

# Who will replace Kofi Annan: Ban or Shashi?

**What South Korea has been able to achieve is simply fascinating. When they nominated Ban, a career diplomat who earlier served as their permanent representative for the UN secretary generalship late last year, the UN pundits were skeptical in view of Seoul's antagonistic ties with Pyongyang and other socialist countries. Amazingly, within a year Ban has overtaken all other candidates and if the lone dissenter at the straw polls is a non-permanent council member, as is widely believed, then he surely is tantalizingly close to clinching the top UN job. Anyway nothing is final at the UN until the votes are cast.**

SYED MUAZZEM ALI

SOUTH Korean Foreign Minister Ban Ki Moon, 52, seems to have further consolidated his lead in the second round of straw polls at the UN Security Council. The second "informal" sounding of support of various candidates took place last Thursday. The first round was held on July 26. Ban has increased his "encouraging" (meaning "yes") votes from 12 to 14 by converting two "no options" (meaning "abstaining") votes in his favour. Still one Council member has again cast a "discouraging" (meaning "no") vote against him.

The trillion dollar question is: Who is the lone dissenter? As such polls are held in secret, it can be any of one the fifteen Council members. The speculations at the UN circles are that it could be either Japan (as South Korea had opposed their Permanent Security Council membership last year) or China (for its long-standing ties with South

Korea's arch rival, North Korea). Japan does not have the veto power, so they will not be able to block Ban; but China does, so it could very well sink Ban's candidacy, despite the otherwise undisputed support.

India's Shashi Tharoor, 50, came out second again. As on the previous occasion, he bagged 10 votes, but one of the earlier three "abstaining" members has now voted "against" him, raising the negative tally from two to three. Again, the most important thing is to find out which members cast the negative votes; are they permanent or non-permanent Council members?

According to UN speculations, among the permanent members, France, UK, and Russia are not likely to cast negative votes against the Indian candidate, and the two possibilities could be China and United States. They believe Beijing, in view of its delicate ties with New Delhi or because of their strategic ally Pakistan's firm opposition to the Indian candidature, might have cast

the negative vote. Why should the US vote against their emerging ally India's candidate?

The only possible explanation the speculators could cite is Shashi's close proximity to Kofi Annan, who once was Washington's blue eyed boy until he fell from their grace on account of his bungling in "Food for Oil" program in Iraq. These are, of course, pure speculations. The three negative votes could very well have been cast by non-permanent members.

The high profile Thai deputy prime minister, and the hitherto front runner, Surakiart Sathurathai, 47, was once again at the third position. However, to his credit, he could finally muster the "magic" number of nine votes, as required under charter, in his favour, possibly by persuading two of the five earlier "abstaining" votes. No one knows who the three members are that voted against his candidature.

Surprisingly, the 42-year old Jordanian ambassador to the UN,

Prince Zeid Ra'ad al-Hussein, who joined the race only recently, came out fourth, well ahead of Sri Lanka's Jayantha Dhanapala, 67. The prince received six votes in favour, four against, with five members abstaining.

There are speculations in the American press that in view of Washington's strained ties with Muslim countries, the United States might prefer a candidate from Muslim countries in an attempt to bridge the existing gap. If that is so, then Jordan, an American ally with good Arab backing, should be a highly preferred choice. However, Ambassador Sheikh Haya Rashed Al Khalifa of Bahrain has just been elected as the president of the current session of the UN General Assembly. She is the first Arab lady to have been elected to this high post. How her election will impact Zeid's election, only time will tell.

Dhanapala support base has further shrunk from five to three. However, the negative votes have also come down from six to five, and the abstaining votes have increased sharply from four to seven. Does it mean his candidature is over? Well, in the unlikely event of a stalemate between the leading contenders, he could theoretically still emerge as a "compromise" candidate, but in reality, his chances are very slim. His age and the standing of his civil war-affected country might have gone against his candidature.

What is next? The current

Security Council president, Vassilakis of Greece, after the second round of straw polls, has indicated that a formal vote could take place by the end of this month. The American and Chinese ambassadors, however, had earlier stated their preference for a formal vote by mid-October. Nevertheless, given Ban's firm showing at the latest polls, Vassilakis believes that the Council would be able to take a final decision in this regard by the end of the month.

