

A Crucial Reform Agenda

POLICE reform is not quite on the back burner. It is understood that the Public Administration Reform Commission (PARC) has begun from the assumption that police reform is imperative for an improvement of the law and order situation, establishment of rule of law and fostering of justice and fairplay in the society.

After thorough deliberations on MP Rahmat Ali's report and former civil servant Khaled Shams' concept paper as PARC members, the commission has reached a conclusion that political will is *sine qua non* for an improvement in the law and order situation based on adequate and effective police reform. We are entirely in agreement with this prescription. So long as a government uses the police force as an instrument of political aggrandisement police reform is bound to be a non-starter at best and a perverted process at worst. When the BNP was in power it made political use of the police force. Now, the Awami League is said to be only 'clearing up the mess' and depoliticising what had been left to them in a politicised state. The police officers' antecedents are gone into with a great attention to detail including queries about their home districts and political leanings, etc. Those who pass the screening test, so to speak, are regarded as good enough for favours. All this is about those who are in the force already while the recruitment of new personnel is often susceptible to partisan considerations. The term 'political will' has become a cliché but what is even worse, it is most narrowly comprehended these days. Political will does not mean determination only nor even gritting the teeth against an imaginary foe. What it really means is an honest desire to allow the public institutions to function. We underline the word 'public' in relation to the police force because of the fact that it is a public property maintained by the tax payers' money not any ruling party's personal fiefdom.

Next to an apolitical recruitment policy based on merit, character, motivation and educated reflexes, we need proper and rotative training of police personnel and rewards for good work and punishment for lapses. Equally important would be separation of the preventive wing from the investigation wing at the thana level; manning of the investigation wing with persons knowledgeable in law; introduction of history-sheet, crime-map and computerised maintenance of records; and adoption of modern forensic technology. Police reform will be incomplete if the law enforcers' relationship with the magistracy is not radically improved.

Peace in Kosovo

THE last piece of the Kosovo puzzle seems to have fallen in place with Russia agreeing to a peace-keeping role under the "tactical control" of NATO generals in the war-ravaged southern Serbian province. Although Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic's formal assent to a Western-backed peace package on June 3 and formal beginning of Serb force withdrawal a week later had signalled an end to the conflict in the Balkans, constitution of the peace-keeping force, KFOR, remained a thorn in the flesh. Russia's demand for a separate zone for its troops in Kosovo was greeted with vehement opposition from the United States. To make matters worse, a small contingent of Russian army pre-empted the Pristina airport. On the whole, the scenario looked increasingly murky. Thankfully, three days of intense negotiations led to the Helsinki Accord. It means that after months of war, peace in Kosovo is finally in the offing. For nearly one million Kosovars of Albanian descent, who took refuge in neighbouring Albania and Macedonia to escape Serb atrocities, it means they can safely go back home.

Contrary to widespread speculations, the 78-day NATO operations have apparently managed to achieve their goals — "the Serb forces out, the international force with NATO at its core, and the refugees coming home," as summed up by US President Bill Clinton. However, a tougher task is ahead: removing the rubble of war, rebuilding the war-torn province and rehabilitating the repatriates. It will be no less than a war. Retreating Serb forces, clearing out of the Kosovo heartland to meet a Friday night deadline, will certainly leave behind a trail of destruction for home-bound refugees. Ethnic Albanians will have to start from the scratches, with their homes destroyed and assets looted. On top of it will be the trauma of losing their close ones. In the coming days, the Kosovars will need all the help they can get. Indeed, the peace-keepers will be there to ensure that there be no more Serb atrocities; however, they will need a lot more than that: a political settlement of the deep-seated ethnic conflict.

