

## Modi begins on a high note

### Welcome tenure for the region

WE felicitate the assumption of office by Narendra Modi as prime minister with his full cabinet. He made a very significant statement on the very first day by having invited Saarc leaders as well as engaging them in bilateral talks individually. It is imperative that peace begins in the neighbourhood. We have always advocated for a lessening of tensions between India and Pakistan which is key to durable peace and collective development through cooperation in the Saarc region.

Modi's engagement of regional heads of state at the oath-taking ceremony has been a reflection of statesmanship, particularly when he showed a decisiveness to make it happen breaking through prejudices in some quarters.

The fact that both premiers of India and Pakistan have decided to restart the stalled peace process is an auspicious development. Nawaz Sharif is on record having stated that where the dialogue was left off during Atal Behari Bajpayee's tenure will be picked up and advanced with the new Indian PM.

As far as Bangladesh is concerned, Narendra Modi has assured our Speaker Shirin Sharmeen Chowdhury of dealing with the outstanding issues, particularly Teesta water sharing and border demarcation in the near future. He has also accepted the offer of invitation to Bangladesh at the earliest possible opportunity. Taking these two cues together, we believe the warm bilateral relations that already exist between the two countries are set to be strengthened even further on pending issues.

## Why plethora of conditions?

### Not a healthy trend

STRANGE though it may sound, the Munshiganj police and district administration allowed BNP chairperson Khaleda Zia to hold a public rally under 20 conditions. Those conditions, among others, required that the meeting should end before sunset, the speeches should not contain any provocative remarks and the party activists won't be able to carry any sticks. Surely, such a large number of conditions, all of which have not been clearly spelt out, lent themselves to all sorts of interpretations.

Why is the government setting such an unprecedented instance of cramping a public meeting being organized by a major political party of the country? It may be recalled that the government had earlier refused BNP permission to organise meetings at Jatrabari, Narayanganj, Institution of Engineers, Bangladesh and on the premises of High Court on various pretexts. Now once permission had finally been given and that, too, outside the capital, it was encumbered with so many conditions. This is unfortunate. It is reflective of a mindset that is clearly in conflict with democratic norms.

This practice of denying the opposition its constitutionally granted rights to assembly and voicing protests peacefully does not bode well either for the government or democracy or for the country.

In fact, no democratic government should shut off all avenues of engaging the opposition towards practicing inclusive politics.

The government must rise above such an attitude thus enabling the opposition to engage in an inclusive and constructive politics.

## Honouring the peacekeepers

SHAHRIAR FEROZE

ON the International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers we pay tribute to the over 3200 military, police and civilian personnel who have died in service for the cause of establishing peace worldwide. A few things brand Bangladesh as a courageous and proud nation globally, and in this regard the role of our peacekeepers has been more than just great.

Going back to the turbulent days of the late eighties when we participated in two operations -- UNIMOG in Iran-Iraq and UNTAG in Namibia -- and since then till November 2013 Bangladesh contributed with the second highest number of total Peacekeepers to United Nations Peacekeeping Operations; with (1,830 police, 73 UNMEM and 6,605 troops) attached to various UN peacekeeping forces worldwide.

For displaying outstanding discipline and efficiency the BBC, a decade back, marked our peacekeepers as 'the cream of the UN peacekeepers.' Success surely came but at the cost of lives. Bangladesh registered its first peacekeeping casualty with the death of Lieutenant Colonel Md. Faizul Karim, who died in Windhoek, Namibia in April 1989. As of now, eighty-eight Bangladeshi peacekeepers have lost their lives, out of which eighty four belong to Bangladesh Army, one to Bangladesh Navy and three to Bangladesh Air Force. We compliment these brave sons of soil who risked their lives for the sake of establishing peace in foreign lands.

International days across the globe are observed routinely and temporarily forgotten till the day returns again. Besides commemorating the peacekeepers worldwide we focus on the message marking the peacekeeping a part of which says, "Un peacekeeping is looking at how innovation and technology can help the peacekeepers not only deliver in challenging environments but also to offer real value for money...and UN peacekeeping is also deploying new technologies such as unarmed, unmanned aerial vehicles, refining our practices to better protect civilians and boosting the representation of women among its ranks."

