

## Barrages on the Ganges Concerned at the prospect

WE are concerned about India's reported plan to undertake the construction of 16 barrages, one in every 100 kilometres of the Ganges under the Ganges waterway Project. If implemented, this would have a disastrous impact on the river Ganges and harm the ecology of both Bangladesh and India.

In light of India's promise to not harm Bangladesh's interests, we are surprised that India has planned to build the barrages in an international river without consultation with Bangladesh as the lower riparian. It is in contradiction to good neighbourly practices as well as a violation of international norms.

In 1974, the Farakka barrage alone reduced the flow of the Ganges downstream known as the Padma in Bangladesh, turning parts of the once majestic river into a wasteland. The sharing of the Ganges' waters is a long-standing issue between the two nations, and although the Ganges Water Sharing Treaty 1996 stipulates the amount of water sharing during lean season, the treaty is not always followed. Further diversion of water would have calamitous effects on the Padma and surrounding areas, increase salinity and food insecurity and cause irreparable damage to the ecology.

It is surprising that though India has already applied to the World Bank to finance the project, our government apparently is yet to take cognition of the matter, let alone lodge a protest. We urge the government to take up the matter with the Indian government.

A cumulative environmental impact assessment of the entire transboundary Ganges must be carried out before any such project.

## Death under mysterious circumstances

Hold the responsible to account

TOO many questions remain unanswered as to how Asma died in the care of Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH). After the hurried discharge by hospital authorities for burial, the unexplained wounds sustained by the victim on the forehead and blisters along her body, the explanation that she died of renal failure after a caesarian cannot stand serious scrutiny. Asma and her sister had earlier been caught by hospital authorities sneaking away with her newborn. Allegations have been raised that Asma was unable or unwilling to pay for costs involving the caesarian operation.

We are obviously shocked by the manner in which hospital authorities have tried to handle the incident. It is very disturbing to find that Asma's corpse was dispatched with undue haste by a hospital that is embedded in the culture of red-tape. We would like to know why senior management of the hospital failed to answer questions about Asma receiving bodily harm.

It would seem that Asma and the earlier scandal revolving around baby-stealing have become an embarrassment for some. The issue of Asma's death has put the onus on hospital authorities. We expect nothing short of a full investigation by the concerned authority that may involve

# McCarthyism incarnated!

STRATEGICALLY  
SPEAKING



Brig Gen  
SHAHEEUL ANAM KHAN  
ndc, psc (Retd)

body to the Shaheed Minar and the character assassination that followed.

The way some people have taken upon themselves the right to question the loyalty of those whose views are not in accord with theirs, question their patriotism, and equate dissenting views with treason and being anti-Liberation, brings to mind the effort of a US Republican Senator, who in the 1950s went after alleged communists or communist sympathisers in the US administration, and whose name has come to be used to describe the practice of making accusations of 'disloyalty, subversion, or treason without proper regard for evidence.' In our case, critics of the establishment are becoming targets of the self-appointed guardians of the spirit of the Liberation War with exclusive rights of patriotism. Are we to understand that critique of the government or the ruling party or its policies or leaders is an anathema and anyone who ventures to do so will be persecuted?

The bigotry has reached such a level that several eminent journalists including editors and university professors, who had empathised with Pias Karim, have been made persona non-grata in the Shaheed Minar. One cannot fail to note the line, between the religious bigots and these political bigots, for want of a better name, getting blurred.

The issue is more than that of Pias Karim per se. And it will persist long after the late professor has become a memory in our collective psyche. It is the question of whether the right to differ and disagree will forever be removed as a precept and practice from this country. It is more disquieting when a group assumes the mantle of the sole repository of loyalty and patriotism and arrogates to itself the right to pass judgement not only on the position of a person on various national issues, which to them is antithetical to their views, but also condemn him for the alleged role of his father during

the Liberation War. And in this exercise of castigating a person the most revered icon of our freedom -- the Liberation War -- has been used in the most disingenuous manner. That some ruling party members see in even the law minister's statement on Pias Karim a trace of conspiracy shows the level of political depravity that we have to encounter.

The reasons why the friends and relatives were threatened with obstruction by the Chhatra Sangram Parishad if Pias Karim's body were taken to the Shaheed Minar were that, according to his detractors, he had "taken a stance in favour of Jamaat-e-Islami and Islami Chhatra Shibir, made derogatory remarks about the Shabbagh movement which demanded capital punishment for war criminals, and made adverse remarks on the trial procedure of the International War Crimes Tribunal."

Let us assume that all these accusations are correct. But does that allow a particular organisation or group to take on the role of the government? And the government, by keeping mum has demonstrated its acquiescence to the utterances and actions of the Chhatra Sangram Parishad. And when individuals or groups start playing god with the state turning a blind eye, the nexus becomes obvious.

But let us dwell on the accusations. First, the so-called derogatory remarks about the Shabbagh movement. Are we to understand that the Shabbagh movement was so sacrosanct that all its utterances and actions are above board and beyond criticism? And anyone who dares to comment on the

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Gonojagoron Mancha will have his or her loyalty questioned, and will be targeted as a Jamaat - Shibir sympathiser? The outcome of the movement which started with so much of positivity and hope, its split up in three groups is testimony to the criticism that there were political motives behind the movement; this has disappointed a large number of its supporters.

