

# River up for grabs

## Gamekeeper turned poacher

THE excuse given by the UNO of Banaripara justifying his action of putting signposting showing a good part of the River Sandhya earmarked for various entertainment and recreation facilities is deplorable. It is difficult to accept that it was done to prevent other encroachers to grab the river. Such acts of the administration do not deter but encourage the unscrupulous. And to top it all we are told that the local MP had given his nod to it.

We wonder whether it is within the remit of the UNO to commandeer part of a river whose control and administration is the responsibility of another agency of the government, or indeed within the authority of the local MP to give permission to do so. The DC, we understand, was out of the loop and had no knowledge of what the UNO was doing.

If the administration has to resort to illegal and even sly acts as a deterrent the only impression we get is that of a self-serving administration which, in spite of its authority, is either unwilling or unable to exercise it.

River grabbing, and in fact encroachment and devouring of all such public property are being done by well linked syndicates in many parts of the country. And they indulge in their illegal acts with the help and support of local public servants whose job it is to prevent exactly that.

When we are busy trying to save the rivers from the clutch of private parties it is absolutely exasperating to find some local administration replicating the encroachers and grabbers.

# Toxic food everywhere

## Ad-hoc measures won't do

THE incidence of adulterated food items has acquired such an intensity that now the list of edibles has shrunk only to a few. Monitoring of food supply chain will not be enough by itself, long term damaging effects of consuming contaminated food will have to sink in the minds of the perpetrators. We need to ensure that concerned persons at all levels of food production and supplies are sensitised about the harmful effects of adulteration and refrain from it.

The malady is not only afflicting the present generation of citizens but also casting a shadow over future generation with the prospect of stunting them. Some doctors even hold the view that if cases relating to consumption of toxic foods recur then the number of physically and mentally disabled children by the year 2020 will rise terrifyingly. The pattern of diseases, caused due to poisoned food has already changed, and that's why we now have more cancer, diabetic and kidney patients than ever before.

In this context, manufacturers, growers and sellers must prioritise what is more important to them -- making quick profits at the cost of public health or focus on honest and sustainable income with a salubrious commitment to society.

Regular crackdowns for banning toxic foods must continue and culprits handed deterrent punishment. Not only should the government combat the offenders but the public too must come forward to lend a hand. Only an all-out approach has any chance of success.

# Tinted windows in vehicles

RIFAT HALIM

IN recent times, it seems the war on tinted windows has become a major issue in the fight against crime. Shortly after the Narayanganj incident, Bangladesh High Court issued a ruling to ban all tinted windows on vehicles. So, the question arises as to how tinted windows play a part in crime. To come to a solution we must evaluate certain facts about this and how such a system can be handled through proper management.

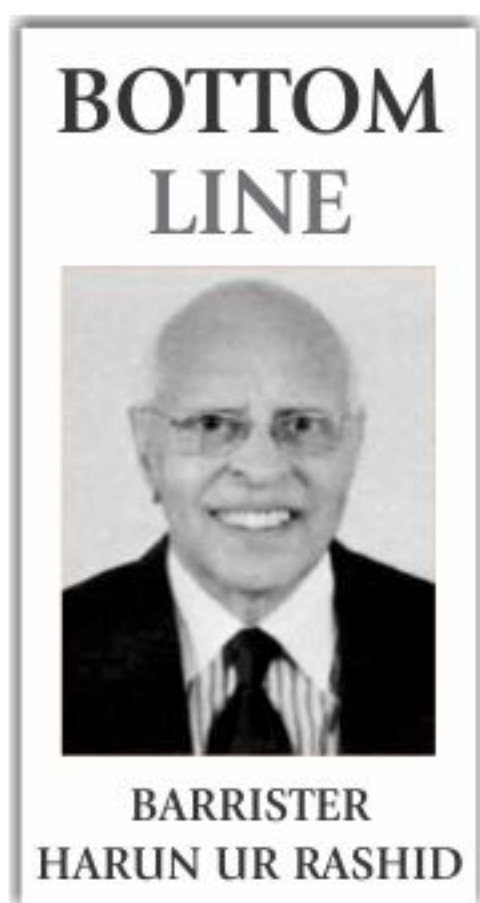
Tinted windows are used (1) to get relief from the extreme heat, and (2) many VIPs, company heads and people from all walks of life believe it provides a semblance of security from crimes being committed in broad daylight at traffic stops. The objection that law enforcement agencies have raised against tinted vehicles is that kidnappings and killings may be carried out behind tinted windows, but it can also be argued that criminals may utilise the trunk of their cars for the same purpose. Are we to do away with trunks as well?

