

Indian voters have spoken

A verdict for change

THE victory in the Indian election of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the crushing defeat of Congress mark a historic change in the political landscape of the neighbouring countries. It is the first single-majority party government in India in thirty years. It is the first non-Congress government in three decades that has won with a resounding majority. Indeed, the BJP's electoral victory also signifies a change from dynastic rule.

The last five years of Manmohan's government were marked by weak and indecisive governance. Red tape bogged down UPA government's every step and economic growth plummeted to 5% from 10% the term before. Corruption scandals stalked the government and tarnished its image. Narendra Modi projected himself capable of providing strong and effective governance. A turn-around in the economy with jobs for the burgeoning unemployed struck a chord with voters. He optimally utilised the social media to connect with the young voters. Modi's projection of himself at the helm of the BJP was also welcomed by the business community. His coming to power exudes investors' confidence. Now that victory is his, the onus on Modi is that much greater to deliver.

Coming to Bangladesh, as Modi is not dependent on support of any regional party, he is expected to deliver on unresolved issues, namely, Teesta water sharing and border enclave exchange. We wholeheartedly look forward to a speedy resolution of these issues. We congratulate the BJP on its landmark victory and wish Narendra Modi a successful tenure. We hope that the partly divisive image that came through during his campaign will be shunned now that he is prime minister of India.

Leather industry's record success

Export upswing holds some messages

EXPORTS of finished leather, leather goods and footwear have reached record high worth \$1 billion in the first ten months of the fiscal year and set to easily meet the target of \$1.21 billion by the year end. According to EPB data, leather goods, leather and footwear exports rose 70.14 percent, 33.90 percent and 30.24 percent respectively compared to the levels of the last fiscal.

The factors behind such a steady trend of export growth need to be underlined to absorb some messages as to how an industry can grow strong quietly through a combination of mutually reinforcing circumstances. The upswing in export orders is attributed to our competitive pricing helped by higher production cost in China.

The second category of reasons has had to do with investment matching higher inflow of orders, spike in import of capital machinery and concomitant improvement in the quality of products. It is heartening to note that a number of leather goods and footwear manufacturers are turning out high quality products targeted at the middle-and higher-end segments of the market.

The relative political quiet and peace and absence of labour unrest in the leather sector have proved conducive to the export growth. While the industry owners aim at \$2 billion worth of export in the next fiscal, it will still be a small fragment of the \$230 billion global export market. With our potential, we must strive to grab a better slice of that market.

Beauty of Bangladesh captured by cyclists

RIDWAN QUAIUM

IN one of his poems, Rabindranath Tagore wrote that to experience the beauty of nature, one may not need to travel long distances as beauty may exist very close to home.

Cox's Bazar, Sundarban, Rangamati and a few other natural and historical sites are considered as the main scenic places in Bangladesh. People in the capital city complain that the capital and its outskirts lack scenic places to visit. But is this true?

A cycling group has been successfully promoting cycling among people of all walks of life, and has been arranging weekly rides for the past three years in the capital, in its outskirts and also throughout the country.

Through these cycle rides cyclists have discovered that the beauty of Bangladesh is not hidden only in the above mentioned few places but exists in every corner of the country. Cyclists have been able to discover this beauty because walking and cycling help a person to see, feel and enjoy the beauty and attractiveness of a place more closely. In fact, walking and cycling help us visit places which are not reachable in motorised transport. This is why most of us who are habituated to traveling by motorised transport never come across these scenic places.

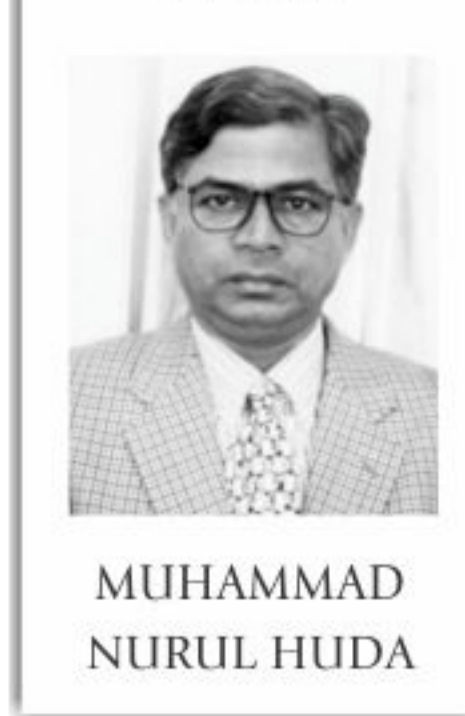
One will be amazed to know that some of the scenic places that cyclists discovered are very close to our homes, and we probably pass by them on daily in motorised transport but do not know that they exist because we pass by so quickly that we cannot appreciate the beauty of the place.

