

PCJSS Stand-off

This is a PCJSS sticking point that sounds downright obsolete before the benign spirit and forward-looking substance of the CHT peace accord. They have given a mere technicality the look of a 'principle' by rejecting out of hand an interim Regional Council the government has had to nominate pending elections in the CHT which are to be held under new laws in due course.

Since none of the clauses of the CHT accord has been violated in any manner or shape we are inclined to regard this as a tiff over a small detail rather than a conflict of either principles or interests. It is an interim body to which the government, albeit in consultation with the local leadership has sent some Bengali settlers' names and that too in an agreed proportion.

When the polls to the three hill district councils are eventually held and they form an electoral college for the regional council all the members of the RC proper including the settler component of it will have been duly elected public representatives.

Such an obdurate stance of the PCJSS has led the Minister for Hill Tracts Affairs Kalparanjan Chakma to suggest that the government would have to look for alternative steps to form the RC if the PCJSS continued with their one-point stand-off. We do not want to guess the kind ingenious solution the government has up its sleeves but suffice it to say that we are for an amicable settlement of the question.

The peace accord should not be a captive of egocentric semantics or sentimentalities. Especially when the 700 Shantibahini members who had surrendered their weapons have been absorbed in the police force, the refugee returnees are picking up their lives, prisoners are being speedily released, military camps are winding up and a massive development programme has got underway.

A Better Deal from Teachers

What's teaching? And who's a teacher? It is possible that in any serious understanding of these two terms, not all belonging to the profession of teaching are teachers. And also that many a one outside the fold is quite a capable teacher doing the self-appointed job with more application than is generally seen in the profession.

The teachers have their share of problems of security and employment although the government has been bearing the lion's share of the emoluments of all regularly employed teachers in the nation. In spite of the big salary support, teachers in non-government schools and colleges are still not in any enviable position.

Ways must be found to exorcise the ghoulish in the mustardseed itself. Who will do that? It is better that the teachers do it. For to develop true professionals out of the poorly performing education employees in the schools and colleges, impositions would not help.

In this land of a thousand movements, popping up so often, there hasn't been todate an education movement launched by teachers aiming at an overdrive of self-improvement as teachers.

Yesterday was the World Teachers' Day. We have no doubt in Bangladesh teachers' bodies met on the occasion to clamour for better deals. The society deserves a better deal from them all.

The G-7 Myopia

It is shocking the manner in which the seven richest countries of the world, in their worry and eagerness to tide over global recession bypassed the problems faced by the developing nations. The joint communiqué at the end of the first round of G-7 meeting in Washington spoke of the developed world's resolve to fight pervasive economic distress with intensified cooperation.

The oft-repeated appeal for an equitable world trade order also went a-begging. How can there be a healthy global trade order when dices are so unfairly loaded against the developing countries? Can the developing countries ever be partners in the progress of the wealthy and resourceful nations in the present export and import format which remains discriminatory and unjust.

To make an effective contribution in saving the world from economic chaos G7 has to broaden its vision and play a pivotal role in addressing the chronic grievances of the developing nations. The global economy is in much too dire a strait to overlook the need for an interdependent world.

Is Credibility of Malaysian Government in Peril?

by Barrister Harun ur Rashid

Dr. Mahathir, by sacking this deputy Anwar Ibrahim, has rocked the political and economic stability of Malaysia at a time of economic recession in the country. Foreign investment is a must for economic growth but the unstable political situation may discourage the investors to pour in money in Malaysia.

Malaysia appears to be falling in uncharted waters as Malaysians continue to defy a ban on public gatherings and called for political reforms chanting 'reformasi'. After sacking his deputy, Anwar Ibrahim (51) on September 2 on various alleged serious charges, Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammad (72) thought that he was safe politically as the allegations were serious enough not to elicit any support for his deputy.

