

CPA conference

The opposition must not boycott it

THE conference of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) begins in Dhaka on October 4. But it is bad news that the opposition seems rather set to boycott it. We implore them, once more, to see reason and attend the conference, keeping in view the greater interest of the nation.

We believe the opposition had reason to feel aggrieved when it was not given its rightful place in the preparatory work done by a steering committee. Still, we would reiterate that though the grievances were well-founded and fully justified, the decision to boycott the conference is flawed and short-sighted for a host of reasons.

It is not the government, nor the opposition, which is playing host to the conference, rather Bangladesh as a nation is doing it. So, what is at stake is the standing of the country in the eyes of other Commonwealth nations.

Parliament being the institution of and for both the government and opposition, the MPs, regardless of their party affiliations, are on an equal footing when it comes to an international conference of lawmakers like this. The CPA is a forum of parliamentarians and boycotting it would go against the very spirit of holding a conference among lawmakers of the Commonwealth countries.

A parliamentary conference of this stature and magnitude attaches same importance to all the lawmakers, whether of the ruling party or in the opposition. So, the association of the opposition right through to the end is a natural expectation of all concerned.

The AL leaders should also realise that they have made their point and the government's weakness in its very approach to the CPA conference has been exposed. The opposition's point of view has been well taken by the CPA leaders also. After all this, what remains for the AL to press the issue for boycott. If the AL continues to harp on the negative tune, it may only reinforce the impression that it is a stubborn and uncompromising party.

CPA conference is the biggest parliamentary meet in the world. It does not sound logical to bring national political divisions up in regard to participation in such an international forum.

So, the opposition should participate in the conference, leaving aside its differences with the ruling party. If the opposition boycotts it, it will lose the valuable opportunity of not only interacting officially with the assembled parliamentary delegates but also informally with them on the sidelines of the conference. There is still time to see beyond mutual antagonism and ensure that the delegates from the Commonwealth countries have the satisfaction of attending a full-house conference on such an august occasion.

Biman raging with high handling rates

ZIA's competitiveness compromised

ONE has known monopoly to be self-serving. But that it can be patently self-defeating was left for Biman to prove. The national airlines administering ground handling services as the sole agent of the Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (CAAB) are charging exorbitantly from operators of international cargo airlines. They seem put off by such overcharging as inefficient handling rubbed on the wrong side even more. Not surprisingly, 'many international freight service providers do not operate direct flights to Bangladesh,' as has been pointed out by the chairman of the ad hoc committee of the Private Airlines Association of Bangladesh. Loss in potential business is enormous there.

Biman's rates are scandalous in comparison with charges realised elsewhere. Ground handling charges for a Tristar Aircraft at ZIA is \$5600. By contrast, it is four to five times less in Dubai and Bangkok. Only Kolkata charges anywhere near that amount -- \$4000. ZIA represents a whole country's international airport, its gateway. As such, we cannot afford to see its competitiveness diminished by such exorbitant handling rates across the board.

There is more to that flat rate. Thirty per cent extra is charged on the original cost as peak hour, odd hour or overstay fee. Basically, an inefficiency cost gets added to the total. As they are, landing, parking and navigation charges of CAAB are higher at ZIA.

Biman is apparently in desperation to make good some of its loss-making image by milking another source of income completely oblivious of the fact that it is the competitiveness of ZIA that is being undercut.

Though Biman is working as an agent of the CAAB, even the latter is unable to fix rates for Biman on the basis of International Civil Aviation Organisation standards. What an abuse of a borrowed ground handling authority by Biman.

So, we urge the government to intervene in two ways to enhance the image and earning capacity of Zia International Airport: first, make the charges competitive; and secondly, open the ground handling services to competition in the private sector.

M. SHAHIDUL ISLAM

THE 58th General Assembly, representing the opinion of its 191 member states, rebuked the US for its 'botched' military campaign in Iraq while the Palestine conflict enters a dangerous new phase. This Arab morass did not get created overnight. It has a history written in blood and treachery.

The British decision to create too many nation-states out of a single people stands at the root of it. The other major British blunder was the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine despite the Palestinian Jews constituting only 6% of the population in the 1940s. The trauma of the Palestinian dispossession thus began to echo in every political inclination of the people of the region ever since.

Added to this were doses of subsequent US policies that fanned more unrest and mayhem over the last half a century. Though the British had relinquished her Mid East commitments to the Americans following the Suez war of 1956, the US failed to redress Arab grievances due to its obsession for Israeli military preeminence in the region.

