

## Chief Adviser speaks of mid-July roadmap

*Reiteration of election plan reassuring*

**C**HIEF Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed, in an interview with the Voice of America, has reaffirmed his government's plan to hold a credible general election by the end of 2008. The CA spoke of the Election Commission announcing a roadmap to elections in mid-July, a point in time earlier indicated by the EC for the purpose. But come as it does from the CA, it has the ring of reinforced authenticity which is very reassuring.

What should practically be the components of the roadmap? From the public point of view, there are essentially two aspects to it. The first of course relates to how the Election Commission is going about the task of preparing an authentic voter list. The pilot project it initiated recently in Sreepur has now ended on a generally positive note. To be sure, there were some pitfalls, such as the quality of performance by primary school teachers left a room for improvement -- as far as the replication of the project goes. But these problems can be overcome fairly quickly, given a sense of urgency. A second aspect regarding the proposed roadmap concerns the issue of political party reforms as also electoral reforms. A wholesale restructuring and internal democratisation of the parties are certainly in order. As for the EC, the emphasis it has lately placed on the registration, funding, et al, of the parties holds out the prospects of transparency in the working of political organisations. Party reforms and electoral reforms are, in an important way, an integrated draft package the implementation of which will help ensure free and fair electoral processes by way of institutionalising democracy.

Everything said and done, though, the extent to which the road map will guarantee progression to an election framework depends on how soon the government plans to lift the ban on indoor politics. The Awami League, the BNP and the Jatiya Party have a point when they insist on a withdrawal of the ban prior to their participation in any dialogue with the Election Commission. Since the CA has already spoken of a mid-July roadmap from the EC, it is advisable that the government lift the ban on indoor politics either prior to or not much later than that as a way of ascertaining political opinion on the various components of the roadmap. The bottom line is that the credibility upon which the roadmap will rest can only come if the political leadership is able to contribute substantively to it through talking to the Election Commission.

## Dhaka in 2020

*A daunting demographic challenge*

**T**WO research documents, one based on the World Bank survey and the other prepared by the UNFPA, gave an alarming future projection of the population growth in Dhaka city and the pressure on its amenities it will exert. According to these documents, at the current rate of increase of population, the metropolis will have to accommodate twenty million people by the year 2020. The present estimate of Dhaka's population is one (1) crore and the steady annual migration of about 3 to 4 lakh job-seeking people to Dhaka from the rural areas will eventually double the size of population by 2020.

Surely for a resource-constrained country and a capital city with its limitations, rapid growth of population will spell disaster for the existing infrastructure like roads, sewer system, accommodation facilities and utility services. It is widely known that the agencies concerned are finding the task of meeting the current demand daunting; how would they cope with the situation in 2020 remains a big question in everyone's mind.

It is conspicuously evident that because of shortage of proper housing facilities in the city, a large number of people are forced to take shelter in the shanties where health, hygiene and sanitation conditions are at their worst.

With such a bleak scenario looming in the background, we believe a lot has to be done to prepare the city to withstand the pressure of another one crore more people. Alongside further expansion and modernisation of the infrastructure of the capital city to meet the future requirements, private and public investors will have to be encouraged to invest in the rural areas to create employment opportunities. One positive step would be to extend IT facilities to the rural areas to generate self-employment possibilities for the local youths. Land distribution among the landless poor and victims of river erosion is another step that experts recommend to stop rural-urban migration.

We believe, decentralisation of power following the strengthening of the local government system will go a long way in building growth centres all over the country, thereby stemming the tide of influx of rural people into the urban areas.

## Choices to be made



KAZI ANWARUL MASUD

### GOING DEEPER

Indeed, there are gaps in such a road map because of the inherent contradiction between growth and egalitarian distribution of social goods. But when hard choices have to be made, one has to concede in some areas to gain in other areas. Only Bangladeshi, and Bangladeshi alone, should make the choices, as these would not only affect their future but the future of the coming generations as well.

**C**IVILISATION demands that the people of the world be assured of their rights enshrined in various national and international covenants. Mechanisms exist to punish the aberrant in case of irrational behaviour of the ruling elite in any country. But it is easier said than done.

When the Nato forces intervened in Kosovo to save the Kosovars from the genocide by the Serbs the Russians were not happy, and the Nato intervention had to take place without UN sanction, though, later, UNSC authorised stationing of Nato forces in Kosovo. The invasion of Iraq by the US, though not an appropriate example of morality at its best, did free the Iraqis and the neighbouring Arabs from the erratic behavior and muscling of Saddam Hussein.

