

## Turag eviction drive Sends wrong signal to river-grabbers

WEDNESDAY'S drive by the Bangladesh Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) to evict illegal occupiers of Turag's foreshore in Gaziour ended in a fiasco. It should not surprise anyone, since from the very beginning, the eviction operation lacked the seriousness it deserved.

How can one even imagine of carrying out a such massive drive without adequate manpower, equipment, necessary planning and coordination among the government agencies concerned? To think that there was only one excavator to dig a huge quantity of earth, a small workforce and equipment to remove earth filling, demolish concrete structures as well as wooden fences and so on from some 63 illegal establishments on the river was to court a debacle. Worse still, there was neither any coordination among the executive magistrate of Gazipur, the police and the BITA officials involved in the drive, nor were those officials able to see eye to eye with one another about the interpretation of 2009's High Court order on the eviction of the illegal structures and the police's role in this regard.

So, what was to happen has happened. But why did the BIWTA officials concerned go ahead with the drive in the first place without taking all these factors into due consideration? This is unacceptable. With such half-hearted approach, BIWTA has not only made a farce of the entire drive, but has also sent a wrong message to the river-grabbers that it lacks the will to evict them. The government must look into the matter; hold those responsible to account so as to avoid repetition of any such ill-conceived eviction operation in the future.

## Private sector growth prospects

### Political instability needs overcoming

TAKING into account the various factors that are holding back expected growth in the private sector, the World Bank (WB) has found political instability to be a major impediment. Although access to finance emerged as the number one problem, the unhealthy environment that political rivalry between the two major political parties has ushered in over the last seven years has everyone worried. While infrastructure woes like lack of availability of electricity can be mitigated through well planned interventions, the general animosity between the ruling party and the opposition needs to be worked off to propel growth in the country. The study, a joint collaboration between WB and IFC, took into account the opinions of more than a thousand respondents over a five month period in 2013.

In the midst of the bribery, infrastructure inadequacies and political tensions, the study also found that the country had scored very high in manufacturing. That the manufacturing base was performing better than many leading nations with capacity utilisation as high as 84 per cent as opposed to the average 79 per cent for 122 countries covered in the survey is welcome news indeed. Again in the export sector, our companies are outstripping the competition in the region with similar income levels.

One can only imagine how much better the economy could fare if we could address some of the bottlenecks highlighted. Bringing about changes in the regulatory framework or solving infrastructural problems takes time, but surely we can do something about bringing down tensions in the political arena.

## What people think



Friday: May 09, 2014

Do you think that dismissal of 3 Rab officials from the services for their alleged involvement in Narayanganj 7-murder incident is good enough as punishment?

Yes

No

3%

97%

Saturday: May 10, 2014

Do you think Rab should be reformed following the widespread allegation of extra-judicial killings?

Yes

No

90%

10%

Sunday: May 11, 2014

Do you think Rajshahi Medical College Hospital (RMCH) authority would take any stern action against some of its intern doctors who denied medical care to a photojournalist?

Yes

No

27%

73%

Monday: May 12, 2014

Do you agree with BNP leader Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir that the government should resign over the Narayanganj killings?

Yes

No

77%

23%

Tuesday: May 13, 2014

Do you think actions will be taken against the people found guilty of making and purchasing below par shields for foreign friends and organisations for their outstanding contributions to the Liberation War?

Yes

No

14%

86%

Wednesday: May 14, 2014

Do you agree with BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia that the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) should be disbanded as the elite force has now become involved in killings, abductions and forced disappearances?

Yes

No

76%

24%

Thursday: May 15, 2014

Do you agree with BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia that the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) has now become a killer force?

Yes

No

83%

17%

# The visible and the invisible in Narayanganj



CROSS  
TALK

MOHAMMAD  
BADRUL AHSAN

OSCAR Wilde once said that the true mystery of the world is the visible, not the invisible. That saying is turning on its head in Narayanganj, where seven men have been killed after abduction. The mystery has been made thicker ever since the emphasis on the visible shifted to the invisible. The widows are grieving and orphans are left to hug the empty air. Meanwhile, a witch hunt is in progress for one man, who has conveniently vanished into the thin air.

What's really going on in Narayanganj? By now we know everything that we need to know about this particular fugitive of law except where to find him. We know he possessed as many as eleven licensed firearms. Pictures of a large cache of Phensedyl bottles have been circulated to the media to establish the notoriety of a very, very bad man. It's also alleged that he has been a fiendish father who killed his own son.

But is this monstrous man a scapegoat or a scoundrel in this particular instance of seven deaths? Yes, the firearm licenses given him have been revoked. What about the firearms in his possession? Have those been recovered as well? If not, for the life of us it's hard to understand how nullifying papers is actually going to matter when weapons are at full cock.

How in the world did he get so many licenses in the first place? Who authorised those licenses? Why was it justified to give one man so many guns firing which required him to have more hands than the multiple-armed Durga? Too many guns issued in one name were bound to end up in hired hands.

