

Voter list updating

EC has no more time to waste

We are happy to note that the Election Commission has at last embarked upon the proper process of updating the voter list but we are not sure that it is showing the sense of urgency that is expected of it in its updating – an issue that has already created great controversy. The fact that only a small number of enumerators appointed by the EC were found engaged in the door-to-door campaign for enlisting voters on the weekend is proof enough that the time factor, deemed so important, has not spurred the EC to the desired level of acceleration of its prime task at the moment.

The criticism against the EC in recent times primarily revolved around its intent insofar as updating of the voter list is concerned. The lapses ranged from flouting of court directives to putting forward ideas and work plans in violation of the set rules. The barrage of resistance finally forced the EC to revert to the standard procedures, of course after wasting valuable time. Then the general expectation was that the EC would swing into action to complete the job of updating the voter list. But now it is evident that even operational efficiency is something that this EC is not capable of ensuring.

Another disquieting feature of the EC's handling of the issue is that it is not showing any sensitivity to popular demands or expectations. Strangely enough, the EC seems to be under the impression that it is the voters' duty to get their names included in the electoral roll. Equally baffling is the unmistakable go-slow tactic, which may put the whole democratic process in jeopardy.

The question that arises is why the supreme body for conducting elections is not responding to a crucially important national issue with due haste. It's stumbling almost at every step, giving rise to speculations of all sorts. And of course doubt creeps in when the EC comes up from time to time with legally untenable and absurd propositions.

Only three days back we came to learn that the finance minister had decided not to release funds to the EC for the same job once again. This was apparently a normal course for the minister to take. But again, precious time would be lost if settling of such matters is left to the routine bureaucratic procedures.

The EC has to recover from the poor start (in updating the voter list) and make sure that the job is done satisfactorily without getting into 'time trouble'.

RU teacher's murder charge sheet

Justice denied or derailed?

It is extremely disquieting to see the police put under pressure of the powers that be in the conduct of its function of investigation and prosecution of culprits. Our concern stems from a recent report in a Bangla daily that the charge sheet in the murder case of a teacher of Rashahi University has not only not been submitted even almost six months after the murder, its submission is uncertain because of political pressure. Such instances negate the recent assertions to the press of senior police officials that they are not under any pressure from any quarter in the conduct of their duty.

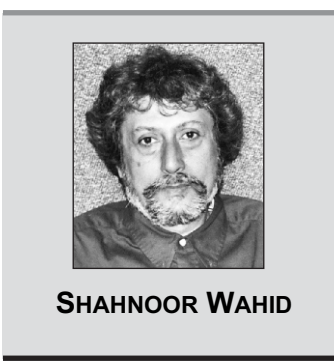
As it is, any murder is abhorrent, let alone the murder of a respected university teacher. But that the legal process, that is so much dependent on the flawless work of the police from the very initial stage of investigation to preparing the charge sheet to ensure the just conclusion of the case, stands to be invalidated because of extraneous influence, smears the very system which is the last resort of the aggrieved.

While not for a moment are we suggesting that investigations should be unduly hurried, because justice hurried is justice buried, in the case we are referring to, there is more than enough evidence of the alleged involvement of the accused to initiate legal proceedings. That it should be delayed on reasons that appear less than convincing, does very little to boost the image of the police.

Many a case has been spoilt because of the weak charge sheet and flawed investigation, which are sometimes the result of political pressure. The judge adjudicating the Udichi bombing case, where the accused were let free because of insufficient evidence, had pointed out these lacunae. Similarly, the investigating officer in the murder case of a Chittagong businessman has been called to account for loopholes in the charge sheet.

While it is true that the police cannot invent evidence, and nor should it, it is equally important that investigations are carried out immaculately on the available evidence, and all evidences and related documents, including the charge sheet, are presented timely and in the best possible manner that would ensure conviction of the culprits. And that should be done not under duress of any kind.

I came ... I saw ... I could not conquer!



