

Why do police stray into trigger-happy mode?

They should be trained in standard crowd control methods

THE death of a school student in an accident on the Dhaka-Mawa highway on Wednesday has had a backlash of a stupendous proportion breaking into a series of incendiary incidents. At first, there was agitation over a demand for constructing speed breaker, this led to clashes between crowds and the police which culminated in the police opening fire. The post-accident casualties were considerable as a young man died, 25 were injured including eight policemen while 16 sustained bullet injuries.

In facing the public after a serious mishap the police react in a familiar and predictable fashion. Almost like automatons they would first chase the crowd, wield batons charging at them mercilessly, fire tear gas shells and rubber bullets and when in their assessment things go beyond their control, and they feel scared, they open fire unmindful of the consequences. That is an extreme measure that the police always strive not to use. Do they?

Ours is a highly populous country with a huge density of population, so that mobs gravitate to any sight of accident and go on a rampage, transport-bashing and barricading traffic for hours. A public behaviour that is getting into a ballistic pattern. Given such mob psyche can there be any room for antiquated crowd control methods? Specialised skills and techniques need to be instilled into the police force through training and re-training programmes at par with countries of similar orientations. It is our firm opinion that this aspect of crowd control should form a major component of police reform and re-equipment along modernist lines. Unless this is done such crowd behaviour and rabid police response will continue to happen and governance would be the worst casualty.

The angry reaction of the public is somewhat understandable. This is for the fact that reckless and incompetent driving is commonplace on the highways and lethal accidents are never accounted for nor the culprit ever convicted. There is no speed limit, either prescribed by law, or supervised by any patrol police near bazars and schools located on the sides of highways. So the demand for speed breaker was quite justified and all that perhaps could have quelled their temper within limits was an authentic assurance for it, punishment to the perpetrator and a commitment towards having the precautions in place on the busy highway.

We want the whole series of incidents centring around the schoolboy's death and death of another person and the firing mayhem investigated focusing on the role of the police.

Disappearing city wetlands

Need for a specific plan to address the severe ecological challenge

A study by the Department of Urban and Regional Planning of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET) has dreadfully quantified the overall loss of wetlands in the capital city at 40 percent in the last two decades. This was revealed in a roundtable organised by Save Environment Movement (SEM), Jano Udyog Jatiya Committee and Institute for Environment and Development.

The widespread loss of wetlands has had telling effects on the environment of the metropolis. The drainage channels have been lost, flood-flow zones clogged, water logging has exacerbated and ground water recharge has been reduced.

The causes are far too obvious to be cited: indiscriminate filling up of low lands by expropriation and grabbing by application of force or under the guise procured authorisation through collusion with authorities. Because these are khas lands and public resource, they have been easy targets for grabbing by influential people. Vested quarters have maintained slums in these vulnerable areas or set up commercial outlets to let out through sheer muscle power against which something as nebulous as an environment authority has had no defence against whatsoever. Neither the Department of Environment (DoE) nor RAJUK nor DCC with its complement of ward commissioners ever raised a finger against such degrading acts of upsetting ecological balance of the city.

Now the task is three-fold for the government consisting of surveying the lost wetlands, reclaiming them as far as practicable through excavation and eviction, taking adequate precautions to preempt any further clogging of lowlands and finally networking them to connect with the surrounding rivers.

Experts have very rightly focussed on protection of existing wetlands and water bodies to save eastern Dhaka from floods that it is so prone to. At least 40 percent of the drainage catchment area must be 'delineated and protected as wetlands and water bodies under the Wetland Conservation Act 2000', asserted a BUET expert. Of the 40 percent, a substantial percentage may be provided for by means of ponds or lakes, some of which might have gone derelict needing re-digging and rest to be freshly dug out and aesthetically maintained. Principally though, we need 46 square km of protected natural wetlands for retention of storm water. Rain water harvesting may be dovetailed to the overall programme as a way of checking water logging as well as a source of potable water. In a word, there must be a thorough-bred action plan, mooted, discussed and adopted by the government.

