

Women denigrated

What examples are we setting about women's rights?

THE incidence of brutal aggression on women that heightened in full view of the whole world in the last few days spoke volumes about the sorry state of human rights, legal rights and fundamental rights with the women representing the most sensitive aspects of these constitutional principles. Such acts of hostility, especially on our womenfolk takes on a totally new dimension when these are perpetrated by none other than some members of the law enforcing agencies who in reality are supposed to show respect and protect them from any kind of harm coming their way.

Shanta, a 3-month pregnant housewife was mercilessly beaten up by the police during the 14-party political programme on 12 March in Dhanmondi. She was on her way home after leaving her child at school but unfortunately got caught at the wrong place at the wrong time. Seeing the commotion ahead on the road she had taken shelter inside a local clinic but some women police personnel dragged her out of the clinic and began to beat her persistently in front of their superior officers. Her repeated plea for mercy on account of her being pregnant fell on deaf ears but the worse was yet to come. Her physical and mental anguish doubled when a senior police officer took her to a corner and made her sign on a blank paper. Now, how can a police officer do that remains a puzzling question that the police big brass will have to answer one day. It is beyond our comprehension why law enforcers display such frenzy when it comes to handling opposition-led political programmes.

We also watched in disbelief as some female activists of the Jatayabadi Chhatra Dal pulverized the general students of Eden College a day before the Shanta affair. These JCD activists have been accused of doing unlawful things concerning admission and allotment of residential seats by the general students. When the agitation against the cadres reached its peak and the hall authorities failed to quell the anger of the common students, the ugly incident took place right on the road in front of the college which we editorialised yesterday but are having to refer to again in utter disgust. It was another show of arrogant disregard for modesty and civility by a section of students who are in reality marauding cadres prowling the campus looking for a kill.

The overall pattern is unmistakable. A new phenomenon of stopping short at nothing to suppress dissent, what if it involves a blatant perpetration of women's denigration, has dreadfully set in.

We, therefore, feel strongly that an independent probe needs to be ordered by the government immediately with assurances made publicly that the perpetrators of the series of ugly incidents will be brought before the court of law.

Hardly entertaining

Not a sign of expenditure control

THE drawing of entertainment allowance by the chief whip's office at the rate of Tk one lakh per month in provisions and cash from the Parliament Cafeteria has caught our attention. During the last eight months of the fiscal 2005/2006 the chief whip has drawn nearly Tk 8 lakh as compared with Tk one and half lakh on an average by other whips. The expenditure tops up the monthly salary and allowances of the lawmaker amounting to Tk 50,000. A serious question does arise with regard to drawing monthly food rations and ready cash from the canteen as reported and that too at an uniform rate of taka one lakh. The food rations were purportedly obtained against two different lists duly authorised by the office of the chief whip, one for his residence and the other for use at the flat allocated to him at the NAM Complex.

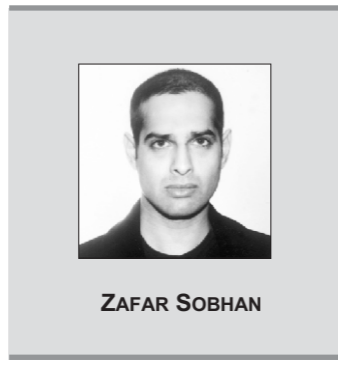
The way the chief whip has defended himself against the expose has betrayed an insensitivity on his part to the seriousness of the issue at hand. He says he has not committed any act of illegality, a claim which of course is expected to go through scrutiny under the financial rules in due course; but it is certainly a question of ethics, morality and, above all, propriety that has been given rise to. Little wonder, some of the former whips have described the matter of drawing rations for his residence by the chief whip as unheard of and unprecedented.

The Jatiya Sangsad is the highest constitutional and representative organisation of the nation. Each of its functionaries is expected to conduct himself or herself impeccably setting examples in abiding by the rules of moderation, propriety and discipline.

On the subject of entertainment allowances, we suggest that reasonable control be exercised by the recipients while the same is periodically enforced by an expenditure review committee for the parliament so as to make sure things are in order.

