

STRAIGHT LINE

Paying for policing

Attenuating the political heat

There is a role here for the civil society

WHAT the country needs at this moment is for both the major parties to involve each other in serious interactive communication to assuage a rather potentially volatile political situation. And to do that both must get off their high horses they have been riding since the last general election. It is not talking at each other but to each other that the people want the two parties to do. There is no alternative to dialing.

Regrettably, that has not come about in spite of repeated exhortations by the media and other section of the citizenry; and the potential threat to politics, to democracy, to trade and foreign investment, and indeed to every aspect of our lives, have once again been reiterated by members of the civil society at a roundtable on Thursday aptly entitled, 'Ongoing Political Crisis and Citizens' Concern' organised by SUJON (Citizens for Good Governance). The speakers have painted some very worrisome possibilities which may well nigh come true if the political course is allowed to run the way it is.

The existing animus between the AL and BNP, that have created the current unstable situation, have been repeatedly worsened by cussed and callow comments of responsible persons from both the parties, the government's ham-handed handling of law and order, corruption, the shrinking political space of the opposition, and by the inflexible attitude towards political issues of the two. These can only bode ill for the country; and this has been repeatedly expressed by our development partners and friends, the latest by the three high-profile visitors to Bangladesh.

We are not prepared to believe that the two parties are not aware of where their respective political stance is taking the country towards. But we wonder why they continue to display a kind of political naïveté that is causing them to drift apart. And this is where we feel the civil society can play the catalyst. By raising chorus of voices to drive home to the leadership that the country can hardly endure the standoff any longer and must indulge in dialogue -- for which the lead must come from the ruling alliance.

Syria's humanitarian disaster

Can the world bear to be silent witness?

THE crisis in Syria continues to take its toll on human life as the civil war drags on with no apparent end in sight. With both the government and rebel forces seemingly unable to gain the upper hand, the fighting seems to have reached a dangerous stalemate.

The problem it seems is that there is no unified opposition allied against the Assad regime. The anti-Assad forces till date remain fragmented. This is perhaps one of the reasons why the West remains unwilling to help arm the rebels sufficiently to make a difference in the field. The other reason could well be the Libya experience; the country after being 'liberated' disintegrating into internal conflict based along ethnic lines is not something to look forward to.

That said, the humanitarian disaster continues unabated. There was some sigh of relief when the UN and Arab envoy Kofi Annan brokered a deal between Damascus and the rebels that would oversee the deployment of UN observers on the ground and pave the way for peaceful transition of power through multi-party elections this month. These hopes have been shattered as the body count continues to rise with the Syrian government forces persisting with their campaign of artillery barrage on major cities like Homs.

In the midst of all this political tension, when suicide bombers strike a highly secure military compound at the heart of Damascus, killing some 55 people, it shows the situation as anything but stable.

The reality on the ground is that unless sufficient economic and political pressure by the UN are brought to bear upon a regime that is clearly 'oblivious' to the sufferings of its own people, that has already taken some 9,000 lives, it will continue its barbarous attack as the civilised world chooses to ignore yet another human tragedy unfolding in yet another Arab state.



MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

operating on a 24-hour basis and providing a standardised and accountable service; and professionals must be paid for their services.

The extreme example of making the police service self-financial is through privatisation; and no one has seriously suggested that the entire policing operation be put out to tender. Policing is the responsibility of the State; and some of its activities could not be made self-financing. However, there are already private security companies making a handsome profit out of doing things which were once a police responsibility, such as a secure transportation of money.

More policing activities could be transferred to the private sector. The policing could be allowed to charge for some of their activities, whilst providing others as a social service. For example, the police could charge for the cost of policing a football match. If they are to be organised on a business-like basis then they could think in a business-like way. Using their surplus capacity, the police could enter into a competitive tendering with private security or other companies for the work which either organisation could do.

There are many potential difficulties here. The image of the force for the police to begin charging for their services, or some of them, on a serious basis, would alter the image of the force and the public perception of its role.

Police Officers themselves might find it very difficult to accept the commercial outlook necessary to making

this work. They have, after all, spent their working lives in the public service, providing something which is free at the point of delivery.

Police procedures and structures would need to be changed. Far more information would be needed about costs. Managers, rather than senior police officers, would need the appropriate training and experience to make the new system work. Who would be accountable for its success?

Clearly a great deal of thought would have to be given to the implications of a commercially-conscious police force. However, it is clearly a way of reducing public costs, and lessons might be learned from other public service organisations which have begun to charge for part of their

there is no real alternative to regarding policing as a public service, which must be paid for out of public money.

