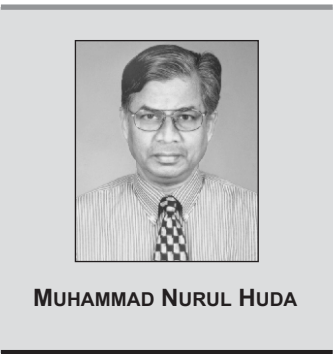


The police and the press



MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

THE relations between the police and the press are probably more embittered now in Bangladesh than ever before. Nevertheless, a complacent acceptance of the situation would be foolish, for present conditions are abnormal. It must not be overlooked that both the police and the press are living, dynamic organisations, operating in ever-changing social conditions, so that the several relationships subsisting between the police, the press, and the public are not static.

Neither are they governed by immutable laws. One may devise a number of palliatives and theories being divorced from the salutary corrective of practical application. However, the more one appreciates the complex nature of the everyday dealings between the police and the press, the further into the realms of impracticability does the prospect of any grandiose plan recede.

Relationship and attitude

In Bangladesh, in the absence of official guidance from higher quarters, each police unit has been left on its own to evolve its policy towards the press. While this may be seen as a desirable flexibility, the lack of uniformity is disconcerting to journalists, who are apt to regard it as inconsistency. It is not surprising, therefore, that the relationship has often been an uneasy one, amounting to no more than a compromise.

The attitude of police officers towards the press varies considerably. Some favour a wide exploitation of press publicity as an aid to police work. There are others who believe that efficiency is still compatible with functioning unobtrusively in the background. Not unnaturally, the dealings of these officers with the press are characterised by an underlying wariness. However, in deciding which is likely to be most beneficial to the public, we should not perhaps lightly dismiss the views of these officers who are not wholly enthusiastic with regard to press publicity, for many of them are ripe in police experience.

Some causes of antipathy

The antipathy to the press felt by some of the police has its roots in the past and even a cursory examination of the earliest dealings between the two parties makes this apparent. For a change if one ventures into English experience, one finds that the advent of the "New Police" in 1829 in London was greeted with derisive and scurrilous antagonism by the less reputable newspapers, while even the better-class journals manifested anti-police sentiments. Newspapers of the day reflected the enmity felt towards the police, and gave prominence to anti-police resolutions passed at meetings of London vestries and parishioners, and to the vituperations of London magistrates, who ridiculed policemen attending court and maligned the whole police establishment.

The press in London assailed the police for unnecessary interference, and, paradoxically, took them to task for not effecting arrests in cases of assault and not suppressing such nuisances as pavement-loiterers and singers of indecent ballads. Although errors are incidental to the first days of any big organisation, the greatest delight was taken in chronicling the mistakes of the police. To this may be added the quoting of malicious rumours, the exaggerating of defects, and a ridiculing of the police generally, and thus it will be appreciated that a newspaper campaign was in full swing, even then. The police probably suffered to a greater extent than any other institution from the alternating favour and disfavour of the population.

STRAIGHT LINE

The needs of an orderly society would be better served by a closer identity of interests between the police and the press. This is in line with the evolving role of the press as an independent and impartial public service. Meanwhile, the obvious needs are simultaneously to maximise the efficiency and public spiritedness of both the police and the press; to instill into the public a high sense of citizenship; and to weld the police, press and public into a powerful and cohesive trinity. In this way an effective bulwark against crime and disorder can be created and public peace fully maintained throughout the country.

Watch over the watchers

There is no denying that it is a proper function of the press to keep a close watch on all public services and ventilate any legitimate complaints. When the fierce light of publicity is focused on some phase of police work, quite often the resultant criticism is largely destructive without appreciating an alternative curse that could have been pursued. One may have to agree that the press is not always qualified to pass judgement, for, in policing, the onlooker does not see most of the game. Some parts of police work have to be performed in secret and there are times when it would be unwise for the police to reveal their reasons for taking a particular line of action.

The press, in its self-appointed role of public watch-dog, accords chastening publicity to the defections of policemen, especially when one of them has committed a crime. However, individual faults often give rise to insinuations or innuendos concerning the police service in general. Resentment is felt when a conscientious policeman doing his duty incurs unjust and scathing criticism which is prominently reported. The need is then felt for some action to ensure that the true facts receive a publicity equal to that afforded to the original strictures.

The approach to news

With the ascendancy of proprietors, most newspapers are commercial undertakings. Profit often determines a newspaper's attitude towards events and the manner in which it selects, treats, and presents its news and views. This perspective perhaps largely explains why the press and police sometimes follow diverging paths.

