

Dhaka, Sunday, December 3, 2000

Police Reform is the Answer

THE Amnesty International Report released on Wednesday as part of its global campaign against torture and impunity has grilled our police force in what appears to be the worst indictment on their role to date. There has been a spate in the incidence of torture, rape and death in police custody. Evidently women and children are the worst victims. Even though constitutionally and legally torture is a reprehensible offence, in Bangladesh governments have accepted it as normal police behaviour. Needles to say, in such a context, anyone can be a victim of torture under the guise of law enforcement. And, it is the innocent people who suffer most, especially the anonymous multitudes 'without connections' to any quarters that could get them off the police hooks. In the absence of safeguards the laws in effect give the police a free hand to detain and torture citizens.

As if those were not enough to tar the police image they have lately been seen to attack political demonstrators and, in a bid to cover up their misdeeds, even beat up the journalists. A section of policemen are also involved in the drug trading and smuggling of goods. In fact their interests are striking firmer roots in the underworld.

The biggest handicap to any effective deterrence against such police brutalisation is that the law enforcers themselves investigate their own offences. Little wonder that in recent times we have seen many an instance of shielding their 'own men with the cases losing potency in terms of prosecution, arraignment, trial and punishment.

The policemen blame it out on poor salary inadequate equipment and professional subservience to political diktat of the partisan variety. While nobody contests that these factors hinder effective social policing, there is something interesting about these police constraints. With our cop:citizen ratio among the most inadequate in the world, wrong-doers and wayward policemen have got a free rein to be in league with each other and carry on with their criminal activities. Moreover sparsely located as they are, with lack of an inspection mechanism to top it off, they are basically left to their own devices.

We endorse all the seven measures recommended by AI by way of creating a preventive dispensation against police torture. They are worthy of recital: clear and enforceable safeguards against abuse of administrative detention procedure: safeguards by magistrates against unlawful detention while ordering a prisoner's remand: impartial and independent inquiry into torture: and training of police personnel in torturefree methods of investigation.

These are the elements we would like to see included in the police reform package which in its entirety will remain a dream no doubt so long as a bipartisan resolve is not forged to carry forward this supremely important task.

The Dengue Scare, Again?

THIS is a devastating piece of news. We hear it I with a great trepidation. Apart from the dreadful experience of the havoc created by the scourge only a few months ago it is being sordidly out of sync with the month of Ramadan that is nearing the end of its first week. It is not long before we shall prepare ourselves for the crowning glory of the holy month which is Eid-ul-Fitr.

In what appears to be the second round of a bout in the last half of the current year, the range of affliction already looks extensive enough to give worries. As many as 800 patients were admitted to the clinics in December alone.

All this gives lie to the predictions that by November we would have been Dengue-free. Now it is the government officials who are saying that we are looking at the ominous prospect of having to live with Dengue right up to the end of January. The same government officials had been reticent during the earlier attack to assess the gravity of the situation. Despite all previous containment efforts Aedes mosquito population remains at a high-risk level. We have a long way to go before we can effectively control Dengue infection.

Does it mean we have squandered the knowledge and expertise in dealing with Dengue we had acquired from our experience with it during July to September, 2000? We know the procedures of treatment but have failed to eliminate the Aedes mosquito although we are well aware of how it breeds and where it breeds. The preventive instructions seem to have fallen flat on people who are in charge of cleansing the environment.

Let us immediately recreate the preparedness level of July-September period to fight Dengue off.

BNP's Stance towards Minorities: Sincere Approach or Gimmick?

sons of Hindu community I from Kalia Upazila in Narail district met Begum Khaleda Zia on August 1, 2000 and joined the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) expressing their solidarity with the party's "ideals and objective". Welcoming the Hindu leaders Begum Zia made "a fervent call to the country's Hindu community to support her and extend their cooperation" to the programme of her party. She 'urged the Hindu community not to be deceived by Awami League time and again.' They would rather strengthen the