Hostage to Hooligans

ALONG with the railway network, the northern region of Bangladesh has had a developed road transport network since the pre-liberation days. While in recent times the railway suffered from lack of modernisation compounded by myopic policies the road transport sector has improved very rapidly into a thriving business. This prosperity has given birth to all kinds of illegal and unsocial activities among a large section of people who call themselves transport workers. More than forty-five million people of sixteen districts in northern Bangladesh are virtually taken hostage by the indiscipline and arrogant transport workers. Illegal toll collection, almost regular road blockades and frequent strikes and hartals have made life miserable for the people of these districts. Business community is the worst sufferer. They are made to pay toll even on industrial raw materials which in turn increases the prices of finished products. Loaded trucks with perishable commodities are prime targets as each one of them has to pay a toll of two thousand five hundred leading to an increase in the prices of seasonal fruits. A bus owner informs the Prothom Alo that he had to pay more than taka four hundred thousand at three spots of Gabtali bus terminal for introducing a new bus service.

Besides, robbery and dacoity on passenger buses have increased. The law and order committee met under the leadership of the divisional commissioner in which DCs and SPs discussed the chaotic conditions in the road transport sector and opined that unless the people's representatives cooperate the administration cannot proceed further in this matter. This is a dangerous observation. District administration must take action against the law breakers and proceed against them according to the law of the land. It is the sacred duty and responsibility of public representatives to provide safety and security to life and property of the people they represent. The ministry concerned must back up the local administration to control the hooliganism in the greater interest of the people of North Bengal.

WITH India's monthlong airstrikes along an artillery duel across the line of control (LOC) at the dizzy heights of the Western Himalaya Kashmir has once again become an international flash point. There could have been an element of surrealism in the prognosis of CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) director who in 1993 identified Kashmir as the most dangerous place on earth with its prospect for the future use of WMD (weapon of mass destruction) including the nuclear weapon, but the danger is now real. Soon after New Delhi and Islamabad conducted their nuclear tests in May last year, Pakistan foreign minister Gohar Ayub Khan made a chilling statement confirming the assessment of American spy master. He said that Kashmir remained an 'open wound' and could lead to a nuclear war in the subcontinent. Indeed there are few places on earth more combustible than Kashmir today as evident from the tensions it has generated even along the international borders between its two contenders, India and Pakistan.

As a full-scale war has been raging in the wilderness of Kashmir's Kargil region the rivals are in the meantime busy to prove their innocence. In doing so while India accuses Pakistan of backing the intruders who had earlier crossed the LOC and occupied some of the vantage points on high mountains overlooking India's strategic communication network below, Pakistan denies any involvement and insists on her ignorance even of the intruders' identity. The current clash of the titans have already all but started their third war over Kashmir blurring however the genesis of the crisis.

According to an estimate the Kargil war is costing India \$4 million a day. She has been already incurring another \$14 million a day to keep the default state under occupation with at least half a million security forces. These are apart from the political and moral cost which are still more exorbitant. The

military control of the state continues to tarnish India's international image. Many exasperated Indians look askance at the forced union between New Delhi and Srinagar is cost effective and worth the efforts to keep them together.

When India was partitioned in 1947 the founding fathers of independent India including Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru caught up with the changed realities and conformed to the inevitable process of history. Implicit in their acceptance of the partition had also been a triumph for a two nation theory according to which the Muslim majority areas went to Pakistan while Hindu majority provinces remained with India. Although 565 princely states of India had the option of joining any of the two states, practically the rules and principles of the partition applied also to their cases. Accordingly, India ensured the inclusion of Hyderabad, Junagadh and Manavadar in Indian union although their rulers wanted either to be independent or the part of Pakistan.

It was an irony that a visionary of Nehru's stature pursued a policy of double standard when it came to the question of Kashmir. The united India in its present shape was a Muslim legacy while the British gave India almost on the platter the vast territories in the North East which never historically belonged to India. The vital parts of Muslim majority provinces of Bengal and Punjab were sliced off by the British. India soiled its hands by accepting the offer of a controversial accession by Kashmir's unpopular Maharaja Hari Singh whose subjects were overwhelmingly Muslims. With this the die was cast for a tense, unstable and insecure South Asia and a golden opportunity slipped out of the hands to make the re-

gion's billion plus people harmonious and prosperous.

