

Pressing need for police reform felt

Caretaker gov't should initiate the process

A roundtable titled, 'Proposed Police Ordinance and Citizens' Thinking', a consensus was reached on Monday among leading legal experts and civil society members for the process of police reforms to be initiated during the tenure of the present caretaker government. Notable exceptions were, however, politician-participants who advocated enactment of the reform bill through an elected government.

Those who are for immediate action on the agenda have argued that successive governments during the last 37 years having failed to bring about police reform, the task now devolves on the caretaker government.

For our part, we have been consistently stressing the point that rather than leaving the agenda like police reform and right to information for elected governments, let these be addressed by the caretaker government on a concrete footing. Our argument in favour of taking this rather unconventional position is three fold: first, since the political governments have used the police as a tool against their opponents to serve their partisan ends, they were the least motivated to reform the police force on truly professional lines. By contrast, the caretaker government being non-political is ideally suited to bring about the changes in the police force. Secondly, the draft ordinance for police reform that is in hand had been put through scrutiny by experts, civil society leaders, senior police officials and media analysts. Granted that this must still be subjected to further public discourse and debate before being finalised, the fact remains that we have a basis to work on. It is from this angle that we welcome the inputs provided by the participants in Monday's roundtable organised by Sujon. Thirdly, after all, the ordinance that the caretaker government passes would have to be ratified through an elected parliament. We are confident that what is good will stand the test of time.

The police is the first and the most obvious face of the state before the people. A well-trained, efficient, public spirited and impartial police force is a multi-dimensional boon for a nation. It is just not a law and order asset but also an asset for stable democracy, economic well-being and sustainable development of the country. We fully endorse the view of a retired IGP that investment in the police should be looked upon as an investment in development rather than a mere revenue expenditure.

Rising dangers in Afghanistan

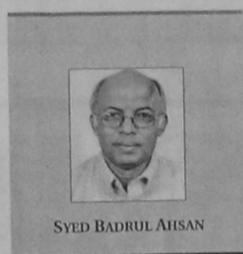
Only a government with a popular base can fight the Taliban

HOW dangerous a place Afghanistan continues to be has just been demonstrated yet once more. President Hamid Karzai has escaped assassination at the hands of the Taliban and that too in the capital Kabul. The incident proves the volatile nature of politics, or the lack of it, in the country. A number of global leaders have meanwhile condemned the incident and some have even lauded the brave work they believe Karzai has been doing in his country. We, like everyone else, are happy that the Afghan leader has survived the onslaught. At the same time, like everyone else, we feel that there are some intrinsic problems in or with Afghanistan that need to be handled if a semblance of normalcy is to be restored there.

The truth is inescapable, which is that everyone who believes in modern, civilised government does not want a new Talibanisation of Afghanistan. The damage that the Taliban did to their country and to themselves between 1996 and 2001 remains a fundamental reason why efforts must go on, indeed with renewed vigour, for them to be neutralised. And yet the glaring reality at present is that the Taliban have made significant inroads in various parts of Afghanistan and now appear to be in a position to take potshots at the government in Kabul. That is reason enough for worry. On the other hand, it is true that the instability in the country today is a direct result of the fact that it is under foreign occupation. The Karzai government, in place as a result of international efforts, has however never been looked upon as a symbol of popular aspirations. Indeed, for many Afghans and certainly for Taliban supporters, Karzai represents Western interests. The issue today is, therefore, not one of the efficiency of the government but of legitimacy. For Afghans, as also for others outside Afghanistan, the worsening conditions in the country are a result of the politics imposed on it.

It is now time for the global community to reconsider the options in Afghanistan. Obviously, a country where the writ of foreign occupying powers runs large cannot be expected to build the infrastructure to provide for political stability. It makes sense, therefore, to now ask that thoughts be given in world capitals to ending the foreign presence in Afghanistan and giving the country back to its people.

Of politics, criminals and cohorts



SYED BADRUL HOSSAIN

HERE is such a thing as conscience. There is such a thought as principles. And when many of us, or most of us, tend to think that an incarcerated politician should be freed, we do so out of the conviction that the charges of corruption or criminality that have been levelled at them may not be true.

And yet, if there are specific grounds to show that these politicians who hold in respect, perhaps even in reverence, may actually and eventually be proved to be guilty of wrongdoing under the terms of clear, transparent law, we will, of course, not argue with the verdict reached by the judiciary.

