

## Decline in number of police cases

Good move, but some questions need answering

POLICE stations in the nation's capital have drastically cut down the number of cases pending investigation to one-ninth of what they used to be. In the year and a half gone by, cases have declined from a staggering 35,000 to a mere 4,164. Now that surely looks like progress, brought about of course not through a disposal of cases but by a reduction in the workload relating to investigations. And if indeed the number of cases pending investigation have come down to that level in accordance with standard procedure, the police department deserves to be congratulated. We expect that this kind of performance, based on a proper screening of cases in future, will eventually turn out to be a permanent feature of police administration.

There are, however, in light of the report about the decline in the number of cases, certain very pertinent questions that come up. One of them relates to what may have gone on as far as lodging cases is concerned until now. This drastic reduction in the number of cases quite legitimately raises public curiosity as to whether most of the cases now set aside were actually made up or were false cases filed against innocent individuals. Logic as well as the law certainly cannot allow for a situation where genuine cases already filed can be disposed of with the alacrity we have noticed in the present instance. In a social condition notorious for cases to be lodged as a way of harassing the innocent and the socially deprived, one wonders if some rather strange happenings may not have occurred. The police administration would do well to satisfy citizens on this score. And then comes the next question. Judging by the steep manner in which the number of cases has dropped, it is again important to inquire if somehow there has been an abridgement in the law enforcement process, to an extent where genuine cases may also have been disposed of and lawbreakers may have found a way out of their predicament through the process applied by the police department. It is questions such as these that need to be answered.

While on the subject, we also note a positive side to this development. The police department has decided to do away with what are known as case writers, or people engaged by police stations or thanas to prepare cases (in contravention of regulations). That will mean a marked difference in the situation, given the fact that case writers have often been found to be instrumental in harassing people by preparing legally untenable cases and then intimidating them with the objective of obtaining pecuniary benefits from them. If this change can be enforced, it will truly be taken as a sign of progress.

## Population growth projection scary

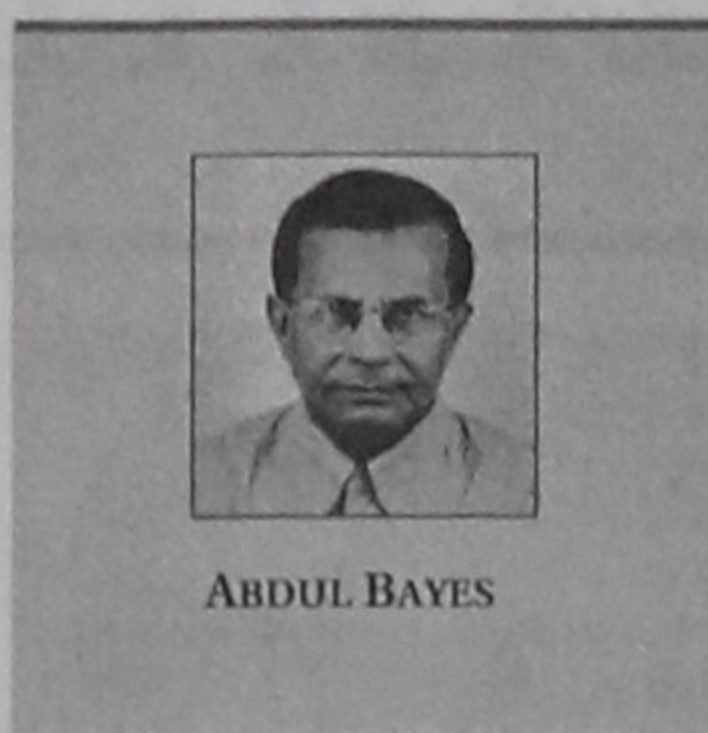
Pragmatic policy needed to check explosion

AS far as population growth is concerned, Bangladesh is not on the right track. The country with a land area of only about 55 thousand square miles is home to nearly 15 crore people. And to refresh our memory, Bangladesh's population was 7.5 crore in 1971. According to standards set by the developed countries, especially those in the west, we are one of the most populous countries in the world. If we take into account the availability of agriculture land, sweet water sources, cattle-head, forests and other natural resources, it will be extremely difficult to accommodate and feed the population if it continues to grow at such a pace, that is doubling in 30 plus years.

