

Student politics in BUET banned

Does it address the symptom or the ailment?

THE academic council of BUET has banned student politics. This comes in the wake of escalating violence in the campuses all over the country while BUET saw the murder of Sony, a young girl caught in the crossfire between two battling groups over a tender bidding process. Many will welcome the decision as campus violence has become a major political issue. But does it address the malady or the symptoms?

Banning student politics is not a new idea. Essentially, ban is a simple solution to a complex problem of national politics when criminalisation rules. That needs to be understood.

Students have become toll collectors and tender bidders because they are endorsed and encouraged to become so by their senior political mentors. No student would have dared to go criminal if they knew that they were immune up to an extreme point. Tender related violence was on for a long time but it's only when Sony was killed that there was an uproar and the government has made tough noises. One is still not sure what the actual outcome will be.

There is almost universal knowledge of the link between politics and crime and till that link is snapped, the criminal elements will only shift their areas of operations. It will probably create a new sector of violence and that breeds new anxieties.

Student politics *per se* is not bad at all. If anything it's one of the more glorious part of our political history including the Liberation War. But today's student politics is a far cry from those glorious days. It's the infusion of the criminal element that has brought it into disrepute and till those compulsions are handled there is unlikely to be any major improvement. A distinction must be made between student party politics as it is practiced today and an individual student wanting to involve himself or herself in political activities as an adult citizen of the country. He or she is free to do politics. What is being stopped by this ban is student party politics within the campus. This we wholeheartedly welcome.

Let all parties agree that they will not encourage criminal activities of students and they will not use students as pawns in their party politics. If students can be delinked from partisan politics then, in due time, student bodies may be allowed to resume their activities which must, by definition, be confined to looking after the welfare of the students, and not that of the political masters who have used the students to their selfish ends. In this all our political parties are equally guilty.

We commend BUET for its bold decision, and support the ban on student politics within the campus.

Municipal polls botched at Sandwip

Investigate allegations of local MP cadres' rowdy behaviour

NEVER before has this happened in our elections. Yet, to simply say that it was 'unprecedented' would not quite convey the outrage felt at the disdainful violation of rule of law centring around last Saturday's municipal polls in Sandwip. None of the 26,000 voters were allowed to cast their ballots, they having been intimidated by rowdies linked to the local ruling party MP into staying home on the polling day. Hardly any wonder, many voters had simply crossed over to Chittagong as a precautionary step.

No, it was not anyone asking them to vote under duress for a ruling party candidate; it was far worse than that. The real motivation behind the vile act was to force the electorate to boycott the polls altogether, because there was no ruling party nominee for the same. It is a tell-tale story. In the election schedule for the year 2000 nominations were submitted by ten persons for one post of chairman and 78 for the ward commissioners' slots. Although the polls were scheduled for September 28, 2000 these were stayed following a writ petition filed by one of the ward commissioner candidates. Subsequently, under the present government, the High Court by a ruling, reinstated the old schedule which in turn made the Election Commission announce a fresh date for the polls on last Saturday. This purportedly enraged the local ruling party elements, because in the previous schedule which took effect there was no nominee from the BNP side. And the local ruling party bosses could not stomach the prospect of anybody else getting a handle to leadership in the area. So, they did everything in their power to spoil the polls.

The local administration was muted into silence by the rowdies who even resorted to assault and plunder at some households. It was alleged that one of them was Local MP Mustafa Kamal Pasha's nephew Roman.

Election Commission is the statutory body to hold elections. If its authority is allowed to be undermined like this, how would it discharge its constitutional obligations? The government must hold an inquiry into the incident and punish the culprits without any mercy whatsoever. The electoral process will have to be saved at any cost.

What's preventing a full-blown Indo-Pak war?



