

THE general impression was that President Clinton's peace proposal 'favoured Israel', but Israel has submitted a six-page response which includes Israeli Cabinet statement accepting the ideas as 'a basis for discussion' as reported by the *Jerusalem Post* on January 7. Though Israel has thanked President Clinton 'for his commitment to forge an Israeli-Palestinian peace over the last eight years', there were serious reservations on the division of the territory including the holy sites, formulation on the right of return of the Palestinian refugees and the positioning of Israeli forces on the Jordan Valley. The Palestinians also have reservations on the same issues though the nature of reservations differs greatly.

After President Arafat finished his discussions with President Clinton in the White House, the special envoy of Prime Minister Barak reached Washington and had a meeting with the President. The envoy said, within this short time left, 'the conclusion of the peace deal appears improbable though not impossible.' Arafat and his negotiators have also expressed serious doubts over the quick conclusion of the peace deal though at some stage they suggested a 12-day intensive three-way negotiations to finalize the deal. Reportedly President Clinton laid emphasis on reduction of violence before any deal could be finalised.

However, Arafat apparently said that he would be prepared to negotiate in the same way i.e. with same seriousness under the Bush Administration. Thus he is also of the view that the deal could not be completed within such a short time. Undoubtedly, the gaps are still too wide particularly on Al-Haram Al-Sharif which Jews call Temple Mount.

BILL Clinton is running out of time in his relentless pursuit of wanting his investment in peace in the Middle East to pay off. A miracle is now needed for the Israelis and Palestinians to reach a final agreement in the week or so left in his presidency.

Clinton's mediation in the past few years has forced Israelis and Palestinians to face the major problems facing them. Talks between them have narrowed differences over the future of Jerusalem and the size of the Palestinian state. But it has also highlighted the huge emotional and symbolic significance of several other issues including the future of the Palestinian refugees and the Jewish settlement in the occupied areas. In his latest proposal, Clinton gave Palestinians the hope of sovereignty over Muslim holy sites in Jerusalem but denied the refugees the right of return to what is now Israel.

According to the proposal, the 3.6 million registered Palestinian refugees worldwide should, as part of the price for peace with

Wide Differences: What Next ?

As the matter is extremely urgent because of the situation in the area, this must be addressed soon. It would be prudent to hand over the matter to the UN which may find it convenient to ask President Clinton, when he leaves the White House, to head a special UN M-E Peace Commission and use his long experiences and connections to find a solution that would be acceptable to both Palestinians and Israelis.

The problems were discussed with possible way out in my last comment. But this is the crucial area for both Palestinians and Israelis.

After his meeting with President Clinton, President Arafat directly reported the results of his talks to the Arab Foreign Ministers' meeting in Cairo last week. The Foreign Ministers fully supported Arafat on all key issues including sovereignty on the holy sites and right of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes in Israel. But Prime Minister Barak rejected it totally and said no Israeli in his place would ever agree to such a proposal. (I discussed this in some detail in my last comment).

On the issue of Jerusalem, there was a grand Jewish rally on January 8 around the walls of the Old City under the slogan "Jerusalem, I pledge" starting from the Jaffa Gate and the rally was reportedly "financed by foreigners." The rally was in favour of "One Jerusalem". This was organised by Natan Sharansky, originally a Russian Jew. He said, "For three thousand years, Jerusalem has been the heart and soul of the Jewish people." The Jews from Israel and other parts of the world including the Chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organisations and the President of JNF-America attended the rally. The organisers put the number of people at the rally at 400,000, but others put it at about 100,000. It did not look like a grand support for undivided Jerusalem. Though the Chair-

man of the presidents of major Jewish organisations attended, he spoke in his individual capacity signifying that there was no full support from the Jewish American organisations for the rally. Because of the strong security measures, there was no untoward incident during the rally.

The extremists are trying to take advantage of the disturbed situation. Now there is a fear that Jewish "Hamas" i.e. Jewish

ians.

So far as Jerusalem is concerned Prime Minister Barak said last September that a peace agreement would include the Jerusalem and Al Quds as two capitals. Apparently he has not changed his position on the issue of division of Jerusalem but said last week that he would not sign away the sovereignty of the Temple Mount. Under President Clinton's formula Israel is apparently retaining the sover-

igns. put by an analyst that 'even summarily tossing out mantras' that have been repeated steadily for 33 years 'Jerusalem is the eternal, undivided capital of Israel' and 'Jordan valley is vital for national security' will be readily accepted. The analyst's view is that the people are afraid of war. My personal impression that I got during my visit to Jerusalem is that majority of the people want peace, but this has to be clearly put to the people through an agreement that would ensure peace and security. As long as the Israelis can pray at the Wailing Wall peacefully and their life in Israel is secure, they may not bother much about the notional or emotional value of sovereignty.

