Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali

Dhaka, Wednesday, May 6, 1998

Academic Freedom

The academics at the BUET are on a warpath. Professor Iqbal Mahmud whom we had welcomed as the VC only last November has resigned citing personal reasons. Seventyone teachers running the academic administration of the place resigned to professor Mahmud in protest against what they called naked interference in the affairs of the university, breaking statutes and traditions that gave it autonomy, by the highest office in government as well as the education ministry. If true, the government is decidedly in the wrong. And there were ample reasons to believe that the government was indeed taking a different view from that held by the BUET Teachers Association in the matter of the resignation of 13 Architecture teachers.

In an on-going process of resolving the issues meetings were held with and communications were made to Professor Mahmud. In fact, the architecture admission test impasse was amicably settled by one such dialogue between the Prime Minister and Prof. Mahmud. On Monday, however, some teachers were seething with anger over Education Minister's attempts to dictate the course of the syndicate meeting on Sunday and teachers meeting on Monday over telephone - even as the meetings were in session. The Education Minister has on the other hand said the Prime Minister's as well as his role in the matter was more as mediators and they had success on record till the other day. There was never any question of imposing any thing on BUET or its VC.

As things are, the situation can be seen as a three-fold debacle, for the government, the VC and the students. The government by allowing itself to be available in the resolution of the architecture admission test quandary, had unwittingly waded into unknown waters infested with politically committed denizens and is reaping its harvest of impudence. Iqbal Mahmud was not a very pleased party to the admission settlement. But he was a party. Teachers Association stalwarts had then thought of launching a movement for the ouster of such an unobliging fellow. Instead they moved to nullify the settlement and give the 13 the sack. Now the situation was too hot for Mahmud to persevere on. And he gave up. The third party to suffer is evidently the students.

We assure all parties to the fray that to a disinterested outsider — this all is a contest between people on an ego trip, a competition in imbecility.

Whatever the government does to mitigate the present impossible situation and set the university again on its rails, they must hold high the all-important principle of the independence of the universities. This independence will be strengthened by governmental deference to it and the academics' putting it to good use.

Another SOS

Once again country's trade bodies have expressed their concern at the deteriorating law and order situation of the country. The latest SOS came from representatives of six top business chambers and associations who in a joint statement urged the government to arrest the slide immediately.

It does not require any barometer to tell law and order in the country has taken a serious nosedive. Despite an enhanced activity of the law enforcers and the personal initiative of the Home Minister that saw some of the most notorious criminals landing behind the bars, law and order has plummeted to new depths. In the last few months, we have seen a mind-boggling rise both in the number and variety of crimes. It has been a frightening assortment of extortion, abduction, rape, murder.

More often than not this apparent rise in crime rate is attributed to enhanced press sensitivity and awareness. This is partly true. But there is little consolation in it for the businessmen who have to deal with unpleasant and crippling daily reality of appeasing the hoodlums and extortionists. There is no denying businessmen bear the brunt of the atmospheric vitiation most.

Although the legal system of the country is ripe for reform it is not legal inadequacy as such which has worsened the matter so much as has the absence of neutral enforcement of the law. Criminals have got used to treat law as a scarecrow due to their increasing patronage by the political leaders. Governments over the years have come to be associated more with bending the law than really upholding its cause. It is years of such governance which has brought us on the verge of a systemic collapse.

The present government may describe it as a legacy from its predecessors but that does not make its task any easier or its responsibility any lighter. Because, after all the buck stops with the government of the day.

Railway Fares

The BR's uneconomic operations have found an unpopular expression through another round of increases effected lately on its fares chart. The railway authorities have not appended an explanation to the announcement as to why they had to take recourse to it. This would have been the right thing to do especially when they did not serve any prior notice on what was coming. Better late than never, we expect the BR to specify the reason for the increases which have been upwards of 10-15 per cent from previous levels.

The BR's higher operating costs cannot be put down to an increased fuel price alone. Poor maintenance, pilferage and theft of railway property and rolling stocks, ticketless travelling etc add up to the costs much the same way that inefficient and corrupt cargo handling is making for a loss of business to the road transportation sector. All of these holes must be plugged with a holistic plan to bring about a rejuvenation of the railway system along modern lines. With the commissioning of the bridge across the river Jamuna in sight, the BR should be in a position now to perfect its master plan for a better future of the railways.

We suggest that the BR adopt a tourist angle and upgrade its services and comfort level to a point where fare increase would be taken in the stride.

