DHAKA SUNDAY FEBRUARY 27, 2005

# Deaths in Congo

The troops must not become cannon fodder

E are shocked to learn that nine UN peacekeepers from Bangladesh have been killed in an ambush in Congo. The brave soldiers have died while working for the noble mission of enforcing peace in a country embroiled in a bloody civil war. They remind us of the high level of commitment and dedication having been consistently shown by Bangladeshi peacekeepers employed by the UN in different troubletorn countries over a pretty long time.

However, the deaths have drawn our attention to certain aspects of the UN peace missions. Of course, we, as a peace-loving nation, want to do our bit in keeping this world free from violence and bloodletting. We are also aware of the hazards associated with such missions, but, surely enough, we do not like to see our troops become cannon fodder in places where insurgency has assumed an intractable form. The UN mission designers have to make sure that all operations or movements of peacekeepers on the ground are undertaken after due reconnaissance and assessment of the risks involved. The government must insist on getting a clear picture of the arrangements and the elements of risk in any mission before sending our troops abroad.

It is assumed that when war ends, peace begins. But the matter is not so simple in the flash-points. The ground reality can be different from what the paper prepared for a mission had envisaged. The paper-work might have been done with relative ease, but that might not hold good about what the troops could be encountering while working in an unfamiliar and hostile setting. In other words, it is not black and white. We need to be better informed about the reconnaissance, intelligence-gathering and riskarrangements for a mission and the assignments thereunder before taking a plunge.

In other words, our positive response to any request for troops must be preceded by a careful weighing of all the factors so as to avert dangers to our men in peace-keeping

Hats off to our valiant soldiers who died in the line of noble duty, and our hearts go out in sympathy for the members of their bereaved families.

## **Donors' concerns**

Let us address these seriously

HE government should not view the recently concluded meeting held by Bangladesh's development partners in Washington with reservations. In the first place, the meeting should serve as a long overdue wake-up call with respect to the government's unfulfilled responsibilities; and in the second, the meeting should correctly be interpreted as an offer of help in troubled times.

The government was apparently chagrined by the meeting, if the finance minister's reactions and statements were anything to go by. Most of the bad feeling generated seemed to have to do with the fact that the donors were meeting in the absence of the Bangladesh government.

It is clear that the government needn't have been worried. The idea that the donors have some vendetta against the government is, frankly, childish. Indeed, if they thought that they could accomplish more without the government present, this should serve as a message to the government as to how its credibility is impaired. The donor community has no reason to favour one side over the other in a partisan manner.

In any event, now that the meeting has ended and that we can see plainly that it kept the nation's interests at heart and expressed appreciation for the achievements of the country, let us put the matter behind us and move on. The meeting should not be the cause for bad relations.

Indeed, it seems as though the government has rethought its stance and finally decided to shift from its denial mode. It is beginning to crack down on antidemocratic militants. The atmosphere is therefore congenial to working with the donors and there exists a strong logic for the joining of hands.

When the EU and other bilateral donors with whom we have long shared liberal good relations take a tough line, the government should take the matter seriously and ask

Let us have no more of the tired and stale government rhetoric of erosion of our "sovereignty." The donors have, after all, said nothing new. The same has been said by civil society and democracy loving people of the country for a long time now.

# Good politics safeguards the national interest

MUSTAFIZUR RAHMAN

earned our independence from British colonialism in 1947 only to be under unequal rule for more than two decades. Through a chain of events, we won our independence again in 1971 at a very high cost. In the last 34 years, we have seen attempts of one-party rule, martial law regime, coup and counter-coups, multi-party democratic system, reintroduction of martial law and virtually experimental party-dictatorship or arrogant, misdirected party rule under the cover of democracy.

The world has witnessed great changes, for good or bad, within the last decades, but our people are as disillusioned as before and are probably reluctantly thinking of embarking on another fight for still unachieved rights, independence and freedom from undesirable rule vis-a-vis management of affairs of the state on behalf of the people for people's welfare.

The gaps between the ideals of the ruling parties, the governments the state machinery and the people's aspirations are widening fast, creating a situation of mistrust abuse of power, dereliction of duties, uneasy frustration in the society, high-handedness in suppressing unrest, economic dependence, unwelcome external meddling, compromise with national interest, disregard for people's life and welfare, broken chain of command in the administration, redundant or dysfunctional institutions, and the rule of bad and hazy laws.

