

Police becoming casualties

They need strong back-up including proper equipment

ANOTHER armed clash in broad daylight between the police and hardcore criminals has claimed a few more lives among the law enforcers. Our heart-felt sympathies to the members of the bereaved families.

This is a trend we have been witnessing lately with much worry and concern. Members of the police force are becoming more and more vulnerable to fatalities while performing their duties. It is so unfortunate that the state has not been able to provide adequate protection to them in the face of growing dangers to their lives. They are being simply outgunned by criminals.

We are also concerned about the nature of such crimes taking place at the business hub of the capital. The group that tried to catch the criminals at Motijheel on Sunday was one of the twenty-two specially formed units assigned to cover as many crime-prone spots of the city. They along with regular forces were patrolling the area. But that didn't deter the criminals from carrying out their mission. They probably knew that no matter how many policemen confronted them they would still manage to get away, and this is exactly what makes us very worried. It doesn't say much about the security environment in one of the most important parts of the city. This is a place where a lot of money is transacted daily making it a potential target for criminal extortion. Therefore having merely a group of five policemen to cover that particular area with minimal arms and ammunition could not have forestalled the danger. The sooner the authorities realise this, the better.

And finally, the reported link between the criminals of Sunday and Chhatra Dal, the student wing of the ruling party leaves none in doubt as to where the malcontent needs to be homed in on, and excoriated. The onus, therefore, is on the government. It has to show us that criminals will actually be brought to book irrespective of their affiliations with any political party whatsoever.

Indo-Pak test ban

Good news for both countries and the rest of us

ONE of the bright spots in the recently ousted BJP-led government was the thawing of relations between India and Pakistan on its watch, and one of the concerns that accompanied the election of the Congress-led government was whether or not it would continue with the BJP policy. The fact that the Congress is no less eager for a peaceful and co-operative relationship with Pakistan than its predecessor has been confirmed by an agreement reached at talks between the two countries this weekend to ban further nuclear testing, absent "extraordinary" justification.

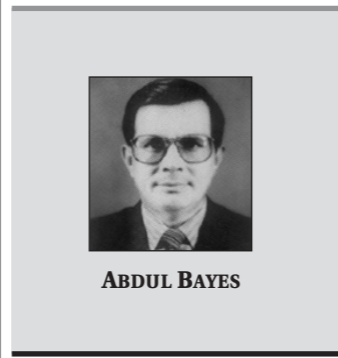
In addition to the continuation of the two countries' 1999 bilateral agreement to suspend further testing, New Delhi and Islamabad also agreed to set up a hot-line linking the top civil servants in both countries' foreign ministries to help avoid future nuclear confrontation. This weekend's talks were the first between the two countries on the issue of nuclear risks since both conducted nuclear tests within two weeks of one another in 1998.

The continued thaw in relations between Pakistan and India is good news for both nations and, if anything, even better news for the rest of the nations in this region. For too long, regional co-operation has been held hostage to the hostility between the two biggest players, and the entire region can expect to glean a large part of any peace dividend between New Delhi and Islamabad.

On the specific matter of nuclear weapons, once again, if anything, the biggest winners are the rest of South Asia. None of the other countries in the region can possibly gain from nuclear confrontation, only lose. Ratcheting down tensions between India and Pakistan and an agreement to initiate dialogue to address issues of concern is a major step forward for the entire region.

Hopefully, the agreement with respect to nuclear testing is a harbinger of continued good relations between these two fractious neighbours. We would all reap the benefits of nuclear tensions and risks being reduced, and of the confrontational politics of the past being replaced by mutual co-operation and understanding.

Reeling rounds, reading realities



ABDUL BAYES

WITH the backdrop of a lack of progress in the WTO negotiations, growingly, bilateral trade negotiations are in the offing. Meantime, a number of agreements are working with full force and, sordidly, bilateral agreements among some of the key players in the world market has led to further marginalisation of the excluded low income countries. What globalisation demands is multilateralism, not the other way round. For ensuring efficient global trade, what is essential is the restoration of the effectiveness of the multilateral negotiations through the WTO. It is true that much of the failures of the rounds, especially pertaining to agricultural trade liberalisation, owe to the awful protective position of the developed countries, and we can recall quite correctly that agriculture for long was "out of bounds" in WTO just to keep the USA and EU on an even keel. Whereas the future of 350 million small farms and the people employed by them in low and middle-income countries around the world depends upon improved access to well functioning markets. Their food and nutrition security is closely linked to the functioning of markets, home and abroad.

