Dhaka, Wednesday, May 27, 1992

Good Initiative, but...

The Dhaka University Central Students Union (DUCSU) took a welcome initiative last Sunday when it organised a day-long student convention on how to root out terrorism from educational institutions. According to press reports, leaders from about 200 student bodies attended the convention which was addressed by no less a person than the Prime Minister herself

We welcome this initiative by DUCSU. After all, the students themselves are the greatest victims of campus terrorism and hence it is only natural that their most prestigious representative body -DUCSU — should take the type of initiative that it did. But we must add in the same breath that we have had similar initiatives before. In fact we have never fell short of pious intentions and noble initiatives. Our failure has always been in implementing them. Last December an all-party initiative on curbing campus violence produced a 7point declaration full of constructive ideas. As the parleys ended, the political parties went their separate ways and the collective decision fell by the wayside.

There is a lesson in all this. In collective dealings we are seldom sincere. Take the DUCSU initiative itself. We all know that this highly prestigious body is now controlled by the JCD, the student wing of the ruling BNP. Yet when it operates as DUCSU, and especially when its goal is to eradicate as complex a problem as campus violence, it has to involve as many different parties as is possible — especially the student fronts of all the major political parties. We do not know if any serious attempt was made to involve them. Their absence renders whatever resolution that emanated from the convention to be another set of pious intentions.

The truth of the matter is that for our political parties and their student fronts, everything is politics. The violence on the campus is politics and any move to eradicate it is more so. The allconsuming passion is to point finger at others and to devise ways to embarrass the opponent. And in all this any sincere attempt to bring the armed miscreants to book gets relegated into the background. Let us stop pretending as if student violence were somebody else's problem. By now we have had several demonstrations of the fire power of the student wings of all the major parties, especially of the BNP, AL, Jamaat and JSD. If violence has to be curbed - and it must - then house clearing will have to be started from one's own. In maintaining law and order the first responsibility is with the administration and with the party that holds its rein. The BNP can never convince other parties to disband their armed cadres, unless it disbands its own.

In the unlikely event — but a necessary one that we have an agreement that all parties disband their armed wings, the first step will have to be taken by the ruling party - and demonstratively so. Today the atmosphere is one of suspicion and lack of faith in other partys' sincerity of purpose. The most important task therefore is to bridge the credibility gap between our major political parties and only then will effective steps against campus terrorists will become practical.

The irony is that our leaders do not seem to realise that violence has a dynamics of its own. It is possible to turn it on when wished. But if allowed to continue for a while, it may not be possible to turn it off when desired.

A Hazardous Calling

It was approaching midnight at the air force runway strip near Bangkok. Ousted Prime Minister Suchinda Kraprayoon was supposed to take a flight abroad from there. A group of nine journalists, getting the scent of it, were already there to try to make something out of the final moments of Suchinda's ill-fated escapade. Up come four gunmen on motorbikes and pump twelve rounds at the nine. One newsman is hurt.

The incident seemingly has no point. The shooters did not pick any particular newsman to shoot at — it was very evidently no case of settling personal scores. But then it makes one - and very strongly too. The journalist's is a dangerous calling and you don't need a war or insurgency, terrorism or a Los Angeles style riot to make it so. His is the risky business of telling in print the people at large what some would find unpleasant and inconvenient. His is the job of cultivating enmity of people of action in the elusive hope of doing good to a far greater number of passive population. He is supposed to be helping make national existence safe and secure, but at the price of making himself vulnerable.

Something is needed to be done to make the journalist inviolate to social hazards of violent nature. The UNESCO has possibly a code already with them that aims at giving protection to journalists on dangerous assignments. This readily smacks of elevating the journalist to the proverbial inviolability of ambassadors of warring nations. If that is a highly desirable thing, it is at once very hard to put into practice. The signs of Red Cross could not come away unscathed from American bombings in Vietnam.

In more peaceable and sedate times, should the journalist have some statutory protection against being molested while on assignment? Although we have cases like Hanif Khan of Narayanganj being murdered for journalism-related circumstances, ordinary people, even the common run of lowly criminals, do not care much for pestering the journalists. The journalists in our country, as well as possibly in most third world countries, get the dirtiest and meanest deal from the establishment.

Can we make the government to put a limit to its own power as far as the performance of journalistic duties are concerned? In the relentless fight for press freedom the journalists have indeed been moving towards that goal also. Even then, something specifically aimed at prohibiting molestation of journalists by police and the private armed cadres of the parties should be adopted as soon as possible. We cannot help remembering the many beatings that the photojournalists have been subjected to over the last so many decades.

