

Government directives to police to be professional

It must really mean what it says

WE are happy that the government has directed the police to go for tough action against the unruly elements of the Chhatra League. We are happy too that police officers have been told to act professionally, that a failure to do so will result in disciplinary action against them. On the face of it, everything seems to be in order. The reality, however, is quite different. It has to do with the political culture that has developed, insidiously, in this country over a long period of time. We have a situation these days where many among the political classes, especially those who ascend to power at given periods, blur the distinction between the party and the government and, again, between the government and the state. That is a perfect instance of myopia. And in our present conditions, it has led to the menace today typified by the Chhatra League.

Now, the fact that the government has asked the police to act professionally while carrying out their responsibilities is not quite matched by the ground realities. Only the other day, senior police officers made their grievances known about the insubordination of their junior officers, whose sense of duty is clearly guided more by their proximity to the politicians they are in regular contact with than by an upholding of professionalism. Besides, all this exhortation by the government about responsibilities and professionalism is in a number of ways clear public posturing on its part. We are convinced that if the government had really meant business, the Chhatra League would have been put on the leash long ago. That these unruly young men continue to damage the image of the government and terrorise the public by their misdeeds only proves that unless the authorities mean what they say and really allow the police to do their work, things will only get worse. The BCL is a test case for the ruling party. Its activities have blackened the idealism once associated with student politics and have patently shown that the Awami League has no control over the organization.

The government must abjure rhetoric and rise above its narrow political considerations. It must see to it that the police are not simply advised to act professionally but that when they get professional, they are rewarded for their performance. It must remember that when one officer fails to do his work because of political pressure, it has a ripple effect that leaves others unable or unwilling to be different. Conversely, if one officer is steadfast in his professionalism, it sends out a powerful message to others to emulate him. Why not adopt the latter as policy since professionalism on the part of the police, of any other body of individuals for that matter, will restore the credibility of those involved. That is easier said than done, though.

To ensure that the police can work without fetters will call for the government to provide the necessary space to the police administration. The government must stand by the police as they do their work. Over a period of time, we believe, it will produce positive and concrete results. But as long as police appointments (read here the recent SP appointments) are made on partisan considerations, the slide will go on. It is time the government meant business where the freedom of the police to conduct business professionally is concerned. Let it up wake up to the grim realities around it.

Wayward buses

Why don't law enforcers get tough on them?

THE front-page photograph of a taxicab crushed between two passenger buses that appeared in this daily on Saturday speaks a thousand words of the horrendous situation prevailing on the roads. The accident occurred when a reckless bus driver hit the taxicab from behind and pushed it under another bus. The accident could have resulted in deaths of the passengers, since such vehicles are run on compressed natural gas, but fortunately people inside and the cab driver only suffered injuries in the process.

Incidence of deaths and serious injuries in road accidents is rising alarmingly in the cities, towns and highways, because of inexperienced drivers, faulty vehicles and lack of implementation of traffic laws and regulations by the authorities concerned. In the absence of strict supervision and monitoring on a regular basis, buses on city roads and inter-district highways pay no heed to speed-limit signs displayed at various points. The tendency to overtake one another on the roads is another factor that often leads to fatal accidents. And what compounds the situation is the fact that often killer drivers flee the scene by bribing the police constables on duty; and those who get caught and are sent to the court manage to get out on bail serving short terms.

The country's media, including The Daily Star, have always been vocal about the wayward buses and trucks and all sorts of vehicles that run without valid papers and fitness certificates. We have been told by the government that there are thousands of unfit vehicles running on the roads but we have not heard as yet if a single one of them has been taken off. Mere dishing out of facts and figures will not improve the chaos that exists on the roads at the moment.

To be candid, the government must bring discipline back on the roads if it wants the cities and towns and highways to remain functional. The capital city is already on its way to becoming dysfunctional as far as traffic management is concerned. We believe people in charge are aware of the grim fact that the number of vehicles in the capital and other district towns is rising defying all rhyme and reason. Therefore, quick implementation of a pragmatic strategy will be able to bail us out of the predicament.

Perils of dancing blindfolded



RAYMOND MEDICI/GETTY IMAGES

At present, our nation is facing a formidable divide which may lead one faction to walk on the tightrope while the counterpart will be glad to dance blindfolded and praise the rhetorical call of the leader (right or wrong). We should expressly impress upon our leadership to save democracy, which is balancing on the edge.

Z.A. KHAN

POLITICS in Bangladesh is getting murkier because of utter disregard of the leadership to the maintenance of ethical values. One observes gradual downward slide of commitment of the leaders with anguish and disdain. Politicians are found more engaged in fostering relationship with the leaders than focusing on public welfare.

The reason behind this unabated degeneration of moral standard is that the leaders are bestowed with unchallenged authority by the party constitution to consider themselves as the bastion of political power. To one's dismay, these leaders have had leadership thrust upon them by familial legacy or by self-seekers, most of whom are devoid of the wisdom and sagacity that are regarded as political capital.

