

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 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 country 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 personnel for a thana. 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 *Brotiñi* and *Sitting Service* and *gate-lock* 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 *autur 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.

ZULFIQAR Ali Bhutto, the whiz kid of Ayub Khan's first Martial Law Cabinet was out and out a product of the establishment. He rose up to become the country's youngest foreign minister under the direct patronage of his military boss. Even when he floated his Pakistan People's Party in the late sixties and during the crises of 1971, he was known to be hobnobbing with the generals. Yet after ascending to the pinnacle of power in a truncated Pakistan, he swiftly moved to cut the military to size and assert the supremacy of civil authority for the first time in the country's troubled history. A man of rare ability and an x-ray vision he knew exactly what stood on the way of Pakistan becoming a stable polity. So he sufficiently clipped the wings of the military brass to stop the rise of Bonapartism in the armed forces. Under his deft leadership, amidst the trauma of break-up and bitterness of long years of inept military Pakistan could be salvaged from the brink of collapse.

However, like any human, Bhutto also faltered and his fortune dipped soon after 1977 election which he was alleged to have rigged at least selectively for his party. A countrywide agitation launched by Pakistan National Alliance (PNA) left Bhutto totally exasperated. During those turbulent days, Bhutto received a guest, albeit a friend from the royal family of Iran. In the banquet hosted by him for princess Ashraf, Bhutto escorted her through the invited guests and at a point came across General Ziaul Huq. Bhutto made him the Chief of Army Staff after crossing as many as sixteen generals as his most trusted man in the uniform and obviously took him casually in the guest's line. But the Princess, well conversant with the murky politics of Pakistan, did not. After a few steps she sharply looked at her host. Bhutto knew what was in Princess' mind. "He is in my pocket," an apparently disturbed Bhutto whispered his confident reply to the Princess. A few days later, Bhutto was in Zia's custody, if not in his pocket.

This precisely illustrates the stark vulnerability of the democratic politics in our part

of the world. It shows how brutally the question of legitimacy, the norms of civility, the world opinion and even the nations 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, experimenting 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 fall of Ershad both the elected governments favoured

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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 to take any decision either on nuclear policy or Kashmir issue without having the military in confidence.

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dissimilar from that of either Pakistan from whom we borrowed most of the traditions 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 appealed 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 expedient 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 sort 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 combating 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 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, extortionist 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 rising 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 laying 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 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

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.

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his life on the line, so that he could carry his team to victory. At the end of the fifth game, as Jordan was about to collapse, his friend and fellow superstar, Scottie Pippen grabbed him! Next year, Chicago Bulls will pay their franchise player thirty-five million dollars for his services. He is worth every penny of it!

One reader responded to the 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!

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 Harbour 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

statement of PM contradict that of our FM? Secondly, in the TV programme "Deshbhashi Mukhnomukhi", when PM was held in the wrong court against the people involved in share scam, she admitted gravely 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

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 FM, 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 our economy. To minimise financial strain

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!

Md 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 young life. Indeed, the accused are exonerated "honourably" because of loopholes in the process of law, which were mis