

It's a Shame

One student was killed and forty wounded, when a systematic and brutal attack was carried out in four residential halls of the Rajshahi University (RU). This attack is widely attributed to the Chhatra Shibir, the student wing of the Jamaat. In apparent reprisal, violence broke out in many towns, leading to two more deaths in Khulna. This cycle of violence and counter-violence is a result of the government's failure to clean the campuses of the terrorist elements. This newspaper had joined its voice with many others in demanding that the government take the sternest of measures against all those who terrorise other students in the universities and colleges throughout the country. Just the other day, the health minister gave a shameful catalogue of failures as a result of which six medical colleges of the country were forced to remain closed for long periods during the last six months.

The incident at RU is much more insidious, and as such, worthy of looking deeply into. Only last February, three students were killed and hundreds injured when a five-hour-long gunbattle ensued between the supporters of the Islamic Chhatra Shibir and its rivals. From then, till now, we are unaware of any steps that the government took to bring the culprits of that incident to book. Containing campus violence has been the BNP government's single biggest failure. It springs from the PM's refusal to take any stern action against student terrorists. At one stage she took a bold step in dismissing the central committee of her students wing and arresting the general secretary. That move gave us all hope for a serious assault on campus violence. But unfortunately the move was prematurely halted, reportedly on the advice of her party stalwarts who apparently convinced her of the folly of her tough action against these 'useful elements'. Since then, the government's policy has been one of turning the other way, when student violence occurs.

Sunday's incident also raises some serious questions about the role of the police. As has been reported, the RU incident was a sequel to the clash occurring earlier at the Rajshahi College near the Sonadighi area. Tense situation was prevailing in the city, and some sort of clash on the campus was anticipated. So why did not the police take necessary precautionary measures to prevent the outburst that took place? Some police contingents were reportedly placed in the campus area. What did these contingents do? What were their orders? It is not only in the case of the RU; here, in Dhaka too, we have seen the police on duty look the other way when rival student groups engage with each other in gunbattles, or violent clashes.

Eye witnesses, and those who have survived the attack, have identified the student wing of the Jamaat as the perpetrators of Sunday's reign of terror on the RU campus. Similar claim was also made last February. We think that serious investigative work by our intelligence services and the CID should probe into these claims and prove or disprove them, as the case may be. Continuation of these claims, and the refusal by the government to either clear the air or punish the culprits create unnecessary confusion in the public mind and feed suspicion about a collusion, or of the incapability on the part of the government.

We would like to clearly state that it is the responsibility of the government to ensure law and order. To do so, legal mechanism exists which empowers the authorities to undertake any action as they may deem fit. To further strengthen the government's hand the Anti-Terrorism Act was passed last year, which gives sweeping powers to the police. So the question is, why with so much legal authority behind it, the government is so hesitant in moving against known campus terrorists? The patent answer that some 'vested quarter' is harbouring the terrorists is no longer acceptable. It is the government's duty to expose all such 'quarters' and put the culprits behind bars. According to the latest reports, ten students have been arrested in connection with the RU killing. A swift and effective interrogation of this group should reveal the game plan of the attackers, which appears to be quite elaborate.

Asia's No to Pesticides

The long-raging chemical war in the paddy fields of Asia had produced mass casualties: destruction of harvest, environmental degradation, health hazards to both the applicators of the toxic chemicals and their consumers. Saying thus, the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) goes on to observe that the chemical tide has been turned in Asia — by proving to farmers and governments that they can reap benefits by not dousing their fields with insecticides and pesticides.

This must sound like a fairy tale to every caring citizen of Bangladesh. A sense of unreality grips the mind as one reads on and takes in the facts that after subsidizing insecticides every year to the tune of 15 million US dollars, Indonesia woke up to the folly and banned 57 brands of such chemicals in 1986 raking in a 15 per cent rise in rice production as a result. The good fairy vanquishing the demon of pesticides has been identified as the FAO's Integrated Pest Management (IPM) programme, launched by the Indonesian government.

How can the farmer fight the pests in his paddy field without those handy weapons produced and marketed by giant western multinationals? Those weapons undo rather than help the farmer. For, as surely as they kill the pests, the chemicals also kill very effectively all their natural predators — the snails, frogs and fish. The pests come back with a vengeance adapting genetically to the chemical challenge to find the fields swept clean of their enemies. And yield of crop starts falling sharply.

