

Guest Editorial

After the pullout

By Muhammad Anwar Shamim
Retired air chief marshal of Pakistan

A YEAR after the signing of Geneva accords which paved the way for the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan and a month after the completion of the pullout, the future of Afghanistan continues to be uncertain.

True that since the Russian departure, certain positive developments have taken place. The Afghans have constituted their consultative council, the Shura. They have formed an interim government which has held its cabinet session on the liberated Afghan soil. It has been admitted to the OIC to occupy Afghanistan's seat. It has been recognised by three Muslim states viz Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Sudan and is planning to move the UN to give it Afghanistan's seat in the world body. Yet the situation is grave and many vital aspects of the problem remain unresolved.

The bloodshed in Afghanistan continues unabated and although it appears that the Mujahideen are struggling desperately to take at least one major city such as Jalalabad yet it is difficult to visualise Kabul falling within weeks of the Soviet departure as was predicted by the Mujahideen leadership. The flow of the Soviet military supplies to Kabul remains uninterrupted. These fresh supplies together with the enormous stockpile that the Kabul regime built up during the last nine years would sustain it for a long-drawn slogging match, should it opt for one.

The Afghan Shura does not enjoy the confidence of all the seven groups based in Pakistan; the Iran-based refugees have dissociated themselves from it and no "good Muslim" from Kabul has so far joined it. Same goes for the interim government. Only three states have extended their recognition to the interim government inexplicably Pakistan is not one of them. Pakistan's foreign minister waxed eloquent in the Islamic Foreign Ministers' meeting in support of the Afghan interim government's admission to the OIC. This admission does amount to the de-facto recognition of the Mujahideen government by all member-states of the OIC but why should Pakistan, which has done so much to help the Mujahideen groups set up the interim administration, withhold the symbolic gesture of granting it de-jure recognition which would add substantially to the interim government's clout?

In these circumstances a comprehensive settlement of the Afghanistan question through negotiations or a military decision seems a far cry and the present situation may be described as a virtual stalemate.

Having beaten the retreat from Afghanistan, what are the Soviet intentions now? In the first instance it must be appreciated that the Soviet Union was not really vanquished in Afghanistan. These factors were significant; but in the final aligned and, what made the Soviets leave Afghanistan were their own economic and political compulsions.

It must, however, be remembered that the Soviet interest in Afghanistan, has not ceased. As its next-door neighbour of geo-strategic importance the Soviet interest in Afghanistan cannot even wane. Neither could Moscow be expected to treat the costs, financial and otherwise, of its Afghanistan campaign as a dead loss and just sleep over it. One may also justifiably apprehended that the USSR would for long remember the 'nasty' role played by Pakistan in this sordid affair.

The Soviet Union thus has no other choice now but to sustain the regime in Kabul as long as possible. Proxy assistance in every possible field should be considered a normal phenomenon. The principle of "positive symmetry" agreed upon by the two super-power guarantors of the Geneva accords is already being exercised. The Soviet-Alghan friendship treaty that has existed for more than half a century would be invoked, if necessary. In addition, the USSR would use every ploy that it can to destabilise Pakistan by sabotage, subversion, threats and propaganda.

Efforts would also be made to create a wedge between the Mujahideen and their friends such as Pakistan and the US on the one hand and between the various groups of the Mujahideen, on the other. The Soviet Union regards Afghanistan as its soft underbelly and would do everything, short of returning its force there, to protect it from the onslaughts of the other side so that harm stays well away from its own borders.

The Afghans are known for their raw courage and fearlessness. All the warring factions share this characteristic. As the Mujahideen, sensing imminent victory, are in no mood to compromise with the Najibullah coler, the chances of the induction of abroad-based government in Kabul, as supported in varying measures, by Pakistan, the US, the USSR and Najibullah are somewhat bleak. In these circumstances, the Kabul regime is likely to put up a fierce last-ditch fight against the Mujahideen.

If the war remains indecisive for long, there is every possibility of Afghanistan's fragmentation, not necessarily on a formal basis. Some months ago, the idea of Afghanistan's division into two separate states on the German-Korean pattern had been floated, probably at the Soviet instance. This envisaged a pro-Soviet northern Afghanistan with Mazar Sharif as its headquarters and a pro-Pakistan southern Afghanistan with Kabul as its capital. Now a four-way split is being talked about; the two additional fiefdoms would be the Shia-dominated central Afghanistan comprising Hazarajat, and pro-Zahir Shah eastern Afghanistan with Kandahar as the seat of administration.