On the occasion of the World Population Day 2008 some facts and figures have been disseminated by the relevant government departments. These might make one feel optimistic about the ongoing population control programme but, to be candid, ground reality suggests otherwise. Officially it is claimed that the percentage of users of family planning methods has increased from 7.7 in 1975 to present 55.8, that total fertility rate (TFR) has come down to 2.7 and the population growth rate stands at 1.41 at the moment. But it has not been elaborated what percentage of the rural and illiterate population use contraceptives and practise family planning such as birth spacing. As far as we know there is a considerable gap between the family planning practices observed by the literate urban, suburban and illiterate rural population. When the urban couples are reluctant to take more than two children, rural couples still go for four or even five. This is a stark reality that is contributing to many facets of social disequilibrium as well.

The family planning drive that began in the late sixties and continued through the seventies and eighties and produced encouraging results began to flag since the mid-nineties when focus on family planning was diluted through some administrative decisions. It created frustration amongst the officials and general staff members of the family planning directorate. They almost became inactive in their field level motivational work and door-to-door approach with service. As a result, today a government circular says population of the country would stand at 25 crore in 2085. But private researchers estimate the figure to reach 28 crore in 2050. To us both the figures look scary and we urge the government do much more to halt the growth rate to save the country.

## Why invest in energy? The missing milepost



ABDUL BAYES

ENERGY is an integral input to modern life. The lack of it could also thwart thumping victories with equal force. The energy crisis all over the world has already demonstrated it. In fact, per capita consumption of energy level would go to explain the level of development of a country.

Bangladesh is poor simply because it cannot provide its population with required energy so much needed to raise productivity and cost effectiveness. The higher the consumption, the greater is development. But household income level determines the range of fuel options. The various energy carriers form what is commonly referred to as an energy ladder. Each rung corresponds to the dominant fuel used by successive income

**BENEATH THE SURFACE**

We are aware of the fact that the Bangladesh government places high importance on the development of energy sector. But the argument on which projects are placed for approval misses the important point that modern energy could be an important tool for reducing fertility levels and hence population growth rates. Unfortunately, however, very little empirical support to this is available due to the lack of research. We can only expect that more resources should be devoted in researching on the missing mileposts.

groups. The lowest rung -- applicable by the poor -- is represented by wood, dung, and other bio-mass.

We are told that donor agencies are helping us in making modern energy available to households and enterprises. Especially I know of ADB's assistance in the distribution and transmission of gas pipelines to northern and southern part of the country. However, discourses on the development of energy sector mostly hover around the economics of energy for reducing cost of cooking, processing and service sector activities, and for lighting houses, offices and other work places. By and large, the pace of energy expansion is linked to the pace of economic growth only -- and indirectly to poverty reduction. The impact

of clean energy on factors like demographic transition is less pronounced in documents I have read so far. I shall highlight this point in the paragraphs below.

Pia Malaney (1999) succinctly summarises the nexus between energy, poverty and demographic trap which should appear before policy makers in their arguments for investing in energy. We want to postulate that one of the important factors for which modern energy (gas and electricity) should be made available to the poor is to contain the growth rate of population through reducing infant and child mortality rates as well as through improving women's health conditions. The poor are caught in a vicious circle of poverty trap where poverty

leads to the use of traditional fuel that increases infant and child mortality rates and, in consequence, in high birth rates for meeting demand for child labour. We, paraphrasing a bit, present below some of the observations from Malaney that draws upon cross-country experiences of 108 countries of the world:

First, the traditional fuel use on infant and child mortality rates is positive, statistically significant and sizeable in magnitude. Impact on crude death rate (CDR) is positive but not significant. The result is consistent with the view that the negative consequences of indoor air pollution are disproportionately experienced by children who are physiologically most vulnerable to its effects.

Second, the statistically significant negative effects of traditional fuel use on life expectancy are higher on females than for males. It shows women have greater exposure to the effects of indoor pollution.

Third, fertility rates are positively and significantly associated with traditional fuel use as is crude birth rate (CBR). A 40% increase in traditional fuel use (which corresponds to the difference between traditional fuel use in Vietnam and Malaysia) translates on average into one extra birth per woman over lifetime and an increase of 7 births per 1,000 population. The difference between CBR and CDR explains why traditional fuel use has positive and significant effect on population growth rate. The same 40% increase in fuel use translates into an increase of nearly a full percentage point increase in the population growth rate.

Fourth, the poor are being bound by the pattern of energy use that is associated with high infant and child mortality rate and with high birth rate maintained in part to meet demand for child labour.

