

Reforming Our Police Force

Last Monday the Prime Minister, while addressing senior police officials, declared her intention of rebuilding and expanding the force. She very rightly drew attention to the need to reform the police in line with the needs of a democratic system. If we look back into the history of our police force and the types of regimes that they were required to serve it becomes abundantly clear that there remains much to be done in terms of instilling democratic values in this vital agency of law enforcement. Since the birth of Bangladesh, for the most part, the police had to serve military and autocratic regimes. Under such system the police were used most often as a tool with which to intimidate, coerce and oppress the people.

With the foregoing experience to contend with, the task that our PM has set for our police is not only necessary but, in some respects, essential for the proper functioning of a democratic system. Police are, on the one hand, constantly called upon to maintain law and order, protect the citizens from any infringement of their rights by others, keep the criminals at bay and oversee the smooth functioning of the society. But on the other hand, not really being imbued with democratic values, they often times become the worst violators of law and of the civic rights of the citizens.

In our opinion, therefore, the most important reform to be undertaken in our police force should deal with a change of their attitude — that people are their pay masters and the ultimate boss and not desperate individuals to maltreat. This should start at the senior level and filter down within the shortest possible time to the lower ranks. There is also the need, as the PM mentioned in her address, to expand our police force. But the new expansion must go hand in hand with training. Throughout the modern world the police force consists of recruits who are highly educated and trained. Maybe we should start demanding higher educational qualification for our police recruits — both for the officer and general recruit.

Stringent and urgent efforts need to be taken to improve the popular image of our police. Their image at the moment is of a force which is so steeped in corruption that the public is better served avoiding them than by seeking their help. To accomplish it credible cleansing operation should not only be undertaken but should be publicly seen to be undertaken. This is the only way the police can regain public faith, without which they can never become the effective bearer of the law of the land.

Given the fact that our criminals are increasingly armed with more and more sophisticated weapons, adequate protective measures should be thought of for our police. One essential element of effective law and order maintenance is a developed communication system. This is of particular importance in the case of communication between Dhaka and the rest of the country. Computerisation of police files and networking them throughout the country should form the core of the reforms and modernisation efforts that the PM talked about.

Begging in Moscow

A picture carried in a Dhaka English daily yesterday says more than words could have succeeded to do. It shows a half-bent Moscowite throwing a coin into the hat of a fellow Moscowite. The comradeship, as displayed here, does no credit to the once-cradle of communism but now on course of a market economy. Now in its death throes the world-over, communism could at least accomplish one little precious thing: under that much maligned system such a sight in Moscow could not even be imagined. Gone are those days when the state had the onerous duty to look after the old, infirm and invalid.

Indeed, Moscow, the whole of Russia and the republic-turned independent states will see more such pictures in the coming days. Defenders of free market economy, however, are expected to be quick to point out that the wounds so long kept concealed under the iron curtain are now being exposed. If that argument is tenable, one also must explain how. Extreme penury forces people to beg alms. To hide that either resort to extermination or compel the beggars to go on starving. Did anything remotely similar to this ever happen in the former Soviet Union? We are not in the knowing, we only know what the media Mughals of the West let us know.

Until now such news has not been fed and we can rest assured that if the condition was so, we would not have been left in the dark — specially when the Western media are not known to be averse to sensation. Knowing people, however, understand that the transition period most of the time is supposed to be hard. Granted, but that concession should have had ancillary mechanism developed to take care of the hardest hit before switching to the new system. Russian president Boris Yeltsin seems to have no time to lose. On the very first day of the introduction of open market, the soaring prices of essential commodities — touching as they did the highest points until then — left the Russians puzzled and dejected. The peoples of other states where such hasty decisions were taken also had to undergo similar traumatic experiences.

What transpires from all this is that the people of the former Soviet Union needed some time to cope with the change. In his haste Yeltsin and others have missed the point completely. The Russians have often demonstrated a great capacity for fortitude and mental resources in the face of overwhelming odds. This time as well they could come out in flying colours, if only the men in power had given them enough time and opportunities. Let us hope, the great peoples there successfully overcome the present difficulties.

