

Summit on the road map

Let's see justice and fair-play triumph

THE trilateral summit at the Red Sea resort of Aqaba, Jordan, may have ended on an upbeat note for the participants, but not so for the audience. The ultra-right among the Israelis have been openly rejectionist in their reaction.

US president George Bush who cut a short his G-8 summit related appointment at Evian to herald a summit with Palestinian prime minister Mahmoud Abbas and his Israeli counterpart Ariel Sharon at Aqaba waxed eloquent. Said he, "everyone has a right to peace", a statement that basically echoed the current *two nations, two states* thrust to US foreign policy on Middle East. This has had reverberations in what Sharon had to say after the summit on the intertwined issues of separate Palestinian homeland and peaceful co-existence between the Israelis and the Palestinians. But mere freezing of new settlements cannot do, those already in existence need to be dismantled as a vital step forward in creating a separate homeland for the Palestinians.

Mahmoud Abbas, the prime minister of Palestine, has called for an immediate cessation of hostilities and violent acts vowing to work together with Sharon to implement the Middle East road map.

How have the detractors of Sharon and Abbas reacted to the summit outcome, given the changed circumstances? The answer is, very negatively indeed. The ultra-conservatives in Tel Aviv have made it abundantly clear that they are opposed to the existing settlements being dismantled at all. They are even unwilling to accept a 'divided Jerusalem' while the Palestinians would settle for nothing less than full control of the holy city.

On the Palestinian side, Hamas and Islamic Jihad have been sharply critical of the exhortations. They have refused to lay down arms until a single centimetre of the Israeli-occupied land is returned to the Palestinians.

This is not the first time that the Israeli and Palestinian leaders have shaken hands under the benign canopy of a smiling US president. But there is a difference. For better or worse who knows? Only time will tell. And, it is two fold: first, the latest US sponsorship of the peace process comes on the back of US invasion of Iraq signifying an extended power-play in the region. A comprehensive peace plan is being talked about -- involving Syria and Lebanon as well. So, there is an element of pressure it. The setting in which the road map has been announced is compelling, let alone the blue-print coming from the top. Furthermore, they are dealing with a man of their choice Mahmoud Abbas, and not Yasser Arafat, even though the latter's popularity rating was higher than Abbas's.

The clincher of change will be how the US uses its clout with the Israelis, because the Palestinians are not only the weaker side but also at the receiving end of the superior military might of Tel Aviv. Given the implacable relations between the Israelis and the Palestinians there had to be mediated talks and guided summits. To top it off, as soon as these ended, there would be no follow-up either. That has been the unfortunate trend so far. But we believe it is time the contending parties developed a mechanism of their own to carry forward the process of negotiations to a point of final resolution.

The key to solution of the Middle East problem is held by the USA. It has to work for a just and fair order so that durable peace can take root in the hearts and minds of people. Neither the geopolitical card should be overplayed nor the Zionist lobby allowed to influence US decision-making at this point in time. It is the arming of Tel Aviv to the teeth that has recoiled, something which no fair-minded US leadership can ignore anymore. At the same time, we would like the spiral of extremist violence to stop.

However fragile the peace process maybe, we want it to succeed to see "a fully sovereign, equal and independent Palestinian state" emerge.

G-8



HASNAT ABDUL HYE

HERE is something unsavory about wealth. It exudes greed, selfishness and power. Those who have it can appear to be insensitive to others who are not so lucky. A fraternity of the rich and powerful like the G-8, is looked upon with reservation, suspicion and even apprehension. Those outside, find themselves guessing every time the rich and the powerful meet. Is it about growing more rich and hatching plans towards that end? Or is it about growing rich and sharing with others? If it is the latter can it be done without restructuring the international system that is extant? Those with an optimistic bent of mind keep hoping against hope.

The demonstrators belonging to civil society organisations of almost every stripe, who routinely turn up at the venue of G-8 meetings to protest, are convinced that wealth cannot be spread around and shared unless the existing international economic order is radically changed. They are particularly vocal and physically active against multinationals that represent global capitalism, which according to them, is the source of all evils afflicting the world. It is not, therefore, surprising that the recently concluded G-8 meeting at the French town of Evian had its due share of protesters with the standard spectacle of placards, banners and stone throwing. Mercifully, the demonstration did not turn ugly, as it often did in the past.

