

IGP's directive against tender violence

Better late than never

THE IGP's warning to his under command that their failure to check tender-related violence in future would make them liable for punishment is welcome news. He has instructed the police to go after anyone, irrespective of political affiliation, who attempts to create a law and order problem, particularly related with submission of tenders.

While we commend the IGP for his stand, we wonder whether the warning has come too late and whether or not the reaction is too little given the grave damage the many instances of tender snatching by the appendages of the AL, since it assumed power to run the government, has done to its image.

It is a dismal picture that has brought shame to the notion of good governance when one sees the blatant inaction of the police when it comes to the question of taking action against the BCL or the Jubo League cadres engaged in snatching tender boxes or preventing others from dropping bids for a government work by force.

In fact, the situation has come to such a pass that it has become an unwritten stricture that everyone other than those belonging to the ruling party cadres or those not being sponsored by them, has forfeited automatically the right to participate in government tenders. The state of affairs had degenerated into such a situation that the police was constrained to suggest that the tender boxes be kept in the thana or the office of the police super. And the matter has degenerated to such a state that intra-cadre rivalry of the BCL / Chattra League over dominating the tender business has resulted in deaths and injuries.

We wonder why the IGP was constrained to pass such an order when it is the normal function of the police to maintain law and order and go after those that are trying to break it irrespective of the party the offenders belong to. And why did he have to wait for orders from the highest tier of government before reacting?

We would hope that the law enforcing agencies will be more proactive and not wait for orders from the political authority to do what they are bound by their terms of reference to do anyway. This is not the first time we have heard the government talking of going after the law breakers cutting across party lines. However, their commitment to improve law and order must be translated into substantive action and the police must be allowed to function without political interference if the rule of law is to be established in its truest sense

The death of a president

Lech Kaczynski's belief in democracy was all

THE death of Polish President Lech Kaczynski, his wife and scores of senior Polish government officials in a plane crash on Saturday is a tragedy that has stunned not only the people of Poland but also people across the world. That the crash occurred even as the president and his team were on their way to mark the 70th anniversary of the massacre of 20,000 Polish soldiers in the Katyn forest by Soviet forces makes the tragedy doubly heart-rending. More important is the fact that the plane crash has left almost the entire Polish government bereft of its key figures. It is one of those tragic instances which, in hindsight, leave a good number of thoughts for people to mull over. Fundamental among these thoughts is whether it is wise for a large team of government figures, in any country, to travel together. The probability of disaster overtaking the entire team becomes very real. In the Polish case, a combination of weather conditions and an inability on the part of the authorities to consider the chances of a disaster has now led to unmitigated tragedy.

Lech Kaczynski's career reads like, indeed is, the story of a man who consistently believed in the freedom of the individual. With his twin brother Jaroslaw, he demonstrated early on his opposition to communism in Poland during the days of the Cold War. As part of the Solidarity movement in the early 1980s, he was close to Lech Walesa and went to prison for his beliefs when the communist Jaruzelski regime imposed martial law in the country. With the crumbling of totalitarianism, Kaczynski went on to serve Poland's democratic government but often ran into trouble because of his consistency of belief in the rights of the individual. His mentor Walesa dismissed him from the government, but Kaczynski always found a way of coming back, thanks to the rapport he had established over the years with the masses. As a popular mayor of Warsaw, he saw his possibilities for presidential office brighten over a period of time. Of course, at a point he and his brother, who for some time was prime minister, ran into criticism but that did little to dent the president's popularity.

We mourn the death of President Kaczynski, his wife and the members of his delegation. Our sympathies go out to the people of Poland. We believe that with its democratic system in place, Poland will emerge from the tragedy stronger and more confident about its place in the world, a goal towards which its late president worked ceaselessly.

Whither law and order?



Politicians, members of the civil society and all concerned will have to be more responsive and reactive to this relentless slide in the law and order situation. The luxury of aloofness will not help, for in the long run no one will be able to escape the consequences.

