

PM's Thanks to Begum Zia

This is for the third time in a row that we are bringing into focus the genuinely constructive trend being evidently set by Begum Zia in opposition politics. Our plea with the PM has been to draw her into making a completely co-equal response to the highly positive signals coming in a succession from the opposition leader.

Only yesterday in our editorial column did we urge the PM to reciprocate. And what has happened since then that we are having to repeat it today? Actually, it seems to us that the PM is yet to treat the matter as seriously as is deserved by some latest developments in the temper and texture of opposition politics.

In the face of the whole bunch of positive signals beamed by the opposition leader what have we got from the Prime Minister? In a seeming back-handed compliment she has thanked Begum Zia for accepting the reality that election is the only way to change a government in a democratic society. She has predicated it not just on acceptance of a reality but also on politically loaded side remarks that unmistakably bordered on sarcasm. In other words, even with the PM's thanks to the opposition leader Begum Zia she falls short of what was obviously expected of her in terms of being forthcoming. Quite evidently the compliment has had a digression of sorts which we wish it didn't have.

As a matter of fact, the opposition leader deserved the PM's 'thanks' twice over. Once for the fact that the former has affirmed her belief in electoral politics as a sign of relenting on the oust-government movement. And second time for the cogent reason that Begum Zia has successfully dissuaded the Jatiya Party from observing hartal on the Black Day set for March 27 in Chittagong division coinciding with Larma's take-over as chairman of the CHT Regional Council.

The objective conditions of national politics demanded that the ruling party started greeting a small positive step by the opposition as a big step forward. That's how a working relationship is built from a zero-sum situation. But here we find that some real big developments in the opposition camp are being first ignored and then treated with undisguised disdain, although sugar-coated by a courteous remark or two. Such an approach is no help.

Worse than We Thought

The tragic launch capsized in the Meghna on 8 May last that had taken a huge toll of human lives was caused by switching of vehicles, according to the findings of the inquiry committee set up to go into the tragedy. A news item in this paper on Wednesday based on a report submitted by the Principal Officer of Mercantile Marine Safety to the authorities on 18 May states that the owner of the launch cheated the authorities by operating Dweep Kanya, which sank with more than two hundred passengers on board instead of ML Upadip which had the permit to ply the mighty Meghna. At the time of the accident the launch was allegedly being commanded by an assistant of the 'sareng' who was not obviously authorised to be doing so.

Originally, Dweep Kanya was built as an oil tanker and was not supposed to carry passengers. Converted into a launch later and named ML Mala, it was allowed to ply on the Buriganga. But authorised to carry a maximum of two hundred plus passengers in calm waters in small rivers it was hardly a craft to negotiate the rolling waves of the Meghna.

We thank the authorities concerned for completing the inquiry as quickly as they have done and making the contents known to the public. The report also exposes the complex processes through which the owners have to go for obtaining permits to ply these transports and also the slackness of the authorities concerned to supervise compliance and apply the specific laws in this behalf. In this case the owner of the ill-fated launch is clearly at fault in light of the findings of the inquiry committee. But the IWTA officials responsible for application and supervision of compliance with the relevant rules and laws should also be held responsible for the tragedy on the Meghna.

Insecurity at Sylhet Gasfield

It's been nearly a week since a group of miscreants assaulted the general manager of the Sylhet Gasfields Limited (SGL) at the Rashidpur-7 well-site, demanding jobs for 'their people'. Although the DIG of police, Sylhet Range, and SP and Deputy Commissioner, Habiganj were promptly informed of the incident, there has not been much activism at the law-enforcers' end. A sub-inspector aside, high-ups in the local administration, reports suggested, did not even visit the site so far. With the perpetrators still at large, naturally, the professionals engaged in drilling at the site, especially the foreigners, felt threatened and some have even made it clear that unless the situation is redressed soon enough they would leave. A simple law and order situation looks set to snowball into a major crisis, and at some risk is the World Bank and ADB-aided Tk 124 crore Gas Infrastructure Development Project, which is expected to be completed by mid-July.

