

Power Politics in Pakistan

The decision on Sunday of Pakistan President Gholam Ishaq Khan to dismiss the 29-month old government of Nawaz Sharif became inevitable once Sharif went public 24 hours earlier accusing the President of conspiring to topple his government. With the two powerful pillars of the Pakistan government — President and the Prime Minister — going in opposite directions, one was bound to fall by the wayside. Given the Pakistani Constitution's tilt of power balance in favour of the President, it was almost a foregone conclusion that it will be Sharif whose head will roll.

If ever there was an example of a decision of state made on the grounds of personal rivalry, coterie interest and conspiratorial politics, Sharif's dismissal was it. Issues of principle or of national interest was far removed from the motives that dominated that minds of the principal actors of this tragic drama.

It was the young Pakistani Prime Minister's umbrage at the octogenarian President's decision to appoint Abdul Waheed as the army chief of staff, against the PM's own nominee, that triggered the present crisis. In Pakistan's politics it is very important for a head of government to have his or her own nominee heading the army. The rebuff in this case clearly showed that the real power lay in the President's hands, and it was there that the loyalty of the army lay. Sharif reacted by trying to organise a parliamentary majority to change the 8th Amendment to the Constitution — brought about by the late President Gen Ziaul Huq — that gave the President a lot of power including some very critical ones.

There was an irony in Sharif's seeking to change the 8th Amendment, because it was the very ladder through which he climbed to power, following the technically correct, but ethically and morally bankrupt, decision by the very same president, to dismiss the democratically elected government of Benazir Bhutto.

The charges of corruption and nepotism brought by President Ishaq Khan against Sharif are the same brought earlier against Benazir. The accusation that Sharif's family — though a well known business family from before — became among the richest in the country during his tenure in power is believed by many Pakistanis to be true. Regardless of the veracity of the charges of corruption and nepotism, what is true is that these charges are being invoked to serve the political aims of the President.

But what are Ishaq Khan's aims? To bring in military rule is not likely to be in his agenda, for it will only corrode his power. To bring Benazir into power, the very same he dismissed — again because she was talking about clipping the President's a bit too powerful wings — 29 months ago, and one who may not have forgiven him for his alleged involvement in toppling the government of the senior Bhutto, back in late seventies. Whatever may be his game plan, it does not auger well for Pakistan. The power of the President to tamper with an elected government does not make for a confident Prime Minister. The decision to hold a fresh election on July 14 is welcome. However, we may recall that announcing a date for election and ultimately sticking to it is far from being the same thing as repeatedly proven in Pakistan's history.

The recourse to law that the ousted Speaker of the National Assembly took in filing a petition to the High Court against Ishaq Khan's decision is a good move. The President should prove before the court of law that he did not violate the Constitution.

As we said earlier, the present crisis springs from a clash between the President and the Prime Minister. It is our hope that it is resolved in a way that people's representatives are restored to power, and at no time should the possibility be created for the armed forces to take over. Pakistan has suffered too often and far too long under military dictatorship.

SSC Exam Outlook

Yesterday 6,79,014 boys and girls started taking their Secondary School Certificate examinations. This is an increase on last year's 5,39,696 and a very impressive one at nearly 19 per cent. We do not, of course, know how this satisfying spurt would compare to the figure we should have for SSC examinees had there been universal enrollment at school level and no dropouts. However, it is a fact that West Bengal, with no particularly bright literacy record in the Indian context, has more examinees at this level than ours albeit with a population much less than ours. We have still a long way to go and we hope that the present progress would not only be sustained but shall be speeded up.

The task is evidently more uphill when we come to the question of gender gap in education. Of 6.79 lakh examinees, boys at 4.34 lakh are 1.90 lakh more than the girl examinees. When will the girls catch up and how? It is very important that the girls outstrip the boys at least at this level — for very many weighty reasons. How shall we achieve that? It should not prove so difficult if society at large took its cue from what has been happening at some southern district interiors. There are areas in Gopalganj where some schools and colleges have more female enrollment than male. Beside the people there — plain peasants — being overly enthusiastic about education, a number of NGOs there have been very wisely funding the girl students' going to school and college.

