

Hi-tech monitoring system for DMP

Motivation is the key for police to deliver

DHAKA Metropolitan Police (DMP)'s modernisation has long been overdue. As the city is growing at a breakneck speed, so is the incidence of crimes and snarl-ups increasing at the numberless road junctions. Naturally the city police were at their wits' end to fight crime and ease movement of traffic with their limited manpower and technical resources.

Now that the Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) is set to have a sophisticated monitoring system, dubbed Command, Control and Communication System or C3S, equipped with closed-circuit televisions (CCTVs) at the major crime points in the city, dot matrix display at the road intersections and an advanced telecommunication network at central control to make one-to-one contact with the on-duty police anywhere within the metropolitan area, it is hoped the DMP will be able to deliver better service than before.

Since the police in most cities of the world are fitted with modern equipment to combat crime and maintain traffic discipline, the need for such facilities for the DMP cannot be overemphasized. Strangely though, the DMP is finally going to have its own hi-tech set up about a decade after the authorities first raised the issue of introducing such a modern system in 1997. The reason why it took so many years to materialise the decision is best known to the authorities themselves. However, the decision to install a hi-tech monitoring system for the police, albeit delayed, is still welcome, for it is after all better late than never.

While appreciating the modernisation of the metropolitan police, it is important to add at this point that technology, though a necessary ingredient of any management and control system in modern parlance, is not the ultimate determinant for any system to deliver at the desired level. In fact, as always, it is the man behind the machine that determines everything. It is true also of our own police, especially the DMP.

After introduction of C3S, as they term it, the DMP will certainly look smarter. But would that also make the metropolitan police one hundred per cent efficient overnight? As a matter of fact, that would be too much to expect of the police.

To be up to its task, the members of the DMP will need further orientation, training and motivation. For it is only a highly motivated police force that is able to deliver its best.

In the circumstances, to match the people's increased expectation from a better equipped DMP, the authorities would do well also to enhance police morale through better training and a higher level of motivation. And the sooner the authorities take such measures the better is the possibility that the police would serve the city dwellers up to their expectation.

The helpless women in Faridpur and Brahmanbaria

Let the law go after those who humiliated them

THE men who raped a young girl in Faridpur recently and had the scene recorded on video and distributed in public have not yet been hunted down. This is inexplicable failure on the part of the police. Are we then to suppose that because the scandal has centered around a poor family it is all right to ignore the matter and pretend that it will be forgotten soon? It has been days since the incident took place and yet the local administration has seen little reason to move against the accused. On top of that, the police kept the victim's father confined at the police station in Charbhadra for fifteen hours after having picked him up to identify the houses of those who had allegedly raped his daughter. The situation has now come to a point where the father of the victim is now in fear of the police. And, of course, there is the shame that hangs over his poverty-stricken family.

As if this humiliation were not enough, we now have reports of yet one more woman falling prey to a so-called fatwa in a village in Brahmanbaria. She has alleged that an uncle of her expatriate husband, having failed to lure her with his advances, arranged to humiliate her through forcing one of his accomplices into her home at night and then raising a hue and cry about her 'immodesty'. That led to a *salish*, or village arbitration, which decided in its absolute insensitivity to punish the woman with a hundred and one lashes of the whip. Predictably, the man who had entered the woman's home went scot-free. A relatively comforting aspect of this sordid episode is the courage the woman has demonstrated by filing a case against her husband's uncle and his accomplices. All but one of the accused are on the run, which only strengthens the argument that unless all of them are in the net, the woman will run the risk of seeing her stigma lead to her being ostracized by her neighbours. With all the outcry about violence against women going on around the country, it is only proper that the case be taken up by the administration and citizens as a whole in the interest of the law and decency. Similar must be the approach in the matter of the rape of the young girl in Faridpur.

There is little question that young women are these days falling victim to sex-related crime in the rural regions. The problem lies in the fact that not many women are willing to come forward and report such incidents owing to the embarrassment that might be caused to their families. And yet it must be the job of the law enforcement to go for tough action against those guilty of these crimes. In the present circumstances, the young men who have humiliated the girl in Faridpur and the men who convened the *salish* in Brahmanbaria, especially the cleric of the local village, must be swiftly rounded up and dealt with under the law. These criminal elements deserve no sympathy.

