

Worrying signs in Pakistan

People's verdict must be respected

PAKISTAN'S cricketer-turned-politician Imran Khan has clearly been muddying the political waters in his country. His belief that the last general election which brought Nawaz Sharif and his Muslim League to power was rigged flies in the face of reality. Khan has demanded the resignation of the prime minister and fresh elections. He says he will not negotiate with the government until Sharif resigns. By doing so, he is only pushing Pakistan, where democracy has largely been a tenuous affair since the creation of the country in 1947, into newer dangers. Mr. Sharif has done well by refusing to give in to Khan's demands, given that the last election was fair by any standard and, except for Imran Khan, no one has complained about the results.

There is a certain incongruity about Imran Khan's politics as he goes on with his demagoguery. He has seemingly allied himself with the fanatical, foreign-based cleric Tahirul Qadri in his campaign to unseat Nawaz Sharif. Qadri's politics leaves few people in any doubt about his intentions. His rabble-rousing is aimed at creating a radical political system in Pakistan, an approach that does not bode well for the future of a country already under assault from diverse Islamist elements. For his part, the western-educated Imran Khan appears to have little clue about where he wishes to take politics. Mr. Khan has been crying hoarse in the past few days without offering any vision for Pakistanis.

Pakistan's fragile democracy needs to be saved from demagogues like Imran Khan and Tahirul Qadri. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif must stand tough. Every institution in Pakistan, especially the army, must ensure that nothing of an extra-constitutional nature happens again.

Living dangerously on foothills

Prevention long overdue

EVERY year monsoon arrives and like clockwork there are landslides in Chittagong burying and killing people, living in shanties on the foothills of hills. This is hardly news anymore. Yet we are forced to ask why the administration looked the other way when such hill slopes and foothills were being expropriated allowing for construction of residences on them decade after decade. Not only that, there appear to be no move to relocate people, mostly belonging to lower income groups to safer ground. Going by what has been published in this newspaper, we find much to our alarm that no less than 185 people have lost their lives to such accidents since 2007. What is even more surprising is that authorities have found some 30 hills to be vulnerable to landslides and yet there are no communities living around these hills.

With little vegetation growing on the topsoil of these hills, they are prone to landslides in case of heavy downpour. All this of course is known fact. With some 10,000 people living in these danger zones, surely relocation is not that much of a problem? There will always be a steady stream of people seeking accommodation in the rickety buildings found at the bottom a hill where the monthly rent is significantly lower than elsewhere in the city. The poor have just as much right to live as the rest of society. We believe it is high time authorities take steps to relocate these hapless people to more secure ground in the interest of public safety.

It's the booming populace...

SHAHRIAR FEROZE

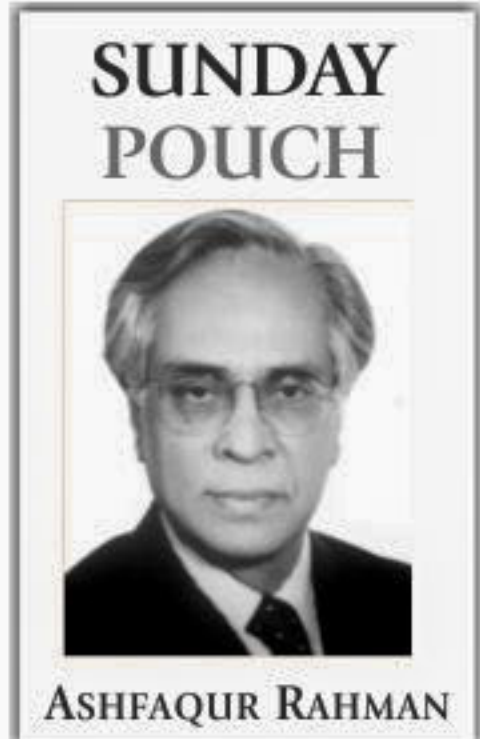
FACT that Dhaka has been ranked as the second least liveable city in the world doesn't come as a shock. And why should it since, so little has been done to change its worsening condition. The shock would have come if the Global Liveability Index had declared Dhaka number 1 the list of the 'Cities that collapsed'. Whatever, liveability indexes are prepared based on a whole range of criteria including culture, healthcare, education, environment and infrastructure. We know in which of the parameters we are lagging behind, but constantly failing to address them. Why? Because since independence we have never focused on the most crucial aspect of the city, and that is its: booming populace. Despite all workshops, seminars and Talkshows about solving the problems of Dhaka can anyone confirm if there was an initiative ever taken to prevent its population explosion?