From today will start that shameful abomination of newspapers informing the society about how many have been expelled from examination halls for copying. The education authorities naturally reacted very sharply to the chronic phenomenon of universal copying in almost all examination halls. And they hurried to all kinds of wrong solutions to smother the copyist examinee. What they tried was very near cutting the head off for curing the headache. They almost killed evaluation of language ability and powers of assimilation and integration — education to sum these up. We haven't yet completely recovered from that course of wrong and dangerous therapy.

The problem seems to be one of placing the cart before the horse. Of the 30-thousand-plus schools, hardly three thousand could pass if tested for the quality of education imparted. And of those teaching in these select three thousand, how many have a tolerable grasp of languages and a mind open to ideas and culture? Little education is being imparted in our institutions, and you want to test the poor students? They would be up to their unending capacity of mischief to beat the exams as long as they do not get the education to pass them squarely.

PALESTINIANS are born in tents, brought up in tents and die in tents. Earlier they die, less they suffer. Sufferings in the hand of Israelis are their lot whether in occupied territories or in Israel or in South Lebanon. They often suffer as individuals, family members, groups and even as a nation. Against this, Israelis, a wandering tribe planted by the then imperial powers in Palestine heartland and well-nourished and militarised by them enjoy nice and cosy life — the real picture of haves and have-nots.

In such a situation, violence, terrorism and all forms of anarchy are bound to rise. Both Palestinians and Israelis are on the rampage, death toll on both sides are increasing — Palestinian deaths 76 and Israeli 17 — since over 400 Palestinians were deported to South Lebanon last December. Last week two Israeli traffic policemen were ambushed and murdered at a place about 30 kms from Tel Aviv — something very ominous for Israel. They are no longer safe even within their own borders. Thus the argument for extension of borders and grabbing of more lands from Palestinians for safer Israel becomes meaningless.

ISRAELI Foreign Minister Shimon Peres wants a Middle East peace deal by the end of this year and if that means meeting directly with Palestine Liberation Organisation members like Faisal Hussein, or offering to withdraw from the Gaza Strip, so be it.

On a visit to Canada, Peres purposefully kept a measured, moderate tone despite heightened tension between Arabs and Israelis back home. He stressed his desire for peace rather than talking about drastic measures Israel had taken to quell unrest in the Occupied Territories.

And he made one of the clearest statements yet of Israel's long-term intentions in the occupied Gaza Strip: "We do not intend to remain in Gaza and I think Gaza should be returned to the Gazan people."

In an interview with The Toronto Star, Peres acknowledged he has already met with Faisal Hussein, who is a member of the PLO. Israel recently quashed a law that made it illegal to have dealings with members of the PLO but until now insisted publicly it had no direct contact with the PLO.

Peres said the Israeli delegation is free to meet with whomever it chooses and that he would gladly meet Hussein again. He would meet him, "whatever he has as a capacity. We can meet him because he's not engaged in acts of terror and he comes from the territories, he lives in the territories."

Hussein has been acting as an adviser to the Palestinian negotiating team, but because he comes from East Jerusalem, which Israel does not acknowledge as an occupied territory, he has been barred from direct talks.

Peres seemed to be signalling that could change. He said new Israeli President Ezer Weizman, who has publicly called for direct talks with the

Israel Keeps a Nation in Prison

The eruption of violence and high Israeli death toll angered Prime Minister Rabin and he ordered sealing of the borders of the occupied territories for an indefinite period. This made the whole occupied territory a vast prison — a nation in prison for violence committed by only a few. Not only this, Prime Minister Rabin relaxed rules for using firearms by Israeli army. They can now shoot Palestinians carrying firearms even without being threatened. This is dangerous encouragement for the Israeli army which is known for its brutality against the Palestinians in the occupied territories — driving Palestinian families, the old and children together, out of their homes even at mid-night on the pretext of searching for terrorists. Israeli troops enforcing the closure of Gaza Strip and West Bank carried out raids which "started before dawn of Sunday; soldiers armed with automatic rifles from their beds and children from their beds and home owners were forced to empty closets and pull apart

furniture." Rabin has also asked Israeli public "to take more responsibility for its own security and to react swiftly to attack in the street." Everybody has the right and is justified to defend himself against any attack but the word of that sort from the Prime Minister of a country may encourage people to take law into their own hands thus create a civil war situation in

