

Drifting Back to Square One

Nearly a month after friction in the top leadership of the ruling party's student front led to three killings and heavy gunbattles, a terror-free Dhaka University remains a hope rather than a reality.

Unfortunately, things are beginning to fall apart again. The arrest of Ilyas Ali has not been followed up with further action, which has raised doubts in the minds of many people about the determination of the government in dealing with terrorists within its own ranks.

There has not been any political initiative to bring to an end the current practice of keeping armed cadres, nor has there been anything like adequate legal steps to make armed politics an unprofitable business.

Under such circumstances, it is perhaps not surprising that cadres have started returning to their DU haunts again. Earlier this week, gunshots were heard on the campus, from halls controlled by the JCD and BCL.

When students cannot even return to their own dormitories, it represents a major administrative failure responsibility for which has to be borne by the DU administration in general, and its chief executive, the Vice Chancellor in particular.

Both the BNP and the AL should know by now that the path of politics based on the use of armed cadres, leads nowhere in a democratic polity. Worse, it creates distrust among the public of political parties, which is not conducive to the healthy growth of democracy.

Refreshing Change

It has an element of new thinking about it. The newly admitted students of the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET) — five hundred and fifty of them — will participate in a literacy programme, while waiting for their regular classes to start.

Let this new move be only the first of many such initiatives. A comprehensive plan of involving our students in more and more of such activities should now be taken up. Ideas like holiday camps, in which students will participate in literacy project in some village, should now be examined.

The point needs to be made here that however innovative and noble the BUET students' literacy project is, it is an ad hoc arrangement and as such it has its limitation. If serious dent is to be made in our formidable illiteracy problem, more regular and organised programmes — and most importantly, ones that have follow-up mechanism — have to be set up.

Whatever may be the shortcoming of this idea — and frankly there are quite a few — the thing which is so attractive about it is that it gives our students an opportunity to participate in a constructive nation building task.

Let us have more of such initiatives from our students.

EVER since India redraw its political map some 35 years ago to meet the demand for linguistic states, unsatisfied communities and areas have kept their standard of protest aloft.

Only two movements have met with success after the States Reorganisation Commission (SRC), appointed in 1956 to demarcate the states' borders, rejected their claims. One is the Punjab Suba movement, which ended up in lopping off the Hindi-speaking Haryana from the bilingual Punjab.

Similar was the fate of the demand for integrating the tribal Adivasi areas of Chhota Nagpur and Santhal Parganas in south Bihar into a Jharkhand state. Although it was raised before independence, it was rejected, first by the subcommittee of India's Constituent Assembly, and later by the SRC.

The demand, flawed on economic grounds, was apparently corrected by inflating the claim to a territory that would

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include all the Adivasi areas in Madhya Pradesh, Orissa and West Bengal, apart from Bihar. The suggestion was shot down as forcibly as the earlier one. It would not have been resurrected if Home Minister S B Chavan had not played politics.

His statement that Jharkhand should be created either as a state or a union territory was meant to destabilise all the four states — Bihar, MP, Orissa and West Bengal — where the opposition parties rule. Chavan's half-hearted denial made things worse.

Whether Chavan did it on his own or whether he had the blessing from elsewhere is not so relevant as the fact that the demand has come to the fore. It cannot be ignored now. The genie is out of the bottle. A straight rejection, as some political parties have done, will not do.

The thinking which has taken the Jharkhand leaders to articulate the demand is understandable. Had the successive governments at Patna improved the plight of Adivasis, the demand would not have acquired the edge it has. It is the absence of development that has spurred violence and defiance.

I have visited the Santhal

Parganas thrice in the last few years. Each time I have found the people poorer than before. Their belongings are no more than a few earthen vessels and one or two wrappings. There has been no improvement in terms of roads, electricity, drinking water, dispensaries or jobs.