Of performance and corruption

Performance of the corrupt must not be seen with compassion as their performance does not matter positively to the nation. It is flagrantly obvious that the fortune they develop weighs arithmetically much more than they deserve, the injury they commit to nation is geometrically higher than they contribute, and the damage they add to morality is logarithmically greater than the charity they provide to the society.

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WIDESPREAD recognition and public perception prevail that corruption has become the part and parcel of our socio-economic life, simply a culture in Bangladesh. Individual morality, family values, social norms, economic machinery, political discipline, and statutory institutions all have pervasively adjusted with the reality of corruption. General people fear to find any corruption free public space and suspect that anticorruption regime could control corruption within a tolerable range.

People's feelings are not meaningless, as Paulo Mauro, an IMF scholar who finds that when corruption becomes rampant and persistent, it establishes multidimensional bad equilibrium with society, economics and politics, and strategic complementary exists everywhere. People believe "If I reject corruption others would not follow me, rather I will miss my share". In other words, people do not trust themselves, and could not trade off their own corruption benefit with the greater benefit of the society and state.

Does it mean that public offices are counterproductive or stigmatised in Bangladesh? Instead, neglecting major national and international recommendations of privatisation and reduction of treasury functions, governments have been increasing the number and scope of public servants. This article accepts that our government is well aware of the deleterious effects of corruption and committed to eradicate it. But it appears that governments get trapped within the maze or monopoly of public servants, or overvalue the contribution of public services.

It is conceived that corruption and performance have been intertwined and thus broad spectrum "zero tolerance" anticorruption initiatives stumble in

Bangladesh as they precipitates complementary negative effects on administration and economics. Moreover, people question the morality and legitimacy of the anticorruption leadership. Therefore, government should study the performance continuum and should select strategic spaces within the public service to install site specific intervention and leadership.

This article proposes a hypothetical two dimensional matrix of corruption and performance with qualitative magnitude of low, medium and high of both. Performance here includes every lawful service done lawfully, risk taken to establish the public right and to resist the working influence. On the other hand, corruption means all direct or indirect personal gain either cash or kind through violation, manipulation, misappropriation and deprivation of public offices and citizen's rights. The matrix has nine grids. Every grid has its own continuum ranging in quality, quantity, objective and modus of performance or corruption.

Cash Cow ranks high in performance as well as in corruption magnitudes. They are corrupt but do work, and thought popular when people are not much aware of their rights and take the public works as charity and acts of magnanimity. They usually prevail where strong tradition and perception of corruption exist like in police, land registration, meter reading and custom offices. Sometimes, service takers prefer them to avoid procedural complication, minimise service costs, ensure extra speed, and to appropriate or rent public property or utilities.

Black Cash Cows exploit from people, have less opportunity to incur loss to government like in police, and do not usually hesitate to injure people if their demand is not met. White Cash Cows cause illegal benefit to people but exploit the public funds like in customs, land registration and

other revenue offices and harass people for the cause of the government. Very often they make their business smooth by making good public relations, playing tricks and maintaining relationship with employers.

In the performance and corruption matrix, take "Tortoises" as opposite to Cash Cows, low performer and low corrupt. They fear or dislike the risk or hardship of performance and have variable level of greed typically low. Sometimes they hibernate when corruption is risky or pass them safe and clean to build their career. But, they hardly become good performers. When the organisational oversight is very low, people are less aware, individual authority is very high and procedures are too wide, they become opportunists. White elephants are just opposite to opportunists. They perform in affluence and excel in appropriating public resources and facilities, and frequently participate in foreign or rewarding activities. For them, government costs much more than they contribute.

"Malignants" are extremely corrupt. They work only for wrongful gain. Practically, they belong to some powerful segment. They are less in number but very harmful. There should be periodic scan and effective alarm system in administration for their early detection. Extermination or incision is preferred option for Malignant; at best they might be isolated or kept quarantine. Government should remember that "Malignants" are not only dangerous for people and administration but also too dangerous to tarnish the image of the government.

