

Resolving Iran-US nuclear flare-up



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DOES a country have the right to be economically self-reliant and technologically sophisticated if it has the resources to become both? No it doesn't, if it is Iran which is not friends with the US. Critics from both inside and outside scold America for being double faced in its foreign policy posture. In fact, US foreign policy has only one standard: in President Bush's words: "You are either with us or against us" -- a doctrine of unilateralism guided by barefaced self-interest.

Iran rejects unilateralism and braved the resumption of research scale enrichment of uranium on January 10, after the IAEA approved resolution referring Iran to the UN Security Council (UNSC). This sparked a fresh flare-up and stern warnings. Israel spared no time threatening with dire consequences whilst US hawks, the pre-emptive doctrinaires, reacted with less pigheadedness. The US realises:

- Strikes on Iranian nuclear installations will enmesh US with protracted conflicts with conse-

NO NONSENSE

Iran with nuclear energy would benefit the global economy in terms of more oil for others at stable prices and slower rate of depletion of world oil reserves. The doctrine of pre-emption and unilateralism guided by self-interest is the reason America has such a negative image at home and abroad. Iran's right to peaceful development and uses of nuclear energy must not be held back.

quences. Reactions in the Muslim world will be swift and explosive, threatening world peace and the global economy, and destabilize the American-friendly regimes of Kings, Sheikhs, Sultans, and thugs in the Middle East.

- Iran with its modernized missiles and air strike technology can block the Strait of Hormuz and destroy all oil infrastructures in the region. A daily potential loss of 4 million barrels of Iranian crude oil may skyrocket oil prices to \$100 per barrel or even more -- a nightmare for the world economy.
- With its present quagmire in Iraq and Afghanistan, Katrina disaster and Bush's plummeting poll numbers, an all out invasion of Iran is an absurdity. Also, with a population of 68 million and ultra-nationalism, Iran is not Iraq.
- British, French, German, and other EU oil and gas companies having multi-billion dollar stakes in Iranian gas and oil deposits are exerting pressure on their respective governments to resolve the nuclear tangle diplomatically. Add to these Chinese and Russian on-going

multibillion dollar deals. Meanwhile, there are some new hopeful signs. IAEA chief Mohammed El Baradei recently indicated that the international community might have to accept small-scale enrichment on Iranian soil as a condition for Tehran to move its full enrichment program abroad. After resuming talks with Tehran, Russia's top nuclear negotiator on February 25 said that a resolution of the nuclear standoff with Iran is still possible. The progress of the talks between Tehran and Moscow is critical to face off the dispute before the March 6 meeting of the UN Security Council (UNSC), which could trigger a process leading to UN sanctions against Iran.

On Monday, February 27, the chief of Iran's Atomic Energy Organization claimed that he and the Russian nuclear chief agreed in principle on the Russian offer, but details still need to be worked out. Iranian Foreign Minister Hamid Asefi, however, reiterated that research on nuclear fuel cycle would continue despite international demands that the country return to a freeze on such efforts. Moscow insisted the fundamental dispute over Tehran's nuclear

plans had yet to be resolved. So the standoff continues.

The west contends that with its enormous oil and gas reserves, Iran does not need nuclear energy. Tehran argues oil and natural gas deposits are not self-perpetuating whereas nuclear fuel cycle is, and that it has the right under the 1970 provisions of the NPT to peaceful uses of nuclear energy. But the West denies Iran that right simply because Iran is a Muslim country openly belligerent to both the US and Israel. The west argues that for faster energy development Iran should build oil and gas burning power plants. For long-term energy needs, however, Iran can build nuclear reactors but must buy enriched uranium from outside sources.

What is this self-perpetuating fuel cycle that Iran is elusive about? A nuclear fuel cycle consists of mining uranium ore (U-238) in which only 0.7 percent are fissionable (fuel) isotope U-235. To use as nuclear fuel, this naturally occurring U-238 must be processed to enrich it to varying degrees of U-235. Enrichment with 3.5-4.0 percent purity of U-235 is needed for use in nuclear reactors, 10-20 percent purity for use in research

reactors, and at least 90 percent for making nuclear weapons.

Once enriched uranium fuels undergo controlled chain reaction generating electricity, they become converted to another nuclear fuel material called plutonium (Pu239 or Pu241). Nuclear reactors thus produce both electric power and a different kind of nuclear fuel and is therefore, in principle, a self-perpetuating source of energy. However, there is presently no known plutonium burning nuclear reactor in operation. But this highly enriched plutonium can be reprocessed to produce nuclear warheads. That worries Iran's adversaries.