The UN Secretary General, as per the UN Charter, is elected for a five-year term; technically, though, there is no limit for the number of terms one could serve. However, as per convention, previous secretaries general have served for two terms at the most. The incumbent Kofi Annan completes his second five-year term in December 2006, and the new secretary general would take over next January. Furthermore, the secretary general is chosen on a rotational basis from the different regional groups. But then it is a convention only, and so far Washington has not accepted the prima facie claim of any group on that basis. Anyway, it should be Asia's turn to claim the top UN job. The late U Thant of Myanmar was the only Asian who had served as the UN secretary general from 1962-71.

How is the secretary general elected? Article 97 of the UN charter states that the "Secretary General is appointed by the General Assembly upon a nomination

of the Security Council." In reality, the Security Council, especially its permanent members, elect the secretary general and the General Assembly merely approves it. In order to get the Council's nomination, the candidate must receive at least nine votes, and no veto from a permanent member. The Council's five permanent members are China, Russia, United Kingdom, France, and United States, and currently its ten rotating non-permanent members are Argentina, Congo, Denmark, Ghana, Greece, Japan, Peru, Qatar, Slovakia, and Tanzania.

As per existing rules of procedure, both Security Council and the General Assembly exercise their votes in closed sessions. Past record has shown that high profile front runners often tumble at the last minute in view of persistent veto of one or more permanent members, and lesser known candidates emerge as compromise choices.

The classic case was the election of the secretary general in 1981. Tanzania's prodigal foreign minister, Salim Ahmed Salim's bid was consistently vetoed by the United States, while Austria's Kurt Waldheim's bid for an unprecedented third term was also firmly opposed by China. Finally, both the candidates withdrew and the Peruvian Foreign Minister Javier Perez de Cuellar emerged as the compromise candidate.

Washington had also played an equally crucial role in the election of

Boutros Boutros-Ghali in 1991, and his subsequent dumping in 1996 when he antagonized them through his pronouncements on the Israeli bombings of Lebanon. After the Salim episode, the Africans learned to be more pragmatic. In 1996, they initially backed Ghal's re-election bid but when they found out that Washington would not give him the usual second term, they quietly backed the alternative candidature of Kofi Annan. As a result, the Africans were able to keep the top UN post for the last three terms. The Asians would be well advised to learn such pragmatism from the Africans and be ready "to expect the unexpected."

The Non-Aligned Summit is currently underway in Havana and surely leaders of India, Thailand, Jordan, Sri-Lanka, Jordan, and even South Korea would like to drum up support in favour of their respective candidates. After all, two-thirds of the UN General Assembly members and one third of the Security Council members (Congo, Ghana, Peru, Qatar, and Tanzania) are also members of the Non-Aligned Movement (Nam). Every candidate, of course, has his own support base within its own sub-regional group, as in the case of Thailand within the Asean or Jordan within the Arab members. So it is very difficult for Nam to persuade any of its members to withdraw so that the group could endorse a single candidate.

What are the qualifications for the "World's Most Impossible Job"

as it was termed by the first UN Secretary General Trygve Lie of Norway? Undoubtedly, this is the top job for any professional diplomat. Prior to Annan, almost all the previous secretaries general were foreign ministers and top-most diplomats of their countries. Annan was an insider with long-standing UN experience and he was well versed with its working procedure. Both Shashi Tharoor and Jayantha Dhanapala have served as under-secretary general and they do have long UN experience. Shashi, with long 28 years of UN experience, is also known for his leadership qualities and was named a "Global Leader of Tomorrow" by the World Economic Forum in Davos in 1998.

On the other hand, what South Korea has been able to achieve is simply fascinating. When they nominated Ban, a career diplomat who earlier served as their permanent representative for the UN secretary generalship late last year, the UN pundits were skeptical in view of Seoul's antagonistic ties with Pyongyang and other socialist countries. Amazingly, within a year Ban has overtaken all other candidates and if the lone dissenter at the straw polls is a non-permanent council member, as is widely believed, then he surely is tantalizingly close to clinching the top UN job. Anyway nothing is final at the UN until the votes are cast.

