

Palestine: The Great Betrayal



ERESH OMAR JAMAL

THE OVERTON WINDOW

WHEN it comes to Palestine and the plight of Palestinians, everything is generally inverted. Take for example the US decision to shift its embassy in Israel, to Jerusalem on May 15, 2018, on the 70th anniversary of Israel declaring its independence, also the day when Palestinians commemorated 70 years of unending "Nakba" (Day of Catastrophe). "Catastrophe" for Palestinians, because it was 70 years ago when during the 1948 Palestinian War, an estimated 700,000 Palestinians (out of 900,000) fled or were expelled and hundreds of Palestinian towns and villages were depopulated and destroyed.

On May 15, 2018 we saw a glimpse of that inversion, as while Israel celebrated the opening of the new US embassy to Israel in East Jerusalem, Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) killed about 60 Palestinians, maiming hundreds and injuring thousands more.

When asked about the violence, White House Spokesman Raj Shah accused Hamas' leaders of making a "gruesome and unfortunate propaganda attempt" that led to the "clashes", adding that "the responsibility for these tragic deaths rests squarely on Hamas"—the same narrative doled out by Israel every time it perpetrates unwarranted violence and murder against Palestinians, who are completely defenceless against sophisticated Israeli weaponry.

But, lest we forget, it was Israel that was initially interested in enabling Hamas' activity during its early days to weaken the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) and end the first Intifada (Palestinian

uprising), as exposed by secret documents passed between American diplomats in the 1980s, published by Wikileaks. One document dated September 29, 1989 reads, "Earlier in the uprising, some Israeli occupation officials indicated that Hamas served as a useful counter to the secular organisations loyal to the PLO."

Another, dated September 23, 1988, says, "Many West Bankers believe that

leaders have been detained."

The most incriminating of these leaks concerns a diplomatic exchange (dated June 13, 2007) between then Israeli Director of Military Intelligence Major General Amos Yadlin and US Ambassador to Israel Richard Jones, where Yadlin told the US Ambassador that he would be "very happy" if Hamas formed a government in Gaza. Adding that Israel would then work with the rival

through the Google search of News this time for 'clashes', you discover that the western and Israeli media peculiarly have precisely the same preference for this entirely inappropriate word."

And when it comes to downplaying the sufferings of Palestinians, even the UN is not innocent—as one document published by Wikileaks dated May 5, 2009 showed former UN General Secretary Ban Ki-moon secretly working with Israel to undermine the UN's report on war crimes perpetrated in Gaza (Titled: Ambassador Rice's May 4 Telcons With UN Secretary-General On Gaza Board Of Inquiry Report). With that in mind, can Palestinians really count on the UN to conduct a fair investigation into the recent carnage unleashed on them by the IDF, especially with powerful western nations always backing Israel no matter what? And given the UN's repeated failures to help Palestinians or to hold Israel accountable?

After all, the only major western political figure today who from time to time criticises Israel for its brutality against Palestinians is Jeremy Corbyn, leader of the Labour Party in the UK. Although, ironically, it was in the UK that the conspiracy to carve the state of Israel out of Palestinian land was hatched in a letter dated November 2, 1917 from the United Kingdom's Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour to Lord Rothschild, which later became known as the Balfour Declaration.

This, of course, is what the British media almost always tries to overlook when it comes to the Palestine-Israel issue. And what is worse is its tendency to call anyone that dares to criticise the crimes of Israel, including Corbyn, anti-Semitic.

And this is where the "inversion" gets most tragic—and glaringly criminal as a result. Because according to large numbers of leading Jewish scholars and others, including Israeli Emeritus Professor of

History at Tel Aviv University, Shlomo Sand, most Jewish people today, including those living in Israel, have absolutely no historic or genetic connection to what is the land of Israel today.

As Arthur Koestler described in his book *The Thirteenth Tribe*, "their ancestors came not from the Jordan, but from the Volga. Not from the Cannan, but from the Caucasus," which makes "the term 'anti-Semitism'...void of any meaning based on a misapprehension shared by both the killers and their [Palestinian] victims." In fact, because "Semitism" or "Semitic" refers not to a race but to a language group, which does not include the people of the Caucasus, but does include languages from today's Arab countries spoken by Arab people, including Palestinians, it is those who discriminate against Palestinians that should be called anti-Semitic—not the other way around. The perfect example of anti-Semitism, then, is the apartheid state of Israel that, as is well known, massively discriminates against Palestinians, forcing them to live in near concentration-camp-like conditions for decades.

