

A dynamic Chittagong port Present discipline must translate into permanent order

Asudden change for the better has come into the workings of Chittagong port. We are heartened by the development. It is a clear sign that given firmness of purpose individuals and organisations can truly carry out their prescribed responsibilities. Till only weeks ago, the port remained paralysed by a rash of activities linked to unionism and politics. Since the imposition of the state of emergency and consequent firm action to restore normal activities at the port on the part of the administration, quite a turn-around has been brought about. It must be borne in mind, however, that under the circumstances it is a palliative we have before us where Chittagong port is concerned. The need today is to ensure that the current state of discipline at the port is transformed into a permanent, normal state of activity.

No one can deny that under the emergency much of the indiscipline that had earlier been noticed in various important areas is being rolled back. It is in line with such assertive action that Chittagong port is once more functioning well. But an important job that must be done now is for the authorities to inquire into the basic flaws that have regularly undermined the operations of the country's premier port. Obviously, among these flaws has been the presence of a number of unions whose clear identification with politics and individual self-interest rather than a promotion of national economic activities nearly brought the port to a standstill. Along with such regressive symbols came an acute lack of good management, so much so that it is an entire administrative system that has collapsed at the port. Therefore, while the nation is cheered by the marked improvement in the activities of the port, it is important that the opportunity now opened up per courtesy of the task force constituted to look into the problems of the port be utilised to the largest extent possible. The authorities need to look beyond the emergency and leave in place a system that will in future offset any move to disrupt the activities of not only Chittagong port but of other ports as well.

There are some good ways in which the future can be made reassuring for Chittagong port. In the first place, anyone found involved in undermining the port must be identified and penalised. In the second, a clear set of guidelines or code of conduct that will leave the port free of destructive activities by individuals and groups must be put in place. And where handling cargo is concerned, efficiency demands that modern technology, in the sense of computerisation, be brought into the workings of Chittagong port. In the ultimate analysis, a proper streamlining of work at the port is now the most crucial of requirements.

Faulty signalling equipment A major bottleneck in traffic management

RANDOM malfunctioning of signals in the city is causing hindrance to movement of traffic. Nearly half of the 68 automatic traffic signalling units remaining out of order, regulating the flow of traffic to reduce congestion has become a difficult exercise.

While the equipment is installed and maintained by the Dhaka City Corporation, the DMP traffic is responsible for the overall control of traffic movement. With that many signals conking out, a large number of traffic police has to be deployed to substitute for the mechanised operations. This is causing undue pressure on the traffic staff strength.

Often driver of a vehicle or even a pedestrian is confused when policemen on duty give a go-ahead signal whereas the lights on the signal indicate otherwise. Besides, at times, one side of the traffic is often unduly held back for long before being given a green signal. This delay is particularly inconvenient for people travelling by hired public transport like the CNG operated three wheelers or taxis. They often end up paying much higher charges than they would have normally paid for a trip.

It's a pity that in this high tech era we are wrestling with some rudimentary traffic equipment like the signalling system. What happens when we go a step forward and have CCTV in traffic intersections? Let these faulty traffic lights, therefore, be fixed and maintained regularly and the responsibility be given clearly to one single authority. It is also our impression that the traffic police who now thin out after 11:00pm or are not that much visible before 7:00 in the morning make their presence felt in some form at some of these hours.

Traffic jams and bad traffic management have been serious concerns for the city dwellers for long. Let us therefore address this issue with due seriousness and commitment and provide some relief to the city dwellers who are already burdened with innumerable other problems of daily living.

Restoring policing as an institution



MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

I have never been a member of the police force. I have however watched the functioning of this important arm of governance with great care over the last four decades. Having been a bureaucrat for nearly 35 years, I have considered the responsibilities endowed on them to be most significant for the maintenance of security within the state mechanism.

We, as ordinary citizens expect many things from our police. Like the armed forces, it is also an integral pillar within the infrastructure of our country. They ensure that the matrix of governance is upheld and that citizens are assured maintenance of law and order without fear or favour. Their effective role is essential for a functioning and accountable democracy.

The recent past has however seen our police force being subjected to various detracting factors. Their ability to function in the expected optimum manner was curbed not only due to abuse of political will but also misuse of the political process. This was revealed very clearly in a recent base-line survey which measured people's perception about our police and the manner in which they carried out their policing function. The survey was carried out between May and December 2006.