No one down the leadership ladder dares to emerge as a trend setter, rather they are developing a mindset that it is hero-worship that pays dividend which cannot be earned by fulfilling the obligations of social contract. That is why the party activists and supporters dance blind-

folded, hoping to gain their leaders' favours even at the cost of denial and deprivation of our toiling millions.

Skulduggery by the political rank and file has attained such incredible heights that people feel obliged, due to the instigation by leadership, to question the historical claims regarding our way to independence and post independence achievements as if history can be made in one's own way. No one should look at our past with one eye because popular feeling is in favour of two eyes.

So let us not remain engaged in finding arguments, we should rather promote understanding to pave the way for eliciting the people's interest in national political programs regardless of party line and choice of leadership. Leaders who champion the people's cause will find slots to fit in through natural process.

Political parties in Bangladesh must be warned that any evil plot to dispossess the people of their rights to democracy and economics of welfare will be regarded as an act of dislodging a foetus from the mother's womb, which is a heinous crime.

Our leadership, as we know, is

immensely susceptible to moral eclipse due to the prevailing dynamics that fuels greed and gratification, which is gradually distorting the set of rules that is universal.

So, the leadership should be chastised either by despatching them into oblivion -- unless they show sincere eagerness to abandon the path that is tantamount to self-aggrandisement -- or by framing rules to deter them from pursuing acts of disregard and indifference towards the constituents.

Social norms and ethical values evolved over the past couple of decades by leaders, taking advantage of their being emotional anchors, do not seem conducive to development that promises good of the common people. I would assume that there has been enormous erosion of the social fabric. A recent attempt to repair the distorted fabric was doomed to failure.

The reform endeavour was aimed at pressing for an ethical and emotional approach to public welfare. The reason for the failure of bid to push for reform is that it would have clipped the wings of the politicians who dole out favours to their supporters to consolidate their hold on the party and to further their selfish interest.

Without doing much injustice to them, we may assume that for most of the politicians the desire to be elected takes precedence over policy preferences, ethical barriers and moral constraints. Even in the face of public outcry for reforms, legislators take into account the costs and benefits associated with pushing for reform. Does it mean that we should continue to preside over the downhill slide of our values that shroud our pre-liberation aspirations?

Let's begin again

The Bhutan Summit asked all the countries in South Asia to come closer. Prime ministers of India and Pakistan have given a lead by deciding to sit across the table. This demands eschewing mistrust and overcoming past grievances. It may be tough. But let's begin again.

KULDIP NAYAR

ELEVEN-year-old Devika has not yet reconciled to what happened to her on November 26, 2008. She was hit by a bullet and lost her right leg while waiting at a bus terminus. That the gunman, Mohammad Ajmal Kasab, has been found guilty is her personal and emotive issue. She does not know the larger perspective.

However, her father Natwar Lal feels the ends of justice have been met when the only surviving terrorist out of 10, who came from Pakistan to attack Mumbai, was brought to book. His reaction, more or less, represents Indian opinion, although some feel that the media-hyped trial served more as a catharsis than the cry for justice.

Many in India have taken the government to task for spending lakhs of rupees to get the conviction of Kasab, who was seen wielding his AK-47 even on television screens. New Delhi, however, did well in conducting the case methodically lest some should criticise it for having a kangaroo court trial.

Pakistan Foreign Minister Qureshi made an irresponsible remark during an interview to a television network that his government would study the judgment and then make up its mind on Kasab's conviction. Doubting the judiciary will be the beginning of a new chapter of suspicion between the two countries.

After Kasab's conviction, New Delhi expects that Hafiz Sayeed, the Lashkar-e-Toiba chief, who reportedly planned the Mumbai carnage, will soon be arrested and punished. Pakistan's efforts are not consid-

ered adequate on this end. Islamabad's plea that the evidence provided by India is too flimsy to convince the court.

Since New Delhi insists on having given a clinching proof of Sayeed's involvement, it would be better if the entire evidence, including Kasab's statement of admission, was made public for the people to judge.

Unfortunately, the man who has been arrested for planting the bomb at the Times Square in New York is from Karachi. True, he is a naturalised citizen of the US. But people in Pakistan must take the case seriously and come out openly against organisations like Lashkar which train and brainwash the common man in the name of religion.

The public is correct in voicing its criticism against the exoneration of two Indians, also involved in the Kasab case. The judge may not be blamed because he found the only witness "unreliable." It is the police who failed to collect tangible evidence against Fahim Ansari of Mumbai and Sahabuddin Ahmed of Bihar. This does not mean that the attack on Mumbai was carried out only by the Pakistanis and the belatedly-found accomplice, David Headley, an American of Pakistani origin.

There are "sleepers" in India, and the Taliban have their followers in this country. They are active, and it is quite possible that the collaborators in the Mumbai attack were from among the Indian Taliban. They have not yet been traced. But they are there. An operation of Mumbai scale could not have taken place without local help.

