

The BUET mess

Using police to deal with students too costly for the govt

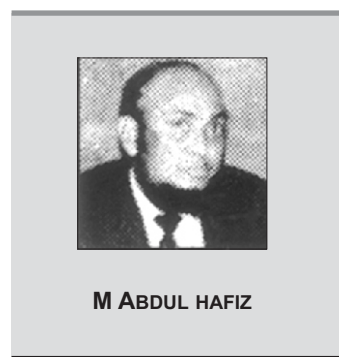
HERE are three issues that we want to comment on. First the police action, second the handling of the incident by the BUET authorities and the education ministry, and finally the demands of the students. We strongly condemn the police excesses and the brutal way in which they attacked with tear gas and baton charged the students. There was no reported violence in the events of Sunday that necessitated the use of such force. The police could have used peaceful means to disperse the students and clear the VC's office of the demonstrating students. Instead of calming the situation police went straight for the use of force which in fact turned the situation for worse than it needed to be. When asked the BUET VC said he ordered the deployment of police but professed ignorance about police brutalities. We consider the VC's action ill judged, resulting more from panic than from clear thinking.

As for the handling of the incident, both the BUET authorities and the education ministry underestimated the silent appeal of the issues raised by the students. From the very beginning the BUET authority's attitude was that only a fraction of the students were behind the 'fast' and that the general students were totally opposed to the demands of this group. This is what the BUET administration told the education ministry, and the ministry in turn told the Prime Minister. BUET's mistake was to underestimate the situation, education ministry's mistake was to totally gulp the BUET version of things and the PMO's mistake was not to use alternative sources of information to assess the situation. Thus everybody operated on a fundamental misconception and totally failed to handle the situation when students yesterday suddenly marched on to the VC's office, surrounded it, locked some gates and cut off the telephone lines. Even in the yesterday's press briefing the VC tried to brush aside the popular base of the students' demands by saying that only a handful of them were misguiding the whole student community. The question is how can a handful of students swing the popular sentiment into what the authorities term as "illogical" demands. They were able to do so because of the mishandling of the situation from the very start. Doesn't the BUET authority know that calling the police is the ultimate acceptance of their failure and risking total alienation from the general student body?

As for the students' demands we cannot be in total sympathy with it. The BUET authorities cannot arrest anybody, only the government can. As for the expelled students returning to campus, they got a court order staying the expulsion and as such BUET cannot force these students out of the campus without violating court order. As for lifting the ban on student party politics inside the campus, we think that general students want the ban and people of the country in general have welcomed the decision. Banning party politics from campus is something this paper strongly supports and has been advocating for several years now. As for trial and punishment of Sabequn Nahar's killers we think there is ample evidence that BUET administration is for such punishment as the rest of the country is. We call upon the students to re-examine their demands carefully and see where the BUET authority has gone wrong and what it could have done otherwise. We must examine whether or not the students have exacerbated the situation by being unreasonable.

But whatever doubt we have about the justification of the students' demand we have absolutely no doubt about the incorrectness of using the police to resolve student problems. We categorically condemn the police excesses and blame the BUET authority for panicking and over-reacting. We think the PM did the right thing by reprimanding her two cabinet colleagues. But the question is, how long such reprimanding will continue without punishing them for their failures?

Beyond the report of Transparency International



M ABDUL HAFIZ

THE transparency International has once again identified Bangladesh as the world's most corrupt country. Few are surprised at the disclosure and still fewer are stirred with any reaction and took it as something improbable. That Bangladesh would rank as the most corrupt country should have been known to anyone with grain of commonsense. It some one kept his eyes and ears open he could sense what could be the verdict of any neutral body on his country's righteousness.

Not only all symptoms of a pervasive corruption were writ large on the face of the country. Numerous organisations that included those of donor countries, World Bank and IMF who keep pumping life saving elixir of financial help to our sick economy and the NGOs have been routinely warning Bangladesh of the looming disaster -- the disaster of a festering graft culture. They even

threatened to stop the aid flow unless the corruptions are curbed.