A massacre and a celebration

Somehow, I have this strong conviction that had Ziaur Rahman been alive today he wouldn't have allowed such celebration of Begum Zia's birthday on a day when the nation mourned the death of a leader and his family.

SHAHNOOR WAHID

THERE was no war-like situation in the month of August in the year 1975 in Bangladesh. A nascent government in a nascent country was trying its best to make all the loose ends meet despite internal and outside evil forces trying their best to make governance impossible. The evil forces, supported by the defeated forces in the War of Liberation, got desperate and plotted to kill Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Accordingly, on the fateful night of August 15 the entire family of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was gunned down. There was no revolution and there was no war. It was a peaceful time and yet the crime was committed in cold blood by a deranged group of people. They did not spare innocent and unarmed women and children.

Since then the sky over Dhaka changed

full many a time in the month of August. It often poured rain over the city to cleanse it of the blood of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib and his family but the blood never did wash away. The blood stuck on the forehead of each of the killers and the beneficiaries of the gruesome murders. Instead of ever saying a word of sympathy the beneficiaries began to celebrate August 15 as the birthday of Begum Khaleda Zia, the present chairperson of BNP.

The TV footage of Begum Zia and her sycophants having a great time on August 15 speaks loudly of the kind of persons they are in reality and the kind of politics they do. What kind of people follow them as leaders? I wonder how the few literate and saner people in the party tolerate such behaviour! A Bangla daily reports that August 5 is the real date of birth that is kept on record in the school Begum Zia went to in her childhood.

If that is true then we cannot but be amazed at the level of ingenuity, degree of machination and extent of wickedness that went behind planning of the event.

Can lust for power make people stoop so low that they would banish etiquette, nicety and civility from their character entirely? What kind of examples are they setting before the young generation by resorting to such spiteful, malicious tactics to go one up against the opposition? Will they ever get respect of the people for showing such colossal scale of disrespect to another political leader?

By organising a birthday party on August 15, BNP leaders may pat one another's back but by doing so they expose the darkest side of their character that borders on the sinister. Nowhere in the world, in the past or the present, have politicians shown such disrespect to deceased opposition leaders. But our politicians have beaten all such records and set examples of vulgarity that only bring shame on the entire nation.

Somehow, I have this strong conviction that had Ziaur Rahman been alive today he wouldn't have allowed such celebration of Begum Zia's birthday on a day when the nation mourned the death of a leader and

his family. Whether Ziaur Rahman had any hand in the assassination is another debatable issue, but he never spoke ill of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman as long as he lived.

BNP always speaks loudly about protecting Islam in Bangladesh. But we know that in Islam, during the *janaza* (last prayer before burial), the imam asks everyone to forgive the deceased if he or she had pained anyone during his or her lifetime. People do so and pray for the salvation of the departed soul. Maintaining the religious and cultural custom of the land, people do not speak ill of the deceased. In politics, one may criticise the political motives and actions of a dead leader but that shouldn't cross the parameters of ethics and civility. Is BNP following the tenets of Islam when it comes to showing respect to a deceased person?

If one may call the deaths of Bangabandhu and his family a Shakespearean tragedy then one may also say the plan to observe August 15 as the birthday of Begum Zia a Shakespearean wickedness. And one does not have to be an Awami Leaguer to say so.

Shahnoor Wahid is a Senior Assistant Editor of The Daily Star. He can be contacted at shahnoorwahid@yahoo.co.uk

Can drought bring us closer?

India recovered from that crisis. There is no reason why it cannot do so this time. But coordination with our neighbouring countries could do better because the entire region is hopelessly dependent on agriculture.

KULDIP NAYAR

THE monsoon may well be a seasonal wind of the Indian Ocean. But it is accompanied by rains. The subcontinent, comprising India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, is dependent on them. Nearly two-thirds of the population of the three countries lives in the countryside. More rains make their life a bit easier and less pushes them further to the edge.

I do not know about Pakistan or Bangladesh. But the crisis in India is deep. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has officially declared that the monsoon has failed. As many as 141 districts, nearly one third of the country, have been badly affected. The worst hit states are Assam, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Haryana, Jharkhand and West Bengal. Punjab is slightly better off because of the canals and water pumps.

