

DU Flares up Again

Imagine the campus of Dhaka University around noon last Thursday. By all description it was a virtual battle field. Two groups of so-called students were trying to show one another who had how much power, meaning gun-power. There were no other purpose of Thursday's gun-battle at the DU campus, except to flex muscles and show the other side who is the boss around the campus. What we would like to know as to what the law enforcement agencies were doing during the period. Is the public to understand that the state power is so weak, or that our police is so inept that a group of armed people can literally take over our premier University campus, for two hours, during the peak time of a working day, and the whole state machinery could do nothing better than to be an onlooker? Yes, we know that certain number of tear gas shells were lobbed and at some point a particular group of students were given chase by the police. By all descriptions, it becomes clear that the police took their time in deciding when to enter, and chose very well as who to give chase to.

Given the rising tension in the overall political scene, it was only a matter of time that its violent reflection would manifest itself in the country's student politics. That is really what had happened in the Dhaka University last Thursday. The two hour mayhem, in which the student wings of the two leading political parties — the ruling BNP and the opposition AL — fired hundreds of rounds of bullets at each other, marks, perhaps, the beginning of another phase of confrontation between the government and the opposition. The firing went on throughout the Arts Faculty and the library premises, putting at risk lives of hundreds of innocent students, whose only crime was to have gone to the University to attend classes.

The political meaning of what happened at the DU campus can easily be gauged from the fact that within hours of the event, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, one of whose better side is her circumspection, quite uncharacteristically took a public position, and pointed finger at her favourite devil incarnate, the 'particular party'. She squarely blamed it for the violence. Her jumping into the fray so early in the episode gives the DU events a very special significance. The statement of the Dhaka University Teachers Association (DUTA), which has taken position on the other extreme, clearly blames the student wing of the ruling party, for its 'fascist activities'. Thus the battle line seems to be clearly drawn with the DUTA on one side and the PM and her party on the other. What concerns this paper is that the PM's statement, which clearly absolves the JCD from any responsibility of the Thursday's event, may give a very dangerous signal to the armed cadre of her own student wing, who are equally guilty, as the BCL, of breaking the peace in the DU campus on Thursday.

Campus violence has been with us for quite sometime. One of the major failures of the present BNP government is its failure to do anything about it. It is extremely difficult to understand that the whole law enforcing machinery of the government could not sift out the campus terrorists in the last three and half years that this government has been in power. We have written on several occasions that in disbanding armed cadres, the ruling party has to take the lead. And after having done so, if the opposition parties do not follow suit, then use the police and other forces to identify and catch the terrorists of all other parties, and thus eliminate campus violence. While maintaining BNP's own armed cadres, whose presence was more than evident last Thursday, the ruling party cannot eliminate campus violence.

The Road Block at Sayedabad

Last Tuesday, from early morning upto 1 pm in the afternoon, truck drivers and workers put up road blocks which had cut off the capital city from several districts of Bangladesh. There are two sides of this event that we feel obliged to highlight. First is the humanitarian aspect, and the second is the legal and law and order aspect. This paper received harrowing details of the plight of passengers who got caught in the road block and were stranded for hours without any food and water. The 10-hour barricade, which the truck drivers used their vehicles to set up, created a huge traffic pile up, which took hours to sort itself out, after it was lifted at 1 pm in the afternoon. In effect the traffic took the whole of the afternoon of Tuesday to return to its normal pace. In reality, therefore, the road block at Sayedabad can be said to have lasted for the whole day. Public caught in the road block had no option but to walk past the blockade, which in some cases meant walking long distances, and take up some means of transport on this side of the barricade. The old and sick travellers had no option but to wait out the event. It is only by chance that we did not have any casualty as a result of the action by truck drivers. We would like to stress that nobody has any right to block public roads and put passengers through the trial and discomfort that the blockade forced upon the unlucky travellers. We would like to state as firmly and as strongly as we can that public thoroughfares must, at all costs, be kept open, and serviceable.

This brings us to the next point. How was it that this blocking of such important road junction was allowed to remain for more than 12 hours? Wasn't it a mockery of the law enforcement agencies, and more directly of the government itself? When a group of truck drivers feel that they can close important inter district roads to realise some demands that they have, then we are really in trouble. It is something that no government should tolerate. We urge upon the government to take serious actions against those who dared to block inter district roads. Regardless of the cause, such an action is not acceptable. If the government does not do anything, then a totally wrong and unhealthy signal will be conveyed to the law breakers.

