

Inexcusable Incident and Inaction

An extraordinary incident was reported in the press last week. A student of Dhaka University felt he had received a raw deal in his Master's degree examinations and decided to go and physically assault the teacher concerned in the latter's office. The Dhaka University Teachers Association (DUTA) was incensed, not only by the incidence of assault, but perhaps even more so by the fact that the university authorities did not see it fit to take immediate disciplinary action against the offending student.

It is not the purpose of this paper to discuss what kinds of grievances that student might have had, nor whether those complaints were credible or not. By assaulting the teacher, the student had crossed the furthest limit of decency and norm of behaviour acceptable in any educational institution in this or any other country. The question of a sympathetic hearing for the student, which would have been the course taken by this paper under any other circumstance, does not now arise because of the utterly inexcusable nature of the boy's actions. The outcry among the teachers over the incident is an understandable and justified one, but what is certainly not comprehensible is the inaction of the university authorities.

Given the nature of the crime — for it was a crime and a case has also been registered with the Ramna police station, we understand — one would have thought that stern disciplinary actions would have been taken by the authorities as a matter of course. Instead, we have the unhappy spectacle of teachers having to take strike action to force the university to deal with the offender in an appropriate manner. The university's inaction may well be interpreted as a sign of weakness and a woeful lack of any sense of its own place in society or of the place of teachers within the academic community. Such a deficiency is not only dangerous for the future growth of the university as an academic institution, but it is also an unforgivable display of spinelessness on the part of the authorities. The teachers have taken a stand that will earn them greater respect among the student community, especially considering that incidences of disrespectful or even violent behaviour with teachers have been increasing in frequency over the years. The latest incident only received such media prominence because the teacher involved swallowed great deal of personal pride to make it public and file a case with police.

All students are aware that if such tactics of "terror" continue to be practised by what is admittedly a handful of students, the whole atmosphere of student-teacher relation will become a poisoned one. This cannot but retard the growth of intellectual interaction between teachers and students, ultimately leading to a general impoverishment of academic attainment at the country's highest seat of learning.

It is evident that teachers are determined to use this latest incident to tackle the whole issue of their safety and position on the campus, and the authorities should take due note of that. The latter should try to understand that any further inaction over the matter would look like an effort to shirk responsibility. In that case, the burden of guilt on the shoulder of the university administration would be even greater, with the acting Vice Chancellor and the Proctor themselves being accused of an inexcusable failure to discharge their duties.

Safe Housing for Workers

The fire in the workers colony of the Adamjee Jute Mills has once again revealed the precarious existence of our labour force. According to reports, it took just one careless fling of a match stick to burn down about 1000 houses rendering nearly 10,000 people homeless. There are many things that this accident reveals. First and foremost, the labour colonies such as the one in Adamjee Jute Mills have become virtual slums, where houses have cropped up in an unplanned way and far in excess of the permissible limit. The Executive Director of the mills has claimed that of the estimated 1,000 thatched houses that have burnt down, only 30 to 32 were authorised. Meaning more than 97 per cent of the houses were unauthorised. How did people come to occupy the land, construct the houses and start living there, without proper authorisation? We also need to know whether or not genuine workers were living in that colony, or were most of them outsiders? Who owned the houses that were erected illegally? It is just possible that the land meant to house the workers was occupied by the local hoodlums and was being used for their own gain.

The question of occupants is directly related to the safety of the workers. If unauthorised construction is permitted to the extent of 97 per cent, then in no way can the mill authorities ensure the safety of the workers. We would like to make a strong case for safe abode for our labour force. We suffer from many natural calamities which are not in our power to control. But a tragic event like that of Saturday, we can and should be able to prevent. It is true that our fire brigade was able to prevent any loss of life. But it is not very clear whether the fire could have been brought under control earlier than it was, if the colony had fire hydrants within its compound. It was also reported that the fire started from what is suspected to have been a gambling den which is another indication that criminal elements have a hand in the affairs of the Adamjee workers colony.

