

Obama surging, Hillary Clinton in trouble

LETTER FROM AMERICA

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FAKHRUDDIN AHMED *Writes From Princeton*

WITH 22 delegate-rich states holding Democratic primaries and caucuses, February 5 was supposed to be Hillary Clinton's coronation night. Instead, a white knight from Camelot ignored the damsel in distress and unchivalrously rode right past her to potentially his own coronation. Ever since Super Tuesday, Barack Obama has won eight primaries and caucuses in a row, in states such as Washington, Louisiana, Nebraska, Maine, Maryland, Virginia and in Washington, DC. And they have not been narrow victories; they have been blowouts, with Obama thrashing Clinton by between 20 to 35% points.

Thus far, Obama has won 21 states to Hillary's paltry 10! Yet, because of proportional representation system of awarding delegates, Barack (1,078) leads Hillary (969) by only 109 pledged delegates. Because of the Clintons' superior connections, Hillary (234) leads Obama (156) in superdelegates. Nevertheless, history will record that it was on the night of Tuesday, February 12, that Barack Obama took the lead in total delegate count (pledged and super): 1,234 for Obama and 1,203 for Clinton. It will be a major surprise if Obama relinquishes it. In a tell tale sign rich in symbolism, on February 12 night, the sagging Hillary campaign headed south, to El Paso, Texas, which does not hold its primary until March 4, whereas a triumphant Obama

stormed north into Wisconsin, which, along with the state of Obama's birth, Hawaii, holds its primary on February 19. In an indoor facility at the local university campus at Madison, Obama electrified the nation with yet another of his mesmerising speeches. Oh, how things have changed. Only a few months ago, Hillary, the presumed nominee, chastised Barack for criticising her policies, saying Barack was getting "desperate." In Maryland the other day, she rationalised her five losses thus: caucuses do not represent the popular will and many primaries Barack won were because of black voters. Yeah? Interestingly, Barack did not dwell on why he won! Hillary will find it much harder to explain her latest three defeats,

because in both Virginia and Maryland Obama won more white male votes than Clinton, Hillary's share of white women's vote declined, and for the first time in a state with significant Latino population, Obama won more Latino votes than Clinton in Virginia. Hillary campaign says that Texas with a huge Latino population, Ohio and Pennsylvania with working class whites, will be her "firewall." She leads in polls in all the three states. Once again, Obama is closing in fast in every demographics and every segment of the population. The residents of all these three states are also witnessing first hand the Barack Obama "phenomenon." They know that Obama is routing Clinton everywhere. Hillary should not be surprised if they too suddenly catch "Obama Fever!" Listening to Hillary stump speeches, one is reminded of a topnotch technocrat, who is on top of her game and can rattle off relevant numbers effortlessly. Listening to Barack is a whole new experience. He is inspirational and transformational and brimming with idealistic fervor. It is this idealism that has touched a chord

with the American psyche. When Obama speaks, he does not sound like a politician, he sounds like a messiah who can cure what ails America. Hillary embodies the attributes of Antonio Salieri, a very competent musician, whereas Obama reminds one of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, a musical genius. Everyone now acknowledges that many Republicans are switching sides and voting for Obama. At his Madison speech Obama said that many Republicans come up to him and say: "Barack, I am a Republican, but I am voting for you. I say: 'Thanks you.'" Obama coined a name for Obama Republicans, "Obamacans." Obama arouses his audience into rapturous applause and frenzied ovations, whereas Hillary's speeches are like that of a vaudeville actor fallen on hard times. With the Democratic party disqualifying Michigan and Florida for bringing the date of their primaries forward without authorization, it is unlikely that either Obama or Clinton will win over 2,025 pledged delegates. Most of the superdelegates will wait and see who wins most pledged delegates before endorsing anyone.



Obama on a roll: Inspirational and presidential.

Hillary was already suffering from an enthusiasm gap and an inspiration gap with Barack, now for the first time she is suffering from a delegate gap as well. To overtake Barack in pledged delegate count, Hillary has to win 55% of the remaining delegates. With Barack winning by lopsided margins lately, this looks like impossibility.

Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed is a Daily Star columnist.

Following in Indira's footsteps?