In the past when Adamjee workers barricaded the Dhaka-Chittagong road, the government did not take action against them. This no doubt emboldened others. This time if no action follows then the government will have more serious indiscipline on its hands.

On the otherhand, we also urge our truck owners and truck drivers to think of other means, which are legal and democratic, to pursue their demands.

What We Need—Right Economic Fundamentals or Fundamentalism?

by Abdul Bayes

THAT the growth of fundamentalism in a society is inimical to the socio-economic and political development of that society is, perhaps, a foregone conclusion. Fundamentalists always place religion at the core of politics and since politics is the major determinant of economics, fundamentalism with its canine ferocity, also tends to dictate economic principles and practices of the society. Our forerunners, who gave birth to this nation, could easily grasp the nature of correlation between the fundamentalism and the development of the society and thus once chose to close the doors for the emergence of fundamentalism in this country.

Just take the example of our neighbouring country India. By its sheer physical size and natural and human resource endowments, India should have emerged as the richest country in Asia long before. But it does not have a track record a growth rate exceeding, on average, even 6%. In terms of poverty and literacy, India lags far behind other countries of east and southeast Asia. There might be a number of factors attributable to the poor performance but, as sociologists and anthropologists would like to argue that two C's appear to contribute to the underdevelopment of India e.g. caste system and communalism.

History and contemporary events tell us that the further a country is from fanaticism, the more likely to be its development. And as we all know, being secular in their national charters, Muslim countries like Malaysia and Indonesia are at the top in terms of growth and development as compared to their Muslim brothers elsewhere. In Korea, China or Taiwan or in other developed countries, people are no less

religious than we are in this sub-continent, but the whole gamut of religion lies in the private domain and the state stands to protect, as it does for properties, religious rights.

Not after Taslima alone!

Bangladesh seems to enter into the most perplexing situation where the fundamentalist forces are up to seizing state power. It all started with an oblique reference to Taslima Nasrin who is alleged to have made some objectionable remarks on our Holy Book (she, of course, disowned the remark), Taslima's unparable remark, quite obviously, hurt the sentiments of all of us because we hate any adverse comments on any religion, religious book or race. It could possibly be said that if Taslima's writings on women exploitation and gender inequality had earned any wreaths for her, the alleged remark is now costing her to breathe in hideouts. Her recent bail is a positive development in all sense of the term.

While the whole nation would like to condemn such a remark, the most disconcerting event, however, is that those who virtually cooperated in the killings of innocent Muslims of Bangladesh during the war of liberation, who witnessed and thus helped the burning of the Holy Quran while millions of houses were destroyed during the occupation rule, who helped our women to be raped by Pakistan army and forces loyal to it — all anti-Islamic activities — appear to use the remark by Taslima and emerge as the vanguards of establishing the Islamic principles in this soil and are assuming the status of the sole custodians of Islam. They are active on the streets to protest against Taslima's remarks and declare prize money for her

slaughter. The protection of the whole nation seems to vest on those who rather guillotined the teaching of Islam during the war of liberation. But, a deep peep into the recent happenings would unveil a plaque of grave concerns to show that there are more motives beneath the carpet than a mere Taslima and her alleged remarks. Just take few examples:

If Taslima's remark is the lone issue at stake, then why should NGOs in rural areas be attacked? Did they say anything against Islam? I believe not. It is, perhaps, because NGOs are trying to pull women out of unemployment and put them on to more worthy task, give them education and provide them with health care facilities. All these activities are dictates of our religion Islam and the avowed policies of our present Government BNP, major opposition party Awami League and other political parties of the country. The fundamentalists, it appears, is wrestling Taslima's remarks to use it as an instrument of attacking the targets of socio-economic development, especially of women's.

While blasting Taslima and the "non-Muslims", why should speakers at the so-called 'Long March' make such remarks as birth of Bangladesh was a conspiracy? Did the freedom fighters of a liberated Bangladesh ever make any comment which, the speakers could show, went against our religion? When a comment of a writer on an issue breeds adverse remark on the nationhood of a country then it is to be explored whether the motive is any respect for the Holy Book or disrespect to the freedom fighters.

The heightened audacity in such comments could also be gleaned from their remarks, as

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people who love Bangladesh as well as the spirit of Islam? Why should not the Khatib be dismissed for calling every one in the parliament non-Muslims?

