

PM and the Judiciary

IT is as if our PM does not have anything to keep herself busy with. No sooner had she returned from Malaysia than she again, quite unnecessarily, lashed out at the judiciary accusing it of helping the criminals and the terrorists by granting them bail.

The controversy centres on specific instances of bail given to accused criminals who, after being out on bail, committed more crimes. The PM's point is why bail is given to these people unless the judiciary is either in sympathy with them or is not interested in fighting crime.

We would like to make only two points. First, the specific issue of bail; and second, the general issue of relationship between the executive and the judicial organs of our state. Assuming that a bail has been given wrongly, the government side can make three appeals to have that bail cancelled.

Secondly, why is the PM taking such an anti-judiciary position in public? Suppose the PM has genuine reasons to be upset about the role of the judiciary. The path to follow would be to have confidential discussions with the chief justice to address them.

Our PM does not seem to distinguish between the different ways of accountability of an elected official and of a judge. By definition and function their accountability cannot, and should not be similar.

A City Clogged, Waterlogged

THREE days of torrential rains last week have had a telling impact on life in the capital city, exposing in the process inadequacy in our traffic and sewerage system. Low-lying areas were submerged and almost all the major thoroughfares went under ankle to knee-high water.

Neither the WASA nor the Met office has anything positive to offer. More rains are forecast and "moderate flooding" is also likely. The WASA people, on the other hand, say that they don't have enough pumps at their disposal to flush out the rainwater.

The solution to the two-dimensional problem lies, of course, in enhancement of WASA's drainage and sewerage system. In addition to installing more pumps on the embankments to drain out rainwater, we need to clean up the clogged drainage system. Surely, both require huge investment in terms of money and time.

(This piece was written at the request of Times of India for a special issue on "India as a Neighbour", published in The Sunday Times on August 3, 2000.)

FOR India there are only two neighbours - China and Pakistan. The rest of us are just geographic entities to be patronised when we are good boys, cajoled when we show signs of disobedience, lectured upon when we think differently, bullied when we choose 'wrong' friends, and even punished when - God forbid - we act independently.

Bangladesh stands as one of the most significant foreign policy failures of India. It could have been perhaps India's flag-waving bilateral relations for the world to see, exemplifying what a big neighbour can do for its economically disadvantaged but

extremely resilient and resourceful neighbour. But instead what we have today is a 'correct relationship' putting up with nearly daily shooting across our borders and occasional innocent deaths and occasional innocent deaths with neither the vision nor the effort and the goodwill that is needed to give that vital spark of which historic bilateral relationships are made of.

Further, so farsighted a man as Abba Eban half-joked that Israel would negotiate with the Palestine Liberation Organisation the day that the Orthodox Jewish rabbis endorsed the consumption of pork. If Israel took a tough line back then, the Palestinian view was no less blinkered. They operated on the basis of a charter decreeing flatly that "armed struggle is the only way to liberate Palestine".

I rehash this history both because it is easy to forget and because it is so recent. The record of almost absolutely implacable hatred and isolation between Israel and the Palestinians has taken not hundred or even fifty years to reverse, but fewer than thirty.

Today, Israeli leaders routinely meet with Arafat; not even Israel's right wing gets very upset about it. And in Arab areas of the Israeli-held West Bank, violence against Israel is kept in check by Palestinian police officers. Until just the last few months it was universally acknowledged that the biggest Middle East hang-up was Jerusalem. The conventional wisdom was that Israel would never, under any conceivable circumstances, even think about negotiating Jerusalem's future.

The next few months are decisive. Attempting to salvage something from the ruins of their negotiations at Camp David, Israeli and Palestinian leaders have vowed to continue their efforts to produce a peace agreement. But the goal will never be reached unless certain types of conduct are scrupulously avoided.

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Our honourable minister's four year old promised dreamland 'Tilottoma' may appear to him a reality but to us - the voters, taxpayers and forced listeners of incessant rhetoric the city is a wretched place strewn with pot-holes, open man-holes, incomplete sewer lines, dug up roads that make the city dwellers' life really unbearable.

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How is India as a Neighbour?

by Mahfuz Anam

India is insensitive and condescending to the needs of its smaller neighbours. It's obsession with Pakistan and fear of China clouds all its thinking on South Asia. It does not understand, nor have any respect for the fundamental urge of its neighbours to be totally independent and be treated with respect and dignity. For India to be a regional or global power it must enjoy the full confidence of its neighbours which India expects but does not try to earn.

Independence, we can naturally spite the friend who helped us get it. (Of course conveniently forgetting what happened to the great Mahatma). The return of the military into power and the rising place of Islam into the affairs of our state set the Indian alarm bells ringing. The spectre of a 'second Pakistan' on the East began to haunt the Indian policy makers' psyche, unleashing a most naked arm twisting policy towards us.

