Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali

# Home Ministry Doesn't Go Far Enough

Suspension of four constables involved in the public humiliation of a lady BNP activist during hartal on May 11 goes only part of the way to mitigate this particular offence, let alone the other excesses committed on the day. Even there the Inspector General of Police hinted at a possibility that 'more police officials might be suspended after the final report' is submitted. Putting some personnel under suspension for such a grave-offence should practically mean initiation of further proceedings against them. Therefore, even in this particular case, we have some way to go before a feeling of redemption pervades us.

But that is not where our focus is. While we certainly commend the home ministry for its swift action in the case of public humiliation of a lady we cannot help being discomfited over three other palpable offences going completely unaddressed. First and foremost, what has been left out in the cold is the threatening statement of the Officer in Charge of Motijheel thana to the effect that he had orders to shoot at pickets and journalists.

Several photo-journalists were witness to such an outrageous remark being made by the police officer. Whether he said so on his own or there were such instructions as he claimed should have been a subject matter for a no-nonsense probe to establish the truth. Moreover, it was imperative for the government to remove any public misgiving on this score by disassociating itself from the statement at the earliest opportunity. This it evidently failed to do, and as if to highlight the fringe-touching peripheral corrective action of the government we have heard nothing as yet about any comprehensive move being contemplated against all those who committed gross misconduct.

As for the onslaught on the working journalists that followed the threatening statement there is not a word that those who perpetrated it will be brought to book. Last but not the least, the verbal and physical assault on the MPs that adversely reflected on the prestige and image of the parliament has gone squarely unmitigated also. We demand affirmative action against the string of reprehensible excesses committed on that day. The home ministry's fractionated and peripheral step will not obviously do. A corrective and deterring swipe is in demand here.

#### Congress in Crisis

Solly Gandhi's reported resignation from Congress presidency in the face of rebellion from three senior members underlines, more than anything else, her inherent sense of dignity and deep-rooted commitment to the party's cause, which is a rarity in sub-continental politics. With the backing of the majority in the party, the Italian-born widow of assassinated Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi could easily have engineered expulsion of the troublesome. The Congress had even hinted that the transgressors "will have to apologise or they will have to go." But she chose not to.

Sonia Gandhi's origin has been a matter of controversy ever since she took over the Congress reins. With the mid-term polls just round the corner, the debate over the issue has only heated up. The BJP was expected to harp on the issue to whip up the electorate's 'nationalistic sentiments'. Against this backdrop, came the rebellion within the Congress by people like Sharad Power, Purno Sangma and Tariq Anwar. This raises the spectre of cleavage in the Congress.

In the event Sonia Gandhi pulls out from Congress leadership the party is likely to be pushed on to the precipice of a newer and graver crisis. Congress will not only suffer from a leadership crisis but could also invite the wrath of the electorate sympathetic to Sonia, which in turn may lead to a major setback in the forthcoming midterm elections.

We may not have seen the last of it as yet. The Congress Working Committee has reportedly rejected Sonia's letter of resignation. The fact of the matter is the Congress cannot do without her at this point of time. After her husband's assassination, contrary to popular expectations, Sonia Gandhi stayed out of politics for three and a half years. When she eventually relented on this and became the Congress president things certainly started looking up for that hitherto demoralised party. And now with an eye to the general elections in September-October Congress can hardly afford a leadership crisis. Sonia can hold the party together and lead it through the polls successfully.

#### Quick Disposal of Files

Instances abound where both governance and public service deliveries have suffered heavily due to the bureaucratic rigmarole bedeviling the work at the national secretariat.

The Cabinet meeting on Monday discussed some recommendations of the Public Administration Reforms Committee (PARC) and its observations on the sufferings of the public on account of redtape and slow (at times no) movement of files. On issues concerning public interest decision-making is delayed in the ministries. Though the rules do not allow any file to remain unattended for more than 72 hours, but that is what happens most of the time.

The Prime Minister has instructed the ministries to adhere to the rules and advised the ministers to hold regular meetings with the secretaries and other officials to put an end to the sufferings of the people on this count. Another recommendation of PARC regarding harassment of visitors to the Secretariat has also been accepted by the Cabinet and remedial measures have got underway.

