

OIC and Bangladesh: Anniversary thoughts



ARSHAD-UZ ZAMAN

FOLLOWING the burning in 1969 of the Al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem, the second holiest shrine of Islam, the Islamic world witnessed an unprecedented reversion and the late King Hasan II of Morocco assembled the leaders of the Islamic world in Rabat, the capital of the Kingdom of Morocco. They swiftly decided to establish an organisation encompassing all the countries of the Islamic world. The Secretariat of the OIC was established in Jeddah in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The membership includes all the 57 states of the Islamic world and has states from Asia, Africa, and the Arab world.

The division of work within the Secretariat is as follows: there are political departments including Palestine and Jerusalem, an economic department, a cultural department, and administration. The Secretary General is the head and is elected for a non-renewable four year term. There have been exceptions, though. In the hierarchy, there are four Assistant Secretaries General, broadly representing the geographical regions. The Assistant Secretary General in charge of political affairs, Palestine and Jerusalem, is the senior-most and fulfills the function of the Secretary General in his absence.

Bangladesh joined the OIC as member in 1974. I remember it well. In 1973 Bangladesh joined the Non-Aligned Group Summit in Algiers under the leadership of then Prime Minister Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. I was Bangladesh Ambassador in Algiers and it was a major breakthrough for our diplomacy. The Non-Aligned Summit assembled more than a hundred heads of states and governments from Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Very few of those states recognised Bangladesh.

In February 1974 the OIC held a summit in Lahore. The Islamic countries, particularly the Arab countries were very keen that we join the OIC. Bangabandhu had taken a principled stand that for him to visit any foreign country, that state had to accord recognition to Bangladesh. Our Foreign Minister Dr. Kamal Hossain came to Algiers and had very important talks with his counterpart Abdel Aziz Bouteflika (currently the President of Algeria). Bouteflika pressed Dr. Hossain to attend the OIC summit in Lahore. Dr. Hossain pointed out that Pakistan had to recognise the independence of Bangladesh first.

THE HORIZON THIS WEEK

One of the most memorable event during my time was the Iran-Iraq war. The first ever OIC summit was held in front of the Holy Kaaba, where the assembled kings, presidents, and heads of government sat in front of the Holy Kaaba as the Imam of the Holy Mosque in Makkah-al-Mukarramah chanted suras from the Holy Koran and the summit began.



Burning of Al-Aqsa mosque (pictured above) in 1969 led to formation of OIC.

When the decks were cleared, a five-member OIC delegation led by Algeria came to Dhaka. It was a Friday and the top official from Algeria, Adjali, told me later that, were mobbed by the Friday prayer crowd in Bait-ul-Mukarram. Pakistan announced recognition of Bangladesh and Bangladesh did likewise and with an aircraft provided by the authorities of Algeria, Bangabandhu and his delegation reached Lahore and joined the OIC deliberations amidst scenes of great emotional fervour.

Tragedy struck Bangladesh in 1975, when Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman along with his entire family and near relations were assassinated in one of the cruelest events in history. This was followed by jail killing of top four leaders of the ruling Awami League in a bid to paralyse the political party and sow the seeds of destabilisation.

In 1979 I was Bangladesh Ambassador in Egypt. I was getting ready to attend the annual OIC Foreign Ministers Conference in Rabat. I received a telephone call from Justice Abu Sayeed Chowdhury, who was living in virtual exile in London. For many years I had excellent friendship with Justice Chowdhury, specially

during his Presidency of the Republic. As Chief of Protocol, I organised his first state visit to India in 1973, and it was a huge success. Since the assassination of Bangabandhu, Justice Chowdhury had settled for a modest living in London. He told me on the phone that Gen. Ziaur Rahman, the new President of Bangladesh had been pressing him to contest the post of Secretary General of the OIC. Justice Chowdhury wanted my opinion.

After thinking the matter over, I told Justice Chowdhury that I could not feel enthusiastic, because his was a very big name and his role during the War of Liberation had made him an icon. On the other hand, I realised that saying no to a proposal from the President was very delicate and difficult. Justice Chowdhury told me that he also felt that he had to accept, but he would not campaign. Justice Chowdhury did not campaign, and in order to frustrate Bangladesh's ambition Pakistan proposed a senior bureaucrat Ghulam Ishaque Khan.