Patriots are opposite to Malignants, they are high performers and low to zero corrupt and are thought to be the backbone of the administration. Patriots are either morally strong or financially solvent or both. They have two major styles; Greens consider other's corruption softly, but Reds declare zero tolerance and full fledged war against corruption. Frequent transfer or withdrawal from appointment accompanies the red patriot. Genuine Patriots in extreme adversity might become rational, working less to reduce risk, but never skew towards corruption. It is often regretted that Patriots are going to be extinct, or endangered.

Rationals operate between Tortoise and Patriot. They contribute their level best to the public service keeping their security and welfare matters to basic level. They are optimistic and cherish to eliminate corrup-

tion but maintain a rational status quo believing that their effort could not eliminate corruption overnight, but wait for slow recovery. Rational employees could be best regarded as the mainstream of bureaucracy, and could be treated as a good interface or interim space to truncate corruption to a practical level. Better Alternatives are one grade higher in corruption and performance to Rationals. They love performance but with their due share. They do not injure people or clients if corruption demand is not met.

Broadly, Patriot, Rational and Better Alternative make a good trinity for anticorruption campaign, whereas White Elephant, Malignant and Opportunist form the corrupt trinity and are the root of corruption culture. Cash Cow, Mediocre, and Tortoise could be left for development and correction. In fact, performance styles are not permanent; they transform or change over time, space, and contexts. For example, today's patriot might be a Cash Cow before. Transformation happens in any direction, usually vertical, but towards the adjacent grid. It means that a tortoise might move to an Opportunist or a Rational, but rarely to a Malignant or a Patriot. Thus for confidence, performance records, previous character and job place reputation of an employee should be considered for a pretty good period of time, for instance five years.

This analysis bears much implication to fight against corruption. It helps unmask the representation of corrupt public employees. Anticorruption regime could formulate their strategies regarding each group. This article suggests that Malignants and Patriots should not be seen in one angle and not to be prosecuted under same provisions. Patriot might do some wrong but should be protected. It strongly argues that performance does not matter positively to the nation. It is flagrantly obvious that the fortune they develop weighs arithmetically much more than they deserve, the injury they commit to nation is geometrically higher than they contribute, and the damage they add to morality is logarithmically greater than the charity they provide to the society. Worst from them is to listening their self narrated story or epic of great performance, and to see their names as saviours of the nation.

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Kashmir clouds Indo-Pak talks

Islamabad's declaration to have a region-wise plan to combat the Taliban will mean strong action against Lashkar which, along with the Taliban, is under the discipline of Al-Qaida. Religious values are an antithesis of what the Lashkar represents. Today's world, including the Muslim nations, wants religion to inculcate values, not to incite violence.

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WITH such positive talks between India and Pakistan at Islamabad, the tragic happenings in Kashmir seem more than a coincidence. That the youth in the valley are angry because they are not getting their due is known to all. Their pelting of stones at the security forces has been going on for more than a year. Still, why should Kashmir be on the boil when relations between India and Pakistan are on the mend?

It is also a strange coincidence that hundreds of devotees should get stranded after having reached Kashmir for the Amarnath Yatra. Apparently, there was no understanding of the problem of unemployment or the grievances that had alienated the youth. The state political parties only ran each other down without caring for the anger piling up.

Syed Gilliani, who has the image of an extremist, uses the killing of one young man at the hands of the security forces to incite the people to come on the streets. The Hurriyat Conference gives a call to start "something fresh, something organised." Political parties also jump into the arena. All this develops into a huge protest in four cities, Srinagar, Sopore, Anantnag and Baramulla.

The ineptness of the Kashmir police and the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), which have only guns, not lathis or tear gas, at their command to tackle protests, aggravates the situation. The use of force against the protesters agitating against the successive killings in the firing was probably too excessive, and what the security forces did was without restraint. This is a matter to be looked into by an inquiry committee.

Yet, the fact remains that the extremists in Kashmir strike whenever an atmosphere of goodwill begins to prevail after some kind of equation between India and Pakistan. The pro-India elements have become irrelevant. They, in any case, are too elitist, seldom mixing with the common Kashmiris. Chief Minister Omar Farooq Abdullah leads the exclusive club.