The order issued by the High Court requires that all tinted windows have to be removed from cars, except for a few government vehicles used by persons who require high security. Law enforcement authorities have been conducting spot checks to stop vehicles with tinted glass and fining them.

A possible solution to this might be fixing a fee for vehicles that want to continue with tinted windows. The fee can be yearly and based upon the locality of the vehicle, a nominal amount of Tk. 500-1000 could be charged. All vehicles wishing to avail this facility must have current registration and up-to-date paperwork. The vehicles can be taken to the nearest precinct and, after verification, a sticker can be put up on the front glass, visible enough for authorities to view it without having to stop the vehicles and slowing down traffic as a result. This will not only assist with crime control but also eliminate the hassle of spot checks. It could also expedite field operations as well as ensure public safety. The proposed method might be a deterrent to crime. It will also lead to increased cooperation between the law enforcement authorities and the civil society.

The writer is CEO of SolarCon Bangladesh.

# Modi government and Bangladesh diplomacy



BARRISTER HARUN UR RASHID

SINCE 2009, the Sheikh Hasina government has been building a stronger bilateral architecture with India in almost all sectors. The government moved quickly to address Delhi's concerns on cross-border terrorism (including expelling top Ulfa insurgents to India) and promised connectivity to the North-East. Cooperative efforts are continuing from both sides to implement many projects and programmes in economic, social and infrastructure, especially under the supplier's credit of \$ 1 billion loan to Bangladesh by India (out of which \$200 million was later converted into grant).

Both Bangladesh and India benefitted from this partnership. However, there is a perception that India got more than what Bangladesh received from India. The question is whether the Modi government will not only resolve the pending issues but also enhance the relationship with Bangladesh. Modi's commitment to bring about economic recovery and create jobs can only be executed when peace prevails inside India and with its neighbours. Bangladesh is a huge market for India, which could be one reason for the Modi government not to disrupt the existing relations.

It is believed the Modi government, with its huge majority in the parliament, can resolve the pending issues. However everyone knows that issues or disputes between Bangladesh and India directly involve the Indian states of West Bengal, Assam, Tripura, Meghalaya and Mizoram, and the Modi government needs to seek their views, particularly when the states are not ruled by the BJP.

Modi, being a former chief minister of Gujarat state, knows very well about the fissures between the states and the centre. He wants to empower states with full responsibility for the lists of subjects under their jurisdiction, and work with them to resolve issues both within the country and with neighbours. One of the diplomatic steps is to craft stronger cooperative government-to-government links with the neighbouring Indian states to better coordinate the breadth of Indo-Bangladesh issues.

For example, Bangladesh has more than 4,096.70 km land border with West Bengal (2216.70 km), Assam

(263.00 km), Meghalaya (443.00 km), Tripura (856 km), and Mizoram (318 km). Bangladesh is a lower riparian of 54 rivers flowing from these states.

The states have their own domestic political dealings with the centre and also within the state, and reaction to any agreement with Bangladesh by the New Delhi government could be either negative or positive. The most glaring illustration has been the non-implementation of the Teesta Agreement signed in 2011 because of the opposition of West Bengal's chief minister.

Bangladesh diplomats need to know before signing any agreement with the national government whether the centre has taken on board the state concerned to implement the agreement. Second, Bangladesh also may ascertain from independent sources the views of the concerned state about the proposed agreement. Another major diplomatic move for Bangladesh is to vigorously pursue areas such as water, energy, food security and environmental degradation through the 2011 Indo-Bangladesh Framework Agreement on Cooperation and Development. Furthermore, Bangladesh may move diplomatically to demonstrate that because of its geographic location, the country can be of immense value for India in terms of security and enhanced economic growth in the northeastern states.

Bangladesh may play a proactive role in integrating the economies of Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal and northeastern states of India. They could be constituted as a sub-regional economic group, sharing their resources for mutual benefits. In that context, Bangladesh may diplomatically persuade India to adopt a regional policy where all its small neighbours are on board for the benefit of the region.

It appears that Mamata's Trinamool Congress has become stronger politically than before with the increase in the number of MPs. It is felt that she opposed the Teesta Agreement because her state does not get enough water from Sikkim. Modi may persuade Sikkim to release more water to West Bengal and consequently make it easier to implement the Teesta Agreement with Bangladesh. BJP's majority in the parliament makes it easier for India to ratify the Land Boundary Agreement with exchange of enclaves.

The results of the diplomatic steps by Bangladesh government may hinge on BJP's assessment of whether political stability will continue in Bangladesh after the non-inclusive January 5 election. BJP wants peace and stability in Bangladesh; otherwise it may have an adverse impact on India.

