

Palestinians need to solve their own internal problems first



HARUN UR RASHID

of change" towards people's participation in their governments is blowing in Arab countries, strongly supported by the Bush administration.

Palestinians in general cannot be immune from such change in the region. The uprising, although it arose primarily out of the appointment of Arafat's nephew, goes much deeper. It is the tip of the iceberg. It demonstrates that the new generation of Palestinians appears to have lost confidence in the "old guard" of Palestinian leadership. They accuse them of mismanagement, cronyism, nepotism, and corruption within the Palestinian Authority. Because of these shortcomings, the credibility of the Palestinian Authority is being questioned in Western capitals.

Furthermore, the "old guard" primarily consists of Palestinians who came from Tunisia in 1994 to the West Bank and Gaza (after they were expelled from Lebanon in the 1980s) and the local Palestinians call them "Tunisians." To the local Palestinians, the "Tunisians" have lost touch with the ordinary young generation of Palestinians and have consistently resisted all reforms in their "dictatorial" nature of administration. It seems Palestinians want a new leadership with reinvested commitment to assist ordinary Palestinians, although Yasser Arafat is widely respected for his struggle to put the Palestinian cause in the world map.

The US Secretary of State Powell said: "Right now there is a debate going on within the Palestinian community about the role of Chairman Arafat, the role of the Prime Minister, the organisation of the security forces and this is a problem that can only be solved by the Palestinians."

No Elections for Palestinian People since 1995

Since 1995, no election took place in Palestinian lands to express the voice of ordinary Palestinians as to how the Palestinian Authority is governed. Chairman Arafat and the Legislative Council were elected in 1995. Much water has flown through the river Jordan but there is no sign

of holding of elections or reforms of the administration to reflect the wishes of ordinary Palestinians. It is argued that elections in Palestinian lands (West Bank and Gaza Strip) cannot be held under Israeli military occupation. No one appears to be impressed by this line of argument any more, specially in the West-ern countries.

and the Prime Minister publicly continues. The first Prime Minister Abu Mazen had to resign because he had no power. The existing Prime Minister Ahmed Qurei (Abu Ala) resigned twice in recent days because he felt frustrated in not being able to do anything to quell the uprising. No Prime Minister wants to be a "toothless tiger."

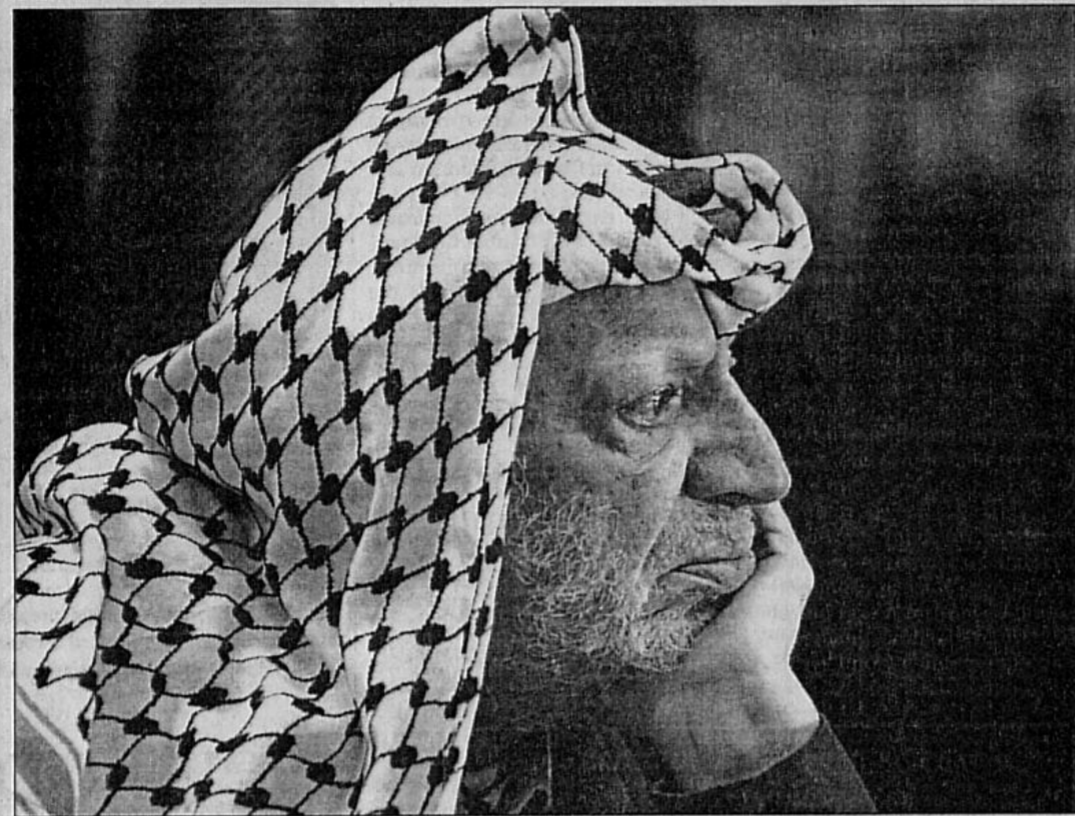
The security services have been under the full control of the Chairman and reportedly reluctant to cede control to the Prime Minister. It seems that the more Chairman

