

The Agenda for the Middle East

by Douglas Hurd

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Need for a Science Policy

At a time when experts from various fields have been offering new ideas for the development of the country, ideas which we all hope will receive the attention of the new elected government in due course, it is only natural that scientists of Bangladesh should also come forward to state their case for the much-needed rethinking in their field.

There is no doubt at all that such a rethinking is absolutely necessary, the kind of rethinking that paves the way for careful planning. If the country is to deal with manifold problems facing this field. In the first place, there is wide-spread frustration among scientists, old and young, in the country, which provides one of the reasons for continuous brain drain from Bangladesh. There are also questions asked about the quality of science education in the country as well as about the level of research at the university stage. Again, are we doing a reasonable job in using the results of our applied research in the country's industrial field, in agriculture or in medical institutions? Where does Bangladesh stand in relation to the transfer of technology from developed countries?

These are all important and complex questions. If we are to tackle them in a systematic manner, instead of treating them in an ad hoc way, Bangladesh should first formulate a science and technology policy, a policy that not only lays the foundation of a new thinking in this field but also provides for a framework for the effective implementation of the policy itself. In a two-part series, just published by this paper, Dr Anwar Hossain, a noted scientist of this country, has argued why one of the priorities of the elected government should be to formulate this national science policy and explained what kind of structure should be brought into being in support of such a policy. He has covered the two areas in substantive details.

Obviously, no single scientist, even of the stature of Dr Hossain, can possibly provide all the answers to questions raised here or, for that matter, in the minds of intellectuals in Bangladesh. Therefore, it is important for the authorities to set up high-powered study group to look into all aspects of the situation and to make necessary recommendations to the authorities.

The political liberation that the country has earned through the fall of an authoritarian regime will lose much of its meaning if we fail to free our creative energies from bondage, bureaucratic and authoritarian, and put them to use in the field of national development. In the case of science, there is the additional need to recognise that the modernisation of our society essentially depends on the development of a scientific approach to our every-day life, an approach that influences the thinking of our teenagers as much as it determines the behaviour of our adult population. Hence, just to give one example, the introduction of computers in a school classroom changes more than just the curriculum. Like all other developing countries, Bangladesh has no choice but to take this road, the starting point of which may well be the formulation of a science and technology policy for the country.

Peace on the Campus

Gunshots rang out on Dhaka University campus on Sunday night. And it continued for several hours. This probably would not have merited much of a comment six or seven months ago, especially as, mercifully, there were no casualties.

But things are supposed to be different now. Ershad and his regime have long fallen from power; parliamentary elections have been held in a remarkably peaceful and free manner. Tensions, bred by an oppressive atmosphere, that caused tempers to flare and patience to snap, are no longer there. Democracy, for which tolerance is a precondition, is making a tentative return to the country. In that context, return of peace to the campus was not only desired, it was positively expected. Sunday night shattered the illusion. But why?

Current wisdom holds that two groups of "mastans" decided to take recourse to bullets after words failed them during an argument. As often happens the battle spread from hall to hall. Another line of thought suggests that this is merely an exercise to gain control of various halls of residence.

Either way, this is a most unfortunate and dangerous development. What effect it will have on the All-Party Students Unity (APSU) remains to be seen. For the present, consensus among APSU components on its 10-point demand, including trial of Ershad and establishment of a government accountable to a sovereign parliament, appears to be holding. Student unity through APSU — whatever the issues — has been instrumental in keeping the campus atmosphere peaceful and conducive to educational pursuits since the fall of Ershad. But what happens when the bind is gone, and old party political divisions resurface?

Sunday's battle has reminded us all that tensions remain below the surface, and it does not take much to light the fire. And the guns, they too are very much in existence. There is no reason to feel smug about the lack of casualties on Sunday. As long as the gun mentality persists, it's only a matter of time before a life or two is lost.

Now, with DUCSU elections not too far away, it is crucial that all components of APSU, together or separately, keep their unruly elements in check and allow a sense of tolerance to take root. An emphatic rejection of terror is necessary for campus democracy to flourish, and vital for what the university was established in the first place — education.

