

Predators at JU Again

NOT even a year has passed since their exit as abominable rapists of so-called students, that once beleaguered faction of BCL is back on Jahangirnagar campus. Their shameless re-entry was spearheaded last Friday night by hired armed outsiders who literally fired their way into the four residential halls seizing control of these from the hands of the rival BCL Kakor group. Kakor who had taken advantage of the Mahibullah group's loss of face in the wake of the outcry over rapes they committed on some female students did not seem unblemished either having been accused in the Ananda murder case. So as a prominent Bangla daily has aptly headlined the latest JU story, the campus has passed from the hands of a 'murderous group' to those of a 'rapist group'.

That is where the crux of the problem lies. It is the malcontent at the JU, one or the other feuding group of the BCL, which has been ruling the roost with the police and university authorities capitulating before the alternating capture and loss of territory between the rival factions of BCL, the pampered student wing of the ruling party. In the bargain, the general students have suffered terribly.

The 'rapists' would not have dared Friday's armed expedition on the campus and the take-over of the halls if the disciplinary actions processed against them, largely under pressure from the general students, had proved deterrent enough in the end. Except for ex-general secretary, BCL, JU university unit, Jashimuddin Manik, accused in the rape case, who was expelled from the varsity for good, leniency was shown across the board with five of the 13 accused receiving any punishment at all. And it so happens that all of the accused barring Manik are back on the campus with vengeance. What would the police do when the ruling party's student wing has armed infighting erupting every now and then? And aren't the university authorities including the VC, the provosts, proctors, and the Syndicate in a state of stupor before the diabolic fits for the occupation of student halls? It is the ruling party which has to put its feet down on the recalcitrant BCL elements to live up to its mandate. As we understand it, the 'rapist students' were expelled from the JU BCL unit earlier on. If that be the case then how could they resurrect themselves?

We extend our full support to the general students' demand for ridding the university of the rapists and terrorists at once so that JU can be restored to its original image of a citadel of learning. But their protests need to be non-violent in order that fresh complications do not delay redressal of their grievances. The government for its part must now sit up, take note of the dangerous brewings of trouble and do something about these before it is too late.

IT Inertia

MINISTER for Commerce and Industries Tofail Ahmed's promise for quick steps to transform the country's nascent IT industry into a billion dollar-spinner within a decade, has the familiar tone of a political rhetoric. But we would like to look at it as a renewal of the government's commitment towards enhancing our IT prospects despite the slow-go attitude discerned in the implementation of the recommendations put forth by the Jamilur Reza Commission nearly two years back. The commission came up with a string of area-specific suggestions for fiscal, human resource development, infrastructure and marketing measures. However, for want of complementary official activism, this has proved an exercise in futility. So dismal is the ratio between recommendation and implementation that even the incorrigible optimist would hesitate to harbour any high hope of the country carving a niche in the huge global IT market which was worth 276 billion US dollars in 1996.

The government activism in this regard has largely been restricted to forming committees. Another — a high-level committee along with the finance minister and the leaders of the IT sector — appears to be in the offing. Such a committee-obsession may not help the country even meet its 'conservative' ambition of capturing an IT market worth one billion dollar; whereas India, which earns about four billion dollars a year from software exports, is contemplating a 100 billion market.

The fact of the matter is, Bangladesh has already fallen far behind in the global IT race — thanks to the dearth of incentives to the private sector. Fortunately, we still have the chance to make our mark on the IT map although time is fast running out. In order to realise our modest target of earning one billion dollar from software export, we must produce, as a speaker at the seminar, *Moving Forward with Info Technology*, reminded us Saturday, 120,000 IT professionals. To that effect, the government needs to be more active in immediately expanding education and infrastructure support.

Wretched Postal Service

IN a country like Bangladesh where bulk of the 130 million people live in rural areas the importance of postal service can never be exaggerated. Yet this vital area of public service has been neglected since the inception of Bangladesh. Despite improvements in the modern-day communication methods and facilities, the stiff competition from courier services, introduction of computer communication and terrestrial linkages, the need for postal services has not diminished.

