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[Note: Using editorials as an indicator, this series presents views, understanding and attitude of the Urdu periodicals in India towards various developments concerning the Middle East. The selection of an item does not mean the endorsement or concurrence concur with their accuracy or views. Editor, MEI@ND]

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Dawat Online (Invitation), New Delhi
Editorial, 16 November 2011, Wednesday

1. Focus Back on Iran

Iran is back in focus; it is an old issue that it is trying to enhance nuclear technology for developing nuclear weapons. The unfriendly countries accuse Iran of trying to develop nuclear weapons to bully its smaller neighbours. Huge noises were raised against it since Iran established nuclear plants to generate nuclear energy demanding investigation. The IAEA was then given the charge of investigation in order to keep an eye on Iran's "illegal" nuclear programme. On several occasions the turn of events has reached to the point of 'use of force' against Iran. When the measures taken by the United Nations did not yield the desired result, the US took unilateral steps to prevent Iran and imposed economic sanctions. It was also warned to open all its nuclear plants for investigation by international agencies and keep off from trying to achieve enhanced nuclear technology. The EU also acted in unison and imposed economic and trade sanctions. It was threatened to toe the Western line else it will have to pay severe price. Efforts were made to isolate Iran from international trade and commerce.

However, a time came when the issue went into the cold bag or did not remain in focus may be due to the fact that the opposition had had a share of its own problems. But the West was not ready to be found napping on the issue. The main reason was the country that takes Iran to be a danger for it was not ready to let the West take any lenient view of the matter. Israel kept pressurising Western powers and despite having their own share of problems, it spoke in one voice to condemn Iran for pursuing nuclear technology. But the pressure on Iran had eased off a bit. The matter has again been raised with huge uproar and its being claimed on the basis of “solid proof” that Iran is pursuing nuclear weapons. Israel now has itself jumped on to the ground; earlier it used to pressurise the West to use force if diplomatic measures and sanctions fail to prevent Iran from enhancing nuclear technology. It has come to light that Israel is fast losing hope on its allies and now wants to take things in its own hands as the danger of Iran acquiring nuclear technology is increasing. According to a latest report it has also tested a missile that will target the Iranian nuclear plants.

Source: http://dawatonline.com/Archive_Editorial.aspx?sDate=16-nov-2011



Roznama Sahafat (Journalism Daily), Delhi
Editorial, 16 November 2011, Wednesday

2. Syria's Expulsion from the Arab League

Arab League is not a very active organisation. Whatever stands it took on any issue remains limited to only media reports. It has never been taken note of at international level. However, it still has a symbolic value. So, Syria's expulsion from the Arab League can also be termed as symbolic. But in the light of the unstable situation in the Arab world and the events in Libya it may not only have a symbolic value. There can be two ways of looking at the situation in Syria. Some powers want to weaken the Syrian-Iranian strategic ties thus breaking the Iran, Syria and Lebanon alliance against Israel. Israel obviously is at the fore front of this effort. The US which is also worried about Iranian influence in Iraq wants to minimise its influence in Lebanon and Syria. No need to say that it has the support of some Arab countries. Syria rightly has opposed its expulsion terming it as a dangerous trend. But it is also true that the Syrian President Bashar al-Assad has shown undue severity in dealing with the protesters. Perhaps he finds it better to follow the rulers of Libya and Yemen which has certainly weakened his stand. The Syrian security forces have killed thousands of protestors in the last three months and the number of those killed is largest compared to any other country where protests have occurred. A cursory look at the history of Syria will show that his father was also a brutal ruler. However, the people of Syria supported him because of his uncompromising stand against Israel. Even though he ruled with an iron hand, the people largely supported Bashar taking over the helm after his death. The main reason was his promise to bring democratic reforms in the country, though he was reminded of this promise several times and he himself repeated it on a number of occasions but never took practical steps in this direction. With the people starting to

raise their voice for democratic reforms a confrontationist stand was taken rather than trying to resolve the issue with the opposition. The Arab League tried to intervene and proposed that the security forces are removed from civilian areas and the opposition be engaged in talks with the condition that they would not indulge in violence. However the Syrian regime refused to accept the formula and intensified the use of force. The situation has become extremely vulnerable now but any Libya like foreign intervention in Syria has to be opposed which the Arab League shall make clear. Even though the Saudi military intervention was quite contentious but Bahraini monarchy has largely refrained from using brute force against civilians and only minor incidents of violence have been reported. External military intervention would not be easy in Syria and it may lead to regional war and can spread to Lebanon and other neighbours. The Arab League must understand the situation but a lot will depend on the Syrian regime.

