

Formalin-contaminated edibles

Hooligans at retail markets resist checking!

A formalin-checking operation by a joint team of BSTI and mobile courts launched on Saturday at Mohammadpur Town Hall Market met with stiff resistance from the traders. With the apex trade body, FBCCI, and some banks having supplied toxin detection kits to the city's 11 kitchen markets, the checking at Mohammadpur market was only to be expected. The news had been doing rounds that none of the markets was using the appliance. They were merrily going around with the business as usual.

On top of it, like hoodlums, they were claiming a right to free use of poisonous chemicals in perishable edibles including fruits. That they are playing a dangerous game with the lives of citizens including stunting the growth of future generations does not even occur to them. Their profiteering motives completely blindfolded them to any need for social commitment even as traders.

For all the outcries from civic rights bodies and the media and even High Court directives to stop use of chemical toxins as preservatives and ripening agents, the menace has been growing unabatedly.

Checking at the retail level will not clearly be enough by itself. The whole supply chain from the producers and importers through wholesalers to retailers will have to be flushed clean of the impunity culture indulged in by the traders. Simultaneously, a consumer resistance campaign will have to be launched and sustained for a turn-around in the situation.

Turn to green energy

Stop scratching the surface only

AN interactive session between Nordic and Bangladesh companies organized by the Danish and Swedish embassies in the capital on Tuesday last has proved to be quite an eye-opener. It provided a glimpse of the enormous green energy potential we have.

All we need to do is to embark on a planned and vigorous exploitation of the obvious natural endowments.

Whilst the long coastline has the prospect for developing off-shore wind energy, the hilly terrain can provide sites to generate on-shore wind energy. Secondly, with around 300 sunny days a year, Bangladesh is estimated to receive 10,000 MW of solar radiation daily. This, according to Anette Galskjot, Commercial Counsellor of Danida Business Partnerships in Bangladesh, exceeds the daily electricity demand in the country. Already, some headway has been made in solar direction -- 2.8 million solar home systems have been installed with a power generation capacity of 115MW. Obviously, we have to go a long way there.

After a look at the wind and solar energy prospects, we turn to a huge source of biogas lying untapped. We have a much polluted capital with proliferating waste problems, a large part of which is organic and, therefore, suitable for biogas production.

Since global entrepreneurs have evinced 'tremendous' interest in the green development agenda of Bangladesh, we should prioritise this undeveloped sector attracting investment on a collaboration basis to make a stride in meeting our energy needs the safe way.

Strategic gesture

EDITORIAL: *The Statesman* (India)

AT the outset there is need for caution against hype over Saarc leaders being invited to the swearing-in of Mr. Narendra Modi, thus far it is no more than a call to celebrate. Yet, recalling that "you have to meet before you can shake hands," it points to a considered re-think in the prosecution of foreign policy: larger objectives remain consistent, the diplomatic effort needs re-energising. As yet the prime minister-designate has not "named" his foreign policy advisers, he certainly has made a "smart" move -- how it is sustained is what will count, and for that assessment prudence dictates patience. While far too frequently have gestures flopped for want of follow-up, there can be no minimising the relevance of symbolism, particularly in the context of regional cultural mores. True the immediate responses were cautious: that the invitation was not rejected outright by anyone is more than mere diplomatic nicety. The message sent out is that electoral rhetoric and hawkishness need not necessarily be converted into national policy, and it seems to have registered. Simultaneously, the fact hawkishness helped secure the substantial mandate that facilitates a policy re-work is not to be discounted, by anyone.

More evidence of Modi's predecessor lacking the internal authority to make bold moves externally: why, the poor chap couldn't visit his ancestral village wearing the India "crown." Another indication of the clout Modi wields that he has in a single sweep ignored the Shiv Sena line on Pakistan as well as signalled to Mamata Banerjee and the Tamil parties who will be calling the shots on tricky aspects of ties with Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. It is not insignificant that the invitations were issued by the External Affairs Ministry, not the BJP. Even before being sworn in Modi has announced he has "arrived," acknowledged by the Congress having only an "alert" by way of reaction. There is joy in Kashmir circles. Not quite so in Tamil Nadu.

