

Demystifying Modi mandate



PLEASURE IS ALL MINE
SHAH HUSAIN IMAM

No one should be deluded into thinking that because BJP has a decisive majority in Lok Sabha, it will be a cakewalk for the party in carrying out legislative business, particularly that centering around Indo-Bangla issues.

mony at the forefront of the Rashtrapati Bhavan with 3,000 invitees to mark the grand occasion. To optimists the invitation of Saarc heads of governments and states signals New Delhi's prioritising good relations with the immediate neighbourhood.

This is a statement, if you like, of a man out to prove that he is not the divisive or arrogant person that his detractors would like to have us believe. Early into his victory he voiced his willingness to work with others.

Indeed, he has no choice but to. BJP in the present Rajya Sabha is in a minority while the Congress is in a majority. The Congress-led UPA with its 102 representatives in the 245-member Upper Chamber had to struggle in garnering support from regional parties to pass important bills. One only remembers how former Congress external affairs minister Salman Khurshid's repeated attempts at raising the Indo-Bangla border demarcation accord in Rajya Sabha fell through the cracks of BJP-Trinamool reservations -- in fact, in both Houses of the Indian Legislature.

The BJP-led NDA with only 65 members in the Rajya Sabha will stumble in lawmaking for sure, let alone pushing through the unresolved legislative agenda concerning Bangladesh. No one should be deluded into thinking that because BJP has a decisive majority in Lok Sabha, it will be a cakewalk for the party in car-

STOOPING to conquer' -- *The Times of India* phrased Narendra Modi's reverential forehead-touching on the stairway to the Lok Sabha. This was one of the few firsts that Modi's ascent to power has been enacted.

Another first is his upcoming oath taking cere-

try out legislative business, particularly that centering around Indo-Bangla issues.

The only hope for a BJP breakthrough rests on one-third of the Rajya Sabha seats falling vacant towards the end of 2016. Almost two years on, elections will be due in several states and should the BJP and its allies do well in the polls could they be securing an advantage in Rajya Sabha.

The extraordinary invocation of Article 118 of the constitution to hold a joint session of parliament to end a legislative deadlock is an exceptional option that had better be set aside.

It needs to be noted that for all her handsome victories in the Lok Sabha contests in West Bengal, Mamata is not smiling, wears a concerned look. This is because the loss of left front votes was not the gain for Trinamool-Congress but rather for the BJP. That is where Mamata sees a BJP rise as an alternative force in West Bengal. BJP's win butters the bread on the wrong side for Mamata which may cast a shadow over the centre's relations with the state, perhaps with implications for some of Bangladesh's outstanding issues with India.

Incidentally, one extreme reaction to BJP triumph in Pakistan is reflected through Friday Times' advisory editor Raja Rumi's comment: "Modi's victory reminds most Pakistanis that two-nation theory in a way may have been proven right." Such is the sense of *déjà vu* in Pakistan. Add to this, BJP's manifesto agenda to annul Article 370 in Kashmir which would take away the special status of the state. The obvious reaction to this will be more commotion in Kashmir going perhaps to Pakistan's advantage.

Creation of Bangladesh, let's not forget, marked an unceremonious burial of the two-nation theory based on religion as the sole determinant of nationhood. That is the difference in the perspectives from which Pakistan and Bangladesh look at India. Secularism has been the point of commonality between India and Bangladesh. We cannot allow it to be diluted by any shortsighted policy ori-

tation in either country.

We cannot be oblivious though to the downside of the BJP's popular mandate.

An apprehension cannot be brushed aside that Modi may walk the path of Hindutva he has been accustomed to treading so long. He may like Hindutva to flourish, a possibility underscored by his decision that birth anniversary centennial of Deen Dayal Upadhyaya, a vanguard of the philosophy, will be celebrated throughout India in 2015. This would be happening for the first time in secular democratic India. Also berths of ministership may go to RSS and Shiv Sena, the two hardcore fundamentalist outfits of the Bharatiya Janata Party.

Will the moderation of Atal Bihari Vajpayee have any foothold in the corridors of power?

Another flipside to the popular mandate is writ large in the findings of the Association for Democratic Reforms in India. The observer group predicted the 16th Lok Sabha to be the richest, with 34% of the new MPs facing criminal charges. The figures in 2009 and 2004 stood at 30% and 24%, respectively.

Admittedly though, this is a sub-continental feature encompassing Pakistan and Bangladesh in varying degrees. This puts a question mark on the quality of leadership electorates tend to choose in an atmosphere simmering with money and muscle powers.

One cannot but help marvel at the tenacity of Priyanka Gandhi in securing the victories for her mother Sonia Gandhi in Rai Bareli and sibling Rahul Gandhi in Amethi against the raging BJP wave in UP. It was a close call for Rahul Gandhi as against BJP candidate Indrani but Priyanka turned it around for him. This was both a tribute to a competently conducted campaign as well as a measure of love for Nehru-Gandhi family. The dazzle of dynastic lineage may have lost its lustre but the lamp keeps shedding a mel-lowing light.

