

Lessons for the Government

What happened last Sunday is condemnable. The fact that such an incident could at all occur is frightening. It is frightening because the profession of journalism has been attacked by the very arm of the government that is supposed to enforce law and order. It cannot be brushed aside as a stray incident, nor as a spur of the moment outcome and definitely not as an event going out of hand accidentally. From all accounts and published reports, it is clear that nothing had happened that evening to warrant the type of reaction by the police. The abusive language that the police used when they fell upon the journalists on duty, especially the photographers, and the ferocity with which they carried out their attack into the Press Club revealed, if not a pre-conceived plan to attack journalists, at least a pent-up hatred against the Fourth Estate that is threat to the free press, if not to the process of democracy itself.

The police action that caused injury to no less than 50 journalists is a very serious blow to the freedom of the press. It puts into question government's commitment to an independent press. Much will have to be done by the government to regain the confidence of the journalist community. In this regard, we would like to clearly state that no identification of a scapegoat will satisfy the public. In fact that should not satisfy the government either if it is sincere in its desire to get to the bottom of this incident. It is difficult for us to believe that the police force that is usually so reluctant to take any action even when arms carrying miscreants pass by their very nose because, in their own words, "there is no order to take action", should suddenly go in for this massive assault without order from high-ups. Directives there must have been. But the question is, from where and from what level? Was it only the police hierarchy involved in this decision? What was the role of the home ministry and of the minister himself? If the government was a party to this decision, then it will have to pay dearly for this undemocratic act by losing public sympathy and support. If, on the other hand, the government was not involved, and the police acted on its own, then the nation will have to pay dearly for having put into place an inept administration that cannot control its own police force. Either way it is a bitter lesson.

This journal has made repeated pleas to the government for stern action by the police against terrorists, extortionists, and armed miscreants. Yet months have passed without anything happening. And now we have an example of police action which has put the whole nation to shame, while the criminal elements gradually overtake civic life. We cannot emphasize enough the importance and the urgent need for the government to rethink its policy on the law and order situation and the control and use of the police in this regard. In the same vein we urge the government to rethink its policy regarding the news coverage in the radio and the television. The practice of ignoring such events as the Sunday's attack on journalists continues to reinforce doubt in the public mind about the ruling party's pre-election pledge of granting autonomy to Radio and BTV and making their news services objective and credible.

Out of what happened during those crucial three hours last Sunday, there are more than a few lessons to be learnt by the government of Begum Khaleda Zia.

Applying Science and Technology

The need for application of science and technology for the development of the country was on Saturday underscored for the umpteenth time. This time it was the Speaker of the Jatiya Sangsad, Sheikh Razaque Ali, exhorting the engineers, agronomists, doctors and civil administrators and the subject at hand was 'Challenges of the 21st Century.'

Apart from the sermon being rather too hackneyed, it has the added problem of appearing to presuppose that applying science and technology (ST) for development or whatever depended on the engineers and doctors and agronomists. Which is only very partially true and as such very misleading. The politicians, who take all the policy decisions of the state and even of the society at large, almost without an exception think of ST as some magic wand to be wielded to the benefit of the nation — or better still a magic potion to be rushed down the throat of the nation in order that it gets developed in a jiffy. While this approach is not going to help in any possible role to be played by ST in social development, it continues to beg the question — who would wield the wand and who would administer the potion? The doctors and engineers etc are only so many individuals with the distinction that they happen to be trained in some special ways in some special areas. They largely carry out what the state and society lay down for them to perform. The engineer needs an outlay in terms of maybe crores of Taka, the doctor needs a hospital appointed and equipped with best of facilities and gadgets, the agronomist needs a politically decided broad guideline to develop the country's agriculture on particular lines. None of such first-order things are subject to the individual scientist's and technologist's goodwill, merit and dedication. The successive governments in our country have neither been science-friendly nor science-wise with the result that governance in the last two decades have never reflected any attempt to apply ST on the state-level, not to speak of government policies benefiting from the scientific attitude.

