

Chief Justice's Timely Comment

THE Chief Justice, while participating in a human rights seminar on Saturday, made, in our view, two very pertinent points. To ensure human rights, he said, we needed to develop democratic culture and possess a credible law enforcing body. Let us start with the law enforcement bodies first. The Chief Justice recounted a meeting he held earlier on the day with the public prosecutors whose descriptions of police activities forced him to comment that protectors of the public have become their persecutors. We share the Chief Justice's worry. Our police have virtually become non-functional. Corruption has so entered its inner core that today the name of the police has become almost a synonym for all corrupt practices. We would be the last one to state that all our police men and women are corrupt. But definitely there are the ones who are doing most of the mischief and thereby maligning the image of the whole force. If there are honest police officers, as we believe that there are, then they must come out openly against the corrupt ones.

Take the recent report of Bangladesh Rehabilitation Centre for Trauma Victims (BRCTV). It reveals that the police tortured 484 people in the first six months of this year. Of them, 44 died in the custody - 34 in police, 3 in BDR, one in Army, two in Ansar and four in other custody. This unbelievable number of custodial deaths makes our police perhaps the most dangerous in the world. The tragedy is that not even in a single case was the police held accountable and given an appropriate punishment. We suggested before and we do so again, that we need police reform of a fundamental nature, which will transform it into a modern law enforcement body. We need to increase the basic pay of the lowest tier of our police personnel otherwise we cannot stop petty crimes.

Absence of a democratic culture in our politics is the other point our Chief Justice laid stress on to ensure human rights. We take considerable pride in having repeatedly defeated military dictatorships and having re-established democracy. But our democracy remains fatally flawed by a lack of democratic culture among our leading political parties that remain totally under the clutches of their leaders. In our view it is the lack of inner party democracy that lies at the root of all our political vulgarism and excesses that plague our politics today. Democracy cannot be established in parts. It has to be there in every part of our society. We cannot have a healthy example of it at the national level when we do not permit it at the party level.

There is also the 'winner take all' mentality that vitiates our politics. There is no sharing of power or its spoils and privileges between the ruling and the opposition parties. Therefore neither side is prepared to lose when contesting an election which results in the adoption of 'every' means to win it, with the outcome that democratic norms become sacrificed at the altar of party and self interest.

We commend our Chief Justice for having spoken out this essential truth in a forthright manner and hope that those it is meant for listen.

Sharif Capitulates

FORMER Pakistani prime minister Nawaz Sharif has surprised everyone by accepting a 10-year exile in Saudi Arabia, in return for a swift presidential pardon of his 25-year jail sentence. Sharif made his clemency deal with Pakistan's military ruler, Gen Pervez Musharraf, the very man who ousted him just over a year ago and then put him in jail on hijacking and corruption charges.

Sharif's easy capitulation to Musharraf's offer of a reprieve is disappointing, a cop out in the real sense of the term. All Sharif needed to do was to wait for just another two years, when Musharraf's three-year military rule of Pakistan is scheduled to end. Although Sharif was banned from contesting elections for 21 years, that ruling could have been changed and he could have emerged from jail with his career intact, even stronger. Now, he has virtually ended his career. He has also jeopardized the future of his Muslim League party which, under the leadership of his wife, Kulsoom Sharif, had joined hands with arch foes, including the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), in a bid to forge a united movement against Musharraf's military rule. That alliance, the Alliance for Restoration of Democracy (ARD), is now confused and uncertain about its own future.

The episode certainly has raised several questions. What were Gen Musharraf's true motives in going for this deal, for instance? Was this a shrewd move on his part to weaken the democratic alliance being mounted against him? Or has he made a mistake by letting Sharif out of the country? Musharraf will certainly have to face much domestic criticism for allowing Sharif to go free, when all this time he has been making lofty statements about not letting a single corrupt politician off the hook in Pakistan. If Musharraf really intends to step down from power in two years' time, as he has repeatedly stated and as per the Pakistan Supreme Court's ruling to him, how can he - or for that matter, Sharif - assume that the 10-year sentence of exile will be honoured? Why would Sharif himself accept such a deal, knowing these circumstances? These questions continue to intrigue us, no doubt, and only time will tell. At this stage we can reinforce our view that we believe that Sharif's departure is a disappointment and military rule is not an alternative in any country. We sincerely hope that democracy will triumph in Pakistan.

