

BUET Expulsion and APSU Demands

NO sooner had the BUET authority announced its decision to take disciplinary actions against a few students implicated in the act of vandalism last April than the All Party Students Unity (APSU) announced its rejection of it.

The university probe body, formed to investigate the incident, submitted its report to the administration on May 30 following which BUET authorities expelled one student for life, three others for four terms (two of which are 'suspended').

The APSU wants a judicial probe body instead of a university probe body to decide on the issue. First of all they have no right to do so. Let them come out with evidence showing that the BUET probe body's work has been faulty or partial.

DEPH Dread

NEITHER the health ministry nor the Institute of Public Health (IPH) appear perturbed by the findings of US scientists on probable carcinogenic or cancer-causing effects of di-2-ethyl-hexyl-phthalate (DEPH).

Whatever the reason is for the government's indifference, and inertia, the matter is certainly of grave concern, as manifest in the developed countries' response to the findings.

On April 6, this paper ran a report in this regard. Also, in an editorial comment the next day, it urged the people concerned to "weigh up the research findings in detail and, if needed, switch to safer containers".

The PSC Report

THE Public Service Commission (PSC), the supreme body which selects government officers of various cadres through competitive examinations every year, has released interesting statistics on its 18th BCS batch.

A report in The Daily Star Saturday enumerates the number of posts in various categories of services, secured by the students of major educational institutions of the country and the percentage-wise superiority of Dhaka University, the largest and the oldest in Bangladesh.

The annual report of the PSC, released recently, painstakingly calculated the percentage of Dhaka University candidates appearing in the examinations and coming out successfully securing highest number of jobs among all other universities, without mentioning student-job ratio.

The PSC report, however, did not mention the number of students who got 'zero' in English in the said exams and which universities they belonged to.

So what is the big deal in pointing out a particular university as the top in a particular examination belittling other institutions in an unequal competition?

GENERAL elections were held in Indonesia on 7 June last. Although full and final results have not been published as yet, there is enough indication that the opposition leader Megawati Sukarnoputri, has won by a comfortable margin leaving behind the rival ruling Golkar party.

Out of a population of 200 million nearly 120 million are voters. Almost 91 per cent voted in the recently held polls. The elections generated enough enthusiasm and more important credibility for the Indonesians to vote in such massive numbers.

This was Indonesia's first free election in 44 years. The leadership of the freedom movement of Indonesia was provided by the charismatic leader Sukarno. He had established himself as a world figure in the fifties and the mid sixties, when he was overthrown by a coup engineered by Suharto.

For more than four decades Suharto built up a family empire and ruled the country singlehandedly. His political machine was the Golkar party, which was represented by the army, the civilian bureaucrats, the big business and industry and assorted hangers on of the regime.

Elections in Indonesia Megawati Stirs Hope for a Change

Megawati Sukarnoputri, the housewife turned politician has her plate full. She is about to succeed somebody, who overthrew her illustrious father, with the administrative machine intact. Can she bring about the kind of sweeping changes that the situation calls for?

In his long reign Suharto did not face any serious challenge until the arrival of the daughter of the Father of the Nation Sukarno, Megawati Sukarnoputri. Megawati appeared to be a hesitant entrant into politics in 1987 and started addressing ever increasing crowds. It was really in 1996 that the tide turned when Suharto unleashed his goons on the supporters of Megawati.

It was street demonstrations which really brought down Suharto. He handed over power to his hand picked Vice President B J Habibie. The street democratic movement was contained only by a firm promise of a free and fair election.

On 7 June those elections have been held and from all accounts they have been fair. The only explanation given so far for the very slow process of counting of the votes is inefficiency of the administrative machine and the inexperience of those entrusted with the job.

According to the latest figures Megawati's Indonesian Democratic Party for Struggle (PDI-P) has 36 per cent of the votes counted. The count so far is 58 million that is half of the total. The second in the race is the ruling Golkar and has nearly 18 per cent of the votes, that is half that of PDI-P's.



