

Campus police

Concept has merit but should be carefully thought through

AGAINST the backdrop of the recent violence spurred on by an incident in Dhaka University, the government is reportedly contemplating formation of campus police in the higher educational institutions of the country.

The idea to look after security on the campus had been mooted in the past but it never got around to seeing any concrete shape in our context largely because of its sensitivity. As it is, many university campuses overseas have such internal policing squads, so that we have some best practices to model our proposed campus police on.

Let's make no mistake about it, we are all for campus police that is totally funded, administered, managed and run by the university authorities. The campus police ought to be featured by certain characteristics that set it apart from conventional police forces.

Under no circumstances, should it be an extension of and an appendage to the police force or any other security forces. This can be an internally grown security squad drawing on leadership training provided in campuses where students are groomed to be caretakers of libraries and dormitories et al. Or, it can be manned by security guards from reputable companies with the university authorities exercising the power to hire and fire them.

The sole purpose of the specialised security unit is to maintain academic atmosphere, protect the teachers, students and university property from internal disturbances and desist outsiders from physically intruding into university affairs. That being the case, the idea to have campus police must be deferential to the sensibilities of those it seeks to protect. This is very important.

In conclusion, we would like to say that the idea has some merit, but it can go astray without some safeguards built into it. We have seen how our campuses have been politicised in the past. Unless it is made totally impervious to political abuse, it is likely to end up being coercive apparatus of the ruling party within the campus. We need to be wary of such possibilities. It is a novel idea in these parts of the world, so we have to think things through before going for campus police.

Autonomy for BTV

Should not be elusive anymore

IT is good news that the caretaker government is taking measures to provide autonomy to the only state-run television channel Bangladesh Television (BTV), thereby presaging the end of the government's hold on it. The sea change will come through necessary amendments in line with the recommendations of the commission formed by the Awami League government in 1996. It will also be based on a review of the existing law -- the Bangladesh Television Authority Act (BTA) 2001.

There is no denying that BTV has been suffering from severe ownership crisis over the decades. Though a state-owned enterprise, it was blatantly exploited by the political elements in the governments of the day for narrow partisan gains. And because of the obvious slant, BTV used to be treated by the people as an extended part of the government in power. As a result they rejected news and views aired by the channel outright. Total autonomy henceforth has been a long-standing demand of the people of the country.

The urgency of making BTV autonomous, modern and credible is prompted by the fact that private television channels are doing a wonderful job of making the news items authentic and entertainment programmes as varied and enjoyable as possible. Therefore, it is not surprising that today private enterprises and corporate houses are rushing to these channels to advertise their products. The phenomenal growth rate of the front-ranking private television channels explained what freedom could do for attaining credibility and commercial viability.

All said and done, we hope this time the authorities will do the job properly because our experiences show that in the past all the successive governments had given their pledge to implement the reforms as per recommendations of the committees but on the ground things remained unchanged. The concept of 'free media' thus remained only in the files of the government. The good name that BTV once enjoyed has to be salvaged through ensuring autonomy and competence at all level. The existing infrastructure facilities should be fully exploited to make it a viable enterprise.

Ryuhei Kawada and his lonely crusade

Kawada's interests are not only confined within the narrow scope of public health and welfare issues. He is a relentless fighter for the protection of basic human rights and peace in the world. He would like to see Japan coming out of the narrow vision of economic gain where the idea of making profit is placed before that of human life. As a lawmaker he intends to deal with issues of broader perspective as well, which will make the whole world a better place to live for every human being.

MONZURUL HUQ

IT is indeed very hard to imagine how a ten-year old boy would react if he was told that he has been infected with HIV since his early childhood and his infection might take the form of AIDS, making his already complicated life more difficult to sustain. For a ten-year old boy, we presume there is not much difference between HIV and AIDS, and also between the thin line of separation that childhood understanding puts between life and death. For life, in reality, is yet to take a head start for him, that would eventually take him to the uncharted waters of the real world where many of our childhood dreams get easily shattered.

