

Sorry, This is Unacceptable

With temperatures hovering around 35 and shooting at times to 40 and beyond, the absence of power has proved the second best leveller after death hitting everyone of the 120 million Bangladesh citizens directly with the taste of being stewed in one's own juice. The power-starved wheels of our industry and pumps of own irrigation are going to deeply dent manufactures as well farm produces that will prolong the suffering beyond the sweltering days.

But the government must know that sweating people are getting up at midnight and cursing it from heart. Night after night and often many times a night.

We have been repeatedly told over the last two years that the present power crisis is due to the inaction of the BNP government. But can we ask today what specific actions have this government taken to solve this problem? We are being told that the acute power crisis resulting in unbearable load-shedding is going to be solved very soon. This also we have been hearing for the last two years. But the situation went from bad to worse. We do not believe in these vague assurances anymore. We want a clear picture from the government — phase wise — about how and when our power situation will return to anything resembling normalcy.

We would like to remind the government that the power crisis is crippling the economy. Industries in some areas stay closed for the greater part of the day causing production to fall to alarming levels. The most critical blow is being dealt to the prospect of attracting foreign investment. Let us have no doubt in our minds that unless the power situation improves we will not have foreigners coming to Bangladesh to invest.

It cannot be that the government is sleeping out the problem. But can it be either true that a government determined to do something, cannot even show a semblance of it in two years? Frugality was not what people wanted of the government in regard to augmenting power generation and distribution by as much as 25 per cent. For only then the tottering plants could be given long furloughs for overhauling and putting to more dependable use than so far.

Our national situation, specially power, is direly in need of dynamism. You give it or your political prospects must start dimming.

The BUET Reprieve

By virtue of its internal dynamics facilitated by the Chancellor's hands-off approach Bangladesh University of Engineering & Technology is close to resuming normal academic life. The BUET Teachers' Association suspended day before yesterday its work-abstention programme launched since May 5 in response to appeals made by Vice Chancellor Dr Iqbal Mahmud. Earlier on June 2 the officers of the administrative wing had resumed their duties. So the stage looks set for the classes to begin, subject to adjustment in the academic calendar necessitated by 35 days of regrettable shut-down. Also the convenience of 30 per cent students who had left Dhaka for their hometowns will have to be taken into account. Aside from these nitty-gritties of a none-too-easy rejuvenation exercise, the fate of 13 architecture teachers who had resigned will have to be decided in a positive way if that faculty is to pulsate with life again.

Thus the arrangement worked out by the VC in cooperation with the BUET Teachers' Association is a stop-gap one and not a complete recipe for enduring normalcy.

The positive elements in the scenarios are there for anyone see through — VC Dr Iqbal Mahmud's resignation has not been accepted by the Chancellor and, he in turn, has not entertained the resignation letters submitted by the 70 teachers. There is also a decision on the admission test issue concerning the Faculty of Architecture which had triggered the whole crisis in the first place. A note of understanding is supposed to have been struck as well on the matter relating to the resignation of 13 architecture teachers. All of this seemed to have floundered on the rock of will assertions and procedural see-saws.

The positive elements will have to be built upon so that a congenial academic atmosphere can be restored to the BUET. There, in an astounding departure from track-record, a one-year-plus sessions jam stares everybody in the face.

Bon Voyage World Cup'98

The world will be in a trance for over a month from today. A trance of excitement, delirious delight and haunting heartbreaks as the most involving and stirring spectacle on earth — World Cup of football kicks off at Paris' Stade de France.

Every World Cup is an unfolding of a new tale — whole new range of unfulfilled promises, predictions, achievements of excellence. No two quadrennial meets of the best footballing countries are same. Every arrangement is an improvement on the previous one.

