

BCL criminality now down to arson!

Will the govt and party take grip of the deteriorating scenario?

THE news that BCL activities set a CU teachers' bus on fire to press home their five-point demand is alarming, to say the least. The BCL appears to have decided to clinch everything through applying brute force even if it comes to their own teachers.

What haven't they done in the last 15 months? Seats at the university dorms have been turned into their private preserve; tenders are manipulated; and, to cap it all, they are committing all other types of offences with complete impunity. Obviously, the list will be further lengthened if we consider the BCL's internecine feuds that often lead to bloodletting. Again, killing each other does not make their activities less repugnant to the academic atmosphere.

The sudden and violent outbursts of BCL rowdism are often triggered by the authorities' failing to meet their unlawful demands. In the latest instance, the VC of Chittagong University had reportedly turned down their proposal of setting up some stalls on the campus on Pahela Baishakh to do business. Infuriated by the VC's decision, they started a movement to oust him! Now, the question is who should run the university? The BCL goons or the VC? Or indeed do the education ministry, the government or the ruling party feel any pinch of responsibility?

One cannot but keep on asking who is actually responsible, apart from the BCL activists, for the situation now prevailing in the academic arena? The ruling AL's stand is manifestly not to go beyond issuing sermonic statements. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's exhortations and warnings have produced no results; on the contrary, these have only helped increase the sense of impunity. The BCL could overlook what is being said from the top and continues, rather blissfully, to indulge in criminal activities.

It is clear that the government is totally oblivious of the BCL's nefarious activities which now include a crime like arson. The law enforcers are doing nothing, or apparently not asked to do anything, to curb the illegal activities. Such activities have already started wreaking havoc on the government's credibility and effectiveness. It is not an overstatement to say that when the ruling party fails to control its cadres, particularly those involved in crime, a general surge in the crime situation is likely to follow. And the result can be free-for-all criminalisation of society with the government pushed to a point of looking on helplessly. What a disaster that will be! But it is our firm belief that if the government and ruling party are serious and determined to contain BCL's predatory activities, they surely can.

Reclaiming occupied city's canals

JS directives should lead to concrete action

THE directive of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Land Ministry on reclaiming the canals of the city now under the occupation of different individuals and organisations couldn't have come a day later. It is a natural extension of the earlier action by the government against river grabbers.

Reassuringly, the Jatiya Sangsad (JS) body appears to be serious about freeing the city's canals from grabbers as it warned that a joint drive would be launched involving different government bodies concerned in case the unauthorised occupiers fail to comply with the notice of the Deputy Commissioner (DC) in that connection.

Belated though, the issue taken up by the JS body is a serious matter for the city's stifled drainage system. The listed 39 old canals, which the Land Survey department has demarcated, once provided the natural way to drain off the waste materials of the city thereby keeping water logging at bay. Admittedly, some well-thought-out steps have been envisaged to begin with, but what next?

It is suspected that the grabbers have They also have a deep nexus with some corrupt elements in the administration and with their help they are apt at faking up documents to justify their illegal occupation. This aspect should be looked into for a sustainable eviction of illegal grabbers.

A cautionary note may not be out of place here. Given the fact that the grabbers are powerful quarters, initial moves and the promises made by JS body to free the city's canals should be matched by effective actions. For in the last Wednesday's Daily Star report on canal grabbing, for example, the chief of the JS standing committee on Land Ministry has admitted that different government institutions including DCC are among the illegal grabbers of the city's canal. In that case, the question naturally arises about the efficacy of the promised joint drive against canal grabbers where DCC itself is a defaulter!

So, to make this latest move by the JS body a success, it needs to get to the root of the problem and take concrete action programme supported by appropriate legal actions. And before everything else, it would be necessary to clean the proverbial exorcist's bag of the ghosts already hiding in it.



Loyalty in the ranks

For the military, commitment to democracy and unqualified loyalty to constituted civil authorities is absolute, and to devise the best means to inculcate that is an essential function of military leadership.

SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN

REPORTEDLY, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Defence has recommended "consolidating the armed forces" loyalty to the country's constitution to prevent military takeovers in future.

Obviously, the idea has been compelled by past experiences of repeated military takeovers, and the reason has been attributed to lack of commitment to the constitution. It is indeed an interesting recommendation, more so because the committee has suggested that it be done through effective training.

