

DAP alteration untenable

Environmentalists' concerns justified

THE government's decision to allow private housing development on conservable flood flow zones in Rugganj and Tongi has got environmentalists up in arms. The alterations being proposed to the Master Plan of the city are dubbed as "suicidal" by environmentalists who contend that these natural water bodies and tracts of land are essential for a functional city like Dhaka. Any filling up of these channels will, it is argued, increase exponentially Dhaka's vulnerability to flooding. Alterations being made to the Detailed Area Plan (DAP) just prior to the placement of the budget did not entail consultations with various stakeholders.

Needless to say, we are deeply concerned with the "commercialisation" of flood zones to make way for private housing and other so-called infrastructure projects. Concerns raised are valid ones. No one is against development. But should that be allowed at the cost of the collective security and wellbeing of the 15 million or so residents who call Dhaka their home? And the hurried manner in which alterations are being pushed is devious to say the least. One must not forget that the state of environment in the capital city is already precarious. Are we willingly signing away the last of the protection systems that nature has bestowed upon us for a residential plan? Then we could very well be courting doom. It is baffling to see such plans afoot especially since land earmarked for housing development in the estimated 1,500km² is yet to be exhausted. Then what need is there to touch the flood flow zones?

Highway mayhem over a rumour

Mob frenzy should be controlled

TRIGGERED by a rumour that two female students of a local school in Tongi were run over to death by a pick-up van, a frenzied mob of students and locals damaged scores of vehicles, set ablaze the pick-up van and barricaded Dhaka-Mymensingh highway. All this caused immense suffering to travelers and commuters for hours on Tuesday.

Fortunately, the two female students were not dead, but received injuries and were undergoing treatment in different hospitals in the city.

The incident was most unfortunate. Who did the rowdy elements, including students, think they were serving by breaking vehicles and holding unsuspecting travelers hostage to their mindless act? It cannot be the way to redress any grievance or establishing justice.

Whilst reckless driving cannot be condoned, what the wild mob did on the Dhaka-Mymensingh highway in Tongi was a serious crime punishable under law. They must realise it. At the same time, police should have an auto-reactive mechanism to deter such mayhem on a short notice.

Mr. Ershad versus Mrs. Ershad

SHAKHAWAT LITON

THE handmaiden main opposition Jatiya Party's Chairman H.M. Ershad, at a press conference at his Banani office on Saturday, made some critical comments against the proposed budget for the coming financial year. In his view, it is not only highly ambitious, but too much of a dream as well. Many party leaders were present at the press conference. However, his wife Raushan Ershad, who is also leader of the opposition in parliament, was absent. Her absence made journalists curious and they raised question about it. In response, Ershad said: "I am the party [Jatiya Party] chairman. I am expressing the reaction [to the proposed budget] on behalf of her [Raushan]."

But Raushan seems to have not liked Ershad's comments. She arranged a press conference on Tuesday at Parliament's Media Centre and expressed her opinions on the proposed budget, highly appreciating it. She said: "What the party chief said about the proposed budget is his personal opinion only." This makes it clear that she does not want to make any critical remark against the proposed budget. The reason is crystal clear. She has been recognised as the leader of the opposition with the status of a minister with the blessing of the government. It was a reward for her performance. She had foiled Ershad's move to bring JP out from the one-sided and voter less January 5 parliamentary election.

Now, in return, followers of Ershad may term Raushan's views as her personal opinions too. This shows the main opposition is facing opposition within itself, let alone opposing the government's wrong policies. The situation clearly exposes once again the fragile state of JP and its inability to perform as a shadow cabinet to hold the government accountable to the House.

One thing, however, is common in both Mr. and Mrs. Ershad -- both of them are beneficiaries of the current political situation. Like Raushan, Ershad also enjoys the blessing of the current government. He has been made a special envoy by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina with status of a minister. The trial proceedings of some criminal cases against him, including Gen. Manzur murder, have not got space. Therefore, it is difficult to keep faith in whatever Ershad says. Rather, when Mr. and Mrs. Ershad take opposite stance on any issue, it only generates amusement for people in return for paying salaries and other benefits to Ershad, Raushan and other MPs.

The writer is Senior Reporter, The Daily Star.

Modi's Republic

STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING



Brig Gen SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN
ndc, psc (Retd)

It is always a pleasure to listen to Dr. Raja Mohan's talk. It is not only interesting it is so convincing that you have to agree with almost all of what he has to say. And I could not take issue with what he had to say yesterday in his talk entitled, "Political Transition in India: What it means for South Asia and beyond."

However, I have of course some comments on his very enlightening expose which covered the changes in the political continuum of India since 1947 and the resultant impact on the socio-political and foreign relations spheres. And I will deal with only a few.

India appears to have gone through two phases of change straddling nearly four decades up to 1989, and it is now in the cusp of the third phase; and these phases Raja Mohan very suitably describes as 'Republics.' The current phase being the 'Third Republic' or perhaps can be most appropriately called 'Modi's Republic.' Next five years in India will be about Modi and by Modi. It seems that not only has the BJP as a party been subsumed by the man's name perhaps India too is experiencing a similar phenomenon.

