

Congo *Africa* *The Muslim* 9-6-97 Zaire-a victim of self-interests

Syed Masroor Sabir

ZAIRE, a former Belgian colony and tool of Cold War, has a total area of 2344885 sq kms (905365 miles). It shares its borders with nine African countries including the Central African Republic, Sudan, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, Zambia, Angola and faces Tanzania across Lake Tanganyika. Major portion of the country falls within the Congo river basin, which carries the second largest volume of river water and finally drains into the Atlantic Ocean. The Capital of Zaire is Kinshasa, formerly known as Leopoldville. Zaire has a population of about 46 million people. One million Rwandan Tutsi refugees took shelter across Zaire during the genocidal war in Rwanda in 1994 when Hutus minority took over the reins of Rwanda into their hands. About 700,000 of the refugees are believed to have returned to Rwanda and between 200,000 to 400,000 are said to escape into Zaïrean forests. French is the official language apart from other regional languages. 70% of the population believe in Christianity and the rest are either animists or Muslims.

Zaire became the personal fiefdom of Belgian King Leopold from 1885 until 1908 and before that it comprised of communities and kingdoms. The colonial rule of Belgium continued till its independence on June 30, 1960. Joseph Kasavubu shared power with PM Patrice Lumumba. The province Katanga now known as Shaba was separated by Moïse Tshombe. This secession led to civil war. Lumumba was assassinated. Shaba province was restored to Central government on Nov 24, 1963. Lt Col Desire Mobutu seized power in a coup against Kasavubu. On Oct 23, 1971, he renamed the country as Zaire previously Congo. This was done to have carried out the policy of authenticity.

in Shahaba. Same continued and in Sept, 1991 an army mutiny took place, riots and lootings were committed. France, Belgium and USA announced suspension of their support in the wake of these crisis. In the meantime, National Conference adopted the draft constitution for federal government in Nov 1992.

The violence did not end up here. Situation worsened in Jan, 1993 when soldiers resorted to looting of Kinshasa. About 1000 people died and 2000 foreigners left the country. Joseph Kengo Wa Donda

turned in robbing the country of this natural wealth. And, still the neighboring countries have kept their covetous eyes on this natural treasure of Zaire. Secondly Zaire is the third largest country in Africa with a total populace of 46 million. It is surrounded by nine African countries and strategic location had made its existence trouble-ridden. Its society is heterogeneous consisting of about 250 ethnic groups, which makes the process of governing difficult for any ruler. In particular 32 years of

The crisis in Zaire is the outcome of American colonial game which she played by unfairly backing Mobutu Sese Seko for almost 32 years. The USA extended \$ 1.5 billion economic and military aid to sustain dictatorial rein of Mobutu. This money was kept by Mobutu in Swiss banks or spent on purchasing property in Europe. This decaying strategy was adopted by USA in order to support an anti-Communist bulwark during the Cold War era.

was elected as PM in 1994. The crisis continued, Mobutu extended transitional period for 2 years upto July, 1995. May 1997 was set as the date for multi-party presidential general elections in 1996. Mobutu left for Switzerland for surgery of prostate cancer and did not return till December, 1996. Again, he went to France in Jan, 1997 for medical examination.

Laurent Kabila stood in revolt and launched a rebellious offensive in Oct, 1996. By mid-March, 1997, he took hold of one quarter of the country including its 3rd largest city Kisangani.

The crisis in Zaire is the outcome of American colonial game which she played by unfairly backing Mobutu Sese Seko for almost 32 years. The USA extended \$ 1.5 billion economic and military aid to sustain dictatorial rein of

autocratic and tyrannical rule of Mobutu under the umbrella of USA and other European powers, has put the country on the road to mismanagement and political turmoil. Last but not least, the Cold War is now over and US interest has well nigh disappeared. Since Oct, 1996 Laurent Kabila has arranged to have an Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire (ADFL) in order to put a permanent full-stop to the autocracy of Mobutu Sese Seko.

The worst is still waiting for Zaire. Because, influx of Rwandan refugees, giant of economic and political mismanagement and withdrawal of economic and military aid by USA and other European powers are the readymade problems which will certainly pose serious threats to the new set up in Zaire.

