

## Baneful delay in adopting new Police Act



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**R**ESPONSIBLE quarters have expressed premonitions that the long awaited new Police Act may not see the light of the day during the incumbency of the present caretaker government. There is no denying that the Bangladesh Police, as an organisation, can perform well if it is founded on valid organisational principles. The unpleasant truth is that with regard to our police, these principles were ruthlessly violated over the years, resulting in corrupt, inefficient and highly politicized police forces. Consequently, the police largely turned into agents of the political executive rather than as instruments of a democratic state.

The question is, are we not serious and sincere to ensure that Bangladesh Police perform its duties efficiently and strictly in accordance with law? The alleged delay in enacting a new Police Act would indicate that some quarters are not ready to replace the ruler-driven police by a community-based outfit by effecting substantial changes including the institutional mechanism of Public Safety Commission at the national level. We have to ask ourselves as to why efforts for fostering credible police accountability, gender-sensitive policing and operational neutrality are not accorded the due importance.

The high mark of any modern police model is that the law guarantees the independence of chief officers of police. In maintaining the police chief's responsibility of direction and control, the law places high value on freedom from political control and influence when making decisions concerning

## STRAIGHT LINE

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ing the administration of force and operational command. It is high time to ensure that police operations are no longer subjected to general control and direction from outside the police department.

At this point of time any further delay in enacting a new police act shall mean that we would prefer the continuation of the selective application of law against opponents, whether political or personal at the behest of persons of influence. It would also mean that we want the continued perception of police as agents of party in power, and not as members of an organization publicly maintained to enforce the rule of law.

The question is, can the police of Bangladesh be turned into a symbol of human security without organizationally gearing it towards that end? Is it possible to ensure operational neutrality of police? How can police be made effectively accountable? Can it be transformed into an instrument of law? What steps are needed to insulate the police from partisan political control? Is it possible that the empty political rhetoric of ensuring fair, just and humane dispensation at police stations becomes a reality? What should be done to raise the integrity levels of police? These are some of the critical questions that underpin the vexed police reform debate in Bangladesh.

If the police of Bangladesh are to achieve all these, its first order of business is the enactment of a new Police Act to replace the present archaic legislation enacted in 1861. As it is, the Act is weak in almost all the parameters that must govern democratic police legislation:

(i) The Act has made it easier for others to abuse and misuse the police organization. It has been

possible for people in positions of power to do so because of the following reasons:

a. The Act gives the government the authority to exercise superintendence over the police, without defining the word superintendence or prescribing some guidelines to ensure that the use of power will be legitimate.

b. The Act does not establish any institutional and other arrangements to insulate the police from undesirable and illegitimate outside control, pressures and influences.

c. The Act does not recognize the responsibility of the government to establish an efficient and effective police force.

d. The Act does not make it necessary to outline objectives and performance standards, nor does it set up independent mechanisms to monitor and inspect police performance.

(ii) The Act is antiquated in its charter of duties, which is narrow and limited.

(iii) The Act does not mandate the police to function as a professional and service-oriented organisation.

(iv) The Act is not in consonance with the requirements of democratic policing. These requirements insist on the existence of a police force that:

a. is subject to the rule of law, rather than the whims of the party in power;

b. can intervene in the life of citizens only under limited and controlled circumstances; and

c. is publicly accountable.

We have to remember that an inefficient and outmoded administrative legacy is undermining reform supported by scores of national and international expert missions. For too long, the basic

functioning of police has remained unchanged. What is needed is to make improving the quality of law enforcement a permanent and integral part of the national agenda, regardless of which party is in power.

Without focusing our debate on the organizational inadequacies, it seems pointless to spend time on the rhetoric of police reform. If the organization designed to carry out reform is broken, the rhetoric alone won't take us anywhere. If the vehicle won't move, it hardly matters which direction we point it; we won't get there. Today, the core issue is not so much what police does, but why it does what it does. It is time to make the police work for the people.