THE war in the Gulf finished quickly — more quickly than most observers predicted. The first part of the international community's task in the Middle East has therefore been accomplished. Kuwait is free, the legitimate government has been restored. Making sense of the peace will be as important as winning the war, but nobody should expect dramatic breakthroughs to match the spectacular success of allied forces in the Arabian desert. Resistance to the necessary changes in the Middle East is not going to collapse as satisfyingly as the resistance of the Iraqi Republican Guard. But we have to be as determined as skillful as we can in bringing stability and order to a notoriously troubled part of the world.

The world in general and the Middle East in particular look different now. The UN has responded effectively to a challenge to collective security, the first time in its history when one member state had been swallowed by another. The military machine in Iraq has suffered a shattering defeat. Most of its neighbours took a part in that defeat. Turkey and Jordan applied sanctions at great cost to themselves. Syria and Iran were active and responsible. The international coalition led by the US found partners in unexpected quarters: for example, from Senegal and Niger in what used to be called the South, from Czechoslovakia and Romania in what used to be called the East.

There are three priorities now for the Middle East: Gulf security, arms control and Arab/Israel. All three must be tackled imaginatively. The six GCC states and Egypt and Syria, meeting in Damascus on 6 March, made a constructive start by agreeing new forms of coordination and cooperation for Gulf security. These have our full support. The details of this agreement have to be hammered out but it is a serious start.

Arms control is trickier. All states have a right to self-defence and therefore a right to the weapons which they need to ensure their sovereignty and integrity. But a line must be drawn between legitimate security requirements and an arms build up which frightens others and leads to a renewed arms race. Ultimately only stable political relations in the region can give states the

confidence to do without vast armies and arsenals.

But suppliers too have a role. The permanent five members of the Security Council account for 85 per cent of arms exports. We shall have to discuss the possibilities of tighter control among the twelve in Europe, with the US and the Soviet Union. There are already suppliers clubs for weapons of mass destruction. Their rules try to prevent proliferation through controls on the export of relevant technology. We must now work for ways of making the controls more effective.

Conventional weapons are more difficult. Britain already has its own rules, stricter

formally acknowledged. The difficulty is in getting to this destination.

The signposts are there: Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338 — Land for Peace — plus a recognition of the legitimate political rights of the Palestinian people, their right to self-determination. But the engine of negotiations between the major players — between Israel and her neighbours, including the Palestinians — has been stalled for too long. The countries in the region and the United States, with Europe in support, must now work to restart the engine.

In July last year we were celebrating the disappearance of Super-power rivalry based

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than is often supposed. We need to find ways of distinguishing internationally between peaceful states whose needs are defensive, and others who might use new armaments for aggression. Even where controls are effective, a country which does not like the limits imposed on it may be capable of developing its own manufacturing capability. These difficulties require us to approach the problem with our eyes open. They are not a reason to refuse to approach the problem at all. It cannot be right to allow again a country like Iraq under Saddam Hussein, with his record and policies, to accumulate nearly twice as many tanks as Britain and France combined.

The Arab/Israel problem is trickiest of all. We can see quite clearly what the end result should be: The state of Israel recognised by all her neighbours and existing behind borders which she feels to be secure, a Palestinian entity on the West Bank, perhaps with a special relationship with Jordan and a special demilitarised status, the unique importance of Jerusalem to both people — and several religions —

on conflicting ideologies. The Gulf crisis has not resurrected that rivalry. On the contrary Soviet cooperation was maintained despite occasional tactical differences. Through the pressures of a real crisis, the US and Soviet Union have deepened the process of ending the cold war.

The Gulf war has shown that we can hope for a period when the nations of the world, through the United Nations and the Security Council, will judge international disputes by objective tests, will do more to prevent disputes and — if those efforts fail — will be able to enforce the UN's decisions. Because Iraq's aggression against Kuwait was blatant and indefensible, it was relatively easy to persuade the international community of the need to reverse Saddam Hussein's aggression, eventually of the need to take military action. Future disputes are unlikely to be as clear cut.

