

Victory Speaks

FANTASTIC, fabulous, stunning, whatever one wishes to call it, Monday's sensational but richly deserved victory against Pakistan proclaims one simple message: our cricketers have come of age. Instead of being overawed by their powerful opponents, Aminul Islam and his men played like champions from the word 'go' and forced one of the hot favourites in the seventh edition of the game's premier event to taste their first defeat. Bowed to them Wasim Akram's apparently invincible eleven and showered praise on them the pundits. Joining the few thousands of frenetic Bangladesh fans in the stands at the Northampton ground were dancing, singing and chanting millions back home. Celebrations continued till the dead hours of night. Explosion of fire-crackers, sprinkling of coloured water and burgeoning rallies all around took the while country on an ecstatic ride.

The triumph would not count for much, though, as far as the World Cup is concerned; nevertheless, for us, a nation of 120 million people, it has been more than winning the Cup. Pakistan may still go on to lift the title; and if they do, our cricketers will go down in the annals as the ones who conquered the conquerors. Our batsmen lorded over arguably the most potent bowling attack, and our bowlers and fielders won respect from the game's highly respected batsmen. Above all, they played like a team, a team of winners, who, with consummate ease, proved mightier than the mightiest on the day. The Davids brought down the Goliaths. There may not have been the likes of Wasim Akram, Saeed Anwar, Inzamamul Haq, Ijaz Ahmed, Moin Khan, Waqar Younis, Shoaib Akther or Saqlain Mushtaq on our side; but Shahriar Hossain, Akram Khan, Khaled Mahmood, Shafiquddin Ahmed, Mohammad Rafiq, Aminul Islam, Naimur Rahman, Khaled Mashud have shown that they are no lesser-lings.

Our cricketers have shown the world that they deserve a permanent place in the game's ivy league. They have proved that they have the potential to win the much-coveted Test status. However, there are certain pre-requisites to be met for that to happen. The Bangladesh Cricket Board has to recognise the fact that brilliance in the shorter version of the game is not enough to get the International Cricket Council (ICC) nod for Test status. Our domestic cricket must be shored up and three-day tournaments introduced without delay. At the same time, the government must invest more, both in terms of time and money, for infrastructure development. The world should get the message that Monday's brilliance was not a flash in the pan, rather it marks the beginning of a triumphant march to greater cricketing glories.

Trans-Asian Railway

THE Trans-Asian Railway is a rapidly approaching prospect of phenomenal significance. Originating from the South Unan province of China, the network is envisaged to girdle Myanmar, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Iran and Turkey before ending up in Bulgaria overlooking the whole of Europe. This ESCAP proposal on 'southern corridor' occasioned a four-day brain-storming session of experts that concluded in the capital last Friday on a highly focused note. Our thanks to ESCAP and CPD for having organised this seminar. It can be said without any fear of contradiction that no country wishes to be left out of this grandiose project. Principally because it promises to turn globalisation into a physical reality. On a lighter vein, we shall be able to go to London by rail — what a liberating thought! But on a far more weighty note, Bangladesh as the bridge-head between South and Southeast Asia would stand to benefit immensely from market and investment inter-penetrations that are a far cry now, given the lack of trans-border infrastructure.

Whilst there is a unanimity over the concept it is the question of regional networking of routes that has seen India, Bangladesh and Nepal on differing wave-lengths. In fact, Bangladesh and Nepal favour Birganj-Roxal-Singabad-Rohapur route, the direct route for landlocked Nepal to gain access to Bangladesh. But the Indian proposal is for Nepal to enter Bangladesh via the Calcutta-Darshana route. Bangladesh is learnt to have told India that Kulaura-Shahbajpur-Karimganj route would not be opened by her if the latter were to say 'no' to short-cut transit being proposed by the former, along with Nepal. We would like to keep faith with the Indian delegates' parting assurances of consideration for the proposal put on the table by Nepal and Bangladesh. India, hopefully, will not allow this to be niggling to a point where the Trans-Asian railway has difficulty in taking off.

