

The Justice Reports

The report of the judicial inquiry into the June 21 police attack on the National Press Club has not left much room for ambiguity. The report, made public in a summarised form through a government press handout Friday night, has pointed the finger unmistakably at the police. Justice Kazi Shafiqul Islam, while suggesting punitive action against seven police officers including two Deputy Commissioners, has also accused the Commissioner of the Dhaka Metropolitan Police Maj. (ret'd) Mirza Raquibul Huda of negligence of duty. The speed with which the inquiry was completed and the report published will undoubtedly heighten public confidence in such inquiries in the future. However, this is not to suggest that the publication of the report has fulfilled all hopes.

For one thing, a summary of the report did not quite enlighten the public as to all the events and foolhardy decisions and actions that led to the June 21 incident; and crucially, the name of an eighth person, whom the report referred to as the spearhead of the day's troubles, was left secret. The logic behind this omission is not at all understandable, and it may in fact lead to a robust bout of speculation in the press as to the identity of the man. That cannot be a healthy development, and it is to be hoped that the government would make that name public soon and prevent any speculative hunt.

The government's main responsibility now is to move swiftly and act upon the recommendations of the report. Justice Shafiqul Islam can be assured of a public nod of approval at the fairness with which he conducted the inquiry without seeming to try to exonerate anyone. It is now the government's duty to follow it up with administrative actions that would confirm as closely to the recommendations of the report as possible. This would naturally mean taking legal, as distinct from disciplinary actions against all seven police officers cited in the report. In addition, the government should now give some serious thought to the question of Commissioner Huda. The former army officer has been a controversial figure ever since he was implicated in the bloody police action on an Awami League procession headed by Sheikh Hasina in Chittagong in early 1988. Now Justice Shafiqul Islam has accused him of negligence of duty, which is by no means a minor offence given the highly sensitive nature of the task the police are required to perform. The Home Minister ought to look at Maj. Huda's position as Commissioner from a strictly professional and administrative viewpoint, and in the light of the inquiry report, without allowing his judgement to be coloured by the views held by opposition political parties. The government should be aware that its follow-up to the inquiry would have a major impact on public perception of its sincerity.

The speedy completion and publication of the report also raises points about other inquiries that have been ordered in the past, but the reports of which have never seen the light of day. If we are expected to believe that the Shafiqul Islam Commission's work is an example of this government's transparency and accountability, as we would certainly like to, then we would expect all other inquiries to follow the same pattern. For instance, the government has ordered an inquiry into the recent attack on the mosque of the Ahmaddiya community, and we hope the inquiry will follow the high standard of fairness followed by Justice Shafiqul Islam, and that its report too would be made public as soon as it is completed. In fact, we hope the next report would be published in full, and not only in summarised form. Justice Shafiqul Islam did an excellent service by going beyond the June 21 incident, and looking at the wider problem of tackling law and order problems. His suggestions that the police should be provided with better equipment and training to meet modern-day requirements is a common sense one. However, in the context of the June 21 incident, the training that we ought to talk about is a special kind of training to deal with mass agitation in the streets. Maximum attention should be paid to education and character-building of officers and learning of unarmed crowd control techniques, so that difficult situations can be overcome without resorting to violence.

A Tribute to Bhashani

The five-day observance of the 16th death anniversary of Moulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani, now on, should focus not only on the life and achievements of this legendary national figure but also on his time when several events shaped the destiny of our people. Right from the time he served as the President of Assam Provincial Muslim League in the early forties, he was indeed the most visible mentor of all progressive forces. Thus, he provided his inspiration and leadership on wide ranging issues, from agrarian reforms to the pursuit of an independent foreign policy for Pakistan, from the setting up of a common front against autocratic rule of Muslim League in erstwhile East Pakistan to his opposition to growing authoritarianism in the Awami League administration in Bangladesh. On most of these issues, Bhashani proved right in the end, although some of his utterances raised controversies from time to time. What was important, the place of this unique man among the heroes of Bangladesh was fully assured. So, on his death when he was probably closer to 100 than to 90, he received due honour and respect from his grateful people.

While a good deal of work has been done on the War of Liberation, several gaps still exist in the history of the political awakening among our people during the pre-1971 period, some 25 years when the Moulana played a vital role in our ever-changing and often unpredictable political life. True, if he was a source of inspiration to a cross-section of our progressive forces which found in him a leader of incredible mass appeal, he was a cause of despair to governments and regimes. There were paradoxes and contradictions which deserve to be studied carefully by historians for our own benefit as well as for our future generations. This is something we owe to the memory of Moulana Bhashani and, indeed, to our own people.

