

DUCSU Legacy

After a long gap, the university authorities are busy preparing the ground for holding the Dhaka University Central Students' Union (DUCSU) and hall union elections on April 12. A code of conduct enjoying acceptance of all the contending parties has already been worked out. But the different student wings' acquiescence to comply with the code of conduct is no guarantee for peace on the campus during, before or after the polls. Campus after all has ever remained unpredictable, violence-prone and seemingly outside of the bounds of the country's legal system. How else can one explain the death of 44 students, as estimated by the DU teachers' association, during the past 20 years without any action whatsoever against the culprits?

Considering the importance of the coming election to the DUCSU, the student organisations will surely try to wrench the results in their respective favour. But as long as the parties devote their resources and energies within allowable limits, nothing wrong with it. In the past the university had been a witness to adventurism of the worst type and even needless violence and cruelty when the scores were settled. This time the DUCSU election is coming on the heels of the mayoral election, thus raising the stake further.

On the current strength, the Jatiatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) should win the DUCSU election but all calculations may be upset if the Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL-ME) can forge alliance with other like-minded student wings to give a joint panel like they did in 1989. And if the Ilias faction of the JCD try to settle its old score with the rival group now enjoying the BNP's backing, the question of holding election may, take a back seat, courtesy of a bloody confrontation between the JCD factions.

After the incidents of Jahangirnagar University and the Jagannath University College, the fear of a more ominous consequence gets deeply embedded in our minds.

To allay this fear, the government should demonstrate a strong resolution to hold the election peacefully. The mayoral election, minus its post-poll Lalbagh carnage, can be a guide. While the ruling party ought to co-operate as much with the polling authorities in ensuring the smooth conduct of the DUCSU election, other political parties also need to participate in the effort with the same spirit they demonstrated during the mayoral election. The key element is everyone's will to build up a democratic tradition.

To make DUCSU election violence-free, not enough vigilance will do. The police have an uncanny role to play whenever armed confrontations between student groups or factions take place. What is most necessary is to disarm the cadres of the student groups. It is unbelievable that the law enforcers cannot nab the culprits. If they are made fully responsible for the task, they can apprehend the gun-totting culprits sooner or later.

The cult of violence could be established because of the double-dealings on the part of the politicians and the administration. Clandestine supply of weapons and condemnation of campus violence cannot go together. Campus tragedies will continue to repeat unless the myopic politicians stop using the student bodies to help serve their own narrow ends at the cost of the future of the country's higher education. People across the length and breadth of the country will be closely watching how the students conduct themselves in their exclusive body's election. Theirs is an onus to set example before the nation.

Unpaid Utility Bills: How Much the Govt Owes?

The unpaid telephone bills for the first seven months of the current fiscal year amount to Tk 30.19 crore. As can be expected, the unpaid amount, Tk 16 crore is due from the semi-government and autonomous organisations. Newspapers and news agencies make up for another Tk 2.60 crore. This information came out during the question and answer session in the parliament last Monday. What the minister concerned did not say was the amount actually owed by the government itself in unpaid bills to the telecommunication authorities. We think we will not be very far from the truth if we say that a large portion of the unpaid amount — about Tk 13 crore — is due with the government itself.

The point that we would like to highlight here is the culture of not paying the bills, especially utility bills, permeates the whole fabric of government institutions. There is a feeling that the government, or public corporations or other such bodies do not need to pay for utilities which are produced by other government or public entities. What is true for telephone is equally, if not more, true for electricity, gas, and WASA bills. It will amount to hundreds of crores of Taka if all the unpaid utility bills of all government, semi-government and autonomous bodies are put together.