Miraculously also, it was business as usual inside the hotel on Lake Geneva, the site chosen for the meeting more for its safety from the protesters than for the picturesque beauty. For the first time in its history, the G-8 summit apprehended ugliness to bare its face, not

in the streets leading to Evian town, but inside the posh hotel where the G-8 leaders were to meet. This was the first meeting of the leaders representing America, Britain, France, Russia and Germany after the Iraq war and the air was full of foreboding. The relation between the two groups of countries, divided over the issue of war, had not yet returned back on track. The host country France, having taken the most vocally opposed stand against America, was a bit uneasy about the prospect of a face to face meeting between the two Presidents.

With the major irritant and the source of a potentially disastrous conference out of the way, there was nothing to prevent the G-8 meeting from having a happy ending.

If the outcome of the meeting satisfied the members of the rich men's club, the outsiders in the rest of the world were left aghast. The G-8 meeting neither helped the cause of international peace in any substantive sense, nor promoted the issue of development, particularly for the poor. Though a few developing countries were invited to the

warming, they were simply put under the carpet. The overriding objective of the meeting appeared to be placating America by papering over differences of views over Iraq war. The members of G-8 gave the impression of bending over backward to satisfy an America still grumbling and ranting about betrayal by allies. As if to assuage her heart feelings and ego the issues that got prominence in the meeting were mostly those that are top in the agenda of America's current global policy.

In the Final Declaration the G-8

change in American position regarding its exclusive and dominant role either in reconstruction or in nation building in Iraq. Not to speak of any member country of G-8, other than Britain, America has not even agreed to a central role for the UN. The Security Council, where all the G-8 countries except Japan were present, has just given the authority to the occupation forces led by America to be in overall command with regard to both the tasks. So where is the scope and opportunity of 'united' effort to reconstruct Iraq? How can G-8 leaders be optimistic

taken out Iraq from the hit list, two countries remain to be tackled according to the American design. But as everyone knows, Iran and North Korea are not birds of the same feather. One has publicly repudiated non-proliferation treaty and is threatening to go nuclear, if already it has not done so. If America applied its doctrine of pre-emptive strike to North Korea a semblance of justification could be found. But apart from threatening with dire consequences, America has not taken any action that resembles even remotely what it did in the case of Iraq. Iran, on the other hand, is already under the shadow of America's war machine. It is building a nuclear power plant in a transparent manner and complying with the non-proliferation treaty. Inspection by IAEA is going on at regular intervals and the inspectors have not detected anything suspicious so far. Moreover, Russia, the supplier for the nuclear plant, has recently offered to America joint inspection and collaboration, which should allay any lingering apprehension.

So, bracketing of Iran with North Korea has no justification whatsoever unless America has other motive to single out Iran. The G-8 member countries in the Security Council did not oblige America by agreeing on Iraq's alleged possession of weapons of mass destruction before the inspection was complete. They seem to be in a mood to do so now in case of Iran. Wittingly or unwittingly, they may have just given justification for future attack against Iran by America.

Both for omissions and commissions, the just concluded G-8 summit has been disappointing to the rest of the world and perhaps to many citizens of these countries. It rewarded America by endorsing its wish list to the hilt, forgetting that it has just carried out an illegal war. The old maxim has proved enduring: nothing succeeds like success.

Hasnat Abdul Hye is a former secretary, novelist and economist.

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Though France had let it be known that she was prepared to mend the relation without compromising principles, America was not yet in a mood to forgive and forget. The American leaders at the top level, and the media abetted by it, have continued to berate and humiliate France over Iraq. Given this rancour, anything could happen in the G-8 meeting, from infantile silliness to dumb arrogance.

In the backdrop of nervous apprehension, ranging from diplomatic disaster to social faux pas, French charm, deployed at its best, carried the day. A sobered down and sublimated Bush obliged the host with public expression of equanimity. In the one to one meeting between the two Presidents, Bush Jr. observed that the two countries could disagree without being disagreeable. But even in his seemingly generous and civil mood was he insinuating against the French for being disagreeable in the run up to Iraq war? If the French had this Derridian puzzle, they did not go for hair splitting deconstruction to decipher the intent of the remark. On their part, the French maintained their position with aplomb, without regrets for the past and at the same time, expressing the desire to move forward in unity for common pur-

meeting, their specific problems were not discussed. There was no mention about the pledge made by the rich countries recently in Mexico to make funds available for the Millennium Development Goals. Concerted international efforts to combat scourges in the form of killer diseases like malaria, tuberculosis and AIDS did not figure anywhere on the discussion. As regards global environment issues like global

leaders pledged unity to rebuild Iraq and move past their bitter division over the US-led war in Iraq. The French President declared, on behalf of the conference, that the G-8 leaders share the conviction that the time had now come to build peace and reconstruct Iraq. 'Our shared objective is a fully sovereign stable and democratic Iraq', the French President intoned. The declaration does not indicate any

