

Ever Smiling King Hussein is No More

The changes in the internal political areas including demand for more democratic reforms, freedom of speech, improvement in the human rights situation etc. will continue to be in the agenda of majority of the Jordanians... The international community and particularly the Arab world will henceforth keenly watch the developments in Jordan.

KING Hussein of Jordan, the longest serving King in the Middle East, passed away at the age of 63 (1935-99) on February 7, 1999 at 11.43 am (Jordan time). He was reportedly declared clinically dead in Mayo hospital in the USA where he had been undergoing cancer treatment for some time. But as it seems he wanted to die in his own land and hence the need for life-support arrangement. This also probably gave the Palace the needed time to arrange everything related to King's burial according to strict Muslim traditions and also final taking over of power by his successor. Jordan went into deep psychological trauma with the departure of their beloved King who served them for about 47 years. As the King was terminally ill Jordanians were undoubtedly preparing for this heart-breaking event for sometime but some rays of hope emerged when the King piloted his own aircraft only 21 days ago and landed in Amman airport. The smiling King alighted from the aircraft, offered prayer and then returned to the Palace in a top-open wide-bodied special Mercedes — rain-soaked but smiling all the way and receiving thunderous welcome-home wishes from his admirers who lined up both sides of the avenue from airport to the Palace. It was an extraordinary enjoyment for the Jordanians to welcome back their King who was declared free of cancer germs. Their worries were over.

But the irony of fate is that the King who piloted his own aircraft as he usually did had to return to the States almost a day after as a passenger and then came back to his kingdom next week under a life-support machine. The King is no more and the Jordanians are in great pain and deep grief. Jordan has lost its great King and friend. The whole world is mourning. A large number of Kings, Presidents and Prime Ministers including President Clinton, President Chirac, Prime Minister Tony Blair and other important world personalities arrived in Amman to attend the burial of King Hussein on Monday, February 8, 1999. Apart from following the strict Muslim traditions in arranging the burial, full military formalities were also observed, as King Hussein was the Commander-in-Chief of Jordanian Armed Forces.

King Hussein took over as king on May 2, 1953 at the age of only 17 years, when his father Talal abdicated because of his illness. His grandfather King Abdullah who was the King of Trans-Jordan was assassinated in Jerusalem and that time young Hussein was with him. Jordan grew with the King. King Hussein managed to convert his Bedouin community into a modern society in about 40 years time. He loved Jordan and Jordan loved him. King Hussein was everywhere in Jordan and will continue to remain so. This is the impression my wife and I got when we visited Jordan about two years back at the invitation of the President of Yarmouk University of Jordan to sign an academic collaboration between North South University and Yarmouk University.



Spotlight on Middle East

Muslehuddin Ahmad

Jordan is a beautiful country, which is rich in history but poor in natural resources. It is the Mount Nebo in Jordan from where Moses saw the Biblical land. As per Deuteronomy: "The Lord said to him, 'This is the land which I swore to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob that I would give to your descendants. I have let you see it with your own eyes, but you shall not cross over into it.' That Biblical land stretching over Jordan valley to Jericho, Judea, Samaria and beyond led to many wars which King Hussein and his forefathers fought. In 1967 war he lost half of his kingdom to Israel. He was of the view that it was a trap Israel laid which Egypt could not foresee. This loss of territory led to serious turmoil in the Middle East in terms of expulsion of Palestinians from their land and annexation of occupied territories by Israel. As it was his territory the King had to be deeply associated with the Middle East peace process all along. He was the leader who

as he rightly thought war was not the answer and indeed by joining war he lost territories to Israel. The other serious concern was Palestinian population in Jordan. Indeed, about 60 per cent of the people in Jordan are Palestinian. At one stage in 1972 he suggested the establishment of a United Arab Kingdom to lay the foundation for joint Jordanian and Palestinian state. This was, however, rejected by the PLO, Israel and Egypt. Therefore, the only option for him was to pursue the peace process to reduce his own burden in terms of Palestinian population. Now with the departure of King Hussein the M-E peace process has indeed suffered the first death-shock. As Arafat is in failing health and Israel is in chaotic political situation, one does not see much hope in the peace process unless Labour returns to power in Israel and President Clinton makes special efforts to press Israel to cede occupied land to the Palestinians.



