

State Funding of Political Parties

THE core point about reforming sick politics in the country to our understanding relates to finding a strong safeguard against entry of black money into political party coffers and politics in general. The nexus between politics and black money has had a telling effect not merely on the outcome of polls but also on the shape of things to follow in the domains of administration and politics in the country. When political parties garner funds indiscriminately from whosoever is able and willing to pay, a whole array of bank defaulters, smugglers, big-time commission agents, contractors, armed cadre supremos and other dubious characters throw their hats into the funding fray wistfully eyeing on favours of all kinds — immunity to prosecution, policy accommodation, dividends in the shape of contracts and instant access to power coterie for purposes of manipulation. It is also to their convenience that they can be focused on the funding choices in a scenario where power is likely to seessaw between two major political parties of the country — AL and BNP. Funding either one of them is looked upon as an investment in the future.

We think the most forceful and clinching answer to this sickening continuation of political criminality lies in the state funding of political parties. The argument that state funding of political parties is a luxury in a poor country strapped for cash to meet competing social priorities does not hold water when what is visualised here is an expenditure of Tk 300 to 400 crore under the proposed new head. This would amount to a tiny percentage of the GDP or about one per cent of the operational cost of running the country's administration as such. Juxtaposed against the costs of negative politics in the country the monetary involvement looks more than justified for the dividends it will reap in terms of cleaner pro-people politics.

Most importantly, when the state places specified amounts of money at the disposal of political parties it can demand and secure transparency of accounts from the recipients with spot-on effectiveness. Sheshan and Gill as Chief Election Commissioner of India went to the extent of demanding daily accounting of expenses from candidates during electoral campaigns. It will be possible to follow this practice more effectively when the state starts funding the political parties. With a good auditing network to complement state funding of political parties it can do wonders by way of reforming politics in the country.

One formula we can think of by way of giving due weightage to political parties in the matter of state funding is to link it to the percentage of popular vote they had bagged in relation to each other in the previous election.

No other developing country is known to have done this. It will be a bold move on our part. We have already become a 'first' of sorts by being the only country in the world to hold elections under a caretaker government. So, why not take another bold step to free our elections, our politics and our political parties from the clutches of black money peddlers.

Teachers' Strike

DISBURSEMENT of salary from the public exchequer for the teachers of some 22,000 non-government schools, colleges and madrassahs across the country remains an issue because successive governments have side-stepped it, instead of facing the same head on. Often the teachers have arranged sit-ins, demonstrations and even indefinite strikes to press home their demand and often they have gone back to their work on some airy-fairy assurance from the education minister only to take to the streets some time later. This time around, the teachers' strike on the age-old demand comes halfway through the academic year, keeping abeyance half-yearly examinations at most of the non-government schools. Although nearly a month has gone by since the work abstention began on July 10 this year, the government has so far made no concrete move to resolve the crisis. The education secretary says the government's position on the issue stands unchanged, which means the matter is still under "active consideration". While the government actively considers the demand and the teachers continue the strike, it is inevitably the students, and their parents, who pass their days in stifling anxiety.

If the government were to accommodate the teachers' demand, it would have to make arrangement of some 150 to 200 crore taka per annum, a formidable amount indeed relative to the total allocation to the education sector. Budgetary aspect aside, there has to be a rationale behind such a huge investment. Would the assurance of disbursement of salary from the public exchequer bring about any substantial change to the overall standard of education? If not, why would the taxpayers accept enhanced allocation in this regard?

Should the government decide to entertain the teachers' demand up to any extent, the assurance must be conditional upon better performance from them. Our long-term view in this regard is that the public exchequer should be gradually relieved of this expenditure with the government encouraging a stronger private sector participation in educational funding. Our plea to the teachers would be, don't let your movement be a hindrance to the academic progress of your students.

Israeli Govt. in Deep Crisis: Peace Talks Face Uncertainty

Any unilateral declaration without exhausting all the possibilities that Prime Minister Barak may like to explore with the support of the present US administration may not be considered good by many and may create unnecessary diplomatic problems for the Palestinians. Such an action will, indeed, nullify all the peace work done during these years and put the Palestinians back to square one in terms of their relation with Israel.

ment, Barak said, "The elections are much further away than you think". He seems hopeful about reversing the present mood of the Knesset on fresh election. After all, the same members could not be sure about their returns to the Knesset, then why taking risk? These members know the public preference on peace and security against ceding of land to the real owners. This was quite clear in the last election when Barak was elected as the Prime Minister.

Barak has about 90 days to consolidate his position and pursue his peace agenda, if necessary, under a minority government. He knows he will have to go directly to the people for approval of the peace agreement, if he succeeds in drawing up one with the Palestinians.

