

Rajshahi University disorder

Sow the wind reap the whirlwind

WHAT we saw happen in Rajshahi University the other day evokes instant condemnation. However, we cannot hold anybody else other than the university authorities responsible for reaping as they had sown by acting on partisan lines in the first place.

Recruitment rules were flouted by the university authorities while filling in a very large number of vacancies, an action that has a stricture delivered on it by the High Court. When lines are arbitrarily crossed to allow partisan consideration in enrollment, no wonder when the system of recruitment collapses, the general state of discipline and order that one normally associates with the highest seat of learning crumbles, too. And that was what exactly we witnessed happening at Rajshahi University.

But we ask, how dare does anyone raise hands on the teachers and staff of the university? Will it be wrong to suggest that such actions cannot be possible unless the perpetrators have backings of powers that be? Reportedly, local office bearers of one of the major ruling coalition partners led the perpetrators in the wanton vandalism and thuggery.

We also find the demand for the confirmation of the appointment of the several hundred, employed in a patently irregular manner, most reprehensible. This, when the case is sub judice can point to only one motivation of the perpetrators, which is to get an illegal action legalised.

No doubt the institution has been denigrated. And both sides must take the blame and be held to account for it. We hope that not only those who carried out the ransacking of the university building and the assault on the teachers must be brought to book including those who instigated them but also those in the university administration who had subverted the system by recruitment through the backdoor.

All this is not expected from the highest seat of learning. While we need to strengthen the institutional capacities, we seem to be ruining whatever little we have by irresponsible behaviour.

Fake licences, endangered lives

Culprits are known, punish them

THE figure is staggering: half a million people are driving vehicles on fake licence. This must be regarded as one of the prime causes for road accident.

All this is the result of a classic combination of corruption and callousness on the part of BRTA officials concerned and traffic policemen on duty. Mere observance of a traffic week every now and then and seizure of some fake licences can only make a minor dent in the racketeering -- the racket operating on a triangle involving brokers, corrupt employees of BRTA and traffic personnel on the road. It is a matter of grave concern when one finds that you could get a genuine licence through a broker for Tk 5500 and Tk 5000 in two categories when these should officially cost you between Tk 1250 and Tk 650 respectively. This certainly speaks a lot about the operational procedures applied by BRTA in the issuance of licences. There is something seriously wrong with the procedure through which a licence is issued.

In recent times there has been a considerable increase in fatalities by road accidents; surely the factor of fake licences has had a major role in most of these deaths. We must devise ways and means to tackle this matter effectively. The authorities should immediately take into custody the known gangs engaged in dealing in fake licences. Consideration should also be given to strict imposition of high rates of fines and varying degrees of jail terms for defaulters depending on the nature of violations -- from wrongful parking to involvement in actual accidents. A provision could also be introduced for permanently canceling the licence of an individual for a certain number of recorded traffic violations.

There is no short-cut to solving this endemic issue of both corruption and total mismanagement. Yet, we strongly believe that given the will and commitment on the part of the administration, the overall mismanagement including the scourge of fake driving licence could be effectively addressed. We need to do it urgently to save lives.

The French intifada?



M. ABDUL HAFIZ

TRIGGERED by the electrocution of two French teenagers of North African origin who took shelter in a power substation to escape police hassles routinely meted out to black and Arab immigrants ghettoised in Paris' suburb -- France witnessed late last year a sudden eruption of violence that spread like a prairie fire from Paris to the country's other cities including Marseilles, Dijon and Rouen. To the shock and surprise of contented authority nine nights of rioting followed burning thousands of cars. It bore resemblance to 1968 student revolt or an upheaval like that of Paris commune of 1871. It has been likened by some to social explosion like one in 1848 or to Civil Rights movement minus Martin Luther King. Some saw in it the continuation of 1789 French Revolution whereby the suburban immigrant youths were demanding equality, liberty and fraternity. Yet France's new proletariat are not criminal rioters. They are only making revolt so catalyse some social change which may ultimately be effected

through revolution.

The electrocuted youths' Muslim and Algerian identity immediately led many to assume the rioters to be of fundamentalist persuasion. Daniel Pipes, an American commentator, known for his ideological loyalty to Israel's Likudists dubbed the event as Europe's first 'intifada'. Those assumption proved to be false when French 'intifada' soon subsided in the face of the government's carrot and

stick policy of combining curfews with significant concessions at the social level. The assorted theorists who saw through their prism the signs of the clash of civilisation in the event also backed out. In fact, the revolts in the ghettoised suburbs only brought to the open the French delusion that the incantation of 'Liberte, egalite, fraternite' would somehow mark the reality of life for non-white French men and women: Repression, discrimination and segregation.

