

## UN peacekeeping force

Bangladesh deserves senior posts

**B**ANGLADESH Foreign Affairs Adviser Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury has requested Jean Marie Guehenno, UN Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, for selecting Bangladeshis for senior positions at the headquarters and field level. We think it was a timely and justified request since Bangladesh has been one of the top contributing countries in the world to UN Peacekeeping Missions and earning good name for itself wherever our troops have been deployed.

We are happy to note that the peacekeeping operations chief has assured our adviser that the UN would consider his request when future placement would become available. We also recall that recently UN Deputy-Secretary-General Asha Rose Migiros has thanked Bangladesh for its significant contribution to the UN Peacekeeping Missions and expressed her gratitude when our foreign affairs adviser called on her at the UN Headquarters in New York.

The Bangladeshi troops in UN Peacekeeping Missions working at various destinations make us proud with their commitment to duty, discipline, diligence, courage and honesty. Besides armed patrolling and flushing out miscreants, they have gotten involved in social development works in some countries. They have also set unique example of discipline at personal level. We have been told that our troops register almost zero infection rate of HIV or STD after return from overseas postings while it is much high among troops of other countries.

We feel it would be relevant to mention here that the eminence of Bangladesh Armed Forces goes back to the days of our Liberation War in 1971 when they led the war from the front at every sector with courage and vigour unparalleled. They were poorly equipped to take on an enemy that was armed to the teeth and yet they sustained in every battle. We are proud that the legacy continues.

Bangladeshi troops in UN Peacekeeping Missions have proved their worth; therefore we feel we rightly deserve senior positions in the headquarters and also field level. We hope the relevant UN authorities would consider our request on the basis of its merit.

## Children in hazardous work

Their plight highlighted

**W**HILE launching a two-year-long study on "Code of conduct towards children in the informal sector", organised by Children Sweden-Denmark along with Together with Working Children (TWE), it was revealed that as high as nearly one crore children in Bangladesh are engaged in hazardous work of some kind or the other. Dr. Abul Barakat, a well known economist of the country who conducted the two-year-long study blamed the earlier governments for sheer lack of commitment and foresight in tackling this vital problem well ahead of its snowballing. According to ILO estimates, children in Bangladesh are engaged in 54 different categories of hazardous work.

Given the debilitating scenario, it is also our observation that total eradication of child labour would not be possible since it is deeply embedded with the socio-economic conditions of the country. However, as has rightly been pointed by one of our former advisers to caretaker government, laws could be enacted with a code of conduct for strict implementation by those who deal in and employ child labour.

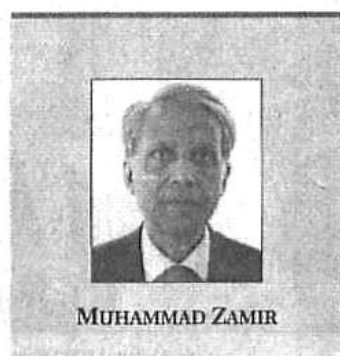
Our children are one of the most deprived sections of our population, both in the urban and rural areas. Those coming from poorer segments of the population are not only engaged in hazardous work but are often used and abused in innumerable ways.

We thus wish to urge the government to give an urgent and serious attention to the nutritional aspects of childcare and their access to education in bettering the overall conditions of our children.

It is also important to understand that in Bangladesh perspective, child labour is a deep rooted social problem driven by poverty and economic deprivation. Thus if we are to contain the situation, an extensive awareness campaign has to be undertaken through a proactive role of both the electronic and print media.

People who employ children should also be duly motivated to run training courses with government and NGO assistance to groom the children up for adult life.

# Re-calibrating democracy in Bangladesh



MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

**T**HE word democracy seems to mean different things to different people. For some it probably connotes the right to exercise one's choice with freedom, albeit responsibly. For others, it appears to suggest the freedom to use acquired power without any restraint or accountability or without the need to function within the due process of law. This difference in interpretation has become for all of us the central point in the re-organisation of politics and political behaviour that is normally associated with the dynamics of democracy. We stand today at an important crossroads in our national existence. We are faced with challenges that have to be met and overcome. I am tempted here to refer to and compare our current situation with that of Charles Dickens' observation of his incomparable 'Tale of Two Cities' - "It was the best of times. It was the worst of times". He was referring to Paris during the French Revolution.

