

Ban will be a bane Police gag on media

THE IGP's directive to put a stop to his junior operatives talking directly to the media has come as a shock to us as indeed it must have to all those that hold the ideals the people's right to know to be sacred. Under the new order, nobody below the rank of Superintendent of Police is permitted to talk to the press. Even, in the case of an SP, he shall need clearance before he talks to the press.

It is our considered view that the old arrangement has served well the cause of public interest and the administration's need to be accountable. We feel that any government that is keen on getting the genuine picture of a matter as well as on seeing the ends of justice served, cannot have missed the inherent flaw in the new directive.

We fail to see the rationale of changing the system that worked well for the press; unless, of course, it has brought to light the inherent weaknesses of the police and their sometimes-not-too-transparent way of functioning.

The benefits of direct access of the press to the relevant police functionaries are many, not least of which is the real time information the press can access. Getting the facts from the 'horse's mouth' ensures accuracy and correctness, because it comes from the man on the ground, having knowledge of the event first hand. Should the authorities have felt the need for further clarity, there were plenty of scope for providing an updated version of an incident subsequently.

We are dismayed at the government's attempt to stifle the free flow of information in an important area of public service. It is important for the government to realise that by putting a lid on potential news it would be so much the worse off. For, it might very well end up feeding only on those stories that the official sources want the government to hear and not what it should hear.

Making the whole procedure circuitous would also result in delay in the dissemination of information related to public interest. Moreover, it could lead to dilution of news, and manufacture of speculation and rumour.

In all these lie the dangers of the truth being swept under the carpet, something that can be desirable to none.

EC must translate its warning into action

Violation of code of conduct cannot be condoned

THOUGH the ravaging floods have somewhat deflected public attention away from Gazipur-2 by-election scheduled for August 1, the Acting Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) could not simply put up with the blatant violation of campaign rules by the candidates. In fact, he categorically pointed out to the contestants from three major political parties -- BNP, AL and JP -- were in breach of electoral regulations. This is totally unexpected because the code of conduct was adopted in consultation with the candidates.

Somehow, we are not so surprised. In fact, the campaign for this by-election has been dogged by controversies since the day one. First, the mysterious death of Suman in custody, a key witness to the murder of Awami League MP Ahsanullah Master, the father of the opposition candidate in the fray came as a big jolt casting a shadow as it did over the run-up to the poll. There has not been any significant progress in the inquiry, with the government remaining tightlipped over it. All this is part of an election atmosphere that may not bode too well for the outcome.

At one stage, even the civil surgeon of Gazipur was publicly alleged to have been campaigning for the ruling coalition candidate which rightly made the Election Commission put its foot down on the wayward official.

We hope the EC would not confine itself to merely condemning and cautioning the law breakers but go beyond it. Unless the acting CEC translates his warnings into action, the helplessness and impotence of the institution would only be a glaring reality. This is perhaps another signal for strengthening the EC with adequate reforms. Meanwhile, with the by-election only a few days away, the EC must ensure that there is no further violation of the electoral code of conduct.

Shifting sands or just quicksand?



M. ABDULL HAFIZ

WITH the change of guard in New Delhi there is an unusual outpouring of optimism with regard to normalisation of relations between India and Pakistan. A great deal of buoyancy is visible in the public temperament of both the countries. They are ostensibly based on the success on the recently held expert level talks on nuclear CBMS followed by the positive note on which the foreign secretary level meeting has just ended. Both the events show that the new found detente between the two countries has survived India's general election. India has, in more than one way, reassured Pakistan that the marked improvements in bilateral relations seen in the final months of the Vajpayee government would persist. Indeed, the process initiated on January 6, 2004 at Islamabad under the leadership of Mr. Vajpayee and General Musharraf

continues unabated. In the meantime, further relaxation has been introduced to the bilateral relation, with more and more personal touches by the leaders of officials of both the countries. The scion of a ruling family from a North Indian state, the courtly external affairs minister of India profusely quoted from Faiz Ahmed, Pakistan's uncrowned poet laureate while speaking over the telephone to his Pakistani counterpart. On their

produced one tangible result. After about ten long years of going round and round the mulberry bush, Islamabad and Delhi have at last reached that it is time to bury the hatchet. The urge for peace and amity has never been greater between the two countries. But all the gestures so far on either side can prove illusory as they often did in the past.

