

Politicians' Role in Development

BNP Secretary General Abdus Salam Talukdar told newsmen the other day at a press conference on the concluding day of the party's council session, that from now on political leaders would oversee all development work undertaken in their respective areas for proper implementation of projects.

Addressing a workshop later in the week, Planning Minister AM Zahiruddin Khan appeared quite critical of the performance of the bureaucracy in the implementation of development programmes. Do these events portend a major change in the policy outlook on project implementation strategy?

The Secretary General of the ruling party, while explaining the decision, is said to have observed that development projects, usually taken up and supervised by civil servants, revealed a lot of flaws after completion. The Planning Minister was speaking at a workshop on structural reform for self-reliant development, organised by the Bangladesh Economic Association. As the media reports have it, he blamed the bureaucracy for failing to give any positive direction to the country, saying that less bureaucratic control encourages more development.

Slow progress in the implementation of public sector investment programme, particularly the Annual Development Plan (ADP), gives the appearance of a nearly intractable problem. Government claims to have introduced a host of improvements in the policy framework for development planning, project preparation, sanctioning procedure, fund release and so on. A system of continuous monitoring at top levels has also been instituted. Yet, project implementation continues to lag behind.

ADP implementation in the last fiscal year was no better, could even turn out to be worse, than in the preceding year. The first quarter of the current financial year is drawing to a close. However, hardly any information is available about performance during the first months of the year. It will probably take the Planning Commission several months to get full information on the pace of project implementation during this period.

To add to the woes of the policy makers, inter-service rivalries in respect of field level coordination and monitoring of development projects, are heating up. Professional bodies of the civil services other than the administrative cadre, continue to protest against empowering the Deputy Commissioners to coordinate and monitor development activities at district level. One can easily imagine, how smooth and effective coordination and monitoring of implementation of projects would be, if the tussle keeps on at the field level.

The need for people's participation in planning and executing development projects is increasingly being recognised as an essential element in ensuring success of public sector investment programmes. The donor community also seems to favour the idea of assessing the social impact of a development project through a process of consultation with the people who would benefit from it or are, for that matter, affected adversely.

Any change in the policy framework for project implementation should not only aim at improving the quality and speed of its execution but also at securing people's participation in the process. Entrusting the job of supervising implementation of development projects to the elected representatives of the people could well be a policy option in this regard. However, current thoughts on the subject do not visualize a direct integration of the politicians in government projects. Rather, it will be a voluntary supervision for improving quality of projects. At least, this is what the reports on the press conference say. Read as a tentative foray into the domain of bureaucracy, even such an approach could help bring failings of the present system to light. However, unless the parameters of voluntary supervision are clearly defined in advance, the move could also degenerate simply into interferences bringing more harm than good.

The Censors' Umpteenth Folly

The Censor Board is up to the same mischief all over again. You make a movie on the Liberation War and try to bring forth the true spirit behind that gory and glorious thing, the Censor Board will throw its weight to kill it in vitro, that is within the cans. 'Dhushar Jatra' was only a short documentary. And the censors thought the movie-makers were perhaps committing aggression on a sovereign land or demolishing something dear within their souls. After much ado and proving well the farsight behind the naming of the film, the CB let go of the piece of celluloid — a dear black and white thing with flashes of near-greatness both as a film and as a recreation of the reality of the Liberation war.

'Ekattor Jishu' was a bore of a repetition of the same shameful conduct of the censors not many of whom can perhaps pretend either to having a deep film-sense or extraordinary respect for that war. The director of that film, a leading personality in the Bangladesh theatre arena and a freedom-fighter of eminence, was all too conscious of the dangerous ground he was trudging by shooting even a foot of anything that had to do with the Liberation War. In a fantastic attempt to outflank the CB's pet phobias he deliberately chose as the locale of his story a Christian church and his main dramatis personae — churchmen. Even that failed to get the picture past the censor portals. Not before a sizeable segment of society, The Daily Star included, started moving against the totally uncalled for presumptuousness of the CB, the film could be released for public showing.

This time the censors are sitting tight on Smriti Ekattor — a documentary on the intellectual martyrs of the Liberation War who fell as victims to a murder package executed by the Al-Badr and Al-Shams. By so acting are the censors adding to the good name of our first democratically elected government in ages or improving upon the image of the same?

