

# M-E Peace — Wider Implications for the US

The issue of loan guarantee only against freeze on settlement may decide the future course of Israeli politics and thereby the M-E peace process.

## Anarchy on the Campus

It has now come to a point where people's worst fears about Dhaka University have gained a habit of invariably coming true. Apprehension has been growing in recent weeks that a major calamity was waiting to strike the campus. But the sense of shock generated by Friday's incident is not lessened by that fore knowledge, nor is the crime of murder in any way excused or even "explained." The death of a 20-year-old student should be viewed as a loss of devastating proportion even under normal circumstances, but when the life is taken away in a calculated move to strike terror into the heart of the student community, then we can only sit back and wonder, in shame, in agony and in anger.

The gruesome irony of Friday's killing is that the tragedy this time struck not a gunman, but someone who was out protesting the violence that had gone on in the area for nearly two hours beforehand. Perhaps the shots that were fired into the procession, brought out so bravely by the Gonatantrik Chhatra Otkyo (GCO), were designed to hammer home the point that terrorists would not tolerate any challenge to their domination of the campus, even if the challenge came from students as unarmed as the GCO processionists evidently were.

The worst part was the pathetic role played by the police, who were on duty at the spot. True, they fired some tear gas to "bring under control" activists of the Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) and the Jatnyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD), who were engaged in battle. But obviously, the police had not done its job thoroughly, because the bullet that killed Moin Hossain Raju fired after the "battle" had died down, came from the direction of the University Library where one group of armed men had taken position earlier. It is astonishing that the police allowed those gunmen to remain in the area to carry out the sixth murder on the campus in less than four months.

It is nearly a year since an elected government took office and effective power. But, judging by the events of the past 12 months, the very word "government" seems to have become a misnomer. If not an outright farce on the Dhaka University campus, Friday's killing under the noses of the police has only served to highlight the utter lack of safety of public life and property in the area.

The situation exists because gunmen of both the JCD and the BCL are freely moving around the halls of residence of their respective control, as well as in the open; although the police in recent months has arrested a number of BCL cadres in connection with terrorist activities, no such arrests have taken place involving cadres of the JCD, raising the suspicion that police action is driven more by political expediency than by requirements of maintaining law and order. As a result, the government's claim that it wants to see a terror-free campus lacks credibility.

The government's inability to solve the problem, and indeed its apparent unwillingness to tackle the issue head-on, cannot but erode whatever authority the university administration has left in its own domain. At the same time, the continued armed activities of the student wing of the Awami League (AL) is robbing the main opposition party in parliament of an effective role on the issue.

However, while it is morally incumbent on the AL to rein in its student wing, it is the legal, constitutional duty of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party to do the same first, because it is the government of the country. It is the government which the tax-payer pays to protect life and property and educate the young of the nation. And it is the government which the tax-payer will ultimately hold responsible for failure to carry out those duties. A display of some true leadership qualities is now badly required, a display that will include taking some tough political decisions, like disbanding of armed cadres, expulsion of arms carriers, allowing for a withdrawal of police from the campus. It is still not too late for our political leaders to show those qualities.

## SAARC Chamber of Commerce

A pall of gloom spread over Asian cities from Dhaka to Male and from Islamabad to Colombo when the sixth South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (SAARC) Summit scheduled to be held at Sri Lankan capital Colombo was postponed at the last moment last year. Truncated, the summit was held later on but the wound left there did not quite come to be healed. Considered against that background, the news that the members of the SAARC have unanimously adopted the draft of a constitution for the group's proposed chamber of commerce and industry should indeed provide a glimmer of hope for the region.

The pace of progress in the regional co-operation has mostly been constrained by mistrust, a legacy of the painful division of the sub-continent, and meddling by powers from outside. But the potential benefits from a close co-operation among the nations of the region are immense. The chambers of commerce and industry of the seven nations stand, for the first time, to exploit in full that potential, particularly in areas of trades and commerce. When the constitution is finally approved by the countries concerned, a new beginning in the economic activities through raising the trade volumes is what we can surely expect.

The fact that trades and other types of economic co-operation between and among SAARC members can be more beneficial than for similar ventures with countries of far climes should no more be missed by the region's leaders. This concern has often been overshadowed by political considerations of a myopic sort. The chambers of commerce and industry are not expected to dictate terms in the face of political opposition; rather it may be the other way round. That is natural too. But still then, their role cannot be underestimated because with each new trade link established, they will help broaden the understanding between and among the SAARC nations. That is highly important.

