

A mother's cry for justice

Solve her daughter's murder case

SIX months have passed since her daughter was murdered. With investigations into the murder not making any progress, Tonu's mother has called on the authorities to deliver the justice that she and her family is owed. It is a wish which we all share. That the investigators could not find, after all this time, any suspect to cross-match the DNA collected from the crime scene with, is quite unbelievable.

Tonu's murder was a sensational case. Not only did it evoke loud public outcries, but the circumstances surrounding it were also quite striking. While a young and promising life has been snuffed out in the most brutal way, we are yet to see any palpable progress made into the murder investigation, despite the various commitments that the authorities had made.

Is Tonu's murder investigation to meet the same fate as that of Sagar and Runi? What does it speak about our overall law enforcement and investigative process? The call for justice that Tonu's mother is making is not hers alone, but of the entire nation's. Do the people not deserve to know what had actually happened? Should the criminals responsible for such a heinous crime not be held to account?

The authorities must realise, that the inevitable outcome of their failure to apprehend the real perpetrators will be a total loss of public confidence in the justice dispensation system, causing irreversible damage to the rule of law. And the public cannot be faulted for thinking that there is an attempt to shield the high and the mighty. This the authorities cannot allow. The criminals responsible for Tonu's death must be brought to book.

Total disregard for safety

Jaywalking inexcusable

A picture carried on the front page of this newspaper on September 21 shows a toddler-carrying parent nonchalantly crossing the median that runs between opposing lanes on Pragati Sarani. It illustrates how little we value our lives and the lives of those dependent on us. That there is an elevated pedestrian crossing not 100 yards away from where the father was crossing the road with his child goes to show that it is the pedestrian's propensity to break traffic laws and callous disregard for public safety that is, to a great extent, to blame for many of the road accidents on our roads and highways. What exactly possesses a parent to risk the safety of a child when he cannot be bothered to walk to a nearby foot-over bridge and cross the road in safety? This is a common practice on the streets of the capital indulged in with impunity.

People cross busy highways where there is less traffic congestion and buses and cars travel at higher speeds than in gridlocked Dhaka. It appears that people are of the opinion that it is their God given right to suddenly cross the road whenever they feel like it, and that their safety must be guaranteed by drivers of vehicles on the road. Such behaviour is criminal because he is endangering the lives of others.

It really is up to us to take the trouble and pain to use designated crossing places and bridges that are there for ours as well as the safety of motor vehicles plying the roads. Jaywalkers must face severe penalty and only then is there any possibility of this mindset changing for the better.

Escalating regional tension

STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING



BRIG GEN
 SHAHEDLUL ANAM KHAN
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PLACE in South Asia is a direct function of the Indo-Pak relational dynamics. If the region continues to remain unstable, the responsibility for that lies squarely at the doors of the two countries and the nature of their bilateral relations which at best of times has been cool, in spite of the attempt to put a veneer of amity through efforts like "Birthday Diplomacy" from time to time, to outright hostility between the two, such as which we see at this particular moment.

The recent attack in Uri that killed 17 Indian soldiers has brought the state of bilateral relationship of the two countries to dangerous low. What the attack has exposed is a very lax operational preparedness of a garrison situated in a most sensitive and vulnerable location in Kashmir. Indian fingers are being pointed at Pakistan as the following statement from a former Indian foreign secretary suggests. "Pakistan is doing this in order to put India in the dock, unmindful of the reaction from the Indian side. These attacks have the backing of elements from Pakistan. There is a clear collusion between the government and extremist organisations who have been threatening such attacks."

All kinds of retaliatory measures against Pakistan are being suggested by informed and influential quarters in India. The options vary from creating an Indian Fidayeen, as espoused by a former Indian Army Chief, to a swift and limited foray inside Pakistan, to a Special Forces raid as was carried out in Myanmar against Naga rebels. But there is also the less belligerent and more sagacious view that is averse to any kind of knee jerk reaction - because knee jerk reactions are not likely to bring any long term results.

Evidently, the Indian decision makers are informed by wiser counsel that a military option is a non-starter. And the very reason for which India did not embark on a military venture, in spite of a full-scale buildup along the Indo-Pak border in 2002 following the terrorist attack on the Indian parliament on 13 December 2001, is also the restraining factor in this instance. Not being aware of what the nuclear threshold for Pakistan is, and an articulated non-first strike policy by India, it was the exercise of discretion as the better part of valour on the part of India that averted a major conflagration in the

subcontinent at that time. The same compulsion is dictating Indian response this time too.