The problem clearly lies in the failure of many of the agencies and organs of the government to go with the best thoughts and feelings in the land — all for some mysterious backward pull as if to please quarters that were on the other side of fence during the Liberation War. The government should wake up to the dangers of this and caution the Censor Board and such other agencies against acting in their foolishness in a manner that shakes the very basics of our entity. And also never again to repeat these follies.

Something inconceivable has happened or inevitable has taken place — the debate is no longer important. Arafat has finally given the olive branch to Rabin and dropped his gun. In return, the Palestinians are about to get back some of the land Israel occupied. 'Gaza-Jericho first or last' — a valid question but needs to be put aside for the time being. Grab whatever has been offered and continue to try for the rest. So long PLO's fight was from Jordan — then from Lebanon and finally from Tunis — all foreign lands. Now the fight though of different kind could start from Jericho — a city in Palestinian homeland — something very dear to them. A homeland is very dear to any one but particularly so to the Palestinians who have been living in others' land for far too long a period and that also in unacceptable conditions. The situation since Gulf war was most agonizing — almost a Bosnian situation with the difference that here all involved were not only Muslims but also Arabs. More or less abandoned by majority of Arab countries the Palestinians had to go for the minimum which undoubtedly has sown the seeds of a Palestinian state. The process has started with Gaza — Jericho; it may be hard to stop it now.

It is totally utopian to talk about destruction of the Jewish state. The thought of war of any sort including Saddam-Gaddafi's nuclear bombs (still in their dreams) for recovering the lost land is nothing but madness. Israel has already a couple of nuclear bombs in its stock and would be enough to destroy the entire Arab world. Therefore, for Palestinians dropping of the relevant parts that mentioned destruction of

Israel

was a foregone conclusion. Indeed, Chairman Arafat renounced terrorism through a statement in 1988 and later he declared that the articles in the PLO Charter alluding to destruction of Israel were 'null and void'. But Prime Minister Rabin wanted Chairman Arafat to do it officially by dropping the relevant parts of the charter and also disavowing all forms of arms struggle including Intifada. Though only the PLO Parliament in exile can take such decision, a short-cut method through a decision by the Executive Council was adopted. Even this smaller body of 18 (only 12 participated) had acrimonious debate on this issue of momentous importance. However, the majority present agreed to authorize Chairman Arafat to sign declaration that Israel wanted. Even Arafat's Foreign Minister Farooq Kaddoumi who is known to be a moderate did not agree with the text but decided not to resign and work from within. The PLO's declaration — rather a long one recognized the right of the state of Israel to exist in peace and security and chose the path of peaceful negotiations for settling all problems thereby renouncing all forms of violence arms struggle. PLO also assumed the responsibility to discipline its dissident factions.

Norwegian Foreign Minister Johan Joergen Holst who has been assisting the PLO-Israel secret peace talks in Oslo for several weeks and was waiting in the wing during PLO Executive Council meeting did not waste any time in carrying the PLO declaration to Prime

Arafat's Fateful Decision

ugly face of M-East and usher in a new era of understanding and peaceful co-existence.

Amid mixed reactions in the occupied territories and Israel — apparently majority supporting and welcoming the present developments in the M-East peace process, one can easily detect the helplessness of the PLO and indeed very little Palestinians received out of the present deal. Israel exists and has the right to exist — some-

ment" in Gaza and Jericho. Though these suggestions may seem much beyond what Israel has agreed, PLO should stand firm on its position and continue to work ahead.

In this column I commented on March 15, 1992 — 'The US efforts in the M-East peace seem to have the best chance... It is historic opportunity for the Americans to settle the M-East problems and make their position safe in the region.' Mutual recognition by PLO and Israel created the right atmosphere for settling the M-East problems. President Clinton has rightly decided to assemble all the concerned dignitaries including five former Presidents of the US (2 reportedly declined) in the White House for Monday, September 13 (13 is unlucky for some) ceremony for signing of the M-East peace agreement between PLO and Israel. It is important that both Arafat and Rabin attend the ceremony in the White House. This ceremony would give necessary international support to both the leaders who have to implement the peace accord.

US's continued role in the days ahead appear crucial. The US "guarantee" for peace should be in the form of financial support to the Palestinians and political pressure on Israel for steady withdrawal of Israeli forces from the occupied territories. The ultimate goal has to be total Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories with the provision for the security of Israel.