WHILE an anxious population has its attention diverted by discussions of the need for consensus between the government and the opposition parties on matters of long-term economic importance, consensus has already been reached on a matter that affects the pocket of the entire nation and will continue to do so for many years to come. Unhappily, this consensus has been reached amongst the guardians of the people's interest, comprising the entire Legislature, without regard for the people's long-term economic future.

In its recent capitulation to SKOP, the government was aided and abetted by all the opposition parties. There have been no protests, no threats of 'movements', private property has not been put to the torch and the campus has not been convulsed. The press does not carry any reports of proposed debate on this question. No committees have been formed. To all appearances, therefore, all the political parties have recognised a superior power: SKOP.

Despite its recent financial gains, an unsoftened Executive has made common cause with SKOP if only by withholding advice that might have strengthened the government's bargaining position.

The tax-paying electorate

finds itself today with virtually no representation. As if this were not bad enough, the State, comprising the Legislature, the Executive and the creature of the Executive, has decided to demonstrate its new-found cohesion by commanding the electorate to pay higher taxes in order to sustain an elite work force that has distinguished itself not by efficiency in the work-place

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but by its powers of persuasion in the political swamp.

It has out-manoeuvred the formal political parties and won their willing compliance in taxing an already disabled economy. By implication, SKOP has also persuaded the government to face foreign donors on its behalf. This situation raises a number of questions: Are donors going to be impressed by this particular form of democratic expression? Will they go on supporting our lame public sector with their taxpayers' money? In view of the new opportunities offered by the erstwhile USSR, Central Asia and Eastern Europe, can

Parliament versus the People

by S. Alam Rashid

Bangladesh reasonably expect donors to be as interested as they once were in pouring money into an economy that is voluntarily moving backwards?

As for the domestic taxpayer, it is not so much a question of compelling him to pay more taxes; the true question is whether he is able to pay more in a period of recession/inflation. It would be more reasonable to suppose that the public sector industries could clear their bank loans, pay their utility bills, pay their taxes and give themselves better wages than to expect the taxpayer to pay for the upkeep of a large number of pre-mature pensioners.

If the government had been more interested in its obligations to the electorate and the economy and less concerned with politically accommodating the bureaucracy and its militant left arm, SKOP, it could have taken the issue to the people through the media. It could have made imaginative

and meaningful use of the most powerful medium of all: Television. It could have called for public debate. It could have explained the issue to the electorate that voted it into power and demanded its support. It could have asked the public whether it was willing to be taxed for this extraordinary purpose. It could have

power at a given time.

This fact has been acknowledged by the opposition parties in allowing the government to concede to SKOP's demands; they can now claim, in their own future negotiations with SKOP, that they too turned their backs on the people.

In taking stock of the resulting situation, it is difficult to dispel the notion that the

apparent gains on any side are illusory. Where will the government find the money to meet fully its commitment to SKOP? How much time has it bought itself before SKOP renews or expands its demands? To what extent do the opposition parties imagine that they are immune to the power of SKOP? Given the dismal history of revenue collection, can SKOP really expect this or any other government to persuade the bureaucracy to collect taxes in order to maintain SKOP in the style to which it would like to become accustomed? As a highly organised and

A Tribute

Justice Murshed: One with the Commonman

by Prof A F Salahuddin Ahmed

THE late Justice Syed Mahbub Murshed symbolised all that was best in Bengali culture tradition. He was born in 1911 in an aristocratic family of Murshidabad district of West Bengal. His father Syed Abdus Salek was a Deputy Magistrate. He was an accomplished oriental scholar. His mother was a sister of Sher-e-Bangla A K Fazlul Huq. From his ancestral background Mr Murshed had acquired a rare degree of urbanity and refinement together with a deep love for learning both Eastern and Western. His great uncle Sher-e-Bangla Fazlul Huq had instilled into his mind a profound sense of patriotism and love for the common man, the underprivileged and the down trodden. After obtaining his B A Honours and Master's degrees in Economics as well as Bachelor of Law degree from the Calcutta University, Mr Murshed went to England for higher studies in law. He was called to the Bar from the Lincoln's Inn in 1939. While in England Mr Murshed had come in contact with some of the leading British liberals and socialists who were sympathetic to the political aspirations of the people of the Indian sub-continent. It may be noted that the intervening years between the two World Wars (1911-1939) saw on one hand, the rise of Nazi and Fascist dictatorship and militarism, while on the other, there was an upsurge democratic, nationalist, anti-imperialist and anti-fascist forces to resist all kinds of exploitation and tyranny. Young Murshed had no hesitation in making his choice. He was an enthusiastic supporter of the anti-imperialist, anti-fascist democratic forces. He returned home thoroughly well-versed

in English constitutional practice and an abiding faith in the rule of law.