As we progress, we too feel the need for deploying our peacekeepers backed with latest and innovative technologies of peacekeeping. We too seek for opportunities where our women officers from the different forces can display their skills in the international arena. Finally, on the International Day of United Nations peacekeepers, we remember the 120,000 or more peacekeepers, serving in 17 missions in some of the most volatile and dangerous environments across the world. We salute them all.

The writer is Current Affairs Analyst, The Daily Star.

# Is the government losing control?

### STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING


 Brig Gen  
SHAHEDEL ANAM KHAN  
ndc, psc (Retd)

HAVING ensconced her party, for five years, at least that is what the AL would have us believe, in the seat of power through an electoral coup de grace on her opponent, it would be no exaggeration to suggest that things are not running as smoothly as the prime minister would like. And the cause of her discomfiture in part is more because of the interne-

netic feud within the AL rather than the activity of her rival political party. And in part it has also to do with the state of law and order in the country.

There is no comfort in hiding behind statistics; comparing the number of incidents of abduction and killing occurring now to the past is an odious exercise that will draw only opprobrium from the public, particularly those who are the direct sufferers of such acts.

The state of law and order, despite what the police chief would want us to believe, has caused more than an embarrassment for the AL, although one feels it has long stopped feeling embarrassed for any act of indiscretion on its part or for that matter of any other institution or agency of the government.

Not only has the state of law and order in the country taken a nosedive, a peculiar phenomenon has emerged recently where the intra party feud of the AL has degenerated into acts of gruesome killing of own party men. And added to this is the alleged complicity of the police in the killings, apparently taking sides with one of the factions. When such is the case, there can be no other conclusion than what the title of the piece suggests.

The Narayanganj murders have highlighted the extent to which the party leadership seems to be beholden to a party MP so much so that it is unable or unwilling to take action against him who by now has all the fingers pointing at him as being the alleged mastermind in the gruesome killing. Giving party ticket to such a person for the January 5 election betrays the bankruptcy of the party. Surely the people of Narayanganj deserve better, but they had no hand in his election since he won uncontested like 153 other of his party men. Would he have won had there been a free and fair election? Given the fact that the AL has not put up a candidate for the forthcoming Narayanganj-5 by election to be held on June 26 suggests that it is not willing to bet even on its own candidate at this particular point in time.

To explain the reason for the spate of intra-party bad blood and the sheer brutal manner of the killing is the job of the social scientist and the criminologist. But as a dispassionate observer one cannot but be alarmed at the unholy nexus of the administration and the law enforcing agencies with the criminals who also happen to be members of the ruling party.

One could argue that the feuds within the AL that have

manifested in the violent killings are perhaps because of the current opposition-less politics, where contest for political domination as well as for control of economic activity at the local level occurs between two factions of the AL. And where such a situation occurs the law enforcing agencies deliberately keep aloof lest they displease one of the factions, except when they become a part of the plot as in Narayanganj.

Narayanganj is a classic case where the party and the government, the dividing line has been diluted long ago, were caught between action and inaction, between fealty to party men allegedly involved in crimes and honouring the law of the land. And if one were to conclude that the

*Government's loss of grip has caused it enough unease to harden its position vis-à-vis the BNP. That perhaps explains why the BNP has not been allowed to hold meetings and rallies in the capital. What conclusion can one draw when the law enforcing agency is used to issue ridiculous diktats to restrain the political activities of the opponents.*

former perhaps predominated the decisions of the high-ups in the administration following the seven murders that allowed the main culprits to escape, one would not be very wrong. The sacking of the additional advocate general, reportedly for not opposing the High Court's order to arrest the three Rab-11 officers strongly enough, suggests that the administration was not in favour of taking the three in custody. One wonders why.

Government's loss of grip has caused it enough unease to harden its position vis-à-vis the BNP. That perhaps explains why the BNP has not been allowed to hold meetings and rallies in the capital. The reportedly 20 conditions of the SP of Munshiganj to the BNP for holding elections, one of which is that no provocative statement can be made, reflect the situation. What conclusion can one draw when the law enforcing agency is used to issue ridiculous diktats to restrain the political activities of the opponents.