Every country will go by national interest in its approach to the TAR. And, Bangladesh cannot be any exception to it. But if better be enlightened national interest rather than an interest swathed in narrow political considerations. Can we turn a blind eye to the fact that 'political prejudices' are taking a back-seat to visions of long term economic prosperity in the present-day world? What, Bangladesh has to ensure is that her share of multilateral trade increases by virtue of the Asian Railway and that her trade imbalance with India becomes a matter of the past.

Shrimp Exporters' Plight

DISTURBING news has come from the frozen foods sector, particularly the foreign exchange earning shrimp processing plant owners. Reports have it that 40 factories may face closure due to price fall in international market which has caused around Taka 400 crore worth of frozen foods to stockpile in the country. This is really a gloomy picture for an important export-oriented industry that employs a good number of the labour force, apart from earning valuable foreign exchange for the country.

Bangladesh Frozen Foods Exporters Association (BFFEA) has claimed that prices in international markets have fallen for the second time resulting in gluts of a huge quantity of frozen foods in Khulna and Chittagong regions. They also feel that there is no guarantee of better prices for BFFEA members as their competitors have lowered their prices' following devaluation of their currencies. A major exporter has claimed that governments in Vietnam, India and Thailand, main competitors of Bangladesh, have extended co-operation to their frozen foods exporters in the shape of subsidisation which they want to see done in Bangladesh as well. They are apparently for this course instead of going for devaluation. Whatever may be the best way to help the frozen foods industry must be devised quickly so that the exporters are bailed out of the crisis sooner than later.

Confrontation in the High Himalayas

Now that both India and Pakistan are nuclear powers, they have a great responsibility in not playing at these war games. Should this escalation get out of hand it could lead to terrible, tragic consequences.

LIKE a bolt from the blue, Indo-Pakistan confrontation in the high Himalayas has assumed dangerous proportions. There is method in this madness. There is need for restraint on both sides.

This half-a-century-old conflict has been debated back and forth for umpteen number of times. Since 1948, that is one year after India and Pakistan emerged as sovereign independent states, they have been locked in battle for the possession of this strategic state. They fought two wars and a third one in 1971 saw the humiliating surrender of Pakistan forces to the Indian forces in Suhrawardy Udyana, here in Dhaka. This was followed by Simla Agreement, which demonstrated the superiority of India and ensured that the question of Kashmir would be removed from the international agenda, and become a bilateral question as has been repeatedly asserted by India.

I write from personal knowledge because I was Public Relations Officer of President Ayub Khan. President Ayub Khan's peace-making efforts did not go far beyond offering condolences to the Indian authorities and lowering of the Pakistani flag.

We all know that a war broke out between India and Pakistan in 1965 and caused great loss in men and material on both sides. In 1966 when I was Press

POOR Benjamin ("Bibi") Netanyahu! He was only following to the letter the Likud recipe for making "peace" with the Palestinians, as enunciated by his predecessor Yitzhak Shamir: negotiate the Palestinians to death, keep on building settlements, and then turn around and say, "Sorry Yassir, the facts on the ground have changed, cannot with- draw!"

Such tactics worked flawlessly before Oslo. The Israeli lobby in America could be relied upon to always explain away Israeli intransigence and lay the blame squarely on the Palestinians. With American government taking on the role of an active partner and a backer of the Oslo accord, things got a little rougher for the land-loving, Arab-hating, anti-peace Israelites. Instead of bombarding the American people with the Israeli propaganda through the media, which they control, the Israeli lobby is now finding it difficult to convince a skeptical American administration of Israel's real intentions.

