

ACQUISITION OF CHINESE SUBMARINES

No cause for India to worry



BARRISTER HARUN UR RASHID

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BA NGLADESH is not only a riverine but also a maritime country. It was the ocean route that in the past led many foreigners to come to then undivided Bengal and Chittagong port was the conduit for interaction between Bengalis and foreigners including

European colonisers. Today's Bangladesh as an independent and sovereign nation needs to address both military and non-military maritime security threats in its jurisdiction in the Bay of Bengal. Reportedly Bangladesh and China signed an agreement last December to buy two "Ming" class submarines at the cost \$230 million to protect its maritime areas in the Bay of Bengal and there is nothing unusual about the procurement of the submarines to protect our maritime areas. Since 2010, the government has taken firm steps in gradually building Bangladesh Navy as a deterrent force and the acquisition of submarines is a part of the plan to defend its off-shore areas. Bangladesh also acquired a warship from the US coastguard which is believed to be the biggest Bangladesh has ever commissioned as yet by the name of "Sumdra Bijoy" (Victory of the Ocean). Following the verdict of ITLOS in March 2012 on the maritime boundary between Bangladesh and Myanmar, large areas of living and non-living marine resources of east of the Bay of Bengal have come under its jurisdiction including the 200-mle exclusive economic zone and outer continental shelf. So in light of this it was necessary to upgrade Bangladesh's naval capabilities. The arbitration case between Bangladesh and India on the dispute on maritime bound-

ary in the western part of Bay of Bengal was heard this January by the Arbitral Tribunal at The Hague. The verdict, however, is expected to be delivered by June 2014, and has possibilities to be in favour of Bangladesh, adding more maritime areas under its jurisdiction. Exploitation of coastal and off-shore areas includes seafloor mining, deepwater drilling and exploration of oil and gas. There is a full-blown new revolution of technology to exploit marine resources at any depth. Besides the traditional non-living resources (oil and gas) numerous forms of life live in the sea which could become one of the potential resources of food and the sea could be one of the renewable sources of energy (tidal waves) in future. Scientists say that sea resources are more than those of the land and as land resources deplete and the population increases, the country will depend on its sea resources. It is noted that 90% of GNP depends on sea trade and commerce and almost 100% of Bangladesh's energy requirement (in terms of fuel arrives) by sea from the Middle East and therefore non-military threats, such as piracy, human and drug trafficking, gun running and oil spill on the sea areas of Bangladesh need be adequately addressed. The two sea lines of communication connected with two sea ports at Chittagong and Mongla act as vital trade links. Thereby any sort of disruption to the sea lanes will have a disastrous effect. It is reported that India felt unease about Bangladesh's deal for submarines with China and sought clarification from China on the necessity of supplying submarines to Bangladesh. Although India does not perceive a threat from the acquisition of submarines by Bangladesh, but some geo-political analysts think that India is worried with increasing Chinese influence on Bangladesh and turning Chittagong port similar to "Gwadar port" of Pakistan.

Gwadar, being built in Baluchistan coast, is only 180 nautical miles from the exit of the Straits of Hormuz and the port will be run by China. India thinks that both Pakistan and China will take control over the world energy jugular and may interdict Indian tankers, if necessary. This apprehension emanates from Indian perception that China has been gradually encircling India by the so-called "String of Pearls". The term "pearls" meant naval facilities China reportedly has been developing in Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand and Cambodia. In Myanmar alone, they include ports such as Sittwe, Coco, Hianggyi, Khaukphyu, Mergui and Zadetkyi Kyun. China moved into India's backyard when it signed an agreement with Sri Lanka in March 2007 to develop Hambantota Development Zone, which includes a container port, a bunkering system, an oil refinery, an airport and other facilities. It is expected to cost about US\$1 billion and the Chinese are said to be financing more than 85% of the project. The entire project is scheduled to be completed in the next 8 years. The Chinese role in the Hambantota project is not only about influencing Sri Lanka, but it is also about China's presence near the Indian shores, which has implications for India's security. India sees Sri Lanka as a sentinel of its security astride in the Indian Ocean. Given the above geo-political background, India appears to be worried that Chittagong port may be added in future among the "string of pearls" of China. India shouldn't worry as Bangladesh maintains cooperative interactions with both India and China, and the relations with these countries are not at the expense of the other. Bangladesh is pursuing a mature foreign policy of what may be labelled as "more friends, fewer enemies."

So it could be said that there is little for India to worry.

