

## Whither Draft Police Ordinance, 2007?

*Police reform cannot brook further delay*

IT seems that the Draft Police Ordinance, 2007 has been sent to the backburner. We note with considerable dismay the fact that even after three years of its submission to the government and a very extensive public discourse on the matter the proposals have not found a concrete shape. We wonder why?

It is worth repeating that the need to change the archaic police ordinance of 1861 has been long felt and therefore overdue. Given the state of law and order in the country, and the blatant politicisation of the police during every regime, with appointments to responsible positions made on political consideration rather than on merit, the matter of police reform assumes pressing urgency.

The Draft Ordinance, 2007 had come out with very appropriate and significant changes which, hopefully, once implemented would make the police force free of political interference, accountable to the people, and certainly, with a changed mind-frame of the force, more efficient.

However, given the current status of the Ordinance, which has been lying with the ministry since June, 2007, and the attitude of the bureaucracy towards police reform, one cannot but draw the disconcerting conclusion that the reform proposals may not see the light of day in the near future. Our apprehensions stem from the recent reported remarks of the Additional Secretary, Ministry of Home, made to a Bangla daily, that the proposed ordinance is unrealistic and impracticable. It would not be remiss to suggest that there is a bureaucratic resistance to giving a final shape to the Draft Ordinance, perhaps because there is a fear that the force may no longer remain under their control once the ordinance becomes an act. It does require a strong farsighted political will at the top to push things ahead.

One must recognize the fact that there is difference between government control and undue political interference. And it is the latter that the proposed reform would help do away with by making such undue influence a punishable offence. Any statutory body must be answerable to the lawful authority and obey lawful commands and that is what the preamble of the new ordinance also enshrines.

We need a police force that will be responsive to the need of the people and not an instrument of coercion of the government. As we have said before, no new proposal, particularly one that seeks to replace old regulations, can be entirely without flaw. But whatever shortcomings that might be present will become clear only after it has been put into effect. The issue is too important to brook further delay.

## Making upazila bodies dysfunctional

*This lies at the heart of why development lags behind in rural areas*

IT is not good news when elected local body officials inform the country that they are not being allowed to play their part in development activities. On Saturday, the Upazila Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen Oikyo Parishad made the complaint that Upazila Nirbahi Officers (UNOs) in their various areas have seen little necessity of contacting upazila chairmen and members on issues related to development on a local scale. The clear allegation they made was that the UNOs have not been cooperating with them. On the other hand, the UNOs have been in regular touch with local MPs in the matter of deciding priorities for the local regions.

It is, obviously, a critical situation here. The perception has grown in the country over the last few years that a strengthening of democracy calls for a development of local government in a way that will fulfil people's expectations. It was expected that with the upazila parishads at the local level and members of Parliament at the national level, the necessary coordination in development and other activities would be arrived at and implementation of plans and programmes would be carried out by UNOs in line with local body recommendations. That does not seem to be happening. And this is not for the first time that we have come across such complaints on the part of elected upazila officials. And what they say is crucial: if locally elected representatives must see their authority undermined by government servants, if UNOs are not at all worried about the complexities they are causing through their non-cooperation with the upazila bodies, the entire process of government by the consent of the governed is put at risk.

We believe it becomes the responsibility of the government as also of all parties represented in the Jatiyo Sangsad to deal with the issue on the basis of immediacy. Elected bodies cannot be made redundant because old, entrenched forces such as UNOs are unwilling to relinquish their hold on authority. The plain and clear fact is that all elected officials, from the upazila chairman to a member of a village council, must be allowed to work without any hurdles being put in their way. Democracy is fundamentally a matter of linkages, from the village to the union to the upazila to the national levels of governance. When any one of these linkages is undermined, it is an entire democratic system that comes under threat.

Let the grievances of the upazila chairmen, vice-chairmen and members be addressed in all seriousness - if democracy is to take the needed roots in Bangladesh. Those grievances, by the way, are also ours.



Protectors need protection!



## Police facing criminals' fury

Looking at their number deployed at every corner of the city, it wouldn't perhaps be too much to ask of the law-enforcers to keep the city crime-free. But the way the criminals are operating at will with equal ease whether it is at night or in daytime, defying the police speaks volumes for the defencelessness of the common citizens.

SYED FATTAHUL ALIM

A quick look at the last one week's newspapers will show how desperate the criminals in and around the capital city have become. Stalkers in Nikunja area of the city attacked and injured four members of the police, who had gone there to arrest them responding to a call from a resident of the locality that his sister was being harassed by those stalkers.