Pressed by a military confrontation with Pakistan it was New Delhi which in 1948 took the Kashmir dispute to the United Nations. It then promised to abide by the Security Council's resolution which called for a plebiscite to allow the Kashmiris to decide between joining India or Pakistan. India broke that promise although she had all the chances of winning it. Both the cooperation of Kashmir's most popular leader Sheikh Abdullah and a pro-Indian disposition of his



PERSPECTIVES

by Brig (Rtd) M Abdul Hafiz

party, the National Conference were assets for India. Yet India continued to defy the UN's call for allowing the people of Kashmir to exercise their right of self determination. She presumably did not want the plebiscite to cast its shadow over the state's accession to India in 1947 which she considered final and irrevocable. But as Abdullah later flicked with the idea of more autonomy the central government responded with curtailment of a special status it initially granted to Kashmir and put Abdullah, India's best friend in prison.

Except for two brief spells of freedom Abdullah remained in India's prison for 22 years until February 1975 when the Sheikh again became chief minister after signing an agreement with Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. Mrs Gandhi was able to defend the Lion of Kashmir who now allied with the ruling Indian

Kashmir in 1965 failed mainly because of the Kashmiris' non-cooperation with the Pakistani commandos who infiltrated into or were dropped in the valley before Indo-Pakistan war during that year.

Sheikh Abdullah was a great nationalist and in politics worked in close liaison with Nehru, Maulana Azad and Indian National Congress. He seldom met Mr Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan, and was least influenced by his ideas. Abdullah instilled a strong sense of nationalism among the Kashmiris and made them aware of their separate identity. The Kashmiris' identity was however based on place, kinship and culture as much as on religion. Considering all these factors they were constitutionally given a special status under article 370 of Indian Constitution. As an ambitious Abdullah's wings were clipped and

even before that India started taking the Kashmiris for granted. Kashmir was gradually stripped of the special status granted to her earlier. Not only that in 1984 Farooq Abdullah who also clamoured for greater autonomy was dismissed as chief minister by central government. There followed a period of obtuse and thuggish rule by New Delhi in Kashmir, an apparently rigged election in 1987 that gave a chastised and more obedient Farooq Abdullah another spell in power and the outbreak of violence two years later. New Delhi and Srinagar drew further away from each other and their linkage became tenuous.

Beside political disenchantment the Kashmiri alienation from India is mirrored in history, economy and psychology of the state. The problems have never been much about communal issues. The latest phase of Kashmiri discontent followed significant social changes in Kashmir. Meaningful economic growth didn't accompany the land reforms and expanded education facilities achieved during the rule of Sheikh Abdullah and Bakshi Gulam Muhammad. The roots of the popular uprising in 1989 lay in the bad governance, neglect of the state and Delhi's ruthless manipulation of Kashmir politics. But India confronted the insurgency with allegation of external subversion, brute force and unlawful machinations.

India's oft-repeated claim that Kashmir is an integral part of Indian Union increasingly rings hollow because of her classic failure in integrating the state — particularly after the uprising of 1989 which was essentially propelled by socio-economic reasons. From the start of the anti-militancy drive India's attitude had been to coerce the Kashmiris into

submission and to find out a scapegoat for the turmoil. A faulty approach to the crisis did not allow the authority to get a rational assessment of the situation. As a result the vengeance, brutality and violence become the instruments of government policy for its own people. Indian government is today mired in an endless war with its people in Kashmir instead of addressing their genuine social economic need and fulfilling their rightful aspiration.

After how India treated the Kashmiris during their militancy in last one decade her moral standing in the state is nil. At the peak of its deployment in the state Kashmir was garrisoned by 7m troops including the paramilitary. According to the official source 24000 Kashmiris were killed in the decade-long insurgency but the militants put it at more than 60,000. Now there might have been a lull in the insurgency within the valley, but the war for what the militants call

'azadi' is far from over. To the Indians' embarrassment the issue of Kashmir is far from being settled one. While India shuns outside interference in the issue or an offer of mediation and assert it to be a bilateral issue between the two neighbouring countries the whole world knows for a half century that Kashmir is a disputed territory and the dispute over it can turn explosive as it has become now.