The present police setup needs to be replaced by an arrangement that strives to be customer-friendly. Let there be a clear, shared sense of mission. Let there be clearly understood organisational goals. Let citizens be part of the police decision-making process. Let the police command and control structures fully rest with the police chiefs. Let the police leadership be empowered to effectively control their erring subordinates. Let there be credible and effective mechanisms for policing the police, no euphemistic accountability structures. Let the Police Act 1861 be replaced with new legislation that embraces all the essential elements of reinvention, based on the best models available in the world.

The enactment of a new police act will not change the present scenario overnight. However, the first step as indicated hereinbefore has to be taken, sooner rather than later.

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## Saarc food bank imperative for the region



ANM NURUL HAQUE

**T**HE South Asian heads of state -- in the 15th Saarc summit that ended on August 3 with the adoption of a 41-point Colombo declaration -- have agreed to start the operation of the Saarc food bank. The soaring prices of food grains across the world have emerged as a serious concern for most developing countries, prompting Saarc leaders to act decisively.

Continuing high prices of grains in the international market and domestic drawbacks in food production due to recurring floods in many South Asian countries are the reasons for the looming crisis. India, Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka faced heavy floods in the last year -- two consecutive floods damaged crops of some 8,19,985 acres of land in Bangladesh in 2007 alone.

Global food security is likely to face enormous challenges and the South Asian countries are most vulnerable to it, as they do not have adequate food reserve to face it. Further liberalisation of global agricultural trade will make food grains costlier for net importing countries like Bangladesh, and will worsen its food security.

Rice plays a very important role in food security in Asia, as it is the major cereal crop here. With an annual world production of about 576 million tonnes, rice feeds more than half of the world's population. But the stock of rice with major exporters worldwide is on decline.

The pre-summit meeting of the Saarc council of ministers, held on April 2, 2007 in New Delhi, signed the deal to finalise the establishment of the Saarc food bank to meet the growing challenge of food

## BY THE NUMBERS

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security of more than 1.5 billion people in the South Asian region. The summit also adopted a declaration for establishing the Saarc food bank. But no effective steps were taken to establish it or to start its functioning.

The establishment of the Saarc food bank was designed to aid its member countries in meeting the emergency food crisis due to the destruction of crops by natural calamities or other such reasons. The Saarc food bank was to initially start off with 241,580 tonnes of foodgrains, which would then be increased gradually.

According to the proposal, Bangladesh and Pakistan were to contribute 40,000 tonnes of foodgrain each, while Sri Lanka and Nepal were to contribute 4,000 tonnes each. Maldives was to contribute 200 tonnes and Bhutan 180 tonnes. India was to contribute the highest quantity, 153,200 tonnes.

The proposal for the establishment of a regional food bank was first broached at the third summit held in Kathmandu in 1987 in a different form. An agreement was then signed for the establishment of the Saarc Food Security Reserve (SFSR). The agreement, which came into force on August 12, 1988, provided for a reserve of food grains in case of an emergency situation of food shortage in member countries.

The paper concept of the Saarc food bank was prepared during the 12th summit in Islamabad, held in January 2004, and formalized in the 13th summit held in Dhaka. The heads of state or government noted the proposal for establishment of the regional food bank proposed by India and agreed to examine the proposal. Only four

member countries have ratified the idea so far since the 13th summit held in Dhaka in 2005.

An FAO report said that, South Asian countries are likely to face a food crisis due to climate change. Jacques Diouf, the Director General of FAO, said recently in an interview with The Financial Times that increases in the prices of basic food products could spark unrest.

FAO is helping many countries to promote regional food security. Regional Programmes for Food Security have been working to boost regional integration among neighbouring developing countries to enable them to successfully confront the challenges of globalisation and to solve regional problems through collective action. FAO works directly with Regional Economic Organisations to achieve these goals.

The devastating flood that had hit Zambia, Angola, Mozambique and other African countries, posed a challenge to food security in the region. The regional body, Southern African Development Community successfully faced that unexpected shortage of food.