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Underlying messages of UZ polls

SHAKHAWAT LITON

I N their electioneering many grassroots level leaders of ruling Awami League are telling voters that the AL is in power and the upazilas will see more developments if the AL-backed candidates are elected chairmen and vice-chairmen to the upazila parishads. According to them, development will be hampered if candidates backed by BNP and other parties get elected in the upazila polls. In support they are portraying the development activities of the AL-led government over the past five years in different sectors including communications, education and health. The ruling AL grassroots' strategy is significant. Their views cannot be ignored. People also believe it in the light of their past experiences. This, however, exposes the perverted political culture in our country. This also validates the argument that the local government bodies are yet to be built as institutions. And their fate still depends on the whims of the party in power. The constitutional provision and laws enacted in the light of the constitutional provision cannot ensure a smooth growth of the local government bodies.

Whether or not the people believe in what the AL grassroots leaders are telling them about the local developments will be clear after the elections to the upazila parishads are over. But the elections to 97 upazila parishads held in the first phase on February 19 suggest people are not caring much about the assurances of local developments, at least that is what the first phase results tell us. In the battle of ballots, the BNP backed candidates performed well in all the posts. Of the 97 chairman posts, the BNP-supported candidates won 41, the AL 34 and Jamat 12. The BNP-blessed candidates won 72 of 192 vice-chairman posts, including those reserved for women. The AL-backed contender secured 63 vice-chairman posts and those supported by the Jamaat, a key component in the BNP-led alliance, won 30 vice-chairman posts. BNP supported aspirants won all three posts of chairman and vice-chairman in 11 upazilas, while those with AL support emerged victorious in 10 and Jamaat men in three upazilas. BNP and Jamaat men together won all three posts in another 12 upazilas.

The outcomes of the first phase battles of ballots have made the AL policymakers worried. They want to fight back in the next phases, particularly in the second phase polls to 117 upazila parishads slated for February 27. If they are able to accomplish their mission and emerge victorious, then it will be good for them. The ruling AL, that has been mired in controversy for holding the one-sided voter-less January 5 parliamentary election, will be able to claim that they have people's support. A whopping win for the ruling party however may be dangerous for the country's democracy as it might make the government and the ruling AL more desperate in the coming days. And if they fail to win the battle of the ballots, that will be a blow to the ruling AL and the newly formed government. Their defeat will be portrayed as the decline of their popularity. And the BNP will claim an increase in public support and they may make efforts to use the win to gear up anti-government agitations. All these impacts are related to the national level politics.

For the upazila parishad, there is a strong apprehension about its future. Will the AL-led government go for strengthening the upazila parishads if the BNP-backed candidates win the majority posts in the upazilas? The AL-led government did not make the upazila parishads functional in the past five years despite the party winning majority of the posts in the January 2009 upazila polls.

The AL is well aware that empowerment of upazila parishads dominated by the BNP backed chairmen will contribute largely to boosting up grassroots level units of BNP. Effective functions of parishads will drum up people's support for the chairmen belonging to the local BNP. Before the polls, some government policymakers spoke in favour of strengthening the upazila parishads this time. But will it do so if the BNP backed candidates win the majority of the posts in more than 480 upazila parishads?

The confrontational culture in politics does not encourage us to be optimistic. Take the example of the mayors of the four city corporations—Rajshahi, Khulna, Sylhet and Barisal. Four BNP backed candidates won the mayoral posts in the elections held in the middle of last year defeating their rivals supported by the ruling AL. Before the BNP leaders were elected as mayors, ruling AL leaders were mayors of the four city corporations and all of them had enjoyed status of state ministers. But the government did not give the status of state ministers to the four mayors elected in the middle of last year as they belonged to the BNP. There is no legal provision for giving such status. The governments in the past gave the mayors the status by issuing circulars. Considering the fate of four city corporation mayors, one can well assume what will be the fate of upazila parishad chairmen if they are affiliated with the BNP.

In the view of many political analysts, the outcomes of the ongoing upazila elections will determine the government's next course of actions regarding the long overdue elections to the zila parishads and two Dhaka City Corporations. If the government party fails to win the battle of ballots in the upazila parishads, then the fate of the elections to zila parishads and two DCCs will remain uncertain for indefinite period. This will be a severe blow to the country's local government system. But it does not matter to the ruling party. The ruling AL men who were appointed in December 2011 as administrators of the zila parishads are running the zila parishads. Not holding elections will prolong their term as zila parishad administrators. And not holding elections to DCCs means the government will keep appointing new administrators after every six months to run the DCCs. If so, narrow interests of partisan politics prevailing over the local government system will dominate the future of local government bodies including upazila parishads.