For Ryuhei Kawada, the newly

elected member of the upper house of the Japanese Diet, this unthinkable childhood was a reality in the true sense, as one fine morning when he was ten-year old, his mother told him of the virus that he was infected with while he was going through the treatment of a disease that he was born with. She also warned him that the virus might one day develop into a more deadly form known as AIDS.

Kawada was diagnosed with hemophilia when he was 6 months old. The treatment of the disease required the use of blood products, and Japan at that time had no shortage of such products imported mainly from the United States. It was the post-Vietnam war period, and as the demand for blood products in battlefields suddenly dwindled, there was

abundant supply in the market.

For medical facilities and drug companies, it was welcome news as they could get the products at a bargain price without much difficulty. Drug companies in Japan were simply too happy to find an abundant source of blood products in the US market, and started to import such products bypassing the rigorous quality control process that such imported items are required to go through.

Large quantities of unheated blood products were imported to treat patients who suffered from diseases like hemophilia. It was simply the careless attitude of the controlling body, the Ministry of Health and Welfare, as well as drug companies that are interested more in making big profit, which permitted tainted blood products to

get into the market. Kawada became one of the early victims of that careless attitude of the Japanese government and pharmaceutical companies.

At ten he was told of the disease he was suffering from, and though he was not sure of what it really meant for him he eventually became aware of it, and later joined a group of other hemophilia patients who, too, were victims of the same unheated blood products, to file a lawsuit against the central government and the drug companies.

None of the plaintiffs initially disclosed their names, and Kawada too remained anonymous. It was a deliberate decision on part of the victims, as they thought they would be discriminated against in the society, like it happened in the past with those who suffered from leprosy and some other diseases.

The Japanese society in the past had been notoriously unkind to those who suffered from diseases considered to be incurable. But at age 19 Kawada decided to go public, and disclosed his name as one of the plaintiffs in the law-

suit. It was a brave decision, and he was convinced that his disclosure would result in greater public attention to the problem and would eventually help the HIV victims to gain public sympathy for their plight, and would force the government to take measures not only to ease their sufferings, but also to ensure that what happened due to mere negligence would not be repeated again.

Kawada, though right on the first count, was wrong on the second point, as the recent pension record debacle proved once again that it is indeed very difficult to clean public offices of such vices as negligence and arrogance.

A year after Kawada went public with his identity, the health ministry in 1996 apologized to the plaintiffs for the HIV scandal, that eventually paved the way for an out-of-court settlement. All along his struggle, Kawada's mother, Etsuko, stood firmly beside him and provided the essential support that he needed. She was elected to the lower house of the Japanese parliament in 2000 and, during the three-year period she served as a lawmaker, she tried relentlessly to compel the

government to take measures to ease the sufferings of the HIV victims.

The same responsibility now had fallen on the shoulder of her 31-year old son, who has been elected to the upper house running as an independent candidate from Tokyo.

Kawada addressed a press conference recently at Tokyo's Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan, where he outlined the basic policies that he plans to uphold at the upper house of the parliament and also made candid opinion on a wide range of issues that he considers crucial for Japan.

In the July election he received more than 680,000 votes, which took him by surprise as he still remembered what many around him told after hearing of his desire to run for an upper house seat. The shared opinion of his friends and acquaintances was that, he could run, but probably never would receive support anywhere closer to the number needed to be elected.

But he continued campaigning with the clear message that the Japanese society needs to correct

calling the set-up he belongs to an "army-backed national government" it flies in the face of the whole purpose of an early credible election.

The information and law adviser's notion of a national government was about to create fresh polemic, which could have been divisive in an already fissured society had not the army chief himself reacted promptly.

In a quick riposte while inaugurating the footwear section in Gazipur's machine tools factory, the general was dismissive of the adviser's perception of a national government and categorically stated that the present ruling dispensation was just a neutral caretaker government, and the military, like the civil and police administrations, was only another organ of it. It was so during the tenure of the political governments in the past, and will remain the same way even in the future when an elected government will be installed.

