

Ban on Student Politics

This is for the first time that university teachers in a large body, one hundred of JU teachers to be precise, have come forward taking an unambiguous public stance on student politics. Echoing the President's recent call for a 10-year moratorium on student politics they have formally declared this support for it urging that effective measures be taken to put it in place. Making a distinction between student activism in support of political parties and student politics that is internalised and purely institution-oriented — divorced from any links with national political parties — the teachers said they would not mind to see latter kind of 'politics' on the campus.

The print media by and large has already been forthcoming about President Shahabuddin's ringing calls for placing a ban on student politics reinforced by the political parties' failure to rid themselves of their student fronts and vice versa, despite the entreaties galore from all quarters. The guardians of students have been generally supportive of the President's concerns over political rectitude on the campus and his calls for a moratorium on student politics. Despite such overwhelming media and public endorsement of the moral position to exorcise vicious politics from the campus, there has been a missing link of a most vital component of the university population — the teachers — choosing to remain inarticulate about it. Now that Jahangirnagar University teachers have spoken, the teachers of other universities and important educational institutions must speak out too.

They are the cream of the society, leaders of education, guardians of the students and persons highly knowledgeable in the in's and out's of campus politics and outside environment. Last but not the least, the teachers are 'political animals', and so too are students, both highly perceptive of and keen on whatever is happening in the national political arena and having their opinions on it. For reasons of their intimate understanding of the students' sensibilities and requirements the teaching community is best placed to provide us guidance in this matter. They must first discuss the pros and cons of the proposed 10-year moratorium, come to a consensus on the definition of student politics that may be permissible within the four walls of academic institution given the dictum that 'today's students need to be groomed as tomorrow's leaders', and then publicly voice their comprehensive support for a suitable moratorium on student politics as we know it.

Business Concerns

The business community has often been found to be ahead of official thinking. This is possibly because they represent the "grassroots" of the industrial economy, being the ones carrying the burden of trade, commerce and industry. It was not surprising, therefore, to hear leaders of various chambers of commerce and industry speak on a whole range of issues that the government ought to be paying greater attention to, than it is doing at the present.

One such issue raised on Saturday at the conference hall of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) was establishment of direct road links with various bordering points in India. It appears that while the government is thinking only in terms of the vote-catching Dhaka-Calcutta and Dhaka-Ajmer routes, it may have ignored the economically important destinations such as Agartala, Shillong, Darjeeling, Gauhati etc. The business community's proposal for direct road links with these points needs to be thoroughly examined by the ministries concerned.

Another important point was the issue of bank interest rate. The business community is the principal victim of high interest rates, and this is adversely affecting investment and economic growth. But given the sheer size of the non-performing loans in banks' lending portfolio, it remains a mystery as to how interest rates could be reduced. The private sector accounts for nearly half of bad debts that, combined with public sector liabilities, have forced banks to keep interest rates at a high level. The government has to pursue the bad debt issue with seriousness, so that the level of default shows a decline and terms of lending improve for new entrepreneurs.

But more immediate is the worry expressed over law and order. Criminality affecting business, particularly extortion and kidnapping for ransom has increased unabated despite loud claims of success in the battle against crimes. Political involvement in such criminal activities, particularly extortion, remains high. It is this paper's view that extortion is not inevitable in a developing society, nor is it beyond redress. But the government needs to show steely resolve and rise above partisan interest if it is sincere about eradicating extortion from society.

DMP's New Gesture

Our hearts are gladdened at the prospect of a grand new service idea floated by the Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP). It has advised persons drawing big amount of money from banks to call the DMP for help and protection, if necessary. Contact numbers have also been published in the newspapers. This is highly commendable and we congratulate the DMP for their sincere urge to help people in need. In the face of deteriorating crime situation in the city and before the Eid shopping frenzy builds up it has been a timely offer of help coming from the already overworked police force. Instead of seeing additional responsibility befall the slim shoulders of the DMP we would love to have a situation in the country where people would hardly need any police protection to withdraw their money from the banks and carry it home. Is it too much to ask from the DMP? If we take a look around us we find much better atmosphere and law and order situation. Even in a highly risky place like Colombo people hardly ask for police help for such day to day transactions. We are afraid that a police escort would draw attention of the muggers and make the client more vulnerable than he would normally have been without police around him. Nonetheless, we admire the DMP for their thoughtful suggestion and offer of selfless service to the public.