France of great French revolution consists today of two different countries, one rich of swanky French and another poor belonging to 5 million hapless immigrants

mainly from North Africa. This is not acceptable in a country baptised by French revolution. After all, it was France itself which once encouraged immigration from its former colonies particularly Algeria which was relinquished with great reluctance after a bloody war of liberation in the 1960s because of work force shortage. It is true, when the first immigrants arrived in France they accepted inequalities because they were not born in

go around. But that has changed in recent decades and throughout 1990s there were indications of a tinder box in making. When the Paris metro was bombed in 1995, the terrorist attack was blamed on local adherents to the armed Islamic group as a result of Algeria's domestic politics arising out of conflict between the country's military regime and Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) spilling into France. The fear engendered by the

rioters included more than a sprinkling of immigrants from non-Muslim part of North Africa and some under-privileged Gallic natives. The preference of death to police harassment paints desperate picture of dereliction and neglect in Clichy-sous-Bois where the non-whites live and the place where the riots began points to level of the immigrants' incendiary angst. The profound

totally forgotten the price it had to pay in French Algiers. It is yet to learn that it takes social measures to address social explosions.

France is estimated to have the largest Muslim immigrant population in Europe, 10 percent of the national total. In a country of the laudable principles of liberty, equality and fraternity the multiculturalism is still a taboo as reflected among others through a draconian ban on headscarf in schools. French youngsters of Arab origin can hardly be accused of not playing by the rule when an Arab name on a job application increases the chance of its rejection and when they are constantly subjected to police harassment. As a result, the smugness about the state of race relations is punctured leading to the big politics making or breaking the governments. The race relation today threatens to become a potent battlefield in the first part of twenty-first century.

It is not surprising for the French to be upset by the upheavals they are witnessing. They would do well to realise that overcoming the 'us' and 'them' mentality requires good will on both sides and that the riots had at least as much to do with 'class' as they did with 'race'.

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Brig (ret'd) Hafiz is former DG of BISS.

PERSPECTIVES

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the country and things were often better than where they came from.

Now the second and third generation immigrants have been born in France and signed up to the principles of the republic. They can see they are not treated equally which is shocking to them. They obviously are no more prepared to accept the discrimination. The French establishment a generation ago exiled the immigrants to miserable apartment blocks built around Paris -- faraway from the city centre. Whether or not the ghettoisation was the purpose of this social policy, it was inevitably the consequence.

Serious issues did not arise for as long as there were enough jobs to

event left an exaggerated impression on French psyche of Islamist terrorism in their country creating a growing audience willing to lend an ear to the racist rants of politicians such as Jean Marie Le Pen.

It may be true to an extent that the militant Islam has gained a foothold among the French citizens of North African origin. But the religious radicalism is directly related to the appalling level of alienation among the targeted demographic group and this alienation stems from social and economic conditions of the immigrants. Also the blame on Islamist backlash is considerably diluted as the reports suggest that the

infrastructural decrepitude in the ghettos is compounded by underfunded schooling and sporadic social services. Add to that 40 percent unemployment -- four times the national average -- and you are left with an ideal recipe for all explosion saying 'we've had enough of police treatment, joblessness, poverty and racist insults.'

But the rightwing elitist French ruling class chose to add insult to injury by turning to its colonial past to crush an African revolt and calling the rioters more 'scum'. It thinks that the 'thugs' will just disappear with the deployment of 'riot squad'. Ironically it has

Combating terrorism with US assistance



ANM NURUL HAQUE

THE government of Bangladesh has realized at long last that the country is in great peril with the rise of religious based terrorism and its Ministry of Home has finalised the draft of the Anti-Terrorism Act, prepared in the style of the anti-terrorism acts of the UK and the US. The draft of the act is likely to be tabled in the 20th session of the 8th parliament beginning on January 23.

Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Moudud Ahmed said that the new act would be enacted into a law in the next session of the House to ensure awarding of speedy punishment to the godfathers behind terrorists, and the militants. "The clause of sedition would be inserted into the new act and the act will be used against those individuals, groups and organizations which have been financing, patronising and provoking activities of the militants and terrorists in the country."

There is no sedition clause in the existing laws of the country other than the clause 124(A) of the Penal Code which is now being regarded as the clause of sedition. As such, the law enforcers are unable to frame charge of sedition against terrorists and their godfathers and try them even after their arrests on specific charges. All the cases relating to militancy and terrorism will be tried in the Special Tribunal if the Anti-

Terrorism Act is enacted into a law. In accordance with the proposed act, an offender could be awarded with punishments like death sentence and the cases that will be filed under the act will also be non-bailable.

The US Under Secretary for Political Affairs Nicholas Burns, who has changed his travel plan to exclude Bangladesh during his South Asia tour, said the US government wants that the Bangladesh government to respond vigorously

chair, discussed the draft of the proposed Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing Prevention Act-2005, aiming to stop sending illegal money to Bangladesh and prevent terrorist financing.