Bihar has 26 districts out of 36 in the drought-stricken area. Maharashtra's Vidarbha, perennially caught between dismal poverty and farmers' debt-suicides, has had no rains for the third year in a row. In terms of crops, paddy has not been sown in 60 lakh hectares. India consumes more rice than wheat. If rains fail the current kharif crop, the moisture in the land for the rabi (wheat) will be affected. The prime minister, who convened a meeting of state chief secretaries this week, has emphasised preparation of contingency plans to deal with the drought.

But, unfortunately, most of these IAS officers do not know the countryside. They sit in their air-conditioned offices in state capitals and prepare plans that look good on paper but fail on the field. Even the experience transmitted to state governments seldom figures in the schemes meant for the countryside. The Union Agriculture Ministry in New Delhi is the nodal point. But Union Minister Sharad Pawar is the weakest link because he remains absorbed throughout the year in his Nationalist Congress Party and

cricket board affairs.

The Union ministry has declared a stock of 253 lakh tonnes of wheat and 232 lakh tonnes of rice. But most of it is lying in the open and at least 25 percent must have gone waste due to inclement weather and rats. Despite the drought in one area or the other, New Delhi is found wanting whenever a large-scale scarcity takes place. It has been suggested again and again that the areas dependent on rains should be decreased. Even after 62 years of independence, 60 percent of the agricultural land is not irrigated.

New Delhi has announced an allocation of Rs 25,000 crore to meet the drought. Strange,

the package to bail out Air India is Rs 20,000 crore. Come to think of it, what is described as Bharat is neglected by India. New Delhi is legislating for the right to food. It is a commendable step. Both Islamabad and Dhaka should emulate the example. A democratic state has to ensure that its people do not go hungry. If they do, they may be tempted to look for desperate remedies.

Basically, it is a sad commentary on the development in a region. Industrial growth cannot make up for the failure of crops. The West has done it otherwise. We have to realise that poverty has to be eliminated by hard work, not through the use of force or the deepening of religious faith. Industry would have to play a bigger role.

Steps to grow more food are linked with the land. Farmers have to be motivated to put in their best. India introduced some land reforms nearly five decades ago. It needs another dose to reduce the highest holding of 18 acres per individual so that the land is available to the landless.

Yet, Pakistan continues to be a feudal society where both President Asif Zardari and Prime Minister Yousuf Gilani possess hundreds of acres of land. Once I asked a leading landlord in Sindh if he knew how much land he owned. He was frank enough to admit that

Like friendship nurtured in adverse conditions.

he had no idea but took pride that two railway stations were located on it. Bangladesh may not have big zamindars. Still the inequality in holdings is too glaring to be ignored.

The Mehboob ul Haq Human Development Centre in Pakistan pointed out in its 2008 report that the number of deprived people in South Asia, in terms of adequate income, health and education, has remained more or less the same in the last 10 years. "The region continues to be home to about one half of the world's illiterate adults and about an equal proportion (47 percent) of the world's poor, defined on the basis of people living below \$1 a day earning." In India, however, things are slightly better because the base is \$2 per day. Yet, 70 percent of the population is stuck at that income, many even below. The drought will affect them the most.

The three countries could coordinate their efforts on climate and ecology. I do not know why the Indian Meteorological Department fails every year in predicting the rains. In January, the department said that the monsoon was normal. But its forecast, as usual, turned out to be wrong. The then minister in charge, Kapil Sibal, claimed after the failure to know about the tsunami that the best of equipments had been imported to predict the monsoon. The Meteorological Department has done no better this year. Should crores of public money be wasted on a

setup that is dependent on hunches and the out-of-date methods? I am sure Pakistan and Bangladesh must have had the same experience.

In the midst of food crises, New Delhi's export of rice does not make sense. There has been a ban since October 2007. As much as 10 lakh tonnes of rice have been exported on "humanitarian grounds" to African countries. The ships carrying the rice were diverted to other destinations. Some Rs 250 crore have been earned by many hands, including government servants. Had the matter not been raised in Parliament, the scandal would not have come to light. New Delhi is reluctant to order an inquiry because it is still "studying the files." The pressure of politicians and the vested interests has seen to it that the government remains "studying files."