However, Dr. Mahathir's sudden disposal of the man he groomed to succeed him appears to have shocked the average Malaysian and furthermore they were horrified to learn the alleged violence on the person of the former Deputy Prime Minister while he was in police custody when he was produced before the Court on 29 September. Although the government is said to investigate this matter, it appears that the reputation of the government appears to have been seriously damaged in the eyes of the Malaysians.

Some of the anxious questions that are being agitated the minds of the Malaysians are: why did Dr. Mahathir not take any action against Mr. Anwar in 1993 when he was reportedly informed by the police of certain allegations against his deputy? why were the allegations raised when it was perceived that Mr. Anwar's supporters were preparing to challenge Dr. Mahathir as the President of the Party, UMNO (United Malays National Organisation)? how could Mr. Anwar, a high profile political person, evade the commission of alleged offences when in all probability he could be never alone either the driver or security guards must always with him? are the allegations against his character credible given Mr. Anwar's deep Islamic convictions and having a family of six children and a practising Muslim wife? why are the specific charges not prepared prior to his arrest and why was Mr. Anwar arrested under the 'omnibus' draconian law, Internal Security Act (ISA) when specific laws were there to

frame charges against him? (ISA allows to detain a person for indefinite period without trial and was primarily designed to combat communism.) Unless the Government comes clean with the answers to the above questions, grave doubts on the allegations will remain irresistible and the country may continue to suffer from political instability and adverse international reaction.

The mere fact that Mr. Anwar has now been charged for 10 alleged offences after nine days before a court may not absolve the perception of abuse of power by the Government. In the past Dr. Mahathir was successful in eliminating his political rivals with ease such as former Finance Minister Tunku Razaleigh. This time it appears to be a problem for him as the political protest appears to gather momentum. Not only there were several successive rallies with 20,000 Malaysians since Mr. Anwar's arrest but also a new coalition of some 18 political parties and religious and human rights groups under the name of 'Democracy Coalition' has been launched. It is significant to point out that the rallies called out for reform in my view, the programme of the Coalition has become wider in scope in political terms and is not confined only to Mr. Anwar's arrest. It is now the cry for democracy and reforms in the country's political architecture.

Dr. Mahathir is known for his authoritarian rule for the last 17 years. Under his rule Malaysia progressed with impressive record in economic growth. The average Malaysian endured his rule because they were becoming affluent and had enjoyed a quality of life never experienced before. The Malaysians had the impression that their country's economy would remain a permanent island of prosperity in an economic turmoil in the region. But that was not to be the case. When the country slipped into economic recession Dr. Mahathir's management of economy including the projects, such as the world's tallest building in Kuala Lumpur and the new airport, became question marks.

It was an open secret that Dr. Mahathir and his deputy Anwar Ibrahim were at loggerheads over economic policy after the recession. Dr. Mahathir appeared to believe that Mr. Anwar's policies were dictated by the West. They did not see eye to eye over the proper response to the continuing devaluation of the currency (ringgit). When Dr. Mahathir decided to fix the currency to the US dollar, Mr. Anwar as Finance Minister was reported to have disagreed. Furthermore, there is a view that after the fall of President Suharto Prime Minister Mahathir has become worried about his political fate.

In the backdrop of the above situation, Dr. Mahathir sacked his deputy in a dramatic fashion on 29 September amidst charges of serious offences including the one impugning his moral character. It was thought this serious charge against his character in a conservative Muslim country such as Malaysia would permanently damage his reputation and end his political career. However Mr. Anwar denied the charges, saying that they were part of conspiracy at a high political level and he would fight against them. His wife Dr. Wan Azizah (46), an eye surgeon, had full confidence and trust in her husband. Mr. Anwar's arrest on 21 September from his residence in a violent manner seems to have added more fuel to the agitation of Anwar's supporters. As of writing (Oct 1), the supporters have staged three huge anti-government demonstrations (between 10,000-20,000 people) in the past four

days despite the government ban on assembly of more than five persons. The question now arises: why does Dr. Mahathir face such continuing unprecedented anti-government protests from his own nationals? I wish to offer some observations on the subject.