CORRECTION

Due to a printing error, several words were missing from the second sentence of the second paragraph of our editorial entitled "The Trip to India" published yesterday.

The sentence should have read, "Begum Zia undertakes the trip at the personal invitation of her counterpart, Narasimha Rao, as the first democratically-elected prime minister since Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, . .

Our apologies.

What Use a Ministry of Culture

HICH countries have a Ministry of Culture, and why? The question has dogged me for quite some time. When President De Gaulle found a Minister of Culture in Andre Malraux, it was quite a news. The entire civilized world took note of it. It was a befitting choice for a culture - proud country like France. Also, it testified to one great man's unqualified trust in another great man. I am told on good authority that the regard of one man for the other was mutual. Otherwise, it is difficult to imagine a man of Malraux's stature to accept an

office of the state. This choice of Malraux as a minister strikes me as an ex traordinary event. I am not aware if there are precedents of such appointments even in France, and if the experiment has been repeated there. France being France, I should not be surprised if a Ministry of Culture is an accepted and permanent feature in that country. Also, if most other Western countries have done quite well without a ministry or a minister of culture, that too would appear to be a most sensible thing. For I regard it a dangerous idea to dabble in culture at the governmental

level. In this context, Pandit Nehru, India's first Prime Minister comes to mind. Here was another great man, a man with a vision and a supremely cultured man, who could be

HE national newspaper

sation. "Soldiers and officers of

the Combined Forces of the

Commonwealth of Indepen-

dent States are fighting on

both sides of the conflict," it

reported on its front page in

that video films confirmed sol

diers and officers of the CIS forces are fighting on both

sides of the war between

Azerbaijan and Armenia, which

each claim possession of the

peared barely a week after an

alleged mass killing of Azeri

civilians by Armenian soldiers.

pushing the four-year-old con-

flict between the two republics

to the brink of a full-scale war.

and Azerbaijan accuse the CIS

forces of taking sides in the

guerrilla warfare, instead of

serving as a buffer of mediator

to leave Nagorny Karabakh

February 28. Marshall Yevgeny

Shaposhnikov said the soldiers

were being attacked and their

ammunition stolen. Many have

left the conflict zone, they

were surrounded by Armenian

guerillas. Ten CIS officers and

men were taken captive.

Scores of soldiers of either

Azeri or Armenian origin were

reported to have deserted the

Red Army to join the guerillas

on both sides, taking with

them military hardware, in-

cluding tanks and different

town of Khojali, where gueril-

las butchered dozens of un-

armed civilians to death, indi

cate horrifying acts of vandal-

ism. Video films showed the

mutilated bodies of innocent

civilians, including women, old

men, and children as young as

corpses, wrote lzvestia, shows

no sign of fighting or flight.

Some of the people were shot

individually, but many were

The camera depicted chil-

dren with chopped-off cars;

killed with their families.

The positioning of the

Reports from the Azerbaijan

types of ammunition.

two years old.

However, as the soldiers

been killed.

CIS soldiers were ordered

Leaders of both Armenia

The Izvestia article ap-

Nagorny Karabakh territory.

The newspaper reported

early March.

Izvestia was one of the

first to make the accu-

expected to do as De Gaulle did. India too can take pride in her ancient culture. And there were quite a few stalwarts around Nehru in the field of art and culture who would fully justify his choice as a minster of culture. A statesman who could enlist the services of a Bhaba for science, a Mahalanabis for planning, and who could persuade Maulana Azad to preside over the Ministry of Education, could also look around for a suitable person to formulate and give a direction to a programme of culture. But Nehru knew better. Culture was too fine a thing to be handled by the coarse fingers of the government. All that was needed was to allow men active in the field of culture to work unhindered. He had better ideas : to have a Sahitya Academy; to have ICCR -Indian Council for Cultural Relations - an adjunct to the Ministry of External Affairs. Here he followed the British model: a British Council, and autonomous body, but loosely attached to the Forcign Ministry.

The idea is to eschew direct involvement of the government in matters cultural. In these matters, we can see two different points of view, two different approaches to things to be done. And we can say that the one is a democratic way. I find it difficult to name the other way of thinking, the other style of doing things.

