

The American ideal and Donald Trump

A historic day for the country

Main work of Padma Bridge starts

PRIME Minister Sheikh Hasina formally inaugurated the main construction work of the Padma Bridge on December 11. We congratulate her for undertaking the single largest infrastructure project in the country so far. The 6.15km bridge will connect Dhaka with other districts in the South and will significantly reduce travel time from districts like Khulna, Barisal and Jessore. And after completion, it will add 1.7 percent to GDP that will come from the savings in travel time and fuel, productivity gains, and increase in traffic volume, the added freight that will be carried and also the increased employment generation. Estimates point a boost of up to 29 percent in construction, 9.5 percent in agriculture and about 8 percent in manufacturing and transport.

That the government has decided to forge ahead with construction of the bridge without foreign assistance demonstrates a confidence in its ability to get the job done within a short timeframe, i.e. 2018. While we applaud the decision to move ahead with Padma Bridge, experts have pointed out the parallel investment of about US\$6 billion to develop associated infrastructure to reap the full benefits of the bridge. These include building up a comprehensive road and rail network on both sides of the bridge.

Apprehension remains as the several highways including the Dhaka-Mawa road network expansion project are yet to gather full steam. Without building several ring roads around the capital which will facilitate smooth transportation of vehicles from northern, western and eastern regions to travel over the bridge, the benefit of the potential of the bridge may not be realised fully.

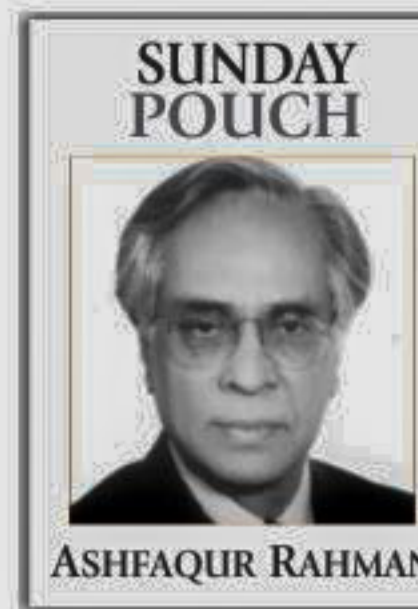
Lynching of dacoits

Nobody should take law in own hands

EIGHT robbers were beaten to death in Arahazar of Narayanganj on Thursday while four more were severely wounded by mob beating in Purinda Bazaar. All of them were linked, allegedly, with the pre-dawn robbery of a rice shop in that area. And the people were alerted through the mike of the local mosque about the robbery.

It is a dangerous trend and the statistics will say why. Between 2012 and 2014 more than 380 people were done to death by mobs. And this year alone up to September 104 people were killed in mob beating. It is dangerous too because it betrays the erosion of public faith and confidence in the agencies involved in the legal process. For example, in Purinda Bazaar this year alone there were 10 robberies and, reportedly, the police have done nothing about those so far. And if in this instance the police had not taken more than an hour to react then some lives could have been saved.

There is urgent need for the government to go into the whys and wherefores of lynching in this country. It does not require a social scientist to say that there is something very wrong in a society where people choose to dispense justice without taking recourse to the due process of law. The question one must ponder is whether it is a choice or a compulsion that lead people to do like what they did in Arahazar. But whatever may be the reason, nobody can take law in his own hands, and those who do must be held to account.



ASHFAQUR RAHMAN

SUNDAY POUCH
 DONALD Trump, one of the several Republican party candidates vying for the next US presidency, is in trouble. He callously declared that no Muslims should be

allowed to travel to the USA until the US elected representative can decide what needs to be done to contain the killings of American citizens in future. His announcement came after a Muslim couple had gunned down several US citizens in San Bernando in California recently. He has of course added that Muslims who live and work in the US should not be disturbed and be allowed to go about their business. Unfortunately, this announcement has created mixed feelings among the citizens of his country. It has not only created misgivings in the Muslim community worldwide, but has alienated several of the country's allies in the war against terrorism.

Trump has business and property interests across the Middle East; many of his clients there have not only condemned his statements but have also distanced themselves professionally. His insistence on attacking Muslims worldwide is thus bewildering.