IPM-Asia's top man Peter Kenmore, while recently briefing an international conference, has said that 'along with Indonesia, Vietnam, Bangladesh and the Philippines are taking well to the IPM concept which emphasizes teaching farmers right in their own fields'. Kenmore must have been led on a palatable fare from Bangladesh but we are so far absolutely in the dark about any anti-pesticide campaign hitting the paddy fields of this nation. Farmers here do believe the pesticides to be some godsent manna. And perhaps evermore thousands of hectares under paddy are being brought under pesticide coverage every season.

The pesticide business will continue to flourish here at the cost of both environment and our paddy if only because it fattens the assets of some trading houses. The reason why the IPM has had a phenomenal success in Indonesia lies in the government's straightaway banning the pesticides and matching the action with on-the-field teaching. Only after our government will have emulated the Jakarta performance, can one hope the IPM to take off in Bangladesh meaningfully.

THE Speaker did well to fix a date and to allow time — a fairly generous allocation of four hours — for a discussion of the measures taken (and not taken) on the incident at Jahangirnagar University of July 29. It is hardly necessary to recall the chain of incidents leading to the ugly misconduct — the assault on teachers by students — but it may help to refresh our memory if we set the succeeding events in a chronological order.

On July 26, the Syndicate of Jahangirnagar University passed a resolution expelling a student. His offence: snatching of a tender box. The student in question was in the process of taking his Masters examination, in fact, near the end of it.

On July 29, the date fixed for the election of teacher representatives to the Syndicate, JUCSU organises a violent protest of students. A procession starts from the south end (faculty of social science building) of the campus. There are some masked men among the processionists. Many carry sticks and stones. On way to the University Club, the venue of the election, they are on the rampage in several buildings. The assault on the teachers takes place near the Club. Teachers hold a protest meeting later in the day, meet the Vice-Chancellor, and demand his resignation, mainly for his failure to obtain police help.

August 1-7, university teachers wear black badge, in protest over government's mysterious silence and inaction.

August 8, teachers, officers and employees in a rare show of solidarity, observe a full day's abstention from work, followed by August 21-26, one hour's abstention from work.

September 5, all university teachers observe full day strike, and a press conference at the Dhaka University Club.

September 8, Federation of

Sangsad Discusses the JU Crisis

At a time when students, teachers, officers and employees were working unitedly to build the university as one free from session-jam, organised terrorism struck at its root. Not only the general students, the administration itself became a hostage to this terrorist circle.

University Teachers' Associations organises another full day's abstention from work and a silent procession because there is no 'sincere and positive response' to the teachers' demands from the government.

The above chronology of events is an incomplete record of happenings. It is based on the Memorandum addressed to the Prime Minister and submitted to her by the Federation. Whoever drafted the Memorandum deserves our full praise: it is factual; it allows facts to speak for themselves. It does not mince matters. It tells the Prime Minister in clear terms that the offenders — JUCSU and the rabble they led — are all her men and they all gave their war cry in her name. It tells her that it is some of her ministers who have been providing shelter to the accused, and some of these facts are in public knowledge. It draws a vivid picture of the various forms of lawlessness to which university administration has been subjected at Jahangirnagar and elsewhere. Some of these are worth mentioning, and here I can do no better than give an English version of a passage from the Memorandum:

'At a time when students, teachers, officers and employees were working unitedly to build the university as one free from session-jam, organised terrorism struck at its root. Not only the general students, the administration itself became a hostage to this terrorist circle. To put up barricades on the highway on the slightest plea so that they can force passing vehicles into the campus and extort money from the owners, to snatch tender

boxes, to demand freedom of copying in the examination hall, to demand the class and the position of their choice (and not as per examination norms and rules), to enjoy free food at the canteen, to extort commission from contractors, to loot their implements, to force students to enrol themselves as their party cadre, to declare as undesirable and ban the entry into campus of those who refuse to submit, — the list of the misdeeds of this terrorist circle is not exhausted here. It is due to them that the university's academic, administrative and financial discipline came to a point of collapse. Further, they reduced the ad-

Federation certainly is, representing university teachers across the country, will make such allegations lightly without being confirmed of the truth of the charges?