Given what has come out in the press, we demand that auditing be conducted at the behest of the Speaker into the use of entertainment allowance by the chief whip.

Paradise lost?



ZAFAR SOBHAN

IT was initially named after the then Lieutenant Governor Sir Ashley Eden in 1878 and not the garden in which Adam and Eve happily spent their days before they were expelled for eating the fruit of the forbidden tree, but Eden College has long enjoyed a reputation for fine academics as well as for being an institution free of many of the troubles that plague our university campuses. Not any more.

The events at Eden College since the night of March 7 have unfortunately brought this hitherto quiet campus into the limelight, but the truth of the matter is that the rot set in some time ago and in many ways mirrors the rot that exists in all our other institutions of higher education.

The cancer at the heart of Eden College is the take-over of the campus by ruling party cadres, many of whom are not even actual students, and the authorities turning a blind eye to their criminal activities.

In a sense this should come as no surprise, since these days college administrators are hand-picked for their unquestioning fealty to the ruling party and so are actively

complicit in the abuses of the party cadres. The fact that the quality of education on offer as a result has plummeted and the campus has become a den of criminal activity bothers the administrations of today not in the least.

It was as long ago as September 2003 that The Daily Star first reported that JCD cadres at Eden College were dealing rooms in the hostels to the incoming freshers for money and were forcing those who

cadres restricted to extorting money from students for place in the hostels, it has also been reported that they run a flourishing business in admitting first year students in exchange for money, something that can only be accomplished with the complicity of the college authorities.

The current crisis began on March 7 when the JCD cadres took over 15 rooms in different hostels and evicted some 20 of the rightful

front of the campus from 4 pm on March 13 until the early afternoon the next day.

Throughout the day the JCD cadres, armed with sticks and bricks, kept guard over the dorms and pelted the demonstrators and beat up anyone who came anywhere near the vicinity of the dorms.

At one point the JCD cadres swooped down on the demonstrators and unleashed a vicious attack, injuring ten of them, and sending

full support of a section of the government who will go to any lengths to ensure that the campuses do not become centers of political opposition and thus turn a blind eye to the misdeeds of their own cadres.

There are numerous instances where the government has systematically replaced genuine vice chancellors and principals all over the country with their compliant lackeys who are under strict instruction to go to any lengths to accom-

Throughout the crisis, it has been clear which side she has been on.

For its part, the JCD has said that the Eden College organization is divided into feuding factions and that the criminal activities might be the work of one faction. The JCD central committee has said that they have no organization at Eden College. Right.

It is the same old story, but with women instead of men. The campuses have been taken over by political cadres and the authorities are too craven to stop them. In a sense, we should not blame the university authorities too much since it is clear that they are just lackeys who are acting according to their instructions.

Make no mistake about it, as with everything else in this country, nothing can happen on campus unless it has official support. The reason that public education is in such a mess and that rampant criminality on campus is permitted to continue without check is because of the practices that are being followed by the government. But the true tragedy is that in this country things are so politicized that the government can easily find stooges to do its bidding, however odious the task, and that no one from within the party or among its supporters will raise their voice in opposition, ensuring that any campaign to improve things ends up a partisan and thus failed exercise.

Zafar Sobhan is Assistant Editor, The Daily Star.

STRAIGHT TALK

In a sense, we should not blame the university authorities too much since it is clear that they are just lackeys who are acting according to their instructions. Make no mistake about it, as with everything else in this country, nothing can happen on campus unless it has official support. The reason that public education is in such a mess and that rampant criminality on campus is permitted to continue without check is because of the practices that are being followed by the government.

did not pay up out of the rooms to make way for those who did submit to their extortion.

This is a common practice in our universities and did not begin with the tenure of the ruling alliance in 2001, but as with all the other abuses of power that we have lived with for so long, the practice has now reached unprecedented levels of criminality.

It has been reported that the former principal of Eden College and some of the other staff had attempted to take a stand against the criminality that was rampant in the college, but that they were pressured to quit by senior government officials as a result of their efforts, leaving the field wide open for the cadres to continue with their activities.

