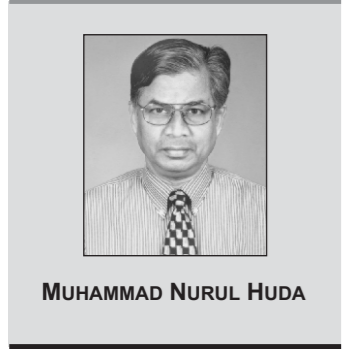


Demonising the police will be fatal



MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

RECENT events involving the high-handed and apparently lawless police actions are inevitably further tarnishing an already battered police image. Paradoxically, in our situation, such lawless police officers are in high demand by our politicians to serve their partisan interests. Police behavioural norms that are generally admired are those of 'tough' rather than 'controlled' behaviour. The ideal police culture in a democratic society governed by the rule of law implies that a policeman discharges the statutory duties in accordance with the dictates of law. Therefore, the police are supposed not only to operate under the constraints of law but within the bounds of civilised conduct also.

Bangladesh's police culture has suffered devastating blows and contemporary police culture is far away from the ideal one. In particular, the recent misdeeds of police indulged in fearsome frequency, are unfortunately not leaving any responsible citizen in any doubt about the ugly shape Bangladesh's police culture has willy-nilly acquired. The country witnesses the policeman misusing his position and thus violating the trust of the public. This cannot be allowed to continue because the police organisation needs to be saved from sinking beyond retrieval. There is an imperative to make our police jettison the contemporary police culture and adopt the desired measures.

The historical perspective and the continuity
Our policing methods have developed over time from very rough and ready origins. The first purpose of our police force is to support the State and thus the primary role is a political one. The State, rather than the law, is supreme and the major enemy of the police is the so-called political subversive rather than the ordinary criminal. Our police have been more accountable to the superior officers than the public opinion or the law. Duties are tabulated and there is little or no room for

discretion. Such traditions or practices would dictate a very different relationship between police and society.

The role of police in our country have made them appear as an agency more to implement and enforce the objectives of the government in power and to help the affluent sections of the society. The police is not looked as an independent and impartial agency for encouragement of law and order. Many policemen suffer from egocentricity and self-orientated ideas and often act contrary to public interests and expectations. A good many policemen feel that people should acknowledge their authority with abject submission and remain ever-ready to oblige them in every possible way.

Somehow policemen in our parlance feel that the enrolment in police force automatically gives them the right to enjoy many rights and privileges. Since police are armed with coercive authority, the policemen get the idea that people must fear them and oblige. They exercise discretion by becoming indiscriminate all too often.

Societal expectations and police role

The duty of police a democratic polity is not only to enforce the law but also to observe it. If this cannot be ensured then the law in practice is likely to be disregarded. In a democracy our police have to function under two basic principles, namely, (i) consent and balance and (ii) independence and accountability. This would mean efforts to secure the consent of the community and to strike a balance between different objectives of the role of police in society as well as maintaining independence in functioning but always remaining accountable to the law of the land and parliamentary institutions. Undoubtedly, this is a complex and difficult job. The difficulty lies in reconciling the dilemmas of preserving liberty and human rights of the individual on one hand and enforcing laws which aim at preservation of society from criminal depredations on the other. The police has to function in a battlefield of tension between the state and the individual. So the task is to ensure that the police use their force and authority with utmost restraint and only in unavoidable circumstances.

Political behaviour and aberrations
Our politicians betray a pathetic lack of appreciation of the imperative that the foundation of a civilised

society depends upon the effective and impartial working of some corrective institutions, prominent among which is the public service. They appear to be perilously oblivious to the reality that the regulatory outfit of police must be demonstrably impartial to ensure public confidence in the governance ability of the ruling class. The ruling parties in their misplaced exuberance forget that the police was the dominant visible symbol of repressive imperial alien power and that de-colonisation requires large-scale behavioural and attitudinal changes of the political masters and the public

and is now planted in a developmental, democratic and prismatic environment where a new ruling class is passing through numerous stresses and strains, it becomes difficult for the police to obtain and secure a close cooperation of the people and thereby discharge its functions and fulfill its role efficaciously. There is, therefore, a need to appreciate the role perception of the police system in our changing environment so that we can understand and identify the challenges emanating from the systemic stresses and strains and be able to formulate viable responses.

accountable to the real sovereign, the people. Such policemen will inevitably compromise the dignity of the individual citizen. In such a scenario, democracy will gather deficits at our peril.