First, Dr. Mahathir's action against Mr. Anwar and his apparent determination to stay in power may have alienated many younger party (UMNO) officials, in particular at a time when there was an unsuccessful attempt by Anwar's supporters to pressure him into resigning. Dr. Mahathir is a person of earlier generation and Mr. Anwar, being much younger in age, remains popular with young people. The protests could be described as yearning for a 'generation change'.

Second, most of the protesters belong to new emerging middle class and the irony is that their parents became rich through government patronage under Dr. Mahathir. This new educated middle class are articulating demands of democracy and reforms from the environs of a contemporary culture in Malaysia. Mr. Anwar's arrest became the focal point of their aspirations for more democratic and free society. Globalisation of information technology has broken the frontiers of Malaysia and the young people do not like their lives regulated. The protests could be seen as signs of social revolution.

Thirdly, the economic recession in the country has shaken the very credibility of the government's policies. It is the startling realisation by the Malaysians that its economic stability and years of hard-won growth is destroyed within months and they found their Prime Minister helpless to reverse the situation. The contraction of economy, according to the World Bank new report, will be 3.4 per cent in Malaysia this year. Furthermore the Malaysians now realise that they have to endure economic and social hardships at least for 3 to 5 years and this bleak prospect may have propelled the protesters to demand the removal of the Prime Minister.

Fourthly, with the economic melt-down in South East Asia, Malaysian neighbours, namely Indonesia and Thailand had a change of their governments. President Suharto's downfall from political power remains a powerful symbol of 'people's power'. If President Suharto in May 1998 and President Marcos in 1986 could be forced from power, why can't the Malaysians do the same thing? Finally, as I have stated earlier, Anwar's arrest is perceived to be unfair and the treatment of a former Deputy Prime Minister by the police appears to be ruthless. If there are charges of serious offences, they believe that Mr. Anwar should have been produced before a court as soon as possible within 24 hours with formal charges and the fact that his members of family and his lawyer were reportedly denied to meet him for a few days was considered to be gross violation of human rights and decency. Cracks began to appear in the government's case against Mr. Anwar as he appeared in court.

Conclusion

Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammad must be credited for his remarkable achievements in the economic progress of Malaysia. He has transformed Malaysia from an exporter of rubber and tin into an 'Asian tiger' producing electronic equipment, cars and steel. He introduced many reforms in his country including curbing the powers of the royalty. In addition he became the spokesman for the developing countries in the world forums criticising the existing unfair global trade and monetary systems.

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Letter From America

In Kosovo and Elsewhere, Muslim Blood is Cheap!

Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed writes from Princeton

The only way to get things done in the West is through activism. Bending at the knee, begging and appealing to compassion are not positions of strength. The Muslims have to support the Western action against terrorist-murderers like Bin Laden. Only then can they ask why even after Sudan had acceded to the US demand to expel Bin Laden, was Khartoum bombed?

UNDER the caption "How Convenient", the following lead editorial was published in The Wall Street Journal, America's largest circulation daily, on September 30, 1998.

Today there is peace in Kosovo-Metohija. Life in Kosovo-Metohija has returned to normal. The Republic of Serbia has thwarted the secessionists' attempts to realize their intentions through terror. The terrorist gangs have been destroyed. Serbia has once again shown that it is capable of resolving its problems alone, with full respect for democratic countries' principles and standards regarding human, civil and minority rights. — Serbian Prime Minister Mirko Manovic

The above quote was part of an Orwellian victory peroration given by the Serbian Prime Minister on Monday September 28. How convenient that the West is now demanding that Slobodan Milosevic call a cease-fire and withdraw his forces from Kosovo. For the last three months, Mr. Milosevic's army and police forces have been burning and bombing their way across the ethnic Albanian dominated province of Kosovo in an 'antiterrorist' campaign that has left more than 200 villages destroyed and sent more than 250,000 refugees into the woods and mountains, or across the border to an uncertain fate in crumbling Albania.

