

Fare You Well, NU

It could be a good quiz teaser. Is there a university anywhere in the world that does not teach? Or, is it possible that a university would not teach? The smart ones would in a jiffy reply yes sir, on Thursday exactly such a university came out with the results of the first batch of its examinees — not quite their students — in a nation called Bangladesh. Nothing new, would say the smarter ones. After all Oxford etc are only clusters of so many colleges.

Bangladesh is a small-sized big nation with possibly the world's highest number of educational changes in policy and devices per second that combine to pull down all known ideals of education as also the nation itself. One of the latest innovations in that exponentially increasing body of educational changes has been the National University. It has certainly taken away one of the worst headaches of our existing general universities — assessing students they do not teach. 1.27 lakh for the 92-94 session, to wit. This comes not only as a relief for those universities but also removes chances of unfair practices by the assessors. Examiners teaching in the universities know their pupils at first hand and this was always feared to have weighed heavily against candidates appearing from faceless mofussil colleges.

It may, however, quite well be a case of transferred unfairness if the imprimatur of the National University comes to mean substandard quality not exclusively for the fault of the bearer of its degree but more likely because of a welter of factors related with the conduct of this all-examination university. This should imply that in order to justify its founding and continued existence, the National University must do far more than merely conduct examinations.

For the National University to earn respect and claim the students of its constituent colleges as its own, it must follow a minimum regimen but with all the care in the world.

One, it must hire and/or groom talented and dedicated teachers preferably of international standard in order that they keep on visiting and lecturing the nearly 600 colleges round the year. This group of 200 or more select teachers should be multi-discipline personalities carrying quality to the colleges and infusing them with the highest ideals of liberal and scientific education.

Two, the National University must supervise and monitor education imparted in its colleges as is not done in the other universities.

Three, it must apply very stringent requirements and high educational-cum-managerial yardsticks for the colleges to satisfy before they are taken into the fold. As a corollary of this the university should exercise power to disqualify colleges failing to keep to the university's standards.

The suggestions are made with the hope that the NU would sincerely exert to become a true university — already the biggest and potentially the most important among the few we have here. Two things it must warily shun — become a dump of the educational dross of the society in which case its very birth would be a most unfortunate thing to happen to the nation; become a fifth board after the horribly performing four secondary boards, only a little higher-perched.

The rise of the coaching centres and teachers minting money outside of the classroom, guide-books and similar devices, objective questions and question-banks etc made education flee this country as if it were plague-ridden. Let the National University be a beginning of a change in all this.

A Wonder Fertilizer

Seldom do we have an occasion to celebrate an invention or a discovery by our local scientists and researchers. Even when there is one on a grand scale, we do not know how to accept it. Cynicism and disbelief are what greet any such invention at home. But when it has received foreign recognition, few can match the belated zeal and appreciative outpourings over the achievement. But the public response apart, there is an even more important task that has to be performed by the government. All the governments — without exception — have routinely appealed to the researchers and scientists for applying their faculties for home-grown invention and advancement of knowledge. Surprisingly none has responded enough faith in the scientists' abilities to perfect things others in the advanced countries have failed to do.

It is exactly against such a backdrop, that our scientists have to go abroad to invent something of high value in foreign laboratories. Dr Abdul Khaleque is one such genius who has come up with a wonder fertilizer after years of research in the laboratory of the London University. Mercifully though his is an invention that has been brought about entirely keeping in mind the Bangladesh situation. Sarna under which brand name the fertilizer has already been marketed in a limited amount and used in an irrigation project on a trial basis, comes at a time when the utility of the chemical fertilizers has been widely questioned throughout the globe.

According to reports received so far, the fertilizer, unlike its chemical counterparts, leaves virtually no adverse effects on soil. As a photo-hormone inducer, the fertilizer invented by Dr Khaleque enhances the soil fertility in a natural way. The idea is that the soil has enough natural and biological fertilizer conserved in it. Only a small amount of micro-nutrient can stimulate the otherwise ineffective fertilizer conserved in the soil. So speaking in scientific terms it is a breakthrough no doubt. How the natural inducer will benefit the country through retaining the soil quality and boosting agricultural production is to be eagerly awaited.

