

Politics Bazaar

Dr Pervez and



As if all issues of government stand settled, the poor earning enough to feed their children (without any problem) and half the population living below poverty line getting access to everything they couldn't afford in the past, the police closing down their torture cells and the dreaded cops suddenly turning polite to those seeking redress of their grievances and the courts dispensing justice sooner than expected, the government in the country's largest province decided to take holidays for a week. And once a system starts functioning on its own it's no use disciplining the society that respects rule of law with the state fulfilling its foremost responsibility of providing protection to its citizens and taking care of their needs for food and shelter.

But unfortunately Punjab throws up no such image of being a bastion of peace as to afford an opportunity to its chief executive for holidaying for a whole week along with a plenitude of top officials of his administration; the rest of half a dozen bureaucrats would be spending good time at America's

prestigious John Kennedy School known for offering career development courses. Such courses do help but some bureaucrats need a couple of lessons on brushing up their public dealing skills, for they don't get paid from the taxpayers' money to bully the people. Mr Saadatullah Khan may start looking for such courses for new entrants to the PSP cadre before they also shed their civility. So next time if a poor hack gets injured after his bike hits an SIP's jeep he would be rushed to a hospital rather than thrown in a police lock-up.

Excuse this digression. But one can't simply shut one's eyes to the bitter realities of life in a society like ours where the police patronage gives a free run to murders and outlaws, where thana culture continues to haunt the seekers of justice against the excesses of the rich and the mighty, where law-abiding citizens are humiliated and beaten up at police pickets in the cities and where the daughters of poor peasants are gangraped on decrees issued by the beasts on village panchayats. If on any given day no crime takes place it is because the news has not leaked out and not because criminals have decided to take a break, nor because the law

BY SARMAAD BASHIR

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enforcement has improved.

My friend Raja Bashaarat can rightly claim credit for the record legislation done by the Punjab Assembly but then this ahead-of-others rhetoric might well fit in when it comes to comparing Punjab with other provinces vis-à-vis crime, corruption and other illegal practices like official patronage of land grabbers. A Lahore District government officer who regained consciousness after spending two weeks in an intensive care unit of a government hospital where he was admitted with severe head injuries he had received in an 'operation' to displace 'illegal occupants' from a government property might drop some hint about the influential guy who is now being leased out this piece of reclaimed land. Wasn't it meant for a

journalist colony?

Ch Pervaiz Elahi must be aware of this situation. But then he understands that when a foolproof system could not have been put in place over the past two years to check such illegalities the situation cannot improve overnight. So why take tension and postpone a weeklong visit to East Punjab, especially when he could feel the warmth of Captain Amrindar Singh's arms around him. It was about time to express belated sympathies with his East Punjabi counterpart on the storming of the Golden Temple way back in 1984, to tell him that his heart goes out with the families of victims and to assure the Sikh nation that it was not alone in remembering this tragedy.

But there must be more to it than meets the eyes. It must be viewed as a sincere attempt to revive friendship with the old buddies that might go a long way towards realising the dream of Greater Punjab. The proponents of this ideology believe that the promotion of the Punjabi language would be the most important factor in achieving this long-cherished goal. This theme forms part of the Lahore Declaration issued at the end of the World Punjabi Conference early this year where Capt Amrindar's presence gen-

Greater Punjab

erated a fair amount of positive sentiment. This enthusiasm of rediscovering Punjab was duly acknowledged by Guru Nanak Dev University which awarded both the CMs with honorary degrees of D.Litt.

So when he returns home Dr Pervaiz Elahi might feel more excited to carry forward the idea of Greater Punjab. Do these honorary degrees sharpen one's intelligence? Maybe there is a need to get carried away with the idea coming from across the border that the plan to establish Greater Punjab would mitigate the sufferings of the Partition and help bring together the people who shared cultural heritage. Beyond making efforts to promote the Punjabi language the rest of the concept tantamounts to negating the basic philosophy behind Pakistan's creation.

At best he should treat his weeklong stay in India as vacation from the engagement that keeps him busy neutralising the political intrigues against his government and, if there is time left, dealing with the issues of governance. Perhaps his longer stay at work would automatically dispel the wrong perception that Ch Shujaat Hussain prolonged absence from the country has some political overtones.

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