

Salvage the sea-trapped people with utmost urgency

National and international bodies should coordinate unflinchingly

WE are deeply worried at the reports that after a long two weeks boats full of Bangladeshi and Rohingya immigrants are still stranded at the Bay of Bengal and Andaman sea. Due to lack of access to urgently needed food, water, and medical assistance many of them have already perished and others if not succoured soon enough would go the same way. It is a man-made humanitarian disaster that all concerned must make a common cause to mitigate without further ado.

Meanwhile, Philippines and Gambia have offered help to give shelter to these floating people and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) has assured repatriation of Bangladeshis to their homeland. But the pressing need of the moment is to arrange safe landing of these floating people to a nearby country as Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand are turning away the boats. There has been very little progress in that sphere.

As for Bangladesh, it is disconcerting that the Foreign Ministry, Home Ministry and Expatriate Welfare Ministry instead of coordinating to address the problem of salvaging the victims are passing the buck to each other. If the inter-ministerial committee to counter human trafficking had worked effectively we might not have had such a problem on our hand in the first place.

We urge the government to make a coordinated effort in the whole salvage operation ranging from mobilising international support to arranging immediate landing of the boats to safer places to eventual repatriation of Bangladeshis to their homeland. Time is of the essence.

Barbaric torture of a minor

Corporal punishment lingers

THREE madrasa teachers in Dinajpur were arrested by police for alleged torture of a student accused of stealing on May 19. That a Class II student can be confined for three days and caned at a stretch and kept half-fed is something out of medieval times. Enlightenment, it seems, has not permeated some strata of the education system. Indeed, a 2008 UNICEF study pointed out that these are not stray incidents and nine out of ten students involved in the study claimed to have suffered one form of corporal punishment or the other.

If the study is anything to go by then we have a serious problem. A lack of child-friendly mindset is missing in the school or madrasa teaching system. We are paving the way for scarred minds of the next generation who will grow up to be less-than-productive adults in society. Corporal punishment is still taken recourse to for enforcing discipline despite its prohibition, which reflects a failure of enforcement of the law. The archaic practice is entrenched and it will take concerted and persistent efforts of education authorities, parents and teachers to treat corporal punishment with zero tolerance.

Until the ministry concerned gets involved in inspecting schools and takes effective disciplinary measures against teachers abusing children, there will be no improvement in the situation. In parallel, teachers need to be reoriented on how to better manage students that involves non-violent measures.

COMMENTS

"It's time to wake up"

(May 16, 2015)

Md. Sabuj Sarker

We always talk about awareness/waking up, but what's the result?

Rafiqul Islam

Unplanned constructions are going on; both by the general people and different authorities. Buildings are required to accommodate people and business but should not compromise safety.

Abed-ur Rahman

The main reason behind this is corruption.

Tasnuba Afroze Runa

The number of unplanned buildings is increasing day by day in Dhaka. If an earthquake occurs, hundreds of thousands people will die. Buildings must be constructed in a planned way.

Sharif Iftekhar Mahmud

We often talk about unplanned urbanisation and industrialisation but we hardly think about who is going to fix them. We need planners to plan, engineers to construct and oversee maintenance, politicians to implement the plans and law enforcers to clear obstacles for implementation and make people follow the rules and regulations. We also need professionals of other fields to contribute in their own ways to make the whole process a success. It is a pity that we hardly see qualified people in such important positions.

"Urban poor in abject health condition" (May 18, 2015)

Faysal Ahamed

By establishing community clinics, the present government has taken some important steps toward developing rural health conditions and services.

Shah Alam

A consolidated health plan is necessary in this regard.

Salahuddin case getting 'CURIOUSER' and 'CURIOUSER'

STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING



Brig Gen
SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN
ndc, psc (Retd)

THE plot would have provided for an excellent script for Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and an even more challenging mystery to Sherlock Holmes to solve how the BNP

leader landed up where he did after two months of being incommunicado with the rest of the world.

The government's "we told you he is not with the police" is as surprising as BNP going into a mute mode after the appearance of Salahuddin in Shillong. But should we be surprised?

Given the curious happenings in the country that we have been witnessing for several years -- from politics to elections, both at national and city council and UZ levels, disappearances of political figures, some members of the law enforcing agencies acting as paid killers, submission of charge sheet for gruesome killings taking nearly a year, the delay due allegedly to the fact that some well linked persons are allegedly involved in the brutal killings -- we have stopped being taken by surprise anymore.