A gesture, as Menachem Begin said on the visit of Anwar Sadat to

generation, and, as such, carried no prejudicial baggage. The realities however turned out to be otherwise, proving that the national interests change neither with change of personality nor with the generation one may belong to.

It also may be recalled that preparatory to the Shimla meeting in 1972, DP Dhar visited Islamabad as Indira Gandhi's emissary, and even at that time he profusely quoted Urdu couplets while guarding zeal-

could take an uncharted path. Recently, he is on record having said that his life-long mission is to craft good relations with neighbours. Has Manmohan Singh a similar life-long mission? Can he, being from a minority community be able to assert his views on the majority community? Can he be bold enough to deviate from the beaten tracks followed by his party predecessors? How will he perform at the stumbling block of a future dialogue: the issue of Jammu and Kashmir?

During their rule lasting for almost half a century, successive Congress governments could not effectively tackle this problem. Experience shows that no Congress government has made any progress on the Kashmir issue after the signing of the Shimla Agreement which has since been stalled. In the meantime, the difference in perception on the issue of both India and Pakistan is as wide as ever, while the option for the use of force by both countries has not resolved the issue, and apparently been discarded.

A sustained dialogue may be a sane approach to the issue for the moment. The process can persist with pressure from the people and intelligentsia from both the countries, as well as the international community. But at the end of the day the differences still persist. JN Dixit, India's National Security advisor, who will exercise influence on the present government's policy making, thinks that "a solution to the Kashmir problem could be sought with some adjustment in the delineation of the line of control." But Pakistan's General Musharraf is totally dismissive of this idea, stating: "Line of control is not acceptable in future solution of the Kashmir dispute."

With such pitfalls lying ahead, how do we describe current trends in Indo-Pakistan normalisation: shifting sands or just quicksand!

Brig (ret'd) Hafiz is former DG of BISS.

PERSPECTIVES

During their rule lasting for almost half a century, successive Congress governments could not effectively tackle this problem. Experience shows that no Congress government has made any progress on the Kashmir issue after the signing of the Shimla Agreement which has since been stalled. In the meantime, the difference in perception on the issue of both India and Pakistan is as wide as ever.

part, the Pakistani interlocutors liberally cracked Punjabi jokes. Whenever the couplets of Ghalib and Faiz are brought in, jokes are frequently exchanged and moods on either side are swamped with nostalgia for the golden days of yesteryear -- these are usually the signs of ice melting in the frozen relationship.

Apart from the symbolism and rhetoric ingrained in Indo-Pakistan diplomacy, the flurry of events in the last few weeks, accompanied by extraordinary diplomatic alacrity,

Isreal "is only a gesture. Inter-state relations have more solid foundation, based as they are on national interest." The sentiments and emotions should be accorded value and welcomed too, but they are not, and will never be, a substitute for hard-headed negotiations and results obtained therefrom. When Rajiv Gandhi became India's prime minister in 1984, President Ziaul Huq of Pakistan saw brighter prospects for Indo-Pakistan rapprochement because, to him, Rajiv belonged to the post-partition

ously his country's vital national interests. The Shimla agreement, for the first time, formally put the Kashmir dispute in a bilateral frame which could not henceforth broken by Pakistan. It goes substantially to DP Dhar's credit. So, the hard realities inherent in the positions held respectively by India and Pakistan can, at no point, be lost sight of. While it is obvious that some sort of dialogue, maybe even a composite one, will resume and continue, but the approach of the two sides is likely to be different, and can

relations with the people surrounding the border. We should provide all facilities which include hassle-free travel, preferential treatment by giving concession in government hotels, transports, hospitals, etc. Our people should also be encouraged to

The defence of Bangladesh

COMMODORE AMA ALAM (RETD.)

ANY sovereign country worth its name must have defence against external aggression. Each country has its own unique requirement, depending upon geographical location, economic condition, size of the country in terms of area and population, etc.

Bangladesh right after liberation had virtually no defence capability worth mentioning. Having very friendly relations with its neighbour, it did not feel the requirement for some time after liberation. With the passage of time, because of clash of interests, the country started feeling the need for armed forces to safeguard its vital interests. The problem is that the modern defence machinery is very costly and investment in this sector does not pay immediate or apparent dividends.