And it is because of these inversions that the state of Israel has been able to keep them in such conditions for so long. Whereas Palestinians were brutally expelled from their homes a long time ago, it is the continuing lies, deceptions and ignorance that are still keeping them from returning today. Therefore, in order to right the wrong that Nelson Mandela described as the "greatest moral issue of our time," these lies must be confronted with truth so that the inverted world created by our upside-down perception can be turned back again to its upright position.

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Protesters in London demanding the release of Palestinian child prisoners including Ahd Tamimi.

SOURCE: INMIND

Israel actively supports Hamas...They point to the fact that Hamas operatives act boldly in distributing their leaflets...whereas UNLU [Unified National Leadership of the Uprising] leaflets are distributed secretly for fear of Israeli security forces, Hamas operatives walk into shops and present their leaflets directly to the owners. Mayor Freij of Bethlehem claims that members of some well-known families who collaborate with Israeli officials have been seen among Hamas street gangs in Bethlehem...despite massive arrests...relatively few Hamas

Palestinian political party, Fatah, to form a government in the West Bank and work to undermine the Hamas government—which is exactly what happened, followed by Israel launching the largest-ever assault on Gaza in December 2008.

Then, what is truly "gruesome" is how all these "facts" are completely ignored by western nations and their media and how the "massacres" of Palestinians are often called "clashes", as pointed out by historian and former British diplomat Craig Murray, who further wrote on May 14, "If you look

Combating Dhaka's traffic congestion

ASHIF ANAM SIDDIQUE

AFTER a praiseworthy journey in implementing MDGs, the next big target for Bangladesh is execution of SDGs. The government has integrated the 2030 agenda of SDGs (17 goals) in its 7th Five Year Plan, Perspective Plan, and Vision 2041. Some of the goals are visibly linked to one another, some quite intrinsically connected, and a few require special attention given the country's huge population and rapid urbanisation especially in the capital Dhaka. Of them, goal 11 is of special relevance. A major focus of goal 11 is ensuring sustainable urban development that supports increased productivity, investment and employment—and one of the challenges to achieving that goal in Dhaka is its traffic congestion.

In recent years, we have noticed extensive government efforts to ease the traffic situation. The government has already implemented several flyover projects and is now working on metro rail and expressway projects, which are intended to improve public transportation in the city. On the other hand, Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) took steps to introduce automatic signalling system. Several eviction drives have been conducted to free road spaces. Despite these efforts, there has been little progress in the traffic situation. A recent report by *The Daily Star* mentioned a survey that says Dhaka's traffic congestion eats up around 5 million working hours daily and the concomitant annual loss is between Tk 20,000 crore and 55,000 crore. It also said that the city's road network covers

only 7.5 percent of its space while the global standard is more than 20 percent.

It seems the initiatives taken by the authorities did not have the desired results to reduce the sufferings of the city dwellers. The reasons behind this may be the continuous increasing of the number of vehicles and rising population density in the city. Moreover, in my view, expansion of the city areas towards Gazipur, Narayanganj and Munshiganj makes Dhaka more vulnerable to traffic gridlock, and its connectivity with those districts is rather slowing down their infrastructural and institutional development. Finally, government intervention in the infrastructure development and incorporating modern signalling system to ease traffic seems insufficient and ineffective. The question is, is there any policy scope left to improve the situation?

Some commentators say restricting new vehicular registration and imposing high duties in the import of private vehicles and automobile parts may work. But the authorities are, quite reasonably, careful about these suggestions. The fact is, automobile purchasing and selling has a prospective market in our economy and it has a positive contribution in the overall growth of the country. We see a favourable market for automobiles in the US, China, India and many other countries. The US is popularly known as a consumerist society but China and India are developing nations and they, too, do not like to restrict consumption growth. Considering



New Market, Dhaka

PHOTO: JOISEY SHOWAA/FLICKR

such macro-economic factors, our ground reality and best practices in the modern cities, I would like to propose some policy interventions that might come into use.