The stalkers are generally loafers or roadside bullies whose job is to waste their time in teashops sipping tea or puffing at cigarettes. And their best pastime is to harass girls passing by along those lanes. They are not like the hardened criminals, since real criminals mean business and are not eager to expose their identity to the public so openly.

The Nikunja stalkers should have, therefore, been a soft target for the police. But lo and behold, it was the police that turned out to be the victims instead.

In Dilkusha business area, on being

challenged by the patrol police, muggers opened fire on the police killing one of their team members. However, a mugger was also shot to death in exchange of fire.

These are but two of the instances in which one can see how arrogant and desperate the criminals have become. Similar incidents are taking place in other cities and districts. And there are places in the remote rural areas where it is not the police, but the different armed brigands who rule the roost once the pall of darkness falls.

Now consider the situation of the common citizens. Take for example the incident of last March in which a couple was shot dead by a hooligan. The reason the victims drew the wrath of the thug named Rubel was that the couple did not agree to marry one of their daughters to that thug. So, the ruffian stormed the house where the couple and their daughters lived and shot the parents to death.

And now the two daughters that survived the dead couple are exposed to the fury of the hooligan and his accomplices.

## CPM's crisis deepens

This spells censorship and status quo -- a recipe for decline, disaster, and eventually, demise. Unless the CPM leadership admits that its basic political strategy is in deep crisis, and that the rot isn't limited to state-related factors, it will learn nothing and won't change course.

PRAFUL BIDWAI

WHAT the Communist Party of India (Marxist) dreaded the most in West Bengal, its bastion for 33 years, has happened. Trinamool Congress Party leader Mamata Banerjee held a well-attended rally at Lalgarh in the Jangalmahal region bordering Jharkhand, enlisted the support of the People's Committee against Police Atrocities (PCPA), and announced the end of Left "hegemony."

The CPM hoarsely attacked Ms. Banerjee's "unholy" alliance with "Maoists," who control a section of the PCPA. This didn't quite square up with the PCPA's publicly expressed ire with her for not articulating its demands.

Finally, the CPM was reduced to making a lame appeal to the Congress to distance itself from the TMC on the Maoist violence issue, which, it termed, like Prime Minister Singh, India's "greatest internal security threat." But Ms. Banerjee had thrice appealed for non-violence at Lalgarh.

The CPM piously wishes that the Trinamool-Congress alliance, widely expected to win next year's Assembly elections, would collapse. But wishes are one thing, strategy is another. The CPM lacks a strategy to revive itself.

This was confirmed by its recent Extended Central Committee in Vijayawada -- the last plenum before the next party congress. Vijayawada didn't change the line of opposing the United Progressive Alliance's neo-liberal economic policies and foreign policy and combating the Bharatiya Janata Party.

Less charitably, General Secretary Prakash Karat manipulated the CPM into covering up apex-level failures, which contributed to its rout in the 2009 Lok Sabha elections.

Critical here was withdrawal of support to the UPA in July 2008 over the US-India nuclear deal and the cobbling of a super-opportunist front with dubious leaders like Ms. Mayawati and Jayalalitha and Mr. O.P. Chautala. The West Bengal CPM was

unhappy with this; it pushed the TMC and Congress into an alliance.

Mr. Karat conceded that the timing of withdrawal was controversial. But Vijayawada didn't revise the official line blaming the defeat on "state-specific" factors including governance, "arrogance" and corruption.

Mr. Karat shrewdly bought some insurance for himself for a post-2011 defeat. He can quote the Vijayawada resolutions in self-defence. But that won't help the CPM.

The CPM faces a bleak election prospect. In Kerala, the Left Democratic Front is widely expected to lose the coming elections. Its Lok Sabha tally plummeted from 19 out of 21 in 2004 to only 4 seats last year. The LDF took no bold pro-people measures.

Kerala party Secretary Pinarayee Vijayan, named in a scandal related to a Canadian contract, is the first Communist party politburo member to have been charged for corruption.

The West Bengal outcome could be worse. If the Assembly vote follows the Lok Sabha pattern, the Left Front's score will fall from 235 (of 294 seats) to 110-120. But it could sink even lower.

In 2009, the Front lost support in all Bengal regions, barring Jangalmahal, where it won 5 of 6 Lok Sabha seats. Now, Trinamool leads the LF in 130 constituencies in Central and Southern Bengal. If it expands the recently made opening in Jangalmahal, it will score an emphatic victory.

That's why the CPM mortally fears Ms. Banerjee's foray into Lalgarh. Trinamool thugs can unleash even more violence against the Left than Maoists.

