

Skirting around the Campus Problem

The DU authorities' clamping of a 7-day moratorium on visible forms of student politics, like holding rallies and taking out processions on the campus, has been grossly disproportionate to the magnitude of the challenge posed by some recent incidents in Dhaka University. This is not to say we are for a stronger or a long-duration ban on student politics. Instead we are suggesting that the move, even though taken in an understandable desperation to allow the cauldron-like situation to subside, actually slurs over the urgent need for a code of conduct to be entered upon by the student organisations, teachers' bodies and the national political parties when it comes to letting the seats of higher learning function.

Never before has the compulsion been so acutely felt to extricate the academic writ from the clutch of demanding and indulgent national politics, issue-based reactionary overkill on both sides, and armed and violent manifestations thereof along the corridors and in other premises of the campus. Raw nerves came into play with the authority of and the respect for teachers — some of them seemingly having their political scores to settle — ebbing to a new low. The library did not open, classes had their shutters down and, all of these, regrettably, in a season of examinations. Many examinations could not just be held. The administrative wing of the university stopped functioning and the residential halls were engulfed by commotion and gun-running that threatened to put the whole edifice of higher education in jeopardy.

Against this background, the brief moratorium on students' political activities comes as a palliative measure touching on the fringe of the problem. It is just an addition to the series of ad hoc measures we had taken recourse to, hopping from one contingency to another, as the objective situation on the campus deteriorated and the academic agenda slid backwards. We have reached a point where we look for escape routes through private universities here and the academic institutions abroad. Keeping to expedient wisdom, typical of us, that an issue, if allowed to run its course, will automatically fizzle out does not quite work on the campus. This is something we have learnt the hard way. But are we acting by the knowledge?

The major political parties are convinced coverts to the idea that leverage must be secured in student politics at any cost to have clout in national politics which could brighten the prospects for a victory in the general elections. Back in time, student parties had felt drawn to national political parties of their own volition and prided themselves on having connections with them but this craving is now being witnessed in the reverse order in the relative sense, that is, the political parties are falling head over heels to cultivate students and teachers of the varsities to keep their hold on campus politics. We are not saying that the links *per se* are bad; for, of course, there should be the penchant for upholding one set of principles as against another set of these. That is perfectly admissible, even welcome, in a pluralistic society because here is a numerically large part of the intelligentsia of the country who are fully entitled to be conscious of whatever is happening around and hold their divergent views on national issues as opinion-builders in a largely under-educated society. The battle-lines have to be drawn there and not as an extension of national politics in virulent and self-destructive forms on the campus.

WASA's Unusable Water

An alarming piece of news carried in this daily yesterday shows how exposed public health is even to a utility service in this city. A locality in Hazaribagh gets water supplied by the Water and Sewerage Authority (WASA) all right, but it is the last thing that the residents there wanted. So contaminated is the water that comes through the faucets that it is virtually unusable for any domestic purpose. The residents of that locality are forced to purchase their drinking water from other areas. Apparently, a terrible mix-up between the water pipe and sewerage line through some leakage has been responsible for this pollution of WASA water. The residents have done their parts by appealing to the supplying agency.

So far their appeals have fallen on deaf ears and the people there continue to find themselves on the receiving end. It is a serious complaint the residents there have lodged and the response should have been equally prompt from the concerned authority. An agency known for digging roads endlessly and leaving them open for eternity cannot put forward any lame excuse that further digging would have caused inconvenience to the road users there. It is the WASA's engineering fault that is likely to be responsible for the sewer getting into the water pipes. Even if it was an accident, the WASA is to be held blamable for an offence for which it can be taken to the court. By ignoring the appeals the agency has only doubly committed the offence.

The problem lies in the approach to the public issues. Almost all the utility services pose to be condescendingly offering their services to the public. Unless they acknowledge that they are doing no favour to the people by way of their services and it is a people's right to get their services for which they pay, things will never really improve. Irregularities and even serious corrupt practices are sometimes reported in newspapers, showing how those let down the agencies concerned and cost the nation.

