

Hamas replaces Fatah in Palestinian general election

SPOTLIGHT ON MIDDLE EAST

The acting prime minister of Israel, Ehud Olmert has said that talks with Hamas, the Palestinian radical movement sworn to Israel's destruction, were out of question. That Hamas wants to destroy Israel is obviously wrong, but Olmert conveniently forgot that Israel has already destroyed Palestine, and has hardly any intention of re-establishing it.



MUSLEHUDDIN AHMAD

THE inevitable has happened. With the departure of Yasser Arafat, legendary leader of Palestinian (Fatah) Movement, Fatah has lost its right to rule. It was expected, as Mahmud Abbas is not a politician who could keep the Fatah members together for any length of time against Hamas which, to the US and the Western countries, is a terrorist organization, but to Palestinians is a dependable organization that has so far delivered and could deliver in the future.

The Palestinian Authority consisting of Fatah members were seen by the Palestinians and also largely by the rest of the world as a corrupt organization. It has so far failed to deliver anything worth mentioning. Hamas is a determined type of organization which, as reports show, made it a point to win the hearts and minds of people by rendering its services including social and health services, which could not be provided by the Palestinian government i.e. Palestinian Authority. In fact, Hamas was working as a parallel government in terms of services to the Palestinian people.

The Palestinians could see that it was Hamas bombs that cleared the way of Arafat to the negotiating table, otherwise, as history shows, Israelis would have never entered into negotiation with Arafat. The recent unilateral disengagement from Gaza is also seen by the Palestinians as the result of Hamas attacks which were unbearable for most Israeli settlers in Gaza and seen by Israel as an area that cannot ultimately be protected by any

means. In the backdrop of such events and developments, Hamas was set to win ultimately. It would have taken time if Arafat was alive, but the process has been expedited because of his departure. There could have been some improvements in favour of Fatah if Marwan Bagouti was released from Israeli jail. This seems to be a setback for Israel, as it could not predict such landslide victory for Hamas. Hamas won 76 seats out of 132 of the Palestinian Legislative Assembly.

Its win has been greeted by Palestinians in general with the exception of some sporadic clashes between Hamas and Fatah supporters. Mahmud Abbas is, of course, very disturbed because his party lost the election, but said that Fatah has to "accept the outcome of the vote and to keep the public order." He is, of course, in a difficult situation as the president where the government is likely to be formed by Hamas.

Things are still very uncertain, as there are views that Hamas may decide to form a national government with the support of Fatah. The other view is that Hamas may even choose to sit in opposition and allow Fatah to govern and negotiate with Israel. However, one Hamas leader said Hamas should form the national government and run the internal affairs with emphasis on reorganizing the social and health sectors in which it has enough experience, and leave Fatah with the task of negotiations with Israel. This indeed makes sense, as then the issue of dealing with Israel and the international community would not pose a serious problem. Hamas also knows the international reaction on its election victory. So it finds it safer to leave the foreign affairs and negotiations with Israel to Fatah group of the government as Mahmud Abbas is the President and belongs to Fatah.

In fact, Mahmoud Abbas already indicated that he would like to continue negotiations with Israel on the basis of the Road Map. In case he finds prob-

lems there, he might as well resign. His threat of resignation may lead to some rethinking in Hamas circles on the issue of formation of the government. The idea of a national government with Fatah members with the special responsibilities may enable Hamas to gain experience and build up a working relationship with the US and the EU, which will ultimately pay political dividend to Hamas.

On the issue of renouncing violence, Hamas has to be practical as it would now be, in all probability, in the government. Being in the government, working and dealing with the governments of the rest of the world, is something quite different from agitating in the street, which might even be for a very genuine cause. Moreover, it's an unjust world with all types of corrupt practices and self-interest diplomacy. Some people talk of democracy but when it comes to national interest, the latter gets the preference and priority. So democracy is something that must suit one's national interest.

The acting prime minister of Israel, Ehud Olmert has said that talks with Hamas, the Palestinian radical movement sworn to Israel's destruction, were out of question. That Hamas wants to destroy Israel is obviously wrong, but Olmert conveniently forgot that Israel has already destroyed Palestine, and has hardly any intention of re-establishing it.