Also a plethora of meetings, seminars and research organisations warned the government of ever deteriorating corruption. The prospective investors often complained of the redtapism and corrupt practices in our government and many of them, disgusted and disappointed, packed off. The economic association of the country in its

year for the first time, some of the stalwarts of the government then unabashedly tried to defend themselves raising the question of faulty methodology only of course to be rebuffed by the TI functionaries. Even this time the desired grace and humility were lacking. Some of the government leaders tried to draw consolation from the fact that the period covered by TI was that of

The corruption charges are already there against the stalwarts of Awami League including the former prime minister. The big scandal surround the purchase by Awami League government of controversial Mig-29 and a Korean frigate and they do create sensation in public mind. The people look at them as objects of sensation and consider them as matters pertaining to the

their redress. Neither Transparency International has a clue of them.

What is more painful for the people of Bangladesh is their everyday trials and tribulations. The big sensational graft cases do not affect them directly. What affect them everyday is their plight in the hands of petty officials dispensing succour to their everyday life in various forms. Our civic life can be turned into a hell even by petty *chaprasi*

government's resolve to eradicate corruption. Even before the election the four-party pledged to root it out alongside terror -- two vices the alliance found rather handy to make a sweep in the election. Even at that time they talked to reorganise Anti Corruption as an autonomous body and equip it with right persons and right gadgets. But whether a crisis of the magnitude of corruption can just be tackled administratively raises a lot of doubt.

A stage has been reached in the country when none of the national problems -- be it law and order, terror or corruption -- can really be tackled piecemeal. An integrated approach is an overwhelming imperative for the task. Not only that an administrative outlook which calls for little more firefighting to tackle the problem can suffice. It is time to evolve a political philosophy to address the problem of society -- now steeped in reckless consumerism and unbridled hedonism. Such a society can never evolve anything noble. There are crossroads in national life when one really needs to have a drastic socio-economic engineering. Or else all the potentials of the nation are likely to go haywire in the form of misuse, waste and missed opportunity. Can't we as a nation close our ranks at this critical stage to chart a new course and make a fresh start?

Big (ret'd) Hafiz is former DG of BIIS.

PERSPECTIVES

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annual report beautifully analyzed and showed how the enormous external aids were squandered away by the bureaucrats, contractors and so-called consultants and very little of it trickled down to the poor for whom it was meant.

Over and above millions of our commonmen, the worst victims of corruption everyday in police station, court or *kutchery* or in a Tahsil office are the living witness to the enormous corruption of this country. Yet when the ignominy came last

Awami League government as if they are not polluted by any corrupt misdeeds. They so conveniently forgot that the start of the new regime was marked by a bombshell of corruption charges released by Danish authority against the shipping minister. That was not the end. Then came the wheatscam. There are also charges of the import of poisonous fertilizer and defective aviation fuel.

The balance sheet of corruption is no lighter on Awami League side.

upper strata of the society. They are concerned more with the corruption that pricks them everywhere every time. The big scams involving political leaders have their own political dynamics and move quickly towards concluding phase. But the corruptions the poor people encounter apparently have no solution. Like the leeches they stay wherever they are and keep sucking the blood of the people. They have neither political sensation nor any other clout to draw outside attention for

and *darwan* in various offices of the utility services like PDB, Gas, Telephone, Poursava or WASA. The corruption in these offices are what takes away not only extra money but also peace of mind. If one has to maintain his time schedule he has to massage the *any dirty palm* -- be it of junior clerk or even of a peon carrying the file. It is not much of a bribery -- I call it a kleptomania, why spare even a taka if it so easily come to your fingertips!

We have been hearing of the

Between Veerappan and Anderson

Hollow might of the state

PRAFUL BIDWAI
writes from New Delhi

TWO RECENT events starkly expose the Indian state as a giant with feet of clay. The first is bandit Veerappan's abduction of former Karnataka minister H. Nagappa.

The second is the Central government's shocking attempt to dilute criminal charges against Warren Anderson, former chairman of Union Carbide, liable for the world's worst industrial disaster, at Bhopal, in which over 12,000 people have perished.

So blatantly illegal was the attempt to charge Anderson trivially for a "rash and negligent act" (punishment: simple imprisonment for two years, or a fine) in place of "culpable homicide" (10 years' imprisonment) that Bhopal's chief judicial magistrate threw out the Central Bureau of Investigation's petition.