This non-paying of bills result into two things. First the utility supplying bodies never reach a healthy balance sheet. The gaping holes that the non-paying government and related bodies create, remain like sore points seriously jeopardizing the evolution of these bodies as sound financially managed institutions. The second result of this custom of not paying the bills by the government and related bodies, is that the defaulting culture get tremendously entrenched. Years and years of non-clearing of such bills create an unhealthy mentality among the managers of these bodies that utility bills are merely for bookkeeping purposes and that these accounts will be someday written-off or balanced out with some government dispensation at some stage in the future. Thus we will see that government or some such bodies, who owe crores in unpaid bills, expanding offices and increasing power, water and gas consumption without batting an eye. The whole idea is, 'we the government bodies do not fall under the normal rules of the game, and we do not have to think how these bills will be paid.'

One important step this government can take, towards good governance, is to force all its units and subsidiary bodies to adhere to some sort of financial discipline. It must be remembered that when the public are aware that the government itself does not pay its utility bills, then a tendency arises among the latter to default in paying, and look for ways of settling things through bribery and underhand dealings.

The figures of the unpaid telephone bills is only the tip of the iceberg. Government must clear its house, and set it in order, if it expects the general public to pay bills clearly.

WHAT are the near term growth prospects of Bangladesh? We all wish for a happy new year — let 1994 be the year of hope and fulfilled aspirations. Can we say the same for the economy of Bangladesh?

The answer is both yes and no. After all, if there are four economists, most likely there will be five replies in a typical yes/no mixed-up scenario.

To say the least, it is an extremely difficult, if not an impossible, question: could be hazardous as well. Still, nothing ventured nothing had — let us try to venture out into the unknown.

First, if 1994 continues to be the third successive bumper crop year, then blessed is the land and the people. However, we know from the past that on the average, one out of three years had been a bad crop year although the adverse effects would be moderated because floods or droughts are time-bound phenomenon. Due to wide-spread, round-the-year cropping instead of the dominance of aman harvest, losses in one season tends to be compensated by greater intensity of cropping in the following season. Thus barring any major calamity, weather induced harvest failures are not likely to be decisive — taking the year as a whole and the total GDP from agriculture.

Perhaps of greater importance in 1994 will be the farm-gate prices received by farmers for their marketable surplus. We have witnessed during the past two years that bumper

Bangladesh: Prospects for 1994

crop meant denial of a fair price to the farmers. Today, atta and rice are retailed at almost the same price. The middle class is indeed happy about it.

Such ludicrous pricing cannot endure for long; very soon, the invisible hands of the market are bound to eliminate such incompatible regressions.

There is a prevailing misconception that price factors do not work in agriculture since farmers would have no alternative but to grow paddy. Yes, it is true but the critical factor is not 'to grow or not to grow'. Farmers will cut down cost of production by reducing fertiliser application as well as irrigation. Consequently, high yielding varieties will be replaced by traditional or, at best, locally improved varieties of paddy. There will be more of low yielding, rain-fed paddy and dryland crops in order to avoid irrigation. Thus agriculture growth rate would tend to taper off during 1994. Hopefully, this would then lead to new initiatives in market development including agro-processing, particularly for the rice economy. The tragedy is that an action programme to boost paddy prices during 1993 would have sustained the sectoral growth rate in 1994.

This was a opportunity lost and we will pay for it in terms of less or the same volume of rice in the current year — atleast on a per capita basis.

The silver lining on the agri-

culture scenario is the expected increase in the prices of commodities internationally traded by Bangladesh. World coffee price has increased by 20 per cent in late 1993. This will be reflected in terms of favourable tea auction take-off and prices, beginning March 1994. Demand for jute has already picked up and the trend is likely to be sustained due to environmental

considerations: jute is a biodegradable packaging material while used plastic bags are clogging drainage systems almost all over the world — so much so that its use has already been banned in many European countries. Of particular importance is the expansion of the world rice market with the entry of Japan and South Korea as importers. If appropriate investment decisions are made and put into practice today, Bangladesh might enter that market as an exporter within 1994.