SHAHNOOR WAHID

It was not Veni, Vidi, Vici for the chief election commissioner. He came to the Election Commission, he saw everything there, but then he could not conquer anything. And yet, like Don Quixote, he keeps charging headlong with his lance without knowing where he is going. And most of the time he is going the wrong way!

Nevertheless, he became a darling of the column writers of the country as he continues to supply them with material for writing post-editorials and commentaries. Each episode is proving to be more interesting than the previous one. Writers never get tired of

SENSE & INSENSIBILITY

Don't bother about the cynics. They always ask cynical questions and that is what they do for a living. Keep doing what you are doing. This is a free-for-all country and once you are in power you have the license to do anything for five years. For five years you stuff your ears with sterile cotton so that nothing can reach the inner ear. You also wear dark glasses and sit inside darkened cars so that you cannot see anything clearly. After five years, go abroad with your entire family and wait for the next opportunity. It will come eventually.

writing about him, and interestingly, readers are also not showing any signs of boredom reading the stuff.

The CEC is also hot property at the moment as far as creating news is concerned and therefore a favourite of the media of the country. A news editor heaves a sigh of relief if anything on the CEC comes to his table. In fact he becomes ecstatic since he will not have to worry about the lead story for that evening. He has got one! Cartoonists are also in hot demand these days. And critics say that there is a permanent tent outside the office of CEC where

reporters from the print and electronic media live to cover his every move.

The words and deeds of the CEC have entertainment value of pristine quality. His latest encounter with none other than the powerful finance minister (FM) reminded us of the heavyweight boxing bouts between Mohammad Ali and Sonny Liston. The left hooks and upper cuts of the finance minister were deftly dodged by the CEC. The FM also foiled all attempts of the CEC to hit him below the belt. It was an interesting fight, indeed, and we have been immensely enter-

tained.

The CEC also has rare in-built magnetic properties in him that has greatly astounded scientists. They have shown interest to go over his body to find out why he is stuck to his chair at the EC and cannot be removed no matter how hard everyone tries! The interesting part is that he seems to be enjoying his predicament! He does not want to go!

It has been reported that some senior citizens have offered to meet all the expenses of the CEC once he agrees to go home. But, once unemployed how will he get money to pull on! No problem,

Time for UN peacekeepers in Lebanon?



KAZI ANWARUL MASUD

ISRAEL'S most recent aggression on Lebanon and Palestine to free two captured Israeli soldiers from the Hezbollah treats with contempt Professor Michael Walzer's concept of Just and Unjust War and stretches to breaking point the Bush doctrine of pre-emption, because of the totally disproportionate Israeli response to the kidnapping of Israeli soldiers by Hezbollah and the presumed terrorism by the Hamas which now is in power in Palestine elected through a free and fair election.

The Arab foreign ministers, in their most recent meeting, have described the Middle East Road Map drawn up by the Quartet – US, EU, Russia and the UN – as dead. The Non-Aligned Movement has accused Israel of undermining the peace process, and called for an international force to be deployed in the area.

The G-8 meeting held at St. Petersburg, where President Bush sounded a discordant note, as opposed to Jacques Chirac and Vladimir Putin, resolved to send an international stabilization force into Lebanon to contain the relentless Israeli destruction of Lebanese and Palestinian infrastructures and rising civilian casualties.

The Summit blamed extremists forces of trying "to destabilize the region...to plunge the Middle East into chaos and provoke a wider conflict." The leaders called on Israel to end military operations, for early withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza, and release of Palestinian Ministers and Parliamentarians to which Israel as yet is to pay any heed.

Kofi Anan who called for an immediate cease fire, an idea which reportedly did not appeal to President Bush, flew to Brussels for talks with European Union's Javier Solana, and is fleshing out plans for a UN Stabilization Force which, if

approved by the Security Council, would go to the troubled area in greater number than UNFIL set up in 1978 to oversee the volatile Israel-Lebanon border.

Domestically, if Israel can deal a death-blow to Hezbollah, then Prime Minister Ehud Olmert can dictate a de-facto border in the occupied area. On the other hand, the conflict now has become between Hamas and Hezbollah, both having increased their popularity among their people and Israel.. A lot, therefore, would depend on the international peacekeepers ability to contain the explosive situation.