The priority accorded to Saarc is tactically sound as well as strategically important. Physical proximity makes it difficult for the invitation to be rejected on the basis of travel-complications, and a "regret" would leave itself open to interpretation. Not rushing invites to Washington, Moscow, Beijing, London or Paris suggests Modi is aware that India's becoming a global player is still work-in-progress. A resuscitation of Saarc has both diplomatic and economic advantages -- it tempers the allegation of India playing "Big Brother," and even mere containment of tensions in the neighbourhood would suffice for a mini-success. For someone whose previous job involved limited diplomatic activity, Modi's opening foray -- in any sphere of government -- merits appreciation. Applause must await effective pursuance of the promises.

Change in the neighbourhood

STRAIGHT LINE



MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

THE thumping electoral victory of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), led by the intensely inspirational Narendra Modi, in the just concluded Indian national election raises hopes and fears. Hope is generated by the pronounced discourses of Gujarat Model economic development with which the prime minister designate is fondly credited. One would like to believe that contemporary India stands on the threshold of an economic take-off in which a great power status beckons. In such a scenario there is a natural expectation in neighbours to share the fruits of potential economic development.

In India itself, however, there are quarters that dispute the claims of accelerated salutary economic management of Gujarat variety and point to the better performances of other states like Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu on the socio-economic indices of development. What is not clear as of now is whether the Gujarat Model will work out on an all-India format.

BJP's electoral victory with Narendra Modi as the upbeat steward gives rise to premonitions also because he is considered as being very close to the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), which is the primary source of ideological inspirations. One may recollect that Mr. Modi's Gujarat has often been described by the Sangh Parivar (comprising the BJP, the RSS, Viswa Hindu Parishad, and Bajrang Dal) as the 'Hindutva' (primacy of Hindu values) laboratory, i.e. where the Hindutva political philosophy based on hatred of minorities is tested.

To students of history it is quite intriguing as to how Gujarat that ought to have been a peaceful state, not only because of its economic prosperity but also owing to its 'Gandhian Heritage,' became the epicenter of communal violence in India and witnessed several ferocious communal riots through the '60s to the carnage of 2002.

It would be pertinent to remember that the Jan Sangh, a right-wing Hindu party formed in 1950, is a political off-spring of the RSS and was renamed as Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in 1980. The Jan Sangh had played a key part in inciting communal violence in Gujarat in 1969. In fact, the 1969 riots were mainly organised by the RSS and further consolidated Jan Sangh's position by the polarising effects. Many in India acknowledge that communal violence is a tactic in the consolidation of political support by Hindu right wing parties. The Jan Sangh, later known as BJP, adopted a political strategy of provoking communal violence to consolidate its position in Gujarat.

We in Bangladesh have good reasons to feel concerned at the potential rise of communally motivated political forces in neighbouring India. The dangerous fangs of

obscurantist elements have already made their presence felt in our country in the not-too-distant past. The threats posed to our liberal democratic values and also to a pluralist dispensation by such groups are all too manifest to be overlooked. In fact, the 13-point demand of a so-called fundamentalist organisation is a clear threat to women emancipation and democratic way of life. The rise of communally driven forces in democratic India, it is feared, will strengthen the hold of retrograde elements in Bangladesh.

There are numerically weak but organisationally vocal elements in India who correctly realise that the secular front faces an uphill task in recapturing the political as well as the psychological ground already lost to Hindutva. There is no denying that the aggressive social mobilisation by the Hindu Right has paid handsome dividends in terms of resounding electoral victory. Such mobilisation, however, does not take note of the danger of realigning state and cultural power in the interest of the majority.

The BJP in its earlier stint of exercising political power ventured to extend the influence of Hindutva. Their strategy to reform the education system was exploited as a

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pretext to revise the school curricula in line with the more extreme elements of Hindutva thought based on the schooling model of RSS. This was done by implementing a new national curriculum framework and editing approved textbooks in ways that directly promoted Hinduism as the 'essence of Indian Culture' and other religions as 'alien or invading faiths.' This was flagrant violation of Article 26 of the Indian constitution that prohibited the teaching of religious instructions in educational institutions managed out of state funds.

