

Strengthening EC

Its suggestions are worth a look

REPORTEDLY, there has been a rethinking, particularly on the part of the Election Commission, to strengthen its hand in conducting elections. One could not agree more that the Commission should have all the necessary powers to ensure free and fair elections that are transparent in all respects.

There are a few suggestions that are rather innovative. For example the matter of investing the EC with powers to cancel and declare seats of MPs, who have furnished wrong information, vacant. Given the past experiences of inordinate delays through the normal legal procedures to adjudicate such disputes, some of which could not be resolved within the tenure of the parliament, the idea deserves consideration.

On the other hand, while the idea of giving the EC authority to punish officials, who are temporarily on deputation to it for election duties, for misconduct and incompetence, appears quite rational, its implications on the commission's manpower and workload should not be lost sight of.

Admittedly, the EC should not only have authority to withdraw errant election officials, it should be able to also mete out appropriate punishments to them. This requirement stems from the experience of the EC of past instances where the offending officials did not face any departmental or legal procedures after being withdrawn for improper acts. But one wonders whether the EC has the manpower to involve itself in the paperwork as well as the investigation required to draw up proceedings against an errant official.

There is indeed a need to re-look at the RPO, and we agree with the idea in principle of the EC seeking more powers to conduct election without being dependent or beholden to the government or any of its agencies. However, the suggestions must be considered very objectively, since one should not have more in its hand than one can handle.

Our ambitious ADP

Implementation is key

A 28% increase in the recently approved Annual Development Programme (ADP) of Tk. 46,000 crore for the coming fiscal year brings with it several questions, the key one being, how far will it be implemented?

Of the ADP of the last fiscal year, only 60% has been implemented in the last 10 months, leaving Tk. 14,221 crore of funds to be spent in the remaining two months. Neither has any progress been made under the Public-Private Partnership (PPP), an initiative of the current government to encourage private investment. In the last two fiscal years, Tk. 2,500 crore and Tk. 3,000 crore respectively were allocated to PPP but not a penny has been spent. The 16 PPP projects included in the new ADP will really put the government to test.

According to experts, a big ADP also comes with increased risks such as to quality, proper distribution of funds and projects based on political considerations -- the latter an even greater concern with regards to a block allocation of more than Tk. 700 crore. We should also be careful about drawing satisfaction from the fact that our dependence on foreign aid has decreased, as it may well be that the failure to implement has led to reduced foreign aid resulting in less dependence.

A recent move by the government to speed up the implementation process by giving the concerned ministries more financial authority has been welcomed, subject to a proper system of check and balance and efficient monitoring mechanisms. Previous measures taken to speed up the ADP implementation process included providing ministries with instructions regarding development projects early on and the relaxation of procurement laws, all of which we hope will serve to speed up the process and ultimately increase implementation. The assigning of competent project directors following the dismissal of incompetent ones, as suggested by the Prime Minister herself, is also vital.

We stress here that while allocation of funds is all well and good, implementation is key. At the end of the year, rather than highly ambitious but unfulfilled plans on paper, we wish to see tangible results towards develop-

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

May 31

1223

Mongol invasion of the Cumans: Battle of the Kalka River Mongol armies of Genghis Khan led by Subutai defeat Kievan Rus and Cumans.

1790

French Revolution: the Revolutionary Tribunal is suppressed.

1910

Creation of the Union of South Africa.

1924

The Soviet Union signs an agreement with the Peking government, referring to Outer Mongolia as an "integral part of the Republic of China", whose "sovereignty" therein the Soviet Union promises to respect.

1961

Republic of South Africa created.

1962

Adolf Eichmann is hanged in Israel.

1987

The member states of the World Health Organization (WHO) created World No Tobacco Day (WNTD).

ENIGMATTERS

It's time for a free state



MOHAMMAD ALI SATTAR

PM Benjamin Netanyahu's address to US legislators travelled far from peace. It was a downright defiance of legitimate demand. The natural reaction of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas was "if negotiations don't take place, we shall go to the UN and seek recognition from its 192 members for the State of Palestine."

The meeting between Netanyahu and Obama, which was beamed on TV channels, lay bare the negative reaction of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas was "if negotiations don't take place, we shall go to the UN and seek recognition from its 192 members for the State of Palestine." The meeting between Netanyahu and Obama, which was beamed on TV channels, lay bare the negative bearing that the Israeli PM harbours for the Palestinians. He snubbed Obama's proposal of going back to the 1967 borders prior to reaching the two-state solutions. Embarrassed Obama showed resilience in face of the rebuff.

