

Future of DU

As the leader of country's highest seats for learning, Dhaka University, of late, has been the centre of lot of critical attention. A very welcome concern about the unabated deterioration in the standard and atmospherics of educational institutions seems to have coloured our social imagination as never before. Viewed from one angle, it is a pity though that at a time when most other nations are well into their preparations for entering the new millennium, we are still stuck with the basics. So much so that we are still in search of a proper perspective in this field. However, more than our comparative backwardness what really adds to our frustration is the lack of initiative matching the directional discourses or discussions that have taken place so far. All the wise words have gone a-begging due to the lack of real action. It seems no quarter is sincere enough to own its responsibility in the problem and take the field first to get things right. Allowed to continue, this trend will defeat the idea of freeing the universities from the inefficiency syndrome that they have been suffering from for quite some time now.

In this general drama of inaction, we hope Saturday's Roundtable on "Dhaka University on the threshold of the 21st century" cohosted by the Dhaka University Alumni Association will provide the much missed dynamism and set the ball rolling in the right direction.

In its eagerness to show the alma mater a way out of the doldrums it is in, Dhaka University Alumni Association has taken a very praiseworthy initiative. But this obligative effort should not be allowed to rot in ineffectuality. It has to be whipped up into a creative energy, a white heat that will pave the way for some action. We suggest that the DU Alumni Association build on its initiative and make its base as broad as possible by including all the alumni of the institution. A national convention can be called to bring the problem under an even sharper focus around our entry into the 21st century. The whole exercise has the potential of metamorphosing into a moral force. Can we get a move on in that direction?

Make it Work Now

It is perhaps a very helpful move. This placing of the entire field staff of the mosquito control directorate at the disposal of the Dhaka City Corporation. The DCC, or precisely Mayor Hanif, as soon as he was returned to his present office, pledged to free his dear city from the menace of mosquito. The citizens of Dhaka know best how he fared with his pledge. It now comes to light that the approach was flawed at the very start — the DCC had no control over the mosquito campaign field-workers. Now why should this obstacle be discovered in the third year of Hanif's mayoralty? Disgraceful is the performance of his men.

There is a directorate to fight and eliminate mosquito. It has been there for long. It works for the whole nation, doesn't it? If its entire staff is placed under the DCC who will cover the void? Or is it that the directorate never went beyond minding this city's mosquito problem, there being no nation outside of Dhaka? While it can be expected that the move will help DCC's efforts to eliminate mosquito become more effective than before, what will happen to the directorate?

There is indeed no need to weep over a directorate's demise if that doesn't have any use for the society any more. Mosquito is no doubt a national problem. But like most other national problems, the governments can fight these best in the urban settlements where they come in concentrations ideal for engagement. A mere directorate less than 500-strong cannot be expected to fight mosquito all over the country — roughly at the rate of one person per square kilometre. But if the directorate goes who will fight mosquito in the towns and cities other than Dhaka?

We hope the work in Dhaka will at last pick up. It is also important that between them the DCC and government must clearly understand the new arrangement they are making and brief the nation on it.

Of Caring Carriers

First the improved and regular trains and now the airconditioned express bus — communication between Dhaka and Narayanganj is evidently headed for a welcome change after decades of neglect. The twin towns could be one and the same but for 10 kilometres of low land on the one side and a river on the other. The physical separation has, however, pushed up the passenger traffic between the two rather than lessening it. Trains deteriorated becoming garbage carriers and that too very uncertain and irregular. The commuters ran for the buses. The bus operators made the most of a seller's market situation by offering the world's worst service between any twin cities anywhere. It is good that something positive is being done about this most important passenger shuttle moving tens of thousands of people.

In Dhaka there isn't yet a stand for Narayanganj buses. And buses with daubings of *Birothin* and *Sitting Service* and *gatelock* etc pack passengers and depart and reach at their own convenience. Now that some people in the governing seats are taking care of this important communication link — the improvement process must not die in the *autar ghar* or labour room. The airconditioned buses, a small fleet of them to begin with, is all right and is most welcome. Besides having very important uses such as carrying children and women and the old and the invalid, the A.C. buses would surely exert a healthy influence on the service of the standard buses which ironically conform to no standards whatsoever.

The move in the right direction should continue till all the buses of the route begin to practise some passenger-friendly norms.

