

Reforming Our Police Force

We commend the Prime Minister for clearly stating in public that police should nab terrorists, including those that belong to her party. This statement was necessary both to let it be known that terrorists will henceforth not receive any shelter in the ruling party or its front bodies and also to give a clear signal to the police that from now on they have a free hand in dealing with the terrorists.

However, as all experienced police officials will say in private that such public exhortations are neither new nor uncommon. Private instructions are the ones that ultimately matter. Is the duty of the police interfered with? Do they receive confidential instructions to release partymen or raid halls occupied by opposition students? It is what goes on beyond the public eye which will ultimately determine how efficiently the police force will function. It is here that the sincerity of the PM's statement will face its real test. The danger is that the PM may not herself know how other high-ups in her own party — and it may well be lower rankers using names or reference of high officials — are subverting the legal process. In this regard we would like to suggest, now that the PM has given a green signal to the police to arrest terrorists within her own party, why she doesn't take one step further and instruct her party stalwarts to carefully examine the terrorist elements within the party, and hand them over, or at least their names, to the police. It will be an exemplary act of cleansing party politics of criminal elements. It will also help send a clear signal to all concerned that days of armed politics are over and create the right moral pressure upon the opposition to follow suit.

The Prime Minister is right on target when she exhorts the police to change their attitude and become a friend of the people rather than their tormentor. But, as she knows well, that it is easier said than done. It is no good blaming the police for oppressing the people. They are often made to do so by the political power of the day. The governments who derive their strength from sources other than the people, have to use the police to keep the latter in tight leash — and God knows we have had plenty of such governments and for so long. But the time is propitious for the police to change because there has been a qualitative change in the nature of our government.

The question of police becoming a friend of the people is a well-intentioned one, but it will take much more than exhortations to bring it about. What we perhaps need is an in-depth study of what ails our law enforcing body. Why is it as inefficient, as corrupt and as oppressive as it is today? There are historical, political and administrative reasons for them. Perhaps a fact finding Commission could be set up to look into the question thoroughly and suggest a comprehensive reform plan to make our police force more responsive to the needs of our people and more accountable to the taxpayers.

Go for 432!

When resilience is married to sheer talent, one cannot fail to get results. According to that logic, Indian pace bowler Kapil Dev's achievement in becoming only the second person in Test Cricket history to capture 400 wickets is perhaps not so surprising. The elation that engulfed the ever-smiling Kapil last Monday, when he trapped Mark Taylor leg before wicket at the Western Australia Cricket Association (WACA) ground, was the kind of self-congratulation he could well afford. From the rest of us, he deserves praise of the most lavish kind, not only because of the tremendous feat he achieved, but also because of the circumstances under which he performed. The fact that Kapil has continued to take top-bracket wickets at what must be the twilight of his illustrious career, proves that the former World Cup-winning Indian captain is one of the greatest batsmen in the game.

There is one point one ought to take into account in order to put Kapil's achievement in the correct perspective. That is the tendency among Indian groundsmen to prepare the duldest of wickets possible in order to aid their own slow bowlers and thwart the quickies from abroad. The Indian spinners have undoubtedly benefited from the slow but turning wickets on home grounds, but that policy exacted a heavy physical and mental toll on genuine fast bowlers like Kapil Dev. There is nothing more frustrating or dispiriting for a quick bowler than to have to hammer away on a wicket that would not respond. It is therefore a major triumph for Kapil that more than half of his 401 wickets to date were taken on those unhelpful home pitches.

India's disastrous performance on the just-concluded Test series against Australia, apart from the third and fourth Tests when the tourists came agonisingly close to victories, would have been something for the millions of cricket lovers back home to forget, had it not been for Kapil Dev's exemplary efforts. Now, the predator from Punjab, as London's The Observer once called him, has another target to aim for: New Zealand hero Sir Richard Hadlee's all-time record of 431 wickets. On current form and spirit, he may well surpass that total before the year is out. More important, his achievements should make Indian cricket authorities re-think their strategy about preparing slow wickets at home, and allow new, fast bowling talents to rise. For the moment though, all eyes are fixed on Kapil and we join Sir Richard in saying: Well done. Go for 432.

