

DU closure a sign of ailing without healing

It's a crisis of politics not students

HERE are certain times when the phrase 'enough is enough' becomes inevitable. What has been going on at the Dhaka University for the last few days leaves no room for doubt that the situation is beyond recovery under the present management. The last straw was declaring the University closed *sine die* without consulting the Syndicate. Dhaka University, already on the brink of functional bankruptcy has turned into a playground for slanging matches by various quarters. But the bottom line is clear. It couldn't get worse easily than what it is now.

Sadly, nobody is reading the public opinion on the wall nor exploring the facts. The attack on the female dorm of the Dhaka University is the stuff of nightmares. Authorities have claimed that police went in to rescue confined teachers/students at night and this now is a matter of clarification but nothing changes the facts that students were beaten up inside the female dorm or that girl students were beaten up later. One certainly hopes that the judicial probe will at least provide a set of answers and sequence of events but the damage is not about that. It's much more about what the Dhaka University has become. People don't perceive it anymore as a place of safety and sensibility.

The protest march by students running into thousands can't be ignored and no matter what the University administration says, it doesn't enjoy general confidence of the students as of today.

What makes the matter worse is the link between such odious incidents and the general debate on student politics. Whatever be the merit of any argument, both present and past ruling governments have used students to gain political victories. In fact, the 'success stories' of both parties are based on what their cadres did and do.

The latest incidence of violence on the DU campus should be addressed within the confines of what has happened on the ground, responsibility fixed for it and action taken against the guilty. There is no point in sweeping it under the carpet of the broader issue of student politics.

History is replete with incidents, which show that political hypocrisy ultimately turns around and stabs back. Our political parties have used educational institutions and continue to do so for achieving their own ends while stating platitudes. Just as the present DU administration doesn't enjoy public confidence, the political parties may well have to face the same situation unless things improve dramatically.

Police officer's death

Just how hazardous it has become for lawmen

WE are horrified and touched. Horror strikes us when we go over the circumstances in which young Police Inspector Nazrul Islam lost his life. And, what touch us are the first words to come out of deceased police officer's grief-stricken daughter as she looked at her father's dead body. "He had warned us he might come home late but he has done that only as a dead man", wailed Poppy. As a CID officer he was apparently a plainclothes part of the mounting police vigilance activity currently on.

According to reports, an organised gang of muggers after knifing Nazrul indiscriminately got caught by a mob when trying to flee the scene. As the muggers came to know of Nazrul's identity they were presumably 'scared' and made sure he died. In the confusion that followed, however, the ruffians pointed their finger at the bleeding inspector to divert public attention away from them. Resultantly, in that critical state of his, Nazrul received blows from the mob, too. Thus he was hurt the second time over. His divulging the identity obviously did not help him out.

It is a tragic eye-opener to police vulnerabilities.

A relative of deceased Nazrul's family has complained of lack of emergency treatment which caused him so much haemorrhage that led to his death. He was first taken to the police station along with the muggers in that critical condition before being carried off to the DMCH. The police better hold a departmental inquiry into all these.

Some muggers and the driver of a baby taxi the police inspector had ridden have been arrested. He was dispossessed of his pistol, the only weapon he had for any attempt at self-defence. Let the culprits be punished. Nazrul having died in the line of duty is certainly entitled to compensation. We share the sorrow of his family.

'Remove Arafat': The refrain of Bush's vision statement



M ABDUL HAFIZ

IN 1993 when the post-Madrid diplomacy secretly hammered out Oslo agreements with Israeli willingness at long last to accept the PLO as the negotiating partner, Yasir Arafat was, for a while, the darling of the West. So much so that he was pitch-forked from remote Tunis where, after a series of set-back the PLO chief had been licking his wounds -- to the signing ceremony of the 'Declaration of Principles' between the PLO and Israel at White House in the presence of President Clinton. It was in spite of the fact that by then both Arafat and his PLO were largely irrelevant amidst the rising tide of first Intifada spontaneously led by Palestinian youths while new leaders from among them were vying with each other to take the rein. Now only after a decade, in a bizarre about-face the US' Bush presidency is hell bent to remove Arafat, 'being an obstacle to the peace process' from the scene. The idea originally conceived by Israel's prime minister Ariel Sharon, later accepted by President George Bush, is now also under consideration of Arab leaders. Only to the ordinary Palestinians Arafat is still the best bet for them. Meanwhile, Arafat himself shows no sign that he would give in so easily.

