

## Our vulnerable women

### Calls for serious attention and action

FOR all the claims made about progress insofar as women's outward and upward mobility is concerned, there are some very good reasons to think that there is yet a long way to go. Just how long that road is comes through a Unicef finding that one of every five girls between the ages of 15 and 19 is sexually abused by her partner or husband.

Add to this the fact that as many as 47 per cent of adolescent girls in the country suffer through physical or sexual violence. Of course, we do not get to hear of such violence, not much any way because of the conservative nature of society. Indeed --- and this is apart from what Unicef says --- there are even educated, career women in the country's urban regions who have borne in silence violence exercised on them by their husbands. Housewives are raped and murdered. Young women have been known to commit suicide following their failure to arrive by justice over crimes committed on their person or reputation.

Now that is indeed a serious indictment of the circumstances in which Bangladesh's women lead their lives. Despite the presence of rights bodies dealing specifically with women's issues, there is hardly any coordinated mechanism that can ensure that women will not become targets of men's violence.

The Unicef findings should be a wake-up call, especially for the government. It must show that it cares about the safety of women. Only when it does that will the nation feel reassured about the unhindered movement of Bangladesh's women.

## Raising literacy rate

### Bridging the gaps

SINCE 1991, successive governments have undertaken several projects at an estimated cost of over Tk 2,000 crore jointly with various development partners to increase literacy rate in Bangladesh; yet a big gap remains in terms of attainment. Against the backdrop we have to adopt more inclusive and realistic plans that would help step up literacy. In our country, a person's ability to sign name is take as the mark of literacy, but this does not meet all the parameters required to be met for functional literacy.

The foundations of basic skills-orientated learning which enables a person to read, write and do arithmetic up to a workable level should be the marker of literacy. So it's the very definition of the term 'literate' that needs to be practically more broad based and goal-oriented than it is now. Moreover, literacy programmes should be implemented keeping the country's socio-economic realities in view.

However, literacy rate has gone up to nearly 60 percent as per Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics while the education ministry puts it at 65 percent. This is not a small achievement but one that has to be more functional. This can be built up on two levels; adult literacy drive and the primary education. With respect to the former, retention of skills should be ensured through rotation methods.

## No room for complacency

EDITORIAL, THE HINDU

AL-Qaeda's declaration that it has set up a "branch" in the Indian subcontinent called Qaeda al-Jihad poses serious questions for India and the new government. For al-Qaeda to establish an operational base in India, which has the third largest Muslim population in the world, would be to pull off something of a coup. Its failure all these years to establish a presence in this country has been attributed to India's democracy, its secular foundations and pluralistic traditions. The government says the video recording through which al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri made the announcement --- the group's most direct call ever for jihad in India --- is genuine. Even so, the message sounds like a recruitment pitch by a group that has no following on the ground and is taking a shot in the dark. Coming soon after the pull that the Islamic State seems to have exerted on a few Indian youth through a campaign on the social media, al-Qaeda apparently believes there is a market for jihad in India that is waiting to be exploited. The video also supports the theory of rivalry between the two groups --- though the IS was born from al-Qaeda, the older organisation has denounced its offshoot and cut off all links with it. Whatever the reason for the announcement, there is certainly no room for complacency on the part of the Indian security establishment. After the 2008 terrorist attacks in Mumbai, India has struggled, largely unsuccessfully, to set up a streamlined intelligence gathering system that can also read and effectively respond to inputs from the ground. Indeed, from the ease with which the IS has been able to lure some youngsters from India, it is clear that the internal security apparatus is far from reaching that goal.

There would be no bigger mistake, though, than to treat this purely as a security issue. The portents from the video must not be allowed to become a justification for a heavy-handed response that would end up treating members of an entire community as suspects. As recent episodes have shown, there is a worrying tendency among police forces across India to respond to terror threats or attacks by detaining young Muslim men, sometimes on the flimsiest of grounds. There is also a pattern of acting on complaints against social media content in a manner that threatens individual liberties. If al-Qaeda is on a fishing expedition in India, it is because it believes there are disgruntled sections in the Muslim community with which it can build up its base. The Modi government's and the BJP's best response to the threat by al-Qaeda would be to address the causes for such disenchantment. Reining in communally polarising political rhetoric of the kind that is roiling U.P. now, would be a welcome first step.

