

Is Dhaka a city under siege?

Government's harsh measures disturb life

THE unprecedented security measures the government has taken ahead of the planned BNP's 'Dhaka Cholo' (Let's March to Dhaka) programme for March 12 has left citizens mystified and worried. On the one hand, there is the big question of whether such stringent measures are at all needed when a party simply wishes to exercise its democratic right in a furtherance of its politics. On the other, the way in which conditions are being handled makes it clear that the nation's capital has been placed in a state of siege by the government. All the signs point to a state of panic on the part of the administration in the sense that it thinks the political opposition could really be up to some mischief.

The government's explanation is that such measures are necessary in order to avert chaos on the streets. Of course, no citizen desires to see chaos taking over. But what the authorities clearly seem to be ignoring is the fact that on March 12 it will not be just the BNP which will remain busy with its political programmes. There are tens of thousands of citizens who, as usual, will have their deadlines to meet and responsibilities to fulfill on the day. Now, with the police taking over the streets and then even raiding hotels and messes in the city to ensure that no anti-government elements are around, it is the residents of Dhaka who are being put into great difficulties. The job of a government is to make life easier for people. In the present case, precisely the opposite is being done. It is simply not acceptable.

As for the government's measures to keep the BNP in check, we believe they are misplaced and demonstrate all the features of a police state. If the opposition does engage in any subversive act, the government can very well take action on March 12. But to go about hunting down BNP activists all over the city and even at bus and railway stations and river terminals prior to that date flies in the face of rational thinking. The BNP, the ruling party might do well to remember, is not a proscribed organization but a well-established and major political party. Therefore, for the government to go after it in this rather medieval fashion is really to undermine its own credibility.

We urge the government and the opposition to step back a little and do nothing that will inflame further an already worrisome situation.

Draft Education Act welcome

It should not discourage private sector education

WE heartily welcome the final draft of the country's first-ever Education Act that seeks to implement the guidelines provided in the National Education Policy-2010. The draft attempts to bring all private schools, colleges and universities under a regulatory framework.

Clearly, the aim of the draft Education Act is to restrain private institutions from charging unreasonably high fees. As stipulated in it, all private educational institutions, irrespective of their mediums of instruction, including the MPO-listed schools and colleges will have to receive the government's permission before fixing tuition fees and other charges. It also provides for stern punitive actions against those who will be found to act in violation of these rules. As it stands, the draft Act appears to be rather ambitious, though it largely reflects the expectations of common people who have always demanded government intervention in matters of excessive charging of tuition and admission fees by many private schools and colleges.

Having said that, we would like to caution that unless steps are taken judiciously in matters of tuition and other fees, its implementation may prove to be discouraging for the educational institutions in the private sector. The private sector has been playing a very important role in catering to the increasing demands of education services. We should not forget that if it was not for the quality education provided by some of the leading private universities of the country, we would not be able to keep a lot of students from going abroad. Therefore, in fixing various fees the genuine cost required by a good private educational institution, be it a school or university, must be taken into consideration along with rising inflationary pressures.

At the same time, the authorities concerned should take care that the draft Act in no way curbs the autonomy of the private and public universities.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

March 11

1784

The signing of the Treaty of Mangalore brings the Second Anglo-Mysore War to an end.

1917

World War I: Baghdad falls to Anglo-Indian forces commanded by General Stanley Maude.

1977

The 1977 Hanafi Muslim Siege: more than 130 hostages held in Washington, D.C., by Hanafi Muslims are set free after ambassadors from three Islamic nations join negotiations.

1983

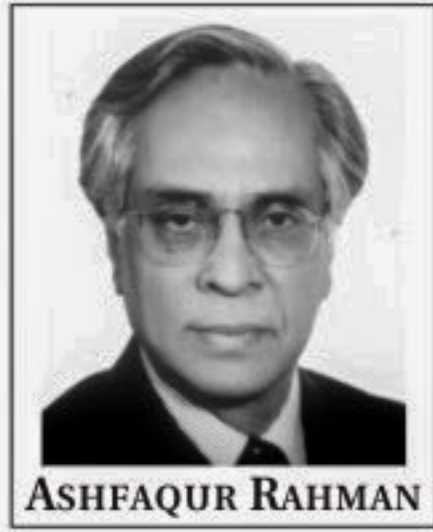
Pakistan successfully conducts a cold test of a nuclear weapon.

1985

Mikhail Gorbachev becomes General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

SUNDAY POUCH

Meet the Indian diplomat



ASHFAQUR RAHMAN

DIPLOMACY in India can be traced to the times when the great epics, *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* were written.

The *Bhagavat*

Gita, which is also a sacred book of the Hindus, is a fine tutorial on diplomacy. The text here is a battlefield dialogue between Arjun the warrior and Krishna, the Vishnu incarnate, who was the chariot driver.