Arshad-uz Zaman

PKB is led by a moderate Muslim leader Abdur Rahman Wahid. Another Muslim Party Muslim United Development Party (PPP) obtained 9.8 per cent of votes. There were many other parties who contested the elections but got small percentage of votes.

The Indonesians voted to elect a 500-member Assembly. The Indonesian army has been the lynch pin of the regime of Suharto and its high profile leader Gen. Wiranto has 38 members within the Assembly. 700 strong People's Consulta-

tionary by the Chinese, traditionally reluctant to go to the polling booths. According to the current showing Megawati Sukarnoputri is expected to be elected President. Religious leaders of various stripes are trying to raise a hue and cry that a woman cannot be President in Muslim Indonesia.

There are such glaring examples of women as heads of Governments in several Muslim countries that the argument is not expected to carry much weight. Furthermore Indonesia has solid credentials as basi-

During her election campaign Megawati Sukarnoputri has said little except to offer her image of a sober housewife, mother of two children. She has spoken warmly of her relationship with her famous father Sukarno.

Indeed the votes have been cast as much for her father as much to shake off a corrupt regime, which had entrenched itself.

Should Megawati succeed in occupying the seat of power in the energy rich, eighth most populous country of the world, Indonesia will come really full circle. For Suharto ousted her famous father and ran the

country as a dictator for more than four decades. He had to give up power in face of street demonstrations. He has not been particularly kind to Megawati. The young militants who engineered the downfall of Suharto, have high expectations from Megawati. Can she clean the Augean stables? The dictatorial machine set up by Suharto is very much in place including his hand picked successor B J Habibie and Gen. Wiranto. How much change Megawati will be allowed to bring about? Indonesia is a big country with nearly 3000 islands and the eyes of the world are on Indonesia and her resources and market potential.

Indonesia has resisted western pressure on the question of autonomy or outright independence of East Timor. It was annexed by Indonesia and its future status is to be determined through a referendum. Megawati is on record that she will not allow an option of independence of East Timor.

Megawati Sukarnoputri, the housewife turned politician has her plate full. She is about to succeed somebody, who overthrew her illustrious father, with the administrative machine intact. Can she bring about the kind of sweeping changes that the situation calls for? Like another housewife next door Cory Aquino, she is about to inherit the mantle of her father, whereas in the case of Aquino, it was her husband, gunned down at the Manila airport by the goons of Marcos.

Megawati has stirred hope among the Indonesians for a change. Time will show how much she will be allowed to achieve.

China's Growing Links with South Asia

Indo-Pakistan disputes and tensions are a big obstacle to the process of peace and stability in South Asia. Since both India and Pakistan appear to value China's counsels at varying degrees and other South Asian nations consider Beijing as a good friend, China can come out with bigger interest in reducing tensions between two South Asian neighbours.

AKISTAN foreign minister Sartaz Aziz was in China on a very brief visit early this month before he had flown to New Delhi for 'crisis talks' with his Indian counterpart Jaswant Singh on the tensions over the 'Kargil' developments.

The Indian external affairs minister also visited Beijing immediately after his talks with Mr. Aziz. Islamabad's ties with Beijing are cordial for many years while New Delhi-Beijing relations are in the process of normalization. India and China were once good friends and the old slogan 'Hindi Chini Bhai Bhai' was reflective of the close relations which, however, turned sour over the border dispute culminated by the 1962 clash. Their ties were frozen for a long time and it was today's Indian prime minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, who as the external affairs minister in the Janata Party government in the two decades ago, undertook a visit to China initiating the process of normalization.

This was the first high level political visit from India to China after the 1962 border war and later prime minister Rajiv Gandhi paid an official visit to that country which helped accelerate the process of improving the bilateral ties although the main bone of contention — the disputes over their land boundary — remained unresolved.

