

Dhaka University's uneasy calm

Bring back peace and studies

THE crisis at Dhaka University continues to reign despite a spell of relative calm. The immediate and extreme phase of violence seems to be suspended for the time being but the general environment of hate and mistrust isn't. The students are protesting the moves by the University administration and as many have said this is primarily a "general student-led" movement supported by the teaching community.

Everyone needs to find out the facts. The strange display of force by the police which has injured students, teachers and journalists is extremely condemnable but to ensure that this never happens again one must allow the due process of law to reign. That means judgement has to be suspended till the judicial probe body comes out with the report and the exact sequence of events is made public based on complete evidence. Given the range of public rage this is a very difficult task but probably the most significant one because it is likely to have a bearing on the normalisation of relations on the campus.

The resignation of Vice-chancellor Anwarullah Chowdhury and Proctor Prof. Nazrul Islam has been termed 'a triumph' by the agitating students.

The curious part of the entire scene is that the political parties are seeing it as their own struggle too and both the two major parties are trying to control the movement. The opposition has gone behind the students because the government has been favouring the administration. One hopes the general students remain in control of their affairs; for basically their movement originated in their collective concern for a congenial and healthy academic environment on the campus.

We hope the problem is resolved and the situation improves so that the students may return to what they are supposed to do at the University which is to study and learn not pelt anyone with stones.

Nearly 5000 Bangladeshis in foreign jails

Being looked after is their right

FOREIGN jails are full of Bangladeshis and the figure could be as high as 5000. The government has confirmed that 4500 are officially shown as detained and more could be inside without being known to the authorities. Most of them are in either for violating immigration rules or for criminal activities. They are in many countries of the world and range from India to Greece with the Middle Eastern and CIS countries falling in the middle. This should arouse concern as well as induce action.

Bangladesh's Ministry of Expatriate Welfare and Overseas Employment has agreed that the number is high and steps need to be taken immediately. It's an emergency because international norms demand that we look after our own citizens. For Bangladesh this is particularly significant because this country is looking towards expat workers for a bail-out from the export slump as the global economy continues to tumble.

Given that thousands work abroad and many more thousands who want to, but don't get the right opportunity take a risk anyway. Most developing countries have some people or other in foreign jails. For Bangladesh the matter is even more serious because many have been tricked at home by cheating manpower agents and these criminals have sent hopefuls straight from local shores to foreign jails.

The government has meanwhile approached the International Organization of Migration (IOM) for support in this regard. As a specialised UN body they can certainly provide assistance but the best method is to ensure that Bangladeshis don't land up in jail due to preventable and manageable causes. It means that the overseas employment sector needs streamlining and that the issue of rights of migrant workers be as much a concern of the government as the remittance flow. The embassies abroad should work more effectively in looking after the people whose money keeps the national economy alive.

For Bangladesh, overseas employment and migrant workers mean something more than guests working abroad; they constitute a vital part of the survival system. Keeping that in mind, one needs a more energetic and active ministry and offices and an enthusiastic recognition of the role of remittance senders in the national economy. Unlike many wealthy citizens they send money home and not smuggle it abroad. That is why they need to be taken more seriously if Bangladesh's potential for progress is to be fully realised.

A society devoid of mutual respect



S H IMAM

of vogue after nine-eleven. But if these have, then their society must have grown poorer with its traditional grace and beauty lost in the wilderness. Even if it were "a veneer atop cross-cultural shocks and feelings of discrimination and alienation encountered in a western society", that was still something demonstratively good and positive.

The unhappy contrast

Just contrast all that with what we see and encounter in Bangladesh today. People standing right in the

counted a dozen scuffles along a stretch of few kilometres on a day. The invariable assertion is: "I am right, you are wrong." This is a sickening trait of the perpetrator playing the prosecutor, judge and jury—all at the same time.

It's the lack of respect for the other's right of way that is causing most of the traffic congestion. To blame it all on our road engineering and network inadequacies is wrong.