King Hussein waving to crowds in the streets of Amman January 19. — AFP photo courtesy IHT

believed in peace and encouraged others like Israelis and Palestinians to go for more accommodation for the sake of peace in the region. Though he was critically ill he had the courage to leave the hospital bed and join Wye Plantation negotiation at the request of President Clinton when it reached a critical stage. His participation helped the process and led to the success of the negotiation.

The people say the King was pro-western and particularly pro-US. Obviously he was because of the need and his family links. His kingdom is surrounded by the hostile states like Israel, Syria and Iraq. As the recovery of the lost territory was uppermost in his mind he had to support the peace process

With King Hussein's departure M-E politics has become more uncertain as Jordan's role would probably be somewhat unpredictable due to change of the line of succession. During his brief stay in Amman, to the surprise of many, he made Prince Abdullah the Crown Prince by deposing Crown Prince Hasan who served the King and Jordan as Crown Prince for 32 years. Reportedly, the King said, Hasan abused his power. The story about change of the line of succession was in the air for some time and many knew that it would happen. Probably it would have faced less criticism if the King exercised his authority for which he needed no excuse without casting any aspersion on the behaviour of his brother Prince

Hasan. Though Prince Abdullah, now King Abdullah, is reportedly popular in the army because of his own position as a Major General, he is a less known personality in Jordanian politics. He is, of course, young, dynamic and well educated but he has to learn politics if he is to take his father's place. There he has to depend a lot on his uncle Prince Hasan. It is not known whether Prince Hasan would be that enthusiastic to extend necessary political help to establish him as the King of Jordan for which he was aspiring for pretty long time.

However, much would depend on King Abdullah's personal relationship with Prince Hasan. So far the report is that the Royal Family is united. Hopefully it would remain united and this is what the Jordanians want. Prince Hasan is well educated and served his country and his people well. He probably would not need the kingship to steer himself as someone very important in Jordan as well as in the Arab world. If King Abdullah decides to keep Prince Hasan in the mainstream of the decision making process, then he will find less difficulty in dealing with the domestic and Arab affairs.

The most important area of conflict would, however, be the international affairs — whether Jordan remains pro-western as some other Arab countries are or moves towards those Arab countries, which oppose pro-western policies. King Hussein was confident about his position and as such he was able to make some political adjustments when needed. He did take a sensible position during the Gulf war keeping in view his people's obvious sympathy with the Iraqis. But that angered the west and he lost much of aid that he used to receive from them. He, however, recovered his position later.

King Hussein signed the peace deal with Israel in 1994 though many Jordanians did not like it. However, the King was in a position to handle such a situation because of his own position in the kingdom and also his experience and expertise in dealing with such international affairs. But King Abdullah does not have any such position or experience. Another crucial area involving Israel and Palestinians would need constant watch and expert advice for which King Abdullah will have to depend on Prince Hasan and senior army and civilian advisers. The changes in the internal political areas including demand for more democratic reforms, freedom of speech, improvement in the human rights situation etc. will continue to be in the agenda of majority of the Jordanians. Young King Abdullah may find them rather difficult to deal with, as he has not been really associated with these problems. What is necessary for him now is to organise a team of trusted senior advisers who should guide him to the point from where he could comfortably take off. Obviously it would take time and would totally depend on young King's attitude. The international community and particularly the Arab world will henceforth keenly watch the developments in Jordan.

Hussein: The King with a Difference

by Brig (Retd) M Abdul Hafiz

He voluntarily abdicated much of his comfort in a royal retreat and was tirelessly on move to right some of the contradictions of intra-Arab politics and, of course, to neutralise Israel's ominous designs by fostering constructive relationship with West. It is doubtful if his successors can do it the way he did it.