For some time to come even A.C. buses will use the so-called Bishwa Road via Adamjee. A longish Siddhirganj-Adamjee stretch is too narrow to take even three vehicles abreast. In fact, the Premium Bus operators have justified their 20-taka fare by citing possible jams there. Something must be done to beat this congestion before the fruits of the good moves should prove tasty and mouthful.

Towards an Enduring Civil Order

It can be seen in hindsight that all governments in Bangladesh, both civilian and military, have to their credit track records almost indistinguishable. With some pluses and minuses they all had been, on the average, same in their performance and none could singularly stand out.

of the world. It shows how brutally the question of legitimacy, the norms of civility, the nation image can be brushed aside and an elected government dumped in no time. Then there would not be any dearth of domestic supporters or external patrons for the usurping regime. Worse still, there is no appropriate strategy as yet evolved for the defence of the nascent democracies which are, at the best, ex-territory, with the rudiments of the system. They simply succumb to the assault mounted against their fragile foundation. While blatant military takeover had been almost an unmistakable pattern in post-colonial world, nowadays, there are many who draw consolation from the trends set in with the triumph of democracy after the Cold War.

It is often asserted that an inhospitable global environs would now take care of the adventures and the potential military rulers would find it difficult to sustain themselves. The ground realities around the world do not seem to vindicate such claim. Moreover, the notion is incomplete and a historical. Because the democracy's victory, if any, is in no way absolute and it has its own ups and downs throughout its long chequered history. There are instances of the world sliding back to authoritarianism even after periods of democratic flush. So what is the guarantee that the history will not repeat itself?

The problems with the military do not just end there. The problems are more acute in democratic set-ups themselves and compound in the countries that experienced military rule earlier. In such countries an earlier access to power has given the military experience, confidence and vital contacts turning it into a dominant social force. The exposure to power gave it a chance to leave a legacy behind which is difficult to be erased. With such assets at its disposal, it is in a position to reassert its role in national politics and reappear in national

scene at any opportune juncture. Both Bangladesh and Pakistan stand testimony to these possibilities. Even when it is not overtly ruling the country, it continues to remain a factor to be reckoned with in domestic politics. In Pakistan, vital foreign policy issue like Afghanistan remained an exclusive domain of the armed forces. It is also impossible there to take any decision either on nuclear policy or Kashmir issue without having the military in confidence.

In our country, although the politicians enjoy absolute freedom in decision-making on national issues they are rather cautious about stepping into 'sensitive' defence matters and prefer to let the armed forces more as a large corporate body with almost total autonomy. After the fall of Ershad both the elected governments favoured

dissimilar from that of either Pakistan from whom we borrowed most of the traditions of martial law politics. During the early days of our independence, there were instances of the military — either individually or in group — fraternising the politicians to promote their personal or group interests. Later the trend reversed with the politicians fraternising the military to be in its good book. Nowadays, this fraternisation which is undertaken in more organised way also aims at diffusing the threat, if any, from military's side. During the tenure of previous government, the BNP carried out this exercise in a naive naked manner by creating its own lobby in the armed forces through promotions and plum postings. The present government of Awami League with its stigma of gross negligence of the armed forces during its ear-

come into play with some of its ugly manifestation — the failures of the polity, the opportunities provided and seized as well as a temptation for the usurpation. Benazir — Bhutto's daughter — with all her bitterness of the military appeased its top brass by sending, on being elected, her first emissary to the Army Chief. She undertook hazardous journey to Siachen glacier to fraternise with the troops fighting there. On several occasions, she abdicated her official prerogatives and compromised with the generals on various issues. All these expedience failed to produce results. Both the times, she was fired by the president, the Army was apparently not on her side.

Our prime minister also has shared food with the troops, put on an army fatigue during field manoeuvres and lavished praises on our armed forces in her ceremonial speeches. These are just in the fitness of things in her capacity as the country's chief executive as well as defence minister but not enough to forestall potential assault against the civil authority.

