

Continuing attacks on Hindus

Bring the criminals to justice

There is clearly no sign that attacks on the Hindu community have come to a stop or that adequate measures have been taken to provide it with security. As our front-page report yesterday has shown, seven homes belonging to Hindus were torched in Satkania on Thursday. On the same day, in Netrokona, four idols in a Hindu temple were subjected to desecration. Our question, which we believe is also that of the nation as a whole, is simple: how much longer must our Hindu citizens be victimized before we as a society call a halt to such criminal acts?

We have said earlier and we say it again that it is the solemn duty of the government to come to the aid of the minority community and ensure that its members feel safe enough to go about their normal business. Alongside this assertion of conviction, we believe that unless measures are taken speedily to bring the perpetrators of these crimes to justice, our reputation for communal harmony will be tainted. Such criminality does not go with our socio-cultural ethos.

It is time for platitudes to be cast aside and for real action to take over. While citizens on the whole must rise and resist this menace of communalism perpetrated by a few, it remains, now and always, the business of the powers that be to govern to the satisfaction of all classes of citizens. That governance must begin through ensuring the safety of the minority community.

Expatriates' fate hangs in balance?

Get a move on the MRP issue

We are perplexed as to why on earth the authorities are taking their sweet time in issuing machine readable passports (MRPs) for estimated 5million expatriate workers in waiting. These workers could face the axe without MRPs since host countries could very well reject them after November 24. The snail's pace involved in the induction of MRPs speaks volumes about the efficiency of relevant authorities. Having taken nearly four years to issue 6million passports, we think if 5million passports are to be issued in less than two years, they have to work on a double quick basis.

The issue of MRPs is a long drawn one. Traditional labour receiving markets in the Middle East have repeatedly asked Bangladesh to provide its workers with proper passports. But these requests have not been taken with the seriousness these deserved. With all the confusion running rampant about making MRPs fool-proof and foot dragging on which body needs clearance from whom, precious time has been lost. There is hardly any need to reemphasise the importance of remittances in the national economy. The billions of dollars earned are directly injected into the rural economy and it is a lifeline for tens of millions of people in Bangladesh – money that is essential for survival and expanding the economy; a fact that seems to have eluded policymakers, unfortunately.

A glance at remittances

FAARIA TASIN

REMITTANCE has been one of the key contributors to foreign exchange reserve in the country. Remittances have depicted a familiar trend where the numbers continued to climb year after year. According to Bangladesh Bank data, total remittance was US\$1.88 in FY01; it increased approximately 8 times to US\$14.46 billion in FY13 - implying that remittances have leapt at an average annual growth rate of 18.5 percent in 12 years. Will FY14 be able to maintain the glory or is this all about to change? Let us take a quick look.

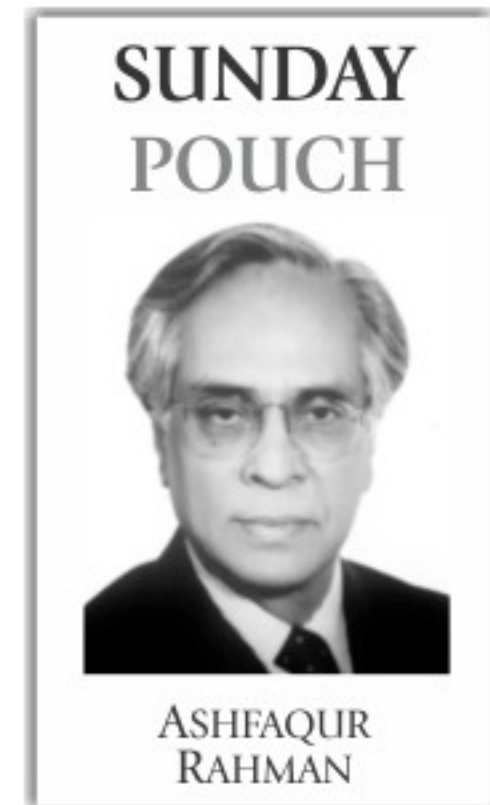
In the first half of FY14 (July to December 2013), total remittance was US\$ 6.78 billion. This was 8.4 percent lower than remittances in the same period in FY13. This is an unpleasant change as growths in remittances in the first half of fiscal years have always been positive in recent history.

The most common explanation for a decline in remittance remains that the total number of migrants going abroad is not growing like preceding years. For instance, in 2013 the total number of migrants going for overseas jobs was 441,301. This was a 36 percent decline compared to the numbers in 2012, which were 691,402. The government has been unable to resolve the problems related to the legal status of Bangladeshi migrant workers Saudi Arabia, UAE and Kuwait. As a result of which less migrants are now going abroad and more are coming back to the country, leading to a decline in remittances.