Syed Muazem Ali is a former Foreign Secretary.

# Kashmiri youth and prospects of peace

**My experience with the workshop clearly established that the educated youths do feel alienated from India and, what is worse, nothing is being done to remove this feeling of alienation, either by the state government or the Union Government. The feeling that India betrayed all promises made to the people of Kashmir is really a sore point. They were promised full autonomy, and Sheikh Abdullah gladly agreed to be with secular, democratic, India than with "theocratic Pakistan." However, this promise was not kept, and autonomy was not only diluted after the arrest of Sheikh Abdullah but totally abolished, and Kashmir became simply a state like any other state in India.**

ASGHAR ALI ENGINEER

OUR centre conducted a five-day peace and conflict resolution workshop in Srinagar from August 21 - 25. The centre has been organizing these workshops in communally sensitive areas for the last few years. The Kashmir turmoil, of course, has nothing to do with communal trouble, but is certainly afflicted with ethnic turmoil, and peace is an urgent need there. So we decided to organize a workshop on peace and conflict resolution with a local NGO, Eves Welfare Society.

I must confess that it was the toughest workshop I have ever conducted. The participants in the workshop were post-graduate students, 72 in number, from the departments of Mass Communication, Human Rights and Political Science of Kashmir university. I had to face the youths who are completely alienated from mainstream India. Many of them

even maintained that they were not a part of India and that they were fighting for their independence. Some even said that the Indian army was an occupation army, and without this occupation by India Jammu and Kashmir would have been a peaceful state.

I had to battle through every position the students took and tried to convince them that though their grievances were genuine their decision to fight was not justified. Use of violence in a democratic era cannot bring about resolution of their problems. It is vitally necessary to use democratic ways for solving the problems facing them. However, the youths maintained that independence was the only solution. The students of human rights, particularly, insisted on this course.

There was also a section of students who did not insist on separation from India but, nevertheless, felt alienated. They kept on quoting excesses committed by the army and the human rights viola-

tions. No doubt they had deep wounds because members of their families were killed or injured or, in some cases, women were molested or dishonoured. They also said that the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, had promised "zero tolerance" for violation of human rights, but still violations still take place.

A section of students also maintained that they wanted to be part of Pakistan and not of India. However, they were few in number but quite rigid in their position. It appears that they belonged to Geelani's Hurriyyat group. I pointed out that many nationalities in Pakistan, like Baluchi and Sindhi, have launched secessionist movements and feel that Pakistan is dominated by Punjab, and that small nationalities have no future. How then can Kashmir be happy with Pakistan?

Moreover, Pakistan has had no democracy, and the small democratic interregnum is always followed by the military capturing power. In India there has been

continuous democratic rule, and there can be legitimate hope of accommodation of the democratic aspirations of the Kashmiri people. Also, religion cannot be the basis of nationalism as Bangladesh shared a common religion with Pakistan but could not remain part of it for long. Language and culture are a more stable basis for nationalism than religion. However, this small vocal section of students refused to be convinced and we had to disagree. It appears that due to their strong grievances against India (largely due to the presence of a 600,000 strong army) Pakistan appears to be a romantic alternative.

My experience with the workshop clearly established that the educated youths do feel alienated from India and, what is worse, nothing is being done to remove this feeling of alienation, either by the state government or the Union Government. The feeling that India betrayed all promises made to the people of Kashmir is really a sore point. They were promised full autonomy, and Sheikh Abdullah gladly agreed to be with secular, democratic, India than with "theocratic Pakistan."

However, this promise was not kept, and autonomy was not only diluted after the arrest of Sheikh Abdullah but totally abolished, and Kashmir became simply a state like any other state in India. The 1953 agreement between Nehru and Sheikh Abdullah was also not honoured and, much worse, the

agreement between Indira Gandhi and the Sheikh died with the death of Sheikh Abdullah. How can the Kashmiris trust the Union Government?