What happened? In hindsight it would appear that at the time of launching the Oslo peace process the parties to peace participated in it with divergent expectations which

started clashing at a later stage -- particularly between those of the PLO and the United States. The PLO was practically orphaned after the demise of the cold war and more so after the Gulf war in which it lent support to Iraq and had few options other than accepting the peace brokered by the world's sole superpower. As for the United States she wanted a negotiating partner for Israel who while representing the Palestinian people would be pliant enough to be dictated by both the

da broke out three months later -- only to save the peace process from collapse. Unfortunately the peace process could not be saved; neither could Arafat satisfy either his people or the peace brokers. The second Intifada had, in the meantime, snowballed into a major conflict when Israel started retaliating militarily with its full force. The Palestinians also were not found wanting in using their only weapon: the suicide bombing. The crisis deepened. Although the conflict on the

described Arafat as corrupt leader who coveted with terror. The US Secretary of States Collin Powell also warned Arafat that Bush administration would push for his removal if Palestinian authority did not move more effectively against the infrastructure of terrorism. The leaders of Russia, EU and Arab world whom President Bush consulted understood his intentions and urged him not to discard Arafat as the Palestinian interlocutor. In their view an Arafat-specific move would be an

tinian people actively pursue these goals America and the world will actively support their efforts." Although Bush did not mention Arafat's name even once there could be no doubt about what he meant. In their reaction the Palestinians have, as could be expected, bristled at what they considered US effrontery in telling them who their leader should be, or rather who should not be. Arafat's senior aids deluded themselves in absence of any name uttered by Bush, that the US presi-

with complete insouciance that he would be a presidential candidate.

Even before Bush's speech Arafat had taken some measures to reform the Authority along the line that the US President was to insist upon. A couple of weeks earlier Arafat had finally signed onto a piece of legislation that conferred independence on Palestinian judiciary. A newly appointed security chief was engaged in discussions with Egyptian and Jordanian security services. Arafat might not be much troubled if the Palestinians were to draw up a constitution that rendered his presidential post into a ceremonial one and transferred executive power to a cabinet answerable to parliament. However, the loss of control over Palestinian public finances which Arafat has held firmly in his hand all along will hurt him deeply. This is the most powerful lever that Bush can use to effectuate a thorough-going reform of the PA -- something that he sees as being the most basic necessity that had to be fulfilled for Palestinian statehood.

Perhaps Arafat could survive even the use of financial weapon against him -- simply because he is Arafat. There is no one else around who can match his master of the splits and relations between Palestinian clans and sub-clans, of the various cliques and factions and how to play off one side against the other. Even if he is booted into ceremonial post Arafat will remain by far the most influential person in the Palestinian territories. If he plays his card well Arafat might eventually be able to make both Bush and Sharon realise that they would have to do business with him in one form or other.

According to experienced Middle East watchers, however, Bush's personal dislike for Arafat and his inadequate grasp of the complexities of Palestinian situations are responsible for his rash decision. Yet few think that Arafat is threatened with immediate removal. He is the master of the art of survival. Arafat instantly spotted the chink in Bush's argument and slipped his way through. While the leaders of Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia are still trying to decipher the words of Bush, Arafat had skipped nimbly ahead by announcing that Presidential and Parliamentary elections in January 2003 and local bodies polls two months later. Arafat also announced

PERSPECTIVES

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US and Israel, its strategic ally in hostile Arab heartland. A beleaguered Arafat sufficiently mellowed down after PLO's eviction last from Lebanon was the US' obvious choice.

But Arafat, once a revolutionary often gave way to his revolutionary impulse, though inadvertently, only to panic his negotiating partner as well as the peace brokers and caused them discomfort once the Oslo process started. Finally in July, 2000 when Arafat refused to sign the dotted lines with regard to the status of Jerusalem during what came to be known as second Camp David it not only irked President Clinton who then inwardly sided with Israel, the episode also marked the beginning of the end of Arafat's honeymoon with the Americans.

