

Needless Politics on Names

NAMING of some academic and administrative buildings at the Shahjalal University of Science and Technology appears to have more appeal to the opposition political parties than the country's socio-economic good; or else, they would have surely thought twice before calling the five-day hartal in Sylhet. At this point of time, we'd rather not indulge in any debate on whether the personalities chosen are controversial or not. Our concern is about the future of a few thousand general students and the lack of peace at Sylhet.

The trouble that broke out late last year has already taken away two valuable months from the academic calendar and it looks set to delay their graduation by several months. Even worse, the situation having deteriorated progressively, it doesn't seem that we have seen the end of it yet. On a larger scale, five days of hartal would invariably result in violence and thereby damage to life and property. Besides, nine days — the two weekends inclusive — of civic paralysis is bound to tell on the country's economy as a whole. Isn't it too high a price to pay over the naming of some buildings?

If the syndicate's decision in this regard, as the opposition parties want to have us believe, is not just, then the course they have taken to ventilate their disapproval is criminal, if not seditious. Who gives them the right to toy with the lives of so many students? What right do they have to keep not only the campus but also the whole of Sylhet under siege? Are intimidation and issuance of 'death warrants' to the vice-chancellor and some syndicate members, by themselves, not stretching the issue a little too far? They have virtually unleashed a reign of terror in Sylhet and their behaviour could well be dubbed as insanity.

Such an issue should never have been allowed to blow out of proportion. Unfortunately, the leaders of both ruling and opposition parties, in their bid to gain some political points out of it, have done exactly that. The least they could have done in this case was not to interfere and let the controversy be settled within the campus. Thanks to their unsolicited patronage, the whole city is now suffering. We demand an immediate and peaceful end to the stand-off. We hope the politicians will play a responsible role in demonstrably refraining from politicising the issue any further than they have already done as a precursor of rolling the rumpus back to order.

Serious Credibility Lapse

THE police handling of Sumon murder aftermath has been as bad as the perpetration of the mayhem by its Detective Branch at the small hours of Wednesday last. Increasingly, the expected distance between the commitment of a crime and the start of a legal process to call it into account is narrowing down to a point of nullity. Those responsible for blurring the difference between culpability and enforcement of law are coming out unfazed from public or media storm which they knew too well from the beginning would not last long anyway. Needless to recap instances where the prosecution cases never jelled, partly taking advantage of a growing public amnesia over them but largely because there were skeletons in the cupboard of the offenders which they were desperate to keep from public or legal view. The civil society including the legal aid groups can make a difference here by asking the government to resurrect such cases from oblivion.

We would like to know in the Sumon case what empowered the DB men to enter his family house on a tip-off at that hour of the night and that too without any warrant of arrest to show on demand. Secondly, why were they accompanied by masked men armed to the teeth as they stormed into the residence. Although they have denied this we don't see any reason why the family should prevaricate on this. Thirdly, why did they start firing without any obvious provocation from apparently unarmed people?

Above all, we have been observing an increasing tendency among policemen not to accept a case filed by the relatives of a victim where the grievance resulted from their own action. When the police version has been registered, there is no need to recognise another version even though the police is decidedly not the aggrieved party here. An amazing twist in which the police have delivered the judgement already before the real judge has sat to dispense it!

It is supremely note-worthy that we are yet to hear a single word from any government spokesman as to the administration's thinking on how it wishes to proceed on this case and what specific steps have been taken to book the culprits. Even the standard police press version of self-justification is missing along with the news of any probe ordered, far less an independent one. Police credibility hits its nadir when any black sheep in the force on being caught in the act is shielded from punitive action.

Right to Cheating?

ALL hell broke loose in Anandamohan University College, one of the premier educational institutions in the country, on Saturday afternoon. The candidates for Honours part-III examinations caused a total pandemonium at the college premises on the plea that the question papers set for them were too stiff and yet the teachers were not allowing them to adopt unfair means to write out answers to them. Their pent-up anger finally burst into total indiscipline with the agitated students not only damaging property but also assaulting teachers that included female members also. Some of them snatched answer scripts of the morning session and tore them off in front of the teachers and a posse of inactive policemen. The teachers were to subsequently assemble in front of the police super's office demanding protection of their lives from the hooligans.