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Qaidatul Jihad comes knocking at Bangladesh

ANIMESH ROUL

AFTER a tumultuous year marked by massive protest rallies and violent confrontations between moderate secularists and Islamic radical forces, Bangladesh's tryst with religious and political turmoil seems enduring. The deteriorating situation has led to fear of the revival of Islamic militancy. While outlawed but dormant militant extremist groups like Harakat ul-Jihad Islami Bangladesh (HUIJ-B), Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) and Hizbut Tahirir are now attempting to resurge and consolidate, many newly-founded groups like Ansarullah Bangla Team, linked with al-Qaeda, have found the opportunity and resources to raise ugly heads.

Arguably, the religiously charged environment has drawn global Jihadists' attention towards the country. With ever-dwindling manpower and resources, transnational terror groups like al-Qaeda and the Taliban of Khurasan (a historic reference to Greater Afghanistan) are looking for opportune moment to infiltrate into the country with the fourth largest Muslim population in the world. Al Qaeda leader Ayman Al-Zawahiri has already urged the Bangladeshis for a popular uprising against the present Awami League government and against anti-Islamic forces. Released by as-Sahab, the media arm of al-Qaeda, Zawahiri's latest audiovisual message titled "Bangladesh: Massacre Behind a Wall of Silence" talks about many issues, including the ongoing anti-Islamic atheist movement and atrocities committed by the security forces against pro-Islamic protesters. He has also called for a Sharia-based Caliphate in Bangladesh.

This author has closely studied the 30-minute-long message released in mid-January this year and found it very graphic with gory details in first few minutes depicting violence against Muslims followed by the speech in Arabic (also featuring file messages from Malcolm X (El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz) and by Imam Abdulla Azam, which besides being crafted very well include depiction of violence against Muslims. It carries carefully chosen footage that shows police brutality and torture. A direct reference to the Shahabab move-

ment can be established as Zawahiri lamented: "my dear Muslim brothers, thousands of people are being killed in the streets of Bangladesh without any guilt, except they have come out to protect against the collusion of anti-Islam secular government with a bunch of transgressing secularists who are heaping insults and vulgar abuses on Islam and the Prophet (PBUH) of Islam." The message categorically cites Bangladeshi writers Tasleema Nasreen and Ali Rajeeb Haider (the slain blogger) who had 'insulted Islam'. While calling to have patience and fight, he urges Islamic scholars and clerics of Bangladesh to lead the protesters from the front and asks them to teach how to defend the religion and how to instill love for martyrdom. He exhorted religious leaders in these words: "You must teach your Ummah that the one who wants freedom must pay its price, and that the price of freedom is death." Quite in tandem with Zawahiri's general guidelines for Jihad message released earlier, which called Muslims of the Ummah to adhere to a two pronged strategy of 'Jihad and Daw'a', where he professes to create awareness within the masses about the ongoing Jihad, to incite them, and to exert efforts to mobilize for two goals: to revolt against the rulers and to join the side of Islam. His message turned emphatic when he said "I invite you to adhere to the laws of Islam, its ruling and ethics. Live up to the Shariah, and bring up your sons and daughters on its firm adherence. I invite you to gather around the true scholars of Islam, support them and protect them. I invite you to back them and support them and guard them." It should be noted that this message came at a time when Bangladeshi radical clerics affiliated with Hefajat Islam and Jammate-Islami are spearheading an Islamist upsurge and radical clerics like Mufti Jasim Uddin Rahmani and Maulana Habibur Rahman are fuelling extremist fervor.

The latest message is the first of its kind from al-Qaeda for Bangladesh. Even though Zawahiri's message was targeted at Bangladesh and Myanmar (with reference to Rohingya conflict), intermittently it also urged Muslims of the subcontinent to take up Jihad against the 'democratic' and 'oppressive' governments, especially in the neighboring

(Hindu) India. This exhortation seems focused on recruitment and fund raising that would help to further consolidate the Islamic Jihad in the country and elsewhere, e.g. Syria, Afghanistan or Iraq. The desperation is visible on the part of jihadist brethren who are now trying to exploit the fertile grounds in the sub-continent for their benefit. The propaganda and Jihad rhetoric would find more takers amongst the Bangladeshi migrants or Diasporas as they are in no way immune to the calls. Past cases of Rajib Karim, Ehsanul Islam and Quazi Mohammad Rezwanul Ahsan Nafis tells us an alarming story of how the so-called 'Qaidatul Jihad' has influenced them to take up Jihad in foreign lands.