Apartment from rice, prospects for export of fresh and frozen marine foods are bright. Modern poultry industries and feed manufacture should expand in 1994. But, in spite of incentives, dairy farming would not be able

to make any headway simply because within our 56,000 square miles of territory, we cannot afford the required pasture lands. It should not be too difficult to understand that in a country where majority of the rural households are landless, land is too scarce to be left to the animals only. Hopefully, very early in 1994, Government will realize that it is poultry and

ments not only in the field of energy but on a broad front.

Here I must mention the phenomenon of bandwagon followers: If an eminent Japanese multinational is attracted to invest, other big and small direct foreign investment would follow. In this connection, visit to Dhaka of a wellknown Korean corporate giant late last year should be seriously noted and vigorously pursued. If followed up successfully, 1994 may usher in the high tide of direct foreign investment in Bangladesh.

Jamuna bridge project on the other hand is a massive construction venture so much so that it should be capable of invigorating the entire construction industry consisting of supplies, services and manufacture of building materials. In addition, demand for labour from the adjoining areas should boost the local economy.

"Madras Check"

A little known event of 1993 manifests the seeds of a enormous change in 1994 and beyond. This is the successful export for the first time of handloom textile fabrics known in the trade circle as Madras Check to Europe and USA under the initiatives of Grameen Bank. It was a small beginning like the single seed of a giant rain tree. If effectively managed without any interference, it may result in the export of half a billion dollars worth of fabrics

made by our weavers without any substantial investments and well within the next few years only. Simultaneously, supply to local garment makers ought to follow. The year 1994 may become a milestone, the starting point for the rapid growth of the entire textile sector — beginning with spinning and ending with the finished product, the garment, bound for department store chains of OECD countries.

The good luck predicted for construction, petroleum and textile industries could be vitiating no doubt. We have done so in the past but not through any external agent; the wrong-doers exist among ourselves. As for example, electricity supplies are being withheld so that private gains are realised from poor weavers working on night shifts in order to meet the demand for Madras Checks. Petroleum explorations should have started in 1993 but full authorisation to foreign companies were not available on time.

Whether it is bribe or illegal rent, such payments must be reflected in the cost of production and in a competitive world, it is difficult, if not impossible, to survive — so long such unforeseen delays and payments are not minimised, if not eliminated altogether.

1994 should be a year of hopes and aspirations — a year of achievements from hard work and utmost efforts. The global economy is climbing out of a deep-seated recession. We can and we must cash in on it. If we fail, it would be primarily our own doing.



not dairy farming that they must promote. In the meantime, I wish to caution the banks advancing loans for dairy farming without any proper understanding of the real situation.

In 1994, the two big events on the Bangladesh development front are likely to be the beginning of construction of the Jamuna bridge and reopening of petroleum exploration and drilling by foreign oil companies. The latter should restore foreign business confidence first and then promising expectations are likely to be fulfilled. New gas and petroleum reserves would most probably be discovered since in the past one out of three drilling operations was successful. The expectations should bring in new invest-

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... And All this While the Nation was Waiting

supported the Opposition's position of asking for Minister Huda's apology. But after the second 'regret' the Opposition should have relented. At that stage it had become a semantic battle, not a substantive debate.

The events of the last week also raised some serious questions about the role of the Leader of the House. Her highly irregular presence has been criticised in the past, both on the floor of the House, and in the press. But so far to no avail. Shouldn't she, or couldn't she have played a different role in this crisis? Imagine a scenario, that on hearing of the Opposition's walkout, she would have rushed to the Parliament, talked to the aggrieved Opposition MPs, and did the necessary liaison to solve the crisis. Three things could have happened if she took this step? First, and the best option, the crisis could have been solved in a few hours. Second, may be some Opposition MPs, would have listened to her, and others not. This would have set the dialogue into motion, towards winning the Opposition over. Third, and the worst case of option, that nobody would have listened to her, and the stalemate would have continued. In that case, the political offensive would have been in Begum Zia's hands, and she would have been seen, by the voters, as having tried. But now she appears to have been totally aloof, with the long standing impression gaining further credibility that she does not care about the Parliament.