Public money comes from two main sources -- national and local. National revenue and expenditure vastly exceeds local; and the police are a major source of national expense. Therefore, the police should be paid for on a national basis, out of nationally-raised public money, which is raised by a variety of means, and is under the control of the Treasury whose officials are accountable to Parliament.

On a practical note, unless the finances of local government were drastically improved, they would be unable to meet the real costs of policing. The solution, as so often in British

diture was not linked to performance.

"We have spent more money on you than ever before, and still crime has gone," says the politician: and what can the police officer answer? Paradoxically, there is a case here for emphasising local options, and local community, including politicians and journalists, may be able to ward off nationally-based criticism; and if a police officer has control over his/her own budget, s/he will be able to respond to local needs more readily.

The police, traditionally, do not rent out their assets. However, times changes; and there are plenty of progressive-minded police officers around, who want to make the best use of their assets, and realise that it means a new approach is needed.

To summarise: traditionally, a police force had very little real control over its finances. The income it generated for itself was minimal. The income it received was very tightly controlled. Getting it was a cumbersome process and the money trickled down to the police force was rather like water flowing down a hillside through an elaborated, linked, and artificial lagoons.

The disadvantages of the present system are many. Even as the money is finally available there is very little possibility of its flexible use. What had been bid for had to be spent, in its original categories; and the operational police commander was kept on a very tight shoestring as far as financial resources were concerned.

The system is characterised by lengthy accounting periods, unrealistic forecasts, and tight controls at all levels. It discourages initiatives and leads to illogical behaviour, such as spending money simply to get rid of it. The government recognises all these faults, and intends to reform the whole system and link expenditure to performance.

The writer is a columnist of The Daily Star.

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A great deal of police work is concerned with investigating crime, and much of recorded crime relates to theft. If the police are successful in catching thieves (or convicting drug-peddlers or fraudsters) then they should be paid a proportion of the recovered or seized.

However, the implications of policing being paid for on the basis of successful criminal investigation are profound; and it is unlikely that the police force could survive in anything like its present form, were this principle generally applied.

Serious consideration of either voluntary or commercially-orientated policing soon indicates that, whilst both activities may help defray costs,

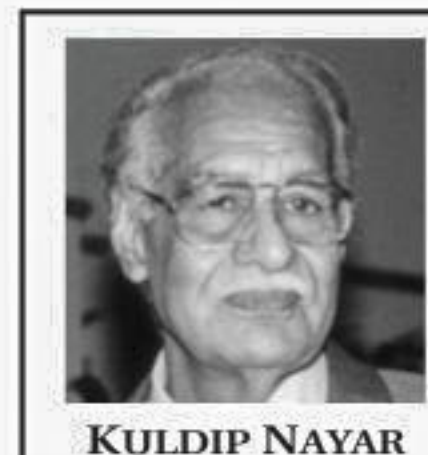
public life, is a compromise; policing is paid for out of a combination of local and central funding.

In UK, whereas, in the past there was an almost even balance between central and local sources of revenue, with the Home Office providing fifty-one percent, that balance no longer applies. Central government now supplies ninety-one percent of police funding; and police work can no longer be described as a locally-funded activity.

Police financing is at a crossroads. Under the old system the State, with local government, provided a fixed amount of money which the force spent. The force was able to say how it had spent the money, in terms of where the money had gone; but expen-

BETWEEN THE LINES

Babri masjid in the fore



KULDEEP NAYYAR

to the fore after nearly 20 years. It indicates the intrinsic strength of the system which otherwise has been beaten because of indelible corrupt deals and the weak, faltering governance. It was such a deliberate defiance of law and morality that the destruction could not have been in oblivion for a long time.

Top BJP leaders like L.K. Advani and Murli Manohar Joshi, linked with the demolition, have been accused of conspiracy. The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has done a meticulous job to charge them with plotting and executing the demolition. True, the CBI has doubtful credentials and its control in the hands of government makes it still more suspect. Yet its work in ferreting out the truth in certain cases cannot be minimized or rubbished.

The Babri Masjid's demolition was not a hush-hush job. It was shown live on television networks across the country with hoary details of vandalism instigated by the Hindu crowd; the ladders and ropes used to bring down the masjid's domes and the joy of BJP leaders over the removal of the last brick are still etched in the memory of people. Uma Bharti jumped into the laps of Joshi, celebrating the destruction of the mosque which had become over the years a structure that stood as a testimony to the country's pluralistic philosophy.

