

CEC breaking the law twice over

Govt and opposition must talk to find a replacement

THE Election Commission's decision to revise the existing voter list without engaging its enumerators in a door-to-door enlistment drive, as has always been the practice, constitutes a violation of law. Eminent jurists, including former election commissioner Justice Naimuddin Ahmed, have termed the step 'illegal'.

The EC is apparently showing no concern about the accuracy and credibility of the voter list -- an issue that has already turned highly controversial, thanks to the CEC's decision to prepare it unilaterally in violation of court orders in the first place. But then the EC had decided in its August 6 meeting last year to follow the rules set for preparing the list under the Electoral Ordinance 1982, which clearly required of the EC officials to go from door-to-door for voter enlistment. There is absolutely no room for any ambiguity or any other interpretation of the rules. The trouble with preparing it sitting at the EC office is that a huge number of voters will be left out. It is not clear why the EC is again trying to do something that amounts to breaking the law. Why must it change the age-old modus operandi of preparing the voter list?

Our stand on the issue, after so much of fuss, is that the EC should be reconstituted as a whole which is possibly the only way to retrieve its lost credibility. The CEC has given a dismal account of himself and the election commissioners are not known for any better. For instance, Commissioner Zakaria was virtually not on talking terms with former CEC Abu Sayed for the last two years of his tenure as secretary to the EC. It was well known that he was taking orders from PMO rather than from the then CEC for personal and political grounds.

Informal signals coming from government high-ups suggest that the ruling party may not be quite unwilling to consider removal of the CEC. But his replacement could be a tricky issue, given the track record of the two major parties never reaching any agreement easily. Here the two sides can make themselves understood to each other at the informal level and pave the way for finding a point of convergence in regard to suitable replacement.

Time is running out. We badly need a better understanding urgently between political parties on matters crucial to the electoral preparations in which both sides have an enormous stake.

Distracting remarks in Parliament

Time too precious for these

RULING party MP Moshir Rahman's remarks against Sheikh Hasina were not only patently uncalled for, and unparliamentary, these were also derogatory to the image of the opposition leader. What was perhaps more uncalled for was Sheikh Hasina's reply. Given her level and stature, she should never have gotten into the fray in the first place.

The acting Speaker Akhter Hamid Siddiqui's expunction of such derisive remarks by the lawmaker together with the reactive comments of the opposition leader have helped restore equanimity in the House disrupted by the opposition walkout. This has to be welcomed.

We all know that the country is passing through one of its most difficult times and there are so many burning issues on the table that the parliament has no time for exchange of invectives, innuendoes and personal remarks between the ruling and opposition party members. These are distractions that must be religiously avoided.

Although it must be said that it has become a part and parcel of our political culture to be indulging in remarks that are offensive in nature and aimed at hurting one another, we are happy to note that the parliament has, after a long while, set a precedent by recording its disapproval of unwarranted and indecent comments. We earnestly hope that from now on good sense will prevail and words of relevance and substance befitting the parliament will be exchanged on the floor of the House.

While we are on the subject, there is one other point we would like to raise here relating to the remark that the leader of the opposition purportedly made to the press to the effect that if ruling party lawmakers should make derogatory remarks against opposition MPs the latter also reserve the right to be making such comments. We are rather disappointed by her remarks, which we so much wish she had not made at all. Why such a national leader of her stature stoop as low as that?

Can't we make our defence budget more transparent?

STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING

Not all the expenditures in the military budget need to be laid out in detail, the reasons for which are well understood. But more transparency must be accorded to the defence budget and the major heads must be made public through the budget documents. This is essential not only to justify defence expenditure but also to put an end to controversy and criticism in the allotment procedures.