Krishna tells Arjun how one's speech should have the following qualities: "It should not disturb the mind of the listener, should be precise, should be truthful as far as possible, pleasing to the ears and if need be of some utility to him." Truth is not shown as the highest virtue. Rather the premier place goes to the need that it should not cause distress to the listener. Precision and good language are therefore part of any Indian diplomatic dialogue.

In the fourth century BC the political analyst Kautilya in his *Arthashastra* said that what produces unfavourable results is bad policy. A policy is to be judged by the results it produces. To him diplomacy is an art which need not concern itself with ideals. It must achieve practical results for the sovereign.

When the Mughals came to India, the Rajput clans used diplomacy to appease them. Thus, when Emperor Akbar proposed to marry a Hindu Rajput princess, Jodhabai, who was the eldest daughter of the Raja of Amber, she was persuaded to give her immediate consent. This cemented the bonds between two different races and religions. The Indians also used pompous social festivals like the traditional "Rakhi" ceremony to tie the knot of fraternity among monarchs. Recall how Raja Man Singh of Gwalior also gave the irresistible classical singer Tansen as a "gift of appreciation" to Emperor Akbar. It was to gladden the heart of this powerful sovereign, who could otherwise be a

difficult proposition. Diplomacy is, therefore, deep inside an Indian's psyche. Its centrepiece is tolerance and conciliation.

Fast forward to present day India. The diplomats from that country are the scions of these great traditions. They pursue their national objectives now with greater sophistication and better negotiating skills. Their canvas has expanded not only to include the neighbouring states of South Asia but the world at large.

It may, therefore, be interesting to meet such an Indian diplomat who also doubles as a negotiator. The person is usually a complex and highly imaginative individual. His behaviour is influenced greatly by his cultural values. At times, this may lead him to be inconsistent in his behavior. On his own, he is very aggressive. But as a part of a team he tends to be passive and demure. Then he does not

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express any views, unless it is a part of the consensus which was reached earlier with other members of his negotiating team. But his rich imagination expresses high aspirations. He may also join in creative problem solving.

Indian culture is hierarchical. Top down decision is the norm. A subordinate diplomat rarely differs with his seniors. He would at most disagree with the nature of the decision or the way it is being implemented. One cannot, therefore, expect maverick behaviour from him.

The Indian negotiator sometimes has an exceptional ability to analyse. The rapid growth of software industry in India would not have been possible without such a skill among the Indians in general. This also means that he is discerning and is able to quickly find flaws in the arguments put forward by the opposing side. India is

perhaps one of the most nationalistic places on earth. The diplomat-negotiator is, therefore, sensitive to advice from foreigners. He will then react quickly as his sentiments are easily aroused.

The Indian diplomat often takes a subjective view of time. He does not feel the same sense of urgency in solving bilateral or multilateral issues as other country's negotiators. He has what can be called more of a "being" than a "doing" attitude. For this he may be labeled as a foot dragger.

An Indian diplomat always seeks a lot of information. He will subject this information to a lot of analysis before he draws up his line of argument.

When you start negotiating with an Indian diplomat on any matter, he will at first express his reluctance to accept your proposal. He will try to squeeze you as much as possible. He will negotiate for months or even

years to get the best deal. Eventually, you will get so tired negotiating for the last 5% that you could eventually agree with him.

Finally, contractual or treaty obligations do not have the same sanctity with him as with others. The Indian diplomat usually operates in a somewhat chaotic environment. There are political uncertainties, judicial delays, nationalistic concerns, sensitivity of state governments etc. This suggests the need for flexibility. So, given a chance an Indian diplomat would prefer open ended obligations.

Now, with such unconventional behaviour, how should we negotiate with the Indians? How do we engage them and find mutually acceptable solutions on substantive matters such as the determination of land and maritime boundaries, peace at the border, or sharing the waters of

the common rivers? Given the political will on both sides, we must know how the behaviour of the Indian diplomat would impact the outcome of any negotiations. First, we must understand that any negotiation process with India will necessarily be long and time consuming. Second, contractual obligations of India cannot always be taken seriously. The matter of implementing the Indira-Mujib Accord and the signing of the accord on Teesta are just two of the many cases where the Indians acted in a casual way in implementing their commitments. A changed situation on the ground may also tempt Indians to request fresh negotiations. In that case, it would be wise for us to introduce new parameters, each time there is a shift by them, in meeting international obligations. Harsher conditions could be laid down to desist them from taking recourse to casually postponing the implementation of agreements.

