

Enhancing police capacity

Reform before expansion imperative

THE government has decided to go for a massive expansion of the police force. The move couldn't have come a day earlier given the recent tumble taken by law and order, density of crime, and most importantly, diminishing public trust in the effectiveness of the police's crime control role. In fact, the home ministry has already drawn up a strategic plan envisaging an increase in the number of police stations across the country to 565, and in Dhaka alone, from 22 to 50. Furthermore, 19,277 cops will be recruited increasing the size of the force to around 1,27,000 and raising the police-public ratio from 1:1300 to 1:1070. Neighbouring India's ratio is 1:728.

Even our shorthanded police force spread thin on protocol and VIP duties, tailing political processions, maintaining watch over rallies and controlling opposition and other forms of demonstrations. With an increase in police capacity, the same kind of deployment at the expense of crime control and prosecution should be avoided; otherwise, the same malady will only be exacerbated.

The plan is to be implemented by the government over the period of three years i.e. during the remainder of its tenure. We hope that the recruitment policy would be devoid of any political overtone so that neutrality of the fresh complement is fully guaranteed. This would help allay any apprehension of the police being used for any partisan purposes.

Equally important would be to seal off the routes of abuse of power and corruption. The government needs to recast the laws or provisions of laws that are often misused by the police, widely violating human rights in the process. Simultaneously, the much-awaited police reform should come about; in fact precede the force's expansion. A simple increase in the manpower is not likely to bring about the desired result; on the contrary, it can have the opposite effect unless it is preceded by necessary reforms.

There is one more factor crying for attention. Unless the salary structure of the police force is improved substantially, taking into account the considerations of a living wage and their occupational hazards, their moral obligations not to resort to corruption cannot be effectively enforced.

Disband the group

Supremacy of law cannot be a plaything

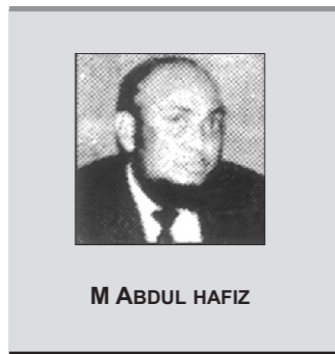
IN our comments on the subject a few days ago we had expressed our apprehensions of deleterious consequences of using private armed groups in curbing another set of clandestine elements. Such a move was not only an anathema to rule of law, the spate of killings and counter killings this would trigger could spell anarchy.

From what we have learnt of their activities over the past several days we can assert the following. One, this is for the first time that a vigilante group has been pressed into service in an area where the authority of the government should have reigned supreme. Two, the killing spree they were on is pure banditry regrettably committed with the knowledge of the police and apparently under the patronage of some senior members of the ruling party. That, they based their determination of the Sarbahara identity of an individual on subjective basis and hearsay, since no Sarbahara would go around carrying a tag of self-advertisement, their motivation could very well be to settle old scores or show off their power by terrorising.

While on the one hand reports suggest that the government is contemplating action against this group, on the other hand the events so far gave us the impression that the Bangla Bhai people with its sinister agenda were being shielded by the authorities. Given the confusing state of affairs, the government needs to come out with a statement of clarification.

But principally, in order to establish the supremacy of the law of the land, the government will be well advised to disband the group and punish those who are responsible for the atrocity and murders committed at its behest.

The AL's faux pass



M ABDUL HAFIZ

THE AL's pipe dream of toppling the country's elected government has been, as expected, ignominiously dashed, leaving the party's ranks and files crestfallen. Shorn of reality, and even gumption and common sense, the attempt was pre-destined to fail. Few were surprised at the fiasco, but many from among the organisers of the comic show were flabbergasted at the hollowness of the month-long Awami rignarole. They now bitterly understand the futility of such campaign even against a nincompoop government.

The AL's electoral setback in 2001 left the party badly bruised and in the lurch, and for all these years it has been licking its wounds which are yet to be healed. Now with a self-inflicted injury they will only fester and

turn into a running sore -- of course, with the spread of miasma. As a matter of fact, the AL never really got over the trauma of the 1975 tragedy and had been on the retreat since then. Thanks to its grassroots organisations and die-hard adherents the party, however, survived the ravages and kept up its existence. Now it seems to be reaching its elastic limit. The

stalwarts like HS Suhrawardy and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and had spearheaded the country's independence. And even now the party's outlook is weird, erratic, and, at times, a veritable enigma to the public. It will take long even if the party can be brought back to its pre-30 April shape.

