

## Time running out for expats

### No end in sight for MRP saga

THE deadline for Bangladeshis living abroad to switch to machine readable passports (MRPs) runs out in about two weeks time and the tussle between the Department of Immigration and Passport (DIP) and the contracting company IRIS continues as time runs out. On top of that the company has apparently siphoned off Tk50 crore collected as passport fees. To put it in a nutshell the whole situation is a complete mess and while the tug of war continues between the government and IRIS, one cannot foretell what fate will befall the half a million expatriates in two weeks' time when they no longer have valid documentation.

This whole situation has been mismanaged from inception. Despite the company violating one guideline after another and the authorities failing to live up to its end of the deal in terms of paying service charge owed to the company, we have now arrived at a critical juncture. This is not how things are done when it comes to running the passport department. It is understandable that the company in question was allowed to continue to work on the MRP deal, despite having been found guilty of financial misconduct.

After November 24, the fate of 500,000 expatriate workers in countries of the Middle East and Malaysia will depend on the governments of these respective countries. We have no one to blame except ourselves should they be sent back. The economic repercussions of a fall out of this magnitude do not require further explanation.

## Rescuers now being harassed!

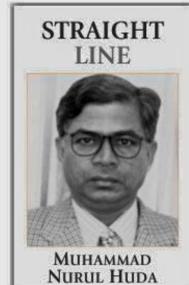
### It only affects public confidence in police

IT is disturbing to note that police have allegedly unnecessarily kept three people for 'interrogation' in relation to the case of attack on constables at Ashulia Checkpoint. Two of the detainees helped take the injured policemen to a nearby hospital and the third one is the sibling of one of the rescuers who wasn't even present at the scene!

Several days have passed but still the family members have been kept in the dark about the three detainees. Police has refused to divulge any specific detail about the detained persons, even their names. Most worryingly, they have denied arresting one of the rescuers named Saikat. According to Saikat's wife, he was picked up by police last Thursday and has been missing ever since. The police authorities must have credible answers to the queries of the family members of the missing persons. They also cannot shrug off the responsibility of finding the whereabouts of a key witness of the attack.

People in general, do not want to get involved in helping victims of a crime, fearing harassment from police. Now, those who would have will think twice before coming forward to assist a person in need, more so if it is a law enforcing agent. It is outrageous that law enforcing agents instead of expressing their gratitude to those who lent their hands to save their colleagues, are allegedly unnecessarily detaining them. The authorities must immediately probe into this matter and make sure that those conscientious individuals who spontaneously helped the injured policemen are released without delay.

# TASKING THE LAW ENFORCERS


 MUHAMMAD  
NURUL HUDA

**T**HE killing of two foreign nationals, the gruesome death and wounding of progressive publishers and the deadly attacks on law enforcers resulting in two deaths may have given rise to a fear psychosis. Concerned scribes have implored the authorities not to engage in rhetoric and blame games and impressed upon the imperative of tasking the law enforcers to apprehend the criminals and their mastermind, and bring them to justice.

A senior law enforcement officer has said that they do not as yet have an appropriate counter-terrorism outfit to effectively combat the recent depredations. Some observers see the regrowth of a political ideology arising from manipulation of religion. Accusations have also been made about the suspected alliance of some political elements that have facilitated the clandestine growth of the so-called religious extremists. Reportedly, such developments were often overlooked or tolerated for short-term political goals. The rise of militant Islam globally accompanied by an ideology of nihilism is suspected to have given impetus to the home-grown obscurantist elements to cause the mischief.

Under the circumstances, while the law enforcement agencies need to be made accountable, it is equally important to look into the policy and attendant strategy dimension of countering the so-called religious extremism. This is essential for countervailing measures which would inevitably bring to the fore the issue of real threat perception. In specific terms, do we have a broad

political agreement about the threat posed to our polity by the so-called religious extremists? Or is the current resolve, howsoever inadequate that may be, only regime-centric?

In tasking the law enforcers, whether in fighting or controlling or even containing the so-called religious extremism, the first step is to understand and appreciate the very prevalence of such elements in a given society and their pernicious effects on the way of life of the citizens. Unfortunately, in Bangladesh, we have been slow in appreciating the realities on the ground. This is not to discredit anybody or apportion blame to any particular political party because the growth and muscle flexing of the obscurantist elements has not been limited to the tenure of one regime. Cumulative inaction of the regulatory authority resulting from a lack of appreciation by policy-makers about the mindset and modus-operandi of the extremists may have brought us to the present state of affairs.

We need to be clear and definite about the threat perception. This is crucial because one cannot possibly treat a disease by denying its very existence. So from vague generalities if one has to venture into meaningful specifics, one cannot but make a pointed reference to our constitution.