I have refrained from writing on the evolving and emerging democratic process within our country. I have done so consciously. I have been an interested spectator and watched the unravelling of political partnerships and political parties. The intensity of the storm that started since the beginning of the year has gradually gained over the last few months. However, there are now hints that a transition and resolution of sorts is on the way.

Some among us have expressed anxiety and concern about the nature of the current process of governance within the country. Others have indicated satisfaction with the current situation. One political analyst from within the

preceding category informed me the other day that Bangladesh had lost its democratic status in the eyes of the international community. He suggested that I should write about it. His concern emanated from the fact that we had not been invited to participate (for the first time since 2000, possibly because of our current indeterminate and unusual political status) in the Ministerial Meeting of the 'Community of Democracies' (a global group of 126 active participants and 20 observ-

not perceive any political role for the Armed Forces. The senior leadership of our Armed Forces has also clearly indicated that they are not interested in the taking over of power.

Nevertheless, it is also true that the Armed Forces have been playing an important role in matters of governance -- the curbing of corruption, improvement of law and order, marketing of food items and the distribution of flood relief. From that point of view it has been an

throughout the country, at least up to the Divisional headquarters level. This would have been better. This might have facilitated greater exchange of views (at the council and executive committee levels of political parties) on proposed reforms within the electoral process. This would have strengthened the hands of the Election Commission during their ongoing discussions with representatives of different political parties who could have presented their proposals on

in related areas. It has been reported in both the print and the electronic media that the Election Commission will finalise this proposed draft after their ongoing dialogue with the different political parties is completed by the end of November this year.

One can only hope that the Election Commission will be able to ensure that suitable rules are in place that will stop black money and muscle power from determining electoral results. This will necessi-

accord to an MP a status where he considers himself as being above the due process of law and accountability. Some of the political parties who have very little presence throughout the country will probably term some of the EC's requirements as harsh or even undemocratic but that should not stop the EC from bringing back some order into the system.

The other day, for example, one political party suggested to the Election Commission that 'willing candidates from a non-registered party should be allowed to participate in the elections through a registered party'. This is absurd. If someone is so keen to participate, that person can always do so as an independent candidate.

The Election Commission and the political parties should also focus in their ongoing discussions on the following factors: (a) the question of having a fixed regulatory mechanism pertaining to the receiving of donations by political parties, generating of other forms of revenue by such parties and their eventual expenditure (which has to be made more transparent and should include annual auditing) and (b) The publication of clear manifestos by each political party at least three months before the election date (with regard to their perspective policies on future agricultural initiatives, energy, vocational training and employment opportunities, healthcare, safeguarding of human rights, higher education, dissemination of information technology, improvements to be undertaken in the transport and communications sector, the facilities to be accorded to our hardworking expatriate community and the diversification of our manufacturing capacity and the export base). These manifestos should be devoid of platitudes and focus on real answers to real issues, as they exist both at the district levels and the national level.

We need to move one step ahead in the global race and restore confidence in us within the international community. This will help us again to emerge as a country others can bank on and invest in. Only then will democracy find a meaningful expression.

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## POST BREAKFAST

**Politics must not be seen as the pathway to wealth through participatory corruption. It must not also accord to an MP a status where he considers himself as being above the due process of law and accountability. Some of the political parties who have very little presence throughout the country will probably term some of the EC's requirements as harsh or even undemocratic but that should not stop the EC from bringing back some order into the system.**

ers) being held in Bamako, Mali in November this year. I have told my analyst friend that he should not read too much into this exclusion. I firmly believe that we will be there in other meetings of this important Group in the future. We will be there after we have completed the many sensitive and delicate tasks associated with the restoration of a meaningful and functional democracy where the elected representatives will be accountable to the people for their actions.

We still have many miles to go before we can really claim to be a responsible democracy. There are many unresolved issues that need to be addressed. In the meantime we should try to be positive and constructive. We, in our own way, should also assist the current Administration to arrive at just decisions (pertaining to criminal cases filed against important political and business personalities) according to due process of law.

We have a Chief Adviser who has recently dismissed the notion that the country is presently under a dual rule format. It has also been made clear that, despite the continuing states of emergency, he does

interesting partnership.

It has been suggested by some that the current government or some of its agencies have taken interest in the reformation of politics, in the changing of the leadership of certain political parties within the country. The Chief Adviser has denied this. We shall accept his view with the hope that the future will not prove his reassurance wrong. However, it also needs to be noted that chaos prevails today within the two major parties. I personally believe that splintering of the Awami League and the BNP can only lead to the strengthening of the less affected and currently more organised extreme right wing parties who have within themselves extremist and fundamentalist elements. One hopes that the wrong genie is not let out of the proverbial bottle.