We would like to suggest that the affairs at the workers colony of the Adamjee Jute Mills need to be thoroughly looked into. First of all, all unauthorised construction should be removed and appropriate housing facilities should be provided for the legitimate workers. Given the mismanagement and corruption that has plagued what was once the biggest jute mill in the world, it is quite possible that land and housing belonging to the workers have been misappropriated by some vested quarter in which the connivance of a section of the management is not altogether improbable. After all they did nothing to remove the unauthorised constructions till the tragic fire raged them to the ground.

As for the immediate future, we suggest government's assistance to help the unfortunate workers, especially in meeting their needs of food and shelter. The management of the mill in co-operation with the workers should take this opportunity to clear the colony of unauthorised elements, and help set up a minimum level of safe housing for the workers.

THE federal government has ordered the Pakistan Army to take over for six months the maintenance of law and order in the troubled province of Sindh. The action has been taken under Article 147 of the Constitution, in terms of which the government of Sindh requested the federal government for entrusting the function of public security and maintenance of law and order to the officers of the federal government for the stipulated period. The federal government in Islamabad consented to the proposed arrangement and issued necessary orders to the Commander, Fifth Corps, at Karachi, in this behalf.

In plain words, for six months from now the Commander of the Fifth Corps of the Pakistan Army will be the operational head of the province, although under a joint operational plan which the federal Interior Minister had announced a few days earlier, the Corps Commander, the Sindh Chief Minister and the Inspector-General of Police would form the operational committee that would run the province.

According to constitutional experts, since the Chief Minister has already surrendered the government's powers in this field to the federal government, it is but logical that the Corps Commander would be calling the shots, and the provincial authorities will have to go along.

It has not been as easy for the government to initiate the action as it has been for the newsmen to report the developments. The action has come after several days of intense controversy and political discussion, inside and outside the legislatures, in the party caucuses and the pages of the newspapers. In fact, it is the only event of this nature which has followed such open official and unofficial debate — two days of exclusive discussion in the National Assembly, highlighting the remarkable change in style of government since the days of the late general Zia-ul-Haque. The government of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif can surely take credit for this.

The government has shown political wisdom by not invoking Section 245 of the

ARMY MOVES INTO SINDH

Critics Ask for Political Action to Resolve Ethnic Conflicts

Some observers have likened the situation with that which existed in the former East Pakistan during the sixties. "Ayub Khan thought that Monem Khan had found the right prescription for the ailment eating the fabric of the then Pakistan," wrote Khalid Akhtar in the Islamabad daily, *The Muslim*.

Constitution which suspends operation of the civilian courts in similar circumstances. That would have exposed it to severe criticism about curtailing the citizens' constitutional rights when Pakistan's image in this respect is already much tarnished, thanks mainly to abuses in Sindh. The government, however, reserves the right to do so if the need arises. The Law Minister gave such a hint in the National Assembly on Wednesday night. As noted earlier, the action was not unexpected. It was being talked about for a long time as instances of lawlessness showed no sign of receding. The turmoil in the province is not new. It has been violence-ridden since the mid-eighties. It came in the form of ethnic riots, involving first Mohajirs and Pukhtoons, then Mohajirs and Punjabis and finally, Mohajirs and Sindhis. There was also a brief but bloody tangle between Mohajirs and Baluchis.

The breakdown of ethnic entente was followed by a rapid rise in the incidence of car thefts, dacoities and kidnappings for ransom. Even the constitutional amendment setting up special courts for the speedy trial of killers, dacoits, kidnapers and terrorists did not help in arresting the upward trend as public floggings and the threat of public hanging during Zia-ul-Haque's time did nothing to reduce violent crimes.

It is interesting to note that the nature of the turmoil has changed with the change of government in the province. During Zia-ul-Haque's days when Mohammad Khan Junjo was the Prime Minister, ethnic riots were the order of the day. During the rule of the People's Party, Mohajir-Sindhi ethnic

strife had replaced all others.