The two proposals made are: one, to integrate Adivasi areas in Bihar, MP, Orissa and

Scottish pattern of governance. The UK has successfully experimented with it to meet the aspirations of Scotland, richer in natural resources than Jharkhand. What it means is that the assembly members elected from the Jharkhand area will have a house of their own to legislate on the specified subjects delegated to it.

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

West Bengal into the Jharkhand state; two, to split Bihar to constitute its southern part a separate state. Both proposals will complicate matters than solve them.

Breaking up four states may set in process such events as may be difficult to control. Practically all the chief ministers have warned New Delhi against dire consequences. Dividing Bihar may also throw the state into a cauldron of unprecedented violence.

Perhaps the way out is the

participate in the affairs of the state.

There is a case for smaller states to make the administration more accessible to people and help them develop a livelier sense of local needs. But this is not time to open the Pandora box.

However urgent the Jharkhand case, it should not be taken up singly. There are so many other demands pending. Narasimha Rao is quite right in saying that there is no question of upsetting the apple

cart or going beyond the precincts of the constitution. Incidentally, the Gorkhaland will get more powers but not the status of statehood.

Frankly speaking, the redrawing of political map has not been a happy experience because it has divided the country, not united it. Most states have become islands of particularism which has given rise to linguistic and regional chauvinism and unaccommodating attitudes.

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It appears that the Congress party, which had been advocating linguistic states before independence, saw the dangers when it came to power. The committee, known as JVP committee, which had Jawaharlal Nehru, then prime minister, Vallabh Bhai Patel, then deputy prime minister and Pattabhi Sitaramayya, then Congress president, as its members, sounded in 1948 a note of warning against the linguistic principles.

After the recommendations of the SRC were announced,

the rulers woke up to the harm that an untrammelled linguistic raj might do. A last-minute effort was made to retrieve the situation. B C Roy, then chief minister of West Bengal, and Sri Krishna, then chief minister of Bihar, proposed the integration of the two states. But the tide of unilingualism was so strong that it swept aside the proposal.

The ill-effects of linguistic states could have been offset if the unit of devolution of power had been a district. Decentralisation would have given authority to the people than the mass of territory, which is the case today. To strengthen the unity at the base, a third tier of governance, Congress of districts could have been constituted, apart from parliament and assembly.

Even now some way should be devised to disperse power. If it is to remain concentrated at the Centre or in the state capitals, any formula to meet the local or regional aspirations of the people will be futile. The lack of economic development is also due to lack of power at the grassroots. Most states — old or new — continue to be in the throes of one agitation or another because the people have remained poor and because the Centre and the states have not shed power.

Yeltsin Keeps Kurile Row on the Boil

by Judith Perera

Days before Russian President Boris Yeltsin was due to visit Japan he cancelled the trip. The reason was believed to be the tough line still being taken by Japan over return of the Kurile Islands. Yeltsin wanted credits for oil and gas exploration projects. Japan wants the islands back first.



After World War II, USSR took over strategically important southern Kurile Islands. Japan, which calls islands its Northern Territories, wants them back.

on the declaration, but local leaders in the Russian Far East and the military argue that the islands provide essential protection for the Pacific Fleet. Japan says any substantial

aid to relieve Russia's economic problems will depend on resolving the Kuriles issue and insists on the return of all the islands. Both sides realise the sensi-

tivity of the problem and went to great lengths to prepare the ground. In August, for instance, Yeltsin sent Deputy Premier and Minister for the Press Mikhail Poltoranin to Japan.

Poltoranin believes his visit was successful, but it caused considerable controversy at home with accusations that he was influenced by the fact that the Japanese Asahi newspaper contributed \$20,000 towards his expenses.

The intrinsic economic value of the Kuriles lies in their rich fishing grounds. Until recently they earned around 2.5bn roubles a year for Russian fishermen. Economic decline has put a stop to this because fuel shortage means fishing boats can no longer put to sea.

On Shikotan six canning factories used to produce 60 million cans a year. Now only one is working and that has to depend on fish delivered by Japanese fishermen.