WILL the spring of '92 be the last one for over three million Afghan refugees in Pakistan which has been host to them for over a decade? The yellow jasmine lining the boulevards of Pakistan's Foreign Office heralds the advent of spring bringing with it a breeze of fresh air at the Afghan desk.

This week the State Minister for Foreign Ministry Mr Siddique Karju finally declared that "as far as the future policy on Afghanistan is concerned, the ball is now in the UN's court. Pakistan will facilitate to implement the UN Secretary's five-point peace plan."

Initially when this UN formula was announced, Pakistan had only gone as far as to 'welcome' it and there was no policy to adhere to the two superpowers' agreement on negative symmetry.

Pakistan's decision has been widely welcomed not only at home but by countries, party to the war.

President Najibullah has written to the chief of Army Staff Gen Asif Nawaz and requested for a meeting.

The reason is simple. It has always been the Pakistan military and specially the Inter Service Intelligence (ISI)

FOCUS ON PAKISTAN

'It's for the Afghans Themselves to Determine their Future'

Mariana Baabar writes from Islamabad

which has been formulating Pakistan's Afghan policy.

One of the most important reasons for the change at Islamabad has been the assertion of a realistic view in the army with the change of command, especially with the departure of General Beg and the sidelining of the other hawks

the Mujahideen parties refused to produce Soviet POWs during the visit of Russian vice-president Rutskoi.

Economically also, after over thirteen years, Pakistan is in no position to single-hand-

edly provide for the largest exodus of refugees in the world.

Added to this is 'donor fatigue' which has set in and is best described by the UN Secretary's special representative, Benon Sevan who said, "The international donors are now getting immune to the plight of Afghanistan."

Pakistan today is also looking towards the future where it is in a hurry to establish eco-

nomc links with the Central Asian republics.

Only peace inside Afghanistan can provide that important link. This is also creating interest in the West as they know that once again

the four moderate groups within the alliance of the Mujahideen are heavily in favour of the UN formula. The ISI government's Afghan policy is also being opposed by its own coalition partners, the Jamaat-i-Islami which has accused the government of opt-

ing out of a military option.

The leader of the opposition Ma Benazir Bhutto whose father, the late prime minister first brought in Gulbadeen Hikmatyar as his protégé, reacted, "This is a sudden somersault and it smacks of opportunism."

On merits alone the UN proposal should have been accepted long ago as espoused by the Pakistan People's Party.

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Fundamentalism Becomes the Scapegoat in Algeria

by Allan Thompson

The first ever multi-party elections in Algeria would have led to victory for the Islamic revivalist FES. The secular FLN party that has ruled since independence was so alarmed it cancelled the second round of voting. The West, through its muted condemnation, seems to have tacitly approved the generals trying to snatch away democracy. The elite may be trying to cover its economic failures by exaggerating the fundamentalist threat.

DEMOCRACY was thwarted in Algeria. But it did not happen just when a military junta annulled the electoral process that would otherwise have seen an Islamic party take over parliament.

No, the deed was done two years ago when the ruling National Liberation Front (FLN) party — backed by the military — publicly committed itself to a democratic, multiparty electoral process it had no intention of honouring.

Now the political chickens have come home to roost. What we are witnessing in the most important country of Arab North Africa is not the much-ballyhooed surge of Islamic "fundamentalism", but a deceitful political gamble gone wrong.

It is a shame that the West is so terrified of Islam that it feels compelled to give — through its near silence — tacit approval to the general now trying to snatch away Algeria's first chance for democracy.

The country was half-way through a two-round electoral process — the country's first-ever multiparty vote — when the military intervened. The Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) had won 188 of 230 parliamentary seats decided in the first round on December 26 and was poised to secure a majority in second round voting set for January 16.

The military pushed President Chadli Benjedid into resignation and cancelled the elections. It formed a new

Council of State to run the country for two years and it was rumoured the FIS could be banned.

Most Algerians do not want an Islamic Republic — nor would they stand for one. Theirs is one of the most secular countries in the Muslim world.

What Algerians desperately wanted when they finally got a

chance to vote in December was a change from the autocratic, corrupt regime that has ruled them since independence from France in 1962.

