

Desperate DU Steps

The Dhaka University is at last addressing the problem of campus terrorism in the way it should long have done. Politically picked chief executives or VCs of universities were never persons who could do more than sermonising the terrorists. The terrorists, appointed to secure party interests in the universities, suffered the sermons with hilarity and went about their business as usual. DU is showing signs of pulling itself out of that fatal hole. Students will now carry laminated ID cards with photographs of the bearer; all unauthorised entrances and passages running into the campus will be closed; walls of residential halls will be heightened to make them insuperable and pen in perpetrators of crime; terrorists, proved to the satisfaction of DU as such, will be expelled and all their educational certificates cancelled; campus roads will cease to be thoroughfares for buses, trucks and other public vehicles. Quite a formidable list. Half a thank-you for Professor Azad Chowdhury, the remainder to be tendered when tangible results would rewardingly be raked in.

It is sad to see DU, a treasury of wonderful social, cultural and academic records, being put on kinds of fetters that do not go with university ideals. A university is, almost by definition, the most civilised place, the most cultured ambience of a society. It has long been reduced into a slaughterhouse of civilisation and culture. There's not one murderer to date who has been made to pay for killing a student or more on the DU campus. This is a zone where the nation's laws or even universal ones do not operate and a whole little world lives as hostages during the pleasure of a motley horde more treacherous than any that existed ever.

While we welcome the positive steps decided on by DU, we cannot but be sceptical of the outcome of these. Will these preventive changes in the outer trappings of DU be adequate to heal the lacerations within — the brutalisation and criminalisation of the whole corpus, sparing not even its teachers and officers. Can any measure, even divine ones, effect an improvement in the DU or other universities' health while the political parties continue to maintain armed cadres there. A volunteered moratorium *ad infinitum* on this anti-state practice by the parties is the only way through which any attempt at freeing the universities from the clutch of terrorists can have any effect.

What has happened to our suggestion of delinking the systemic ties between student and political parties? That could be the first effective step towards healing the intractable disease of the dying universities of Bangladesh.

The Dysfunctional Port

There has been no work at the Chittagong Port since the mid-day of Saturday. Thirty ships remain stranded at the jetties and outer anchorage. The container yard gives a deserted look.

What is so nettling is the row over a small but a corrective measure. The QC shipping company merely tried to commission two forklifts to handle its own containers with prior permission of the Ctg port authority. The workers smelt privatisation in the move and went on a wildcat strike. It was no undue favour the private shipping company asked for or the CPA granted to any party; for, private sector tractor-trailers had been operating in the port area for sometime anyway. It was quite convincingly a matter of concern for efficient handling of cargo, unquestionably legitimised by a frequent absence of such service from the port employees themselves.

The Chittagong port has been writhing, with five workers unions pulling in different directions, although a CBA has vanguarded the initiative to resist any operational change even for the sake of efficiency which obviously cannot be compromised in realm of maritime trade.

The port authorities have shown signs of buckling under union pressure, the latest example of this being their concurring with the CBA in the suspension of the operation of the forklifts until such time as a tripartite meeting were held to dispose of the matter finally. Meanwhile, the workers have hardened their position saying they would continue with the strike so long as the forklifts were not withdrawn wholesale. The owing company of the equipment, the QC shipping company, is up against their removal reportedly on the strength of support extended by an influential MP. The Chittagong mayor is wielding his influence to end the impasse. The port users have to pay a heavy demurrage.

The Chittagong port remains a den of trade unionism and a hot-bed of political animus. These are the worst anti-economic vices we are hard-put to accept at the dawn-time for the 21st century.

Banish it Root and Branch

This is one success story we would love to see replicated throughout the country within a stated time-frame. Well over three thousand inhabitants of village Char Nitai Jhar under the Mughalbama union of Kurigram district have publicly renounced under oath to banish dowry from their otherwise sleepy locality.

The moving force behind this has been a local NGO, called *Jiban Bikash Karjakram*, a nomenclature which, when translated into English, should read something like this: Life Enrichment Initiative. The man to administer the oath was thoughtfully chosen to dramatise the break with the past; he happened to be the octogenarian senior most villager Ansaruddin.