Of course, a pioneer as a party in opposition the AL has always been in the line of fire and drew

even when it was driven from pillar to post under the country's repressive regime.

The situation obtaining later -- in the sixties -- was even more bleak. As the country was groaning under martial law, Suhrawardy -- the powerful champion of democracy -- died abroad and Ayub Khan, the country's military ruler threatened to speak with the opposition

mass. Never before could any leader reach so close to the heart of the people. It was no wonder that at the peak of the party's ascendancy, during 1969 mass upsurge, he became a national totem of sorts, again leaving no hiatus between his destiny and theirs'.

Is the AL's tryst with the people's destiny still intact? It did not appear so when the party

AL's standing does affect the nation's destiny. A credible AL is a need of the hour because a democratic polity cannot flourish in the absence of a strong sensible opposition. Who would, after all resist the party in power's undemocratic onslaught and contain its imperious impulses? Notwithstanding the damage done to the AL by some of its top leaders in their oxymoronic instinct, the party is a national asset and has to be preserved in the interest of democracy.

However, a long haul, introspection, and starting afresh, are what Awami League needs to do today. There is no magic that can catapult the party to power by skipping the distance it is otherwise required to traverse. What is the guarantee that the party will win in the mid-term poll that it has been insisting on? None of the indicators suggest that they will. Has the party introspected to find out if there is a qualitative change among the people with regard to their choice for AL in the last two and half years? Being a left-leaning party, can AL really stage a comeback during this heady time for the political right?

Big (ret'd) Hafiz is former DG of BIISS.

PERSPECTIVES

A long haul, introspection, and starting afresh, are what Awami League needs to do today. There is no magic that can catapult the party to power by skipping the distance it is otherwise required to traverse. What is the guarantee that the party will win in the mid-term poll that it has been insisting on? Has the party introspected to find out if there is a qualitative change among the people with regard to their choice for AL in the last two and half years? Being a left-leaning party, can AL really stage a comeback during this heady time for the political right?

symptoms are visible in the irresponsible utterances and conduct of the party's frontline leaders and the backlashes they invite.

It seemed that the AL General Secretary, with his grotesque oust-government project was consciously removing the bricks of credibility, one after another, from the party edifice, and racing to trivialise the great political outfit that was once led by

flak from all quarters. Things were not rosy for the party when it came into being in 1949 amidst the worst of adversities and it grew from crisis to crisis. But it never yielded to the browbeating of the authority, and its equation with the people seldom suffered. None ever matched the spontaneity with which it could strike chord with people's hopes, aspirations, and emotions. It constantly moved with people

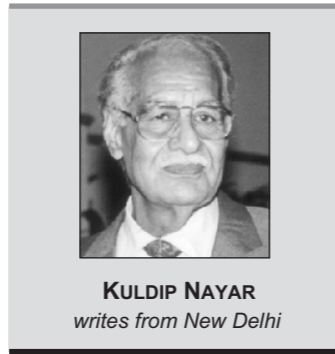
"in the language of weapons". It was indeed a litmus test for the Awami League to tide over those adversities.

After he took the helm of Awami League during those difficult days, Sheikh Mujib, with an unbelievable skill, occupied the entire political space by moving across the country like a messiah. Sheikh Mujib's public contact on that massive scale left no hiatus between him and the

General Secretary's claims fell flat amidst public nonchalance bringing slur to Awami League's long legacy of populism. Neither did the party have its homework done with earnestness. As a result the AL stratagem became a mockery of itself.

Even though the AL's foolhardiness could be ignored or set aside as one of those gimmicks, it cannot be done so, for what happens to a party of the

BJP whining



KULDIP NAYYAR

writes from New Delhi

I am told that Atal Behari Vajpayee was against an early poll. It was N Chandrababu Naidu who pushed him into it. Naidu's compulsion was that if he wanted to stay as the caretaker chief minister, he had to hold the state election within six months, that is, before May 13. Otherwise, according to the constitution, the state would have come under President's rule.

