

'Econergising' the Khakis

There are many areas of cost-cutting one can address without undermining the potency of our Armed Forces. What it needs is some training for our officers in better economic management and responsibility for budget planning and implementation thereof

ON the brink of entering the 21st century, Pakistan has to take concrete steps to galvanize its Armed Forces out of its 19th century syndrome and put into effect a realistic economics of scale that will permit pragmatic modernisation without bankrupting an already frail economy. When Jahangir Karamat took over as COAS and then Acting Chairman JCSC there was real hope that this brilliant professional soldier, one of the finest professionals ever produced by the Pakistan Army, would effect meaningful reform.

The politico-economic environment prevalent in the country coupled with his personal hesitation in effecting meaningful change buried that pious hope. A man may have the vision and may have the intent, he also has to have the courage to take decisions that upsets the routine. Without dynamic initiatives, routine takes over the individual and bad keeps on becoming worse. Macro-decisions are required in place of micro-ones, since it is General Pervez Musharraf's Karma to take the Armed Forces into the 21st Century, the hard decisions are his to make. One believes he has the stomach to take such heat. For God's sake let him rid this Army of batmen. Nowhere was this concept prevalent except in the British Asian sub-continent, it has persisted since independence. The salary of a male servant ranges between Rs 2500 and Rs 3500 pm along with meals at this time. Give the officer a sliding scale from Rs 2500 pm in three to four slabs up to Rs 4000 pm. By taking away batmen from officers and JCOs, the Army will save up to 50000-60000 soldiers, that amounts to more than three infantry divisions with its full complement of supporting arms and services. Since a soldier costs up to Rs 15000 pm for upkeep including salary, ration, pensions, etc, one third of such cost could be saved.

We are not a colonial Army anymore, the day of the Junior Commissioned Officer (JCO) has been over for 50 years. For some odd reason we persist with this though everyone in the Army knows that this class is not required in an army where a direct contact in necessary between officer and men, unlike an imperial army where a Viceroy Commissioned Officer (VCO) as a buffer was a necessity. This is not meant to take away the good work done by JCOs over the years. To avoid heart-burning, it is proposed

that all Naib-Subedars be made Second Lieutenants and Subedar Major becoming Captains. The service length should be confined to thirty years and those crossing that limit retired. In future good NCOs (and even privates) found fit to become officers should be sent to a special training company in the Pakistan Military Academy for a year to learn such subjects as language and etiquette that they would require to become officers and gentlemen. After all quite a few short commissioned officers (six months in PMA post-1965 are now reaching 3-star rank).

The JCO class is a huge financial drain on the Army for no cost-effective reason whatsoever except the continuation of status quo. Just take off the ribbon on the JCO's shoulder flaps and bring the Armed Forces into the 21st Century, away from 19th Century moorings. The Armed Forces must target the services next and make them cost-effective. These

include medical and engineering services. Modern hospitals are housed in one building, ours are spread over acres in many buildings. This is expensive and inefficient. Moreover, very few doctors treat patients as their right, on the contrary it is almost a 'favour' given to 'destitutes'. It is true that we have a core of dedicated medical professionals but these are few and far between.

On the pattern of the Armed Forces Institute of Cardiology (AFIC), hospitals must be under one roof. Free treatment must only be available to soldiers up to the most of Senior NCOs, beyond that there must be a shared cost tag to medical treatment i.e. 25 per cent must be borne by the serving and free for retired personnel. Patients so that there is some control over expensive medicine. A policy must be devised that ensures maximum patients are looked after at the unit level and specialist service has a price. The other major problem is the Housing and related Military Engineering Services (MES). This breeds in-built corruption which drains maximum expenditure for the min-

imum quality of services. Units and fixed establishments could be directly allocated funds for maintenance and up-keep while married officers can be allocated a fixed sum on an annual basis for their houses rather than relying on MES for painting, plumbing, electrical services, etc. This will be both cost effective and economical. Similarly EME and Ordnance need to be drastically reformed.