Now Israel talks of unilateral setting of borders by putting special concrete walls -- much of it has been completed already -- by grabbing as much Palestinian land as Israel needs to have its "safe" Jewish state, regardless of whether the Palestinians are left with anything that can at all be called a state.

This is not the way the prime minister of the people of a democratic country takes the results of a democratic election of another people. The international community also cannot continue to use disgraceful words towards a political party, whatever may be its past, which

has won the mandate of its people.

So if democracy has any meaning, the election result, whether it is somebody's liking or not, has to be accepted and dealt with appropriately. Due patience is certainly called for. The pressure for renunciation of violence appears quite valid but undue haste for recognition of Israel does not seem to be in consonance with continuing events. This sort of eruption of sympathy and support for a hawkish religious (Jewish) state like Israel does not speak well of the intention of many leaders of the developed countries, who determine the future of this helpless globe.

Hamas has been designated as a terrorist party by Israel, the US, the EU, and many countries around the world for the means it adopted to fight occupation. Yes, suicide bombings have to be rejected outright as a means to achieving anything and as far as I know, suicide in any form is also prohibited in all religions. But it is also to be recognized that there is no standard rule when it comes to fighting occupation.

The case of Allied bombings on Germany and Japan, including the use of atom bombs on innocent men, women, and children of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in WW II, killing millions, is a burning example. What is the difference between suicide bombing and carpet bombing plus dropping of atom bombs on innocent civilians? In the former, the suicide bombers themselves destroy their lives and in the latter the bombers return to base safely and enjoy hot coffee.

It should be recognized that Hamas joined the political process and this should have been welcomed by all with the hope that it would now demonstrate responsible behaviour when it is in the government. The "regret" of the British Foreign office appear to have carried such sense: "We have the responsibility to accept the outcome of a democratic election, but those who run in a democratic election have a responsibility to renounce violence because the bullet and the ballot are incompatible."

The British Foreign office further said that London did not rule out the possibility of dealing with some Hamas figures, "but the decision is not ours, it is theirs -- the decision to renounce violence." British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw urged Hamas to renounce violence and recognize Israel.

The US President George Bush said that Hamas cannot be partner for Middle East peace-making without renouncing violence, and he reiterated that the United States would not deal with Palestinian leaders who do not recognize Israel's right to exist. He also added that Israel is the US ally and friend, and called upon defeated chairman Mahmoud Abbas to remain in office.

Condoleezza Rice, the US Secretary of State, interrupting a discussion on democracy in Economic World Forum in Davos to give first reaction of the US government, said that: "The election has been peaceful, and free of violence, and by all accounts fair. The Palestinian people have voted for change." But she told Hamas that: "You can't have one foot in politics and another in terror."

The remarks of both British and the US administration on renouncing violence were appropriate, but their insistence on recognition of Israel was too hasty, partisan, and should not have been raised at all at this stage. Better approach would have been to wait and see how Hamas reacts after entering into the government. If Hamas forms the government and agrees to negotiate with Israel, this would have virtually meant recognizing the negotiating partner, Israel.

Hamas leaders have already said they are ready for a long truce with Israel if Israel moves out and goes beyond 1967 borders. This would mean virtual recognition of Israel by Hamas and end of violence. In any case, the Palestinians recognized Israel long ago and Hamas is only a political party of the Palestinian people. So, one may say that the recognition implicitly exists, though its party's charter said something different. The party's charter is not



A Palestinian shop owner displays in front of a poster of late Hamas leader Sheikh Ahmad Yassin a mug with slogans in Arabic and English hailing "Democracy in Palestine."

Palestinian government's charter. So the better course would have been to keep quiet on the issue and insist on end of violence.

However, as the question of recognition has been raised, Hamas leader Zahad asked when Israel does not recognize the right of the Palestinians to return to their homes. How and why they should recognize Israel? Moreover, Israel even does not vacate occupation which the international community including the UN asked for. The existence of Israel is a hard reality and its recognition appears to be formality, but those who lost everything at the hands of the Israeli occupier may not find it that easy to recognize it without knowing what would be their final status.