LAST Monday's bloody incidents at the Shalderda and Dechuapalong-II refugee camps near Cox's Bazaar came as a sharp reminder about the volatile nature of the problem being faced along the country's south-eastern frontier. It also exposed the failure of the government both on the diplomatic and internal security fronts.

From a humanitarian viewpoint, the police killing of at least seven and possibly nine, Rohingya in a single day is a disturbing development by any standard. Monday's toll surpassed that of Sept. 25 when five were shot dead at the Dhuapalong camp, sending the government's relations with international aid agencies into an unwelcome spin.

Critically important was the fact that at least two and possibly five Anars received bullet injuries in Monday's clash at Shalderda. The bullets were presumably fired by Rohingya militants, giving a new, ominous demonstration of the length to which they are prepared to go in order to challenge indigenous authority over the camps.

What the incident, especially the use of firearms by refugees against the police and Anars, has exposed, is the government's total failure in asserting its authority over a wide area within its sovereign jurisdiction. The 21 camps, housing some 265,000 refugees, are dotted around four thanas in two districts.

Top officials of the home ministry as well as administrative officers in Cox's Bazaar have claimed that violent activities of the militants are the only major obstacle on the path of smooth and speedy repatriation.

They feel that if the militants were not intimidating those refugees willing to return, then the vast majority of the camp-dwellers would come forward soon to volunteer for repatriation.

Given the fact that Monday's incident at Shalderda was triggered by the public "execution" by the militants of a woman refugee willing to return, the claim of the officials does not seem an unjustified one.

However, that also means the local administrative machinery is simply being overpowered by the militants, and ordinary refugees are being held hostage in camps run and fed by the government!

The identity of the militants, particularly of the Rohingya Solidarity Organisation (RSO) and the Arakan Rohingya Islamic Front (ARIF), and their local political and international backers, are well known to the authorities, both in Dhaka and in Cox's Bazaar.

It is also no secret that a number of aid agencies from Muslim-majority states are actively engaged in funding and helping RSO and ARIF. Young activists of the Jamaat-e-Islami's student wing are often reported to work closely with the anti-repatriation militants.

The camp administrations do not seem to have the capability, or the authority, to prevent these local activists and their foreign backers from gaining access to the camps. The police and para-military Bangladesh Rifles also seem incapable of without instructions to isolate the militants or drive them out of the camps.

It looks easy from Dhaka, but it is not that simple, said a top home ministry official, referring to suggestions that the trouble-makers should be hounded out of the camps and put behind bars.

That 'not simple' can be translated to mean 'we cannot do it, even though it is our territory'. In other words, the

ROHINGYA REFUGEE CRISIS

Stuck between Government Indecision and Militant Violence

by Sabir Mustafa

Monday's clash marked a new high point in refugee agitation and violence, and in the absence of any firm government stance against such tactics, police are often left with little choice but to open fire indiscriminately to defend themselves. The killings of refugees do not go down well in the world at large. And the government needs that world at large to stand by it.

RSO and ARIF have backers whose influence over the elected government of this country is considerable.

The official also discounted searches inside the camps to recover firearms, saying that would cause even bigger trouble.

This inability can also however mean that, after so many months of inertia, the government has allowed the Rohingya militants to grow in strength to such an extent that law enforcement in the camps has now become a high risk affair.

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The killings of refugees, most of whom may not have been doing anything more than demonstrating for this or that demand, do not go down well in the world at large. And the government needs that world at large to stand by it, not only to finance the relief operation, but also to provide crucial backing on the diplomatic front.

Last September's killings, which came just three days after the first batch of 47 Rohingyas were repatriated, forced the latent friction between the government and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to the surface.

The tension reached a high point in early October, and top

officials of the foreign and home ministries had asked, informally and verbally, UNHCR to replace Darious Bayandor, the agency's Dhaka mission chief.

Bangladesh officials felt Bayandor was behaving "undiplomatically" and overstepping his mandate as a UN servant.

The UNHCR office in Dhaka however felt the mission chief had a duty to speak up for the safety and welfare of the refugees, and make sure that no one was sent back against his will.

The UNHCR was not involved in the negotiations leading to the Dhaka-Yangon accord of Apr. 28 last, which provided for voluntary repatriation of refugees, without UN supervision.

A compromise seems to have been worked out following Foreign Secretary Reaz Rahman's attendance of the UNHCR Executive Committee meeting in Geneva Oct. 5-9. Officers of the agency are now taken to the transit camp at Rangkhali to ascertain the voluntary nature of the repatriation process, while Bayandor is keeping a low profile, possibly waiting to be replaced at an opportune moment.

