

## Armed clashes at RU

*Student politics at its worst*

THE armed clashes between two rival political student groups, Chhatra Dal and Chhatra Shibir, in Rajshahi University only confirms our impression about the negative impact of student politics. This was just another example of how unruly cadres of student wings wield monstrous power on the campus. Turning the campus into a virtual battlefield with trading gunshots, exploding bombs and thus putting the lives of general students at grave risk -- is not the kind of behaviour one would expect from student wings of political parties after the rhetorical flourish of their leaders.

First of all, according to reports some of the perpetrators of the clashes were not even students of the university; they were apparently outsiders. Secondly, they got engaged in armed clashes over an illegal practice. It may sound unbelievable, but it was reported that Chhatra Shibir activists were selling admission forms in black market to which some Chhatra Dal activists objected. They reportedly beat up a Shibir cadre causing rage among the group. Thus began the attack and counter attack between the two groups. But how could the university authorities allow them to sell admission forms in the black market in the first place? Or did they just turn a blind eye to what was going on? Why couldn't the police stop them from ransacking the rooms of Chhatra Dal activists?

These kinds of scenes in the campus take us back to those days when clashes between rival student groups were frequent and regular incidents. Though the general students usually have no stake in these clashes, they are the ones who suffer the most in terms of their academic pursuits. Therefore those trying to establish their supremacy on the campus through guns and bombs can't be allowed to carry on with their mission any longer. We earnestly hope that the university authorities would be able to discipline the unruly elements sooner than later. And lastly, the leaders of the political parties must stop patronising their student cadres to help contain illegal practices on the campus.

## Dealing with outlaws

*The process has to be transparent, legally tenable*

THE report that 80 underground operatives are going to surrender to Barisal police on Friday deserves a closer look for some obvious reasons.

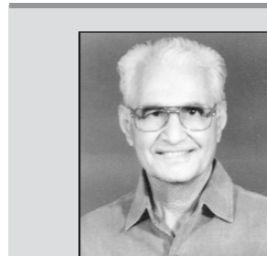
The planned surrender of the political extremists, responsible for a marked slide in law and order in the southern region, is reported to be the result of negotiations between the police high-ups and the representatives of two extremist groups. And they have been assured of a safe passage to normal life. However, legal experts have questioned the validity of such a deal, as under the law of the land criminals cannot be set free only because they have surrendered to police.

Police must have worked in light of their experience that law and order is nose-diving in many places in the south, where political extremists are very active. But the question is whether clearing a large number of known criminals of the grave charges that they are facing will be an effective move, not to speak of the legal intricacies. Even the general amnesty for underground operatives that the immediate past government declared did not produce the desired results, though a good number of extremists did surrender to police. Many of them are believed to have returned to the underworld as few follow-up measures were adopted to rehabilitate them.

The latest move appears to be an initiative of Barisal police only as reports say that even the DC of Barisal doesn't know much about the plan. The job of handling political extremists posing a serious threat to law and order has to be accomplished on the basis of a well-thought-out plan. Both the administrative and law enforcing agencies of the government should have a role in the process.

An amnesty for political extremists can be a peaceful way of bringing them back to normal life. But that can by no means be a deal or understanding having no legal or administrative basis.

# Hopes and fears



M B NAQVI  
writes from Karachi

THOSE who observe trends in the Subcontinent are pleased with the two successes achieved in the first six days of the new year: the 12th SAARC Summit could not only be held but made a breakthrough by adopting a key agreement on free trade in South Asia; the second was another, bilateral, summit between Pakistan and India, on the sidelines of SAARC Summit, that agreed to resume their bilateral, normalisation, talks next month.

Both these are bold steps in a desirable -- peace-promoting -- direction. The SAARC breakthrough infused a new life in the otherwise ineffective, almost moribund, regional grouping. It can now productively move from one success to more in days to come. It can become a harbinger of, and the means to, ever closer integration of the seven economies. Almost instinctively the sort of goals seem to have been accepted that have produced the EU in Europe. Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee allowed his imagination to soar: he visualised such a close integration of the South Asian economies as would need a single currency which has already been named Rupa. Pakistan PM found it appropriate and seemly to tacitly accept that goal.

The context of the breakthrough in bilateral ties of the two nuclear powers is the restarting of bilateral negotiations along the path charted on the conditions and for purposes agreed in Islamabad in the summer of 1997. Its format was called the Composite Dialogue. Its specific

purpose was to complete the business (normalisation of ties) left unfinished by on-again and off-again negotiations after the Simla Agreement. The talks visualised by 1997 agreement between two Foreign Secretaries virtually collapsed after a few ineffectual meetings amidst the 1998 events -- insurgency in Kashmir seemed racing towards a climax and India forced a sort of show of hands by May '98 nuclear test explosions.