Of the parliamentary committee's recommendations we know about another, which is related to the matter of organising a reserve force and a national service to support it. And we shall deal briefly with both.

It is welcome news that Bangladesh may soon have a defence policy. Reportedly, the draft is awaiting final approval, having gone through the scrutiny of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Defence and incorporating several of its recommendations.

It is good news indeed for everybody,

particularly the military, that after long 38 years, and for the first time, there will be a document governing the macro matters governing the armed forces and the defence of the country.

The government must be lauded for the effort. Needless to say, a defence policy helps streamline many things regarding national defence. What we have seen till now is super ad hocism at best. While that helps meet the functional requirement of the services on a day-to-day basis, the long-term focus, on the need and development of the military keeping the defence needs of the country in view and in harmony with the resources of the country, gets distorted.

A policy on defence is all the more necessary since the operations of our armed forces are no longer restricted to within our borders, but also, given our involvement with UN peacekeeping duties, in which we are the largest contributor, it has acquired a transnational character, and where a host of issues, including interoperability with other armed forces, need to be addressed.

However, that is not to say that the military had got it wrong all these years. In the absence of a formal policy, formulation of which is the preserve of the government, the defence needs of the country have been

reasonably addressed, although not as efficiently as might have been done under a set of well-defined guidelines.

The policy is yet to be finalised and, understandably, we do not have the details as yet except for some bits and pieces appearing in the media from time to time. It would, therefore, be entirely appropriate that once the policy is adopted a defence whitepaper is published laying out the essential elements of the policy in detail, except of course on matters relating to sensitive national issues. And one hopes that it would help clarify many doubts.

The idea of a reserve force complements the idea of "national" defence, which must be the cornerstone of our policy. And to support the idea of a national reserve force there is no other option than to have the national service system.

But before a reserve force is formed through the scheme, the government must formulate a reserve policy, which to my knowledge does not exist. All retirees must accept reserve liability up to a certain age that the government should determine, and that will help make up for the deficit in manpower during emergency.

The issue of loyalty, or indeed consolidating loyalty, is a rather more complex and sensitive matter. In fact, experts and military historians term loyalty as the most important of all the military virtues. And since it is also a much-abused concept, and one which lends itself to various definitions, allusions to it must be made with utmost care and after deliberate consideration. And in this regard one wonders

whether one can actually be "taught" loyalty.

Loyalty has no gradation. Like pregnancy one is either loyal or not. But that is perhaps a very simplistic approach. What leaders at all levels, including the political masters, must understand is that loyalty has many dimensions, and according to one author "loyalty within itself contains a number of internal conflicts because a person has not one loyalty but a packet of loyalties which may, from time to time, conflict with one another." What if these cannot be reconciled?

Soldiers affirm loyalty to the flag and the constitution, which are the symbols of sovereignty of the nation, and which is manifested in the person of the president of the republic. And while for a soldier loyalty means following the commands of his superiors, the exception must not be lost on us. The exception, added in the British system since 1769, was that the command has to be lawful. And the definition of "lawful order" had been thrashed out in the US through a judgment in 1813 and later through the remarks of the US Supreme Court Chief Justice in 1851 in the case of Mitchell vs. Harmony, and also in Germany since 1872.

For the military, commitment to democracy and unqualified loyalty to constituted civil authorities is absolute, and to devise the best means to inculcate that is an essential function of military leadership.

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A costly hesitancy

The Iranians are difficult and drive a hard bargain -- but they look out for their interests -- and we can do the same even as we reach out to them. Two strong Muslim neighbours could become a strong community of power. Instead we continue to undermine our real interests as our leaders kowtow to US imperialist demands.

SHIREEN M MAZARI

AS one sees developments in Pakistan and Iran today, it is sad to note the inability of Pakistan to get out of its mindset and attitude relating to Iran formulated in the recent past, despite a highly altered environment that came into being post-9/11. The result is that Pakistan is unable or unwilling to take advantage of the new outreach by Iran towards Pakistan -- be it the offer to supply electricity on to the national grid or the IPI pipeline project which may have been inked but still awaits operationalisation. And there are other potential projects that are being ignored, even though Iran, like China, offers viable alternatives of cooperation to the rather costly US relationship. In order to overcome the psychological barriers and hesitancy to act, we need to understand our decision-makers mindsets on this vital issue.