But Sharon's planned visit to the Muslim holy sites on September 28, 2000 which led to Palestinian uprising has apparently changed the position. Indeed, the situation became more complicated when Prime Minister Barak resigned which appears to be a mistake and he may have to pay for it dearly. As he had the mandate in his last election to negotiate with Palestinians, it was not necessary for him to resign and seek fresh mandate. Now he is really in bad shape in terms of his reelection. Indeed, Barak is under pressure to step aside allowing Shimon Peres to contest, who is still ahead of Ariel Sharon in the opinion poll, but Barak is far behind. Barak's own brother's own Gallup firm show him at 22 percent whereas Sharon at 50 percent. Even Netanyahu said as quoted by Yediot Aharonot that

'Peres would defeat Sharon unless there were a terrorist bombing attack.'

But Barak remains adamant. He said, "There is nothing in the world that would make me quit the race. I am convinced that I will be able to persuade the Left camp that this election is not a video game. They will support me and I will win the race." If there could be a peace deal, even a partial one, that could ensure peace on the ground, Barak stood the chance of winning the ensuing election. But the situation does not look promising at all for Barak.

Undoubtedly, the efforts are on for finding something that could be acceptable to both parties, but as time is running out for both President Clinton and Prime Minister Barak, it would be worthwhile to have at least a "Statement of Principles" from President Clinton. This could be done at a summit or at an international conference of the interested countries as suggested by President Clinton himself. Such a "Statement of Principles" could form the basis for future negotiations.

As the matter is extremely urgent because of the situation in the area, this must be addressed soon. It would be prudent to hand over the matter to the UN which may find it convenient to ask President Clinton, when he leaves the White House, to head a special UN M-E Peace Commission and use his long experiences and connections to find a solution that would be acceptable to both Palestinians and Israelis. It is expected that Bush Administration which would obviously take some time to organise its affairs, would lend full support to such a Commission.

Spotlight on Middle East

Muslehuddin Ahmad

extremists may try to destroy Al Aqsa Mosque. The *Jerusalem Post* reported that "Israeli Minister Melchior said the threat that the extremist Jews might try to destroy the mosques on the Mount Temple in order to build a new Temple must be taken seriously..." He also said that the "Mount can also be gate to hell." Undoubtedly, any damage to the Muslim holy sites Al Aqsa may lead to a major crisis where Israel may have to pay a very heavy price. Therefore it is expected that Israel will take all measures against such possibilities. However, the events clearly indicate that the pressure is growing against giving away the sovereignty of the Noble Sanctuary, which Jews term as the Temple Mount, to the Palestin-

eans of the Temple Mount and Barak might take shelter under the interpretation that even if sovereignty of Al Aqsa esplanade i.e. the upper part of the Mount is given to the Palestinians, Israel would hold sovereignty of the actual (First) Temple site which is believed to be under the Mount and the Wailing Wall which is a part of the Second Temple would continue to remain under Israeli sovereignty as the pilgrimage site for the Jews around the world.

There is already a debate in Israel on Israel's options on peace and war. Does it want to stick to the sentimental also the religious issue of undivided Jerusalem and face violence or even war or it wants peace? Barak's camp is of the view as

Elusive Peace

At the beginning of a new millennium, the international community must look at what can be done to recreate some sense of normalcy and to prevent renewed violence, an escalation that could all too easily spread to the entire Middle East. For their part, the Palestinians and the Israelis have no choice but to resume talks.

Israel, abandon the right of return to Israel. Only those with relatives in today's Israel would be allowed back, and then only with Israeli approval. The rest would return not to their ancestral homes, but to a new Palestinian-run state on the West Bank of the Jordan and the Gaza Strip, or be resettled elsewhere by a new international commission. Stateless Palestinians find this price of peace plan too costly to pay.

The Middle East is facing extremely uncertain times, made more complicated by the change in US administration and the confusion of the Israeli elections to be held in the first week in February. Recent opinion polls show the Labour Party candidate Ehud Barak trailing miserably against the right-wing Likud Party candidate Ariel Sharon. This is despite Sharon's military record. An Israeli official inquiry

found him indirectly responsible for the massacre in 1982 of about 3000 Palestinians in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps in Lebanon. That was soon after

unrest in the occupied areas in Palestine against the Israeli rule mirrors the fundamental opposition that has divided these two people for almost five decades.

Sharon led Israel's invasion of Lebanon, plunging Israel into an unwinnable guerrilla war.

