

Impending power crisis

Immediate short term measures needed

We must face the facts. In so far as the power situation is concerned we are in for a very hot and dark summer. This is not to sound alarmist but to wake up the authority to the very real dangers of a looming power crisis. In spite of the unwillingness of some in the relevant ministries to counteract the possibility, the consensus about the power sector problems and the way out of it that we witnessed amongst the participants of a recent Daily Star roundtable demands immediate action to implement short-term measures to alleviate the likely sufferings.

However, while we understand that there are no quick fix solutions to the mess that have accumulated in the power and energy sector particularly in the last five years, that will cut very little ice with the public, particularly the farmers, with the new crop season round the corner. Thus, immediate measures must be undertaken to tide over the urgent situation in the next six months.

We are glad to see that the government has initiated certain temporary measures like load management as one of the steps to save power. But we feel that there are concomitant measures and simultaneous actions that must be initiated also for the generation of power on a very immediate basis. There are many options open to the government; establishing small-scale generation unit as well as involving the private sector to undertake power generation project are but a few alternatives the government should seriously consider.

But perhaps the immediate measure to regain loss of revenue as well as save on power is to reduce the non-technical system loss, a euphemism for theft of power. It was horrendous to learn that in some areas in Dhaka city such losses can be as high as 50 - 60 percent. Preventing the non-technical system loss can give us as much as 200 mw of power.

In addition, the government must do two things immediately, we feel. The government must come out with a white paper and let the people know actual situation obtaining in the power sector. It must also provide the people with a road map to improve the power supply before the onset of the summer season.

Parties and move against criminality

Now is the time for a pro-active role

We welcome the public announcement by both the Awami League and the BNP to distance themselves from the criminal elements within their organizations. We believe that the positions adopted by the two major political parties reflect, in broad measure, the sentiments of Bangladesh's people where handling corruption is concerned. There is hardly any denying that the crusading zeal, if one may call it that, with which the caretaker administration has gone into the job of cleansing society of corruption has struck a chord in the public mind. The publication of a list of fifty allegedly corrupt politicians, many of whom are already behind bars, has been one more step towards convincing people that the authorities mean business.

If now the political parties agree with the caretaker government that the corrupt need to be dealt with under the law, nothing could be more satisfying for the nation. Corruption and criminality can never be part of any democratic political process; and given that belief, we are of the opinion that the nation's political parties ought to begin a process of distancing themselves from individuals who have sullied their own as well as their organisations' reputation in the last sixteen years. There is, however, a pertinent question which may arise here. It is simply this: in all the years elected governments have been in office, why were the corrupt in them and around them not checked or brought to justice? One response, again not a very credible one, might be that all political governments have their own compulsions to deal with. But there comes the irony. If a government armed with a popular mandate fails to uphold the cause of the people, where does a nation go for true and selfless leadership? The many tasks the present team of caretakers has taken upon itself are responsibilities which logically and constitutionally should have been carried out by elected governments. That, unfortunately, has not been the case in Bangladesh. Indeed, a cursory survey of the past decade and a half will perhaps make people think, for good reason, that political parties have conveniently ignored one another's corruption committed in office. Something of mutualty was there since neither the Awami League nor the BNP seriously went into investigating corruption in high places.

But let the present be an opportune time for the parties to make amends. That job can be done through identifying the bad eggs in their baskets, go for a cleansing process and eventually purge themselves of the men and women who have given them a bad name. The country will stand to reap dividends from such a proactive role.

ME peace process: Stagnated by design



M ABDUL HAFIZ

PERSPECTIVES

Even as the second Intifada is yet to peter out, the exiled political leader of Hamas, Khaled Mashal talked of a third Intifada to be unleashed if establishment of a Palestine state is not effected within six months. Regardless of how historians choose to chronicle these uprisings, they will always be remembered by most Palestinians, as well as by the people of conscience everywhere, as a fight for freedom, human rights and justice.

