

A Turning Point in Dhaka-Tokyo Relations

It was an innovative move to discard the customary exchange of felicitations in favour of a free and candid discussion on the relations between Bangladesh and Japan on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties between the two countries. For arranging the discussion, in the form of a seminar on Monday, credit goes to the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS) and, indeed, to the Japanese Ambassador Toshio Saiki for bringing Prof. Setzaburo Sato of the University of Tokyo to deliver the key-note address at the meeting.

The discussion in which a number of noted local experts joined forces with Prof. Sato produced almost an unanimous conclusion. It is simply this: The relations between Dhaka and Tokyo have reached a turning point or, as some might say, a testing time. The overall picture drawn by the distinguished visitor who is the chairman of the South Asia Forum in Tokyo, in his opening speech, was largely a positive one, based on what we all regard as welcome changes on the global scene. How much benefit Bangladesh can derive from these changes, especially where its economic ties with Japan are concerned, is another matter. This is the area that calls for careful deliberation by policymakers in this country. Within the limits of time, we had a taste of such discussion at the seminar on Monday.

To start with, it is important to acknowledge the close economic relationship that exists between Dhaka and Tokyo, in both trade and aid, and to hope that the framework for collaboration can be further strengthened with the restoration of democracy in this country, together with the introduction of wide-ranging market economy in different sectors.

Until the late eighties, Japan appeared reasonably content with the status quo. But not any longer. There was an admission in the speech of Prof Sato that his country's investment and even trade with members of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) have reached a saturation point and Tokyo must now look for new areas for investment, such as, as the visitor put it plainly, the former Indo-China states, especially Vietnam, and South Asia. Assuming Bangladesh would figure prominently in this respect, we should welcome this new thinking which has been voiced by several Japanese policymakers, besides Prof Sato. Unfortunately, there are hardly any signs of this thinking being translated into practice. Again, recent Japanese performance in the field of investment, almost euphoric in the case of ASEAN as against indifference to SAARC, inspires little confidence here about Tokyo's future intentions. As pointed out by a local expert, Japan's total investment in Bangladesh, mostly in the Export Processing Zone, is still below \$50 million, a pittance compared to her investment in ASEAN or even in India.

Here, it is imperative to know the obstacles investors, from Japan and elsewhere, face in coming into Bangladesh or in raising the level of their existing performance. At the seminar on Monday, Prof. Sato mentioned bureaucratic bottlenecks as major discouraging factors. Indeed, he could have mentioned others, like work stoppages and policy indecisions. However, we would like Japan to appreciate that a year-old democratically elected government cannot bring about the changes that we are asking for all that quickly. The government—and the country as a whole—needs encouragement from a partner in development, like Japan, in the form of concrete actions.

A Tribute to Haley

It was not long ago that millions of people in different parts of the world remained glued to their television sets, week after week and sometimes night after night, watching the "Roots" that traced the saga of a black American family from slavery to freedom, from torture and humiliation to the glorious success in the literary career of the last member of the family. To say that the programme was—and still remains—one of the best TV serials of our time would be an understatement.

The "Roots: The Saga of an American Family" made history by adding something, not just to the American understanding, but also to an universal appreciation, of human bondage, otherwise known as slavery, that changed lives of millions in different continents.

Today, we mourn the death of Alex Haley, the author of the "Roots" who passed away on Monday, at the age of 70. He is certainly neither the first nor the last black American writer to join the ranks of great authors of our times. However, he will be long remembered as one who not only produced a unique book but also set off a wave of interest among all kinds of people in their origins, the so-called roots, an exercise that for many often resulted in dismay, disappointment and huge expenses.

The success of Haley went a long way in strengthening the American consciousness of the place of black heritage in the country's culture and history, a heritage that evokes pain and sorrow but also produces rich varieties in arts and music. The strength that the US way of life derives today from its varied sources provides a contrast to the weaknesses of regimented uniformities which led to the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Herein lies a lesson for many countries, including some developing ones, which are in the process of finding out what culture is all about, often working towards wrong conclusions.

BINYAMIN Begin, son of Menachem Begin, said, "... there is no entity called Palestinians unless it includes me. I am a Palestinian Jew. By saying this he apparently tried to establish that all Jews now living in Palestine are first Palestinians and then Jews and this raises the serious question of identity and belonging to the land. However, in the next breath he said, "The Palestinians as a different nation is the greatest hoax of the 20th century after the Nazi hoax." If Palestinians are not a nation then his claim of being a Palestinian makes very little sense. The Jews do not make a nation. It is a group based on religion, consisting of people from many nations and of many ethnic origins.