Yet another plus point is that the fertilizer is highly competitive in price. Where several maunds of chemical fertilizer are necessary for augmenting the soil fertility, there is need for only a few grams of Sarna fertilizer there. The comparable costs between chemical fertilizer and sarna for cultivation of a bigha of land have been estimated as Tk 700 and Tk 90 respectively. Unless the new variety of fertilizer proves otherwise unsatisfactory over the years, it is going to change the country's agriculture beyond recognition — and certainly for the better. We hope the country takes the full advantage of this phenomenal invention.

Foreign Relations: BNP's Invisible Achievements

One cannot seek a solution of a problem both bilaterally and multilaterally at the same time. Bilateral negotiations are essentially based on mutuality of interests and a sense of trust between the two countries; multilateral negotiations, on the other hand, are successful only when the opinion of a significant number of countries involved is favourable to a particular cause.

It was pleased to read the text of The Daily Star's exclusive interview with the Foreign Minister Mr Mustafizur Rahman last week. I liked his candour right at the beginning of the interview he dismissed the critics by admitting that in the last three and a half years of BNP rule what has been achieved "is not easily visible or perceivable". The concept of invisible achievements in the field of foreign relations is a novel one. I was under the impression that just as success in the conduct of external relations attracts admiring attention, failures also do not escape public notice. For instance, have we forgotten the embarrassment and humiliation of the FAO election episode when our candidate for the post of Director-General got only two out of 168 votes? How much of the tax payers' money did the government spend for canvassing? No, Mr Foreign Minister, such failures are neither "silent" nor "invisible". They scream out for attention. Notwithstanding the partisan use of the news media, particularly the television and the radio, people do notice such glaring examples of failed efforts which tarnish the image of the country.

"Friendship towards all and enmity towards none." This, according to the Foreign Minister, is the cornerstone of our foreign policy. This is what Bangabandhu declared in 1972 to be the basis of our foreign policy. But how has this broad policy guideline been implemented by the BNP government during the last three and a half years? The Foreign Minister said he adopted two strategies, one for our neighbours and the other for Muslim countries. What about our other good friends, the donor countries or the Commonwealth or the Non-Aligned Movement? Anyway, let us look at the government's performance in shaping our relations with the neighbouring countries. As regards India, he said that his strategy was to take a "bilateral approach towards our problems with India." Fair enough. But then

One cannot seek a solution of a problem both bilaterally and multilaterally at the same time. Bilateral negotiations are essentially based on mutuality of interests and a sense of trust between the two countries; multilateral negotiations, on the other hand, are successful only when the opinion of a significant number of countries involved is favourable to a particular cause. In fact it is the complex interplay of many forces which determine the outcome of a multilateral diplomatic effort. I presume the Foreign Minister knows all this but the UN speech was made entirely for domestic consumption. Indeed, such a fruitless step was taken purely for partisan propaganda purposes. The question of equitable sharing of the waters of the international rivers between Bangladesh and India is such a serious issue that it is unpardonable to play with this problem for short term partisan gains. If the government has reached an impasse due to India's lack of political will, as the Foreign Minister alleges, what is the government doing about it? Should they just sit and wring their hands, moaning helplessly about the non-responsiveness of India? The people have a right to know the facts of the situation. They want effective diplomatic steps to resolve the issue. Vague accusations will not satisfy them.

The Foreign Minister mentioned the arrangements about the Tin Bigha corridor. I am glad that at last this long overdue step has been taken by India. Bangabandhu had been much maligned for this agreement by certain well known quarters, but in all these years have we been able to improve upon what he achieved? The developments in the Chittagong Hill Tracts seem to be moving in the right direction. India's cooperation is certainly necessary for a solution of the problem, but it is basically a domestic problem of Bangladesh. It is good to see that the issue is being addressed seriously.

On our relations with Pakistan the Foreign Minister

process stopped after the first batch but as the proverb goes, one swallow does not make a summer. Such tokenism is rather unkind to the thousands of Pakistani families whose hopes were raised and then dashed.

In response to The Daily Star's question about our role in global affairs, the Foreign Minister could only refer to the signing of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the provision of our troops for peace keeping operations. The point about NPT intrigued me. As far as I recall, this treaty was signed by Bangladesh in 1980. Is the Foreign Minister claiming credit for what was done some fourteen years ago? As regards

notion of a bipartisan policy on vital national issues seems to be alien to the BNP. On the contrary, this government has gone out of its way to appoint the killers of the Father of the Nation as our envoys abroad. There are few actions that could have alienated the main opposition party more than the assignment of these killers to key diplomatic posts.