It is 2000, the Palestinians' anger at Ariel Sharon's swagger in Al-aqsa mosque erupted into second Intifada. With that ended the tumultuous road that started from the Madrid peace conference of 1991.

It wound through several phases of the now infamous Oslo accord and finally upto the disastrous camp David-II talks under the auspices of the then US president, Bill Clinton, who himself attempted to coerce late Yasser Arafat into submission for accepting an unjust peace.

Eban came and eclipsed the international quartet's road map for peace. But the second Intifada is still in progress, even without garnering anything worthwhile.

The calculation of the neo-con patrons of Israel that a US military victory in Iraq would itself compel the Palestinians to accept whatever terms for peace Israel would offer to them has, however, gone haywire because that victory in Iraq has proved to be illusory.

Yet Israel's contingency plan was built upon this calculation as she embarked upon the destruction of Hizbullah who, however, in a sharp riposte repulsed the aggressors.

So, after having failed to achieve a decisive victory in Iraq, or to intimidate Iran and destroy

Sadly, there is nothing spectacular, nothing grand in its objective.

Recognition as a people is a demand for which the Palestinians have struggled for a few generations. At times, Israel completely denied the existence of the Palestinians as a separate nation with exclusive rights and demands.

Golda Maier, in her June 15, 1969, interview with the Sunday Times ominously stated: "There was no such thing as Palestinians. They never existed." It was a direct threat to the Palestinians' identity, with the terrible prospect of their being erased from history.

They keep wondering how a popular rebellion of an historically oppressed group of people could foster so much corruption, disunity and infighting as Fatah and Hamas are now steeped in? How could the same uprising, that fought for peace, justice and life, inspire death and suicide?

The momentous events surrounding the second Intifada have been dissected by scores of political observers and analysts, only to find that the Palestinians' actions including this one, were, at best, manipulative, directed from behind the scenes by Palestinian politicians vying for mere concessions from a vulnerable, beleaguered state of Israel.

In the post cold-war world where the role of the US, the world's sole superpower, as final arbiter of things is, indeed, crucial, particularly when her comprador ally Israel is a party to the conflict.

Yet, not only is she suspect in

the eyes of the Palestinians for her

clear bias toward Israel, a US

administration in thrall of a neocon

cabal and the extraordinary lobby-

ing effort of the American Israeli

ally.

The international quartet's

Political Action committee, cannot play an honest broker with integrity.

However, in the past, she perfunctorily nudged the concerned quarters for initiating actions for Palestinian statehood, at least to allay the concerns of her Arab allies. Now, that effort is also in limbo.

The last known American initiative for Palestinian statehood had been the proposition for an international quartet's road map for peace to establish a Palestinian state.

It was accepted by the Palestinians but largely rejected by the Israelis, who now refuse to have any contact with the Palestinian Authority because the last election brought Hamas -- considered terrorists by Israel -- into power. So a deadlock persists.

Nevertheless, there are several other options which are consistent with the key UN resolutions supported by both, the US and Israel.

Then there is official American policy since 1967, strengthened by agreements consummated by Israeli leaders and governments in 1978 and 1993. The Arab league's documents, with an offer to recognise Israel in 2002, had also been a landmark step.

The international quartet's

roadmap is still alive. Any one of them, picked up and processed in due earnestness by the concerned quarters, can still lead to Palestinian statehood.

Not only is an initiative lacking -- even summits and negotiations initiated by any quarter would again be dominated by the Israelis from their position of strength.

They would invariably dictate the terms of peace and circumvent international and meaningful interpretation of those terms -- with the tacit support, or even active participation of the US, its patronising ally.

In the same way they had succeeded on earlier occasions in extracting Palestinian concessions without halting settlement build-up or easing military restrictions.

The UN has also been an irrelevant world body as far as the Palestinians are concerned. Former US ambassador to the UN, John Negroponte, often advised Arab delegations not to bother presenting drafts of UN resolutions to the security council, for they would always be vetoed if they failed to condemn Palestinian terrorism.