Joachim von Braun, Ashok Gulati and David Orden of IFPRI take on the task of telling the tales of reeling rounds and reading realities. In a recent research paper titled: "Making Agricultural Trade Liberalization Work for the Poor," the authors emphasise the role of rules-based trade, the abolition of pervasively used anti-poor protectionist policies, and a rise of reali-

ties on the ground. In this column today, I take the opportunity to highlight some of their observations.

Harm first, heal second!

Despite tears rolling down the cheeks of the poor of developing countries, developed countries allegedly pursued policies that militate against the interest of the poor. The support and border policies of the developed countries are "special and differential treatment" for the rich, not the poor.

Joachim von Braun, Ashok Gulati and David Orden strongly feel that developed countries should, in future, stop doing this farm to the farmers of developing countries. The developing countries should be brought to the talking tables to offer 'real reforms'.

Disorderly developing

The house does not seem to be clean from the side of developing countries also. According to the authors, nearly one-third of the agricultural trade of developing

agricultural exports." This is because, as the authors say, food consumers tend to face a fall in food prices.

Distributional issues

A grandiose generalisation on the positive impact of agricultural trade liberalization should be made with caution, as developing countries themselves are different in terms of the levels of development. Nor are their resource endowments same. For example, Brazil versus Bangladesh, Maldives

products largely hinge on the health standards set by the developed countries. Stringent developed country regulatory measures to address health, safety, and quality goals have come to close off market opportunities. Admittedly, the authors note, from fishing industries in Bangladesh and India, to the groundnut sector in Brazil, developing countries successfully coped with health and safety related conditionality. But despite that, a maize of regulatory measures are making exporters marginalised. "It is a daunting

tural markets in low income countries.

New dividing line

Joachim et al also reckon that, for trade policy and development aid, the traditional distinction between "developed" and "developing" countries should no longer hold. A finer classification is needed for rule based graduation process from exemption to trade rules and allocation of development assistance. "One useful principle would be that as per capita income rises and internal market become increasingly efficient, a country should reduce its agricultural trade barriers and subsidies. This principle would reverse the current pattern of protection and subsidisation worldwide."

Last words

For the sake of a fair play in agricultural trade -- the sources of income of millions of small farmers -- multilateral negotiations based on rules-based agenda could, possibly, provide a solution to the impasse. The developed countries could afford to keep off from coming to the tables; as they have bilateral agreements, and also the less they they talk on agricultural trade, the more they gain. But developing countries in their own interest should see that the world trading systems follow a rule based games. No matter that the Doha Round did not deliver, or Cancun concluded in clouds, the efforts at negotiations must continue for the sake of a peaceful and prosperous world.

Abdul Bayes is a Professor of Economics at Jahangirnagar University.

BENEATH THE SURFACE

The developed countries could afford to keep off from coming to the tables; as they have bilateral agreements, and also the less they they talk on agricultural trade, the more they gain. But developing countries in their own interest should see that the world trading systems follow a rule based games. No matter that the Doha Round did not deliver, or Cancun concluded in clouds, the efforts at negotiations must continue for the sake of a peaceful and prosperous world.

Drawing upon the researches of IFPRI and elsewhere, the authors are of the view that developing countries are robbed of agricultural exports worth \$37 billion (25 percent) annually due to blocking market access and driving down world prices. The aggregate figure conceals, more than it reveals, the exact impact on the poor. The authors submit a suitable example to drive home the point. The country is Benin and it is cotton export-dependent country. It could be discerned that a drop of world cotton prices by 20 per cent -- as might happen due to developed country subsidies -- raises poverty by four percentage points (an increase of 10 percent in the population in poverty) through direct and indirect effects on rural incomes.

There are, in fact, innumerable examples of developing country exports -- from bananas to biscuits, sausages to sugar -- that tend to face non-tariff barriers in the pretext of safety food. At home, the poor farmers produce these products and an export market denied goes to mean that their economic uplift is being denied.

countries is with other developing countries. The share is growing over time. "But these countries also have substantial trade barriers on agricultural products. Among large developing countries such as Brazil, China, India, and Mexico, tariffs applied to agricultural products average more than 25 percent -- these are higher tariff levels imposed by many low income countries." Disconcertingly, developing countries are divided over their own baneful barriers and thus eroding their energies for a united front against the developed countries. Those to prosper, argue for open trade; those to perish, argue for protection.

