

# Taskforce helping grabbers!

Govt. must intervene to set things right

A taskforce created to preserve rivers around the capital by properly demarcating their boundaries is in effect helping land-grabbers by apparently overlooking the setting up of pillars at wrong places. In the past three years since the demarcation work began in 2011, those rivers have lost some 2,500 acres of river land worth Tk. 250 billion to the land encroachers. Rather than taking steps to remove the wrongly placed pillars, the shipping minister, who heads the taskforce, has reportedly been pressing BIWTA to 'accept erroneous demarcations' and pay contractors involved in the work. When the defects are so glaring, why shouldn't those be corrected? This is bizarre as it is incomprehensible.

How should one explain the entire chain of events taking place under the administration's watch that defies the very spirit of the 2009 High Court order to the government in response to which the prime minister formed the taskforce to retain the eroded parts as well as the shoals formed in those rivers. Distressingly, the very existence of the rivers supposed to be protected by the taskforce is in jeopardy.

Callousness is not the word to describe the gross irresponsibility on the part of those in charge of protecting the rivers as members of the taskforce. In truth, what they have done borders on the self-destructive.

A lot of damage has already been done to the rivers girdling Dhaka. The government must wake up and act to intervene from the highest level to save the lifelines of Dhaka.

# Unsafe pedestrian crossing for disabled

Take measures to help the disadvantaged

WHILE no exact figures exist, but it is estimated that nearly a tenth of the city's population are in one way or another physically or mentally challenged. With such a large proportion of the populace at a natural disadvantage, we find that crossing a road is of particular challenge for these people. This is so because on the one hand there is little regard by traffic management officials to provide ample zebra crossings on the roads; while on the other, urban planning simply does not take into account the mentally and physically challenged groups of people. This is being insensitive to those who require aid in getting across busy junctions.

With little by way of planning, existing footpaths are either too narrow or the absence of ramps make it impossible for people in wheel chairs for instance to gain access to walkways. The same could be said about foot over-bridges that only take into account the physically fit and not those who may require assistance in availing of this public utility. For those who suffer from sensory issues such as sight and sound, urban planners could incorporate sound-based traffic lights and physically escort the blind across zebra crossings. What it all boils down to is that we are talking about a sizeable portion of Dhaka residents who are left in the lurch. Measures, both physical and otherwise, need to be incorporated into demarcation of city roads and improvising other facilities to make

# Keeping the problem of illegal workers in check

EDITORIAL DESK: THE STAR (MALAYSIA)

THERE is a Malay saying -- *Harapkan pagar, pagar makan padi* -- which is used to describe a person who, having been entrusted to protect something, betrays the trust given to him by working in the opposite direction. This is especially relevant in the world of enforcement when those tasked with enforcing the law work in cahoots with those against whom they should take action.

The home ministry is coming down hard on agents who bring foreign workers into the country illegally and, more importantly, the immigration officers who work in cahoots with them. "It is high time that certain clauses are added in the Immigration Act -- to cane agents and immigration personnel for their misdeeds," said home minister Dr. Ahmad Zahid Hamidi.

While the issue of caning is debatable, we certainly welcome any move to crack down on those who play any role in flooding our country with illegal workers. The officers who check passports and other documentation of incoming visitors have to ensure that no illegal person slips in.

There are of course illegal channels, due to the porous nature of most geographical boundaries, whereby illegals can enter the country without going through the Immigration checkpoints.

The number of illegal workers in the country can never be confirmed but various reports indicate that there could be anything between 480,000 and one million of them, primarily in the plantation, construction and manufacturing sectors. These are sectors that are generating good money because labour costs are kept low due to the large foreign workforce.

For this situation to persist, there is no doubt that many hidden hands are at work. The agents who bring them in without proper documentation know that there will always be those willing to take them in despite the risk. Such employers are equally guilty, and they cannot plead ignorance.

We should, in fact, make these employers pay a heavy fine, not only for hiring illegal workers, but also taking up precious enforcement resources that could be utilised better elsewhere. Corrupt immigration officers who turn a blind eye to such practices, or worse, facilitate the entry of illegals, should be severely dealt with.

The minister must be commended for his frankness in revealing that Immigration tops the list of 10 departments and agencies cited for wrongdoings in a Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission report presented to the cabinet recently.

The first step in any battle is to recognise that a problem exists. We hope all necessary action will be taken to combat the problem of illegal workers.

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# China's aversion to power projection



STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING

THE world has perhaps forgotten that China was once one of the greatest naval powers that rose to the high water mark during the time of the Ming Dynasty under its famous admiral, Zhang He. What would have happened if the Emperor had not ordered the destruction of the entire fleet after the seventh voyage of the eunuch admiral is a matter of speculation. The admiral, who hailed from the province of Yunan and who was of Arab descent, is, however, still revered as a god by many in that country.

Many ascribe economic reasons for the decision of the emperor. It was considered wasteful to spend money from the royal coffer on an exercise that had not added anything proportionately substantial to the empire. But another reason that many cite was that the Ming emperor, engaged in the consolidation of power within the country, did not want to become an extra territorial aspirant. China then was quite content with an isolationist policy.

