

Parliamentary standing committees

Ministerial non-cooperation is the problem

ONCE again the parliamentary standing committees have expressed their dissatisfaction with the cooperation they are receiving from ministers and ministry officials when it comes to the committees attempting to fulfill their oversight role. In a meeting on Tuesday a number of the committee heads raised the same complaints that they have expressed since the standing committees came into effect.

The fact that the committee heads who are complaining so vociferously about indifference of the ministries they are charged with overseeing are also members of the ruling alliance gives their complaints added credence. This is no partisan debate between the government and the opposition with both sides content to hurl accusations at one another. If the cabinet does not take the grievances of its own MPs seriously, then, one can fairly ask, exactly whose grievances will it be inclined to address.

The last government introduced the practice of heading up the standing committees with non-ministers, which was a welcome innovation. The ministers have been petitioning the PM to restore to them the committee chairmanships, but we would urge the PM to stand firm, as standing committees headed by the minister of the ministry the committee is intended to exercise oversight on cannot be expected to fully probe all irregularities.

The role of the committees needs, in fact, to be strengthened. Presently, they serve only as advisory bodies and their recommendations are not binding and the committees have no role in their implementation. For the committees to effectively fulfill their oversight function, their role and power needs to be expanded.

But even under the current system, there is much room for improvement. Most of the problems stem from the non-cooperation of the relevant ministries. Committee complaints include the fact that ministries withhold needed information and documentation, and that ministry officials and ministers often absent themselves from meetings, with the result that very little is accomplished.

This sort of foot-dragging on the part of the ministries must end. The ministries must be directed to comply and cooperate fully with the standing committees and to take their own role more seriously. Functional standing committees are indispensable to the accountability that is crucial to good governance, and it is the duty of the ministries to ensure that the committees are able to properly fulfill their role.

Private school teachers

Government's job is not to regulate but set standards

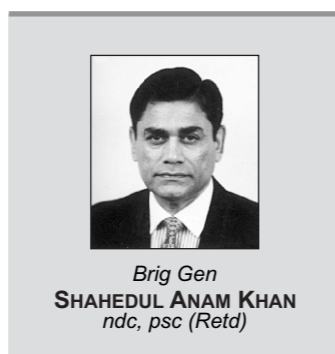
THE government decision to set up a regulatory body to register, train and certify the aspiring candidates for appointment as private school teachers needs to be examined in all its ramifications.

The decision has apparently been taken in light of the ever deteriorating standard of education at the school level and the very poor performance of a huge number of private schools in the public examinations. The decision makers have cited intense lobbying or clout of money in the existing recruitment process as having prompted them to have a measure of control over the system.

But some questions certainly arise as to the merit of the decision. First, regulation runs counter to the spirit of modern administration which seeks to delegate more and more power to the agencies below at different levels. Deregulation is in vogue now and it is now a universally sought administrative and economic objective in all developing societies. The setting up of a body to control the whole private school teachers' recruitment process could amount to intrusion into the functioning of private schools in different categories. Second, if uniformity of education is what the government wants to ensure, then one may argue that this doesn't as yet exist even in public schools due to shortage of good teachers. Third, by attempting to establish its control over the recruitment process, the government is taking on a huge responsibility, the fulfillment of which would require a vast infrastructure. The physical preparation needed to train and certify hundreds of thousands of candidates could indeed be a daunting task. Finally, excessive government control could also lead to the opening of the floodgates of malpractice and corruption which are ostensibly aimed to be avoided by the intended new policy approach.

The government has rightly felt that school level education has to be streamlined, but the method chosen is hardly the suitable one, considering that there are other options available to us. What we suggest is that the education ministry set the criteria, albeit in consultation with the experts, for appointing teachers alongside enhancing the training facilities for the candidates. The schools crucially also need professional management committees which will have to be catered for. Then it can establish a supervisory agency to monitor whether the guidelines are being followed.

Death in a distant land



THE death of nine Bangladesh soldiers came as shocking and sad news to all of us. The death of one soldier is one too many, not to speak of nine of them falling victim at one time to militia bullets in a distant land.

It has always been my firm conviction that there are no bigger pacifists than soldiers, and if there is anything that they are more adept at doing than conducting war, it is making peace. And it was in the process of making peace between the hostile elements in a country, far away from ours, that nine of our brave men met their tragic end on February 25. The Bangladesh patrol was reportedly ambushed 5 kilometers west of Kafu, in the district of Ituri in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), by one of the armed groups that refused to participate in the international community sponsored Disarmament and Community-Based Reintegration process.

