

Police Excess

The police broke into the Awami League central office at Bangabandhu Avenue and rushing up the second floor beat up a hundred workers and leaders of the party on Wednesday evening. That they entered the AL headquarters chasing agitating crowds does not temporise their crime. Police cannot enter any private premise without prior and proper authorisation. Trespassing is a crime for all. This should be more so in case of police. Ordinary crime and the crime committed in uniform do, of course, differ in seriousness. As breaking of law done by men in uniform severely undermines the system charged with enforcing law and keeping the peace, such acts are doubly injurious to life, individual citizens, governance and society. Police have indulged in a grave crime and there must not be any repetition of this as long there is a government controlling them.

How could it happen? Was there no government in Bangladesh? Who authorised the trespass? Police get rough on agitating mobs when, as police maintain, they attack police or disrupt normalcy on the streets. What were those inside the AL headquarters doing? They couldn't be disturbing the peace from inside that building or endangering the lives of a fully armed and chasing police force? And what did the police do in that building? They simply ran amok. Police have no business to do so anywhere anytime under even worst of provocations.

The most bandied about word for some time has been democracy. Lately constitution has also been occurring in all high-minded talk. Responsibility and accountability are attitudes and practices basic to both. Who will take the responsibility of the Wednesday raid? It must be traced to one person. And he must be accountable to someone? Who? Theoretically, police top-brass. Or may further, up, the Home Ministry, or the Minister himself. Unless this exercise is done and transparently, the popular perception will be that the government did it. Will that suit the government? They won't be helped by that at all. Sadly enough, the state and the things that move it will be inordinately more harmed.

Sign of Discontent

A token strike and a hunger strike, which too is symbolic in nature, observed on consecutive days by businessmen and garments manufacturers and exporters give a message worth noticing. The message, meant for the country's politicians, is that the continuing political impasse is hurting — and hurting deep enough. Many will try to seek a motive in the staging of such protests. But the occasional hartals which are a natural consequence of the political stalemate create all kinds of serious dislocation and disruption of business transaction and production at industrial units. Particularly export-led industries such as garment factories suffer most of all from breach of contracts due to such disruptions.

Politics ought to be definitely concerned with the country's economic performance and people's well-being. The concern has to be even greater for an industry that earns foreign exchange almost next to none and has the potential to grow further. Because there are others waiting in the wings to wrest the initiative from us and capture the markets we can consider our own monopoly, we can hardly afford the kind of directionless politics resulted from myopic and obdurate leaderships.

The way things are going out of control, politicians may not be able to bring the affairs of a broad socio-economic life in order once people from other areas start expressing their discontent and dissent. A democratic culture demands maximum tolerance as well as flexibility, both of which seem to be in short supply among our leaders — let alone the common people. People after all are likely to follow their leaders. Here the people have shown tremendous restraint. Now they are growing restive. Pay heed to their feelings before their patience is unduly tested to the limit.

Rising Mastanism

Crimes are getting more intrepid gradually. The perpetrators are either too desperate or too strong to take into account the law enforcing agency. As their reach and influence grow, it is the common people who pass their days with constant mortification. How else one can explain the storming of a school room by a group of mastans when a teacher was imparting lessons in the class?

A few bus dacoities — two of them in the city proper — in broad daylight and several cases of snatching money from bank counters or gates confirm the idea that the city is lorded more by 'mastans' than any other agency, including the government. If all these are crimes of conventional type, the shooting of students and teacher in the class is definitely not.

It shows the respect and aura long attached to the institutions — particularly that of education — are fast eroding. People no longer treat them with the veneration they used to do. The mastans are also no exception. The fact is educational institutions are also becoming — albeit in a limited sense — a breeding ground of crime. When this happens, a deferential treatment for those institutions is out of question. We are reaping what we have sown. Society will have to pay a heavy price for turning a blind eye to the rise of mastanism.

Congress May Split Again

In a situation where every party mistrusts the other, a working arrangement will be hard to achieve and still harder to sustain. True, the scenario was no better a few months before the 1989 elections where Congress under Rajiv Gandhi was defeated.

ONE formulation that is taking rounds in New Delhi is that Prime Minister Narasimha Rao will continue to be the prime minister after the parliamentary election. The reason adumbrated is that he has money to purchase support and he will not mind aligning himself with even the Bharatiya Janata Party to stay in power.

