

## "An act of God"

We condemn BGMEA for this cruel joke

WE are appalled by the inane and cynical comment of the president of the BGMEA on Sunday that the Rana Plaza disaster was an act of God. We wonder how long the garment factory owners and their organisation will continue their attempt to dilute the gravity of the Rana Plaza killings.

The comment of the BGMEA boss that the collapse was beyond the owner's control is a cruel joke on the victims and their families. But we suspect dubious motives also behind such comments. It is to save the killers as well as to deprive the families of the victims and the survivors their rightful due. And in fact this paper reported on Monday that by showing that the collapse was a natural disaster the BGMEA has indeed cheated the victims.

We have been watching with awe the shenanigans of the garment factory owners to mitigate the gravity of the matter and this is yet another example. The BGMEA must not take the people for fools. No amount of semantical play can exculpate the factory and building owners from the responsibility of the deaths of more than a thousand people. And anyone who attempts to find ways and means for exoneration of the culprits are abettors of the crime.

Compensating the victims is not doing them a favour. It is their right which the owners are obligated to fulfill. We would hope that the BGMEA would not exploit the loopholes of the labour law to wiggle out of its obligations.

## Kuril flyover brings relief

We commend the government

THE Kuril flyover has been inaugurated by the prime minister and has been functioning to help thousands of Dhaka citizens cope with pre-Eid traffic better. Though five months behind schedule, the flyover comes as a blessing for the Dhaka traffic and we commend the government for taking this step for creating an uninterrupted linkage between the airport, Nikunja, Banani, Rampura and Purbachal areas.

Besides the Mohakhali and Khilgaon flyovers we have had one mega-type flyover connecting airport, Banani, Gulshan, Mirpur, and another is nearing completion in Jatrabari. There are plans some others. It is obvious that Dhaka has benefitted by these constructions. While a scientific evaluation of their impact on overall traffic situation would have to be carried out, the general notion is that highly complicated and congested traffic intersections remain unserved. Especially areas like Uttara, Motijheel, Maghbazar, Kawran Bazar-Sonargaon, Pantha Path and Dhanmandi would need solutions including underpasses.

We hope the traffic situation will improve significantly with a combination of flyovers, underpasses and, above all, a mass transit system. The population of Dhaka is rising constantly and the need for a modern transport infrastructure can hardly be overemphasised. We look forward to more ways of getting home and to places of work, safely and timely and without any hassle.

We need to save energy and man-hours lost to traffic congestion.

FROM FOREIGN PRESS

## Israeli PM can't change his spots

EDITORIAL DESK: THE BRUNEI TIMES

US Secretary of State John Kerry may claim a diplomatic victory of sorts by bringing the Israelis and Palestinians back on the negotiating table, but if he firmly believes that a comprehensive peace deal can be achieved within nine months then Kerry needs to revisit his Middle East history lessons. Previously such attempts were made but they all were scuttled by Israel's blatant arrogance and violations of international laws.

Israel has openly defied the US and international community and, with hawkish Benjamin Netanyahu in power, expecting any change in the policy would be living in a fool's paradise.

First of all, Kerry did not spell out how a six-decade old dispute can be resolved within nine months. Kerry may be equipped with great diplomatic and persuasive skills; he must know that in peace or in any other matter, two equal reasonable, accommodating and fair parties are needed to reach a fair and just resolution of any dispute.

The diplomatic Quartet on the Middle East comprising the US, Russia, European Union and United Nations has already put a caveat on peace talks by issuing a joint call on Israel and the Palestinians not to "undermine trust" as they embark on landmark peace talks.

The Quartet should have addressed this question only to Israel, which has time and again breached the trust of the international community by continually carrying out illegal settlements on the occupied Palestinian land and depriving the Palestinians of their right to an independent state. In 2010, President Barack Obama sent Vice President Joseph Biden to Israel to express his government's opposition to its violations of a settlement freeze that Netanyahu had agreed to. But Israel humiliated Biden by publicly announcing further violations of the freeze. Kerry's valiant effort is bound to meet the same fate as other peace bids because, like leopards, Netanyahu too cannot change his spots.

