

DU campus rocked by political violence

Independent inquiry warranted to restore confidence on the campus

THE threat perception of Dhaka University authorities was exaggerated. This seems borne out by facts. Basically, what could be sorted out as an administrative matter was allowed to be an eye of political storm that in no time fanned out in all untoward directions. Moreover, the application of force was atrocious, to say the least.

Prof Sultana Shafi's term as the provost of Shamsunnahar Hall was to end in September. So, there were two more months to decide on her 'representation' for an extension of the service contract. Why did it become a cannon fodder for a politically-charged showdown even before the chips came formally down? Although trouble had been brewing for quite sometime revolving around Prof Sultana's move for extension of service and her opponents' resistance against it, one wonders why the controversy could not be resolved one way or the other by administrative means before things came to a head. Why were the battle-lines drawn between supporters of white panel and those of blue panel on the issue so early in the day?

This is no oversimplification of the problem, because if in each case an administrative matter is allowed to degenerate into a political contention then where goes higher education - except into the gutter?

The facts speak for themselves. The police women stormed into Shamsunnahar Hall at 1.30 am and swooped on female students until 3 am. There are allegations of police in riot gear dragging students from their beds and beating and abusing them with the reckless abandon 'of being under some orders.' While a few hundred may have been beaten up at least 50 girl students received injuries that were visible.

The cops also took 18 girl students to the Ramna police station at that unearthly hour, and even though they were to be released later on, they have been asked to appear before court.

A backlash followed. Enraged by the arrest of female students and the traumas their sisters had to go through, the night before, all student organisations, except the JCD, organised demonstrations on the DU campus in the morning. The police clubbed the agitating students the second time around in an extended war-zone. JCD, for its part, attacked the protestors as they took out processions.

Further down the line, police also baton-charged students, mostly female ones, who had staged sit-in demonstration before the VC's office.

Then followed the running battles between the students and the police in a wider area. At one stage, the agitating students went on a car-bashing spree which couldn't be condoned because they were taking their wrath out on inanimate objects and their owners that had nothing to do with the incidents.

Principally, we find no word strong enough to adequately deprecate police atrocity on female students which was unprecedented even by our volatile standards. The deployment of women police as claimed by authorities hardly put matters in a better light, because their handling of the situation certainly left much to be desired.

The two sides have sharply differing versions on the course of events or developments. On Prof Sultana Shafi's side it has been claimed that it's at the nod of the authorities that some JCD leaders who had completed their studies came back to stay at the Shamsunnahar Hall. This apparently followed the JCD unit's failed attempt on Tuesday to take over the provost's office and have the incumbent replaced by a BNP-backed teacher. Anyway, it is the allegedly planted JCD female leaders at the hall that the rest of the students wanted expelled. But the authorities, instead of meeting the students' demand for ordering the JCD elements out of the hall reportedly asked the agitating students to go back to their respective rooms in the dormitory.

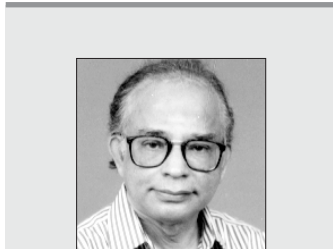
To break the impasse, it is understood, the students suggested that all the inmates be asked to leave the hall and then ushered back in by checking their identity cards in each case of entry. That was their idea of flushing out 'undesirable elements.' But it didn't work and the police action followed.

The VC refuted all the allegations emphatically adding that Prof Sultana Shafi, on being accused by a group of students of corruption, irregularities, misdemeanour and politicisation, impelled the authorities to take cognizance of the complaints against her. In fact, before the expiry of her term the authorities have terminated her contract and replaced her by Prof Habiba Khan following Wednesday's events.

Since both sides are claiming justification for their respective positions it becomes imperative for the government to institute an independent inquiry into the incidents and get to the bottom of things for the sake of stable conditions on the campus.

Let's not raise afresh the spectre of running battles between the JCD and the BCL. As it is, the DU teaching community remains divided along white and blue panel lines. Further confrontation on the campus must be averted by all means. To this end, we would like to see a dialogue take place between the two sides to iron out their differences so as to save higher education yet another roller-coaster ride.