Consequently, the Mid East is left to its own dynamics upon the collapse of the regional sub-system. The quagmire has also sucked in, once again, the US-UK duo into a war of attrition entailing two Arab lands -- Iraq and Palestine -- under foreign occupations. The significance of the 133 votes on September 20 in the UN General Assembly (UNGA) against the Israeli decision to expel Arafat lies herein.

Bush's Achilles' heel

The UNGA re-endorsed Arafat's legitimacy at a time when Bush chose to castigate him as a 'failed leader.' Bush's Arafat bashing is a continuation of the senior Bush's similar attitude toward the octogenarian Palestinian leader who, along with Saddam, proved too strong to quiver. Arafat is an elected leader of a people, empowered by the UNGA (*Res. 3236 of Nov. 22, 1974*) 'to regain its rights by all means in accordance with the purposes and principles of the UN Charter.'

Though the UN recognised the PLO as the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people in 1964, the US

never took heed of it. Hence, the peace process remained frozen since the Security Council's adoption of Resolution 242 (demanding withdrawal of Israeli forces from all occupied land) in the aftermath of the 1967 Israeli aggressions against neighbouring Arab countries.

Hidden agendas

The one major exception was the US-moved Camp David accord of 1978 that brought, thanks to Carter's good offices, Egypt and Israel to the negotiation table. But the gain of the Camp David was sacrificed a year later by the

freedom fighter. The US was willing to share only half of that truth with respect to Palestine. It was not until 1993 that Bill Clinton resumed the peace process and arranged for the signing of the Oslo agreement.

But the strategic collusion between US and Israel kept the PLO out of negotiations since Reagan's decision in 1988 to revive the peace process on the basis of Resolutions 242 and 338. Declassified documents reveal that Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and Israeli Deputy Prime Minister Yigal Allon signed an agreement on September 1, 1975 on behalf of two gov-

The British assurances were not hollow. Declassified in 1939 by Her Majesty's government, the *British Command Papers* contain a treasure trove of legal materials, including correspondences between Sherif Hossain of Hijaj and the Cairo-based British High Commissioner Sir Reginald Wingate. Wilson's 14 Points charter too incorporated a provision for the creation of a separate homeland for the Palestinian Arabs.

Resistance as a response to treachery

Oblivious to Palestinian plight, the

The British assurances were not hollow. Declassified in 1939 by Her Majesty's government, the British Command Papers contain a treasure trove of legal materials, including correspondences between Sherif Hossain of Hijaj and the Cairo-based British High Commissioner Sir Reginald Wingate. Wilson's 14 Points charter too incorporated a provision for the creation of a separate homeland for the Palestinian Arabs.

two major US decisions: (1) Carter's consent to sharing satellite intelligence with Israeli forces, a rare privilege that even eluded US' major ally, UK, and, (2) The decision to transfer US army's W-4 nuclear warhead to Israel. The nuclearisation of Israel created a permanent imbalance in the Arab regional sub-system.

The peace initiative got further derailed by the US inaction in stopping Israel from attacking Iraq's Osirak reactor in 1982. Iraq does not share an inch of territory with Israel and the unprovoked Israeli attack made the Iraqis more vengeful against Israel and its US mentor. The seeds of today's discord were, hence, sown in the early 1980s.

The US backing also emboldened Israel to invade Lebanon and evict Arafat and his followers from Beirut in the same year. Following this, the Arabs did not view the dispatch of US marines to Lebanon as a mere coincidence. A massive Arab resistance by the Iran and Syria-backed *Hobollah* guerrillas drove the US out of Lebanon after one single truck bomb killed over 300 marines in 1982. The Israelis too left Lebanon a decade later. Lebanon was thus freed from foreign occupation.

From Oslo to the oblivion
One man's terrorist is another's

ernments to exclude the PLO from any peace negotiations.

Thus, when the Oslo accord faced some insurmountable obstacles due to Israeli negation to accepting Palestinian refugees' return to their homeland, one had the hunch for a backlash to follow. Israel showed similar stubbornness when asked to concede a number of enclaves (that connect West bank with the Gaza strip) to the Palestinians. The issue of accepting refugees back to Palestine was another thorny one.

If one has a friend like Sharon, one needs no other enemy. Sharon rekindled Palestinian anger by visiting the Muslim holy site of Al-Aqsa in September 2000. His visit sparked the latest spate of *Intifada*. The Road Map having arrived after the devastation of 9/11, and Israel becoming the staunchest Mid East ally of the US to fight Islamic terrorism, the maiden Road Map was destined to die in its cradle.

For, the Arab mistrust has had historic roots. During World War I, the British government sought an alliance with the Arabs to defeat the Ottoman Turks. The Arabs were promised in return of self-government and an independent Palestine state. Though the Arab revolt brought down the Ottoman Empire, Britain never kept her promises.

