

Segregation and settlement in Palestinian Occupied Territories

The real reason is to clear land for settlements, bypass roads and related infrastructure. Under Israeli military law, Palestinian families evicted from their homes are not entitled to alternative housing or compensation. The result is that many then face homelessness and destitution.

IRENE KHAN

MY taxi sped down the double lane highway from Tel Aviv and arrived in Jericho in the West Bank of the Palestinian Occupied Territories in just an hour. Very different from my last visit in 2006 when I was held up for 4 hours at an Israeli military post.

Travel has eased for foreigners -- but not for Palestinians. The Israeli army mans some 37 checkpoints on the border between the West Bank and Israel and another 59 inside the West Bank. Freedom of movement for Palestinians is regarded by Israel not as a right, but as a privilege to be retracted at will.

Even within the West Bank, Israel restricts the access of Palestinians to many areas. Palestinians are not allowed to use the same roads as Israelis. On the highway from Jerusalem to Jericho I could see only cars with Israeli registration plates. This is because only Israelis and foreigners are allowed to use this route. Palestinian cars must drive on other, more circuitous and less well-maintained roads.

Palestinians say it is apartheid. Israel says the segregation is necessary for the security of the Jewish settlements.

The Fourth Geneva Convention prohibits an occupying power from transferring its own citizens to the occupied territory. Nevertheless, since 1967 Israel has established over 121 settlements in the West Bank on land that it has seized or expropriated or considered as public land. It has built another 12 settlements on land that it annexed in 1967 adjacent to east Jerusalem. In addition, there are about 100 or so "unrecognised" Jewish settlements or outposts in the West Bank.

Israel provides generous financial benefits and tax breaks to encourage people to become settlers. In the last ten years the Jewish settler population in the West Bank has trebled to around 500,000 (while the Palestinian population in the same area is 2.5 million).

Underlying the concept of settlements is the Zionist vision of re-claiming what they see as the historic homeland of all Jews. The consequences on the human rights of Palestinians are severe.

The settlements -- including built up areas, municipal areas and regional councils -- cover 42% of the land of the West Bank. Palestinians are either totally

banned from accessing the land or can enter it only with special permission and for limited purposes.

In the interests of settlements, restrictions have been placed on almost every aspect of Palestinian life, from movement, building homes, farming land and carrying out economic activities to accessing water and sewage treatment.

To give one example, many Palestinian homes have been demolished by the Israeli authorities, ostensibly because they had no planning permission (ignoring the fact that no planning permission will be granted to them if they apply). The real reason is to clear land for settlements, bypass roads and related infrastructure.

Under Israeli military law, Palestinian families evicted from their homes are not entitled to alternative housing or compensation. The result is that many then face homelessness and destitution.