M ABDUL HAFIZ

IN 1962 an overwhelming pressure from India's public opinion made Jawaharlal Nehru commit India to a war with China resulting in a humiliating defeat for the country from the shock of which India is still recovering. Apart from many other reasons for the defeat it can be argued in hindsight that India lost the war because she was least prepared for the kind of war undertaken by her in the wilderness of the Himalaya. Today there is even more impressive consensus in India on retaliatory action against Pakistan for the latter's proxy war in Kashmir. Quite in consonance with the public mood the Bharatiya Janata Party government -- driven, of course by its own compulsions as well as its hawkish tradition -- effected one of the largest ever peace time mobilisation along the LoC in Kashmir and international border with Pakistan. Yet despite this menacing posture for the last six months the hostility between the subcontinent's two arch-rivals stopped short of the outbreak of war. As a matter of fact, by mid-June the tension along the border receded -- although slowly and haltingly -- with both India and Pakistan making some symbolic gestures which are positive and conciliatory.

While Pakistan persistently

urged India to resume the process of dialogue, an apparent climbdown on the part of India is attributed to some subtle pressure exerted by Washington which, until the end of May seemed to be tilting towards New Delhi, started applying diplomatic pressure on it from early June. US pressure on Pakistan had already been there to crackdown on the militants operating along the LoC as a first step. By

might have to fight with Pakistan than they were in 1962. A prolonged vacillation over question of preparedness has been no less responsible for India's 'only war option' taking a back seat.

The crucial question before India's military planner mainly pertains to the nature of Pakistan's reaction if the militants' camps across the LoC are hit by Indian forces. Will it enlarge the conflict? If

past. The reality however dictates that almost any conflict in Kashmir is bound to escalate into wider conflict. Let's see the stages of such escalation culminating in either of the sides adopting the choice of a nuclear strike. In an event of Pakistan retaliating by crossing the areas where the terrain favours its forces, India will be compelled to bring in its air

such development. It is at this point that the Pakistani generals will have to choose between launching a conventional or nuclear strike against the Indian invaders. Given the predilection of Pakistan's military mind it will be inclined to exercise the nuclear option. However, the deterrence of the threat of decisive Indian nuclear retaliation will greatly influence Pakistan's decision which will now hinge on its

must be launched after Pakistan has fired its missiles but before they hit their targets. The window of opportunity for India in a situation like this is no more than three to four minutes -- a time hardly sufficient for India's decision makers to recognise the Pakistani threats, issue their orders and get the propellants and fire control system sufficiently sophisticated for them to lift off before the Pakistani missiles arrive. Not only most of the Indian missiles still have cumbersome liquid fuelling system its dependence on aircraft-borne nuclear weapons is marred by the fact that other than Delhi all of India's forward airfields will be Pakistan's first targets.

Obviously the Indian commanders seem extremely cautious and bent upon this time in addressing these questions as well as all connected problems before they commit their forces across LoC in Kashmir and most certainly before it does so across the international border. They do realise that before taking any retaliatory action India must enjoy numerical edge in nuclear warheads and build many more solid fuelled Agnis and Prithvis. The nuclear tipped missiles and nuclear armed aircraft must be widely dispersed and many more hardened silos built. Most importantly, marrying-up of all its warheads and bombs, bombs and missiles for instant use must be widely undertaken. All these are time consuming projects and must take their due of time. This time around they are wise enough not to embrace the ignominy of the Himalayan blunder in the Himalaya.

Brig (ret) Hafiz is former DG of BISS.

PERSPECTIVES

Obviously the Indian commanders seem extremely cautious...They do realise that before taking any retaliatory action India must enjoy numerical edge in nuclear warheads and build many more solid fuelled Agnis and Prithvis. The nuclear tipped missiles and nuclear armed aircraft must be widely dispersed and many more hardened silos built. Most importantly, marrying-up of all its warheads and bombs, bombs and missiles for instant use must urgently be undertaken. All these are time consuming projects and must take their due of time...They are wise enough not to

early June the Americans acknowledged that the Pakistan government had started taking 'verifiable action' against the militants and indicated that it was now India's turn to reciprocate. That the international community also was doing its best to avert a war in the subcontinent could have been reflected in India's scaling down.

But what this notion obscures is the search for answers to some vital questions by the India's military itself. Even if the nation was seething with anger over a series of ghastly militant attacks in Jammu and Kashmir. The armed forces of India had not only been circumspect about plunging their forces in an uncertain and unpredictable war, they diligently sought answer especially to the question if they are any better prepared at this moment for the kind of war they

Pakistan retaliates will it do so with a conventional or nuclear strike? Pakistan's military is so deeply committed to a proxy war in Kashmir, which is virtually sacrosanct state policy for survival, that it is almost inconceivable that Pakistan will allow India to call its bluff and getaway with it.