So a word of advice on cessation of violence appears acceptable, but insisting on immediate recognition appears to be putting the horse before the cart. Normally official recognition comes on reciprocal basis. Anyway, the world should wait and see how Hamas, a party which has the mandate of the Palestinians, talks and behaves while in the government. If Hamas forms the government, it cannot have a militia and at the same time the official Palestinian security forces. These two things do not go together. Let things move and settle down. Too much of negative and indeed derogatory remarks would only complicate things and make issues harder for Mahmoud Abbas to deal with it.

The world should, while advising Hamas, ask Israel also to accept the election result and do business with it. Indeed, in the latest poll after the Hamas election victory, majority of the Israeli citizens expressed their support for negotiations with Hamas. Many see the possibility of a reasonable deal. It is also possible that Hamas would try to deliver a Palestinian state which Fatah could not do in five decades. This may induce Hamas to go for negotiations. As mentioned before, Hamas already said it would go for a long truce if Israel goes back to 1967 borders. This is what the international community also wants. If Israel goes back to 1967 borders, violence would stop regardless of whether Hamas renounces violence or not.

It seems that the people of Israel are more interested in peace than the governments of Sharon, Ehud Olmert, and Netanyahu, which were no less terrorist than Hamas. One may just browse through the pages of very recent history to see the violence that the security forces of successive Israeli governments inflicted on innocent Palestinians by way of dropping missiles on Palestinian homes with families inside, bulldozing of Palestinian homes, assassinations, building concrete barriers separating Palestinian land and villages, road blocks, daily harassment, economic deprivation, etc.

It is high time for the international community to give up its partisan attitude and seriously insist on Israel to go for immediate two states solution as given in the Road Map.

Muslehuddin Ahmad is a former Secretary and Ambassador.

Art of the Skyscraper

In "Art of the Skyscraper: The Genius of Fazlur Khan," the author, Dr. Mir M. Ali, professor of architectural structures at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, offers a vivid portrait of Fazlur Rahman Khan (1929-1982). In 16 chapters spread over 240 pages that include many illustrations and pictures, the author has done a marvellous job of telling the story of a highly technical man in both technical and non-technical language.

Book Review

Art of the Skyscraper: The Genius of Fazlur Khan
Mir M. Ali

Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., New York.
ISBN: 0847823709
Hardcover, 240 pages

DR. AHMED S. KHAN

DR. Fazlur Rahman Khan was one of the greatest structural engineers of the twentieth century. His contributions and innovative approach to tall building design and attention to aesthetic details to the field have been so significant that he has been called "the Einstein of the structural engineering" and "the father of the modern skyscraper." For his contributions to the field, he has not only received highest international awards for engineering but also recognised for his architectural creativity. To honour this world-famous engineer, a chair has been established in Dr. F. R. Khan's name at Lehigh University. The Structural Engineers Association, Illinois, has installed a Khan Sculpture in Sears Tower; and the city of Chicago has named one of the streets in downtown Chicago "Fazlur R. Khan Way." Had there been a Nobel Prize in engineering, he surely would have won it.

Dr. Fazlur Rahman Khan revolutionised the construction of tall buildings by inventing "bundled tube," "braced tube" and "bundled tube" structural systems, which made it possible to construct the 100-story John Hancock Centre and the 110-story Sears Tower in Chicago (a building so tall that it needed Federal Aviation Administration approval before the construction could commence) using minimum amount of steel. Dr. ER. Khan's structural system inventions play a fundamental role in the design of modern high-rise buildings. His efforts were not only limited to structural engineering but also played an important role in the form and architecture of the buildings he worked on.

In "Art of the Skyscraper: The Genius of Fazlur Khan," the author, Dr. Mir M. Ali, professor of architectural structures at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, offers a vivid portrait of Fazlur Rahman Khan (1929-1982). In 16 chapters spread over 240 pages that include many illustrations and pictures, the author has done a marvellous job of telling the story of a highly technical man in both technical and non-technical language.