In the meantime, we have today, an interesting scenario within our political arena. The ban on indoor politics has been lifted at least in and around Dhaka. There are still many restrictions that I wish were not present. I personally believe that there should be withdrawal of all restrictions on indoor politicking

the basis of broad consensus.

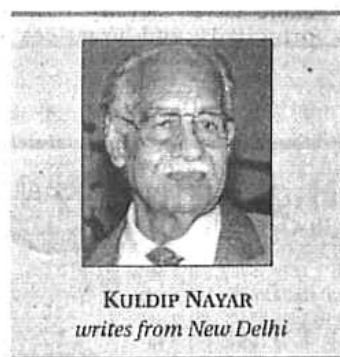
It needs to be remembered that significant issues will have to be resolved by the Election Commission if the forthcoming election is to be considered as credible and fair. Media reports have indicated that the Election Commission is going to propose new provisions and amendments to the Representation of the People Order, 1972. They have a tough year ahead. In addition to the preparing of a corrected electoral roll and the relevant identity cards, they will also have to finalise that basic structure under which the future election will be held. They will also have to decide on sensitive issues like political parties being permitted to continue to have labour and student fronts and the total amount that can be spent by a candidate for his/her election. This is as difficult as it gets.

The Election Commission has apparently prepared a draft of the amended version of the Representation of People Order, 1972. This will be the format of the Representation of People Ordinance, 2007. Once promulgated by the President it will acquire the status of law and will be binding

tate each candidate filing with the Election Commission a detailed report about the current wealth status of the candidate and the immediate members of the candidate's family. There should also be a brief resume about the nature of his socio-economic activities within his prospective constituency and also whether he has ever been prosecuted and sentenced for any form of criminal activity. That should also include whether he is a defaulter of any loan. These details should subsequently be made available in a web page on the computer so that any voter from his constituency can access that page for information. If it is subsequently found that the candidate has filed wrong information or concealed information then his election from the constituency will have to be cancelled. At the end of the day we must have a matrix that will stop fly-by-night businessmen steamrolling their way into the political arena, getting nomination from political parties (on the basis of extortion/donation) and becoming Members of the Jatiya Sangshad.

Politics must not be seen as the pathway to wealth through participatory corruption. It must not also

# Mid-term poll probable, not inevitable



KULDEEP NAYAR

writes from New Delhi

**W**HAT one imagined was a storm in the tea cup has not subsided. The Communist Party of India (Marxist), the main Left group, has prepared itself to part company with the Congress-headed coalition at the Centre. The rest of the Left would follow suit. This may make the mid-term poll probable, if not inevitable.

There is, however, more to the CPM's decision, not the Indo-US nuclear deal alone. The party is trying to wipe out its record of "going along" with the government on the economic policies which have benefited the upper half. In the process, the party has unwittingly strengthened the hold of multinationals over India and reduced nearly 70 million people to the penury of the British days.

The Left will have to go before people with an ashen face to seek their forgiveness. They expected it to make the Congress-led government depart from the pre-World Bank policies. Instead, the Left became part of the establishment and felt satisfied over taking unimportant decisions like choosing

India's vice-president. A party believing in revolution supported the status quo, enjoying the distant glow of power. At times, it barked, but the Congress knew it would never go beyond that -- and bite.

If and when there is a no-confidence motion against the Congress, the Left will be hard put to posture itself. It cannot support the motion, which the BJP will back or initiate. Nor can the Left be happy to see the government staying in power after

known communalists, something as bad as supporting the Indo-US nuclear deal.

This dilemma will become more embarrassing if and when the BJP decides to sponsor the no-confidence motion. Were the Left to abstain, the government would survive. This may give a wrong message to its cadres, which are keyed up to oust the government if it decides to go through with the deal. On the other hand, if the government falls because of the

Congress governments without having a majority. Only the president can decide what to do with a minority government. Congress chief Sonia Gandhi probably anticipated such a situation. She was adamant to have the president of her choice. In Pratibha Patil Sonia has a rubber stamp president.