The heinous assault, first and foremost, puts a big question-mark over the security system at this important installation. Why were the assailants allowed entry into the well-site remains anybody's guess. Then comes an even more disturbing question: what emboldened the group to barge into the site, assault the general manager, demand jobs for 'their people', and ask for suspension of drilling? Is the Ganadabi Parishad, of which the intruders claimed to be office-bearers, that powerful? String-pulling reportedly by a group of influential people with a local MP's blessings has made the situation extremely complicated.

We condemn the incident and demand immediate police investigation into the matter. The sooner the miscreants are brought to book the better. At the same time, we would urge Petrobangla and the ministry concerned to re-evaluate the security mechanism at the site; for, all said and done, the incident was a serious breach of security.

WHEN Pakistan responded to Indian nuclear tests last May, South Asia was a very tense region. The world powers were running around trying to tame the tidal wave of nuclear arms race which had locked both India and Pakistan in a new confrontationist mode. What worried the world even more than the nuclear capability of India and Pakistan was the presence of triggering factors like Kashmir. As long as Kashmir was not defused, the world thinking was, a nuclear war could break out any time. A year later, Kashmir is still the heat of region's tense strategic environment. The recent skirmishes along the Line of Control followed by exchange of hard-hitting statements from both sides indicate that even the much talked about Lahore Declaration has not had much impact on the bilateral relations of the two countries whose future continues to revolve around this long-festering problem.

Following are certain important facts about the Kashmir issue which have been gleaned from various published material. At the eve of partition of the subcontinent in August 1947, the constitutional position of some 500 princely states, Kashmir being one of them, was that paramountcy was neither to be retained by the British Crown nor could it be transferred to the new government. The states had no choice but to opt for either India or Pakistan on the basis of the religious majority there. The state of Jammu and Kashmir was ruled by a Hindu Maharaja, Hari Singh, a descendant of Gulab Singh, a Dogra Rajput who had purchased the Kashmir Valley in 1846 on payment of Rs 750,000 (\$24,200 at today's conversion rate) in cash plus nominal tribute to signify British paramountcy. The state had an overall Muslim majority of 78 per cent, while in the Valley, the Muslims number 93 per cent.

The other factors, geographical contiguity and economic dependence, too, linked Kashmir closely to Pakistan. In early August 1947 Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi visited Kashmir and persuaded the Maharaja to replace Prime Minister Ram Chandra Kak, who favoured an independent Kashmir, and accede to India. The *quid pro quo* was India's support to the Maharaja against his Muslim subjects who had revolted following an order by the Maharaja to surrender their arms to the police. Muslims in Jammu, the Hindus formed a considerable portion of population and where Sikhs and other militants from India had infiltrated, were slaughtered by the thousands. Almost the entire Muslim population of 500,000 was eliminated: some 200,000 were killed and the rest fled to West Pakistan.

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The Heart of the Matter

Syed Talat Hussain writes from Islamabad

According to the Simla Agreement, "in Jammu and Kashmir, the Line of Control resulting from the ceasefire of December 17, 1971, shall be respected by both sides without prejudice to the recognised position of either side. Neither side shall seek to alter it unilaterally, irrespective of mutual differences and legal interpretations. Both sides further undertake to refrain from the use of force in violation of this Line." After the signing of the Simla Agreement, little progress was made towards a final settlement on Kashmir and its boundaries.

Outraged by these massacres, tribesmen from Pakistan's Frontier Province crossed the border into Kashmir to wage a holy war (Jihad) against the Dogra force. On October 24, 1947, the Maharaja appealed to India for help. The government of India, acting on Mountbatten's advice, decided that Indian troops could be sent to Kashmir only if the Maharaja first acceded to India, and further, since Kashmir had a Muslim majority, accession should be conditional on the will of the people being ascertained by a plebiscite after the raiders had been expelled. India soon took the matter to the Security Council, which formed a United Nations Commission on India and Pakistan (UNCIP).