The Lebanonisation of the hapless country would perhaps suit the powers that be, but it would ruin the Afghan nation which deserves better than this after the extreme hardships it has suffered during this decade.

The US has already made the Soviet Union rub its nose in Afghanistan. It perhaps would not mind if Moscow chooses to remain involved there, with the resultant economic and military burden on it, and its political ostracism in significant segments of the international community. Also, the US is not specially interested in the installation of an Islamic-oriented government, or, for that matter, any other type of government in Kabul in the post withdrawal era.

The Indian moves to project the Zahir Shah option as a comprehensive solution for the Afghanistan problem, although irrelevant, have not come to a halt. There is also the news of the Indian military advisers operating in Afghanistan for the Kabul regime. If the in-fighting drags along for an indefinite period, Moscow is likely to make an ever-increasing use of Delhi to enhance the Soviet interests in Afghanistan. India would seize the opportunity for its own consideration of regaining political and economic influence in Afghanistan which has received a setback as a result of the Afghan conflict.

Pakistan faces a real dilemma. For it, the fallout of the Afghan war has been very heavy. Apart from the financial, economic, and political burden that Pakistan has had to bear on account of three million Afghans, Pakistan had been subjected to the violation of its territory and airspace, much loss of life and property, as also the introduction of the heroin-Kalashnikov culture in its society.

How one wishes that the Soviet Union would recognise the realities of the situation and respect the aspirations of the overwhelming majority of the Afghan people, demonstrated so clearly through their relentless struggle for liberation. Also, one only hopes that in the interest of the world peace, and in its own interest, the Kremlin would finally call it a day as far as Afghanistan is concerned and allow the Afghans the freedom to shape their own future without any outside interference.



From Congressional Intifada hearing



Washington

NEARLY a year ago, on April 26, 1988, the first and only congressional hearing about the Intifada was held in Hearing Room 1310 of the Longworth House Office Building on Capitol Hill.

Actually it wasn't an "official" hearing — rather amazingly there had not been to this date an "official hearing" by any standing committee of the American Congress which year-by-year provides Israel the billions of dollars which are crucial to Israel's ability to continue controlling the occupied territories and putting down the Intifada.

Rather the hearing last April was a day of fact-finding, and testifying arranged by the Congressional Black Caucus, an organisation that links the Black members of the House of Representatives. The CBC was able to use a regular hearing room, and the proceedings were conducted just as a regular congressional hearing would have been. But still the gathering had no official nature as far as the rest of the Congress or official Washington was concerned.

The reasons for this situation are well-known, of course, though increasingly difficult to justify. Congress remains hostage to the infamous "Jewish lobby." And though privately there is much frustration, lots of grumbling, and in some quarters even considerable hostility toward "the lobby" the situation remains one in which Congress is effectively paralysed in regard to Middle East policies affecting Israel.

After so many years of heavy-handed arm-twisting and various forms of political blackmail and lots of political money giving, all designed to keep Congress firmly in Israel's pocket, resentment has grown, of course. But not to the point that anyone is ready to directly challenge "the lobby". After all, everyone remembers that those who did in the past — going back to Senate Foreign Relations Committee chairman, William Fulbright, and in more recent years another chairman of that prestigious committee, Charles Percy, as well as Congressman Paul Findley and Pete McCloskey — are all gone from the Washington scene thanks to "the lobby".

So no one other than the CBC has had the guts, or the moral decency, to even begin to investigate and publicise what is happening to the Palestinians in the areas occupied by America's top client state for nearly 22 years. And even the CBC has been very hesitant and circumspect, as dramatised by the very lengthy and extended time it has taken to even get the hearing transcript into print.

Indeed, on that day last April only

three of the 23 members of the CBC were courageous enough even to appear in the Hearing Room during any part of the day-long session. And one of the three, Congressman Ronald Dellums, only came for a few moments at lunch time.