World Cup'98 too is a long way from the preceding event in the U.S.A in its organizational expanse and glitz, in its share of media attention. A record 32 teams, expected to be watched by 3.8 billion television spectators, are taking part in this year's carnival. Although injuries have made early inroads to account for crowd pulling name like Brazil's Romario and cut short the possibility of the fullest exhibition of an amazing attacker in the form of Dutchman Bergkamp, the fiesta still promises to be fascinating showcase of skills of all the supernovas of world football. Led by the redoubtable Ronaldo, the constellation looks a full body of dazzling stars. Look anywhere you like there is a man at every corner with a promise to play a ripple: Zidane, Del Piero, Battistuta, Maldini, Zamorano, are all capable of acts that may shape the future of this meet. While the world is agog with expectation to see if the Latin flamboyance and skill makes light of European physical strength and mental discipline to take the Cup across the Atlantic for the first time since 1958 — the time when the world knew a genius called Pele as Brazil bagged the trophy a second time in a row — the football crazy Asians keep our fingers crossed in the hope to witness a rise in the fortune of the continental representation. But it is the spirit of the game which outweighs every other strand of devotion and interest. It is too large to be boxed in continental and regional considerations. And rightly so.

Let the eternal prayer: may the best team win, win in France again.

Campus Politics and National Insecurity

by Dr Abul Kalam

The public universities in the country as centres of higher learning and research have to regain their traditional role for grooming leadership in the various sectors of governance of the country.

SECURITY is one of the few concepts perpetually related to the situations of threats or perceptions of insecurity. The traditional security concerns had been state-centric, but these concerns have been changing in terms of dimensions and levels, touching as well aspects which normally feature as 'low politics', with an extended security concern at the individual or community level. The pattern of campus politics in the country leaves no one secure. Individuals who live in, and move around, the campuses or the university community, and may in the long run even imperil the security of the nation. Hence there is a call for "prohibitory action against student politics".

Indeed, the make-up and manifestations of campus politics in Bangladesh have been of such an intensity and divided nature in recent years that it places both the security of people and that of the nation in jeopardy. And it is President, the conscientious Chancellor of many of the country's universities, has been the most outspoken in expressing the nation's sense of disgust and outrage against the "malignant nature" of campus politics, the magnitude of violence in most of the educational institutions and the involvement of the political parties and the teachers in them. What seems most alarming is not the most recent recrudescence of violence at Dhaka University, that has been endemic anyway, but the stalemated nature of the teachers' politics at the BUET, often seen as the last outpost of academic excellence in the country. This, together with the terrorist recurrence at the DU and the divisive nature of the teachers' politics, led the President to pique at both the politicians and the teachers for violence at the universities.

Recent Eruption

The outburst of violence at the DU Arts Building campus few weeks back was claimed to be linked to an *ouma* of an admission-seeking girl student, reportedly a relative of a 'student leader'. The *ouma* of the girl was alleged to have been pulled off by a student adversary. The result was a chain of events leading to a shooting episode involving the two main student front organisations — contending for dominance in the campus — and killing of a partisan ex-student-cum-journalist, and subsequently the 'takeover' of the four student dormitories — which were the last bastion of the main oppo-

sition party — by the government-backed student body.

The DU community took time to regain their awareness and to reflect on the whole chain of events. Beyond the routine affair of a bereavement in a situation like the loss of a mortal sibling, no body seemed interested in diagnosing the whole episode in its true perspective. Rather the arrogant cadre leadership of the students, the self-proclaimed guardians of law, seemed to have their supporters even among the teachers who asserted that a culprit trying to dishonour a girl student needs to be handled directly by the armed cadre, rather than by the government's law and order agents present only a few yards away or even by the university administration, the Vice-Chancellor or the Proctor, under the existing proctorial law. Does it represent a renewal of their trust in the administration of justice by an elected government or a loss of confidence in the fairness of the university administration?

About the loss of a precious life, one may ask: why a youngman had to continue his studentship much beyond the expected period of four years, and then take up the role of a 'general' in an unassuming cause, despite being warned repeatedly by his own comrades around him about the dangers involved?

The question also arises, why a working professional in a conscientious job, the son of a college principal, a husband — promise-bound to his loving wife never to be separated — and a prospective father, was turned into the kind of role playing in which he had to give his life for a cause which can only provoke a sense of disgust? His dream to be both a leader at the party and DUCSU levels (*The Sangbad*, 9 May 1998) led him to the temptation to hang around the campus and was to invite a tragic end to his precious life and calamity for the family. The last rite for him of a cash tribute of Tk 50,000 from the government (carried by the Education Minister himself for his expecting wife), seems a cruel joke for a life that was so much more up-and-coming.

