

KEPZ hobbling without a licence

Into the fifth year, still a non-starter!

THE Korean Export Processing Zone (KEPZ), baptized in 1999 through a gazette notification to be built up over a huge acreage of land on the eastern bank of the river Karnaphuli remains a non-starter even to this day. The Korean entrepreneurs led by the Youngone company have so far invested about Tk 100 crore to develop the basic infrastructure in the area. Even allowing for the fact that a long gestation period has to be given to such a huge undertaking, one sees no rhyme or reason in withholding the grant of licence to the designated Korean corporation without which the EPZ cannot be operational.

It is difficult to understand why the Korean private sector corporation having been given a go-ahead to develop the EPZ would not automatically get a licence to operate as an integral part of a package deal supposed to have been struck with it!

The process to set up the KEPZ had been initiated as far back as in 1995 following the visit of the then prime minister Begum Khaleda Zia to South Korea amidst optimism that a new buoyancy has been flagged off in the economic relations with Seoul. The private EPZ Act, however, came into being during the succeeding AL rule. But when the BNP assumed power in October 2001, questions began to be raised in certain circles about some 'irregularities' in KEPZ as well as anomalies in the EPZ Act of the previous AL vintage. Consequently, the PMO which deals with private EPZ, formed several committees to go into the alleged irregularities and anomalies. But a high powered committee in November 2003 determined that there was no need for change in the Act and, therefore, recommended that "in the interest of national image and foreign investment, KEPZ should be allowed to function without any delay."

The indecision is drawing out a heavy price from projected gains. Investors from Vietnam, China and India have evinced a keen interest in the EPZ, but the foot-dragging could dampen the enthusiasm. When commissioned it will be the biggest EPZ with 500 factories and one and a half lakh workers under their employ promising Tk 120 crore in export earning.

A year and a quarter has passed since the positive PMO committee decision was taken. Yet, the licensing is inexplicably in hibernation. Let's see an end to this costly governmental vacillation over a vital matter of national interest.

Journalist under the baton

An illegal act by keeper of the law

WE are appalled at the news of a journalist being once again at the receiving end of the wrath of the law enforcing agencies. This time it was the elite force, RAB, beating up a photojournalist while he was going about his professional duty and fulfilling his responsibility as a journalist, which is to keep the people informed.

The RAB personnel apparently took exception at being snapped while they were administering on-the-spot justice to a few extortionists. It was not a case of mistaken identity because the said pressman gave out his identity to his tormentors. And while they were beating him they kept on reminding him of the fact that it was not permitted to take photographs of RAB.

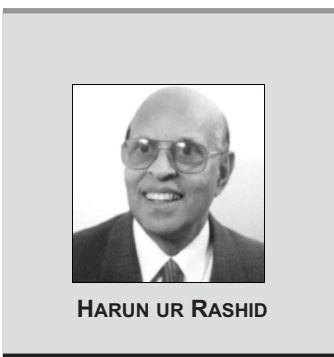
Pardon our ignorance, but we are not aware of any restriction imposed upon the press not to take pictures of a piece of action by an agency, paid for by the people, and meant to serve the people. The people have the right to be informed of any occurrence that is of public interest and it our considered opinion that no one ought to be above public scrutiny, and that includes the elite forces. It is as well that an apology was tendered to the journalist but that was too late, not before the poor journalist had gone through considerable personal agony and humiliation.

There are far too many instances of the members of the journalist community being made the butt of police highhandedness. This appears to be a deliberate attempt to prevent the press from carrying out its duty.

This goes against the idea of an unfettered and free press that is so very essential for a vibrant and meaningful democracy. If we are to recognise the comments of an illustrious modern day philosopher that the behaviour of the police is the index of the state of a nation, to be true, one really has reason to believe that ours is in a dire strait.

What the journalist was subjected to was patently illegal: and when the law enforcers resort to illegal acts, who will protect the public?

Bangladeshi troops and UN peacekeeping missions



THE whole nation is deeply saddened with the tragic news of deaths of nine Bangladeshi troops who were reportedly ambushed on February 25 by unknown "gunmen" in the northeast mineral-rich Ituri region of the Democratic Republic of Congo, while they were on patrol to protect the civilians who took shelter in the area due to fighting among Lendu and Hema tribes since 1999 over the mineral resources of the region.

The Prime Minister received their dead bodies in Dhaka on February 28 with due honour and solemnity. The country observed a national mourning day on March 1 as a mark of respect for the fallen soldiers.

