

Continued operation against BNP

We condemn it, but Khaleda shouldn't hurt the economy

FIRST the BNP Chairperson was confined in her office, and continues to be so. And she was denied her fundamental rights of free movement and assembly. And now the acting GS of the party has been taken into custody, we do not know on what grounds. We find it absolutely unacceptable and condemnable. Yesterday, in this very column we had opined that Khaleda Zia has been wronged and we reiterate that position. However, by calling indefinite blockade Khaleda Zia is doing a wrong to the country; blockade will hurt the economy severely.

We understand the frustration of the BNP chairperson, being incarcerated for more than 72 hours and being prevented to leave her Gulshan office. We fully sympathise with her state of mind and we have made our position amply clear on the shrinking of political space for her party and have expressed our support for her position. In this regard the prime minister's speech to the nation on Monday was disappointing in as much as it failed to address the issue of muzzle of the opposition's voice that is pushing the opposition gradually against the wall. The government policy will serve no useful purpose and might indeed prove self-defeating.

However, we feel that the announcement of blockade lacks rationale. We are not quite sure what 'blockade' really implies. However, it will certainly inconvenience the man on the streets as we have seen happen with the virtual blockade imposed by the government on January 5. And given the proclivities of the mischief mongers we cannot write off the possibility of their indulging in all sorts of mischief, even sabotage activities. Blockade is a bad idea and should be withdrawn immediately.

Record export earnings

Maintaining momentum is the challenge

A milestone has been reached in export-earning. For the first time it has surpassed previous records notching up US \$30.17 billion, representing 16.65 percent growth at the close of the last fiscal year. But this record growth comes with a couple of critical lessons that must be heeded if we are to build robustly up on the buoyant note the last fiscal ended.

The message cannot be lost on us that the last six months of 2013 witnessed serious political turmoil that jolted trade and commerce in the country rather severely. In spite of this and thanks to the determination of entrepreneurs, aided by government incentives, to step up productivity the last fiscal ended with a record good earning. Of course, from January to June, 2014 we have had a calmer political climate which was of help.

In the last fiscal, however, whilst garments export was satisfactory that of jute and jute goods declined by 20 percent only to slightly improve in the following months.

Curiously though, in the first five months—July to November—of the current fiscal not marked by any inclement political weather, the overall positive trend could not be retained. There has been a shortfall in frozen foods, leather and terry-towel exports.

The downtrend needs to be gone into and found answers. First and foremost, acts of intimidation, blockades and hartals are like self-imposed sanctions that political classes must abjure. Simultaneously, as we upgrade our

Mythology and science

EDITORIAL, *The Hindu*

THE 102nd Indian Science Congress being held in Mumbai will be remembered for a very long time to come, but for all the wrong reasons. For the first time, the science congress had a session on "Ancient Sciences through Sanskrit". If the Indian Science Congress had long lost its eminence as a forum where results of serious science being done in the country are presented and discussed in most sessions, the inclusion of Ancient Sciences through Sanskrit has only lowered its standing further. Even as a public session, there is no real reason whatsoever for it to have been included in the proceedings. At best, a session could have been devoted to the history of Indian science which has real and substantial achievements to celebrate, with serious scholars working on the subject presenting papers. With Prime Minister Narendra Modi setting the tone for this antiquity frenzy with his implausible claims that cosmetic surgery was practised thousands of years ago and in-vitro fertilisation-like procedure was resorted to long back, and different political leaders following it up with several other incredulous claims well before the start of the national event, the reason for the inclusion of the session becomes supremely clear. Instead of fostering scientific temper, the congress has provided a forum to seed the minds of young people with pseudoscience. Some of the papers presented were about Indians' "knowledge of making aeroplanes" that could undertake interplanetary travel, between 7000 and 6000 BC, and "radars" that worked on the principle of detecting energy given out by animate and inanimate objects and finding out if a body was dead or alive.

Science is grounded on the principle of reproducibility of results. The claims of advanced science and technology in the ancient world are based on some references in ancient scripts that may be wholly imaginary. Flying, for instance, has caught humankind's imagination across cultures right from ancient times. Such references should be taken for the myths they are, not as scientific facts. Scientists have been able to create animal chimeras that have cells/organs of different species, much as what Greek mythology describes. Should the Greeks then be taken as pioneers in the science of chimera production? Thanks to our understanding of genetics and the ability to fertilise eggs outside the body, producing designer babies is no longer in the realm of science fiction. Should the creators of the science fiction then be credited with devising the procedures? Compare this with how Sir Arthur C. Clarke documented his idea of communications satellites in a concept paper published in 1945. Dozens of geosynchronous satellites launched each year do precisely what Sir Arthur had visualised there.