BOUT 50 prominent per-

ment a befitting reply. During her meeting with some leaders of the Hindu-Boundha-Christian Okya Parishad she is reported to have told them to extend their support to her party and that she would do the needful

give the promise-breaker govern-

for their betterment. In the last few months, Begum Zia addressing public meetings in different areas of the country, called upon the Hindus to vote her party to power so that she can take care of their problems and grievances. Begum Zia said that if BNP formed the government in future, it would ensure the religious and civil rights of all citizens irrespective of religion or creed. She said that the exodus of Hindus would stop. She urged the Hindus to boldly establish their rights in their own country instead of leading a humiliating life in a foreign land. She did not

mention the name of the country. The BNP chairperson said that her party would soon organise a rally of the minority communities in Dhaka. She said that she would "highlight the problems of the minority communities and try to solve them.

by Syed Abul Maksud

Begum Zia's move is an indicator of a change in the BNP's policy towards the minorities especially the Hindus. If the initiative is aiming at creating a solid non-communal political environment then it is a positive sign. Now the Hindus will watch with care the new BNP line on minorities whether it is a sincere approach or a gimmick.

liberals Begum Zia is trying to woo Hindu voters and boost the image of her party. She is also trying to bridge the gap between BNP and the country's largest religious minority. In this initiative she may have to face opposition from the hardliners who are plenty in her party. They are pownationalist forces who would do erful, too. She is also surrounded what was needed for their equal by them. And they play a vital role rights. She called on them to "anin formulating the party policy. nounce solidarity with BNP and

From its inception in the 1949 Awami League has been maintaining a secular stance. Awami League considers the Hindus as its vote-bank, but it is not true that the Hindus do not vote for BNP candidates. Both in the 1991 and 1996 general elections Sadeq Hossain Khoka, a BNP leader, won from a Hindu-dominated area. On the other hand, Muslim voters also caste their votes in favour of Hindu candidates. For example, a Hindu candidate of BNP from a Tangail constituency won a bye-election in late 1990's. It is widely believed that the Bangladeshi Hindus, who number about 20 million, have traditionally, with some exceptions, voted for Awami League, which prides itself on its secular creden-

Speaking on the occasion, Begum Zia said, "BNP believes in communal harmony and respects all citizens of the country irrespective of their religion and caste." Perhaps she has felt the need for reworking the relationship between her party and the Hindus in Bangladesh. Before the next elections, she will try to reach out to the Hindus in a bid to Presumably influenced by the weaken the influence on their

minds of the sustained negative propaganda.

A few months back, addressing a rally on the occasion of the death anniversary of Ziaur Rahman, the founder of BNP, at Paltan Maidan, Dr Badruddoza Chowdhury said that BNP is 'a liberal democratic party which is not based on religion. May be BNP is a liberal democratic party but it has utterly failed to earn the confidence of the minorities because of its pro-Muslim and pro-Islami policies. In the 5th parliament BNP had no minority MP in the Jatiya Sangsad. There was no Hindu minister in the cabinet of Prime Minister Khaleda Zia. She could have appointed a Hindu minister from the technocrat quota but she did not. All this had distanced the religious minorities from BNP. If the leadership is wise and pragmatic enough it must study the minds of the Hindus and other religious minorities. But major parties are guided by vote-bank considerations for immediate

Prior to the parliamentary elections of June 1996 Begum Zia made some indiscreet utterances that had hurt not only the Hindu community but also the progressive and liberal forces of the country. Making virulent attack against the Awami League and the Indian ruling class she said uludhani (sound raised by Hindu women by the moving of tongue on auspicious occasions) would be heard from mosques if AL was voted to power. Undoubtedly, an irresponsible, indecorous and communal statement. This statement had become counterproductive. Her party lost the elections. Awami League with the support of other parties formed the government and nothing of the sort happened which Begum Zia

had predicted. During Pakistani rule the Hindus had become victims of dirty communal politics of the ruling class. The Muslim League plundered the Hindu property after 1947. After the independence of Bangladesh a secular government was installed. But the Awami League government preached one thing practicing another. In the post 1971 era homesteads and landed property of the Hindu minorities were grabbed and misappropriated by many apparently 'secular' and 'pro-liberation' people.

