

## US-Bangladesh Relations

Taking into account the huge potentials of expansion of US-Bangladesh relations, we must make efforts to build a forward-looking relationship from which peoples of both the countries will benefit. If the current momentum can be maintained, we can foresee a very close and productive relationship between Bangladesh and the USA.

by K M Shehabuddin

BANGLADESH-US relations are at their best today with the two countries cooperating in wide variety of areas. The degree of warmth of the relations can be measured by the high level deliberations between their leaders. In September, 1999, US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright called on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at her hotel suite in New York to discuss a number of important issues. In October, 1999, Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad had bilateral meeting with Secretary Albright which was followed by a joint press conference. Most importantly, President Clinton undertook his historic visit to Bangladesh in March this year.

Bangladesh attaches particular importance to its relations with the United States not only because of its preponderant role in international affairs but also for the commonality of interests of the two countries in many areas including promotion of democracy, human rights and protection of peace and security in the world. The US today is not only an important development partner but also a friend in need that has come forward to assist Bangladesh during the time of natural disasters, like floods, cyclones etc. It was the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman who laid the foundation of US-Bangladesh friendship and co-operation through his successful visit to USA in 1974. As a prudent statesman, Bangabandhu could visualize that in a bipolar world Bangladesh could derive benefit by promoting friendly relations with both the superpowers.

During the past few years, our relations with the US have been taken to a new height. The most significant transformation of US-Bangladesh relations has been its evolution from one based on aid depen-

dence to one based on trade and investment. This is a result of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's declared policy of dependence on trade and investment rather than on aid as well as economic reform measures and opening of the market undertaken by her government.

Bangladesh today figures prominently in the US map of countries which matter to it for a number of reasons. In the first place, the US looks at Bangladesh as a leading developing country where democracy is taking firm roots. It wants to help the efforts of the present government in institutionalizing democracy. US Under Secretary of State Mr. Thomas Pickering at a recent seminar organized by the John Hopkins University commented that Bangladesh in less than 30 years of independence has turned itself into a model both of a moderate Muslim democracy and a grassroots based economic development. Assistant Secretary of State Mr. Karl Inderfurth has described Bangladesh as a 'jewel in the crown' in South Asia. Special Assistant to President Clinton and Senior Director of National Security Council Mr. Bruce Riedel has remarked that there are immense potentials of trade and investment cooperation between Bangladesh and USA. Secondly, Bangladesh has been able to attract attention of leading US companies to invest in gas and power sectors in view of the country's huge reserves of natural gas. They have invested about US\$ 1 billion in Bangladesh and the investment is expected to reach about US\$ 3 billion shortly. Bangladesh is now being seen as a country with huge economic potentials. US Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia Karl Inderfurth has expressed the hope that Bangladesh will achieve middle income country status by 2020. In the third place,

Bangladesh is being viewed by US policy makers as a stabilizing factor in South Asia. They see Bangladesh as a ray of hope in the region torn apart by ethnic and religious violence, hatred and conflict. US political leaders have appreciated Prime Minister's peace making role in the domestic plane, within the region as well as in the world at large. World leaders including President Clinton have appreciated Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's initiatives to resolve Chittagong Hill Tracts insurgency and the Ganges Water Sharing dispute with India through peaceful means. Ratification of CTBT by Bangladesh, the first country in South Asia to do so, has been greatly appreciated by the US.

Finally, Bangladesh with about 130 million people offer a huge market for US products. US companies are nowadays looking towards the East to expand their business and Bangladesh is being considered a country with enormous potentials.

Bangladesh, on its part, finds in the US a good friend that not only is the destination of \$ 2 billion worth of our exports but also a country that can help us bridge the technology gap through diversifying its investment in our country. Strong support of the US to our democracy as well as socio-economic development efforts is a great source of our strength. President Clinton's historic visit to Bangladesh on March 20, the first ever by a US President, was an occasion to cement the bonds of friendship and co-operation between the two peoples. The visit is a clear indication of US support to the policies of the government as well as to the ideals of democracy and peace that it upholds.