The suffering of the members of public

The governance scenario will not register positive improvements if the principal regulatory outfit shows signs of decadence. Many of us including the political masters do not realise that the police as an agency of the state is expected to be the relief-provider. So if appropriately

minds and motivations of such individuals remain preoccupied with the compulsions of recouping their initial investment at the earliest. Quite naturally, the lure of the lucre takes its toll. The imperatives of acting neutrally and with sympathy and compassion recede into the background. No wonder therefore that many of our police stations are not sympathetic listening posts from where the people can expect service delivery.

The important point to note is that most people visit police stations or come into contact with the police only when under stress and strain. It

is that the police is cast into a rigid adversarial relationship. Under such circumstances, the hallowed talks of endearing the police to the community and the lofty ideas of community policing sound hollow. In any venture of promotional efforts the real stakeholders are conspicuously absent. The outcome remains less than desirable.

Ground reality and remedy
Bangladesh police suffers from a colonial past and a legacy of coercion. In colonial times, the police was an agent of imperial brutality and earned an image of being anti-people. However, in our democratic polity, police is the first servant of the people; it is not to be used as it used to be, that is to perpetuate particular party's rule. To effectively prevent misuse of police force, the infiltration of political element into the organisation rendering the outfit incapable of providing impartial and efficient service must stop. This is of paramount importance because large number of incidences of torture in various forms and harassment of political opponents reportedly take place at the behest of the government in power.

Legal aid, sincere in nature, must come along almost the time a member of the weaker section of the society is arrested. Such a step will reduce the possibility of wrongful confinement, false incrimination in offences and the pangs of torture and the possible physical deformity, if not death in police custody. In this connection reference may be drawn to the observation of the Indian Supreme Court in 1986 when it said that the failure of a criminal court to provide legal aid to a person who cannot engage a lawyer to defend himself at a criminal trial will entitle him to acquittal.

Another preventive measure would be aggressive investigative journalism to expose the gross misuse of power by police. This will, hopefully, substantially deter the wayward lawmen.

Our policemen and proportion of wrong-doers

One may not know that the life style of the overwhelming majority of our policemen are no different from the ordinary Bangladeshis. Let any prudent man enter the Rajarbag Police Lines and see for himself what the policemen eat, where do they live and what is their take-home pay. Let him also find out the average working hours of a policeman. It is strongly likely that he will mostly find ungrudging sons of the peasants of Bangladesh ever ready to

of the call of duty. Like ordinary Bangladeshis they have reconciled to their fate and quietly wait for a better tomorrow. Like their countrymen they display infinite patience. The acts of a few black sheep must not be allowed to smear the virtues of ordinary policemen. The bad hats must be dealt with an iron hand at the very first instance of criminality. The unholy alliance between criminal policemen and corrupt politicians must be broken and the performance of both should be under constant scrutiny. The recruitment process of subordinate police functionaries should be sanitised to prevent the entry of undesirable elements and drastic disciplinary actions relating to delinquent police officers must not be interfered with. These are not tall orders. We need them to bring sanity in our governance scenario.

Finally, let all concerned remember that the police are vested with the authority to use legitimate force against the citizens and this mandate to use force to curb violence raises the key issue that the police themselves should not indulge in unnecessary violence or excessive use of force. The task before the supervisors should be to ensure that the police use force and authority with restraint and only in unavoidable circumstances. While the ultimate accountability of the police is to the people, the police must respect the law of the land. They are not licenced to become law-breakers themselves. Let the most visible symbol of government authority be a helping arm for the public instead of being a coercive arm of the state.