To get out of this impasse, the Russians offered Iran to shift its uranium enrichment facilities to Russian territory. To the West, the Russia's compromise plan allays concerns over Iran potentially producing weapons-grade nuclear material.

This obscures the fact that, despite its vast oil deposits and the largest gas reserves in the world, Russia also has a booming nuclear industry at home. Having already built the Bushehr nuclear plant, it is now cajoling Iran to secure eight more such plants that Iran plans to build over time.

Iran with its own technical capabilities must not fall for the trap of letting its nuclear reactors become potential hostages of another country for fuel and at the same time squander its future oil revenues to buy nuclear fuel it can fabricate at home. Given past broken promises and deals Iran has every reason to be concerned about its national interest. For

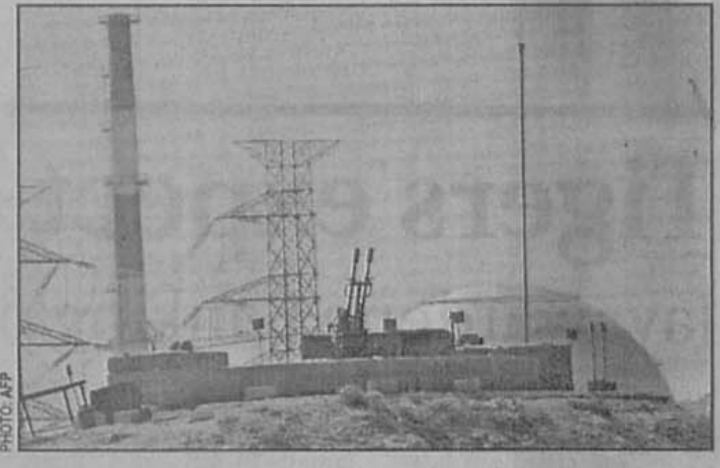
example:

- Britain blocked raw uranium it bought before the 1979 Islamic revolution.
- Germany refused to complete its only nuclear power plant.
- France blocked releasing Iran's uranium materials despite Iran's having a share at a uranium enrichment plant in France.
- Iran's assets in the US were frozen shortly after the 1979 Islamic revolution that toppled Reza Shah Pahlavi.
- Iran faces the same prospects of its assets being frozen by the EU nations in the face of current nuclear confrontations.

Iranian reformists, who lost the last election, rejected the US "spur democracy" funds and cautioned the US that such pressures will only fortify militarism and Iran's resolve to be inflexible.

The West seems bent on denying Iran the prospect of becoming an economic power simply because Iran is a theocratic form of representative government and stands up to unilateralism and hypocrisies of the West. For now, however, Iran must hang tight and insist on having its own nuclear enrichment facilities on its own soil. Iran, in exchange,

- Must not enrich uranium in excess of 5 percent purity as needed for its reactors,
- Procure 15 percent or so purity in uranium only from foreign sources for its research reactors.
- Accept the conditions of absolute transparency and intrusive IAEA inspections,
- Must not transfer uranium enrichment technology to other



An anti aircraft machine-gun is seen in front of the Reactor building of the Bushehr nuclear power plant, in southern Iran. The launch of Iran's first nuclear power station is being built near the southern city of Bushehr with Russian help.

countries,

- Will reserve the right to export its nuclear expertise including building nuclear reactors like other nuclear nations within IAEA provisions.

Despotism and autocracy in the Middle East has been enshrined by the West from evolving into representative government because of the fears that such governments may stand up to the West like Iran. If the West truly wanted to democratize the Middle East, couldn't they have started the process from the liberation of Kuwait from Iraqi occupation of August 1990 conditional on democratic reforms? When it comes to oil and autocracy versus democracy, the later stands no chance with the West.

Iran with nuclear energy would benefit the global economy in terms of more oil for others at stable prices and slower rate of depletion of world oil reserves. The doctrine of pre-emption and unilateralism guided by self-interest is the reason America has such a negative image at home and abroad. Iran's right to peaceful development and uses of nuclear energy must not be held back.

For its part, instead of competing for nuclear warheads, Iran should use its human heads and enormous resources to replicate institutions of science and technology like those of MIT, Cal Tech, and Stanford University to become the global intellectual epicenter.

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Reflection on JUTA election



ABDUL BAYES

BENEATH THE SURFACE

There is a wrong notion that the movement of the association is only for the removal of the VCs. This is not true. Most of the teachers are democratic in mind and decent in manner. They know that unless their institution prevails, their existence is at stake. So, the basic idea is to keep it upright through thick and thin. An accountable and truly representative teachers' association can fulfill the dreams of the teachers -- the asking of a top ranking institution.