THE speed, enormity and frequency of events surrounding his life seldom allowed others an insight into what all he was to his country and Arab world at large, and what would the latter be without him. Only at his death an hour of reckoning has arrived. Yet it would be difficult to truly measure him up not only because of the vastness of the canvas he was silhouetted against but also because of his embellishment of it. As an epoch comes to an end with his demise it will be in order to put in perspective the odds he surmounted in establishing himself as a distinguished Arab leader internationally counted and respected. His autobiography "The uneasy lies the head..." is an eloquent testimony to how traumatic can be a regality in one of the most turbulent regions of the world and deceptive the buoyant disposition of the King — a Sandhurst graduate speaking clipped English, dressing immaculately and hobnobbing with the celebrities. Under the thin veneer of those glitters he was a melancholy man treading the treacherous landscape of Middle East politics.

Just as he climbed the throne of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan in 1952, Hussein — who was still in his late teens — was confronted with a complex web of hostilities of undictable intensity. Jordan, among the Arab countries shared the longest border with a hostile Jewish state at her doorstep with whom the country already fought a war in 1947-48. At home, Hussein was constantly haunted by the tragic fate of King Abdullah, his charismatic grandfather who had been gunned down by the Palestinians within the precinct of Al-Aqsa Mosque in 1948. His occupation of the West Bank in the first Arab-Israeli war was suspected to be the result of his secret understanding with the Israelis. Apart from this unsavoury episode Hussein also knew with certain guilt conscience that much of the kingdom King Abdullah created with the British help after the first World War was carved out of Palestine.

The territorial expansion of Jordan at Palestinians' expense had, however, a mixed consequence. It flooded the country with Palestinian refugees changing the demographic structure of Jordan. The kingdom's loyal Bedouin subjects were heavily outnumbered — a nagging concern for Hussein throughout his reign. The factor weighed heavily in any royal decision-making affecting the future of the Palestinians. At a later stage as the Palestinians' consciousness sharpened and there grew a demand for Palestinian homeland the Jordanian reaction had to remain lukewarm because the accompanying question was disturbing: what territories other than the West Bank would form the state of Palestine?

But the greatest challenge to Hussein's survival came from the Arabs themselves. Hussein was enthroned exactly at the time when the rising wave of Arab nationalism was at its peak. Baptised to an anti-West strident nationalism the radical Arabs strongly despised an avowedly pro-west monarchy in their midst. But Jordan, created by the West, could not but lean heavily on the West for its survival. Even its famous Arab Legion was trained by British commander General Glubb

western connection he was staunchly an Arab nationalist not only to assuage his fellow Arabs but by strong conviction. So when the ultra-nationalists of the revolutionary brand succumbed to the western pressure to abandon their chosen path Hussein remained steadfast and loyal to the Arab cause. That is how he endeared himself even to his Palestinian subjects. Also otherwise he developed an unique chemistry with his people who adored him as their folkhero. He was equally at

was the best available conduit for the Arab world. A universal acceptability that he enjoyed was a tribute to his versatile genius. As he himself was a symbol of stability in a volatile region with his balanced approach to the region's problems, he ensured the same stability for his country. He inherited a desert kingdom with impoverished subjects and little natural endowment but at his death he left behind — by the Middle East standard — a prosperous country with semi-industrial base. The transition of Jordan as well as Middle East as a whole to an era without King Hussein — the great moderator, a communicator par excellence and a credible promoter of regional peace and stability — has already started worrying the world leaders and will be watched closely and analytically.

However the biggest casualty of Hussein's exit will perhaps be the Middle East peace process which has been limping ahead for years. Hussein himself had been the life support system to the dying process. Few are left now in Middle East scene to infuse confidence and trust in both Arafat and Netanyahu who are to carry the process forward. At a critical stage of Wye River parley an ailing King Hussein had to be brought in to save the talk from collapse. This by itself is a tribute to his credibility as a peace maker.

Today to many Arabs the Oslo peace process is a hoax. Many of its stipulations are shrouded in ambiguity while the ground realities give enough indications that its ulterior motive is to further restrict the choices of the Palestinians. Jordan had to willy-nilly join the process in 1994, one year after the PLO made peace with Israel. When the principal contenders bury their hatchets the bystanders — the Arab countries — had no alternative to pursue. But once the peace was made King Hussein genuinely committed to its success. He could not conquer a homeland for the Palestinians in Diaspora but wanted to conquer peace through which he sought to create a Palestinian homeland. No one knows immediately the fate of a precarious peace in the Middle East and every one seems to be keeping his fingers crossed awaiting a new power equation in the region which can in either way affect the peace process.