It is the state under the total control of the politicians — and, of course, the generals — that has bureaucratized science and its practitioners. Science — and its application called technology — has gone out of the life and thoughts of whoever is in the employment of government. In such an overwhelming atmosphere of non-science, made the more so by a society that has travelled backwards to one of pre-science — the independent individual scientist or experimenter-inventor is rather on a short leash and cannot be expected to achieve anything worthwhile.

Better than exhorting the professionals and cadre service people, the government itself and as a whole should set about beginning to cultivate the scientific attitude and adopt national policies that would require the whole of our scientific manpower to give their utmost to science and to the country.

CERTAIN periods in the history of a nation should never be forgotten. They serve as a reminder of the worst times the people have faced. One such period in India was that of emergency. It was imposed 17 years ago in the darkness of the night on June 25. The ruling Congress (I) would like to erase its memory and whatever documentary evidence of that period is not to its liking. That explains why the report by the Shah Commission, which went into the excesses of the emergency days, remains banned.

Yet, if the country is to preserve the fundamental values of a democratic society, it must periodically recall how India nearly lost freedom when Indira Gandhi subverted the system. What happened was that she, then prime minister, panicked after losing her seat in an election petition and declared an "internal emergency." The press was gagged, dissent smothered and individual freedom suspended. Nearly 100,000 people were detained without trial. So great was the fear that judges tailored their judgments to suit the government's pleasure and magistrates issued blank warrants for arrests. Public servants as well as police willingly carried out arbitrary and high-handed actions. It was a reign of terror.

The authoritarian rule, lasting two and a half years, ended when Mrs Gandhi and her alter ego, Sanjay Gandhi, the younger son, were defeated at the polls. I asked Sanjay then why they thought they would get away with all that they did. His reply was that elections were not in their "scheme of things." He elucidated that they would have put their own men at various levels to run the system, ruling out the polls.

In fact, holding elections at regular intervals is probably

A Page from Contemporary History

Reminiscences of Emergency in India During the Rule of Indira Gandhi

the only institution that has survived the rigours of emergency. Although the plugs of restraint were pulled out at that time, opening the floodgates of manipulation and gerrymandering, the polls still retain some sanctity.

Other institutions have lost all their credibility. They have got such a thrashing that it is not even possible to restore them to their original shape. Politicians and their cohorts, the bureaucrats, find the battered institutions convenient and cooperative. Their whims and wishes get authentically and gone are the days when they were looking for credibility or morality.

The judiciary has been the biggest casualty. Mrs Gandhi transferred 16 judges during the emergency and there was a justifiable resentment. The Shah Commission warned: "The State owes it to the nation to assure that this vital limb of the government will not be subjected to strains which might even indirectly operate as punitive." But this has had little effect.

Now the sword of transfer hangs over the head of every judge. Chief justices are vying with each other to oblige the government on transfers or, for that matter, appointments. Judgments are at the asking. The high-faluting phrases like the independence of the judiciary are not even mentioned. Corruption was inevitable once the standards became to be

compromised. Mrs Gandhi regretted "certain mistakes", never the emergency. She underlined this on return to power in 1980. She brought back the officers who were instruments of tyranny during the emergency. Not only that she punished those who had pursued cases of excesses against her, her son and the party men. The bureaucracy, categories into 'ours' and 'theirs' at that time, has never recovered since. It is

Brutality, which got embedded in police at that time, knows no bounds now. The trend of arresting or releasing persons on political considerations has continued. The illegal use of power, to which police has got used, is hard to defeat now. What is seen in Kashmir, Punjab, Assam or elsewhere in the country is a cumulative effect of unbridled authority given to the force. It does not know, much less care about normal, acceptable methods to

lected for their integrity and sense of public duty and functioning independently of the intelligence agencies." But the agencies remain unaccountable. No wonder, Justice J S Verma in his report on Rajiv Gandhi's assassination, has said that the fatal incident could have been averted if the central government's intelligence agencies had exercised "more vigilance."