This essential service in a different scenario of sprawling and highrise cities cater to the requirement of a vast majority of our people. But the report published in The Daily Star on Sunday is full of interesting as well as sad statistics on the state of postal communication in the country. It is awfully surprising to know that only 86 postmen have been appointed for the Dhaka city since liberation of the country but its population has risen to 9 million from a reasonable 2 million in 1972. As a result the ratio between postmen and clients stands at 1:25352. In 28 years after liberation the number of post offices for the city has increased by a meagre 23. The picture is no brighter for Chittagong either. The number of post offices rose to 55 from 42 in 1972 as the population increased to 3 million in 1996 from 1.2 million in 1972. Rajshahi and Khulna are faring no better.

Almost everyday we hear a lot of promises from the ministers and ruling party bosses about their efforts to improve the lot of the rural people but in practice these turn out to be hollow. The indifference shown by the government to postal service directly affects the rural folks who depend heavily on postal communication.

AFTER the declaration of poll dates for 13th Lokshava by Chief Election Commissioner of India in May last the ensuing election seemed to be one of the most down-to-earth polls in the country's living memory. It was to be a straight battle between the two contestants with no ambiguity as to who will be heading the government in the event of either winning. This was going to be the third election in slightly more than three years and the public mood was that of fatigue. They just wanted to get to the basics and the contending parties also did not want extraneous issue to influence the election outcome.

As the BJP's national executive met soon after the fall of its coalition government it decided to fight the next election on the basis of the National Agenda for Governance by keeping intact the existing alliance. Shunning the coalition politics the Congress already wanted to provide the country the stability of one party rule which seemed, for a while, the preferred choice of exasperated electorate. There was no ideological humbling this time on either side because the objective of both BJP and Congress was only to seize power.

Till the fall of the BJP's coalition government in April this year the Congress was clearly on ascendancy. Only months before, it bagged big victory in state assembly elections in some of the vital states. Not only Ms Sonia Gandhi, the party president, consolidated her hold over the party, she brought back a measure of discipline among its ranks, conceding herself with dignity by lending constructive support to the government on selective basis and built up her image as responsible opposition leader.

However, she first stumbled by being instrumental in revoking President's rule in Bihar and thus salvaging a corrupt and inefficient Laloo-raj in the

India's Ensuing Poll and Kargil War

Both the contenders have their valid arguments to offer over Kargil but at the end of the day it is the combined effects of many visible and invisible factors of the country's electoral politics which would tilt the balance.

state. Her stature suffered a serious setback with her abortive attempt to grab power after Vajpayee government was marginally voted out. The whole series of events from Ms Gandhi's triumphant claim of majority in the parliament to her shocking failure in producing anything more than the support of only 237 showed her in a poor light. Even the secular allies of the third front deserted Sonia Gandhi and the Congress' traditional friends from the Left were divided over their support to her. The final blow came from the party dissidents who challenged her credentials as prime ministerial candidate.

On the other hand, a wave of sympathy was generated for the BJP after the opposition's dismal failure to provide an alternative government. The public saw it as a waste because the house had to be dissolved as a result. They thought it to be preposterous to pull down the government, even though the dynamics behind Vajpayee's collapse emanated from the alliance's internal squabbles. But the events unfolded later went in favour of BJP. Now more people felt sympathetic towards Mr Vajpayee in spite of his earlier image of 'non performance' during his whole tenure and tended to accord him martyrdom of sorts. His Jansanghi and RSS credentials were quickly washed away. The BJP's hate campaign, its Babri demolition and Sangh Parivar's murderous anti-Christian attacks were all forgotten at least for the time being.

