

The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR
LATE S. M. ALI

DHAKA THURSDAY AUGUST 24, 2017, BHADRA 9, 1424 BS

The Executive - Judiciary dissonance

Should end forthwith

WE are worried about the continuing attack of the executive on the judiciary. This we consider an unhealthy development for the country. We had hoped that the matter, which stemmed from the Supreme Court verdict on the scrapping of the 16th Amendment, had run its course by now. Regrettably, the CJ's reference to Pakistan, which drew a parallel between that country and Bangladesh, was what triggered the latest spat by the PM, and that has added a new dimension to the matter. We are constrained to say that the situation in the two countries admits of no comparison, and the reference was misplaced and unfortunate.

We believe that no judgment can be beyond criticism, and not all may agree with a verdict. One may question the merit of a judgment but without attributing ulterior motives behind that. It is because one differs with a particular judgment that appeals are lodged, and sometimes the original verdict is overturned. We feel that reservations about a judgment, as in this case, can be and should be resolved through the established procedures and existing judicial channels, and the judiciary, especially the office of the Chief Justice, must be given the prestige and dignity that is called for in the constitution.

The three branches of the government are not contenders or mutually exclusive. In fact the three complement one another in the proper functioning of the state machineries. The executive and the legislative branches should govern while the judiciary should adjudicate. And this can be done without impinging on one another's turf or denigrating one another's status.

The inevitable consequence of the recent dissonance between the two branches is the sapping of people's respect for both the organs of the government, a very dangerous state of affairs. We believe that it is for the respective branches to perform as per the book, without losing sight of the fact that preservation of the dignity and the integrity of the three organs of the state is very much a responsibility of each of them. The denigration of the judiciary should stop immediately for the overall betterment of the country.

So many deaths on roads

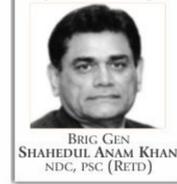
Take punitive action

WITH Eid-ul-Azha barely ten days away, we are once again confronted with raw data of people dying on our roads. According to figures published in a leading Bangla daily, 1,810 people have died due to road accidents over the last 189 days. That puts the number of people dying at 10 persons per day on average! Our paper has been highlighting the plight of passengers over the years, especially during the Eid festivities when this number multiplies manifold as reckless bus drivers start competing with one another to reach destinations faster. Faulty roads contribute to the accidents.

Excessive speeding of heavy vehicles on the country's highways has not decreased, and with little by way of legal measures to stop unskilled drivers being at the helm of large transports like buses, no one can tell what the consequences would be during the coming Eid festivity. We have never quite understood the apathy of the authorities to take measures to stop these avoidable deaths. The spate of accidents has much to do with the watered down proposed Road Transport Act that has no serious penalty for fatal accidents. When an 8th grader is deemed fit to drive an inter-district bus and where the driver can, literally, get away with murder, we have to be resigned to the fact that such accidents will continue to happen and drivers will act with impunity, unless quick measures are taken to rectify the faulty roads and the proposed toothless Road Transport Act is amended to include harsher penalties for fatal accidents.

Trump's "principled realism"

STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING



BRIG GEN SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN NDC, PSC (RETD)

IT has taken President Donald Trump exactly eight months into his presidency to accept that running a corporate house and running a country are two different ball games, something that he must surely have realised the very first day after he was sworn in as president. It is interesting to see how quickly he has adjusted his judgment, in so far as his views and decision making on foreign policy issues are concerned, from citizen Trump to candidate Trump to President Trump—and thus the "principled realism" that he has based his arguments on and offered to the world as a prop up for the new Afghanistan and South Asia policy that he pronounced on August 21.

President Trump has realised, after all, that making decision as a president is not quite like making decision as a corporate head. And he says, that was what compelled him to study Afghanistan and prevented him from giving in to his instinct of pulling out of Afghanistan lock stock and barrel. But if one goes a bit deep into his stated policies—which narrates what he would be doing in Afghanistan henceforth, but not how—one is not sure if he has drawn the proper lessons from the history of a country that has gained the moniker as the "graveyard of empires".

Afghanistan is a country that has never been subdued. If Alexander would have kept a diary we might have had the benefit of knowing why, contrasted with Persia that took only six months for him to conquer, Afghanistan resisted him successfully for three long years. The three Anglo-Afghan wars show who came out the worse of the two contestants, and the Soviet venture which ended in total disarray for the Soviet army compelling its withdrawal from Afghanistan, is a clear testimony to the truth that technological superiority has no correlation with the final

outcome of a war fought against, and resisted by, a people, no matter how much socially incoherent they may be. And this fact has been reconfirmed by the continued involvement of the mightiest country in the world in Afghanistan, and providence only knows when that will end, if at all, because the new strategy enunciated by the US President on August 21 makes a shift from time-based approach to condition-based one. And "condition" lends itself to very wide interpretations.

