

The PM's speech on first hundred days

A good example in public accountability

THE Prime Minister has set a precedent in answerability to people. This has come in two ways. First, she flagged off a 100-day programme on her assumption of office thereby taking a deadline pressure on her government to deliver on a specified list of agenda. Whatever the balance-sheet of the first hundred days of her government, to which we come later, the important thing is the public has been given a role to assess its performance within a time-frame it had adopted of its own volition. The second part of the precedent was set day before yesterday when Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia delivered an address to the nation explaining the scorecard of her first hundred days in office. All these made for a methodical answerability exercise on the part of the government which we would like to see replicated in future.

All that the people expected from the first hundred days of the government was getting the directions right and setting the tenor for good governance. By this criterion, let's tick off the achievements and disappointments of the first hundred days of the BNP government.

On the plus side, we have seen a certain seriousness to acknowledge embarrassment caused to the government by notorious party and student wing leaders. Some high-profile among them have been taken into custody and neutralised. Yet most of the identified top criminals remain at large. Efforts to increase garment export quotas, step up manpower export to a number of countries, revive food-for-education programme and stipends to primary school students and streamline administration at sea and airports have paid some dividends. Welcome, too, is the move to strike out PSA and SPA from the statutes book, subject to satisfaction that nothing by way of their legacies shall exist. The determination with which the government is trying to solve the traffic congestion and pollution problems has gone down well.

That said, we now turn to the roller-coaster ride given to the administration through a seemingly unending series of reshuffles, the rising prices in the market, the spate in murders, changes in the text-books that stirred up controversy and threw their timely distribution off-gear, and above all, the impression that the government has yet to shed partisanship. The BNP-led government stands committed to good governance and they can only deliver it by adherence to a certain set of time-honoured administrative norms.

Two laws on the anvil to fight acid attacks

These will make the grim battle easier

THE government has decided to get tough on acid attackers. The cabinet has approved two draft laws for punishing attackers and controlling access to acid. Bangladesh's acid throwers are infamous all over for providing examples of the extreme cruelty that one human can inflict on another. Acid attack is terrifying because it horribly disfigures and keeps the victim alive to die a million times in a life time.

Experts and activists have all stressed that the acid attacks which seem to be increasing in frequency can't be stopped through stiff punishments alone. One must limit the sources of acquiring the deadly liquid. It's heartening to note that at last this is getting attention.

There are various reasons which are cited by experts about the use of acid but revenge, especially of the sexual variety, is a significantly contributing one. People who throw acid, in many cases rebuffed admirers with unstable mental states, often hope to actually destroy the face they themselves can't have. It's vile and twisted but all too real.

But such minds are products of a twisted society as well. And one has to remember that repairing the social mind is also necessary. Acid attacks are part of an overall phenomenon of violence. While its prime victims are women, the sights have now shifted to males too and the number is rising. Since conflict in Bangladesh society is not showing any sign of decline, this is all the more significant. Acid has till date generally not ventured into the middle and upper class households. It has now shed its gender tag and the class tag is next. All are vulnerable now.

Acid attacks have given Bangladesh a bad name but also exposed how naturally violent we are. Our refusal to take action may be partially explained by the denial of our own base characteristics. We are now slowly waking up to reality and implementing laws which we should have years ago. But at least we are taking action and that's good news.

We congratulate the government and hope that the number of acid victims will decline and the compensation and rehabilitation mechanism for the unfortunate victims will improve as well. If we share a common humanity, we share the cruelty too. That's why we all have a responsibility.

PRAFUL BIDWAI
writes from New Delhi

THE mood of this year's Republic Day in New Delhi was more sombre than celebratory. Never before were so many parade stands empty. Never before did such few Army units participate. And never before did 125,000 policemen "sanitise" the roads and prevent people's movement.

The parade became a militaristic ritual, an awe-inspiring show of might -- including the new Agni missile --, and an exhibition of macho values.