Arafat is being sidelined by Israel and the Bush administration, the more adamant he has become not to share power with the Prime Minister. This may be designed to show to the US and Israel that he alone has the ultimate power to negotiate settlement. The US policy of sidelining elected chairman Yasser Arafat is seriously flawed and does not help the situation.

Even the US Secretary General Kofi Annan is concerned with the destabilising situation between the Chairman and the Prime Minister.

BOTTOM LINE

While accusation can rightly be pointed out to the US and Jewish lobby in rich countries for their unstinted support to Israel for its barbaric atrocities on Palestinians, it is not unfair to say that Arab and Palestinian leadership cannot be wholly absolved from their responsibility in the mess. There is no point in always blaming others, and one needs to be critical about oneself as well, as to whether one has missed or not the opportunity.



He urged Chairman Arafat to "take the time to listen" to the Prime Minister and carry out the reforms international mediators have called for as a condition for advancing "road map" to peace plan, promising Palestinians a state in Gaza and the West Bank.

Many Arab commentators say that the Palestinian Authority could have been modeled on a democratic tradition but it did not. All powers seem to be vested in one person and ordinary Palestinians resent such concentration of power on one single individual at a time when their democratic aspirations are on high in the Arab world.

Democratic principles are not a Western concept. They mean transparency, accountability, and good governance. They also imply that leaders should not disregard the necessity of public morality in their actions and conduct. They should not behave and act as though the financial resources were little more than their private property. No leader should think that he or she is indispensable.

Missed Opportunities for Palestinians

While accusation can rightly be pointed out to the US and Jewish lobby in rich countries for their unstinted support to Israel for its barbaric atrocities on Palestinians, it is not unfair to say that Arab and Palestinian leadership cannot be wholly absolved from their responsibility in the mess. There is no point in always blaming others, and one needs to be critical about oneself as well, as to whether one has missed or not the opportunity.

Many believe that Palestinian leaderships have made two political

mistakes. First, they should have accepted the partition of Palestinian land as agreed by the UN through resolution 181 of 1947. Second, they should have agreed to the solution brokered by former US President Bill Clinton between the Barak Israeli government and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat in 2000. Many political analysts say that Arab countries should have intervened with the Palestinian leadership to accept the best possible deal under Israel's Labour Government, supported by the Clinton administration. The art of politics does not rest on emotions but on a hard calculated compromise, given the situation.

United Arab Leadership is Needed

Arab countries fought armed conflicts three times with Israel and were defeated. Each time as a result of war, Palestinians lost to Israel substantial part of their lands, originally earmarked for Palestinian state by the UN. It is sad to see that what Palestinians now are fighting for is only a third of the land of what was originally meant for them in 1948.

One thumb rule in armed conflict is to weigh strength and power of an adversary and it seems unbelievable to many military strategists that the Arab countries went into war without proper assessment of military power of Israel. They knew that they were fighting an entity that has sophisticated weapons and intelligence services provided by the US.