All this is true. But it would not have affected Naidu because President's rule meant the central rule with the BJP at the helm. The only difference might have been that Naidu would not have had the trappings of a chief minister. In any case, his power was already curbed once the assembly was dissolved. Unfortunately, this was a selfish way of looking at things. A person who had brought Andhra Pradesh on the world map could not be so shortsighted when it came to personal power. He blamed the Election Commission. He had dissolved the assembly many months before the end of its tenure because he wanted to cash in on the sympathy wave that was sweeping across the state following an attempt on his life by

the People's War Group at Tirupathi. The Election Commission did not oblige him by holding an early poll. With the lapse of time, the sympathy factor disappeared.

These facts have come to the fore because of Naidu's rout in Andhra Pradesh and Vajpayee's miserable showing in the Lok Sabha election. What would have happened if the centre and the state had gone to the polls in October when the elections were actually due?

Nadu.

That the Hindu elements are a force to reckon with was also seen in UP. Their weight led to the summoning of Narendra Modi, the butcher of Gujarat, for campaigning. He is a red rag not only for the minorities but also for most of the educated middle class. Even in his own state, he has slipped. It means that at last even the Gujarat conscience has pricked. Is it because of the Supreme Court's judgment which compared him

have learnt the lesson by now. Not even reaching a figure of 200 in the 545-member Lok Sabha is no performance by any standard. NDA which began with a high-profile campaign of 'India Shining', gave it up halfway through. It realised that the unemployed and the poor, particularly in the rural areas, felt more irritated. How could the slogan -- L.K. Advani once took pride in owning it from an advertisement -- work in a country where every fifth person -- as many

latter. The stigma of being a 'foreigner' did not matter. My impression is that the BJP overdid it and, at some stage, the sympathy factor worked in her favour. Even the Bofors scandal raised by the party had no effect. It was a case of flogging the dead horse. As for Vajpayee, he has suffered in stature because the BJP's entire poll campaign was built around his personality.

Now that the elections are over, I want to go back to the second exit

BETWEEN THE LINES

I would not suspect the fudging of exit polls. But it is too serious a matter to be left at that. It may turn out to be another scam. There has to be an inquiry to know who brought about the fall of such a magnitude. Pollsters and television pundits are a means, not the end. Strange, the biggest losers are said to be the public sector undertakings and banks, both financed by the people of India. This takes me to the utility of exit polls. That they are held in America and the UK is no reason why they should be held in India.

This is a hypothetical question.

But both the NDA and Naidu's Telugu Desam may not have done as badly as they have now. In Andhra Pradesh the BJP has not secured even a single seat in the Lok Sabha. While talking on hypothetical situations, I may mention that the DMK would have been part of the NDA. But the BJP - more so Advani -- pushed DMK chief Karunanidhi out because he was thought to be "not Hindu" enough. The Hindu Munnani, the RSS in the south, dictated Vajpayee and he, although against joining hands with Jayalalitha, caved in. The result is that both the BJP and Jayalalitha's AIADMK have been wiped out in Tamil

with Nero?

Where does the BJP go from here? Sushma Swaraj has said in an interview that whether or not the party would go back to the hard-line depended on the post-poll analysis. But the RSS spokesman has complained that the party's reverse was because it did not pursue the Hindutva line. He said that they, the RSS, would have to "intervene."

However, it would be a mistake to pick up the discarded clothes because some fresh air had begun blowing in the BJP. If it were to reopen the wounds of bias and prejudice, it would bleed still further. The party must realise that India's ethos is pluralism; it should

as 20 crore -- according to the Food and Agriculture Organisation is "undernourished"?

If the slogan of 'India Shining' was raised to submerge the local issues and caste and religious considerations, it failed miserably. In all the 28 states where the Lok Sabha elections were held what was common were *bijli, sadak and pani*. Otherwise, there were different issues in different states because each one of them is bigger than the size of any European country.

Gradually, the economic issues took the shape of personalities and ultimately it came to Vajpayee versus Sonia Gandhi. It appears that the electorate preferred the

poll held on April 26. The share market crashed and the Sensex came tumbling down by 213 points. The estimated loss was somewhere around Rs 55,000 crore. The fall had never been so steep since the 9/11 attacks. Sebi has all the records of who sold their shares and who bought them. I want it to make the information public. My hunch is that some pattern will be discernible -- the pattern that may expose the parties behind the manipulation. Was the crash stage-managed after the exit poll on April 20 had shown the rise of Sensex by 72 points?