Scope and plan of a city's infrastructure, road communications system, environment, and ranges of many other factors, are designed as according to the need of a specific number of inhabitants. And it's the population of Dhaka that has increased far beyond limit. The in-flow by the thousands every day is adding extra load. No one is there to restrict and control this human flood and therefore the city fails to cater to the needs of more than it can bear. The city houses no less than 15 million people but was the city - when planned - meant for this mammoth number of people? Lamenting Dhaka's present condition is not the solution but the realisation behind being worse must come and come immediately. If all the conditions of Dhaka are to improve in a broader spectrum, then its capacity for accommodating its citizens should be specified. We must also get out of the mind-set that owning an apartment and a car in Dhaka defines symbol of status. Need of the minute is to declare that 'think many times before settling in Dhaka as there is a ceiling up to which extra capacities can be added to the city's strength', and after that the city will just collapse'. If mass migration cannot be stopped then the city will collapse just due to population density and then where will you go?

Since solution by decentralizing is not likely to happen any time soon so we have a lot to worry about. By no means am I trying to discourage people from other parts of the country to come and live in Dhaka, but thinking deeply about its problems - the perennial traffic gridlocks, destruction of its wetland and green spaces, encroachment of its pedestrian space to its failing transportation and communications system to an ailing waste management scheme - and all that includes the city's cruel reality have happened because its population boomed unfettered. We are the ones to decide if we want to stop it.

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Where is Modi Sarkar ?



SUNDAY POUCH
ASHFAQUR RAHMAN

LIKE a new celebrity occupying the biggest house in the neighborhood, Bangladesh and all of India's South Asian neighbors are keenly following each day in office of the new Indian Prime Minister. Everyone is looking forward to see euphemistically whether this big house lawns are being pruned, its wall painted and its windows cleaned. Once India is again organized, the neighbors would be confident that India can give the economic leadership and the region can move forward. Modi has already stepped into the 89th day in office. Once he crosses the 100 days in power, analysts will start evaluating his performance. To date there is not much to see on the ground. There is not much action but indeed as reports go there is a lot more planning and preparation taking place to put Modi's electoral commitments to work. The big question is where exactly Modi sarkar has started working.

So what has Modi been doing for so long? Interestingly he seems to be doing more listening than talking or acting. He has brought all the Secretaries in the central government to come to him every afternoon and tell him why the previous Congress led government could not deliver. What were the difficulties each Ministry faced in implementing the political agenda of the previous government. In fact they candidly pointed out that India's growth and governance collapse in recent times had two dimensions. First the Congress derailed the economy by its populist policies. It spent too much on social programs which pushed the Indian economy into a corner. Secondly, the Congress led government took all steps with an aim for electoral gain. This combination of actions put India in a vise like grip. It could not gain in populism nor could it benefit electorally.

But now with Modi coming in with a thumping majority in the lower house, he can behave as a political stabilizer. He can attempt to introduce some bold reforms. However, big ticket reforms will need more than mere gumption. He has to repeal the 'dangerously anti industry land acquisition law' enacted in 2013. He has also to do away with social programmes which involve huge outlays by the government. So far Modi has not shown any signs that he is taking these major decisions. Perhaps he is looking at these propositions more closely. But Modi has to remember that time is of essence. He must think of reinventing the wheel than learning on the job. The delay could prove costly to him.

Modi Sarkar had so far no 'honeymoon period'. He regrets this and has tweeted so to his myriad followers. By now Modi has tweeted more than 100 times. This is a new way that any Indian Prime Minister has reached out to his supporters through the social media. Modi says that in the short period of nearly 89 days he has come up with 'road maps' for the various ministries on the basis of his personal interactions with the officials. In the process he has also discovered in-built rivalries of each Ministry with others and how such rivalries has spilled over to the courts and stymied the smooth functioning of the government. He expressed his disappointment in his Indian Independence Day speech from the Lal Killa.

