

'Whoever touches Jerusalem will be walking into fire'

US President Donald Trump has recently recognised Jerusalem as Israel's capital, drawing sharp international criticism and threatening to jeopardise the future of peace efforts in the region. **Yousef Ramadan, Head of Mission at the Embassy of the State of Palestine in Bangladesh, talks to Badiuzzaman Bay of The Daily Star about the unilateral US decision, its implications, and what Bangladesh can learn from the Palestinian experience to deal with the Rohingya crisis.**

Authorities must act before it's too late

The culture of question paper leaks continues

FOR years now, we have been witness to leaks of question papers of Secondary (SSC), Higher Secondary (HSC) and admission examinations. Despite outcries and some action by the authorities, we have failed to address this corruption. So, it is does not come as a big surprise to me today when we hear of question paper leaks of primary school classes. A recent letter by the Anti Corruption Commission (ACC) to the cabinet based on a year-long investigation has rightly called this epidemic of question paper leaks a failure of the state machinery. The ACC investigation pointed fingers at officers in the education board, BG, Press and other government officials for these leaks. They are right in saying that once the question paper is leaked, there is little to be done, and therefore, the onus is on the question preparation authorities to ensure proper monitoring and discipline. A few recent examples may remind us of the proportions this phenomenon has taken today. This week, authorities had to cancel final exams of grades I and IV in all primary schools in Barguna after parents uploaded the leaked questions on social media demanding that steps be taken. In the same week, in Munshiganj, tests for classes II and IV at 119 schools had to be postponed after the questions were leaked. Last month, we saw the leaks of question papers of Junior School Certificate (JSC) and Junior Dakhil Certificate (JDC) exams via Facebook and WhatsApp. The ACC has made important recommendations in this regard to the cabinet. To that, we would like to add that the authorities must acknowledge their responsibility in the matter and not blatantly deny what everyone knows. At the same time, parents must be equally wary so that they do not acquiesce to the corruption like many did during the JSC and JDC exams. If education is to be more than a mere degree, then parents must understand that doing so would only teach their children corruption and malpractice. Of course, the prime responsibility is with the education authorities; we can only hope that the ACC investigation prompts them to act soon.

The US president's recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel has prompted some critics to say that the US can no longer claim to be a "neutral" mediator in the conflict between Israel and Palestine. What are your thoughts on that?

The US announcement on Jerusalem has isolated it from the rest of the international community, and disqualified it from leading peace efforts in the region. Israel had occupied the Palestinian territories of the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and Gaza Strip in the 1967 war. This is an established historical fact. No policy announcement from any country will, or can, alter that. If President Trump, by his reckless decision, wishes to dictate policy for us, it won't work. The long struggles of the Palestinian people have proven that no such dictates will work.

Security Council to pass a resolution confirming its rejection of Donald Trump's decision, and to recognise Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Palestine. Now is the time to take measures to confront the illegal occupation head-on. But depending only on the international community is not going to help, nor will talking behind closed doors. We've been talking for too long. Right now, what we need is tangible action both from the international community and the Arab world.

an impact on the Palestinian fate and put extra pressure on the US government to reconsider its decision.

Lebanon has already proposed that Arab nations should place sanctions against the US. How do you think the Arab countries can help to resolve the crisis?

Lebanon has always been a trusted ally of Palestine and fought a number of wars on our behalf. As for what the Arabs can do, let me take you back to the 1973 Arab-Israeli war, when King Faisal made a courageous decision by stopping oil supply to all the Western countries that backed Israel. Needless to say, this Oil Weapon proved to be extremely helpful. I hope King Faisal's descendants in present-day Saudi Arabia will rise to the occasion to do what's necessary. Other Arab countries, especially those surrounding Palestine, can also play a very effective role. Sanction is but one example of what the Arab—a united Arab—world can do.

After the US decision, Nikki Haley, the US envoy to the UN, has claimed that only the United States, not the other 14 nations of the UN Security Council, has "credibility" when it comes to mediating the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Would you agree?

