

Food Security

Monday against the backdrop of having attained what is rather euphemistically called 'self-sufficiency in food for the first time in 1999-2000.'

Yes, we should congratulate ourselves on the achievement of autarchy in the staple food item viz. cereals, even be jubilant over it but not certainly euphoric. In fact, this is something on which we would like to apply a reality check to be on the right track insofar as the entire gamut of the food security issue is concerned.

That said, we now move to the crucial question about availability of food being not the same thing as access to food. With the majority of our people having a very poor purchasing power for lack of employment they cannot buy the food they need.

The other cogent point is that if food prices can be established at affordable levels access to food would be automatically widened. The government usually tries to ensure this by releasing food stuffs into the open market from its own stocks as a price control mechanism.

Break the Cycle of Violence

Monday, there was widespread apprehension that the talks would prove a futile exercise. The first few hours of summit interspersed with instances expressive of intense antipathy Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat bore towards each other only fuelled the fear of a collapse of the talks.

Although the post-summit reaction from both leaders still bore indignation and mistrust for one another, their consent to disengage from violence offers the silver lining in the deep dark cloud cast over peace in the region.

As Mr Clinton has suggested at the start of the summit, both leaders need to avoid recrimination. They have to stop attaching conditions to an effective cease-fire as well. Wasn't it Israeli opposition leader Ariel Sharon who had instigated the violence in the first place?

Anyway, the mayhem in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip should end now and both leaders must realise that irresponsible behaviour at this juncture could very well lead to a full-blown war like the one the region experienced some three decades back.

Canine Dishes

Dog meat has entered the food chain, so it seems. A Prothom Alo report yesterday revealed that 80 restaurants at the Aricha ghat cooks 300 kilograms of mutton to serve, of which 50 kg is dog meat. How this business has gone on undetected so far, if not totally unnoticed, if only one cared to look at the kitchen backyard, remains a big surprise.

Wicked and greedy people will always look for profiteering and they would like to invest as little as possible to reap huge profits - all this is a familiar business tactic followed by the socially uncommitted businessmen. But the question is: what is the government doing to deter them?

The Crisis: Image or Identity?

The RSS wants to have Advani in place Vajpayee. Regional parties may go along with it because they only want a share in power at the centre and it does not matter to them who the Prime Minister is Vajpayee or Advani. Vajpayee may prefer to retire because he has neither the inclination nor the stamina to fight the hard-liners, who are now breathing down his neck.

The RSS was in the picture. Sushma's entry is also a victory for Home Minister L.K. Advani, who is trying to acquire a new image neither that of a hard-liner like the RSS core, nor that of a liberal who would raise eyebrows in the RSS camp.

Poor Law Minister Arun Jaitley was a victim of the cross-firing between Vajpayee and Advani. Jaitley was keeping both sides informed of what he did in his ministries and consulted them before taking any decision. Perhaps both wanted his exclusive loyalty.

RSS. It wants to control the political scene and sustain its identity. Its agenda is the creation of a Hindu Rashtra and it has been relentlessly pursuing the task of Hindu revivalism for the last 75 years since its birth.

linked with the RSS, will be preferred to those with liberal ideas. The RSS sanchalaks in the different states are busy preparing the list of candidates on that basis. This alone is not enough.

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

wake of the party president's promise to rectify the mistakes committed against the Muslims, the inference is that the Muslims have expressed their distrust through voting. The BJP, with no cadre of its own, has no option except to move closer to the suture of the RSS.

From all accounts, it is clear that the party has surrendered before the RSS. The hard-liners have taken the charge of assembly elections, scheduled for 2001, in six states including UP, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal and Assam.

sever their relationship with the Vatican and Muslims with the Ummah (a people or a community which transcends ethnic or political definition of nationalism). The Vishwa Hindu Parishad seems to have got the green light to re-articulate its demand on building the mandir at the site where the Babri Masjid stood before demolition.

New Era of Democracy Dawns in Yugoslavia

People's Power Propels Kostunica as President

by AMM Shahabuddin

fully well that his days were numbered and his sun was about to set closing his sordid chapter, made a desperate last attempt to catch the straw to save himself from imminent and ignoble fall.

The angry crowd comprising cross-section of the people, from miners to factory workers to farmers and the middle class, young and old, stormed the parliament building and occupied it driving out the policemen on duty there.