The Cabinet has taken the right decisions under the leadership of the Prime Minister. Similar decisions had also been taken in the past but most of them hit a snag at the implementation stage. We can only hope this will not happen again.

## Thoughts on Third Front

A third front is wishful thinking. But the political climate has changed. The communists, as their approach suggests, are keen on roping in all such elements as are outside the orbit of the BJP and the Congress. This is a faulty approach. This formation will neither evoke enthusiasm nor new thinking. The voters will remain distant.

rhinking. But the political climate has changed. The voters have moved away from the concept, which was born out of disillusionment with both major parties — the Congress and the BJP. The VP Singh phenomenon was essentially anti-Congress. The Janata Dal, his creation,

was essentially anti-Congress. The Janata Dal, his creation, was able to get people's support because it took up the issue of corruption. The Bofors gun kickbacks were synonymous with dishonesty in higher places. That paid dividends.

In a way, it was a repeat of

what the Gandhian Jayaprakash Narayan had done in the seventies. He had reminded people of the clean standards which were followed before the advent of Indira Gandhi. His own example — and the appeal — harked back to values which VP Singh emulated to some extent.

When the Janata Dal again came to power in 1996 and 1997 under Deve Gowda and Inder Kumar Gujral, respectively, it was not because of the numbers it had. By then, in fact, the Janata Dal had been reduced to some 26 members in the Lok Sabha as compared to the 90 during the VP Singh period, but then all non-BJP parties were imbued by the same motive: to stall communal forces that the

BJP represented.

The Congress, which supported the Janata Dal governments, had much greater strength than the Janata Dal's. Yet standing by the secular forces was the overriding consideration. The Congress was not willing to join the coalition and the other parties were opposed to its leadership of the

(Last of four articles)

RIMES and anti-social ac-

as a whole, although some

particular individuals become

the direct victims and sufferers

of such acts. Similarly crimes

are also borne by the society

itself although the criminals

are not evenly distributed all

over the society and may come

sometimes from other areas. If

the whole society is alert and

conscious, the criminals can

easily be identified and

incidents of crime can be

prevented and resisted. Social

mobilisation by way of

organising the members of the

society to make them

conscious, alert and active

against crimes and criminals

can therefore be an extremely

important way in which terror-

ism and lawlessness can be pre-

vented and detected. What is

needed is for the community it-

self to take initiatives to organ-

ise and mobilise the people for

the purpose. Following are

some ideas on how social mo-

bilisation can work in crime

prevention and crime detection:

should organise "Law and Order

Committees" in each village or

locality in the rural areas and

in each locality or ward in the

municipalities or urban areas.

Respected elders as well as ener-

getic youths including local

teachers, religious leaders,

labour leaders, people of vari-

ous vocations and women

should be included in the com-

mittee. Their main objective

should be to prevent crime

through motivation and coun-

selling and to detect crimes and

up its plan of operation and

strategies for its programme of

action. They will hold meetings

and discussions with the local

inhabitants on prevention, re-

sistance and detection of crimes

and terrorist activities and

send information to the police

about the criminals and sus-

pects. They should also gather

information about unlicensed

guns or explosives kept by any-

(2) The Committee will draw

criminals through vigil.

(1) The local community

tivities affect the society

That the BJP represents communalism or that the Congress reflects authoritarianism goes without saying. But if the third front is to tilt tothen Inder Gujral, making its own political calculations. Still wards caste bigotism or rank the arrangement reflected an corruption, what purpose will it serve even when formed? Can it ideological harmony as long as give a better government? That What is there now to fire the is the crux of the problem. The people's imagination for a third mere pulling down of a governfront? They have learnt from ment is not a lofty idea. What it their experience that the rulers replaces is important. And it of such a formation are no dif-

the prospect they face — either the BJP or the Congress. The BJP has not abandoned its agenda of Hindutva. It has been done "for the time being." BJP chief Kushabau Thackrey has said that they will continue to follow the national agenda which the BJP led coalition adopted when it assumed power. Nowhere has he announced, for example, that the BJP will not build the temple where the Babri Masjid once stood. The party will not press the demand at present. That is all. It has the

#### reflects opportunism. party will not press the demandation at present. That is all. It has

#### Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

BETWEEN THE LINES

People have also been disillusioned by the running battle among the third front constituents. They quarrelled openly, although their decisions at the cabinet were reportedly unanimous. There was crisis all the while. This could not have endeared them to the people. It is surprising that the communists and some goodygoody persons have the impression that the front has only to be formed and the voters will come running to it. Apart from other factors, it cannot happen so long as there are the same old faces which the public has come

to despise. People are not happy over option to pick up the thread from where it has left off whenever the party so desires.

