

Dhaka, Wednesday, July 29, 1992

Baker's Call to ASEAN

The US Secretary of State James Baker has rendered a valuable service to the suffering humanity and, most certainly, to this country by urging the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to send a strong signal to Myanmar about what he called the country's deplorable human rights record, especially over tragic plight of some 2,70,000 Rohingya refugees who have fled into Bangladesh. Baker's call came on Sunday when he addressed the ASEAN's ministerial meeting and later during a press conference.

The US Secretary of State's statement was precise and clear. It also came at the right moment. He must have noted, as indeed we have from here, that the six-nation alliance has been generally reluctant to speak out against the Yangon's record, preferring what some of its members called a "policy of constructive engagement" whatever it might mean in diplomacy. In the pursuit of this ambiguous policy, some ASEAN members were even willing to invite Myanmar as an observer to the grouping's ministerial meeting in Manila, a move that was vetoed by Indonesia and Malaysia, two predominantly Muslim countries which feel particularly concerned about the plight of Rohingyas. However, it is not quite clear where Kuala Lumpur and Jakarta stand on the question of the so-called constructive engagement, or for that matter, on the question of sanctions which many western countries, including the United States, would like to see applied against Yangon, especially on the supply of arms.

One could comment on the so-called constructive engagement, perhaps even approvingly, if only we were told what it means or, for the matter, what message ASEAN has sent to Yangon. Indeed, we do not feel particularly encouraged by what we have so far seen or heard from some ASEAN ministers on the Myanmar situation, especially on the Rohingyas. For instance, soon after the ASEAN ministerial meeting, the Thai Foreign Minister, Arsa Sarasin assured that the alliance did not "condone" Yangon's treatment of the refugees who have crossed into Bangladesh. Isn't it surprising that Sarasin could not find a milder expression to comment on what the international community regards as an intolerable situation? Thailand which had to cope with the influx of refugees from Cambodia for more than a decade and now faces the incoming Rohingyas should have a better appreciation than other ASEAN members of the crisis caused in Bangladesh by the exodus of close to three hundred thousand refugees who have crossed our border.

Baker is also fully justified in seeing a solution of the crisis in Myanmar in the wider political context. If the junta in Yangon is destabilising the Southeast Asia, flooding its neighbours — both Bangladesh and Thailand — with refugees, it is doing so because of its refusal to allow a democratic government to take office. This means that unless there is a change in the internal situation, meaning a transformation of the political system, Myanmar will continue being a centre of instability and large refugee flows.

Whether or not ASEAN members will listen to Baker would largely depend on how they value their present — and somewhat devious — trade and commercial interest in Myanmar as against their long-term interests, based on friendship and understanding with the future democratic government in Yangon — and, indeed, with the relationship with Dhaka.

We Want to Know What's in the Deal

We are delighted to hear that the road and railway 'barricade programme' called for by the jute and textile mills workers has been put off. However, we are a bit concerned not knowing at what cost this has been brought about. According to news reports, two memoranda of understanding have been signed between the workers and the relevant ministers. The reports are uncharacteristically silent as to the points of the accord. The reason for our concern is, of course, based on our experience of the past. On quite a few earlier occasions we have seen the government succumb to pressure — some would say blackmail — and conclude deals that cost the exchequer quite a bit.

There are, however, two things different about this particular instance. First, the initiative to come to an understanding was taken well ahead of time, instead of waiting for the situation to become critical. Secondly, the government made it known this time that it would take a tough line against the programme of barricade. Both these moves entitle the ministries to a pat on the back for playing their cards well. However, this guarded compliment could have been made into a loud praise if we knew that the government stood its ground and that the accord had not come about at a great cost to the tax payers.

At this point we would like to challenge the very practice of coming to the negotiating table with the threat of a strike or a barricade in the background. The threat, in this case of a barricade, should follow a failure of talks and not precede it. No negotiation should ever take place under threat. In fact the government should have made the lifting of the barricade call a condition of sitting down for talks. Instead it allowed the impression to be created that the government was too eager to avert a confrontation with the workers, with all its political fallout, and had to conclude this deal at any cost.

Now that the deal has been made, we would like to know what's in it. We request the concerned ministries to make the provision of the two MOUs public. There cannot be any question of confidentiality here as they involve public money and touch on issues of private concern.

ME Peace May Help Bush Retain Presidency

President Bush's election position has improved somewhat after the withdrawal of undeclared Presidential candidate Ross Perot but he faces a serious challenge from democrat Bill Clinton. As, at present, there is no foreign policy action to take Americans' attention away from domestic problems, Bush should make Middle-East Peace as one of his most important election targets.

which is likely to wash out his gain in the Gulf War).

