

Campus Violence: How Long the Lip Service?

Opposition's Show of Strength

The question before us all is: how will the ruling party react to the new programmes of the opposition? Will our political dialogue of the future sound like so many broken phonograph records with the same lines playing all the time? As we said before that our people are quite tired of hearing the two sides say the same thing over and over again — "nothing but election under a caretaker government" and "nothing outside the Constitution."

BNP, for its part, is premising its reactions on the assumption that public's threshold of tolerance will crack at some point, and that more the opposition calls for strikes, the more it will lose popularity.

This is a dangerous game for the ruling party to play. Yes, people are getting fed-up of strikes but they are not singling out the opposition to blame for it. People are also faulting the ruling party for not coming up with a solution, and for not really trying to find a compromise formula.

What is happening — not so unknown to both sides — is that people are losing faith in our politicians in general and are questioning whether or not they are fit to govern us. These rising doubts are acquiring increasing credibility. Before they become firm opinions, grounded on facts, present leadership of both sides should change their course of action.

Economic Reform

The World Bank mission chief Pierre Landell-Mills' reiteration of the need for a total commitment on the part of our political parties to the economic reform process has quite a convincing ring about it. An oft-repeated general statement like that could have entered through one ear and exited through another had it not been for the way in which he has amplified it.

Mills has rightly pointed out that the political decisions needed to carry forward the currently 'stagnated' economic reform process should be forthcoming because there are no basic differences between the ruling party and the opposition on the principal elements of the reform agenda. Secondly, we get the WB's mind on the issue when Mills makes an example of the stalemated Jute Sector Adjustment Credit Programme to illustrate his point about reform stagnation.

There are losing jute industries in the public sector that are required to be either closed down or made over to the private sector under the JSAC. Closure of industries and their privatisation bring in their wake the problem of labour redundancy or retrenchment in varying degrees. The promises of safety net and rehabilitation being made to the vulnerable workers have hardly sounded to them to be as good as secure, even if, propped-up, employment in the subsidised public sector. So, basically the workers need to be persuaded to accept the change-over.

The Greatest Show

The drum was being beaten for some time. But the actual event took place on Tuesday. That day 2 lakh and 24 thousand men and women took the literacy examination in some 600 centres of the Lalmonirhat district. One is not sure if this is enough to claim that the event makes Lalmonirhat the first literacy-free district in Bangladesh. Undoubtedly, however, Lalmonirhat becomes the district with the least presence of illiteracy.

The Tuesday event indeed signifies much more than these claims would ever do. Imagine 224 thousand adult men and women — impoverished perhaps of both health and means of life — bending their heads, all concentration, and answering questions testing their newly-acquired power to decipher writing and themselves shaping letters and then letters into words and even sentences.

The most correct claim for Lalmonirhat is that there on September 26 and between 10 am and 5 pm the greatest show on earth took place. The world has never before seen the like of it. And it is our fervent hope that this great show would very soon be copied and repeated and even surpassed by other districts of Bangladesh.

And the device which made all this possible was wholly of Lalmonirhat's own making. The programme of enabling 268 thousand identified illiterate people to read and write was taken in 1993, and two years later that was realised, to the last individual. The cost? Roughly about Tk 140 was spent from government coffers on each of these 268 thousand achievers — 45 thousand of them made literate before the Tuesday test.

THE day the members of the Bangladesh University Parishad — the standing committee of the VCs — called on Prime Minister Khaleda Zia on 26 September, ramps and rampages rocked the boat of Jahangirnagar University (JU). When, possibly, the VCs were briefing the chief executive of the government about the "relatively better" campus situations, heavy gun fights between the delirious groups of BNP-backed student wing (JCD) went to crack the silence that JU is in need at the moment to downsize its session jam and to gear up its various development works.

The clash, according to the newspaper reports, left a dozen seriously wounded and perhaps more importantly, invoiced a sense of horror in the minds of the new admission-seekers who were there to face oral tests. Given this, the reported submission of the VCs that "academic atmosphere had improved significantly with the stopping of terrorist activities on the campus" could sound as mere adulating and devoid of any empiricism, whatsoever.