Brig Gen
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SURELY we can, but not until we stop treating it as a holy cow and attaching an aura of mystery to defence, something that was done during the pseudo-democratic rule. It appears that the bad practice has rubbed off on the democratic governments too, and since 1991, despite democratic government being at the helm in the country, the assiduity in keeping the defence budget out of the domain of public discourse has been progressively strengthened. The manner of depiction of the current defence budget is a case in point. It appears that not even the public representatives are privy to information regarding the major allocations of the defence sector under the ministry of defence.

This year, the finance minister, in keeping with the practice that he started last year in that -- while in 2004 he did us the favour of at least mentioning the lump sum allocation for defence -- did not bother to even mention the defence allocation, not to speak of

the breakdown under various heads, nor even the allocation made for the three services.

The only assumption that one can make from this is that either the defence budget merits very little importance to feature in the minister's remarks or that he would rather not engage in any discussion on the matter by giving out the details of allocation. On both counts he has gravely erred. Neither in a cash strapped country like ours can we keep from the public the knowledge of how their money is spent, nor can defence be such an 'unimportant' sector not to merit any mention in the finance minister's budget speech. Both the defence and the money spent for it must be a matter for the public to be familiar with. Or perhaps even the finance minister is not aware of the details and the government will perhaps play it by ear as and when the question of detail expenditures in various heads arises. Nothing can be more bizarre than this.

Such a policy of the government has generated all sorts of comments that could have been avoided. Knowing fully well that

the defence and defence spending in our country is a much talked about issue, merely mention of a lump sum allotment has engendered more criticism and speculative comments that need not have come up at all had the government been a bit more transparent in laying out the defence expenditure. And the critics, in particular those who deal with the subject of defence and development, cannot be blamed for ascribing all sorts of motives to the government for resorting to this way of describing the defence budget. Regrettably, it is the armed forces that has to bear the brunt of the criticism whereas one can say with some degree of certainty that a modicum of budgeting exercise is done at the service headquarters to meet the expenditures under several heads.

There is, however, a general diminution of the argument against having a military at all and one notices, very happily, that the number of those that term it as a non-productive entity, is gradually reducing, particularly after the military's contribution to the foreign exchange coffers from its UN peacekeeping operations. But

that does not detract from the imperative of having a detail and transparent defence allocation in the budget for the public representatives in the parliament to discuss. While one can understand the need for confidentiality in this matter there is no rationale that can justify the way the military budget finds mention in the main budget documents.

There are basically two aspects of the defence expenditure that one is generally faced with. One is the actual size of the military budget and the other is the rationale behind the size of the budget.

The size of the military budget, because of the way it is presented, naturally lends itself to criticism. It would be nice to know not only the breakdown of allotments sector wise but also some indication as to what has necessitated the increase or decrease in the sectoral allotments would help understand the planning rationale, and the direction that the military is taking. However, one is not sure whether the six per cent increase in the defence allocation this year has been made to keep up with the inflation or for any spe-

cific expenditure. Neither the finance minister's speech nor the budget documents make one of the important information available to the public. Thus, when the nation is hard pressed to make both ends meet, even necessary expenditures that remain shrouded in mystery is bound to be viewed with a degree of scepticism.

While there may not be enough grounds to question the 'why' there is certainly a need to know the 'how' of the military expenditure. When detail figures are not provided there is always the apprehension in the public mind that the fungibility of the military budget will be exploited; which in other words imply financial discipline. Absence of details and thus the lack of transparency always provide plenty of scope for improper use of military funds; and the public cannot be faulted for this perception, even if that may not be so in reality. That is why expenditures for the military must be well defined and follow a definite plan of acquisition particularly of weapon system. Otherwise, matters will be

dragged to the court as had happened in the case of purchase of Mig-29s, or it would cause severe embarrassment to the service chiefs as was in the case of our air chief who got his numbers horribly mixed up in the case of purchase of F-7s.

