

From Breivik to Brenton to #HelloBrother

Halda River pollution getting worse

Authorities silent on effluent dumping

A recent report by the Department of Environment (DoE) states that the discharge of industrial effluents into the Halda River is causing depletion of fish stocks. Halda River is vitally important because we are told that it is the only place in the country where naturally-laid carp eggs can be gathered for hatching. Unfortunately, DoE's probe has found that a number of industries are directly responsible for polluting the river. This probe was conducted back in 2017 and two years on, we find that no effective steps have been taken to take the polluters to task. With some 18 canals connected to the Halda River, the pollution has spread and despite being armed with detailed laboratory tests, we cannot understand what is holding up authorities from acting to save the river from destruction.

Although many industries in the area have claimed that they use effluent treatment plant (ETP), our reporters have found that there are some industries that are not using them. There are various types of activity going along the banks of the river ranging from housing estates to tannery, paper mill, power plant, etc. and it is the job of authorities to protect both the river and fisher folk communities that depend on the river for their livelihoods. In a country where there is no dearth of legislation but where the implementing agencies remain weak and ineffective, we find that saving rivers to be at the bottom of "to-do" list by authorities. The Chattogram Development Authority has stated it will act once the final report is published. We are extremely disappointed that the authority could not formulate a plan of action over the last two years since the DoE had prepared the initial report replete with toxicology tests and it is precisely this sort of delaying tactic that allows polluters to get away with environmental damage.

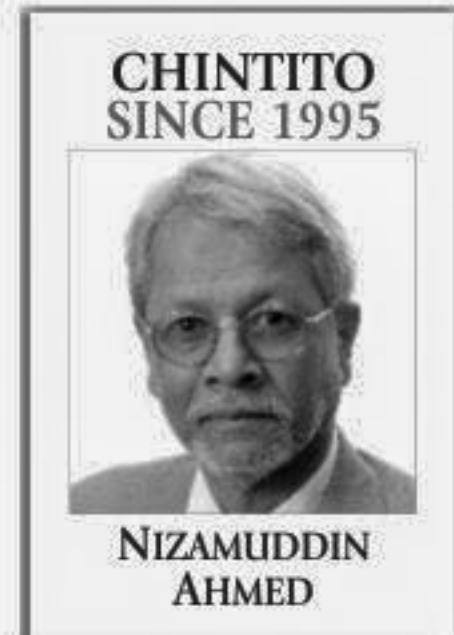
Drug cases flounder for lack of witness

Police witnesses the main defaulters

It is surprising that scores of drug related cases would remain adjudicated, some of them for as many as eight years, because witnesses fail to turn up for the hearings. That is exactly what the situation is in the Court of the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate, (CMM) Chittagong, according to a recent report in the leading Bangla Daily, *Prothom Alo*. According to that paper for example, an officer of the general registry office, which happens to be a few hundred yards from the CMM, Chittagong, could not find time in 30 months to appear before the court in a case in which he happens to be a witness. The matter assumes a preposterous degree of absurdity when one finds that one such case has been pending for last eight and a half years, and the investigating officer has not turned up as witness in these years. As many as five hundred police witnesses are defaulters.

The Drugs Control Act 2018 is very clear on this matter. These cases must be completed within 90 working days from the date of arraignment, and there can be an extension of 45 days at most. There can be no earthly reason why a trial should linger on for such inordinate length of time. Police duty does not end with submission of the charge sheet. They have a responsibility of not only investigating the case but also to see the case through.

When it is their duty to ensure the presence of the witnesses, there can be acceptable reason why policemen should fail to turn up in the court as witnesses in the appointed time and date. It goes without saying that such delays spoil the merit of the case, which ultimately helps the real drug dealers to escape the law. It cuts the other way too. In some cases, some innocents do get roped in. Such excessive delays are a burden on them too.



CHINTITO SINCE 1995
 NIZAMUDDIN AHMED

TERRORISTS kill without discrimination. Their tactics differentiate them from freedom fighters. Terrorists have no religion. They may have names—Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Muslim or any other. Buddhism does not support the use of violence as a way to resolve conflict. In Christianity, peace is achieved by accepting Jesus Christ as Saviour. Hinduism insists on the complete renunciation of violence because, by the law of *karma*, violent action has to result in a violent reaction. Muslims submit to Allah (swt), who says in the Quran, "... whoever kills a soul unless in retaliation for murder or for corruption in the land—it is as if he had slain mankind entirely. And whoever saves one—it is as if he had saved mankind entirely" (5:32).