# Young voters and the 'C' word



SYED MANSUR HASHIM

ELECTION time is round the corner and one wonders what the major political alliances will offer this time around. Manifestoes do matter these days in Bangladesh, so does their implementation. After all, the audience includes a staggering 65% population that are under the age of 35. A huge number of them are first time voters. And they care for the agenda, agenda that matters to them, agenda that resonate with their dreams, aspirations and views about the country and the world. What do the political parties have in store for these voters this time? Is it something along the lines of Digital Bangladesh? Will it be about new leadership? Is it about the economy? Or the foreign and trade policies?

To these young voters false propositions, fear mongering or array of billboards will not appeal for sure. Parties need to dig deep into the heart of the matter and unfold the root causes rather than addressing symptoms. It will be important to understand young people and their take on politics.

Since they form a core constituency, their opinion matters and they need to be heard. In recent times we have seen the upsurge of the young generations in the Arab region and also in Bangladesh. They are no longer willing to be told but rather have demonstrated that they have a strong voice too.

In a recent study by Brac University Institute of Governance Studies (2012) it has been reported that more than 70% of all eligible youth (18-30) are registered as voters, and registration was even higher among women (nearly 74%). In the study, while giving their assessment of the performance of core public "institutions", these young voters have expressed strong support for the military and local government institutions, whereas highest dissatisfaction registered for the police and Members of Parliament (MPs). Therefore, parties need to offer game changing plans to root out corruption from law enforcement agencies.

In the wake of Padma Bridge debacle, Hall-Mark scam and the Rana Plaza tragedy, young people started to speak out on allegations of corruption in social media that went viral. Although their dissatisfaction is rooted in the daily

experience of petty and systemic corruption, the manifestations came at a time when the election is not far away.

Corruption unfortunately has become all pervasive. It exists in the education system. Students are unlikely to obtain good grades unless they enrol themselves with teachers' "coaching" classes after school hours, albeit for a fee that is exorbitant and unlawful. It exists on the roads and highways where one can break the rule and get away with paying bribe. Indeed, corruption is not only perceived but has virtually invaded every sphere of our lives. It is there in hospitals, in businesses, in government, everywhere. We live in a huge conundrum of corruption and there is virtually no way out of it.

Everyone knows about the problem but what about the solution? There may not be a panacea. It may be extremely difficult job to take on. It may actually turn out to be a 'thankless job' at the end. But this has to be done, right now, head on. The question is whether the leaders are listening? Are they bold enough to tackle the root causes of the issue? Will they stand up against it no matter what may be the consequences?

Unfortunately, the answer does not seem to be 'yes' yet. There may be a genuine urge to be in power but no sign of respect on the horizon for what matters to the lives of many on a daily basis. Hopefully, the parties will do their own fact finding and bring out the root causes of the corruption to the surface.

There is one epicentre of corruption at least that could be dealt with now as opposed to tomorrow. That is the national revenue system. It is mired in the highly complex, beyond comprehension and self-contradictory provisions. The government must take away this so-called "discretionary power" of the officials, introduce auto-deductions at source, preferably through bank accounts, and have the direct debit in place besides automating the submission system. This will pave the way for people to pay taxes, for government to have all the money it needs to do development and foreign investments to flow in, businesses to boom and stem the flight of young talent abroad. Bangladesh can then become a middle income country by 2021 or sooner.

The writer is Assistant Editor, The Daily Star.



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## Let's go back to people

BETWEEN THE LINES



KULDIP NAYYAR

IT was heartening to watch debates on poverty on national television channels, particularly the English ones. Elitist in approach, they seldom deliberate privations of the common man. Likewise, the English press is reluctant to carry news or write-ups on poverty because it has come to believe that its well-to-do readers do not want to know about the extent of poverty at the breakfast table. The Hindi and other language papers are more sensitive. This is probably the difference between India and Bharat.

