

## Please, Delink Them

The vice-chancellors of nine Bangladesh Universities met President Shahabuddin Ahmed on Thursday and requested him to advise the political parties to delink their student wings from the parties. This is exactly what we had pleaded in these columns and not long ago. This is a must for more reasons than one. Not only the President or the Vice-chancellors, even the man in the street knows that this is one good enough way to rid the nation of the butchers that hold the universities and hundreds of colleges hostage, to free the campuses of the reign of terror they have for more than a decade been subjected to. Then why haven't the student parties been delinked from the political ones? The answer is simple: not everybody is interested in seeing the students stop carrying the politicians' hatchet. And you can count as many politicians as you wish among those that want the students to do their bidding.

Linking the students to political parties as required by chief Martial Law Administrator and President General Zia when issuing licences to political parties has brought ruin to our students and campuses, destroyed education and sapped whatever power of good was left in the idealism of youth — giving birth to a greedy and mindlessly cruel generation of mastans. Politics of Bengal was always heavily influenced by student involvement as a supremely sacrificing force — whether this be of the Congress or Muslim League kind of pre-partition days or the communist and Awami League kind in the Pakistani times. Students then were formally unlinked with the parties. The whole society then cared for what the students felt and said. When political parties entered the campuses and made agents of the student leaders — the tiger had tasted human flesh and wouldn't any more feed on their traditional quarry. The society started fearing the students. It resented them, almost hated them. Students started being looked at as if they were all gun-toting mastans.

The proposed delinking would surely bring the campuses back to normalcy. More than that it will help students become students again — a true socio-political force. We doubt whether the process to materialise it, as suggested by the VCs to the President, will be able to deliver the goods. Instead let us dare Awami League, now that they are in power, to first relinquish their stranglehold on their student wing and then require, by law, all political parties to give up their student wings.

## DCC on the Move

According to a Star report, the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) has opted for legal measure to deal with the unabated and unlicensed arrivals of rickshaws on city streets. Already cases have been filed against two trade unions for violating the law by issuing illegal nameplates. We suppose it was DCC's last resort in tackling a situation that has been showing increasing signs of going out of control.

The soup DCC has found itself in is largely a creation of its own. We have always found the rising number of rickshaws at the core of Dhaka's deteriorating traffic problem. In fact, we have literally grown hoarse from harping on the necessity of keeping tab on the number of unlicensed rickshaws.

What has the DCC been doing all this while as some trade union organisations indulged in the corrupt practice of issuing illegal nameplates?

Condemnation of the politics of irresponsibility and convenience would be of some pertinence in this connection. If the political parties were scrupulous enough in not letting the trade unions corrupt a system under their shelter, the problem would not have snowballed into today's proportion.

Belatedly though, DCC has woken up to the challenge and we hope, for once, the political parties will show some responsibility by not doing something that may encourage their affiliated trade unions to put spanner in the works of the DCC. To forestall any such obstacles that may crop up in the run of such corrective measures, the DCC would do well to involve the political parties in this issue.

## Jail Reform

The news that hogged the headlines from the middle of last December to almost the turn of the new year has apparently died. Jail revolt, the tale of a spree of mutiny by the prisoners across the country which culminated in the bloody suppression of it at the Jessor Jail does not worry us as a problem on hand. But the message it left is as fresh and relevant as it was at the peak of the crisis.

And the weekly magazine of the Daily Star has done a commendable job to keep us focused on the issue with a fairly in-depth story on some of the reasons that led to the rebellion among the men behind the bars. In a country known for the notorious culture of forgetting a crisis at its passage, the story is expected to prepare the ground for a healthy and maledictive debate on jail reform all over the country.

But the initiative for some real work has to be taken by the government. As the cover story of the weekend Star magazine has revealed recommendations for jail reform were placed before the then government as early as in the beginning of the eighties. They were done by knowledgeable people who studied jail situation abroad and based their recommendations on comparative analysis research. For some reason or the other, the recommendations were not implemented and the consequences for that failure have been quite disturbing. We do not want to dig into the past but eagerly expect the present government to blaze the trail in jail reform.