But in the case of Burma, the military rule spanning over decades, and the internment of Aung San Suu Kyi for years together, have not produced

international reaction to right the wrongs being done to the Burmese people by the military junta by denying the people their inalienable right to choose their rulers. UN sanctions prohibiting issuance of visas to the henchmen of the junta, and denying financial benefits to them, just have not worked. Asean and neighbouring countries continue to deal with the Burmese government for their own selfish ends. The Japanese appear to favour engagement over coercion in dealing with the Burmese authorities.

This essay is not about Burma or Milosovic but about the conditions that are necessary for people to engage in participatory democracy. It has to be clearly understood that casting a vote once every four or five years cannot be the be all and end all of democracy.

This exercise, which is expensive (e.g. US), or time consuming (e.g. India), is aimed at providing certain services (social

goods) to the people, and must have a structural mechanism to overthrow those people who are unable to make good the promises they made at the time of election.

One could think of the recall vote that exists in California, under which the voters can recall their representative from the assembly if they are not satisfied with his/her performance. The recent events in Bangladesh have amply proved that lack of accountability of the government, and lack of democracy within the political parties, can lead to catastrophe. That was averted at the eleventh hour through the proclamation of a state of emergency in the country.

The question to be asked is how we reached a state of nihilism, understood through Nietzsche's explanation of devaluation of highest values due to secularisation of society. The events of the recent past have shown that our politicians

had put their trust in the ethic of absolute end, i.e. the end justifies the means, condemning the society to political and moral impotence. In our case, nihilism resulted from conscious rejection of moral values.

The task of basing our society on moral principles, not those grounded in any particular religion or sectarian belief but the ones people have believed from time immemorial, will not be easy. Given the fact that to accelerate our economic development a degree of capital accumulation would be necessary, which may not necessarily be done through legal ways (Joseph Kennedy's accumulation of wealth during the Prohibition period in the US readily comes to mind), may give rise to contradiction between strict observation of the laws and the necessity of capital accumulation for furtherance of economic development.

The description, by Yves Menay (La Corruption de la

independent Palestine. The Zionist "divide and rule" policy has come into full play in the occupied areas of Palestine.

The Sharm el Sheik Summit of the four leaders on June 25 -- Hosni Mubarak (Egypt), King Abdullah II (Jordan), Ehud Olmert (Israel) and Mahmoud Abbas (Palestinian Authority) -- was clearly designed to bolster Mahmoud Abbas. The release of Palestinian tax funds by Israel -- some \$600 million -- for Mahmoud Abbas is a clear evidence of that policy. The funds were frozen by Israel when Hamas won the PLC elections in January 2006. The West has already recognized the Fayyad government and has pledged all support to him. Ismail Haniyeh is in the doghouse -- at least for now.

Palestinians in Gaza feel that Abbas has betrayed the Palestinian cause. Haniyeh reacted angrily to the release of funds to Abbas saying that the money belonged to all Palestinians and not just those in the West Bank. He castigated the Summit saying that only resistance shall achieve the Palestinian nation. The question is whether Abbas will be able to re-establish control and spend the money in Gaza. Gaza, now known as an open-air-prison, is in a critically desperate situation. To discredit Hamas, Abbas may be tempted to spend

never allow the two factions to unite. It can handle the ineffective Qassam rockets with impunity with guided missile attacks against Hamas "terrorists" in Gaza -- and the first likely target could be Ismail Haniyeh. Driven into a corner Hamas may be forced to launch attacks on Israel, which in turn shall invite Israeli incursions into Gaza leading to the destruction of Hamas.

What is distressing is that the great Arab League, which was created in 1945 to resolve the Palestinian issue, sits on the sidelines issuing useless statements of intentions and not getting the Arab countries together to act for a just and durable settlement of the crisis.

The Sharm Summit was not designed to talk about the future of Palestine or the Road Map. It has achieved nothing except the open Israeli support for Abbas. The Palestinian movement seems to have lost its sense of direction. Important questions like whether the PA represents the aspirations of the Palestinians and can carry their people towards their cherished goal of nationhood loom larger than ever. The reason why Palestinians have clung to Hamas is because of their disillusionment with the Palestinian Authority.

For the West and Israel nothing

can be more gratifying than the current situation in Palestine. Israel is free of worries. The fraticide between Fatah and Hamas has left a gaping wound, which Israel will exploit to its advantage. Only Bangladeshi, and Bangladeshi alone, should make the choices, as these would not only affect their future but the future of the coming generations as well.

defeat of communist ideology and incessant globalization have put countries like Bangladesh, a chronicle of underdevelopment at best of times, in a situation where the country with built-in disadvantages has to compete with others who are already far better placed than it is.

