

Police work casualty of politicisation

As senior officials speak their mind, listen to them

WHAT we have been calling for off and on, free the police of undue interference and influence of politics, has been articulated by none other than those that are feeling the pinch of this despicable tradition of political interference in the administration, the policemen themselves.

There is a natural authenticity to what the high-ranking police officers have expressed at the annual crime control or law and order conference in Dhaka about the various ways of meddling with the police administration, including recruitment on political considerations, because it is coming from within. This has to stop if we want the police to be the efficient and disciplined force that they are capable of becoming and yet cannot because of the constraints they are having to face.

The most important factor behind good and effective police work is the chain of command. Undue political meddling not only causes the breakdown of the system of command, it weakens the establishment from within by sapping the morale and de-motivating the members of the organisation across the board. When the OC of a thana assumes more importance than the SP of a district it is time to sit up and take note of the harmful effect of political interference.

The induction of manpower into the force through political backdoors has a telling effect on the professional standards. The police force being the public face of the administration needs to be manned by persons of presentable moral and ethical standards apart from being competent and spartan in outlook. It is in any government's interest that they be so. But what we see instead is that they are used as the political tool of the government of the day whose interest they are impelled to subserve.

Now that senior police officers have basically reiterated what they had been saying in bits and pieces in a coherent fashion, about political interference holding sway over their work, the government must act to bring about depoliticisation of the police force's work atmosphere. It must be part of an overall administrative reform process.

Extortion at Eid

Every year it is the same sad story

BEFORE the Eid holiday starts, the air is thick with tension and uncertainty, and for too many people it is simply not possible to find transportation to their family home at an affordable price, or even at any price.

This is a yearly phenomenon. In fact, it is at least a bi-annual one as the same happens at Eid-ul-Fitr as well, and though not so marked, there are also similar problems ahead of other holidays and celebrations.

The whole process of struggling to find a ticket and most likely having to pay many times the face price of the ticket to a tout, if indeed a ticket can even be located, leaves a bad taste in the mouth, and is the antithesis of the spirit of Eid.

That touts and transport operators should take advantage of the public at such a time is deplorable. The transport operators and authorities know that at such times there is a huge demand for tickets for people going home for the holidays. Year after year, there is this shortfall, but nothing has ever been done to correct the situation.

The reason for this is that the transport operators can raise their prices many times by creating an artificial crisis. The fact that they have a duty to provide services to their customers does not occur to them. Nor does the fact that to exploit people at such a time of year is a disgrace. The touts who work either for the operators or in syndicates of their own also make money hand over fist, as do the authorities who turn a blind eye.

It is only the public who suffers. Taking advantage of the public in this manner is nothing more than legalised extortion. The government should have taken steps long ago to protect the interest of the public and to regulate the transport operators to ensure that there is sufficient transport available and that ticket prices are not raised sky-high. A little attention to the matter would do the trick.

JMB threat to kill DU professor



DR. ABDULLAH A. DEWAN

THE JMB threat to kill a Dhaka University professor and his family members is certainly disquieting to say the least. The threatening letter states: "We are giving you 15 days. If you understand your faults, come to our path. If not, prepare for death."

The letter further stated: "We are going to make Bangladesh an Islamic republic. You are making our job difficult. Your research about militants creates problems for us."

Given that JMB has allegedly executed atrocious acts and murders, such threats must be taken seriously. JMB and similar groups resort to terrorist tactics because they are indoctrinated to the belief that such tactics are effective in realizing their goals. Such beliefs are the root cause of terrorism. Our job as democratic and God-fearing citizens is to show unequivocally that they are wrong and their approach is counter-productive to their cause.

While addressing the International Summit on Democracy, Terrorism, and Security on March 10, 2005, the UN Secretary General Kofi Annan identified five elements to fight terrorism:

- **Dissuade** disaffected groups from choosing terrorism as a tactic to achieve their goals,
- **Deny** terrorists the means to carry out their attacks,
- **Deter** states from supporting terrorists,
- **Develop state capacity** to prevent terrorism, and
- **Defend** human rights in the

struggle against terrorism.

