

Gruesome UZ chairman murder

An instance of severe security lapse

THE gruesome murder of Phulgazi upazila chairman in broad daylight on Tuesday at Feni comes as yet another shock to the nation after the Narayangaj killings. The horrifying incident only points to the dismal state of law and order in the country.

The ease with which the perpetrators went ahead with their entire scheme of blocking the road, surrounding the vehicle carrying the victim and pelting it with brickbats, firing shots at him and then pouring petrol on the vehicle to set fire to it is mind-boggling. And how surprising it is that the killers faced no challenge either from the police or from local people at any stage of their operation! If this is the level of security of an important public representative, then what can an ordinary citizen expect from the state?

It's indeed a sad commentary on the state of preparedness of our law-enforcing agencies to prevent any such attack on citizens or intercept it before criminals strike down their intended victims.

It has become clear from the method of the murder that the assailants carried out their attack in a premeditated and well-planned manner. But how can it be that the different intelligence wings of the local police were caught unawares by those criminals? Obviously, this is a case of serious and inexcusable lapse on the part of the intelligence agencies concerned.

We are aghast at the familiar political blame-game that has started centring around the murder. This must stop for the sake of unhindered investigation into the killing leading to arrest of the culprits and their exemplary punishment.

Progress on safety in RMG sector

Still some way to go

A survey carried out by the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) which took into account approximately 12 per cent of factories and an equal percentage of Bangladesh Knit Manufacturers and Exporters Association members has come up with some interesting findings. Though substantial progress has been made in factories to improve workplace safety, there remain critical areas that are yet to be addressed. However, with more than 8 out of 10 factories surveyed having approved factory layouts and more than 90 per cent of the 499 factories inspected possessing updated fire safety licenses, we are hopeful that the industry is taking steps in the right direction to avert workplace hazard like fire and building mishaps.

That said, there are areas that require immediate attention if we wish to avert future disasters on the factory floor. It was found that about 4 out of 5 factories lack separate emergency exits. Hence in case of fire or other calamity like building collapse, significant losses of life and limbs cannot be ruled out. And although 87 per cent of factories have direct access to exits, 13 per cent do not. So what happens if there is an accident in those factories? Other less talked about problems include faulty electrical lines which have been identified in inspections to be a major source of causing fires. Despite significant shortcomings, including the fact that the survey was limited to Dhaka division, the study provides an important glimpse into the world of safety and

Is there only one Nur Hossain?

ABDUL MATIN

THERE was an interesting joke in Vienna around the mid 1970s. An army tank of the former Soviet Union once lost its way and by mistake entered into Austria in the darkness of the night. Neither any army surveillance team nor any border security guard could detect it. The tank was discovered by chance by a traffic police on the following day during a routine patrol only because it had been parked on the wrong side of the road. Soon the following joke went viral among the Austrians: "Nobody in Austria would know if the Soviet Union invades the country unless they park their tanks on the wrong side of the road!"

Now, who would have known about Nur Hossain and his illegal activities, had there been no case of murder in Narayanganj with him as the prime suspect? On April 27, seven people including Nazrul Islam, four of his associates and senior lawyer Chandan Sarker and his driver, were kidnapped separately from the Dhaka-Narayanganj link road. Their bodies were later found in the Shitalakkhya River.

The life of Nur Hossain, the prime suspect on the run, is a typical rags-to-riches story. He started his career as a truck-helper but soon got involved in underworld activities. Within years he became the king of the drug empire in the Siddhirganj area. He owned 20 shops to sell drugs and liquor, both local and foreign. His stores used to be open, often day and night, till six bodies of the seven abductees were found floating in the Shitalakkhya River. He possessed 11 licensed firearms, was engaged in illegal lifting of sand from the bank of the Shitalakkhya River and also extortion. It is reported that money came to him like "flood waters" and he carried out all his illegal activities under the nose of the law enforcers and the local administration without ever being challenged.

