

US Veto Must Not Derail Peace Process

The peace process, though at times appeared disrupted, stalled and delayed, achieved good results — indeed so good that the Palestinian state is no longer something existing only in PLO Charter; it is now a reality and that also, as it seems, without another war.

Reducing Trade Gap

That trade imbalance between Bangladesh and India places the former at a disadvantage is long recognised. However, the conclusion of a three-day unofficial dialogue organised by the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), a Dhaka-based think tank, and participated by a sort of its counterpart in Delhi, the Centre for Policy Research, reiterates it in unambiguous terms. The growing trade imbalance is severe a stumbling block in further improving relations between India and Bangladesh.

It is indeed revealing that India's export to Bangladesh is increasing by as much as 30 per cent a year. Bangladesh's gain at the same time is virtually insignificant. The cause is not far to seek. India has not opened its market to its small neighbour adequately. Tariff and non-tariff barriers disfavour commodities from Bangladesh. The dialogue has rightly suggested the need for removing all such trade barriers by Delhi. What has remained unspoken is that Dhaka's share of export to Indian import is not going to be a staggering volume at any rate. Nor there is any possibility of an adverse impact it might leave on the huge Indian market. So Delhi does not stand to lose anything if it reciprocates Dhaka's trade liberalisation move.

The benefit, however, is likely to be mutual. It is a gesture that might remove many of the causes of mistrust and misunderstanding between the two neighbours. Such a gesture can indeed open up the floodgate of co-operation and collaboration in a whole range of trade, industrial and economic fields. As the bigger country, India should have taken the first step to boost trade and economic co-operation between the two neighbouring countries. Bangladesh needs to reduce the trade gap not only for its economic survival but also for taking in more foreign goods — Indian included. A weak economy cannot absorb goods and commodities from abroad. Like individual consumers, a country also needs to have a reasonable level of purchasing capacity. Allowing Bangladeshi goods access to Indian market will help our manufacturing base to expand, making our economy stronger, and as such able to absorb more Indian imports. Delhi would have done better, had it paid attention to this fact and acted accordingly.

Doomsday Scenario

The Worldwatch Institute, a Washington-based organisation, keeping a tab on world affairs, has painted a very grim picture of the planet we inhabit. The various developments it has recorded are all disconcerting but none so ominous as the rise of global temperature and population explosion. The earth has become warmer by .12 degrees Celsius — up from 15.20 to 15.32 degrees within a year by 1994. During the same period the world has become host to another 88 million people, bringing the total to 5.64 billion. To cite that the world is not at peace with itself, the prestigious body has put forward the case of refugees, 23 million of whom were forced last year to leave their homes for an uncertain and miserable life. To complete the list, the Worldwatch has brought to the fore the four million new AIDS cases that added up to the previous figure of 22 million.

Each one of these issues is potentially catastrophic for this globe. Keeping man at the centre of them, it is not hard to find that they are all linked to this marvellous and malicious species. To take the environmental issue, it is obvious that man's overriding concern to tame, manipulate or tinker with nature has been at the root of this natural hostility. The collection of chloro-fluoro-carbon (CFC) in the ozone layer of the stratosphere — a direct result of the release of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere by man — poses a threat of unprecedented order to his existence. Similarly, the human species is approaching towards a situation where, according to the rule of nature, anything in excess will perish.

AIDS, again, is a result of human indiscretion. Despite its talent for better things, man has indulged in actions and behaviours irreverent even for species of the lower order. These are signs that man is virtually digging his own grave. What is, therefore, needed is a review of the definition of our civilization. Discretion, a choice for simpler living and the readiness to live in peace and harmony both with the fellow beings and nature seem to hold the key to the sustainability of human civilization.

ME Crisis Averted!

In the face of a no-confidence motion that might have brought down his government, prime minister Yitzhak Rabin has suspended the expropriation of land in Jerusalem. As tension was brewing up over the confiscation of 53 hectares of land threatening the Palestinian-Israeli peace plan, this latest development in the Knesset (Israeli parliament) is most welcome. This is despite the fact that the Israeli premier had to back out under pressure.

