

Police and politics

UNDP survey makes compelling reading

HERE is hardly anything new that a UNDP survey on the police administration reveals. And yet there are all the intriguing bits that come across to us. When senior policemen finally find a way of informing the country of the political compulsions they traditionally, and regrettably, work under, we are not exactly amused. In a political situation where for years together the police department has been utilized for partisan purposes, it is only natural that those who have borne the brunt of the pressure will be tempted to let us in on the manipulations they have always been subjected to. The damage that such partisan use of an organization of the state then goes through hardly requires any explanation. The damage comes in the form of corruption which is again a consequence of the corruption politicians resort to when they blur the distinction between government and party politics. Matters related to police administration have by and large exercised the public mind over the past many years, to the extent that questions have always arisen about the reforms necessary to get it back on track. In recent days, moves to bring about some positive changes in the police force have been appreciated across the country. But a very significant question which still needs to be answered concerns the ways and means of de-politicising the police force in a way that future governments will think twice before attempting to undermine its professionalism. The survey, in such a perspective, comes in handy. It simply reinforces the urge among broad sections of the population to have the police, as also other areas of administration, decoupled from party politics. A police force at the beck and call of governing political parties runs the risk of turning, eventually, into an anti-people organization. That, by the way, is precisely what we have noticed in these last few years. Additionally, the fear among policemen that they will be subjected to political vindictiveness once they take a professional stand has greatly reduced the efficiency and self-confidence of the force. In the end, narrow politics has quite emasculated an institution that ought to have been a symbol of dynamism.

The problems of the police administration, when taken in conjunction with those encountered by other state organizations, reveal in glaring detail the corrosive role of partisan politics in the country. Obviously, such realities cannot be ignored. And that precisely is why proper lessons need to be drawn from the UNDP survey and corrective measures brought in.

Fake CBA leader in custody

Sordid disclosures

MUZZAFAR Ali Musa, according to media reports, lost his job in Sonali Bank in 1991 having been found guilty of forging testimonials and document he had submitted at the time of his appointment in 1979. Even though jobless, he continued to head the CBA Faridpur region as its de-facto leader until he was arrested. He exercised his party line influence and continued to intimidate both staff and officers of the bank as a self-styled leader. He allegedly even extracted money from them on all sorts of pretexts.

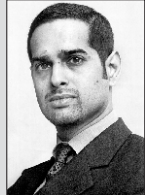
Labour leaders wielding some kind of authority without any job is not an unknown phenomenon. Then there is a question of more than one CBA officially representing respective segments of the labour constituencies.

It must be pointed out that some CBAs have been instrumental in hindering the independent and smooth functioning of not only our productive sectors but also management of commercial organisations. It is common knowledge that the leaders of most of the CBAs are so powerful having the support of successive ruling parties that they are often seen to dictate the day to day management of nearly all the public enterprises.

It is, therefore, high time that the government seriously looked into all aspects of trade unionism to make it conform to modern standards of employer-employee relationship. Serious consideration should be given to reforming the existing labour laws that regulate the activities of the CBA as a whole. While reforming the laws and regulations special attention should be given to the jurisdiction, scope and the authority to be vested in the CBA.

The present government being non-partisan and non-political in character with its high commitment to overall good governance is ideally suited to start the ball rolling in the right direction.

No room for error



ZAFAR SOBHAN

MAKE no mistake about it. Contrary to conventional wisdom, it is perfectly easy to prosecute someone for corruption. Laymen sometimes have an exaggerated sense of the standard of proof required to bring in a guilty verdict. For a murder case it does not require someone actually witnessing the suspect pulling the trigger, and for a corruption case it does not require a signed statement saying that a contract has been granted in return for cash.

Evidence that customary or prescribed procedures were not followed and that rules and regulations were not complied with is all that is necessary to establish a prima facie case, and credible testimonial evidence can often be more than sufficient to create a case beyond reasonable doubt.

The tried and tested method for conviction is to lean heavily on those at the lower end of the scale and cause them to flip on the bigger fish. The unhappy

truth about these kinds of cases against any kind of syndicated criminality (and what else are we talking about here?) is that you often have to let the smaller fry go or offer them qualified immunity in order to create a case against the bigger fish. That's the way it goes, but it is effective and it is not hard.

So there is no reason why it should not be possible to bring solid, air-tight cases against those currently netted in the anti-corruption drive. Corruption has been so widespread and open that it would be foolish to think that evidence for it could not easily be unearthed by a halfway decent prosecutorial team.