It excluded the citizens in whose name India's democratic, socialist Republic was founded. Devoid of flesh-and-blood people, what it left was Rambo-style nationalism. This is now brutalising our sensibilities. Nothing illustrates this more starkly than a January 11 incident from Shivpuri in Madhya Pradesh, not far from Gwalior. This involved two boys, Pinku (16) and Rinku (17), who wanted to "avenge" the attack on Parliament House--by assassinating General Pervez Musharraf.

Brought up on Bollywood films like "Gadar", "Indian" and "Fiza", Pinku and Rinku decided to become "patriotic" terrorists who plotted to buy arms and kill Gen Musharraf. They kidnapped Shanu (8), a businessman's son, for ransom. They would use the money to kill Musharraf the Monster. But they soon realised they couldn't hide Shanu anywhere. They panicked

and strangled him to death. The boys have reportedly confessed to their crime. The authorities believe their motivation was "patriotic".

We shouldn't discount this incident as an "aberration", a case of "juvenile delinquency" from "too much Bollywood". It raises disturbing questions about the values we are imparting to the young generation -- through textbooks, television,

and our social-political discourse. These values glorify maleness, violence, aggression and war. They militate against humanity and compassion.

For years, India's "popular" cinema and TV have promoted macho heroes, and hate-driven images of vamps and villains. Now, the hero and the villain have merged, and the vamp has become the middle-class bride. In the mass media, violence competes with sex. "New-formula" Bollywood films like "Maa Tuzhe Salaam", "Gadar" and "Indian" take Rambo nationalism to its extreme. They locate love for one's nation in hatred of all others. This Sunny Deol-Nana Patekar phenomenon is sharply different

from, say, Manoj Kumar. Kumar says: "The difference between us is the same as between patriotism and aggressive nationalism. One teaches you to love your country ...The other prompts you to ... show others in a demeaning light".

Take education. Most of our schools imbibe military-style discipline and super-"patriotic" values". The typical child grows up believing that pride in India's "inherent"

Its overriding purpose is to "prove" that India is the world's greatest civilisation; everything valuable in the "ancient" world derived from India.

Mr Joshi has just announced the "discovery" of a 7,500 year-old "civilisation" in the Gulf of Cambay--a strange thing for a minister to do in the absence of scholarly evidence. Finding "ruins" is not the same thing as layer-by-layer archaeological

excavation. The "finds" need corroboration. It is unclear if there was a "civilisation", or only an urban settlement.

But in Mr Joshi's scheme, all critical questions are snuffed out. India must have an older civilisation than Sumer! Such nationalism demands blind loyalty to an "Eternal India", deified as "Bharat Mata". Rambo nationalism glorifies the past, claims "inherent" superiority for India, and grossly exaggerates its achievements. For instance, RSS s a r a s a n g h a c h a l a k Sudarshan claims that an Indian made an airplane years before the Wright Brothers--a fabricated, ludicrous, assertion!

Hatred of Others is equally cen-

This nationalism is suffocating. It is not anti-imperialist. It does not question the global inequalities of power. It only wants India to be the cock of the walk. This nationalism is servile to the West, in particular, to the United States. The servility has become particularly odious under the NDA. Never before has New Delhi so slavishly colluded with hegemonic US moves... This spells unprecedented interference in India's affairs and erosion of her sovereignty.

trality to this ethnic-nationalist demonology. Islam and Muslims function as its longest-standing Others.

Today's principal Other is Pakistan, with which peaceful co-existence is declared near-impossible. It is credited with demonic powers to destabilise India. Other neighbours are treated as non-entities.

The message is, India is unique, India is glorious, India is unbeat-

able, India is Eternal.

This is the kind of nationalism that Rabindranath Tagore described as a "great menace", which "for years has been at the bottom of India's troubles". Such aggressive, exclusivist, nationalism is the opposite of a relaxed, self-confident, inclusive view of the world.

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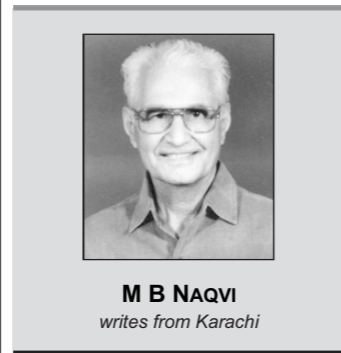
before has New Delhi so slavishly colluded with hegemonic US warships carrying "high-value" assets through the Malacca Straits. India is thus being used as a counterweight to China.

