

# Baker Away to Moscow: Washington Peace Talks Fail

## Spell it out to Yangon

Saturday's raid across the Bangladesh-Myanmar border in which Myanmar troops killed two Bangladeshis and walked off with a considerable amount of arms and ammunition from a Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) outpost, was possibly the most serious incident of its kind in that region for a long time. As such, its implications for Dhaka-Yangon bilateral relations cannot be over-estimated. True, it is incumbent upon both parties not to "blow it out of proportions", as foreign minister Col ASM Mustafizur Rahman said during a press conference on Sunday, but we can hardly remain silent over it either, given the nature of the incident and all the uneasy facts it highlighted.

The relationship between Bangladesh and Myanmar has been such that one would not have expected any such behavior from Myanmar forces which was a blatant violation of Bangladesh's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

If we were to go by official pronouncements on existing state of bilateral affairs, then we would have been more than alarmists had we dared to anticipate such a turn of events. But it has happened and while press reports of a troops build-up across the border may yet turn out to be exaggerated, there is no denying that something is not quiet right across the Naf river.

The question the government has to ask itself — and find the answers to — is, what lay behind this sudden nose-dive in relations. Did some rogue commander suddenly get bloody-minded and decided on a small bit of adventure by stealing a few Bangladeshi weapons? Or was the attack part of something altogether more planned and sinister? Whatever it was the government has to find it, and confront the military junta in Yangon with it. We take the expression of "serious concern" as a logical first step, but that now has to be followed up with diplomatic contacts on the one hand, and defence vigilance along the border on the other. The foreign ministry's demands for return of the weapons, a halt to troops build-up and compensation for the loss of lives suffered by Bangladesh are not only justifiable, they are the minimum any country could ask.

This particular job will not be easy, since we are well aware of the brutal nature of Myanmar's ruling military authorities. The government therefore has to be forthright and tough in its dealings with Yangon. Judging by the way General Saw Maung and his cronies deal with their own people, it is quite obvious we can expect little result by exclusive reliance on reason and hope. Our national interest in the region has to be spelt out in no uncertain terms to the Myanmar authorities, who will also have to be reminded forcefully that they are expected to abide by all the agreements they have signed with Bangladesh, including the 1978 border agreement and the recent agreement on the repatriation of the 50,000 Rohingyas who fled to Bangladesh during the past few months.

The government needs to re-think in its stated policy on the Rohingya issue, since repatriation is the only short-term solution that is wholly in Bangladesh's interest. The existence of so many thousand politically-motivated and possibly armed refugees from a foreign country in Bangladesh could pose a serious threat to social harmony and stability in the Chittagong region if they remained for long.

But, along with the process of repatriation, Bangladesh now has to take the issue up at international forums with vigour to ensure international scrutiny of how returning Rohingyas are treated by Yangon. Bangladesh must insist that the United Nations take a special interest in the affair, because as a politically and economically under-developed country, we cannot, and must not be expected to, shoulder this burden alone.

## Passing away of an Academic Leader

Although dying at 72 cannot quite be termed as premature — for Dr M N Huda, who had always been a smart bright youngish man in spite of being a professional heavyweight all the time since 1949, it was indeed so. He died of a massive heart attack on Sunday. Our sense of grief harked us back to the memories of many good things he did although he always tried never to trudge beyond his province.

Although Dr Ayer — whose love of Dhaka had a shining testament in the naming of his Madras home as the Dhaka House—stayed back with Dhaka University for some years past the partition of the subcontinent, it fell on the young Reader joining in '49 to hold together the Economics Department — and take it to something to be reckoned with. Thus started the stay of a leadership that withstood the advent of the analytic economies rather than the largely descriptive, one which Huda, the Cornelian, represented.

It was under his leadership that the Pakistan Economic Association was born — and that was a very important link in the chain of events that resulted in the birth of Bangladesh. It was on this platform that the Bengali firebrand economists put on a firm unshakable foundation the 'Two Economy' theory, thus sowing the first effective seeds of Pakistan's falling apart.

This penchant for leadership made non-academics to look forward to him with anticipation whenever there was any important gap to be mended. That explains his becoming a finance minister twice and then even the Vice President of the new state without being ever being involved in any rat-race for top jobs.