While the teachers expressed their helplessness in the face of such indiscipline and made their position known to the district authorities, the agitating students brought out a procession in the town blaming the teachers for all the ills. In the past we have strongly condemned such unruly behaviour by students and wrote a number of times against the declining credibility of public examinations due to the epidemic of student cheating in them. For a handful of miscreants the majority of the students suffer. However, things would not have come to such a pass if the classroom instructions were adequate, question-papers did not encourage rote and the racketeering in question leakages and the collusive element to cheating were eliminated. We endorse the latest idea about treating these infractions as criminal offences.

Kashmir: Spiralling Out of Control?

A thoughtful segment of Indians is indeed disappointed that neither the Kashmiris' alienation nor the problems of winning them over was addressed. The action plan drawn up may work to an extent for some time before another serious turn of events in Kashmir would wake up the authority for another high level deliberation.

FEW anticipated in India that their euphoric victory of Operation Vijaya could be followed by a bitter winter of death and despair in Kashmir. Because the dull and dreary winters in the valley had usually been a period of relative respite in the past with the suspension of militancy. This winter the militants, most of whom are believed to be 'foreign hand' in the stepped-up insurgency in the state — mainly pointing to Pakistan and battle hardened Afghan Mujahideens sponsored by her — Pakistan persistently denies its involvement in the imbroglio except her diplomatic, political and moral support to the cause of the Kashmiris. Whomsoever the onus of responsibility for the crises can be attributed the ordinary Kashmiris are inextricably caught in the crossfire and their lives stuck in a decade long limbo.

The situation in Kashmir today is in sharp contrast to how it prevailed before the Kargil war. The insurgency lost much of its momentum since the election in 1996 ending Delhi's direct rule of the state. In fact by the end of a turbulent decade there had been a long lull in militancy and the Kashmiris seemed resigned to the fate of their failures in achieving the state's independence. Delhi even claimed that the state was under control and safe for tourism. The stock was taken of the past mistakes with regard to Kashmir and an animated debate ensued on the future of the state. Taking, however, no lesson from the cataclysmic events of a decade the authority reverted back to its old frame of mind and favoured a hardline in dealing with supposedly a post-militancy Kashmir. It scornfully rejected even its protégé Faruq Abdullah's suggestion for the state's return to pre-1953 status the denial of which fuelled much of the insurgency's fire. The Hindu hardliners also spurns a parley with India unless a Kashmir-first agenda is agreed to. In the mean time the militancy in Kashmir not only raged on with remorseless complacency. It was just when a

fresh upsurge with lethality not experienced before. While Delhi sees 'foreign hand' in the stepped-up insurgency in the state — mainly pointing to Pakistan and battle hardened Afghan Mujahideens sponsored by her — Pakistan persistently denies its involvement in the imbroglio except her diplomatic, political and moral support to the cause of the Kashmiris. Whomsoever the onus of responsibility for the crises can be attributed the ordinary Kashmiris are inextricably caught in the crossfire and their lives stuck in a decade long limbo.

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reassessment of the whole situation was under way the Kargil war broke.

The war in the line of control created a void in the valley from where 58 army battalions were taken off the state's counter insurgency role and despatched for their combat duty in Kargil. This together with other unexplained reasons seems to be responsible for the upsurge of militancy deep inside the state. According to Indians it might as well be part of Pakistan's Kargil game plan. As the Mujahideen climbed down the Kargil mountains their compatriots started showing their teeth in the valley. Ever since the militancy in Kashmir has taken a dangerous turn

Kashmiri Mujahideens. Indeed there are evidences of more number of Kashmiri youths going across the border for training. Whomsoever may be fighting and what ever their number or inter-group ratio the conflict is becoming nastier everyday.

