

STRAIGHT LINE

High powered expert enquiry needed for Sonali Bank

Ensuring impartiality is a must

IN what is by far the single largest banking scam in the country involving a nationalised commercial bank (NCB), the Hallmark group managed to get Tk3,500-crore loans. The fact that only 17 midlevel officials have been suspended, where initial reports by the anti-graft body ACC puts it much higher, sends a chill down our collective spines as to where we are headed on the issue. Given the enormity of the scam, we demand a high powered enquiry committee be setup must include relevant experts familiar with banking procedures so that they can identify the loopholes in the system utilised to avail unworthy loans. The enquiry committee will identify the perpetrators, find the systemic flaws that exist in the bank's operations and offer long-term solutions. All this must be done within a specified timeframe and findings published for public scrutiny.

For its part, Bangladesh Bank which serves as the central regulatory authority for the banking sector must conduct a full audit of all banks, both state and privately-owned, for loans disbursed in excess of Tk1,000-crore to take stock of the extent of other such scams occurring in the wider financial sector. In addition, it is imperative that all Hallmark group's real assets are frozen immediately so that money already taken may be recovered.

NCB board members selected on political consideration rather than professionalism is one of the core reasons for such scams. Such appointment invariably leads to corruption when it comes to sanctioning loans and must be stopped. The question of "political patronage" of the accused group of companies has surfaced in the latest scandal and given the history of past enquiries, we are deeply concerned about the governance process as a whole in the banking sector.

Social safety net funds politicalised?

Empower the local government bodies to distribute these

IF the present government can be credited with any new undertaking to alleviate poverty, then the safety net programme constitutes the centrepiece of it. But ever since its initiation, we have noticed some irregularities in the distribution of allocations which is why the benefits of the programme have yet to reach the most vulnerable target groups.

In a recent meeting at the Jatiya Press Club on the necessity of accountable local governance, UP chairmen and members of several unions alleged that rampant politicisation of the safety net fund is largely behind the irregularities in distribution. Using their political clout, local ruling party leaders meddle in the dispensation of the fund by superseding the local government representatives. All too predictably then, the fund is distributed largely on political consideration.

Thus, need and vulnerability do not seem to be the sole criteria for selecting individuals to whom the fund should go. This is an abysmal situation, to say the least. As we know it, the social safety net was introduced to safeguard the marginalised groups against poverty, hunger and extreme medical conditions. However, thanks to the meddlesome ruling party elements; such a highly appreciable government initiative has turned into another political farce, depriving the poor for whom the fund was meant in the first place.

Politicisation has already heavily dented the image of the ruling alliance. Intervention of its local leaders in the distribution of social safety net funds has been brought to light and this will have to be addressed.

We strongly recommend that the government dispense with the local party leaders and empower the UP chairmen and members to make sure that the fund reaches the poorest social groups. The government would also do well to assign a separate monitoring cell to

When police attack the people



MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

THE front page photograph printed in *The Daily Star* on August 29 that shows several policemen menacingly assaulting

an unarmed student is without doubt a sickening sight. Many would term it as an indefensible demonstration of highhandedness. For law enforcement officials, who really want to change the colonial style of policing, this event is hugely image-shattering.

The image factor is very important as the national and international media will highlight the disturbing photograph to the clear discomfiture of enforcement functionaries who solicit public support in law enforcement.

Quite simply, this one incident will wash away the positive work done by others. Exhortations to enlist public support in crime and order management will not carry any substance and may even be ridiculed and laughed at.

The photograph in question will remain a standing testimony to the unfortunate impression that the police, who are supposed to be protectors of the citizens, have themselves been indulging in dubious and deplorable activities. There are good reasons for citizen's concern. One could ask why years of advocacy and sensitisation have not been able to put an effective end to brazenly illegal acts by sworn policemen.

Media reports about the premonition that recruitment and training of policemen, particularly at the subordinate rank, has been less than appropriate. There are complaints that during the last one decade the recruitment of subordinate ranks of police from Constable to Ser-

geant/Sub-Inspector positions have been subject to extra-departmental pressures which some would like to describe as politicization of the recruitment process.

The alleged irregularities have necessitated enquires and institution of criminal cases thereby, unfortunately, creating doubt about the impartiality of the recruitment exercise. The irony of the matter is that in the not-too distant past complaints about irregularity in the recruitment were almost non-existent and the whole exercise used to be completed by junior officers at the district level without any supervisor breathing over

of the police that comes in direct contact with the people in the performance of their duties. It is being realized that at this non-gazetted level there is a need of requisite knowledge, favourable attitude and specialised skill.

