

Delay in police reform is unacceptable

Show cause should be on the home ministry and not the IGP

WE are surprised, to say the least, about the show cause notice served on the Inspector General of Police, the highest ranking police official of the country, for speaking out publicly about the delay in police reform, something without which we cannot expect any significant change in police performance.

Successive governments have agreed to the viewpoint and research findings have repeatedly confirmed it that because of outdated regulatory framework dating back from 1861, both legal and operational, it is unable to serve the public in any meaningful way. Over the years it has become a mere extension of the government parties of the day who use the police more to repress the opposition than to prevent crime or ensure public safety. Lack of legal protection from undue political influence and partisan interference have reduced our police force into instruments of power abuse. This has demoralised the police and deprived them of the legitimate pride and job satisfaction that are crucial for any law enforcement body to function properly.

Presently our police operate under a law promulgated 147 years ago. Since then practically no changes have occurred in the law though British ended their colonial rule in 1947 and Pakistan in 1971. Though talks of police reforms have been going on for many years, it is to the credit of the present caretaker government that it took up the issue in earnest and actually drafted a law (ordinance) within months of its assuming office and submitted it to the home ministry for vetting in June 2007, where it lies till date in spite of the CA's special interest in seeing it through quickly.

It is against this inordinate delay that the IGP spoke out, quite mildly at that, the other day. He hinted that the delay was deliberate and was due to the fact that the reforms would hurt some vested interest. We believe that the delay is being caused by a section of the bureaucracy whose arbitrary control and whimsical use (read abuse) of the police would be greatly reduced if the proposed draft is adopted. It is that same section of the bureaucracy that may have instigated the issuance of this show cause notice deliberately distorting the intention of the IGP. We feel that instead of harassing the IGP the ministry would better serve itself, the government and the people of Bangladesh by investigating the cause of the delay and who were responsible for it. In fact the show cause notice should be against the home ministry for delaying a much-needed reform and not against the IGP, who only voiced something that we all feel needed to be said.

Curbing bureaucrats' trips abroad

Examples should be set by those at the helm

THE government has finally taken the matter of foreign trips by bureaucrats seriously. That is certainly encouraging news owing specifically to the fact that there has been a growing trend among government functionaries -- right from the top of the administration -- to undertake frequent trips abroad. In the process, it has been the image of the officials as well as of the government in the public eye that has taken quite a battering. While this penchant for travel among people in the government has been there for years, it has especially been in the past twenty months that there has been a flurry of foreign travel on the part of both advisers in the present government and senior civil servants. With advisers weighed down by the responsibility of having to deal with two or three ministries each, such trips have a telling effect on decision-making in the government.

Which takes us to the very important thought of examples being set by those at the helm of affairs. Precepts alone are unimportant if they are not lived up to. What we have noticed lately is that a culture of truancy seems to have gradually developed, to a point where going out of the country on real or imagined business has turned into something of an obsession for a particular class of individuals. In a very large number of instances, such travel puts the country's diplomatic missions abroad, especially in western capitals, in a quandary because they are forced to provide protocol to these visitors from home. That not only detracts from the actual work of the missions but also adds to the expenses, in terms of vehicle use, et cetera, incurred by the missions as a result of these trips.

Quite often, officials are seen to obtain invitations for themselves (when such invitations should in fact be going to the department which in turn will choose the relevant official or officials for the visit) and then are only too ready to travel by economy class on flights when their position demands a higher entitlement. There are examples aplenty of invitations meant for mid- or junior-level officers being appropriated by senior officials who simply cannot resist the temptation of making yet one more trip abroad. In the process, the image of the country is tarnished.

It is against this background that restrictions on foreign travel, for everyone involved in government, must come into place. The fact cannot be ignored that these trips, unnecessary as they are, not only lead to sloth in the administration but also give rise to resentment among officials at various levels, which too does not bode well for administration.

The eternal Che Guevara



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

LAST week would have been more appropriate to write about Ernesto Che Guevara since October 9 was his death anniversary. I am late not because I forgot, but because I dithered. How should I remember a man who is larger than life? Death anniversaries only commemorate lives, which are over. But that isn't true for Che Guevara. His life has become more than before after he died.

