

Basic parameters of police reform

A pressing matter of wider public discourse

THE Daily Star held a roundtable Saturday on police reform against the backdrop of the drafting of Police Reform Programme (PRP) completed by a committee assisted by UNDP, DFID and European Union. The deliberations helped in identifying some short and long-term goals for the reforms so that these could be regarded as being complementary to the PRP process.

The short-term recommendations to emerge from the interaction relate to administrative measures whilst the longer-term proposals seek to effect systemic changes through a replacement of the archaic Police Act, 1861, redefining of the relationship between the government and the police and public oversight of police activities.

Political use of the police has been witnessed in three forms: politicisation of the recruitment, posting and promotion processes, executive interference in investigations and turning the police force against political dissidents. The situation has been compounded by the discretionary authority of the police that led to abuse of power and violation of human rights.

The participants in the roundtable emphatically demanded police immunity from political control and training of the police force in human rights and people friendly behavioural norms. The police must act for the satisfaction of the communities rather than be a tool in the hands of the ruling authority.

Most debilitating factor in the police debacle is the peanut of allocations given to the police stations for running their day to day affairs. So cash-strapped they are that even for the purpose of carrying dead bodies from the scene of crime they have to depend on undefined sources. Given the starkly adverse citizen:police ratio they are physically overstretched. Add to this, their poor salary to make both end meet, family-wise, which drive them to corrupt ways.

Several proposals for police reform are on the table but these are by themselves not sufficient, there is a deficit of community participation in their articulation. It is necessary to bring the views of all communities, especially the vulnerable ones, to bear on the finalisation exercise of the draft police reform programme. We therefore advocate wider public discourse on the subject.

Siege of the Red Mosque

We must resist use of religion to advance political agenda

THE Red Mosque in Islamabad, Pakistan, continues to be under the control of some militant clerics and students who remain unrelenting in their demand for the introduction of Islamic sharia law in the country. For the past six days a lot of blood has been spilled on both sides when gunfight broke out intermittently between the law enforcers and the armed inmates.

The disconcerting development is, even though the firebrand leader of the fanatic group Abdul Aziz was caught by the police while escaping from the scene, it apparently failed to cause any dent in the aggressive posture of the militants. They were seen guarding strategic points of the mosque wearing gas masks and brandishing automatic weapons.

In a latest bid to end the fiasco, Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf has categorically told the Islamists to immediately free women and children held as human shields or face death. He made it known that his government has so far shown a lot of patience and restraint.

Seeds of religious extremism have been sprouting in Pakistan over the past decades. The attack spearheaded from the mosque in Islamabad only demonstrates how vicious the obscurantist elements have grown right in the heart of the capital. But the stern counter-offensive launched by the government spells out its no-nonsense attitude as far as giving space to such elements in Pakistan society goes.

We strongly believe that whether a country will be governed under the dictates of Islamic sharia law or not is a political issue that needs to be settled through initiating debates and discourses among the people at various tiers. It could also be discussed in a parliament. Therefore, using a sacrosanct place like a mosque to do warfare and spill blood in the name of Islam is tantamount to sacrifice, and the perpetrators ought to be punished by law.

Outrageous series of incidents seen in Pakistan once again brings forth the necessity for universal condemnation of using religion or a place of worship as a base to articulate obscurantist political ideology. Exploiting religious sentiments of the innocent people to advance political agenda has become the pastime for some misguided religious elements. Such people have to be exorcised from all Muslim societies.

The politics of reform



M ABDUL HAFIZ

PERSPECTIVES

Once the political parties are bereft of the leaders they are used to, they will go adrift and will ultimately disintegrate. Then the proliferation of smaller parties will breed unrest, instability, and confrontation, all of which we want to put an end to. The country's political space will be taken over by political chameleons, charlatans, and hustlers, pushing the country further back. We may then prosper propitiously, if inequitably, but the country might descend into a never-never land of democracy for a long time to come.

REFORM is now a buzzword, and the refrain seems to have reached a crescendo now with everyone clamouring for it willy-nilly. According to critics, the enthusiasts are, however, simply trying to evade the fate of their incarcerated colleagues and forestall a smear campaign against them. They also see in it a wind-fall opportunity that usually accompanies any political reshuffle. Moreover, sensing the establishment's approval, if not the pressure for reforms, the reformists are vying with each other to steal the limelight. An invisible Pied Piper with his mesmerising tune is taking them to an indefinite destination, and the folks are in a mad rush to ride the bandwagon. For the buoyant lot of reformists -- reform is their ultimate mantra.