We had in these very columns dilated on Salahuddin's disappearance and had concluded with the hope that he would be the last of our citizens to go missing under dubious circumstances and that he does not meet the same fate as Ilyas Ali's, who, like some of his few other colleagues, seems to have proceeded on an never-ending journey like the sage

Agastya or Agastya Muni. We are not sure about the former but we are all relieved that the phantom figure, that Salahuddin had become, has materialised, even if it happens to be in the most unlikely setting and place.

In this column too, we had by reasoning eliminated two of the three possible circumstances of his disappearance, with the third possibility, of state involvement

answer to every one of those if only to prove that the finger being pointed at the police is being wrongly done.

Salahuddin is not the first prominent person to have landed up in India under doubtful circumstances, intentionally or otherwise. Two persons, by virtue of their involvement in or association with significant legal matters, had also landed up in India in similar fashion. I am referring to the case of Sukh Ranjan

The first question is why should the BNP leader seek on his own volition to land up in India illegally? What could be Salahuddin's reason for seeking sanctuary in India? It could be perhaps to avoid the same fate as some of his colleagues. But he could well have attempted the legal way and if he was arrested, say for example, at the airport, then the matter would have been in public domain and there would not be the chance of his 'vanishing.'

It is not beyond the pale of possibility that Salahuddin wanted to create a sensation. And if the government would have us believe that the Salahuddin act was meant to embarrass the government one wonders why a person who was in hiding in Bangladesh and apparently outside the reach of all the agencies, would inflict an uncertain situation on himself by going to India illegally? Would one subject oneself to a legal procedure whose conclusion no one can predict? And should the government have not anticipated such a possibility and instructed those guarding the borders to have been more vigilant to prevent him from escaping?

Given the circumstances so far we have come to know, the situation of Bali, Nur and Salahuddin appears to be quite similar. It is for the government to prove that Salahuddin is a fugitive. And instead of waiting for the legal process to end, it should use its good offices with the Indian government to get Salahuddin back, if only to prove that Salahuddin was not in police custody, and that the government had nothing to do with his two-month absence or his landing up in Shillong.

The writer is Editor, Oped and Defence & Strategic Affairs, The Daily Star.



PHOTO: BANGLAR CHOKH

meriting strong rationale for consideration. Therefore, when one commentator states that his appearance in Shillong after two months of going missing proves that Salahuddin was not in the custody of our agencies, it literally is jumping to conclusions without offering an iota of a cogent rationale why that is so.

Salahuddin's disappearances and appearance have raised many questions and it is for the government to provide

Bali and Nur Hossain. And it's not by coincidence that both these persons are involved in two very important criminal cases in Bangladesh, the former being an important witness at the trial of a war criminal. There is no certainty when Nur Hossain might return. And pending the absence of one of the main accused in the seven murder case, one wonders how justice can be meted out fully and without delay.

PROJECT ■ SYNDICATE

The Modi government turns one

AWAKENING INDIA



SHASHI THAROOR

INDIA'S Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government, led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, will mark its first anniversary in office this month. While it is too early to assess its overall performance,

the overwhelming sentiment across India so far is one of disappointment.

The BJP rode to power on a wave of expectations after a decade in opposition to the United Progressive Alliance government, led by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh of the Congress party. (Full disclosure: I was a member of that government.) Support for the BJP was so strong, in fact, that the party became the first in 30 years to win a majority in the Lok Sabha (the lower house of India's parliament).

Early enthusiasm for the BJP government was based on the perceived contrast with its predecessor. Here, at last, was a strong single-party government led by a decisive "man of action," rather than a fractious coalition led by a reticent octogenarian, who was often unfairly caricatured as uncertain and vacillating.

Modi was marketed to voters through a clever (and lavishly financed) campaign that portrayed him as the business-savvy leader who had transformed the state of Gujarat into a lodestar of development -- and who would do the same for the country as a whole. Attracting young people with the promise of jobs, and older voters with the prospect of reform and growth, Modi won a mandate that stunned the country's pollsters. Congress, meanwhile, recorded its worst-ever performance.

Since the election, Modi has energetically strutted the global stage, touting his

government as more hospitable to investors and urging foreign manufacturers to "Make in India." Yet his foreign travels have achieved little, beyond improving his personal standing, which had suffered considerably following accusations that, as Chief Minister of Gujarat, he had been at least negligent as more than a thousand people were killed in a 2002 anti-Muslim pogrom.

Modi's domestic performance has also been underwhelming. Although his speeches and sound bites continue to impress fans of his Hindi oratory, the gap between rhetoric and reality widens by the week.

Indeed, despite speaking eloquently of tolerance and accommodation, Modi has remained largely silent in the face of hate speech by BJP ministers and MPs that is alienating India's non-Hindu minorities. The BJP may preach development, but it is practicing bigotry -- a contradiction that Modi could resolve only by repudiating the forces that helped ensure his electoral victory.