The number of villages having been declared dowry-free till-date is so small that it can be counted on the finger-tips. Torture and deaths stemming from the oppressive dowry-related demands by mercenary husbands or members of their families do not all get reported or receive any timely cognisance of women activist or legal aid groups. The continuing social malady, in overt or covert forms, has been a constant reminder of not only an abominable human rights shame but also a huge block of an impediment to raising the status of women in our society.

We would like more NGOs and local government bodies to take the cue and launch a nation-wide crusade for an early and total obliteration of the utterly regressive practice.

Load-shedding — How to Deal with It

With the shops closed and television off the air — the peak demand will be reduced but still it may not be within manageable limits.

THE issue is load-shedding. It is a reality and we have to face it for the next couple of months — unless and until the gas supplies are restored to the established power generation plants. Even then it may just balance the peak demand at the margin. Demand is increasing everyday. We will still must face occasional black-outs — hopefully on a lesser scale. Only when the new barge mounted power plants become operational by early next year, load-shedding can be obviated only in the short run, since new generation capacity must come on stream for which independent power producers are still hanging around the corridors of power.

But how do we suffer from load-shedding? The suffering should be shared by all at least cost to the economy. There must be proper management of load-shedding. Priorities need to be established in terms of who should get power and who shouldn't and at what time of the day or night. Secondly, can the use of electricity itself be reduced, if the use is considered to be of less priority and therefore can be dispensed with for the time-being. Above all, shared suffering, if perceived by all users of electricity, would tend to reduce the collateral damage to the party in power.

The good news is that demand for electricity is not uniform throughout the 24-hour period of a day. The variation in demand between the peak and off peak demand is considerable and if the truncated generation capacity of today is sufficient to meet the off peak demand, then the problem boils down to management of peak demand for electricity between 6-9 pm. First, how the peak demand can be reduced. There are several measures I can suggest.

At 6 in the evening, as much as 90 per cent of the televisions are switched on. There are at least two million television sets in the country and they consume huge quantity of electricity. Why not ban television broadcast during peak demand period. Not only BTV, it must be ensured that cable and satellite channels are also not allowed to be received under the law. Without television for three hours in the evening is a small sacrifice which we can all endure. I have seen this in Thailand when television broadcasts were shut down for three hours during the Gulf War in order to reduce consumption of fossil fuel imported to run the electricity generation plants. But industries running second shift did not suffer since it would adversely affect the growth rate of the economy. We should pursue similar policies — let us shut down the TVs but let garment factories operate throughout the evening.

Another big consumer of electricity are the shops and shopping centres. Throughout the country, covering all towns and cities, there must be millions of shops consuming a great deal of electricity particularly during the peak demand period after which they all close down starting from 9 pm — exactly when demand starts to go off peak. Therefore, all shops should close down at 6 evening. The inconvenience is too little for shoppers but the savings in terms of electricity will be enormous. As a compensation, let the shops remain open on Friday which is a public holiday and shoppers can switch over from evening to holiday shopping — obviously till 6 in the evening.



Window on Asia

Shahed Latif

television off the air — the peak demand will be reduced but still it may not be within manageable limits. Most of the industries and other enterprises remain closed on Friday. If the holiday is staggered in such a way that one-seventh of the enterprises remain closed on any particular day of the week, then as much as fourteen per cent of the potential day-long demand of electricity can be reduced — without any negative impact on the production of goods and services. 14 per cent is quite a huge reduction; it means that out of a potential demand of 1000 M.W., the savings would

amount to 140 M.W.. Shared suffering is a meaningful approach to enhance the tolerance level of ordinary consumers of electricity. The consumption of electricity by the Parliament building — when the Parliament is in session — is as much as a small district town of the country. If so, why the Parliament should meet in the evening? Only the security lights should be on for the evening and next time when it meets — the sessions may be