New stories on Nur Hossain's underworld activities are now surfacing every day, giving rise to many questions. Is there only one Nur Hossain? Who are the other ones engaged in illegal drug and liquor trades, sand lifting and extortion in other areas of Bangladesh? How many musclemen possess more than one licensed firearms? How many licensed firearms does a person need for his own protection? Are not the law-enforcing agencies and the local administrations aware of them?

Shall we know the answers before it is too late or must we wait till another ghastly incident occurs to reveal the identity of another Nur Hossain?

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

STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING



Brig Gen SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN
ndc, psc (Retd)

INTEREST in the Indian election results evinced by the two major parties is understandable, and there are very good reasons for the differing views that the AL and BNP hold regarding the outcome. If the AL thinks that the reaction of the BNP to BJP win is like as if it was a win for BNP, the BNP on its part may have cogent ground to see the change of guards in India as a start of a bilateral relationship based on country to country and not party to party dynamics.

The BNP's apparent vicarious pleasure at the Congress defeat is understandable, although one must consider the fact that out of the total votes cast, the BJP share was 31%, and the difference in terms of percentage of votes obtained by the two major parties is around seven. The election in Bangladesh was a sham and the BNP feels that it had a good chance to beat the AL had there been an election under a neutral government. Thus the Congress drubbing is seen as a thrashing of an AL backer; and the AL, the BNP feels, would have met the same fate had there been free and fair election on January 5.

While the hurry on the part of the AL and BNP leaders to congratulate Modi may have appeared a tad ridiculous, that too is understandable. After all, Modi is the new kid on the block whom everyone wants to befriend. And I am inclined to think that even Narendra Modi was embarrassed to receive letter of felicitation even before he had assumed office, and not only be asked, by the Bangladesh PM, to make Bangladesh the first destination of his foreign visit but also to make it his second home, as reported in some newspapers. He may have been also amused to see a parallel drawn by our prime minister to the resounding popular support to BJP and her claim of similar support to the AL by the Bangladesh voters.

Be that as it may, we should delve into what the BJP wins means for the political parties and indeed for Bangladesh without going into the many lessons that we can take from the Indian election like the role of the ECI, whose firm

Vicarious pleasure in Modi victory

What one would want to know, however, is whether the Modi win indicates the abnegation of the inclusive religious and cultural ethos, notwithstanding the cleavages, that had defined India so long, or an affirmation of the deep influence of religion and religious ideology on politics.

stand made even one like Mamata Banerjee to fall in line, perhaps under threat of possible president's rule in Paschim Bangla if she did not comply with the Commission's orders, the conduct of the political parties, conduct of the party in power during the election, and putting the country over party.

Perhaps all the hype in Bangladesh about the Indian election was overdone. After all, this is not the first time that the BJP will be holding the reins of the central government in India. And Modi as prime minister will not see India shedding its secular credentials overnight. Remember there are the 69% voters who did not vote for BJP. What one would want to know, however, is whether the Modi win indicates the abnegation of the inclusive religious and cultural ethos, notwithstanding the cleavages, that had defined India so long, or an affirmation of the deep influence of religion and religious ideology on politics.

One thing is certain that the Gandhi charisma has worn off, and even though one must not write off Congress to bounce back, dynastic politics in India may well have come to an end. But it took an extreme right wing Hindutva party to accomplish that.

The AL would have liked the Congress to return to power as much as the Congress did not want to see power change hands in Bangladesh. However, one feels that change in power in New Delhi is a change for the better for the AL. It will be easier for the AL to take a firmer stand on bilateral issues and easier too not to fight shy of refusing concessions to BJP that it had so readily granted to the Congress. One wonders whether the AL would have acceded to all the demands of the Indian government so readily if it was the BJP and not Congress that were in power.

While one does not foresee a major shift in India's Bangladesh policy, there may be change in strategy to fulfill its objective. It is difficult to agree with those who believe that it will be easier for a party with an overall majority in the parliament to resolve the outstanding issues. Not quite so because in that case the BJP will have to change its fundamental stand on the LBA, and Teesta issue with Mamata and Modi at daggers drawn seems destined to linger.