Apparently, President Bush has already taken some bold steps for activating Middle-East Peace Process. Indeed, his firm refusal to give loan guarantees for \$10 billion to Israel for settling Jewish immigrants, mainly in occupied territories, was one of the main reasons for Yitzhak Shamir's recent election debacle bringing Labour to power.

Even initial adverse reaction of American Jews on Bush's refusal turned gradually in favour of President Bush as they later made statements criticising Shamir's adamant attitude on settlement. President Bush's firm action indeed brought some changes in the attitude of the Congress too. In Israel itself the change was evident. More Israelis started getting concerned about wholesale immigration of Jews from around the world to Israel creating serious social, ethnic and economic problems for the Israelis. It is high time to seriously question whether Jews from former Soviet Union should at all be encouraged to immigrate after the total collapse of Communism which, they say, was responsible for persecution of Soviet Jews.

Along with the refusal of loan guarantees, the US stand on "Settlement is an obstacle to Peace" and "Land for Peace" apparently led to some re-

thinking among many Israelis about their relation with Arabs. They, indeed, started having some doubt about Shamir's seriousness in the US sponsored peace negotiation. All these contributed in a major way towards Likud's fall.

Thus, it was quite evident that US was a key to the transformation of political attitude of Israelis, which brought Yitzhak Rabin to power. This was a welcome achievement for Bush administration and here lies the opportunity which Bush administration

Palestinians see these as a political ploy to achieve loan guarantees of 10 billion from US Administration. The Arabs may not be altogether wrong. There is a suggestion that Bush Administration also wanted loan guarantees to go ahead, which could ensure more Jewish vote for President Bush. "A resolution of that issue is considered critical by Bush Administration officials if they are to hold the 27 per cent of the American Jews vote that Mr. Bush garnered in the 1988 Presidential elec-

of the occupied territories.

Baker's visits to Lebanon and Syria clearly indicated Bush Administration's approach for total solution of the Middle-East problems. Though Israel said that under no circumstance it would vacate Golan Heights, there is a possibility that the US would arrange for Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights with some mutually agreed security arrangements against Syria's phased withdrawal from Lebanon. Baker, indeed, spoke of Lebanon's political independence and it can only be achieved through withdrawal of Syria and Israel from Lebanon. Bush Administration should, obviously, realise that Syria will create serious disruptions in the peace process, if any attempt is made to ignore Syria's concern by taking advantage of the present Arab disunity.

Despite Gulf War disruptions, important Arab leaders have met in Damascus, with a view to forging a common approach to the peace negotiations which is likely to resume next month. It is interesting to note that King Hussein of Jordan visited Syria twice in a week to meet President Assad. Obviously, the king is trying to coordinate the Arab's position.

Madrid negotiations formula may continue; but open negotiations across the table are not likely to produce any break-through, at least not in the near future which is im-

portant for administration. Therefore, US must work as an honest mediator behind the scene to arrange for basic understandings on major issues. This would, however, need change in US Foreign Policy approach. With the departure of Shamir from Israel's administration, his rejection of PLO as a terrorist organisation must immediately be abandoned. The US must start talking to PLO as no Middle East Peace is possible without direct participation of the PLO in the negotiations. As PLO is the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, there is no way that it can any longer be side-tracked.

It must be clearly understood that there has to be basic understanding on the major issues — the "Land for Peace". However, initially, in the first phase the Palestinian autonomy with legislative election in the occupied territories may satisfy Palestinians provided Israel agrees in principle on exchange of land, the details of which along with the final status of the proposed Palestinian state may be worked out soon after the implementation of the first phase of Palestinian self-rule in the occupied territories.

Once there is a clear understanding on these vital issues, the Arabs may not have any objection to sit with Rabin's Government in East Jerusalem. This is the best and probably the only chance; there may not be any better opportunity for the Arabs and Israelis for achieving peace in the region. The opportunity must not be missed.

SPOTLIGHT ON MIDDLE EAST

Muslehuddin Ahmad

should take advantage of for bringing progress in the peace process.

US Secretary of State James Baker's visit to Israel and many capitals of the Arab world, though seen by many as farwell calls, signifies President Bush's effort to promote peace process. Baker's visit has produced some good results. All new settlements contracts have been cancelled; though work on some 800 old settlements were allowed to continue in the occupied territories. However, Labour Government decided to review the entire settlement plan drawn by Shamir Government. These are encouraging steps; but the Arabs, and particularly, the

The Arabs feel that Rabin facilitated this by declaring halt on the settlement in the West Bank and Gaza. Therefore, to remove all these doubts and apprehensions, a genuine approach on settlement question would be total freeze and not curtailment. This will remove a major impediment in the peace process. Indeed, the total freeze could be negotiated against withdrawal of Arab boycott of companies dealing with Israel. There is a good chance of Arabs agreeing to withdrawal of boycott once total freeze is announced. Total freeze is vital for Arabs as such announcement would confirm Israel's recognition of Arab ownership

