

The Politics of Ceasefire

The bottom-line favoured by most of APHC (All Parties Huryat Conference) leaders is some variant of Owen Dixon plan of 1950 which also envisioned a partition of Jammu and Kashmir along Chenab river. The final deal to be struck will of course be dictated by India and Pakistan who cannot but ensure their own vital interest and security.

ANY positive information with regards to Indo-Pakistan relations is almost always viewed cynically, if not dismissively and thought to be something to do with the peacenicks' yet another attempt to piece the peace in the volatile region. However, two successive ceasefires in strife-torn Kashmir - one offered by the Hizbul Mujahideens, the largest and most dreaded of the militant groups in the state in July last and another announced by Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee on November 19, 2000 - have raised eyebrows among the observers who are struck by their sheer straight forwardness. The developments surrounding the cease-fires have also given rise to a pertinent question: who is, after all holding the string from behind? Because they could not have been offered in vacuum and were, by all probabilities, the follow-up of some invisible efforts and understanding at some level.

On July 24 last year, Abdul Majid Dar, a senior Hizb commander announced in Srinagar his organisation's decision to declare unilateral ceasefire for three months and also offered to talk with Indian administration. The offer of the Hizb - crucially dependent on Pakistan for its sustenance - not only came as a surprise, it was immediately challenged by UJC (United Jihad Council) - an Azad Kashmir-based apex body of 15 militant Mujahideen which unanimously decided to step up attacks

against Indian security forces. As a result the ceasefires crumbled much before the stipulated time. It is now learnt that General Pervez Musharraf constantly accused by India of "cross border terrorism" and under pressure to talk to the Indians acted, within the framework of some understanding, to initiate the ceasefire. Pakistan's Islamic fundamentalists, however, got the wind of and scuttled it before it could be effective. The July initiative ended at that but an alacrity remained in Track II diplomacy.

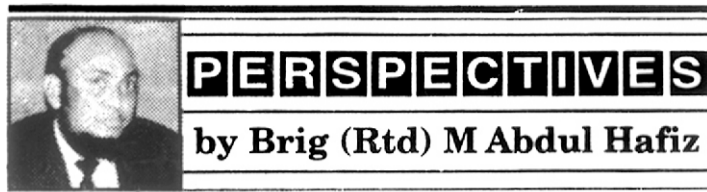
Later, before Mr. Vajpayee announced his cease-fire for the holy month of Ramadan he had to brush aside several obstacles to his decision even from his close aides who were however delighted to see its results in the end. As it was in July, the cease-fires immediately divided the militants into pro and anti ceasefires factions. Although the ceasefires were not strictly observed even this time it was able to create a great deal of confusions among the groups concerned. However the most significant aspect of the ceasefires was Pakistan's positive response to Vajpayee's November 19 announcement, seeking reciprocity from both Pakistan and the militants. On December 2, Pakistan For-

eign Secretary Inamul Huq announced in Islamabad that the troops on the LoC (Line of Control) would observe maximum restraint in order to strengthen and stabilise the ceasefires. The declaration was followed by three week's cull on

ing of none other than President Clinton himself. Whether his claim is credible or not he visited Srinagar escorted by RAW people only weeks before the Hizbul Mujahideen had announced a unilateral cease-fire. It is reported that in August last, Izzat

hoping that the US is in fact aiding India's interest in Jammu and Kashmir. However the write-up in the *Herald Tribune* makes clear that the US government's central objective is containing Islamic rights and Pakistan. Amidst these diverse hopes and speculations, the crucial point is how the dialogue would proceed once its process is restored. Till the process was rendered null and void with India abruptly adopting its on July 12, 1999 that talks with Pakistan on Kashmir are conditional on its ending "cross border terrorism" dialogues were in practice.

Even after the insurgency erupted in 1989 in Kashmir the prime ministers of India and Pakistan continued to meet in the course of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) summit and in New York during UN General Assembly sessions. The Foreign Secretaries held many rounds of talks and drew up useful agreements on Confidence Building Measures (CBMs). Despite the nuclear tests in May 1998 at Pokhran and Chagai respectively, the dialogue was revived by the prime ministers in New York on September 23, 1998. The November 1998 meeting of the Foreign Secretar-



PERSPECTIVES

by Brig (Rtd) M Abdul Hafiz

the hope. Most of the militant groups mocked at Vajpayee's offer but did little to render it ineffective.

To obtain a coherent picture from these developments the attentions are now focussed on a publication on 22 November in *International Herald Tribune* writing in which a US businessman Mansoor Izzat, also a nuclear physicist and investment banker talked of his initiative in bringing about a dialogue between General Musharraf and Atal Behari Vajpayee what is however interesting is his claim that his initiative had the back-

and the US diplomatic establishment renewed their efforts and evolved a formula in which Pakistan would be brought to the negotiating table at the outset of the political discussions after ceasefires had taken hold, first bilaterally between India and Kashmiris and then, at Kashmiris' request, trilaterally. Is that process for dialogue in progress? Or the present developments are only a prelude to that?

