

## Reckless drivers getting off scot-free! Shockingly low conviction rate in road accident cases

A report in this daily yesterday shed light on the fact that only five percent of cases relating to road accidents result in conviction. The report also makes a mindboggling revelation: often times, the reason behind the accused getting away scot-free is law enforcers themselves.

We are all aware of the mayhem in the transport sector. And there seems to be no end to reckless driving that has cost way too many lives. So, how can we expect to bring discipline to the sector when an astounding 95 percent of cases result in no conviction? The fact that police officers many a time encourage out-of-court settlements, even when the law disallows such settlements when it comes to some serious crimes, is extremely dismaying. The report presents one such incident where a sub-inspector in charge of an investigation coerced a family into reaching a deal with the bus owner to withdraw the case and settle for a monetary compensation even though the case in question was "non-compoundable" (no out-of-court settlements allowed).

This only goes to show that bringing discipline to the sector remains a far cry despite longstanding demands to overhaul the sector, and that the government has an arduous task ahead which involves implementing institutional reforms. When law enforcement officials are uncooperative with families seeking justice and do not abide by the law, how can we expect a fair investigation to take place? Furthermore, there is also a dire need for judicial reform: our courts are backlogged with so many cases that for victims and their families, taking the legal pathway often means enduring yet another ordeal. The government should focus on ensuring proper conduct of law enforcement officials and making the judicial system more accessible to citizens. Otherwise, justice will remain elusive for road accident victims and our roads will continue to be death traps.

## Why this level of intolerance? Attack on Ducusu VP

THE attack on Ducusu VP Nurul Haque Nur, along with several other quota reformists and at least one journalist, allegedly by a group of Chhatra League activists in Bogura on May 26, is condemnable. Reportedly, Nur went to Bogura to attend an iftar party arranged by a quota reformist platform. Previously, local Chhatra League leaders had also barred Nur from joining an iftar party in Brahmanbaria. It makes completely no sense as to why any person would be attacked for joining an event as innocuous as an iftar party. And when an elected vice president of a student organisation like Ducusu is attacked, it just shows that there is a lack of tolerance for people with dissenting views.

The BCL's claim that they had not attacked Nur and others has no basis, as there are video clips showing Nur and several others being beaten up at the scene. Such intolerant behaviour from the BCL leaders and activists is unacceptable. And we think that the senior leaders of the Awami League have to take responsibility for the BCL's misdeeds. The Awami League and its student wing BCL have a glorious history of doing politics in the right manner and for the people. If the AL central leadership remains silent about such violent activities of BCL, it will only serve to tarnish the image of the student body as well as the ruling party.

The main reason why the BCL leaders and activists can carry on with their despicable activities across the country is the general impunity that they enjoy. We have never heard of any case in which any BCL member was given punishment or brought to justice for their unruly acts. This culture of impunity must end. The BCL leadership must rein in these rogue elements within the organisation. In this particular case, the government must take stringent action against the errant BCL members who have attacked Nur and others.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### Worsening traffic congestion in Dhaka

Traffic jam has turned our daily trips through Dhaka into something of a nightmare during this Ramadan. And the road conditions are only expected to aggravate with the Eid-ul-Fitr approaching. The horrendous congestion is taking a toll on the life of the residents and daily commuters.

According to a World Bank report, in the last 10 years, the average traffic speed in Dhaka has dropped from 21 kilometres per hour (kmph) to 7 kmph, and by 2035, the speed might drop to 4 kmph—which is slower than the walking speed. The report further stated that the time wasted in traffic jam amounts to billions of dollars annually, which obviously is a huge loss for the economy.

Poor urban planning and traffic management system in the city can be blamed for such a frustrating situation. I think the commuters and even the traffic police should become more conscious about maintaining traffic rules, otherwise the construction of all the flyovers and metro rail, meant for mitigating the traffic, would only go in vain.