The UNSC meeting held in response to the US decision has proven otherwise. It proved that the US has lost whatever was left of its credibility; it cannot be a fair and just mediator. Donald Trump should know that his decision will have dangerous ramifications. It will encourage countries guilty of violating international law and human rights. Why would they respect international law if the US president not only disrespects it but also rewards those who violate it? So, no—we do not trust the US anymore.

Palestine has reportedly suspended all talks with the US. How do you see this playing out in the future?

After the US declaration, President Mahmoud Abbas gave a statement in which he made it clear that his



Yousef Ramadan

decision, for us, signals the withdrawal of US from the mediation process. We will reject any US role henceforth because it has sided with Israel, blowing its credibility as a mediator. You cannot be the accused and the judge at the same time.

In any case, we defend, first and foremost, on our people in the struggle for Palestinian rights. They're ready to sacrifice everything for the sake of Palestine and Jerusalem. And they've proven that repeatedly, more so after Trump's declaration. We also depend on our brothers from the Muslim world and the majority of Arab countries. I think if we can combine all the efforts and protests that are presently underway and channel them into the right direction, it will have

observes one hundred years of the Balfour declaration that basically laid out the plan for the formation of the Jewish state of Israel. How do you view this correlation?

This only confirms our suspicion of an Israeli takeover that has been in progress for decades. This 100-year-old conspiracy that was hatched on November 2, 1917 set a legacy that would, in the ensuing decades, plague not only the Palestinian nation but also the entire Arab world. For Israel is a threat not only to Palestine, but also to the security and stability of all Arab countries. With the Balfour declaration, Israel was planted in the heart of the Middle East. The results are now visible to everyone.

In recent months, we have seen a similar kind of state persecution taking place in our own backyard—that of Rohingyas in Myanmar. What suggestions do you have for Bangladesh and the international community to resolve this crisis?

The Rohingya crisis reminds me of what my parents told me about when they were driven off their land in 1948. It seems like déjà vu. If the Palestinian experience is any indication, depending only on the international community to solve this crisis will not be wise. The solution, I believe, lies in regional efforts—leading to international consensus—since an unsolved Rohingya crisis will affect all countries in the region as the Palestinian crisis did in the Middle East.

But any solution in this regard should be complete, by which I mean that it should adequately address the causes that led to the crisis in the first place, so that the Rohingyas feel safe to go back to the place they were driven away from.

Where was the central bank?

Farmers Bank scam

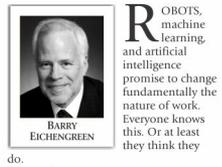
THE Farmers Bank is Tk 700 crore. With the bank failing to come up with Tk 500 crore to repay other banks over the last two months, we are beginning to wonder if the bank can recover at all. Because of the nature of the inter-banking lending conditions, it has now been discovered that all banking rules have been flouted and the bank has resorted to setting debts using treasury bonds. The bank speaks for itself. As of September 27, the bank had deposits totalling Tk 5,170 crore and lent Tk 5,066.39 crore, which is unheard of in any credible banking institution.

We would like to know what the central bank has been doing, especially in light of the fact that an investigation carried out in November 2015 found Tk 400 crore. Precisely what has the observer been observing over the past one and a half years or more? The situation has been deteriorating in the bank for nearly two years, and the rot in Farmers Bank is the same rot that had in earlier years engulfed the state-owned banks.

Hence, the onus is as much on the central bank as it is on the corrupt officials of the Farmers Bank for having allowed practices to continue unabated without blowing the whistle. Now that the financial institution is in a state of utter disarray, it has been put on life support by the central bank that is costing the national exchequer Tk 150 crore per month. The real question now is whether perpetuating the Farmers Bank scam is really the easy way out it will be punished for their crime, or will this scam join the ever-growing list of bank scams where no justice is meted out.

PROJECT SYNDICATE

Two myths about automation



Barry Eichengreen

ROBOTS, machine learning, and artificial intelligence promise to change fundamentally the nature of work. Everyone knows this. Or at least they think they do.

Specifically, they think they know two things. First, more jobs than ever are threatened. "Forrester Predicts that 9% of US Jobs in 2018," declares one headline. "McKinsey: One-third of US workers could be jobless by 2030 due to automation," seconds another.