King Hussein was fond of his battle dress donning which he could be often seen in the desert with his Bedouin storm troopers. He voluntarily abdicated much of his comfort in a royal retreat and was tirelessly on move to right some of the contradictions of intra-Arab politics and, of course, to neutralise Israel's ominous designs by fostering constructive relationship with West. It is doubtful if his successors can do it the way King Hussein did it. Not only he did, he perfected the art with the precision of a soldier.

People cry 07 February in front of the King Hussein Medical Centre in Amman, after hearing that the 63-year-old monarch died following a seven-month battle with cancer. — AFP photo



Pasha whose ouster became a virulent Arab demand during the early fifties. King Hussein's life-long struggle had been to bring about a balance in the apparently contradictory forces of Middle East politics and secure Arab interest vis-a-vis the beligerent Jewish State of Israel. But the strategy he crafted for it stemmed from his own ingenuity and he shunned the extremist path adopted by some of his Arab compatriots. At enthronement he knew exactly what a slippery slope he was standing on and how much vulnerable he was. In spite of his

home in establishing rapport with the world leaders to whom he enjoyed an easy access.

Back in the Arab world he was a great force of moderation — and albeit a crucial link between the Arab radicals and conservatives who seldom saw eye to eye with each other. He could be equally trusted, for example, by both Saudi King and Hafez Al-Assad. Hussein had been an indispensable interlocutor for any intra-Arab dispute. Even when he tilted towards Iraq during the Gulf War he could not be totally abandoned by the West for whom he

Pakistan's Nuclear Diplomacy

Talbot's diplomatic finesse doesn't say much, but suggests a lot. Afzal Mahmood explains

PAKISTAN and the United States have completed their eighth round of talks on non-proliferation regime on an inconclusive but positive note. They have agreed to continue the dialogue and hold further meetings in March/April on export control and strategic restraints. For all those expecting a breakthrough in the recently held round of talks in Islamabad, the joint statement issued at the end of the talks must have come as a disappointment. But a careful reading of the text of the joint statement and the observations made by Foreign Secretary Shamshad Ahmed and US Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbot reveals extraordinary diplomatic finesse that does not say much but suggests a lot.

Words play a crucial role in the conduct of diplomacy, especially when it comes to interaction between two sovereign states. It is the choice of words that indicates either flexibility or rigidity, sends positive or negative messages and suggests an opening or an impasse. That is why drafting a joint statement is often the most difficult part of a complex dialogue. When the states involved are democracies, the task of drafting a joint statement becomes even harder because it involves not just an interaction between two governments but also between them and their domestic opinion which plays a crucial role in shaping a negotiating position. To figure out the joint statement and the remarks made by the interlocutors after the Islamabad talks, one needs to read between the lines and pay attention to not only what was said, but also what was left unsaid.

The joint statement said that Pakistan and the United States resolved to stay in close touch with each other during the negotiations of the Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty (FMCT) in the UN disarmament negotiations beginning later this year. The formulation suggests a convergence of views and readiness to cooperate in drafting the FMCT at Geneva. But it also reveals divergence of

opinion over Washington's call on Islamabad to join a multilateral moratorium on the production of nuclear material for weapons.

On the CTBT, Pakistan reiterated its position as enunciated by the prime minister at the UN General Assembly last September. The joint statement, however, does not refer to the US call on Pakistan to sign the CTBT. But in diplomacy what is not said is often as important as what is proclaimed. The clue to the discussion on the CTBT lies in the brief statement of Mr Shamshad Ahmed, made to the media representatives after the formal talks with his interlocutor, who he observed, "We have significantly achieved our objectives during these eight rounds of talks." His comments indicate that the US will be quite happy if Pakistan signs and ratifies the CTBT before September this year.