Yet the nation cannot run away from the fact that roughly 65% of Indians are poor, 35% of them destitute. After projecting the Planning Commission's criteria for expenditure as Rs. 24 in villages and Rs 33 in urban areas, the government has realised that the amount is too paltry to convince even the most gullible.

Now the average has been placed around Rs. 50. This sum is also too meager. Yet some leading Congressmen have tried to trivialise poverty by proclaiming that one can have a full, hearty meal for Rs. 5 at Delhi and Rs. 12 at Mumbai. According to the Planning Commission, seldom right, poverty has been reduced to 22%. The Commission, a creature of the ruling Congress, gives credit for this to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's government.

Planning Commission's Deputy Chairman Montek Singh Ahluwalia says that the reduction of poverty during the BJP-led coalition was 0.8% while it is going down by 2.5% annually since the Congress takeover. Assuming that the reduction to 22% is correct, still one out of every five Indian is poor. This is a dismal record in the last six and a half decades after independence. If you were to add dimensions, other than food, you end up comparing India with backward countries in Africa.

The Congress has been ruling at least for 50 years and it is the most to blame for the mess in which the country is today. Poverty and education, both neglected by the British, should have been on top of the party's agenda. An undertaking given during the independence struggle on social justice remains on paper. So do the provisions on equal opportunities in the constitution.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, an eminent economist, was expected to bring things in order but he has been a failure. The growth rate in the last two years is less than the proverbial Hindu growth rate of 3.5 to 4%, although the overall average in the last decade is 5.5%, reportedly next to China, the leader in the world. Manmohan Singh has turned out to be more of a politician than an economist. This is proved by the fact that he has managed to be the prime minister for nearly a decade.

India's poor performance is not due to the global factors, ascribed by pro-establishment economists, but because of poor governance. The fact is that we are spending more than we are earning. The government has doubled it in the last 10 years. Inflation has been galloping upward. Printing of currency notes, if at all a short-term

relief, is not a solution. The paucity of funds is sought to be met with panicky measures.

Take the concessions offered to foreign investors, 49% in insurance and oil and gas. The measures have been compared to opening the floodgates. Instead of self-sufficiency, the cardinal principal after independence, foreign investment has become the mantra. Then, foreign investment was welcome in technical or such fields in which we had no know-how. Now any field or method is good enough as long as it attracts foreign investors. Still they want more concessions.

Bureaucrats, more than politicians, must share the responsibility. They too, like the prime minister, have followed the World Bank advice to convert India into a crony capitalist state. America has not helped a bit despite high-ranking people from the US visiting the country every other day.

Most members of parliament and state legislatures live in their make-believe world and continue to delude themselves. It is well known that they get subsidised food and many other things. The central hall of parliament where the MPs congregate to rub shoulders with the obliging journalists has a canteen which is run by the Railways and sells food at a ridiculously low price.

The welfare schemes, started with good intention, are starving for funds. The Congress-run government has an eye on the next elections. For unpredictable gains, the Congress has put the entire economic system at stake.

The opposition parties may be shrill in their criticism, but they are right in stating that Manmohan Singh's rule has been fraught with mismanagement, corruption and a few belated steps to stem the rot. The economic situation has been going from bad to worse.

India is a non-sympathetic society. Over the years, it has deteriorated

in values. There is not a semblance of idealism, much less movement, to lift the lower half to lead a viable living. Poverty, unemployment and malnutrition, all signs of a decaying society, are visible on an increasing scale. The bureaucracy has been reduced to an authority merely for affixing seal, from being the steel frame that it was till the beginning of seventies.

Once in a while a courageous official like Durga Shakti Nagpal appears on the scene to evoke optimism. Her attack on the mining of sand mafia in UP was applauded. But then state Chief Minister, Akhilesh Yadav, was influenced by politicians and she was suspended. Some of these politicians are the owners of trucks she impounded while carrying sand illegally from Yamuna and Hindon river banks. Had the two main political parties, the Congress and the BJP, been together in backing measures against corruption in administration, the situation would have been different.