The Cup and the Lip

The Prime Minister is learnt to have reiterated her government's commitment to witness campuses free of violence — a commitment that the present regime has been chewing and forcefully propagating since its coming to power four and a half years back. The PM is also reported to have asked the VCs to clamp down on terrorists

When the UN conference went to Beijing, the city thought it was prepared, the opening ceremonies were suitably elaborate — this is what China wanted for its capital — a high-profile international event, orchestrated, choreographed and spectacular. But according to international wire agencies, what it got was at times rather different: for the first time, foreign political activists were meeting, arguing and demonstrating. Viewed in the Chinese context, it was a memorable clash — making a culture of protest against the culture of control.

But the plenary sessions

Having no certain promises from the world financial institutions for women-oriented development like poverty elimination and changing world-wide economic systems and consumption patterns of the rich which pour out global injustices, it will be hard to implement the draft document effectively in the backdrop of fast-changing society.

went much better than what many have criticised to be nothing but a talking-shop. This was the first UN (women's) summit to have escaped being dominated and divided by highly political debates on apartheid, Cold War-time and Palestinian issues. But the war-time afflictions on women — with particular reference to Bosnia-Herzegovina — were put to the discussion agenda.

Still then, the US First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton — whose arrival in Beijing was ensured only after the last-minute release of the Chinese-American human rights campaigner Harry Wu — couldn't avoid subtle political tone in her speeches. Mrs Clinton was speaking in a rebuking manner which seemed too "foreign" on the Chinese soil: "Let me be clear — freedom means the right of people to assemble, organise and debate openly."

Though she was supposed to watch her words on Chinese way of life, she delivered — among many of her sweeping speeches — a clear slap at the country's methods

To the Editor...

Save Dhaka

Sir, This is to congratulate through your esteemed daily the residents of Dhanmondi for their united and persistent protest against filling up of the Dhanmondi lake. This is the voice of the people against the unwise and motivated move of the concerned officials. Some officials being unable to foresee the long-range interest of the people, and beautiful landscape of the capital city, venture to fill up the lakes. In order to facilitate recreation facilities,

Human security and human rights are enshrined in the Constitution and to uphold earnestly the verdicts of the Constitution, a government should mobilise its forces and have a crack-down on the weevils notwithstanding their political colour.

to eke a clean campus. It is, however, alleged that while the commitment of the government has always been on its lip, the steps taken so far were not deep enough to get the criminals on their neck.

At the beginning of its tenure of office, of course, the BNP government aroused a lot of campaigns in favour of clean campuses. To that end, the government also called upon all political leaders of different political parties to extend their respective hands in its vying for a violence-free campus. Few rounds of roundtable conferences were also held as could be in evidence by the courtesy of Bangladesh Television (BTV). The "groping" for a consensus on eradication of violence inside campuses turned into a fiasco with, as the government sources tend to allege forcefully, the "non-cooperation" of Sheikh Hasina (the then leader of the opposition) as the villain of peace.

One would wonder to ponder as to why an elected government should seek others' opinion to have a crackdown on terrorists. Does the government, for example, consult the opposition (or for that matter Sheikh Hasina) to put criminals, smugglers, law breakers etc. behind bars? The other side of the argument is that despite opposition's absence (and hence of the non-coop-

Beijing Was No Miracle for Women

by Ekram Kabir

AFTER all that China went through during the last week of August and the first half of September, at least some Chinese have seen light at the end of the tunnel. Despite the hassles of security officers with video cameras who, reportedly, prevented Chinese delegates from taking part in controversial discussions, some 6,000 Chinese women had active participation at the Fourth World Conference on Women (FWCW).

While advocating "micro-credit" for poor women, she often became too American with a recent realisation of US's disintegrating symptoms of family values that are compelling the country's women into impoverishment. This is particularly so because female-headed households in the US are increasingly going into poverty. According to a recent issue of The Economist of London, in 1994, more than three out of five African-American households with children were headed by a lone mother — typically young, poor and never-married. The situation is worse when it comes to violence against women: a 1994 New York Times survey reveals that in 1990 alone, one in every five adult women in America had been raped.