While police training is witnessing perceptible changes in different parts of the world, our ground reality is far from satisfactory. Barely one percent of the annual financial allocation of police department is spent on training.

It would appear that training of police officials has not made desired impact as the attitudinal changes

authority. Emancipatory human rights training of the police personnel, particularly of the subordinate ranks are necessary to make the police more professional, responsive and people-friendly.

The principles and standards of correct practice taught during the training have to be sustained by an appropriate organisational culture that lays stress on promotion and protection of human rights. Constant supervision and unswerving adherence to human rights norms by senior officers is necessary to build up such an organisational ethos and make policing ethical, lawful and humane.

A pertinent question is: Whether police's political controllers are really serious to shake off the colonial trappings and keen to create a caring and responsive law enforcement organisation. Shall we see the dawning of realisation that lawless enforcement tarnishes the image of not only the police but also of the government and the State? Can we also ensure that lawless police officers will not be in demand when an area is affected by disorder and lawlessness?

At times efforts are made to explain away excessive use of force by characterising the delinquent officers as only a few bad apples. This presumption is too simplistic. Excessive use of force is decidedly more complex and multidimensional than the few bad apples' theory would imply.

Officers' personality features represent one element of the problem. Organisational culture and practices are also often responsible for police misconduct. Police deviance is symptomatic of a system-wide problem. The issue and the remedies, quite clearly could not be viewed in isolation.

The writer is a Columnist of *The Daily Star*.

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their shoulders.

The pressing need is that the district and divisional authority must have complete freedom in the recruitment process in order to ensure the visibility of an upright cadre of investigative and law enforcement officers. Branding police officers as favourites of one or the other political party is ruinous because the credibility of police as the principal law enforcement agency of the state will be open to question.

No sensible citizen or well-meaning politician will want that type of a scenario to develop. It is time to make concerted efforts to keep the recruitment process above question so that appropriate and self-respecting persons are attracted to the job and allowed to develop as professionals.

In fact, it is the non-gazetted level

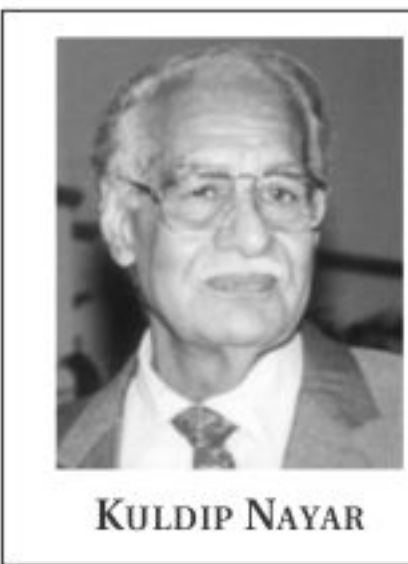
have not materialised. In fact, it needs to be understood that police is one of the means by which the State seeks to meet its obligation to protect some of the fundamental human rights- right to life, liberty and security of persons, right to a fair trial, equal protection of law.

Indeed, effective order maintenance and law-enforcement will enable people to enjoy fully not only their civil and political but also social and economic rights. Thoughtless and unlawful policing, on the other hand, can only cause suppression of those rights. Thus one often witnesses the paradox that human rights are protected by law and yet are often at risk from the law enforcers.

It is urgently required to build up an organisational culture that frowns on abuse or misuse of force and

BETWEEN THE LINES

A torn democratic fabric



KULDEEP NAYAR

ASSAM on the headline one day. Mumbai on the headline another day. And dominating all the news is the non-

functioning of parliament that the people note helplessly -- Rs.1 crore is the daily expenditure on parliament. What the scenario indicates is that the political consensus, important for a parliamentary democracy, is beyond repair. The law and order machinery has broken down and faith in peaceful methods has drastically lessened. One may as well say that the Indian polity is coming apart from the seams.

The BJP is most to blame because it has taken the situation to a pitch which may leave the country with no option except to have a mid-term poll. Pushing Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to the centre of stage and asking for his resignation is driving the ruling Congress and its allies to the wall. Their defence is cutting less. The row over the Rs.148-lakh crore coal scam is a symptom, not the disease. The disease is the BJP's calculation that this is the most opportune time for them to have elections in the country.