Human development index



HASNAT ABDUL HYE

MORE than a decade has passed since the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) published the first Human Development Report (HDR) in 1990. The HDR's most significant innovation, the human development index (HDI), has been widely accepted and is now used by policymakers, researchers and the development community to measure socio-economic development. Additional issues relevant to human development but kept outside the HDI have been discussed with great analytical vigour in successive HDRs. These have broadened the perspective from which development is considered consistent with the concept of human development. As a result, the HDR has become an unfolding and evolving enquiry into the causes and outcome of development in different countries of the world. While the formulation of the HDI with annual updating has ensured continuity with the past enabling comparison both nationally and internationally, the analysis of policy issues has emphasised the expanding scope of the concept of human development.

As an analytical tool and a methodology for evaluating change the HDI marked a sharp departure from the traditional approaches to development. As the first HDR in 1990 stated: "It

respect were also mentioned. The HDR 1990 thus included both subjective and objective indicators. These sought to capture the conditions for creating an enabling environment where people can exercise their choices as subject of development while remaining its object at the same time.

The first HDR suggested that the measurement of human development should for the time being focus on three essential elements of life viz. longevity, knowledge and a decent standard of living which would correspond to the three critical choices defining human development. For the first i.e. longevity, life expectancy at birth was used as the indicator. For knowledge, literacy figure was used, being objectively verifiable. For the third, per capita income derived from purchasing power

adjusted real GDP was used. The composite of these figures represented the HDI. The merit of the index was that it included choices other than that for income. The HDR 1990 recognised that in its present calculation HDI was an approximation for capturing the many dimensions of human choice. Besides, it had some of the same shortcomings as income measures because as national averages the aggregates concealing local and regional variations. The

methodology of the HDI overtime. Though Table 2 in the HDR 2002 presents comparable HDI trends based on a consistent methodology and consistent data, HDI values and ranks are not comparable across editions of the report. The weightage given to some of the indicators to calculate the overall development in respect of that component. For instance, weightage given to adult literacy rate is 80 per cent while that for combined primary, secondary and tertiary rate is 20 per cent which skews the education index in favour of the former. But primary education may be more meaningful for enlarging choice for knowledge. Perhaps the starkest example of data problem is the large number of countries excluded from the HDI. Because of a lack of

reliable data 18 countries have been excluded from the HDI in the present report.

According to the HDR 2002 substantial progress has been made over the last decade in the level of human development in most parts of the world. The exceptions have been in eastern and central Europe and the former sub-Saharan Africa. In these regions many countries have a lower HDI today compared to the early 1990s. In some cases the HDI is even lower than in 1975.

the reality in the index for the four components but does not explain why the value for an index relating to a component or the composite index of the HDI has changed for better or worse. Case studies of a few countries representing the three categories, particularly those that have suffered decline in the value of their HDI could be part of this huge exercise, which would have made the report more useful as a guide for policy and planning. Since the report presents data for most key indicators with a two-year lag between the reference date for indicators and the date of the report's release, time should not be a problem for commissioning selective country studies. It is hoped that the UNDP will give attention to this matter, which will enhance the importance and usefulness of the report.

The HDI for Bangladesh has increased slowly but steadily over the years. The figure for 1990, 1995 and 2000 were 0.416, 0.445 and 0.478 respectively. But its ranking compared to other countries shows marginal improvement. Compared to this slow progress Sri Lanka and Maldives have posted far better results. Both of these countries started as 'low human development' country like Bangladesh but they have now graduated to middle human development categories. So has India. Individual component-wise achievements show that except in the health and sanitation sector Bangladesh's performance has been unsatisfactory. The laggard status in human development calls for rethinking of our development strategy.

Hasnat Abdul Hye is a former secretary, novelist and economist.