The first requisite of a modern newspaper is that it should be interesting. At present dullness is seen as a sin. It is unfortunate from that point of view, therefore, that in real life truth is not often stranger than fiction. Even when there is no actual departure from truth, distortion is sometimes achieved by adroit use of headlines, the subtle juxtaposition of paragraphs, or tortuous seeking after some new "angle." At times, individuals, and organisations are discredited by means of "emotionally toned" words which arouse in the reader a biased emotional attitude.

It is a depressing reflection, that because vice is hot news and virtue is not, crime, immorality, scandal and sensationalism are sure aids to increased popularity. Whether rise in the level of education of readers will eventually result in a higher standard of journalism may be debated but meanwhile sensational -- is bound to have an adverse effect on the young people, and adults of low mental or moral standards. Since a big proportion of criminals are drawn from these ranks, the press bears an inescapable responsibility in the matter.

Problem of furnishing information

When police adopt an attitude of extreme secretiveness, the pressmen undoubtedly secure information by devious methods. Having elicited facts by tactics, journalist may find themselves at liberty to publish them in a manner which, although not amounting to an infraction of the law, would be thoroughly unsatisfactory from a police point of view. Therefore, some police officers follow the practice of providing such facts as can be safely made public, lest misleading information be published.

Opinions vary considerably as to

how much information should be revealed with regard to undetected crime. As such, interviews range from a battle of wits, with bluff and reticence to completely frank "off-the-record" disclosures. Obviously, in the adoption of former modus operandi, the situation bristles with problems. Experience in such situation is the mentor. If publicity is likely to jeopardise police action, details are withheld; if not, they may be furnished. Above all, it has to be borne in mind that reports received from civilian complainants must be treated as confidential.

The principal complaints of the press are that information is withheld until it has lost its "news value" and that when it is divulged it is usually too scanty. Both complaints arise largely from the fact that, because the functions of the police and the press do not coincide, the parties view crime from different standpoints. In the interest of justice, the police often find it imperative to impose a safety-margin of time or information or both. If it so turns out that police erred on the side of caution, no recriminations are justified because policemen are not endowed with previsions. This needs to be appreciated. The objective should be to create a situation where the police reveal to the accredited representatives of newspapers the maximum amount of information about all crimes, stipulate which should not be reported and explain why, and then leave the treatment of the facts entirely to the press, subject to there being no distortion.

The press and crime prevention

In addition to aiding in the pursuit of criminals, the press contributes to the prevention of crime. By publishing accounts of offences, newspapers underline the need to take precautions and newspaper accounts of court proceedings mentioning penalties inflicted acts as deterrent.

Enterprising police forces in the Western countries have utilised press publicity with the object of informing the public how they can protect their own interests and inviting them to co-operate with the police. Whether we like it or not, police work has now become inextricably bound up with the activities of the press, particularly newspapers. Indeed, social conditions have so changed that the police could not function efficiently without the support and co-operation of the press. The increased complexity of modern life has created far more opportunities for committing crime, while greater mobility has rendered the chances of escape correspondingly easier. The police are realizing that new conditions demand new methods and there is a pressing need of intelligent and judicious use of the press.

Co-operation between police and press

Frictions occur by the ultra-cautions attitude of policemen, who, uncertain of the rights of pressmen, have forbidden them access to a particular place or prevented them from taking a photograph of something. The policemen need to be enlightened of their powers by means of suitable instruction in the curriculum of training classes.

Securing authorisation of official access by pressmen to information of legitimate public interest has been a thorny issue in every society. The requirement can be diversely interpreted and it is unlikely that the police and the press will always interpret the phrase in the same

way.

The power of the press to allay public uneasiness and promote confidence has been abundantly proved. The press exercises a choice of inflaming public opinion or calming it, of exacerbating differences between the police and the people or minimising them. It can so mould public opinion that the police receive a great measure of help and co-operation from the public. To undermine the authority of the police is to imperil peace and therefore police should make a determined and sustained effort to induce all newspapers to translate into reality the claim of the press to be a partner with the law in safeguarding the orderly society.

The personal element

Perhaps the most effective way of ensuring a complementary relationship between the press and the police is to pay particular attention to the personal aspect of relationship. It becomes evident that the personal element obtrudes itself into every stage of the dealings between the two organisations. If maximum amount of information for the press is to reach the appropriate quarter in the minimum time, then the closest harmony must prevail internally. Persons eminently suitable for the duties may compensate for imperfect arrangements. Fault personnel can vitiate the most carefully planned schemes.

