

Kudos Bhasantek vigilante group

Should be an eye opener for the govt.

IT is heartening to note that the locals of Bhasantek slum, unwilling to be silent victims any longer, have joined hands to fight organised crimes and stand up against injustice.

Locals were forced to form their own vigilante group called Lathi-Banshi Bahini (Stick-Whistle Force), as the police categorically failed to protect them from the reign of terror of various crime gangs in the slum. Residents were particularly enraged by the actions of local thug Mamun, who assaulted nine members of a single family for 15 hours in February, and allegedly killed local youth Nasir Hossain for protesting verbal abuse of his cousin by some gang members in October. According to the locals, the police turned a blind eye towards the perpetrators, despite cases filed against Mamun and his accomplices.

We are moved by the show of solidarity, bravery and resilience of the people of Bhasantek and hope that their collective strength can rid the area of murky forces. We are horrified at the reports of hooliganism, extortion and violence and drug peddling within the slum, particularly of the forced involvement of children in the matter.

We urge the state to provide protection to its citizens so that they don't have to resort to taking the law into their own hands. The suspension of 19 policemen alleged to have been in collusion with the local goons after Nasir's murder is encouraging but not enough to bring peace and justice to the area. Crime gangs must be identified and members arrested immediately so that the residents can live in peace.

Fish output quadruples

More nutrition, avenue for livelihood

AS per a Food and Agriculture Organisation report, Bangladesh has made great strides in raising the output of fish production in the country. Improving output by five times over the last three decades is no mean feat, which translates into nearly 3.5 million metric tons of fish to provide an important source of nutrition for an ever-growing population. With fish providing about 56 per cent of total protein needs of the average citizen, more must be done to promote aquaculture in the country.

It is understood that when we talk about fish production and consumption, it has mostly to do with fresh water varieties that are farmed extensively in natural water bodies and fish farms across the country. While the government has been attempting to protect fish fry from being caught during spawning season, it has remained an uphill struggle. As has been the fight to protect national water bodies that are under constant threat of being filled up by unscrupulous business interests to make way for often illegal housing estates.

Given that the fish industry is now worth an estimated Tk. 50,000 crore per annum and provides livelihoods of around 11 per cent of the population, more needs to be done to preserve this sector from encroachers. Government efforts in setting up and promoting swamp nurseries should be lauded and we cannot emphasise enough on the need to preserve natural water bodies that have contributed so much to the growth of fish and fish production in the country.

Why is China building second railway in Tibet?

SUNDAY POUCH



ASHFAQUR RAHMAN

IT is curious that China, which built a multibillion dollar railway line from the province of Qinghai to Lhasa, the capital of Tibet, only in 2006, has now approved the building of a second rail line, this time from Lhasa to Nyingchi to the east, parallel to India's Arunachal Pradesh. The matter has raised concern not only inside Tibet but also in neighbouring India. It is feared that the central authority in China is eager to further consolidate its political grip in the region and also to come in close proximity to Indian forces in the disputed border in eastern Himalayas. But is this really so?

The story of building the first railway line, the Qinghai-Lhasa connection, is a fascinating one. The Chinese faced tremendous engineering challenges when they started work on this project. It was a marvelous achievement to build this line at such a high altitude in the Himalayas. There was need to build long tunnels through the mountains, and in an oxygen scarce environment. The line traversed the 16,000 feet high Tanggula Pass and set up the Tanggula railway station, which became the highest railway station in the world. The railway line in fact connected Beijing the capital of China with Lhasa the capital of the province of Tibet, and for the first time in history brought these two important regions in Asia close together.

The construction of this marvel railway line was part of China Western Development strategy to include the poorer parts of China with the developed eastern part of that country. In 2008, China announced that in time it would extend the railway line to Khassa in the Nepalese border. It was also suggested by China to connect this line to Indian and Bangladeshi railway networks eventually. Thus, a continental bridge would be established linking China directly with South Asia. How marvelous an idea, and a welcome project of the future.