Pakistan's Afghan Policy: Chasing a Mirage

Unless the Taliban can be put under leash, Pakistan's finger in Afghan furnace will burn and her dream of a secured western front and strategic depth as well as sharing of Central Asian oil bonanza will remain as elusive as ever.

VERY often the professional camaraderie comes into play to transcend the barrier of geography and ethno-religious identity and establishes contact even between the adversaries. I saw the soldiers on guard at either side of Berlin Wall and an invisible line of divide at Panmun-jom exchanging pleasantries and cracking jokes. But anytime I visited Tokham, the checkpoint on Pak-Afghan border in the Khyber Pass, the spectacle was entirely different. Neither the smartly turned out Khyber Rifle men nor the stone-faced Afghan militia ever transmitted any such expression across the border. Stranger to each other they stood motionless at their posts and scanned each other's territory like hawks. That stiffness once symbolised the state of relationship between the two estranged neighbours across the Durand Lines.

The delineation was imposed by British India's Foreign Secretary, Sir Mortimer Durand between Durrani Kingdom of Afghanistan and British Indian empire in 1893 and was accepted by successive Afghan rulers from Amir Abdur Rahman to King Amanullah but the fact that the line was drawn arbitrarily with no regards to ethnic tribes living astride it made the Durand line somewhat controversial. With the departure of British from the subcontinent the legacy was obviously inherited by Pakistan for which she paid dearly during the most part of her existence.

At the time of British exit King Zahir Shah of Afghanistan saw in the new dispensation of territories an opportunity to enlarge his kingdom and, if possible, obtain an access to the sea for his landlocked country. One of the devices he adopted towards this end was the demand for what he called an independent state of Pushtunistan comprising the lands where his fellow Pushtuns were in majority in Pakistan.

At Afghanistan's behest a Loy Jirga — a grand assembly of tribal elders — met in July 1949 and repudiated the frontier agreements sowing the seeds of Pak-Afghan tensions. Pakistan's retaliation by halting movement of goods from Karachi to Afghanistan, the murder of Liaquat Ali Khan in the hands of an Afghan assassin,

overflight of American spy plane U-2 from Pakistan's Badaber base and Pakistan's military alliance with the US only heightened those tensions. As a result not only the diplomatic relations between the two neighbours were severed several times, forces were also mobilised against each other. By mid-fifties Pushtunistan issue was internationalised with the Soviets openly supporting the Afghans. The Cold War politics also gradually spilled into Pak-Afghan relations and made it all the more complex.

Pakistan could not however afford this relationship with her Muslim neighbour in her western flank. She already had a hostile neighbour in her eastern flank — several times larger in size and resources and military potentials. The bitterness generated by the partition and her war already fought with India over Kashmir set the trends and pattern of future Indo-Pakistan relationship. Pakistan obsessed with her insecurity vis-a-vis her eastern neighbour was rather considering Afghanistan together with Iran to be her strategic depth in the event of conflicts with India. On Afghanistan's part, she also could not confront Pakistan on whom the backward and the landlocked country was desperately dependent for trade and transit for long.

Moreover, not only both the countries had been in close proximity of each other, they shared many experiences of the history.

The initiative came from Pakistan to normalise relations with the strategic Kingdom of Hindukush when President Iskander Mirza paid a visit to Kabul in 1956. It was reciprocated by King Zahir Shah's return visit in 1958. Although bungled at times, the Pak-Afghan relations were now onward — characterised by positive signs and upturnings in the relationships which however never turned into that of unalloyed friendship.

Nevertheless, by the time the Saur Revolution took place in 1978 the Pushtunistan issue was significantly toned down and the frontier between the two became relatively peaceful — due mainly to the cross cur-

rent of many dynamics of Afghanistan's domestic politics. In fact, Sardar Daud, the assassinated President of pre-revolution Afghanistan, who found confrontation with Pakistan counterproductive was belatedly moving towards a rapprochement with Pakistan.