held only in the day time. Not only that, all air conditioners may also be switched off in the government offices. Fans should be enough when there is a power crisis. These are important initiatives when the government can also rightfully urge the public to switch off their air conditioners and instead of two — only one lamp may be on in the private offices and homes. A campaign may be launched to conserve electricity. Use minimum number of lights and fans and other electricity using equipment and facilities — this will be the main campaign slogan

and it can be successful only when government itself appears to be the ardent practitioner of power conservation measures. The first strategy to deal with load-shedding is to avoid load-shedding as far as possible through measures which will reduce demand for electricity during peak hours in particular and at other times in general. I have so far suggested that by banning television broadcasts from 6 to 9 pm, closing down all shops at six in the evening, staggered holidays for business enterprises and the government measures to curtail its own electricity consumption, — thereby setting an example for others to follow, — would lower peak demand in particular. Yet, load-shedding may not be avoidable. What do we do then?

First, load-shedding must be made known to the people. There should be public announcement through the newspapers informing the people of the particular areas where electricity will not be provided, its duration and the time. Load-shedding, as far as possible, should be uniformly spread out so that the suffering is equally shared by all throughout the Dhaka and other city or town areas. There must not be any exception to the principle of equity in this respect. This may be a complicated exercise for PDB, DESA and REB but it must be done. I am sure this would enhance the image of the government in spite of load-shedding. If the Prime Minister is

found working in her office where there is load-shedding, — people will appreciate and they will participate in the proposed conservation measures, essential for dealing with the crisis of the hour.

Following the people-oriented approach, I will also suggest that as a part of the total load-shedding policy package, it must be ensured that water supply network as well as hospitals must not suffer for lack of electricity. Load-shedding must not lead to water shortage and if necessary, separate generators may be installed as soon as possible near each WASA water tank. As I mentioned before, priorities need to be established to determine who should get electricity and who shouldn't.

People must know that even Ministers may suffer due to load-shedding but there is electricity for pumping enough water for the residents of Dhaka city.

In fact, with clever political management and effective directions to power Managers — it is possible to turn the energy crisis into a huge political capital. As Mr. Kazi Fazlur Rahman pointed out yesterday, this Government is not responsible for the crisis; unfortunately, it has failed to emphasise the failure of the previous regime. However, the utter incapacity of the past can be transformed into the solid foundation of a grand success of the present. It is not load-shedding — it is how the government deals with it.

People are clever. They will understand. They have never made a mistake at the polling booth.

North Korea

Changed Posture in Relations with South Korea and America

by A S M Nurunnabi

In the 43 years since the end of the Korean War, a binding peace treaty between North and South has never looked closer than it has now.

INA bid to secure some urgently needed aid from abroad, an economically cornered North Korea on December 29 last expressed 'deep regrets' for landing a submarine with commandos on a South Korean beach in September last and for 'tragic loss of life' the apology, sought by an enraged South Korea was extracted with the help of the United States.

It was the first formal show of remorse over military that the North has made to Seoul since the 1953 armistice ended the Korean War. Over the decades since their invasion of the South was beaten back, the North Koreans reportedly sent down waves of assassins and saboteurs, seized war ships and cargo vessels at sea, blown up at least one civilian airliner and hacked US truce guards to death axes — all without the slightest of self-doubt.

International observers have wondered why this change of heart has occurred. It might be that Pyongyang's leadership felt it had little choice; belligerent business as usual, possibly leading to the regime's collapse, or knuckling under to demands from South Korea and the US for change in behaviour. After looking over the options, Pyongyang chose the latter course, for now. Lately, there have been disconcerting changes in the over-all situation. Having lost their economic and political support from China and former Soviet Union, their economy has shrunk by an estimated 30 per cent in the last five years and after two years of floods they are facing food shortages that could result in famine next spring. Even their prized armed forces are suffering for lack of food, fuel and modernisation. Washington and Seoul were worrying out loud that the dismal situation could make North Korea desperate enough to launch another invasion

which it would be sure to lose. However, it was felt that North Korea's interest now is in survival, not destruction.

The apology made on December 29th opens the way for more aid to the North, for better relations between the North and the US and between the two Koreas. The Americans have let it be known that, though they have no plans for sending emergency food aid to North Korea direct, they have no objection in contributing to an international appeal on North's behalf.