The reformists in the two major

political parties are already up in arms against their party chiefs -- a phenomenon seldom witnessed before in our country -- and that too in unison, transcending the party line. The reformists of the contending political parties appear to be working hand in hand for neutralising their top leaders. The reform proposals advanced by the reformist leaders of both Awami League and BNP are strikingly similar -- as if they are being overseen by some invisible apex body. The main thrust of these proposals is against the party chiefs, who are scathingly condemned for their past political roles.

The reform proposals are designed in such a way that the party chiefs can be removed from their posts and, if required, also from politics itself. Yet the authors of the reform proposals,

and their supporters themselves, sustained both the leaders in their top party posts through their willing allegiance, cooperation and sycophancy, and formed an integral part of the system, fair or foul, presided over by their now abandoned chiefs.

Isn't their present role -- that of rebels without a cause -- reflective of their moral turpitude? Do they at all have moral authority to demand reforms in the party after participating in all of its follies and failures through their acquiescence, if not abetment. The morally upright people prefer to sink with their captain! It is cowardice to abandon him when he and his ship are in distress.

So, if only the ouster of the chiefs of the two parties is the quintessence of the reform agenda it will, alas, be only a travesty of reforms.

As is generally understood,

reform is changes intended to bring about improvement of what is being reformed. It is, indeed, a riddle as to how the removal of the top leaders from the scene will bring that about. Reform is an evolutionary process which spontaneously takes place in a society or corporate body, in their own interest, and is best served through an autonomy of action without outside interference.

Likewise, reforms in political parties are undertaken for their very survival, but in a congenial political ambience, because it involves a great deal of interaction and political alacrity. At the present time, when politics itself is banned, there is no scope for undertaking political reforms.

Moreover, the reform proposals of the two major political parties, if at all implemented, will be fatally divisive for the parties concerned, which are likely to be

ultimately split under divided leadership. That does not bode well for the country's political future. Political parties worth the name do not grow overnight. The organisers of the party, for good governance by the fittest and the honest, must have understood how daunting the task is. There are over 100 political parties in the country, but none match the stature of either the AL or the BNP. The AL took more than half a century to come to its present form, and it was a roller-coaster ride all the way. In spite of its smooth origin, the BNP's march to its popularity has not been smooth. These exceptional political outfits ought to be considered as the country's assets.

Discerning observers of the situation obtaining in the country's politics tend to agree that the principal political parties will be inevitably ditched without the leaders who led them through many crises. In the case of the AL, no single reformist leader will be able to hold it together. The role and intents also of the BNP have been put to question widely at the grass-root level. As a result, in both the cases, the alternative chiefs of the parties will be difficult to put in place. And the idea of collective leadership? It's still a fantasy in our political culture. Our people are more fond of symbolism with

regard to the question of leadership.

Once the political parties are bereft of the leaders they are used to, they will go adrift and will ultimately disintegrate. Then the proliferation of smaller parties will breed unrest, instability, and confrontation, all of which we want to put an end to. The country's political space will be taken over by political chameleons, charlatans, and hustlers, pushing the country further back. We may then prosper propitiously, if inequitably, but the country might descend into a never-never land of democracy for a long time to come.

The power game is extremely tricky, deceptive, and dangerous, all at once. Its heady brew can drive the power-seekers mad. We have seen enough of this game during the extra-constitutional regimes, both in the Pakistan and Bangladesh periods. They come in the guise of magnanimity and patriotism and for rendering service. Once their base is consolidated they bare their fangs. Will the politicians -- reformists or otherwise -- be pawns in their game? Can't they, for a while, close ranks in this hour of crisis?

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Lip service to non-alignment



PRAFUL BIDWAI
writes from New Delhi

At this delusion's roots lie many Indian middle-class pathologies: uncritical admiration for the US, consumerist greed (best fed by an American-style economic model), unbridled individualism, and the arrogant belief that India is now in the Big League. In reality, India belongs to the bottom fourth of the world in human development.

May, the "quadrilateral" grouping held consultations in Manila, provoking demarches (formal diplomatic communications) from China.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has tried to allay Chinese concerns about the "quadrilateral." But his assertion that "there's no question of ganging up against China" is unlikely to reassure Beijing.

After all, in a veiled criticism of China, Singh also said: "We Asians often look at each other through borrowed eyes." More important, he added: "The international system is about power relations, it's not a morality play."

