

The Demise of King Hussein and the ME Peace Process

The Middle East has been the happy hunting ground of foreign powers mostly from the West. The stake of Russia can be gauged from the fact that President Boris Yeltsin defied his doctor's orders and came to attend the funeral. Jordan has had a rough journey and from all available evidence the situation does not appear to settle down any time soon.

US System Vindicated

President Clinton's acquittal from two sharply-honed impeachment charges — perjury and obstruction of justice to cover up his affair with White House intern Monica Lewinsky — comes by a dramatically convincing bipartisan vote in the US Senate. The outcome in its essence was a foregone conclusion given that the architect of the impeachment trial, the Republicans, were way short of the two-thirds majority in the 100-member Senate, but from the way the issues had been articulated for long 13 months the possibility of defections from the Democratic ranks never looked entirely remote. That is the beauty of the system, and quite frankly, delving deeper into the implications of the entire process that caught the world beyond the US into a sort of mental whirlwind, we think, there are lessons to draw from the experience just not for the American establishment and people but also for other democracies around the globe.

Each of the expressions used by the political pundits of the western world at the end of the long-drawn-out episode — 'storm over a tea-cup,' 'elements of both tragedy and farce in it,' 'just going through the motions of the Constitution,' 'all the US institutions coming scathed from it,' etc — may have been appropriate upto a point but not wholly. To our understanding, the outcome has proclaimed the triumph of a system emerging more vibrant and infinitely stronger from an all-out display of total transparency in its working. Not merely was the holder of the highest office of the land subjected to the due process of law, made the more stringent for the constitutional obligations of his position, all facets of his dalliance with a 21-year-old woman were also laid bare. The process brought out the man in full — his "I did not have any sexual relationship with that woman" was overtaken "by I had an inappropriate relationship with her for which I am solely and completely responsible confession." In the people's eye, Clinton's ills were watered down by contrition paled before his economic achievements and a rare gift of stamina to stay focused on the job despite stupendous odds. The US people decided like the US senators that the offences he committed did not reach the standards of high crime and misdemeanor the founding fathers of the country had set for the removal of an incumbent US President from office. The US people by their high approval rating of Bill Clinton signalled that he must be allowed to carry on with the agenda of the people, the issues directly affecting their lives rather than be mired in a scandal.

The crucible through which the US system has emerged stronger by virtue of total transparency bears a lesson for us. Our democracy will stand to benefit immensely from transparency at all levels. System must prove bigger than individuals.

FBCCI Initiative

As usual, the series of hartals unleashed by opposition parties on Feb 9-11 has taken a heavy toll on the economy. Dislocations, particularly in industry, trade and commerce have been severe. The hartals have impacted heavily on Chittagong port activities, with dozens of ships stranded at outer anchorage. Vessel operators have incurred thousands of dollars worth of extra cost due to each day's delay. Industrial activities have been hit hard, both by the stoppage of production and the lack of transport for three straight days to ship out products and bring in supplies. With municipal polls due for Feb 23-25, an even longer bout of hartals is looming on the horizon.

Against such a backdrop, the business community's initiative to get a dialogue between the government and the opposition started comes as a welcome move. President of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) Abdul Awal Mintoos has already met the prime minister and secretary general of the BNP, and suggested that the two sides agree to a dialogue. Mintoos expects to meet President Shahabuddin Ahmed on Monday in an effort to seek his mediation. The business community is generally viewed as apolitical, with a strong stake in maintenance of political stability, but the question now is: would the two sides respond to the initiative and agree to talk, before the die is cast on Feb 23-25.

There is every reason to believe that a dialogue is imperative, not only to avert another catastrophic hartal, but also to restore some semblance of normality in the way the country's politics is conducted. The opposition needs to understand that it gains nothing from hartals but the country loses much. The government also needs to realise that its refusal to address opposition demands through a dialogue hurts stability and would do irreparable damage to its standing in the eyes of the voters. The path of confrontation would bring no laurels for either side, while causing immense misery for the common men and women of the country. The FBCCI initiative offers yet another opportunity for the two sides to start a dialogue without appearing to "climb down". This is an opportunity that ought not to be missed.

Executive Jet for PM!

Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad's suggestion for procurement of an executive jet for the prime minister's exclusive use has certainly surprised us beyond measure. Apparently desperate to cover up his ministry's failure to arrange the premier's participation in the funeral of King Hussein and, at the same time, ingratiate himself with her, the veteran politician has come up with such an absurd proposition for a stand-by aircraft for her.

That Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Wajed could not join the world leaders at the final rites of King Hussein is beyond doubt a display of the ministry's ineptitude. Non-availability of Amman-bound aircraft is nothing but an excuse. The ministry had ample time, in view of the premonition about his demise, to finalise the premier's travel plans; unfortunately, they did not make use of the lead time. The Bangladesh Ambassador to Jordan Major General AMSA Amin was reported absent at his station in Amman without leave.

The ministry's failure cost the premier a chance to meet the world leaders, albeit for fleeting moments. Regardless of the fact that some 28 heads of state and government could only attend the funeral, it was an opportunity wasted no doubt. While her absence in the funeral may have had a negative impact on the country's image, suggestion for an aircraft for her exclusive use can only hurt the government's credibility at home. A country still smarting under the devastation of last year's prolonged and pervasive flood can certainly do without such an expensive sycophantic suggestion.

AFTER a long 46-year reign — the longest for any Middle Eastern monarch — King Hussein of Jordan has passed away. The void left by him will be very difficult to fill. King Hussein nearly succeeded his grand father King Abdullah, who ruled Jordan in the beginning of the century. King Hussein's father King Talal was deposed on grounds of mental illness and I recall that as a young diplomat in Istanbul, I heard that he was lodged in a mental hospital in that city.

Whether King Talal was a mental patient or fell victim to the tortuous nature of Middle Eastern politics, remained an open question. King Hussein, an adolescent of 16 became the King. It is a miracle that in spite of many attempts of assassination and the vast intrigues spun around him he succeeded in completing his life's journey.

King Hussein ruled his country for 46 years and died at the age of 63. He waged a heroic battle against cancer. He was a brave man in the true sense of the term. He enjoyed sports including water skiing and scuba diving. He was an accomplished pilot and has flown everything from jets to helicopters.

A high drama was played out shortly before his death. He rushed from his death bed in the hospital in the US barely a month ago and appointed his eldest son Prince Abdullah to succeed him in place of crown. Prince Hassan, his brother, who had held the post of Crown Prince for more than four decades. It was confidently predicted that Crown Prince Hassan would succeed King Hussein. As he flew into Amman it was given out that he had recovered from cancer surgery and he appointed his son the Crown Prince, thus changing the line of succession, established for four decades. The King then rushed back to his hospital in the US, underwent surgery once again and returned to Amman to die. As the King lay with life supporting respiratory system, his son was appointed King by the Parliament and for all practical purposes became the King. He has succeeded his father with due ceremony shortly after his death.

The outpouring of grief of Jordanians has been genuine. During his long reign, he came to identify totally with his people and succeeded in winning their affection. Jordan has been truly orphaned. It is a measure of the esteem in which he was held that his funeral was attended by nearly seventy ruling Heads of States and Governments from all over the world. His funeral attracted such arch rivals as President Hafez Al-Assad of Syria and Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel. World leaders like President Clinton accompanied by three former Presidents, Ford, Carter and Bush, President Yeltsin of Russia, Prince Charles of Britain and Tony Blair, the Prime Minister, were among those who attended the funeral. King Hussein, who had a tumultuous reign passed away in a grand

show of funeral. In Middle Eastern politics King Hussein filled a large part of the stage. He was a product of Sandhurst of Britain and maintained very close contact with that country. He sent his son to Sandhurst. He had been known as a pro western leader and has maintained that position even when he felt enormous pressure mounted against him. It was thus that during the Gulf war, in spite of his pro American stance, he was compelled to

Hussein has been on the side of moderation. In a region full of hatred and frequent blood letting, moderation is often not a sought after commodity. Thanks to her peculiar geography — sandwiched between Israel and Iraq — her history of many battles including the disastrous six-day war of 1967, which saw the loss of the West Bank and the holy city of Jerusalem, Jordan has remained firmly on the side of peace.

Ramadan war that Israel agreed for the first time to sit in a conference table with the Arabs. The result was the Camp David accord between Egypt and Israel. That gave a great momentum to the Peace Process and deals have been struck between the Palestinians and Israel. That Peace Process has been steadily moving forward until the advent of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on the scene of Israel. King Hussein of Jordan left his sick bed in the US to give a hand to the signing of the Wye river accord between Chairman Arafat and Premier Netanyahu. It is therefore natural that President Bill Clinton has eulogised the role of King Hussein in favour of peace in such enthusiastic terms.

