

Dhaka, Sunday, July 28, 1991

Crisis in Education

The closure of Rajshahi University on Friday — the fourth out of the country's seven universities to be affected by factional violence in recent months — after some 200 were left injured in three days of running battles, comes as another depressing sign of the deepening crisis in the education sector. The police meanwhile, as has unfortunately become customary these days, occupied the gall-ery seats, leaving educational institutions and ordinary students of the city ruing their misfortunes.

Rajshahi is the latest, and we shall not fool ourselves into thinking it is the last. According to one count, at least 62 higher secondary and degree colleges have also either closed or are in the grip of rising tension and uncertainty. And the violence continues to gather momentum. One group is causing the problem in Chittagong, another sparking it off in Rajshahi, while a third is held responsible for the paralysis at Dhaka. It is the same picture everywhere else. Different groups with different motives and grievances. Opposition parties are involved, but so are student groups affiliated to the ruling party.

But there is a common factor. Throughout the education sector, a free-for-all environment seems to have been created by, on the one hand, the inability or unwillingness of law enforcement agencies to check the rising wave of violence on or even outside campuses (note Rajshahi), and on the other, a total absence of initiative on the part of the education ministry to put its own house in order. The tragedy is that the two ministries most directly concerned with the situation, home affairs and education, are headed not by political non-entities, but by Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and deputy leader of the Jatiya Sangsad Dr Badruddoza Chowdhury respectively. The question naturally arises, why is it proving so difficult for the country's two top political office-holders to tackle an essentially political situation? Should we assume that they are not terribly bothered about the situation? Or do we take it that they are simply unable to cope with the problem?

Barely five months into the life of a new government, we earnestly hope none of the above is actually the case. But the situation has already reached a crisis point and we are yet to see any meaningful initiative, which has to come from the government because, in the first instance, it is their job to administer the country. (Recent events have exposed the July 12 grand conference of political parties to have been more of a failure than the success it was claimed to be at the time).

At the moment, we see the education minister on television virtually every evening, chief guesting at this or that function. But we do not see him discussing the campus situation with university vice-chancellors or college principals. Dr Chowdhury is a man of considerable ability, energy and intellect, but his current style of ministership cannot, and does not, cause public confidence in him to grow.

We do not expect the government to declare war on the campuses, nor is it desirable. Since violence-mongers largely operate inside campuses, any heavy-handed police action could lead to injuries to, or even deaths of, innocent students. But what we do expect is a firm directive and follow-ups from the home ministry to the police to contain the violence. Simultaneously, the education minister should initiate a process of direct dialogue with university and college authorities on the one hand, and all student groups on the other, in order to find a mutually agreed solution. In the meantime, the major political parties should stop inflaming the situation with press statements accusing one another — but never themselves — for the violence.

An Award for PFA

Nearly three decades of hard work put in by the Manila-based Press Foundation of Asia for the development of journalism in this continent has won the well-deserved Magsaysay Award. The PFA which represents newspaper owners, editors and individual journalists from some 30 countries in Asia has been honoured for its contribution to international understanding. If this citation gives due recognition to the press organisation for its work in this all-important field, it also underscores the need for using the regional press with increased vigour for creating better understanding among nations in Asia.

In this respect, the fullest potential of the three main activities of the PFA should be realised, but this is possible if the organisation receives greater programme support from its members as well as from the international community than it has obtained so far. Among its activities, two important ones relate to training for journalists and the syndication of development-oriented feature service, better known as Depthnews Asia. When funds permit, the organisation also holds professional consultations among journalists on current issues of our times, such as press freedom and the role of newspapers in economic development.

From the time of liberation in 1971, the press in Bangladesh has benefited considerably from its association with PFA. A number of our journalists have received specialised training in development journalism through PFA courses; some of our feature writers regularly contribute to the Depthnews Asia service; and one of our noted writers, Poet Shamsur Rahman has been a recipient of the prestigious PFA award for his contribution to journalism. These links between the press in Bangladesh and PFA should be further strengthened, against the propitious background of the return of independent journalism to this country.

In offering its felicitations to the PFA, this paper specially commends the role played in the organisation's growth by its founder-directors Amitabha Chowdhury and Tarzia Vittachi as well as of its present director general Mochtar Lubis and the editorial director Romeo Abundo. Working together, they have helped the press in Asia to gain a place of its own in the international field. We, indeed, owe them much.

Shevardnadze: His Vision and Goal

In an exclusive interview with Olga Trofimova of Novosti Observer Eduard Shevardnadze replies to the critics of the democratic reform movement.

A Star Exclusive

something else, adopt its programme and statute and elaborate concrete ways of taking Soviet society out of the crisis, accelerating economic reforms, building a law-based state and preventing any further deterioration of the social situation. We, by the way, think a lot about an approach to the problem of unemployment, which is quite real even now, as well as the social protection of citizens.