It seems that the psyche of the Ming rulers has rubbed off on the modern day Chinese leaders in the way they see their role in the current world order. There is a palpable lack of China's will to wield power. It seems, they are quite content to play within the framework that is being determined by other big powers. And the motivation of the government of President Xu Jin Ping remains quite like the Ming Emperors', which was to become economically strong and address the matter of famine, flood and other internal issues as priority. The domestic problems compelled the rulers to be inward looking wanting to have to do very little with the neighbours or the region, just as the problems the present leadership is seized with, particularly of equitable development of all the regions of the country.

My view stems from our discussions with various Chinese officials during the recent visit of a Bangladesh media delegation to China, on the invitation of the Chinese government. However, the significant difference between now and then is that the current Chinese leadership, in its attempt to reconcile between a command economy that China was, and a market economy that it has become, which has resulted in the sharp rise in inequality between people, and unequal development between its different regions, is involving its neighbours and the region to achieve the goal of a truly egalitarian society. That

is why the many regional and sub-regional groups that China has initiated

That China doesn't pursue the path of superpower was what was articulated very clearly by Mr. Guo Yezhou, Vice Minister of the International Department of the Communist Party of China, while talking to our team. He further said that China was adverse to power projection. It was in response to a question as to when China would be playing its role as a world power. Understandably, China's unipolar role is compelled by the need to climb higher than the current 18th position in the per capita income matrix. While Chinese scholars and academics do not hesitate to assert that China is indeed a big power, I am sure it was not merely modesty that prompted the response that it is averse to wielding power. It was a frank expression of China's international policy which is focused entirely on 'peaceful development role' of China. However, one wonders whether such pronouncements would assuage the apprehensions of the West about the emerging clout of China both economically and militarily and the "China threat" as articulated by Obama.

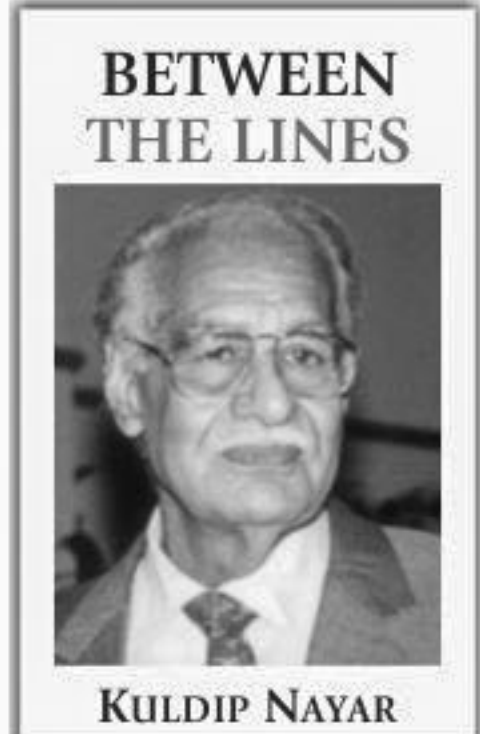
China, willy-nilly, has overtaken the US as the leading economic power. According to one scholar, this fact had been acknowledged way back in the spring of 2010 in a Pew Global Attitude Survey where more Americans, British, French, Germans, Russians and Japanese believed that the Chinese economy was larger than US', although the Goldman Sachs Report Published in 2007 would

have us believe that it were not to happen before 2027.

For those that would want to see a countervailing weight to the current world order where only US' diktats run, China's virtual abnegation of a leadership role in international politics will come as a disappointment. While no one would like to see another hegemonic power emerging in the world, for China to remain non-committal on issues that threaten international security adversely, like its stance on the Ukraine issue, is indicative of its emphasis on self interest

China's policy of good relations with big powers while not disturbing the small neighbours and allowing them the space to develop is all good. But to abdicate its responsibility as a global power, which China is, in prevailing upon a unipolar world to change the status quo will be counterproductive in the long run. That will make the underlying philosophy, that economic development and interdependence would make the possibility of conflict recede, a fallacy.

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BETWEEN THE LINES

THE Indian National Army (INA) was the force which Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose had raised when he was living in Singapore after escaping the British rule in India. The force was meant to be an armed hand of the people participating in the national struggle and drew people from all communities.

Netaji differed from Mahatma Gandhi's approach of non-violent movement to oust the British. Netaji believed that non-violence could be an ideology but not a creed. The national movement should be free from violence but, if need be, people could resort to arms. Netaji recalled the Mahatma's immediate stoppage of *satyagraha* at Chauri Choura in Uttar Pradesh where the mob killed the policemen who had fired on them till they exhausted the last bullet.

Subhash Chandra Bose died abroad in mysterious circumstances and did not return to the subjugated India. His papers probably reveal not only his differences with the Mahatma but also the cult of violence against the non-violence ideology.