The draft Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing Prevention Act 2005 provides for a Financial Crime Investigation and Prosecution Office and allows the government to take foreign assistance. The law drafted by the Bangladesh Bank defines terrorist acts and

tion about some of the clauses in the convention. However, the government has recently decided to accede to the International Convention for Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism realizing its significance in the context of present global situation.

The US forces have killed some more innocent people in their search for the leaders of Al-Qaida. At least 18 people have perished in a bomb attack made on a Pakistani village on the country's frontier with Afghani-

stan. While focusing the US "war on terrorism" almost entirely on the Middle East, Iraq and Al-Qaida, Washington's current war in Colombia, a war in which the United States is actually supporting military forces that are terrorising the population, is hardly mentioned. The people of conscience in the US have to ask themselves if they really want their country to be supporting with funds and men a military in Colombia that is terrorising the population in order to

spread public perception in most of the Asian countries is that, in the name of war against terrorism Bush is conducting terrorism worldwide. Steve Engelken, the Director of the office of Bangladesh and Pakistan Affairs in the US State Department said US is cooperating in enhancing Bangladesh's capability to fight against terrorism. He said it while answering some motivated questions of a few newsmen that had an internet chat with him recently.

According to media reports, the government is contemplating to set up a counter terrorism unit with US assistance for \$100 million. Besides, US intelligence unit CIA and British intelligence unit MI-6 have been providing assistance and training to our intelligence units. But ironically Bangladesh was not provided assistance under the US government's Millennium Challenge Account (MCA), though the country met most of the criteria for MCA.

to violence and religious extremism. "In Bangladesh, we'd like to see the government to respond vigorously to the challenge of violence and of religious extremism that have been all too evident in Bangladesh over the last several months," he told the press at the American Center in Mumbai on January 18. The US Assistant Secretary of State for South Asian Affairs Christina Rocca is likely to fly in Dhaka on a 3-day visit to Bangladesh on January 26 to discuss critical issues of counter-terrorism and the next general election. Rocca may also carry a letter from the US government appreciating the government's anti-militancy crackdown.

Terrorism could not make much headway without the help of money laundering. So the government is also going to enact tough laws to check money laundering and terrorist financing in the country. The cabinet at its weekly meeting held on December 19, with Prime Minister Khaleda Zia in the

prescribes harsh punishments including life imprisonment and death sentence for them. The new law to replace the existing Anti-Money Laundering Act 2002 was penned at the suggestion of the US in the wake of 9/11 and in the context of the worldwide rise in terrorist activities to prevent and crush money laundering and funding terrorism and militancy.

Bangladesh is likely to be able to strengthen monitoring of bank accounts and fund transactions to detect terrorism financing effectively from now on, as the country has since acceded to an international anti-terrorism convention. Except the International Convention for Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism, Bangladesh had earlier acceded to 11 other anti-terrorism conventions, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on December 9, 1999. The country delayed to accede or ratify that particular convention for several years because of its reserva-

stan on January 13. Earlier, quite a large number of people were killed; some at wedding receptions, when US planes dropped bombs on what they thought were gatherings of Al-Qaida or Taliban in Afghanistan. It does not appear that such blunders have embarrassed the George W. Bush administration, which goes on pretending that all the innocent people killed are collateral damage and therefore is something that is inevitable in a war. Now, on this latest blunder, the US administration is not even ready to apologize, but rather has made it clear that they are ready to launch more such attacks with a view to wipe out the roots of Al-Qaida, as the US and Pakistan have been working together to fight against the terrorism.

America's fight against the Al-Qaida, though seen as helping to safeguard the authority and sanctity of national governments, is also considered as a clear violation of state sovereignty as in the case of the American invasion of Afghani-

protect oil interests.

The US government expressed its interest in considering new proposals to expand cooperation in counter-terrorism drive in Bangladesh in the wake of the threat to blow up the US and European mission in Dhaka which came from Al-Qaida members. One does not require much wisdom to understand that the types of terrorism we are experiencing in Bangladesh differ from the contemporary terrorism in US or UK with vastly different ideologies. In many parts of the world, freedom fight or retaliatory actions are being termed terrorism by some quarters of vested interest.

After the terrorist attacks on Twin Towers, the US government enacted the Patriot Act and following the London blasts the UK government enacted the Prevention of Terrorism Act 2005 with a view to punishing both the terrorists and those who provoked people to indulge in terrorism. But the wide-

The issues of Islamic militancy and extremism have soiled our national image abroad. Growing of any sort of extremism is not necessarily confined within one's territory, but has international ramifications. The country is already under foreign pressure to check the rise of Islamic militancy in the country. If the government was prompt in taking appropriate measures without denying the reality, the subversive activities of the enemies within could have been nipped in the bud. Though the definition of terrorism remains to be contested in the US and elsewhere, it has no ambiguity in Bangladesh. So it is imperative to determine our own strategy to be used in counter terrorism particularly in the situation we are confronted with.