President Clinton's visit brought Bangladesh to sharper focus in international affairs. The President not only assured

America's continued support to the economic development and democracy in Bangladesh but also recognized its role in peace-keeping and peace-making in the region and in the world at large. He remarked: 'I think this is a nation with a very big future'. His welcome announcement of partial debt cancellation under PL-480 debt for tropical forest protection has been well appreciated. The recent visit of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to USA to accept Pearl S. Buck Award, address the Harvard University and open the newly built embassy building in Washington, D.C. was a remarkable success. Americans now know Bangladesh as a peace loving country that is marching ahead. President Clinton has invited Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to pay an official visit to the US in October this year. Prime Minister's visit will be an important milestone in breaking new grounds to further deepening of our relations.

The number of Bangladeshi community living in the US is increasing day by day. Expatriate Bangladeshis contribute to the foreign exchange earnings of the government to a considerable extent. As they are gradually joining the mainstream, I believe, the community will be able to play a major role in projecting a positive image of Bangladesh and contribute to further expanding of our bilateral cooperation.

Taking into account the huge potentials of expansion of US-Bangladesh relations, we must make efforts to build a forward-looking relationship from which peoples of both the countries will benefit. If the current momentum can be maintained, we can foresee a very close and productive relationship between Bangladesh and the USA.

The author is Bangladesh's Ambassador to USA.

## A New Kind of Thriller

Without in any way denying the fact that various bombing incidents against Israelis have taken place and roundly condemned by everyone, it is also true that there is no comparable set of systematic (as opposed to sporadic) Palestinian practices against Israelis, and I haven't in this context even mentioned the bombing by Israel of refugee camps, hospitals, schools and the like...

by Edward Said

DURING the Oscar ceremonies last March only one award (Best Documentary) was given to a 1999 film that had neither been released, nor seen by anyone outside the academy (for some of whose members special screenings of the film had, I gather, been hastily improvised). To say the least, this was an unusual set of circumstances for so important an award.

At last, though, One Day in September was released on May 19. Directed by Kevin Macdonald and produced by John Battsek and Arthur Cohn it is a 92 minute account of what is supposed to have occurred when a group of Israeli athletes at the Munich Olympic Games were held hostage by eight Palestinians who on September 5, 1972 seized the unsuspecting men at 4:40 am, and held them for 21 hours.

The end of the ordeal came at Munich airport when five German snipers opened fire on hostages and captors, thereby instigating an appalling blood-bath that drew in a considerable number of basically untrained and undisciplined German police. Eleven Israelis were killed, as were five Palestinians (three were seriously wounded but survived and later escaped) and one German.

I don't imagine that there is a Palestinian who does not think that the Munich adventure was a total disaster for the cause and the people, who remain stateless and either under Israeli occupation or as refugees, 28 years after the Munich Olympics, 52 years after most of them were driven out — indeed, ethnically cleansed — by Zionist forces.

Over 400 villages were destroyed in 1947-48, uncounted numbers of innocents either massacred or forcibly evicted, and an entire society effectively destroyed in order that Israel could come into existence. That is the tragic nub of the Middle East conflict, enacted as I write these lines on a daily basis in West Bank and Gaza towns and villages, as youngsters battle Israeli settlers and soldiers who represent a state still in the process of demolishing homes, holding a large number of prisoners, taking more land, all the while remaining adamant in its official unwillingness to acknowledge any responsibility for what was and is being done to the Palestinian people.

One of the shortcomings of the Oslo accords is that, thanks to the servile acquiescence of Yasir Arafat, the damages of thirty-plus years of Israeli occupation of the rest of historical Palestine that began in 1967, are casually written off without so much as a word about reparations which by comparison with Iraq's rela-

tively short, but no less illegal occupation of Kuwait, are still being extracted from Saddam Hussein's dreadful regime and his long-suffering people.