As for the contamination of the WASA water, it is undeniable that sometimes accidents can also be responsible for the underground fouling. We also understand that the pressure on the WASA is heavy. But this does not make a case for it to be unresponsive to genuine grievances of its customers. As precious a commodity as water calls for maximum discreet use of it. By allowing the water to get contaminated the WASA is also forcing the residents to waste it. The Hazaribagh locality might not be the only area to get the raw deal from the agency. Many other areas are also getting water contaminated to some degrees. In all such cases people have to be satisfied in the first place that the supply is adequate. Then they can try to apply their own mechanism to purify their drinking water. Getting enough water is considered a luck here. Of course, there is a serious maldistribution of water in the city. That problem should also be addressed.

Extremist Movement is Pushing the Country Backward

by Md Asadullah Khan

Of late, it appears, an upsurge of extremist movement, zealotry and fanaticism has almost shaken the foundation of the fledgling democracy. Government faces a dilemma on all fronts — hindering progress and development. The hard part that the government faces is governing a volatile country burdened by poverty, landlessness, foreign debt, and now religious antagonism. Three out of four Bangladeshis are illiterate, unemployment is endemic. The economy is headed towards a chaotic situation half-way between market economy and state controlled business and the situation is aggravated by 2.17% population growth rate. Added to this the country is still entangled in the Rohingya refugee problem which, it appears, is not going to be eased out in the immediate future, and there is the lingering stranded Pakistanis' headache. The government, as it appears, has not been able to make much of a dent in all these pressing problems. Over and above this, the opposition is feuding with the ruling party on the issue of Caretaker Government and the battle that is going on unabated may stonewall some of ruling party's plans to ease out the process of hastening democratic reforms.

Notwithstanding everything that counters the surge of development activities, the ruling party has to find ways to meet the expectations of the poor and the downtrodden. In the raucous streets of Dhaka, their hopes were ballooning beyond reality. They have been denied everything ever since Bangladesh came into being by the surge of patriotic efforts and relentless struggle of the people who made tremendous sacrifices. The government has to come forward in creating jobs and shelters for these people.

The most crucial and basic requirement of a government, is to know the mind of the people through different exercises. Sir Winston Churchill whose name and fame are recorded in history had more information about the progress of World War-II from the staff members of the Govt. departments he had formerly run: The war office, the admiralty, the RAF. Visitors from these organizations reported to Churchill on Hitler's progress abroad and Britain's woe.

The world-order is full of diversity. Looking back to nature we see that the trees, plants, the leaves, flowers etc. are of different colours and smells. And so is the case in the animal kingdom and of human races. So what we can talk about is unity in diversity and that is what our Creator wanted us to assert. None should coerce us to abandon our convictions, our philosophy or traditions, nor do we urge anyone to abandon theirs. If we speak of the true spirit of

failure to respond. Most importantly, when the war began with the German invasion of Poland, Churchill heard of it before the government did. This is what one has to do with wry insight in running a government in managing the state of affairs with steady fast zeal and picking the right things without vengeance and retribution from garbages of information.

A Different World

Zealotry, fanaticism and fundamentalism have no place in a progressive society destined to carve out an independent and dignified place in the contemporary world. The world in which we live today is radically different from what it was at the beginning or in the middle of this century. Today preservation of any kind of closed system is not only unacceptable but untenable too. The world economy is becoming a single organism and no state, whatever may be its social system or economic status, can make any headway outside it. The basic question and thinking that have always been uppermost in human mind is how to make man's life happy, just and safe. The idea of development at the expense of others has ceased to be a dictum in the state-craft. In the light of existing realities, no genuine progress is possible at the expense of the rights and freedoms of individuals or nations. The use or threat of force no longer can, or must, be an instrument of governance. All of us and especially the stronger and conscientious of us must exercise self-restraint. At this hour of grave crisis striking the nation, it should be brought home to all of us that freedom of choice, freedom of expression, to the extent it does not hurt the sentiments of others, is mandatory. Its non-recognition at any stage is fraught with grave consequences for regional, national or world peace.