The constitutional position as against the scheme and designs of the extremists leaves no room for any ambiguity. While at the macro-level it may be a matter of political direction to sort out disagreements through dialogue and persuasion, the field-level operatives, both in uniform and plainclothes, must have clear directives and a plan of action for preventing violent subversive actions. This is all the more significant now because the new enemy has an emotional and religiously sensitive alignment with the common folk of the country. One must not be oblivious of

the fact that the enemy combatants are entrenched in places and institutions that are traditionally respected and revered in our society.

As part of strategy, the enforcement apparatus should succeed in separating an act of violence from its so-called politico-social context and thus criminalise a certain mode of political expression. In Bangladesh's context, this line of action would be very appropriate because there is a greater need to reject the religious extremists' right to legitimise violence as part of a larger social movement.

### Do we have a broad political agreement about the threat posed to our polity by the so-called religious extremists? Or is the current resolve, howsoever inadequate that may be, only regime-centric?

The so-called Jihadists must not be bracketed with political dissenters, although such differentiation becomes difficult from an enforcement point of view. Procedures for dealing with religious extremists should be such as to distinguish them from constitutionally oriented political elements.

The above has been emphasised upon because the mission and strategy of our crime-fighting and intelligence organisations had not been stable, at least insofar as the so-called religious extremist threat scenario is concerned. Those have

changed with the change of a regime. It has been our unfortunate experience to witness the differing political agendas often clouding the pragmatic understanding of our real national interests.

There must not be any hesitation in the battle against the frontal attack on our constitution. There must not be any ambivalence in relentlessly pursuing the bigoted mischief-makers. Religious institutions or places of prayer should not be allowed to be used as sanctuaries. Quite a number of such entities may have to be subjected to well-planned discreet surveillance.

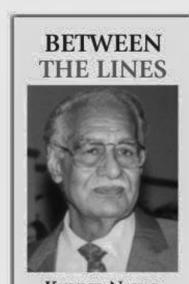
Voluntary or charitable work or even religious teachings which are suspected to be used as cover by some organisations should be shadowed so that genuine welfare work can be separated from malafide subversive ventures.

Foreign donations either by individuals or organisations must pass through government scrutiny. This must be made mandatory. Along with this there must be a complete account of suspected educational institutions and the areas of instruction should be known to competent authorities.

Democracy has to allow the interaction of different shades of opinion or divergent views to ensure the vibrancy of a pluralist society. However, that does not mean that there will be freedom to convert the entire country into a theocratic dispensation by application of force and intimidation. There is a challenge to our way of life. This must be realised by the mainstream political parties who are pledge-bound to uphold, protect and preserve our constitution. Therefore, the visible enemy must be caught by the forelock and be dealt with under the law. A sovereign Republic born out of a historic struggle entailing epic human sacrifices demand that. We must not fail.

The writer is a columnist of *The Daily Star*.

## Has Modi's magic waned?



KULDIP NAYAR

**W**HETHER or not the Narendra Modi magic has waned or whether the strategy of campaigning has been faulty, the fact remains that the Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP) has been routed in Bihar. That BJP is putting up a brave front and feels its loss is because of the unity of the opposition.

The Bihar assembly election results have, nevertheless, delivered a body blow to the BJP, more specifically to the Prime Minister-party president duo of Modi and Amit Shah. The blame game that began within a couple of hours of the counting continues unabated. The angry voices within the party ranks are growing by every passing day. There will be more in the days to come.

As in any post-poll analysis, Bihar will be analysed and re-analysed many times. Undoubtedly, this was the most bitterly fought elections of all time to come. Never before has an election been based on a divisive politics of communal hate and religious intolerance. Nor have we seen an assembly poll in which dozens of central ministers campaigned and Prime Minister addressed 30-odd rallies. Party president Shah rooted himself to Bihar for over eight months to devise strategies. Yet, when the results were declared, it was the Grand Alliance that had the last laugh. The Nitish Kumar-Lalu Prasad Yadav combine along with the Congress, which needed a makeover after continuous drubbing since 2014 general elections, quietly marched ahead in what was a landslide victory—a vote for social welfare and economic development over all forms of divisive politics of the RSS and the BJP.

In the end, as it turned out, the people of Bihar have rejected outright the BJP which rode to power at the Centre in 2014 on the Modi momentum and the so-called Gujarat model. In fact, Delhi was the first one to reject both when the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) was voted to power with 67 out of 70 seats. No doubt, the BJP went on to taste successes in a few states like Jharkhand and Haryana and

managed to form a coalition government with People's Democratic Party in Jammu and Kashmir. But Bihar was one state that the BJP banked on the most to turn the corner.

Unfortunately, it was not to be. To my mind, there are several reasons that can be attributed to the BJP loss — polarisation, reservations, cow, et al. Yet for me, it is the reasonably good governance that Nitish Kumar had provided in the last two terms that stands out. Forget the minor aberration called Jitan Ram Manji, who ruled the state for a brief period, thanks to Nitish Kumar's largesse.