This other way we have seen being followed when we were with Pakistan. The way and the style still remains good to us. We have a Ministry of Culture. The Ministry follows the example set by successive Pakistani governments. It has, under its umbrella, the Bangla academy, the Shilpakala Academy, the National Museum, and a Library system. It may have a few more organisations over which it exercises control. The Acts/ Ordinances guiding the administration of these institutions give them a

been the pattern and the practice. It has such a strong hold on the mind and imagination of our politicians and of our bureaucracy, that even under democracy the pattern persists and the practice continues. It never occurs to any body that in democracies, both the pattern and the practice are different. There are better ideas, if the concern is to serve the cause of culture.

But who will tell us what is the cause of culture? Not surely the bureaucracy, and the

CLOUDS PASSING Zillur Rahman Siddiqui

little bit of autonomy, perhaps considerably more to Bangla Academy than to the rest. But autonomy, under successive governments, have always been a tenuous thing, easily snapped, easily trampled upon.

And when things are not so bad, autonomy is easily set aside. When a President decides to project himself as a patron of culture, he passes an order for the institutions under the Ministry of Culture to set the stage for him. He would occupy the centre of the stage Microphones will carry his voice. Flashlight for the cameras will be turned on him. The electronic media, and that section of the print media which subserves his wishes. will carry his message, this has henchmen and the sycophants buzzing around the Bresident. or the Minister.

So far, the Ministry of Culture has done precious little to promote cultural relations with other nations. We have cultural pacts with some states, if not with all the states we have diplomatic relations. My information may be inadequate, but I know that our cultural personalities do, from time to time, get invitations to visit a host country but I do not remember our government or our Ministry of Culture to have extended an invitation to a poet or a painter or scholar of another country.

I will recall a typical case of how we practice cultural relations. But must I ? It is only

mention seems hardly necessary. It was the winter of 1982. A number of our well-known writers had received invitation to attend a literary meet, a Sahitya Mela, at Santiniketan. It had the blessings of Sri Annada Sankar Roy. Roy's distinction is that besides being a writer of the first rank himself, he has ben a tireless exponent of literary and cultural communication across the border, a writer who has lovingly followed the trends and achievements in literature in Bangladesh. His wife, Mrs Lila Roy has extensively translated poetry produced by our poets. The couple are two truly internationally minded men of letters and their likes are not many, even in India. The Mela organisers had made elaborate arrangements for the reception of their Bangladeshi guests. To their utter surprise, and to our eternal shame, our writers did not turn up at the last moment. They were not permitted to leave.

one of so many cases that its

This is but one example of how consistently the govern ment here has played a negative role in the field of culture. Having a Ministry of Culture is no proof that culture is the aim or the objective.

The Ministry, we must admit, has its own bright ideas. One such idea is that the best way of impressing the outside world about our artistic excellence is to send out troupes of

standing, our dance is the last thing about which we could be proud It is about the one form of performing arts where we have nothing to give and everything to learn. In music perhaps we have done a little better, but nothing to compare with india or the West. In the theatre art, we have made some strides, as it is generally acknowledged and that too because we started from scratch. But have we, has our Ministry of Culture, sponsored a visit by one of our theatre groups to another South Asian country? Not within my knowledge. The trips, as far as they have taken place, have all of them been sponsored by others, on a pri-If any of these facts are in-

dancers. To my limited under-

correct, and if the Ministry has in fact sponsored visits of our scholars and artistes of real distinction or have extended invitation to foreign scholars, scientists, writers, then my sincerest apologies to the Ministry I proffer in writing.

The Ministry is hardly to blame. After all it is what our political wisdom has made it. And our political wisdom has never been of a high order.

Am I suggesting a remoulding, a recasting of the Ministry? Not exactly. I am just inviting others to share my wonder, what made us think we needed a Ministry of

Old Rivalries Flare into Tragedy in Nagorny Karabakh

Charles Quist Adade writes from St Petersburg

The embattled Armenian enclave of Nagorny Karabakh, surrounded by Azerbaijan and claimed by both of the former Soviet republics, has become a scene of death, devastation and misery. Armenian and Azeri soldiers have deserted the army of the Commonwealth of Independent States to fight for possession of their homelands, often taking their tanks and ammunition with them. Gemini News Service reports on the brutal feud that is being treated with casual indifference elsewhere in the CIS.