Mr. Syed Mahbub Murshed joined the Calcutta High Court in 1939 and soon drew the attention of all as a very promising barrister. He had married the daughter of Mr A K M Zakaria, a leading nationalist Muslim leader who was elected Mayor of Calcutta Corporation. Mr Zakaria was opposed to the communal politics of the Muslim League and was an advocate of secular nationalism. Meanwhile, Mr Murshed had drawn wide public attention for his independent thinking which was reflected in his incisive articles published in the British newspaper The Guardian and the leading Indian daily The Statesman. He was particularly critical of Jinnah's communal politics.

Bengal Famine
During the great Bengal famine of 1943 Mr Murshed rendered valuable service. He was actively associated with the relief operations of Anjuman-i-Mufidul Islam particularly in distributing food to the poor and the destitute in different areas of Calcutta. During the Great Calcutta Killing of 1946 he came forward to give relief to the riot-victims and help in their rehabilitation. He also worked to reestablish communal harmony.

After partition of India in 1947 Mr Murshed continued to practice at the Calcutta High Court. But the outbreak of large-scale communal riots in 1950 in both West Bengal and East Pakistan created a serious threat to life and security of the minorities in both the regions. The situation had somewhat improved after the Nehru-Liaquat Pact of 1950. Mr

Murshed actively helped in implementing the Pact. But in view of continued uncertainty and tension he migrated to Dhaka with his family in 1951. He now started to practice at the Dhaka High Court and resolved to identify himself with the hopes and aspirations of the people of this region. Thus



during the language movement of 1952 he gave solid support to the demand for making Bengali as one of the state languages of Pakistan. From now on Justice Murshed's career entered a new phase. He was a fearless champion of the rule of law and an unflinching advocate of equity and fairness in all aspects of national life. He did not hesitate to lend moral support to the legitimate aspirations of the people of this region, the language movement had aroused Bengali national consciousness. The Pakistan central government having failed in their move to make Urdu as the only state language now launched an attack on the composite and humanistic aspects of Bengali literary and cultural tradition.

Realising that Rabindranath Tagore symbolised this great tradition, the Pakistani rulers now made a vicious move to inject communal venom into the minds of the people. A handful of Bengali Muslim intellectuals were induced to issue a public statement declaring that since Tagore was not a Muslim, his works could not provide inspiration to the development of a distinct Bengali Muslim literary and cultural consciousness. Hence they demanded that Tagore should be banished from the Bengali Muslim literary and cultural scene.

Against this vicious move there was a widespread protest and a large number of Bengali writers and intellectuals issued counter statement declaring that Tagore despite being non-Muslim truly symbolised the literary and cultural heritage of the Bengali-speaking people both Hindus and Muslims. They pointed out that religion and culture were not conterminous. Culture according to them had a much wider connotation. It included within its domain many other elements besides religion. In addition to Islamic religious element derived largely from the Sufi saints and Muslim rulers of Perso-Afghan and Turgo-Mughal origin, the culture of the Bengali Muslims had been greatly enriched by admixture and assimilation of a variety of indigenous elements which had given it its distinctive character.

Both Rabindranath Tagore and Kazi Nazrul Islam represented this unique cultural tradition. It was a composite, syncretistic and humanist tradition in which the Bengali-

speaking people irrespective of their religious faith could always take pride. This realization in face of the Pakistan government's move to denigrate Tagore aroused a new cultural renaissance amongst the Bengali intellectuals of the then East Pakistan. This was reflected in the unprecedented enthusiasm with which the birth anniversary of Tagore was celebrated in the country. Mr Justice Murshed ignoring the displeasure of the Government agreed to be the Chairman of the Tagore birth centenary organising committee. His towering personality was a great source of strength to the committee. The popularity of Tagore songs increased manifold.

