

UN SUMMIT

A historic opportunity missed

SYED MUAZZEM ALI

EVEN before the formal convening of the largest assembly of world leaders in New York last week it was apparent that lack of agreement among the member states would only produce a highly watered down declaration. Six months ago, when Secretary General Kofi Annan had submitted a bold and comprehensive reform package, it was expected that the world leaders would take advantage of the historic sixtieth anniversary Summit to reach agreement on at least the major issues to bring in the much-needed reforms to the United Nations.

What was finally achieved at the end of the three-day Summit fell far short of the vision of Kofi Annan for a stronger UN. Why did the Summit fail to reach its lofty goals? Well, all members support reforms but the devil is in the details. The different groups clearly had divergent perceptions about issues of priority in the reform package. Every group pushed for the reform proposals that were of interest to them and opposed those that would weaken their position. The 35-page declaration adopted, by consensus, last Friday only indicates broad agreements on key issues leaving the door wide open for renewed negotiations to work out the details. There was very little statesmanship at the Summit to reach common ground.

Developing countries allege that the negotiating atmosphere was vitiated by the newly-appointed United States Permanent Representative John Bolton when he asked for wholesale change of Kofi Annan's original reform package. His long list of unilateral demands only aggravated the existing mistrust among the members from different groups. Subsequently, however, Washington somewhat softened its position but by then members were already engaged in a bitter struggle to retain their own domain of influence.

Washington, which enjoys the coveted veto power in the Security

Council, was not at all keen to go for any major reform of the Council which could dilute its preeminence in the global scene. They did not publicly support inclusion of any new permanent member in the Council, other than Japan. On the other hand, bids of the big four aspirants, namely Japan, India, Brazil and Germany, were bitterly opposed by members in their respective groups. Japan's candidature was opposed by China and Korea, India's by Pakistan, Brazil's by Argentina and Germany's by Italy. But the die was cast when the big four failed to get the much-needed endorsement of the African group--the largest vote bank in the General Assembly. Finally it was agreed that the reform negotiations would continue with a view to making the Council more broad-based and efficient.

On the development question, Washington had initially sought the dilution of millennium development goals which were adopted five years ago through adoption of more broad based declaration. They had also questioned the Secretary General's right to set specific targets for reducing poverty, hunger, child mortality and combating deadly diseases like AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria. They agreed on the need for increased aid but refused to commit 0.7 per cent of the GDP for this purpose, as the Europeans have recently done, with a time table for achieving that level of aid.

Even though US is the world's largest donor in terms of value, it is next to last among the donor countries in giving it as a share of its national income. Ultimately, they were persuaded by their European allies to commit themselves to the precise steps needed to reach the millennium development goals by 2015. President Bush endorsed these goals in his speech to the Summit, but by then the African and other developing countries had already expressed their dismay.

On the sensitive issue of human rights members agreed, in principle, that the existing Human Rights

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UNSC in session.

Commission would be replaced by a new Human Rights Council as was proposed by Annan. It was agreed that the current session of the UN General Assembly (UNGA) would work out details regarding the Council's mandate, functions, size, composition and membership. Western countries wanted that members of the new council should be elected by two-third majority of the UNGA to keep countries like Cuba, Sudan and

Libya out of it. However, the others opposed it. On other human rights issue, members agreed to assume collective responsibility to protect civilian populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity and committed themselves to take effective steps through the Security Council whenever any state manifestly failed to protect these rights.

As regards reforms in the areas of internal management within the

UN, Western countries wanted to give the Secretary General a freer hand to raise the level of efficiency and to reduce the level of corruption and malpractices through an overhaul of the system including a one-time buy-out of staff. The developing countries agreed to the need for reform in these areas but they maintained that the General Assembly should continue to hold the overall power on such issues.

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was its inability to address the question of proliferation of nuclear weapons. US and Western countries preferred that highest priority should be given to the issue of non-proliferation while developing countries maintained that any move to strengthen the Non-Proliferation Treaty should also include further steps towards disarmament. In other words, nuclear powers only talk about curbing horizontal expansion but completely ignore the other provisions of the NPT which also emphasises the need for halting vertical expansion and eventual nuclear disarmament. Incidentally, the same differences had earlier wrecked the NPT Review Conference held last May.