THE term of peace is brought in someone's favour by bargaining it from a position of strength. It has been invariably Israel's monopoly in now stalled Oslo peace process in the Middle East whereas the advantage could never be availed by the PLO which had neither the state nor the compliments of strength to be derived from it. There is such a great disparity between the two in their power potentials which constitute bargaining strength that it virtually made the peace process unworkable. The asymmetry in power between two sides led the strong the Israelis dictate both pace and scope of the agreement's implementation and the weak the Palestinians to look for alternative including violence to peace negotiations. Yet the Peace Accord limped forward for some time with sheer force of momentum provided by powerful peace brokers. But after seven years of travails it is now practically dead with fresh violence erupting and escalating now in occupied territories.

The fact that Israel is disproportionately powerful for negotiated peace settlement with PLO almost a non-entity has been ignored in the first place in designing the Peace Accord. Israel is the only country in the Middle East to be credited with its participation in the much bruited 'revolution in military affairs' by applying high-tech to armaments. It has built so great a lead in conventional arms that several Arab states, let alone the PLO, openly concede that they cannot compete with it on that level. Even if they ever resort to the use of the weapon of mass destruction, Israel has an elaborate anti-missile defence, the Arrow as well as nuclear and anti-terrorist

capabilities. Economically it is today in big leagues enjoying a per capita income of \$18,000. It is a high-tech giant with computer and internet sector larger in absolute term than that of any other country outside the United States. On political front unlike its neighbours and rivals the country is the beneficiary of a robust democratic culture and on security issues the country's major political parties find much common ground. Over and above the power of her guaranteed ally, the United States, is invariably thrown behind her whenever in crisis.

By contrast, the PLO, a partner in the peace process, is desperately dependent on the goodwill, backing and, at times, sanctuaries of its Arab patrons for its own survival. Obviously it never fought a conventional war, as it was not designed for it. It was politically orphaned when the Palestinians lent their support to President Saddam Hussein during the Gulf War. Riddled with indecision, corruption and factionalism the PLO had been marking its time in its far-off sanctuary in Tunis when it was pitched forked from there by the peace brokers to negotiate a vague peace with a difficult partner, Israel. Could it in any way assert its term of peace? Look at its potential Arab allies who are in the world of a UN official, "particularly exceptional in being the highest spender in the world for military purpose" (they devote 8.8

per cent of the GDP to military, versus 2.4 per cent of the world as a whole) Yet Arab conventional forces are in decline and lost all wars they fought with Israel since its inception. Politically the Arab world has the highest quotient of autocratic regimes who are at each other's throat rather than unitedly promoting any of their

But for mysterious reasons the peace brokers adopted a weird approach to peace by devising Oslo peace accord to resolve the world's one of the most intractable disputes. But even in that case both sides jumped into the 'peace process' without having clarified workable objective and expected to wrest that clarity



PERSPECTIVES by Brig (Rtd) M Abdul Hafiz

causes. It is an economic blackhole with per capita income as low as \$270 in countries like Yemen where in Aden the USS Cole was recently subjected to terrorist attack. Could they throw any weight to the bargaining power of a despondent lot of PLO interlocutors at negotiating table?

Taken together, all these factors seem to suggest that Israel has a definitive edge over its historic enemies including the PLO and thus power to dictate terms in any negotiation. In such circumstances, perhaps an apex body capable of mediating between the two could preside over the conflict resolution. The 1967 UNSC resolution No 242 was a right step in that direction.

from the process itself. But as the Oslo process unfolded its inadequacies came in sharp focus against the backdrop of evolving realities. The open-ended and transitory nature of the agreement bred ambiguity, conditionality and reversibility.

In fact in the name of a peace process the PLO was being persuaded all these years by the Americans and Israelis to sign a peace that would give the Palestinians neither a state, nor an end to Jewish settlements in occupied territory, certainly not a capital in Arab East Jerusalem. After seven years of hard negotiations what PLO got, by giving away all the gains of 1987-1992 intifada, was little more than the municipal authority over patches of occu-

pled territory while all else was deferred to so-called final status talks. Israel used this extended time to build so many Jewish settlements and security highways dividing the West Bank into many pieces which are isolated from each other, that the Palestinian state which may finally result from the peace process would not be more than a cluster of apartheid-style Bantustans.

