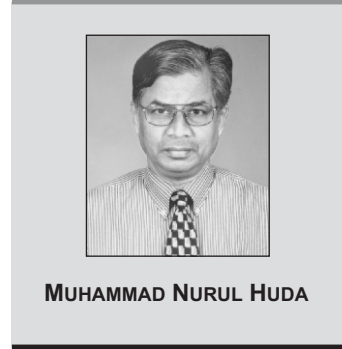


# Domesticating the enforcement apparatus



## STRAIGHT LINE

**We seem to have forgotten that the foundation of a state rests upon the impartiality and resilience of some institutions, prominent among which is the public service or civil service, whatever name you call it. Bureaucracy is a necessary organisation for carrying out public functions while bureaucratic vices are condemnable, one has to remember. The partisan behaviour and attitude of the government and the perilous polarisation of our society are marginalising the public services.**

WELL-meaning citizens must have been concerned after reading the front page report captioned "Cops tasked to survey ruling party candidate popularity" appearing in The Daily Star of 7th September last. This piece of report comes as a shock as in the not-too-distant past the media expressed concern about the pernicious politicisation of the police force of the country. Different sections of thinking men and women voiced their concern about the devastating effects of the alleged blatant politicisation on our body politic. The saner elements of our society sought the intervention of the chief executive of the country to stem the rot and take corrective measures before the nation finds itself in an unenviable state.

The aforementioned news report would indicate that all the appeals and entreaties of law-abiding citizens have fallen on deaf ears and the establishment is dead set to embark on its own plan, come what may and whatever the price. Under the circumstances, there is no alternative but to once again impress upon the paramount necessity of insulating our administrative and enforcement organs from political influence for ensuring the healthy growth of a democratic policy.

### State and government interests

A clear understanding of the dividing line between state and govern-

ment/party interests is one of the fundamental requirements of a democracy. Such realisation assumes heightened significance in politics that have been subjected to colonial rule for a long time. A People's Republic ought to be different from the governance culture of dictatorship or the colonial administration and the same must be a manifest reality to emulate and to draw lesson from. Unfortunately, however, our feudal mindset has not changed although feudalism is a relic of the past. It is such mindset that demands personalised and partisan attention from the services of the republic and would not let institutions grow to support and sustain our not-very-adult and mature democracy.

Our politicians 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 decolonisation requires large-scale behavioural and attitudinal changes of the political masters and the public 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 coterie 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 a lackey of the political government. Nothing could be more sad and frustrating than that.

### Service ethos and police

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 job 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 can not be expected to be 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.

Few things in the world of police service can damage the police image as much as police involvement in politics. Police in their professional capacity have to be apolitical and impartial in their application of law. Interference with the statutory duties of the police contrary to the provisions of law has to be deprecated at all times and more so when it impedes the performance of their duties in the maintenance of public order and investigation of cases.

There are credible fears that the

police image in Bangladesh will suffer a grave damage if politicisation continues unabated. We already have the unfortunate spectacle of a police service in whose investigative fairness the major opposition political parties and a sizable section of the civil society entertain grave doubt. Criminal cases relating to victims of diabolical and dismal murders that are considered as acts of political vendetta, are not investigated properly, according to the versions of complainants and relations. There are persistently vociferous demands to arrange for proper investigation of sensational cases by external agencies including international organisation. Without doubt, such appeals and petitioning indicate the deep distrust of the impartiality of the state's investigative apparatus. No sensible Bangladeshi would feel at ease in such an unsettling environment.

It must be appreciated very clearly that the regulatory functions of the state like maintenance and preservation of public order and investigation of criminal cases cannot be arrogated to private bodies. These functions cannot be performed through contractual arrangements either. Only persons with solemnly sworn loyalty to the state who have been examined, selected and verified in a constitutional process are expected to conscientiously perform the onerous responsibilities without profit motive.

### Organisational climate

### and past experience

We had the unfortunate experience of witnessing a very sensitive intelligence organisation working principally for the whims and caprices of a virtual dictator and using public funds for creating and destabilising political parties, political horse-trading and shadowing people on personal and flimsy grounds. No wonder in such a scenario the professional efficiency is sacrificed and public servants turn into personal servants with the attendant ignominy. The mission and strategy of our intelligence organisations had not been stable at least insofar as the domestic threat perception is concerned. It invariably changes with the change of a political government. Differing political agenda often tend to cloud the pragmatic understanding of our real national interests.