Fifth, continued dependence on firewood or fuel depresses

income and maintains rural poverty by: (a) time and money devoted to fuel collection, (b) harming the health of those who use it, and (c) abetting high birth rate.

To break the vicious circle, Malaney (1999) suggests that: (a) modern energy should be available to the poor through proper policies and programmes and (b) access to credit should be there so that the poor can face fixed cost of availing modern energy. Be it gas or electricity, high fixed costs could crowd out the poor from availing such access.

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Abdul Bayes is a Professor of Economics at Jahangirnagar University. Comments: abdulbayes@yahoo.com.

## Hostage to history



KAZI ANWARUL MASUD

THE recent events in South Asia are disturbing. At a time when the Saarc nations are preparing to hold their next summit shortly and the environment ministers of the Saarc member nations just had their meeting at Dhaka in which critical issues of adverse effects of climate change and the need for ensuring food security were discussed, the terrorist attack on the Indian embassy at Kabul followed by Afghan official accusation that Pakistan intelligence agency ISI was involved in the carnage that took the lives of some Indian diplomats and injured many Afghans waiting at the embassy for visa to visit India does not augur well for cementing the bonds of cooperation in the regional organisation.

While Indian reaction to the Kabul carnage has been measured, the Pakistan prime minister has totally denied any involvement of his country in the terrorist incident. If Kargil misadventure is any indication (President Musharraf claims that then Prime Minister Nawaz

**GOING DEEPER**

Some would like to assume that the Deobandi ascendancy in NWFP, Baluchistan, and Afghanistan created an Islamist-Pathan belt stretching from Kandahar to Quetta to Peshawar. Does it necessarily mean the ascendancy of the Islamists in Pakistan? Though Pakistan is a deeply religious Islamic country, the most recent elections have shown that the Islamists have not fared well at the polls.

Sharif was in the loop before the Pakistani troops crossed the line of control while Nawaz Sharif claimed that he was kept completely in the dark about the incident) it is theoretically possible that ISI might have kept the Syed Yusuf Raza Gilani government in the dark about its involvement in the attack on the Indian embassy in Kabul. But then Afghan government is yet to produce concrete evidence of Pakistan involvement as demanded by Pakistan government.

It is well known that Pakistan had always regarded Afghanistan as "strategic depth" in the event of Indo-Pak conflict, and consequently is worried about alleged increased Indian influence in Afghanistan. Besides, President Hamid Karzai's strident accusations that attack on Afghan and Nato forces in Afghanistan are conceived and financed from Pakistani soil have added fuel to the fire.

In defense of Pakistani government, it can be argued that some of the areas along the Pak-

Afghan border are under effective Taliban control and Pakistan government is trying, both through signing an agreement with the Taliban and through military means, to bring back these areas under the central government control.

Pakistan's inability so far to stop the cross-border incursions into Afghanistan has led to the US military leaders including the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Mike Mullen to claim that the US had the right to take military action in Pakistan or in Afghanistan without prior information to either government if the US got reliable and concrete intelligence about the presence of top leadership of Taliban or al-Qaeda including Osama bin Laden.

Pakistan immediately denounced such US claims and asserted that only Pakistani troops had sole responsibility to root out militants within Pakistani border. Pakistan itself is beset with terrorist attacks as seen in the Red Mosque incident in Islamabad, and, most recently, bomb blasts in

Karachi.

The gravity of the situation can be gauged by the remarks of presumptive Democratic party presidential nominee Barack Obama on July 9 that the bombing of the Indian embassy in Kabul "is one more indication of severe deterioration that we have seen in the security situation in Afghanistan." He has suggested phased deployment of US troops from Iraq to Afghanistan "to stabilise the situation in Afghanistan and go on the offensive against al-Qaeda who have reconstituted themselves (and) have created safe havens in the north-west province of Pakistan."

Problems in Afghanistan are complex. In the international context the resurgence of al-Qaeda (suspected by some with the help of ISI) that was underlined by Dick Cheney to President Musharraf during one of his visits to Pakistan when he informed President Musharraf of the US Congress's growing frustration with Pakistan and of the Democratic party's threat to make aid conditional on a crack-

down on Taliban in the tribal areas.