It has been seen that IB and CBI are loaded with jobs which are not really theirs. Keeping track of opposition leaders and critics of the government, intercepting their mail and tapping their telephone calls is not what the two agencies should be doing. Nor should they be checking the credentials of candidates and weighing their chance of winning at the polls. But this is the practice started during the emergency and continued by governments of all hues.

The Shah Commission also said that certain laws which were of oppressive nature should be scrutinised every now and then to find out if they had ceased to serve the purpose for which they were enacted. When the government has no time to frame properly even new laws, where is the room to assess which ones from among the old have become redundant? The law courts have pointed out the defects and so has the Law Commission.

One evil practice noticed during the emergency was

proliferation of seats of unconstitutional power. Once again people have emerged at all levels claiming authority on the basis of proximity to Prime Minister Narasimha Rao; some because they are from Andhra Pradesh. Certain decisions taken both in regard to some individuals as well as business houses indicate that some pressures do work to open even the steepest locks.

Had action been taken against those who erred during the emergency, a new chapter of clean politics would have begun. But Mrs Gandhi, after regaining power, was not interested in it. And the law courts were so terrified that they threw out all cases relating to the emergency excesses. So everything was whitewashed. In fact, there were efforts to implicate Justice Shah also.

Perhaps many would like the public to believe that nothing really wrong happened during those days. But what about facts? The illegal detentions, the motivated raids, the transfer of judges, the demolition of houses and the misuse of the media — all these were not a figment of imagination. Some victims are still there for any one to see.

True, there is no press censorship at present, no visible dictation of the people. But it looks as if it is not necessary. The different pieces are beginning to fall into place without anyone making an effort. Already there is a tendency to go along and not to question. There is timidity in the atmosphere. Narasimha Rao should be worried about these trends. If without any emergency, the people begin to behave there is something wrong with the state of affairs. Once the desire to act according to what is right goes, there may be no realisation of what is wrong. This is precisely what happened during the emergency.

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

now a set of sycophants and supplicants who allow themselves to be used by politicians.

Mrs Gandhi threw out even the recommendations by the National Police Commission to reform the police because the commission was appointed by the Janata government (1977-79).

She preferred to stay with the Indian police system, structured on an act of 1861 and rejected the draft bill which the Police Commission had recommended to ease the force from the stranglehold of politicians. Since the baby was thrown out with the bath tub, even the recommendation on how to make police accountable was not implemented.

deal with a situation.

On the other hand, employing the police to the advantage of any political party, started by Mrs Gandhi, has been a source of subverting the rule of law. Now there is such a nexus between the politicians and police that the force does not carry out duties for which it is by law intended. The policemen have themselves stopped realising that politicking by them is outside of their domain.

The Shah Commission even pointed out that the two police organisations, the Intelligence Bureau and the Central Bureau of Investigation, "should be suitably overseen and evaluated by responsible forums composed of persons specially se-

Nigerians Don't Want what Somalia has Thrown Away

Bayo Onanuga writes from Lagos

Overthrown last year by military opposition, after a repressive 22-year rule, Somalia's Siad Barre has now been given temporary political asylum in Nigeria. As Gemini News Service reports, the former dictator faces a torrent of criticism from Nigerians who do not want their country to become a haven for discredited African leaders.

The rise and fall of a dictator:



- 1969: Barre becomes leader after assassination of President All Shirmarke
- 1976-77: Fights war against Ethiopia, adopts pro-West policies
- 1979: Introduces new constitution - 'party and state indivisible'
- 1987: First anti-Barre riots in Mogadishu. Rebel movements step up guerrilla war in north and central Somalia
- 1991: Rebels overthrow Barre after intense fighting
- 1992: After a brief stay in Kenya, Barre given political asylum in Nigeria

MOHAMED SIAD BARRE arriving in Lagos

ing to make by receiving Barre? Asked local journalist Uche Onyebadi, in a newspaper article, "That we are the dumping ground for Africa's ousted dictators? Is this a signal to the Mobutu Sese Seko, Ka-

criticised the granting of asylum to Barre and described it as a mistake requiring immediate correction.

