

Gene secrets now unlocked

Revitalising livestock a possibility

BA NGLADESH has one of the largest buffalo populations in South Asia. However, with modernisation of farming techniques, the venerable buffalo is no longer the mainstay on our fields. The recent discovery of the complete genome of the water buffalo by two institutions, Lal Teer Livestock and Beijing Genomics Institute has however opened up a whole set of new possibilities for this animal. It is now wholly possible to develop superior breeds of buffalo, with the potential of inducting them as dairy animals for milk production or to repopulate livestock population. We wholly welcome this latest discovery in the field of genetics.

The importance of the buffalo cannot be understated. Though only 30 per cent of the cattle population is buffalo, the animal contributes 60 per cent of total milk production in the country. Meat and protein are both vital proteins for the general population. Having access to the gene pool of the buffalo could open up new research to repopulation of the water buffalo. Looking beyond the protein factor, there are significant economic gains to be made from such discovery. Needless to say, the private sector which is now heavily involved in commercial farming and dairy will be hugely interested in making required investments in further research and development to develop superior breeds. It is of paramount importance that this discovery is patented immediately, which once gotten could earn significant royalty when used internationally. One cannot forget that India earns somewhere in the vicinity of US\$2billion in annual royalty from patents.

Dhaka gets yet more unlivable

Pull up the socks to upgrade it

DHAKA has come at the top of the list for most unsuitable city to live in by The Economist's Intelligence Unit, as reported in Prothom Alo. Sadly this year's ranking is no surprise looking back on 2013 which is mostly filled with political violence, breakdowns of transportation systems, crimes, traffic jams and growing everyday insecurities.

The educated class laughs and jokes about it, Facebook statuses are put up, and smart comments are made. But not much is done to fix it. This should change now.

Before we think of it as an international insult, we should really think how we can take part in making this city more livable. We talk about our younger years in this city and reminisce good memories, we say Dhaka was emptier then, the roads wider, traffic was less, crime too. But is it really too late for Dhaka to go back to a pleasant place to live in? If everyone is doing his or her part as respecting traffic laws, government and non-government services are given without prejudice, corruption is less, healthcare is available for all, and overall if everyone starts to think about others' wellbeing besides their own, things are bound to change.

The question is will the right people be affected by this report, and by right people we mean everyone, not just at the top or bottom but all in between. The only way to find out is looking for the same report next year, and hope we are taking this indicator seriously starting now.

THE BRUNEI TIMES

Israeli snags in peace process

EDITORIAL

WITH the April deadline looming, US Secretary of State John Kerry has been increasing efforts to make both Palestinians and Israelis agree on a framework which can work as a guide or map for the further peace negotiations.

However, before any progress could have been made on this front, Israeli Army Radio announced that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has told Kerry that he wants to annex a fourth bloc of West Bank settlements. This should not come as a surprise to those who are familiar with Israeli tactics. Such tactics are part of a bigger game plan of the Israelis to keep scuttling any meaningful progress in the peace process. It may be recalled that in the first week of this month, Israel announced plans for some 1,800 homes in the West Bank, including annexed Arab East Jerusalem, just days after the latest peace mission by Kerry, his 10th visit to the region in less than a year.

In recent times, Israel has accelerated its expansionist policy of building Jewish settlements on the Arab lands in total violation of the international law, drawing the wrath of the global community.

Last week, Israeli ambassadors in four key European states were reprimanded by their hosts over the new construction tenders in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. A senior European diplomat said such a move was detrimental to the efforts made by Kerry that created a real opportunity to advance the negotiations.

Germany, Britain and France have sent strong messages to Israel voicing disappointment over its obstinate behaviour. The Israeli plan to annex a fourth bloc of West Bank settlements is yet another cunning ploy of the Jewish state to not only put new roadblocks in the way of peace process but also a sinister design to deny the Palestinians a contiguous territory that is crucial to a viable and independent country.

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Beyond communal attacks

STRAIGHT LINE



MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

the depth and severity of the wound.