How India sees "power relations" has since become clearer -- with the docking of the aircraft carrier USS Nimitz at Chennai, and the debate triggered by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's remark that non-alignment "has lost its meaning."

Take the Nimitz. The nuclear-warship called at Chennai at India's invitation, amidst protests by political parties, trade unions, and some of India's tallest public intellectuals, including celebrated writer-dramatists Mahasweta Devi, Arundhati Roy and Habib Tanvir, historians Romila Thapar and

Sumit Sarkar, economists Deepak Nayyar, Prabhat Patnaik and Amit Bhaduri, and ex-civil servants S.P. Shukla and Sudeep Banerjee.

The warship's call wasn't a neutral or innocent affair, but an unambiguous statement of strategic proximity with the US.

The UPA claimed that the ship wasn't carrying nuclear weapons, and hence its visit didn't violate India's well-established policy of disallowing foreign nuclear weapons into its territorial waters.

This claim flies in the face of the US's well-reiterated policy to "neither deny nor confirm" the presence of nuclear weapons on its warships under any circumstances. Yet, India gratuitously granted this certificate to the US. This speaks poorly of its foreign policy.

India has travelled a long way from opposing the transit of nuclear weapons in its neighbourhood and the US base at Diego Garcia, and demanding a Zone of Peace in the Indian Ocean.

During the Bangladesh war, India bristled when the US sent the aircraft-carrier USS Enterprise to the Bay of Bengal. This was considered "nuclear

blackmail." Today, India willingly invites American gunboat diplomacy.

What has changed is not the US's arrogance or hegemonism -- but India's willingness to accept it.

The Nimitz's visit was intended to send a message. The warship was involved in offensive operations in the Gulf. It was again sent there two months ago as part of a 50-ship armada to threaten Iran.

Its India visit came amidst feverish lobbying in Capitol Hill, to make the India-US nuclear deal conditional upon cancelling of the Iran-Pakistan-India pipeline. India is tightening its strategic embrace of Washington at the expense of relations with third countries.

The Nimitz visit sent a deplorable signal amidst the destabilisation of West Asia caused by the US-led invasion of Iraq. The fact that 10 other nuclear-powered ships recently visited Indian ports is no excuse. This shouldn't have happened in the first place. Such precedents cannot justify a policy violation.

This criticism of the Nimitz's visit isn't rooted in knee-jerk anti-Americanism, or opposition to a balanced, dignified, mutually beneficial relationship with the

US, but in a cool-headed analysis of Washington's global role.

The US is setting negative examples through its Abu Ghraib and "extraordinary renditions," through Guantanamo Bay, "pre-emptive war" doctrine, militarisation of space, work on new nuclear weapons, opposition to the Kyoto Protocol, trade protectionism, and support for despotic governments.

In Chennai, US military personnel performed community service -- after committing unspeakable crimes in Iraq. They were permitted free entry into Chennai, without visas or passports -- an extraordinary step!

Now consider the media response to Rice's attack on the Non-Alignment Movement, and the Indian statement that: "NAM's relevance continues in promoting South-South cooperation and the democratisation of the international system."

Many commentators have declared non-alignment dead. NAM should "roll over," an editorial said, to be replaced by "cooperation between democracies ... Since democracies are used to settling internal disputes through a process of dialogue rather than violence, it stands to reason that two democracies will use the same processes as far as possible in case of disputes."

This is nonsense. The US does not usually resolve disputes through "dialogue" -- witness Iraq. It remains committed to coercion, and the first use of nuclear weapons even against

non-nuclear states.

To imagine that there can be a "Community of Democracies" that cuts across the vast economic inequalities, cultural diversities and political differences that mark today's global order is dangerous self-delusion.

At this delusion's roots lie many Indian middle-class pathologies: uncritical admiration for the US, consumerist greed (best fed by an American-style economic model), unbridled individualism, and the arrogant belief that India is now in the Big League. In reality, India belongs to the bottom fourth of the world in human development.

Yet, India is one of the world's few countries, according to a recent survey of 46 countries, where the US's approval rating is 59 percent among the middle class. In all European countries (barring Poland) it is lower (30 to 45 percent). This is also true of Latin America and Asia, barring Japan.

This doesn't speak of rational, critical thinking on the Indian elite's part, but of its deep disconnect from the world. This can only produce a disastrously one-sided pro-US orientation which sells the Indian people short.