During the Summit, the Security Council unanimously passed a UK-sponsored resolution outlawing incitement to terrorism at home and abroad. But there was a disagreement about the definition of terrorism. Muslim and Arab countries maintained that the Palestinians who are fighting to liberate their country from alien occupation are freedom fighters, not terrorists. However, it was agreed that renewed efforts would be made to complete a comprehensive convention on terrorism within a year.

Kofi Annan had initially expressed disappointment at the outcome of the Summit but now he sees the glass "half full". He acknowledges that when he had submitted the bold proposal in March he had deliberately set the bar high since "in any international negotiations you never get everything you asked for." He expresses his satisfaction with whatever could be achieved in the areas of development, human rights, new global commitment for strengthening UN's capacity for peace-keeping, peace-making and peace-building, including a detailed blueprint for a new peace-building commission to strengthen lasting peace in war-torn countries.

Annan also notes the positive outcome in the areas of global early warning system for natural disasters, of mobilisation of new resources to fight deadly diseases like HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria; and of strengthening the UN Emergency Relief Fund so that disaster relief could reach more promptly and reliably in future. He, however, acknowledges the "biggest failure" in the areas of proliferation and disarmament, and appeals to world leaders to show greater statesmanship and make an urgent effort to find common ground.

The 170 world leaders who had come to New York for the Summit have left. This largest assembly of Heads of State/Government was indeed a historic opportunity to reach a new global consensus to ensure a better life for mankind. Global poverty is the biggest challenge before mankind. What was achieved at the Summit was a mere reiteration of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) pledged five years ago. Even if all the lofty provisions of the MDG are implemented, it can only reduce poverty by half by 2015. Some researchers emphasise that at the current pace, it would take more than 100 years to completely eradicate poverty. What a tragedy! Poverty exists not only in developing countries but also in developed countries and Hurricane Katrina that hit parts of US exposed it so blatantly only weeks ago.

Interestingly, the UN charter was signed sixty years ago in San Francisco Opera House. The reason for the choice of San Francisco was that it was the furthest point from the Nazi Germany who had still not been defeated. Six decades later, the entire area has been reconstructed and designated as the UN Plaza and tourists come here every year to see the birthplace of the UN.

Ironically the global failure to eradicate poverty and ensure a better life for mankind is visible even at the birthplace of UN. Homelessness is a scourge in San Francisco, and thousands of homeless people live on that plaza; they sleep on open space at night and beg money from passers-by. The last time I went to the place with a visiting friend, a homeless person was washing himself in the fountain that had been built not too long ago to commemorate the declaration of human rights. Obviously, his inherent rights to live a decent life has not been ensured. It is sad that mankind has spent billions and trillions for the arms race, and yet have done so little to protect its weakest members.

Syed Muazzem Ali, a former Foreign Secretary, sent this write-up from the United States.

Musharraf's handshake with Sharon

BY ABDUL HANNAN

THE international community raised their brows and the media took note when Pakistan president Pervez Musharraf shook hands and exchanged pleasantries with Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon while participating in the UN summit in New York recently. There is every reason to believe that it was not a chance meeting but unmistakably deliberate and purposeful. What followed confirmed the suspicion. Close on the heels of his meeting with Sharon, in his address to the council of American Jewish congress in New York at a ground breaking dinner, what may have sounded remarkably conciliatory to the ears of his Jewish audience, he spoke to standing ovation, of the tragedy of Holocaust and the strife since the creation of Israel in 1948 as 'an aberration in the long history of Muslim-Jewish cooperation and coexistence'. He however said, 'as the process progresses toward the establishment of an independent Palestine state, we will take further steps toward normalisation, and cooperation and full diplomatic relation'.

Earlier, Pakistan foreign minister Khurshid Kasuri held what was described as a 'historic meeting' with Israeli foreign minister on September 1 in Istanbul. These cannot be isolated incidents but must have been carefully choreographed diplomatic overtures as a prelude to rapprochement and repudiation of Pakistan's past stance of not recognising Israel.

After Turkey which established diplomatic ties with Israel in 1948, Pakistan will be the second Muslim state to recognise Israel apart from the Arab states Egypt, Jordan and Mauritania. According to press reports, hushed but real normalisation of relation with Israel are taking place by Morocco, Tunisia, Oman, Qatar, Libya and most likely by the America backed new Establishment of Iraq.