At the moment the different types of vehicles exceeds our wildest imagination, it is a disgrace. Other than rapid standardisation, the allocation of front line vehicles needs to be rationalised. Peace-time units and fixed urban establishments do not need four-wheel drive fighting units do. And yet, all the non-combatants have first right on spanning new vehicles. There has to be a thorough re-allocation of priorities. On the pattern of Army Housing Scheme, a 'vehicle scheme' should be started so that officers up to the rank of Captain get two-wheelers, Majors and Lt

Colonels up to 800 cc. Col and Brigadiers 1000 cc, while rank senior to that should have over 1300 cc on this scheme. Staff car drivers should be allocated only to one-star rank and above. Nobody has really looked at the number of warehouses containing derelict equipment. One is right outside the country's capital, Vehicle Supply Department (VSD) Gofra. These must be got rid off, they are a drain on our scarce resources. We have a virtual army of men employed under the Head 'Civilians Paid out of Defence Estimates'.

The number of men in DSG (Defence Services Guards, responsible for guarding fixed establishments) is a national disgrace. The bureaucratic answer is we pay only Rs 2000-2500 pm to these men, in all they cost the Government of Pakistan Rs 10000-12000 when you add up all their allowances, rights and prerequisites. It would be far cheaper to have private security companies do the same task on a cost-effective basis. We need to close down unnecessary institutions. Necessary ones like the Command and General Staff at Quetta and the National De-

fence College at Islamabad are understandable. For the size of the Air Force and the Navy, the Air Force War College and the Naval War College makes no sense at all, it is an expense in self-delusion. We should send outstanding officers to USA, China and UK, etc it will be far cheaper and they will get exposed to much more modern concepts and techniques.

Similarly the Army has to rationalise its institution, why not amalgamate the institutions like the Armour School, the Artillery School and so on? Above all we need to centralise our existing cantonments to our operational role. While troops quartering in both the cities of Sialkot and Lahore are necessary because of the proximity of the border, the bulk can be shifted closer to their operational areas. The land vacated is quite expensive may be sold for enough price to pay for land and housing for the new cantonments. At the moment troops and civilians are inexorably mixed and at the same time the housing is, in some cases, more than 150 years old. The amount of money that is used for maintenance purposes presently is enough to build new housing, badly needed for our rank and file. At the moment things are very much haphazard.

AS I SEE IT

Ikram Sehgal writes from Karachi

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The Tables of Organisation and Equipment (Ts of O&E) needs to be rationalised for the needs of the 21st Century. Obviously this can hardly be discussed in the print media but those are different roles assigned for holding infantry divisions in defence of the mountains and the plains of Punjab from that of the formations meant for offensive requirements in the mountains and plains. At the moment our TO&Es are standard for all areas with changes only in some. As the Siachen experience has shown we have to be adaptable and innovative, without being cost-effective and without losing efficiency. There are many areas of cost-cutting one can address without undermining the potency of our Armed Forces. What it needs is some training for our officers in better economic management and responsibility for budget planning and implementation thereof. We must economically energise the Defence Services if we are to maintain a credible fighting force in the 21st Century.

The writer is a renowned columnist of Pakistan

From Absolute Monarchy to Democracy in Nepal

Experimenting with Multi-party System

by A M M Shahabuddin

The multi-party system, in a democratic system, is not a bad thing, rather it enlivens democratic process with new zeal of people's voices in different shapes and colours. But when it becomes a 'mushroom growth' of just 'letterhead' parties, in some cases having more leaders than followers, then it becomes more a liability than an asset.

