

## Institutions weakening

*Personalised government must be rolled back*

**E**VEN without Transparency International Bangladesh having to inform us, people across the board know the manner in which governance has been on a slide. What TIB does, though, is give us all the actual arithmetic of how things have been going wrong at those very places where the state as an institution must assert itself. To be fair, the government for its part commissioned a National Integrity Study back in 2012 as a means of finding the ways and means of rejuvenating the institutions of the state. Unfortunately, the NIS appears to have yielded little result, for reasons that TIB now has come forward with and with which there can be little disagreement.

Essentially, over the years and especially in recent times, there has been an enormous increase in the powers of the prime minister, to an extent that a parliamentary form of government does not encourage. That has meant a worsening in the performance of such institutions as the Jatiyo Sangsad, hobbled as it has been by the absence of a credible opposition over the years dating back to the early 1990s. Add to that a weakening of the judiciary along with a blatant politicization of the civilian bureaucracy and the police. The ramifications have been disturbing, to a point where expectations of justice and a desire for good administration consistently turn out to be misplaced.

Unless this tendency toward personalized government is checked, and checked decisively, it could well become a dangerous precedent for the future. Without checks and balances, governments stumble. At a point, the state itself is rendered weak.

## Deaths on Meghna

*An avoidable accident*

**T**HE latest tragedy to hit the troubled inland waterways is the sinking of Miraj-4 passenger ferry with some 200 people on board. This is not the first launch to go down in Meghna River nor is it likely to be the last given the inexorable lack of preventive actions.

It has been disconcerting to see the lacklustre pace of rescue operations being carried out by authorities. But then, going by newspaper reports, rescue operations are apparently being hampered due to underwater trenches created by dredging. Whatever may be the case, progress is woefully slow and the fact that although BIWTA has the capacity to recover vessels weighing up to 250 tonnes, and Miraj-4 weighs a lot less than that, we are left with the impression that coordination between the different agencies involved in the salvage exercise has been sorely lacking.

Unless authorities are serious about tackling the issues of overloading passenger launches and allowing unfit vessels to ply the inland water routes, accidents like this will continue to happen. Indeed, the list of problems facing the inland river passenger transport sector ranges from flawed design, incompetence of vessel operators to overloading. It really falls upon the authorities to do their job properly when it comes to fitness checking of both vessel and competence of those responsible for navigating these craft. Handing out a cheque to the bereaved families of those lost in the depths of rivers like Meghna is little consolation,

## Simple steps for solving traffic jam

TANVIR RAQUIB

**L**IFE in Dhaka can be unbearable due to constant traffic jam on almost every road and street. During my recent visit to Seoul, the capital of South Korea, I noticed that it also had high rise office buildings and apartments just like in Dhaka but the difference is that I did not feel suffocated there.

As Seoul makes greater efforts in developing its public transportation system, rush hour traffic jams are becoming a thing of the past. Mass Transport System and taxi cabs are so efficient that people are encouraged to use buses and taxis (occasionally). Public transportation (buses) can be much faster than the cars because roads have dedicated lane for buses.

Mr. Oh Se-Hoon, the Mayor of Seoul, said: "Constructing more roads doesn't work in dealing with the traffic problems, developing public transportation is the only solution."

Lee Manki from the Seoul Transport Operation and Information Service Center says that the Transport Operation and Information Service Center can monitor more than 700 traffic cameras in Seoul. If any traffic accident occurs, police and ambulance will be deployed to the site in three minutes. Moreover, about 8,000 buses in the city have been equipped with GPS, so that the speed of these buses can be monitored in real time. With this data, the centre can adjust the traffic lights in accordance with the traffic flow.

What can we learn from this effective model in Seoul to solve our own unbearable traffic problem? The following are some suggestions:

(1) Offices should use car lift system for maximum utilisation of the space. Instead of the traditional basement car park if a car lift system is used, the number of car spaces can be doubled;

(2) Large 1,000 car multistory car parks have to be constructed in Gulshan-1 (at least 1), Gulshan-2 (at least 1), Banani (at least 1), Dhanmondi (at least 3), Mirpur (at least 3), Uttara (at least 3) Elephant Road (at least 1), New Market (at least 1), Shabbagh (at least 1), Moghbazar (at least 1), Motijheel (at least 2);

(3) Dhaka Metropolitan City has to be brought under surveillance system. Any car parked illegally has to get an automatic ticket when the surveillance camera detects it on any street. The software system will issue the ticket automatically without any human involvement;

(4) Illegally parked cars on any street have to be towed away. Proceeds earned from the illegally parked vehicles should be spent on keeping the footpaths clean;

(5) The traffic control system should be fully automated and monitored 24x7 to avoid traffic violation.