The Malaise

At Dhaka University, the well-meaning Vice-Chancellor from the very beginning has shown his sincerity in restor-

ing normalcy, but his efforts reportedly has come under serious strain from a segment of the government-backed student front and from his own group of teachers who are out to discredit his image (*The Sangbad*, 3 May 1998). The appointment of two party stalwarts as Provosts in the previously JCD-controlled student dormitories where the sitting provosts have resigned rather than yield to the pressure for issuing ID cards to the outside armed cadres can hardly help alleviate the situation in the long run. The "hull" indeed proved to be deceptive: the eruption this time is an "intra-party" affair, the attack and capture of a dormitory in the with no adversary involvement and no *ouma* affair.

At the national level when the opposition took up the campus disease in the *Jatiya Sangsad* after the *ouma* affair, the government initially seemed least interested to talk about it, but when it did talk there were very strong doses of antibiotics offered without any diagnosis of the disease, which the patients can be least interested to swallow. The very idea of banning student politics or "to shoot at sight" cannot be the language of a democrat and can rarely be a solution in a democratic setting. When the President spoke candidly against student politics his whole spirit must have been to raise consciousness against the escalating trend of violence in the campuses where both the politicians and the teachers may perhaps have a hand. The students had, after all, a glorious tradition since 1948 in the creation of this country and re-making of its history since 1971.

Society, in particular the academia and the politicians have to take a lot of blame for their more recent degeneration. Having served the country in the very top positions more than once and steered the nation's course from crisis to crisis, the perceptive President could hardly miss the point. The order and ordinances meant to regulate the affairs of the universities initiated about a quarter of a century ago in the backdrop of anti-Pakistani struggle need urgent renovation and updating. The teaching community can, and should be allowed to retain, much of their autonomy; but it is also time for their self-examination. In

their self-reflection they should ask whether their past performances are consistent with their assignments or whether their aspirations and activities have crossed the internal limits involving their students or have interloped too much into the realm of national politics. There seems little doubt that a lot of teachers do maintain liaison with cadre pattern of student politics, and still worse have direct affiliation with the political leadership that patronizes the kind of 'student politics' prevailing in the campuses. Here one may suggest a plausible, causal link in the crisis at both the DU and the BUET.

Similarly, it is not proper now for our politicians and the political parties to delink themselves from the current pattern of student politics? The student community portrayed the role of the "nationalist vanguard" during the entire Pakistani period, a role which the politicians were supposed to have played against alien dictation, exploitation and impositions. The students have also played a similarly courageous role against an internal autocratic regime. But there are limits to their role perception in the campuses of a free country in a democratic setting when thousands of jobless graduates are roaming around. The nation needs, not armed student cadres working as political surrogates but politically alert qualified professionals committed to the formidable task of nation-building. There is also no longer any need to have immature recruits into the arena of the country's volatile politics. What is needed in every sector of national life and governance is mature leadership in order to ensure Bangladesh a secured future. For this the younger generation needs both skill development and preparation through cumulative experiences. However, posterity will not forgive us if the issue is just left for an aberrant process of evolution and allow the problem to drag on like this. Both the politicians and the academia have roles to play.

The Remedies

Sheikh Hasina has to play the catalytic role. She must realize there has been a qualitative degeneration in the pattern of student politics. As the post-Cold War vision would suggest,

the agenda of nation-state has to be consolidation of democracy and ensuring sustainable, secured future for the nation. Sheikh Hasina has, as she fondly says, "fought for the people's voting rights". She is now elected to perform: fight for fulfilling their positive security aspirations i. e. eradicate poverty and illiteracy, ensure health and housing, cleaner air and water, accountability and access to information etc.

