

Aborted Khaleda Zia rally in Gazipur Government's intolerance bodes ill

We are flabbergasted at the orchestrated and ruthless manner whereby the opposition-planned rally, which was to be addressed by Khaleda Zia in Gazipur yesterday, was foiled by the government machinery in collusion with BCL cadres. It was a glaring denial of legitimate space to political opposition, which includes the rights to assembly, expression of dissent, voicing of demands and creation of public opinion in their favour. Such rights are regarded as constitutional imperatives so long as these are exercised within the bounds of law, peace and public order.

Now, here was the BNP which sought permission for a rally in Gazipur and the request was met neither with a refusal nor a go-ahead signal, rather a premeditated plan of action to prevent it happening. On the back of BCL threats to hold counter rally in the same venue, and the ruling party student cadres actually occupying it the day before, the ground lay prepared to impose Section 144 banning assembly. And the administration did it, not just for the venue but the whole of Gazipur district. The engineering that went into it was nothing but a hackneyed ploy to subvert an opposition rally. It was not even allowed to take off, so the apprehension of lawlessness remained untested as far as the BNP went, while BCL cadres took law into their own hands under the blissful eye of the state machinery.

The way BNP and Jubodial leaders are being arrested with cases stalking their footsteps, the functionality of the party may soon be at stake. When the BNP has reacted with restraint, the signal should not be lost on the government.

Dearth of small apartments

REHAB needs to rethink strategy

WHAT has come to light in the recently held REHAB winter fair is that a growing number of middle class families want to invest in small to medium apartments. Given the phenomenal rise in price of retail value of apartments due to the high value per square feet, the retail value of spacious readymade apartments remain outside the purview of most white collar working people. According to REHAB, the demand for such property had been practically non-existent a few years ago, but is seeing a rebound of late. Yet, most established real estate companies have for years shunned this portion of the market.

As Dhaka continues to see double digit growth in terms of population, it is natural for families looking to own property to defray the high cost of rent in the city. Some companies are introducing "studio apartments" down to a size of 550 square feet, while others are tapping into single-bedroom apartments that are ideal for small families. That apartments costing up to Tk. 2.5 million are in very large demand has become apparent from the feedback of potential customers. Most do not intend to live in upscale sections of the city and have the financial capacity to invest in apartments up to 1,000 square feet. With the proliferation of bank loans that allow for instalment payment on property, it is high time the industry re-position itself to come up with property built with budget buyers in mind.

Should banks freeze any account on flimsy grounds?

ABDUL MATIN

A retired person put his savings, all earned by legal and honest means, in a bank. He opened the account with all information and supporting documents required by the bank. His family lives on his income from investments in saving certificates, government bonds and fixed deposits. He pays income tax and discloses his income and the sources of income to the concerned authorities as per law. Under such circumstances, has the bank any authority to freeze his account just because he didn't submit any new document or information required by the bank? Why should he suffer if the bank failed to collect necessary information before opening his account? Freezing an account is a serious matter as it amounts to denial of bread and butter to an entire family. Banks should not take it too lightly.

Recently, different government agencies have been issuing circulars to banks asking for new information/documents, including eTINs, from account holders. To some extent it is causing harassment to the account holders. In this digital age, is it difficult for the banks to collect the eTINs from the National Board Revenue (NBR) using the old TINs available with them? The NBR must have a computerised system for conversion of old TINs into eTINs. Why should the account holders be bothered for supplying their eTINs? Moreover, why should banks ask for signatures of account holders on photocopies of eTINs which are computer generated documents requiring no signatures?

Banks normally freeze an account only if it is not operated for a certain period of time. The account becomes operable as soon as the account holder contacts the bank and fulfils some simple requirements. Banks cannot freeze any account for any other reason unless there is an order from a court of law. This is the norm in all civilised countries.

Where is the retired person living? This is his money and it is not stolen from anywhere. He operates his account regularly. If he fails to comply with any requirement of the bank, it can decline to maintain his account. In that case, he can withdraw his funds from the bank and invest elsewhere. Under no circumstances should the bank be allowed to freeze his account and practically force a family to starve. Is it not a violation of the constitution which promises to provide "the basic necessities of life, including food, clothing, shelter, education and medical care" to the citizens? Shouldn't our vocal finance minister term this practice as 'rubbish' and stop it immediately?