Yugoslavia style war which Foreign Minister Shimon Peres warned about some weeks ago. An indefinite ban on movement of Palestinians out of the occupied territories has created serious economic problem for the population. Over 100,000 Palestinians cross over to Israel everyday for jobs as practically nothing is available in the West Bank and

fare of the people under its control, whether legally or by force, has no right to rule them. Moreover, by keeping indefinite ban on Palestinians in the occupied territories Israeli lives cannot be made safe. Thousands of Israeli settlers are in the occupied territories. Successive US administrations have made some peace efforts in the Middle-East but their peace efforts were no match for their huge military aid to Israel, which enabled this tiny nation even to produce atomic weapons. An arrogant nation with such military strength of its own cannot be serious about peace with its stone-throwing neighbours. Peace may become a possibility if US decides to put enough pressure on Israel. President Bush, for some different reasons after the Gulf war, made some serious efforts for settlement of Middle-East problems. President Clinton vowed to pursue Bush's path in the Middle-East but his vow does not to be backed by strong political actions. His reported statement that Israel has done enough on the return of depor-

tees not only goes against the spirit of the UN Security Council Resolution 799 demanding immediate return of deportees, but also encourages Israel to be more stubborn and obstinate on the issue. The issue of deportees is a serious political problem for the Palestinians and PLO. This is a fast changing political spectrum of Palestinian people in the occupied territories. As the issue has been dragged on with wide publicity to focusing on the human rights angle of the deportation, more Palestinians are turning towards Hamas, an organisation opposed not only to PLO but also to the entire peace process initiated by the US. This is a dangerous trend and it must be stopped.

The recent US proposal to have Fatah Hussaini, a prominent Palestinian leader from East Jerusalem, as the head of Palestinian delegation may prove to be a good incentive for a Palestine to join the proposed peace talk today at Washington, but to keep the process alive and make it acceptable to the majority of the Palestinians, a way must be found to have the deportees back home within an agreed timeframe and also lift the ban on West Bank and Gaza.

SPOTLIGHT ON MIDDLE EAST

Muslehuddin Ahmad

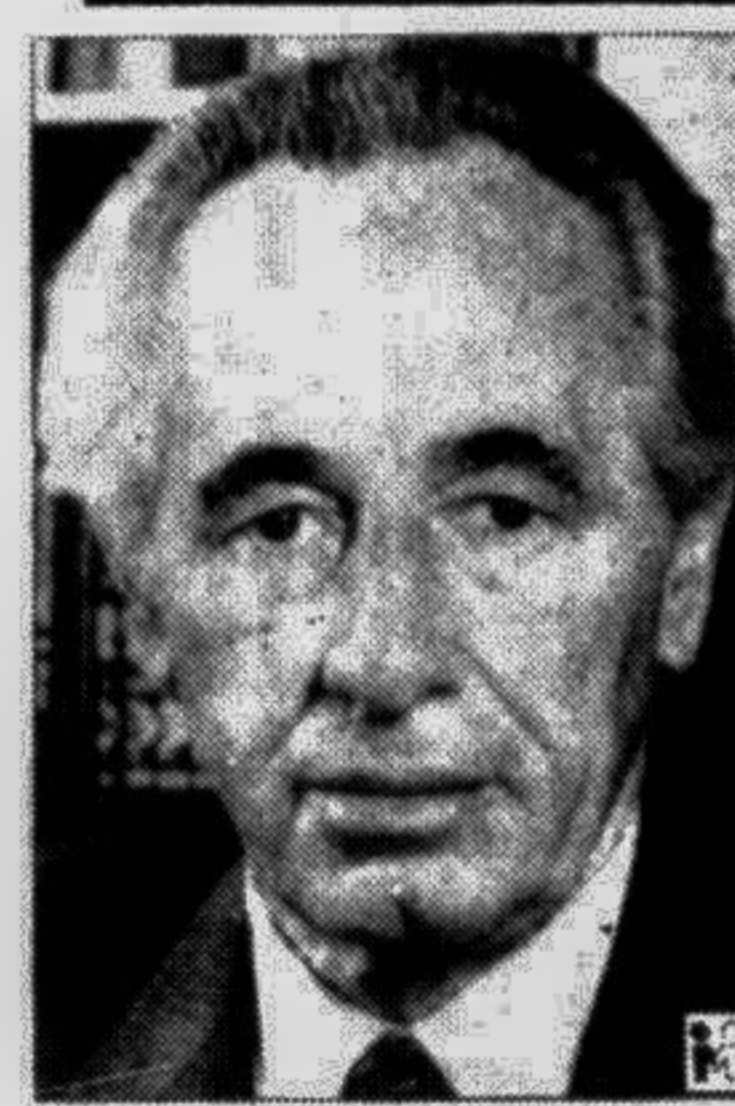
the country. Indeed, the slaying by an Israeli of an Arab who was bound hand and foot for a stabbing incident in the occupied territory was the immediate proof of someone taking law into his own hand. The Arab man who was responsible for the stabbing attack must be tried and fully punished but somebody cannot just come, shoot and kill him. Such extreme form of revenge would obviously have wider repercussions on the entire population and may lead to civil war — a