With apparent fall of the most hated regime of Milosevic, and emergence of the new leadership of Kostunica, poured in international support from America, European Union (EU), China and other nations.

when Russian Foreign Minister Iyvanov arrived in Belgrade with the congratulatory message from President Putin. Thus the last anchorage on which Milosevic had banked throughout was gone.

Now with the emergence of a new Yugoslavia under the leadership of Kostunica, the country is expected to receive a welcome return to the international fold to which it once belonged and made a mark by its remarkable contributions.

The contemporary history recognises what Marshall Tito of Yugoslavia played through the thick and thin, keeping his country at a distance from the 'protective umbrella' of then Soviet regime. Tito followed boldly his own breed of socialism keeping close link with the West for necessary economic cooperation.

Why Not Kosovo? The new president has declared that the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia will henceforth remain an integral part of Europe.

ers, namely, Pandit Nehru of India, President Nasser of Egypt, and President Soekarno of Indonesia, in establishing the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) which played a remarkable role as a neutral third force during Cold War period, particularly in the sixties and seventies. It is a pity that with the 'exit' of four of its founding fathers, NAM today remains just a historic name, a sort of land-mark of post-War period.

"Belkan's Butcher" But the ghost of Milosevic will haunt for many years to come not only the Yugoslav people but also the international community because of the war crimes and genocide perpetrated under his leadership on the Muslims of Kosovo because they wanted to be free from Yugoslav rule.

As they say, where angels fear to tread, the devils rush in. And his predecessor, the Devil did rush in to make a hell of Kosovo, without much gain. In case of any future hostility, breaking the present artificial peace, maintained by the NATO ground forces, KLA (Kosovo Liberation Army) would certainly receive most helpful responses from two of its friendly neighbours Macedonia, where a huge chunk of ethnic Albanians crowd the villages bordering Kosovo, and Albania which is all-out, despite its own internal difficulties, to extend any possible help to KLA.

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OPINION

A Sigh of Relief in the Middle East?

Zakir Husain

AN emergency summit meeting is being held at the Egyptian resort Sharm el Sheikh to stop the violence raging over the past two weeks in which more than 100 nearly all of them Palestinians have been killed. The stakes are presumably high.

The Palestinian trust in the US as an honest broker has been undermined during and after the failed Camp David 2 under the stewardship of President Clinton who has accused Chairman Arafat for not making even more concession, specifically on Jerusalem issue.

Indeed, the US President has spent much time and effort in the peace process. But has the US position been truly that of an honest broker? What has made Israel a 'monster' in the Middle East which is now defying all international law and behaving like a superpower?

Even to a detached observer the so-called peace process since 1993, so assiduously steered by President Clinton himself, has become a mere 'surrender process' for the Palestinian people. They had lost their original homeland when the state of Israel was created without any semblance of negotiation with the inhabitants of old Palestine.

In the much-touted democratic state of Israel, the Arab citizens of Israel remain without equal rights; they have recently been subjected to 'pogroms' and even killed by their Jewish neighbours. This is akin to an apartheid regime though it is hardly talked about let alone invite sanctions on Israel.

Denied as they are of their rights to nationhood, the Palestinians have been forced to make concessions after concessions while at the same time Israel was allowed to go scot-free in non-compliance of the UN resolution

242, and fresh colonisation of Palestinian land. The Oslo peace accord, flawed as it was, has been diluted in favour of Israel during the so-called peace process negotiations under the stewardship of the US.

Ironically, throughout this process it is the victim and the powerless who has been pressurised to make concessions.

The above account does not include the daily indignities being inflicted on the Arabs in Israel which amounts to violation of human rights of citizens and racial discrimination with total impunity.

One cannot but conclude that the 'peace process' is a cruel joke and in fact a surrender process that is being forced down the throat of a besieged population.

Now, the 'summit' at Sharm el Sheikh is on. Grave are the stakes. The parties are warned of severe consequences if they fail to relent. The warning so deftly orchestrated by the media on cue is actually directed more if not entirely towards Chairman Arafat. For the Palestinians perhaps the defining moment has arrived; they either have to draw the 'red line' on the sand and resist the tirade of 'negotiations' with an adversary which enjoys unlimited immunity from punishment for its violations of international law and human rights; they may choose the path of resistance even at the cost of delays and more sacrifice, or they can choose to surrender and live in a rump second-class state at least for now.