# Conciliation is desirable, not conflict

BADIUL ALAM MAJUMDAR

BNP has been making repeated threats to uproot the government by staging mass movements. However, the ruling party appears to be little concerned about this. Rather, some of the ruling party stalwarts have been enticing BNP by saying that it is incapable of waging a mass movement. Some have even been making explicit threats that the street agitation of BNP would be appropriately dealt with by the law enforcement agencies as well as the ruling party members.

As citizens, we are seriously concerned about the threats and counter threats. BNP was not allowed to hold human chains on the street, not even an indoor meeting at the Engineers Institute. Based on such experiences, it is clear that if BNP announces a peaceful political programme, the law enforcement agencies would prevent it. If BNP announces hartal or siege, the government would take severe repressive measures which might lead to violence. Consequently, the lives and properties of innocent people would be at stake.

Our political parties normally display their strength by unleashing violence on the street, which has been becoming more destructive over time with the misuse of official power by ruling parties. Due to continued politicization of the bureaucracy and law enforcement agencies by successive governments, the ruling party is now able to use the government's legitimate power to exercise illegitimate force against its political opponents. The attractiveness of using public servants against political opponents is that they can be used for both unleashing violence and filing cases against opponents, which has been increasingly happening in recent years. As a result, the ruling party cares little about BNP's repeated threats and may now arrogantly think it is invincible.

In the interest of public safety and security, we are obviously opposed to BNP's threats of creating violence on the street and destroying people's properties. However, BNP's staying away from waging a street movement is not going to resolve the on-going political dispute, particularly relating to the January 5 election. Rather it may accentuate the problem, pushing us to an uncharted course.

The principal reason behind the present political dispute is the one-sided and manipulated election of January 5. This is not a dispute between Awami League and BNP alone; the citizens of the country are also a part of it. They feel disenfranchised and are very unhappy, although they do not want further violence and deterioration of law and order.

In addition, BNP has little credibility with the neutral citizens who have not forgotten the excesses of the past BNP regime. To many of them, Awami League and its allies in the government have been merely continuing the transgression and misuse of the past BNP government, but with increased intensity. Furthermore, BNP's alliance with Jamat, its shaky position about the war-crimes trial and the practice of dynastic rule within the party have caused

many to give up on the party.

Many people also do not think that merely holding a free, fair and inclusive election at this time would be a cure-for-all the ailments facing the country. They want sustainable solutions to the prevailing problems; along with a credible election they want substantive reforms in our electoral system, political parties and the constitution.

However, BNP's incapacity to stage mass movement should not make Awami League feel safe and invincible. Because, not only is the 'birth' of the present government tainted, its activities of the last six months are also disappointing. The past misdeeds of the last Awami League government --- corruption and criminalization, violence and human rights violations --- are continuing as if with new vigor. If these persist, public support for the government will erode further, requiring it to use force and impinge on the rights of the citizens, the evidence of which is already apparent in some of its recent decisions. With the concentration of power in one individual, the thumping majority in the parliament and no opposition of any significance, the government's ability to indulge in excesses has increased. In the words of Lord Acton, power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. However, history teaches us that no government anywhere could stay in power forever by using force. Therefore, the present situation in the country is potentially unstable and unsustainable.

There is also another ground for this potential unsustainability. Some ruling coalition leaders have been claiming that democracy has become consolidated through January 5 elections. Some of them even think that the election has paved the way for creating 'democratic dictatorship' in the country. However, we feel that the so-called election has ushered in a type of 'toxic democracy', which may not only harm the ruling party but may also lead to the failure of democracy.

The effectiveness of a state depends on the effectiveness of its institutions as well as the prevailing rules and procedures. According to one of our former chief justices, our judicial arena was devastated by a severe 'cyclone'. Our Election Commission, the bureaucracy and law enforcement agencies are to a great extent functioning like the ruling party's affiliated organizations. The ACC has not yet been able to prove its unquestioned neutrality. Various attempts are already underway to curtail the freedom of the media and the civil society. If these institutions lose their effectiveness further, there may be serious problems in the country.

Given the situation, we urge the opposition political parties to stay away from violent movement. We request the government to engage in dialogue to resolve the disputes. If the ruling party feels that they are now in a stronger position, it would be prudent for them to engage in dialogue with the opposition political parties from that strong position.