Japan's Experience and its Relevance to Bangladesh

by Mustafizur Rahman

THE developed and the developing countries alike are now taking serious interest in things about Japan. Most of the non-oil exporting countries are having huge trade deficit with her, Bangladesh is not an exception. The "learn from Japan" policy of Malaysia, Singapore and a few other countries and "follow and surpass Japan" policy or ambition of South Korea, China and a number of other nations are guiding them towards hard plan. However, many resourceful countries like Brazil, Mexico, Argentina and a few others which resorted to over-borrowing are now in serious debt problem. This was unknown to Japan in real sense throughout her entire period of transition to the second largest economy in the free world. Many people wonder how Japan managed it.

The condition that led to the adoption by the Japanese of the policy of isolation (Sakoku) for the period from 1639 to 1854, effectively freeing themselves from the possible influence of Christianity, particularly the Portuguese, the Dutch East India Company and the British East India Company which could not be avoided by Indian Subcontinent and many other Asian countries. This account for the basic Japanese sense of freedom from non-Japanese domination. The ending of "sakoku" in 1854 was not voluntary. The new wave of nationalism that resulted in Meiji restoration in 1868 was guided by a clear ambition in becoming a "rich country and strong army". Meiji restoration was not a mass movement, but there was hardly any controversy about the national goal determined at that time.

Japan's rather unequal trade treaty with the West did not allow her free hand in deciding her own tariff till late 1890s (officially 1911). The vigorous industrialization that started since early Meiji period could not enjoy tariff protection. Japan had to spend for foreign technicians, for training of the Japanese abroad and also for foreign capital machinery.

The conception of foreign "aid" as it is understood or misunderstood today was not clear then though Japan took some loan from Britain in 1870 to complete her first 18 miles of railway line between Tokyo and Yokohama in 1872. Japan was facing trade deficit and balance of payment prob-

lem. She had to take hard measures including bringing the balance of payments under control, rationalization of its industries and cutting down demands by cutting government jobs, stretching working hours, reducing wages, etc.

The deflationary policies of Matsukata in 1880's, the formation of public-private deliberation councils since 1927, the 10-per cent pay cut for civil and military officials by Prime Minister Hamaguchi in 1929, introduction of deficit financing by Takahashi Korokyo in 1932 for selected investment to bring the economy out of the prevailing depression, creation of "economic general staff" in 1937 in the name of Cabinet Planning Board, enactment of National General Mobilization Law of 1938, and adoption of deflationary Dodge rationalization plan in 1949

cutting over 10,000 government jobs from MTTI alone were not definitely simple or popular economic policies and strategies.

These may be very safely called extraordinary responses to the need of time. Despite all the hardship, there are only few instances when Japan allowed foreign investment at that time. Her leaders knew it very well that their new industries could hardly compete with the established Western industrial giants, but they were not unaware that foreign technology was necessary for growth of their own industries. Japan thus took legal and other measures to achieve the double targets of keeping the foreign investment off the Japan market and rapid introduction of foreign technology at reasonably low cost.

She managed to suppress domestic demand — private and public, within the limit of the supply capability of her industries. Japan paid off all her outstanding foreign debts out of her profit earned during World War I. Had she taken foreign debts lightly and indulged in heavy loans instead she would probably have lost her freedom in adopting many of the policies that took her to prosperity. Except for some direct financial help from the USA immediately after the War and some loans from World Bank, starting with US\$ 40.2 million in 1953 for electric power companies and subsequently for some steel compa-

nies, Japan relied on its internal finance for local mobilization and on export for import of capital goods. Even such small borrowings too were bitterly criticised in the Diet by irritated nationalists as "national dishonour".

As Japan had to achieve her objectives through hard policy planning and institutional innovations, Japan's policies have so many remarkable aspects that, through understanding and selective adoption of them, may help Bangladesh in overcoming a great many of her short term and long term problems.

The present economic and social problems of Bangladesh are mostly her own creations. The governments in the past were afraid of unpopular steps and allowed the basic prob-

lem.

The import policy of Bangladesh which has always been influenced by interested quarters does not reflect any concern for long-term problem of the country. Many people argue for argument's sake that liberal import policy allowing even luxury items at high tariff earns revenue for the government. They do not appreciate that tariff is not for earning revenue for unscrupulous general account spending. Tariff is basically for protection of weak and sensitive sectors of domestic industries or agriculture, and if any earning comes out of tariff, it may even be spent for necessary subsidies or promotional expenses in those sectors.