British-Jewish nexus chose to allow Jewish immigration to Palestine since the Balfour declaration of 1917 that assured the Jews of a separate homeland. And, during the thick of World War I, Britain and France signed a secret agreement (*Sykes Picot, 1916*) to partition Iraq and Syria. The content of this secret pact was published by Moscow's Bolshevik regime in 1917.

Hundreds of thousands of Arabs were evicted from Palestine while Britain held a League of Nations mandate to administer Palestine. A century on, the déjà vu replays. Who then can deny that the Oslo accord of 1993 sprang from the ferocity of a number of *Intifadas* that began with the 1988 one, and the *intifada* of 2000 produced the Road Map.

Meanwhile, Saddam's overt vouching to remunerate Palestinian suicide bombers made the Jewish lobby in Washington hell bent on removing him from the power of world's second largest oil producing country. This is what lay behind the US-UK decision to invade Iraq under any pretext.

But the US-UK cabal was grossly mistaken this time. Until 9/11, the US economy alone produced over 35% of the world GDP. Now the world's richest nation has lost 90% of its savings and over a million jobs. US budget deficits will have overshoot the record \$480 billion in 2004, creating a

major setback for the already feeble global economy. The crisis is further compounded by \$137.7 billion current account deficit in the second quarter of this year alone.

Politically, the US today is one of the most mistrusted nations on earth. Incapable of retrieving the situation from the brink of an impending catastrophe, another British leader, Tony Blair, now desperately tries to mend fences with France and Germany to end the US-UK occupation of Iraq. And, Bush himself too returns to the UN with a sullen face to beg for global support for an adventure that recoiled

badly on his face.

With man like Sharon

As the US' Mid East policy remained an Israel-centric one, resulting in the outbreak of one conflict after another (particularly since the Iranian mass rose against US hegemony in a popular revolution in 1979), Israel must learn its lesson and trade land for peace sooner. The Israeli expansionism has reached a *cul de sac* and Sharon's strategy has rebounded with a bang. Sharon is an accused war criminal and his ambitions are dangerous for global peace.

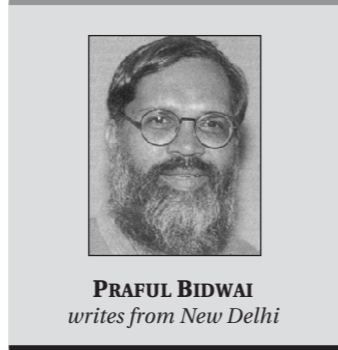
The world is also aware how the US backed Israel blindly over the decades despite Israeli policy covertly aiming to grab more lands from the Arabs. The war in 1948 was the very first step toward fulfilling such a stratagem. Had that not been the mission, what else could have driven Israel on the eve of the 1956 Sinai campaign to plan for the expulsion of all Palestinian Israelis from the North-Central Israel (known as the 'little triangle')?

And, in the 1960s, Sharon, then a Colonel, ordered his subordinates to investigate how many buses would be needed to transfer 300,000 Palestinians out of northern Israel. Decades on, his views remain unchanged.

During the 1967 war, 200,000-300,000 Palestinians were expelled

The struggle for pluralism

Lessons from near and far



PRAFUL BIDWAI
writes from New Delhi

BRITAIN'S Conservative Party has done something remarkably refreshing. It has selected Ms Sandip Verma, a woman of Indian origin, to contest a Parliament seat held for 24 years by Enoch Powell, the notoriously fierce opponent of immigration.

Powell's infamous warning in 1968 that immigration and racial tension would turn Britain's streets into "rivers of blood" is probably the best-remembered anti-immigrant remark made anywhere. The Tories had to sack Mr Powell from their front benches for it.

It's irrelevant whether Ms Verma wins or loses. What matters is that the Tories have followed Labour in projecting a "modern" self-image. They describe Ms Verma as "a candidate of our times", who contrasts sharply with Powell's racism.

This is a handsome tribute to *multicultural-pluralist* Britain, which takes pride in ethnic diversity, and its ability to assimilate different

languages, modes of conduct, attire and food. It's a sign of the enormous distance Britain has travelled since the 1970s when white-racist Skinheads roamed its streets bullying immigrants, especially from South Asia.

Most immigrants then lived in fear in ghettos, unrecognised as White people's equals. Books like Dilip Hiro's *White British, Black British* document this.