The UN Secretary General condoled the death of the Bangladeshi troops and called the attack "a criminal act." The US Assistant Secretary for South Asia sent condolences to the Bangladesh Foreign Minister and lauded Bangladesh's role in the UN peace-keeping missions across the world. The government of Congo issued a statement that they were determined to hunt the criminal gangs and punish them for the murders.

The soldiers' deaths in Congo were the second largest loss of life for the Bangladeshi army while on UN peacekeeping duties. In October 2003, 15 officers of Bangladesh army died in a plane crash in Liberia.

Bangladesh contribution to peacekeeping

It is believed that there are more than 44,000 UN peacekeeping troops in many tension-torn zones in the world and they are bravely carry-

ing out duties for a noble cause of peace as directed by the UN Security Council. Bangladesh troops reportedly constitute about 14 per cent of the total UN peacekeeping missions, the second highest among developing countries.

It is reported that Bangladesh has sent 1,300 troops in the Congo at the request of the UN Secretary General. In recent years, Bangladesh is one of the largest contributors to the UN peacekeeping missions across different continents of the world.

Chapter VI of the Charter refers to techniques that the Security Council can adopt in pursuit of the peaceful settlement of disputes, such as fact-finding, negotiation, mediation, arbitration or judicial settlement, while Chapter VII gives the Security Council power to enforce decisions to maintain or restore international peace and security. Peacekeeping operation is thus not explicitly provided for in the Charter.

The official UN account of peace-keeping, titled *The Blue Helmets*, defines peacekeeping as follows: "A

peacekeeping operation has come to be defined as an operation involving military personnel, but without enforcement powers, undertaken by the UN to help maintain or restore international peace and security in areas of conflict."

The first full-fledged peacekeeping mission came in 1956 when the UN Emergency Force 1 was established in response to British and French forces' invasion of Egypt during the Suez Canal crisis. Hammarskjöld in consultation with the President of the UN General Assembly Lester Pearson (Canada) defined the principles as follows:

- The principle of consent of the parties to the dispute for the establishment of the mission.
- The principle of nonuse of force except in self-defence.
- The principle of voluntary contributions of contingents from small, neutral countries to participate in the force.
- The principle of impartiality by the mission.
- The principle of control of peacekeeping operations by the UN Secretary General.

Most of the peacekeeping opera-

tions are restricted either to observe cease-fire or monitor of peace along the borders and buffer zones after cease-fires have been agreed upon by the parties of the conflicts. This means only once the parties cease armed conflicts, peacekeeping mission may begin.

Statistics show that between 1945 and 1988, there have been 42 UN peacekeeping missions across the world. After 1988 there has been dramatic increase in the number of peacekeeping operations. The increase implies that conflicts either

on ethnic or linguistic or religious grounds have occurred and the UN had to intervene.

Contemporary peacekeeping missions of the UN can be appropriately categorized as (i) multilateral, (ii) multidimensional, and (iii) multinational/multicultural.

Multilateralism refers to the several aspects that may be involved in an operation. Parties to the conflict may be two or more than two, for example in Somalia more than a dozen vied for power, whereas in Mozambique, two identifiable parties existed in the conflict.

The operation is often multidimensional, having military, police and the civilian components, and each component is entrusted with specific duties to perform. Increasingly, civilian and police components play an important role in maintenance of public order. Military component serves in a supporting role in which the civilian component can work.

Multinationalism/multiculturalism means that a peacekeeping force is assembled by a multiplicity of troop-contributing nations and the civilian component is derived from a diverse range of nations. For example, in

Congo, peacekeeping mission includes troops from Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan, and Morocco. Each nation comes to the operation with its own political and cultural background, its varied understanding of the conflict and its own diverse skills, approaches, and techniques.

Categories of peace operations

At present UN peace operations include three kinds: (a) peacekeeping, (b) peacemaking, and (c) peace building. Each operation is different

from the other in scope and functions.

Peacekeeping means what the term refers to. To maintain peace among the two or more conflicting parties after they have ceased active armed combat. The UN mission is there with the consent of all parties in the conflict to facilitate or monitor the implementation of peace agreement. They troops in the peacekeeping missions have no enforcement powers to keep peace. It is important to note that peacekeeping requires consent while peace enforcement does not.

Peacemaking is the prevention of conflict and making of peace. It is a process of diplomacy, mediation, negotiation or forms of peaceful settlement that end disputes. Military activities that support peacemaking include military-to-military relations and security assistance operations. These activities contribute to an atmosphere of cooperation and assistance among parties that lead to prevention of conflict.

Peace building consists of post-conflict actions, primarily diplomatic that strengthen and rebuild civil infrastructures and institutions in order to avoid a return a conflict. It also includes

mechanisms that advance a sense of confidence and well-being and support economic reconstruction. Military and civilian involvement is normally required. Military support includes assistance in the conduct of elections and demobilisation of former belligerent parties.

