

Pakistani High-handedness

Having failed to deal with the MQM, the Pakistani government did, what governments all over the world are prone to do, victimise the innocent and the weak. Within weeks of the declaration by the interior minister of Pakistan that there are a large number of illegal Bangladeshis there, 145 of them have been picked up, and sent to Bangladesh without so much as talking to our government. Under normal circumstances when a country, with whom we are supposed to have friendly relations, decides to proceed on a sensitive issue like that of illegal immigrants, it starts by informing our embassy about the nature and extent of the problem. Then specific cases are brought out and discussed, and then a course of action is taken. Even if the two sides disagree, there is at least some formality, and diplomatic moves precede a precipitate action, like the one we saw on Saturday. We are not aware that any such attempt was made by Pakistan.

By all norms of diplomatic behaviour Pakistan's move was a high-handed one, to put it extremely mildly. We all know that the question of Bengali-speaking people living in Pakistan is not a simple one. During our 24 years of existence as a part of Pakistan, lakhs went over and settled there. Immediately after liberation, and some time later, many people took up residence in Pakistan to join families and to link up with near and dear ones. There was a sizeable number who opted for Pakistan out of a conviction. All these people have been settled there long time ago, and have by now become Pakistani.

The underlying question is, what has triggered the current Pakistan outrage against the innocent people who ended up at ZIA on Saturday? Simply put, it is the government's failure to quell the Muhajir uprising, which has been going on for many years now. Spearheaded by MQM, the political organisation of the immigrant population, they have been demanding equal political and economic opportunities as enjoyed by the rest of the Pakistanis.

By this move Pakistan is giving an ethnic colour to what is fundamentally, a political and economic problem. Having failed to negotiate with them, the government, in an attempt to divert the attention of the people of Pakistan, is picking on the mild-mannered and hard working Pakistanis of Bengali origin, as if packing them off is the answer to the ethnic strife that is plaguing Pakistan. This is an inhuman, racist, and dangerous policy, which may end up making MQM extremely attractive to this group of people, who have so far remained outside the present strife.

Nigerian Martyrs

World opinion, specially all-out efforts by Mandela and Mugabe, failed to save the charismatic Nigerian leader of the Ogoni minority people and eight of his rights activist fellow fighters. They were executed in a hurry for the Nigerian junta felt they were too hot a quarry to be allowed to live after the sentence was pronounced.

The 52-member Commonwealth on Saturday suspended Nigeria's membership in the toughest action it has taken since its inception. The suspension would lead to expulsion if the regime did not release 43 'plotters' including deposed head of state Obasanjo and Chief Abiola who had clinched the 1993 elections annulled by the usurpers. The United States has recalled its ambassador to Lagos and was considering sanctions against Nigeria. All the nations of the European Union have also withdrawn their envoys from Lagos.

The question is not of making that rogue of an Abacha government reform but of making it quit. And the Nigerian people are lucky that all of the world nations are now actively poised against the Abacha regime.

This universal revulsion over the executions would fail to affect the gang unless effective sanctions are made against buying Nigerian oil, the mainstay of the economy of that nation.

As we mourn the death of Ken Saro-Wiwa and his fellow fighters and condemn the Abacha gang's barbarous action, we firmly expect Bangladesh to commit itself to international action aimed at Nigeria's return to democracy.

Wonderfully Forgetful

In November, 1970 it was the Eid season and all Dhaka was out shopping for a change of taste from the politically volatile atmosphere of the day. News came to the media offices on November 13 that something was seriously wrong with the Noakhali chars, some incredulous informants had counted bodies by the hundred — all dead by the sloop of a cyclone-tidal bore double-hit the previous day, Thursday, November 12.

