

# City corp polls

## Ensure peace, accept outcome

TODAY'S city corporation polls are unique. Never before had we seen four city corporation elections taking place on the same day. It is unique too in the sense that the elections are taking place at a time when we are in the cusp of a general election.

Local government elections are supposedly non-party affairs, but the pre-poll activities leading up to today had all the characteristics of a miniature-national election. Not surprisingly, because there is a lot at stake for the AL and BNP who will see in the results an indicator of the way the wind will blow come the general election.

The buildup to the polls was peaceful and the contestants and their supporters deserve praise for keeping it so throughout the campaign. Except for the Barisal incident there was no major untoward happening.

For the Election Commission, today's polls are a test case since such a large venture had not been undertaken during the tenure of the current CEC and his deputies. We must, however, record our disappointment at the continuous blatant flouting of election rules by the supporters of the candidates during the campaign. In most cases the commission did nothing to prevent these. The EC might have been more proactive than it was.

It would be for EC now to ensure that voters are able to cast their vote without coercion or hindrance, and any attempt to do is severely dealt with. We would hope too that the results would be accepted with grace and equanimity by all the participants.

# Vandalising a market!

## What it has come to?

WE view the news of a group of pro-Awami League BCL activists damaging 15 shops at Gulshan-2 City Corporation market on Tuesday afternoon with consternation. The outrage must have been felt not only by the victims, but in a reflected sense, by the onlookers as well.

It was not a hartal-related incident; yet, it had a political ring to it. This is how it happened out of a petty cause and an avoidable tiff. It stemmed from a sense of arrogance of power and a feeling of being above rules and reproach. A private car carrying a BCL leader of Dhaka city north unit tried to enter the market premises through the exit in a cavalier defiance of a simple civic rule. As the security guard stopped the vehicle, three passengers including the leader allegedly beat him up.

Whereupon employees, guards and other drivers assaulted the BCL leader, going by the version of the security supervisor. Police intervention had a short-lived effect. On the same evening, some 50 youths apparently local BCL men armed with sticks freely vandalised the shops. The police had to open blank fire to bring the situation under control.

This is symptomatic of an inherent highhandedness on the part of ruling party student wing elements. Equally noticeable is the clannish nature of attacks and counter-attacks that have become part of the city life to the chagrin of city-dwellers.

The incident should be investigated and those who took law into their own hands should be penalised.

## FROM FOREIGN PRESS

# Cross-Straits interaction

EDITORIAL DESK

IN his meeting with honorary chairman of the Kuomintang Party Wu Po-hsiung on Thursday, Xi Jinping, general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, put forward a four-point proposal for furthering cross-Straits ties. This will have a far-reaching influence on benign interaction between the two parties and will inject new vitality into cross-Straits cooperation in a wide range of fields.

Wu is leading a delegation on a three-day visit to Beijing that started on Wednesday. The visit, his sixth to Beijing, coincides with the Dragon Boat Festival. That compatriots on both sides of the Straits celebrated the same festival with same rituals and customs carries the message that we belong to the same family, which has added an extra cordial touch to Wu's trip.

The meeting was Xi's first with a high-ranking KMT official since he became CPC chief in November. There were high expectations before the meeting that this high-level exchange would set the tone for cross-Straits interaction for the next five years. Xi's proposal has made such expectations well-founded.

Xi suggested that both sides should grasp the overall situation of cross-Straits ties from the perspective of the overall interests of the Chinese nation. Both should grasp the future of cross-Straits ties with a clear understanding of historical trends, and both sides should continue to increase mutual trust, adhere to positive interaction, seek common ground while reserving differences and steadily push for the overall development of cross-Straits ties.

Xi's proposal epitomises the CPC's new vision in advancing cross-Straits interaction, as well as broadening pragmatic cooperation between the two sides.

Xi also stressed that both sides belong to a community with a shared destiny, which is a vivid reflection of both the width and depth of cross-Straits cooperation in recent years.

Since Taiwan allowed visits from individual tourists from mainland cities in June 2011, individual mainland residents had made 385,800 trips to Taiwan by the end of May, the State Council's Taiwan Affairs Office said on Sunday. This is only part of the picture, as cross-Straits interaction has continually grown and been enriched in recent years.