We live in a world of nation states. The system of order laid down in the UN charter means that security, order and justice are essentially achieved by interaction between states. The differences between systems of government within nation states

create argument and strong feelings. Out of this argument can come welcome change. We have just seen in Eastern Europe how bad ideas about government and contempt for human rights can eventually be overturned when exposed to competition with better ideas. But in this system of international order, when one state attacks another, the danger to the international community is greater and more 'dangerous'.

Prevent proliferation through controls on the export of relevant technology. We must now work for ways of making the controls more effective.

Iraq violated the rights of Kuwait. It was right and responsible of other states to act collectively to restore security and justice. The UN acted collectively to protect international order. Resolutions were passed either unanimously or with very substantial majorities. Thirty countries — from every continent — sent their forces to the Persian Gulf and Arabian desert. Despite his expectations Saddam Hussein failed to rouse Muslim peoples to overthrow their governments on his behalf. The Saudi tank commander and the Kuwaiti pilot showed the world that they were better exponents of Islam than the Iraqi aggressor.

For 40 years after the establishment of the United Nations confrontation between the Superpowers prevented the international community from acting collectively without jeopardising all mankind. This is no longer true. The Gulf crisis showed that it is possible for nations acting together to manage responsibly the society of nations.

Now that crisis is over it is our shared responsibility to see that the rules, and the mechanisms for enforcing them — which we have all voluntarily accepted — continue to gain in strength. We live in a rough, disorderly world, and shall never see complete peace and harmony. But the reversal of the aggression in the Gulf should encourage us all to persevere. Britain can no longer impose her own solutions. But because of our long experience, because of our recent effort in the Gulf, because of our partnerships in Europe, with the US, in the Security Council and in the Middle East, we have the will and the ability to make a stalwart contribution.

An Island's Trauma: Wijeratne's Killing

Harold Pieris writes from Colombo

He was known for his unorthodox style of speech and equally unorthodox way of handling matters... He believed people should not enter politics to make money.

IN what was the biggest political assassination in Sri Lanka in over thirty years, the island's controversial and colourful State Minister for Defense Ranjan Wijeratne was killed in a car bomb explosion in Colombo last March 2.

Mr. Wijeratne (59) was travelling to his office from his home in Colombo when his motorcade was blown up, killing over 20 others including civilians, wounding dozens more and damaging houses and buildings in the vicinity.

In a country not unused to assassinations in the recent past, Wijeratne's assassination came as a shock and many felt it was the biggest since Prime Minister Solomon Bandaranaike was killed way back in 1959.

The six-foot-tall minister was in many ways a colossus among the present-day politicians of Sri Lanka. Respected by many, hated by others, he was known for his unorthodox style of speech and equally unorthodox way of handling matters.

At the time of his death he held the Cabinet portfolio of Minister of Plantation Industries and was in charge of the country's main export crops — tea, coconut and rubber. He was also the chief executive of the ruling United National Party (UNP), holding office as its general secretary.

But his major task was as Minister of State (Deputy Minister) for Defense from where he led the war against the Tamil rebels — the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) fighting for a separate state in the country's north and east — vowing that "either I will get his (LTTE leader Prab-

hakaran's) neck or he will get mine."

It was yet not clear as to who was responsible for the assassination though the LTTE is strongly suspected. The LTTE was not Mr. Wijeratne's only enemy.

In late 1989 Wijeratne spearheaded the successful crushing of the Marxist Sinhala rebel group, the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) which had brought the country to a virtual standstill.

The success of the operation where many thousands died endeared Wijeratne to the victims of JVP violence but at the same time made him a hated figure among JVP sympathisers.

Wijeratne entered the higher echelons of politics when he took over the helm of the ruling party as its chairman in 1988 after the JVP assassinated his predecessor and there were no takers for the job. Later on in the year when the party's general secretary was also killed, he took that job, too.

His latest offensive was against South Asian casino King Joe Sim who was deported from Sri Lanka in January.