Floods and droughts are major causes for food storage in South Asia. About 300 million people in the region, who are chronically hungry, desperately need food security. A firm pledge by the Saarc leaderships, backed by pragmatic policies and appropriate plans, is needed for the operation of the food bank to provide regional food security.

A landmark UN sponsored report said on April 15 that the world would face social upheaval and environmental disasters if agriculture is not reformed to better serve the poor and hungry. The warning in the report, which is

was compiled by about 400 experts from the International Assessment of Agricultural Science and Technology for Development, comes amid growing discontent among the world's poorest people over rising food prices.

Continuously soaring prices of grains is a stark reality today for South Asian countries, which has been making life miserable for an increasing number of people in the region. The global shortage in grain supply has prompted grain-exporting countries to curtail exports so as to suppress domestic inflation. On the other hand, declining productivity of grains due to climate change has made most of South Asian countries dependent on importing grains.

The South Asian region, which is the home to 43% of an estimated one billion poor people in the world, has a dire need for the food bank, as a huge majority of the populace has no food security. The Colombo declaration that focused on collective regional efforts in core areas like food, energy security, trade, combating terrorism and climate change, must strengthen cooperation among the members to avert hunger and misery.

The Colombo summit issued a separate statement on food security. There is also a great need for regional cooperation for long-term forecasting, including early warning and vulnerability assessment for food security. Bangladesh should play a central role in formalising regional food security and seek better ways to spearhead the programmes under the umbrella of the Saarc food bank.

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## Remodeling education system European instance

ABDUS SATTA MOLLA

**A** few days ago, a letter writer termed the Bangladesh education system as "poor," and it is a fact that science education is not up to par. There's a strong opposing view against the diversified primary education system, but the government drive to implement a unified education system in the secondary stage has failed. There are many more such problems, which make a national drive imperative. In this age of globalisation, we can see what others are doing. Several years ago, I reviewed the systems in Asian countries, and recently I have done that for twenty European countries. They are Austria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Italy, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Russia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, The Netherlands, the UK and Ukraine.

The percentage of GDP spent for education is a crucial factor in maintaining standards. This spending varies in the studied 20 European countries from 3.7% (Russia) to 7.7% (Denmark). We are still spending only about 2.4% (UNESCO data)!

In reviewing the education systems in Europe we can go level-wise, dealing with primary and secondary; higher education curricula being managed by individual universities.

### Primary education

Primary education in many countries starts with kindergarten, but usually this stage is neither compulsory nor state-run. Of the 20 countries studied, state-run kindergartens are found only in Greece and Italy. Usually, the formal and compulsory, or "basic," education begins with primary Grade-1.

The duration of primary education varies from 3 (Armenia) to 10 (Iceland) years in Europe, but is mostly 6 years. Fifteen European countries follow this pattern. The countries are Belgium (Flemish), Belgium (French), Cape Verde, Cyprus, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Luxembourg, Malta, Poland, Russian Federation, Spain, Switzerland, the UK and Vatican City.

Of the rest, the duration is 9 years in nine countries, 8 years in

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nine countries, 4 years in six countries, 5 years in five countries and 7 years in Norway. In countries where primary education ranges from 8-10 years, the arrangement is for imparting "compulsory basic education." But most other countries that declared 8-10 year education as "basic" have combined primary and lower secondary together, without merging the two completely. Thus, the duration of "basic education" is 9 years in 12 out of the 20 countries, 10 years in four, 8 years in three and 6 years in Russia.

The subjects studied at this level can vary, but every country puts emphasis on the mother tongue (also state language and English, if not mother tongue) and mathematics. Apart from language and mathematics, some type of physical education and arts/music are also studied from the very beginning. Religious studies are compulsory, or combined with civics, ethics or morality. Computer science, or information and communication technology (ICT), is studied at the primary grades in only four of these 20 European nations.