STUDENT POLITICS

A government, having guts and honest commitments to enforce laws of the land, should pick up all students

involved in anti-social, anti-educational and other untoward activities, and place them at the disposal of the

country's judicial system.

To Ban it or Not to Ban it, That's Not the Question

HERE has been an avalanche of reports, ▲ opinions, editorials and commentaries in the newspaper pages ever since the Prime Minister made a proposal in the Parliament to ban student politics in the country. Of course, hot debates and exchange of ideas are also taking place in other arenas of both public and private discourses. Although no scientific evaluation of these views and opinions are yet available, perhaps it can be safely surmised that the public sentiment is leaning towards banning student politics rather than streamlining it or leaving it as it is.

Such a near universal disapproval of student politics by all sections of the people indicates how glaringly things have gone wrong with so-called student politics in the country. The reasons are, however, not far to seek. Many of the students or non-students, who are involved in student politics, have long been involved in all kinds of anti-education and anti-social activities. President Shahabuddin is right, more often than not, they carry guns, instead of books.

If newspaper reports are any guide, they are involved in collecting tolls and amassing wealth, adopting unfair means in exams and shattering public properties, disrupting congenial atmosphere in campuses and resorting to armed battles in broad day light. Sometimes they work as hired goons - to

silence the opposition, to defeat rival candidates, to deny others to bid for a tender, and to sus-

ignated areas. The situation with the Dhaka University is still more horrifying. Anybody familiar with the university knows that the students here play a key role in appointments at coveted positions both inside and outside the campus, they poke their nose in multi-million dollar business deals, and they are adept in transforming burning national issues into non-issues, and non-issues into sensitive national issues.

tain a reign of terror in the des-

And these king makers and prime beneficiaries of state-induced booties are almost always above the laws of the land. You just can't touch them - they are protected by awfully powerful people, your fingers will be burnt. Therefore, it is not surprising that the members of the public are expressing their almost total disgust with the existing state of affairs with the student politics in the country. and demanding a ban on it, for five to ten years or for an indef-

inite period. Without denying or undermining any of the accusations against student politics and without having any sympathy to anybody remotely involved in student politics, this writer,

is resourceful enough to muster

the required number, 273 in the

546-member House. At one

time, he even began the exercise.

He first met AlADMK chief

Javalalitha of Tamil Nadu and

then Mamta Banerjee of Tri-

namool Congress from West

Bengal. Both promised him

support. But Sonia Gandhi put

her foot down. She was not pre-

pared either for the Congress-

led government or any other ar-

BJP which, she has said pub-

licly, represents fascist forces

in the country. Yet she feels that

the longer it continues in office

the sooner it will be 'exposed'

before the public. Her reported

belief is that with the passage of

time, the contradictions within

the party on the one hand, and

the contradictions between the

party and its allies on the other.

will come to the fore. "We have

only to wait to pick up pieces."

says the Congress leaders who

represent her voice. Some of

them even recall that former

Prime Minister Narasimha Rao

wanted to follow the same line

and allow the BJP government

to continue beyond the 13 days

when it fell. He too thought the

functioning of the BJP govern-

ment would falsify the impres-

sion that given a chance

She has no love lost for the

rangement.

however, believes that to ban student politics or not to ban that can't be a question in a society that claims to be a democratic one. As the readers of this column may recall, this author also opposes ban on CBAs and trade unions on the same

ground. A democratic society simply does not have such an option it has to live with the chaos and discords, and orchestrate its

tem, than in a democracy. If students and trade unions can somehow be banned the job of ruling would be much easier two of the most militant and most powerful groups of the society would lose their voice in the operation of the state-craft. There would be no street agitation as the other forces of the society — the bureaucracy, the military, the business community — simply cannot afford to

by CAF Dowlah

way through the morass so that slowly but surely a stable political system can emerge some day in which everybody, including the students and labourers, will bow their heads to the rule

The position of the ruling party on banning trade unions and student politics is easy to understand. Like any body familiar with the operation of a state-craft, they know that it is always easier to rule in an authoritarian or dictatorial sys-

be that militant. And then, if the press can be silenced on some pretexts, the game of ruling the country would be a fun of the century.

There can be no additional advantage with the banning of student politics in the country except creating a honey-mooning environment for the rulers. This writer, therefore, believes that, like the problems with the trade unions and CBAs, the solution of the problem with the student politics lies with

cleansing it, not with banning it A government, having guts and honest commitments to enforce laws of the land, should pick up all students involved in anti-social, anti-educational and other untoward activities, and place them at the disposal of the country's judicial system.