The Saur Revolution followed by Soviet invasion a year later had been a watershed in Pak-Afghan relations. They brought both prospects and difficulties for Pakistan in her bid to improve relations with Afghanistan. During long Soviet occupation period Pakistan not only sheltered hundreds of thousands of Afghan refugees, she also took active interest in the resistance movement against the pro-Soviet government in Kabul with a hope that

to Afghan statehood while no outsider including Pakistan knew whom to deal with in Afghanistan. As the Soviets pulled out from Afghanistan and Soviet Union itself collapsed, which the Afghans like the most of the world neither believed nor expected, the Mujahideen leaders from their Pakistani camp rushed roughshod to grab the power in Kabul. After the Soviet withdrawal Afghanistan became split into multiple centres of power — some friendly but most of them hostile to Pakistan — with Mujahideen leaders becoming competing warlords after Najibullah's fall in 1992.

Pakistan, in spite of her great role in the war of resistance found itself marginalised in Afghan affair. A central gov-

and gas resources of Central Asia via Afghan territory.

It is believed that Pakistani impatience for quick and acceptable end to Afghan civil war was a major factor behind its backing of Pushtun dominated Taliban forces emerging from the theological schools in Balochistan and NWFP of Pakistan. Without waiting any longer to build up a consensus among the Mujahideen leaders Pakistan opted for giving the Taliban for a stable internal order in Afghanistan so that she could share the oil bonanza of Central Asia and her dream of reviving the 'silk route' to the region could be materialised. Although Pakistan's Taliban connections are denied by its government, few outsiders, however, disbelieved it. At the height of Taliban fortune when they captured Kabul in 1996 Pakistan was the first country to recognise.

But can Taliban secure Pakistani interests in Afghanistan? How long would they be able to hold on to Kabul? How strong are they both internally? Taliban are yet to consolidate their conquests in the country's north and west where the Tajiks, Hazaras and Shias are united by Northern Alliance subtly backed by Iran. Taliban are unacceptable to both Russia and Central Asian Republics who are concerned at the spread of Islamic extremism in the southern reaches of CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States). Even the US view them with disfavour as they provide sanctuary to terrorists and tend to extend Jihad beyond Afghan soil.

Besides, many believe that Taliban's brand of puritanical Islam is only a tool to achieve the Pushtuns' ethnic interests in Afghanistan. Pushtuns are the largest ethnic group in the country who held sway over whole of Afghanistan until Saur Revolution. But they were given rather inferior position in post-Najibullah government under Rabbani. Taliban wanted to put an end to this ignominy and restore the past glory of the Pushtuns. Once the primary objectives were achieved the Pushtun dominated Taliban started to fall in

line of their tribes, subtribes, clans and families thus greatly diluting Taliban solidarity and at the same time keeping the civil war alive. For example, the relations between Taliban and Hezb-i-Islami were never cordial although both are Pushtun formations because the two had separately fought for the control of several Afghan provinces.

However, the vital question is how much influence can Pakistan exert on Taliban-led Afghanistan. The point to be understood here is that the understanding reached by Pakistan whether with Mujahideen or Taliban, seldom went beyond a partnership of convenience. The Taliban and their backers in Pakistan have entirely different goals which are hardly compatible with those of Pakistani administration. Pakistan once grouped up Mujahideen leaders and now backs Taliban, but like in any alliance of convenience it may also frustrate Pakistani intentions.

There is no evidence as yet that Pakistan has been able to control either the events or the attitudes of the Taliban once unleashed from Pakistan's religious seminars. Also the Taliban's ranks have now been swelled by various elements within Afghanistan including even the former PDPA activists. Pakistan is aware of the harm the Taliban clash with Central Asian Republics would cause to her but she cannot refrain them from spreading religious extremism chagrined by those republics. Taliban's killing of Iranian diplomats in Mazar-i-Sharif has already strained Pakistan's relation with traditionally friendly country Iran. Taliban have influenced Pakistan's internal politics more effectively than the latter could do in Afghanistan.