A brief period of calm had followed the dismissal of the PPP government. When the calm was broken, the incidence of kidnapping increased alarmingly. School children and foreigners (Chinese engineers working on aid projects and Japanese student-cum-tourists) were the victims. That introduced an ominous element in the situation: state authority had virtually ceased to exist and the dacoits and kidnapers had virtually come

people and generally abusing the womenfolk through their own organised gangs of dacoits or toughs. The most pathetic spectacle of the collapse of state power was the kidnapping and torture of a serving army officer at the hands of a powerful urban ethnic organisation and the complete lack of punitive response from either the provincial or the federal government.

Secondly, since the days when Jam Sadiq Ali became the Chief Minister of the

Ms Benazir Bhutto, has said, such an action must come as an integral part of a political action plan.

Unfortunately no such plan exists; on the other hand, the twisted policy of using state organs to back various extremist groups to implicate rival parties or groups continues unabated. As one commentator has said, "It is a measure of the peace-mindedness of ruling forces that they have chosen to embrace extremist elements among Sindhis and Mohajirs, even at the risk of breaking up the country, merely in order to keep a party out of power."

The tragedy is that the armed forces are not perceived by Sindhis to be neutral and impartial. The civil-military bureaucracy and its members have big economic and financial stakes in Sindh, which is visible to every Sindhi. The best agricultural lands have been allotted to military and civil personnel, almost all of whom are non-Sindhis. Most public sector industrial enterprises are manned by non-Sindhi officers and workers. The experience of 1983 when the pro-democracy movement was brutally suppressed in Sindh cannot be easily erased from the memory of the people. The recent incidence of rigging elections through violence, intimidation and gang rape of women in the rural constituencies are similar experiences which are better forgotten but cannot be. The most recent episode of an "encounter" on the high seas near Karachi in which the Naval forces killed 13 men alleged to be members of Al Zulfikar, said to be a terrorist organisation led by the late Mr Bhutto's son Murtaza. The official account of the encounter

Observers do not think that the army action will yield the desired result. Even if the dacoits are wiped out, new gangs may emerge. This will be mainly because the decision-makers in the corridors of power are not addressing themselves to eradicating the political and socio-economic conditions which foster the dacoit culture. In fact, many observers feel that the army operation is likely to further aggravate the political alienation among the Sindhis and enlarge the base for the enrolment of dacoits and terrorists.

This is not to say that a strong action against dacoits and terrorists is not called for. Almost all political leaders have said that such an action has become essential. But, as the Leader of the Opposition,

and the killings has not been accepted by any section of the public.

Some observers have likened the situation with that which existed in the former East Pakistan during the sixties. "Ayub Khan thought that Monem Khan had found the right prescription for the ailment eating the fabric of the then Pakistan," wrote Khalid Akhtar in the Islamabad daily, *The Muslim*. "Lacking political vision, Yahya Khan resorted to the only remedy he knew — the dreaded and destructive military option." Mr Akhtar continued and said, "East Pakistan required a political remedy, but it was given a law and order dose. Now, 21 years later, Islamabad is again making a wrong diagnosis, administering a wrong medicine in handling a familiar situation."

According to him, the long dictatorial rule of Ayub and Yahya had alienated the Sindhis also. The emergence of Bhutto had brought them in the mainstream. But his execution, "which will go down in history as the greatest political blunder," reverse the healing process in the Sindhi masses. "Since then, the Establishment in Islamabad has committed one folly after the other."

The writer thinks that by far the biggest folly was the building up of the MQM as a mainstay against the PPP. The PPP's wings were clipped but at what cost to national unity? asks the writer. He then discusses the role of Jam Sadiq Ali who he calls "the great executioner who played the destroyer role far more efficiently and ruthlessly than Monem Khan had done in East Pakistan in the sixties." Jam Sadiq excessively used the state apparatus against his opponents, but it took him nowhere.

Politicians and commentators have suggested various measures to tackle the complicated problems of Sindh. Most of these are however short-term measures which will merely brush the problems under the carpet but not eliminate them. But if Islamabad remains obsessed with the illusion of seeking a solution of the situation by eliminating the PPP and by playing one group against the other, the results could be worse than experienced so far.

FOCUS ON PAKISTAN

M J Zahedi writes from Karachi

to hold the government and people of Sindh to ransom. The government seemed paralysed until the latest kidnapping of the personal representative of the Aga Khan seems to have finally aroused it into action.