Only the future course of events would indicate if the sense of optimism following the 2014 national election of India has been unrealistic or the fears overblown. However, as in 1947 and so today, the main issue before Indian politics is to provide appropriate mechanisms to make political integration possible in an extremely diverse society. This is, and remains, a very earnest and solemn endeavour.

The writer is a columnist of *The Daily Star*.

Sheikh Hasina's visit to Japan: Reinforcing relations

ASHRAF UDDOULA

UPON an invitation of Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will make an official visit to Japan from May 25 to 28. She had earlier visited the country in 2010, when the opposition Democratic Party of Japan was in power.

According to foreign office sources, the PM will hold summit talks with her Japanese counterpart. His Majesty the Emperor of Japan will receive her in audience (His Majesty has a fond memory of visiting Bangladesh in 1973 as then Crown Prince of Japan and meeting Bangabandhu), while the Deputy Prime Minister & Finance Minister of Japan Mr. Taro Aso -- who is also the president of Japan-Bangladesh Parliamentary Association -- and the President of JICA, Madam Sadako Ogata, will call on her separately. She will address a business seminar in Tokyo jointly organised by the JETRO and Japan Bangladesh Commission for Commercial and Economic Cooperation (JBCCEC) and deliver a speech at the Waseda University.

The visit of Sheikh Hasina to Japan is her first foreign trip abroad since returning to power after the January 5 election. The visit, which comes within months of a visit by the Japanese foreign minister to Bangladesh, is significant in many ways for relations between our two countries and especially for the present Bangladesh government. It will be an opportunity to renew and reinvigorate Bangladesh-Japan bilateral cooperation. It will also provide a major international forum for Hasina to explain her government's views and the context of the recent election in Bangladesh, which continues to be perceived as lacking in popular mandate not only within the country but in the capitals of the important western capitals too. No doubt she will take full advantage of the opportunity and seek to validate her return to power and its justification.

It will also be interesting to know how the major western powers react to the overtures of the Japanese government to the Hasina government. The major western countries still seem to be undecided on whether to warm up to the present government or to remain cool, allowing the traditional interaction to continue unhindered between Bangladesh and their respective countries. Notwithstanding the fact that it's the prerogative of a sovereign state to structure its foreign relations as it deems fit, nonetheless, many like-minded countries take an identical stance on certain international issues, such as in the case of the recent election in Bangladesh. In that context Japan has, to the delight of the present Bangladesh government, proved to be a source of relief and inspiration for the latter. In fact, the Japanese ambassador to Bangladesh in a recent press meet reportedly stated that they were happy to conduct business with the present Bangladesh government as the elections were held within the "legal and Constitutional" framework.

As to the Summit talks, it's understood that both the countries will re-emphasise their desire to further strengthen the existing economic and trade ties and explore new avenues for cooperation, taking into account that Japan is the single largest development partner of Bangladesh. The Bangladesh prime minister is likely to seek enhanced Japanese support for the major projects the government has undertaken to be implemented on fast-track basis, greater FDI from Japan to Bangladesh, and augmentation of Bangladesh export to Japan.

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prosper economically, develop an inclusive political culture and practice, ensure peace and stability and, by doing so, create a conducive and enabling condition for attracting greater Japanese business and investment.

Though Japan has demonstrated its desire to promote bilateral ties with Bangladesh by its recent actions, it will likely be interested to know the Bangladesh government's thoughts on resolving the political stalemate currently obtaining in the country. Japan would surely be interested to learn the views of Bangladesh, as one of the closest neighbours of India, on the evolving political developments in India following the emergence of a non-Congress government and its impact both regionally and internationally.

Coincidentally, it is learnt that the prime minister elect of India, Mr. Narendra Modi, has decided to visit Japan on his first overseas trip.

Japan would also be happy to receive the support of Bangladesh in its aspiration to a permanent seat in the UNSC and also to the issue of abduction of Japanese nationals by the North Koreans. Although the latter is a minor issue in the international context, it is an important emotional matter in Japan.