It is indeed good to know that the Israeli parliament does not lack people who can see things or events in their right perspective. "Monumental stupidity" is how Israel's environment minister describes the confiscation move. What prompted Rabin to press for the expropriation of land, particularly at a time when the US-brokered peace agreement is charting a tortuous course, is beyond any political analysis.

Rabin, more than anyone else, needed to realise that the move could bring to nought the little confidence that was building up between the Palestinians and the Israelis. PLO chairman Yasser Arafat would have found his position weakened to the extent that his credibility and leadership among the Palestinians were in question. On the other hand, the radical groups like the Hamas were likely to gain in popularity and strength. All this is indicative of an ominous prospect of turning the region into a political cauldron once again.

The prospect, however, has not entirely vanished out of sight. Because Rabin has only stalled the expropriation plan, not abandoned it. For the peace agreement to materialise in letters and spirit, there is an urgency to give up the plan. Both vision and generosity have to be abundant in supply for a peaceful settlement of the dispute there.

THE unwavering support of the US for Israel is well-known. The major initiative of Clinton Administration supported by earlier Administration's shuttle diplomacy, for a comprehensive Middle East peace through signing of Palestinian-Israeli peace declaration in September, 1993 was the result of Washington's apparent redefined foreign policy towards the Middle East in the wake of the Gulf war and collapse of Soviet Union. Though the main objective of the US was and always is to finally and firmly establish Israel in the Middle East, the changed attitude of Washington towards the region enhanced its credibility practically from zero to the status of an honest broker among the majority Arabs including Palestinians.

This was undoubtedly an achievement of the Clinton Administration despite the sad and angry memories of the Gulf war. Apparent changed policy initiative of the US indeed, lured Arafat and his PLO into the negotiating process despite serious objections from important Palestinian leadership. The peace process, though at times appeared disrupted, stalled and delayed, achieved good results — indeed so good that the Palestinian state is no longer something existing only in PLO Charter; it is now a reality and that also, as it seems, without another war.

The foot-hold established by the PLO in Gaza and Jericho, the tiny area of West Bank is now to be expanded to several other towns and adjoining areas of West Bank. July 1 is the target date and banishing unforeseen situations, PLO will have these areas under its administration. PLO negotiators fought

a veritable battle, luckily not a war, with Israelis to achieve this much. Although slow, progress was not that bad, expansion of the self-rule areas and Palestinian election to follow soon. This should be seen against the worst: Biblical land not to be ceded, come what may — a position that was taken by the Likud Party.

In the backdrop of all these, negotiations on the final status of Jerusalem in an year's time. Labour Party's own limited governing period etc. apparently led Prime Minister Rabin to go for the final crunch for expropriations of Palestinian land in East Jerusalem. Rabin's hurried and desperate action despite opposition from some leftist members of his own coalition government and Israeli peace activists was apparently based on his effort to please Israeli rightist voters as general election is not far off. The other idea is to grab as much land as possible before losing East Jerusalem to the Palestinians which is almost certain as otherwise peace will be nowhere.

Rabin could also see the obvious support from US Congress. Indeed, the US Congress was one step ahead of Rabin as majority leader and next Presidential candidate, Robert Dole, with a view to catching Jewish votes, already initiated a bill in the Congress for forcing US Administration to transfer its embassy from Tel-Aviv to Jerusalem by 1997.

Against these developments, US veto on UN Security Council resolution calling on Israel to rescind its order of expropriation of Palestinian

land was not unexpected. Though highly regrettable it was, the first US veto in five years and first in Clinton Administration, which went against the will of the international community. The US could have easily avoided the veto, a veto apparently under US Congress pressure as the resolution was to call on Israel to rescind its order of expropriation — a resolution Israel would have ignored anyway as it has been doing for decades. The US representative's argument against the resolution that 'The Council sought to

fully supported the resolution but unfortunately not the US — the principal broker of the Middle East peace process. Probably, one could expect different action of the US administration if the political configuration of the US Congress had not changed.