By default Congress opposed an early election after BJP a longer incumbency which proved to be an asset for the latter. Riding on a sympathy wave Mr Vajpayee also steered his caretaker government through the vicissitude of a war

from which he seems to have emerged as a hero. In the meantime his rating has sharply risen. Even before the Kargil war 49 per cent responses in an opinion poll approved his performance as PM to be good and another 15 per cent found him at least average. In spite of slow and sluggish conduct of war it has impressed the Indians who hungered for some kind of victory over their nudging enemy across the borders and improved Vajpayee's stature. Although India's military performance in Kargil can be debatable she has undeniably

lives in India and they initially refrained from politicising Kargil, the war is now coming to be the main issue of electioneering. The Congress and Left parties have already lashed at the establishment for what they have called a terrible cost paid by the country for manifold lapses on the part of government in its conduct of Kargil war. The allegations are levelled against the BJP for neglecting national security. The Congress, bereft of a credible plank for the election which is now only six weeks away will, it seems, make desperate use of

quite intelligence collection they were not analysed or disseminated for action, it is alleged. The Congress attributes these failures to the government which, it says, has overall responsibility to secure the country's external frontier.

As regards the actual conduct of war, even as the BJP government tried to put up a brave face during the war, a close look at it afterwards revealed a host of weak spots in the country's defence preparedness. It was a costly military enterprise to employ as much as five army divisions, 500 artillery pieces and 15-20 air sorties a day to evict out 1000-1200 militants occupying the Kargil heights. Contrary to the defence minister's demand that the intruders would be thrown away within 48 hours, one third of the militants were still holding the Kargil ridges when Pakistan agreed to withdraw them after two months of fierce fighting. The Congress asks if it was much of a victory on the part of the government when the nation had to pay so much for so little.

The Congress has also questioned the way the conflict was brought to an end. The government claimed that India found unequivocal endorsement of its demand that Pakistan should take immediate steps to withdraw the armed intruders from Indian side of LoC and ensure that such violations do not occur in future. The opposition is critical about how that endorsement was obtained by compromising India's traditional position of keeping matters relating to Kashmir in a bilateral frame. The Congress alleges that Vajpayee government itself has 'internationalised' the localised problem of Kargil by writing letter to President Clinton, sending his emissary

to Beijing and despatching similar mission to G-8 conference. In a way, declares Vajpayee's 'diplomatic victory' and terms it as institutionalising foreign mediation on permanent basis.

The BJP's refusal to convening Rajiwa Shava where Congress is in majority is severely censured by both the Congress and the Left parties. Although there was a constitutional, democratic and political requirement for an emergency session of the upper house of the Parliament to discuss Kargil situation the BJP government persistently showed a negative attitude. The Congress alleges that the government avoided it so that its weaknesses were not exposed.

In its equally desperate bid for power the BJP is obviously not sitting idle. The party is trying to use Kargil to its full electoral advantage. Although its 'Hindutva' ideology was temporarily set aside after its trust vote defeat in April it seems to have revived it in the wake of Kargil war. A new Hindu chauvinism is generated at the BJP's behest — thanks to the media hype and war hysteria the party was able to create during the war. As regards the alleged government failures in Kargil Prime Minister Vajpayee has responded by ordering an enquiry which is turned down by the opposition as an 'eye wash'. In the meantime the Vajpayee government has also been highlighting the lapses and failures of Congress government during 1992 debacle.

Just now it is not clear who would be the beneficiary of Kargil in electoral bout. It has however decidedly cast its long shadow over the country's electoral scene by now. Both the contenders have their valid arguments to offer over Kargil but at the end of the day it is the combined effects of many visible and invisible factors of the country's electoral politics which would tilt the balance.

PERSPECTIVES

by Brig (Rtd) M Abdul Hafiz

scored some diplomatic victory in enlisting the support of big powers including the United States and this has put Pakistan to withdraw from across the line of control. This has straight away given BJP's caretaker government a significant political mileage which will weight heavily in its favour in next election.