If the converts to Judaism are kept aside, the children of Israel and the Palestinian Arabs had common ancestral root some four thousand years ago but they turned out to be different people with the passage of time and through process of history. Apparently from the point of view of occupation and present possession of land Binyamin Begin has put forward his claim as a Palestinian. But on the question of identity the Palestinian Arabs are not only Palestinians but also Arabs. Long and complex history shows that "Arab nationalism started from a wide base — the thesis that all Arabic speaking peoples were one nation." But nationalism based on political freedom of

Have Palestinians been Abandoned?

each Arab state from foreign occupation grew with the passage of time. Apart from other considerations the Egyptian nationalism appeared to have grown strongly with a vow to fight the British occupation, Syrian and Lebanese nationalism against French mandate. Likewise in Palestine hostility to the British mandate and to its adjunct, political Zionism — which has since eventuated in the birth of Israel — generated a local type of national feeling. Thus the Palestinians, though Arabs, are not the same Arabs as those in Yemen or in Iraq; they are a different entity. This is why Binyamin Begin was wrong in his assertion that "there is no group of the Arabs west of the Jordan River that is distinct from other Arabs and that is eligible for the right of self-determination".

Not One Entity
Even in the M-East peace negotiations there are more than one delegation from the Arab world confirming that they are not one entity though they are all Arabs. Madrid formula put Palestinians and the Jordanians in one delegation but this was later modified at the Washington talk at the insistence of the Palestinians allowing them to negotiate separately in the committees with token presence of one or two Jordanian members. Obviously

the entire effort was to establish Palestinian identity. Palestinians took a decisive step on the question of their representation in the Moscow Multi-lateral talks that took place in the last week of January, 1992. They simply refused to participate in the joint Palestinian-Jordanian delegation. Again they wanted to assert their own identity. Indeed, in their struggle for

put the Arab world into complete disarray and Israel reaped full benefit out of it. It has received diplomatic recognition from many important countries of the world, which otherwise, would have been impossible. Palestinians appeared to have been abandoned in the crucial negotiations with staunch enemy like Israel. In Moscow Multi-lateral talk a number of Arab coun-

committees. The US appeared favourable to the idea; it was a question of putting a joint Arab position.

Slow Going

In the context of Middle-East peace negotiations the following scenarios are discernible. The US, the main sponsor, is allowing the talks at both bilateral and multi-lateral levels to go ahead slowly but steadily. It is not imposing anything directly on any party.

Taking the advantage of the Gulf war, it is happy with its success in bringing all Arabs to the negotiating table with Israel directly. The talks are extremely slow and produced practically nothing except the fact that the adversaries sat across the table. Israel is not in a hurry as it has been gaining substantial grounds in terms of diplomatic recognition though it has come to the point of putting forward some proposals on Palestinian autonomy in the occupied territories. May be this is a carrot only to be shown and not to be given. If Benny Begin's views were to be taken as those of the Israeli leadership, then, Palestinian autonomy, in view, may be something relating to the people and not to the land. Prime Minister Shamir already said Israel was not bound by every

word of its Camp David records which envisages Palestinian self-rule. It is not the first time that they went back on their commitments. Israelis have been well known for their broken promises.

The US may like to take note of two significant aspects of the Israeli negotiating strategies. Israel is moving slowly as it wants to buy time; may be it is hoping to see a new administration after the US election which may be still more favourable to Israel. Delay may enable Israel to get the Loan Guarantees for \$10 billions from Congress without making any commitment on the question of Israeli settlement which the present Administration feels is an "obstacle to peace". Protracted negotiations — Shamir said he was not committed to any date — gives enough time to Israel to collect more Jews around the world for the purpose of settlement in the Arab land. After a time "nothing will be left to negotiate about" and the exercise in the bilateral talks might have to be abandoned. The strategy would, then, be to pursue vigorously the multi-lateral talks with a view to finding solutions in other areas and particularly with regard to sharing of water and resources with other Arab countries. The Palestinians might even be left where they are — still struggling alone for their identity and right.