Source: http://sahafat.info/delhi/Nov2011/16_11_2011/p-5-1.htm



Roznama Rashtriya Sahara (National Sahara Daily), Delhi
Editorial, 16 November 2011, Wednesday

3. Syria's Expulsion from the Arab League

The Arab League has expelled Syria which was one of the founding members of this organisation comprising 22 Arab states. The League of Arab States was formed in 1946. The principle behind formation of Arab League was to help in development of Arab states, to stabilise the inter-state relation among Arab countries and to resolve conflict among or within Arab states without any external intervention. In the beginning, it was an 11 member organisation that increased to 22 members later. However, its activities and performance remains limited. It may have been a meeting point for the Arab rulers and Kings but the world or the Islamic world has nothing worth note when it comes to the Arab League's contribution. It did not play any worthwhile role even during the Iran-Iraq war or the US attack on Iraq.

However, the Arab League in 2011 was unexpectedly more active; on 22 February it expelled Libya from its membership, later on 13 March it asked for a 'No Fly Zone' over Libya which was expectedly welcomed by the UN, EU and the US and a 'No Fly Zone' over Libya was imposed by the United Nations. The world then witnessed the rush of NATO fighter planes which bombarded Libya and finally the Libyan ruler Muammar Gaddafi was not only deposed but killed.

The West has now moved towards Syria after bringing an end to the four decade long rule of Muammar Gaddafi in Libya. Syria like Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Bahrain and Yemen is facing protests and demonstrations against the regime by the people. The Western and westernised

media then started to propagate that Bashar al-Assad like Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi is killing its own people to suppress the protests against his rule. It then started to plan the fall of an unfriendly regime in the name of human rights violations and democracy promotion and a resolution to impose economic sanctions on Libya was proposed which was blocked by Russia and China. The Syrian issue then went out of focus for a while, but perhaps it was not acceptable for the US and its allies, they were not able to plan a new strategy after their defeat in the UN.

The Arab League has revived the issue by expelling Syria from its membership. The US and its allies as well as the UN have welcomed the Syrian expulsion but the kind of response which was witnessed in Syria with respect to the Arab League action indicates that foreign intervention to remove Bashar al-Assad from power by use of force will push Syria into a civil war. The countries which want to stop the killings in Syria shall keep in mind that till now about 3500 people have been killed but a military intervention and subsequent civil war can be a cause of much more killings and Syria's fall into chaos as it was witnessed in case of Libya.

There is no doubt that the killing of 3500 people in Syria is extremely disturbing which shows that the government has failed in taking control of the situation and prevent the killings, but can it be confirmed that the protestors did not indulge in any kind of violence and instigation. It's beyond doubt because even the people in undemocratic countries are not aware of democratic ways of protests and dissent. It is very important to prevent the killing of even one innocent life thus the Arab League shall avoid taking any measure that may lead to death of innocent people.

Bashar is not a despotic dictator who is refusing to leave power in any condition. He is a new generation leader who is educated and has been a medical practitioner. He was first elected President in 2000 after the death of his father Hafez al-Assad and he was re-elected in 2007. He may have to make way for others in next elections. The Arab League should understand this fact and should take Syria into confidence before taking any action rather than working under external pressure. It should work for peaceful transition of power in Syria.