Not only this, election after election was rigged and the people of Kashmir felt that they were not free to choose their own government. The rigging of the 1987 elections proved to be the last straw on the camel's back, and this rigging led to great dissatisfaction among the people of Kashmir. In fact this was the beginning of the 1989 militancy. The Kashmiri youth thought that they had no future in India, and took up arms for "azadi."

Since this workshop was for the youth it gave real insights into their thinking as well as their problems. There is also a great deal of discontent among them due to the high degree of corruption in the state government and the administration. The educated youth are well aware of the lack of economic development and job opportunities. Expansion of education and lack of job opportunities is an explosive combination. The fact that they are Muslims, and Kashmiris, makes them feel that they are being deliberately kept out of jobs.

A top police official told me in private conversation that if the Government of India has some vision it should open training centres for the youth for recruitment to the NDA (National Defence Academy), and this will make lot of difference. The young people have

been confined to Kashmir and have no idea of the vast opportunities India offers. If they get out of the valley, and get job opportunities, they will realize the importance of being with India. If their loyalties are suspect they may not be posted to Kashmir, but may be posted to other parts of the country.

If the youths are involved with the Indian army it will make a great deal of difference. He also cited examples of certain people who went out of Kashmir, to places like Bangalore, and they feel that they belong to India. If they remain confined to the valley the sense of "Indianness" is not inculcated in them. I myself felt this while conducting the workshop.

The participants in the workshop had hardly any knowledge of India outside the valley. They even thought that all Hindus are supporters of RSS and enemies of Muslims. It took lot of time to convince them that this is not so, and that most of the Hindus are secular and only a small percentage of them are supporters of Hindu communalism. The fact that the BJP could not get more than 12 per cent of the votes until it raised the highly emotive issue of Ramjanamboomi, but this emotional upsurge on the issue also did not last more than a few years, and BJP lost the elections in 2004. It came as a surprise to many of the youths that most of the Hindus are secular.

Thus, in order to win over the

valley of Kashmir some concrete measures will have to be taken. I suggest the following steps:

1) It is necessary to hold awareness raising camps in the valley to stress the importance of peace and creative use of democratic space. It should also be impressed on their minds that no amount of violence is going to solve their problems; in fact violence is part of the problem and not part of the solution.

2) In order to convince them of the importance of peace as the only way to solve the problem the state should also try not to use the army as a solution, and avoid violations of human rights. Today, violation of human rights in the valley is unacceptable, and the prime minister's assurance of 'zero tolerance' of such violations must be given top priority.

3) Greater job opportunities should be provided to the youth within the state, and also outside the valley in central government institutions.

4) The young should also be recruited in the armed forces and posted in places outside the valley. Top priority should be given for recruitment in NDA. Service in the armed forces would make them feel very proud of being Indian. The Government of India should seriously consider this suggestion.

5) It is a wrong notion that pouring money into the valley will win over the hearts and minds of the people of Kashmir. Money can never assuage the hurt psyche. A

sense of dignity, and the pride of being Kashmiri and Indian at the same time, must be inculcated through various ingenious moves.

6) The educated youth are being indoctrinated today and they are even made to reject syncretic Sufi culture of Kashmir. One participant even described it as "colonial discourse." From school level itself, Sufi syncretic culture has to be emphasized.

7) Also, steps should be taken to restore autonomy of the valley, which is politically viable in the present circumstances. The central government should be honest in this matter.

8) All elections should be held fairly, and there should be zero tolerance for rigging. It will vastly change the scenario and induce confidence among the people. The politicians should stop playing games if they want to strengthen Kashmir's relations with India.

It should also be noted that, by and large, the people of Kashmir are not in favour of joining Pakistan. However, their confidence must be won through political negotiations rather than through use of military force. That will simply not work. Jackboots cannot crush political aspirations. If we do not realize this, we cannot solve the Kashmir problem in years to come.