SPOTLIGHT ON MIDDLE EAST

Muslehuddin Ahmad

their own identity the Palestinians received full support from the other Arab states. In 1964 the first Arab summit called for the establishment of a separate Palestinian identity despite Jordan's effort to represent Palestinians. And in 1974, the Arab heads of state meeting in Rabat, Morocco, designated the PLO as sole representative of the Palestinian people. Even the UN General assembly later awarded observer status to the PLO. Since then the PLO has been enjoying significant international status both politically and diplomatically. But the Gulf war changed the position of the Palestinians dramatically because of PLO's support for Iraq. Indeed, Gulf war

tries except Syria and Lebanon which decided not to join the talk apparently for different reasons, sat with Israel though Palestinians stayed out. Even Jordan which forms a joint delegation with Palestinians in the bilateral negotiations with Israel joined the Moscow talk. Arab solidarity even while dealing with Israel was absent — a situation probably unthinkable before the Gulf war. The best course for the Arabs would have been to work on a joint strategy on a minimum common denominator — the Joint Palestinian — Jordanian delegation could sit at the opening session and participation of separate delegations at the level of various concerned

Nuclear Arms Should be Banned in All Nations

by KR Panikkar

The on-going US-led campaign against North Korea's alleged nuclear weapons programme exposes the double standards practised by the US and some of its allies in their international relations.

IN recent weeks there have been repeated warnings from South Korean and US officials that North Korea is close to making nuclear bombs. Claiming that a nuclear-armed North Korea would be the most serious threat to peace and stability in East Asia, US Defence Secretary Dick Cheney has indefinitely postponed planned US troop reductions in South Korea. There is also talk of getting UN Security Council to demand access to North Korean nuclear facilities to ascertain the nature of the activities being pursued in them and, in the event of North Korea refusing to accept that demand, of carrying out a "surgical" military strike at those facilities.

Clearly, after securing the destruction of Iraq's nuclear facilities and probably encouraged by that success, the United States has shifted its attention to North Korea's nuclear programme.

In the face of this mounting pressure, North Korea has continued to deny it is engaged in developing nuclear weapons.

Recalling that it has already signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), it says it is prepared to sign the follow-up Nuclear Safeguards Agreement, which would allow international inspection of its nuclear facilities, provided the United States withdraws its

nuclear weapons from South Korea and North Korea allow simultaneous inspection of its nuclear facilities.

North Korea, in fact, is asking no more than reciprocity as the condition for opening up its territory for international nuclear inspectors. Nor impartial judge deny that the North Korean position is just and fair.

Then why concerted effort at demonising North Korea? Is it because its present isolation affords a rare opportunity to carry out a military strike against it on the pretext of eliminating its dangerous nuclear programme, bring down the communist regime and unify the peninsula under South Korean leadership?

If indeed Pyongyang is developing nuclear weapons, what possible use could it find for them?

Is it envisaged that North Korea will use them against the South? Such action would inevitably result in the death and mutilation of possibly millions of civilians in the South.

Whatever one may think of the Pyongyang regime, it is preposterous to suggest that it will entertain the idea of exterminating huge numbers of fellow Koreans. In any case the North Korean leader cannot be assumed to be stupid enough not to know that its use of nuclear weapons is certain bring a nuclear riposte from South Korea's ally, the United

States, which will ensure the extinction of North Korea.

A plausible reason why North Korea may want nuclear weapons is to use it as the weapon of last resort if faced with the prospect of extinction. Nevertheless North Korea may not be lying when it denies it is developing nuclear weapons.

The on-going campaign against North Korea's alleged nuclear weapons programme once again exposes the double standards practised by the United States and some of its allies in their international relations.

Why is it safe and acceptable for Israel and the five permanent members of the UN Security Council to have nuclear warheads and long-range missiles, but dangerous and unacceptable for Iraq and North Korea to develop them?

What is the basis on which the United States feels free to develop whatever kind of military technology its scientists can come up with while at the same time it arrogates to itself the right to decide what technologies other states may or may not develop?

What makes it right for the United States to sell huge quantities of arms to its clients while preaching the necessity for arms reductions and exhorting other states to cut down their arms sales?

Are similar actions being contemplated against states like Israel, India and Pakistan which have not yet signed the NPT and which have either developed nuclear weapons or are believed to be well on the way to fabricating them?

The difference between the treatment meted out to Iraq and the indifference shown to Israel is particularly glaring. The history of the post-1945 period has shown that nuclear weapons have no utility other than perhaps to deter aggression by a nuclear-armed state.

The United States' possession of atomic weapons did not deter the 1950 North Korean invasion of South Korea. Neither did it help to achieve the US ambition to unify the Korean peninsula.

John Foster Dulles' Massive Retaliation strategy did not deter the Vietnamese communists from renewing their

guerrilla war. The enormous US stockpile of nuclear warheads did not deter Iraq from invading Kuwait, nor did it win the coalition war against Iraq.

If the United States had as much as threatened the use of nuclear weapons against Iraq, international opinion would have turned against it. The enormous civilian casualties which would unavoidably result from a nuclear strike are morally reprehensible and politically unacceptable.

