

Heinous Motive

RECENT developments at the Shahjalal University of Science and Technology take us 28 years back in time to the days of another December when the Pakistani occupation forces and their loyalists executed the intellectuals in a bid to strangle the soul of an emerging nation.

Evidently, the situation has arisen out of naming some academic and administrative buildings of the university after some of our great leaders, scholars and personalities, some of whom hail from Sylhet.

Hartal Violence on the Rise

IT seems a reduced duration of hartal as was the case on Monday — for nine hours all over the country barring Chittagong — was not accompanied by any lessened degree of violence.

The propensity to mayhem in hartals has markedly increased for some cogent reasons: one, it is a freshly aligned opposition formation out to prove its agitational prowess; two, the stake is high for them in a municipal polls where only the AL is fielding candidates; three, the ruling party has never been without a strategy to counter, even foil, the opposition's agitational programme; four, the AL as a party and the police as a government agency are having to contend with four parties afield with their respective organisational strengths brought to bear upon their common action programme; and finally, that is why the numbers of clashes between the police and the activists of the four parties on the one hand and those between the AL loyalists and the whole range of opposition activists on the other, have increased manifold lately.

That being the menacing outlook in the overall, we urge the four-party opposition to take all their protests to the parliament which is scheduled to sit on the auspicious new year's day of the new millennium. We implore both the AL and BNP to put their right foot forward on that great day.

Late and Little

THE government ban on the import of single pack disposable syringe is a limited one and comes too late in the day. According to the new order only 'blister and ribbon' pack syringe can be imported on fulfillment of conditions laid down in the Import Policy Act, 1997-2002 and with permission from the drug administration authority.

Only banning the import of single pack syringes won't do. The ministry and departments concerned must be geared up and properly equipped with men and machines to strictly supervise the implementation of the latest government order.

When Disappointment Turns into Desperation

HOW does New Delhi look from here? I posed this question at a small gathering of lawyers and intellectuals in Srinagar early this month. One lawyer replied: "It is ugly and makes me feel ashamed." Another one said: "How could you criticise Pakistan for having lost democracy when you never allowed us to rule ourselves?"

Indeed, as I talked to more and more people — lawyers, journalists, retired bureaucrats, politicians, economists and businessmen — I found that India's image was more smeared than before. It is not only alienation, it is a mood of indifference.

During my earlier visit, one and a half years ago, I had seen the Kashmiris expecting things to take a turn for the better. A substantial number of them had participated first in the Lok Sabha poll and then in the state assembly election in October 1996. In more than one way they had rebuffed the forces which were pro-militant, parochial and which had stalled the process of merging with the mainstream.

Even otherwise, the Kashmiris were tired of leading an insecure and uneasy life. The militancy had once ignited a spirit of challenge and defiance. But it had also brought in its wake the retaliation by security forces, often brutish and brutal. Enough of bloodshed had taken place. There was a realisation that all that had happened had taken them nowhere.

ALONG with the many ideas being floated for enhancing revenue generation, it is important to find innovative ways for cutting non-development costs and curtailing expenditures. There is a fair amount of recurring wastage and only strict control at every tier of administration can keep this to a very minimum.

There is a dire need to reduce the number of departments in the civilian bureaucracy as well as personnel. There may be a hue and cry about unemployment but it will be far more economical to have people stay at home and collect their salaries than load the government with additional financial burden because of individuals making private telephone calls, excessive use of electricity, misuse of government transport and personnel, etc.

A comprehensive pro forma should be devised and issued to every department and sub-department for study and comparison of a three-member committee belonging to the same department but appointed by the next higher authority. This proforma should indicate the number of appointments, in the sub-unit, the responsibilities/tasks of each person, their salary/allowances for the year 1999, the number of telephone and vehicles being used and their expenditures (individually) in use thereof.

There is a tendency to avoid elimination of departments and reduction of number of jobs because of humanitarian considerations. Everyone must understand that the elimination of a post does not mean automatic unemployment, people would be transferred to a Central Surplus Pool by categories.

They may be offered a Golden Handshake if attempts for their gainful employment do not materialise and if on re-organization/re-structuring they cannot be slotted into a job. Even then it would be cheaper to keep them "on hold" rather than on any job.

