

SUNDAY POUCH

Return to 1967 ME borders

Netanyahu's rejection impedes peace

THE differences which have cropped up between Barack Obama and Binyamin Netanyahu over the former's Middle East pronouncements are misplaced. Israel's hawkish prime minister has unnecessarily tried to push the reality under the carpet. The reality is that a solution to the Palestinian issue demands Israel's return to the borders that existed prior to the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. The standard argument here is UN Security Council Resolution 242, adopted soon after the war, demanding that Israel go back to its earlier geographical position by vacating all territories it occupied in the course of the Six-Day war.

That any question of a solution to the Middle East problem rests on a return to the pre-1967 realities has also been an article of faith with successive American administrations, particularly since Bill Clinton's, when the United States brokered a deal between Yasser Arafat and Yitzhak Rabin in the mid 1990s. Therefore, when President Obama publicly called for a peace deal to be shaped around the pre-1967 borders, he was only reiterating what has long been American policy. Besides, he also made it clear that such a deal would need to guarantee mutually agreed swaps of territory, which could be a subtle way of letting Israel hang on to the illegal settlements it has built on the West Bank. It cannot be expected that Palestinians will agree to having a state for themselves that will be a throwback to the 'bantustans' created in apartheid-era South Africa. For Israel's prime minister to dismiss the Obama initiative is really to complicate matters, for the attitude suggests Israel's unwillingness to give up territory it has long occupied in clear, brazen defiance of international law. Additionally, Israel's unwillingness to negotiate with a Palestinian authority which includes Hamas is a patent excuse on Netanyahu's part to have the crisis prolonged. It ought to be the Palestinians' prerogative as to who they want to represent them in government and in dealings with nations abroad.

Mr. Netanyahu should not expect the world's sympathy for his belligerence. For President Obama, the emphasis must now be on pushing his plan harder if the projected Palestinian state is to be a reality.

Help Biman to its feet

Urgent overhaul imperative

BIMAN Bangladesh Airlines, the national flag carrier, has been in a state of disorder for quite a long time now. We have more or less got used to the news of its declining performance.

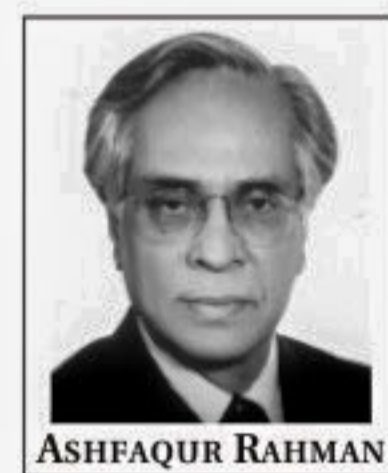
The severe cash crunch that it is faced with is cause for worry. It had to borrow Taka 20 crore from bank to pay salaries to its 2600-strong staff strength in April. It owes more than Taka 20 crore to Padma Oil while its London office is in debt of over Taka 49 crore to different airports and organisations. It also owes Taka 125 crore to the Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh. Biman's earnings from ticket sales fell by more than Taka 100 crore between January 17 and April 30 this year. The statistics paint a dismal picture. It is now in a near-bankrupt situation.

Although Biman had accumulated Taka 510 crore in cash reserves in February 2008, it has gone in the red for the last three and a half years. Why is Biman persistently under such crisis when other airlines are doing good business operating in our routes?

Mismanagement, lack of planning and failure to operate flights on schedule have brought the national carrier to this perilous situation.

Biman is so cash-strapped that it cannot send its aircraft to Singapore for a routine check up, let alone purchase new ones. Corruption plagues the organization, some putting the drain at a whopping figure of Taka 700 crore.

It is high time the government took up some serious overhauling and streamlining in the management and operational areas of the organization. The government should help Biman realize the huge amount of arrears that different ministries and departments have run up with the Biman. Besides, the unbridled corruption



ASHFAQUR RAHMAN

MARK Twain had once said: "France has neither winter or summer nor morals. Apart from these drawbacks it is a fine country."

When the Dominique Strauss Kahn (DSK) scandal broke last week in New York, the world was looking at the man who began it all. He was none other but a Frenchman. The arrest of DSK, the chief of the International Monetary Fund, for an alleged sexual attack of a maid at a New York hotel sent tremors for the first time through the French political establishment.

But, first, who are the French?

These people are not total strangers to Bengalis. Our history tells us that the French came to our shores early in the sixteenth century to trade. At that time the English were also here for the same purpose. But both these nations were at war with each other in Europe. They continued their war on our soil and we were sucked into their rivalry. Many of us heard about the English Lord Clive fighting the French General Duplex. Of course, the French were defeated and routed from Bengal.