We also intend to work out concrete ways for the radical transformation of the economic system and reveal the opportunities for the development of enterprise and the transition to a free market.

We will also elaborate on our approaches to cooperation between different nations and nationalities. We attach priority importance to relations between republics, i.e., the development of so-called horizontal ties. There should be a clear-cut system of relations between the Centre and the Republics.

The foundation of the state is, in our opinion, spiritual, economic and political freedom and the individual himself. We are to find out what is

to be done to emancipate Soviet citizens to make them free individuals and the genuine masters of property and the results of their work.

It is necessary to create conditions for equitable and interested cooperation in foreign policy and foreign economic activities. Such conditions, for instance, should stimulate foreign investments. The issue at hand are not sops from foreign countries, but mutually beneficial deals. Correction of foreign policy guidelines is not excluded either. All this will be handled by the founding congress.

QUESTION: Western analysts are looking for a certain clandestine meaning of your movement. Is there any?

SHEVARDNAZDE: Our movement is not an act of confrontation. Some parties and political trends make clear right from their very inception their antagonistic stand vis-à-vis other political or state structures. We adhere to constructive positions, are loyal to the Government and the President and will support them when they conduct a

policy in the interests of the people. If they make mistakes we will work as an opposition. It goes without saying that we will formulate public opinion in favour of the ideas which we think are correct.

We make a special stake on the young. We are aware of the close attention of the country's young people to our movement. They want to understand what this force stands for. We have already established contacts with many of their leaders.

By and large, this is a movement for the young and in the interest of the future generations. We want our countrymen to become convinced that the people who stand at the source of this movement think about them, their children and grandchildren first and foremost.

QUESTION: It is contended that your resignation from the Communist Party can entail massive withdrawals and in a way lead to a split in the party. What could you say in this connection?

SHEVARDNAZDE: I said this in Leningrad a few days ago and I



will repeat that I am not going to make political capital on anti-communism. If some communists want to quit the party, this means that they do what their conscience tells them. There is no need to dramatize the situation or look for the culprit. It is up to the Communist Party if it splits. I can only add that precisely the methods used by its apparatus members have led to a real threat of a split.

Lately, some Communist Party functionaries and other

die-hard conservatives have trained slander and even insults on our movement and its leaders. This only re-affirms that we are on the right track. I react to such things calmly, though personally I am offended. But I by no means intend to respond in the same manner.

QUESTION: Having resigned as the Foreign Minister and headed your foreign policy association, you turned a new page in your career. Today you are again caught in the vortex of political passions and concerns. Is this your come-back in big-time politics? And if it is, in the name of what?

SHEVARDNAZDE: I repeat that, like my colleagues, I was motivated, above all, by concern about the future generation. I am sure that the elder generation, myself included, should take the responsibility of bringing the young to the political scene now. Our life experience, including the bitter one, could be very helpful in this new endeavour.

I do not claim any place in the hierarchy of state power. To create normal conditions for the life and activities of the younger generation is my ultimate goal and my calling. I want to do some good while I still can.

No Red Carpet for Returning Asians

Wasswa John Bosco writes from Kampala

The international community is applauding the Uganda government for doing justice to Asians expelled from their homes by Idi Amin in 1972. But allowing the Asians back means many Uganda families and businesses will be pushed out of their buildings or face enormous rent increases and they are not happy about it.

THE Ugandan government's move to return to Asians the property that was confiscated in 1972 by Idi Amin is popular among the international community but is bringing a lot of local criticism on the government.

President Yoweri Museveni, head of the National Resistance Movement (NRM) is trying to prove to the international community that Uganda is a stable economic environment. "Return home and invest in Uganda," is his message to the Asians. "How can I assure foreign investors of security of their investments if I don't return the property of the Asians?"

So far over 1,400 Asian families have filed claims for the return of 7000 properties. More than 80,000 Asians were expelled by Amin in 1972.

Laws seeking to either compensate the Asians or to return their properties were actually passed in 1982, but little had been done about it until the NRM came to power in 1986.

Many Ugandans are displeased with the idea of surrendering the properties that Amin showered on them, and with the way it is being done.

Among the disgruntled are the Baganda, who felt they deserve compensation for the property they lost to Uganda. Baganda was a kingdom that became part of Uganda when it gained independence from Britain in 1962. Its royal property was confiscated and is now being used as Uganda's

Uganda U-turn on Asians

1962: Uganda gains independence from Britain	1982: Laws passed to compensate or return property to Asians
1971: General Idi Amin takes power in military coup	1986: President Yoweri Museveni's National Resistance Army wins protracted guerrilla war against Obote's troops
1972: 80,000 Asians expelled, and their properties confiscated	1991: Museveni appeals to Asians to return to invest in Uganda
1979: Amin overthrown	



main military barracks and the headquarters for the Ministry of Defence. The Baganda want the property returned to their current monarch, Prince Ronald Mutebi.