In the first few chapters of the book, Professor Ali discusses Dr. F. R. Khan's childhood, youth, education, and early years of his professional career. In latter chapters, he addresses the development of tall buildings in Chicago, and highlights Dr. F. R. Khan's innovations, contributions and leadership role in the design and development of tall buildings. He focuses on a period from 1950 to the early 1980s when Dr. Khan worked mostly at the Chicago offices of Skidmore, Owens & Merrill (SOM), one of the largest and renowned architectural firms in the world. Dr. F. R. Khan's innovative contributions to structural engineering enabled SOM to become a leader in the development of tall buildings. The author also portrays Dr. Khan as a lover of humanity and a deeply introspective and spiritual man (Chapters 9 and 13).

Dr. Mir M. Ali is uniquely qualified to tell the story of Dr. F. R. Khan. A structural engineer himself, Professor Ali had been the chairman of the structures division of the School of Architecture at University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign from 1993 to 2003. He knew Dr. Khan personally and also worked with him on some of his projects at SOM.

Reflecting on the reasons as to why Dr. F. R. Khan selected the University of Illinois for pursuing graduate studies, Professor Ali writes: "Fazlur R. Khan went to University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in 1952 to pursue graduate studies in structural engineering. He was attracted to this institution because of its

worldwide reputation in the field of engineering. This reputation was due to names of renowned people like Hardy Cross, Thomas Shedd, N.M. Newmark, and Ralph Peck within its faculty. Khan departed for Urbana-Champaign from Dhaka, an old city in the heart of Bangladesh (formerly East Pakistan). He had studied engineering at Bengal Engineering College Calcutta, India, and moved to Dhaka after the creation of East Pakistan." He further writes: "It is not known how Khan got his admission to the University of Illinois, since it was extremely competitive for foreigners -- particularly for those coming from a new country like Pakistan." (p.20, 21)

The author provides an account of the academic brilliance of Dr. F. R. Khan, specifically how he completed three graduate degrees in a short span of three years. Dr. Ali writes: "Khan got enough academic credits by taking courses in both civil engineering and theoretical and applied mechanics simultaneously to get two Master's degrees in two years. He completed his Ph.D. thesis in the very short time of one year after that." When Chester Siess (Khan's adviser) was asked about how Khan managed to get three graduate degrees in three years and how the Civil Engineering Department allowed that to happen, he replied, "Faz was unusually brilliant and we could make an exception for someone like him." (p.24)

Professor Ali has also included a number of examples of Dr. F. R. Khan's contribution to the field of structural engineering, providing technical details with relevant background information. The author presents detailed description of Dr. Khan's "braced tube" and "bundled tube" approaches, which are widely known in the field of advanced structural analyses. The author also discusses some of his contributions that are significant but not well known to general public. Regarding Dr. Khan's contributions for designing building in seismic zones, the author writes: "A further innovation by Khan, and something that is not as well known, is his original concept of dissipating energy as the lower storey of buildings in seismic zones. He thought of a shock-absorbing soft-storey concept in which a 'stability wall,' consisting of neoprene pads, and deformable cables would be used in the lowest most level in a predetermined fashion such that during an earthquake the lower level would dissipate energy and isolate the upper floors from any damage. Thus designing the entire building to resist high earthquake forces, the bottom storey of building is allowed to distort by earthquake, thereby screening out most of the forces there. The upper part of the structure remains unaffected and behaves as an elastic system, whereas the lower storey behaves as an elastic-plastic bilinear system." An earthquake in Yugoslavia in the 1960s in which the bottom storey of many buildings was excessively damaged, when brought to Dr. Khan's attention by a colleague, led to this innovation.

In the process of writing the book, Professor Ali interviewed a number of Dr. F. R. Khan's colleagues, friends and advisers and included their impressions about ER. Khan's abilities. Commenting on Dr. Khan's abilities, his co-advisor for graduate studies, Narbey Khachatryan recalled: "He (Khan) was a universal man, a man who would look at all aspects -- social, architectural, aesthetic, you name it -- the entire universe. Khan was also a very good and perceptive listener. He could grasp very quickly what you would tell him. He had that unusual mental ability."