Not many people will disagree with the statement that Atal Behari Vajpayee is a cut above the rest in the BJP in temperament or attitude. He is opposed to fundamentalists. L K Advani and Murli Manohar Joshi, the hard-liners, are not even a patch on him. But then Vaipayee says that the RSS is 'His soul." How can its philosophy of the Hindu Rashtra accommodate his liberal outlook? He is only a mukut (mask), as an RSS ideologue has said. If it is so, why should people vote for him? He will have

to publicly sever his relations with the RSS for the sake of

credibility. On the other side are the Congressmen, who fall head over heels at the mere mention of the dynasty name, however remote. Sycophancy is the trait of the party. Sonia Gandhi is the icon they worship. The party meant something under Jawaharlal Nehru and Lal Bahadur Sahstri. It followed a moral code and stood firmly against communalism and corruption, now it has been reduced to a combination of selfseekers, jostling each other for the luxury of office. They are the same, old lot sullied by scams and scandals.

In fact, the Congress looks like a party which wants to gain power by hook or by crook. It wants to be everything to everybody for the sake of votes. Not long ago, the party passed a resolution to placate the Hindutva supporters. It said: "Hinduism is the most effective guarantor of secularism." What should the minorities, which are trying to return to the Congress, infer from it? Where

When idealism lessens, many compromises are made. Even ethical considerations are pushed into the background. And leaders without qualities begin to stalk the land. India is going through such a phase. It does not, however, mean that one set of undesirable people should replace another set of undesirables. The beginning for

a change can be small but it cannot be dubious. For quick results, the future cannot be jeopardised. The third front cannot be a carbon copy of the BJP or the Congress. Anything built without values will come crashing down, as it has happened.

That an alternative both to

That an alternative both to the Congress and the BJP is needed is generally accepted. But a third front cannot be on the old lines. In the past, the non-BJP and the non-Congress elements were brought on the same platform, however wanting in their credentials. A similar effort will be of no avail. A new liberal democratic front should be built de novo under the leadership of West Bengal chief minister Jyoti Basu, who is acceptable to the country. Many like-minded people from other parties will join the front. NGOs, not looking for money or blessings from abroad, will become part of it. There are thousands of young men and women, who are working voluntarily at the grassroots in the fields of health, education, environment and human rights. They can all be strung together. They, in turn, will bring in their experiences and contacts to make the front more meaningful.

The communists, as their approach suggests, are keen on roping in all such elements as are outside the orbit of the BJP and the Congress. This is a faulty approach. This formation will neither evoke enthusiasm nor new thinking. The voters will remain distant. If still the front is formed, it will be an affront to the intelligence of the nation.

#### How to Stop Lawlessness and Terrorism

### Social Mobilisation against Crimes

by Mohammad Siddiquer Rahman

A moratorium should be declared on hartals to stop economic loss and suffering of the people. Issues for which hartals are called should be debated in the parliament. Political protests should be confined to public meetings, processions, demonstrations etc so that the rights of individuals are not hampered.

body in the area and inform police about such persons or their

ferent from the leaders in the

Congress and the BJP. What do

the voters look forward to:

caste, corruption or compro-

mise? The communists have

dropped their objection even to

corruption. Is it the right objec-

Laloo Prasad Yadav, who has

looted the state as if it is his

personal fieldom, is now sought

much in the third front. So is

Mulayam Singh Yadav, who

has propagated caste in UP as

Laloo Yadav has done in Bihar.

True, without them, the num-

bers will not tally. But the mes-

sage it sends out is that the

combination matters more

front had failed time and again

is that mere anti-Congress or

anti-BJP sentiments is not the

glue which can hold the dis-

parate elements together. There

has to be something positive.