The country is currently following all these five elements to deter terrorism with commendable success. However, many political and social scientists in Bangladesh believe that terrorism in our country is essentially home-grown because of years of ever growing economic plight of the people brought about by pervasive corruption and moral degradation of the politicians and bureaucrats.

These factors not only have affected the poor and the destitute, they have denigrated people of all walks of life (except government officials and political functionaries) including those working in institutions of academics and research. We all are victims of an evil empire created by our corrupt and ill-educated power broker, wheeling and dealing politicians. So JMB's threats to kill university professors, judges, journalists, and innocent people are misdirected to say the least.

The difference between a school teacher and a university professor is that the latter, in addition to presenting class lectures, also provide guidance to independent research in the form of thesis (or dissertation). A dissertation involves an in-depth exposition and analysis of a single or a composite topic or an issue of theoretical or practical interest generally set off by a student and approved by a supervising professor or a dissertation committee. The advisor provides guidance to appropriate methodologies of research and supervises the progress of work so that the research progresses in the direction of the goals set forth in the original proposal.

In the current spectre of political unrest, religious radicalism, and terrorist violence, it is not atypical that students would like to write their research papers on topics of Islamic economics, governance, caretaker government reform, religious militancy, and so on. If such research papers are a reason to send life-threatening letters to professors, then we can only envisage how ruthlessly the people would be treated if extremists reach the seat of power.

Research and higher studies in any area of academic field brings new knowledge, innovative ideas, and often outcomes. Whether Bangladesh should be an Islamic state to be governed by shariat, or a secular democracy as it is now, is an academic and intellectual discourse to academicians and researchers. The system of governance is ultimately decided by the voters -- by the people -- not by researchers and academicians and the thesis work of students. As citizens, we must engage in such academic pursuits, otherwise we will turn into a nation of mindless zombies.

A vast literature exists on Islamic rule of governance and Islamic economics. These literatures evolved over hundreds of years of research, and learning through intellectual discourse, debate, and often disagreements. No system of governance, Islamic or otherwise, can exist as one cohesive body if its members do not respect each other's diverse and dissenting views.

After enjoying the freedom to read, write and speak, and experiencing the values of democracy and the openness of acquiring new knowledge, there is no going

back to the days of nomadic living and culture. People who promote the Islamic rule of governance must respect those who are equally religious but promote secular democracy. The latter group does not invoke violence or inculcate hate and intolerance against the former, because the latter respects opposing views.

The non-violent people believe in Qur'an's teachings that "one who walks in the path of knowledge walks in the path of God." If a university professor deviates from the path of knowledge to the path of hate and diatribes against others' beliefs, he will suffer the consequences under God's justice.

Politicians of the two major parties while sopping themselves in corruption have in the process corrupted the entire government machinery, political system and the social fabric of the nation. This has denigrated the country's image to the community of nations. National election has become a landscape of vote rigging and vote buying. Black money is multiplying at the patronage of the government itself; lawmakers and ministers instead of working to reduce poverty alleviations are working for property acquisitions. I am not recommending violence against thieves and thugs. However, JMB can win the hearts and minds of the people if the JMB movements redirect their energy and efforts and demand:

- Curbing of bureaucratic and political corruption,
- Reconciliation of two major political parties and bringing sanity to the political process,
- That black money be confiscated and use them for poverty

alleviation and rural infrastructure development,

- Loan defaulters be brought to justice and all available measures be taken to recoup all unpaid balances,
- Non discriminatory application of the rule of law, transparencies in all governmental activities,
- No infringing acts against print and broadcast media which will hinder transparency, and
- Human rights must be upheld in their pristine form.

Additionally, JMB must pledge non-violence; instead display tolerance to opposing views and people of other faiths. If JMB leaders start working towards achieving these goals and ideals, they can be a legitimate alternative. To bring about a political transformation from the current system of corrupt governance to any other system, JMB must convince that their system of governance is politically sound, socially non-discriminatory and economically viable.