If at all anything, it indicates Narasimha Rao's chameleon-like character, which combines all the qualities to remain as prime minister. It does not take into account the feelings within Congress, which he heads. The party will split the moment he attempts such a combination after the polls. However Congress may have deviated from its original path, it has not yet come to a stage where even the BJP will be acceptable to it.

In fact, there is a serious threat to Rao's leadership before Congress goes to the polls. That every second member in the parliamentary party is unhappy against him goes without saying. His or her main grievance is that Rao has not performed well. And he does not pull the crowds, a yardstick with which a leader's popularity is measured in India. Former Andhra Pradesh chief minister Bhaskar Reddy is still not tired of telling that wherever Rao went to campaign in the last state assembly poll, that constituency was lost.

Muslim MPs particularly make the point that Rao's leadership will cost them and the party the vote of their community, nearly 14 per cent. Civil Aviation minister Ghulam Nabi Azad may not have attacked the PM directly but he made it amply clear whom he was holding responsible when he said the communists occupied chairs in the central cabinet.

The change of Jaffer Sharif from the Railways, however temporary, will alienate Muslims further because he has some base in the community. In a small way, he has found some openings for them through catering and other departments. Now they feel insecure.

But Rao's main grievance against Sharif is the canvassing he was doing before he went to the US for heart surgery that Congress did not mind finding another leader if that could bring all secular forces on one platform. He

even argued for a coalition between Congress and the Janata Dal before the Lok Sabha elections.

This has also been the thesis of another leader from Karnataka, Rama Krishna Hegde, the state's former chief minister. But his reasons were different. He did not find anyone better than Rao, while knowing well how strong was the hatred of some Janata leaders towards Congress. Congress leaders hate persons like VP Singh or Ram Vilas Paswan, the Janata Dal's secretary general, equally. Even this hurdle can be got over but it is difficult to change the common perception that Rao has tried to change the nation's agenda from cleanliness to corruption and from independent economic policy to the Washington-dictated line.

All this is building into a challenge against Rao's leadership. The winter session of parliament may be crucial. Congressmen need a person who can bell the cat. The drum-beaters that the PM

know that once the PM is removed from leadership, it will wind up its activities and rejoin the main Congress. This prospect pleases Congressmen, who believe that, together, they can win a majority.

Some Congressmen have been toying with the idea of rapprochement between their party and the communists. Much water has flown down the Hoogly since they parted company. The break came when Indira Gandhi imposed the emergency. (The CPI continued its support to Congress during the emergency but distanced itself afterwards).

The communists as such do not favour any understanding with Congress. When I asked recently a top Marxist leader about the possibility of an alliance between Congress and the communists, he said: "There has to be some background, some preparation. It just cannot happen all of a sudden." I did not find in him any animus against Congress, which is recognisable in

other parties. However, the communists are keen on creating a third force against Congress. But they find the Janata Dal inept in handling the situation. With great difficulty the CPI(M) brought round Mulayam Singh Yadav of Samajwadi Janata Dal, although he has not forgotten VP Singh's effort to remove him as UP chief minister. The Janata Dal has spoilt the whole thing by announcing Mulayam Singh Yadav's inclination to join the JD at a press conference.

There is hardly a state which does not have on Congress group pitted against another. They will rather harm the party than sink the differences. Many of them have already a secret understanding with the Tewari group, which is making inroads in a quiet way.

Even if the tall claims by the group is not accepted, they are bound to cut into traditional Congress vote to the extent of 10 to 15 per cent. The party MPs would naturally want to avoid that. To Rao's discomfort, the Tewari group has made it

stand why Nigeria needs another three years." Last year he gave a lecture before a distinguished audience in Abuja which pulled no punches about military rule. He said it had no place in a democratic country and called it "rule by the big stick." The government was angered and recordings of his speech were confiscated.

The Secretary-General, who is 62, is a sharp, wiry, dignified figure. He comes from Obosi in eastern Nigeria, to which he returns each year to keep in touch with his local community and carry out his chiefly duties. He has devoted the greater part of his diplomatic career to the Commonwealth, having joined the Secretariat in 1966. His term as Secretary-General runs until 1999. After that, under new rules, holders of the office will serve a maximum two terms

of four years. Anyaoku has a high ambition before he steps down. He wants to see the Commonwealth give to the wider world some of its long experience of tackling problems by consensus — that is, by collective opinion.