Given the importance of the property now, it is unlikely the government will return it to the Baganda.

Corruption, bribery and forgery have also been reported to be involved in the Asian property deals. The

Minister in charge of the Departed Asians Property Custodian Board, Steven Kavuma, is at the centre of the controversy. He was accused by the very critical Uganda Confidential of pocketing between Uganda Shs 3 and 10 million on each property he hands back to a claimant. As well, Kavuma's law firm is handling claims for many Asians. Cries of opposition have also been coming from Resistance

Councillors (RC III) of Kampala Central, the Kampala business community and the National Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

The business community will suffer in two ways. Many will be either evicted from their premises or will have their rent hiked. As well, Asian businesses will be bringing to Uganda commodities in bulk and offering them at much lower prices than Ugandans are able to. Business disaster is on the minds of many Ugandan business people.

Asians own over 60 per cent of the property in Kampala. Apartment dwellers in the capital are already suffering exorbitant rent increases, some up to 300 per cent from returning landlords. Other tenants have been evicted by Asians under the pretext of having repairs done. Museveni has said the government will tolerate no further impromptu evictions or rent hikes.

Many believe the whole idea of repossession is being forced on Uganda by the IMF, World Bank, USA, Britain and other countries.

Many argue that compensa-

tion from the Ugandan government is not needed, since as many as 315 Asians have received compensation from the United Nations High Commission for Refugees.

Several Kampala people have threatened to go on hunger strikes when evicted, to kill Asians or to burn the buildings. When Asians first returned in the early 1980s, when Milton Obote's Uganda People's Congress Party was in power, they were not greeted warmly. Many were robbed and some were killed.

The government had planned to discuss the Asian issue in parliament in mid-June. But the discussion did not happen as scheduled because, the press argued, of a visit from Nazmu Virani. He is an Asian expelled from Uganda

in 1972, and now one of the richest men in Britain. He is to undertake some multi-million dollar projects in Uganda. Controversy stirred up by the parliamentary discussions would have been spread all over the local papers and many have discouraged Virani's plans.

The NRC discussed the Asian issue a few days after his departure, but in session closed to the public. The Aga Khan, leader of the Ismaili Muslim community worldwide, has guaranteed loans for members of his community to the tune of US\$500 million if they want to invest in Uganda. He is to repossess over 200 properties.

The great economic benefits tied to the return of the Asians mean the government is doing whatever it can to satisfy them. But it might have to take action to satisfy its own people as well. — GEMINI NEWS

WASSWA JOHN BOSCO studies mass communication at Makerere University and writes regularly for the Weekly Topic, a Ugandan weekly.

OPINION

The Singaporeans Lack the Human Touch?

After relishing Vedette's vignette on the versatile Singaporeans and the panegyric fireworks on their city of lions (Star, July 2), it would not be uncharitable to round up the image of their strength; because, paradoxically enough, their weakness lies in their very strength — the lack of human touch.

The Singaporeans are admirable company during office and business hours; deadly keen on paging their efficiency. But how do you communicate with them during the leisure hours (not business lunch/dinner/parties; and outside the hotel)? That is the dilemma of the tourists, visitors, and resident foreigners. Of course the Singaporeans are far better than the Japanese (stress on formality) — some wit dubbed the J tourists as mobile islands.

About one and a half years ago, I wrote a piece on this lack of lackness (for the Singapore press). The situation has been improving rapidly since the venerable old man decided on an active retirement. Three cheers for the leadership for cultivating the power of the bindu (the dot called Singapore). From the centre the aura spreads, and it is time for outsiders to enjoy the fringe pleasure of the company of Singaporeans. They are coming out of their shells (note the show on BTV).

The key question is "After development, what else, or what next?" It is encouraging to watch that the 'dehumanizing' process is on. (I would prefer a softer term than 'dehumanizing'); and the robots are trying to loosen their fixation on efficiency, and fumbling to tackle the leisure hours with state sponsored friendship clubs and other attractive props; keeping one eye on below-zero population growth rate, and the other on the attractive non-spinsters.

The modern narcissism with the minute hand of the watch is deplorable philosophically. In my country the first advice I used to offer to the foreign experts was to forget the minute hand, as we go by

the hour hand (due to circumstances beyond our control). While window-shopping in Geneva, I came across a wrist watch which showed time by colour windows changing its aperture. Hence the time could only be read to only within two minutes of the correct time — the tension remover watch of the modern age! I bought one, but found it to be useless in the developing countries, where time is timeless!