It may be mentioned that at this point in time Bangladesh is engaged in as many as 12 UN

peace missions all over the world contributing almost 8,000 troops, making it one of the largest troop contributing countries to UN peace missions.

To many it might appear rather irreconcilable having to lose lives while trying to keep peace, and helping the people of a country, plagued by interecine bloodletting for the last decade, to transition to an institutionalised political process.

Peace, and Acts of Aggression." The concept of "peacekeeping" subsequently emerged when the need was felt to provide diplomatic space to the belligerents to sort matters out, by interposing UN blue berets between them in a situation that was short of peace enforcement as stipulated in Chapter VII of the UN Charter. Congo is an instance of a UN mission mandated under Chapter VII of its Charter that authorised

MONUC's mandate has also gone through significant enhancement in its scope and area of operations that its tasks mandate it to cover, and if one looks carefully at the acronym one would find the two most important adjuncts of any UN peacekeeping operations, "peace" and "observer" absent. This only indicates the wide scope of the tasks mandated to MONUC. Apart from overseeing the

expanding the scope of the tasks, was made under Chapter VII of the UN charter, i.e. enforcement of peace where force was envisaged to be used particularly in the provinces of Bunia, where the Bangladesh troops are deployed under the Ituri brigade, and Kivu. According to the mandate, "In order to fulfill its mandate, the Security Council authorizes MONUC to use all means in Ituri district, and as deemed neces-

previous peacekeeping operations that were the main determining factors in entrusting them with the responsibility of a very dangerous region of the mission area. It is also an acknowledged fact that the security environment in the region had significantly improved after Bangbat had taken over the responsibility of the area. We often forget what Einstein said about peace, that it couldn't be kept by force. It can only be achieved by understanding. It was "understanding" that our peacekeepers were trying to sow among the disparate groups in the region.

Since it is not up to us to choose our mission area, the best we can do, having undertaken to invest troops in the mission area, which must be done after proper risk and threat assessment so as to preclude all possible dangers, is to provide the necessary training to the troops to stand them in good stead. It has to be kept in mind though that it is well nigh impossible to simulate the geography, environment, political or security situation prevailing in the mission area in our training matrix.

Ituri is perhaps a stray incident, and, shocking and sad as it is, it is hoped that this will not have any negative impact on our commitment to UN peace operations. But complacency, if any, in our operational alertness, must also be eschewed. Being vigilant and alive to the likely eventualities would help us avoid loss of lives in future.

One would also like to wish that peace be established soon in the DRC. Only then will the sacrifice of our soldiers not have gone in vain.

The author is Editor, Defence and Strategic Affairs, The Daily Star.

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The deaths will naturally raise questions about our future participation in UN peacekeeping operations and also whether or not we should rethink our involvement in missions that are fraught with danger and might in effect amount to making our peacekeepers "cannon fodder" of the local armed militias hell bent on death and pillage.

Thus there is a need to look at the relevant portion of the UN Charter that deals with peace missions undertaken by the UN and what "peacekeeping" actually involves. In fact, the concept of "peacekeeping" was never even considered an option of the UN when the Charter was drawn up in 1945, and as such finds no mention in it. What Chapter VI of the UN Charter envisaged was "Pacific Settlement of Disputes," while Chapter VII deals with, "Action With Respect To Threats to the Peace, Breaches Of the

use of force in dealing with the situation in the DRC, particularly in the two most disturbed areas of the country, Kivu and Ituri.

To those that have lost their dear ones in the recent incident, the fact that such dangers are but a part of the occupational hazards that soldiers face at all times will come as very little comfort. But one must also acknowledge the presence of certain ground realities in the DRC. MONUC or the United Nation's in the Democratic Republic of Congo, as the acronym stands for, has mutated over the last five years from a representative mission with 100 or so observers in the seven countries that were party to the ceasefire agreement signed in Lusaka on July 10, 1999, to an almost 13,000 strong mission as of today, though much less than what the UN Secretary General had asked for initially.

compliance with the provisions of the Ceasefire Agreement, the mission has been tasked to help the process of political transition in the Congo. This in itself is a significant undertaking since it involves not only disarming the various parties and militias which are heavily armed, but also to see that they are integrated into society, a tall order indeed. This is where the role of the peacekeeper assumes significance. Also involved in the exercise is the protection of the internally displaced persons that are put up in various camps all over the region; in other words, these actions precede and help create conditions for holding elections, slated for sometime in mid-2005.