The international community has failed to bring the two sides in the Middle East conflict closer together. In fact, the emotional rift between Israelis and Palestinians is at its widest for decades. They seem to live in separate universes. Today's civil

israel seemed to become a star of the new Internet galaxy and lost sight of the central importance to its future of improving relations with its neighbours. This was a recipe for war.

territorial terms it was the wrong decision to take. Israel was so afraid of their own internecine quarrels, so obsessed by the ideological and institutional dangers facing a state torn between theocracy and democracy, that they mostly ignored the growing despair and humiliation of the Palestinians, not to mention the daily injustices suffered by their fellow Arab-Israeli fellow citizens.

In case of the Palestinians, this despair was deepened by the indifference shown by the international community. As things stand, the formula coined in the 1950s by the French philosopher Raymond Aron to define the Cold

War - peace impossible, war improbable - seems to fit the realities of the Middle East. The socio-economic, cultural, religious and emotional gap between the two peoples is too large for peace. The weakness of the Arab armies and the dependency of most Arab states on the United States make war very unlikely. A reduction in the level of violence seems to be the only way ahead. Yet the passions of war remain real.

At the beginning of a new millennium, the international community must look at what can be done to recreate some sense of normalcy and to prevent renewed violence, an escalation that could all too easily spread to the entire region. For their part, the Palestinians and the Israelis have no choice but to resume talks. However elusive a final settlement is certain to be, they have to try to preserve the progress achieved and maintain the hope for a solution. The alternative - a breakdown in the peace talks - is destined to lead to more violence, an option neither side can afford.

What makes the present situation so tragic is that in the past year or so peace had never seemed closer. In trying to examine what went wrong in the past eight years since the beginning of the Oslo peace process, one must emphasise the arrogance that engulfed Israeli society, best characterised by its suicidal Jewish settlement plan. In addition

to the daily injustices suffered by their fellow Arab-Israeli fellow citizens.

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that we know of at the higher levels, and at the lower levels what seeps through is far less than it was in the 'democratic' 90s. That in itself is a plus. The general has neither the guile and gall of Zia-ul-Haq nor his amazing capacity to tell lies. Another plus. But, in a short space of time he has decided that he has been assigned a 'mission' (which he hinted was divinely inspired). Now this is a definite minus. Reportedly, he does not read as many newspapers as did Zia, thereby hoping that he will be less confused. Another minus.

The general's one ear is Major-General Rashid Qureshi who luckily does not commute as often as did Qaim Ali Shah, Benazir's commuting chief minister of Sindh, but who for ever seems to be hovering over various areas of our land and is thus affectionately known as 'Eagle'. He sometimes reads, and he may read this column.

As far as the Hamoodur Report is concerned, why not let the entire unexpurgated document be made public? This may do less harm than a truncated version which arouses high suspicion. Let it be read, commented upon and criticized. General Musharraf should be big enough to do this.

As for the people of Bangladesh, Musharraf should do as did Conrad Adenauer, Chancellor of West Germany, after World War II, who visited war memorials and various controversial sites and started the trend of atonement for the sins committed by a country at war. This trend has continued down a half century with other countries such as Japan and the US. If Musharraf cannot bring himself to travel and offer atonement for the sins committed for 24 long years by the Pakistan military and civil authorities, he should form a delegation of senior officials to do so. Is anyone in this country aware that it is the man who extends his hand and offers an apology, no matter how late, who is bigger than the one who doesn't?

Advancing to Retreat

Ardeshir Cowasjee writes from Karachi

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main report with the portions which have been withheld from us.

The principal culprits responsible for the break-up of Pakistan are all dead, the cleverest of the lot of course being the power-hungry, megalomaniac politician, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. I'd rather be the topdog of half of Pakistan than the underdog of the whole of Pakistan.

Second on the list is President of the Republic, Commander-in-Chief of the Army, General Agha Mohammad Yahya Khan, but to

our eternal shame, the brave leaders who followed him denied him an open trial and an opportunity to speak.

It has been recorded, and remains uncontested, that to the credit of Yahya, it must be said that he never denied responsibility for the part he played in the dismemberment of Pakistan. He made this admission on many an occasion, including to the Hamoodur Rahman Commission. Major-General Rao Farman Ali Khan, in his book 'How Pakistan Got Divided', records: "As far as Yahya was concerned, the Commission stated that he had accepted responsibility for everything."

Yahya was immediately incarcerated and held incommunicado by Bhutto at the end of December 1971, first in a 'special house' and then in his own home. By the time Zia came along and released him it was too late. He had suffered a debilitating stroke and was severely incapacitated until he died.

The third victim was Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who, prior to the break-up, was imprisoned by Yahya, released to become the first head of the new country Bangladesh and was subsequently killed together with members of his close family, daughters Hasina and Rehana being the two survivors, by factions of his own warring former supporters. (Sheikh Hasina is now the prime minister of Bangladesh and the least any gentleman from this side could do is, in this age of apology and frank admission, is to condole, sympathize and express regrets for the bitter bloody past.)