The world-order is full of diversity. Looking back to nature we see that the trees, plants, the leaves, flowers etc. are of different colours and smells. And so is the case in the animal kingdom and of human races. So what we can talk about is unity in diversity and that is what our Creator wanted us to assert. None should coerce us to abandon our convictions, our philosophy or traditions, nor do we urge anyone to abandon theirs. If we speak of the true spirit of

Islam and its values, we at once find it, in the essence of the great Quranic Surah, "La Ekraha Fiddin" and "La Kum Deeno Kum Alya Deen" meaning that there is no compulsion or coercion in religion. Your religion is yours, and my religion is mine.

Surely we would not be treading a path that results in intellectual impoverishment with the rejection of powerful source of everything original that each of us in the society has independently created. If wisdom and pragmatism guide us in any way, then surer it is that we are still far from attaining the ultimate truth.

The country today faces a grim situation. Disparate activities bereft of sensibility are causing destabilisation in the society. Fatwas issued by the fundamentalists, zealots, even so-called Islamic scholars virtually opposing the literacy drive, poverty alleviation programme, health care, development and environmental programmes, as some of the NGOs have embarked upon in some districts of Bangladesh, have stalled progress and development. New industries are not also coming up. Many of the existing ones are either derelict or have ceased operation. In recent times, fanaticism and ultra-religious passions have unleashed powerful political and social cross-wind and conflicts. Buffeted by the currents, the ruling party is struggling to preserve a precarious balance between secular moderates and religious conservatives. At stake is the economy and growth of industries in the country.

Pakistan

In Pakistan, before 1988 general election, after Zia's death, a group of 40 Islamic scholars issued a fatwa saying that a country that entrusted its affairs to a woman would not prosper. But in a vigorous rejection of the politicians of the erstwhile military government, Pakistanis handed Benazir Bhutto's People's Party a clear election victory, installing her as the Prime Minister. No wonder, the country still goes on prospering and has not fallen into the pit of western cultural degeneration. There is no denying the fact that Muslim fundamentalism is sweeping over Iran, Egypt, Malaysia, Libya,

Sudan, etc. Pyramids and other Egyptian monuments, have long since, attracted visitors from the outside world. But the attack on foreign tourists by radical gunmen has caused severe damage to Egypt's tourist industry, the country's largest single source of foreign exchange (earning \$3 billion a year). The attack on foreign tourists has signalled a major escalation of guerrilla warfare that Muslim extremists have been waging against President Hosni Mubarak's moderate government. The radical Islamic group has specially targeted tourist industry with full knowledge of the fact that it is very much vital to the cash-strapped government in Cairo. If these attacks continue, it is feared, government efforts to rejuvenate the economy might fall through and the consequences eventually follow: unless the economy improves, unrest among Egypt's impoverished masses is bound to rise, playing directly into the hands of the radical group.

Speaking for ourselves, we daresay, despite monumental efforts, the government has achieved with scant success any substantial offer of foreign investment, mostly because of the absence of investment climate in the country. This is a very serious issue that all concerned from the individual to the party level politicians have to reckon in the face of the grim fact that already there are one crore 20 lakh educated unemployed people in the country. The situation will evaporate to a bursting point and any party that comes to power will find it difficult to contain.