Yet, the crack and defection of Islamic solidarity against Israel is baffling. There is no denying that regardless of geographical immediacy, the spiritual underpinnings in the collective imagination of the Arab and other Muslim world's opposition to Israel is rooted in sympathy and support for Palestinians as fellow Muslims suffering the pain and agony of ethnic cleansing, displacement and dispossession, persecution

and injustice caused by their ouster first from their homeland what is now Israel and later by the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories of Gaza and West Bank including East Jerusalem. The concept of Arab unity was forged in 1945 by Arab League as a collective response to conflict in Palestine and Zionist territorial designs. The first meeting of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) in Morocco in 1969 was held in the wake of 'criminal arson' perpetrated by Israel in August 1969

The danger of unconditional normalisation of relation with Israel, specially by those who have historically been staunch supporter of Palestinian rights, is that it will alienate popular support, foster anti-Americanism, spawn terrorists and deprive the Palestinians from a very valued support and lead pathetically to delegitimising their struggle for self-determination of their rights to statehood of their own.



Sharon-Musharraf: Narrowing the gap?



against Al Aqsa mosque in occupied East Jerusalem. Arab and other Muslim countries have been forcefully supporting Palestinian demand raised in the UN General Assembly and the Special Political Committee for an immediate end of the occupation of Palestinian territories and grant independent statehood to Palestine. Diplomatic recognition of Israel at this time could be seen as reconciling with the status quo of Israeli occupation and denial of Palestinian rights of self determination for an independent Palestine state.

The change of attitude towards Israel may be due to the Israeli propaganda for ending occupation as manifest in the withdrawal of Israeli settlers and troops from Gaza. Despite the withdrawal, the occupation remains as Israel controls the land and sea borders and air space of Gaza. Virtually the

entire 1.3 million Palestinians in Gaza will be confined to live in an open-air prison. Israel will relocate 9000 settlers evacuated from Gaza in the newly expropriated land in West Bank adding to the existing 430,000 Israeli settlers. Besides, the construction of the wall in West Bank, a symbol of apartheid and occupation, declared illegal by the World Court in Hague, separates Palestinians from their lands, divides their towns and families, disrupts their health care, transportation, agriculture and

Pakistan a front line state, the Trojan horse to fight America's war in Afghanistan against the Soviet Union earlier and the Taliban rule later has been more than adequately compensated by lifting of economic sanctions, lucrative offer of military aid, cancellation of debt payments and generous largesse of economic assistance. No wonder, Pakistan a trusted ally of US in its war on terror, under the apron strings of Washington as its strategic partner outside NATO, will recognise Israel at US behest and prodding. But Musharraf should look back at the fate of erstwhile favourites, president Ziaul Haq, president Suharto, President Marcos and the Shahinsha of Iran who were forsaken in cynical abandon when their usefulness to US was felt no longer essential. If US muscle flexing towards Iran's nuclear ambitions is any indication, it is a matter of time when America will tell Musharraf that it will not countenance Pakistan, a Muslim state, home to Taliban fugitives and Al Qaeda sympathisers, in possession of nuclear bomb. His political survival will depend on the choice he makes between the aspirations and pride of his people and the American pressure.

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It is significant that all those Arab countries and Pakistan who are willing to normalise relations with

Israel are self-imposed authoritarian or military regimes without any popular support but having special political, economic and military ties with the United States which is a patron Saint and chief sponsor of Israeli military dominance in the Middle East to serve US interests by uninterrupted supply of oil. Out of 80 US vetoes in the UN Security Council, 39 were for Israel, the largest recipient of US budget.

Creation of industrial zone sometimes require creating laws to govern its issues and activities. For example, Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Act of 1980 was created under which BEPZA was formed and EPZs came into being. The most important issues related with creation and management of Industrial Estates is creation of infrastructures and facilities of utilities and environment management. Port facilities, transportation facilities (roads, highways) and communication facilities (telephone), information technology (Internet, radio link), housing facilities (dormitory), utilities (gas, electricity, water), environment facilities (effluent treatment, industrial waste treatment, incineration etc.), security (police station) are all needed to set up and run an industrial estate.