The writer is Secretary, SHUJAN: Citizens of good governance

## A NEW INDIA? Why Modi will need more time

CURTIS S. CHIN & MEERA KUMAR

DELHI --- How fitting for the world's largest and perhaps most free-wheeling democracy that with only 100 days having passed since Narendra Modi was sworn into office as Prime Minister of India, critics and supporters alike -- in Bangladesh and elsewhere -- are already vocally weighing in on his performance. Hope remains high that Modi will bring change to this traditions-bound nation, but as Russell Green, a former U.S. Treasury attaché to India and Clayton Fellow at Rice University's Baker Institute, puts it, "[Modi] has yet to explain his big economic reform vision in enough detail to revive corporate investment and pull the public onboard."

It is of course too early to meaningfully judge Modi's long-term impact. Here though are several key benchmarks by which global investors and India's own citizens should measure the country's new leadership.

### Job creation:

With 50% of India's population under the age of 30, job creation must be foremost in the minds of the nation's leaders. Nothing, after all, is more dangerous than educated, unemployed youth roving the streets, their frustrations rising and, sooner or later, finding expression in public disharmony. It is estimated that a million job aspirants enter the labor market each month. Economic growth will have to keep pace with this reality, and Modi will be wise to focus on agricultural and education reforms, vocational, technical and professional training, and a continued opening of the economy to help drive job creation and growth. According to India's Labour Bureau's "Third Annual Employment & Unemployment Survey 2012-13," the nation's unemployment rate among "educated youth" was 19.4 per cent in 2011-2012 and increased to 32 per cent during 2012-2013.

For the past five years, and particularly from 2012-2014, the Congress Party has allowed growth to slip and investment plummeted. The new prime minister must remember that growth is not India's birthright; not something that will automatically happen unless nurtured. Investor confidence must be restored and capital inflows improved.

The sentiment toward India has begun to turn positive and small changes in Foreign Direct Investment regulations in the insurance and defense sectors have been approved. At the same time, a mammoth obstacle to all development --- the Land Acquisition Act --- is under review. The prime minister will need to demonstrate real and continuous changes in policy to attract the capital India so desperately needs. India last quarter registered a growth rate of 5.7% in GDP on an annualized basis, a slight improvement over past quarters. Yet, by some estimates, 62% of this increase came from the financial sector alone. There was a slowdown in all other sectors of the economy.

Concurrent with the emphasis on growth is the need for macro-economic stability. The past government's breathless attempts to win the population's goodwill through subsidies and by creating welfare programs have had a serious impact on the coffers. Subsidies have absorbed such a large proportion of the government's budget that capital expenditures by the government have fallen to 6 percent of GDP. Such populist programs are unsustainable and open the window to increased corruption. It is time for India's leaders to come to terms with economic fundamentals and budget deficits, and restore macroeconomic stability.

### Corruption:

India has adopted the institutional structure of a modern democratic state; now it is important to ensure these institutions function in an honest and credible manner. In the

recent past, governance has weakened, and institutions have been hollowed out by corruption and rendered dysfunctional. If the public cannot trust the judiciary, or have faith that the police force works in their interest, they will resort to unfair means to achieve its goals.

If business, domestic and foreign, are to invest in the India described so eloquently on India's independence day at the Red Fort, Modi must address head-on a plethora of issues that relate to the high level of corruption and poor governance, which keep the nation low on the ranks of the World Bank's annual Doing Business survey. (India dropped from 131 to 134 in the latest World Bank ranking of 189 economies.) Such ills have eaten into the very core of Indian society, with tales of the unpunished and hubris among the ruling class now legion.

After all, if no one gets punished for wrongs when evidence is clear, documented and apparent, it can only lead to a disregard for the very institutions without which a modern democratic state cannot survive. Such was the hubris among the elite and powerful that they could subvert any law or regulation merely by calling on those who had the power to protect them.

### Infrastructure:

From our perspectives based on our time at the Asian Development Bank, insufficient change has come to India's core infrastructure despite hundreds of millions of dollars from numerous development agencies and banks. In the India of today, much like the India of yesterday, even in urban areas access to water and to reliable electricity cannot be counted on. Grandiose promises already have been made by the prime minister, which would require an investment of \$2 trillion, but details are sparse, and no one has articulated where the capital would come from.