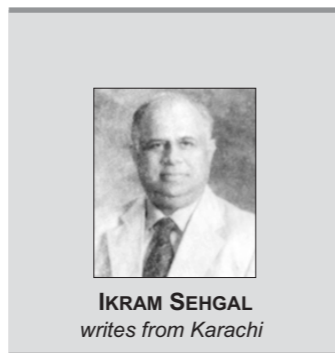
It must also be mentioned that Congo today is perhaps the most dangerous mission area and the UN resolution of July 28, enhancing the size of the force and

sary and within the limits of its capacities, in the Kivu's."

Although it is in Ituri where we took so many casualties, it was not the first time that our peacekeepers had come under attack. Our experience in Bihac and also the constant physical threat our peacekeepers were exposed to in Cambodia are fresh in our minds. It may, thus, be a pertinent question whether we could avoid such dangerous UN missions in future and not expose our peacekeepers to physical dangers.

Unfortunately, we cannot cherry-pick the missions that we would like to participate in. All mission areas, without exception, have elements of hazard inherent in them that are often unpredictable, and risks that are sometimes difficult to foresee. It is worth mentioning that it was the experience of our troops and the level of competence that they had acquired in the

Playing cricket?



ACCORDING to Anurag Thakur of the Himachal Pradesh Cricket Association, exiled spiritual leader Dalai Lama, who made Dharmasala his home after fleeing China's Tibetan province, failed in an uprising against the Chinese, was to inaugurate Pakistan's first three-day cricket match against the Indian Board President's team. All very innocent on the surface but given that the Chinese consider Dalai Lama a rebel, Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) President (and former diplomat) Shaheryar Khan did well to put an immediate stop to this nonsense. The question arises, knowing Chinese sensitivities, what were the Indians upto? Manipulating the Pakistanis into a serious faux pas with China is certainly not cricket. The next minefield, during the replacement (of the Test) one-day match at Ahmedabad will Pakistan cricketers have to shake hands with the Gujarat's Chief Minister (CM) Narendra Modi, given his orchestrating of the massacre of Gujarat Muslims only a couple of years earlier? The cause for concern is if this is not Indian State policy, who is trying to queer the diplomatic pitch? And why?

Cricket is just not an ordinary sports event between the two countries, it has connotations

beyond the accepted norms. The acute disappointment of Pakistani team losing both the test and one-day home series notwithstanding, the spontaneous Pakistani crowd reaction and the warm welcome given to the Indian team as well as the visiting Indian spectators in city after Pakistani city, cut into the virulent anti-Pakistani propaganda in India in the last few years. The Indian masses

ual brilliance but lack a cricket format that institutionalises the building of sound cricket expertise. Our players perform in bits and parts, capable of flashes of individual brilliance but susceptible to sustained periods of mediocrity, making them the most erratic performers on the international cricket stage. We have individual players who can turn a match on its head on their day, regrettably the golden "day"

selfes. Those who should be permanent part of both the Test team and the one-day side include, viz (1) opening batsman Salman Butt (2) one-down batsman Yassar Hameed (3) Yousuf Youhana (4) Inzamam ul Haq (5) Shoaib Malik as a batsman (6) all-rounder Abdul Razzak (7) wicket keeper Kamran Akmal (8) Fast Bowler Shoaib Akhtar (i.e. if he can get rid of his problems of (a) attitude and

due to injury, we are already in trouble. Salman Butt and Yassar Hameed have the potential, if properly groomed, in both versions of the game. This is the best Pakistan has, unfortunately it is not good enough.

Individual brilliance does not represent the vast reservoir of potential that exists. What is needed is a truly well constituted PCB, capable of organising cricket according to a format that

and a successful record in corporate ability is extremely necessary.

A few of our outstanding cricketers are still capable of giving useful input, e.g. the Mohammad Brothers, Hanif and Mushtaq, cousins Majid Khan and Imran Khan, Zaheer Abbas, Javed Miandad, Wasim Akram, Waqar Younis, Aamir Sohail etc. While nobody understands the game in the cricket field better than Javed Miandad, all around, whether in the field and/or outside in the cricket and/or corporate world, only one Pakistani is world class (and respected as such internationally) -- Imran Khan.