According to Indian press reports, New Delhi is likely to accede to the CTBT by the end of June when the ninth round of Indo-US talks is expected to be held. The dilemma for Islamabad will be whether to sign the CTBT before New Delhi does or wait for the terms offered to India to get its accession to the CTBT. In a regular press briefing on February 2, State Department Spokesman James Rubin said, "Progress has been made in these most recent negotiations (in New Delhi) and we are consulting with Congress and other members of the international community how to respond to the movement in the right direction in terms of CTBT."

Asked if the US had been given a "date certain", Mr Rubin said, "We have received some encouraging indications on the timing." India wants some quid pro quo for signing the CTBT. Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee has made it clear, soon after Talbot's recent talks in New Delhi, that "some progress has been made but much ground has yet to be covered before India signs CTBT."

dialogue with America has been split, two appear to have proved more amenable. With Pakistan's track record, the issue of export of nuclear knowledge and technology does not pose any problem. As for the CTBT, Pakistan has more than once publicly declared its intention to sign the CTBT before September this year. There are indications that Islamabad may bring forward its signing of the CTBT to May or June. In a global situation where the idea of a ban on any further nuclear explosions is gaining wide support, Pakistan has nothing to lose by signing the CTBT.

The more intractable, however, have been the issues of moratorium on fissile material production and the Pakistani need for maintaining minimum credible nuclear deterrence. As made clear by Foreign Minister Sartaj Aziz in his December 26 statement in the National Assembly, Pakistan could not agree to any demand for a moratorium on the production of fissile material before the conclusion of the Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty (FMCT). Pakistan's major concern is the unequal stockpiles of fissile material at the global and regional levels. If the FMCT aims at only preventing further proliferation, it will be freezing the present nuclear imbalances, thereby creating more security problems than solving. Pakistan has, however, expressed its readiness to cooperate in drafting the FMCT at the disarmament conference at Geneva.

If one were to compare the excessive demands made after the May nuclear tests by the P-5, the G-7 and the UN Security Council Resolution 1172 with the current four benchmarks, identified by the US negotiators, to resolve the non-proliferation issue, it is clear that considerable ground has been covered by the US and Pakistani interlocutors during the past eight months. It is an achievement of Pakistan's nuclear diplomacy that America has been obliged to cut down its excessive demands regarding the four benchmarks now under discussion. Though it is not in a

position to accept Pakistan and India as regular nuclear weapons states in the NPT framework, Washington now clearly understands that it cannot force these two countries to cap, or roll back their nuclear capability.

The most complex issue has so far been the question of minimum credible nuclear deterrence or the so-called nuclear posture. Washington wants India and Pakistan to define their concepts of minimum nuclear deterrence. Mr Strobe Talbot, addressing a select gathering at the Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad, disclosed that he did not ask his Indian and Pakistani interlocutors to quantify their nuclear deterrence needs but to "define conceptually and operationally credible minimum deterrence which will be recognized by the US and the world and is verifiable."

Though Pakistan has made it clear that its need for credible minimum deterrence is not a cover for an open-ended nuclear weapons programme, it cannot define its concept of minimum deterrence unless India does so. New Delhi has so far refused to oblige on the ground that a certain opacity on force size and structure is an essential component of a minimum deterrent posture.

Mr Talbot stressed that the objectives of a nuclear regime for South Asia's security and peace will be best served if Pakistan and India could agree on bilateral measures to ensure non-proliferation and fissile material control under an agreement. He pointed out that without going back on their nuclear capabilities, as evidenced in their last May tests, the two countries could regain their acceptance by the international community for purposes of trade and economic needs by evolving a bilateral nuclear regime.

Taking the much needed initiative, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, in a recent interview with an Indian newspaper, has offered to negotiate directly with India on the nuclear issue.

Courtesy: The Dawn of Pakistan

BJP Morale at its Lowest before Delhi By-election

The Congress Party, pepped up by its president Sonia Gandhi, is at its aggressive best, itching to take on the BJP in the upcoming by-elections. BJP officials privately admit that both seats, including the one vacated by Sushma Swaraj, would be bagged easily by the Congress.