European Union officials were highly critical of the US veto. A senior official said, 'I think this was outrageous. It puts us completely at loggerheads with them, we are furious at both the Israelis and the Americans'. As it seems, the European Union's proposed

May, 1996 as per Washington agreement. Faisal Hussein said, 'May be in one year I'll find no land to talk about'. Hussein's proposal was rejected by both Israel and the US.

Faisal Hussein and some other Arab leaders, already warned Israel and the US about new intefada and terrorism attacks on Israeli and US targets unless Israel refrained from implementing the land confiscation order. One simply wonders why the US has put itself into such a dangerous situation when the diplomatic escape without antagonizing Israel was possible. Even now the US can go for a rescue by asking Israel not to go ahead with the project or at least delay its implementations till the determination of Jerusalem's final status. What purpose this extra piece of land will serve if this poses a serious threat to the lives of the people?

In the meantime, Arab League Secretary General has been very active and consulting League members to have an Arab Summit by the end of the month to consider Arab response to Israel's confiscation of Palestinian land. Though one or two members and particularly Syria has not yet said 'yes' to joining the Summit, it seems that majority supported the idea and the summit is likely to be held by the end of this month or early next month. Though the Palestinians are the worst sufferers and Arafat felt terribly disappointed by the US veto, they should not support the strategy of totally severing Arab ties with Israel as suggested by

some Arabs. The idea of Arab solidarity is good but unfortunately this has really not been operative for sometime and particularly due to Gulf war. Indeed, PLO's peace declaration and establishment of self-rule in Gaza and Jericho, Jordan's total peace overture to Israel and Syria's slow but steady peace negotiations etc. have been moving on in separate tracks without any umbrella support of 'Arab Solidarity'. But some form of Arab Solidarity is now likely and desired too as the issue of Jerusalem is very crucial and something that concerns everyone.

But keeping in view the overall objective of regaining East Jerusalem, if not entire Jerusalem, from Israel, the peace process must be allowed to continue; there is absolutely no other way to achieve this. Arab League should continue to put pressure on the US and also ask Israel to rescind its order of confiscation of Palestinian land for the sake of peace and also to show respect to the will of the international community as reflected in the latest UN Security Council resolution which could not be officially adopted due to US veto. Arab League should once again confirm and indeed renew Palestinians' claim on the confiscated land. As Israel has reportedly decided to go ahead with this confiscation, Palestinians' claim on land must remain on the table and appear in the ensuing negotiations on final status of Jerusalem.

The column was written before Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin halted the expropriation of Arab land to block no confidence motion against his government



Spotlight on Middle East
Muslehuddin Ahmad

declare itself on a permanent status issue — Jerusalem seems misplaced. Indeed, the status quo was disturbed by Israel's own action as it went for confiscation of mostly Palestinian land measuring over 131 acres and US veto confirmed such illegal action of Israel in the occupied territories before negotiations of final status of Jerusalem in May, 1996.

The UN being the world body had already passed many resolutions on Israel's occupation of Palestinian land including asking Israel to vacate occupation and it could not keep quiet on such blatant violation of international law. All the members of the Council including the allies of the US

trade agreement with Israel would now be postponed probably until the determination of the final status of Jerusalem, a holy city dear to the people of all three religions — Muslims, Christians and Jews.

There has been wide ranging angry reactions and condemnations from the Palestinians and other Arab countries. Arabs and European Union members are of the view that Israeli and US actions would damage the prospects of the Middle East peace process. In Montreux, Switzerland, Faisal Hussein who is in charge of Multilateral peace negotiations proposed immediate bilateral talks on final status of Jerusalem which would otherwise take place in

IVT Can Build Confidence in the Vote Counting Process

by Feroz M. Hassan

In Bangladesh the election authorities by law are obliged to provide a tally sheet of votes counted in each polling centre to the candidate or his polling centre agent. When all these tally sheet are brought to the party office and tabulated by the party workers this can be called IVT. So there is nothing, new about IVT.

