

Will Terminal 3 be everything we want it to be?

BLOWIN'
IN THE WIND



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ONE of my favourite films, *Love Actually* (2003), begins with the narrative voice of "the British prime minister" (Hugh Grant) saying, "Whenever I get gloomy with the state of the world, I think about the arrivals gate at Heathrow Airport." The added video collage shows the crossroads of humanity featuring a wide spectrum of people coming together with a potpourri of emotions. The voice continues, "General opinion's starting to make out that we live in a world of hatred and greed, but I don't see that. It seems to me that love is everywhere. Often, it's not particularly dignified or newsworthy, but it's always there. When the planes hit the Twin Towers, none of the phone calls from the people on board were messages of hate or revenge – they were all messages of love. If you look for it, I've got a sneaky feeling you'll find that love actually is all around."

Sitting at the airport lounge recently, I wondered if the British prime minister would have actually located love at Dhaka airport. I saw countless instances of mismanagement, negligence, and incompetence as I muttered, "Whenever I arrive at the gate at Dhaka airport, I get gloomy with its state of affairs." Thankfully, I am not a politician who needs to be publicly upbeat and professionally enthusiastic. I do not have to be a cynical preacher of gloom, either.

The construction of Terminal 3 at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport (HSIA) in Dhaka offers a silver lining. Designed by architect Rohani Baharin, whose work includes critically acclaimed Changi International Airport in Singapore, the HSIA Terminal 3 promises to render a much-needed facelift to our civil aviation sector. And, under the guidance of Japanese and South Korean



companies, the construction is way ahead of its schedule and likely to go for a soft launch in October 2023.

This megaproject is going to revolutionise our air connectivity. The completion of Padma Bridge, despite many odds, gives us hope that this terminal, too, will become a development milestone. My concern, however, is not the simulation of a world class airport; my concern is its operation. Our development partners can help us with the impressive structure, but do we have the resources and mindset to manage it at an international standard?

In a country where the High Court has to issue directives to control the mosquito population at the airport, where the lack of luggage trolleys hits the national news, where passenger harassment is of epic proportions, where aeroplane toilets act as proxy goldmines, where the gangs of HSIA are waiting for a

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SK ENAMUL HAQ

Martin Scorsese to make a film after them, it is difficult to be overexcited about the physical growth of the airport facilities. In a country where civil servants do not miss out any opportunity to avail foreign trips to learn about sowing grass seeds, cooking mishmash, inspecting lifts before ordering, or hopping on a flight to find feasibility of a non-stop route to the other hemisphere, it is difficult not to be dispirited.

A series of freak accidents at HSIA in the last few months raised an extra red flag for me. On Thursday, a Biman Dreamliner grazed the abrasion-resistant rubber on the boarding bridge while being taken to the hangar. On June 4, a microbus of the US Bangla Airlines hit a Boeing 737 aircraft. In April, a flight to Dubai was cancelled after the nose of a Boeing aircraft hit the tail of another aircraft at the hangar. On February 15, a Boeing 737 aircraft of Biman was brought back from Malaysia once a crack was found in

its windshield. On March 6, a Boeing was damaged when its engine was struck by a bird during landing at Sylhet airport.

These incidents show a serious lack of skilled crew and ground staff to run an aviation system. Running an airport with 20 million passengers a year is almost as challenging as running Dhaka city or a small country. The airport has the responsibility of moving millions of people to their ultimate destinations through scores of different airlines from different countries. Do we have plans to reskill and upskill our airport personnel to deal with these hundreds of daily arrivals and departures? Our current performance says we are far from it.

I am sure the designer of Terminal 3 has paid enough attention to include various services in its concourses and terminals. Already, a complex surface-transportation system consisting of elevated expressway, metro rail, tunnel passage, bus bay, car park, etc. is being built to ease the way people can get to and from the airport, and commute within the airport structure itself. The airport will also boost local businesses, including shopping, lodging and accommodation. But my worry is, have adequate measures been taken to increase the number of service providers and improve the quality of the operators? Are there enough projects in place to make passengers' travel experiences effortless? Do we have the people with appropriate aptitudes and attitudes to make the best of the infrastructures being built? Do we have the right communication and professional skill sets? I have not seen any such news in the media. If we are to rely on the trade unionists who have often held the aviation sector hostage to their whims, then I believe there is not much to expect from Terminal 3.

This is an area that we cannot overlook. An airport is the face of a country. It shapes a visitor's overall perception of a destination. The impressive building can only impress, but to make it truly impressive, we will need to take a stride further to add human elements to the steel and concrete slabs.

Can the 'fringe' make the BJP cringe?



PALLAB BHATTACHARYA

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THE outrage against the deplorable comments by two now suspended and expelled members of India's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) against Prophet Muhammad continues to spread among the Islamic countries. At home, too, the BJP faces a barrage of criticism from the main opposition Congress. The controversy saw several days of protests, at times marred by arson and violence in several Indian states, and two individuals were killed during clashes with police in Jharkhand.