The broad function of maintaining public order for ensuring internal security is closely associated with the task of collecting and collating intelligence in the interest of the state. In reality, in our situation, the interests of the state often get diluted and mixed up with the interests of the government of the day. The situation is marked by an unfortunate lack of understanding and appreciation of the requirements of the state and the government in a democratic and pluralist society like ours. The unpleasant truth is that intelligence agencies maintain file and shadow the leaders and workers of pronouncedly

constitutional politics-oriented parties belonging to the opposition who are recognised partners in the business of politics. At some point of time when such opposition party comes to power, there is an uneasy relationship between the political masters and the agencies. In such a scenario, professionalism becomes the worst casualty, sense of direction is lost, the organisation dips into a lackadaisical environment and interests of the state take a back seat giving greater space to partisan considerations. It is needless to say that the values of a democratic polity are universal and as such demand unconditional adherence to it.

Intelligence agencies are expected to be able to effectively serve national interests if directed appropriately by the political authority. If they (agency) have to remain preoccupied with largely inconsequential partisan matters to the detriment of national interest, then we will not be able to manage the crisis situation, not to speak of forestalling the tragedies of recent times. We have been criticising the agencies very loudly without, however, appreciating the impediments to the growth of an apolitical professional organisation. Time has come when we must have the honesty to call a spade a spade and realise that the governments will change hands but not the state.

### Service conditions and political neutrality

The significance of job security or permanency lies in the development of expertise and the natural growth of civil service ethos. Most importantly, security ensures the availability of such expertise to governments of differing political persuasions. The services owe their loyalty to the government of the day, irrespective of the political party and

it is imperative that the services avoid creating the impression of political bias. The anonymity and political neutrality of public servants are usually reinforced by rules restricting political activity. This is so because if the public service is to serve governments of all political persuasions, it is essential that public servants or civil servants, whatever their private political views, must not be seen to be politically active in a manner which would inevitably compromise their neutrality under one political party or another.

If civil servants by their activities turn into public figures thereby subjecting them to scrutiny in media and parliament, their capacity for maintaining the appearance of political impartiality get badly damaged. The public servants are duty bound to give honest and impartial advice to ministers and to endeavour to deal with the affairs of the public sympathetically, effectively, promptly and without bias or maladministration of public money. They are also required to conduct themselves in such a manner as to deserve and retain the confidence of ministers and to be able to establish the same relationship with those whom they may be required to serve in some future administration. They must not misuse their official position to further their own or another's personal interests.

### Harmful practices

Cronyism has assumed new heights. Cronyism says that cronyism has now been almost institutionalised and it is an accepted practice that at a higher level, only the cronies get the plum jobs. In the recent past, ruling party functionaries including influential ministers have ensured large recruitments in police, education, Election Commission in disregard of rules or regulations. Members of Parliament and other

ruling party stalwarts were allegedly allocated their own quotas for jobs.

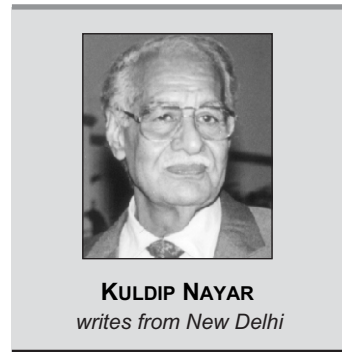
The above-mentioned cronyism brings with it the problems of delinquency, incompetence and of course, pliability. In addition, a clique of corrupt courtiers always surround those who wield power in a medieval ruling culture. They become the link between the rules and the ruled.

The above practices give rise to arbitrariness and irrationality. As against institutional development, we have now developed a patron-client relationship. A whole network of patronage has been built around quotas for jobs, admissions, urban plots, connections for electricity, gas or telephone and dispensation of development funds. The distinction between public property and private gain is totally blurred. Another ominous development is the contempt for rule of law. There is established happiness with people who are pliable and corrupt but claim to produce 'results.'

We seem to have forgotten that the foundation of a state rests upon the impartiality and resilience of some institutions, prominent among which is the public service or civil service, whatever name you call it. Bureaucracy is a necessary organisation for carrying out public functions while bureaucratic vices are condemnable, one has to remember. The partisan behaviour and attitude of the government and the perilous polarisation of our society are marginalising the public services. The premonition is that our present conditions, if not amended, may lead to a stateless society. In a stateless society the constitutional government will be dislodged by political brats and their godfathers.

Muhammad Nurul Huda is former secretary and IGP.

# Sharif's disclosures and rapprochement



## BETWEEN THE LINES

**The welcome point is that both countries are going to resume the peace process. There are specific references to Siachin glacier and Sir Creek. All those who want rapprochement between the two should support the efforts which may turn a new leaf. This requires an entirely different approach which bureaucrats surrounding both Manmohan Singh and Musharraf cannot even perceive. Sharif's disclosures are important because we are putting all our eggs in Musharraf's basket.**

Victory Malik says:

"The Air Force had to face serious limitations due to the mountainous high altitude terrain, the narrow flying corridors, the lack of effective ordnance delivery systems and the stipulation not to cross the LoC even when engaging important targets very close to it." In the face of this it is difficult to believe that the carpet bombing was possible.