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matter to be left at that. It may turn out to be another scam. There has to be an inquiry to know who brought about the fall of such a magnitude. Pollsters and television pundits are a means, not the end. Strange, the biggest losers are said to be the public sector undertakings and banks, both financed by the people of India. This takes me to the utility of exit polls. That they are held in America and the UK is no reason why they should be held in India. In those countries, elections are a one-day affair. Exit polls do not matter because the time difference between their finding and the results is only that of a few hours. But India has span of several days to cover the process. In this election, the first vote was cast on April 20 and the last one on May 10. But three weeks are too long a period.

Will the change in government affect India-Pakistan relations? I do not think so because what Vajpayee was doing had the nation's will behind it. Narasimha Rao has rightly said in an interview: "Everybody will be in agreement with any effort by India for close Indo-Pak relations. Are there any two opinions? It doesn't matter which leader."

My main worry is over the talks the centre has initiated with the Hurriyat leaders. Since people like Ghulam Nabi Azad are opposed to any talks with them, there may be a cooling off situation. It will be a tragedy if it happens that way.

Kuldip Nayyar is an eminent Indian columnist.

Muslim Americans condemn the savage murder of Nicholas Berg

DR FAKHRUDDIN AHMED writes from Princeton

I have only one question for the butchers of American civilian Nicholas Berg: Did Nicholas Berg behead anybody in Iraq? If not, for what crime was he beheaded? Has it become a crime to be an American civilian in Iraq? Why was Nicholas Berg butchered with a knife accompanied by shouts of "Allahu Akbar" in grotesque imitation of an animal sacrifice? Who are the real animals here: Nicholas Berg or those who butchered him? The fact that Nicholas Berg was a Jew makes the crime especially despicable. We offer our sincere condolences to the family of Nicholas Berg, our near neighbours who live in West Chester, Pennsylvania, about seventy miles from here.

As the world recoils from the horror of the atrocious murder of Nicholas Berg, it must grapple with some troubling questions. One simply cannot dismiss this as an aberration, because the same cowardice was perpetrated on *The Wall Street Journal* reporter Daniel Pearl, also a Jew, only two years ago in Pakistan. One must resist the temptation to blame it on a religion, Islam in this case, as the right-wingers in the US have done. No religion allows the murder of the innocents. Mass murderers like the perpetrators of 9/11 and the butchers of Daniel

Pearl and Nicholas Berg do not belong to any religion. Mass murder of the innocents is the only religion they practice.

While religion may not be to blame, no civilized society can afford to allow this malignancy to spread in its midst. These criminals are law unto themselves. While every religion advises the faithful to be moderate, patient, humble, compassionate, generous and to respect the dignity of human life, these criminals are extremists, impatient, arrogant, and cruel and find satanic satisfaction in destroying innocent human lives. While paying lip service to religion, these murderers violate every tenet of the religion they profess to practice. A society that does not stand up to these monsters and destroy them is going to pay an enormous price when these monsters spread their tentacles. We hope that the murderers of Nicholas Berg will be apprehended, tried and sentenced to die through beheading!

While every Muslim American that the writer knows feels the same way as the writer, that is not what the Americans are being told by the conservative, neoconservative and the Zionists in the media who dominate several television and most radio talk shows. They stress that Muslims in general and Islam in particular are responsible for what happened to Nicholas Berg, just

as they refer to 9/11 as "Islam's attack on America" (Did Bangladeshi Muslims, followers of Islam, also attack America?) To make their point, one of them, Zionist Michael Savage of New York's WOR 710 AM recently replayed the audio of the heart-piercing cry of Nicholas Berg as he was being butchered, over and over again until the listeners were

extending to Muslim Americans under savage attack in the form of hate mongering and incitement to violence by the right-wingers like Mr. Savage. Is Mr. Savage immune to prosecution? Is the FCC afraid of the right-wingers, like Mr. Savage who know only to spew hatred of Muslim Americans? Listeners of Mr. Savage's programme should remember that

and correcting them. By defining the Muslims as followers of Satan to the American people, the likes of Mr. Savage have prepared the American people for the necessity of the destruction of the Muslim American community, should, God forbid, another atrocity like 9/11 occur. The fact is, the fledgling, mostly first generation Muslim American community is far