After protracted debates, through two resolutions, the Security Council decided that the dispute should be settled by holding an impartial and free plebiscite under the auspices of the United Nations. The resolutions of August 13, 1948, and January 5, 1949, form the basis for the settlement of the Kashmir dispute but there has been no movement towards their implementation except that a ceasefire line was effected on July 27, 1949. Later, in 1957, the Security Council passed another resolution reaffirming the principles embodied in its resolutions of April 21, 1948; June 3, 1948; March 14, 1950, and March 30, 1951, and the UNCIP resolutions of August 13, 1948, and January 5, 1949, that the final disposition of the State of Jammu and Kashmir would be made in accordance with the will of the people expressed through the democratic method of a free and impartial plebiscite conducted under the auspices of the UN. In 1965 India and Pakistan clashed in a conflict that began when Pakistan sent its troops into Kashmir and India retaliated by crossing the international border. But significant developments took place in Kashmir after the 1971 war, that Pakistan lost: the 1972 Simla Agreement. A major issue on the negotiation agenda was Kashmir: on a redefining of the ceasefire line (CFL) that had been delineated in Kashmir in 1949.

The agreement signed on July 3, 1972, by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi of India and President Zulfikar Ali Bhutto of Pakistan pledged both sides to settle their differences by peaceful means through bilat-

eral negotiations or by any other peaceful means mutually agreed upon between them." Further, "Pending the final settlement of any of the problems between the two countries, neither side shall unilaterally alter the situation." With respect to Kashmir, the Simla Agreement resulted in a redefining of the CFL, from that time forth known as the Line of Control (LoC). According to the Simla Agreement, "in Jammu and Kashmir, the Line of Control resulting from the ceasefire of December 17, 1971, shall be respected by both sides without prejudice to the recognised position of either side. Neither side shall seek to alter it unilaterally, irrespective of mutual differences and legal interpretations. Both sides further undertake to refrain from the use of force in violation of this Line." After the signing of the Simla Agreement, little progress was made towards a final settlement on Kashmir and its boundaries.

factor. The current situation in Kashmir can best be summarised thus: First, among the population living in the most significant part of the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir, that is the Kashmir Valley, there is a deep sense of alienation from the Indian Union. Second, since 1988 Pakistan has mounted a sharp, diplomatic campaign to highlight the Kashmiri freedom struggle, officially supporting it morally and diplomatically. N something India alleges is a cover military operation to exploit this alienation. Third, Indian security forces, near 600,000, have systematically and with impunity perpetrated outrages violations of human rights in the valley which have been well documented.

Almost all possible ways to resolve the Kashmir dispute have been suggested. Some are still relevant; others have been repeatedly rejected by the two parties out of hand. Here is a brief overview of the different solutions which have been suggested by different quarters.

i) Multilateral or third-party approach: The ceasefire and truce agreements arranged by the UNCIP in 1948 and 1949 fall into this category. But the ceasefire agreement did not hold for long, and the peace-keeping operation that emerged from it failed in large measure to keep the peace. From the beginning of the Kashmir conflict, international involvement has been looked upon with a certain amount of suspicion by both India and Pakistan. Both sides have been acutely conscious of the dangers inherent in mediation exercises, among them the mediator's own (and not necessarily compatible) political agenda; both sides have also been painfully aware that even successful mediation, if it exposed them to charges of a sell-out, could lead to domestic political disaster. But on balance Pakistan is in favour of a third party intervention, be that the UN or the US but India is not. So much so that UNMOGIP (United Nations Military Observers Group on India and Pakistan) is generally viewed in India as being partial to Pakistan.

ii) Bilateral approach: The Kashmir dispute has been discussed in bilateral talks between India and Pakistan at many different fora, more or less formally, and by officials of widely differing rank and importance, on countless occasions. Since the 1949 ceasefire ending the first India-Pakistan

war, however, settlement of the Kashmir dispute has been the explicit, primary objective in direct, formal, and substantive bilateral talks between them on only three occasions: the series of talks held between the prime ministers of India and Pakistan in July-August 1953, the talks held at the same level in May 1955, and the six rounds of ministerial-level talks held between December 1962 and May 1963.