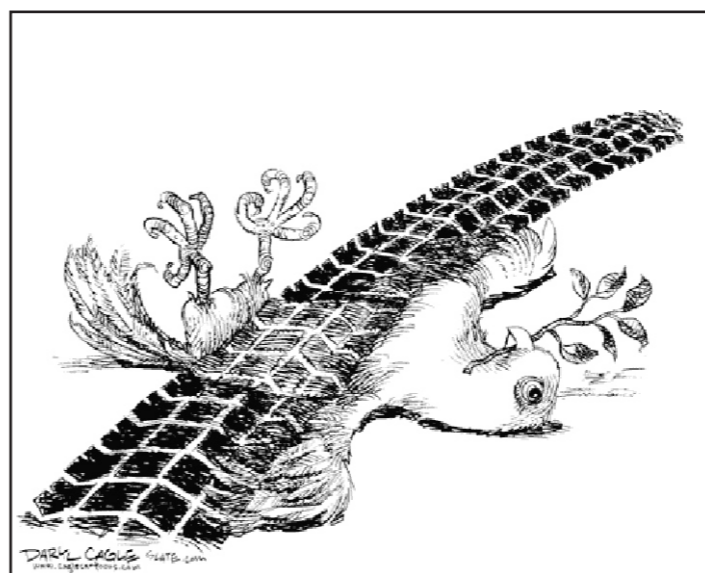


Illustration by DARA CALOJA

The fall



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

AN angry wind swept across the town, before the sky turned from gray to black. Dry leaves and pieces of paper swirled in the air, thick with dust, while the lightning flashed like flickering neon and the peeling thunder heralded the rain. As soon as the first few drops spat on his head, the middle-aged man covered it with his hands, and started to run as if chased by a ghost.

But no sooner had he reached the front gate of his house than the mishap happened. Suddenly, the earth scraped under his heels like abraded skin, and the burly frame of forty-five came crashing down like a barrel. His wife, who saw it from the window, smacked her lips in annoyance and muttered under her breath that this man had lifelong problem with staying erect. She ordered a servant to rush to the scene, and help his master get into the house.

Inside the house, the man limped like a prisoner returning from the torture cell. At his age, he knew,

there was no sympathy for a grown-up man who had fallen down. He looked at his wife with a pounding heart, and knew she was going to do something to embarrass him.

The wife threw some dry clothes and asked him to change in the bedroom. As he proceeded, he could hear her hissing behind him that she had wasted her life with a man, who didn't even know how to keep standing. Then she said she wasn't surprised at all, because an empty top couldn't sustain a heavy bottom. He could tell without think-

sense most of the time.

He sat down with a cup of tea, and tried to avoid the sight of his wife. There was certain solitariness about middle age, when one felt drifting in the mid-sea of life, farther from the beginning and closer to the end. The bones in his body clattered under the skin as if they were broken in more than one place.

The calling bell rang and the servant opened the door. He could tell from the staccato ring that the visitor was his wife's cousin. He shifted his weight in the chair as if in

front of him, like a ghost which had materialised out of the thin air. The man stooped over him with an uncharacteristic smile and asked if what the servant said was true. His heart jumped like a frog as he realized that the secret was already out.

His wife joined her cousin in no time, and together they descended on him like the Visigoths destroying a civilization. They jeered at him, caressed his head in improvised sympathy, sucked their teeth to express their sorrow, pulled him,

year! He walked alone in that storm, fell down, stood up and walked again, the deadweight of sorrow weighing like a boulder on his heart.

He looked at his wife, who came into his life like a groundhog in a golf course and ruined it. When his parents settled his marriage, they insisted that in the old age, when the fired died, a man was going to enjoy the company of his wife. But he has been lonely ever since he got married, increasingly squeezed into the corner where howling winds echoed in the silence of heart.

he was going to go to the kitchen, using it as an excuse to get away from them. He had hardly slipped one foot into his sandal than the servant came running for the mug. The cousin-in-law pushed him back into the chair, and teasingly said that it was too soon for his brother-in-law to risk another walk.

He fell back in the chair, but it seemed too long and hard. For the first time he felt he had actually fallen, which hurt him in his depth. This time he felt that his body had merely dropped, but his spirit had actually fallen, that before his weight crashed in the chair, his soul was already shattered.

He realised that in the past he had fallen down in the eyes of others. But this time he had fallen down in his own eyes. He was married to a woman who never belonged to him. He spent his life in the futility of a gardener, who tended the plants so that others plucked the flowers.