THERE has been a lot of talks about Parallel Vote Tabulation (PVT) or Independent Vote Tabulation (IVT) in the news media as well as in the political circles. This is being discussed because Fair Election Monitoring Alliance (FEMA), a broad-based citizens coalition formed to monitor the next general election in the country, is planning to conduct an IVT on the election day as part of its election monitoring activities.

Now let us explain what is IVT, in the context of election monitoring, and its purpose including information as to how it is carried out.

During the past decade, non-partisan election monitoring both by international and national observers has grown increasingly sophisticated. Election observers are no longer limiting themselves to observing the election day mechanics, but are now evaluating elections in their totality. In order to properly assess the elections, observers must now consider the quality of the voter list, the nature of the campaign period, the integrity of the polling and counting procedures, and the willingness of the people to accept the results.

The lion's share of the monitors' attention, however, still goes to monitoring the balloting and vote counting process, the stages where chicanery is most likely to occur. Mere suspicions of fraud, if sufficiently widespread, can discredit an election and undermine the legitimacy of its result. Thus domestic election monitoring groups and international observers have striven to develop effective means for evaluating how ballots are counted and the results are tabulated.

Various terms are being used by the monitoring groups

to describe the process whereby election monitors record results after monitoring the vote counts from individual polling centres and comparing these findings with official results. We prefer the term 'independent' vote tabulation, however, in many countries it is called 'parallel' vote tabulation.

What exactly is Independent Vote Tabulation (IVT)? An IVT is a method for monitoring and independently verifying the process of counting ballots in an election. It is separate and 'independent' from the official vote counting process. An IVT focuses on the final number of actual votes that are counted by election officials.

What is the purpose of IVT? An IVT verifies the accuracy of the results reported by the electoral authorities as these results are counted at different polling centres and tabulated by the Returning officer at the local level and transmitted from local level to central level i.e. the Election Commission's office at Dhaka.

According to FEMA, if properly implemented, IVT can help to do the following:

1. Deter fraud by increasing the prospect that manipulation during the tabulation process will be discovered;
2. Suggest a 'true' vote count when fraud is attempted;
3. Help candidates, political parties and their agents to believe in, and accept, the official results if they are consistent with FEMA IVT counts.

The IVT has helped in building confidence and faith in the electoral process, thereby contributed to making

elections free and fair in many countries of the world. One best example, is the Philippines where an IVT conducted by NAMFREL indicated that opposition had won, whereas the electoral authorities' result showed victory for the Marcos. Thus IVT unveiled rigging in the elections.

The organizers of the NAMFREL, a citizens coalition for fair elections of encouraged all parties to participate in the elections, and sought to organize a comprehensive election monitoring operations. NAMFREL was able to mobilize over 500,000 volunteers on election day. In 1986 presidential elections, NAMFREL volunteers conducted an IVT covering about 70 per cent of the polling centres, which showed Corazon Aquino leading over Marcos. The official results done by COMELEC (the election authority) showed Marcos as victor. However, the NAMFREL results were finally accepted as more credible and Marcos had to step down.

The June 1990, Bulgarian elections exemplify on the other hand how a IVT can also help to convince a disappointed opposition to accept an unexpected ruling-party's victory. Drawing on the experience of Philippines, and many other countries which organized election monitoring activities, civic activists in Bulgaria formed Bulgarian Association for Fair Elections (BAFE) in April 1990. BAFE recruited and trained more than 10,000 volunteers to monitor the elections and conduct an IVT on election day as part of its activity.

In order to carry out the

IVT, BAFE had to overcome considerable government suspicion. However, on the election night, when the Central Election Commission announced that BSP was leading the elections and not the opposition UDF there were lot of tension among the people specially the supporters of the opposition party UDF. But, finally by midnight the BAFE conducted IVT also showed victory of BSP, the opposition leaders accepted the results and began to plan for the next elections.