Seven years after the Oslo Accord Israel has security and administrative control of most of the West Bank and at least 20 per cent of Gaza Strip from where Arafat's Palestinian Authority functions. During the period Israel has been able to double the number of settlers, to enlarge the existing Jewish settlements, to continue its discriminatory policy of cutting back water quota for three million Palestinians and to seal an entire nation into restricted areas, imprisoned in a network of bypass meant only for the Jews. During these days of strict internal restriction of movement in the face of Palestinian uprising, one can see how carefully each road was planned, so that 200,000 Jews have complete freedom of movement while three million Palestinians are locked into their 'Bantustan' until they submit to Israeli demands.

The Palestinian frustration was obvious over the way the process progressed through the years. The scepticism about the process abounded even before it took off. Now it steadily grew

among the young Palestinians with their dream of homeland still unbroken. They became restive as the issues of final status were coming to the fore. Although many crucial issues like the water, the fate of 3.6 million Palestinian refugees, the Israeli settlement, the border, the security, the status of Jerusalem and the extent of Palestinian sovereignty have been left to the final negotiations the last two irked the Palestinians most.

The extent of sovereignty that may be granted to the Palestinians can be judged from the territorial dispensation made during the last seven years and Israeli insistence on retaining the security and foreign policy in its hand even when a Palestinian state becomes a reality. The Camp David summit of July last where Arafat was pressurised by none other than President Clinton to sign almost on the dotted lines as regards the future of Jerusalem came as a shock to profound Palestinian sentiments. It was the elastic limit of the patience of the Palestinians who are not prepared to make compromise on Al-Aqsa. Sharon's visit to Al-Aqsa could have only sparked off the eruption but it was already in the making. The moment of truth for the Palestinians seems to have arrived and they seem ready to shape their destiny in a different way.

Putting an end to the so-called 'peace-process' at this point is important for Israel also because it has already gained from the Oslo Accords everything it had desired particularly PLO's recognition to Israel. So there is not much incentive left for the Israelis to continue with the process. It is however to be seen how the peace brokers in the West, particularly the United States, would tackle it after her role as an 'honest broker' has been much tainted.

Lessons from US Polls

The Leadership Crisis is Global

Praful Bidwai writes from New Delhi

The time has clearly come for The Fourth Way, a new approach to society, politics and economics which challenges corporate capitalism and globalisation. There is a ray of hope as I write this on the first anniversary of the Seattle revolt against globalisation, with its inequality and injustice. Seattle proved that the struggles of labour unions, environmentalists, human rights activists, or campaigners against child labour, can be knit together; that a new common vision is possible.

they felt there was no real choice or need) who decided the contest's outcome.

However, there are significant differences between Messrs Bush and Gore's support bases. For instance, Blacks voted 10 to 1 for Mr Gore. Families of unionised workers favoured him over Mr Bush two-to-one. Mr Gore's 11-point lead among female voters is attributable to his stand on abortion rights.

The two differ in policies on healthcare, tax reform, environmental protection, the death penalty, and on religion. There have equally significant differences on security and foreign policies too: Mr Bush will be less interventionist than Mr Gore. And he will push harder for anti-missile defences and deal more aggressively with Russia and China. Mr Bush will probably oppose CTBT ratification, unlike Mr Gore.

However, what divides them far more sharply is their approach to the Supreme Court, where at least three judges are to be replaced, including the ultra-conservative Chief Justice William Rehnquist. The nine-member court's fate can change radically depending on who

becomes President.

Mr Gore will probably nominate moderates. Mr Bush will nominate hardcore conservatives like Judges Antonin Scalia and Clarence Thomas, who have recently assaulted individual freedom.

Today's U.S. Supreme Court is the product of 30-plus years of nominations largely by Presidents Nixon, Reagan and Bush. It is narrowly divided. A couple of reactionary appointments would tilt that balance and harden a 5-to-4 majority which is consistently right-wing, totally pro-corporate, and tears down the Court's own past rulings in favour of freedom, justice and equality.

In the past, the U.S. Supreme Court played a progressive role on racial segregation, affirmative action, women's rights, etc. In the future, it could do just the opposite. This would have important consequences for the whole world for instance, further tightening of patents for corporations, or removal of restrictions on biotechnology research. The crisis of leadership in the U.S. will aggravate the political crisis everywhere. That crisis is global. But America's crisis is uniquely men-

acing.

Today's world is not quite unipolar. But America's economic and technological pre-eminence is as unchallenged as its military might. This was not so a decade ago although the Cold War was ending.

Then, scholars like Paul Kennedy (The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers) forecast U.S. decline vis-à-vis Japan and the European Union. It was not guaranteed that the U.S. would emerge the world technology leader, or that market-fundamentalist policies would hold long sway over the world. It wasn't inevitable that NATO would get more aggressive under US leadership even after the Warsaw Pact collapsed. Where does U.S. dominance leave the world? How might it be challenged to promote a less skewed global order? How can its consequences for world, especially the

Global South, be mitigated?