For the military, fighting in a nuclear battlefield is well-nigh impossible. A territory devastated by nuclear bombs is not worth acquiring. These considerations make nuclear weapons unusable in war.

Now, with the Cold War ended, even the deterrent function of nuclear weapons has become questionable. With the collapse of the former Soviet Union, the United States and its allies no longer face a formidable adversary.

The international climate has undergone such radical transformation in the last two years that the remaining nuclear adversary China and other nuclear aspirants cannot but go along with moves to make this a nuclear weapon-free world.

The time has come to declare that the possession of nuclear weapons is illegitimate for all states. Nuclear weapons are truly horrendous weapons.

The Japanese have preserved for posterity enough evidence of the 'meaninglessness and insanity' of atomic weapons in the Peace Memorial Museum at Hiroshima.

So any move to rid the world of these weapons deserves our enthusiastic support. But to be meaningful and acceptable, such moves have to be universally applicable and non-discriminatory. Steps towards eliminating nuclear weapons should start with the most heavily armed states like the United States.

It is farcical to force Iraq and North Korea to abandon their nuclear weapons programme while at the same time the United States continues nuclear testing to develop new nuclear weapons.

The United States as the leading world power should set the example by taking the first step towards eliminating nuclear weapons. That first step is undoubtedly a decision to end nuclear testing.

This should be followed by a prohibition on the production of fissile materials and progressive steps for the reduction and eventual elimination of nuclear arsenals world wide and without discrimination. — Third World Network Features/Star

(K R Panikkar is a retired senior military officer lecturing at University Malaya in Malaysia.)

Japan's Peacekeeping Role in Doubt over 'Comfort' Women Issue

Haruko K. Watanabe writes from Tokyo

JAPAN is ready to play more important political and security roles in Asia "provided Asian countries show understanding and support."

This stand was affirmed by Foreign Affairs and Vice Prime Minister Michio Watanabe in a recent talk with selected members of the press in Tokyo.

Mr Watanabe discussed Japan's peacekeeping role in the international community, the official development aid (ODA) for 1992 and compensation for Korean "comfort women" or those forced to serve the sexual needs of Japanese soldiers during World War II.

Because of brutalities committed by the Japanese Imperial Army in the war, Japan's external assistance other than economic aid has lately been regarded with fear and suspicion by many Asians.

Mr Watanabe noted for instance, that there is need to explain the intentions of the Peacekeeping Operations Bill,

pending in the House of Councillors, or parliament's upper house.

He has met with various Asian leaders, he said, and "they understood." Mr Lee Kuan Yew, former prime minister of Singapore, had been most critical about Japan's sending non-combat troops to Cambodia but has changed his position, added Mr Watanabe.

Similarly, Kuwait along with the international media had praised the minesweepers belonging to Japan's Maritime Self-Defence Force which destroyed hard-to-locate mines remaining in the Gulf, he noted.

This is in contrast to the earlier failure by the Kuwait government to mention Japan among the 28 countries it thanked in a full-page ad in the New York Times for their help in the Gulf War. Japan contributed US\$13 billion to the peace-keeping operations of the United Nations in the Gulf.

Unless Japan officially apologises for misdeeds during World War II and compensates victims, its external aid may no longer be trusted

representing a quarter of all expenses.

Mr Watanabe hoped that the House of Councillors will pass the Peacekeeping Operations Bill so that Japan's Self-Defence Forces can join the UN Peacekeeping Forces currently composed of 81 countries.

He said he was proud to announce that despite financial difficulties, Japan increased its ODA by 7.8 per cent from the previous fiscal year to US\$7.6 billion in 1992. General expenditure increased by an average of only 2.7 per cent and the defence budget increased only 3.8 per cent.

"I wish to exercise Japan's leadership in fighting nar-

cotics and in helping refugees by providing both financial and personnel contribution," he said.

The Foreign Minister, however, was less eloquent on the matter of compensation for Korean comfort women. Until the end of the war, some 100,000 to 200,000 Korean women were drafted by the Japanese Army to entertain soldiers sexually.

The Japanese government had denied such a crime until military documents on recruitment were found in an archive of the Self-Defence Forces.

The Korean government demanded the official investigation on the occasion of Japa-

nese Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa's visit to Seoul in January. Three "comfort" women have filed a suit against the Japanese government seeking official apology and compensation of 20 million yen each.

But while expressing deep sympathy for war victims, Mr Watanabe confirmed the government stand that all compensation claims have been settled by the Japan-Korea Treaty.

