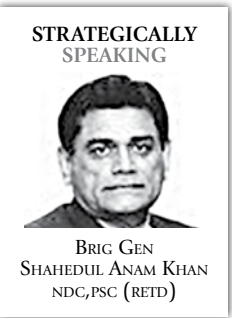


Who will guard the guards?

Salvage the Draft Police Reform Bill from the deep freezer



STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING

BRIG GEN SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN NDC, PSC (RETD)

THERE is a common refrain amongst the public circle whether things would have moved with the speed that it has in the case of Major Sinha, were it not for the fact that he was a military officer. It would be fair to suggest that, considering the trend of police behaviour in similar incidents in the past, it would have gone the way the killing of councillor Akram of Teknaf Municipality and many more such killings have gone, virtually into the backburner. In all likelihood, Shifat and Shpira—instead of being alive and being able to give the true account as eye witness, may have met Sinha's fate. And the perpetrators would have gone about their merry ways as they have been doing so long, with blatant impunity.

And in this case too, everything was going in that direction. The SP colluded in the construction of an untruth. Their dubious plans fell through this time, because of the forum of retired military officers, RAOWA, put up a very strong position in this regard. But the several hundred others who have met the same unfortunate fate as Sinha's, many under the watch of this particular OC, on this very stretch of road, the Marine Drive, which some have renamed "Killing Drive", do not have such a dedicated organisation working for them to voice their just cause.

Thus, it is time to resurrect the issue of police reform, and if I might add, reform of the police as well, an issue which has been pushed under the carpet for long. We are still clinging on to a colonial relic—a code of conduct that was formulated following the First War of Independence in 1857 to suppress the aspirations of the people.

Colonial rules, naturally, infuse colonial mentality in those who are entrusted to implement those rules. We saw that during

the Pakistan period, and we see that attitude even now, unfortunately. To live with an anachronistic and outdated law, under the completely changed concept of a free society, is a gross incongruity.

Regrettably, the police have never been allowed to function even within the parameters of the existing archaic Act of 1861, which also calls on the police to follow "legal orders". Importance of police reform has been well articulated over the past two decades by all segments of the civil society. Senior police officers at various times have called on the government to, "save this vital organ of the state from further corrosion" and go into, "in-depth examination of the police organisation, its mandate and its functional dynamics."

But the long awaited reform has not, and may never, come about. Why?

Readers would recall that the Draft Police Ordinance—2007 (DPO-2007) was put up to the government with well-considered recommendations. But regrettably, a draft ordinance that was informed by valued opinions of practitioners, bureaucrats, lawyers and representatives of civil society, including human rights organisations, is gathering dust on the shelves of the ministry.

Apparently, there is a resistance to change the status quo, which was clearly betrayed by the remarks of the Additional Secretary, Ministry of Home, made to a Bangla daily in August 2010 that the proposed ordinance was unrealistic and impracticable. He did not bother to elaborate on the "unrealistic" and "impracticable" aspects of the document. It is not hard to guess that the short shrift to the issue by the bureaucrats and the political leaders is perhaps because with the proposed ordinance in place, the police may no longer remain under their control since, among many new proposals; DPO-2007 makes illegal interference into police operations a criminal offence.

It must be emphasised that there is a difference between government control of the service, which a must for accountability, and political control which must be abjured, for the sake of rule of law. However, with

the distinction between the administration and the ruling party becoming completely blurred, and with the unmitigated politicisation of the service, the question of government control has been rendered moot. This is a view shared by many police officers too.

It may be relevant here to mention that that the two other countries in the subcontinent that had inherited this colonial legacy have moved more resolutely to purge it. Pakistan has a new police act since 2002, and in India, although the Police Act of 1861

has not been totally replaced, a "Model Police Act" was introduced in 1981.

But while one talks of police reform in Bangladesh, one must also mention reform of the police psyche too, a state of mind that has not been entirely of their own making. The concatenation of events culminating in the premeditated murder of Major Sinha, betrays such a crude and debilitating culture that has accreted over time, turning the police into an object of fear and trepidation rather than an agency that engenders confidence and trust among the law abiding citizens.

But whatever reforms are introduced, no substantive changes can be effected without addressing the main problem with political sincerity. At the root of the

problem is political interference, a feature not unique to any one particular regime, but to all regimes since our inception. The deep extent of political control has been betrayed in the way the police have been used as a handmaiden of the political party in power, to go after its political opponents. Almost all its agencies had been made dysfunctional, most of all the investigative agencies, which were compelled to alter the course of many criminal investigations. Such interference at all levels even now are more common than not. "We are seeing the spectacle of a

police force which simply enforces the wish of the government or the party, and here the rule of law is not a respected principle. Our police have been active more in repressing dissent rather than enforcing the law." That, according to former IGP who goes on to add, "Our police have been rendered to act as agents of the political executive rather than as instruments of a democratic state."