During its three and a half years tenure, the present government, probably more than any other government of the past, has a track record of promulgating Sec 144 to avoid any confrontation between two or more political rivals. Knowing fully well and also much beforehand, that the arrival of Ghulam Azam in Chittagong could result in a blood shed why, instead of promulgating Sec 144, the government appeared so "democratic" as to the deployment of fleet of BDR and police and also allow the intrusion of private arms cadre to protect the so-called "popular" leader? Why should there not be a press note on Chittagong episode when even small events get wide TV coverage?

If the present government's determined objectives are to ensure the socio-economic emancipation of the people, especially of women, then why should the fatuawaz be cheered rather than chased. What steps did the government take to punish those who burnt NGO schools and attacked NGO offices?

If hartals are anti-development, as the government rightly tends to view, then why the hartal call of 30 June by the anti-liberation forces was not equally slated? If any damage during opposition movement could capture TV screen, then why not the damages caused by the fundamentalists to the Sangsad Bhaban?

The government could think that the activities of the fundamentalists succeeded in diverting people's attention to somewhere else. But such a complacency can be very short

lived and soon the same government might realize the costs incurred to do that. The sauce for the government may not be delicious for the nation!

On the other hand, the main opposition party Awami League might have thought that they edged over the government through isolating government's main ally. However, such complacency again could be very short lived. To embrace fundamentalists, either to be in power or to go to power, is like digging that canal to invite the crocodile. The sooner our politicians realize this, the better it is for the nation.

Mutually Exclusive

The present government, more often than not, boasts of representing: (a) right economic fundamentals; (b) democracy and (c) socio-economic development. While one can be appreciative of some of its achievements so far, one must condemn the fact that, in its power game, the government appears to have let loose fundamentalists through various supports. The above package and the existence of fundamentalism are mutually exclusive events and we have to choose either of them. There is no doubt that political unrest and chaos delays investment, foreign or local, but the surge of fundamentalism simply kills the prospect for ever.

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first time since the end of the Vietnam war, through its dispatch of 90 "Military Technical Advisers" to assist the Cambodian army. The US State Department's proposal to set up an office to investigate Pol Pot and other Khmer Rouge leaders for activities during their rule between 1975 and 1979 has also increased the possibility of a greater US role in the coming years.

Though US government officials point out that they are sending only advisers and no direct military assistance to Cambodia, more than three decades ago the US entered the quagmire of southern Vietnam with precisely that — unsolicited advice.

And, as for the Khmer Rouge's crimes, few are likely to forget that it was the massive carpet bombing of Cambodia in the early 1970s by US aircraft killing thousands of innocent civilians that drove Cambodians into the arms of the Khmer Rouge guerrillas and brought the genocidal force to power in 1975.

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Inept Government has Cambodians Seeing Red

Satyaranay Sivaraman writes from Bangkok

Despite a democratically-elected government and considerable foreign aid, Cambodia remains a shattered nation. As Gemini News Service reports, government mistakes have made even the murderous Khmer Rouge look like a reasonable alternative to many citizens.

Cambodia: still searching for peace



rivalry that have plagued the country's coalition government since it took power in June 1993.

Born out of a marriage of convenience between the CPP and Funcinpec, after the both rivals failed to get a decisive majority in the polls, the government has lost much public credibility as a result of the squabbling of its members for control over various administrative and military posts.

Added to this has been the hectic lobbying indulged in by the country's aging monarch, Prince Norodom Sihanouk, for greater control over the running of government than is accorded him under the country's constitution.

"I would not mind assuming power for one or two years if the situation becomes anarchic," he said in an interview with the Far Eastern Economic Review. The comments sparked strong protests from both co-premiers Hun Sen and

Prince Ranariddh.

An abortive coup attempt led by Sihanouk's estranged son Prince Norodom Chakrapong in early July further compounded the impression of growing anarchy in the country. In a move that had no visible motives, Prince Chakrapong, a bitter rival of his step-brother, Prince Ranariddh, was said to have been the mastermind behind a rebellion by nearly 200 soldiers who were arrested on their way to Phnom Penh.

The government has also

been alienating the public due to its inability to check growing corruption within its ranks. With the average salary of even senior government officials just \$30 a month, corruption has become almost a way of life for many in key administrative positions. This has led to widespread discontent among a public still mired in poverty.

