

ME Peace Process after Yitzhak Rabin

Even in the sea of sadness around the funeral Israeli leadership expressed happiness over the presence of important Arab leaders which they justifiably see as the result of their peace efforts.

A young Jewish extremist gunned down Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin on November 4, 1995 at the end of a historic peace rally where Rabin sang a peace song with over hundred thousand participants. His tragic death stunned the entire Israeli nation and shocked all peace loving people around the world. The killer Yigal Amir is a law student at Tel-Aviv Bar-Ilan University which is known to be a hot house of extremism. Assassin Amir told police while in custody: "I acted on God's order and I have no regrets." He is a known religious extremist and has been at the root of many settlers' fights with Palestinians and also with Israeli police on duty in settlements. If all Israelis whether fanatic or lunatic can have guns the result is obvious. Serious questions have also been raised regarding utter failure of the Israeli security service - probably best in the world - certainly the best against Palestinians, to provide proper security to country's Prime Minister. The sacred belief that no Jew can kill a Jew now seems shattered. Though some killings reportedly took place in pre-Israel days, this is the first tragic incident in Israel involving the life of the Prime Minister of Israel. Middle East peace process sharply divided the Israeli society and the opposition Likud's uncontrolled rhetoric against Labour Party's peace agreement with Palestinians

apparently encouraged the religious fanatics to go for violence. Indeed, Leah Rabin, the wife of the assassinated Prime Minister directly accused Likud party for using "very very violent expressions" in the Knesset, which led to such tragic incident. In the morning of the same day and even earlier Likud party activists demonstrated in front of Yitzhak Rabin's residence and accused Rabin with treason for which they shouted - 'you should be hanged'.

There was explosion of grief and anger in Israel on Rabin's assassination by another Jew. Israelis may now realise that fanaticism exists not only across the border in another religion but within their society and in their religion too. And that also for the land - the land that Jews claim as the Biblical land - a religious belief but for the Arabs it is their homeland which now stands occupied. It is Yitzhak Rabin who as chief of army staff during 1967 Arab-Israel war grabbed the land and it was he who thought it was time to give the land back to the Palestinians. Yitzhak Rabin said: "..... there is time for war and there is time for peace." He was a tough General who fought back to Jerusalem in 1948 where he was born. He was a recent convert to peace

— peace for land — the vision provided by Shimon Peres, the Israeli Foreign Minister and both formed the solid partnership for peace. Yitzhak Rabin has just been laid to rest. The formal ceremony was attended by over 60 world leaders — kings, presidents, heads of state, prime ministers and other dignitaries from around the world. Chairman Arafat did not attend as the PLO authorities decided apparently

get Mubarak in Jerusalem when he was alive despite repeated invitations; only death brought them together in Jerusalem. Oman and Qatar also sent delegations. Thus this tragic death brought some important Arab leaders to Jerusalem. Even in the sea of sadness around the funeral Israeli leadership expressed happiness over the presence of important Arab leaders which they justifiably see as the result of their



Spotlight on Middle East Muslehuddin Ahmad

in consultation with Israeli leadership against Arafat's attending the funeral because of serious political and security problems. However, Arafat indirectly attended the formal ceremony by watching funeral live on television. He, however, sent a Palestinian delegation to the funeral. King Hussein of Jordan attended the funeral. He indeed became first and not Arafat to reach Jerusalem since 1968 war during which Jordan was thrown out of Jerusalem and West Bank. President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt also attended the funeral. Yitzhak Rabin could not

seemed to have encouraged so many world leaders and particularly the Arab leaders to attend the funeral of a man who gave his life for peace. This should be the message to the people of Israel as well as to the opposition Likud party. Likud now seems to be on the dock and it is likely to lose support of much of Israeli population. Israeli people are also likely to be more watchful of the ultra rightists. Above all Israeli government is now expected to take tough actions against the peace disruptionists including the settlers. All these and Shimon Peres's own vision of peace will lead him to the peace path even more vigorously. He seems to have full support of his colleagues in the Labour Party. Next year's election may not slow down the peace process as Peres already said: "Peace is more important than winning the election." This may indeed improve his party's election prospects. Israeli public in general are likely to be influenced by Rabin's supreme sacrifice for peace in making their decisions in the next general election. Labour party will surely capitalise on this. Above all the most important is US's support for peace — indeed for comprehensive ME peace and particularly President Clinton's personal commitment to peace which would now be strengthened due to this tragic event and also for avoiding others. Thus the ME peace process remains on hopeful track.