THERE has been a tremendous progress during the last one decade or so on the part of the tiny Himalayan kingdom, in its experiment with democratic system, since it came out of the hard shell of 30-year old absolute monarchy in 1990. This is particularly laudable because of Nepal being one of the newest democracies — a nascent democracy — in one of the ten poorest countries in the Third World. The credit undoubtedly goes to Nepal's oldest national party, the Nepal Congress, which, in collaboration with its rival United Marxist-Leninist-Nepal Communist Party (UML-NCP), launched a pro-democracy movement at grassroots level, that ultimately brought down the 30-year old citadel of absolute monarchy. As a result, democracy was established under a new constitution which made the monarchy henceforth constitutional, rather, the monarch a powerless showpiece or a ceremonial head. But it didn't come on a silver platter as a gift from the monarch. It was achieved after a bloody pro-democracy uprising, claiming some five hundred lives. Absolute monarchy was given a 'decade', but unsung and un-mourned burial. But prior to this upheaval, there was another uprising in the 50s, 1954, to come to it later.

Congress Victory and Stability

The just concluded general elections, third in series since 1991, held on May 3 and May 17, saw the Congress prevailing until recently Nepalese politics and pushed up again Nepalese Congress (NC) as the single majority party, winning 104 seats, in the 205-member parliament. Some 38 parties and over two thousand candidates participated in the elections. The closest NC rival, the Nepal Communist Party, has bagged some 64 seats. In 1991 elections, NC achieved this single majority, ruled for four years and then collapsed due to infighting among Congress leadership. For this they had to pay a heavy price in the mid-term elections held in 1994 when they conceded defeat to their rival communists who won 88 seats as against NC's 80 seats. So the recent election has shown that the NC has regained its 1991

position, while the number of communist seats slid down to 68 from the previous 88. Of course, rift in the communist party was to a great extent responsible for Congress victory. Other minor parties occupied positions like 'also ran' group. Seven seats have gone to the rightist National Democratic Party, three each to National People's Front (extreme left), and pro-India Nepal Sadhbana party and a single seat each to Nepal's Peasants-Workers Party and United People's Front (another extreme left). So it clearly shows which way the wind is blowing in Nepal's political scenario. Much expected stability seems to be round the corner.

Multi-party vs Two-party System

The multi-party system, in a democratic system, is not a bad thing, rather it enlivens democratic process with new zeal of people's voices in different shapes and colours. But when it becomes a 'mushroom growth' of just 'letterhead' parties, in some cases having more leaders than followers, then it becomes more a liability than an asset. The sooner this can be done away with the better. There should be some restrictions to regulate participation in national elections by such 'paper tigers', giving a marginal benefit of a certain percentage, going below which would bar them from further participation in national elections. Local elections may be a 'barometer' for their 'strength'. Moreover, if the advanced countries, like USA and UK, can manage their democratic responsibilities through a two-party system, then why should poor developing countries go for unnecessary 'halla-gulla' in the name of multi-party system. It's time to call it a day. Isn't it?

Fall of Rana Dynasty: End of Feudalism

In the process of democratisation of a feudalistic society and thereby bringing about a radical change in the life of the common man in Nepal, the Nepalese Congress has contributed a great deal. We have already seen how they brought about the people's upsurge in 1990 throwing the absolute monarchy in limbo for which, however, they had to pay a

heavy price. Earlier, in 1951, the NC played a similar role in bringing down the century-old Rana Dynasty under which, the feudal lords were no less ruthless 'monarchs' in their own way, running a serfdom in Nepal in all respects. The people under them were just like 'dumb-driven cattle'. They ruled the country for over a century (1846-1951) as hereditary Prime Ministers, treating it as their 'ancestral property'. Through another historic agitation, the NC brought down the Rana Dynasty, banishing them forever from the corridors of power. Thus NC ushered in a new democratic regime in Nepal for the first time in 1951. But the Congress committed a big blunder by bringing back King Tribhuvan who was living in India in self-exile since the 40s. Following a general election in 1951, Nepal Congress was voted to power to run a democratic government, but the newly-installed King had his own 'evil designs' to stab the Congress in the back.