Gaza. Recently an advertisement for a "cleaning job in Gaza paying \$400 a month drew 11,466 applications." Israel occupied West Bank and Gaza in 1967 and ruled them since then practically at gun point and never bothered about their welfare. Last week Israeli Prime Minister Rabin told Israeli Parliament Knesset that he would "solve Israel's security problem before worrying about Palestinians' welfare." An authority having no desire to worry about the wel-

Peres is for Peace and Talks with PLO

Allan Thompson writes from Toronto

Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres wants a Middle East peace deal by the end of 1993. To achieve this he is ready to meet the Palestine Liberation Organisation officials. He has told journalists in a revealing interview that Tel Aviv is ready to negotiate the future of the Occupied Territories. As the stalled peace talks resume, Gemini News Service reports on the apparent change of attitude on the Israeli side.



SHIMON PERES
Gaza should be returned to the Gazan people

"Gaza should be returned to the Gazan people," Peres said in an interview with The Toronto Star. "We do not intend to remain in Gaza and I think Gaza should be returned to the Gazan people."

Peres said the Israeli delegation is free to meet with whomever it chooses and that he would gladly meet Hussein again. He would meet him, "whatever he has as a capacity. We can meet him because he's not engaged in acts of terror and he comes from the territories, he lives in the territories."

does not depend only on us," he said. On whether Israel would again expel Palestinians, rather than subjecting them to due process in Israel, Peres was non-committal: "What we are saying publicly is what we have been saying privately, namely that expulsion is not our policy, nor will it be our policy, it was an exception (in the case of the 415 Palestinians), but as long as the Palestinians cannot assure the end of terror, they cannot demand from us any other guarantees."

He made clear that "from the outset we have said that we do not intend to remain in the territories and we have suggested a solution in two stages." But when asked to define geographically what he considers to be "the territories," Peres dodged the question: "Actually our approach is not really to the territories but to the people. The problem is not the land but the population. Basically we do not want to become the dominators of the Palestinian people so this will be the guideline for us on the one hand. On the other hand, we shall surely keep those pieces of land which are needed for our security."

Peres pledged there will be firm borders — and a map of Israel — within five years. "We are using the language of (UN Resolutions) 242 and 338 calling for the withdrawal from territories and not 'the' territories and this is an important

distinction." In other words, there would not be a full withdrawal, as the Palestinian side has demanded, and Jerusalem would remain the united capital of Israel. "Basically the idea is every place where you have Arab life will be managed by Arabs. Places where you have Jewish life will be managed by the Israelis and places that do not have either Jewish or Arab life will be managed jointly."

He said Israel would not settle for a bilateral deal with Syria only, exchanging territory annexed by Israel in the Golan Heights for peace with Syria. "He added: 'We have to have agreements with all parties on all subjects.' In the first stage, 'sovereignty will remain an open question. We're not going to decide during the interim who will be the sovereign of the land. Ownership will remain unchanged. We're not going to confiscate lands. And the management will be in accordance with the People (who live there).'"

