

## SUNDAY POUCH

## Deliberate denial of space to opposition

### Confrontation precipitated

WE view with trepidation that the ruling party has opted for what looks like a deliberate creation of impediments to the opposition's right to dissent. The DMP in a sweeping prohibitory order has forbidden all kinds of political meetings, processions, sit-in demonstrations, human chain formation from 6am to 12 midnight today.

Since the opposition's launching of a road march programme a month ago, government authorities cooperated and the ruling party refrained from interfering with its road marches and rallies. In that context, it is highly disconcerting to note that the ruling party scheduled an elaborate political programmes on the same day that the opposition had planned 20 days ago to bring out public processions in Dhaka.

The provocative announcement of the counter programme by the ruling party is reflective of what the state minister for law Quamrul Islam had said on Thursday addressing the BNP: 'We have tolerated enough, no more leeway would be given' (to you).

Thus in the face of simultaneous scheduling of programmes and counter programmes by the opposition and ruling party respectfully, the DMP has had a handle to step in ostensibly to maintain civic order. Two points, however, must be clearly made here: first, BNP's programme had been announced at least three weeks back but the Mohanagar Awami League's programme was retributively decided to invite a show-down and consequently violence. While the law and order authority, approached by the BNP much earlier than the AL, should have proceeded on first-come-first-serve basis, it has taken the easy way out, or was it all stage-managed? In any case, such an approach is bound to recoil on them.

When the BNP was in power it had applied a similar practice towards the then opposition Awami League.

The simple point is, if only the Awami League had decided to stage its programme a day earlier or later than the BNP, the confrontational posturing could have been entirely avoided, government shown in a better light and the public spared the misery at home and on the street.

We are therefore forced to conclude that what the ruling party has done is to consciously and deliberately act to suppress the opposition's right to demonstrate and hold public rallies. This will not augur well for consolidating democracy.

## Biking criminals' heyday

### Intensify organised patrol

MOTOR-BIKE riders mugging through the streets have added a new dimension to the slide in the law and order. Mugging on the congested roads heightens the sense of insecurity apart from the loss of valuables. They often shoot their way through, which is an added concern for the citizens' lives and limbs. At a recently held conference at Rajarbagh Police Lines, DMP officials gave out that victims had been robbed and shot in 35 incidents only in the last month, leaving some of them fatally injured. As admitted, this is a fragmented picture since a good number of similar incidents went unreported.

What we find more alarming is that the police have yet to find an effective way to stop these mugging speedsters. To add to our misfortune, most of the accused who were arrested in this connection got bail in no time and resumed their activities in full swing.

First, we do not understand how criminals having shot and mugged somebody in broad daylight can slip through the net. How could they get away even after intensified patrols as the police claimed? In fact, it goes to prove the commonly held view that criminals are a lot more organised and smarter than the DMP. Secondly, we are baffled as to how the accused can easily get bail if they are prosecuted with adequate proofs.

In order to stop this, we believe that roving and stationary police teams will have to be brought into operation coupled with community policing to checkmate urban crimes including any new form this may take on. If the criminals prove to be more organised than the police,

# Indian Navy: Running silent, running deep!



ASHFAQUR RAHMAN

LAST week, the Indian Navy commissioned a nuclear powered submarine called *INS Chakra*. The 8,000 ton vessel built by Russia has

been taken on lease for a 10 year period, at a cost of almost \$1 billion. The new submarine will be added to the fleet of 14 aging Indian submarines. It will be armed with 300 km range Klub-S land attack cruise missiles and advanced torpedoes. The submarine will be based at Visakhapatnam along the Bay of Bengal.

According to the Indian Defense Ministry, *INS Chakra* "will be deadly hunter-killer of enemy submarines and warships." It will also provide protection to fleets at sea. The vessel is as sophisticated as the latest US submarines as regard its sound effect and capacity to stay under the sea for a very long period.

It is curious that India is arming itself with offensive naval platforms and military assets. To many, this may seem unusual for a country that is committed to world peace. But analysts say this is part of a regional effort against any other hostile mega power, especially in the Asia-Pacific.

To begin with, an alliance of countries, known as the "axis of democracies," is being formed. Here, India is being joined by the US, Japan and Australia.

Let us take a closer look at what is happening around us in the Bay of Bengal, the Indian Ocean and the Pacific.

Last May, Japan and Australia signed the Japan-Australia Acquisition and Cross Servicing Agreement (ACSA). It calls for reciprocal provision of goods and services during joint exercises, peace keeping operations, relief activities, etc. This is the second ACSA after the one Japan signed with the USA.

