

## Chilling truths about political degeneracy

### Treat Brac research as pathfinder

MAy be our political parties, especially the ruling party, won't see eye to eye with the diagnosis of the Brac Institute of Governance and Development about multi-party democracy having degenerated in an ascending order over the last three decades. But this finds resonance with what we in the media have known and dilated on through our reports, analyses and comments. Public perception too is no different, as is reflected by opinion polls from time to time.

The Brac report aptly points out that the so-called multi-party democracy has turned into 'partyarchy.' This means political parties have shown the tendency to exerting overwhelming influence on state and non-state institutions in almost alternating sequences. This played havoc on governance and development, producing a disconnect between them. Resultantly, democratic development was stymied whilst economy progressed, the drivers of which have been the people. But it is they who have been receiving a raw deal.

While the parties do not practice democracy within themselves, their financing is reliant on business men who are also dominant in parliament. The central leaders dominate at the grassroots and women are marginalised in political parties. An inclusive and participatory local government system remains a far cry.

Our point is, the fact of being elected to public office should be treated as a chance to serve the public rather than bend the system for personal gains.

In the end, we thank Brac for the comprehensive and thought-provoking report it has presented to the nation. Let it be put to good use.

## The Shitalakkhya's plight

### And no one cares

IF pictures speak a thousand words then the one carried by this newspaper on the front page yesterday showing the condition of a major river speaks volumes. The unscrupulous sand traders have filled in almost half of the Shitalakkhya east of the Kanchpur Bridge creating an artificial bend.

It speaks volumes about man's greed overriding the need to protect one's national resources. It speaks volumes about how the lead agency in this regard -- the BIWTA -- has turned a blind eye and allowed the perpetrators to wreak havoc with our rivers. And certainly the blind eye of the BIWTA is not for free.

It is alarming that most of the major rivers skirting the capital are in a moribund state. The Buriganga is all but dead given the severe state it is in due to heavy pollution. And add to that the encroachments on the river which have caused it to become almost unusable.

The current condition of the Shitalakkhya or other rivers has not happened in a day. We had been publishing such pictures from time to time. It is therefore shocking that the government agencies by not stopping the rot have colluded in the killing of a river. It needs no expert to say that the artificial bend will be the cause of siltation, which is a character of any river, thus causing it to become sedimented quickly.

Could we ask the relevant ministries to please wake up to the slow death of our rivers? And, would it be asking too much of the BIWTA to explain the reason for their inaction

# Criticism is good for Israel

FAKHRUDDIN AHMED

ISRAEL'S relentless settlement-building in East Jerusalem and the West Bank has reached a tipping point. Realising that the creeping annexation of the occupied territories will make the two-state solution impossible, European nations are belatedly beginning to recognise Palestinian statehood en masse.

The status quo, favoured by the politically powerful right-wing Israeli settlers, is the one-state solution. It is not pretty. More than 50 discriminatory laws restrict the rights of the 20% of Israel's citizens who are Arab. According to one poll, a third of Israelis want to strip Arab citizens of their voting rights. Foreign Affairs Minister Avigdor Lieberman favours offering Arab Israelis "inducements" to "transfer" out of Israel, prompting Israeli President Reuven Rivlin, a decent man, to lament that Israel is a "sick" society in need of treatment for its anti-Palestinian bigotry.

While the Jewish settlers in the occupied territories enjoy liberal democratic rule, the native Palestinians live under cruel military occupation and suffer daily humiliation. They are denied civil rights. A bi-national state with two peoples unequal under the law is apartheid, not democracy.

Expropriating Palestinian lands at will, Israel has strategically arrayed the settlements and linked them to Israel proper through an intricate network of roads closed to Palestinians, in order to make occupation irreversible. If these settlements are incorporated into Israel, a Palestinian state will be a collection of Bantustans.

If Israel overreaches and caters to the religious chauvinism of its extremist citizenry by legislating prayer rights for Jews at the compound of the Al Aqsa mosque, Islam's third-holiest shrine, cataclysmic events could unfold.

The Israeli-Jordanian peace treaty of 1994 stipulates exclusive Muslim prayer rights at the Al Aqsa mosque compound. Former Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon violated that treaty by storming the compound like a conqueror in 2000, triggering the second Intifada. Al Aqsa mosque is an Islamic issue. Its perceived "desecration" may not only trigger a third Intifada, it could inflame passions around the Muslim world, possibly igniting a conflagration.

In such an eventuality, Israel will not suffer many consequences beyond its borders, as it does not have diplomatic relations with most Muslim nations. Israel's staunchest backer, America, does, and will bear the brunt. Unlike Israel, America has business interests in most Muslim nations, and those will take a direct hit.

