

## SUNDAY POUCH

### Politicised school management committees

*A problem that must be put out of the way*

GOOD, balanced, representative and efficient school management committees have chronically been in short supply in this country. Educationists are very strongly of the opinion that this is endangering the school level learning, which is the foundation for the entire edifice of education. Successive governments have, by word of mouth, prioritized school education but neither in budget allocation nor in terms of educational administration have they ever lent any attention to this stage of education.

A yet-to-be-published World Bank study reveals the moral degradation that most school management committees are saddled with because of their partisan composition. The study, as cited during a dialogue by DU professor Amanullah who was a part of it, shows that at least 62 per cent members of the school committees are politically nominated. As media reports have also disclosed, lawmakers or people with a known political clout are often selected as chairmen of management committees, that too, of several schools at a time. Such a politically affiliated school governing body can only lead to nepotism and even corruption in matters of teachers' recruitment and students' admission. We urge the education ministry to take this matter very seriously and ensure that the school committees are constituted mostly by people of knowledge, education and non-partisanship. Professional management of schools is key to imparting quality learning.

When a teacher's recruitment and his enlistment in the MPO (monthly pay order) depend on bribery or political affiliation, he gets entangled in a vicious cycle. Resultantly, teachers have little or no qualm for skipping classes, drawing more students through manipulation to his coaching centre and dragging education down to a commercial enterprise. One cannot but wonder what example a teacher with such ethical standards can set to his pupils.

Imparting education is one of the noblest of all professions. This is precisely why transparency and accountability must be built into school managing committees to run the schools professionally. We must keep in mind that a teacher does not merely deal with a roomful of students; he rather deals with the future and he, indeed, builds the future.

### Indications from BNP to join JS welcome

*They will be the gainer, and so the democracy*

THAT BNP is considering to attend the parliament's winter session sounds not only 'proper' but also auspicious. It will be 'proper' because of the prospect of ending a stand-off from the "House of the People" thereby playing the opposition's legitimate role. And the auspicious part it is in a possibility of debating the contentious caretaker issue in a bid to resolve it.

The opposition's boycott culture with its avoidance of parliament to remain in the street and reel off tirade against the ruling party have neither benefited the party nor democracy of which parliament is the centre.

Any positive political programme of the opposition is well received by the people. A case in point is their shunning hartal and embracing peaceful long marches across the country. Buoyed by the success, BNP is now said to be planning to use parliament as a platform to articulate their demand on restoration of caretaker system in the constitution. If they join the parliament and present their formula they have the chance to mobilise public support for their cause more effectively. Should the ruling party fail to provide them with an adequate space, that too would be exposed to the people.

BNP must realise that caretaker issue will have to be essentially resolved through the parliament and not by talking angrily outside it to unseat a constitutional government.

What we would urge both sides to do is to engage each other and have quality debate on caretaker and other related issues like reconstitution of the outgoing Election Commission in a constructive frame of mind based on a spirit of mutual accommodation in the best interest of the country.



ASHFAQUR RAHMAN

TV channels showing a Bangladeshi boy being beaten inside India, close to our border, by the Indian Border Security Forces (BSF) for allegedly not paying bribes to them for smuggling cows. The pictures were graphic and told a tale that was told by us many times in the past.

We are happy to know that the Indian authorities have taken cognisance of the event. The BSF commander of the unit which committed the offence was sent to the spot to investigate and report. We are keenly following the story to see the outcome of the investigation.

There is no doubt that India has become one of the profitable smuggling markets. Cows from as far as Mumbai reach West Bengal (Paschim Banga) to be pushed over to Bangladesh.

To many, smuggling seems to make so much sense. You sell, others buy. But there seems to be the small matter of laws in both the countries which are now pushing criminal activity to the border. The residents there happen to live in the gateway from where these animals are pushed into Bangladesh. Their homes therefore become a place for this criminal activity.

It might be relevant to understand the dynamics of cow smuggling. It is reported that 1.5 million cows worth \$500 million are smuggled from India into Bangladesh each year. It is also estimated that a medium sized cow in Jharkand can be bought for \$100. But when the cow enters Bangladesh its price can become as high as \$350. The Indian authorities, in order to prevent smuggling, had taken an initiative to provide photo identification of all Indian cattle and their owners. But massive falsification of data by interested quarters there has put an effective end to this project.

We are told that illegal trade between India and Bangladesh bring in \$2.7 billion annually to India.

Compare that to the legal trade between the two countries, which ropes in \$3.6 billion annually. So imagine the economics of our love with India.