On the other hand, in a deeply worrying sign, the Yogi Adityanath government in Uttar Pradesh used bulldozers to flatten the houses of some of the people allegedly involved in the violent protests against the anti-Prophet remarks in Saharanpur, Kannur and Prayagraj (formerly Allahabad). In the case of demolition in Saharanpur, the local authorities claimed that the houses had been constructed without approval by the civic bodies concerned. But Additional Superintendent of Police of Saharanpur Rakesh Kumar had a different take on it when he said the police were taking "strict action" against the accused involved in violence on June 10.

Concerned over what has been called "bulldozer politics," six former judges of the Indian Supreme Court and various High Courts and six senior advocates have appealed to the Supreme Court to take suo motu cognisance of the acts of demolition of the residences of those who protested in Prayagraj against the objectionable remarks made by the former BJP leaders. "Such a brutal clampdown by a ruling administration is an unacceptable subversion of the rule of law and a violation of the rights of citizens and makes a mockery of the constitution and the fundamental rights guaranteed by the state," said the hard-hitting letter. Even assuming that the houses were illegal constructions, the crucial question is: Why act against them now? Secondly, even if they are illegal, there is a well-established legal route of serving notice to the house owners and moving a court of law before demolition.

It is not the first time that the hot heads within the BJP and other Hindutva outfits, like Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) and Bajrang Dal, have made what has come to

be known as "hate" speeches. There have been a number of instances of it in the past; one still remembers the "termites" expression used by Home Minister Amit Shah in describing "illegal" immigrants from Bangladesh to India.

It took the BJP leadership nine whole days to act against the duo – Nupur Sharma was suspended from primary

host government had summoned Indian Ambassador Deepak Mittal and handed him a protest note, said that "these are the views of fringe elements."

Given the robust trade ties India has with Gulf countries and India's dependence on some of them for its oil and gas needs, the reason why the BJP had to act against Sharma and Jindal appears

and in public life, people should exercise utmost restraint in what they do and say in public.

It has been noted that the words "fringe elements" used by the Indian Embassy spokesman in Doha after Mittal was summoned by that country's foreign ministry never found any mention again in any reactions by the MEA on the issue. Implicit in it is the recognition that "fringe" could not be an escape route out of a messy situation.

The BJP in a statement said, "The BJP respects all religions. The BJP strongly denounces insults of any religious personalities of any religion. The BJP is also strongly against any ideology which insults or demeans any sect or religion."

A section in the BJP would like the party's rank and file to view the action against Sharma and Jindal in a much larger context that is evolving in the BJP and its spiritual mentor RSS. According to some Indian media reports quoting an unnamed senior BJP leader, the prime minister has sought to create a narrative of inclusive development through "Sabka saath, sabka vikas, sabka vishwas" slogan, and the party's role is to build on it and anything that hurts this process would be considered as "indiscipline."

Secondly, going public for the first time on the controversy over the Gyanvapi mosque in Varanasi, RSS head Mohan Bhagwat recently spoke to RSS cadres: "One should not raise a new issue every day. Why escalate fights? In Gyanvapi, our faith has been there for generations. What we are doing is fine. But why look for a Shivaling in every mosque? What happens in mosques is also a form of prayer. Okay, it (Islam) has come from outside. But Muslims (in India) who have accepted it are not outsiders, they need to understand this. Even if their prayer is from outside (this country), and they wish to continue with it, we are fine with it. We are not opposed to any form of worship."

What do Bhagwat's remarks mean? Is he signalling that with fresh general elections two years down the line, the *Samaj Parivar* wants to avoid confrontational politics on the streets on any divisive issue?

When it was in the opposition, the BJP's core Hindutva agenda helped its march to power in India on the back of Ayodhya temple movement and other issues even as the party got the anti-minority tag. There is a feeling in the party that the BJP must live down its image of a "natural party in the opposition" and replace Congress as the "natural party for governance" after the latter's long stint in power.

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membership, and Naveen Kumar Jindal was expelled from the party. Assuming that the disciplinary action taken against Sharma and Jindal was primarily under pressure from Islamic countries, particularly those in the Persian Gulf, one could well question the sincerity of the BJP in cracking down on such elements. In the past, no action was taken against the party leaders who had made inflammatory speeches – some of them were given assembly poll nominations. Why did the BJP wait to act against Sharma and Jindal till it became an international diplomatic issue?

A total of 20 Islamic countries have so far protested against the remarks by Sharma and Jindal, but it is interesting that the Indian Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) pushed back against only the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and Pakistan. The MEA has said that the controversial remarks do not, in any manner, reflect the views of the government of India. A spokesperson of the Indian Embassy in Qatar, where the

more economic than political. Nearly 6.5 million Indians are working in Gulf countries. In 2020-2021, the total value of India's trade with the Gulf countries was worth over USD 87 billion, which included total imports worth nearly USD 60 billion.

Since becoming prime minister for the first time in May 2014, it was Narendra Modi who has taken extra efforts to strengthen ties with West Asian countries. Post-Covid, Modi undertook his first international visit this year by going to the UAE and Kuwait in January. Modi has been a regular visitor to the Gulf region, having visited many of the countries several times in the last eight years. Can his efforts be wasted by "fringe" elements?

The question is: Can the "fringe" be a credible defence against Sharma, who was the BJP's national spokesperson, and Jindal who had been the media in-charge of the party's Delhi unit? No doubt, Sharma and Jindal are ultra-political lightweights in the BJP, but their status as the articulators of the party's views in public cannot be ignored. In politics