

Arafat's Conditional "Yes" to Clinton's Proposals

PRESIDENT Clinton's "Peace Parameters" were given to the negotiators a couple of days back. While these were not divulged officially, most of the proposals have been discussed in some form or the other by the media. The basic issues are sovereignty over East Jerusalem and the holy sites, the right of the Palestinian refugees to return home to what is now Israel, and the fate of Israeli settlers. President Clinton's peace proposals reportedly include the following elements. East Jerusalem along with the holy sites belonging to Muslims, Christians and parts of Armenian quarters shall go to the Palestinians, 100 per cent of Gaza and 95 per cent of the West Bank will be handed over to the Palestinians, and about 40 per cent of the Israeli settlers will be withdrawn and resettled within Israel proper. There was, however, no commitment about the Palestinian refugees. In other words, Palestinian refugees will not be allowed to return to their homes in Israel.

This is far from what Palestinians are demanding and, not surprisingly, the mini summit proposed to be held in Sharm-el-Sheikh and to be presided over by President Hosni Mubarak was cancelled. Unfortunately, the violence has continued. While the death and injury casualties were higher for the Palestinians, life for both sides has been in turmoil and under greater risk. On the election front, Barak's poll rating continued to drop. As Israeli Knesset refused to dissolve itself, Netanyahu decided to pull out of the Prime Ministe-

If the peace process is accepted keeping in view the concerns, President Clinton's proposals could become the basis of an acceptable deal by both Palestinians and Israelis. Such an agreement would stand a good chance to curb the present violence and set the path for the return of normalcy to a region that truly needs peace and harmony.

rial race. The Israeli Knesset had earlier authorised him to contest the elections as an independent candidate. Netanyahu's departure has increased the chances of Ariel Sharon to win the election.

Under these situations there was hardly any scope for President Clinton's peace proposals to succeed. However, Barak at one stage said he would accept these proposals as a basis for negotiations if Arafat did the same. It was not possible for Arafat to commit anything, as the issues remained vague and the major demand of Palestinian refugees right to return home was not addressed. Arafat asked for clarifications but repeated transatlantic communications over telephone could not resolve the problems. Ten days were lost. This is crucial as President Clinton is set to leave the White House on January 20 and Barak is facing special Prime Ministerial election on February 6, 2001, which he is expected to lose if a good peace agreement is not presented to the Israeli public.

However, better late than never. Chairman Arafat had a long telephonic conversation with President Clinton and agreed to go to Washington for direct talks. These have now taken place in the White House. Apparently some clarifications were given which enabled Presi-

dent Arafat to give a conditional "Yes" to President Clinton's peace proposals. Arafat chose wisely, as otherwise he would have been blamed for any failure. In the meantime Barak reversed his earlier position on the Temple Mount and said he would not sign away its sovereignty to the

Arafat said "Yes" to the peace proposal but undoubtedly there are ambiguities that need to be addressed. As it seems, Israel suggested that Palestinians could have control over the surface of the holy sites, but they could not excavate or dig in to the ground as Israel wants to main-



Spotlight on Middle East

Muslehuddin Ahmad

Palestinians. He said the situation on the ground could continue without any challenges. In other words, the Palestinians could have control over the Al-Aqsa Mosque esplanade and Israel over the Wailing Wall without imposing the word "sovereignty" in any peace document. Such a stance is probably best ascribed as political maneuvering by Barak to ease the situation at home where Sharon has been battering Barak on the issue of sovereignty. For a peace treaty to be lasting, however, the final agreement should specify that the sovereignty of Al Sharif Al Haram be with the Palestinians and that of Wailing Wall with the Israelis.

tain some kind of "sovereignty" underneath because of the possible presence of the First Temple. However, it's a historical fact that the First Temple was totally destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD; only a part of the walls of the Second Temple still remains which is known as the Wailing Wall against which the Jews pray. As it's a sentimental issue, may be there could be a solution as suggested there is practically no need to excavate the ground of the holy sites. Indeed, the Israelis have been digging around the holy sites and they found a tunnel (I myself saw the tunnel when I visited Al Sharif al Haram) which led to riots by the Palestinians.

2001: The Beckoning of a Cold Peace

by Badrul Khan

If it is not cold war, it is certainly shaping into an era of cold peace. And never than before do we need a multipolar world where capital, set to liberate itself from all social and political constraints, faces a resistance and is not allowed to impose unilaterally the logic of managing the world as a market....To the extent that any revolution in this age of reluctance is beyond imagination, there is certainly a need to fight over the nature of capitalism by putting a counterweight to the unbridled growth of capital. Whether Russia will stand up for such a task remains to be seen.