The Commonwealth does not vote. It decides by general feeling so that dissenters are won round, maybe with some reluctance, to the majority view unless they feel too strongly for this to happen. In that case there is no decision. Anyaoku says: "Intra-state conflict causes massive suffering. The international community needs consensus on these matters. The Commonwealth has a good track record in this approach. Commonwealth countries have lines into so many regional organisations. I want governments to promote consensus in other organisations. If everyone adopted consensus it would make matters easier in the UN and elsewhere."

Since Anyaoku took over, the good offices role of the Secretariat has grown. He has personally been involved in Bangladesh, Kenya and Lesotho, and the Political Division, led by the able Australian Max Gaylard and his innovative Ghanaian assistant Moses Anafu, has played a positive role in such places as Papua New Guinea, St Kitts-Nevis and Sierra Leone. Lesotho (which is an enclave within South Africa) was pulled back from politi-

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

has recently inducted into the council of ministers may not be of much help because they have no base and no credibility.

They may shut down the opponents or minimise dangers through manoeuvres but these tactics would be of no avail when misperformance and corruption of the Rao government are going to be the two main issues which the opposition parties will be articulating before the electorate. Rao also has to fight dissidence in the party.

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CHOGM — Action or Just Words?

Anyaoku Tells Leaders: It's up to You

Derek Ingram writes from London



Chief Emeka Anyaoku: "Nuclear testing is a clear banana skin" for the 21st Century.

Faced with this situation, Anyaoku has always been vulnerable to the charge that he has not spoken out loudly enough against the regime in the Nigerian capital, Abuja. Usually the criticism has come from people who have not read exactly what he has been saying. His actual words have often been quite tough.

Anyaoku is quite clear about the way he has to proceed. "Being a Nigerian," he says, "is not a relevant factor

The Commonwealth Secretary-General finds himself in the invidious position of promoting better democracy among member countries while his own is under military rule and breaking all the principles he is dedicated to uphold. Chief Emeka Anyaoku tells Gemini News Service: "I am the custodian of the Harare Declaration." (Auckland summit, 10-13 November).

in my approach. I see myself as the custodian of the Harare Declaration and the holder of the office charged with responsibility for helping a member state to implement it.

"As a Nigerian I have no difficulty because the Declaration was fully subscribed to by the then Nigerian president.

"I am a Nigerian who cares deeply for his country and cannot accept that a country so richly endowed with material and human resources should not be performing better than it is."

The Nigerian government of General Sani Abacha, which is under international fire for its political jarrings and other abuses of human rights, has now announced a programme of return to civilian rule by 1998.

Anyaoku is far from satisfied. He says: "I can't under-

stand why Nigeria needs another three years."

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For God's Sake, Stop this Madness

by MG Quibria

THE political deadlock that exists today in the country has invoked the concern of all those who wish the people of Bangladesh well. It is heartening to see that serious efforts are being made by intellectuals and citizens to resolve the deadlock. Unless satisfactorily resolved, the stalemate has the pernicious potential of setting in motion a process that may nullify the political and economic gains so far achieved by the country.

Since its independence, Bangladesh has made notable progress in selected economic arenas. Belying the predictions of those who pessimistically labelled the country as the basket case or the test case of development, Bangladesh has achieved progress in poverty alleviation, population control, food production, mobilisation of domestic savings and export of garments and unskilled labour. These achievements, though relatively modest, have earned the appreciation of the friends of Bangladesh. However, the country still has a long way to go if it has to meet its economic destiny as a dynamic and vibrant nation.

The challenges ahead are enormous and would require the disciplined and concerted efforts of the people. These tasks include acceleration of economic growth, elimination of poverty, rapid human resource development, radical transformation of the industrial sector, massive improvements in domestic resource mobilisation, and rapid increase in exports. However, all these tasks will require a greater degree of political stability and social harmony than exists today.

A few years ago when the people of Bangladesh established democracy, it earned the admiration of the whole world. The establishment of democracy in Bangladesh contradicted in some ways the conventional wisdom among the pundits that a country needs to reach a sufficient level of income and human resource development before it can aspire to any measure of real democracy. No doubt, the country will have to further enlarge its democratic foundations to provide for greater economic, social and political freedoms for its people. There is scope for considerable improvement in the areas of governance, including provision of the rule of law, and enforcement of contracts and property rights. Once these improvements have been made, the country has the potential of becoming a

magnet for attracting massive foreign as well as domestic investments, given its comparative advantage in labour-intensive exportable commodities. The economy is now poised for greater economic achievements, if only it can establish a stable political environment. Hence, the resolution of the present stalemate is a must.