Muhammad Nurul Huda is a former Secretary and IGP.

STRAIGHT LINE

The police are vested with the authority to use legitimate force against the citizens and this mandate to use force to curb violence raises the key issue that the police themselves should not indulge in unnecessary violence or excessive use of force. They are not licenced to become law-breakers themselves. Let the most visible symbol of government authority be a helping arm for the public instead of being a coercive arm of the state

servants belonging to this vital organ of the state. Thus while admonitions from the pulpit come in plenty for rational behaviour on the part of enforcement officials, in reality, unhealthy pressures are regularly exerted to carry out the wishes of the ruling elite in the most expeditious manner. It is the continuance of such regressive mentality that has brought us to the present lamentable scenario wherein the police outfit has been described as a lackey of the political government. Nothing could be more sad and frustrating than that.

The administrative position and imperatives

If we want to get out of the aforementioned undesirable situation, we have to take quick action to repair our badly bruised democratic credentials. First of all, the police needs to be insulated from political executive and other interferences in promotions, postings and security of tenure. The people must not get an impression that the investigation agencies are very efficient while taking the required action against those not in power and that as against those in power, their edge is blunted. If police act impartially, credibility would be restored to the investigative authorities. This is very important because as long as the impression persists that a policeman is not an unbiased friend of the people, the concept of an orderly society would not be achieved.

Since our police system conceived and grew in a colonial ecol-

Our police is the most significant sub-system of the criminal justice system. It is also a limb of the executive system and the judiciary which takes its energy from the legislative system. Our constitutional value depicts general spirit of service of weaker sections, women and children, serving the people and functioning as per rule of law and due process of law. Therefore, if due to large-scale politicisation of the police start acting at the behest of extralegal persons which is a genuine suspicion, then mostly they will round up innocent persons and permit the guilty to escape.

The police continue to be the principal investigating agency for the state under the criminal procedure code in addition to being the primary outfit responsible for prevention of crime. They should, therefore, strive hard for upholding the constitutional objective of protection of an individual's dignity and civil rights. Since justice is the ensuring of civil liberties it is only proper that the police truly become its protector and defender. A politicised police force will not be able to ensure a sense of security in the community and will not succeed in enlisting the cooperation and participation of people in crime prevention programmes. Similarly, the political appointees may not appreciate that their jobs is not to encroach upon the rights and liberty of the individual and the premonition is that they may look upon themselves as mere pawns in the hands of governing elite. They cannot be expected to be

motivated and competent personnel do not man the organisation, who is going to provide the much-needed relief to the common folks? Coming to the unpalatable specifics of getting an appointment in police ranks by greasing the palms of the influential, one may say with a degree of certitude that appointees from such process mostly turn into bitter individuals from the very start.

Only the affected and the insiders know the extent of financial hardship experienced by the ordinary people in such dubious exercise.

So when bitter individuals occupy positions of coercive power, the result cannot be wholesome. The

is in these circumstances that every victim expects a sympathetic and understanding response. The expected support and sympathy are not there because the disgruntled and bitter appointees cannot appreciate the aforementioned psychosocial dimension. Therefore, if the police has to provide service it has to induct capable and psychologically appropriately disposed individuals.

Lack of sensitisation

Our politicians have failed to sensitise our policemen in correctly understanding the rising expectations and aspirations of the people which result from the enunciation of



If winter comes can spring be far behind

Eventually, as Prof. Yunus foresaw, this protest would be transformed into a full-throated social movement to be respectfully reckoned with in days ahead. The change may come tomorrow or the day after. But it will have to come for our own social and economic salvation. Let the sterling initiative of the civil society instill in all of us a state of robust optimism to unveil brighter days ahead.