Historically speaking, one has to admit that Bengal as a whole was not totally free from communal clashes, however loudly we may try to proclaim our non-communal mindset. Surely, Bengalis did not experience the horrendous brutalities that residents of greater Punjab went through in the wake of the greatly unsettling partition of 1947. The fact of the matter is that Bengali Hindus did suffer in great measure in the 1946 communal riot, particularly in Noakhali.

Thereafter, in 1950, in the then East Pakistan the Bengali Hindus were victims of communal flare ups. One can recall the Liaquat-Nehru pact which was aimed principally to protect and save the minority from communal violence. Such violence, however, did recur later owing to socio-political factors both in India and Pakistan. The Hindus suffered again in terms of life and property in 1964 before suffering en masse in 1971. Prior to that, following the India-Pak war of 1965, the enactment of Enemy Property Act reduced them to the status of second class citizens; and in 1971 they were quite clearly victims of what in later time came to be known as 'Ethnic cleansing.'

On a sub-continental perspective, one could speak volumes about the genesis of communal friction tracing as far back as the conquest of India by Muhammad Bin Kashim. Others could refer to the communal award of early twentieth century by British colonial rulers that according to them was a corollary to the divide and rule policy; still others would point an accusing finger at the two-nation theory resulting in the partition of India on communal lines that according to them sanctioned communal politics.

The debate on the origin of sub-continental communal divide and the resultant tension, as also the identification of the malevolent actors, could go on indefinitely without producing durable solution for the sufferers. Hence, it is

RECENT attacks on Hindus and their property demonstrate the immensely sad but blunt reality that even after forty two years of democratic pluralistic existence, the religious minority of Bangladesh have not been able to save themselves from the deadly embrace of communal fire. When the battered Hindu citizens propose to disenfranchise the entire community by publicly asking to strike Hindus off the voters list so that they can escape the wrath of politically motivated obscurantist elements, one can gauge



time to find out why the number of Hindus has decreased over the years, particularly since the creation of People's Republic of Bangladesh in 1971? Has our policy been same as it was when we were part of Islamic Republic of Pakistan? Has the mindset of the majority community really changed for establishing the ethos of equal rights society?

We in Bangladesh need to ask whether it is religion per se or the politicisation of religious identity and the mobilisation of this identity for community and state ends that have resulted in communal violence. We also need to find out whether the emphasis is on contests for power and resources. Have the recent violent outbreaks occurred with the acquiescence of the administration?

Experience indicates that quite often the outbreaks of communal violence have not been the result of spontaneous outbursts of passionately held religious beliefs; they are carefully planned and orchestrated and occur within a context of political mobilisation. Violence has been facilitated by the ability of officials and criminals to behave and act with impunity. It has been seen that in circumstances in which the state acts resolutely violence prone situations do not erupt into large scale disturbances.

Coming to specifics, in Bangladesh, why do we witness attacks on Hindu properties? Is creation of hatred a ploy for some of the majority Muslim politicians and influential people to grab Hindu property? The torching of Hindu houses over a petty altercation quite clearly indicates the malafide intention of terrorising and dislocating the vulnerable minority. Simple common sense should tell that the ferocity of attack on

Hindus is caused by the victims' weakness and the perpetrator's immunity from the process of law. Are the patrons of the mischief-makers too powerful to be dislodged?

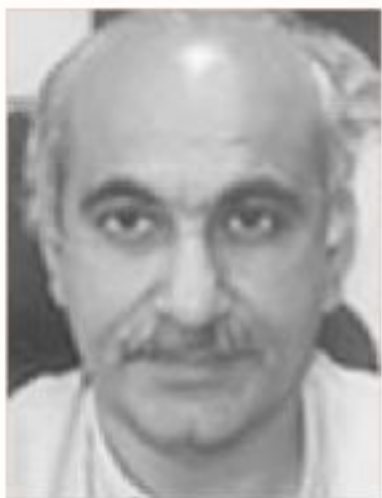
The immediate imperative, under the circumstances, is to effectively deactivate the vultures that are on the watch to grab the lands and properties of panicked Hindus. This requires political will and stern administrative measures for ensuring continued security. However, beyond that, the minorities need to politically organise themselves in such a manner that in course of time, issues of their honourable existence become a focus of mainstream politics. Such course of action is expected to provide substantial relief.