Since OIC prides itself as an organisation of the Ummah, a compromise candidate Habib Chatti of Tunisia was elected the new Secretary General. Habib Chatti and I had been

colleagues in Algiers and when he moved to Tunis as the Foreign Minister, I met him frequently with the President of Tunisia, Habib Bourguiba. In 1980, the OIC Foreign Ministers Conference was held in Islamabad, the capital of Pakistan. My government proposed my name for the post of Assistant Secretary General. Pakistan made a last minute attempt to frustrate the candidature of Bangladesh. Thanks to my friendship with Habib Chatti and many foreign ministers including Turkey's, I easily won the post.

I joined the post of Assistant Secretary General in charge of Political Affairs, Palestine, Jerusalem, Information, and Legal Affairs. I joined the OIC on September 1, 1980, and Habib Chatti gave me an appointment letter stating that I would be the senior-most Assistant Secretary General, and in his absence would be Acting Secretary General. As Habib Chatti enjoyed traveling a lot, I was frequently Acting Secretary General.

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Holy Kaaba as the Imam of the Holy Mosque in Makkah-al-Mukarramah chanted suras from the Holy Koran and the summit began. This was an unforgettable experience.

We then swiftly moved to the hill resort called Taif, where a whole city in marble had sprung up for the summit. Since Iran was convinced that Iraq was the aggressor, she refused to attend the summit until the OIC declared that Iran had been aggressed. Habib Chatti was sent post haste to Tehran to request Iran to change her mind.

Meanwhile, the summit started with the foreign ministers, and I assisted Prince Saud al-Faisal, who was presiding. The summit was held without Iran in the end. For the OIC, it was the hardest challenge for two very important members were locked in battle. The summit decided to set up a Peace Committee comprising eight heads of government. Chatti wanted to know if Bangladesh should be included and I said an emphatic yes. Thus President Zia played an important role within the Peace Committee.

Chatti wanted me to ask the heads of state whether the presidency should be a rotating one or on the basis of seniority. President Sekou Toure of Guinea was by far the senior-most and he told me that he did not understand "rotation." The Saudi government provided all logistical support like a very luxurious plane (bathroom attachments of pure gold), a royal palace for the eight heads of state, and secretarial help. We made several trips to Tehran and Baghdad, including a meeting with Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. The Iranians insisted that they would not sit with Saddam Hussein of Iraq, who must be branded an aggressor. Saddam, whose forces were on the retreat, was more than willing for a deal.

The Peace Mission of the OIC petered out. In 1981, I was discussing with Chatti in Baghdad, the arrangements for the Foreign Ministers Conference that was about to begin. One of his aides gave him a faxed message. President Zia-ur-Rahman had been assassinated. He was an important personality within the OIC and was playing a valuable role for finding a solution to the Iran-Iraq war. I told Chatti that the best way we could pay respect to President Zia was to hold urgently a memorial meeting in Dhaka. He asked me to contact Sekou Toure, who broke down on the phone. He ordered that a memorial meeting be organised immediately in Dhaka. Chatti and I started contacting heads of states of the Peace Committee.

In the afternoon when we compared notes, we found that whereas all the heads of state were willing, President Zia-ul-Huq of Pakistan had said flatly no. His argument was that the Bangladesh authorities would drag him to the National Memorial and he would have to stand bareheaded. Our effort for a memorial meeting for thus President Zia fell through.

The author is a former Ambassador and Acting Secretary General, OIC.

We will return

DR SANDEEP PANDEY

THE India Pakistan Peace March from Delhi to Multan is symbolically over, but we left Pakistan with a sense of dissatisfaction. We were not allowed to march within Pakistan. It was quite an embarrassment for us to be talking about disarmament but moving around under heavy armed security cover.

A police jeep was always accompanying us wherever we went. Some of our hosts within Pakistan were also uncomfortable with this. We do realise that probably under the given circumstances in Pakistan this was the best possible thing that we could have done. This was the only reason we decided to come to Pakistan in what eventually was a curtailed and restrained visit for us.

In my opinion, in the end it was ultimately the difference of democracy between the two countries which resulted in different response from the two states, although it was only marginally better in India. The marchers from both countries had difficulty in crossing over into the other country to participate in the march. Both governments delayed giving visas to the marchers from the other side, but whereas the Indian government did give visas for all the 12 districts that fell on the route to the Pakistani citizens, the Pakistani government granted visas to the Indian citizens only for the cities of Lahore and Multan.