## Limited but Essential Role of Government

*"It is an argument for finding those activities for government that markets cannot adequately perform and where, if government adopts appropriate policies, the welfare of rural people will be enhanced."*

THE role of government, especially in the realm of agricultural development and rural uplift continues to be bone of contention. There was a time when pervasive presence of government interventions was the obvious prescription despite the fact that they have distortionary impacts, through discriminatory treatments to factors of production and other associated problems. Revolutionary changes, however, have recently occurred or are in the offing to take place to mark a departure from the conventional wisdom of a huge role of the government. Governmental interventions have been heavily axed in China, and also in Bangladesh we witnessed a major wane in the role of government in agricultural development. The process of change also dramatically knocked central and eastern European countries although the changes are, allegedly, much more amorphous and confusing. By and large, the historical huge role of the government seems to have been reduced to positive and essential roles.

There are a variety of factors that contributed to the slimming of government role but two of them need special mention. First, a realisation among

the policy-makers that price support and subsidy policies are too costly to live with, especially, for the tax payers. Second, while the developed countries vied for liberalised markets outside, they had to swallow the prescription of liberalising their own markets with serious dents to their subsidy and price support policies.

About 50 years back, D Gale Johnson, an ace international agricultural economist, wrote a paper titled : "Contributions of Price Policy to the Income and Resource Problems in Agriculture" where he forcefully argued that "price policy could be used to improve the efficiency with which agricultural resources were used if price policy served to improve the accuracy of price expectations and was not used to raise the average level of farm prices .... The reduction of price uncertainty would be beneficial, as well, through reducing capital rationing in agriculture." A second major point that the celebrated economist drove us to was that "price policy, at best, could make only a very minor contribution to modifying the distribution of income within

agriculture within a socially acceptable direction in reducing inequality .... Increasing farm prices above market equilibrium levels would increase income inequality within agriculture while doing little or nothing towards reducing the differential between the returns to farm and non-farm labour."

Unfortunately, over the last five decades or so, as Johnson argues, agricultural price policies as adopted by various government could do very little in augmenting human or physical investment in agriculture.

The above contention about the role of government in agriculture should not be construed

as on agricultural and rural development.

(v) Market information is essential for smooth functioning of markets. Government should arrange for appropriate technologies and institutions so that rural people could be regularly fed with latest developments in the prices of commodities and services in and around them. The reported concerns of the Grameen Bank and their projected steps in this regard in Bangladesh seem timely and very much conducive to the idea of market dissemination.

The government should see that private parties get incentives in undertaking information business.

It would, perhaps, be unfair to say that all the government interventions in the past have been harmful altogether. It appears that in the past, the governments led to care only for urban infrastructure.

The government should pay immediate and worthy attention to the development and maintenance of rural infrastructure building.

(vi) Government should continue to support agricultural research and extension. Unfortunately, over the years that allocations to research and extension works have been lowered with their adverse im-

## Beneath the Surface

by Abdul Bayes

Gale Johnson pointed out that there were at least three sources of low incomes and low returns to labour in agriculture. These were, for example, (a) excess labour resources in agriculture to depress the marginal product of labour; (b) low level of investment in the human agent (eg nutrition, health and education) in rural areas; and (c) rigidity in facts and product markets with adverse impact on the mobility of the factors.

as an argument for *laissez faire*. "It is an argument for finding those activities for government that markets cannot adequately perform and where, if government adopts appropriate policies, the welfare of rural people will be enhanced." Leaving everything to the market and ignoring the role of the government is another folly that we need to reckon with. What then are the limited but essential roles of the govern-

## To Act up to Popular Interest

Terrorism free orderly life and proper education are the universal demand of the people all over the country. The party or parties that contribute to meeting the demand are sure to be rewarded in proportion to their contribution, writes M Arshad Ali.

ALL days are equal in the ceaselessly inexorable march of time. Some of them are however found to assume greater importance and marked with prominent colour in the calendar because of the events that take place on them. Such a day was the 5th of January 1997. On this day came off the convocation ceremony of the Jahangirnagar University, the first one that took place in the long history of its nearly three decades of existence, though it should have been an annual event — an event of paramount importance signifying many things in the life of a University, nay, in the lives of its graduates, who are invested with charge and instilled with courage and determination to reap the vast possibilities that life will unfold before them instead of its being relegated to futility — to a tale told by an idiot.