In that inspiring speech, Modi also made one important announcement. He decided to scrap the Indian Planning Commission. He found it as a relic of the Soviet command economy which ran as a parallel Finance Ministry. It conceived Five Year Plans for India but scuttled flexibility and resilience of this gargantuan economy. He promised to revamp it and perhaps redesign it as a government think tank. But does that mean that Modi is taking steps to further liberalize and open up the Indian economy. But Modi's other utterance like 'Come, make in India' to foreign investors is just a slogan for attracting foreign investors. Everyone will be waiting to see what other policies to follow that will pull foreigners to its shores. Modi has first to use his talons to pull out the rotting policies that had pushed India to economic collapse in the past.

Modi is one Prime Minister of India who has met many world leaders in the first two months he has been in office. At the end of six months he will have met American, Russian, Chinese, Japanese, Australians and of course all SAARC leaders including our Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. Modi will meet the Japanese Prime Minister Abe in September. China's President Xi Jinping will visit India soon after. Modi will meet US President Barack Obama in Washington soon after the Chinese President visit concludes. So by year end Modi should be able to frame his foreign policy options and his military strategy at one go.

It is quite relevant to Modi to tackle a few issues that affect the daily life of Indian citizens as well as Indian businessmen. The first is of course the price rise. Modi needs to keep prices in check so as to provide relief to the common man who have voted him to power. He also knows that once he is able to do it he will provide the Indian central bank space to lower interest rate and to jerk the economy forward. Modi is also keen to end all legal and illegal forward trading in food items. He thereby wants his government not to face sensitive issues that may affect his government's image.

The Prime Minister is therefore sharpening his tools to tackle serious issues within his government and what may come before him in future. Modi is no rebel and while he sits and work within the broad frame work of his government his first 100 days has shown us which way he is likely to go in the future. Definitely he is not to rock the boat unnecessarily. But Modi should not also forget that the Indians as well as the countries in the neighborhood are impatient. They expected dramatic changes and bold reforms. But that unfortunately needs to wait. But how long would that be is a matter for Modi to arrive at a fine judgment.

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Throwing bouncer balls -- Democracy Pakistan style

ZIAUDDIN CHOUDHURY

THE drama unfolding currently in Pakistan is better than some Bollywood movies where politicians heckle government and rouse mobs with promises of Eden. It is better because the end in Bollywood movies is predictable, the end to the drama in Pakistan is not so. It is because often what you see in Pakistan is not what you get in the end. There are too many players in the drama.

Democracy is supposed to be the expression of free will and exercise of choice by people in electing their representatives. This is in theory at least. In mature democracies there are rules that guide such choice which people exercise at given intervals in electing a parliament. In such countries the guidance is also framed by people through their chosen representatives. These are countries where democracy arises from grassroots, freedom of expression is a human right, and everyone is guaranteed rule of law. Absent these conditions, democracy is a foil used by the ruling elites and their cohorts to disrupt any attempt at having people to exercise their choice. In a democracy in this paradigm only elites gets to rule the country, and they fight among themselves when one group goes to power and the others do not. Normally even in this pseudo democratic setting where masses are mere observers the deprived group could wait for its turn. But in Pakistan (much like our own country) a five-year wait is too long. The group not in power would like to short circuit its ascendancy to power by whipping up causes that may or may not be there.

The striking irony in the current movement launched by Tahir-e-Insaf Party (PTI) of Imran Khan, more known for his cricketing career than politics, is that he is accusing an election of fraud and forgery that he had accepted nearly one and a half year ago, and in which his party had won 34 seats. He now demands that this election be declared null and void, the elected government resign, the election commission be disbanded and new elections be held under a newly formed election commission. A greater irony is that his PTI got majority seats in Khan's own province in the Frontier region in elections held by the same commission and it formed government there. Will anyone in Pakistan ask why is this double standard?

There may not, however, be a double standard in this paradoxical movement in Pakistan. The movement like those in the past is targeted to bring changes to power because the current leadership has been unable to seek accommodation with the king makers of the country. And as in the past the king makers of the country are giving a helping hand to the noise makers.

