

## Modi's assurances on LBA, Teesta water deal

### Need to accelerate process of delivery

THE talks between Bangladesh prime minister Sheikh Hasina and her Indian counterpart Narendra Modi on the sidelines of the 18th Saarc summit in Kathmandu, have ended on a positive note. Indian premier has reassured Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina that two longstanding bilateral issues between next-door neighbours, Teesta water sharing deal and Land Boundary Agreement (LBA), would be resolved sooner rather than later. The good news is, unlike in the past, the LBA bill this time has not met with any opposition at the Indian parliamentary standing committee on the external affairs ministry and is now waiting to be sent to the next parliamentary session for its passage into a law. What's more, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, who earlier in 2011 opposed Teesta water deal, has now reportedly had a change of heart thereby brightening the prospect of clinching the treaty.

These are undoubtedly very welcome developments. Needless to say, these two unresolved issues have remained as a thorn in the side of the two neighbours' bilateral relations. If the Indian Prime Minister Modi is finally able to deliver on his promise, it will indeed prove to be a milestone in the furtherance of good neighbourly relations between Bangladesh and India.

We believe given the huge mandate he has received from his people, Indian prime minister can make a true difference; he can well throw his weight behind the issue and accelerate the process of reaching the deals within a foreseeable timeframe.

## Probe committee offers nothing

### Failure to find cause unacceptable

THE nationwide electricity shutdown on November 1 and the failure to find the reasons thereof by the committee are not only unexpected but downright disheartening. We have all been informed how due to a combined effect of fall in voltage and system frequency caused a chain reaction that shutdown plants originating from Bheramara. Yet the probe committee that published its final report has failed to trace the cause of this low voltage. Indeed the report has skirted the issue in entirety. What the committee states is that this was due to professional negligence of some officials who failed to take corrective action at the National Load Despatch Centre. It has basically recommended a few steps that will, hopefully, help avoid a repetition of the November 1 incident that plunged the whole nation into darkness for more than half the day.

That is all very nice. But the fact remains is that we still do not know precisely why electricity failed on a national scale. We have been told that the safety measures did not work on that day. It still does not explain the precise reason for grid failure. The failure to pinpoint the exact cause of such failure rests squarely on the probe committee. Their passing on the buck to others is hardly helpful for anyone. We still do not know the level of loss caused to the economy due to the daylong shutdown. And since we now "officially" have no idea precisely what went wrong, how we can prepare for the

## Fading memories of Mujibnagar Government

ABDUL MATIN

IT is sad but true that, nowadays, we hardly hear of or talk about the Provisional Government of Bangladesh, formed on April 10, 1971 and popularly known as the Mujibnagar Government. On the contrary, what we get to hear is when some high government official is caught with a fake freedom fighter's certificate.

Why is this apathy towards this government which conducted the War of Independence against Pakistan and led it to victory on December 16, 1971? Shouldn't history be told in its true perspective?

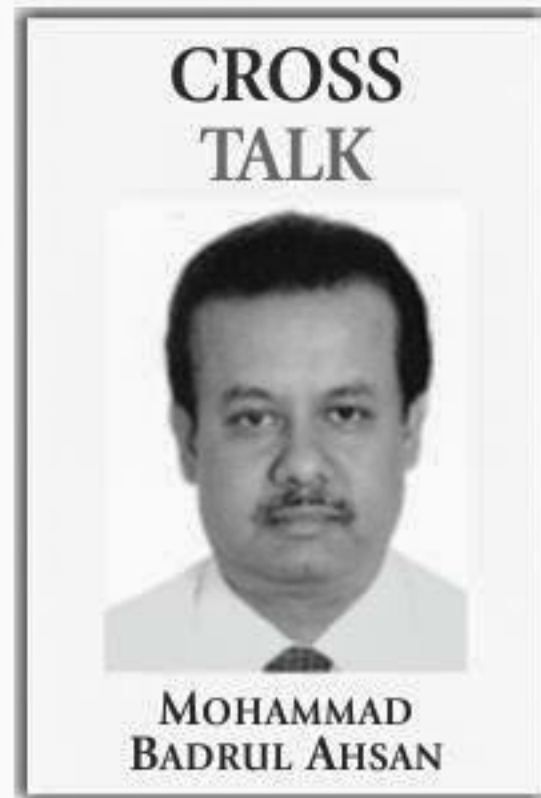
No matter how some may try to distort history, there is no scope to undermine the role of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the Father of the Nation, who united and mobilised the country to fight for our independence. Similarly, there is also no scope to undermine the role played by the Mujibnagar Government, headed by Syed Nazrul Islam as acting president in absence of Bangabandhu and led by Tajuddin Ahmad as prime minister. The Mujibnagar Government earned the confidence of the Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, who sheltered ten million refugees from Bangladesh and helped the Mukti Bahini (Freedom Fighters) with arms and ammunitions.