That would mean Israeli settlements in the West Bank would remain. That interim agreement, giving Palestinians autonomy, would last five years, and in year three of the deal, talks would begin on a permanent solution, Peres said.

Peres spoke of his vision of a three-way confederation of Israel, the Palestinians and Jordanians in the Benelux

model: "A political confederation with a very strong accent on economics and everybody shall keep their language, identity and flags."

When asked how Israel would deal with highly-armed Jewish settlers who oppose any territorial compromise, Peres said they would be forced to comply with the "rule of law."

Throughout his remarks, Peres referred frankly to "the territories," rather than using the biblical terms Judea and Samaria for West Bank, terminology employed by politicians who consider the West Bank an historical part of Israel.

Born in 1923 in what was then part of Poland, Peres was taken to Palestine in the early 1930s by his parents. While still a high school student he joined the Jewish underground movement Haganah. During a 1944 mission to the Red Sea Port of Eilat to gather intelligence, the 22-year-old Peres disguised himself as an Arab and spent two weeks in a British jail.

In the early 1950s Peres led arms-buying delegations to the United States and later was credited with securing France as a supplier of modern weaponry.

He had a long association with his mentor and Israel's

first prime minister, David Ben-Gurion, and as chief executive of the defence ministry in 1952, became the prime architect of Israel's weapons industry and nuclear research programme.

He was elected to the Israeli parliament, the Knesset, in 1959 and while serving under Prime Minister Golda Meir became the first minister responsible for economic development in the territories occupied after 1967.

In the 1970s, Time magazine described him as Israel's "leading hawk," but he has since come to be identified as a moderate. During his brief tenure as premier from 1984-86, Peres shocked Israelis by travelling to Morocco for a summit meeting with King Hassan, then only the second official trip to an Arab country by an Israeli leader (the first was Menachem Begin's famous trip to Egypt in 1977). He also formulated a comprehensive plan for an international peace conference, but it never materialised.

While credited with being genuinely sympathetic to the plight of the Palestinians, Peres has long rejected any role for the PLO. It was he who authorised the 1985 bombing of the PLO headquarters in Tunis by Israeli jets.

Yet he reportedly met secretly with Jordan's King Hussein in 1987 in an attempt to foster a peace accord and in later 1991, Israeli radio reported he shocked Labour party hardliners by walking into a meeting and saying he would be willing to trade occupied land in the Golan Heights for peace with Syria.

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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.

Family Planning programme

Sir, We understand that during the last two decades our successive governments have spent over sixteen thousand crore Taka on Family Planning programme. But we wonder what net result has been achieved so far? Except a few propaganda programmes on the TV and Radio and some wasteful advertisements in the newspapers, we see nothing, hear nothing and find nothing but a levathan staff strength of Family Planning Department, many of whom sitting idle most of the time without any practical work. It appears that a colossal amount of public exchequer is meant only for the payment of salary and allowances, TA, DA, bonus, honorarium and overtime allowance of the family planning personnel for their such continuous service upto the age of 57 years — without any anxiety, worries or fear.

It is said that our population growth rate has come down from 3.2 per cent to 2.4 but we strongly feel that in order to achieve better results not only the set-up, functions and responsibilities of the Family Planning Department should be reformed and recast but also the service rules and regulations (of the employees) may also be made anew consistent with the requirements of time and situation in the greater interest of public service.

I would like to suggest that the services of all employees of Family Planning programme may be made on three years

contract basis which may be renewed on year to year basis for a maximum period of twenty years or 55 years of age whichever is earlier after examining their individual half-yearly confidential reports to be prepared separately by i) Deputy Commissioner (Civil), ii) Chairman Zilla Parishad or Union Parishad and iii) District Health Officer under the chairmanship of a Member of the Jatiya Sangsad.

I would also suggest that the family planning clinic and child health care service may be merged together to make both the services more attractive, interdependent, acceptable and mass oriented.

O H Kabir
Dhaka-1203

Accountability

Sir, The president of the Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry, has sought Japanese assistance towards the performances of Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE) while speaking at the inaugural session of Japan-Bangladesh Commission.

Haji pilgrims: Accommodation

Sir, The concern of the Minister for Religious Affairs for this year's intending pilgrims regarding transport arrangement and accommodation considering respectively the adverse climatic condition of Saudi Arabia and harassment meted to non-official pilgrims by "touts and agents" in Makkah and Madina call for laudable appreciation.