Reports like these leave the impression that technological progress and job destruction are accelerating dramatically. But there is no evidence of either trend. In reality, total factor productivity, the best summary measure of the pace of technical change, has been stagnating since 2005 in the United States and across the advanced-country world.

Moreover, as the economist Timothy Taylor recently pointed out, the rate of change of the occupational structure, defined as the absolute value of jobs added in growing occupations and jobs lost in declining occupations, has been slowing, not accelerating, since the 1980s. This is not to deny that the occupational structure is changing. But it calls into question the widely held view that the pace of change is quickening.

The second thing everyone thinks they know is that previously manual jobs are now at risk. Once upon a time, it was possible to argue that robots would displace workers engaged in routine tasks, but not the highly skilled and educated—but the doctors, lawyers and, dare one say, professors. In particular, machines, it was said, are not capable of tasks in which empathy, compassion, intuition, interpersonal interaction, and

communication are central. Now, however, these distinctions are breaking down. Amazon's Alexa can communicate. Crowd-sourcing, together with one's digital history, can intuit buying habits. Artificial intelligence can be used to read x-rays and diagnose medical conditions. As a result, all jobs, even those of doctors, lawyers, and professors, are being transformed. But transformed is not the same as threatened. Machines, it is true, are



The rise of automation means that people will need to continuously update their skills and renew their training, given how their occupations will continue to be reshaped by technology.

changing, not disappearing. These observations point to what is really happening in the labour market. It's not that nurses' aides are being replaced by health-care robots; rather, what nurses' aides do is being redefined. And what they do will continue to be redefined as those robots' capabilities evolve from getting patients out of bed to giving physical therapy sessions and providing emotional succour to the depressed and disabled.



PHOTO: AFP

to guide and cooperate with their robotic colleagues.

Thus, the coming technological transformation won't entail occupational shifts on the scale of the Industrial Revolution, with its wholesale redistribution of labour between the agricultural and industrial sectors. After all, the vast majority of Americans already work in the service sector. But it will be more important than ever for people of all ages to update their skills and renew their training continuously, given how their occupations will continue to be reshaped by technology.

In countries like Germany, workers in a variety of sectors receive training as apprentices and then over the course of their working lives. Companies invest and reinvest in their workers, because the latter can insist on it, possessing as they do a seat in the boardroom as a result of the 1951 Co-determination Law. Employers' associations join with strong trade unions to organise and run training schemes at the sectoral level. The schemes are effective, in part, because the federal government sets standards for training programmes and issues uniform curricula for trainees.

In the US, board membership for workers' representatives, strong unions, and government regulation of private-sector training are not part of the prevailing institutional formula. As a result, firms treat their workers as disposable parts, rather than investing in them. And government does nothing about it.

So, here's an idea. Instead of a "tax reform" that allows firms to expense their capital outlays immediately, why not give companies tax credits for the cost of providing lifelong learning to their employees?

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 California, Berkeley. His latest book is *Hall of Mirrors: The Great Depression, the Great Recession, and the Usuals*—and
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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Corruption must be contained

The Daily Star has recently published a report titled ACC go after big names next year, based on comments by the Anti-Corruption Commission Chairman Iqbal Mahmood. It was interesting to receive such a statement from the country's anti-graft body.

In Bangladesh, corruption has become endemic, permeating every sector of our society. It may not be possible to eliminate corruption altogether, but it can certainly be contained. I hope the ACC will find the courage to fulfil its promise of bringing down high-profile corrupt individuals, regardless of their power and political affiliation.

AKM EhsanulHaque, By mail

Don't bring politics into schools

Recently, I was shocked to learn that Bangladesh Chhatra League is setting up committees at high schools across the country. I fail to understand why BCL would do such a thing when the odds are heavily against it.

The kind of student politics practiced in public colleges and universities has brought us nothing but pain and suffering. So, initiating schoolchildren into this brand of politics would be extremely harmful, to say the least. Already, a BCL school committee member has reportedly beaten up his teacher, while two students tied to BCL in Moulvibazar were hacked to death. The BCL leadership should take note of these incidents.

Shihab Ahmed Shah, By mail