If the unit head treats journalists considerably, his subordinates will assuredly act in consonance. There may be occasion when a police officer, harassed by his manifold and emergent duties, is brusque towards the energetic reporter but the ideal should be to treat journalists as unofficial public servants.

The needs of an orderly society would be better served by a closer identity of interests between the police and the press. This is in line with the evolving role of the press as an independent and impartial public service. Meanwhile, the obvious needs are simultaneously to maximise the efficiency and public spiritedness of both the police and the press; to instill into the public a high sense of citizenship; and to weld the police, press and public into a powerful and cohesive trinity. In this way an effective bulwark against crime and disorder can be created and public peace fully maintained throughout the country.

In Bangladesh, the manifest reality is that the police needs the press more than the press needs them. In fact, for the police to salvage a battered image there could be no better guide and facilitator than the gentlemen and women of the press. This needs to dawn on all ranks of police hierarchy if they are to get from the society what is deservedly theirs.

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S CHOWDHURY

WITH my twin experiences of being an English language student and as well as an English language teacher, I have always been intrigued by the English language.

Having finished my MA in English, I went to London where I had the opportunity to do PGCE (post graduate certificate in education) from one of the leading universities during my stay there for almost 17 years. During my teaching engagements in a number of inner city schools in London, I gathered invaluable and extensive experience on modern, effective, and stimulating teaching strategies, including a careful integration of ICT to enhance the quality of English teaching.

In my last school, where I was also an ICT coordinator, I had been able to enrich and modernise my teaching experiences to a greater extent. There, to say the least, I realised that teaching of English can be really fun, interactive, and stimulating through contextualised activities supported by very sophisticated audio-visual software and other creative resources.

There are, literally, hundreds of software, teaching aids and mind blowing resources to teach rules of grammar, spellings, punctuations, vocabulary, phonics and phonology, comprehension, improving reading and writing skills, games, puzzles and what not. And all of these skills can be taught easily and effectively using a very innovative teaching tool called interactive whiteboard.

The learners, nowadays, don't need to memorise rules of grammar, vocabulary, spellings, etc any more. Through this ICT-based framework the students/children can interact, investigate to find the rules of grammar and spellings through animated and interactive games without putting any stress on the learners.

I remember quite clearly, when I had my education from primary school up to university in Bangladesh, what I did, like many others, was memorise and memorise without understanding what we were learning. Our teachers were not well trained on interactive and effective teaching strategies to be able to teach us properly to the international standard. The old, ineffective method of teaching and rote learning is still practised widely in almost all schools, colleges, and universities in our country.

As a nation we will never be able to maximise our potentials if the students in our country are not educated to the international standard, particularly if the importance of English language skills are ignored or are not taught using a range of stimulating software and modern teaching aids such as computer, interactive whiteboard, cassettes, DVD, electronic games, and puzzles.

The world has moved on and some countries have taken ICT to a different level altogether, paving the way for the new generation but unfortunately we, in Bangladesh, have not realised the importance of integrating ICT in our daily teaching.

ings. Therefore, we are falling behind in the race to compete in the international job market, with our neighbouring countries, let alone developed and western countries.

One other thing that hurts and annoys me most is that our educated graduates and post graduates are not able to speak fluently in English. Why? What seems to be our problem? Is it because we don't have a comprehensive structured syllabus on spoken English? Is it because we don't have trained or qualified teachers to teach English language to the international level? Or don't we have modern resources? Quite simply, the problems are embedded in our pedantic educational system which needs a drastic face-lift or modernisation.

I have spoken to a number of graduates and post graduates who studied English Language, and Literature including ELT students and teachers. To my surprise, they were not fluent in English, nor were they found to be articulate, with persuasive language skills. Ideally and professionally they all should have advanced level of English language skills. Now my question is: what's the point of studying English language and literature if the students don't have the necessary skills of spoken English? Have we done enough to upgrade the quality of education, particularly the teaching of English language?

As far as I know, from primary to master degree, there's no syllabus or curriculum for Spoken English in our country. What we have, invariably, is grammar, comprehension and written English. No room for spoken English which is the most powerful and effective means of communication in the modern era of technology based education and employment.