The writer is Editor, Op-Ed and Defence and Strategic Affairs, The Daily Star.

Future of Congress

BETWEEN THE LINES



KULDIP NAYAR

THIS is not the first time that the Congress has been decimated, getting only 44 seats in the 543-member Lok Sabha. The party met more or less a similar fate in the 1977 election held after the emergency. Mrs Indira Gandhi, the architect of the emergency and her extra-constitutional son, Sanjay Gandhi, too lost in the polls. Yet the Congress retained the three southern states -- Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Kerala. Even the overall tally was around 150. It was, indeed, a defeat but not a rout as it has been the case now.

People were then angry over the excesses committed during the emergency. They felt relieved after punishing the Congress for all that it did. They brought back the party after they found the Janata Party, the successor, floundering. Theirs was anger, not alienation. This time it is a vote against non-governance and the scams which tumbled one after another from the party's cupboard. The disillusionment is deeper than ever before, the belief that the party cannot give a clean and efficient government.

If Narendra Modi and his Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) manage to deliver on the agenda of development and employment -- they have secured 282 seats -- then the return of the Congress will be difficult even in the next election in 2019. Much will depend on Modi. The speech he has delivered before the elected MPs of his party is so emphatic in tone and so promising in tenor that he looks like settling in at least for a decade. The delivery on progress and jobs may make the return of the Congress still more difficult in the foreseeable future.

Modi is intelligent enough to realise that the Hindutva card is not necessary to play when the BJP-RSS combine has made inroads in the southern states as well. If the middle class had not been influenced by soft Hindutva, such a sweep would not have been possible. That is the reason why Modi is underlining development. He wants to show that the BJP is capable of pulling people out of poverty in which at least one third in the country are hopelessly stuck.

True, the outgoing Prime Minister Manmohan Singh was an open book. But there was very little written in terms of performance. The ever-increasing prices and the arrangement of power botched even the average growth rate of nearly 8%. The Congress problem was never Manmohan Singh who, in any case, is a yesterday story. How does the party disentangle itself from the dynasty and stand on its own is the issue it is facing today.

Party president Sonia Gandhi and her son, Rahul Gandhi, ran the government and the party. Now that both have failed who do the people turn to? Both have offered to resign but the working committee has refused to accept their resignations. After all, they are the ones who constitute the leadership. They have not allowed anyone else to grow or emerge. The Congress has nowhere to go except the dynasty which has run the party since independence.

It was said about Jawaharlal Nehru that he was like a banyan tree which did not let anything beneath to grow. The Congress was dependent on him. Consequently, none in the party emerged to be its natural choice when he died. Mrs. Indira Gandhi, his daughter, whom he had groomed,

was not acceptable to the party at that time. Lal Bahadur Shastri was the natural choice because he was the consensus candidate, although Morarji Desai threw his hat in the ring knowing that he had the support of most state chief ministers. But the then Congress president, K. Kamaraj, found him too rigid and preferred Indira Gandhi.

The party of today is entirely different because Kamaraj and Mrs. Indira Gandhi are rolled into one person: Sonia Gandhi. The party does not have to introspect. She has to do so. Is she willing to give up control over the party, state leaders and others? Is she ready to accept the criterion of work at the grassroots rather than being sycophants to her? The suggestion that the party's office-bearers should be elected carries weight. But something similar was tried and found to be a mere exercise because bogus voters proliferated.

Maybe, the office of party president and that of the prime minister should be combined. Mrs. Indira Gandhi did so. She, as prime minister, found the Congress president in the way. This may be very much a presidential form of governance. But that is how Narendra Modi is going to function. His election campaign showed that. The presidential form is, no doubt, democratic but it gives room for authoritarianism. He has already announced that he would also head the National Democratic Alliance.

History is replete with such examples. The Soviet Union was run like that. After several decades, it got disintegrated



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because of concentration of power at Moscow. Even now Russian President Vladimir Putin rules in the same style and this can be seen in Moscow's attitude towards Ukraine. America has escaped dictatorship even though it has the presidential system because of the checks and balances. The Congress, the US parliament, is strong.