After the changeover of 1975,

the political scenario changed drastically. The secular character of the state was gone. Ziaur Rahman made some significant amendments to the Constitution. He inserted "Bismillah..." He replaced the fundamental principles of the state nationalism, socialism, democracy and secularisms. He replaced 'secularism' with "absolute trust and faith in the Almighty". He replaced 'socialism' with "economic and social justice." All these had changed the basic character of the constitution. But more importantly all these have hurt the sentiments of the non-Muslim minorities. Gen. Ershad had gone one step forward. He declared Islam as the state religion. But he did not face any strong opposition from the major

political parties including Awami League and BNP. Begum Zia and Sheikh Hasina issued ritual statements condemning the amendment. Had they opposed tooth and nail the attempt to amend the Constitution, Ershad would not have dared to do so. Rather he got some sort of silent support from the major parties.

Most of our leaders are guided

by principles of short-term gains which would have serious longterm implications. But many a Constitution expert is of the opinion that even after the 8th amendment Bangladesh is still not an Islamic State. A few months back, the Chief Justice of India Dr A S Anand commenting on the Constitution of Bangladesh observed that Bangladesh is a secular state in spite of the 8th amendment when Islam was made the state religion. It has been a strong demand of the intellectuals to restore the original Constitution of the 1972. But a Constitution the people and the rulers. Even when all the Constitutional barriers have been removed and legal rights of the minorities ensured the problems of communalism remain unsolved.

The minorities have had their grievances. It is undentable that differences between majority Muslims and minority Hindus, Buddhists etc in Bangladesh do exist to a marked degree. The place of minorities in the national mainstream has been on the debating agenda by the secular and progressive intellectuals. Minorities, especially the Hindus, in Bangla-

desh have been under represented in the senior government posts in terms of their share in the national population. The present Awami League government has appointed a number of secretaries from among the Hindus. Now we have a Hindu Vice-Chancellor and a Budhist Ambassador. It is a good sign but this is not enough. The government has taken some positive steps but the Vested Property Act is yet to be scrapped. The Act was introduced in 1965 to provide legal cover to the properties of Hindus who had left erstwhile East Pakistan. After the creation of sovereign Bangladesh the very concept and conditions under which this law was promulgated have ceased to exist. Regarding the scrapping of the Vested Property Act the stance of BNP is not clear. To win the hearts of the Hindus the BNP leaders should come forward with pragmatic approach.

Our leaders had committed serious mistakes in the past. Communal politics had done great harm to the people of this subcontinent. Now it is essential for our leadership to free their minds from the evil spirit of the twonation theory in the interest of Hindu-Muslim amity. They should refrain from activities that cannot change the mentality of are responsible for creating enmity between the two communities. Far-sighted leaders should strive for permanent communal harmony and a greater social cohesion and look more to the future than to the past. Begum Zia's move is an indicator of a change in the BNP's policy towards the minorities especially the Hindus. If the initiative is aiming at creating a solid noncommunal political environment then it is a positive sign. Now the Hindus will watch with care the new BNP line on minorities whether it is a sincere approach or a gimmick.

Education, Education, Education

Ardeshir Cowasjee writes from Karachi

The most important problem that Musharraf must address is that of an illiterate population explosion which means an explosion of bigots.... How does this government hope to educate, in the true sense of the word, the coming generations and endow them with free minds unless, as of now, it makes some move to contain the obscurantists, the bigots?

O one denies that the bigots in this country outstrip by far the educated. No government since the government of the founder of the nation has acknowledged the fact that the educated have a natural ascendancy over the bigots and that therefore something has to be done to eradicate the dangerous deficit.

This past month in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, the large majority of bigots have had a field day. They killed a Shia because he was a Shia. They killed ten Ahmedis because they were Ahmedis; they orphaned forty and injured thirty. The Government of Pakistan, in its powerful wisdom, has announced that the suspect is 'the hidden hand' of our traditional enemy. It goes without saying that this peren- wrote: We need the creativity, nial ubiquitous 'hidden hand' has never been found and chopped off by any of our brilliant govern-

From the better educated of the educated world, we and the government should learn. A recent issue of the Journal of the Royal Society of Arts (London) carried the transcript of a lecture given by Professor Bob Fryer, Assistant Vice-Chancellor at the University of Southampton. To quote:

"I sign up completely to the government's slogan of 'education, education, education' and I admire recent initiatives. I make that clear because I want to say a few critical things. My theme is the relationship between schooling and lifelong learning, and while I believe wholeheartedly in the importance of education I believe it is dangerous to assume that it can be the sole or even the most effective tool of social change. It is wrong to assume that there is a clear relationship between learning and happiness

Fryer talked about David Blunkett, the blind British Secretary of State for Education, a man who had been in the education field for years, having been allocated the education portfolio in the shadow cabinet whilst the Labour Party was in opposition. His guide-dog, Lucy, a black Labrador, used to be a great

favourite in the House of Commons. She retired honourably as an old lady not long ago and has been replaced by a younger, more agile yellow Labrador guide.

To quote Fryer on Blunkett:

"David Blunkett has a wonderful vision which he expressed in the Green Paper, The Learning Age', and which remains for me a benchmark against which all initiatives need to be tested. In his foreword, the Secretary of State enterprise and scholarship of all our people. As well as securing our economic future, learning has a wider contribution. It helps make ours a civilized society, develops the spiritual side of our lives and promotes active citizenship. Learning enables people to play a full part in their community. It strengthens the family, the neighbourhood, and consequently the nation. It helps us fulfil our potential and opens doors to a love of music, art and literature. That is why we value learning for its own sake as well as for the equality of opportunity

"I cannot remember an official government publication that was serious enough to capture the idea of spirituality as well as creativity in the breadth of its compass. We need to remember what Mr Blunkett said.

"It is impossible to believe that however good any school and further education system was, it could deal with all the problems encountered throughout life. Increasingly, directors of education, head teachers, teachers and some school governors are realizing that lifelong learning concerns them, but we still have a long way to go and there are many challenges.....

"Nearly eight million adults have serious difficulties with the basic skills of literacy and numer-

acy. We have seven million adults with no qualification whatsoever and 35 per cent of the workforce has never been offered a single day's training. There has been a welcome increase in learning at work in the past decade; the downside is that it goes mostly to professionals who are already highlys qualified. We have a widening gap in qualifications, achievement, aspiration, and access to information in communications technology. We have too many people who are indifferent or hostile to the opportunities of learning."

A country with an almost 100 per cent literacy rate has its problems. Naturally of a different and less menacing sort from those of a country such as this one with a true literacy rate of some 20 per cent, with too many people aspiring to learn and too few facilities for them to learn.

Fryer maintains that there is a huge gap between the educationally qualified and unqualified. His question: What can schools do about this? His answer: "They are remarkable resources and would like to see them made community centres of learning. Schools are the most valued, accessible and safe places in most communities. We need their buildings, their equipment and their teachers to be used and celebrated by everyone. They need to be used not only during school hours in school terms but during all hours throughout the year. In addition to providing opportunities for children to reach their highest possible levels, we need to raise the expectations and aspirations of every one in the community and imbue in children the attitudes and competence of learning throughout life, not only study skills, but a whole bundle of others, including critical thinning and crosscurricular competence. These should become the norm so that there is a habit of lifelong learn-

We in Pakistan need schools.

Musharraf took over this country from a corrupt undisciplined man, a dangerous despot, who sought to become the Shadow of God on Earth, the Ameerul Momineen, by threatening to promulgate his 15th constitutional amendment. Musharraf Islamic. Well, let me admit to you sense of the word, the coming initially set out, so he obliquely once informed us, to be another Attaturk. We saw him relaxed and smiling, standing with his family and dogs. Soon Attaturk was ditched and the dogs were

mutual love."

In April this year, he made obscurantists, the bigots? noises about introducing proce- Any suggestions? Will the dural safeguards against the educated educate us?

application of the highly controversial blasphemy laws. These were and are being used to incriminate innocent people. He was navigating soundly. Then suddenly, under fundo-pressure, he retracted. Not even a weak man-likes a vacillating general.