The bottom line appears to be about the leadership of Arab countries in addressing the plight of millions of Palestinians who live as refugees. The Arab League meets and adopts resolution but no concrete action is taken. This is partly because the Arab world is sharply divided.

Arab political leadership requires taking a new and bold course of action. Many political analysts believe that Arab leaders ought to embrace a vision and underwrite it with reinvested peace process of their own. No peace initiative except Saudi Arabian Crown Prince Abdullah's peace proposal has been floated.

Furthermore a commitment to providing immediate financial assistance to Palestinians will radically alter the daily life of unemployed youths (almost 60 percent). Palestinians should not depend on their jobs in Israel for their livelihood. Arab countries are rich enough to ensure that Palestinians get a minimum quality of life and build their own economy.

A campaign must be in place by Arab countries (21 countries in total) to build support and galvanise opinion in the US into a potent force against Sharon's inhuman policies against Palestinians and for peace. Many of the Arab countries are oil-producing countries and have considerable influence on Washington.

Conclusion

Although Chairman Yasser Arafat is an icon for Palestinians and they have great respect and sympathy for him for being confined to Ramallah, almost being in a position of house arrest, for more than two years by the Sharon government, there is a pressure on him, from local Palestinian population and international mediators, to surrender some of his powers to the Prime Minister.

Meanwhile, Israel has been carrying out unlawful and inhuman atrocities on Palestinians, killing thousands of them, including the wheel-chair bound spiritual leader Sheikh Yassin. Many political veterans in the Arab world believe that prior to negotiated peace with Israel, the Palestinian leaderships have to resolve their internal problems first and gain credibility abroad. In this connection, it is noted that Surah Ra'ad (XIII) in Verse 11 of the Holy Qur'an proclaims:

Verily never Will Allah change the condition Of a people until they Change it themselves.

Barister Harun ur Rashid is a former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.

AL and BNP: Two sides of the same coin

SHAYAN KHAN

It is clear, after a third of a century of independence, and well over a decade of democracy, that Bangladesh is going nowhere. We hailed the overthrow of General Ershad's regime in 1990 as a victory for democracy, for the people, for the nation. Indeed it was. But subsequently, what has democracy brought us? Perhaps that sounds like a criticism of democracy, so let me rephrase that question and ask, what have the harbingers of democracy, the Awami League and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, brought us?

If you are an AL enthusiast, maybe you can look back a few years and recall some good memories. If you are a BNP enthusiast, you can probably point to some good things now. But generally, it has proved a disaster for the nation to put either of these two parties in power at whatever point of time. One's as bad as the other. They are both full of corrupt minds who care about being in power, and never once consider what is good for the people. Worst of all, they are equally driven to do whatever it takes to be in power, with all other considerations of secondary importance.

The AL and BNP are basically two sides of the same coin. Their policies differ little. Their aims are the same. Their methods of sucking Bangladesh dry are also similar. I can only think of one difference between them and that is their interpretation of Bangladesh's history. Otherwise, the profile of a typical AL/BNP lawmaker is in essence identical: He rises to power on the strength of how many cadres he has under him, he decides what mode of transportation he will import on his MP ticket, he bickers with the opposition in press conferences, he rants on irrelevant matters in the Parliament, and then tries to pass a project from which he can siphon the largest amount of money. In between, he looks into the welfare of his relatives and close friends.

Possibly the most despicable tragedy about Bangladesh right now is that merit and hard work have been rendered useless. To rise through the ranks, you have to cozy up to the people in power by showering them with gifts and praise. You may hate their guts, you may see through their corrupt souls, you may look through their lying eyes but your future depends on how elegantly you offer them the sweets you bought from Raush or Plaza Central. You have to choose between your principles and your future. You have to abandon one or the other. It is the age of the *lucicha*. And if things go on like this, this is the way it will always be.

What we have to realise now is that the way things are progressing, we may never get our country back.

With no viable third option, power will always be alternating between these two parties who are the bane of our existence. The most frustrating thing is that they have rendered elections meaningless. We celebrate free and fair elections in our country from time to time. International observers congratulate us and we lap up the praise, patting each other's backs at how far we've come.