Armenia Caspian Sea Georgia USSR Azerbaijan Kirovabad Leninakan "lin NAGORNY KARABAKH Iran Pop: 180,000-~ 85% Armenian Turkey Saudi Arabia Area: 30,000 sq. km. **1970**

old women with the skin torn from the side of their faces; men with their skulls rent open and headskin ripped

The press secretary of the former president of Azerbaijan, Pazim Agaev, charged that 'we have irrefutable facts that soldiers of the CIS army took part in the criminal murder of peaceful civilians together with Armenian guerillas

Giving their version of the tragic incident, the Armenians claimed "the dead bodies were specially placed on the way from Khojali to Agdam by the Azeri army.

Nagorny Karabakh is a mountainous enclave within Azerbaijan populated by Christian Armenians, but which has been administered by the Muslim Azeris since 1923.

Since 1988, ethnic Armenians in the enclave who tasted Gorbachev's glasnost

have launched a campaign to break away from Azerbaijan to rejoin Armenia.

The Azeri authorities took steps to smother the nationalist agitation but this drove militant Armenians to launch guerilla warfare to secure independence. At least 1,500 people are now estimated to have died in the confrontation between the two former Soviet southern republics.

Azerbaijan's president Ayaz Mutalibov was forced to resign a few days after the Khojali massacre. Just days before, he accused both Mikhail Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin of cold indifference to the fate of the people in the conflict zone.

Within the framework of the former Soviet Union, there were all the structures and laws by which to resolve the conflict peacefully," he said. "But no, they had global tasks

on hand.

He told a reporter that none of the leaders of the CIS phoned him after news of the Khojali massacre became

Azerbaijan has accused Russia of taking the side of Armenia in the conflict. The recent signing of a military accord between the Russian Federation and Armenia has added to suspicion in Baku that Boris Yeltsin and Armenian President Levon Ter-Petrosyan have forged an

alliance against Azerbaijan. Reports say that in Azerbaijan, anti-Russian sentiment is as strong as anti-Armenian hatred.

The Armenian leader Ter-Petrosyan says he is ready for peace talks and has called for the total demilitarisation of the conflict zone and the granting of autonomous status to Nagorny Kharabakh.

But before talks can proceed, he says Azerbaijan must end its economic blockade against Armenia, and warns that the enclave's war could spill over to the rest of the region if this demand is not met.

For two years, Azerbaijan has shut off the gas supply to Armenian homes and industries, bringing

Armenia to the brink of economic collapse.

In Russia itself, however, the traditional dislike for southerners has led to a lack of interest in the conflict. "Let

them kill themselves, "Is a commonly-held opinion. "There are too many of them in our cities, and they are speculators." There have already been

clashes between Russians and Azerts in Moscow and St. Petersburg, and there fears that major conflicts could flare up in the Russian cities between southerners and

Armenians, Azeris other citizens from central Asia control nearly all the markets in the Russian Federation, where they sell a large selection of sub-tropical fruits and foods. The high prices of their wares, especially after the Yeltsin price reforms. have fuelled old hatred for the market people from the South."

CHARLES QUIST ADADE is a Ghanatan freelance journalist, recently returned from studying for his PhD at St. Petersburg University.

guished warriors in the field of

law. The warriors include both

OPINION _aw and lawyers

"If I'd been an upright judge should no longer be a judge, Lord Denning often cited this case to his students to make them understand the gravity of contempt of court. What does it mean by contempt in the face of the court? According to Lord Denning, it means a contempt which the judge sees with his own eyes. So that he needs no evidence of witnesses. The judge can deal with it all by himself at once.

The most quoted case goes

back to the year 1631. It was at Salisbury on the Western Circuit. A prisoner brought to trial threw a stone at the trying judge. What happened subsequently is quoted below: "Richards" Chief Justice of C B at the assizes at Salisbury in the summer of 1631 was assaulted by a prisoner condemned there for felony who after his condemnation threw a brickbat at the said judge which narrowly missed, and for this an indictment was immediately drawn against the prisoner and his right hand cut off and fixed to the gibbet, upon which he was immediately hanged in the presence of the court. The Judge had his head on one side on his hand as the brickbat whizzed passed. Straightening himself up, he said, "If I'd been an upright judge, I should no longer be a judge." It was more of a pun than a hyperbole. The prisoner referred to in the above mentioned case was definitely not a man of wisdom and learning. In all probability he was an ordinary man without any knowledge of law. What happens when lawyers themselves commit such contempt in the face of the court?