There was an unacceptable loss of life, the goal of getting 200 political prisoners released from Israel (which was their declared aim from beginning to end) was not achieved, and ever since, thanks as much to this one incident as to all the others combined, it permanently affixed the label 'terrorist' so implacably to 'Palestinian' as to displace and even to efface the tragedy of Palestine almost completely.

But this latter result is largely due to the unrelenting mull of political propaganda and this is where One Day in September, in its crudely deliberate manner ('style' being too strong a word here), comes in. To make of the awful Munich episode 'a new kind of thriller' is in the first instance to eliminate the Palestinian narrative that antedates and in some way illuminates if not the idiosyncrasy but the desperation and horror that gave it inception and nourishment.

Nowhere in the film is there focused attention paid to Israel's antecedent role, its daily, hourly, minute by minute persecution. In the meantime, bombing, dispossession, humbling of Palestinians from top to bottom, right across the board, from eviction, to wiping out of every possible trace of Palestinian life, to brazen denial of same, from the beginning to the end of the last fifty two years.

Let's hear a little more from Macdonald's production notes, which seem tirelessly to extol the film's total, complete, unqualified originality: 'What I wanted to do with One Day in September,' he rattles on yet again, 'was to make a documentary different than anything I had seen before: a documentary thriller, one that would work as a film, at the cinema. I wanted it to have a strong narrative grip and to pull the emotions of the audience, while at the same time investigating and revealing the extraordinary facts behind this event in a detailed way.'

Well, it doesn't work as a film in any locale, unless one's standards are so low as to allow that a transparent, and even caricatural, quasi-staccato sequence that, basically, tells a well-known, thoroughly familiar story pieced together out of old film clips, predictable interviews, and gross misrepresentations that show Palestinians to be irreducibly terrorist (though clever, and a bit manipulative), Israelis brave, serious, courageous, and long-suffering. Germans (shades of Colonel Klink in TV's Hogan's

Heroes) incompetent, lying, bungling, bloody-minded fools is 'original' filmmaking.

Granted that we mustn't forget all that, but what 'original' point is being made by mining this already ideologically overloaded film with subliminal cues planted to elicit western guilt for Jewish suffering, at the same time condoning and even justifying Israel's horrendous practices? This at a time when an on-going conflict, tragically unresolved between two peoples (despite what Macdonald, in an unusually grotesque image calls 'the monumental peace process') is weighted preponderantly in favour of one of them, while the other enjoys no access to the mass media, no ready narrative of persecution and dispossession, no admissible and endlessly re-useable symbol for political exploitation. Once the film is finally available to viewers the distinctly unpleasant experience of viewing it will pretty much dissipate any claim about the absence of a political agenda.

Consider, for instance, that no Arab voice at all, except the unfortunate Mr. Al Gamshey's and later that of an unidentified Libyan, is ever heard. Not a single Arab name is cited in the film's credits. No music, no children, no elderly women, no mutilated bodies. Above all, no Palestinian witnesses, say, to the Deir Yassin massacre, or Qalqilya, or Kufur Kassem, or Sabra and Shatila in 1982, the terror evictions of Palestinians from towns like Lydda and Ramleh (the latter two actions commanded by the late Yitzhak Rabin). Macdonald's keen historical sense seems to have whisked away any memory of the fact that Zionist militants introduced terrorism into the Middle East in the 1920s (see in this regard David Hirst's classic book, *The Gun and the Olive Branch*).

Israel has always held Palestinians prisoner without trial, with torture, without real recourse. For a period the Emergency Defence Regulations first used by the British Mandatory authorities (until 1948) were adopted without change. Then after 1967 a more complicated set of occupier's laws, as the Palestinian jurist Raja Shehadeh calls them, were implemented. Until today hundreds of Palestinians are held prisoner by Israel on charges equating resistance to Israeli occupation with terrorism. Dozens, if not hundreds, of thousands of Palestinians have passed through Israeli jails; many of these men and women have been held so as to pry information out of them, to force them to work as collaborators and informers, to get their families to promise things that make military occupation easier for

Israel. In addition, since 1982 Israel has maintained a prison, Khiam, in the zone it occupies illegally in south Lebanon for the express purpose of detaining Lebanese citizens who legitimately fight against the occupation of their land. Finally, the Israeli government has openly admitted that it has abducted many Lebanese citizens (including Shaikh Obaid al Hizballah) and keeps them as civilian hostages pending the return of one or two Israeli prisoners held in Lebanon. All this is herded under the rubric of fighting and refusing to negotiate with 'terrorism'.

