

FOUNDER EDITOR  
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# Challenges facing the new Palestinian president

KAZI ANWARUL MASUD

THE election of Mahmoud Abbas as President of the Palestinian Authority was expected. He bagged over sixty percent of the votes cast. The voter turnout despite boycott call by some Islamist political parties was reportedly healthy. The Presidential elections have been brought about by the death of Yasser Arafat last November. Under Basic Law and the Election Law a new President had to be elected within sixty days. Since 1999 various parties have been pressing for fresh elections both to the Palestinian Authority (PA) and the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) which represents only the residents of the West Bank and Gaza as opposed to the Palestinian National Council (PNC) which is the highest decision making body of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO).

Demands for fresh elections were made by reformist elements among the Palestinians who feared loss of international legitimacy of the PA and PLC and of the bodies running the risk of becoming moribund. Compared to Israeli democratic vibrancy where Prime Ministers come and go and governments fall sometimes at alarming rate (though maintaining constancy in the persecution policy in the occupied lands), the unchanging faces of the Palestinian leadership, albeit in step with the tradition of having absolute monarchs and long duration Presidents in the Arab world, has been causing discomfort among some Palestinians. Despite Yasser Arafat's undying devotion to the Palestinian cause and the Palestinian people's devotion to him, Arafat rarely felt bound by rules and regulations and was used to administer without feeling any need for accountability. Indeed it was in reaction to Presidential domination (and also due to President Bush's conviction that Arafat was the main obstacle to Middle East peace process) that the

PLC amended the Basic Law to transfer much authority to a Prime Minister. Though Arafat accepted the amendment he paid scant regard to its implementation resulting in continuous tussle between the President and the Prime Minister. The election of Mahmoud Abbas promises a degree of stability in the Palestinian political institutions.

One, however, is not so certain whether election of Mahmoud Abbas is not a schematic exercise in democracy. Palestinian political analyst Omar Barghouti sees the election "while still under the boot of an occupier (as) oxymoron. Sovereignty and occupation are mutually

Many who thought that Oslo accord would produce a just peace had limited their analysis to the text of the agreement that met only the minimum aspirations of the Palestinians. They, perhaps, forgot to take into consideration a constant in the policy of various Israeli governments to exploit the asymmetric balance of power between the occupier and the occupied. In 1993 then Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin had told CNN that his vision of peaceful co-existence meant Israel as a Jewish state with united Jerusalem as its capital and "a Palestinian entity, less than a state, that runs the life of Palestinians". This vision of

was an effective call for regime change without taking into consideration the facts that Yasser Arafat was not only the duly elected leader of the Palestinian people but he was also recognised as the legitimate head of state of Palestine by most of the countries of the world. But then the behavioural pattern of the Colossus, which British historian Niall Ferguson has termed the United States, is not expected to conform to the universally recognised standard of behaviour of others. It is true that Morton Klein, President of American Zionist Organisations, was shocked by the fact that President Bush was the first

border of the Palestinian state, and on the sticky question of the return of an estimated five million Palestinian refugees? Reportedly during President Clinton's attempt to midwife a settlement at Camp David in the Year 2000 Israeli Prime Minister Barak had proposed that Jerusalem remain united under Israeli sovereignty leaving the Palestinians control over East Jerusalem and Muslim holy sites. Yasser Arafat was reportedly willing to accept Israeli control over Jewish quarters of Jerusalem but sought sovereignty over East Jerusalem particularly over Haram-al-Sharif/Temple Mount. Even after Barak's resigna-

terrorist attacks was to find an urgent solution of the Palestinian crisis which was seen as fuelling discontent among Arab and Muslim youth. On 30<sup>th</sup> June 2003 President Bush made public the Quartet (US, UN, EU and Russia) Road Map for a solution of the Middle East crisis. While the Palestinians agreed to implement the Road Map Israel came up with a number of reservations. Meanwhile Ariel Sharon announced his unilateral disengagement plan of troops withdrawal from Gaza - a move welcomed by both President Bush and the PA. In April last year President Bush discounted the possibility of Israeli withdrawal to the armistice line of 1949 and advocated the return of the refugees to the Palestinian state and not to Israel.

