

KALEIDOSCOPE

Police brutality again!

We condemn it

THE picture carried in all the newspapers last Sunday, depicted policemen beating a journalist of a leading Bangla daily. In fact, there were two other journalists of the same newspaper that were subjected to the most brutal physical attack in the same manner.

These once again showed the aggressive attitude of policemen towards journalists whose job it is to take snaps of occurrences in the line of duty. Police do not look kindly upon journalists photographing incidents where their high-handed handling might be exposed. They seem to be raring to have a go at them.

This is reflective of an attitude, disposition and to a large extent lack of motivation to let journalists do their work. We find no words strong enough to condemn such excesses perpetrated by policemen on duty.

The journalists had not adopted any aggressive postures, and the only tools that they were carrying were their cameras and notebooks. Reportedly, the policeman took umbrage at the journalists not 'obeying' their order to keep within a certain part of the road. But who are policemen to restrict the movements of journalists. They are supposed to cover events and they will do that as best as they can and from as best a position as they can, but of course without standing in the way of the law enforcing agencies. And we have no reason to believe that the journalists were posing hurdles for the policemen in the performance of their duty.

Regrettably, instances of journalists coming under attack are increasing. No society that hold high the principle of freedom of expression and freedom of the media countenance a situation where only in the last three months more than a hundred journalists have come under attack of police and miscreants, of that only in the current month nine journalists have been victims of such attacks. We cannot but be concerned at the increasing number of journalists facing threat to their life while doing their duty, more so when state agencies are the source of the threat.

While we appreciate that the police authorities have taken prompt measures to suspend the errant policemen we feel that this is not punishment enough. These policemen must be made examples of so that such roguish behaviour is not repeated in future.

Two amazing feats in a week

Wasfia has done us proud

BANGLADESH'S women have been doing exceedingly well in different fields and pushing bars in areas hitherto not trodden by them. The sheer ambition of conquering the mount Everest is an exalted goal and the exhilaration of achieving it is exulting not only for the achiever but also those who hear the news.

Within a week of Nishat Majumder leaving her foot-prints along with Muhith at the highest earthly point and planting our national flag, Wasfia Nazreen has done it conclusively emblazoning a new-found glory for our daughters and sisters. No obstacle can be insurmountable for our women -- that is the inspirational message they have put across.

The ultimate in gender balance has been naturally achieved at mount Everest when Musa Ibrahim and Muhith were matched by Nishat and Wasfia making it to the peak. They have endured the stiffest of tests in physical and mental endurance and sophisticated mountaineering techniques reaching world standards.

It takes years of sustained interest, single-minded pursuit, mind training, physical fitness conditioning and trekking technique applications in real mountain climbing to carve the niche at mount Everest. For instance, Wasfia was the first Bangladeshi woman to climb the African peak of mount Kilimanjaro. She had also reached mount Aconcagua in Argentina but had to stop 300 metres short of mount Elbrus in Russia.

Stereotyping of women and discrimination against them in any form and manifestation should now be blown away by their extraordinary accomplishment in newer areas of human endeavour.

Their feats not only present them in a comparable light with their peers overseas they have also done our country and its people proud to the outside world. They are like our ambassadors extraordinaire.

Our hearty congratulations to Wasfia and again to Nishat. The round of our felicitations will remain incomplete if we do not extend the same to their families, patrons and sponsors who have rendered valuable services to women with

Readiness to accept criticism



SYED FATAHUL ALIM

STATE Minister for Home Shamsul Haque Tuku has dismissed the Washington-based global rights watchdog US Human Rights

Watch's report and its call on the government to carry out probe on the alleged "extrajudicial killings" by security forces as "baseless and motivated." So it has also trashed its other contents, including allegations of "killing and torture by security forces and their abuses responsible for disappearances and custodial deaths." Earlier, terming the report prepared by Amnesty International on extrajudicial killings committed in Bangladesh throughout 2011 as "gross and untrue," he also rejected it outright.

This is yet another instance of the "denial mode" that characterises the government's attitude towards any kind of critical appreciation of its performance. Its reaction to the reports brought out periodically by local rights bodies or research groups is equally dismissive.

