

# Global competitive- ness scale

## Bangladesh's ranking needs improving

IT is like moving up and down a slippery slope. One year we go up by a notch or two, another year we slide down. In the main, it remains an uphill task to better our previous standing in terms of global competitiveness. All this is because in the vital areas we are largely stuck up.

It is little solace that the Geneva-based World Economic Forum-2014 report places Bangladesh 109th on the competitiveness scale out of 144 countries. This means 45 countries are below while 108 are above us. If it's a psychological cheer that is only nominal, but enough to shed our complacency to improve markedly in a highly competitive business world.

In the last six years infrastructure has fallen in the 'worst' category due to limited road transport, even though electricity supply has improved significantly. Look at the four-lane Dhaka-Chittagong highway which has hovered as a dream far too long. It is felt infrastructure uplift should be focused towards development of supply chain.

A significant deterioration has been marked in key indicators centred around government and public institutions during the last two years. Government effort to combat corruption and bribery have been largely ineffective, according to CPD analysis.

While noting improved macro-economic management and a leap in financial market development, business-government relationship has fallen short of creating an adequately enabling business environment. We endorse the economists' call for access to public utilities and to credit at an affordable rate of interest.

While we offer opportunities for investment we must underpin it through raising our competitiveness levels.

# Ministries' bill defaults

## A huge drag on power ministry

WE had known MPs defaulting on telephone bills running into a few crore takas. Now it seems the ministries have romped on to the wagon hitched to a train labeled as financial indiscipline express.

The amount in arrears electricity bills owed to ministries is a whopping Tk 806 crore. The total is made up of Tk 401 crore and Tk 405 crore respectively owed by different government offices and semi-government and autonomous bodies. As many as 21 ministries are the worst bill defaulters.

The sticking question has been as to how the outstanding bills get paid to the government exchequer. It seems to us various measures have been adopted from time to time to have the arrears cleared but obviously these have recoiled.

Steps such as holding regular meetings with bill defaulting ministries and authorities, sending demand orders to secretaries, and even attempts at disconnecting electricity lines have met with little success.

How problematic the issue has become within the government that it has prompted conducting mobile courts to realize the bills! If SMS bill payment system and installation of pre-paid meters could not nudge the defaulters then what is left is an intervention from the highest government i.e. cabinet level. For, we have to establish financial discipline in government ministries and bodies. They are the ones to set the example so that others are enthused to follow it.

# Tribute to a socio health reformer

MUHAMMAD ABDUL MAZID

NATIONAL Professor Dr Muhammed Ibrahim, a great and successful physician, a gifted teacher, a talented organizer and a great reformer was born on 31st December, 1911 and died on 6th September, 1989. His death anniversary is observed as (Diabetic) Service Day (Sheba Divash) to endorse and honor his great contribution for the socio Medicare services.

His contribution in the field of medicine in general and diabetes in particular has been nothing but phenomenal. He was the founder of the Diabetic Association in Dhaka (1956) and in Karachi and Lahore, West Pakistan (1964). He first thought of diabetic care in the country. He realized that diabetes, a silent killer non communicable disease, is such a disease where not only doctors but patients should be involved in the process of diabetic care. He thought the matter as a socio-medical care. Although the real extent of the problem of diabetes was not evident in our part of the world, he could foresee the present picture at that time and organized a group of social workers, philanthropists and professionals.

Diabetic care was started in a tin-shed building at Segun Bagicha with only 23 patients. The motto of Dr Ibrahim was 'no diabetic patients should die untreated, unfed or unemployed even if she/he is poor'. So, he committed to give primary care to the diabetic patients free of cost irrespective of socio-economic, racial or religious status.

To develop trained and specialized manpower, he also established an Academy in BIRDEM for postgraduate education in Diabetes, Endocrine and Metabolism (DEM). BIRDEM has been acclaimed as a model for South East Asia. In recognition of its innovative, extensive and high quality services BIRDEM was designated in 1982 as a 'WHO-Collaborating Centre for Developing Community-oriented Programmes for Prevention and Control of Diabetes'. It is the first such centre in Asia.

