

Mehta Affairs : India Needs New Laws against Corruption

There should be a law, as it is in the UK, to make it obligatory for the corporate donors to admit all political contributions in excess of Rs 5,000. Political parties carry out legitimate functions; hence the sources of their income are matters of public interest.

new of 22 people in top government positions who had their relations fixed up in business firms on fabulous salaries. Nehru asked him to give him one name — whose case he referred to S R Das, then Supreme Court judge. Nothing was proved against that person (K C Pant, now heading the finance commission) and Nehru was able to put an end to "wild" charges.

Power Game in Pakistan

With each of the contending parties battling it out to make the most of the murky politics, Pakistan is plunging into deepening crisis. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, President Ghulam Ishaq Khan, Opposition leader Benazir Bhutto and the army are the main players in the political chess game of Pakistan and certainly there are other minor aspirants waiting in the wings for their respective chances. Most others are just playing in the hands of those main actors. Events are taking place at a breath-taking pace and no one can tell for sure where the forces, like a devil, unleashed will come to a rest after wreaking what devastation.

This is however an upshot of a most positive development ever to happen in Pakistan's political history: the restoration of the Sharif government by the Supreme Court, overturning the presidential order. Earlier on April 18, it was Ishaq Khan who really made the first move and enjoyed the upper hand for a while. The dissolution of the Punjab Assembly twice in a month has once again set the contending parties, particularly Sharif and Ishaq Khan, on a collision course. Benazir Bhutto, determined as she is to bounce back to power, seems to have chosen a wrong role to play in the entire political drama that is being enacted ever since the president and the premier fell out with each other over the power sharing in the government.

The latest warning the opposition leader has issued is the possible unfortunate intervention in the feud between the Prime Minister and the president by the army. This she has done not so much in her eagerness to see to an amicable solution to the crisis as she has done in her haste to get an early election. She may be right in her prediction because in Pakistan, the threat of an army take-over always looms large even in a considerable normal situation — only recently did the military break with the tradition — and more so when the political situation is so volatile. She does not need to invite the army.

In fact, Benazir made the gravest blunder of her political career at the most decisive moment when Sharif invited her to jointly fight Ishaq Khan and thus strike out the constitutional clauses giving the president some extra power to deal with the elected parliament. She backed out and instead sided with Ishaq Khan, the man who dismissed her from the premiership in 1990 in the same manner Sharif was removed. Nawaz Sharif challenged the president's move in the Supreme Court and had the verdict in his favour, turning the table on Ishaq Khan. Sharif has indeed conducted himself quite admirably throughout the earlier crisis but the moment he set about bringing the loose ends together, he found the task too daunting for him.

His rivalry with Ishaq Khan he could manage any way. But the problem is within his own party. During the trying time, a number of his party's parliamentary members, including ministers, deserted him, sensing the debacle for the prime minister. Clearly, the present political crisis in Pakistan owes a lot to the politics of opportunism and none seems to be immune to this practice at this moment. To press for their respective advantages, every one goes beyond his/her limits and betrays in the process a degree of own naivety. Ishaq Khan accepted the verdict of the Supreme Court apparently in good grace but actually has no wish to relinquish power. Many believe he is plotting Sharif's fall. In his attempt to do so he has got the unlikely alliance of Bhutto and, to a lesser degree, the army. What has gone out of everyone's sight is the need for a stable political system which alone can deliver the goods. If they cannot come out of their personal considerations, they will push the country towards a sudden collapse, in which case the judgement of history on each of them is bound to be very unkind.

Checking Culprit Vehicles

The government has signed an agreement with the Asian Development Bank, under which the latter would set up four fully equipped motor vehicle inspection stations at Dhaka, Chittagong, Rajshahi and Khulna. At present there is in the whole country only one such station, perhaps none-too-well-equipped, at a god-forsaken part of Mirpur Dhaka. The measure could hopefully help the transport sector out of a very vicious problem if only this was true that absence of appropriate vehicle inspection facilities was the only reason for our roads to be full with road-unworthy vehicles. Unfortunately, that is not the case.