The Indians doubt that Pakistan may have induced their regulars in the conflict in the garb of foreign mercenaries. The do-or-die resolve of the militants speaks of a military mind behind their operations. The hit and run tactics that have long marked the militants' strategy is now replaced by determined attacks on security formations. Military commanders in Kashmir

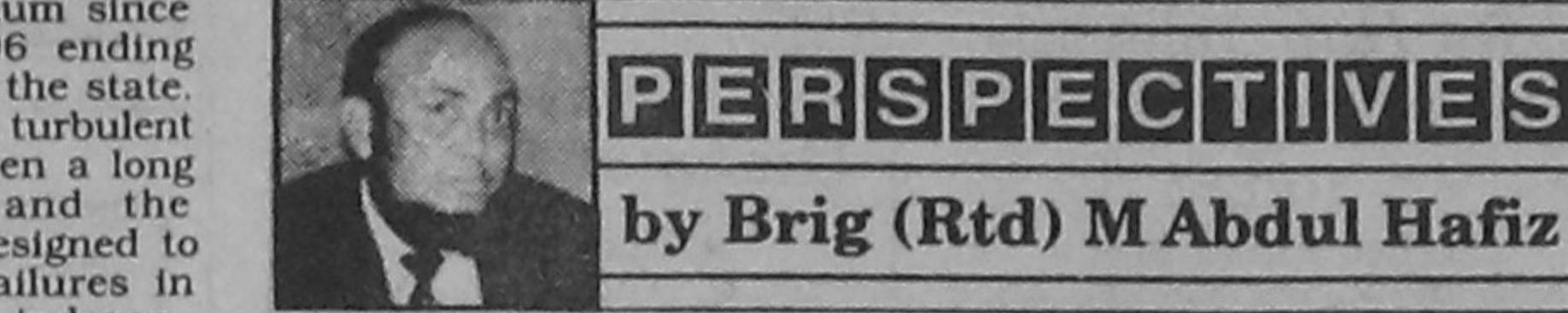
unusual. What is unusual now is the qualitative and quantitative changes that the militants have brought about. Most of the 2000 mercenaries who have come from across the borders are known to be diehard soldiers of Islam. Officials in India point out that the ISI has been using a mix of money and motivation to rope in the jihadis from the fundamentalists' seminaries along Pak-Afghan borders. Apart from lucrative amount of money they are given better arms including high calibre rocket launchers, mortars and anti tank missiles with which the militants have been playing havoc in the valley during the recent months.

Even the officials acknowledge a post-Kargil qualitative shift in the militants' tactics, essentially aimed at chipping away the morale of the security forces. In the meantime the militants are bound to exploit their victory in the recent hostage crisis. The real import of the government's surrender at Kandahar is yet to sink in but the disastrous portent the deal holds for the state was not lost on the security forces who fear yet another phase of heightened pre-cessation sentiments and a sagging morale for them. They are given the brief to suppress the insurgency. And since the bulk of counter insurgency operation takes place among unarmed civilians they behave as an alien force in enemy country and instill fear by being triggerhappy. There is no other visible achievement for them. Two years ago during a heightened phase of insurgency in Kashmir Mr LK Advani the Home Minister of India called a high level meeting, drew up an action plan, wanted to follow a proactive policy with regard to an undeclared war in Kashmir by Pakistan and even hinted at hot pursuit across the border. In

May 1998 after the militants had struck successively in Doda, Rajouri and Poonch Advani had gone to the extent of telling the affected people that he would resign if he could not protect them. Both the killing and Advani continued.

In the face of deepening crisis in Kashmir now the centre came up with a knee-jerk reaction that so far marks its policy on combating 'terrorism' in Kashmir. Yet the expectations were high when another high level meeting assembled on 17 January last in the official residence of Prime Minister Mr Atal Behari Vajpeyi to draw up an action plan — a new strategy for Kashmir. What emerged from the meeting was much of the same: the typical law and order and fire fighting approach to a highly sensitive political issue. The meeting ended up with the decision of having a unified headquarters for the forces employed in the state, dividing the counterinsurgency grid into 49 sectors as against 27 earlier, throwing in additional CRPF troops and arming the village Defence Committees with better arms and ammunition. Also a proactive approach coined by Mr Advani two years ago was repeated.