A major portion of the Federal Budget goes to Defence Services. It is reported that the Chief Executive (CE) has initiated a serious cost-cutting exercise to reduce recurring expenditure by as much as 30 per cent without compromising the effectiveness. Obviously this must be a systematic exercise that will cut waste down to a minimum as well as curtail/eliminate those areas that are not vital to the Army's mission.

But it is an important issue for India. I think, if the Government of Bangladesh agrees to this issue, the existing relation between these two countries will be better than that in the past years.

Mrityunjoy Saha AR 72801, USA

Public phone outlets

Sir, The private telephone service shops in my locality no longer provide the illegal telephone call service (at exorbitant rates), as the government disconnected the lines, prior to the introduction of the newly approved policy of renting out such phone call centres in the private sector, after due registration, and as per regularised payment chart.

Syed Waliullah Dhaka

Transshipment facility to India

Sir, As a non-resident Bangladeshi, it is quite difficult for me to know and understand the current affairs in my country. However, in this modern age of science we, the non-residents, are able to know about some of the major events taking place in Bangladesh.

From the time of War of Independence, India has been helping Bangladesh in many ways. It's our responsibility to support them as much as possible. For the past several years India is facing a lot of trouble to ship goods to their eastern regions. This transshipment issue is not a big deal for Bangladesh.

The image of the militants has improved. Lately, they are seen as "liberators." When anyone of them is killed, there is a burial procession. Even youthful leader Shabir Shah argues that there may not be any other option "if New Delhi does not listen to us." At present, he favours a dialogue and wants the Hurriyat leaders, who have become more credible after their detention, to be associated with the talks.

They wanted to try him again — and also the Government of India.

New Delhi was seen learning from the Lok Sabha election in 1996 that a free atmosphere evoked a wider response. The assembly election was a welcome follow up. Afraid of gun culture and communal sentiments overtaking their peaceful and Kashmiri way of living, many came forward to exercise their vote. Despite a boycott call by the Hurriyat leaders, who associated themselves with the demand for independence or elections under the UN, nearly 40 per cent of the Kashmiris went to the polls in 1996 to elect the assembly. It was not that they had come to accept New Delhi but it was their feeling that normalcy would give them better dividends.

Whether the Centre or Farooq Abdullah realised this or not, most Kashmiris had generally reconciled themselves to the situation provided they got good governance and secure living. Two years, from the assembly election in October 1996 to the end of 1998, was a trial period. It seems that the advantage had been blown up. The 1999 Lok Sabha election in Kashmir was the biggest fraud committed on the voters. Elections were only in name. It is a sort of blot which the Central Election Commission will not be able to rub off easily.

The rigging in the 1998 assembly election had driven young men from ballot to bullet. A feeling of disappointment had turned first into desperation and then into insurgency, with the help of the Pakistan army and arms. The same thing happened in the 1999 Lok Sabha election. More than 200 disgusted boys have crossed into Pakistan to get training. The local population is once again showing a sneaking admiration for even foreign militants, 90 per cent of them Pakistanis.

People feel that their expectations have been belied. They find the government failing in every field, particularly the administration. Nor do they find any redress of their grievance. The cost of living is going up, electricity alone, if and when available, costing 50 per cent more. On top of it, they daily come across examples of waste and unchecked corruption from top to bottom.

In fact, people have felt cheated. New Delhi is seen engaged in security, not in the measures on how to improve their lot. Farooq Abdullah's acts of omission and commission have come to be seen as New Delhi's doings. The state government's defence is that the promised economic package is yet to arrive. And the Rs. 400 crore released by the Centre is inadequate.

Criticism of India, which was somewhat muted at one time, has now become loud. They feel that they have no say, much less participation, in managing their own affairs. A political solution is at the back of their mind. But a cleaner, quicker and more sympathetic administration would have been better.

There are allegations of excesses. The militants operate even in the city. A hand grenade was lobbed at a place near my hotel. There was an explosion at the inauguration of a bridge by Farooq Abdullah. One thing different from the past is that such incidents do not seem to disturb people. They have begun to take such incidents in their stride. There is no hartal, no detour of the affected place by pedestrians.

While walking on the road, I found no sign of Talibanisation of the city. Very few women wore burqa and few men sported beard. There is normalcy of sorts. The number of bunkers in the city is far less than before. Even security men on the streets are not so visible as it was the last time. No doubt, there are more militants from across the border than are from within. But the local population does give them shelter and provide them guides for 'the target'. The attack on the army headquarters at Badami Bagh is one example of local assistance.

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