The brimming corruption situation is at present instrumental in allowing all kinds of purveyors of death in the shape or deshape of dead and deadly vehicles to rule over the roads and over the life and death of pedestrians — and of also those they had left behind in the houses and offices. Mechanisation of inspection can hardly reduce corruption.

We certainly welcome the four inspection stations. The ADB would give them and to match their good Samaritanry we must be able to make the most of them by running them efficiently to capacity and maintaining them punctiliously — and by engaging that corruption thing with sincerity and strength.

One way to do well our part of the deal is to involve sections of our people who are less susceptible to an unclean dole. The roadworthiness of a vehicle may be a very technical thing needing precision hitech gadgets. Roadworthiness is, however, a thing very difficult not to notice. Senior students of better schools like St. Gregory's and Viharunnessa, Agrani and Udayan etc and members of such organisations as Kochi-Kanchar Ashor and Khelagher or, say, Chhayanaut, can be called on to keep a vigil on vehicles belching black smoke and looking veritable death traps. They can be detailed on unannounced heavy-traffic points, changing spots every day. An entry into their diaries should mean a prompt halt to the culprit vehicle — and drastic police proceedings and quick legal action.

There was never a question of the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority or BRTA's coping with the vehicles situation — the moving machines are too numerous for them to keep a tab on. A polluting unworthy motor vehicle very patently violates law and it is for the police to catch it, — red-handed as the professional cliché goes.

We have two recommendations in the matter. Let private motor cycles and scooters, not to speak of passenger vehicles of the same category, not escape the worthiness net. Two, one inspection station should be set up at Bogra. This commercial capital of the northern districts, and not so much Rajshahi, would be very useful to check motor vehicles using the northern roads.

STRANGE as it might seem, there was no mention of corruption all through the 16-day world conference on human rights in Vienna, which I partly attended. Both non-government organisations (NGOs) and official delegations vied with one another to trace links between democracy, development and destitution. But none pointed out how a tainted system could safeguard neither freedom, nor progress, nor human rights.

In this goody-goody atmosphere, the allegation by Harshad Mehta, the key broker involved in the Rs 5,000 crore scam, that the paid Rs 1 crore to Prime Minister Narasimha Rao came as a rude shock. The NGOs from South Asia realised that corruption should have figured at least in their meet, which preceded the formal conference. A few Indian NGOs wanted to raise the matter even at that stage but they could not evoke attention.

A Pakistani delegate cynically remarked: "Only one crore; we have higher standards because scandals connected with our prime ministers run into hundreds of crores." Many from Europe recalled the mafia disclosures in Italy where top politicians and bureaucrats were found guilty. The British drew attention to the contributions of Rs 2.25 crore by Asil Nadir, a tycoon who has taken refuge in Cyprus, to the ruling Tory party. The West seemed to take corruption in its stride.

We still have some moral streak left. Corruption may be a way of life but we have not accepted it. This is evident from Rajiv Gandhi's defeat at

the polls in 1989 following the pay-off in the Bofors gun deal. Therefore, all the government and Congress party statements and the resolutions in support of Rao have not been able to rub off the taint.

True, Harshad Mehta's allegation that he personally handed over the suitcase containing currency notes to Rao does not wash. Rao is not a babe in the woods of politics and it is difficult to believe that he accepted money directly. Also it must be quite a large amount. Harshad Mehta's plea that the pay-off was to seek the PM's blessings is not convincing. But the defence of the government, the Congress and the prime minister has been too feeble. The charge does not lose weight because the Bhartiya Janata is reportedly behind Harshad Mehta.

This attitude is similar to the one Indira Gandhi had adopted after the Allahabad High Court judgment, which had disqualified her. Once again the prime minister has begun to address rallies, organised at public expense and once again is a blatant misuse of the government-owned TV and radio. The old argument that some people and parties are out to destabilise the country has been lent new voice.

The issue is not whether Rao or the Congress can collect crowds or show solidarity but whether he is in any way involved. Harshad Mehta's affidavit in support of the allegation binds him down both

legally and morally. He may sound dramatic but he appears to possess more than he has revealed because he and his lawyer, Ram Jethmalani, have staked all.