Unfortunately, Barak faced another debacle a couple of days ago when Shimon Peres, a Nobel Laureate and indeed a peace laureate, lost in the presidential race in the second ballot to a relatively less known right wing politician, Mr Katsav. Barak openly campaigned for Shimon Peres and indeed Israeli public favoured Peres over Katsav by 3 to 1 margin in the opinion poll.

This shows that the present democratic institutions, not only in Israel but also in many different democracies, do not respond to the wishes of the common people. In some countries democracy works somewhat better because of their long traditions, but there too democracy suffers setbacks when money, party and group interests etc., overly influence the democratic process. Once elected, the individuals return to their own ideas and views regardless of what people need or want and indeed turns the democratic system into dictatorship of elected individuals (more on democ-

racy in a separate comment).

Israel is relatively a new state as it was established on May 14, 1948. In the eyes of many including the West, Israel is a democratic country. But here in the Knesset, some political parties including the radical ones have started working against the

and their historical claim of sovereignty, East Jerusalem will be a big liability for Israel in terms of administrative, security and political control. Even now, after more than 50 years of occupation, Israel has very little control over East Jerusalem. Therefore, the shared sovereignty seems to

The other alternative of separate sovereignty of the respective religious sites belonging to respective parties with well-defined areas of operation and control may also deserve consideration but this may not be acceptable to Israel.

Shared sovereignty means Israelis do hold sovereignty over entire Jerusalem. This should bring satisfaction to those who have sentimental attachment to it. But because of the special nature, requirement and the status of East Jerusalem which holds the sites holy to three religions, special arrangements are called for. This is why the political, administrative and security matters are to be appropriately allocated and shared by the people and the government of both sides. If this is realised early by both sides, negotiations would be much easier and a deal can be reached.

Let Israelis Decide on a DEAL

Let Prime Minister Barak negotiate and conclude a deal on the basis of shared sovereignty over East Jerusalem but with full security arrangements guaranteed by the US and the world community and go back directly to Israeli people for approval before Knesset resumes its work in some 90 days time. This 90-day period is crucial for the M-East peace. Barak is likely to get approval of the majority of the Israelis as he is still trusted by the people as someone who is honest and as the former Chief of Staff understands security better than those radicals. This is most important for the Israelis. The impression that I got during my visit to Jerusalem some time ago is that a big majority of Israelis want peace with security and would not bother too much about



Spotlight on Middle East

Muslehuddin Ahmad

Let Barak Continue to Work on the Deal on 'Land for Peace and Security'

Prime Minister Barak has already staked his political life on the peace process and he got a mandate from the Israeli people for negotiating peace on the basis of 'Land for Peace'. Indeed, he would do well to go ahead with the peace negotiations as his predecessor and mentor Rabin did and complete a deal with the Palestinians. As I suggested in my earlier comment (The Daily Star, July 27, 2000), shared sovereignty of East Jerusalem with well defined political, security and administrative control of the area and particularly the religious sites seem to be the peaceful way out of the this volatile situation. It seems that such a solution with full security measures would be acceptable to the people on both sides.

Does the Wind of Peace Blow Gently ?

by A M M Shahabuddin

The latest move both by the Hijbul Mujahedeen and the Indian government carry huge potentials that can't be denied. Whatever may be the outcome of the pouring in and pouring out of fiery things by India and Pakistan at this stage would perhaps be mostly for home-consumption. But the peace process set can't be allowed to go down the hills again endangering the relationship between the two countries.

organisation covering over a dozen of militant groups, including the Hijbul Mujahedeen, who had welcomed Delhi's offer of unconditional talks with Hijbul Mujahedeen; adding, that the proposal "reflects a change and could be a step in right direction." He, however, said that cease-fire call was a hasty step, but expressed the hope that the other militant groups would "try to reach a common position It has to be a collective effort ... we will sort it out."

Incidentally, Bhat also disclosed at this stage that he had earlier held "unofficial" talks with "some (Indian) bureaucrats," which at last confirms earlier reports that "backdoor" meetings had taken place to find an amicable solution to the much-vexed Kashmir problem.

It may be recalled here that during the last days of the Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, reports were very much in the air about such 'unofficial' behind-the-scenes talks between Indian official Mr Mishra and Pakistan's retired foreign Secretary Agha Shahi who made several 'secret' shuttle runs between Delhi and Islamabad. And later it was heard from a very high-up level in Delhi saying that we were about to reach a point of agreement on Kashmir, had it not been scuttled by the fall of Nawaz Sharif's government.