Yet, the French are a great people. They are ethnically Gauls (Celts) with a wonderful language, which they dearly love. Like us they are very emotional about their language. Even today about 300 million people in 55 countries speak French as their own or as a second language. It was the language used for diplomacy for several centuries in Europe.

The French are noted for starting the mother of all revolutions way back in 1789. Through this revolution they gave the world startling new concepts like liberty, equality and fraternity. It brought change to most of the governments in the then Europe and introduced democracy in place of monarchy. Today, France continues to inspire many countries in Africa and Asia to establish democratic governance.

The people of France have many

more things to their credit. They lead the world in fashion, in perfumery, in cinema and the arts, in cuisine, in diplomacy to the disappointment of many other great powers. There are many French intellectuals who still lead the world in thought and theories.

The French women lead the world in fashion. They also lead in coquetry. The rule of French women is to make an effort at all times to look attractive and appealing to others. To her "less is more" when it comes to her looks. They have a restraint in these matters. They believe that makeup is there to enhance a women's face subtly, not cover up

President Nicholas Sarkozy divorced his first wife and married a model who is not only taller than him but also immensely attractive.

The French as a people are least bothered about what happens in the personal lives of their politicians. It is simply not their business. Hence, no French politician or bureaucrat has suffered politically for such moral shenanigans.

In contrast, the Americans are finicky about the morals of their politicians. They cannot tolerate any of their politicians gallivanting with women. Americans are liberal when it comes to freedom of speech or religion. But they have almost

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or camouflage her face completely. Just look at a French model at a fashion show.

Perhaps that is why the French have recently ordained that the Muslim 'burqa' (veil) in public places is not admissible. Anyone who covers her face must pay a fine. This does not go down well with the Muslims who have immigrated there from the Middle East and Asia.

A French man on the other hand has a condescending or philosophic look. He is easily excitable and can be violently forthright. A typical Frenchman will sport fulsome seductive lips usually formed in a pucker.

No wonder then, with such combustible looks and elegant demeanour, both the French men and women throughout history were involved in martial and extra-marital scandals.

In recent times, the late lamented French President Francois Mitterrand had a mistress who only appeared before the public after he died. He had fathered children through this liaison. The present

zero tolerance towards sexual immorality. They think that a politician cheating on his wife is pure dishonesty.

The question that is moot now is whether DSK can get out of this fix quickly in order to be a candidate from the Socialist Party to contest in the French presidential election in 2012. This was what he was aiming for before he got entangled in New York last week.

Many however think that the incident is part of a political conspiracy to deny him the opportunity to contest for the post of French president.

Questions are being asked as to why the maid in question was sent to his room when the hotel knew that DSK had not checked out. Also, why are the Americans being so hard on the treatment meted to this man? The world only knows that the maid who is the alleged victim is a recent immigrant from Guinea in West Africa. She is a Muslim, struggling to carve out a livelihood.

It is curious that DSK has been sent to the high security prison in

New York's Rikers Island. However, the court has now agreed to let him out on bail under restrictive conditions, such as wearing a security bracelet staying 24 hours in his daughter's New York apartment till the next hearing.

The fracas with DSK in IMF offers a chance for the emerging economies of the world to revamp the organisation.

They have expressed their dismay at the traditional carve-up of leadership -- with a European heading the IMF and an American heading the World Bank. The developing countries are always thought of as supplicants and not stakeholders of the body.

Thus, with the resignation of DSK, the field is open for other countries from the developing world to try to occupy this position. A total of 14 candidates from around the world are vying for this position, including one from India. But the most likely person to get the position could be the French finance minister, who is a woman.

In March this year, eyebrows were raised when it was leaked out that French President Sarkozy and his elegant wife Carla Bruni Sarkozy were cheating on each other. The world reacted with shock at the rumours, except France. There, the people responded with a Gallic shrug. They were wondering what the fuss was all about.

The French culture minister recently admitted of holidays for sex in Thailand. This hardly ruffled a feather in the French establishment.

The 19th century French author Alexandre Dumas had once commented: "The bonds of wedlock (in France) are so heavy that it takes two to carry them, sometimes three."

Are we to assume that for Dominique the bonds of marriage has proved too heavy? We may need to wait a little longer to find out whether his romp in New York with the chamber maid has lightened his burden. After all, to DSK it is *c'est mon affaire* (that is my affair)!