Nor are the activities of the JCD

occupants. This was not the first time that innocent students had been summarily evicted by the cadres, but enough was enough. It was this that caused the students to start demonstrating on March 8, demanding reinstatement of the evicted students.

The response of the college authorities was disgraceful. They made no move to reinstate the students and let the illegal eviction stand. Then, in an attempt to defuse the tensions that had been caused by their siding with the cadres, on March 13, the authorities issued a notice for all students to vacate the dorms, despite the fact that exams were still going on and that many of the students did not have anywhere else to go.

It was to protest this decision that students blockaded the street in

three to the hospital. It was only when the shocking pictures of this violent assault were splashed on the front pages of the dailies that the country sat up and took notice of what had been happening.

But what is happening at Eden College is not new and indeed is the modus operandi of all institutions of higher education in the country.

That this is a national problem should be self-evident and no sentient person can defend the degradation of our once internationally reputed university campuses.

That political cadres, most of whom are not even active students, are permitted to not only impose a reign of terror over the campuses, but are also involved in wholesale criminality, is bad enough.

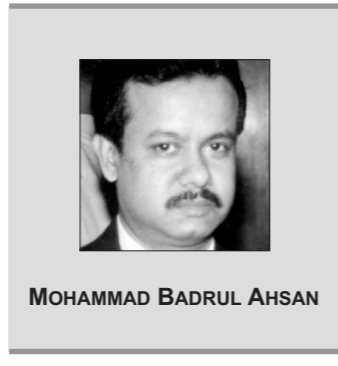
But what compounds the problem is that this is being done with the

moderate the cadres who effectively run the campuses.

Let us look at the pathetic response of the principal of Eden College to the take-over of the campus under her ostensible control by the JCD cadres, many of whom, let me remind you, are not even actual students.

First, she has sat idle for almost two years while the JCD cadres have been selling admissions and hostel space (though apparently a committee was finally formed last week to look into the matter). Then she did nothing when 20 students were evicted from their rooms, refusing to even meet with the demonstrators to discuss their legitimate concerns. Then she took the indefensible decision to close down the dorms during exams that has only exacerbated the problem.

Trial by jury, not perjury



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

ately after his arrest, his face and hair burned and one arm roasted like a rack of lamb, his swollen face and bloated belly conjuring the image of a fallen ghoul.

We are waiting for them to speak, if they haven't spoken already. We don't need to know everything, honestly, not what inspired them to take this course. It's of no interest how they planned their attacks or recruited members to expand their network. We don't want to know how and where they

We can give these militants consecutive life terms, hang them or hack them to death but justice will be achieved only if we can unravel all aspects of the crime, laying out all facts like articles displayed in museum.

That is exactly what they are trying to do in Cambodia. They are taking preparations for the trial of the Khmer Rouge. The budget is USD56.3 million, which will be spent on setting up special tribunals, appointing judges, building

got away with what they did. Pol Pot died before he could be brought to justice. Milosevic passed away in the detention cell in the middle of his prosecution. Many of the Nazi war criminals escaped justice. People, who collaborated with the Pakistan Army in 1971, were never tried.

That is why, I say it again, justice is not about vengeance because all murder trials happen after the victim is dead. But it is always about the crime. People are often

question whether even if the captured militants are punished, will it be fair trial? When the government is accused of complicity, fingers pointed at some of its ministers, will justice be achieved if we punish the guilty and protect the guilt? Think about it. Will it be fair if we hold trial of the gun and spare the hand which pulled the trigger?

In that case, the militants should get what they deserve but we must also look behind the scene. It's important to know who funded

understand the phenomenon which brought them pain, and know those who are responsible for it.

It is strange how these things work. Justice can be miscarried like a disrupted game of chess if one of the pieces is missing. The capture of the militants has made one thing obvious that no foreign operatives had infiltrated the country to do those subversive acts. They were our very own people with a warped sense of justice. If all the layers of conspiracy are peeled away, these militants are products of demonic forces which are more deeply rooted in politics than in religion.

The trial of the militants brings us the rare opportunity to separate one from another. It brings us the opportunity to look for faces hiding behind faces. Religion is passion of believers firmly embedded in faith. What politics does is stoke that passion so that the devout minds are deluded. We must use this trial to sort out that delusion. Otherwise, while we get mere headcounts in vengeance, justice is going to fail.