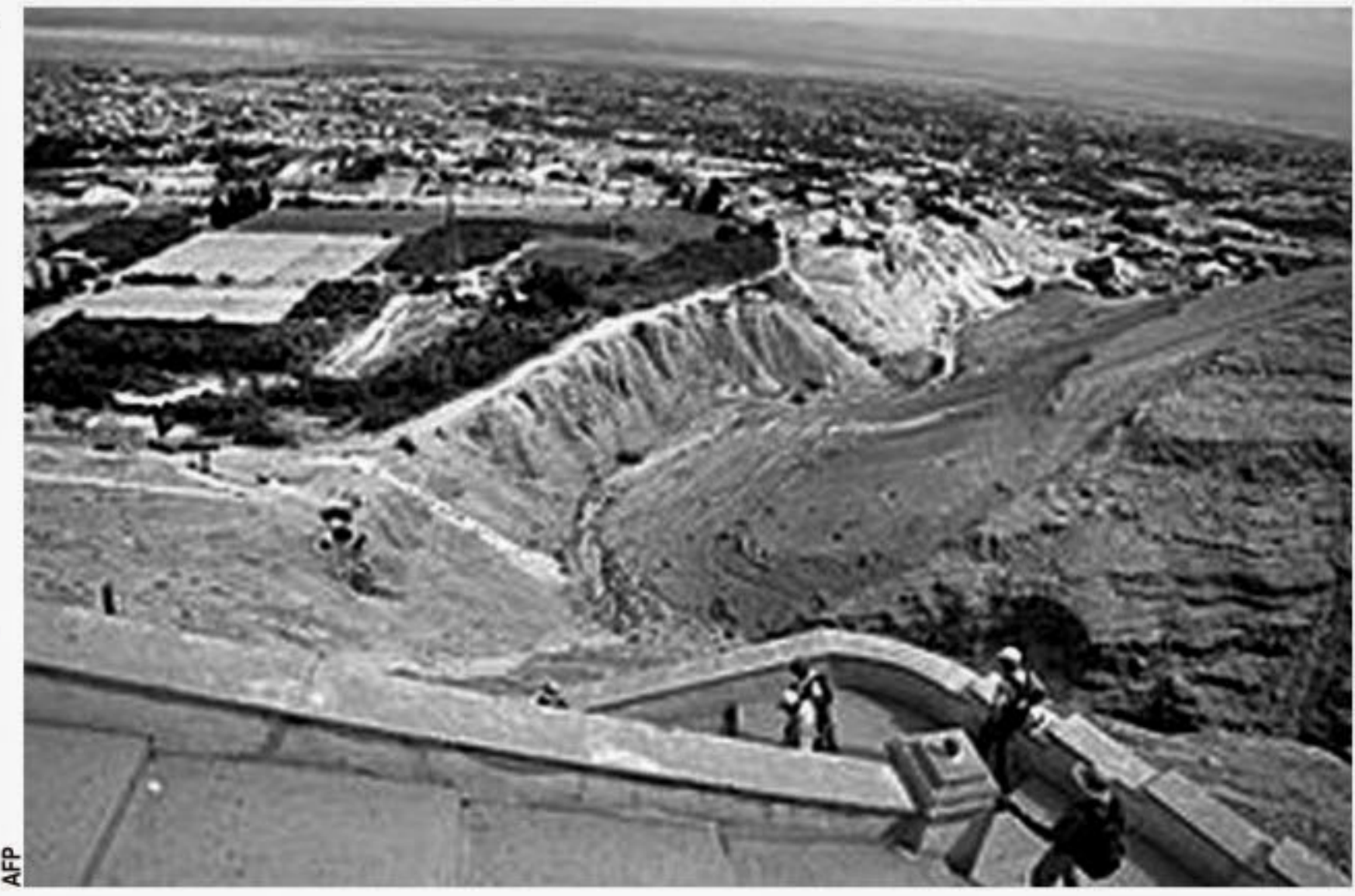
To give another example, the Dead Sea lies partly in Israel and Jordan and partly in the West Bank. It is a major international tourist attraction in Israel and Jordan, but brings no revenue to the Palestinians. In fact, Palestinians are not even allowed access to the Dead Sea along the West Bank. The entire adjacent land area has been designated as a Jewish settlement regional council, under the control of Israeli settlers, who carry out and benefit from tourism and other economic activities such as salt extraction.

The Israeli authorities are building a 700 km long barrier, ostensibly to protect its borders along the West Bank, but in reality running deep into Palestinian territory so as to annex those parts of the West Bank where the settlements are located. Cutting through many Palestinian villages, the barrier has separated farmers from their lands and orchards, destroyed their livelihood and impoverished them.

Israel has refused to accept the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice that the barrier is illegal.

The Palestinians are governed by military law while the settlers enjoy all the benefits of Israeli democracy (and some additional privileges).

The Occupation has produced a regime of segregation and discrimination in which Palestinians are grossly disadvantaged, not just in terms of movement,



Jericho.

livelihood and land, but also access to justice, due process and protection from violence.

When Palestinians attack Jewish settlers, the Israeli authorities invoke all means at their disposal -- even some that are unlawful by international standards -- to arrest and bring suspects to trial. Those convicted by the military courts receive harsh sentences. By contrast, when Israeli civilians attack Palestinians, the authorities either turn a blind eye or are lax in investigating and lenient in sentencing.

How can there be peace when there is no respect for human rights, no accountability for human rights violations?

That question was posed by one of the participants at the meeting of the UN-sponsored International Women's Commission in Jericho, which I had come to attend.

Established by the UN and composed of equal numbers of Palestinian, Israeli and "international" women, the Commission seeks political action to achieve a just and sustainable peace to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict.

The Commission was meeting against the background of a political stalemate in the US-sponsored peace talks, after Israel announced it would lift of the moratorium on settlements, and the Palestinian Authority refused to join the talks without a moratorium in place.

Our prognosis was somber. Settlements are destroying the viability of a future Palestinian state and endangering the peace process. The extremists are squeezing the moderates out in both Israel and Palestine. Time is running out.

In Israel a right wing government has taken a hawkish line, continuing the siege of Gaza, rejecting UN reports of war crimes, and maintaining its stand on settlements. The democratic space for dissent and moderate views has shrunk

in an environment of heightened nationalism and religious fervour (which recently led the government to demand that all new citizens must swear allegiance to Israel as a "Jewish state").

On the Palestinian side, the continued siege of Gaza and the restrictions in the West Bank are creating an untenable situation in which the moderate Palestinian leadership is losing ground to Hamas and others with extremist views. There is growing disillusionment with the Palestinian Authority amidst reports of corruption and mismanagement.

The Women's Commission concluded its meeting with renewed determination to mobilise public opinion in Israel, Palestine and around the world, particularly in Europe and the US, on the urgent need to halt settlements, end Occupation, and establish an independent Palestine as the best strategy for peace and security in the region.