But before that, in April last year,

the Japanese defense minister visited India and held the second Japan-India Defense Ministerial meeting. Among other things, it was agreed that joint exercises, staff talks, exchanges in various fields and various levels would take place.

In the meantime, the US is busy putting together the bricks and mortar to form a new security architecture in the Asia-Pacific region.

The concern of the US is mainly the sea "choke points" -- the narrow channels along widely used global sea routes. They are a critical part of the global energy security due to the high volume of oil passing through the narrow straits. Two such "choke points" are the Strait of Hormuz leading out to the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Malacca linking the Indian and the Pacific oceans. On the south

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eastern end of the Malacca Strait it flows into the South China Sea where the resource rich Spratly islands are contested between China and several members of the Association of South East Asian nations (Asean). In Hormuz, the US directly faces Iran, which is ready to close the Strait if US pressure through economic sanction due to its nuclear programme increases.

Thus, last October, the then US Defense Secretary Gates met with the Japanese defense minister at the Asian Defense Ministers meeting in Hanoi and reiterated that their countries would jointly respond in line with a bilateral security pact towards stability in areas in the East China Sea, covering disputes between China and Japan. It may be mentioned that there is complete inter-operability between the navies of the US and Japan.

Relations between the Indian and Australian navies have grown in strength recently. Australia sees India as her "extended neighbourhood." Naval exchange ship visits and exercises are becoming frequent. Australia has agreed in principle to sell uranium to India in a major policy reversal.

The US has also tied up with India through consolidating a strategic partnership. In October 2011, the US army participated in the latest and the largest of *Yudh Abhyas* (training for war) games with India. The US has also been joining annual naval exercises named Malabar with India. It has now included Canada, Australia, Japan, and Singapore. In 2007, Malabar naval exercise was held in the Bay of Bengal close to the Bangladesh shores, with more than 25

warships from five nations. So when India, with more than 700 million poor, is engaged in purchasing and leasing military hardware like the *INS Chakra*, eyebrows are likely to be raised. The scarce resources of the country could instead have been used to alleviate poverty. India's own society, which is threatened by Maoist insurgency, attacks by terrorists, as well as armed insurrection in the north eastern states, needs priority attention.

By participating in a big power game in the Indian Ocean, India may be putting itself at odds with other countries that do not see eye-to-eye with it on strategic matters. India, it is suggested, should first engage China and quickly demarcate their northern land borders so as to increase mutual trust and reduce the possibility of any conflict with China.

Recently, in the 15th meeting between India and China on the border issue, a "working mechanism for consultation and coordination" only was agreed upon. The process of border demarcation continues to be stalled as there is little confidence between the two. India and China are two large trading partners, but this in no way seems to overcome the distrust that exists between them. India's participation with the US, Australia and Japan to contain China through their navies may acerbate the situation.

In 2011, India had invested over \$36 billion in its military. It is rapidly modernising its armed forces and building a missile defense system and nuclear triad delivery systems. The country will be investing more than \$112 billion in sophisticated arms and battle platforms before 2016.

So how do India's small neighbours like Bangladesh see these developments?

Bangladesh has since 2009 been undertaking joint military exercises with India to combat terrorism. It has also been testing combat zone tactics together. India is also now thinking of supplying Bangladesh with military equipment. This is in addition to what Bangladesh buys from China, which, ironically is seen as militarily hostile to India.

In spite of all this, Bangladesh as well as other small nations along the Indian littoral, who use the sea lanes for trade and energy supplies, will remain uncomfortable with the Indian navy patrolling the deep seas ever so quietly and inconspicuously. They would also be worried to see a Nato-like force emerge in the Indian Ocean and the Pacific, comprising of the US, Japan, India and Australia, to jointly confront China or other powers.

The acquisition of *INS Chakra* points towards such a possible development in the future.

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# Peace talks and Pakistan

KHALID AZIZ

SOME years ago, a small passenger aircraft in the US crashed because its pilot and engineer started concentrating on neutralising the trimmer that had not settled, although it was not dangerous. Both crew members failed to watch the fuel gauge, and the crash occurred due to lack of fuel, not the malfunctioning trimmer.

Today, Pakistan is in a similar situation. The state machinery and its top civil-military leaders are so engrossed in the day-to-day happenings in the Supreme Court and the Mansoor Ijaz episode that developments in Afghanistan are being ignored. They are not receiving the attention they deserve.