SYED FATTAHUL ALIM

IN the past, the government and the media used to express a lot of concern about the downward slide in the law and order situation. Of late, though the expression of such concerns is fewer in

number, reports in the media on violence in all its forms is rather on the rise.

A quick look at the front page of any newspaper on any day will make this glaringly evident. In the major dailies last Saturday, for example, one would find a number of such reports that tell of worrying

developments on the law and order front.

Take, for example, the arson attack on and looting of shops and factories by a gang of criminals in broad daylight at Kamrangirchar in the city. And the hooligans did their job unchallenged and finally were able to get away with their crime with impunity.

According to the locals, the motive of the attack was either to collect illegal tolls or to grab the land on which the factories and shops are situated. What is surprising in this case is that the police, to all appearances, remained unaware about the incident, though some 10 fire service engines from Sadarghat, Lalbagh and Palashi stations went there and worked hard to put out the fires.

Mercifully, the local ruling party lawmaker Quamrul Islam, who is also the state minister for law, was prompt enough to visit the spot and give assurance to the effect that the criminals involved would be punished. Talking to this paper, he even went so far as to admit that some ruling party men were involved in the incident.

One would appreciate the spirit and activism of the local lawmaker visiting the scene of the crime and his utterance of assurance to the victims. His personal initiative in the matter aside, any critical observer would not fail to notice the failure of police itself to reach the spot in time and catch the arsonists and looters in the act.

The police's failure in timely intervention to prevent a crime from happening or bringing the criminals to book is just one side of the story. For, in cases where political string pulling comes in the way, the police has really little to do, except, however, when some overzealous officers in the police administration themselves have their own axe to grind in the matter.

Anyway, this particular incident aside, the objective of the discussion is more about the rising curve of violence and crime in society than to underscore the police's failure in timely intervention in the incidents, in the first place. However, it should be noted here that police failure is an important element in the matter as it contributes to emboldening the criminals to get away with their evil acts.

The incident referred to is only the tip of the iceberg. In fact, such stories are the stuff of the print and electronic media nowa-

days. Some may not like to accept such presentation of the reports on violence and crime in the media and take it all with a grain of salt. They may even blame it on the so-called "negativism" in our news culture.

But how can facts themselves be termed as something negative, if they really happen on the ground? One needs to face facts, if one means to find a way out of the situation obtaining in society.

How do our politicians or some people in the administrations usually react when such reports on the ascending curve of crimes and violence is brought to their notice?

Even if they may not be entirely dismissive, they are, however, often apt at making immediate comparisons with some highly developed countries, especially with their big cities, where crime rates are far higher than in Bangladesh. But such comparisons are uncalled-for, simply because the realities of those countries and those of Bangladesh are worlds apart.

Moreover, though in some cases their large cities may have records of higher incidence of crime than in Dhaka or in other major cities of Bangladesh, the fact remains that they have a far better record of their law enforcers' promptness and efficiency in bringing those criminals to justice.