For some reason or other, this is a much difficult job to do in the country than banning the student politics altogether. After all, how can you bring a student before a judge knowing fully well that you supplied him the gun and the license to abuse it? How can you put a student before a trial knowing fully well that it is your money and your backing that provoked him to commit the crime that he has been charged for? How do you put a student on trial knowing fully well that he knows the secrets of your successes and triumphs, your holdings and properties, your appointment and promotion, and your killings and riggings?

The university administrations are equally incapable of handling the students. Key positions in the universities are routinely filled up with persons actively involved in politics. How can a Vice-Chancellor, having total commitment to a political party, convince the students that he is acting neu-

which will end before long.

trally? How can the students belonging to other camps accept his integrity knowing fully well that he is in the hands of those who had put him in that coveted position? How can one believe that the VC is not communicating to the students what he has been asked to communicate by others that he has to listen to? No wonder, under the existing system, the institution of VC lost its credibility almost in to

Therefore, problems are everywhere, diseases are all over the body. The misdeeds of the students or the trade unions are not any bigger, any nastier than those of other segments of the society. Only difference is that the misdeeds or crimes of the other segments of the society are less known or less exposed. Moreover, none should forget that the students and labourers are not aliens in this land, they are parts of this society and their rights are protected by the Constitution of the country as is everybody else's.

Banning student politics or trade unions will not ensure endless flow of milk and honey in the streets. This will only pave the way for an authoritarian or dictatorial rule in the country. Today you ban student politics or trade unions, tomorrow you will kill the freedom of the press. Nothing can be expected from a society that silences these three forces — their freedom is indispensable for a society that claims faith in democratic development.

Can BJP Government Turn a New Leaf ...?

Hopes are beginning to turn sour. If government continues to function as is doing presently, its image will be in tatters soon. That may well be the time when Sonia Gandhi or some other persons in the opposition will strike.

LL that has happened to A the Indian politics in the A last couple of months is the change which has come about in the framing of questions. Earlier, it was whether the BJP-led coalition would last; now, it is how long will it last? The party leaders themselves do not know the answer. In fact, none does. But every one is convinced that the government will not survive for long. It must be so because President K R Narayanan, before going on a 11-day-long tour to Latin American countries, talked to different political parties to assure himself that there would be no crisis in his absence.

However, the main reason why the Atal Behari Vajpayee government has not fallen so far is the absence of an alternative. No party. especially Congress, which is the second largest, is yet interested inpulling the government down. It is not that the Congress leaders lack ambition. The fact is that they are helpless. Congress president Sonia Gandhi is presently opposed to the overthrow of the government. And it is her writ which runs in the

"Our saviour is Sonia Gandhi," say some top BJP leaders unashamedly. They realise that but for her firm 'no', the Vajpayee government would have been history by this time. Several ministers who, otherwise hate Sonia Gandhi, privately admit that she is their best bet. "Until she gives green signal, nothing will happen," the BJP leadership says with re-

would do well. But the Congress party reportedly forced him to Maharashtra former chief support the United Front govminister Sharad Pawar, who did well in the Lok Sabha polls.

ernment. The BJP and its allies, whatever their rhetoric, realise that their strength is the failure of others to combine. And they are in the know of the attempts made to cobble a combination. For example, former Prime Minister Chandrashekhar was the first to throw his hat in the ring. But the hat just stayed there because no support was forthcoming. He was not ac-

ministership. The UF believes that its is a natural choice because Congress is not acceptable to some of the Front's constituents. However, it is conceded that Congress should be part of the government if and when it is formed. Congress, on the other hand, feels that it supported the front last time and now it is the turn of the party to step in and that the UF should support it. At one time, the Communists were in favour of a Congress-led coalition. But they have changed their stand

This is a mere wishful thinking, similar to the one indulged into before she became Congress president. Very few thought that she would occupy the office. But she crossed the Laxman rekha to head the

party. Not only that, she also came to occupy the position of the chairperson of Congress parliamentary party. However deserving Sharad Pawar may be, it is she who gifted him the leadership of the parliamentary party in the Lok Sabha. Congress had authorised her to

> Maybe, Sonia is trying to gain time. She may be wanting to carry on with Sharad Pawar till she is sure in her mind that she will be acceptable to the country. Were she to push out the government now, she knows she would be playing into the hands of the BJP, which may whip up the slogan: Ram versus

nominate the leader.