IN MY VIEW

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The report reveals that more than 60 countries have lower income per head at present than they did before 1990. In 26 countries incomes are lower than in 1980. Though values of the HDI for some developed countries have also dropped, these being at a higher level of development there is no cause for concern. But the lowering of values of the HDI for countries in the low and medium human development category is alarming. Is this deterioration the result of negative growth in GNP or is it because GNP growth has not been accompanied with enlargement of choices in the three areas that constitute the aggregate value of the HDI? Could epidemics like HIV/AIDS or natural disasters be the reason behind the reversals? These are questions that beg for answers. The HDRs only capture

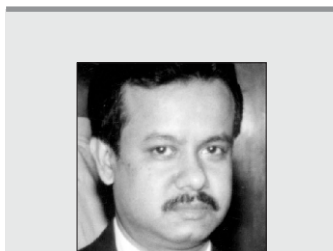
of darkness, which also means the manifest is made in the image of the hidden. He started to skip his meals to conquer hunger, which he said was the root of all vices. Hunger created need, need created want and want was the source of conflicts, which separated man from his God. This is the only reason why lightnings flashed at stormy nights to hunt down and strike those who enraged God. Hunger, he claimed, was also the master of all mischief, when its fear forced people to accumulate, which turned into greed. And greed, according to him, was the deadliest sin because every other sin would stem from it.

Soon he would vanish from time to time, saying that he was preparing for death. Withdrawal and return was the secret of life, that every death was a withdrawal and every birth was a return, that light was returning of the spark of which darkness was withdrawal. He quoted from Carl Jung that the sole purpose of human existence was to kindle a light in the darkness of mere being.

One day he said he had found God, the loving, angry and merciful God who lived in the forest. He said he had found God in the pristine silence of trees and bushes, undisturbed by the cacophony of human voices. First God created man, and then man created God until civilisation confused who created whom.

He decided to abandon the last relic of civilisation on him and stopped wearing clothes. Mohammad Badrul Ahsan is a banker.

Goaded by God



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

HE was a little boy when the lightning struck the palm tree and ripped through its trunk with crackling, vertical noise. The village elders said it was the wrath of God, and for a long time since then, he believed that an angry God lived in the clouds. He woke up to the pealing sound of rolling thunders in stormy nights, wondering if the lightnings flashing across the sky were searching for those who had stoked God's ire.

It wasn't until his father's death that his mother told him something else. She said that her father had died young because God loved him and called him back to heaven. God lives in heaven and inside every man and woman, she explained to him. God is omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent, she confirmed.

So his belief shifted from an angry God to a loving God, the creator of man and the ruler of the universe. He was excited to know that his own body was God's abode, that the supreme being of the universe had a presence in him, that he was a shelter of

divinity within himself in the manner the sky is reflected in water-hole.

When he failed in the school final, his mother consoled him that it was the will of God, that not a leaf in the tree stirred until it was first approved by God. Now he was convinced that whatever happened was will of the loving God and if man did anything, which God forbade, it drew His wrath. He realised that God was like his

visited his mother's grave as if it was a shrine. He sat beside it, hugging it with his hands, resting his head on the side of his mother's feet as if to lower the burden of life on their hallowed prop. From time to time, he looked at the sky, his eyes dense with apathy of the world; eyebrows contracted on the quizzical face that appeared engrossed in the mystery of the universe. Often he went to the graveyard in the middle of the

side of the grave, that he was the lord of the dead and the living, of everything on earth, in the sky and under the water.

Children teased him for being an errant and adults frowned upon his apathetic nature. Men said he was just another bum who didn't like to work, and women said he was inebriated with the frenzy of his own emotions. But nothing influenced his mind as he sank deeper into the passion, which filled his

remained invisible in our consciousness in the manner of the stars in sky during the day.

Then he reasoned that it was important to close eyes for meditation so that one could submerge in the darkness in which one could deny one's own existence. That the light of life originated in the same darkness that prevails in the lust of parents when they consort, in the amniotic depth of mother's womb where a man starts his

CROSS TALK

He started to skip his meals to conquer hunger, which he said was the root of all vices. Hunger created need, need created want and want was the source of conflicts, which separated man from his God. This is the only reason why lightnings flashed at stormy nights to hunt down and strike those who enraged God. Hunger, he claimed, was also the master of all mischief, when its fear forced people to accumulate, which turned into greed. And greed, according to him, was the

father when he was alive, who loved his children if they were disciplined and punished them when disobedient.