President Bill Clinton appeared to have provided

leadership in the funeral. His funeral speech was obviously full of expressions of friendly sentiments to Yitzhak Rabin but also something reassuring to the Israelis. He said, among other important things: "..... we will not fail you, we will not be forsaking you...." This will undoubtedly strengthen Acting Prime Minister Shimon Peres's hand in pursuing the peace process. Though Israel is still in deep shock, and official mourning continues, Acting Prime Minister Shimon Peres said, peace momentum must be maintained. He also said: "It was the funeral of the man who led to peace but not a funeral of the peace process." This is seen as his strong determination to go ahead with the peace process. Israeli authorities confirmed that the re-deployment would resume immediately and be completed on schedule. The Palestinian election will take place in January, 1996, the release of prisoner will continue and the transfer of power will take place as stipulated in the agreement. Being almost sure that he is going to be confirmed by the Knesset as the Prime Minister within a couple of days, he has taken all possible steps to expedite the peace process. Indeed, peace process

US Congress Urged to Pass Immigration Reform Bills

Wendy S Ross writes from Washington

THE House Judiciary Committee has completed work on legislation to overhaul the nation's laws on legal and illegal immigration, and the Clinton administration supports much of what the bill contains. Doris Meissner, the commissioner of the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), said the administration "welcomes the passage of important immigration legislation" which reflects much of its programme on immigration. She said she hopes Congress this year will enact the legislation to provide INS with additional tools and resources "to build a seamless web of enforcement from the border to the workplace."

The legislation would scale back legal immigration and provide new tools to combat illegal immigration, including provisions making it tougher for illegal aliens to get jobs and easier for authorities to exclude or deport them. The bill would make it harder to qualify for refugee status. Meissner said that "many of the provisions in H.R. 2202 advance the administration's comprehensive strategy to control illegal immigration by regaining control of the nation's borders, removing the job magnet through work site enforcement, and aggressively pursuing the removal of criminal aliens and other illegal aliens."

Key enforcement provisions of the bill include: additional border patrol agents, expedited exclusion procedures and increased penalties to combat alien smuggling and the use of fraudulent documents, and special removal procedures for alien terrorists. Meissner noted that "President Clinton has made clear that we need legislation to reduce the level of legal immigration... in a manner consistent with principles that are pro-family, pro-work and pro-naturalization."

She said the administration remains "concerned" about several issues in the bill which may compromise the ability of the United States to effectively enforce its immigration laws "and we remain committed to reform of legal immigration that reflects the principles that we support. We look forward to working with the Congress to address those issues."

Meissner praised Congress for using the appropriations process to respond to the administration's call for resources to support the new initiatives and ongoing activities in the immigration area. — USIS WENDY S ROSS IS USIA Congressional Affairs writer.

Devastating Cyclone of 1970 : The Nightmare Still Haunts Needed a Cost-effective Disaster Preparedness Programme

by Md Saidur Rahman

BANGLADESH is a country prone to disasters, both natural and man-made. Every year it is affected by one or more number of natural disasters e.g. cyclones, floods, tornadoes, droughts etc. The under-developed physical infrastructure and marginal economic condition of the poor make them more vulnerable to the effects of disasters. The devastating effect of the severe cyclone of November 12, 1970 was the worst in the recorded history. Half a million people were killed in one night. Damage done to crops and properties was simply colossal.

programme volunteers were recruited from every village in the coastal belt and offshore islands and trained in the dissemination of warning signals received from Meteorological department, rescue of people and to provide first aid to the injured. Emphasis and importance on mitigation and preparedness programme against cyclone were reduced as there were no major cyclone till May 1985. The severe cyclone of April 1991, which killed 138,000 people in the south-eastern coastal belt of Bangladesh, brought back the key planner and actors to action. The newly elected Government of Bangladesh in 1992, constituted a Task Force with members drawn from government departments, NGOs and donor agencies. A multipurpose cyclone shelter study was conducted by professional engineers and economists of the country. The study recommended a series of measures including construction of 2500 shelters, making of feeder roads, etc. The total cost of the project is estimated to be Tk 1500 crore. A number of organisations including Government, Red Crescent Society and NGOs have so far constructed over 600 multipurpose cyclone shelters. Due to lack of effective coordination and control, these shelters varied in designs, sizes and costs significantly. The selection of sites for the construction of the shelters did not always have the proper justification. It is alleged that 100 of 300 school-cum-cyclone shelters constructed by the Ministry of Education under financial grants from the Government of Saudi Arabia have been constructed outside the high risk cyclone areas.

