

MRP stalemate

Lack of action of line ministries mysterious

THE fate of 6 million expatriate workers may be affected because the Malaysian company contracted to deliver machine readable passports (MRPs) has failed to do so. Given that the deadline for these workers to switch to MRPs is November 2015, the rate of issuance which presently stands at 13,000 passports a day will need to double to nearly 22,000, a near impossible task given the existing situation. Even then all our expatriate workers may not get MRPs.

The joint venture agreement between Department of Immigration (DIP) and IRIS states that the latter should provide all necessary documentation by October 30 for system integration with other companies. That has not happened yet. According to the DIP, IRIS has not only failed in its obligations but has instead blocked the central system with codes thus hampering integration of new passport centres and data access.

It is interesting to note that problems started to occur only after 2012, two years after the Malaysian firm had started its operation, and only after the start of the expansion programme, a programme that it lost its bid to obtain contract of. And disturbingly, it has illegally gained access to the data base at our Malaysian High Commission.

We wonder why the authorities have let things come to such a pass in the first place and seem to have taken no palpable action as yet. There are several crucial issue involved in the matter. Apart from the risk to six million overseas workers, a very important national security matter, the ability of a foreign firm to access millions of personal data of Bangladeshis, seems to have escaped the notice of our authorities.

Ordeal of a Jessore shopkeeper

Another Limon episode in the offing

THE ordeal of a Jessore shopkeeper in the hands of the police which appeared in this newspaper on Friday makes very pathetic reading. It reveals yet another instance of police brutality and their proclivity to justify their actions by taking people to court on false charges.

Reportedly, Kamal a shopkeeper from Jessore, who does not belong to any political party, fell victim of police action on a BNP-led political programme in front of Jessore Press Club on October 1. The police fell upon him when he was closing the shutters of his shop and shot him in the chest at a point blank range.

Police scorn for common men was taken to the extreme when they made him pay for the travel costs of the police personnel who accompanied him to Dhaka and back for treatment. Not only that, Kamal has not been released as yet even after being granted bail, the unfortunate man now faces at least two charges of 'assaulting police and spreading terror'.

We are afraid Kamal's may be another Limon case in the offing. Apparently, efforts are underway to link him with the BNP and thus 'prove' his 'culpability' in the said charges. We want to ask whether ones affiliation to an opposition political party makes one a fair game for the police to treat one as it likes with impunity.

We would like to draw the attention of the law enforcing agencies to the comments of the Chairman of the National Human Rights Commission regarding their scant regard for human rights and ask them to take it seriously.

Expectations from Nepal Saarc Summit

HARUN UR RASHID

THE two-day 18th Saarc Summit is scheduled to begin on November 26 with the heads/governments of the eight countries in the Nepalese capital of Kathmandu.

Saarc is the least integrated region in the world with intra-regional trade at 5%, while it is 32% in Asean, 50% in European Union, and 68% in US-Canada-Mexico trade bloc (NAFTA).

Some 200 meetings, mostly at official and expert levels, take place every year within Saarc countries, but they do not produce results. Real progress remains stalled due in part to hesitancy borne from historical legacies, differences and disputes. Saarc has been limping for the last 27 years. Time has come now for the political leaders to advocate and commit to further integration on physical connectivity through multi-modal transport, setting up of regional energy grid and regional water resources management institutions, regional counter-terrorism strategy, combating environmental degradation, and people's movement within the region with easy visa facilities.

To make the institution effective, there is a need for active participation of representatives from private sector, civil society, NGOs and think-tanks across the region. The public sector alone cannot implement the promises made at summits.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi showed vision and courage to invite all the Saarc top leaders at his swearing in ceremony on May 26. This demonstrates his realisation that India cannot emerge as a global power without regional prosperity. Saarc exists because the fates of these countries are tied together and no region can prosper unless commonality of interests is recognised. India, with its predominance in terms of resources, economy and population, may initially take "non-reciprocal" cooperative measures with all its neighbours in an effort to remove old mindset and perceived misconceptions.

It is correct that economic relations do not develop substantially without good political relations. However, if the political will exists, multi-lateral cooperation on a broad framework of give and take will develop steadily. The founding principles of Saarc are self-help and regional solidarity, and multilateralism will be the key of success of Saarc.

