DHAKA MONDAY JUNE 14, 2004

#### So, back to the ballot

Free and fair election is what we want

HE verdict of the High Court in the election symbol allocation case serves the ends of justice and fair play. A potential wrong has been put right, but more importantly it serves as a reminder to those, both in the government and outside it, who seek to trample norms and convolute rules and regulations, that such actions are always in breach of law.

We feel that the whole episode could have been avoided had the election commission (EC) chosen to play its part and intervened in a matter that was not only within its jurisdiction but fell within its constitutional obligations as well. This omission has also been taken cognizance of by the court who thought it fit to administer a mild stricture to the EC 'for having failed to exercise its authority as a constitutional authority'.

It would appear to any observer that the returning officer (RO) and the EC were working in watertight compartments when in fact the ROs are to function under the supervision of the EC. Although the ROs happen to be government servants, and some of them may feel beholden to the party in power, the EC being a statutory body should have acted assertively.

In this case one gets the impression that the RO had succumbed to government pressure, real or perceived, by denying 'kula' as symbol to the Bikalpa Dhara candidate. Had the EC chosen to see through the game, the embarrassment could have been avoided and the byelection held in time.

We are sure we echo the public sentiment when we demand transparency of the EC. Basically it should function free of extraneous pressures, and without fear or favour. Impartiality is the essence of the functioning of the EC. It must not only act impartially it must also be seen to

Now comes the conduct of the by-poll. It is for the EC to ensure suitable conditions that would allow free and

#### Lump allocations to UPs

We see merit in the demand

HE views expressed by speakers at a roundtable held in Dhaka on government's allocation of funds to Union Parishads for implementing development projects at the grassroots merit consideration. Lawmakers from both the ruling and opposition parties, donor representatives, NGO leaders, civil society members, and chairmen and members of UPs struck a note of unanimity on one point: the allocations should be increased substantially to the UPs.

We think the demand for lump grants coming from the local government functionaries has got merit. The government has apparently accepted the logic for the same as is attested by the fact that lump sum allocation has been given in one district with plans to gradually encompass six other districts. But obviously, the government has adopted a slow-and-steady approach. It probably has its own reasons, but in our view, it would be too prolonged a process before lump grants become the rule to help accelerate rural development. The argument advanced by those who prefer a go-slow is that lump allocations in all districts of the country might put the development process at risk. To this we wish to say that if all the districts do receive such development allocations, it would comprise only two percent of the Annual Development Programme; 98 percent of it will remain in the government's hands.

Therefore, we fail to see where the actual worry lies. In fact, whenever and wherever a lump sum has been allocated, it has been efficiently managed and utilised; even the women UP members have competently spent the money. If we look at the issue from a global and regional point of view, we will see that countries achieving a faster development pace could only do so by virtue of a strong local self-government system. It is the same story be it Sri Lanka or India, nearer home. And what is a local self-government tier worth if it does not have a steady flow of quality allocations?

# The merchants of democracy and human rights!



M ABDUL HAFIZ

FTER having taken over the white man's burden' from Britain, it was henceforth America's monopoly to trade democracy, the rule of law and, of course, the human rights with the world's 'lesser breeds' by occupying their lands, capturing their resources and establishing hegemony over those creatures. Ever since wherever she intervened her principal concern had been that of those patent attributes of modern civilization. She seldom tired of carrying her merchandise i.e. the democracy, the freedom and human rights to be dumped in far off lands even if there are few takers of her brand abroad. She relentlessly pushed ahead with her mantras notwithstanding the risk that their hollowness will be found out. It is thus surprising that any country from Vietnam to Afghanistan to Iraq that had been under US occupation reported some of the worst travesties of freedom and the abuses of human rights.