After that Mr. Vajpayee rode a bus to Lahore and signed the Lahore

little and Pakistanis and Indians are allowed to meet one another.

There was the recent occasion of the Joint Convention of Pakistan-India People's Forum for Peace and Democracy in Karachi when over 260 Indian peace activists visited Karachi along with over 350 of their Pakistani counterparts. The bonhomie and friendly feelings gushed forth from both sides. Although the number of Indian activists was smaller at the South Asia Partnership's Islamabad function, called People's SAARC Summit, just before

exchanges -- no improvement in the inter-state relations can be stable or lasting. No normalisation, let alone friendship, between Pakistan and India can be sustained without a visa-free regime throughout South Asia -- so as to make India, Pakistan and Bangladesh adopt the sort of civilized mode operated by Nepal and Sri Lanka.

The Indian and Pakistani governments, in the current phase, are seeking a normalisation that has eluded them since 1971. Its scope does not extend to the sort of rela-

Americans are a help, of course. But they are only 'some' help. Before too long and under other circumstances -- say under another US government -- things can get ugly. It is a natural and correct policy to get closer to India and fast.

But India is a diverse and big country and is in a different league. It has a complex -- and to a certain extent unpredictable -- politics that is so divisive as to deeply affect Pakistanis. Improvement in ties with it will remain fragile and vulnerable to variable moods in the famous 250

people reconciliation from the grassroots up in all inter-state relationships, it is ultimately the responsibility of the Mr. Common Man, while the governments get ready to spoil these relationships virtually at the drop of a hat. That happens to be so, however odd it may be.

What the rulers of Pakistan have now done in and about SAARC as well as bilaterally with India, whatever their motives or compulsions, is good and timely. It is for them to resolutely resist the already visible adverse reactions from vested interests -- one talking about? It is the social and economic structures that produce and sustain the Jihadi culture. There are viscerally anti-Indian lobbies that can be depended upon to oppose both a vigorously revitalized SAARC and the graduation of the normalisation process with India into a genuine rapprochement between the two peoples that is sure to result from wide-scale cultural exchanges. It is only in Pakistan and India where opposition to an Indo-Pak friendship exists, though common people everywhere need it.

It is not the place to go into domestic political questions or how this narrowly-based government can move toward strengthening Pakistan's seriously damaged relations with major powers by doing what takes to become vitalized politically. That they are other stories for other times. Here the writer can only underline the far-reaching significance of what Islamabad may have done: it has released SAARC from needless foolish restrictions and revitalised it, on the one hand, and has offered to befriend India at a huge political cost to Pakistan's old and sterile stances. The advance will be opposed and it is for this government to face the cacophonous music from the Right wing as best as it can. For, it cannot go back or resile from what it has done.

MB Naqvi is a leading columnist in Pakistan.

## PLAIN WORDS

**What the rulers of Pakistan have now done in and about SAARC as well as bilaterally with India, whatever their motives or compulsions, is good and timely. It is for them to resolutely resist the already visible adverse reactions from vested interests ... The advance will be opposed and it is for this government to face the cacophonous music from the Right wing as best as it can. For, it cannot go back or resile from what it has done.**

Declaration which led to Pakistan Army's virtual revolt in the shape of the ill-fated Kargil operation and a freeze in bilateral ties followed. It was unsuccessfully sought to be broken in Agra. The year 2002 saw the nadir of Indo-Pak relations when a million troops looked like going to war amidst atomic sabre rattling. Indian PM, with prodding by foreigners and some finesse, threw a peace feeler in April last year and the Joint Statement of Jan '04 has succeeded in restarting the normalisation moves.

It is necessary not to be carried away by media hype or diplomatic rhetoric that is occasioned by all Indo-Pak meetings meant to take the normalisation process further. The decibel and volume of all this rhetoric should be seen for what it is: it demonstrates the common people's deeply-felt urge for a coming together in friendship and cooperation on both sides. Normally they two governments keep up an invisible curtain to keep the ordinary Indians from fraternising with common Pakistanis. Highly emotional scenes are witnessed on the few occasions when this curtain is lifted a

the official SAARC's Summit, but the easy camaraderie with Pakistani counterparts had an intense quality of its own. This fact explains why the two governments, whenever they start quarrelling, first thing they do is to clamp down on the visa issuing to prevent the normal civilized intercourse among civilized neighbours. Both governments fear normal cultural exchanges and only permit blood relations to meet their relatives after much hassle.

