

US' critique on our human rights situation

We note their points but should they not look at themselves?

IT is ironic that the US with its own stained human rights records should have seen it fit to admonish other countries on their performance in the sensitive area. This is not to preclude criticism where it is due in order to improve upon poor records but to point at a holier than thou attitude that is clearly not morally tenable.

The memories of violation of people's rights in Afghanistan and especially in Iraq are still fresh with Guantanamo Bay and Abu Ghraib as stark proof of inhuman torture evoking protests from the world as a whole including the US itself. What about private mercenary army called black waters fighting for US in surrogate wars? Then does the rendition of 'hostile' persons to a country with reputation for torture and having them brutalised from behind the scene doing any good to US image?

We do, however, take note of many valid points that the US state department has raised about human rights in Bangladesh. Allegations range from preventive and arbitrary detentions, arrest without warrant or formal charges through torture in detention to extract confessional statements or to come out with names of other suspects to lack of open trial, denial of right to bail and restrictions placed on print and electronic media. Nevertheless, the state department is cognizant of the fact "there was significant decrease in the number of killings by security forces."

The US report has echoed what we had known and often written about. In a state of emergency civil rights remain suspended but that does not mean a dismissive attitude would be taken to the primacy of human rights which is the bed-rock of civilised society. A government that has come about with popular support on a pledge of handing over power to a representative government through free, fair and credible elections should concentrate on good governance and rule of law to create a congenial atmosphere for the polls by December. We are hoping that free and fair elections held on schedule will usher us into a stable and bright future.

Dealing with swindler NGOs

Firm action against them is a necessity

NEWS coming in from Natore about the vanishing acts resorted to by some NGOs does little to cheer us, naturally. But what surely leaves everyone perplexed is the extent to which the district administration there has failed to take action against such NGOs even after reports about their negative activities were circulated widely. It is a lax administration we are speaking of here, for the very simple reason that despite the detection of as many as 30 fraudulent NGOs in the district, no punitive measures appear to have been taken against the people behind them. Just how serious the problem is turning out to be is to be seen from the way in which a million people have been swindled out of an altogether Taka 500 crore in eight north-western districts by these fake NGOs.

Not long ago, reports of the swindle committed by a so-called non-government organisation, Freedom Unnayan Sangstha, pointed to the nefarious role that such bodies were engaged in. That should have been reason enough for the authorities to go for concrete and tough action against the individuals and groups engaged in such shady business. That did not happen. What happened was even worse. Earlier this month, the Natore district administration permitted the establishment of some new NGOs, ignoring public opinion about the need to apprehend those who had earlier hoodwinked people by simply disappearing with their money. The height of irony is that since this new decision came into force, two other organisations, also calling themselves NGOs, vanished after pocketing a total of Taka 170 crore. Our credulity is stretched to the limits when we are informed that despite two probes conducted last year, revealing anomalies in the working of some NGOs, the authorities adopted a laid-back attitude where prosecution of the corrupt elements associated with these bodies is concerned.

A few delinquent NGOs cause scratches on the overall image of NGOs. The need now is therefore straight and simple. The Natore administration must not only explain its failure to do its job but also ensure that from here on all past lapses will be set aright. At the same time, it should be the responsibility of NGO coordinating bodies (and one may here mention such organisations as the Association of Development Agencies of Bangladesh) to have their own supervisory or investigative mechanism in place. They could prevent fake NGOs from damaging the reputation of the genuine ones.

Pilloried police and pompous platitudes



MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

STRAIGHT LINE

This scribbler has been unsuccessfully venturing to state that the demand for a truly professional police outfit has to come from within the society, and thus feels encouraged when he sees a widely read column echoing the same view. In fact, the crux of the matter lies in the reality that for too long we have restricted ourselves to the utterance only of pious intentions for police reform without getting into substantive corrective actions.

READERS of The Daily Star cannot but congratulate Syed Badrul Ahsan for his intensely thought-provoking and eloquent piece on how he would like to see our police perform. This writer is referring to Mr. Ahsan's column of March 5th wherein, amongst others, it was observed very poignantly that "...the real, paramount, need today is for a batch of educated, sophisticated men and women, those attuned to the ways of the world, to make it into the police service, indeed into any areas of public activity. Let there arise circumstances where the policemen in your neighbourhood and mine will give us little or no reason to gripe about their performance."

