

Assam's Assembly election and Bangladesh

Relocation of tanneries

It has become a farce

THE project to relocate Hazaribagh tanneries to Savar, considering environmental and health hazards, has become a travesty with lapsed deadlines and no acceptable excuse. The irony is that, it was an outcome too apparent to all but the government which has failed to make the Central Effluent Treatment Plant (CETP) in the new location fully operational for proper treatment of toxic waste spewed out by the tanneries—the main objective of the much-hyped relocation move.

The whole exercise is quixotic. How can the government expect factory owners to move when the construction of CETP is yet to be completed? Why has the project floundered since it was started in 2003?

Hazaribagh, with about 200 tanneries, forms the backbone of the country's leather industry contributing about USD 1 billion to the annual export basket. However, these factories operate in a virtual enforcement-free zone in which they are subject to little or no government oversight with regard to environmental regulations or labour laws. The consequences are there for everyone to see: a river, once the lifeline of Dhaka, running black with pollution from the tanneries and workers exposed to hazardous materials daily.

Ensuring compliance of all tanneries with international standards and Bangladeshi law is an opportunity to firmly establish the leather industry to strengthen the economy. But first and foremost, the government must show genuine commitment in ending the relocation fiasco by getting the Tannery Industrial Estate in Savar up and running as per guidelines.

Splitting up ministries

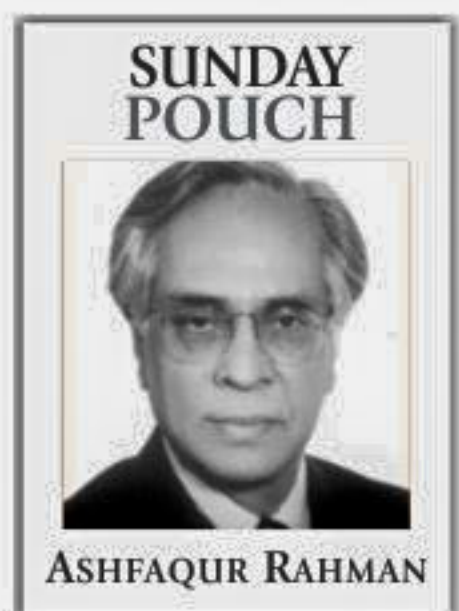
Good as long as it adds to efficiency

REPORTEDLY, the government is contemplating splitting up five ministries into several divisions each. Of the proposed five, two, home and education, have already received the PM's approval. The other three, namely health & family welfare, LGRD & cooperatives, and civil aviation & tourism, are yet to.

There are two aspects of the proposed arrangement. One, it would make the larger ministries enhance their output. Two, something that is not so openly articulated, it would allow the government to enlarge the cabinet and accommodate to higher positions a very large number of officers holding the same job in the promoted rank that they were holding before promotion. We hope this is not the principal reason, in which case it would be ill advised.

On the other hand there is strong rationale for some ministries to be broken up into divisions, more so, with the increase in our population and in the variety of subjects a government has to deal with these days. And thus the move to split the home and education ministries into separate divisions, each charged with a separate or a cluster of related subjects, is timely. We also think the splitting of the health and LGRD & cooperatives may also be justified. It is the civil aviation & tourism that we have serious questions about. The ministry is too small for a split. Also Biman is supposed to be run by an independent board without the ministry meddling in it.

Breaking up ministries may not necessarily increase productivity. We believe the underlying principle for such an arrangement must be efficiency and efficiency alone. We hope that is the case.



ASHFAQUR RAHMAN

SUNDAY POUCH
IT is interesting that the election to Assam's legislative assembly in India has aroused much debate recently. The election is expected to be held in two phases on April 4 and April 11 this year. Seats in all 126 constituencies are up for grabs; a political party will need 64 seats to attain a majority. The Congress now holds 78 seats, and its leader Tarun Gogoi is the current chief minister of Assam. The tenure of the present Assam assembly ends on June 5. Since Assam is an adjoining province of Bangladesh, it is natural for us to take a deeper interest in the ongoings in the state.

Prior to this election, the Indian National Register of Citizens was updated only this January. In fact, the Supreme Court of India was monitoring this update. 1.92 crore voters has been recorded for this election. The main reason behind this detailed updating of the electoral roll is to check what the voters in Assam, as well as the political leaders there, consider "illegal immigration from Bangladesh" to Assam as "very alarming".

In order to attract voters to vote for the Congress Party in the coming elections, Chief Minister Gogoi announced that if his party returned to power with a majority, he would supply rice at Rs 2 per kg and build religion bhavans. On the other hand, Congress' main challenger, the BJP headed by Prime Minister Modi has, through Home Minister Rajnath Singh, pledged that they would complete the fencing along the Bangladesh-India border to bar any future illegal immigrants from Bangladesh entering Assam. Assam shares a 263 km long border with Bangladesh, out of the 4,096 km long international border between the two countries. Yet, about 44 km of the boundary passing between the two countries has no fencing, and there's little hope that one can be built in the future, as the Brahmaputra River flows between these two territories.

