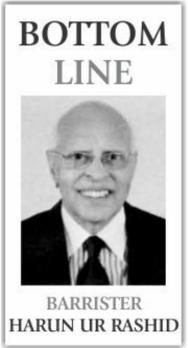


# Indian election: Possible impact on Bangladesh

# Zila parishads made victim of partisan politics



BARRISTER HARUN UR RASHID

**BOTTOM LINE**  
relation between Bangladesh and India develop after the Indian elections? Will it be the same or different? Answers to the questions will depend on which parties are likely to secure the largest number of seats in the election.  
The magic number is to get 272 parliamentary seats to form the national government in New Delhi... Whichever party or parties can cobble together this number of seats, they can form the national government.  
Polls in India suggest that BJP is much ahead of the Congress. According to recent Indian NDTV polls BJP is likely to secure 214 seats (116 in 2009) while the Congress may get 104 seats (206 in 2009). Another private channel G-News claims that the BJP may get 218 and the Congress may secure 94-106 seats. However it has been

**T**HE 16th parliamentary election of the Lower House (Lok Sabha) is being held from 7th April in nine phases until 12th May. The results will be announced on 16th May and a new government will be formed thereafter.  
Naturally everyone in Bangladesh is thinking how will the relation between Bangladesh and India develop after the Indian elections? Will it be the same or different? Answers to the questions will depend on which parties are likely to secure the largest number of seats in the election.  
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seen that in many instances polls do not translate into reality.  
Analysts say BJP's coalition could be possibly built if the BJP gets around 200 seats. Winning less than 170 seats, BJP would have to rely on more coalition partners in which case the party may have to compromise its domestic agenda.  
Ordinarily it is correct that foreign policy does not change dramatically with the change of the government because geo-political and economic realities remain as they are and especially with neighbouring countries. However domestic agenda has direct impact on foreign policy. Furthermore another type of pressure that influences foreign policy is based on the political ideology of the party which comes to power.  
The above view seems to be corroborated by the Indian High Commissioner who on 7th April, said at a seminar as reported by a new agency (UNB), that "I would suppose that the policy would also remain constant." Then he was quoted to have elaborated that "the policy will remain the same as long as the fundamentals of the relationship are strong, as long as the two country's interests remain constant and as long as both countries have a general understanding of what need to do".  
On Bangladesh-India relations, although has been many gains in many areas, severe confidence deficit remains with Bangladesh on India's commitment to fulfill its pledges with Bangladesh, such as, signing of the Teesta water sharing,

non-ratification of land boundary agreement and continued killing or kidnapping of Bangladeshi citizens at the border.  
In the light of the above background, when a new government is installed in New Delhi, the direction of relations may likely to develop on the following situations:  
First, if BJP forms a coalition government at the centre, it may implement its hardcore Hindutva agenda including construction of Ram Temple on the site of Babri mosque as indicated in its poll manifesto. Furthermore a resolution of the BJP national council meeting in February in New Delhi said: "The BJP is firmly opposed to any hurried border dispute settlement with Bangladesh and it must be a part of comprehensive solution of all issues, including the most important issue of infiltration," of people from Bangladesh to India.  
Allegation of illegal immigration from Bangladesh is one the mantras of the election campaign of BJP. Many think the allegation is cooked up by BJP to get votes from Hindu extremists.. Once BJP in power, this may possibly result in sending back all Bengali-speaking people from India to Bangladesh, irrespective of their citizenship.  
Second, if either the Congress makes a surprising comeback or the third front forms a coalition government, it is most likely to be weak and as a result it may not be able to take any further initiative with Bangladesh.  
Third, whether political position of chief minister Mamata Banerjee of West

Bengal and leader of Trinamool Congress and those of Asom Gana Parishad party or BJP in neighbouring states of Bangladesh becomes stronger or weaker after the election.  
While Ms. Banerjee blocked the Teesta water agreement, AGP, Trinamool Congress together with the BJP blocked the Singh government to implement the land boundary agreement. The reported statement of Mamata Banerjee on border enclaves and Teesta water-sharing during her election campaign in Cooch Behar district on 12th April is not helpful.  
There is another view. If Modi becomes the Prime Minister, analysts say that some of his campaign's populist Hindutva policies were used for votes and when one is in power, pragmatic views force a leader to change the policy. Furthermore Modi is reportedly not comfortable with the increasing influence of China in Bangladesh. All these factors may prompt Modi to pursue friendly policies with strategically located Bangladesh because of India's security and economic interests. However, since there are too many unknowns about Modi, it is hard to predict in which direction the bilateral relations will shape up if he becomes the Prime Minister.  
In an event of the aforementioned political scenarios, India-Bangladesh bilateral relations will be somewhat different from what exist today.  
The writer is former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.