Alongside public ire in India and call for a precipitate and immediate action, there is also a call in India for a graduated and calibrated response backed by robust diplomacy in order to bring to bear international pressure on Pakistan to make it desist from aiding and abetting the insurgency and terrorist activities in Kashmir. The idea behind this move is to isolate Pakistan and project the country to the world as a 'terrorist state'. However, it is a matter of conjecture as to how far that would go in fulfilling India's objective, and whether at all the underlying issue that has shaped Indo-Pak relations over the last

attempt to bring the Kashmir situation in international discourse once again. And that was very made very clear by the Pakistan prime minister when he said in a meeting with the Hurriyat leaders of n Pakistan Kashmir ahead of his departure to New York, that, "He would emphatically highlight the Kashmir issue at UN. Pakistan recently said at the UN Human Rights Council that Indian "repression" in Kashmir "was worse than that by Nazi forces".

If Pakistan is fomenting unrest in Indian Kashmir it is because there are objective conditions in that area that lends themselves to exploitation by Pakistan. And those conditions must be addressed by



ILLUSTRATION: JAMAL KHURSHID

seventy years, Kashmir, would be resolved through this.

Attack on Uri is the second attack on an Indian military establishment in eight months. But unlike Pathankot attack in January of this year which Pakistan had acknowledged as having originated from its territory and promised to cooperate in the investigation, Pakistan in this instance has rejected outright all allegations of its complicity in the attack.

The timing of the attack is also significant. It comes in the backdrop of renewed violence and unrest in Kashmir that has resulted in the death of more than 70 and just ahead of UN session. Many think that the attack may be linked to Pakistan's

India. Countering Pakistan diplomatically is one thing, and it is quite another to resolve what many see as 'the rising discontent among a new generation of estranged Kashmiris.'

What worries the other countries of the region is the very inflammable situation that obtains between the two nuclear armed countries. And this is a very unique situation too. Nowhere in the globe except for South Asia are there two countries possessing a destructive nuclear arsenal who share a common border and who are constantly on tenterhooks.

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Prachanda's visit: An Indian perspective

Addressing the intractable issue

SMRITI S PATTANAIK

NEPAL'S Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal, who heads the Communist Party of Nepal, Maoist (UCPN-M), recently wrapped up his three-day visit to India. His visit comes in the background of the downslide in the bilateral relations between the two countries under the prime ministership of K.P. Oli, who did not hesitate to play the China card after India publicly expressed its dissatisfaction over the passing of the Constitution that was not inclusive and especially excluded the interests of the Madhesi and Janajati people of Nepal. How Nepal resolves the issue of representation and federalism would determine the temperature of Nepal's relationship with India.

The nine-month rule of K.P. Oli, the eighth prime minister in the last ten years, was marked by distrust and suspicion, especially after Nepal hurriedly passed the republican Constitution in September last year. Out of Nepal's 598 MPs, 507 voted in favour of the Constitution and the lawmakers took just two days to pass all the provisions of the Constitution without any debate or discussion. The reaction it generated saw more than 40 people killed in police firing, as the protest movement spearheaded by Madhesi engulfed the southern part of the country. The Madhesi blockade with New Delhi's acquiescence was equally matched by anti-Indian sentiments, allegedly instigated by the government and a 'hill-inspired' Nepali nationalism that divided the country.

Rather than recognising the marginalisation and taking corrective steps to address the issue of political representation, the debate centred on the issue of sovereignty. The entire issue of political marginalisation was portrayed as Indian instigated agitation without any domestic root. Though the Madhesi withdrew their agitation, the low in India-Nepal relations was visible even when Oli visited India.

Rather than assuaging India's concern regarding political instability that is bound to have a spill over effect across the Indo-Nepal open border, Oli decided to play the China card. His visit to China and signing of the 10-point agreement was projected as a successful foiling of India's 'hegemony'. The transit treaty that was hailed as an important agreement that would end Nepal's dependence on India was high on rhetoric than reality. It did not take into account the cost effectiveness of the route. For example, the Tianjin port in China, that is supposed to provide transit to Nepal, is 3,000 kilometre away from Nepal compared to the Haladia port in India, which is only 1,000 km away. Moreover, Nepal receives subsidised petrol from

India. Though, the agreements did not unnerve India, Oli's obduracy to address the issue of political marginalisation of Madhesi and Tharus riding high on hill-inspired Nepali nationalism that manifested in intense anti-Indianism to consolidate his hold on power became a major concern. When confronted with a possible split in the government, the Nepal government not only cancelled President Bidya Bhandari's first visit to India but recalled Nepal's Ambassador to India, accusing him of conspiring with New Delhi against the government.