Our acquisitions must never be externally induced but dictated by strategic and tactical requirements of the forces. This had not been the case, as would be evident from the propensity to go for new systems with every new regime. Lack of continuity in procurement gives us a good indication of the unplanned expenditures. That is not to suggest for a moment that a particular weapon system is not necessary. Expenditure under a well argued plan would allow the services to conduct a proper budgeting exercise and the expenditures could be spread out over a period of years thus reducing the pressure on the economy.

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NATO's new role



M B NAQVI
writes from Karachi

ON June 8 met the NATO Defence Ministers to chart out their future course, technical re-organisation and the expansion of NATO's area of interest. This came amidst publicity about NATO's new expanded role.

NATO has now to take over some more US responsibilities for global security, whose balliwick remains universal. But the US requires ancillaries and cannot alone do all the chores. NATO is required to make itself more agile in promoting global security and should acquire the capability of quickly intervening in 'structural interventions'. Afghanistan and Iraq interventions were supposed to be structural interventions. A larger number of such interventions are visualised in which the NATO is required to move into them quickly and to get out quickly. What happens if a crisis is not resolved by, or despite, quick movement out of the NATO troops?

What will fill the gap that would result from situations of popular resistance such as Iraq and Afghanistan have exhibited would be considered presently. We will go into them presently. Let's grasp the basic idea first. NATO was an alliance against a specific enemy, viz. the Soviets. The Soviets having

disappeared, the question is what is NATO's function now? Shouldn't it disband itself the way Warsaw Pact did? However, the Americans wanted NATO enlarged and got it. This recent expansion was due largely to American influence in which old NATO members somewhat reluctantly acquiesced in the membership of several East Europeans and move eastward. Now the Americans, it seems, are asking it to move further eastward and southward into Asia and Africa to tackle frequent crises.

Why would NATO's older members respond with alacrity to the manifest American desire for a rapid action force for the entire globe in which NATO should share the occupations with American troops? The design is that NATO must become a rapid deployment force for structural interventions in the rest of the world. Question arises: why would old NATO countries automatically approve any structural intervention, without consulting their own national interest? Doubtless the US thinks it has to maintain global security that ensures its political, economic and strategic supremacy. But what would the other NATO members want to do with, say Iran? May be the next structural intervention is in Iran because the

Iranian nuclear programme is perceived by America as a threat to global security.

Smaller NATO nations' motivation remains to be considered. Why would the entire NATO membership, east Europeans included, act exactly as America wants them to? Why would they intervene in distant lands in Asia and Africa? They may get some of their soldiers killed. That may not be popular among their populations. What specific national interest of other NATO members would be served thereby?

The central concept, global security, preserves stability or status quo. America is obviously moved by the 'necessity' of remaining world leader, as their Neocon thinkers perceive. They assume the entire west to be a monolith: There are no differing interests or strategic considerations. This assumption is so wide, it is hard to take it seriously. Not that it is entirely unrealistic. The rest of the west is certainly a beneficiary of the way the world works both in economic and political spheres. And America is the main guarantor. It appears to be demanding a price for its continued services to rich nations.

Now what is the NATO being really asked to do. As noted, it has to have a large rapid deployment

forces for deployment abroad as and when the Americans desire. But the concept of getting into a crisis requiring strategic interventions and getting out quickly looks uncommonly like what the Americans wanted to do in Iraq and Afghanistan. The American forces need to be relieved of the tedium of daily policing the occupied country. Would the NATO do the policing for the US? That occasions some doubt: if the Americans find policing occupied territories unappealing, so would most NATO troops and governments behind them. There is however a hint here.

Clearly the NATO forces would be among those that would get out quickly after initially changing a regime, whether or not it works or it involves longer-term policing and suppression of the popular resistance. This is where a new idea has been introduced. NATO has to make alliances with other democracies. So far the names heard are of Australia, Japan, South Korea, India and similar others. Then, behind these semi-NATO members, a new grouping is emerging: non-NATO allies of the US; this tribe may become more numerous and it may hold the forts for the longer term. America is designing a two or three tier system of intervention: let GIs and

NATO troops do initial job and then it is handed over to the yeomen.