The BJP leaders' defence is not on the demolition of the masjid but on the timing of the CBI report. The agency may be playing politics at the instance of some ruling party mem-

bers. Yet, how does this lessen the crime of those who demolished the mosque or those who enthusiastically watched the spectacle? Whether the conspiracy of Advani and seven of his party colleagues is proved in a law court or not -- the Liberhan Commission said something like that in its report three years ago -- is not what matters at present.

The issue today is that who are the culprits? The biggest relief is that those whose hands are soiled have not got away with it. The real worry of the nation has been that the whole matter would be effaced because of the Herculean efforts by the BJP and its ally, the Shiv Sena.

Even if the conspiracy to pull down the mosque is not proved, the fact of demolition cannot be denied, nor the

them had considered. One top Muslims leader said after the demolition: I felt for the first time that I was a Muslim.

The BJP may have built its vote bank in the Hindu community or may have refurbished the image of Hindutva. And the party's success at the polls in UP shows that. But what the party demolished for a few seats was Muslims' implicit trust in India's secular polity.

The common man realises, if not the BJP, the harm it caused to the country's integrity.

Were the guilty to be punished, the loss of faith can be restored to a large extent. But the CBI's report may well be only a storm in a tea cup. The Manmohan Singh government has neither the will nor the strength to

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glee of the BJP leaders that the cameras have recorded. It is well known that before the masjid's demolition, Advani undertook a rath yatra in northern India to prepare the ground and he, indeed, drove a wedge between the two communities, Hindus and Muslims. The killing of Muslims in the wake of demolition confirms the polarisation.

In fact, the Muslims who after the partition were gradually joining the main stream began standing back and wondering whether their entity was safe. The Babri masjid's destruction was a watershed in the relations between Hindus and Muslims and it made many Muslims hark back on the division and think that Pakistan was not such a mistake as several among

take on the BJP which may get away with the murder of India's secularism.

After all, Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi, who was behind the happenings in the state in 2002, may also be getting away with all that he did. The Supreme Court appointed Special Investigation Team (SIT) has exonerated him completely. What made the SIT give Modi a clean chit may come out one day as the complicity of Advani and other BJP leaders has in the case of the Babri masjid demolition. It would be too late by then, but what one can do when political considerations have scrambled the entire system.

In the case of Modi, amicus curie Raju Ramachandran strongly disagreed with a key conclusion of the

SIT that IPs officer Sanjiv Bhatt was not present at a late-night meeting of top Gujarat cops held at the chief minister's residence in the wake of the February 27, 2002 Godhara carnage. It has been Bhatt's claim -- made in an affidavit before the apex court and in statements to the SIT and the amicus -- that he was present at the meeting where Modi said Hindus must be allowed to carry out retaliatory violence against Muslims.

Raju Ramachandran who has suggested that there is sufficient material to "proceed further against the Gujarat chief minister." Ramachandran too was appointed by the Supreme Court and there is no reason why the case against Modi be closed.

Ramachandran concedes that "there is no proof that Modi's diktat was implemented by ministers or police officers who participated in the meeting. But making the statement was in itself an offence."

It is true that Ramachandran did not investigate and relied on the documents prepared by the SIT. But this is the job which was entrusted to him by the Supreme Court. So how can it be argued that the amicus curie's statement does not have any locus standi? The may take long because there will be day to day hearing in the lower court, but the details of Gujarat riots will be in the public domain.

The BJP should realise that the two blemishes, one about the demolition of the Babri masjid and the other about the carnage in Gujarat, will not go away until action against the culprits is taken. Quotas will not give confidence to Muslims but what they want to be assured of is that they will get justice. A pluralistic society can do this at least to prove its credentials.

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THIS DAY IN HISTORY

May 12

1916 James Connolly was sat on a chair and shot dead in Kilmainham Gaol in Dublin, after his role in the Easter Uprising

1949 The Soviet Union lifts its blockade of Berlin.

1952 Gaj Singh is crowned Maharaja of Jodhpur.

1955 Austria regains its independence as the Allied occupation following World War II ends.

1956 Gold Coast to get independence: Colonial Secretary Alan Lennox-Boyd announces the Gold Coast is to become the first black African nation to be granted independence from Britain.

1971 Britain's oldest tabloid closes: *The Daily Sketch* newspaper which was founded in 1909 has been published for the last time.

1998 India explodes nuclear controversy: The Indian government announces it has carried out a series of underground nuclear tests in a move which has shocked the world.