To get that, they were willing to throw their support behind the FIS, a party committed to bringing about eventually radical changes in Algerian society. While many Salvation Front supporters do

want a return to the Islamic Sharia's law, most threw in their lot because they had no other choice.

The Islamic party has enormous support among the legions of poor and oppressed, the young and unemployed, the excluded in society who populate bleak places like the dirty, overcrowded Casbah in old Algiers. Those people now find themselves once again looking down the barrels of government tanks.

"People don't necessarily follow the Islamic party because of ideology, but because it gives them hope," a former top minister in the Algerian government told me in Algiers last summer — the last time the regime cancelled elections and brought the tanks into the street.

There is no easy answer to the mess in which Algeria now finds itself. Leaders of the Salvation Front may have democracy on their side, but there are valid misgivings about what kind of democracy they would foster if given power. The military council now in command — with the support of many Algerians wary of an Islamic republic — has no

intention of loosening its grip.

It did not have to be that way. There were many other options to the FLN, centrist and left-wing parties that could have won wide support among the highly politicized Algerian population in free elections. Lasting democratic institutions could have been built.

But the government was so successful in polarising Algerian politics — in the hope that voters frightened by the prospect of an Islamic government would rally to the ruling party — that the Islamists stole votes from other opposition movements and for many ordinary Algerians provided the only real alternative to the government in power.

Ironically, it was primarily because of such political manoeuvrings by the army-backed FLN that the Islamic Front garnered so much support. The ruling party's gamble failed.

As a British reporter aptly put it in a despatch from Algeria, the Islamic party made the mistake of winning the elections.

Even after the elections,

there was some chance of compromise. The Islamic party leadership is split over whether to rush headlong into reintroducing Islamic law or to offer Algerians a more moderate programme.

It is arguable that given a chance pragmatic politics would have prevailed.

There were already hints that President Chadli, who under the Algerian constitution would still have held power, was in the end, willing to compromise and work with an Islamist parliament.

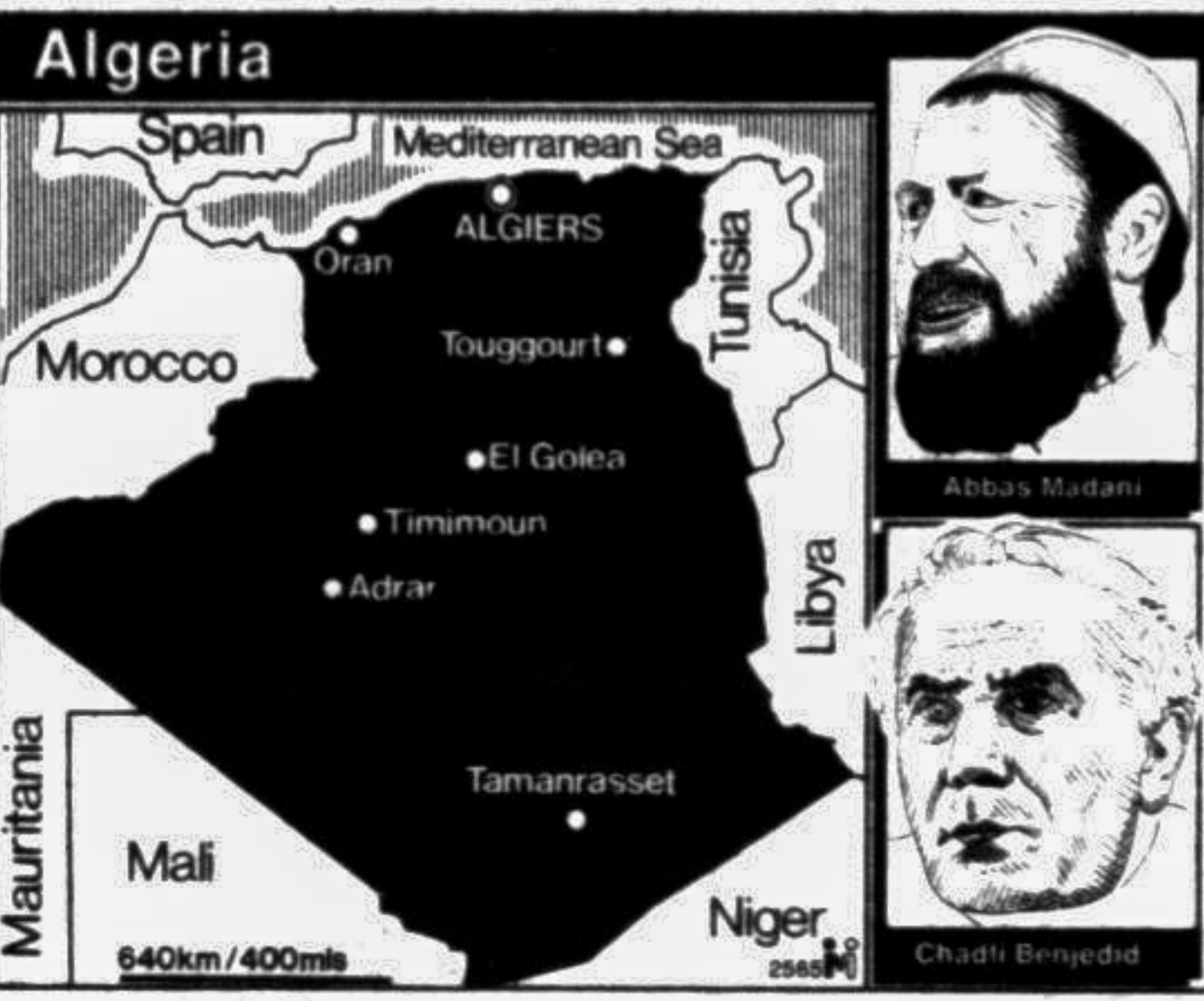
That surely brought about his downfall. The military forced his resignation to create the power vacuum it was so eager to fill.