KAZI ALAUDDIN AHMED

"HONESTY is the best policy." This age-old precept appears today to have been heavily rusted in the backyard of our social and economic life. It is no longer used or adduced to in the life and living of the people of Bangladesh. Our globalised status on this account continues to be the 'most corrupt' country of the world for five years in succession. If things go in their own way we shall have achieved a double hattrick this year.

Against such a stark reality based scenario the leaders representing the civil society sat in a seminar on March 20, 2006 in the city. The central theme of the meet veered around representation in the Jatiya Sangsad of honest people who have clean records and antecedents. In the general perspective, the discussion and paper presentation appeared to have been very critical about the politicians. By and large they were taken to have been responsible for most of the moral degradation pervading ominously in the country for long. It was contended that only the civil society could emerge as the saviour of the nation. To achieve such a desired goal it was also suggested, among others, that the civil society waged a nationwide campaign against corruption and took massive awareness programme to ensure representation of only honest people in the Jatiya Sangsad. Microcredit fame Professor Mohammad Yunus was the keynote paper presenter.

The dialogue on 'initiative of the civil society in the accountable development efforts' was participated by many eminent intellectuals and reputed elite, noted teachers, economists, former bureaucrats, artists, litterateurs, distinguished members of the legal profession, social development activists, journalists and politicians. Organised jointly by the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), Prothom Alo and The Daily Star, the discussion laid particular emphasis on how to extricate the country from the insidious clutch of maladministration and to install good governance. To achieve such a noble end there was

an ultimate consensus that it would be absolutely imperative to nominate honest and qualified candidates ever uncompromising on matters of moral principles. It was considered necessary to organise intensive mass-awareness programmes across the country towards achieving such an end through a free and fair election in 2007.

From the numerous discussants it was learnt with specific instances that the country was not being run well. It was also held that the national parliament and the administration in its entirety were all ineffective, politics at all levels right from top to bottom was viciously besieged by invincible spates of corruption. Besides, many were seen thriving on terrorist activities with the blessings of their political godfathers.

It cannot be denied that we have been passing through a period of abject dejection and hopelessness. Still then, we shall have to work out ourselves the most formidable course to get out of the woods. We have to make honest and sincere endeavours to liquidate the present stigmatic situation born of unfathomable corrupt practices at almost all levels of administration. In the perpetual absence of accountability on the part of the administration things will continue to be ever waning.

Our salvation lies in true democracy if we can afford it to ourselves. Only such a desired state of democracy, democratic practices, honest commitment can only ensure the desired transparency and accountability of any government. Establishment of such a desired democracy, vis-a-vis democratic institution, culture etc can be possible and practicable through a Jatiya Sangsad comprising people who are honest and known to be of high moral integrity, qualified in all respects and well-principled. In actual practice, however, we are far away from such a blissful and desirable situation. It is needless to say that the political parties in our country are used to select their respective party candidates for nomination in elections on consideration of the comparative affluence and muscle strength of the individ-

ual aspirant for nomination. These are, till now, practical hurdles to overcome.

Professor Mohammad Yunus presented his personal thinking in this connection. It was suggested, among other things, that continuous pressure from the civil society should be made on the political parties to nominate only the honest, deserving qualified men of principle to contest in the next general election. He thought that even the leaders, workers and supporters of different political parties should also put similar pressure on their respective party high command to nominate only the men of integrity. In the event of the political parties' unwillingness to give in, Professor Yunus suggested that the civil society would consolidate itself into a separate stronghold, would make its own nomination. If needed he would also like to see the members of the civil society going to the polling stations and submitting blank ballots as a mark of protest against the nomination of dishonest member of any political party.

On the face of it the proposition of Professor Yunus may appear to be very idealistic in nature. Yet it is hoped to pave in a real base and path for the majority of the people to be more and more vocal against the bad culture practiced by the political parties. It shall also give the civil society a strong handle to raise its voice condemning the deliberate and purposeful eroding of our moral values at the hands of the political parties. Eventually, as Prof. Yunus foresaw, this protest would be transformed into a full-throated social movement to be respectfully reckoned with in days ahead. The change may come tomorrow or the day after. But it will have to come for our own social and economic salvation. Let the sterling initiative of the civil society instill in all of us a state of robust optimism to unveil brighter days ahead.