The Israel leader spelt out a clear no to Israel's full withdrawal to the 1967 borders; he rejected the suggestion of the partition of Jerusalem, Palestinian military presence in the would-be state and return of the Palestine refugees.

So it's a denial of the very existence of the people who were driven away from their land. And US goes on patronising the haughtiness of Israel's leaders for decades without any remorse. Are Jewish lobbying and wealth so indispensable in US politics and economy that the Americans will be dictated by them for perpetuity?

Modern America should reflect anew on the "Zionist theory" which has been sapping the American character in all US affairs. If the Jews are

rocking the US economy by their presence in all investment sectors including oil and weapons, the "most powerful country in the world" does not remain "the most powerful" with its "driving force" in the hands of a supposedly marginal collection of wrong head individuals.

Can we ignore Jewish complicity in the huge US economic downturn couple of years back that shook the whole world (mainly the Western economies)?

What's the secret of the US weakness? Is it the Zionist money, the conclave, the faith or the anti-Muslim stance? It is

certainly not the "middle kingdom" like China that it demands full policy shift from the US. The real problem lies in the US's Israel policy and its attitude towards the Muslim countries that surround the Jewish State. Netanyahu appears to be oblivious of changes that have been taking place in the political world. The rise of educated middle class in Arab, the urge for freedom and democracy and the changing power relations both in the Middle East and around the world have been conveniently overlooked.

A state of Palestine could only be possible if it is designed and run by powers in Tel-Aviv. The distorted concept of a Palestine dominion still lingers in the Jewish dreams. However, things have come to such a pass that there has to be a respect-

able solution to the legitimate demand of a people. It's been so long a battle and so many lives lost, that even the new generation Jews are now advocating for peaceful co-existence between the two warring groups. Netanyahu's intimidation no longer carries weight.

Political negotiations and initiatives at different times from Madrid conference in 1991, through Oslo, Camp David, Taba and Annapolis alongside the publication of different initiatives from the Geneva Initiative and the Saudi Plan to the Nussaiba and Ayalon Plan, have clarified what

it would take to reach a peace settlement based on the two-state solution. It entails three central components:

- Israel's full withdrawal to the 1967 border, with possible one-for-one land swaps so that ultimately the total amount of land that was

- occupied will be returned;
- Jerusalem's division according to the 1967 borders, with certain land swaps to guarantee that each side has control over its own religious sites and large neighbourhoods. Both these clauses entail the dismantlement of Israeli settlements and the return of the Jewish settlers to Israel;
- The acknowledgement of the right of return of all Palestinians, but with the following stipulation: while all Palestinians will be able to return to the fledgling Palestinian state, only a limited number agreed upon by the

two sides will be allowed to return to Israel. Those who cannot exercise this right or, alternatively, choose not to, will receive full compensation.

Israel continues to resist the initiatives of a two-state option. The other solution, if it's there at all, is: power sharing.

The essence of power sharing would mean preservation of existing borders from the Jordan Valley to the Mediterranean Sea, and formation of a government comprising Israeli Jews and Palestinians based on the liberal democracy model of the separation of powers. The arrangement would also ensure a uniformity of mutual esteem. Like, each side respect the other side's identity and philosophy, including language, culture and religion. This, to put it simply, is the bi-national one-state solution.

Israel will try to hold on to its tough stance until the time the Palestine leadership caves in and come to terms with a one-state power sharing deal with Israel or the Palestine leadership will not accept anything short of sovereign state of Palestine and that too on 1967 boundaries. It is now the test of patience and politics for both. They can only fail at their own peril.

Latest: In Doha, the Arab League decided on May 28 to seek full UN membership for a Palestinian state (at the UN General Assembly's meeting in New York in September) in the Gaza Strip and the West bank, with East Jerusalem as its capital, (on the 1967 borders).

The last word: An independent State of Palestine should be the only peaceful solution.

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Why is the 1967 border so important?

M. SHAFIULLAH

THE borders of Israel and a Palestine state should be based on the pre-1967 lines with mutually agreed swaps so that secure and recognised borders are established for both states," President Barak Obama said in a policy statement on May 19 at the State Department. The heart of the matter is that Israel declared independence on the Palestinian land on May 14, 1948, but did not formulate a constitution just to avoid limiting itself to a fixed boundary.