His death is premature in another respect. His teacher at DU, Dr Samar Ranjan Sen, was the other day in town to join in the celebrations of the Gandaria Mahila Jubilee which had been founded by his illustrious mother Srimati Asha Late Sen. The teacher lives on at 76 as actively as ever and the pupil now is gone — a very worthy pupil and a very worthy man.

Our heartfelt condolences to Mrs. Qulsum Huda and the rest of the family.

SINCE the end of the Madrid Conference on the Middle East Peace Process problems arose with regard to the date and venue of the next phase of the peace talk. Israel wanted the talk to take place in Middle East with the idea that any talk taking place in Israel with the Arabs would virtually mean Arab recognition of Israel. The Arabs were aware of the trick and therefore opposed the proposal. The US, one of the co-sponsors, after having discussions with the concerned parties to the negotiations, invited the parties to Washington to talk peace from December 4. Israel objected and said it was not consulted. Actually what happened was that Israel was consulted but its objections were not heeded to. Later Israel took an unyielding position on the date saying it would not be ready for negotiations until December 9. It said it would be in Washington for starting the negotiations from December 9. The idea behind was to tell the US that it could not dictate terms. It was indeed a long distance signal to the US that during the peace talks which may spread over not only months but years, it could not decide things for Israel. Washington took the hint and did not insist on anything. It left the matters to the negotiating parties. So far so good. But the world knows how much Israel

depends on Washington for its survival. The Arabs showed up at the State Department at Washington in time for December 4 negotiations but found the Israeli chair empty. However, the Arabs took it easy. Apart from some shopping they gossiped with the concerned officials of the State Department who were in contact with the low level Israeli delegation which reached Washington before December 4. However, December 9 suggested by Israel was not acceptable to the Arabs. The Palestinians said December 4 was the fourth anniversary of their intifada. Thus the Arabs and Palestinians took the chance to set their terms and the week was lost.

### Bumpy Resumption

Finally, on December 10 the negotiations resumed but "resumed bumpyly". The Syrians and the Lebanese sat separately with the Israeli delegation and had some discussions but procedural wrangle on whether Palestinians should meet the Israelis separately instead of joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation disrupted the Israeli-Palestinian talk. The question was whether Israel would accept Palestinians as a separate entity. Israel wants to avoid any appearance of negotiating with an independent Palestinian en-

ity fearing that could set a precedent for the creation of a Palestinian state. Palestinians, however, felt that Israel wants to "blur the existence of a separate Palestinian nation by insisting on talks in one room with the joint delegation." They wanted "two-track" negotiation which, according to them, was also a part of the understanding given by the US in their invitation letter before the conference. They, however, did not want "splitting entirely". They wanted only token Jordanian

Palestinian entity. Thus the issue, though on the face of it seems to be a procedural one, really arises from the basic concept of a separate Palestinian entity — Palestinian problems need to be solved independently of Jordan. Though these should take shape in a logical way in the final stage of the peace negotiations, these have started peeping out for obvious reasons in such forms right at the beginning of the peace talks. These will have to be tackled by the sponsors — incidentally it is only one

meet somewhere again at a future date. This is a sign of some hope in the midst of near hopelessness. The Palestinians should now take into account two setbacks on their side, apart from their failure to obtain anything in Washington. One — the repeal of the UN resolution equating Zionism with racism and the other — Arafat's failure to have the world "Jihad" inscribed into the resolution on Palestinian issue in the Islamic summit in Dakar in the second week of December. The Egyptian representative reportedly said, "We are not going to fight with Israel tomorrow." Anyway, any more fight with Israel appears out of question. Therefore, negotiation is the only answer.

The reports from other negotiating rooms — with Syrians and Lebanese — were also discouraging. As there was no procedural problem, Syrians wanted to engage the Israelis on the question of withdrawal from occupied Golan Heights, but Israelis only talked about peace and not about withdrawal. The Syrian representative angrily remarked that the Israelis do not have to word "withdrawal" in their dictionary. At times the atmosphere was so hostile that two Syrian diplomats refused to enter an elevator with an Israeli diplomat. So there was nothing from Israeli-Syrian front also.