However a rock solid belief in each country that the other is bluffing is dangerous indeed. For example, Pakistan is absolutely convinced that India "does not have the belly to cross the LoC in Kashmir". India is equally firm in their belief that Pakistan "does not have the gumption to unleash a nuclear first strike on a nuclear-armed foe". India's military thinkers seem convinced that Pakistan's response will not be nuclear. It is precisely out of such miscalculations that all wars were borne in the

power and might get the better of the conflict given the IAF's distinct edge over Pakistan Air Force. Will Pakistan then accept the defeat or raise the level of conflict? In its present hyped up state it will certainly choose the latter. If the conflict in Kashmir proves to be indecisive and gets stalemated Pakistan is likely to pump in thousands of Jihadis in the state to attack the Indian force and civilians behind the front line. India will be simply thrown back to square one of its punitive war against Pakistan. At this stage India will be left with no option other than attacking Pakistan across the international boundary with the aim of capturing territory that can be exchanged for negotiated peace.

For Pakistan's generals, however, the case for a nuclear first strike will become stronger with

assessment of India's capacity to withstand a nuclear first strike and launch a devastating second strike of its own. Pakistan believes that India does not have that capacity. Because, except a small superiority in nuclear warheads it does not have sufficient number of missile silos hard enough to withstand a nuclear assault; neither does it have submarine borne nuclear force -- essential for a second strike capability.

Second, in case of Delhi becoming a nuclear target of Pakistan -- almost a certainty -- the Indian command structure, especially its nuclear command and control, may not remain functional after an attack to initiate a second strike. Third, after Pakistan's first nuclear strike India's last resort of nuclear missile batteries must be brought into operation. To be effective they

Ekushey Television: To be or not to be?

NIMA RAHMAN

WHEN the Prince of Denmark in his monologue utters the eternal question about existence, Shakespeare makes himself universal through his question: "to be or not to be." We are to die -- that is the ultimate truth. But we do not want to die a meaningless death, and hence we want our lives to be full of dreams and achievements.

To dream is to take the risk of fulfilling and realising it and to be able to let that dream flourish and become a sweet dream and not a nightmare. We are dreamers of dreams and we believe that what one can create today should be produced immediately. Life is very short for one to accomplish all that one dreams of and one cannot wait for years to do the work, because the ideas are coming NOW. Moreover to achieve, one needs calculated thought, one has to know what one is doing, and that is the real power of existence.

Thus when the existence of Ekushey Television is in question we -- the makers, writers, performers, directors, cameramen, editors and many many other workers who had taken up the job of programme making as a profession are in a dilemma. What is going to happen to us, if ETV really closes down? What shall we do with our newborn industry? What will happen to the huge investment some of us had made to buy cameras or to set up production houses?

Because of the unique and extraordinary opportunity Ekushey Television opened up, many of us have worked for and aspired to professional success in the young industry. We have worked hard and long to get where we are today and now we

deserve the reward for our integrity and commitment to achieve this successful position -- and that is the security of the industry.

We are at cross-purposes as to what path we should take. We respect the verdict of the Supreme Court, but we also would like the Honourable Judges to please take into consideration our point of view and sentiment. So we want to appeal to the Honourable Judges to listen to our

that another major issue, the transfer of the licence by Mr. A. S. Mahmud to Ekushey Television Limited, was in fact also a legal and valid process.

The High Court proceedings also cleared many other issues relating to the legality of the Ekushey Television broadcast operations. In particular the Court accepted that ETV did not use State or BTV facilities and equipment to make its broadcasts. It

mass of the people, the programme makers and the viewers, being punished? Why can a different solution not be implemented? We are just general people who do not know the answer to the questions.

Will banning ETV stop others from doing anything illegal? Will it stop people from giving or taking bribes? Will all tenders, from henceforth, be given in the right

not a factor that is being considered in this case, it only deals with the transparency of ETV's licence. We could explain this, but trying to analyse the matter would be like dissecting a frog. We may see its entrails and whatever is inside it, but in the process the frog will be killed. We do not want to see any deaths. What we want is that ETV should be given a chance to survive.