The close ideological and military ties between Pakistani religious extremists and their Taliban allies have already fuelled political instability and sectarian violence making Pakistan itself a potential target of terrorism from the camps of its Afghan allies. Unless the Taliban can be put under leash, Pakistan's finger in Afghan furnace will burn and her dream of a secured western front and strategic depth as well as sharing of Central Asian oil bonanza will remain as elusive as ever.



PERSPECTIVES

by Brig (Rtd) M Abdul Hafiz

Pakistan would be subsequently able to install a friendly government in Afghanistan.

As the Mujahideen war of resistance started against the Soviet occupation forces its leaders were in the hands of Pakistanis — albeit at their mercy in the sanctuaries in Peshawar. It was Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) which organised, planned and coordinated this biggest clandestine operation since World War II. The Pakistan hopes were however dashed once the resistance war ended in Afghanistan.

Because the aftermath of civil war in Afghanistan brought in its wake a fundamental change in Afghan polity. It marked the end of a central authority exercised by Pushtun dominated Durrani rulers for over two centuries till Sardar Daud's violent death in the revolution as well as a central government maintained under PDPA (Peoples Democratic Party of Afghanistan) rules.

Now onward it was a threat

— of a sort — remained in power in Kabul with Rabbani-Masood combination in predominant position till 1996 according to Islamabad Declaration of 1993. But its non-Pushtun composition and propensity to accommodate left leaning forces was unacceptable to Pakistani decision makers. Pakistani persuasion to broaden the base of the government failed and inevitably cracks appeared in Pakistan's relation with Tajik-dominated Rabbani government.

So long Pakistan wanted a friendly government in Kabul. Now she aspired to have a plant government with whom she could thwart and guide the course of turbulent Afghan politics. Because after the collapse of Soviet Union and demise of Cold War her stakes in Afghanistan were considerably raised. It was no more the question of a secured western front or strategic depth only. Pakistani desire to direct the course of Afghan policy acquired a new urgency as their fuel-starved country was presented with an opportunity for an access to oil

The Army in Civvies

It is time to talk about how uniformed personnel can be used to strengthen key sectors as and when required without damaging the fabric of their fighting efficiency. The first thing to remember is to depute professional soldiers for civilian jobs only when vitally necessary and that also for very short periods.

as air guards on PIA on a permanent basis in the wake of the spate of early '80s air-jacking was a disaster of the greatest magnitude for the SSG itself as the men lost their special edge which made them different.

Whenever there is anything of vital importance to the existence of the country then a country has a right to use its Armed Forces under civilian authority. This is given in the Constitution. While the survey of 'ghost schools' in the Punjab cannot be put in this category, one can condone their survey by Army teams as a necessity in the special circumstances of corruption in education. Similarly because military courts were necessary in Sindh to break the hold of terrorism gradually turning the Province into anarchy, it was a welcome initiative on the part of the government. Again because the power sector was in doldrums, the moving of a serving Lt Gen and as his deputy a serving Maj Gen is acceptable.

With the experiment of Brig Khurshid Alam into KESC as Director Implementation at the instance of the then Minister Power and Power Raja Nadir Pervaiz showing signs of success, eight serving Brigadiers have now been posted to head the Area Electricity Boards.

However the news that 35000 servicemen will be moved to WAPDA as shock as it takes away badly needed jobs in the civilian sector without the incremental benefit that could have been possible through monitoring by small teams.

There are rumours that military courts may be established to try cases of power theft, an endemic problem, in Pakistan. The rumour mills went overboard and stories started appearing in the national Press, thankfully denied by Brig Rashid Qureshi, Director ISPR himself that 'there is no proposal to take over the Railways and ICOs are not being appointed to look after garbage cleaning in Lahore', unquote.