Ours is a resource starved and underdeveloped economy. As a nation we cannot survive without exports and imports, foreign investment, foreign aid and development funds. Reality is that if we are labeled as a terrorist state, and become one, millions of our children and adults will die from malnutrition and starvation. JMB's struggle should be directed against those who degraded our country's image by corruption and poor governance, not against intellectuals who educate our children, enlighten our society with new knowledge and raise our country's image abroad. I dare to have a dialogue with the JMB leaders on the following issues:

-Have you prepared yourselves with the required knowledge and qualifications to run a state based on Islamic sharia?

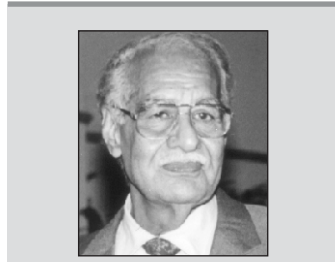
- Where is your detailed manifesto or a constitutional framework?
- You must realize how lack of statesmanship by our two leading politicians has brought the country to the brink of a failed state?
- Killing intellectuals, teachers, journalists, doctors, lawyers and judges will only help the corrupt politicians to tighten their grip on power.
- Violence against people of opposing views will never achieve political, social and economic goals.
- By killing or threatening to kill people of dissenting views will not establish the Islamic ways of governance; it will only push back its emergence, if it were to have a chance to emerge any time in the future.

We need nurses to comfort the sick, doctors to treat the dying, engineers to build roads and houses, veterinarians for dairy and beef cattle, scientists to discover new methods and techniques, economists to formulate economic policies and imams to lead us to prayers and rectify the corrupt.

JMB leaders know that anti-liberation forces (for example, Al Badr) that killed many of our intellectuals on the eve of the victory day on December 14, 1971 are enjoying the glamour of power today. JMB followers do not have to follow the traits of Al Badr to share power with corrupt political parties; they can ascend to power and establish their political ideals through gaining public support. There is no precedence of establishing a religious state by resorting to intimidation and violence against those to be governed. Because, that is not God's will in any form or shape.

The author is Professor of Economics, Eastern Michigan University.

Conversation with PM



KULDIP NAYYAR

writes from New Delhi

PRIME Minister Manmohan Singh has been always effusive and warm whenever I have discussed with him India-Pakistan relations. I have found him this time a bit distressed and disappointed. He is not as optimistic as before because he says he does not know what is in the mind of Pakistan President General Pervez Musharraf.

The Prime Minister says he has been impressed by President Musharraf at his meeting in New York and he may go to Pakistan to meet him. "After all, I have an invitation for a visit," he adds. But he regrets that despite President Musharraf's promise, cross-border terrorism has not stopped and the machinery to sustain it has not been dismantled yet.

Maybe, General Musharraf is under pressure from within his own country, the Prime Minister wonders. He is full of praise for President Musharraf for trying to modernise his country. He may well turn out to be another Kamal Ataurk. "I wish him well," says the

Prime Minister. "But he must appreciate my difficulties. I have told him that I could not change the borders, nor could I divide the state on the basis of religion. I have no such mandate from the nation."

The bomb blasts in Delhi a few months ago are uppermost in the Prime Minister's mind. He says that relations between India and Pakistan were improving at a good pace. People were shedding mistrust. "Then the bomb blasts at Delhi take place," says the Prime Minister. There is reverse and everything stops. "We reacted to the situation calmly and responsibly." But where do we go from here? Pakistan has to make sure that there is no cross-border terrorism. America too has "assured us on this point."

The meeting with the Prime Minister was a day before the Bangalore shootout. I told him that the people-to-people contact on a large scale, in thousands, along with free trade between the two countries would provide the sinews of peace and normalise the situation. In reply, the Prime Minister said that he was already being attacked for opening up

points at the LoC. Increasing incidents of terrorism in India were being linked with his liberal policy. As for trade, he said, he had proposed "several business packages" but Pakistan had turned them down on the ground that there had to be a settlement on Kashmir before the resumption of trade.

