

KALEIDOSCOPE

Egyptians claim their stake



SYED FATAHUL AILM

A new Egypt has emerged after President Hosni Mubarak's ouster from power in the wake of 18 days of mass revolt. Tahrir

square in Cairo, Egypt's capital, where hundreds of thousands of Cairenes gathered to voice their anger against widespread poverty, unemployment, corruption and misrule, which finally transformed into a single issue demanding Mubarak's resignation from office, kept the world glued to it since January 25 when the uprising broke out.

Now, though in a mood of happiness and euphoria all over, total peace is yet to set in as fresh waves of marchers are gathering at the Square, while a diehard group has been there for the last 20 days stating their intention to see through the reforms promised by the military. The army wants the Square to be cleared of the crowd, but the protesters are unwilling to leave. But how long can they occupy the streets?

Are they still not fully convinced that the change for which they have been struggling hard is not forthcoming easily and so soon?

One cannot blame the Egyptian masses for their doubts or impatience. For they have seen so often in the past how the politicians, once in power, conveniently forget the promises they had made earlier. Naturally, they are afraid to be cheated once again. Is it any surprise that the experience has made them so resilient and determined?

The resilience of the protesters in the face of ruthless police action that claimed over 300 lives and wounded hundreds, has forced the stubborn Mubarak to hand over power to the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces. The military has promised the Egyptians reforms as well as peaceful and democratic transition to civilian rule through election. But the new

cabinet that Mubarak had hurriedly constituted before his departure in order to appease the rebellious masses will stay in office throughout the transition process.

Though many in the crowd assembled at the Tahrir (Freedom) Square had initially rejected the new cabinet formed by the erstwhile president in his desperate effort to continue in power, they had finally to relent, otherwise the military would have to take power directly to the dismay of the libertarian and youthful marchers

as they laid the foundation of a modern secular Egypt, they were not a set of democratically elected leaders either. So the republic that they had established in place of monarchy remained essentially an authoritarian state.

The assassination in October 1981 of president Anwar el Sadat, who succeeded Gamal Abdel Nasser in October 1970, paved the way for nearly three decades of dictatorship in the country under President Hosni Mubarak. No free democratic elec-

they expressed their solidarity with the street agitators, always trying to ensure that the demonstrators might carry out their campaign peacefully.

That was evidently in a sharp contrast to the behaviour of the police and other the security officials under the hated Interior Ministry that came down mercilessly with clubs, teargas shells, water cannons, even bullets, on the campaigners chanting downfall of the Mubarak regime. From that point of view, the Egyptian army has rather acted as a catalytic force in precipitating the resignation of the dictator.

The people of Egypt, though impatient at the moment to see the reforms started in earnest, freedom and democracy established, their rights returned, corruption in the administration removed, job opportunities created and the scourge of poverty duly addressed, will still have to put their trust in the military until at least the process of transition to democratic rule is completed.

The good news is that the Western allies of Egypt have expressed their happiness over the army's commitment to ensuring peaceful transition to democracy. President Barack Obama of the USA has welcomed the military's present move. Even Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has welcomed it. What has perhaps pleased the West and Israel in particular is the fact that the army will honour all international obligations of Egypt including the 1979 peace treaty with Israel.

We in Bangladesh welcome the positive trend towards change initiated in Egypt. Like we have of our own experience of fighting against subjugation, tyranny and autocracy, the Egyptians, too, have seen enough of it. We salute them for their heroic legacy of struggle for freedom and democracy against oppressive regimes and hope that they will be crowned with success at long last.

The writer is a senior journalist.



AFP

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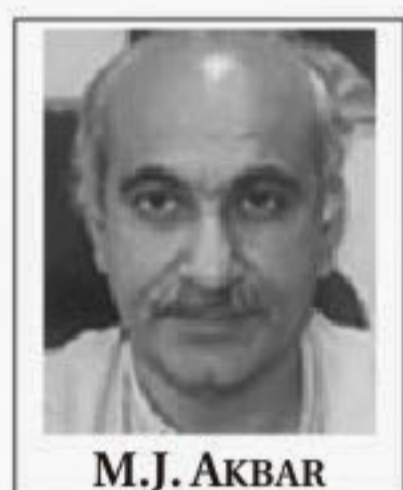
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BYLINE

Egypt finds its destiny



M.J. AKBAR

Salahuddin Ayyubi, more familiar as Saladin, would have understood what was happening in Cairo 2011 perfectly. When, eight

centuries ago, he set out from Damascus to recapture Jerusalem, he headed not towards any Crusader state dotted across the map of Arab Asia, but marched instead to Cairo to destroy the rotting regime that had infected Egypt with smug impotence. Saladin knew, and said, that an Arab victory was impossible without the mobilisation of the heart of the Arab world. The epicentre had shifted from Baghdad with the decay of the Abbasids, and there it lies still.

When Europe began its colonisation project, Napoleon headed for Alexandria, for he knew that the strategic route to both Ottoman Constantinople and British India lay through Egypt. When the British decided it was time to intervene, they sent Lord Cromer to Cairo.

When a dictator falls in Cairo, every other Humpty Dumpty gets a nervous breakdown. All the various kings' horses, and all the many despots' men, cannot put them together again. It is now a matter of time, and time has shifted its loyalty from dictators to democrats. It is a trifle awkward to quote from one's own book, but one of the themes of *The Shade of Swords* [published in 2002] was that most of the Arab world was between 10 to 15 years away from its French revolution.