It is a different matter that the Pakistani marchers could not use their visas for all places as by the time they were in India, because of further delay by the Pakistani government in granting them permission to cross the Wagha border on foot, the march was in the last district of Amritsar. However, while the Pakistani marchers were walking on the road for five days in India there were no police accompanying us. We consider it an achievement of the march.

We are glad that we received a very positive response from the various people's representatives that we met during our tour in Pakistan. The Nazim of Lahore Mian Amir Mehmoood granted us permission to take out a peace march within the city of Lahore and allowed us to plant a sapling that Professor Rameek Mohan, one of the marchers from India, had brought from Rohtak, as a symbol of peace and friendship.

Rana Tariq Javed, Member of National Assembly was present to welcome us at a small function in

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The Wagah border between India and Pakistan.

Sahiwal on our way to Multan. The local Nazim and SSP, Khuda Bux Malik were also present here.

In Chinchawatani the local Nazim welcomed us. In Multan, MNA Shah Mahmood Hussain Qureshi, who also happened to be the Sajjada Nashin of Dargah of Bahauddin Zakaria, almost echoed our sentiments in his speech and granted us permission to move about freely in Multan. We planted another sapling at the City Council Hall in Multan that we had brought from India. Member of Provincial Assembly from Okara hosted dinner for us when we were returning from Multan.

Back in Lahore, we were hosted in the Punjab Provincial Assembly by the Opposition Leader Qasim Zia, a former Pakistani hockey player. MNA Chaudhary Manzoor Ahmad of the PPP was quite harsh on the two governments especially for engaging in arms race. He questioned the two Members of Parliament from India who had joined us that evening, Nilotpal Basu and Hannan Mollah, both of CPM, why India was still following the path of BJP government in defence spending.

Riaz Fatyana, another MNA, hosted high tea for us at the Lahore Gymkhana and he too supported our campaign. These people's representatives compensated to some extent for the negative atti-

tude shown by the Pakistani government towards the peace march. But it is clear that movement for democracy in Pakistan will have to be strengthened if pro-people's initiatives are allowed to take place freely here. Even at the risk of appearing to interfere in the internal matters of our neighbouring country, we would like to see our peace movement also strengthen the democratisation process in Pakistan, just as various people's struggles are aiming to do exactly the same in India.

Hence, we will continue to push forward the agenda for peace and friendship between the two countries. At the common people's level it is the most important democratic issue in the context of bilateral relationship. We had planned to organize a joint peace march of activists from both countries. But that remains unfinished.

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The author is a social activist and recipient of the Ramon Magsaysay Award for the year 2002.

Cementing Israeli apartheid and occupation

JAMAL JUMA

AS world leaders gather in Scotland for the G-8 summit, the Palestinian people and solidarity groups across the world will mark the first anniversary of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruling on the Apartheid Wall. The court, having taken up the popular appeals from Palestine, stipulated that the wall is illegal and must be dismantled while directing the international community "not to render aid or assistance in maintaining the situation created by [the wall's] construction."

Popular resistance in Palestine is gearing up to respond to the G-8 leaders' lip service on "support for Palestinian economic development and reform" that completely disregards the fundamental basis of the Palestinian struggle in all its terms of discourse. The contrast between the actions of the G-8 and the legal mandates of the ICJ, the countless UN resolutions, and the Palestinian right to existence and self-determination could not be starker.

Each day in Occupied Palestine, more land is confiscated, homes destroyed, and Palestinians turned into refugees to make space for an ever-expanding Israeli apartheid system of Jewish-only roads, settlements, military zones, and a 700 km long wall. Yet, political leaders and international financing bodies like the World Bank have opted to accept the wall as a fait accompli, and now aim to normalise its presence through a seemingly apolitical discourse of "development" and "aid."