But let it not be forgotten that the present Qinghai-Lhasa railway line had to break many conventional engineering practices. Nowhere in the world has a railway line been built over barely permanent permafrost. In summer the uppermost layer thaws and the ground becomes muddy. The heat from the passing trains melts the permafrost further and makes the tracks insecure. So, Chinese engineers built elevated tracks with pile driven foundations sunk deep into the ground. This added to the cost of building the line, and was a logistical nightmare. Yet the railway line was built and is in use today. Of course, the line has come under the harshest criticism from the outlawed Tibetan independence groups, both from inside China and outside. They allege that the line was built at

such great cost and effort to strengthen China's political control over Tibet. It will only encourage Han Chinese to migrate into Tibet from the other provinces and control the local population.

How far this is true, only the future will tell. But the idea of connecting Tibet by rail came first from the pioneer of China's democratic revolution, Sun Yat-sen, as early as 1899. He had proposed to establish a united community of all ethnic groups of China to resist foreign imperialist aggression. In order to materialise this idea he felt it was vital to build railways in Tibet so that frontier defense could be consolidated and Tibet's economy developed. The Chinese were inconvenienced as they could not transport their troops in large numbers due to non existence of easy transportation. So in 1911, when the government of Republic of China was proclaimed under Sun Yat-sen, he emphasised that military strength was a necessary pre-condition to solving the Tibet issue.

Subsequently, when the People's Republic of China was established, the matter of connecting Tibet with China was taken up in right earnest. But in the initial years, due to lack of funds as well as the gargantuan engineering challenges, the idea was shelved. It was only in 2006 that the first railway line was built and put in operation. The second, connecting Lhasa to Nyingchi, is a natural extension of that idea of connecting remote regions of Tibet with the locus of power in the country. The experience gained in combating the engineering challenges when building the first railway line would be used when building the second line in the Himalayas.

This October, the National Development and Reform Commission of China announced that it had approved this second rail line. The 402 kilometre line is expected to further tourism and spur economic development. However, some analysts also say that troops brought to Tibet to suppress dissent can also be easily transported. Again, Chinese troops can be taken to areas where Indian forces along the border in Arunachal Pradesh, which both India and China claim, are perched. The railway will be able to bring the Chinese troops in close proximity to Indian border troops high in the Himalayas. The Indian government is reported to be planning to build its own infrastructure along Arunachal to confront any Chinese military threats.

It is now debatable whether the second railway line in Tibet will be able to usher in peaceful economic development in the region. The only option for both the countries is to settle their border dispute and finalise their international boundaries before the second line is built.

Let us not forget that Bangladesh is not far from the disputed border of China and India as the crow flies. So once these countries invest huge amounts in building railway infrastructure they might be tempted to use them willy-nilly for military purposes. We would be at risk of being sucked into a dispute which is not ours.

The writer is a former Ambassador and a commentator on current issues.

The new frontiers of loyalty

THE WORLD IN WORDS



MARK MALLOCH BROWN

THIS is a tricky time to be a state, and an even trickier time to be a citizen. The nation-state, the classic provider of security and basic wellbeing in exchange for citizens' loyalty, is under threat - both at home and as the fundamental unit of international affairs.

New types of loyalty and association are challenging the state's traditional role. Some are geographic. In Europe alone, there at least 40 would-be

Scotlands seeking separation of some kind from the countries in which they now find themselves. Other loyalties are based on other kindred identities -- not just religious or ethnic, but based on shared commercial, political, or other interests. Today, many more of us are supporters of NGOs than are members of political parties.

In short, our allegiances, particularly in the West, have rarely seemed more divided than they do now. Amartya Sen, the Nobel laureate economist, has argued that we can learn to live with these multiple identities and even thrive with the diversity of citizenship and loyalties that they allow us.