The UN Secretary General Kofi Annan argues that peacekeeping missions will need to have greater coercive capacity to be fully effective. Peacekeeping forces need to be able to make available rewards in the mission area. This concept of peace-keeping, which Kofi Annan, sees as absolutely essential for future effectiveness of peacekeeping missions.

Conclusion

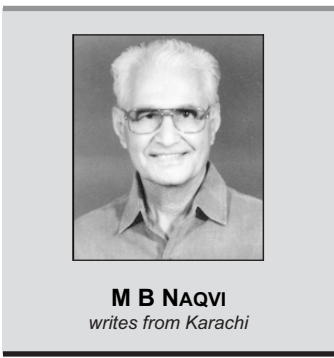
It appears that peacekeeping missions are getting riskier day by day, in particular in Africa which has a major share of fierce intra-tribal conflicts. It is noted that in 1993, nineteen US peacekeeping soldiers were killed in Somalia by rival gangs and since then, the US has been very reluctant to participate in UN peace-keeping missions. Last year for a very brief period, the US troops were in Liberia under pressure because it was once administered by the US. The policy of the US, instead, is to help with logistics the UN peace-keeping operations.

Since the functions of peacekeeping and peacemaking/enforcement are different, it is suggested that unless armed conflict has come fully to an end among all parties or belligerent groups, dispatch of peacekeeping missions is unsuitable. The UN Secretariat has the responsibility to clearly and fully advise the Bangladesh government of the situation of the conflict-area in which the UN seeks Bangladeshi troops for peacekeeping, not for peacemaking.

Bangladesh may seriously consider whether in the vague or unclear situation, it would contribute in future its troops to the UN mission. The unnecessary loss of precious lives in Congo has made the consideration more urgent and important, while committing Bangladeshi personnel to the UN peace operations.

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Issues behind reconciliation talks



HERE is much media noise about back channel negotiations between the President and PPP leaders, especially Benazir Bhutto, directly or through other leaders. Similarly, the President is thought to have contacts with the Sharifs in Jeddah. No one knows what is being discussed. Going by assertions of ministers, the President is supposed to have laid down conditions under which he seeks cooperation of either PPP or PML(N) with the ruling coalition in Islamabad.

It would obviously involve expanding the pro-Musharraf coalition by inclusion of those who agree to join the Cabinet in support of the President. The President has laid it down: no general election before 2007, possibly further; Mr. Pervez Musharraf has to remain president till 2007; agreeing party must support his candidature for presidency after the 2007 Elections (whenever they are held); and the party must work under the constitution as it stands after the Legal Framework Order was incorporated in it.

Reports of contacts with Benazir Bhutto have been both contradicted and confirmed through back chan-

nels. PPP is said to be discussing with the President's men the modalities of cooperation. No clear guidelines have been disclosed by PPP as to what they are insisting on. Similarly PML(N) has virtually, if coyly, admitted to some contacts, especially between Shahbaz Sharif and the President's boys. Insofar as MMA -- and one is prepared to go along with its claim of being in opposition -- is concerned, its problem appears to be the President's uniform, i.e. his decision to remain the army chief and president simultaneously.

Let's consider the issues: The viewpoint should be concern for the future of Pakistan. First prerequisite for country's stability and unity is ending the radical divisions in the polity between those whose power rests on military's support and those outside the charmed circle of power. The term "democracy" has been much abused: it can be anything in Pakistan. Nevertheless, institutions of democracy are still there while credibly free and fair elections are absent. In the 2002 polls, the pitch

was queried by the bureaucracy in selecting candidates and manipulating results. Moreover, throughout Pakistan's history, there has been no respect for the constitution or rule of law.

The national security state that Pakistan is, rulers have operated through intelligence agencies on critical matters like manipulating elections or democratic institutions. That is Pakistan's tragedy. Pakistan needs either a neutral bureaucracy or a wholly partisan one; let's be

clear which is desired. If a neutral bureaucracy is desired, it has to be given safeguards against obeying illegal orders and security of service. The democracy should work the way it does in any normal parliamentary democracy. One specific problem is to the intrusion of military intelligence agencies into political affairs. That has to be stopped once and for all.

For the rest, Pakistan needs a democratic government that would tackle its social and economic problems, beginning with economic development that promotes social justice. It is no longer possible to be satisfied with GDP and GNP growth without creating massive new employment opportunities. Poverty has to be frontally attacked through

a binding system of social security.