Things have changed a lot, although, although racism is far from

Take an example of the struggle. When the racists showed placards saying "Go home", the immigrants would turn around and shout: "We are HERE because you were THERE". Later, they took the bull by the horns. They declared: "Our home is London (or Birmingham or Bradford)". This was an attempt to turn the tables and redefine the *meaning of Britishness*.

This struggle had two other components. One was the South Asians' assertion of their identity as

people. Being better off than the average White American, they don't have to fight for equality.

American NRIs are not particularly interested in *participatory* citizenships distinct from the Green Card unlike second-generation British immigrants. A majority are content to pursue individualistic agendas, without collective commitment.

In Britain, the anti-racist struggle has reshaped political parties. Labour responded to it first by promoting

Multiculturalism is the best way to tap people's human potential. In India, the greatest obstacle to multiculturalism is Hindu majoritarianism, which places Hindu culture above all others: Hindus must prevail because they are the majority... This repulsively arrogant idea subverts the liberal and humane spirit of the Constitution. It rationalises the exclusion of other groups. And it suppresses the fact that there are as many divisions among Hindus as between them and others.

dead in Britain. There is "institutionalised racism", and prejudice in society, including the police, against "asylum-seekers". There are periodic clashes between neo-Nazi groups and immigrants in certain depressed areas. There is Home Secretary David Blunkett's proposal to give immigrants compulsory "lessons" in British history and citizens' rights/duties.

But what *has* changed is mainstream public discourse. It's no longer permissible to air one's ethnic or racial prejudices or demand the exclusion of minority groups from social life.

This has not happened overnight. It is, above all, the result of a long, bitter struggle by the immigrants for *equal citizenship* and against racism.

working-class people through struggles. Among the most heroic of these was a two-year-long strike at the Grunwick film-processing factory in northwest London, led by a diminutive saree-clad woman, Jayaben Desai. These struggles solidly grounded South Asians in Britain's reality.

A second component was solidarity with other immigrants, from Asia, Africa and the Caribbean, in their fight for full citizenship. New bonds and identities emerged through such struggles.

That process hasn't occurred in the United States, where many more Indians live. The bulk of American NRIs are conservative upper middle-class professionals, not working class

multiculturalism within its membership. Labour has created many Asian Lords, including Meghnad Desai, Bhiku Parekh and Nazir Ahmed.

Last year, Ghanaian-origin Paul Boateng became Britain's first-ever Black Cabinet Minister. Pakistan-born Michael Nazir Ali, the Bishop of Rochester, narrowly missed being elected the Archbishop of Canterbury, the world leader of the Anglican Church.

The Tories now say they "celebrate immigration and cultural diversity". Last year, they dismissed MP Ann Winterton for narrating a racist joke at a rugby club.

The "Tebbit Test" of loyalty, about which side you cheered in an England-

vs-India or England-vs-Pakistan cricket match, has become a complete joke. Today, everyone accepts that British South Asians will "naturally" cheer "their" side.

Britons of South Asian origin are now on average better off than Whites. Their cultural distinctiveness is respected. In Britain, Diwali parties are more important than in India. *Tandoori chicken* and *tikka masala* have been declared Britain's national dishes. (They aren't South Asian

There's a larger lesson here. Britain's success lies in universalising citizens' rights and encouraging active citizenship, through participation in public life regardless of ethnic origin. Implicit here is also a *democratic* concept of culture and *equality* of different traditions. It's only when the bulk of the White British, led by their most liberal elements, stopped believing in their cultural superiority that British society became open and less insecure.

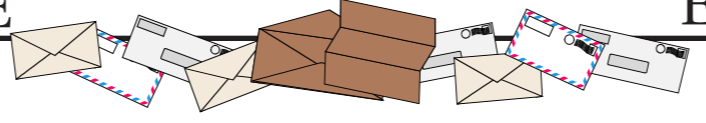
Multiculturalism is the best way to tap people's human potential. In India, the greatest obstacle to multiculturalism is Hindu majoritarianism, which places Hindu culture above all others: Hindus must prevail because they are the majority.

This repulsively arrogant idea subverts the liberal and humane spirit of the Constitution. It rationalises the exclusion of other groups. And it suppresses the fact that there are as many divisions among Hindus as between them and others.

Majoritarianism is profoundly undemocratic and wantonly destructive of equality and social cohesion. It breeds a false sense of pride while negating all that's valuable in our plural traditions.

Majoritarianism will arrest society's evolution and turn it into a cultural backwater, an intellectual swamp, a spiritual cesspool. We must not allow that.