But this diversity is not entirely benign. Many of us work for or hold stock in commercial organisations that seem to pay scant regard to national tax or regulatory authorities. And, in much of the West, states adhere to models of welfare provision that increasingly disappoint their citizens and are often unaffordable. A global reordering of economic growth is punishing the developed countries' high-cost, high-tax, high-benefits governance model.

The Western state's shortcomings are strikingly apparent when compared with robust survivors and adapters in other parts of the world. China represents what might be called the Economic Security State: seeking to channel domestic savings into household consumption to sustain GDP growth and popular support, while using its investment power abroad to secure the commodities and energy that underpin its industrialisation.

Under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership, India may prove to be a semi-admiring imitator of China. Russia, by contrast, is a more classic National Security State, now playing Western anxieties like a fiddle to consolidate its tightening grip on Ukraine and suppress domestic opposition with a tide of official nationalism.

So we live in a world of evolutionary state disorder. While some in the West may yearn for the return of the strong, unifying state, most of us recognise that it is not coming back. Indeed, some argue that the inventiveness and internationalism of a world networked by interests and shared causes is likely to be more resilient than one

crammed into the artificial -- and increasingly constraining -- box of the national state.

In that sense, economic success in China or India may be those states' undoing, as middle-class political aspirations render current arrangements dysfunctional. Conversely, we may find ourselves in a world whose eastern half is organised into strong authoritarian state structures, with the West embracing post-state models of association.

The question for international governance is how to provide a framework of institutions and rules in a world of competing organisational structures. The politicians' answer is depressingly predictable: in the face of a resurgent Russia and China, this is no time to abandon our own states and diplomacy to their fate.

Yet the old systems no longer offer useful answers, as Russia has demonstrated by brushing aside the United Nations Security Council -- the high altar of the state-based international system -- over Ukraine and stalemating it over Syria. And, away from the din of their ranting politicians, what Russians, as much as Americans or Chinese, probably want most is a peaceful, predictable international order that allows them to provide for their families and enjoy the benefits of a golden age of global commerce and technology.

A world, in which states' hard power is contending with the soft power of transnational ideas, invention, and finance, needs rules. We will all pay dearly -- in defense budgets and, more important, in lost global opportunities -- if we do not summon the courage to design a global order in which non-state actors have a formal role. Otherwise, we would be inviting states to continue

pursuing a might-makes-right approach and to shirk the coordinated action on, say, financial regulation and the environment that the world now requires.

Of course, states do not have a monopoly on bad behaviour. Transnational economic activity has been an opportunity not only for business, but also for organised crime and others to liberate themselves from effective regulation. At the moment, the United States has stepped into the breach, relying on often-Draconian extraterritorial use of its justice system and control of the international banking system to impose a crude frontier justice.

That is not good enough. What is needed is a legitimate system of rules, norms, and institutions, devised by private as well as government stakeholders, that reflects the emerging global nature of economic, political, and social activity as the old state loses its dominance and must coexist with a patchwork of non-state structures of association.

The writer, a former UN deputy secretary-general and UK Foreign Office minister of state for Africa, is a member of the World Economic Forum Global Agenda Council on Global Governance.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

Gagging media and democracy

This refers to the article, "Not to gag the media" (Oct. 28). Governments do try to gag the media on one pretext or the other. In the UK, also such efforts were made after the hacking scandal. But fortunately, better sense prevailed and the media escaped gag. Not only print media, but the internet is also facing curbs in the forms of law, especially the social networking sites.

Free media is vital for democracy and the growth of a nation. Can we forget how the UK government destroyed servers of a prominent newspaper when it was publishing reports on surveillance of the US's National Security Agency (NSA)? Even in the USA, the media has faced visits from the security agencies. The print media is already regulated in the form of a plethora of laws, then why should the government make further efforts to strangle it?