But the stakes from liberalisation of agricultural trade are different for developed and developing countries. IFPRI researches estimate that when developing countries join in agricultural trade liberalisation, they reap home additional GDP gain worth \$23 billion annually. "This is more than \$14 billion gain when only developed countries undertake agricultural reforms. The developing country trade policy reforms add an additional \$15 billion annually to their aggregate

task for the small-holder economies of many poor nations to implement food safety standards that can be traced and monitored from "fork to farm." New institutions and resources are needed to make it happen. Thus regulations that are well intentioned in some dimensions can have damaging effect of reducing income opportunities or blocking technology adoption that would benefit the poor."

Unsafe 'safety'

According to the authors, the fastest growing world agricultural markets for developing countries are for fruits and vegetables, livestock products, and other high-value commodities. Fruits and vegetables now alone account for nearly one-fifth of developing country agricultural exports.

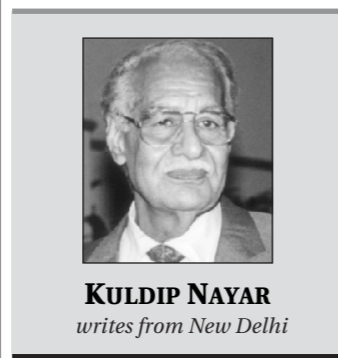
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Fair five

An end to the impasse calls for rounds of negotiations based on rules, respect, and realities. In bullet point brevity, the agenda for agricultural reform must comprise five fair judgments: (a) an end to any types of export subsidies; (b) reductions in systematically high tariffs that close off market access; (c) disciplines on domestic subsidies and bound tariff rates so that the beggar-thy-neighbor subsidisation and high protection of the late 1990s are not repeated; (d) ongoing efforts to keep trade open while accommodating legitimate regulatory goals; and (e) scaled-up investments in development assistance to strengthen agricul-

A crime is a crime



KULDEEP NAYYAR

writes from New Delhi

PRIME Minister Manmohan Singh rang up Opposition Leader L.K. Advani to let parliament function when the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) stalled the proceedings for the second day. He said that the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) was prepared to discuss any subject, even the 'tainted' ministers, if that was the price the NDA wanted to exact for not disturbing the two houses. Advani expressed his inability to do so.

Not because Advani could not prevail upon the NDA, but because he was party to the decision the NDA had taken before the session not to allow parliament transact any business at its first sitting after the general election. The same message came through clearly during the discussions at the business committee of either house when the Congress leaders met the BJP. 'Let this session be like this' or 'do not press us this time' was the refrain of comments by the BJP leaders. What vicarious satisfaction the BJP or, for that matter, the NDA wanted to have by stalling the parliament is difficult to comprehend. It might be a feeling of anger

for defeat at the polls or sheer disappointment for not being in office. Whatever the reason, the BJP set new precedents for disturbing the two houses.

For the first time in India's parliamentary history, the opposition did not allow a debate on the president's address. Again, for the first time, the prime minister was stopped from introducing his council of ministers to the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha mem-

I can at least do one thing: not to draw the sitting allowance for the days the house is adjourned because of the disturbance within. Kindly issue instructions not to give me the daily allowance for the days the house was forced not to work..."

The chairman accepted my plea and ordered the deduction of daily allowance from my emoluments. I have written this week to the speaker and the Rajya Sabha chair-

walkouts. And now, it is free for all. Even when the practice of coming into the well of the house began, members respected the sanctity of the Question Hour. They have gone back on that as well. The NDA crossed all limits when it did not allow discussion on the president's address. It violated what was considered unthinkable at one time.

The disconcerting aspect is that neither the BJP, which is guilty now, nor the Congress, which was

strong public annoyance over the stalling. But they have already announced that they will not allow parliament function even in the budget session, if there is no 'settlement' by then. The word 'settlement' has not been defined. Probably, the reference is to the 'tainted ministers'.

The Election Commission has a list of some 100 MPs who have criminal proceedings going on against them. They are from all

to exclude persons charge-sheeted in two or more heinous offences from contesting elections. The Congress did not agree to it.