But situations in Afghanistan and Iraq are unmitigated disasters. The daily killings in Afghanistan may be less than the daily toll in Iraq, but the phenomenon is the same. What will any friend of America achieve? Troubles began as nationalistic popular resistance, and insofar as Iraq is concerned, it is mutating into civil war and worse. Western analysts have somehow not sifted facts and traced where do the equipment and funding for the Iraqi insurgents are coming from? Curiously one had not heard of stopping the funding of Zarqawi's men.

Nearer home, factors that are creating tension between Pakistan and Kabul, in the first place, and Pakistan and Britain and America, in the next, are known. It is obvious that what Karzai or a British Army colonel said cannot be far different from what the American generals and Karzai have been saying for over a year. Is American displeasure of Pakistan for not doing enough vis-à-vis Taliban without effect? The key concept remains global security. Pakistan being US ally -- of sorts, at any rate -- is sure to be asked to act to share the burden. But many in Pakistan

ask as to what is there for Pakistan in the American quest for global stability and security (status quo)? The global security means the US remaining the top dog.

Hyperpower's dominating the world is for its own benefit. Is that also in Pakistanis' interest? Most countries will ask what is there in the US leadership for us? For Pakistan's military rulers, the kind of largesse that the Americans have made available after 9/11 is sufficient reason for yoking Pakistan to American chariot. But how many Pakistanis share this view? Not many in fact. Pakistanis have no desire or credentials for fighting the terrorism that George Bush and Tony Blair have enunciated. It is an unending war against an Islamic ideology that appeals to many Pakistanis. Pakistan cannot be an ardent supporter of the Americans, given the texture of politics in Balochistan, NWFP's FATA areas and the climate of opinion, not to mention the military's option of using some terrorists in Kashmir.

Many Pakistanis, particularly the left-liberal fraternity, face a profound threat from what masquerades as Islamic extremism of many hues. That is a structural threat that cannot be fought with force alone. Government, bureaucracy and Army are, in different ways, part of the problem. Not even paramilitary or police forces are of any use. It is a battle for the hearts and minds of the people. Let rationalism provide the framework for ideological battles to be fought.

As for the NATO's new role, one wonders how the proud nations of Europe and Asia would simply go on running errands for Americans.

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PLAIN WORDS

Many Pakistanis, particularly the left-liberal fraternity, face a profound threat from what masquerades as Islamic extremism of many hues. That is a structural threat that cannot be fought with force alone. Government, bureaucracy and Army are, in different ways, part of the problem. Not even paramilitary or police forces are of any use. It is a battle for the hearts and minds of the people. Let rationalism provide the framework for ideological battles to be fought. As for the NATO's new role, one wonders how the proud nations of Europe and Asia would simply go on running errands for Americans.

OPINION

Let us take a stand against corruption

AM ZAKIR HUSSAIN

THE pervasiveness of corruption in third world countries has led many to relate corruption with poverty. But is this relationship absolute? It would be too simplistic to say that the poor are corrupt and the rich are incorruptible. The dynamics may also be just opposite: the rich, being corrupt themselves, can afford to incite and support the poor to be corrupt. A poor will be too coward to fan his greed, without any bracing.

A million dollar philosophical question is -- why greed? What in fact breeds greed? What are those breezes that brace greed? Could we say safely that, greed (of different types and shades) hibernates in every mind? It is however, one's upbringing which either teaches one that greed is reprehensible or allows one to indulge in greed. Our teaching itself might be so weak that the content of morality is easily washed off from our mind in

a sleaze company or being over powered by the degree of greed. The other is our inability to fathom the economic implications of corruption, that it eats into the vitality of the economic system of a country and that corruption engenders inflation and that inflation urges for further corruption and that all these boil down to the pauperisation of a nation as a whole, where every one, including the ones who have so much of ill gotten money, also suffer.