What will the larger 'international community' wish to choose is an open question. Whatever it is, there can be no peace that will endure without justice. History is replete with examples. Unless and until the fundamental equation is set right, there will remain instability and strife in the region. At the minimum, while the right to exist may no longer be denied to Israel and this has been done by its arch enemies already, peace will require the return by Israel of all occupied territories it took in the 1967 war, and full sovereignty to the Palestinian state. Anything short of that or any other contrivance would inevitably fail for it would be unjust and untenable.

To the Editor ...

Bad news for BD

Sir, A news about the arsenic disaster in Bangladesh was published in 'The Independent', the highest circulated and popular newspaper of the UK, on October 11, 2000. It was horrifying as well as revealing news for the people of the country. The heading of the news was 'Unseen and untold: The mass poisoning of an entire nation'.

The report says, 'This country [Bangladesh], beset by famine and disease since its fiery birth 30 years ago, is confronting its biggest crisis: the accidental poisoning of as many as 85 million of its 125 million people with arsenic-contaminated drinking water.'

the crisis in the most urgent, simple mannerly providing an arsenic-free water supply to affected communities.' It goes on, 'Yet two years on the \$44m remains unspent while officials haggle over how to use it. In Dhaka there is no feeling that the government is gearing up to tackle a disaster.'

The report quotes a World Bank official. 'There are 80,000 villages in the country [Bangladesh]. So far the government has covered only 1,000. If they go on at this pace, it will take hundreds of years before they reach the villages.' It also quotes Mr. Mahmudur Rahman, a professor of medicine at Dhaka National Medical College. He says, 'We have been told to expect an epidemic of cancers in the next 10 years. The victims will be people in their thirties and forties who have been drinking the water all their lives. People in their most productive years.'

the people or for the people of its own party. Is it not a bad news for the people of Bangladesh? So the people themselves should come forward to solve the disaster that claims their lives.

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A Cry in the Fire

Sir, Helicopters loaded with rockets and missiles were flying in the sky. Military tanks were taking their position. War ships were also seen. The helicopters flying were firing the missiles and waves of rockets. No, I am not describing any video or computer game nor I am talking of any action packed Hollywood movie on war. This was the live coverage shown in CNN and BBC World the other night. CNN reporter Ben was describing the live event of the missile-attacks by the helicopters as if he were commenting on a live football match. Hats off to all those reporters along with the crew who took the risk of their life and showed the world the live attacks by the IDF at the city of Gaza and Ramallah in Palestine. The attacks were on immediately after the Joahar Prayers. The helicopters targeted not only the police stations but also the Head Quarter of President Yasser Arafat in Ramallah, the radio station over there and many civilian buildings in Gaza and Ramallah. Anyone who has seen the telecast must have seen how the innocent civilians were running for their life.

The whole world has seen how Mohammed Al-Dura, a 12-year-old boy died on his fathers lap after being trapped under heavy Israeli fire in Palestinian ruled Gaza. What was his offence? A

two-year-old girl was shot dead West Bank by the attacks launched by the Israeli Army. The world witnessed the brutal incidents. Everyone knows the violence started and the peace process was derailed when Sharon, the Israeli leader of opposition, entered the Al-Aksa Mosque along with Israeli troops.

The world witnessed when Palestinian under different parts of the world gathered in Beirut to fight for their occupied territory dropping their studies, carriers on one call from Chairman Arafat. The freedom fighters were not afraid of death as they had high determination and dedication.

The world witnessed when Israelis targeted the civilians in Lebanon that had provided shelter to the Palestinians with bombing, shelling rockets and missiles. The world saw the way Arafat fought and changed his HQ frequently to survive. The world saw how and when the Israeli attacked the innocent civilians. The world remained silent.

We have seen the quick response from US President, when he sent his army in the Gulf immediately after the King Fahd-Bin-Abdulaziz has requested for its assistance. We have seen the UN to respond to both Kosovo and East Timor. We from this part of the world can do nothing but ask the US and the UN to take necessary steps immediately so as to ensure no killing of Duras takes place and to restore peace in the region. We would urge the Arab world and Muslim world to fight against the situation unitedly.

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