The constituents of the third

front made a hash of the prin-

ciples which it said it would up-

The reason why the third

than the commitment.

Former Bihar chief minister

tive to pursue?

activities.

(3) The Committee should work in cooperation and collaboration with the Ansars, VDP and the Rural Police. The vigil of these organisations should be bolstered with the active support and participation of the Law and Order Committees. They may be given further training on the prevention and detection of crime.

(4) The local schools, colleges, madrasas and mosques, temples, churches and other religious institutions should be called upon to hold meetings and lectures for motivating the students and others to abstain from criminal and anti-social activities and to give information to the Law and Order Committee about crimes and

(5) The Zila Parishad, Upazila Parishad, Union Parishad and Gram Parishad will have to provide back up support and incentives to the Law and Order Committees within their respective areas. Similarly municipalities and ward committees will have to give back up support to the Law and Order Committees within their respective areas in carrying out

their activities.

(6) The Nirbahi Officer, the Assistant Commissioner of Police, Assistant Adjutant of Ansar, the OC of the thana will have to provide help and assistance to and fully support the activities of the Law and Order Committees within their areas and keep a close touch with them. The Nirbahi Officer should coordinate the activities

the poor performance of our

team - most recently at South

Asian football. Their return

I am not even a football fan,

home was without any whistle.

because tragedy almost struck

me at the same stadium years

ago when I came to watch the

most fancied Abahani-Mo-

hammedan clash. Well, it

turned out to be a real clash be-

tween thousands of supporters

and those of us who were there

just to enjoy the match bunking

college classes were promising

to God never again to bunk

classes for football. I was trying

with my friends to get out, but

first shielded ourselves against

flying stones and bottles, and

then in a final run out through

the narrow stairs almost fell in

violence had spread outside the

stadium and onto the streets

with innocent people getting the

wrath. Covering our face to

ward off tear gas, we rushed to

safety with the great fear of

eventually getting hit by hood-

lums or landing up in jail, at

the efficiency of our police, for

vandalism. Coward I maybe,

but that was the last of it for me

2 at Mirpur was set for football.

I thanked those who took the

right decision as it took vio-

lence away from the main busi-

ness districts of Motijheel and

Dilkusha as well as the seat of

the government — the secre-

tariat. That was possibly a

dream and sports sources now

say the 'sobers' have been edged

out by the 'roughs' with the

When the National Stadium-

and I said adieu to football.

Stepping out, we found the

a stampede.

of all departments and local government organisations within the upazila. The Deputy Commissioner of the district and the superintendent of police should encourage the Law and Order Committees in carrying out their activities, and extend to them all possible support and cooperation. The NGOs may also be involved in the activities of the Law and Order

(7) The women members of the Law and Order Committee may make a separate plan of action and work in cooperation and collaboration with the woman members of the Union Parishad in the respective area under the guidance of the Law and Order Committee.

Committees.

If the society and the community can be effectively mobilised, that would be one of the most effective way to stop crimes and antisocial activities.

One of the most important things needed to stop political terrorism and armed violence is the political commitment on the part of the leaders of the political parties. The leaders of the major political parties, whether in the government or in the opposition, should overcome their narrow party interests, show large-heartedness and a spirit of statesmanship and patriotism to save the country from destruction caused by armed fights and terrorism between the major political parties. They must give up politics of confrontation and conflict and come to some compromise and understanding leaving behind their ego and

rigid attitude. The chairpersons of the ma-

jor political parties should come forward to make public statements, condemning political terrorism and armed violence that are only leading the country to destruction. They should express sincere resolve to clear their own parties and front organisations of all armed terrorists and criminals and not to allow any act of terrorism and fight under the shadow of their own party.

The chairpersons of major political parties should make a public declaration and direct all their party workers, armed cadres, front organisations and armed fighters to stop all kinds of terrorism, armed violence and fighting and surrender all their arms and explosives to the chairpersons of the respective parties within a certain date, to be agreed upon by the parties mutually. Annesty should be declared up to a specific date for surrendering such arms, ammunition and explosives. Such declaration should preferably be made jointly by the major political parties. Those who will surrender arms and explosives should be given social and economic rehabilitation under a project to be undertaken by the government in consultation with other parties.

