

Undermining Grameen Bank

Amending ordinance will result in politicisation

IN a shocking and perverse move, the Cabinet set in motion steps to amend The Grameen Bank Ordinance 1993 that effectively empowers the Chairman to have overall control in the institution's operations and denudes the powers of the real owners, all 8.3 million of them, 95 per cent of whom are destitute rural women from having any real say. According to what has been reported in the press, the new powers of the Chairman become absolute in sidelining the real owners of the bank those who own 97 per cent of the share. Presently, the Board has 12 members where only 3 members including the Chairman represent the government. The other 9 women members are elected from the grassroots by the 8million plus women shareholders. Hence, the latest effort shows the government's intention to change the very nature of one of the most unique bank in the world which has successfully empowered destitute women and has become a model for emulation throughout the world. The Nobel Prize was jointly awarded to both the institution and the founder and the government's deliberate move to change the way it is run is in effect, a camouflaged attempt to turn it into a government institution and we all fear and share the concerns of the Foundation.

The latest move is the culmination of a well-orchestrated policy of harassment of Professor Yunus that has been reduced to a personal level where his personal integrity is being questioned. This witch hunt apparently knows no bounds. Questions are being raised whether the founder of this internationally acclaimed institution took financial benefits from the bank after he stayed on as Managing Director beyond the age limit of 60. One may then easily ask whether Yunus had any right to receive the Noble Prize that was awarded to him in 2006 when he was aged 66.

The mean-mindedness is reflected in the latest decision and goes to show the government's resolve to continue to hound and harass a man who has brought so much honour and dignity to Bangladesh. In the present world after Nelson Mandela, he is perhaps the most revered person in the world having been awarded almost all awards of any worth by countries throughout the globe. The government will be well advised to desist from taking steps leading to politicisation of the bank and denuding the banks real owners from exerting their legitimate authority. It should also stop degrading a man who has done so much to have brought so much recognition to the toiling masses of the land.

HRW report on Rohingya repression

The crisis should be resolved internally

IN spite of widespread media reports, the Myanmar government continued to categorically deny allegations of state-sponsored violence against the Rohingyas that erupted following the rape of a Buddhist woman in the Rakhine state of Myanmar. But a report released by Human Rights Watchdog (HRW) sets the record straight by asserting that Myanmar security forces not only supported Buddhist attacks on Rohingyas but also themselves unleashed violence on the minority Muslims at times.

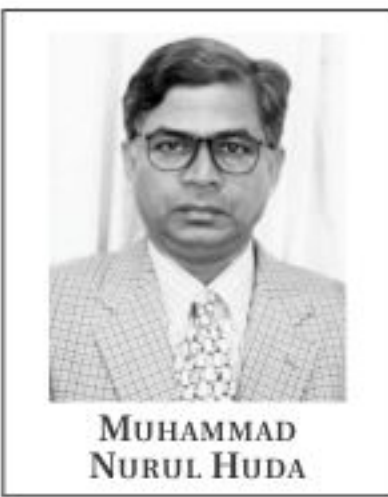
Based on dozens of witness interviews, it also claims that scores of Rohingyas have been arrested for their alleged involvement in the violence and kept incommunicado.

We believe the report raises a genuine concern over how the Myanmar security personnel, instead of protecting innocent people, joined hands with the Buddhist majority to attack and oust the Muslim minority group in what was triggered mainly by racial prejudice and hatred. This report should be immediately heeded by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and other powerful nations of the United Nations that stay in touch with leaders of the once-closed Myanmar. This is a racial issue which demands corrective state actions and if necessary, immediate international intervention, to solve it internally.

We heartily welcome the significant strides Myanmar has made in bringing about democratic reforms which is why many western countries have inked trade and business deals with it. However, the way it has dealt with the recent communal violence one-sidedly stands fundamentally against the democratic norms it has adopted of late.

The international community has ways to persuade the present Myanmar government to find out an effective way to resolve the escalating ethnic tension. We want friendly ties with Myanmar so that any spill-over of refugees is to be vigorously stemmed at the source.

STRAIGHT LINE



MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

WE have now become accustomed to the term "police service" rather than "police force" being used of police agencies,

and there is little doubt that it expresses the desired relationship between police and public much more clearly. Police officers have always provided a service to society, and indeed, have prided themselves on so doing.

For police to acknowledge themselves to be supplying a social service is to acknowledge that they are part of the welfare state. It is somewhat ironic that police finally accept that they are part of a state structure at the very time that structure is under threat.

The most basic requirements of life are food, shelter and personal safety and security, followed very closely by health and education. Personal security and safety were assured by a judicial system which could provide every-one with redress for wrongs, the cornerstone for which had been laid in 1215 by Magna Carta and developed over the centuries. The state had responsibility for the court system, but otherwise the rudimentary mediaeval roots of the welfare and justice systems were no part of government responsibilities.