Those who breathed with relief that the generals had saved the world from yet another Islamic regime need to think again. The "Muslim masses" are not rallying blindly to Islam. Rather, they are grasping for some chance of turning out corrupt, unrepresentative regimes.

Many in the Arab world look to Islam these days for hope — not out of religious zealotry or fanaticism, but because of economic desperation and political repression.

Islamic politics is not the wave of the future in North Africa. It is a catalyst for much-needed change.

— GEMINI NEWS
ALLAN THOMPSON is a reporter with the Toronto Star and visited Algeria during the state of siege when elections were cancelled in June 1991.



Filipino Maids Cater to Abuse, Insecurity

Perla Aragon Choudhury writes from Manila

IN Hongkong and Singapore, do not sweep dust out the door or let the tip of a broom touch the feet of your employer. Be prepared for meals of rice gruel.

Defer to the parents of your master. Dress modestly, and don't be caught crying — you might drive out good luck.

Such advice should go to domestic helpers before they fly out to work with conservative Chinese families abroad, suggests anthropologist F. Janda Jocano of the Philippine Studies Department, University of the Philippines.

It is with older members of the family that domestic helpers in Hongkong and Singapore usually spend the most time with, since the employers are at work during the day, noted Dr Jocano.

Generally, these in-laws, parents and grandparents are very conservative. They are also meticulous about housework. They love to order the new help around and get angry when they are not understood.

In Chinese culture, not reacting positively to what elders say — including being unable to understand the language — is a very serious offence. This can result, said Dr Jocano, in quarrels between the household and the employer and lead to

verbal and physical abuse, prompting the domestic helper to run away or even to commit suicide.

Dr Jocano's observations are based on field work in Singapore in 1985-1986, data from reports of colleagues and interviews with returning workers.

He said the most striking causes of grave problems involving Filipino domestic helpers in Singapore and Hongkong are "psychological in nature." He agrees but offered another explanation: Culture shock.

Dr Jocano described this as a form of anxiety resulting from an inability to predict the behaviour of others or to act appropriately in a cross-cultural situation. It is most prominent in the matter of language, food, feelings of loneliness and jealousy, sexual abuse and cultural practices.

For example, not being able to understand or be understood brings about anxiety and fear of punishment for mistakes. The Filipina might respond to this and to loneliness ("the worst enemy") by crying, only to puzzle and anger her employers who think that crying causes bad luck.