In the backdrop of the complexities of the problem Mahmoud Abbas has an unenviable task of restoring a Palestinian economy which is on the verge of collapse due to Israeli closures, military incursions, innumerable checkpoints separating Palestinians from Palestinians and Palestinians from vital services. Abbas on his part will have to check lawlessness in parts of occupied territories caused by Israeli assault on Palestinian authority and its security apparatus. The US has to extend political and financial support to Mahmoud Abbas and bring the two sides to the negotiating table. The world must realise that Mahmoud Abbas cannot do what Yasser Arafat could do because of his iconic stature. He would, therefore, need all the help that can be given to him particularly by the US that has to keep a tight leash on Israeli militaristic behaviour in the name of ensuring security. The US and the West may wish to take a global view of the Middle East problem and realise that Israel-Palestinian conflict is not a war of religion but one of politics that has remained unresolved for more than half a century.

Kazi Anwarul Masud is a former Secretary and ambassador

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exclusive". Barghouti points out that the election will be that of the President of the PA, an offspring of the 1993 Oslo Agreement, and not of the President of the Palestinian people. PA at best represents only a minority of the Palestinians living in the West Bank and the Gaza strip while the majority of the Palestinians are refugees in various countries or are Palestinian citizens of Israel not represented in the PA. Question has, therefore, been raised as to how a President elected by only one third of the Palestinian people can conclude agreements on behalf of the entire Palestinian community particularly because he may have to barter away the future of a very large number of Palestinian refugees' right to return. But then this is no ordinary time. Oslo agreement, criticised by many as a betrayal of the Palestinian people had to be concluded if only to institutionalise the Palestinian Authority (PA).

"peaceful co-existence" was nothing but another formula to solve the main paradox faced by Israel after 1967 war as to how to take control of the resources of the occupied lands without taking any responsibility for the people living in the occupied territories. Effectively Israeli strategy emboldened by almost unconditional US support has been to negotiate a peace deal with the Palestinians but to impose a set of conditions as victors impose upon the vanquished. It remains to be seen how Mahmoud Abbas's election as the President of the PA will help to change the fundamental equation based on asymmetrical balance of power between the parties.

Exit of Yasser Arafat from the political scene accords with President Bush's June 2002 statement that "peace requires new and different Palestinian leadership so that a Palestinian state can be born". This

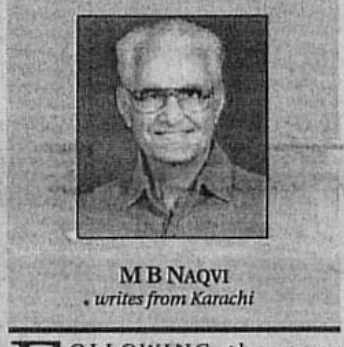
American President to publicly endorse a Palestinian state - his shock strengthened by the unreserved support of large number of Senators and Congressmen and women calling on the US administration not to ask Israel to make concessions until Palestinians took steps to contain terrorism against Israel. This unstinted support by the US legislators may be seen in the backdrop of two US Congress resolutions of May/June 1997 calling on the US administration to affirm that Jerusalem must remain the undivided capital of Israel, prohibiting US government business with the PA in Jerusalem, and allowed Israel to be recorded as the place of birth of American citizens born in Jerusalem.

American legislators' mind on the status of Jerusalem appears to have already been made up. What then Mahmoud Abbas can deliver to the Palestinians in Jerusalem, final

tion pending elections in Israel President Clinton suggested that Israel cede sovereignty over Haram-al-Sharif/Temple Mount and Arab neighbourhood in Jerusalem, 96 percent of the West Bank, all of the Gaza strip, and Jerusalem be the capital of the two countries. While Arafat was seeking further clarification on congruity of the Palestinian state territory, the division of East Jerusalem and the refugees' right of return, Ariel Sharon was elected Prime Minister and declared the results of the Camp David negotiations "null and void". This was followed by a statement by the first Bush administration that Clinton's proposals were no longer the United States' proposals.