Ray of hope

It should be possible, however, to instill some traffic sense in people.

had sent someone to the GM's office to sort the problem out.

He returned with a rather caustic piece of advice from the man in charge: "If you had a telephone you must be prepared to visit us once in a while." That's the attitude. Whether you approach a bank branch (NCB) or an utility outfit or a government or semi-government office for any service you have basically paid for as rentals, not to speak of paying their salaries as taxpayers you are made to feel they are doing you a favour.

only walk on its hind-legs.

Where has the traditional decorum at the top gone?

Sense of proportion and mutual respect are pathologically wanting.

Where abuse can be hurled at a prime minister by anyone in the opposition party and, conversely, the leader of the opposition can be taken a dig at by a person of similar level in the ruling party what an edifying example is set for the rest of the hierarchies.

Then, burning all boats of commu-

JUST ANOTHER VIEW

A society that fails to value qualities in an apolitical way can only walk on its hind-legs... But the society and country are what we have to live in or with as a permanent entity. And the way a society degenerates tends to affect the political parties like everyone else, them perhaps more than others. It will be in everyone's supreme interest, therefore, to protect the society from ruination.

Balmy breeze
Before your exit you must have been wafted (somewhat like, a balmy breeze) by a feel-good series of courtesies tossed at you in and out of places. "What can I do for you, Sir?" And, "Thank you-o (as if to emphasise 'pleasure is more mine than yours)' to your plainly muttered "thank you."

On the motorway as you decided to swerve towards a slower stream of traffic you waved a "thumbs-up" sign to let a speeding car from behind pass you by. A little act of grace that perked up the car rider(s) and you, too.

One wouldn't know if such reflexive geniality in the West towards complete strangers have fallen out

middle of streets and trudging along in a defiant indifference to honking or hooting by any approaching car or vehicle. This is thoroughly disgusting; but who cares? It has become a nuisance on the inner city roads in particular. And, as you frantically tried to move on to the main thoroughfare from a subsidiary road, you had it! For no one on the big road is prepared to give you any space whatsoever to drive in.

There is no right of way except for myself; everybody is pushing to go forward and in the process none is moving ahead. Filthy swearing, altercation and coming to blows are a daily epidemic. And one has

Nobody used to queue up at the bus stands before; but lining up under a shed is a common sight now. Better still, nobody jumps the queue these days. What a sea-change in the outlook of an ungovernable city! Bus riders learnt the hard way that it was in their best interest to be doing it. After that realisation, falling in line has now become a habit with them.

Similarly, when the right of way will be valued by all transport users and pedestrians as the best safeguard for their common interest, we will see a change of mentality in them.

Always a favour done

Once overbilled on my telephone, I

The problem is, those who can set things in order are not hardship-induced to solve it. They are not personally affected.

It's as much a governance problem as a social malady. We are disrespectful of our obligations to each other. It is a society that has become dysfunctional in many respects.

No respect structure

The respect for merit, excellence and experience hardly cuts across political affiliations and is subject to strong liking and disliking factors. And a society that fails to value qualities in an apolitical way can

nation between political opponents has become an extremely counter-productive national pastime.

An interesting story on Churchill and Lloyd George by Lord Boothby, parliamentary private secretary to Winston when he was chancellor of exchequer in Britain runs like this:

Churchill said to me: 'I know you are a great friend of Lloyd George. I am now writing the last volume of *The World Crisis* and there are certain questions that he alone can answer. Do you think you could persuade him to come and see me?' I said: 'It is not a question of persuasion. He would be delighted.' I then went to see Lloyd George and said:

'Winston wants to see you.' He replied: 'Splendid. Fix up an appointment.' I did, for the following evening at six o'clock. Lloyd George arrived punctually and I showed him into Winston's room. They were alone together for about an hour. After that I heard Lloyd George leave by the outside door, down the corridor. I sat alone in the secretary's room. Nothing happened. No bell rang. After about ten minutes curiosity overcame me and I went to the Chancellor sitting in an armchair, gazing into the fire, in a kind of brown study. I said to him: 'How did it go?' He looked up and replied: 'You will be glad to hear that it could not have gone better. He answered all my questions.' Then a hard look came into his face and he went on: 'Within five minutes the old relationship between us was completely re-established. The relationship between Master and Servant. And I was the Servant.'