The above comments were occasioned by the alleged remarks of Mr. Nur Mohammad, the IGP to the effect that "most criminals in the country commit offences that are well within the knowledge of the police." If indeed Mr. Nur Mohammad, Inspector General of Police, has said what has been quoted above then he may perhaps be commended for his disarming candour almost bordering on masochism of a sort that is uncharacteristic of our establishment

utterances. However, our attention should focus on the salutary part of Mr. Ahsan's article insofar as it relates to the brilliant articulation of the societal concern for a caring police. This is a refreshing thought, as policing, for obvious historical reasons, remains a less than respectable profession in our part of the world.

This scribbler has been unsuccessfully venturing to state that the demand for a truly professional police outfit has to come from within the society, and thus feels encouraged when he sees a widely read column echoing the same view.

In fact, the crux of the matter lies in the reality that for too long we have restricted ourselves to the utterance only of pious intentions for police reform without getting into substantive corrective actions. A case in point is the less than desirable speed in enacting a revised Police Act by doing away with the archaic provisions of Police Act, 1861.

While appreciating Mr. Ahsan's pleading for a good police force it would only be relevant to look at matters in their proper perspective. The police organisation created under the 1861 Act was designed not to attract better talent, to ensure

built-in subservience of the police to the executive administration regardless of the resulting corruption, lack of professional excellence, police highhandedness and police-public estrangement.

In fact, the police were impressed upon to act as the "hands" of the civilian authorities, thereby reducing the former to an agency of the latter. Such an arrangement practically excluded the Inspector General and his deputies from effective supervision of the police in the sphere of law and order. More seriously, the authority of the district superintendent was routinely interfered with, even in matters of internal administration of the force.

The above retrograde steps, including in particular the constant extraneous interference with the authority of senior police officers over the personnel under their command, not only had a crippling effect on the ill-conceived organisation, but also greatly exacerbated the bitter complaints of police oppression and extortion, apart from spoiling the discipline of the force.

In fact, as far back as 1902, the Sir Andrew Fraser Commission concluded that one of the major causes of failure of the 1861 Act was undue

interference with the police by civilian authorities. There is effort even now by vested interests to continue that undue meddling.

To set the record straight, it should be said that there have been many instances where governments have been accused of using the police for political ends, as well as of individual politicians interfering with the administration and the work of the police. The norms that should govern the relationship between the party in power, the individual politician, and the police have still to be developed.

Due to the oft-repeated financial constraints our police have been compelled to bypass the constructive impulses of science and technology and find itself in an anachronistic situation. In Bangladesh, the apology of scientific facilities available to the police has thus naturally failed to constitute a system so very typical of a modern police outfit.

For educated men and women attuned to the ways of the world to make it into the police service as very fondly desired, the stumbling block is the general unpopularity of the service due to an unattractive pay structure not commensurate with the responsibilities of police duties, meager promotion prospects, lack of

social recognition vis-a-vis other services, and a sense of uncertainty arising from political situations.

Many discerning observers are of the considered opinion that it is now almost impossible for conscientious men, not to speak of sophisticated, to think of joining police service because in independent democratic Bangladesh the attitude of the political establishment has hardened, thus making the police respond to the democratic protests with fury and unbridled violence. The distinction between public service and domestic service has dangerously thinned.

There will be many grounds to gripe about the performance of our police because, paradoxically, when extraneous interference grew the exhortations for stricter police accountability became louder.

Ironically, these calls for more accountability have been used to gain greater operational control over the police thereby debilitating the internal command and control structures.

The solution lay in doing away with the illogical concept of dual control as in the Police Act, 1861, allowing necessary operational autonomy to the police command, and then holding it effectively accountable when things go wrong.

The principal reason as to why persons of honour would be reluctant to join the police is that the police organisation under the 1861 Act was not meant to reward initiative, promote merit or manage and sustain organisational change. In fact, it was designed to promote and sustain a culture of status quo, with police hierarchy playing "second fiddle" to their "bosses" outside the organisation.

There are police officers, however, who are happy if change efforts focus on issues like better transport, more manpower etc. Their attitude becomes lukewarm when reform agenda entails more responsibility coupled with stricter accountability.

With regard to pay and perks, there were times when policemen were virtually expected to live on the ground. The situation has not really changed much, and given the wide discretion and power and the strains of the job it is indeed difficult to attract desirable elements into the organisation.