Now the US vetoed in defence of Israel stand at 85, allowing the latter to pursue whatever destructive policy it wishes to with total impunity.

It is to be understood that the ideological composition of the Palestinian leadership is truly irrelevant as far as Israel's colonial policies are concerned, for Israel's policy was altered little before Hamas' advent to power in January 2006 if compared to its decidedly colonial approach under Arafat or his successor, Mahmoud Abbas.

There is always reason to brand Palestinians, always a reason for why Israel's favoured status quo must not be disturbed. And it's this same status quo that continues to suffocate any attempt to negotiate a just settlement of the conflict.

Amid this deliberate stagnation, the Palestinian people are left with no option but to revolt. In fact, Israeli aggression has crossed the traditional boundaries of daily murders and small-scale land confiscation.

Under the deceptive disengagement from Gaza, West Bank lands are being expropriated while Israel's imprisonment of apartheid wall, illegal according ICIJ decision of July 2004, is swallowing up whole towns and villages.

This reality, as history teaches, is only a prelude to another popular response which is already echoing in the angry chants of substitute farmers whose lands are being effectively annexed by the encroaching Israeli wall.

Even as the second Intifada is yet to peter out, the exiled political leader of Hamas, Khaled Mashal talked of a third Intifada to be unleashed if establishment of a Palestine state is not effected within six months. Regardless of how historians choose to chronicle these uprisings, they will always be remembered by most Palestinians, as well as by the people of conscience everywhere, as a fight for freedom, human rights and justice.

It will remain a loud reminder that popular resistance is still an option -- and one to be reckoned with at that.

Brig (retd) Hafiz is former DG of BIIS.

Open letter: Views from Canberra

Finally, we all are well aware that ex-ruling-political parties are suffering from transparency, honesty and accountability, and intra-party democracy and nepotism. We hope that Dr. Yunus's new party constitution would not give any concession in these regards. We are aware of his honesty, simplicity, fairness and devotion to work and hope that his colleagues will follow him up.

ANAMUL BHUIYAN MUKUL writes from Canberra

THE initiative taken by Nobel laureate Dr. Yunus to form a new political party has touched the expatriates living in Canberra.

It is worth to mention here that a good number of highly professional expatriate living in Canberra are in touch with Bangladesh and are well concern about the well beings of Bangladesh including political parties.

I have a couple of friends to whom I chat everyday since September last year and analyse the web-based news from different dailies everyday.

The general feeling of all concerned Bangladeshi-Cambrian is that current Caretaker Government (CG) was necessary for us.

Though it is not wise to guilt all ex-ruling party leaders but one cannot ignore the question raised

in recent time on some nonsense corruptions, accountability, bringing neutrality in EC and government mechanism to hold free and fair election and mal-handling of CG headed by President.

Politically concerned expatriates living in Canberra have expressed similar views irrespective of their political support.

In response to Mr. Yunus's open letter, I would like say 'thank you' for his interest in politics at the time when our existing leaders are fails to reach in consensus to hold a creditable and acceptable general election, a core fundamental issue of democracy.

We want to see alternative leaderships in Bangladesh as most of the ex-ruling leaders are seriously suffering from transparency, honesty, accountability, and intra-party democracy and nepotism.

As dishonesty prevails every corner of life it is hard to start from bottom, so we want a see a top-

up approach to bring transparency and accountability in political, govt. and semi-govt. leaderships first.

In regards to his open letter to the citizen of Bangladesh, I want to mention that his initiatives and effort would only be recognise by the sensible people of Bangladesh if he can bring a difference in forming your new party compared to existing one.

As an expatriate-citizen, I would like to mention here following issues that we want to see in the new party.

• We want to see a solid selection criterion for National and MP level leaders for the party. I would suggest that National and MP level leader must be well educated and self-sufficient and must be declare their source of income that they live on.