Yet, in the light of many details now coming into light, the government failures were colossal in Kargil war. The cost incurred in Kargil both in terms of man and material was enormous. There were shocking lapses, unforgivable goof-ups and abysmal intelligence failure in anticipating Pakistani infiltration resulting in high casualties and soaring cost of war. Even though there is a consensus among the political parties on foreign and security po-

Kargil. As the poll dates are drawing close and the party's political isolation is near complete, Kargil will be its last weapon which BJP will use, of course, party with vengeance.

It is alleged that in Kargil there was an intelligence failure having few parallels in recent history. Even the defence experts are amazed how an intrusion of the magnitude of one in Kargil that must have taken Pakistan many months to execute went undetected. It is found irreconcilable particularly when the Kargil war zone had been a familiar scene of fighting also in the past. So the questions are asked how its surveillance could be ignored by the intelligence agencies — the RAW, IB and military intelligence — which all have elaborate network in this sensitive region. Even if there were ade-

Indian Elections: Which Way the Minorities Will Swing?

Major political parties vying for power are obviously wooing the Muslims for their support. The BJP and the Congress as the two main parties are clearly wary of Muslim votes because in many constituencies their support becomes decisive.

Muslim League as such is not a force to be reckoned with as their strength rests on two or three seats in the 545-member Lok Sabha. Their leaders say, Ibrahim Sulaiman Sait or G. M. Banatwala often find a berth in the parliament but Muslims as a whole are mingled with different political parties. This is construed as a measure of their prudence and wisdom since as the main religious minority it is necessary for them to identify with mainstream politics rather than projecting themselves on any religious platform.

The Congress has traditionally enjoyed the support of the Muslims till late seventies when Congress saw a sliding of the minority support in the 1980 elections that Indira Gandhi lost. However, while it was the Congress in the national level in most states, Muslim support has been a major strength for some centrist parties in the 'Hindi Belt' like Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan as well as for leftists like the CPM and the CPI in West Bengal and Kerala. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the largest political group in the dissolved parliament which had formed the government by virtue of that strength in collaboration with other parties is certainly now a major political force. Since the Congress is believed to be winning back the minority votes to some extent and centrist-leftist United Front maintaining a hold over the Muslims, the main question is whether the BJP will be able to attract Muslims. The BJP is often seen as a communal force by different

MATTERS AROUND US

Zaglul Ahmed Chowdhury

quarters and as such it is pertinent to ponder over the possibility of this party's ties with the Muslims. The question is whom the Muslims will support — the Congress, BJP or UP. More importantly, what are the chances of their endorsement to a particular party or alliance in a large number? If their votes are broadly splintered, who stands to be benefited?

A critical analysis of the current situation will suggest that Muslim votes are unlikely to be attracted by a single party or group for a variety of reasons. They are unquestionably at an arm's length from the Hindu nationalist parties like the Shiv Sena in Maharashtra. They have always seen with a great degree of alarm and suspicion forces such as the former Jansanghi which had later merged with the Janata Party in the late seventies and then re-incarnated itself in the form of today's BJP. In that case can the BJP expect Muslim votes?

The BJP as the main constituent of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) is distinctively different from hitherto known communal overtones although sections of the party leadership often talk in communal lines. But Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee and

some other liberal leaders have refused to be drawn into communal lines and this has acted as an effective leverage to balance the hard-line BJP leaders. Even if the party President Kashubhai Thakre feels like pacifying the hawks in the party, influence of the liberals helps to obviate the situation. It is not meant to say that the BJP has jettisoned its communal approach on many issues but what is important is that it pursued the NDA programmes while in power and not the BJP election manifesto. Most of the NDA allies like the Samata Party in Bihar, the Trinamool Congress in West Bengal or the Lokshakti in Karnataka are secular and their pressure keeps the hard-line leadership of the BJP somewhat away from taking decisions on communal lines.

The present government headed by Mr Vajpayee is an interim one but when it was in power before collapsing three months ago, its decisions were marked by consensus in the NDA. Besides, the BJP has to pay heed to the alliance partners without whose support it could not have remained in power. The Muslims have come closer to the BJP in recent times

and the party attracted some minority votes in the last polls. It is possible that the party will maintain that much of influence over the minorities because of its performance in power. The Babri Mosque experience is there but BJP, while in power, took care to an extent to assuage their feelings.