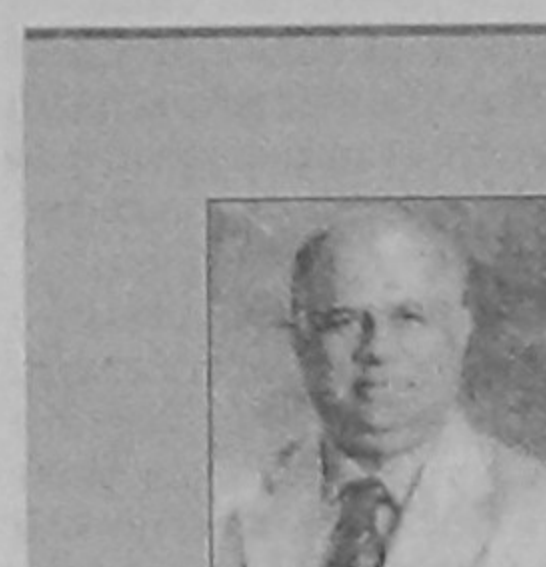
Add to that the oppressive work conditions and the absence of positive work ecology, the scene is maddening. In addition, the opportunity of being corrupt is low and, thus, the obvious rational choice is often the acceptance of bribes.

To be brutally frank, the profession of policing has to be salvaged from the morass of a politically and managerially incapacitated scenario. The rank structure has to be rationally changed in a phased way to enable the organisation to do a discreet job. This would require substantial injection of resources, which would only be possible with the support of a broad agreement across the political landscape on the future role and responsibilities of police.

The police needs to be organisationally accountable, operationally autonomous and neutral and functionally responsive. The question is, do we have the will to accord police reform the desired priority?

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Bread, electricity and water



AKRAM SEHGAL
writes from Karachi

AS I SEE IT

The Bhubran Accord of March 9 seems to have achieved compromise, the seeming impossibility of a grand coalition. Vilified from pillar to post as being "Mr. Ten-Percent," particularly by his new-found friends, the Sharifs, till very lately, does Asif Zardari now deserve to be called "Mr Miracle-Man?" How long this bonhomie lasts is another matter, the two differing political ideologies (and personalities) are already being tested. The first salvo is the PML (N) veto of Makhdoom Amin Fahim as PM, is this a ploy to divide and destroy the only national party?

GIVEN that Mian Nawaz Sharif considers confrontation to be the essence of politics, the general public perception is that converting him from confrontation to politics of compromise would be nothing short of a miracle.

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How long this bonhomie lasts is another matter, the two differing political ideologies (and personalities) are already being tested. The first salvo is the PML (N) veto of Makhdoom Amin Fahim as PM, is this a ploy to divide and destroy the only national party? Or was Khawaja Asif's public denouncement of a respected leader of a one-day old coalition partner a "reverse" favour, on someone's request from inside the PPP hierarchy? Can PPP afford a bitter "Faqr of Hala" becoming a brooding King Lear?

A crude poll of the electorate (including the 54% who did not vote)

came to conclusions that were not surprising. Law and order came out as second priority to the worsening economic situation inside and outside the country. An overwhelming majority of the populace expects immediate initiatives to ensure food, electricity and clean water. The incoming federal government will have its hands full ensuring equitable distribution of scarce resources to the common man.

The mass apprehension is -- things will get much worse before they become better. "Restoration of the superior judiciary" is not a high priority for the masses, but it is for the lawyer's community and activist segments of civil society agitating the issue for over a year. This, supposedly, will be sorted out by parliament within 30 days of formation of the government.

The Bhubran Accord may be pragmatic in the choice of priorities, the time-delay is a delayed time-bomb. The legal gorillas (that is not a pun) in and around the presidency will now proceed to plant "Improvised Legal Explosive Devices" (ILEDs) along the route to parliament: the right of self-defence?

The common intent and purpose should aim to give common

Pakistanis a comfortable livelihood, with freedom to practice their choice of worship and beliefs with complete security. In literal sense, crisis translates into danger. Dangers in the realm of politics, economics and military are mostly interconnected with each other.

One must be cautious about the fail-safe line between freedom and licence. In the mindless exercise of licence, particularly by the electronic media, we could lose our freedom. We have the capacity and potential to emulate the Chinese meaning of crisis, danger as well as opportunity. Prudent and effective governance by genuine representatives of the people can overcome the inherent challenges.

Water levels in the dams and catchment areas are dangerously low, irrigation canals are underfed and electricity is in short supply. With oil prices going through the roof, electricity rates will register an inordinance.

With tubewells working at less than capacity, the priority must be to conserve available water and allocate maximum electricity for optimum running of tubewells. Agriculture shortages will require emergency import of food-grains

and edible oils. Manufacturing must be given priority over commercial and residential electricity requirements. The gap between demand and supply in Karachi, the main hub of manufacturing activity, being between 750 to 1000 MW during summer, a number of barge-mounted plants must be immediately sourced on priority basis to meet shortages.

A judicious allocation of available electricity resources to agriculture and manufacturing will keep unemployment from rising and becoming a socio-economic problem.