Is there any one who would be able to tell me, what's the point of studying Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Keats etc if the students don't have the required basic language skills to appreciate the beauty of literature? No one can deny the fact that one needs to master the language first to be able to comprehend and enjoy highly literary and poetic language of English literature. We need to ensure giving our students the necessary skills of language first, then they will be able to enjoy studying literature.

Not surprisingly, we don't see any children's story, or literature written in English by anyone who has graduated from English department.

May be there are some books written by the students of English language and literature but not many. If the purpose of studying English is to become an ELT, IELTS, TOEFL, TESOL instructor or to be a teacher in English medium schools or lecturer in college and university then, my question is, were the students given any training on teaching of English? Suppose, the students will pursue a career in multinational organisations, banks, or sit for BCS exams, then were the students given any support/training on related English skills? Definitely not.

Quite understandably, it only makes sense to bring a positive change in the teaching of English and its curriculum, making it more job oriented so that the employees can meet up with the global challenges of modern age.

The following suggestions can be taken into consideration to improve the quality of English Language Teaching in our country:

The English curriculum right from primary education needs to be developed/modified with a strong focus on speaking, listening and reading with a structured teaching of phonics and phonology. Assessments/tests to be conducted regularly to monitor the progress on these skills.

Marks would be given or added against those skills. Specialist teachers will train the teacher on teaching, planning and assessment. A set of manageable resources, including books, I-Fly books, software, online teaching and learning resources, would be used to enhance the teachings of English using ICT where necessary and possible.

The young children/students need to read a range of stories, including fairy tales, Aesop's Fables and lots of popular stories and poems available, on CD/DVD and Interactive whiteboard. There are innumerable free resources and assessment opportunities available online which can be used to enhance the teaching and learning of not only English but also many other subjects.

In secondary and college level the English curriculum will focus more on creative writing, reading, speaking, listening, comprehension, grammar, stories, poetry and use of powerful language etc. Students in this category depending on their class/age/level can also work on reports, essays, seminars, presentations and dissertations.

Planning, assessments and teachings will be carried out according to the terms and the specialist teachers will train the teachers to teach the curriculum. It only makes sense to have short and long stories/poems back on the syllabus of Bangla medium schools and colleges.

Comprehension alone is not the way to improve the basic skills of English, rather it's a negative and ineffectual strategy. I had a good look at the recently held SSC English papers and I could not make any sense out of the both papers, having same kind of question patterns on comprehensions dealing with mcqs, matching, cloze procedure, ticking the boxes etc. Even the text chosen was full of mistakes. What is the point of removing literature and creative writing from the syllabus?

Students need to read a huge range of fiction and non-fiction to provide them with

opportunities for contextualised activities through which they will be able to understand the use of grammar, punctuations, vocabulary and spelling patterns. These all can be taught, yet again, using a range of very rich and creative online

resources and software.

At University level, the students, in their first two years, will study phonics and phonology, improve skills on speaking, listening, reading and writing with a strong focus on reading a range of fiction and non-fiction including children's literature. Again rigorous and efficient assessments will be carried out to ensure the progress in the respective area.

Here the students can use software like Kar2uche to make a variety of projects using interactive graphics, sound and animation to produce a multimedia story/ play on a CD. In the final two years the students can study either English literature or applied linguistics or ELT, etc. A very innovative assessment and monitoring will be conducted at the end of the academic year to assess students' ability, skills and competence on all those major skills particularly about their spoken skills. The students will listen to a variety of stories, poems, commentaries, interviews and arguments to enrich and advance language skills. They will also be supported on how to organise seminars, dissertations and learn business English skills. How to write an impressive CV can be a part of the curriculum too.

It is, therefore, an undeniable fact that, in the modern age of technology, spoken language skills and ICT are a must to be able to maximise human resources which, given the international standard of education, can make a significant contribution in generating national and international employments.

Once there was a report about how our graduates and post graduates are not able to compete with Indian, Sri Lankan and Pakistani employees in the Middle East and Far East. Only thing that our educated employees lack primarily is spoken English skills, which is letting them down and keeping them from getting the managerial and supervisory posts. Maybe there are some exceptions, but generally our English is not as good as that of the Indians. Why? Are we inferior to them in terms of intelligence? Or, don't we have trained teachers, or do we have a seriously flawed curriculum?

Let's work together to eradicate this age old problem and upgrade our English to the international standard now. Better late than never.