The second was in early January 1994 at a meeting of the foreign secretaries of India and Pakistan in Islamabad. Their meeting, the first since August 1992, when worsening relations between the two countries over Kashmir had resulted in the suspension of further talks, was the seventh round of foreign secretary-level discussions held since they were launched as a confidence-building activity in 1990. But over two days, the two sides spent less than three hours in formal discussions. No progress was reported, and no further talks were scheduled. The third was in early January 1994 at a meeting of the foreign secretaries of India and Pakistan in Islamabad. Their meeting, the first since August 1992, when worsening relations between the two countries over Kashmir had resulted in the suspension of further talks, was the seventh round of foreign secretary-level discussions held since they were launched as a confidence-building activity in 1990. But over two days, the two sides spent less than three hours in formal discussions. No progress was reported, and no further talks were scheduled.

iii) Conversion of the LoC: This includes relatively minor territorial adjustments or exchanges to rectify irrationalities in the border. Modifications to the LoC of this kind were offered by India to Pakistan in the 1962-63 negotiations; from time to time there have been indications that the Indian government continues to think along these lines. Conversion can also include boundary control provisions, such as that for the opening of transit points at regular intervals, or for the maintenance of a soft (customs-free) border for trade, travel, and bi-national employment. Or it could itself form part of a larger, multifaceted autonomy package embracing more than territorial partition.

iv) New LoC: A number of possibilities present themselves, but by far the most common proposal has been that all or most of the Valley of Kashmir be transferred to Pakistan, with India retaining the larger but less populated Ladakh and Jammu regions of the state. This proposal obviously collides with the aspirations of Kashmiri Muslims either for independence or for retention of the state in its pre-1947 form.

v) Modification of sovereignty: a) Multilateral (global) — those built upon direct control over Kashmir by the international community, primarily via the United Nations; (b) multilateral (regional) — those built upon a confederal arrangement consisting of the states of the South Asian region; and (c) bilateral/joint — those built upon a shared, co-operative, or condominium arrangement between India and Pakistan.

lowing statement on the menu of the Turkish Airlines: "Although Turkey is a Muslim country, wine is an important part of Turkish culture!" My friend was equally taken aback by the hostility, yes hostility, of the elite Turkish students and Professors towards Islam. The ordinary Turks, however, are devout Muslims. Any one who performed the Hajj knows that the biggest contingent is always from Turkey.

One notices two types of Turks in the USA: very religious and the completely non-observant. Recently, my niece wished her female Turkish school teacher Eid Mubarak; the teacher stared back coldly as if to say, "I wish you had not done that!" Funny, when my nieces wished the Catholic nun teachers "Eid Mubarak," they reciprocated with beaming smiles!

Turkey is not well regarded in the West. Remember the somewhat derogatory expression, "Young Turks!" What Turkey is really loathed for is what it did to the Armenians in the 1910s. It was Kosovo in reverse. Over a million Armenian Christians were massacred by Ottoman Turks. The Allies concluded that the safety of the Armenians could not be guaranteed under the Turks. That's how Armenia became an independent nation. The allies came to the same conclusion about the Muslim Kurds. The Treaty of Sevres (1920) promised the Kurds a homeland. Unfortunately for the Kurds, Kemal Ataturk fought to re-conquer Kurdistan.

People of the Indian subcontinent appreciate colonial Britain for certain things — the English language, civil service and the rail roads. But that in Serbia or Saudi Arabia, the Ottoman Turks rulers are universally despised. Some would say that Kemalism has been a failure; that is why its defenders are desperate. Quest of Europeanism has not done Turkey much good. Turkey remains a non-entity in Europe, and is inconsequential in the Islamic world. On a visit to Al Quds ("Jerusalem") three years ago, the writer was shocked to see the large number of daily flights between Israel and Turkey from Tel Aviv airport. Among Muslims, Israel considers Turkey its only true friend.

Turkey may gloat and delight, but the persecution and expulsion of Ms. Kavacki, and the capture and certain execution of Kurdish hero Abdullah Ocalan will not gain Turkey admission into the European Union. Turkey needs to demonstrate that it is a tolerant, truly democratic society that believes in human rights and the right of citizens to practice their faith freely, before the Europeans will consider Turkey one of their own.