During this period — from early sixties — Pakistan's ties with China improved considerably and obviously the bitter New Delhi-Beijing relationship contributed to this because of the fact that Pakistan and India are the traditional rivals. Islamabad maintains close contacts with Beijing and the exchange of visits between the two countries at different levels is very frequent while the visit of Mr. Jaswant Singh to China was after several years by a foreign minister of India. However, both India and China say they are keen to improve ties and are taking measures as far as possible towards that direction.

Beijing's relations with other countries of South Asian region are fairly good including that with Bangladesh. This can be borne out of the fact that the prime ministers of the two successive democratic governments here chose China as the country for their first official visit. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina was in China soon after taking over as the head of the government while Begum Khaleda Zia was there on her first official visit abroad. China has come out quite generously to assist Bangladesh financially and technically for the construction of a massive international conference centre mainly to be used for the coming, non-aligned summit in Dhaka in 2001. Foreign minister Abdus Samad Azad had initially visited Beijing for the purpose and signed the modalities which were later formalised in detail during a visit here a few months ago by former Chinese prime minister and current chairman of the people's representative council Li Peng, who enjoys high clout and status in the Chinese leadership set-up.

Beijing's ties with Nepal, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and other countries in the region are reasonably friendly and the Chinese leadership seems to be keen to develop the bond of intimacy with these nations. This has been amply demonstrated in Beijing's diplomatic activities and spirit of cooperation even though there are differences on many issues including the pattern of governance which is democratic in South Asia while China pursues communism and many democratic countries have reservations about China's human rights record. However, China steadfastly remains as the leading socialist nation in the world after the demise of the former Soviet Union much to the dismay of the admirers of socialism across the world.

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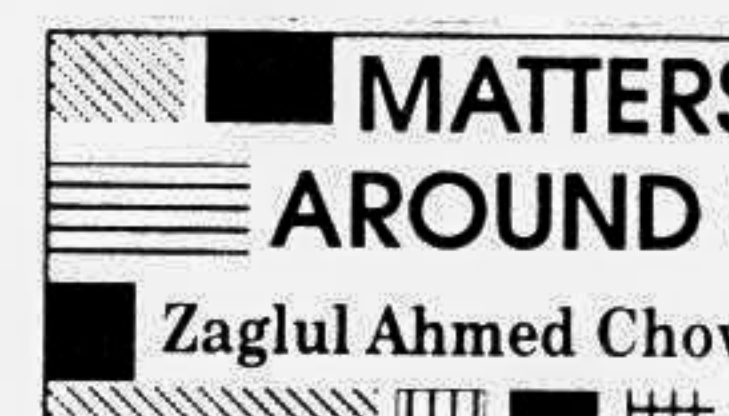
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reformers in the economic policies. The system of government — whether a multi-party democracy and/or one-party socialist pattern — is not preventing Beijing's development of ties with different countries. Its relations are improving with even the United States despite differences in many areas including the human rights issue. As such, China's increasing cordiality with the South Asian nations falls in the purview of Beijing's quest to develop ties with the neighbouring and distant countries with whom bilateral ties might not have been friendly before.

Indo-Pakistan disputes and tensions are a big obstacle to the process of peace and stability in South Asia. Since both India and Pakistan appear to value China's counsels at varying degrees and other South Asian nations consider Beijing as a good friend, China can come out with bigger interest in reducing tensions between two South Asian neighbours.

China must have been briefed by both sides of the situation as two foreign ministers visited Beijing within week's time. Understandably, China has its own strategies in its approach to the South Asian scene particularly the Indo-Pakistan hostilities. It has warm ties with Islamabad but it is also pursuing a policy to improve relations with New Delhi. China is gaining greater confidence among other countries of the region while its ties are very close with Myanmar which is not exactly a South Asian nation. Apart from the border dispute, China may have other problems with India and the 'Tibet' issue is certainly an eyecore. In recent times, Beijing has jettisoned certain dogmatic tendencies in its pursuance of communism as evidenced in the

On the other hand, people like Dr. Sirajul Islam Chowdhury, Convener of the Movement Committee) a Professor of the English Department, University of Dhaka have chalked out a plan to stage demonstrations for protection of all trees from destruction and to save the environment from ruination. The intellectuals' circle and conscious people from all tiers of life are cautiously observing the evolving tense situation. It seems that the entire nation has been divided into two groups on the issue and both sides have reached the point of no return. Everybody is eager to know what would be the next course of action? It means that it has become an issue of prestige for the authority concerned. Everybody demands the shifting of the conference venue elsewhere in the city.