## SUNDAY POUCH



ASHFAQUR RAHMAN

**T**HE result of the biggest exercise in democracy in the world is in our hands. The outcome of the elections was stunning. Over 8,250 candidates from myriad political parties contested for the 543 seats. But two major political parties, the incumbent Congress and the main opposition BJP had fielded candidates to the constituencies spread all over India. The Congress was expected to lose to BJP due to its past political misdemeanors and mistakes. But it was inconceivable to anyone that it would lose as miserably to BJP as it has done. By the last count, the BJP captured 285 seats while Congress got 44 seats.

There are many reasons behind the BJP victory, but one reason stands out. It is the leadership of Narendra Modi. He is a single-minded politician who could arouse the masses in India against corruption of Congress leaders, lack of leadership and lethargic governance which led to less than 4% GDP growth and high inflation. The result shows that BJP now has a single party majority in the Lok Sabha, and the Congress, even with the help of smaller parties, cannot challenge it. The era of coalition government is finally over in India.

So what are the other reasons behind the BJP success? Apart from Congress' poor performance in government, the party could not inspire the youth of India to vote for it. Over 100 million young people joined the Indian electorate this election year. Again, about 20% of the entire electorate of 814 million are young people. BJP election machinery used the social media and mobile telephones to carry its message of change that it wished to bring to the Indians if elected to power. It could successfully connect to 230 million voters. This is an unprecedented figure. Congress in contrast relied more on traditional contacts as it had done in the past. Its reach was short and its election message was weak. As the urban and semi-urban voters could be linked up by BJP, they rewarded it by giving it a resounding victory. Only the rural poor in faraway places in India could be reached by Congress. These voters were traditional supporters of Congress anyway. Thus the Congress party could connect with only 13 million voters.

What message has BJP given to the Indian electorate? First, that in the next 5 years BJP would change the way the country would be governed. By that, BJP means that it has an elaborate economic agenda. It would be a business and manufacturing friendly government. Bureaucratic procedures would be minimal in getting licenses to run businesses and factories. Money for investment in projects and infrastructure would be easily available. Modi's

## Congress decimated: Why?

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government would support development work in the urban and rural areas equally. Efficiency would be the object in running business in India. This would be in line with what he had done in his own state of Gujarat where he had been chief minister three times.

Besides the economic agenda, BJP has a social agenda. Its slogan has been 'toilets before temple.' By that, it gave the message that it will be prioritising basic sanitary and water needs of the people before investing on places of worship. The BJP also has a political agenda. In the first press conference after its election victory, the BJP president clearly said that the success of the BJP is not its own but belongs to the people of India at large, transcending all religious groups, castes, creeds and persuasions. By saying that, it clearly indicated that it has drawn its support not only from Hindu majority population but from all sections of the population. How much of this is a true reflection of its political agenda needs further ascertaining. Everybody knows that the BJP is a Hindu nationalist party with links to Hindu militant organisations like the RSS and the Biswa Hindu Parishad. They all want to look to Hindu interests first. But will the BJP, now that it has power in its grasp, stick to this agenda in the future? We have to wait and see how BJP treats minorities, including the Muslims, residing in that country.

The BJP victory in many ways can be attributed to Modi personally and his strong image. It is likely that he could turn out to be dictatorial in his demeanour in the future. But for his own good he will need to balance India's needs with his personal image. But there is no doubt now that BJP and Modi's victory has sounded the death knell of dynastic politics in India.

Will BJP victory mean that Bangladesh, whose Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina had close relations with the outgoing Congress party, will get the short shrift in the future. One issue that may irk Modi is the legitimacy of the Awami League government. Modi himself has worked his way through a massive election and won. He might not be tolerant towards a government in neighbouring Bangladesh that has yet to prove its electoral victory on a level playing field. Is he likely to raise this when bilateral negotiations take place in future? It is too early to comment on this.