And also set up a family planning section at BIRDEM for motivational work. He took keen interest in family planning. His involvement began as a founder member of the Family Planning Association of Bangladesh, which first started its programme in this country in the mid-fifties. He made a real impact as the Adviser to the President, with the rank of Minister, in-charge of the Ministry of Health and Population Control, in the mid-1970. A few know that he was also instrumental in formulating the population control policy of the Government for the first time and introduced the National Population Council.

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# The politics of marginalisation

## STRAIGHT LINE



MUHAMMAD  
NURUL HUDA

Bangladeshis sadly watch their guardians unmoved despite the combined onslaught of logic and reason, law and fact.

Politically speaking, the current scene is not the first instance when otherwise responsible and erudite people have talked irrelevantly and irreverently. The tragedy is that we are forgetting that democracy, with freedom of opinion and opposition is not the normal way of organizing society but is a rare human achievement. In our environment, many citizens may appear un-dimensional but our political leaders have no excuse for being so perilously un-dimensional. They have to act as catalyst. The responsibilities, which today lie on their shoulders, are far greater than at any earlier time in our history.

We seem to be oblivious that law moves on a unique plane and that a lawful society reflects man's sense of order and justice. Such society embodies rules and traditions that have a binding effect and provide the enduring element, the dimension of permanence, in history. We cannot have a government without order and there can be no order without law. Viewed in the above context, there is no doubt that the country is in the midst of a serious crisis and the premonition is that the downward slide to dangerous uncertainty may have commenced.

The country is now sharply and dangerously polarized with political adversaries bent upon maligning each other. The language of reason and moderation is absent while there is hardly any trace of tolerance. This, however, does not come as a surprise as forebodings of a perilous polarization were there for any keen observer to realize. One feels constrained to comment that the country is held hostage to the partisan ambition of an immoral and acquisitive class whose kleptocratic instincts are no secret.

There is no denying that Bangladesh in recent times

has experienced the politics of violence, which in practical terms means resorting to physical violence to promote a political objective. At the same time, we have also seen violence of politics built into the institutional structure of politics despite the ideal that liberal democracy abjures violence of politics.

The rule of law, though a civilising factor, has often led to violence for purposes of governance without ensuring to check indiscriminate use of power in our polity. We have also not seen any serious policy discussion on the phenomenon of violence.

Political violence should call for a political response from the state authorities rather than a police response. The latter may be necessary, but not sufficient. In a situation of large scale institutional malfunctioning, as is feared in our case, politics acquires an appetite for all spaces, both public and private.

Under circumstances as above, all violence becomes political and our state authority relies largely on the police machinery, not only for information gathering pertaining to social conflict and violence but also for the analysis and interpretation of the phenomena of violence in terms of their nature, causes and solutions. As such, the colonially derived significance of the police machinery on such a crucial matter, and its influence in determining the state response to violence, has not been seriously looked into.

It is an unfortunate facet of our political existence that the political class has quite often shifted to the police the burden of providing a response to many socio-political movements, which are essentially an expression of people's aspiration for a life of dignity and self-respect. The Kansat tragedy of the not-too-distant past is a glaring case in point.

Terms such as "law and order," "public order," or "security of state" are often used in Bangladesh to deploy state violence with impunity. The police in our situation tend to make indiscriminate use of the provisions of Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code to disperse unlawful

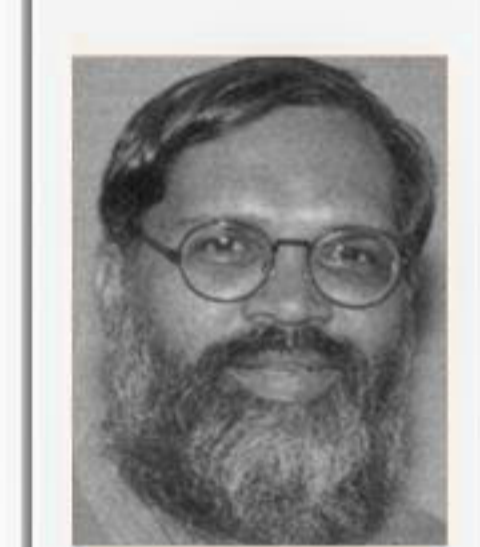
assemblies even when the demands made by such assemblies are legitimate and lawful. No effective guidelines in law are provided for the use of force to deal with such assemblies, except the general specification that minimum force be used. Such use of force often leads to loss of life and liberty.