Malik further says: "No targets were engaged by the Air Force across the LoC. However, it is to the great credit and dedication of the Indian Air Force that its personnel continued to experiment and evolve new techniques throughout the operations to overcome these handicaps." A top Air Force officer who was engaged in the operation once complained to me that their main handicap was the government had strictly instructed them not to cross the LoC. I do not know how far Musharraf's allegation of carpet bombing is correct. After the operation there should have been some debate in the foreign media, at least in Pakistan. I do not recall any such thing.

Sharif's statement that Musharraf had "moved the nuclear devices from one station to another during the Kargil operation" is probably the most disconcerting disclosure. The fact that the US knew about it and did nothing is still more disturbing. Washington should have made this public to build up international pressure on Islamabad.

After losing at Kargil, Sharif says that Musharraf requested him to bale out the army. When he (Sharif) sought President Clinton's good offices for the purpose, the latter admonished him. So did Prime Minister Tony Blair. "I took the entire blame on myself to save the honour of the armed forces," says Sharif. "I was sincere but the

army commanders harboured spite against me and decided to end my government. Musharraf was afraid that I might order an inquiry into the Kargil operation. He wanted to save his skin."

Sharif's allegation is that the army was all set to stage a coup, "otherwise it is not possible to change a government within a few hours." He puts no credence to the story that Musharraf's plane from Colombo was not allowed to land. Sharif says that Lt Gen Mohammad and Lt Gen Ali Jan came to him on the night of October 12 (1999) and asked him to sign an order to dissolve the state assemblies. But when he said "over my dead body," they said that "they would take revenge." The reason why I am reproducing what Sharif has said is the renewed faith Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has shown in Musharraf, knowing well Sharif's version on Kargil. This is important because India is set to establish a joint mechanism to fight terrorism inside the two countries and across the border. It should be interesting to know how New Delhi and Islamabad would change the nomenclature of "enemy" that the two use to describe each other in their war plans and otherwise. Military academies in both the countries have only one enemy to target when they train their officers. On the Indian side, it is Pakistan and on the Pakistan side, it is India.

Since the intelligence agencies are going to part of the proposed mechanism, what will be the role of ISI which, according to Sharif, is independent of the government and the army? Will it stop helping the anti-India elements in the northeast through Bangladesh or even Nepal?

Only time can tell how far the joint statement and other observa-

tions that Manmohan Singh and Musharraf have made will affect India-Pakistan relations. Will there be a visible change in the attitude of their respective governments? For example, many routes between the two countries have been thrown open but the visa restrictions are so strict that the buses have more officials than passengers.

Still the welcome point is that both countries are going to resume the peace process. There are specific references to Siachin glacier and Sir Creek. All those who want rapprochement between the two should support the efforts which may turn a new leaf. This requires an entirely different approach which bureaucrats surrounding both Manmohan Singh and Musharraf cannot even perceive.

Sharif's disclosures are important because we are putting all our eggs in Musharraf's basket. His recent statements show that he has changed his stance a bit because he does not insist on solving Kashmir first and then tackling other problems. That he exudes optimism is encouraging.

But the real change in Musharraf will be judged on two counts: one, how soon will he give up the uniform and, two, how ardent is he to restore democracy in Pakistan. By keeping both Benazir Bhutto and Sharif out of the country, whatever be the charges against them, Musharraf is only heightening doubts about the credibility of forthcoming elections in 2007. He should know that the world will judge him how he acquires himself on all these points, not on the basis of President Bush's certificate which is neither here nor there.

Kuldip Nayar is an eminent Indian columnist.

# Keeping the faith

**Looking around, all I see are ordinary people drawing on their faith to make a go of their lot, to coexist without strife, and to get by until evening. That is what Islam can mean at ground level. And though I haven't put the question to them in so many words, I for one am convinced that none of the people I know and love here have the slightest inclination to destroy our civilisation, as Bush and Blair and so many others would have us believe.**

ANDREW MORRIS

I watch with increasing despair the portrayals of Islam in the mainstream Western media. Armchair commentators, many of whom have never lived in a Muslim culture, fulminate about the Muslim threat, basing their entire conception of the religion on a few cardboard cut-out figures. Osama will do for starters, as a convenient bogeyman. Remote, intense and hirsute, he fits the bill perfectly. Then when he disappears into a cave we can always turn to up a few local caricatures: an imam with a hook for a hand, for example, is a gift for myopic observers. A mosque or two with shadowy connections adds a dash of mystique. If we then pepper our broadcasts with a few loose references to the Taliban, the lumping of every disparate group of disaffected radicals with a grievance under the meaningless term of Al Qaeda, and then talk grandly about the battle for civilisation, we ratchet up the tension nicely.

