

## Military takeover in Egypt

*A divided people caught in turmoil*

THE military ouster of Mohammed Morsi, the first ever popularly elected Egyptian president after only a year in office, is disquieting. We are against any takeover of power by extra-constitutional forces, whatever the exigencies.

Ostensibly, the Egyptian military has staged the coup amid widespread political unrest spearheaded by anti-Morsi demonstrations. The protesters comprising mainly liberals, secularists, minority Christians and disgruntled quarters of previous regime have been demanding Morsi's resignation. They highlighted his failures to salvage the economy, which went downhill and attempts to take all power in his own hands through a controversial constitutional declaration made last November.

This is a sad commentary on the 2011's January revolution of Egypt that overthrew the three-decade dictatorship of Hosni Mubarak in the hope of a corruption-free, liberal and democratic Egypt. Ironically, president Morsi has been deposed by a military that was instrumental in removing Mubarak from office paving the way for a universally recognised free and fair election that voted him into office.

Undoubtedly, Morsi had his failures. He failed to efficiently address the major concerns of the revolution, the Mubarak-era legacy of nose-diving economy and ever-worsening security situation verging on lawlessness. He attempted to place the President's decisions beyond judicial review triggering the public outcry. Worse yet, as a public leader he could neither engage his opponents in a dialogue, nor mobilise public opinion in his favour.

Even so, in a democracy, transfer of power can and should take place only through an election. But that democratic norm has been blatantly violated in Egypt's case.

## Jacking up prices of essentials

*Why must it happen before Ramadan?*

CONSUMERS have by now become habituated to seeing a fresh hike in prices of essentials as the month of Ramadan draws nearer. This has become somewhat of a yearly torment. The manner in which traders' bodies come up with assurances that prices will remain stable during the holy month of fasting has become such a routine manner, that consumers hardly bat an eyelid when prices shoot up.

This year the apex business forum, the FBCCI, has explicitly stated in a recent press conference that the sins of the past will not be committed this year. And like clockwork the Commerce Secretary has expressed his satisfaction that word will indeed be kept.

Why are we not satisfied with such assurances? It has perhaps to do with the fact that despite having ample provisions for the most sought after items on the 'Iftar' menu, prices at both wholesale and retail levels go up and there is hardly any government drive to hold traders to account. The fact that authorities have let consumers down in the name of *laissez faire* is hardly an excuse for inaction. Countering business syndicate and unfair business methods through which such malpractices take place would not be an impossible task for the government had the political will existed. We urge the government to engage the trade and chamber bodies, wholesale market operators and the retail networks in periodic consultations by way of monitoring the behaviour of the market and ensuring that the prices remain stable.

### INSTANT REACTION

## Family call or official duty?

SHAKHAWAT LITON

THE way the PM's private visit to London has been turned into an official one has triggered a serious question. The reason behind changing the trip's status is pretty obvious. And the taxpayers will have to bear the expense of the visit by Sheikh Hasina and her 43-member tour party, who will have a cushy time at public expense.

What will she do in London for five days?

She will attend the wedding reception of her niece, the eldest daughter of Sheikh Rehana. Scheduled for next Sunday, the reception is a private ceremony for family and friends.

How was this trip turned into an official visit then? The patina of "official" has been lent to the visit by the fact that the British Foreign Minister William Hague will be calling on her and she will be holding a breakfast meeting with the members of the All Party Parliamentary Group for Bangladesh.

It seems that for the greater part of her 5-day stay in London, our prime minister will be tourist there. And what will the poor people of Bangladesh, who are footing the bill of the large entourage, get in return?

In terms of amount of money, the five day all paid 'holiday' will certainly be a big amount. But this may not be considered as a 'big deal' in Bangladesh where thousands of crores of taka are being plundered from public exchequer through corruption and other misdeeds and where the finance minister terms Tk 4,000 crores swindled by Hall-Mark Group from the state run Sonali Bank, or the several thousand crores swindled by Destiny, as a paltry amount.