India's Kashmir policy represents a chronicle of opportunities deliberately or inadvertently missed by her. Today if there is a grand settlement on Kashmir by shedding prejudice and paranoia and even by trading off territory India will be its biggest beneficiary — given her present predicaments in the state. But only a mandated government in India, which is lacking at the moment, and a bold leadership can take that momentous decision.

(Pakistan's missed opportunities in Kashmir will be published in this column next Monday.)

Cellular Lobby Prevails: Our Own Crony Capitalism

Praful Bidwai writes from New Delhi

WHENEVER an Indian politician says, "I am a disciplined soldier of my party," we know he or she is in trouble. Mr Jagmohan has been forced to join this group — not for incompetence or misconduct, but because he became inconvenient to certain business interests.

Caretaker PM Vajpayee committed a gross impropriety by moving him out of Telecommunications. The transfer has huge financial implications. The impropriety goes far beyond breaching democratic conventions. It highlights our 'crony capitalism'.

Mr Jagmohan's tenure in Telecom was rung out by the powerful lobby of private telephone operators, who own the public a huge Rs. 3,719 crore. They have repeatedly defaulted, but have close access to the Vajpayee household through 'adopted' son-in-law Ranjan Bhattacharya.

The defaulters, including Birla-ATT, Reliance, Tatas and Essar, are among the most influential of India's top corporations.

Mr Jagmohan was not inflexible or unreasonable, but proper and legally correct, to demand that the operators pay the fees under the contract they signed. When they pleaded they couldn't pay the entire sum, Mr Jagmohan asked them to pay a fifth of the dues — a lenient

concession.

The leniency surprised many familiar with Mr Jagmohan's terrible role as Governor of Jammu and Kashmir, and in Turkman Gate in Sanjay Gandhi's Emergency action. The leniency was real.

Mr Jagmohan was also right to cash the defaulters' bank guarantees for Rs. 1,000 crore. He had legal backing from Attorney General Soli Sorabjee, who is by no means ill-disposed towards corporations.

The private operators had bid for the licences with their eyes open, on profit-centred calculations. Any business involves a certain risk. Neo-classical economics tries to legitimise profit as reward for risk-taking.

Our telecom operators espouse that very ideology — until it comes to coughing up dues. After that, these free-market tigers turn into poor mice, who need protection. They have relentlessly lobbied the PMO for extensions of the payment deadlines — with which Mr Vajpayee obliged them. They succeeded in getting a draft New Telecom Policy-1999, also

heavily tilted in their favour.

This is the third time such a policy is being drafted in six years. This speaks of the mess created by the National Telecom Policy of 1994. NTP99 is worse. It is geared to guarantee business to private companies through 'revenue sharing' — a crude device to snatch customers away from the government-run DoT. This is another travesty of 'free-market' economics.

If the 1994 NTP with its promise of Rs. 23,000 crore private investment and a 'telephone on demand', was a fraud, NTP99 is a huge scam organised and executed by India's craftiest corporations.

NTP99 will mean sky-high tariffs, greater urban-rural disparities, slower telecom growth, and strangling of DoT. Private operators will concentrate on high-revenue customers, and neglect the 'cherry-picking'. DoT will lose revenue until it cannot add new lines (last year, it added 3,000 more lines than the private sector). Mr Jagmohan questioned this and was removed.

Big Business has been trying through the 1990s to write policies not just in telecom, but in every infrastructure area. The BJP-led government gave it a direct and unique role by appointing Working Groups on petroleum, power, highways, aviation, etc. Their conveners were to the last man, industrialists with a stake in the concerned sector.

This involved a blatant conflict of interest. Even Mr Ronald Reagan would not have been as brazen as Mr Vajpayee in this regard.

The Working Groups excluded consumers, trade unions, economists, sometimes technical experts. Their casual deliberations were not based on background papers, serious projections, considerations of equity or regional balance.

They were designed to bring the infrastructure under the rule of 'India Inc' and shower massive subsidies upon Big Business — unrelated to efficiency, experience or competence.