Democracy as the world knows has had a troubled history in Pakistan, a country that has been governed by Army dictators for two thirds of its history. Even the



them believe that in Pakistan people are not king makers. The real power brokers are watching both of them; the winner will be the one who gets their nod.

Regrettably this movement is whipped up in the name of people and resources on both sides are being wasted at people's cost for a battle that is not theirs. Transition from one government to another, from one political power to another, should be people's choice at given intervals. The leader of PTI who had been a Cricketer of world class at one time should know that when two teams play, each team plays the role in each inning, a team that bats and the other that bowls. The game has its rules and punishment for foul play. A bowler may take resort to bouncers to intimidate the batsman, but in the end the game finishes within its own rules. The PTI leader may think that in this current game he has the umpire on his side, but what he may not know that this umpire has a history and the ability to upstage any game that is not played to his satisfaction. For Pakistan's sake we hope that this madness comes to a stop soon.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Dhaka second worst liveable city!

From your front page report of 20th August we have known that Dhaka is among the world's worst ten cities in order of livability! We would have topped the list but luckily for us, Damascus, the capital of Syria (in civil war) leads the table. So we are the second worst city in the world! Most of these ten worst cities are located in Muslim populated counties! Among the top ten best livable cities, seven are located in British Commonwealth countries!

Now, shall we not do something to improve our sad score? The daily that published this news can organize a competition among its readers to present, say, a ten to twelve-point pragmatic proposal for cleaning and improving the face of Dhaka city. Maybe by implementing the best proposals we can get out of this 'ten worst city' list. S.A. Mansoor
Dhaka

Tuba workers pay dearly for their strike



STAR

The owner of Tuba group has closed down five of his factories on the plea that the workers observed an "illegal" strike. This means the 1500 workers of those factories have become jobless overnight. They have already suffered a lot because of the owner's delay in paying three months' outstanding salaries plus Eid bonus. They have been living miserable lives not for their own faults. Now they are thrown out of jobs. Where will the workers go now?

We demand justice for the workers.

Zabed Wali
Chittagong

Some suggestions on FFs' criteria

I thank the Liberation War Affairs minister A.K.M. Mozammel Huq for his kind initiative in preparing Criteria of Freedom Fighters. Although Freedom Fighters' list was made 5-6 times up until now, it is still incomplete and a high percentage of fake names are included there. I will earnestly draw his kind attention to the following suggestions:

- Freedom Fighters trained in India, included in the list given by Indian Army, Kaderia Bahini, Hemayet Bahini and two others can be enlisted in one list (say Red List)
- Fighters who did not go to India but were trained by the Indian-trained Freedom Fighters and fought with them can be enrolled in another list (say Green List).
- Singers, artists, writers, players, photographers, pressmen, doctors, nurses, local guides etc who did not fight with arms by risking their lives directly in the War

Front but did contribute in the Liberation War indirectly be included in another list (say Blue List).

This is for the kind consideration of the newly formed committee preparing criteria of freedom Fighters.
SD Alam
Motijheel, Dhaka

Comments on news report, "A plea goes in vain," published on August 19, 2014

Shams Reza

Brick by brick, the government is taking apart all the democratic institutions of the country. It will be very difficult to undo the damage that has been done to the democratic institutions in the future.

Mortuza Huq

This is nothing but a ploy to travel back to BAKSAL days under the cover of questionable democracy emerging from the farcical 5 January election. Actions of this Awami League government is totally dividing the country, putting Awami League on one side and the people on the other. Obviously, this will not bring any good for Awami League in the long run.

Sukhamaya Bain

It is a strange country indeed! The 1972 constitution was actually better than what Bangladesh could handle. Thus came the ill-conceived actions of giving the president the power to impeach the SC judges in 1975 and the creation of a SJC by a military dictator through his rubber stamp parliament in 1979. Now the judges panic over the idea of restoring the 1972 constitutional provision that was actually sound.

Saleh Md. Shahriar

A conflict between the court and the parliament has been going on for a long time. There should be perfect checks and balances among the three branches of government.