But for people to inform us, even as a case drags on, even before legal proceedings have drawn to a conclusion, that those accused in the case are guilty, that they should be treated as criminals, is to intimidate us into deserting the ideas we have always held dear -- that rule of law and democracy go together, that politics is the underlying principle of governance.

You deny politics and you have nothing to fall back on. Take politics out of life. Wholesale chaos will

GROUND REALITIES

Which is why we do not agree with Kamal Hossain when he takes it upon himself to inform us that those who today demand a freeing of the politicians accused of corruption are doing so because they are the cohorts of those detained individuals. That is a sweeping statement to make. There are millions upon millions of men and women in Bangladesh who, despite everything, have never wavered in their support and love for Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia.

descend on you and on your neighbours.

Which is why we do not agree with Kamal Hossain when he takes it upon himself to inform us that those who today demand a freeing of the politicians accused of corruption are doing so because they are the cohorts of those detained individuals. That is a sweeping statement to make.

There are millions upon millions of men and women in Bangladesh who, despite everything, have never wavered in their support and love for Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia. You cannot now go around telling us that these millions of Bengalis are equally guilty of the corruption that the two former prime ministers have been charged with.

Besides, there cannot be a single side, or a single aspect, to an argument. If there are all the people who have in the past many years indulged in corruption (and we are all aware of who these people are), there is also the truth that the manner in which such criminality should have been proceeded against has simply not been there.

Dr. Kamal Hossain would have done us all a whole lot of good if he had enlightened us on the Truth

Commission, on the unhappiness that such a commission will cause in our lives if it really ends up freeing all those detained symbols of venality once they confess to their guilt and leave some of their ill-gotten wealth to the state.

The former law and foreign minister, being the significant cog in the wheel of national history he has been and remains, ought to have reflected on the manner in which the Election Commission has been operating where dealing with the two factions of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party is concerned.

We would have felt happier if he had pointed the finger at the bad eggs of the last elected government that are still in the basket, in the form and shape of some of the men within the so-called reformist camp in the BNP.

He would have cheered us had he asked the caretaker government what it planned to do about academics doling out fifty two first classes in their university departments, about teachers diverging from their subjects and focusing on imparting lessons on the Islamic dress code before their pupils.

The country is at a crossroads. And, let us be courageous enough to

admit, politics is in dire straits. In the one and a half years that have gone by since the arrival of the Fakhruddin Ahmed caretaker dispensation, politicians have remained out of the picture. That being so, it makes little sense to keep up the refrain that they are to be blamed for everything that is going bad and going wrong in our lives.

Prices in the market, the desperate rush for rice, the increase in transport fares -- all of these are issues for which you cannot pin the responsibility on the political classes. On a bigger scale, you cannot condemn the vocation of politics because of the misdeeds committed by a band of men and women masquerading as politicians in the last five or six years.

And you ought not to forget, despite the many reservations you may have about them, the immense contributions of the men and women who, between October 2006 and January 2007, put up a fierce, determined struggle to get the lajuddin caretaker dispensation out of the way in the interest of free, fair and transparent elections.

As a nation born of a mighty struggle against a communal state and its genocidal army, we remain keen

observers of history -- for our people have been keen and key players in the making of our history.

Back in the 1960s, we did not share the opinion of the Pakistani establishment that Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his fellow accused in the Agartala affair were conspirators who needed to be penalised for their sedition.

In 1971, we laughed away the thought that the men who set up a Bengali government in Mujibnagar and waged war against the state of Pakistan were agents of foreign powers. And we did all that because of our conviction that politics mattered, that politicians were a pivotal force, which could lead us out of the woods. We yet hold fast to that belief.

We hold to the idea that when politics is infiltrated by the unscrupulous and by the villainous, it needs to be reformed. A purge conducted along the lines of logic and historical necessity then becomes an absolute necessity. When ministers and lawmakers grab an entire country and treat it as their fiefdom, or as so many fiefdoms, they need to be put through the legal grinder.

The men and women who in these past many years engaged in pilferage, in deriving pecuniary benefits from sales of CNG-driven scooters, in commandeering roads for their advertisement firms, in getting away with murder, must be dealt with in exemplary fashion. And that is the principle that should be applied to all, equally and without selectivity.