While, for General Musharraf, it is indeed a risky gambit to de-escalate in Kashmir, India is pinning its high hope in the game

Towards a Thaw in Lanka? There's Room for Hope

Praful Bidwai writes from Colombo

Sceptics, including the non-LTTE University Teachers for Human Rights, who have valiantly fought for civil liberties, argue that the LTTE may use any lull in fighting only to enter Jaffna and forcibly recruit young students, and then renew the fighting. They may be right. The LTTE must be tested on the ground in a peace process that includes all Tamil currents. The present moment offers a unique chance. Ms Kumaratunga must seize it.

LEOPARDS don't change spots. Guerrillas never willingly surrender arms, nor governments "sovereign" territory. Going by conventional wisdom, moves for negotiations on the Sri Lanka ethnic conflict must be viewed with the utmost scepticism. The LTTE may only be playing a wicked game through a unilateral cease-fire because it has lost over 2,000 cadres in a year.

Similarly, Ms Kumaratunga's government is promising talks only to ward off international opprobrium; it hasn't even reciprocated the Tigers' cease-fire.

Many arguments can be constructed to cast doubts upon the significance of Lankan developments since the November 1 meeting between Norwegian envoy Erik Solheim and LTTE chief Prabhakaran.

One can contend that no basic change has occurred in Eelam or Sinhala-chauvinist mindsets. If a militarily powerful India could not bend the LTTE to reason, how can tiny, distant Norway succeed?

And yet, a plausible scenario can be constructed for an optimistic view, based not on ignorant or naive hope, but on hard realities. This column, written after discussions in Colombo with gov-

ernment supporters, scholars, peace activists and diplomats, outlines one. It aims not to present cut-and-dried solutions, but stimulate thinking on alternatives.

Colombo and the LTTE have come close for the first time since 1987 to third-party mediation, technically called "facilitation". The Norwegians have even laid down the parameters: a one-state Sri Lanka with generous autonomy for the North and the East.

Both Colombo and the LTTE have explicitly or implicitly accepted these parameters. Ms Kumaratunga recently admitted "the real cause" of the crisis is that the minorities lack "a fair or reasonable share in the ... power structure".

The Solheim visit is the first time Prabhakaran was publicly photographed on his home terrain with a foreigner. This wasn't

a mere public relations exercise. In his November 27 Heroes' Day speech, he called for "unconditional talks" for "a negotiated settlement that would be fair, just, and ... satisfy the political aspirations of the Tamil people."

He also wants a cordial atmosphere and "de-escalation of war" but not as a "precondition".

A close reading of his carefully-crafted speech reveals an uncharacteristically soft tone. He directly mentions Eelam only once, and that too as a peroration much like "Jai Hindl!" The only other reference to Eelam is conditional: "If the Sinhala nation fails to redeem itself from the grip of racism ..., we have no alternative other than to secede."

This is markedly different from insisting on a non-negotiable Eelam.

We must distinguish Prabhakaran's declared commitment to a "political solution" from

his demand for interim steps such as de-escalation. On these, the LTTE has a shifting, exploratory, approach. It variously asks for a cease-fire, unbanning, restoring "normalcy", etc. But it has not once said that there could be no talks without these steps.

Crucially, unlike in the past, the LTTE no longer demands its three well-known preconditions: cease-fire, ending of the economic embargo and the army's removal from the Northeast. Its December 21 cease-fire declaration came despite the government's reluctance to make "further gestures of goodwill" until subsequent "negotiations proceed to ... mutual satisfaction".

The government is in two minds on de-escalation. Some hardliners oppose it because they think military pressure can decisively weaken the LTTE. It is hard to believe this. A long delay in responding to the LTTE's diplomatic offensive risks losing an unprecedented opportunity. One must hope Ms Kumaratunga rises above the narrow agenda of some colleagues, including Prime Minister Wickramanayake.

Both sides are jockeying for bargaining power. Neither has

undergone a change of heart not least the LTTE which remains one of the most, if not the most, brutal, militaristic and fascist forces anywhere.

Nevertheless, there is a real change of posture. Both are both under enormous external pressure to negotiate. Even if there are "talks about talks", the process can build confidence.

The pressure on the government comes from western donor agencies and international banks. On December 18-19, the Sri Lanka Development Forum read the Riot Act to it for failure to meet standards of "good governance". It said conflict resolution is critical to reducing poverty. The European Union demanded peace talks and an improved "human rights record".