Now without in any way denying the fact that various bombing incidents against Israelis have taken place and roundly condemned by everyone, it is also true that there is no comparable set of systematic (as opposed to sporadic) Palestinian practices against Israelis, and I haven't in this context even mentioned the bombing by Israel of refugee camps, hospitals, schools and the like, the wanton killing of prisoners of war, the destruction of homes, olive trees, fertile farm land, and beduin tents.

Nor have I alluded to the veritable orgy of assassinations, state terrorism by any other name, that Israel has indulged in before, since, and after Munich, e.g. the Beirut killing of three PLO leaders in their beds in 1973, the murder of at least a dozen other Palestinian personalities, plus numerous, booby-trapped, point-blank shootings, car-bombings, one of the most horrendous being the Beirut assassination of Ghassan Kanafani, an engaged Popular Front partisan who was also one of the most gifted writers in the Arab world. This last outrage occurred before, not as a result of, Munich.

No, One Day in September is a tired, cliché-ridden tissue of bad cinema, bad politics, bad thinking. As history it has no status at all. It's as if nothing happened before or after 1972, just those events as constructed by Kevin Macdonald and company. Even the film's musical soundtrack made up of 'period' music from Led Zeppelin to Philip Glass trivializes what we see on the screen; it struck me as somehow morose and undignified at the same time, unreluctantly inappropriate and jarring from start to finish. In short, this is a film that constructs a simplified, ideologically narrative in the best (or worst) CNN style of 'you-are-there' reporting, condemns the 'viewers reliving the experience without learning anything new or understanding anything better. Courtesy: The Dawn of Pakistan

## LETTER FROM EUROPE

### Rising Interest Rates in the US

Why has Mr. Alan Greenspan, the Chairman of the Federal Reserve decided to take such a drastic step now? Can it or will it affect the outcome the American presidential elections in November, this year? What sort of repercussions will this measure have on the Euro?

How will it affect the economies of the so-called developing countries?

Chaklader Mahboob-ul Alam writes from Madrid

THE Federal Reserve Board of the US has just raised its short-term interest rates. It is the sixth time in less than a year that it has done so. Until now the interest rate has been hiked up by a quarter per cent every time but now it has done so by a half per cent. It now stands at 6.5%, which is the highest since January, 1991. Why has Mr. Alan Greenspan, the Chairman of the Federal Reserve decided to take such a drastic step now? Can it or will it affect the outcome the American presidential elections in November, this year? What sort of repercussions will this measure have on the Euro? How will it affect the economies of the so-called developing countries?

The US economy has been growing for the last one hundred and ten consecutive months. That is not what worries the head of the Federal Reserve Board, Mr. Greenspan is worried about the rate at which it is growing (annualised 5.4% in the first quarter of 2000 and 6.3% in the second half of 1999). Since no one is capable of determining with any reasonable accuracy how much of this growth is due to accelerated productivity increase caused by information technology-driven structural changes and when this acceleration will come to an end, Mr. Greenspan, in his position as a cautious central banker, thinks that the economy is overheated. The inflation rate has steadily risen close to 4.0% which is higher than what Mr. Greenspan would like it to be. Although the unemployment rate has gone down to approximately 4%, yet there are no signs of wage pressure. This would please any central banker, but not Mr. Greenspan. He fears that high inflation will soon translate into unsustainable wage pressure.