It means if we protect anybody who might have helped these militants we are going to lose the moral right to hold this trial and close the circle. What we need is a trial by jury, not perjury.

Mohammad Badrul Ahsan is a banker.

CROSS TALK

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sourced their explosives, although the authority may like to know. Only two things are important for us. Which bomb attacks are they responsible for? Who sponsored those heinous acts?

There is always an inequality in the justice for mass murderers. Eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth, it doesn't work when one or few men conduct a holocaust or carnage, because in the end you can kill one man only once. Some years ago a Pakistani court had given a landmark verdict in the case of a paedophile, who had molested and killed hundred boys. The order was to hang the accused to death and then chop his body into hundred pieces, one for each victim.

More than anything, justice is geometric, not arithmetic. It is not so much important to settle the equation as it is to close the circle.

courtrooms and incidental expenses. The tribunal will be ready in 2007, and it has been already 27 years since the atrocities perpetrated by the Khmer Rouge wiped out 1.7 million lives. Many of the criminals, victims and witnesses could be dead by then.

So what? Justice is not about vengeance. It's about closure, not so much to match crime with punishment but to restore the moral balance that we are accountable for our actions. That is why the family of the victim is allowed to watch when a murderer is sent to the gas chamber or given the lethal injection in the United States. It's an act of closure to demonstrate that the wrongdoer has been brought to justice right before their eyes.

We have many examples of exceptions in history when people

tried in absentia, because justice must be upheld even if the criminal can't be held. Under the present scenario, the criminals have been held but the question is whether justice will be upheld. Will their trial be transparent and fair?

Let us not doubt that the trial will happen. But the question is how is it going to happen? Who will be the judges? In 1983, Professor Harry Elmer Barnes re-evaluated the Nuremberg trial of the German war criminals and observed that the court had no real jurisdiction over the accused or their offences. Then he wrote that it also permitted the accusers to act as prosecutors, judges, jury and executioners; and it admitted to the group of prosecutors those who had been guilty of crimes as numerous and atrocious as those with which the accused were charged.

It leads to the fundamental

them and whose brainchild it was to unleash terror in the name of Islam to make political gains. Like there is chain of command amongst those who acted, there must be chain of command amongst those who guided. We need to get both sides so that the temporary remission of fever doesn't mislead us that the virus has been rooted out.

We must listen to the militants and understand why they utter the names they utter. Even better, their trial must be televised to the nation in the manner some international trials such as Saddam's are televised to the world. The families who lost their dear ones have the right to hear every word spoken by these militants, pick up every name they drop and scrutinize every argument they give. We owe it to these families so that they can

Overcoming identity crisis

A K Md ABEUR RAHMAN

IDENTITY is an important feature for any country or nation. Every nation or a country must have certain distinct features to identify itself as a separate entity. Race, ethnicity, culture, religion and language play their respective role in determining a nationhood. All or some of these factors should combine together in establishing the nationhood of any group of people living together, although the role of race and ethnicity is not as important as religion, language and culture. These three factors are so interdependent that one must be supplemented by the other so that each of them can act as a potent factor to become a component unit in the process of forming a nationhood.

As I will make an attempt to focus on the identity crisis of the people of Bangladesh, I will critically examine the role of religion, language and culture towards the formation of nationhood. Separate nationhood was the only basis for the division of Indo-Pak

sub-continent into two separate states. Religion was the guiding factor for such nationhood. A closer look at the history of the creation of Pakistan will reveal that Bengalis, regardless of whether they were Hindus or Muslims were more influenced by religion than any other factor. Such sentiment was so strong that it led to the division of the Indo-Pak sub-continent into India and Pakistan, with Bengali Hindus and Bengali Muslims joining India and Pakistan, respectively, in the east. Such division then clearly demonstrated that religious sentiment overshadowed the linguistic impact on nationhood. The persistent rejection by the Congress leaders to accommodate the genuine demands of the Muslim community helped to grow such narrow nationalistic sentiment. The demand for the creation of Pakistan was a desperate attempt by them to escape the subjugation of the Congress dominated majority rule in India. The subsequent events leading to the creation of Bangladesh, however, proved that the creation of Pakistan on

The question of the determination of our identity which besets so much of our affairs should be dealt with by striking a balance between the conflicting ideas of religion, language and culture. An attempt should be made to make a synthesis between our fundamental beliefs and cultural values. Such compromise, if made, will ensure that we will retain our identity as Bengali.

the basis of Muslim nationhood was not a step in the right direction.

