

No doctors in 63 jails!

A case of gross neglect

WE are utterly dumbfounded to know from a report in this daily, that as many as 63 jails across the country have no doctors at all to treat sick prisoners while the Dhaka jail, has only two doctors serving a 172 bed hospital. The report has revealed a glaring lack of not only doctors but also nurses and ambulances. This often leads to prisoners dying because of lack of treatment. Some have died because they had to be sent to public hospitals and breathed their last on the way. Around 111 posts of doctors lie vacant.

It is learnt that the IG of police has informed the finance and health ministries of the shortages but no action has been taken yet.

There have been many reports on the terrible state of most of our prisons with underhand dealings that allow prisoners with connections and money to get certain privileges that ordinary prisoners cannot avail. This includes long hospital stays for their 'illnesses' that allows them to avoid the hardship of prison life. But for the rest of the inmates, things are very different and this report only reinforces that they are treated with utter neglect. Prisoners are in prison because they have breached the law of the land but that does not mean that they can be treated in such an inhuman way. The government must immediately put an end to the huge inadequacies of medical staff and ambulances in all the jails. There is no excuse for such gross negligence and violation of basic human rights that prisoners are entitled to.

Vested Property Return Act

Undue delay in implementation unacceptable

WHEN the Vested Property Return (Amendment) Act was passed in 2011 it came as a relief for the minority community of the county. They saw in it the prospect of getting back their properties through legal channels. Unfortunately, six years into enactment of the Act, there are still complications in its implementation, and legal owners have to face a lot of hassles in reclaiming their assets.

A study conducted in seven districts by Human Development Research Centre (HDRC) reveals that each legal owner had to spend about Tk. 2.27 lakh for the reclamation process. It also takes an unnecessarily long time to complete the handover. This interruption is caused by both pre-court parties including local administration and land offices and in-court parties including lawyers, public prosecutors and judges. The study also finds that a low number of judges and lack of priority on the cases under the Act delay the whole process. Rights activists also allege that illegal occupiers and land grabbers often manipulate the whole process in collusion with government officials.

The large number of unsettled cases, undue delays in transferring the property and high cost clearly indicates to the poor implementation of the Act. Despite the PM's repeated direction for quick disposal of the cases, the situation has hardly improved. The land ministry should look into this issue seriously and take immediate action to remove all the barriers to the proper implementation of the Act and thus expedite the return of 'vested properties' to their rightful owners.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

Cumbersome transport payment procedures

The process of depositing payments to the BRTA is very inconvenient for vehicle owners. Southeast Bank on the New Elephant Road used to accept payments, but it was later transferred to the City Bank near the City College. But yesterday, City Bank refused to accept the payment saying that they were short of officers. They advised us to go to the NRB Bank in Zigatola, who also turned us away because they didn't have the papers required to receive road taxes. They suggested that we go to One Bank in Dhanmondi instead.

This is proof of how civilians who want to pay their dues on or before the due date are harassed and inconvenienced. It's high time that the BRTA arranges receipt of payment from specified banks. The ideal solution would be for us to pay at the bank branches closest to our respective areas. We hope the BRTA will look into this matter immediately so that we can pay our taxes before the expiry dates.

 Sirajul Islam
Paribagh

Footpaths infested with shops

The entire pavement on the New Eskaton Road is occupied illegally by shops, vendors and makeshift eateries. Many school children need to use the footpath on a daily basis with their parents, but there isn't an inch of space to walk on. Some areas are even taken up by car and motorcycle repair shops.

I earnestly request the city mayor, who has done a great job freeing up footpaths in other parts of the city, to focus on the New Eskaton area.

 Mahboob Mallik
By email

21st-century version of Silk Road

NO FRILLS



SYED MANSUR HASHIM

THE keynote speech by Chinese Premier Xi Jinping during the opening ceremony of the first ever OBOR (One Belt One Initiative) summit held in Beijing recently contained an

outline of the financial offers for infrastructure development along the OBOR map. Indeed, he upped the mercury by announcing a further USD 14.5 billion to the fund and the summit is being attended by heads of states of 29 countries including Russia, Turkey and Pakistan. Most conspicuous is the absence of India. As an article in *The Economic Times* (India) stated, "OBOR in its current form encompasses all of South Asia sans India and Bhutan and enhances strategic heft in the same countries where India also has huge stakes including connectivity initiatives and infrastructure projects launched during past three years."