It is known to many that in the developed countries like the United States and Europe, besides the political parties and candidates, the media organization and even academic researchers often compile unofficial tallies of election returns. The parties or candidates do it because they need to know how they are doing in the particular elections. The media do it to analyse and make news reporting for the public, while research organization use it for evaluating the public opinion and trends.

In Bangladesh the election authorities by law are obliged to provide a tally sheet of votes counted in each polling centre to the candidate or his polling centre agent. When all these tally sheet are brought to the party office and tabulated by the party workers this can be called IVT. So there is nothing, new about IVT.

However, this tabulation when done by party/candidate is essentially a partisan act and as they have interest in winning the elections, therefore it will be less acceptable in case the official counts of the Election Commission will be

challenged for any reasons.

The situation that now prevails in Bangladesh is very critical as there exist mutual mistrust among the political parties. Controversy surrounding the BNP victory in the last March Maguara-2 by-elections prompted reciprocal allegations of political interference and procedural impropriety in elections by the government and opposition parties, and fueled the political impasse on election issue that continues to dominate national politics.

The next parliamentary election is very crucial so far the continuity of democracy and the constitutional process in Bangladesh is concerned. The elections, even though dates are still uncertain, will be held amidst suspicion, mistrust and a very politically charged atmosphere among the political actors. It is therefore, very important that the election is not only held and conducted free and fair by the authorities, but must also be seen and believed to be free and fair by a majority of the population in the country.

In such a situation the organizers of FEMA believes that independent election monitoring by a credible citizens

group will help improve the prospects for a free and fair elections in the country. Of course, such a citizens' group should be neutral and non-partisan. Further, according to FEMA, as a part of the election monitoring operation, 'the IVT can assure all political actors, parties and candidates that all the votes will be properly counted and also accurately tabulated and if fraud is committed in the counting process it will be uncovered.'

Recently, MSS/SG which works as an election watchdog in Bangladesh applied IVT process in one of the by-elections and the results were found to be very encouraging.

Finally, IVT can also encourage participation by convincing prospective voters that their ballots will be accurately tabulated; deter fraud by increasing the prospect that it will be uncovered; reveal manipulated vote totals; promote the reporting of timely and credible, albeit unofficial results; and provide a focus for election monitors.

The writer is the Secretary General of FEMA and has wide experience in election monitoring both at home and abroad.

CROSSCURRENTS by CAP Dowlah will be published tomorrow.

To the Editor...

Budget opinion

Sir, Opinions regarding the forthcoming 1995-96 budget is a thoughtful action on the part of your newspaper.

The interview of Mr S M Ziaul Huq on 16 May, 1995 could have been interesting and thought-provoking though the questions were a bit trite. Mr Ziaul Huq, Chairman of the Truck & Bus Owners' Association had many predictable answers which lacked depth and economic insight. The disturbing facet of the replies was the inevitable 'The Government should do this or else.....'

A sweeping declaration that duty/tax waiver must be implemented on tyres and spares smacked of personal interests since Mr Huq is himself involved in bus body building. He ought to have mentioned the perspective number of vehicles he plans to fabricate and not left the option absolutely open. The threat, if it can be called that, to raise bus fares by 25 per cent was puerile. One would have expected that the Chairman of a fairly influential sector in the transport business ought to have thought out his replies.

Regarding the political situation his response was something which anybody could

have echoed. The readers of your daily hope that questions are relevant and the answers intelligent. The suggestion to send in passport size photographs will activate publicity seekers.

