

Fragile Gaza truce

Lasting peace should be the thrust of any deal

THE Egypt-brokered 72-hour truce between Israel and Hamas seems to have taken effect since Monday. This respite in armed hostilities, the longest-ever since the Israeli campaign in Gaza strip began 29 days back, will at least provide some breathing space for the embattled Gazans to count their dead. With some 1,900 people, 98 per cent of them civilians, already killed in the Israeli air strikes, rockets and artillery fires aimed at houses, UN-shelters and even hospitals, the main challenge before the peacemakers in Egypt will be to see that the ongoing truce is extended indefinitely.

Regrettably, when France, an ally of Israel, and many well-meaning people in the UK and elsewhere in Europe and the world at large are condemning Israeli barbarism in Gaza, the US's silence is shocking.

US Secretary of State John Kerry, in a recent interview with BBC, termed the deaths and destruction in Gaza "horrible collateral damage" with an unmistakable slant. What is more, he laid the entire blame for it at Hamas's door, and not at Israel's. If this is the stance of the USA, the only world power that can hold Israel in check, then what remains of the chance to achieve a lasting peace in the region? Despite Israel's plea for self-defence, one finds it hard to comprehend how Hamas, the group that enjoys 1.8 million Gazans' support, can abdicate its right to defend its people through 'demilitarisation,' as demanded by Israel.

We hope world powers would be more even-handed in their approach to resolve the Gaza crisis.

EU ban in prospect?

Authorities need to take heed

WITH a potential European Union (EU) ban staring us in the face on Bangladeshi vegetable and fruits exports worth nearly US\$210 million per annum, perhaps now the government will wake up to ground realities regarding food adulteration. Unlike the domestic market where public health remains at constant risk due to widespread usage of industrial-grade toxic chemicals, the export market is far too sensitive in such matters. Exporters may soon be in for a rude awakening should such a ban be enforced by the EU. We find it ironic that authorities have failed to act upon EU's repeated warnings on the issue from 2010 – 2013. And though promises were made to keep exports virus- and bacteria-free, such pledges were not implemented. We are informed that the ministry of agriculture has prepared an action plan to prevent falsification of export-certification and contract farming that will be placed under government watch. And indeed, a host of other measures being contemplated that will step up monitoring and laboratory facilities to test produce before it leaves for the EU market. Government must move expeditiously to implement such measures.

We can't afford to lower our guard when it comes to EU's stringent health and consumer guidelines. With export receipts from vegetables and fruits rising 15 percent over the last fiscal, this is proving to be a lucrative export sector, and one which needs to be protected and promoted. We certainly hope that inertia of authorities will be replaced by dynamic concrete action on the ground to root out harmful organisms in agro-foods and check fraudulent practices by

Anti-Semitism is no answer to Gaza!

MUAAZ JALIL

MANY people in this country, as elsewhere in the world, are with the Palestinian people in Gaza and are appalled by Israeli military actions and resulting civilian casualties. While this is a deeply emotional issue, we have to pause and reflect on our response lest we take actions which might be also blameworthy. I am sure many of my readers themselves, or have heard others, voice hatred towards Jews in general for atrocities committed in Gaza. Some have gone on to make snide comments about how Hitler should have finished his 'job,' referring to Holocaust. Here I believe we have to draw a line because blaming an entire religious group for atrocities in Gaza is no different from rightwing parties in the West branding all Muslims as terrorists.

Israel is a product of Zionist movement; all Jews do not support Zionism just like all Muslim don't support Salafi or Tablighi movements. Even within Israel there is a growing protest against the rightwing ultra-conservative party politics. There are groups such as "Jewish Voice for Peace" and "Breaking the Silence," which is made up of ex-IDF soldiers, that are horrified at the atrocities committed by the Israeli government and want the world to know. These groups are actively engaged in protest, both within Israel and internationally, and many a times are putting their own lives at risk. A former IDF combat soldier, Efrati, has been recently arrested and is receiving death threats because he informed the world how some IDF soldiers intentionally targeted Palestinian civilians as revenge for the death of an Israeli soldier.

Furthermore, anti-Semitism plays perfectly into the hand of rightwing Israelis. The current Israeli government wants to represent this war as a religious war, where Hamas, an Islamist party, is waging a war of extermination against a Jewish State; rather than showing it as a war between poorly equipped resistance movements against a mighty occupier. Responding with anti-Semitism only strengthens the Israeli government's stance that Jews around the world are unsafe and need a powerful apartheid-like state to protect them. The rising anti-Semitism is not only morally reprehensible but will also go on to strengthen the extremist elements within Israel and ultimately increase the plight of Palestinians. Let us not give free rein to our misguided emotions, let us not respond to one moral outrage with another, and let us not play into the hands of the Israeli government.