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OPINION

Bureaucracy: Points to ponder

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IT is a matter of fact that the bureaucracy represents the core of any society and reflects the dynamics of the same. The fact that bureaucrats are entrusted with a sacred job seems to have gone into oblivion, but their ideal role isn't to be overemphasized. The masterly job of synthesis between theoretical knowledge and professional expertise is aptly done by them. Instances of aberrations are not few either. Nonetheless, bureaucrats can very well mould the moral fabric of a nation.

The survival of France in times of great national instability is attributed to unflinching stance of the bureaucrats. National development in many developed countries has been either spearheaded or supplemented by the bureaucratic institutions. Though political institutions were fairly competent,

bureaucrats had always the edge to manipulate state activities therein. But their interference hardly collided with national interest. While bureaucrats are in constant aid of the political institutions in the developed states, the responsibilities of bureaucracies multiply in the developing countries because of premature political culture and lack of awareness among the masses.

The bureaucrats of a country are supposed to furnish values and ethics to the whole society but the nature of their work ethics presents too dismal a picture. Value-orientation and mindset of the bureaucrats of the developing countries seem to have been severely stunted and tantamount to sort of a bankruptcy. The downward trend of the developing states have every right to look up to the mandate for change as well as betterment of their lot. Millions in these countries are struggling hard

It seems to be a happy compromise between the politicians and the bureaucrats for mutual gains. However, coercive measures are very unlikely to do good to reorient them towards the people. Because they, as has been demonstrated for the last 34 years, are matured and smart enough to resist such measures. Having said so, I don't think that they would be able to withstand long the worldwide trends of bureaucratic reorientation.

to come out of the vicious cycle of poverty. Not to speak of relative or absolute poverty, hard core poverty still encircles majority of them. 'Less than one dollar per day' is still the trademark for many. Did the bureaucrats live up to the expectation?

Introduction of merit based recruitment was indeed a milestone in the administrative arena. However, this golden rule did never experience an easy sailing. It received firm footing even in the cradles of democracy only towards the end of the 18th century. Merit system must have counteracted many maladies caused by spoils

and patronage systems but sort of redefinition of merit was also not to be downplayed. Necessary considerations for 'unbalanced development' and 'disadvantaged sections of the society' called for such redefinition. Hence, positive discrimination or affirmative action has been adopted by the civilized societies to promote the deprived groups and give bureaucracy more of a representative look. However the term is redefined, it is always a coveted qualification and has proved to be consistently creditable.

Merit alone has, however, not been proved to be a panacea for all

administrative ills. If meritorious people remain resolute and defy the temptations consistently, the ones that try to entice them will find things difficult. The downward trend in the values of the bureaucrats alludes to the fact that they are lacking in the required amount of commitment expected of them. Rather, they tend to succumb to slightest of temptations. The problem might be aggravated in that meritorious yet unscrupulous persons may become evil geniuses. In fact, this truth applies not only to bureaucrats but to every segment of society.

To cope with the increasing

problem of morality, rethinking as to the present emphasis on merit may be seriously considered. The present emphasis on merit, thus, must give way to equal emphasis on merit and morals. Even the 'positive vetting' mechanism, to my mind, may be tried while recruiting candidates to public services as well as other responsible jobs. Phenomena such as family background, track record of behavior patterns, moral character, innate propensities of the candidates might be given due importance along with academic excellence and psychological aptitudes.

Bureaucracies around the world especially in the developed states are facing constant threat of job insecurity in the wake of New Public Management, Reinventing Government and such other cost-cutting and efficiency based phenomena. During the last three decades, the world has experienced drastic changes in terms of bureaucratic service delivery and responsiveness towards the people. Almost all the developed democracies have gone for massive overhauling of their administrations with a view to making them more efficient, more effective, more cost-effective and, more importantly, more responsive towards the citizens.

Bangladesh gained independence more than three decades ago. But our bureaucrats still remain obsessed with colonial past and their orientation shows no signs of change whatsoever. In

Bangladesh, almost everything seems to have changed with the passage of time but the bureaucrats are rock solid in resistance. Sustenance of status quo is the most discernible aspect of our bureaucratic culture. Political unwillingness on the parts of successive governments is also to blame for this inertia. It seems to be a happy compromise between the politicians and the bureaucrats for mutual gains. However, coercive measures are very unlikely to do good to reorient them towards the people. Because they, as has been demonstrated for the last 34 years, are matured and smart enough to resist such measures. Having said so, I don't think that they would be able to withstand long the worldwide trends of bureaucratic reorientation.

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