Source: <http://roznamasahara.samaylive.com/Details.aspx?id=37206&boxid=11535859>



The Etemaad Urdu Daily (The Confidence Urdu Daily), Hyderabad
Editorial, 17 November 2011, Thursday

4. Syria's Expulsion from the Arab League

The Arab awakening continues to spread in different countries of the Middle East. The political situation in Syria is now fast changing after Tunisia, Egypt and Libya. Syria is a democracy under the rule of Bath Party, but one family has ruled it for the past four decades. The people of Syria, like the people of other countries in the region, are demanding

political reforms for the last eight months. These protesters have, however, been dealt with bullets. The armed forces are pitched against the people. Human rights violations have been reported on large scale throughout the country. In view of the deteriorating conditions in Syria, the 22 member Arab League presented a roadmap to control the situation where it demanded immediate end of violence and negotiations with the opposition. But the government has failed to stop violence and continues to kill protestors.

The Arab League expelled Libya from its membership after the incident of violence on Friday where 11 protestors were killed. The Bashar al-Assad government responded with attacks on the embassies of Arab countries and Turkey in Damascus. Turkey immediately recalled its diplomatic personnel from Syria. The condition in Syria is not just a problem for Middle East but it has become a bone of contention between different powers at international forums. The US and NATO are continuously pressurising Syria while the EU is planning economic sanctions.

The Syrian government should take lesson from Tunisian, Egyptian and Libyan examples; the reason for expulsion from the League can be asked but attacking foreign embassies in Syria cannot be justified. Russia is against any action against Syria. Among the permanent members of UNSC, China is in favour of giving time to Syria while the US wants immediate actions. Bashar al-Assad was made President of Syria after his father's death by amending the constitution because he was not eligible to be the President as per the constitution.

Tunisia, Egypt and Libya were also under dictatorships in the garb of democracy which the people finally threw out after tolerating it for a long time. Syria like Tunisia continues to seize democratic rights in the name of democracy and Islamic way of life is suppressed. Syria does not allow its women teachers to wear Hijab. The first lady is always seen in western attires. The people are not allowed to practice Islam despite being a Muslim country. The state by encouraging un-Islamic way of life was in the illusion that people have forgotten about their democratic and religious rights. Syria is suppressing people's opposition by force which has resulted into thousands of Syrian refugees entering into Turkey fearing for their life in their own country.

Turkey, which is a leading trade partner of Syria, is bearing the pressure of large number of refugees. Islamic Republic of Iran is the only country in the region against sanctions and external intervention in Syria. Iran may be supporting Syria because of its anti-US and anti-West policies. Syria despite being an Islamic country has remained aloof from the Islamic and Arab cause. It terms its expulsion from the Arab League as ordered by the US. Syria shares its boundary with Israel which occupies Golan Heights. Syrian role in Lebanon and Palestine have always been suspicious.

Bashar still has time to reconcile and end violence on the people and bring the opposition on the negotiations table and respect the commitment made with the Arab League. The killing of innocent citizens to save individual rule will weaken the state. The Arab awakening is a ray of hope for people in Middle East; Yemen and Syria continue to witness struggle for democracy. The rulers are giving the US and the West a chance to interfere by not heeding to people's demand. It would be better if Bashar al-Assad understands the situation sooner than later.

Source: http://www.etemaaddaily.com/EtemaadArchive_files/nov/17/editorial.html



The Siasat Daily (The Politics Daily), Hyderabad
Editorial, 19 November 2011, Saturday

5. The Report against Iran

The world powers have decided to target Iran on behalf of the US and its allies. The IAEA has released a report where it has alleged that Iran is developing nuclear weapons. The world powers plan to impose more sanctions on Iran acting on this report. The US and other powers have continuously accused Iran of trying to develop nuclear warheads. IAEA has been used against Iran to prove their accusations. Meanwhile reports have also come that the Pentagon is preparing to attack Iran. Israeli involvement in the whole situation cannot be ruled out and it has also been reported that the Jewish state is weighing the option of striking Iranian nuclear installations. All this exercise is aimed at keeping Iran away from achieving nuclear power even though Iran has time and again made it clear that it does not seek nuclear weapons and that all its nuclear activity are for producing clean energy.

The latest report also accuses Iran of trying to develop nuclear weapons which Iran has denied in clear terms. The report terms the Iranian activity as a danger for peace in the region. Earlier the world has witnessed Iraq being accused of storing and making WMDs and it was attacked. However, after plunder of the country and the killing of millions of innocent people no such weapons could be located in Iraq. The UN also did not play a positive role in resolving the problem and acted on behalf of the US and the West causing huge loss of life in Iraq. It is now Iran which is being targeted with the accusation of nuclear weapons development and economic sanctions have been imposed. It may later be subjected to military intervention or invasion. Israeli strike may also not be ruled out looking at the past experiences.