It is surprising to think that the USA and other western nations started using

billions of dollars to help the world's poorest countries. Well, don't the figures imply the real situation of the world's female population? Such inequalities stretch to other sectors as well: women own only 10 per cent of the world's property and earn simply, again, 10 per cent of all income. And in the employment scenario, when it comes to holding positions of influence — only one per cent executive-level posts are held by women worldwide.

The FWCW identified that women are still denied education — two-thirds of the world's illiterates are female, and girls in most of the countries still have unequal access even to primary education. After the Beijing meet, it is now well-established — firmer than the past — that increased access to education has an extraordinary impact on health, family-planning and overall economic well-being of women and their families. It is heartening to know from the UNESCO projections at the conference that 300 million more girls will be enrolled in the

world's elementary and primary schools in 1995 than in 1960. The basic idea of equality is followed by the concept of world as a platform where the contributions of both the sexes are valued in equal terms. Any sort of deviation from it will end up in depriving the one half of the humanity — within the global system of behaviour — of making its rational contribution to the entire development process of the society.

As the UN in Beijing came up to recognise the importance of gender within a wide range of issues for the first time in its history the FWCW document — a 149-page Plan for Action — defines women's sexual rights and pledges to promote equality. But, of course, the document was not a binding one, because, according to available reports, it didn't promise or made any commitments for fund-mobilisation. It is then a frustrating point to ponder, particularly on the part of the Third World countries.

The future lives — well-being — would depend on

lakes and parks are as important as other facilities in a modern city. In an increasingly congested city like Dhaka lakes and parks should be considered very important for guarding against environmental hazards. Filling up lakes in Gulshan and Banani started in the 1980s to create some residential plots with ulterior motive totally ignoring the interest of the residents and ecology of the township. There is growing demand for the preservation of environment in the country. Impressive papers are pre-

Beneath the Surface

by Abdul Bayes



non-cooperation foiled government's "earnest endeavour" to wipe out terrorism from the campus, in fact, holds very little water. Besides, we are shy of any empirical evidence available anywhere in the world where a government expresses its innocence in that way.

Yes, the argument is, perhaps, true that many political parties do in fact patronise terrorists within their respective student wings and to that extent, it is condemnable. But one can also safely argue that the law enforcing agencies are at the

disposal of the government which it should deploy to confront them. But what happens: if the criminals belong to the government party and the law enforcing agencies belong to the government? The alleged reign of terror ushered by JCD in different campuses is considered to be the product of a direct patronisation from the government and if this allegation is true, the PM or her cabinet can hardly wash off

Vulnerable VCs

The PM asked the VCs to put up their best to clamp down on terrorists that, seemingly, tended to constrain the completion of vari-

ous developmental works. The VCs in Bangladesh are prone to vulnerability on many counts. First, some of them are directly appointed by the government who are alleged to bear pro-BNP identity cards. Their allegiance to the party, more often than not, delimit their capacity to apply their own "professional" judgement on terrorism if it, particularly, owes to BNP-backed student wing. The length of their tenure is critically dependent on the impression of the ruling party, especially its student organisation. On the other hand, other VCs are the products of 1973 Act and elected by the Senate. Their capacity is constrained not by the allegiance per se, but by the fact that law enforcing agencies, allegedly, barely come to their rescue on time. Further, in the selection of one out of three from the panel, it is alleged that many VCs register their unwritten sympathy to the party-in-power and especially to its student wing. Unless VCs are endowed with forces of their own within the campus or unless they are free of clutches, it is doubtful whether any appeal to them

PERISCOPE by Voyager

The Nightmare on Dhaka Streets

TIME was when driving from Gulshan to Motijheel took fifteen minutes. Time was when one could actually walk on Dhaka streets. Time was when vehicles obeyed some traffic rules, but that was then and this is now when the Nightmare on Dhaka Streets is the only show in town.

Each morning as I sit in the middle of unmoving traffic on the Shantinagar turning and the rickshaws are adding to the jam by manoeuvring into each little gap. I try to remind myself that the ubiquitous rickshaw is actually an extremely environment-friendly mode of transport. Its manoeuvrability makes it ideal for narrow lanes and byways. When walking long distances in the city centres of the western world I have sometimes longed to yell "Aet, Rickshal" and imagined the comfort of taking the weight off my feet and being trundled off to my destination. However, that was before the rickshaw became the Demon of Dhaka and added measurably to the number of coronaries suffered by owners and drivers of cars on our streets.