Bangladesh with its acute resource constraints, and being hard-pressed to meet the basic requirements like food, shelter, and health care, for its people, it is very difficult to decide

how much the country should spare for its defence. This is the decisive factor to fix the size of the armed forces and the war machinery it can afford.

Until a briefcase nuclear weapon is readily available at an affordable

price, Bangladesh will have to be content with conventional weapons. Even with conventional weapons, how much we can match with our potential enemy is a matter of discussion. This article is not going to discuss that issue, though it is one of the vital things that the policy makers should decide.

The first trait that comes to mind that plays a vital role, is the morale of the people. Morale is taking pride in what we are, what we have, and the will to withstand all hardship to survive as a nation. Unity boosts

morale, and division has a sagging effect on morale. So our leaders, writers, intellectuals, poets, singers, journalists, and for that matter all conscious people of the country, should contribute towards raising the morale of our people and instilling

pride in the people, so that when needed, the whole nation will rise to the defence of the country. A nation without pride is not capable of defending itself. So, the first and foremost task should be to raise the morale of the people. Our people have proved during the liberation war, and during natural calamities that we can absorb a lot and keep our morale high despite the worst of situations.

At the end of the day it is the will of a nation which is the decisive factor. A nation with high spirits and the will to remain independent can face any odds and fight for a hundred years to uphold the independence of the country.

Amongst the states in the region. Should we go for a defence pact with some group is a big question, but why not? If our adversary is out of proportion, we have to align with someone or some group to match the enemy, otherwise we will be taken for a ride. In foreign interaction it is "give and take" policy that works better. So when we expect something, we should also be ready to give something. By that I mean we might have to give some trade concessions, etc. In the sub-regional context, the country should have the best of

visit these places so that a close people to people contact is made and we become friendly to each other. The policy of the country should discourage massive urbanisation. It takes few bombs to carry out mass destruction at very little cost. If the population is dispersed all over the country it will be a strength during any hostility. As one can remember Moscow was vacated during the WWII. For this, the people living in villages are to be provided with certain facilities like health care, education, sanitation, electricity, amuse-

Slow-motion justice for Bhopal



PRAFUL BIDWAI writes from New Delhi

THE Supreme Court judgement ordering disbursement of Rs. 1,503 crores to the Bhopal toxic-gas disaster victims is a significant, if long-delayed, victory. It acknowledges that the destruction wrought by Union Carbide in the world's worst-ever accident was far greater than thought 20 years ago.

Indeed, the Supreme Court itself underestimated the havoc by a factor of five while approving a 1989 settlement with Carbide. From 3,000 deaths, the toll has climbed to 15,310.

Equally, society itself seems to have recognised the colossal injustice visited upon Bhopal's victims. That's the meaning of a recent New York judgment ordering Dow Chemicals, Carbide's successor, to clean up the toxic residues in Bhopal at its expense.

In reality, the Bhopalis have been

re-victimised by UCC over the years through the poisoning of their water by the residues. They can now hope to get clean drinking water.

While this recognition is welcome, the latest judgement doesn't remotely meet the requirements of justice. Most victims will be paid paltry sums like Rs. 25,000 for a lifetime of suffering and disability. The worst-affected people, disabled by grave, irreversible health damage, will be denied even the minimum

The \$470 million represents one of the world's cheapest settlements of any toxic-exposure suit. It barely equals double the amount of Union Carbide's insurance cover.

Had a much less terrible accident occurred in the West, UCC would have been immediately bankrupted. Its directors would have been jailed. They'd face more severe punishment than, say, Enron's Kenneth Lay.

If UCC's victims have received some recompense, it's not because of

tragedy, but three. The first was the 1984 accident caused by flawed plant design and negligence. The second was the unjust out-of-court settlement with Carbide, after the victims were deprived of independent legal representation.

The third disaster was the way their claims were settled. Ninety-five percent received a disgraceful Rs. 15,000 for a lifetime of suffering. They were further humiliated by callous doctors and corrupt bureaucrats.

criminal liability.