There are many unknowns about Modi and it is hard to predict anything at this stage. Bangladesh faces tough diplomatic challenges in dealing with the Modi government. Finally, the two countries are destined to live next to each other. Therefore, I firmly believe that there is no reason why Bangladesh-India relations should not be mutually supportive and friendly as both should fight together the common enemy -- extreme poverty -- existing among people of both countries.

The writer is former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.

# Disaggregating the Modi phenomenon

SMRUTI S PATTANAIK

BJP'S massive landslide victory, the biggest in the last three decades for any party, has generated a hope of stability and a strong government that will provide a fillip to the much-awaited economic growth, and lowering of inflation and price rise. BJP's stunning victory, the most spectacular since its birth, made as much news as the devastating Congress defeat, the worst since independence. In ten states Congress could not even win a single seat, and in others it managed single digit victory, winning a total of 44 seats. There is still some doubt whether Congress would be recognised as the main opposition party since it won less than 10% of the seats.

What accounts for BJP's massive win and Congress' loss? Is it communal polarisation? Is it touching of a chord with popular aspiration, especially that of the new generation? In spite of the acrimonious election campaign, with diatribes, personal attacks, communal and caste remarks, especially in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, many in India are looking forward to this government with a lot of hope. *Ab aache din anay wala hai* (good time is going to come now), as the tag line of the BJP promised.

While the Congress and some other parties drew an ideological battle line, projecting Modi as divisive and BJP as communal, they could not make much of a dent in his popular appeal or cut much ice with the large middle class, and especially the 100 million new voters. The last five years of Congress rule had been marked by massive corruption, scams, price rise, inflation and a visible policy paralysis, which exasperated the people who looked for a change, and for a party that embodies that aspiration. BJP cashed on this aspiration for change and hope. For many of the voters, Modi's past did not matter, even though the opposition kept on harping on his role in Gujarat riot after Supreme Court acquitted him. What mattered to common men is what he has to offer to them in the future. *Abki bar Modi sarkar* caught people's imagination, so also his appeal to give him at least a chance.

Modi's engaging style of campaign, his confidence, his leadership in rallying the BJP around him worked for the party that wanted to project him as a strong leader who can bring effective change and a vision that would embody aspiration of the new and old voters. Compare this with Rahul Gandhi, who was the main campaigner and a prime ministerial hopeful. He looked under-confident, lacked clarity of thought and there was hardly much that he could showcase as achievements. The corruption scandals were weighing heavily on the party in spite of having one of the cleanest prime ministers at the helm.

The complete dependence on the Gandhi family also did not speak much for the government. Congress had nothing new to offer, especially after a disastrous UPA II. Contrastingly, Modi, coming from a humble background, turned Congress' description of him as *chaiwala* to his political advantage and emphasised his underprivileged status to become the new *Aam Admi*. His reference to Congress as *maa-beta* (mother-son) party brought to the election platform the dynastic inheritance of the Congress party. Moreover, the frequent media reports on how the Congress Party chairperson controlled the real decision making made many emphasise why this duality had to be ended -- the power and accountability equation

in the UPA II.

BJP's victory cannot be attributed to communal polarisation, though the election campaign degenerated to some extent to that in UP and Bihar where other parties like the Congress, Samajwadi Party (SP), Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), and the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) played on Hindu-Muslim divide to get support from the minority communities. It needs to be underlined that the *Sankaracharyas* of Puri and Dwaraka were opposed to Modi.

In Assam and Bengal the issue of illegal migration paid BJP electoral dividends because there exist anti-immigration sentiments, especially in Assam. This communal polarisation also helped parties like the All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF), formed in 2005, which has its support base among the Bengali Muslim population. It won 3 seats in lower Assam compared to the one in 2009. In Bengal, the votes were also polarised where the Trinamool Congress (TMC) appealed to its minority support base while BJP played on illegal immigration issue. It managed 2 seats in Bengal where it had no electoral presence.

However, it needs to be mentioned that communal polarisation helped the Party to some extent in the Hindi heartland, where the Muslim votes were divided among the parties opposed to the BJP. Elsewhere in the country, local issues dominated the discourse. In most of the North Eastern states, except for Mizoram and Nagaland, the Party gained a presence where it was non-existent earlier. The political marginalisation of Aam Admi Party (AAP), which at one point of time was considered a serious contender, also helped the BJP. The AAP mostly made a dent in the Congress support base as is illustrated by the vote share it secured in Delhi.

The election saw 66.38% voter turnout, the highest by far. BJP's 31.1% vote won the party 282 seats of its own and 336 as part of National Democratic Alliance (NDA). It needs to build confidence among the minorities, which was eroded by speeches made by senior party members even though Modi condemned them. The RSS General Secretary said: "The new government should treat the 125 crore people of the country as equal and without any discrimination on the basis of caste, creed or religion..."