To showcase the beauty of nature that cyclists were able to capture in their rides, the group arranged a photo exhibition at the Drik Gallery. This is probably the first time that an exhibition on this topic has been held. The group believes that the exhibition will not only promote cycling but also the beauty of Bangladesh that exists in every corner of the country. Through the exhibition people will understand what Rabindranath Tagore meant in the poem

The writer is a transportation engineer working in Thailand.

Of myopic law enforcement

STRAIGHT LINE



MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

Multiple abductions followed by grisly murders committed allegedly with the help of elite law enforcement outfit have made many citizens worried and jittery. Responsible individuals including nationally important public leaders have demanded the disbandment of the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab), holding the organisation responsible for the serious malfeasance of a few key officials. In a charged situation nobody is in a mood to study the objective conditions that are causing worrisome deviance. However,

have not murders of publicly important persons occurred in the preceding years? And have not we chosen to forget the death episode without displaying the resolve to effectively combat the menace? Examination and scrutiny would reveal that violent incidents that include murder of politicians are outcomes in a society marked by deep polarisation, weak institutions and chronic poverty. The quantity and quality of violence characterising Bangladeshi society at all levels today has an irreducibly political context. Overt and visible violence co-exists with invisible violence that destroys the identity of human beings. The visible violence, being situational and physical, can be dealt with through law and order solutions. The invisible violence being structural and requiring radical solutions, however, flows into and determines physical violence in a bipolar interaction.

Bangladesh today is witnessing the politics of violence, which means resorting to physical violence to promote a political objective, as well as the violence of politics built into the institutionalised structure of politics.

The relationship between violence and power has to be noted. Though violence in society is perceived as a breach of law, in our situation, often the law itself becomes equally violent and has a debilitating impact because of its systematic ruthlessness backed by official sanction.

Cynical observers of our social scene are of the distressing view that there is a functional utility of violence for politicians. Such opinions point an accusing finger towards the suspected state complicity in the perpetration of organised acts of violence and the inordinate delays in securing justice for the victims. This delay is alarming as it sends a clear message to potential delinquents that no harm will come to them in the event of repeated performances of criminal activities.

In Bangladesh, we need to seriously acknowledge the significance of authoritative approval or condoning of violence because such action is construed as social approval. The so-called political circumstances have often obstructed accountability of the culpable individuals. There is good reason to doubt that considerable number of officials abnegated their responsibility to protect all citizens regardless of their identity.

The disturbing reality in Bangladesh is that with the change of political regime the faces of the criminals and their sources of patronage change. At times the same criminals who had terrorised the community under the patronage of the outgoing ruling party continued their depredations with a renewed mandate from the incumbent ruling party.

TAHMINA RAHMAN

THE 4.7% rise in Sensex Stock index after the public release of the preliminary results of the 16th Lok Sabha election says it all. India has voted for economic development and stability. This historic victory of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) marks a new era in the electoral culture of India. For the first time in the last 30 years, BJP is the first party to be able to form a majority government. It is not so much about Indian population's disillusionment with secularism that has brought BJP to power. Rather it is a verdict in favour of open and progressive economic policies. It was not so much the religious appeal of the party, but the remarkable success of its prime ministerial candidate Modi in transforming Gujarat into an economic miracle that has attracted the voters. 66.38% of over 800 million voters in the country exercised their voting rights in the past five weeks, and as Congress spokesperson Shakil Ahmed puts it "have decided to vote against us (Congress)."

Although pretty much everyone could predict the defeat of the Congress-led alliance by NDA this time, the extent of Congress's humiliation requires some in-depth investigation. Modi declared his victory as Indian people's rejection of corruption and dynastic rule, but loyal Congress followers are still holding placards outside Congress headquarter urging the leadership to bring Priyanka Gandhi to politics. Apparently, the fondness the people share for the Gandhi family for their contribution to the independence struggle is not going to wane anytime soon. But critics are concerned about the lack of a second tier of leadership after the Gandhis within the party as a major barrier to the internal reform of Congress.