**Territorial Design**  
Some movement, however, could be discerned in the talks between Israelis and Lebanese. Israelis said they do not have any territorial design in Lebanon though it has already been occupying a good piece of Lebanese territory as a self-declared security zone. Apparently the latest proposal was that Israel would be prepared to pull out from the self-declared security zone provided Syria pulls out its 40,000 troops from Lebanon's Bekka Valley and ensures proper security at Israel's northern border. Again the Syrians are involved and therefore one can not be so optimistic about any quick results, but there is room for negotiations.

One of the main reasons for failure of the Washington talk was the absence of the master of the ceremony — James Baker who was away in Moscow to have the last glimpses of the Soviet Union before Boris Yeltsin could finally destroy it. Though President Bush was aware of the situations in the peace talks and indeed expressed dissatisfactions at the results, he was obviously preoccupied with the domestic affairs. Domestic matters are undoubtedly very important during the presidential election time, but there is no doubt that some good success in the Middle East peace process will make the election task easier.

### SPOTLIGHT ON MIDDLE EAST

Muslehuddin Ahmad

presence in the delegation to conform to the peace talks conditions and sit in a separate room to negotiate with Israel. Similarly Jordanian delegation could also have one or two Palestinians to preserve the character of the joint delegation. Palestinians insisted that "we call ourselves a joint delegation, but we have two separate national entities, two separate concerns." Palestinians are right in a way that joint delegation means two separate entities joined together — it is definitely not one. But the Israelis saw the problem in a different way. They "see the solution of the Palestinian problem in the context of Jordan and not in a separate

sponsor now as the Soviet people have lost their great country, a superpower, in the power-fight between Gorbachev and Yeltsin, otherwise the entire peace process may come to a halt.

### Confined to Corridor

So far as Washington peace-talk between Israel and Palestinians in concerned, it remained confined to the State Department corridor, occasionally helped by the concerned officials of the State Department and never reached the negotiating table. Still, when even the corridor exchanges ended, both sides remained hopeful and agreed to

# Twenty-seven Years on, Banda Tries to out-Moi Moi

by Keith Somerville

*Resistance to multi-partyism is as strong as ever in the Malawi of Life President Kumuzu Banda. As so often in the past, he stands politically almost alone in his region of Africa, conducting foreign and domestic policy in his own idiosyncratic way. Yet reform is taking place in all the countries around him and the pressures on Banda grow.*



Malawi power-holders: Hastings Banda and John Tembo

ALONE among the states of eastern and southern Africa, Malawi seems unaffected by the fervour for greater democracy and the end of single-party rule. Even President Daniel arap Moi of Kenya has bowed to domestic and foreign pressure and agreed to repeal the constitutional clause prohibiting parties other than his own.

The position is nothing new for enigmatic, autocratic Life President Kamuzu Banda of Malawi. He has built his career on idiosyncratic politics. For nearly three decades he was a pariah among southern African states because of his warm relations with the white minority government in South Africa.

Malawi is now surrounded by states which are either already multiparty (like Zambia and Mozambique) or in the process of reform (like Tanzania).

One of his partners in the nationalist fight against the Central African Federation in the late Fifties and early Sixties, Kenneth Kaunda, has been swept from power by the people of Zambia. And even staunchly pro-one party President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe has renounced the institutionalisation of the single party system.

At the Commonwealth summit in Zimbabwe last October, which was dominated by discussions of the extension of democracy and the establishment of "good governance," Banda turned a blind eye and a

deaf ear. He also showed at the conference just how old and frail he was. At the public opening, he stumbled and had to be helped to his feet by his presidential colleagues.

He played little part in the discussions in Harare and returned to Malawi saying the

Commonwealth summit had been the best he had attended because it was not dominated by condemnation of South Africa.

Banda ignored the summit focus on democracy and instead sought to convince Malawians that the Commonwealth had finally come round

to his view on South Africa by concentrating on hopes of dialogue rather than discussing sanction.

At the Malawi Congress Party (MCP) conference in September in the northern town of Ntuzu, Banda had written off any ideas of political reform and said the country was content with the system currently in operation.

He said the same thing at the beginning of December when he opened Parliament. In the eyes of the Malawian people the MCP "delivered the goods." The Malawian media reported these comments without any suggestion of multipartyism, although some reports said that Banda had told MPs to debate multipartyism once and for all and prove that it was not wanted in Malawi.

Banda sustains this position because of the way he has successfully destroyed all domestic opposition, put out of action many opponents in exile, and forced other exiled politicians to do little more than make periodic token protests to Britain and other aid donors over Malawi's lack of political and individual freedoms.