The main purpose of my seeking an appointment with the Prime Minister was to know from him what he considered was the most distinctive feature of his one-and-a-half-year rule. Without any hesitation he said: the economy. India was having a growth rate of more than eight per cent annually and that the prospects of doing still better were good. By the time his government finished its tenure, he said, the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme Act would have covered the entire country. More and more opportunities would be available in different fields and different areas, particularly in the countryside. He was confident about India's bright future and there was glow in his eyes when he said that.

Foreign policy was doing well,

he said. In the last one and a half years of his government's tenure, America, Great Britain, Russia and Europe, all were "very friendly" to India. With China, the Prime Minister said, the discussions were going on the border and Beijing had itself taken up "substantive points" of the problem.

Still LK Advani said that Manmohan Singh was a nikamma (inept) Prime Minister. The remark still rankled the Prime Minister, although he was laughing when he was repeating the words. He did not want to comment on the BJP or the disarray in which the party was. His elegance did not allow him to do that. But he did not think much of the Atal Behari Vajpayee government's record. "We are determined to end the role of money in elections," the Prime Minister said. He mentioned the effort his government was making towards that direction by trying to allocate funds for financing the poll campaign of political parties.

"The communists think that you are the World Bank man," I said. "Where does this remark fit in when everything we are doing is

according to the common minimum program to which we agreed before the formation of the United Progressive Alliance (UPA)?" countered the Prime Minister. He was averse to join issue with the communists but wanted to know where the government had strayed off course.

He said none could deny that America was the most powerful country in the world and that its economy was the strongest. Probably, lest the Prime Minister should be misunderstood, he said: "I am not under US pressure of any type."

When I touched upon Sri Lanka, I got the impression that India did not want to "get involved." The Prime Minister recalled what India had gone through in the past. He mentioned the Indian peacekeeping force which was made to quit. This conversation, incidentally, took place a day before the arrival of Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapakse. My impression has turned out to be correct because India has offered all support to the peace process without becoming part of it. All assistance would be

available from outside and a tab would be kept of the progress made about the parleys between the Sri Lanka government and the LTTE.

The general belief in Colombo, where I was after Rajapakse's visit to India, was that New Delhi wanted to wait till after the elections in Tamil Nadu. (The ruling UPA has 40 MPs from Tamil Nadu and most of them have a bit of sympathy for the Lankan Tamils.)

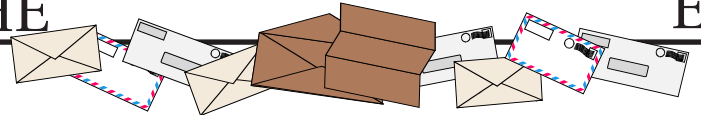
The Prime Minister was not unduly worried over Bangladesh. He said he held a long talk with Prime Minister Khalida Zia during his visit to Dhaka. He had invited her to visit India and hoped she would come soon.

What worried him about India was the "increasing provincial and parochial outlook." Political parties did not see things "in totality." They tended to perceive a situation from their own point of view. "Certain issues have to be kept above politics because they relate to the country's welfare, its growth and progress," the Prime Minister said. He felt exasperated that parties did not rise above their "petty self."

When Vajpayee was the Prime Minister, I heard him making the same point: certain things had to be kept above politics because they concerned the country's interests. He too talked about the consensus. Why does the same political party begin to view things differently when it is out of power, I wonder? Why can't the country's interests be kept above that of the parties?

Kuldip Nayyar is an eminent Indian columnist.

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



Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

Toll collection

Toll collection under political protection has become a bad culture in the Bangladesh society. The newspapers are full of it, including cases of violence and deaths (DS Dec 30). The chaanda groups could be seen everywhere, including student groups seeking financial assistance for functions.

Some toll collectors do carry some documents, and some carry or deliver threats. Who are the monitoring agencies, (must be visible, and advertise their presence through awareness programmes) for regulation, monitoring and taking disciplinary action in case of doubt?

Complete silence from the regulators!