One political analyst quoted a paper written by a senior British Defense Ministry official alleging ISI's involvement in indirectly supporting the Taliban and suggesting that the problem would not be solved unless "Pakistan moves away from the rule of the military." In the immediate context Pakistan's suspicion of India taking advantage of deteriorating relations between Pak-Afghan relations is a reflection of historical animosity that has guided Pakistan's endeavor to have close relations with the West ever since the partition of India in 1947.

"Indeed," writes Dr. Harsh Pant, "The development of closer ties between Kabul and Delhi has placed India's fragile relations with Pakistan under even more pressure, as well as jeopardising Pakistan-Afghanistan ties. It strengthens Pakistani fears of encirclement and of the implications of India's rising global status more widely."

The turbulence in Afghanistan has added to the woes of South Asia that is deeply dependant on co-operation with the West in all areas. Some would like to assume that the Deobandi ascendancy in NWFP, Baluchistan, and Afghanistan created an Islamist-Pathan belt stretching from Kandahar to Quetta to Peshawar. Does it necessarily mean the ascendancy of the Islamists in

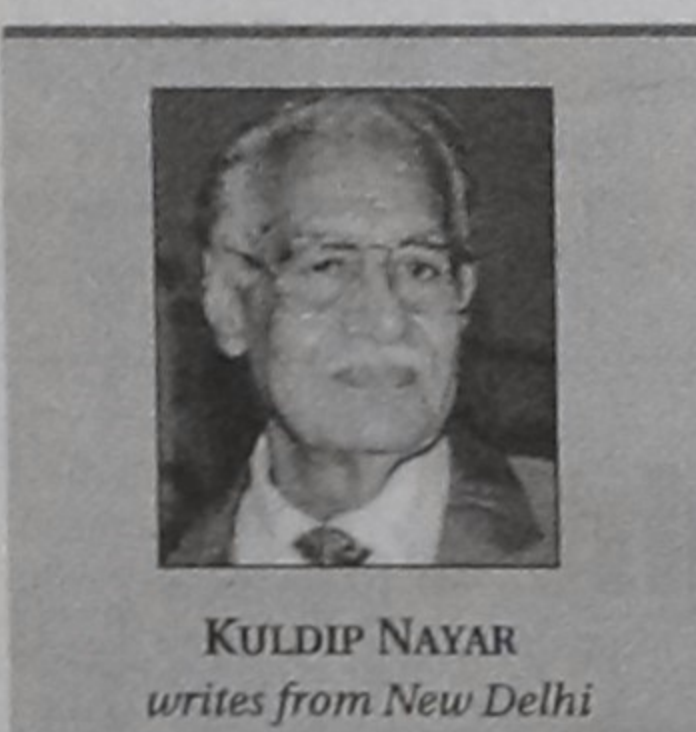
Pakistan?

Though Pakistan is a deeply religious Islamic country, the most recent elections have shown that the Islamists have not fared well at the polls. Therefore the Western hope of establishing in most parts of Pakistan of a form of secular government may not be ill founded. Obstacles to deliberative and liberal democracy remain in the feudal structure of the Pakistani society that South Asian expert Stephen Cohen describes as "moderate oligarchy" meaning a coalition of military, some chosen members of the bureaucracy, judiciary, industrialists, and the landed gentry who have ruled Pakistan ever since its birth.

The restoration of democracy ushered through the elections held recently that has propelled PPP-led coalition government at the centre, PML(N) in Punjab, and ANP in NWFP, disappearance of President Musharraf (the manner of his exit is to be decided by the Pakistanis), the restoration of 1973 constitution, among others, appear to be the only reasonable short, medium and long term solution for the stability and economic development of Pakistan. The quest for peace in Pakistan would also mean peace in South Asia, keeping in mind the objective realities that have emerged in the region.

Kazi Anwarul Masud is a former Secretary and Ambassador.

## Congress tricks Left parties



KULDIP NAYAR  
writes from New Delhi

THERE were no heated arguments, no throwing up of papers, no walk-out. The Congress tricked the Left parties and held no final meeting of the co-ordination committee. It was here that the ruling Congress was to inform the Left whether it was going ahead with the nuclear deal with the US or not. They were also to be shown the safeguards agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

Instead, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh made a cryptic statement about the decision on going to the IAEA from the plane in which he was flying to Tokyo to attend the G8 meeting. The Left came to know about the

## BETWEEN THE LINES

**Manmohan Singh can sign the nuclear deal straightaway. There is no legal bar on him to do so because the constitution does not say that an international treaty has to have the approval of parliament. Yet, Mukherjee has announced that they will go to the IAEA only after getting the vote of confidence. In the entire process, the Left has lost the most. It has withdrawn the support when the Congress does not need it.**

decision from a news agency which rang up to seek the reaction of CPI (M) general secretary Prakash Karat. Being a hard-liner, he was furious.

