

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 proportions. 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.

fresh upsurge with lethality not experienced before. While Delhi sees 'foreign hand' and an unstepped-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 to 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 lesion 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 fueled much of the insurgency's fire. The Hindu hardliners even agitated for the repeal of article 370 of Indian constitution that gives a special status to Kashmir. There prevailed an air of remorseless complacency. It was just when a

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 upsurge of militancy deep inside the state. According to Indians it might as well be part of Pakistan's is 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 Pakistanis may have inducted 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 Indian officials in India point out how the ISI has been using a mix of money and motivation to rope in the 'jehadis' 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 pro-secession sentiments and a sagging march 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 achievements 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 successfully 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 Vajpayee 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 'Huryat' sources put their number at many thousands but claims the insurgency 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 fatigue, had attacked the Rastriya Rifle Brigade Headquarters at Khanabal in Kashmir valley. Given the gravity 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 Ministry of Human Resources Development is the umbrella organisation for sports. But Murl Manohar Joshi, heading it, is more interested in saffronising Indian culture than saving sports. Now sports

are in the hands of bureaucrats, charlatans and amateurs. By this time, Joshi should have appointed a commission to find out why a country of one billion is almost at the bottom of practically every game in the world. Hockey, once country's pride and our neighbour's envy, has been ruined. We are nowhere in football, a game that is played the world over. And cricket is the latest shame.

Take cricket. There should be an inquiry to find out why India, which won the World Cup 1983, is now in the bottom half of the rating list. And why some players, who did not even deserve to be in a state team, were sent of Australia.

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.

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip 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 companies, 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 considera-

tion 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.

Personal bias is coming into play in the selection. Someone is left out, not because he is not good, but because someone at the top does not like him. We

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 Pakistani 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 Dev'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 Mongia, 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 Mongia. While in Australia, Mongia 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, Mongia 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.

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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.

Allegory, indeed!

Sir, You must have seen, at least, one pair of Doel. The other one? Here is the answer. Those of us who traverse the Doel Chottor traffic island must have appreciated the two beautifully sculptured birds facing the opposite directions, provided we had the right mood at the time. In our subsequent passage through the location we glance at the handiwork also a landmark, casually, without any thought of it, whatsoever. At times we just pass by the island without even noticing it, particularly when we are engrossed in our deep thoughts.

Lately, whenever I pass by the birds, one uncanny thought comes to mind. It is a question and is related to a possible significance of the two birds in juxtaposition, but looking towards opposite directions and trying to take off the ground, but they cannot for their wings are so closely set that they will hit each other if they try to fly. In that case they are likely to break each other's wings.

Does it sound allegorical? To me, it appears to be symbolic of the role of our beautiful quaternary birds heading the two large political parties, each trying to fly but due to their close proximity, they are unable to fly. Both of these birds should be able to fly provided they co-operate with each other. In this case one has to fold one of its wings to 'make space for the other to take off'.

It seems that the sculptor has unwittingly designed the sculpture in this way and never considered the fact that s/he symbolised one very saddest part of the history of this land.

Food for thought! from Ghalib, for the day.

Why fight she says
Why speak I say
We wait, watching to see
Who will break and say
Words of love first.

Syed Waliullah
Dhaka

Let's talk less

Sir, Why do we talk more than we work? We have a lot of readers who are working in the IT sector. We have doctors, engineers and other professionals also among the readers. I have come across many who talk about 'technology'. But so far I haven't seen anything done in the country. We can write millions of articles to improve the technological sector in Bangladesh, but talking will not help. We have to be active. So, let us work more than we talk.

Ronit Chowdhury
USA

Unsafe

Sir, What the DB police reportedly did in Postagola is barbaric. They not only killed an innocent person but also labelled as a criminal. Further-

more, they were not at all ashamed of their act.

What is going on in this country, anyway? The law and order has deteriorated so much that no one is safe, not even in their own houses. And all the government is doing is enacting new laws instead of utilising the existing ones properly. If only the government was sincere and controlled the law enforcing agencies properly instead of using them for their own purpose, no laws — be it PSA or the previous ones — would have been necessary.

Faria Rahman, Farah
Road-32, House-15
Gulshan, Dhaka

Let us live and die...

Sir, Recently, the government has adopted a plan to acquire 54,000 acres of land in three Thanas of Bandarban district for expanding an already existing cantonment and building up training facilities for the air and ground forces. It seeks to acquire 19,000 acres of land from Bandarban Sadar Thana, 9,500 acres from Ruma Thana and 26,000 acres from Lama Thana. The whole matter is still in the process, but as the press reports suggest, if the plan is implemented hundreds of thousands of people, Bengalee and Hill People alike, would be evicted from their ancestral homes. Experts say this will have the same impact on the whole fabric of Juma society as the Kapai dam had during the sixties. Moreover, the ecology and biodiversity would be the worst sufferer as the existing forest of the area would have to be cleared off.

We earnestly appeal to the Prime Minister to cancel the plan and let us live and die in

our own lands with our own culture, heritage and life style.

Mong Sanu Marna
English Department
Chittagong University
Chittagong.

One-day weekly holiday

Sir, Over last two years, our government has introduced 2-day weekly holiday in all government, semi-government offices and public sector corporations causing great inconveniences and sufferings to the common people. This has also paralysed the works and functions in government hospitals, post offices and banks. We feel that the government decision of 2-day weekly holiday was high-handed.

We however welcome the recent decision of Ministry of Health to observe one day weekly holiday on Friday for all government hospitals and district and thana level health centres.

We would request and highly appreciate if our government considering the manifold problems and socio-economic condition of our country keep close the post offices and banks only one day in a week instead of 2-days weekly holiday in the interest of public service.

O.H. Kabir
6, Hare Street,
Ward, Dhaka-1203

Violence against women

Sir, I visited Dhaka last year and it was a nice time for me. I met a lot of kind people who showed a great hospitality to me. Since then I regularly read news about Dhaka on the Internet. I also read The Daily Star.

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 policemen and the female judges. It's also important that women need to feel protected when they break their silence. They often 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.

Karin Cromptach
Bad Kreuznach
Germany.

Ijtema-time traffic

Sir, Ijtema is the biggest annual congregation held near capital city in winter. Hazards always loom around such gathering. Here safety consideration should be the prime considera-

tion to prevent any tragedy rather than a crisis management afterwards. Organisers must ensure safety measures of the event-area by deploying volunteers, while the government is to ensure measures taken to facilitate quick evacuation of injured and serious patients.

A planned traffic arrangement is a precondition of quick deployment of rescue and evacuation teams in an affected area.

For all the four holy sites of Hajar smaller vehicles (smaller than microbuses) are limited during Haj period. They allow larger vehicles to facilitate mass transit. The authority there notifies such traffic arrangements beforehand. For Ijtema, the Police Dept. deploys enough traffic personnel, but we hardly get any information, in the national dailies, about any traffic arrangement made by them. This often, devotes of remote areas face trouble by following the normal route. As police put unannounced barricades - and often at night, commuters suddenly find it difficult on their way. Backtracking of these vehicles causes another traffic congestion. Airline passengers, to and from Zia, guess the safer route to their destinations.

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

A R Choudhury
Uttara-Dhaka