Such sentiment based on religion did not last long. The economic disparity between the two wings of Pakistan resulted in the development of Bengali nationalism, which ultimately led to the creation of Bangladesh. The development of Bengali nationalism as distinct from Muslim nationhood proved that religion as a bond of unity failed to serve its purposes. The language movement launched to establish Bengali as one of the state languages of Pakistan marked the origin of Bengali nationalism. The attempt by the West Pakistani authorities to impose Urdu as the only state language of Pakistan was considered by the Bengalis as an intrusion into their cultural life. The creation of Bangladesh on the basis of Bengali nationalism proves that, although religion

can work as a bond of unity, the impact of language on culture cannot be ignored altogether.

The creation of Bangladesh was characterised by changes in their socio-economic and cultural activities, affecting their day-to-day life. It is necessary to make reconciliation between our religious and cultural values before resolving the question of our identity. Such reconciliation will depend upon to what extent our culture is likely to be influenced by religion, language, customs, usages and traditions. It is a misconception that language and other associated factors, which are considered an integral part of our culture, should be the sole basis for its development. The role of religion towards such development is equally important. Bangladesh consists of 68 thousand villages inhabited mostly by semi-literate and illiter-

ate people. They constitute about 80 per cent of the total population. Religious sentiments are strong among these people. The urban population may be broadly divided into two groups: traditional and westernized elite. Although most of the people in these two groups are literate, their religious views are not the same. Despite the fact that the traditional elite are trying to adjust themselves to the new challenges of science and technology, their views on religion are still strong. The ultra-modern westernized groups, on the other hand, have adapted themselves to the newly acquired values, regardless of its adverse effect on religion. Such changes affecting the socio-cultural lives of the people of Bangladesh, although found favour with the westernized elite groups, could not make much impact on the traditional elite and have been altogether rejected by

the rural population.

Some ultra-modern elite groups, who have also been reaping the benefits of the creation of Bangladesh since its independence, have innovated some new cultural fabrics to serve their own interests. The adoption of such practices by the well-to-do may be considered as a symbolic gesture of their class structure. The practice of such customs and rituals has no religious or cultural significance. Majority of the people of Bangladesh are treating such values as alien.

The traditional elite groups possess effective power and influence, which they can use to mould public opinion. It is true that their views on religion are not as progressive as the westernized elite, but at the same time they will not be happy to see the revival of any Muslim nationhood. They should make a combined effort with the ultra modern elite groups

to launch a movement in order to ensure that regressive and orthodox views do not gain ground, affecting the ideals of Bengali nationalism. The identity of the people of Bangladesh should be looked at both from religious and cultural points of view. In other words, for instance, they are both Bengali and Muslim. Whether or not they should be treated primarily as Muslims and then as Bengalis or primarily as Bengalis and then as Muslims is a controversial topic. As Muslim we observe the tenets of Islam in order to fulfil our religious obligations. Bengali, which is our language, is a part of our culture. It is not an easy task to pin point the importance of either religion or culture. In order to assess such importance it is necessary to establish their relationship and their impact on the people.

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synthesis between our fundamental beliefs and cultural values. Such compromise, if made, will ensure that we will retain our identity as Bengali. The intermixture of religion and culture will help to create an environment conducive for the creation of a society where different groups, regardless of their diverse religious or cultural views, can live together without any animosity. Any attempt made to solve such problem must be accompanied by an objective to promote secularism so that the people of the minority groups can get the equal opportunities to practice their own religion without any interference from the majority groups. Such a move will help create a multi-religious society where every body can feel secure to live as a loyal citizen, enjoying his/her rights and liberties and at the same time discharging his/her duties towards the state.

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