The writer is a graduate from Cambridge University, England.

The Broadcast Policy: A euphemism for media control

STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING



Brig Gen SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN
ndc, psc (Retd)

FREEDOM of thought and conscience is guaranteed under Article 39 of the Constitution. However, the right of every citizen to freedom of speech and expression and freedom of the press is guaranteed subject to any reasonable restrictions imposed by law in the interests of the security of the State, friendly relations with foreign states, public order, decency or morality, or in relation to contempt of court, defamation or incitement to an offence. The question is, does the newly proposed National Broadcast Policy impose more than 'reasonable restrictions' in the way of freedom of expression and the bounden duty of the media to criticise the government and inform the public, or otherwise.

Going by the available details of the draft policy recently approved by the cabinet, the new Policy is likely to be more of an encumbrance than a facilitator. The way some of the caveats are laid out one is reminded of the fear expressed by Ben Franklin related to the print media that if all printers were determined not to print anything till they were sure it would offend nobody, there would be very little printed.

It must be stated before taking on some of the aspects of the Policy that while it is true that society will suffer without an unfettered media, that freedom only extends up to where the other guy's nose begins. It is my belief that the electronic media, for whom this Policy has been devised, is very well aware of that fact.

And to my mind there have been very few transgressions of that freedom by the electronic media. Some of the TV channels have been highly critical of the government of the day. And that is the job of the media, which, according to Orwell, is to oppose and criticise.

On the other hand, it has been, unfortunately, effort of governments to circumscribe that freedom under various pretexts, not least of all the pretext of national security. I cannot recall in very recent times that any section of the electronic media had deliberately spewed out matters that had proved injurious to the security of the country. And any such transgression could well have been addressed under existing laws. And I am quite confident that the private TV and radio channels have their own policy guidelines that generally conform to a universally acceptable norm of behaviour.

No doubt institutions need policies to operate. However, that should facilitate rather than hamper the performance of the media. And when the government seeks to define the work procedures of the media or a segment of it, through a policy, one can be forgiven for think-

ing that to be an effort to regulate the media.

Apart from putting the cart before the horse, by formulating the policy before setting up the broadcasting commission, the Policy itself is imprecise, confusing (Code, Code of Guidance, Charter of Duties, Disclosure Policy) and opens itself to misinterpretation, not to say misuse.

The very first section of the operative paragraph (Section-3) is self contradictory. It calls for objectivity, principles, impartiality and responsibility on the part of the electronic media. There is no scope of impartiality, which to me means remaining equidistance with regard to a particular issue, in journalism. The media has to be closer to the truth, closer to the good rather than maintain equidistance between the right and the wrong, and it cannot be responsibly performing its duty if it cannot expose the facts. It must call a spade a spade, and if that goes against the government and its policies, so be it. By the way, could one ask if the requirement of 'impartiality' will be applicable to the BTV?



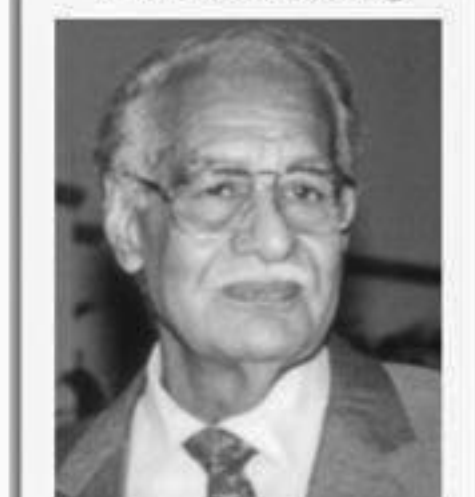
And why are some sections of the government agencies being made a holy cow? Would that these restrictions were in force before May this year could the involvement of a few black sheep in Rab in the gruesome seven murder case have been exposed? And would that this policy was in vogue prior to February 25, 2009, could the country have known the extent of the BDR massacre. Admittedly, many of the TV journalists were not mentally equipped to cover that situation but what evil did the projection of the mutiny on the electronic media bring to the country? If anything, it helped the government to tackle the situation.