The countries which want to strike Iran are themselves nuclear powers. The US has all kinds of nuclear and biological weapons. The Jewish state of Israel also has huge cache of nuclear weapons and these are the two main countries who do not want Iran to acquire nuclear weapons because they wish to rule the world. Iran has maintained despite this report that its nuclear energy are for peaceful purposes. If these countries are genuinely worried about the nuclear danger then they should first themselves destroy all their nuclear weapons. The world can wait for their preaching about the dangers of nuclear weapons. The US is indulging in anti-Iran actions to defend Israel and the UN should keep away from all these activities.

Source: <http://www.siasat.com/urdu/news/idr19-27>



Roznama Rashtriya Sahara (National Sahara Daily), Delhi
Editorial, 19 November 2011, Saturday

6. Demonstration by Opposition in Kuwait

In the backdrop of the events that rocked the Middle East in 2011 even small incidents are attracting international interest nowadays. The opposition rally against the Kuwaiti Prime Minister Nasir Muhammad al-Ahmad Al-Sabah was prominently reported in media. The demonstration was led by opposition leaders including Muslim al-Barak and other Members of Parliament. Their main demand is removal of the PM and dissolution of the parliament. According to reports, the demonstrators broke open the parliament, entered and sung the national anthem. They also staged a short sit-in outside the parliament followed by a march towards PM's residence. As a result the police resorted to use of canes and water cannons and in the scuffle five persons were injured.

This is the first incident of violence after December when the elite forces had targeted anti-government protestors. The opposition accuses the government of stashing huge sums of money abroad and they wanted to question the PM which was refused by the government. The opposition then presented another resolution for discussion in parliament on the issue and they are now determined to struggle till the PM is removed. Earlier the Kuwaiti Foreign Minister had to put in papers due to the same issue. The tension between opposition and the government has been going on for a while and now the opposition is demanding for PM's resignation.

However, it can be said that the incidents in Kuwait are quite different from other events in the region and does not look part of the Arab Spring. The opposition is demanding resignation of the PM and is not against the monarchy. The other countries have mainly witnessed protests against the regime. The people of Kuwait also do not face much problems of the sort faced by the people elsewhere in the region. Kuwait is a strong economy and the rate of income is also very high. It has good relations with Western countries and it also does not suffer from security threats. However, the emerging situation does not auger well for a country like Kuwait, particularly at a time when the region is witness to a wind of change. The Emir of Kuwait should contemplate about the entire issue and take proper action.

Source: <http://roznamasahara.samaylive.com/Details.aspx?id=37537&boxid=1552328>



Roznama Rashtriya Sahara (National Sahara Daily), Delhi
Editorial, 21 November 2011, Monday

7. Tahrir Square: Not Finished Yet

The movement when it began in Tunisia subsequent to self immolation by an unemployed graduate was weak and did not look threatening for the former President, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, who thought that it is easy to crush the people's movement and employed the military force. However, he budged under the pressure of people's movement, had to resign and fled the country taking refuge in Saudi Arabia. It was bound to have some impact in other Arab countries because majority of them were suffering from similar problems of poverty, unemployment and corruption. Subsequently countries like Algeria, Yemen, Libya, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Egypt and other Arab countries witnessed similar people's movement. It threatened a number of rulers but most of them have survived.

As the protests and demonstrations spread in different Arab Gulf countries from Bahrain, Oman, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, the GCC send its forces in Bahrain to crush the protests and the US and Western countries turned a blind eye to it. However, in case of Egypt when Tahrir Square became the centre of people's movement; the former President Hosni Mubarak looked completely helpless while the Egyptian military chief's several visits to Washington gave an indication about some game plan of the powerful nations; the movement has continued even after Hosni Mubarak has left power.