WITH humanity entering a new millennium people basking into predicting what holds them for future are ready to retreat into a more pessimistic note. Many tend to suggest that the world will essentially remain the same and instead of any genuine initiative undertaken by any of the world leaders, the political hangover inherited from the last few years of the passing century will continue to exert its soporific influence. If the world were to reckon with the hangovers before it was prepared to embark on any new initiative, then there remains at the moment more unassailable hurdles than any easy alternative solution to them. With all talks of globalisation and the promise of benefit people would cash in from it, the world is more divided today on many fronts than it was ever united. Although one would hesitate to buy into the doctrine that characterises our era as the clash of civilisations, there are indications that we are living in a world which is far from what politicians and forces of globalisation tend to suggest. Recent events in the heart of Europe have allowed us to question the parameters of civilisation vaunted by many. Events in former Yugoslavia have given rise to an unprecedented display of nationalistic fervour with most of Europe now being fragmented more than it used to be. Characterised by intermittent war and conflict, there are signs that the unsettling wind of change will turn this region into a zone of instability with more adjacent to Europe nations caught up in the wave of new identity politics. All this reiterates the statement made by American scientist David P Calleo in his book "Restarting the Marxist clock" that "it is tempting to say that the Soviet Union has threatened the West more by dying than it ever

did while living. Ironically, it is the demise of the Soviet Union that has encouraged the resumption of capitalism's old internecine character."

There is no respite in other parts of the globe either. Peace has alluded the Middle East ever since the two sides plunged into extremism and resorted to an unprecedented spell of violence against each other. Nor is there any hope for the future when Israel is set to elect an ultra right Prime Minister by the name Donald Rumsfeld as his defence secretary who served in the same position from 1975 to 1977 under Gerard Ford. Mr Rumsfeld had been quick to outline his priorities. Having served as a congressman for Illinois, a representative to NATO and a member of the National Economic Commission, he outlines his priorities in terms of new defence threats. These include the spread of weapons of mass destruction among lesser states such as North Korea, Iran, Afghanistan; information warfare on computer systems; and attacks on space satellites. His vision of America being under threat emanates from his belief that America under Clinton had utterly underestimated alien threats to its security. In this chorus, the new national security adviser, Condoleezza Rice, who is fluent in Russian and is an expert in Soviet affair, joins him. Yet she is certain to figure out in the new administration

the Philippines are on the verge of disintegration as chaos rather than stability rules over, suggesting that the more things change in this world, the more they remain the same ("Plus ca change, plus c'est la même chose").

In this winter of discontent there is neither any voice positive that is to be heard from America the powerhouse of world economy and politics. President elect George Bush has appointed a cold war warrior by the name Donald Rumsfeld as his defence secretary who served in the same position from 1975 to 1977 under Gerard Ford. Mr Rumsfeld had been quick to outline his priorities. Having served as a congressman for Illinois, a representative to NATO and a member of the National Economic Commission, he outlines his priorities in terms of new defence threats. These include the spread of weapons of mass destruction among lesser states such as North Korea, Iran, Afghanistan; information warfare on computer systems; and attacks on space satellites. His vision of America being under threat emanates from his belief that America under Clinton had utterly underestimated alien threats to its security. In this chorus, the new national security adviser, Condoleezza Rice, who is fluent in Russian and is an expert in Soviet affair, joins him. Yet she is certain to figure out in the new administration

not so much as a promoter of the chummy relationship that developed between Bill Clinton and Boris Yeltsin but as the precursor of a new cold war. The two nominations are a mere hint to what awaits next. It all suggests that America will vigorously defend the star war missile defence system and will add more spice to the discontent Europe and other countries have over this deeply divisive proposal. China has already announced that the proposed strategy will not work and she will combat it with its own system of combat.

In this context the most important player both politically and ideologically many believe would be the Russians. Dogged by mistrust the relationship between the two unequal partners now seems certain to be over. Russia has realised over and over again that the carrot in Clinton's hand had played more of a traditional role of luring the cold war partner into its political burrow than a genuine and sincere concern of the Americans for the woes Russia had been passing through.