In terms of political and economic development, the country is at a crossroads now. Future historians may look at 1995 as the defining time when good sense prevailed among the political leaders who decided to compromise on their differences. They went on to build a stable democracy and a conducive economic environment. Thereafter, a thousand flowers of entrepreneurial genius bloomed and Bangladesh became one of the most dynamic economies of Asia. Or alternatively, future historians may look at 1995 as the beginning of the end. The political leaders bickered among themselves, chaos was followed by greater chaos, and eventually all the gains the country made in the political arena were squandered. The economy failed to pick up. The foreign investors never arrived. The country lost its economic opportunity, as it failed to capture the wave of globalisation the world was going through, and became increasingly mired in the vicious circle of poverty.

The consequences of the two different paths are clear. It is hoped that greater wisdom will prevail on the country's political leadership and they will find a peaceful resolution of the present political deadlock. Any compromise by a political party may appear as a weakness to its die-hard partisan supporters who are often guided by myopia. However, it should be apparent to any enlightened leader that what is considered weakness by die-hard supporters is often viewed as magnanimity by the vast majority of the non-partisan general public. As experiences of various countries indicate, this magnanimity, which is the defining characteristic of a great leader reflects less of altruism and more of self-interest than is apparent at first sight, because magnanimity is often rewarded by greater electoral votes in the elections by the general public.

The writer, who presently works for an international development finance institution, is a former faculty member of the Department of Economics, University of Dhaka. The opinions expressed here are strictly his personal.

cal chaos two or three times at a critical period during the South African transition to majority rule by Secretariat diplomatic skill.

Anyaoku puts before the summit in Auckland an action plan designed to enhance the capacity of the Commonwealth and member countries individually and collectively to make a reality of the Harare Declaration.

The key question is how member countries are to be dealt with when they severely violate the Harare principles. Unless that can be agreed — and several countries sitting round the table at Auckland are already transgressors — then the Secretary-General will lack the authority to prescribe action.

As Anyaoku says, the Commonwealth has to acquire some teeth. It can become a greater force for good by promoting and sustaining the principles.

In his pre-CHOGM report to the leaders he put the ball firmly in their court. He said: "... the Commonwealth must now face the question of what it can and should do to promote greater adherence by its members to their commonly avowed fundamental political values."

It is essentially a question for Heads of Governments themselves to address and I hope they will do so at Auckland in a manner which makes for greater — not less — Commonwealth unity.

How is the good offices role to be played without becoming intrusive? Although some countries are less sensitive about sovereignty, outside intervention is still a delicate matter.

Little progress will be made in this work or in helping the poorer countries to make socio-economic progress unless there are more resources.

There's the rub. Such a commitment requires political will. Whether the leaders brought it to Auckland is, as they say, the 64,000-dollar question.

War crime

Sir, Thanks to Parveen Haque, residing in Lahore, Pakistan for her expressed feelings and reaction in respect of war crime — through your daily.

Actually, the whole nation is awaiting for the day Pakistan will seek pardon for the atrocities and repressions on the Bengalees during the Liberation War by the then rulers of Pakistan.

Mrs Benazir Bhutto is a very talented and highly-ed-

ucated lady who is now the head of the government of Pakistan. She could at least realise that her father Z A Bhutto was also responsible for the repressions on the Bengalees. Therefore, we demand to the present government of Pakistan, particularly to Mrs Bhutto to seek pardon officially for the crimes committed by her father and the then rulers.

Mohammed Sharif U Shaikh Sher-e-Bangalagar, Dhaka

Black horizon of political field

Sir, The commentary 'Making a Mockery of Our Anxiety' published in The Daily Star on November 2, 1995, convey the real picture of our mental state, our hopes and bitter disappointments. We are appalled by the lack of concern by our two leaders. It seems they are playing hide and seek at the cost of our very existence. Or, are they participating in a letter-writing con-

test?

Our two top leaders, in whose hands lies the future of our country, have become so much engrossed in their own stands that the welfare of the country and its people have been pushed into oblivion. Will they become reasonable before the situation deteriorates further and gets out of control? We can only hope and pray.

Nur Jahan East Nasirabad, Chittagong