In politics, as in everything else in life, every crisis is also an opportunity. This is more true for leaders. As crises give leaders chance to show their leadership quality, it also comes down hard on them, when they fail to rise upto the occasion. Begum Zia, unwittingly, and if I may say, foolishly, allowed an excellent opportunity to slip through her hands to play her role as the Leader of the House. Now what can we learn from this crisis? There appears to be some members on both sides of the bench whose unthinking remarks often lead to a lot of heated exchanges, sometimes even leading to boycotts. Whips of both parties should take steps to control them. Barrister Huda especially earned himself an unsavoury reputation of making provocative statements. Except for generating more of heat and less and less of light, Minister Huda will agree that his comments did not help anybody, neither the Parliament, much less his party. After this latest experience he

should really concentrate his energy on the positive.

The role of the Speaker left much to be desired during the last session. According to Opposition MPs, he did not make any attempt to mediate. Was he showing his displeasure at Nazmul Huda's statement, by staying aloof? If it be so, as some observers feel, then he allowed his personal feelings to get the better of his duty towards the Parliament. Is it not possible for the speaker to call all MPs, from all parties, who tend to mis-speak and appeal to them to help smoothen the Parliament's proceedings.

Can the Business Advisory Committee be used to have a sobering affect on MPs who create such situations? If we recall, the last big crisis was triggered by an unparliamentary remark — 'Ora Mithya Boley' (referring to Opposition MPs) tell lies — of go less a person than the Leader of the House herself. This was followed by Sheikh Hasina's own faux pas. So the counsel for sobering up has to go all the way.

Perhaps, the most important lesson to learn, to my mind, is that the Leader of the House must take up the affairs of the Parliament more seriously. The Parliament provides her the best forum through which she can speak to the nation. For example, she could have taken the Hebron debate and used it to make a substantial speech on Bangladesh's foreign policy, her own global views, and how she sees Bangladesh's position in the ever changing world. Speeches of the Leader of the House, collectively, constitute the overall policy of the government. Parliament is the PM's vehicle of communicating to the people what her thoughts are on current affairs — both domestic and foreign. Without her constant participation in the Sangsad people do not get to see her intellectual leadership role. Speeches in public meetings are no substitute. Begum Zia should not make slight of the persistent impression that her heart is not in the Parliament. This impression is strong, becoming all-pervasive, and is being increasingly reinforced. This is very damaging for her, if not downright dangerous. It is possible that her personality does not suit the parliamentary exercise. Then she should devolve the responsibility on somebody else. At the early stages of her Premiership, this paper suggested to her not to wear three caps simultaneously — that of the Prime Minister, Leader of the House and BNP

chief. In Britain, John Major is neither the party boss nor the Leader of the House. Same is the case in Australia and New Zealand. In India till the time of Congress split, PM and party chief used to be separate. However in Pakistan Benazir Bhutto, at this moment, wears all the three caps.

Begum Zia must have realised by now, how difficult it is to effectively sit on all the three chairs. Her failure to give a new committee, even after so many months of her party convention, should be proof enough that each of the

three positions she occupies need more and more of her time.

If she chooses to continue to be all three, then she has to find some magic formula and give each of her positions more time, with the role of the PM getting the lion's share. But her current manner of running things will have to be changed if she wants to pull her government, her party and her parliamentary party out of their present morass.

I would like to conclude by pointing out that Parliament belongs to the whole nation, and neither to the Treasury

bench, nor to the Opposition. Consequently, any attempt that renders it ineffective, or reduces its efficacy should be avoided. The democratic provision of walk-out should be used sparingly, and that of boycott, only in extreme cases. This means provocations by individuals and groups will have to be overcome. This is the joint responsibility of both the benches.

I fervently appeal that we should never forget that Parliament must be made effective at any cost, and its processes made universal with tireless efforts on everybody's part. Provocation, over-reaction and meaningless posturing will not get us anywhere.