### Secondary education

Although there are two or more subsystems of education in the secondary level, the main system is, obviously, general education. The duration of secondary education varies from 3 to 8 years in the 20 European countries. The minimum, 3 years' secondary education, prevails in only those countries where primary education is of 9/10 years' duration. In 13 of the 20 nations, duration of secondary education is 5-8 years. This longer secondary education is divided into two or three parts; the most prevailing pattern is of two sub-stages -- lower secondary and upper secondary. Only in Spain and UK is secondary education divided into three sub-stages.

The lower secondary curriculum is unified in most countries, having a few elective or optional subjects that don't divide the students into groups or streams. But in the upper/higher second-

ary stages, there are some "core" subjects and some groups or clusters of subjects. The higher secondary curriculum is streamlined in most countries, with the exception of France, Germany and Russia.

Along with language and mathematics, all the countries put due emphasis on science and social science subjects; while a subject like bookkeeping is rarely studied. Religious/moral/ethical education is studied in most of the European countries throughout the secondary stage. Computer education is emphasised in a few countries, including the UK. This subject is usually elective in the lower secondary grades.

### What Bangladesh can do

We inherited vestiges of the British system, and almost the total Pakistani one, in 1972. The system of 5-year primary and 7-year secondary education was prevalent. We inherited also the diversified (grouping into humanities, science, commerce etc.) secondary (9-10) and higher secondary (11-12) systems introduced in 1961.

The Bangladesh Education Commission (Dr. Khuda Commission), formed in 1972, published its report in 1974. The Commission proposed 8-year primary to fulfil the UNESCO requirement of compulsory schooling up to 14 years of age. Since then, most of the commissions formed later on supported this 8-year plan. Only the Moniruzzaman Miah Commission of 2003 supported status quo. Why did we fail to materialise the 8-year plan in 33 years?

The duration of primary education in Europe is mostly 6-years. Greece, Switzerland, UK, Spain, Germany and Russia did not dare to make primary education up to grade 8/9. However, except for Russia, all others declared education up to Grade 9/10 "basic and compulsory," yet kept grades 7-9/10 with secondary school.

Our present infrastructure can probably support 6-year primary

education (87 out of known 182 countries have such a structure). Even if we can afford an 8-year primary plan, the standard would fall rather than improve (being part of the primary). The subjects in the primary level, including religion, can remain. We can introduce public examination at the end of the primary grade-6 and award Primary School Leaving Certificate (PSLC). It is largely felt that the prevailing test after crossing the primary is ineffective.

"Unity in diversity" is a popular phrase nowadays. What can we do is make kindergarten, English medium, and madrasa education follow the mainline curriculum, allowing diversified medium and pedagogy. More important is to make the non-functional governmental primary school education worthy through better public (not private) management and effective teaching.

Secondary education may be divided into two sub-stages -- lower (7-9) and higher (10-12). We can declare 9-year education as basic, keeping grades 7-9 in the secondary schools. The lower secondary can be unified by having some core subjects applicable also to the madrasa and technical streams. The core course can contain a new subject -- "ethics and law" (replacing the traditional religion that has, so far, failed to enhance moral values) -- having the gist of major religions, some basic laws (including land matters) and human rights.

A Lower Secondary Certificate (LSC) can be awarded to the students successfully completing the 9-year basic education, which can be treated as equivalent to the present SSC. The 3-year long higher secondary should be diversified by having choice of group subjects along with compulsory core subjects that should be uniform throughout the subsystems.

Planning and implementing such a pattern may require some more discussion among the academics.

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## Tokyo's Afghan mission destined to remain elusive

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**I**T was Japan's prime minister of the time, Junichiro Koizumi, who in 2004 took a bold but much criticised initiative of sending Japanese troops to a mission that had not been authorised by the United Nations. Japan's Iraq mission, though symbolic in nature as the troops had to be provided protection by peacekeepers from other nations stationed in Iraq, helped tone down the criticism that the United States had been waging since the first Gulf war, which Tokyo did not take part in. Japan had to compensate for that failure, and a \$13 billion check was the price the country had to pay. But the hefty compensation did not make Japan immune to criticism, and since then Tokyo has been reminded periodically about her reluctance to be an active player in global politics.