Perhaps the word transition does not truly explain the degree of the changes that the Modi win has wrought on India. It was very nearly a small scale tsunami when, belying predictions that even if BJP won it would have to seek partners to form the government, it won a single majority all by itself. Although the difference in percentage terms of votes received by these two major parties is only ten, the perverseness of the 'first past the post' principle is very perversely reflected in the difference in the number of seats won by the two parties.

The first point of interest of any India watcher is what the character of India would be in terms of its religious and communal dynamics. When Raja Mohan argues that one of the changes that election has effected is that people have transcended religious or caste identity in choosing their candidates it appears quite out of sync with reality on ground. It was on religious grounds that Modi started his campaign, to build a temple on the site of the

historic mosque, and it is this issue that drew Hindu voters towards him and the BJP. Modi is rooted to Hindutva ideology, which holds non-Hindus as foreign to India, and that is what generates another question if not a concern. This is also the question that many in India are posing. Given that Modi is so deeply involved with the RSS and that his umbilical links are still very strong, will he be in a position to fend off any RSS pressure on the government to influence policies, particularly those related to social and religious matters? Despite RSS' claim that it has never kept any remote control and that it is not a political organisation but a social one, it is difficult to accept its argument that the right wing communal organisation never played a political role, except to bring a permanent and sustainable alternative. And that has been achieved.

But one would be advised to exercise caution in this regard because even RSS insiders like Mahesh Sharma suggest that the first general budget the Narendra Modi government presents next month will show if it is faithful to the BJP's manifesto or has been influenced by "all



shades of lobbyists." It will be interesting to see to what extent the Modi government will be backseat driven by the RSS, if at all.

It has often been argued that India's desire to gain the status of an important player in the international system was circumscribed by, not its ability but by its unwillingness to do so. In fact its 'will to power' was constrained by its 'power to will.' While the Modi government understands India's strong potential to influence world issues it would be well for it to understand that without being an acceptable player in the region it can hardly become an international player. Thus the priority and emphasis, as Raja rightly suggests, must be first on the neighbourhood.

And if what Raja Mohan says is true that the Manmohan government displayed little political intent to resolve the outstanding Indo-Bangladesh issues, and that the party made no arguments in favour of the agreements that eventually fell through, the only conclusion that one can make is that the Awami League and Bangladesh were taken for granted by the Congress. Bangladesh would not like to see the BJP, under the Modi regime, play favourites like the party it defeated.

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Modi back to his agenda

BETWEEN THE LINES



KULDEEP NAYAR

WHEN Narendra Modi broke down during the election campaign while hailing the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP), a pro-Hindu outfit, as his mother, I thought it was an emotional outburst. And I felt assured when he said after becoming India's prime minister that he would take along with him all the 125 crore Indians on the path to development.

But as the party unfolds its programme, I find that it is only a cover-up of the divisive strategy that the RSS has formulated. Modi projects an image of unbiased person while the BJP-cum-RSS takes steps to dilute pluralism. The RSS is already posting its trusted men as members of different commissions or at key positions. The youth from the cadres are being recruited for lower assignments. Since bureaucracy tilts in the direction to which the wind blows the BJP and RSS are finding no resistance in implementing their agenda.

Sharad Pawar, former agriculture minister, who was also the chief minister of Maharashtra, is justified in his remark that after the BJP's victory communalism is beginning to be visible all over. And this is only in the first fortnight of Modi's government. It is yet to run the full course of five-year term. What happened in Pune, the most liberal city in Maharashtra, indicates the forces which have run amok. An extremist Hindu group killed Mohsin Sheikh, a 28-year-old IT manager, following the posting of derogatory photographs of Shivaji and Bal Thackeray, founder of extremist Shiv Sena. Mohsin was a suspect, with no evidence and proof.

True, the BJP condemned the murder. But this was an ideal opportunity for Prime Minister Modi to assure the Muslims, feeling insecure, that his government would see to it that the perpetrators were brought to book quickly. Even when specifically requested for a word of sympathy for the victim's families Modi kept quiet.

This attitude should not come as a surprise. As Gujarat chief minister in 2002, when more than 200 Muslims were killed with the complicity of the administration, including the police, he never expressed regret. In fact, Modi threw at the face of criticism a clean chit he got from a magistrate court at home. Till today he has not said sorry. His regret at the murder in Pune would have gone a long way to assuage the feelings of Muslims and strengthen the idea of India based on the concept of pluralism.

People like me want to assure the Muslim community, roughly 15 to 16 crore, that it has nothing to fear because India follows the constitution which guarantees to every citizen equality before the law. There are courts, the media and liberal voices which are on the side of the Muslims if the community becomes a target. This was seen when the Babri masjid was demolished and the Gujarat anti-Muslim riots took place.

Those who have asked for Article 370 giving a special status to the state of Jammu and Kashmir are the same elements which are anti-Muslim. Article 370 is as old as the constitution, more than 65 years. But since Jammu and Kashmir is a Muslim majority state, they have found the atmosphere during the Modi regime conducive to challenge the state's status. They do not know the history; nor are they interested in finding out the facts.