Vehicle parking is not a professional planning problem, as it is widely practiced all over the world, and the rules and regulations have been tested many times over. The bug is in the implementation, and keeping up with the growth rate reflected by the national effort, although sincerity and motivation may be present in adequate measure. Then there is the multiplying effort of similar seminal projects in the other sectors.

The taxi drivers complain they have no parking spaces at the critical points in the city; and the daily car-parking jams at the numerous schools seemingly defy solutions (visit Asad Avenue any working day). The naive rickshaw drivers are fond of parking right at the street intersections; where the vegetable vendors/hawkers are also vying for a place (with full knowledge of the zone). That is not the end of the story. Motor repair shops spill on to the streets, and add to the parking problem or traffic jam, depending on the subjective problem of the moment.

"In any event, in Pakistan old friendships run deep. To the annoyance of my anointed ambassadorial colleagues in Islamabad (including old friend General Parkavan, who was back in Pakistan as Iranian ambassador), Yahya took to calling the American charge to

sit next to him on public occasions. We talked of the long-standing US-Pakistan alliance and how to preserve it. He got me off the hook with the US Air Force on the matter of compensation for the movables left at Badabur. I escorted to him a long line of visiting senior US officials, culminating in President Nixon's visit on August 1, 1969. Lasting good came out of that. Henry Kissinger's subsequent secret visit to Beijing from Pakistan, the first step in US recognition of Communist China, was arranged.

By the time of the break-up of Pakistan in 1970-71, the pains were in far-off Turkey. Yahya emerged in the world press as the bloody but incompetent 'Butcher of Bengal'. Word came from old friends that he was drinking again. That may have explained some of the brutality and inefficiency of Islamabad's performance in what soon became the independent country of Bangladesh.

"In my mind even now, however, the real reasons for the break-up were different. Aspiring prime minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, fearing rejection by an East Pakistani majority, enraged the people of East Pakistan by forcing a delay in the national elections Yahya had promised to restore democracy. An always suspicious India seized the opportunity to undermine Pakistani unity and supported Bangladeshi independence by war..."

Today Pakistan is mired in a deep sticky pool of cess. Our sole ally is the uneducated, violent, obscurantist, terrorism-bent Taliban government of the internationally ostracized sanctioned stricken Afghanistan.

General Pervez Musharraf and his men are floundering, as would 99 out of 100 in their position and circumstance. However, there is no corruption

down from the average practised in the last 60 years. This is a fundamental issue, and needs administrative probing and review. There may be other options to enforce the principle of "No work, no earning".

AMA Dhaka

Parking problems

Sir, Parking problems are there not only on Dhaka's streets, but also in other sectors, as for example, in politics, in the academic field, in safety measures, security in daily life, and while travelling.

Vehicle parking is not a professional planning problem, as it is widely practiced all over the world, and the rules and regulations have been tested many times over. The bug is in the implementation, and keeping up with the growth rate reflected by the national effort, although sincerity and motivation may be present in adequate measure. Then there is the multiplying effort of similar seminal projects in the other sectors.

Urban migration is a relevant example. The problems arising

To the Editor ...

"Blowing Hot and Cold in Vietnam"

Sir, I would like to make a comment on the above mentioned article by Brig (Rtd) M Abdul Hafiz published in *The Daily Star* on January 8.

In this article, the writer mentioned that "... But before the ink was dry on the peace treaty, the US reneged on its commitment and instead imposed an economic blockade on the country."

This is not true. The peace agreement was signed and was violated by the Vietnamese communists (VC). According to the peace agreement, the VC had to withdraw completely its force from south Vietnam, and the people of south Vietnam would hold an election under the international supervision to select their government. The US would provide economic aid to both south and north Vietnam.

Unfortunately, this was not respected by the VC. The VC army took over the south Vietnam by force 2 years later. People of south Vietnam could only protect the country from the communist invasion in a short time because of lacking military aid from US while the VC kept receiving a huge amount of military aid from the communist block.

Govt inspectors' pay roll

Sir, Since the inspectors in the public sector do not or cannot work diligently due to institutionalised corrupt practice inside and outside, the government may review why they should draw their full pay and allowance each month for shirking their duties and responsibilities. The basic pay may be reduced, and two new additional allowances introduced; (1) for booking each case; and, (2) for prosecution of each case. Clause (c) may be inserted to take care of the demerit system for false or weak cases.

This scheme will involve a participatory role: no work, no additional allowance, those who like to resign may be allowed to do so, as there would be no dearth of new applicants. Without disciplinary actions, the public services cannot run efficiently. At present the average percentage of such actions has come