Pyongyang's rare apology offers a flicker of hope for the last great cold war front. The deal had taken weeks of hard-slogging negotiations, largely at the US mission to the UN in New York, and all parties had reason to wonder if may be, just may be, this kind of rational discussion might one day bring the Cold War stand-off to an end. Inch by painful inch, old enemies on the Korean peninsula are edging towards conciliation. In the deal lately reached, the North, the South and the US agreed to launch the postponed 'talks about talks' that could lead, one day, to a formal treaty ending the Korean War more than decades after the final battle. The deal that persuaded Pyongyang to shelve its nuclear weapons programme can also pick up where it left off. Plans to build two multi-billion dollar reactors in North Korea can move forward with

the North agreeing to resume nuclear waste from the reactor it operates new. The sub-incident had stymied all of these initiatives.

Warming up relations with the world's only superpower is probably Pyongyang's greatest ambition. The sub-apology has unstuck that process. Talks between Pyongyang and Washington are due to grapple with a number of subjects: opening liaison offices in the two capitals, ending North Korean missile sales abroad and allowing officials from the US department of Defense to comb the northern countryside for remains of American soldiers killed in the Korean War. The United Nations is to make an appeal shortly, with America expected to contribute additional \$6m worth of non-food aid together with \$8.4 m in cash it has earlier provided to help meet North Korea's shortage of food and heating oil. On December 30 last, the American government gave Cargill, a grain-trading firm in the US approval to barter 2m tons grain for magnesium and other metals. Thus, step by step, American embargoes on North Korea are to be lifted.

Above all, the North Korean apology clears the way for four-party talks with South Korea, as well as China and the United States, to get under way. Last April, the Americans proposed to hold a joint briefing in which the North Koreans would sit face to face with the South Ko-

reans. This was to be the first step towards getting the North to attend broader four-country discussions aimed at hammering out a peace treaty to replace the armistice agreement that brought the ceasefire in 1953. The briefing was called off when the 'sub-incident' occurred.

With the briefing proposal back on the table, a more suppliant North has now offered to meet the Americans soon as a prelude to the full four-country talks on devising a peace treaty. None can afford to be very optimistic here. Nevertheless, in the 43 years since the end of the Korean war, a binding peace treaty between North and South has never looked closer than it has now. But the South is in no mood to offer concessions other than humanitarian aid until and unless the North agrees to arms reduction and provision for divided families to travel across the border.

Another aspect of the apology tendered by North Korea appears to be that it is a significant setback for the hawks in the crumbling Stalinist regime. Until recently, the military leadership headed by the first vice-minister of the North's army, had tended to dominate the government's policy-making along with the powerful Workers' Party, which also remained hostile to the South. Though nominally the North's supreme commander, Kim Jong Il has been unable to assume the unquestioned authority of his father, the late Kim Il Sung. As a result, the regimes links with the outside world had been inconsistent on account of internal struggles for the reins of power. Kim and his followers may believe they are adapting only in order to save the regime and stay in power. But their turn away from ideology suggests another strain of Stalinism is dying.

To the Editor...

BRTC buses in Khulna

Sir, With two million people, Khulna, the industrial city, is lacking a good transport system for the inhabitants. There is no local BRTC bus in this big city. Besides, the number of private local buses is very limited. Only a few vehicles ply on between Rupsha and Fultala — the only local bus route in Khulna. They can't meet the demand of the masses, which is increasing day by day with the rapid expansion of the city. Under these circumstances, BRTC vis-a-vis private entrepreneurs should come forward to render the conveyance facilities for the common people of Khulna city. And it is expected to be a profitable business as well.

I urge the BRTC authority and other concerned to provide the city with sufficient number of vehicles for the convenience of the masses in Khulna.

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Foreign goods

Bangladesh is engaged in bilateral and multilateral trades of export and import. As an importer it is often stated that our market will be flooded with foreign goods and we do not want our country to be flooded with foreign goods. But there is a point; if essential goods cannot be produced here with quality, then foreign goods are welcome as imports.