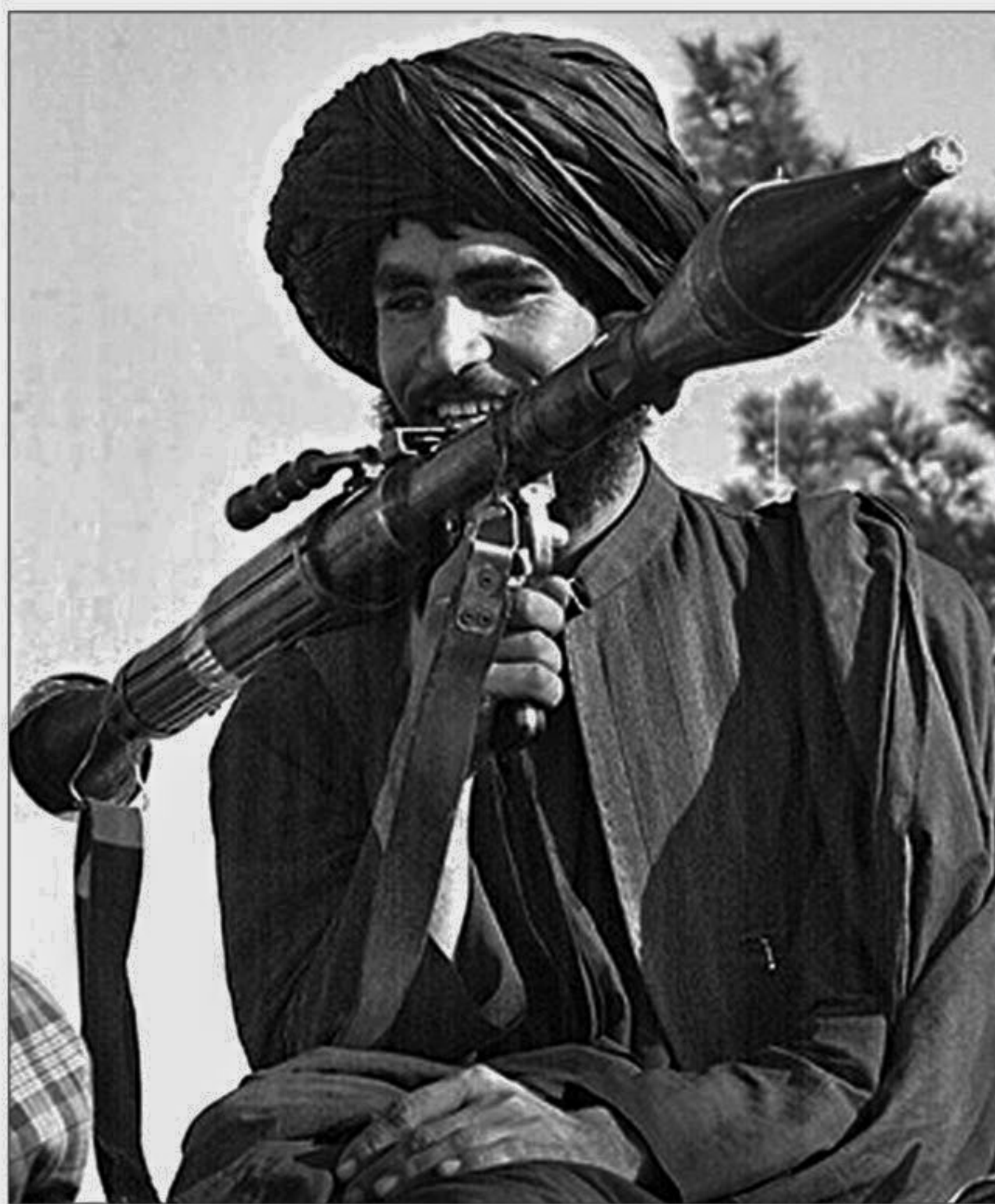
The screaming headlines in the media on the growing number of violent incidents like harassment of young girls by wicked youths at the street corners leading to unwanted deaths of the girls, looting and arson in broad daylight under the very nose of the law-enforcers, grabbing of forestlands and rivers, violence and killing over tenders, murders, whether gratuitous or for money, are all the telltale signs of a society that is getting brutalised. The dangerous trend has to be averted at all costs.

The police or the government, for that matter, cannot by themselves handle this colossal task.

Politicians, members of the civil society and all concerned will have to be more responsive and reactive to this relentless slide in the law and order situation. The luxury of aloofness will not help, for in the long run no one will be able to escape the consequences.

Syed Fattahul Alim is a senior journalist.

The key to defeating Islamic extremism



Clearly, people will be reluctant to get involved in any program if they have the slightest suspicion that it is feeding information to the security services, and that their details will appear on some database.

AZEEM IBRAHIM

ACROSS-PARTY committee of MPs has just finished a six-month investigation into the government's anti-radicalisation programme.

It is supposed to help Muslims stand up to any young people who are tempted by extremist pervasions of Islam into violence, and to encourage them to turn away from that path. Its conclusion? It's not working. Worse, in fact, the committee claims it is actually doing exactly the opposite of what it was meant to do.

