

## SUNDAY POUCH

## BSF chief's statement regrettable

*An authentic clarification called for*

WE recall the Indian Home Minister P Chidambaram's emphatic assurances on a visit to Dhaka in July last that 'under no circumstances' would the Indian border security forces fire upon anyone trying to cross from Bangladesh to India. He even added, "The message has gone down to the last jawan." Against such a backdrop, we are appalled by the BSF chief's observations to the BBC on January 7, 2012 that it is not possible for them to stop firing at the border. Seeing the deliberate nature of his comment, we cannot but be shocked and surprised. We wonder how a border security chief who works under the home ministry could make such a statement that runs counter to the spirit and letter of the assurances given by his minister. We are confused and perturbed at this disconnect between the Indian home ministry and its subordinate apparatus, the BSE.

True, we have a porous and long border with India and there can be exigency at times. Surely there are ways to address it through means other than a recourse to shooting. But if no less than a person like the BSF chief makes a remark like that, then what could perhaps stop the BSF men from being trigger-happy? Actually, it is the attitude of the BSF chief that is patently regrettable.

We expected that after the disturbing footage of torture on a Bangladeshi youth recently released by an Indian TV channel, BSF would be more circumspect. But unfortunately, even after that some Bangladeshis have been shot at by BSF men.

The BSF does not seem to be realizing the negative impact such shooting incidents have on Bangladesh's trust in friendly bilateral relations. At the political level, there may be a realization but that is hardly reflected on the ground. It is a question of respect for human rights, norms of inter-state relations and above all, goodwill between neighbouring states.

In view of the mismatch between assurances from the Indian government level and the attitude of the BSF, we think an authentic clarification from the Indian government will be in order. In fact, it is most desirable to remove further misgivings on the subject; for, each border killing veers us away from good neighbourly relationship that has to be based on trust at all levels.

## Deepening crisis in Pakistan

*It affects governance*

PAKISTAN'S crisis of governance deepens a little more with the country's Supreme Court dismissing an appeal by Prime Minister Yusuf Raza Gilani against a summons in a contempt case. The prime minister's problems have been multiplying since the judiciary took serious exception to Gilani's reluctance to reopen old corruption cases against President Asif Ali Zardari. Despite the prime minister's view that the president has immunity from legal prosecution by virtue of the office he holds, the Supreme Court has continued insisting that Zardari's corruption be reinvestigated.

The judiciary certainly has a point. Reports of corruption surrounding Zardari and his late wife Benazir Bhutto have been circulating for years, especially with prosecutors in Switzerland collecting evidence on the extent of the couple's wrongdoing. But while the Supreme Court may be right in insisting that the matter be reopened for investigation, there is too the fact that the problem threatens to paralyse the government in Pakistan, to a point where politics, whatever there is of it, goes through emasculation. Add to that the troubles the government has been having with the army. In a clearly bizarre situation, the army has been open about its displeasure over the president's role in the writing and sending off of a memo to a senior US military official soliciting help in preventing any coup by the soldiers. The soldiers are miffed and many Pakistanis, for whom the Americans are today more an adversary than a friend, consider the memo to have been an insult for the country.

In these past many weeks, therefore, the government has been under pressure both from an angry military and a re-energised judiciary. If now Gilani is compelled to step down, there is little guarantee that the court and the soldiers will not then go after Zardari. Which again is a message for the government: it can either submit itself fully to the law, through telling Zardari and Gilani to let their places be taken by others as they face the law or it can continue as it is and let the country haemorrhage. And do not forget that an irate army lurks in the bushes.



ASHFAQUR RAHMAN

LAST year, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in the USA celebrated 150 years of its birth. In

these years, it had played the lead role in taking the US into the future.

Just a few of the many discoveries made by its faculty, students and ex-alumni are the telephone, electro-magnet, radar, high-speed photography, photo copier, treatment of cancer, pocket calculator, computers, the internet, the decoding of the human genome, lasers, space travel, etc.

About 25,800 companies in the US today, which employ 3 million people including a quarter of the work force of Silicon Valley, have been set up by ex-alumni of MIT. The companies are generating revenue of \$ 2.2 trillion a year. Yet MIT at no time had more than 10,000 students and 1,000 faculty.

MIT is proud to have produced more than 60 Nobel Prize winners. So what is the mantra that makes the students and faculty of this Institute go on to succeed?