But their distance with the people is only a contributory factor in what is happening in the state, not the factor itself.

The factor is the belief of Gilliani and the Hurriyat that violence alone can lead to a solution in Kashmir. That the problem that has been hanging fire for a long time needs to be tackled quickly goes without saying.

But the extremists, including the Hurriyat, only stall the issue by instigating violence. They should have themselves come on to the streets to lead the protests in a peaceful manner to focus attention on the unresolved issue of Kashmir. They should understand that no discussion is possible at gunpoint.

One welcome development of talks at Islamabad has been that nobody, except a few hawks, has brought in the name of Pakistan in the happenings in Kashmir. The credit goes to the government and the political parties at this end. This means that the talks between the two foreign secretaries and home ministers, in that order, have reduced to some extent the deficit in confidence, which New Delhi has been seeking.

I do not know whether Home Ministers P. Chidambaram and Rahman Malik discussed Kashmir. But at least the two foreign ministers should do so when they meet at Islamabad later this month. India's Army Chief General V.K. Singh has also emphasised on "political initiatives" in Kashmir.

The talks at Islamabad have made two points clear. One, New Delhi has re-announced Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's assurance in Egypt that the terrorists' attack would be kept separate from the talks. Many experts in India tried to quibble over the meaning, but there is no ambiguity now. Two, the core issue between India and Pakistan or, for that matter, before the Saarc countries was terrorism.

The separation of the two points was clear when the two foreign secretaries, who prepared the agenda for the forthcoming talks between their foreign ministers, kept away from discussing terrorism. But they did discuss Kashmir. My information is that Indian Foreign Secretary Nirupama Rao



Agitation in Kashmir has become typical of the state now.

asked her counterpart whether the ground covered on Kashmir through the back channel held good.

The Pakistan foreign secretary had told me at Delhi that the two countries would go forward from the undertaking reached through the back channel. This should set at rest the doubts some Pakistani quarters raised that a democratic government was not bound to follow what was achieved during General Pervez Musharraf's regime.

Chidambaram, who played to the gallery when he spoke to journalists at Delhi, was more responsible and vividly sober in his remarks at Islamabad. For him to say that he did not doubt the intention of Pakistan should be a slap on the face of retired Indian foreign secretaries who continue to follow the hard line they had taken during their careers to bring the two countries practically to a point of no return.

They are openly critical of Manmohan Singh who has taken the bold initiative to talk to Pakistan despite the BJP criticism. He, like former prime minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, has realised that there is no alternative to peace.

New Delhi expects more arrests in Pakistan after the disclosures by David Headley, whom the Indian intelligence agencies met at Chicago. Manmohan Singh has reportedly drawn President Barack Obama's attention to Headley's confession. Chidambaram has rightly reminded Pakistan of the status of the Most Favoured State India extended to it many years ago. If Pakistan were to respond to it, Chidambaram's ideas on trade and investment between the two countries could be

implemented. India, with a bigger market and investment potential, can retrieve Pakistan from the lack of openings and latest technology, which puts its industry at a disadvantage.

Action against Lashkar-e-Toiba chief Hafiz Sayed remains India's litmus test to assess Pakistan's steps towards normalisation. His cries of war or jihad against India is not what bothers the government and the people so much as his vast network which made the 26/11 possible, and which has not accepted Pakistan's policy to befriend India.

In fact, Islamabad's declaration to have a region-wise plan to combat the Taliban will mean strong action against Lashkar which, along with the Taliban, is under the discipline of Al-Qaida.

Some elements in Pakistan consider it their duty as Muslims to support fundamentalism. But religious values are an antithesis of what the Lashkar represents. Today's world, including the Muslim nations, wants religion to inculcate values, not to incite violence.

One practice both New Delhi and Islamabad should adopt is to ensure that their rulers meet the opposition leader when they visit each other's country. India has been able to establish it for visiting presidents or prime ministers who call on the top person in the opposition. The Pakistan government should also do so by including Nawaz Sharif on the list of dignitaries during the visit of top Indian leaders.

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