If popular culture were any measure of the mood, there is evidently a feeling of dejection in the Russian air, as people tend to turn away from all that is American. Recent public opinion polls sponsored by the US State Department suggest that Russian people's favourite attitude towards America has dropped

from nearly 75 per cent in 1993 to a mere 50 per cent or less in the first part of 2000. More tendencies now are the culture of hate, a reminiscence of the Soviet era. The pop song *Kill the Yankees* is a hit among youth in Russia and the movie *Brat II* is also big hit that features a killer who travels from New York to Chicago blowing out the brains of the Americans. All these are symptomatic to a people who, now being free from the free market syndrome, realise how it was tricked into the so-called *perestroika* and then abandoned like a whore in a post coitus limbo.

In conformity with this popular sentiment Russian President Mr Putin since taking office exactly a year ago, has given all impressions that he will rather block a US campaign to build a unipolar world than seeing off the diminishing role Russia has lately been assigned to in international arena. In this attempt Putin has cultivated ties with those who represent in American mind the rogue states ready to hit American cities with missiles of mass destruction. Apart from lobbying European leaders to reject the new star war adventure citing that it will violate the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, Putin has established ties with Washington's enemies. Russia no longer observes a 1995 accord barring conventional arms sales to Iran, listed by the US State Department as a sponsor dose of state terrorism.

Putin has met Fidel Castro of Cuba in a rare show of solidarity, which is sure to revive memories of cooperation that tormented America for a long period of time.

Putin's adventure has already met America's resistance who has announced an end to its support that saw Russia receive multilateral bank aid in the coming years. This will hurt Russia in its attempt to restructure the payment of soviet era debt worth \$48 billion US dollar to the Paris club of creditor nations. On the other hand, America will have to take into account the fact that Russia still has the second largest store of nuclear weapons in its arsenal.

Yet, I tend to view this new millennium in a far brighter note. If it is not cold war, it is certainly shaping into an era of cold peace. And never than before do we need a multipolar world where capital, set to liberate itself from all social and political constraints, faces a resistance and is not allowed to impose unilaterally the logic of managing the world as a market. It is one of the ironies of the past century, wrote Eric Hobsbawm in *The Age of Extremes*, that the most lasting results of Russian revolution, whose object was the global overthrow of capitalism, "was to save its antagonist both in war and in peace by providing incentives to reform itself after the second world war, and by establishing the popularity of economic planning." To the extent that any revolution in this age of reluctance is beyond imagination, there is certainly a need to fight over the nature of capitalism by putting a counterweight to the unbridled growth of capital. Whether Russia will stand up for such a task remains to be seen.

To the Editor ...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

Waiting for judgement

Sir, It is tragic for our nation that we still have not received a final verdict in the Bangabandhu murder trial. Over the last 25 years, the nation has demanded the trial of the killers of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. The judges were also aware of this; they also have a responsibility to the nation's demand. Our judicial organ is independent as per the Constitution. Recently a split judgement was delivered by two judges. We have been informed of various incidents such as the tape scandal, the granting of midnight bail etc. We believe the executive branch of the state will execute the death penalty on the 10 criminals convicted to be the killers of Bangabandhu, provided the accused do not proceed further with appeals and we also expect that conflicting judgements regarding the other five accused will be resolved through separate hearings and different judges.

Finally, we believe that the court will give a prompt decision in this regard to make people feel that there is rule of law in the country.

Md Sirajul Haque
Dhaka

Passion and performance

Sir, People belong to two broad categories, one generally ruled by the heart, and the other ruled by the head in day to day affairs. In politics it is a mixed affair, contaminated with half truth. This is more so in the emerging nations. The recent close US presiden-

tial election fight revealed the nature of the Americans. It was a tough mental test for the voters and the candidates. The fighting spirit was there, and ultimately the loser gave in gracefully. All's well that ends well; but this issue left a bad taste in the mouth.

But not in turbulent Dhaka, ruled by political passions and hyper-patriotic spirit. A section of the political workers are after the judiciary, and one of the parties to a case is trying to dictate judgement from outside through devious means, including display of violence and lawlessness. The Chief Justice has commented publicly, in an adverse manner.

All is not well in *Sonar Bangla*, as the lust for gold is enormous.

We are short of silver linings.

Most of our leaders are suscep-

tive to plain thinking and high

living.

Our leaders have a role to

mould the society; but it is being

done by setting the wrong exam-

ples.

AZ
Dhaka

Integrity? Or the lack of it?