Unfortunately, the current prosecutorial team does not appear to be meeting even this low standard. Given the fact that so many of them are hold-overs from the previous administration, it raises the question as to how diligently or seriously the prosecution is pursuing the cases.

Indeed, whether the will to really crack down exists at the head of the law ministry is also a legitimate question.

Things are further complicated by the fact that the judiciary remains as compromised as it ever was and is filled from top to bottom with political appointees from the last administration. The solicitousness that has been shown to the rights of the high level detainees was never shown on behalf of ordinary people brought before them in the past five years (to say nothing of those who were extra-judicially executed without benefit of any kind of trial). So, one way or another, the corruption cases are not progressing anywhere near as well as they could be.

The new rule that has been promulgated under the Emergency Power Ordinance to bar those convicted of corruption from taking part in elections is a good move, but isolated and in the absence of other sound

investigative and prosecutorial measures, it remains unclear whether the anti-corruption drive will really have the effect that the public hopes.

It seems to me that we need to take a more imaginative legal approach when it comes to deciding how to prosecute these cases. Now, I am not denying that it would be highly satisfactory to see many of those currently behind bars do hard time for the next ten-to-fifteen years for their crimes against the country, but the main thing that we would like to see as a nation is an accounting of their crimes and to be assured that they never again darken the doors of Bangladeshi politics.

In other words, the prosecution should be working on plea bargains.

One element of such a plea bargain would be a full admission of guilt as well as full and complete testimony as to one's crimes. Then there could be a court ordered restitution or dis-

STRAIGHT TALK

The popularity of the current caretaker government, such as it is, rests largely on the belief that they are going to clean things up. The current anti-corruption drive is a good idea in theory. But if the current administration makes a mistake and for some reason the nation does not get justice for the unbridled corruption of the past decade, then they will have done the people of the nation a real disservice and created an unholy mess that we may never be able to fix. So here's my unsolicited advice to the caretaker government when it comes to the corruption cases: Get it right.

Life for sale



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

DON'T worry if you are not happy with your life. Organize your stuff, emotions, relations and earthly possessions, item by item, category by category, and put price tags on each of them. Then go to eBay and place them on auction to kill three birds with one stone. Get rid of an unappreciated life, live happily thereafter, and enjoy a splurge of crispy cash in the pocket. You may not be able to exchange it or ask for a refund. But, thank God, you can sell your life, if you don't like it.

Sounds weird, but some people are already doing it. An Australian named Nicael Holt auctioned his life out of frustration. He started it as a joke, which turned into a fulltime job he never wanted. He has employed a friend to run the website because he himself is not computer literate and does not have internet at home.

Holt offered his life for sale,

expressing interest to go through the deal with any buyer who paid him cash. The entry on eBay read "New life for sale." What was old and stale for Holt, others found new and refreshing. So it went like a hot cake. The bidding opened at \$5 and ended at \$5,875, continuing even after the deal was clinched. One bidder, likely to be a woman, has offered up to \$30,000, while an unconfirmed bidder set the price at \$150,000.

So, what goes into a deal like this? Well, Holt included his name, phone number and all of his belongings. It was part of the deal that he would also introduce the buyer to his 15 close friends, 170 other friends, two nemeses, and eight potential lovers he has been flirting with. The buyer will get his repertoire of six jokes, 300 CDs and a lamp given to him by an estranged girlfriend. Others include a fractured relationship with an ex-girlfriend, and a four-

CROSS TALK

What will happen to Holt? He will take up a new identity, a new name, new friends, lovers and, perhaps, new parents. It is as simple as rebranding a shop. Just get rid of the existing stock before you switch trade, and change the signboard outside to announce change of business. Perhaps all that fuss about life is meaningless. It is an illusion that keeps the body hostage to the mind. Give up familiar faces, places and all their traces. A new life can breathe inside the same old body.

week training course to learn how to become Nicael Holt, including surfing, doing handstands, fire-twirling skills and his very special style of seduction.

More good news for the buyer, who will have access to a fruit delivery job Holt was going to start in March. The buyer will be entitled to \$20 and a six-pack of beer owed him by two friends. A special attraction is celebration of Christmas with Holt's parents. That's all for buying a life, which is only 24 years old.

What will happen to Holt? He will take up a new identity, a new name, new friends, lovers and, perhaps, new parents. It is as simple as rebranding a shop. Just get rid of the existing stock before you switch trade, and change the signboard outside to announce change of business. Perhaps all that fuss about life is meaningless. It is an illusion that keeps the body hostage to the mind. Give up

familiar faces, places and all their traces. A new life can breathe inside the same old body.