Another reason due to a fall in remittance could be the appreciation of taka against the US dollar in 2013. When taka appreciates, this means that less taka is now obtained against dollar conversions. Conversely, when taka is devalued, remittances can increase as more taka is attained against converting a dollar. Appreciation can actually increase the taka prices of assets in the country, to a migrant worker. Higher taka prices of assets can discourage each worker to send in more remittances, as a result of which remittances fall. Recede in remittance can also be due to a fall in wages of workers who are residing illegally in GCC countries.

Since remittance is an important contributor to Gross National Income (GNI), it is necessary to try to find ways to overcome the barriers and increase it. One way is through higher education and training of workers. Though the benefits of higher education and training can entail a time lag, the advantage in the long-run is substantial.

The writer is the head of research at The Daily Star and can be reached at faaria.ts@gmail.com



ASHFAQUR RAHMAN

whether he is talking rationally, as long as he is able to tap into the public's emotions.

Churchill had said that a successful politician was the one who promised the moon and stars to his electorate and, on being elected to power, could explain to them as to why he could not do all that he promised. There are politicians in our country who have promised much but could not explain why they failed to achieve what they had promised. The prime minister is yet to give a public explanation of what she was unable to do during her last tenure in spite of those things being mentioned in her party's election manifesto of 2008.

The public often has its own perception as to who is a successful politician. It could be he who smiles with others all the time. The people will support him because he is friendly. Then there is the politician who is kind to others as he understands what it is like to walk in other people's shoes. The politician who is not affiliated with any unpopular groups, or has any unpopular ideas, will not face difficulties with the constituents. He must be careful about not harbouring 'any skeletons in his cupboard' as they say.

A list of the ten most successful politicians of all times was made once. The top ranker was Mahtama Gandhi of India. He was followed by President Abraham Lincoln of USA. Nelson Mandela of South Africa occupied the third place with Winston Churchill the fourth in line. Woodrow Wilson, another American president, was the fifth successful politician. Interestingly, Hugo Chavez of Venezuela took the sixth place followed by Chancellor Willy Brandt of Germany. The Frenchman Maximilian de Robespierre, who lived in the period of the French Revolution, occupied the seventh place. John F. Kennedy, the American president was not the best of the best and took the ninth position. The last of the ten was the Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. So it might help our politicians to study the biographies of these great leaders and even to take up one as their role model.

Can we in Bangladesh also make a list of the ten top politicians of our contemporary times? This would be a highly controversial list. The interesting thing is that the first three slots from the top would be thoroughly fought over. But we must fix some criteria on the basis of which this can be drawn up.

An acceptable criterion would be how a successful politician thinks. However, the word 'think' itself means

How successful politicians think!

WHERE success is concerned, a politician is not measured in inches or pounds or college degrees or family background. What counts most is measured by the extent of his thinking. Let us take the case of most of our politicians. We usually consider whether he has good public relations or whether he makes connections within his constituency. At some stage we may grade him as a good public speaker. It does not matter

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different things to different people. To one person it may mean having a high IQ. To another it could mean knowing a bunch of trivia. Good thinking is not just one thing. It consists of several specific thinking skills. Becoming a great politician means developing these skills to the best of one's ability. One of the first skills would be seeing the wisdom of Big Picture Thinking. This comes about through continuous learning. It helps a politician to connect to the unconnected. A successful politician also has to look expansively. A wise man once said: "Many an object is not seen, though it falls within the range of our vision ray because it does not come within the range of our intellectual ray." Politicians see their own world first. But, because there is a world out there besides their own, they must make an effort to get outside of themselves and see other people's world through their eyes. The mistake committed by the opposition leaders was that they ignored the pleadings of the ordinary man to stop the recent violence.

One of the ways in which a politician sees the Big Picture is by sizing up a situation, taking many variables into account. Those politicians who see the big picture can find out possibilities as well as problems. They can then form a foundation to build a vision. Both BNP and AL failed to understand the necessity of elections on a level playing field. The common vision of deepening democracy in Bangladesh fell by the wayside, and both the parties resorted to unwanted violence. The opportunity of seizing

the moment when the time was right was lost to both the political parties. When the UN Secretary General requested for an effective dialogue, the politicians dithered. Each party was living in its own little world. A politician who can do Big Picture Thinking can see what others see. If AL had considered the matter of subsequent legitimacy of the election and its international credibility the matter would have been handled in a much better way. It is now facing criticism for holding a one-sided election where the majority of the electorate did not participate.