Then there was the clown cousin, that emotional monkey, who had made it worse. For twenty good years, that scoundrel remained lodged between him and his wife like a membrane. They lived together, close to each other, in the same house, same bed, yet one couldn't touch the other and feel the warmth. Their marriage had been like a plug in a dead socket; everything was there but no electricity.

The two cousins were still busy putting up their acts, while he realised that the tea he sipped was cold as poison. He stood up and thought

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CROSS TALK

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ing that the reference was made to his head and the rotundity of his lower body.

The rude comment cut him deeper than the fall had hurt him. The words rang in his head like a buzzing swarm of bees as he wondered what sins he had committed to deserve a wife like that. Though he didn't think what she said was true. It should be an empty bottom, which would be upset by a heavy top, he convinced himself.

Inside the house, the man limped like a prisoner returning from the torture cell. At his age, he knew,

anticipation of a horrible thing. The man would soon enter the house, throwing off his charm like a freshly bathed dog shaking off water. His wife would then mention to her cousin that her husband had a crashing fall in the rain, which lowered her head in shame before the entire neighbourhood. Then together they would make fun of him until he lost his temper and asked them to stop or go away.

He twitched at the thought of the imminent opprobrium, and wondered whether courtesy was weakness or strength of a man. By then

poked him and made all sorts of innuendoes about possible spots in his body, which could have been bruised by the fall.

The wife said that he must have fallen down more times as a grownup than he had fallen down as a toddler. The cousin retorted that his brother-in-law turned younger as he grew older, and became a toddler again. In his mind he wished many ills to his giggling persecutors and his heart burned with hatred for them. Little did they know how he stumbled every day in the storm that swept across his heart year after

year! He walked alone in that storm, fell down, stood up and walked again, the deadweight of sorrow weighing like a boulder on his heart.

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able to stop domestic violence totally. Many men are found guilty and sentenced to prison for such offences, but we have no way of keeping track on them or knowing what they are doing once they are out of prison. For example, a man is sentenced for so many months or years for physically abusing his lover or wife. At the end of his sentence when he comes out of prison and finds that the woman has remarried or is living with a new male partner, there's no way of telling whether he will react violently once more or not. So a record is essential so that we can identify such persons and an arrangement for weekly monitoring is also essential for preventing the recurrence of violence.

The Crown Prosecution Service is expected to issue a directive regarding the new legislation in June or July this year which will be treated as final, and it will contain the provision that the victims of domestic violence, whether men or women, will be given the chance to apply for permanent residency in Britain even though they have not been able to live together for the minimum mandatory period.

What did (or does) George have on Tony?

SAGAR CHAUDHURY

NO, that question is not on everyone's lips not yet, anyway -- but it must be lurking at the back of the minds of many, especially after the latest allegation made by the British Prime Minister's erstwhile Cabinet colleague Clare Short. In a BBC interview on Sunday, June 1, the former International Development Secretary accused Mr Blair of being deceitful to the Cabinet over the Iraq question on at least three occasions.

Short of directly calling the Prime Minister a liar, Ms Short (no pun intended here) accused him of: (1) not being honest about wanting a second United Nations Security Council resolution authorising the war as he had already agreed in "secret" with President Bush at Camp David last September to go to war against Iraq by the following Spring "come what may" and then told the Cabinet that he would try to act as a constraint on the US; (2) misleading the Cabinet over Iraq's weapons capability by claiming that "Iraq was an immediate threat to us in 45 minutes" because it was in a position to launch a biological or chemical attack at such short notice; (3) falsely stating that the French President Jacques Chirac would veto a second UN resolution "under

any circumstances" because a transcript of Mr Chirac's interview -- which Ms Short subsequently read - showed that Mr Blair's claim had no substance.

When asked during Sunday's BBC interview who could be held responsible for misleading the Cabinet, Ms Short said with her customary bluntness, "It (the misinformation) came from our Prime Minister" and added: "We could have done it properly and we could have tried without war, minimising the harm to the people of Iraq." She complained that the Cabinet subcommittee which should have dealt with the war did not meet at all before the outbreak of hostilities and Mr Blair's secrecy over the war had hampered the planning for its aftermath and helped produce the current "chaos and suffering" in Iraq. "It was all done in Tony Blair's study..." said Ms Short. "... The normal Whitehall systems to make big decisions like this broke down and were very personalised in No. 10." Mr Blair did have a private summit with Mr Bush at Camp David on September 7 last year where, if Ms Short's accusations are true, a detailed war plan might have been agreed upon.