Another twist of irony. Ernesto Che Guevara should have been laid in state after his death, thousands filing past his body for one last glimpse of the world's most indefatigable revolutionary figure. Instead, the state of his body lying in the laundry room of a hospital in Vallegrande, a Bolivian village, presented him as a trophy in a big game hunt.

The world's greatest revolutionary was lifeless, his body riddled with bullets, hands chopped off as evidence, and eyes left open in a vacuous stare. He was surrounded by people who had come not to mourn but to celebrate his death.

Forty-one years after he was captured and killed, Che Guevara's memory endures, grows even stronger. In fact, he is

more alive today than dead, more popular than before, more celebrated than ever. It's a negation of the pernicious scheme of his killers. They had hastily buried him in an unmarked grave to deny him any chance of martyrdom. As it happens, after all these years Che is the most adorable martyr in the world.

Jimi Hendrix is credited for saying: "Once you are dead, you are made for life." True to these words, Jimi died at 27, and he is still sorely missed by music lovers. Che lived longer than him, 39 when he died. In his fight for a better world, in his dream of erasing inequality, in his unflinching faith in the power of the peasantry, his life ended in mid-flight, an unfinished business, an apotheosis. But he is made for life.

Perhaps there is a terrible fascination for life cut short at its prime. Perhaps it lingers like the afterglow of a bright burst. James Dean was a second-rate actor, who turned into an icon of youth after he died in a road accident at the age of 24. Buddy Holly was a gangly kid from the hick part of Texas. He became a music legend since his death in a plane crash at 22. Jim Morrison finished his earthly journey at 27, dead in a bathtub in his Paris apartment.

CROSS TALK

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On the opposite side of the coin, what is the fate of heroes who live their full course of life? Marlon Brando died a bloated recluse, a pale shadow of his illustrious days. Bono was a figure of enormous sex appeal, but looks odd as an aging Irishman. What about Paul McCartney? He isn't in the news unless there is a divorce or court settlement.

What would have happened to Che Guevara? He would have been eighty years old, hairline receding, skin sagging, faltering in his walk, at best sitting in the power of a Latin American country, contemporaneous with Cuba's Fidel Castro, shuffling between life and death, between holding power and looking for succession. May he would have moderated in his revolutionary zeal. May he would have given up or made more mistakes.

But death has made him admirable and ageless. The image of the man, captured by photographer Alberto Korda, at a memorial service in Havana, embodies the glamour of a revolutionary at its photogenic best. No other image -- apart from the one of Marilyn Monroe standing at a subway grid -- has been reproduced as many times in history.

Che's famous likeness appears on posters, subway walls and

countless consumer articles such as T-shirts, mugs, key chains, wallets and cigarette lighters all over the world, once even on a vodka bottle in Britain.

If alive, his life could have taken a different turn. He was obsessed with the peasantry, convinced that the struggle for socialism in the mainly rural countries of Latin America should be based upon their guerrilla struggles.

According to Daniel Waldron of Socialist Party in Ireland, that was the core weakness of Che's political mistakes. He was unable to see that the working class had the ability to effect social change. Che might have changed his mind, if he were around.

And he might have made more mistakes, as he had in the past. As Cuba's Minister of Economics, his policy made the Cuban peso practically worthless. During his days as Minister of Industries, a previously prosperous Cuba was rationing food, closing factories and losing productive citizens fleeing the country.

He even got appointed the governor of the central bank of Cuba by mistake. Che himself told Rene Burri, a photographer from Magnum Photos, that when asked if there was an economist in the room, he raised his hand because



Alberto Korda's original uncropped picture of Che Guevara taken in April 1960.

he thought the question was whether there was a communist in the room.

Che had already changed in his last days, increasingly hardened in his battle against imperialism and capitalism, lancing even with the Soviet Union. The asthmatic child from Argentina had become the most renegade revolutionary, despised by both superpowers. Jorge Castañeda, author of *Compañero: The Life and Death of Che Guevara*, once said to a reporter of the Guardian that Castro was ready to send a rescue team to save Che, but between them US President Johnson and Soviet leader Kosygin had agreed otherwise.

It was the ultimate twist of irony that Che had first come in contact with a revolutionary situation in Bolivia, and it was in the same country that the curtain fell on his revolutionary life. In Vallegrande that irony elevated him to a supernatural position.