Partly because of the expulsion of all foreign journalists and the detention of any local ones who dare report what is really going on, Malawians are poorly informed about what is going on elsewhere in Africa and even worse informed about their own country. The press reports nothing without Banda's sanction.

So it is hard to tell whether any pro-democracy movement has taken root. The ruthless and efficient way Banda roots out all potential sources of criticism, his intelligence service, police special branch unit and the informer network operating through the Young Pioneers, the youth paramilitaries of the ruling party, all neutralise opposition.

Banda and his immediate political lieutenants, John Tembo and Cecilia Kadzamba, who is known as the Official Hostess, are quick to crush any doubters or dissidents among the upper echelons of the party and government apparatus.

Ministers are shifted between portfolios with amazing regularity to prevent them gaining institutional power bases. Real executive power lies with the senior civil servants — notably the permanent secretaries. They are hand-picked by Banda.

In the early years of independence, Banda kept the senior civil service jobs in the hands of expatriates, who would do his bidding without developing political ambitions. As Africans gradually replaced Europeans, Banda used his patronage — and the

threat of its removal — to build a civil service hierarchy loyal to him personally and separate from the leading structures of his party.

The most important post was that of Secretary to the Office of the President and the Cabinet. As doorkeeper, official mouthpiece and executor of Banda's policies, he was a key player.

The sudden sacking of the latest incumbent, Justin Malawazi, indicates tension within the ruling group. In the past this tension has been evident within the police which has had a rapid turnover of inspector-generals, and between the army and the police.

But the firing of Malawazi for "dishonesty, disloyalty and failing to set a good example as head of the civil service" reveals conflict at the highest level. The charge of "dishonesty" is generally translated in Malawi as direct opposition to the policies of the President.

The most likely cause of disagreement now is with Banda's attempts to cling to the one-party system, Zambia having demonstrated the perils of resisting change to the last.

Earlier this year it was rumoured Banda might spring a sudden change of system to wrongfoot the weak and exiled opposition, but now he is trying to out-Moi Moi by fighting change, seeking to ignore donor pressure and continuing to destroy his opponents.

Banda is old, increasingly weak and more and more in the power of Tembo and Kadzamba, who is his niece. He may not have the stamina for the fight. And when he goes, the system will change — either by popular demand or as Tembo and Kadzamba seek legitimacy through reform.

— GEMINI NEWS  
KEITH SOMERVILLE is a writer and broadcaster on African Affairs.

## 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.

### Mourning and tributes

Sir, With the advent of the month of December we see a competition for paying tributes to the martyrs of the liberation war especially to be martyred intellectuals. In the media specially the electronic media we have been seeing a set of social organisations and intellectuals paying glowing tributes to a section of the martyrs for the last 19 years. This year also it was no exception and these countries appeared on the media with the same merchandise of memorabilia like cigarette lighter, empty bullet shell, torchlight case, hose etc. To shed "crocodile tears" in memory of the same particular section of martyrs and try to tickle the sentiment of the nation. The government has also joined hands and declared two festival bonuses to 3578 families of martyred and crippled freedom fighters.

Since the liberation of Bangladesh, we have been kept us remained, day in and day out, that three million people gave their lives during the liberation war and hundreds of thousands were crippled and injured. Were then these three million people minus those mentioned in the preceding paragraph, non-entities, who had no families/relations to be favoured for their being "shahed" or crippled in the liberation war?

All killings are painful. Without any aspersion and with all regards to the memory of

these who died during the liberation war, it can easily be said that the killings that are taking place on the campuses or in the name of politics throughout the country now are no less painful to the victims' relatives. Who will mourn these victims?

Instead of going overboard in grief during the month of December and projecting the memory of a few martyrs, let us take a hard look and try to do something tangible to improve the socio-economic condition of the nation, that will automatically benefit the people as a whole along with the families of those who laid their lives for the nation.