In democratic countries the Leader of the Opposition enjoys certain privileges and courtesies, both at home and abroad. Yet Bangladesh Ambassadors do not either receive or see-off the Leader of the Opposition on her foreign visits. Such gestures, I am led to believe, would bring swift retribution upon the hapless envoys. As a former ambassador and foreign secretary it gives me no pleasure to write about this issue but to my mind these practices speak volumes about the attitude of the BNP government towards "the Opposition." I am not surprised that the Foreign Minister avoided a proper answer and instead digressed into irrelevant issues.

After a couple of abortive attempts a SAARC summit session was indeed held last year but concrete progress has been meagre. All these meetings and feel-good speeches about poverty alleviation are fine but is anything happening on the ground? SAPTA is a good beginning but only a beginning because in its present form it is almost toothless. I agree with Mr Mustafizur Rahman that such regional groupings need a long gestation period but the people must be wondering, how long? The fundamental factor inhibiting progress is a lack of understanding and trust. Major bilateral issues between India and Pakistan, and the question of water-sharing between India and Bangladesh remain unresolved. Moreover, the power

and influence of the Hindu and Islamic militants are on the rise in the sub-continent. This is not a harbinger of greater peace goodwill and harmony. Such forces promote hatred and intolerance among the people of the region. This issue must be squarely addressed by the leaders of the SAARC member countries if they are to move forward together.

The people of Bangladesh are paying for the BNP government's inept handling of the Rohingya refugee problem. More than three years have passed and yet the Foreign Minister is making vague comments about how he is "asking the UNHCR to expedite the process." It was he who went to Yangon to solve the problem single-handedly with the cooperation of the fellow military officers in charge there. But after signing the agreement with Myanmar he soon found out that he has been taken up the garden path. A bad situation was made worse by antagonising the UNHCR. In the end the Foreign Minister had to eat the humble pie and bring the UNHCR back into the centre of the repatriation operation. It is saddening to think that the Rohingya problem is still festering essentially because of the poor handling of the issue by the BNP government.

A review of the foreign policy performance of the present government leaves us with the unhappy feeling that the Foreign Minister's remark was probably prompted by the absence of any significant achievement. The BNP government has failed to revive the economy, restore law and order and a sense of security, curb the terrorists on the campuses, prevent the erosion of order and discipline in the administration or widespread corruption. In this long litany of failures the record of the government in the field of foreign affairs is certainly most depressing. If the Foreign Minister thinks that the people will be satisfied with "invisible" successes, he is sadly mistaken.

Comments lawyer German Ivtantsov, who heads the Society for Defence of Investors: "These people have been trapped."

Indeed, government spokesmen have warned that the rising number of cases of investment scams are denting the image of market reforms in Russia and could lead to a drastic erosion of public support for them.

Ivtantsov believes stricter government controls are needed and that the state must be more active in warning people to be aware of different commercial structures. He is trying to organise seminars and awareness drives: "We live in a brutal society and if we do not unite, we will be trampled on."

ON THE RECORD

by Shah AMS Kibria

Our Prime Minister visited Pakistan to solve the problem of assets and liabilities and the question of stranded Pakistanis. What a pleasant surprise! Did she succeed? Was there any progress in the matter of sharing of assets and liabilities? As far as I am aware the last meeting on the subject was held in Dhaka in 1980 at the level of Foreign Secretaries and there has been no progress since then. I hope the Foreign Minister realises that such statements do not add to the credibility of the government. If there was no progress he ought to say so and give the reasons for the lack of progress. The manner in which the question of repatriation of the stranded Pakistanis was handled has further eroded the credibility of the government. One plane-load of families was indeed sent to Pakistan but the publicity given to the event seemed to suggest that tens of thousands were sent back. The

deployment of troops for peace keeping operations of the UN. It is certainly a very honourable task but it has little to do with foreign policy success. Countries which do not have any partisan interest in a conflict and are willing and able to provide troops are equally requested to join in these operations. I am very pleased that our troops have given a good account of themselves and that they are involved in several peace keeping operations. But this is hardly a foreign policy victory that one can write home about.