The term peacekeeping was referred to by Dag Hammarskjold as belonging to "chapter five and a half" of the UN Charter because chapter six provided for mediation and fact finding while chapter seven provided for more forceful measures such as embargoes and military intervention. UN peacekeeping has been described as non-aggressive use of military force to help nations in conflict to reach a settlement.

Paradoxically, though the conflict zones needing peacekeeping operations by the UN are generally located in the South, the underdeveloped regions of the world, who become victims of civil wars and disasters either man-made or natural, and those who organize the interventions are mainly from the industrial North, the countries from the South were often the ones opposing these operations.

The recommendations of the Brahimi Report, produced by the UN panel set up after UN inaction resulting in massacre at Srebrenica and genocide at Rwanda, inter alia, of enhanced UN capacities for peacekeeping was seen by some

of the Southern governments as a Trojan horse for rampant intervention by the North. Even though the Brahimi Report was broadly welcomed by the Millennium Summit and endorsed by the UNSC Summit (2000), its critics saw the attention given to peacekeeping as distraction from priority that should have been given to social and economic issues.

Besides, the report's suggestion that stronger and more centralized analytical capacity was needed for conflict prevention and management as being potentially intrusive in their domestic affairs, worried some Southern governments. This Southern wariness can be explained by their apprehension of greater chances of unanimity among P-5 due to disappearance of Cold War bipolarity; greater awareness of G-8 countries of global interdependence and that democracy deficit in any part of the world if tolerated could fuel conflicts adversely affecting their interests; and increasing possibility of the West by-passing the UN if necessary (as in Kosovo and Iraq).

Added to these newly emerging factors, was the fact that over several decades UN declarations on strengthening humanitarian assistance had stressed the principle of state sovereignty and the need for consent of the state requiring humanitarian assistance.

Admittedly, since the Cold War, the inadequacy of peacekeeping force as an effective instrument has been felt in places where civil war is still in progress, where consent for the presence of the peacekeepers is fragile and they are accused of being partisan. In such cases, the Grotian doctrine, named after Dutch jurist Hugo Grotius, justifying forcible intervention to protect

people from genocide has been advanced. But such intervention need not be without UN blessings.

As UN Under Secretary General Shashi Tharoor points out, peacekeeping remains exactly the kind of mission where using the UN has advantages because: (a) UN peacekeeping allows burden sharing, (b) UN peacekeeping has brought peace and democracy to Namibia, Cambodia, El Salvador, Mozambique, and East Timor, and eased US burden in Haiti and Afghanistan, (c) UN peacekeeping is highly cost effective as the UN spends less per year on peacekeeping than the New York fire and police departments.

Susan Rice, a senior State Department official in the Clinton administration, however, contends that notable, even dangerous weakness remain in the UN's capacity to mount and sustain effective peace operation. In particular, according to Susan Rice, UN continues to fall short in the realm of rapid response to crises -- a weakness which can be overcome through the adoption of early warning and preventive response to conflict; rapid deployment of trained, equipped and capable forces, civilian police and civilians to respond to swiftly unfolding crises; and political will of the UNSC members to respond effectively to crises and to finance peace operations.

Susan Rice and Shashi Tharoor appear to be on the same wavelength in their assessment that while regional organizations/individual states may try to mitigate crisis and stabilize conflict zones (Australia in East Timor, Britain in Sierra Leone, and France in Cote D'Ivoire) there is no substitute in the long term for the UN.

scream the senior citizens. They have suggested collecting toll, if need be, to raise the money. It seems the only ploy to get the CEC out left to the citizens is marching down to the EC office at Agargaon and to cry and wail loudly standing before him. The tears from a thousand eyes might finally help unglue him from that favourite chair there. We are yet to hear from the CEC on this issue.

More entertainers

The great Shaikh and Bangla Bhai continue to sing their special brand of songs to entertain the neighbours in a residential area in the city. They are allegedly getting the same treatment that a son-in-law traditionally gets from his in-laws in this country.