There is no easy answer. But logically, the main challenge to American domination must come from Western Europe. That is where there was a lot of hope, with the coming to power of Liberal-Left governments in the 1990s. Last year, 11 out of the European Union's 15 governments fell in that category. (Since then, Austria has moved rightwards).

Today, that hope remains unfulfilled. The Third Way, which the New Social Democrats promised as an alternative to U.S.-style global capitalism, is in crisis. It has failed to challenge U.S. economically. The Euro has lost over a quarter of its value in 20 months.

Indeed, the Third Way's proponents have not even re-created the "capitalism with a human face" which was the hallmark of

1945-75. This period witnessed the construction of the infrastructure and the welfare state on an unprecedented scale. The EU has been timid in asserting political and strategic autonomy. Kosovo demonstrated that starkly. Although the EU is now creating an armed force of its own, its function will be far narrower than NATO's. Political autonomy will be especially hard to achieve unless Europe develops an altogether new social-economic model of its own, one that is defiantly dissimilar to America's.

The time has clearly come for The Fourth Way, a new approach to society, politics and economics which challenges corporate capitalism and globalisation. There is a ray of hope as I write this on the first anniversary of the Seattle revolt against globalisation, with its inequality and injustice.

Seattle proved that the struggles of labour unions, environmentalists, human rights activists, or campaigners against child labour, can be knit together; that a new common vision is possible. The Fourth Way, premised upon that vision, could be our greatest hope.

Vajpayee's Statement on Ram Temple

by Harun ur Rashid

What the peoples of the sub-continent need is harmony and peace among all irrespective of caste and religion. It will be a sad occasion if Indian leaders encourage unintended divisive forces within its borders.

THE reported extraordinary statement of the Indian Prime Minister that the construction of Ram Temple in Ayodhya on the site of the demolished Babri mosque (1992) remains an unfinished business of his government appears to have surprised all, both inside and outside India.

This is because that although Prime Minister Vajpayee belongs to Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) which represents as the political wing of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the right-wing and ultra-nationalist organisation, he has been known to be a moderate in his views. It was assumed that he would be in a position to tone down the activities and rhetoric of RSS.

Secondly, he is leading a coalition government consisting of many secular parties and not a government of BJP. It has been claimed however that the statement reflects the views not of the coalition government but of the BJP. Former Indian Prime Minister V P Singh has been reported to have demanded that Prime Minister should make amends to his position.

The question is: why did the Prime Minister make this statement? First, there is a view that his government has not been doing well in economic front and his popularity is on the decline. The electorate appears to be disillusioned with the direction of the government. Political analysts believe that this statement could be a diversionary tactic of the Prime Minister. The people in general are likely to be engrossed in this debate and will tend to forget the pressing issues facing the country. The subject matter is an emotive one and the right-wing people will be pleased that the

Prime Minister did not forget the religious significance of the construction of Ram Temple.

Second, the election in the Uttar Pradesh will be held next year and the announcement of the construction of Ram Temple appears to be an election strategy to secure votes for his party BJP at the election. It may be noted that his party did not do well in UP and in the Hindi heartland at the last general election as BJP had expected. Some say that it could be a political ploy to get more votes from the UP constituencies.

It may be borne in mind that BJP swept the key northern states of UP and Bihar in 1991 election. In the campaign the BJP continued its calls to raze the 464-year old Babri mosque at Ayodhya and build a Hindu temple on the site it claimed was the birthplace of the Hindu god, Lord Rama. On 6th December 1992 the BJP's campaign against the mosque was realised. A Hindu crowd demolished the mosque. This fuelled more communal violence all over the country causing grave problems for the Congress Rao government.

Third, his Home Minister L.K. Advani has been charged for allegedly taking part in the demolition of the mosque. It is believed that the case might be heard soon by the court. Mr. Vajpayee has been walking on a tight rope on this issue and the right-wing followers do not approve his position of 'sitting on the fence'. There appears to be a mounting pressure by the BJP and RSS on the Prime Minister to make this statement so that he aligns himself with the core values of the party. The statement could be construed as a clever move by the Prime Minister to keep the party

followers happy as the BJP parliamentary party had to adjust its much heralded ultra-nationalist policies to form the coalition government.