The Congress while in power with Narasimha Rao as the prime minister saw the destruction of the Babri Mosque at the helm of the state government in UP where Ayodhya lies. The Muslims did not take kindly the role of the central government at that time and this had resulted in the weaning away of many minority votes from the Congress. The situation has since improved with Sonia Gandhi becoming the party president. Several Muslim organisations like the Jamiat-Ulmae-Hind have decided this time to support the Congress, which in the last elections failed to win a single out of a total 85 seats in the where Muslims are in fairly good numbers. In this state, the Muslims opted for Samajwadi Dal of Mulayam Singh Yadav, BSP of Kanshi Ram and Laloo Prasad Yadav's party in Bihar for their secular credentials. The Congress is sparing no efforts to win back the Muslim votes in the northern India that sends

most members in the parliament. It is likely that Congress will succeed in winning back the minorities to an extent.

The centrist Janata Dal and its leaders like Vishwanath Pratap Singh, I. K. Gujral or H. D. Deve Gowda have enjoyed Muslim support to a great extent but the party is currently in a crisis over support to the BJP-led alliance in the coming polls. In fact, the organisation has suffered a split on the issue with the faction led by Mr. Gowda refusing to align with BJP whom they see as communal. This may result in the loss of Muslim support for the party because they may feel that their support to a party which itself is mired in squabbles may turn out to be inconsequential. The leftists have maintained a solid command over the minorities where they have strongholds like the West Bengal. The Muslims who have supported them are unlikely to be vacillating and the CPM, CPI or the RSP can continue to count on their support.

The election scenario in India is not clear yet and will keep on changing till the last days based on electoral exigencies and other factors. Major political parties vying for power are obviously wooing the Muslims for their support. The BJP and the Congress as the two main parties are clearly wary of Muslim votes because in many constituencies their support becomes decisive. Muslim votes are likely to be divided in the coming polls with the Congress expecting to win back their support, the BJP seeking to secure partially and the centrist-leftist Third Force counting heavily on them.

Art Buchwald's COLUMN

He was Family

I knew John F. Kennedy Jr., not intimately enough, but enough to say hello to on Martha's Vineyard. It was a place his mother loved very much and one he and his sister Caroline loved as well.

We have a charity auction on the island for Community Services, which includes day care centres, visiting nurses, drug and alcohol abuse counselling and other services to help people in need.

Ours is different from other auctions in that the items cannot be purchased anywhere — they are sold as dreams. We auction off a sailboat ride with Walter Cronkite, an extra part in a Mike Nichols movie, an evening at Lincoln Center with Beverly Sills, a tennis game with Mike Wallace, a walk across the bridge with David McCullough, and a luncheon with Kay Graham.

Three years ago, I called John F. Kennedy Jr. to ask if we could auction him off.

He was reluctant but finally agreed to take four people on a bicycle trip around Gay Head near his home. The ride sold for almost \$12,500 and was one of the most popular of all the items.

A few weeks ago, I called John and asked him if he would be auctioned off for lunch at George Magazine.

He hesitated and then said, "I'll be honest with you. I hate to be auctioned off. I feel part of a slave market."

I said, "I understand."

Realizing I had let him off the hook, he said, "Tom Hanks is on the island and he loves Martha's Vineyard."

He laughed, and I thanked him for the tip.

John, his wife and sister-in-law's tragic flight to Martha's Vineyard struck so many people in this country. It forced us to re-examine Kennedy tragedies, particularly his father's assassination. Once again, a country went into mourning for a Kennedy.

Not only was John F. Kennedy Jr. very much part of our history, but he represented the type of person we wanted our sons to be.

When it was announced he had disappeared, those of us on the Vineyard received dozens of calls from friends around the country who felt or wanted to feel that we knew more than they did. We didn't. Our source of information was the TV, the same source they were tuned in to.