If the Israelis could have both peace and land, they would sign on right now! Former Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir actually tried that formula before: "peace for peace," he said, meaning, "if you leave Israeli settlers on your land alone, we will not break your bones." Unfortunately for the Likudniks the Oslo formula is "land for peace." And that is

what they have trouble with. After a distinguished career in the military and politics, Yitzhak Rabin realized that Israel's security lay not in more sophisticated armory, but in peace with the Palestinians. That is what led to Oslo. There were other mitigating factors. All the three principals, who themselves had to congregate at Oslo to accept the Nobel Peace Prize — Rabin, Peres and Arafat — were getting old. Like Gandhi, Nehru and Jinnah, they wanted to see the fruit of their labour before they passed on.

The young Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu was in no such hurry. As Rabin withdrew from more and more Palestinian territory under Oslo, Netanyahu's denunciation of Rabin as a "traitor" grew louder and louder. The natural consequence of that vitriol was, Rabin's assassination at the hand of a Jewish extremist in November, 1995.

The smooth operator Netanyahu was worth watching

accepted plebiscite as the solution of the Kashmir problem. Needless to say that much water has flown down the Dal Lake of Kashmir and the division of Kashmir into Kashmir proper controlled by India and Azad Kashmir controlled by Pakistan, has tended to solidify.

There is a parallel to the scenario unfolding before us. In 1964, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru died. President Field Marshal Ayub Khan decided to present an olive branch to India, in her moment of extreme grief. Meanwhile, the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) Directorate of Pakistan started a plot to upset the apple-cart and prepared to launch guerrillas through Azad Kashmir into India.

Attache at the Pakistan Embassy in the Federal Republic of Germany with Ambassador Abdur Rahman Khan, brother-in-law of President Ayub, as the Head of Mission, he ruefully admitted that civil and military bureaucracy had dragged President Ayub into the war with disastrous consequences for President Ayub.

White people were basking in the afterglow of the bus rides to their respective countries, infiltrators had been sneaked into the high mountains near Kargil and they managed to get more than a foothold. Alarmed by these developments, India has taken recourse to bombing the hide-outs of the infiltrators and is reported to have killed,

has threatened unspecified action, should India cross into Pakistan territory. This has already happened and Pakistan has shot down two Indian jet fighters.

The United States and Britain have called for restraint and a negotiated settlement of the question. Pakistan as usual wants to involve the UN and India is unlikely to play ball. Given Indian reluctance to the involvement of any third power including the UN, the big powers are unlikely to put any pressure on India in this regard.

India and Pakistan have a great interest in keeping this latest flare-up within reasonable bounds. Although India has used air power to flush out the infiltrators, this high wire trapeze gamesmanship is taking place in the Himalayas far away from the land border of India and Pakistan. There has been in the past an inconclusive test of strength in the Siachen glaciers of the Himalayas. The two adversaries have to make sure that the trial of strength does not turn into one between the total forces of India and Pakistan.

This becomes all the more pressing because both countries

are in possession of nuclear bombs. There is no room for miscalculation, for the result can be catastrophic for the poor and hungry millions of the two Third World countries. Mercifully, the two leaders are talking to each other on the line and exploring an honourable way out of the current crisis.

The argument has been advanced that the escalation of violence by the Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpeyi has been designed to improve his chances in the forthcoming Indian national elections. Similarly, Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif is supposed to take a hawkish attitude because of mounting difficulties within the country. These are puerile considerations and do not deserve any attention. What appears far more certain is the perennial desire of the Pakistani intelligence agency to internationalise the conflict when it ran the risk of drowning in the bus diplomacy.

Now that both India and Pakistan are nuclear powers, they have a great responsibility in not playing at these war games. Should this escalation get out of hand it could lead to terrible, tragic consequences. It is best to bury the hatchet and turn a new page, as it appeared to have started with the bus diplomacy.

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per cent to 44 per cent votes, an unprecedentedly large margin of loss in the history of Israeli elections. Promptly, Netanyahu resigned from the Likud party, and later resigned his seat in the Knesset. He plans on making money by writing his memoir and lecturing in the US. The primary reason for Barak's victory is the switch in allegiance by the Russian Jews. In 1996, they voted 60 per cent to 40 per cent for Netanyahu. This time they chose Barak, 55 to 45 per cent.