In Assam, the religious configuration is 61.5 percent Hindus and 34.22 percent Muslims. The Christian

populace is only 3.7 percent of the total Assamese population. It must be noted that Muslims came there about eight centuries back. In fact, out of the 32 districts in Assam, nine are Muslim majority, according to a 2011 Assam census. It should be noted that before the Partition of India in 1947, internal movement was commonplace between the regions of what is now Bangladesh and the regions of Assam and West Bengal. During the pre-partition days, Assam was thinly populated, and the British colonial government was keen to exploit the rich resources of this region. It, therefore, did not mind the movement of people from northern India, West Bengal and the present territories of Bangladesh. During the Liberation War of Bangladesh in 1971, about 10 million Bangalees had moved to different parts of India. There was also a moderate flow of Bangalees to nearby Assam. However, after the end of the war, there was a flow back of the temporary exodus. Yet, in 1978, it was noted by some Assamese observers that about 45,000 Bangalee names were in the electoral roll of Assam. But they were of Hindu religious persuasion. Thus, by 1982, the agitation by Assamese to

deport these people to Bangladesh petered out. However, by the end of 1982, the Indian central government had called elections in Assam and triggered the movement to deport this small group. As a consequence, it led to the 1983 Nellie massacre, which was followed by the All Assam Students Union calling for whole scale deportation of this group of migrants for economic reasons, but they did not resort to violent means. The Nellie massacre, however, was never subject to official investigation.

In 2015, the current president of BJP, Amit Shah, stated in Guwahati that his party would give citizenship to all Hindu migrants from Bangladesh, terming them as 'victims of religious persecution'. But we need to analyse the extent of this claim; as situations stand today, it would be hardly credible to state that there is religious persecution in Bangladesh or fewer economic opportunities for Hindus, when compared to India. Moreover, when one compares the state of the territories of Assam to Bangladesh, one would find it to be quite poor. With 6.2% annual growth and a greater diversification of the economy, one could argue that

there is a larger flow of Indian citizens to Bangladesh now. The living conditions are better and there is better availability of jobs than in neighbouring Assam or even some other parts of India. There have been reports of more and more Indian citizens coming to Bangladesh as tourists, and overstaying their visa when they find gainful employment here. They send back large remittances to India informally. In 2012, Indians working in Bangladesh have reportedly sent \$3.7 billion in remittance, as part of their pay from their employment in Bangladesh. Citizens of India, belonging to West Bengal, Meghalaya, Assam, Tripura and Mizoram, mostly work in the NGO, RMG, textiles and IT sector, and send back money through a hundi system.

It is now clear that the economy of Bangladesh is only improving, as the country is swiftly moving towards a middle income status. As this is in fact the case, there is less or no need for Bangladeshi themselves to seek their fortune in a less developed region like Assam.

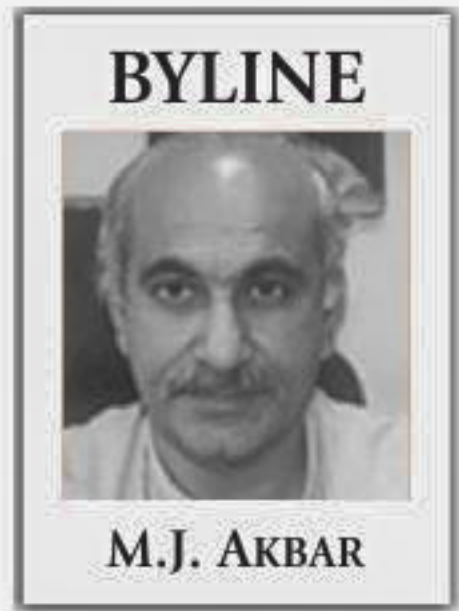
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Assembly election in four states, Assam, West Bengal, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and one Union Territory Puducherry, will be held in April, May.

PHOTO: INDIATODAY.IN

The way dynasties end



M.J. AKBAR

BYLINE
SUCCESS measures capability; a crisis tests an individual's or institution's maturity and resilience. Congress was hit by an explosion in the 2014 general elections which ripped apart its crumbling ideological facade and exposed the termites that had eroded its structural foundations. It was a moment that demanded the emergence of a sagacious leader who could prescribe an elixir of renewal and the way forward through a tense and aspirational period in India's history.