The model that guided the Groups was Enron — probably the world's craziest and costli-

est power project. This will sell gold-plated electricity at Rs. 4.75 per unit to the Maharashtra state electricity board — four times costlier than the power MSED generates. Whether MSED buys the power or not, it must pay Enron Rs. 80 crore a month.

The Enron contract is skewed, unequal and legally dubious. It was darkly opaque, involving no competitive bidding. Yet, the Centre gave it sovereign guarantees. Enron will inflict crippling losses on MSED, once our most profitable board.

It is this kind of public money siphoning that business houses are trying to effect in different infrastructure areas — an unprecedented bonanza of Rs. 500,000 crore. This festival of shady deals will make basic services unaffordable for the vast majority. This is retrograde from every point of view.

By facilitating this loot of public money, the Vajpayee government has inflicted grievous damage upon the economy in just 15 months. It is privatising not just the infrastructure, but policy-making itself.

Its functionaries are candid: they want official policy to be "corporate-driven". On June 3, special commerce secretary N.N. Khanna told industry that India's stance at the forthcoming crucial Seattle Round of WTO negotiations "will be corporate-driven and genuinely reflect the felt needs of Indian industry".

Industry associations like CII, Assocham and FICCI have never been more vocal — not just in demanding concessions, but in dictating policy. Babu raj is undesirable, of course. A company raj might be worse.

In a democracy, babus can theoretically be brought to book. In practice, they sometimes are. Corporations are never answerable to the public. They are accountable only to the nabobs who run them as fiefs, although they own a fraction of their equity.

Business is a highly parochial interest-group. Our organised sector only employs 27 million of our 500 million-strong workforce. Company raj means exclusion of the vast majority, and the rule of the super-privileged.

It is this that Messrs Vajpayee Pramod Mahajan, Ranjan Bhattacharya and Jaswant Singh are busy promoting. Such corporate nababi is incompatible with democracy. It must be abolished.

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.

Save Osmani Uddyan

Sir, Nowadays one of the most discussed issues is environmental issue. Every person related to this issue are continuously extending their support to improve the environment and protect the world from possible disaster. And in this quest for saving the earth, the most important role is played by trees. Trees play a vital role in maintaining the ecological equilibrium of this planet. But it is a matter of great regret that our PM has taken a self-destructive decision to build an international conference centre by felling the trees of Osmani Uddyan.

I fervently request her to refrain from this self-destructive act for the sake of the people of this country, their successor and as well as the whole world.

Anwar Faruq Shameem
Eastern Bank Limited,
Moulvibazar.

Crisis of the decade!

Sir, According to a front page news report, upto April 13, 1999, there had been no electricity for nearly seven hundred and ninety-eight hours for which the city's one hundred and thirty-eight water pumps remained inoperative. Therefore, the sufferings of the general people in the month of Chaitra, the hottest days in Bangladesh hardly needs any explanation. Probably this has been the worst type of crisis faced by us in decades that too in the era of the wonders of modern science.

Where are the intellectuals now?

Sir, Pictures were printed on all the news papers of the country on 12th June 1999, showing the police harassing a female BNP activist and an opposition MP (BNP). I looked at those pictures and thought for a moment whether it was 1971 or 1999. How could an incident like this happen, and that too under a democratically elected government?

It is more astonishing and painful to see that our intellectuals neither protested against the incident nor brought out any procession denouncing/condemning the acts.

Iqbal Ahmed
Dhaka-1000.

Why not Sunday

Sir, We think it is high time the people changed the weekly holiday from Friday to Sunday. And please don't compare things with Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan, Nigeria and Turkey (D-8 countries).

Friday being the day of weekly holiday many among us

who otherwise would have attended the Jummah prayers, now get the excuse to miss it due to preoccupation like picnic, late wake-up call, family reunion or for purpose of travelling within the country, without going into details, we should consider the loss of our country is facing in all respects, only because the weekly holiday is on Friday.

During the days when Friday was a working day, I used to say my Jummah prayers in the secretariat masjid and I always found the place filled to capacity.