But there are several outstanding issues with India that need to be resolved. These include sharing of the water of the Teesta River, implementation of the Land Boundary Agreement between the two countries, firing by BSF along the border between Bangladesh and India, and duty free access of Bangladeshi products into the Indian market. Modi's approach may depend on what his administration's policies are towards India's other smaller neighbours. He can bring substantive improvement in relations among countries in South Asia. Let us see how things move between India and Bangladesh in the first 100 days of the Modi administration.

## India's Shinzo Abe

### THE ASIAN CENTURY



BRAHMA CHELLANEY

**I**NDIANS' desire for a dynamic, assertive leader to help revitalise their country's economy and security.

Like Abe, Modi is expected to focus on reviving India's economic fortunes while simultaneously bolstering its defenses and strengthening its strategic partnerships with likeminded states, thereby promoting regional stability and blocking the rise of a Sino-centric Asia. The charismatic Modi -- a darling of business leaders at home and abroad -- has promised to restore rapid economic growth, saying there should be "no red tape, only red carpet" for investors. The 63-year-old Modi mirrors Abe's soft nationalism, market-oriented economics, and new Asianism, seeking close ties with Asian democracies to create a web of interlocking strategic partnerships.

In a country where the gap between the average age of political leaders and citizens is one of the world's widest, Modi will be the first prime minister born after India gained independence in 1947. This constitutes another parallel with Abe, who is Japan's first prime minister born after World War II.

There is, however, an important difference in terms of the two leaders' upbringing: While Modi rose from humble beginnings to lead the world's largest democracy, Abe—the grandson and grandnephew of two former Japanese prime ministers and the son of a former foreign minister -- boasts a distinguished political lineage. In fact, Modi rode to victory by crushing the dynastic aspirations of Rahul Gandhi, whose failure to articulate clear views or demonstrate leadership ran counter to the Indian electorate's yearning for an era of decisive government.

Modi, like Abe, faces major foreign-policy challenges. India is home to more than one-sixth of the world's population, yet it punches far below its weight. A 2013 essay in the journal Foreign Affairs, titled "India's Feeble Foreign Policy," focused on how the country is resisting its own rise, as if the political miasma in New Delhi had turned the country into its own worst enemy.

Many Indians want Modi to give a new direction to foreign relations at a time when the gap between India and China in terms of international stature has grown significantly. India's influence in its own backyard -- including Nepal, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives -- has shrunk. Indeed, Bhutan remains India's sole pocket of strategic clout in South Asia.

India also confronts the strengthening nexus between its two nuclear-armed regional adversaries, China and Pakistan, both of which have staked claims to substantial swaths of Indian territory and continue to collaborate on

weapons of mass destruction. In dealing with these countries, Modi will face the same dilemma that has haunted previous Indian governments: the Chinese and Pakistani foreign ministries are weak actors. The Communist Party and the military shape Chinese foreign policy, while Pakistan relies on its army and intelligence services, which still use terror groups as proxies. The Modi government is unlikely to let another Mumbai-style terrorist attack staged from Pakistan go unpunished, employing at least non-military retaliatory options.

Restoring momentum to the relationship with the United States -- damaged recently by grating diplomatic tensions and trade disputes -- is another pressing challenge. But Modi's commitment to pro-market economic policies and defense modernisation is likely to yield new opportunities for US businesses and lift the bilateral relationship to a new level of engagement.

America's strategic interests will be advanced by likely new defense cooperation and trade that boosts US arms sales and creates avenues for joint military coordination. The US already conducts more military exercises with India than with any other country.

Modi is the sort of leader who can help put US-India ties back on track and boost cooperation. Yet there is a risk that his relations with the US, at least initially, could be more businesslike than warm, owing to an American slight that is hard for him to forget. In 2005, the US government revoked his visa over unproven allegations that he connived in Hindu-Muslim riots in 2002, when he was chief minister of Gujarat. Even after India's Supreme Court found no evidence to link Modi to the violence, the US continued to ostracise him, reaching out to him only on the eve of the recent election.