A planter by profession, he was a Colonel in the Sri Lanka Army's Volunteer Force. He had declared that he never entered politics earlier because "he had no money" and that he believed people should not enter politics to make money. Wijeratne was widely believed to be a man of integrity while being outspoken and ruthless.

He was also the government's official spokesman addressing the press corps once a week. His press conferences were lively affairs with him throwing bouquets and brickbats at newspapers and journalists, attacking Indian officials at one time, and praising them at another.

One of his last onslaughts was against ragging of new entrants in the country's universities. Just two weeks ago he issued detention orders against emergency regulations against students suspected of being involved in ragging and declared that the country's universities "may as well be transformed into warehouses" if discipline cannot be maintained.

For the country's armed forces, Ranjan Wijeratne was their inspirational leader in their wars against both the JVP and LTTE. He toured the frontlines, and vowed "to follow the LTTE wherever they go."

Mr. Wijeratne's killing came after the government began a fresh offensive against the LTTE in the Madhu area in the north on February 28. Announcing the government's intention to wipe out the LTTE camps in the area, Mr. Wijeratne said the government had ordered 9,600 refugees in the area to move away pending the attack.

There has been a resurgence of LTTE activity in the North and east. The previous week the LTTE ambushed and killed 45 soldiers in Mannar and on February 27 six more

soldiers were killed in Trincomalee.

Mr. Wijeratne's assassination may mean that the armed forces have lost their inspirational leader who backed them to the hilt at all times. As to who will provide that leadership remains to be seen and will depend on the naming of Wijeratne's successor by President Ranasinghe Premadasa.

At the time when the government was asking refugees from the Northern and Eastern Province who fled to other areas in Sri Lanka and also India to return to their homes, Wijeratne's death will be a setback for the rehabilitation plan of the government.

The last car bomb attack in Colombo took place in November 1987, and the LTTE was believed to be responsible. Since then there have been no such attacks although there was JVP-related violence which was abated by December 1989. With relative peace in the country, tourism has revived.

For President Premadasa and the government, too, Mr. Wijeratne's loss is a huge blow. It was he who held the ruling party organisation together during the height of the JVP attacks on it and loudly defied the JVP.

President Premadasa posthumously promoted Mr. Wijeratne to the rank of "General" paying tribute to Mr. Wijeratne's efforts to "preserve the sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of the coun-

try." The chief of police has been ordered to personally head the investigations into Wijeratne's death.

President Premadasa called Mr. Wijeratne "a great hero who fought to protect the country from terrorism and fear psychosis."

The government declared

March 6 a public holiday to mark Wijeratne's funeral, which was held at Colombo's Independence Square, a rare honour normally reserved for the country's leaders or religious prelates.

For President Premadasa and his government as well as for the people of Sri Lanka, Ranjan Wijeratne's killing is a traumatic reminder that peace is yet to return and that no part of this island is yet completely safe for her people.

— *Depthnews Asia*

OPINION

Manpower Import and Muslim Ummah

Kuwait and Saudi Arabia have extended assurance for taking Bangladeshi manpower, including the Bangladeshi employees who temporarily returned home in the wake of the outbreak of Gulf war. We are anxiously awaiting fulfilment of their sincere assurance.

Twenty per cent of Bangladeshi manpower engaged in Kuwait was hired by the Kuwait Govt, and rest by the private companies. Most of these companies could not settle back to Kuwait and restart normal functioning as yet, as they are still scattered in Saudi Arabia and other places. At this juncture our Ambassador in Kuwait, Foreign Ministry, and the Ministry of Labour & Manpower need to keep constant watch on re-activating of those private companies/firms in Kuwait and help in sorting out the bottlenecks faced by our people in rejoining their previous respective private employers.

The Kuwait Govt. has given contract for re-construction of that war ravaged country to 100 contractors including the British and American firms. It is time for the Bangladeshi business magnets and the Govt to manipulate and manage sub contracts, particularly from the British or Americans, who appreciated our attitude, stand and policy towards the just cause of Kuwait. That effort can open a positive avenue to bringing in much needed foreign exchange.