THE election of the Jahangirnagar University Teachers' Association (JUTA) is being held today. It is a routine matter that happens every year and in every university. Teachers' associations in our country are generally teachers' "trade unions" to bargain with the authority relating to benefits of the teachers. But sometimes, the role of the associations also crosses the demarcated boundary. For example, more often than not, associations tend to air their views on national and international issues. We can recollect the roles of the associations in their fight against autocracy and other anti-people policies of the government in the past. Unfortunately, however, associations have become so politicized over the years that what is wrong in case of BNP turns out to be right in the case of Awami League and vice versa. Teachers' associations, allegedly, have become more national than local and more for political parties than for teachers. There is definitely some grain of truth in this proposition and I shall refrain from further comment on this allegation from society.

As a teacher of Jahangirnagar University, I had always been proud of the roles played by JUTA. It is not only in terms of realizing the demands of the teachers but also in terms of its commitment to the calls of the community. I remember, our association once strongly stood up against the attack on teachers by JCD cadres, possibly in 1990, under the leadership of the then executive members. I also recall when the executive committee of our association declined to meet the then autocratic ruler, HM Ershad, just for the

sake of bringing some benefits to the university. And, JUTA is the only association in the country, perhaps, that decried the decision of the government to remove the elected VCs.

But those golden days of JUTA seems to have been lost in the lust for power and favours. It seems to me that, of late, JUTA has lost its line and length as an association of teachers and as a spokesman of the people of this country. Allow me to cite a specific example to justify my position. The last executive committee of JUTA did not hold a single general meeting on the happenings of the university, positive or negative. Reportedly, some members of the committee pressed for a meeting, but due to the pro-administration lobbies, the proposal was laid to rest. It is, as I think, simply a shame on the community of teachers and a blow to their brave role of the past. Whereas, in the meantime, a lot of unbelievably unwarranted things had happened in the university. The admission scams, the recruitment scams, and politicization of the academic atmosphere are some of the ills under which the university had, allegedly, been reeling for the last few years. JUTA, disconcertingly, opened its voice to address none of the above mentioned problems.

During the time of the past VCs, JUTA played its promised role. When I was the VC, JUTA raised a number of issues through discussions. When Amirul Islam Chowdhury or Kazi Saleh Ahmed or for that matter Jashim Uddin Ahmed were VC, JUTA continued its commitment to uphold the spirit of the association. The only moment when JUTA slipped away from its duties are the last two years, and specifically during the

tenure of the incumbent VC.

I cannot believe that JUTA would remain silent on an issue that should have pierced through the breasts of all teachers. One incident tells us all we need to know. That is, the JCD president of JU occupied a seat, during the third convocation just finished, in front in the row earmarked for the cabinet members of the present government. Unbelievable indeed! At the first flush, we thought that it could have happened at the ignorance of the authority. But if that premise is thought to be true, and we took that to be so, then the said student leader should have been punished for his actions. Unfortunately that did not happen and the leader is lined up with the authority and moving around the campus with his chest expanded. Should one forgive the authority for the unpardonable offence? I think JUTA should have vehemently raised the issue with the administration to say that teachers, after all, are not tail enders in convocation. Else, in the future, another student leader might occupy a seat on the dais of the convocation, along with distinguished guests, and JUTA would have very little to cry upon the crisis.

All that odds could have happened because JUTA was dominated by the followers or supporters of administration. The "carrot and stick" policy of the current administration, sordidly seized upon the sanctity of the teachers and the total academic atmosphere of the university. There is a famous verse in our holy book: "God helps those who help themselves." If teachers do not rise against the anarchy of their administration, who on earth is going to help them?

I feel that my word might be a source of displeasure for those siding with the favours provided by the administration and they might want me guillotined. But believe me, I am just reminding you of the ills to come in the near future. Again, just remember, the famous adage: a stitch in time saves the nine!

Therefore, I expect that teachers of the university will keep those in mind and choose their candidates in the election through secret ballots. I am not, at the moment, for a particular candidate, but for a committee that would fight tooth and nail for the preservation of the purity of the institution. As a former VC, I fervently hope that JUTA would hold its meetings regularly, critically scrutinize the activities of the administration, and then press upon the authority to fulfill their demands. My personal experience is that a strong teachers' association goes to make an administration augur well.