John F. Kennedy Jr. was not an astronaut, a war hero, a Nobel Prize-winning scientist, or a professional athlete. Yet somehow we were connected. As with all the Kennedys, he was family.

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To the Editor...

The JU mockery

Sir, I was disturbed to read that the Jahangirnagar University rapists who had been expelled earlier have now taken over two dormitories with the use of firearms.

Earlier the police had refused to apprehend these criminals for rape as no one of their victims came forward to press charges. However, this latest violent act happened in front of many witnesses; in fact, several of them were injured by the armed thugs!

It's time the police pressed charges and jailed the guilty individuals. It will be tragic if the public has to sit and watch these ex-BCL goons make a mockery of the police, the university and the government once again.

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Sour criticism?

Sir, It refers to Dr A H Jaffar Ullah's article titled 'Sour Notes: dHAKA Receives Its Comeuppance for Being Off-tune!' in the 'Star Literature' page dated July 31, 1999. There were some points on which I could not agree with the writer's views.

First of all, the remark about the bandleader and his saying that he was an English honors graduate of DU was totally irrelevant. It seemed that the writer actually expressed doubt about the fact, which was pointless, unless he had some concrete proof that the singer was not what he professed to be. Music is something where

there's always scope for experimentation. One American band used to use a guitar to create the effect of distorted guitar. Pink Floyd has used telephones, clocks etc., to add a new flavor to the songs. The fact that nobody had tried it previously did not mean that the effort would not be successful.

Tagore's songs are enjoyed by almost everybody in this country and many more abroad. What dHAKA did was they put on some different instruments to create the music but they did not change the tune or the lyrics. And the fact of the matter is that even if they did distort it as the writer says, it can be sung again in the traditional way — right? It caused no permanent harm. Why not keep an open mind to these things? Nothing can diminish the attraction of these beautiful songs.

And as for the leader Dr.

Jaffor Ullah mentioned by Shubert and Schumann's (this, I believe is the correct spelling), it is not necessary that we imitate everything that the West does. Just because, in the writer's opinion, the people of the West would never 'distort' these leaders that doesn't mean we have to stifle our own means of improvisation and experimentation.

I do not know what the Dhaka TV or DTV is, but evidently they were very grievous about the telecasting of the song.

And last but definitely not the least, in my opinion the females in the videos were very incongruous. But the statement that 100 bands like dHAKA could never make a dent on Tagore's songs is irrelevant too. If they intended to make dent on Tagore's works, they would have, I'm sure, made a parody. A rendition of the original song

in the original music doesn't sound like any attempts to make dents, let alone amputate Tagore's songs.

The original melody and the appeal of these songs are eternal. The addition of different musical instruments in the latest version may well be an attempt to make these classics more acceptable to our teens. It can always be sung in the traditional manner whenever desired. New things have to be tried.

And as far as I understand Tagore's songs are not private property. Thousands of artists render these songs every now and then, without the permission of any authority.

The effort to resist anything new is innate of old people — no I do not say that. It was said by Tagore himself in his famous poem, "Shobujer Gaan".

Adnan R
Dhaka

M Ali
Dhaka

Plant more neem

Sir, Now is the prime time of planting trees. Previously, with many others, I have written about the importance of neem tree. Apart from its medicinal value, neem tree extracts can be used as an effective pesticide. Neem-based pesticide is environment-friendly and it can significantly reduce the use of hazardous chemical pesticides.

One of our neighbouring countries, Myanmar, has set a unique example of producing and application of neem-based pesticides. Estimated number of neem trees in Myanmar is more than 500,000. A pilot pesticide plant was established in late eighties with annual production capacity of 145 of neem-based pesticides. Research findings of neem pesticides show it to be as effective as chemical pesticides and it is found to be most suitable for use on vegetables.

Let us plant more neem trees. And the government may also take necessary steps to transfer neem-based pesticide production technology from Myanmar to Bangladesh.

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