Therefore, for the time being, she is busy organising her party and the way she is going about it shows that she wants her own trusted people at key positions, even at the expense of tried Congressmen like Madhavrao Scindia. Once she is ready she will challenge the government. This may be some time around the Budget session in February next. By then the non-performance of the BJPled government would also have

been proved to the people who wanted to give it a chance.

The point for the BJP to worry is that its stock is rapidly going down. Vajpayee's image is also taking a beating. He is not even heard saying anything decisive, much less doing it. People have already nick-named him as Mouni Baba (a saint who keeps silent). The government has nothing to show to its credit. At least it should be implementing the National Agenda, which it released with flourish some weeks ago.

The media is till soft towards the BJP. If dissensions and demands - in the party and among its allies do not lessen, a wide and vehement criticism will begin. The government has to perform to silence its critics. Come to think of it, the failure or success is dependent on Vajpayee. Too many expectations are pinned on him. It will be too disappointing if he fails. The stability factor, which the BJP raised during the hustings, does not bother people. But their betterment does. They expect employment to go up and prices to go down. Can the government turn a new leaf in the country?

Hopes are beginning to turn sour. If government continues to function as is doing presently, its image will be in tatters soon. That may well be the time when Sonia Gandhi or some other persons in the opposition, will strike. Then there will be no tears shed over the demise of the BJP-led coalition. Even if the BJP were to revert to the Hindutva stand then, there would not be many takers.

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

ceptable. The Janata Dal and the communists were not willing to overlook his perfidy in 1990 when he spilt the Dal and became prime minister with the support of Congress for 40 days. No one else is available. In fact, the one refrain at the meeting of every opposition party is how unprepared each one of them is if the BJP-led government falls tomorrow.

The BJP is banking on it. It sees the opposition parties divided. There is a tug of war between Congress and the United Front on the question of prime

after Sonia Gandhi has become Congress president.

They are right because the Sonia factor will come in handy to the BJP. The latter is convinced that no political party will accept her as prime minister because of her foreign background. In the Congress party itself, there is a similar feeling. And the Congressmen trust that when the time comes, she will herself refuse to become prime minister. There are some senior Congress leaders who sincerely believe that she is a passing phenomenon'.

Zia is a serious point to ponder.

parties: can they not spare their

trade unions for one day at least

to give them a chance to cele-

brate May Day of their own?

They will certainly argue that

they did not organise those

meetings and that these were

organised by trade unions. One

can answer that everybody

knows it is all the same, has no

My question to the political

such programmes, no efforts have been taken for a long time to break the 'economic isolation' of women, especially in

the rural poor communities. Women involvement in income generation programmes supplements income thereby supporting the family (it adds extra support to the family). It has been observed that males are the main earners in the family. Women's contributions add to men's income. Women's own earnings and contribution to the family have strengthened their role in the family deci

sion-making process. Many cases can be cited from

ation programmes of ASA, Grameen Bank, BRAC etc., in this regard. Studies show that the women participation in credit programmes for income generation has brought about a change in the domestic environment, mode of family behaviour and overall family culture. It has influenced their standard of living. Sometimes it is found that the rural women have developed their leadership and management skill which expedite their participation in the decision making process in

the family and in society.

A K M Aminur Rashid the experience of income gener-

When students were students

Sir, In the '50s and the early '60s, students, by and large, were admired by all sections of people for their decent attitude and demeanor towards others in the society. Common people used to listen to them and their words. Many of us may remember, the cordial way employees used to behave, regard and treat a student, in buses/trains/ launches/steamers/cinema halls/canteens restaurants. But what has gone wrong now with students or

those common people? We see an altogether different picture today. When an uncouth hardened criminal of rape and gruesome murder is being taken in police custody in completely dressed manner. whereas, the other day, we saw policemen arrested some students, disrobed them and dragged them in bare chest and made them seated, in open and under blazing sun. Their nature of crime and legal requirement behind such disrobing and

not clear. I think, to maintain someone's own personal dignity also falls under human right. Some students of the '50s and the '60s. or before, may now still be active and few may have retired, but yet watching this drama. While others might have left this world and could not witness this show.

made them seated that way, is

Luckily, one of the students is still in the helm the Republic - our President. I don't know how he thought of this. Was this, double standard, directed from the authority? If not, then I hope, someone in this Republic would answer to the public.

Though all students are not saints, but I feel, yet student community can build the lost image by activities, not under the umbrella or banner and benefits of party politics. I hope people in the helm would save this nation by keeping students as students only, and not pawns of their selfish interests.