Following this summit, on September 24 the British Government published a dossier on Saddam Hussein's Weapons of Mass

Destruction (WMD) which included the claim that he had the capability of launching an attack "within 45 minutes". No evidence of any WMD possessed by Saddam Hussein, however, has been unearthed yet and there is growing doubt that such evidence will ever come to light. But Mr Blair continues to insist that the evidence on Saddam's arsenal which will be published in the next US-UK intelligence dossier in the coming weeks will make sceptical people "very, very well satisfied" that he has been right all along.

Meanwhile, the former Foreign Secretary and ex-Commons Leader Robin Cook has also joined ranks with Clare Short by demanding an independent inquiry into the 'government's failure to uncover evidence of WMD. He told BBC Radio 4's 'The World This Weekend' programme that "It is beginning to look as if the government has committed a monumental blunder", adding: "In the real world, governments make mistakes, but what they must never do is try to deny and cover up these mistakes.. The government should admit it was wrong and it needs to set up a thorough independent inquiry into how it got it wrong, so we never again send British troops into action on the basis of a mistake."

This latest attack on Mr Blair by two of his former Cabinet col-

leagues is sure to trigger further rebellion among disgruntled Labour MPs. More than 70 of them have issued a signed motion voicing their concern about the absence of evidence of WMD and the results of the latest YouGov poll show that at least 63 per cent of voters feel that they have been misled by the authorities. Britons whose lives have been directly affected by the war are naturally even more deeply concerned. A mother whose Royal Marine son was killed in a helicopter crash near Kuwait at the start of the

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war said: "If this turns out to be a lie, then Tony Blair should resign and he should be prosecuted under international law as a war criminal." And she is not the only one with such sentiments.

But at the same time, we must also remember that it was Robin Cook himself who, back in 1998, told the Commons: "There is no room for doubt over the scale of Saddam's chemical or biological capacity, nor over his repeated attempts to conceal it." He was in the government then. What makes him now conclude that the govern-

ment -- which he has left very recently -- is trying to cover up "a monumental blunder"? Besides, simply because no WMD have been discovered so far does not necessarily mean that they never existed. So, for the sake of a balanced point of view, if we accept that such weapons had actually existed, should we not also accept that Saddam Hussein -- for whatever reason -- chose not to use them and took care to ensure that none of his WMD ever fell into the hands of the allied troops because that would be handing the

propaganda victory to his enemies. Thus the real problem for Mr Blair is not being accused of deliberate prevarication by his former colleagues, neither the threat of rebellion from inside his own party. His real problem is that now when he insists that he is convinced Saddam Hussein did possess WMD and that he expects to be able to prove it in the near future, he is probably speaking the truth but no one seems willing to believe him, or even give him the benefit of doubt. Unfortunately, the Iraq war has unfolded to lose much of the nation's trust he

once enjoyed.

New legislation to prevent domestic violence

There are nearly 700,000 reported cases of domestic violence in Britain every year. At least three out of every four of the victims happen to be women who are beaten up or physically abused by men. Every week two women on an average lose their lives as a result of domestic violence the perpetrators of which are their present or former husbands or male partners. The legislation currently in place for dealing with such incidents do not seem to be effective enough as a deterrent and so the government is now planning to introduce a system of recording all reported cases in a 'Register of Domestic Violence' which will, in effect, be similar to the Register of Sex Offenders already in force that contains the names and other details of everyone accused and found guilty of serious sexual misdemeanours.

The proposed domestic violence legislation will make it mandatory to record the details of any man sent to prison for six months for beating or physically abusing his wife or partner and these details will remain on the Register for the next seven years. Not only that, a man who is sentenced to two years or more in prison for similar offences will have

his name and other details on the Register for the rest of his life. Once a man's name appears on this Register -- whether for seven years or for his whole lifetime -- he will be required by law to report to the local police once every week, inform the police of any change of address and all relevant details regarding him will be passed on to his GP, the Social Services and Benefit Agencies.

In certain cases, payment of benefits may be suspended or stopped and all existing or prospective employers may be advised to either dismiss the person concerned or take appropriate disciplinary action against him. More serious cases may even lead to social ostracism. If, at any time in the future, the person concerned repents and wants to go back to his former partner, he will have to do so through the police and the initial contact between him and his partner will be arranged under police supervision. The couple will be given the permission to resume living together only after a suitable 'waiting period' determined by the authorities.

The main purpose of this Register of Domestic Violence is to help the police to easily identify the perpetrators and deal with all cases more effectively. As a spokesperson of the Association of Chief Police Officers said: "It is virtually impossi-