Two years later, under the VP Singh government, criminal liability was restored. But the Indian embassy in Washington still failed to serve the warrant on Anderson because, it claimed, he couldn't be located. This, when Greenpeace published his address!

The Centre put the Madhya Pradesh government in charge of relief despite its appalling record of callousness, incompetence and

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needed for medical treatment.

The roughly 30,000 victims who have sustained extremely severe damage, and deserve upwards of Rs. 2 lakhs in relief, will suffer a dilution of that sum. The Rs. 1,500 crores will be split among 5.5 lakhs in the 36 affected municipal wards of Bhopal.

The sum is what remains of the \$470 million (originally equivalent to Rs. 710 crores) paid to the government by UCC, but withheld from the victims. Only half the original amount was disbursed earlier.

The sum's size explained by the three-fold depreciation of the rupee vis-à-vis the dollar and accumulated interest. The additional "compensation", then, only makes up for devaluation.

the courts or governments, not because "the system works." The reason is their own heroic effort. Their struggle has been valiant. Its strong collective experience has empowered them and helped them recover their dignity and rise above victimhood.

Since 1984, I have personally witnessed how broken widows, children forced to become heads of their families at age 9, and all-but-crippled day-labourers, all turned into strong human beings and great activists.

This self-empowerment through struggle is the greatest achievement of the Bhopalis and their transformation from victims to victors.

Bhopal has experienced not one

Families of the dead got just Rs. 1 lakh; even rail accident victims get more. Putting such a low value on human life speaks poorly of Indian society itself.

Institution after institution let down the Bhopalis. The government took over the litigation and ruined it. The US courts made matters worse. Indian courts couldn't handle the case on the basis of torts (civil wrongs, caused by negligence) -- because we had no tort law. The CBI failed to act on an arrest warrant for UCC chairman Warren Anderson, issued in 1992!

The Supreme Court itself let the victims down by approving the \$470-million settlement in return for extinguishing Carbide's civil and

corruption. The Indian Council of Medical Research failed to suggest a rational line of treatment for the victims' disorders, including immune system damage.

Bhopal's elite has been hostile to the gas-affected. BJP leaders Uma Bharati and Babulal Gaur demand that they should share the compensation with the well-off unaffected wards!

In 2002, another challenge emerged: collusion between the Indian and United States governments to dilute criminal charges filed against Carbide's officials. The Ministry of External Affairs asked the CBI to amend the charges against Anderson from culpable homicide not amounting to murder (304-II of IPC)

to "a rash and negligent act" (304A), which carries 2 years' imprisonment.

The Bhopal victims -- killed or scarred for life for no fault of theirs -- were again asked to sacrifice their rights for Indo-US "strategic partnership," "investor confidence," "market sentiment," etc.

The Bhopalis beat back the challenge. They are clear: they might never receive adequate compensation. But the world shouldn't forget that a multinational corporation which was abysmally negligent in plant design and operation, caused their grievous suffering. Its officials must not be let off. The victims must know who heaped injury, injustice, and ignominy upon them.

That struggle for full justice still lies ahead. But what the victims have achieved is significant. They never allowed themselves to be browbeaten by the worst adversity. Their spirit is indomitable.

Their organisations have succeeded where most NGOs fail: preserving unity. The latest litigation was initiated by 36 individuals, each representing a gas-affected ward, cutting across different organisations.

The Bhopalis' struggle hasn't ended. But it will continue to inspire millions -- and remind us of how far we have to go to create a safer world. Bhopal's example will energise many struggles against tyranny.

Praful Bidwai is an eminent Indian columnist.

In need of psychotherapy

IFFAT NAWAZ

Generalisation and categorisation will always be a part of human nature just like scrutiny and comparison are. People everywhere, of every race and background compare, contrast and judge each other, finding flaws and criticising as a group brings unity to the crowd as a whole. It is easier to bond when there is a common hate between two entities, cashing in on a common detestation brings new beginnings to eras.

Bangladeshis have always been known for their extreme emotions. Our people have marched to rebel against the US going to war with Iraq and also revolted when Humayun Ahmed decided to hang his imaginary Television Serial character Baker Bhai. We have made a fuss over the hanging of Ershad Sikdar, (reminder: he was accused in 50 cases including 22 murder cases and was known to be a

top criminal of Khulna) his death received more publicity than the deaths of his murder victims.