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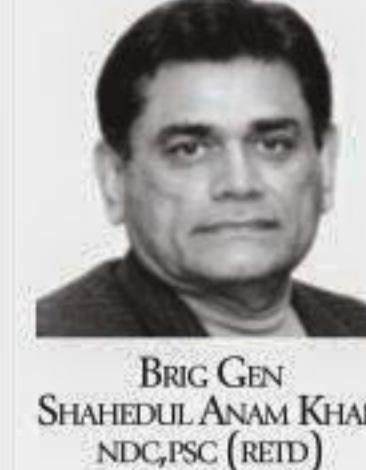


PHOTO: REUTERS/RAFIQUR RAHMAN

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# MODI'S VICTORY A win for far-right Hinduism

### STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING



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INDIAN Prime Minister Narendra Modi has returned to power with a renewed mandate, with more seats and even more percentage of votes. Apparently, Modi's policies have gone down well with the public as the margin of win on both the counts of number of seats and percentage of votes received, which rose by nearly 33 percent compared to 2014, shows. So, what does another five years of BJP mean for the internal politics of India and its external relationship with its neighbours and the rest of the world?

For one thing, the days of electoral alliance in India are over with the emergence of BJP under Modi as the single largest party for the second time, with a secure all-India base, much like the late eighties and the nineties under the Congress. And Modi has emerged as the dominant political personality. As for the Congress, although it might take comfort in the fact that it has won eight more seats than 2014, the sheen of Gandhi family as a political icon has vanished and the party's status as a viable dominant opposition and an alternative to BJP has diminished greatly. And it seems that the idea of India envisaged by its founding fathers has lost out to the India of Modi and RSS Inc. The BJP has made inroads into many opposition bastions, Maharashtra and West Bengal being the two most prominent states.

The 2019 Indian Lok Sabha election has been considered by some Indian scholars as one of the three crucial elections since India's independence; the others being: the first election after India's independence, and the election held in 1977, which purged the ominous possibility of dictatorship, under a unified opposition. Because of what preceded in the socio-political scene of India, the 2019 election had become one of a choice between a Hindu Rashtra—a move intensified since 2014—and a secular government.

This election, it was expected, would be greatly informed by what had happened in the preceding five years during BJP's first term in office. Observers had identified several areas that would have a significant bearing on the psyche of the 900 million voters. The first being the economy. Experts agree that the Indian economy has underperformed, particularly the rural economy which was brought in the headline by the farmers' debt and suicide, demonetisation and



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi gestures after the election results in New Delhi, on May 23, 2019.

shrinking employment opportunities. Although the social welfare schemes had a positive impact, what was promised in the economic sector was not delivered. But interestingly, that has not been reflected in the election results.

Why so? Why have the ranks of BJP supporters increased manifold in the past two decades? Are we to believe that all BJP voters subscribe to Modi's idea of future India? Modi's future India, as described by an Indian journalist several years ago, is that it should be "strong, rich and Hindu, and that all three things would have to happen together or none of them would happen at all. And this, in a nutshell, is the dominant conception in national politics today."

The second was the social and religious alienation due to the emphasis on Hindutva ideology, which was a manifestation of "rich, strong and Hindu" identity, meaning that all religions would be subsumed under the main creed. That was reflected in the *Goraksha* and the lynching that it caused, the *Love Jihad* and *Ghar Wapsi*. The *Ghar Wapsi* effort had its downside too. While it may have forced the so-called converted back to the main fold of Hinduism, who was to ensure their social acceptability or accord them the social mobility—since most were from the lowest castes, a curse that had motivated them to "convert" in the first place?

One also saw in the last five years in India a constriction of space for free speech and attempts to dismantle educational institutions and rewriting of text books, particularly history. Many saw in the apparently robust foreign policy an

effort to publicise the Modi personality, although he has brought India closer to the US strategic orbit and used the Balakot bombing to garner votes. And the "clean government" that was promised was not that clean actually.

But none of these things mattered really, and at the end of the day it was Modi and his charisma that prevailed.

And it prevailed because he promised doubling farmers' income, making India the third largest economy by 2030, and spending more than a trillion rupees on infrastructure. His base—and a very large one at that—is banking on the BJP building a temple in Ajodhya, an unfinished task that the RSS and BJP would like to see finished. And there is a good chance that Modi might revisit Article 370 of the Indian Constitution that accords special status to Kashmir.