Begum Khaleda Zia certainly has no special reason to patronize the kind of student politics that is currently 'popular'; rather she had built her image through an inexorable leadership attribute in the struggle against autocracy and proved her success in the first three years as Prime Minister, when she was allowed to work without much duress.

In the current scenario of politics, one can hardly suggest that the leadership on either side of the political spectrum would sit across a table and come to a consensus on the issue. Yet politics itself is an interactive process and it has its dynamism; given the right stimuli it cannot but create a positive response and help build a momentum. The Prime Minister as the elected leader may unilaterally delink her party from the ruling party's student front, and the teaching community should follow their Vice-Chancellor and delink themselves from their formal association with the country's political parties. That would automatically create a moral pressure on the political opposition and their campus adherents to reciprocate and respond accordingly.

Secondly, it may not be necessary to impose a clampdown on student politics as such; for that may perhaps be misconstrued in a democratic setting, but what can and should be done is to impose ban on students' procession and meetings in and around the academic buildings. The student bodies at DU may still have their meetings in TSC area, near DUCSU Bhaban and in the Mall, but the class rooms be left undisturbed.

Linked to the above is a third point: there is already a sort of moratorium-in-place on DU student politics, with no election for DUCSU and Hall Union bodies for nearly three-quarters of a decade now, a *de facto* moratorium that may indeed be

allowed to continue until a relatively stable and healthy environment is restored in the campus. Meanwhile extra-curricular activities may be encouraged among the students through organizing Department/Institute based associations — elected from each class under the direct supervision of the course teachers — bodies which performed quite useful functions in the 1960s and in which extraneous elements/cadres would have no influence.

Fourthly, since the student dormitories are the main source of insecurity in the campuses, the Hall administration must be streamlined and be made non-partisan. The most amazing thing is that the cadres are treated as guests, get a percentage from the contractors and free meals in the Hall canteen! If discipline in the Halls cannot be restored, even with the help of the police and the BDR, they may simply be privatized on a commercial basis, within the permissible pattern of a market economy era, with certain percentages of seats being reserved for the poor but meritorious students.

Finally, the laws regulating the university, in particular the 1973 order, should be repealed in consultation with the teachers. Elections, too much of it, and academic excellence do not go hand in hand. In a swiftly changing era when the world is approaching a new millennium Bangladesh university community have to be forward-looking; they must make themselves model for the rest of the society. This means that they must be accountable and make their performance as transparent as possible. Specifically, the election criteria in the appointment of the university hierarchy has to change in favour of selection through advertisement and search criteria; similarly, power of election process has to be curtailed in the choice of teaching positions in favour of specialist opinion and qualitative judgement.

The public universities in the country as centres of higher learning and research have to regain their traditional role for grooming leadership in the various sectors of governance of the country. To this end and to ensure a secured future for the coming generations, the students, the politicians and the academia — all have to work together, in their differing ways but dedicated to a common cause. The alternative is a grim, insecure future for the nation.

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The PM's Secretariat

The people have great expectations in the PM, he can only become great when he practices economy in making their expectations come true.

AS I SEE IT

Ikram Sehgal writes from Karachi

Deputy Secretaries on deputation from each of the Provinces and each important Ministry i.e. Ministries of Defence, Foreign Affairs, Finance, Commerce, Interior, Communications, Water and Power, Information, with one Joint Secretary and three Deputy Secretaries looking collectively after the other Ministries.

The ISI and IB should provide four equivalent rank officers each. These people will be divided for work in 8-hour shifts i.e. 8:30 am to 4:30 pm, 4:30 pm to 12:30 am and 12:30 am to 8:30 am. The Joint Secretaries will necessarily work in the morning shift with one PA and one Steno each, while one each of the Deputy Secretaries in the afternoon and night shifts, one Deputy Secretary in reserve to provide relief in case of sickness, holidays, etc. Each shift will have direct access to the CCR to be manned by the Armed Forces with a person of not less than the rank of a Lt. Col as in charge of the CCR with three Majors and ancillary staff to maintain maps and communications to assist him. At the same time other than the inherent CCR manning staff there will thus be about 15-18 personnel at the most in close proximity of the CCR who can coordinate not only what the PM may require from their parent Ministries but also be available to the PM to give him an immediate briefing concerning their own Ministries whether in his own office or the CCR.