A thoughtful segment of Indians is indeed disappointed that neither the Kashmiris' alienation nor the problems of winning them over was addressed. The action plan drawn up may work to an extent for some time before another serious turn of events in Kashmir would wake up the authority for another high level deliberation. That it will take more than just meetings and action plans to deal with the challenge in a state virtually under siege is yet to dawn on the authority. One of the three protagonists in the conflict — perhaps India which is at the giving end for any new dispensation in Kashmir — must be able to come up with a brave plan, a workable alternative to mindless posturing that plunged the valley into pool of despair.



PERSPECTIVES

by Brig (Rtd) M Abdul Hafiz

with the 'newcomers' hitting the vital targets with deadly precision.

The Indian security agencies reckon that these 'newcomers' are religious warriors from Afghanistan, Sudan and other Muslim countries apart from Pakistan-sponsored infiltrators. They have joined the fray with sophisticated arms, high-tech communication equipment and motivation of suicide squad. Delhi believes that some of them are even financed by Osama bin Laden, the Saudi millionaire holed up in Afghanistan. According to Indian estimate there are 1200 to 2000 foreign mercenaries now spearheading the Kashmir rebellion. The Hurayt sources put their number at many thousands but claims the insurgency is to be under the control of

openly admit that the militancy now has a clearcut military direction. They have now been successfully and successively hitting high-security army camps. More recently they are targeting the Special Operation group (SOG) the cutting edge of the state police's anti-militancy drive. During the last week of December the militants stormed the SOG Headquarters in Srinagar in a daredevil attack. Barely two weeks later they, wearing the army fatigues, had attacked the Rastriya Rifles Headquarters at Khanabal in Kashmir valley. Given the graveness of the situation the Army chief broached the idea of a 'limited war' to tackle it.

In the past the violence in Kashmir had its cycles of ups and downs which were nothing

The Jokers and the Joke

The real problem is that the Indian public is so hooked on cricket that it does not stop watching the players in spite of their bad performance. People go on hoping that the team would perform better next time. But next time seldom comes. The Indian team may win a game or two, as it has done against Pakistan, but they are lucky victories. The basic thing is that most of the players do not have the talent. Nor are they prepared to accept the fact that they lack it. I do not agree with the selection committee that India does not have the talent. Living in a world of its own, the committee is not looking for it.

willing to quit. Neither has the selection committee chairman, Chandu Borde, more than half a dozen defeats in a row and that too, through the carelessness and imbecility of players should have woken up some people in some quarters. But no.

The Indian cricket team is not only playing politics but messing up matches in a manner that it can be said: 'It isn't cricket.' Considerations other than those connected with the game have been dictating all of them — players, managers, coaches, selectors, members of the Board of Control for Cricket in India, and their patrons — over the years. This time they have been exposed in Australia much more than ever before because they picked up a rag-tag band of players, gave them the name of Indian team and sent them out. Intrigues, back-biting and personal prejudices seem to have bequeathed the team from day one. The stage has now been reached where the country feels let down.

In my journalistic career of more than 40 years, I have never written on cricket. But since millions of Indian viewers have been humiliated, I thought I should devote my column this time to the cricket team. I have talked to many former cricketers of repute and members of selection committee. I find to my horror that there is no accountability.

For the team's dismal performance, none is held responsible. The post-mortem is always cursory and introspection seldom serious. None from the Board or managers have ever been asked to quit. Kapil Dev, the team coach, has talked about everything except his

When the selection committee caps a player, it confers on him a rare honour. (Saurav Ganguly showed that when he

kissed the emblem on his helmet after making a century against Pakistan). He becomes India's representative and he is expected to uphold its honour. He can do it only if he has the requisite talent. How can cricketers who do not know even the basics of the game qualify? It is obvious that the selection committee does not go by merit.

The cricket map of the country has five zones: North, South, East, West and Central.

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BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldeep Nayar writes from New Delhi

The Board's affiliated zonal units return members to sit on the selection panel. They do not have to be even cricketers. Like all elections, there is a liberal flow of money, pull and pressure to get a berth on the committees, because it is an honour of sorts.