The attitude is not limited to reports of different watchdog bodies of local or foreign origin. It is equally dismissive and even intolerant of media reports on any critical issue that has anything to do with the government. And such an attitude is common among most government leaders from the prime minister down to junior ministers like Tuku.

The level of intolerance is so acute that even the prime minister had once gone so far as to blame the media for misusing the freedom bestowed upon it by the government (The Daily Star editorial, February 28).

LGRD Minister Syed Ashraf Islam, on another occasion, discovered that the media had been creating the ground for the death of the prime minister (commentary by The Daily Star Editor Mahfuz Anam, August 24, 2011). There are also allegations of

the assessments and remarks coming from international quarters are hundred per cent correct and unbiased. No criticism, study or evaluation and reports on any area of government activities can ever be one hundred per cent correct. The possibility of both intended and unintended mistakes are always there.

Neither can the periodical reports on the various aspects of the government's performance, prepared locally or internationally, have the single

what they get in return is not thanks but only censure.

The international watchdog bodies, on the other hand, do their research more rigorously for consumption on a global scale. AI's 50th global human rights report for 2012, for example, castigated the UN Security Council (UNSC) with these opening words: "The courage shown by protesters in the past 12 months has been matched by a failure of leadership that makes the UN Security Council seem tired, out of step and increasingly unfit for purpose."

Now this not-so-flattering comment of the AI may not make UNSC and the world powers that represent it happy. Will they reject or have they rejected this report because it did not praise them? In country-specific reports, too, respective governments have come under close scrutiny, especially regarding human rights-related issues. Unless they are run by dictators, no sensible government should see any sinister motive in these reports. Gone are the days when governments could insulate themselves from the outside world and its peering eyes.

A government that claims itself to be a democracy must be prepared for criticisms either from home or from abroad. And it cannot simply afford to ignore those, as even the most powerful of governments on earth, such as that of the US, well understand.

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lesser gravity against the media such as the one from the finance Minister, A.M.A. Muhith, in which he held the media and the think tanks responsible for low foreign investment in the country (bdnews 24.com, January 19).

It is therefore not hard to read the government's mind about the USHRW and AI reports.

The question is: why has the government to be so overly sensitive and reactive about criticism from any quarters, whether from home or abroad? Why is the government forever in a defensive mode and living, as though in a state of fear? Who is its enemy?

Are all members of civil society, the foreign-based anti-corruption and "human rights watchdog bodies" at war with the present government? We are not suggesting here that all

motive of denigrating or demeaning a government. On the contrary, their basic objective is to inform and make the government and all others concerned aware of where things have gone wrong and hence are in need of attention.

Local rights bodies like Odhikar, Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK), anti-corruption watchdog Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) or Shujan, a fair election monitoring body, and so on do rigorous researches on the raw data they collect from media reports or through studies or surveys carried out by themselves, using standard scientific methodologies and publish those for free. The government should be rather thankful to these organisations, if only for the simple reason that they did the hard job without asking for it. But

PRAFUL BIDWAI COLUMN

UPA-2 under Big Business spell



PRAFUL BIDWAI

INDIA'S ruling United Progressive Alliance has no cause to celebrate its third anniversary in power. It observed it with self-destructive tactlessness, by raising petrol prices by 12%. UPA-2 shows no sense of public purpose. As the contradictory signals on a presidential nominee from its constituent parties suggest, they're pulling in different directions.

The UPA leadership is adrift and bereft of ideas. There are no signs that it can stop the coalition's further decline before the 2014 elections.

UPA-2 squandered the opportunity to fulfil the promises which propelled its return to power. The crucial promise was to build an inclusive, aam aadmi-centric, India, with a less skewed distribution of growth, and greater social cohesion, which could give the minorities and the poor a sense of belonging.

Instead, UPA-2 became a slave to neoliberalism, pampered Big Business, and facilitated plunder of natural resources. Its policies made agriculture unviable for millions of farmers. UPA-2 also got mired in corruption scandals.

Inclusive growth by definition means growth that benefits all, rapidly reduces poverty, provides public services to the underprivileged, increases employment and incomes, and narrows inequalities between individuals, groups and regions. None of this has happened. The fruits of India's GDP growth have largely accrued to the top 10%. Poverty has intensified in many states while high malnutrition rates have proved persistent.