The people still regret that Santo (Saint) Ernesto was so bru-

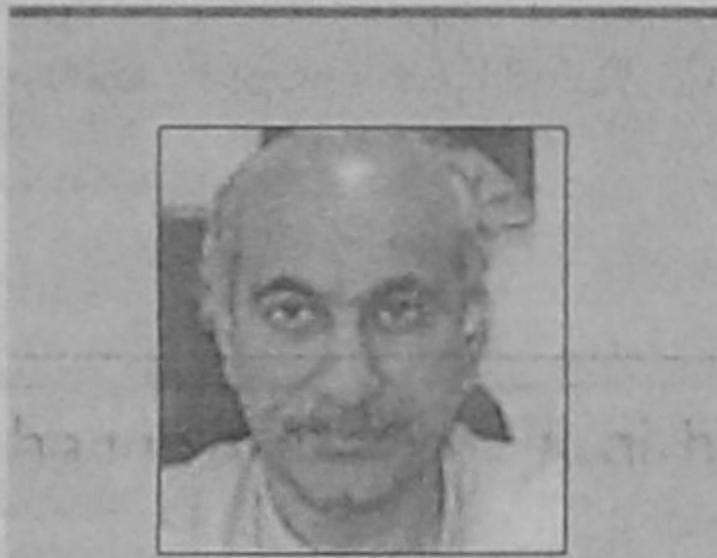
tally murdered in their village. Then they will remind you of the curse. It haunts those who killed the Saint. Six of the politicians and military officers who shared responsibility have already died violent deaths. One by one, they were either murdered or died in accidents, including President Barrientos, the man who had ordered Che's execution. He died in a helicopter crash.

In the last analysis, Che Guevara lived for what he believed. He extolled the virtue of guerrilla struggle as a way to deliver the high ideals of liberating humankind from exploitation and oppression. He continues to inspire activists with the idea of self-sacrificing struggle on behalf of the downtrodden, because he died to become its "living" legend. His slogan was "Hasta La Victoria Siempre" (Towards the Eternal Victory). He will remain eternal until that victory is achieved.

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Why Zardari said what America wanted to hear

BYLINE



M.J. AKBAR

NO passport has yet been devised that can take one easily across the borderline of fear. Pakistan used to fear annihilation by India; now it fears hegemony. India used to fear invasion across the Line of Control in Kashmir; now it fears the export of terror.

One nation's freedom-fighter can, of course, be a neighbour's terrorist. Pakistan may sincerely want peace with India, but it still has not reconciled itself to peace in Kashmir. Politicians, bureaucrats and generals sitting across a walnut table are not the only ones who determine the management of visceral fear. The street also has a say, the Pakistani street being a less than melodious orchestra of *mohalla*, *madrasa* and media.

Might I offer a suggestion for the new kid on the block, Asif Zardari, once "Mr. Ten Percent" and now the honourable president of Pakistan. The next time he feels inclined towards discussing Kashmir in an interview, he should outsource the interview to his spokesman. It will save him the bother of claiming he has been misquoted or misunderstood.

Is there any rational explanation for what Zardari definitely

Zardari was telling a Republican paper what he thought the White House wanted to hear. But this is useful only if it meshes into a larger framework. Washington is reorienting its policy towards the entire region between Kabul and Delhi, and the basic foundations are being repositioned for a new architecture. At the centre of this shift is recognition that the failing war against Afghanistan was deeply flawed by an error of judgment.

told the *Wall Street Journal* -- that those who had picked up the gun and bomb in Kashmir were terrorists, and that India has never been a threat to Pakistan?

Part of the reason lies in the fact that he was speaking to a conservative American paper. Zardari obviously shares one trait with India's prime minister who, in September, offered the true love of every Indian to George Bush, the most hated president since polls began to measure such sentiments.

Zardari was telling a Republican paper what he thought the White House wanted to hear. But this is useful only if it meshes into a larger framework.

Washington is reorienting its policy towards the entire region between Kabul and Delhi, and the basic foundations are being repositioned for a new architecture. At the centre of this shift is recognition that the failing war against Afghanistan was deeply flawed by an error of judgment. It should have been against al Qaeda, fountainhead of terrorism, and not against Taliban, government of the Afghanistan.