Veerappan, the ruthless gangster-cum-ivory-and-sandalwood-smuggler, kidnapped Mr Nagappa barely two years after collecting Rs. 40 crores from abducted filmstar Raj Kumar. His latest victim had a Y-security cover, with round-the-clock guards. All three guards were missing when Veerappan struck.

The abduction happened barely seven kilometres from the Special Task Force headquarters at Gundal. STF commandos were informed within five minutes, but waited for "orders from above" -- for three and half hours!

To crown it all, Veerappan

walked six kilometres, hijacked a bus, and rode it over 10 km, before vanishing into the forest!

This is a shameful comment on the 950-strong "elite" STF, which has soaked up Rs. 100 crores without yielding results in 12 years.

Ms Jayalalitha has blamed Karnataka for the abduction and traced it to "laxity" after IGP Kampaiah's transfer from the STF. She has also used Veerappan as a

The STF repeatedly says Veerappan is "on the run", about to be "captured". On June 2, Mr Dawaram declared the bandit "has only two men" left. Then Veerappan struck.

The STF doesn't lack money or sophisticated technology, including satellite imagery and remote-sensing help from the Indian Space Research Organisation. The Centre has promised it more commandos, night-vision glasses, helicopters,

The STF refuses to involve the forest department in its operations. There is little political will in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka to isolate the vested interests who help Veerappan sustain his activities.

These factors are compounded by the Centre's failure to develop a strategy to tackle the bandit. Veerappan is not some "local" goonda. He has killed 150 people, including scores of policemen, slaughtered more than 200 ele-

How can the poor villager trust the officer who steals his last chicken?

The Indian state may boast of nuclear weapons -- egregiously rationalised as "the right of one-sixth of humanity" --, of its 700,000 troops at the border, its capacity to displace and brutalise 35 million for "development", its battery of repressive laws and paramilitary forces, and its ability to inspire awe among the neighbours.

bid would have been instantly bankrupted and its senior officials sued for billions. In India, the settlement extinguished *all* of Carbide's liability. It is only on review that the Supreme Court restored *criminal* liability, and ordered the government to pursue criminal charges.

The government now wants to drop even these. In May, the CBI filed an application for diluting charges because it was so "directed" by the Ministry of External Affairs.

It is astounding that the mighty Indian government could not locate Anderson for ten and half years. But a Greenpeace activist has just released a video showing that Anderson lives in New York's super-rich Hampton suburb. It will be easy to have Anderson extradited.

But evidently, the Indian government lacks the will. Like tinpot Third World regimes, it doesn't have the courage to tell the US government -- which has been heavily lobbying for Anderson -- that it will do whatever is necessary to defend Indian citizens' rights.

The West has no business ordering India "to do as we say". "Doing as we do" would mean holding Carbide liable and making its successor company, Dow Chemicals, pay.

Tinpot states can't protect the nation from global threats. Their "sovereignty" has nothing to do with the people.

Praful Bidwai is an eminent Indian columnist.

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pawn in her battle over the Cauvery.

While Karnataka's top priority is to negotiate Mr Nagappa's release, Ms Jayalalitha wants a storming operation to kill Veerappan.

Ms Jayalalitha is wrong about the STF and its Tamil Nadu component, which is no less inefficient than its Karnataka unit. She appointed Walter I. Dawaram -- notorious as "the Butcher of Dharmapuri" because of his "shoot-first-and-talk-later" tactics -- to lead the STF. Mr Dawaram promised to "finish" Veerappan within six months. That was long ago!

even a Global Positioning System.

The STF's real problem is not commandos or equipment. It is paucity of intelligence on Veerappan's movements.

The STF uses high-handed methods against the people of the 256 villages in the 6,000 sq. km Satyamangalam forest, badly alienating them. In 1999, the National Human Rights Commission started an investigation into STF atrocities.

Clearly, the mighty Indian state cannot give the STF a leader who can regain the people's confidence!

phants for ivory, besides felling countless sandalwood trees.

Veerappan's operations are transnational: the ivory goes into the global market, the sandalwood all over Southeast Asia. Veerappan is a *national* menace.