The world sees American and Israeli policies in the Middle East as one and the same. In the interest of both the nations, it is imperative that there be some daylight between the two.

America has vetoed 41 UN Security Council resolutions to protect Israel from the condemnation of the rest of the world. US vetoes in defiance of world opinion erode America's moral power and, in a convoluted way, weaken Israel, which relies on America's hard and soft power.

If Israel annexes the West Bank through settlement-building in the next 20 years, the Palestinians will not stop resisting. The Muslim world will not simply give up. They will attempt to fight back and exact vengeance not only on

Israel, but also on its chief patron, America.

Cynics contend that by making impossible demands of Iran through the US, Israel is torpedoing US-led negotiations that aim to relieve sanctions on Iran in exchange for Iran eschewing its nuclear ambitions, and that Iran-US rapprochement is not in Israel's interest because it will devalue Israel as the United States' strategic ally against a common enemy. But perpetual, punitive sanctions against the Iranian people on the pretext that Iran may harbour nuclear ambitions is immoral, because both the US and Israel are nuclear powers.

It is not Iran's power, but Israel's abuse of it that may undermine Israel. Reminiscent of apartheid South Africa in the 1980s, the boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) movement against Israel is gaining traction. Like the anti-apartheid movement that isolated South Africa and made it an international pariah, the BDS movement could do the same to Israel.

Many Jews may emigrate from a country built on dispossessing, dehumanising and oppressing another people, which are antithetical to the Jewish tradition of compassion, tolerance and pluralism. If enough of them decide that it is not worth living in a country that is isolated in the world and diminished in the eyes of Europe and America, that, not Iran's economic or nuclear power, will spell Israel's doom.

The fact is, as Israel became economically and militarily more powerful than all the Arab nations combined, it lost its appetite for negotiations with the Palestinians. Israel needs a

leader endowed with the foresight to settle with the Palestinians while there is time. Distant rumblings should perturb Israel: Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the No. 1 recruiting tool for the Islamic State terrorists.

Since America supports Israel no matter what, and will veto any resolution that makes even reasonable demands of Israel in the UN Security Council, seeking fairness, Muslim nations may slowly abandon the West and align with China, the ascendant superpower in the East, who is courting them with sweet trade deals.

Israel's founder, David Ben-Gurion, would have jumped at the bargain of Arab recognition of Israel within the pre-1967 border offered by the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002. Israel has not responded to the Initiative, nor ever offered its own peace plan. Just as hard-line Israeli policies engendered Hamas, gentler Israeli policies will empower Palestinian peace-seekers.

Last summer's Gaza war was a game changer. The world was horrified at Israel's disproportionate use of force that caused massive Palestinian civilian casualties. No propaganda could neutralise what people witnessed with their own eyes. The war made the world pro-Palestinian.

The Israelis and the Palestinians urgently need to separate and cool off. The alternative is burgeoning sectarian strife leading to catastrophe.

Israel should welcome criticism from friends and not label those anti-Semitic. Nations should not be afraid of losing an "eye" for an "eye" vote for a Palestinian state. Since the two-state solution is also Israel's official policy, it should welcome criticism of its actions that make such a possibility distant.

The writer is a Rhodes Scholar.

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

### No prior plan to contain oil spill?

After a tanker capsized with 3.8 lakh litres of oil on December 9 in a river of the Sundarbans, the oil spread over several kilometers of the forest area which is threatening its biodiversity. We have seen



PHOTO: STAR

that till date no concrete decision or measures have been taken to reduce the effect. The government directed the local people to collect oil from the river without even considering the health risk. There must have been a disaster management plan as these vessels regularly ply through these river routes. If we fail to contain such type of hazard, then what will happen when vessels will ply this route carrying tons of coal for Rampal power plant?

Md. Arifur Rahman  
Environment Counselor  
Mongla Export Processing Zone, BEPZA

### Their sacrifice for freedom must be required

The other day, a news on 'Birangonas' caught my attention. These women were sexually assaulted, oppressed and molested during the Liberation War by the Pakistani army and their cohorts. Reading about the miserable condition of these great women, I couldn't hold my tears. The Birangonas are still suffering from social stigma and leading inhuman lives. What a shame for us as a nation! Instead of honouring them, society has alienated them. Most of these war heroines are at the fog end of their lives who wished to lead the rest of their lives with respect. We should come forward to help them as they have sacrificed so much and we owe them a lot.

Md Zohaed Emran  
A banker

### TTP's brutal massacre

TTP's recent massacre in an army operated school in the city of Peshawar of Pakistan is one of the most horrible events of the present time. TTP's brutality shocked the whole world. At least 141 people were killed; among them 132 were school children. Pakistan government should take immediate action to punish the culprits.