It took a huge investment and a

All of us, both at home and abroad, feel very proud of the quality of ETV -- its news and other programmes, its sophisticated presentation and approach. Bangladesh can be as good as other countries too!

Now, at this juncture of uncertainty regarding ETV's fate, we (the new, up-coming visual media workers) have become unstable and insecure. We do not want to say anything about the legal issues -- we only want our right to work and make an honest livelihood. We want to stand on a strong ground -- for our benefit, yes, but also for the benefit of our country and its future. There is the potential here for us to do so many good things in the world.

We, the people directly involved with Ekushey Television, want to make an appeal that is not an attack on legal procedures or the verdict; this is not to defend the way in which the ETV licence was given; this is not a hymn about popularity over legality. It is about the next generation of these issues and the fate of the people they involve. It is about the question of "to be or not to be".

We respect the ultimate legal process and wish to strengthen it. But we also want to live, to earn and create a healthy industry -- for us and for the future of our nation and our people. So before the final death sentence is given -- or not -- could everybody please hesitate for a moment and think of the future of this new industry and our country. We want Ekushey Television to be.

Nima Rahman is an actress and freelance producer/director.

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plea before they reach their final verdict.

Now before we pledge our case we want to clarify the legal aspect of what we're talking about. If we look into the Ekushey Television case we, the general audience/people are at another dilemma, whether or not one can say anything at all regarding the issue when the case is in the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court. We also do not know whether saying or writing anything about ETV would be committing contempt of court and thus risk going to jail. Moreover, we are also not in the clear or rather the case is not transparent to us.

It appears to many of us that the judgement in the High Court specifically accepted that the licence issued to ETV by the Government of Bangladesh was legally valid and had the proper legal endorsements, clearances, security (KPI) and otherwise, from all the key Ministries; and also the judgement specifically accepted

said it didn't use a "channel" belonging to BTV either.

The only area where the judgement found fault was in the government process of evaluation of the licence tender applications, saying that the procedure lacked transparency and was malafide in the way in which the report had been prepared. The Court also criticised the Government for not handing over relevant files when asked to do so by the Court.

For the reasons stated above, the Court said they had no choice but to declare the licence given to ETV as not being valid/legal.

We desperately want sound and well thought out solutions to our dilemmas. When my right to earn an honest livelihood is being threatened through no fault of mine, would it be illogical if the following questions came to my mind:

Surely if the problem was in the process and the ETV licence was, in the first place, legal, why is ETV being punished? Why are we, the

way? Will everything between the government and the public becomes transparent? Will the general people be able to voice their likes and dislikes? Will all the people get jobs which would be just as challenging? Will we -- the freelancers -- be able to make an honest living? Will the programme making industry ever be able to sustain such harshness? Will we be able to get over our insecurity? Who will answer these questions? We know none of these will happen overnight.

Making programmes is not an easy job. It is a serious business, it requires resources, creativity, knowledge, insight, and experience about what will make people watch, or what will go flat and make them change channels. It is also a very time consuming factor to make a channel popular. And this is where lies ETV's credibility.

In an extraordinary way ETV managed to create its own popularity in a very short time. One could point out that popularity is

huge effort, considerable creativity, endless brain-wracking, long hours of hard work and much integrity -- from both the inhouse and outhouse battalions -- to make Ekushey Television everybody's channel, the people's television.

We began to work with more zeal and enthusiasm, we could feel the electrifying vibration that went around us to do quality work, work that was challenging both in its presentation and content. We began to put our dreams on paper and then on to the screen to be viewed by so many millions. We began to realise what healthy competition was and how to specialise and gain momentum.

ETV gave us the security that was missing in the visual media and helped us to expand our goals by realising our ambitions. ETV also managed to come up with a professional quality in their transmission, which was just as good as any foreign channel.

OPINION

Gas reserve of Bangladesh

DR. BADRUL IMAM

I read with interest the opinion titled 'Gas reserve of Bangladesh' (The Daily Star, July 18), expressed by a 'concerned geologist' on my article titled 'Rating Bangladesh for gas reserve -- the present controversy' (The Daily Star July 2). I feel the following points may help him perceive the matter more clearly and in getting out of the confusion he is in.