Japan, being the largest development partner of Bangladesh, has an abiding interest in seeing the country prosper economically, develop an inclusive political culture and practice, ensure peace and stability and, by doing so, create a conducive and enabling condition for attracting greater Japanese business and investment.

Recently, the Bangladesh government recognised a number of our foreign friends, including a few Japanese, for their contribution during our War of Liberation. However, quite a number of countries have bestowed special honours to Japanese nationals for their role in promoting bilateral relations between Japan and them.

In this context, the government may consider honouring H.E. Mr. Taro Aso, former prime minister and currently deputy prime minister and minister of finance of Japan. An old and time-tested friend of Bangladesh, Mr. Aso, after taking over as president of Japan-Bangladesh Parliamentary Association in 2007, took special interest in promoting closer ties between the two countries.

It would be worthwhile to recall that Mr. Aso, then prime minister of Japan, made a personal telephone call to congratulate Sheikh Hasina within days of her return to power following the January 2009 general elections. He not only informed her of his decision to withdraw the suspension of the Japanese ODA to Bangladesh, which was effected during the CTG in 2008, but also pledged to considerably enhance the amount of ODA from that of the previous years.

In my opinion, Mr. Aso deserves special recognition by Bangladesh.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Charging for "maintenance" of what?

Though our High Court has ordered not to charge any annual or re-admission fees in English medium schools, unfortunately, some of the reputed English medium schools are not following the instruction. Instead of using the words 'annual fees', they are using the word 'maintenance' to take the amount, and after receiving the amount, the schools are not issuing any receipt.

As a concerned parent, my question is, how can the so-called "maintenance" fees be BDT 30,000 to BDT 50,000? I hope the government will take necessary steps to exempt us from these unwanted and illegal charges.

Nazmul Hasan
On e-mail

Eliminating child labour

The ministry of labour and employment adopted a national child labour elimination policy 2010 which provides a framework to eradicate all forms of child labour by 2015. But the government's pledge to eliminate child labour by 2015 doesn't seem possible at all. According to the labour law of Bangladesh 2006, the minimum legal age for employment is 14. An ILO survey has found that there are 3.2 million child labourers in Bangladesh, the majority of whom are between the age 12 and 17. The government should realise the gravity of the situation and ban child labour completely, making it an offence under law. But only banning child labour will not change the situation, unless and until we can ensure education and shelter for these underprivileged children.

Md. Ali Mas-ud
Dept of Business Administration
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Address urgent needs of DU students

Dhaka University has 20 residential halls for its 35,589 students. This is quite inadequate for accommodating this large number of students. That is why most of the students are non-residential who come to the campus by university buses, which are also too few to meet the students' need. Students have requested the university authorities to increase the number of bus trips, but the authorities are not responding to this crying need of the students. Through this letter, we once again draw the kind attention of the university authorities to solve this problem without further delay.

Misbah Uddin Sumon
Department of Tourism and Hospitality Management
University of Dhaka

Comments on news report, "Dr Kamal contradicts Hasina's comments," published on May 20, 2014

Touchstone

Now it's his words against hers! Only the wearer knows where the shoes pinch.

PlainSpeaker

Someone is lying, who is it? Is it Dr. Kamal or Hasina or both?

"Target stronger ties with India" (May 19, 2014)

SM

If the ties are stronger than what we have now, then it will snap. There is a limit to tightening of the screws which AL and Hasina don't understand. India is not your saviour.

"AL 7, BNP 5" (May 20, 2014)

Mortuza Huq

Had this been a fair election, result would be AL 0, BNP 12.

Aronnyo

How can you expect a fair election from the government which has come to power without people's mandate, through the January 5's mockery of an election?

Anonymous

BNP should thank AL as Awami Leaguers has given them the chance to win in 5 seats. It is not unexpected that AL would try to grab all the seats with the help of their musclemen and cadres.

"Osman family critics rally behind AL rebel Akram," (May 20, 2014)

Monju Huq

Mr. Akram is no doubt the best candidate among those whose candidature has so far been indicated in the media.

Anonymous

It is nothing new for the Osman family...

Sif

What else do you expect from this family?