Where is Osmani Uddyan? Osmani Uddyan is with an area of 23.1 acres of land, a wooded garden of 11000 trees planted by the Department of Forest in the early '90s, covering most of the area. The south side of Abdul Gani Road (opposite to Bangladesh Secretariat) and the north side of the Uddyan are occupied by Osmani Memorial Hall named after General Osmani, the then Commander-in-Chief (C-in-C) of the war of liberation in 1971. In the north-west corner is situated the office of the Ministry of Communication. In the north-east corner is the multi-storied Peer Yeemini Super Market. In the south-east corner of the Uddyan stands Gopal Shah Mosque. These are the important major establishments surrounding the Uddyan. The location of this Uddyan has demarcated the Old city and New Dhaka. This place is the heart, and one of the most congested areas of the city. Traffic jams are the everyday scene there. Moreover, a host of im-

portant installations remain all around the Uddyan like Bangladesh Secretariat, General Post Office, Stadiums, Country's Central Mosque, Supreme Court Buildings, National Press Club, Gullistan Cinema hall, Nagar Bhaban, T&T Bhaban, Police Sadar Dapdar, Dhaka University halls and other installations. This is the Zero Point of the country.

In reality, there is no room for any installation like the Bangabandhu International Convention Centre. With respect to affording environmental facilities to the people, a definite proportion of open space is required for some fresh air. Despite the ratio of open space (Uddyan) and road width to building space being very low, the trees in the garden gives the people the advantage of fresh air and so the garden is rightly called the 'lungs'/'heart' of the city. This should be protected at any cost.

What is NAM? This is the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) of Third World countries numbering about 100 who desire to keep themselves aloof from the implications of the pacts of the super-powers. In the present world, the wave of open market economy, the process of globalisation, liberalisation of international trade and commerce is blowing unhindered from the West or from the industrially developed countries into the rest of the world. Everything is going on at the behest of the big powers.

As a result, NAM has lost its importance to a great extent as every member of the Movement is aligned either directly or indirectly with the superpowers in the field of economy or nuclear Energy. The activities of this type of Movement is being carried out merely in the name of conferences, similar with a common saying airing in our country 'Sitting, Meeting & Eating'. However, we do not consider this movement so lightly or undermine its programmes, rather, we would like to exert proper stress on this movement and expect that the bridge of the relations among the member-countries will be strengthened further day by day, at least for the protection of the human rights of the common people of the Third World countries.

Even we, whole-heartedly congratulate the efforts of the present government for taking active initiatives to construct the international NAM convention centre in Bangladesh

naming it after Bangabandhu. We feel, we are lucky enough that a big conference like the NAM Summit (not held here ever before) will be held in Bangladesh in near future (in 2001). We are really proud of this opportunity.

But why must the conference centre be established at the Osmani Uddyan? Is this the most suitable place for the centre? Isn't there any other place in Dhaka or elsewhere in the country for construction of the centre other than the Osmani Uddyan? So many questions like these abound in the minds of the people. Is this rigidity due to the foundation stone laid by the honorable Vice Chairman of the Government of the People's Republic of China? Is there any other reason or design behind the scene? Whatsoever may it be, it does not matter. Our earnest appeal to the authority concerned is to pay heed to the call of the citizens otherwise it will lose the public support that can lead to irreparable loss to the public properties.

Congratulations on the success of the human chain programme demonstrated on May 23 by 'Save the 11000 trees at Osmani Uddyan Movement'. The felling of trees of a wooded garden is a gross violation of the Environment Protection Act. The trees give us O2 (oxygen) and absorb CO2 (carbon dioxide) and dust from the air. The trees are the friends of the people.