Arafat, however, had to strike a delicate balance between his people enraged over Sharon's visit of Al-Aqsa and an over-demanding US ever since the current wave of Intifa-

Palestinian-Israeli front was in large measure the making of Israel's western patrons particularly the US which unabashedly endorsed Sharon's barbarism and cruelty in occupied West Bank as an act in "self-defence" while branding the Palestinians fighting for that self-determination terrorists thus only strengthening the hand of Sharon who had been wreaking havoc in Palestinian towns and villages in what was an organised state terrorism. President Bush condoned all of Sharon's excesses but all suicide bombings taking place spontaneously were thought to be carried out with Arafat's blessing and he was squarely blamed for it and his inability to do the seemingly impossible task of containing suicide bombing.

Bush had spoken often enough of how Arafat had never won his trust and how the Palestinians had never exercised real leadership in the interest of the people. The national Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice

endorsement of his personal enemy, Sharon and would further complicate US-Arab relations. Yet Bush decided that it was essential to go ahead with his 'Remove Arafat' advocacy for the realisation of his vision of a Palestinian State. What's that vision? "My vision is two states, living side by side, in peace and security. There is simply no way to achieve that peace until all parties fight terror. Yet, at this crucial moment, if all parties will break with the past and set out on a new path, we can overcome the darkness with the light of hope. Peace requires new and different Palestinian leadership so that Palestinian state can be born." President Bush said in his statement. What is however more significant follows as he continues in the same statement. "I call on the Palestinian people to elect new leaders, leaders not compromised by terror. I call upon them to build a practising democracy based on tolerance and liberty. If the Pales-

dent was not pushing for Arafat's ouster. But sooner or later the Arab leaders and people will face the stark reality that Arafat having the ire of all powerful Bush will have to be sacrificed if the Palestinians are to have statehood.

President Musharraf's visit and Bangladesh-Pakistan relations



HARUN UR RASHID

PRESIDENT Pervez Musharraf pays a three-day visit to Bangladesh from Monday. The President is not occupying a ceremonial position as he is also the chief executive of the government. Therefore the visit assumes its significance. There are many bilateral, regional and global issues that need discussion between the leaders of both countries.

The very fact that the President is not overflying India demonstrates that South Asia is charged with tension and has been strategically a volatile region. This does not help boost the image of South Asia to the outside world. The countries in South Asia cover about 3.3 per cent of the surface area of the earth while the region is inhabited by about 21 per cent of the world's population. Almost half of the world's poor live in this region. More than 450 million people out of 1.2 billion live reportedly below poverty line in South Asia. The total GDP of South Asian

countries is much less than that of ASEAN countries and the contribution to world trade is only 1.2 per cent from this region.

These statistics demonstrate that the challenge to the nations of South Asia is to mobilise and deploy their resources more effectively -- nationally and collectively -- to energise their growth and development, draw strength from joint undertakings, exploit global opportunities and to

ship with past warring nations as Algeria has been able to stable its relations with France, despite its bloody and bitter wars with France in the 50s and early 60s.

Late Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's visit in 1974 to Bangladesh was a missed opportunity to heal the wounds of the people of Bangladesh. Successive Pakistani leaders came and visited but the wounds in the minds of the people of Bangladesh remain.

Furthermore, there are a few substantive pending issues which need to be resolved between the two countries. First the apportionment of assets of united Pakistan to Bangladesh. It is believed that the quantifiable assets could easily be identified, such as the fleet of national Pakistan Airlines, vessels of Pakistan Shipping Corporation, defence equipment, share of gold and foreign currency at the Reserve Bank

government in this respect has not been consistent. Nawaz Sharif's government appeared to be much more responsive than others.

Third there is a view that to assuage the hurt feelings of the people of Bangladesh, an apology from Pakistan with regard to traumatic events of 1971 is overdue, followed by offer of compensation to the surviving families of the victims. The quantum of compensation can

domestic policy. This in turn depends on the consensus arrived at in the delineation of "national interests" among major political parties.