"Asylum is a political instrument which if well utilised, can serve the purpose of the beneficiary and the nation granting it without affecting the displeasure of the home country," it said.

"It can be a means of maintaining justice, hospitality, humanism and at the same time of diffusing tensions. In Siad Barre's case, the objectives that are being served remain vague. No diplomatic gains will accrue for Nigeria." Barre came to power in 1969 through a military coup. He initially flirted with the Russians, then switched over to the west on the promise of more economic and military aid. His rule was characterised by a period of repression and torture.

He mastered the art of divide and rule, setting one Somalia clan against another. Eventually, in January 1991, the opposition summoned the military strength to drive him out of Mogadishu.

Now Nigerians have been unsettled by a comment made by a spokesman for Somalia's former defence minister, General Farah Aidid, leader of the United Somalia Congress, whose forces aborted the April push of Barre's forces into Mogadishu.

The spokesman interpreted Nigeria's action as an

unfoundedly act. The belief is that by giving Barre sanctuary, Nigeria has blown its offer to broker peace talks between Somalia's warring groups.

In March, Nigeria's foreign minister, Ike Nwachukwu, told UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros Ghali that President Ibrahim Babangida has offered to host a peace conference on Somalia in Nigeria's new capital at Abuja.

Nwachukwu's UN visit came days after his trip to warring Somalia, during which he succeeded in persuading all the factions to attend the proposed conference.

Granting an asylum to Barre is "a serious blot on Nigeria's image," declared the CRP spokesman, lawyer Clement Nwankwo.

It appeared the Nigerian government anticipated this domestic uproar in agreeing to accommodate Barre. On the day Barre landed in Lagos on a Kenyan — chartered Boeing 757, the government issued a statement from Abuja justifying its action and stating the extenuating circumstances.

The statement said Barre and his family were granted temporary asylum since "no country has as yet decided to offer political asylum to the former Somali leader... In keeping with the humanitarian concern of the federal Government of Nigeria."

It said the measure was taken because of the govern-

ment's belief that Barre's removal from the war scene would pave the way for the resolution of the conflict. The government was also hoping to reap a diplomatic dividend — by strengthening its position as a peace broker.

For now, it is difficult to know where Barre is staying. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees in Lagos denies having anything to do with him.

While in Kenya, Barre was beset by ceaseless attacks. Kenyan opposition parties demanded he be kicked out. And for lawyers signed a statement demanding that he be extradited to Somalia to face trial for his atrocities against his people.

Amidst the whirl of controversy, Kenyan leader President Daniel arap Moi said his government was keen to get Barre out of the country and Kenya's foreign minister, Wilson Ndolo Aya, conceded that "Barre is an embarrassment the government would like to drop like a hot brick."

At the Safari Park Hotel, where Barre piled up a bill of more than \$300,000 in 10 days, hotel staffers found him a source of amusement. "He's very old. When we see him, we laugh," one hotel staffer told The Nation.

On the morning of May 17, Kenya finally said farewell to Barre as he boarded a plane to Lagos.

Now 73, chain-smoking and walking with the aid of a stick, Barre is sequestered in an unknown place in Nigeria.

— GEMINI NEWS

BAYO ONANUGA is a senior Nigerian journalist who was until recently Editor of the Concord.

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.

Boss-subordinate relationship

Sir, In an organization, whether government or private, the relationship between the boss and the subordinates is based upon the organisational structure and disciplines. Officially, a subordinate is accountable to his superior. However, this superior-subordinate relationship should not in any way be treated as master-slave relationship. In our society, bosses are often alleged to use their subordinates in realizing personal interests. Sometime the boss even interferes with the personal affairs of his subordinates. One of my friends recently told me about the ridiculous behaviour of his boss. If my assumption is not wrong, readers would agree that sometimes corrupted bosses in our organizations rather contribute in promoting corruption among their subordinates. Let us all work honestly to get rid of corruption

through concerted action. M. Zubaidul Haque, Assistant Professor, Bangladesh Agricultural Institute, Dhaka

English text books

Sir, The existence of a large number of English medium schools in the country, especially in big cities, proves the fact that English medium schools are fast becoming a trend in education to a large group of students in the cities. In spite of the high cost of education in these schools, the schools run to full capacity. This shows a change that is taking place in the education sector. People, specially urban parents, want their children to compete with the outside world and look at English medium education as the means to do so.