In other words, the voters of Bihar

and he, taking on Modi at the Centre, without any interference in Bihar's affairs. I can already hear murmurs of Yadav's sons being included as cabinet ministers, one of them as the deputy chief minister. This is where Nitish will have to do the real balancing act as the BJP and his NDA rivals are waiting for such an opportune moment to jump in.

I don't want to go into what went wrong with the BJP as there are poll managers of the party to analyse it. But what I can say with authority is that the Bihar example has provided a kind of template for future elections. With three states—Assam, West Bengal and Tamil Nadu—going to the polls next year, the

campaigns, could be the sole reason for the party's rout. Of course, RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat added fuel to fire by raising the issue of reservation. Even the BJP leadership in Bihar has come out with statements that point to how the party went overboard on certain issues and underline that the remarks of the RSS chief did not go well with the Biharis.

It appears that Modi has lost the way and does not know how to overcome the deficiencies of bureaucracy, something which his predecessors had faced. Economic reforms announced by the party take the country to the right unashamedly. Even if Jawaharlal Nehru's socialistic pattern is abundant, the BJP



Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, RJD chief Lalu Prasad and Bihar Congress President Ashok Chaudhary at a press conference after Mahagathbandhan's (Grand Alliance) victory in Bihar assembly elections, in Patna.

wanted continuation of Nitish, the face of good governance, despite the fact that he had aligned with his once bitter rival Lalu Yadav, the Rashtriya Janata Dal chief. The RJD may have got more seats than Janata Dal United and Lalu Yadav may demand his pound of flesh during the cabinet formation. I am, however, sure that Nitish will rein in and will not disappoint the people who have reposed their faith in him. I am also hopeful that the Congress, which has a good number in the assembly, will not overlook what is happening.

I don't read too much into what Lalu Yadav had said about Nitish ruling Bihar

regional parties may look for and forge some alliances on the Bihar model to take on the BJP in each of these states.

No doubt, every state has its own needs and development agenda besides a specific model to work on with local leaders. Only a clever combination like the one between Nitish Kumar and Lalu Yadav, that had the pulse of local voters, can click to the extent it did in Bihar. The pre-poll alliance has to be precise and based on a pure understanding of the local needs.

Coming back to the Modi-Shah leadership model, I am sorry to say that the duo had taken things for granted. Their arrogance, reflected during the

impression because a country where most people are poor has to move away from rightist policies.

I am not suggesting that the party follows the preamble of the constitution word by word. But it cannot take a line which is entirely opposite to the spirit of the constitution: the governance which is opposed to taking any step to rectify the distance which is increasing day by day between the haves and have-nots. The sooner Modi and his party realise this, the better it would be for them.

The writer is an eminent Indian columnist.

## COMMENTS

### "Only 9% pass DU 'Gha' unit entry tests" (November 10, 2015)

Ziad Chowdhury

I think the admission process is faulty. You cannot judge a student's capacity by an hour of MCQ exam. DU should follow the IBA/BUET process and offer a written exam along with the MCQ. The results in DU and other notable institutions clearly demonstrate that the quality of our education system is deteriorating day by day. The massive number of GPA 5 students and incidents of question leak show us that we are only concerned about grades and the government is only concerned about highlighting its success, rather than improving our syllabus or the quality of the education system.

Naveed Hossain

We need to find capable people instead of people who just want to get good grades.

Aparna Islam

Being a teacher of a university, I have a pretty good idea about the quality of students nowadays. And I am not shocked to see the result of the DU admission tests. The pre-university education quality has deteriorated immensely.

G K Md Nasarullah

We need to refine our educational system.

Shahidul Islam

The system may be faulty but the quality of education has also worsened.

Lone Sparrow

Students are trying to earn degrees without learning anything.

### "Traumatised, she learns her world has gone dark" (November 8, 2015)

Aditi Halder

Now what punishment will be provided to that brute?

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### A noble teacher

The report by S Dilip Roy published in TDS on November 10 is an admirable example set by a visually impaired young man who is giving his best for educating young children in a remote village. He is everything a teacher should be. The government should extend help and support to these noble persons who, despite their own limitations, have devoted

their lives to helping others.

S. A. Mansoor  
Dhaka



PHOTO: S DILIP ROY

### Who's next?

The security situation in Bangladesh has been deteriorating at an alarming rate. No one is safe anymore. Free thinking writers, their publishers, pirs and foreigners are being killed or attacked indiscriminately. Even members of the law enforcement agencies are being targeted. There is a

sense of fear among a lot of people. The government has not been able to resolve any of these cases. But they are pretty good at blaming the opposition parties in order to gain political scores, which only complicate and interfere with proper investigation of these crimes.  
Nawfal Talukdar  
USA