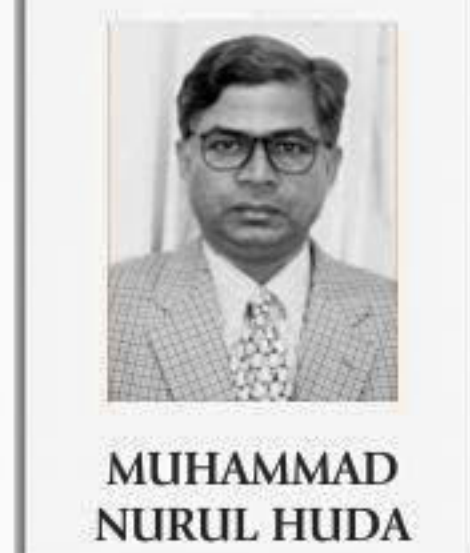
The merit of the Summits rests on an exchange of shared perceptions and goals which are an important factor in the growth of good neighbourly relations and success of regional cooperation. The importance of Summits lies in reinforcing personal relationship among the top leaders of the region and, on the sidelines, the leaders are able to discuss bilateral issues in one-to-one meetings for their speedy resolution.

Saarc, despite its difficulties, has come to stay because of its geo-strategic importance. That is why the US, China, Iran, Japan, South Korea, Mauritius, Australia, Myanmar and the European Union have joined as observers.

The writer is Former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.

Behind the reverent veneer

STRAIGHT LINE



MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

IN recent times, the nation has witnessed animated debates and discussions about the procedural deficits and even the very maintainability of the trial of persons for crimes against humanity in 1971. The sight of very old bearded persons, some hobbling, apparently with an ecclesiastical appearance, facing the rigours of trials for a long time, has even evoked sympathy in some hearts. Some younger folks, particularly women, unaware of the atrocities committed by a section of the Bengali population on their fellow countrymen and co-religionists in 1971, appear to be ambivalent about the legal and moral validity of the trials.

The post-liberation generation of Bangladesh needs to know that the Bengali villains and criminals of 1971 have not been held to account for their misdeeds for a long time, owing to factors better left unsaid. That, however, cannot be grounds for exonerating the sinister collaborators from charges framed later.

The scenario, quite clearly, calls for a recapitulation of at least a few gory incidents of that cataclysmic year to remind us of our debt to posterity and history. Historical events and culpability thereof, surely, need to be placed in correct perspective.

At this point of time we may or may not venture to discuss about the credible and documented accounts of the dastardly crimes against humanity committed by Bengali collaborators in 1971. However, it might be relevant to refer to one direct firsthand experience of this scribe. This refers to the unbelievably brutal murders committed by one Rajab Ali Razakar, a former caretaker (Khadem) of a holy shrine in a small south-western town. There are living witnesses to this date who would testify that the said Rajab Ali used to eat his breakfast only after personally slaughtering, by means of machete, a Hindu or a freedom fighter. This was his daily schedule for quite some time.

To recollect and appreciate the tragic happenings of 1971 in the then East Pakistan, one must recognise

APEC Summit and recent twists in Sino-Japanese relations

DELWAR HOSSAIN

“CHINESE, Japanese leaders meet to thaw ties” and “Government, lawmakers hail Abe-Xi summit, note difficult road ahead”—these two headlines of China Daily and Japan Times respectively on November 11, 2014 indicate the significance as well as challenges in Sino-Japanese relations in the current world. By surpassing the USA as the largest economy in the world in recent times, China has made improvement of Sino-Japanese relations inevitable. These headlines were printed on the occasion of the first formal meeting after two years between Chinese President Xi Jinping and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on the sideline of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) meeting. Japanese Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga called it 'major progress' toward improving Sino-Japanese relations.



Japan had been the largest trading partner of China. But relations between two of the world's largest economies have been marred in recent times due to territorial and political disputes. Among recent issues, territorial disputes surrounding the Diaoyu (as known in China)/Senkaku (as known in Japan) Islands and associated fishing rights and energy resources are major hindrances to Sino-Japanese relations.

Against this backdrop, this commentary focuses on the recent twists in Sino-Japanese relations.

The Abe-Xi meeting should be a new starting point to elevate Sino-Japanese relations. Shinzo Abe wrote in the social site LinkedIn on November 11: “I had summit talks with President Xi Jinping of China. We have been making quiet efforts in order to make use of the sidelines of the APEC meeting to first of all launch a dialogue between our countries' leaders.” This summit meeting became the first step towards improving Japan-China relations by returning to the starting point of a “mutually beneficial relationship based on common strategic interests.” Another major outcome of the meeting was the proposal by Abe of establishing a hotline to prevent clashes at sea although the islands were not included in the 30 minutes talk between Xi and Abe. So, although the world saw strained relations between China and

that the full extent of Bengali genocide became understood painfully slowly. Quite late in the day, it became manifest that the Bengalis of East Pakistan had fallen victim to a uniquely satanic programme of mass murder. The ordeal left many survivors homeless and dispossessed.