Unfortunately, we have done very little to project the history of the Mujibnagar Government and the people who worked for it. Every time I pass by 8 Theatre Road (now Shakespeare Sarani) in Kolkata, which housed the Mujibnagar Government during the war, I wonder why we did not build a museum there and call it Mujibnagar Museum to commemorate the War of Independence and the role of the war-time government. For about nine months, it was the centre of all activities of the war-time cabinet. A museum in Kolkata could project to the outside world how Bangabandhu inspired the nation to fight for independence, how the Pakistan army and their local collaborators committed genocide on the innocent civilians of Bangladesh and killed the Bengali intellectuals in cold blood, how ten million refugees took shelter in India, how the valiant freedom fighters fought against the Pakistan army and forced them to surrender with the help of the Indian army and, lastly, how the Mujibnagar Government, imbued by the ideals of Bangabandhu, conducted the war from the same premises.

Unfortunately, the premises at 8 Shakespeare Sarani now houses the Kolkata Branch of Sri Aurobindo Ashram. Is it not possible to regain possession of the premises with the help of the Indian government and build the proposed Mujibnagar Museum? It is reported that the Indian government once offered the premises to Bangladesh but we failed to make use of it for unknown reasons. Could we now take the initiative to build the museum?

The writer is a former chief engineer of Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission.

# Rumours are like ripples in a cornfield



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

THESE are more rumours reverberating through this land of ours than there are stars in the sky. Every crime is complicated, every corruption is convoluted and every crisis is circuitous. And rumours are leading to speculations as abidingly as faith leads to worship. A Jewish proverb says that we shouldn't witness with our mouths what we don't see with our eyes. But when it comes to an absorbing speculation that gives this government anywhere between three and six months, it's hard to tell who is living in his mouth and who is living in his eyes.

This political uncertainty that hangs in suspense over us is comparable to a block of marble that can be sculpted by anyone as he pleases. Be it the Freudian slip of prime minister's advisor, or interneccine battles pitched by the student wing of the ruling party, or the controversy over the arrest of an axed minister who sneaked into the country from his temporary exile, every twist and turn of events is providing grist to the roaring rumour mill that weaves them into a coherent purpose. Like all roads lead to Rome, most rumours lead to the same compulsive conclusion: The days of this government are numbered.

How is it going to happen? Different deductions inhabit different mouths but the onion peels down to the same ominous nub: Foreign powers are once again working to refurbish our political landscape. How is that possible? India, which has zealously protected this government so far, is ready to cut some slack to give foreign hands enough room so that they can engineer the change. Proof of that pudding is in the eating. Modi and Obama are getting dangerously close. The US president has even agreed to grace the Republic Day of India as chief guest. Rumours are always quick to connect the dots!

Who is going to win and who is going to lose? One compelling version has it that this government will be forced to announce midterm elections and whoever wins the majority will come to power. Another version sees the ruling party completely out of the picture. Yet, the third one sees the sphinx of a third force rising from the ashes of the two large political parties and their alliance partners. BNP leaders are longing for the change to favour them. The

ruling party leaders rule out these rumours as nothing but harebrained concoctions of disgruntled rivals.