This was brought out by South Asian Free Media Association's several years of experience. It has been campaigning for a visa free -- or with really easy visas -- travel of senior South Asian journalists in the region. It has lobbied hard to have the issue included in the official SAARC agenda. Most Foreign Ministers and Foreign Secretaries have separately expressed, sometime repeatedly, sympathy and support for putting it on SAARC's Summit agenda. But the issue continues to elude the official SAARC agenda. This is really a key issue. Without free travel by citizens of South Asia in the region -- meaning free cultural

ties that subsisted between Pakistan and India between 1951 and 1965. The current effort is restricted to the sort of normality that existed on Dec 12, 2001, no more. But now that Pakistan policy makers have allowed the impression to get abroad that Mr. Vajpayee's vision of regional integration to the point of having a single currency is generally acceptable to the Jamali government, including its Boss, it is time for the government to go the whole hog. Let it work, from here and now, for a visa-free South Asia for all its citizens.

Much will depend on speed with which Pakistan moves. Everybody knows why Pakistan's policy makers are going along with Mr. Vajpayee's formulations. There is relentless pressure from the rest of the world, as is shown by the cascading stories in the global media of Pakistan's atomic scientists helping North Korean and Libyan governments' plans to have WMD technology. Iran went a step further and named individuals and cos that helped it acquire technology for uranium enrichment. Pakistan's strategic location and Gen. Musharraf's reliability in the eyes of

million strong middle class -- that now have a certain orientation. That is not really helpful. Indian politics per se may not be a consideration for Army generals and the government under Mr. Jamali. But other Pakistanis have opinions on, and about, Indian politics. Indeed they have preferences and fears as well as ideological interests. But moving fast on free cultural exchanges and a normalisation such as obtains in Europe is however the need of the hour that is not likely to lessen despite the vicissitudes of Indian politics.

Three considerations have to be kept in mind. First, normal or civilized relations among the peoples of the seven states is the minimum, not maximum, need; ideally, friendship among them is a prior requirement that can enable and sustain friendly cooperation among the SAARC member governments. Governments are not always responsive to their common folks, for they frequently represent narrow elites whose interests can vary, even if they are not volatile. To keep the governments committed to a people-to-

# Japan's road to success: Directions for Bangladesh

DR. M. ATAUR RAHMAN

HOW could we explain Japan's road to success? What directions can it provide for a least developing country like Bangladesh? Explanations for Japan's success often vary, historians, economists, social scientists -- all trying to analyse and understand the roots and origins of success in terms of development of national consciousness i.e., 'kuni no tame' meaning for the sake of the country, absorption of western technologies, far-reaching educational reforms, market expansion, political stability and social cohesion. From the economic perspective, the issue boils down to the question of whether we see a 'third way' between plan and market -- through which a wise and benevolent state represented by an enlightened and efficient bureaucracy, guided the economy successfully in the interest of common good. From the social perspective, a political society whose citizens recognized the virtues of education, and 'communitarian orientation' that served as important pillars of economic success.

From the political and legal perspective, Japan has been a country of unique political stability -- one party under a parliamentary system ruled for thirty-eight years and a rapid social change was accommodated without major political disruptions. This has been possible because of the 'culture of compromise and consensus' that allowed the second largest world economic power and a modern industrial nation to manage its functions with a significantly lower number of judges and lawyers and fewer civil administrative proceedings than, for example, Germany and the United States. It is, indeed, remarkable how clever the Japanese are not wasting scarce resources on lawyers and lawsuits, and still providing for an adequate measure of intra-societal justice and ensuring maximum security for the citizens. Indeed, many nations can take direction from Japan in terms of mobilizing the creative energies of

people to desired goals of national development and social peace.

### Model for other nations

The experience of Japan -- its strategy of economic growth, political process, human resource development management techniques and state-society relations -- inspired many nations of East and Southeast Asia including Taiwan, South Korea, Singapore, Hong Kong, who are now joining the ranks of developed countries. These countries, while retaining the western style of representative government, opted for effective governance in terms of creating and sustaining order and discipline in their societies. They realised like Japan the need for democratisation, but at the same time keeping the

Merit has always been recognised, and is apparently growing in importance in making job assignments, and determining compensation. The largest political party of Japan -- Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) contained factions, sub-factions, policy-groups at different levels to accomplish instrumental goals as well as stabilise disorderly environment. Political stability under business government made it easier for business to plan ahead and make long-term investment. Political parties converged on vital national development issues, macroeconomic stability, and business to grow. The LDP-Business alliance has been seen in this respect as a key stone of post-war Japanese economic success and political stability.

factor in creating a stable political and social order. There is an urgent need to give due recognition to merit, hard work and collective orientation -- in order to create a disciplined social order.