The ICT had come under criticism by many others. Didn't the resignation of ICT-1 Chairman for seeking advice from someone who, reportedly, was part of the prosecution and living outside the country, denigrate the court itself? And in any case the comments were calling for improvement and reform and not impunity.

Recent happenings are ominous. Not only the case of Pias Karim but in several other instances also the slander that the nonconformists have come under have demonstrated a very base form of witch hunt. One fears that the diktat of a student group acquiesced by the Dhaka University authorities have set a dangerous precedent that may well boomerang.

The writer is Editor, Op-Ed and Defence & Strategic Affairs, *The Daily Star*.

## Ukraine's vote, Russia's fate

THE WORLD  
IN WORDS



CARL BILD

ago, and Ukraine opted for independence, many expected the country to do better than Russia in the years to come. But events turned out differently.

During the first decade of the new century, Russia benefited from the combined effect of an old hydrocarbon industry that privatisation in the 1990s had made more efficient and high oil prices. The reversal of sought-after economic diversification, and the reduction of "modernisation" to little more than a slogan, caused no immediate concern.

By contrast, Ukraine became the worst managed of all the post-Soviet states, with cronyism and corruption thwarting productive capacity, and causing the country to fall further and further behind other post-communist countries in transition. Most notable is the comparison with Poland: at independence, the two countries had roughly the same GDP per capita; today, Poland's is more than three times higher.

The Orange Revolution in 2004 was a failure for most Ukrainians. The hoped-for break with the past did not occur, as political infighting among the country's new leaders blocked the implementation of any serious reform agenda.

But 2004 was also a bitter failure for Russian President Vladimir Putin, who tried to bring his favoured presidential candidate, Viktor Yanukovich, to power in Kyiv by supporting massive vote manipulation. The failure was a bitter blow to the Kremlin, one that was neither forgiven nor forgotten.

Then, in 2010, the Orange Revolution's failure brought Yanukovich to power in a free and fair election, and in 2012 Putin selected himself for a third presidential term in Russia. The creation of a new Eurasia Union was a key part of his platform.

In the meantime, Ukraine had been negotiating with the European Union for a free-trade and association agreement since 2007, and these talks were completed in early 2012. Though entirely compatible with the existing free-trade agreement between Ukraine and Russia, the proposed pact with the EU certainly was not compatible with Putin's Eurasia project.

A little more than a year ago, the Kremlin began its offensive to turn Ukraine away from an EU agreement that was supported even by Yanukovich and his Party of Regions. The rest -- Yanukovich's renunciation of the EU agreement, the popular uprising that ousted him in response, two invasions by Russia, and thousands of people killed in the country's eastern Donbas region -- is history.

The Kremlin is seeking more than the annexation of Crimea and control over the Donbas rust belt; its aim is to prevent Ukraine from going West, force it to turn East, and

quash any risk within Russia's wider orbit of further revolutions like the one that brought down Yanukovich.

Western sanctions against Russia have certainly highlighted the seriousness with which the EU and the United States view Putin's efforts to challenge and undermine the core principles of European security and international law. But even a weakened Russia will still be a strong power in its immediate neighbourhood. At the end of the day, it is only the strength and determination of Ukraine that can block Russia's revisionist ambitions.

But to strengthen a Ukraine plagued by corruption and cronyism, and heavily burdened by Russian aggression and destabilisation, is no easy task. The election on Sunday must give rise to a government that is truly determined to bring radical reform to the country.

Such a government must be able to count on the strong and determined support of the wider international community. A revised and reinforced International Monetary Fund package is imperative if the necessary reforms are to be enacted. The country's irrational energy policy, based on immensely wasteful subsidies to consumers, must be fundamentally altered. And the agreement with the EU must be used to drive the reform process forward.

If this agenda succeeds, the Kremlin's revisionist bid will be blocked; as this becomes apparent, there might even be an opening for a new and urgently needed wave of



reform in Russia itself. But if reform fails, there is little doubt that the Kremlin will continue its policies until it reaches its aims in Kyiv. Putin is in no hurry, but he clearly knows what he wants.

Then, set on a course of continued confrontation with the West, Russia might hunker down into a siege mentality, with the risk that the Kremlin might seek to compensate for economic failure with further revisionist behaviour. Anyone familiar with the aggressively nationalist posturing of Russian state-controlled media nowadays knows the danger of this.

It is in these circumstances that the real danger for Europe could arise. The ambitions of such a Russia will not stop at the Dnieper River. Revisionism might turn into outright revanchism as the Kremlin seeks to counter-balance internal weakness with demonstrations of external strength.

By that time, it might be too late to stop a slide toward a wider confrontation. That is why the emergence of a strong and democratic Ukraine from decades of failure is needed now. The election this Sunday is crucial for Ukraine, but it also holds the key to encouraging the transformation of Russia into a true member of the democratic European family.