For the benefits of compatriots on both sides of the Straits and for shared aspiration for the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, we have every reason to continue building on the favourable momentum in cross-Straits interaction and consolidating the political foundation for the peaceful development of cross-Straits ties.

# The rising Narendra Modi

STRAIGHT  
LINE



MUHAMMAD  
NURUL HUDA

watch in 2002 the Indian State of Gujarat witnessed the worst communal riots of the sub-continent. All secularists in India strongly denounced the communal carnage of Gujarat and severely criticised the Modi Government for its failure to control the pogrom. Some portrayed Modi's Gujarat as a fascist State where minorities are sought to be eliminated as Hitler planned to eliminate the Jews. In fact, Gujarat has been labeled as the 'Hindutva' laboratory, where the 'Hindutva' political philosophy based on hatred of minorities is sought to be tested.

Narendra Modi is considered as very close to the RSS, which is the source of ideological inspiration to the communally charged political entities of India. These entities are the BJP Viswa Hindu Parishad and Bajrang Dal. It is pertinent to recollect here that after the Gujarat carnage and winning the Gujarat Assembly elections of December 2002. Mr. Modi's position was greatly strengthened.

It is relevant to state that at least 2000 Muslims were killed in widespread riots in Gujarat in 2002 after Hindu pilgrims were killed in a train fire. According to credible reports, the state government and police allegedly supported the rioters.

Gujarat has been considered a hypersensitive state as far as communal violence is concerned since the late 1960s. It witnessed a major outbreak of violence in 1969 that shook the entire country. The state witnessed several communal riots after 1969. A prolonged spell of violence commenced on February 18, 1985, and lasted until October 1986.

A considered view is that Gujarat ought to have been a peaceful state, not only because of its economic prosperity, but because of its Gandhian heritage. It was Gujarat from where he launched in 1930 the non-violent salt satyagraha.

That is why one wonders how Gujarat became the epicenter of communal violence in India and witnessed such ferocious communal riots?

Communalism is basically a political and not a religious phenomenon. Violence is an outgrowth of communal ideology and the institutions which promote it. The Jan Sangh which was formed in 1950 by Shyamaprasad Mukerjee was a right-wing Hindu party whose main purpose was to establish a Hindu Rashtra and was integrally linked to the RSS, a right-wing ideological movement established in 1925.

The Jan Sangh, which was renamed the Bharatiya Janata Party in 1980, was a political offspring of the RSS. The Jan

THE elevation of controversial Indian politician Narendra Modi, Chief Minister of Gujarat of more than a decade, as the chief of BJP's (Bharatiya Janata Party) campaign committee for the next general elections is bound to make substantial impact on sub-continental politics. Political pundits feel that the secular face of Indian polity may be notably bruised in future, to the detriment of a pluralist society.

The above premonitions are not absolutely unfounded as under Chief Minister Mr. Modi's watch in 2002 the Indian State of Gujarat witnessed the worst communal riots of the sub-continent. All secularists in India strongly denounced the communal carnage of Gujarat and severely criticised the Modi Government for its failure to control the pogrom. Some portrayed Modi's Gujarat as a fascist State where minorities are sought to be eliminated as Hitler planned to eliminate the Jews. In fact,



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Sangh had played a key role in inciting communal violence in Gujarat in 1969. The RSS and Jan Sangh had specifically targeted Gujarat.

It remains a mystery as to what happened in Godhra on the morning of February 27, 2002, when fifty-nine Hindu passengers coming from Ayodhya in the Sabarmati Express were burnt. The government appointed Justice U.C. Banerjee, to inquire into the Godhra train incident who concluded in his findings that the fire in S-6 of Sabarmati Express was accidental and not planned.

However, the BJP leaders and particularly the Chief Minister of Gujarat, Narendra Modi, took it for granted that Muslims set fire to the Sabarmati Express compartment to kill the karsevaks (volunteers) returning from Ayodhya.

What happened in the three months from February 28 to the month of May 2002 was unparalleled in the history of communal riots in India in terms of intensity and brutality. Though the government figures claim 900 people died, unofficial figures put the death toll at more than 2000.

Immediately after the Gujarat carnage, Narendra Modi dissolved the assembly and ordered elections. The BJP had a comfortable majority in the Gujarat Assembly and there was no political crisis of any kind which could have warranted dissolution of the Assembly. The only reason for the polls, it thus appears, was to exploit the charged communal atmosphere in the state.