While there is no doubt the rickshaw has earned its title of "Demon" and of course overloaded trucks driven by drug addicts are the "Badshahs of Demons" it is actually quite difficult to decide what rank in demology to assign to the auto-rickshaws, the van rickshaws, the tempos, and of course, the thelas.

There must also be a special place in the Hell reserved for all traffic policemen who stand so nonchalantly by and occasionally pick their noses as they contemplate the relative beauties of completely snarled traffic.

One can almost hear them compare traffic jams as they sip their free tea at a wayside stall — "Oh no, today's tamasha at the Narinda crossing was much more entertaining than that ordinary one hour holdup in Mohakhali yesterday" or "Arre, bhal, that redfaced man in the white Toyota turned a most unusual shade of puce when he was having his heart attack and did you see how his driver yelled in panic."

The incredible rate at which new vehicles are being added to our roads can surely

be controlled. We have full-fledged Police Departments and Traffic Police to control and regulate the flow of traffic on the streets. The situation is still controllable if a modicum of discipline and adherence to traffic rules can be enforced. But unfortunately the malaise which is gripping so much of the country has the guardians of law in its grip as well. The Police Department, indeed the entire Ministry of Home, should be awarded the highest honours for incompetence and inefficiency not to mention apathy and corruption.

I understand that the British Government has given considerable amounts of technical aid and equipment to the Police Department. The equipment can be seen in the shape of computers tastefully arranged on side tables and often covered by embroidered tablecloths adorning the offices of senior members of the Police Service. No doubt, they serve an ornamental purpose but what of the expensive training that has been given both at home and abroad to our police? Are they waiting for a divine voice to call out "Action boys" and waving their batons like magic wands they will swing into action and miraculously bring their training to bear to restore discipline and order on the streets? Of course, the voice will have to choose an appropriate time to call out when most members are relatively free of their onerous responsibilities and not actually raping young girls or covering up their lapses or angling for lucrative postings or on training abroad!

Shall we wait for that special day or should we actually expect some action from the policemen entrusted with our safety and well-being? Perhaps if all VIPs drove in flagless cars and were to experience themselves what the citizens contend with every day some action would result. And dare I suggest, that occasionally the Prime Minister herself could drive out in an unmarked car. Should we sit patiently on choked up streets and hope for this to happen or do we say "this is now and that was then", as we succumb to The Nightmare on the Streets of Dhaka?

Stripping during hartal

Sir, The incident in which a gentleman was forcibly stripped of his clothes on the first day of the

recent 72-hour hartal has drawn attention of all people. The incident has been condemned vehemently by all sections of people. In the name of political rights perhaps, the political parties have allowed the picketers to do anything. The people who are completely devoid of normal sense can do such inhuman things.

The political parties should cancel membership of such supporters who dare to do such types of stupidity.

Md Mustafizur Rahman Dhaka

an awareness raising seminar to help the citizens and government officials.

Let us do it for our children whose right it is to live in a pollution free Dhaka city in the 21st century. Mrs Mahmura Rahman Mrs S Elora Rahman Dhaka

cially for children who need this for social, and mental development.

As a matter of fact, filling up of Dhanmondi, Banani and Gulshan lakes will never solve the housing problem of the expanding city. Maybe a few fortunate people will enjoy the benefit having plots at the cost of environment. So a policy decision against occupying vacant land and filling up lakes for construction of buildings should be formulated to save Dhaka city.

May be The Daily Star, BELA, BUET and conscious citizens will take initiative for

sent in seminars and conferences at home and abroad. Recommendations are made to preserve environment but in practice, in Dhaka city, nobody cares to implement those recommendations. I urge upon the authority concerned to develop a comprehensive plan in order to achieve environmental balance in the city. Instead of filling up Dhanmondi, Banani and Gulshan lakes and other ponds for constructing high-rise buildings, lakes and parks should be developed and attractive facilities made available for residents espe-