Will Musharraf learn from Indira Gandhi and let the people vote him out by letting the opposition win a two-thirds majority on Election Day, as the polls clearly indicate, or will he compound Pakistan's misery by rigging the polls and creating a new round of confrontation? The future of Pakistan hinges on the answer to that question.

HUSAIN HAQQANI

HERE is a quiz question for all readers. Who told London's Sunday Times: "It is wholly wrong to say that I resorted to emergency to keep myself in office... The extra-constitutional challenge was constitutionally met." The "emergency was declared to save the country from disruption and collapse;" it had "enabled us to put through the new economic program" and led to "a new sense of national confidence." If you guessed General (retired) Pervez Musharraf, you guessed wrong. It was Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1975. She also told the Saturday

Review of New York: "What has been done... is not an abrogation of democracy but an effort to safeguard it." Although she came from a democratic dynasty, Mrs. Gandhi fell into the authoritarian temptation when on June 26, 1975, she imposed emergency in India. Most observers thought she was acting to avoid the consequences of the judgment by the Allahabad High Court, annulling her election to parliament from Rae Bareilly in 1971. Mrs. Gandhi, who considered herself indispensable for her country, explained the imposition of emergency as an opportunity to clean up accumulated mess and lay the foundations of a

bold new order. India was not a strategic ally of the United States and Britain, and, therefore, international public opinion was not a consideration for Mrs. Gandhi. Still, she had to explain her action to India and the world. Her statements from that period strongly resemble the recent pronouncements of General Musharraf and his benchmark. Mrs. Gandhi said: "The president has declared emergency. There is nothing to panic about." She claimed: "This was a necessary response to the deep and widespread conspiracy which has been brewing ever since I began to introduce certain progressive measures of benefit to the common man and woman of India."



Election posters in Rawalpindi.

Mrs. Gandhi's explanation of the Emergency reads uncannily similar to Musharraf's recent statements though, given his general aversion to extensive reading, it is unlikely that he had read Mrs. Gandhi's statements before making his own. Quite

clearly all rulers in authoritarian mode think alike instinctively, and do not need to read the others' words to be influenced by them. After administering what she described as "bitter medicine" necessary for the good of a sick

"child," Mrs. Gandhi decided to secure a mandate from what she expected to be a grateful Indian populace. Elections were held in the third week of March 1977, and when results were announced on March 20, the ruling Congress party had been routed by an unusual alliance of all anti-Indira forces joined under the banner of the Janata Party. Indira Gandhi lost her own seat in parliament from Rae Bareilly. For all her authoritarian disposition, Mrs. Gandhi did not have it in her to try and rig a general election. India's strong democratic tradition and its independent Election Commission and judiciary would have made it difficult, if not impossible, to thwart the will of the people as expressed at the ballot box. Over the next three years, Mrs. Gandhi reorganised her party and apologised to the Indian people for the excesses under emergency rule. The Janata Party's internal

cracks led to the collapse of its government and, in the subsequent election, a chastened Mrs. Gandhi and Congress returned to power. In Pakistan's case, General Musharraf is not a politician willing to lose power for a few years to return to office in a subsequent election. Pakistan's Election Commission and post-emergency judiciary are mere instruments in the hands of the executive branch of government, which is firmly controlled by Musharraf. Public opinion polls indicate that 70 percent of Pakistanis want Musharraf to quit. The latest poll by US-based Terror Free Tomorrow shows 38 percent support for PPP, 25 percent for PML-N, and only 12 percent for PML-Q. In the 2002 election, Pakistan's poll manipulators gave the religious alliance MMA almost 21 percent of seats in the National Assembly, with only 11 percent of the popular vote in a low turnout

election. This time, efforts are underway to depress the turnout with attacks on opposition rallies. Every opposition party has had some of its members killed in mysterious terrorist attacks that, for some strange reason, have not targeted the ruling PML-Q or its major ally, the MQM. Will Musharraf learn from Indira Gandhi and let the people vote him out by letting the opposition win a two-thirds majority on Election Day, as the polls clearly indicate, or will he compound Pakistan's misery by rigging the polls and creating a new round of confrontation? The future of Pakistan hinges on the answer to that question. Husain Haqqani, Director of Boston University's Center for International Relations, is Co-Chair of the Hudson Institute's Project on Islam and Democracy. He is the author of the Carnegie Endowment book *Pakistan Between Mosque and Military* and served as an advisor to former prime ministers, including Benazir Bhutto.