Toilets on a per capita basis are deplorably low; many rivers are little more than sewers and school children cannot do their homework because there is no power in the evenings. Health and morbidity directly affect productivity; human dignity is the basis for building a cohesive society that thinks for the nation, not just for itself.

### Socioeconomic divide

An urgent task awaiting the new government is the need to build cohesion out of diversity. The Muslim population of India is close to 15% and this community is a vibrant part of India. Yet, on every economic and social measure, this segment of the population ranks low. While the reasons for this are complex, the reality of their weaker economic and political power has rendered many disgruntled and with a sense of being marginalized.

The new government must focus on this community's grievances and demonstrate an approach that is inclusive and credible to the Muslim population. One can always believe in one's virtue; what counts is that others believe in you. Governments are often defined by their failures, and given what was seen by many as anti-Muslim rhetoric during the Modi campaign, real progress in addressing this community's specific needs, as part of an "all India" economic drive can help prove naysayers wrong.

In India, democracy defines itself by its ability to "get the government". The Modi government should continue to bear that in mind as it moves forward to manage, if not meet, the incredible expectations that its election has engendered among not just foreign business leaders but its own people.

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### What's the use of new voter list?

Sometimes an event can change the course of life. Writing letters in newspapers was my passion and I used to consider it a sacred duty to point out the many problems that are besieging our country. But after January 5, it has become meaningless. Nothing matters anymore as a government was formed ignoring people's basic voting right.

Now we have learned that the Election Commission is preparing to update the voter list and include new voters. It will cost a huge amount of taxpayers' money, but it will not bring any fruitful results because people will not go to the polling booths unless the caretaker government system is reinstated.

Nur Jahan  
Chittagong

### Remembering Pandit Ramkanai Das

Famous classical and folk song scholar Pandit Ramkanai Das passed away on September 5, 2014 at the age of 79. His father Roshiklal Das and mother Dibyomoyee Das were also folk singers. His family has been preserving and practicing folk music for generations. His parents, grandfather Prakash Chandra Talukdar and great grandfather Ramcharan Talukdar were all renowned bards of the greater Sylhet region. In recognition of his contribution to Bangla folk music, he received several awards including Ekushey Padak, Bangla Academy honorary fellowship- 2012, etc. He has left us but his presence in the musical arena will remain alive forever.

Safina  
On e-mail

### Frightening impacts of global warming

In the August 25, 2014 issue of The Daily Star, there were articles about two places which are far apart. But both were chilling reminders that global warming is not just a theory. It is already here and having devastating effects.

In the back page, the article "Polar ice shrinking rapidly" states that the two largest ice sheets in Greenland and Antarctica, are melting and getting reduced in size at an astounding 120 cubic miles each year, clearly contributing to rising oceans. The other reports that (on page 13) tidal surges at the full moon in June and July of this year were much higher than usual and flooded 13 villages situated near rivers that are directly connected to the Bay of Bengal saline water. The brackish water entered tube wells, making them inoperative. Around 30,000 people have been affected and can no longer access drinking water from these tube wells. These incidents are directly related to climate change. The world should better sit up and take notice of this.

H. Imam  
Gulshan, Dhaka

### Comments on news analysis, "Our neo-historians," published on September 4, 2014

#### Dev Saha

It is rather sickening to see some people are rewriting history with no corroboration of any historical facts. They think, if they keep repeating certain things, those will become historical facts. This kind of distortion should be considered a serious crime against the nation.

#### Abul Kalam

I was a student of BIUET at that time and I was sitting in front of the dais from where Bangabandhu was delivering the historical speech of March 7, 1971. He never uttered 'Joy Pakistan'. The mass people present there were not in a mood to tolerate the word 'Joy Pakistan'. AK Khondokar's assertion is completely unfounded and devoid of truth.

#### A Freedom Fighter

From this discovery by AK Khondokar, it seems probably he was not in the gathering at that time. A person with zero IQ would realise that after having said, "This is the struggle for emancipation, this is the struggle for independence" followed by 'Joy Bangla', if the leader would say 'Joy Pakistan', the whole essence of the speech would have been nullified. Moreover, could Khondokar show any such thing that the newspapers in the then East Pakistan printed?

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### "Padma corruption probe laid to rest" (September 4, 2014)

#### Sayed Rahman

Padma corruption probe laid to rest or the matter has come to the surface again? This massive project should be kept above politics.