Likewise, Modi has not kept his vow of "minimal government, maximum governance"; on the contrary, he has created the most centralised, top-down, bureaucracy-driven, personality-cult-dominated central government since Indira Gandhi's emergency rule in the mid-1970s. Those who decried the alleged "paralysis of decision-making" under Modi's excessively democratic, consultative, and consensual predecessor are now faced with a different kind of paralysis, as files pile up in Modi's office, the only place where decisions are made.

Senior positions -- including two on the indispensable three-member independent election commission -- stand vacant, leaving vital institutions unable to function effectively. Despite his talk about transparency and accountability, Modi has failed to appoint a central information commissioner, vigilance commissioner, or Lokpal (the ombudsman who has jurisdiction over all corruption cases involving MPs and central-

government employees).

With Modi too busy to keep up with all of the decisions he -- and only he -- can make, the government is adrift. In some cases, it is pursuing blatantly contradictory approaches.

Consider economic policy. Although Modi has declared that "the government has no business to be in business," he has failed to question his government's ownership and control of airlines and hotels. Indeed, privatisation of major public-sector behemoths is no longer mentioned.

Furthermore, labour-market liberalisation, once considered indispensable to attract investors and promote industrial growth, is on the back burner. Optimistic talk of reform has been replaced by officially articulated respect for "graduated incrementalism."

Likewise, Finance Minister Arun Jaitley, who once derided "tax terrorism," has unleashed the taxman on entirely new categories of victims, including the foreign institutional investors Modi is trying to attract. Unsurprisingly, investor sentiment, which perked up during Modi's campaign, has dampened considerably.

Modi's government has also revealed a fine talent for announcing grandiose schemes and failing to finance them. Worse, budgets for health, education, sanitation, and women's security -- all major talking points of the BJP's election campaign -- have been cut.

None of this has been lost on the public. India's farmers, for example, are up in arms, because the land-acquisition law passed by the previous government has been gutted through a series of amendments imposed by fiat (which are now, however, running into legislative resistance).

More generally, voters are not impressed by Modi's transformation from the chai-wallah (tea-seller) of the election campaign, who had sacrificed domestic bliss to serve the nation, into an omnipresent, gaudily attired celebrity

hobnobbing with other bold-face names. The nadir was reached in January, when Modi received US President Barack Obama -- "my friend Barack" -- in a pin-stripe suit with his own name embossed in gold on every stripe. The public, appalled by this display, promptly humiliated the BJP in polls for the Delhi Assembly, which the party had nearly won the previous year. Needless to say, the opposition, flattened electorally a year ago, is back on its feet.

In a sense, Modi is fortunate that his government's failings have become so

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starkly apparent so early in his tenure; he now has time to address them. He showed that he is capable of learning the right lessons when he quickly auctioned the pin-stripe suit for charity. Unfortunately, the rest of his errors cannot be so easily undone.

The writer, a former UN under-secretary-general, is a member of India's parliament for the Congress party and Chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

Disappointing view of Kuldeep Nayar

This refers to the article "Disturbing Trend at AMU" by Mr. Kuldeep Nayar published on May 9, 2015. While expressing his dismay and concern after returning from Aligarh, he has claimed that "Aligarh is the place where Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, the eminent freedom fighter, was abused before the country's partition. The students had found him in a train compartment. He was travelling from Delhi to Calcutta from his hometown. They took off their clothes and booed him to show all the disrespect which they could."

In this respect, I would like to clarify that the

group of activists which showed disrespect to Maulana Azad mostly comprised Muslim League elements and there was no participation of Aligarh Muslim University students in this fracas. In fact, Aligarh Muslim University invited Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, the first education minister in free India, to deliver the convocation address on February 20, 1949, and he was also conferred with Doctor of Theology (D.Th.), honoris causa at the same convocation. The Aligarh Muslim University Students' Union too honoured him with its prestigious honorary life membership. These positive aspects have not been touched upon in Mr. Kuldeep Nayar's article.

Maulana Azad, accepting Sir Syed's influence on him, said, "There has been a time in my life when

Sir Syed's works left great impression on my mind; it was the initial period of my student days." Acknowledging Sir Syed's contribution in the nation building, Azad said, "Sir Syed and his companions had established not only a college in Aligarh but they had created a progressive centre for all literary and educational activities. He became the central force of these activities surrounded by the most creative minds of the time."

We have always honoured the views of Mr. Kuldeep Nayar. He is an enlightened individual, secular to the core, but his views on AMU have disappointed and disturbed the Aligarh fraternity.

Dr. Rahat Abrar
Public Relations Officer
AMU, Aligarh