The media needs freedom to flourish as much as a fish needs water to survive. And even if policies are needed to operate it cannot become a diktat, because then 'policy' becomes a euphemism for restraint and censorship. It would do well if a broadcasting commission, independent in the strictest sense, was set up and entrusted with the task of formulating guidelines to help, not restrain the functioning of the electronic media.

The writer is Editor, Oped and Defence & Strategic Affairs, The Daily Star.

The idea of partition recedes in shadows

BETWEEN THE LINES



KULDIP NAYAR

INDIA'S independence or the migration of Hindus and Muslims on the basis of religion is as old as fifty seven years. I remember leaving my home in Sialkot city on August 14 itself because the new state of Pakistan did not entertain non-Muslims, just as East Punjab did not want any Muslim in their midst. I heard Jawaharlal Nehru's famous 'tryst' speech at my home town, Sialkot.

However, I crossed the border on September 17, thirty two days after independence. By then, the fury of killing and looting had subsided. I did not see Hindus and Muslims quarrelling or actually fighting. But I saw the pain etched faces of men and women with their meager belongings bundled on their heads and the fear-stricken children following them. Both Hindus and Muslims had left behind their hearths, homes, friends and neighbours. Both had been torn on the rack of history. Both were refugees.

The tragedy of partition is too deep to describe in words. But to convert it into a Hindu and Muslim question is politicising the problem. The riots took the toll of 10 lakh people and uprooted more than two crore Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. Some biased elements in Pakistan propose to depict the rioting to highlight "the oppression of Muslims." Unfortunately, this will whip up hatred against Hindus, who were as much at the receiving end in Pakistan as were Muslims in India.

Despite the stories of brutal killings there were examples of bravery and courage shown by the Muslims to save Hindus and of Hindus saving Muslims in India. A study done by Ashish Nandy, a leading intellectual in India, has estimated that both communities saved 50% of the opposite community from the brutality.

Why did the killings of people take place when they had lived together for centuries? Nothing would be more futile than the effort to pin down who was responsible for the partitioning of the subcontinent. With the sequence of events stretching back for over six decades, such an exercise can only be an academic study. But it is clear that the differences between Hindus and Muslims had become so acute by the beginning of the forties that something like the partition had become inevitable. Pakistan Founder Mohammad Ali Jinnah went on plugging that Hindus and Muslims were two separate nations, and this made them increasingly distant from each other.

For those who still regret the division, I can only say that the British could have probably kept the subcontinent united if they had been willing to ladle out more power in 1942 when Sir Stafford Cripps tried to reconcile the aspirations of people in India with his limited brief. The Congress Party could also have done it if it had accepted in 1946 the Cabinet Mission proposals of a centre with three subjects -- foreign affairs, defence and communications -- and four states included in the zones.

But history's ifs are at best hypothetical and at worst subjective. The partition was like the Greek tragedy. All knew what was happening. Still they could do nothing to check it. The climate in the country had become too pol-

luted to escape the carnage and the migration that came in its wake. The speech on August 11, 1947, by Quaid e Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah, a title given by Mahatma Gandhi, that you were either Pakistanis or Indians and that religion had nothing to do with politics could not assuage the parochial feelings which had been advanced to justify the constitution of Pakistan. The speech was too late. The mood of fanatics in that country can be judged from the fact that they suppressed the speech itself.

Has partition served the purpose of Muslims? I do not know. During my trips to that country, I have heard people saying that they are happy that at least they have "some place" where they feel secure, free of "Hindu domination" or "Hindu aggression." But I feel that the Muslims have been the biggest losers. They are now spread over three countries -- India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Imagine the influence that their numbers -- their votes -- could have commanded in the undivided subcontinent! They would have been nearly one-third of the total population.

The reliefs at the border would only widen the gulf between the two communities. Instead of blaming each other, it would have been far better to deal with the enmity and hatred that has been the fallout, keeping the two countries on tenterhooks.

I have returned from the Wagha-Amritsar border disheartened, not because there is no lessening of martial posture of soldiers at the sunset parade, but because of a new monstrosity that has come up there. The Pakistan authorities have put up 10 reliefs, projecting figures in carving on boards to show how Hindus and Sikhs had killed and looted Muslims during partition. The reliefs have been displayed in such a way that they are visible only from the Indian side. They cannot be seen from the Pakistan side because their backs are merely large billboards.

The happenings depicted are offensive in expression and depraved in purport. They have been installed in the last two months, probably because the voice of peace with India is gaining strength in Pakistan and because nearly 50 people came to the border, the zero point, for the first time last year to light the candles since independence six decades ago.