Coming back to parties, MMA's interests are limited, as noted. It has no specific ideas on economic development nor has it any proposals about social justice. It is not of one mind about land reforms. What does it think of globalisation as the regulating paradigm? No answer is audible. It only wants to fight with obscenity and to improve individual morals. Except for the President holding the two top offices (army chief and the presidency), every-

thing else is OK. It does swear by democracy when it suits it.

Insofar as the PPP is concerned, it says on the record all the things that democrats normally agree with. But it is hard to be sure what the PPP will do in practice. The reason for that is its conduct in the two spells of being the government in the 1980s and 1990s. It accepted the army's terms in 1988, including specific Zia-vintage Ministers being retained. It allowed the army to control the foreign policy, nuclear matters and national security affairs, including the intrusive role of the intelligence agencies. The prime minister lacked (ultimate) power and yet Ms. Benazir Bhutto agreed to serve as PM twice. Considering the record, it is widely suspected that she may again agree to Mr. Musharraf's

terms, if he promises not to block her path to prime ministerial office -- no matter if it is only of figurehead variety.

It is hard to be sure about what the PPP policy will be vis-a-vis the constitutional amendments that have implemented the LFO with the help of MMA and PML(Q), if Musharraf does not block Benazir Bhutto's path to office, allow freer scope to her and Asif Zardari. Doubts arise largely because it has worked under a constitution disfigured by Ziaul Haq's

Eighth Amendment. That is not much different from what the current constitution is. PPP used to be a left of centre party during Zulifkar Ali Bhutto's early days, raising slogans of *Roti, Kapra Aur Makan*. Benazir has demonstrably eschewed it; she has worked the IMF-suggested structural reforms and allowed the social inequalities and poverty to grow. It advocates no significant economic or social change. All it now wants is democracy, the credibility of which may be compromised by its own conduct in office or the army's undiminished role.

As for PML(N), its credentials for opposing President Pervez Musharraf are still good because of personal factors. It is the staunchest opposition party inside

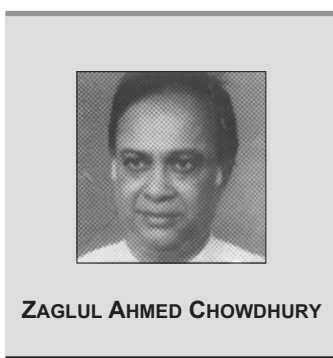
ARD until now. It stands for original 1973 constitution sans many amendments done later -- except probably the one declaring Qadianis as non-Muslims. But its record is as chequered as PPP's. Mr. Nawaz Sharif undoubtedly was military's protegee. That he outgrew his original limitations is creditable. His record remains compromised by his two constitutional amendments through which he muzzled ruling party MPs and wanted to become a dedicated Amirul Momenin of Muslims by enforcing Shariah. So long as he does not clearly condemn these two constitutional amendments, his claim to stand for original 1973 constitution would remain suspect.

President Musharraf's not allowing him inside the country, certainly not as a possible prime minister, may have something to do with his purist stand. Nevertheless, we should give full credit for what he says, provided he gives satisfaction on the question of his tendency to accumulate total power in his hands.

The outlook remains mixed. Which way Pakistan will move is uncertain. Why? because there is uncertainty regarding Pakistan's political future. Will it be a democracy? Will it remain military-dominated? Will it have a hybrid political system that preserves the military's control of all vantage points in the economy and polity, together with ultimate power, while the civilians play second fiddle to army chiefs? There is no knowing. Until there is some certainty, the country will remain unstable and weak.

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Nepal crisis: More steps needed to restore democracy



NEPAL'S King Gyanendra has released sacked Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba from house arrest and along with him several others have also been set free. Obviously, he has done it under intense pressure from home and abroad following recent harsh measures taken by the King when he imposed emergency, outlawed political activities, and himself took over the reigns of the nation by going beyond his largely ceremonial role as a monarch.

As expected, the King's steps sparked severe protests and condemnation particularly in the democratic world since the measures dealt a grave blow to Nepal, which was making progress towards a system of representative government despite

strains in the new-found democracy. But King Gyanendra's action sought to put the clock back as he took over all executive powers by dismissing the elected prime minister on flimsy grounds. The reactions that followed at home and internationally were clearly not anything that the monarch would relish and he was coming under mounting pressure to reverse what he did.

He is slowing slackening his grip and indicating that the tough measures are a short-lived arrangement. Sher Bahadur Deuba has been released but many other top politicians including former premier and president of the Nepali Congress G.P. Koirala and general secretary of the communist party (Marxist-Leninist) Madhav Kumar Nepal were still interned at their homes. Political activities have not been allowed as of writing this column.