The party is over

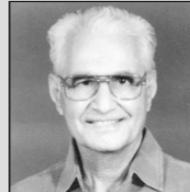
Top sub-continental leaders during the British Raj used to fight as wild cats in the parliament, but at the personal level they would fete each other to sumptuous dinners at their homes. The tradition carried into Pakistani days and early Bangladeshera.

The fundamental stake

Power constructs change. But the society and country are what we have to live in or with as a permanent entity. And the way a society degenerates tends to affect the political parties like everyone else, them perhaps more than others. It will be in everyone's supreme interest, therefore, to protect the society from ruination.

SH Imam is Associate Editor of The Daily Star.

The other strategic review



M B NAQVI
writes from Karachi

THE U.S. Secretary of State, Colin Powell, called again to urge talks and restraint on India regarding Kashmir and on Pakistan to do more to stop the Jihadi infiltration into Indian-controlled Kashmir. Earlier the EU Commissioner on foreign affairs and security did much the same. That is good insofar as it goes. But how far do such efforts go? They change little on the ground. Bulk of the Indian and Pakistani armies continue facing each other menacingly on the borders; India has again clearly indicated that it is in no hurry to start negotiating with Pakistan or to take de-escalatory steps. It is true such visits can always be justified in the name of bilateral relations. But what really is the point of all this high level rushing around?

Insofar as the Indian behaviour is concerned, it has to be assessed in terms of India's domestic politics. It has credibly assured the world that it will not invade Pakistan or even Azad Kashmir and Pakistan, on its part, has also satisfied the world that it finds nuclear weapons' use unthinkable. That is making the situation curioser by the day. What then is the point of this confrontation? It is costing a pretty penny to the taxpayers in both countries. Someone has to do some explaining.

As for Pakistan, a true review of the country's strategies is urgent. Necessary lessons have to be learnt from the soul-searing experiences since the May 1998 test explosions. As it happens, there has not been a single initiative by either side that has succeeded. Or there has been a

manipulating Afghans and helped their fanatical proxies, Taliban, overwhelm the fractious mullahs then mismanaging Afghanistan. All these initiatives later rebounded. These can be seen as having been foolish and costly adventures that have brought Pakistan justifiable criticism.

The source of trouble during this forward foreign policy phase was an exaggerated view of mass destruction weapons' deterrence value.

Nuclear weapons became a licence to do just about anything with impunity.

That forced India to stand

the Americans, on the one side, and

legalism and concerns for Muslim minority and secularism. Both employ a militarist outlook. Two clashing national security aims: one wants to take away Kashmir while the other wants to retain it, each ready to do what it takes. Well, the result is the present paucity of options. A rational and democratic definition of national security with a policy of peace is urgent for Pakistan, irrespective of what India chooses.

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will take a lot of work by primarily the Kashmiris because the Indians have made the status quo a test of their nationalism's macho character and a vital element of their secularism. Pakistan and Pakistanis are irrelevant for the basic problem, though their interest in Kashmir will remain strong. It will thus be a long haul.

As for general relations with India, there is obviously no scope for direct action concerning the primary objectives, necessary and urgent as they are. But two pointers however provide the starting point: one, the old policy of Pakistan trying to win Kashmiris' freedom for them, if necessary by military force, is no longer a meaningful proposition.

Secondly, there are many forces in India that are struggling against Hindutva fascism which need to be supported and indeed strengthened, if possible. Proper ways of doing that have to be found. We

Pakistanis have in any case to change the old puerile confrontational approach to India, the results of which threaten to fall below zero. A long-running cold war rivalry can only be replaced with the constructive idea of a people-to-people reconciliation, in much the same

way as the French and Germans ended their age-long enmity in postwar Europe. Like France and Germany, the South Asians too have to find a regional context in which to anchor their rapprochement.