Change in police psyche is a tall order, but necessary for an organisation to be effective. It must realise that it is not a "force"—the word force conjures up an idea of coercion, and implies that it has enemies arrayed against it. The people are not the enemy. Thus I do not feel that combat camouflage dress is an appropriate outfit for an agency

that is supposed to build confidence among law abiding citizens. Of course this does not apply to specialised forces, which I believe has specific and specialised tasks. And for that reason I feel that all and every specialised force, and we have quite a few, should be separated from the general police service and brought under a separate set up under the home ministry, and under a different command altogether. The police should have the mandate only to maintain law and order, combat crime and investigate and help in the litigation process.

An independent oversight body is an essential adjunct in the administration of the law enforcing agency, which the proposed ordinance recommends to have. There also are some very important features of the draft policy including that of the provision of a "police commission" which, among other things, would oversee the workings of the force and also recommend a panel of names to the government for selecting the IGP. The DPO-2007 would ensure that the police conform to the democratic values and the principle of universal human rights. It enjoins upon the police, among other things, to be answerable to the people, who want policing by consent and not by force. Hurting your own people using the uniform as a veneer of legality is unacceptable.

Reform is necessary to ensure that the rule of law is enforced, and every single breach of law punished, and if it is a law keeper who breaks the law, with even more severity than the general public would be for the same crime.

The police should work under the rule of law, rather than the whims of the party in power, intervene in the life of citizens only under limited and controlled circumstances; and be made publicly accountable. Those are not my words but that of the said former IGP, whose comments and opinions, I found, are always informed by objectivity and backed by rational arguments.

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Covid-19 and the challenges to children with special needs

MALEKA PERVIN

AUTISM Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neurobiological disorder characterised by impairments in social communication and interaction as well as restricted and repetitive patterns of behaviour which is increasingly recognised throughout the world and Bangladesh is not an exception. Services to the affected and their families are at preliminary level in most of the developing countries, while health, education and social services related to autism have achieved remarkable heights in the developed nations. In this context, children with special needs in Bangladesh are primarily cared for at home rather than in institutions. In general, ASD impacts the well-being of the entire family.

At present, the uncertainty and sudden changes caused by Covid-19 are difficult for all families, but particularly for some families and individuals experiencing anxiety and autism. Children on the autistic spectrum are generally susceptible to high anxiety daily, and of course, for those children who manage the anxiety with a daily routine, being out of school and at home more will change that.

The management of autism spectrum disorder often relies on routine and regularity; however the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic has massively impacted many families' ability to provide this structure. Lifestyle changes including social distancing, remote learning, and self-quarantine, can certainly be challenging to any parent. For parents of children with special needs, specifically ASD, a disruption in a well-established day-to-day schedule can lead to fears of meltdowns and steps backward. Therefore, individuals with autism and their families may need additional support that will be useful for making decisions during times of stress and uncertainty.

Every child is unique, but children with autism tend to love structure and they generally thrive when their days stay close to the same as the day before, so a lot of kids are going to be thrown for a loop during

this time. Most families that have a member with ASD have been directly impacted by the coronavirus pandemic. Coping with the anxiety and uncertainty that we are feeling during this time is something all parents will need to address with their children. For many children with ASD and their families, the transition from a structured daily schedule in home, school, or community programmes to extended unstructured time at home is challenging. Visual aids and social narratives can be a helpful way to create

structure, provide guidance, and encourage independence while your child is at home. They used to help individuals predict or understand upcoming events.

During this situation, a family with a special child would prevent the child attending his/her daily routines outside the home environment including attending special education classes, participating in recreational activities and enjoying their favourite entertainment. Disruptions in the daily schedule can be difficult for children

with autism, so creating structure at home can make a huge difference. As much as possible, follow previously established routines related to bed times, meals, breaks, etc., at the same time each day. A visual schedule will help your child understand the new structure of their daily routine at home. It is appropriate to include limited screen-time within the daily schedule, but be sure to provide transition warnings and visual countdowns when transitioning away from highly preferred activities. A lot of kids are

now participating in at-home education, so making your home resemble the environment a child with autism is used to can help them feel more comfortable.