In 1964 Justice Murshed was appointed chief Justice of the Dhaka High Court. The dignity which he brought to this exalted office, the extraordinary impartiality, profound wisdom, remarkable insight and deep respect for human values which were reflected in his judgments won for him universal acclaim. He believed that justice should be administered not solely according to the letter of the law but according to the spirit of the law. He always maintained that a judge should conduct himself in such a manner that the people's faith in the rule of law is never shaken. He believed like Lord Acton that 'no law is valid against the conscience of mankind.'

Justice Murshed was as firm advocate of unfettered democracy. No wonder therefore, that he was not happy with the so called 'basic democracy' introduced by the military President of Pakistan, Field Marshal Ayub Khan. It was nothing but dictatorship in a democratic garb. Attempts to

privilege group with a sophisticated leadership, SKOP has an almost unique power to do a great deal of good without compromising any of its principles. But first it must learn to see itself in a newer and larger perspective. It can only be hoped that with a growth of power, SKOP will also learn to deal more magnanimously with a country too poor to sustain itself at even present levels.

At the same time, it is clear that the Legislature is unsure of its own constitutional rights and abilities; that SKOP has alienated international opinion; that the opposition parties have acted irresponsibly; that the government needs to develop much greater confidence and consistency (to say nothing of integrity) in its dealings with special-interest groups of all kinds.

Unfortunately, the national press too must admit that it has been remiss on this occasion. It has been slow in warning the people, cautioning SKOP against short-sighted ambition and guiding the Legislature through the shoals and shallows of parliamentary democracy.

This is the second of the two articles in this series, the first one 'SKOP versus the People' appearing on January 1 last, by the author who is a well-known businessman and a former newscaster on BTV.

curb the independence of the judiciary seriously disturbed his mind. He therefore took the momentous decision to resign from the post of Chief Justice in November 1967. Henceforth he resolved to work for promoting the cause of democracy in the country.

Support to Six-Point Demand

In early 1969 Justice Murshed was one of those few independent non-party men who had been invited to participate in the Round Table Conference called by President Ayub Khan for resolving the political crisis. Justice Murshed took an active part in the deliberations of the conference. He strongly supported Sheikh Mujib's stand and his Six Points programme and did not hesitate to point out repeatedly that he demands put forward by 'Mujib' truly represented the collective will of the people of East Pakistan. (This was disclosed to the author by Dr. M. N. Huda who was also a participant at the Conference).

But Justice Murshed despite possible threat to his security boldly refused to collaborate with the regime. It is a matter of regret that the services of this noble man, great jurist, fearless judge and a committed intellectual who had always upheld democratic and human values, were not utilized by the Bangladesh Government after liberation. After suffering from protracted illness Justice Murshed passed away peacefully on April 3, 1979.

The writer is a former Professor of History of Rajshahi and Jahangirnagar Universities and is one of our foremost historians.

To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

WB and our Population Policy

Sir, A recent news item (Daily Star, January 7th) stated, "The World Bank has advised Bangladesh to revise its current population control strategy, shifting the focus on an irreversible method of family planning". Now, all donor agencies shower us with advice from time to time. And we also have to digest the conditionalities, because we have not been able to build up a self-reliant economy, and our economic growth per year is minimal/marginal. The causes hindering our growth are - almost negative saving, poor work ethos, and a fearful population growth.

In the year 1947 the population of present-day Bangladesh was fortyone million. In 1971 it was seventy million and in 1991 it was 105 million. The present population is one of the densest, and also the poorest in the world.

The clinic-based population control efforts of the sixties produced little results. The field-level-based population control policy of the seventies and eighties did show some good results, but did not free us from the possibility of having a population of fifteen crores by the end of this century. Our present economy

cannot simply bear the burden of that number.

The largest population increase is mainly centred on the households who are living below the poverty line. Our 'poverty curtain' cannot be lifted unless we act now. The permanent methods of contraceptions offer us some hope, regarding our future. We have to examine the issue of our present population growth pragmatically and objectively. And freeing ourselves from emotionalism.

Let the Government target be one child family, and the permanent methods of family planning be considered for those families who already have two children. There is no other way for our respectable survival. Let us face the truth. Shahabuddin Mahabub Dhanondt, Dhaka.

