

Punish the predator

Corruption threatens to eat into the vitals of police working as professionalism gets eroded and the capacity to fight against terrorism and crime is depleted. In addition, the fact of policemen's legitimate expectations often getting clouded by considerations extraneous to the profession has been a damper in the fight against corruption and highhandedness.

MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

THE recent arrest of an Assistant Superintendent of Police, working in Rab, on charges of robbery baffles all citizens and undoubtedly puts the law enforcement apparatus in great shame. Such predatory acts by higher echelons of police, though not on a disturbing frequency shatter the much-desired credibility of the crime fighting organisation. The element of trust assumes prime significance when one hears exhortations of lawmen imploring members of public to become proactive partners in the crime prevention campaign.

Unfortunately, there have been cases in which the protectors of law have themselves turned into its prime violators. Instances of policemen associating themselves in crimes like rape, robbery and extortion have dangerously lowered the image of the service. False encounters, custodial violence and trampling of human rights, which many of the so-called successful officers rejoice in resorting to often end up, sooner or later, in criminal proceedings against them.

The important aspect to remember in the sordid transaction is that criminal or departmental proceedings in respect of the aforementioned gross delinquency often lose their momentum after some lapse of time. Experience shows that hurriedly initiated departmental pro-

ceedings while getting rid of the delinquent often leave loopholes that the offending functionary takes advantage of in the subsequent criminal proceedings and succeeds in reinstating himself, much to the discomfiture of the authority and the suffering public. Thus, it is no wonder that the establishment on many occasions fails to adequately check the criminal proclivities of potential and actual delinquents.

It is in the background of such eventualities that this writer urges the inspector general of police to vigorously pursue the criminal case that must have been registered against the officer arrested on charges of robbery. Evidence available prima facie indicates that it should not be difficult to submit charge sheet in days and help the court in pronouncing on the culpability. If the officer is found guilty, it would not be difficult to dismiss him and thus there would be no scope for a re-entry into the service.

It has to be borne in mind that the criminal depredations of police have an extremely deleterious implication for the over-all image for two important reasons: one, being in uniform the corrupt policeman immediately catches public attention, and two, since the complainant the police deal with is often a person with a grievance, any corrupt demand imposed on him pains beyond measure.

While deliberating on the subject of

police delinquency it would be relevant to refer to the lackadaisical attitude of superior police officers resulting in slackness and looseness in supervision. On coming to know about criminal acts of policemen, the superior police officers should lose no time in getting a criminal case, if prima facie made out by the facts of the case, registered and investigated, if need be, by the nearest unit of CID.

The delinquent should be arrested, placed under suspension and the case put up before court for trial. Delay in taking action should be adjudged as supervisory negligence and the default-

ing official should be punished for that. Swift action will not only be appreciated by the citizens but would also go a long way in serving as an effective deterrent to other errant police officers as well.

Experience also shows that police officers guilty of inaction often go scot-free. In reality, inaction deserves great retribution because it amounts to gross negligence and remissness in the discharge of duty and unfitness for the same. Therefore, when inaction is met by severe punishment, it motivates policemen to act and take initiative; and inaction is unmistakably an image-shattering factor. Somehow this has

become a visible part of Bangladesh's contemporary police culture.

Criminal acts by the policemen will definitely lessen and stand discouraged if believers in the rule of law and followers of the straight legal methods are not sidelined by the political executives who consider such officers as "cows" and "sissies" that are not fit enough to deal with explosive law and order situations. If we are primarily interested in short-term spectacular but actually illusory results then it would be problematic to check the deviant officials. Desperate officials will naturally indulge in unlawful acts, con-

sidering such acts as compensation for their extra zeal.

In retrospect, it would be proper and relevant to point out that policemen's living off the land was made integral to the scheme of police organisation designed in 1861. It was a well thought-out decision that an adversarial relationship between the police and the "natives" was necessary to ensure political control of and obedience to the colonial government. The purpose was admirably achieved by creating and sustaining an extortion-based relationship between the police and the natives.

Corruption threatens to eat into the vitals of police working as professionalism gets eroded and the capacity to fight against terrorism and crime is depleted. In addition, the fact of policemen's legitimate expectations often getting clouded by considerations extraneous to the profession has been a damper in the fight against corruption and highhandedness.