International complicity and support for Palestinian subjugation under occupation has intensified dramatically over the last year. Today, these global agencies are planning to sustain the Apartheid Wall and the continued colonisation of Palestine, rather than placing pressure on Israel to enforce the ICJ decision. The G-8 controlled World Bank poignantly depicts this policy in its most recent report on the region, whereby a particular vision of "economic development" evades any discussion of the illegality of the wall, the occupation, and the denial of the right of return for Palestinian refugees. To the contrary, it lays the foundations for economic sustainability of the Palestinian ghettos created by the Apartheid Wall. The World Bank identifies economic boundaries in the official Zionist frame-

work of the wall and the "disengagement" plan, replicating and building upon the occupation's discourse and needs to ensure the complete control of Palestinians.

The notion of "aid" is used throughout the World Bank and occupation's economic agenda of "developing" Palestine, as a synonym for cheap labour initiatives and trade liberalization. The notion of "free trade" for imprisoned peoples is itself a profound irony conveniently disregarded. massive industrial zones - to be financed by the World Bank and other

West Bank. These industrial zones generate their own systems of regulation and surveillance that "allow" a limited number of Palestinians to move within their own land in order to sustain the most devastating system of racial capital. On top of a military occupation and forced expulsion, Palestinians are to be subjects of an economic colonialism common throughout the southern hemisphere for inflicting poverty and misery. High-tech military gates and checkpoints are proposed, through which Palestinians and exports can be

nected infrastructure as a "security fence" or "separation barrier." This not only legitimises in the eyes of the World Bank the confiscation of Palestinian lands, but also dangerously obscures the reality on the ground in which over 80 percent of the wall's destructive path deviates from the Armistice Line, separating Palestinians from other Palestinians, their capital Jerusalem, and from essential sources of livelihood.

In the village of Jayyous for example, an agrarian community of over 3,000 people have been isolated from

prison systems of occupation. A second wall being built around Gaza will cement the jailed existence for the 1.3 million people caged inside.

The governments of the G-8 have shown vivid interest in this project of displacement, imprisonment and oppression of Palestinian communities under the pretense of development and humanitarian aid. In breach of the ICJ ruling, the US has already contributed \$50 million to construct gates within these prisons to "help" serve the needs of Palestinians. Perhaps even more disturbing is the normalisation of such brutal schemes within the programmes of donors (such as USAID), who implement politically motivated projects under the rubric of humanitarian assistance.

One year after the ICJ ruling, the failure of the international community and financial institutions to work towards the implementation of the ICJ decision to tear down the wall has come at an enormous human cost. And yet, against this bleak and overwhelming reality, Palestinian communities are actively defending their right to exist. Palestinians are implementing the ICJ decision with their own hands, where in villages like Bil'in, the wall's cement foundations were physically dismantled in active resistance. Villages are mobilising regular demonstrations against the construction of the wall in the midst of violent reprisals by the occupation forces and continue to direct their protest beyond these imprisoned boundaries, towards the international community at large. As history illustrates repeatedly, attempted pacification of resistance to occupation will always be thwarted by a people's unrelenting will for self-determination. Palestinians are calling on the international community and the people of the world to expose and isolate the decades-long occupation that has gone unabated. As the world's most powerful leaders convene at the G-8 summit, any discussions on "support" for Palestine cannot be divorced from the political context through which the need for this agenda arises - Palestinian liberation. One year after the ICJ decision there can be no "aid" or "development" other than the tools and resources necessary for one of the first steps of this Palestinian struggle - tearing down the Apartheid Wall.

Jamal Juma writes on behalf of the Palestinian Grassroots Anti-Apartheid Wall Campaign.

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Mr. Sharon, tear down this wall!

donors and controlled by the occupation - are envisaged as forming the basis of economic "development" built upon Palestinian land around the wall. In the case of Itah in Tulkarem, land for the zone is located behind the wall, on fields which used to provide for over 50 families. These sweatshops will be the only possibility to earn a living for the Palestinian population left in disparate Bantustans throughout the

conveniently transported and controlled. This will be supplemented with a "transfer system" of walled roads and tunnels to funnel Palestinian workers through this economic matrix, while simultaneously denying them access to their land around them.