But the example the prime minister has set through her London trip may call into question the moral standard of the government she has been presiding over.

The writer is Senior Reporter, The Daily Star.

# Sleeping thermometers

### CROSS TALK



MOHAMMAD  
BADRUL AHSAN

THE story minus the credentials of its characters reads like a sugar daddy-styled seduction scandal. A 77-year-old man shared the same bed with a 17-year-old girl and she was duty-bound to use her undressed body like a thermometer to take the temperature of his passion every night. People may ask why it's important to dig up the dirt after all these years. It's because Mridula Gandhi, known by the diminutive Manuben, has spoken to us. The dead woman has broken her silence after an Indian weekly published the excerpts from her diaries for the first time. Hearsay before, now we can hear her saying it from her grave to us.

The Gandhi lovers would wish to let the sleeping dogs lie. Their icon didn't sleep with his personal attendant in the wrong sense of the word. The two of them were engaged in a yogic experiment to seek a superior level of mind. Manuben doesn't anywhere in the 2,000 pages of her diaries indicate that the Mahatma ever tried to take advantage of her. She has mentioned many times that the father of the Indian nation was like a mother to her. She sincerely believed she was helping a larger-than-life man attain his heights.

Let us not judge Mahatma Gandhi or, for that matter, any living or dead great man if he has occasionally embarked on a questionable path. Great lives are comparable to an exercise in mathematics when students calculate and erase in the trials and errors of their attempts to find solutions. What matters in the end is final work, not side notes.

In his final work Gandhi led India to freedom. Let us not deny he gave much more than he must have taken. But one could see his dilemma in the battles he was fighting on two fronts. He was trying to get rid of the British on the outside and flee from "the serpent" on the inside. The serpent forced him to take the vow of celibacy at the age of 37. He never slept with his wife again.

Apparently, he also never escaped the serpent altogether. It was rattling him with evermore fury as he was shaking up the British Empire. He carried out his bizarre experiment by asking his female associates to sleep with him naked. He needed reassurance every night that he was in control of his carnal impulse.

Some of Mahatma's sleeping thermometers led normal lives. One of them even became a union minister of India. Those women used their close proximity to the great man to fulfill their individual goals. But Manuben was only 19 when Gandhi died. Young and scantily educated, what was she to make of that loss? She withdrew herself into a solitary life until she died, unsung and unweid, in Delhi at the age of 40 in 1969.

Manuben's diaries give us ample hints that while her mentor was lifting the masses across India, she was getting weighed down by its burden. She was wracked with shame and guilt as friends and followers of Gandhi urged him to suspend his celibacy test. She requested Babu to allow her to sleep separately. At some point she even mustered courage to stop her evening walks with him.

But the immensely wise Mahatma always prevailed with his convincing words. He told her that she was a sacred part of his *yagna* of celibacy and promised that if she came out unscathed from this experiment it would take her character to greater heights. A teenage girl must have found that temptation hard to resist. She obeyed and returned to the experiment like Trilby succumbed to Svengali's charm in George du Maurier's 1894 novel.

Gandhi scholar Stanley Wolpert writes that the Mahatma had hoped that through the yogic powers of his celibacy he was going to help restore Hindu-Muslim unity across India. In that consideration, what was Manuben's role in that noble thought? She must have spent the rest of her life grappling with that question. And it must have further afflicted her tormented soul. When Manuben was hospitalised with an "unknown" ailment in 1955, Morarji Desai wrote to Jawaharlal Nehru that her problem was more psychological than physiological.

Mahatma Gandhi once told industrialist G.D. Birla that if his mind was impure during the experiment and he was being hypocritical, then he would die a miserable death. The last entry in Manuben's diary was 22 days after Nathuram Godse assassinated Gandhi on January 30, 1948. It's hard to tell how far the experiment was completed. Did Gandhi find what he looked for? Did Manuben reach the heights she was promised?

India won freedom. Gandhi became immortal. What did Manuben get? That mournful cry rings through the diaries. Her troubled soul shuffles through the pages long after her body has left the world.