Can anyone deny us our bread and butter when God doesn't even when we fail to obey His Commands?

The writer is a former chief engineer of Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission.

Step by step, Modi designs a foreign policy

SUNDAY POUCH



ASHFAQUR RAHMAN

IT is no wonder that India with 1.2 billion people is still performing much below its potential. This is in spite of a spike in economic growth rate and improvements in human resource indicators. The country seems to be still poor and suffers from an infrastructure deficit. India is viewed as an indolent giant and best left to its own devices. Yet India and its youth are tired of this perception and want its leaders to do something dramatic to change all that. In fact, Indians want their country to shine and punch above its weight. Instead, India resists its own rise. Its leaders have turned the country into its worst enemy.

Enter Narendra Modi into the Indian political scene in the middle of 2014. He is the country's prime minister with a charismatic sheen and a treasure chest of ideas. He is proving to be a game changer. In the six months he has been in power he has taken big steps to resuscitate India's economy and devise foreign policy options that would also ensure its military security.

Modi's foreign policy debut started with initiating normal relations with the US. India, since its independence over sixty years back, always had a chilly relationship with the US. But Modi has changed the dynamics. In these first six months in power he not only visited the US and met President Obama but has also invited the American president to visit New Delhi. Obama is expected to attend the Indian Republic Day celebration in January. The return visit would help take the India-US relationship to a higher level of engagement. US businessmen are likely to accompany the US president and take advantage of Modi's preference for pro-market economic policies.

Modi has also been pragmatic in promoting India's new relationships with its immediate neighbours like Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal. He has made it clear to all these countries that his foreign policy is not powered by any ideology. It has more to do with ideas which take into consideration the needs of each country. He has shunned mere reiteration of old doctrine. This has given a new spin on bilateral relationships with these countries. Thus, he is keen to sell his excess electricity generated in eastern states of India to meet Bangladesh's energy needs. Similarly, he wants to sell more Indian consumer goods to Nepal and Bhutan. In return, he wants to invest in generation of electricity by using their hydropower potential due to their geographical advantage.

Modi has engineered strong partnership with Japan. He wants to trade and avail of Japanese investment and technology which his country dearly needs. In return, he

is willing to meet Japan's political and strategic requirements vis-a-vis China. With Pakistan, Modi faces major challenges. But he has not shied away and has evolved 'dynamic and innovative approaches to diplomacy and national defense.' His answer to Pakistan is to look east where India is able to join the economic dynamism of smaller neighbours there. Modi is increasingly putting emphasis on building close cooperation with these neighbours. He is sidelining Pakistan with the idea that giving too much attention to that country will not allow him to make much progress as a regional power in South Asia.

In pursuit of this foreign policy, Modi made official visits to Bhutan, Nepal and Japan within the first 100 days of his government. He then went to Myanmar, Australia and Fiji. His Foreign Minister Shushma Swaraj has made official visits to Dhaka, Thimpu, Katmandu, Nayapadaw, Singapore, Hanoi, Manama, Kabul, Dushanbe, New York and Washington DC, London, etc. As may be observed from the places which Modi and his foreign minister visited, it is clear that his foreign policy priorities were as follows. He

first sought to improve relations with India's immediate neighbours. Next, he introduced the concept of para-diplomacy in India, where each state and city had the liberty to forge special relations with countries of their interest. The final priority is to see that bilateral trade always dominates India's relations with all these countries. India will, however, develop additional strategic partnership with global powers like the US, China, Russia, Australia and Japan.

Modi has also decided that India should play an active role in various multilateral forums such as the United Nations, World Trade Organisation, G-20 leaders' Summit, the BRIC Summit of emerging countries,

among others. Modi showed interest in remaining engaged in many regional groupings like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Indian Ocean Rim Association, Saarc and BIMSTEC.

There is no doubt that Modi wants to see India play a significant role in making the 21st century an Asian century. In this task he has used 'fast track diplomacy.' So, over this short period in power, he has convinced many through deft acts that India remains a friendly power who will always act to benefit its friends. Its policies will not be used to bring harm to anyone in the region, at least in this part of the world.

Modi has several more years before his term ends. Through the foreign policy which he has evolved, he seeks to bring rich dividends to India as well to its immediate neighbours. This prospect seems to be attractive and has endeared Modi to the neighbours for the time being. But the question remains how well will the policies be implemented on the ground? The devil will be in the details.