As my taxi drove out of Jericho, I looked back at this city of great historical and religious significance. Situated well below sea level, just miles from the Dead Sea, it is the lowest permanently inhabited site on earth, and one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities of the world.

It features in the Bible as the site of the first battle of the Israelites during their conquest of Canaan (the Semitic name for this region). According to the narrative, the walls of Jericho fell after Joshua's Israelite army marched around the city blowing their trumpets.

The barriers to peace in the Middle East are unlikely to fall as readily. My taxi climbed steeply up towards Jerusalem, but it was nowhere near as steep a challenge as the Middle peace process.

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Heightened disorder in garment sector

A bad omen as placement of orders buoyant

WE are constrained to comment on the ongoing violence in the garments sector, for the second day in a row, as we are aghast at the scale of violence and lawlessness breaking out even after months since the resolution of the minimum salary issue. This was to take effect in November, 2010.

Aside from the damage wrought on Friday and Saturday to RMG factories in Chittagong and Dhaka with 50 vehicles vandalised, the Sunday's toll is simply devastating: four persons were killed and 90 others including 56 policemen and three journalists were injured in and around Chittagong Export Processing Zone (CEPZ). Eleven garment factories and 20 roadside buildings were damaged as five vehicles put ablaze with 90 of them caught up in a car-bashing spree with panic spreading all around. This is far from auspicious at any time, more so now when new replacement market opportunities are unfolding.

The trouble originated as usual in an apparently minor cause centring around payment Tk 250 as food allowance. The Youngone factory chief in Chittagong talking of the resulting flare-up observed, 'outsiders had provoked the agitation by showing bloodstained papers and spreading rumours of workers' death'. The Youngone chief explained that since the food allowance in part had been already given at the time of rice price hike, the decision to factor in Tk 250 as food allowance was temporarily withheld. There appears to have been some miscommunication which was taken advantage of by trouble-mongers.

Indeed, when the workers are in a state of anticipation of a salary raise, all details including any logical variation relating to it would have to be communicated to them, for which there should be auto-reactive mechanisms within managements.

Of course, given the pattern of origin, deliberate incitement, contagion effect and embroilment, one is likely to see 'outsider hands' being at play behind the bush-fire like engulfing of a large segment of the garment sector. But there are admittedly issues of worker representation, communication between the worker and management and continuing, informative and mutually receptive engagement between floor and management levels. What about the industrial police that seemed in the works? The garment sector being highly competitive, internally and externally, attempts at meddling by vested quarters cannot be ruled out.

From the BGMEA to the law enforcement authorities to the ministers there have been oft-repeated pointers to the 'outsiders' handiwork'. While they never tire of it, we the audience are fatigued by such allegations simply because despite all the refrain for a long time, there is no public knowledge about who the outsiders are! The clarion call we would like to issue is for the government to identify the outsiders, expose them and bring them to justice.

A new commission to protect rivers

Effectual implementation of relevant laws needed

WE understand that draft of National River Protection Commission Act has been submitted to the Task Force on River Protection headed by the Shipping Minister and is likely to be put up for approval of the Cabinet shortly. The Act provides for establishing a commission with powers to prosecute river grabbers and encroachers.

This is another step in the government's effort to save our rivers from dying out on the back of the rather failed ones, given the pollution that they are being subjected to on the one hand, and on the other, the rather indiscriminate and carefree manner with which the rivers have been encroached upon. There is a sense of impunity in the manner with which river grabbing has gone on all these years. This has been the case with the major rivers, particularly those that are the Capital's lifelines, as well many others all over the country, which have had severe implications on river traffic and fishing.

The authorities have expressed their hope that the new law once enacted, would help prevent river pollution, stop river grabbing and end construction of structures on river banks, once and for all. And that is what begs the question.

It might be pertinent to point out that it is not enough to have a commission with powers to prosecute, what is perhaps equally important is the unflinching implementation of the prevalent laws and regulations, and an special body, if need be, with powers to enforce the laws, without having to be mired in legal procedures.

There are a plethora of laws in connection with the protection of environment and safety of public property. But that has not prevented people from polluting the rivers or encroaching upon them. This is primarily because, for one, there is lax in the enforcement of the law, and two, the loopholes of the law are exploited to circumvent the process of recovery. One hopes too that the commission will not be another bureaucratic hurdle to implementation of government policy. We feel that it should be given more teeth to ensure implementation of the policy regarding river protection within the bounds of the law.

We note with concern that the timeline for completing various works, like demarcating the river banks, are not being maintained. In this regard we welcome all that is necessary to expedite the work.