It is true that the American people are "weary of a war without victory" as Trump says, particularly a war that has gone on far longer than any in American history, exactly 16 years and several

And if war is extension of politics, one wonders if the political objectives of launching the wars have been met at all. Except for in Iraq where the end of Saddam, a thorn on the side of Israel, and the control of the Iraqi oil—the two objectives—have been secured, the political scene in both countries contains the recipe for further destabilisation of the region. And if it is "enduring outcomes" that the US is seeking to attain, policies guided by ulterior motives have little chance of securing that.

Certainly the Trump administration has taken some lessons from the continuing debacle in Iraq and Afghanistan which is reflected in the

strategy, which is directly related to South Asia, has serious strategic implications for the region. It is understandable that the US would seek alternative partner in the region to address the Afghan mess, given the duplicitous policy of Pakistan of running with the hare and hunting with the hounds. But changing "allies" and developing strategic partnership with India would surely initiate a modern "Great Game" in Afghanistan. For Pakistan, Afghanistan is its strategic depth and it is this compulsion that forces its Afghan policy. Pakistan has to be in good terms with whoever controls Afghanistan, and it is certainly not Ashraf Ghana's government whose writ



US President Donald Trump delivers remarks on America's military involvement in Afghanistan at the Fort Myer military base in Arlington, Virginia, August 21, 2017.

PHOTO: AFP

No war can be fought on predetermined time-line as Obama wanted to do. But Trump is adding—even if by only 4,000 soldiers—to the so called "Obama Surge" which has failed to deliver.

trillion dollars to boot. But then what victory in wars is Trump talking about? One can recall only one single war after the end of World War II that went America's way. Except for "Desert Storm" the Korean War was a stalemate and the consequence of which is a region that is constantly on razor's edge. The Vietnam War was an unmitigated disaster, and Iraq and Afghanistan continues to and has cost the US heavily in terms of American lives and money and has bled the two countries under its occupation.

It is a maxim in military strategy that one can determine fairly accurately the day to initiate a conflict but cannot say with certitude when that will end or if ever the author can end it. While America dictated the factors before starting the wars in the two countries, once the dice was rolled, the unpredictable factors are dictating American policy now.

new policy. No war can be fought on predetermined time-line as Obama wanted to do. But Trump is adding—even if by only 4,000 soldiers—to the so called "Obama Surge" which has failed to deliver. But a situation based approach is more realistic than a time based one.

Trump wants to do away with the US nation building programme in Afghanistan. It is true that "nation building" in a country whose people are yet to congeal as a nation produces very little result on ground. And nation building as a development matrix cannot be infused by an occupying army nor can it be done in the image of the occupying country. There is much more to nation building than building of physical infrastructure. The social-political aspect cannot be overlooked in this exercise.

But the third aspect of the new US

runs in that country. On the other hand, India would never allow Pakistan's influence in that country to go unchecked. That is why India has, reportedly, invested billions in infrastructure building in Afghanistan and has so far built 2,500 kilometres of road there, the soft power approach.

We have to wait and see how the new US policy, the so called "Path Forward in Afghanistan" is implemented and how the American "global war on terrorism" is readjusted to stop resurgence of terrorism which is the core US objective. It bears repetition that the US war on terror has been a dismal failure. Realisation of strategic folly needs serious recalibration of strategy. The latest policy, stemming from "principled realism" gives little indication of that.

Brig Gen Shahedul Anam Khan ndc, psc, (Retd) is Associate Editor, The Daily Star.

Silk Road to the Southeast

BIMSTEC can pave the way to expedite trade between South Asia and a thriving Southeast Asia



BIJENDRA MAN SHAKYA

THE two-day ministerial meeting of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multisectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), that wrapped up in Kathmandu on 11 August has pushed for a free trade agreement among the seven member countries. The meeting has also agreed to deepen rather than widen the areas of cooperation among the members, who have been saddled by broader yet futile activities since its inception. In this regard, the understanding as reached at the meeting to speed up cooperation—explicitly in technology, energy, and trade facilitation—is laudable. This is an encouraging sign for a group that has been moving at a glacial pace since its establishment 20 years ago. Apart from this, the Kathmandu meeting has shown Nepal to be an ardent supporter of free trade in BIMSTEC. Nepal was also the first country to ratify the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) agreement. Collaboration with partners is necessary to develop the alliance as a booster of intra-regional trade in general and a strategic market access for Nepal in particular.