However, I have some alternative proposals for active considerations of the authority concerned for setting up the Conference Centre elsewhere in Dhaka or in the country for the greater interest of the country.

1. The Conference Centre may be established outside Dhaka at Gopalganj or at Tungipara near the shrine of Bangabandhu. This decision will increase the importance of the place manifold and increase the beauty of the place. In addition to that, this place will get the international status (recognition) providing different scopes for employment of the rural people. Ultimately this place will be the hub of the internal trade and commerce creating innumerable facilities for the rural poor.

2. The Conference Centre may be established in any suburb of the Dhaka city (like Gazipur, Kalia, Kaligang) or in places suggested earlier by the intellectual group.

OPINION The Conference Venue

Mahbubur Rahman

Is there any alternative to "saving the greenery of the Osmani Uddyan"? Environmentalists and intellectuals of the country are worried about the construction of an international convention centre at Osmani Uddyan.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina raised a question in a recently held meeting at the Osmani Memorial Hall about the actual number of trees of the Uddyan and expressed her determination for setting up the convention centre at the same place.

On the other hand, people like Dr. Sirajul Islam Chowdhury, Convener of the Movement Committee) a Professor of the English Department, University of Dhaka have chalked out a plan to stage demonstrations for protection of all trees from destruction and to save the environment from ruination. The intellectuals' circle and conscious people from all tiers of life are cautiously observing the evolving tense situation. It seems that the entire nation has been divided into two groups on the issue and both sides have reached the point of no return. Everybody is eager to know what would be the next course of action? It means that it has become an issue of prestige for the authority concerned. Everybody demands the shifting of the conference venue elsewhere in the city.

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To the Editor...

Form a national government

Sir, The way the political parties are conducting themselves by pushing the nation into a point of no return; it appears, judging from the media reports that there is no immediate practical solution of the crisis and the critical situation will not change unless there is a change in approach.

The political parties may not like it, but they have to try to form a national government for a few years, till conditions return for the practise of normal political intercourse. The next, or future general elections will not change the approach and these battles of hatred and attrition will continue to prevail outside the parliament, and inside the august body. Are we aware that we are trapped? Do we want another vicious revolution, this time internal? It is a very relevant question, judging from the fact that democracy hardly exists within the political commands.

The general masses desire peaceful and normal living conditions without the domination of the front pages of the newspapers by nasty political events, day after day, year after year, decade after decade, for half a century — a pattern obvious in almost all the emerging countries (there are common factors of local instability in most of the nations).

In the under-developed countries, public opinion cannot prevail over the coterie of politicians who try to hold sway for decades on one pretext or other; that is why from time to time external or a third force takes over for limited periods, as had also been noticed in Bangladesh. The vicious cycle has to be interrupted, but the politicians seem to be stuck with ISMs of their kinds.

Our MPs are found spending most of their time, in searching faults with the opposition parties instead of working together for the welfare of the country. The government now even feels the need of calling separate meetings to discuss current problems. It is really ridiculous that in spite of the parliament, they have to find other places for meetings and discussions. I recall the day when the

Things that make me laugh

Sir, We, the common people believe that parliament is the place where people's representatives should talk about the problems of the country and try to find out the solution. But what had been watched in the BTV highlights of the parliament procedures, tickled me to laughter. There were huge undesired quarrel shows performed by our 'honourable parliament members'. Their activities, if watched, I think can take us millions of years back, when the primitive barbarians used to beat the ground with their branches of trees to express their anger. Very similar is the case of our parliament members beating desks with their files.

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National government

Sir, The statement in a 'Verbatim' by Dr Wazed Mahabub, former Chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission and husband of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina published in a national weekly on June 18 '99 has attracted my attention. Dr Wazed said — "Prevailing situation in the country necessitates formation of a national government. Honestly, my feeling is that a national government will be formed soon"

Appreciating the feelings of Dr Wazed I would like to add that, so far a true national government, the existing gap in values and understanding of some national issues among different political parties has to be bridged first.