Kazi Alauddin Ahmed is a management consultant.

Nuclear Iran: Is possibility of another war looming large?

MOHAMMAD AMJAD HOSSAIN

DRAMATIC developments relating to Iran's enriched uranium programme and President Ahmadinijad's defiance of international community's request to freeze it have caused much furore in the international political arena. Iran has progressed in acquiring modern warfare techniques which could be unbeatable in some cases. Iran's very recent successful launching of high speed torped missile (at 223 miles per hour) which no submarine or warship could escape, coupled with the success of enriched uranium may have caused genuine concern in the US and Europe.

While Bush administration believes Iran is in advanced stage of making nuclear weapons, Iran is insisting that its nuclear ambitions are peaceful, it only wants nuclear energy. But Iranian President's claim "Iran has joined the club of nuclear nations" has made Bush administration strong enough in its efforts to convince the 15-member Security Council that stern action is needed to stop Iran's nuclear programme.

Meanwhile, the Chief of UN nuclear watchdog, noble laureate El-Baradei was in Tehran to talk with Iranian authorities to bring a political solution and China dispatched its top nuclear expert as envoy to Tehran in an effort to defuse the crisis.

Against this backdrop, there has been spate of speculative news and interpretative commentaries in the United States on the defence planning and intelligence gathering with a view to carrying out President Bush's doctrine of pre-emptive strike on Iran although the White House in a press briefing on 10 April dismissed that notion while counselor to the President Bush Dan Bartlett is stated to have said that the President's priority is to find a diplomatic solution to the problem.

alleged underground nuclear sites. The fear of attack has strengthened from two counts:

Bush administration has been frustrated as its appeal was not carried out to impose sanctions on Iran in the Security Council on 26 March by the reluctance of Russia and China and secondly, Bush administration refused to join with troika of European Union to talk with Iran to defuse the tense situation.

There is no denying the fact that same orchestrated swan song by President Bush, Fox news channel, the Washington Times and a few columnists of the Washington Post as they did on the eve of invasion of Iraq has begun against Iran. After

The possibility of another war also may not be totally ruled out in order to divert attention of the people of America from growing scandal and corruption charges against Republicans and allegations against President for violation of law

vote by the Board of Governors of International Atomic Energy Agency to report Iran's suspicious nuclear activities to UN Security Council. President Bush did not waste time to say: "the world will not permit the Iranian regime to gain nuclear weapons". His Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice delighted on hearing the unanimous decision of UN Security Council to call on Iran on March 26 "to suspend its uranium enrichment programme within 30 days".

There are saner elements in the US administration, who do not subscribe to the opinion of Iran possessing nuclear weapons. For example, Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Peter Pace is stated to have said that Iran does not possess nuclear weapons and said that there are many things that can be done before any country contemplates a military solution. Another Congressman from the Republican Party Ron Paul spoke in the House of Representatives on April 05 loudly that "how soon after being discredited over the charges levied against Saddam Hussein the necons are willing to use the same arguments against Iran? It's frightening to see how easily Congress, the media, and the people accept many of the same arguments against Iran that were used to justify

an invasion of Iraq". But their voices would not perhaps be heard again. Instead, the voice of Tom Lantos, Congressman who is Jewish, in fact receives attention of the administration. He is stated to have said the "option for using diplomacy to stop Iran from developing nuclear weapons is running out".

There is an interesting coincidence to note that another Ahmad Chalabi, (present Deputy Prime Minister of Iraq) a dissident Iraqi, who gave wrong information on Iraq's nuclear programme to Pentagon, has appeared in the person of Alireza Jafarzadeh, president of Strategic Policy Consulting Incorporated and a Fox

news channel foreign affairs analyst. Alireza Jafarzadeh has provided information on Iran's secret lab; building tunnel plan for nukes; building of a secret tunnel to develop nuclear weapons and research etc. Alireza is an Iranian dissident.