**SHAKHAWAT LITON**  
**A** study conducted by TIB has depicted a frustrating picture of zila parishads (district councils). The study has revealed that the zila parishads have turned into political organisations of the ruling Awami League as they are run by partisan administrators instead of elected representatives. According to the TIB, the parishads are being used as political offices of ruling party men and their tea and breakfast expenses are being paid for by zila parishad funds. Even official vehicles of the councils are being used for personal purposes.  
The sorry state of the zila parishads shows how the AL-led government has been disregarding its electoral pledge to strengthen the local government bodies. In the run up to the 2008 parliamentary elections, the AL in its electoral manifesto had pledged to strengthen the zila parishads through decentralisation of power and transform those into centres for implementation of programmes on education, health and other development plans and for maintenance of law and order.  
But after assuming office after the 2008 elections, the AL-led government had taken no step to hold elections to zila parishads. In a surprise move, the government, in December 2011, appointed its party men administrators to 61 zila parishads without any specific tenure. So, they will stay in the offices until elections are held or the government removes them.  
Why were the zila parishads turned into political organisations of AL? A zila parishad administrator explained some of the reasons behind this. He said they did not have any control and authority over the district administration led by a deputy commissioner in each district. Other officials in the district administration also do not care about the administrators, and they refrain from attending meetings convened by the administrators to review the development activities in the district. The appointment of the administrators, he said, could not bring any dynamism in the functions of the parishads. Amid such a situation, in his view, they pass time by holding meetings with the party men, which is defrayed by the public exchequer. Every month each of the 61 administrators gets Tk.27,500 as remuneration, Tk. 300 entertainment allowance and 400 liter fuel per month. The administrators use a vehicle of the zila parishads.  
The administrator however thinks there is no alternative to holding elections to the zila parishads to make them functional. He believes the situation will dramatically improve once the full parishad is formed through elections. But will the elections be held to meet the constitutional requirement? The present state of zila parishads exposes the government's lack of sincerity to uphold the constitution to ensure people's participation in the district level administration through their elected representatives.  
Article 152 (1) of the constitution declares every district as an administrative unit. Other administrative units like upazilas and unions have too been so declared by separate statutory laws. According to the law, districts enjoy a high status, undoubtedly. But this could not yield any benefit for the districts so far. Elections have never been held to form zila parishads to run the district administration since districts were declared administrative units in the constitution in 1972, due to lack of political will of the successive governments.  
In 1975, the government led by Bangabandhu had replaced the traditional local government system with party machinery. District councils with representatives from Baksal and its front organisations were constituted, with party men at their helm as governors.  
After the violent political change on August 15, 1975, Gen Ziaur Rahman promulgated a local government ordinance in 1976 which provided for a zila parishad in each district, to be comprised of elected representatives. But no elections were held. The DC continued to act as ex-officio chairman of the parishad. Under another military ruler, HM Ershad, things changed. His government enacted a zila parishad law in 1988 with provisions for MPs to serve as chairmen of the parishads as a way of strengthening the base of his Jatiya Party at the district level.  
After the fall of Ershad in 1990, the then BNP-led government removed the chairmen of the zila parishads as they were MPs from Jatiya Party, and appointed DCs temporarily as ex-officio chairmen of the parishads. The DCs continued to function as ex-officio chairmen until the Zila Parishad Act was passed in 2000 by the AL-led government with provisions for holding polls to the parishads.  
Again it was the AL-led government that in December 2011 has appointed its party men as administrators to run the zila parishads in an effort to consolidate the party base at district level. Through this move, the AL-led government has taken a giant leap backward, replicating the same practice of using the zila parishads for narrow political purpose.  
The possibility of a strong zila parishads remains a distant cry as the AL-led government continues to remain indifferent to its commitment made before the January 5 parliamentary polls to strengthen the zila parishads.  
The writer is Senior Reporter, The Daily Star.