Since economy today is the prime concern of either the individual or the states, its improvement serves as a launching pad for carrying with the good works in other areas as well. The EC is bent on removing the last of the barriers in giving the organisation a new shape and substance. The Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) too is gaining in strength. Both the groups are going strong, so far as their economy is concerned. The SAARC, we hope, will play its part on the issue quite admirably.

THE fourth round of Arab-Israeli peace talks started in Washington at a moment when there was serious crisis on Israel-Lebanon border. The Israeli forces — infantry and tanks — forced their way into Lebanese villages by destroying the UN barricades and seriously wounding the UN peace keeping forces; this was done in response to Lebanese Shitite rocket attacks on northern Israel. Earlier Israel carried out terrorist attacks and killed Hezbollah leader Sheikh Abbas Musavi, his wife, his child and a number of bodyguards. Israel said it did this as Sheikh Musavi was responsible for killing of three Israeli soldiers in a camp in northern Israel by Hezbollah guerrillas. Israel was sure about nothing. If Hezbollah were responsible, the obvious thing would have been to go after them. Why indiscriminately bomb the Palestinian refugee camps and kill men, women and children? Again, as per Israeli version, Sheikh Musavi was responsible but his wife and child were not. Why this state sponsored murder and how the international community reacted to this? Practically nothing. The UN barricades along with the UN peace keepers were bulldozed and atrocities were committed in Lebanon. — What the Security Council has done?

### Peace Talk and the Loan Guarantee

Despite all these, the Arabs joined the peace talks in Washington thereby indicating their seriousness and commitment to the US initiated peace process. However, the peace talk was overshadowed by another important development — the US Administration's opposition to Israel's request for US guarantee on \$10 billion loan for set-

ting the Soviet Jews mainly in the occupied territories. This strained the US-Israeli relations considerably. Secretary James Baker in his testimony to the US Congress on February 24 openly demanded a total freeze on Israeli settlement in the occupied territories in exchange for loan guarantees. Israel termed this as US's interference in the internal political affairs of Israel and also accused the US administration of siding with the Arabs in the peace process. Loan guarantees are nothing new. The US gave loan guarantee for \$400 million in 1990 for housing the new immigrants with the condition that none of the amount will be used for settlement in the occupied territories. But later reports proved that loan guarantee amounts released Israeli internal funds that were used for settlement in the occupied territories. The US had no means to stop it. Therefore, the US administration was right this time in asking Israel to make an open and firm commitment to freeze settlement in the occupied territories. Apparently the American Jews, who strongly lobbied in favour of the loan guarantee, now appear reluctant to support the wild and internationally criticised idea of continuing the Jewish settlement in the occupied territories, which goes totally against the present M-E peace process.

Whatever might have happened on the ground, different US Administrations also opposed settlement in occupied territories for over two decades. Bush administration also firmly believed that the settlement was 'an obstacle to peace' and has been insisting

on its freeze. The discussions were going on with Israel for 'over two and half years — may be three' as Baker put it. Thus the US position was not designed to influence the present political position in Israel. The new Labour Party leader Robin himself reportedly spoke in favour of stopping settlements in the occupied territories. Therefore, the US did not have to negotiate with Robin and convince him of the need for this. Indeed President Bush took some political risk in making public statement at a time when he is facing considerable political challenge at home. He himself

support Israel that it would antagonise the Arabs. (b) The Gulf War has created a new alignment in the M-E politics. Even some staunch enemies of Israel and, for the same reason, of the US gave direct or indirect support to the US and its allies during the Gulf War. Nothing should be done to break this as, according to the US, the threat from the radicals in the Gulf area is not yet over. Indeed, some new alignments are developing among the radicals.

(c) The collapse of the Soviet Union also gave rise to a new geopolitical situation in

after the Gulf war the US virtually owes it to the Arabs. M-E peace will make US position stronger and also safer in the region.

(e) M-E peace in the form of an amicable settlement of Palestinian problem with the Israeli withdrawal from say 90% of the occupied territories — 10% along Israeli border for security under UN supervision — and withdrawal from south Lebanon will neutralise most of the radicals in the Palestinian and Shitite groups and reduce terrorism and stop western hostage taking. The hostility towards the US will also gradually disappear.

(f) The US efforts for the M-E peace seems to have the best chance. The only condition is that the US Congress will also have to see the new realities and lend its full support to the peace process initiated by its own Administration. It is an historic opportunity for the Americans to settle the M-E problem and make their position safe in the region.

Washington Talk  
The Arabs apparently feel that the US peace effort is genuine and this is why despite Israeli army march into Lebanon and army atrocities, they appeared in Washington for the peace talk.