Israel's initial offer of Gaza-Jericho is not without purpose. This will put Palestinians to test — whether they can live in

peace with Israelis. The Palestinians will have to go for all types of confidence building measures. Israelis including Jewish settlers will have to feel safe in the midst of Palestinians. Only such an environment can help the future negotiations.

It will be necessary to have total cooperation between PLO and Israel executives and intelligence agencies with a view to controlling the agitations and violence of the rightist elements of Israel and Palestinians. Extreme patience has to be shown in dealing with these elements. Any excess will only strengthen rightist hands and they are already too many.

The present peace arrangement, once it is signed in the White House, will be only a small step in the peace domain. Vast areas are still to be traversed — some and particularly the Syrian one immediately, otherwise, even the present step may soon meet the slippery ground. Lebanon is another. It is not Lebanon — it is Iran and the Hezbollah. Best course for Israel would be to get out of the self-declared security zone which is no security at all; it is indeed the source of all troubles for northern Israel. Once Israel leaves that strip of land, it will find cooperation from Lebanon.

Hard tasks are ahead for both Rabin and Arafat. Arafat has taken the biggest risk and put a step into the total darkness. No single political soul has ever taken so much upon himself. If US (the reason for putting the US first is obvious), Rabin and the international community keep Arafat's hands empty for too long a period even the moderates will turn radical and pick up the "gun". Arafat dropped and M-East will again burn.

stop drug barons contesting the region's eight parliamentary seats, traditionally won by them.

Says Fateh Khan Bindyal, Minister for Interior and Narcotics: "With reduced political influence because of remaining out of the assemblies, it will be easier to prosecute them."

Although the known drug dealers may be barred from the elections, the law cannot stop their relatives taking part in the electoral process. There are other cultural factors. The peculiar practice in FATA, with only tribal elders, the Maliks, having the right to vote, means drug traffickers can openly buy the voters.

The government has also promised to compile a list of politicians known to have links with the drug business. It says when the links are established they will be arrested. Says Bindyal: "We cannot do much as far as effectively stopping this killing business is concerned because of our limited time in office and the primary responsibility of holding free and fair elections."

In Pakistan elections have become so costly it is extremely difficult for genuine political figures to contest elections. In the last decade the drug mafia has continued to sponsor politicians willing to be of help once elected. This trend is unlikely to change. But, given the media exposure of drug-runners, public hatred against them is likely to grow.

— GEMINI NEWS

JAVED A MALIK is on the staff of The News, Islamabad.

ASEAN Preferential Trading Agreement (PTA) was dismissed as a joke: it lowered tariffs on such goods like snowmobiles which ASEAN states did not trade among themselves.

Despite the absence of formal agreements, intra-regional trade and investment has flourished in the last five years between Japan and the newly industrialised countries (NICs) of South Korea, Taiwan and Hong Kong, on the one hand, and would-be NICs of South-East Asia, on the other.

Analysing AFTA's prospects, Pelkmans makes a distinction between 'regionalisation' and 'regionalism'.

Pelkmans describes regionalisation as the process in which economies in a region become increasingly integrated through market forces with or without formal trade agreements between governments.

'Regionalism' refers to the process of formal integration attained through the sort of pacts that have created the European Community or is gradually forming the North American Free Trade Area.

Past ASEAN efforts to promote intra-regional trade have flopped, largely because member countries were exporting similar goods to Western markets.

The last such attempt, the

ASEAN Preferential Trading Agreement (PTA) was dismissed as a joke: it lowered tariffs on such goods like snowmobiles which ASEAN states did not trade among themselves.

Analysts warn that given the rapid changes now transforming the international economic landscape, like the emergence of China as a major trading power, AFTA is not moving fast enough.

Economists say AFTA's best hope lies in promoting trade between different segments of the same industry. But that will take off only if ASEAN governments prune down its lengthy exclusion lists and remove the protection it gives to favoured domestic industries.

Pelkmans argues that ASEAN governments should give these exclusion lists a limited life and require industries in these lists to restructure and become more internationally competitive.

The Dutch economist says without these, AFTA is likely to go the way of other failed attempts to build regional blocs.