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Following thorough examination, they would make out a prescription, which consisted of a carmine mixture for fever, cough, cold and stomach ailment and the mixture was prepared by the dispensing chemist, attached to the doctor's chamber. No fee was charged by the doctor at the chamber except the price of the medicine, but when called at the patient's residence a meagre fee, however, was charged. With the passage of time these mixtures just disappeared along with the dispensing chemist, and stethoscope just vanished with the advent of ultrasonography, ECG, scanning and other electro-medical gadgets. Even if a stethoscope dangles around the neck of the present day doctors he would seldom use it. I am of course not advocating for those old practices. But often I think didn't they have a boosting impact on the patients?

Secondly, by way of seeking

to prove that corrupt societies do not necessarily have slower rates of economic growth, Mr Bayes drew comparison between what he termed as 'a middle corruption country' in China, on the one hand, and 'low corruption countries like Taiwan, Singapore, the United States or Germany', on the other. In the first place, to term China as 'a middle corruption country' is, to me, not fair, although economic reforms, alleged by some quarters, have had a rampant corruption in that country. In my opinion, even cases such as the

of the heart and congestion of the lungs. They used to determine the condition of stomach, liver, spleen and intestines by digital manipulation. Throat, tongue and eyes were also examined.

Barkatullah needs more practice to skillfully present the emotional scenes. Hope she will make it in her next role.

Zahid
Dhaka

Vanishing stethoscope and mixtures

Sir, Recently the Bangladeshi Television had telecast a drama title "Doorotto" which was quite entertaining because of the theme. The story of the drama was related to the job and life of a real estate agent. This has actually become a popular business in our society. Often some unscrupulous agents cheat people by selling a single piece of land for one or more time to different buyers. As I was witnessing the drama, I was wondering whether these agents have any licence issued by the relevant authority for doing such estate business. If they do not have, then I think that the authority should make it compulsory for them to receive licences before involving themselves in the real estate agency business.

However, the drama was

well produced and the roles played by the artist were satisfactory. I think Bijuri

N H Sufi
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OPINION

Corruption

While I found Mr Abdul Bayes's article on the above subject, published in your esteemed daily's July 9 issues, very illuminating and interesting, I cannot quite understand what the learned writer meant when he said, "Think of the reputedly corrupt governments like Japan and Malaysia who are also dubbed as highly efficient economic managers". True, these two countries, particularly the former, were rocked, at a number of times, by financial scandals at the ministerial levels. But I cannot recollect an incident that involved more than one or two ministers of any government of these two countries at a time and which can, therefore, justify summarily branding governments in these two countries as egregiously corrupt. To speak of Japan in particular, it could not have elevated itself to the position of the world's second largest economy with bands of corrupt people in power. After all, if we are to believe in the adage that it is the managers — neither laws nor rules of government and economic — that make resources productive, then managers must, of necessity, have generally to be of unquestionable integrity. Japan could, doubtless, not be an exception to this rule.

Secondly, by way of seeking to prove that corrupt societies do not necessarily have slower rates of economic growth, Mr Bayes drew comparison between what he termed as 'a middle corruption country' in China, on the one hand, and 'low corruption countries like Taiwan, Singapore, the United States or Germany', on the other. In the first place, to term China as 'a middle corruption country' is, to me, not fair, although economic reforms, alleged by some quarters, have had a rampant corruption in that country. In my opinion, even cases such as the

caught in the tentacles of an arm-twisting and palms-greasing mechanism. Besides, who, after all and in the ultimate analysis, make a country corrupt — be it rated a "middle corruption country" or a "low corruption country" — except its leaders? And so long as the Chinese leaders remain uncompromising on the question of corruption — as they are at present — there will, I think, be little scope for corruption to enter the sinews of the Chinese society. In that event, corruption will remain a matter of only a few stray cases to talk about. And, in all fairness to China, what else but stray incidents are a few hundred cases of corruption of a year in a country of about 1.2 billion people?

This is, however, not to say that corruption is endemic in the under-developed world. But of one thing one can perhaps be sure. Corruption — be it in the form of bribery or favouritism and nepotism — is the single biggest impediment to development. A look at the state of affairs in any country belonging to the under-developed world will prove this point. Corruption can, in fact, as the writer of the article said, be one of the indices of under-development so that more a society is corrupt, harder