### Reorientation of political culture

Bangladesh is fortunate like Japan to enjoy a unique homogeneity as a nation in terms of race, language and religion, but unlike Japan, the political elites in Bangladesh espouse seemingly irreconcilable beliefs, symbols and values -- creating stress and indiscipline in the political and social system. There is, therefore, a need for Bangladesh to evolve norms and new political values, in order to establish consensus and stability in

sive and deep in territorial and substantive terms. In terms of territorial expanse, besides the ten countries in ASEAN, she needs to be engaged with North East Asia, with Japan, with China and the Koreans. Down south, there is a need to have engagement with Australia. Therefore, when we talk of Bangladesh's Look East engagement we are including this whole region of Southeast and East Asia -- Japan being the focal point. It is gratifying in this context that Bangladesh has been continuing its beneficial and exemplary relations with Japan for the past thirty-two years. These relationships need to be deepened further for mutual benefits and effective communications between the peoples of the two countries.

It is a 'bridge between Southwest and Southeast Asia'. Not merely must we be geographically in the centre of things, but in our engagement also, we must be at the centre of things in terms of development, security and cooperation. Therefore, in recent years, Bangladesh has to put emphasis on 'rediscovering Asia'. We have to create deep networks in East Asia, and raise a new consciousness of our Asian identity. People across countries are freely talking about the twenty-first century being an Asian century. We have to translate that into reality to be a part of it.

### Conclusion: National determination

Bangladesh's engagement with the immediate and extended neighbours should be based on strength in terms of growth of her economy, progress in science and technology, achievements in human resource development, and strength of vital democratic institutions. Therefore, in all our interactions, the emphasis should be on development of human resources, on greater economic engagement in terms of investment as well as in terms of trade. The emphasis should be on technical assistance that Bangladesh could receive from these countries to improve its institutions of governance and development. Clearly, if Bangladesh wants to pursue the national and international goals that we have set for ourselves, we would like peace to prevail globally and particularly, in our region. Any threat to peace by state actors or non-state actors is a threat to the goal of prosperity for our people that we pursue. There must be a consensus within Bangladesh that prosperity within a peaceful order is a goal we should pursue with single-minded determination. That is the direction we can meaningfully take from Japan's road to success, and it is imperative for Bangladesh to be engaged with Japan.

Dr. M. Ataur Rahman is Professor of Political Science and Director, Japan Study Centre, University of Dhaka and President, Bangladesh Political Science Association

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### Directions for Bangladesh

Japan's road to success has a clear direction for Bangladesh despite many differences in history, society and stage of economic development between the two countries. Like Japan, Bangladesh needs to evolve a consensus of purpose for clearly defined objective of national development under a democratic order. This involves creating an appropriate framework to curb violence, indiscipline and corruption in the society. Japanese experience suggests that to evolve such a framework, a comprehensive approach is needed that should include not only the legal order, but also reorientation of political culture and social behavior through education, vigorous socialization and strengthening bonds of solidarity of state institutions with society. Since Bangladesh has opted for a democratic system of governance, the value-framework of its political leadership is a crucial

### Foreign policy direction

Bangladesh's external engagement with immediate and extended neighbors must be constructive, purposeful and based on strength. The government of Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, with the initiative of Foreign Minister M. Morshed Khan, launched Bangladesh's 'Look East Policy' -- a praiseworthy policy step indeed. But Bangladesh's Look East policy has to be more comprehensive.

### Other areas.

If growing of tobacco is not banned (in Bangladesh), then what is the point in shouting 'Produce more tobacco and give up smoking!' Fear of cancer is not enough. The human being has been designed to err. The mass psychology and motivation (especially of the new young smokers) have to be explained for awareness. There are many kinds of deterrence, and the local applications have variable impacts. There are other greater evils like alcoholism and drunkenness, corruption, rape, kidnapping, wife-beating for dowry, etc. Why isolate smoking only? The spotlighting has to be well integrated for perspective impact.

