

# PLO Should Join the Peace Conference

by Muslehuddin Ahmad

**D**URING his seventh peace mission to the Middle East, Secretary Baker said — "If this opportunity is missed, in my opinion, the Palestinians have perhaps the most to lose as they are to gain most." The statement reflects the situation that seems valid under the present world political environment. Successful US administration undertook shuttle diplomacy for achieving peace in the region but all failed. This time the situation is quite different for various reasons.

The end of the cold war and collapse of the Soviet empire dramatically changed the global power balance. In the UN Security Council the traditional affairs of vetoes and counter-vetoes by opposing superpowers now form a part of history. The new Soviet Union is at present at the mercy of the west led by the US for its own survival — "food" is the only cry there. They have practically no more decisive influence on the world events. There should not be any doubt that because of such deep changes in the global power balance, Gulf war became a reality and that also took place in the name of the UN though was commanded by the US. All these happened as the UN control was passed on to the other superpower — the US which received necessary support from the other permanent members. China joined the chorus in the UN Security Council because of its past deed in Tiananmen Square; it wanted to get out of that mess. Of course, nobody denies that Gulf war did overturn Saddam's aggression but this

could have been done without war though without war Saddam's military capabilities could not be destroyed. The US is still pursuing this with the support of the Security Council. Indeed, war has changed the whole political and strategic picture of the M-E Rival Arab leaders became alliance partners to support the US led operation against Iraq. Hope, if no understanding, was that the US would bring some balance in its blind support for Israel and embark on a negotiated settlement leading to Israeli withdrawal from occupied Arab land. President Bush also saw some merit in continuing to work with the important Arab countries with a view to finding overall peace and security in the region. The US now can use some Arab soil for landing of its forces and also storing its heavy military equipment. Thus Bush administration

talitarian oppression. The whole exercise of collecting people of one religion, irrespective of their nationality, in one foreign place is politically and socially explosive. The Soviet Jews have already expressed their unwillingness to live with the black Ethiopian Fallashas. Israeli Jews appeared up with stream of new immigrants as they have already created tremendous strain on present resources and facilities. Soviet Jews, Fallashas, Israeli Jews and nearly 1.8 million Palestinians in West Bank, Gaza and Jerusalem make the region a social volcano. The US should take this aspect into serious consideration while giving aid and loan guarantees for building more Jewish settlements in the occupied territories. Soviet Union also should take necessary steps to help the

why PLO should not attend the conference once the basic elements like Palestinians' right to self determination and Palestinian representation were sorted out. As the Peace Conference would be based on resolutions 242 and 338 of the UN, though the UN itself will have no active role in the Conference, which require Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories, the most important issue is covered.

**The Palestinian National Council, now in session in Algiers, is expected to take the final decision. Hopefully, it would be in favour of joining the Peace Conference...**

The US should find no difficulty in agreeing, in principle, to the right of self determination but it might ask for non-application of the right immediately after the proposed Israeli withdrawal as Israel is totally against the creation of a Palestinian state in West Bank and Gaza. On Palestinian representation, Shamir, a former terrorist leader, is totally against talking to the PLO as he, unfortunately, terms PLO as a "terrorist organisation". The PLO, the sole representative of the Palestinian people and recognised by so many countries around the world can not be a "terrorist organisation".

separate and direct negotiations, these Arab countries' representatives under Arab League can form separate country-groups like Syria group, Jordan-Palestine group etc and can have separate and direct negotiations with Israel under the general guidance of the Arab League which would coordinate the Arab policies. Otherwise, the Arabs negotiating as completely separate delegations without the coordination of the common policy objectives may fall into Israeli trap. Israel may offer something to one delegation and nothing to others and thus achieve Israeli strategy of case by case considerations as it did with Egypt — saying this much this time and rest in the next conference. Shamir already spoke in those terms.

The Palestine National Council which is now in session in Algiers is expected to

take the final decision. Hopefully it would be in favour of joining the Peace Conference though there are strong oppositions from the leftist PLO groups. In case it fails it runs the risk of even being left out of the peace process. PLO should be aware of its position in the Arab world after the Gulf war. The Arab world has changed considerably. An Arab is a suspect in another Arab country and being forebodingly thrown out. "You Palestinians are like AIDS. We should put a warning sign on you so no one will touch you," a Kuwaiti reportedly told a Palestinian after his arrest in July at a check point. All these make Israel extremely happy. Moreover, if the PLO remains out of the peace process, Israel will rejoice as it would not have to talk about West Bank and Gaza at all in the Peace Conference. It would suit its strategy of separate and direct negotiations keeping the Arabs divided.