The most important problem that Musharraf must address is removed from the public lime- that of an illiterate population light. For a few months I had quite explosion which means an exploa job convincing people that he is sion of bigots. Each minute eight no relative of Big Chief Wumilong babics are born in Pakistan. or Umboppa and that the dogs have 480 each hour, or 11,520 each not been eaten up. Luckily and to day, or 4.204.000 each year. Let my great relief, in his August us assume that infant mortality interview on the BBC, when takes its toll. Even then, at the asked a foolish question about end of five years, the survivors, dogs being 'anti-Islamic', he some three million-plus, would answered, 'Well I don't think dogs need to find schools with places are anti-Islamic, certainly. I don't available. How does this governknow who called them anti- ment hope to educate, in the true very frankly, I love my dogs and generations and endow them with my dogs love me also. It's a free minds unless, as of now, it makes some move to contain the

Pakistan should Apologize

reported that the Deputy High Commissioner of the Pakistan High Commission made some highly objectionable comments about our War of Liberation and had also shown a dogged attitude by questioning why his country would apologize to Bangladesh. The diplomat's behaviour was nothing but a dereliction of all established diplomatic norms. There has been sharp reaction from among those that were present at the BIISS seminar as well as our Ministry of Foreign

him back. But the diplomat's remarks must be taken seriously. Because, he, as a senior ranking official of the Pakistani mission, made this comment at the time when the whole nation expresses its indignation against the Ingilab for mimicking our national anthem. The diplomat said that the atrocities committed during 1971 was not done by League miscreants. What a shame! The diplomat does not world knew how the indiscrimi- There is also a growing consennate killing was conducted and sus among the young Pakistani proper schooling. He should earlier leaders. It is astonishing read the then world press that constantly reported on the brutality of the Pakistani Army namely the Herald Tribune, the Time, the Newsweek, La Monde, Pakistani journalist Anthony Maskeranhas' articles, etc. He

would get an insight of what really happened at that time. question to other participants, further accentuates his anguish. like many other Pakistanis, of losing a battle, as they claim, "by the most valiant armed forces in apologize. Look at Japan, look at Germany, they have apologized for their excesses in the World President Bill Clinton visited Vietnam, once their arch enemy.

I'm sure the Deputy High Com- around?

The daily newspapers have missioner keeps abreast of what was the real motive of Bill Clinton's visit to Vietnam.

The Achilles' heel of Pakistan is the military rule, more pathetically so, when the Pakistani members of the civilian society, such as the diplomat in question, perform doll dancing with the military regime. He, as rightly pointed out in the seminar, in fact was representing the dead ghost of Yahya Khan and the haunted shadows of those brutish generals. His stubborn comments on such a sensitive issue for us proved his completely un-However, Pakistan has called diplomatic character. Alas, a clear manifestation of a typical Pakistani mentality! This bigbrother' attitude of the then Pakistanis was the real cause of a sad cry in 1971.

However, not all Pakistanis are of this mentality. In recent times we have seen a growing concern among the members of the citizenry who voiced for an apology for the atrocities committed. The Pakistani military but by Awami women organizations have also come forward demanding trial of those responsible for rape and know the history! The whole murder of women and children. who did it. I am sorry to say that military officers that they don't the so-called diplomat needs want to carry the blemish of their that a diplomat of the stature of deputy high commissioner is not aware of these developments in Pakistan (!?). Recently, our respected historian Prof. Montasir Mamun led a team to Pakistan and interviewed those that were involved in this crises. Some of those interviewed The diplomat arrogantly threw refuted allegations ostensibly to hide their failure, and some did "Apology for what, is it for losing not refute the charge of looting. half of Pakistan?" His arrogance raping and killing and obviously acknowledging the truth. Some agreed that the killings were severe and brutality unprecedented. The intelligentsia, the the world". Apology is not in the journalist class, the progressive veins of Pakistanis. Only a great minds in Pakistan, do acknowlnation with a great heart can edge this inhuman episode and are out to press Pakistani government for apology for massacring 3 million innocent lives and War II. Very recently, the US ravaging their property by looting and arson. Does the diplomat know all these happening

We fought, we won, we are the victorious. But we don't want to maintain an antagonized relationship with Pakistan. On the international platform, we will work in close cooperation with Pakistan wherever and whenever it is pragmatic. We shall form, create and recreate bodies and commissions with Pakistan, if needed. Simultaneously, we shall also hold high our heads in respect of our greatest achievements our liberation, our national anthem, our martyrdom, our national flag. No compromise, because these are bare