Terrorists have no colour. White supremacists, Boko Haram, Islamic State, Aum Shinrikyo, Irish Republican Army...

Terrorists have but one language, spoken only by them, that of hate against mankind. By that count, random bombing of civilian targets is also terrorism.

Terrorists have no heart. They can kill a child with the ease of plucking a flower petal, and smile.

Terrorists are basically cowards. They choose to attack the most vulnerable, the innocent, including women, children and the aged, the profoundly defenceless, and the differently abled.

Terrorists have blown themselves up. Terrorists have detonated car bombs in crowded places. Terrorists have driven vehicles into people. Terrorists believe in mass shooting. What a waste of life!

Terrorists are everywhere, what with their often inexplicable agenda, many remain unknown, making the death of the bystander, the father and the mother and the son and the daughter more meaningless.

Brenton Harrison Tarrant is an Australian Christian. Prophet Jesus (peace be upon him) would have been so perturbed and ashamed.

Brenton's lengthy course of planning (motive to kill Muslims, purchasing weapons online, writing on the weapons, loading his car with arms and ammunition, choosing an alley for parking, knowing about Friday congregation, unguarded Muslim prayer

hall, the timing of his attack) describes his Christchurch carnage as calculated cold-blooded murders.

Brenton's hatred for an unarmed and peaceful group in prayer is highlighted by his live-streaming of the 50 killings and as many injuries, many by shooting repeatedly at close range the same victims writhing in pain. A woman lying by the pavement could be heard pleading, "Please help me, help me", and the killer shot her again from a few metres.

Facebook should be called to question on how it could allow live-streaming of the first 17-minutes of Brenton's attack on the two mosques. But bizarrely, thanks to Brenton; his video has stopped any possible witch-hunt.

Hours before opening fire, Brenton posted online a 75-page manifesto of

due to prolonged press conference. New Zealand Cricket did not provide any security protection and guidance for the team bus. Bangladesh Cricket Board has failed because before the tour, BCB's advance team should have discussed security measures with New Zealand in New Zealand.

An inscription on one of Brenton's five guns read "To take revenge for Ebba Akerlund", an ostensible reference to an innocent 11-year hearing-impaired girl, who with four others was killed by a terrorist in Sweden's Stockholm in 2017.

He was taking revenge of a killing in Sweden. He is Australian. He goes to New Zealand. If he was man enough, he should have gone after that particular 2017 killer. Instead, he videoed killing people prostrating before Allah.

If terrorists fought and targeted each other, much of the world would not be

across the board. Then why after a terrorist with a Muslim name goes on a rampage, the entire Islamic world becomes a target?

It is easy to fan nationalism because of natural unemployment against growing population and rise in costs of living, but not easy to deliver on the promises. We have seen election victories based on fanaticism, but the euphoria fizzles out because the ground reality is that much challenging.

New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern has responded with utmost compassion and has led a nation in grief to find strength and unity among religions and communities from this tragedy. The commencement of the first session of the New Zealand parliament after March 15 with recitation from the Holy Quran shall remain a moving moment in the annals of pacification.

As promised by Ms Ardern, not only the gun law, all countries should review their standpoint on the death penalty for extreme crimes. Online sale of weapons must stop worldwide. Violence on so-called digital games must cease for good. Love for others irrespective of differences of any nature must be included in education from kindergarten. Perpetrators of hate crimes must be dealt with severity.

For killing 77 people, Breivik is serving Norway's longest sentence, 21 years solitary-confinement with the possibility of an extension. For ploughing a van into Muslim worshippers, Darren Osborne will serve at least 43 years. Weighed against the crimes, the sentences smack of impunity, which allows latitude to terrorists, criminals and extremists of all creed and colour to partake in taking the life of another. For killing nine black parishioners, however, Dylann Roof is now on federal death row, awaiting his execution.

That fateful Friday, Brenton was welcomed at the mosque entrance by a 71-year-old former Afghan refugee Daud Nabi with two beautiful words, "Hello Brother", as would perhaps anyone to a house of worship of any religion. He was met with Brenton's venom and shot multiple times.

Let Allah (swt) bless Mr Brenton Tarrant and others like him to be kind and sympathetic, and to understand other religions and people. No one should be demonised because of one's faith or difference.