Who can narrow these gaps? How can these gaps be narrowed for national prosperity, social discipline, and people's welfare? There is no magic answer to all these questions, but there is a system of finding the answers and solving the problems confronted by us. Here I try to touch on some of the issues involved with indication of solution for public rethinking.

### The rules of the game

Politics is supposed to be practiced according to the rules of the national constitution accepted by all. In a democratic system, political parties usually play the role of opinionleaders. They enjoy the respect of the people as they think and act for the welfare of the people. History tells us that any party staying long in

power starts thinking of their men as above the law and the society. The party men start to be self-seeking, abuse power, and push the country to economic and social indiscipline, as is the case in recent times, and the so-called terrorism, rentseeking, extortion and security crisis are simply some visible forms of direct or indirect reactions to them. These cannot be remedied arbitrarily. They may well be eradicated or inhibited through innovative institutions and effective and scientific form of local selfgovernment, possibly, non-party

national constitution may provide for clear rules and effective institutions.

National economy

In Bangladesh, most of the governments have seemingly been in competition to borrow externally under any conditionality to run the administration lavishly without any regard to capacity building. The result is today's miserably imprudent devaluation of the Bangladesh Taka to about Tk.63.8 to a dollar (as of Feb. 10, 2005) which is itself weakened in the world market.

The rate was Tk.7.3 to a dollar in

value of Taka is very much welcomed. Over the last few decades our economy was not handled properly. Its handling is too miserable and weak now. A small amount of export and expatriate remittance is temporarily saving the government from a foreign exchange crisis. Why should we, with a population of 140 million, be complacent with per capita GDP of about \$420? Why could we not raise it to \$3000 to \$5000 within last 34 years? Should we still say, our policies were right? We must think beyond. Laissez faire economics cannot take us to idea and relevant prompt action with

Relations with donors

The World Bank, IMF, and ADB, the advice of which never helped any country, mostly happen to incapacitate the industrial, technological, and developmental potentiality in the developing countries like ours as quickly as possible, and lock them into a cycle of borrowing, lavishing away, and borrowing much more again to repay the dues to finally push them deep into perpetual dependency and vulnerabil-

Ziaur Rahman's popularity can be greatly attributed to the goodwill and greatness of the members of his initial advisory council in addition to his committed leadership. Present two-thirds majority can really sow the seeds of continuity by amending or rewriting the constitution with consistent intellectual input from all parties and thinkers for long-term development of the country, preserving our social values.

local self-government.

### Party regulations and code of conduct

Our constitution does not have any clear provision for regulating political activities and parties. Constitutions of many countries stipulate that the political parties shall participate in forming of political will of the people. Their internal organization shall conform to democratic principles. They shall publicly account for the sources and use of their funds and for their assets. They must be registered bodies, etc. There are provisions regarding

qualification of the candidates. allowable period of campaign, election expenses, and other effective election rules. There are restrictions on fund raising, code of conduct and regulations on other important matters. To minimize abuse of fundraising provisions, for instance, Japan allows payment of public money to political parties in proportion to the number of seats won. Parliament membership is supposed to be a demanding fulltime job. There is no scope of musclemen and open abuse of illgotten money for vote-buying. When the populations are better educated it becomes difficult to buy their conscience and election is liable to be fair and beyond question. The politics will gradually be the politics of issues of national and people's interest and that of compe-

tition to serve the people better. The

1971-72, Tk.8.875 in 1974-75, Tk.20.065 in 1981-82. Tk.35.675 in 1990-91, Tk.40.836 in 1995-96, and Tk.53.952 in 2000-01. Can we call it a responsible management of economy? Who will take the responsibility? If we compare the strengthening of Japanese currency from the rate of 360 Yen to a dollar in 1971 to about 105 to a dollar now, we can well understand our miserable situation despite rhetoric to the

China is resisting pressure to revalue her currency upward with her trade surplus of \$161 billion with the US alone in 2004. Some people tend to take credit for a foreign reserves of \$3 billion plus. What does it really mean for a borrower keeping a part of his borrowed money in his pocket to show his solvency? The textbook logic that high value of currency makes our exports costlier, simply does not apply to Bangladesh which must import to cover shortfall in essentials and can export a few primary products of limited supply and lowvalue-addition like readymade garments mostly based on imported raw material, spending up to 70 to 80 percent of export value.

