

Simmering DU Campus

Internece feuding has reportedly reached flash point at the Dhaka University campus. Any day, there could be a violent outbreak. Security personnel posted around the area have already raided couple of dormitories known as the bastions of the armed cadres, but as usual, to no avail. Only some cocktail bombs were recovered, said the press reports.

The fears of a possible trouble have a different dimension this time. It is not the traditional rivalry between BCL (Bangladesh Chhatra League) and JCD (Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal), the student fronts of ruling Awami League and opposition BNP, rather it is rivalry within themselves — factional feud at its literal worst. Causes are despicable for their sheer pettiness. It is almost entirely the result of different factional leaders' attempt to consolidate their powerbases.

Heightening of tension on the campus has followed close on the heels of an apparent administrative stasis observed in the recent rhetorical collision between opposing fronts over DUCSU or students unions' elections in the latest meeting of the *Paribesh* committee (formed to monitor university atmospherics). BCL has demanded immediate dissolution of the current body of DUCSU which is now in the eighth year of its existence, a gross aberration of the legitimate practice. JCD, of course, has taken a contrary view of the matter for obvious reasons. What is annoying here is the University authorities' muted or non-committal stance on the issue. A decisive step on the part of the authorities, one feels, is likely to boost the process of normalisation in the university.

We are worried the escalation of tension on the campus might spoil the atmospherics and spirit of Ekushey February. We plead for enhanced vigilance in that area by the law enforcers; but having said that, we also feel, rather reiterate that no solution will follow if the political parties do not delink their student fronts. Unless a consensus is reached on the issue followed by strict and ethical adherence to it, things will never look up no matter how keen or active we are in de-escalating tension.

So, we goad the political parties once again, please, do away with your systemic insensitivity and hypocrisy and pull out whatever stakes you have in the educational institutions. Law then can always take care of the agents of squabbling and bickering.

Transit Debacle

No pulsation after three truck-loads of pulses — that is the story of sudden death occurring to the Bangabandha transit corridor between landlocked Nepal and sea port-endowed Bangladesh. The route was opened on September 1 last year in an extended pursuit of the trade protocol earlier signed by India, Bangladesh and Nepal, but on an experimental basis for six months only. After the inaugural day's passage of three truck-loads of lentil nothing moved through the route during the last five and a half months. The make-shift immigration and customs outfits on both sides of the border have shuttered down. The so-called six-month experiment turned a non-starter from the second day, it seems.

Why, what happened? The prominent Bangla daily which published this news item traced the origin of the anti-climax to India's laying down of certain conditions for the transit like using Indian trucks only for transportation of goods and that too under the supervision of Indian Army units and on two specific days — Saturday and Sunday. Saturday is closed in Bangladesh and Sunday in Nepal. Apart from other things, such stipulations foreshadowed higher transportation costs. Apparently what has been given by one hand has been taken away by another, and Nepal can hardly be blamed for reverting *ipso facto* to the Calcutta port.

We regard this as lip-service done to subregionalism by none other than who should be at the vanguard of it — India. At the same time, let's be prepared to greet free trade which is emerging as an irrepressible agenda for the next century. We need improving the services and infrastructure on our side — right up to Mongla Port, the natural deep sea entrepot and outlet for effective subregionalism in this part of South Asia.

This Hilsa Gospel

Dhaka press has gone into a spree of superlatives in the last few days praising the many qualities and health giving powers of the Bengalee People's centuries old object of adoration *Hilsa* or as they say in Hindi and English — *Hilsa*. Physicians and nutritionists were in two minds about this best loved of all fishes — and possibly still are. And then the newspapers started extolling the sterling and so far unknown good points of *Hilsa* — beginning with The Daily Star. As a sea fish, *Hilsa* was supposed to be imbibing a lot of plankton and as with all other sea-fishes it, because of that, developed fats that rather than adding to human fat, always cut on that substantially. But till very recently this good news was mixed with another positively bad. That while cutting on LDL or the bad cholesterol, *Hilsa* being a veritable depot of triglycerides or TG, more than offsets its other good work.

The team led by Professor Sohrab Ali seems to have conclusively proved that *Hilsa* oil greatly curbs TG as well as LDL levels and has an improving effect on HDL or the good cholesterol. This is not only good news as The Daily Star has said. This is fantastic. Heart and blood pressure patients have so long been avoiding *Hilsa* knowing it to be poison for them. Now this has turned into an antidote for their ailment.

Granting that the news is all true, it devolves on both the people and the government that *Hilsa* fries are not caught and sold and consumed. For the netted *jitka* has not had its chance to go to sea and develop into the medicine it was destined to be. Point two — care should be taken not to allow entrepreneurs to grow *hilsa* in ponds, as they have done with *pangash*, another sea fish. And perhaps in the light of the new knowledge, it would be wise not to allow export of *hilsa* until our production of it has increased to wholly satisfy the domestic demand and surpassed it.

There is no end to good things happening to Bangladesh, things like gas and oil strikes. It is us humans that fall ourselves. Let *hilsa* be an exception to that.

A Farewell to Arms

In the annals of human history, it is hard to find a parallel where ethnic conflict has been resolved peacefully through talks. Examples of never-ending conflict abound. In Sri Lanka we read daily gory details of bloodbath. The Kurdish minority is a telling example

THE signing of the historic Peace Accord between the National Committee on Chittagong Hill Tracts, led by the Chief Whip in the National Assembly Abul Hasnat Abdullah and the Parbatya Chattagram Janasanghati Samity (PCJSS), led by its Chairman Jotiridriyo Bodhipriyo Larma (nicknamed Shantu Larma), is an unprecedented success of the government of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

The accord was signed on 2 December 1997 at the Prime Minister's Secretariat between the two leaders with a beaming Sheikh Hasina watching. It is the culmination of two decades of insurgency and intermittent efforts at peace-making through talks.

The war started in 1977. The first contact between the Bangladesh Government and the PCJSS started in 1985 during the regime of President H M Ershad. The talks did not appear to make much headway when the government led by Khaleda Zia picked up the thread. In 1992 the BNP government formed a committee headed by Communications Minister Col (retired) Oli Ahmed to resolve the problem. On August 1, 1992 Shantu Bahini, the military arm of the PCJSS declared unilateral cease fire which would continue till December 31, 1997. In November 1992 Col (retired) Oli Ahmed held the first talks with PCJSS at the Kha- grachhara Circuit House. Until October 1995 Col (retired) Oli Ahmed held six rounds of talks with the PCJSS but was unable to reach an accord. It is a fact that the BNP government made some serious efforts to settle this two decades-old problem with the Shantu Bahini. It had some moderate success in bringing back more than 3000 refugees from the camps in Tripura.

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