More than half the population of Jordan is reported to be of Palestinian origin. It has been emphasised that the wife of the 37-year old new King Abdullah is of Palestinian origin. It is perhaps to balance the equation that the son of Queen Noor, Hamzah has been named the Crown Prince. In this neat arrangement the last Crown Prince for more than forty years Prince Hassan has been left out. He looked a forlorn figure standing beside the coffin of his brother King Hussein.

However, any challenge to the authority of the new king will find himself surrounded by these turbulent winds. It is a daunting prospect for anyone and certainly for some one who was not supposed to take on the mantle of power. The Middle East has been the happy hunting ground of foreign powers mostly from the West. The stake of Russia can be gauged from the fact that President Boris Yeltsin defied his doctor's orders and came to attend the funeral. Jordan has had a rough journey and from all available evidence the situation does not appear to settle down any time soon.



The Horizon This Week

Arshad-uz Zaman

lean towards Saddam Hussein of Iraq. Outside of other considerations it must be remembered that Iraq and Jordan are from the same Hashemite family. One of his actions that has come in for severe criticism has been his establishment of full diplomatic relations with Israel. The Arabs, who have been critical of him, tend to forget that it was the most powerful Arab country, Egypt, who established diplomatic relations with Israel. Consistently the role of King

Jordan and for that matter the entire Middle East has been trying to clear the debris left by the six-day war of 1967. The successful war from the Arab point of view was fought in the Ramadan of 1973, when taking advantage of the moon light Egyptian forces crossed the Suez into the Sinai desert and for once the advantage of surprise attack was on the side of the Arabs. The Israelis fled and were rescued by the US in full battle gear. It was after the debacle of the

New Battles Begin Soon in the WTO

by Martin Khor

Even as the financial crisis places a heavy burden on the affected developing countries, a new challenge is emerging at the World Trade Organisation. The developed nations are piling on the pressure to launch a new Round of trade negotiations during the WTO's Ministerial Meeting this December. They are now planning their strategy to get developing countries to agree to putting more issues, such as investment, competition, government procurement, environment and labour standards, onto the WTO system. This will put developing countries into deeper trouble. It is thus time for these countries to pay attention to the developments in WTO and resist the attempt to start a new Round.

THE Asian financial crisis, which has now spread to Russia and Brazil, should have at least taught the world the lesson that there are great risks for developing countries when they are asked to liberalise their economies too fast, or to take part in "globalisation" in an indiscriminate way. Opening the economy when a country is not yet prepared to withstand the shocks generated by the world economy, or when its local firms and farms are not ready to compete with international giant corporations, can cause disruption.

Yet before we can even digest the full lessons of how to manage the interface between the domestic and external economies, pressures are once again mounting to get developing countries to open up even more to the big companies of the industrial countries. The extra pressures are coming in the World Trade Organisation, which will be holding its third Ministerial Meeting at the end of November in the United States. The European Union, backed by Japan, Canada and other developed nations, have announced they want to launch a new "Round" of trade negotiations at this meeting.

In such a Round, several issues will be made the subject of negotiations for new multilateral Agreements that will be legally binding on WTO members. For example, the Uruguay Round (1984-90) concluded with many new Agreements covering services, agriculture, intellectual property rights, investment measures and other issues. It also created the WTO to replace the old GATT (General

To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

Please stop this madness!

Sir, This is to urge the opposition to stop this madness that has characterized civil disobedience since British rule. Times have changed. BNP cannot regurgitate monologues such as "Hartal is a democratic right of the people".

The democratic rights of the working people to make a living are indeed taken away when the country shuts down due to these strikes. The country's economy bleeds most painfully when BNP cannot find ways to resolve political differences with the ruling party in the Parliament. While we fully remember that Awami League did exactly the same thing while in opposition and was finally rewarded for it due to twisted turns of events, BNP cannot hope for the repeat of the same thing. If they have any political consciousness, they will believe that any strike under the current Bangladesh political scenario is not likely to award them any future gains.

Besides, BNP along with the Awami League in its past opposition role can be held principally responsible for halting the country's progress through Hartals. Please, it is time to stop this madness.

If several leaders in the Middle East could give their lives for peace, then why cannot BNP and Awami League give up their ego and dynastic animosities to learn to resolve their differences through dialogue in and out of parliament?