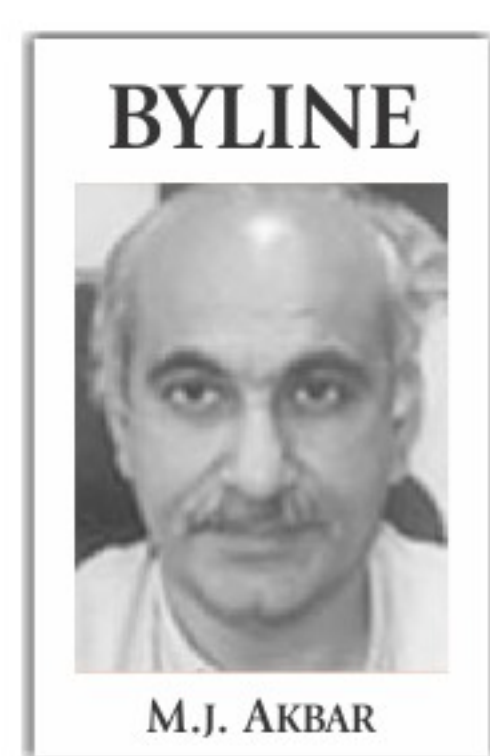
Another skill which successful politicians need to have is creative thinking. It comes from evaluating various ideas. They know how to manipulate them to the fullest. Creative thinking politicians can see all kinds of inconsistencies and gaps. They explore these gaps and use their imagination to fill them up. When BNP raised the matter of caretaker government, they should have thought about alternative ways of achieving free, fair elections. They should have sat down with AL for a dialogue to find a solution. Creative politicians draw people to themselves.

No one is suggesting that politicians must just embrace dreams. They must at the same time do realistic thinking. It minimises downside risks. It gives the politicians a target and a game plan. It also gives them credibility.

We have some respite from violence and political agitation now. Let good sense dawn on the two leaders and the rank and file of the parties. Let wisdom be the tool with which the new politics will be crafted in Bangladesh.

The writer is a former ambassador and a commentator on current issues. E-mail: ashfaq303@gmail.com

How to win allies and offer a stable government



M.J. AKBAR

1969; or the more recent splurge into Subsidy Raj. A honeymoon, of course, is no time for reports on clumsy manoeuvres. So an AAP minister is forgiven lapse of manners, not to say premature hubris, when he stops the screening of a Satyajit Ray film in order to deliver a speech after arriving late. Another minister who unleashes vigilantes on doctors in a hospital gets an indulgent pass. Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal gets away with amnesia on past corruption of current benefactors in Congress.

Such foibles will evaporate, although not without raising some questions about credibility, as general elections begin in earnest. The principal question before the electorate in 2014 will be quite different: stability. Who can provide a stable five-year government for an India groping through an economic and confidence crisis? And which alliance has the better set of policies to restore India's faith in itself?

Corruption is a vital concern; but no one has exclusive claims on honesty. Look east, if nowhere else. Nitish Kumar, Mamata Banerjee, Naveen Patnaik, Shivraj Chouhan, Raman Singh have been in power, some for a decade or more. No one accuses them of sleaze. Both Congress and BJP understand the need to offer a stable platform. This is why Rahul Gandhi, who is visibly averse to the politics and personality of Lalu Yadav, deemed to give the convicted Bihar leader a few parsimonious minutes of his time, setting off renewed speculation about an election alliance. Congress is anxious to partner TRS in Telangana, or face the heart-stopping possibility of being wiped out in Andhra Pradesh. It continues to woo the DMK in Tamil Nadu, despite Karunanidhi's rebuff. In Uttar Pradesh, it wants the company of Mayawati, although she is as cool as the Arctic.

The BJP is getting better purchase in this bargain hunt. It has set aside discomfort within to restore grey sheep B.S. Yeddyurappa to the saffron pen. Raju

Shetti, a small but important ally has signed up in Maharashtra; prodigal Chandra Babu Naidu is expected to trudge back later this month. The Chautalas in Haryana are waiting for a nod; a conversation has begun with Asom Gana Parishad in Guwahati. If wishes were horses, Jayalalithaa, Naveen Patnaik and Mamata Banerjee would be in the NDA stable (treat this is a small but not negligible pun).