In Bangladesh the opportunity cost of being corrupt is very low; if the cost of losing one's job is very low as compared to losing the corruption related money, then the rational choice may be to accept bribes. In such a situation if extra-departmental aspects replace professional considerations and penalty for deviance becomes ineffective on account of extraneous interference as in the past, there will always be incentive for inefficiency and corruption.

A punishment and reward-based system would be critical to achieving the goal of minimising corruption. A strong accountability mechanism coupled with commensurate compensation policies could be the essential elements of a desirable system.

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What happens when protector becomes predator?

Small hydropower generating units can ease power crisis

In the case of Bangladesh and its contiguous region, there appears to be as much concern as there are opportunities. While there are opportunities for importing electricity from Nepal into northern part of Bangladesh, there are disconcerting questions of sovereignty, politics and above all, concern about long term reliability.

MD. ASADULLAH KHAN

ENERGY plays an important role in accelerating economic growth inasmuch as it serves as an important element in providing food, shelter, healthcare facilities, safe water, sanitation, education and access to jobs to either an individual or group or the whole community. Sustainable human development, which means economic growth through equitable distribution of benefits, can only be ensured through the fulfillment of the energy needs of the nation. This brings into focus the interrelation between per capita energy consumption and per capita GDP, emphasising the fact that improvement in human status contributes to increase in per capita energy consumption.

The development of the country's energy sector hinges mainly on power generation based on natural gas, which is the country's only indigenous source of fuel. Till January 1997, as newspaper reports indicated quoting Petrobangla sources, the net recoverable reserve of natural gas was 10.88 TCF. With power demand shooting up to 5400 MW since early June, against a generation capacity of 4184 MW, and despite commissioning of a spur line in Jalalabad gas field, there has been no appreciable increase in power generation.

It is, therefore, imperative that the government starts exploring possibilities of generating power by using alternative and environmentally benign sources of energy. Experts indicated in a workshop held at Buet in 1999 the vast potential of hydropower, especially small hydropower units, in and around Bangladesh, especially in Nepal.

Hydropower is the one renewable energy resource with which mankind has long been familiar, and for which most efficient energy transformation technology is available. Most strikingly, the conversion efficiency from natural resource to electricity is 85% to 90% for hydropower compared to 20% to 30% for fossil fuels, nuclear and geothermal sources. People worldwide are now keen to go for hydropower because its environmental impact, except for land submergence under reservoirs, is minimal. The continued growth in the demand for electricity throughout the developed world has raised concern about the ability of the environment to sustain this development without harm to itself.

This brings into focus the need for harnessing hydropower, especially mini-hydropower units that are very much cost effective, with the possibility of providing an attractive means of achieving rural electrification, power supply to irrigation,

drainage pumps, and cottage industries. Moreover, the plants and equipment used in hydropower generation are relatively simple. Nepal, India, Pakistan, Thailand, and the Philippines have made significant strides in hydropower development. Hydropower unit sizes up to 1000 KW are termed as mini whereas small units may range from 500-5000 KW.

Despite the fact that hydropower is a clean and cheap method of power production, the scope for hydropower generation is quite limited in Bangladesh because of the topography. The lone hydropower plant in Kaptai, Rangamati, with installed capacity of 230 MW, continues to generate 180 MW without any major breakdown or overhaul since its commissioning in 1962.

The chief engineer of the Kaptai hydroelectric project told me in 2003 that the generating capacity of the Karnaphuli project could be raised to 300 MW by addition of at least two units. There is a feeling among many knowledgeable quarters that the discharge from the Karnaphuli Hydroelectric Power plant could be recycled to the Kaptai lake either by conventional water pumps or by installing pumped-storage type units to enhance the potential of the Kaptai lake and hence generate more power.

Experts indicated that there are certain locations within the country where small hydropower stations could be set up as per the recommendations of the IECO Master Plan in 1964 and the subsequent study made by four working groups in 1981. The working group explored the possibility of setting up mini-hydropower generation stations on hilly streams, chars, and rivers having steep slopes.

The recommended sites where projects could be started on a priority basis are: Foy's Lake at Pahartali, and Choto Kumira in

Chittagong proper, Sealock in Bandarban, Nikhari Chara and Madhab char in Baralekha, Moulavibazar, Ranga Poni Gung in Jaintapur of Sylhet, Bhugai Kangsha in PS Nalitabari and Marisi in PS Jhinaigati in the district of Sherpur, Punarhaba and Talma in greater Thakurgaon and Pathraj in Dinajpur. Studies of these sites suggested that a total annual production of 11,56,320 KWH in Chittagong-Bandarban area, 63,06,041 KWH, in Mymensingh-Sherpur district, and 18,70,752 KWH in the greater Dinajpur-Rangpur area could be generated.