## The Syce's whip

**RAVINDRA KUMAR**

**T**HERE is merit in the Congress' criticism of the book on Prime Minister Manmohan Singh written by his former Media Adviser, insofar as accusations of it being self-serving and aimed at personal gain are concerned. Certainly, the "insights" Mr. Sanjaya Baru offers on the power equation between Congress President Sonia Gandhi and the Prime Minister are curiously timed, not the least because it has been abundantly clear for some time that Mr. Singh is serving out his last days in office. The public flogging of a horse on its last legs by its former syce would seem therefore an act of unbridled cruelty.  
But let us restrict ourselves to the thrust of Mr. Baru's "revelations" which appear to be that, first, Mrs. Gandhi's renunciation of office in 2004 was a political charade and not the act of sacrifice it was projected to be; second, that the Prime Minister's powers were subservient to and circumscribed by the president of his party who wielded authority in government; third, that the PMO was controlled by officials placed there by Mrs. Gandhi and who reported to her, and that finally Mr. Singh refused to quit even when he realised he had lost all vestiges of control over what was thought to be his government.  
Like many others in New Delhi and elsewhere, we have always believed that Mr. Singh was a puppet Prime Minister controlled by Mrs. Gandhi. Unlike many others, we said so from the beginning.  
In March 2005, in the wake of a crisis in Jharkhand an editorial headlined 'India needs a PM' had said: "A puzzling aspect of the imbroglio surrounding the shows, of strength and duplicity, in Jharkhand is the near absence from the scene of a man we call and would like to believe is our Prime Minister. Where, pray, does Mr. Manmohan Singh stand? After all, in the Westminster model of democracy we chose to give ourselves, it is the Prime Minister who must accept credit and blame for the triumphs and failures of the system. Quite apart from the questions that are within the province of the Congress' party apparatus, there are serious and Constitutional issues that are the preserve of the government of the day. It is not for the party to decide if the Governor acted in haste or worse, or whether he thus deserves censure or recall. It is for the government to make this call, and for Mr. Singh to assume he has no role to play in a political situation is unacceptable...For the Prime Minister to have responsibility without power is as unacceptable as it is for Mrs. Sonia

Gandhi to wield power without responsibility...It is not nearly enough to say that Mrs. Gandhi relinquished the Prime Ministership; that, as she was at pains to point out at the time, was the call of her own conscience. The flip side cannot be that having spurned office she now be allowed free run of the government."  
Mr. Baru, as Media Adviser to the Prime Minister, did not react.  
When in November 2005, Mr. Natwar Singh was moved from the External Affairs Ministry to Minister without Portfolio and the Prime Minister took charge of the Foreign Office, we had commented: "Necessity may well have forced on the government a compromise that is not entirely unwelcome by making Mr. Manmohan Singh assume charge of the Foreign Office. In a dispensation where both policy and crisis management are handled by the Congress president, finally the Prime Minister has something substantial to do."  
This was a pointed jibe but Mr. Baru as Media Adviser held his peace.  
When there was a Cabinet reshuffle in January 2006, this newspaper began its editorial headlined "Frothy Shake-Up" with these words, "For an event that was discussed for months before it happened, Sonia Gandhi's reshuffle of Manmohan Singh's Cabinet was an uninspiring exercise." The Prime Minister's role in the re-jigged Council was summed up thus, "First, and most important, the Prime Minister continues to hold charge of External Affairs. While we may be accused of being tart for saying it at least gives the poor man something to do, the fact is that by neither temperament nor background is he the best suited for this particular job." The continuance of the Home Minister was described thus, "The other to have survived is Shivraj Patil, by all accounts a poor Home minister, and now in light of the Supreme Court judgement in the Bihar case one who ought to have been moved or dropped. To have retained him is a mistake, indeed another example of Mrs. Gandhi's willingness to retain in key ministries those without the slightest evidence of possessing a backbone, or of posing a political threat."  
Mr. Baru was Media Adviser but chose not to react.  
In March 2006, when Mrs. Gandhi resigned her parliamentary seat in the wake of the badly-botched office-of-profit issue that she had orchestrated, I had written an article headlined 'Inner Voice - Another Sacrifice or Plain Self-Interest?' It said: "And the principle reality of