As back as in April 1971 a young US Navy lieutenant and leader of Vietnam veterans against the war Foreign Relations Committee put up a harrowing picture of war crimes committed in Vietnam. He also testified that those were not isolated incidents but the crimes were committed on a day to day basis at the full awareness of the officers placed over the perpetra-

side of South Vietnam in addition

That was in Vietnam three decades ago, then came Afghanistan where in a war on terror soon after 11 September reckless arrest and illegal detention of anyone suspected of having Taliban or al-Qaida links became a routine procedure of the US occupation forces. Presently 60 Pakistanis captured on suspected Taliban/albases. These frequent arrests of civilians and prolonged detention without informing the next of kin is a normal practice of the occupation authorities. Faulty intelligence led to most of the arrests where the civilians were detained indefinitely without charges. All prisoners languishing in the detention facilities in Afghanistan have absolutely no contact with any outside agency and human rights group. Worse

run by a cruel dictator, Saddam Hussain. In Iraq the US holds 8,000 prisoners in 14 different jails - three prominent which are Abu Ghraib and Camp Crooper in West Baghdad and Camp Bucca near Umm Qsar which hold inmates for extended period. It is one of these prisons, at Abu Ghraib that photographs clearly depicting inhuman behaviour towords Iraqi prisoners were shot and then leaked, by a

- an Egyptian newspaper showing photograph of another incident where the US soldiers were shooting civilians from a helicopter in Iraq. Following this contradiction between Rumsfeld's claim and Secretary had to go through a sixhour grilling session and testify before the Senate Armed Forces Committee. Over the prisoners' scandal in Iraq, while some Democrats on Armed Services Committee called for his sacking, the Republicans backed him as had the President himself.

Donald Rumsfeld took the only viable course open to him: to tender an apology accepting "full responsibility for what he said" but remained circumspect on the question of resignation. It was, of course, followed up with the routine measures such as investigation and court martialling -ostensibly to mollify American pride at being 'found out'

But the prisoners' abuse in Iraq is too colossal to be hidden under rugs and its miasma too strong to be suppressed. The hollowness of US freedom and human right is indeed synonymous with American military presence in an occupied country. Can there be an end to this occupation? Even if there is one the leash will still be held by the same occupiers on some pretence or other. That is what American 'freedom or liberation -- as envisaged by her.

# PERSPECTIVES

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tors of the crimes. The obscure Navy lieutenant of 1971, now Senator John Kerry, also a democrat candidate to US presidency, told the committee on behalf of over 150 honourably discharged and some very highly decorated veterans the stories that at times they had personally raped, cut off ears, chopped off heads, taped portable telephones to human genitals and turned up the power, cut off limbs, blew of bodies, randomly shot at civilians, razed villages in the fashion reminiscent of Gengis Khan, shot cattle and dogs for fun, poisoned food stock and generally rayaged the country

Qaida links continue to be held as detainees in Sharbaghan alone. However the total number of Pakistani detainees in all facilities reportedly add up to almost 500. They are neither convicted nor charged and have been held up simply on the suspicion that they would be able to provide information regarding Osama or Mullah Umar. They are yet to be given a legal hearing

The US forces operating in Afghanistan also arbitrarily detained civilians in separate detention facilities at Bagran. Kandahar and Jalalabad military

still, some prisoners from these facilities are shifted to Guantanamo Bay by air from Pakistan's Kohat. At Guantanamo, the torture stories and denial of legal facilities are yet more horrifying. The data collected through private sources and journalists reporting from near camp X-ray in Cuba point to a sordid detail of the prisoners' abuse by their captors. It was all in the name of democracy, rule of law and human rights!

Now there is Iraq to undergo the same ordeals again in the name of freedom for people who suffered in an autocratic regime

against the US, the trader of human right and created an unprecedented outrage in the Arab world. US Defence Secretary Ronald Rumsfeld, apparently caught

compassionate US sergeant, to

the American media, which

brought an international uproar

unawares mumbled to insist that the pictures showing Iraqi prisoners being abused and tortured at the Abu Ghraib prison in Baghdad was an aberration by a few soldiers and are not reflection of American values. But almost at the same time BBC reported of the Al-Wafd

Brig (retd) Hafiz is former DG of BIISS.