Iran

In Iran, the fundamentalist Islamic Republic that Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini created has shown signs of splits after his death. Significant changes had begun to take root in Iran in the months just before Ayatollah Khomeini died, and the country is now engaged in a quiet struggle for the soul of the Iranian revolution. There are now increasing number of Iranians who want greater personal freedoms. Social and economic reforms, such as encouraging private enterprise have accelerated in Iran, since Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, a pragmatist, was elected president. Strict Sharia laws' restricting women's freedom

have been gradually diminishing in effect. Iranian women have begun to test perhaps the limits of what Khomeini successors are willing to tolerate. Brightly coloured head scarves have begun to replace black ones. Teenage girls sport a hair-do called "Kakol" that allows them to display a shock of hair at the front without totally abandoning their obligatory head scarves. Once forbidden high-heels and patterned stockings have come back to use. Rafsanjani has tried with limited success to curb excesses committed by the vigilante groups called "Komitichs" that were put in for enforcing Sharia laws during Khomeini's time.

Iran has also begun a modest campaign to boost tourism. The government has printed glossy brochures inviting foreign tourists to view some of Islam's most beautiful shrines. Reports have it that many Japanese and Italian tourists have taken up the invitation.

Our democratic government installed three years back has begun to experience the excruciating pain all around. Extremism and fanaticism, often at the cost of freedom of speech and action, are bubbling toward a boil. Hostilities among different groups of the people belonging to the same religion have reached a crisis proportion. The situation, if anything, is worse.

In the backdrop of such a worsening scenario that is likely to bedevil all reform policies, we may recall the great historical lesson of moderation and tolerance that prompted Prophet Muhammad (SM) to sign the great treaty of Hudaibia. The significant part of the treaty that exhilarates and impresses all regardless of religious ties is our Prophet's great magnanimity, tolerance and self-restraint in the face of highest provocations.

The Prophet's (SM) Example

After six years of stay in Medina, Prophet Muhammad (SM) came to Mecca for performing Umrah with an unarmed band of 1500 followers. Article (3) of the treaty overwhelms us with awe and admiration for the Holy Prophet (SM). It reads "if a Quraish from Mecca, under guardianship, should join the Prophet without the guardian's permission, he/she should be sent back to the guardian, but in the contrary case, they should

not be sent back and (4) that the Prophet (SM) and his party were not to enter Mecca that year, but that they could enter unharmed the following year." Prophet Muhammad (SM) went back to Medina that year. Other remarkable feature of the draft of the negotiation was that the draft started with "Bismillahir Rahman-ir-Rahim", meaning "In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful". The Quraish tribe insisted on existing that sentence and it was so done at the instance of Prophet Muhammad (SM). The article of negotiation contained another word "Rasul-Allah" meaning "Prophet of Allah". The Quraish people expressed their dissent to accept this word in the article of negotiation on the plea that they do not adhere to the faith (Islam) preached by Prophet Muhammad (SM). On that point also the magnanimous Prophet instructed Hazrat Ali to excise that word. But Hazrat Ali out of his profound respect and reverence for Prophet Muhammad (SM) could not oblige him. Then the Prophet (SM) himself with the assistance of Hazrat Ali made the excision. One wonders as to why all these great and singular example of self-restraint and superb sense of tolerance demonstrated by Prophet Muhammad (SM) even in that dark age are being lost sight of. Overwhelmed with the magnanimity of Prophet Muhammad (SM) the people of Quraish tribe in larger numbers embraced Islam.

Moderation instead of craze for vengeance should be the clarion call of the day. This sort of wariness can't save the country in any case. The extremist movement and hate campaign that are spreading across the country are the resorts of people who have been left without any better hope. To move the country forward again, to build up a sound foundation for democracy, the present ruling party leadership will have to make a great leap forward of courage and persuade the people to do likewise. The present crisis that has enveloped the country from all directions is the worst of its kind. Political leaders belonging to all shades of opinion must seize this opportunity and begin building for all instead of tearing one another down. Let us not forget the dictum, "Discretion is the better part of valour."

Once Bitten Asians Shed Some of their Shyness

Amy Waldman writes from Kampala

Despite the trauma of Idi Amin's brutal expulsion of tens of thousands of people of Asian origin from Uganda in 1972, some of those evicted from the country are returning to see whether they can re-make their lives there. Gemini News Service looks at a cautious homecoming.