This goes far beyond "intelligence sharing", even "cooperative monitoring".

It probably involves "joint operations" on the ground in Jammu and Kashmir, prepared by the visit of DIA chief Thomas Wilson to "sensitive areas" in the Valley. This spells unprecedented interference in India's affairs and erosion of her sovereignty.

Praful Bidwai is an eminent Indian columnist.

On the way to eternal bliss?



M B NAQVI
writes from Karachi

(civilian) dictator at a time when negotiations must have started for Pakistan's joining the west against Communist Russia and China; one is however not interested in the question who was the wooer and who was the wooed between them. Pakistan's need for military aid could only have facilitated the process, though that friendship enabled the coterie of conspirators --- Ghulam Mohammad, Col. Iskandar Mirza and Gen. Ayub Khan --- to rule the roost between

an arms race with India in its confrontation with it on Kashmir. Indeed it is world's seventh or eighth nuclear power today. Arguably, all this might not have been possible without as much US aid and help as was received. But there is certainly a flip side to it. It is 47 years since Pakistan formalised its American connection and began receiving foreign aid more or less on a regular basis. The debit side of the economic development was writ large over the faces of all Pakistani

ment was haphazard. It correctly relied on industrialisation as the immediate objective but had no coherent criteria for it. Ad hoc factories and mills were added without any thought of whether these units can be efficient or really profitable. In the event Pakistan had an industry that requires costly imports but is unable to pay for them. The agricultural policies preserved the rural elites' position largely through subsidies or where necessary circumventing the laws. A heavy

scale industry is unable to face international competition that cannot now be avoided under WTO. The main troubles afflicting the economy before September 11 last year are still all there, only worse. Only a reprieve has been available. To repeat, the present cheerful outlook is due to continued inflow of aid. That is nothing to be cheerful about. Now that the friendship with the US has been revived, the fear is that Pakistanis will continue to live in a 'democracy' that will be effec-

matter what motivated the Bush administration to start the war on terror, the fact of the matter is that the geopolitical consequences of this war are not lovely to observe --- it has already meant the growing hegemony of America over both South Asia and Central Asia to the detriment of China, Russia and Iran. There are jitters in Iran, Syria, Iraq, North Korea and Somalia. One is not making a plea for saving the regimes that govern these countries. But making the unipolarity of the world so brutally stark and so intrusive is not an advance and Pakistan's foreign policy is now sure to be in hock to the senior partner's experiences. Militarisation will continue to dominate Pakistan politics. Concretely, much of the aid received is likely to be spent on replacing the weapons systems in the armed forces on the plea that all the major hardware has long been aging and needs replacement. There would be enough noises about spending more money on education, modern technology and healthcare. No doubt, some more money will be earmarked. But a few percentage points increase in these sectors will scarcely achieve the desired ends nor can it improve overall human development indicators in any significant way. Economy too will continue to live on handouts. As soon as the largess of the donors decreases, as it is likely to after a while, we shall be back seeking bailouts at each year's end on any terms. The prospect is not as rosy as the government of the day thinks it is.

What of the main saving grace of this regime: the free press. It is going to reopen all the old wounds of this polity. National integrity and unity are already not in top form. The show of solidarity by one and all during the continuing Indian military forces' threat on the borders is not a proof of meaningful and sturdy unity in normal times.

The renewed American connection would merely lock Pakistan in all its old orientations: in politics, economics and foreign policy. No

PLAIN WORDS

What of the main saving grace of this regime: the free press. It does look today that this hard won freedom cannot be suppressed. But think again. Can free press remain the only flower in bloom in a desert of controlled democracy where a majority of politicians, parties and even institutions will have to be somehow made supporters of the President with extraordinary powers? Some of the lectures to journalists on patriotism, responsibility and research are a telltale preliminary.

