

Accusing opposition leader Potentially counterproductive

We are aghast at the news of lodging of a case by a public prosecutor on behalf of the government against the leader of the opposition Begum Khaleda Zia in connection with Monday's skirmishes between villagers and the law-enforcers in Munshiganj. What is particularly disquieting is accusing the opposition leader of inciting violence when she was not even there.

It all speaks of lamentable insensitivity of the ruling party towards the issues that affect the lives of the common people on the one hand, and utter disregard for the rudimentary sense of decency and ethics in a polity that we claim to be democratic.

The ruling party should have known that in a democracy, it is only expected of the opposition that they would criticise the government's omissions and commissions, if any. And here was a case where, we think the government provided enough grounds for criticism by having undertaken a project with huge national implications without going through a proper environmental impact assessment and analysis.

When environmentalists and local people themselves articulated their concerns that the project would affect their livelihoods, besides the ecology and environment. What was the opposition leader's fault in echoing public sentiments which by and large were arrayed against the mega-project in Arial beel? How is one to equate criticism of a government's move with incitement to violence? We fail to understand.

We believe this has had the portents of eroding the credibility of the government on an issue that required more informed and judicious approach overall. We think lodging a case against the opposition leader on at best a flimsy ground of incitement to violence would prove to be counterproductive.

Amar Ekushey Boi Mela

An auspicious beginning

A MAR Ekushey Boi Mela 2011 opened at the Bangla Academy grounds on Tuesday. The event that started its journey in 1984 has hugely expanded in size, number of publications on display, in terms attracting visitors over the years. The theme of this year's fair is Rabindranath Tagore, to mark the 150th birth anniversary of the poet.

The Prime Minister inaugurated the fair while it was graced by the presence of Nobel laureate Amartya Sen. The PM had words of wisdom to say, "read more books to know thyself, the country and the world". Amartya Sen observed that special feature of Bangla language is its capacity to absorb from foreign languages and its sense of unity through language that will take the Bengalis forward.

The heartening news is, 40 books were sold in just 30 minutes into the opening. It all says about the interest the fair has generated amongst book-lovers. This year 3000 new books will be up for sale from 376 publishers. Number of visitors is on the rise and reading habit is on an upward curve.

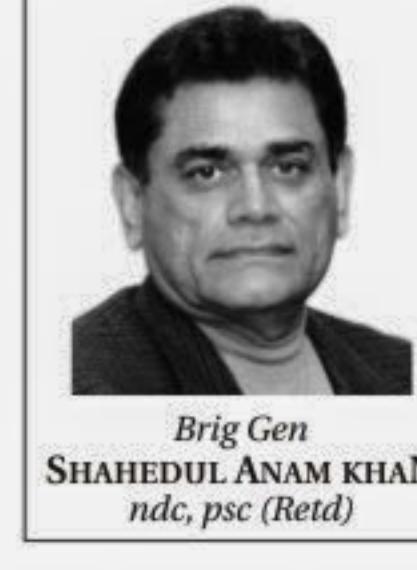
It is through Boi Mela that new authors get a window of opportunity for reaching out to larger audience, much as the established authors benefit from building new bridges with the readers.

It has all the potentials of being a melting pot for authors, publishers and readers. In order to maximize benefits from Boi Mela it must be better organized and held in a much larger venue with multiple entry and exit points. A permanent location with state-of-the-art facilities ought to be thought of.

Ekushey Boi Mela is symbolic of our love for Bangla language and literature. It also provides something of a basis to gauge how far we have progressed in developing our language and literature including translation of books from foreign languages into our mother tongue.

STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING

30 years too many



Brig Gen
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ndc, psc (Retd)

THAT was the writing on a placard carried by a protestor in Egypt demanding the exit of Hosni Mubarak. They

have been on the streets for the last seven days and for them it is Mubarak who should leave power before they leave Tahrir Square.