For a month and a half, the Federation leaders have done their best to move the government into doing what a responsible government is expected to do in a situation like this. In this they have met with a very limited success, so limited indeed that there is hardly any consolation in it. It took full ten days for the government to signify its knowledge of the incident. Meanwhile, a case was filed by an ex-student, heading the list

some quarters within the government had been patronising the terrorists, one of them even pointing to Sugandha, the Prime Minister's office, as their sanctuary. I am not aware that a charge as serious and as damaging as this was challenged by a government spokesman. The most interesting defence came, expectedly enough, from the honourable Information Minister, — a medley of denials, assurances, and a typically blunt attack on a particular teacher, without naming him, whose personal ambition and frustration he considered to be the root cause of all the troubles. The Home Minister was more circumspect. He stopped short of naming the person or persons responsible, 'to say anything that might influence the Enquiry committee.' But what he did say was enough to point an accusing finger to the teachers. One thing came out quite clearly: a shared belief in government quarters that the teachers are guilty — perhaps meaning equally guilty — of engaging in politics. One speaker — the Home Minister — declared the government's plan to amend the '73 Act, and thereby put an end to University politics. In saying so, he evidently overshot his mark, and gave away something which may embarrass the government. This is a sensitive topic, and he might have known that. There was a tendency, in the Treasury bench speeches, to depict the conflict as one in which the teachers and the students were the only two parties, the government having nothing to do with it. The Opposition speakers, one and all, not excluding Maulana Nazim, gave a

lie to this pretension. The best comment of all, in my judgement, was made by that veteran Parliamentarian, Mizanur Rahman Chaudhury. The crime committed, he said, by our young students was grave indeed, but graver was the crime of those who spoke in defence or in extenuation of their crime in this assembly. Maulana Nazim's was a two-pronged comment. He really rubbed it in when he said that the government was in an awkward position because of the party-affiliation of the offenders, and he quickly added to say that the whole thing was a conspiracy of deliberately creating a situation on the campus that would prompt our boys to seek admission in India. This may not be a word-for-word report of what he said but I believe this was the sense of what he said.

And finally, I will give full marks to Mr. Shahjahan Siraj for having uttered the ultimate truth, a truth I have been propagating during the past few months in my own humble way. Terrorism will remain as long as student organisations continue to be affiliate bodies of political parties.

There may not be any immediate and concrete result of the debate but who knows. Quite a few government spokesmen held out a promise that offenders will be apprehended; that it was just a question of time; that criminals will be treated as criminals and not as party men; that teachers could feel fully secure and when they returned to their work. The most straightforward and apparently the sincerest speech came from Works Minister Rafiqul Islam Mia: no aspersions, innuendoes, no barbed attacks; a call for a consensus, a call for action to the Home Minister and a call to everyone to stand against terrorism so that confidence is restored and teachers can return to work. He sounded the right note and this should not go in vain.

PASSING CLOUDS

Zillur Rahman Siddiqui

mission procedure of the university to something meaningful. They forced out really meritorious candidates for admission by terrorising them on gun-point, sold services for admission of the undeserving or to obtain admission for relations, friends and party-workers; secured admission for candidates drawn from the bottom of the waiting list.

One wonders whether this is the picture of a university or that of Adamjee Jute Mills under the complete sway of confirmed criminals operating under the shelter of so-called trade unions. The picture may look lurid, and the one-man Enquiry Commission will do well to satisfy itself about the truth or otherwise of the charges.

What will outsiders think of this picture? Is it conceivable that a responsible body, as the

of the accused in the case filed by the Registrar on the incident of July 29, against ten teachers of the university. Reportedly the case was filed not in person, but by post, fifteen days after the event at the instance of higher authorities; ten teachers now stand charged with having criminally assaulted some students!

The Speaker, as I said at the beginning, has done well in allowing time for a full-scale Sangsad debate. As many as twenty-one Opposition members spoke on the 15th and seven members from the Treasury benches spoke in reply to the charges levelled against the government. Opposition members, in their turn, did not spare the authorities, including the police, for their inaction and worse. Some speakers made it perfectly clear that they believed that

the inquiry disclosed that some soldiers were fined \$1,000 for the 'accidental discharges' of their guns. An unarmed Somali was shot dead on March 4, but nobody has been charged with the killing. Troops of other countries, Belgium and Nigeria among them, have been even more trigger-happy. And some blame may rest with the US General Robert Johnson, who forbade the use of tear-gas, with the result that troops who could not control crowds with batons have had to resort to rifle fire. But in Canada the scandal has made wider ripples, because Kim Campbell was Defence Minister at the time of the two killings, and opposition politicians have demanded to know why the news of the deaths was not made public for two weeks. Recently Canadians learned that the family of one of the Somali victims was secretly paid \$15,000, or the value of 100 camels (the Somalis' traditional blood-money), while Campbell was campaigning for leadership of the party, to become Prime Minister. While she is not directly being accused of a cover-up, the incidents are likely to hurt her credibility as she leads the Conservatives into an election on October 25. One journalist, unkindly misspelt her name, Kim Camel. —GEMINI NEWS