1953 and 1969. Historically this friendship has meant Pakistan Army's power and America's underwriting of it with dollars --- a lethal combination. It was however not America's fault that the second military dictator, Gen. Yahya Khan, could not last beyond 2.75 years.

The third, the inimitable Soldier of Islam Gen. Ziaul Haq, was sustained for more than 10 years, quite like Gen. Ayub Khan's decade. Now that Ambassador Chamberlin has reminded us and President Bush had pledged to stabilise the Presidency of Gen. Musharraf --- and not Pakistan --- presumably by underwriting his government's needs, democrats in this country feel that it sounds like being sentenced to that another Decade of Reforms. Let's get this correctly. The US alone is not responsible for only dictators flourishing in this country. Weakness, incompetence and incoherence of the democratic-minded citizenry are far more culpable. Also, the US connection did facilitate the receipt of around \$ 80 to 85 billion in total foreign aid. A certain amount of development has undoubtedly taken place. Moreover, Pakistan has been able to run

Finance Ministers of recent years --- all were beseeching immediate cash aid from IMF to avoid default in the balance of payments.

Pakistan's economy managers have lived on the edge of security and on their wits. High budget deficits, high inflation, high trade balance deficit, widespread unemployment, high growth rates of population and poverty and insufficient rise in literacy rate and healthcare coverage have been the characteristics of Pakistan economy. In all the statistics, high growth rates in savings, investments, GDP and exports were and are conspicuous by their absence. This litany is not really complete. The point is that the economy's management --- that affects common Pakistanis more than how governments feel --- has suffered from all manner of defects. Under dictators it has ignored the necessity of simple prudence of not encouraging increases in consumption without increases in the productive apparatus, production and sustained growth. It never encouraged savings and investments nor was it able to give good governance or even a minimum of financial discipline. Its strategy of develop-

social cost was paid in terms of growing disparities of income and opportunities between the elite and the commoners. Mechanisation of agriculture has been undertaken without any thought of what has to be done with or for the surplus rural population --- that now boosts the figures of the permanently unemployed and of poverty growth. These disparities are both horizontal in terms of social classes and vertical in terms of regions. Thus successive dictators and their civilian stooges, with much American assistance, have given the people of Pakistan a badly distorted and unviable economic dispensation.

The point of it all is that what Pakistan needs is a paradigm shift. All the policy orientations in politics and in economics so far have ended in a *cul de sac*. The economy has been living on bailouts. The improved outlook --- such as \$ 4 billion plus in monetary reserves --- is due to the inflow of dollars in loans and in grants for service rendered while imports of machinery and sophisticated equipment remains minimal. Growth rates have been slowing down. Most of the large-

tively subservient to the Army Chief. This is what is the meaning of President Musharraf remaining the President for at least five more years after the present 'term' of three years ends. The supremacy of the military is a fact of life and the presence of the serving generals at the head of the political system heavily underlines it. That is acceptable to the people of Pakistan any further. But they certainly notice that the American support is going to sustain Army's overlordship of a tightly-managed democracy. This American support to the generals, with their readiness to pay for the services rendered, negates the basic human rights of self-governance of the Pakistanis. It is going to reopen all the old wounds of this polity. National integrity and unity are already not in top form. The show of solidarity by one and all during the continuing Indian military forces' threat on the borders is not a proof of meaningful and sturdy unity in normal times.

The renewed American connection would merely lock Pakistan in all its old orientations: in politics, economics and foreign policy. No

OPINION

Of police week and police reform

MOINUDDIN CHISTI

POLICE week, the annual event of the country's oldest force, concluded the other day. Ceremonial side apart, the week every year provides an opportunity to the field officers for a refreshing get-together, to compare notes and learn from each other's mistakes and achievements. In view of the stress given to the improvement of law and order, the week this time was specially significant. The officers were greatly benefited and felt honoured when they had the rare privilege of having separate audiences with the honourable President and the honourable Prime Minister at Bangabhaban and Gonobhaban, respectively. Besides, they also received valuable advice and directions from their face to face meetings, both formal and informal,