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*One could see Gandhi's dilemma in the battles he was fighting on two fronts. He was trying to get rid of the British on the outside and flee from "the serpent" on the inside.*

## Morsi's fall and impact on democracy

ZIAUDDIN CHOUDHURY

EGYPT'S Morsi has fallen, and fallen very badly, trying to stem a tide of protest against his government, but more significantly trying to stand up to the most powerful institution of the country -- the Armed Forces. Morsi has been ousted by the army because he failed to heed to the protests against his government by people who had been peeved by a failing economy, his political ideology, and assumption of more power for his office. They wanted him to go.

His response to his detractors had been that he was elected to the office by popular vote, and he had the right to remain in office to serve his term. Apparently, his country's most powerful institution did not agree with him. So, citing people's concerns and demands, they forced him out. And all they wanted was democracy for Egypt. Since when has toppling democratically elected leaders by force been democratic?

Morsi may have made many mistakes in his first year, like dismissing top army officers within the first few months. Like many public leaders in many other countries who are elected to office with popular votes Morsi also thought that he had people power behind him. He may have thought that the protests that he encountered in the last two weeks were part of the democratic process where the opposition vents its disapproval of the government in power, and he wanted to meet these politically with support from his loyalists.

Where he went wrong was in his apparent belief that he could discount the army's role and influence in the politics of his country. He may have into account that his was an institution that had been built over and thrived for more than five decades with government help. It has supported and buttressed authoritarians for much of modern Egypt. This seat of power and authority cannot be diminished in a year, or even in the term of a president.

Unfortunately, in ignoring of the army Morsi is not alone. In Pakistan, time and again, the army had intervened to "save" democracy in that country. The most recent example was when Gen. Pervez Musharraf toppled a democratically elected leader, and his country had lauded his actions -- albeit to regret it some ten years later. Unfortunately, in countries like Egypt, Pakistan, and Turkey (until turn of last century), the army has been the unofficial guardian of the country. The institution has thrived with the blessings of the governments because either the heads of governments came from the armed forces or they were propped up by them. The army in these countries played the role of a parallel government of sorts and arbiter of political feuds, intervening as necessary. The army managed to create a squeaky clean image by maintaining an official arms-length distance from politicians, many of whom dived into corruption and thrived on it.

Unofficially, the army carried the power baton that would be wielded to herd the straying politicians to the line it wanted them to follow. Majority of the people in these countries never got an inside view of the palace intrigues. Instead, they have been enamoured by the show of external discipline and time to time application of force to cow down errant politicians.

The supreme irony of the recent uprisings and protests

against Morsi and the jubilation of the protesters at the army's ouster of Morsi is that similar protests were staged by people in the same famous square against the army prior to last year's election. That protest was staged to remonstrate against the army's dilly-dallying with the election schedule. Thanks to people's protest and the army's holding of the elections, which were declared to be free and fair by all, Egypt had its first truly democratically elected Parliament and later a president.

In the initial days there were tremendous apprehensions in the outside world whether this would last, particularly when the new president changed the top brass of the most powerful institution of the country. The powerful army lost a battle, but not the war. The opportunity came via the massive protests over economic woes, rising prices and unemployment, power cuts and lack of security. The final coup de grace was provided by Morsi's belated response for a political dialogue. By that time the die was cast for him.

But is this the way a democratically elected leader should be shown the exit? Is not ballot the proper answer to oust a government that we do not like? What precedence do we establish when we trash a nascent democracy in a fashion that only fits a dictator?

Public memory is proverbially short. We all live in a state of amnesia or pretend that we never faced dire conditions in life before when we face new troubles. People easily forget the dark times of authoritarian or military rule, abuse of human rights, and absence of freedom. Democracy releases people from these chains, but it also bestows some accountabilities and responsibilities that people cannot appreciate immediately. People react sharply when there is a dearth of physical amenities that a dictatorial regime made available to people to keep them happy. It takes time for a democracy to be stable, and people need to realise that.