Entailing the "Gulf war politics" the Sudanis, Yemenis even Palestinians and Jordanians had to quit Saudi Arabia with no hope of recent return. To fill up the resultant vacuum and to absorb the war shock Saudi Arabia also needs substantial number of workers.

In various deals and on different occasions it has been observed, the very word "Muslim Ummah/Muslim brotherhood" proved to be a lip-service. Bangladesh inspite of being a Muslim country and biggest jute producer of the world, the contract of supplying jute bags to Saudi Arabia went to other country. Again, Bangladesh, inspite of being a

thickly populated country having a variety of skilled, semi-skilled, un-skilled manpower, major portion of recruitment takes place in non-Muslim countries.

In this respect I would request the manpower importing Muslim countries for executing some procedures and methods, which may prove that the word "Muslim Ummah" is not mere a lip-service, rather it is very much meaningful in practice. My humble suggestions are as follows:

1) For manpower recruitment by the Muslim countries foremost preference and priority should go to the Muslim manpower exporting countries.

2) Non-Muslims should be given preference, only when the required qualified employees are not available in manpower exporting Muslim countries.

3) The number of personnel for importing should be decided proportionate to the ratio of population of respective manpower exporting Muslim countries.

4) For discharging same amount of work of same quality and standard, remuneration, facilities also should be the same for employees from Muslim world and those from a developed country.

Moreover, Bangladesh deserves preferential treatment particularly from Kuwait and Saudi Arabia under following grounds: i) Bangladesh stood uncompromising in rendering active support to the just cause of Kuwait. ii) Bangladesh sustained so much of economic sufferings due to the Gulf war. iii) It is the direction of the Holy Quran to help own brothers, first.

It is high time for sincerely and appropriately translating the word "Muslim Ummah" in practice in its true sense. I take the opportunity of drawing the kind attention of the manpower importing Muslim countries, particularly Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, through their respective embassies in Dhaka.

S. A. Hussain
Secretary General
Probaah-o-Prottagoto
Bangladeshi Kalyan Sangho

To the Editor...

Reading as a hobby

Sir, Reading is one of the best hobbies which man can cultivate. Not only does it give him information, it also helps him to improve his language.

We all should try to develop this habit in our leisure time. But while choosing the books, we must be very careful. The books while helping us to pass our time should also be of certain standard. The books should help us to combine leisure with usefulness. That also should be easy reading as well as interesting.

Of course, then the question of time comes in. Those of us who do a job, or have small children to look after, seem to be very tired at the end of the day. So even if we do want to, we cannot spend our time reading.

But there is a famous

saying "if there is a will, there is a way". So no matter how busy we are, if we really want, we must be able to dedicate some of our valuable time to reading each day.

Roxana Jabeen
Dhanmondi.

Quota for women

Sir, Indian woman have demanded 30 per cent seats both in the areas of politics as well as jobs.

This is a good and useful demand, as long as women are concerned. India being the largest democracy in world, if women there are able to achieve even this much, it will not only be an example but the beginning of a ray of hope for women in other third world countries as well.

Women are exploited by and large in most of the countries of the world. More so in the Third World

countries. So any endeavour from any quarter, in the direction of providing any right to women, should be lauded.

We hope this will eventually lead to better and fruitful results. No country can progress until and unless the other half of the population also contributes to it's working force.

Shams Huq
Narinda, Dhaka.

Polythene bags

Sir, The production of polythene shopping bags has brought a revolution. These disposable bags not only help save space but at the same time also help save money. Because, these bags are much cheaper and can be easily folded and stored in a small place.

They are most popular with housewives as whenever one goes to a market, there is a chance that the seller of any item will give her a free polythene bag free to carry the thing he is selling. So there is a bag free for her, everytime she is buying something.

There can be no joy, than getting anything free, be it a cheaper polythene bag or a costlier curio. This I am sure everyone will agree with me. But the of late mass production of polythene bag in our country has also led to deterioration of its quality.

They are not the same as were before in sustenance or with holding capacity. The producers must pay attention here too.

Raju Ahmed
Kalabagan, Dhaka.