Already the bad news is that India's growth rate has gone down by 1 to 2 percent. But if the rains fail even in winter, the growth rate may go down by 3 to 4 percent. The worst situation was in 1988, when even water and fodder had to be reached to distant places. India recovered from that crisis. There is no reason why it cannot do so this time. But coordination with our neighbouring countries could do better because the entire region is hopelessly dependent on agriculture.

Kuldip Nayar is an eminent Indian columnist.

America's fatal flaw

Each one of these problems is getting worse by the day, and yet the political system seems unable to take them on and make major reforms. On these very important issues, America is caught in a downward spiral.

FAREED ZAKARIA

IN the past few weeks, we've seen the twin personalities of US government come out: one is impressive, the other deeply worrying. Good news first: we now have increasing evidence that Washington's response to the global financial collapse was effective. Recall the fall of 2008. The financial markets seized up, credit froze, the economy went into a nosedive. Almost every metric by which we judge the economy moved into its darkest territory since the 1930s. And this was happening at the worst possible time. A lame-duck US president faced an opposition party in charge of both houses of Congress. It was a recipe for paralysis and inaction.

In fact, the administration and Congress collaborated fast and well, and within two weeks, Congress appropriated a staggering \$700 billion to rescue the financial system. As the Bush administration left office, it worked closely with the incoming Obama team, which continued the basic framework of the rescue, modifying some aspects of the Bush programs and adding others.

Both groups worked carefully with the Federal Reserve, the lead player in this drama, which acted aggressively and creatively. Democrats like Barney Frank supported the Bush administration. George W. Bush put aside his ideological blinders and massively intervened in the economy.

As with any successful policy, it is now easy to say that it was unnecessary or overdone. At the time, of course, the dominant criticism was that the rescue effort was too weak and the fiscal stimulus was too small. As with all emergencies, one can always suggest, in retrospect, that more sophisticated strategies could have been taken. And the measures that were adopted may lead to other problems over time, such as inflation. But faced with the distinct possibility of an economic depression, Congress, the administration, and the Fed all worked together and brought stability to the system. In a crisis, they responded. Why? Precisely because it was a crisis.

It is something about America that allows us to react to a crisis with astonishing speed. Think of Pearl Harbor, or even 9/11. Whatever one may think of the Bush administration's later strategy, in the weeks

after 9/11 both parties came together and put in place important policies -- getting international cooperation in making counterterrorism a top priority, improving safety on airplanes and in airports, tracking terrorists and their money, chasing Al Qaeda.

These actions have helped to keep terrorists on the run and continue to make it difficult to plan and execute spectacular attacks.

Now, to see the weakness of the American system, consider the past week or two and the debacle of the health-care debate. It is demonstrably clear that the US health-care system is on an unsustainable path. If current trends continue, health care will consume 40% of the national economy by 2050. The problem is that this is a slow and steady decline, producing no crisis, no Pearl Harbor, no 9/11. As a result, we seem incapable of grappling with it seriously.

It's not as if the problems aren't apparent to everyone, whatever your political persuasion. Costs are rising so fast that every day, more than 10,000 Americans lose their insurance coverage. In 1993, 61% of small businesses provided health insurance for their employees. Now that number is down to 38%.

Larger firms face greater and greater health-care costs. And yet, Americans do worse on almost every health measure than most advanced industrial countries, which spend about half as much on health care

per person and have proportionately more elderly people.

The political debate that is taking place is unreal, with conservatives suggesting that Obama is endorsing euthanasia and murder boards, and turning America into Russia. (I guess they haven't noticed that Russia isn't communist anymore.) The lack of serious discussion is a tragedy, because the Democrats' proposals leave much to be desired. They include only a few, vague measures to rein in costs, and the chief one -- a medical board -- assumes that Congress will cede massive powers to five unelected people who would have the power to deny people treatments and drugs.

The likely scenario is that expanded coverage and new benefits will be enacted, while the cuts and curbs will be pushed off to be tackled another day. Health care is the nation's most serious long-term problem. But think of Social Security, government pension liabilities, state -- government deficits, and energy dependence, and you face the same issue.

Each one of these problems is getting worse by the day, and yet the political system seems unable to take them on and make major reforms. On these very important issues, America is caught in a downward spiral. It makes you wish for a crisis.

Zakaria is the bestselling author of *The Post-American World*.

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