The decade-long Farakka episode was both unnecessary and unthinking on the part of India. Finally when the Water

restoration of democracy in '91 has greatly assuaged Indian fears about Bangladesh. The Water Treaty with India and the Peace Accord with the people of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, many of whom were in Indian refugee camps, have done wonders for our ties. In the last decade Indo-Bangladesh trade has grown by leaps and bounds. Regrettably it remains extremely one-sided. Today India officially exports goods worth US\$ 1.2 billion to Bangladesh. To that another US \$1.8 billion can be easily added for Indian goods that are smuggled here.

As against that we export a mere US\$ 60 million. Now the question

is does India treat us with the importance and the respect that a US\$ 3 billion market deserves? Forget altruism and good neighbourliness, just for narrow business interest India should be doing far more to help the growth of Bangladesh's economy than it is in the habit of doing.

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Camp David Talks and the Aftermath

The next three months may tell the tale of Clinton's legacy and of the prospects of real peace in the Middle East... Palestinians and Israelis have come a long way since they refused to recognise or negotiate with each other. That they have come so far offers hope they can continue their journey toward peace.

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The next few months are decisive. Attempting to salvage something from the ruins of their negotiations at Camp David, Israeli

and Palestinians leaders have vowed to continue their efforts to produce a peace agreement. But the goal will never be reached unless certain types of conduct are scrupulously avoided. Last week, after they agreed to continue disagreeing over such seemingly intractable issues as the future of Jerusalem, the two



Connecting the Dots, Dr. A. R. Chowdhury

Mideast leaders issued a statement declaring that both of them "understand the importance of avoiding unilateral actions that pre-judge the outcome of negotiations".

For Israel, it means refraining from establishing new settlements in the West Bank and forbidding settlers to provoke Palestinian reprisals. These settlements have always been provocative and an impediment to peace, and they would be espe-

cially so in the current unsettled environment. Equally important is the need for Palestinians not to rock the boat and avoid any step that could jeopardise the future prospect of peace.

If the lid can be kept on and tempers kept cool, both sides may reconsider and expand the limits of the possible and return to the

bargaining table. Seen against the backdrop of their recent history, it is not outlandish to suggest that the two sides will inevitably compromise on issues that they and others now deem utterly beyond discussion.

However, things have become more complicated with the latest political developments in Israel. Earlier this week, Israeli prime minister Ehud Barak narrowly survived a no-confidence vote brought against him in the

Knesset by his opponents. Israeli foreign minister has resigned accusing Barak of negotiating the future of Jerusalem during the peace talks. At the end of October, Israel's parliament will reconvene after a long summer break. That gives Barak a reprieve for three months. That also may be the amount of time left for Clinton to leave a legacy as a peacemaker.

If nothing changes by the time the Israeli parliament reconvenes, it is unlikely that Barak will survive another attempt to bring down his government. If Barak's government falls, it is unlikely the current peace process will continue. This would definitely be a setback for Arafat who has staked his leadership to the talks as well as for Clinton's hopes.

Clinton, therefore, needs to act now. He must encourage other Mideast leaders not the least of them Hosni Mubarak to get involved and support Arafat's efforts.

Clinton also can and should use his office to discourage Israel from unilaterally creating more settlements in the West Bank. Moreover, the suggestion that the US Embassy to Israel should be

media is working overtime to etch it deep.

This is where India, we feel, is letting down its smaller neighbours. India appears to have the dream and the wish - and even the capabilities - of becoming a regional power. But it seems to lack the vision, the expansiveness of its strategic thinking and the wisdom that must come with that dream.