Tareq M Feroze
Dhaka

Imran's marriage

Sir, The whole of last week (with move following) has seen newspapers being dominated by news and analysis of superstar Imran Khan's marriage to the Jemima Goldsmith, drawing much unwanted criticism from a bunch of narrow-minded people in Pakistan and England. They have no right to denounce his bride, as it is entirely his personal affair. In any case, whether Jemima had converted or not, this marriage was very much legal as Islam allows Muslim men to marry Muslim, Christian or Jewish women. Also, I find no logic to suggestions that he'd have married a poor girl who can't pay dowry — in that case, he'd have been marrying out of sympathy for her status, and not out of love. But what about millions of other's who cannot pay their dowry? Neither is there any ground to call it 'disgracing Pakistan (?)' at an

international level! Those people in Pakistan and Britain were only projecting the negative reactions and unfairly gave the impression that by marrying a Westerner, it'd end or hamper 'his political ambitions' (he never said that) — didn't Rajiv Gandhi become the Prime Minister? Did King Hussein of Jordan abdicate his throne?

More than the women, the men are jealous and only imbecile people write off Imran's commitment and devotion to his people and Pakistan. He was always a hero. He always shall be.

Ayesha Farzana
Sattamsjid Road, Dhaka

Kashmir crisis

Sir, India wants the subjugation of Kashmir and the Kashmiris want freedom. Who is right? The latter, of course.

The people of the whole world support the human rights and freedom for the Kashmiris and for that matter others so subjugated anywhere in the world. But it is very strange that some Indian leaders start shouting 'wolf' wolf pointing their fingers towards Pakistan whenever the Kashmiris try to

break the shackle of Indian occupation.

This is happening for the last four decades. Thousands of Kashmiris have been killed and maimed by the Indian soldiers but their freedom struggle continues unabated. Surely day shall dawn one day for them too, like India herself, Bangladesh and many other countries which won freedom after great sacrifices. India cannot overlook the history.

We strongly condemn the desperation and burning of the Charar-e-Sharif shrine complex and large scale killing of the Kashmiris by the Indian troops.

It appears that following sacrifice of thousands of Sikhs in Punjab, demolition of Babri Mosque in Ayodhya, and now the carnage of Charar-e-Sharif, the New Delhi leaders have lost their senses, and they have threatened Pakistan to occupy Azad Kashmir. Are not they fueling the crisis?

We would request them to follow the advice of the ancient Chinese philosopher Confucius who said, 'Do not do unto others that you do not like others to do unto you'

Art Buchwald's COLUMN

How Sick are You?

EVERYONE is talking about Medicare and the costs of health care.

Intense on cutting costs, health insurance companies are now dictating the amount of time a patient can stay in the hospital. There is tremendous pressure on hospitals to toss patients out as fast as possible.

Thus the demands of the insurance industry are forcing new methods on everyone in dealing with the sick.

I paid a visit to Our Lady of Beth David in Doubleton, Md. and it was an eye-opening experience.

Nancy Webking, the hospital director, told me, 'We have no choice. If we don't get rid of our patients by their insurance deadlines, we're stuck with their bill.'

'How do you get them out on time?'

'Through innovation. For example, we can now discharge someone who has had a triple bypass operation in one hour and three minutes.'

'That's miraculous,' I said.

Nancy explained, 'We built a chute from the operating room, and as soon as the surgery is completed we slide the patient straight down into the parking lot.'

'Doesn't the patient have any time in the recovery room?'

'Not unless his insurance policy specifies it.'

That must really hurt you

to have to discharge a patient so soon.'

'We don't enjoy it, but we have no say anymore as to who stays in the hospital and who goes.'

'Suppose a patient is really sick with a high fever and can't eat any food, would you still discharge him?'

'We'd call his health insurance company and let it make the decision. It employs high school tenth-graders part-time to man its phones. They are the ones who have the final say on major medical decisions.'

'Do you ever get lucky and admit a patient whose policy entitles him to stay in the hospital for more than 48 hours?'

Nancy sighed, 'No, but we had a patient once who couldn't pass a kidney stone. He was in so much pain that he said he would pay for the room out of his own pocket. So he stayed for two days and became like one of the family. He was such a nice man that we didn't charge him for his hospital room.'

'What has happened to your staff because of the austerity? Have you cut back on nurses?'

'We can't because you never know when we'll get a patient who is covered by both Medicare and Blue Cross — and is entitled to stay in the hospital a full week.'

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