The diplomat's stand on Bihari repatriation is another exhibition of typical Pakistani mentality. The Pakistani junta utilized this Bihari minority against the majority Bengalees in all their 23 years of rule here. The Biharis were given all protection from the administration and all possible preferences in job. business, etc. They were made to behave in a way that you are the superior race, come to rule these short. black, rice-eating Bengalees'. Under the direct patronage of the Pakistani administration, these Biharis even took arms against Bengalees. But they are Pakistanis at heart. They came all the way from India for their promised land Pakistan. Unfortunately, they are a floating mass of people now having no permanent home and are leading an inhuman life in camps. They still hope that they would eventually get to their promised land. The Pakistani stand against repatriation of Biharis is nothing but 'eat the cake and hate it' philosophy; we needed you once and now we don't need you a typical Pakistani sentiment.

The Pakistani diplomat's audacity surprises us. His undiplomatic and stubborn behaviour is most unbecoming. For a better understanding and cooperation in the future, we demand that the Pakistani government apologize for their atrocities committed in 1971. This is, at present, the most pressing need for Pakistan in order to build up a friendly relationship with Bangladesh.

The message of the holy month

Sir, The Holy month of Ramadan has started and as usual Muslims are performing the rights of this month. In Bangladesh people are quite religious and maintain sanctity of these special 30 days. But unfortunately, as soon as the month starts, a section of the society begin unpleasant activities exhibiting influence and harassing ordinary people. Particularly, certain 'Maulanas' engage in delivering 'Fatwa' against those who do not fast. Poor owners of road-side tea-stalls are often harassed for carrying out business during day time. During Jumma prayers, Imams criticise non-Muslims and less religious persons.

But are these the true ways of serving Allah and Islam ? Allah has clearly said that any one can perform his or her own religion freely and without any obstruction. Criticising others is considered a great sin in Islam. Then Imams criticise others and that

serve humanity in a proper and disciplined way, no religious practice or preaching will come to our help in any way.

Uttara, Dhaka

Entrenched management

Sir, One of the weaknesses in administering under-developed countries is the entrenched management which refuse to be disturbed and transferred. One of the basic principles of good management is to transfer the officials at regular intervals, to discourage building up of small kingdoms for

A recent report in the press ability to take up this unpleasant said that some Customs officials task at the ports resist to be transferred elsewhere, for the fear of

network. Some stations of posttoo in Mosques and other holy ing are attractive and some are third class punitive stations. For Until and unless we learn to example, the training establishments are seemingly dumping grounds for unpopular officials; hence the quality of training at the government training institutes are not up to the mark.

The Code of Practice in the Establishment Division has to be reviewed and updated to suit the needs of modern administration. The poor image of the bureaucracy has to be changed. This cannot be brought about suddenly and on the spur of the moment (note how the PARC recommendations are being resisted in the background) There will be resistance from the civil service, but the PM has to be firm about the reforms, to ensure transparency in transfers and posting. Dhaka has to be decentralised, but no team has the

The problem with the secretarlat in Dhaka is that the political-

why these religious leaders or losing entrenched management policy makers depend on the turned out to be the place of their flywheel effect of the service to work in the old traditional manner. It needs a lot to bring about changes in a running system; but this political stamina is missing in our political culture of ad hocism. The politicians still cannot be depended upon for ensuring public services with long-term

All factories must have highest safety measures

Sir, In the current year a number of fire incidents had occurred in garment factories, the latest being the one in Shibpur Narsingdi, in which 30 people died and at least 49 people injured.

Those unfortunate people were working there to earn their living but ironically their working place

death. It has been reported in the print media that when the fire broke out from electric short circuit the workers became panicky and died from stampede and when they jumped from the fourstorey building as there was only one stairway and the gate was locked.

We are outraged that the factory owners do not care about the safety of the employees. All they are interested in how much profit they make. Most of the garment factories are set up in such way that it is not at all fit for the purpose. A factory must have all safety measures, enough routes to escape if accidents occur but the owners of these garment factories seem least concerned about it.

It is high time the government take stern actions against those establishments which fail to meet the required safety standards.

Nur Jahan Chittagong