JUST two months after being battered in elections, Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is in shambles in the national capital and widely expected to lose both by-elections to the Delhi Assembly later this month. Leaders and activists of the BJP, otherwise one of the country's best-knit parties, say morale is at an all-time low in a city considered one of its strongest bastions for nearly five decades.

The continuing infighting within Vajpayee's 10-month-old coalition government has only added to the BJP's discomfort, with the image of the Prime Minister — once its USP and star campaigner — taking a severe beating following the election defeat in November.

The BJP was trounced that month by the main opposition Congress party in the key state elections held in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Delhi. The BJP lost control of both Rajasthan and Delhi — where it had been in power — and failed to wrest Madhya Pradesh, India's largest state, from the Congress. In New Delhi, the Congress swept 51 of 68 seats which went to the polls, leaving the BJP with just 15 members in the 70-strong Assembly. Two seats were won by Congress rebels. Elections are due in the two remaining seats on February 22.

It was the worst electoral showing by the BJP in the In-

dian capital. "There is no way we can win the coming (two) by-elections," admitted a despondent party leader, one of the many yet to recover from the shock defeat. "The morale of our cadres defies description. It is as if our world has collapsed."

Even before the November hustings, the BJP's Delhi chapter — once the pride of the party — had been at war with itself, with rival factions headed by former Chief Ministers Sahib Singh and Madan Lal Khurana pulling in different directions.

Sushma Swaraj, a woman leader hoisted as Chief Minister of Delhi by a perplexed party leadership two months before the polls, was dismissed as an outsider by both factions. In the process, Swaraj led the BJP to a miserable defeat. She herself scraped through from a southern Delhi middle class neighbourhood by barely 2,500 votes against a Congress greenhorn. Later, she resigned her Delhi legislature seat to continue as Parliament member, further sullying her image.

Last month, Khurana, a Punjabi politician considered the architect of the party's steady growth in the city since India's independence, staged a virtual revolt against the BJP brass, quitting the federal government and a top policy-making body to protest against increasing attacks on the Christian minority. Although the BJP has denied it plans to sack Khurana, his confidants have hinted he might chart his own independent course, snapping five decades of relationship with the BJP and its predecessor, the Jana Sangh party. The Jana Sangh, set up in 1951, merged with three other parties in 1977 to form the centrist Janata Party.

The BJP was formed in 1980 as a successor to the Jana Sangh. Sahib Singh, a soft-spoken leader of the agrarian Jat community who is the other power centre in the BJP's Delhi unit, continues to sulk over Prime Minister Vajpayee's refusal to induct him in the federal cabinet.

BJP officials say at the root of the infighting in the party which once prided on its discipline is increasing interference by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), a powerful Hindu revivalist group with close links to the BJP and a plethora of other Hindu outfits. "There was a time when RSS leaders and activists stayed in the background, providing only guidance on many issues," said a former minister in the Delhi government. "Now they behave and act as if they themselves are politicians."

"Anyone who is close to the RSS is promoted, anyone who utters a word against the RSS is contemptuously ignored," the party leader said. "As long as we were in power (in Delhi), we managed to keep all this under wraps. Although Khurana was the soul of

the Delhi BJP, the RSS deliberately humiliated him, promoting Singh at his cost."

Another party activist, who joined the BJP some 25 years ago, echoed the mood of despair. "It will take at least five, maybe 10, years for the situation to come under control," he said. "Even when that happens, the cadres would never be their original self again. Most of them feel let down both by the local as well as national leadership."

The BJP, party officials say, is paying the price for failing to iron out in time differences between Khurana, who had to quit as Delhi's Chief Minister after he was linked to a corruption scandal, and his successor Singh. Today, the two are not even on talking terms. In complete contrast, the Congress Party, pepped up by its president Sonia Gandhi, is at its aggressive best, itching to take on the BJP in the upcoming by-elections. BJP officials privately admit that both seats, including the one vacated by Sushma Swaraj, would be bagged easily by the Congress.

"Looking back, it is clear we had become complacent and over-confident in recent times," a party source said. "We thought the Congress would never be able to revive itself and there will never be any opposition for us in Delhi. We realise we have been very, very wrong."

— IANS