Idi Amin: Evictor of Uganda's Asian community

term used here — have begun to trickle in.

The recession in Britain has propelled a number of Asians back to Uganda, as have attacks against Asians in neighbouring Kenya. While Doshi describes Nairobi as "deteriorating," he sees Uganda, with its "brilliant, virgin land," as a country on the upswing.

The scars of past destruction are readily visible throughout Uganda, but so are signs of rebirth in construction, new roads and development. Doshi says the sight of

protesting university students on his maiden journey back three weeks earlier gave him even greater joy than signs of economic growth. He saw it as evidence that "democracy has come back."

Doshi's wife and children, however, remain in Britain, not yet wanting to risk returning. "One person from a family comes, the rest watch," says Doshi. "If I have to run, I can run alone. You cannot run with your family."

Rajinibhai Tailor, who left Uganda in 1973 and returned in 1980, believes that most Ugandans view Asian settlement positively. He says that most Asians used to live in small towns and villages rather than major cities, and that it is those villages, "the grassroot," which want the Asians back.

But many Asians are reluctant to invest at local level, fearing they may once again lose everything, and the community now is concentrated in the main towns. Only some are investors; many are more transient workers.

Tailor, whose thriving motor vehicle and tyre business is bedecked with "I love Uganda" stickers, believes the bulk of

Uganda's Asians abroad, particularly those who are old or middle-aged, will not return. "Once you've lived a free life in a Western society, it can be hard to return to Africa."

Dennis Lobo, 65, who came to Uganda in 1960 to work for a sugar factory which had advertised in India, and lived a nomad's life in exile until his return four years ago, says things will never quite be the same for Uganda's Asians.

Finding work has become difficult. He says of Asian life: "There's not much juice in it, compared to before. No-one's doing business with heart and money together. They come because there are opportunities here, but there's a certain fear. No-one knows what will happen tomorrow."

Inside the AP Swaminarayan Temple only about 10 men pray each night, a reflection of a shrunken community.

The temple was reclaimed in 1992, after years of use as a school, disco and beer hall. Some temples were sued as mosques.

At the time of their enforced exodus, Asians had to abandon approximately 8,000 properties. Tailor helped lead a drive to have the government

return confiscated property. About half has been returned, and compensation provided for the others who no longer want their homes or businesses.

Reclaiming property has sometimes required returnees to evict African families who had occupied their homes. "When someone has been staying in a house for 20 years, and you have to remove him, it hurts," points out Arvind Patel, a 42-year-old businessman who helps maintain the Swaminarayan Temple.

Relations with the African population are a sensitive issue for many Uganda Asians. Trakamba Bhatt, a Hindu priest who came from India to help restore the spiritual centre of the Asian community, the Sanatan Dharma Mandal temple which is a feature of the Kampala skyline, stresses the benefits for Uganda of the presence and investment of Asians. Nothing that each night the temple feeds up to 100 poor or disabled Africans. Bhatt comments: "What's done is done; we want to forget about the past now."

Many of Uganda's Asians were descendants of labourers brought to Africa to build the

Nairobi-Kampala railway. The labourers stayed on, playing a significant role in economic development. By 1972, Asians owned about 90 per cent of the property in Kampala.

Many Asians acknowledge that their success fed resentment against them and laid fertile soil in which Amin's hatred could take root. Referring to the hostility some Asians still encounter in Uganda, 58-year-old Praful Patel says: "The hatred is not because we are Indian; it is because we are richer."

A third generation resident whose family arrived in 1916, Patel says he will die a Ugandan citizen. "Some families have been here 100 years, but they are still called Indians," he notes with bitterness. "Many of us know nothing of India."

Past events are a constant reminder to Asians that their fate may depend on the goodwill of the African majority. "At one time we were trying to help Africans," Patel says. "Now we need help from them."

Nevertheless, while Asians were dispersed all over the world, Patel notes that they did not suffer as much as the Africans who stayed behind.