In the middle part of the 19th century the state started to take responsibility for welfare, when British, European and other governments began to concern themselves directly in education, Poor Law reform, regulations for workplace safety, and in Prussia, the first worker's compensation insurance. The first recognisable modern police bodies date from about the same time, an indication that the modern state was also prepared to take responsibility for ensuring the safety

and security of its citizens.

In the modern industrialised world, food, water, and security are taken for granted, and when a country descends into chaos, as happened in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s, these are the very things the loss of which is felt most urgently by its people. In this context, it is no surprise that the coalition forces in Iraq in 2003 stated that the re-establishment of police was as great a priority as the restoration of electricity and water supplies.

overtly concerned with the welfare of society. Any police agency that considers itself to be a service (and many that retain the old designation of a force) can, with good reason, be called part of the welfare state.

The police will always remain a 24-hour emergency service, available when all other services are out of hours. It may well be that as financial constraints cut the availability of specialist social services, the welfare role of police will grow rather than diminish

just because they are always available.

Governments have an important role to play in police accountability. A dynamic tension exists between police, the law and society where a balance of control must be reached for the maintenance of a civil society. There have been number of changes in the attitude of the government of police, most notably in Britain since the election of Tony Blair's New Labour government in 1997, where a number of Acts of Parliament intended to address the perceived problem of rising crime have, as will be shown, made quite fundamental changes to police strategic planning.

A problem with applying the business model to the provision of police services by the state is that criminal justice is an important state monopoly; emergency health provision is a near state monopoly. Individuals can decide whether or not they want bicycles, and

if so, which bicycle they want at what price. They do not choose whether or not to become victims of crime, or to have a heart attack or stroke, but when this happens they require the police or health service to be available immediately.

Police are rightly one of the emergency services, since their services are, to a large extent, those that the recipients need because of untoward circumstances, not through any positive choice in the matter. Most of us would rather go through life not needing the professional services of a police officer, any more than we would choose to require the service of a heart surgeon or a dentist, but are glad that these professionals are available when the need arises.

In a variety of ways decisions about policing matters are being taken away from police. Government interference has resulted in an erosion of police autonomy at a time when police accountability is at its highest. Unless genuine decision-making power is developed, the devolution of authority to middle management does no more than create potential scapegoats within the intermediate ranks.

What recent trends have shown is that police in Britain are no longer allowed to set pragmatic goals but are expected to meet politically motivated government targets. The cult of statistically driven management and financial control bodes ill for policing, as it serves to stifle innovation.

Policing in the past was criticised for its rigidity and unwillingness to change traditional practices, but the last two decades or so of the 20th century saw police agencies shake off organisational inertia and undertake major changes in their approach. The start of the 21st century has seen policing aware of the need to change, but unable to do so through external constraints.

The writer is a columnist for *The Daily Star*.

Police service and government control

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In the modern, democratic world, police are required to do far more than simply maintain order. Order can be maintained by sheer brute force, as many totalitarian regimes have shown: in some, like Stalin's Russia, terror became a government monopoly. Modern, democratic police agencies need to maintain order peacefully, remaining answerable to the public for the manner and scope of their actions. From the 19th century onwards making a complaint to police provided a means of free access to the criminal courts for every member of the public. Pure law enforcement occupies a relatively small proportion of police working hours.

The emphasis on crime prevention (in Britain, the wider term "community safety" is used), obliges (in Britain the obligation is statutory) police to work with local and community groups. Policing is a state (or at least local government) run task, and is now

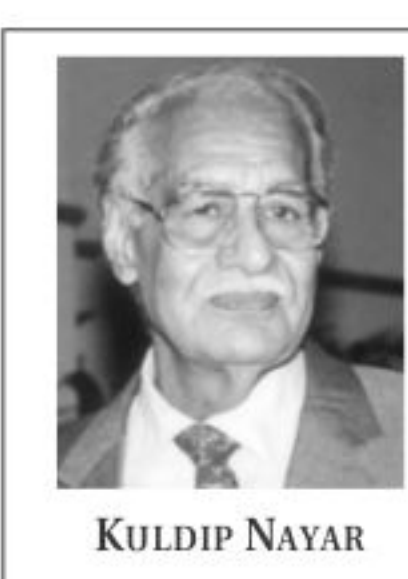
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BETWEEN THE LINES

Combustible northeast of India



KULDEEP NAYAR

INDIA'S northeast is the most combustible region. Some 250 ethnic groups are arrayed against one another and New Delhi

to fight for their identity, some seeking even an outside-India status. Religion-wise, the proportion of Hindus, Muslims and Christians is more or less the same. Infiltration, mostly from Bangladesh or what was East Pakistan, has only aggravated the problem. Even the Assamese who were given a separate state in 1955 when India was reorganised on the basis of language have become a minority in Assam itself.