It is going to be one of the great tragedies of our history that those who have crippled this nation will always be able to say that we, the people, put them in power by voting for them. The pages of history will not record that we never had a better alternative on the ballot. They say democracy is government "of the people, for the people, by the people." The successive AL and BNP governments may have not fulfilled the first two criteria, but unfortunately, they were by the people.

Sometimes, we even tout ourselves as one of the few examples of a Muslim nation where democracy has succeeded.

The reticence to self-criticism is sickening. Show me a man who could stand up and tell these observers that one other adjective that would be appropriate to describe our elections is "meaningless" and I will show you a man worth respecting. The sad thing is, you and I both know he doesn't exist. Neither of the two giants are going to even look to improve the state of affairs, and the smaller parties are too overwhelmed to even hope. We have no choice.

X may have a relative or close friend in the AL ranks that he can canvass for a promotion so he'll vote for AL, while Y may have a similar acquaintance in the BNP, so he'll vote for the BNP. Apart from that, there is the grassroots base these two parties have built up over the years who will not even consider swaying regardless of whether a murderer or a dacoit is running on his party's ticket. And whoever comes into power, the state of the nation as a whole does not improve one bit. Just the lot of certain segments depending on who is in power.

The intellectual community is quite helpless. They see what is wrong, and they may hope for something different, but they are quite caught up in their own contradictions, I am sorry to say. Let me explain what I mean by their contradictions, because it is not something that may be readily visible on the surface. The leading intellectuals of our country (at least those who maintain a neutral stance) all agree that AL and BNP have ruined this nation, their rivalry and acts of one-upmanship with each other have driven this country into the dog-house. At the same time however, they hail elections and elected governments and champion the rights of every elected government

to carry out the people's mandate. The "people's mandate" is possibly the most irrelevant phrase on a Bangladeshi politician's agenda, and we all know this.

What is the use of giving these politicians this right when it is now a foregone conclusion that this right to carry out the "people's mandate" will be abused by whoever is in power? How much of this are you

willing to take before speaking out about how the whole system in Bangladesh has failed? How elections can change nothing in this country? Do you honestly believe that elections can change anything in this country as long as the AL and BNP exercise the influence they possess? Do you honestly see any hope of some honest men and women rising to the top under the present system? Do you honestly believe our current political system can ever breed a leader from within

backwards? If you answered these questions honestly, you answered "No" to all of them. And that is where your contradictions come through. You know things cannot change under the present electoral system because it is destined to bring the AL or BNP into power, under whom things will never change, yet you will not put forward the possibility of bypassing these meaningless elections and seeking another alternative, whatever that might be.



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Biman Flight Catering Centre (BFCC) invites sealed tender 01 (one) envelope system for supply of following items:

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|---------|-----------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|-------------------------------|
| 01. | SUPPLY OF ELECTRIC AL ITEMS | 21-08-2004 | 10,000/- | TK. 400/- | FROM 10.00 HOURS TO 12.00 HOURS ON 22-08-2004. | AT 14:30 HOURS ON 22-08-2004 |

Schedule of tender along with other terms and conditions may be obtained on request in the official letterhead pad during office hours on payment of cost of schedule from the Office of Manager Finance, BFCC, Zia International Airport, Dhaka.

Tender boxes will be available in the following places:

- BFCC Security Gate, Zia International Airport, Dhaka.
- Security Gate, Biman Balaka Head Office, Balaka Bhaban, Zia International Airport, Dhaka.
- Biman Poultry Complex, Biman Medical Centre Building, Farmgate, Dhaka.

BFCC Management reserves the right to accept/reject any or all tender/tenders and also to change the opening date of the tender without assigning any reason whatsoever. If tender opening day happens to be holiday, the tender will be opened on the next working day at the same schedule time.

For Biman Flight Catering Centre
Dy. General Manager, BFCC
GD-449

we do not want to come out of. But I pray we have not lost the belief that our country's destiny lies in our hands. Why cannot we have a Bengali Dream?