Something fundamental remains to be done by the politicians to remove the threat of military — both overt and covert — once for all. It is to put up a paradigm of performance distinctively better and more attractive. It can be seen in hindsight that all governments in Bangladesh, both civilian and military, have to their credit track records almost indistinguishable. With some pluses and minuses they all had been, on the average, same in their performance and none could singularly stand out. Although it was primarily the responsibility of the politicians to deliver to the nation under any circumstances they unfortunately had always been on the look out for scapegoats of some sorts for their follies and failures. They kept holding the lack of appropriate system responsible for all the maladies dogging the nation. At the height of military's primacy in national politics it was argued that the restoration of democracy would

set things right. The free economy was once identified as the panacea for diluting the country's economic stagnation. Then there were movements for reverting back to parliamentary system to make the government answerable and accountable. In turn all these goals were achieved by bringing about the desired systems. But what had not been achieved was to make these changed systems work. There was no visible improvement in the quality of politics. And there was no qualitative change in the performances of the subsequent governments. As a result, a spectre of despair we wanted to dispel continues to haunt us. We desperately look for alternative of some promise whatever may be its hue.

The yearning for alternative keeps growing as there is a continuous precipitation in our society, polity and economy. Contrary to the expectation, there is a retrogression in the society which is bereft of traditional values. Consequently, it becomes a favourite turf of terrorists, extortionists and musclemen. The politics has lost its purposes and is, at the best, a self-serving profession. In almost a stagnant economy the growth has further dipped. Law or order situation is as bleak as ever. Higher education continues to suffer setback with unrest raging on the campuses. The social justice is trampled with ever widening rich-poor gap. Public money is squandered away by the bank-loan defaulters. With corruptions rampant, the investment is shy. The smuggling across the border is almost open. This has been the picture almost common with all the regimes. Only if any government can arrest the trends, it would be credited with the lying of the foundation of a rampart for the protection of a civil order in the country. Much of the construction of that rampart and turning it into a citadel for the defence of a democratic polity will substantially depend on an imaginative leadership imbued with vision, commitment and sincerity of intent as well as the quality of the politicians. Only then a quality government capable of deliverance is possible. We have to keep our fingers crossed until we achieve them.



PERSPECTIVES

by Brig (Rtd) M Abdul Hafiz

statutes quo with regard to military's appointments in ambassadorial posts with certain quotas as well as some key civilian positions of the government. Not only that, some of the arrangement which involve the military but were introduced by the military regimes purely under martial law conditions are allowed to remain till date. That Awami League induced maximum of military brass in its rank points to how much importance it all attaches to its military connection. It is not thus surprising that the AL government, the most civil of the civil governments, adjusts itself to the legacies of the military regime without even the prick of the conscience. At the moment, the AL seems more concerned with its own survival than the sustenance of an enduring civil order.

The pattern that emerges from a delicate civil-military equation in Bangladesh is not

lier rule prefers a policy of appeasement.

Whether it is fraternisation or appeasement seldom would any government have daring to cross the way of the military however docile, loyal and conformist it may be for the establishment. None would like to tamper with its beefed-up budget allocation — whether justified or not. No politicians of standing would risk his future by bringing to scrutiny the huge defence spending; neither would anyone raise any question about the lucrative contracts and purchases within the armed forces. A sort of *quid pro quo* has since been established between both the sides ensuring full control in their own respective spheres. Both sides seem to be working to develop in the arrangement a stake for each other. But it works only on the short term basis.

In the long run, however, the dynamics of power politics

LETTER FROM AMERICA

Recent Happenings in America

Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed writes from Princeton

It takes a big man to apologise. America has, to its own citizens. Perhaps Germany and Japan should as well, to the whole world! African-Americans are now suggesting that America owes them another apology — for slavery! Stay tuned

In the shameful episode.

The other apology, to the Japanese-Americans, came about a decade ago. During the second world war, after the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor and declared war on America, Americans of Japanese origin were gathered in camps. For their own safety, they were told. After all, they resembled the enemy! No such things were, or possibly could be, done against German-Americans, because they looked like the rest of the Caucasian Americans. Further, about 27 per cent of Americans are of German origin.

Although the camps in which Japanese-Americans were interned in no way resembled Hitler's concentration camps, it nevertheless was disgraceful that America found it fit to basically imprison a section of its own citizenry! For many Japanese-American soldiers, this posed a bizarre dilemma. They went about fighting bravely for their country in Europe, and liberating inmates from Hitler's concentration camps, knowing full

well that their parents back home were in such camps, deprived of their liberty!

Nevertheless, it takes a big man to apologise. America has, to its own citizens. Perhaps Germany and Japan should as well, to the whole world! African-Americans are now suggesting that America owes them another apology — for slavery! Stay tuned.

Last week was a great week for science buffs. The Pathfinder sent stunning pictures back from our nearest planetary neighbour, Mars. The pictures were so Earth-like. The topography of Mars looked as though it was right out of a scene from Arizona or Saudi desert.