### Reinstatement of Nepalese PM

#### A step in the right direction



**ZAGLUL AHMED CHOWDHURY** 

ING Gyanendra of the Himalayan kingdom of Nepal has reappointed Sher Bahadur Deuba as prime minister of the country, and a jubilant Deuba, sacked by the same king two years ago, was sworn in amidst optimism that this would help lessen political unrest in the country. The South Asian nation is unfortunately embroiled in a long running political crisis stemming from the absence of a representative government since the dismissal of Deuba. The handpicked prime minister Surya Bahadur Thapa, a royalist, quit his position more than three weeks ago facing prodemocracy street agitations. The king had asked the political parties to name a prime minister within a timeframe, but the politicians failed despite their willingness to co-operate with each other for restoration of the democratic government. The king then took the decision to reinstate the sacked prime minister, who had been clamouring against his ouster as he was an elected head of the government. The monarch had so far turned a blind eye to the demand and instead sought to

appoint his men of choice as prime ministers, but none was stable as the move was seen by most as deliberate efforts to scuttle the democratic pattern of governance which has intermittently been hindered since the kingdom introduced parliamentary democracy in 1990.

Even though the elected governments did not live up to the expectations of the people as far as

reforms. The latest development is a positive step because it will help calm the political unrest and may also have sobering effect on settlement of the ultra left

The woes seem to know no bounds. The massacre of the mainstream royal family nearly three years ago in a stunning palace development came as a rude shock as well as a jolt to the Bahadur Thapa and Koirala later squabbled in the Nepalese Congress and the main opposition communist party gleefully watched the developments, but all were angered when the elected government was dismissed by King Gyanendra

Earlier, Gyanendra himself took over as the new monarch in the aftermath of the killing of King who was an elected leader, but sacked at the whim of the mon-

It appears that King Gyanendra was seeking to re-establish the authority of monarchy which was restricted to largely titular functioning since 1990. Taking advantage of the political instability coupled with the assassination of a popular king unwilling to meddle in the affairs of running the

objective is to turn Nepal into a republic.

The reinstatement of Deuba as prime minister is likely to help create better relations with the radicals, as dialogue now may yield positive result although the entire exercise is tortuous and very cumbersome. The Maoists, having made some gains in controlling areas of the country despite losses of their men and materials, may be keen to call the shots henceforth. As such it may be very difficult to carry forward the future negotiations with much success. However, the atmosphere now may be more congenial for productive outcome. But certain key areas remain unclear and these are crucial to development of the overall political situation in Nepal.

Whether the reinstated prime minister will be an effective head of the government or not remains a big question. Besides, the timing of the elections needs to be specific, and the king should make unambiguous his intention to bring back representative rule. Otherwise, dissent fuelling political unrest may continue to stalk the picturesque country. The latest decision taken by the king has come obviously as a bid to lessen the political unrest, but unless the monarch keeps himself away from the halls of governance and reverts to popular form of rule by co-operating and encouraging the new prime minister, Nepal may not come out from the dark shadow of political uncertainty which has been lengthening for last few years.

Zaglul Ahmed Chowdhury is a senior journalist.

## MATTERS AROUND US

Whether the reinstated prime minister will be an effective head of the government or not remains a big question. The latest decision taken by the king has come obviously as a bid to lessen the political unrest, but unless the monarch keeps himself away from the halls of governance and reverts to popular form of rule by co-operating and encouraging the new prime minister, Nepal may not come out from the dark shadow of political uncertainty which has been lengthening for last few years.

good governance is concerned, only a few might have relished the sacking of the last of the elected prime minister Sher Bahadur Deuba by King Gyanendra on the Political parties severely resented the dismissal despite differences among them, but the monarch stuck to his guns, and Nepal was robbed of a representative authority for the last two years. Finally, the king has seen reason and the return of the sacked prime minister is considered a wise move to fend off the continuing political turmoil in the country, which is also convulsed by a determined Maoist insurgency demanding dismantling of the monarchy and

nation that was struggling to contain the Maoist insurgency since 1996. The radical leftists are opposed tooth and nail to the monarchy, which, however, was affair since 1990 when King Birendra, facing unrest, accepted the demand of democracy.

quit the scene as the effective head of the government, paving the way for the elected governments, which mostly walked tight rope because of majority problems in parliament or being afflicted by various issues. Former Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala had to hang up his gloves before his term, after being charged with corruption. Sher

the liquidation of the most members of the royal family including the Queen remains shrouded in mystery, even though official Dipendra for the massacre. The royal palace killings removed a popular king, who was known to be promoting democracy after he had given up as effective ruler. But the new king appeared somewhat different and Nepal was being governed by unelected prime ministers till the reappointment of Deuba. There was no prime minister for the last three weeks following the resignation of Thapa. Deuba's appointment filled a vacuum that was badly needed. But what is heartening is the return of the person