The BJP has unnecessarily tried to differentiate between what it considers 'political crime' and 'regular crime'. A crime is a crime, whether motivated by political considerations or others. One is no less heinous than the other. The point at issue is not the type of crime, but the crime itself. Parties should not politicise the problem but try to find a solution.

To begin with, those MPs against whom the court has framed charges should not be eligible for election. Apparently this will not be acceptable to the BJP because at one stage the court had framed charges against Advani in the Babri-masjid demolition case. Still, a 'settlement' to reignite the functioning of parliament cannot be at the expense of justice.

Tainted ministers or MPs should have no place in parliament, the highest court in a democratic country. Had the institution of Ombudsman been in position -- what the successive governments had promised -- the cases of tainted ministers and MPs could have been referred to it. But what do we do in the meanwhile? Maybe, once a 'tainted' person is elected to the legislature or parliament or appointed minister, the hearing of cases against him should take place daily for an early verdict. Special courts can be established for this purpose. It may not be an ideal solution but it will be a 'settlement' of sorts.

Kuldeep Nayyar is an eminent Indian columnist.

BETWEEN THE LINES

The disconcerting aspect is that neither the BJP, which is guilty now, nor the Congress, which was guilty in the past, has a sense of guilt. Both of them do not consider it unethical to hit below the belt. They do not seem to realise the harm they are causing to the system. The real problem is that for most of political parties and leaders, the dividing line between right and wrong, moral and immoral, has ceased to exist.

bers. And, significantly, for the first time, the accommodative Atal Behari Vajpayee was not the opposition leader.

When it comes to halting parliament's sessions, the Congress is not without blame. The party has disturbed both the houses repeatedly when it has been out of power. It has picked up some issue or the other to hold up the proceedings. I got so fed up with the disturbances -- I was then the Rajya Sabha member -- that I wrote the following letter to the chairman: "... The non-transaction of business in the house is the order of the day. Despite your efforts, the house has to accept what one party or the other decides on a particular day. As a nominated member, I have practically no say in the matter. But

man, citing my example and requesting them not to pay members their daily allowance so as to discourage them from stalling parliament. If 'no work, no pay' can be a dictum for workers, why not for MPs?

The NDA supporters argue that it is their right to ventilate their protest. I do not think anyone is in favour of imposing restrictions on MPs. The question is: should the protest be expressed by disturbing the proceedings in the house? On the 50th anniversary of parliament members themselves swore not to disturb parliament on any count. Still they do the opposite. MPs should realise that their protest is getting uglier, session by session. Initially, it was confined to raising points of order. Then there were

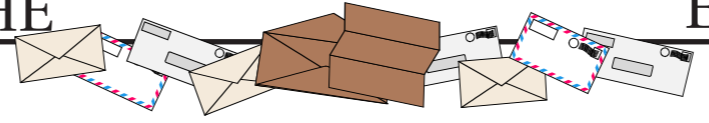
guilty in the past, has a sense of guilt. Both of them do not consider it unethical to hit below the belt. They do not seem to realise the harm they are causing to the system. The real problem is that for most of political parties and leaders, the dividing line between right and wrong, moral and immoral, has ceased to exist.

India may take pride in having a democratic structure that ensures free voting and peaceful change of government. But if parliament does not function and if one political party or the other intentionally disturbs its proceedings, democracy would cease to have any meaning. People's faith in parliament has already lessened because of MPs' conduct. The BJP leaders should have learnt a lesson from

parties, 26 from the BJP, 15 from the Congress, 5 from the CPI(M) and 54 from other groups. An intrepid weekly has culled out information from the affidavits which candidates had submitted to the returning officer at the time of filing their nomination paper. It is obligatory for a candidate to give a list of criminal cases against him.

Long before the polls, some human rights activists persuaded the Election Commission to make candidates disclose their police record. Political parties joined hands to make government issue an ordinance to negate the commission's ruling. The Supreme Court struck it down, making it mandatory for all candidates to declare their criminal antecedents. The NDA wanted to introduce a bill

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR



Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

OIC

Dhaka's defeat in the OIC election for the post of the Secretary General was nothing short of an embarrassment. The way the Foreign Minister spoke prior to his departure for the Meeting in Turkey made us feel that we have this very important post in our pocket. Now, with only 12 of the 56 votes received, someone has to take responsibility and made to answer.