Again, there are people to speak against subsidies know-

ing to her targeted industrial nurturing and development. The small amount of foreign investment that was allowed was only to get access to technology or to ensure technical cooperation. The foreign Trade Control Law of 1949 and Foreign Capital Law of May 10, 1950 (Gaishi Ho number 163) gave Japan all legal weapons to keep any undesirable import and foreign investment off Japan. The "closed nature" or "protectionism" of Japan is now being criticised by the USA but ironically these laws were enacted during SCAP (Supreme Commander of Allied Power) rule. Referring to such a law and SCAP's transferring power to Japan in 1952, Leon Hollerman says: "In liquidating the occupation by handing back operational control to the Japanese, SCAP naively presided not only over

Bangladesh, neglected our duties for too long. It is time for us to act to live upto our rich culture and tradition by our own vision of the future. Time is running out very fast for us. Our economy is weakening; population is increasing; problems are multiplying; foreign debt servicing burden is mounting. But we are not realizing that our policies are not leading us anywhere near our desired goal. We are chasing some wrong targets at high cost and failing to fix our priorities in right sequence and pursue them with undivided loyalty and dedication. The hardship, austerity, cut in government expenditure, policy innovations, structural changes, basic policy and strategy of self reliance and short term sacrifice that we have been trying to avoid are the only means that can take us to the path of long-term self-reliant economic and social development. Some people may try to see that such plans fail, but the people with conscience must be ready to take leadership with intellectual and political courage to face the reality wisely. Japan had dedicated bureaucracy; educated, enterprising and innovative business community; devoted professionals; and educated and patriotic leadership we shall have to do create them through our own efforts.

The earlier we forget about laissez faire economy, the better it will be for us. The dependence on foreign loan or dream of foreign investment for our national development might prove to be a nightmare someday if we don't be wise in our basic thoughts and approach. This written strongly believes, Japanese examples and experience in these respects are invaluable for Bangladesh, if taken seriously and adapted properly. The present slogan of market economy should not confuse us. The World Bank staff or IMF service holders who are in the habit of writing economic prescription for weaker developing countries hardly know that the territory that forms Bangladesh has more than thousand years of history of practical market economy occasional by disturbed by the colonial rulers.

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To the Editor...

Water scarcity at Tejkunipara

Sir, Through this column, I would like to draw the attention of the relevant authorities regarding the supply of water at Tejkunipara.

For the last six months, the supply of water by WASA is so little at times that we even do not get enough water for drinking not to speak of other bare requirements. The Government is planning so many things, but we do not hear the Government taking any immediate steps to mitigate the sufferings of the people by providing more water.

The scarcity in the area is so acute that, I apprehend, the people will take to the streets

and also gherao the WASA office very soon to press for this demand.

I fervently appeal to the concerned authorities to increase the water supply so as to meet the basic daily need, immediately.

Manzur Rashid
Tejkunipara, Dhaka

Crime in Mirpur and inadequate police force

Sir, Law enforcement in the country is the responsibility of the Government. But in Mirpur the Government remains as it appears, deliberately careless in spite of mounting crimes in the area.

There are about 20 lakh inhabitants in about 15 square miles of Mirpur and adjacent areas. But there is only one police station with five tiny police outposts in this huge area.

The total police force under this police station and five police outposts is reportedly only 200, learnt from the police authorities. Only two vehicles are used by the Mirpur Police Station, including its Officer-in-Charge.

Not to speak of Bangladesh, nowhere in the world and never in the history of mankind the security of such a big population has ever been vested under one police station force under one police station. What is the logic of our Ministry of Home Affairs for

such neglect?

Years back it was publicized that the Mirpur area would be divided into two police stations. But it has been shelved. But why?

It seems that with bad roads (about 90 per cent), large-scale illegal constructions and slums, and total traffic lawlessness the Mirpur area would have become a much greater crime zone than what it is. We do not know if the Ministry of Home Affairs is experimenting with the area as "test case"? If it is so then it is a violation of the human and constitutional rights of the people.

We went to hear from the Ministry of Home Affairs and the honourable members of

our National Parliament about the above irresponsibility.

AB M Shamsud Douah
Advocate, Supreme Court
Mirpur, Dhaka

BTV — stale sports news

Sir, Belated congratulations to The Daily Star — we get the sports news faster in the daily than on BTV, as you have a radio monitoring unit, operating till the press run deadline.

There appears to be lack of co-ordination between Radio Bangladesh and BTV, as apparently BTV is not making use of the service provided by RB's International Radio Monitoring Centre, which feeds the RB

News Unit. Even a daily monitoring bulletin used to be published for circulation to the Cabinet and to senior government officers.

One glaring lapse of BTV is the stale cricket scores in the evening bulletins, which we have already read in The Daily Star earlier the same morning. It is unbelievable that the BTV News Section has not a radio receiver in operation to monitor what is happening in the world.

BTV and RB should not behave as two 'opposing political parties', now that there is no coordinating Chairman, NBA at the top. A Masud
Dhaka