The World Bank's report adopts and perpetuates the occupation's strategically misleading terminology for the wall, referring to it and its con-

over 75 percent of their agricultural lands. Qalqilia, with a population of over 45,000 people, has been completely encircled by the wall and subsequently suffocated from its long established economic and social ties with surrounding villages. These dire conditions are replicated throughout the West Bank, as the wall encloses Palestinians into ghettos that function as racially demarcated, open-air

You shield us, we'll shield you

JONATHAN ALTER

AS a general rule, journalists shouldn't be in the business of lobbying Congress. But once in a long while an issue comes along that so threatens what we do that you read and seethe that we need to use whatever leverage we have to change the law. That's why in the wake of Timelinc's decision last week to betray a source, I'm recommending what might be called the Lysistrata Strategy, after the play by Aristophanes in which ancient Greek women withheld sex from their husbands until they stopped fighting the Peloponnesian War.

The reporter-source relationship has sexual overtones anyway (seduction, mutual satisfaction), so here's the deal: no more off-the-record chats with White House political aides, members of Congress or their staffs unless they support the Free Flow of Information Act, a bipartisan federal media-shield bill now pending. If specifically asked, most will probably commit to the bill. If they refuse, it won't be much of a loss because nowadays these folks mostly just spin, anyway; you can count the number of useful leaks from them on one hand. (Notice how no one leaked Sandra Day O'Connor's retirement.) The precious information provided by anonymous sources comes from elsewhere, usually the bowels of the bureaucracy. Under my plan, reporters who are told by a member of Congress that he wants to go off the record should politely reply, "If you won't commit to protecting us, we won't protect you."

Now this has about as much chance of actually happening in Washington as banning sex. But something had better come up with something soon or the basic arrangements by which you learn hard-to-find truths about your world will collapse faster than a Hollywood marriage. Interested in Enron and other business rip-offs? How about the war on terrorism or the spread of nuclear weapons or some local scandal or half the other important stories you see on the front page? Once federal prosecutors and even civil claimants (like Wen Ho Lee) get in the habit of forcing reporters to cough up their sources, you'll be dining on handouts and hokum.

Consider the consequences of last week's, well, mediocidal developments. The Supreme Court refused to rule in the Valerie Plame case, leaving a federal judge free to jail innocent reporters. When

Transparency and the rule of law usually go hand in hand; they are the foundation of our society. In this case, though, they are at odds: transparency requires a free press obtaining vital information for the public, while the rule of law requires compliance with the Supreme Court.



Freedom of the press under threat in US?

Norman

Pearlstone, editor in chief of Time Inc., agreed to turn over Time magazine reporter Matt Cooper's sources to the prosecutor, the chilling message to any other anonymous sources thinking of telling their stories to Time Inc. publications was clear: don't. Your identity cannot be protected. Reporters will now have to tell their confidential sources two things: (1) I'll go to jail to protect you; and (2) I'll never turn over my notes to my corporate bosses. That's not going to be very comforting to whistle-blowers (see Time's "Persons of the Year," 2002) who put their jobs on the line when they talk to the press.

Yes, Washington journalists rely much too heavily on anonymous sources. And, yes, this was a lousy casenot a whistle-blower but pro-Bush partisans using columnist Robert Novak (who apparently cooperated with the grand jury) to smear a critic (Joseph Wilson) by outing his CIA-agent wife (Plame). But if you think that federal prosecutors will now use discretion in issuing subpoenas to reporters, consider that Judith Miller of The New York Times (who, unlike Cooper, is fully backed by her corporate boss) will likely go to jail soon over a story she never wrote. She simply talked to someone in the government, then did nothing. Last year nearly a dozen reporters were either given or threatened with jail time. Next year

it will likely be many more.

Transparency and the rule of law usually go hand in hand; they are the foundation of our society. In this case, though, they are at odds: transparency requires a free press obtaining vital information for the public, while the rule of law requires compliance with the Supreme Court. That's where civil disobedience comes in. It is a respectful way of registered opposition by suffering punishment under law. By refusing to allow Cooper to engage in this civil disobedience, Time Inc. has essentially said that the principle at stake here is not important enough to fight for.

There is a way out: the Hoosier Solution. Sen. Richard Lugar and Rep. Mike Pence both Republicans of Indiana (something in the water?) - have introduced a federal shield law. At present, 49 states have shield laws or operate under court decisions offering reporters a "privilege" comparable to that extended to clergy, social workers, and lawyers. But this covers only state and local cases, not federal ones. A federal shield law won't end the prosecutorial witch hunts, which are mostly a function of the current low status of the news media. But it will help keep the pipeline of important information open. And it beats withholding sex.

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