Though Bush administration was comparatively less engaged in the Middle East due to its conviction that Yasser Arafat was the main obstacle to peace, yet one of the conclusions drawn from the carnage of 9/11

## Why opposition stays divided



MB NAQVI  
writes from Karachi

FOLLOWING the poor showing of MMA's Black Day on Jan 1, commentators have emphasised that what is needed for a peaceful change of regime is a grand united front of all democratic forces. But to achieve that unity formidable hurdles have to be crossed. Some superficially think that MMA should somehow unite with ARD so that the regime can be forced to hold an early general election, preferably this year. Now, ARD is highly suspicious of MMA and regards religious parties to be too close to the military. Which is why the MMA is perceived to have stabbed the ARD in the back in 2002 by helping write Gen. Pervez Musharraf's Legal Framework Order into the Constitution. MMA supports the 17th Amendment even today that gave the General the power to sack the entire elected system.

True, ARD and MMA are the mainstay of opposition. But their positions differ both over how they have fared in recent years and in political philosophies and drives. ARD component parties have been out in the cold; most of them are the bete noir of the General. MMA parties had been at the beck and call of the military in organising various jihads in Afghanistan and Indian

Kashmir. Seriously, the Mullahs are dyed-in-the-wool conservatives, indeed reactionaries. In the system engineered by Musharraf both are partners: MMA controls one and a half provincial governments, viz. NWFP's and half of Balochistan's. Its current spat with Musharraf aims at winning more seats in the next elections as opposition that is not responsible for Musharraf's actions. ARD comprises two mainstream parties -- Benazir's PPP and Nawaz Sharif's Muslim League -- plus a number of regionally significant

Other reasons include: most of the opposition, viz. PPP Nawaz League and MMA, actually agrees with Musharraf's foreign and economic policies; opposition parties have no different visions on how should the world be organised. America's sophisticated foreign policy not only deals with Musharraf regime, it cultivates military-to-military relations on wide scale. It humours parties on a case by case basis. There are no differences between Musharraf and opposition vis-à-vis Pakistan-America ties, except

neither the military regime nor opposition parties can take a clear stand. Behind these loom old perennial problems that question the basis of the state and its reason to be. Although Bangladesh became independent 33 years ago, a really workable Centre-State relations are still being sought. Sindh, Balochistan and NWFP sorely want autonomy as founding states of Pakistan Federation; they demand that federal principle be strictly acted upon. Do Musharraf and his

Musharraf government has a firm policy of no land reforms. Who precisely wants land reforms within ARD and MMA? On foreign policy most of them are virtually united. The question is how willing are the people to suffer the expected repression by basically the military government when and if they start anti-Musharraf agitation. Many commentators have noted that the people remain apathetic and cynical thanks to their past experiences. That means the opposition parties have to show how can they motivate people to join the agitation against a military regime? The parties have to ask the question: why would the people be ready to suffer bodily harm or incarceration? Can they create that kind of interest? As it happens, ideological fluff will not do; it has not aroused much interest during the last 30 years. Remember how easily was the MRD movement crushed. Religious issues do not enthuse people enough as MMA should have concluded by now. There has to be a clear nexus between the desired democracy and concrete ways in which democracy will improve the lot of common man. People have to see what is there for them in the struggle for democracy.

## PLAIN WORDS

**Explaining how democracy delivers and what it delivers requires detailed economic and social programmes that each party must present and it better make it credible: the ordinary people should be convinced that these programmes will actually deliver what is promised. A last condition is that leaders should show how can the people participate in actually achieving the goals that fascinate them.**

parties like ANP and several Pushtoon and Baloch nationalist groups. The latter may have fewer seats in Assemblies or a small percentage of national vote. But their ability to organise struggles in their areas and influencing opinion nationally is considerable; their credibility is high.