Egypt is the second largest recipient of US military aid in the world after Israel (\$2 billion annually since 1979), and along with Israel is the most trusted ally in the Middle East (ME). And US feels that the situation in Egypt is still stable. One feels that for each year of despotic rule in Egypt it is US that must answer as to why that was so, because it is US sponsorship of the Mubarak regime which has allowed it to survive this long.

I guess the writing on the placards sums up the feelings of all Egyptians smarting under dictatorial rule for the last three decades. But what it also expresses is the urge of the people for democracy and secular rule that have been suppressed in this country and in many others of the ME for over half a century by dictators, most of whom were directly propped up by US.

At first it was Britain that did not feel shy to express openly that it was prepared to suppress nationalistic aspirations of the people in its ex-colonies in the ME and the Arab world if that went against its interest. The British position could not have been better expressed than what was articulated by British Foreign Secretary Selwyn Lloyd after acceding nominal independence to Kuwait, that, "we must also accept the need, if things go wrong, ruthlessly to intervene, whenever it has caused the trouble" (Chomsky, Hegemony or Survival).

Britain's position was taken over by US after Britain's abdication of its colonial role, which has since been

doing remarkably well as a resolute successor of the British and its policies in the ME, in what can at best be described as an ugly form of neo-colonialism.

President Obama has perhaps expressed the sentiments of the US establishment that the voice of Egypt's youth is coming across loud and clear, and in deference to that the transition to a new chapter in Egypt's history should be peaceful. He has, in other words, called for establishing a pluralistic dispensation in Egypt. Before the US president his secretary of state had also spoken in similar vein, of addressing the legitimate

Coming as these rhapsodic wishes do from an establishment that had done everything to help strut lackeys in the Middle East (and in many other countries of the world, including countries in South Asia) these utterances appear obscene. Given the history of US role in the ME, talk of "legitimate aspiration" "universal human rights" "legitimate rights of the people" not only sounds hollow, it is also utterly disrespectful of those that have been victims of the state coercion while fighting for their legitimate rights. And as for dialogues for reform with the Mubarak government, we have hardly, if at all, come across that being openly articulated

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According to Hilary Clinton, over the last 30 years there have been private and public dialogues with the Mubarak-administration for reforms -- economic and democratic. We hear now from the US leadership affirmation of faith in "real democracy" that would recognise the "universal human rights" of the Egyptian people and which would open up chances for their participation in the affairs of the state, and which in turn would ensure stability.

by the US administration, let alone making sure that reforms are implemented.

It is not as if this is a sudden outburst of people's pent up resentment. It is resentment no doubt and it is pent up too. But that anger was vented by challenging the emergency laws in the form of "Kifaya." This was an anti-Mubarak movement for democratisation in Egypt that started in 2000. According to the spokesperson of Kifaya, the movement that was essentially anti-imperial had goals that went

beyond the democratisation of Egypt. But the movement that had taken its inspiration from the Palestinian Intifada was crushed, with the help of US and Israel. Therefore, the belated call by US for democratisation of Egypt appears indecent at best.

While his masters have been able to foresee the possible outcome of the outburst against his rule, Mubarak is either unwilling or unable to do so. He would much rather like to end his "career," that is how he prefers to see his 30 years of dictatorship, which he was going to perpetuate by anointing his son as his successor, through a peaceful handover in September. Everyone wants to see a peaceful



transition, but prolonging Mubarak's presence in the scene and ignoring the reality would be disastrous.

What we are watching in Egypt is perhaps the beginning, a beginning that commenced with Tunisia, of the end of despotism and autocracy in the ME, and one only prays that it would be achieved without too much of bloodshed. And it is only US that can prevent further bloodshed by forcing Hosni Mubarak to see reason quickly.

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| The New York Times EXCLUSIVE

Allying with the next Egypt

JOHN KERRY

VEN if the protests shaking Egypt subside in the coming days, the chaos of the last week has forever changed the relationship between the Egyptian people and their government. The anger and aspirations propelling a diverse range of citizens into the streets will not disappear without sweeping changes in the social compact between the people and the government -- and these events also call for changes in the relationship between the United States and a stalwart Arab ally.