Cracks were already visible in the coalition of the Communists and the Maoists. Both the Nepali Congress and UCPN-Maoists saw Oli as a rigid politician who was unwilling to accommodate the genuine grievances

committed during Nepal's insurgency. The seven-point agreement to form a 'national consensus government' also could not salvage the partnership, as Prachanda felt that his continuation of alliance with CPN(UML) will dent his support base as the government failed to rehabilitate earthquake victims and refused to negotiate with the Madhesi. Already, Prachanda, after his May 5 flip-flop, was sending feelers to New Delhi for its support to a government formed under his leadership. Maoist decision to withdraw support to K.P.Oli paved for a new agreement between Nepali Congress and UCPN-Maoist with the support of Madhesi and as per the understanding, Prachanda assumed power after Oli's resignation. China tried its best to save the Oli government and

accommodating the aspirations of all sections of your diverse society." Prachanda also assured India that he will "take all sections of the Nepali society on board for the effective implementation of the Constitution" - a welcome development compared to Oli's stance of dismissing the Madhesi demand as 'externally instigated'.

It has been a year since Nepal promulgated its republican Constitution on September 20 last year. Yet, its painful transition to a stable republic is far from over. Though some factions of the Madhesi parties are part of the government, there are others who continue to remain outside the government. The major challenge is to muster the support of two-third members in the



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Nepal Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal during a ceremonial reception at the Presidential palace in New Delhi on September 16.

PHOTO: AFP

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of the Madhesi, pushing the country to enduring political unrest. The sharp political division on the basis of hill vs Terai and reluctance to accommodate Madhesi political aspirations had the danger of radicalising the Madhesi movement. The Madhesi leaders were also under pressure from their supporters to bargain hard, and their failure means conceding the ground to the hardliners that had threatened to fight for an independent Madhesi country, thereby leading to the possibility of more bloodshed in Terai.

Oli also could not fulfil the 9-point agreement that he concluded with Prachanda in May, which includes an agreement to withdraw cases against Maoist cadres for the crimes

salvage the coalition of left political parties from breaking away. The Madhesi were assured that the Constitution would be suitably amended to ensure their representation in the Parliament.

The first step Prachanda took is to reinstate Deep Kumar Upadhaya, who was sacked by K.P.Oli, as Nepal's Ambassador to India. Before Prachanda visited India, in a meeting held in Kathmandu, he said that he intends to "normalise the relations that went through some bitter experience in the recent past". A red carpet welcome was laid out to Prachanda in New Delhi during his first state visit to India between September 15 and 18. India also emphasised the need for "inclusive dialogue

Parliament to amend the Constitution and redraw the boundary in such a manner that the historically marginalised communities, including the Tharus, find political space and are represented. It is likely that K.P.Oli is likely to give a tough time to the government over the amendment.

Unless the political forces of Nepal join hands to address the issue of marginalisation that paralysed the first Constituent Assembly and almost derailed the second one, Nepal will move towards an uncertain political future and instability in Nepal will have serious implications for India, with which it has a roti-beti [ties of food and family] relationship.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Calling for laws preventing accidents

Hon. Minister for Roads and Highway has expressed responsibility for the recent road accidents. Stiff financial penalties should be enforced on the vehicle owners liable for these incidents. This will prevent further violation of traffic rules and urge owners to take responsibility for their vehicles' actions.

The fines should vary based on the registered capacity of the vehicle. Offending buses should be fined for TK 5000 multiplied by the registered capacity, for instance. This amount should be paid, with official receipt, to victims within ten days of the accident. The police should charge additional TK 2500 if payment is not made in time.

 Engr. S.A. Mansoor
 Dhaka

Why did Bengal stop being ours?

I went through the article written by Enam Chowdhury about the ownership of the terms Bengali, Bangla and Bengal. Having fought our liberation war based on these terms, he is absolutely right in claiming that they belong to us culturally and historically.

In his historic speech at, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman said, "Banglar mukti chai, Banglar manush bachte chai, Banglar manush tar adhikar chai," finishing with "Joy Bangla." Yet these slogans were banned after his death in 1975. BTV and Bangladesh Betar stopped airing these terms until Awami League came to power in 1996. Questions arise as to why they were not preserved as our national heritage. Why was Joy Bangla replaced with Bangladesh Zindabad? I will be very grateful if the writer could address these issues in another article, explaining his party's stance on these matters.

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