He became an orphan in the true sense of the word when his mother died, when the dreary desolation of the cruel world convinced him that life was nothing but a vale of tears. He wept bitterly as his relatives consoled that God was merciful to give her a long life and take her away just about the time she was prepared to die. She fell sick but didn't suffer for a long time, and the end came to her as if on the touch and go of an invisible button.

For many days since then, he

night, lighting candles at his mother's grave and offering prayers until the break of dawn.

To those who asked, he said he was desperately seeking God, the loving, angry and merciful God. He said he looked for Him by day and he looked for Him by night, that he looked for Him in the thin air and thick of darkness, the loving God who took away his father in his youth and the merciful God who took care of his mother in her sickness. He said God pervaded the universe, blooming with flower, blowing with wind, flowing with water, shining with the sun, and beaming with the moon. He said God ruled both this side and other

heart with an inexplicable urge to discover God. He started visiting his mother's grave more often, spending more time in the graveyard at night, and muttering inscrutable words round the clock.

His hairs grew matted and his beard long; it appeared as though his face was receding behind a hairy mask. He stopped bathing his body and washing his clothes, his complexion soiled by a layer of dirt that looked like a coat of paint on him. Friends and relatives pleaded with him to take good care of himself, but he told them that one had to lose oneself in order to find God. He said God was hiding inside every person and that He

journey as a fetus, and in the ignorance with which he goes through life without knowing its purpose. It is the same darkness, he said, which then devolves into his own lust and ambition, which transpires into his struggle to survive until it gets devoured by the darkness of grave.

Thus a man's life is nothing but a flash in the pan that is rooted in darkness, routed in darkness and eventually, rutted in darkness. Man has to ingest that darkness to find his way like light in a penumbra radiates through the shadow at the source of illumination. Man is made in the image of God, which means light is made in the shadow

OPINION

Gas reserve and a concerned geologist

NURUDDIN MAHMUD KAMAL

I read with interest the opinion expressed by a concerned geologist, published in the DS on 18 July 2002. But I was as much unhappy as I was intrigued reading the subject matter "Gas Reserves of Bangladesh". I was unhappy because it was like pouring an old wine in a new bottle; intrigued because the author remained anonymous. Why the writer preferred to remain behind a veil is a mystery. Yet, my intuition is that the faceless geologist is trying to confuse the readers by interchanging the words, resource and reserve, out of context. I suspect, there is a strong similarity in his approach on the subject when it is correlated with the views of Mr. Scott Barber, Managing Director, Unocal. Is this simply a coincidence?

To begin with, the concerned geologist attempted to self-glorify by first distancing himself from the professional ethics and etiquettes.

He then passed some unkind remarks for an academician, Dr Badrul Imam, professor of geology in the University of Dhaka. He followed it up by a naive comment, "why are they so keen to prove that Bangladesh has hardly any significant gas reserve". Incidentally, the second link of 'they' is I myself which has prompted me to write. I can assure the author that I am known in the professional domain, for my participation in geological activities in Bangladesh. In fact, I consider myself lucky to have had opportunities to serve the nation in the national planning and development of oil and gas resources since the liberation of Bangladesh. However, the gentleman is right on target about my involvement in gas discovery. Yes, I admit, I have not worked in a derrick nor discovered a gas field. But did he/she climb up the rig and discover many oil or gas fields? Well, may I ask the concerned geologist - is that the only criteria for becoming a geologist? Then, I feel that there was hardly

any need to harp on the subject of ever changing gas reserve, which certainly depends on investment and exploration efforts. You do not need a geologist to emphasize on the same, a subject I have never challenged. But the shadowy character appears to make a point as if the geologists of Bangladesh have never heard about the mathematical models or the constantly improving modes and methods of resource estimation. And, it seems he/she alone has become Mr Know-all and the community of geologists only so-called experts. Least he forgets that in a seminar sponsored by the departments of geosciences of Dhaka, Jahangirnagar and Rajshahi (held on 18 June 2002) the geologists of the country reached a consensus on the proven plus probable recoverable reserves of gas at around 11 Tcf after deducting the already produced 4.5 Tcf gas in the past about 40 years. This information on reserve must have hurt the concerned geologist's sentiment. I