This job will include preparation of "Daily Situation Reports" as to the extraordinary events in their domain of work as well as the progress in their own particular Ministries for various schemes/projects. The night shift will be responsible for a draft of the Daily Situation Report, which will be finalised not later than 9:00 am every day (i.e. the morning

shift). At the same time, the Provinces and the Ministries would know when to contact the CCR to send information as and when required. With computers and adequate communications, the CCR set-up gives the PM necessary command and control while streamlining procedures and operations. It reduces personnel drastically while enhancing efficiency.

The whole PCC set-up can then be housed in a modular-type building with the CCR in the middle and each ministerial entity having a suite of two/three rooms of about a 1000-1200 sq ft each including a moderate-sized cubicle for the Minister whenever he is visiting the PM House. There can be an attached cafeteria for meals and at least 3-4 small conference rooms that can also function as private dining rooms if some guests need to be given meals, which (in any case) should be a rare occasion. There is no need for Peons (or Naib Qasids in exalted language), give each office Suite an electric tea kettle, a coffee percolator, etc and let them make Tea/coffee themselves. The three shifts together will have a maximum of 80-100 people (of all ranks), the 30-35 personnel in each shift will be work-oriented.

I had once recommended that Asif Zardari's famous stables in the PM House be converted into a PCC of about 20000 sq ft, costing (even at Rs 1000 per sq ft) not more than Rs 20 million. Consider even the funds presently

allocated for daily maintenance and you can appreciate the difference. The maintenance should not be more than Rs 2-3 million per month including cost of electricity, telephones, etc. Moreover except for the formal area in the PM's House, the funny courier uniforms should be dispensed with, they are symbolic of the luxury of imperial rule.

With all due respects the present functioning of the PM's Secretariat is the main reason for the inefficiency and corruption in government. Instead of looking at the Ministries for getting the work done, everyone looks at the PM's Secretariat, who in turn have become a sort of super-government as each bureaucrat posted therein seeks to increase his own clout and in that expand his own little empire. The result was that we had to have that monstrosity next to the Supreme Court so as to house the small army. Each small bureaucrat in the PM's Secretariat is a petty tyrant since he just has to use the magic words of the PM's Secretariat to bully/coerce Ministries to toe his line, most of the time to do such bidding which may not be related to PM's actual desires. May I ask the PM a direct question? As a private sector person, would he have a commensurate unwieldy organisation to run Ittefaq Corporate HQ?

Even one-tenth the size would still be too many! The main reason his Ministries do not function is because their work has been usurped by the

PM's Secretariat in an imperious, haphazard and uncoordinated manner. The essence of good management is good information and coordination backed by good communication. The leaner the staff the more focussed on their actual work. One can never stop being amazed by the fact that government does not begin functioning till well after 9:00 am ceases to function at 4:00 pm when any country requires a 24-hour vigil mechanism at far less the cost than what we are incurring today. There is no concept of institutionalised crisis management of any kind.

Well done, Mr PM, for moving the staff out of the PM's Secretariat, move them now to their parent Ministries so that they can actually be productive for the government you have been mandated by the people to run.

Well done, for changing the Mercedes for a Toyota, now

Jump the queue everyone below the rank of Federal Secretary in a Suzuki. You might like to see how brother Shahnaz runs his domain in Punjab, the largest province, with a few Staff Officers in constant touch with the Ministries to ensure they are doing their job of running the machinery of government efficiently. The PCC needed by you has to be a combination information cell, crisis management HQ and an electric prod to keep things moving. Unless you dismantle the bloated PM's Secretariat and put together a lean, efficient core of management that is hands-on 24 hours a day, the symbolic gesture you made for austerity on May 28 to meet the anticipated sanctions will become another symbol in frustration at big government doing not much at the present and capable of doing not much in the future. The people have great expectations in you, you can only become great when you practice economy in making their expectations come true.

