

Lahore

News

# Force of notoriety



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**H**ow times change! Once considered the epitome of safety, protection and security, the policeman of today has turned over an absolutely new leaf. Unfortunately it's much for the worst rather than for the better. Now he has become an ugly caricature of what we used to see generations ago. Gone is the smartly dressed, dignified and stately officer. Today what we get to see on the streets of Lahore is an overweight, shabby and uncivilised man who has no manners, no scruples and no sense of obligation towards his duty. All he seems to be doing is grasping at opportunities to make a penny or misuse his power.

Once upon a time children were taught to go straight to a man in a uniform when lost or in trouble. That time seems like a fairy tale away. Now, it's considered the last resort. Out of the frying pan and into the

fire. Going to the police has unfortunately become one way of aggravating a bad situation. People try to avoid police interaction as they would avoid the Ebola virus.

Though policemen today come in all shapes and sizes, two signals as glaring as neon blinkers glow above them like a halo: for sale and beware! They are notorious for their lecherous behaviour with women and their belittling attitude towards the poor. Police cells are well known for sexual misconduct, physical torture, harassment and the unhygienic conditions that prevail within them. And yet with crime on a constant rise, it's unavoidable for every citizen to encounter a police situation sometime or other in life, and consequently suffer.

Traffic police are the most common of the species. They can be found lurking under shady trees, behind billboards or around corners, awaiting unaware victims. Their keen sight spots prey in an instant and loses no time to attack. The officer who strolls towards you is a man who has victory in his *kohl*-filled eyes, a smirk on his mouth and a bulge in his pocket (after all this isn't his first conquest of the day). As he approaches the vehicle, he brings out the deadliest of ammunition, his *challan* book. You know that if he lodges a complaint against you and confiscates your papers, it'll be days before you get them back, if you ever do, not to mention the hassle of going to court etc, etc. Mentally, you admit to the loss of a hundred-rupee note, lesser if he's mild, more if he's aggressive.

The experienced driver will be wiser to the situation. If the officer is on wheels, he'll stop, otherwise he'll

speed off. He might even have the cheek to wave. The unluckiest of all are the motorbike drivers who accidentally park on zebra crossings. Officers sneak up to them from behind and take out their keys. Once their wings are clipped, they have to give in obediently. All this is extremely ironic because police jeeps are always the first to break traffic signals.

Traffic police have great nuisance value, but fortunately come in small doses. Interaction with them does not last long. Pitiably are those people who have the misfortune of having to step into a police *thana* and communicate with the officers on duty. These people could be there, as either victim or criminal, but respectively the mental harassment they have to undergo does not differ. They are all treated alike, most often abusively, like common criminals. The police station no longer seems a place fit for any respectable person to enter.

**P**olice key haath bohat lam-bey hotein hain. This often repeated film dialogue takes on a new meaning in real life. Police, like trained dogs, know where to sniff out the chance to "warm up their pocket". It seems they are everywhere. When road accidents take place, the lower staff is there to sneak out tape recorders, cassettes or other accessories from the vehicle, irrespective of the gravity of the situation. Those who have a little more authority can even go as far as planting objectionable material in the car. Anything to harass the party for bucks. This seems so petty and yet is such a significant reflection of reality. In suicide cases, police try their level best to prove murder, un-

less of course handsomely paid off by the victim's family. They as much as approach the doctors performing post mortem, trying to manoeuvre the report to their benefit. In thefts, especially car thefts, it's common knowledge that more than half of the time police are involved in the crime.

A very rare and unusual news story appeared in the paper three days ago. It reported a police constable who was awarded for arresting a thief and recovering stolen money and valuables. This proves there are exceptions and there are honest officers. But these policemen are mere needles in an altogether corrupt haystack. Generally speaking, policemen today have managed to tarnish the image of a respected and sacred institution. They are depicted in movies as buffoons. They are seen on streets as equals to the street gangsters who pick up stuff from shops, daring anyone to ask them to pay. How many times have we seen our area officer sipping free cup of tea or having a free meal from one of the poor roadside vendors?

What will it take to turn the leaf back? Higher pay scales, more benefits? More than two-thirds of the population manages in less. Not as if privileged higher officials are any less corrupt. Since the army has encroached into all government departments (successfully or not being another issue), maybe it is time they totally took control of the police as well. If they can't defend the nation against local crime, lawlessness and general disorder, how will they defend the nation in war? Now it's for them to decide which is the easier of the tasks.

# Light on eating delights

Lahore Dawn Nov 5

**L**AHORE never had dearth of eating houses and yet it always had scope for new eateries and restaurants with local or foreign cuisines. This may look like a puzzle hard to crack but if you watch Lahoris eating in any street you don't have to tax your minds too much to find reasons behind their limitless capacity for eating.