am afraid, I cannot help him in this respect. But let me inform him that in a TV interview the convener of the National Gas Assessment Committee Prof. Nooruddin Ahmed, VC, BUET said that in a 50-year demand-supply scenario, 11 or 15 Tcf gas reserve is insignificant. The honourable VC has reiterated his statement in an interview with a reputed Bengali weekly -- 2000 -- in the issue of 19 July 2002.

Be that as it may, in the affair of technology, it is only natural that someone will be a little ahead of others. The reputation and credentials of US Geological Survey (USGS) and the Norwegian Petroleum Institute (NPD) is known. But their actions are not always above board. What is important is that the members of the geological community in Bangladesh are trying to advise the decision makers of the country what is technically known and what should be done for our national development, not what an oil company promotes for their

self-interest at the cost of national loss. We should not be influenced by the so-called smart public relation efforts, lobbying, informal pressure techniques of some bounty hunters, their trade associates (shadow boxers) and allies of the power structure. Nevertheless, what we have been earnestly saying about is that the USGS did not evaluate the gas reserves of Bangladesh rather they conducted the assessment of undiscovered gas resource only that may be technically available in the next 30 years provided commensurate investment and exploration is made. Unfortunately, the Norwegian experts (HCU/NPD study) assigned some ghost recoverable factors to jack-up the reserve figures of all the 22 gas fields, based on their study on only four gas fields namely Titus, Habiganj, Rashidpur and Kailastilla.

The rumour is that the Norwegian experts manufactured these data perhaps based on their analogy with another sedimentary

basin, elsewhere in the world, without assigning any scientific basis for the discreet (rather fictitious) and new recovery factors for Bangladesh gas fields. This has obviously created a suspicion in the minds of professionals. But I am amazed that our concerned geologist as well as Scott Barber of Unocal did not care to examine these deficiencies, perhaps assuming that it would be beneficial for them. But, does the concerned geologist realise that based on insignificant reserve, the Gas Utilization Committee has almost negated the issue of gas export. The DS published on 21 July reported: Gas Export Not Now. But I am afraid there is a catch-22 somewhere in the game plan. We have to wait and see. Nevertheless, I would like to reiterate that there has been a cautious but earnest estimates of gas reserves made by Petrobangla in March/April, 2001. I only referred to what the authorised public sector enterprise stated, based on

their years of experience. I was intrigued that the concerned geologist did not contradict the 11 Tcf figure nor he/she made any definite statement on the reserve of gas. Then, what is his/her point?

Let me conclude by saying that my intent is not merely to respond to an unreasonable arguments of a geologist about my views and visions on a subject that is so dear to me. The issue is very vital for national development. To me, it appears that just prior to the submission of the National Committee Reports, the effort for a new debate by an unknown geologist is perhaps a ploy to fix the blame on the nationalist elements so that a new chaos may be created and the attention can be diverted. Now it is time for us to shake the trees. There is a strong speculation that one operating company is planning to abandon the orchard! We can hardly remain tongue-tied in the face of new techniques developed by interest groups using

some people like a concerned geologist to meet their ends. I or we of the geological community would be guilty in the eyes of our posterity if we give in to such pressures. Much I pray that the Almighty may bless us with patience while giving us plenty. Nothing, in my humble knowledge, can be a greater harbinger of pleasure (to a geologist) than if we can explore and discover greater amount of gas. I do not know who will benefit by establishing a distorted information, but the estimation of gas reserves is one of the most difficult, most misunderstood and most controversial in the field of energy resource estimation. I am afraid I cannot console the unidentified author. He seems to be very worried. His genuine concern has been exposed by the statement: if this kind of writing continues the chances are that the government might disregard the gas export proposal.