The Water Development Board has been constructing embankments to protect the coast from the water surge accompanied with cyclones. But due attention was not given in the repair of embankments affected by the cyclones all over the coast. The coastal afforestation programme is moving at a snail's speed. The traditional knowledge of the people living in the coastal belt has not been taken into consideration in the selection of the species of plants/trees to be planted. We know that even with the application of modern science and technology, cyclones cannot be prevented. But the effects of cyclones could be reduced significantly in two ways: by structural and non-structural means. The first one includes mainly construction of dykes, embankments, shelters, strong community houses, elevated roads etc. The latter involves development of awareness of the common people leading to their enhancement of capacity to cope and live with disasters. The structural solution costs millions of dollars in construction which perhaps a country like Bangladesh with minimum financial resources cannot afford. Most of our means and efforts should be geared to the non-structural solution which costs little but contributes to the empowerment of the poor.



Of course, we cannot stop this from happening but, certainly, can much reduce the scale of damage.

only to the dissemination of warning signal in time of disaster. They have no role in the pre-disaster preparedness of the family and the community or in the post-disaster relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction programmes. The Government of Bangladesh has appreciated the need for pre-disaster preparedness and has taken a number of promising and encouraging steps. The name of the Ministry of Relief and Rehabilitation has been changed to the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief. The control room located at the ministry has been strengthened with the addition of electronic equipment e.g. SSB radio sets, fax, telex etc. The most significant step is the establishment of the Disaster Management Bureau (DMB) outside the secretariat area for easy inter-action with NGOs and other private organizations. The DMB, a product of UNDP funded study has a four million dollar project for three years. The donor organisations which have committed funds to DMB are UNDP, UNICEF and ODA. The project has an important component of massive public awareness programme starting from the lowest level in the field (Union Parishads) upto the Chief Executive of the country. With the financial support of UNICEF, a three-year plan for training of members of Union Disaster Management Committee, Thana Disaster Management Committee, District Disaster Management Committee as a pilot project in four cyclone prone districts has been prepared. Voluminous modules for the training courses have also been prepared by professional experts in the country. The DMB has already orga-

nized over forty workshops, seminars and training courses at union, thana and district levels. Due to constraint of funds available from the donors, this very important aspect of training and public awareness programme has been slowed down. The Private Voluntary Development Organisations (PVDOs) in this country, primarily engaged in the socio-economic development of the poor, have earned credibility in immediate intervention with emergency relief and rehabilitation support in post-disaster situation. But pre-disaster preparedness is a pretty new concept to most of them. Some of the organisations e.g. OXFAM, IVS, DACT and Bangladesh Disaster Preparedness Centre (BDPC) have been conducting research, studies and training courses on pre-disaster preparedness specially family level coping mechanism and survival techniques against cyclones. The results of several studies and long years of experience in the field have shown that for the most cost-effective disaster management programme in Bangladesh what is needed

and dramas, religious functions etc. The model of promotion of ORS (Oral Rehydration Salt) by BRAC could be used for successful implementation of IPC programme. Bangladesh Disaster Preparedness Centre (BDPC), with financial support from UNICEF, has conducted a thorough study in the island of Hatiya under the district of Noakhali and prepared a project on family and community level disaster preparedness in line with the marketing plan mentioned above. It has been found that such public awareness programme through IPC supported by media campaign for period of one year would cost only Tk 30/- per person. Donors and policy makers should appreciate that investment in pre-disaster preparedness has been proved to be much more cost-effective than that in the post-disaster relief and rehabilitation operations.

In a country like Bangladesh, with limited resources and heavy dependence on foreign aid, we should opt for the cost-effective capacity enhancement and empowerment programme for the poor rather than very capital intensive and expensive structural solutions. The Government of Bangladesh and PVDOs oper-

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Photos Courtesy — CDL Dhaka.

ating in high risk areas should integrate the disaster management components in all their development programmes. All the civil servants and PVDO workers posted in vulnerable areas must be trained in disaster management. The criticism on spending over 600 crore takas in the study phase of Flood Action Plan is still fresh in our minds. It is hoped that the Government should develop disaster management programmes based on experience of indigenous people who are facing disasters for hundreds of years rather than theoretical advice and guidance given by expensive expatriate consultants. The author of this article is the former Country Representative of OXFAM in Bangladesh and Somalia. At present he is the Director of Bangladesh Disaster Preparedness Centre (BDPC).



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