

## One year after Rana Plaza

Much remains to be done to avert recurrence

TODAY we take stock of what has happened over the course of a year since the tragedy of the Rana Plaza collapse that killed more than 1,100 people and disabled scores of others. On the bright side, we see the labour law amended paving the way for union formation in the garments sector (RMG). A minimum wage scale of Tk5,300 has been agreed upon and is being implemented in phases and steps have been taken to recruit factory inspectors. These are undoubtedly positive steps, but much remains to be done to ensure long term security of workers.

Major drawbacks remain in key areas. Especially the issue of compensation has been largely unaddressed. Such a high casualty rate and so many more remain scarred for life, both physically and emotionally are issues that need immediate redressing. With as many as 17 ministries and departments involved in the process, there has been a lack of coordination in activities and the confusion needs to be sorted out. The proposal to shift factories to an apparel village in Munshiganj remains on hold as does the appointment of sufficient number of inspectors due to problems with amending government recruitment procedures.

A tragedy of such gargantuan proportions should have expeditiously propelled criminal proceedings against people responsible for the tragedy. Yet we do not see concrete measures to bring them to book. Unless guilty parties are brought effectively to justice for criminal negligence, no deterrence is possible against such criminalities.

## No qualms for patients

Doctors hold hospitals hostage

IT'S mind-boggling to see that doctors who should be caring for patients are making them suffer. In fact, as doctors busy themselves with strikes and acts of high-handedness, public health service goes through an epidemic of hostility from those in charge of catering for it. The trend is menacingly engulfing a large swathe of the country.

Rajshahi Medical College, Sir Salimullah Medical College and Mitford Hospital, BIRDEM and Barisal and Rangpur hospitals have been held hostage to doctors' agitation or strikes on various demands. As a result, treatment is denied to thousands of outdoor and indoor patients in various stages of illness, many requiring critical follow-ups. Not only the patients, their relatives and even journalists have also been harassed, beaten.

Matters coming to a head, civil society and rights bodies like Ain o Salish Kendro have expressed grave concern over the restive hospitals. Health Minister Mohammad Nasim has formed three committees to probe the incidents in Rajshahi, Mitford and BIRDEM hospitals. Formation of committees has done little to discipline the agitating doctors. It's a question of collective mindset of coercion that seeks satisfaction of demands by making others suffer. Nobody is in a mood to heed good counsel. But those in the medical profession must be guided by its ethical code the mainstay of which is the Hippocratic oath.

Doctors may have their demands and grievances and there are ways to have them addressed without having to punish patients. Every hospital should have an internal troubleshooting mechanism to stave off denial of services.

## Sheikh Hasina's wise decision

ABDUL MATIN

IT is reported that the management committee of Faridpur Medical College took a resolution in 2011 to rename the college after Sheikh Hasina. Accordingly, the resolution was forwarded to the concerned ministry for approval. In a recent meeting of the management committee, it was disclosed that Sheikh Hasina had declined to associate her name with the medical college. Accordingly, the name of the institution would stay as Faridpur Medical College. I must congratulate her for taking this wise decision.

In our country, there are no set rules in naming public institutions and places. I read a story about naming of a road in Paris after Sir Winston Churchill. I understand France has a law that prohibits the naming of any public place after any living person or within five years after the demise of a person. The French government made one exception. The road in front of the Grand Palais connecting Cours la Reine with Avenue des Champs-Elysees in Paris was named Avenue Winston Churchill soon after his death by making a special amendment to the law only for him, and he was informed of the decision by the French government during his life time.

This was indeed a great honour to a great man who had made so much contribution to the liberation of France from Nazi occupation during World War II. It is interesting to note that the French did not do it during the life time of Sir Winston Churchill. They waited till his death to honour him.

There must be good reasons why the French made such a law. Autocratic regimes often misuse their powers and name public institutions, places and roads after their own names only to glorify themselves. These names, however, do not last long. They are often changed when a new regime takes over and follows suit. This practice creates confusion in the minds of the public and often deprives deserving persons. I saw a cartoon in a newspaper after the fall of Stalin when many cities in the former Soviet Union were being renamed. In the cartoon, the headmaster was telling the class teacher: "Stop instructions in geography till we hear from Kremlin!"