Probably a mid-term poll could have given a fresh start to the country. The new government would have had at least five-year tenure to formulate policies for that period. It would have renewed trust which is badly needed for investment from within and from abroad. Even now Manmohan Singh should go back to people. His remaining 10 months in office are a lame duck rule.

The writer is an eminent Indian columnist.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### "The sons are coming?"

The sons are coming with their same old arrogance and same old fashions. We were expecting a major change in our rotten politics. But we are rather disappointed to see that the sons are coming. One is very much known for his widespread corruption and another one has nothing to give to the nation but reproduce the same old politics. We don't want them in politics, rather we want committed youths who can bring about positive changes to our beloved country.

Md. Shahjahan Mia  
Satmosjid Road, Dhaka

### Concern about amended labour law

Recently the national parliament passed Bangladesh Labour Law (Amendment) Bill 2013. Now it awaits the president's approval. Meanwhile, many national and international rights organisations expressed serious concern over it. They suspected that the new law will be inadequate for protecting the rights of workers. Besides, ILO released a statement that said the amended law falls short of international standards. On the other hand, the US government is pressing Bangladesh to strengthen worker-safety standards for restoring GSP facilities.

Right now, it is a crying need to make a worker-friendly labour law to protect the rights of both sides (owners and workers) and to satisfy the international communities. Otherwise, the responsibility of the negative consequences will have to be borne by the government.

Jainal Maruf  
Department of Law  
University of Chittagong

### A threat to India's communal harmony

The Indian state of Gujarat witnessed the worst communal riots of the sub-continent in 2002 when at least 2000 innocent Muslims were brutally killed by Hindu fanatics. Narendra Modi, the chief minister of Gujarat, did nothing to save the lives of the Muslims. It is now an open secret that he not only willfully refrained from quelling the widespread carnage on the state, but also tacitly incited communal hatred against the minority Muslims.

This Narendra Modi is now the chief of BJP's campaign committee for the next general election in 2014. If BJP wins the elections, he will, most probably, be the next prime minister of India. Hence Modi's rise in Indian politics poses a direct threat to the communal harmony in India.

Now it is to be seen how the secular forces in India face the challenge posed by Modi / BJP's political ideology 'Hindutva' in the days to come!

Md. Mohsin Ali  
Nutan Courtpara, Kushtia

### Comments on news report, "Independence to an unwilling nation!" published on July 31, 2013

Ash C.

I am inclined to think that the words of anguish from a frustrated man like Muntasir Mamun is more out of witnessing the debacle of AL in the recently held five mayoral polls. He is known as a staunch Awami supporter although he does not show it outwardly. As for Jamaat, both AL and BNP are equally guilty for patronising it and one can bet safely that AL won't miss the chance to pull Jamaat out of BNP fold for its support, as in the past, should there be a scope. Anything is permissible in BD politics.

Junaidul Haque

I agree wholeheartedly with Abid Anwar. Bangabandhu received full support from our people.

Samih34

Dr. Muntasir Mamun belongs to a group of people known as 'Awami intellectuals'. Anyone or any group not meeting their 'ideological standard' or opposing AL are branded as anti-Liberation. Therefore, Dr. Mamun's frustration is quite understandable.

Nds

I do agree with the views of the author that Dr. Mamun's comment is hardly acceptable in its entirety. I also think that Mamun's comment reflects more of his frustration than his conviction. But he has definitely genuine reasons for frustration.

### "Pledges not fulfilled" (August 4, 2013)

Nds

The civil society appears to live in their dream world, far from the reality. The government, BGMEA or development agencies took such tragic events as an opportunity for making false pledges just to promote their image in the public eye. So fulfilling the pledges always remains out of their agenda.

Nasirullah Mridha, USA

We never fulfil our commitment in due time.

Doronto

Some people in power do not mind playing politics even with dead people. Also, there is no one to oversee whether the commitment made was fulfilled or not. Action has to be taken against the law breakers.