If Trinamool comes to power, there will be large-scale bloodshed -- a prospect no public-spirited citizen can relish.

The CPM itself is largely responsible for this situation. Its policies of the 1980s eroded some of its early gains since 1977 -- including land reforms, panchayati raj, women's empowerment and joint forest management.

By the early 1990s, the CPM became complacent as it repeatedly won elections

Recently, even the High Court had to step in and issue order to the Gulshan and Badda police to provide security to the two daughters of the deceased couple.

Apart from these special incidents where law enforcers are under attack or where the country's highest seat of justice has to intervene for the sake of safety and security of its citizens, consider the situation of the nameless and faceless commoners who are falling prey to the ferocity of the roadside bullies and robbers day in day out!

However, we cannot expect that kind of situation in the capital city where some 400 teams of patrol police are learnt to be on duty round the clock under 41 police stations and 52 outposts. Given the concentration of the administrative and business-related activities in the capital city, where all the high-ups live, the security situation should have been better.

Looking at their number deployed at every corner of the city, it wouldn't perhaps be too much to ask of the law-enforcers to keep the city crime-free. But the way the criminals are operating at will with equal ease whether it is at night or in daytime, defying the police speaks volumes for the defencelessness of the common citizens.

The overall situation calls for a totally new look at the way the police are administering law and order in the city as elsewhere. The daring with which the criminals are operating, even defying the police, may have two reasons; either they are more clever and better armed than the police or

that the numerical strength of the police is not enough to be on guard at every nook and cranny of the capital city. Or it also may be that they are lax or lack in efficiency.

A report carried by the Sunday edition of this paper has dwelt in detail on how the weeklong drive for small firearms recovery from criminals has come to a virtual nought, if only due to what the report said "lack of vigilance in the crime-prone areas of the capital city."

The criminals use motorbikes, private cars and minibuses at dead of night to rob victims at the road intersections. And it was to improve the level of security in the city that the special drive against illegal small firearms was conducted by the Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP). Regrettably though, as noted before, it failed to produce any tangible result. So, the questions as noted in the foregoing have been raised as a matter of course.

The authorities need not merely improve the level of preparedness, or inflate the pay package or enhance the quality of arms supplied or the training provided to the police. In fact, they need something more -- their morale needs a booster, and that can be best done through fighting corruption effectively. The slogan for fighting corruption is there for too long; but precious little has been done to address the scourge so far.

Syed Fattahul Alim is a senior journalist.



Bane for the Left?

without doing much for the people. Its local-level leaders developed a stake in the status quo and getting a cut in various contracts -- whether for school buildings or construction labour supply.

The magnet of power drew into the party unscrupulous operators with no commitment to Left-wing ideas. More than two-thirds of the Bengal CPM's membership was recruited after 1977.

Monobina Gupta, a journalist and a former CPM cardholder, has lucidly documented the party's alienation from its base in her just-published book *Left Politics in Bengal*. Party cadres got mired in corruption. The CPM turned against its own supporters.

Further degeneration came early this decade when the CPM promoted private capital-based rapid industrialisation through sweetheart deals and tax breaks. The Singur and Nandigram crises over land acquisition for industry were direct effects of this misguided policy. The state and the party unleashed violence against the people to take their land, crush their resistance and "teach them a lesson."

Singur and Nandigram became household synonyms all over India for the loathsome betrayal of the people by a force which rose to power with their support.

The CPM's base among Muslims also eroded thanks to Nandigram, and the growing realisation among West Bengal's Muslims after the Sachar Committee report that they have had a raw deal. Although

they form 25% of the population, Muslims' representation in government is only 2%. They have the least exposure to modern secular education.

Impending election defeat should have shocked the CPM into sincere, deep introspection and self-criticism, impelling radical course correction. But the CPM leadership chose to behave like an ostrich. Worse, it came down heavily on inner-party critics.

When party members demanded free and open debate on policies, strategy and tactics, and criticised the organisational doctrine of Democratic Centralism -- which concentrates excessive power at the apex and outlaws real debate except at party congresses -- Mr. Karat answered them by asserting that Democratic Centralism was essential to Leninism and indispensable for a revolutionary party.

This spells censorship and status quo -- a recipe for decline, disaster, and eventually, demise. Unless the CPM leadership admits that its basic political strategy is in deep crisis, and that the rot isn't limited to state-related factors, it will learn nothing and won't change course.

The CPM could then go the same way as the Communist Parties of the Soviet Union, East Germany or Romania. And that would be a terrible tragedy for Indian politics.

Praful Bidwai is an eminent Indian columnist. Email: bidwai@bol.net.in.