Before it is too late, we should save every dollar we can earn and make them available to and for industries of potentiality. We must aim at a currency rate of around Tk. 40 to a dollar in some years. For promotion of industrialization and prosperity. Political initiative is a

## Industrialization and employment

Full employment cannot be dreamt of except through selective industrialization, not through competing low-tech foreign investment. We need to do the hard job ourselves to solve our problems and open up our future. Internal economic strength shall also help us build up honorable friendly relationship with other countries as an equal.

President Ziaur Rahman could be convinced to seriously take up technology-based industrialization for national development. He took the idea and gave a life to industrialization process and inspired the entrepreneurs to get into industrial ventures. With him the light of industrialization got dimmed, if not extinguished. It is very unfortunate that we are closing our industries one after another with illusionary, if not deceptive, promise of replacing them by future EPZ ventures, etc. We are opening our service sector to uneven competition before our secondary (manufacturing) industrial sector.

If the government is serious, it can immediately nullify the wrong decision on closure of industries, set aside interest-free or low-interest fund of \$1 to \$2 billion, to start with, for setting up new industries and rehabilitating the closed ones. There may hardly be any sensible citizen or political party that will not support the

In the absence of clear laws and constitutional provisions regulating external borrowing and its conditionality, restrictions against entering into any secret agreement. government and its officials easily yield to external pressure or allurement to put the national interest in jeopardy. We are borrowing money for consultants to give us superficial. negative or worthless advice, to destroy our nationalized banks and important institutions and to finally influence our banking and financial

system itself. We are under pressure and allurement to stealthily sign losing agreements and laws to give immunity to World Bank and IMF. There is no use blaming them. The employees of those international institutions are not to care for our interest. they are supposed to carry out the mission and order given to them. The responsibility is ours to identify our national interest and safeguard them with full responsibility and calculated hardship. This may however need political decision. possibly on national consensus

#### Bilateral and multilateral agreements

We are under pressure to sign TIFA (Trade and Investment Framework Agreement), showing a carrot of FTA (Free Trade Agreement) with the US. We have to evaluate our position. We can send some manpower. We are not capable enough

to export any substantial manufactured goods. We are far from strengthening our own service sector to withstand external competition now. We virtually have no intellectual property to sell. While we find it hard to comply with WTO provisions, there is no point hurrying for any secret or bilateral agreement at this point of our economy. We shall have to study a lot. We must frame laws and amend constitution to prevent our governments to sign secret agreement against the long-

### Conclusion

Continuity in policies is one of the great casualty of the democratic system, specially when it is still in fluid state. Except for the advisory councils of Ayub Khan and Ziaur Rahman, there was hardly any occasion for socially, academically, and professionally prominent people to contribute to political deci-

Ziaur Rahman's popularity can be greatly attributed to the goodwill and greatness of the members of his initial advisory council in addition to his committed leadership. Present two-thirds majority can really sow the seeds of continuity by amending or rewriting the constitution with consistent intellectual input from all parties and thinkers for long-term development of the country, preserving our social values.

Incidentally the author has worked on such a constitutiona proposal which has been submitted to ruling and opposition politicians and intellectuals for study. The development is the product of concerted play of numerous policy instruments like economic system, fiscal and monetary policy, lega system, educational policy, technological capability building, research priority, infrastructure building capacity, taxation system, effective administrative system, and institutions, and the like.

It is desired that the ruling party shall earnestly take initiative to sort out effective policy instruments in right perspective for national development and people's welfare, that will continue to function under changed circumstances

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# Piggybacking with neighbours

GHALIB CHAUDHURI writes from

HE recent speech by the Indian foreign secretary on "India and its neighbours" was indeed very eloquent and forthright. For once we have a good glimpse of what India thinks of its South Asian neighbours and of Saarc, its regional economic forum.

Addressing its neighbours, the predominant message conveyed in the speech was couched in bid brother speak along with the prover bial carrot and stick nuance: India is willing to invite its neighbours to join them and share the ride of economic growth, where India would act as the locomotive moving forward and pulling the rest of South Asia with it.

However, as in life, there are no free lunches and this magnanimity is also not free. In return for the economic assistance, the neighbours must stop being bad boys on issues of politics and security.

On the face of it this is not a bad deal. For the neighbours there is lot to gain from piggybacking with India and possibly the best win-win situation for South Asia.