Since our major political parties are not desirably committed to share principles of constitutionalism, we may have to wait for the working class and the peasantry to organise political parties and stronger social movements to push for social equality and justice for ensuring true progress.

The writer is a columnist of The Daily Star.

# Politics of 'love jihad' Spreading fear through stereotypes

## PRAFUL BIDWAI COLUMN



PRAFUL BIDWAI

Hindu, cultural super-identity. RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat recently said that all Indians must be called Hindu just as people who live in England are called English.

Worse, the Modi Cabinet's sole Muslim, minority affairs minister Najma Heptullah, then said there's nothing wrong with the term Hindu being used for all Indians as a label of "national identity". Under flak, she claimed she had used "Hindi", an Arabic geographical description, not "Hindu". This claim was belied by the interviewer's audiotape.

The BJP made a dismal start in the national elections. It fielded just seven Muslims of its total of 482 candidates, none of whom won. For the first time in Independent India, the ruling party has no Muslim Lok Sabha MP. This doesn't speak of inclusion. The trend was reflected in the abysmal share (0.7 percent) of funds for the minorities in the last budget.

Symbolically, Modi sends out a similar message. He put

*The "love jihad" campaign tries to cover up the male aggression inherent to the patriarchal family and externalise it. It's socially regressive because it reinforces masculine authority, tyrannical hierarchy and women's oppression.*

on every conceivable headgear (Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist and tribal) in the past six months, but never a skull-cap. His is also the first Indian government which did not host an Iftar party during Ramzan. Even the Vajpayee government unfailingly did.

Symbols matter. India has national holidays on days important to the followers of all significant religions. Many scholars consider this a hallmark of Indian secularism which doesn't oppose politics to religion, but follows the principle of nondiscrimination between religions.

The minorities' fears of violence by Hindutva elements have also materialised, with 80 communal riots instigated in 100 days in Uttar Pradesh alone, and with 72 Dalit Christians converted to Hinduism.

Potentially even more dangerous is the insidious "love jihad" campaign being unleashed in UP, which claims that

young Muslim men entice Hindu women into a romantic relationship or marriage only to rape them after converting them to Islam. This demonises an entire community. The BJP's Uttar Pradesh president has become a party to this.

The entire Sangh Parivar is mobilising itself to fight "love jihad" in UP, inspired by Yogi Adityanath, who's in charge of the state BJP's campaign for the coming 11 Assembly byelections.

This is a throwback to the 1920s when the Arya Samaj and Hindu Mahasabha exploited the idea of violation of a woman's body to create an artificial Hindu identity, and launched shuddhikaran (purification) to "reconvert" Muslims to Hinduism.

The strategy behind such campaigns is to create irrational insecurities and bring them into intimate spaces: the home, the family, the bedroom. The campaign doesn't need a cataclysmic event or even a genuine case of forced conversion. Rumours serve the purpose.

It doesn't matter if the Hindu woman concerned entered into a relationship with a Muslim man out of free will. Indeed, the whole idea is to deny such free will or independent agency to the woman. She is, by definition, innocent and gullible, while the Muslim man is wicked, sexually charged and violent. She must be protected against his designs.

These stereotypes exploit the patriarchal dread of female sexuality and free will, and permit self-appointed guardians of community "honour" to police young women's behaviour.

The "love jihad" campaign tries to cover up the male aggression inherent to the patriarchal family and externalise it. It's socially regressive because it reinforces masculine authority, tyrannical hierarchy and women's oppression.

It promotes the idea that a woman cannot make free choices about love, pleasure or marriage; these must always be made for her by men, her self-proclaimed protectors.

It's disgraceful that the BJP should stoop to "love jihad" to win the coming Assembly byelections. But this is part of a well-established pattern.

Now Yogi Adityanath, who faces several hate-crime cases, has launched a provocative attack on Muslims: "In places where there are 10 to 20 percent minorities, stray communal incidents take place. Where there are 20 to 35 percent of them, serious communal riots take place and where they are more than 35 percent, there is no place for non-Muslims."

There's a clear case for prosecuting Adityanath under Section 153A of the Indian Penal Code for promoting hatred between religious communities. But BJP leaders are deafeningly silent on this.