The writer is Editor OP-ed and Defence &amp; Strategic Affairs, The Daily Star.

### CORRECTIONS

In yesterday's Ground Realities, please read, in para 2, "saw in Indira all of India"; additionally, the year 1979 will read as 1977. In para 5, read "in another day and age" rather than "in another day age".

# Importance of being Nawaz Sharif

### BETWEEN THE LINES



KULDIP NAYYAR

I followed the visit of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to India from his arrival to the departure. I did not find any false note either in his observations or meetings. He did not mention Kashmir. Nor did he meet the separatists who are always keen to have talks with the Pakistani leaders, not the Indians. From all angles, it was a positive and constructive visit.

Still I do not see any breakthrough in the apish stand that the two sides have taken from the time the two countries parted company in August 1947. In fact, I have sensed more optimism on earlier meetings between the prime ministers on both sides. Nothing concrete has come out because the establishments in India and Pakistan are basically hostile to each other. Passage of time has not lessened their influence.

Yet the relationship of love and hate is always smouldering. People in both the countries yearn for friendship or at least normalcy. The meeting between Prime Ministers Narendra Modi and Nawaz Sharif has once again evoked hope for better days. If the past is any experience, the amiable relationship will not fructify. The reason why I say so is the enmity which has been fostered in the minds of people.

Kashmir, which Pakistan considers a core issue, is a symptom, not the disease. The disease is the bias and mistrust which is a narrative of partition. Even after 67 years of division, both India and Pakistan have not been able to formulate even a semblance of future policy. Both react to particular happenings, sometimes harshly and hurriedly and sometimes mildly and tardily. They have realised that they have to sit across the table to have talks after fighting three wars. Yet, they have done little to create an amiable atmosphere for an uninterrupted and uninterrupted dialogue, the words used by Islamabad's spokesperson a few days ago.

Yet it was to be seen and believed with how much enthusiasm that the visit of Nawaz Sharif was awaited in India. The nation should have been engaged in Narendra Modi's resounding victory or the decimation of the Congress party which has ruled India for several decades. But the eyes were fixed on Islamabad.

The four or five days between Modi's unexpected invitation and Sharif's belated acceptance dominated the Indian media and the drawing rooms with discussion whether the Pakistan prime minister would come to Delhi at all. Even though Modi's sweep in the Lok Sabha election and the formation of his government were germane to the occasion, the visit of Sharif was the topmost point of attention. And it was all positive. People wanted him to come and literally prayed that he would.

That he had to bring round the armed forces and the extremist elements was conceded. But it was argued that his arrival would be an apt step to reciprocate Modi's gesture through invitation. Therefore, when he telephoned to say yes, a wave of relief swept through the country. Most newspapers made his acceptance as the first lead.

I recall how at the time of partition there was so much bloodshed—nearly 10 lakh people were massacred on both sides. Yet a few weeks later when I bought a few tapes of Noorjehan at Lahore, the shopkeeper refused to take money since I was from India. A similar treatment was meted out to the Pakistanis.

More recently, the families in Chandigarh fought over hosting the Pakistani visitors who had come to watch a cricket match between India and Pakistan. Outside the subcontinent people hailing from the two countries are the best of friends. Is it because both share the same history and heritage? The fact is that people in Pakistan are no different from those in India in language, dress or eating habits. There are more Muslims in India than the entire population in Pakistan, created on the basis of religion.

It is beyond me to make out why Pakistan has unilaterally ended posting of two journalists from either country to cover the situation. Pakistan did not have its journalists in position for more than a year. I could have understood the reason if the two Indian journalists had violated any law or sent a dispatch which had hurt Pakistan's sentiments. There was nothing like that. Regrettably, news agencies and correspondents from the West are free to report.

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's visit to India took a similar zigzag path. Prime Minister Modi, considered a hawk, surprised even hardliners in both the countries when he invited all heads of Saarc nations. Nawaz Sharif was inclined to accept it. Yet some India-Pakistan animosity came in the way. The army and the extremists exerted so much pressure that the visit seemed abandoned. Ultimately, Sharif asserted himself to attend swearing-in ceremony. His was not only a gesture because after meeting Modi, Sharif said that a new chapter has begun in the history of the two countries.