When the British paramountcy lapsed in August 1947, the choice before roughly 560 princely states was either to integrate with India or go with the newly constituted Pakistan, taking into consideration the religion of the majority of subjects. The ruler could stay independent if he so desired.

Jammu and Kashmir's ruler Maharaja Hari Singh belatedly joined the Indian union even though the state's majority population was Muslims. My reading is that Kashmir would have gone to Pakistan if it had been patient. But it first sent tribal and then the regular forces to annex the state. The maharaja signed the instrument of accession in favour of India to get its forces to stop the murders. He transferred only three subjects—Defence, Foreign Affairs and Communications—to India.

The state retained other subjects. Article 310 is the codification of that understanding. If the union of India wants more subjects, it is for Jammu and Kashmir to decide because it joined the union on that condition. The union cannot have more subjects without the state's consent. Therefore, the RSS which has propelled the demand for the abolition of Article 370 is acting illegally.

In fact, things have now come to such a pass that the settlement has to have consent of three parties—India, Pakistan and the people of Jammu and Kashmir. If a referendum were to be held today, the valley of Kashmir would vote for an independent state. Jammu, with the majority of Hindus, would like to integrate with India and the Ladakh, with the Buddhists' majority, would want to have the status of a union territory directly under New Delhi. All these considerations have made the problem intractable.

In any case, the RSS should not play politics when it claims to be a cultural organisation. I am reminded of the ban imposed on it on January 30, 1948, after Nathu Ram Godse, an RSS man, assassinated Mahatma Gandhi. Then in 1949 when negotiations in response to the appeals from the RSS to lift the ban led to an agreement between then Home Minister Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and RSS in which the latter gave an undertaking that "RSS will not engage in political activity" and that "RSS will engage only in cultural activities."

But then Patel, not satisfied with the RSS undertaking, demanded that it incorporate the promise not to engage in political activities in their (Sangh's) constitution, to seal the agreement and to freeze RSS permanently from political activities. That was in 1949 and subsequent to that the government lifted the ban on the organisation. However, in a shocking betrayal, the RSS led by its sarsanghchalak chief, Mohan Bhagwat, indulged in aggressive political activity from June 2013 in efforts to foist Modi, formerly a RSS pracharak, in the post of prime minister of India. The result is before you.

The writer is an eminent Indian columnist.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Doctor martyred for his faith

American cardiologist Dr. Mehdi Ali Qamar set off to provide free medical services in Pakistan. A few days into his humanitarian trip, Dr. Qamar was brutally murdered in front of his wife and three-year-old son by terrorists. Unfortunately, this murder took place because Dr. Qamar was a member of the Ahmadiyya Muslim community, a minority group that has been criminalized in Pakistan.

Dr. Qamar now joins the 137 Ahmadis that have been martyred in Pakistan in the last four years. Those who are behind this murder should keep a verse of the holy Quran in mind: "If anyone slew a person...it would be as if he slew the whole humanity."

Monsura Sirajee
Washington DC, USA

"Relief in two years?"

TDS's news under the above heading on June 9 has perfectly portrayed the situation that exists at the Shahjalal International Airport. But no government did ever make any serious attempt to resolve these problems.

When the government boasts that the foreign exchange reserve stands at 20 billion dollars or more, they forget that a part of that came from the remittances sent by the toiling masses living abroad. But at our airport, these workers not only have to wait for a long time but also have to go through unnecessary hassles with the customs officials.

It appears from the report that this modernisation project would cost around \$10 to \$15 million and the PM has given the go-ahead to the project. We want to get rid of this poor service from Biman and also want quick implementation of this project.

Amanullah
On e-mail

Prevent questions from leaking out

It is heartening to see that esteemed educationist and writer Prof. Zafar Iqbal has come forward to address the issue of question paper leakage of various competitive public examinations. The education ministry must take the matter seriously and take stern action against the culprits. It must be ensured that questions of public exams will not leak out again.

Md Zonae Emran
A banker

Comments on news report, "Step good yet not enough," published on June 9, 2014

Nasirullah Mridha, USA

Cops' action is plausible. But unless the dishonest farmers and traders face exemplary punishment, the menace will not stop. All parties concerned need to roll up their sleeves to stop these traders' unholy business.

Snr Citizen

Too little, too late!

"Why Hazari MP?" (June 9, 2014)

Mofi

See how easy things are in Bangladesh; law, prison, regulations -- nothing would be able to stop you if you are a political leader or affiliated to a political party.

Akhtar Shah

Why bother with all these formalities? AL has given him the ticket, therefore he is a saint! He should be left alone. May be promoted to a ministerial post!

He certainly has all the necessary qualifications and experience!

"BSF again kills Bangladeshi" (June 9, 2014)

Aasfisarwar

Do we have a foreign ministry?

Snr Citizen

Indians know that in comparison to Chinese and Pakistanis, we Bangladeshis are very gentle and never protest against any of their actions. They ensure the triggers don't get rusty.

"Rab cautions media" (June 8, 2014)

Salahuddin Ayubi

What Rab allegedly did in Narayanganj does not bfit a law-enforcement body. Rab's warning should have been directed towards them and not against the media.