The drive against corruption must target the men who have purchased party nominations and then gone on to see their coffers fill with gems that were not theirs. It should be aimed at those who have filed tax returns that

are patently false. The imperative today is to retrieve politics from these elements, which have long held it captive to their depredations. It is not, and should never be, to neutralise the men and women who have symbolised Bangladesh's secular democratic culture and replace them with individuals to whom idealism and principles have not really mattered.

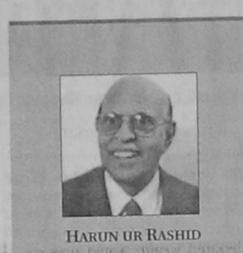
We do not disagree with Kamal Hossain when he avers that national unity can propel us out of our collective misery. And yet, national unity cannot be a generalised interpretation of conditions as they exist today. There must be some core points -- secularism, transparent, unfettered elections, the supremacy of Parliament, the primacy of elected civilian authority, the absolute independence of the judiciary, et al -- around which such unity can be forged.

There is a need today to resist the obscurantists who have come in the way of an enforcement of women's rights in the country. The demand that the war criminals of 1971 be made to face justice must not be sidetracked in all this gathering debate over the nature of existing conditions in the country.

There is a need today for all of us to emerge clear of the political vacuum we are in at this point of time. There is that urgency of politics, one that demands a return to constitutional, popularly sanctioned government through a general election, as it is meant to be in a system of democratic accountability.

Syed Badrul Hossain is Editor, Current Affairs, The Daily Star.

Chinese foreign minister's visit to Dhaka



HARUN UR RASHID

CHINESE Foreign minister Yang Jiechi arrived in Dhaka on April 24 on a two-day visit. He was warmly welcomed at the airport by his counterpart, Foreign Affairs Adviser Dr. Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury.

On the same day, both the government leaders held bilateral talks. The foreign minister met with the chief adviser on April 24 and invited him to visit China later this year.

At the end of bilateral talks with the foreign affairs adviser, Foreign Minister Jiechi reportedly said at a joint press conference: "China deeply appreciates Bangladesh's firm support for the One China policy and for what China has done to protect the interests of the Tibetan people."

During the visit, it is reported that the Chinese foreign minister offered Tk. 6 billion in "free aid" to Bangladesh's development, and Tk. 5 million in "token gift" to mark his visit. The two countries signed an exchange of notes for construction of Bangladesh-China Exhibition Centre in Dhaka involving Tk. 1,890 million.

He also indicated that China was willing to assist Bangladesh in energy generation, including nuclear energy through the Ruppur 300-500 MW plant.

It is reported that the Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi said that military to military cooperation was an important part of overall

BOTTOM LINE

The visit by the Chinese foreign minister aims to strengthen and expand bilateral cooperation. Relations need to be nurtured occasionally through exchange of visits at a political level. However, this visit took place against the background of Bangladesh's position on the Olympics in August in Beijing. This time, the Olympic slogan, One World, One Dream, calls upon the world to unite in the Olympic spirit.

bilateral relations between Bangladesh and China. Jiechi, who met the army chief, General Moeen U. Ahmed, made the remark to journalists.

He conveyed greetings of the Chinese defence minister to General Moeen U. Ahmed. During the meeting, they discussed exchange of training programs of military personnel of the two countries.

Why the visit?

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It may be recalled that, on March 20, when his attention was drawn to reports of rioting in Tibet, a spokesman for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that "Bangladesh looks forward to the successful holding of the 2008 Olympics in Beijing and believes that no quarter should seek to politicise the Games."

It was reported that Foreign Affairs Adviser Dr. Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury also telephoned the Chinese envoy in Dhaka, Ambassador Zheng Qingdian, to apprise him of Bangladesh's posi-

tion in this regard.

Dhaka's unambiguous stance on the Olympics must have pleased China, when the wave of violent protests by monks in Lhasa on March 14 could not have come at a worse time for the Chinese government. They do not want want the monks' protests to become the country's image before the Olympics in August.

Furthermore, China's long-standing "three no policy" to Taiwan are well known: No two China, no independence, no representation in international bodies. Bangladesh has always consistently supported, and is committed to, the One China policy. This means that Bangladesh considers that Taiwan is a province of China. It also regards Tibet as a part of China.

Against this background, the Chinese foreign minister's presence in Bangladesh (he left on April 25 for Pakistan) appears to be a "thank you" visit for a friendly country, especially for the stand Bangladesh has taken on the Olympic Games and the Tibetan protests.