The Convocation ceremony's order and discipline, majesty and grandeur, solemnity and symmetry, addresses and speeches delivered by intellectuals of exceptional stature can set many things right, viewed in national context, particularly in the back-drop of the prevailing untoward conditions in our universities.

The day held two other events both addressed by the Prime Minister, the one being the reunion of the BCL, the student wing of the ruling Awami League, and the other, the congregation of the senior police officers. Addressing the reunion in observance of the 49th founding anniversary of the Chhatra League the Prime Minister said, "We cannot give arms to the students and we do not believe that students using arms will help us in any way. At

the nation, called upon ('warned') to speak constitutionally, 'all not to spoil the students by tutoring them in violence, terrorism and extortionism to gain petty, mean and selfish party or group interests.' The President gave vent to the nation's grievance that 'the students are deprived of proper education as they are being attracted to lethal weapons rather than to books to serve the interest of political parties' — a course they are pushed into by prodding and provoking. Regrettably enough, a process has long been in operation to equip the students with weapons of destruction instead of letting them being armed with knowledge for creation. Fully conscious of the bleak gloom that hovers over the national horizon consequential of this operation, the President warned, 'Our existence as a civilised nation will be jeopardised if the students are not brought up as conscientious citizens of the country.'

These are the manifestations of the selfsame desire for ensuring a congenial environment for the budding genius of our upcoming generation in order to make them fit for responsibilities that will devolve on them to lead the country in the 21st century — a century when the world, believably, will be more competitive, more complex and more demanding with tremendous leap made forward by the application of newer inventions and discoveries.

If educational institutions are not free from all forms of terrorism to allow the students pursue academic activities unhindered and untrammelled, the inevitable disaster that befalls the nation is fraught with boundless consequences. The existence of the nation will be at stake, let alone its vying with others in gaining respectful position in the comity of nations.

The fearful spectre looming large in the horizon has been well delineated by the President. No exaggeration to say, education alone may be taken to be the sole indicator of the classification of a country within any of the economic brackets of development, under-development and least development in that the developed countries of the world have the highest rate of literacy and the greatest advancement in the field of education and vice versa.

It seems the head of the state and the head of the government are propelled by the same profound sense of patriotism that impelled them to call a spade a spade, even though that disgruntles some self-interested insiders in the case of the latter, let alone the outsiders. While making those pronouncements they were doubtless giving vent to the feeling of the mute millions (we would do well to mind always that they are not always so) they have proved themselves adequately vocal and unfailingly active rightly time and again when time demanded.

The unity of the thought of the two is an impetus to the nation that emerges more powerful with the strength of their unity. "If music be the food of love, the love of the people for the country well-fed is deepened and strengthened as the two top figures of the nation sing in unison though from two different venues but situated in al-

## 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.**

### The lonely

Sir, It is noticed that the middle-class people, who have no home or abode of their own to live in Dhaka, have been staying in rented apartments or flats after retirement with a load of moral responsibility to their off-spring. By an unofficial survey and examination we have discovered that most of the retired people at Uttara are unhappy because of the size of their families is making the old people lonely.

The retired life is, in fact, a life of agonies, sorrow and loneliness. Those who are well-off go to clubs in the evening and their life-style is totally different from that of the middle-class retired people.

Public leaders regularly hold public meetings.

Demonstrations and rallies on public roads cause untold sufferings to the people and bring the entire traffic system of the city into a complete chaos. There is no law and order on the roads. The roads and footpaths at various crowded and busy places are being used as toilets. Many yellow coloured municipal dustbins are kept haphazardly on the roads, blocking the traffic. Piles of garbage are left uncleared for days together.

Many people ask "Whither Dhaka?" All a critic can say is that Dhaka is going on the way to perdition.

It appears there is no authority which really cares to solve the ever-spawning sufferings and woes of Dhaka-dwellers.

A foreigner may have a sound sleep in the air-conditioned room of five-star hotels, but when he or she visits the Lalbagh Fort or Sadarghat and sees thousands of beggars at Baitul Mukarram or Azimpur graveyard road, he or she simply believes that all that glitters is not gold.

We are always anxiously waiting and looking forward to a better tomorrow for a neat, clean and disciplined Dhaka. But it seems we are hoping against hope and getting nothing except setbacks. If we fail to

solve our civic problems within this century, we may have to undergo more serious, acute and catastrophic problems in the next century.