Zaire became the personal fiefdom of Belgian King Leopold from 1885 until 1908 and before that it comprised of communities and kingdoms. The colonial rule of Belgium continued till its independence on June 30, 1960. Joseph Kasavubu shared power with PM Patrice Lumumba. The province Katanga now known as Shahaba was separated by Moïse Tshombe. This secession led to civil war. Lumumba was assassinated. Shahaba province was restored to Central government on Nov 24, 1963. Lt Col Desire Mobutu seized power in a coup against Kasavubu. On Oct 23, 1971, he renamed the country as Zaire previously Congo. This was done to have carried out the policy of authenticity.

Mobutu also took a new name Mobutu Sese Seko Kuku Ngbenda Wa Za Banga. He maintained its suzerainty over Zaire for about 23 years at the head of the sole legal party, Revolutionary People's Movement. He then announced the beginning of a transition towards democracy in April, 1990. Other parties were also legalized and in 1990, a national conference was held. Elections were scheduled to be held in May, 1997. A transitional parliament known as High Council of the Republic drafted a new constitution in 1996 for a federal state under parliamentary system which is to be put to referendum. 450 political parties were in the saddle of politics. Since July, 1994, the government was being headed by PM Kengo Wa Dondo.

The riots started in May, 1990 when a student demonstration was held in Kinshasa and 50 students were killed by the President's guard

extended transitional period for 2 years upto July, 1995. May 1997 was set as the date for multi-party presidential general elections in 1996. Mobutu left for Switzerland for surgery of prostate cancer and did not return till December, 1996. Again, he went to France in Jan, 1997 for medical examination.

Laurent Kabila stood in revolt and launched a rebellious offensive in Oct, 1996. By mid-March, 1997, he took hold of one quarter of the country including its 3rd largest city Kisangani.

The crisis in Zaire is the outcome of American colonial game which she played by unfairly backing Mobutu Sese Seko for almost 32 years. The USA extended \$ 1.5 billion economic and military aid to sustain dictatorial rein of Mobutu. This money was kept by Mobutu in Swiss banks or spent on purchasing property in Europe. This decaying strategy was adopted by USA in order to support an anti-Communist bulwark during the Cold War era.

America, in the interest of human welfare and general prudence, could have pressed Mobutu for democratization of Zairean rule but it deliberately put democracy on the back burner. In 1978, USA helped Marshal Mobutu to repel the rebellion in Shahaba. In the wake of an army mutiny in 1991, the Bush administration pressed Mobutu to retire but subsequently the idea could not materialize.

THE deteriorating conditions which have gripped the rich land of Zaire is the outcome of a number of significant factors which need some elaboration. Zaire is rich in minerals. Mobutu and his cronies left no stone

of USA and other European powers, has put the country on the road to mismanagement and political turmoil. Last but not least, the Cold War is now over and US interest has well nigh disappeared. Since Oct. 1996 Laurent Kabila has arranged to have an Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire (ADFL) in order to put a permanent full-stop to the autocracy of Mobutu Sese Seko.

The worst is still waiting for Zaire. Because, influx of Rwandan refugees, giant of economic and political mismanagement and withdrawal of economic and military aid by USA and other European powers are the readymade problems which will certainly pose serious threats to the new set up in Zaire.

The ouster of Mobutu was made possible due to the support lent by Rwanda and Angola to Kabila in military terms. They are also expecting investment and economic benefits from the newly established government of Zaire. Mobutu's departure will also jolt the authoritarian rulers of the region. Either they will have to provide economic and political amenities to the ruled or will have to make their authoritarian policy more iron-fisted. Uganda is also waiting to achieve economic cooperation from the new Zairean leadership.

Laurent Kabila has taken over the control of Zaire with the promise of holding general elections within 60 days. He has renamed Zaire as the Democratic Republic of Congo. Much now depends on Mr Kabila how he will play his cards in the coming time and how he will manage his stake at national, regional and international levels, again putting the country on the track of development.