Sangu river: Studies also suggest that by damming the river Sangu at Tarasa Chara location and building a reservoir with a surface area of 32,500 acres and a capacity of 1900,000 acre-ft, power generation of about 82 MW at this site could well-nigh become possible.

Matamuhuri river: A compacted earth-filling dam could be constructed at Champatoli over the Matamuhuri river with an installed capacity of 17,500 kW.

Teesta barrage project: The Teesta barrage project built in 1990 with regulating structure holds promise of generating 125 million kWh of electrical power. There are at least 19 potential sites of hydropower generation in the Teesta barrage maintaining head difference of even 1 metre because of enormous discharge available here. At least for six months in a year around the monsoon season, power can be generated in these sites. Other than the sites described above there are many streams in the hill districts of Rangamati, Khagrachari and Bandarban where small storage can be created for hydropower generation.

In the context of development of hydropower in the whole region, including India, Bangladesh and Nepal, Engr. Rishi Shah, an expert from Nepal, indicated in his paper at a workshop at Buet in

1999 that the Himalayan Kingdom of Nepal possesses hydro power potential of an unimaginable magnitude.

Energy, both electrical and mechanical, can be harnessed from the mighty rivers flowing down the steep gradient of the mountains for the development, not only of Nepal but also for the entire region. They possess hydroelectric power potential of about 83 GW (1GW=1 billion watt) out of which only 50% is considered to be economically feasible for exploitation.

In Nepal, some encouraging work has been done for promotion of micro/mini hydropower capacity up to 100 kW/5 MW by the private sector to provide electrical energy to many communities living in remote areas that are not connected with the national electrical grid/network. BBC circulated a news bulletin on July 28 that indicated that Nepal was building a hydroelectric plant that will produce 42,000 MW, a power potential that could be shared by the countries in the region provided India agrees to extend the grid line over its territory. There have always been excellent ideas on the establishment of a regional power transmission network within the Saarc countries but, shockingly, those ideas never came to fruition, frustrating the very spirit and the objective of Saarc.

There are instances galore of such large-scale power sharing in the countries of Latin America. The Itaipu Dam between Paraguay and Brazil is the largest hydropower project (14,000 MW) so far known. The two countries saw the potential of joint development because Paraguay could not use half of the power from the project.

Brazil purchases the power Paraguay does not need. Interestingly, there are strong electric ties between various

European countries with long-term purchase agreements. In Central Asia, there are power purchase agreements between Kyrgyzstan, China and Pakistan. Kyrgyzstan has been selling hydropower to China for sometime now.

Encouragingly, some of the historical and political barriers among these countries have been pulled down in favour of economic development. Reports have it that a 500 KV transmission line has been built through Malaysia to link Thailand and Singapore. Thailand also buys electricity from Laos.

In the case of Bangladesh and its contiguous region, there appears to be as much concern as there are opportunities. While there are opportunities for importing electricity from Nepal into northern part of Bangladesh, there are disconcerting questions of sovereignty, politics and above all, concern about long term reliability. By all reasoning it can be said that, if the water sharing agreement signed between Bangladesh and India is any indication, one can be hopeful that similar agreement can be reached in the power sector as well.

Nepal will sell electricity to Bangladesh and India will transfer power for a fee. A series of agreements on inter-dependence can be reached to reduce the threat of supply interruptions even in times of political conflicts in the region. While the whole world is reeling under the looming threat of increasing greenhouse gas emissions and global warming caused by burning of fossil fuels in the power plants, exploitation of hydropower seems to be a brilliant idea to be exploited.

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Will Indo-Pak ties improve?

Obviously pressure is mounting on Pakistan for quick actions against the Mumbai attackers and the government has to move effectively on the issue. The pressure has increased as United States secretary of state Hillary Clinton during a visit to New Delhi has called for such actions from Pakistan.