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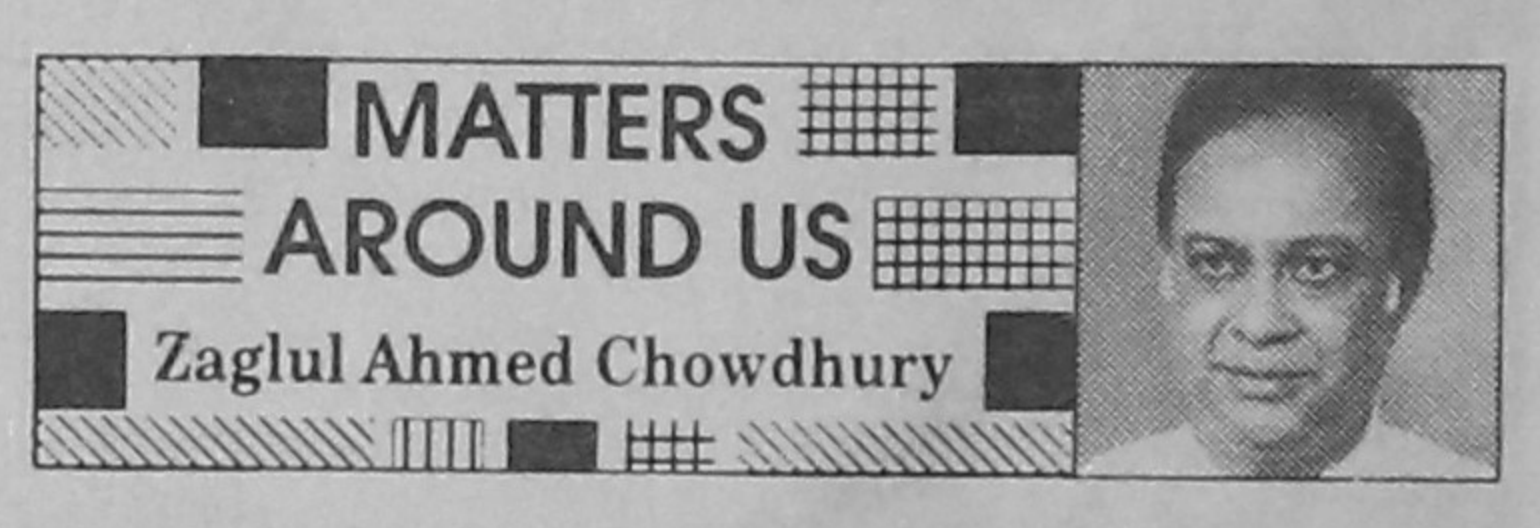
Kashmir: Let the Dialogue Start

There are obstacles on the way. The approach of Pakistan and policies of the militant outfits matter in the whole issue. It remains to be seen how far the Hizbul and the Indian government can go with peace moves. However, supporters of peace would certainly welcome the latest developments centring the ceasefire and dialogue.

It caused outrage in India. The government in New Delhi blamed the hardliners who are opposed to the ceasefire and peace process for the massacre. India's arch-enemy, Pakistan, says the killings might be a ploy by New Delhi itself to create hatred against those opposing the peace talks.

The Hizbul Mujahideen asked their men to stop fighting for three months and New Delhi also suspended all military operations against the militants who would abide by the ceasefire. The two sides have also begun discussions in Srinagar, the capital of the Indian Kashmir, first time since 1989. The militancy has claimed at least 25,000 lives in the valley. During the interregnum of ceasefire announcement and the beginning of talks, killing of more than 100 unarmed innocent people took place, including Hindu pilgrims trekking towards Vishnudevi temple.

It goes without saying that the news of ceasefire and positive response from the Indian government had come as a significant



development. After the resolution of many an international crisis, the Kashmir tangle certainly remains possibly the major problem that continues to afflict relations not only between two neighbours India and Pakistan it has also been bruising the political atmosphere in the region. In addition, it is a headache for global tranquillity. Two countries fought two of their three wars over Kashmir and were on the brink of another a year ago centring Kashmir.

Kashmir is a divided region since 1948 a year after India and Pakistan became independent

from British rule with the former controlling two-thirds. Both lay claims to the portion controlled by the other. Islamabad has been urging for self-determination for the people of Kashmir while New Delhi insists that it is an integral part of India.

Two sides often expressed willingness to talk but India opposed inclusion of Kashmir on the agenda but Pakistan says it is the crux of whole problem. Side by side, several Kashmiri organisations are carrying out violent activities in the Indian-held Kashmir which they call their struggle for independence, but New Delhi describes as

terrorism fomented by Islamabad. But Islamabad denies the charge saying that it only provides political and moral support to them.

Against this backdrop, ceasefire by the most important militant group the trouble-torn region and subsequent beginning of talks with the Indian government in quest of peace certainly merits considerable importance. Does this situation give any glimmer of hope for any kind of solutions to a contentious problem which breeds violence and loss of lives?

Needless to say that the issue is complex and to expect an early and amicable resolution of this will be a height of folly. Difficult problems are being resolved in the international arena, the latest remarkable instance of which is reconciliation moves between two Koreas. Why, then, cannot the Kashmir issue be settled no matter how complex the issue is?

True, positions of the parties concerned in the tangle are so divergent that any settlement is almost a distant dream. But the cases of two Germanys and two Koreas were still more difficult matters. The Middle East is even worse in some ways but none rules out a settlement despite recent setback at Camp David.