Food for thought, if you wish to think. What is life if not a concept conceived in mother's womb and then trapped in your own body? And that concept is expressed through motions which involve people, places and objects, as life configured in living is defined by company of persons, their positions, choices and habits. Under the witness protection programme in the USA, people who testify against mafia bosses are relocated with new identity. New name, new driving license, passport, often face-lift, can give new life to someone who is constrained to escape his familiar scene.

But life leaves behind its indelible mark on the body, and the house is haunted by its evicted tenant. Memory retains the discarded life, its images stored in the brain like

gorgement of a reasonable amount of the assets determined to be illegally accumulated. The final piece of the plea agreement would be an order barring the convicted from participating in the political process in the future.

Breaking the terms of the agreement (e.g. a move to contest the plea or uncovering that full accounting had not been proffered) would allow the prosecution to re-open the case and seek a custodial sentence.

What's in it for the accused? Well, they would be able to avoid jail-time and would most likely be able to keep a large proportion of their ill-gotten gains (which might be hard to track down anyway to the extent that they are safe in foreign bank accounts). In addition, they might be as happy as the rest of us if, upon release, they were escorted to the next plane out of the country.

On the other hand, they could contest the cases. They might win, but chances are they would lose. How legitimate the cases that would be brought against them remains to be seen, but the fact of the matter is that they would be no more suspect than dozens if not hundreds of dubious convictions handed down over the past five years.

I think of some of the more egregious cases I have written about over the past few years. For instance, of David Biswas, vice-president of Proshika, who was maliciously denied bail and mistreated horrendously in

an archive of films. An American named John Freyer catalogued and sold nearly everything that he owned. He sold more than 600 items, including his false teeth, a full size office copier, personal photographs, and his winter coat.

Yet, Freyer couldn't give up the urge to reattach himself to the life he sold. In August 2001, he embarked on a journey to visit the various places to retrace his former possessions, and started to chronicle his travels on his ongoing travelogue site Temporama.com. He devised a new life out of the necessity to piece together old one which was sold.

In fact life is psychosomatic, when mind is folded into the body like a picture fitted in the frame. Only if it was possible to erase memory, we couldn't tell one life from another, whether lodged in the same or different body. Together mind and body create the life, while each moment lived is consigned to remembering, like the trail of ash grows on a burning fuse.

The oldest trade in the world was to sell the body. But there is a stigma attached to it because the identity of an individual is more directly associated with physical appearance than it is with mental scheme. Rape victims are tormented

custody despite the fact that he was a sick man and that the case against him was 100% politically motivated and had not even been brought to trial.

It is amusing to note that those who routinely ensured that the rule of law was flouted to railroad political opponents and business rivals into jail for the past five years and who didn't bat an eye at the more than 900 extra-judicial killings are now at the forefront of the clamor for the rights of the current detainees.

But the fact that we potentially have a train-wreck on our hands and that the legal system needs to devise a way to legitimately and expeditiously, and, above all, fairly deal with the detainees should not be overlooked.

The popularity of the current caretaker government, such as it is, rests largely on the belief that they are going to clean things up. The current anti-corruption drive is a good idea in theory. But if the current administration makes a mistake and for some reason the nation does not get justice for the unbridled corruption of the past decade, then they will have done the people of the nation a real disservice and created an unholy mess that we may never be able to fix. So here's my unsolicited advice to the caretaker government when it comes to the corruption cases: Get it right.

Zafar Sobhan is Assistant Editor, The Daily Star.

because once the body is violated, the mind keeps enacting it. Prostitutes find a way to tackle that problem. They allow the body to overpower the mind by getting repeatedly violated.

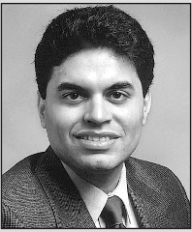
The newest trade in the world has arrived, and it allows you to sell your life keeping your body. You will live so long as you breathe, as if the air inhaled propels some mysterious machine that runs the illusion of life inside the theater of the body. Death is when the show is cancelled because the theater is closed. Now you have a choice to sell either the theater or the show.

A record company executive claimed that when he visited Maria Callas on her deathbed he wanted to snip off a lock of her hair, but fought back the temptation believing that the famous singer should go to her grave intact. Twenty-three years after she died, an auction was held in Paris where amongst her furniture, bras, stockings, latex girdle and pictures, was a swatch of slightly graying chestnut tresses marked Lot 202, priced at \$2860.