Rao should have offered on the very day of the allegation an informal examination by leaders of the opposition parties. He could have volunteered to appear before the Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC), which is looking into

1991, it did not mean much at that time because Mehta was nobody. Nor could have the prime minister suspected that Mehta would achieve notoriety one day. He was merely a person accompanying a Congressman in whom Rao had faith.

My impression is that Rao is guilty of "passive corruption". He was present when the money was allegedly given. But the money was not for his per-

government the most. A party's organisational set up does not need so much money; it is the electoral politics that requires crores. The limit of expenses by a candidate in an assembly or a Lok Sabha election is ridiculously low. He or she spends many times more. At the recent Lok Sabha by-election at Jalandhar the Congress candidate spent nearly Rs 1.5 crore. The Akali opponent's expenditure was also nearly a crore. From where did the fund come? It was the largesse of big zamindars, transporters and industrialists.

It is openly said that Mrs Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi collected crores for the polls. Jayaprakash Narain often said that whenever he talked about corruption with Mrs Gandhi, her interest to curb it was only superficial; she always denied its prevalence on a large scale. "However, once when she asked me to help her fight corruption," JP said, "I discussed the matter with Atal Behari Vajpayee (BJP) and Surinder Mohan (Janata Dal) but nothing came out of it because she was not interested in pursuing the matter, though the two leaders I talked to were willing to cooperate with the government in fighting corruption."

Mrs Gandhi could have taken a leaf from her father's book by appointing an inquiry commission to go into any charge of corruption levelled against people in high places. During Nehru's time, C D Deshmukh, former finance minister, had alleged that he

Thanks to Harshad Mehta's allegation, the entire issue of contributions to politicians or political parties has come to the fore once again. There should be a law, as it is in the UK, to make it obligatory for the corporate donors to admit all political contributions in excess of Rs 5,000. Political parties carry out legitimate functions; hence the sources of their income are matters of public interest. Perhaps the parties have to be more appealing by offering individual electors better reasons to subscribe. At present, there is too much money involved in elections and this is keeping away the best of people from contesting. And there is no reason why political parties or their leaders should not operate to the highest standards of probity and openness.

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

the scam. Sooner or later, he will have to appear before the JPC as some opposition members put it. "After Harshad's testimony, it will become a must," they say. When he has nothing to hide, Rao should have taken the bull by its horns.

Government's spokesman has said that Harshad Mehta did not meet the prime minister on the day he claimed to have done. This is a denial of sorts, particularly when the spokesman has admitted that the record of meetings with the prime minister is not kept beyond a fortnight. Then how can he be categorical about a date going back to November 4, 1991? The fact of a meeting on some other day has not been controverted.

I go even a point further. Suppose Harshad Mehta had met Rao on November 4,

sonal use but for Congress party funds. This only underlines the squalid manner in which the Congress or, for that matter, other political parties finance themselves. The way some industrialists have cornered official patronage is illustrative of a system of party finance. The more they have paid the bigger has been their leeway.

A concession here or a preference there earns a ruling party at the Centre or in the states crores of rupees. Many industrialists or businessmen also contribute to the coffers of opposition parties in the hope that some day they will come to power. Indeed, it is dirty money but it is also dirty politics.

But it is indiscriminate. No party is above it although the Congress is the main beneficiary since it has been in the

Aussies, Kiwis Seek Closer Relations with Each Other and Asia

Derek Round writes from Wellington

There is now virtually a single New Zealand-Australia market for goods and soon it will be the same for services

taxpayers. But New Zealand pointed out that over 200,000 New Zealanders in Australia were not on welfare benefits and paid over A\$1 billion (US\$704 million) a year in tax. In contrast to the big number of New Zealanders living in Australia, only about 49,000 Australians live in New Zealand.

There is freedom of movement between the two countries for their citizens and they are about to establish a common border, with aircraft flying from one country's domestic terminals to the other's and new immigration and customs clearance procedures for passengers to help unrestricted travel.

But Prime Minister Bolger made it clear in his talks with Mr Keating that New Zealand would not be seeking to become the next Australian state.