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INTERNATIONAL DAY ON OBSTETRIC FISTULA

"Blast out" the theme of the day: "Tracking Fistula, Transforming Lives"

ARGENTINA MATAVEL PICCIN

THE theme of this year's International Day to End Obstetric Fistula, "Tracking Fistula - Transforming Lives," reflects an important step forward in eradicating this preventable condition, which affects an estimated two million women and girls in developing countries.

Every day, globally almost 800 women die from pregnancy complications. For every woman who dies, 20 or more are injured or disabled. One of the most serious injuries of childbearing is obstetric fistula, a hole in the birth canal, caused by prolonged, obstructed labour due to lack of timely and adequate medical care.

In Bangladesh obstetric fistula and other maternal morbidities affects 400,000 women. One out of 1,000 pregnancy gets affected by obstetric fistula (BIRPERTH, 1996). In Bangladesh we do not have any recent data regarding its prevalence. However, a study jointly conducted by GOB, UNFPA and Engender Health in 2003 (hospital based study) showed that the prevalence of obstetric fistula is 1.69 per 1,000 ever married women. Every year, an estimated 2,000 new women develop obstetric fistula and currently 71,000 women are living with it (DCHS 2009).

The trauma, pain and agony of a patient suffering from obstetric fistula can hardly be expressed in words. This debilitating morbidity is often a result of circumstances, beyond the control of the poor victim, that are often preventable. The consequences of this condition are physical, social, economical and profoundly psychological, with many sufferers being labeled as social outcasts.

As a result of prolonged, obstructed labour, in most cases, the baby is stillborn or dies within the first week of birth, and the woman suffers a devastating injury -- a fistula -- that leaves her urine incontinent. The consequences of this injury more often leave her ashamed, ostracised and marginalised. Many women and girls who suffer from fistula are excluded from daily community life and abandoned by their husbands and families, isolating them socially and emotionally, making it also difficult to maintain a source of income or support, thus deepening their poverty and magnifying their suffering.

Simple and effective interventions exist for the prevention of obstetric fistula and techniques for surgical repair are becoming more widely available yet number of cases is still rising in the country.

In most instances, stigma forces women living with the condition to remain hidden and isolates them from families and communities. By systematically registering and tracking each woman and girl who has or had an obstetric fistula, we can make enormous strides in improving their well-being and increasing the chances of their babies' survival in subsequent pregnancies.

In Bangladesh efforts to manage fistula were accelerated by the UNFPA led Campaign to End Fistula launched in 2003. Currently coordination of fistula activities is led by the National Task Force on obstetric fistula with the MoH&FW, UNFPA, Engender Health, Obstetrical and Gynaecological Society of Bangladesh, and members of civil society. Bangladesh government has approved fistula strategy, take initiative to make available fistula services at district hospital. UNFPA and government of Bangladesh jointly initiated a fistula center at Dhaka Medical College in 2003 which became fully established with 10 pre-operative and 20 post-operative beds. UNFPA and Bangladesh government are going to inaugurate 'The center of excellence' on the occasion of national Fistula Day which will have more bed to accommodate fistula cases. It will also have a fully equipped conference and training room. UNFPA is also supporting 9 medical college hospitals to treat the fistula patients.

Till now 2,904 complicated fistula cases have been operated. Bangladesh government also has taken initiative on eliminating classic obstructed labour by facilitating community acceptance of 100% labour and birth in proper facilities, and increasing the number of midwives in the health care system and expanding the availability and access to emergency obstetric care. Bangladesh government also took initiative with the support from UNFPA to rehabilitate the fistula survivors who are isolates or separated from families and communities. About 421 fistula survivors are rehabilitated among which 102 became fistula advocate to create awareness in the community.

On May 23, 2014, UNFPA will be marking the annual International Day to End Obstetric Fistula designated by the United Nations General Assembly and will observe the day with utmost zeal and enthusiasm for this sacred intention of all stakes throughout the country to end fistula focusing three integrated components to get rid from this curse -- Prevention, Treatment and Rehabilitation. This severely neglected health and human rights tragedy urgently needed to be addressed.

The writer is UNFPA Representative Bangladesh.

What next after Feni and Narayanganj?

SHAKHAWAT LITON

HOURS after the brutal killing of Fulgazi Upazila Chairman Ekramul Haque Ekram, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina had claimed that evil forces against the spirit of independence and the Liberation War, who wanted to weaken the Awami League organisationally through killing and terrorism, might have killed Ekram.

She did not directly implicate BNP-Jamaat men in the gruesome killing. But she pointed a finger at them for the killing because, in the eyes of the government and AL, BNP-Jamaat men are the anti-liberation forces.