Colombo admits its defence expenditure has risen to the "intolerably high level of six per cent of GDP." (According to independent estimates, it may be 20 per cent). Besides this "negative" pressure, there is also the "positive" pressure from Ms Kumaratunga's own past positions favouring reconciliation.

On the LTTE, the greatest pressure comes, ironically, from its own military victories in early 2000. The Tigers found world

sympathy vanishing just as they were knocking on the gates of Jaffna. The international community rallied behind Chandrika.

It is hard to say if Prabhakaran has concluded that Eelam is not internationally saleable. But he knows he must show moderation. Another source of pressure is the British threat to ban the LTTE in its international headquarters.

Sceptics argue including the non-LTTE University Teachers for Human Rights, who have valiantly fought for civil liberties that the LTTE may use any lull in fighting only to enter Jaffna and forcibly recruit young students, and then renew the fighting. They may be right.

But the LTTE must be tested on the ground in a peace process that includes all Tamil currents. The present moment offers a unique chance. Ms Kumaratunga must seize it.

Should India play a role here? India is not acceptable as an honest broker or even facilitator, given its past involvement. Nor must it promote anything resembling a two-state solution. New Delhi's past partisan politicking with different Eelam groups, including the LTTE and the EPRLF, has tainted it.

However, for India's NGOs and scholars, Sri Lanka poses a challenge. They can generate conflict resolution ideas within a radical federal framework. An imaginative formula could have applications and lessons in Kashmir and the Northeast.



Velupillai Prabhakaran and other LTTE leaders with the Norwegian team during the first round of talks in the Vanni jungle.

To the Editor ...

"Alternative form of government"

Sir, This in reference to the letter of Mr A Mawaz published in these columns under the above heading on December 1. Mr Mawaz proposed the formation of a Caretaker Government for a longer period (than the scheduled three months) to provide the wallowing politicians some rest period for recovery of their normal sense of direction in guiding the affairs of the country.

A good proposal, indeed! But how can it be implemented? We know the very Caretaker Government was a provision ultravires to the Constitution. The politicians themselves realised their inability to conduct fair election and made the provision of Caretaker Government Constitutional. Now if the above proposal for lengthening the period of the Caretaker Government is to be made a law, the provision should be enacted as such by the Jatiya Sangsad (JS). Would the politicians themselves realise their need of 'some rest period'?

MAS Molla
Dhaka

May the coming year be a happy one

Sir, We don't know what is in store for us in the 21st century, what is the future of Bangladesh, after the next hundred years Bangladesh will be in what condition. However, the present situation does not augur well, we could see only a black void before us.

May the Almighty Allah have mercy on mankind, may all become united, irrespective of race and religion and strive for peace on earth in the coming year.

Nur Jahan
Chittagong

Residential area or what?

Sir, For about last 20-25 years the residential area of Armanitola has been turned into a godown area wherein the transport agencies and inter-district truck services are always busy in loading and unloading goods and commodities. Hundreds of residential houses have been converted into godowns and most of the roads and streets are blocked and traffic jammed.

Now some traders and merchandisers are trying to grab Wari residential area in order to turn it into a godown area. One by one many houses are being used as godowns and road traffic jams have become a nuisance.

We request DCC, Rajuk and DMP to kindly look into the problems and difficulties of the residents of Armanitola and Wari residential area and to take some effective and concrete steps to alleviate their sufferings.

Would the authorities concerned also define and earmark the residential, commercial, market, industrial and godown areas of the metropolitan city of Dhaka, help maintain and protect their respective utility, security and sanctity and enable the city dwellers to lead a normal and peaceful life?

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Comfort of a

democracy

Sir, There has been a lot of discussions in

the country in recent time on the question of the citizens' right to criticize the judiciary in a democracy. While all major schools of opinion and the media seem to have endorsed the Western model of democracy without qualification, curiously the bar still seems to believe in a special sacrosanct status for the judiciary.

Needless to add, the above is not tenable in the Western democracy which is making room for more and more in fundamental democratic rights for the people. In fact, freedom of expression of the educated mass and the media has proved to be greatest triumph for Western democracy in the present information age in spite of its weaknesses - and probably the inherent injustice - of capitalism.

I would request the DS to reproduce the comment published in the Washington Post on December 13 on the US Federal Supreme Court judgement in the Bush vs. Gore Case on the US presidential election. This should be an eye opener for those who still believe in a "special status" for any community or profession in our country while professing democracy and accountability.

Khairul Mahmud
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Dhaka

Making the wrongs right

Sir, A news story entitled "Stop brain drain, worried JS body urges govt" (DS, Dec. 14, 2000) tells about the concern of the political leaders about tremendous loss of the country is incurring, as the meritorious students are going abroad. On principle, it sounds very "patriotic", but the reality is that our corrupted politicians have polluted the country to such a sickening extent that nobody wants to get back to the country when they find a disciplined life abroad, despite their yearning for their own country.