While Israel is having row with the US administration, PLO should indeed go for a diplomatic offensive fully supporting the US initiative playing a leading role in the proposed peace process. By doing this it will lose nothing; indeed, the chances of gain is good. It is an "historic opportunity" and PLO must not miss it. By joining, PLO should prove that it is in favour of peaceful negotiations and see how the US handles the peace process.

The author, a former Secretary and Ambassador, writes on national and international issues.

## A Task Force for the Media

It is good to have the assurance of the Minister of Information Nazmul Huda that the department of information would be modernised and that, in the process, emphasis would be placed on the use of modern technology. Judging by his talk delivered at a meeting of the Press Information Department (PID) on Tuesday, Minister Huda's approach to the issues involved is very much on the right track. What is important is to translate this thinking into tangible action in the form of a comprehensive programme covering the entire media of Bangladesh.

In such a programme, the emphasis should really be placed on communication at the grass-roots level. In other words what is important is to pay increased attention to the development of the community press which is functioning, not with much success in several district towns of the country. Being owned by the private sector, this community press should certainly remain outside the control of the Ministry of Information. However, there may be ways for the authorities to provide assistance, as distinct from supervision to the community press. Here, possibility should be explored for giving the community press additional government advertising. It should also be possible for the authorities to support newspapers — mostly weeklies — published from the district towns by making bulk purchases of these publications for distribution among rural population. However much will depend on what these publications will offer in their editorial columns. In our view there is an urgent need for revamping the materials which appear in these publications. Nazmul Huda, who has called for use of "people oriented information" in the media, would certainly agree that the community press — indeed the media as a whole — should put together the latest information and ideas on family planning, health care, education, environment and such other issues which, we fear, are yet to receive adequate attention from the media.

Another issue that should be addressed by the new minister of information relates to the state of health of the industry as a whole. In our view, a great deal remains to be done by the authorities as well as by the industry itself to give this all important sector an increased financial strength. It may be a good idea for the owners of newspapers and news agencies, journalist union and the ministry of information to set up a high powered think tank which can identify the issues which hinder the growth of the press in Bangladesh — the print media as well as radio, TV network. The same think tank, functioning as a task force, should also offer answers to the problems facing the industry as a whole. This should be only the first step in the long journey that lies ahead for the press in Bangladesh.

## Vestiges of Barbarism

Jamila jumped into the Karotoa river along with her three daughters in a package suicide attempt. Villagers from nearby localities could rescue the mother and the eldest child but the two others, aged 11 and 9, drowned. All the four were going without food for days. Jamila wanted to spare her children the pains of hunger and herself wanted to escape the realities which had been particularly hard on her. Cases of poverty-induced desperation take place every minute of the day in this poorest nation of all. They hardly make news. Jamila's case is different. She had a home and a husband and the family was eking out a modest living all right. But Jamila consecutively gave birth to three daughters. This was too much. She wasn't anymore worth having in the house. She was pushed out on the roads by husband Nurul Islam for her crime of failing to bear a son child.

The scenario so far is not quite unfamiliar. Jamila could now find work or try to get a divorce and marry someone else. Wife-abandoning husbands are an ubiquitous species in the impecunious strata of the society — second in frequency to only the wife-bashers. Nurul Islam did something more than that. Together with Jamila he drove out of home his own daughters — all three of them. This pathological misogynist must have a son for a child — or none. Didn't this son-maniac know that he was pushing all four to a certain death? In most of our sleepy villages a near famine condition is prevailing for years. Jamila now couldn't find work nor could she go hunting for another husband or, in the last resort, sell herself into prostitution even if she was forced to — with three quite grown-up daughters.

She begged for food for some time. Then they started starving. Then she made the only choice now open to her — to die.

Two questions remain to be answered. The youngest daughter — who is now no more — was nine-year-old. How come Nurul Islam refrained from having another go for a son all these years — and take action nine years after the birth of his third daughter? It is quite possible that he has been torturing Jamila throughout the period of time — and denied Jamila the chance to have another try for a son. Then one day Jamila found it unbearable and Islam did a kindly job of driving out the woman who begets only women.

What will now happen to Jamila and her surviving daughter? Will Nurul Islam be shamed into taking them back — through social pressure? Does he deserve that? If society gets down to action — it should better pillory Islam and not placate him. But there is sign enough in the story that in many areas of our land society — in the sense it was understood so long in the villages — has ceased to be. While we appeal to the sense of philanthropy of our townsfolk to come to their help we can't help wondering about the vestiges of barbarism and inhumanity that still infest our social fabric as we knock on the door of the 21st Century.