The BJP achieved its goal in that it won a two-thirds majority in the December 2002 elections. It captured most of the seats precisely in those areas which were rocked by the communal violence. It lost several seats in the areas which had remained peaceful. After the declaration of the election results, the BJP celebrated its triumph and took pride in inventing a new model to win elections. In fact, the model was a most shameless legitimisation of the communal carnage in Gujarat.

From the above it follows that the 'Hindutva' ideology of BJP does represent a threat to communal harmony in India. Its advocates appear more determined than those 'secularists' who work for the concept of unity in diversity. Secular forces hardly work with such dedication, much less with a sense of mission.

The 'Hindutva' ideology is a deliberate effort to realign state and cultural power in the interest of the majority. If successful, it will result in non-Hindu minorities being defined -- explicitly or implicitly -- as second class citizens of India.

With regard to the question of civic action to prevent, contain, and control riots, it has been evident that the political mobilisation of communal sentiment overpowered whatever civic engagement existed. The civic action to contain and control rioting once started was ineffective.

Hope lies in the fact that there exists now in India an institutionalised system of riot documentation that comes into play after each riot. It, creates a body of truths to counter the mendacities of the perpetrators and the blame-displacing claims of their apologists. This provides a ground for hope that the extra local civic action of the civil society may acquire sufficient political force to ultimately displace the former.

The writer is a columnist of The Daily Star.

# Condition of Bangladesh's weavers-turned-stitch workers

ALAMGIR KHAN

ACCORDING to The New York Times, the April 24 disaster at Rana Plaza in Savar which killed at least 1,129 people is 'the deadliest disaster in the history of the garment industry.' The day after the disaster, The Economist presumed it to be 'the worst industrial disaster in Bangladesh's history' and that 'this may turn out to be the second-deadliest industrial disaster in South Asia after the Bhopal disaster in 1984.' The Guardian called it 'the world's worst industrial accident since the Bhopal gas leak in India in 1984.' So we, a backbencher in the industrial world, have reached the top of the world once again in a bad thing, the deadliest disaster in a relatively safe industry.

It was neither the first nor the latest disaster in the Bangladesh's apparel industry. More than 700 workers have died in fires since 2005. (The Guardian, May 9, 2013). The recent collapse of the 8-story building has been termed as 'murder', 'crime against humanity and genocide' (Mujahidul Islam Selim, The Daily Ittefaq, April 29, 2013), 'corporate manslaughter', 'holocaust' (Holocaust in Savar, by Jeremy Seabrook, The Daily Star, May 1, 2013), etc. The largest bomb was dropped from abroad by Pope Francis who denounced the conditions of our garment workers as 'slave labour'. The giants profiteering from this slave labour are spread across the western world.

Ensuring profiteering of the giants and their deshi agents, Bangladesh's labour law has set only Taka 1 lakh for the worth of the life of a garment worker. However deplorable this condition may be, it is not new. It has a linkage with the colonial history of Bengal and deep similarity with the conditions in the past. Then it was Bengali weavers who have been demolished through the British colonial policy.

In his book Considerations on India Affairs (1772), William Bolts of East India Company described, 'Various and innumerable are the methods of oppressing the poor weavers, which are daily practiced by the Company's agents and gomastahs in the country; such as by fines, imprisonments, floggings, forcing bonds from them, & c. by which the number of weavers in the country has been greatly decreased. The natural consequences of which have been the scarcity, dearness and debasement of the manu-

facturers, as well as a great diminution of the revenues.' [The Zamindari Abolition Movement in Bengal, by Kazi A B M Iqbal, Arial, Dhaka, 2012].

Bolts further wrote, 'Weavers also upon their inability to perform such agreements as have been forced from them by the Company's agents, universally known in Bengal by the name of Mutchulcahs, have had their goods seized, and sold on the spot, to make good the deficiency; and the winders of raw silk, called Nagaads, have been treated also with such injustice, that instances have been known of their cutting off their thumbs, to prevent their being forced to wind silk.'