To keep the country's fuel bills from rising exponentially, car imports must be restricted and private transport discouraged by disincentive taxation, and incentives must be given for use of public transport. Kerosene and diesel need subsidising, and the rates for gas to manufacturing units kept at a minimum.

The construction industry must be given priority, cement and steel flows must be kept constant at stable prices. Water is likely to be in short supply unless we have plentiful rain. Unfortunately, we lack water storage capacity. New dams are also required to provide cheap electricity. Dams

are long-term objectives with political repercussions, and tough decisions on them have to be taken now by the elected representatives.

The electoral process gave us somewhat of a hiatus from our "war against terrorism." With the Lahore bombings, targeting of soft targets is back with a vengeance. The February elections saw the rout of the religious parties, however their vote bank remains intact.

While the religious parties cannot be condemned as being party to terrorism, and the spate of suicide bombings it has spawned, the NWFP government could not move against the militants. In Fata this did not make much difference, in Swat this inaction was almost fatal. Maulana Fazlullah was allowed free rein to turn a paradise into hell.

Extremists to give religious connotation to the social divide between haves and have-nots are exploiting the frustration and bitterness of unemployment. Along with the fires of secession, this social bitterness boiled over on the night of December 27, 2007 throughout the country, which is far more dangerous for civil society.

With the ANP victory and the PPP gains in NWFP, the elected representatives are well positioned to mobilise public opinion so that the root causes of terrorism can be addressed. Economic initiatives must be given priority along with political initiatives.

The militants have a deadly mindset about fomenting anarchy. For political and economic initiatives to take effect, a platform of peace is necessary. The major part of any population may abhor violence, but extremists thrive on it.

Our para-military Frontier Corps (FC) are woefully outgunned and ill-equipped, without adequate training in counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency. The latter is also true to an extent for regular troops of the army. And what about motivation, in their thankless task they must have the full support of the elected representatives, not only locally but also on countrywide basis.

Theirs is not to reason why but to fight the war alone and unsung, and their sacrifices must be acknowledged. Some of our politicians take populism beyond sensible parameters, while governance enjoins coming to terms with ground realities.

The electoral process went off relatively smoothly, and the imperfections and aberrations need to be rectified over a period of time, not in any rush. The cause and effect of economic disparity among the provinces has led to political disaffection with the Federation, and must be addressed immediately. After the death of Mohtarma Benazir, the ugly head of secession reared itself briefly.

Asif Zardari acted immediately and firmly to spare the country disintegration of the 1971 kind. To quote a friend of mine: "In the hour of crisis he (Zardari) delivered. And observing all leaders he is definitely much taller."

Initial skepticism aside, Asif Zardari's attempt at national consensus seems a serious commitment to delivering to the masses "roti, bijli aur paani!" probably an unintentional variation of the first PPP slogan, "roti, kapra aur makan!"

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Ahmedinejad in Baghdad

A stable and friendly Iraq is also in the interests of Iran, but the deep schism which has been sown over decades between the Shia majority and Sunni minority in Iraq stands as a roadblock, not only for the Americans in constructing a sustainable, liberal and democratic state in Iraq but also for Iran in claiming unalloyed friendship and close relationship with that country. The road to peace in Iraq may travel through Tehran, but the process of reaching that final destination seems still unclear.

SYED REZAUL KARIM

ONE of the significant events that has taken place amidst the insurgency torn tragic happenings in Iraq is the state visit of Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to Baghdad in the first week of March. Once an arch foe, personified by Saddam Hossain who was aided and abetted by the United States of America immediately after the Iranian Revolution in 1979, Iraq fought a ten year bloody war with Iran. A million people died.

The terrible war with its huge human toll has not been forgotten in Iran or Iraq. Even today, Iranian towns and streets remember their lost sons and daughters: their pho-

tos, pictures and murals adorn the walls of the buildings and city squares. With such a scar the Iranian president took the journey to Baghdad.

One is reminded here of a historic journey to Jerusalem decades ago by the Egyptian President Anwar Sadaat to cut the Gordian knot of military disengagement with Israel and to break the political and diplomatic impasse to usher in the signing of a peace treaty with Israel, once a bitter foe, freeing occupied Egyptian lands and opening trade, travel and diplomatic relations with that country.

While the Sadaat trip transformed a once seemingly intractable and hostile relationship into a friendly, normal one in a single stroke, no

such dramatic transformation is expected in the case of Ahmedinejad's recent trip to Baghdad. But, as the indications go, positive developments are going to take place in such important areas as trade, transport and industry.

