

DHAKA MONDAY FEBRUARY 23, 2009

# 'No' to partisan policing

ASM SHAHJAHAN

To disarm the strong and arm the weak would be to change the social order which it is my job to preserve. Justice is the means by which established injustices are sanctioned." Anatole France (1844 1924).

Is not this cynical statement as true today as it was in the 19th century?

In 1918 Bertrand Russell was attacked by a group of angry citizens, who were protesting against his unpopular pacifist views. His friend went to a police station to rescue him. Police paid no attention. His arguments like, "he is an eminent philosopher," "he is famous all over the world" could not cut the ice with the Police. They were unimpressed. The helpless friend made his last effort saying "But he is the brother of an earl." The story goes police immediately rushed to rescue him. Even though it might be an exception in those days for countries known for good policing we find many similarities of the incident in our soil. The machinery of law works in favour of the influential.

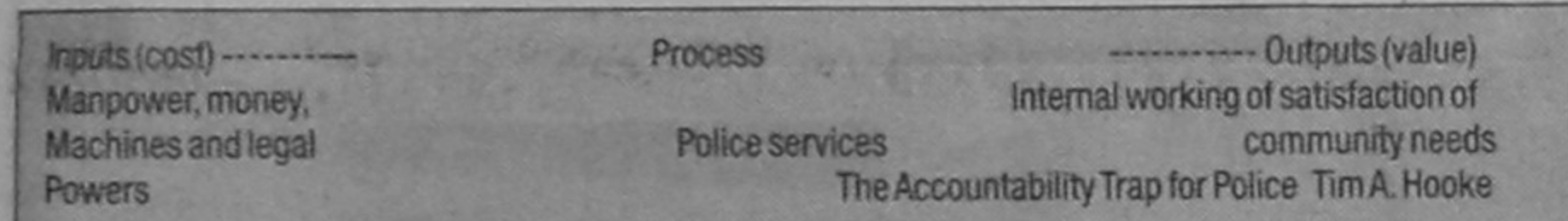
People of this country like many other countries of the world pay for all public services including the Police. Government cannot give anything without depriving the people of something. But the police budget indicates 'inputs' and not the 'outputs'. Public expectations are high. A government funded by them should be cost-effective by providing quality services and being 'responsive to their needs'. Any government that fails to provide

of law and in the name of justice" -- Baron de Montesquieu (1689 1755)

For years we have seen how political or politically sensitive cases were not allowed to be investigated neutrally. Instances of manipulative investigation are many. Investigation of many important cases was derailed with political motive. 'Blame game' became a culture and it did not stop there. The investigating officers were compelled to divert the investigation to save the real criminals and to involve the innocent. Many extrajudicial killings were not properly investigated. On many occasions once a case was lodged, the supporters of the political party in power reportedly added names of rival political party activists as accused persons. Police arbitrarily arrested people whenever the opposition came up with a political programme. Police also occasionally indulged in harassing the opposition political leaders and activists whenever they got a chance to do so. Some political leaders supported and connived with such illegal acts. Police engagement with partisan politics came to such a stage that officers started competing to please the political bosses.

The present government has come with a promise embodied in a 'A Charter for Change' adopted in their manifesto for the Ninth Parliamentary Elections 2008. The 'Charter for change' under 'Establishment of Good Governance', which is one of the five priority areas inter alia includes: -

'Terrorism and religious extremism will be controlled with iron hand.'



services efficiently cannot be deemed to have performed its task well. Ultimately 'Value for money' is undoubtedly the key word. People's money should be spent for the wellbeing of the people who bear the expenses of running the government.

Foundation of democratic policing lies in its 'accountability' to the community. All police services should be aimed to achieve 'satisfaction of community needs'. A police force can function well only when it has a warm supportive community close behind it.

A politicised and partisan police force indulges in violation of human rights, tortures, illegal arrest, and motivated investigation. Partisanship manifests itself in 'repressive' policing leading to abuse of power. Indeed "there is no cruder tyranny than that which is perpetrated under the shield

'Genuine independence and impartiality of judiciary will be ensured. Extrajudicial killings will be stopped. Rule of law will be established; the Human Rights Commission will be strengthened and made effective. Human rights will be strictly enforced.'