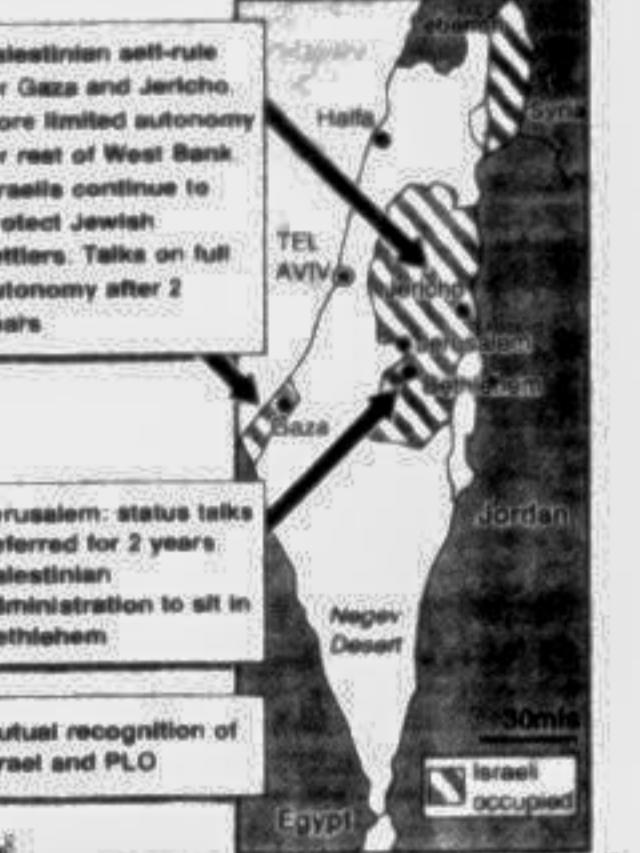
SPOTLIGHT ON MIDDLE EAST

Muslehuddin Ahmad

PLO within the M-East peace process. Thus the mutual recognition added a new chapter in the PLO-Israeli relationship — a relationship that may perhaps change the present

The Israel-PLO package

Main elements of the deal being worked out between Israel and Palestine Liberation Organisation



thing obvious but not so to its immediate neighbours — the Arabs. It was extremely important for Israel to get this recognition and it got this from the Palestinians, but what Palestinians have got? Just recognition of their representative organization PLO and not even mention of their right to self-determination let alone a Palestinian state? One may argue that PLO stands for Palestinian people and recognition of PLO means recognition of the right of the Palestinian people but such argument does not mean much to the Israelis. But as the situation stands PLO had no alternative but to grab whatever is available and hence Gaza and Jericho where they can have their legal presence.

However, one may say that Israel recognized PLO as the representative of the Palestinian people to which Gaza and Jericho are being handed over thus marking it the legal authority or even the "Govern-

ment" in Gaza and Jericho.