The embarrassing defeat of the party under the leadership of Rahul Gandhi demonstrates how repelled the general population is by his 'feudal prince' image. Modi, on the other hand, has carefully built an image of a 'self-made man' from a humble background through what some might call a 'media and marketing coup.' But the bottom line is where Rahul Gandhi failed to inspire confidence in people and give clear direction about his party's plan in case it got mandate to rule the country for a consecutive third term, Modi made the voters believe in his motto of 'minimum government and maximum governance.'

But does Modi have the 'genie in the lamp' to transform the country into an economic giant overnight? BJP will certainly enjoy a greater degree of freedom in formulating economic policies than the previous government. One of the reasons Congress lost its credibility was its inability to implement economic policies that were not welcome by its coalition partners. So, unrestrained by coalition politics, BJP is expected to formulate economic policies at the national level with more autonomy and efficiency. But will it be able to replicate Gujarat model nationwide without invoking resistance from the power-

Quite often, the disconcerting socio-political reality is that the source of deterioration in crime and order situations originated in the continuing patronage of criminals and bullies by the incumbent ruling party. Practically, what the public see is the end result of cumulative process of patronised crime, practiced over successive regimes.

The premonition is that if criminals continue to enjoy immunity from law enforcement over successive administrations then we have a systemic crisis at hand, and a serious one at that. The manifestation of that crisis relates to the allegation of selective law enforcement scenario wherein state functionaries hesitate to enforce the law, suo moto.

The question is: have hardened criminals joined political parties in order to practice their trade with impunity? Are ranks of political parties polluted with criminals and shady elements that are considered indispensable resource for furthering political and commercial fortunes of the political patrons? Is selective law enforcement driving some officials to abuse the system for their own advantage?

The suspicion is that the systemic deficiency is located within the political parties and machinery of law enforcement. The desired corrective actions cannot be unilaterally taken by the ruling party and quite distinctly calls for a bipartisan approach with active involvement of the civil society. Demobilisation of criminal elements by the ruling party demands a reciprocal response from the political opponents. The remedy lies in cleaning our politics through its decriminalisation, backed by the de-politicisation of law enforcement as well as the administration.

It is pertinent to note that we have attached disproportionate importance to the so-called maintenance of public order at the expense of overlooking crime prevention and scientific investigation. Thus we see more personnel for political intelligence collection, security of VIPs including foreign diplomats, riot police establishment and the so-called elite units. Capital investments for public order situation have been accorded priority over expenditures for improving scientific skills of the investigator. The armored car has been more important than the forensic laboratory.

In a scenario as above, professionals and politicians have to share the blame, but perhaps politicians are to blame more. This is so because enforcement leadership had to satisfy the political boss's requirement. To the political leadership the political opposition is the graver threat and, as such, greater resources have to be deployed to counter that scourge. The political executive is the authority and he has the last say.

Now may be the time when we must know why investigative efficiency of the police has deteriorated over the years and whether such efficiency can be regained in isolation without setting the expected organisational goal of the police. It may also be appropriate now to know the pattern of resource allocation for increasing the professional competence of investigative outfits. We may have to know if there is a lack of proper emphasis in fixing priorities and deciding the core functions of police in a pluralist society like ours.

Finally, howsoever facile the sound bites of the politicians may appear, we have to remember that we cannot defend the liberal principles of a democratic society by cultivating and encouraging a medieval prejudice. Therefore, a law enforcement outfit which takes pride in its being an elitist organisation cannot be irreverent to the rule of law.

The writer is a columnist of The Daily Star.

Beginning of new era in Indian politics

ful state governments run by regional parties? Modi embraced Ratan Tata's Nano in Gujarat after it was banned from West Bengal. This proves the marked difference in views about economic development between different state governments in India.

Indian constitution gives certain rights and privileges to the state governments regarding their economic life. So securing support from these governments will be one of the biggest challenges for the upcoming BJP government while implementing its election manifesto of making India an economically prosperous country. Modi will also have to work against the rising expectation of a thriving middle class and an enthusiastic business community. People are eager for change. But how soon can Modi deliver it? Will the fruits of development reach every corner of this huge country evenly? Are the people ready to wait for the changes to take place or will they lose hope too soon? These are some of the questions that the new government in India will have to address.