# Cuba at Bay as Gorbachev Takes Out his Troops

Luis Tricot writes from Santiago, Chile

**C**UBA may have beaten the United States for the first time ever in the recent Pan-American Games, but the disintegration of the Soviet Union has now left Cuba facing a much more serious kind of game — survival.

Fidel Castro's Caribbean island republic is one of the few countries left proudly waving the banner of socialism. The question now arises whether this tiny nation can survive the dramatic demise of its main ally.

Since the 1959 Cuban revolution, the US has tried by all means — including the disastrous Bay of Pigs mercenary invasion — to overthrow Castro's government.

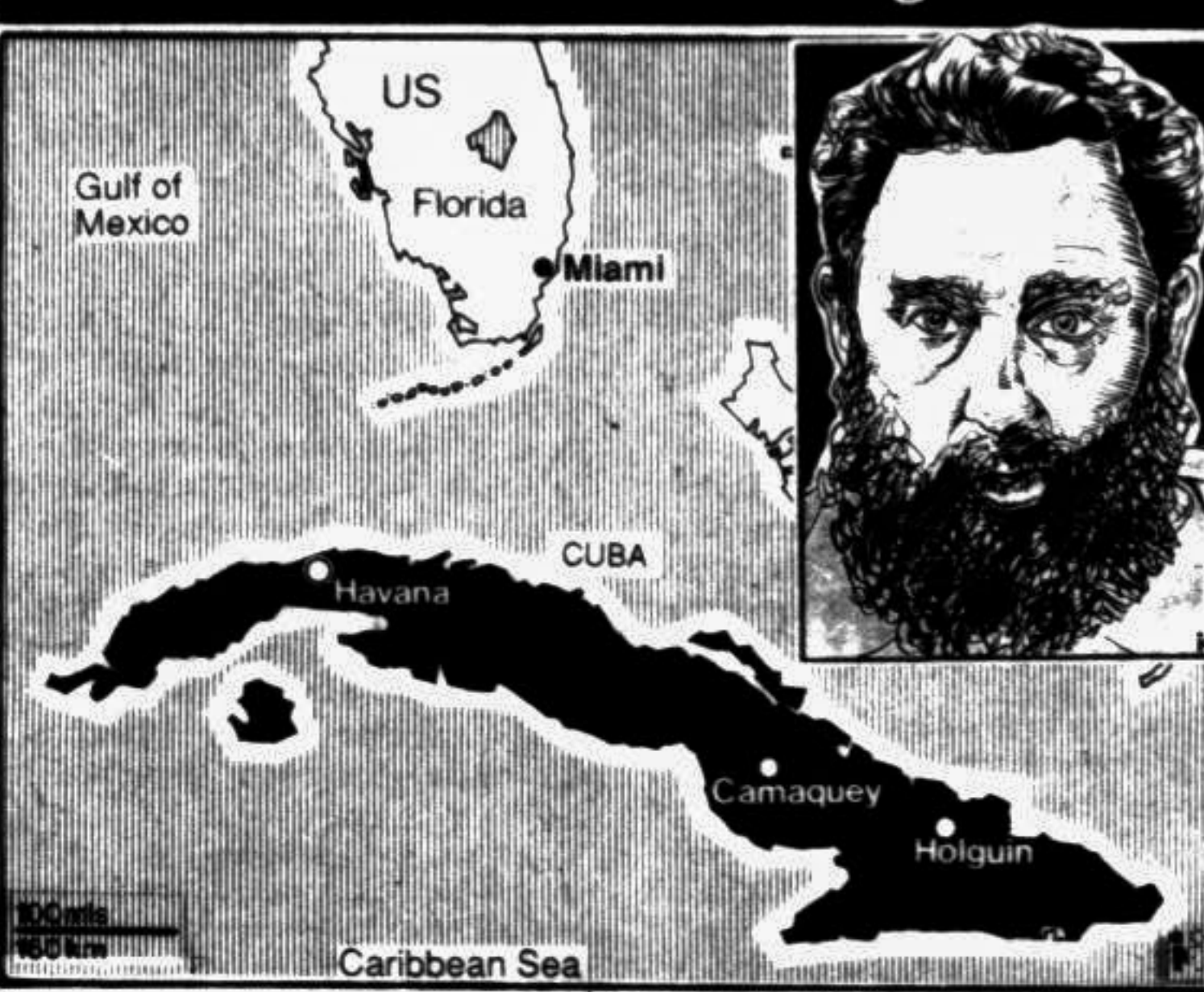
The US economic blockade has been in force for over 30 years and costs the Cuban economy \$600 million annually. Yet Latin America's only socialist state has so far managed not only to survive, but also to accomplish important social goals.