Without trying to teach anyone the primary role of the

tend to severely disparage any adverse performance while ignoring the successes. During the '80s and even the '90s the performance of uniformed personnel in civilian jobs has been as good or as bad as the individual. Some people have made money their ancestors could not dream about but their descendants will enjoy. Let us put it bluntly, has the corruption in WAPDA, Pakistan Steel, PASSCO, National Fertiliser, etc., lessened even though at times their heads have been uniformed or

sionalism and inculcating corruption. One must give credit to successive COAS since late Gen Ziaul Haq like Gen Aslam Beg, Asif Nawaz Janjua, Abdul Waheed and Jehangir Karamat who weaned the Army away from civilian clutches, in different styles and modes maybe but with the same aim, to make the Army professional as it used to be.

There is a vast bank of manpower that can be used by the Army. Instead of sending its serving uniformed personnel, it can put those going on retirement and some of those immediately retired persons back in uniform on contract into jobs that are of vital necessity, to name a few viz. (1) in the field of justice, as special magistrates with each Police Thana or as special military courts to deal with excesses and corruption of law enforcement agencies (2) in the field of accountability as special investigation teams, taking the help of civilian specialists, to enquire about nepotism and corruption in different government departments, particularly the tax collection agencies like the CBR and its constituent courts (3) in the field of education by setting up schools and colleges and acting as administrators (4) in medicine as special field hospitals and acting as administrators of existing ones (5) in transportation by the checking of vehicles at nodal points throughout the country to ensure safety and reliability, to use them also as customs check posts to counter smuggling and

in the collection of petrol (6) needless to say as engineers in road and bridge building, to oversee and monitor contractors in other fields, etc.

While some posts require Cols, Brigs and Maj Gens, the most valuable position in the Army is the Major, a man found not suitable for any number of reasons for going on to the rank of Lt Cols. A vast number of Majors are usually available in any given year, mostly they are between 40-45 years of age, just right in experience and maturity to do jobs in which they do not replace civilians but complement them in many ways. Someone up there in the military hierarchy has to think this one through.

The corrupt have an enduring ambition other than making money for themselves, that is, to corrupt others around them. That is the easiest way rulers have to retain power. One of the problems the COAS has to face is when to say 'no' even in the face of temptation or as to intervene in areas vital to the country's needs for purely national interests. In putting men out to civilian pasture, there is always a risk and there has to be a special unit to monitor that the men sent out do not disgrace the uniform and bring a bad name to the Army.

At the same time when taking over institutions one by one there is always the ambition, why have civilian rule at all when all the work has to be done by the Army? The factors balanced on the fine edge of propriety are (1) the task of vital national importance and (2) what is the minimum time span for its completion?

When answers to these questions are unambiguously clear, there will be no backlash to the Army in civvies.

AS I SEE IT

Ikram Sehgal writes from Karachi

Armed Forces and the necessity of keeping high standards of professionalism by concentrating on matters purely professional. It is time to talk about how uniformed personnel can be used to strengthen key sectors as and when required without damaging the fabric of their fighting efficiency. The first thing to remember is to depute professional soldiers for civilian jobs only when vitally necessary and that also for very short periods. Whatever the Army has done up till now qualifies that touchstone, more than that would seriously affect their combat efficiency and one is confident that the COAS would never permit this.

Moreover the media would

ex-uniformed men of integrity? Why does not the Army commission a blue-ribboned high-powered survey of the living conditions of ex-uniformed personnel?

This is not to cast any aspersions on the vast majority of honourable people like former Chairman JCSC Gen Sharif who lives in virtual austerity while a few of their colleagues (and their sons) wallow in unlimited wealth. Where did this money come from? Some of it can be traced back to Defence Purchases but most of it was accumulated during tenures occupying civilian jobs.

Putting the Army in civvies in the '80s resulted in the high price of undercutting of profes-

on the subject. It is indeed a pathetic scene when we have to silently observe the role of a number of ME countries.

The base and transit passage facilities provided by those countries would have to watch out for long-term interests of the hawks. History has many such instances to prove that clash of interest can turn a friend into a foe at any time. Operation Desert Fox is indeed a clever ploy emitting signals of dangerous days ahead.

Tanzia Choudhury Comilla.

What are schools for?