The Left had not been shown the safeguards agreements which was promised. However, Foreign Minister Pranab Mukherjee claims that the summary was shown to them. The anger of the Left is understandable because they were so considerate that they had announced not to withdraw their support to the government till the prime minister returned from abroad. Indeed, the 59-member Left has sustained the government in office from its inception, some four and a half

years ago.

For the Left, it is a let down because one assurance or the other came from the Congress, even from its president Sonia Gandhi, that some way would be found to allay the Left's fears. They, on the other hand, were confident that the parting of the ways would come in a manner where the clash of ideologies was seen not as a spat between the Congress and the Left. They had also prepared a white paper, listing the government's failures, for release at the time of their formal rejection of the nuclear deal.

In the end, it turned out to be an anti-climax. They had no opportunity of telling the

Congress leaders to their face that the Left felt betrayed. It was merely reduced to a position where it gave a letter to President Pratibha Patil, informing her that they had withdrawn their support and suggesting an early session of parliament to prove whether the Congress had the majority.

However, the moment the Left had handed over the letter to the president, the government was reduced to a minority, and, technically, not in a position to go ahead with the deal. The BJP was correct in asking the president to advise the prime minister to convene parliament session within a few days to prove his majority on the

floor of the house.

How soon the president convenes the session of parliament is her decision. Both the BJP and the Left put together do not constitute a majority. Therefore, she is not constitutionally bound to summon parliament immediately. It goes without saying that her discretion is bound to be in favour of the Congress because she has come to occupy the position entirely on Sonia Gandhi's initiative.

The other factor helping the Congress is the support that the Samajwadi Party (SP) of Mulayam Singh Yadav from UP has announced. The party, constituted as today, has 38 members in the Lok Sabha. This is enough to help the Congress to cross the magic figure of 272 for a simple majority. The SP has also sent its letter of support to the president, although the letter sent by SP general secretary Amar Singh to the prime minister makes little sense. He has demanded certain steps in the fields of telecommunication and petroleum. Does it mean that the SP's support is conditional?

The Manmohan Singh government has two options: one, to have the Lok Sabha session and prove its majority, or, two, to submit its resignation and hold elections. The second option gives the Congress less time for preparations because the constitution has laid down that there should be at least one session of parliament convened within 180 days. If there is no further session of the present Lok Sabha, elections have to take place by November to elect a new Lok Sabha, since the last session was in May.

The government has chosen the first option and wants to prove the majority on the floor of the Lok Sabha. If it succeeds, elections would be held in March-April as scheduled. It is apparent that the government wants time for the rising prices and spiraling inflation -- now hovering around 10 per cent -- to come down. On the other hand, stitching together too many small parties for winning the vote of confidence could prove risky.

The Congress has the strength

of 153 and the support of SP makes the total 191. This means it will have to get another 81 to have a simple majority. This is not difficult because the DMK has 16 and this is already in the Congress kitty because the DMK is part of the ruling coalition.

However, there are rumours that the SP is not a unitary house. Twelve of its members may be enticed away by Mayawati, the UP chief minister who is Mulayam Singh's rival. If this happens, the Congress will fall short by five members. Obviously, there would be horse-trading. Many houses from the corporate sector are already in the arena. The rate quoted for a member is reportedly Rs 10 crore. "There will be horse trading," a political leader says.

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after getting the vote of confidence.

In the entire process, the Left has lost the most. It has withdrawn the support when the Congress does not need it. If the Manmohan Singh government wins the vote of confidence, it would have proved that the Left's threat, repeated many a time in the last one year, did not matter even at the first instance. If the government were to fall, the Left would be seen siding with the BJP to pull down a secular set-up. It would look as if the target of the Left was not the deal but the Congress.

I personally think that the Left should have put all the pressure, as it did, but should not have been a party to a position where a secular government could fall. The party to pick up the pieces is the BJP which is an out-and-out communal set-up. What an irony that the Left has helped the BJP unwittingly. History was a mute witness to the election of Hitler by the social democratic elements in Germany.

Kuldip Nayar is an eminent Indian columnist.