I am very much tempted to ask a Singaporean: what would you like to have which money cannot buy? How to remove this invisible wall which inhibits, fraternization? To be self-sufficient within one's own society is one of the lesser goals of life, and a very limited objective. Why do we not aspire to be citizens of the world?

In Singapore, what do you do after the business, and the shopping? You cannot talk to a self-regimented mind obsessed with self-improvement. Personalities come in various geometric shapes. The best company is a sphere. A triangle has three sharp projections: a square or rectangle has four. How do you match with a cone or pyramid? One move I appreciated was publicizing the thoughts of Confucius.

Singapore appears to be saturated, and brain drain is causing concern. Some foreign factories have shifted or are shifting to other ASEAN countries. The new factories are robot and high-tech oriented. Singapore has been depending on services rather than exports. Besides, the Singapore dollar is getting stronger and stronger. The problem is how to prevent flattening of the development curve at the top. This is the current challenge facing Singapore, hence we hear of new and enterprising schemes to remain at the top.

What is life, if full of care, there is no time to stand and stare? My last message: "Singapore, here I come!" A. Mawaz Dhaka

To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

Bank loans: A clarification

Sir, My attention has been drawn to a news item published in the national dailies on 23 July, in which it has been stated that the Finance Minister in reply to a question in the Parliament presented a list of directors of private banks who borrowed money from different nationalized banks. Some of the newspapers have distorted the Finance Minister's statement stating that these private bank directors have defaulted in repayment of their loans and purchased shares of private banks with the money.

I am surprised to find my name on this list. The fact is that my late son Ejaz Ahmed Chaudhury on return from abroad after completion of higher education set up a specialised textile mill of 20 looms at Sylhet at his own initiative with a project loan of Tk 28,62,250/- from Janata Bank, Sylhet in 1984 for import of capital machinery. Before the mill went into commercial production my son died prematurely as a result of a road accident in 1985. Since his death the mill has been lying closed.

I want to make it absolutely clear that I never borrowed any money from any nationalized, private or development bank. I hold only 315 shares of Pubali Bank Limited worth Tk. 31,500/-. After my retirement from government service I was elected as a Director of Pubali Bank Limited by majority of

the shareholders in the interest of the Bank.

EA Chaudhury
Chairman, Board of Directors,
Pubali Bank Limited, Dhaka.

Dacca and Dhaka

Sir, From some time past our capital city is being spelt in English as "Dhaka" instead of its earlier spelling "Dacca". We, Bangladeshi though use and write this new spelling, it has often been noticed to our dismay and misfortune that letters and communications coming from foreign countries bear "Dacca" in the address.

"Newweek" is a very important English weekly of international repute printed abroad and distributed by a company in this capital. It has a good market in Bangladesh and our intellectual class is its buyer and reader extensively. This journal without taking the least care to the decision of government about the change in the spelling has for years been printing "Dacca" as may be seen in their "subscription rates" column of each issue.

"University of Dacca" (Dhaka) is an age-old educational institution. We do not know if its Syndicate by any amendment has brought about any change in the spelling of "Dacca". In the distant future our posterity and research scholars would be in confusion whether there were in existence two different cities — "Dhaka" and "Dacca".

Therefore, it is now perhaps proper for us that we do revert to the old spelling of

the capital city "Dacca" instead of "Dhaka" in view of the fact that the old spelling is still popularly known to the world around and that we have also failed to use phonetic sounds in other cases, as we are still using "Bogra" instead of "Bagura" and "Chittagong" instead of "Chattagram".

Abdullah Al Abu Bakar Dinafi,
Biroi, Dinajpur.

English movies on TV

Sir, English movies are a vital entertainment in the BTV programmes. But, for the lack of lingual skill, the greater bulk of TV viewers is not able to understand that. Then again many of those who know English sometimes fail to understand for the problem relating to pronunciation. So, if the TV authority sets a system to show the movies with subtitles (the speeches of the character written at the bottom of the frame), we all shall have benefited by it, understanding the English movies fairly. We do hope BTV authority will look into the matter.

Fazlul Haque
Surja Sen Hall,
Dhaka University.

Violence on campus

Sir, An uneasy atmosphere is prevailing in different educational institutions all over the country. The whole nation is greatly concerned at the terrorist activities of a section of students. They have turned the holy educational campus into war fields endangering the thousands of other students' academic life. Dhaka and Chittagong universities have become the harbouring places of terrorism for quite a long time.

Most unfortunately, the authorities are yet to find a solution, and there is little hope that they would find it soon. What is our expectation from a popularly elected people's representative government? Should majority of the guardians see their wards' future joining into oblivion, helplessly? And how long?

Dr. M.A. Hanif
Holderpara, Brahmanbaria.