'The Parliament will be made effective and the government will be made accountable for its activities. Parliament Members will be allowed to express differing opinions.'

'Security and rights of religious and ethnic minorities will be ensured. Courtesy and tolerance will be inculcated in the political culture of the country. Militancy and extortion will be banned. A consensual and unanimous charter of political behaviour will be promoted.'

'Administration will be free from politicisation and will be pro-people.

Efficiency, seniority and merit will be the basis of appointment and promotion in public service.'

'In order to provide security to every citizen of the country, police and other law and order enforcing agencies will be kept above political influence. These forces will be modernised to meet demands of the time. Necessary steps will be taken to increase their remuneration and other welfare facilities including accommodation.'

That politicisation of police impedes good governance is an axiomatic truth. Politicisation is the outcome of shortsightedness of political leadership. Officers should understand that indulging in partisan policing is like dining with a tiger and the tiger will have the last meal.

Each member of police specially the leaders in the service must understand that it is not respectable personally for them or for the force in general to be perceptively aligned with any political party. This causes a breakdown of the moral, image and chain of command of police. Police trust is bruised beyond repair and ultimately this adversely affects the performance of police. There can be nothing more detrimental than partisan policing. Police force is, beyond doubt, a very important institution for the overall growth of a country. Good economics, good governance is unthinkable without good policing. Partisan policing leads to degeneracy of a force. Most of the governments since independence need to share the blame for using the force for party interest or narrow self-interest. Police was not used for greater public interest. Whatever police interest or state interest was served, it was the by-product, but the main product was the use of police for narrow partisan/self interest. The trend must not be allowed to continue. Unless the trend is arrested right now, it will have definite detrimental impact on our state of human security, economy, human rights, access to justice, rule of law and the quality of our politics and image as a nation.

Police leadership has a lot to do in this respect. They must not act on political wishes devoid of legal sanction and conduct themselves in a manner reflecting unbiased, responsible and professional character. There can be no end to the action of playing to the extralegal wishes of the political bosses. Once the malpractice starts, it has a multiplying impact and ultimately it is the people who suffer.

The present government promised to keep police and other law and order enforcing agencies above political influence. We are looking forward to



Inauguration of Victim Support Center at Tejgaon Thana premises.

have an apolitical and non-partisan police force. Partisan policing also creates a culture of impunity. Partisan policing is mainly responsible for abuse of Human Rights.

Allegations against officers involved in abuse of power and indulging in excesses, with the blessings of political masters must be dealt with an iron hand. All allegations of torture should be dealt with exemplary punishment. The government has an obligation to criminalise all torture including those perpetrated by law enforcing agencies.

Police officers 'code of conduct' should be published so that this is known to the members of the public. This will enable them to exercise indirect oversight over police and report the violations to the appropriate authority, when such instances are noticed. Supervising officers should ensure that all personnel under their command act in a manner consistent with professional conduct.

Unless we openly discuss our wrongs and shortcomings, we cannot find ways to achieve what is right. Human Rights suffer due to human wrongs. We are dreaming of a "change". 'Change' will come when it comes from the heart of the people of Bangladesh. We achieved miracle in the past when we dreamt together. We as a nation have been trying to come out of the indignity of so-called 'pretended democracy' practiced in the past by some regimes indulging in politicisation.

Politicisation of police is the worst

form of injustice, perpetrated by the people in power seeking perpetual power. Politicisation is the other name of 'discrimination'. It works against the 'principle of equality' before law, which is the oxygen of the soul of democracy. No police force can be 'trustworthy to the community' if it is politicised. If trust is at stake the image is at stake. If the image is at stake everything is at stake.

Partisan policing is at the root of most of the policing malpractices including brutality and torture, corruption, extrajudicial executions, bias and discrimination.