Since the committee members are beholden to their units, they see to it that they serve the interests of their zone. All types of players are pushed and repushed into the team even when their performance is below average.

The overall consideration

is the representation of the zone, not the right player. Mohinder Amarnath, a former Test batsman, once called the selection committee members a 'bunch of jokers.' He had to pay the price. He was permanently dropped when he was in peak form.

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have the example of Mohammed Azharuddin (Even the Australian captain Steve Waugh has pointed out this omission). When the selection committee wanted to rectify the mistake of dropping him, Kapil Dev & Co reportedly threatened to resign if Azhar was sent. Is personal pique more important than the country's honour?

I recall that when Kapil and I were riding the bus to Lahore under the leadership of Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpeyi, we discussed how Sachin Tendulkar had been given run out a

day earlier in a game between India and Pakistan in Calcutta. Tendulkar could not make it to the crease because a Pakistani player accidentally came in the way. Kapil said that Pakistan captain Wasim Akram should have called Tendulkar back to undo the wrong. The responsibility is moral, Kapil said. In a different context, Kapil faces the same dilemma. The moral responsibility for India's debacle is Kapil's. He should have at least offered to resign. Tendulkar too should resign from captaincy because it is not his cup of tea. He becomes too tense and too tentative. He performs better when he is not burdened with the responsibility of captaincy.

Talking about prejudice, I am told that Nayan Monga, the country's No. 1 wicket-keeper, who was sent to join the team, was not allowed to play because of Kapil's dislike for him. Other players of the team reportedly kept away from him lest they should displease Kapil Dev by mixing with Monga. While in Australia, Monga celebrated his birthday in his room, practically alone.

The main problem with Indian cricketers is that they have lost sensitivity. In the dressing room, they talk about the contracts they have signed with advertisement firms, not

why they have lost and how

they should improve. That they have smeared the good name of the country does not cross their mind. This distinguishes them from the other teams.

And why Ajay Jadeja was not sent is the cricket board's failing. It wanted Kapil Dev and Tendulkar to accept either all the three, Azhar, Monga and Jadeja, or go without Jadeja as well. How did it help the country? I am at a loss to understand.

I have three suggestions to make. One, the cricket board should limit, if not ban, the players' appearance on advertisements. Kapil himself is a big ad-star. The second suggestion is that a player should get only half the fee for playing if they lose the game. And last but not least, the Board should be constituted properly. Only knowledgeable former Test cricketers should be on the board. Zonal considerations should not come into play when the national team is selected.

The real problem is that the Indian public is so hooked on cricket that it does not stop watching the players in spite of their bad performance. People go on hoping that the team would perform better next time. But next time seldom comes. The Indian team may win a game or two, as it has done against Pakistan, but they are lucky victories. The basic thing is that most of the players do not have the talent. Nor are they prepared to accept the fact that they lack it. I do not agree with the selection committee that India does not have the talent. Living in a world of its own, the committee is not looking for it.

I followed the news about violence against women with great interest. I think violence against women is increasing in societies which are changing. For example, if women become more self-assured, more independent, men in these societies have not learnt how to react on this. They fear that women will take their places. Sometimes they may feel like fools and their only way to react and to show their power is to use violence against women. It happens in all classes and all over the world. I think it needs several ways to face these difficulties.

One way may be a law — the possibility to carry it through the police women and the female judges. It's also important that women need to feel protected when they break their silence. These crimes have to be made public whenever they happen. It's important. Victims should break speak out. They are not guilty, after all. It's the perpetrator who is guilty. It would be useful if more prominent citizens come forward against these crimes. A change in the mindset is a must. Examples of partnership between men and women have to be highlighted in the media.

I met a lot of wonderful people from Bangladesh in Germany. They are all very kind people. They show a great deal of hospitality. But unfortunately a few still do not know how to treat women.

Since government has deployed defence personnel for easing traffic jam in the city, and some are at ZIA intersection, they can also look after the Ijtema traffic.

In any case, the government must notify members of the public, in advance, through the newspapers about the traffic arrangements made for Ijtema. This would help the visitors and commuters immensely, and Ijtema devotees largely.