US 'Role' Praised

Meanwhile, Pakistan's military ruler, General Musharraf, giving his apparent endorsement to Hijbul's cease-fire declaration, in an interview with The Times of London praised America for its "role in providing ideas and support" towards the goal of peace in Kashmir, adding, that "it had been brought one step closer" by the cease-fire declaration of the Hijbul. Pakistan's Chief Executive Gen Musharraf further said, "I would like to give credit to the Americans to the extent that they played a role in the resolution of Kashmir dispute."

Although it goes against India's stance on 'no-third-party involvement', what the General had said is not just the tip of the iceberg, but it seems to have uncovered the whole iceberg! (Is the cat still in the bag?) The US "ideas" and "support," the two phraseologies, used by Gen Musharraf, while praising US "role," were perhaps working behind the scenes, since the visit to the sub-continent by President Clinton in March last, and it seems to have produced instant results. The US President's "invisible" hand must have worked well in shaping the peace-process. As they say "good things always come in small packages." So whatever, might have come so far in "small packages" of 'ideas and support,' from whatever source it might be, let them prove to be 'good things' for not-only the future peace and prosperity of Kashmir, but also a long-lasting peace and stability in the sub-continent and the region.

What began in the name of peace and friendship between India and Pakistan to find a just solution of Kashmir problem, with the historic 'bus diplomacy' of Indian Prime Minister Vajpayee to Lahore was ripped through mid-way by, what is now called, 'Kargil tragedy' for Pakistan, and 'Kargil victory' for India, is now again put on the track, (thanks to US "ideas and support"), with the declaration of cease-fire by one of the extremists militant groups, Hijbul Mujahedeen, which only in May last threatened to send 'suicide bombers' against military camps in Kashmir. And India's prompt reaction, responding to Hijbul's cease-fire call, to extend invitation to the militants to peace dialogue had been a miraculous development. India's offer of unconditional talks has shown vividly India's flexibility and openness.

It must, however, be admitted that the cease-fire call by the militants group has come at a very crucial time for India which

should take full advantage of it. According to an Indian military source, an estimated 3,500 militants were in Kashmir and an additional 5,000 were "trained and ready to cross the border" from their Pakistan camps. Indian military strategists had also anticipated "an increase in fighting this summer," creating perhaps a renewed Kargil-like situation.

In such a volatile situation, has come the cease-fire declaration from the largest single and most powerful militants group to serve as a breathing-space for India to take advantage of it. On the other hand, the declaration of cease-fire by a pro-Pakistan and Pakistan-based militant group will be exploited by Pakistan to show before the world that it had no control over the organisation and its decision was independent of its own.

However, the latest move both by the Hijbul Mujahedeen and the Indian government carry huge potentials that can't be denied. Whatever may be the outcome of the pouring in and pouring out of fiery things by India and Pakistan at this stage would perhaps be mostly for home-consumption. But the peace process set can't be



allowed to go down the hills again endangering the relationship between the two countries. At least the international community that is eagerly waiting for peace and stability not only in the sub-continent but also in South-East Asia region, won't allow it to be derailed. And neither India nor Pakistan would like to be accused of firing the first shot to kill the peace dove. The two newly-emerged Asian nuclear powers India and Pakistan must live together in the greater interests of the people of the two countries and establish peace and stability in the region.

Feedback from a Voter Tackling the Political Dengue!

by A Husnain

OUR lot is not improving; and if improving, the pace is too slow. We are just not clicking as a new nation, as the spark of regeneration is damped. Factions and local differences in approach are retarding our progress. We know about it, and do not do anything about the problems at the higher levels of definitions. We are still tinkering with the national grammar and composition. Where is the epic of Bangladesh?

We cannot blame the foreigners for our internal plight and external show, brought in by our own weaknesses and lack of cohesion and unity. A disarrayed nation is fighting an internal war at the ideological front, led by the zealous political leaders, who believe in the uniqueness and exclusiveness of the means employed to achieve the lofty goals.

Have we learnt to be practical enough to overcome the day-to-day frictions due to difference of opinion? We stumble too much on the uneven road, and even when a new road is under construction. The novelty of the national tale overwhelms us at the right moments. We cannot break the shackles and earn freedom from ourselves.

The vendors of culture are vying with the hawkers of nationalism; and extremism is becoming the better part of valour and honourable compromise. We have spent 30 years debating what is good for us. One can recall the story of the philosopher

guru who told his students never to be sure of anything.

So on the day he died, the students started debating whether he had actually died or not, and the corpse lay waiting for disposal. Let us get rid of dead ideas.

When will the debate end so that we can start working? We simply cannot depart from the port for that great voyage as pilgrims of a new nation. We were wallowing in mud, and now we cannot extract ourselves from the quagmire.