The institute is able to attract brilliant minds from across the globe in various disciplines. In MIT they are clumped together in one campus. So a great musician like Yo Yo Ma and an intellectual cum linguist Professor Noam Chomsky could be meeting each other in MIT corridors almost every other day. The close proximity of such giants in their own disciplines lead to intellectual exchanges that spurs innovation and germinates bold ideas.

One overriding factor in MIT is meritocracy. The lady president of the Institute says: "It is one thing to talk about fostering creativity, but unless you strive for a true meritocracy, you are driving away the best people, and what would be the point of that?"

Harvard University is located across the Charles River where MIT stands. This institution is another great seat of learning. It has produced some of the best minds of the contemporary world. But Harvard stuck to the English model of classical education. MIT, however, took

up the German system of learning based on empirical research. Thus Harvard bent towards the predilections of the rich and the landed gentry where students of privileged birth sparked in the realm of arts and humanities. MIT on the other hand championed meritocracy and industry. At MIT "knowledge is at a premium, but it had to be useful." Students came from all strata of society. But they excelled in what they could produce with their "minds and hands."

So what is the situation in Bangladesh? We have at the moment more than 100 universities, both in the public and the private sectors.

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Some of them focus on science and engineering studies, while many are actively pursuing arts, humanities and current subjects of high value like business administration, computer science, etc. But only a few of these universities maintain reasonable academic standards. The standards of the rest are abysmally poor. They cannot be compared in excellence to their peers in Asia or even in South Asia.

The Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (Buet) has attained a name for itself within our borders. So have Dhaka University and a couple of other universities in the capital. But the overwhelming concern now is that many of our universities are increasingly becoming centres of anarchy, corruption and indiscipline.

Look at the images on TV and in the newspapers of the state of affairs in the various campuses. Pictures of student groups running with arms and chasing other groups are a common sight. Many students who have through sacrifice of their parents arrived at these high seats of learning are getting more and more involved in tender-business, becoming a part of any one of the several *bahinis* (armed groups), and mouthing empty political slogans to get protection of any one of the political parties, etc. Where are their academic programmes? In many of these campuses there are self-

serving student leaders who are showing these students how to perpetuate a vicious atmosphere in the campuses so that the leaders can fulfill their personal agenda.

Once upon a time students were focused on substantive issues and chased ideals. They would fight for these ideals while pursuing their studies. Alas this seems to be now out of fashion.

But are only the students to blame for such state of affairs? No Sir, our teachers and faculty have largely failed to discharge their responsibility to instill the values which these students had come to the institutions to obtain.

In the light of the prevailing situation, it might be relevant to look at some of the best qualities that a university needs to have in order to succeed.

Any good university must be able to support the learning process. It must have modern buildings, qualified instructors and adequate high-technology facilities. The most important aspect is that the university must be well managed.

Experts say that any education institution must have the following four elements. First, it must have tangible assets like physical infrastructure, etc. Second, it must have human resources like excellent teachers and directing staff. The third is that a first class university should possess its own internal culture. The last is that it must have a good operational system.

To elaborate on the third element, any university worth its name must develop a culture with regard to discipline, recruitment, merging of schools, facilities construction, assessment system, etc. It has to follow a select "package of practices" and then keep upgrading itself.

The operational system of a university must allow schools to be run freely by educationists. It must have autonomous right of independent thinking and free expression, within of course the country's laws and constitution.

Today, most of the campuses around the country are disturbed, because the authorities have not developed this internal culture. There is therefore no academic atmosphere. Hence creative work cannot take place.

One policy that needs to be reconsidered relates to the appointment of the vice chancellor (VC). Any university should be led by accomplished persons in a society. The VC should not only be academic minded but must also be a good administrator and a leader. His image should be impeccable. Nowadays, VCs seem to possess academic degrees. But they are not always able to carry forward the institution to the next logical level as many of them lack administrative skills or an understanding of how to steer the institution into the future.

Sir Ashutosh Mukherjee, an outstanding lawyer and judge in India, was the VC of Kolkata University. His contributions are fondly recalled. So was C.D. Deshmukh, an Indian civil servant who was the VC of Delhi University. Even the present Vice President of India, Mr Hamid Ansari, is a retired Indian foreign service officer who was once the VC of Aligarh University. These persons were giants among men in their days.

We thus have much work to do in all the one hundred or so of our universities. The University Grant Commission and the chancellor of the universities have a special responsibility to see that our universities work to attain such high standards that we can be proud of them in our region.