The people in Cairo and Alexandria are back on the streets; the reason for which has been reported to be some constitutional amendments which will give constitutional status to the military and it would be set to play the role of master for the civilian government. But is it the only reason for people's protest? If the military chief can issue statement in Washington that the military would not use force against the people then why is it ignoring the people's protests with respect to constitutional amendments. It has also been noted that the religious parties are more enthusiastic in the recent protests against the military in comparison to other parties.

There are two important points; why is the military pressing for constitutional amendments and why the religious parties are more actively involved in protest against this amendment. It becomes very clear that the external powers are working only for their interest; they allowed military to use force in Bahrain while supported the people in Egypt and Libya and now are silent on constitutional amendment by the military in Egypt. They understand that the Islamist parties are all set to benefit the most from the people's movement and once Islamists come to power in Egypt it will be a very difficult situation for Israel. However, if the military sets itself as

the guardian of the government the interest of Western power would be protected through it. The leaders of people's movement in Egypt should guard against external interest in their movement.

Source: <http://roznamasahara.samaylive.com/Details.aspx?id=37731&boxid=1347751>



Dawat Online (Invitation), New Delhi
Editorial, 22 November 2011, Tuesday

8. Is it Syria's Turn?

Turkey has announced that it would not be part of any military intervention in Syria. This announcement itself is an indication that the option is under consideration. In fact, there are strong reasons to believe that the preparation for military intervention in Syria has begun. It's almost clear that NATO would be the front man. It would most likely be a Libya like military strike because Syria has failed to respect international opinion. The rulers in Syria are crushing its own citizens and are not heeding to their demands when the people of Syria like the people in other countries want democracy. The people in Syria want freedom from political authoritarianism and want to be the guardian of their own fate. The Syrian regime has however refused to give the political freedom and start democratic reforms. The people of Syria are up against the regime and the regime has not hesitated in using force and killing its own citizens to continue in power which is condemnable. However, the problem is what should be the solution to make the Syrian rulers understand this; particularly the neighbouring Arab governments are themselves not democratic. There is no point that these autocratic rulers ask Syrian President to respect people's demand. Turkey in this case has been actively involved and has the democratic set up to show the path ahead.

The West has tried to use this situation for its interest. They are now looking for ways of democracy promotion in all Arab countries, even though till now they have backed autocratic regimes in these countries providing all possible moral and material aid to maintain the suppression of people. They do not have any credibility and right to support these people and cannot be trusted with their activities. The Western powers have always tried to extend their national interest in the region and have always tried to exploit the domestic and regional situation for their benefit. Earlier they were supporting the autocrats but when the people have raised their voice against, they shifted their support to the people. Another important and larger question is who gave them the right to interfere in these free and independent countries. The right to self determination is a universal right and it is an irony that the Muslim world has not been able to deal with their problems and issues in itself. It is because of this that the external powers get an excuse to intervene in their internal matters and conspire to extent their interest.

Source: http://dawatonline.com/Archive_Editorial.aspx?sDate=22-nov-2011



The Siasat Daily (The Politics Daily), Hyderabad
Editorial, 22 November 2011, Tuesday

9. The Revolution Resurfaces in Egypt

The military administration is being blamed for creating another crisis in Egypt. The people now realise that it was not wise to allow the Military Council to take over the governance. The military has proved very slow in beginning the process of electing a civilian democratic government. The people are back at Tahrir Square demanding a civilian government. The Military Council at the time of taking over the government had promised that it will transfer power to an elected civilian government by the end of September which it did not. The announcement that the presidential elections and the implementation of a new constitution may take place in 2013 or after has enraged the people. The military is trying to have a role in the elected government of Egypt through constitutional amendment. The people have been patient with the hope of democratic reform in Egypt but the problems have further augmented. The people are back on streets and their fight is now against the military. Protests and demonstrations are getting violent as the military has failed to fulfil its responsibility and heed to people's demands. The people now realise that the military may not transfer power and continue with its rule which the people are against. The Islamist parties and leaders have also raised their concerns regarding the intentions of the military generals. The military has to defend the borders and secure the independence and not govern. However, the military has refused to budge till now and the protests have grown. Reports of violence have also been coming in while police and protestors fought pitched battle on the streets. This is a disturbing trend and may not be good for the integrity and interest of the people. The military is not ready to accommodate the concerns of various parties and groups with respect to constitutional amendments and wishes to gain a role in the future system of governance. The Muslim Brotherhood has asked its members to resume the struggle for democratic transfer of power as other political parties. The unfolding situation in Egypt is significant for the region and the world at large which may have larger influence on other Arab countries.