What are the ordinary people thinking? They are like the prisoners in Plato's *Allegory of the Cave*, who spend their lives facing a blank wall. These prisoners are constrained to guess the name of shadows projected on that wall by things passing in front of a fire burning behind them. Trapped between unrelenting past and unforeseeable future, they couldn't care less. Deep inside their heart they are frustrated that politicians don't give a flying fig about them. These politicians no longer even need their votes to call it a government!

How does it matter then if this government goes or stays? Some people are not so sure. They don't want to see yet another 1/11, because they believe this nation is still paying dearly for the distortions created by that interregnum. Those who had famously vowed to put the derailed train back on track left in a hurry after the track itself started to get damaged.

The skeptics argue that if the improvised elections of January 5 proved anything it was that the track is now even more disjointed. BNP had conspired to hijack that track in 2006, and the caretaker government fiddled with it for two years. A notch above them, the present government is creating magic: Their train is running on an invisible track.

The rumours on the expiry of this government have legs. For the umpteenth time, the BNP chairperson said last week that the end of this government is drawing near. Other opposition politicians are also making similar predictions. Talk show guests are regularly practising it like Goebbelsian propaganda, as if repeating it too many times is going to bring it on.

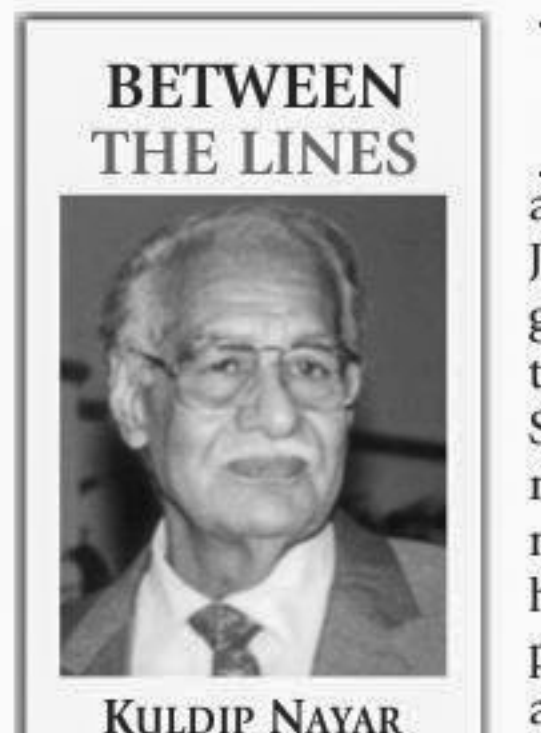
Rumours are always rooted in intentions. Their next step is speculation, which may or may not always reach its logical conclusion. But rumours work like a harsh sea that throws back to the shore the garbage dumped into it.

Conspiracy theories are a cottage industry in this country, not only because we have got credulous minds but also because we lack credibility. The change may or may not come, but the appetite for it is certainly there. Susan J. Palmer explains in her book *Aliens Adored* that rumours are like ripples in a cornfield, which may be ephemeral but they do indicate which way the wind is blowing.

More than our mouths and eyes, we have been witnessing with our ears.

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## Indo-US partnership for arms



KULDIP NAYYAR

BY any yardstick, the participation of US President Barack Obama at the Republic Day parade in January is a recognition of India's growing stature. His phone call to Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif was, no doubt, an effort to make amends of sorts. But it does not hide the fact that Washington has chosen New Delhi as its partner to advance the policies and programmes it has in view in this part of the world.

Washington is for free enterprise and leads the capitalist world. Its policies are aimed at benefiting big enterprises and the rich. In Prime Minister Modi, it has a tailor-made partner. Even the right of centre Obama looks liberal compared to Modi. Why the two have joined hands is not for economic reasons, although New Delhi will benefit because the American industry is bound to make way towards India.