Employment has annually grown by 0.8% -- less than half the addition to the workforce. Access to public services has deteriorated. Income inequalities have widened. Opening up retail trade to organised business and foreign investment has undermined the livelihoods of millions of

petty traders. Despite setbacks, UPA-2 hasn't given up on allowing 100% foreign direct investment (FDI) in retail. Nor has Prime Minister Singh stopped pushing the giant Korean-origin POSCO steel project -- despite its rejection by three official committees on unassailable grounds.

Indeed, obsessed with the "India Brand Equity" concept, his office is setting up a Special Purpose Vehicle to grant super-fast clearances to infrastructure, mining and industrial projects although they don't conform to India's environmental and forestry laws.

Industry lobbies are stridently cam-

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paing against a fictitious "policy paralysis." They demand "second-generation reforms" -- greater privatisation of public enterprises, liberalised investment and trade, and dismantling of even meagre labour protection.

They seize upon every sign of a slowdown, and every move to downgrade India's investment rating by Standard and Poor, as an argument for yet more neoliberal policies. They raise a false alarm about India sliding into a deep Europe-style recession. Yet, Western credit-rating agencies shouldn't be given much credence. Their standards are politically motivated. If they were to apply to the US Spanish indebtedness norms, the world's biggest FDI recipient would become a no-investment destination. Spain's public debt-to-GDP ratio is 69%, the US's is 103%.

India, with a ratio of under 60%, fares much better than France (86), Germany (82), the UK (86), Japan (210) or the US.

India now attracts over \$50 billion in FDI, up from under \$5 billion a decade ago. Its savings rate has risen to 33% of GDP from 25% in the 1990s.

The problem isn't FDI or GDP growth. It's the quality of growth and what it does for people. India has become a more unbalanced, strife-torn and unhappy society, with reduced human security and tattered social cohesion.

Yet, the government tackles the resulting discontent with brute force. This is painfully evident in the central tribal belt, where Naxalism has flourished, fed by deprivation of millions from access to common property resources like forests, grazing lands

an independent course in world affairs. Thanks to the US-India nuclear deal, India has locked itself into an inappropriate, extremely hazardous and costly energy path, while abandoning the fight for a nuclear weapons-free world.

On Iran, Palestine, Libya and Syria, UPA-2's unbalanced stand has caused a loss of goodwill for India in the Arab world and Iran.

India under UPA-2 has neglected the vital task of substantially improving relations with its neighbours. It hasn't taken a bold enough initiative on Pakistan through resolving the Siachen and Sir Creek disputes, negotiating nuclear risk-reduction measures, and unilaterally liberalising trade.

India lost a precious chance to seal an agreement with Bangladesh on the Teesta waters issue, which would have removed long-standing bitterness over the Farakka Barrage on the Ganga, which India built without consulting Dhaka.

India facilitated a worthy agreement in Nepal, which deposed the monarchy and brought the Maoists into the mainstream. But through interference on some issues, and inaction on some others, India has since lost goodwill.

On the mass killings of Tamil civilians in Sri Lanka during the anti-LTTE military operation, to which India lent intelligence and logistical support, New Delhi's role was deplorable. It abjectly failed to prevent the massacre.

India, a rising power, has joined groupings like the G-20 (comprising the world's 20 major economies), besides BRICS (with Brazil, Russia, China and South Africa), and IBSA (with Brazil and South Africa). It also won a UN Security Council non-permanent seat.

India's elite relishes global recognition, but has no strategy to make the world less unequal and violent. This failure is replicated domestically on a larger scale.

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THIS DAY IN HISTORY

May 28

- 1964** The Palestine Liberation Organization is formed.
- 1975** Fifteen West African countries sign the Treaty of Lagos, creating the Economic Community of West African States.
- 1998** Nuclear testing: Pakistan responds to a series of nuclear tests by India with five of its own codenamed Chagai-I.
- 2002** NATO declares Russia a limited partner in the Western alliance.
- 2004** The Iraqi Governing Council chooses Ayad Allawi, a longtime anti-Saddam Hussein exile, as prime minister of Iraq's interim government.
- 2008** The first meeting of the Constituent Assembly of Nepal formally declares Nepal a republic, ending the 240-year reign of the Shah dynasty.