Though Tausiq Zia successfully organised the PCB into a viable economic entity, the grooming of cricket talent for the present and the future fell short of expectations. While the President may not like Imran Khan's politics, and there may be quite a number of people in Pakistan who don't, Gen Pervez Musharraf has shared with the general public two of Imran Khan's attributes, viz (1) sound knowledge of cricket as a game as well as command of cricket affairs and (2) his organisational skills symbolised by the world-recognised Shaukat Khanum Memorial Hospital. The President as the Chief Patron of PCB should give Imran Khan a mandate for one year on an ad-hoc basis.

Ikram Sehgal, a former Major of Pakistan Army, is a political analyst and columnist.

AS I SEE IT

While the President may not like Imran Khan's politics, and there may be quite a number of people in Pakistan who don't, Gen Pervez Musharraf has shared with the general public two of Imran Khan's attributes, viz (1) sound knowledge of cricket as a game as well as command of cricket affairs and (2) his organisational skills symbolised by the world-recognised Shaukat Khanum Memorial Hospital. The President as the Chief Patron of PCB should give Imran Khan a mandate for one year on an ad-hoc basis.

watched in disbelief on prime time TV the hospitality and warmth of the "hated" Pakistanis, all portrayed as bearded fanatics in a movie after movie churned out by Bollywood. If not into outright love and affection the tide was turned somewhat, into one of cautions co-existence. What the visit of the American ping-pong team to China did for US-Chinese relationship in 1970, cricket has contributed to sustained composite dialogue between India and Pakistan, the resultant Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) auger extremely well for permanent future rapprochement.

The inadequacies of our cricket team cannot be blamed on Shaheryar Khan alone. We have glaring weaknesses in not having viz, (1) a sound opening pair and/or (2) a credible bowling attack (either fast or spin). We have plenty of talent and individ-

comes after months. To compound an inherent mediocrity, what about a Selection Committee that chooses Imran Farhat, a natural one-day opener, for the Test side and Toufiq Umar, a reasonably sound opening batsmen in Tests, for the one-day series. And destroying the youthful confidence of Yassar Hameed by forcing the natural one-down batsman Yassar Hameed to open in one-dayers? And how many more chances will they give Muhammad Hafeez, a mediocre player at best? Bob Woolmer is certainly one of the best coaches in the game but he is not a magician, he can only deliver if the ingredients given to him are of the required quality. With my limited cricket knowledge I may be forgiven for trying to impersonate a selector but this is general knowledge, for the most part almost 90 per cent of the team select them-

(b) fitness) and (9) Fast Bowler Muhammad Sami. Those who can make it into both the Test teams and one-day side, include viz (1) Shahid Afridi (2) Rana Naveedul Hassan (3) Yousif Khan and (4) Danish Kaneria. What we really need are replacement fast bowlers, viz (1) Shabbir Ahmed and (2) Umer Gul, who should remain fit and available for selection. Razzak has begun to show some consistency in both batting and bowling but we need to find another genuine all-rounder somewhere. Azhar Mahmood has not lived upto his promise. Taufeeq Umar should only be considered for Tests and Imran Farhat only for one-days. Let's face it, only Inzamam and Yousuf Youhana, Razzak as well as Shoaib Akhtar (when fit and not having an attitude problem), are really world class at the moment. If any of them are out of the side,

taps the available talent without hindrance and develops it into world class according to a well laid-out plan. Somebody has to win a game and someone has to lose, what is important is showing grace in winning and courage in losing. Losing, without a fight, has become synonymous with our cricket team, the competitiveness that is the essence of any confrontation seems to be missing.

Departmental teams notwithstanding, the need is to cultivate local potential in each area/region, not possible the way the present competitions are structured. Where is the emphasis on schools and colleges to act as nurseries? Emerging cricketers rise to first class cricket equally viz (1) on the basis of their own talent and/or (2) their luck in being noticed at that level. A hands-on sincere approach along with extensive cricket knowledge

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

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.

Uncensored photographs

These days I have become very reluctant to read a newspaper or watch any news on the television in the presence of my child. The reason being that the photographs of the dead bodies of the criminals or the victims simply terrorise the children as well as the adults.