In any case, Donald Trump is performing well with many of his close

supporters. They have shown their fondness for his 'strong stand' and wish him well. His utterances have gained momentum among certain groups, who are in a state of terror or confusion following the sudden attacks by militants. For the moment, he seems encouraged, and is likely to play a greater role in discouraging Muslims from travelling to the US.

Donald Trump is undoubtedly making a huge mistake by blaming all Muslims. He is, in effect, spreading canard against Muslims who are going about their own business or who intend to do so. But Donald Trump intends to score some easy points against other Republican contenders of the US presidency. Islam has always been a religion of peace. Its true adherents do not engage in killings of other humans. It is only those who misunderstand Islam who vilify it.

The US has always been a country with a proven track record of equal opportunities for all, irrespective of caste, colour, creed and religion. It has always been proactive not only in protecting the rights of all men and women throughout the world. But then why are some of its prominent citizens picking on people adhering to certain religions or beliefs? Generalising a certain religion or persuasion is not only wrong, it could also seriously damage the reputation and goodwill of free-thinking citizens of the US. It would stand out as a bad example before the world.

Historically, the US has welcomed

people of all nationalities who've been politically persecuted or socially excluded in their own countries. It has always helped the downtrodden, the outcast and the forgotten. The Statue of Liberty in New York is a symbol that reminds the world that the US has opened its arms to the best and the worst of human beings to allow them a chance to shape a good future for themselves. The founding fathers of the

permanent feature. Just as the US can pluck the best fruits from around the world, it can also be submerged in the quagmire of religious radicalism and animosity that prevails elsewhere in the world. However, if US leaders stoop as low as Donald Trump has, the US will fail to live up to its own standards, failing to be a torch bearer of equity and universal opportunities around the world.

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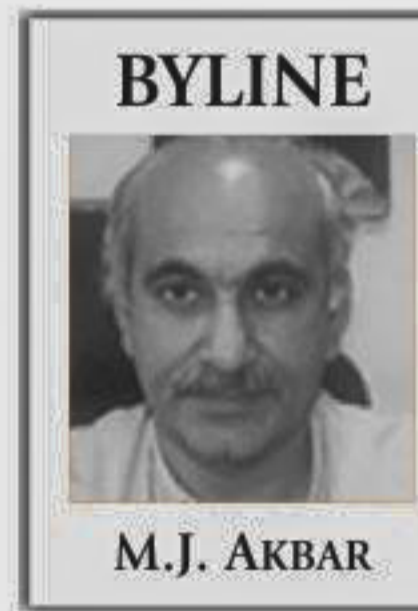
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The US has geographically been an insular country. With oceans on either side of North America, the US could remain out of the fray which has continuously plagued the citizens of Europe, Africa and Asia. The September 2011 attack and the recent killings in California prove, however, that the insularity of the US is no longer a

of the American population. By deliberately pointing fingers at people of a particular religion, he is trying to destroy the well-deserved reputation of a great country. Donald needs to be stopped. The American people can do this by not giving him even the chance to be elected as the next president of the USA.

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Bluff is not course correction



M.J. AKBAR

BYLINE
 THE bizarre is not as distant from our political discourse as we might wish it to be. There are times, however, when a party's defence-offense explanation becomes so overstretched that it can only be considered contempt — not of the court, but of the people.

This morning [I write this column on Saturdays], the Times of India carried an extraordinary story on its front page. It quoted two heavyweight Congress leaders as saying that the continuous disruption of both Houses of Parliament for four days had nothing to do with the fact that the courts had served notice for the trial of Mrs. Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi for alleged manipulation of funds in order to acquire properties currently in the possession of a defunct newspaper, the National Herald, worth an estimated Rs 2,000 crore for the rather paltry sum of Rs 50 lakh. They had, they claimed, permitted their MPs to warble and hoot [earning rebuke upon rebuke from the Chair] because of much older issues.

I do not mention the names of these senior Congress leaders out of sympathy for their plight. They cannot possibly actually believe what they said. They were speaking on orders from the palace. They know as well as anyone else that there was order in Parliament before a judge in the National Herald case deemed the case worthy of trial and summoned the principal accused to appear before court. In fact, there was an excellent debate in the Rajya Sabha on Nepal which made the House nostalgic for what it should be doing as a matter of course. The opposition stung with all the force at its command, and External Affairs Minister Mrs. Sushma Swaraj's reply not only answered each point but set at rest speculation about our position on a crucial problem. This is what the Parliament is meant for. This is democracy as it should be practised. The Congress participated in this debate.