However, the government, in its 10 meetings so far with Myanmar officials, appear to have made no headway in one area which could speed-up repatriation.

Ordinary refugees are often quoted by newspapers as saying that they are not sure about situation inside Myanmar, and

therefore were apprehensive about going back without some sort of international presence and guarantee.

Even the militants, whose ultimate aim may well be to detach the province of Rakhaine from the rest of Myanmar, say they would join the repatriation process if it was supervised by the UNHCR, and if the agency were given a 10-year monitoring right of the situation inside the province.

Yangon has not shown any remote interest to entertain these demands, and Dhaka has not shown the remotest inclination to try and bring the Myanmar junta around.

We may assume that the demands placed by the Rohingyas are all designed to reduce Yangon's authority over Rakhaine, by the withdrawal of army camps and presence of UNHCR monitors. This, presumably, may pave the way for secession, and that is something the Myanmar government, like any other government, would not accept.

So where does that leave the Bangladesh government? The government seems to be caught in a trap of its own indecision and lack of vision about where the country's national interest lies in the crisis.

A former foreign secretary said that the question before the government is rather a simple one: Do we want to back the RSO and ARIF in their armed struggle for a separate Arakan state?

The answer would depend on where the government per-

ceived our national interest to lie. If the answer is yes, then military assistance to the militants, with all the risks of war it entailed, should be provided. At the very least, Dhaka could be expected to mobilise international opinion in favour of the militants' demands as preconditions for repatriation.

But if the answer is no, as seems to be the majority view among the country's opinion formers and public in general, then the law of the land should be applied to the camps as elsewhere. That would mean a severe police crackdown and arrests of militants. Since government officials themselves say that only intimidation is preventing the vast majority of refugees from volunteering, then that obstacle should be removed without any further fuss.

The government, however, seems to be doing neither, and as a result, the situation appears to be slipping right through its fingers.

On the diplomatic front, the government is facing nothing short of a debacle. Under the terms of the April accord, Bangladesh is expected to make a list of all bonafide Myanmar refugees living in the camps and hand the list over to Yangon immigration officials, who would then re-check and confirm the names for repatriation.

Until this week however, Myanmar has confirmed only 14,000 names out of a total of 120,000 supplied by Bangladesh. Dhaka has already finalised another list of 30,400 names, bringing the total of Rohingyas positively identified as Myanmar refugees to 154,000.

The fact remains that nearly seven months after the accord was signed, only 216 refugees have gone back, and Myanmar has shown willingness to take back 14,000 out of 265,000.

That means Myanmar does not obviously feel under any compulsion to speed-up the process. Or, reading it the other way round, Bangladesh has failed to put enough pressure on Yangon to act in the spirit of the accord. Either way, it represents a major failure on the part of the foreign ministry.

World's Poor to Hit 1.3 Billion by 2000

CHILDREN squatting on the mud floors of shanties lined along railway tracks. Farmers coaxing land that is increasingly turning barren, to yield even a meagre harvest. The now-familiar skin-and-bones figures of Somalia's refugee camps, stark against the arid landscape.

These are but a few images of the one billion people worldwide who live in absolute poverty.

It is a tragedy that may no longer be ignored. "Unfortunately, even as recognition of the tragedy has grown, so have the numbers of the poor," says Idriss Jazairy, president of the United Nations International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD).

Mr Jazairy estimates the world's poor to number 1.3 billion by year 2000. Almost all of the additional numbers of the poor will be rural women, the IFAD chief told 90 leaders from the 106 member-states of the global Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), which recently held its 10th Summit meeting in Jakarta.

NAM has a definite role to play not only in preventing wars but in fighting poverty and illiteracy, Mr Jazairy stressed. He called on NAM

nations to implement the objectives of a declaration made in an earlier summit this year on the economic advancement of women held in Geneva.

Called the Geneva Declaration, the document defines the main issues that need to be dealt with in order to enhance the productivity of rural women.

"It is rural women who carry the prime responsibility for household food security and welfare," said Mr Jazairy. "Women farmers produce the bulk of food in Africa and account for between one-third and one-half of food production in Asia and Latin America. They also often bear the responsibility for food processing and for trade in food products."

In spite of this women receive inadequate attention from development agencies, from agricultural research and extension services and from credit and financial institutions," he said. "It is evident, that unless the productivity of rural women who actually produce much of the food of the developing world is increased, there can be little hope of ending hunger."

The Geneva summit on women's economic advancement pushed for an approach

A Special Correspondent writes from Jakarta

Almost all of the additional numbers of the poor will be rural women

which discards the stereotyped treatment of women as welfare recipients, passive bystanders and helpless victims of poverty.