That notwithstanding, representatives from 80 countries, both senior and not-so-senior officials are attending the summit because OBOR promises to be as big, if not bigger than the Marshall plan rolled out after World War II (for the reconstruction of devastated Europe). The fear in many capitals of the West is that with a budget of around USD 124 billion for the purposes of boosting infrastructure (money sorely needed by emerging economies like Bangladesh), the balance of economic power will shift squarely to Beijing. We will have to wait and see if that is truly the case, but for the moment, countries like Bangladesh are keeping an open eye to see what is on offer.

The buzz word making the rounds remains "financial inclusivity". As President Xi pointed out "no matter if they are from Asia and Europe, or Africa or the Americas, they are all cooperative partners in building the Belt and Road." One can understand Indian scepticism about OBOR, especially in light of the fact that the USD 55 billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor runs



Chinese President Xi Jinping welcomes world leaders at the Belt and Road Summit.

PHOTO: DAMIR SAGOLJ/AFP

through some disputed territory and will in effect; help transform the economic landscape of its arch rival. This time round, the world's premier lending bodies did not skip the meet. As pointed out by Reuters "leaders from 29 countries attended the forum, as well as the heads of the United Nations, International Monetary Fund and World Bank. Britain's finance minister told the summit his country was a 'natural partner' in the new Silk Road." OBOR promises to plug some of the gaps in infrastructure financing that developing countries need in Asia. For Bangladesh, the appeal is obvious. The idea of replicating the China experience, even at a much scaled down version, is hardly lost upon anyone. We have taken the first baby steps in setting up of an EPZ for Chinese investment. Indeed, as pointed out by Professor of International Affairs of Renmin University of China Wang Yiwei, Bangladesh may indeed be one of the

first beneficiaries of special finance. "Bangladesh is one of the first choices for Chinese investors. That's why many Chinese entrepreneurs are engaged in many mega infrastructural projects in Bangladesh like Padma Bridge." Given our bitter experience over alleged graft on the Padma Bridge project that set our infrastructure and connectivity plans back several years, Chinese involvement in financing (and construction) comes as a much welcome relief — financing without political strings attached. In fact, that is perhaps one of the biggest selling points of the Chinese-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) which, according to the Chinese premier hopes to forge a path based on "inclusiveness" and "free trade" as opposed to "diplomatic power games". These are what policymakers of the developing countries have been waiting to hear for decades and only time will tell whether Chinese stewardship of

AIIB and the OBOR initiative is truly devoid of the power games we have been witness to for years.

OBOR and the advent of AIIB present Bangladesh with unique opportunities. The country's communications infrastructure requires billions of dollars' of investments to upgrade and we would be wise to stay out of regional rivalries that are a natural phenomenon in global politics. At the end of the day, Bangladesh will have to provide millions of jobs to the vast majority of its population (two-thirds of the population is aged below 30) and those will have to come through industry in the coming decades. If we are really serious about building Bangladesh as a regional hub for trade and commerce, then those billions will come in very handy and being linked to OBOR can only help us get there faster.

 The writer is Assistant Editor, *The Daily Star*.

Why Kashmir remains disturbed

BETWEEN THE LINES



KULDIP NAYYAR

WHETHER stone pelting on Indian Armed Forces in Kashmir is being done at the behest of Pakistan or as a response to fundamentalists' call, the fact

remains that the valley is disturbed. Scores of schools have been burnt and there is a fear in the mind of students that they would be punished if they were to attend classes. The separatists are allegedly leading a movement demanding students to boycott their education. The result is that the students

view but in the process, the Dal Lake shikaras and Nagin Bagh's *dongas* are not getting business. An ordinary Kashmiri is suffering. Even otherwise, the state's economy has been badly hit. People in Kashmir are generally poor like in the rest of India and they want jobs which they realise would come only through development, including tourism.

Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti does not seem to have any clue to the situation. She has said many a time that Prime Minister Narendra Modi is the only person who can solve the crisis in Kashmir. She is probably underlining the alliance between her People's Democratic Party and the BJP which is ruling at the centre.

is languishing in neglect because it is considered the language of Muslims. If New Delhi were to own and encourage Urdu, it would give Kashmiris at least one less reason to feel aggrieved.