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Spying on Americans may prove costly for President Bush

MOHAMMAD AMJAD HOSSAIN

SPYING on citizens by administrations is not new. Governments around the world maintain extensive intelligence gathering network. Diplomats are also often blamed of spying, for example, in communist countries or dictatorial regimes in particular, to obtain information clandestinely as many such governments obfuscate details on matters which may be vitally important to assess the situation in the country where they are posted. Now the issue of spying on the citizens of America by Bush administration remains a major subject of discussion in the Congress and other platforms since the leakage of the development in the New York Times in December last year. The New York Times is also facing criticism

for not publishing the story two years back at the request of the administration to save the Republicans to remain in power. It was revealed by the author of the story James Risen in an interview to Larry King of CNN that the New York Times knew of the Bush administration's practice two years earlier, but sat on it until just recently for reasons he would not explain.

This issue has caused furor both in and outside the Congress by the Republicans since Democrat Senator Russ Feingold introduced the legislation on March 13, 2006 to censure President Bush for breaking the law by creating a secret domestic spying programme. This has further caused serious uproar in the Congress following publication of news by US Today newspaper on May 11 with regard to collecting and analysing millions of Americans' telephone calls since 9/11, 2001 by National Security Agency. Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman

Arlen Specter, a Republican, said that he would call major telephone companies that are participating in the NSA effort to verify the allegations. That has angered Democrats in the Congress to blast Republicans for not more aggressively monitoring the administration's anti-terrorism activities.

Actually former Vice-President Al Gore's fierce speech at Constitutional Hall in Washington DC, sponsored by the Liberty Coalition and the American Constitution Society, triggered a spate of comments by lawmakers, both Republican and Democrat, columnists, law professors on President Bush's authorisation of domestic surveillance on the citizens of America. While condemning the measures Al Gore urged upon the Attorney General of the United States to establish a special council to probe the allegation against President's flagrant violation of country's constitution and law.

In view of the growing discontent among all sections of the people in America over the domestic surveillance, President Bush came out to defend the measure 'in the interest of the country and Americans'. The President described it as "a terrorist surveillance programme" to divert the attention of the general people, who are supposed to be unconcerned and naive in the matter. In his remarks at Kansas State University President Bush said that allowing the National Security Agency to monitor the international phone calls and e-mails of Americans with suspected ties to terrorists can hardly be considered domestic spying. The White House Press Secretary again stated that spying on international calls to and from America does not come under the purview of domestic surveillance. All sorts of funny explana-

tions are coming from the administration. President Bush further said that he acted within the gambit of the Constitution and the power given by the Congress after 9/11 episode to use force to stop terrorist attack on America. He emphatically said that he would continue the surveillance in the interest of the country and the people of America since America is at war against terrorism. On May 11, 2006 he denied of "mining or trolling through the personal lives of millions of innocent Americans", but he neither denied nor confirmed the report in US Today.

Helen Thomas, 52-year veteran White House correspondent of UPI and now columnist for Hearst newspaper chain in her column stated that Bush administration has used the 9/11 attacks as his carte blanche to initiate domestic spying on Americans without court warrant in pursuit of terrorists, although the law is very clear on its court approval. Editor of Falls Church News-Press, Nicolas Benton commented: "We can only conclude that this administration is deliberately engaged in law breaking as much for the sake of the precedents it is setting for stepping outside the restraints of democratic due process as for the objectives it claims to be pursuing."

The claim by the President that Congress gave him power to use force necessary to protect the American people after 9/11 episode does not mean to introduce surveillance on the citizens of America. The target at that time was Osama-bin-Laden and his Al-Qaeda group. The fourth amendment in the constitution, which is a part of the bill of rights, implied the right of the people "to be secure in their persons, houses, papers and effects against unreasonable searches and seizures". Here is the result of two Gallup

polls on this issue. A recent AP Ipsos poll indicates that 56 percent people believed that the Bush administration should seek a warrant from the court while another Gallup poll of January 24 gave the verdict that domestic surveillance was wrong without court approval and 58 percent are in favour of an appointment of a special prosecutor to investigate the programme. Newsweek of May 13 last reported that 53 percent of Americans think that NSA's programme goes too far in invading people's privacy.

The story of domestic surveillance has come out at a time when half of his party's lawmakers have challenged him and passed a bill to ban torture. And the domestic spying programme has the potential to hurt him badly when he needs to establish credibility with the Americans. For the first time in his second term President Bush has been pushed to identical hot seat which eventually cost President Nixon his presidency in a disgraceful manner.

By and large, majority people hold the opinion that the President has violated the constitutional provision and the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act of 1978 bypassing the secret court in this regard.

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