There is a wrong notion that the movement of the association is only for the removal of the VCs. This is not true. Most of the teachers are democratic in mind and decent in manner. They know that unless their institution prevails, their existence is at stake. So, the basic idea is to keep it upright through thick and thin. An accountable and truly representative teachers' association can fulfill the dreams of the teachers -- the asking of a top ranking institution. Teachers should not forgo the interest of the institution for the sake of individual interest. That's why we are teachers, not grocers to maximize daily profits!

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Ensure Thaksin does not return

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The Nation, ANN

THE Thai people must not let caretaker Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra divide and lead them onto the warpath. His nationwide TV address following Parliament's dissolution February 24 was too polarising, inflammatory and inimical. I would even consider it as a form of hate speech. It showed his utter lack of understanding or appreciation of democratic processes and practices.

No wonder, for he continues to dwell in his increasingly isolated world of self-indulgence, ignoring the popular sentiment mounting against him. Using a textbook propaganda technique in his speech, Thaksin branded those opposed him "rogue elements" that "operate outside the parliamentary framework." He also declared that they were trying to oust him. Citing intelligence sources, he said that ill-intentioned elements might incite violence at massive rallies.

As the huge rally at Sanam Luang showed, congregation and freedom of expression are important features of democracy. The outpouring of people was indicative of the strength of public opinion which has not been covered by major polls. They want embattled Thaksin to resign, knowing full well that a new election will not solve the long-term problems or answer the vexing questions about the Shinawatra family's fortune and corruption-related scandals.

Indeed it is not wrong to say that the atmosphere on February 26 represented a kind of rough justice for Thaksin. Those who showed up used to be strong Thaksin supporters who believed in his brand of economic nationalism, but they feel they have been betrayed by the tax-free Bt. 73.3-billion (US\$1.9-billion) Shin Corp-Temasek Holdings mega-sale.

They wanted to show their disapproval by attending the rally. Alas, Thaksin still does not get it. Unbelievably, he is still in denial as he continues to reiterate his commitment to democratic values as he calls for a snap election on April 2 in order to "return the power to the people." To hell, he implied,



with all those demonstrations of the past five months. He should have heeded what Mahatma Gandhi famously said long ago: "Even the most powerful cannot rule without the cooperation of the ruled."

In more ways than one, the House's dissolution also quelled months of speculations about coups, counter-coups, assassination plots and palace interventions (made famous by Thaksin's comment that he would step down if the King whispered in his ear). What we are seeing here is a contest for legitimacy between the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) and Thaksin.

Of course, Thaksin is no longer the formidable leader he once was. Just over a year into his second term, he has already seriously undermined himself through a series of lies, seeming acts of corruption and not-so-cosy relations with the Privy Council.

Unfortunately, his most remarkable achievement has been the way he has changed Thai society's perception of truth. He has gotten away scot-free in so many dubious undertakings. His position at present is a far cry from his heyday of power and public confidence in 2001.

In the past six years he has single-handedly butchered every aspect of Thailand's democratic progress and process, especially within the parliamentary system. As the first Thai leader controlling an absolute majority in the House, he has made himself -- and he's proud of it too! -- the only big boss or chao poh in Thai politics.

He has set his own ground rules to attain his objectives. By winning 19 million votes, he contends, he has secured a mandate and is entitled to do anything he wants with Thailand. Grounded in a culture of relativism and deception, he has inculcated the notion that moral authority does not count and ethical issues are meaningless. Remember those famous words he once uttered: "Democracy means no end."

And he has fixed an immutable dichotomy, dicing the Thai public into Thaksin supporters -- the faceless voters -- and his enemies. Others do not matter. It is a clever play seeing as it has already created the impression that the demonstrators are nuisances wanting to pressure him to quit because they are sluggish and refuse to play by the rules. Worse, some of them are against him due to personal grudges.

He has even faulted Chamlong Srimuang for joining the PAD. Thaksin accused his former mentor of trying to get even with him because of past disagreements over financial contributions.

Thaksin hopes that his Thai Rak Thai Party will win the snap polls with its new populist policies. In the past weeks he has announced new handout schemes for students and the middle class who were not covered by existing populist policies.

But somehow this time around the public is no longer gullible, as demonstrated by growing calls for his resignation. They are more sceptical of Thaksin's policies and motives. As Democrat Party leader Abhisit Vejjajiva said last week, the Thai people no longer trust Thaksin and view everything he does with a suspicious mind.

In a democracy, Abhisit said, one has to respect popular sentiment, which is the barometer of leadership legitimacy.

For the sake of the common good, we have a great responsibility to ensure that Thaksin and his cronies do not come back into our political lives.