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR



Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

Road divider

I welcome the decision of the honourable prime minister to stop the dismantling of the road divider at the airport road. After liberation it is a common sight to see that road dividers, which has been built at the cost of millions of tax payers money is dismantled at somebody's whim. It is also surprising to read that the communication minister is unaware of the dismantling of the divider at the airport road. Who is suppose to know then? And what is happening in the ministry?
Shahed Jamil
Gulshan, Dhaka

Time for the Tigers to hunt big games

Bangladesh's tour of Pakistan might be well over by the time this article gets published. But one must admit that it was a series with a lot of positives for this young touring side. It felt really good to see the Tigers live up to the billing and play to their potential with considerable consistency in a series for the first time after being accorded equality in the family of Test nations.

The tour opener was a mere indication of what may be on the cards for the rest of the tour provided that the Tigers keep on playing in the same vein while keeping the level of lapses down.

The second Test raised further hopes and Bangladesh was probably well on course of its maiden Test win. But unfortunately a dismal batting collapse in the second innings came between Bangladesh and the much-coveted win. Then ensued the final Test, which was packed with a lot of actions, suspense, excitement and what not! It was truly one of the most entertaining Test matches cricket buffs have seen in recent times. In fact it was so close that some guy in the commentary box couldn't help uttering, "Bangladesh is now seriously in danger of winning its first ever Test match"! That's an outrageous comment indeed, but funny nonetheless. That was a tremendous effort on the part of Khaled Mahmud and Co. Luck didn't bowl for Bangladesh in that match, that's for sure.

Bangladesh has been performing miserably in the ODI's over the past few years. This wretched run of performance could easily be attributed to the batters' perpetual failure to apply themselves in the middle properly. And the blame for this recurring failure could be laid upon their sheer lack of sound temperament and mental toughness among the players more than anything else. It was rather conspicuous in the 2nd ODI when, after a fairly promising start, the Bangladeshi batsmen virtually batted with apparent lack of purpose and game plan and that way they literally 'snatched defeat from the jaws of victory'. But the 4th match was a much better show as this time around the batsmen applied themselves fairly well to shore up the innings after a mid-innings stutter and pile up a rather respectable total. In the end,

Bangladesh again came "dangerously close" (?) to winning its first ODI in four years. Had it not been for that Youhana guy who is of course one of the finest batsmen of contemporary cricket, the match could have gone either way. The team management is apparently in a limbo over deciding the opening pair. I really feel sorry both about and for Ashraf. He is definitely one of the most capable and talented batsman we have but unfortunately he's been letting himself and his team down just again and again. I can't figure out why the think tanks don't take Rafique into consideration whenever they think of sending in a makeshift opener. We must not forget that it's Rafique who pioneered two of the most memorable victories for Bangladesh as a pinch-hitting opener. I hope team management will try to make the best use of his batting

pro prowess whenever an opportunity arises there in future. In the middle order Alok and Rajin both are doing a great job. We hope with the help of Whatmore's able guidance and proper coaching the Tigers will be able to put on better and better shows in the matches to come.

I started off saying that this particular series meant to be a series of positives for Bangladesh. Many of the players enjoyed a fecund tour this time around and there are really a lot of things for us to cheer about. Habibul Bashar did really set the field ablaze with his entertaining display of ball bashing with the willow to emerge in the end as the highest run getter of the series. And then comes Rafique who bowled well with wile and poise to come out as the highest wicket taker with 17 scalps inclusive of two 5-wicket hauls in the series. The duo's sterling

showing is by no standard a mean achievement considering the fact that they both achieved those feats as members of the vanquished side. Did you really think I wasn't going to mention Kapali at all? That young fella looked a class act in every discipline. He's definitely the one versatile genius we have got in our side. That memorable hat-trick is simply one glimpse of his potential. Rajin Saleh looks a bright prospect and like Alok he has shown considerable skill in all the three departments of the game.

The over all performance of the Tigers on this tour augurs well for the future. The side boasts a bevy of promising young players who have made us proud with their enthusiastic display. Their batting has shown some signs of improvement though there are still a lot left for Whatmore's charges to improve in that department. The

bowlers have shown discipline and tenacity that is so important at top-flight cricket but I think it's the fielding that is the one department in which the Tigers totally outplayed the Pakistanis. But again the occasional but costly lapses are still there that eventually result into all the hard works going down the drain. They'll have to learn how to press home any advantages that come their way if they are to win a game. No doubt Dave Whatmore is a top-class coach with a shrewd cricketing brain and our young cricketers must try to follow his instructions as impeccably as possible if they are to stamp their mark as world-beaters.

Again not a bad show Tigers! Keep up the hard work. Your day will come.
Hameem Muhammad
One-mail

Author and columnist M. Shahidul Islam is a Senior Assistant Editor of The Daily Star.