"No matter how much we get on with Australians, I don't see that as an advance at all," he said.

The Australian Constitution makes provision for New Zealand to become an Australian state. But both governments have always stressed that political union is not on the agenda despite rapid progress towards economic integration.

Mr Bolger also made it clear New Zealand is not in a hurry to ditch the British monarch, Queen Elizabeth — who is also Queen of New Zealand, and Australia — in the wake of Mr Keating's avowed intention to see Australia become a republic by 2001.

All Mr Bolger would say was that it was inevitable the issue would be debated in New Zealand. Although there is far more of a groundswell of support for a republic in Australia

than is currently evident in New Zealand, older conservative New Zealanders express dismay at the controversy surrounding the antics of younger members of the British royal family.

The Keating-Bolger talks have apparently done little to remove a contentious issue between the two governments — New Zealand's anti-nuclear stance which blocks American warships entering New Zealand ports while the Americans maintain their policy of neither confirming nor denying they are carrying nuclear weapons.

This has resulted in New Zealand being effectively frozen out of the ANZUS defence alliance with the United States and Australia. Mr Keating wants New Zealand to drop the ban and resume a full role in ANZUS. He also wants New Zealand to spend more on defence.

New Zealand is building two new frigates in a joint programme with Australia. But Mr Keating wants it to build two more — which the New

Zealand government, slashing spending to balance its budget, is reluctant to do.

One Australian commentator said Mr Keating had come "dangerously close to trading on sensitive toes" when he expressed concern about New Zealand's defence cuts.

The Australian newspaper said Keating's visit showed Australia had much to learn from New Zealand in the areas of economic reform and reconciliation with its indigenous inhabitants, the Maoris.

But he was less appreciative of New Zealand's radical economic initiatives, while New Zealand remains frustrated by the slower pace of reform in Australia which it sees as hampering its efforts to increase trade with its biggest export market.

Despite this, the two countries have taken big strides under the 10-year-old Closer Economic Relations agreement. There is now virtually a single New Zealand-Australia market for goods, and soon it will be the same for services.

—Depthnews Asia

Bosnia-Herzegovina

Muslims Flee to Far-away Haven

Malaysia offers distant but safe refuge. Leah Makabenta of IPS reports from Kuala Lumpur

old campaign for their right to return to their homes. That is why Abim is not in any hurry to take any more Bosnians. "We know our limitations. We hope others will play their role, too," Anuar says.

Diplomats and officials from Muslim-dominated countries like Malaysia have been frustrated with the West's continued failure to take action against the moral outrages in Bosnia. So far, the violence there has already claimed at least 130,000 lives.

This (the refugee programme) is a manifestation of Malaysia's sincerity, that we are doing something within our limited ability, and not simply sitting down being ut-

terly helpless," says a foreign ministry source.

Adds Anuar: "What we are doing is acting as a catalyst for the rest of the world. If we who are so far from Europe can afford to take this commitment, how much more the countries that are nearest."

Malaysia had its own "Bosnia" in May 1969 when Malay Muslims massacred several hundred Chinese in the cities of Kuala Lumpur and Penang after a Chinese election victory.

The Malay-dominated government concluded Malay resentment of Chinese wealth sparked the violence and adopted policies to transfer

wealth from the Chinese to the Malays. Along with the Indians, these two are the major groups in this multi-racial nation in

South-east Asia.

Says Anuar: "This will show Malaysians that the same could happen to us. We hope not to experience the same thing. We are now in a situation where we have plenty of food, plenty of everything. People will learn to value what they have by supporting others."

When first conceived, the Bosnia-Abim aid programme meant to take only orphaned Bosnian children who would be cared for and educated in Malaysia but would "retain their identities as Bosnians to continue their generation when they return as adults to their country."

But the closely-knit Bosnians were unwilling to let their children go far away without their mothers or other close relatives. Thus, it became a programme to rescue children with mothers or grandmothers. From that, it graduated to children and mothers reunited with their prisoners-of-war (POW) husbands.