Would the Dhaka City Corporation and Metropolitan Police kindly wake up and save Dhaka from disorder and mismanagement?

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### About BCS Examination

Sir, Thanks to Mr Md Sami Billah for his opinion on BCS examination in *The Daily Star* on 24th December, 1996.

I would like to add 'my' request to the BPSC in this regard. I am a candidate in the 17th BCS examination. I would like to request authority to emphasise on the marks obtained in the compulsory subjects instead of all the subjects including optional ones while considering the 'general cadre' posts.

Further, I request to the authority to fix 50 (fifty) marks instead of 200 for viva-voce examination from this very 17th BCS examination to ensure better assessment. I am more than sure that it will be welcomed by the people and earn fame for the government.

Sharif Ruhul Ameen  
Dhaka.

### Myth of quality service

Sir, We have witnessed an interesting brawl between KLM and Bangladesh Biman few days back. An expatriate also took pain to write in *The Daily Star* to exonerate KLM and blame Biman squarely. I am narrating my experience about KLM below to prove once again that all that glitters is not gold.

It was 13 November 1994. I went to Amsterdam from Dhaka via London. On my arrival, I found the handle of my Samsonite suitcase was broken into two pieces. I lodged a complaint with the airport office of KLM. I was offered 40 guilders instantly which I refused because I was not sure of the cost

of repair. I was asked to report to the city office of KLM, which I did over telephone.

Somebody from the KLM office picked up the phone and advised me to take the suitcase to their office. I wanted to know the location of the office and how to reach there, and also wanted to know if there was any other alternative to taking the suitcase to their office. The answer was rude and abrupt, "Look you, we cannot repair the suitcase over telephone," I said. "Do you think I am such a stupid that I did not know it?" I then hung up. After that I did not try it in Amsterdam any more.

Returning to Dhaka, I went to the airport office of KLM four times. Twice it was found to be closed. Once I was told that I have to come again. When this same request was made again, I stopped going there. There ended the saga of my broken suitcase.

This is the myth of the quality service. When my national flag carrier is blamed by an airline that should be apologising to me. Well, there's dirt under the rug.

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### Tell me, who?

Sir, My aunty has selected two guys for her lucky daughter. One person is from an elite family. His parents are already (well) settled in America and he is also born and brought up in that country. He is doing business over there without having any recognised degree.

On the otherhand, the other person has done his master's from Dhaka University with a good result. His parents are also educated. He is working with a multinational company.

Dear readers, can you give your opinions on who is the best between these two persons?

Curious  
Dhaka

spot by local people.

"Give Africa what belongs to Africa," said Masepe, who urged the opening of negotiations with neighbouring Zambia with the aim of restoring the original name of the Falls, which straddle the border. The Zambians had already named a hotel *Mosiya Tunya* in the town of Livingstone.

Professor Tafatona Masepe, a prominent Zimbabwean social scientist, said some Western journalists had portrayed Livingstone as a hero for Africa, but the opposite was true. Livingstone's statue and the name Victoria Falls had been disappeared long ago.

One of the missionary's descendants, currently living in Livingstone's native Scotland, was quoted as expressing regret about the proposed change: "The liberation Livingstone was involved in was not in the Zimbabwe area, but he was not an imperialist. They are looking at the past in a different light from what actually happened."

The statue inscription refers to the thousands of captives whom Livingstone worked to free from slave traders north of the Zambezi river in the years before his death in Zambia in 1873. He confronted armed slavers in their bush camps and campaigned in the corridors of power in Europe to act against the trade.

This is not the first time his reputation has been argued over. After Zambian independence in 1964, militants from the then ruling United National Independence Party pressed for the removal of the statue.

Tinay Chigudu, permanent secretary in Zimbabwe's Home Affairs Ministry, said no order had been given for the removal of the statue. Instead, he said, the Ministry was considering ways of changing the inscription, because "liberation" was generally taken to mean the war of liberation against white minority rule, which was not the meaning in Livingstone's case.

Godfrey Mahachi, deputy director of National Museums and Monuments, said no direct order to remove the world had been received, but his department was re-examining the inscription and considering what action to take.

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GEMINI NEWS  
The writer is a Zimbabwean journalist based in Harare.