The timing of the new cease-fire demands from the United Nations Security Council and NATO beggars belief. If these ultimatums have a familiar ring to them, rewind several months to the first days when television cameras relayed pictures of the bodies of murdered Albanians and their burned-out homes. The tough-talking Madeleine Albright led the outrage club: The United States, declared Secretary Albright in March, was 'not going to stand by and watch the Serbian authorities do in Kosovo what they can no longer get away with in Bosnia'.

In late June, foreign ministers from Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Russia and the US met in London to demand that Belgrade cease all military action against Kosovar civilians, help the return of

refugees and allow international monitors into the areas. "President Milosevic will be making a grave mistake if he imagines the international community will be as slow to act in Kosovo as it was in Bosnia," said British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook. And later, "President Milosevic is now on his last warning."

NATO then conducted military operations in neighboring Albania and Macedonia, issuing a statement that the operations have "the aim of demonstrating NATO's capability to project power rapidly into the region." The meeting, it turned out, was just another pit stop on the photo-op diplomacy circuit.

There were more warnings. "If President Milosevic does not realize how dangerous the game he and his military forces are playing, the consequences will be very serious for him and his country," Richard Holbrooke told a National Press Club audience in June. He was echoed by British Defense Minister George Robertson after a spate of high-level talks in Brussels.

It is difficult to think of a time when the language of diplomacy has been so devalued, or when U.S. and Western leaders have been so careless with the principle of credibility. These warnings were followed by — as Milosevic knew they would be — three months of relative silence as Serb tanks and howitzers made their way from village to village in Kosovo. Now there's the onset of winter, with its potential to leave thousands of refugees stranded in the mountains and woods dying of cold or starvation — a humanitarian crisis that would no doubt be embarrassing for governments that swore they wouldn't let it happen.

The truth is that the West made a conscious, if nonpublic, decision to leave Milosevic to his dirty work in Kosovo. There were plenty of "reasonable" justifications for doing so along the lines of, "We were unprepared to recognize an au-

tonomous Kosovo, which is what the ethnic Albanian leadership in Kosovo and the Kosovo Liberation Army were seeking." Or, "Had we intervened earlier, we might have emboldened the KLA, who after all are a bunch of outlaws too." Or, "We never expected his forces would take it this far and kill this many civilians" — and so forth. Privately, European foreign ministry officials have told us that they would have gladly supported an effort to hit back at Milosevic if only the U.S., which would need to supply the air power and leadership, had said the word.

But the foreign policy apparatus in the U.S. has lost its compass. When leaders refuse to lead and instead hide behind empty threats, high-minded phrases and supplicant visits to the aggressor, credibility goes out of the window. If the Kosovars foolishly thought the West Or, "We never expected his forces would take it this far and kill this many civilians" — and so forth. Privately, European foreign ministry officials have told us that they would have gladly supported an effort to hit back at Milosevic if only the U.S., which would need to supply the air power and leadership, had said the word.

One major omission in the otherwise very frank editorial is a very pertinent fact: the primary reason for the West's reluctance to act is that the Kosovo Albanians are Muslims. And that Milosevic should be added to the list of war criminals headed for the Hague, as suggested by former U.S. Secretaries of State and Defense in a New York Times advertisement a few days ago. And that Yugoslavia should be banned from international sports until Milosevic surrenders.

The same day, September 30, there were ghastly photographs of ethnic Albanians murdered by the Serbian security forces, on the front pages of leading newspapers such as the New York Times. The outraged

British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook called for a meeting ASAP. This is so laughable that it is not funny. We have seen from the Bosnian holocaust days that whenever the massacre of Muslims became public, the British would call another meeting to express their indignation! Does not the British intelligence inform the Secretary of what is going on in Kosovo every day? He is outraged only when the massacre is public knowledge. Why doesn't he call a meeting before a massacre, to save Albanian lives?