The Congress may stay in power, but its credibility will begin to slide. This may explain the sudden induction of Rahul Gandhi, Sonia's son, as the secretary-general in

dynastic stamp is probably important for even senior Congress leaders who have no base. Rahul's entry at least has opened the doors for young Congress MPs and others. Sonia did not allow them to come up till the induction of Rahul because she was afraid lest one of them should find a respondent chord in the country and become a challenge to Rahul.

Yet, leadership is not a plug of tobacco which can be passed by one leader to another. Rahul will have to

work at the grassroots, something which the Congress has forgotten.

Yet, much will depend on the programs the Congress projects. The Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, which promises every family a half-year employment, would help, although the pilferage in the program is substantial. But how will the Congress explain the disparities its policies have created, class-wise and state-wise?

The plus point of the Congress is that the BJP, its main rival, is in the doldrums. It could not even pass an economic resolution at the national executive held a few days ago. The party has preferred to go still deeper into Hindutva, not realising that this line pulled it down in the last general election. The third front, United National Progressive Alliance, may be the dark horse. All its constituents are the parties which may benefit from the anti-incumbency factor.

The third front, United National Progressive Alliance, may be the dark horse. All its constituents are the parties which may benefit from the anti-incumbency factor. They are the ones who were replaced, and they are the ones who stayed in the opposition as separate entities. The voters in India have no real choice. No new elements have come up to contest against the existing political parties -- the difference between them is that of Tweedledee and Tweedledum.

The Left is bound to pursue the question of the Indo-US nuclear deal. The middle class, embedded to consumerism, is not opposed to the deal. But what can make the difference is the projection that the deal has lessened India's sovereignty. The Left has not been able to build up a convincing case on this point. It is a pity.

Kuldeep Nayar is an eminent Indian columnist.

## BETWEEN THE LINES

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"operationalising" the Indo-US nuclear deal. True, the majority in both houses of parliament does not accept the nuclear deal. But the Indian system is such that the cabinet's approval binds the country. Parliament's sanction is not necessary.

Former UP chief minister Mulayam Singh Yadav was the first to announce his support to any political party, even the BJP, in its efforts to oust the government. But he would prefer the Left doing so, as he has said. The Left supporting the no-confidence motion would amount to voting with the BJP and joining hands with the

BJP motion, the cadres and even the liberals may not feel happy over the exit of a secular setup when the Left could have rescued it.

Yet, there is an option: the Left parties can write to the president of India, informing her about the withdrawal of their support to the Congress-led government, and stay at that. This may not force the government to resign. Even if it is in a minority in the 545-member house, it falls only when the opposition proves that it has crossed the magic figure of 272, the half-way mark. Both Mrs Indira Gandhi and P.V. Narasimha Rao ran the

charge of the Youth Congress. I recall the time when Mrs Indira Gandhi installed Sanjay Gandhi in the same position in the Congress session at Chandigarh. However, at that time, the country was under the emergency. None dared to speak against the appointment. Even otherwise, the Congress leaders do not, and await the Congress president's indication. But will Rahul shore up the sagging stock of the party?

Today, there is no emergency. But the fear of Sonia is so pervasive that every bit of dissent in the Congress has been snuffed out. The

prove himself. The impression that he, Jawaharlal Nehru's great grandson, has only to be there for the people to flock around him was proved wrong. He led the campaign during UP assembly election. The Congress went down further in the percentage of votes polled.

Rajiv Gandhi, imposed by his mother, proved his majority. He won 420 seats in the Lok Sabha, even though it was on the wave of sympathy after Mrs Indira Gandhi's assassination. Rahul is not even a familiar face as Rajiv Gandhi was before he became prime minister. Rahul will have to

# 'Quality teachers for quality education...'

PROF. QUAZI FARUQUE AHMED

**Y**ESTERDAY, October 5 was World Teachers' Day and a day of celebration for the teaching community throughout the globe, in view of the adoption by the ILO and UNESCO, 'Recommendations' concerning the status of teachers on that date in 1966 in Paris at a special intergovernmental conference. The 'Recommendations' are immensely important due to their wide ranging significance and implications in regard to educators in particular and education in general.

**Theme of the Day for 2007** Education International (EI) under the patronage of UNESCO adopted the main theme for the World Teachers' Day 2007 as: "quality teachers for quality education; better working conditions for teachers mean better learning conditions for learners".