For instance, the Afghan Taliban made a very important pronouncement on January 16, when they officially declared victory in the Afghan conflict. Obviously, they are now making the announcements that will lead to the end of hostilities: if the war has ended in victory, it is no longer necessary to continue fighting.

This declaration, though very meaningful, has not received due attention. Only 10 days earlier, the Taliban officially expressed interest in negotiations with Washington. This was a considerable shift from their normally stated position that there could be no talks until foreign troops left Afghanistan.

This stance, too, is no longer fixed as they announced their willingness to open a political office in Qatar (although no date for an actual opening has been fixed yet). The Taliban have said that the objective for opening the office was to reach an "understanding with other nations."

Afghan ethnic minority leaders

have simultaneously begun to make statements that they support a negotiated settlement with the Taliban.

By all accounts, it is apparent that the Afghan peace process is under way but Pakistan -- for reasons explained -- is not focusing on the ramifications of what is happening.

What was the need for the Taliban to announce victory? One of the strongest reasons for the group to do so is that it is shifting and transforming itself from being a non-state to a state actor. In 1996, the Taliban fought and came to power in the civil war after the departure of the Soviet Union from Afghanistan. Now, however, the situation is different and they realise that they will need to supplement military options by starting a political process that will allow them to share power.

In the earlier period of the civil war, there was no government in Afghanistan. This time around, there is one. However weak it may be, it is a legal entity. There is also a visible flexibility on the US side, which is no longer insisting that the Taliban accept the existing constitution as a pre-condition.

As an indication of this change, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said some days ago that discussions regarding the opening of a Taliban office in Qatar were taking place and that the release of Taliban prisoners held in Guantanamo was also under

consideration.

These are clear signs that positive steps have taken place to start the Afghan peace process. It is likely that some milestone agreements can be expected before the next Nato conference in Chicago in May. It is hoped that by then Pakistan opts to assist in the peace process.

Sagacity and cold calculation warrant that once peace returns to Afghanistan, Pakistan's centrality -- that was crucial for the western alliance -- will no longer have the same

value. This would call for serious debate on the terms and conditions for its re-engagement as an important regional player.

The window of opportunity is closing fast and our present thinking and concerns will be less valid in, say, six months time. Perhaps the time has come for Pakistan to renegotiate its position with its erstwhile partners and to

build some solid IOUs to use for solving many or some of its problems. Pakistan also needs to focus on the terms and conditions on which it would like to reduce the level of military operations that it began in support of Nato in Fata and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

However, as time passes, two of the country's largest worries will be to control and retire the phenomenon of the Punjabi Taliban that is predicted to continue challenging the state and

threaten regional security as well as cause difficulties with India. Pakistan must counter this situation and instead concentrate on building links.

But, to bring about a positive change, we will have to take robust counterterrorism measures coupled with the de-radicalisation of militants and de-weaponisation. Reconciliation with different groups may now be unavoidable; in a sense, Pakistan today appears to be facing more difficult challenges than perhaps Afghanistan is.

We should begin the task of national self-preservation in right earnest immediately, since the regional security situation is changing very rapidly. Meanwhile, Pakistan must begin to provide whatever assistance it can to help bring the Afghan conflict to an end. The opening provided by the Qatar peace process is a major opportunity to finally conclude the decade of death and destruction that began after 9/11.

Our tragedy today is that Pakistan has a split national consensus -- not only is civil society split among various political parties but the civil-military framework that is so essential to stability is also not functioning smoothly.

For Pakistan's efforts to succeed, the country must find the space to generate economic growth for an increasing population that is facing massive unemployment, inflation and a decaying infrastructure.

The situation would have been much worse if Pakistan had not had a strong agricultural base and the benefit of the flow of remittances from expatriates working abroad. Pakistan badly requires nation-building.

The writer is chairman of the Regional Institute of Policy Research in Peshawar. © Dawn. All rights reserved. Reprinted by arrangement with Asia News Network.

## THIS DAY IN HISTORY

January 29

- 1886**  
Karl Benz patents the first successful gasoline-driven automobile.
- 1916**  
World War I: Paris is first bombed by German zeppelins.
- 1918**  
Ukrainian-Soviet War: An armed uprising organized by the Bolsheviks in anticipation of the encroaching Red Army begins at the Kiev Arsenal, which will be put down six days later.
- 1991**  
Gulf War: The Battle of Khafji, the first major ground engagement of the war, as well as its deadliest, begins.
- 1996**  
President Jacques Chirac announces a "definitive end" to French nuclear weapons testing.