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# Straight to the heart

**No one has to tell the 4-23 that every war is cruel. Its members freely admit they've been luckier than a lot of units in Iraq. The 172nd has lost fewer than 20 of its roughly 4,000 troops in the past year, and the 4-23 has had no one killed in action. Their record in the field, along with their almost indestructible armored vehicles, made the 172nd an obvious choice to clean out Baghdad's sectarian death squads.**

MICHAEL HASTINGS

TOWARD the end of July, Captain Brad Velotta began daydreaming a lot. He thought about making the summer's last run of salmon in Alaska's Russian River, where bears lumber down from the woods and chase fishermen out of the water. He thought about getting a kitten for his 3-year-old daughter, Sophia. Most of all, Velotta hoped to see his 83-year-old grandmother Mary one last time before she died of cancer. "She thought she could hold on," says Velotta's father, Albert, at the family home in Alexandria, Louisiana. Her grandson was supposed to leave Iraq on August 2. "She thought it would only be a few weeks more."

But it wasn't. On July 26, Velotta learned that he and his unit, the 172nd Stryker Brigade, were going not home but to the core of Iraq's sectarian blood feud: Baghdad. After a solid year of battling the insurgency, from Mosul to Tall Afar to the westernmost reaches of Al

Anbar province, the 172nd has been extended until after Thanksgiving -- if not later. Velotta, 29, Blackhawk Company commander in the 172nd's 4-23 infantry battalion, gave a tough talk to his squad leaders: "I know it f---ing sucks. But you don't have the option to not be motivated. You don't have the privilege to be worn out. This is Baghdad. This is graduate-level s---t."

No one has to tell the 4-23 that every war is cruel. Its members freely admit they've been luckier than a lot of units in Iraq. The 172nd has lost fewer than 20 of its roughly 4,000 troops in the past year, and the 4-23 has had no one killed in action. Their record in the field, along with their almost indestructible armored vehicles, made the 172nd an obvious choice to clean out Baghdad's sectarian death squads. "We were victims of our own success," says Captain Phillip Mann, the 4-23's intelligence officer. Even so, the war's emotional and spiritual costs keep rising for them and their loved ones back

home. Velotta's little girl tells of bad dreams that he's going to die. "No, baby," her mother says. "He is coming home" -- wishing she could mander in the 172nd's 4-23 infantry battalion, gave a tough talk to his squad leaders: "I know it f---ing sucks. But you don't have the option to not be motivated. You don't have the privilege to be worn out. This is Baghdad. This is graduate-level s---t."

The Army says troop morale remains high. For the first 11 months of fiscal 2006, two out of three soldiers who were eligible to re-enlist have done so -- a rate unchanged since 9/11. But whatever the numbers say, the strain is showing. Captain John Grauer, the 4-23's chaplain, describes the scene when the order came down: "There was a rush of soldiers trying to get on the phone to call home. Some literally threw up when they heard the news. Some were extremely angry. Some went to sleep for a couple of days, hoping maybe it was all a bad dream." It

was tough for Grauer to tell his wife, Tyra, and their two girls -- especially Moriah, 9. "She started crying," he says. "That's when I put the sunglasses on." Behind the shades, he wept.

Back home, the news hit hard. Some 172nd wives are too proud to complain. "At least our husbands are out there saving the world," says one. "They're not wussies just sitting there on the couch." But at Fort Richardson, Alaska, the 4-23rd's home base, chaos erupted at the announcement of the extension. Some wives had already packed up and shipped their household goods to their husbands' next duty stations. There were families without a place to live; children pre-enrolled in schools thousands of miles away; parents scrambling for winter clothing they had given away; household goods in storage; airplane tickets for vacations that could not be taken -- not to mention thousands of broken hearts. Grauer says soldiers have told him, "This has killed my marriage. It's been my third deployment in five years, and we've only spent 15 months together."

Staff Sergeant Chad Denton is on his second deployment. "It takes its toll," says his wife, Beth, back home in Anchorage. "You just don't know each other anymore." The Dentons have five children, 1 to 13 years old, and the two middle sons,

6 and 8, are having trouble. "They need their dad," Beth says. "I keep telling him, 'I know you guys are getting blown up, but I'd rather be on that side, doing what you're doing, than on this side, being mom and dad.'" Telling her about the extension was "brutal," says Chad. "At first she said she couldn't believe it. I guess there are three stages: denial, shock..." His voice trails off. He doesn't get to the third stage.