During the day, it will be important to handle play activities, listening to music or watching movies for a limited time could be considered as okay for these children. Ideally, individuals with autism have some coping and calming strategies in their repertoire of skills to access with support during their most anxious times. These may include rocking

in a rocking chair, listening to music with headphones, deep breathing, watching a preferred video clip, brief periods of vigorous exercise, or accessing a favourite activity or material. If coping or calming strategies are not yet part of the routine, caregivers can prioritise the teaching of these skills during this time of uncertainty. For example, LEGO-based play is an increasingly popular social skills programme for children and young people with autism. In addition, use tried and true ways that have worked for you previously for reinforcing your child's good behaviour and for following the rules. Fun activities, video games, snacks, late bedtime, etc. can all be potential rewards. Make a bucket of rewards that your child can pick from. The element of surprise will add to the process and decrease the likelihood of boredom from using the same positive reward over and over. Catch your children being good. Praise them aloud. A little praise can go a long way.

Parents of a special child should always attend to the needs of the child irrespective of the outside normalcy or abnormality. Children with autism often have difficulties expressing their emotions including fear, frustration and anxiety. Difficulties in expressive communication may be compounded by expressive communication delays, limited verbal and nonverbal skills and social communication deficits. They may communicate heightened emotions through changes in behaviour including increased repetitive behaviours, tantrums and behavioural outbursts, difficulty following directions and a lower frustration tolerance. If significant behavioural changes occur, additional support from a behavioural therapist, mental health or medical provider may be needed. Talking with the healthcare provider can guide decisions about how to access needed equipment, supplies, medications, etc., and whether it is best to visit a healthcare facility or stay at home.

Moreover, parents of special children are really worried about the direct impact of this pandemic on the family. Children with autism are generally prone to viral infections due to weak immunity and a child with

autism may not tolerate a mask, isolation in a new environment, or an unfamiliar health staff. They would not communicate their bodily symptoms, physical needs and emotional requirements. Admitting these children to an inward facility in the absence of a parent is virtually impossible. It is neither practical nor possible to ask the special needs child to self-isolate or stay alone. Thus it is very important to keep the children safe during Covid-19 situation all over the world. Every parent should carefully ensure their children's safety and help them grow good body immunity by eating healthy food and supplements after consulting with medical experts.

This pandemic has considerable impact on all family members, it is important for parents to care for themselves, both physically and emotionally, and set realistic expectations as they assume new roles in the family (for example, working from home parent, teacher, therapists, sports coach, etc.). Moreover, social distancing is better understood as physical distancing; maintaining social connections is of high importance. Many parents are expressing feelings of stress, guilt, shame, and worry, among other negative emotions at this time. Simultaneously, you may also be experiencing joy, humour, love, and deep connection to your loved ones. Please remember and don't forget about your self-care in whatever form that takes—meditation, connecting with other parents who understand the situation, watching a favourite show, enjoying a snack alone, exercise, or taking an extra-long shower.

The spread of the novel coronavirus has resulted in unprecedented changes to the daily lives of children and families and these changes may be particularly challenging for individuals with ASD, who tend to benefit from structure and routines. During this crisis, caregivers and health care providers should take this into account when designing strategies to understand and help children with autism.

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MARCUS GARVEY
(1887-1940)
Jamaican political activist,
publisher and journalist.

*The ends you serve that
are selfish will take you
no further than yourself
but the ends you serve
that are for all, in
common, will take you
into eternity.*

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS	32 "Forget it!"	vehicle
1 Be bold	36 "Piece of cake!"	9 Crazy talker
5 Low point	39 Receipt line	11 Head to the
10 In the thick of	40 Hilo Hello	Arctic
12 Writer Jong	41 Custom	17 Possess
13 Botch	43 Mail, as	19 Gaul invader
14 TV's DeGeneres	payment	22 Grow rapidly
15 Low digit	44 Less colorful	24 One released
16 "For sure!"	45 Prophetic ones	early
18 Appointment	46 Cruise stop	25 Impressive
misser		27 Strange
20 Low digit	DOWN	28 Sub systems
21 Coffee	1 Matt of movies	30 Words before
dispensers	2 — acids	dare or tear
23 Corn unit	3 Valentine gift	33 Author Calvino
24 Gasp for air	4 Finish	34 Hoopster
26 Party leader	5 Call for	35 Put to use
28 Shop tool	6 Singer Guthrie	37 Engine sound
29 Parka part	7 Waters down	38 Chow
31 Mine material	8 Wind-driven	42 Maple flow

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YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

S	E	T	O	F	F	A	P	E	D
A	M	O	R	A	L	R	A	R	E
M	U	T	A	T	E	O	M	A	N
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BEETLE BAILEY

BABY BLUES