The Iranian president is said to have signed seven pacts in promoting economic ties with Iraq. This in itself augurs well for the well-being of the two neighbour nations, securing peace, and creating an atmosphere of optimism in this volatile region.

In the case of the Egyptian president's dramatic dash to Jerusalem, the United States was a happy cheerleader. In the event of Ahmedinejad's trip to Baghdad, the United States appears apparently as an indifferent

bystander.

Ahmedinejad travelled through the "Green Zone" of Baghdad, an area secured by the US military as a safe haven for the US and Iraqi administration and military establishments, to reach Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri-al-Maliki's place. Without the nod of the United States, it is clear that the Maliki government would not have laid down the red-carpet and presented a guard of honour to the Iranian president.

After a dangerous and dreary five years of the Iraq war, is there now a realisation on the part of the US administration that the resolution of the Iraqi problem cannot be reached unilaterally without the co-operation and support of Iraq's immediate neighbours, particularly Iran, whose leadership is close to the present Iraqi leadership?

Mr. Nuri-al-Maliki, the prime minister, Mr. Jalal Talabani, the president and Grand Ayatollah al-Sistani, the respectable cleric of Iraq, were all once in exile in Iran. Their hugs and kisses dubbed as "love-fest" for the Iranian president were expressions of thanks and respect to

Iran.

The response of Mr. Bush, when asked about his reaction on Ahmedinejad's visit to Baghdad was: "He is a neighbour and the message needs to be; quit sending sophisticated equipment that is killing our citizens."

After meeting Nuri-al-Maliki, the Iranian president responded: "You can tell Mr. Bush that accusing others will only complicate America's problems in the region. They must come to terms with the realities. Iraqi people do not like the Americans."

The Iraqi prime minister hailed Iran's contribution to improved security in Iraq: "I can honestly say that the Islamic Republic's recent position has been very helpful in bolstering security and stability." Does the road to peace in Iraq lead through Tehran? The religious unity, cultural identity and geographic contiguity should have made Iran and Iraq natural partners in ensuring peace, stability and security in the region, and significantly reduced the burden on America. So far this has not happened.

Both materially and metaphori-

cally, US is bleeding in Iraq. In spite of the presence of 160,000 troops, \$275 million expenditure per day, 4,000 soldiers dead, 60,000 wounded, 700,000 Iraqis killed and 4 million Iraqi refugees, the goal of a stable, peaceful and democratic Iraq has not yet been achieved.

The UN Security Council resolution sanctioning the intervention/invasion of the coalition forces will come to the end of its term by December 2008. The US administration is now busy drafting a new strategic and security agreement with Iraq. The celebrated US economist and Nobel laureate Joseph Stiglitz and his colleagues have calculated the cost of the Iraq war, and have put it at \$3 trillion, a staggering figure compared to the \$2 to \$3 billion forecast at the beginning of the Iraq invasion.

The Iraq war has imposed a burden of \$4100 on every US household. The Iraq issue has become a hot election agenda in the forthcoming US elections.

Here, again, there is a historical parallel between what US government is trying to achieve in Iraq with

what Imperial Britain endeavoured to do unsuccessfully between 1920 and 1930. On the collapse of the Ottoman Empire after the First World War, Britain occupied the provinces of Iraq. In 1920 a revolt, or "Thawra," broke out.

Fuelled by a population resentful of the heavy-handed approach of the occupying forces, the rebellion quickly spread throughout the country. The cost in lives and money made the continued occupation of Iraq unpopular with the British. Britain attempted to build a modern, sustainable and liberal state.

But how the British understood Iraq made it impossible for them to accomplish what they initially set out to do. Ultimately, the decision was made to extricate Britain as quickly as possible and hand over the country under the League of Nations' mandate. That failure to engage the Iraqi society for a sustainable, stable and liberal state reverberates today in the crashing sound of bombs and bombers under the American and coalition occupation. Observes an academic: "The sense of incoherence and political division at the

heart of American attempts to rebuild Iraq has been seriously exacerbated by the Coalition Provisional Authority's inability to establish meaningful communication with the Iraqi Society."

Ahmedinejad's visit to Iraq is to be seen as a great bolstering of his own image and standing in his own country. It is also a strong signal to the Shia majority in Iraq of Iran's support for the Maliki government.

A stable and friendly Iraq is also in the interests of Iran, but the deep schism which has been sown over decades between the Shia majority and Sunni minority in Iraq stands as a roadblock, not only for the Americans in constructing a sustainable, liberal and democratic state in Iraq but also for Iran in claiming unalloyed friendship and close relationship with that country. The road to peace in Iraq may travel through Tehran, but the process of reaching that final destination seems still unclear.

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