OPINION

Massacre in Mosque

Lt Col (Retd) Mohammed A Latif Khan

The assassin waited until all the worshippers knelt and reverently touched their foreheads to the floor as Muslims do during their prayers. And then the marauder, wearing military uniform, opened fire with an army-issue Galil assault rifle. For about ten minutes the mass murderer emptied one 35-shot magazine after another. Brains and blood oozing out of the dying victims formed small pools on the floor of the millennium old mosque. When the carnage finally stopped, 63 lifeless bodies lay on the blood-soaked floor of the mosque. The fusillade of fire from the evil mass murderer's assault rifle gravely wounded 270 other worshippers. It may sound like a gory scene from a horror movie. But actually this ghastly incident took place only the other day on 25th of February in the ancient Ibrahim mosque of Hebron in the Israeli occupied Palestine. The 63 dead and 270 wounded persons were Muslims from the territory who as usual went to offer their Fajr prayer in the mosque on that fateful morning.

Twenty-fifty of February was a Friday — a Jumma day for all Muslims throughout the world. That Friday was also more auspicious because it was in the month of holy Ramadan when most Muslims fast from dawn to dusk. Naturally there was a wall to wall congregation in the morning for offering their Fajr prayer in the Ibrahim Mosque. Worshippers who entered the mosque did not notice anything unusual or suspicious. There was no reason to suspect any wrongdoing in a place of worship. But in Jewish occupied territory even the places of worship and worshippers are not immune from the terror and violence. In the evil minds of the Jewish settlers or Kibbutzniks living in the nearby settlements or Kibbutz, a dark plot was hatched. The deadly plot was to kill as many Muslims as possible during the holy month of Ramadan. And in the early morning of 25th February they executed their ghastly crime with Gestapo-like efficiency.

The mastermind of the massacre is a 38-year old the immigrant Jew Dr Baruch Goldstein, whose life's main objective was to murder Muslims en masse. The mass murder that this abominable beast and his co-conspirators perpetrated was not a sudden outburst of a few fanatically deranged Jews blinded by their enmity towards the Muslims. By all accounts, it's now almost certain that the latest mass murder was a part of the well-planned campaign to further their ambition of acquiring 'Eretz Yisrael', i.e. the land God gave to the Jews. The

date they choose to murder and maim hundreds of Muslims praying in the Ibrahim Mosque coincides with the first day of 'Purim' when Jews celebrate a military victory by their forefathers in ancient Persia. Like most of the Kibbutzniks or Jewish settlers who forcibly take the ancestral homes and land of Muslims in occupied Palestine, Dr Baruch Goldstein — the Nazi like mass murderer — was also an American Jew. He was a follower of another American fanatic Jew Rabbi Meir Kahane who founded the Kach movement for forcible relocation of all Muslims from their ancestral homes and lands. Newspaper sources claim that the mass murder of the Muslims was an act of revenge of the violent death of Rabbi Kahane in New York caused by an Arab youth. But it is hard to say whether it was an act of revenge or a carefully designed Jewish plot to derail the on going peace process to give limited autonomy to the people of Palestine.

The reaction of the Jewish state was simply despicable. After the gruesome massacre they let loose the killer Kibbutzniks in the streets who wildly fired bullets from their Uzi machine guns. In the Kibbutz, many settlers went on a drinking binge and danced to celebrate the massacre of scores of Muslims in the Ibrahim mosque. They called the massacre a 'great gift' for Purim ceremony. It is hard to believe that fellow human beings can rejoice the violent deaths of 63 persons knelt in prayer before the Almighty. It is incomprehensible that any one with even a touch of humanity can glorify the death of an evil mass murderer who snuffed out lives of 63 innocent human beings in a matter of minutes. Perhaps it is this perversion of human nature that made heroes out of the butchers like Halaku Khan, Hitler or Tikka Khan. The cruel murder of the innocent people in the mosque will certainly touch a raw nerve among the Bangladeshis. During our own liberation war we experienced similar tragedies.