Dipendra. The event leading to

government, he spared no efforts to tighten grip in the affairs of the kingdom. There was no election since the sacking of Deuba and political unrest deepened causing iscontent over the lack of non lar government. During the period, the Maoist insurgency also grew in intensity as they control vast areas of the country and often get involved in clashes or even battles with the army and security forces. They also call strikes across the country and another such spell is set from June 10. True, the elected governments in the past also did not make much headway in the complex talks with the Maoist, but the ultras were more favourably disposed to the democratic authority as their main

### WTO and RMG: Contemplating survival strategy

MD EFTEKHAR HOSSAIN

HE Multifibre Agreement (MFA) was replaced by the Agreement on Textiles and Clothing (ATC) of the WTO on January 1, 1995. As per agreement, the ATC is to phase out quotas on textiles and clothing in four steps within ten years. The fourth and last step is scheduled to be taken on January 1, 2005. The MFA played a vital role in developing the garments industry in Bangladesh. Despite our drawbacks, US buyers were compelled to import garments from us due to the quotas introduced by the MFA. Now because of withdrawal of quota, we are afraid to think of the future of our garment industry.

No doubt that, right now the Bangladeshi economy is considerably dependent on the ready-made garments (RMG) industry. If this industry really collapses, then its impact on the socio-economic situation will be tremendous. About 75 percent of our foreign currency earning garment sector employs as many as 1.8 million workers, i.e. half of the nation's entire industrial workforce. Even much of the remaining workforce is also directly or indirectly dependent on RMG industry.

It seems, because of some unexplainable reason, Bangladeshi entrepreneurs are only waiting to see through their ruination without analysing the situation and doing anything to overcome it. We are going to face the challenge after December 31, 2004. Does it mean

everything is going beyond our grip? Have we ever calculated what threats actually we are going to confront? What opportunities we are still left with? What are our weaknesses and what are our strengths? What rearrangements we need to cope with the changing situation? I will try to discuss these

While implementation of that ultimate phase of WTO treaty begins after 2004 we will have no pecial support and have to face lobal competition in the business The quota will be out rightly abolished, and as per WTO treaty the tariff barrier (i.e. import duty) all over the world will gradually be reduced to zero. Consequently we will lose buyers' interest from both US and EU in our products. It is a matter of great anxiety for not only our garments industry, but for the whole economy (because of GDP and employment shares).

Haphazard and shortsighted growth of any industry cannot survive long, unless it is brought to a systematic track. So, it is the right time to give special attention to this sector to put it on the survival track. For surviving and competing in the global market, garments experts and researchers give importance to the following points judging from their experience, observation, and the trend of modern businesses.

Cost minimization: Our first disadvantage is our unit production cost. Despite the least labour

compensation our unit production cost is higher mainly because of --High wastage of raw material

and system loss: The main component of raw material is fabric/yarn. Wastage there reduces company's net profit by 20-50 percent on an average. By employing efficient, educated and sincere merchandisers this problem can be reduced drastically. Wastage from system loss can be reduced through efficient management system.

Lower productivity: There is no way but to boost our productivity to survive in the highly competitive global market, specially when we bit of attention can reach us there. Special briefing and modern technologies can be introduced in this connection.

Minimum lead-time: Currently we are shipping goods within 60 to 90 days. In very special case we can ship in less than 60 days and sometimes we are also taking more than 90 days. As per market's requirement, where fashion is changing frequently with shorter duration, buyers want shipment within very short lead-time. Despite meeting, ture development. India is much more advanced than us in this sector. We have to think what measures we have to take to survive by competing with those in the

Introduction of modern communication technologies: Now the buyers expect real-time information, instant reports and services. Whereas, we are taking not only several days, but often even several weeks to give the service. Introducing modern technologies we can

For styling, lab-dips, and other approvals: Through modern technologies we can obtain approval and buyer's opinion on certain styling and colour matching within a very short time. It saves our time for making samples again and again while saving time and money for sending those by

All this will help us to reduce the lead time a lot and at the same time gain the buyer's confidence.