Being emotional we have celebrated the only time the Bangladesh cricket team won against Pakistan, a celebration which came close to the joviality of 1971 when the people of East Pakistan defeated West Pakistan and created Bangladesh. Being emotional, we have beaten to death the Imam of an Ahmaddiya mosque in front of his ten-year-old daughter, and being emotional, we have gathered singing *Amar Bhai* or *Rokta Rangano Ekushe February* in the early mornings of every 21st February since 1952.

Being emotional, we have condemned the way Iraqis have behatted American hostages, the way American soldiers have tortured Iraqi prisoners, and while being emotional about these, we have overlooked the chopping down sessions of contract killers and blood baths created by local thugs in Bangla-

desh. Being emotional, we supported (some of us) and damned (rest of us) the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon. Being emotional, we have created a saga of monarchy, keeping a power in the

added to this definition the whole idea changes, extremely emotional being the most appropriate state of a Bengali mind and body.

In most cases the "developed world" doesn't consider emotion to

So before we hear this from an outsider, I thought as an insider I would spell it out and throw the news. Bangladesh is in need of major psychotherapy, now the question is do we bill the therapy expenses to foreign aid or internal administration? Ideas anyone?

family, falling deeply and blindly listening to the history of past and future empty promises from so-called prominent mouths.

A Webster definition for "Emotion" is as follows: a moving of the mind or soul; excitement of the feelings, whether pleasing or painful; disturbance or agitation of mind caused by a specific exciting cause and manifested by some sensible effect on the body. Now if the word "extreme" is

be a positive aspect. Finding a "balance" in emotions and limiting feelings makes a successful person. Paying a therapist few hundred dollars an hour, people in America and Europe learn to swallow their emotions, only spitting out the necessary leftovers for the right time and place. Sure, Gandhi starved for days to get what he wanted, but today that same emotional guilt trip will just not work, and the developed world realises that

So the standard spells excess emotion to be a negative concern, and since the world follows the standards set by the developed world, Bangladesh being a developing country is

way behind catching up to this benchmark of minimal emotion. The amount of excess emotion is not shown in reports by the World Bank or USAID but if the amount of Bangladesh's emotions were to be accounted for, Bangladesh would be overflowing with this commodity, adding another written and recognised alarm of backwardness that Bangladesh faces during her developing stage in her constant race with the world.

If one is to psychoanalyse Bangladesh, a few disorders would appear vividly. For example, Intermittent Explosive Disorder which defines as episodes of aggressive outbursts resulting in either destruction of

property or physical assaults on others. Bangladeshis easily qualify for this. Our aggressive outbursts to all happy and sad incidents resulting with destruction and assaults are nothing but an everyday event. Not only do we devastate when there is desolation, but even in happiness we are heard of insulting and harassing the weak and meek, i.e. during New Year's Eve of 2002 in the heart of Dhaka's university area a young

woman was brutally stripped of her clothes, assaulted and molested by a bunch of young men, who were just having a jolly good time!

Then there is the psychological disorder Pyromania, which is a psychological problem that primarily involves setting fires -- also something Bangladeshis can relate to. Setting buses on fire during strikes and burning temples and mosques in the name of revenge for some riot in another country defines a frequent tale of Bangladesh.

Not to mention Kleptomania the impulse control problem which involves the compulsive stealing of items not needed for their monetary value, the one problem Bangladesh definitely suffers from. The disappearance of big chunks of foreign aids to make fat wallets fatter and eating up all allocated funds for general administration by over-paid administrators without accomplishing any points of administrating -- perfect symptoms of

a Kleptomania.

We Bangladeshis are afraid of words related to psychology. Our idea of psychotherapy can only exist in extreme cases involving mental asylums. So we rather live in denial making our physiological disorders bigger and pretend to be completely normal performing all abnormalities. We rather act civilised while acting barbaric, while all our basic raw instincts and emotions rule our minds, our bodies and as a whole, our country.

So before we hear this from an outsider, I thought as an insider I would spell it out and throw the news. Bangladesh is in need of major psychotherapy, now the question is do we bill the therapy expenses to foreign aid or internal administration? Ideas anyone?

Iffat Nawaz writes for Lifestyle, The Daily Star.