Bilateral relations

China is only 100 miles from Bangladesh over the Himalayas. Because of the barrier of the mountain range, Bangladesh can only visit China by air through the east. Guangzhou (Canton) stands on the same latitude as Dhaka, and is a two-hour journey from Dhaka.

The cultural interaction between China and Bangladesh dates back to

government officials, between political parties and eminent citizens and professionals and students.

And over the past two decades, there has been increasing interaction among the businessmen and private sectors of the two countries.

Bilateral relation reached its peak in 2005 when the two countries celebrated the 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations. Premier Wen Jiabao paid a state visit to Bangladesh in April 2005 and the prime minister of Bangladesh paid her return visit to China in August 2005.

As many as fourteen agreements on bilateral cooperation were signed during the two visits. This track record speaks for itself the relevance of Bangladesh in China's South Asia policy.

Bangladesh-China cooperation was not limited to just bilateral relations. Bangladesh could find understanding in China of its problems and concerns to reduce poverty through economic growth and development.

Generating \$3.2 billion worth of trade volume in 2004, the Sino-Bangladesh relationship is founded on the cornerstone of economic cooperation. Bangladesh is also China's third largest trade partner in South Asia.

Chinese entrepreneurs are encouraged to invest in Bangladesh in such areas as infrastructure, textiles, electronics, information technology and ceramics.

Strategic importance of Bangladesh

The two countries have closely worked together in the multilateral forums, particularly in the United Nations, by keeping the focus on the development and peace issues. The strategic importance of Bangladesh in China's South Asia policy is obvious. Let me enumerate a few issues:

- Bangladesh stands between

China and India, and both are emerging as global economic and political powers. Bangladesh's cooperation may help achieve their goal in South Asia.

- Bangladesh has a sizeable middle class of about 40 million, and is emerging as a lucrative market for China.

- Bangladesh is a bridge between South-East Asia and South Asia. Bangladesh's membership in ARF (Asean Regional Forum) has made Bangladesh critically important for any country, which wishes to engage in South and South-East Asia.

- Bangladesh is a member of the Commonwealth, Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC), Non-Aligned Movement and the UN. A few countries are members of all these organisations. Bangladesh can play an important role in ensuring global peace, harmony and stability through these organisations.

- Bangladesh is a moderate and tolerant Muslim-majority country. It is a multi-lingual, multi-religious and multi-ethnic country (45 ethnic groups live in the country). It has considerable influence among the members of the OIC. Its role in curbing Islamic extremism within the country has been praised by the international community.

Sino-Bangladesh relations have been characterised by comprehensive partnership of cooperation with China for more than 32 years. The basic course of Bangladesh's relationship with China has been firmly set and will continue for further expansion.

The visit, although a brief one, is a gesture of goodwill and will consolidate further bilateral relations for the mutual benefit of the people of both countries.

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Hillary the destroyer

LETTER FROM AMERICA

Some believe that Hillary's real aim is to damage Obama to such an extent that he loses to McCain in November. Then Hillary, 64 in 2012, can run again. This is a good explanation, except that it is devoid of logic. If Hillary is responsible for Obama's defeat, Democrats will not turn to her in 2012.

FAKHRUDDIN AHMED

ONE way to take the measure of a person is to listen to what the person's enemies say about him or her. William Safire, a Republican and a columnist of The New York Times, once called the Clintons "congenital liars," who would cheat, say anything, do anything, and break any rule to have their way.

Candidate Bill Clinton received over 90% of African-American votes in the 1992 and 1996 presidential elections. Bill Clinton would not have survived his impeachment ordeal in 1998-1999 without the steadfast

support of the blacks, the only community that solidly stood by him. African-American columnists like Bob Herbert of The New York Times were Clinton's staunchest defenders in the media.

So, what does Bill Clinton do when his wife faces a serious African-American candidate in 2008? He compares Obama's victory in South Carolina to that of Jesse Jackson, who in the 1984 and 1988 presidential campaigns won less than 10% of white votes.

Just before the Pennsylvania primary last week, Bill Clinton claimed that the Obama campaign was playing the race card against

him! All this proved too much for South Carolina Congressman James Clyburn, the highest ranking African American in Congress and an uncommitted superdelegate. Calling the Clintons' and their surrogates' tactics "bizarre," "disingenuous," and "scurrilous," he opined that the Clintons were "hell-bound" to damage Obama to such an extent that he would be unelectable in November. This was doing irreparable damage to the relationship between the Clintons and the blacks, Clyburn complained.