Again, the reliefs put up at the border distort facts. Whatever has been shown happened on both sides. Hindus and Sikhs were victims in Pakistan and Muslims in India. It was the same sordid spectacle in the newly-born countries, neither less in brutality nor more in compassion. Women and children were the main targets.

If someone were to tell me that Hinduism is greater in generosity or that Islam emits more love, I would beg to differ. I saw the followers of the two religions killing in the name of faith. They were raising slogans of Har Har Mahadav or Ya Ali while piercing sword or spear into one another. Some incidents were captured in the books which were published at that time. Aur Insan mar gaya is the famous book by Ramanand Sagar and Peshawar Express by the eminent Urdu writer, Krishen Chand, to narrate events of how man dies when the Satan in him awakes. Then there are Sadaat Hassan Manto's short stories in Urdu that tell how the two communities touched the depth of crime and callousness.

The writer is an eminent Indian columnist.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Obama disappoints the world

Shame on those, who, despite having the ability, are not doing anything to stop the massacre of the Palestinians by Israel. Israel has been killing innocent Palestinians indiscriminately. Even schools, hospitals, UN shelters have not been spared.

Deprived of their land, the Palestinians have been living in the most deplorable condition for so long. Their sufferings are unimaginable. America has the power to force Israel to stop the atrocities. But we are aghast by the words of President Barack Obama who said that Israel has the right to defend itself. He is supporting the aggression of Israel!

When Barack Obama was a presidential candidate, we wanted him to become the president of the USA because he seemed to be a kind and considerate person. But his fond behaviour towards Israel has shattered our hopes. The death toll of Palestinians has reached nearly 1900. Does Israel want to annihilate all the Palestinians?

Nur Jahan
Chittagong

What if situation in Gaza were reversed?

Gaza is controlled completely, like the West Bank, because it is totally surrounded by Israel. Israel could not be imposing the kind of chokehold it has on Gaza if it were not surrounding; if its military were not surrounding Gaza, and not just on the territory, but also on the air, on the sea. No one there can make a move without coming into contact with the Israeli IDF; you know, outside this imprisoned area where Gazans live.

What if the situation were reversed, and the Jewish population were locked into, were told, "Here, you have less than 2 percent of Palestine, so now behave. No more resistance. And let us deal with the rest"? Is there any Jew who would have said this is a reasonable proposition, that we cease our resistance, we cease our effort to establish a Jewish state, at least on one-half of Palestine, which is authorised by the U.N.?

"Hamas is no more a 'terror organisation' ... than the Zionist movement was during its struggle for a Jewish homeland. In the late 1930s and 1940s, parties within the Zionist movement resorted to terrorist activities for strategic reasons." "The fact is that Israel had, pre-state -- in its pre-state stage, several terrorist groups that did exactly what Hamas does today." Henry Siegman
Ted Rudow III, MA
Palo Alto, CA, USA

Comments on news report, "Biman sitting idle with large planes," published on July 28, 2014

Humayun Hyder

It is disgusting news that Biman's 777-300 ERs planes are lying idle, thus making Biman lose crores of taka every year. Firstly, Biman should have thought about its position before purchasing those planes. Secondly, Biman should have listened to Boeing company for getting those planes run. Biman did not do anything. Biman also doesn't have enough pilots to run those planes.

Shams Kabir

Typical Bangladeshi mismanagement and corruption at their worst. We will never learn!!

Surjo Dipto

Biman is in a mess and it needs a complete overhauling. The tragedy is that despite knowing where the problem lies, steps are not being taken to rectify them as the beneficiaries have good rapport with the people who can take action.

Aasfisarwar

Biman will never run profitably. Biman must shed some fat and become lean and thin and constantly evaluate its performance. It must find some strategic partners before expanding new routes. While New York and Toronto could be profitable routes, Biman must provide opportunities for targeted passengers living outside those hubs by making alliance and code sharing with other carriers so that Montreal, Vancouver, Calgary as well as Los Angeles, Houston, Chicago and Seattle etc. can be connected too.

M. Ashraf

We don't need to hire another foreigner with crores of taka to tell us what we already know. There is a lot of theft and corruption which are affecting Biman. The only way that can be fixed is through transparency in expenditure and audited quarterly reports.

Supermono

The management is incompetent and the flight staffs are rude. Currently, the national airline is an embarrassment to the country.

"Israeli pogrom in Gaza" (July 28, 2014)

Paddy Xtolpho

Israel doesn't want peace. Their sense of absolute superiority, annihilation and entitlement leaves no room for peace.