• We want to see a guideline on how the party would meet up the operational cost. I would suggest a yearly fee of

Tk.1000 from all financial-members of the party to meet up the operational cost. Annual financial report must be published and audited. We also want to see the party will seek financial member from the citizen with guidelines in a transparent manner.

• We want to see a transparent and well-organised party central office. I would suggest that party central office should be computerised and a couple of full-time customer-focused employee should be recruited.

The salary of the central office employee would be paid from financial-member's contributions. We don't want to see another pocket based party. Central office employee would enable to attend to any query as per customer service rules of the party.

• We want to see 300-constituency-committee (300-CC) in the new party in line with 300-constituency headed by an honest, well-educated and self-sufficient person who will able to contest in upcoming elections. Head of these committees must be register as a financial-member of the party by paying yearly fees regularly.

• We want to see proposed finan-

cial-members or other form of pre-listed members would elect the Party Chief, Deputy Party Chief and Treasurer through a ballot. Ballot must be held in every two year. Party Chief will select panel of fixed-number national committee/shadow minister in consultation with Deputy Party Chief and Treasurer and will distribute the portfolio among the national committee members.

• (If elected) we want to see the party will create a logical and/or physical new administrative structure to run the country. I would suggest dividing the country into a 300-Parliamentary-Administrative-District (300-PAD) by reorganising/merging current Districts and Upazillas in line with the Parliament seats. These 300-PAD could be further strengthened by strengthening current Unions, Parishad and current Divisions. In this way we can evaluate the performance of the MPs, local leaders and govt servant and services more accurately.

• (If elected) we want to see the party will set up a computerised-office in proposed 300-PAD to involve elected MP in monitoring and developing

development activities instead of lobbying to senior leaders to make money. They must answer in the parliament if any question rose from any constituent. The party would create an opportunity to have such question-answer session in the parliament.

• We want to see new party would educate all MP-level leaders by providing all sorts of statistics of the constituency. The party would educate all MP-level leaders how to prepare a need based project by analysing local data. As a performance measurement each MP-level leader must develop a small-project for the poor every year and will raise fund locally to implement such project developed by them.

Finally, we all are well aware that ex-ruling-political parties are suffering from transparency, honesty and accountability, and intra-party democracy and nepotism.

We hope that Dr. Yunus's new party constitution would not give any concession in these regards.

We are aware of his honesty, simplicity, fairness and devotion to work and hope that his colleagues will follow him up.

America's China worries

The Chinese, for their part, should realize that the primary impact of their Asat test is to have shot themselves in the foot diplomatically. They need to renounce any further such provocations and reaffirm their commitment to the peaceful uses of space. They need to resist attempts to excuse their actions as mere reactions to US space policies and programs.

JOAN JOHNSON

WITH their recent successful anti-satellite weapons test, the Chinese destroyed not only a satellite, but also demolished the myth that a new space arms race is not looming.

That myth was most recently promulgated in statements by US administration officials who, in explaining the 2006 US National Space Policy, argued that space arms-control agreements are not needed because there is no arms race in space, nor is one likely to emerge.

Rarely are such myths destroyed in so clear, unambiguous and unfortunate ways. But the Chinese demonstration that a space arms race is alive and well does not mean the US has to jump in.

With its foolhardy test, China may have removed any incentive

for the US to show reticence about its own anti-satellite weapons (ASAT) programs.

Since the 1980s, American officials have observed a kind of taboo on admitting to ASAT capabilities. Now, there could well be pressure for America to admit to and strut a similar capability in order to overcome specious arguments that somehow the US has been "overtaken in space."

The Chinese will almost certainly react with similar vows that they will not allow space to become the 51st American state, and in no time both nations will be off to the space races.

In its defense, China will likely claim that American policy is hypocritical on the question of weaponizing space. While there may be some truth to that, nothing excuses the irresponsible stunt they pulled last month.

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details to the Foreign Ministry so as to allow Chinese diplomats a certain plausible deniability about the whole business.