Art Buchwald's COLUMN

A \$6 Billion Smoke

THE tobacco companies settled with the state of Minnesota for \$6 billion. This sounds like a lot of money until you realize you couldn't even buy the Chrysler Corporation for that. This was the third billion dollar tobacco settlement made with a state. Texas and Florida are being paid off with even larger sums. So the question arises, how will they pay for it when the tobacco companies settle with the rest of the 47 states at an average of \$6 billion each? Like it or not, it will cost the companies \$282 billion, which, as everyone knows, is not chopped liver. I asked a tobacco executive how he and other companies were going to raise \$282 billion. He replied, "Have you ever heard of the People's Republic of China?"

"Is that where you hope to get the money?" "There are more than a billion people in China. If every man, woman and child buy just one pack of cigarettes a year, we'll be in clover."

"Then there are no rules against smoking in China?" "On the contrary. The government would rather have its people smoke than produce more than one child. We're all set to go. The Chinese haven't had much advertising in the past, so we're plastering the Great Wall from one end to the other with the Marlboro Man."

"What about Joe Camel?" "We're taking out TV spots on the Tibetan network, and we're going to bring the Virginia Slims tennis tournament to Mongolia. We've got all the bases covered."

"Aren't you concerned that the Chinese government will have smoking and no-smoking areas for student political demonstrations?"

"No, unlike America, the Chinese believe in free choice."

"Suppose the Chinese don't smoke as much as you want them to?"

"Have you ever heard of the Eastern Bloc?"

"You mean Poland, Hungary and Romania?"

"We figure whatever they smoke will pay for whatever we're fined in New York and California."

"How will the Chinese pay for the cigarettes?"

"By selling the Americans ashtrays."

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To the Editor...

Don't leave any place unfilled!

Sir, We have seen what Rajuk and DCC have done to the green or open space over the past four or five years. They have filled up the lakes and low-lying areas of the city and its surrounding areas giving excuse of the high-ups of the society. As a regulative body i. e. Rajuk or DCC — if their hands are tight, then my suggestion is why spare the Ramna Park or the Suhrawardy Uddyan? Please allot plot to the high-ups as early as possible. Toufik Al Mumin B-4/3, Bally Square Dhaka

Are we that helpless?

Sir, Where we were, where we are and where we are going day by day? It's a question to myself

as well as to the nation. Nowadays rapes of minor girls and teenagers have crossed the believable limits. This type of vicious acts are increasing alarmingly. School and college going female students are now frightened to go to their respective institutions alone, especially those who are good looking. A group of insane Romios vex them as well as illogically propose them refusing which are the results of merciless offences like rape and acid throwing.

Mamun Ali Khan BBA (Hons) Programme Asian University of Bangladesh Dhaka-1230

Let wisdom, not vanity

Sir, This is a reflection on Mr Meer M. Ali's reflection

(26/5/98) on Dr Azadur Rahman's earlier letter, both printed in the DS. Mr Meer M Ali of BUET, in a diabolical play of words, seems very much to object to the world 'obey' and vehemently advocates the world 'follow' in its stead. It is indeed a mystery to me whether in actual fact there is much of a difference between the two. If by 'follow' one will in action 'obey' and vice versa, where's the controversy? To have a false sense of well-being just by saying that I will not emulate the colonial era! seems to be steeping in hypocrisy. And if it seems out of fashion to 'obey', how can one run any institution? Such a statement spells of sheer irresponsibility.

Shafiqul Kader, 2/23 Mugdipara, Dhaka

Whither BBC?

Sir, I would like to add my voice to the chorus of dismay at the continued absence of BBC programmes from BTV's programme schedule. BBC is a highly respected news source. Apart from that, it also features fascinating documentary and investigative programmes such as Panorama, Assignment, Horizon, Top Gear etc.

It also enable us to pick up the correct pronunciation of English words. So why has BBC been omitted? This is not consistent with this government's stated goal of transparency. The authorities should reverse this unpopular decision. Far from stopping transmission, we would like BBC to be aired from 7 am to 3 pm. Syed Zahirul Akmal Sylhet Medical College Sylhet