Source: <http://www.siasat.com/urdu/news/idr22-21>



Roznama Rashtriya Sahara (National Sahara Daily), Delhi
Editorial, 24 November 2011, Thursday

10. Hope for Yemen

The crisis which has been lingering on in Yemen since the beginning of this year may be resolved now. An important Yemeni leader has said that the President of Yemen Ali Abdullah Saleh has agreed to sign the deal for transition of power mediated by the GCC which will transfer power to the Vice President.

Yemen is one of the countries where protests against the President have been going on since the beginning of this year. The protests have weakened the position of President Saleh who has been in power for 33 years and he is under tremendous pressure to step down. Earlier Tunisia and Egypt have witnessed peaceful transition of power as a result of people's movement while Libya saw a violent transition from 40 years of Qaddafi's rule after the rebels hunted him down. Yemen has also witnessed demand for removal of Saleh since the beginning of the year but he has refused to step down till now even though on several occasions he has announced that he would step down but has failed to keep his promise which has enraged the people in Yemen.

However, the recent reports indicate that the negotiations between the President and the opposition have succeeded and it has been agreed that power would be transferred to the Vice President. According to the revolutionary national council of Yemen the talks for transfer of power as per the formula proposed by the GCC has been agreed upon. The UNSC has also passed a resolution on 21 October demanding that President Ali Abdullah Saleh steps down. The resolution has also said that if the president agrees to step down he would get immunity from court proceeding. Despite welcoming the resolution he has refused to step down. If he agrees then he will have to step down within 30 days. The agreement gives immunity to the president and his family and sets a time frame of three to six months for presidential elections. The interim government has to be a unity government of the ruling party and the opposition.

However, the deal is significant as it will pave the way for a democratically elected government within a set period of time. Even though it gives unscrupulous immunity to the President, his aides and family members but this could be the price for democracy and peaceful transition. There was a danger of Yemen falling into chaos and further spread of violence in case such immunity would not have been given and the President would have refused to sign the deal.

Source: <http://roznamasahara.samaylive.com/Details.aspx?id=38061&boxid=24145213>