It has become so easy to collect illegal tolls, as the society is defiant and undisciplined. There is no

respect for honest living. This is not possible without the tacit concurrence of the governors of the country, who provide shelter or protection. The people are losing faith in political governance, due to institutionalised corruption at all levels. The internal house cleaning is not being advertised, although mud-slinging is prevalent at all social levels.

Illegal wealth will erode; but how to protect honest living?

AMawaz,
Dhaka

A poor decision

The impromptu decision of the government to allow import of Cotton Yarn through land ports came as a bolt from the blue as it appears that reasons for its closure during the year 2002 have either been overlooked or the

policymakers have been subdued by prevarication of heavyweight groups in which case national economic interest was not considered in right earnest. Frequent change of decision disharmonises economic activities as it drives private entrepreneurs to different directions, jeopardising national economic growth.

"Nurse the baby, protect the child and free the adult" the famous adage is rightly applicable to backward linkage industries of textile sector in our country which is still at a nascent stage and deserves both tariff and non-tariff protection. Past experience reveals that no belt tightening measure at land ports could stop unauthorised entry of cotton yarn when even the built up trucks are smuggled inside the country without problems. A simple non-tariff protection did help flourish

both cotton spinning, woven and knit fabrics industries during the last four years creating more than a million jobs which was unprecedented in the history of our nation. On the other hand, the distinct advantage that the local users have been enjoying with delivery of cotton yarn in their factory premises by the manufacturers promptly on receipt of order without any additional cost involvement has totally been ignored; rather importance was attached to import through land route at the expense of foreign currency. The phenomenal growth in the sector during the last four years led to denial of our textile products' duty free access to US market in the latest Hong Kong meet of WTO as the move was blocked by the US representative followed by objections of Pakistan and Sri Lanka. It needs to

be evaluated seriously. Secondly, the protection in the form of cash incentive introduced a few years ago is threatened to be withdrawn from the next fiscal year and if it is implemented then the sector will start limping with negative growth. The competitive countries in Asia have been providing huge subsidies on export and even at the grower level of raw cotton although in our case every item is import based. The Honourable Finance Minister, a few days ago, admitted having witnessed a number of industries under construction in the rural areas, a major part of which belong to the textile sector meant for creating further employment opportunities. It is destined to bounce back for lack of domestic market demand and therefore a bleak future awaits us.

It would have been most suit-

able and befitting if a survey is conducted by national think tanks or a committee is formed under the auspices of Bangladesh Bank with members from FBCCI, BTMA, BGMEA and BKMEA to study the rationale behind demand of both the sectors and a guideline by them could serve the purpose. The country has been reeling under severe foreign currency shortage for the last few months culminating in the exchange rate of one USD for Tk. 67/68. The rising interest rate tends to increase inflation which is not desirable. So withdrawing barriers to import of cotton yarn through land ports coupled with stoppage of cash subsidies shall push the present situation of foreign currency shortage into further crisis and there will be no way to counter balance it.

Rezaul Huq

Lalmatia, Dhaka

Sound pollution

I appreciate the letter from Mr. Toufiqueur Rahman titled 'Sound Pollution' dated 2nd January. May I add a couple of points to what appeared in that letter.

In metropolitan Dhaka the pollution has taken an alarming dimension from an apparent beneficial measure implemented by the authorities. Large vehicles are not allowed to ply in the city during daytime. So heavy vehicles carrying goods move through the city during night causing enormous noise in the stillness. Construction materials are transported to buildings sites (mostly residential areas) and unloaded at night. Sound of moving vehicles, goods unloading and hollering of the workers pierce through the night

making sleeping impossible for the unfortunate neighbours. Can builders/contractors take special permission for movement of their goods during daytime for such destinations? Or can the authorities restrict them to unload the cargo only after daybreak?

The authorities, apparently least care for noise pollution. The letter of Mr. Rahman tells about the effect of constant exposure to such pollution. I think there should be courses for educating the concerned officials about this menace. People in Dhaka city corporation areas do not even know the root of the term 'decibel', the unit for measuring sound, which they spell incorrectly on their roadside notices to warn the polluters. Quite understandably, nobody takes any notice of such careless warnings.

MAH
One-mail