Democracy of concrete assumptions



KNOT SO TRUE
RUBANA HUQ

MIRESSWARAI, Feni, Sitakundu and Comilla are four spots an exporter fears the most. The covered vans are burnt mostly in these places, with Sitakundu topping the list. With the continuous blockade announcement, one ought to be worried. Approximately 4500 trucks carry RMG exports and 2000 bring back imports from Chittagong every day. A covered van of an average size usually has the capacity of 20 containers and it may carry up to 7500 pieces of shirts, 25,000 pieces of t-shirts, or 13,000 pieces of sweaters. The average value of 7500 pieces of shirts may come up to \$45,000.00 (US \$6.00 per piece); t-shirts may come up to US \$50,000.00 (US \$2/per piece); sweaters' value may be up to US \$104000.00 (US\$8.00/piece). Considering the trend of export from June 2014 onward, with knit and woven exports being almost close, considering that all the trucks may not carry full load and considering the export volume of Bangladesh, which is almost US \$2 billion a month with the trucks carrying goods worth at least US \$67 million a day, one could conclude that every export truck, at the least, carries US \$15000.00 worth of goods on a daily basis. An exporter exports at least 6-20 trucks a day, depending on the size of the garment factory. Even if 200 trucks out of 1,35,000 (4500 trucks a day x 30 days) trucks are damaged or face delays en route to the port city every month, then exports worth \$36million a year face uncertainty.

Why are we causing this distress to the economy? If it is for the sake of democracy, then it certainly isn't worth it, considering the place and the protagonists. While the government maintained its tough stance of not letting Khaleda Zia make it beyond her gate, and while ministers of the cabinet kept on making ridiculous statements about Zia herself having placed trucks of bricks and sand in front of her own house for renovating her building, one point became clear: the opposition has indeed run out of steam, and has hugely disappointed the spirit of democracy. Watching Khaleda Zia's car play peek-a-boo in the afternoon of January 5, and a full agenda or a full plan of action not being able to make it beyond the gate... just killed the game. Unfortunately even threats are dated. The final threat of being on the field till the present government is ousted doesn't quite play out well in the theatres of democracy anymore. All it does is simply create drama in live television. Not only did the whole country follow a single spate of drama for 48 hours, but it also had to witness split screens on television, which kept on covering violence happening in different places. Incidentally Bangladesh is one country where one never runs short of issues or challenges. In times of discomfort, the nation just happens to stumble across more events that control the direction and the pace of the public swing. While the drama unfolded and stepped into the second phase right after Khaleda Zia ended her speech from her car parked

inside the office of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, the nation witnessed the Prime Minister delivering her speech and sharing the success during her tenure. The nation indeed lives and dwells in ironies and contradictions. Hypnosis has just joined the band. Given that most of the people remain glued to the television screens during crisis, and imagine gunshots when the neighbourhood is actually indulging in harmless 'Potkabaji', reflects that as Bangladeshis most of us live in fear. The fear generally stems from uttering politically incorrect statements in all media including new, and speaking what most of us believe to be the truth. Therefore most of our statements are laced with sugar and paralyzed with half-truths.

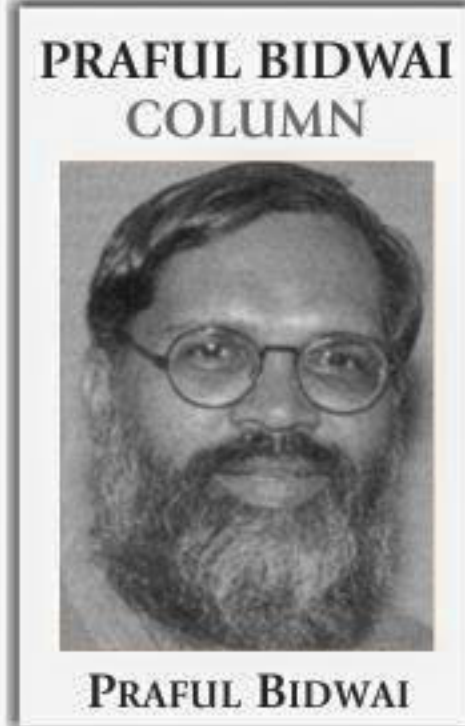
A few references to history won't possibly hurt today, especially at a time when the opposition lacks any concrete agenda and the position is at its strongest. All parties leaning heavily on one central figure and one central voice make democracy a difficult task. Robert Mugabe, who rules Zimbabwe with an iron hand, may boast of 85% literacy but fails to prove his economic point. Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan, one who was at one point praised for impressive economic growth, today bears the label of autocrat as he routinely cracks down on his protesters, opponents and the media and gives the intelligence services more latitude. Truth is, leaders who tolerate little or no opposition end up achieving more. It is easy when the leader does not need endorsements. Take for example, Deng Xiaoping in the late 1970s opening China up to private incentives in agriculture, which increased farm output overnight. Leaders in Chile, South Korea, Taiwan and Singapore also changed their economies by adopting radical means, which favoured private sector. But in the long term, perhaps, in spite of whatever economic successes autocracies produce, democracies are far more favoured by the people living in those lands just because they do not produce long-term disasters and preserve civil rights.