The talks have taken place for nearly one-and-half weeks but produced no tangible results. However, both sides produced proposals on self-rule for the Palestinians; this is by itself an achievement as there is now an agreement that there must be self-rule for the Palestinians. Israeli proposals seem to be slightly better than the previously thought

Garbage Collection self-rule; they include some control on various aspects of their daily lives like education, taxation etc. There is nothing like election or creation of 'self governing authority'. The Palestinians have rejected this.

The Palestinian proposal calls for elections within the year and a near total withdrawal of Israeli forces before a local government is installed. It also includes 'detailed plans for interim self-government with legislative functions and power over land, natural resources, water, sub-soil, territorial sea-exclusive economic zone, and air space.' The Israelis said the proposal was unacceptable as it amounted to 'a framework of an independent Palestinian state'. The answer lies somewhere between these two proposals at least for the initial period and here the role of the US comes in. As there is no more Soviet Union and Russia itself is in turmoil, the burden lies on the US administration.

### US and Israeli Elections and Peace Prospects

The problem is that both the US and Israel are facing the general elections soon and therefore there could be no immediate breakthrough. Though it appears that the US Administration, despite all odds, is likely to remain in place, Israel may have change in the government; the Labour may return to power. In such a situation peace stands a better chance. Some, however, see Likud-Labour coalition. This would reduce the peace prospects and the US Administration should take note of it while it is so engaged in the peace process. The issue of loan guarantee only against freeze on settlement may decide the future course of Israeli politics and thereby the M-E peace process.

## SPOTLIGHT ON MIDDLE EAST

### Muslehuddin Ahmad

admitted that there were certain political risks but I am not going to siff the foreign policy of this country because of political expediency.

### M-E Peace and US's Global Interest

Some members of the US Congress are trying to find a compromise but it is hoped that Bush Administration would not give in under pressure as the Jewish settlement has become the crucial issue in the Peace Talk. President Bush's stand appears to be based on the following strategies that would serve the US global interest in the long run.

(a) After the cold war and the collapse of the Soviet Union, Israel's strategic importance has practically disappeared. The US may continue to consider Israel as a friendly country but should not blindly

the area. The Muslim Republics of the former Soviet Union are gradually moving towards the Muslim countries of the area and here the US appears very concerned. If these Republics lean more towards Iran, which appears natural because of the proximity and ethnic affinities, then the power balance in the Gulf would go against the US. The present thinking of some officials of the US administration not to pursue Bush-Major vow to overthrow Saddam is apparently based on this. The US effort appears to be to create as much link as possible between the Arab allies and the Muslim Republics of the former Soviet Union apart from their own friendly relations with these Republics. One may see Baker's visit as a part of this exercise.

(d) M-E peace is a must and

# Agro-based Industry — a Forgotten Language

by Avik Sanwar Rahman

WE have been talking about productivity for years. In most of our talks we stressed 'industrialization' — creating an impression that we can increase productivity by more of industries. But, recently a forgotten language found a way within the minds of our experts. It is probably high time that we faced some facts. Because, the root of our deficiency lies in our approach — in our mind. As the preamble of UNESCO states: 'War starts not on the battlefield, but in the minds of men. And it is in the minds of men that bastions of peace must be erected...' Similarly, we have to lay the foundation of our growth in our own minds.

Experts said, the country can boost its export earnings ten times by opting for agro-based industry utilising available raw material. Without development in agriculture, country's balance of trade will never come to a stable position. Indeed it is. And if we

just look back through the passage of time, the importance of agricultural goods will be obvious.

The victory of British power in 1757 killed indigenous capitalism of Bengal in its nascent stage. The trade which was being carried on by the East India Company, and for which England had to pay large amounts of bullion to Bengal traders and manufacturers, was transformed into an organised plunder. Thus ended the days of prosperity of the Bengal merchants. Henceforth they were allowed to exist only as the agents of the company and their employees in the form of gomasthas and banyans.

The process of changing Bengal into a market and supplier of primary products which could be exported to other countries necessitated the restructuring of her land relations on a commercial basis. The new land system superseded the traditional right of village community. Under

the village community system, land was not a commodity, and it could not be alienated without the approval of the community. But under the new system, land was transformed into a commodity which could be disposed of in the market like any other thing.