However, while the government's achievements in the fields of health, education and scientific research are recognised the world over, it is evident that little could have happened without the helping hand of the Soviet Union.

Three-quarters of Cuba's trade is carried out with the USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist States, the former USSR), on very favourable terms. The Soviet would often pay above market price for Cuban sugar, the country's main produce and export food. Cuba would also acquire Soviet oil at concessionary prices.

This preferential treatment ended soon after Mikhail Gorbachev's perestroika reforms in the Soviet Union. The reform meant, among other

## Castro's survival challenge



things, a dramatic drop in the supply of Soviet petroleum, raw materials, machinery, spare parts and foodstuffs coming from the USSR and former eastern bloc countries.

The increasingly protectionist stance of Western nations, particularly the European Community (EC), and a drop in world sugar prices has already hurt Cuba. It has also been denied access to new loans from the West since 1985, even though the Cuban economy has shown a sustained growth throughout the Eighties — in sharp contrast with the rest of Latin America.

Cuban authorities have always been painfully aware of the country's structural fragility and its dependence on exports of sugar, its main product. This has left it at the mercy of world prices.

For 10 years the govern-

ment has been trying to diversify the economy and encourage non-traditional exports in order to obtain much-needed hard currency denied by Western banks.

It has achieved relative success in the production and export of citrus fruit, steel products, non-electrical machinery and, above all, in the area of biotechnology.

Cuban scientists have successfully developed a vaccine against Meningitis type B and, since 1986, the Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology has made a significant contribution to the development of world medicine and science. There are 156 scientific and technological centres in the country, employing 30,000 people.

All this has been achieved despite the US blockade. No

**Mikhail Gorbachev's announcement that the Soviet "training brigade" of 11,000 troops is to be withdrawn from Cuba has effectively ended the military protection which has existed since the 1962 Cuban missile crisis brought the world to the brink of nuclear war.**

wonder, then, that there is a sense of national pride.

At a speech delivered recently in Matanzas, 100 kilometres east of Havana, Castro said: "We are more intelligent than weapons and more intelligent than those who possess them."

But how will Cuba survive after the disbanding of the world's socialist camp?

In 1982, it passed a special law to attract foreign capital and there has been some success in the development of a tourist industry, particularly in joint ventures with Spanish investors. But Cuba's position is precarious.

George Bush, the US President, recently commented sarcastically: "Someone in Cuba is sweating blood over what's going on in the Soviet Union." For his part, Russian Republic President Boris Yeltsin has said that all aid to Cuba must be stopped immediately.

The problem is not only economic, but political and ideological as well. In the face of the collapse of world communism, Cuban communists are working hard to transform their fourth party congress, to be held in October, into an active instrument for the defence of socialism.

The Communist Party, the

revolution, and particularly Castro, command much popular support.

Cubans may complain — and they do so openly — about the scarcity of goods, rationing cards and corruption, but some are prepared to give their lives for the revolution.

Half the country's population is under 25, so the revolution — and its extensive health, education, housing and welfare programmes — is all they know. They have a sense

of national pride not to be found anywhere else in Latin America.

Cuban Solidarity Committees have sprung up in Brazil, Chile and Venezuela, with "Petrol for Cuba Now" campaigns. The US invasion of Panama two years ago is still fresh in the minds of many Latin Americans, who fear that US victory in the Gulf War and the collapse of the Soviet Union may tempt it to try once again to oust Castro through an invasion or intensified political and economic isolation.

In the past century and a half, the US has carried out nearly 200 interventions in Latin America. Little wonder that some worry about Cuba's future — and whether it will be able to determine that future itself.

— GEMINI NEWS  
Luis Tricot is a Chilean journalist writing and broadcasting on Latin American affairs.

## OPINION

### Offset Printing Inks

We take the liberty to bring to light some of the many ill effects of the price restriction imposed on the import of Printing Ink (Offset).