I usually use young people as sounding boards before I write my columns. While I shared my idea with one of them and referred to autocracies in Taiwan, South Korea and Chile having finally turned to democratic, multi-party system under fierce opposition to single party rule, she interrupted and reminded me that all these countries took their sweet 'time' to democratise their processes. I agreed. Yes, it takes decades to build democracies. It took France more than 80 years to build the Third Republic after the collapse of the monarchy in 1789. But the little one wasn't convinced and hadn't finished yet. While sipping her coffee, she had a response ready, mentioning that though South Korea and Chile have made it to the top, they had taken time to graduate to democratic practices. She finally added that Bangladesh wasn't ready for the 'real' democracy as yet. The mention of 'time' wasn't what shocked me. What startled me the most was the loss of hope I sensed in the youth, when she referred to the 'real' and 'unreal' democracy while throughout our lives most of us have only learnt and read about democracy in only 'one' form... rich in truth and justice.

The writer is Managing Director, Mohammadi Group.

HINDUTVA TRUMPS 'DEVELOPMENT'

BJP's real agenda



PRAFUL BIDWAI COLUMN
PRAFUL BIDWAI

SOME commentators have deplored the award of Bharat Ratna, India's highest civilian honour, on Hindu Mahasabha founder Madan Mohan Malaviya. But many have welcomed its award to the Sangh Parivar's first Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee. They include even Amartya Sen, also a Bharat Ratna and Nobel Laureate, who called Vajpayee a "great statesman".

The first group is emphatically right—not so much because Malaviya was honoured 69 years after he died, but because the Mahasabha has for a century propagated virulent Hindu-communalism. It now wants to erect statues of Gandhi's assassin Nathuram Godse.

Malaviya advocated "reconversion" of Muslims and Christians, would accept food and water only from Brahmins, and was devoted to protecting "the sacred thread (janeu) ... the Vedas, Puranas, [and] cows".

Malaviya is regarded as the founder of Banaras Hindu University. But new research shows he was at best a "fringe player".

The government honoured Malaviya mainly because his grandson Giridhar nominated Modi as Varanasi's Lok Sabha candidate. The idea is also to promote sectarian-Hindutva icons.

What of Vajpayee? He's less extreme. But his intimate relationship with the Ramjanmabhoomi movement led to the Babri mosque's demolition and terrible riots in which thousands perished. Vajpayee was responsible for India's 1998 nuclear tests. This fulfilled a long-term Sangh obsession, but created a dangerous security environment in South Asia.

Communalism legitimised under Vajpayee found its bloodiest expression in the Muslim butchery in Gujarat-2002. Vajpayee criticised Modi for violating "Rajdharna", but made a U-turn within weeks.

Had Vajpayee himself followed "Rajdharna", specifically the Constitution, he would have dismissed Modi. Failure to do so paved the way for national-level communal polarisation, which eventually brought Modi to power.

True, after Pokharan, Vajpayee made half-hearted attempts at peace with Pakistan, like the Lahore-Delhi bus. But he allowed the Agra summit to be sabotaged. He also ordered a scary, costly 10-month-long military standoff with Pakistan in 2001-2, which achieved nothing.

Vajpayee failed to free the BJP of the RSS's influence and put it on a moderate path. On every critical occasion, he proved too timid to do the right thing. On balance, he didn't prove a responsible, even if conservative, leader—leave alone a statesman.

The Parivar's functionaries have indulged in hate-speech contrasting ramzadas and haramzadas and in provocative acts including ghar wapsi ("reconversion"). RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat says the minorities are "maal" (goods), stolen by "outsiders", which Hindus must "re-cover".

In this climate, even foreign minister Sushma Swaraj,

with a Socialist past, demands the Bhagwad Gita be declared India's "national scripture". This is incompatible with India's secular Constitution.

At work is the Parivar's highest concerted campaign to redefine the Indian state as Hindu, and citizenship as something based on religion and culture, not equality within a plural, diverse community.

Modi made a few token, ineffectual noises about restraining Parivar-style hate speech, but his actions suggest the opposite. He refused the opposition's reasonable demand for a statement in Parliament on hate speech—and held up Bills on insurance, land acquisition, etc.

By pushing these measures through ordinances, the government is denigrating Parliament and making democracy dysfunctional.