The writer is former prime minister and foreign minister of Sweden. Copyright: Project Syndicate, 2014. www.project-syndicate.org (Exclusive to *The Daily Star*)

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

### Culture of labeling people

I felt really sad to know that Professor Piash Karim has passed away. I personally do not know Prof. Karim, but have seen him in talk shows in Bangladeshi TV channels and have developed respect for him for his rational thinking. I was not too surprised to see the reactions of different people regarding his funeral.

The tendency to label people based on ideology or political view is a hindrance to progress and free thinking. A doctor's son is not a doctor, neither an engineer's son an engineer by birth. The freedom fighters of 1971 did a great deal of sacrifices and they worked hard to free our country and it is great to see that our nation enormously respects them. However, a freedom fighter's son is not a freedom fighter and a rajakar's son is not a rajakar. Nationalism can be a platform where we can bring all the people together and work towards development of our country. I believe the new generation of our country is more tolerant towards the differences that we have and more compassionate on the similarities that we share as a nation.

Mohammed Zakiur Rahman  
Studying at Lund University, Sweden

### Right to safety on road

Our roads have become death traps. Every year thousands of people get killed in road accidents. There is hardly any family left in this country that never experienced the pain of losing somebody in road crash.

So far by birth we have the rights to have accommodation, food, clothing, education and medication. I think it would not be wrong if I say that safe road should also be our right. Safe road is now the demand of the whole nation. It is our right to reach home safely in one piece.

Pradip Das  
On e-mail

### Avoid aping alien culture

Nowadays people of our region are more interested in the western culture so they now neglect their own culture, ideas, norms and values. Mostly the young generation is imitating them. This happens mainly because of globalisation which helps the capitalist countries to expand their trade and commerce all over the world through intruding into other cultures (e.g. advertising their culture and products through satellite channels). We must be aware of it and should hold on to our cultural values and norms strongly, rather than imitating the West blindly. Our culture is very rich and we should show it to the world.

Md. Abdur Rashid  
Assistant Manager (Social Advocacy & Knowledge Dissemination Unit), Palli Karma-Sahayak Foundation (PKSF), Dhaka

### Comments on news report, "Modern-day slave trade unearthed," published on October 19, 2014

#### New Generation

Is this horrifying incident also an 'achievement' of the present government? Who is there to reply?

#### Shiful Islam Foysal

I can't believe that slavery still exists.

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### "Sagar-Runi murder investigation" (Oct. 17, 2014)

#### Mortuza Huq

This unacceptable delay might reinforce the belief in people's mind that the government has things to hide regarding this brutal murder case.

#### Rahman Mostafiz

This case is still shrouded in mystery. This is how we are heading towards the notion that justice is far away from the general people.

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### "Limon's ordeal ends" (Oct. 18, 2014)

#### Nds

The sort of justice you desire for Limon is like a utopia in this land of savagery. But the true nature of our law enforcing agencies has been exposed through this case.

#### Rahman Mostafiz

Limon has got a lot of support from the human rights bodies and the media. He is very fortunate in comparison to other such victims.

## Measures to check bus drivers

RIDWAN QUAIUM

THIRTY two people died and several others were injured in another tragic head-on collision involving two buses a few days ago. Speeding and reckless driving were the reasons for the accident. News of road mishaps has become quite common these days.

To curb the high rate of road mishaps some serious measures need to be taken by the government, bus operators and the highway police to make the roads safer and, most importantly, the buses safer as bus is the major mode of transport for inter-district communication. One also needs to realise that the road mishaps are not only socio-economically hurting the families of the victims but also having a negative impact on the economy of the country.

Speeding and reckless driving of public transport drivers such as buses and vans is also a major concern for Thailand. Below are some measures that Thailand has taken to put drivers on check that may be considered for our country as well. To prevent speeding and reckless driving many bus operators have installed GPS device in their buses. As a result, the operators are able to monitor the speed and driving pattern of the buses in real time at all times.

To observe the speed and driving behaviour of vehicles, the traffic police and highway police department have installed CCTV cameras at different sections along the highway and major roadways. From a traffic control centre, the police can monitor the traffic situation using the video from the CCTV cameras in real time at all times. In addition, to monitoring the driving behaviour and traffic situation from the traffic control centre, the traffic police and highway police measures the speed of vehicles using speed guns at different locations along the highway.

The police have a database containing the number of times a driver committed a traffic offense. Depending on the degree of speeding or reckless driving or other traffic violations, and from the information of the driver from the database, a driver stopped by the police for committing a traffic offense may have to pay a fine and or serve jail time, and have his license confiscated temporarily or even permanently.

Some of the bus operators display information related to the driver on the front of the bus -- such as the driver's name, photograph, identification number from the company, license number, etc. -- and also the vehicle number. The operators have developed a mobile phone application using which passengers can complain about the driver or the bus staff in real time if they feel that the driver is speeding, driving recklessly, and violating traffic rules, over loading or even misbehaving.

The writer is a transportation engineer working in Thailand.