

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.

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.

The biggest handicap to any effective deterrence against such police brutalisation is that the law enforcers themselves investigate their own offences.

The policemen blame it out on poor salary, inadequate equipment and professional subservience to political diktat of the partisan variety.

We endorse all the seven measures recommended by AI by way of creating a preventive dispensation against police torture.

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 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.

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.

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.

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.

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

To the Editor ...

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.

why these religious leaders or Imams criticise others and that too in Mosques and other holy places?

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

A Citizen, 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.

A recent report in the press said that some Customs officials at the ports resist to be transferred elsewhere, for the fear of

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

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.

ABOUT 50 prominent persons of Hindu community 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 objectives".

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 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.

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.

Presumably influenced by the

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.

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.

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."

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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 Pallab Majdan, Dr Badruddoza Chowdhury said that BNP is a liberal democratic party which is not based on religion.

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.

productive. 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 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.

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.

Most of our leaders are guided by principles of short-term gains which would have serious long-term implications. But many a Constitution expert is of the opinion that even after the 8th amendment Bangladesh is still not an Islamic State.

The minorities have had their grievances. It is undeniable that differences between majority Muslims and minority Hindus, Buddhists etc in Bangladesh do exist to a marked degree.

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?

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 young 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."

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."

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.

curricular competence. These should become the norm so that there is a habit of lifelong learning. 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.

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 I 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."

removed from the public limelight. For a few months I had quite a job convincing people that he is no relative of Big Chief Wumilong Umboppa and that the dogs have not been eaten up. Luckily and to my great relief, in his August interview on the BBC, when asked a foolish question about dogs being 'anti-Islamic', he answered, 'Well I don't think dogs are anti-Islamic, certainly. I don't know who called them anti-Islamic. Well, let me admit to you very frankly, I love my dogs and my dogs love me also. It's a mutual love.'

In April this year, he made noises about introducing procedural safeguards against the

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 that of an illiterate population explosion which means an explosion of bigots.

Any suggestions? Will the educated educate us?

OPINION

Pakistan should Apologize

Ulfat Hussain

The daily newspapers have 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 BISS seminar as well as our Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

However, Pakistan has called a 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 Inqilab for mimicking our national anthem. The diplomat said that the atrocities committed during 1971 was not done by Pakistani military but by Awami League miscreants.

The diplomat arrogantly threw question to other participants. "Apology for what, is it for losing half of Pakistan?" His arrogance further accentuates his anguish, like many other Pakistanis, of losing a battle, as they claim, "by the most valiant armed forces in the world". Apology is not in the veins of Pakistanis.

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 undiplomatic character.

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 women organizations have also come forward demanding trial of those responsible for rape and murder of women and children.

There is also a growing consensus among the young Pakistani military officers that they don't want to carry the bluish of their earlier leaders. It is astonishing that a diplomat of the stature of deputy high commissioner is not aware of these developments in Pakistan (!?).

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, at present, the most pressing need for Pakistan in order to build up a friendly relationship with Bangladesh.

desch 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 Buddhist Ambassador. It is a good sign but this is not enough.

Our leaders had committed serious mistakes in the past. Communal politics had done great harm to the people of this sub-continent. Now it is essential for our leadership to free their minds from the evil spirit of the two-nation theory in the interest of Hindu-Muslim amity. They should refrain from activities that are responsible for creating enmity between the two communities.