With every passing day the toll mounted. And went well past a million dead. The whole tragedy was compacted into one small coinage — *proloy raat* — the doomsday night. Unfortunately the remembrance of the day receded further this year owing to the hartal week beginning the day before. Doves of people rushed for trains and river vessels and airliners to get away from the capital and make the best of the time. The Dhaliwood crowd tried to make of the week a busman's holiday, converging on Cox's Bazar for shooting as well as having a good time. They were unaware of November 12 and its connection with the Bay. But the elements were fleetingly on a repetition march all right.

We Bengalees have a wonderful capacity for forgetting what others wouldn't in a hundred generations.

Assassination Never Changes History

The bullet that killed Yitzhak Rabin, following a peace rally on Saturday night November 4, 1995, traumatised the entire world. The forces that gunned down President Sadat in 1981 for the self-same reason — forging peace, in another form — took the life of Yitzhak Rabin.

Of the many lessons of history is that the progressive movement of human civilisation is full of ironies. Abraham Lincoln, 16th President of the US, an archetypal figure of the American democracy, was shot dead just after Lee's surrender. President John Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr. both gave their lives to the assassin's bullets — both victims of hatred and intolerance; but the example closest to Rabin's assassination is the death of Mahatma Gandhi. Yitzhak Rabin, the folk-hero of the Jewish State of Israel who witnessed the holocaust, led his country to a lightning victory in the 6-day war in 1967 against the Arabs and brought the country to what the Jewish scriptures suggested, to the fulfilment of the dream of building their Home in the promised land of Judea and Samaria by occupying Gaza and West Bank and the eastern half of Jerusalem.

The occupation of Jerusalem made it possible for the Government of Israel to think that they could shift their capital to the city which unified in itself the history of all three monotheistic religions — Judaism, Christianity and Islam — all children of Moses and Abraham; the city with the unique distinction of having the Wailing Wall, Holy Sepulchre and Al Quds al Sharif. Rabin fulfilled the dreams of Jews all over the world, the completion of the dream of return to the promised land with Jerusalem at the heart of it. For a while the Israelis almost forgot in their jubilation and merriment their diaspora, the bad memories of King Herod's violence and tyranny, the beheading of John the Baptist and even the humiliation inflicted on them in the defeat and destruction of the temple in Jerusalem by the Roman Emperor Titus Flavius in 70 AD.

Legend has it that after the decisive victory of Israel against the Arabs in 1967, the Jews stopped scouring the bottom of the Tiber in Rome, in search of the Jewish treasures including the famous candelabra for Jewish Henukka festival which, reportedly, were looted from the Jerusalem Temple and flung into the river Tiber by Emperor Titus, in whose view, that was the worst humiliation of the Jewish population of the Roman Empire!

It must have taken a lot of pondering and meditation on the part of Prime Minister Rabin to have engaged himself in peace talks with his Arab neighbours. The agony of the diaspora and the holocaust vividly remembered by every Jewish citizen it was not easy for Yitzhak Rabin to ultimately think in terms of Peace for Land. In war he defended his country's interest, fought for the truth as seen by the State of Israel, but in peace he must have imbued the spirit of the Old Testament and the wisdom contained therein. Solomon's Temple must have occupied a central place in his decision to move towards engagement for peace.

The temple first destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar in 588 B.C. and again in 90 A.D. this temple was sacked by Vespasian and Titus. Don't we remember when two harlots came in front of King Solomon carrying a live and a dead baby, each claiming the live baby as her own. Solomon ordered the live child to be cut in half, and shared between the two claimants? Upon hearing this, one woman implored the King to give the living baby to the other woman, rather than kill it. Solomon knew perfectly well who the true mother was!

The General-turned-politician, Yitzhak Rabin, was sensitive and alive to the reality of the day. It is not a surprise therefore to learn that Solomon was his favourite reading.