Nepal, the landlocked nation, admirably introduced parliamentary democracy in 1990 replacing executive monarchy. The developments in the country, in the form of sacking the elected prime minister and vesting of all power in the monarchy, cannot be commended since these measures are certainly taking the nation further away from representative government.

The current millenium had certainly begun on an ominous note for Nepal, which was otherwise a largely

MATTERS AROUND US

Sher Bahadur Deuba, soon after his release, made no secret that strong agitation will be built up protesting undemocratic situation in the country. It is expected that Nepal will go back to democratic pattern and the monarchy needs to take larger and speedier steps in that direction so as to assuage the feelings of the democracy lovers both at home and abroad.

calm and peaceful country drawing huge tourists from all over and was making significant strides to change its impoverished image. Monarchy remained the constitutional head with an elected parliament and leader of the majority party or alliance in the helm as the prime minister to run the nation.

But over the last four years, the happy conditions began to change and the political situation is getting murkier. The dismissing of Sher Bahadur Deuba government, strictly speaking, has not come as a total surprise. In a way, something like this was expected sooner or later since political developments held no promise for a better future taking into consideration the evolving condition centering the elections and the ever increasing unrest caused by a determined insurgency by the ultra-left "Maoists."

Three important factors determine the course of events in the country, with the monarchy definitely being at the supreme, followed by the political parties and the radical leftists. A popular monarch King Birendra had to loosen his grip on powers facing a pro-democracy movement when he conceded demands like democratic government in 1990.

Political parties -- the Nepali Congress, the Communist party (Marxist-Leninist) and other smaller groups -- have not shown maturity in a new parliamentary democracy as intra-party rivalries as well as squabbles within the main Nepali Congress kept all at bay about the fate of democracy even though people favour representative system of government. The murky political situation can be well judged by the fact that Nepal witnessed as many as thirteen premiers in fourteen years

history of introduction of democracy in 1990.

Alleged corruption on part of the politicians in power also played a role in growing despondency among the people. Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala had to quit being embroiled in a serious controversy over leasing of a Royal Nepalese Airlines passenger aircraft. Later, his Nepali Congress was split over leadership and at one stage Sher Bahadur Deuba -- a challenger to Koirala -- was ousted from the organisation and he set up Nepali Congress (Democratic).

Deuba was prime minister but sacked by King Gyanendra, triggering a debate as his was an elected government, but the King reinstated him in June last year, giving him the task of organising elections and settling the Maoist problem. When Deuba was sacked this time, the King cited the reasons of "incompetence"

against him. Political parties, which seldom show any unity, had come together on the broad issue of "elected government" when dismissed premier Deuba was reinstated replacing the handpicked prime minister Surja Bahadur Thapa.

The accusations brought against him by the monarch, broadly titular head of the nation, evidently lack basis to dismiss a democratic government. Even if there is rationale behind the charges, it is the people who should give decision through fresh mandate and not the arbitrary decision by the King. In Pakistan, a clause was in the constitution when parliamentary democracy existed that the ceremonial presidency could sack the elected prime minister and his government whenever he wished. This clause was contrary to the democratic principles and as such was later annulled by two-thirds majority of parliament in a fitting development to

honour democratic principles. Against this background, the constitutional power of the King to sack elected government is simply not convincing unless the government loses majority in parliament or is embroiled in a grave crisis.

Undoubtedly, the biggest headache for the King is certainly the activities of the Maoists, who often engage themselves in fierce battles with the army and police causing big toll of lives on both sides. By this time they control a large area in the countryside. Efforts for a government-Maoists negotiation did not bear much fruit and consequently a stand-off situation exists as far as the fighting is concerned. The Maoists want dismantling of the monarchy and setting up of a Republic and a constituent assembly to draft a new constitution. The King is not ready to accept these demands, not surprisingly.

Ironically, a country like Nepal can ill afford to absorb two serious crises, stemming from political instability and the long-drawn Maoist insurgency, which is growing in intensity even though no sides are in a decisive stage. But the solution definitely does not lie in measures like "killing" democracy in the country.

As expected, Nepal developments came in for severe criticisms in the South Asian region and larger out-

side world. Donor nations including the United States, the UK, and India -- all important democracies -- threatened to cut off military aid to the country. World Bank and other agencies are thinking twice about their assistance and the nation heavily depends on such assistance. The setback to democracy has not been taken kindly.

It is against this background that the King seems to be rescinding some of his harsh decisions. But these are not enough as the country needs quicker and more tangible measures towards restoration of representative government. Full political activities and fresh polls towards an elected parliament are undoubtedly among the steps that are required before political instability and tension escalate.

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