The two congressmen who were in attendance most of the time, and the ones who in fact decided the hearing should be held, were congressman George Crockett and Congressman Mervyn Dymally. CBC chairman and vice-chairman respectively. In each case their aides were instrumental in making arrangements for the hearing — Cheri Waters, a young Black woman who used to work for Trans-Africa, for Crockett; and Marwan Burgan, a young Palestinian-American, for Dymally.

The hearing itself actually was quite interesting and it certainly was very timely coming after a few months of shocking pictures on American news programs that brought into American homes the reality of the Palestinian suffering at the hands of the Israeli army. In fact, the hearing was so much of interest that C-Span television broadcast the entire day of testimony and questions-gavel-to-gavel on Cable television.

The CBC had done its homework and gone to the trouble and expense of inviting former Israeli General Matti Peled to come from Israel and Palestinian human rights activist Roger Shehadeh to come from Ramallah on the West Bank. Palestinian scholar Edward Said was there, as were other academics and human rights representatives. The Arab-American Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC), sent its President Abdeen Jabara who aroused considerable interest as he held up for the cameras gruesome photos of Palestinians who had been injured.

The situation with American Jews was confused. Originally invited were the executive director of the powerful Jewish lobby, Tom Dine, along with journalist Leonard Fine, a "liberal" critic of Israeli policy but nevertheless a loyal member in good standing of the American Jewish establishment whose positions usually mirror those of the "doves" in Israel's Labour Party.

But neither of these two persons did appear. Instead, called to the witness table was Henry Schwarschild representing a new organisation known as the Jewish Committee on the Middle East (JCOM), a coalition of American Jews that had quickly come together, provoked by the Intifada, to call for a basic change in American policy toward Israel including major reductions of aid.

Schwarschild, who works at the

Transcript finally to appear

American Civil Liberties Union [ACLU] directing a programme against the death penalty, had the stage to himself when it came to American Jewry. For when Dine and Fine found out that a spokesperson for JCOM was invited they tried to pressure the congressional staff persons to retract the invitation. But the pressure failed largely thanks to the steadfastness of Crockett and Dymally and their assistants. Fine actually called again the morning of the hearing to say that if the JCOM representative was allowed to testify he would not. And so he didn't. Dine decided in the end to send his prepared testimony but did not appear in person.

But even the CBC found itself unable, and apparently unwilling, to do very much after the day-long hearing. First came problems in getting the transcript published — something that could have been very important at the time had it been widely distributed to other members of Congress.

Because the CBC is an unofficial group there is no money from Congress for printing hearing records. Consequently the CBC Foundation, a non-profit organisation which works in co-ordination with the CBC, agreed to undertake that task. But then came one delay after another reflecting dissent within the CBC itself and reluctance, by some, to get further out front regarding the Intifada and opposition to Israel.

After many months of delays some of the groups who had testified were not happy that the hearing record wasn't available and began inquiring and then pressuring in their own ways. Still, no transcript was published, and a series of excuses were made by CBC staff persons and CBC Foundation officials.

By November of last year everyone was, of course, concentrating on the election. And after the election, Congressman Dymally was said to be concerned that nothing be done to lessen his own chances of taking over a committee chairman assignment that he wanted. Hence, no progress on the hearing record from November through February.

Meanwhile, much has happened in the Mid-east and the Intifada is more alive than ever even though in Washington it's not much in the news anymore. Any way, whatever the reasons for all the delays the CBC's Hearing Record is about to appear though it seems unlikely there is going to be much notice.

Furthermore, there doesn't seem to be any planning for another CBC Hearing, even though its needed more now than ever.

Wednesday talk



From A after Z

By Muhammad Umar Al-Amoudi

TEACHING English language is an important part of the preparatory-to-secondary school curricula; no less important than such subjects as Arabic language, religion, science and mathematics.

However, despite the importance attached to it and the number of hours devoted to its teaching, English as taught in our schools does not enable a secondary school graduate to use it and communicate in it in the simplest of matters.

It can be imagined how much the teaching of English at the school level costs: hundreds of millions of riyals are spent by the state each year on English teaching programmes.

So far, the endeavour appears to be fruitless, for whenever a student goes abroad for undergraduate and post-graduate studies, he need spend about a year to learn English. He begins anew, and often his former study of the language at the Kingdom's schools constitutes an impediment that he takes a long time to get rid of.