Two of the Congress allies, Mamata Banerjee's Trinamool Congress in West Bengal and Mulayam Singh's Samajwadi Party in UP may ultimately come round to agreeing to a mid-term poll. Both have registered a thumping victory in assembly elections in their states and both provide the Congress the required numbers to have a majority in the Lok Sabha.

The five-state elections later this year in Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh and three in the northeast may help trigger the demand for a mid-term

polls. Chief Minister Narendra Modi looks like winning in his state. Yet the general elections are 20 months away. The Congress can legitimately say that it should either be defeated on the floor of the house or allowed to complete its present term. However, the BJP is desperate and is not willing to find an amicable way out.

The BJP has already played the communal card and its mentor, RSS, has asked for the ousting of Bangladeshis since most of them are Muslims. Some Muslim fundamentalists have also jumped into the fray, as seen at Azad Maidan in Mumbai and Khokraj in Assam. Communalism indicates, to the delight of the BJP, that the plight of secularism is not

they are unmindful of the harm they are doing in the process. They are, in fact, wrecking every rule, every norm and every value in a society which is also deficient in virtues. Consequently, the people are suspicious of both because they do not find any difference between when the BJP ruled and now when the Congress is at the helm of affairs.

Assam is a political problem which all parties and activists can solve provided the Congress drops its know-all attitude. Mumbai is a law and order problem but the Congress government is too complacent and too weak to handle Hindu chauvinists. It is true to some extent that people have got used to corruption which both parties have indulged in whenever they have been in power, although the Congress beats the BJP hollow. The coal scam which has come to light indicates that the allocation of coal blocks was capricious and

designed to benefit such companies which must have paid money to particular rulers. The minutes of the screening committee show that the coal blocks were allotted even to those who did not apply.

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The Congress-led government appears to defend the Rs.148-lakh crore scandal only half-heartedly. Its plea is that there was no loss to the exchequer because the coal blocks it allotted never extracted any coal and hence did not sell any. The government gave the same zero-loss argument when the Rs.180-lakh crore scam relating to the 2G spectrum was disclosed by the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG). The Supreme Court had to rubbish the

argument to make the government not to repeat.

How can Finance Minister P. Chidambaram say that there was no loss to the exchequer when 150-odd parties were given the coal blocks? They may not have extracted coal but it is their property and their balance sheets have gone up by crores. Such fallacious arguments coming from the government dents its own reputation. The prime minister's statement finds fault with CAG and does not fully explain the allotment when he was the minister in charge.

The Anna Hazare movement which was expected to provide an alternative has lost its ethos and has become another Naxalite group, mouthing laudable slogans but acting like the Nihilists who want to destroy everything around them. People want an orderly change and admire those who sacrifice and suffer for it.

The third alternative which Samajwadi Party chief Mulayam Singh Yadav has mentioned is the same old combine of practising casteists and ever-changing politicians in loyalty. They, including Bihar's Lalu Prasad Yadav, changed the complexion of governments which came in the wake of Jayaprakash Narayan movement, seeking a total revolution. It was sheer graft and self-gain.

Because of the acts of commission and omission by rulers, the very fabric of India looks torn. Both Hindu and Muslim fundamentalists are marshalling themselves and spreading the politics of hate and parochialism. I do not know what was Health Minister Ghulam Nabi Azad trying to prove by offering namaz at the protected monument of Safdarjung. The purpose was probably to capture 31 such protected monuments. I wish he had focused attention on other mosques which are in a dilapidated conditions.

The writer is an eminent Indian Columnist.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

September 1

- 462** Possible start of first Byzantine indiction cycle.
- 1604** Adi Granth, now known as *Guru Granth Sahib*, the holy scripture of Sikhs, was first installed at Harmandir Sahib.
- 1906** The International Federation of Intellectual Property Attorneys is established.
- 1939** Adolf Hitler signs an order to begin the systematic euthanasia of mentally ill and disabled people.
- 1939** Germany invades Poland. German forces attack Poland across all frontiers and its planes bomb Polish cities, including the capital, Warsaw - Britain and France prepare to declare war.
- 1969** A coup in Libya brings Muammar al-Gaddafi to power.
- 1976** Water crisis deepens. The first of 11,500 standpipes are connected in Yorkshire as local reservoirs reach their lowest levels in years.
- 1985** A joint American-French expedition locates the wreckage of the RMS *Titanic*.