Therefore, we have to weigh carefully the advantages and disadvantages of practicing liberal democracy, which has effectively meant "missing people" after the elections are over in Bangladesh, vis-à-vis a transparent and accountable democracy under the eyes of regulatory institutions that would call the aberrant to account whenever corruptive and collusive faults beyond the threshold of tolerance are detected.

Indeed, there are gaps in such a road map because of the inherent contradiction between growth and egalitarian distribution of social goods. But when hard choices have to be made, one has to concede in some areas to gain in other areas. Only Bangladeshi, and Bangladeshi alone, should make the choices, as these would not only affect their future but the future of the coming generations as well.

Kazi Anwarul Masud is a former Secretary and Ambassador.

## Democratic experiment in Palestine collapses

For the West and Israel nothing could be more gratifying than the current situation in Palestine. Israel is free of worries. The fraticide between Fatah and Hamas has left a gaping wound, which Israel will exploit to its advantage. It will never allow the two factions to unite. It can handle the ineffective Qassam rockets with impunity with guided missile attacks against Hamas "terrorists" in Gaza -- and the first likely target could be Ismail Haniyeh.

### MAHMOOD HASAN

**T**HE Second Palestinian Intifada has yet to come full circle. The recent bloody civil-war-like violence in Gaza between the Hamas and Fatah supporters has completely shattered the democratic experiment in Palestine.

Since the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) elections in January 2006 the two factions have been at odds with each other. While the "unity" government was dominated by Hamas -- the "Preventive Security Force" (PSF) was under the control of Fatah's Mohammed Dahlan, the Security Chief of Mahmoud Abbas. The body (Hamas) was not in control of the army (PSF). It was a classic recipe for disaster.

Weeks of unrest for supremacy between Hamas and Fatah and brutal bloodletting in Gaza have left scores dead and hundreds injured. Gaza is now under full control of Hamas -- law and order restored. Fatah is

in charge of the West Bank, where Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas has his Headquarters in Ramallah. When Hamas overran Fatah strongholds in Gaza on June 15, Abbas dismissed the Hamas dominated Palestinian Authority, led by Ismail Haniyeh. A state of emergency was also declared in Gaza and the West Bank. Mahmoud Abbas appointed Western educated Dr. Salam Fayyad as the prime minister of the emergency government.

The invisible and visible hands, which are engaged in the

Middle East puppet show have been laid bare. Hamas, a Sunni militant group, draws its support from Shia Iran, the Lebanese Hezbollah, Syria and the Muslim Brotherhood spread across the

entire region. Fatah, the moderate Sunni group, gets direct backing from neighbouring

Egypt and Jordan, as also from Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States -- all close allies of the US.

The capitulation of Mahmoud Abbas under pressure from the

West has effectively terminated

the democratic experiment in

Palestine. Not because Hamas has failed, but because it was not allowed to function. The

Palestinians do indeed value

democracy and demonstrated in

January 2006 that they too can

conduct free and fair elections,

under the hawkish eyes of international observers. But once the

election results were announced

the West turned its back, rejecting

the legally constituted

Palestinian Government led by

Hamas. Hamas is accused of

being a "terrorist" outfit and

every possible sanction and

embargo were piled on it so that it capitulates and disintegrates.

The Zionist design was to

fragment the Palestinian movement

into several factions, pitch

one against the other -- instigate

a power struggle and weaken

the movement to such an extent

that it cannot articulate its

demands forcefully. That goal

has been achieved by the

Zionists. Gazans, completely

deprived of all minimum basic

needs of life, may now be forced

to think twice on the idea of an

independent Palestine. The

Zionist "divide and rule" policy

has come into full play in the

occupied areas of Palestine.

The Sharm el Sheik Summit

of the four leaders on June 25 --

Hosni Mubarak (Egypt), King

Abdullah II (Jordan), Ehud

Olmert (Israel) and Mahmoud

Abbas (Palestinian Authority) --

was clearly designed to bolster

Mahmoud Abbas. The release of

Palestinian tax funds by Israel --

some \$600 million -- for

Mahmoud Abbas is a clear evi-

dence of that policy. The funds

were frozen by Israel when

Hamas won the PLC elections in

January 2006. The West has

already recognized the Fayyad

government and has pledged all

support to him. Ismail Haniyeh

is in the doghouse -- at least for

now.

Palestinians in Gaza feel that

Abbas has betrayed the

Palestinian cause. Haniyeh

reacted angrily to the release of

funds to Abbas saying that the

money belonged to all

Palestinians and not just those

in the West Bank. He castigated

the Summit saying that only

resistance shall achieve the

Palestinian nation. The question

is whether Abbas will be able to

re-establish control and spend

the money in Gaza. Gaza, now