We speak the language in the accent of our teachers, and wonder hearing others speaking it differently. Some people speak it with Asian accent, unconsciously copying the style of their teacher, even nodding their head left and right. There are others who speak it with an African accent which might sound to have the letters turned upside down.

All this takes us to the ultimate point: the teaching method. Although the world has made huge progress in language teaching techniques, our schools apparently cling to the traditional method which is not fruitful.

The problem is not confined to the preparatory and secondary schools. An English literature graduate from one of our universities admitted that when he went to the US to study for the masters degree, he discovered that he did not know the language of the folk, or spoke it differently from the natives. He had to take a crash programme of English language lasting six months before he could be accepted by the university for the degree he desired to obtain.

We were surprised to hear this from him.

'Quote me'

Mossad exploited the general Arab acceptance of the Filipino workforce to recruit them as agents. — Nur Misuari, leader of the Moro National Liberation Front.

I expect some of the minister members to establish a link between economic development and the debt problem ... in the sense that the rising rates of interest in the world, and particularly in this country (US) but elsewhere, too, ... complicates substantially the resolution of international debt problem. — H. Onno Ruding, an IMF official.

We note with deep concern that the staff of the embassy (British in Pretoria) sought help from the South African police in an attempt to evict the six (Blacks who sought refuge there) ... trying to bully them back into the hands of the apartheid police. — Murphy Morobe, spokesman for the Mass Democratic Movement.

We cannot impose socialism. The National Liberation Front (NLF) ... must win the confidence of the people. — Chaidi Benjedid, Algerian President.

Islam is an inseparable whole. It embraces all aspects of human life, so there could be no dividing line between religion and the state. — Sheikh Muhammad Lakhrou, candidate in Tunisian elections.

We are completely ready to cooperate with all Opec members to stabilise the oil market. We have always supported the efforts of Opec to stabilise prices in the world market. We are in constant contact with Opec member states. — Vasily Dinkov, Soviet Industry Minister.

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Blood donation to fund electricity in Bengal

By Rajendra Bajpal

THE communist government of India's West Bengal State is calling for blood — to pay for electricity. The Calcutta-based government has launched a major blood donation campaign to help raise 10 billion Rupees (650 million dollars) to build a thermal power plant to overcome chronic shortages.

The campaign is also aimed at spiting on Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and boosting the communists own election prospects.

Biman Bose, a West Bengal Marxist leader, said in a recent interview that the state government was fed up with what he

called New Delhi's apathy and had decided to fund the power station on its own.

The initial work has begun and the state government aims to finish it by 1995. But at the moment the project is generating controversy rather than electricity.

Gandhi's Congress (I) party called the blood donation an election year political stunt and offered to find some of the money if West Bengal shares electricity with neighbouring states.

But Bose, who has donated blood three times, said the state government wanted 70 percent of the electric power generated by the plant rather than 30 percent offered by the national government.

He said the money was being raised from donations, loans from small savings, the state budget, blood donations and voluntary labour.

Under the blood scheme, donors are paid 40 rupees (Three dollars) for giving 0.25 litres (about half a pint) and then hand the money over to the power project. Some 50,000 people have already given.

Many villages have offered to give bricks free and thousands of people are volunteering to work at the project without wages.

"The money from blood donations is very meagre. We know it can't fund the project," Bose said. "But it is invigorating the campaign."

Bose admitted the political

able to his Marxist Communist party with national elections due before the end of the year and that the power plant was likely to become a major election issue.

"It has a serious campaign value," Bose said. "People are coming out in large numbers."

Electric power has long been a problem in West Bengal and shortages are most acute in sprawling Calcutta, which has a population of at least 12 million and is India's second most important business centre after Bombay.

Power cuts during summer are frequent and even before the hot season sets in, power breakdowns in Calcutta can last hours.

Most shops, hotels, restaurants and government buildings

have their own diesel-powered generators.

The blood donation campaign more than anything else has rattled Gandhi's Congress party, which sits as an opposition group in the state assembly.

It has organised demonstrations against it saying that limited storage facilities at blood centres were forcing doctors to destroy blood stored before the campaign to accommodate the new supplies.

Energy minister Vasant Sathe told parliament this month: "Blood is going to waste. This collection of blood is a stunt."

The power project will generate 840 megawatts of electricity when it is completed in a state anticipating a shortage of 600 megawatts in 1995. But