The main problem the MPs found was that most Muslims regard schemes funded

by the programme as a way of covertly policing the Islamic community. They argue its methods leave many feeling "alienated and stigmatised." At the same time, many community cohesion projects that are seeing some successes in their fight against extremism are feeling "tainted" by their use of government money, which reduces their credibility and arms their critics.

This is, unfortunately, not surprising. Here are three simple lessons which the government and the police could learn to help the strategy work better in the future.

First, trust must be earned. That also means that police and politicians alike

must understand how they are eroding it. Aside from foreign policy, number one on the list is data. Clearly, people will be reluctant to get involved in any program if they have the slightest suspicion that it is feeding information to the security services, and that their details will appear on some database. If that security service is foreign, especially American, the danger to trust is even greater.

And yet that is what has happened. The Independent reported on 1 April that personal information concerning the private lives of almost 1,000 British Muslim university students was given to the US intelligence agencies.

After the Christmas Day bombing attempt on a plane flying from Amsterdam to Detroit, which was carried out by a former president of the University College London Islamic Society, police seemed to have thought it appropriate to collect data on all students who were members of that society.

Detectives visited the campus in January to ask for the information. The society's president said that, when asked what they would do with the information, they said they would share the data with other intelligence agencies if asked. Of course, the police have the right to use information on people they are investigating. But they do not have the right to use information on people they are not investigating. But that is exactly what they were asking for. The justification that the subjects of the data were members of the same student society as the would-be Christmas Day bomber is unbelievably flimsy.

If you ever wanted proof that the deep-rooted British love of liberty lives in the breasts of these young Muslims, there is no better quote than that of Sayyida Mehrali, 19, a first-year neuroscience student. "It is a bit extreme that my information has been passed on to the Metropolitan Police," she told one paper, "as I joined UCL after Umar Farouk had left. There was never any opportunity to meet this individual and I think it's shocking that they have my details on a database." How do the police argue with that?

The point, though, is the damage it does to trust. Many Muslims told the communities and local government committee they believed the purpose of the government's programme was to "spy" on Asian communities. Lesson one is that trust between the police and the Muslim community must be earned. Operational decisions on a day-to-day level must be made in that context.

The second lesson is that the police must not blend engagement and intelligence-gathering. For engagement to be successful, people have to feel that the police are

on their side, providing them with a service and protecting them as a community. This is about the police winning trust.

But for intelligence-gathering to work, individuals or groups from the community have to be willing to come forward and tell the police of any suspicions they have. This is about the police asking for co-operation. You can't do both at once. You have to build trust before you can ask a favour. Many in the Muslim community found themselves at events around the country with a representative of the police trying hard to win their trust. This was the right move on the part of the police.

But at the same time, they were being asked to report on any neighbours, friends or even members of their family who were acting suspiciously. This is like someone you have never met coming up to you, engaging in five minutes' worth of small talk, and then asking you your bank details. You can only expect co-operation once trust has been built.

I do believe that the strategy was carried out in good faith. Indeed, I do not blame the police. They are just proceeding by trial and error. But trying to gather intelligence at the same time as trying to engage communities for the first time was an error.

The third lesson is that the credibility of Muslim leaders and teachers is essential. Much of the strategy involved doling out money to Muslim educators who did not have credibility with the community. Thus, the government money further tainted them. Through the Solas programme a programme of Islamic engagement which I and my friends have set up Islamic educators with impeccable credentials teach young Muslims that true Islam is about peace and justice, and inoculate them against those perversions of the faith that want to present our religion as one of violence.

So, community engagement in the UK has been flawed. But it is important to put the programme's failures in context. On this, the UK as a country is far ahead of the US, where this kind of active police engagement with Muslim communities does not happen.

It is another sign that, for all the failings of the programme, we should not lose sight of the fact that we are lucky to have a police force which at least understands the importance of making an effort in this area.

Azeem Ibrahim is research scholar at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, Research Fellow, International Security Program, a Board Member of the Institute of Social Policy Understanding and the Chairman and Chief Executive of Ibrahim Associates.

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