Many alumni from universities in Bangladesh have given the world new ideas. Of them are the concept of microcredit, and the ideas of social business and of oral saline. Researchers who graduated from our technical universities have developed several excellent strains of high yielding rice. Some of them have sequenced the genome of jute. What keeps us from inventing much more?

President Barack Obama is reported to have once said: "We did not come to fear the future. We came here to shape it." Can we also expect our seats of learning to start work on shaping the future?

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## Russia's Syrian power play

YAGIL BEINLASS and DANIEL BRODE

RUSSIA has been steadfast in its diplomatic support for the embattled regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, even as Assad becomes ever more isolated within the Arab League and the international community.

The Kremlin sent a strong message earlier this month when its aircraft carrier, the *Admiral Kuznetsov*, anchored off the Syrian port of Tartus. Then last week, Moscow said a draft resolution introduced at the U.N. Security Council by the Arab League calling on Assad to step aside "crosses our red lines."

Russia's support for Syria dates back to the days of the Soviet Union. The continuing partnership can be attributed to several factors -- historic ties, economic interests and geopolitics.

Recent Russian arms sales to Syria are worth \$4 billion, including fighter jets and advanced missiles. Russian business investments in Syria encompassing infrastructure, energy and tourism amount to nearly \$20 billion. A natural gas processing plant about 200 kilometers east of Homs is being constructed by a Russian engineering

company, Stroytransgaz.

But financial investment carries only so much weight in the face of international criticism. The United States, for example, had billions invested in the Mubarak regime in Egypt, yet halted its support as protests mounted.

Russia has refused to follow suit

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in Syria, demonstrating a willingness to absorb criticism. For the Kremlin, it appears more important to demonstrate a confident and sovereign foreign policy in defiance of the West.

Russia has major geopolitical and strategic considerations that dictate supporting Damascus. As the world's largest oil producer and second largest exporter, Russia is in no need of oil supplies from the Arab world. Moscow also reaps the benefits of controlling regional energy markets. Russia therefore has

no need to appease the predominantly Sunni Arab bloc, which is currently acting in tandem with the West in opposing the Assad regime.

In addition, Russia has its own problems with Islamists in the Caucasus and Central Asia, and it fears rebellions similar to Syria's erupting breaking out in such areas

as Dagestan, Abkhazia, Ingushetia or Chechnya. By supporting its ally in Syria, the Kremlin is sending a strong message to dissident groups that might want to fight unpopular governments within the Russian federation. The Syrian regime also provides Russia with a key strategic asset: a deep warm-water port at Tartus. The lack of such a port has plagued Russia's global ambitions for centuries and is said to be one reason behind its invasion of Afghanistan.

The importance of the port may

not be as great as it was in Soviet times, but unfettered access to the high seas remains a driving force for Russian strategic thinking as Russia's main ports are either ice-locked for much of the year or land-locked by straits controlled by other powers.

Tartus, which garrisons Moscow's growing Mediterranean fleet, is worth defending for the Kremlin. The recent shipment of arms delivered to the port underscored Russia's commitment to its multibillion-dollar arms deal while ignoring an E.U. arms embargo. The port is being upgraded to accommodate larger vessels, as Assad declared the port will eventually be home to some of Moscow's nuclear-armed warships.

In the end, Russia's bold declarations and actions in support of the Assad regime are cold calculations meant to revive its position as a global superpower. While Russia has considerable economic and strategic reasons for the continued support, Syria above all offers the Kremlin the chance to counter the West's influence in the Middle East. Backing the Assad regime is not based on ideological or moral convictions, but on pure power politics.

The writers are intelligence analysts at Max-Security Solutions. © New York Times. Distributed by the New York Times Syndicate.

## THIS DAY IN HISTORY

February 12

**1502**  
Vasco da Gama sets sail from Lisbon, Portugal, on his second voyage to India.

**1554**  
A year after claiming the throne of England for nine days, Lady Jane Grey is beheaded for treason.

**1912**  
The Xuantong Emperor, the last Emperor of China, abdicates.

**1968**  
Phong Nhi and Phong Nhat massacre.

**1974**  
Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, winner of the Nobel Prize in literature in 1970, is exiled from the Soviet Union.

**2002**  
The trial of former President of Federal Republic of Yugoslavia Slobodan Milošević begins at the United Nations war crimes tribunal in The Hague. He dies four years later before its conclusion.