Although the punishment in the then Britain under common law was severs and inhuman but the prisoner who threw the brickbat at the judge definitely deserved punishment. When the learned lawyers with years of practice to their credit commit blatant contempt in the face of a Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court the extent of punishment they deserve should better be determined by the votaries of rule of law. An eminent American politician once said that the American independence was won not in the battle field but in the courts of law. Our country also rightfully can boast of many distin-

judges and lawyers. Justice Morshed in the past and Justice Badrul Haider Chowdhury in recent times were internationally acclaimed judges of our country. Similarly H S Suhrawardy in the past and presently Dr Kamal Hussain and Barrister Ishtiaq Ahmed are lawyers of great eminence. These personalities upheld rule of law and had made great sacrifice for it. The concept of rule of law

can best be ensured only through the concerted cooperation and contribution of both the judges and the lawyers. The long movement of the lawyers against the dictatorial regime of General Ershed is a case in point. Eminent lawyers like Barrister Ishtiaq, Dr. Kamal Hussain and Advocate Shamsul Haq Chowdhury went to jail for protesting the usurpation of the power of the Supreme Court by the military ruler. The whole nation praised them and was proud of their sacrifice and contribu-The recent incident in the

Court of CMM at Dhaka should put the entire lawyers' community to utter shame and dismay. A group of lawyers of whom some of them are reported to be office bearers of Dhaka Bar raided the Court of CMM hurled chairs at the dais and witness box and forced the CMM to 'flee for life'. So long we have heard of 'mastans' raiding the shops and ransacking the same if tolls are not voluntarily given. But a member of distinguished profession could do such an act of vandalism is beyond the imagination of any civilized person. It is also gathered that this group of lawyers are supporters of a political party. We expected that they would come out with a statement condemning such attack by their partymen. We have a panel of intellectuals who routinely issue statements on most trifle matters but on this issue they also acted like an ostrich.

The verdict of the honourable court over the contempt reference made by the CMM will go a long way in establishing rule of law.

> Sultana Fatzun Nahar Advocate Dhanmondi, 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.

Requisitioning of vehicles

Sir, After a relentless struggle we were able to throw the autocratic rule deep into the ditch and stalled democracy in the country. But to our utter surprise we find that though changes have been made in the rules to run the country according to the principles of democracy, it is never followed to the letter and spirit.

Authorities in the Traffic Police continue to requisition private vehicles. Outright requisitioning the vehicle of a private individual or company from the road is not only a gross violation of democratic principles but a violation of the code of moral and social ethics. It can be relaxed only when an Emergency is declared in the country, but, then the owner should be

Editor.

given at least a week's prior notice. The requisitioning authority has to ensure that the notice is not ante-dated one. To avoid misuse of and damage to the vehicle, the driver of the vehicle must be taken with the vehicle and paid overtime and food expenses. Utility vehicles like delivery van, microbus and pickup should be spared so that no dislocation is caused to production and marketing. We would like to draw the kind attention of our Home Minister for redress.

Abu M Faiz Azimpur, Dhaka.

Father Timm

Sir, In reference to the published report of May 18th from a news agency in your newspaper on the demand for deportation of Father R W

Timm from the country, we maintain that any foreigner can involve in any type of voluntary and development services for the greater interest of the country having permission from the government. Holding positions of a couple of organizations, Father R W Timm who is working for the greater interest of the Bangladeshi people, can't be regarded as an undesirable

Chowdhury General Secretary, Coordinating Council for Human Rights in Bangladesh

Obnoxious occurrence in Mirpur College

Sir, Obviously it is a matter

of great regret that some local hooligans assaulted the principal and two other professors of the above college. This incident took place on 10 May in the college premises. While I was passing by the college on foot, the unthinkable brutality of the mastans held me standing in front of it. With a very lacerated mind I noticed how

Mirpur Police Station was informed of it while the incident was going on. But the policemen reached the spot after the game had been over. Rather farcically they went to the spot and did nothing. Why did they go there? Weren't they supposed to arrest the miscreants? Weren't they supposed to rescue the victims? The next morning the same

the gentlemen were hit. The

hooligans looted the college li brary and took away books, type-writers and furniture reportedly worth about Tk 9

A case was filed with Mirpur PS. Just to console the victims, after four days of the incident, three of the miscreants were arrested but for five minutes only. Immediately after release they threatened the principal going to his residence. If hooliganism is

brought up in this way, what is the significance of keeping law enforcing departments? Isn't it a disgrace? Where is the reign of the legal government? Would the authorities concerned please pay heed to this immediately?

Ilias Ahmed Mirpur, Dhaka.

Md Shafiqual Haque