Referring to a point in my article he writes "Is it fair for him (Dr. Imam) to say that the estimation of undiscovered gas resource is based on hypothetical and speculative data....., then what are the basis for exploring a sedimentary basin for oil and gas.....is there any

reason for employing geologists, geophysicist in oil and gas exploration company?"

His question clarifies that he is not aware of the concept of undiscovered gas resource, nor did he see the Norwegian Petroleum Directorate (NPD) assessment report on undiscovered gas resource of Bangladesh which he has referred to. It is for his information that in this report the NPD clearly stated that the mean undiscovered gas resource of Bangladesh is estimated at 41.6 Tcf of which 16.9 is hypothetical and 24.7 Tcf is speculative. So how could he comment as above with such a gap in the knowledge base?

The 'concerned geologist'

seemed to have been irritated at my defining the terms 'reserve' and 'resource' and pointed out that anyone can find these in a 'Dictionary of Geology' or in book on 'Energy Economics'.

While I agree with him, my concern is that who is going to forward these definitions to the concerned people, or to be more specific, to the State Minister for Energy or Mineral Resources or to his advisors? None of them seems to know the meaning of the terms as they use these terms for public consumption. Take for example the statement of the State Minister for Energy Mr. Mossarrar Hosain, expressed in an interview with UNB (The Daily Star Dec. 20) that "the

United States Geological Survey (USGS) has estimated the gas reserve of the country at 32.1 Tcf, but Petrobangla put the figure at 11.5 Tcf." The truth of the matter is that the USGS never stated that the gas reserve is 32.1, but it stated that undiscovered gas resource is 32.1 Tcf. This is a case of misinformation, falsely giving impression of large and inflated gas reserve of the country. It appears that neither the minister nor his advisers actually know the distinction between gas reserve and gas resource. May I humbly request my friend 'concerned geologist' to bear with me a little while these definitions ring their bells a little longer to wake up the ministers and their advisers.

I believe, one should not go for

personification while discussing matters such as gas reserve of the country. It would have been much appreciated if the 'concerned geologist' spent more time in arguing my points if he wished, rather than arguing on my 'person', as he questioned, "it will be interesting to know if Dr. Imam was ever involved in discovering or assessing gas fields?" I am not sure what the 'concerned geologist' meant at this point.

I would find it inappropriate and out of sense to preach that I obtained my Ph.D. degree from London University doing research on the gas reservoirs of the gas fields of Bangladesh; was employed by an European oil

company at Scotland to work on problem with reservoirs of the Claymore oil field in North Sea in UK; was involved in the gas reservoir research project of Gharwar oil field (largest oil field in the world) in Saudi Arabia while working at King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals and had working relationship with national petroleum exploration company (Bapex) and Bangladesh Petroleum Institute.

The 'concerned geologist' made a point seemingly in favour of foreign oil company. He stated "Oil companies may explore options for developing gas market, however it will be too much to expect them to invest in power plants..... In a free market environment, gas market will develop itself either within the

country or outside the country... All it needs is perhaps less interference by so called experts".

This is an outrageous statement trying to justify the oil company's proposal for gas export from Bangladesh. May I ask the 'concerned geologist' what is the rationale of advocating for outside gas market for the IOCs and more importantly at what expense? Bangladesh is a mono energy country, has 70 per cent dependency on natural gas for its commercial energy, produces 90 per cent of its electricity by natural gas and has little prospect of finding alternative energy like oil or nuclear etc. With 7 Tcf of proven reserve of gas (or 12 Tcf of proven plus probable reserve) the national experts have every reason to

maintain a conservative outlook in the gas export issue. Should one find it upsetting that the foreign oil company cannot develop gas market outside Bangladesh for easy profit for the interference of 'so called gas experts'.

As for the 'concerned geologist', it certainly appears so. But who is this 'concerned geologist'? A foreigner IOC executive or geoscientist, a local associate, or an 'expert'? Perhaps it would be a gentleman's gesture not to ask further, because he does not seem to be identified.

Dr. Badrul Imam is Professor of Geology, Dhaka University