Humans have so fantasised about life on Mars. We have celebrated Martians 'landing' on our mother planet. What if there are creatures on Mars? Imagine how petrified they must be to see a space craft from Earth actually landing on their planet! Unlike Martians 'landings' on Earth, where the visitors were apparently afraid of

being detected, the Earth craft does not hide its presence. Indeed, it defiantly moves about, looking for rocks, analysing them with laser light, and openly (unlike ET's phone call) sending signals back to earth. In short, the Pathfinder is terrorising the Martians!

Although current technology is capable of making it happen, the US has no plan to send humans to Mars in the near future. However, if America actually embarks on a mission to Mars (President Bush talked about it in 1989, without allocating the funds), the round trip will take about two years. If earthlings do land on Mars, the 'Martians' will surely take to the hills...

Last month, Michael Jordan's Chicago Bulls won their fifth National Basketball Championship in seven years, defeating the Utah Jazz four games to two. (The two years Chicago Bulls did not win the Championship, Michael Jordan was trying his luck, unsuccessfully, at baseball.)

Michael Jordan is the

world's number-one sports superstar now, although golf's Tiger Woods is catching up. After the series was knotted two games each, Michael Jordan fell sick. He had a stomach virus, unable to hold any food. Yet, the fifth game, in Utah, was crucial. History had shown that in a tied series the winner of the fifth game usually went on to win the seven-game series. Experts suggested that Jordan should rest and recover his strength, and try to win the sixth and seventh games in Chicago.

Jordan played. Did he ever! With his tongue sticking out, struggling to breathe, walking gingerly after every spurt, Michael Jordan almost single-handedly led Chicago to victory in the fifth game, scoring close to forty points. Chicago won the sixth game as well. Jordan's inspirational fifth game performance left sports fans speechless. It added one more dimension to his aura, and further embellished his multifaceted talent. Here was a very wealthy man, literally putting

author's piece defending Mike Tyson in *The New York Times*. He suggested that my use of the "race card" in defense of Mike Tyson was "phony". Pete Rose, the baseball player who has most hits in baseball, was banned from baseball, and Hall of Fame, for gambling, in 1989. Since Pete Rose is white, I did not have a case, the writer argued. First of all, I have always disagreed with the decision to ban Pete from the baseball Hall of Fame, because his gambling habit does not diminish his accomplishments on the baseball field.

More important, Pete Rose was banned from baseball when he had retired, and was managing his old team, the Cincinnati Reds. Unfortunately, he placed a bet involving his own team, an absolutely "no-no" in baseball, or in any other sports, and was banned. Pete Rose was not banned when he was an active player. Jesse Owens, Muhammad Ali and Mike Tyson have all been banned at the peak of their careers and earning power!

To the Editor...

BTV channel-2

Sir, Every year it was announced. The latest propaganda: in two years' time, under state control, subject to fund availability.

If it is in the private sector, it can come up by early next year, as FDI (minority share) will be no problem, provided the state holds a minority share.

The problem is not engineering, financial, or technical. The commission's report may carry a recommendation, not a decision. Policies are getting more opaque than transparent. The image has to be improved.

A Husrain
Dhaka

DCC: Slow and steady

Sir, The Dhaka City Corporation has announced a 40-year project to straighten the crooked lanes and by-lanes of old Dhaka. Good for the next generation not yet born.

A similar 31-year project may be announced to level the city's footpaths. Every 10 yards my footstep has to come up or go down at the sunken car-drives across the footpaths connecting the gates of the houses beside the footpath. Dangerous in the dark or in dim light.

Another 1.9-year project is necessary to fill in the missing manhole covers on these footpaths (the period is short as the manholes are already there and the size of each manhole is standard). If there is shortage of funds, at least half the manholes may be covered with theft-proof covers.

To minimise financial strain

Who is Correct?

Sir, It is really surprising to see when our honorable prime minister and finance minister give contradictory statements in public. It happened recently in as many as two occasions as I have noticed. First, on June 14, 1997, our PM, in a post-budget seminar, arranged by Center for Policy Dialogue, said that if we could remove the bottlenecks and impediments prevailing in our economy, our investment scenario would have improved a lot. It clearly implies that there are bottlenecks in our economy.