### With growth of population and ever-increasing hunger, the better-off were able to build up estates.

There was a distinction in British India between ryotwari areas, where the peasant held land directly from the state, and zamindari, where the land was held by owners who were often absentees, or probably exploiting gentry. Especially in areas under the 'Bengal Permanent Settlement' of 1793, which was designed to set up a class of improving landlords on the contemporary English model, there developed a fantastic number of in-

termediaries between the rack-rented peasant and the final landlord who paid a fixed revenue assessment. Under the British Raj, land had become a market commodity for investment, and overwhelmingly investment of a rentier rather than entrepreneurial

type. A unique condition for 'absolute rent' (which is deduction from profit) rather than capitalist ground rent (which is a surplus above profit and fits the condition of entrepreneurial type). With growth of population and ever increasing land-hunger, the better off were able to build up estates. The variety of titles, tenures, rents and services was bewildering.

When Pakistan came into existence, land reforms fell essentially under three closely

related heads: the elimination of intermediaries between the cultivator and the state — this is often referred to as zamindari abolition; the setting of ceilings on individual holdings, and the protection of tenants by providing for security and fair rents. The objective in East Pakistan was the abolition of intermediaries altogether; zamindars were limited to a personal holding of 33 acres (13.3ha). The big zamindar may be on the way out; but the 'malik' or middling proprietor may have gained; and while a few 'kisans' (working peasants) may have improved their position and perhaps even graduated to the malik class, the mazdurs or laborers, often attached by debt-slavery, are probably as wretched as ever.

And after 1971, when Bangladesh came into reality as a nation-state, the condition of 'cumulative diseconomies' (e.g. fragmentation of land) as termed by economist S K Iyengar in 'A Decade of

Planned Economy', is being continued. The extension of education and urbanization which break down the joint family system and the Muslim hereditary property law, both, added to the fragmentation of our lands.

To what extent land reforms have actually improved production is an even more difficult question. One factor in the changes of policy has been the apprehension, especially in bad years, that a too rigorous application of ceilings on the size of holdings might prejudice production by depriving the larger, better-equipped, and more commercial minded proprietors of needed land, and also of incentives. Looked at in cold blood, it might indeed appear that the strengthening of the malik class would, economically considered, be the best thing for production.

Hence the dream for agro-industry to flourish in the country without considering our social structure could become the 'Achilles' Heel' for us.

# Hanoi Government Breaking out from Cold War Cocoon

by A Special Correspondent

MANILA Vietnamese Prime Minister Vo Van Kiet's visit to the Philippines in late February comes as part of his government's campaign for regional integration after almost two decades of isolation brought about by its success in driving the Americans out of its territory and its intervention in the Cambodian conflict.

Mr Van Kiet, who assumed Vietnam's most powerful position only five months ago, had been to Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand and Malaysia.

From Manila, he will proceed to Brunel where establishment of diplomatic relations with the oil-rich kingdom will be formally announced during his visit. That would complete his round of the six countries belonging to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

Mr Van Kiet's "getting-to-know-you" visit to ASEAN leaders is a prelude to what his government had long desired — membership in the predominantly non-communist ASEAN.

Philippine Foreign Secretary Raul S Manglapus, chairman of the ASEAN stand-

ing committee for the 25th ministerial meeting to be held in Manila in July this year, said that arrangements are being made to have Vietnam and Laos sign the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation during the meeting.

Signing of the Treaty qualifies a country to be an observer in ASEAN summit and ministerial meetings. It is also the first step towards becoming a member.

Vietnam, through its former foreign minister, Nguyen Co Thach, first made public its desire to join ASEAN in 1988. ASEAN snubbed Vietnam's initial overtures using the presence of Vietnamese soldiers in Cambodia helping the Hun Sen government repel the murderous Khmer Rouge forces.

A Philippine diplomat said ASEAN countries, all of which have adopted free enterprise, see difficulty in working within the context of ASEAN with a country with a centrally-planned economy.

The first roadblock to Vietnam's integration into ASEAN was removed with the withdrawal of Vietnamese soldiers from Cambodia in September 1989 and the sub-

### Arrangements are being made to have Vietnam and Laos sign this July an ASEAN treaty of amity and cooperation, the first step towards becoming a member

sequent establishment in Phnom Penh of the United Nations-sponsored Supreme National Council that will oversee the holding of an election this year.

ASEAN countries repudiated their own reservations about the incompatibility of capitalism with socialism with a growing, albeit unofficially, trade with Vietnam by those who were wise to take advantage of Vietnam's 65 million market.

Singapore, the supreme advocate of capitalism among ASEAN countries, had the most active trade relations with socialist Vietnam. Best quality Vietnamese rubber enjoys brisk sale in Singapore market. Vietnam has purchased several oil rigs from Singapore's private companies.