Luckily that didn't happen this one time. None of those guns has killed any one of the seven victims. Instead, all of them were strangled to death before their bellies were slit open to quicken their sinking in water. Why then is this one particular suspect getting so much attention? Why are the investigators vigorously going after him like Speedy Gonzalez, a Warner Brothers cartoon character, but slouching like Gonzalez's cousin slow-foot Pedro when they need to catch those three Rab men given the High Court order?

Science has a name for this phenomenon, and it's called pseudo neglect. For reasons that are not entirely clear, during some tasks humans have a tendency to devote more visual attention to the left side of the visual world than the right side. If we look at the political murders in the past, the lopsided brain was always at work.

What about the three sensational crimes that shocked this nation until seven bloated bodies floated in Shitalakhya River? The disappearances of BNP leader Chowdhury Alam and Ilyas Ali and the gruesome murder of journalist couple Sagar and Runi remain unsolved despite prime minister's personal assurance to their families and to this nation. Thousands of others have disappeared and are still

disappearing, some of the bodies littering the killing fields of this land.

It's odd that every time these crimes are discussed, the ruling party leaders and their sympathizers bring up the killing of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his family members on the fateful night of August 15, 1975 and the grenade attack of August 21, 2004. Those were horrible crimes no doubt and some of the guilty have been punished already, others under prosecution. But do they have to sound so vengeful as if this government has been created for the sole purpose of settling its scores with BNP alone!

Agatha Christie writes that dogs are wise because they crawl away into a quiet corner and lick their wounds before they rejoin the world being whole once more. The two large political parties in this country have never recovered from their wounds. Time and again they have been pushed to the corner by autocratic regimes and by each other. And, they have always returned to power to hurt their opponents more.



That's why the impulsive reaction of some ruling party leaders including the state minister for home was that the Narayanganj killing was an act of BNP men. In any civilised country the minister would have been asked to resign for his unbridled tongue. But that doesn't happen in this country because power rests on a daisy chain where conniving people are connected in a series and the manifest is as much of a vital link as the hidden.

This is where the spin comes. One, who has gone into hiding, is hiding for many who're out in the open. This technique proved effective every time as it always forced mystery to get more mysterious. The reason why the invisible has taken over the visible in Narayanganj is the same old story. The suspicious and the suspect are in cahoots. Everything else is giving us eyewash.

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## Modi and the illiberal India

MUBASHAR HASAN

THE right-wing Hindu nationalist party, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), led by Narendra Modi is likely to defeat the "progressive" and "secular" Congress Party, and may form the next government of India. Modi, who is alleged to be a Hindu-fundamentalist, is likely to lead "secular" India as its prime minister.

This year, a total of 814 million Indian voters were registered to cast their vote. There are two remarkable points to note about this number. First, the total number of voters increased by 100 million compared to the previous general election. Second, about 20% of total voters have voted for the first time. These young Indians, who are millions in numbers, were expected to play a crucial role in determining the winner. Most likely they did.

Critics of Modi have argued that he played a dirty role in the Gujrat riot in 2002, which saw over 1,000 Muslims being massacred. This allegation against Modi, however, is yet to be proved in a court. Despite that, his critics even compared him to Hitler to underscore his alleged fanatic nature. Amartya Sen, a Nobel Prize winning economist and a Harvard Professor, is among Modi's strongest critics who publicly said: "Minorities have reason to fear Modi." In short, the central premise of mounting criticism against Modi is based on his non-secular worldview.

Modi's non-secularity seems to be a matter of least concern for the Indian public, including millions of first-time voters. They seem to have become frustrated with the poor governance record of "secular" Congress Party. Modi, on the other hand, was successful in convincing Indian voters about his commitment for development. In election campaigns, he sold, or maybe oversold, the Gujrat development model where he claimed that he had improved Gujrat's infrastructure and law and order situation, ensured uninterrupted power supply and so forth, when he was the head of Gujrat state.

Another important but inspirational point about Modi is that he is a self-made man. His rise to the position of the BJP leader, and may be the Indian PM, from a boy who used to sell tea in train stations is more than inspiration to ordinary Indians. By contrast, the Gandhi family represents the elite of the elites. Ordinary Indians have little in common with them. Weak governance of Congress further alienated voters from them.

Disturbingly, Modi's election campaign, alongside selling 'the development model,' was somewhat anti-Muslim. BJP's allies, hardline Hindu fundamentalists, too, used hateful rhetoric against Indian Muslims. It is

noteworthy to mention that about 150 million Indians are Muslims. Despite this particular campaign pattern, Indians might vote for Modi and BJP. Why does there seem to be no reaction among Indian voters about BJP's anti-Muslim campaign? How important is secularism to Indian masses? Or how realistic is the carefully crafted "secular" image of India that academicians like Amartya Sen want the world to see? Is secularism in India a chimera?