Rahul Gandhi failed to inspire confidence in people and give clear direction about his party's plans in case it got mandate to rule the country for a consecutive third term, Modi made the voters believe in his motto of 'minimum government and maximum governance.'

This historic victory has proved that the frustration over economic stagnation and corruption during the last Congress regime has compelled people from different faiths, castes and regions to vote for BJP. Indians have put their faith in Modi. It is his turn to return the favour by fostering national unity and political stability. Any prudent statesman with a keen sense of economic modernisation must know that communal violence and political instability can greatly hamper the economic growth of a country. He should also know that cultivating hostile relations with neighbouring countries like Bangladesh will not help his image at the international level and cause unnecessary regional tension. So whatever the religiosity charged rhetoric during the election campaign meant for Modi and his fellow party members, BJP should understand that there is no alternative to consolidation of national identity when it comes to economic development. The sooner the realisation comes, the better.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Make ethylene cheaper than calcium carbide

In general, fruits become sweeter, less green, and softer as they ripen naturally. For export or for marketing in bulk, often fruits have to be picked long before they are ripened. The reason is that once they are ripened they go rotten quickly before even they are shipped. So, ethylene is used worldwide for ripening fruits, which is proven to be almost harmless to human body and it does not spoil the taste of the fruits.

However, it has been found that unscrupulous businessmen in Bangladesh use calcium carbide for ripening instead of ethylene, since the latter is costlier. Just to save a few bucks, these businessmen are using calcium carbide knowing very well that it is hazardous to our health. I would suggest that the government should withdraw all kind of taxes on importing ethylene so that it can become cheaper than calcium carbide. If necessary, government should subsidise it for the sake of public health.

Dr. Kamrul Hassan
 Professor
 Department of Physics
 Dhaka University

Traffic police's arrogance of power

The other day I was returning home from work at 6.00 pm when suddenly a traffic sergeant stopped my car which had tinted paper only on the rear windows. He asked me to remove this paper immediately, and without any delay I followed his instructions. My driver removed the tinted paper on the spot.

But the sergeant was behaving oddly and he snatched the car papers. I felt that he might be expecting bribe. So, finally, I asked him directly: "How much bribe do you want to let us go?" But it hurt his ego. Without a word he filed two cases against me. One was for tinted paper and the other for 'not following' the instructions, resistance and refusal to provide information.

My question is, what was the instruction that I had not followed? I certainly did not resist in any way! My crime was not giving him bribe. When this is how policemen behave, is it a wonder that murders and disappearances happen on a regular basis? While criminals are roaming freely, ordinary citizens are being harassed by the members of law enforcement agencies.

Saima Kamal
 On e-mail

Why are our passports not valid for 10 years?

Now Bangladesh government is issuing Machine Readable Passports (MRP). I was wondering why the Bangladeshi passport is not made valid for 10 years instead of 5 years as it is now. To my knowledge, most of the countries of the world have been issuing passports to their citizens with 10-year validity since long. If our government does the same, it would save one from the hassles and inconvenience that one has to face for renewing one's passport every five year. This would also cut down the workload of the passport office and our embassies abroad.

Ziauddin Ahmed
 On e-mail

Comments on news analysis, "Legally right, morally not," published on May 9, 2014

Akhtar Shah

This is further example of turning a peoples' state into a family estate.

PlainSpeaker

There is nothing right in this thievery, it is all wrong Mr. Liton.

SM

What is the market price of this land? At least BDT 100+ crores or more?

Monju Huq

I would like to appeal to the prime minister not to degrade the Father of the Nation by doing such immoral act.

Zman7

The security of the family members of the father of the nation is imperative and there is no doubt about it. However, the crucial question regarding allocation of house or land should not 'be the ground of morality' as the way TDS author has put it.

Spiderman

People like you are responsible for turning a democracy into dictatorship. What makes you think that just being the family of Sheikh Mujib, they are above ethics, morality and law? Only his family has the right to security? What about the rest of the citizens and their families?

"Not a lost case" (May 11, 2014)

PlainSpeaker

Mr Steele, good luck for you that you left the rotten Biman on time. Even God can't help this company to become a profitable one, how can he?

Nasirullah Mridha, USA

All over the world airline business is considered a profitable one. Our corrupt Biman personnel turned it into a loss project. They always fill their pockets with public money.