Deendayal M. Lulla
 On e-mail

Necessity of libraries

Not very long ago, many people had the habit of reading books. But nowadays it seems to be a rare habit. People find it more fascinating to spend time on facebook and other social networks rather than reading books. But the fact is, until and unless we get back to our reading habit, building a knowledge based society is not possible. And without knowledge based society a country cannot march forward. There lies the importance of library. A library helps to grow reading habit among people. There are dozens of food outlets across any road of Dhaka but alas, not a single book shop or library! It seems library is going to be extinct from our country. How about building one public library in every union of Bangladesh? Local administrations should come forward to materialise this in order to help people grow reading habit.

Khandaker Zia Hasan
 Communication Trainer and Journalist

Distributing warm clothes among poor

We all enjoy winter as this season has a lot to offer such as various types of vegetables, pithas (rice cakes), date juice, etc. But the poor people of our country pass this season in a miserable condition as they don't afford to buy warm clothes, let alone winter vegetables and pithas. They don't have the money to enjoy the season's offerings. Now is the right time for giving them warm clothes so that they can utilise those properly.

M. E. Hossain
 Islamic University, Kushtia

Comments on news report, "No escape," published on November 4, 2014

M. Emad
 Muhammad Kamaruzzaman has got what he deserves.

"Village of widows" (Nov. 4, 2014)

Rahat Jobayar
 Those who are brainwashed by the Jamaatis and who think ICT is a political vendetta must read this.

Dev Saha
 The culprits could go on living normal lives while widows were left alone to suffer!

"Govt moves to upgrade nat'l grid" (Nov. 4, 2014)

Masumanwar
 We need to adopt an efficient energy policy to meet the demand of the country.

"Key man behind atrocities" (Nov. 4, 2014)

Sayed Rahman
 In our country key men always remain behind the curtain.

"Bangladesh, India decide on power inter-connection line" (Nov. 4, 2014)

ShamimH
 This is a good move and will create better relations between Bangladesh and India.

SM
 No one is asking the key questions regarding the conditions! What are the clauses and the prices?

Will Hillary be another victim of Obamacare?

ABDUL MATIN

FOR the first time since 2006, the Republicans gained control of both the houses in the US Congress in the midterm election of 2014. They have the largest majority in the House of Representatives in more than 60 years. The election result is a great debacle for President Barack Obama and a manifestation of the frustration of the voters with his administration, particularly for his healthcare policy known as Obamacare.

It may be mentioned here that the US has a bicameral legislature consisting of the Senate and the House of Representatives. The Senate has 100 seats, two from each of 50 states, while the House of Representatives has 435 voting Congressmen/Congresswomen who are elected on the basis of population from each state. Senators are elected for a six-year term with about one-third elected every two years, while the Representatives are elected for a two-year term. Having gained full control over the Congress, the Republicans will naturally play a prominent role on how the administration will run. Under the circumstances, will President Obama be like a 'lame duck'?

Unlike our political leaders who perpetually fight tooth and nail with their opponents, more on the streets than inside the parliament, both President Obama and the incoming Republican leader of the Senate, Mitch McConnell, pledged to work together. Obama said he was "eager to work with the new Congress to make the next two years as productive as possible." McConnell also pledged to make the Senate more productive. He explains that working within a two-party political system does not mean "we have to live in perpetual conflict." One thing is certain that President Obama has to follow a middle path to get support of the Republicans over both legislation and appointments to judicial and official posts.

The results of the midterm election, particularly the losses for governorships in the Democratic strongholds like Illinois, Maryland and Massachusetts, have given rise to speculations regarding the 2016 presidential election. Attention is again focused on Hillary Clinton. She was clever enough to distance herself from the Obama administration by not accepting any position during his second term. This will partly shield her against the failures of the Obama administration. With her credentials as a former senator, former secretary of state and former first lady, she would have been a formidable candidate against any Republican hopeful. But would she be able to convince the Americans to leave aside party lines and vote on personal credentials or be another victim of Obamacare?

The writer is a former chief engineer of Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission.