Following the inception of the War on Terror, at a time when terrorism was almost a synonymous word for Muslims, India's "secular" brand received a boost with particular help from the administration of President Bush. With Muslim majority Pakistan and Muslim majority Bangladesh on its two sides, India seemed to constitute the beacon of liberalism in South Asia in the West's eyes. However, the euphoria was short-lived. The recent Modi wave that is seemingly sweeping across the country confirms that India, in reality, hosts a highly illiberal society similar to almost all South Asian countries.

Finally, three elements can be identified for Modi's success. First, millions of Indians are poor. They are not happy with their lives and they long for development. It is a fact that despite its impressive growth, India remains a highly discriminatory country. According to a WHO estimate, about half of the Indian population does not have access to sanitary toilets. *The Guardian* reported that 50% of Indian children are stunted, the vast majority due to undernourishment, and 50% of women have anaemia for the same reason. In one survey, no evidence of any teaching activity in 50% of schools in seven big northern states was found, which explains the terrible academic underachievement. When people are hungry and angry secularism makes little sense to them even if the Ivory Tower academics of India want the world to see India through that lens. That India does not exist.

Second, most of the development works in India do not go ahead as per plan due to corruption by politicians. There is a positive correlation between lack of development, unhappiness of the people, and corruption by politicians. Finally, corrupt politicians manipulate religious sentiments of the public to blame the other -- the minorities -- for their misfortune and joblessness and promise that if they (politicians) come to power they'll develop the lives of poor because it is their religious duty. In most cases, the poor remain poor and unhappy. This is the recipe behind the formation of India's illiberal society and the story behind BJP's possible win.

The writer is Founder and CEO of alochona.com. He is currently completing his PhD on Liberalism, Islam and Political Islam in Bangladesh at the School of Government and International Relations, Griffith University.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### Why this foot-dragging?

The alleged Rab officials of Narayanganj seven murder case are not arrested yet. Rather it seems that the law enforcing agencies are wasting time deliberately. Why don't they take some effective steps to arrest the trio? The High Court has already ordered their immediate arrest. One wonders if the law enforcing agencies are giving them time to flee. We want those Rab officials arrested right away.  
**Rina Mondol**  
*On e-mail*

### Make Chaktai canal navigable

Chaktai canal is considered to be a gateway to internal and external business of Chittagong as it is connected with Khatunganj, one of the largest commodity market and business place in Bangladesh. However, during monsoon the canal gets flooded and brings woes to the local people. Chittagong City Corporation claims to have spent crores of taka in dredging the canal. But we don't see any result. We want to see a fruitful dredging programme from the authorities.  
**Fahad Amin Quadery**  
*Chittagong*

### Rab's controversial role

Rab was formed in 2004 with an aim to take rapid action against criminals. But now their alleged controversial role in Narayanganj killing raised a lot of questions about their contribution in the last 10 years. Limon, a college student, lost his leg because of Rab. In the last ten years, Rab had killed many alleged criminals. Whether those people were really criminals or not is a matter of debate. The recent incidents involving Rab prove that the government has failed to ensure safety and security of its citizens.  
**Misbah Uddin Sumon**  
*Department of Tourism and Hospitality Management University of Dhaka*

### Comments on news report, "Arrest, right away," published on May 12, 2014

#### PlainSpeaker

They have disgraced the whole force and nothing less than arresting all of them and putting them on trial is desirable from an honest government.

#### Abbasuddin

This is the best time for Bangladesh Judiciary to regain its lost power and honour. A stitch in time saves nine.

#### AA

Please arrest them immediately, show zero tolerance and punish them.

#### Shahin Huq

Sheikh Hasina consoling the bereaved family members; How ridiculous!!

#### Mortuza Huq

People will surely judge this government by the final outcome of this case.

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### "Graft everywhere in administration" (May 11, 2014)

#### Barkat

It seems that Mr. Bhuiyan has more issues with Sayeede and his party rather than the practice and culture of corruption. Nowhere had he said that AL man tried to bribe him or about the record breaking corruption in AL time. As if AL is miles away from corruption. The fact is, every department, from head to toe, is in corruption and lawlessness. And this is true during any government and practiced by every government.

#### Nasirullah Mridha, USA

The secretary's disclosure of corruption pleased us. But if he had showed his courage during the BNP rule, things could have been different now.

#### Nazmul Haq

"Wait and see". - Thank you Mr Muhith. I consider you to be honourable and to my knowledge one of the few shining stars who have published their wealth statements. We will be waiting and watching your action ASAP.

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### "Mamata blocked Teesta deal: PM" (May 12, 2014)

#### Bangalee1971

Whether we like it or not, Mamata is serving the interests of India? But whose interest is this government serving?

#### Shahin Huq

Mamata did that for her country. What has Sheikh Hasina done for her country? Sheikh Hasina has given virtually everything to India without receiving anything in return except the assurance that India will try its best to keep her in power.

#### Touchstone

Can you elaborate "everything" that Hasina gave India? You have forgotten that India had sheltered millions of Bangalees on their soil and thousands of Indians were killed during the Liberation War of '71.