I attended the Hajj Office at Mirpur on the 18th March and on enquiry with the relevant authority there whether the sum of money announced by our Government for residential accommodation was for both Makkah and Madina, the authority emphatically replied that governmental accommodation was only for Makkah. This disturbed my mind and left me puzzled, too.

A brief but categorical statement given out by the Saudi Embassy at Dhaka stated that an agreement was entered into between its Government and ours on the 13th January 1993 where it was agreed that "all Bangladeshi pilgrims must reside at the houses hired by the Government of Bangladesh with relevant authorities in Makkah Mukarramah and Madina Munawwarah" and that "no pilgrims will be allowed to hire accommodation privately."

Further, if our Government, for reasons unknown, has to deviate from the terms of the said agreement entered with the Saudi Government, it would be a moral obligation for the ministry to disclose the fact well before the commencement of the Hajj flights.

Let all the intending pilgrims take leave of their homeland with a peaceful mind, sure of a known temporary abode away from home although we know that in Makkah all pilgrims are the spiritual guests of Almighty Allah and their physical needs are merely secondary to the call of the All Merciful.

Zebunnessa Rahman
Wari, Dhaka

Export of fish

Sir, At the moment there is acute scarcity of fish in the market. As a result price of fish has gone beyond the reach of middle class people, not to speak of the commonman.

Bangladesh is reportedly exporting a substantial quantity of fish to a number of countries for earning foreign exchange. Earning foreign exchange is good but the question is, foreign exchange for whom?

Is there any point for export of fish when the commodity has become almost a dream for the common consumer? Hence it is felt that some restriction may be imposed on export of fish to bring down its price to a reasonable level. Will the concerned authorities go into it?

Saleh Ahmed Choudhury
Dhaka Cant., Dhaka

OPINION

Education Policies

CERTAINLY "consensus" and "commitment" are two funny words that are not at par with all the people anywhere in the world, not to speak of Bangladesh. Nevertheless, at the outset of 1993, we could possibly read some of the following and just try to see the nascent possibilities of their existence while formulating the education policies.

In order to make the plan "compulsory primary education" successful, the Government will need to establish more and more primary schools all over the country in phases and all the expenses ought to be meted out from the education budget. The Govt. will also meet all the expenses to run all the primary schools already built by the Govt. and to be built under the programme "compulsory primary education" during the years 1993-2000, including the books, paper, pencils etc required for the students.

It is a high time for us to accept the fact that only to make the declarations in the TV, radio, newspapers, meetings, seminars etc will not lead to the desired goals; in the past it has not been feasible nor will it be feasible now. The declarations ought to be put into action through the planned phases.

The administration ought to be equal to the declaration without failing. Now, should we desire to run the administration through the "meetings" (all our honourable Ministers/MPs/leaders/politicians are apparently very busy with the "meetings" all over the country and they seem to have little time to take care of the matter that only to make the declarations in the TV, radio, newspapers, meetings, seminars etc will not lead to the desired goals; in the past it has not been feasible nor will it be feasible now. The declarations ought to be put into action through the planned phases.

PRIMARY SCHOOLS: All expenses, including the books, paper, pencils etc for the students, to be meted out by the Govt. from the education budget. Thus the poor people shall have the chance to get the primary education all over the country.

The Govt. also ought to eliminate the term "nationalization" of the existing schools/colleges (just for the cheap popularity as we had seen in the past) since it does not help to increase the number of students nor the capacity of the schools/colleges. In fact, this policy could be termed as "wrong" in relation to the policies of the other developed countries of the world. There ought to be (a) public schools and colleges. The public schools and colleges ought to be built by the government and run by the Government.

PRIVATE SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES: All the expenses including the examination fees to be meted out by the Govt. from the education budget; however, expenses of books, paper, pencils etc. to be borne by the students.

PRIVATE SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES: The managing committees of the private primary/high schools and colleges shall arrange to meet the expenses. The Govt. ought not to subsidise the private schools and colleges. The Govt. ought to use all Govt. funds for more and more new Govt. public schools and colleges.

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