Mr. Greenspan wants to have a controlled economic growth (between 3% and 4% per year),

which will allow him to maintain the inflation rate at about 3%. His rationale is quite simple. He thinks that the current low unemployment rate together with substantial speculative gains (warnings have already been uttered against supposed overvaluation of some American assets) made at the stock exchange have induced the Americans to continue with their spending spree. In his opinion, there are sectors of the economy where demand is already outstripping supply, which sooner or later will lead to even higher inflation.

According to figures published by the department of Commerce, the trade deficit (more than 60% over last year) is increasing at an alarming rate because of accelerated consumer spending. Part of the increase is, of course, due to the increase in the price of oil — the US still continues to be the world's number one importer of crude oil. It remains yet to be seen whether Mr. Greenspan would achieve his objective by hiking up the interest rate to 6.5% (almost everybody expects further increases before the end of the year), but it may indirectly affect the outcome of the American elections in November, this year.

There is no doubt that uninterrupted economic growth for a long period under the presidency of Mr. Clinton helped him in the past to survive the impeachment proceedings. According to recent opinion polls, the Democrats are expected to have an edge over the Republicans in the coming elections because of the same reasons. But the question is: If the economic situation suddenly takes a downturn during the final days of Clinton presidency, and it affects the pockets of the American consumers, will they not change their political allegiance? It is more than likely that they will do so.

The Euro has lost approximately 21% against the US

dollar (the American interest rate has a direct bearing on this phenomenon) since it came into being on January 1, 1999, which has made European goods cheaper in the American market and American goods more expensive in Europe. Although a weak Euro has helped to bolster European exports, it has probably taken some pressure off the much-needed structural and technological reform. This will inevitably affect the European economies adversely, some time in the future. The export-driven economic growth of the Euro area (eleven members of the European Economic Union) in the year 2000 is expected to be 3.4% against 1.1% in Japan. The exports will rise by 8.5%. Although the unemployment will fall from 11.6% to 9.2%, the average inflation rate will be held at 2.1%. The German economy is giving signs of coming out of its doldrums. The French is running neck to neck with the Spanish (3.7% vis-a-vis 3.8%). The Dutch will increase by 4.1%, while the Irish will achieve an incredible 7.5% growth. Even the Greek economy is expected to do better than last year (3.9% vis-a-vis 3.5%). In all fairness to the Euro, it should however, be mentioned here that higher interest rate in the US (6.5% against the EEC rate of 3.75%) is not the only reason for its dramatic fall.

Although the principal indicators of the EEC show continuous economic growth in its member countries, the comparative performance of the American economy over a longer period inspires greater confidence in the international money market. Lack of confidence in the Euro is also due to the inability of the EEC leaders to inspire investor confidence in the feasibility of a political union within a constitutional framework in the near future. As long as these and other political uncertainties such as the proposed expansion of the

Union to incorporate new members from Eastern Europe, the future Danish referendum over the Euro and the renewed British doubts persist, it would be difficult to have a strong Euro, even though its (EEC's) principal economic indicators show good results.

The EEC, with the necessary structural and technological adjustments will be in a position to withstand a gradual slow down of the American economy. But it will most probably have greater negative impact on the economies of the so-called developing countries because of a fall in their exports. This might also trigger a chain of currency devaluations in these countries with unpredictable consequences. Other areas like debt financing and debt repayments will also be affected.

It is frightening to think that one person's actions or decisions can have such wide repercussions on world affairs. Mr. Greenspan, who is a moderate Republican and who has recently been appointed to a fourth term as chairman of the Federal Reserve Board by President Clinton, is well aware of his enormous power. He not only enjoys the trust of the markets but also is very popular with the American people. He has the reputation of being a non-partisan public servant. In his official decisions, apparently he has never been guided by any other principle except his friend Ayn Rand's philosophy of objectivism (rational selfishness), which essentially exalts the virtues of capitalism.

We, who come from a developing country like Bangladesh or Mexico (where memories of the 'Tequila crisis' of 1995 are still very vivid) can only hope that in managing one of America's capitalism's most sacred institutions, the Federal Reserve Board, Mr. Greenspan's decisions are indeed rational but not too selfish.

by Jim Davis

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