Lahoris love to eat their traditional *siri pai*—*khadd*—*kebab* stuff and still have stomach for all kinds of exotic dishes. That is what makes food the biggest business here and that is what accounts for the profusion of so many local and foreign restaurants, including multinational joints. They were eating their local stuff and looked perfectly satisfied but when the Chinese opened their restaurants they developed taste for the Chinese dishes. And when Kentucky chicken and Pizza Hut arrived here, they welcomed the new development.

They continued eating the *murgh karahi* but started trying chicken Kentucky style. They have been eating beef burgers for long but when McDonald arrived here, they thronged its first restaurant mela-style. Looking at the rush caused on the Main Boulevard gave one the impression that the restaurant was there only for a one-day show and there would be no burgers on sale the next day. The initial swarming of the joint by the customers showed that all junk food shops in the area would close down. That did not happen. They keep selling their burgers side with Big Mac.

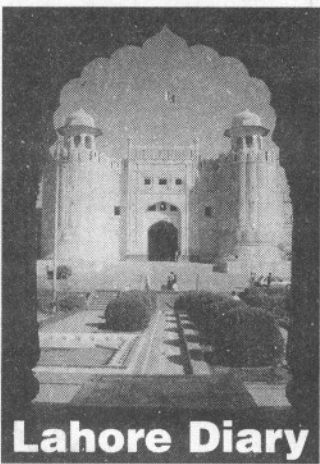
So successful is the food business here that one fails to understand why the owners of the so-called sick industries should be incurring losses and seeking government concessions to resume work. Why don't they open new hotels and restaurants to promote gluttony that is thriving with the full support of the Lahoris? Are there any failures in food business? Yes, there are, one being the Pak Tea House whose proprietor is desperately wanting to get into tyre business. Those who watched the inaugural crowd at the food street in Gowalmandi should not be inclined to buy the plea of the proprietor that food sells less than tyres in any manner.

The inauguration of the food street amid sound and light represents another leap forward in

the food business. Those who have been eating all sorts of food should now be meeting the new challenge. They should be eating a little more in the well-lit street to make the dream of Mr Kamran Lashari a real cultural success. Let no-one have the feeling that Governor Muhammad Safdar had tried so many dishes in vain right in the street. The street is indeed the right setting for eating and listening to Hadiqa's song *Buhay Barian*. Music is not only the food for soul as they say. It also makes you eat more if you have the right gastronomical appetite.

## Once a caretaker always a caretaker

**O**NCE a caretaker always a caretaker. Sweeping though it might sound, this generalization fairly befits the general behaviour of most caretakers, including prime ministers and



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ministers. Having once been entrusted with the job of caretaking in an interim set-up, these top-slot people have been prone to taking credit for their brief performance and the policies they worked out. Long after the end of their tenures they have been defending the policies that were devised by them. Some of these gentlemen have been lucky enough to serve two caretaker set-ups of sorts. This is because they keep working for a chance to serve when there is an occasion for being picked up instead of earning their position by election, which is a difficult process.

Mr Moeen Qureshi who once served as caretaker prime minister was here the other day on his way to Islamabad where he was scheduled to meet Chief

Executive Pervez Musharraf. Mr Qureshi, who is strongly advising the country against defaulting on IMF loans, has been criticized by some religious party leaders for lobbying for the IMF. These leaders believe that Mr Qureshi was wanting to influence the present government to revoke the controversial blasphemy law. They have also voiced suspicions that he is trying for a top position in the present or future set-up.

He completely denied this while talking to reporters here on Monday.

Mr Qureshi surely makes no secret of his ideas about correcting the country's image vis-a-vis the IMF and its donors. He sees the present government heading in the right direction and would expect it to improve its performance to make itself more acceptable to the donors. He believes that efforts should be made to win a long-term moratorium instead of defaulting on IMF loans. He is not sure that the government, under the circumstances, cannot appease the donors to win such concession but he terms the thinking of pro-default theorists "immature."

Going by Mr Qureshi's line of thinking, the default position was dangerous for the country's sovereignty. He somehow believes that our survival lies in collecting taxes to meet our debt-servicing responsibilities. But he offers no relief to the people who are currently hard-pressed against soaring prices and unemployment. Mr Qureshi is clearly soft on the IMF and the present set-up which is going an extra mile to squeeze out the last penny from the ordinary tax-payers.

Mr Qureshi, despite his reservations and balancing clauses, is behaving like an outsider who happens to be an IMF insider. His patriotic assertion that he still travels on a Pakistani passport does not make much difference. The present government has sought the support of former IMF and World Bank officials to no avail. If Mr Qureshi has any recipes of salvation he should not stand on ceremony to spell them out to the CE. If any of these secret formulas offer a lease of life at home, it should not fail to win him popular support. But can an IMF board change its spots? That is the question. — **VIEWFINDER**