Md. Yamin Khan  
Shyamoli, Dhaka

### Comments on commentary, "The massacred children are 'Ours'," published on December 19, 2014

#### Neils

As an American my heart goes out to the people of Pakistan and especially to the families who have lost loved ones. I know that many Muslims are angry with the West, but you should know that there is also much anger in the West about the treatment of the Palestinians, even among Jews. We all must fight for justice and to root out the people who think that killing is the answer. We stand with you.

#### Hanjala Galib

I admired the point explained in your commentary; this is the high time for the Muslim ummah to understand the actual position- inner and outer. The editor did his job excellently on behalf of all the Muslim....thanks to him.

#### Salauddin

Pakistan breeds extremism through many religious organisations, most of which speak in a similar way without the proper knowledge of Quran and Hadith.

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### "December 16<sup>th</sup>, Gen Niazi and Imran Khan" (Dec. 16, 2014)

#### Anwar

Pakistani people need to know the history of their army.

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### "Genocide they wrote" (Dec. 16, 2014)

#### FBM. Salman Shatabdee

Pakistan is now facing their troubles as the fallout of their sins.

#### M. Emad

Bangladesh should try these 195 Pakistan army officers (even in absentia) for genocide, rape and war crimes.

#### Saurav

It is a shame that India let off this butcher Niazi and 93,000 prisoners of war unharmed.

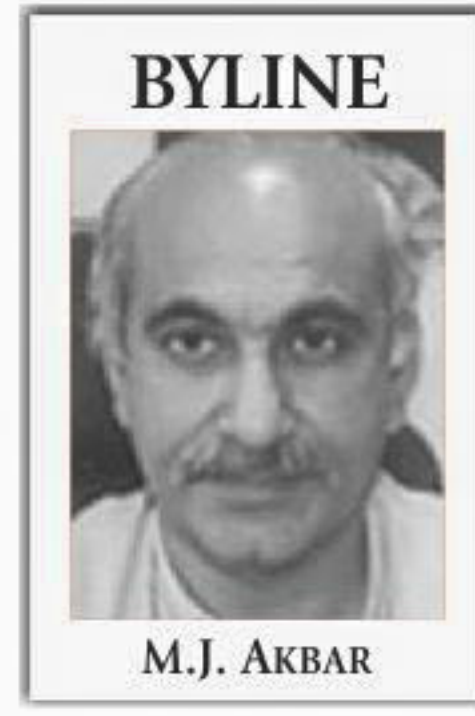
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### "Dhaka eyes joint venture in India" (Dec. 14, 2014)

#### Prof. M. Hoque

I personally think that our diplomatic, commercial, educational and cultural relationship with our big neighbour India should be accelerated and should be based on fair play and mutual respect.

# India wins the Kashmir elections



### BYLINE

M.J. AKBAR

AS political parties wait, with either bated breath or resigned despair, for poll results on December 23, one thing is already clear: India has won the Kashmir elections.

There was no violence, which is the terrorist's only hope against the power of democracy. The turnout, including in the core strongholds of extremists, was either extraordinary or exceptional. And the crowds that came to greet and cheer Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the valley were unprecedented for any leader from outside Kashmir at election time. It is difficult to predict how many seats BJP will get, but it is certain that its vote will increase hugely in constituencies where it was a bare presence before. The change, in that sense, has already come. People have responded to the theme message of development, encouraged by the urgency of the prime minister's commitment to their welfare after the recent floods.

I write this without the benefit of near-sight or hindsight. The exit polls have not come; nor did I visit Jammu and Kashmir during the long campaign season. But it is obvious that of the four principal parties in contest, two, National Conference and Congress, are in a tight race to finish last. Which of these partners, who have governed with an arrogant mix of cynicism and bombast, will actually pick up the lead medal remains to be seen. But the National Conference is headed towards a long exile, and the Congress is comatose in yet another state, which it has ruled for over a decade.

The BJP lost the general elections in both 2004 and 2009, but the party retained a substantial and substantive presence in its base-states. The chief ministers kept the party in business and then led the revival, most notably Narendra Modi in Gujarat. He made good governance, effective development and quality infrastructure the fulcrum of his appeal. He caught the mood of the 21st century, particularly the youth.

After a quarter century of emotionalism and perilously high voltage politics of creed and caste, the young yearned for something different, something sensible, something relevant to their true needs -- for a better life, and within their own lifetimes. You can see the nuanced pattern of the vote in Gujarat. During the Modi decade, BJP did much better in the Assembly elections than in national elections -- until of course the tsunami this year, when the Gujarat experience blossomed into an India promise.