Canada under Fire in Africa

Clyde Sanger writes from Ottawa

For over 30 years African countries have perceived Canada as a friend they could trust. But in recent month that goodwill has received a blow. In Zimbabwe tension has risen over the issue of land reforms. Canadian aid to Tanzania and Ethiopia has been virtually stopped. And Canadian peacekeeping soldiers in Somalia are under investigation for killing innocent Somalis. These developments have strained Canada's relations with Africa.



PRIME MINISTER KIM CAMPBELL. Cuts aid to Africa.

Beatty had further concerns when the Zimbabwe government passed the Land Acquisition Act and moved to start expropriating five million hectares of commercial farmland for resettling peasant farmers.

Under instructions, Canada's High Commissioner to Zimbabwe, Charles Bassett, protested in private conversa-

tion to a minister that the system was unfair since the mostly white commercial farmers were not to be given the right of appeal if the government-fixed price for their land was set ludicrously low.

Soon afterwards Robert Mugabe's outburst was carried on national television. The Zimbabwe papers chimed in too, calling Bassett 'a racist bigot'.

What had enraged Mugabe was a decision in Ottawa to postpone a visit to Canada of Zimbabwe's Trade Minister, who wanted to drum up private investment in his country. The visit, which was being paid for by Canada, had been postponed twice before. This time the 'reason' given was 'the uncertainty expressed by potential Canadian investors about the investment climate in Zimbabwe.'

It was easy for Zimbabwe's leaders to read between the lines. Canadian officials and businessmen think that expropriation of half the commercial farmland for peasant resettlement will be disastrous for the economy.

They point to the fact that the original resettlement scheme, begun after independence in 1980, has largely been a failure. Only 55,000 families out of an intended 162,000 have ever received land, and more than one million hectares of land to be resettled is still unused. In contrast the 5,000 commercial farmers generate over a quarter of Zimbabwe's foreign exchange earnings.

So the Trade Minister would probably have got little response from Canadian businessmen just now. But, oddly, there was a delegation of the Canadian Exporters Association in Harare soon after his visit was postponed. For good relations, Ottawa might have been better advised to go through the motions of hosting the Trade Minister, even if the fishing trip produced no catch.

Meanwhile Tanzania and Ethiopia, two of the world's poorest countries, discovered that Canada was cutting off

virtually all aid. Ten African ambassadors and high commissioners did the unprecedented thing of appearing in a body to protest against the cuts in front of a parliamentary committee. Canada has since restored aid worth about \$10 million to Tanzania, but a friendship built up over thirty years has been strained.

Finally, in Somalia, the 1,250 Canadian troops who sweated it out on peacekeeping duty for six months have returned home under a cloud. The valuable work they did repairing bridges, roads and schools has been almost forgotten in a scandal over the beating to death of a Somali on March 16. Four soldiers from the Canadian Airborne Regiment are to stand trial for his murder.

A military board of inquiry into this and other incidents in Somalia published a report in September that reveals deep-seated problems of racism, heavy drinking and lack of discipline.

Those who keep a close tab on the global press must have noted that it was becoming a big burden for Israel over the years to maintain its military deterrent pose in constant state of readiness and the huge allocations to defence over the years was telling and becoming a financial strain; coupled with the fact of decreasing export market, with no signs of decrease in imports. The impact of the recession was staring Israel in the face, calling for some drastic steps to stem the bleeding hostilities with the Arabs for several decades (or the 100 years war as the propaganda machine of the west loves to call it now).

Big industrialized nations are facing the pinch of recession [when 'recession' reaches the level of 'depression' according to the western masters who lay down the world standards], so it is unbelievable that a tiny country like Israel would be able to solve her financial problems tackling the 'terrorists' (a western coinage) year after year.

Look closely at the state of financial health of a few countries: Australia, New Zealand, UK, South Africa, France, Western One-Europe, the CIS, Japan, IBM, General Motors, Mercedes Benz. How Israel could be more lucky? It is time somebody shows us the other side of the picture. Ali Zabr 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.