The real reason is what is hawked about as the strategic partnership. America wants to sell weapons, an underpinning of its industrial growth. India is starved of advanced military technology and hopes to get it from the American-led West.

Why New Delhi has bought the post-Bofors guns at an exorbitant price of some Rs. 15,000 crores is because of its insistence that the suppliers put up the manufacturing plant in India. Since the country faces an attack on two fronts at the same time, as National Security Advisor Ajit Doval has warned, it is frantic to have weapons from whatever source it can obtain them. Fortunately, Russia is still India's dependent supplier and does not mind the purchase from the West, as was the case in the past. And New Delhi has gained from this.

Obama, no doubt, likes democratic India, however disorderly. But his main purpose is to span the distance between India and Pakistan. He does not like the way in which the Taliban are proliferating in Afghanistan and to some extent in Pakistan. True, Islamabad is itself to blame for creating the Frankenstein, but never expected the Taliban to invade it first. With the outside Taliban, supported by the home grown crop, Pakistan has become an 'epicentre of terrorism' in the eyes of the world.

How does Washington wish if the democratic India could join the fight against the Taliban. But rightly does not want to commit its forces in that area knowing how America bled in Vietnam when it joined the war there. The fundamentalists in the area may find it a God sent opportunity to launch a jihad against the infidels.

There is no prospect of India and Pakistan normalising their relations till they shed mistrust in each other. It has not happened since the partition of India some 70 years ago. It was sad to see how the prime ministers of India and Pakistan avoided each other at the Saarc Summit in Kathmandu.

I recall the founder of Pakistan Quaid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah saying more than once before he won a 'homeland for the Muslims' that the two countries would live like the US and Canada. Although he had propagated the two-nation theory he did not want religion to be mixed with politics after partition. That was probably the reason he never wanted the migration of population after the creation of Pakistan.

To put the blame of enmity between the two countries on Pakistan alone would be unfair. The Congress accepted

the partition formula even though Mahatma Gandhi had warned that the partition would be over his dead body.

Keeping that spirit alive, India went for rule of the constitution which knows no of parochialism and treats every person, belonging to any religion, an equal citizen with all the rights. No doubt, India is a secular state, but lately it tends to be tilting towards Hindutava. This is a dangerous fallout of the Modi phenomena, who is an old RSS parcharak (preacher).

True, the Hindus and the Muslims in India are equal before the law. Yet the contamination of civil services, particularly of the police, has taken a toll; the force sees to it that the Hindus have the last word.

Since I cannot put myself in the shoes of Muslims, however hard I may try, I do see that the phenomena of Modi has worked in favour of Hindutava. He is making it hard for the Muslims and the liberals to accept him when he continues to seek the RSS leadership for advice.

This may well be the reason why RSS Chief Mohan Bhagwat has announced with pride that the Hindu raj has returned after 800 years. He forgets that India is ruled by the constitution even though the Hindus are in a majority. I wish the new generation of Hindus realises this and goes out of the way to reach the Muslims and other minorities. Sadly, this is not the case.

Unfortunately, Pakistan is brought in all the time in discussions. Things are different. That country has opted for Islam, which is the State's religion. India, nurtured in



the atmosphere of the national struggle, led by Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Patel, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and Rafi Ahmed Kidwai, could not have accepted anything except the ethos of the independence movement, pluralism. The Muslim League acted differently. It appealed in the name of Islam and mixed religion with politics. Unfortunately, Islamabad still does the same.

The Modi phenomena reminds me of those days when every Muslim was expected to be a member of the Muslim League and a supporter of Pakistan. The BJP's propaganda is similar. This is a betrayal of the national struggle and its ethos of secularism. Why does not Modi ever recall those days during his speeches to remind the nation of its diversity and the sentiment of togetherness still running through all?

Modi can at least suggest some reforms in Hinduism, which continues to follow the archaic customs and inhuman traditions. The stigma of caste still besmeared the face of Hindu religion. I have never heard even a word against such a practice from the BJP leaders.