In 1971, while some Bengalis scaled summits of courage and nobility, there were shameless collaborators who plumbed depth of evils in a fashion that compels the awe of posterity. Amongst many present day citizens of Bangladesh, to whom serious hardship and collective peril are unknown, the tribulations that millions endured in the fateful nine months of 1971 are almost beyond comprehension. It was a contest between good and evil that imposed monumental misery upon so many.

It is also worth pondering that only a tiny fraction of those guilty of crimes against humanity in 1971 have been indicted. This is partly because the victors had no stomach for the scale of executions, numbering several hundred, that would have been necessary had strict justice been enforced against every criminal accused of crimes against humanity. Very few retributive executions took place in liberated Bangladesh. Students of history may like to compare this with events of post-World War II in Europe where nearly a thousand retributive executions took place in the western zones of occupation. Some 920 Japanese were executed, more than three hundred of them by the Dutch, for crimes committed in the East Indies.

The post-liberation generation of Bangladesh needs to know that the Bengali villains and criminals of 1971 have not been held to account for their misdeeds for a long time, owing to factors better left unsaid. That, however, cannot be grounds for exonerating the sinister collaborators from charges framed later. There is also no reason to show mercy to these evil characters on account of their age because they have proved their incorrigibility by words and wishes. These criminals do not show any remorse or regret even now.

The haggard and frail looking characters in the docks with drooping postures must not make us forget the gory crimes they committed in full public view in complete disregard of morals and scruples. Their actions turned countless women into widows and scores of children into orphans. A particular faith became a nightmarish burden for a sizable population due to their perverted fanaticism.

Believers know full well that patriotism is an inseparable part of the faith. That being so, persons accused of crimes against humanity in 1971 have quite manifestly defied and defiled their own faith. They deserve no compassion and consideration, morally or legally. The devil must pay his due with a view to establishing fair play and justice.

The writer is a columnist of The Daily Star.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

Opportunity for BCL in BCS!

On November 12, 2014, while speaking at a discussion organised by BCL at DU, HT Imam, one of the advisers to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, said they would see how much they can help the Chhatra League with the viva voce exam of BCS. He also said their leader (Sheikh Hasina) told them to arrange jobs for BCL activists by any means.

Definitely, it is good news for the BCL men but very shocking for the other BCS aspirants. It is also a clear violation of the article 29 of the constitution of Bangladesh which states equal opportunity for all in public employment on the basis of merit. Are we living in an autocratic country? My question to the prime minister, is there a special constitution for the Chhatra League?

Md. Abdur Rashid
 Department of Sociology
 University of Dhaka

Unruly bikers

Nowadays, alongside biking on the footpaths, some bikers are developing a new trend of disturbing the pedestrians by honking horns. They blow deafening horns without any apparent reason. What is just fun for them is very irritating for pedestrians. Horns are for making people alert that a bike is behind them, not for annoying them. The unruly bikers should understand this.

Gunjan Pronoto
 Jagannath University

Fight climate change by reducing carbon emissions

A new report by IPCC (Inter governmental Panel on Climate Change) states that unchecked climate change will escalate the likelihood of severe and irreversible impacts on people and ecosystem. It establishes the fact that there are massive shifts in land and ocean ecosystems and our efforts to reduce the climate change are not enough.

The most important lesson to learn from this report is the need to address this issue following a comprehensive approach. Climate change has adverse effects in all countries even in the developed nations. It also breaks the myth that climate action is costly. Our inaction is far more threatening. It is crucial for us to understand the current situation of climate change. The report states that carbon emissions will ultimately have to fall to zero. Moreover, global poverty can only be alleviated by halting global warming. The report also makes clear that carbon emissions, mainly from burning coal, oil and gas, are currently rising to record high levels, not falling. It is very alarming because the world can probably adapt to up to 2 degree Celsius temperature rise. But if temperature rises by 4 degree Celsius, then we will be in grave danger. To minimise carbon emissions, we need strong political will and must work together with other nations.

Anika Tasneem
 East West University
 Dhaka

Comments on news report, “A contractor too mighty,” published on November 12, 2014

New Generation

It may be very interesting if the identity of IRIS's Bangladeshi collaborator is revealed.

Snr Citizen

All foreign suppliers and contracted companies should translate their documents in Bangla in order to avoid loopholes in the agreement.

“Handcuffed body raises questions” (Nov. 12, 2014)

New Generation

Hundreds of such questions remain unanswered. It is easy to ask questions but difficult to reply.

“Drive against unfit vehicles” (Nov. 12, 2014)

Nds

But when will there be a drive against unfit government authorities?

The writer is Professor and Director at the East Asia Study Center (EASC), University of Dhaka. E-mail: dhossain@du.ac.bd