PLO and Israeli accord

Sir, The peace agreement signed between the Palestinian Liberation Organisation and Israel is an achievement that I didn't think I would see in my lifetime. It has been the fruit from the seed sowed by two great leaders of our time Anwar Sadat and Jimmy Carter. The little step they took in Camp David has resulted in the giant leap of the signing of this agreement on the lawn of the White House which I am sure will see the end of distrust, killing of the innocents and hardship of the millions. This is the day of awakening for a new era in world peace and harmony and our struggle against fundamentalism the world over. This peace treaty will not only give the people of Palestine a nationhood but for all those who are fighting against fundamentalism in all forms this is a great beginning.

I am surprised that our intellectuals and progressive leaders have not welcomed this great achievement in an overwhelming way so that Bangladesh could recognize the nation of Israel. After all,

lest we forget, back in 1971 during our struggle against the Pakistani atrocities Israel also who was one of the first nations to come forward in our support.

Akku Choudhury
West Nakhalpara.

Posting of Govt. employees

Sir, About 2400 teachers were appointed in 1991 and '92 in Govt. schools of the country. Most of them were posted in their respective zones. It may be mentioned here that the country has been divided into eight zones, each of the old four divisions being bifurcated. The zones are Rangpur, Rajshahi, Mymensingh, Dhaka, Sylhet, Chittagong, Barisal and Khulna. Surprisingly enough, some of the teachers have been posted as distant from their home district as possible. For example, some Chittagong people have been posted in Panchagarh and the vice versa.

Furthermore, some pass course graduates have been posted in Dhaka city, while many trained post graduates

failed to avail of this opportunity. What is their fault? Perhaps the main deficiency(?) in them is not to come to terms, if any, otherwise! How much time should the democratic government lapse to size the power of the Education Directorates of using Dhaka allegedly, as their milching cow?

Over 1800 Govt. college teachers are going to be appointed very soon. The Honourable Prime Minister is fervently requested through these columns to keep an eye to this so that the Govt. employees including the college teachers are not posted in exchange of any material gain. There is no logic behind posting of employees remote from their home districts. They may better be posted in their own district as far as possible so that they can serve the country with less anxiety. Only the administrators may be posted in districts other than their own for the cause of strictness in avoiding fear or favour. They should also not be harassed by being posted very distantly.

Md Abdus Sattar Molla
SME, IER, DU.

Use jute bags

Sir, Polythene bags are harmful to our environment and health. We need to replace those with jute bags which are pollution free.

We would request our public sector and private sector entrepreneurs to kindly manu-

facture low cost, light, thin and durable jute bags of variety of sizes for variety of use.

If we start meeting our day-to-day domestic requirements with jute bags we would not only be able to give a fresh lease of life to our moribund jute industry but we would also encourage and motivate people of different foreign countries to discard the harmful polythene bags and to replace those with our golden fibre jute for the better sake of environment.

Let us use and popularise jute bags from today.

O H Kabir
Dhaka-1203.

Cabinet reshuffle

Sir, A minor reshuffle in the Cabinet on 14-8-93 has disappointed all in the opposition and many in the government.

To generate life, action and dynamism in the activities of the statecraft, a major reshuffle is overdue. Two-and-half-years is long time to assess a ministry's performance and an individual minister's integrity and efficiency.

If we want to mean business, the cabinet must get rid of corrupt, inefficient and old folks if any, soon to facilitate infusion of new blood in reorganizing our scarce resources efficiently and quickly.

As a member of the public I want action, better action and quick action by the concerned

decision maker in the government.

Secondly, creation of a new Ministry of Science and Technology has disappointed us at the time when we need to reorganize ministries in relation to their functions and co-ordination and to reduce the number of ministries for much greater efficiency and desired effectiveness of decision making processes and co-ordinated implementation of programmes.

Md Fazlul Haque
Uttara, Dhaka

Why Israel opted for peace?

Sir, Michael Jansen's commentary from Tunis headlined 'Why the PLO-Opted for Peace' (Star Sep. 14) did not give any indication as to why Israel also opted for peace. This is the problem with the Western-dominated mass media — we get a one-sided picture all the time, and that too distorted or out of context and repeated many times; till one is influenced by it or starts believing in it and in turn repeats it to others locally, creating an illusory climate of make-believe.

Will the experts point out to what extent the Israeli decision to go in for a peace accord was directly or indirectly influenced by Israel's financial and economic crisis building up slowly but surely, in the global environment of recession in the industrialized countries?