The government of India had an ideal opportunity to release the papers relating to him when a person asked for them under the Right to Information Act (RTI) a few days ago. The people in India are disappointed that the papers, which the BJP promised during the election campaign to make public, has gone back on its words.

Home Minister Rajnath Singh, who gave the undertaking, has taken a U-turn on the issue and has refused to divulge the information in parliament. That the Home Minister has not kept his promise is unfortunate but more regrettable is the denial of authentic information on the differences between Netaji and Mahatma Gandhi. Apparently, it was more than the difference in the viewpoints.

All that the public knows was that the Mahatma supported with J.B. Kripalani, a leading Congress leader, against Netaji for the office of Congress presidency in the party election. In fact, it was a confrontation between the two ideologies, one non-violent and the other for the use of arms, if needed.

With the Mahatma jumping into the arena, the contest did not remain confined to non-violence and violence but a challenge to his authority. Netaji did not want the national movement to look divided and preferred to withdraw. But his stock did not suffer. The people began to revere him more. However, the Mahatma turned out to be right that violence could not match the strength of the British Empire and that non-violence, backed by the teeming millions, was the most effective weapon.

In fact, the Mahatma's ideology had a moral and critical side to it: you can win through love even the most tyrants, not by the gun, which he can gather in great number, but through your behavior not to hit back even when kicked.

Jesus Christ's philosophy was to offer the other cheek when slapped on one. His cult was propagated by the Mahatma through the evening prayer meetings he used to have daily. I recall that at prayer meetings all the three



country's attention focused on the much-needed development. True, Prime Minister Narendra Modi talks about it but when the development is spelled out it seems to be aimed at benefiting the upper half than the lower half.

In the six months' rule of Narendra Modi, there is neither the lessening of the number of poor nor of their improvement. This is primarily because of the BJP, which has installed Modi, has no economic programme to uplift the poor. Comparisons are odious, but China has been able to get 20 million people out of poverty in which they had got stuck.

True, China's is a totalitarian system but in democratic India some progress should have been visible. Apart from the speeches of political leaders on ameliorating the condition of the poor, there is little on the ground. Election after election, the nation is sold on the dream of development but it doesn't fructify because both the main political parties have used power to collect money and have had no other plan for the people.

It is good to hark back on the days of national struggle when *roti, kapada aur makan* was promised. But we also have to think about today and tomorrow. People have little faith in the political parties but do they have any alternative?

The writer is an eminent Indian columnist.

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## Moral education to curb violence against children

We are deeply shocked at the report, published in the daily Prothom Alo on 29th Nov '14, that a 4-year-old girl was allegedly raped by a neighbour, Muhammad Ali, a teenage boy of 15! The child is from a poor family of Bilashpur village under Tarash Upazila of Sirajganj district. Now in critical condition, the child is being treated under the district sadar hospital. A case has been filed against the perpetrator.

Violence against children is increasing in our country at an alarming rate. We should find out the reasons behind it. Moral education and values should be practiced within families strongly. At the same time, schools can play an important role in curbing such crimes by imparting moral education to students.

Md. Abdul Halim  
Project Coordinator  
Community Empowerment in Combating Violence against Women and Girls Project, NDP Sirajgonj

## Congrats to BD cricket team



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Heartiest congratulations to our cricketers. They have defeated the Zimbabwe team in an extraordinary manner. We hope the trend of winning will continue and they will make us joyous again. At the same time, we hope they will not become overconfident, remain humble and thank Almighty Allah for making success possible.

Nur Jahan  
Chittagong

## Amitabh's tweet

I have read a tweet from Indian celebrity Amitabh Bachchan: "The biggest suspense of life is that you don't know who is 'praying' for you and who is 'playing' with you."

The above observation is quite true particularly in the present time when hypocrisy has become the order of the day. Now what people say hardly matches their action. Often people express sympathy to console others in trouble but whether they really mean it or pray for them is a matter of doubt!

Professor M Zahidul Haque  
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## Comments on news report, "Boycott AL to save democracy," published on November 30, 2014

Nds  
Unfortunately politicians have preferred boycotting democracy.

## "Khaleda wanted martial law" (Nov. 30, 2014)

Molla A. Latif  
Jamaat-e-Islami opposed the creation of Bangladesh in 1971 and all those who have been with Jamaat oppose the independence of Bangladesh. If anyone tries to deny it, he denies the truth.

## "Probe committee offers nothing" (Nov. 28, 2014)

Saiekh Sohrauddin  
It still does not explain the precise reason for grid failure. So disappointing!

## "Saarc Summit ends on a positive note" (Nov. 29, 2014)

OpeeMonir  
SAARC has failed grossly; why don't we simply agree with this?

## "BGB men open fire after crash kills 2 jawans" (Nov. 29, 2014)

PlainSpeaker  
Is it acceptable behaviour of any member of the BGB by any standard? When will the Bangladeshi people understand this simple fact? Law of the country must take action against the driver but nobody has any right to take the law in his own hands. Who authorised the BGB men to vandalise roadside shops and charge truncheons on the locals?