A community is safe only when the police is neutral and efficient. Partisan and politicised police has the 'right to do wrong' and go 'unpunished'. It is time for our politicians, administrators and police officers to search their souls and examine their conscience to enable us to build a land worth living and a nation to be envied. We need a government with genuine political will to shun politicisation. Where there is no will, there is no way. Our national leaders should try to build a nation of law-abiding people setting personal examples of obedience to law. Lawmakers should never be accused of law breaking as Sophocles said in 400 BC "Nobody has a more sacred obligation to obey the law than those who make the law". Let every policeman be a symbol of security and every police station a symbol of safety.

ASM Shahjahan, former IGP and adviser to caretaker government.

## In quest of knowledge economy

M. SHAMSHER ALI

N OBEL Laureate economist Robert Solow pointed out quite sometime ago that the real engine of economic growth is science and technology (S&T). Economists cannot fail to note that it is science and technology that has acted as an instrument of change for all countries. The idea of resource generation using science and technology has never been our strong point. It is with this view in mind that I have concentrated on the S&T challenges of the Twenty-first Century which have already brought about economic revolution in many countries.

It is true that the mastering of these technologies needs money. It is even more true that the technologies mastered and practised bring even more money. Following this philosophy of using S&T as a money earner, some of the S & T challenges of the twenty first century are listed as follows:

- to increase speed
- to increase the efficiency of energy transformations
- to reduce back-bending labour
- to increase the packing den-

- city in electronics
- to store information for long within tiny spaces
- to produce more
- to control things from a distance
- to teach from a distance
- to produce high temperature similar to that inside the sun
- to produce very low temperatures
- to produce very high and very low pressures
- to probe the minutest parts of matter (? 10 -13 cm)
- to probe the outer reaches of the universe (10<sup>28</sup> cm)
- to examine the presence of foreign atoms at the trace level
- to excel in the non-destructive test of matter
- to devise materials which can sustain high pressures, high temperatures, low temperatures etc.
- to devise materials (at room temperatures) whose electrical resistance could be brought to zero (High Temperature Superconductivity)
- to understand the complete Human Genome and to identify the genes responsible for different traits

- and to perform genetic engineering
- to understand better the interaction between radiation and matter (including the effects of non-ionising electromagnetic interactions)
- to use various organisms as a labour force in doing things we cannot do (bio-technology)
- to investigate new antidotes for deadly diseases
- to increase the efficiency in food storage
- to understand the interactions between the living and non-living components of our environment
- to recycle matter and to make non-bio degradable matter degradable
- to look for new sources of energy

### Some key issues for economists and planners

The challenges which were discovered in the twentieth century continue to be met also in the new millennium. The above list is only indicative and is by no means exhaustive however long it may be seem.

It is not essential for us to go in for research in all of these fields. The key idea would be to identify areas of scientific research that would increase our capability in solving the problems faced by the common man. However, there should be some groups in the country who would be able to undertake high level research and understand the jargons of the day in their field.

Keeping the above technologies in mind some of the questions that need answering are:

(a) If agriculture is one of the cornerstones of the economy on which 70-80% of our population are dependent for a living and if we really have to be self sufficient in the food sector, how is it that we have not been able to make our own tractors and our own water pumps. These are not high technology things and can be produced in the country with the help of mechanical engineers, for the training of whom we have a full fledged university called Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology.

(b) We are a riverine country and rivers have been the mainstay of our life for long in terms of fisheries, navi-

gation and irrigation. How is it that these rivers have not been dredged systematically over the years and we have not been able to build the dredgers ourselves?

(c) Ship building has been used by many countries as a source of generation of money. It is only recently that some entrepreneurs have been thinking of undertaking this task on a significant scale. Why such steps were not suggested earlier by the planners.

(d) We have natural resources like gas, coal, peat with a great possibility of discovering oil also; how is it that even after 36 years of the independence, we have not been able to acquire the rigs necessary for the lifting of natural resources. These machines are expensive no doubt, but in view of the fact that the exploration, lifting and use of these resources are a matter of life and death for us, one of the highest priorities should have been accorded to this sector. How often have our economists highlighted this problem?

(e) In the present world, services are a major way of earning money but there is no denying the fact that the