Imagine the idea of the Muslim world construing all their images of Christianity based on the fiery Revd Ian Paisley of Belfast infamy. Or perhaps on the US televangelists. Or on their devotees prepared to kill to 'protect life' at abortion clinics. For that matter, let them look no further for exemplars of Christianity at work than the two Mighty Apostles of the Battle against Evil, both impassioned evangelists and harbingers of 'freedom', who fervently pray together as their armed forces rain destruction on Iraq and Afghanistan, while supporting Israel's drive to wreak havoc in Lebanon.

The repeated collocation of Islamic with fundamentalist, zealot, extremist or with terrorist in the media serves to impress the constant danger on the public mind. We reinforce this with incessant images of people shouting 'Allahu Akbar' into the eager camera, by which time the general public is convinced that this is a battle for our very survival. Should we even bother to plan for next weekend, given that it's all going to end so soon?

Here's another perspective, as a foreigner living in Bangladesh, a place where it seems to me for the vast majority of the population, Islam is part of the home, the street



and the village. Where it is a lived religion, not just a media construct. And you know what? Like all religions played out from day to day, it's pretty uneventful. It's not an ideology: it exists in the commitment of minuscule acts of human friendship. It gives people a vocabulary to understand their grief, their moments of elation, their losses and the pressures they are under. It keeps families together, (but doesn't necessarily stop them bickering or smouldering with resentment: it's a faith, not a magic potion). It works through and around individuals. It offers a seasonal catalogue of festivals to mark the passing of the months. It provides, in short, the whole background to the grind and flow of daily life. It's in the air, but not in your face.

Living here in Bangladesh, I notice the impact of Islam on people's names, and then of course on the language, from the use of the most important word a foreigner can learn here: 'Inshallah' to the way my driver says 'Alhamdulillah' when asked how he is. I see it in the many customs and holy festivals: (nearly all of my colleagues will observe the fast at Ramadan), and in daily observance: some male colleagues of mine go to pray regularly, using the mosque or prayer room found in

every institution. For the vast majority of those who live it, religion is a comfortable and familiar garment, not a weapon.

But the picture is neither uniform nor static: there are also plenty who neither fast nor go to pray. I also have a number of friends who are avowedly secular and even anticlerical. All in all it appears to me to be a pretty laid-back place, where you practise at a level of your own choosing: certainly not dominated by the imposition of orthodox or fundamentalist belief. Those students or elders who do have a more fundamentalist interpretation are given scant respect by most of the people I know, despite the inroads they have made to political power.

Nothing extreme then. Nothing to be alarmed about. The West is obsessed with those who preach and proclaim the 'truth' of Islam, and concentrates on the orthodoxies, the narrow interpretations, the perceived 'mediaevalism' and 'inflexibility' of the dogma. But all that is a long way from my perception of people's experience here, as they go about their daily lives, looking out for each other, complaining about the government, dodging cars, getting food on the table and kids into school. They care as much for dogma as your

average Saturday shopper back home worries about the meaning of the Resurrection.

In fact the question of whether religions are true, seems almost irrelevant in this context. People observe religions not just because they represent 'revealed truth' (an abstract concept for most), but because for them religion seems to work, just as it worked for their forefathers. That's what sustains religious belief and practice the world over. Of course there are powerful forces at work at the top of religious hierarchies, which historically have enforced belief, but that is unsustainable in today's anti-authoritarian age. (Look at Italy, where otherwise empty pews are dotted with ancient women dressed in black saying their rosary). And while it may be difficult culturally for individuals to opt out completely of religious practice or belief within a traditional community, whole generations can and do drift away. (As in Britain, preferring to worship these days at the altar of the supermarket). By contrast, it continues to thrive where people still willingly buy into it. (Poland, for example, where there is still standing room only at Sunday mass, or Russia, experiencing its own resurgence of religious expression).

A religion 'works' for people if it does three simple things: it helps them make sense of their existence in a changing, often bewildering, world; it enhances the quality of their lives; and it makes them better people than they would otherwise have been, (which is different, of course, from being better than others, or even as good as they should be).

And of course, in working, religions become believable. It's not that they work for people because they are true: they are true for people because they work.

That is why religion will always be part of the scenery, at least here. Looking around, all I see are ordinary people drawing on their faith to make a go of their lot, to coexist without strife, and to get by until evening. That is what Islam can mean at ground level.

And though I haven't put the question to them in so many words, I for one am convinced that none of the people I know and love here have the slightest inclination to destroy our civilisation, as Bush and Blair and so many others would have us believe. They have far more important things to be getting on with.

The author is a columnist.