To quote: "A decent working environment, a safe and healthy learning environment for teachers

and learners, appropriate class-sizes and adequate pedagogical resources in the classroom;

Living wages salaries that allow for decent living conditions and that are regularly paid;

Equal pay and equal rights for women - female teachers should not experience discrimination of any form and governments should ensure the empowerment of women in the education setting, in decision making and in the workplace;

Initial and ongoing professional development the opportunity to gain and to develop professional skills, to be kept up to date with new information and pedagogical techniques, and to develop a career;

Involvement in policy-making to ensure that new policies reflect the reality of the classroom, social dialogue should be an integral part of education planning and policy formulation;

Collective bargaining to defend and enhance teacher's rights working conditions, as well as quality

assessments of teaching procedures, must be negotiated between representatives of the government/employers and the representative education unions."

**Four salient features**

- Since education is a service of fundamental importance it should be recognised as a responsibility of the state.
- Teachers' organisation should be recognised as a force which can contribute greatly to educational advance and which therefore should be associated with the determination of education policy.
- Since education is an essential factor in economic growth, educational planning should form an integral part of total economic and social planning undertaken to improve living conditions.
- Teachers' salaries should:

- i. reflect the importance to society of the teaching function and hence the importance of teachers as well as the responsibility

ties of all kinds which fall upon them from the time of their entry into the service;

- ii. compare favourably with salaries paid in other occupations requiring similar or equivalent qualifications;

- iii. provide teachers with the means to ensure a reasonable standard of living for themselves and their families as well as to invest in further education or in the pursuit of cultural activities thus enhancing their professional qualification

**Violation of 'Recommendations'**

The teachers and employees of 28,000, educational institutions (schools, colleges, specialised and technical institutions) in Bangladesh passed through a very difficult time in discharging their professional obligations in the very near past prior to the present caretaker government took charge. In the backdrop of harassment, political repression and vengeance, termination of teachers and

employees, the then authorities continuously violated the provisions of 9,10,46, 47, 49, 61, 62, 63, 71, 72,73, 82,89,90,115,117 of "UNESCO/ILO Recommendations Concerning the Status of Teachers." Teachers across the country were subjected to "torture and repression" and many teachers were sacked from their job even without showing any cause. Govt. "Stopped" salaries of thousands of teachers and employees without giving any scope for self defense. The non teaching staff of the non govt. educational institutions of Bangladesh, not only were sacked from job without show cause notice, For years together they were compelled to work for more than 8 hours, sometimes even up to 11/12 hours at a stretch without any remuneration for the extra work. There seems to be no end to their agonies such as absence of service conditions even today.

The then Education Ministry issued orders one after another often seriously jeopardising the honour, professional status and

dignity of the teachers. On January 8 of 2005 alone, nine such orders were issued to stop due salaries, deprive from higher scale on seniority and promotion, etc. The Education Ministry then took all such decisions without any consultation with the teachers' representatives, in clear violation of the UNESCO/ILO Recommendations.

National Front of Teachers and Employees (NFTE), the largest united platform of the non govt. teachers and employees, representing the hopes and aspirations of about half a million teachers and employees serving in educational institutions, raised a voice of protest against the flagrant violation of the provisions of the UNESCO/ILO Recommendations. It submitted an 8-point Charter of Demands to the then government which included 10 per cent enhancement of the initial govt. salary as per election commitment of the then ruling party, dearness allowance due to increase of prices of essential commodities, reinstatement of illegally terminated teachers and employ-

ees, and implementation of the UNESCO/ILO Recommendations.

**Allocation in education**

Governments in Bangladesh claimed highest allocation in education though the non- govt. teachers and employees get only Tk. 100 (less than 2 US Dollars) each for monthly house rent and medical allowance. That allocation again is also decreasing in actual value due to devaluation of currency. On the other hand, there is virtually no allocation for libraries and laboratories.

It is very relevant to mention here what International Commission on Education for the 21st Century headed by Jacques Delors has stressed in its report to UNESCO: "Improving the quality of education depends on first improving the recruitment, training, social status and conditions of work of teachers. They need the appropriate knowledge and skills, personal characteristics, professional prospects and motivation if they are to meet the

expectations placed upon them."

Half a million teachers in Bangladesh raise their heads with the expectation and forward-looking conviction that teachers would be duly consulted in educational matters, and their creativity as well as skill and experience fully utilised by authorities in the greater perspective and interest of human development. They along with 60 million counterparts in other countries urge for implementation of the 145 para UNESCO-ILO Recommendations on the status of teachers. 'Since education is a service of fundamental importance, it should be recognised as a responsibility of the state.' Education, educators and pupils rightly, deserve appropriate national attention.

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