Acceptably, family background or friends or colleagues circle, i.e., working environment, may either be a prohibiting or a facilitating force. The national political system, however, is at the top of a triangular base and the deciding force, with intellectuals coming between them. Unsettling corruption trickles down from the top, by its sheer weight and does not creep upwards, because it cannot. Only petty corruptions, that have no economic or moral effect at all,

Since politicians are the strongest social and national force only those among them should be at the helms of political affairs who have been time tested for their honesty. This may only be ensured by the relevant systems, e.g., Election Commission and the Anti Corruption Commission. The highest offices in the government and in the country are the ones which will have to ensure that appropriate and effective people head these and other relevant institutions and offices.

may simmer at the bottom. This sort of corruption does not scale up, if there are watch-dogs to stymie this if it becomes reckoned. As long as this premise is true there will be no rampant corruption in a society. This can be ensured only when a family or a society or a nation looks down upon a corrupt with contempt and sanction and shuns his company. But unfortunately in a thoroughly corrupt environment illegal earnings, as long as it can ensure a powerful and comfortable cushion in the society, is not abhorred. When the corrupt are powerful then it is an indicator that the legal or law enforcing systems are pur-

chasable. It happens very obviously only when a political system itself is indulgent. In an ambience of this indulgence that does not contempt corruption it assumes larger and larger proportion and people become bolder with the vice as they are unhindered. This then becomes a culture. This is self-annihilation by a nation.

Only political commitment can rein in corruption. Any attempt to cleanse a nation of corruption therefore will have to ensure a clean political slate. Accountability should begin with those who would ask for accountability from others. One measure of political transparency, in this

regard, would be the difference between the legally limited cost of an election campaign and the actual spending.

The second most heinous, perhaps the root, is what can be called intellectual corruption; as the intellectuals are the ones that are responsible for the building blocks or destruction of the society and the future generation. The relationship between 'intellectual corruption' and 'political corruption' is complex. To begin with the reluctance of the intelligentsia to create a corruption-free ambience through their teachings is one factor that facilitates indulgence of future politicians and secondly

they themselves also jump into band-wagon when corruption is pervasive, to satisfy their own ulterior motives and needs.

Intellectual corruption may be multifaceted. It may be in the form of deliberately given improper advice; keeping eyes and ears shut to wrong doings, for what ever reason; not supporting right causes, if these do not serve one's own selfish ends; moonlighting; doing or saying something with ulterior motive, although some of these would seem to support a cause at a given time; creating coterie interests; engulging, rewarding and aggrandising people for wrong reasons, which

strengthen and create corruption. These acts snowball and strengthen the hands of those who push the good ones out of the mainstream (like the bad money driving the good money out of the market). Political leaders are made. They generally stand in the second rung of morality. Unless the intellectuals, the naturally created leaders, are clean and strong on moral grounds any expectation to change or uplift the society or a nation morally will be a utopian dream.

A few suggestions, to conclude this write up, are perhaps in order. Firstly, teachers need to teach, and teach well. They need to set examples and ideals as the initial step in more visible and stronger manner. Other professionals, who trade for noble causes should also join in and set examples of noble attitude and behaviour visibly, e.g., physicians, nurses, police, politicians etc. at every feasible turn and occasion. Every one from among them require to fight alone and

also in association publicly and visibly. Whistle blowing and uncovering corruption and ill motives of the so-called incorruptible, however dangerous and dirty job that might be, have to be in regular practice.

Since politicians are the strongest social and national force only those among them should be at the helms of political affairs who have been time tested for their honesty. This may only be ensured by the relevant systems, e.g., Election Commission and the Anti Corruption Commission. The highest offices in the government and in the country are the ones which will have to ensure that appropriate and effective people head these and other relevant institutions and offices. Any failure in this function will be the failure without any excuse, of those exalted ones, who have been placed in these most venerable and powerful positions and offices by the people.

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