A R Choudhury Uttara, Dhaka

Punishment in public

Sir, the letter of Mr Arbab Quadri published in the DS (27.4.98) was very timely indeed. The best way open to us is to legally kill the "perverts" in our society without showing any mercy. In the name of fundamental human rights we have been keeping many provisions to protect the evil-doers.

Let us hope that the alleged murderer Shahid is punished for killing the innocent girl within a short period of time in public. The Islamic law should be enforced for the safety and security of women in this part of the world.

Abul Ashraf Noor Uttara, Dhaka

Where was the programme?

Sir, The historic 'May Day' was observed world-wide in cluding Bangladesh with due solemnity. Bangladesh Television announced special programme to mark the significance of the day and they were continually announcing about their special programmes in all the news bulletins.

But we could not watch even a single special programme on the TV. The national dailies also did not show any programme of the day in their TV Guides. However, what we watched was the description of how the ruling party and their front organisations celebrated the day. So, where when and what were the special (!) programmes?

Md Babul Akter (Bablu) Deptt of Mass Communication & Journalism MA (Final Year). Dhaka Uni-

Good, now we need steps...

Sir, Recently the Bhorer Kogoj arranged a round-table discussion on Rape and Repression on Women. Women activists and editors participated in the discussion, and indeed it was a very good initiative to make a

constructive plan to stop

We are fed up with the increase in repression on women and children across the country. These crimes are poisoning the society, and perfectly showing the plight of law and order. So the government should take immediate steps to prevent

Mostafa Sohel Banani, Dhaka-1213

Death of Partho

Sir, Who will make up the irreparable loss that we met with the death of a promising journalist Partho Protim Acharjya? The cadre politics of DU has already snatched away 61 brilliant lives. And only for this dirty politics, our 'Oriental Oxford' couldn't place its name in the list of 50 top universities of South Asia. Our present ruling government Awami League now may offer money to Partho's family, but is that all? Would this cash amount bring back smiles on his parents' face?

I don't like to tell anything about BNP. Its founder, late President Ziaur Rahman himself started this tradition of student politics. Our present President Shahabuddin Ahmed once passed the idea of banning of political activities in educational institutions but I don't know for which reason no implementation is possible in this

Arun Kumar Dept of English, DU

May Day for whom?

Sir. The May Day is for

whom? For trade unions or for the political parties? The last May Day celebration in Dhaka exposed once again that the trade unions here are very much partisan. The trade unions actually abandon their own programmes of May Day celebration to give more time to hear the speech of political leaders. How the May Day rally is relevant with portraits of Khaleda, Hasina, Ershad and

substance in the logic. Ahmed Helal Dhaka

Women in income generating process

Sir, Bangladesh, after its independence, is marked with the initiation of non-government development efforts at the rural level. From the late '80s specialised programmes on income generation have gained attention and have been the major focus of development efforts. Induced by the success of the Grameen Bank, ASA, BRAC and other pioneers of lending to the poor, increasingly development efforts have adopted microcredit as a core programme for

poverty alleviation. Now almost half of the population living below poverty line is covered by income generation programmes. And the most remarkable feature is that women are the major (more than 98%) partners in these programmes. In spite of being half of the total population, women possess a very low status due to weak financial/income base in comparison to their male counter-

It is said that the right way to alleviate poverty as well as social injustice and oppression is to raise the income level with participation of the women in the family, as they are considered to be the most deprived section both at the society and family level. Actually income generation is a "multi-dimensional aspect to improve the socio-economic status of the grassroots communities. Economic emancipation helps reduce dependency to a great extent." Before the initiation of

What Have We Got to Offer Our Children? by Shaheda Hassan

(a concerned mother of two daughters)

So many guards So much protection Could not save the tender life of dear Shazneen To the dad, she reached out... To the mom she cried. Only separated by a ceiling The mournful cry could not be heard. So many guards So much protection Could not save her tender life. What assurance can we give our children? What security? What fate? It is only a flimsy thread That snaps away... And takes our children from us. O God! Can it be any more Hellish and painful Than for a father to acknowledge Yes, my fifteen years' was raped and murdered Yes.... Raped and Murdered What is this jungle we live in? Or is it a nightmare? Are we human or only half? Is it true when someone says That the world will end in the year 2000? What have we got to offer To our children In the year 2000? Rape, murder and be raped again? Oh! So much for security! Oh! So much for guards!

Are we really able to

The lives of our babies?

(Written on the night of April 25, 1998)

PROTECT