I think, first of all, Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) and DMP should fix the lanes for buses and private vehicles. But it must be done after proper assessment of the space available on specific roads, rush hours, offices of organisations in a certain neighbourhood (schools, hospitals), usual traffic in the week days, etc. Initially, private vehicles may require more lanes than the buses. Lane crossing needs to be made a punishable offence. Lane-wise speed limit also needs to be fixed.

Second, BRTA, city corporations

and private investors need to arrive at a consensus about increasing the number of public transports along with the improvement of bus stoppages, app-based and card-based bus ticketing system, etc.

Third, the Ministry of Education needs to play a regulatory role in fixing a timeline for the schools and colleges to arrange their own transportation. All educational institutions need to formulate a mechanism so that each student can grow the habit of using their common transport system. Imposing mandatory transport fees on the students may bring a positive result. Similarly, government and private entities are required to mandatorily implement the shuttle services for their employees. Many organisations,

both public and private, are already doing that.

Fourth, BRTA can limit the operation of private vehicles by segregating the vehicles into two or three groups according to their registration numbers, and permit them to run only on specific days of the week. This is a very common strategy followed in some megacities like Beijing. It might help private transport users to get used to public transportation as well as facilitate the expansion of the country's automobile market by giving an opportunity to those who can afford to buy more than one private vehicle to get the benefit of being in different registration number groups. But for that to work properly, DMP needs to tighten its monitoring mechanism.

Fifth, DMP can also initiate a reward programme for the pedestrians to inspire them to videotape and report incidents of traffic rules violation, indiscriminate parking, unlawful lane crossing, etc. so that they can trace the offenders by checking the registration number plates of their vehicles and bring them to book.

The neighbouring city corporations and municipalities (Gazipur, Savar, Tongi, Narayanganj, Munshiganj) are now well-connected with Dhaka. Formulation of zone and imposing zone crossing charge for the light vehicles can be applied to discourage them from entering the city frequently. Also, mass advertisements, media coverage, on-air programmes, and app-based knowledge sharing may be of help in raising awareness of the drivers, pedestrians and other stakeholders.

Finally, a separate cycle lane is a demand of the time. Improvement of the Zebra crossing and assigning time in the signal system for the pedestrians' road crossing are also vital to upholding our developing status. City corporations and private organisations, the latter as part of their corporate social responsibility (CSR), should support and promote bicycle riding.

These are but some policy suggestions that may work, but the government should come up with more innovative ideas. Unless we constantly upgrade our strategy to find the best possible solutions, mega projects like a metro rail or flyovers may be of little help to improve the city's traffic situation.

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QUOTABLE Quote

KARL MARX
German philosopher, economist, historian, and revolutionary socialist

Workers of the world unite; you have nothing to lose but your chains.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Pilaf grains
- 5 Meat-and-potatoes dish
- 9 Sought ore
- 10 Computer screen dot
- 12 Steer clear of
- 13 Cider fruit
- 14 Stand up for
- 16 Flamenco cheer
- 17 Like a desert
- 18 Makes blank
- 21 Indulgent
- 22 Lockup head
- 23 Yield slightly
- 24 Black suit
- 26 Lyricist Gershwin
- 29 Dr. Seuss elephant
- 30 Checkout swipe
- 31 Commotion
- 32 Rely
- 34 Beatles drummer
- 37 Follow the outline of
- 38 Understated
- 39 Sponsorship
- 40 Lawn burrower
- 41 Future flower

DOWN

- 1 Muralist Diego
- 2 Really stuck
- 3 Handed over
- 4 Genesis garden
- 5 Relaxing resort
- 6 Gratuity
- 7 Reveal
- 8 Peter of "Robo-Cop"
- 9 Olympics award
- 11 Sediment
- 15 Cul-de-sac
- 19 Equips
- 20 Tavern quaff
- 22 Karate's kin
- 23 Diamond club
- 24 Salt ingredient
- 25 Right away
- 26 Glacial period
- 27 Unpleasant-tasting
- 28 Peruvian peaks
- 29 Damage
- 30 Bender
- 33 Greek vowels
- 35 Salon stuff
- 36 Exalted verse

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BEETLE BAILEY BY MORT WALKER

BABY BLUES BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

E W E S V O L T S
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