Even with a sympathetic and generous Malaysian public contributing to a Bosnian Fund, Abim found its resources painfully stretched. It now shares the responsibility for the refugees with the Malaysian Foundation for Orphans (Pryatim) and the Muslim Welfare Organisation of Malaysia (Perkim).

Abim also sends aid in the form of money, medicine and food to Bosnia and maintains an office in Zagreb that makes sure the aid ends up in the right hands.

But traditional Malaysian reserve seems to have inhibited any probing about the war. "We don't know how much to ask," says Abim volunteer Fauziah, who learned to speak Bosnian and scoured camps in Croatia for refugees willing to come to Malaysia.

She does not dismiss the possibility that there may be some rape victims among the women. But she says since most of those now here came from the camps around Zagreb, they may have gotten out of Bosnia before the war and the atrocities began.

"It is difficult for the women who still have their husbands or children fighting in the war," Fauziah says. "They don't know whether they're alive or dead. Sometimes they get very upset."

Some like Hajra and her two children are lucky enough to have been reunited with her husband, Fuad Pasic, who arrived in Malaysia in February with 46 other POWs. The POW families, who number over a hundred, live in two-room flats rented for them by Perkim in a government housing complex.

Another group of 80 mothers and children are in the West Malaysian state of Sarawak.

And at Abim's training centre in Kajang, 14 kms from Kuala Lumpur, 23-year-old Jasminka Karahodzic and her three-year-old daughter share a room in the hostel with three other families. There are 163 Bosnian refugees housed there, 39 mothers and their children, all of them without their men who are either back in Bosnia fighting the Serbs or have been killed in the war.

Jasminka's husband, for example, is still fighting in Prijedor, her hometown in central Bosnia. In halting English, Jasminka says she is grateful to be in Malaysia, which she finds "very nice, very hot". Sometimes, she gets to call her family now in Zagreb, the Croatian capital.

She says, "I tell my mother, sometimes I happy, sometimes I cry."

To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

Bangladesh Railway
Sir, The Bangladesh Railway has always been a losing concern to the government. The main reason is that businessmen do not intend to send goods through railway due to its inefficient management. Further, a good number of passengers do not buy tickets but somehow manage to reach their destinations by train.

We would like to suggest that the railway authority may gradually start putting at least a kilometer long wire-fences centering the railway stations on both sides of the track. If this is done, particularly at district stations and junctions, passengers will have no choice other than having a valid ticket to show at the time of passing

out from the station. It is expected that the concerned authority will pay due importance to this proposal in order to minimise loss to some extent at least.

Motius Samad Chowdhury, Phulitola Tea Estate, Sylhet

Bosnia and Muslim world

Sir, I wish, I were not living as a Muslim in this world today! I would perhaps be the happiest man if I had not been here to see the incomprehensible atrocities in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

What the west-European and US along with their "club named UN are doing is not inconceivable to me. They are

District quota

the veteran opponents of Muslims. Nevertheless, it is understandable, that they will kill Bosnia. My plea is what the Muslim world is doing? Can the so-called OIC have any justification to exist? What is the need of this spineless and gutless organisation?

We wonder, how the Muslim states could continue such deplorable inaction in such a ghastly situation. If such things continue for long, people will curse their inactive leaders: Beware! your days are coming. You may have the same fate of the Bosnian Alija Izet Begovic. Allah may curse you to the dustbins of the West.

Abu Ashraaq Mahmud, Tejgaon, Dhaka

Effect from time to time

Despite all this district quota is not being followed in most offices. A survey of the above mentioned offices will testify this. An overwhelming majority of employees are from four or five greater districts allegedly due to string pulling and manipulation.

In some cases offices follow district quota to fill new vacancies but overlook the existing strength due to "pressure from above." This is clearly wrong and negates the principle of district quota. Hence there should be strict and clear order to the effect that there should be no recruitment from those districts whose quota is oversubscribed. And unless the defaulters are punished this practice will continue and even grow. The present democratic Government is therefore requested to do something tangible in this regard. In the past we have seen only lip-service to the cause.

Kanita Ridwana, Dhaka Cantt.