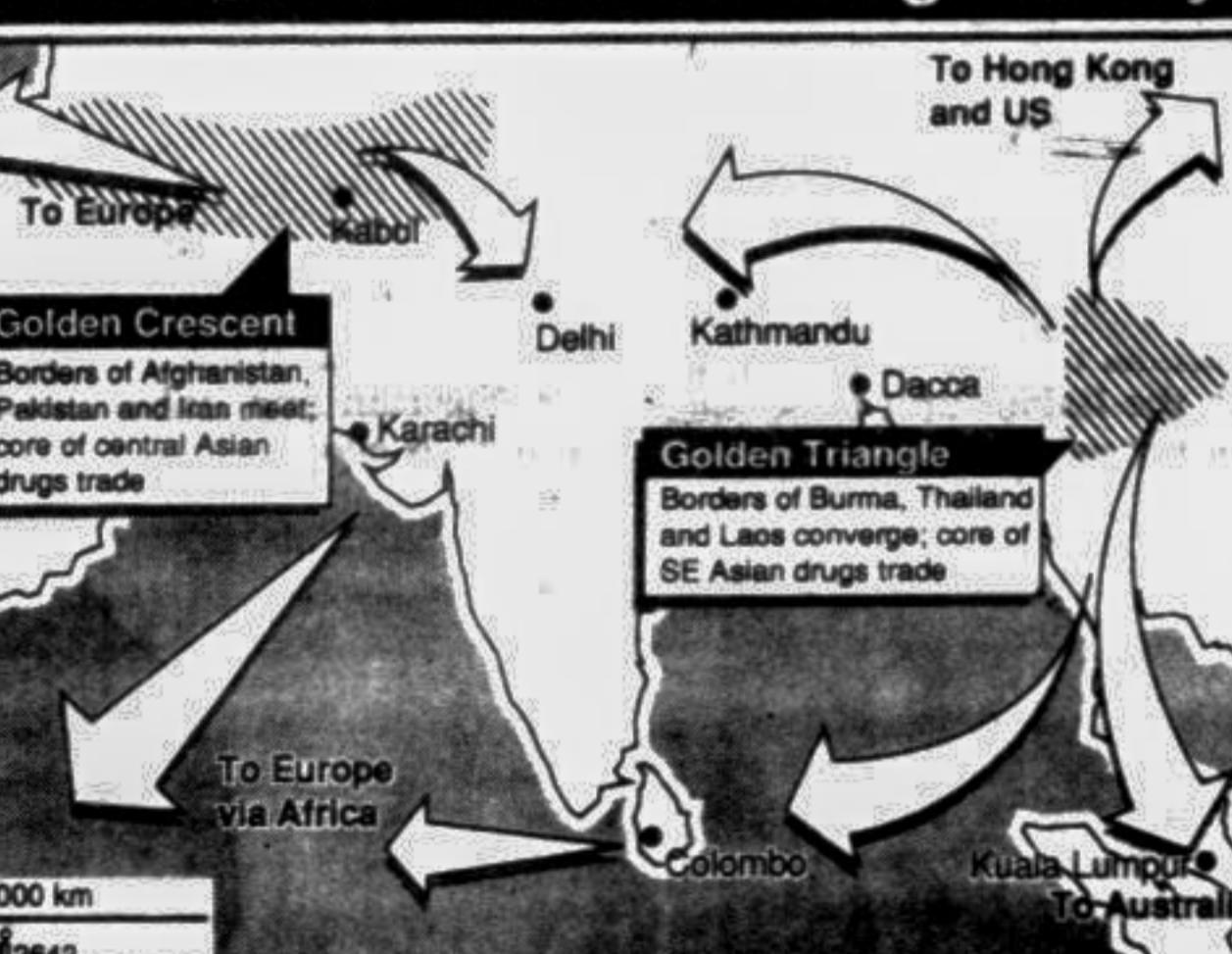
Israel's initial offer of Gaza-Jericho is not without purpose. This will put Palestinians to test — whether they can live in

Drug Money Taints Pakistan Poll Campaign

Javed A Malik writes from Islamabad

Pakistan is one of the world's largest sources of heroin production. Money from the drugs trade is increasingly being used to fight elections. The country's two main leaders, Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif, have accused each other's party of using drug money for campaigning. As politicians bicker hatred for drug-pushers among the ordinary people is growing.

Main routes of Asian drugs trade



forces in Kabul. Along with them came the international drug traders. Increasingly, Afghan-grown poppy was processed in Pakistan and smuggled abroad.

The drug business gained international focus with the onset of the Afghan war. In the early 1980s around three million Afghan refugees made Pakistan a base for guerrilla warfare against the Soviet

proxy war against communism.

During this period the two leading United States agencies, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA), were pursuing conflicting goals in Pakistan and Afghanistan. While the CIA was patronising the drug barons to ensure their loyalty

and finances for the war, the DEA was trying to reduce the production of narcotics in the region.

After the withdrawal of the Soviet army from Afghanistan in 1990, the West became less willing to let heroin smuggling go unnoticed. The continuing war among mujahidin groups and absence of an effective government in war-torn Kabul, has increased the Western pressure on Islamabad to check drug trafficking.

For Pakistani society the effects of this "export" are alarming. The heroin addict population has grown from virtually none to 2.5 million today. The enormous economic and social costs are becoming increasingly painful for a poor country with few treatment and rehabilitation facilities. The most productive section of society — the youth — are becoming increasingly addicted.

Society also has paid the political costs. The drug barons have become too rich too soon for society to sustain and have become politically influential because they need the political patronage to keep their business.

The caretaker government, in power for two months now, has already started taking steps to ensure drug barons are denied the opportunity to enter parliament. It has directed the local administration in FATA to

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