The survey, it was reported in the press, was conducted by the UNDP within 11 thanas in seven districts. It was based on interviews of nearly 6,000 persons. The survey personnel also met top-level police officers both in the field and at the police headquarter.

Consistent with claims made by Transparency International Bangladesh and also the print media, 78 per cent of the people interviewed said that the police took bribes from all sources and most of the time. 71 per cent also responded that the police were of no help when required for the solution of citizen's problems or in apprehending criminals.

These were disturbing references.

In addition, many respondents from rural areas also indicated another disappointing feature. They claimed

cess needed to restore health to a branch of the government that is seriously indisposed.

The police force and the law enforcement agencies can make all the difference in our state of governance. They are the deterrent element in the equation that can guarantee transparency and lack of corruption.

We understand that the Home Ministry and the Police Administration are currently implementing the Police Reform Programme of the UNDP, of which the above survey was a part.

Efforts are apparently also underway

the police force behaved during the colonial times. It brought back memories of South Africa during the period of apartheid. It was relentless brutality, totally unacceptable in an independent, democratic state. It was shameful in the manner in which brutal arrogance had replaced the hands of cooperation and responsive care.

In more ways than one, the law enforcing agents appeared to have forgotten that they were public servants accountable for their actions. It has since been suggested that this attitude had been due to external

in corruption because of political pressures. Being accessory before the fact or after the fact are both equally reprehensible.

This war against corruption within the police force will however be successful only if, on a parallel track, appropriate efforts are also made to address the issue of salaries and privileges within the police force at all levels. Their pay structure must be made reasonably consistent with the powers and responsibilities associated with each post. This will provide the necessary dignity, sense of confidence

report about the activities of the police force and their effectiveness in that unit. In cases of gross dereliction of duty, or palpable abuse of human rights or refusal to pursue criminals or blatant corruption, inquiry could then be initiated against the charged individual or the wayward police official by the police authorities after legal inquiry. If, however, the charges are found to be motivated and not based on actual fact, after inquiry, the person making the charges could also be punished according to law. This is a drastic proposal but will help to restore accountability within the process.

Zero tolerance in fighting crime should not only be spoken of but also implemented. It might, in this regard, be also useful for the relevant authorities to consider establishing a 'Neighbourhood Watch' interconnective system, as it exists in Europe, in North America and in Japan. These units can help the police and will also reduce petty crime. The police force must also try to, through training and self-introspection, understand that they are public servants, paid for by the common taxpayer, who expect impartial cooperation rather than arrogance from their law enforcement personnel.

We must also try to identify ways and means as to how a sense of esteem can grow within our society for policemen. The police force must also try to, through training and self-introspection, understand that they are public servants, paid for by the common taxpayer, who expect impartial cooperation rather than arrogance from their law enforcement personnel. The civil society can particularly help in this regard.

In South Asia, both Pakistan and India have started positive reforms in policing activities. It has begun to pay dividends. We should do the same. We need to take all necessary steps in this direction.

Muhammad Zamir is a former Secretary and Ambassador who can be reached at zmzamir@dhakastar.net

POST BREAKFAST

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that the police were quite often involved in anti-social activities. For obvious reasons, I found such an indicator to be a serious factor in the context of rural governance. It raised questions about whether our current police administration was capable enough to tackle the latent problems that exist in the villages due to the residual effects of feudalism, poverty, illiteracy and absence of gender empowerment.

This survey also identified certain elements that influence police behaviour - nexus between criminals and politicians (who provide hoodlums with indirect cover), local pressure groups, fear of being directly implicated in cases and professional bodies (particularly lawyers and trade union leaders).

It is good that such a survey has been undertaken. Any reform of the police force and its administration require such a wide-ranging inquiry. It will help the corrective reforms pro-

to enhance the capacity of the Bangladesh Police and key stakeholders. It seems that an attempt is being made to put in place a mechanism that will create a 'collaborative' arrangement so that it can contribute towards a safer and more secure environment based on respect for certain fundamental principles. This paradigm is expected to include respect for human rights, equitable access to justice and rule of law consistent with a multi-party democracy.

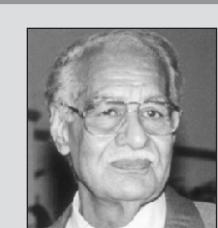
I must admit that this constructive focus is important given the serious erosion of values that has emerged within the police force during the last two years. It is difficult to forget the unsavoury police actions that took place within the Chittagong Stadium during the cricket match between Australia and Bangladesh, or in the fields of Kansar or in Phulbari or on the streets of Dhaka. Watching the police in action in the electronic media reminded me of the manner in which

interference and politicisation within the police hierarchy and the temptation of irregular promotions.