The mass has to be stirred and moved. To do this, a ladie is required for the energy input, as through the hub of a wheel. This energy has to come from the leaders, led by the government. This beam of energy is now ricocheting into different directions from interfering forces whose patriotism is second to none. The national consensus is lacking. It has nothing to do with the imaginary enemies of the nation. The latter have to be analysed and sorted out. Here the opportunists come in and misled the nation, for self gain. The violence comes later; once a premise, good or bad, is accepted, for a campaign or operation. The party must come after the country.

Analysts are publicly questioning the old and outdated colonial style of politics still being practised in the country, when the benefits of the explosive information age could be harnessed in innovative ways to increase coverage and impact, and to reduce the cost of electioneering. The

the full sovereignty over East Jerusalem which Israel can never control any way. The worst would be a fresh election where Barak has to continue to harp on his earlier promise of land for peace with full security. The people may send more of "peace people" to the new Knesset. In case Prime Minister Barak fails on such a stand which seems unlikely, the world community will then appropriately judge the attitude of Israel and take their decisions.

Need for the Final Summit Soon: Peace be Given Another Chance

At Camp David or at an appropriate place, under the same three leaders, the peace should be given another chance. This is why Arafat may like to delay his unilateral declaration of Palestinian State. I made the same suggestion in my previous article. As the Palestinians have already got the State which Israel has also accepted, declaration is a formality and this can be done any time but prudence suggest that it should be done under best of conditions. This will be good for the Palestinians and Israelis and indeed for all the people of the region.

Exhaust All Possibilities before any Unilateral Declaration

Any unilateral declaration without exhausting all the possibilities that Prime Minister Barak may like to explore with the support of the present US administration may not be considered good by many and may create unnecessary diplomatic problems for the Palestinians. Such an action will, indeed, nullify all the peace work done during these years and put the Palestinians back to square one in terms of their relation with the neighbour Israel. The Palestinians will lose much of the territories they are expected to get back. The entity will continue and uncontrollable violence will erupt thus plunging the entire area into virtual flames.

Cricket Again Shows the Way

Let the leadership in both the countries take a lesson from the recent cricket one-day played between Asia and the rest of the world (ROW) in England, with Captain Akram of Pakistan as captain of Asia. Actually, Asia was to be led by Tendulkar, but, in his absence due to illness, the responsibility was given to Akram, and not to any other Indian cricketers present there. The Indo-Pak players showed wonderful co-operations and understanding while playing against the ROW, and won applause from Asian audience, most of whom were Indians. Later, Akram said, "Felt very nice playing with the Indian players and getting support from the Indian public ... We really mixed in well. You would see Pakistan's and Indians waving (their national) flags next to each other and joking with each other." So it was such an occasion when the Indians and Pakistanis forgot their mutual distrust, mistrust, animosity and hatred of each other, at least for the time being, when they were involved in defence of a common cause.

It should open the eyes of the leaders and they should take a lesson how to make a common cause. When five decades of hatred against each other could not keep them apart in the cricket ground, it shows they are very much keen to be nearer. Cricket shows which way the wind is blowing.

(The writer is a retired UN official.)

To the Editor ...

Teachers are robbers!

Sir, When teachers rob and cheat, who will teach the teachers (DS editorial of July 29 on drawing salaries on fictitious posts and other irregularities)? The lame government is unable to do so, as it appears to be too weak to take disciplinary action, either due to inefficiency or nepotism. Where are the honest teachers to teach the children, the future generation of the country? We are poisoning the very roots of culture and morality. We need good administrative governance, not political arrogance.

The education sector has many other types of problems, which have been spotlighted in the media (student and teacher politics; violence and use of arms by the armed cadres under known godfathers; the teacher politics; the tutorial and coaching rackets to make money on the

side; student politics as a profitable avocation; mass cheating in examinations by the examinees and the examiners, the racket in publishing text books etc).

The education system has gone to the dogs, for which all credit may go to the peoples' representatives who administer the country, and talk big and pompous all the time, hiding the weaknesses seen by all. How the politicians feel proud of their duties and responsibilities towards the society?

Once the people lose faith in the political system, there are evil and trying days ahead for the country. Sudden reformation is unlikely, as illegal arms would be used indiscriminately by the terrorists of the different groups and parties for protecting own vested interests. Violence has entered politics, and it is a bad omen for the future of politics; and the politicians are not

focussing on the issue. Political malpractice have created a grim situation in the society and government administration. No use going to the PM, she will blame others for all the illnesses; as if the government has nothing else to do.

AZ
Dhaka

Fake bombs?

Sir, In Faridpur, why the second of the two sophisticated bombs did not go off, as it was detected later, at the helicopter pad, after the VIP had landed and flown back? How could one bomb fail before detection, when the bomb-disposal squad was praising the quality of the bombs? Had the fellow to press the button fled away? It is all too intriguing for the laymen. Can we have a more sensible explanation?

Dumb Citizen
Dhaka