Sir, While reading *The Mother in Manville*, a short story by M.R. Rawlings from the textbook of H.S.C English, I came across the word "integrity". The writer defined this word with a different touch. She regarded integrity as "something that is more than honesty". To her someone who works relentlessly without aspiring to be rewarded, someone who is devoted and determined in his/her work, possesses this rare quality. These kind of people are guided by the purity of heart, by the serenity of mind. They are willing to sacri-

fice their vigour only for love, not just any other love but love that is divine, that is respected. Their tranquillity lies in servitude; their savoury, in contentment.

Bangladesh needs people with integrity. We want leaders who

disdain egoism, who are not censorious, who refrain themselves from all kinds of profusion, whose glowing ardour will

wake our sleeping spirits, who will neither bent nor crack in the hardest of situations. Like the writer, I would also like to

express these qualities in a single word-- integrity. Clearly, our leaders are not of this sort. It is futile to expect anything from them unless they change their (inherited) habits.

Muksitul Islam
IBA, Dhaka

Over-bridges, please

Sir, I would like to express my gratitude to the City Corporation for constructing a number of over-bridges in the city. They have done a good job, indeed.

However, I feel more over-bridges should be constructed, particularly at Banglamotor, Mogbazaar and Kakrail areas. At these road crossings, pedestrians have to stand for a long time to cross the roads and the entire area gives a chaotic look. Moreover they cross the road with great risk. Mothers, school-going children as well as the old and the disabled suffer most. If over-bridges are constructed at these areas, it will minimize the sufferings of the people and put an end to this chaos.

Anika Maria Ahmed
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The shape of the new moon

Sir, Everyone has, at least once in his/her life, seen the new moon. It indicates the arrival of a new month. We have had this opportunity recently on the eve of Eid. However, it is very sad that all television channels as well as all print media show the new moon as being "curved

to the left". But I want to draw the attention to the fact that actually the new moon is "curved to the right"; i.e. convex to the right. The shape that we get to see is the moon at the end of a month which is convex to the left. I find it very surprising that no one has come forward to correct this mistake. People from science background should have noticed it much earlier.

Kazi Parvez Fattah Civil Dept,
BUET

UN sanctions and Iraq

Sir, UN sanctions was imposed on Iraq since its invasion of Kuwait in 1990. Since then Iraq's repeated appeal for withdrawing of unjust and unethical sanctions has been ignored by the UN Security Council showing different vague reasons. It is no doubt that Saddam Hussein himself is responsible for inviting this calamity for his people. And he has already paid much price for his blunder. But, why the innocent Iraqi people will be the victims of such unwanted sanctions for an indefinite period? Millions of Iraqi children are dying for want of necessary food and medicine. Where is the world conscience? Isn't it a violation of Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Among the five permanent members of the UN America and Great Britain are against of lifting sanctions from Iraq. Other members seem quite lenient regarding the matter. The recent arrival of good will and humanitarian missions by air from France, Russia and China is a clear gesture of that.

It is high time to ponder over the matter by the world body especially by members of the OIC and do something concrete to save the Iraqi people from their sufferings.

MH Bari
Bionic Fish Processing Ltd
Khulna

OPINION

Fatwa, HC Verdict and Recalcitrant Clerics

A.H. Jaffor Ullah

On the first day of the year 2001 we just read the news emanating from Dhaka that Bangladesh's High Court had finally given its verdict on legal validity of Fatwa, the religious edict, in the impoverished nation of 125 million people. Two judges declared that Fatwa is illegal in Bangladesh. This news was welcomed by most of the sensible people because for too long the religious edict is used as a tool against women in Bangladesh. Therefore, civil rights groups and other organizations who are helping the women have welcomed the judges' decision. But we knew then that some Mullahs will strike back. Well, just that happened sooner than we thought!

A BBC report came recently in which the headline read "Islamic Group Attacks Fatwa Ruling." In that report it was mentioned that an extremist Islamic group in Bangladesh has denounced two High Court Judges as apostates for delivering the landmark decision against the use of Fatwa. According to the BBC report, one Mullah by the name Fazlul Huq Amin representing the Islamic Unity Alliance had already threatened to launch a nationwide campaign against the landmark verdict handed down on Monday (January 1). This verdict had outlawed any such Fatwa in the nation. Most of the freedom loving people in Bangladesh who value personal freedom heaved a sigh of relief hearing the High Court decision against the use of Fatwa.

According to the BBC report, the Judges now need protection. The government should immediately arrest Fazlul Huq Amin and his ilk for his offensive way of challenging the court decision. Rather than calling the Judges apostate they could have challenged the Judges' verdict in a lawful way. The big task for the government would be to show such recalcitrant clerics that Bangladesh is not a lawless nation as perceived by them and no one is above the law.