Instead, the women are projected as prime movers within the development process, as vital agents of change and as strategic actors in the search for innovative approaches to food security.

The IFAD-supported women's summit, attended by 64 first ladies and high level delegations as well as representatives of rural women, called for political commitment at the highest level to eradicate poverty among women.

In response, the UN Economic and Social Council has adopted a resolution calling on all states and agencies of the UN system to take urgent measures within their respective mandates to implement the Geneva Declaration.

At the NAM Summit in Jakarta, rural poverty and undernutrition in Islamic countries also topped the agenda of

talks between Mr Jazairy and President H E Akhbar Hashemi Rafsanjani of Iran.

Briefing President Rafsanjani on IFAD's efforts to help the Islamic world's rural poor, Mr Jazairy said that since the beginning of its operations in 1978, IFAD has supported 129 agricultural development projects worth US\$7,047 million in 31 Islamic countries in Asia, Africa and Europe.

About half of the 250 million beneficiaries of IFAD projects are poor Muslims, Mr

Jazairy added. He expressed IFAD's appreciation of the pledged contribution of US\$4 million by the Iranian government for the third replenishment of IFAD's resources, and hoped for Iran's continued support.

Among those being assisted by IFAD is the South Khorasan rangeland rehabilitation and refugee income-generating activities project affecting 42,500 families, including 35,000 Afghan refugee families. The project likewise includes environment-rehabilitation activities like afforestation, rangeland rehabilitation and sand dune stabilisation.

Among the major beneficiaries are farmers who are taught soil conservation, water

harvesting and irrigated cropping; poor rural women who train in income-earning activities like carpet design and are extended credit facilities; and herders who are compensated for the loss of their grazing areas by training in animal health improvement and alternative feeding.

Under preparation, said Mr Jazairy, is a proposal for an agricultural extension and women's development project in the northern provinces east of Azerbaijan and Gilan. The project, which aims to improve the production and incomes of over 161,000 farming families, will soon be submitted to IFAD's executive board for approval.

—Depthnews Asia

OPINION

Power and Development

Hardly there can be two opinions about A Z M Shamsul Alam's plea (D S 25.10.92) for not curtailing the "power, authority and grandeur of the centuries-old Institution of District Magistrate" which is aptly called 'pivot of administration'. Though his study of the problem is quite fascinating and thought-provoking, yet some of his observations sound a bit controversial, and may, perhaps, be a good subject for debate on BTv. For instance, he observed that the Deputy Commissioners and police officers can work harder because they "wield power and authority" which, in his words, "act like invigorating tonics." In my views, the so-called 'tonics' do not lie in the power or authority but in the traditional and spontaneous respect such officers, that is, DCs or SPs, command from masses whom they rule as well as serve. Such respect or regard is shown only to those officers who are unquestionably honest, dedicated, hard-working, well-educated, with sufficient cultural background. Besides, there is the fundamental question of good salary. It would be interesting to recall that only a few decades ago the starting salary of an ICS officer, if he was a British national, was Rupees 2,500/- per month while in the case of an Indian ICS the salary was fixed above Rupees 1,000/-. Such amounts may not be impressive today but if compared with the salary of a peon or MLSS at that time, which was fixed at Rupees 7/- only, then one can understand where from the so-called 'tonic' came. So, Mr Alam's tonic theory based on power and authority is not the whole truth, and therefore could hardly be the reason for finding 'pleasure in work', indeed, a difficult job these days!

Why the politicians should feel uncomfortable with the Deputy Commissioners just because they wield power? Did not the erstwhile ICS

Secretaries, not to speak of DMs, underwent rehearsal for twentyone times before entering the chambers of Sher-e-Bangla A K Fazlul Huq, H S Suhrawardy and many others of the similar breed? Unlike today, the statesmen or even the politicians as well as the civil servants were equally brilliant in the past and were adequately conversant with their specific responsibilities and, above all, learnt well the norms of mutual respect and behaviour. Again, it is funny to think that the 'generalist, educated in humanities, don't technically understand problems of the community well', or that 'a graduate in livestock may be more suitable as Deputy Commissioner than a Master's degree-holder in political science'. It is not only oversimplification of a serious issue but also contrary to facts. The brilliance of the past 'generalists' like N M Khan, Akhter Hamid Khan and Aziz Ahmed made history in this part of the sub-continent and it would take centuries to forget them. So, I would suggest that before embarking on a sweeping change in the administrative set-up it would be wise to learn from the experiences of the remaining successor states, notably India and Pakistan, who have not yet altogether jettisoned all the good things of the past, as we have done.