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LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR

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December in Dhaka

As an expatriate, one of my favourite months in Bangladesh is December. I love how the red and green flags adorn Dhaka city... on vehicles, buildings, as headbands etc. These tell the story of how the best sons of Bangladesh, its intellectuals gave their blood for the newly formed nation. Red and green are also the traditional colours of Christmas commemorating the birth of the One whose very name means "God with us." He is the "Light of the World" and surely His message of peace on earth and goodwill towards men is the will of the One who sent Him. It is interesting that the English word "victory" and the Bangla word "joy" have the same definition. It is also interesting that the monument in Savar and a Christmas tree bear a similar shape. "Joy to the World! Joy Bangladesh!"

Scott Elliott
Uttara, Dhaka

Where have the lakeside trees gone?

We, the residents of Mohakhali DOHS have been greatly privileged having a lake in our area. Both sides of the lake were full of greenery which was the abode of a large number of birds. The trees on one side of the lake have recently been cut down, God only knows for what reasons. We are laymen but our common sense says that saving full-grown trees should be the basic principle of a good landscaping project. We strongly believe that this act is an offense as per the environmental laws of the state. Through this letter we want to draw the attention of the Department of Environment and demand that the responsible persons be held to account.

A group of aggrieved residents
Mohakhali DOHS, Dhaka

Ban vessel movements through Sundarbans

The recent capsizing of an oil tanker carrying 3.58 lakh litres of furnace oil has done tremendous harm to the Sundarbans. Experts said this oil spill will have long term negative impact on the flora and fauna of that region. Another thing that worries us is, this pristine mangrove forest is shrinking day by day because of human encroachment.

We hope the authorities will ban the movements of commercial vessels through the forest permanently to prevent such accidents in future.

Zabed Wali
Chittagong

Comments on news report, "Costly healthcare adds to poverty," published on December 23, 2014

Snr Citizen

Doctors and diagnostic centres have been doing booming business at the expense of patients. Previously a medicine named Vastarel MR used to be imported from France. For 2/3 years now, it has been produced in BD. Yet there is no reduction in the retail price, not a penny. This is only one example of how patients have been paying through their nose.

"Pakistan to hang 500 militants" (Dec. 23, 2014)

Snr Citizen

The epicentre of terrorism must be smashed to ashes! These militants are misled and blinded by some fake zealots. It is surprising that Pakistan has been living with them for so long.

"2 fake freedom fighters at ACC" (Dec. 23, 2014)

New Generation

Corruption at ACC?! We have a lot to learn from our seniors!

Dev Saha

This is hilarious!