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hatred, espousing violent right-wing ideology, one that is alarmingly growing worldwide, much with the advocacy of some leading world leaders. How such a racist declaration could filter past social media's sieve belies common sense.

In an act of extreme cowardice, he chose neighbouring New Zealand instead of his native Australia perhaps because of the former's long history of peacefulness and resulting unfortunate lax security. In New Zealand, one can reportedly go back and forth an airport entry several times after check-in, unthinkable in today's world of security alertness.

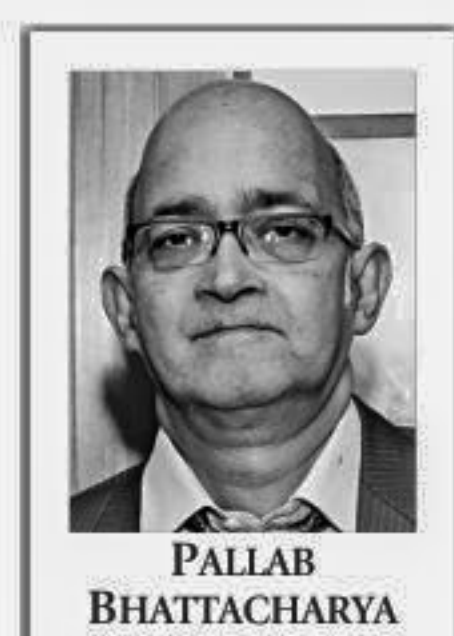
Five Bangladeshi devotees were among the fifty killed. Fortunately, Bangladeshi Test cricketers were delayed by a few crucial minutes in reaching the Al-Noor Mosque to offer their prayers

bothered. In mafia land turf wars, the bad guys shoot or blow up only the bad guys. They had the courage not to kill the innocent. Two children were among those killed Friday at Christchurch.

After Norwegian mass murderer Anders Breivik killed 77 mostly youths in Oslo and Utoeya Island on July 22 2011, no one labelled all Christians as terrorists. After American self-avowed white supremacist Dylann Roof shot down nine African Americans at a Charleston church in South Carolina, 2015, no one branded all whites as criminals. After Welshman Darren Osborne rammed a vehicle in Finsbury Park, London, 2017 near a mosque, no one bracketed all Christians as extremists. After Brenton, no one will either, not after the compassion and solidarity expressed by New Zealanders

Alliance-building for Indian polls gains pace

BJP ahead, opposition flounders



PALLAB BHATTACHARYA

EVER since India entered the unpredictable terrains of coalition politics in early 1990s, winning parliamentary elections and forming governments have been all about the right alliance partners. The coming national polls beginning on April 11 is going to be no exception. The last fortnight has seen frenzied alliance-building and seat-sharing exercises by parties on the opposite sides of the political spectrum with ruling Bharatiya Janata Party stealing a march over its rivals.

This is a far cry from the situation that prevailed in the entire 2018 when the saffron party, in spite of emerging as the single largest party without clear majority in Karnataka state assembly polls, was outwitted by the Congress which showed remarkable reflexes to join hands with the regional outfit Janata Dal (S) and formed government. The Congress was the larger of the alliance partners by miles but allowed its junior partner to head the government in a compromise to keep the BJP out of power. It had given rise to a perception that if opposition parties come together, the BJP can be kept at bay. The opposition hoped the Karnataka development was the right signal in the run up to the 2019 parliamentary battle.

Thereafter, a series of political developments including the victory of the Congress in three heartland states Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh and prior to that, the parting of ways between the BJP regional parties Telugu Desam Party in Andhra Pradesh and People's Democratic Party in Jammu and Kashmir tended to

strengthen the impression that the BJP was failing to retain allies. Besides, the BJP's relationships with its oldest ally Shiv Sena in Maharashtra was mired in all sorts of difficulties with the latter training its guns at Prime Minister Narendra Modi on a daily basis.

But one year is "light years" in politics. Come February-March this year the BJP suddenly got back its coalition-building acumen not only retaining its existing allies but also regaining some estranged ones. It has finalised poll alliance and seat-sharing with Shiv Sena, Akali Dal in Punjab, Janata Dal (U) in Bihar and All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam in Tamil Nadu. More importantly, the BJP managed to bring back in its alliance six small but key regional parties, including Asom Gana Parishad, in north eastern states which had drifted away from the saffron party over sharp differences on the Citizenship Amendment Bill that seeks to give Indian citizenship to religious minorities from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan. Now, the BJP will fight in partnership with these parties in six states (Assam, Nagaland, Manipur, Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh) out of seven north eastern states.