The Congress Party in India can bounce back because it is the only alternative available. In the minds of the people there are only two parties, Congress and the BJP. When they do not find one delivering, they return the other which they had rejected previously. They are stuck with the two. The Aam Admi Party (AAP), a movement against corruption which converted itself into a political party, can be an alternative provided it expands its base. The AAP has secured less than 3% of votes in the election. Moreover, the anti-corruption stand it has taken is laudable. But there has to be an ideology or vision if it wants to attract voters.

It messed up a great opportunity it got in Delhi. Even if the party has admitted its mistakes, though belatedly, it will take time for that blemish to go. The party has to work in the field. It cannot depend on slogans alone. Power that has got concentrated at the top, more specifically its leader Arvind Kejriwal, must spread. There is no other way. This holds good for Modi as well.

The writer is an eminent Indian columnist.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

Phone apps for disaster preparedness

Recently, Becky Koch, Agriculture Communication Director at North Dakota State University (NDSU) has been recognised as a White House Champion of change in community resilience and preparedness. She with her colleagues has developed two very useful smart phone applications -- Winter Survival Kit for Android and iOS, and Disaster Recovery Log for Androids. These two phone applications have greatly helped the residents of North Dakota to get educated on disaster preparedness, post-flood recovery, etc.

While sincerely appreciating the accomplishment of Becky Koch, I would request her to work on developing easy smart phone applications to face the negative impacts of climate change on agriculture particularly in developing countries like Bangladesh having large coastal areas and where people are experiencing the negative impacts of climate change.
Professor M Zahidul Haque
Dean, Faculty of Agriculture
SAU, Dhaka

Will our politicians follow this?

Recently, having suffered the worst electoral defeat in the Lok Sabha polls, Congress chief Sonia Gandhi and her son Rahul Gandhi offered to resign from the party taking moral responsibility for the electoral debacle. However, their offer was rejected later by the party's highest decision-making forum and they expressed full faith in Sonia and Rahul's leadership.

The political scenario in Bangladesh is quite different from its neighbour as most of the politicians always try to grab everything whether they are in power or not. We can't imagine that Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia would offer to resign from the party for any debacle in the election. Could we ever expect this from our politicians?
Shawana Shakhawat
On e-mail

Comments on news report, "River up for grabbing?" published on May 19, 2014

S. M. Iftakhar Rosul(Faisal)
Wow! Half of the river occupied by the UNO and the MP. How did these two powerful bosses do it?

Hardreality
Somewhere these greedy people heard the lecture to "dream big" and they are now after it. I am wondering whether there are no ponds to grab or they just became so insatiate that those small ponds no longer quench their thirst. Whatever might be the reason, they feel that they can digest it.

Mofi
Please take the land issues outside the job description of administrative services. One of the main reasons for messy situation in Bangladesh is unnecessary job load and associated power bestowed upon some officers. This is a very good example of such undue power.

"With neighbours, more assertive?" (May 18, 2014)

Mortuza Huq
I believe despite all pre-election rhetoric, BJP will be prudent in its foreign relations, especially with the neighbours.

PlainSpeaker
Why bother so much about this communal fellow and his policy? If he plays the dirty role he preached in his election campaign, he will destroy India. Better not to give him too much importance.

"Ex-CEC Huda summoned" (May 19, 2014)

Molla A. Latif
Freedom of expression allowed him to speak unhindered. Now the organisations against whom he spoke should have also the freedom to ask for an explanation on what he said.

Hardreality
When no politicians from the sitting government get punishment no matter how serious their alleged crime is, it hardly raises question. When an illegal building like BGMEA is still standing despite court order to demolish the building, the question of these politicians' competency does not arise. When Hazaribagh tannery owners defy court order again and again to relocate their factory, it doesn't matter. But when someone speaks the truth, it's like waging a war against them. They should take the constructive criticism seriously and face it, instead of being jerk.