Stop it. Please stop it. No more Hartals. Rizaz Osman Michigan, USA

Hartal versus Terrorism

Sir, In the night of 10th February I received a very embarrassing phone call from my country. "Please leave Bangladesh and come back here to your own country as soon as possible. No need to study where there is risk of life", said my mother after seeing the news of BBC about the hartals of Bangladesh. What a terrible, unexpected and pale position I was in. Whatever the things I said to make my mother happy, she was not comfortable, as her son is now in Bangladesh where she thinks life is at stake.

BBC, which is known as one of the best news channels in the world, reflects and broadcasts the news of hartals in such a way that people like my mother, who does not know much about Bangladesh will think that there is a war going on here. Should we blame BBC for this?

I, like many other foreigners, think that the hartals, staged by any political party and for any reason are economically and socially destructive and outrageous for Bangladesh. Hartal is like a virus threatening the economy of Bangladesh very badly. The finance minister's figure is that hartal costs Bangladesh Tk. 394 crore a day. For a country like Bangladesh, which sometimes has to depend on foreign aids, this amount is too much and almost impossible to compensate.

"Only one-day hartal costs us 10,000 (ten thousand) USD. Our reputation is in deteriorating condition in international markets only because of hartals. If Bangladesh cannot put a stop to hartal-based politics

neither Bangladesh nor we will achieve our targets and we will have to leave Bangladesh for another country" says a General Manager of a South Korean garment factory in Dhaka. Undoubtedly it is a democratic right of a political party to call a strike on behalf of people. So the citizens should be asked if there is any necessity of hartal. But in Bangladesh, so far I observed, most of the people do not want hartal at all. What we see here in Bangladesh is that the meaning of strike, which is known as hartal has been changed completely.

There is no hartal, which ends without any damage. It results in casualties from death to maiming of human beings apart from damage of properties. We see hair-raising and horrifying pictures of Runas published in the first pages of the newspapers after being injured in hartal.

Isn't this a kind of terrorism? I see no difference between hartal and terrorism.

Mahmut Kaleli A Foreign Student of DU

Hardened politics

Sir, Whenever the newspapers report that the position and the opposition hardened their position toward each other, as an aftermath they become more hardened. There is no denying the fact that our political parties should serve the cause of the nation. My concern is these very hardened people.

How can our politicians ignore the fact that the people are not blind and deaf about what is happening around them?

Syed Waliullah Dhaka

Hartal

Sir, In the editorial of 10 February, 1999, the phrase "violence begets violence" betrays the point made. A chilling stasis prevails in the realization that the piece is part and parcel of a vicious cycle, and only the relative position of the point can change in the

Be more humane

Sir, I am a Bangladeshi student studying in the United States. I left Dhaka on the 13th of August 1998. Ever since that day, I have been in touch with Dhaka's politics through your esteemed newspaper.

Our political situation is very embarrassing. We have two women leaders in the country. The world praises us for this. This portrays that Bangladesh provides equal opportunities for both men and women. At the same time their lust for power is tearing the nation apart.

Why can't we all seat together and be more humane. Hartals don't harm any political party, only tarnishes the image of our nation.

What is the solution to this economic onslaught?

Stragis Salekri Middleville, Georgia USA

"Telephone Service"

Sir, The above-captioned letter was published in the DS of 16 Feb. 1997, wherein I tried to draw the attention of the Telephone Authority that approximately 75 per cent in-coming calls that I am receiving are wrong numbers. Also those who want to reach us through our telephone (323285) find it difficult most of the time because they find the telephone is engaged though nobody was using the telephone at that time from our house.

On many occasions when we want to use the telephone we find the telephone is producing a sound other than the normal tone. I understand from different sources that because my number is an analog one, there

is ample opportunity to use the telephone by others in connivance with the telephone department personnel.

No wonder, I am receiving inflated bill every month. We are using less than 50 per cent the number of calls that are being billed per month by the T&T.

I may be wrong but I would request those concerned at the T&T to explain the issue.

M Shamsuzzoha H-2A, Road#2 Pisciculture Housing Society Mollahammadpur, Dhaka

Intoxicating power

Sir, A comparison of temperance between our two leading political parties will produce lot of heavy artillery from both sides of loyal followers. I only want to add here that we should compare sobriety according to behaviour while in power, because as we all know power is very intoxicating.