Leaking is reshaping approach to information

Now comes WikiLeaks with its unlimited cyber space and no country or issue-specific coupling. It is a great leap forward in the information world -- from "no-news, no-views" to "all-news, all views." Under this circumstance, advanced democracies are targeting the website because they have more to lose.

KAVI CHONGKITTAVORN

A new design for world information is in the making. This time around it will come from the world's major protectors of on-line freedom to ensure that when internet traffic is in the borderless digitised world items -- especially leaked ones -- will no longer be accessible with just a click.

Disregard the so-called Net neutrality and the usual obstacles to free flow of information normally referred to. To the protectors, the precedence has been set -- WikiLeaks has endangered the security of nations. Interests of major powers, including small ones, have been affected or compromised. They need to protect their culture of secrecy. The best way is to find how to counter worldwide whistleblowing while maintaining the rhetoric of free expression.

Four decades ago, underdeveloped countries ruled by dictators carried guns and suppressed their people by blockading freedom of expression and the free flow of information -- symptomatic of the past information war.

At the time, nearly 75% of the world's population lived in the dark with authorities cracking down on the free press and filling their pages and wavelengths with propaganda. Official views proliferated and dominated all aspects of society. No pluralistic opinions -- within the country -- were allowed. Those with brave hearts were killed or jailed.

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specific coupling. It is a great leap forward in the information world -- from "no-news, no-views" to "all-news, all views." Under this circumstance, advanced democracies are targeting the website because they have more to lose.

Authorities and countries depicted in the US embassy's secret cables are of the same mind -- that common security measures are needed to counter the phenomenon of a global whistle-blower. US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton was succinct in pointing out that the leaks were not just an attack on US foreign policy and interest, but an attack on the international community.

After all, WikiLeaks is their new common enemy -- further releases of cables and secrets would jeopardise their national policies and strategies. The question is: can these countries come up with remedial measures to protect their national security without harming freedom of expression. Is it a zero-sum game? Apparently, WikiLeaks' net sympathisers do not think so and have already hacked into the internet systems of those services not friendly to their mentor.

What WikiLeaks should have done as a priority was to assault the world's most oppressive regimes with information that would weaken their grip of power and subsequently allow public voices to surface. Instead, the target was the world's most powerful country -- the US and its friends with details of their global strategies.

When democracies are exposed in such a way, dictators of the world have

the last laugh. An example: Libyan leader, Moammar Gadhafi, who quickly said the leaks exposed US hypocrisy even though his country imposed strict internet censorship. The common belief among democracies, that the issue of transparency and information-sharing is non-negotiable, is obviously a myth.

With such a yardstick, further examination of internet traffic through the dual use of cyber security technologies, which are normally designed to circumvent censored contents, would definitely increase. Ironically, the emerging information architecture would boost practices employed in more restrictive countries.

For example, China and Russia, which have imposed a strong filtering regime and stiffer cyber regulations, would be happy to reinforce their common practices on Net controls and other methods in protecting their online secrets. China has already exported firewall technologies to developing countries to help with their cyber security.

With perceived great damage incurred, the US will obviously review its internet protocols and usage. Whatever decisions are taken by Washington and its allies and friends, like the anti-terrorism measures after the September 11 tragedy, will directly impact on Net users globally.

Immediate fall-out would be general support for and funding to promote internet freedom in developing countries. Recently, Clinton hailed internet freedom as a major pillar of US foreign policy in promoting democracy and openness. Now, with US diplomacy under the world's microscope, there is some serious soul-searching going on. Openness and transparency are good if they do not harm US national interest.

Of course, that was before the WikiLeaks episode. The Obama administration will have the opportunity to clear itself on internet freedom when Unesco

commemorates its World Press Freedom Day on May 3 in Washington.

Within the region, it will prompt Asean to work closely on cyber-security measures. In October, the grouping's national security chiefs met in Ha Noi to find ways to further strengthen their cooperation in this specific area.

Their focus was on exchanging information and official visits related to national security matters. After the US's cable leaks, Asean would consider publication of unauthorised leaks of information in any form in Asean as a security breach.

At the national level, it would probably delay a plan by the National Anti-Corruption Commission in Thailand to open a website to encourage any would-be whistle-blowers to drop in clues or information on any corruption scandals. That kind of anonymity, while it is appreciated as a means to combat wrongdoing, is now questionable as the WikiLeaks's case manifested. Promotion of whistleblowing practices by governments to protect public interest would probably be problematic for fear of unexpected fallout.

The new architecture is likely to receive support from a majority of nations as they have a common stake in limiting access to classified or taboo information. One can argue that such responsibility rests first with individual nations to protect their vital national secrets.

However, with the proliferation of whistle-blower websites and practices, the nature of information-sharing has changed. From now on, the case against WikiLeaks will be used as a motherboard for all justification to curtail internet freedom. If additional new restrictive measures come from democratic countries, any fight for internet freedom is going to be difficult.

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