with the Minister, the Secretary and the Inspector General of Police. The week, in addition, serves as a forum where, in the company of seniors and elders, the officers have a chance for a tete-a-tete and to ventilate their grievances and put forward the many problems they encounter in the discharge of their professional duties. The seminars, workshops and discussion programmes held during the time contribute to the enhancement of knowledge and learning for the participants. The time spent also serves as a welcome break from their monotonous routine and arduous day to day work. The officers go back to their respective desks, charged with fresh energy, broadened outlook and a renewed vow for the rest of the year, when they can revamp their professional knowledge, correct the many errors, mistakes and lapses having seen their inner self through an introspec-

tive eye.

The interesting fact about police is that in British India the force was created for providing security to the people and to set up good governance with which law and order, mainly in the countryside, was to be established. The entire country was divided into several police stations or thanas, each headed by a sub-inspector or *daroga* or simply the OC who enjoyed a sort of unwritten writ over his area. This was a time when armed brigands, thieves and dacoits used to stalk the countryside freely and people lived in a kind of fear. Riot for sands and murder for gains were also very frequent. An elaborate policing system was developed so that people could feel safe and secure. Even the remotest areas were covered by opening anti-dacoit patrol camps known as the ADPC. Details of duties and conducts of a policeman were spelled out clearly in

several books of rules and procedures. A hierarchical chain of command was also established to ensure strict accountability and discipline in the force. The police stations were the starting point of a legal system that became an integral part of a strict field administration.

Tackling crime and maintenance of law and order in days gone by was a task relatively easy and simple for the police to accomplish. In small rural communities one knew each other intimately and an act of crime could easily be traced out on the basis of dependable thana records. The thana or the police station was the focal point for all police activities and adequate number of officers above the rank of the officer-in-charge were supervising and monitoring his day to day work. The police station was, and still is, the centre for complaint, investigation and interrogation. The use of harsh methods, at

times upon suspects in thana lock-ups in order to obtain a confession or information, was never encouraged. There were enough legal safeguards against the application of the third degree, except, when the authorities preferred to look the other way. They were, of course, mindful of possible police excesses in the use of fire-arms and had put sufficient legal brakes against it.

The police in Bangladesh bearing the legacy of the past have remained strapped to laws, rules and regulations considered old, sterile and inadequate, which are no more relevant for today's needs. It is necessary, therefore, for the police force to move with time, re-arrange, re-structure itself in terms of manpower, equipment, training and logistics as well as update its antiquated weapons and public relation system. The police, of late,

have come into focus of attention. They are being discussed in all intellectual and non-intellectual circles. There have been suggestions to improve the service conditions and accountability of the police. The hopeful sign is that something close to a think-tank is emerging, a kind of citizens' forum where the educated section of the society have come forward with new ideas and suggestions for removing the ills of the past and recasting the police to fit into the demanding future.

The most pressing need of the hour is, of course, reform which should target the thanas or the police stations as a first step. No reform would, however, work unless it broadly aims at restructuring the police and educating them in developing the correct attitude towards the people and the society, irrespective of prevailing socio-economic

condition. With the march of time we have a vastly different situation in independent Bangladesh, especially in the urban areas. The police here have the enormous task of rebuilding it from the roots. Democratic aspiration of the people likes to see a police force that respects the social values and cares for human rights. At the same time, they also like to see building up of a professional police strong enough to be able to deal with modern trends in crime and able to control growing chaos in streets. An emerging society in Bangladesh eager to protect human rights and value free expressions would indeed be reluctant to put up with the police unless their standards improve significantly.

The world today is shrinking. Communication satellites and commercial jet flights have established visible linkage between

people living in different parts of the big globe. If ideas travel fast, bad ideas travel faster. The criminals of today learn their lessons, acquire their arms and develop their techniques from various diverse sources and operate in a well regulated network. The success and failure of police in future would largely depend on how much accuracy, sophistication and specialisation they have acquired in dealing with the emerging situation and in a clear perception of the ever-changing crime scenario. And only then can they expect the necessary social support and fund to rebuild.

Moinuddin Chisti is a senior ranking police officer.