Sir, All the high schools follow a syllabus every year. There are schools which sell the printed booklet known as syllabus for each class beginning from class one to ten. This makes every teacher and at the helps them to neglect their duty. Therefore, no teacher ever completes their subjects in the class rooms.

On the other hand, concerned parents hire house tutors to coach their wards to complete the syllabus. And even though they do so with much hardship the outcome is most hopeless and discouraging. Not

because the fault lies with the lack of proper education at home but with the teachers again. During each exam most students do not answer all the questions either because they have learnt to neglect their duties from their teachers or because they feel that it is what they are supposed to do. Here the teachers should instruct the students how to prepare for an exam and answer the questions successfully.

Mujibul Haque Mirpur Road, Dhaka.

Let's go digital

The government has not only been trying to expand telecommunications facilities up to the village level but also to modernise the system by replacing the analogue telephones turning them into digital.

Therefore may I request the minister for Post and Telecommunications to kindly take a decision to convert the 32 lines under Sher-e-Bangla Nar Exchange into digital system immediately in order to rescue the 32 subscribers from frequent sufferings.

M Zahidul Haque Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Dhaka-1207.

To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

Global mastaani

Sir, The Anglo-American (note, only two white nations; without UN concurrence) bombing of Iraq during the holy month of Ramadan is an example of modern barbaric materialism, dominated by the greed to control the energy resources of the world (power, power, power), and keep the Muslim nation divided. What the Jewish controlled super power is doing to Iran can equally be applied to sanctions against Israel. But, instead, it is getting arms aid to the extent of USD 1.2 billion by the same aggressors in Iraq. Clinton went to Israel on a secret briefing session, not for peace talks.

It is ironical to note that the UN system has become a stooge to physical might, misuse of power, and deprecation of timeless moral values. It is 3500 years old.

Some cynics ask: Where is God and what he is doing? Divine dispensations do not come

with advance warning (if should not). The retribution had been, is, and will, be swift and sudden.

The next century will be quite different from the preceding ones. The changes cannot be predicted, as these will occur at shorter intervals, and the actions will be swift and sudden. The fall of the Asian Tigers, the sudden turns of the Monica affair, the Ramadan bombing by American Jews, the political debacle in India, the volte-face in CHT, and other happenings are signs of the shape of things to come in the near future. Changes, once it starts, cannot be controlled through human or super-human efforts or strategies. That is the way nature works, call it cosmic or divine.

Now, there is only one monitoring mission, to watch how long the only western pillar, the United States of America, remains united, if some futurologists are to be taken with a pinch of salt.

What is perturbing for the Muslim world is that some of the affluent Arab nations are bonded to the dollar repayments for thirty years or more, and they are maintaining a quiet profile at the global diplomatic level. Islam says 'think about your neighbour before you think of yourself.'

The US has been placed geographically isolated far from the other civilisations. Is there a message in this geographical oddity?

Abul M Ahmad Dhaka

Fuel-pricing

Sir, A recent article in the DS, regarding the price of petrol, diesel and kerosene, which was set in the days when crude oil cost more than twice as much as now, prompts me to write.

I cannot help but feel that in many South and Southeast Asian countries, their governments have ceased to be governments FOR the people, but for themselves. The fact that reduction in fuel-pricing will bring down the cost of transport, industrial processing, railways, etc., which will eventually improve the lot of the common man, increase economic activity, and may stimulate growth, is lost on them.

What seems to be more important is that the government will lose money.

It is as if the prosperity of the government is more important than the prosperity of the people. I would like to speculate that this arises from the concept of ruler and the ruled. And that too, arises from the concept of government, which existed during the British rule. After all these years, we have not been able to shake off that legacy.

Hasanata Khan Uttara

Terror ahead!

Sir, Clinton-Blair joint-venture assault on Iraq has deep-rooted intentions. In the name of caging Saddam, hundreds of missiles were launched and stopped again to honour Ramadan! The immediate objectives as spelled out by both these countries are simply eye-wash. The far-reaching and ulterior motive would only surface with the passage of time. But for now it is evident that the joint forces have come to stay in the region for a very long time. This would entail a changed geo-political scenario in ME especially when Russia and China have different views