Till recently, Kashmiris were opposed to pick up the gun to defy New Delhi. Home Minister Rajnath Singh has been relentlessly pursuing measures to help Kashmir return to normalcy. But, unfortunately, the Kashmiris have a feeling that the militants are trying to do give them a sense of identity. Therefore, the criticism that there is no resistance to the militants from within the valley should be understood as part of alienation from the rest of the country.

situation, can be won over by the assurance that the entire Indian market would be available to them for business or services. But this alone may not do. New Delhi will have to withdraw all the Acts relating to fields, other than defence, foreign affairs and communications. The Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act which was promulgated some 26 years ago to meet the extraordinary situation in the state is still in operation. Were the government to withdraw the act, it would placate the Kashmiris on one hand, and make the security forces more responsible on the other.

The National Conference waged a long war to get rid of Maharaja Hari Singh and had an icon like Sheikh Abdullah to provide secular and democratic rule to the state. But the party suffered defeat in the Assembly polls due to its proximity to New Delhi. The PDP won because its founder, Mufti Mohammad Sayeed, kept his distance from New Delhi, without alienating it.

The Kashmiris have voted for the untried PDP-BJP alliance because the combination gave them a feeling of identity. Omar Farooq Abdullah had to pay the price of the National Conference's image of being pro-Delhi. Kashmir's links with the rest of the country are too close to challenge it beyond a point. Still the opposition, however small, gives the Kashmiris a vicarious satisfaction of defying New Delhi.

Lord Cyril Radcliffe did not attach any importance to Kashmir. He was a judge in London who drew the line between India and Pakistan to establish two separate countries. He told me many years later during an interview that he never imagined that Kashmir would assume as much importance as it did. I recalled this instance when I was in Srinagar a couple of years ago to preside over the first anniversary of the establishment of an Urdu magazine. Urdu has been unceremoniously ousted from all the states, including Punjab where it was the main language until some years ago. In fact, the language lost its importance in India soon after Pakistan made it the country's national language.

Normalcy is also a state of mind. Kashmiris must be made to feel that their identity is not under attack, and that New Delhi realises the importance of their demands. What New Delhi has to appreciate is that Kashmiris' desire to distance themselves from the centre may not be considered as any meaningful transfer of power from New Delhi to Srinagar. Yet, the impression that the Kashmiris rule themselves has to be sustained, whatever the cost.

The writer is an eminent Indian columnist.



An Indian clears debris from a school building, allegedly damaged from mortar shells fired from Pakistan, in the village of Jhangar, some 130kms north of Jammu on May 14, 2017.

PHOTO: AFP/STR

are finding it hard to prepare and appear in exams which the rest of the country is having peacefully. The separatists should realise that a political movement cannot and should not make students helpless and let them suffer.

Another fallout of the agitation is that the tourists' inflow in the valley has reduced. So much so that Syed Ali Shah Geelani has led processions through the streets of Srinagar to assure the tourists that they would be protected in all eventualities.

Still whatever the assurance, tourists have come to prefer some different hill stations to Kashmir. It is understandable from their point of

New Delhi should, however, analyse why a person like Shabbir Shah, once pro-India, has turned himself to be pro-*azadi*. Probably, he does not find the space which he direly needs to direct his affairs in the valley. BJP has had no contact with people like him. The same is the case with Yashin Malik who wanted a solution within the Indian Union. But New Delhi has stretched Article 370 in such a way that the power has come to be concentrated at the centre.

Kashmir also feels strongly about New Delhi's step-motherly treatment meted out to their Urdu language. And it is generally believed that Urdu

It is unfortunate that New Delhi did not give the package which it had announced after the devastating floods in Kashmir a couple of years ago. There was no criticism by the media or political parties. No leader has pointed out to New Delhi that it had reneged from the promise. All these are interpreted in Kashmir as deliberate signs of a cursory attitude. I still believe that the 1953 Agreement, which gave India the control of defence, foreign affairs and communications can improve the situation in the state.

The Kashmiri youth, who are angry over the state's status as well the