He literally bit the hand that was feeding him. In 1960, the King staged a coup and, under a Royal order, dissolved the parliament. Political parties were banned and Congress leaders including the Prime Minister, Koirala, were arrested. Thus clearing the 'deck', the king imposed his personal rule over the country, thwarting at least for several decades the democratic process. It was perhaps the 'unkindest' cut of all on nascent democracy in Nepal. The rest is now history as discussed above.

Indo-Nepal Relations: Fence-mending Begins

Now that Nepal Congress occupies the driver's seat, the hurdles that had earlier created misunderstandings between Nepal and its big neighbour India, would be easier to remove quickly. Nepal was much humiliated by two Indian Congress government heads, mother and son, Mrs Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi. Particularly, the 'economic blockade', imposed by Rajiv to 'punish' Nepal for approaching China direct to buy some arms and ammunition without holding prior consultations with India, which is said to be obligatory under a Defence pact between the two countries, is still remembered as a 'big stick' from

the 'bully' neighbour. However, the 'scars' were removed to a great extent during the time of Gujral's Prime Ministership, when an alternate 'route' was allowed for Nepal to link with Bangladesh to boost Nepal's imports and exports. BJP Prime Minister Vajpayee had also shown great respect to Nepal's king by inviting him to attend India's 50th Independence anniversary. So fence-mending has already started. India will have to go more mileage to ensure it further.

Let SAARC Spirit Prevail

Nepal is more an 'India-China locked' country than a mere land-locked country. So India will have to take meaningful initiatives to resolve whatever disputes or issues are still hanging fire, particularly sharing of waters and dispute over possession of 'Kalapani', a point on Nepal-India border. The rival parties, in this case, the Nepal Communist Party, will be on the look-out for a 'bogey' of 'sell-out' of interests to the big neighbour. So Nepal's Congress government will have to be some 'exercise' on tight-rope walking between the two giant neighbours — India and China.

India has an additional responsibility for being the leading and a powerful industrial country in the SAARC region. As they say, "A Chain is not stronger than its weakest link." So the SAARC Chain wouldn't be stronger than perhaps its weaker, if not the 'weakest' member — Nepal. India has already shown the way by granting a 'trade route' to Nepal to facilitate smooth movement of goods to and from Bangladesh. This would go a long way in establishing an atmosphere of greater harmony and friendship among the SAARC member countries. Let India shake off its complex of being a dominating 'big brother' or a 'bully' in the region. Then everything will come to a much-coveted meeting point showing the shining path to peace and security in the region. Let SAARC spirit of 'give and take', 'live and let live' prevail in the interest of peace and development in the region.

The writer is a retired UN official.

Democracy and Development

by Syed Jahangeer Haider

Development and democracy have to move hand in hand; former would focus on welfare of the people and the latter would emphasize on individual rights. These two in combination would transform the struggle for development ultimately into a pursuit for humane development.

THE cure for democracy is more democracy. Defects can be remedied by perfecting it and by making it dynamic, adapting it to changing conditions and above all by extending it beyond political sphere, particularly to economic activity. When one relates democracy with development and human welfare, some sort of interventions are always considered necessary to achieve greater good to the public and public services. Interventions are key to keep development targeted towards people's welfare. But interventions cannot be from an arbitrary source; instead it has to be engineered through participation of the people, i.e., interventions by people's representatives, the elected few. Giddings considered democracy as the state of politically organized mankind in which the rule of the few is least arbitrary and most responsible, least drastic and most considerate. The issue is how much of the development planning be concerned with human welfare and to what extent democracy is imperative to optimize development gains geared towards achieving greater good of the public.