Nepal's full membership to BIMSTEC in 2004 coincided with it signing the SAFTA agreement and joining a South Asian free trade group, and its accession to World Trade Organisation, a multilateral trading system. However, even after more than 12 years of these dealings, Nepal has failed to make strides in trade. This is made evident by the contribution of export as a percentage of

the country's Gross Domestic Products (GDP), which plunged from about 8 percent in the early 2000s to just 4 percent in later years. The country's trade deficit is even worse; it has gone from a mere Rs 200 billion 10 years ago to a staggering Rs 800 billion currently. That means the country's trade deficit now accounts for more than one-third of its GDP.

Out of Nepal's six partners in the BIMSTEC coalition, the trade relation with India has also been based on a bilateral preferential treatment and the SAFTA agreement. The bilateral preference which is rooted deeply in Nepali policy and is partially reciprocal is more favourable than SAFTA and

enhance trade with the three partners mentioned above. However, it depends on their willingness to gradually reduce the number of products from their respective negative lists, which have been hindering free trade in South Asia since the implementation of SAFTA. From this perspective, Nepal's affiliation to BIMSTEC can be particularly meaningful to expand free trade with Myanmar and Thailand, which are also members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), a free trade alliance among 10 Southeast Asian nations. And, through this connection, Nepal can smoothly build a strategic market access to thriving Southeast Asian economies.

In fact, this can be one of the core

collaboration with BIMSTEC partners

One of the important steps is to use this overlapping regional alliance as a basis for developing products and services that are tradable with countries in both South and Southeast Asia. For this, BIMSTEC partners will be required to focus only on very specific areas of cooperation that complement the objective of strategic market access. The prioritised areas should be dynamic for the promotion of regional trade as a whole. Like in other regional alliances, trade as the engine of growth should remain central in the BIMSTEC agenda. In addition, all member countries must expedite tariff liberalisation even faster than as stipulated in the existing fast track approach. If the members in the alliance genuinely commit to these measures, they will have hope for the creation of trade between the overlapping regional groupings. Moreover, it can be an excellent start for languishing South Asian economies like Nepal to connect with the dynamic economies in Southeast Asia, such as Malaysia and Singapore, for the promotion of trade.

From this perspective, it is necessary to perceive that sticking to specific areas of cooperation among the BIMSTEC partners is as important as reducing the number of products in the negative list of SAFTA partners so this overlapping regional alliance flourishes for mutual benefit. This is also more valuable for the less developed countries in the grouping, including Nepal, that have been beset by poor performance in trade, while being tangled in the mushrooming regional alliances.

Bijendra Man Shakya is an associate professor of economics at Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu, Nepal.

COURTESY: THE KATHMANDU POST/ANN

Like in other regional alliances, trade as the engine of growth should remain central in the BIMSTEC agenda. In addition, all member countries must expedite tariff liberalisation even faster than as stipulated in the existing fast track approach.

BIMSTEC for Nepal's trade with India. Similarly, the trade ties with Bangladesh, Bhutan and Sri Lanka are also founded on SAFTA, liberalising trade among South Asian countries across-the-board, with the exception of some products as provisioned under a "negative list" that each member country keeps as part of the agreement.

Unlike the SAFTA framework, BIMSTEC approaches free trade on a product-by-product basis which is rudimentary for trade liberalisation. Because of this latent BIMSTEC approach to free trade, SAFTA appears to be a relatively better channel for Nepal to

objectives of Nepal under the BIMSTEC affiliation. Although diversified, the coalition of countries in Southeast Asia has established itself as a successful regional grouping after the European Union. The region as a whole offers a huge market with a combined GDP of USD 2.5 trillion and is inhabited by almost 640 million people with per capita income ranging from USD 2,000 to above USD 52,000. However, the question is whether or not Nepal can exploit this opportunity within the existing BIMSTEC framework. It is not possible to gain from these prospects without Nepal taking aggressive steps in

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

Rest in peace, Nayak Raj

It is saddening to hear that Nayak Raj Razzak died of heart failure at the United Hospital. I have known him ever since Behula was released in the early 1960s. I watched most of his films made in both Bangladesh and India. Since about 2010, I have known him somewhat personally as he, along with his little grandson, used to offer Juma prayer at the Gulshan Azad mosque.

In 2011, I saw a TV report on Razzak's birthday and the next morning was Friday. So, I bought a present for him and took to the Mosque. I delivered it to him and wished him "Happy Birthday"; he thanked me in his usual kind and polite way.

May Allah bless Nayak Raj Razzak.

Luthfe Ali, via E-mail

Too many candidates, not enough vacancies

On August 25, 2017, the Non-Government Teachers Registration and Certification (NTRC's) examination is going to be held. A report shows that six lakh candidates are fighting against only 14 thousand vacancies. Those who pass the examination are supposed to be employed in non-government schools. Not all of those who had passed in the last NTRC examinations, however, were employed. But now the government is holding new examinations for another large group of candidates. The government must solve this problem first by employing those who passed the exam last time and then holding new recruitment exams.

Harun Or Roshid, via E-mail