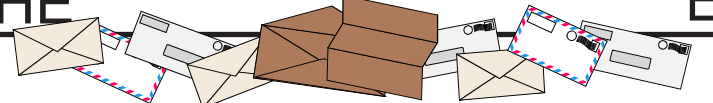
The Indian state's failure to bring Veerappan to book speaks of corruption and lack of commitment to its own laws. How can you enforce laws through a constabulary which has paid huge bribes to land a job, and which is led by men like absconder Ravi Kant Sharma or his rapist brother officers?

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In any First World country, Car-

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR



First Shasunnar Hall, now BUET

It is a great concern for any Bangladeshi citizen to see the prevailing situations in the top educational institutes like the Dhaka University and the BUET.

It appears that the BNP-Jamaat government has decided to tackle any protest activity whether peaceful or not with extreme brutality. The way police clobbered the general students and the way the JCD-Shibir activists attacked the hunger-striking students clearly demonstrated the vindictive attitude of this government.

It is really unclear why this popularly elected government has decided to deal with everything with such high-handedness. These students who are on strike are not representing any particular political party/s. They are demonstrating to meet their demands and that too in a peaceful manner.

I totally agree with the demands of the BUET students, which the authority should meet without any delay. There is no way BUET or any other educational institute can work without the participation of the students. The sooner the authorities and the policy makers realise it, the better for Bangladesh.

Muktadir Shahid
Hossain
University of Tokyo, Japan

Well so far we have successfully destroyed almost every institution of higher learning in Bangladesh.

BUET and IBA were the only ones left to follow the road to illiteracy, *maastani* and terrorism. Just one more left to go and then I suppose we'll have to turn our attention to NSU and the other private universities.

Kim
Dhaka

Why on earth is BNP trying to commit suicide? Almost every decision taken by this government has been ill thought and misguided. I fail to understand why presumably rational politicians are squandering their own political capital.

On the other hand the students have again disappointed us. Everyone sympathises with the students of BUET and DU. But why call a hartal? Calling a hartal just goes to show that neither the government nor the students hold the moral high ground. They're both intent on destroying the country for their own gains.

Masood Rana
Dhaka

It has become almost customary for our present government not to take notice any matter at the primary stage and thus avoid any unprecedented incident. They wake up from their slumber only when things turn worse.

The recent BUET incident is another glaring example of their inertia. If the government had taken action at an early stage things would not have become so violent.

I would humbly like to remind the

people in power "a stitch in time save nine".

Anando
Topkhan Rd, Dhaka
Sartre's Being and Nothingness

I was impressed to read Omar Khasru's brilliant analysis of Bangladesh politics with respect to 'Being and Nothingness' theory of Jean Paul Sartre (August 28).

We get a clear and concise idea about the useful theory and its relevance to hypocrisy in our politics. It is appropriate both for the government and the opposition party. Both have shown total disregard for the election ledges and promises they have frequently made to the people.

I hope *The Daily Star* will publish such significant articles, exposing the duplicity and deceit in our politics.

Mahtab Ahmed
On e-mail

Meter for CNG auto-rickshaws

I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to the Communications Minister for being so forthright and going on record as saying that the government is indeed going to make use of meters mandatory for auto-rickshaws to stop nasty haggling over fare. While talking to journalists he was quoted as saying "I will ask the importers of CNG auto-rickshaws to import vehicles with meters in a couple of days". This indeed is great news for the con-

sumer rights!

On another crucial point the Minister blamed the law enforcers for the existing chaotic traffic situation in the city. He has rightly stated that "our biggest limitation is enforcement...". I just hope he remains vigilant on the "meter issue" and makes sure that the decision to have meters is "enforced" and does not remain as just another decision taken. Congratulations Mr. Minister, you have made my day!

A Thinker
Dhaka

Hypocrisy

I am greatly surprised while going through the two news items titled "PM renews vow to fight poverty, corruption" (September 5) and "Wheatgate scam: Six made OSDs, no action against politicians named in probe" (September 3). Why has the government failed to take any exemplary actions against any of the ruling party politicians identified in the official probe report in Wheatgate scam?

The present government came to power through a solid commitment to fight corruption. But instead we have again secured the position of the most corrupt nation! What a way to fight corruption!