Pricing strategy for marketing:

It is time to think about and exert our full efforts and resources to confront the upcoming challenge. We can improve upon cost, quality, lead-time, communication and real-time reporting, and if we can rearrange our workforce with its potential capacity we can hope for not only surviving, but also taking a lead in world apparel business.

are not in a position to enjoy the economy of scale like that of China and India. We can point mainly to the following reasons, and take necessary steps to resolve those:

\*Lack of workers' training

\* Lack of proper motivation \* Unenlightened production man-

\* Lack of proper knowledge about the potential capacity of machinerv used, etc. Quality control: Quality control

is one of the most important aspects to attract buyers. In the very competitive global market it is not possible to survive without attaining global standard in product and satisfying buyer's taste. So far, we observe, we are not too far from that envisaged quality level. A

all other requirements we may not get major buvers if we cannot improve our lead-time factor.

To overcome the problem we shall have to give more attention

Infrastructure development for backward linkage support: Backward linkage support is actually the most important part of total infrastructure development. This is mainly the job of BGMEA and government. But we have to keep in mind that, our garment sector has basically developed with private entrepreneurship. But in this transitional period they have to obtain direct and indirect support from government. Indian government has sanc-

tioned a huge budget of 25 thou-

sand crore rupees for infrastruc-

provide the following instant services to buvers: Video conferencing: We can have

communicate through video conference with buyers. Buyers can even include the retail customers to give instant solution on a certain point. Internet, Intranet, and Extranets:

Through intranet combining different departments we can have the real-time information and reports on production and shipment status of each and every order. If there is any problem at any stage we can take necessary action to overcome it. Buyer also can check and be updated with the status of his order. Accordingly he can interact with his market and maintain his goodwill and demand in the market.

In the changing situation we have to adopt a different pricing strategy for marketing. Definitely different companies will adopt different marketing policies and pricing levels according to their market range, buyers' demand, machinery setup and quality offered. But we have to consider with high importance the global competitors pricing, level of competition and appeal of our product in the global

Japanese pricing strategy (for any goods) is that they survey the market demand against different price levels and based on optimum emand and profit they set a target price for a specific product. Then they ask their engineering department for addition-deduction to match with that target price. This is

called "target pricing" strategy. In the changing situation, I think we can go for "target pricing" method. This is important to survive and

promote global market share. Market diversification: Now we are completely dependent mainly on two markets: EU and US. This situation is highly risky and imbalanced. Any time it may create trouble and claim undue advantages. Diversification is highly mportant at this moment mainly i to secure sufficient orders; ii) and if there is any misunderstanding with the existing buyer, we can balance it with alternative market; iii) and because in the monopolistic market there is every chance of exploitation by the buyer.

Through diversification we can come out of it.

Government as well as entrepreneurs can take initiative to create business relationship with countries which are importing garments from outside other than us. We can look to the east-European countries and also some South East

Asian countries. There are also other issues, which are even more important. Some of these are -

Compliances: As per the pressure from Human rights organisations and environmentalists, big buyers give some preconditions to protect human rights and environment. To get orders we have to implement these in our factories. It will help us in two ways. Firstly, it will help us to create good environment at our factories, and secondly it will ensure orders.

CBA: It is a very sensitive and controversial issue. Our experience with CBA is not very encouraging. But we have pressure mainly from US buyers for allowing CBA in our RMG industry. If we don't agree we may lose the US market, and a part of EU market. In this situation some experts suggest not to go too far with this bargaining. If we are to allow it today or tomorrow, it is better to do it as smoothly as we can. We may think of allowing CBA in the most controlled, tolerable and production-friendly shape, where the ultimate role of the CBA needs to be diverted towards production and discipline among Conclusion: We need an inte-

grated preparation from government, entrepreneur and management levels. We need more talented and efficient global level managers in parallel infrastructure development, who can take the challenge of upcoming globalisation. It is time to think about and exert

our full efforts and resources to confront the upcoming challenge By implementing as suggested we can improve upon cost, quality lead-time, communication and real-time reporting, and if we can rearrange our workforce with its potential capacity we can hope for not only surviving, but also taking a lead in world apparel business.

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