The army chief's clarification came as a great relief, and exploded the myth that was being built around the caretaker set-up.

Against this backdrop, the army chief's clarity of mind, his vision

through the fog of confusion, and his liberal views are worth taking lessons from. He did not mince his words on the issue; neither did he resort to mealy-mouthed sophistry. On numerous occasions he expressed his abhorrence for politics, which he felt was outside his ambit, and devoted himself to fulfilling his mission -- that of creating a civil political order free from scam, sleaze and criminalisation. In that process, if he abdicates what is in his grip, he still retains his unique stature as one at the helm of the country's defence.

Ours is an enlightened and educated armed forces, well aware of the ugly consequences of cheap Bonapartism because we are still bearing the scars of the aberrations caused by two despots and continue to remain mired in their legacies.

Any democratic architecture to which we are committed presupposes the existence of strong civil order by establishing the supremacy of civil authority. The sooner we proceed towards that goal, the greater are the prospects of our polity.

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

In quest of an enduring civil order

PERSPECTIVES

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becoming a stable and successful polity.

So he sufficiently clipped the wings of the military brass to stop the rise of "Bonapartism" in the armed forces. Under his deft leadership -- amid the trauma of the nation's break-up and the bitterness of long years of inept military rule -- Pakistan could be salvaged from the brink of collapse.

It is, however, a different thing that he was hoisted on his own petard for the part played by him in the country's disintegration. His fortune started dipping soon after Pakistan's 1977 election, which he was alleged to have rigged at least selectively for his party. A countrywide agitation launched by Pakistan national alliance (PNA)

left Bhutto totally exasperated and in the lurch.

During those turbulent days Bhutto received a high profile guest -- a friend from the royal family of Iran. In the banquet hosted by him for Princess Ashraf (sister of Emperor Reza Shah Pahlavi), Bhutto escorted her through the lined up invitees and at some point both came across General Ziaul Huq.

Bhutto had made him the chief of the army staff, superceding as many as sixteen generals, as he was his most trusted man in uniform, and obviously took him casually in the guests' line. But the princess, well conversant with Pakistan's martial politics, did not. After a few steps, she sharply looked at her host.

Bhutto knew what was in the

princess's mind. "He is in my pocket," an apparently complacent Bhutto whispered his confident reply in the ear of his honoured guest. A few days later Bhutto was in Zia's custody, if not in his pocket.

Bhutto's fate aptly illustrates the vulnerability of democratic politics and fragility of a civil order in our part of the world, yet both are inseparably connected with each other. Since an enduring civil supremacy is a quintessential ingredient of modern democracy, the ruling dispensation will hopefully innovate ways and means to ensure that during the course of its long-drawn reform program, which is underway.

At this sensitive juncture, when one of the learned advisers indulges in misleading rhetoric by

BYLINE

The basic question before the nation is actually a fairly simple one: is the future of India linked to every Indian? Or is Dream India the destiny of only some Indians? Has Jawaharlal Nehru's tryst with destiny been converted from a national challenge into a self-satisfied statistic? Shelley's flame drew the fluttering moth. Ghalib's flame, methinks, defines the vote. Shama har rang main jalti hai sahar hone tak, (The flame sparkles in every colour until dawn). What comes at dawn when another multi-dimensional electoral candle is exhausted? The clarity of sunlight, I hope.

Dr Manmohan Singh, possibly moved by the Sachar Committee report on the abject plight of Indian Muslims, promised something of an extraordinary multiple rise in the budgetary expenditure for their welfare.

When his budget appeared in 2007, the allocation for minorities had actually been slashed. The finance minister apparently forgot to read the prime minister's instructions. The prime minister, of course, forgot to do anything about it. Now Antulay, who was given a ministry without an office, has announced a few more committees.

They must also believe that every Muslim is illiterate, and does not know the difference between a guideline and a law or an order. The government has sent "guidelines" that Muslims should be given more jobs in the bureaucracy. These are not orders, just guidelines.