Why do we have to be privy to the whims of a chosen few? Why cannot we have a government that caters to our needs, rather than its own? Why cannot we get our country back from these selfish individuals? The answer is we can, only if we want it enough, and if we believe we can. We only have to open our eyes and realise our own potential, the people's potential to

We need new ideas, new alternatives. I too believe in elections and the democratic process, yes, but not when the same evil is masquerading under different symbols on the ballot paper. In that case, elections become only a symbol of democracy, rather than the engine it should be. What we need is a revamp that ensures these two monoliths lose the vice-like grip they have established on our people, and for that, we have to first ensure that neither of them is in power.

Things are coming to a head, and it is time for us to wake up and seek new avenues to gain our country back and take it forward. Unfortunately many of us have worked ourselves into a comfort zone that

change the course of a nation's destiny. It is not enough to wait for elections and vote for a new man who will be as corrupt as the previous one. We have to unite and take a stand that we have had enough of such people and the system that is manipulated by these people.

It is going to be one of the great tragedies of our history that those who have crippled this nation will always be able to say that we, the people, put them in power by voting for them. The pages of history will not record that we never had a better alternative on

the ballot. They say democracy is government "of the people, for the people, by the people."

The successive AL and BNP governments may have not fulfilled the first two criteria, but unfortunately, they were by the people. And it is time we stopped giving them, or any of their offshoots, any more scope to harm this nation further. It is time we start going about taking back the country that is ours.

Shayan Khan is a student at Coventry University, UK.

গ্যাস জাতীয় সম্পদ এর অপচয় রোধ করে
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Gas Transmission Company Limited
(A Company of Petrobangla)
House No-39, Road No-3, Sector-3, Uttara
Dhaka Bangladesh

Ref. No GTCL/N-B/PLC Date: 26.07.2004

Amendment Notice

The following amendments are made in the bid documents for (a) Construction of High Pressure Natural Gas Transmission Pipeline from Nalka to Chandaikona (ML V-1) under Nalka-Bogra Gas Transmission Pipeline Project (IFB No. GTCL/N-B/PLC/01, for Group-A) and (b) Construction of High Pressure Natural Gas Transmission Pipeline from Chandaikona (ML V-1) to Bogra under Nalka-Bogra Gas Transmission Pipeline Project (IFB No. GTCL/N-B/PLC/02, for Group-B):

- For both Group A & Group B**
 - The bid closing date is hereby extended up to 12:00 hours 17th August, 2004.
 - Clause No-2.0 (a) of Invitation for Bids (IFB) of bid documents shall be read as:

"(a) The Bangladeshi gas pipeline contractors having up-to-date & valid enlistment under category 1.4 with Petrobangla and/or any other company of Petrobangla having minimum experience of construction of at least 4 km long 12" OD or above dia high pressure (above 350 psig) Cross Country Gas Transmission Pipeline in a single project within last 10 (ten) years."
 - Clause No-1.1 (a) of Instruction to Bidders (ITB) of bid document shall be read as:

"The Bangladeshi gas pipeline contractors having up-to-date (2003-2004) & valid enlistment under category 1.4 with Petrobangla and/or any other Company of Petrobangla having minimum experience of construction of at least 4 km long 12" OD or above dia high pressure (above 350 psig) Cross Country Gas Transmission Pipeline in a single project within the last 10 (ten) years as proprietor/partner/joint venture/consortium".
- For Group B only**
 - Clause No. -1.2.1 (b) (iii) of Instruction to Bidders (ITB) of bid document for Group-B shall be read as follows:

"iii (a) Evidence from the client(s) that they (bidder/prime bidder in case of joint venture/consortium) have successfully completed construction of 12 inch or higher dia high pressure (above 350 psig) Cross Country Gas Transmission Pipeline of at least 4 km long in a single project within last 10 (ten) years.

iii (b) List of 4 km long 12" OD or above dia high pressure (above 350 psig) Cross Country Gas Transmission Pipeline successfully completed within last 10 (ten) years by the bidder as a Proprietor/Partner/Joint Venture/Consortium. The list should be suitably tabulated furnishing the name and address of the client, year of completion length, diameter, operating pressure of pipeline. Copies of certificate obtained from at least 1 (one) client should be provided from among the aforesaid listed clients evidencing satisfactory completion of the works."
 - All other terms and conditions and specifications of bid document shall remain unchanged and the amendment notice shall form an integral part of the bid document.

GTPR-03/04-05
GD-448