It is time we should have a law similar to the one in France and bring some discipline in naming public institutions and places. The game of frequently changing names of public institutions should stop as soon as possible.

The writer is a former chief engineer of Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission.

# Post Indian election: The shape of things to come!

STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING



Brig Gen SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN  
ndc, psc (Retd)

REPORTEDLY, the BJP will have spent about five billion Indian Rupees on advertisement by the time the month-long largest democratic show on earth ends in India on May 12. And the man whose pictures dominate the festoons and billboards and newspaper and TV ads is Narendra Modi, whom most see as the next Indian prime minister. However, not all take that as given, considering that there are many aspirants within the party to the post of the PM.

And the slogan, 'is baar Modi Sarkar' (This time it will be Modi government) accompanies all the ads. And this is what irks the observers, who see the very expression as strange, as much as it does the grassroots workers. It seems that the BJP as a party has been subsumed by the persona of Modi, much to the chagrin of the grassroots party supporters who naturally would want the party and not any individual to dominate the political discourse. And there is gripe among the party workers too that some BJP policy makers should choose to label the next government as 'Modi' rather 'BJP' government. Thus one sees a new turn in Indian politics where in a parliamentary form the question that is asked is which party will win, not, unlike a presidential form, who will win.

But why is so much focus on the man and not the party, unlike in the past? It is because of his political background and ideology that he has not only nurtured but also implemented, having been a member of the RSS since his childhood. And RSS is a platform that hosts other organisations of similar hue professing Hindu nationalism. While one cannot fault anyone for espousing a particular brand of nationalism, the core value that sustains it remains an important factor. In the case of RSS the alarming aspect is that the underlying value of the group, and by implication all those that share the same platform, is motivated by is the ideology of fascism, adopted, according to scholars, as a deliberate policy. And record shows that there had been close interaction in the 1930s between RSS representatives and Mussolini.

But if his ideological affiliation is fear-inducing his record as the CM of Gujarat, of sponsoring and abetting the killing of Muslims in 2002, done with the help of the state agencies is a disgraceful narrative. And no matter all

the clean chits that he flaunts in his defence, nor all the tears he sheds now, can wash out a word of the litany of his infamy. The man, if he is finally chosen to lead the BJP-led alliance government, will bring to the office of the Indian prime minister a person with blood-stained hands. And it is with some strong reasons that the *Economist* in its lead of April 5 suggests that his coalition partners should hold out for a prime minister other than Mr. Modi, should victory go to BJP.

But far be it for me or anybody else to suggest who India's next prime minister should be. It is for the people of India to choose their leader. But that notwithstanding, for Bangladesh, as indeed for any of India's neighbours, which party is in power in Delhi and who leads that party in the parliament is of extreme importance. And on that issue, Bangladesh-India relations should BJP get the Delhi Masnad, various opinions have been articulated.

We have been assured by the Indian High Commissioner to Dhaka that there would be no change in India's stance towards Bangladesh with the change of government.

And very recently, statements attributed to our Deputy High Commissioner in New Delhi echoed similar appraisal. I agree with both but do so with not a little bit of misgiving, and feel no reason to be elated that there would be no change in India's Bangladesh policy.

In fact, except for a brief Morarji Desai period, there has never been a dramatic shift in India's policy towards Bangladesh with change of government in India. Unlike Bangladesh, foreign policy in India is driven by the head and not heart.

Notwithstanding personal relationship between leaders of the Awami League and Congress that lends a natural predisposition towards each other, India's policy decisions have been based entirely on the need to uphold their national interest, as they should. Neither Hilsha nor Jamdani diplomacy has paid off for Bangladesh.

Regrettably, no change means that the most important issues for Bangladesh, Teesta and the LBA, particularly the exchange of enclaves, will remain unresolved. Further, as a Bangladeshi, my fear is compounded by the prospect of the BJP government again using the so-called infiltration issue to put pressure on the government of Bangladesh. The recent comments of Modi and Subramaniam Swami ("Hindu migration issue, and ceding land to India, both of which we shall deal next week) are a very good indication that these issues are likely to be ratcheted up in future. Is the AL taking note?