Surprisingly, not only the latest audiovisual message from al-Qaeda or from Zawahiri, but the numerous graphic messages and jihadists' interactions available on the internet, especially in the Bangladesh specific forums (e.g. Islamer Alo and Al Qital Bangla Media on You Tube), and the al-Qaeda-linked Ansar al-Mujahideen English language forum and 'Bab-ul-islam.net' have caught the Bangladesh security and intelligence agencies unaware. Even though Zawahiri's message came a little late, internet forums are full of incendiary speeches with carefully chosen graphic details of atrocities, scenes of torture and bloodsheds by people like Jasim Uddin Rahmani, both in Bengali with sporadic Arabic verses from Quran and Haidith (e.g. see 'The Bloody Path' and 'Bangla Bayan on Myanmar' available also on the You Tube).

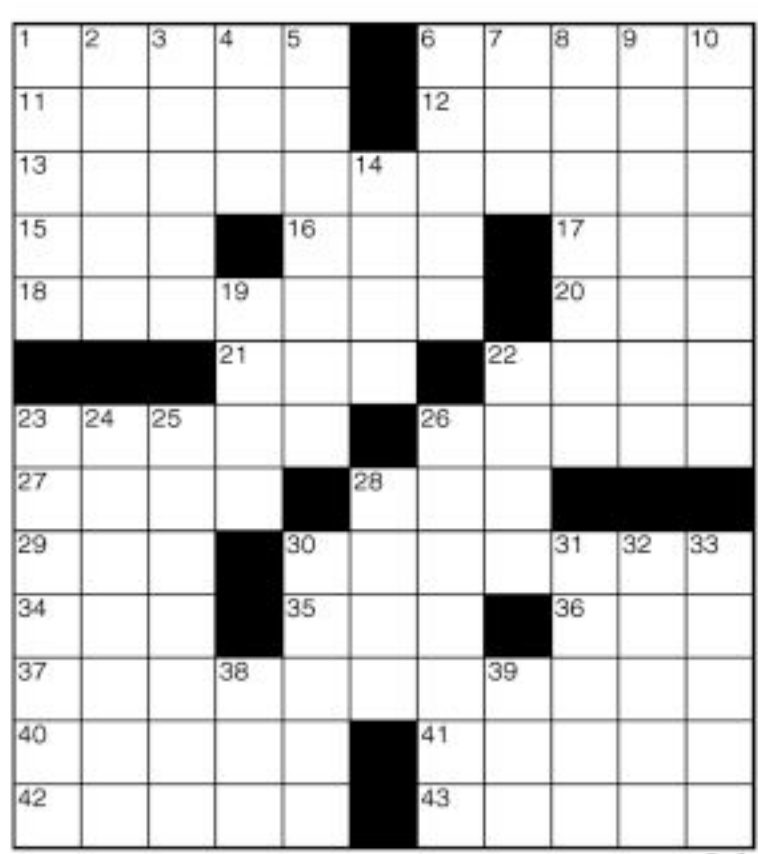
These jihadist discourses help to directly motivate young minds of Bangladesh and are instrumental in bringing groups like the ABT to the fore. Indeed, people like Rahamani, Maulana Habibur Rahman and Mufti Izharul Islam Chowdhury are largely responsible for the present situation in Bangladesh along with the sectarian Jamat-Shibir gangs, of course with active political patronage. And in all likelihood these subversive forces are in contact with al-Qaeda and Taliban leaderships in Afghanistan and Pakistan for their guidance on future course of actions.

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CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| ACROSS | DOWN |
| 1 Angry with | 1 Stately home |
| 6 Cavalry weapon | 2 Home |
| 11 Disconcert | 3 Coolidge's veep |
| 12 Pleasant smell | 4 Tough wood |
| 13 "Listen up!" | 5 Spring-steen nickname |
| 15 Poem of praise | 6 Squad leader |
| 16 Hefty | 7 Museum stuff |
| 17 Print units | 8 Czech region |
| 18 Make good as new | 9 Renowned |
| 20 Singer Torme | 10 Grapples, in the sticks |
| 21 Braying animal | 14 Haughtiness |
| 22 Freshener scent | 19 "See ya!" |
| 23 Leaves at the altar | 22 Pageantry |
| 26 Marina sights | 23 Caribbean nation |
| 27 Neighborhood | 24 Tony Stark's alter ego |
| 28 Farm father | 25 Dancer's attire |
| 29 Cow call | 26 Turkey cooking gadget |
| 30 Whodunit character | 28 Destroy |
| 34 Tiny worker | 30 Cheese choice |
| 35 Humor | 31 Lucy's pal |
| 36 In addition | 32 Port setting |
| 37 "Well, what do you know!" | 33 ECarries |
| 40 Gives a hoot | 38 "My word!" |
| 41 "Person of Interest" character | 39 Pot brew |
| 42 Peruvian peaks | |
| 43 Sea dogs | |