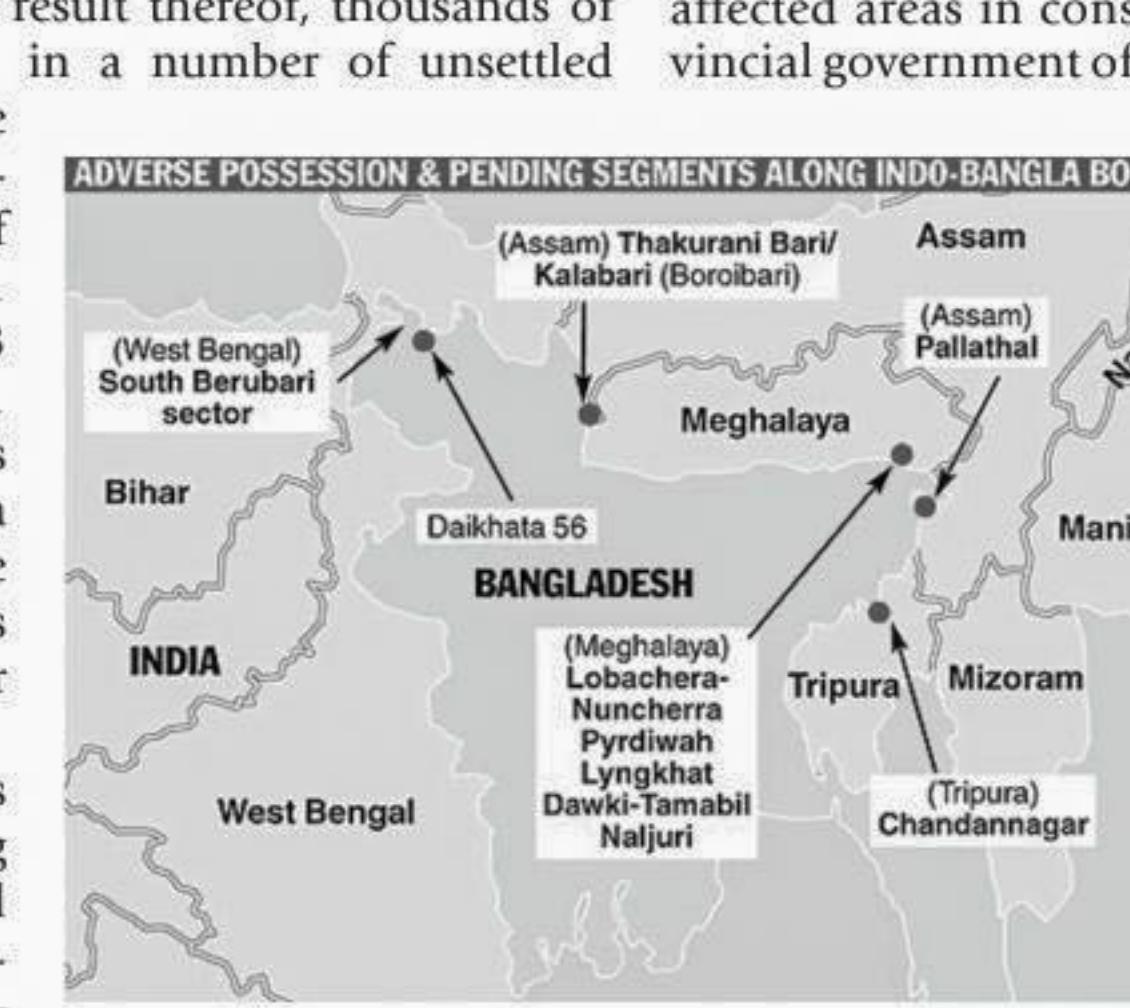
Snr Citizen

No words are enough to condemn this act of fraud! They are belittling the true freedom fighters. Again, this is only the tip of the iceberg!

"Green power gets boost" (Dec. 21, 2014)

Roni Rahman

Why make all these government deals behind closed doors? Aren't those bound to be more costly when no open competitions are there? If the government were serious about renewable energy, why not let it be opened for all private enterprises and may the best rate win the contract, the way Europe, US, and other market economies function?



citizens, they cannot continue to live in territories owned by India unless they are resettled in legally-owned Bangladeshi territories to be identified for the purpose or are given a choice to switch their citizenship without any need to change their place of residence, i.e. current Bangladeshi enclaves encircled by Indian territories.

As the proposed territorial and population exchanges shall have serious implications for the country's security and integrity, the government should exercise all options available to put in place a suitable mechanism and modality to check for the bonafides and credentials of the Bangladeshi nationals who shall be conferred Indian citizenship after legal incorporation of the enclaves where they have so far been residing as citizens of Bangladesh.

The SCEA, therefore, rightly observed that the cognate security aspects should be thoroughly examined before the proposed population exchange is effected. It also recommended suitable augmentation and upgradation of the law and order machinery in the affected areas in consultation with India's eastern provincial government of West Bengal.

It may be noted that because of the fact that these Bangladeshi enclaves are deep within Indian territory, without any fencing or means to physically demarcate them, the Bangladeshi citizens in these enclaves have been practically free to mix with the rest of the Indian populace. In fact, there is no choice available to these people as they are physically encircled on all sides by Indian territories. Such a scenario makes it very difficult for the Indian law enforcement authorities to effectively carry out their

duties in these enclaves as technically they are not Indian territories, notwithstanding the fact that many of these enclaves have become hot-beds for criminal activity. It is this anomalous situation that the proposed LBA and its attendant Protocol seek to address as and when they are ratified and implemented by the two countries.

The Indo-Bangladesh LBA is a low-hanging fruit waiting to be plucked at the asking of the two countries. It is hoped that resolution of this issue would pave the way for the further strengthening and consolidation of a very functional bilateral relationship between the two countries. It is also hoped that such an agreement would encourage resolution of various other intractable issues between India's other neighbours.

The writer is District Magistrate and Collector, Burdwan, West Bengal, India. (The views expressed in this article are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of India.)

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