I think two-hour break is more than enough for the musallihis to say their prayer and have lunch. They may also work extra hours for the love of the country. All the countries mentioned above follow the same practice on Friday. Let us take this matter to our parliament and discuss. I hope we won't need to repeat the arguments why we want Friday as a working day and not as a holiday.

Jamshed Taher,
Lalmatia, Dhaka.

The fallen

Sir, It was sheer pleasure to read the newspapers of June 1, '99, where the headlines screamed the news of Bangladesh cricket team's victory over Pakistan. The victory was very well earned and the game was brilliantly played by our young cricketers.

However, this brilliant episode was marred by a sad news that Gordon Greenidge has been sacked. A bad performance obviously deserves to be punished and mitigating factors may only lessen the punishment. But what we want to know is what was the reason of humiliating a person who once was regarded as the one who immensely contributed to Bangladesh's meteoric rise in the field of cricket? Why none of the players who are the direct beneficiaries of Gordon's talent acknowledged this fact when

they talked to the journalists? Doesn't this smack of ingratitude? Was Greenidge awarded the citizenship of this country — a rare move of being longedness with a foreigner, only as a whim or as a recognition of his contribution?

A Citizen
Dhaka.

Exit the G

Sir, What a comedy of error! The great cricketer and coach who was the instrumental in the historic victory of Bangladesh against Pakistan was nowhere at the victory party-away in England or at home. Nobody, including the Captain Aminul Islam, did ever mention his name. How can the nation be so ungrateful? What a pity that Greenidge was fired the very morning of the red-letter day of the nation? What was his fault? Was it because he expressed his dissatisfaction about the way the board was managing the cricket in the country? We, of course, do not approve Greenidge's views on our getting the Test status. But was he wrong when he talked about the lack of cricketing structure and facilities in the country? Absolutely not. When the team was in England, the cricket lovers in the country were terribly grieved to see the pitches in Dhaka Stadium which were prepared at a huge cost, were being ruined for turning those into a football ground. Who was responsible for allowing that to happen?

Greenidge had been pressing the management for adopting proper planning in the coaching department. He also wanted to work with the young cricketers on a long-term basis. Was that wrong approach? But he was not given the chance. Most of his offers were not utilised properly for the lack of planning and support from the management. Their main interest was only in organising international tournaments to mint money. But, who spent what money and who got what contracts and how, were never

made public. There have been serious allegations about the lack of transparency in spending money or giving contracts to those tournaments. It is also alleged that during the WC, 32 cricket board officials travelled and stayed in UK at BCB's cost. Can a poor nation like our afford that? And what about the drama they made about the World Cup team selection? The less said about the BCB, the better.

Why the officials were so much against the coach when the Captain and his players have great respect for him? Our tragedy is that cricket in our country has become a victim of politics and vested interests. Some people who have little background and knowledge in cricket, have become big shots with monetary and political interest. We must guard against these self-seekers, otherwise the day is not too far away when we might not have anything to celebrate.

Ahmed Firoz
Dhanmondi.

Green Productivity

All over the world, people are now concerned about the impact of not only the production process on environment but also products and services. Productivity is a continuous process that seeks continuous improvement of what exists. For example, we use chemical fertilizers, pesticides, etc., to increase productivity in agriculture. But these agro-chemicals cause serious pollutions. Still we cannot fully give up the use of agro-chemicals. So necessary strategies should be adopted to keep environmental pollution within a limit. 'Green productivity' (GP) is a strategy for enhancing productivity and environmental performance for overall socio-economic development. It is the application of appropriate techniques, technologies and management systems to produce environmentally compatible goods and services.

Shwadinatar Sangram

Sir, Recently I visited the sculpture, 'Shwadinatar Sangram' by Shamim Shikder established at Fuliar road in the DU campus. I'm really astounded to notice the multifarious representation in a single piece of art. The eventual liberation war in 1971 and the effusive feelings for motherland are vividly featured on the sculpture. I see Prof. Shikder's genius for art and culture prominently expressed in the statue. I expect, this sculpture will be a note of information for the coming generation while they take the country into further glory.

Arun Kumar Biswas
English Dept
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