Development concerns, especially to alleviate poverty in Bangladesh have been initially pushed by the expatriate donor community and gradually picked up by the national policy makers, implementers, and recently to some extent by the people. One may be surprised to hear that people have started taking interest in development in Bangladesh, where it is not as pervasive as it requires to be, but development interests are dawning eventually with welfare oriented planning, i.e. keeping the focus on the poor. But the concern is to what extent development planning has become democratic and participatory and to what degree the process of interactions between

beneficiaries have become humane. Is it necessary to pursue development 'with a human face'. Certainly, development planning and implementation have to be achieved through a humane approach, because wherever it is missing, it messes up with the continuity of development gains. Sustainability of development gains is key to alleviation of poverty. Sustained development pursuits can ultimately remove poverty.

But how much of the development process has become democratic and humane, this needs to be investigated. One glaring evidence can be tested in the role of Law and Order authority in maintaining peace and stability in the community to allow development to occur and democracy to transform to establish individual rights. How much of the individual rights can be ensured allowing democracy to function, this is also a national concern. Without entering into debates, one can certainly vouch that the people can judge very distinctly when individual rights are challenged and violated. Again people, on the other hand, can also explicitly judge that how much of the claims for individual rights have been exploited to gain sectarian interests, not public good, so parties involved in the dispute of defending individual rights versus rights to develop and be free from poverty should always thin that when excess of either of these occur, people react and form opinions. People's judgments are not expressed immediately; but either through process of election or revolt people do stage their judgment.

Is participation a necessary condition to development? None will possibly deny that participation is key to sustainable development. This is well

understood by the development agents but the paradox is that they believe in one, and practice otherwise. This would possibly be challenged by development agents, as they think people's participation is at the maximum and more of it would allow weaknesses and inefficiencies in the development process making development interventions ineffective. By development agents, I mean those who are at the helms of development planning and implementation, be it a government employee or an NGO worker or a donor representative. Development agents would always entertain the ideas of people's participation as long as the reins of resource and the access to critical decisions are in their control. One may not blame them for this state of mind, as they think and also it is a reality that accountability of resources directly lies with the development agents. Their perceptions are people cannot be made accountable as they are not identifiable as individuals; and people do not behave responsibly or rationally to use resources. From these perceptions emanate their behaviour and mode of interactions with the major development partner, i.e., the people. And when interactions emerge from such perceptions about the people, the interactions can hardly be assessed as humane.

Development and democracy have to move hand in hand; former would focus on welfare of the people and the latter would emphasize on individual rights. These two in combination would transform the struggle for development ultimately into a pursuit for humane development. If such goals emerge, the development agents would sieve their usual fight for control of resources and power, and instead pursue the goals of humane development through co-existence and harmony.

Small NGOs in the Development Process

by Achintya Das Gupta

It is true that Government alone cannot bring about desired change in the development scenario throughout the country in reducing poverty. To get a better result, development efforts of all the actors, government, big NGOs, small and medium size NGOs and network and apex bodies should be synchronized

local situation and thus in a better position to identify local needs;

Small local NGOs can be more flexible to address needs of the local people, since most of them emerged to serve the local needs;

Small NGOs are more efficient in implementing development programmes, because they operate in a smaller area, and

The development workers are more committed to community organizations (occupational groups they form), because they are the members of the same community.

With these comparative advantages, the small NGOs demonstrate high potentials to work concertedly and can very effectively be utilized as development partners towards the reduction of poverty.

It is no denying the fact that NGOs are making substantial contribution to the overall development of the country, especially in health and family planning, immunization, nutrition, education and water and sanitation. Other areas where NGOs have gained commendable success are — income generation activities, much talked about ones throughout the world, micro-finance, rights, awareness etc. Small and medium size NGOs are always complementing and supplementing development projects sponsored by both government and large NGOs.

Despite their high potentials of good and commendable work that may be replicated elsewhere beyond their own catchment areas, many NGOs quite often suffer serious fund shortage. Moreover, their activities are done in such small geographical areas that many people of other areas cannot reap the benefit of their good work. Individual NGOs' ego-centric attitudes often bar them from replicating others' good work

and as a result, many areas, many people remain unserved and stay outside the domain of any touch of development activities.