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With Kyuma gone, a crucial test awaits Abe

CLOSEUP JAPAN

As a result, it is still unclear that the fallout of political scandals and foul remarks by ruling party politicians is going to have such a negative impact on LDP that the prime minister is left with no other option but to submit his resignation. But much will definitely depend on how various political groupings try to take advantage of the situation in the days leading to the July 29 elections.

MONZURU HUQ

RIUGHT from the moment that Japan's departing defense minister uttered the words that somehow justified the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, many took it as the most crucial turning point in the political career of a politician who has already earned a reputation for making controversial comments.

Though Fumio Kyuma, the outgoing defense chief, was defiant until the very end, it did not take much longer for him to surrender and accept the irony of fate. He made the comment on Friday, and by Tuesday he was gone from the cabinet, a rapid turn of events in the otherwise slow-paced movement that char-

acterizes Japanese politics. Another of his cabinet colleagues is still hanging on, despite being severely criticized by the media and the public in general for branding women as "baby making machines." Hakuo Yanagisawa, the health and welfare minister who made that comment, survived, most likely due to the fact that his comment, though politically not correct, had little to do with emotional issues that occupy a very important position in Japanese politics, and also due to the fact that he apologized time and again for what he said was a big mistake.

Kyuma, on the other hand, was adamantly sticking to his point, and said that he actually did not mean what his comment overtly

reflected. It now seems that nobody, including Prime Minister Shinzo Abe who had appointed him to the post, could decipher the real meaning, and Kyuma had no other choice but to leave.

With Kyuma gone, the door suddenly opened for the first time in Japanese history for a woman to occupy the post of the country's defense chief. Yuriko Koike, the 54-year-old politician seen by many as a skilful ladder-climber in the cut-throat world of the male-dominated political world of Japan, quickly stepped in to fill the vacuum, thus becoming the first woman in Japan to take the helm of defense. She is obviously not a novice in defense related issues, because she was serving as National Security Advisor to

the prime minister. In the cabinet, too, she is not a newcomer, as she was environment minister in the past administration of Junichiro Koizumi.

Moreover, she was one of the "killers" that Koizumi dispatched to unseat rebel ruling party candidates who opposed his postal reform bill, and were contesting in the last general elections in September 2005 as independent candidates. Yuriko Koike was among the most successful "killers," and unseated a heavyweight rebel in a Tokyo constituency. As a result, many have already started to keep a watchful eye on how far she would be able to salvage Abe from the damages inflicted by Kyuma and, a few weeks earlier, by another cabinet member who took the time honoured path in Japan to commit suicide to avoid facing embarrassment which, in his case, was the possibility of encountering legal proceedings for questionable deals related to his office expenses.

Abe's image as a politician capable of bringing changes that

would benefit Japan has come under question, not only due to the behaviour and attitude of some of his cabinet members, but also because of a series of scandals that have eroded the people's trust in the government. The ruling coalition in recent days overrode opposition protests and steamrolled a number of questionable bills, among which one allowed a special exemption from the statute of limitations for pension benefit payouts of people whose records had not been maintained. The ruling coalition also went ahead with a job placement law to help retiring government employees find new jobs in the private sector.

The prime minister might have felt confident that all these measures would earn him public approval. But, as many in Japan are now worried about their pensions, the recent measures taken by the ruling block caused just the opposite reaction, and in the beginning of July the support for the Abe cabinet fell below 30 percent for the first time. The approval rating of the Abe cabinet has been facing falling support rating for quite sometime now. After a strong start, there has been a steady decline in popularity due

to a series of scandals and perceived poor leadership. And now, it is the first time that the figure has fallen to below 30 percent since Abe took office in September 2006. It should be noted that the Koizumi cabinet always managed to stay above the 30 percent mark, and it was his predecessor Yoshiro Mori who had to resign abruptly as his support rating continued to drop. So, is Abe going to face the same fate as Mori?

Obviously it is still too early to predict Abe's possible resignation. Much will depend on the outcome of the upper house election. As the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) controls the lower house that chooses the prime minister, a loss by the LDP would not necessarily mean that Abe would have to step down. But such a scenario would no doubt put pressure on him to pave the way for a more popular party leader. But the problem with LDP is that the party lacks a leader who can be considered popular in the true sense. So it is unlikely that Abe might step down in case the party shows a

poor result. Another important factor that, too, goes in Abe's favor is the inability of the main opposition Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) to channel the public's dissatisfaction with the cabinet to