A Thai fishing company signed an agreement with Vietnam which allows 150 Thai fishermen to work for three months with a Vietnamese company. The agreement also allows the Thai fishermen to work for three months off the marine resources-rich coast of Vietnam.

Five times a week, Thai Airways fly to Hanoi and twice a week to Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon). Thai goods — from appliances to jeans to condoms — are found in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh city flea markets.

Indonesian trade with Vietnam is spearheaded by PT Pantja Niaga, a state trading company. And Philippine trade with Vietnam is slowly becoming less lopsided.

In 1990, the Philippines imported from Vietnam US \$100 million worth of goods, the bulk of it rice. San Miguel Corporation also buys from Vietnam silica sand used for manufacturing bottles. Export to Vietnam was only US \$5 million consisting of fertiliser, San Miguel beer, cement and cigarettes.

Last year, the Philippines didn't import rice — bringing down the figure to US \$25 million. Vietnam increased its purchases from the Philippines to US \$11 million.

More and more Philippine private companies are doing business with Vietnam. Negotiations are reportedly ongoing for Columbia Motors to set up an assembly plant in Vietnam.

Economic cooperation between the Philippines and Vietnam is expected to improve with the signing of three agreements during Prime Minister Van Kiet's visit. The agreements are on the establishment of a joint economic and trade commission, protection and promotion of investments, and on maritime and merchant shipping.

Vietnam expect more foreign investments to come its way as it offers the most liberal climate for foreign investment. Unlike the Philippines that limits foreign ownership to 40 per cent of local business, the very nationalist Vietnam allows foreign firms to own 100 per cent of the business they establish. Foreign firms are also allowed to transfer earnings out of the country and control up to 99 per cent of joint ventures with domestic firms.

The end of Vietnam's economic isolation is expected to improve the life of the Vietnamese people and discourage them from leaving the country by boat to refugee camps in Hong Kong, Philippines and Malaysia.

The only door that has remained locked to Vietnam is that of the United States which has ever ran out of reasons to continue its economic embargo (at first they used Vietnam's military presence in Cambodia; now it's the soldiers who were missing in action during the 20 year Vietnam war) on this Southeast Asian country that dared humiliate 17 years ago the mightiest armed forces in the world.

— Depthnews Asia

## To the Editor...

### ORBIS at Rajshahi

Sir, For the last few years "Project ORBIS" — an international humanitarian organization visits Dhaka once a year and treats eye patients with surgical operation conducted by highly trained ophthalmic surgeons on mobile, modern and well equipped operation theatre. People of Bangladesh are grateful to ORBIS for arranging such a mission to help the sufferers regain their eyesight. We laud their mission. For the blind and eye patients of Rajshahi and Khulna Divisions of the country, we

urge upon the ORBIS to include Rajshahi also in their Bangladesh itinerary. It is so because 52% of the total land and 48% of total population of Bangladesh are under Rajshahi and Khulna Divisions. In respect of communication, river Jamuna is a great obstacle to reach Dhaka. Besides, the purchasing power of the people here are comparatively lower than those of Dhaka and Chittagong Divisions. To go to Dhaka and stay there is costly and time consuming for the commonman. Medical and surgical facilities are not so rich here as that in Dhaka. Rajshahi

has a medical college, a university and an airport. Rajshahi is well connected with all parts of the region by roads and rails. There is a Porjatan Motel. All these seem to be helpful to ORBIS teams stay at Rajshahi. Since ORBIS is also a mobile teaching institution, their presence could play an important role in transferring modern ophthalmological knowledge and techniques to the doctors and medical students of the vast region.

In the context of this, we urge upon the international authority of ORBIS to kindly

visit Rajshahi when they visit Bangladesh.

Md Anwarul Afzal, Rantnagar, Naogaon.

### 24th March

Sir, Twentyfourth March is a landmark in the history of Bangladesh. All well-meaning citizens would sincerely wish not to see a repetition of this day. This land has been the machination of a series of adventurers with the fate of the inhabitants since October 1988. Whenever a democratic government tried to set foot

the civil forces frustrated the efforts and put the blame on democracy and wisdom of general population.

The interferences themselves promote the evils which they own adventurism. And in the process they blacken the image of various institutions who may have innocently played in their hands.

I propose that 24th March be observed in a proper manner to make people aware of the values and diverse aspects of democracy. Specially younger people should be in-

duced to factors like tolerance for others' opinions and guidelines which should govern the norms of public behaviour of leaders. All component forces of the society should be given due respect and honor for their part in the activities of the nation. Their names should not be dragged for the benefit of the usurpers, whatever the excuse may be.

We can have our own Guy Fawkes Day and call it 'Ershad Day'.

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