President Hosni Mubarak must accept that the stability of his country hinges on his willingness to step aside gracefully to make way for a new political structure. One of the toughest jobs that a leader under siege can perform is to engineer a peaceful transition. But Egyptians have made clear they will settle for nothing less than greater democracy and more economic opportunities.

Ushering in such a transformation offers President Mubarak -- a great nationalist ever since his generation of young officers helped their country escape the last vestiges of British colonialism -- the chance to end the violence and lawlessness, to begin improving the dire economic and social conditions in his country and to change his place in history.

It is not enough for President Mubarak to pledge "fair" elections, as he did on Saturday. The most important step that he can take is to end the violence and lawlessness, to begin improving the dire economic and social conditions in his country and to change his place in history. Egyptians have moved beyond his regime, and the best way to avoid unrest turning into upheaval is for President Mubarak to take himself and his fami-



How we behave in this moment of challenge in Cairo is critical. It is vital that we stand with the people who share our values and hopes and who seek the universal goals of freedom, prosperity and peace.

ily out of the equation.

Further, he must guarantee that the election will be honest and open to all legitimate candidates and conducted without interference from the military or security apparatus and under the oversight of international monitors. The Egyptian people are demanding wholesale transformation, not window dressing. As part of the transition, Mubarak needs to work with the army and civil society to establish an interim caretaker government as soon as possible to oversee an orderly transition in the coming months.

Mubarak has contributed signifi-

cantly to Middle East peace. Now it is imperative that he contribute to peace in his own country by convincing Egyptians that their concerns and aspirations are being addressed.

Relationship with Egypt remains crucial for both us and the Middle East.

To that end, the United States must accompany our rhetoric with real assistance to the Egyptian people. For too long, financing Egypt's military has dominated our alliance. The proof was seen over the weekend: tear gas canisters marked "Made in America" fired at protesters, United States-supplied F-16 jet fighters streaking over central Cairo.

Congress and the Obama administration need to consider providing civilian assistance that would generate jobs and improve social conditions in Egypt, as well as guarantee that American military assistance is accomplishing its goals -- just as we are trying to do with Pakistan through a five-year nonmilitary assistance package.

The awakening across the Arab world must bring new light to Washington, too. Our interests are not served by watching friendly governments collapse under the weight of the anger and frustrations of their own people, nor by transferring power to radical groups that would spread extremism. Instead, the best way for our stable allies to survive is to respond to the genuine political, legal and economic needs of their people. And the Obama administration is already working to address these needs.

At other historic turning points, we have not always chosen wisely. We built an important alliance with a free Philippines by supporting the people when they showed Ferdinand Marcos the door in 1986. But we continue to pay a horrible price for clinging too long to Iran's shah.

How we behave in this moment of challenge in Cairo is critical. It is vital that we stand with the people who share our values and hopes and who seek the universal goals of freedom, prosperity and peace.

For three decades, the United States pursued a Mubarak policy. Now we must look beyond the Mubarak era and devise an Egyptian policy.

The writer is a Democrat of Massachusetts, and chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

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THIS DAY IN HISTORY

1783

American Revolutionary War: Spain recognises US independence. In 1783, the Treaty of Paris ended the war and recognised the sovereignty of the United States over the territory bounded by what is now Canada, Florida, and the Mississippi River.

1917

World War I: The United States breaks off diplomatic relations with Germany a day after the latter announced a new policy of unrestricted submarine warfare.

1945

World War II: The United States and the Philippine Commonwealth begin a month-long battle to retake Manila from Japan.

1960

British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan speaks of the "a wind of change" of increasing national consciousness blowing through colonial Africa, signalling that his Government was likely to support decolonisation.

1966

The unmanned Soviet Luna 9 spacecraft makes the first controlled rocket-assisted landing on the Moon. It is the first time the Moon has been observed at surface level.

1969

In Cairo, Yasser Arafat is appointed Palestine Liberation Organization leader at the Palestinian National Congress.

1978

Egyptian President Anwar al-Sadat arrived in Washington DC to discuss the Middle East peace process with US President Jimmy Carter.