Only a few days ago, a girl married her boyfriend belonging to a different caste in a temple. She was strangled to death by the parents themselves. I do not know why such murders are called honour killing. They should be called 'criminal killing.'

The writer is an eminent Indian columnist.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### Making a mockery of V-sign

Nowadays the widespread use of the victory sign has become a matter of mockery. Everyone likes to show it no matter what. Maybe the politicians would secure the first place in case a competition of showing this



sign would take place. The politicians of our country never hesitate to show the sign 'V' whether it is victory in election or a death penalty for crime against humanity. "The order to hang has been issued...let the photojournalists take my picture," said Mobarak Hossain, a war criminal, flashing a V-sign, after a war crimes tribunal convicted and sentenced him to death. We wonder, don't they have any shame?!  
**Md. Yasir Arafat Arman**  
 Department of Sociology  
 University of Dhaka

### Can't Ekushey and Hay Festival go together?

We, the literature loving people, keep waiting for occasions like Hay Festival. With much enthusiasm, this year's Hay Festival was held at the Bangla Academy premises from November 20 to 22. I want to give an idea to the festival organisers: it would be better if this festival is merged with the Ekushey Book Fair. Ekushey Book Fair will not overshadow Hay Festival as both these popular occasions have their uniqueness. Thanks to TDS for being the event partner of Hay Festival.  
**Samiul Raijul**  
 School of Business, North South University

### Prospect of a second Dhaka-Sylhet road link

At present the only road that connects Dhaka with Sylhet is N2 via Bhairab Bridge. The printed maps as well as Google Earth show that there is another road, R-370, which connects Mymensingh and Sunamganj. But in reality about 20 km road between Dharampasha and Jamalganj upazila of Sunamganj is yet to be complete.

I decided to explore the area myself. As we reached there it was raining and the village roads inside the haor area became unsuitable for our motorbikes. But we didn't give up; we pushed the motorbikes from Joysree union of Dharampasha upazila to Mannan Ghat of Jamalganj upazila. We took hundreds of photographs which project that the people living in these two upazillas have cultivated every possible inch of the vast lands. The villagers mentioned that lack of communication during emergency, especially when someone is critically ill, is the most serious problem of the area.

If this 20 km road R-370 is completed, people of Sylhet division will get an alternate and shorter road to come to Dhaka via Mymensingh. Secondly, if the rail link is extended from Mohanganj to Sylhet-Chhatak railroad, alternate railway link can be established, too. We have seen how R&H department has built the 66 km excellent highway inside the Chalan Bil connecting Bonopara and Hatikumrul. Assuming the expertise of our engineers, we strongly believe that soon the incomplete portion of R-370 will be completed and a second road communication will be established with Sylhet division.  
**Anwarul Hasan Sufi, Ph.D**  
 Professor  
 Department of Psychology, University of Rajshahi

### Comments on news report, "BCL activists assault 2 teachers," published on November 25, 2014

**Ahmed Aziz**  
 Not surprising at all; surely no measures will be taken by the ruling party against the perpetrators as they depend on them to maintain "democracy" on the street.

**Redgreen**  
 Where are the police and RAB? Had it been Shibir or Chhatra Dal, then by now dozens of arrest would have been done already.

### "PM for prompt, proper action" (Nov. 25, 2014)

**SM**  
 Easy solution; go and get all BNP people whether they have done anything or not. Don't touch anyone with AL label at all.

**Snr Citizen**  
 Highly appreciable order.

**Redgreen**  
 All these goons and criminals are under the patronage of political leaders. What sort of appreciable work done? Every day these BCL criminals are creating havoc all over Bangladesh.

### "Zero progress in two years" (Nov. 23, 2014)

**S. M. Iftekhar Ahmed**  
 Thanks to these inept, incompetent companies; PDB is equally responsible for not cancelling the contract with the blacklisted company.