I have grown some faith in the ability of this interim government being able to accomplish reforms. We have already seen this happening within the Election Commission and the Anti Corruption Commission. One can only hope that the foreseeable future will also see necessary steps being implemented not only in cleansing the police hierarchy of politicisation but also of its corrupt elements.

We have at large, recognised the good intent shown in the last few weeks with regard to fighting graft. We have seen several police officers being hauled up on charges of taking bribe. This has indeed been refreshing. It will improve our image. Such action will be like sign posts for others in our extended bureaucracy, particularly in the utilities sectors. It will persuade them not to be corrupt or be embroiled

Yes prime minister, no

KULDIP NAYAR
writes from New Delhi

I do not know why Prime Minister Manmohan Singh is once again seeking entry into parliament through the back door, the Rajya Sabha. This is an Upper House. A country's Prime Minister has to face the voters directly to assess his popularity. The Lok Sabha, the House of the people, is the appropriate place. Manmohan Singh can select a safe seat if he fears that after having been the Prime Minister for three years, his government's performance is not good enough to win him a tough election. But he cannot use the Rajya Sabha as a stalking horse to hide his identity. By evading the Lok Sabha election, Manmohan Singh is devaluing the office of Prime Minister. No Prime Minister since independence has tried to escape the Lok Sabha poll.

Mrs Indira Gandhi, when made Prime Minister, was also a member of the Rajya Sabha. She resigned and contested the first available by-election to the Lok Sabha. So did H.K. Deva Gowda and Inder Kumar Gujral, her successors. Both were members of the Rajya Sabha. Yet, after they came to

occupy the office of Prime Minister, they resigned their respective seats and sought election to the Lok Sabha. In contrast, Manmohan Singh has filed his nomination papers for the Rajya Sabha for the fourth time from Assam. He is as good as elected because the Congress party has the requisite strength. The formal announcement will come in the next few days when the poll takes place. But this is not fair.

Whether Manmohan Singh comes

a member of the Lok Sabha, the directly elected house, or of the Rajya Sabha, the indirectly elected house. The choice is obvious. The Prime Minister who will win at the polls on the popular level. That means the Lok Sabha.

While contesting for the lower house, Manmohan Singh would have come into contact with people at the grass roots. Dust and din of electioneering might have given him an insight of politics which may be dirty,

around which parliamentary activities revolve. This is the house which decides the fate of political parties and their allies. Even one vote less than the majority will be too short to sustain a government in power. This happened in the case of the Atal Behari Vajpayee government a few years ago. It lost by a solitary vote.

True, our constitution has no provision which enjoins upon the Prime Minister to be a member of the lower house. But Pakistan has it. Even

minister. At present, not all the states have the legislative councils. More than that, there is a precedent for the legislative assembly member to be the chief minister. Once, before the constitution was introduced, Congress leader C. Rajagopala Chari became chief minister in the then state of Madras. But, rightly, he quit after a few months. Since then the chief minister has been from the legislative assembly.

I can understand Manmohan

decides. I am sure Punjab would want him from the state because he is a brilliant son of the soil. He has only to indicate his desire. One sitting MP from Punjab has told me that he is willing to vacate his seat for Manmohan Singh. This member does not belong to the Congress party.

I concede that after the perverse judgment by the former Chief Justice Y.K. Sabharwal's bench, Manmohan Singh does not have to bother whether he is "ordinarily resident" of Assam. The Supreme Court did away with the domicile qualification for a Rajya Sabha member. However, Manmohan Singh has won the point in an earlier petition where he was declared qualified to contest from Assam on the basis of his ration card, the electricity bill and the rent receipts of the house he had occupied at Guwahati. The judgment says that a Rajya Sabha member does not have to be a resident of the state whose assembly returns him or her.

I do not want to open the case of eligibility, nor do I propose to discuss Chief Justice Sabharwal's judgment. I have no doubt that some day a larger bench will quash it because the judgment defeats the very purpose of the Rajya Sabha, the council of states. My point is a limited one. The Prime Minister has to be a member of the Lok Sabha because this is the House of the people and this is where the sovereign rests.

Kuldip Nayar is an eminent Indian columnist.