In France, the price of a pack of cigarettes is several times higher than that prevailing in Dhaka. Smoking is not a new fashion, it has preceded civilisation right from the cave age. The campaign policy

may be reviewed for greater acceptance. **AZ Dhaka**

### Stop cribbing!

I am a student and the question that agitates my mind is: are we ever going to be really educated under the present system? It seems that we care more for a degree and less for education. And on the road to achieving this, we actually adopt unfair means. To speak the truth, the teaching that we are getting at a huge cost is anything but education. Can you write an editorial on the subject? **S M Rashed Joypurhat**

### "Book Fair"

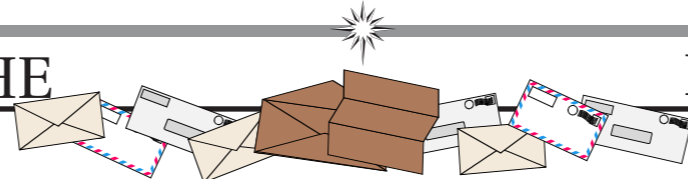
The 10<sup>th</sup> Dhaka book Fair-2004 is being held at Bangladesh-China

Friendship Conference Centre premises. Prime Minister Khaleda Zia proclaimed 2004 as the year of juvenile literature in the inaugural ceremony. Our PM urged people from all walks of life to read books.

With great curiosity, I went to the book fair. From outside it seems that books are being sold like hotcakes, but the real picture is quite different. When I entered the fair premises I found many people enjoying the fair. Most of the visitors are roaming and parading the ground. Very few of them are actually buying books. My request to those who do not buy books but spend money on unnecessary things that they should buy at least one book at the Fair. We know the phrase "The more you read, the more you learn".

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## TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE



## EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

### Secularism in UK

I have just returned from a short Christmas holiday in the UK and have to report that 'secularism' there has gone mad. Some of your readers, sir, may not be aware that, in some so-called 'Christian' countries, there is a quite open lack of sympathy for Christianity, using as an excuse, 'being sensitive to those of other faiths, especially Muslims.'

Many official bodies, including Town Councils and even the Scottish Parliament, refused to use Christmas cards with any religious pictures or messages. A London council distributed a magazine with symbols of every religion on its cover except Christianity and a church in Buckinghamshire was refused a space on the community's notice-board.

A Christmas CD that was produced by a children's hospital for charity - and mentioned the name of Jesus - was banned. The spokes-

man for the hospital concerned said, "If it went to every child it could cause offence to those who are not Christians."

If men go on a 'pub-crawl' for charity, it is considered hilarious if they go dressed as nuns. None would dream of going dressed in a burkha. That would be offensive... Such things are happening in a country where the number of regularly-worshipping Muslims is set to equal the number of regularly-worshipping Christians by the year 2039 - which isn't many. Mind you, a short time ago, there was a national poll that asked everyone what religion they had - and 71% said 'Christian'. The jury is still 'out' as to what they meant.

The European Union has not mentioned Christianity at all in its draft constitution - thus denying the debt of Europe to Christianity.

I doubt if this is the sort of 'secularism' that is wanted. I can only

quote a sensible community leader in London who called what was going on "political-correctness gone mad," and said, "This is Christmas time and the overwhelming majority of people in this country are Christians. If people want to celebrate, then they should have the right, as should minority groups." He is a British Muslim - Baashir Maan. Now that is the spirit of true British tolerance. It is a pity that other Brits seem to be losing it.

**Angela MV Robinson (Rev Mrs)**  
Lalmatia Dhaka

### Awami League and Caretaker Government

The Awami League claims to be the father of the caretaker government system in Bangladesh.

Presiding over a meeting of the AL Presidium, the highest policy-making body of the AL -- the Awami League President Sheikh Hasina criticised the caretaker government that conducted the general elections in 2001, saying it did not abide by any principles "it was used politically" and stressed the need for reforms in the existing electoral process.

We feel that the criticism of the AL chief about the caretaker government and her observations on reforms are not clear and distinct but made in vague terms.

We would humbly request Sheikh Hasina to be practical and to come out with specific charges against the caretaker government.

We would highly appreciate and remain grateful to her if the Awami League, before launching any massive movement to oust the government in power, puts up a comprehensive and fool proof

draft proposal to the nation for holding a free and fair general election without fear, favour or ill will towards anybody.

**OH Kabir Dhaka-1203.**

### Half-hearted anti-smoking drive

The official mass media blitz on smoking appears to be half-hearted. The heart is not there, or the lungs are weak (due to smoking?) The task (involving tens of millions of smokers) has been assigned (as seen on BTV) to a limited number of small groups consisting of GPs (medical doctors), who confine themselves mostly to adverse effects on the body (physiology). Absent are psychologists, social scientists, the agricultural sector (production of tobacco), economists (smoking is a big business), and experts from