The bold headline in Goa's newspapers this morning said all that needed to be said: "National Herald: Cong stalls RS for 4th day". The man who has repeatedly made it clear that his party's problem was the newspaper case, was none other than Rahul Gandhi, who has repeatedly accused the government of playing "100% vendetta" politics, jabbing the air with anger each time he used the immortal phrase.

Naturally, he has not bothered to explain how, because there is no explanation. As Finance Minister Arun Jaitley pointed out in a blog, as well as at a press conference, the government had not sent a single notice on this case to anyone. It was the court that had seen merit in a private complaint by Dr Subramanian Swamy, and indeed made some sharp remarks in the process. It should be noted that the courts have not always responded to Dr Swamy's complaints with equal force. They deal, as they should, with each case on its merits. For Rahul Gandhi to imply that the courts are biased, as he has



PHOTO: AFP

done repeatedly, is to challenge the integrity of the judicial system.

Congress should have understood that it would be isolated on what is a straightforward corruption allegation from the very first day on which it used vocal bullying to stall Parliament. Not a single opposition party came to its support. Even its allies in Bihar, JD(U) and RJD, kept their distance. The Trinamool Congress, which is at the moment trying to win brownie points in the hope that Congress will not enter into an alliance with the Left parties in the forthcoming Bengal Assembly elections, kept its ears open and head down. No one is going to be seen defending apparent or alleged corruption.

Political parties succeed when they gauge public response accurately. Everyone realised that the people were not buying the Congress argument. Congress took longer to recognise this because it is trapped in dynasty loyalty. A week, as has been famously noted, is a long time in politics. In this week, Congress took the national debate back to highest-level corruption and

subversion of a national party to the whims and needs of dynasty.

One has no idea how Congress will behave when Parliament resumes on Monday. It is possible that hardliners will argue that Parliament disruption should continue, this time over other older charges. But the age of Alice in Wonderland politics is long gone: you cannot, like the Queen in that brilliant fable, make words mean only what you want them to mean. The court of public opinion is the most powerful judiciary in a democracy, and Congress has lost the argument there. Voters know that the party has sabotaged important bills that would help the poor, the Scheduled Castes and Tribes, and the salaried because it has taken an untenable position on a matter that is best left to the legal system, rather than the political class.

Bluff is not course correction.

The writer is Editor of The Sunday Guardian, published from Delhi, India on Sunday, published from London and Editorial Director, India Today and Headlines Today.

COMMENTS

"Almost all 'elected' unopposed in Feni" (December 10, 2015)

Sala Uddin

This type of democracy now prevails in Bangladesh.

"Padma abuzz with activities" (December 10, 2015)

Rifat

I feel proud that we are constructing the Padma Bridge on our own.

"I AM SORRY" (December 9, 2015)

Kabir Ahmed

At least the man regretted the violation of electoral code and pledged to refrain from doing such activities in future.

"237 arches to greet home minister!" (December 9, 2015)

Farid Ahmed Dipu

What a senseless misuse of money!

Abdullah

We want to know who will foot the bill

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Chennai floods

This refers to the report, "Flights resume in flood-hit Chennai" (Dec.10). Chennai has always been known as a parched city – a perennial shortage of drinking water exists there. But now the heavy downpour threw life out of gear. The reason is encroachment of lakes on which towers and shopping malls have been built. Haphazard planning of the city should be blamed for the floods. The city's infrastructure has failed to keep pace with the increasing population.

It needs a rain management system. India is talking about smart cities but its cities are not smart enough to tackle a natural disaster!

It is unfortunate that workers of the ruling party were disrupting relief supplies by pasting stickers on relief materials. The air force personnel were not guided properly by the government and rescuing those close to the ruling party was given preference. However, hats off to those who helped the people stranded in floods.

Deendayal M. Lulla
 On e-mail

Discriminatory poll symbols

The symbols designated for women candidates for the municipality polls are highly disrespectful. The Election Commission designated different 'discriminatory' symbols like gas stove, bangles, frocks and dolls for the women candidates in the reserved seats. The EC should reconsider the symbols.

Anami