That does not mean that Begum Khaleda Zia's government cannot enter into a meaningful dialogue with Pakistan with a host of issues to their mutual benefit. Bangladesh and Pakistan, apart from trade and joint investment, may discuss security concerns of the region, terrorism, drug and women trafficking, organised crime, religious extremism, foreign debt, bio-technology, environmental protection and world trade issues under the new Doha round of multi-trade negotiations.

The visit of President Musharraf will be a success if substantive issues are addressed in a positive light so as to enable to put bilateral relations on a sound footing, instead of glossing over some of the fundamentals underpinning bilateral relations. The fact that Bangladesh and Pakistan are Muslim majority countries does not mean to misjudge the importance of resolving the pending issues. If a friend says "these are the difficulties of continuing stable friendship" the remark would be considered as a positive and not a negative element.

Barrister Harun ur Rashid is a former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.

BOTTOM LINE

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make globalisation and information age more responsive to their interests.

The visit of the President has to be viewed in the context of the state of bilateral relations. The overarching theme of bilateral relations is mutual trust, reciprocity and respect for each other. The relations between Bangladesh and Pakistan continue to be difficult in the background of the birth of Bangladesh. The observance of 26th March and 16th December every year in Bangladesh remind the people of Bangladesh of Pakistan's past. There is nothing wrong in continuing relation-

During the second visit of Nawaz Sharif as Prime Minister in 1998, a more reconciliatory approach towards the causes of Liberation War of 1971 was adopted. However, whatever political gain was achieved by his statements with respect to the events of 1971 disappeared when he returned to Pakistan. His Foreign Minister diluted the significance of the remark of the Prime Minister Sharif. The above instance points out to the fact that Pakistan appears to be impervious to the sentiments of the people of Bangladesh as to what happened in 1971.

of Pakistan and the property located overseas including those for the Embassies. One rough estimate is calculated to nearly 5 billion US dollars that Pakistan has to pay to Bangladesh. There is a suggestion that a joint committee needs to be set up immediately to resolve the issue.

Second the repatriation of people, known as "Biharis", to Pakistan as a part of the deal when they opted for Pakistan because of their linguistic affinity and their desire to be united with their members of family in Pakistan. This is a humanitarian issue and the policy of Pakistan

be negotiated in good faith between the two sides.

The above issues appear to be important sign posts to bilateral relations between the two nations. Passage of time is unlikely to wither away these issues. Although Article 25(2) of the Bangladesh Constitution provides that "the State shall endeavour to consolidate, preserve and strengthen fraternal relations among Muslim countries based on Islamic solidarity", the bottom line of foreign relations is to safeguard "national interests" and foreign policy cannot be divorced from

OPINION

An independent anti-corruption commission remains elusive

A R SHAMSUL ISLAM

THE old, rising talk, somewhat hackneyed, on corruption of our governments sometimes snorts aloud when a new feather is added to its already gorgeous cap. Last time it is the TIB report 2001. It reveals that the governmental corruption has eaten up Taka 11,000 crore equivalent to 4.7 per cent of country's GDP in 2001.

During AL's rule TIB brought out a report putting Bangladesh on the top of the corrupt countries under its review. The government got terribly enraged and threw its full-throated protests condemning the report as false, fabricated, misleading and motivated. True, the methodology under which the forum grades corruption of a country cannot claim to be assuredly immune from being erratic, if not unfair and biased.

Whatever may be the degree of accuracy of the reports of the TIB it is the people themselves who cannot help experiencing the stings of governmental corruption in their day-to-day life. Even a burqa-clad 70-plus aged grandmother may

have the pleasure of meeting a water supply bill bearer, knocking at her door at noon when all male inmates are away, half-bent with a smiling demand for tips obviously for bringing the bill at the doorstep in good grace.

The nation has long marked corruption as their enemy number one or else two only after law and order situation. Our two chief political parties, BNP and AL, have correctly read this sentiment of the people. Both had put corruption eradication on top of their election manifestoes in 2001 and pledged to form an independent anti-corruption commission if voted to power. Amusingly, when one of them is in the saddle it has started playing hide-and-seek with its sacred promise.