Previous day's answer



CRYPTOQUOTE
RJAVHISTKU BJHKTWKW SIVZPSX TH
KIXTHZ "SJVM RJHPK MTPM" WJ NPJNSP
LCJ HPYPV OHPL SJVM RJHPK LK ISTYUP.
- Z.O. BCPKWPVWJH

Previous day's Cryptoquote:
I'm worried that the universe will soon need replacing.
It's not holding a charge.
- Edward Chilton

A XYDLBAAX is LONGFELLOW
One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

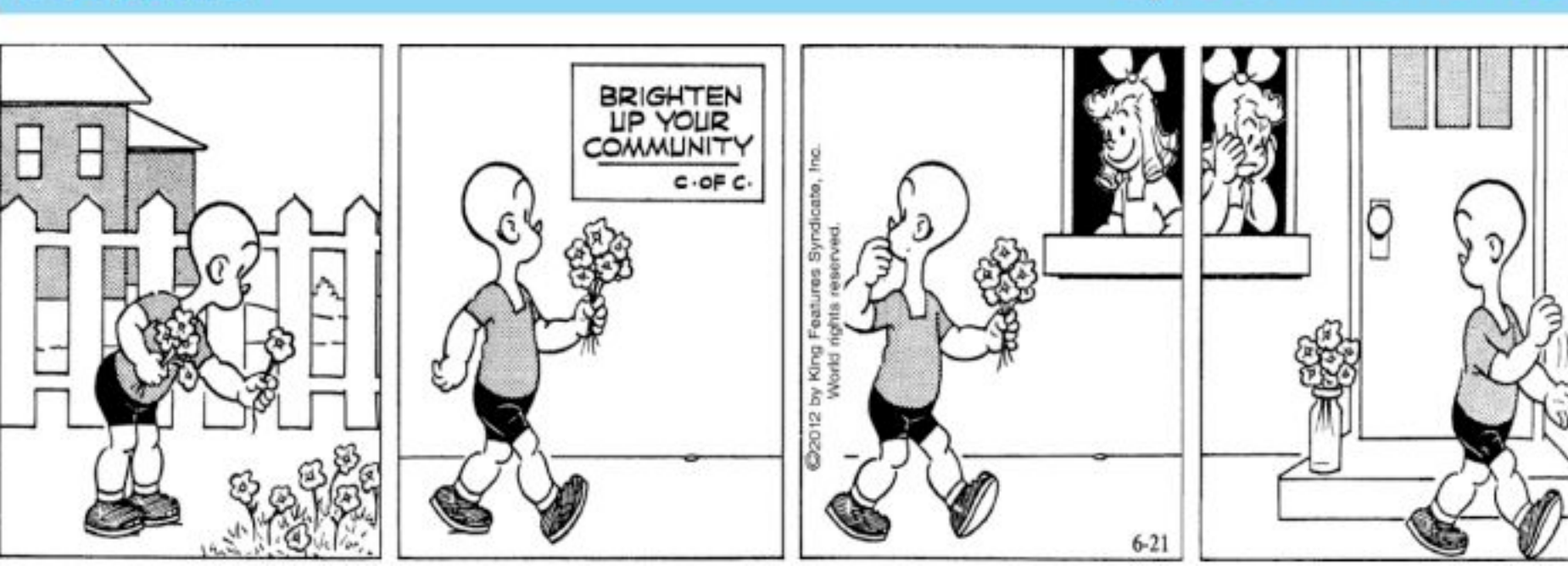
BEETLE BAILEY

by Mort Walker



HENRY

by Don Trachte



QUOTABLE Quote

So be sure when you step, Step with care and great tact. And remember that life's A Great Balancing Act. And will you succeed? Yes! You will, indeed! (98 and 1/4 percent guaranteed) Kid, you'll move mountains.

— Dr. Seuss