The puzzle of soil fertility

Though satisfactory progress has been made in the agriculture sector since independence we have to go a long way to attain desired level of efficiency. Soil fertility is very important for us. The more we concentrate on the puzzle of soil fertility, the better for us.



Farmers tend to the rice crop in Bogra.

A.B.M.S. ZAHUR

SOLIDS, liquids, and gases are three forms of matter in soil. Solids constitute soil reserves of most nutrients, provide physical support for plants and provide a means of holding added nutrients in the root zone. Soil water is the immediate source of most nutrients absorbed by plant roots. Soil gases occupy the soil pores with water. Soil fertility has been of vital concern to men since beginning of agriculture. Men sought out areas with fertile soil. They farmed it until its fertility was exhausted and then moved to another area. Bangladesh is fortunate because silt-laden flood waters renew its soil fertility. Men have attempted at improving

crop yields by adding various materials to the soil. Chinese farmers applied lime-treated bones to the soil as early as 2000 years ago. British farmers used to apply marl (mixture of calcium carbonate and clay) to the soil as early as first century. US president George Washington reportedly had his slaves gather marl from the Potomac river for his Mount Vernon fields. Scientist became interested in growing plants and their nutrition in the late 1800s. Vegetable substances were found to consist mainly of carbon, oxygen, and hydrogen. The source of nitrogen in plants was another puzzle throughout most of the 19th century. Justus von Liebig (Germany) believed that plants could get their nitrogen from air in the form of ammonia in rain-

fall. While Davies believed the source was organic matter. Boussingault found that leguminous plants accumulated nitrogen even in soil devoid of organic matter. Finally Hellriegel (German) in 1886 showed that leguminous plant "fix" elemental nitrogen from the air indirectly through the action of soil microorganisms that attach themselves to the roots of legumes. Liebig stressed the value of mineral elements derived from the soil in plant nutrition and the necessity for replacing them to maintain soil fertility. He recognised the value of nitrogen but believe that plants could get the element from the air. He envisioned a fertiliser industry with nutrients such as lime, phosphate, magnesia, and potash pre-

pared in chemical factories. To him treatment of bones with sulfuric acid to render the phosphate more readily available. The said scientist propounded the "Law of the Minimum" which states that if one of the nutritive elements is deficient, plant growth will be poor even when all other elements are abundant. This concept has been modified as additional elements have proved to be essential in plant nutrition and has been extended to include other factors such as moisture, temperature, insect control, weed control, light, plant population and genetic capacities of plant varieties. Thus attainment of optimum yield involves a complex mix of nutrients in combination with other inputs. The nine major nutrient elements (hydrogen, carbon, oxygen, nitrogen, phosphorous, potassium, calcium, magnesium, and sulfur) were identified and classified into three groups. Hydrogen, carbon, and oxygen are obtained from air and water. Nitrogen, phosphorous, and potassium became the primary nutrients, supplied by fertilizers. Calcium, magnesium, and sulfur became the "secondary" elements, often supplied fertilizers or in gypsum, limestone or dolomite. The importance of most micro-nutrients in crop production was recognized in the early 20th century. Iron is an exception. Gris discovered in 1844 that lack of chlorophyll in some plants can be corrected by sprays of iron salts. In 1905 manganese was recognized as essential to plant growth. In 1920 it was discovered that copper and boron were essential. In 1930 zinc, in 1939 and in 1954 molybdenum and chlorine respectively were discovered as essential plants. Man has gradually learned what plants require for growth. The first insight into soils and nutritional requirement of plants occurred in