For better understanding of animal smuggling, let us retrace the steps of a cow smuggled into Bangladesh. Traffickers bring the cow usually by truck to West Bengal (Paschim Banga) from as far as Haryana or Punjab. They have a strong network in border villages adjoining Bangladesh. The

group, between 2000 and 2010, at least 924 Bangladeshis were killed by the Indian Border Security Force (BSF) on account of alleged offenses.

This force was set up in 1965 and now has 190,000 personnel. Bangladesh's Border Guards are only 67,000 in number. Thus, the BSF is among the largest border forces in the world. Its major peacetime duties include preventing trans-border crimes, unauthorised entry and exit from India and prevention of smuggling

It is quite clear that the BSF ignores procedural safeguards to prevent torture. Like our law, Indian law requires that everyone taken into custody must be produced before a magistrate within 24 hours of the arrest. But this is more in breach than in practice. The Indian Penal Code forbids the causing of "hurt" or "grievous hurt" to any person while in the custody of a force. There are prescribed prison terms and fines for persons found guilty of torture. We rarely hear of any such punishment given to BSF personnel.

On the other hand, the BSF says that whenever they apprehend criminals at the border, they send them to the local police for prosecution. It is alleged that these criminals, get released against corrupt payments. Indeed, if this is so then this is a challenge for the Indian police. Criminals cannot be spared whatever nationality they belong to. But there is no reason for them to suffer inhuman and degrading treatment at the hands of BSF.

While we are looking into the corruption and excesses by Indian border forces, we must also start looking at alternative methods to buy beef from India. Some states in India have banned slaughter of cows for religious reasons. Other states prevent export of beef. But can we not welcome the legal import of cows for husbandry? Paschim Banga, we understand, allows the slaughter of cows. At least, the leftist government there did not ban it. So why can't we legally import frozen meat from Paschim Banga by opening letters of credit? We must find a mutually acceptable way out.

A wise man had once said: "Regret for the things we did can be tempered by time; it is regret for the things we did not do that is insupportable." Smuggling of cows and other items must end. Only a few gain while the two countries and people lose. An Indian proverb encapsulates the sentiment: "It is love that makes the impossible possible." And so from India we expect love and the impossible to happen. We hope India will consider selling us what we need. Let us negotiate this with India.

The writer is a former Ambassador and Chairman of the Centre for Foreign Affairs Studies. E-mail: ashfaqur303@gmail.com

## From India with love

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cows are held there in transit, before being pushed into Bangladesh.

Reports say that traffickers inject Diclofenol Sodium (a banned anti-inflammatory drug) to energise cows before they leap into Bangladesh and crash through physical obstacles including rivers and canals that demarcate the two countries. Once they reach this side of the border, the traffickers keep them in hiding till they are sent to markets and sold.

India and Bangladesh share an international border of 4095 kilometres with the final 6.5 kilometres recently demarcated. Five Indian states adjoin a total of 28 Bangladeshi districts at the border. According to Odhikar, a Bangladeshi human rights

and other illegal activities. With about 70% of the border between Bangladesh and India already fenced with barbed wire, the keys to the gates of the fence are necessarily with the Indian BSF. So anyone caught sneaking through these areas must have some links with them.

BSF in the past has justified the torturing of suspects by noting that smugglers evade arrest. Sometimes, the BSF says, it has to fire on them out of self defense. But the evidence collected suggests that BSF has always used excessive force. Cattle rustling is not a capital offence according to Indian law. So why do they shoot the people in the back? This suggests that the victims were running to evade arrest.

### The New York Times EXCLUSIVE

## Preventing a nuclear Iran, peacefully

SHIBLEY TELHAMI and STEVEN KULL

THE debate over how to handle Iran's nuclear programme is notable for its gloom and doom. Many people assume that Israel must choose between letting Iran develop nuclear weapons or attacking before it gets the bomb. But this is a false choice. There is a third option: working toward a nuclear weapons-free zone in the Middle East. And it is more feasible than most assume.

Attacking Iran might set its nuclear programme back a few years, but it will most likely encourage to aggressively seek -- and probably develop -- nuclear weapons. Slowing Iran down has some value, but the costs are high and the risks even greater. Iran would almost certainly retaliate, leading to all-out war at a time when Israel is still at odds with various Arab countries, and its relations with Turkey are tense.

Many hawks who argue for war believe that Iran poses an "existential threat" to Israel. They assume Iran is insensitive to the logic of nuclear deterrence and would be prepared to use nuclear weapons without fear of the consequences (which could include killing millions of Palestinians and the loss of millions of Iranian civilians from an inevitable Israeli retaliation). And even if Israel strikes, Iran is still likely to acquire nuclear weapons eventually and would then be even more inclined to use them.