Third, the Indian perception of fairness is often different from that held by a Bangladeshi negotiator. This could be quite disturbing. Fairness in deciding contentious issues usually has two dimensions -- the outcome and the process. On either count, we could find ourselves in the lurch. So we have to see that our national interest is not compromised in any way. We must be able to persuade the Indians through cogent arguments, quoting precedents and referring to good practices round the world, to get the best result.

In the end we need to induce the Indian side to relax their rigid stance. They must be encouraged to work in tandem to produce win-win outcomes.

Frank Lloyd Wright is reported to have once said: "I know the price of success -- dedication, hard work and an unremitting devotion to the things you want to see happen."

For Bangladesh, this is the dictum that may see us through our relations with India, for the time being.

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| The New York Times EXCLUSIVE

Poorly told political fortunes

FRANK BRUNI

WITH his time served on the trail in 2008 and the money he had going into 2012 and his momentum coming out of Florida, Mitt Romney was supposed to be turning much of his attention to the fall by now, not looking over his shoulder and sweating Ohio. But this presidential race has been all about upended expectations. At the mile marker of Super Tuesday, it's worth pausing to look at how frequently we've erred and how much we've learned.

By "we" I mean not only the news media but also most political analysts. For starters, most of us grossly miscalculated the ardour, the stubbornness, the spleens of a great many conservative voters, who thrilled to Newt Gingrich despite his leaden baggage, swooned for Rick Santorum in all his frigid sanctimony and would not be wooed by Romney, no matter how many dozens of roses he promised.

This was a likelihood that had been staring us in the face, an easy extrapolation from the far right's behaviour during the debt-ceiling showdown last summer. Still we missed it, so certain that a determination to defeat President Obama would cause Republicans to coalesce before this point.

As fortunetellers we stink, and we stink with dangerous consequences. Because we didn't see Santorum coming, we homed in on his extremism late, so that he was able for a long while to play offense instead of defense and choose his talking points.

Did that help him get this far?

We overestimated the sway of money, factoring it into our glowing predictions for Rick Perry, who burst out of the gate with considerable campaign funds and the hope of much more. His lead was fleeting, his collapse spectacular.

Romney's financial edge hasn't yet slashed rivals quite as brutally as once envisioned. Santorum plodded through the opening phase of the contest on a shoestring and caught fire before Foster Friess opened his checkbook wide. Even now he's not on a financial par with Romney; nor

As for momentum's role in this election cycle, the fabled "big mo" is a seeming no go. Gingrich supposedly had it coming out of South Carolina, long billed as the best bellwether of all the early states, but it was wrested by Santorum after Colorado, Missouri and Minnesota. It's now Romney's yet again.

are Gingrich and Paul. They linger nonetheless.

To the extent that Santorum and Gingrich have been kept afloat by a crucial baseline of financing, they owe thanks to the dawn of super PACs, a development that was thought to be dangerous to Obama but might, in a roundabout way, wind up helping him. The longer the Republican battle grinds on, the bloodier its combatants become. A new NBC/*Wall Street Journal* poll shows that the percentage of voters who view Romney unfavourably now trumps those who view him

favourably by 11 points. Bob Dole, in contrast, had a mere four-point negative spread at this point in 1996. He fared well.

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Meantime, the culture wars have resumed -- usually something Republicans relish.

But the surreal focus this time is on birth control as opposed to abortion, and conservatives keep overplaying their hands. Rush Limbaugh fished tired epithets from a misogynistic toilet; advertisers proceeded to flush him. (On the environmental front, Lou Dobbs attacked "The Lorax" as a tree-smooching Commie, but the movie is cleaning up at the box office.)

Democrats sense an advantage, and are seizing it with the kind of gusto more commonly associated with Republicans. So aloof and cerebral so much of the time, Obama got

warm and fuzzy with Sandra Fluke, calling her up to say her parents should be proud. Nicely done.

Fluke could be the Joe the Plumber of 2012, drafted by political circumstance into a pitched debate about the rightful role of government and given a symbolic currency she couldn't have foreseen. In the "American Idol" era, the people with the most compelling claim on our attention are those plucked from obscurity.

"American Idol" brings us to Fox, whose anchors during the campaign have also strayed off script. Possibly because they needn't worry about being tagged with liberal bias, probably because tense theater equals good television, they have subjected Republican candidates to some of their toughest questioning.

Bret Baier cornered Romney on his inconstancy. Chris Wallace asked Michele Bachmann: "Are you a flake?"

On Sunday morning he grilled Santorum about having given a much lower percentage of his income to charity than Obama had. He also confronted him with federal statistics that 99% of sexually active American women between the ages 15 and 44 have used artificial birth control.

"All of those women have done something wrong?" he wondered aloud.

I got the sense that he was placing his chips on Romney. And I'll say that's right, though I'm aware in doing so of all the wrong turns to date.