Another man made catastrophe seems in the offing as the United States would not surrender its interest for Israel and controlling entire Middle East. Bush administration sees the nuclear development in Iran through the prism of Israel with whom Iran has been maintaining hostile relations since the overthrow of the regime of Reza Shah Pahlavi. The present regime in Iran, however, would not follow reasons either. Economically Iran is not that powerful and militarily cannot match with modern hardware, and nuclear arsenal of the superpower along with that of Israel for whose interest this war would likely be launched.

Geneva drama to drag Iran to the Security Council initially for economic sanctions perhaps to be followed by military attack is the culmination of the planning by Bush administration. That Bush administration was planning a possible military attack against suspected nuclear sites in Iran came out in Berlin based Der Tagesspiegel in

January and Turkish media as well quoting NATO sources, which claimed that "the NATO allies had been informed that the United States is currently investigating all possibilities of bringing the Mullah-led regime into line, including military options". This reminds the same rhetoric before attacking Iraq in 2003. The President spoke his mind clearly on February 01 while talking to the media people that America would attack Iran if the security of Israel is in jeopardy. "Israel is the best ally of the United States and we would defend Israel," said President.

This is for the first time an American President came out

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publicly in support of Israel. We may recall that President Bush at a joint press conference in January with Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany coined hard language while pointing at Iran. The President, who is on record branding Iran along with Iraq, Syria and North Korea as "an axis of evil" in his state of the union address in 2003, has said that "a nuclear armed Iran would pose a grave threat to the security of the world". The coining of words "a grave threat" reminds the identical rhetoric on the eve of invasion of Iraq in 2003. These words are reminiscent of chapter 7 of UN Charter, which authorises action to contain threat to peace and security of the world.

Israel, the closest ally of America, broke its silence. Its newly elected Prime Minister Ehud Olmert is reported to have said that "his country would not allow a nation with hostile intentions towards it to own weapons of mass destruction", which actually echoes the voice of President Bush. Israel is the only country in the Middle East region to possess nuclear weapons. In 1960, Israel began missile program with French assistance. Being strongest military power in the region, Israel has deployed about 100 short range and medium range missiles. Both are capable to carry nuclear

overheads. Israel has US made F-16 and possibly F-151 fighter bombers that too carry nuclear bombs. Israel is another country which did not sign Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Iran signed the treaty in 1970 and signed a protocol with IAEA permitting surprise inspections. According to NPT, Iran has the right to develop its nuclear technology.

It is equally true that the present leadership in Iran lost confidence of western power in view of Ahmadinijad's 'hostile' attitude towards Israel. His comment on Ariel Sharon, former Prime Minister of Israel following his massive heart attacks and that on holocaust in Germany caused concern among western leaders. The present uproar was actually triggered in the second week of January following Iranian government's order for removal of seal on equipment put by IAEA at an enrichment plant. The Washington Times, which is known as mouthpiece of the Republican Party, on January 19 came out with an editorial suggesting striking Iranian nuclear weapons production facilities, both visible and underground by American aircraft and cruise missiles. It also indicated that Israel too has the capability to do so.

The editorial of Washington Times coupled with a signed article in the same paper by Douglas Hanson under the caption: "The Mullah's war games: US did not misread the danger signs", which pinpointed at the 'visible manifestations of its (Iran) decades-old plan to isolate Saudi Arabia', makes one to understand that another war is looming. The recent visit of Vice-President of America to Saudi Arabia is significant, who might have possibly sought help of the kingdom to give a lesson to Iran! This is an ominous sign.

The possibility of another war also may not be totally ruled out in order to divert attention of the people of America from growing scandal and corruption charges against Republicans and allegations against President for violation of law.

Mohammad Amjad Hossain, a former Bangladesh diplomat, lives in Virginia.