Those who will not surrender their arms within the fixed date should be prosecuted and punished under the law and the respective parties will declare them as "undesirable persons" and will not give them any help or support.

The MPs should be directed by the chairpersons of the re-

spective parties to dissociate themselves from all acts of political terrorism and not to give any support or shelter to mastans and armed hooligans. For the sake of justice and proper administration of law and order and to ensure neutrality of the police and the magistrates, the MPs and the political leaders should be directed by the chairpersons of the major parties not to interfere in administration and not to pressurise the officers. For these purposes officers of the district administration including the magistracy and the police should not be transferred before the expiry of their tenure of office to be fixed for each category of officer (2 to 3 years). The main pressure brought upon them by politicians is to threat them with transfer. It should be made a rule that transfer of an officer should be made only when there are specific allegations of corruption or negligence of duty and indiscipline, established on preliminary enquiry.

All the above measures can be taken only when the political parties enter into a dialogue and reach an understanding and agreement to cooperate with each other, work out the steps to stop lawlessness and political terrorism. But such dialogues and understanding cannot be reached unless some irritants between the major political parties are removed. Some of the causes that have distanced the party in power and the opposition may be overcome by an attitude of compromise and generosity on the part of both the parties by

taking initiative in the following direction:

(a) Opposition party should be allocated sufficient time to speak in the National Assembly sessions at least in proportion to the number of their seats. This should apply not only on general debates but also for raising points of order and replying to them. If necessary the rules of procedures of the Assembly may be amended for the purpose. Opposition must be allowed to talk freely in the parliament to make democracy work.

(b) The government may refer the politically motivated and fake cases, as claimed by the opposition party, to judicial enquiry to find out if there is any prima facie case. The best thing would be to find a compromise by mutual understanding between the government and the opposition.

(c) The local administration should be depoliticised and there should be no political interference in the functioning of the district and the thana administration, including the courts of law.

(d) The role of the MPs should be clearly defined and confined to legislative work and matters of national interest. The MPs should not be involved in executive functions of the government or the activities of the local government at various levels.

(e) A moratorium should be declared on hartals to stop economic loss and suffering of the people. Issues for which hartals are called should be debated in the parliament. Political protests should be confined to public meetings, processions, demonstrations etc so that the rights of individuals are not

The ultimate goal of all these steps is to end confrontational politics and fight between the political parties in order to bring in sanity and the rule of law.

The author is a former Cabinet Secretary and Ambassador.

#### Bangabandhu Stadium

# The Making and Unmaking of Cricket Extravaganza

It is basically lack of planning, and far-sightedness. We need to give up politics, personal interests

and greed in giving priorities to what we as a nation really want. Indeed there are pressure groups,

but national priorities must have given us the will not to give in to their pressure.

D ANGLADESH'S cricket fans are betting, participating in numerous quiz competitions and have rescheduled their regular plans to watch the World Cup cricket on television. It's great fun for me when there's speed, but as not one among those very keen I often wonder how days could be spent watching Test matches. But during the mini-World Cup in Dhaka I found some veterans also getting tired because of long hours and was rather a bit elated that it was not me alone who had that particular feeling.

The mini-World Cup at the Bangabandhu National Stadium gave me a boost about the game and I had frequented the stadium, sometimes to my enthusiasm, biting my nails in an exciting match. But, is that booster short-lived because if the authorities decide to move the game out from the stadium, which I can behold from my office window, I might not be going anywhere as I am not a sports reporter.

I tried to be a cricket player. but accidents followed me on the field pushing me away to the galleries at the most. In any case I am a witness to the making of a perfect international standard cricket ground and also its unmaking by dozens of workers. Watching that a thought crossed my mind cricket was the Englishman's game at one time and it was the elite during the rule of the British Raj who played the game along with polo -- basically, those who had money to

Guess, somewhere, days after seeking fresh aid from international donors, somebody had the money to throw away to enable the return of football whose popularity waned with

cricket venue very likely moving to the suburbs, the stadium

at Mirpur.