The fact is that the politicians do not want these assets of the country back home, as they like to exploit the prevailing situation in the country for their own aggrandisement. I hope you understand where the problem lies.

Mahmudul Hasan
Leicester, UK

OPINION

Of Politics and Politicians

Faruque Hasan

What is politics for? The aim in life of a politician is supposedly to serve his country. A politician should unselfishly endeavour for the betterment of his/her compatriots, so that they can stand in glory among the nations of the world.

Politics is not a means to make money and wealth as it is thought to be pursued by most of the politicians of the economically and socially backward countries like ours. What we see in Bangladesh is that whenever a political party ascends to power, many of its leaders start getting rich day by day. But how they earn such fabulous amount of wealth? Obviously through corruption at the expense of national interests. Such dishonest politicians deposit their money in bank accounts mostly abroad. Secret accounts in Swiss banks are their first choice.

Jesus Christ said that the pursuit of knowledge is like drinking salty sea water by a thirsty man, the more he drinks the sea water the more he gets thirsty. Perhaps the crave for wealth is also like drinking seawater, the more wealth a person gathers the more he craves for it.

Accumulation of wealth itself is not a crime or despicable, rather commendable if it is done legally and through honest means. Many political leaders, whenever they come to power, accumulate wealth through manipulation of opportunity and even misuse of government funds. People shudder when they come to know that some political leaders are involved in gold smuggling, some of them have been involved in importing contraband items, in collaboration with some foreign embassies to evade customs and duties. Some powerful political leaders make money by collecting tolls, through activists, under overt and covert threat, from business people. It is also alleged that often some earn illegal commissions from foreign companies while signing contracts with them on behalf of the govern-

ment. Some of them even involve in illegally and forcefully occupying plots of land, houses having disputes of ownership.

How much is enough? How much money does a person need in a lifetime to lead the most luxurious life on earth? When we see a person has much more than enough and still desperately craves for further accumulation, and take recourse to dishonesty and corruption to fulfill that craving, shall we not take that person as crazy? His/her state of mind gets more evident when we see him/her publicly posing as an ardent crusader against dishonesty and corruption! That money and wealth should be earned by any means, even through dishonest and corrupt, at the expense of national interests, is certainly a symptom of mental sickness.

Perhaps such dishonest politicians only get mental bliss knowing that they have an enormous amount of money in bank accounts, at home and abroad. They even do not know what they will exactly do with that. With the utmost effort of a human being to lead the most luxurious life, one can at best use a very tiny fraction of such accumulated wealth to defray the costs of envisaged enjoyment and amenities. But only to satisfy their craze they are perhaps ready to be the most dishonest persons on earth. They see how the people around them are suffering from hunger, malnutrition, arsenic pollution and poverty, but these facts do not create any repercussion in their minds. Is not this a symptom of mental retardation? And what they ultimately gain? One of our ex-presidents is convicted in a corruption case. A lot more corruption cases against him are under trial. Many ex-ministers have been facing corruption charges against them in the court of justice.

Greek philosopher Plato has suggested in his book, "The Republic", that the members of the ruling class should not have their own families. According to his thought that if the ruling class (the people in power) do not have families of their own then they will not misuse their power and get involved in corruption to make money for their families. However, politicians in the socially backward countries have proved that even this great philosopher was wrong! Jayalalita, an ex-chief minister of the Indian state Tamil Nadu, despite being an unmarried person could not keep her hands clean and honest while in power. She has been sentenced to imprisonment by an Indian court for corruption charges brought against her. Has not her insatiable and uncontrollable avareice for wealth made her corrupt? Such lust for money and wealth is certainly not a symptom of sanity.

The gradual degradation of quality of our politicians is alarming. During the British rule in the subcontinent the idea that power can be used to make money was unknown, so only such people as had the desire to sacrifice their lives for the nation and country used to get involved in politics. Gone are those days and the instinct to make money being in politics (power) has surfaced, with people a devoid of honesty flocking into politics.

Such politicians, however, in the name of a political party which comes to power, start thinking that they will stay in power for ever, therefore will never be made accountable for their misdeeds and corruption to anybody. This wrong assumption makes them more desperate to misuse power for making money.

Everything has a limit except perhaps the lust for money and wealth of some people involved in politics in our country as well as other such underdeveloped countries. While making this comment I pay due respect to those very few politicians who still maintain utmost honesty and integrity. When majority of the politicians are crazy what bright future for our country can we hope? We need to expose the state of mind of our politicians, instead of hushing up the reality, so that they may come to sense to correct themselves.