LETTER FROM AMERICA

Turkish Delight

Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed writes from Princeton

Surely, it is a woman's right to wear whatever she pleases. It should not be the state's business to tell women what they can or cannot wear! Turkey should take note of the fact that in the United States Ms. Kavacki was not denied permission to sit for her examinations because she was wearing the Hijab!

curity. Turkey's chief prosecutor, Vural Savas, announced that he had opened a criminal investigation to charge Ms. Kavacki with violating a law that punishes anyone who "openly incites people to enmity and hatred by pointing to differences of class, race, religion or creed." Turkish television endlessly rebroadcast tapes showing legislators shouting insults at Ms. Kavacki.

Ms. Kavacki read a statement: "Know this, I will defend to the end this office that the people have given me, in a manner suited to a woman from the Virtue Party, with this appearance and within law. I cover my head in accordance with my religious beliefs. It is a personal choice." The Virtue Party is the successor to the Welfare Party, which was banned last year on the grounds that it was anti-secular. The government has gone to court to ban the Virtue Party as well.

Mr. Necmettin Erbakan led the Islam-oriented Welfare Party to victory in the Turkish elections in 1995, when he became the Prime Minister. Under intense pressure from the military, a year later he was forced to resign, his party was banned and he was barred from politics for five years.

On May 15, Prime Minister Ecevit announced that Ms. Kavacki will be stripped of her Turkish citizenship, because Ms. Kavacki had accepted American passport in March. Although dual citizenships are allowed under Turkish law, un-

der a rarely enforced clause, Ecevit charged that Ms. Kavacki should have obtained Turkey's permission before acquiring American passport. President Suleyman Demirel signed a decree stripping Ms. Kavacki of her Turkish citizenship. There are about 50 more members of parliament who have dual citizenships; they are not being investigated. Incredibly, both the current Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit, and former Prime Minister Tansu Ciller, have dual citizenships!

Ms. Kavacki dropped out of medical school in Turkey after being denied permission to take an examination while wearing her head scarf. Later she joined her family in Texas, where her father headed an Islamic Association. In 1994, she earned a degree in computer science from the University of Texas at Dallas.

Ironically, the oath Ms. Kavacki was prevented from taking include a vow to uphold the "principles and reforms of Ataturk." In 1923, the founder of the Turkish Republic Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, decreed reforms that shattered centuries-old traditions. He abolished the sultanate, banned religious brotherhoods, adopted Latin script to replace Arabic, and banned the fez, the veil and the head scarf.

In a speech in 1925, Ataturk said: "In some places I have seen women who put on a piece of cloth or a towel or something like it over their heads to hide their faces. Can mothers and daughters of a civilized nation

adopt this strange manner, this barbarous posture? It is a spectacle that makes the nation an object of ridicule. It must be remedied at once!"

With due respect to Mr. Ataturk, it is not wearing "cloth or a towel or something like it" by Ms. Kavacki that makes Turkey look ridiculous; it is the extremity of intolerance to which Turkish government sank to prevent her from doing so, that does.

If the rulers of Turkey believe that a woman wearing a head scarf threatens the foundation of the state, the Turkish state is on a very shaky foundation! Turkey's earliest desire is to join Europe and be a part of the West. Let us see what the US or Britain would have done under similar circumstances.

Can anyone imagine a US Congresswoman or a British MP being barred from serving in the United States Congress or the British Parliament for wearing a head scarf? And these are Christian-majority, not Muslim-majority states. In the Western democracy, it is inconceivable for the military to dictate to the elected government. Sacking of the Erbakan government in Turkey in 1996 was not democracy, the West would call it unacceptable military dictatorship. Ever since the Helsinki accord of 1975, the West has emphasized human rights. Turkish violation of the human rights of the Kurds is well known and well documented. Democracy, human rights, tolerance and freedom of

speech are the pillars of Western society. Can Turkey honestly say they measure up? Then why are they surprised every time they are denied entry into the European Union?

The West is not interested in a cosmetic facade. Does Bangladesh need to change Bengali script to Arabic script to impress the Middle Eastern Muslims? And why is this carnal desire to be labeled "Europeans?" Albanians, Bosnians and the Serb thugs are all "Europeans." Does that make them superior to, or evoke jealousy from the Japanese, Chinese or even the Bangladeshis?

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