Pets and poisons

Sir, Last week within four days we lost five cats including three beautiful kittens. These unfortunate pets died because our neighbours with whom we have a broken fence used rat poison to control vermin. As a result our cats were poisoned to death. This practice is particularly dangerous to the mother cats and their babies because the mamas catch rats and bring them to their little

ones to train them in the art of hunting which is only natural for them. We called in veterinary doctor and arranged treatment including administering life saving drugs but it did not produce any result. Six months ago we had gone through the same tragedy but we did not know the reasons then.

Rat and cockroach poison is being indiscriminately advertised and used in Bangladesh without understanding the dangers of it and its long range environmental hazards. Marketing of such poisons should be stopped forthwith, or at least controlled.

I would request animal lovers to shun using such dangerous chemicals and also educate their neighbours against using them if they want to spare themselves and their children of the agony of watching the most painful and lingering death of their loving pets.

Faruq Aziz Khan Environmentalist, Dhaka

RAJUK's demolitions

Sir, I am shocked and worried after reading your news report about illegal demolishing of a private house by RAJUK or as the chairman claimed, by a magistrate along with some police, published on 7.1.92. I am quite surprised that a magistrate whose duty is to maintain law for the interests of the citizens has been involved in an illegal action personally by helping an illegal demolition of a house of a poor man.

As it is reported, the house and the property does not be-

long to the Govt. Then who bears the expenses of the demolishing patrol police? And what is her (the Magistrate by the name of Amatul Latif) interest in it? How could she bring the police contingent if it was not requisitioned for doing this particular job? How could she order for the demolishing of a private house without showing the order to the owner of the house and without the presence of the Authorised Officer from RAJUK. When a simple announcement (required by law) by a loud-speaker could have saved the ruination of a poor family, who was living there for more than 20 years, with the permission of the owner of that property, why it was not done? I always thought that when some one holds a post like magistracy she/he has extra responsibility of keeping her/his image as a justice-upholder.

They should be very strict about their involvement in any private affair. When law itself breaks laws then where do the people go for justice? I still think there is something wrong in this report, and Ms. Amatul Latif should come out with an open statement about this matter, and it should be published in the newspapers. If she can not do it then the authorities should deal with her and give her exemplary punishment so that in future nobody dares to indulge in breaking the law in the name of law. If the Govt or the relevant quarters do not take up the matter seriously, then none of us is safe from this type of injustice and illegal action from the law enforcers engaged by the Govt.

Moreover people should be assured of the government's good intention of keeping everybody equal in the eye of law. We would certainly like to see unauthorised and unplanned constructions to be demolished by RAJUK in the interest of the inhabitants of Dhaka city but at the same time we would like to see that all formalities are being strictly maintained by the authorities and nobody should take advantage from it.

Selina Mansur Maghbar, Dhaka

Checking licences and weapons

Sir, The government has been quite responsive in partially amending its decision in respect of the earlier decision on deposit of licensed arms. As it stands now the licensed arms will have to be produced before the DC by the holder and the DC will check and return the weapon if he is satisfied. However, even this does not remove the apprehension and misgivings from the minds of the public.

This will mean an unnecessary, and in some cases, long journey to the district headquarters. The checking of licences and weapons can actually be done very simply. From its own records the government knows which licences were issued in an irregular manner i.e. without proper enquiry or police verification. These names and numbers can be communicated to the police station, and then all the holders of licensed arms may be requested to produce their weapons to the police stations. Here those irregularly issued

licences and arms held on their strength may be kept back. Others may be given back their licences immediately with a notation thereupon. This practice of check by the police station was employed before.

I hope the government will give this proposal a thought and rest the matter in peace. Zainul Abedin Retd Dy Secretary Idghar Road, Dhaka.

Rich-poor gap

Sir, Those among us who visited some countries or saw movies like 'Oshin' or 'The Little House on the Prairie' would conclude that the language of poverty and hunger is the same in all the societies of the world. A smaller section popularly known as the rich is enjoying all sorts of benefits by depriving the majority people of the society who are grouped as the poor. Lately initiatives are being taken to reduce the gap between rich and poor but only a little progress has so far been achieved. In reality, the rich-poor gap is widening day by day. The main reason behind this gap, as I feel, is the unequal distribution of national and international development benefits among the people. There is another major factor uneven sharing of the global wealth by the various nations.

I think, there is still some scope for the United Nations to do something pragmatic towards reducing the rich-poor gap.

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