The Indian foreign secretary, Mr. Shyam Saran's speech was illuminating on many counts, foremost, it brought out in the open some pertinent issues of neighbourly concerns, things that has been niggling and gnawing away at relationships since the formation of independent

For the neighbours surrounding India, the debate had for years

suspicion about the real intention of

the big neighbour next door. So

much so, that looking over one's

It is difficult to shake this groove

mentality especially when India so

far has not given good reasons to

think otherwise. As a result every

neighbourly discussion has been

shrouded in suspicion generating

negative vibes from all quarters

this lurking suspicion pervading and

permeating within the South Asian

cluster of nations, Saarc has very

little to show in terms of achieve-

Most glaringly and because of

all neighbours.

including India.

ments in its twenty year history. Indeed, a sad commentary on

communal politics and therefore it's about time South Asia get out of this hackneved morass of overused arguments and judgements by injecting fresh thinking and adding

economics. Mr. Saran in his recent

speech had offered a little opening

albeit couched in some old speak for

fresh thinking to develop and

emerge within the Saarc commu-

The neighbours of India have a

choice, regard this speech as utter

hogwash and continue to maintain

status quo on bilateral or collective

India dialogues; or accept it at its

face value and work towards carv-

ing a joint economic future for South

nothing less than an edict on India's

regional foreign policy, and states in

no uncertain terms that India

The speech, tantamount to

Asia as suggested by Mr. Saran.

regards its destiny as, I quote, "inseparable from what happens in its neighbourhood" and therefor seeks "tranguil periphery" but recognises that peace can only flow through "economic development in our neighbouring countries, an

by India giving access to its neigh-

bours to its huge and growing mar-

ket." These are indeed uplifting

sentiments expressed by the big-

gest and of late economically most

However, no one is fooled that it

is not altruism that has driven

India to offer its share of the pie.

India is riding the crest of eco-

nomic awakening and

globalisation, which it can only

sustain if its undivided energy is

focused on putting the much-

needed economic building blocks

in place. This is a chance they

would not like to squander

through any petty or escalating

successful country in the region.

neighbourly quarrels

At the very least discordant situations diverts government focus and energy and drives away potential foreign direct investment

India is also averse to growth of

that may have the wrong influence

in its vast but culturally diverse

country. And finally, India opening

up its markets to its neighbours is

Whatever may be the real motivation of India, if the offer enunciated in the policy speech is real and genuine, than it would be worthwhile for its neighbours to explore and develop the

economic linkages that will help them grow at a faster pace. Since the offer is on the table, the neighbours should call India's bluff and check its authenticity. It would be foolish not to.

> not just a one-way street, it also benefits from access to approximately three hundred and fifty million additional consumers. There is something in it for India too and hence a fair bargain for all Whatever may be the real

motivation of India, if the offer enunciated in the policy speech is real and genuine, than it would be worthwhile for its neighbours to explore and develop the economic linkages that will help them

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grow at a faster pace. Since the offer is on the table, the neighbours should call India's bluff and check its authenticity. It would be foolish not to. Making economics and joint development programmes as the centrepiece of discussion, will hopefully ease tension on other fronts and make hitherto intractable issues solu-In my piece titled "India's Lost

Opportunity" published in this newspaper on February 8, wrote about the need for a bold and honest leadership from India as a pre-requisite for any economic integration in the region to sustain and survive. saw some glimpse of that high thinking and new opening in Mi Saran's speech. I hope this opens a new chapter in South Asian dialogues. It is however imperative for India, as the largest economy in the region, to follow through and maintain the initiative and jointly work with its neighbours for harnessing the potential of 1.3 billion people. But no amount of effort can be successful without a mindset change, fresh thinking, and a joint will to make it hap-

Ghalib Chaudhuri is a former investment banker.

# TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE

Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

#### day. I remember that I worked even That is the real problem in being Right move

The banning of JMJB and similar fundamentalist militant groups is really a praiseworthy initiative. It's also a relief to see that professor Asadullah al Galib has been arrested. His fundamental objective was to transform Bangladesh into a Taliban state. The extended multitude of terrorism cast a dangerous shadow upon our liberty and democracy. It made us hopeless and pessimistic. Now it has to be suppressed in an utterly uncompromising man-

It's really great to see that eventually we are fighting back to avenge the deaths, destruction and disgrace that we suffered in their hands. Once again it's time to be optimistic. KH Asef Safa Kabir Upal Lalmatia, Dhaka

## An old topic

I have worked in the export industry for a long time. My experience in the export industry is that there is no holiday at all. Everyday is a workin all national and festival holidays in addition to working overnights. In Europe also there are flexible

working hours. That means working hours are designed to suit the needs of any enterprise. If somebody has work whether in communication or in preparation and production, one simply comes to work in the export sector of Bangladesh. This is especially the case in the garments industry.