A few weeks ago, New York's Democratic candidates (Charles Schumer, Geraldine Ferraro and Mark Green; Schumer won) hoping to unseat the incumbent Republican Senator Al D'Amato, were debating on television. They all put the blame for the stalled Middle East peace process squarely on the shoulders of the Arabs and Arafat. It was not Netanyahu's intransigence that concerned them, it was the Muslims! They all agreed with Al D'Amato's insistence that America should not stop with the bombing Afghanistan and Sudan, it should send its missiles to destroy the enemies of Israel! If the current Senator, or the would-be Senators talk this way in public, imagine what they think and do in the privacy of their Senatorial offices.

One of the things that they have done recently is to resurrect the Religious Freedom Bill ("Anti-Christian Persecution Bill"), that the Clinton Administration opposes. The Bill is sponsored by Congressman Frank Wolf of Virginia and Senator Arlen Specter of Pennsylvania — two Jewish legislators well-known for their diatribe support for Israel. The Bill is designed to punish any nation that persecutes religious minorities in theory. Christians in reality. The language in the Bill has been carefully crafted so that Israel does not get blamed for persecuting Christians and Muslims, but Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Indonesia and China do for

persecuting Christians. Why would Jewish legislators be so concerned about the welfare of Christians worldwide? After all, the world's number one religion is, by all accounts, flourishing. Are they trying to express their gratitude for the Holocaust, the expulsion of the Jews from Christian Spain or Shakespeare's Jew-baiting? The answer lies in Harvard Professor Samuel Huntington's 1993 thesis that Islam is the West's new enemy. Without any debate, that thesis has been accepted as the gospel by the West, and Zionists are hard at work making that a reality, so that the historical wrong committed with the creation of Israel remain unaddressed. Huntington also theorized that the Confucian culture, represented by China, is currently aligned with Islam. That is why, China also gets a special treatment in the Bill. It is ironic that China represses its 30 million Muslim minority in the Xinjiang province far more than it does the Christians, and as Pakistan found out last May, China is distancing itself from its Islamic friends as it covets acceptance in the mainstream of nations.

The Muslims must be quick to condemn terrorists like Osama Bin Laden, treat their religious minority justly as their religious demands, and stop the reported persecution of Christians in East Timor. After cleansing themselves of their own wrongs, they can go after their rights. The only way to get things done in the West is through activism. Bending at the knee, begging and appealing to compassion are not positions of strength. The Muslims have to support the Western action against terrorist-murderers like Bin Laden. Only then can they ask why even after Sudan had acceded to the US demand to expel Bin Laden, was Khartoum bombed? It now appears that with no US Embassy in Khartoum, the factory to be bombed in Sudan was selected through deductive reasoning by a low level US employee! For-

mer President Carter said that the US should send a fact-finding mission to Sudan, and should scold the Sudanese if the factory was indeed found to be producing deadly chemicals. If not, the US should apologize to Sudan. And pay compensation, Carter should have added! That would enhance US prestige, not diminish it.

The lack of activism in the defense of their rights is costing the Muslims plenty of blood. They are being repressed in Bosnia, Kosovo, Chechnya, Nagorno-Karabakh, Palestine, Kashmir and China, to name a few places. The least they can do is express outrage at the Western hypocrisy (it took the US less than two weeks after the Kenyan and Tanzanian bombings to bomb Bin Laden; it took them over three years to do anything in Bosnia, and nine months and counting, in Kosovo.) Let us also remember that two US Presidents — President Bush in December, 1992 and President Clinton later — had promised the Kosovo Albanians that what happened in Bosnia will never happen to them. Are promises of two US Presidents worthless? Even if NATO were to punish Milosevic now, it will be too little, too late for the decimated Kosovars.