The returned Taliban have not only turned the flow of battle, but have emerged as champions

of Afghan nationalism and good governance, compared to the utter corruption and incompetence of the Hamid Karzai regime.

The British commander in Afghanistan, Brigadier Mark Carleton-Smith, admitted in the first week of October that absolute military victory was impossible and that if the Taliban were prepared to sit across the table this "insurgency" could be concluded.

He was only making public a process that had already begun. Between September 24 and 27, King Abdullah hosted a dialogue between 11 Taliban delegates, two Afghan officials, a representative of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, and three others. The talks had the official backing of the British government, and the unofficial support of the United States.

America and Britain are talking to those they went to war against after 9/11 in the belief that they were "terrorists." Their rhetoric still describes the Taliban thus.

It is clear that US and UK are trying to declare victory before they get out of a war they cannot win. But since America cannot be defeated by "terrorists," the Taliban will have to be redefined.

The Taliban are delighted to play ball. Mullah Mohammad

Omar has conveyed, through his representatives at the Saudi talks, that Taliban was no longer allied with al Qaeda.

Pakistan has repeatedly been told by Washington to disassociate itself from terrorists, a tactic that has become second nature to the ISI. If Taliban can walk away from Osama bin Laden, then Pakistan should be prepared to abandon Kashmiri terrorists.

In an ideal Anglo-American scenario, the security gap left behind by departing Nato forces would be filled by an informal, if difficult, alliance between India and Pakistan. This cannot happen as long as Kashmir remains a source of conflict.

Hence, a new arrangement for the region needs a resolution of Kashmir. This process cannot begin unless Islamabad decides that Kashmiri militants are not freedom-fighters. Once this happens, the status of Kashmir can be negotiated as long as the governments in Delhi and Islamabad are amenable to American "advice."

In an interesting twist of fate, Pakistan has now more to fear from terrorists on its west than from India. Pessimists have even begun to talk, albeit in hushed

tones, of the possibility of a second partition of Pakistan, with the Frontier becoming a virtually independent region, under the control of Taliban-inspired Pushtun theocrats.

It is only such a context that makes some sense of Zardari's assertion that the real threat to Pakistan is not from India. He is right, of course: India has never had any desire for any Pakistani territory, preferring to let Pakistan stew in the contradictions of its own politico-ideological concoction.

For Zardari, this would mean burial of the strategic legacy of another man he should hate with passion, General Zia ul Huq, who led the coup against his father-in-law, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and later hanged him.

Zia convinced his country that what had been impossible through conventional war could be achieved through unconventional means. It was an attractive proposition in the 1980s: Punjab seemed utterly vulnerable, and it was obvious that India could not hold on to Kashmir if it lost Punjab.

Zia, a packed package of craft, laid siege to India through terrorists, even as he wooed its opinion-maker elite with time, double-talk, carpets and silver teapots in the hope they would find rational arguments for abandoning the defence of Indian unity.

Two decades later, elitist knees continue to wobble far too quickly in Delhi.

Zardari's first serious attempt to test the elasticity of Pakistan's thinking has rebounded: the elastic has snapped back sharply

enough to loosen a molar or two. He could not recognise the power of the Pakistani street because he has never worked on it.

He has usurped the authority of the prime minister and turned the office of the president, which he reached through an indirect election, into the centre of power. It was a constitutional coup, aided by a sycophantic political party and a fragile polity. But bribes and bullying will not alter Pakistan's most durable article of faith, that Kashmir belongs to Pakistan.

One presumes Zardari has learnt a primary lesson: sometimes it is easier to get into office than to sit in it.

The American argument can be beguiling to Islamabad, that when a final prospect of peace is offered, the Indian elite will accept the compromises in geography necessary to make a Kashmir deal palatable to Pakistan. A trial run has already been established in the nuclear pact, where vital commitments have been sacrificed by Delhi and ignored by most of the Indian elite, whether in parliament or press.

Mediocre leaders have an almost incurable urge to "enter history" through a single triumph, even if this means tweaking the national interest here or there. Zardari seems to have bought into the American dream for South Asia.

But nations are not chess pieces, which can be arbitrarily rearranged through clever moves. Rulers might dream of turning a pawn into a queen; in real life, kings end up as pawns much more easily.