A party which cannot offer a stable option will fade, no matter how well-intentioned. Imran Khan had a very strong base in Pakistan, having fought three general elections. Despite doing well across variables, Imran Khan could not stretch popularity into seats. After stability, security. When a party has not thought things through, remarks by leaders stick in perception, as will Prashant Bhushan's views on a referendum over the Indian army in Kashmir. Nor can you extrapolate Delhi decisions on to the national scene easily. Reservations of university seats, an AAP decision, panders to parochial sentiment. It is not an option for India. Is a blasé elite losing the difference between micro and macro, thanks to media's insatiable demand for theatre over value? This year's general elections are not going to be merely another date on the calendar. They will determine the direction of the next decade. A weak, nervous government will ensure further collapse of the economy, even as it loses control over fault lines that always threaten the calm of our country. The demand for Telangana is only one such fissure.

Fortunately, a stable coalition is not that difficult to engineer. No one needs 100% of the vote to win. In our system, you do not need even 50%. In the first general election, of 1952, despite being propelled by the powerful impetus of newly-won freedom, Congress got only 45% support. But this was sufficient to win 364 out of 489 seats. Today, a coalition which can get 35% or a bit more can tell its tailors to start stitching new pyjama-kurtas for the swearing-in.

The only PM to rule comfortably for a decade was Nehru; and even he seemed frayed by 1962. His daughter Indira Gandhi became PM in 1966; by 1975 she had to suppress democracy to survive. Congress, on the upswing in 2004, is bleeding in 2014. It may have to remain content with some rest and recovery. The big story now is whether forces hostile to BJP-led NDA can deny it the numbers for stable governance. We shall know if there is a fairytale ending by May.

The writer is Editor of The Sunday Guardian, published from Delhi, India on Sunday, published from London and Editorial Director, India Today and Headlines Today.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

Who's taking the country backward?

Welcome to a nice sunny morning and a block-ade-free day! I am sure everybody is happy to be able to move free at last! If only our leaders would think more about the country and its poor people, so much of these sufferings could be avoided. Now it's time for the other party to make a similar gesture of goodwill for the sake of its fellow countrymen. Then all will be fine, InshaAllah.

These hardworking people take the country a few steps forward and then it is pushed back a few steps (by whom?)! Are we destined to suffer like this and remain a struggling country for ever? May Allah save us and our country from more sufferings.

Dr. Sabrina

Dhaka

Is it a democratic signal from India?

Looks like our PM has given the nation a fresh and energetic cabinet! I am amazed how Indian PM (head of the largest democracy of the world) greets this cabinet! Is India showing a good democratic sign to the world by supporting Jan 5 elections?

Nothing is going good in the country. May Allah Bless Bangladesh. May there be no hindrance to the country's development in the coming days.

Iqbal Ali Khan

Director

Admin & Customer relations

Naseem Group

Need for another flyover at Mohakhali

The Mohakhali flyover has made the traffic flow in the Airport Road smoother. However, it is causing traffic jam at the Kemal Ataturk Avenue and Airport Road junction. I believe if another flyover is built adjacent to the Mohakhali flyover and the Airport road, this problem will be solved. All traffic wishing to bypass Banani and Mohakhali could use this flyover and hence this would reduce the pressure of traffic in Banani as well as the Mohakhali junctions.

Aminur Rahim

New DOHS, Mohakhali, Dhaka

Comments on news analysis, "Good realisation in the end," published on January 16, 2014

Zerosopher

"On all these counts, her party had failed in its previous movement."

The country now knows no free and fair election is possible under the Awami League government. So the opposition was right. At the same time, we condemn all killings, destructions and so on, for which the ruling Awami League is more to blame. The Opposition is also to blame.

Ash C.

But will Hasina allow any opposition?

Lunik

We would hope Khaleda will sever BNP's tie with Jamaat and start a dialogue with Awami League for the next peaceful election. That is the best course open to us as a nation!

Nasrullah Khan

It appears she will eschew violence in politics and advise followers to practise a forceful but peaceful means for realisation of their demands.

Himukala

We all are happy to see the change in her politics and welcome her, but does it mean we forgive and forget the wrongs done to those lives that were lost?

"Admin loses its trail to reforms" (January 16, 2014)

Ash C.

This may not be the end of the promotion business! One should rather wait to see how many more thousands are promoted for their having 'done their job well' during the farcical 'election'!

Kalu_Mia

Remove the quota system in recruitment. 55% is simply unacceptable. Freedom fighters' sons and grandsons too are enjoying the facility for 42 years. How long?

Akm Bari

It is absolutely wrong to politicise the bureaucracy in Bangladesh. Unfortunately, this is the reality in Bangladesh since General Zia took power and imposed a state of isrule on the country for a decade with the help of bureaucrats. This kind of patronising will increase the arrogance of bureaucrats and politicians will lose control of the country.

Barkat

Systematic and wholesale plunder of administration. The administration will collapse and governance will be deeply affected. Overall, Bangladesh will pay a heavy price in coming decades for this crime of AL.