In this regard, I think the publishing companies can do a booming business which will

help both the parents and the economy. At present, most of the books prescribed in the English medium schools are imported. Parents have to pay a high price for these books. But if these books were locally printed under the licence of the publishing companies, it will bring down the cost price as well as save a large amount of foreign exchange.

The publishing companies can make a survey of the market and find out the viability of venturing into local production of these text books. I fervently hope that in the near future we will not need to buy imported books for our children. Some of the books especially those printed in India are meant only for the Indian students and as such are not always suitable for the students of Bangladesh. The publishing companies, with some changes and editing, can bring out text books to suit the needs of the students in Bangladesh. Haspia Bashirullah, Asst. Professor, Teachers' Training College, Chittagong

Age limit for BCS examination

Sir, The age limit to attend the Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS) examination was limited

to twenty-seven years. It has recently been increased to thirty years fulfilling a demand of the desirers. Of course, Bangladesh civil administration can put forward arguments to justify such age limit. Instances can also be shown from other countries, specially the European ones, where this practice has been prevalent. But yet the grounds, as explained below, to abolish such age limit weighs heavier than those conventional reasonings. I believe:

People become more mature with the passage of age. They gather experiences, they learn to distinguish better between good and evil. A candidate who was allowed to attend the BCS examination at twenty-nine years of age, if fails, even marginally, would not be allowed in the same examination after two years when he is thirty-one, has not been a rational argument. After two years, he becomes more experienced and efficient, so the chance to compete should be available to him.

Again, that we have to follow whatever other countries do ad verbatim, has also not been any wise principle. I understand that the strategies, tactics to reach any goal are to be devised keeping in mind that the present state of affairs

constantly lends itself to reformations.

Bangladesh has been in an awful mess. The society, the polity, the economy need extensive reformation. With regard to the recruitment policy in the Bangladesh Civil Service, I hold that the age limit to attend the BCS examination should be abolished.

Md Abdur Rouf, Department of International Relations, DU

Colonialism of foreign aid

Sir, The politics, economics and mathematics of foreign aid is very difficult to understand and to deal with. It is a very delicate, complicated, intricate and intriguing subject.

Prior to 1972 we used to visit Karachi/Islamabad for approval of our annual budget. After independence we went to New Delhi for sometime as is said. Now we go to B A C, Paris to get our national budget approved.

A simple foreign debt arithmetic. Say in 1972 we took a loan of US Dollar 10000.00 from World Bank with an agreement to pay an

interest at the rate of US Dollar two per cent per annum and return the amount of loan after 20 years. In 1992 we are required to pay US Dollar 1400.00. In 1972 US Dollar 1000.00 cost Taka 8000.00 at the rate of Taka 8.00 per US Dollar, in 1992 US Dollar 1400.00 cost Taka 53,200.00 at the rate of Taka 38.00 per Dollar. We pay an additional amount of Taka 4,500.00 in 1992 for an amount of loan of Taka 8000.00 taken in 1972.

How far have we been successful in improving the socio-economic condition of our people during the last 20 years? Is the foreign debt at all beneficial for us?

Bangladesh's external debt stands at US Dollar 12,245.00 million in 1990. We continue to take more and more foreign loan day by day. The more we get foreign loan the more we feel elated with it. When and how would we be able to clear off the entire amount of foreign debt? Not before next 300 to 500 years? We would request our Finance Minister in particular and the public leaders in general kindly to free our country from the colonialism of foreign debt.

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