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Crushed by the Elephant

But succumbing to the choice of his advisers, and going with Palin, was not only cynical and irresponsible, it was weak. It was a confession that McCain could not, by himself, wrest control of the Republican Party built by Tom DeLay and Grover Norquist, who once loathed McCain but looked plenty happy in St. Paul, Minn.

JONATHAN ALTER

IN a season of ironies, the greatest of all might be that John McCain lacks the toughness to get elected president. During the summer, when he had his best chance, he wasn't tough enough to remake the Republican Party in his own image; instead, he surrendered to a cynical assortment of lobbyists and right-wingers who insisted on a strategic blunder that McCain would

recognise from his reading of military history -- fighting the last war.

In 2004, President Bush won by rallying the base and destroying the Democrat as unpatrician. They would try to do it again.

But the free-market party of Reagan is dead (thanks to the financial crisis) and the resentment party of Nixon (in the form of the ugly attacks unleashed by McCain and Sarah Palin) may find that its best days are behind it.

Where is the party of McCain? The man who survived five and a half years as a Vietnam POW, and a thousand political battles, is being crushed by a dying elephant.

Sure, the market would likely be melting down McCain's campaign no matter what he did. But he'd have a better chance if he canned the character attacks on Barack Obama.

Aside from being offensive and desperate, they don't work with undecided voters. And they're

confusing to McCain's own stoked-up partisans, as he found in Minnesota last week, when he told a woman who said she was scared by Obama, because he was "Arab," that she was wrong and his opponent was actually a "decent family man."

McCain's own crowd then booed him. But McCain wanted one more shot at the job.

To get it, he tacked right during the GOP primaries this year. He felt he hadn't been tough enough when he lost to Bush in South Carolina in 2000, and he wasn't going to make that mistake again.

The hypocrisy of McCain's adopting the Rovean tactics he once derided has been endlessly noted, but it misses the full point. If McCain were truly the independent hard-ass he claims to be,

he would have courted the GOP conservative base right up to the moment he clinched the nomination, then galloped to the middle, which is where most American voters live. A true tough guy would have said, in effect: "Hey, this is my party now, with my platform and priorities."

This was McCain's instinct, and it's why he wanted Joe Lieberman, who has a moderate to liberal voting record on everything except Iraq, to be his running mate. (The fact that everything is personal with McCain, and the two are close friends, was also a factor.)

Picking Lieberman, who is pro-choice, would have led some delegates to walk out of the GOP convention. But Harry Truman survived a walkout of Southern

Democrats who loathed his civil rights platform in 1948, and McCain would have, too.

I'm not suggesting that choosing Lieberman or Mitt Romney (who at least seems like a financial grown-up) or anyone else would have won the election for McCain. His weird obsession with earmarks to the exclusion of the bigger economic picture would still have fallen flat.

But succumbing to the choice of his advisers, and going with Palin, was not only cynical and irresponsible, it was weak. It was a confession that McCain could not, by himself, wrest control of the Republican Party built by Tom DeLay and Grover Norquist, who once loathed McCain but looked plenty happy in St. Paul, Minn.

Those gents and the House

Republicans who almost drove the economy off the cliff last month got into politics because of their hatred of regulation and taxation, the twin bogeymen of the GOP for three decades.

But guess what? In the span of three weeks, those words have taken on a positive connotation (at least as applied to Wall Street). When the tectonic plates of American politics shifted, only one candidate was ready.

McCain always says that he's a "maverick," not a conventional Republican. But the idea of a Maverick Party is a contradiction in terms. A party has to stand for a set of branded ideas or it's not a party. And mavericks by definition aren't leaders; they're headstrong politicians (or, originally, cattle) who derive their self-worth from

wandering away from the herd. They're about as reliable as a crappy '70s car of that name.

So, if McCain wants any chance of getting back into this thing, beyond praying for a foreign-policy crisis or a mother lode of racism just beneath the surface, he needs to break not just from Bush, but from the rotting corpse of his party.

Voters don't want to re-fight the Vietnam War or play stupid guilt-by-association games. They can't be happy that the ads of the Republican nominee are now 100 percent negative. But they might be willing to weigh the vision of a man they once respected, if only he had something left to say.

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