Muslim activism should extend to countering intellectual terrorism. The damage Huntington's thesis has done to vilify the Muslims is enormous. Now comes another Islam-bashing best seller by V. S. Naipaul, who because of his ethnic background, is considered an authentic spokesman for the third world and Islam by the West. It took an intellectual Olympian like Professor Edward Said, a Christian, to point out how damning Naipaul's latest book is going to be for the Muslims. To quote Professor Said: "The greater pity is that Naipaul's latest book on Islam will be considered a major interpretation of a great religion, and more Muslims will suffer and be insulted. And the gap between them and the West will increase and deepen. No one will benefit except the publishers who will probably sell a lot of books, and Naipaul, who will make a lot of money." It is a pity that so few Muslims at home and abroad seem to understand that.

To the Editor...

"Alphabets of Agony"

Sir, Mr. A. Z. M. Obaidullah Khan's article "Alphabets of Agony" dated 25th September in your editorial page was indeed a valiant effort to overcome the daunting task ahead for the country with respect to the floods. It also seems to be an honest appraisal in alleviating the sufferings of the people.

But, I fail to agree on a couple of points. The proposal for "contribution" and "adoption" struck me as impractical and far fetched.

The reason being that the "adoption method" would only be viable if the country was ready to bear the cost and the efforts of "nation building". Bangladesh isn't facing floods and other environment-related problems for the first time and world aid and sympathy haven't done much to overcome the situation so far. The feeling of responsibility and growth I feel should come from within,

alternately unifying the nation.

Some outstanding examples are seen in Japan who performed a post-World War economic miracle. Israel which has grown to be respected as a military power as well as a self-sufficient nation in terms of agriculture and energy resources, from a parched desert 50 years ago. Any of course China, who have also done remarkably well on the economic front as well as in population control by introducing and firmly implementing the "one child" policy.

There is no doubt that good work is being done at the micro level in the country regarding the floods with the help of assorted NGOs, but the problem needs to be tackled at its roots. More stress should be focused on river control and disaster management with their active involvement of its bigger neighbour, India as well as experts in this field around the

world.

Unless urgent measures are taken at this stage, it wouldn't be long before fickle environmental conditions on the global scale vanquish low-lying areas including Bangladesh to oblivion.

Anish V. Koshu
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Kashmir and Indian PM's offer

Sir, Following carrying out tit-for-tat nuclear tests by India and Pakistan the relations between the two countries have become very risky, bitter and dangerous due to half a century old Kashmir dispute.

We wonder whether India and Pakistan would ever be able to do away with their enmity and solve this dispute or they would destroy each other with

nuclear bombs.

We welcome and deeply appreciate the offer of the Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee which he made on the occasion of Indian Independence Day at Moghul built Red Fort, New Delhi that 'India is ready to hold talks with Pakistan on any issue, at any level, anywhere. I do not believe that there is any problem which can not be resolved through dialogue'.

We would request and suggest India and Pakistan to kindly hold talks on Kashmir issue at the level of Prime Minister at the UN Headquarters, New York and resolve the problem for good for the sake of peace, progress, happiness and alleviation of poverty of millions of people of India-Pakistan-Bangladesh.

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Example for the free world

Sir, President Clinton's deposition before the grand jury was telecast by CNN on 21.9.98 from 7:45 pm and onwards. I could watch it from 7:45 pm to 11:30 pm. During this period he appeared to be moose, sulking, and rarely truculent. During this period I also saw that he drank water/soft drink 32 times.

As I rightly guessed that night the President's rating with the US public would improve. I had an initial premonition that I would see the demolition of a president as it was touted by his opponents. But I was impressed by his resilience and ability to handle the questions with aplomb.

The entire proceedings showed that the excellent democratic system of USA is a

shining example for the free world.

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Ban on polythene bags

Sir, It is really nice to know that the government has decided to take steps to control the use of polythene bags. I think the government should firmly put a ban on the production and use of polythene bags which are menace to the environment.

Bangladesh Television can also play an important role to inform and aware the public about the hazards of these bags. Let us all use paper and jute bags like old days and save our country from pollution.

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