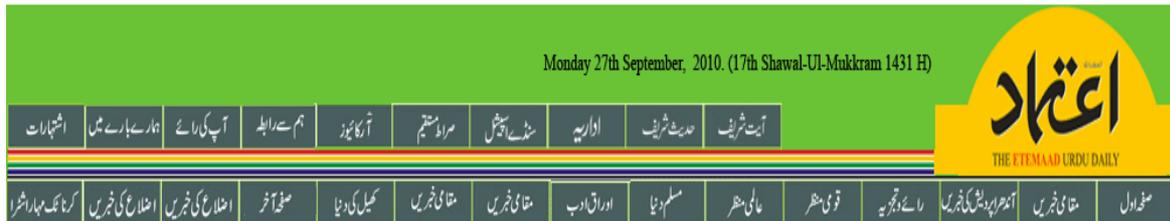


Roznama Sahafat (Journalism Daily), Delhi
Editorial, 26 November 2011, Saturday

11. It's Time for Syria after Yemen

The Yemeni President has agreed to step down, even though this is his fourth such announcement but two reasons make the latest announcement distinct; it is a written agreement and it has been signed in the presence of King Abdullah and Prince Naif of Saudi Arabia. It is an indication that this announcement has been endorsed by the US as well. The US claims to be the biggest promoter of democracy but was supporting Ali Abdullah Saleh, mainly because he had been working under the American tutelage. As per this agreement Saleh would transfer power to his deputy within a week; who would form a new government in co-operation with the opposition which would announce the holding of presidential elections within three months. If such an arrangement could have been signed earlier many innocent lives would have been saved. Yemen has been suffering from violence and instability for several decades. It was a people's republic which was divided into two parts after a military *coup* with Saudi help. It's hoped that the new arrangement will bring peace and stability in the country. The ongoing tussle between the opposition and government forces had cause huge blood bath on the streets of Yemen. The incumbent President is not popular but the new unity government will have to respect the people's demands. The agreement which was signed was proposed by the GCC. The US and Saudi Arabia had also realised that they would not be able to control the anger of people anymore and the Yemeni ambassador in Washington had played a prominent role in negotiations and signing of agreement. It's time for Syria now to do something; President Bashar al-Assad had shown extreme ruthlessness in dealing with the protesters. The number of deaths in Syria in last few weeks is larger than the entire Arab world during this period of unrest. Bashar al-Assad has also refused to accept any proposal which can stop killings. The proposal by the Arab League has also been rejected. It had proposed that the civilian areas be made free from military presence and the opposition be engaged in unconditional talks, but it was not accepted. Subsequently Syria's membership of the Arab League has been suspended. Bashar has refused to accept that people's movement cannot be suppressed through military might. He has refused to learn from the examples of Egypt, Tunisia, Libya and Yemen. If a large population is against the government then it is not possible to control the situation. The Syrian military has also started to break which can prove fatal for the Bashar government. Syria may soon follow Yemen.

Source: http://sahafat.info/delhi/Nov2011/26_11_2011/p-5-1.htm



The Etemaad Urdu Daily (The Confidence Urdu Daily), Hyderabad
Editorial, 30 November 2011, Wednesday

12. Economic Sanctions on Syria by Arab League

The Arab League has announced imposition of economic sanctions on Syria which comes into effect immediately. It would take time to assess the effectiveness of these sanctions. The distinct feature of these sanctions against Syria is that it is first of its kind by the Arab League. There is no precedence of Arab League imposing economic sanctions on an Arab country. The sanctions include travel ban on Syrian politicians and officials, any business with Syrian Central Bank and investment in projects. This is another blow to the Syrian economy after sanctions by the US and EU.

The important question is; why did Syria refused to accept the conditions proposed by the Arab League to avoid sanctions? Who are the powers backing Syria that it has refused to stop killing of people? Mainly three things can be said to be the reasons behind Syria's stand. The first point is that Bashar has pledged not to step down even if it leads to killing of thousands. Secondly, Syria would not be affected by any sanctions and thirdly western powers would not intervene in Syria because it would impede Israel's security.

The Arab countries comprise of around 50 percent of Syria's foreign trade and majority of it is with neighbouring Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon. This is the reason why Iraq remained absent from the Arab League meeting while Lebanon abstained and Jordan participated with reluctance. The common perception is that Russia and Iran have promised to support Syria and help it tide over the economic sanctions. This is why Bashar has refused to step down despite immense international and regional pressure. It seems that the current unrest and instability would continue and Syria is now on the verge of a long and bloody civil war.

The basic reason of unrest in the Arab world is the behaviour of Arab rulers. They don't want any change and do not show any respect for people's aspiration. A number of rulers think that the US is behind this unrest in the Arab world mainly because the West considers itself the flag bearer of freedom and democracy and encourage people through their statements. The blood-bath in Libya was a result of this behaviour of the Western powers. The Western sanctions against Syria reflect the fact that change in Syrian regime is not in their interest. The American policy is focussed on the Mediterranean region these days. The Western countries are also trying to take their share in the regional tussle between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Iran continues to benefit from its influence in Iraq and Hezbollah helping Bashar al-Assad to take a strong stand.

If one looks at the geo-political situation, Syria is important for Iran mainly because of two reasons. The fall of Syrian government would affect the Iranian foreign policy in the region. It also fears that any change in Syria may not be favourable for Iran. Saudi Arabia is another regional heavy weight and wishes to weaken Iranian influence with a favourable government in Syria. Bashar al-Assad is trying to benefit from the tussle between Iran and Saudi Arabia. In such a scenario any American action may lead to problems with Arab allies. Arab League is not strong enough to influence the Arab rulers and the sanctions against Syria may not have any influence.

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FROM THE URDU PRESS-35/QUAMAR

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