Pakistan-Iran relations have been on an uneven keel since the Revolution in Iran and the advent of General Zia in Pakistan. Having looked into this issue for over 10 years now, some major points that have prevented a closer and more mutually beneficial relationship from evolving, can be identified. But the problem is that while the environment has altered, Pakistan remains stuck in an earlier period of mistrust and suspicion regarding Iran. The irony is that it is the Iranians who have had more cause for continuing with these

suspicious and mistrust, for a number of reasons, but they have moved beyond far more than our bureaucracies in Pakistan.

And, at the end of the day, the civil and military bureaucracies have a much larger say in foreign policy making than we realise -- partly because this field draws little interest from the elected leaders beyond the freebie travels; and for another most are not well-versed in the facts.

From a Pakistani perspective, the revolution in Iran raised question marks in Pakistan because General Zia's own religious proclivities and the encouragement of a particular sectarian brand of thinking that was being inculcated within the establishment. Also, the US factor added to the distancing from Iran, because we were about to plunge into a US-led and funded war to get the Soviets out of Afghanistan.

Again, given the closeness of the Pakistan establishment to the Shah's Iran, the revolutionary regime was not understood by them nor did they feel comfortable with it. That Pakistan was also to become a proxy battleground for sectarian wars being funded from outside further added to the cooling of Pakistan-Iran ties. Finally, revolutionary Iran itself did not show any warmth towards Pakistan. Perhaps, the final nail in the coffin of close Pakistan-Iran relations was our devoted support to the Taliban regime in Afghanistan.

From the Iranian side, of course, relations with Pakistan deteriorated further

over the years because of the violence inflicted on Iranian citizens -- from students to diplomats -- in Pakistan and its failure to deal effectively against the perpetrators of this violence against Iranian citizens in a supposedly "brotherly" Muslim state! Unlike Pakistani governments and its establishment, the Iranian state lays great value on the lives of its citizens. Until the hanging of Ganji's killer by Pakistan, the only issue Iranians were interested in discussing with Pakistanis was the violence against them that was taking place in their country.

Economic impediments were placed in Pakistan's way in terms of export of fruit and rice and the positioning on both sides was hardening as was evident to anyone having to deal with the other side. But these moves were a symptom of the problem only.

So, there is today still a pervasive, in this scribe's experience, if not an anti-Iran than a suspicious-of-Iran mindset that dominates the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and some of the intelligence set-ups. References are constantly made to the difficulties the Iranians put up in the way of export facilities across to Central Asia and how the Iranians play hardball. The hostility is not difficult to fathom but it has been most destructive of Pakistan's interests. And now the US factor has once again become a critical impediment also.

The establishment and MFA's positions are so strong that individual institutional and political leaders have not been able to make much headway even when they have sought to! And whenever one raises the Iran issue with members of the MFA or the intelligence set-ups, one gets a tirade that relates more to attitudes than anything substantive and there is always a focus on "arrogance" of the Iranians. While this trait is certainly correct and we have all experienced it at some time or the other -- the urge to be "imperial" towards Pakistanis, have our civil and military bureaucracies

never put themselves in the Iranians shoes and tried to see how they have felt in seeing Pakistanis kill their diplomats, kidnap them and kill their students. Despite all this, there has been no counter violence against Pakistanis in Iran. Should that not be commended?

Even our present ambassador is frustrated by a lack of positive response from his government. For instance, the Iranians have built a rail and road link right up to Taftan -- the border with Pakistan. But there is nothing on our side in terms of these communication means, which would allow us access across into Central Asia and Europe. Apparently the Iranians would gladly help fund the road network from Taftan into Pakistan but our side is silent on this. The electricity issue has already been reiterated in the media but our leaders are unresponsive.

Our leaders are so fearful of paying an official visit Iran that neither the PM nor the president have gone - the latter having only gone to an ECO Summit and only after he was reassured that the Turkish president would also be attending -- to visit this most important neighbour with whom we have no conflict and have cultural and historic ties. How many times have the same leaders hopped off to Europe and the US and what have they gotten for all these trips?

Then we wonder why India has slipped into the vacuum and now everyone in Iran eats "Indian" food and listens to Indian music. Even the musicians in the restaurants know only "Hindi" songs! Yes, the Iranians are difficult and drive a hard bargain -- but they look out for their interests -- and we can do the same even as we reach out to them. Two strong Muslim neighbours could become a strong community of power. Instead we continue to undermine our real interests as our leaders kowtow to US imperialist demands.

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