When the US army invaded Iraq and brought into power a puppet regime that needed all-out protection, a renewed call was made to Japan to make an active contribution to the "holy" mission of spreading democracy through the power of the gun. Koizumi obviously didn't want to risk the reputation of a country that has been for decades holding the second position in global economy and spending a significant amount to build a modern army capable of competing with any other nation. So, temptation was running high among Japanese leadership to use the opportunity to show some of her newly gained

## CLOSEUP JAPAN

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military capabilities to others. It was then that the then prime minister made special arrangements through Diet bills, which eventually helped the government to overturn the constitutional provisions that prohibit the country from sending troops abroad to any mission beyond the jurisdiction of the world body.

Japanese soldiers stayed in the southern Iraqi city of Samawa for almost two years, helping in restoring essential services like electricity and water supply and playing football with local kids under the watchful eyes of Dutch and Australian troops who provided them protection from any possible insurgent attack. This symbolic participation helped the US president to proclaim that the Iraq mission had been a true international venture, not just a narrow US invasion to grab the oil resources of the country.

Though Japan's Iraq mission ended in 2006, it is still providing essential logistic support, like supplying free fuel to naval vessels involved in anti-terror activities in Afghanistan. But the allies are not satisfied with this noble Japanese gesture at a time when the price of oil has reached a new all-time

high. They want a more meaningful contribution from Tokyo, though it's not clear yet if that "meaningful" contribution would be in addition to the fuel supply mission or a mere replacement of that.

Japan has received requests from the US as well as the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (Nato) to commit troops on the ground in Afghanistan. Nato's Afghan mission is not going well as casualties are on the rise, and the people of Afghanistan are increasingly becoming hostile because of the loss of life and property.

As for Japan, it has always been difficult to reject any request coming from its most important strategic partners. In the case of Afghanistan, the important strategic partner has been joined by other important nations to make the call, which has pushed the Japanese government to an extremely difficult position. The US and Nato are asking Japan to contribute transport helicopters and military personnel as part of logistic support for the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF).

The Japanese government responded to the call initially by giving its consent to study the possibility of providing the requested support. In line with that official position, the foreign and defense ministries sent a joint fact finding mission to Afghanistan and neighbouring Tajikistan to review the situation on the ground for a possible dispatch of Chinook transport helicopters and C130 Hercules transport planes. But as suicide bombings and terrorist attacks in Afghanistan intensified in recent months, concerns were raised about the safety of Japanese troops in case of a possible dispatch. Defense ministry officials were particularly opposed to the

US request for Chinook helicopters as they are concerned that they would be vulnerable to surface-to-air missile attacks.

But it was not the reluctance of the Japanese defense ministry that was the obstacle to overcome. A strong opposition within the government about the planned Afghan dispatch continued to gain momentum, and the junior partner of the ruling coalition, the Komei Party, at one stage made it clear that it would oppose any move to send Japanese troops to Afghanistan. As a result, the government of Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda is now almost certain to drop the plan to assist the US-led forces on the ground.

It should be noted that the Komei Party holds the key to the approval of any bill in the Diet if it gets rejected in the upper house controlled by the opposition. The two-third majority that the ruling block enjoys at the lower house to counter any opposition move to block a bill is because of the support of the Komei party. Its opposition to the planned Afghan dispatch means that it will be impossible to pass any bill paving the way for sending troops to Afghanistan. The Fukuda administration has, thus, been left with no other choice but to rethink the Afghan strategy.

The move will no doubt bring increased criticism from Japan's allies. But there are times when national interest has to take priority over those of the strategic partners'. To compensate for the setback, Japan is now considering the possibility of increasing support for humanitarian assistance being provided to Afghanistan through various official channels as well as through the participation of non-governmental bodies.

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