Professor Ali reveals that Dr. Khan was aware of the fact that his success was not solely due to his own genius and expertise, but also due to the help and collaboration of his associates, fellow architects and engineers. In 1981, Dr. Fazlur Rahman Khan paid tribute to his advisor for his success and innovations. He said: "It is not always easy to pin-point the most important reason for my occasional successes in innovations...I have come to realise that three years I spent at the University of Illinois first under the advisor-ship of Thomas Shedd, but more significantly under the research environment and advisor-ship of Chester Siess have indeed been the most significant and responsible factors in shaping my attitudes and approach to structural design." (p.20)

Dr. F. R. Khan was far more than

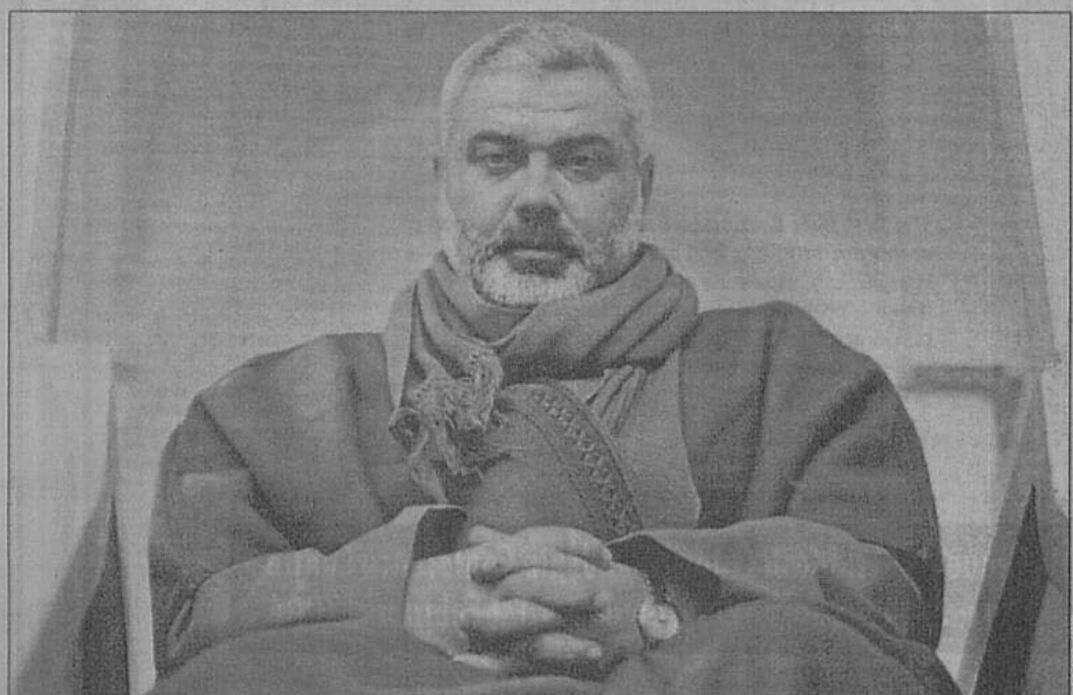
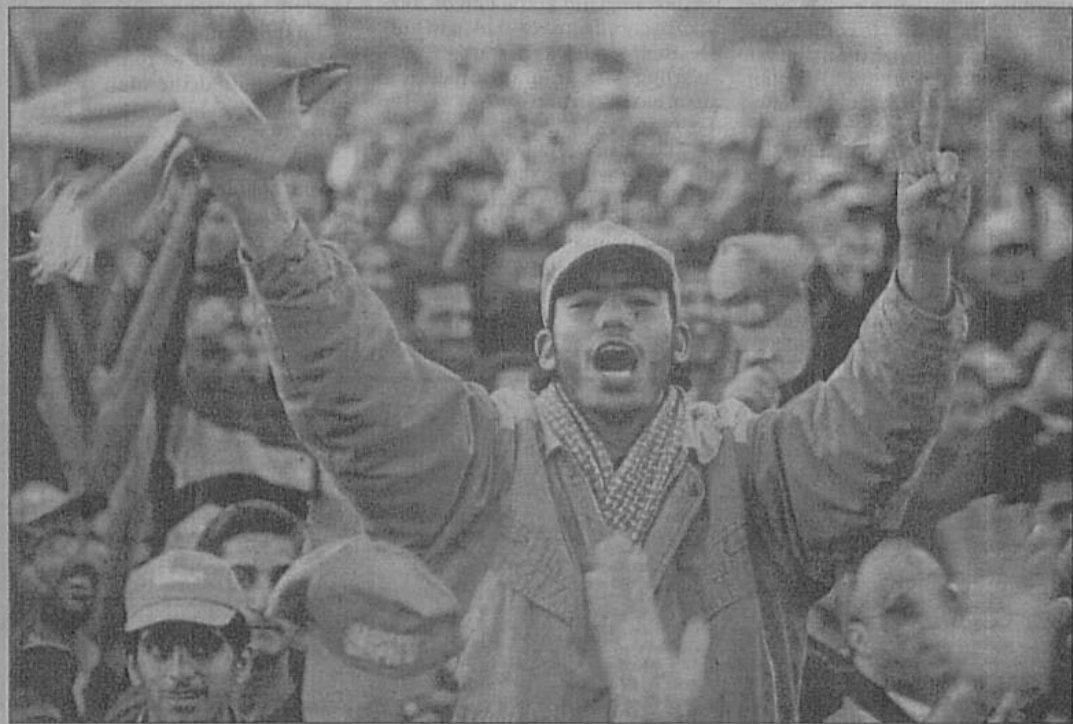
an innovative structural engineer; he was also a philosopher, a thinker and a humanitarian. His designs not only reflect technical innovations, but also meet the local demands and cultural expectations. He paid attention to the minute details of his designs. Commenting on his own thinking process about design, Dr. F. R. Khan said: "when thinking design, I put myself in the place of a whole building, feeling every part. In my mind I visualise the stresses and twisting a building undergoes." Dr. Khan also made sure that his designs were people-friendly too; he placed people first because people were so close to his heart. In this regard, the author has reproduced a comment by Engineering News-Record (1972): "Invariably, when Khan lectures on high-rise buildings, he first goes through a brief slide-supplemented history of tall buildings, and then explains the details of some of his innovations. Suddenly, shots of crowded, smog-covered Chicago and New York City appear on the screen. Khan then cuts to shots of buildings with tree-filled, people-filled plazas. While this is going on Khan expounds on how designers have to face up to urban problems and let their consciences push them in that direction."