In the run up to the 2019 national polls, the BJP has so far struck alliances with 30 parties, both big and small, across India. In the process of coalition-building, the BJP, no doubt, had to make some adjustments, an euphemism for compromises, giving up a number of seats it won in 2014 to its allies in Bihar and Jharkhand and Maharashtra and taking in its stride the strident criticism from them in the past. Coalition-building entails a certain cost to a pan-India party like the Congress and the BJP. But then coalition politics is all about making compromises like Atal Bihari Vajpayee-led BJP had shown in 1998 when his party put on the back-burner contentious Hindutva issues like

uniform civil code, Ram Temple construction at the disputed site in Ayodhya and abrogation of special constitutional status to Muslim-majority Jammu and Kashmir in order to lead an alliance of 24 political parties. Narendra Modi too has shown that he is all for coalition. Despite getting majority on its own in the 2014 parliamentary poll, the BJP led by him, opted for National Democratic Alliance and he sticks to that coalition course.

In contrast to the BJP, the efforts of the opposition parties to put up a united front appear to be in disarray. The Congress has so far managed to stitch up alliance and seat-sharing in just three states—Maharashtra which has the second highest number of parliamentary seats (48) after Uttar Pradesh (80), Tamil Nadu and Jharkhand. The Congress has been excluded from the alliance forged by two key players in the key battleground state of Uttar Pradesh—Samajwadi Party and Bahujan Samaj Party—and will go it alone there. In Andhra Pradesh, the state's ruling Telugu Desam Party (TDP) refused to tie up with the Congress although TDP chief N Chandrababu Naidu had been one of the prime movers of opposition unity. The Congress's negotiations for alliance and seat-sharing with the CPI(M) in West Bengal, which elects the third highest number of Lok Sabha members (42) after UP and Maharashtra, seemed to have reached a dead end. The Congress is also divided on tying up with Aam Aadmi Party in Delhi to take on the BJP in the national capital. Lack of Congress' alliance with the regional parties in Andhra Pradesh, UP, Delhi and West Bengal, which together account around 158 parliamentary seats, means multi-cornered contest and a division of anti-BJP votes which could favour the saffron party like in the previous parliamentary polls five years ago and in UP assembly elections two years ago.

Congress President Rahul Gandhi has been criticised by some Indian analysts for lacking personal rapport with key regional leaders like Mayawati, Mamata Banerjee, Nationalist Congress Party chief Sharad Pawar and a penchant for alliance-formation. Rahul's performance in this area has been juxtaposed with that of his mother Sonia Gandhi as the party head in the run up to 2004 parliamentary elections when she put aside long-held suspicion about Tamil Nadu's key party Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam and its links with Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) which was behind the assassination of her husband Rajiv Gandhi and firmed up a tie-up with that party. In 2004, Congress returned to power after being in the opposition for eight years and ruled India till May 2014. It is easy to flay Rahul for not being big-hearted and accommodative towards regional parties. But one must realise that he cannot be expected to cede political space to other parties in states at the cost of his own party's potential to grow and regain its past supremacy there. For instance, the Congress is the main contender for power against the TDP in assembly polls in Andhra Pradesh, which are to be held along with parliamentary elections, and a main challenger to Trinamool Congress in West Bengal where assembly polls are due two years down the line.

Rahul Gandhi has a difficult choice—to help the Congress stand on its own feet which is a long-term goal or compromise on that to stop the BJP as a near term objective. He also needs to strike a balance in reconciling the interests of the Congress Party in state-level politics and looking at the pan-India picture. Blending the two will require a lot of political skill on the part of Rahul.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Make transactions hassle-free for IT professionals

Bangladesh has had some ground-breaking success in the ICT sector which has created a number of potential sources of income for its young people. Though our economy has managed to acquire USD 900 million in the last fiscal year from ICT exports, our government has failed to ensure that there is a smooth financial transaction system in place for professionals working in the sector.

Even now, in 2019, freelancers have to deal with uncertainties, complex procedures, and other transaction related problems when dealing through the banking channel. Today, thousands of people prefer working freelance jobs rather than fixed jobs. They are adding significantly to the country's economy. To retain the healthy success rate of this sector and expedite its growth, there is no other way but to ensure that a hassle-free transaction system is set up for freelance IT professionals.

Zihadul Islam, HasTech IT Limited