Why wait for the auction until you are dead? Let it happen sooner than later, and spend the money while you can.

Mohammad Badrul Ahsan is a banker.

Global Warming: Get Used to It



FAREED ZAKARIA
writes from Washington

THE most inconvenient truth about global warming is that we cannot stop it. Please don't mistake me for a skeptic. I'm fully persuaded by the evidence that climate change is real and serious. Of the 12 hottest years on record, 11 have occurred since 1995. Temperatures have risen by 0.74 degrees Celsius over the past century. (If that seems small, keep in mind that the difference in temperature between the ice age and now is

No one likes to talk about adapting to global warming because it seems defeatist. But the result is that, as we debate the meta-theories about global warming, we're increasingly unprepared to deal with its consequences. Whether or not CO2 emissions are triggering certain reactions in the atmosphere, we can see that sea levels are rising. What are we going to do about it?

about 5 degrees C.) And human activity appears to be one important cause.

The concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere has risen dramatically since the industrial revolution. Methane has doubled and carbon-dioxide levels are up 30 percent since 1750. The projections going forward are highly plausible scientific estimations. The recent report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change predicts that by 2100, temperatures will have risen by somewhere between 1.1 and 6.4 degrees, and as a result, sea levels will

rise by 18 to 59 centimeters. The trouble is, if you accept all these facts and theories about global warming, it is difficult to see how any human response launched today can avert it.

The gases that are warming the Earth have built up over hundreds of years. They do not disappear or dissipate easily. Even if the world adopted the most far-reaching plans to combat climate change, most scientists agree that the concentration of greenhouse gases will continue to rise for the next few decades. In other words, global warming is already baked into Earth's

future.

Scientists estimate that simply to keep greenhouse gases at their current levels, we would need to slash carbon-dioxide emissions by 60 percent. Given current and foreseeable technology, that would require cutting back on industrial activity across the globe on a scale that would make the Great Depression look very small. In fact, the future will almost certainly involve substantially greater emissions of CO2. Most studies predict that the world will double its consumption of energy by 2050. Since much of that growth in

consumption will take place in China and India, it will involve the burning of fossil fuels.

Between them, these two countries are currently building 650 coal-fired power plants. The combined CO2 emissions of these new plants is five times the total savings of the Kyoto accords -- that is, if the Kyoto targets were being adhered to by Western countries, which they are not. Even under the most optimistic scenarios the industrialized world will continue to burn substantial amounts of coal and oil.

I state these facts plainly, not to induce fatalism or complacency. It's scandalous that we're not weaning ourselves off dirty fuels. Perfecting just two new (and almost workable) technologies -- clean coal and hybrid cars -- would be a giant leap forward. We could be experimenting with hundreds more technologies and tech-

niques. But even so, the Earth would still warm substantially over the next few decades. So, in addition to our efforts to prevent and mitigate climate change, we need to employ another strategy -- adaptation.

No one likes to talk about adapting to global warming because it seems defeatist. But the result is that, as we debate the meta-theories about global warming, we're increasingly unprepared to deal with its consequences. Whether or not CO2 emissions are triggering certain reactions in the atmosphere, we can see that sea levels are rising. What are we going to do about it?

In an intelligent, practical speech last September, the president of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, Frances Cairncross, urged that we begin such a discussion. "We need to think about poli-

cies that prepare for a hotter, drier world, especially in poor countries," she said. "That may involve, for instance, developing new crops, constructing flood defenses, setting different building regulations or banning building close to sea level." She points out that adaptation programs could move forward fast. Unlike plans to slow down global warming, which require massive and simultaneous international efforts, adaptation strategies can be pursued by individual countries, states, cities and localities.

Three years ago the Pew Foundation sponsored an excellent study, "Coping With Global Climate Change," which focused on the role of adaptation. The report found that moving in this direction would be costly and fraught with uncertainty and error. Yet, the authors point out, humankind's long history has shown it's pos-

sible; we have adapted as the environment around us has changed. The costs of relocating seaside communities are extremely high, but they will be even higher if we wait 20 years. The most important conclusion of the Pew study was that early planning is far more effective than managing the consequences of a breakdown. In other words, strengthening the levees in New Orleans costs much, much less than rebuilding the city.

Many environmental advocates fear that talking about coping with global warming will hamper efforts to slow it down. In fact, we have no alternative but to do both. Mitigation and adaptation complement each other. In both cases, the crucial need is to stop talking and start acting.

Fareed Zakaria is Editor of Newsweek International.