Hindutva's excesses are drawing protests from businessmen and chambers of commerce. They have been joined by self-styled liberals, many of whom have gone soft on Modi. They contrast the BJP's "economic Right" to its "cultural Right", and back the first against the second.

They all regard the Parivar's anti-minority campaign as an "aberration" from the "development" agenda (read, pro-business policies), and as a BJP "self-goal".

They are profoundly mistaken. Contrary to propaganda, Modi wasn't elected on a "development" plank. This was mere sugar-coating on its Hindutva agenda, meant to broaden its appeal to the as-yet-non-communalised middle class. The BJP didn't even claim, as it did earlier, to have distanced itself from the core-agenda.

That agenda was implemented through systematic incitement to communal violence, with 247 recorded incidents in 2013 in Uttar Pradesh alone—from Pratapgarh and Faizabad in the East to Allahabad, Bareilly, Bijnore, Mathura and Bulandshahr, and worst of all, Muzaffarnagar Westwards.

The RSS was drafted into the BJP election campaign with greater intensity and numbers than ever before, backed by the electronic and social media, and bankrolled by Big Money, of the same order as the sums spent in US presidential campaigns.

Hindutva motifs were carefully deployed, as also slogans like "Pink Revolution" (beef exports) to chide Muslims. As journalist Harish Khare puts it in his perceptive new book *How Modi Won It*, he "succeeded in instigating another Hindu uprising to become Prime Minister".

For the Parivar, as for Modi, the top priority isn't economics, but politics—how to deepen and widen Hindutva's influence and ensure its long-term dominance, if necessary by coercion.

If there's a clash between growth (or even the giveaways promised to Big Business) and the Sangh agenda, the Sangh must take precedence—always.

This poses a new challenge to secular-democratic forces, which cannot be mounted solely through rational argument and Parliamentary debate, important as these are. The challenge demands grassroots mobilisation on issues that concern the core-rights of the people threatened by the Hindutva-dominated neoliberal order.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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A positive step of Indian HC

The High Commission of India in Dhaka recently announced that from henceforth medical visa applicants would no longer be required to obtain e-token. They can apply direct to the High Commission for visa. We applaud the steps taken and thank Indian High Commission for responding positively to peoples' demand. We further request the High Commission to evolve a mechanism for tourist visa applicants so that they are spared the inconveniences.

Dr. SN Mamoon
Dhaka

Falling oil prices

This refers to the report, "Import bill may go down by \$2 billion" (Jan. 2). The falling oil price in the global market is a blessing in disguise for many nations. However, it can be said that the fall in oil prices is not due to demand-supply equation; international politics is behind the fall. The West wants to punish Russia for its role in Ukraine. For the first time, the US shale oil is available in the global market apart from OPEC nations. The West wants to hurt the economies of oil exporting nations like Russia and Venezuela among others, which are seen as Cold War opponents of the US. There is a saying, "Make hay, while the sun shines". It cannot be denied that global politics plays a vital role in international trade. Fall in global oil prices will also affect Lima Treaty on global warming, as lower prices will lead to more demand, increasing pollution. But who cares?

Deendayal M. Lulla
On e-mail

True peace

Although peace has been the goal of mankind for thousands of years—and the desire for peace is never so great as it is at Christmas—it seems that peace continues to elude us. Today, after the end of the Cold War, bloody hostilities continue on nearly every continent, reaching global proportions once again after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001 in New York City, Washington, DC, and near Pittsburgh.

As Pete Seeger's well-known folk song from the '60s asked, "Where have all the flowers gone? When will they ever learn? When will they ever learn?" True peace on every level—from international conflicts to our personal lives—has become more difficult than ever to achieve.

"And in Bethlehem today, children fear, yet still they play/ While mothers cry and fathers pray for peace to come again / And a round the weary world echoes the refrain: "Christmas in Bethlehem, when shall true love reign?"

Ted Rudow III, MA
Palo Alto
CA, USA

Comments on news report, "Directive withheld amid criticism," published on Jan. 2, 2015

Fazlur Rahman

The main thing is that all the universities need to select the best students through admission test, yet our bureaucrats don't get it.

"State of human rights in the country" (Jan. 2, 2015)

Nds

The question is whether the government recognizes us as human beings at all. If the answer is affirmative, then only the question of human rights arises.

"Our politics is now a bare-knuckle fight" (Jan. 2, 2015)

Nds

We all know and understand the predicament our politics have put us into; please suggest one effective means to get out of it.

"Khaleda seeks security" (Dec. 31, 2014)

sirajulmo@yahoo.com

Government must provide necessary security as per rule for the ex-PM, and not any less or more. But the government should also provide security of life and property for the 160 million people.

"A long overdue UN resolution" (Jan. 3, 2015)

Enayet Mowla

Now the resolution is there; how long will it take to implement?