Modi won with a greater margin of victory than ever before also because he played on the fear psychosis of the people. Fear of the entire North East India being saturated by so-called illegal Muslim migrants from Bangladesh, compared to "termites" by the BJP president. The Balakot episode played in favour of Modi despite many reservations about the official Indian narrative. But like Pakistan that thrives on anti-Indian psychosis, Modi played the Pakistan card too. In fact, as Prof Amartya Sen writes, "India's general election was dominated by scaremongering rhetoric, used very effectively by Mr Modi."

The long and short of it is that the next five years will see even more alienated minorities, particularly the

Muslims, firm anchoring of the extreme far-right philosophy of Hindutva, and saffronisation of Indian politics that was initiated by the election of a Yogi as the chief minister of a state. The initial signs of that are reports of Muslims being set upon by Hindu fanatics in several parts of India after BJP's victory.

For Bangladesh, acknowledged by India itself as its only trusted friend and neighbour in South Asia, there are several disconcerting issues that the country is faced with, and which India must address immediately.

Bangladesh will have to contend with saffronised politics on both sides of its borders, in Myanmar and India. While the use of religion in politics in Bangladesh is nothing new, the only difference between the situation in Bangladesh and these two sets of circumstances is that, in both our neighbouring countries, religion-based politics has been encouraged by the major political party, and in India, it has indeed received popular mandate to power at least in one state. In Bangladesh, the religious parties have been politically rejected.

Also vexing is the issue of NRC and the Citizenship Amendment Bill, and in these cases, concrete steps must be initiated by India to assuage the misgivings and uncertainty in Bangladesh that these two matters have stoked. And it is hoped that with the increased BJP seats in West Bengal, it would be more assertive in resolving the Teesta water-sharing issue than it has been in the last five years.

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## SAFE MOTHERHOOD DAY Unite for women's rights for respectful care

### GEORGE JOBY

ON May 28, Bangladesh is celebrating yet another Safe Motherhood Day. It is time we promoted safe motherhood as an initiative to advance women's basic human rights, and not just to reduce morbidity and mortality. The Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognises that everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and

international conventions on which the charter is based.

Ensuring that women everywhere have access to essential and life-saving health services is one of the most essential steps towards this. Over the last 15 years, Bangladesh has witnessed a steady increase in the utilisation of health care facilities by women, particularly for care related to pregnancy and delivery. More than half of women now go to a health facility for their deliveries, mostly to private hospitals

that uphold health as a human right, Bangladesh must enhance its efforts to reach those who are left behind.

Along with access, ensuring that the women go through positive experience while seeking care is also very critical. Women's experiences with healthcare during pregnancy and childbirth can make or break their confidence in the health facilities. A positive experience will boost their self-esteem while a negative experience will generate fear and apprehensions about care-seeking in



PHOTO: ISMAIL FERDOUS/WORLD BANK

of all healthcare services. Respecting the woman's right to ask questions and seek all information she needs to make informed decisions is key. She should be able to make her choices and preferences about the care she wants, be it for giving or refusing consent for clinical procedures, having a companion during maternity care or for opting to have a normal delivery.

In many over-crowded and under-staffed hospitals, ensuring adequate privacy for women seeking health care can be challenging. The absence of privacy and the unavailability of female providers can be a serious deterrent for many women from visiting a hospital. Women have the right to be treated with dignity and respect and be free from harm and ill-treatment. Often, women seeking care have long hours of waiting without access to food or water. Health services must be available to all women without any discrimination based on economic status, marital status, religion, ethnicity, language or any other factors.

Even though instances of physical, sexual and emotional abuse in health facilities may not be very common in Bangladesh, non-consented care and neglect are not uncommon and are equally disrespectful. Health facilities can do a lot better to stop violations of privacy, refusal of admission to health facilities, neglect during childbirth which may lead to life-threatening and avoidable complications, and delayed referral. Irrational use of clinical procedures and investigations, such as caesarean section deliveries, is another critical area requiring attention of the professional associations and regulatory authorities.

Let us make this Safe Motherhood Day a landmark in the way we treat our women, by starting a movement to help our women realise their rights for respectful and compassionate care. Let this be a milestone for the health care providers in the country to pledge their commitment to uphold the women's fundamental human rights.

George Joby is currently working as the Chief of MaMoni MNCSP project, Save the Children.