1868. In the latter part of the 19th century fertilisers of many sources and types were seen in the market. The immediate problem was one of quality control which ultimately resulted in quality control measures. In 1838 Liebig began experiments in fertilisers and soil fertility at his family estate. In 1842 Lawes set up a fertiliser factory to produce super phosphate. He also marketed mixed fertiliser. Discovery of phosphate rock in South Carolina gave a boost to the industry. The early fertiliser factory in America was heavily based on super phosphate. Nitrogen was supplied at first by Peruvian guano (manure of sea birds found especially on islands off the coast of Peru), and organic materials, such as slaughter house waste, fish scrap, cottonseed meal and tobacco stems were liberally used. Later, Chilean nitrate of soda became available for mixed fertiliser and as a straight nitrogen fertiliser. Intensive agriculture began during World War II due to: (a) demand for more food, (b) development of high-yielding crop, and (c) lower-cost fertiliser. It may be pointed out in this regard that Bangladesh may face food deficit because of: (i) increase in population, (ii) decrease in cultivable area, (iii) increase in acreage of high-yielding crop varieties, and loss of soil's productivity due to intensive cultivation without proper step to replenish the deficiency in nutrients of the soil. Thus a long term plan may be taken to survey and study of total cultivable land to take appropriate measures for loss of its productivity. Though satisfactory progress has been made in the agriculture sector since independence we have to go a long way to attain desired level of efficiency. Soil fertility is very important for us. The more we concentrate on the puzzle of soil fertility, the better for us.

The writer is a former Joint Secretary.

Nobody's puppet

In the party, the puppet depends on the puppeteers. At Government House, the puppeteers yield control to the puppet. The show has just begun and already the audience is glued to its seats.

AVUDH PANANANDA

ALTHOUGH sceptics may view the leadership of Samak Sundaravej as a prelude to the return of Thaksin Shinawatra, the prime minister has sent out a clear message he's not warming up the seat for anyone but himself. Samak is trying hard to establish his footing in order to exert himself as a genuine leader and not just a figurehead. Without a firm base of support within the People Power Party, he has no choice but to rely on political artifice in order to pull strings right back at his puppet masters. Thaksin's allies, including Somchai Wongsawat, Newin Chidchob and Surapong Suebwonglee, need to take another look at the man they support before they end up as props of their own puppet. In the week leading up to the first cabinet meeting last Tuesday, the main coalition party drew up a list of candidates, seen as controversial figures, for jobs as ministerial secretaries and advisers. As party leader, Samak appeared docile and subjugated to Thaksin's inner circle of aides. By Tuesday, Samak had become prime minister and a changed man. In a few short words, he managed to embarrass the Thaksin allies by questioning their judgement in shortlisting candidates, calling it a government disgrace.

The ball is now in the court of the puppet masters, including Newin, to decide whether they dare risk a public backlash by insisting on rewarding cronies, such as Wan Yoobamrung, the son of Interior Minister Chalmern. Tuesday was, in fact, the second time the prime minister had snubbed his puppet masters. On Monday, Samak reported for duty as defence minister. He pointedly refused to reveal the substance of his talks with the top brass, but mentioned he'd just had a lengthy and fruitful discussion with coup leader General Sangprachulchai. Of all the top generals involved in the September 19 coup, Sangprachulchai remains the staunch opponent of Thaksin, and Samak has, interestingly, befriended him. The clincher in outwitting Thaksin and his allies is Samak's job assigning for his six deputies and two PM's office ministers. Samak is the only prime minister in recent memory, going back at least three decades, to hold complete control over the bureaucracy, the state legal machinery, the police, the national security apparatus, the intelligence service and military personnel. He refuses to delegate the supervision of super agencies such as the National Security Council, the Council of State, the Civil Service Commission, the armed forces, the National Intelligence Agency and the Internal Security Operations

Command. In short, he has under his command every mechanism to ensure his safe tenure in power. Even former prime minister Gen. Prem Tinsulanonda was not as powerful in his heyday as Samak. Samak has distanced himself from economic affairs by putting Thaksin's allies at the forefront of revitalising the economy. He has set a deadline for a first evaluation of their performance in three months and a final review in six months. If the economy continues to be lacklustre, the prime minister will have economic ministers, many happen to be his puppet masters, ready for human sacrifice. Should the economy turn robust, there is nothing to prevent a government leader from claiming the laurels. Two of Thaksin's loyal allies, Jakrapob Penkair and Chusak Sirinil, have been designated as lightning rods for the government. Samak has assigned Jakrapob to rein in the local press, doing the dirty work for him. Chusak is expected to battle the opposition on legislative issues but Samak has denied him access to the Council of State. In the party, the puppet depends on the puppeteers. At Government House, the puppeteers yield control to the puppet. The show has just begun and already the audience is glued to its seats.

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