There isn't even a squeak out of Modi, despite his exhortation against communal strife "for 10 years". But there could be a menacing sub-text here: India can safely return to strife after 10 years! Anyway, the exhortation sounds hollow.

If BJP leaders want a minimally inclusive and secure society, in which religious minorities don't feel that they are being reduced to second-class citizens, then the party and its government must change their ways. Or else, they will divide India further--violently and irreparably.

The writer is an eminent Indian columnist.

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# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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## Who are Bangladesh's real 'adivasis'?

Recently the government of Bangladesh asked the concerned people not to use the word 'adivasi'/ indigenous people and gave directive to use the term 'small ethnic groups' instead. This directive of the government has irritated some people. They all were unanimous that the government has done a great injustice, but none of them put forward any reason or historical fact to justify their claim.

'Adivasi' or indigenous people mean the oldest inhabitants of a country. American Indians are the oldest inhabitants of USA and so they are the 'adivasi' or indigenous people of USA. European colonisers brutally dislodged them from their land. The same thing happened in Canada, Australia and New Zealand. These areas were occupied by the European settlers and their inhabitants were killed indiscriminately. Those who survived the European onslaught were confined to a small fraction of their original land.

Now let us see who the oldest inhabitants of Bangladesh are. This area was inhabited by our Dravidian ancestor since about 1000BC (A Country Study: Bangladesh of Library of Congress, call no. DS393.4 .B372 1989). Banglapedia mentions the following about the formation of large Bengali state from smaller ones: "The historical phase of the formation of Bangalee nation started from the Gupta era (320-650 AD). It was during this period that large states were formed from smaller ones. Examples included the 'Vanga' state in the southern region of eastern India. Shashanka was the first historically specific ruler of greater 'Vanga'. The Bangali nationality started its journey from then on. The Sultani state of Bengal was set up based on that foundation. The state was given the name of 'Vangala' or Bangla; the inhabitants of this land were termed 'Vangalia' or Bangali."

But when did the Chakmas or Marmas move into Bangladesh? Both were the inhabitants of Arakan. Due to defeat in war, they fled to Bengal in the early 17th century and settled in the hilly areas. And Santals are the 'adivasi' of Santal Pargana of Jharkhand. Same for the Tripuras who are the adivasi of Tripura state of India. How come they are the 'adivasi' of Bangladesh?

Fazlur Rahman  
On e-mail

## Bt brinjal: A loss-making project

A few months ago, we heard a lot about Bt brinjal. Many said that these genetically modified brinjals would be pest-resistant so the farmers wouldn't have to incur losses. Others said that marketing of Bt brinjal deserves more scientific research as it is not sure whether it will have any negative effect on human health or not. Finally, the government gave its consent for cultivating Bt brinjal and then, like many other issues, we all forgot this one, too.

But it has come to our notice again. On September 1, 2014, newspapers reported that farmers who cultivated Bt brinjals are no more interested to cultivate it again as they incurred heavy losses. Not only did they not get the high yield as promised by the agriculture ministry and BARI, but also found the plants wilted and dead.

It is alarming to note that Bt brinjals are being sold in Rangpur without labels violating the law, and consumers can't differentiate between normal brinjals and the modified ones.

We demand a stop to farming and marketing of Bt brinjal. Enough research is needed to assess the impact of this genetically modified crop on human health.

Rubaiya Hossain  
On e-mail

## Comments on news report, "Nothing to worry about," published on August 31, 2014

Richard Durivage  
Dumb statement.

## Anonymous

Yes, state minister, you are right. There is nothing to worry about because the murdered people don't belong to your family. They are ordinary citizens.

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## "Extreme poverty in the CHT context" (August 31, 2014)

## Munawar

I have been visiting the hill tracts since 1964. Bandarban in those days was totally isolated. With new roads the situation is much better in many ways, but new issues have emerged. One of them is unemployment, as the writer has raised, the other is encroachment of settlers. In order to attract industrial investment, reliable electric supply is essential. There are opportunities for investment, for example in the fruit and vegetable sector. If canning facilities are made available, pineapples and other fruits can be canned and shipped out to the rest of the country, we can even think of export.

## Saleh Md. Shahriar

Extreme poverty! There are lots of NGOs and donor organisations working to reduce poverty. What are they doing if poverty level remains so extreme?