The politicians cannot be part of a deliberate effort to realign state and cultural power in the interest of the majority because that will result in non-Muslim minorities being defined explicitly or implicitly as second class citizens of Bangladesh. It is only proper that the flowering of a nation demands proactive action from the state. Finally, let us bear in mind that the concept of 'Ummah' in the historic 'Medina Charter' included all faiths.

The writer is a columnist of The Daily Star.

Nine weapons? Rahul needs a tenth: luck

BYLINE



M.J. AKBAR

IF you were cooking up a formula for an ideal prime minister, the mixture would surely be a base of Solomon's wisdom, with one ladle of Alexander's strategic skills, topped off by the confidence of David, who slew heavily armed giants with a single sling-shot. But no recipe works without salt. Salt is luck.

The luckiest thing that happened to Narendra Modi on his way to 2014 was the spectacular implosion of Nitish Kumar from putative national hero to regional has-been. Imagine the chaos if Bihar's CM was still in NDA. Media and public attention would have concentrated on stiletto thrusts of this civil war far more than the broad sweep of a BJP Congress conflict. Rahul Gandhi would not need to attack Modi; Nitish could have done this work more effectively.

Nor could Modi have done much about it; the BJP would not have dared to break its government in Bihar. Nitish did Modi a huge favour by walking away unilaterally. Whoever advised Nitish to march towards Delhi in single file deserves Modi's personal gratitude.

Has Modi been equally lucky in finding Rahul Gandhi as his presumptive opponent? Do not answer too quickly. The jury will bring in a verdict only around April and May. Rahul Gandhi has one advantage: after being overestimated for too long, he could be underestimated now.

Ironically, even his own Congress is nervous. It has opted for a heads-I-win-tails-you-lose strategy: if the general election goes well, Rahul can take credit. But if Rahul's appointment turns out to be a disappointment, there is an alibi ticked away in every spokesman's pocket. The excuse that Congress has never declared a candidate is just that, an excuse. In fact, Congress has never fought an election without clarity about its PM nominee: even in 2004 it was Mrs. Sonia Gandhi who was the undisputed leader, which is why she went to the president to claim the right to head a coalition that year.

The thin veil of protection draped around Rahul is fiction. The Congress campaign for 2014 will be around him, visually and thematically. A teaser has already been floated, starring Rahul Gandhi's nine weapons against corruption, plus three extra free gas cylinders for those within the middle class who remain unimpressed.

misalliance that could never work; while Chandra Shekhar required hodge to marry podge in 1990. Narasimha Rao was packing for retirement when Rajiv Gandhi's tragic death renewed Rao's trust in astrology. Deve Gowda and Inder Gujral were unexpected beneficiaries of a fractured Parliament, and Atal Behari Vajpayee first got the job for a fortnight. No one, of course, was luckier than Dr. Manmohan Singh.

Ever wondered why the PM's official residence is situated on Delhi's Race Course Road? Because it's a horse race, of course. Enter only if you have pace, staying power, solid training and a proven track record. The difficulty is not the starting bell, but that long and arduous home stretch, when character is tested along with your ideas. Media is only the bookie of this show. Follow the odds, but remember they can change mid-race too. Above all, arrange for the stars of the zodiac to be on your side. Good luck!

flank from which to launch its counter-offensive. All Modi has to do to blunt the nine weapons is mention Robert Vadra.

Corruption opens space for needle questions. Sample: Where was Crusader Rahul holidaying in the decade of Commonwealth loot, spectrum gifts and cozy coal mine deals? Or indeed during the Congress government somersaults over Adarsh to protect Congress bosses? Why does it take the last session of this Parliament to introduce legislation that could have come in the first?

Corruption is a slippery slope for anyone in power. Congress should have stuck to its familiar narrative of populism and stability, for such advertising can be backed by evidence. The parallel assault on Modi's persona could also boomerang, since the electorate considers his can-do-must-do methods to be strength rather than weakness.