Thanks in part to government machinations and in part to clashing interests, the two bigger components of MMA, viz. Jamaate Islami and JUI(F) stop short of alienating Musharraf to the point where he may send the ministries of NWFP and Balochistan packing. They differ in nuances: JUI has most MMA deputies; JI's smaller stake in the current dispensation enables it to take a more radical line vis-à-vis Musharraf; it aims higher for tomorrow.

that, following the US invasion of Afghanistan and Musharraf's U-turn on Taliban, MMA has become volubly anti-American. MMA view is based on the faulty notion that America is against Islam and Muslims.

Finally, some difficult issues have cropped up and older ones have become more aggravated. Look at Musharraf government: it is paralysed on all the major issues: it is unable to make up its mind over Kalabagh Dam and Thind Canal; it hesitates to enact what Musharraf has long wanted on Blasphemy and Hudood laws. Then, Musharraf's supporters are unable to agree on how to divide the Divisible Pool among provinces. Nor can Musharraf's partners agree on dividing Indus River system's waters between Punjab and Sindh. These are the controversies on which

henchmen agree one way or the other? Do mainstream parties agree on the issue? Divisions over water and finance aggravate differences over why Pakistan was desired; this polarization persists, with provinces wanting more autonomy.

Then there is the question of popular welfare. Was Pakistan to be a national security state or was it desired as a welfare state. If the latter, who is actually planning the citizens' well -- Musharraf or any of the opposition parties. Verbally they all stand for popular welfare. But nobody credibly shows how he would promote it -- necessary details of methodology are needed for credibility. Does anyone recognise that popular welfare for the large rural and urban masses depends on meaningful land reforms and social security?

Explaining how democracy delivers and what it delivers requires detailed economic and social programmes that each party must present and it better make it credible: the ordinary people should be convinced that these programmes will actually deliver what is promised. A last condition is that leaders should show how can the people participate in actually achieving the goals that fascinate them.

MB Naqvi is a leading columnist in Pakistan.

## Saarc summit rescheduled

Hopes raised for a better future

THE 13th Saarc summit is scheduled to be held in Dhaka on February 6 and 7 as all the member countries have agreed to the new dates. The tsunami disaster had forced cancellation of the plan to hold it in early January, but it is good to note that the summit is taking place at the earliest opportunity. The closing ceremony has been brought forward by a day, which could mean a more hectic schedule for the participants. We hope there will be the speed and resolve needed to handle the complex issues.

Dhaka is going to put forward some new proposals to add substance to the functioning of Saarc as the promoter of regional trade and commerce. It is looking forward to revival of South Asian Development Fund as part of the plan to assess the potential of a South Asian Development Bank (SADB). India has endorsed the plan and might propose creation of a \$10 billion fund for the SADB. Such initiatives should play a crucial role in boosting trade and commerce among the member countries.

The summit has assumed greater significance in view of the challenges that the region as a whole is now facing. For example, at least three member countries of Saarc were affected by the tsunami. But there was no concerted initiative or any kind of regional approach to some of the post-disaster imperatives. Representatives of the US and Japan governments visited the tsunami affected areas and the UN also organised a conference on the catastrophe that fostered solidarity among the nations to come in aid of the victims of the massive humanitarian crisis.

There is definitely a lot that the countries can achieve together to reduce their vulnerability to natural calamities. To begin with, installation of a warning system against sea-floor earthquake that could trigger devastating tidal waves can be considered. It has to be linked to the worldwide seismic observation network for the benefit of all.

Saarc has to elevate itself to a platform designed and equipped to address regional issues having a great bearing on the lives of people.

## TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

**"Amrao Pari" and ATN Bangla**

Recently a documentary film of ATN Bangla "Amrao Pari" got an international award. About 25 countries participated in the festival. This is for the first time that a Bangladeshi television magazine programme achieved this award.

I do agree with Mr. Dev that minorities are sometimes neglected and subjected to oppression. There are problems. But things are not so grave that one should be termed "second class citizen". As for patriotism, I must admit myself is not 100 per cent loyal to my country. I will leave this country at the first opportunity. The world is becoming more and more open. This is the age of globalisation.

**Rab**

I am responding to the letter "Why Rab" published on 26th December.

Firstly, as Mr. Kaushik mentioned "recruiting police" as one of his solutions, I don't think it is a good idea to do that before changing the corrupt recruitment system. Naturally, after getting the job most of them try to get the money (paid for getting the job) back by taking bribe. The big portion of our police force is already corrupt. And we don't want any more corrupt police.

Secondly, as he says, laws need to be formulated. The new laws like speedy trial have been introduced and many more are still coming up. Again, it is a really long process which might even take a couple of years. And during that time someone needs to ensure the safety of the general public.

Thirdly, he says there is a chance that Rab might get corrupt in future. In that case, whatever solution we come up with there is a chance that it may not work ultimately. And just because of that tiny possibility we should not refrain from taking any

good step. Let's put the whole thing this way. If crime is a deadly disease then Rab would be the quick and useful medicine. If someone gets this disease and doctors start planning to invent a new medicine or some other better solution for years, instead of giving him the available medicine to save his life, and the patient dies, who will take the responsibility? Wouldn't it be wise if the doctors save the patient's life first and then plan about the better solutions?

Maybe, in future our police force and laws will be good enough so that people will rely on them. Then we will not need Rab any more. But before that happens people need safety which our police and law are still not capable of providing. Also, once our law and order gets back to what it is supposed to be, our image will be very positive to the outside world.

**Firoz Mannan**  
Uttara, Dhaka

People are waiting for the day when there will be no godfathers in the society. Then, we will not need any Rab to catch the so-called criminals; general people are enough to face them if those criminals are not backed by powerful godfathers.

**Fazal Reza**  
On e-mail

**Crossfire deaths and human rights**

I have been going through several letters written in the past few weeks in your daily, most of which expressed satisfaction and congratulated Rab for their actions/accidental or intentional, for the resultant relief, unaware of its length of life. We, the common people, are used to be happy with the chalk or cheesewhatever is instant. We are least bothered as to who are 'godfathers', as they are out of our touch and in fact we usually don't encounter them. Those

(mastans) who are directly encountered, if eliminated this or that way, can be treated as a great gift. Desperate problems require desperate remedies, as you know.

Tracing out or eliminating the godfathers is the job of the law enforcers. If they cannot or do not punish them, could we really do anything? Why some writers or political elements or the so-called intellectuals---who do no good but render only lip service, should be considered (who are anyway microscopic) as the voice of the nation?

I have respect for the writers like Mallik Akram Hossain writing from Hong Kong (DS Dec.04) who are concerned the other way: they could not praise the actions of Rab, but I could not appreciate his disdain "..." then what is the necessity of the judiciary?" None has disregarded or discarded the judicial system or disclaimed the existence of other law enforcing agencies. They are very much there in their quarters but as we all know there was no controlling of the social menaces in spite of their existence and exertion of powers. We have to see what they do to safeguard their prestige and reasoning for further existence. I can also argue that so-called godfathers can not survive that long in the absence of their gangsters and if their hands are crippled, their existence also will, at the end, be at stake.

Yes, I also believe the crossfire deaths have nothing to do with the violation of human rights and Mr. Mallik's apprehension of "breeding of more social unrest" is grossly unfounded. And if the killing and tortu... by themastans/gangsters/godfathers are not termed violation of human rights, can we charge the law enforcers of such violation when they are trying to safeguard the rights of the innocent public?

**AF Rhaman**  
On e-mail