I can visualise every secretary of every ministry, his visage flush with the excitement of a new purpose, getting into office on Monday and ordering the immediate hiring of millions of unemployed Muslim youth. It is one thing if they cannot give jobs; why

twist the knife with jokes?

Why does Shelley's line about the desire of a moth for the flame keep coming back to me?

India is in the throes of a violent fever. You can see it shivering everywhere. There is a bus accident in Agra and the young turn to stones and arson. A dalit dies in Haryana, and the community is out on the streets. Caste wars surface only sometimes, but the turbulence is a permanent stream just under the surface.

Muslims are restless and angry, imbued with a sense of betrayal as yet another government they helped elect has given them committee reports rather than justice. One part of the crimes of the winter of 1992-93 has been punished, but those who indulged in anti-Muslim riots, including policemen named by the Srikrishna report, are untouched by the law. Any protest is fobbed off by the promise of action tomorrow. Tomorrow is a day that never comes.

The poor, of all regions, faiths, castes, economic denominations, want economic and social justice; they want life and sustenance, and if they do not get them they will make their voices heard, and

their anger evident. Whenever they ask a question, they are told by the government to wait till 2020 for an answer.

They are not looking at 2020. They are looking at deprivation and death. There is no 2020 for the farmers who have committed suicide. There is no 2020 for the vegetable vendors and egg-suppliers who see their only form of income being swallowed by a retail giant.

A policy for 2020 can work only if sustained by immediate programs for those who are being dispossessed on the way to El Dorado. A limited dole is not a policy, particularly when it is punctured by corruption.

The nuclear deal with the United States will be an issue in the next general elections, but it will not be the only debate. Campaign season is question time, so the questions that have not yet been articulated will rise to the top of the debate.

One can understand, for instance, the family silver being hocked to protect or expand India's military nuclear program, but why get into an embrace as demanding, one-sided, and restrictive as that detailed in the Hyde Act for civilian nuclear energy? We have enough fuel for our military purposes.

This nuclear deal was not part of the Congress manifesto in the last elections; it did not exist in the Common Minimum Program that is the basis of the ruling alliance. When the last civilian energy policy of the country was announced, a document which was the sum of collective effort, there was no hint that nuclear power was to become so crucial to India's energy requirements.

From which bottle did this genie suddenly materialise? And if nuclear power is so green and so beneficial, why has America not invested heavily in civilian nuclear power after the Three Mile Island accident in 1979?

America doesn't need either the Hyde Act, or anyone else's technology to do so. As this column has argued before, it would be a very foolish country that would prefer hostility with America, but the fundamental requirement of friendship is equality. Subservience is not an equitable or sustainable long-term relationship.

How cost-effective is nuclear energy? There is never a direct, or even an indirect, answer from the government to this question. Can those at the bottom of the pile afford this energy, or do they need more hydro-power? Water is one natural resource that is not going to disappear, for if it does there will be nothing left to protect.

The basic question before the nation is actually a fairly simple one: is the future of India linked to every Indian? Or is Dream India the destiny of only some Indians? Has Jawaharlal Nehru's tryst with destiny been converted from a national challenge into a self-satisfied statistic?

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making profit is placed before that of human life. As a lawmaker he intends to deal with issues of broader perspective as well, which will make the whole world a better place to live for every human being.

At the press conference Kawada made it clear that he would like to see an end to Japanese self defense forces joining the war efforts of other countries in the name of fighting terrorism. According to him there exists many other ways to fight terrorism and war should not be the desired option for Japan.

It should be noted that the bill to extend the mandate of a special anti-terrorism law that allows Japanese participation in refueling US and other allied nations ships stationed in the Indian Ocean is set to be debated at the upcoming extra-ordinary session of the Japanese parliament. Kawada is no doubt going to join hands with the opposition block to see the bill is sent back without the much-needed approval of the upper chamber.

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