Only one prime minister organised his own luck: Jawaharlal Nehru. The self-effacing (if steely) Lal Bahadur Shastri was not the most obvious successor in 1964. Mrs. Indira Gandhi would not have become PM if Shastri had not died of a premature heart attack in Tashkent in January 1966. As for Morarji Desai in 1977, it needed an Emergency and vast public upheaval to give him the job he so desperately wanted. He lost the chair to Charan Singh in 1979 thanks to the betrayal and antics of a vaudeville political turncoat like Raj Narain. Mrs Gandhi's assassination made Rajiv Gandhi PM in 1984. V.P. Singh got the job in 1989 thanks to a

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Were not voters intimidated?

We have learned from newspaper reports that Khaleda Zia thanked people for boycotting the polls. I just want to remind her that most people did not go to cast their votes out of fear. Several polling centres were set on fire. Two Hindu housewives were raped for going to voting centres. Many people were beaten up.

BNP has finally decided to shun the path of violence. Why did they not do this before all the deaths and destruction happened? I believe BNP had a good chance to win the election if they had participated in it, even without the CTG or other alliance parties.

Aminur Rahim
New DOHS, Mohakhali, Dhaka

Heinous power politics

Whenever Awami League came to power the share market collapsed. No proper investigation was done on the share market debacles that happened during its term in office and, according to news reports, no one was punished.

Houses of Hindus and other minorities were attacked and torched during the Awami League regimes, but no proper investigations were done and, according to news reports, no one was punished.

It has been alleged that Hindus and minorities were victimised by the ruling party members for achieving their political objectives.

M M Khaleed Ahasan
Sonargaon
Narayanganj

Comments on news report, "BNP won't cut Jamaat link," published on January 19, 2014

S.M. Iftekhar Ahmed

A flawed decision and a recipe for disaster. Everyone except the BNP seems to be aware of the true colours of Jamaat. As it seems, they live in an alternative universe that is far removed from the people. More pressure needs to be exerted, especially from the US and this extremist outfit needs to be banned.

Molla A. Latif

BNP cannot do it as it has no separate entity now. What people think of Jamaat is not unknown to her. Terrorism is her only political weapon and without Jamaat no one can do it. God save this country.

Deeplejeai

Jamaat-Shibir is equivalent to BCL if one considers the activities of both. The recent attack on a female lawyer is the best example. A lot more can be given. Why should AL be continuing with its armed division?

Barkat

If AL can have nexus with the JP, why can't BNP have link with Jamaat?

Aasfisarwar

The combative power of AL is no less than Jamaat and BNP combined, but no one is asking for banning AL because the nation has been effectively divided into two poles. BNP is marginalised, while Jamaat is the only party that after all these tortures maintained their violent capability on a par with AL and that is very uncomfortable for AL to maintain their one party supremacy and prolong the BKSAL rule.

Akhtar Shah

That would be political hara kiri. That wall of sound (Jamaat) is deafening BNP to listen to anything self-preserving!

"Govt illegal, isolated" (January 21, 2014)

Mortuza Huq

BNP does not need to expel Jamaat. These two parties can amicably agree not to be in the alliance formally. Jamaat can always separately and independently copy BNP's programmes to hold a credible election immediately. Jamaat and Hefazat supporters will surely understand why they can't be with BNP in public. Yet who can deny that they are citizens of Bangladesh and can attend any public gathering. More importantly, they are voters in huge numbers and their votes will matter.

S. M. Iftekhar Ahmed

Jamaat is a spent force and people are beginning to see them for what they truly are: just because you claim to be an Islamic party does not necessarily mean so. No Islamic minded party resorts to violence. It is time to ban these fanatics.

Akm Bari

Does Khaleda Zia understand that her husband General Zia's government was illegal, as declared by the Bangladesh Supreme Court? She claimed at a public meeting that the current government is illegal. But it is a legal government by any standard.

Shahid Imon

There is no denying that the current government has engineered the 5th January election undermining our voting rights as well as democratic norms. It doesn't have de facto legitimacy to govern us. Thus, a fresh election is a must to return to democracy and sustain our economic and social sector achievements.