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A recent and rare meeting between the prime ministers of arch rivals India and Pakistan on one hand raised prospects of a thaw in the bitter bilateral ties and on the other triggered anger and consternation back in New Delhi. Indian premier Dr. Manmohan Singh and his Pakistani counterpart Yusuf Raza Gilani on the sidelines of the just-concluded nonaligned summit in Egypt have pledged to cooperate with each other in combating terrorism and many saw the development as much-needed broad accord at the highest level to normalise the relationship.

New Delhi-Islamabad ties have been badly affected by the terror attack in

Indian commercial capital Mumbai in November last year when many were killed and injured with India pointing the fingers at Pakistan since the attackers came from that country. After the meeting Egypt said that actions against terrorism "should not be linked" with peace talks between the two nuclear-armed rivals. When this statement raised hopes for early talks between the two sides, Dr. Singh faced angry protests in parliament as the opposition charged him with "compromising" on Indian position on the issue.

So far, New Delhi had stated that there would be no dialogue unless Islamabad brings the perpetrators of the Mumbai attack to book. Main opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its leader

in parliament Lal Krishna Advani accused the prime minister of giving too much "concessions" to Pakistan by agreeing to talks since Islamabad has not taken actions against the attackers. Advani even staged a walkout from the house on the issue, evidently leaving the government on the defensive.

Later, Singh in the parliament appeared to have hardened his stance as he said talks are unlikely unless Pakistan moved forward by taking actions against the Mumbai attackers. Consequently, the possibility of the dialogue now once again seems uncertain while the Indian opposition prefer a tougher stand against Islamabad on the terrorism issue. A section of the Indian press is also critical of the latest government position on the subject.

India and Pakistan were in the process of normalising their often-battered relations while keeping the main disputes like the "Kashmir" on the backburner. The composite dialogue at various levels -- mainly between the foreign secretaries -- did produce good results as they cooperated in various fields to promote ties. Then came the Mumbai attack that killed

166 persons and the bilateral relationship took a nosedive.

However, the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (NDA) government headed by Dr. Singh preferred diplomacy to BJP's jingoistic call and sought to calm down the tensions by asking Pakistan to act effectively against the attackers. One of the surviving attackers Ajmal Kashab is facing trial in India on the charge.

During the recent Indian national elections, BJP attacked the government of being soft towards Pakistan on the issue while Dr. Singh and the then foreign minister Pranab Mukherjee defended government position. The ruling coalition won the polls and it was concluded that its mature and wide policy was approved by the people rejecting BJP's tough stand.

But things did not improve and an informal meeting between Pakistan president Asif Ali Zardari and Indian premier Singh on the sidelines of the Shanghai cooperation council meeting in Russia in June helped in thawing the ties that led to the Singh-Gilani contacts in Egypt. As far as the meeting is concerned, two sides seemed happy although the

task was mainly on Pakistan as it promised to take measures against the Mumbai offenders.

"Whatever he (Singh) has said on the floor of the house in India, I think that is the stand which we took and I think that is going to help the two countries in moving forward" Gilani said about their discussions. He also said that his country was probing the case of Mumbai attack. India has said that the Pakistan-based militant organization "Laskar-e-Taiba" is behind the attack in Mumbai and that it has evidence that Pakistan official agencies too were involved in many ways.

Not unexpectedly, Islamabad denies the charge saying state-actors were not involved at all. It remains to be seen how India produces the evidences.

Obviously pressure is mounting on Pakistan for quick actions against the Mumbai attackers and the government has to move effectively on the issue. The pressure has increased as United States secretary of state Hillary Clinton during a visit to New Delhi has called for such actions from Pakistan. However, she favours Indo-Pakistan greater contacts and joint actions in defeating terrorism in

the region.

Needless to say that Washington's key ally Pakistan, in combating terror, cannot turn a blind eye to Hillary's comment. But the American top diplomat had word of praise for Islamabad too as she believed the government there was sincere and working seriously against the terrorists.

Indo-Pakistan ties are quite complex and their topsy-turvy relations have definitely a big bearing in the South Asian region. The political stability and a congenial atmosphere here is largely contingent upon a relatively normal New Delhi-Islamabad relationship. It is imperative that two rivals improve their ties not only for their sake, but also for the entire region. To facilitate the process meaningfully, two sides need to move and since the onus lies on Pakistan to take on the Mumbai attackers, Islamabad must act on the grave matter decisively. In such an event, the bottlenecks on the resumption of the process of dialogue can be removed.

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