The new Import Policy dated June 28, 1991 announced in the Government Gazette dated July 30, 1991, bans the import of Offset Printing Inks valued at less than US\$ 2.50 per lb C&F. On the other hand, offset printing inks of Chinese manufacture of international standard are available at US\$ 1.23 to US\$ 1.43 per lb C&F Bangladesh port. Similarly, "Coates" brand offset printing ink made in India also of international standard is available at rates ranging below US\$ 1.52 per lb C&F Benapole. Similar prices obtain in the Republic of Korea also. From the above, it is evident that nowhere in the world, the price of printing ink is as high as US\$ 2.50 per lb.

It is arguable that this has been done in order to protect the local industry. But that could easily have been achieved by fixing a high tariff value for Customs purposes while permitting import of offset printing inks at any price — as has been done in the case of Duplex Paper, for example.

Moreover, we would like to dwell on the results of such protectionism. The locally manufactured "Hooghly" brand offset printing ink sold @ Tk 80.00 per one lb tin. Then the price began to rise steadily, and now it is in the range of over Tk 140.00 per lb. As such, the restriction on the import of offset printing inks has only benefited the local producer who is now able to amass huge profits from a captive market.

But there are other losses too. The businessmen of Bangladesh are not bereft of intelligence. They know how to circumvent the rules. They will import from China, Korea, India and other countries at C&F costs well below the prescribed limit, but the import invoices will be for US\$ 2.50 or above; they will later realise the difference from their suppliers in foreign currency. Thus a large amount of hard-earned foreign currency will simply disappear into the black money market, causing loss of foreign exchange to the country.

Secondly, the plight of the innumerable users of offset printing ink has not been considered while the authorities concerned appear to be very sympathetic to the printing ink industry. Thousands of printers, publishers and manufacturers of packaging materials will have to enhance their prices. Thus, in order to enable one or two ink manufacturers to garner huge profits, the present import policy will make millions to pay more.

It is quite well known that packaging materials made of paper or paperboard and printed according to the offset process with offset ink constitute the majority of such products; and the authorities are also very well aware that more than half of such packaging materials (in terms of value) are used by 100% export-oriented industries, such as garments and frozen seafood. As a result of this price restriction in the price of imported offset printing ink, the cost of our exportable goods — especially garments and seafood which are high growth industries — will be enhanced and so they will become less competitive in the international market.

Considering, therefore, all the above factors, the said price restriction will adversely affect the country's economy in several ways and create havoc for our industry and export trade.

It is, therefore, requested that the matter is taken with all seriousness by the authorities concerned, and the restriction rescinded, while at the same time measures for protecting the local industry by fixing a reasonably high tariff value for customs purposes is also taken.

Md Abed Ali Khulna

## To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

### Idle thought!

Sir, The spirit of your 'sky-rending' congratulatory for Mirzapur Cadet College and Mymensingh Girls' Cadet College (18.9.91) for their equally 'sky-kissing' results in SSC examination this year is understandable. You touched on a matter which bewildered impartial watchers of the trend of examination results in our country. In 'good old days' we saw and rejoiced how top positions in the matriculation examinations, conducted by Calcutta University, were surprisingly scattered all over the then Bengal, Assam and part of Orissa and not concentrated or localised as we find these days. As a student of a distinguished person who was born at Narsinghdi and stood first in Matriculation examination of Calcutta University, I also take pride in the brilliant results of our students who are the future hopes of this problem-ridden country. Incidentally, it has become customary with many

newspapers to publish photographs of students who top the merit list, accompanied by parents. I am inclined to feel that a single-column bust photograph of the boy or girl, certainly front paged, would have been more pleasant to look at instead of the ones showing them on 'sofa' clustered by beloved parents on most occasions. That perhaps would be more sophisticated and majestic. This is just an idle thought, with malice to none!

Abdul Kader  
Purana Pallan, Dhaka.

### Another day

Sir, My warmest congratulations to Ms Aasha Mehreen Amin on her article "Just Another Day" in your esteemed paper of the 17th.

It certainly gives you an insight into the stark realities one faces in this sprawling

metropolis. A few more articles on this and similar themes may find humans laying eggs or if this is a biological impossibility you may find (at least) motorists being a little more civic minded and stopping at zebra crossings to enable pedestrians to cross at peace instead of doing a nightmarish dash across the road literally taking their lives in their hands.

You may even optimistically hope that your privacy will be respected and you will not be asked: a) What rent you pay for your Banani residence? b) How many servants do you have or how much do you pay them? c) Why is it that you have only one child? d) How is your conjugal life?

A Reader

### Children

Sir, Children are the future citizens of a country; they will take-over responsibilities of the nation. Hence, it implies upon the State to ensure proper environment for the healthy growth and development of all children.

Unfortunately, majority of the children in our country are leading an insecure and sub-

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