"Indian families were scattered, but every African family lost someone," he says. Perhaps, he adds, that shared experience of suffering may ultimately unite Africans and Asians as Ugandans.

AMY WALDMAN is an American freelance journalist currently based in Johannesburg.

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.

City roads and public leaders

Sir, For over two decades our road traffic in the metropolitan city of Dhaka has been plunged into chaos and confusion, disorder and disarray and nadir of degradation but unfortunately neither the BNP/AL/Jaamat any other political party nor the authority concerned has so far taken any effective step to combat the ever deteriorating situation.

As usual, important and busy city roads are constructed, repaired, carpeted and recarpeted again and again at the huge expenditure of the public exchequer but as soon as the work is completed, the roads, pavements and public

thoroughfares are grasped or occupied by a handful of persons for using those as 'garage' for repairing and parking of cars, buses, trucks, rickshaws; for holding public meetings and making hawkers' markets etc. There is little space left for the movement of vehicular traffic or for the pedestrians. We are all stunned and astonished as to what the public roads are meant for and who own them? There is no care, control and supervision of public roads.

Time and again much has been written on traffic hazards but so far the result has been really a big zero.

The solution of road traffic problem solely depends on the

decision making of the authority concerned. But who is the relevant authority? It appears that the ever 'silent' authority concerned is reluctant to make any decision maybe for fear of losing political ground. So let the public leaders and the democratically elected authority concerned arrive at a consensus as to how to solve the traffic problem. Don't they have any courage to make a few decisions on road traffic with a view to mitigating the untold sufferings of the people?

O H Kabir
Dhaka 1203

Dhanmondi Lake

Sir, A few days earlier a detailed report appeared in your esteemed daily regarding the most deplorable condition of Dhanmondi Lake and its surrounding areas. You have also written an exhaustive editorial requesting the City Father to take appropriate action to warrant the deteriorating condi-

tion of the lake and the lake-side. But till now we noticed no response to your request. The condition of the lake and the surrounding areas are turning bad to worse day by day.

The trees and plants along the lake-side are encroached upon by different people in different manner. A large number of cattle are reared in the lake-side. The gardens along the lake-side are used as grazing land and cattle-shed. Number of juggis, shops etc. were constructed and consequently the lake and the trees along the lake-side are regularly encroached upon by different classes of intruders. They are constantly polluting the lake and the lake-side. No new plantations are made along the lake-side though there are enough vacant land. Polluted and dirty water is drained into the lake from all sides poisoning the lake-water and the surroundings. We earnestly request the appropriate authority to move ur-

gently to protect Dhanmondi Lake.
Abdullah
House No. 673, Dhanmondi
R/A, Dhaka

Sewerage in Mirpur

Sir, It's observed that recently sewerage line is under installation at Mirpur area. We thank the authorities for their efforts that after long many years the people of Mirpur are going to get a hygienic atmosphere.

But it's a point to ponder that with only six inches diameter PVC pipe, how long this system will work. In each lane there are 32 houses and recently multi storied building construction is rapidly increasing which might threaten the entire sewerage system with six inches diameter PVC pipe.

Will the proper authority kindly look into the matter please.
Md Nizamuddin
Block-G, Mirpur-1, Dhaka.

DUTA Protests

Sir, Thank you for your objective editorial under the headline, "DU flares up again" published on August 6 last. However, you found the press release issued by the Dhaka University Teachers' Association (DUTA) one-sided and the Prime Minister's statement on the matter opposing it. In fact, we have not tried to convey who started the clash and how, nor do we have information about that and we are not able to collect that information too.

In the press release we have only attempted to tell who repeatedly smashed and ransacked the rooms of our colleagues, manhandled them at gun pints, used foul languages while kicking on the closed doors of the teachers' lounge. That in a brief press release we could not make you understand the whole matter is our inability.

Prof Md Shahadat Ali
President, DUTA