American community. Of course Muslims condemn acts of barbarism by those who profess to be Muslims. Two years ago, the writer had written a piece in *The Daily Star* denouncing the murderers of Daniel Pearl, not because right-wingers had demanded it, but because the writer's humanity compelled him to. These right-wing ideologues

when five hooded scoundrels, who are afraid to show their face, who have not been trained by any government and who represent nobody but themselves, commit the heinous murder of Nicholas Berg? No one blamed American values or Christianity for the way American soldiers humiliated Iraqi prisoners in Abu Ghraib. No Muslim American organisation or Muslim nation abroad, as far as I know, has asked individual Christian Americans or Christian American organisations to apologise for Abu Ghraib. Yet, many Americans and most conservatives, neoconservatives and Zionists are demanding that Islam and Muslim Americans take responsibility for, condemn and pay a price for what those hooded barbarians did to Nicholas Berg! It appears that to prove their humanity Muslim Americans must apologise on demand!

Former Presidential candidate, Vietnam War hero and prisoner of war, and the sanest voice in the US Senate these days, Republican Senator John McCain, said the other day that there is a fundamental difference between a soldier on the battlefield and a prisoner of war. On the battlefield anything goes, because soldiers on opposite sides are trying to kill each other. Once a soldier is taken prisoner, he or she is defenceless. That is why the Geneva Convention (which should really be called Medina

Convention, because it was Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) who first stipulated that captured soldiers are entitled to human rights). The violation of the Geneva Convention through the mistreatment of prisoners by a few American soldiers is what appalled the world about Abu Ghraib prison.

In the face of the vicious verbal attacks by the right-wingers like Mr. Michael Savage, Muslim Americans feel as defenceless as the prisoners of war. Muslim Americans see their religion blasphemed, their customs ridiculed, their presence and immigration resented and their patriotism questioned. Muslim-Americans see their American-born children threatened. What are they to do? The best course for the Muslim Americans to follow is to ignore the Zionist taunts and remember why they came to America in the first place: to make a better life for themselves and their children and to love America. Muslim Americans have a tremendous advantage: they are here to make America a better place, and not to use America for the benefit of another country. Muslim Americans are the true patriots. Because, Muslim Americans can honestly say a resounding "Yes" to America, and a thundering "No" to the exploitation of America for the benefit of another nation, such as Israel!

LETTER FROM AMERICA

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sick to their stomachs! Mr. Michael Savage ridiculed Islam for claiming to be a "religion of peace," denounced "the need of Muslims" to feed Nicholas Berg to "his Allah." Mr. Michael Savage warned America of "the enemy within" (Muslim Americans), expressed disgust at the presence of mosques in the US and pronounced anyone with a headscarf ("Hijab") as an enemy of the US! Apparently, Federal Communication Commission's (FCC) legal protection does not

like the butchers of Nicholas Berg, nothing good ever comes out of those who know only how to hate!

Any time atrocities like the Nicholas Berg murder occurs, there is a hue and cry in the right-wing media decrying the absence of Muslim American condemnation of the act. These are the same zealots who, in their talk shows, define Islam and the Muslim Americans in a way indistinguishable from Hitler and the Nazis, without ever inviting Muslim Americans for rebutting

too preoccupied with establishing themselves in this country to have time for anything else. Sophisticated and media-savvy, they are certainly not! Their tormentors like Mr. Savage, knows it. The average Americans do not. That is why the Zionists like of Mr. Savage feels free to devilishly misrepresent the American Muslim community to advance their Zionist goals, while secure in the knowledge that there is absolutely no chance or capability of retaliation from the Muslim

are not interested in Muslim apology; their only interest is to denigrate Islam by linking Islam to every act of terrorism perpetrated by anyone with a Muslim-sounding name.

President Bush is correct in saying that the prisoner abuse that took place in Baghdad's Abu Ghraib prison does not represent American values. If fully trained American soldiers representing the American government can sometimes commit atrocious acts, why should the world be surprised