M. S. Uddin
Nagoya, Japan

Funny Ad

A TV advertisement by Lily Cosmetics Ltd.(LCL) is very confusing but a

funny one to watch. In it the salesman says to his customer that LCL has developed new kind of soaps. He claims that the soap, which smells good to the customer, is the best one for her skin. This Ad is totally ridiculous. Do we have an Advertising Standard Authority?

FH
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

On MIG-29s

This is in regards to the responses that OH Kabir's well thought letter has drawn. Why is it that we seem so obsessed with having a powerful military? Instead of writing letters asking for more MIGs and Frigates, we should be asking for sewer lines and cheaper phone connections.

Why is it that the majority of *The Daily Star's* readership seems so interested in defending the same people who have contributed so much in making Bangladesh a basket case?

Sabyashachi
Dhaka

"English Medium vs Bangla Medium"

For about a month I have been reading with interest all the letters regarding English medium vs Bangla medium schools. Almost, all the English Medium students have claimed themselves to be "patriotic".

Most of the reputed English Medium schools have started their journey in the pre-liberation period

and their number has multiplied over the past decade. Over this period they have produced many graduates, postgraduates and even doctorate degree holders. But, the statistics in civil service, Bangladesh Army show almost no English Medium educated personnel. Because they will not be financially very solid in such services, they opt to join highly paid jobs in private sector or multinationals or in the first chance migrate to developed countries. I know after reading this they will argue "We are not corrupt like most public sector employees and thus do not want to engage there". But, that is not any relevant excuse.

If they were really patriotic many of them would have joined such these jobs. And by now so many educated personnel would enter in the public sector that corruption, inefficiency and lack of discipline would have automatically reduced. Their refraining from such low paid employment itself presents evidence of how patriotic the majority of them are.

Altaf Hossain
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

Open the door for all

The library in the Bangladesh Bank is a rich one for those who want to study or research about banking. But recently this library has been closed for general people/students. Probably the reason is many of the library goes tear the pages of these books. But if the BB authority makes it mandatory for every one to show some ID card then these unwanted

incidents can be avoided and general public can be allowed to use the library.

Shahed Mustafa
Dhaka University

Submarine cable debate

Only now, Grameen Phone is going for STM-4 from STM-1 moreover, it is not always for data congestion but for PCM crisis too. This is the situation in the biggest traffic of voice-data (consider negligible data traffic) in the local connectivity market. Accumulating all PSTN (fixed) and mobile phone, presently Bangladesh has about 1.25 million phones (which was less than half in early 90s when the previous BNP government has rejected the submarine cable connectivity option with SEA-ME-WE-3 consortium).

How much space does it require to handle these phones, especially for its international gateway only? Whereas, India is easily handling 46.4 million phones with huge future growth provision with 11 units of STM1, what bandwidth do we need? It is certainly not 64 units of STM-1 or 10gbps, what PM has approved BTTB (why an operator, not BTRC!) to sign in Bali, Indonesia on September 4, 2002. Again the question is, where is our traffic more or which is more international accessible-- USA or South East Asia, Middle East, West Europe.

I feel the order of preference for spending 50+million dollars comes

later in submarine cable, than the following:

i) Increase tele-density (0.35/100 persons) or tele-reach, which is more practical.

ii) Force BTTB for inter-operability with private operators to increase revenue for all the parties.

iii) If required subsidise BTTB for exercising info-right of people through data convergence.

iv) All such projects recommended and accepted by the concerned-- to create proper demand for submarine cable and thus make rational use of ICT sector.

M Musleh Uz Zaman
CEO, Grameen Information Highway Ltd

The Opposition leader

I must say, Sheikh Hasina indeed is a strange lady. She embarrassed the nation and her party too many times by her irresponsible remarks.

As per your September 02 editorial, BCL boys torched five buses in the city. It's crystal clear that AL activists were responsible for the death of the innocent the passenger. It would be wise of Sheikh Hasina not to talk about it but any way she blamed it on BNP. You are absolutely right, Mr. Editor. No one is going to buy it. I don't know why she always ends up with this kind remark.

Mazibur Khan
Portland, Oregon, USA