After the massacre, the Jewish state clamped a round the clock curfew on the Muslims living in the occupied Palestine. While the victims remained confined, the killers went free. It is a shame that the world communities allowed this injustice and gross violation of basic human right of a large number of people. Over the last few years, communism in many countries collapsed. Military dictators gave way to the democratically elected governments. Hitler's third Reich is long buried under the rubble of history. The wind of freedom is blowing across the countries and con-

tinents. In such a free world why the Palestinian Muslims are deprived of their basic human and civil rights? Is it the revival of a Neo-Nazi Reich in the land of 'Eretz Yisrael'? What difference was there between the American Jew Dr Goldstein serving in the Israeli Reserve who killed 63 human beings for no reason and a Nazi SS officer who used to kill Gypsies, and, yes, Jews at whims? No, there is no difference between these two killers who come from two different races, religions and times. Human rights could, in fact it does, get violated while leaders of the 'free world' keep telling us that the human race has finally shaken off the shackles of communism. Like a vast number of people, the Palestinian people are not free. The world bodies could not guarantee their rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

In fact, after the massacre the UN failed to condemn the Jewish state which failed to prevent the tragic incident from happening. Probably, it is the all pervasive influence the Jewish people exert that prevented the world bodies from condemning Israel. After the massacre the Jewish controlled print and electronic media launched a major damage control campaign. To water down the impact of the massacre, they immediately started citing the number as 'dozens' of deaths instead of telling the true figure which was 63. The mass murderer who was a physician was immediately declared as a deranged person. No psychological test was administered. (He was beaten to death quickly by the survivors of the massacre).

The reaction of our own government to this tragic incident is simply pathetic. Mere expression of sadness over the murder of innocent people is not enough for a country which experienced so much violence by the Pakistani occupation forces during the liberation war. When we were under occupation — bleeding and dying — many a people from far distant places helped us. We are now a sovereign nation. Now it's our turn to reciprocate. The oppressed people anywhere in the world deserve help from us. It is our moral duty to voice our anger at such a gross human rights violation.

The response of our government after the massacre in the Sangsad was lackadaisical. It was clearly a Foreign Ministry matter which was handled by the Information Minister Barrister Nazmul Huda in a rather comical manner. His handling (or mishandling) of this tragic incident in our Sangsad has developed into a problem for the government.

To the Editor...

STOL service

Sir, STOL (Short Takeoff and Landing) Service is going to be introduced in the country soon in a number of places where there is no Biman passenger service. This is a welcome step which will hopefully improve communication facilities in the country. With a little imagination and planning the scope of the service can be expanded. At the moment there is no air service between Chittagong and Jessore and Chittagong and Sylhet. So, if STOL service is introduced in these routes this will facilitate communication between these important places.

In Dhaka-Sylhet route, although Biman is operating, it becomes hard for the passengers to find seats on days when London flights arrive or depart. This causes lot of hardship to

the international passengers, who are valuable foreign exchange earners for the country. So, on these days STOL flights may be allowed to operate between Dhaka and Sylhet to carry passengers who fail to find a seat in a regular Biman flight. The same situation may occur in Dhaka-Chittagong route when Middle East flights arrive. This option must be studied carefully and objectively. May I, therefore, request the Parliamentary committee on Civil Aviation to look into the matter and extend STOL services to these routes also.

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Forest tree saplings

Sir, I am very glad to find a letter of one of my students, Nusrat Jahan Shimmie in The

Daily Star of January 31, 1994. I am glad because our students are taking interest in the art of writing especially in the English language. I hope Nusrat will continue to write in the newspaper on different issues.

Meanwhile, I expect that the government will take appropriate programmes for raising forest tree saplings with the help of agriculture and forestry graduates as proposed by Nusrat. Such schemes will not only create employment opportunity for the unemployed agriculture and forestry graduates but will also help in the extension of social forestry. This will also earn foreign exchange by way of export.

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