The imports of machinery, scientific instruments etc., are welcome as these are needed for development purposes. The

logic of controlling imports lies on the fact that home-made goods must be protected against foreign goods and local industries should be protected against competition from the foreign ones in the home market.

As an exporter, our goods after local consumption should be exported in the world market. We need foreign earnings through exports. The economy of this country depends upon the favourable balance of trade and payments on current and capital accounts.

Dr Syed Ala-Ud-din
Dhaka

Feeling free

Sir, Self-proclaimed killers of 1975 were moving freely since they were immune from law for their acts that is beyond our knowledge to describe until the Indemnity Ordinance of 1975 was repealed and passed in the Parliament and successive ratification of the same by the Bangladesh High Court on 28 January 1997 declaring the ordinance void.

This ushers a new era. We are now happy and proud to declare that we are now living under umbrella of just and verity that our constitution upholds. All the injustices we have witnessed so far in our society have been in existence for direct result of this unjust ordinance which was incorporated in our sacred constitution. We are hopefully awaiting for this day and so far witnessed grandiose change of its beneficiaries. In fine we are free to say that we are able to have relinquished all relations with inhuman acts that was exercised in 1975 at the house of founder of this

state, and in jail where state protection to the prisoners is obligatory and above all. The personalities to whom state itself is in debt for its creation.

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Friendship Treaty and Sub-regional grouping

Sir, It is shrouded with mystery that at a time when on the one hand, the controversial 25-year India-Bangladesh Friendship Treaty is going to expire, on the other hand, our Ministry of Foreign Affairs officials and other concerned of high echelons are reported to be seriously engaged in preparing necessary papers for spelling out the framework, aims and objectives to form a sub-regional grouping comprised of north-eastern provinces of India, Bhutan, Nepal and Bangladesh.

The question is: 'Are we going to replace or substitute the 25-year India-Bangladesh Friendship Treaty with sub-regional grouping?' Why? What for? For whose interest? Why should Bangladesh squeeze herself to the whims of north-eastern provinces of India? The people of Nepal have been struggling for a long time to get rid of the infamous Indo-Nepal Friendship Treaty of 1950. All the political leaders of Bangladesh are pledge-bound not to renew the 25-year treaty of 1972 which is going to end this month. This is the reason why New Delhi now wants to see the seed of sub-regional cooperation and grouping to meet

'er' ends. Is sub-regional grouping an old wine in a new bottle?

What has Bangladesh achieved from 25-year India-Bangladesh Friendship Treaty? How has Nepal benefited from Indo-Nepal Friendship Treaty? India-Bangladesh Friendship Treaty so far did not help us create friendship and goodwill between Dhaka and New Delhi. It also failed to generate any economic cooperation and development between the two countries. On the contrary, it deprived us of our rightful share of the Ganges water for over 20 years. It also denied us our right to use Tin Bigha corridor for over two decades in exchange of our territory Berubari handed over to India in 1973.

With her leviathan army, sophisticated arms and ammunition, missiles and nuclear weapons, India not only opposes Pakistan but she also apparently considers neighbouring China as her enemy. And so New Delhi wants to establish a domain and jurisdiction of her own involving smaller countries in the disguise of friendship and economic cooperation with a view to attaining supremacy in the region.

If Bangladesh joins the so-called sub-regional cooperation or grouping we would not only lose our identity, but we would also failed to act independently — economically and politically. Bangladesh would not only earn the displeasure of the people of north-eastern province of India who are reportedly struggling for their independence but our friend China would also become hostile to us because of our league with New Delhi. India would be using our Chittagang air port, Sylhet and Syedpur airports as and when

necessary. In case of any political crisis, hartals, strikes and road blockade, demonstration and agitation in Bangladesh, India would withdraw the supply of the Ganges water and disconnect the electricity.

Why should we feel inferior? If we should see ourselves from the clutches of 214 years of British colonial rule, 24 years of neo-colonialism of Pakistan and 20 years of deprivation of the Ganges water, then why can't we stand on our own feet, re-discover ourselves, maintain and defend our own identity, dignity, honour and excellence?