When questioned about the role of the Opposition in foreign policy matters, the minister launched into a harangue on 'hate' as if this is his answer to the question. The Opposition can play a role in this important field only if there is scope for free and full debates on foreign policy issues in the Parliament. But was that the situation in the Bangladesh Parliament? The

Russia: Capitalism is Cruel

Four years after perestroika brought down the Soviet Union, Russians are finding out the hard way that capitalism can be cruel. Alexei Gramatchikov of Inter Press Service reports from Moscow.

On Butirki street in heart of Moscow, a crowd of angry people stand near a grey office block, demanding that Lenin give them their money back.

But the curses of the Muscovites, most of the pensioners, are not aimed at the Father of Soviet Communism. Rather, they are meant for the Russian Leasing United Independent Investment — more popularly known by its Russian acronym Lenin.

Many of the pensioners used to bring their savings to the grey building on Butirki, investing them in Lenin, which had promised monthly returns of 25 per cent in roubles and six percent in hard currency.

But now Lenin's doors are shut, its staff gone. And four years after perestroika brought down the Soviet Union, the people left standing outside investment firm's offices are finding out that capitalism and freedom can be cruel.

"We have been robbed," says Galina Romanova, a former scientist who had invested her US\$750 worth of savings in Lenin.

Adds Ekaterina, who is 65 and claims to have plunked down US\$1,000: "It seems that we had been deceived like naive sheep. These are savings of my entire family. We wanted to protect our money from inflation."

But a growing number of people here say it seems they need to be protected more from the increasing number of swindlers swarming across the Russian capital and taking ad-

quarters. The company chief escaped.

The Lenin case, involving more than 10,000 Muscovites and some US\$8 million, came to public attention when investors went to the police after discovering the company's four Moscow offices suddenly closed. Police have detained the company's co-owner while his partner remains at large in Latvia. The bulk of the money has yet to be traced.

These confidence tricks are only a beginning, says Sergei Ryabikin, a spokesman for the Russian Central Bank.

"We expect a sharp growth in such cases. At the moment this sort of business is a goldmine for swindlers."

Such financial operations are neither prohibited nor regulated by Russian law, leaving authorities unable to control them. The Central Bank has a list of 20 of the biggest "investment" companies that are using legal loopholes to set up their operations, failing to apply for a licence from the Central Bank and registering

the investments as "borrowings."

"Not even the drug running business can bring the sort of dividends which are promised by these companies," says Ryabikin. Yet dozens of advertisements tempt Russians to invest their savings with various funds promising annual returns ranging from 800 to 1,000 per cent.

"People trust them," says Moscow police spokesman Vladimir Vershkov, explaining that the racketeers usually refer to the pyramid principle: first fulfilling their promises and attracting more money.

"When the scam reaches its peak, that is when it becomes time to pay large dividends. They convert the money, transfer it abroad and disappear."

The Moscow police has registered about 600 such cases on investment frauds this year, far more than last year. Vershkov says the hands of authorities are tied by Russian law. He adds, "Until a swindler does close his office door, it is almost impossible to do any-

thing because such activity is strictly speaking not illegal."

Another major factor is that many Russians have yet to catch on the new realities surrounding them. Says Ryabikin: "The mentality of many Russian people is still dominated by communist values, while capitalism is on the loose outside."

"People still believe that somebody will assume responsibility for their decisions, that the state will fuss over them," he adds. "These sad lessons are the only way for people to learn about a free market economy."

OPINION

A Distorted Heading

Sikandar Ali

Views are personal, news sacred. Walter Lipmann would probably have turned in his grave reading the distorted news caption given by the staff correspondent of The Daily Star in its issue of July 7, reporting on the condolence meeting of Jahanara Imam. The caption reads like this, "We sat with Jamaat to save democracy."

I was myself present at this condolence meeting held at Suhrawardy Udyan. I strained my memory but I could not remember when the Opposition leader had uttered these words. The notings I took at the meeting tally with the news reports carried by another newspaper — and I quote "Many people ask me why I sit along with the members of Jamaat which opposed our Liberation War But I want to show respect to parliamentary norms and values I have to sit in the parliament with all-elected members." She continued, "you must be aware of those who have created this situation and you have to try them along with the war criminals." She further said, "Ziaur Rahman, who had captured power illegally following the death of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman rehabilitated the defeated forces of Liberation War in the state power. Zia also scrapped articles 12 and 38 of the constitution to let anti-liberation and communal forces into politics. He also allowed Golam Azam to come to Bangladesh. And Prime Minister Begum Zia reached an agreement with Golam Azam before the general elections of 91 for which Jamaat got 18 seats in the parliament. Golam Azam, being a criminal got citizenship and Jahanara Imam, who lost her son and husband for the cause of the country's liberation passed away disgraced with a treason charge! What kind of country we are living in?" she lamented.