Instead, Congress continued to invest in its fatal flaw - dynasty at the expense of merit, sycophancy at the cost of introspection. With Rahul Gandhi in charge, the explosion was followed by a series of implosions triggered by political incomprehension, and temperamental management that exacerbated inner disputes into rift, and fissure into splits. The shambles in Uttarakhand is hardly unique. It is part of a pattern. Assam and Arunachal were earlier examples, although the Tarun Gogoi government survived the split. Regional leaders, who stayed with the party through the havoc of 2014, have realised the party is trapped in a tailspin. One common complaint is that Rahul Gandhi had little time for them; and if they did get a few

minutes, he was not listening. Last weekend, The New York Times columnist David Brooks wrote an illuminating analysis of Republican floundering in America. Brooks applied Thomas Kuhn's theory of scientific revolutions, a Marxist-sounding phrase for dissection of democracy. Intellectual progress, goes the proposition, is not steady. It moves from the success model, when everything seems to be working, to the "model drift", when contradictions and anomalies surface. This leads inevitably to a "model crisis", when the paradigm collapses: "Attempts to patch up the model fail. Everybody is in anguish, but nobody knows what to do."

Brooks suggests that the inexplicable behaviour of the Republican Party is due to the fact that it has been "psychologically defeated", leading to policy dislocation and disorder, even if this is a "negation of its own history".

During the five years between 2009 and 2014, Congress slid from success, endorsed by re-election, to model crisis. There is plenty of anguish but, because of a local variation, no one will admit it, let alone try and search for a prescription. Dynasties permit some leeway when successful and therefore secure, but shut minds when under threat.

We have recently witnessed a classic case of Congress negating its own history. I have studied the life of Jawaharlal Nehru and been an editor from the time Mrs. Indira Gandhi was Prime Minister to the Dr

Manmohan Singh decade. I can assert with confidence that not a single Congress leader would have compromised the Congress commitment to nationalism in the manner that Rahul Gandhi did by showing warm approval of an upstart student activist who was stupid enough to endorse the outrageous suggestion that Indian soldiers in uniform were rapists and that the Indian Army was worse than Maoists. Rahul Gandhi has become middle-aged without understanding what the Indian Army means to the people of India, and indeed to his own ancestors and predecessors.

Even as a tactical ploy this is counterproductive. Congress is not going to get many votes by standing alongside those who want the dismemberment of our nation.

In the past, Congress has dealt with its crises through a split. The most famous, and most productive, was the split engineered by Mrs. Gandhi. It is important to note, however, that Congress was not immobilised by dynasty in 1969; this ailment only began in the mid-1970s. Today, senior and thoughtful minds within Congress will never admit in public what they express in private. To do so would be suicidal to their individual prospects.

That is the way dynasties end, as T.S. Eliot might have noted: not with a bang but a whimper.

The writer is an eminent Indian journalist and author. Currently, he is the National Spokesperson of the BJP and Rajya Sabha MP from Jharkhand.

Dynasties permit some leeway when successful and therefore secure, but shut minds when under threat.

COMMENTS

"In the eye of the storm"
(March 31, 2016)

Allama Iqbal
When safe zones turn into unsafe ones, there is definitely something to be concerned about.

Monisha Beas Arefeen
I don't know why it's taking law enforcers so long to bring the perpetrators to the book.

Afreen Azhari
It's so sad that women in our country still can't walk freely on roads.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

"All he wanted to see were the polls in his school"

The above news published in The Daily Star on April 1, 2016, states how the violent UP polls claimed the life of Shuvo, a ten-year-old boy. Shovo Kazi Srabon, a fourth grader of Madhurchar Government Primary School in Keraniganj was also killed by a stray bullet fired by the supporters of the Awami League candidate at his school, which was being used as a polling station. The boy wanted to witness the festivity surrounding the voting process in his school, but within an hour, his uncle had to take his dead body home.

Shuvo's father, Halim Kazi, plaintively asked why the government held such violent polls which were responsible for the death of his innocent son. Honourable prime minister and Chief Election Commissioner, could you please answer this question?

Farzana
On e-mail



PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Compliments to the Bangladesh cricket team

Bangladeshi cricketers have established themselves across the cricketing world. However, many of us are still about the lackings in Bangladesh, failing to view our team as a national treasure. The Bangladeshi cricket team never gives up and fights till the very end. Bangladeshis, who have suffered a human genocide in their struggle to attain a sovereign, secular nation, will soon demonstrate to the world what they are capable of achieving.
Saikat Kumar Basu
Lethbridge, AB, Canada

Control mosquitoes at airport

Recently, while returning to Bangladesh, I noticed that the security at the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport was significantly improved, and discipline was evident in all the service counters of the airport. But there was one problem; mosquitoes were present at the departure lounge, and passengers were clearly disturbed by that. I hope the authority concerned will take appropriate measures to control mosquitoes inside the airport.
Professor M Zahidul Haque
Department of Agricultural Extension & Information System, SAU, Dhaka