The one-year and half that the Foreign Ministry ran this campaign, they sent out so many Special Envoys who all came and reported the assurances of support to our candidate. The Foreign Ministry's assessment was that 30 countries had committed their support, many of them in writing. We are waiting to hear from the Foreign Ministry what they have to say now. The Foreign Affairs

Adviser's expression of disappointment is just not good enough.

Someone must also answer for the selection of our candidate. I have no doubt that our candidate's background was one of the reasons for his rejection. The other two countries' nominees fitted into the environment of international diplomacy. We chose a former Health Minister without any background or experience of any international diplomacy. His activities within the country had made him controversial to everyone, even to the members of his own party. He is one who is known to raise controversy whenever and wherever he opens his mouth. A great deal of money was spent in campaigning for his candidature. This is public money and not an internal BNP business. As a member of the public, I demand that a commission be set up to find this out, for the de-

baled has also affected our image internationally. It is just not fair to blame the opposition for damaging our image abroad, if the government is responsible, it too must be made to answer.

The inquiry commission should also look into issues such as the Foreign Ministry's claim that 30 countries had committed its support for our candidate; whether we knew that behind our back Turkey's candidate had gathered the support of 32 countries. The FM himself was in Turkey only recently and did he or did he not get a feel that Turkey's candidature was that strong. He came back and instead gave an upbeat assessment of our candidate. Then, there have been reports that the Saudis also changed their preference from us to Turkey. We started our campaign on the conviction that we have the support of the Saudis. If

the Saudis changed sides, someone needs to tell us why. The Commission should find these answers for us, for the sake of integrity of the Government and the Prime Minister. If someone or some group of people has taken us for a ride, which seem to include even the Prime Minister, then we better know who these people are.

The Foreign Ministry has a long record of playing the bluffing game. It has seldom won any candidatures save those that fall in our bags based on the dynamics of multilateral diplomacy. Let this OIC debacle be a test case for putting the Foreign Ministry in its proper place. Finally, I just hope that by backing our weak candidature we have not annoyed the Malaysians sufficiently for them to pay us back on the manpower issue.

Shahjahan Ahmed
Dhanmandi RA, Dhaka

"Why blame America?"

(Partially agreeing with Mr. Ayon (Why blame America, June 17).

I do agree that America has no fault. I also agree that the powerful will always want to capture the world. But what is the idea behind capturing the world? I think Mr. Ayon is unaware of that.

Three ideologies exist in this world: Islam, Capitalism and Communism. The nature of an ideology is to expand. The same happened with Islam as it conquered the then two-third of the world by its beauty and not by sword. The proof is that even after the Arabs departure from Bangladesh, Indonesia, India etc. people are still ready to die for Islam and have not rejected it. Islam expanded to establish justice of Allah on His earth, not for looting

and oppressing, unlike Capitalism and Communism.

Communism also expanded but by oppression and tyranny and that's why people of Central Asia, which was a part of the USSR, have reverted back to Islam and not become communists.

The history of Capitalism is the same. The British looted India for centuries and now when they left we don't want them back any more and still use the word 'British' as a slang. Now everybody is against the "oil for blood policy". So, people are slowly but surely rejecting Capitalism too. Therefore the only hope is Islam as it is from the Creator of mankind who cannot give an oppressive and biased system. Islam collapsed because the Muslims stopped spreading it and now we are still far away from the adoption of total Islam and that's why we are still suffering. The

current Muslim world is worst as its leaders are western agents and dictators. I will request Mr. Ayon to look at the Muslim leaders from 623 to 1924 when true and complete Islam existed.

Tanveer
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

My country, I am proud of you!

My US born Bangladeshi cousins during their recent visit to Bangladesh found it a wonderful country. In their eyes Bangladesh is full of colours, sounds and lots of lively people. And I felt proud of my country when I received e-mails from them after they returned to the US, saying they loved Bangladesh. Yes, my country, I am proud of you.

I am proud of you because you have gained the label of the most

corrupt country in the world.

I am proud of you because the members of your police department don't demand a huge amount of money for bribe. We the average people can please them even with two taka.

I am proud of you because you have nurtured so called religious leaders like Bangla Bhai.

I am proud of you because of your increasing number of education shops -- I am sorry, can't name it better. Nowadays anyone can set up a university.

Every morning I wake up to find news of killings and accidents on the newspapers. That makes me even more proud of you. Should we take it that -- at least some people are doing something to solve our problem of overpopulation?

Rumana Feroze
Department of English, University of Dhaka