The domestic helper may also stir jealousy, said Dr Jocano. One celebrated case was that of Amelia who, on one

social occasion, was mistaken for the mistress of the house because of her good looks and stylish dressing.

Offended, the real wife accused Amelia of seducing the husband and made her work longer hours.

Amelia had to serve at mahjong games till early morning. She was scolded in front of visitors. And when she failed to iron a dress satisfactorily, she was burned in the

Culture shock is most prominent in language, food, feelings of loneliness and jealousy, sexual abuse and cultural practices.

arm with the flatiron. Finally Amelia ran away, seeking help at a local religious centre.

Flatiron marks seem to be an indicator of physical abuse of domestic helpers, be they in Singapore or Hongkong the Middle East. Philippine Senator Santanina Rasul, who keynoted the symposium told participants that she herself saw burn marks on the arms of Filipina helpers in Jeddah.

Like Dr Jocano, Sen. Rasul is concerned with minimizing the impact of culture shock. At the pre-departure orientation seminars (PDOS) held by Philippine Overseas

Employment Administration (POEA) which outgoing workers are required to attend, she said, emphasis should be given to informing them of the customs as well as the labour laws and related practices of the host country.

For instance, (it is important to know that) it is hard to prove rape in Saudi Arabia, and that it is the police who handle such cases there. In Kuwait, women without marriage cer-

tificates cannot give birth in hospitals.

In Hongkong, domestic helpers can be terminated from the job on the flimsiest of excuses ("she looks sickly" or "she does not bathe after ironing clothes") and would have to leave the island within two weeks. Singapore requires them to have a pregnancy test every six months and prohibits their marriage to a Singaporean or a permanent resident.

For returning the Christmas greeting of male friend, added Sen. Rasul, a woman would get imprisoned in the Middle East.

There is no room of a place to sit, the applicants keep standing under the open sky. The situation becomes unbearable during the rainy season or in the summer. Applicants for visa forms, including women and children, are often drenched in the rain and their travel documents are damaged.

The procedures for visa are also lengthy and cumbersome. Anybody wanting a visa, is required to submit a petition alongwith his/her passport for a visa form. The form is available after a few days, if the concerned officials decide to give the same. The visa form will then be submitted alongwith bank statements, biodata, references, self-ad-

vised envelope etc. After a week or 10 days, the applicant may be asked to appear in person for an interview. During interview relevant, irrelevant, funny and even insulting questions are asked by the visa officer and his staff.

Visa is a bilateral subject and demands mutual courtesies under international rules and Geneva Convention. I wonder if the Bangladesh Government is aware about the ordeal met out to Bangladeshis at Japanese visa office. Does the Bangladesh Embassy in Tokyo behave in the same manner with the Japanese who seek for Bangladeshi visa?

Jeeshan Shihab
Dhanmondi R/A,Dhaka.

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.

Mosquito menace

Sir, Mosquitoes are causing a great suffering to the people of this country. Malaria has once again returned to our society. If we fail to control the mosquito menace, all of us might be attacked by malaria and other mosquito borne diseases.

We cannot use aerial spray

facility because such spray sometimes causes serious damage to the beneficial insects, birds and even fishes. Under this situation, if we can undertake mosquito eradication programme on locality basis, I am confident, we will be successful in controlling the menace. The government needs to organize such group action programmes by supply-

ing necessary inputs. A day or two may be declared as public holiday for executing the mosquito eradication programme by making compulsory participation of all government officials and others in the programme.

M Zahidul Haque
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II

Sir, It is needless to say that the students of Dhaka University, specially those who resides in the halls, are enduring various problems with great patience. However, recently we are in 'danger' with a new problem, that is,

mosquito menace. Swarms of mosquitoes are continuously disturbing and disrupting our normal activities. Sometimes this continuous mosquito menace seems to be more 'dangerous' than the ceaseless campus terrorism. We are requesting the concerned authorities to take immediate steps to eradicate mosquitoes and allow a congenial atmosphere in the residential halls of Dhaka University.

Fazid Ahmed
S M Hall, DU.

Japanese visa

Sir, The applicants for visa wait by the road side in front of the Japan embassy visa office for hours for a form. As