Know what! They are living inside air-cooled rooms! And they get chicken legs and mutton curry and fish curry all the time! Oh, did you know that they have been given death sentence for creating anarchy throughout the country and murdering some innocent people? And according to the law of the land they should be living in the condemned cells in the central jail! But, wait. The law minister says

that everything about them is being done according to law! Now, cynics are being cynical about this comment of the minister. They want to know whether hiring a house to keep murderers with death sentence hanging over their head is lawful! Whether the one-storied house in the fringe of the city with only four or five security people on guard is more secure than the central jail! And whether such criminals should get air-coolers is what the law says!

Don't bother about the cynics. They always ask cynical questions and that is what they do for a living. Keep doing what you are doing. This is a free-for-all country and once you are in power you have the license to do anything for five years. For five years you stuff your ears with sterile cotton so that nothing can reach the inner ear. You also wear dark glasses and sit inside darkened cars so that you cannot see anything clearly. After five years, go abroad with your entire family and wait for the next opportunity. It will come eventually.

Shaheen Wahid is Senior Assistant Editor of The Daily Star.

special religious interest in the preservation of the state of Israel.

To Colin Powell, who was then a key player in the Middle East crisis, Israeli reservations about the Quartet-produced road map was less important than the security for Israel as the return of Palestinian refugees to their homeland remained a crucial issue for any settlement of the Palestinian problem. It is equally important if the US is to play any meaningful role in the resolution of the crisis then there has to be an unambiguous US position of not acquiescing on the undeclared status of Israel as a nuclear power despite Israel's repeated refusal to sign Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty (FMTC) because in Israeli eyes it would be suicidal.

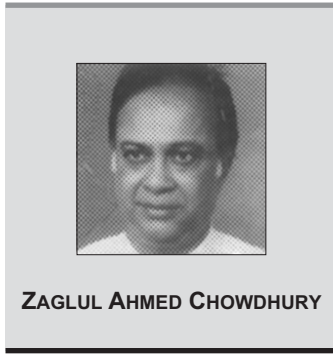
This "nuclear ambiguity" according to McGeorge Bundy (of Kennedy era) and William Crow Jr (former head of CIA) is a significant impediment to arms control and non-proliferation because no Israeli government can make a convincing case that no state needs to fear a nuclear Israel unless the Jewish state is threatened with extinction.

In the final analysis, Israeli aberrant behaviour, not fully reflected in the Middle East statement of the St. Petersburg Summit, has to be reined in. US Jewish Lobby and November Congressional elections, however important to President Bush they may be for the moment, are of far less importance from historical perspective when history will judge that one country was allowed to detain ministers of another country and diminish the sovereign authority of a country (recognized by UNSCR 1559 in the case of Lebanon) by brute force.

It cannot be acceptable that millions of people should live in despair just because of one country, Israel (who does not need any body's protective umbrella), that has to be treated as the West's sentinel in the East. Besides, continuing US neglect of a just solution of the Palestinian problem will in all probability make President Bush's aim to spread democracy throughout Greater Middle East a distant dream. Sooner the Middle East crisis is resolved, the better it will be for the international community.

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Nepal's elections another step in right direction



ZAGLUL AHMED CHOWDHURY

Nepal, embroiled in a long-drawn Maoist insurgency and political crisis, has moved another step further to resolve both the crises, having largely settled the political problem earlier and now addressing the more complex Maoist issue.

Elections for a constituent assembly to draft a new constitution for the country will be held by April next year, and this decision meets another demand of the ultra-leftists who are now observing a ceasefire with the government following broad understanding

MATTERS AROUND US

The crux of the whole scenario is that the two sides are showing great signs of accommodation and this has made the progress possible. Elections for the constituent assembly by April 2007 was a major demand of the radicals and the government has clearly accepted this. In the process, a potentially divisive issue has been averted and the government-Maoists ties have been further smoothened.

reached between the two sides.