However, newspapers of July 4, 1997 have published the news that our PM has assured the chief of OECF, Japan by saying that there is no bottleneck in the investment process in Bangladesh. Does not this

statement of PM contradict that of our FM? Secondly, in the TV interview with *Deshbhashi Mukhomukhi*, when PM was asked how did the government file cases in the wrong court against the people involved in share scam, she admitted graciously that government this time was wrong. But in an interview with a foreign press (on June 25, 1997, at FM's chamber in the parliament), when Mr. Kibria faced the same issue, he replied that government did not do anything wrong; rather, there was a provision in law which allowed to proceed in this manner. So, contradiction again! Now my question is: who is correct?

Whom should we believe? PM or FM?

A Confused Citizen
Dhaka

Misplaced generosity

Sir, The other day the government has donated one lakh taka to the family of Mahub who had earlier died inside the wheel carriage of a Biman aircraft. It is difficult to understand what prompted the government to make this generous offer. Does the government own responsibility for his death? How so?

Mahub's surreptitious entry into the wheel-carriage to go to Saudi Arabia unauthorised was a suicidal act in itself which caused a lot of embarrassment to Biman and the government. Moreover, the government had to incur substantial expenditure to bring back his dead body from Saudi Arabia.

Now on top of that the gov-

ernment has dished out one lakh taka and a minister handed over his dead body to his father as if he was a national hero! If the government taken such a silly decision just to please some people, then God help this government!

Mr. Kasem

35/A, Mogbazar, Dhaka.

Crime and punishment

Sir, We would like to register our anger and outrage at the absurd justice system of our country. Seema Choudhury was raped and died in 'mysterious' circumstances. Yet no one is held responsible for the dreadful end of a young life. Indeed, the accused are exonerated 'honourably' because of loopholes in the process of law, which were misused blatantly by persons concerned.

The learned judge based his decision on the fact that Seema did not register the case herself and that the statement required under 164 GPC was not available. How can we be totally oblivious of how difficult — indeed impossible — it is for a rape victim to register a case, assuming that Seema was in a physical and psychological state to do so? We are not unaware of the kind of criminal cover-up police have been known to indulge in? Indeed it is ironic that the very points on which His Honour based his decision, are, to us, clear proof of the intentional negligence of the officials in charge of Seema's case.

Since Seema was in police

custody throughout this traumatic period, whose responsibility was it to ensure that all legal procedures were fulfilled? Presumably the investigating officials were well verse in the legal requirements of such cases, so what is the reason or excuse for their criminal negligence? Do police officials and medical professionals not have the legal and moral obligations to extend minimal support and assistance to rape victims, who are often not aware of legal requirements?

What signals will such judgements send to perpetrators of such crimes of violence against women across the country?

Ruby and Farhad Ghuznavi
Dhaka

Gulshan Lake

Sir, Your front page coverage on 11 July '97 about leasing out 200 acres of Gulshan Lake by RAJUK to Singapore-based Indus Valley is really alarming. It sounds even more sinister that one formidable local business group well-known for their financial acumen, culture has joined hand with them. Probe by any powerful investigator will, more likely than not, reveal that the same group owns Indus Valley. It is also known that the same group had shares in oil exploring company "Schimitar".

There is a complete lack of transparency in the whole deal and one can smell a rat. On the one hand, the RAJUK claims that everything had been done according to the rules, and clearance from DoE had been

obtained but the latter denies any knowledge of it. The Master Plan for this metropolis had been conveniently set aside.

To substantiate their claim, RAJUK should make public the whole project in full details with scale models. Is Gulshan Lake a private property of RAJUK that it can sell 1 bigha of space for 1 taka?

The DS, has in the past taken up many causes and "Save Dhaka" was one of them. We would earnestly entreat you to revive "Save Dhaka" again and carry out objective investigation into this project and reveal all facts and figures to earn our lasting gratitude.

Iskander Meah
Gulshan North, Dhaka

Judgement should be published

Sir, The judge of the 'Nari O Shisu Nirjaton Domon Adalot' (Women and Child Repression Prevention Court) by a judgement acquitted four policemen accused of violating Seema Choudhury, a garment worker. The judge delivered the judgement in a crowded court. In his 46-page judgement, he said: 'It was a case without evidence or proof.'

The judgement delivered by the court has created widespread confusion in the society. In order to dispel this confusion, we feel the judgement delivered by the court should be published in the newspapers.

Mostafa Sohel
Banani, Dhaka-1213