Despite all the talk of an "existential threat," less than half of Israelis support a strike on Iran. According to our November poll, carried out in cooperation with the Dahaf Institute in Israel,

only 43% of Israeli Jews support a military strike on Iran -- even though 90% of them think that Iran will eventually acquire nuclear weapons.

Most important, when asked whether it would be better for both Israel and Iran to have the bomb, or for neither to have it, 65% of Israeli Jews said neither. And a remarkable 64% favoured the idea of a nuclear-free zone, even when it was explained that this would mean Israel giving up its nuclear weapons.

*There should be no illusions that successfully negotiating a path toward regional nuclear disarmament will be easy. But the mere conversation could transform a debate that at present is stuck between two undesirable options: an Iranian bomb or war.*

The Israeli public also seems willing to move away from a secretive nuclear policy toward greater openness about Israel's nuclear facilities. Sixty percent of respondents favoured "a system of full international inspections" of all nuclear facilities, including Israel's and Iran's, as a step toward regional disarmament.

If Israel's nuclear programme were to become part of the equation, it would be a game-changer. Iran has until now effectively accused the West of employing a double standard because it does not demand Israeli disarmament, earning it many fans across the Arab world. And a nuclear-free zone may be hard for Iran to refuse. Iranian diplomats have said they would be open to an intrusive role for the United Nations if it

accepted Iran's right to enrich uranium for energy production -- not to the higher levels necessary for weapons. And a 2007 poll by the Program on International Policy Attitudes found that the Iranian people would favour such a deal.

We cannot take what Iranian officials say at face value, but an international push for a nuclear-free Middle East would publicly test them. And most Arab leaders would rather not start down the nuclear path -- a real

actually delay or prevent peace in the region. As the former Israeli spy chief, Meir Dagan, argued earlier this month, Israel's current stance might actually accelerate Iran's quest for nuclear weapons and encourage Arab states to follow suit. Moreover, talk of an "existential threat" projects Israel as weak, hurts its morale, and reduces its foreign policy options. This helps explain why three leading Israeli security experts -- the Mossad chief, Tamir Pardo, a former Mossad chief, Efraim Halevy, and a former military chief of staff, Dan Halutz -- all recently declared that a nuclear Iran would not pose an existential threat to Israel.

While full elimination of nuclear weapons is improbable without peace, starting the inevitably long and arduous process of negotiations toward that end is vital. Given that Israelis overwhelmingly believe that Iran is on its way to acquiring nuclear weapons and several security experts have begun to question current policy, there is now an opportunity for a genuine debate on the real choices: relying on cold-war-style "mutual assured destruction" once Iran develops nuclear weapons or pursuing a path toward a nuclear-weapons-free Middle East, with a chance that Iran -- and Arabs -- will never develop the bomb at all.

There should be no illusions that successfully negotiating a path toward regional nuclear disarmament will be easy. But the mere conversation could transform a debate that at present is stuck between two undesirable options: an Iranian bomb or war.

But the stalemate with Iran could risk if Iran gets the bomb -- and have therefore welcomed the proposal of a nuclear-free zone.

Some Israeli officials may also take the idea seriously. As Avner Cohen's recent book *The Worst-Kept Secret* shows, Israel's policy of "opacity" -- not acknowledging having nuclear weapons while letting everyone know it does -- has existed since 1969, but is now becoming outdated. Indeed, no one outside Israel today sees any ambiguity about the fact that Israel possesses a large nuclear arsenal.

Although Israeli leaders have in the past expressed openness to the idea of a nuclear-free zone, they have always insisted that there must first be peace between Israel and its neighbours.

But the stalemate with Iran could

### THIS DAY IN HISTORY

January 22

**1905** Bloody Sunday in St. Petersburg, beginning of the 1905 revolution.

**1946** Iran: Qazi Muhammad declares the independent people's Republic of Mahabad at Chuwarchira Square in the Kurdish city of Mahabad.

**1971** The Singapore Declaration, one of the two most important documents to the uncodified constitution of the Commonwealth of Nations, is issued.

**1991** Gulf War: Three SCUDs and one Patriot missile hit Ramat Gan in Israel, injuring 96 people.

**1995** Israeli-Palestinian conflict: Beit Lid massacre In central Israel, near Netanya, two suicide bombers from the Gaza Strip blow themselves up at a military transit point killing 19 Israelis.