It is not understandable why some body should 'resent' if a Deputy Commissioner had his degree in political science or history or geography or English? I know of a successful DM, retired long ago, who had his Master's degree in Persian. In fact, the most required material to make a good administrator is 'human material' which develops mainly through reading of subjects called 'humanities'! Incidentally, the need for building up a superior administrative cadre is urgent. Also urgent is the need for a superior cadre in education

service. Officers for both the cadres should be selected through tough examinations, and not like the present one for recruitment to innumerable BCS cadres! As mentioned by Mr Alam, we did not see any clash between a District Magistrate and a civil surgeon or an SP. Today there are many development departments headed by civil servants, but who will lead them, or, better say, coordinate their activities? There is no harm if you call the heads of development departments as "District Magistrate", yet there will be the need for a "Principal District Magistrate", to borrow a new coinage.

Past experiences have shown that such senior officers should come from among the most knowledgeable and elite group of civil servants, preferably having degrees in 'humanities', which teaches the meaning and purpose of life and also the art of handling human beings. Of course, such senior officers of the administrative cadre would certainly be guided by the established laws of the land and not by their personal whims or the whims of a politician minister who might be prone to politicise the administration as we have been witnessing in this country. The fall of a government is a natural phenomenon but the fall of administration brings anarchy. Can development be ensured without ensuring law and order? Good administration is pre-requisite for good law and order situation. The country is beset with a number of 'number one' problems! The grim reality is that whoever is in the chair, lack of dedication, honesty, integrity and ability — be he a politician or a civil servant — is not likely to pilot the anchorless nation to a suitable goal. What about stepping into the twentyfirst century?

Abdul Kader, Purana Pallan, Dhaka

To the Editor...

Telephone

Sir, My telephone (254394) has been out of order for about a couple of months. I complained it to the authority but got no response as yet.

As I tried again and again luckily some one picked the phone and told me to contact the switch room. When I tried the switch room they again told me to inform the complaint centre. Now this is for more than a month. I maintain my phone for business purpose and now I am losing much of the contacts.

I would like to draw attention of the high officials of T&T Board to the problem. Why should it take so long a period to restore a telephone?

Haji Md Akbar 71/1 Khaja Dewan, Dhaka

Road in bad shape

Sir, The narrow road by the southern side of the East Rajabazar Masjid proceeding towards West Rajabazar is an important thoroughfare for the people of this locality. But the condition of this road beggars description. The fact that the road is in a bad state of repairs for a long time, it has developed many ditches here and there and when there is a little rain, water and mud accumulate making the condition worst.

There is no lid on the man-hole at many places on the road which makes it inconvenient for the passers-by especially at night. The width of the road is so narrow at places

that two rickshaws can hardly pass at a time. During the rains, the movement of traffic becomes so difficult as is simply in describable. Persons who travel by this road are very hard hit. There is perhaps none to look after its wretched condition.

The municipal authorities realise taxes from the subjects at a very unreasonable rate, but do not seem to take any care to remove the inconvenience suffered by the public.

I would like to draw attention of the relevant authorities through the columns of your esteemed newspaper so that they may conduct an inspection on an emergency basis and take urgent and effective steps ensuring early mitigation of sufferings of the people of this locality.

Kazi Imranul Haque East Raja Bazar, Tejgaon, Dhaka.

Good investment

Sir, Most of the sector corporation undertakings continue to fail during the past few years to pay back the principal bank borrowings along with interest as per terms of lending. Even some of the enterprises could not sell their goods and services against total compensation paid to employees as wages, salaries, benefits etc. To maintain peace in labour front banks continue to give loans under various heads under Government directives and Government continues to

preach politics of production. Unfortunately, in a protected market, ordinary sugar is selling today at Tk 32 a kilogram against Tk 8 a kilogram in the world market. There is no fun in producing industrial goods at a much higher price compared to world market's and continuing support through bank finance perpetually. Under the above backdrop, it is quiet normal to reduce rates of interest on bank deposits, savings certificates etc. Thus poor old retired personnel of nonpenensionable jobs or so are hard hit as they are failing to survive on such returns. Let us ponder over it.

Sadiq Alee Maghbazar, Dhaka

Cartoon timing on BTv

Sir, It is highly appreciated that BTv is showing cartoon films almost everyday. Children find it very much interesting and keenly wait right from the moment the transmission is on. But unfortunately, most of the days they become tired of waiting and watching programmes like Samachar, Shikhsaha-Dikhsaha, Debate, Sports, Ma-o-Shishu etc. which continue upto 6-30 pm even beyond.

However, my suggestion is that the cartoon programme can easily be accommodated just after the religious recitations.

Zafar Shaheen Elephant Road, Dhaka