People in Egypt vented their grievance through massive protests against Morsi and his government. In Bangladesh, we also see such protests against governments, many of which often occur with violence. There is no power greater than people power. However, it is effectively achieved not just by demonstrations but by exercise of ballot.

You cannot solve a democratic issue through the barrel of the gun or exercise of brute force in a *hartal* or strike. If you want to defeat a political system or philosophy defeat it at the polls. A political commentator rightly remarked on the recent happenings in Egypt: "A military intervention, even one backed by the street, will never achieve the lasting impact of an electoral defeat, and will always leave the impression that those backing the intervention fear that they cannot win an election."

The writer worked for the World Bank in Washington, DC.

## LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR  
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### Snowden a hero, not traitor

Edward Snowden is a whistleblower hero who is working for humanity. He did not do anything wrong by disclosing the illegal bugging on different organisations and individuals in the USA. It is pathetic that the other countries of the world are afraid to provide asylum to such a brave man.

Bidit Chowdhury

On e-mail

### Piracy dominates IT market

Software piracy means unauthorised copying of software. Software industries lose a lot of money every year due to piracy. And no matter whatever legal steps they take, it seems that these unscrupulous businessmen are always one step ahead of them.

Being a third world country, Bangladesh will require a lot of efforts to keep up the competitive trend with other countries in the worldwide IT market. But if pirated software continues to dominate the IT market in the country, the local programmers and developers will not stand a chance to show their potential. The existing laws are not enough to reduce software piracy. We must raise awareness among young people about its negative impacts on the country's economy.

Sharmin Sultana

Department of Criminology and Police Science  
MBSTU

### 'Minus-two formula'

Nowadays the PM is repeatedly referring to "minus-two formula" in rejecting the opposition demand for holding the next general election under a CTG. It is alleged that the last CTG plotted to end the political career of both Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia, put both of them behind bars and pressured them to leave the country. But what she does not say is that it was she and her party who were the architect of CTG. And now, like everyone, she has forgotten the past and taken all steps to bury the CTG.

In a recent commentary, the editor of The Daily Star opined that the present government is characterised by arrogance, whims and vengeance. The Daily Star on June 30 published a news in the front page headlined, "CG must; CG never," referring to the addresses of Hasina and Khaleda in the parliament on budget discussion. One cannot be blamed if one looks for the answer in "minus-two formula."

Engr. Md. Aminul Hoque

East Rampur, Dhaka

### Comments on news report, "No doubt about article by Khaleda," published on July 3, 2013

Mofi

Khaleda Zia should come forward either with hard evidence and prove she was not involved in it or explain why she did so.

Bangla bright

Good lord, cat chasing its own tail! GSP was withdrawn because of many accidents and deaths of garments workers under this government, not because of an article whose writer could be anybody since our opposition leader does not have a university degree! Simple!!

Mohammed

If USA postponed GSP because of a write-up by Khaleda Zia, then it seems that she is more acceptable to USA than the present PM.

Abul Kashem

Writing articles and expressing opinions in newspapers may not be an offense indeed. We are not convinced that the GSP facility was postponed by US government only on the basis of that article.

Sara

Did she really think she could deny something published in her name which she has not denied for months?

SM

Lies to cover lies ... usually it catches up to you. Both Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia still don't get it.

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"Amar Desh admits it was Gilaf photo" (July 2, 2013)

A.H. Dewan

Amar Desh went into a frenzy to publish prejudicial materials. It is too late for the newspaper to bite the bullet.

Nds

Now the media people have stepped into the dirty path of belated confession of its motivated and maligned course of action to serve their convenience after the purported object is achieved and the intended damage is done. Credibility is the consequent casualty.

Jafar Imam

Only illiterate people run after eagles to collect their ears. No journalist can do that.

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"US suggests action plan" (July 2, 2013)

Wind

Six month is not enough for the improvement of the structure. This action plan will be definitely tough for the incumbent government.

Iftekar Hassan

Excellent US proposal or guidelines for Bangladesh to follow.