However, serious coordination problems are often apparent, especially in terms of participation of small and medium size local NGOs in the on-going development activities run by government. Despite their comparative advantages, small NGOs are not taken into consideration to play their role with all their potentials. Thus, the small NGOs, remain alienated from not being able to become rural development partners.

This often gives rise to mutual distrust between government and NGOs. Small local NGOs have increasing problems with big NGOs in terms of their operational areas. Big NGOs, with their 'Big-fund' and big staff and also with strong influence, spanned their activities in large areas of the country, especially in easy-to-go localities. As a result, small NGOs are left with only remote areas to operate with their innovative approaches. In other areas where they still work, small NGOs are increasingly facing problems of overlapping of programmes with bigger NGOs.

Networks and apex bodies for NGOs are, in principle, supposed to provide technical and support services, covering institutional capacity building, resources mobilization, training etc. But in practice, most of the small NGOs are again left out without any or with negligible support. Whatever services they receive are insufficient and inappropriate. Big NGOs receive donor funds to support their development projects, while small NGOs suffer fund shortage for implementing their innovative projects.

The crucial challenges for small NGOs are sustaining the existence and providing a steady flow of benefits to the ru-

ral poor, landless labourers and marginalized farmers by serving the unserved with innovative development approaches and giving them a sustained income.

Bangladesh, predominantly an agrarian economy, is characterized by a suffocating poverty syndrome, coupled with one of the highest density of population and majority of people living in abject condition in rural areas. In order to address the deteriorating plight of the country, many development models have so far been tried. But none of them could produce the desired benefit to the rural poor in reducing their poverty. In this regard, Integrated Rural Development Programme and Rural Works Programme can be mentioned. These two programme were quite successful in increasing agricultural production substantially, but could not ensure equitable distribution of development benefits for the poor and toiling masses.

The development benefits went to the large landowners and other advantaged class of rural people and thus contributed to strengthening of existing rural power structure. Swarnirvar programme did not do any better either. Thus, poor masses remained alienated from the touch of development.

As Planning Commission of the Government observed, 'The paramount consideration has to be the welfare of the vast majority of subsistence farmers and landless labourers. Unless they are covered by development activities, development momentum will not pick up or it picks up, cannot be sustained. All good models in an environment of the existence of the rural elite have failed to help the vast majority.'

Another observation of the Planning Commission of the Government explains the situation quite well: 'the production

programmes for sustained income or self employment of the rural poor especially outside the agriculture sector has been so small that it could not create any impact. As a result, the overall process of development, the landlessness has rapidly increased and so also the deteriorating condition of the poor. The share of income for the lowest 40 per cent of the income groups has drastically gone down. Although some improvement has been registered for the higher income groups very at top. The scenario is more or less true for other social development programmes, such as health, education, nutrition, sanitation and drinking water supply etc.

Therefore, it was evident that an alternative model of development was necessary. Rural credit programme, which has already been experimented by several NGOs, started gaining momentum at this stage. Social mobilization and community participation also came to the fore-front. Again came the 'bigs' with their advantage of access to resources. But it should also be recognized that NGOs, big or small are not an unmixed blessing, they have their limitations and disadvantages.

It is true that Government alone cannot bring about desired change in the development scenario throughout the country in reducing poverty. Big NGOs cannot also do it either; small NGOs are no good in this regard alone. To get a better result, development efforts of all the actors, government, big NGOs, small and medium size NGOs and network and apex bodies should be synchronized in a synergistic manner. To do it in the best way, a sort of screening of NGOs is necessary for utilizing their skill, efficiency and potentials. Necessary funds should also be smoothly channelled to the NGOs for implementing development programmes towards reducing poverty. Effective Co-NGO coordination in terms of planning development programmes must also be in place.

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TOM & JERRY