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India-Bangladesh-Myanmar pipeline project

DR. NOUSHI RAHMAN

FOR some time now, we have been reading about the India-Bangladesh-Myanmar gas pipeline, which seems to be somewhat stuck in its formulation phase. The estimated cost of the pipeline is about \$1 billion, which India plans to bear entirely on its own. It must be mentioned here that India's self-serving offers to purchase gas from Bangladesh in the past never saw significant hope. However, the Indian government seems to be increasingly more interested in the recently discovered enormous gas reserves in the Shwe Field, off Myanmar's coast of the Bay of Bengal. To get a sense of Myanmar's gas reserves, consider that Bangladesh's proven gas reserves are 15.3 trillion cubic feet, whereas Myanmar's estimated gas reserves in its largest Shwe gas field is about 14 trillion cubic feet.

Given that India has borders with Myanmar, its reliance on Bangladesh is not a necessary condition to transport gas to Indian territory from the gas fields of Myanmar. Including Bangladesh in the pipeline project, especially when Bangladesh has no direct involve-

ment in India's gas purchase from Myanmar, is quite clearly an economic decision India's part. This is because initial estimates suggested that it would cost India significantly more to build a gas pipeline that bypasses Bangladesh (along Bangladesh's northern borders). But, latest pipeline technologies have made such "bypass alternatives" somewhat feasible. This has raised the possibility of leaving Bangladesh out of the pipeline project altogether.

Just this past December, state-controlled PetroChina has quietly signed off on an understanding to buy 1.66 trillion cubic feet of gas from Myanmar over the next 30 years. Now that China is already on board, India will move swiftly to seal its gas import deal with Myanmar. Notwithstanding the good intentions and brilliance of Bangladesh's diplomacy regarding the transnational pipeline discussions, continuing to play hard-to-get in the proposed India-Bangladesh-Myanmar pipeline project may actually hurt Bangladesh. Some key opportunity costs of missing out on the pipeline project are loss of: (a) potential financial revenues, (b) experience of managing an international gas pipeline, and (c) possible

rights of using the pipeline for gas export and import.

The government of Bangladesh must take swift initiative to move forward with the India-Bangladesh-Myanmar pipeline project. Consider the following example: government intervention at the highest level was instrumental in the BTC pipeline project that transports petroleum from the Caspian Lake region to Turkey (to be channelled out to various industrial nations). Although Armenia and Azerbaijan were not actively involved in the pipeline construction, their cooperation was required as the pipeline had to pass through war-prone territories of Armenia-Azerbaijan border. Governments of Azerbaijan and Armenia have facilitated the BTC pipeline project's work by effectively maintaining a cease-fire condition in their borders since 1994. In comparison to the BTC pipeline circumstances, the India-Bangladesh-Myanmar pipeline enjoys more favourable conditions (i.e. the borders are not "war prone"). If the Armenia and Azerbaijan governments can collectively cooperate with multinational companies that were involved in constructing the BTC pipeline, the government of Bangladesh in all likelihood

ought to be able to cooperate with India, which would be solely responsible for constructing the India-Bangladesh-Myanmar pipeline.

There is no denying that despite being neighbouring countries, many diplomatic and trade issues remain unresolved between Bangladesh and India. From access through the Shilliguri Corridor, to considerate usage of the Farakka Barrage, to enacting visa-free permeable borders for trade and visit purposes, India-Bangladesh bilateral talks have not produced conclusive cooperative agreements. Thus, there is strong temptation to include many of these issues within the negotiation discussions of the proposed pipeline project. It is imperative that our policy makers understand the subtle dynamics of cooperation. Trying to achieve full-blown trust-based cooperation in one shot is unrealistic and will often fall short of expectations.

As a scholar of strategic alliances, I have first-hand studied and observed failures in alliance negotiations, formulations, relationship management, and task implementations. Years of research on strategic alli-

ances has found that smaller level cooperative projects, sequenced over time, is what builds solid and harmonious relationships in the long run.

While our government's intention to address multiple bilateral issues in some package deal around the pipeline is a noble gesture, this approach jeopardizes the hopes of even the very first step of a constructive collaborative venture between Bangladesh and India.

Collaborative projects like these can serve as building blocks to greater collaboration in the future. Armed with the goodwill we will earn from facilitating the pipeline project, we will be in a better position to engage in more fruitful bilateral talks dealing with other pressing diplomatic issues. To build a healthy trade relationship based on collaboration with India (as well as with Myanmar), the India-Bangladesh-Myanmar pipeline can play a crucial first step. Let this transnational pipeline be the first step of a long march!

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