The Clinton campaign's response was that the Republicans would

come after Obama much harder than they. Really? Let's examine events closely.

Asked about Rev. Wright, presumptive Republican nominee, Senator McCain said that he knew Obama to be a decent person, who clearly did not share Rev. Wright's bigotry.

When former Republican candidate Mike Huckabee, a former preacher himself, was asked about Rev. Wright, he said that preachers said plenty of objectionable things, but they were not transferable to the members of the congregation.

Hillary Clinton, on the other hand, said: "Rev. Wright would not have been my pastor. We do not choose our relatives; but we choose our pastor. I would not have listened to Rev. Wright for twenty years; I would have left the church." Translation: Rev. Wright's views are transferable to Obama.

The North Carolina Republican Party is running ads showing, on a split screen, a picture of Barack Obama and Rev. Wright together,

while Rev. Wright spouts his venom.

Senator McCain and the Republican National Committee condemned the ad and asked the North Carolina Republican party not to run it. Asked to comment, the Hillary campaign remained silent. Translation: keep on running the Rev. Wright ad.

Asked to comment whether Obama was an "elitist," in light of the "bitter-gate," Senator McCain said "no." Hillary, on the other hand, was telling any Pennsylvanian who would listen that Obama was an "elitist," "out of touch" with average Americans, and that his comments were "condescending," "demeaning," and "patronising."

Hillary had said that she and McCain would bring a lifetime of experience to the presidency while "Obama would bring a speech;" that she and McCain "had passed the commander-in-chief test," while Obama had not.

Bill Clinton said that it would be nice to see Hillary and McCain, "two candidates who love their country,"

go head to head in November, with a clear innuendo that Obama is not patriotic.

Republicans were not sure how to run against him. Now they are quite confident. They say they will use Hillary's playbook against Obama.

So, what is Hillary's end game? Hillary won Pennsylvania by 9.2%, not 10%. She won only 10 more pledged delegates than Obama. Currently, Obama leads by 135 total delegates (1,717 to 1,592) and by 156 among pledged delegates (1,489 to 1,333). The magic number is 2,024. The delegate math is against Hillary. She is not going to catch Obama.

Although the purpose of the primaries and caucuses is to select, through popular votes, pledged delegates, who along with superdelegates nominate a candidate; "pledged delegates" are dirty words to Hillary, she wants the superdelegates to overturn the voters' will by nominating a candidate perceived to be a better bet in November.

Although every poll shows that

Obama beats McCain more handily than Hillary does in head to head contests, Hillary is convinced she is the better candidate. Chances are that at the end of the last primary and caucus in early June, Obama will lead in pledged delegates and in popular votes. But that will not dissuade Hillary.

Some believe that Hillary's real aim is to damage Obama to such an extent that he loses to McCain in November. Then Hillary, 64 in 2012, can run again. This is a good explanation, except that it is devoid of logic. If Hillary is responsible for Obama's defeat, Democrats will not turn to her in 2012.

The Republicans treat their candidates honourably. Although Ronald Reagan pushed President Gerald Ford to the convention before Ford was nominated in 1976, and many believe that it contributed to Ford's defeat, Reagan was nominated four years later.

Republicans reward loyalty. 1996 was Bob Dole's turn; this year it is John McCain's, the candidate

George W. Bush defeated in 2000.

Democrats, on the other hand, are merciless to losers and party crashers. The last person Democrats nominated a presidential loser was Adlai Stevenson, who lost to Eisenhower in 1952 and 1956. Since then, Hubert Humphrey (1968), George McGovern (1972), Walter Mondale (1984), Al Gore (2000) and John Kerry (2004) were allowed to lose only once.

Party wreckers like Ted Kennedy, who challenged sitting President Carter in 1980 into the convention, never ran again. If Hillary is to make a comeback, she must not wreck her party's chances in 2008.

According to Maureen Dowd of The New York Times, Hillary, looking rosy-cheeked like a vampire, seems to have sucked the blood out of a wan and listless Obama. Having done damage to Obama, for her own sake and for the sake of the party, Dowd advises Hillary "to go away" now.

Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed is a Rhodes Scholar and a Daily Star columnist.