Of course, we need friendship with all countries and malice to none, especially with India. It is therefore imperative that we must maintain, retain, preserve and flourish friendship and cooperation with all countries at the national and international levels and not indulge ourselves in internal and provincial affairs of any country or sub-regional grouping. The sky before us is open. We must promote, develop and perform our friendship, goodwill, economic cooperation and uplift world-wide through UNO, OIC, SAARC, NAM etc., without any bias, discrimination or prejudice in the greatest interest of our beloved Bangladesh.

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Addiction

Sir, The unabated trend of addiction is crippling the society's brains. Due to the failure of well-wishers' attempt or the success of instigators' cause, the number of addicts is increasing which is creating a chronic so-

Art Buchwald's COLUMN Package Deals
LET me make this clear — I am not concerned about the big givers having coffee with the president, or sleeping on a couch in the East Room, or jogging with him on the Mall, or playing golf with Mr Clinton at a country club. That's what running a great country is all about. My big fear is that these people might also be running the government — or worse still, think they are. I got the willies when I ran into Bubba Warbucks in front of the White House. "I can't talk to you now," he said. "Air Force One is taking me to Colorado so that I can check out our air defense nuclear capabilities." "I didn't realise that you knew anything about nuclear capabilities," I said. "I don't." "I came with the package. For \$250,000 I got two seats to a state dinner with Yasser Arafat, coffee the next morning with the president, an opportunity to mark up his budget bill, and an appointment with the Joint Chiefs of Staff." "That sounds like a bargain. You're looking really good." "I slept in the Lincoln Bedroom. I thought I would be nervous but I was only woken up twice — once to send the Sixth Fleet to North Korea, and another call from Al Gore asking me if I wanted him to attend Deng's funeral in Beijing." "That's a pretty good deal for \$250,000." "The Lincoln Bedroom snooze cost me an additional \$100,000 but it included four seats on the players' bench to the Army-Navy game." "Did you ever think that you, Bubba, a manufacturer of zippers for jeans, would be so close to the seat of power?" "The president desperately needs input from people like me who put their money where their mouth is. He was so impressed when I told him what to do about Medicare that he gave me a pair of cuff links and a tie pin." "Did you have to donate any money to the DNC for those?" "What a suggestion! White House cuff links are not for sale." "Are you planning on selling your zipper factory and moving to Washington?" "No, I'm going to stay in Freeport and only fly in on a B-29 when the president wants to have coffee with me." "When do you think that might happen?" "When he needs to know how to handle the crisis in Mexico. I rent a house in Acapulco." I said, "The American people are blessed to have someone with your expertise running their country. You are so much better informed than anyone from Indonesia." Warbucks started to sing, "This land is your land, this land is my land..." providing the Democrats have enough soft money to win California. In association with the Los Angeles Times syndicate and UNB.

cial problem. Reportedly, a survey conducted recently by a NGO has revealed that about 8 (eight) lac addicts already exist only in the northern part of the country. It is learnt that due to manpower shortage and depending on police as required by the exigencies of the situation, the Department of Narcotics Control proves to be inefficient. So, how to root out the addicts and addiction from the society is a burning question of the time. Kamrul Islam
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Noise

Sir, Congratulations on publishing the news items 'Sound Pollution...' on 6 February. The intensity of sound is expressed in terms of the square of the sound pressure. The bel is a ratio and is equivalent to a 10-fold increase in sound intensity, a decibel (dB) is one-tenth of a bel. Levels are reported as decibel (dB).

A hazardous sound source is defined as one with an overall sound pressure greater than 90 dB. Sound is made up of a number of frequencies ranging from 30 hertz to 20 KHz, with most being between 1 and 4 KHz. Repeated prolonged exposure to loud noise, particularly in the frequency range of 2-6 KHz causes first temporary and later permanent hearing loss. This is a common occupational problem. Serious noise induced hearing loss is almost wholly preventable by personal protection (ear mugs, ear plugs); little treatment can be offered once deafness becomes established.

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