In 1947, the British intended to end their mandate on Palestine and hand over the Territory to the United Nations. Palestine then had a population of about 2 million -- two-thirds Arabs and one-third Jew. A UN Special Commission, the same year, recommended the creation of two separate states -- a Jewish state on 52% of the land with a population of 4, 97,000 Arabs and 4, 98,000 Jews, and an Arab state on the remaining land with 7, 25,000 Arabs and 10,000 Jews. Jerusalem and the area surrounding it would become an International Zone. The plan was so crafted that it met the wildest dream of the Jews. The Zionists accepted it with jubilation.

The United States went to the most extraordinary lengths to manipulate things on behalf of its Zionist protégés. Britain and the United States were primarily motivated to partition Palestine for a separate homeland for Jews to stem the Jewish influx to UK and US after the Holocaust in Europe. Secondly, they also realised that a Jewish state in Palestine would protect the Suez Canal and thus safeguard Western interests in the Middle East and beyond.

Britain relinquished the Mandate on May 14, 1948, and hours later the

Zionists proclaimed the State of Israel. The Arabs rejected the partition plan and went to war. Better organised Jewish forces with the backing of the Western powers defeated the Arabs and occupied further Palestinian land, including West Jerusalem of the divided city, at a cease-fire in January 1949. Jordan annexed the West Bank, including the holy sites forming East Jerusalem.

The Zionist state's next strategy was to make Israel as free of Arabs as possible. Underground terrorist organisations Irgun and Hagana carried out systematic and calculated massacres. Arabs were forced to leave the areas the Jews wanted to take over. An Irgun leader Menachem

hostilities after its occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, Sinai desert and strategic parts of the Golan Heights.

Geographically, Israel occupied areas more than four times its original size. Under the "Land for Peace" formula hammered out at Camp David in 1979 Israel relinquished occupation of Sinai desert and Gaza to Egypt, which in turn ceded Gaza to the Palestinian Authority.

Israel is not willing to end its occupation of West Bank and East Jerusalem, a stand which is inconsistent with the principles embodied in UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338 adopted after the six-day war, and accept a viable Palestine state. In occupied West Bank and East

The president hit the right chord by enunciating US policy of "two states for two peoples," with the borders of Israel and a Palestine state being based on pre-1967 borders with agreed swaps to make Palestine a viable state.

Begin subsequently became prime minister of Israel! Exodus of Palestinians continued unabated. An estimated 3 million Palestinians are out of the country. Law of Return established rights of Jews to settle in Israel from any country but forbids Arabs who were driven out of their homes.

Under the charismatic leader Gamal Abdul Nasser Arabs fought two more wars in 1963 and 1967 to restore Arab position in Palestine, but lost more territory. Israel defeated the combined forces of Egypt, Syria, Jordan, the Palestinian Liberation Army and elements of the Iraqi and Kuwaiti armies in a matter of six days. Israel heeded the UN call to cease

Jerusalem Israel is building settlements at accelerated pace to change the demographic composition. Netanyahu calls it "the reality on the ground."

After Israel erected walls on Palestinian territories in several zones the territory under the Palestinian Authority has become roughly the size of a municipality. In such an unrealistic situation the peace process stumbles at every step, giving way to frustration and consequent belligerency -- Palestinian bricks met with Israeli bullets. The Palestinians live in occupied territories in the most dehumanising conditions.

For decades, Israel and the Palestinian Authority have been in a

"no war, no peace" limbo. In his May 19 visionary statement US President Barak Obama rightly emphasised that such a status quo was neither sustainable nor could endless delay makes the problem go away. The president hit the right chord by enunciating US policy of "two states for two peoples," with the borders of Israel and a Palestine state being based on pre-1967 borders with agreed swaps to make Palestine a viable state. This is meant to end the Israeli occupation on the basic principle on which Iraq was driven out of Kuwait during Gulf War in 1990-91.

The president also reminded the Jewish state that it would face growing isolation without "a credible peace process" in the background of Arab awakening. The United States provides approximately \$2 billion per year in security assistance to Israel. A non-declared nuclear weapon state having weapons of mass destruction besides possessing state-of-the-art military machines, Israelis suffer from perennial insecurity because their leaders' lack vision.

Lee wrote in his Story of Singapore: "Singapore did not want to become an Israel in South East Asia to be alone and odd man out, a Chinese entity in the midst of a Malay archipelago of about a hundred million people." Singapore did not show the China card to her antagonistic neighbours, but instead worked tenaciously to win the acceptance of other South East Asian states. She was successful in providing much needed security to her people as well as building a modern viable state with impressive human rights record.

This is the most instructive lesson for Israel to learn from Story of Singapore. At what cost to the US will Israel survive on the American card?

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