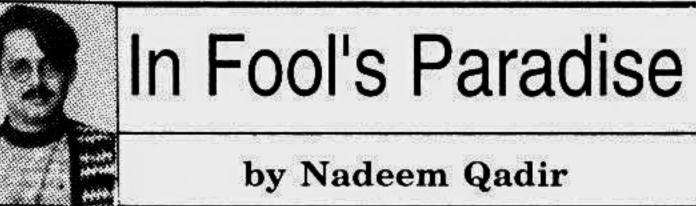
The stadium was put on the international cricket map and it was this very game that brought a sudden joy to us after Bangladesh's win in the ICC Trophy, which paved the way for its debut in the World Cup this year.

Top businessmen and economists had welcomed the mini-cup tournament. "This will not only help the cricket sector in the country, but also bring positive developments on the economic side," economist

properly get the filed ready again for Asia Cup as many feel after football boots hit the ground, it would not be easy to

The idea of an exclusive cricket stadium in central Dhaka failed to get off because of land ownership hassles.

One angry cricket fan wrote in the Daily Janakantha (07/05/99) that the stadium was being used like a "community centre" and except for swimming, circus and cattle market, the bowl had been tested for all other purposes. He further complained that the stadium was



Abu Ahmed had said then.

With all those 'positives' and the Asia Cup possibly occurring in October this year (although its eventual fate is still undecided) one wonders why the cruelty with pitches — indeed if one had seen its making, the unmaking was really painful. Days of work amid century's worst floods and expense of millions of taka despite constraints, give it a total facelift — new floodlights, new grass and

two-storied air-conditioned press gallery. Cricket experts have expressed fear about being able to

new chairs, and of course a new

given back to the Bangladesh Football Federation and now the booters would naturally make the hell of the pitches. Finally the writer says why this 'play' with the "people's money" and if the authorities concerned cannot decide the stadium's permanent status, then they should also open it to circus and cattle market.

Syed Ashraful Huq in a press

comment said, "This is the final nail to the coffin. By handing over the Bangabandhu National Stadium to the footballers those concerned have only ensured the death of cricket." I hope not. My colleague Kuldip

Lal wrote in his report dated May 11, 1999: "A victory over Scotland on May 24 - or even an upset over one of the fancied teams - will light up the Dhaka streets and add to the growing influence of cricket. World stars like Wasim Akram, Neil Fairbrother, Arjuna Ranatunga and Sanath Jayasuriya have been lured to Bangladesh to play in the lucrative local leagues.. Dhaka is now an established cricket centre after hosting the nine Test-playing nations in a 'mini World Cup' last year. Bangladesh may soon join them as the 10th. Does one need to ask more

about our cricket's view abroad?

As a nation we are emo-

tional, with euphoria gripping us from time to time. Think of the last Democracy Day and all that was linked to December 6. 1990. I have learned the hard way that emotion is a destructive element of human character and for a nation it is even more so. If we have to gulp down the reasoning that football has been our favourite game and will remain so, then the question is why did we spent mil lions for the stadium to suit cricket needs? We can question the football authorities when will they be able to bring one glory for the country and why we have failed so miserably always, even losing at the regional South Asian tourna-

Tomorrow if we fancy baseball, which I think is a great game, will we transform the stadium for that spending few more millions? When we talk of austerity, seek aids from donors and impose taxes to raise internal resources, how can we be so spendthrift or is it misspending ...?

It is basically lack of planning, and far-sightedness. We need to give up politics, personal interests and greed in giving priorities to what we as a nation really want. Indeed there are pressure groups, but national priorities must have given us the will not to give in to their pressure.

If finally the Mirpur stadium is chosen for cricket, let it be so forever. Anyone would wonder in a country like Bangladesh a stadium lies idle because sportsmen very unsportingly do not like the venue! In choosing Bangabandhu National Stadium for cricket the decision-makers did the right thing but reversing it to football again, I think it is risky. I am not saying football is a lesser game, rather it is even greater, but our supporters like to fight it out themselves instead of leaving it to the players they support.

Who will protect us from those rowdy 'football fans' when they clash again? Those who made the change possible should ensure peaceful matches and should be responsible if there is loss of property or life during matches. They have to manage the crowd or else take their booters away from the city centre to its suburbs.

We should start thinking of stadiums and other major public establishments/ installations outside the capital to help lessen the population pressure on the city groaning under space constraint, polluted air and water.

# sector in the countring positive deve