The polls dates have been mentioned by Prime Minister GP Koirala in a communication to the United Nations and the development has satisfied the Maoists who were pressing for an election for a body to re-draft the nation's constitution.

An immediate fall-out of the polls schedule was the positive response from the ultras who said they would further extend the present truce to facilitate resolution of the country's problems. Indeed, this has been another step in the right direction raising further hopes

that the picturesque Himalayan country is coming out of the difficult time that has cost it heavily, both politically and economically.

Earlier, the high level much-awaited important talks between the government and Maoists had rather unexpectedly, but happily, produced tangible results. Prime Minister Koirala and Maoist supremo Prachanda achieved significant progress in their first meeting and another meeting between them is on the cards.

Recently, a new chapter was ushered into the history of Nepal when King Gyanendra had to bow

to people's movement on the issue of giving up absolute power and restoration of representative government which he had scrapped in a bid to consolidate monarchy. This development was followed by a decision of the parliament to clip the powers of the King, turning the monarchy, once again, into a ceremonial one. Recently, the parliament also formalised the decisions taken earlier.

Now, close on the heels of all these democratic steps, the government and the radical leftists, who together worked against King Gyanendra under a loose alliance,

despite their differences on a variety of policies, are engaged in a complex dialogue on the future of the nation. Problems centering the Maoists stalked the nation even after the glorious democratic victory against the King in the form of his capitulation to peoples demands. The Koirala-Prachanda talks provided the basis for settling Nepal's lingering woes and the coming election is likely to strengthen the basis even though many more hurdles are still to be overcome before the achievement of political stability.

The government and the Maoists, despite the narrowing down of differences on a variety of issues, still have major differences relating to certain vital subjects like the pattern of the government and the future of the monarchy. Obviously, the government wants to continue with the Westminster system of democracy while the Maoists, in principle, believe in the one-party communist system.

Secondly, and in a way more importantly for Nepal, the prime

minister and some parties in the present seven-party alliance coalition favour continuation of monarchy devoid of any executive power, but the ultras oppose monarchy tooth-and-nail in any form. They even want trial of King Gyanendra for allegedly amassing wealth in the poverty-ridden country, and for the atrocities committed during the pro-democracy movement.

The government is not as tough as the radicals on this matter although it has gone all out to strip the King of key powers, including control over the armed forces, and the automatic accession to the throne on family lines as had existed earlier. The Maoists want to turn the country into a republic with total abolition of the monarchy, but the Nepali Congress, biggest of the seven-party ruling alliance, and its leader Koirala are known to be favouring monarchy in line with Britain and Japan.

Some of its alliance partners, like the second biggest Communist Party (M-L), feel that the King has lost whatever positive image the

throne had enjoyed during the pro-democracy movement, hence, this institution is no longer revered by the people. A kind of lack of unanimity exists on this issue, but no side is creating much noise over it lest the larger scheme of things is derailed.

However, some thorny issues may still create problems in further progress despite the willingness of both sides to move ahead. The radicals want dissolution of the parliament very soon, but a decision on this is still awaited, with some indication that the government may prolong the life of parliament as long as possible.

The most sensitive issue is the status of the arms that are in possession of the Maoist cadres. Here, the government wants them to disarm, but Prachanda is not ready to give up the arms so easily. After all, they were able to develop a more than 30,000-strong force in ten years and are unlikely to deposit arms without making at least some progress in the realisation of their fundamental objec-

tives. However, the radicals favour a role by the UN in monitoring the use of arms as the ultras have vowed not to use them at all during the truce.

The crux of the whole scenario is that the two sides are showing great signs of accommodation and this has made the progress possible. Elections for the constituent assembly by April 2007 was a major demand of the radicals and the government has clearly accepted this. In the process, a potentially divisive issue has been averted and the government-Maoists ties have been further smoothened.

While things are moving on the right track, problems may crop up in the run up to the polls when acrimony and bitterness may increasingly become the order of the day as time passes. Both sides need to remain alert so as not to queer the pitch.

Zaglul Ahmed Chowdhury is the Foreign Editor of BSS.