A number of scholars and businessmen think otherwise. Nobuya Hagura, adviser of the Dai-ichi Kangyo Bank and vice-chairman of the Japan-Korea Economic Council, told *Depthnews* that so-called Korean "comfort" women should be given a pension of no less than that paid to disabled war veterans.

Japan should pay as quickly as possible what it owes to people in Asia, said Isao Nakauchi, chairman and presi-

dent of the Daiet chain of supermarkets.

"The ODA is for the benefit of Japanese business and the elite class of recipient countries. It will not reach grass-roots people (who were victimised)," he added.

Ms Aiko Utsumi, associate professor of Keisen Women's College, also thinks it is the Japanese government's obligation to fully compensate World War II victims and to officially apologise for its past misdeeds. Otherwise, Japan's global contribution will no longer be trusted, she says.

Mr Watanabe, the most likely successor of the prime minister, has been known among Japanese war widows and the business community as the most sympathetic and dynamic statesman with his campaign motto "Decide and Act". But he faces serious challenges from Asia in 1992. — *Depthnews Asia*

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.

Transport strike

Sir, Through the column of your esteemed paper I like to complain about the inconveniences caused to the public by the general transport strike.

As a result of the strike communication in the capital and other part of the country has come to a stand still. Communication is the life-blood of commercial activity. Trade has been paralysed, business transactions have become sluggish. So strike should be averted and efforts made to bring about an amicable settlement between the government and transport owners in the public interest.

Due to the strike the prices of daily necessities are soaring high and it is already very difficult for poor persons to make both ends meet.

Let there be a reconciliation. Government should not sit on the fence but come forward and intervene.

M A Momen
Gulbagh, Dhaka.

Juri-Phoollullah Road

Sir, The Juri-Phoollullah road in Kulara upazila of Moulvibazar district is possibly one of the worst roads of the R&H Department. In rainy season water inundates some parts of the road and commu-

ication remains totally disrupted for weeks. Out of a total 17 km, 6 km stretch is in real bad shape. The deplorable condition of the road was highlighted in national dailies on many occasions and it was hoped that some good work would be done in this dry season but till to-date no sign is there.

Five tea estates are to use this road besides the forest with its huge reserves — all of which very naturally bears a significance in the national economy. Only due to the poor condition of the road tea industries of this end have been incurring a huge loss every year. I would request the concerned R&H authority through your esteemed daily to take up a proper maintenance step for the road considering the ongoing losses to the Tea industry as well as forestry.

M Sanad Chowdhury,
Assistant Manager,
Phoollullah Tea Estate,
Moulvibazar.

Order of precedence

Sir, As an ordinary citizen of the country, I have been raking my brain over a question whether the 'State' precedes 'Government' or the reverse is the right order. This I am asking myself for a valid and particular reason which is intriguing as well. As we all know, the Head of State is the symbol of sovereign statehood, and the President of Bangladesh, by virtue of his unique status, holds the seat of the Head of State. It is again he — the President — who administers the oath of office to the Prime Minister in a Parliamentary democracy like ours. Here, it is not the presidential powers that matter. It is rather the President's role as the custodian of our national constitution that is more important.

Notwithstanding himself being a titular Head, the protocol and also national prestige demands that the President as the Head of State

gets precedence in very subject, particularly in all the media — electronic or print. To my utter surprise I find the position of the President has been reduced in all these areas. This is ridiculous and I consider it as a blatant encroachment on the universally acknowledged principles that guide fixation of the order of precedence in parliamentary democracy. The example of our neighbouring India can be cited as a pointer.

I hope that the Minister for Information or for that matter, the Government will give this aspect a serious consideration.

K A Ahmed
Shantinagar, Dhaka.

Meghalay coal

Sir, It is wonder to know, from the media, that Meghalay coal pollutes the environment in many ways. Meghalay coal contains highest percentage of sulphur i.e. 1.79% to 2.40% than the other coals like

Bhutan coal which contains 65% and Raniganj coal which contains 79%. The air in the atmosphere and environment is already too much polluted. Burning of coal with highest percentage of sulphur as in the case of Meghalay coal will cause dangerous environmental problem. Some importers are importing Meghalay coal through the Burmari check-post and Chilmari river route violating the decision of the Department of Environment. I hope every conscious citizen will rise to the occasion to protest the import, sale and burning of such coal in Bangladesh.

I appeal to the Ministry of Commerce, Ministry of Environment, National Board of Revenue, Chief Controller of Import and Export and the Inspector General of Police to take action to stop import, sale and burning of Meghalay coal in Bangladesh.
Shah Md. Akbar
Jagannath Shaha Road, Dhaka.