The problem in Bangladesh is not with the holiday. Friday holiday is the perfect holiday for socioreligious obligations. There is a Chinese saying that those who cannot rest cannot work.

The real problem in Bangladesh is overwork coupled with substantial delay and detachment from the rest of the world from Monday to Thursday. (The letter of credit section still can come on Friday on a flexible working system.) One section has no rest, working 365 days. Another section is just counting 9 to 5 having no real flexibility. detached from the rest of the world during the workdays when it is not expected

Practically speaking, even in the case of international letter of credits (LC), there is nothing wrong if an LC is not opened on Friday nothing at all. People who have worked in the international import and export sector know that production arrangements and paper arrangements are two different parts of the game. Why do we wait for the last moment for something really to happen on Friday?

Therefore the solution to the problem lies in being effective and efficient in workdays. That is,

1. If one has urgent or special work come to work irrespective of the day. Do not expect 150 million people, to say only, to come on the 2. Plan the work, do not keep it

for the last moment. 3. Have the system work during the working hours; just do not have physical presence of a bunch of

4. Do some research and development; do not just work. 5. Have enough rest to start

Luton. UK An appeal to the mayor We are the inhabitants of the Road-17, Block-D, Ward-2. Once upon a

Abdullah Al Mahmud

time there was a road in front of our house. It was constructed at least 25 vears ago. In 25 years we have seen six governments coming to power. And six to seven municipal and city corporation elections were held during these times. An Eidgah is situated beside this road since 1964. This road is very important because in this road we have Saheed Zia Girls Degree College, and four kindergarten schools. Several times we have appealed to the authorities concerned to repair or reconstruct the road to solve the problem of the inhabitants. Many

leaders of the ruling party and the opposition have promised to take necessary action to repair this road when they seek vote to get elected But it is a matter of regret that all promises had gone in vain. Now this road has gone under soil and it seems that it will become part of the

The DCC should act to save this road in the interest of the inhabitants of our locality. A citizen

Pallabi. Dhaka

# Kibria's assassina-

At first I was extremely shocked to know of the January 27 assassination of SAMS Kibria. I offer my condolences and sympathy for those who lost their lives or were seriously injured. The bloody bomb attack was not the first of its kind. A series of bomb blasts occurred in the last couple of years in different places like Dhaka, Khulna, Jessore, Gopalgani, Naraynganj, Sunamganj, Satkhira,

Mymensingh, Tangail and Sylhet and the targets are ordinary people, iournalists, political leaders, foreign diplomats and cultural personalities. The bomb explosion at a cultural function of Udichi in Jessore (March 6, 1999) killed 10 people; it was perhaps the first bomb attack at a public gathering. And what is the political condition of our beloved country now?

It is time to investigate all bomb attacks with a sense of urgency. We hope that Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina will work together to restore peace in the country and demand a neutral and credible inquiry into all bomb and grenade attacks.

**Mamunur Rashid Tomal** Department of English, DIU

## Great thinkers

What can be done if the United States of America under the able leadership of President Mr. George W. Bush becomes the most powerful and the wealthiest nation of the

I think the best strategy would be to follow the teachings of Sir Syed Ahmed and Syed Ameer Ali. Both the reverend Muslim scholars spread the message of pursuing education and to be tolerant to the adherents of the other religious

**Golam Ashraf** On e-mail

## Rab and police

I tend to agree with the complaints of the Bangladesh police. Rab seems to be doing an excellent job but since its members comprise of two forces, it is only logical that the police should receive their own awards and the military should initiate a separate "service" stripe for the uniform of the Army, Navy and Air Force personnel.

So far as I'm aware, Bangladesh police are not awarded military service medals for their role in UN peacekeeping missions when deployed overseas. so the same logic should apply to Rab. Abdul M Ismail

## A nuisance

It is ridiculous to say that these kinds of people are not hard to come across, they are everywhere, selling medicines for the magical cure of long disturbing diseases, of the diseases that you would feel ashamed to describe to a person. They sell medicines which are very injurious to health. They speak in the most vulgar way trying to cash in using cheap jokes. These 'doctors' are male and the 'patients' are male. So the medicine sellers seduce the people by speaking about the male-female relations in the most obscene way.

Women passing by the selling places may feel molested by the words. Men passing by also, believe, do not gather any nice experience. These people sit in the places like pavements and clog the footpath.

They must be driven away. Mahfuzul Haque Eng Dept, DU