With the US having expressed no regret for its revocation of his visa, Modi is unlikely to go out of his way to befriend the US by seeking a White House visit. Instead, he is expected to wait for US officials to come calling. By contrast, Modi is likely to remember states, such as Japan and Israel, that courted him even as the US targeted him. Modi's 2007 and 2012 visits to Japan opened new avenues for Japanese investment in business-friendly Gujarat. Moreover, Modi has forged a special relationship with Japan and built personal rapport with Abe. When Abe returned to power, Modi congratulated him with a telephone call.

Modi's victory is likely to turn Indo-Japanese ties -- Asia's fastest-developing bilateral relationship -- into the main driver of India's "Look East" strategy, which, with America's blessing, seeks to strengthen economic and strategic cooperation with US allies and partners in East and Southeast Asia. Abe, who has sought to build security options for Japan beyond the current US-centric framework, has argued that his country's ties with India hold "the greatest potential of any bilateral relationship anywhere in the world."

A deeper Japan-India entente under Abe and Modi could potentially reshape the Asian strategic landscape. It is no surprise that Abe rooted for a Modi victory.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### Curbing eve-teasing

We often learn from newspapers about school and college girls, who are victims of eve-teasing, committing suicide. For protecting girls from eve-teasing, the government and the citizens need to work together. Various laws have been made already, but all those laws will only be effective in curbing eve-teasing if we, as a nation, change our attitude towards women.

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### Avoid using trans fat in foods

Nowadays people are conscious about not eating fatty foods as they increase bad cholesterol or LDL cholesterol in blood. Our body needs some fat and we get it mainly from animal and plant. We consume fats in two forms, saturated and unsaturated. Vegetable oils contain unsaturated fatty acids while animal products like butter, meat contain saturated fatty acids. Saturated fat raises LDL and lowers good cholesterol (HDL) in human body. LDL increases the risk of developing coronary heart disease.

Trans fat is being produced by adding hydrogen to vegetable oil through a process called hydrogenation. Trans fat like margarine is actually more harmful than butter because it increases the LDL or bad cholesterol. In our country, hotels and restaurants use Banaspati ghee to cook which is a trans fat and so harmful to human health. Commercially baked food products such as crackers, cookies and cakes as well as many fried foods, such as French fries contain trans fat which should be avoided to keep our LDL level lower. We should use vegetable oils like olive, soybean, and sunflower oils which are rich in unsaturated fatty acids and good for health.

Professor M Zahidul Haque

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### Khaleda on disbanding Rab

Recently BNP chairperson Khaleda Zia demanded that RAB should be disbanded, alleging that the force has now become involved in killings and abductions.

I agree with her because though this force has achieved successes in many cases such as tackling militancy and capturing criminals, there are also serious accusations against Rab for extra-judicial killings and forced disappearances.

But Khaleda Zia should not forget that this force was formed during her rule and there were various accusations against them at that time also. So slamming the political opponent because of Rab's activities is just a trick. Both BNP and AL are equally responsible for turning a state agency into a Frankenstein.

Rokeya Ahmed

*Comments on news report, "Rab official 'helped Nur Hossain flee'," published on May 13, 2014*

### Aasfisarwar

I have read Col Ahsan's interview with various news agencies. It's clear from his statement that he is trying to cover up the serial killers. His statements are out of context, inconsistent and highly suspicious. Too much blood in RAB's hands.

### Mofi

How and why RAB should continue working? People now don't have any trust in them. I think it's time government disbanded RAB. In any future effort to create a special force, I would urge the government to exclude members of the armed forces from it.

### Spiderman

How can the government disband it, as they need this special force to kill their opponents? The government will give a new uniform, new logo and new name to RAB just as they did to BDR. People will be happy and the government will have the same agency in different name to do the same old game.

### Jafar Iqbal

There is a good chance that Nur may be killed in crossfire so that he can't disclose the names of big cartels involved in the murder.

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*"Khaleda for disbanding Rab" (May 12, 2014)*

### Abbasuddin

A universal fate of all the creators of Frankensteins.

### Dev Saha

RAB should be scrutinised, not disbanded! The fix is easy and can be done in no time.

### Surfy007

I do not agree with Khaleda Zia. RAB is needed in Bangladesh since our police is not strong and usually used as puppets by the ruling government.

### Monju Huq

Does she want to let loose the Jamaat-Shibir