Her claim was proved wrong as supporters of Ekram, an AL leader, and locals in Fulgazi of Feni have already pointed a finger at AL local MP Nizam Hazari for masterminding Tuesday's killing.

Media reports have also exposed the rivalry between slain Ekram and Hazari. It is almost clear that the killing is a result of internal conflict in the local AL. If it is so, local AL leaders who were allegedly involved in the killing now turn out to be the evil forces against the spirit of the Liberation War!

The premier might have been misguided or ill-informed about the identities of the killers before issuing the statement blaming anti-liberation forces for the killing. The question is: will she take action against her close aides who have put her in an embarrassing situation by providing her wrong information?

Another crucial question is: was it wise of the prime minister to put the



blame for the killing on political opponents immediately after the incident? This will in no way help to nab the real criminals. The way things are moving, family members of the victim may be denied justice.

Again, politics has ruled in filing the case in connection with the killing. Ekram's younger brother Rezaul Haq filed the case, in which local BNP leader Mahtab Uddin Chowdhury, who was Ekram's opponent in the recent upazila parishad election, was named as the prime suspect. Rezaul said that Mahtab was named as per the decision of the district AL. "It was not our decision," he said.

The prime minister has claimed that Ekram was a popular leader. But his track records say that he had

faced around two dozens criminal cases including some murder charges, and established his supremacy in Feni through unlawful activities. However, will the police be able to carry out a fair investigation into the killing after her statement?

The PM had done this on several occasions in recent times. This is a manifestation of the confrontational culture in our politics in which ruling party men cannot do anything wrong and the opposition men are responsible for all unlawful and criminal activities. For example, after abduction and killing of the panel mayor of Narayanganj City Corporation and six other people, the prime minister on May 1 blamed the BNP for those.

But her claim was proved wrong. The panel mayor was a local AL

leader and the prime suspect of the killings is also an AL leader and city councilor, Nur Hossain, who was expelled from the party after the incident. Locals and media reports have pointed the finger at local AL lawmaker Shamim Osman for the heinous incident, which reveals the rivalries centering the running of unlawful businesses.

The AL men resorted to widespread rigging and violence in the upazila parishad elections held in February and March this year to ensure their win. But Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, on March 27, claimed that her party men were not engaged in rigging the upazila parishad elections. She, rather, claimed that BNP men were behind the rigging.

She had also blasted the media for running news reports exposing the rigging in the polls. Her view was that "a section of media people have been trying to bring unconstitutional forces to power by making the elections controversial."

The fate of the Ekram killing case is uncertain. His killing took place in broad daylight, within three weeks of the gruesome seven murders in Narayanganj, bringing to the forefront the issue of criminalisation of politics. The mastermind and prime suspect of the Narayanganj killing are yet to be nabbed. This raises concern about the situation in the coming days. To remove people's concern the prime minister must take action, whoever the evil forces are. Otherwise, the culture of criminalisation of politics will take heavy toll in other parts of the country.

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CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

ACROSS
1 Aspect
6 "Forget it!"
11 Garlic-seasoned mayo
12 "Pal Joey" writer
13 Took the wheel
14 Electrician, at times
15 Toppers
17 Yemen neighbor
18 Curving paths
20 Brandy base
22 Utah sch.
23 Sincere
26 Surgery tool
28 Film prize
29 Diary jottings
31 Swelled head
32 Stately trees
33 Ignored the limit
34 Farm fathers
36 Secret plan
38 Require defrosting
40 Verdi pieces
43 Caesar's land
44 Mall business
45 Useful skill
46 Annual visitor

DOWN
1 Craze
2 Vacuum lack
3 They're not easily rattled
4 "The King"
5 Even
6 At present
7 Buckeyes
8 Friendly welcome
9 Vicinity
10 Tale
16 Sauna site
18 Qualified
19 Pitcher Nolan
21 Amorous archer
23 Composer Satie
24 Cook's mint
25 Stepped on
27 Sign of error
30 Medium ability, for short
33 In a way, informally
34 Singer Coolidge
35 Super serves
37 Girl
39 Contrived
41 Museum focus
42 School setting



CRYPTOQUOTE
NRYTZ' IJ UYNDU WY XY KYAJWCNDU
EYDU, XY NW FNU, FJQBZKJ WCJ
HZDNKCAJDW NK WCJ KBAJ JNWCI EBT.
-- SBTDJ ABDKRJNGX

Previous day's answer

4-11

Previous day's CRYPTOQUOTE:
WE WOULD RATHER SPEAK OF OURSELVES THAN NOT TO TALK OF OURSELVES AT ALL.
-- FRANCOIS DE LA ROCHEFOUCAULD

5-9

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AXYDLBAXR is LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

BEETLE BAILEY



by Mort Walker

HENRY



by Don Trachte