The writer is Editor, Op-ed and Defence & Strategic Affairs, *The Daily Star*



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## Test of democratic values

BETWEEN THE LINES



KULDEEP NAYYAR

I get many telephone calls almost every day from Pakistan and a few from Bangladesh to inquire about the polling in the Lok Sabha elections. Their fear is that Narendra Modi might be India's next prime minister and destroy the democratic polity which they envy. I hope Modi does not head the next government.

True, most opinion polls give the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), led by the BJP and Modi, a clear majority. But their tally is unreliable because there is not even a ripple, much less a wave, in favour of Modi in the southern states of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala and Odisha. Even in West Bengal and Tamil Nadu, where regional parties sway the voters, the BJP's showing may be poor. As for the other parts of the country, the intemperate language used by certain leaders, blessed by the RSS, is alienating the intelligentsia and those sitting on the fence.

It has become a fashion in election rallies to threaten the Muslims and then saying that the leaders have been misquoted or that their remarks have been picked up out of context. It was good to see the BJP expressing strong disapproval against the party's provincial leader who said that those who did not support Modi would be sent to Pakistan. The party would have earned credibility if it had ousted the leader from its organisation. However, the comment by Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah that he would rather go to Pakistan than stay quiet against Modi is immature in nature.

Moreover, the BJP and its mentor RSS are misreading the people's response. They do not want to be divided into Hindus and Muslims. The society does not want a person whose politics is divisive and whose thinking may well be authoritarian. I believe that Modi would not be able to disturb pluralism whatever the RSS and the BJP may say. His complicity in the anti-Muslims riots in 2002 cannot be hidden even though a magistrate court in Gujarat has given him a clean chit. As the state's chief minister he is overall responsible and has certain obligations to fulfill. The security of minorities is important. He even refuses to say sorry, much less seek forgiveness. A few days ago when he had an opportunity to express regret, he refused to do so.

Still, there is every possibility that a pro-Hindutva person heads India. Modi's speeches, however jingoistic, have not mentioned Pakistan. But he continues to use development as a cover to hide his communal agenda. Some believe that Modi may face the reality of the country's diversities and turn out to be another Atal Behari Vajpayee, the most popular Indian leader in Pakistan.

Whatever is Modi's agenda, he cannot afford to be on bad terms with neighbouring Pakistan. He may well initiate the talks which have not moved after the terrorists' attack on Mumbai on November 26, 2008. Modi and the

BJP, whatever their rhetoric, realise that a working relationship with Islamabad is in the interest of New Delhi.

Pakistan, where the shadows of fundamentalism are lengthening, is in the midst of attack by extremists on the media, bold and behind the democratic forces. Hamid Mir, an independent journalist, was injured by bullets fired by the fanatics. However, the people are increasingly feeling that normal relations with India will give a fillip to democracy and liberal thoughts.

A Pakistani student from Oxford met me at my residence a few days ago. He had visited Pakistan and felt no hesitation in suggesting that Islamabad should normalise relations with India. This was the only alternative his country had because of the menace of the Taliban and the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan. His regret -- and mine too -- was that even known liberals preferred to remain quiet. I told him that India was also a prey to that. A soft Hindutva was contaminating more and more people. I said in reply. We both agreed that there was no go from good, amicable relations between the two countries.

My disappointment is that a democratic and pluralistic society in India is not playing its role in the region. There is too much of tit for tat. Our foreign ministry has officials who have a particular mindset on Pakistan and take the narrative to the partition days for their chauvinistic stance. The youth are especially bewildered. They want employment or openings in business that a big country like India can provide. What hampers progress in that direction is the enmity between the two countries. People are not to be blamed, the establishments and intelligence agencies are.

The few callers from Bangladesh did not doubt India's secular credentials but the prospects of Modi's success made them unhappy. Despite the growth of Jamaat-e-Islami in their own country, the Bangladeshis have seen how secularism during the liberation days has got eclipsed. They had never imagined that the fundamentalists, who were against the liberation of Bangladesh, would one day be so brazen faced that they would destroy Hindus' temples, as it is happening in Pakistan.