A couple of months back, a Bengali daily showed photographs of the murdered father and son and the pieces of their cut limbs. It was so pathetic and terrifying that I could not sleep for days. This has been continuing and there is no end to it. When we open the television the same kind of mutilated dead bodies of the criminals or the victims are shown.

I think that the photographs should be censored from now on. They should apply rating on the news, like we have in English movies, which can be a great help

for the viewers. People abroad, who have recently become subscribers of the Bengali private channels, showed their concern regarding such display of violence and are in a dilemma now whether to continue with the channels or to quit them. I have talked to a couple of psychiatrists and they also showed their great concern about the matter. According to them, exposure to such violent scenes may leave an indelible mark on the children's minds.

I believe these TV channels and newspapers are causing great damage to our future generation. It shouldn't continue. Showing such things on the television or in the newspapers is going to stir the violent tendencies among the viewers. This is time to raise voice against it.

Badal Hasib
Midwest Missouri University
Chillicothe

Distribution of wealth

We have stepped into the 21st century and our nation is already 33 years old! We had governments in the past and also at present pursuing ideologies like Nationalism, Socialism, Secularism, Democracy etc.

We also had long streaks of martial law. No matter whichever ideology is being pursued by the elected representative government or a martial law government, it has to be seen that neither the resident director of the World Bank (WB) nor the resident representative of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) are in a position to 'guide' us to attain our cherished goals as an independent nation.

Moreover, the prime ministers of Singapore or Malaysia would never come to our country and lead us for our overall development. I am sorry to say that although we have crossed 33 years of our independence, the prime duty and responsibility of ensuring 'distribu-

tion of wealth' among all the 'adult citizens' of our beloved country still remains unresolved. Unfortunately, a large segment of the population is still very poor with no or little buying capacity.

Golan Ashraf
DOHS Baridhara, Dhaka-1206

"Uncalled for"

I want to say something about the letter "Uncalled for" by MU Ahmed from Banani, Dhaka. In the letter Mr. Ahmed expressed his concern about the interference of the foreign diplomats in our national affairs. He also observed that he was sure about the neutral diplomatic approach by those ambassadors towards India and Pakistan.

I also don't support the interference of foreign countries in our internal affairs, but the present situation in Bangladesh has forced me to change my position. When the government of a country

becomes so irresponsible with everything (whether it is foreign policy or national policy), then it is not unusual to see other countries coming forward and talking about those issues that the government has failed to handle. And we should also not forget that the European Union played an important role in the opposition to American invasion of Iraq.

I think we should accept such utterances of foreign diplomats with a positive attitude for the betterment of our country, and should not take it personally.

Dr. Mazed Sumon
Kalabagan, Dhaka

Women political activists

I am very disgusted by the way our country's political activists express their anger (women to be exact). It is very unpleasant to see women running in the streets with

their sari *anchals* behind their backs and practically falling off, fighting against the police and getting themselves publicly unutilized in front of the citizens of Dhaka, and the newspapers printing their pictures. I, for one, find it very sad and nauseating that the political parties cannot solve their problems in a rational manner. El, being a citizen of Bangladesh, am patriotic and want the best for our country.

So I wish that the people who are jeopardizing the future of our country would come to their senses and understand that political disputes on such a scale are a threat not only to the citizens, but also to the economy.

My appeal to the parties is that, please create the conditions in which we all can live in peace as one united nation.

Sabeen Shamsher
On e-mail

Corrupt politicians

It was a shocking piece of news when I found out that KEPZ was not getting permission because its organisers could not satisfy some influential politicians. Really, I am surprised why those politicians cannot be happy with their existing assets. The assets of our politicians cannot be seen because, it is alleged, they are saved in some other names.

The politicians have amassed great fortunes. Many of them own houses in European and American cities. But such things are of course not compatible with their known sources of income.

So how can we expect better governance? The corrupt politicians will have to retire before we can overcome the problem of being the most corrupt nation in the world!

A student
UK

Islamic militants

I fully endorse the views expressed by a citizen on the recent crackdown on the Islamic militants. It is hard to believe that the government knew nothing about their activities when bombs were exploding regularly in public meetings. The government dismissed the western concern as being a figment of the imagination. But what has happened now?

It seems our decision makers are finally convinced that militants do exist in this country. So they must go flat out to dislodge the militants, before they cause more damage to this nation.

Mansoor Raja
Dhaka