Power is cut every night and often during the day and airports on two islands are no longer functioning. Mendelejevo on Kunashiri has been closed for "reconstruction" and Burevstnik on Etorofu is refusing to accept aircraft because its fuel

storage tanks are empty. Passenger shipping services have also halted.

With years of uncertainty about the ultimate fate now compounded by economic crisis, many of the islands' 35,000 residents would like to leave. But this is impossible. Even if transport were available they could not afford it.

Many have been unemployed for months and others, although still working, have not been paid. And wages are in any case too low. The average salary of 2,500 roubles a month would not even be enough for an airfare to Sakhalin, which costs 3,000 roubles. And a container to transport belongings costs 79,000 roubles.

Japan has promised citizenship to all those who might choose to stay if this islands were returned and generous compensation for those who decide to leave. Employment for all has also been guaranteed at new fish processing factories, with wages of around \$700 a month.

Japanese charities have even been sending in ships of food "to Our Northern Territories with Love".

Until last year the Russian inhabitants of the islands refused these gifts. Now they are glad of them. Public opinion

polls conducted on the islands suggest there is growing support for some kind of settlement and even for transfer to Japan. An organisation called the Zemlyak Society has been formed to promote this.

Opposition comes mainly from local politicians and officials who stand to lose their positions and influence if Russia gives up the territories. Recently the regional council decided to set up a National Guard and Protection Committee.

The most vociferous critic is Sakhalin Governor Valentin Fyodorov, who says he will personally go to the southern Kuriles to drum up resistance to any Japanese takeover and who wanted Yeltsin to postpone his trip to Japan.

Japan would clearly like a solution because it would speed up the development of economic co-operation with Russia. So far about 70 Japanese-Russian joint ventures are operating throughout the federation. None is on the Kuriles.

There is unlikely to be any quick solution to the problem. Poltoranin said: "I got the impression that the Japanese are not ready to resolve the question right now either. They, too, have problems — the campaign for the islands' return has gone on a long time and the Japanese find themselves prisoners of their own propaganda."

JUDITH PERERA, formerly a senior editor of The Middle East magazine and editor of South magazine, is now freelancing.

To the Editor...

No-confidence defeated, but...

Sir, For those of us inexperienced and not closely acquainted with the dictions of no-confidence motion in a Parliament, it was a surprising about to be an observant of the recent no-confidence motion against the ruling BNP. Beyond any doubt, there had been no apparent potentials for the opposition to topple the ruling party. So far we have come to know of such motions when an incumbent government faces an imminent kick-out. There had been no such development in the country. Notwithstanding, the knowledgeable people saw in it a positive development; they talked very supportively of it as a finger-raiser to point to a rapidly-spreading socio-political disease which inter alia has grave economic implications.

The BNP, grudgingly though, accepted to consider the no-confidence motion in good grace. They flaunted an aura of a real-master in parliamentary democracy. Albeit the declared open-mindedness and the best of intentions, they have fared rather conservatively and contentiously.

Nobody should contest the truth that reviewing the history is in fact an excellent homework for the incumbent leadership to slash down the chances of doing the same mistakes. Also, it has to be noted that nobody from the previous regimes admits that

anything wrong had been done during their rule or misrule. Nobody from AL or JP will admit the atrocious things occurred during their regimes. The law and order records during their regime reached the nadir and all those are never admitted by the offenders. They seem to be lacking in integrity in talking about those days, wars and all. And, for Begum Khaleda Zia, it is appropriate in all senses to talk vehemently of those critical times when Ershadian thugs and goons tended to tear down all the fabrics of the socio-politic body. Anybody having the right of mind should flaming, the boyantly denounce all the atrocities done in the name of keeping "sovereignty" and "security" ... Begum Khaleda Zia has got every right for she had been at the forefront of the movement.

But, it has to be admitted that just only recalling those turbulent and torturous days will not address the present case, the untenable law and order situation let to snowball. Unless and until pragmatic actions are undertaken to deliver the people from the armed muggers, kidnapers and murderers, these strong rumblings will not be welcomed by the suffering masses, even if it gets favourable gestures from the parliamentarians.