What is most significant in the Sindh situation is a clear perception of the loss of legitimacy of the state and government. All provincial governments in Sindh have been propped up and controlled from Islamabad, even during the PPP days, although the phenomenon was at its peak during the dictatorship of Zia-ul-Haque. That is why they have never commanded much respect among the intelligentsia or the people of the province.

The situation induced various elements to owe allegiance to various centres of power and take the law in their own hands. In the urban areas, the political parties exercised their own spheres of power. In the rural areas, the "waderas" or their "pathedars" ruled the roost, killing or kidnapping

Wanted — Aid Programme Switch to Help Indian Poor

Ravi Narayanan writes from Bangalore

The Indian economy, faced with a massive drop in foreign exchange reserves and a record high foreign debt, is being restructured. The cost of much of the programme is being borne by the poor, who have lost the subsidies they rely on and seen prices rise beyond their means. The answer, reports Gemini News Service, must be to restructure India's foreign aid programme alongside its economy.



IN CRISIS
India's Poor Growing Poorer

prices has had the most impact on many of the country's poor. Some 16 million tonnes of foodgrains, almost 10 per cent of the nation's production, are distributed each year at subsidised prices by the government through the Public Distribution System (PDS). The beneficiaries are mainly the poor who cannot afford market prices.

In December 1991, to try to curtail the food subsidy, the

government increased the price of rice under the PDS by a hefty 30 per cent and wheat by 20 per cent. PDS sugar prices have also been pushed up 30 per cent during the last two years.

For poor agricultural wage labourers who earn as little as 11 rupees a day, these increases are catastrophic. If left unchecked, they would lead to a further drop in the already low number of food calories

Indians consume each day. According to the World Bank, India's daily calorie supply increased by just one calorie between 1985 and 1988, to 2,104 calories per person each day. In contrast, the average for 41 of the low income countries rose from 1,988 to 2,331 calories during this period.

Faced with a crunch on its resources, the Indian government has sharply cut its spending on rural development. The ministry's funding has been cut by Rs 4 billion this year, to Rs 31 billion. Money for the rural employment scheme, which forms the backbone of the government anti-poverty effort, has been reduced by Rs 500 million, while rural backward allocations have been cut by Rs 1.2 billion.

The national budget presented to Parliament at the end of February reflected India's new economic reality. Its highlights — partial convertibility of the rupee, liberalisation of gold imports, interest and income tax concessions and import duty reductions — mean nothing for the rural millions, at least in the short term.

They are becoming the major losers as the country, un-

der pressure from international lending institutions, moves to integrate its economy with the rest of the world's.

The economic policies of the government have been designed to tackle the immediate crisis," says the government's Economic Survey for 1991-92. "The crisis has involved hardship for the people. The government has tried to ameliorate it, but not enough. The resources of the people are limited."

The poor cannot be just cast aside. In such a situation, foreign aid can and must play an important role in alleviating the problems caused to the poor by India's programme. It could even be said that, with-

out such support, the effectiveness of government may be weakened.

India on average receives less than \$2 billion a year as foreign aid. The \$2.9 a person India gets is one of the lowest among low-income countries and needs to be significantly stepped up.

At the same time, increase should be directed in such a way that it fits into the larger strategy of poverty reduction and complements the Indian government's approach to targeting the poor with special poverty alleviation programmes.

Foreign donors, too, generally agree with this approach. But now, more than ever before, they need to put their money where their mouths are. The impact of the current Indian economic crisis on the world's largest collection of poor demands no less.

RAVI NARAYANAN was recently appointed deputy director of programmes for the charity Action Aid.

OPINION

Wealth Tax and Income Tax

In his article "Some Thoughts on the Coming Budget" (*The Daily Star*, May 8), Mr Jamal Uddin Ahmed, a former Deputy Prime Minister, very rightly stated that by taxing the income generated from wealth, and wealth itself, the government has been resorting to double taxation, which runs contrary to basic principles of taxation. This, as Mr Ahmed has said, rightly is an irony and contradiction in terms. The democratically elected government should forthwith discontinue this policy of double taxation, introduced by the previous autocratic government.