SA Mozazzam  
Dhaka

### ICB and small investors

Sir, Mr. Abu Ahmed correctly pointed out some of the facts of "ICB failing to retain small investors" in your daily on December 14. I am glad that such things are coming up in your esteemed daily. I am giving some more fact of present sick position of ICB, which I experienced having an ICB investor's account. If you kindly take some pains to send some representative to take interview of ICB Executive some more facts may come to the public. I am giving some of my personal experiences.—

Presently the ICB has been suffering from poor manage-

ment. About a decade ago it was a sound organisation for small investors, producing very good and effective services to them. About 2/3 years back services deteriorated and then an account holder had to wait for weeks and visit 3/4 times only to get an account statement. Present position is however, little bit better than what was prevailing 2/3 years back.

There are some gross irregularities with ICB and for which the account holders are to suffer. Right shares purchased against any account holder are recorded in the book after few years (not months) of allotment with interest debited against the account holder. The loss sustained due to negligence of ICB personnel is realised from the account holders, irrespective of one having sufficient credit balance to meet the cost of the shares. In one case for four right shares of Tk 400/= a sum of Tk 212/- was debited as interest, when I had nearly Tk 4,750 — as credit balance. There are similar other cases of such interest realisation due to recording the transaction after lapse of a long period from its allocation.

There are some institutional defects in maintaining the account and Port-folio of shares/units. Any share accrued by way of "Bonus" or transferred from any other account will not come under financial statements (having no financial transaction) and no record in Port-folio. It happened with my account for Bonus share of National Tea Co. Similarly if any dividend is not recorded against any account by mistake or for any other reason the account holder is deprived of the dividend.

Present "uptodate" recording is nearly 4-5 months behind the date. Dividends of Units/ICB M Fund are yet to

be recorded. Any debit balance due to such non-recording will not be exempted from interest. ICB does not pay any benefit to credit balance of heavy amount for months/years but charges interest on even a very small amount for even a week.

Ms. Strajul Huq  
Mohammadpur, Dhaka.

### To contain corruption

Sir, It is correct that a section of "the elite is the chief beneficiary of corruption." Metaphorically speaking society is like a big fish. Like in case of a fish the decaying process of the society starts from the head and rest of the body decays gradually.

In Ershad's regime, we have seen how corruption had eaten the vital of our social fabric and vicious circle of poverty and greed gripped the whole nation. Because of corruption, people become more and more poor and their desire to survive make them more and more corrupt.

Every one is asking question as to what would be the antidote for the curse of corruption? According to me (1) the parliament should establish the office of Ombudsman in accordance with Article 77 of the Constitution while provision should be made so that (2) all Government, semi Government and autonomous bodies should supply informations from the respective file to the aggrieved party to facilitate them to get proper redress in the court of law and (3) person or persons responsible for any loss to an aggrieved person must pay damages from his/their own pocket.

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## OPINION

### Let's Sing in Chorus

It is in the fitness of tradition that the statesmen (or statepersons) popularly known as politicians, have the honour of basking in the limelight in national affairs, due to the exposure of their noble and exacting profession. At the same time, we cannot disregard the cementing contributions from the other professions, which also have a place in history.

The job of the politicians is to coordinate all the efforts towards a balanced development of the nation, as the running of the country is entrusted to them.

This sacred trust has to be borne by the politicians with a dedication which the lay citizens can feel in their guts, without being obliged to grasp the intricacies of statecraft. The spectacle we see around us today is one of dismay and uncertainty. Slogans, such as 'democracy cannot be seen or felt, but, like electricity, its effects can be seen. What do we see?

This question should first be put to the ruling party, or to the Opposition? Why this issue should become a question at all? It indicates a certain elusive uncertainty. Therefore the answer is not the obvious one. The ruling party is there for a limited designated period, but the opposition will always

be there (any party or parties). Therefore there is a great deal of responsibility in the constructive role expected to be played by the opposition, especially during the nascent period. The actions of today might affect the nation for years to come.

We are engulfed in the mood of the moment, and expect too much too soon from the new Government, may be simple because it has greater responsibility, and carry the hopes and aspirations of the nation.

There could be cruelty in kindness. It is the duty of the voters to ensure that they (the voters) are not accused of playing a sentimental ping-pong game.

The three groups have to put the act together. The politicians have the privilege to lead us into the game we will play for the future generations.

So our appeal is: please do not play with the country. Then all will be losers. Be loyal to your club, but do not forget to pay respect to the national flag — at all moments during any activity. The Bangladesh flag flies in the centre. Let us get around it, and sing in chorus.

A. Mawaz  
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