*The polls of 2014 must deliver a government that sets aside the temptations of self-serving rhetoric and gets down to giving every citizen of Jammu and Kashmir a government that is synonymous with the welfare of the people. This, at the very least, requires cooperation between state and Centre.*

It does not take rocket science to decipher that the young of Jammu and Kashmir and Jharkhand want precisely what their counterparts in Gujarat have experienced, starting with electricity and a better habitat. Today, there is no generator on sale in Gujarat because the state has about 40% more power capacity than it consumes. No one who can afford it lives without a generator in J&K and Jharkhand. Electricity does not merely mean heaters and air conditioners for the rich. More important, it enables the child with just a bulb in the room to study his texts in the evening. Electricity is a necessity, not a luxury.

The people of Kashmir have understood that the politics of religion is barren territory. All they have to do, for confirmation, is glance at Pakistan; the barbarism of its fundamentalists, its unrelenting violence, chaos and fractured polity. The horrifying slaughter of innocent school-children in Peshawar occurred during this election. It has sent a chill into the heart of every child, everywhere, but most tellingly in Kashmir. A schoolchild is preparing for life; fanatics offer nothing but merciless, rampant death. Political scientists have noted that people pull together when danger threatens. The danger of falling into the grip of fanatics stares at Kashmir's children and young.

No businessman will invest in a battle zone, so Pakistan's economy gets lip service while the state stands helpless. Second, Kashmiri youth can see where the rest of India is headed. Kashmiri merchants sell their products in every city. Tourists arrive with an income surplus to spend on leisure. There is the possibility of employment in a hundred different sectors across the breadth of a subcontinent. Why should Kashmiris deny themselves the visible benefits of a new Indian narrative? India is pulling ahead on the basis of a modern definition of a nation state: democracy, freedom of speech and faith, gender equality and economic equity. Pakistan has an uncertain democracy in which the army wants an institutionalised place in office. There is faith supremacy and gender regression. And the poor are fed the opium of fanaticism.

An election, however, is only the start of a process. The polls of 2014 must deliver a government that sets aside the temptations of self-serving rhetoric and gets down to giving every citizen of Jammu and Kashmir a government that is synonymous with the welfare of the people. This, at the very least, requires cooperation between state and Centre.

This election should be the moment when the 21st century reaches Jammu and Kashmir.

The writer is Editor of *The Sunday Guardian*, published from Delhi, *India on Sunday*, published from London and Editorial Director, *India Today* and *Headlines Today*.

## Is Nazism rising again in Germany?

ABDUL MATIN

ABOUT 10,000 people took to the streets against "Islamisation of the West" in the East German city of Dresden on December 15. "No Sharia law in Europe!" one banner said. A counter-demonstration of more than 5,000 people was also held without any major incident. Dresden hosts a movement called Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the West (Pegida), which staged the rally.

Chancellor Angela Merkel warned Germans not to be exploited by extremists. "There's freedom of assembly in Germany, but there's no place for incitement and lies about people who come to us from other countries," Merkel said in Berlin. Earlier, Justice Minister Heiko Maas called Pegida's protests "a disgrace." But the Eurosceptic party Alternativ fuer Deutschland (AfD) is sympathetic. "Most of their demands are legitimate," said Bernd Lucke, leader of AfD, which has campaigned for a tougher policy on immigration. In the western city of Cologne, about 15,000 people attended a demonstration to promote tolerance and open-mindedness, under the motto: "You are Cologne—no Nazis here." The recent demonstrations prompted a public discussion around immigration. There has been a surge in immigration in Germany, fuelled by the wars in Syria and Iraq. Germany takes in more asylum seekers than any other country. Germany expects 200,000 asylum seekers in 2014, up from 127,000 in 2013.

How is immigration related to Islamisation? Any German citizen can support or oppose immigration, but why should an organisation against immigration be named Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the West and allowed to function in Germany? Is it not an incitement by one segment of the population against another? Does it not fall under the purview of the Public Incitement Act? The Act clearly states: "Whoever, in a manner that is capable of disturbing the public peace: (1) incites hatred against segments of the population or calls for violent or arbitrary measures against them; (2) or assaults the human dignity of others by insulting, maliciously maligning, or defaming segments of the population, shall be punished with imprisonment from three months to five years."

Are Germans allowed to utter any word against Semitism or Holocaust? No. Then why are they allowed to spread hatred against Islam or Muslims? Is it not double standard? It looks like Nazism is rising again in Germany in another form though some sane voices are also heard against it. Unless it is nipped in the bud now, it may be too late to control it later. After all, Germany knows better than any other country the consequences of the rise of Nazism if it is not controlled at an early stage.

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