If for any valid and unavoidable reason, Wealth Tax is retained for the time being, its structure should be rationalised, so that it does not appear oppressive. At present, a person holding wealth (cash, bank balance, land, shop, house etc) over Tk 10 lakh is subjected to Wealth Tax. This amount was fixed several years ago. Keeping in view the economic realities of steep rise in prices and cost of acquiring immovable wealth, the previous Tk 10 lakh ceiling should be raised to at least Tk 50 lakh. In other words, persons owning wealth of over Tk 50 lakh should be subjected to Wealth Tax, otherwise, this will be utterly inconsistent with the present government's much publicised policy of free-market economy. Oppressive taxation measures, including double taxation, and policy of free market economy are contradictory, to say the least. The

sooner this anomaly is removed, the better for the government and the people it governs.

The people would eagerly wait to see how our bold and agile Finance Minister tackles this important issue in the coming budget.

May I also suggest that, in order to create a climate of trust and confidence between the government and the taxpayers, the present income limit of Tk 10 lakh, under the Self-Assessment Scheme, should be raised to Tk 25 lakh. Besides, to encourage growth of private savings through recognised means, the existing provision of investment allowance for Income Tax rebate (30% or Taka one lakh whichever is less) should be raised to Tk 2 lakh or 40% whichever is more. These measures will be consistent with free market economy policy and other economic realities of present day. Such measures shall greatly help augment tax-revenue, in the longer run. It should be understood by policy-makers that, high rates of direct taxes always prove counter-productive in that; under such situation even honest tax payers find out ways and means to avoid extra taxes. If the tax structure is rational and legitimate, people consider it their national duty to pay the taxes voluntarily, with a sense of pride for participation in the affairs of the government, be it administration or development.

A Citizen

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.

Pacemaker

Sir, Bangladesh is 'satisfied' with 2.1 billion dollars BAC aid for 1992-93 FY. This more than expected amount has come on time to her rescue and will keep her spirits alive to reach targets.

Aid Club's annual workout makes up her budget which may persuade a patriot to hope that the nation will not have to rely on this aiding system much longer even if hardships continue for a longer period.

Bangladesh has since her independence been battling all sorts of chronic calamities and corruptions having been bound by debt pressures that have provided her with no alternative to efforts for mere subsistence.

Probably now could be one last time this nation made a concerted endeavour with right personnel toward achieving self-sufficiency in each sector in lieu of expecting aids to feed her budget up. With that objective in her perspectives should LDC Bangladesh consider re-ordering priority of schemes against updated facts and projected changes in economic-physical infrastructures.

Besides, among the foremost measures in confronting nature's haves particularly flood and drought, in addition to forecast, afforestation, embankment, river/canal dredging, flood channels, upstream control, river training, estuary treatment, tubewell, etc.,

maybe Hydrobanks.

Hydrobanks — towering containers, elevated and underground reservoirs, mobile tanks, and the like — as stocks of flood water may lessen flood intensity and can also serve the drought areas with underground and overhead pipelines and narrow canals discharged by mechanical or manual device. Hydrobanks will save arable lands producing higher yields and, most of all, may relieve the nation of the label 'International Basket Case'.

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Multinationals

Sir, The present democratic government is encouraging foreign investments in the country to ensure rapid industrialisation. But it is gathered that some major multinational companies are planning to close down their businesses in Bangladesh. Some have already done so. It is understood that the multinationals are experiencing loss because their

products have no market as before in the country. For instance, in the field of electronic goods, local manufacturers are supplying products at a cheaper price than those of the multinationals. It is often alleged that certain local assembling companies are not paying proper taxes or importing their raw materials from nearby countries on payment of less duties. As a result, the products of these companies are cheaper while the quality products of the multinationals are costlier.

As a citizen of this country I would obviously appreciate the flourishing of our local companies but multinational companies are also needed because they are supplying quality products and providing better jobs to a good number of Bangladeshis.

I think the government should take some measures to protect the business also of the multinationals in Bangladesh.

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