Loss of power may be infuriating but I don't think it produces any intoxicating euphoria.

Shafiqur Rahman 1/6 Lalmatia, B.L.A. Dhaka

Sarjah of the East

Sir, It is sad to see that the game of cricket which gives Himalayan pleasure to almost the entire population of Indo-Pak subcontinent irrespective of religion, cast, creed, rich or poor and can bind and blend them into an euphoria has come to this sorry state, that it now depends on the whimsical saying of a cameo-caricaturist who is going through his old life identity crises and the only weapon left for him to draw attention — is cricket.

India, a country which has such rich cultural heritage that it can be called the polebearer in this sector has to fall into this pit — thank God, Pakistan has up to now successfully kept politics away from cricket. Time has come for

Abdullah from his uncle appears highly unlikely. How is the new King going to perform in the turbulent waters of the Middle East? It is a very intriguing question. There can be no doubt that he would take a very long time — if at all it could be feasible — to play the kind of role that his father played. Jordan under King Hussein played a role larger than life. He became the peace maker par excellence. If there is one leader who is going to miss him very badly that is Yaser Arafat of Palestine. They not only share borders but numerous ties. They have decided to share the territory of Palestine among themselves provided Israel can be made to implement the treaty of Oslo signed five years ago.

According to the accord of Oslo, the state of Palestine should be a reality by May 4, 1999. Israeli elections are due in May. For whom are the Israelis going to vote? Benjamin Netanyahu, who has derailed the Peace Process or the Labour Party, under whom the Peace Process had a reasonably smooth march.

Young monarch Abdullah will find himself surrounded by these turbulent winds. It is a daunting prospect for anyone and certainly for some one who was not supposed to take on the mantle of power. The Middle East has been the happy hunting ground of foreign powers mostly from the West. The stake of Russia can be gauged from the fact that President Boris Yeltsin defied his doctor's orders and came to attend the funeral. Jordan has had a rough journey and from all available evidence the situation does not appear to settle down any time soon.

Many developing countries are against it. Their position is that the WTO should allow developing countries (who after all are the majority) the time and space to tackle the problems of implementation of the existing Agreements. That is cause for enough headaches and economic dislocation. The present financial crisis and its bad impact on trade and growth has now magnified the problem. How then can they cope with negotiations on yet more new issues, which are certain to cause another round of new and potentially disastrous problems or crises?

Whilst this position obviously has merit, the developing countries are unfortunately not united. India, Malaysia, Egypt and many African and least developed countries have spoken out against a new Round. But most Latin American and a few Asian countries have indicated they are for the European proposal.

Those countries that have thought through the problem and oppose negotiations on new issues should now get together and strengthen their position as the talks in the WTO hot up in the next few weeks. The financial crisis should not deflect the attention of policy makers or the public from what is happening in the WTO. Otherwise, through pressure or by default we will be landed with a new Round that is not of our choosing and that will place more obstacles not only to the recovery process but to our development in the long term.

The author is Director of Third World Network

Bangladesh to play the important role of a neutral host for the test cricket between this two nuclear-powered country. Recent successful holding of the "Wills Cup" has put Dhaka as par with MCC and Lords. All the participating countries, umpires and ICC officials have congratulated Bangladesh. So I think that both the Cricket Control Boards of India and Pakistan should consider this matter seriously and let Dhaka be the Sarjah of the East.

Why should we the people of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh be deprived of a fine game of cricket played by the subcontinental boys?

Shikha Mansoor House # F25, Road # 11 Banani, Dhaka-1213

Share market

Sir, The DS continues to devote a full page in covering our share markets, performances of public limited companies (PLCs), annual general meetings of PLCs, dividend declarations and so on but in real term mofussol readers are not totally benefiting from it. Orion Infusion Ltd., declared cash dividend at the AGM held in Feb '97, but till today they could not pay dividend due to cash shortage while share transactions of the company have been stopped in the stock exchanges. They do not even care to reply share holders' enquiry since I wrote several letters about dividend warrants.

Mahbubur Rahman Vill+PO Dasari Dist. Bagerhat

Stealing food

Sir, The editorial on 17.1.99 prompted me to ask some questions.

1) Who is to bear the expenses required to carry the stock?

2) Who is to bear the loss incurred due to piecemeal distribution?

3) Who is to bear the incidental cost of the same?

Md Zamaluddin Shikder Shibpur, Narsingdi.