Given the pluralistic culture of India, one hopes that the polarisation that one witnessed in a few states was election maneuver and will not be reflected in the policies and programmes that the government is going to formulate to revive the economy, provide jobs to the youth and a stable government that has remained elusive for the past many years. Good governance continues to remain a key issue for any electoral victory, and not communal politics. The victory of Biju Janata Dal (BJD) for the fourth time in the assembly elections in Odisha and the electoral success of the AIADMK in Tamil Nadu where it decimated the opposition political parties indicate that it is not just communal polarisation that can garner electoral success. Not all of Modi voters subscribe to the party's Hindutva agenda. People look much beyond it. BJP, in fact, has promised that. As Modi said: "Give me 60 months and I will change your life." It is now time for the Party to deliver.

The writer is Research Fellow, Institute of Defence Studies & Analysis, New Delhi. The views expressed are those of the writer.

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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## "When doctors turn hooligans"

Mr. Syed Badrul Ahsan has written yet another scintillating article (TDS, May 16) regarding an issue that perplexes our society at this moment and I thank him for this. Over the years, I have enjoyed reading his articles in TDS and have always seen eye to eye with his views. Today was no different. But there are some issues that I feel require further clarification.

I do not support the use of violence against journalists and doctors. What struck me most about the article was the tone it carried. The animosity towards all doctors and not one in particular was very apparent, almost palpable, one might say. The attack on a senior journalist of Prothom Alo is in no way acceptable, but the attacker was one doctor, not the entire community of doctors. Clearly, one should not blame the entire lot for one rotten apple.

There have been references drawn about attacks made by doctors over arguments about elevator use and about doctors refusing to treat a journalist. There was no reference to the Rajshahi incident where a patient's attendant slapped an on-duty doctor. There was no reference to the incident at BIRDEM where a female duty doctor and her colleagues were mindlessly beaten up, that too under police supervision! Why was there no case filed under the Nari Nirjaton Ain? If you ask me I would say these are the key incidents which led to the latter events you have mentioned in the article. I firmly believe that the doctor who attacked the senior journalist is, without a shred of doubt, at fault and I am ashamed to inform you that there are doctors like this in our society but there are many more doctors who have made exemplary contribution in the healthcare sector of our nation.

Dr. Anonymous  
On e-mail

## Parents shouldn't go overboard with GPA

Most parents of our country are much concerned about their children's GPA score and so they put pressure on their kids for getting a good GPA. Such attitude of parents affects the children's mental health. They suffer from mental disorder, depression, tension etc. Parents should be considerate to their children and should not compare the results of other kids with the results of their own kids.

Anonymous  
On e-mail

## Comments on news report, "Ties to reach a greater height," published on May 17, 2014

AA

Before congratulating him, PM and the AL government should learn the reason of the fall of the Congress--it was massive corruption! The way corruption is increasing in our country, AL may face the same consequence soon. We hope this government comes out of their weak, careless and corrupt administration in every sector and engage very strong and honest people in all sectors. At the same time, it should immediately arrest and punish the corrupt officials.

Disqus

Bangladesh is one of the key allies of India, as we both want security, development and growth for our people. Now that BJP is at the centre, we will build closer relationship with them to develop the eastern region of India and Bangladesh. Trinamul presence in West Bengal may cause hindrance, but at the national level, we will certainly be closer than before.

## "Nehru's India now Modi's Bharat" (May 17, 2014)

Mamun Ul Ala

Let's celebrate 'democracy'. Modi has received the mandate of the Indians. And let's hope: democracy is secularism, secularism democracy.

Hafeejul Alam

I believe nothing has changed in India. It's not BJP that won the election, rather it's Modi who with his fierce communal outlook got the landslide. On the other hand, Mamata Banerjee got landslide in West Bengal. To me it's quite natural, for it's said that what Bengal thinks today, India thinks tomorrow. I had the opportunity to visit many parts of India. Other than West Bengal and a few states in South India, general members of the population are highly illiterate, orthodox and do not know about the basic hygiene (According to a recent report, more than 50% of Indian people do not use toilet). Therefore, it's obvious that the bulk of the populace would not understand the concepts like secularism, social development etc. However, West Bengal is spectacularly different with its rich literary and cultural background. The society is highly cosmopolitan and liberal. No wonder Tagore's message of love and humanism enriched not only West Bengal but gave a meaningful life to all Bengali speaking people in the Sub-Continent and beyond.

Mortuza Huq

In India, democracy and the people won. In Bangladesh, democracy and the people lost in 5 January election.