We are afraid that by taking up battles against the opposition and by taking a posture to blast the past regimes,

the government has contributed positively to the spread of an already-rampant notion that the Administration will sleep in regards to fighting back intimidations and terrorism. If the notoriety of the past autocrat had been a lesson to the government to bring about alterations in the government policy, the whole episode of rumination of history would have been a great boon.

Undeniably, we have a right to say a few words as regards the prevailing situation. Warnings are raised from time to time regarding the sycophants — the opportunists, the bootlickers. They may at any time signal off the downfall of the elected government. To admit a simple truth, Begum Zia had been ardently admired as the driving symbol of fiery movements against the last draconian rule. And, nobody in the right of mind will be happy to see the democratically-placed government to drop down.

There is no denying the fact that the most successful of the governments of the world also entail minus points and plus points. If the government run short of good heats to accept stark realities as a battle ground and run into action, the government will play in the hands of sycophants. It will be same-side game no one in the opposition or in position will ever be able to obviate. The BNP has survived the no-confidence motion pre-

dictably; but to survive the on-going process of destabilisation due to the spurt in law and order irregularities, the BNP leadership must move on their own. It is an acid test to show a mark of maturity henceforth. To think that evasion of reality will be pardoned perpetually is surely thinking to float on a quicksand. We still believe that the lady who once captured the hearts of millions of people for one reason or other will unfailingly armour her government and will not be hoodwinked by the chance-mongers.

Hubert Francis Sarkar Singtola, Dhaka

Public dish-antenna

Sir, Tremendous development of science and technology could be the right and lone criterion to distinguish the present civilization from the preceding ones. Its impacts on information media have changed the globe rightly into a village. But the fruits of this development have not yet reached the doorsteps of the teeming millions of the Third World countries. The governments in these countries are now in a fix to decide whether to buy these fruits at a greater cost. In other words, the families of this global village, i.e., the nations, are the huge conglomerates of individuals whose economic conditions vary so widely that the largest majority of them can not afford

to have access to the information media permeating the world.

Notwithstanding the above reality, a nation cannot stand still while all other nations are in a race to benefit from science and technology.

Comprehending the above, the Bangladesh government has recently allowed the imports of dish-antenna which has been a big jump to reach the world media network. As expected earlier, dish-antenna did not sprout even in this capital city which vividly implies the economic vulnerability of the people. Reportedly, the number still stands several dozen only.

In this backdrop, is it not incompatible with the things that the government arranges some public dish-antenna in some publicly managed places in order that the people can claim themselves to be the members of the global village? The sooner concrete actions are undertaken, the better.

Md Abdur Rouf Sergeant Zahurul Haque Hall, DU

Father Timm

Sir, This refers to a letter from Father Timm that appeared in 'The Daily Star' on 29 Aug. It is probably providential that the controversy surrounding Father Timm has surfaced when this entire nation is

asking the question of what makes one a Bangladeshi, culminating in the Golam Azam affair.

Since it is a Bangladeshi disposition in the best of Bangladeshi traditions to look for precedents in other countries before applying ideas in our own, I would like to ask, what makes one an American? Will a person be considered an American if he only lived in America for say 40 years? And in the case of persons becoming citizens of America, why do they have to take an oath to cherish and defend the 'American Way' before they are allowed to become citizens of that promised land?

The way I see it if Father Timm will only look at Bangladesh and its people the same way that he has looked at nematodes, no matter how innocently or how humanely, he will always be a missionary no matter how long he lives here.

On the other hand if Father Timm has learnt to see the special way that Bangladeshis see life, the Universe and God, his name deserves to be etched next to the names of Vidyasagar, Michael Modhusudan Dutta, Dr Mohammad Shahidullah and Dr Kudrat e Khuda.

We need to know from Father Timm how does he look at us?

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