Today the Pope's voice about tailors in Bangladesh resonates the long-ago dire descriptions about weavers of Bengal once again. But there are many differences. Then weavers made cloths and also stitched these. The garment business then went into the hands of the British colonialist vagabonds after the battle of Plassey and they wanted to keep both stitching and marketing of garments into their own hands. Modern western colonialists want only stitching from workers of Bangladesh. We have lost weaving, designing and marketing of garments to the western companies. Our weavers who produced cloths like muslin in the past have been reduced to the job of only stitching clothes for western people. Today's garment owners are nothing but those gomastahs in colonial Bengal. The inhuman system prevailing in the garment sector ultimately serves the monetary interest of The Gap, H&M, Wal-Mart, Primark, Loblaw, Mango, Joe Fresh, Kik, Benetton etc. of the west.

Therefore, nothing will change in the garment sector unless and until the garment workers in Bangladesh are themselves able to pressurise their own government to institutionalise decent job standards in the sector. But how can one expect any positive change from this political setup in which, as The Economist reported on May 4, 2013, 'the industry is tied to the corrupt political system: at least 25 MPs have investments in the garment business.'

The nexus of local, national and international interests is too tough for poor garment workers in Bangladesh to break it down for bringing positive changes in their lives.

The writer writes on theatre, education and socio-political issues for The Daily Star and Dhaka Courier.

# LETTERS

## TO THE EDITOR

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## Disappearing farmland

A few days back I wrote a letter to this column expressing deep concern about disappearing farmlands. I am happy to see the heading of TDS of June 11 on the same issue. We have become



very indifferent as a nation. Nothing goes into our ears unless it falls on us. The farmlands are drastically shrinking. Even in the remote village, the situation is the same. Due to low price of agricultural products, landowners are selling their lands at a high price to realtors, manufacturers and brickfield owners. It is high time the government did something about this.

Kabir Hossain Taposh  
Banani, Dhaka

## 'Orphan crops' for food security

Howard-Yana Shapiro, a leading plant scientist and the agriculture director of the \$36bn US confectionery corporation Mars, wants to decode the genomes of the "orphan crops" which have potentialities to meet food shortage particularly in Africa. These crops include yam, finger millet, groundnut, cassava and sweet potato.

By combining traditional plant breeding methods with new biotech tools such as "genetic marking," there is a great scope for developing more resilient and higher-yielding varieties of most orphan crops without altering or insertion of genes that takes place with controversial genetic modification.

Scientist Howard-Yana Shapiro's initiative is undoubtedly a positive and realistic step towards ensuring food security not only in Africa but in all the developing countries of the world. Bangladesh can also be benefited by introducing cultivation of some of the 'orphan crops' like groundnut, cassava and sweet potato adopting the improved varieties for ensuring food security.

Professor M Zahidul Haque  
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SAU, Dhaka

## Defining success

I'm writing this letter in reply to the article titled 'Measuring life by degrees' by Milia Ali, published on June 9. To most of the youth, success means earning lots of money. And the writer tells us an awesome story about her personal experiences and dreams, which can inspire the youth to change their mindset. I thank her for presenting us with such a great write-up.

Samiul Raijul  
Bangladesh University of Textiles  
Dhaka

## UN recognises Dr. Yunus

Recently, more than two hundred of the world's wealthiest business leaders gathered at the second annual Forbes 400 Summit on Philanthropy at the UN. They recognised microcredit pioneer Nobel Laureate Dr. Muhammad Yunus and US billionaire Warren Buffett with the lifetime achievement awards.

It makes us happy that a man of our country is being shown honour in different countries of the world for his long struggle to send poverty to museum.

However, we have learnt that Buffett in his speech on the occasion jokingly referred to Steve Forbes' announcement of Muhammad Yunus as Buffett's successor as the CEO of the famous investment company Berkshire Hathaway. I think it is also a sign of honour, politely shown by Buffett, to Yunus. But the government goes against the world in this regard, which really hurts us.

Mobarak Ali  
Gopibagh, Dhaka

## Comments on news report, "Fitting reply, if plotted to fail," published on June 13, 2013

### Sara

Do we know of any means other than threats, violence and sacrifice of lives to put forward our demands? How about trying to change the mindset?

### truthprevails53

A party that was created by an army personnel and shamelessly backs Islamic militants and war criminals is not a party at all.

### Cernventure

Well said.