Generally, the Authority of the Industrial Estates charges service charges and takes premium rates for the facilities created and maintained by them. BEPZA takes 10 per cent service charge on gas, electricity and water it manages from BGSU or Titas, PDB or DESA and WASA. Industrial plots are allotted against rents and sometimes pre-erected factory buildings are also available at higher rates. Many Industrial Estates make plots available on lease or freehold basis. Freehold arrangement enables investors to buy the plots in their names whereas under lease arrangement generally a long-term lease is given against rent.

Uninterrupted availability of utilities should be ensured in the first place because without utilities no production can take place. Environment issues are coming up with priority now-a-days and needed to be addressed as a pre-requisition for buyers' compliance and social demand recognised by countries under UN charter.

Industrial Estate Management Authorities should take up with significance the issues of utilities and environment and create a

SHAKIL MONZUR

INDUSTRIAL Estate Management has emerged under significant focus worldwide during last few decades. Different names of specialised industrial zones have become familiar by now. Free Trade Zone, Export Processing Zone, Duty Free Zone, Industrial Park, are some of them.

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Security is a vital issue for an industrial zone where hazardous activities take place and thousands of people work. Any troublesome incident or accident can claim many valuable lives in such places, which is densely populated. Industrial safety issues needs to be highlighted to avoid fire incidents, blasts of boilers, chemical disasters, and act prudently during natural disaster like cyclone, earth quake etc.



CEPZ: immediate attention of the authority needed.

production friendly environment. Chittagong Export Processing Zone (CEPZ) after about 20 years of its inception is still facing water shortage to run manufacturing activities. Sometimes it is so acute that even drinking water is not available. Almost all enterprises of CEPZ need to buy water from WASA by container.

There is no designated space or facilities where industrial wastes can be disposed here at CEPZ. Incineration (machine that burns out waste materials) is a must for industrial estate for burning hard waste materials and effluent treatment plant is necessary for treating liquid waste. Unfortunately none of these essential facilities have been created by BEPZA in CEPZ.

There remain many other issues that need immediate attention of the Authority (BEPZA) and government to facilitate the production and export form EPZs of

Bangladesh. In the ever-changing business environment of the world we need to adjust fast with the changes and requirements of the buyers to survive with dignity.

Simplification of customs rules and practices is another very important issue for the government for success of EPZs. We all know in EPZs, enterprises can import duty free raw materials and machinery and building materials. This is equally true for 100 per cent export oriented industries outside EPZ too. But there are many items that are needed for EPZ enterprises, which they intend to buy (not import) from local market. Such items include stationery, utensils, medicine, parts and spares, food, furniture, electrical appliances and equipment. But due to non-clarity only limited items are allowed by Customs again Value Added Tax (VAT) issue creates second-degree complications. Many items purchased from

local market are not supported by VAT receipt but Customs authority asks for that and enterprises face difficulties to comply Customs rules in this regard.

Sub-contract between enterprises within zones is a common affair. It is widely practiced by and between industries outside zone, that is, Duty and Tariff Area (DTA). In an EPZ it is allowed only after observation of formalities that are burdensome. Since all the factories are within the Duty Free Zone and inside the fence from where nothing can go out without valid papers such formalities may be considered to be simple.

Security is a vital issue for an industrial zone where hazardous activities take place and thousands of people work. Any troublesome incident or accident can claim many valuable lives in such places, which is densely populated. Industrial safety issues needs to be highlighted to avoid fire incidents, blasts of boilers, chemical disasters, and act prudently during natural disaster like cyclone, earth quake etc. To prevent entry of undesired elements who may plan for destruction within or around the industrial zones strong surveillance should be guaranteed. If any unwanted destructive devastation takes place, the country will lose huge foreign investment and people will lose employment.

Labour problem has already struck EPZs of the country with the introduction of Workers Representative Welfare Committee (WRWC) under a newly created law. This law, however, allows forming WRWC to represent workers group to the Management of the companies and to the BEPZA as an official and legal body to discuss issues of mutual benefits especially those concerning working conditions at the plant level. Though it was said that WRWC is not a form of Trade Union but it is a pre-stage of Trade Union, which by the provisions of the new law will come into existence after October 2006. This phase is described as limited function Trade Union. Practically we are seeing that many enterprises seem to face problems when WRWC attempts to act as Trade Union. So BEPZA, and government should handle this delicate affair with great care just from now.

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