I have taken the liberty of quoting from another English

Daily of the same day only to apprise the valued readership of the esteemed journal The Daily Star. It is very clear in my mind that the caption confused the readers. Following the dastardly murders of August 15th, 1975, this country is being ruled by forces insensitive to the growth of democracy and democratic institutions. The present government, in the guise of democracy, has established the most autocratic and irresponsible form of government. It has hardly any accountability and transparency as is continually claimed.

The UNDP report on administrative reforms published under the advice of the present government, was quickly shelved since the recommendations were at variance with the undemocratic political culture, nurtured by this present government. The reform measures advocated by the USAID and their set of recommendations were also put into the cold storage for identical reasons. After the elections rejected the BNP government in Dhaka and Chittagong Mayoral elections the government followed word for word the Ziaur Rahman formula of May 30, 1977 referendum, concocted by his pliant officials and pulled off the pyrrhic victory of Magura.

The movement for neutral caretaker government under combined opposition is a direct consequence of the undemocratic acts of the government both at Mirpur and Magura. In a recent opinion survey over 73 per cent respondents wanted to see future elections under a neutral caretaker government. When the whole country is for the neutral caretaker government, the administration is showing signs of desperation and restlessness. The caption of the esteemed journal does not seem to reflect the true situation.

To the Editor...

Caretaker Govt and the people

Sir, Our opposition parties have boycotted the Jatiya Sangsad on the issue of caretaker government. But it seems the opposition party members are hardly aware of the more vital opinions of the ordinary voters whom they represent in the Jatiya Sangsad. People in Bangladesh are confronting more serious problems like lawlessness, fundamentalism, farm load-shedding etc. etc. The opposition parties apparently are interested in coming to power by any means, paying in the process, least attention to the actual grievances of the people. Common people have little interest in issues like caretaker government or the trial of those who betrayed the nation 23 yrs ago or even Prime Minister's expenses.

The opposition should come forward with solutions to the problems — the common people are facing today. If the present situation continues the democratic institutions may fail to produce any good results.

The party in power has also adopted squint eye policy to the problems of common man.

Our Finance Minister is supposed to be fully aware of the problems of commonman but

he, perhaps very cautiously, avoids to come face to face with these problems.

Last of all, may I request both the party in power and the opposition not to battle for power but to unite on one point — alleviate the sufferings of commonman.

Ahmed Kabir Choudhury
136/ Housing Estate, Sylhet.

"Woman-bashing must Stop"

Sir, Thank you for your editorial "Woman-bashing must Stop," published on July 9, 1994. It is welcome from someone in the male domain.

It is very sad and terrifying that in the single year 1993, six thousand women have lost their lives tragically and for most of the cases males are responsible. It seems that the number of deaths are increasing day by day as women are trying to establish their rights, and egoistic, cruel males would have none of it.

Women are not born inferior but they are the victims of circumstances, like a sapling. Its growth is stunted for want of proper nourishment in an enclosed space; women shackled in the home share the same fate. Even those who are lucky and have the opportunity

to venture in the wider world, their movements are also restricted for fear of those so-called "superior" males who are not averse to rape or killing. Being physically stronger than women they are taking the full advantage of it and most of the crimes which are committed in the world are their handiworks.

We are hoping against hope, males would regain their senses and act rationally.

Nur Jahan
East Nasirabad, Chittagong

"Fresh Income Tax Burden...."

Sir, May I draw your attention to the article published on 23rd June, 1994, in The Daily Star captioned "Fresh Income Tax Burden On Individual Assesses" written by Mr Md Nurul Haque. I am surprised to see that how The Daily Star could publish an article with so much of wrong information and mistakes. I believe Mr Md Nurul Haque did not read the proposed budget 1994-95 or the budget speech of the Finance Minister, subsequently published in the dailies, carefully otherwise he would not have furnished the readers with such wrong information.

Enhancement of the house rent allowances mentioned in

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