It will be a mistake to write Netanyahu off. He will be back when circumstances are more favourable to his brand of extremism. Now, what about Ehud Barak, the former army chief turned politician?

Although Washington and the Palestinians were happy to see the back of Netanyahu, there has not been wild celebrations. And rightly so. Barak will not be a patsy. Ehud Barak calls himself a "dovish hawk." That is significant. In such two-word descriptions, the second word is the important one.

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After a distinguished career in the military and politics, Yitzhak Rabin realized that Israel's security lay not in more sophisticated armory, but in peace with the Palestinians. That is what led to Oslo. There were other mitigating factors. All the three principals, who themselves had to congregate at Oslo to accept the Nobel Peace Prize — Rabin, Peres and Arafat — were getting old. Like Gandhi, Nehru and Jinnah, they wanted to see the fruit of their labour before they passed on.

The first mistake the interim Prime Minister Shimon Peres made was not to call for elections right away; he would have won in a landslide. Instead, he waited six months. By then passions had cooled and Netanyahu had regrouped. Through slick ads Netanyahu reminded voters that since Peres had not served in the army, he could not be trusted with Israel's security. Many people blamed America's total support for Peres as one reason for his defeat. Actually, it was something else.

Early in 1996, the Hamas bomb-maker "The Engineer" was assassinated by Israeli agents. Hamas retaliated by carrying out several suicide bombings inside Israel, killing tens of Israelis. That's when Peres lost the election. Netanyahu knew that if nothing else, the Israelis are security hawks. Commentators have since faulted Peres for giving the green light for The Engineer's assassination. With peace process progressing, and at such a delicate stage, Rabin would never have agreed to that, they say.

After beating Peres by 1 per cent or only 30,000 votes, Netanyahu immediately claimed that he had won a clear mandate from the Israeli voters to reassess Oslo. He had been elected Prime Minister of Israel, not the Palestinians, he said acidly. True peacemakers like Rabin, Peres and Arafat try to look at issues from the point of view of their adversaries. That is why in the aftermath of the suicide bombings, Arafat agreed to Peres's request for a delay in Hebron pullout.

The peace process was on schedule when Netanyahu came to power. After a lot of haggling and pressure from the US, he did agree to pull out from Hebron. Likud extremists like Benny Begin, the son of former Prime Minister Menachem Begin, resigned from his cabinet in protest. It was then that Netanyahu realized that he could not withdraw from any more territory and hope to remain in power.

Netanyahu went through the motions at Wye river plantation, but had no intention of implementing the accord signed there. The pathetic spectacle of blaming Yasser Arafat for non-compliance was beginning to sound stale even in Washington. Last December, it was the Likud revolt over Wye accord that forced Netanyahu to call for new elections in May. As one commentators pointed out accurately, over the last few years, Yasser Arafat had become a much more welcome guest at the White House than the Prime Minister of Israel.

President Clinton used his good relations with Arafat to dissuade him from declaring a Palestinian state on May 4.

The military had not been consulted, he said. After his recent election victory, he alarmed the Palestinians by stating red lines in negotiations — no getting back to pre-1967 border, no division of Jerusalem, and no dismantling of the Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza.

Unlike Yitzhak Rabin's left-leaning coalition, Barak is trying to form a national unity coalition that will include Likud and the ultra-religious Shas party. That will surely put a brake on how much Barak can yield to the Palestinians. And unlike Rabin, Peres and Arafat, Barak at 57 is not in a hurry.

Whether the Palestinians like it or not, politically Ehud Barak will take up residence halfway between where Rabin used to live, and where the likes of Netanyahu dwell.

Nevertheless, one's ardent hope is that Bibi's divorce from the peace process will only be helpful.

LETTER FROM AMERICA

Bye Bye, Bibi!

Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed writes from Princeton

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