The fear that Modi is anti-Muslim was allayed when the two met. Modi realises that he has to take the Muslims along to traverse the path of development, the slogan which has given him and his Bhartiya Janata Party a majority -- 282 seats in a 543-member Lok Sabha. It is churlish on the part of Pakistan to question the credentials of a person whom the people of India have elected in fair and free polls. There are enough voices in India to force Modi not to go away from the secular path, part of the basic structure of the constitution.

True, his party and its mentor, the RSS, are known for their Hindutva approach. Yet they would put the country in a big turmoil if they exerted pressure on Modi to build a temple where the Babri masjid stood or to tinker with Article 370 which constitutionally gives a special status to Jammu and Kashmir when it acceded to India on that condition.

What kind of country Modi wants to build is the question. The cabinet he has constituted gives a message that he wants the different elements to feel that he will not discriminate against any segment of the society, religious or linguistic. The first heartening step of his government to appoint a Special Investigation Team (SIT) to find out where black money is stacked is a good omen. I want to give him time to meet the aspirations of the people that he has aroused.

The writer is an eminent Indian columnist.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### Spikes no answer to traffic chaos

Recently Dhaka Metropolitan Police has installed retractable spike strips on Hare Road of the capital to prevent vehicles from driving on the wrong side of the road. Of course, the plan is commendable, but not pragmatic. The number of our roads is not proportional to that of vehicles, and the traffic control system is not much effective. It's better to take time-befitting measures to reduce traffic congestion rather than puncturing the tires.

 Samiul Raijul  
North South University  
Dhaka

### Bangalee or Bangladeshi?

We often hear people debating over whether we are Bangalees or Bangladeshis? The people of India, a vast country with so many communities and with Hindi as their national language, call themselves Indians. In USA, there are people of different ethnicities, communities and languages, but all of them are Americans.

Bangladesh is a small country with huge population. There are various tribal communities with different cultures and languages. There are also other Bangalees living in various parts of the world who speak Bangla but are not Bangladeshi citizens. So I think it will be wise to call the people of Bangladesh Bangladeshis.

 Mashudul Haque  
Dhaka

### Reduce load-shedding

During summer, the suffering of people knows no bound because of excessive load-shedding. Residential areas, mills, factories, industries, shops, hospitals, you name it, they are not immune from its impact.



G R SOHAIL/DRINKNEWS

Load-shedding occurs not only because the amount of power generated is less than the demand, but also because its distribution is not well-planned. Strangely though, the government still claims it has achieved huge success in power generation. If so, then why is this frequent load-shedding? The residents of Dhaka faced five to six hours of load shedding everyday during the recent heat wave. The government must take immediate and effective steps to end public's suffering caused by load-shedding.

 Amith Talukder  
Department of Business Administration  
Shahjalal University of Science and Technology

### Comments on news report, "Shamim admits but claims no ill-motive," published on May 24, 2014

#### Jafar Iqbal

It is time for RAB to 'betray' him by disclosing all his crimes and drug businesses that they used to hide until now by taking bribe from him.

#### S.M. Iftekhar Ahmed

All this simply proves that the AL government knows more about these killings, but out of arrogance they will do their best to ensure that a fellow party member is not convicted no matter what.

#### Mortuza Huq

After all these disclosures, if Shamim Osman is not arrested immediately, people will conclude that Shamim has been acting under instructions from the high up in the government.

#### Vikram Khan

Everything is possible in Bangladesh, even the unthinkable...

#### Hardreality

Now the drama is unfolding and it is transparent that Shamim Osman has aided and abetted the criminal; who knows, he might be the mastermind. To find out the truth, he needs to be arrested and questioned. That means, the half-revealed drama has come to an impasse and Shamim Osman will always remain untouchable. To say that hands of law are very large and powerful is a myth, especially, when it comes to bringing an influential person to book.

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### "Shamim Osman to be quizzed?" (May 25, 2014)

#### Molla A. Latif

Crimes should pay back for him too.

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### "Most of them Nizam's men" (May 25, 2014)

#### OpeeMonir

I just look at these young guys and think what a loss of youth. Who is to blame? Why are they in this crime?