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| The New York Times EXCLUSIVE

Patience, not punishment, for Pakistan

TALAT MASOOD

THE revelation that Osama bin Laden was living less than a mile from Pakistan's national military academy has raised serious questions about the efficacy of Pakistan's military and intelligence services and brought into sharp focus the weakness of the Pakistani state.

There is huge pressure from civil society and opposition parties to appoint a commission to investigate the raid on bin Laden's compound in Abbottabad, and to take action against those responsible for the lapses that allowed US forces to enter Pakistani territory undetected. The ability of the armed forces to guard the border with Afghanistan and the civilian government's control over security matters have also been put into doubt.

The volatile situation in Pakistan is matched by the understandable outrage of Americans that the world's most notorious terrorist lived unmolested for five years in a city teeming with Pakistani military officers. But any overreaction by Washington could endanger Pakistani democracy and further empower the military -- or even lead to an outright military takeover. For US, support for Pakistan's civilian, democratic government is the only way to ensure regional peace, stability and prosperity.

Washington cannot separate its military relationship with Pakistan from its political relationship:

America needs Pakistan's cooperation to permit the smooth withdrawal of the majority of US troops from Afghanistan before 2012, while the Obama administration must disentangle itself from the Afghan war to help ensure the president's re-election. And there can be no peace in Afghanistan without a modicum of Pakistani assistance.

For Pakistan, America's military and economic assistance is vital. Moreover, when Pakistan is facing enormous domestic difficulties, it can ill afford to antagonise America. Leaders in both countries must there-

express displeasure, but it would have several unhappy consequences.

First, it would reinforce the already strong perception in Pakistan that the United States is an unreliable ally that acts unilaterally. Second, it would confirm the view that the United States favours India and reinforce the Pakistani security establishment's obsession with India as the enemy.

This, in turn, would renew Pakistan's determination to maintain a strong voice and presence in Afghanistan -- especially in Pashtun

If America tries to punish rather than support Pakistan in this difficult hour, the Pakistani military, in a dangerous test of wills, might pursue a course of action based on emotion and hyped-up nationalism that will only weaken the joint effort to fight terrorism.

fore step back from confrontation and find ways to repair the damage. Pushing Pakistan's political leadership to the brink is not an option.

Washington should avoid the temptation to pursue aggressive diplomacy, cut off economic assistance or intensify its Predator drone attacks. The most dangerous and counterproductive step would be for the US Congress to drastically cut financing for Pakistan's military. Such a punitive measure might satisfy the American need to

areas -- through the Afghan Taliban and other groups unfriendly to the United States, a strategy that many in the security establishment believe will help Pakistan avoid encirclement by India.

This would be a very dangerous route for Pakistan to pursue, as it would invite reprisals and increase Western and Indian distrust of Pakistan. It might also embolden India to go after the Pakistan-based terrorist group Lashkar-e-Taiba, which India and the United States

say carried out the 2008 attacks in Mumbai, and lead the United States to strike at the Taliban-allied Haqqani network in Pakistan. Such moves would create a vicious cycle of recrimination that would result in Pakistan and the region becoming even more unstable and chaotic.

To be sure, Pakistan's India-centric policy is harmful and counterproductive. The present crisis provides an opportunity for the Pakistani military to give up this strategically misguided obsession. India should also use this window of opportunity to step forward and normalise relations with its neighbour, instead of gloating over Pakistan's misfortunes.

The killing of bin Laden proves once and for all that the Pakistani military cannot look the other way as Afghan Taliban gather in Pakistan. Failing to act with full force against Islamist extremists at home is no longer an option. However, the United States needs to show greater understanding and patience while Pakistan undertakes this necessary strategic shift.

If America tries to punish rather than support Pakistan in this difficult hour, the Pakistani military, in a dangerous test of wills, might pursue a course of action based on emotion and hyped-up nationalism that will only weaken the joint effort to fight terrorism.

The writer is a military analyst and a retired lieutenant general of the Pakistan army.

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THIS DAY IN HISTORY

May 22

334 BC

The Macedonian army of Alexander the Great defeats Darius III of Persia in the Battle of the Granicus.

1906

The Wright brothers are granted U.S. patent number 821,393 for their "Flying-Machine".

1939

World War II: Germany and Italy sign the Pact of Steel.

1942

Mexico enters World War II on the side of the Allies.

1972

Ceylon adopts a new constitution, thus becoming a Republic, changes its name to Sri Lanka, and joins the Commonwealth of Nations.

1990

North and South Yemen are unified to create the Republic of Yemen.

1992

Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Slovenia join the United Nations.