India has been insisting that talks have to take place within the ambit of the constitution of the country, which meant to rule out secession of Kashmir from Indian union. But recently the government has shown flexibility and this has facilitated the dialogue with the Hizbul Mujahideen. "It is not the constitution but the insaniyat (humanity) which is the main issue we want that no more blood is lost in the area," said Prime Minister Vajpayee. Indeed, his comments are statesmanlike. Whether or not New Delhi ultimately accepts the positions of the militants is a different matter but at least this position has

moved from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem ought to be abandoned. Both these acts are needlessly provocative. Polls show that the Israeli people are more interested in peace than many of their political leaders. Barak can take advantage of that in the next three months. That he survived the confidence vote earlier this week is a good sign. On the other hand, it is a bad sign that Shimon Peres, Barak's preferred candidate for the ceremonial post of president, lost his election.

Arafat, too, has work to do. Last week, he urged the Israeli people to support Barak. Indications are that he will postpone his deadline of September 13 for the unilateral creation of a Palestinian state. That latter move may play well in Israel; it won't among the leaders of Hamas, the more militant Palestinian faction trying to unseat Arafat.

Things hang in the balance. And what everyone involved needs to do is to try to tip the scales toward peace. The next three months may tell the tale of Clinton's legacy and of the prospects of real peace in the Mideast.

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paved the way for dialogue which became urgent.

But other militant groups want tripartite talks - involving India, the militants and Pakistan in the entire exercise. The Hurriyat - which is an umbrella of several militant organisations - is calling for tripartite talks. The Hizbul Mujahideen has not ruled out involving other militants and Pakistan but insists that at this stage the ground is being prepared by two sides. This may cause rupture within the Hizbul outfit since some of their leaders want Pakistan to be involved right now. A top leader of the party has set a time for the talks to succeed. But several others feel that ceasefire should be held for at least three months and then it should be extended depending on the progress. The smaller militant organisations feeling left out - are expected to spawn violence out of anger.

The peace moves have put Vajpayee's government in a delicate situation since the hardliners in BJP are opposing talks with the militants and some are totally inflexible on the issue of accepting demands within the Indian constitution. The opposition parties are waiting in the wings to criticise the government for its dealings with the militants although they want an end of violence. Most Indian opposition parties may support a broad peace formula. For Vajpayee and his government, the peace efforts may pay dividends as it may dampen the autonomy demand raised by Kashmir's Chief Minister Dr Farooq Abdullah. Besides, the government may bank in the glory of success of an intractable issue if it can accomplish the task of an acceptable settlement of the problem.

But there are obstacles on the way. The approach of Pakistan and policies of the militant outfits matter in the whole issue. It remains to be seen how far the Hizbul and the Indian government can go with peace moves. However, supporters of peace and those abhor violence would certainly welcome the latest developments centring the ceasefire and dialogue. It provides a ray of hope for peace in the violence-ridden flashpoint.

To the Editor ...

Tilottoma Dhaka!

Sir, The honourable minister in charge of Local Government on attaining the charge of the ministry declared that within a year he will turn the capital city Dhaka into a Tilottoma City (city of paragon beauty).

Our honourable minister's four year old promised dreamland 'Tilottoma' may appear to him a reality but to us - the voters, taxpayers and forced listeners of incessant rhetoric the city is a wretched place strewn with pot-holes, open man-holes, incomplete sewer lines, dug up roads that make the city dwellers' life really unbearable.

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were also inundated in some areas due to poor drainage and sewerage systems. . . city traffic was in a mess as vehicles got stranded on inundated roads, creating long jams. WASA sources (drew a worst picture) said the sewerage system in most areas of the city also got clogged because of the poor drainage system."

This is just a small part of the long sufferings of the city dwellers. Surely, by next couple of days we would receive a possible rebuttal from a PRO saying that the picture, as drawn above, of the 'Tilottoma' city has no base and far from the ground situation. Because had this picture been true the Honourable Minister's home itself would have been inundated and his bedroom

would have also been infested with wobbling leeches and crawling worms!

An Uncoouth Citizen Dhaka

Greenback rules

Sir, Whatever be the claim and argument of our leaders, experts, bureaucrats, businessmen and traders and no matter which political party is in power the fact is that the more the price of US dollar increases the suffering of our people multiplies.

The more the rise in the price of US dollar the more the economy of our country is doomed and the more the amount of our foreign loans and interest thereof are enhanced.

No one can deny the fact that for over last 28 years the price of US dollar has been shooting up

on the one hand and the financial problems and hardships of our people have been multiplying on the other hand. Undoubtedly, a handful of persons have become richer but the majority have been beset with abject poverty.

Due to various reasons, we are to believe that the economic progress of our country is linked with the market price of US dollar. And as long as we are unable to free ourselves from the rising price of US dollar and make the value of our currency - Taka equivalent to the rate of US dollar, we would be unable to make any economic progress.

Would it be ever possible for us to equalise the value of US dollar with Bangladesh Taka? If so then how and when?

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