The Bodos, an ethnic group which hurled part of its state, Assam, into communal conflagration -- the Bengali-speaking Muslims were the target -- are far from peace because they have even attacked the relief camps. The Bodos want to get back their land which the infiltrators and outsiders have occupied since the British left in 1947. They also demand a Bodo state of their own, like any other distinctive group in India, even though they wield a lot of authority through their autonomous council.

When some ethnic groups separated from Assam and constituted their respective states -- Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya and Tripura, the Bodos preferred to stay with the state of Assam. But the administration at Guwahati has not been able to cope with the diversity that the Bodos represent. The violence they have committed and the sufferings which Bengali Muslims have undergone have made Prime Minister Manmohan Singh say after his visit to Kokrajhar, the hub of Bodos, that "Assam is a blot on the nation." Yet why should Assam be singled out for the mess by New Delhi? In fact, the blot is on the centre which

is inept in handling the situation in the northeast.

New Delhi's pet formula is that whatever happens in the northeast is a law and order problem. Already, the army is in overall command for maintenance of peace and has under it all paramilitary forces. Even the state police have to look up to the army which has repeatedly said that the problem is political. Apart from sending some home ministry officials to the northeast, there is very little that the centre has done to sort out what is the northeast.

To administer with a free hand, the

involved in communal riots while another is that the overall command at Assam was seeking permission from the Ministry of Defence before acting. If these reports are correct, they raise a very basic question. That is, the army is not bound to assist the civilian authorities, as it is enjoined in the law, but would deal with each case on "merit."

The matter requires a consensus among political parties but they are busy quarrelling among themselves and avoiding the real issue. Frankly speaking, political parties have no idea how to deal with the situation. Both the Congress and the BJP governments

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army has the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA), a draconian measure which authorities a soldier to kill a person on mere suspicion. Since the overall command has become refuge for the harassed people and the inefficient governments in the region, the administrations, wanting in all respects, depend on the armed forces.

Therefore, it is not surprising to hear repeatedly that the army was late to reach the trouble spots. Assam Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi has publicly said that the army came late and the centre withdrew nearly half of the paramilitary units when they were badly required.

It is difficult to say why the army took three days to reach Kokrajhar when it is legally bound to come to the aid of civil authorities after a magistrate has sent a requisition. One report is that the army did not want to get

at the centre have found themselves out of depth whenever they have tried their hand at a solution.

Nagaland is the largest state in the region. Since independence there has been a ceasefire between New Delhi and Kohima, both sides negotiating over a status which has the trappings of independence, without diluting India's sovereignty. Both go over the same exercise of finding a solution, without anything concrete emerging.

Arunachal Pradesh, bordering China, is a state within India. Yet New Delhi "accepts" Beijing issuing a separate visa for people of Arunachal Pradesh and, for some reasons, for people of Jammu and Kashmir. Never has New Delhi stopped those from visiting China who have a separate visa from Beijing.

Manipur is under curfew after the sunset. Years of this practice have

injured people to such restrictions. But there is Irom Chanu Sharmila, who is on fast for the last 10 years, demanding the withdrawal of the AFSPA. Since New Delhi's dependence in the region is on the armed forces, it refuses to even relax the rigours of the act. A few years ago a committee appointed by New Delhi suggested the withdrawal of the act but the armed forces had the last word and the centre gave in.

Meghalaya faces the problem of ethnic identity. But people there have tasted peace and do not want to go back to the days of violence. Insurgency is there but New Delhi feels satisfied that the neighbouring countries, both Bangladesh and Myanmar, no longer now provide insurgents any shelter.

One problem accentuating the situation is infiltration. The Congress itself encouraged it in the fifties to increase its vote tally. Then Congress president Dev Kant Barua told me that they would have Ali (Muslims) and Coolie (Bihar's labour) from their places and win at the polls.

The Congress should have at least implemented the accord between Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and All Assam Students Union (AASU) to detect foreigners and delete their names from the electoral rolls. Assam Chief Minister Gogoi does not want to do so because foreigners give the Congress an edge in elections. The last two elections in the state which he has won have been primarily because of the "voters" from across the border.

The Bangladeshis come to India for economic reasons. Had there been work permits, they would have got them and returned to their home after work. But there is yet no such provision. In any case, their problem should not be mixed with the northeast complexity which is still awaiting New Delhi's serious attention.

The writer is an eminent Indian columnist.