Congress rule today is that the party and government are controlled - totally and completely - by Mrs. Gandhi. She has the ultimate say on appointments, removals, decisions to do or not to do, policy formulation and plan execution. The Prime Minister and his Council serve at her pleasure, and when occasionally one of them is forced to resign - remember a man named Natwar Singh - it is to her they go with their resignations."  
Neither the Prime Minister nor his Media Adviser - the man who now claims it was his job to project his boss's image - reacted. In their defence it must be said and emphatically that they were not required to do so. Without feigning modesty it must equally be conceded that perhaps in Mr. Baru's view this newspaper was not important enough to merit attention.  
The difference between what we had maintained all along - Mr. Singh's position was akin to that of a spouse without conjugal rights - and what Mr. Baru now states is that the first was our perception, while the second is presented as fact. And if the fact is that Mr. Baru knew in 2008 or earlier what he has written now, his silence underwrote the continuing exercise of extra-Constitutional authority by Mrs. Gandhi, indeed its endorsement in 2009 by an electorate ignorant of this newspaper's fulminations. If Mr. Narendra Modi becomes Prime Minister and one day the despotic monster some people believe he will be, Mr. Baru might even be asked why he didn't quit in 2008 on the principle of being unable to serve a man who was master of nothing, for had he done so events might have unfolded differently. For instance, Mr. L K Advani might have wheezed past the post in 2009 and Mr. Modi might have been chewing the cud in Gujarat.  
After the death of my predecessor, C R Irani, a few journalists - including a former editor - had published articles and in one case even a book pillorying him. They were entitled to their views, but would have deserved respect for them had they possessed the gumption to write what they did when the man was alive. Mr. Baru's treatise on the accidental, soon-to-be former Prime Minister falls almost in the same category. It kicks a man when he is down, if not out. It can only be self-serving. But there is a rider.  
In the Byzantine intrigues of modern-day India there is one other possibility that must be considered. Could the crack of the syce's whip be aimed at muffling the final whinny of a tormented horse too scared to buck?  
The writer is Editor, The Statesman (India).

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**QUOTABLE Quote**  
The world is a dangerous place to live; not because of the people who are evil, but because of the people who don't do anything about it.  
Albert Einstein

**CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph**

**ACROSS**  
1 Niagara sight  
6 Flower part  
11 Visitor from afar  
12 Like a gymnast  
13 Dwight Yoakam song  
15 - out a living  
16 Fish eggs  
17 Simple denials  
18 Lease signers  
20 Holiday lead-in  
21 Tick off  
22 Hammer part  
23 Chops finely  
26 Sounds contented  
27 At any time  
28 Golfer's goal  
29 Skillet  
30 Checks the fit of  
34 Colony member  
35 Friend of Harry and Hermione  
36 Father's Day gift  
37 Vivien Leigh movie  
40 Marisa of "My Cousin Vinnie"  
41 Not rented out  
42 Prophets  
43 Lusty looks

**DOWN**  
1 Pretender  
2 Similar  
3 Sheet material  
4 Table part  
5 Loud sleepers  
6 Bank fixtures  
7 Swelled head  
8 Trailblazer  
9 Wide-spread  
10 Decreases  
14 Settling item  
19 Stadium section  
22 Undiluted  
23 Meals  
24 Sir Walter Scott work  
25 Franc division  
26 Hard to bear  
28 Teacher to sophs  
30 Deux follower  
31 Fancy wrap  
32 Crude tanker  
33 High homes  
38 For every  
39 Count start

**Yesterday's answer**

**CRYPTOQUOTE**  
LB SXQG LP PMGGY HP H BSXMGK, YCGO NV NXYCGK LP YCHY PMGGY BSXMGK XB SXQG.  
-- PYGQLG MXOAGK

**Yesterday's Cryptoquote: CEASE CONCEIVING OF EDUCATION AS MERE PREPARATION FOR LATER LIFE, AND MAKE IT THE FULL MEANING OF THE PRESENT LIFE. -- JOHY DEWEY**

**A XYDLBAAX is LONGFELLOW**  
One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

**BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker**

**HENRY by Don Trachte**