There is a view that although the statement is perceived to be a part of the election campaign, it is likely to arouse unease and resentment among the minority Muslims in India. They will perceive the statement as insensitive and inflammatory. The communal tension is likely to rise. Overlaid on this sort of sentiment is the tough stand by RSS on India's 30 million Christians and the Christians were reportedly subjected to harassment and attack in Gujarat, Maharashtra and Orissa states. The recent visit of the Pope led to many right-wing demonstrations in India. These are not signs of healthy inter-communal relations in a secular country.

The statement is also likely to alarm the neighbours as to which direction India is moving. There could be reaction among the right-wing parties in neighbouring countries. After all religion creates high emotions and often reason does not hold good. A view prevails that if the preparations for the construction of Ram Temple begin on the site of the demolished Babri mosque, India may confront an explosive issue that could threaten to spin out of control and could suck the whole region into an unwarranted instability and violence.

What the peoples of the sub-continent need is harmony and peace among all irrespective of caste and religion. It will be a sad occasion if Indian leaders encourage unintended divisive forces within its borders.

The writer, a barrister, is former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.

To the Editor ...

Pakistani diplomat's audacious remarks

Sir, It seems that the recalled Pakistani Deputy High Commissioner Irfan Raja is under the impression that a state named Pakistan had acquired East Bengal in 1947 from the British and allowed the Bengalis to settle there. Otherwise, how could he say 'You are asking for apology. Apology for what? Apology for losing half of my country'?

Indeed this possessive mentality of the Pakistanis had been the root cause of their unfair treatment of Bengalis right from the beginning and particularly during the 1971 crisis.

Pakistanis would do well if they can summon enough courage to admit that East Bengal had become part of Pakistan only because it was a Muslim majority area and not out of anybody's kindness or favour. In course of time, this decision to join Pakistan proved to be wrong as the Bengalis became subject to indiscriminate exploitation in all spheres of economic activities which ultimately led to the separation of East Bengal (East Pakistan) from Pakistan and emerged as independent Bangladesh in 1971. Therefore, it is absolutely wrong to think that Pakistan had lost half the country in 1971.

It is really frustrating to see that after 29 years, the Pakistanis still appear to be adamant in their attitude towards Bangladesh and cannot bring themselves to expressing apology for the inhuman atrocities committed by them during our liberation war. It seems really futile to demand any apology from them.

Abul Mohsin

40, Sidheswari
Dhaka

Kudos to Sadek Hossain Khoka

Sir, I would like to thank Sadek Hossain Khoka for his vociferous condemnation against daily Inqilab for their mimicking our National Anthem. His, together with a very few of his party men's stand in the last 4 party liaison meeting is nothing but a clear demonstration of his deep sense of patriotism. While the nation was watching what would be BNP's stand on this issue, he was there to light a ray of hope for us. At least, we are assured that there would be people like Sadek Hossain Khoka who would not compromise on the issues that purposefully dwarf our greatest achievements such as the heroic Liberation War. This is what the nation expects from a valiant freedom fighter and a leader like him.

Ulfat Hussain
Dhaka

Thank you, Major Akhtar

Sir, We are grateful to the Hon'ble MP Major (Rtd) Akhtaruzzaman for his public disclosure of Army rule. Since the occupation Pakistani days and during the rule of Mr Akhtar's party, we saw that the Army managed the traffic control in the Cantonment areas. None including Major Akhtar raised any opposition to it.

But now in the backdrop of deteriorating law and order situation, when we find the cantonment areas secure to everybody

in all respects, the honourable law makers is raising objection in the possible means. Cantonments are the only places, where traffic laws are obeyed by everybody, irrespective of rank and status. We, the common people feel secure, whenever we enter the cantonment area, whether it is in Dhaka, Comilla or anywhere else. The reason is these places are under management of the Army. If actually, there is any legal limitation in this respect, it should be immediately removed and Major Akhtar as a member of the Parliament should play a vital role. This is our request to him.

Abdul Wahid Unnoo
Chandai, Sylhet

PM's foreign tours

Sir, Our Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is perhaps the only head of the government who has travelled maximum number of foreign countries while in office. For the last four and half years our Prime Minister has been visiting one foreign country after another.

What strike us most is that her tour entourage has always been very large which costs heavily on the public exchequer.

We wonder how and under what capacity Sheikh Rehana, the sister of the PM accompanies her in almost every tour. Who is bearing her expenses?

Would the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Finance kindly clarify the matter for the sake of accountability and transparency?

OH Kabir
Dhaka