Even before starting on that quest, Authority in Pakistan needs to be democratised in all senses of the term, with sharply changing the first priority to mainland Pakistan: extending and deepening the freedoms of Pakistanis to include their economic security. A big legal obligation of providing economic security to all citizens will be necessary to shift national priorities from foreign lands and causes to working for Pakistanis' own welfare and helping democratising the country.

MB Naqvi is a leading columnist in Pakistan.

PLAIN WORDS

We Pakistanis have in any case to change the old puerile confrontational approach to India, the results of which threaten to fall below zero. A long-running cold war rivalry can only be replaced with the constructive idea of a people-to-people reconciliation, in much the same way as the French and Germans ended their age-long enmity in postwar Europe. Like France and Germany, the South Asians too have to find a regional context in which to anchor their rapprochement. Even before starting on that quest, Authority in Pakistan needs to be democratised in all senses of the term, with sharply changing the first priority to mainland Pakistan: extending and deepening the freedoms of Pakistanis to include their economic security. A big legal obligation of providing economic security to all citizens will be necessary to shift national priorities from foreign lands and causes to working for Pakistanis' own welfare and helping democratising the country.

Pakistan now needs a wholly new India policy because the old one has not worked in any sense of the term. Otherwise it would not be in a position today where it can only react to others' moves and can take no initiatives. A grand view of policies is necessary. Looking at India's current trends, a few outstanding objectives rise up in view: leaving aside the complexities of the Kashmir problem for the moment, preservation of secular democracy and containing and countering of Hindutva fascism need to be addressed by all throughout the world. There is of course no doubt about the need for a more rational and pacific approach to the Kashmir problem, starting with the realisation that the fundamental rights of the Kashmiris are better served by democratic precepts than by relying on religious categories. A democratic solution of Kashmir problem

Look at the "Enronish" nature of the proposal by Xpronet. Even though, it will retain 40% stake, the rest 60% will go to two Indian companies, which are in reality the overseas arms of Indian Exploration Major Oil and Gas Corporation (ONGC). It's like Padma and Meghna vying for 30% each, which is 60% for BPC after consolidation.

It is astounding to see our Ministry of oil and gas sleeping as before, without even any clue of what's going on with our oil and gas resources. We must enact laws right now to stop such transfer of ownership, or make the law such that any secondary company buying the right from the primary bidder must fulfil the same conditions, as the initial bidding required.

Nafees K USA

President's power

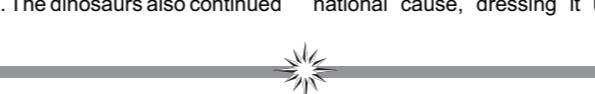
In Bangladesh the President used to play a significant role in society and had more power. But under the parliamentary system of democracy, this power of governing country's internal affairs by the President has been curtailed significantly. Although this was done after amending the Constitution through the much talked 12th amendment; but time has come to think of its demerits too. The President of a country must be kept free from any party affiliation or being biased by any political policy or doctrine. We the Bangladeshis presently lack confidence over all the public representation from either government or opposite sides. Neither the Premier nor the President should have the power to sack each other and such responsibility should be delegated upon both the treasury bench and the opposition bench.

A President may act as an "ombudsman". Neutrality has to be maintained. A President should have that power to advise ministers and MPs. He may play the role as a pivot. Even the Prime Minister should be accountable to this pivot character for getting approval for all sorts of public oriented pragmatic activities.

Iftekhar Ahmed

Dhaka

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE



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Musharraf's visit in Bangladesh

The headline of July 30 newspaper took me by surprise, "Musharraf regrets Pak 'excesses' in 1971." I couldn't help but read the news three times in a row!

It's wonderful to know that Pakistan finally realised that their deed of 1971 is regrettable.

Saquib Islam

Dhaka

To write an apology note over the mishandling of the East Pakistani situation by President Pervez Musharraf, while visiting Bangladesh, was a very mature step and was perfectly in the right direction.