Professor Ali has also presented the other facets of Dr. Khan's personality: a philosopher, a thinker, an educator, and a prolific writer. He had a keen interest in the people, art and music and literature. In 1972, he said, "The technical man must not be lost in his own technology; he must be able to appreciate life, and life is art, drama, music, and most importantly, people."

Dr. Fazlur Rahman Khan has left behind a legacy of tall building design. In his design he believed in logic, truth, objectivity, and rationality. He practiced collaboration. His innovative ideas are present in form of tall buildings in the major cities of the world today. One Magnificent Mile and Ontario Center, John Hancock Center, the Sears Tower, all in Chicago; World Trade Center, Hong Kong; and the Hajj Terminal, Jeddah, are some of his best known completed projects.

"Art of the Skyscraper: The Genius of Fazlur Khan" is an important book on the life and accomplishments of one of the greatest structural engineers of the twentieth century and whose influence continues today. Professor Ali has presented to the people around the world a tribute to the brilliance of Dr. F. R. Khan that will keep his memory everlasting. He has done a wonderful job of combining the biography of Dr. Fazlur Rahman Khan, with the technical problems and challenges associated with the construction of tall buildings. It is a fascinating story of the genius of Dr. Fazlur Rahman Khan; a must read for all technical and non-technical minds; and an invaluable resource for students, architects, and engineers.

Dr. Ahmed S. Khan is a senior Professor in the EET department at DeVry University, Addison, Illinois, is the author of The Telecommunications Fact Book and the co-author of Technology and Society, A Bridge to the 21st Century.



A Palestinian Hamas supporter flashes the V-sign for victory as thousands cheer during a celebration rally in the southern Gaza Strip refugee camp of Khan Yunes, January 27. Hamas chief candidate in the Palestinian parliamentary elections Ismail Haniya.