BETWEEN THE LINES

I can understand Manmohan Singh's difference over contesting for the Lok Sabha because some of the Congress bosses were responsible for his defeat when he did so from South Delhi, a Lok Sabha constituency of highly-educated voters, a few years ago. Maybe, he is afraid to fight lest he should meet the same fate again, especially when some Congress leaders would want to see the Prime Minister out. Yet it is far better to face them through the election than to live under the illusion that he is their real choice. Many states will be willing to offer him the Lok Sabha seat if he so decides.

OPINION

Tata's investment proposal: A layman's observation

AHMAD MUJTAHID

TATA'S Dhaka office has not been knocking the doors of the Advisers of the caretaker government to press home their demand for taking a decision on their "investment proposal". They lobbied to get the approval during the BNP alliance govt but were not successful for various reasons. But did they really submit a comprehensive investment proposal for consideration of the Board of Investment (BOI) or government? This write-up is an attempt to explain some of the misconceptions built around the investment desire of the Tata Group.

The Tata Group submitted an unsolicited (BOI or Bangladesh Govt, did not at any stage make any public invitation seeking investment in any or all of the three sectors) Expression of Interest (EOI) to the Board of Investment (BOI) for making an investment of 2.5 billion dollars (subsequently raised to 3 billion) in (1) one integrated Steel Plant of 2.4 million tonnes capacity, (2) one 1000 MW gas fired power plant and (3) one Fertilizer Plant of 1 million ton

capacity on 13th October, 2004.

Tata Group reportedly did not submit any comprehensive proposal, as it is a standard practice, for each of its proposed investment projects. They even did not submit any pre-feasibility report to the BOI. Industry sources say that the traditional consultants of the Tata group M.N. Dastur & Co was not hired this time at any stage.

What Tata really submitted was a Status Update on April 15, 2004 after exactly six months of the EOI, surprisingly jointly signed by three Managing Directors such as Mr. Firdose Vandrevala, Managing Director, Tata Power Ltd, Mr. Prashad Ragavan Menon, Managing Director, Tata Chemicals Limited and Mr. Balasubramanian Mathuraman, Managing Director, Tata Iron and Steel Company Limited (TISCO) and not separately and independently as though these are one integrated project.

Tata's negotiating teams, sonned as they were and immensely

qualified in international project negotiations, could immediately see and understand the weakness of the Bangladesh side and natu-

rally had the upper hand from day

one. As such they were pushing the projects ahead with speed, through its verbose, meeting and impressing people in the corridors of power of the immediate past government.

As such when the EOI was submitted to the BOI failed to guide the Tata team as to what was required to be done for submission of a comprehensive proposal so that the BOI could properly examine and consider the EOI. They, reportedly, became so overwhelmed on receiving the EOI that they even did not know that in the absence of qualified and experienced negotiators for properly examining and evaluating each of the Tata's projects and evaluating each of the Tata's projects, the BOI needed the services of international engineering consultancy companies from third country to assist them preparing the TOR for such mega proposal, evaluating and examining the proposal when submitted and assisting the client in every step when negotiating.

Why then Tata wants to set up

plants in Bangladesh in stead of in

India and that too not in any steel

plant of a moderate scale and size

but a huge one and in the Power

and Fertilizer plants as well, for which they are not best known. No answer could this writer gather from those involved with the project from Tataside.

In view of the above I thought to

share the following with the readers:

Do we need a mega steel plant?

Tata's status update proposes setting up of an integrated steel plant through the gas based Direct Reduced Iron (DRI) Electric Arc Furnace (EAF) route, with steel making and rolling facility of 2.4 million tonnes of Hot Rolled (HR) steel. Does Bangladesh need such a big steel plant? Can Bangladesh afford to provide the facilities asked for by the Tata for setting up this plant? The government should ask this question to itself and before taking any hasty decision satisfy itself by undertaking a detailed techno-economic Feasibility Study by any internationally famous consultancy organization engaged in this field which may also prepare a master plan for the steel sector for guiding the future investors.

Whatever layman's knowledge I have in this field I am not sure if Bangladesh should go ahead with

this project. I am unable to see why Bangladesh should agree to the production of such huge quantity of HR steel for which there is no market in the country. One may argue that Tata will export the excess quantity. In that case would it not be logical to question why Bangladesh should agree to the export of steel which used gas at a subsidised rate for somebody else's benefit? And why should Bangladesh agree to allocate 2000 acres of its scarce agricultural land for this huge plant and its township? The question should be seriously addressed by all concerned.

Bangladesh should very clearly tell the Tata that she may only agree to (1) plant with a capacity to produce 1 million tonnes of steel the product