Let us now observe what is going about constituting an independent anti-corruption commission.

A proposal is learnt to have been sent to the prime minister early this year for approval to form a high-powered committee which will suggest how an independent anti-corruption commission is to be formed with its clearly-defined

powers and jurisdictions. It is proposed that the committee may comprise eight members: A retired civil servant as its chief; director-general of existing Bureau of Anti-corruption (BAC) as member secretary; three members from among additional secretaries from prime minister's office, law and establishment ministry and home ministry;

launching inquiry into allegations of corruption and d) for conducting prosecution. This will cost about Tk 6 to 8 crore yearly. But this expenditure is not considered unproductive as it may save several hundred crore taka from being misappropriated from government exchequer every year.

Question arises if the existing

The civil society has shown rising concern at the mounting corruption activism amongst ministers, bureaucrats etc and finds it imperative to eke out a free anti-corruption commission to contain the devouring menace... There is a proposal that allegations of corruption against ministers and their cohorts will first be heard in an advisory committee on whose recommendation the anti-corruption commission can institute cases against them. But majority

former deputy governor of Bangladesh Bank M I Khan; and a representative from the Bangladesh chapter of Berlin-based Transparency International.

According to knowledgeable circles the proposed commission is to encompass four separate cells - a) for creating mass awareness against corruption, b) for identifying sources of corruption in the changing realities of situation, c) for

laws of the land are quite inadequate to cope with the rapidly changing modes of corruption. It appears to many that prevalent codes are not that incompetent. But the Bureau entrusted with the responsibility of applying those rules has proved not only ineffective but partisan and repressive, too, due to political influence. More alarming is that the BAC cannot move an inch independently.

BAC has proved a shining armour to strike at the opposition members. A recent TIB report says that about 65 per cent of the people surveyed believe that the BAC is used by the ruling party to repress the opposition. Further 75 per cent men think that the Bureau can not go neutral.

The nation looks disdainfully at what a shameless hobnobbing the existing BAC is doing with the ruling elite. In fact the Bureau is providing

independent BAC has gone pressing. Just think of the volume of corruption in 2001 to the tune of Taka 11,000 crore equalling 4.7 per cent of GDP the same year. Also a World Bank report in April 2000 showed that the country could achieve 2-3 per cent more GDP growth and double per capita earning if widespread corruption could be checked.

Still as corruption weighs heavily on national economy the call for an independent BAC has gone pressing. Just think of the volume of corruption in 2001 to the tune of Taka 11,000 crore equalling 4.7 per cent of GDP the same year. Also a World Bank report in April 2000 showed that the country could achieve 2-3 per cent more GDP growth and double per capita earning if widespread corruption could be checked.

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The TIB has had a series of discussions on an ideal structure of an anti-corruption commission and has held out a proposal which envisages a three-member commission. It will be headed by a chief commissioner to be appointed by a constitutional council consisting of the president, the prime minister, the leader of the opposition, the speaker of the parliament and the chief justice. The tenure of the office will be five years with no provision for renewal. Within the next two months the TIB is likely to submit the proposal to the government as well as MPs for active consideration.

There is a proposal that allegations of corruption against ministers and their cohorts will first be heard in an advisory committee on whose recommendation the anti-corruption commission can institute cases against them. But majority of ministers and bureaucrats have ranged

themselves against sanctioning this sort of freedom to the commission. They think that absolute and final power to approve the commission to probe an allegation against ministers and bureaucrats as well as to lodge cases against them in the courts of law will rest solely with the prime minister alone and no other person or body will enjoy even a bit of this prerogative. If this power is shared by any other, they argue, charges raised directly or indirectly against the ministers will call for investigation rendering it easy for character assassination of the ministers and thus manufacturing newer and newer political issues leading the ruling party to stand discredited and dishevelled.

So the proposal to form a committee to decide ways and means for creating an independent anti-corruption commission has got stuck up in the political tangles of the prime minister's office. It appears elusive that an independent anti-corruption commission will come up soon.

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