In fact, India has discovered to its horror that there is a network of Hindu Taliban as

well. They are connected with the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and said to be responsible for the bomb blasts at Ajmer Dargah (2007), Mecca Masjid at Hyderabad (2007), Malegaon (2008) and Goa (2009). The connection of a BJP-run state government has also come to light. Rajasthan home minister Shanti Dhariwal has alleged that the state police under former chief minister Vasundhara Raje of the BJP kept the involvement of Hindutva outfits under wraps.

Authoritative sources at New Delhi suspect that Madhya Pradesh, where the BJP government is in power, has become a safe sanctuary for the Hindu outfits. The Maharashtra police consider that the Hindu Jagran Manch from Indore in the state is responsible for the Malegaon blasts which killed 37 Muslims.

Top police official Hemant Karkare is alleged to have been eliminated by Hindu extremists when he had collected certain leads on the involvement of Hindu organisations in the attacks across the country. Even the attack on the Samjortha Express (2007) is considered a handiwork of Hindu terrorists.

That Pakistan is itself in the midst of terrorism, suffering a blast here and an attack there, is worrisome for India, particularly when there is genuine fear that terrorism may pour into the country through the Wagah border. The Taliban have said that India was their "real target." Therefore, Islamabad must take into account the point made by New Delhi that the terrorists come from Pakistan and do not go from India to Pakistan.

This perception of India was reportedly the main topic when Prime Minister Manmohan Singh met Prime Minister Yousuf Gilani at Thimpu in Bhutan a few days ago. New Delhi has the assurance of Islamabad that the latter would not allow its soil to be used by the terrorists to go across the border. The good news is that foreign secretaries of both the countries are expected to pick up the thread from where

We should no longer resign ourselves to our fate and witness continuance of deprivation which fuels desperation. We want our society to promote harmonic convergence. We should not bring up issues that drive a wedge in our society, rather we should take positive initiatives so that the prevailing economic and political divide is narrowed down.

Empowerment, freedom from servitude, equitable distribution of state resources, arrest of biodegradation, protection of life and liberty of the people and combating escalating militancy should be the concern of the leadership of all hues so that the negative indices that reflect under or non-development can be reduced to the minimum.

Building up a nation needs patience, accumulated wisdom and the will to perform. To get the nation and the succeeding generations to be involved in nation building we need committed leadership that pursues positive politics and is amenable to suggestions that promise national welfare, no matter where it comes from.

Our Jatiya Shangshad, which is supposed to be the epitome of our democratic image, should be more focussed on deliberating on current issues concerning development and should not remain engaged in such discussions that fan acrimony and disagreement. What is wrong in listening to those who oppose an issue on genuine grounds? The leadership should be willing to accept each others' faults as a necessary complement of their merit and commitment.

A broad majority of our people are threatened with the dangers of undue death due to natural vagaries, food and ethnic insecurity, and incremental divide between the rich and the poor. The leadership must guard against possible squandering of the future of our innocent people by relentlessly pursuing four-dimensional interactions. We should never forget that weakness comes from division and strength comes from unity. It is said that even a sheet of paper becomes lighter when lifted by two people.

At present, our nation is facing a formidable divide which may lead one faction to walk on the tightrope while the counterpart will be glad to dance blindfolded and praise the rhetorical call of the leader (right or wrong). We should expressly impress upon our leadership to save democracy, which is balancing on the edge.

Our nation is no longer prepared to continue to sit on the fence. So let us overcome the glaring political differences as they are transitory, and which I believe will be resolved over time. My humble suggestion is that we should live as comrades, or else we will perish, and take a vow not to dance blindfolded so that one feels encouraged to call spade a spade which will help democracy to settle on a firm foundation.

This will be possible only if we are convinced by our leadership that need of the hour is not pliant followers but people with commitment to cultivate free expression of heart and mind without fear of reprisal.

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the two prime ministers have left it off.

It is heartening to notice that the Indian media has not mentioned the forthcoming talks with Pakistan while singling out its establishment for having "planned and executed" the attack on Mumbai. It becomes incumbent on civil societies in both the countries to put pressure on their governments to resume talks quickly.

Qureshi has rightly said that it hardly matters what nomenclature is given to the talks, "substantive" or "composite," it is the "spirit" that is important. One thing the two sides must resolve is that they would not snap the talks, however wide their differences.

The result of talks will depend on the groundswell of public opinion. People-to-people contact should go beyond the cliché it has become. It should really mean the easing of difficulties the people from both countries encounter to go from one side to the other.

Intelligence agencies will have to be reined in so that they do not question every traveler. High Commissions on both sides should not have mindset bureaucracy. New Delhi, which considers itself more liberal than Islamabad, is insistent that students and faculty coming from Pakistan to the South Asia University should undergo police reporting daily and not travel to more than three cities mentioned on the visa.

I know that most people in India and Pakistan are prisoners of the past. They have deep, entrenched mistrust against each other. They tend to see even positive steps in a negative manner. The media makes a mountain out of a molehill.

The Bhutan Summit asked all the countries in South Asia to come closer. Prime ministers of India and Pakistan have given a lead by deciding to sit across the table. This demands eschewing mistrust and overcoming past grievances. It may be tough. But let's begin again.

Kuldip Nayar is an eminent Indian columnist.