There are, fortunately, no guillo-

tines, because the 21st century has rediscovered the power of Gandhian non-violence as the ultimate mass weapon against the might of the state. There is no blood on the Nile, there is no stain on the Sphinx, and the people are in power in Cairo.

True, transition is still a work in progress. It would be illusory to declare a premature victory. The dust is still rising in Tunisia, where the ancient régime is fighting a rearguard battle to protect what it has seized from the people over so many decades. Such temptations will doubtless be visible in Egypt as well. But if the elites deny Egypt its libera-

Because democracy does not travel alone. It is always accompanied by nationalism. You can have nationalism without democracy, but you cannot have democracy without nationalism.

The West does not really fear the rise of a Muslim Brotherhood as an alternative to dictators, since that is a socio-political movement that can be contained in a crunch. It is worried about an explosion of governments that place the people's interest above that of sectional regimes at home and their mentors abroad. It was this worry that prevented the West from intervening even when dictators

daughter Nesrine had Zitouna Bank and Al Tijari Bank; his second daughter Cyrine owned the Arab International Bank of Tunisia, and his third daughter Ghazoua the Mediobanca. Why go to Switzerland when you have your own bank?

The difference between a dictatorship and a democracy is not very complicated. Governments are vulnerable in the former, but the country is free and stable. Despots seem permanent but under them the nation seethes in below-the-surface turmoil. How long can you keep the lava boiling inside the volcano?

The point may be stretched but is still worth making: is there anything in common between contemporary Cairo and Calcutta? In both cities, one on the knee of the Nile and the other at the foot of the Ganges, the citizen wants the government out after three decades in power. After this the differences begin.

The Communists of Bengal have ruled in a democracy, while the army-backed regime in Cairo has thrived through a cocktail of fear, fraud and ferocity. Cairo's young cannot trust those who have cheated them for so long, and want change now. Calcutta's young have no problem whatsoever in waiting for the hour appointed by the Election Commission. There is no need for a jasmine uprising. A democracy is a continuous peaceful political revolution.

Egypt has found its destiny and its destiny will change the world around it.

The writer is Editor, *The Sunday Guardian* and *India on Sunday*, and Editorial Director, *India Today* and *Headlines Today*.

Two helpless girls

Track down their parents' killers

THE two young daughters of a couple murdered in the city in March last year are suffering from an acute sense of insecurity. That is because the alleged killers of their parents, now out on bail, have threatened to kill them if they mean to testify against them in court. As the young women, Bithi and Iti, would have us know, the fact that their parents' alleged killers are now free has compelled them to seek shelter away from their home every night. It is a situation that is deeply worrying not only for the women but for the rest of us as well and for some patent reasons.

Where is the guarantee that these two young women, one of whom was a witness to the murder of their parents, will be safe from those who committed the crime last year? The sheer helplessness of the women raises the question of legal and police protection for the families of victims of crime. But if alleged killers out on bail are audacious enough to threaten people with fresh new murder, the question arises as to what the state means to do about it. Of course, individuals accused of crimes can and are granted bail. But once that is done, it should be the job of the authorities at both the legal and police levels to ensure that those out on bail are kept under strict surveillance so that they do not go underground and do not go around threatening those who had filed cases against them. The High Court in August last year directed the police authorities to provide protection to Bithi and Iti after a report on their condition appeared in this newspaper. Why have the police not done their job?

We believe that in view of a general diary filed by Bithi late last month, it is important that the men out on bail be tracked down and taken into custody. The two young women are clearly caught in a state of double jeopardy. If their parents' killers get to them before the law gets to the killers, the horrific consequences can only be imagined.

ETPs mandatory for factories

Punish violators

RELENTLESS dumping of untreated industrial wastes into the rivers and streams by the industries and factories continues unabated. The mindless act has already polluted many canals and rivers and also caused colossal losses to crop fields, resulting in gradual decimation of clean water bodies and fertile agro lands. It also exposes the population to serious health hazards.

We recall the government declaration in 2009 that it will close down the industries that will not set up Effluent Treatment Plant. As a part of the initiative, the government has made the setting up of ETP and shifting of environment polluting industries to new locations mandatory. But the order was not carried out. Earlier in March 2007, the then government asked factory owners to set up ETP in six months to neutralize the industrial wastes that affect the environment and the people. This is also gone by default.

By now all factories should have had their ETPs installed and in use. But most of the factories have not installed them as yet, and whatever few have, don't use it on regular basis. A team from the department of environment recently found ETPs of two factories in Savar having been kept idle. DoE made it clear that the ETP has to operate round the clock. The team heavily fined both the companies and asked concerned authorities to suspend or cancel the environment certificates. The move by DoE deserves appreciation, but this just touches the fringe of the problem.

The government should do everything possible to save the rivers, the environment, the crops and above all the health of the population. None should be spared for causing huge multiple injuries to the nations environ-

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

February 14

- 1743** Henry Pelham becomes British Prime Minister.
- 1899** Voting machines are approved by the US Congress for use in federal elections.
- 1919** The Polish-Soviet War begins.
- 1945** President Franklin D. Roosevelt meets with King Ibn Saud of Saudi Arabia aboard the USS Quincy, officially starting the US-Saudi diplomatic relationship.
- 1989** Iranian leader Ruhollah Khomeini issues a fatwa encouraging Muslims to kill the author of *The Satanic Verses*, Salman Rushdie.
- Birth**
- 1483** Babur, Moghul emperor of India.
- 1869** Charles Wilson, Scottish physicist, Nobel Laureate.
- Death**
- 270** St. Valentine, marking Valentine's Day.