The 172nd is in the thick of Baghdad's largest military action since 2003. US and Iraqi officials call it the Battle of Baghdad. General George Casey, head of all Coalition forces in Iraq, told 172nd officers it's "the defining moment, the defining battle of the war." This summer's sectarian violence was the worst Baghdad has seen since the war began, with roughly 1,800 killings in July alone, according to the Iraqi Health Ministry. Large parts of the city have fallen into virtual anarchy. Privately, senior US officials say the Iraqi government has only a few months to stop the killing or collapse.

The Stryker teams are supposed to hold the line. They spend their days searching bad neighborhoods for weapons and evidence of death-squad activities. But Baghdad, like much of Iraq, is suffering from "whack-a-mole" syndrome. The militias keep popping up else-

where. "With two Stryker brigades, one on the east side, one on the west side, we could secure Baghdad," says a 172nd officer, who asks not to be named disputing Coalition strategy. Even then, he adds, it would take more than four months to finish the job. As things stand, many 4-23 members say the sweeps are no more than a temporary fix. Some argue that the aim is only to make Iraq look good before the November 7 US elections -- "fighting for the House of Representatives," as Sergeant Brian Patton describes it.

Meanwhile, families are falling apart. Back in Alaska, one 4-23 wife has a suicidal child in the hospital; another suffered an ectopic pregnancy and had to beg her husband's commander to let him come home to care for her. Another wife attempted suicide. Her husband was sent home, but his career, the other wives say, is over. Gossip is running wild: who drinks too much, who has a compulsive-gambling problem, whose kids are left unattended.

Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld got a taste of this rage and frustration in August when he met with family members of the 172nd at Fort Wainwright, near Fairbanks, Alaska. In a video of the meeting obtained by Newsweek, one woman asked him why the 172nd was spending most of its

time clearing houses, instead of patrolling the streets in the relative safety of the big armored vehicles. "My husband hasn't set foot in his Stryker since he arrived in Baghdad," she said. "Over 90 percent of the house clearings are being handled by the Iraqis," Rumsfeld responded, whereupon women in the audience began shouting "No!" and "That's not true!" Flummoxed, Rumsfeld shot back, "No? What do you mean? Don't say 'No,' that's what I've been told. It's the task of the Iraqis to go through the buildings."

The 4-23's soldiers say they, not the Iraqis, do 95 percent of the searches. "I'd like to punch (Rumsfeld) in the gut," says one seasoned NCO on his second Iraq tour. "He treats us like we're not human. He acts like he's not destroying families."

Baghdad in August breeds thoughts like that. Outside it's 120 degrees Fahrenheit. Inside a Stryker armored vehicle it's 130, sometimes 140. Team members sweat more than seems humanly possible. Their mustaches leak with sweat. Their soaked pants leave damp marks where they sit. The sweat collects in the protective goggles they wear, pouring off the eyebrows and into the lenses. Each soldier has to wear 15-pound side plates, 20-pound body armor, and a three-pound helmet that feels like

it's baking the brain. When the vehicle stops, the teams dismount and go to work, climbing stairs, scaling walls, breaking down doors -- always watching out for snipers and booby traps.

The unit has had plenty of close calls. Captain Benjamin Nagy, who goes by the nickname Ox, has been hit by 15 IEDs. Chaplain Grauer has been IED'd seven times. Strykers routinely drive away unscathed from explosions that would kill everyone in a Humvee. Sometimes Velotta's men, sick of the drudgery of house searches, say things like: "Please, can someone just shoot at us?" But a single call over the radio can turn the tedium into something far worse. In the Adamiyah neighborhood, a soldier from another 172nd unit, the 4-14, recently became the extension's first loss. He was shot in the face by a sniper and died a week later after being evacuated to a hospital in Germany.

Postscript: Mary Velotta died on August 19. Her grandson missed the funeral.

With Scott Johnson in Baghdad, Karen Breslau in Anchorage, John Barry and Michael Hirsh in Washington, Catharine Skipp in Alexandria and Margaret Friedenaer in Fairbanks.

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