Many situations were against Rabin but slowly and surely he made his moves towards peace. One of the problems he faced was the UN Resolution 3379 adopted in the General Assembly in 1975 equating Zionism to Racism. This resolution was certainly one of the darkest chapters in the history of the organisation. The UN reputation was at its nadir. The founding fathers of the UN and the framers of its charter in San Francisco fifty summers ago certainly did not envision a situation such as this. Rabin set it right in December 16, 1991 when the UNGA repealed this resolution by adopting a fresh decision No. A/46/L.47, with 111 votes in favour, 25 against and 13 abstentions. By repealing the resolution of 1975 the world body acceded

to the universal wisdom that one wrong cannot be righted by another wrong. Yitzhak Rabin could now afford to proceed carefully to the path of peace. Known as a Hawk and an uncompromising leader he sent his Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, reputed as a 'Dove amongst the Arabs', to Norway to sit in secret negotiations with the Palestinians. A lesser leader, could not have done this. Rabin understood the meaning of the Latin phrase — *Nil vidantur durable* [nothing that is violent will ever survive]. He was in many ways a perfect archetype of Plato's philosopher-king.

The famous handshake between Yitzhak Rabin and Yasser Arafat, hitherto two inveterate enemies, on September 13, 1993, with President Clinton looking on, was the outcome. Peace in the Middle East and the process of peaceful settlement of disputes between Israel and its Arab neighbours, was inevitable. The seeds sown at the Camp David Accord be-

tween Egypt and Israel, in 1977, was transmuted into the handshake between the PLO Chairman and the Israeli Prime Minister. A brave soldier, the Israeli leader was also an astute diplomat. He, along with other leaders, took note of the force of the 'Intifada' which was pulverising the whole of the Middle East, particularly the land occupied by the Israelis. The valour and the bravery of the Palestinians could no longer be ignored by the Israeli leaders. A significant portion of the Western media was hitherto tilted towards Israel. But the non-violent protesta-

tions of the Palestinian youths, with only stones in their hands, dramatically changed the media perception. Young boys with stones or a tank reminded many of the Biblical struggles of David and Goliath. The symbolic impact of this circumstance was not lost on Rabin. Suddenly Western viewers were seeing the other side of the story, Hannah Ashrawi, Faisal Hosseini and Elias Fraia the mayor of Bethlehem, were on their screens, telling the world of their story. Hitherto a sympathetic West, was exposed to the horrors of the conditions of the homeless and humiliated Palestinians who had been hounded out of their homes — much to the chagrin of the Israeli leaders. Yitzhak Rabin knew that the time had come to forge peace — and renounce war..... 'to everything there is a season, a time to be born and a time to die, a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to love and a time to

hate, a time for war and a time for peace. The time for peace has come. With the moral strength deriving from the Ecclesiastes, Rabin carefully but surely made the giant move towards peace.... on September 13, 1993

On a very personal level, the handshake did not come to me as a total surprise though. He had once attended an informal gathering addressed by the late Israeli Prime Minister at B'nai Beth, the Jewish cultural centre on 46th Street, 1st Avenue in Manhattan. With Chairman Arafat I have had many encounters both in Bangladesh and other parts of the world. I had no doubt in my mind that they both wanted peace, a comprehensive settlement in the Middle East. And they both were waiting for an opportunity.

The bullet that killed Yitzhak Rabin, following a peace rally on Saturday night November 4, 1995, traumatised the entire world. The forces that gunned down President Sadat in 1981 for the self-same reason — forging peace, in another form — took the life of Yitzhak Rabin. The unprecedented assemblage of world leaders underlined the dimension of the gravity of the situation. As President Clinton, and King Hussein of Jordan said the bullet that killed Rabin should not kill peace. The imagery of the 'Divide' invoked by King Hussein who had seen his grand-father gunned down in Jerusalem was conceived in the same way as Blaise Pascal stated "a strange justice that is bounded by a river; can anything be more ridiculous than that a man should have the right to kill me because he lives on the other side?"

Chairman Arafat did well by expressing his condolences to Leah Rabin personally. His anguish must be second only to Leah's. He lost a friend and above all a partner in peace.

Acting Prime Minister Shimon Peres needs allout

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ENCHIRIDION

Waliur Rahman

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