I think that the revival of religion, which is taking place even in the West, is bound to be duplicated in the subcontinent. India is a target of Hindutva forces. They would want the country to be Hindu rashtra. But this is not possible because the people of different faiths have lived together for centuries. Hindus and Muslims have shared the land for more than one thousand years.

Regrettably, there have been communal riots. The recent happenings in Muzzafarnagar in UP remind us that we live on the edge. The victims have returned home and the business is as usual. All realise that they are Indians first and Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs later. The feeling of Indianness binds north with south and east with west.

The spirit of accommodation and the sense of tolerance are lessening because of parties like the RSS-BJP and the Shiv Sena in Maharashtra. Yet the constitution has brought about unity. The current Lok Sabha election testifies the faith of Indians in parliamentary democracy. Those believing in a pluralistic society should realise that their fight will begin if the country takes a right turn.

The writer is an eminent Indian columnist.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### The 'Broken Promise League'

The very thought of planning a third BPL when there are still players from the second BPL who have not been paid yet, and when the league is marred by a match fixing scandal, is a very, very bad idea. What quality foreign player would want to come and play in the BPL given its reputation as such? The Bangladesh national team needs to play together as a unit and not be split apart playing with sub-standard financially needy players from other countries. The very predictable outcome of a third BPL would then be more non-payment of players including Bangladeshi players. This would be an unwelcome distraction leading up to the ODI world cup. If T20 play is what is needed, and why would it be leading up to an ODI world cup, then why not invite the Netherlands, Ireland, and Zimbabwe for a T20 tournament and let the Tigers play together as a unit with more or less equal T20 competition? Or consider a six-team format inviting Afghanistan and Nepal or even an eight-team format including also Hong Kong and UAE. It is quite easy to predict that another BPL would be both another disaster and distraction leading up to the ODI world cup.

Scott Elliott  
Uttara, Dhaka

### History of Bangladesh

These days everybody is trying to write the history of Bangladesh, especially the politicians. I wonder when they will start writing books on mathematics. I can imagine... one will say two plus two makes five and the other will say it makes three. Are not the textbooks in the schools telling different history with change of governments? Who gave them the authority to write history anyway? History has to be written by historians based on hard evidence that is acceptable to all. When it is written by anyone who was a party involved in the events, it is always biased and has to be taken with a pinch of salt. As many of them are still living, I guess the time for writing the history of Bangladesh has not yet come. An objective history will not be acceptable to many of them for obvious reasons. History must not be written in a hurry. The touchstone of time has to allow bringing out the truth in its proper perspective. Till then let us all have patience.

Shahjahan Hafiz  
Gulshan, Dhaka

### Comments on news report, "Modi uses Hindu migration issue," published on April 20, 2014

S.M. Iftekhar Ahmed

Our relations with India is already strained, only the Almighty knows how much it will deteriorate if this fanatic comes to power.

Imracil

Mr. Narendra Modi should know that Bangladesh treats her minorities far better than India, Pakistan or Sri Lanka does.

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### "Same group kidnapped Ilias Ali" (April 19, 2014)

S.M. Iftakhar Rosul(Faisal)

Authorities said they tried their best but we got no clear statement about Ilias Ali's abduction. We still hope that one fine morning Ilias Ali would appear before us. Rizvi should contact the law agencies with all kinds of evidences and tell the names of the suspects as well.

Akhtar Shah

How predictable! Mr. R, you have forgotten to mention RAW! And the other side would say it was JI, BNP and ISI. Great! Is it ok to mention Teesta, enclave, traffic congestion, GSP, dangerously polluted rivers, \$ 1.4 billion loss of GDP through violence, lack of democratic practices etc? No, may be not!

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### "Khaleda unhappy over Jamaat role" (April 21, 2014)

S.M. Iftekhar Ahmed

Does she expect anything better from Jamaat? They betrayed the people during the Liberation War and they abuse the name of Islam. Although the average people know this, Mrs. Zia seems to have lost touch with reality and believes that they are a force she can use to her advantage.

SM

A pet cobra is better than Jamaat; when will she learn?

Amzad Hossain

It is said that BNP is being guided by Jamaat. Then how and why does Khaleda Zia express her annoyance over Jamaat's disobedience?