

DU classes resume

Academic boycott was self-defeating

THE news that classes at Dhaka University have resumed after a 22-day boycott by teachers protesting the attack on Dr. Humayun Azad must have come as a great relief to the students and all others concerned.

The striking teachers protested what is generally seen as an unprecedented act of barbarity which put the freedom of writers in jeopardy. They also demanded exemplary punishment to the attackers and resignation of the home minister for the law enforcers' inability to protect Dr Azad. The demands are indicative of the teachers' strong resolve not to allow the incident to go unchallenged. So the symbolic value of the protest must have been there. The government has responded to the agitation by sending Dr. Azad abroad for better treatment, but the other issues raised by the teachers have not yet been resolved.

However, the rationale behind class boycott for over three weeks, which affected thousands of students, remains unclear. It is difficult to comprehend what the teachers could achieve through the class boycott, except derailing the academic schedules of the university. So what was the point in dragging it that long, the general students having a big stake in regular holding of classes?

The boycott paralysed all activities at the university. It surely needs no elaboration that the attackers were not hurt by the move. If they are the ones who do not want intellectual freedom to prevail in society, they can only be elated if life comes to a standstill at the premier university of the country. If we want to strike at the root of the dark forces, the campaign must begin from the seats of learning. But there is nothing to be gained from embarking on a self-defeating course like boycotting classes for a long time.

The progressive forces, which include the aggrieved teachers, must unite to resist the elements who could commit a dastardly crime like the one we witnessed on February 27. But the campaign must not be at cost of academic pursuits at the highest seat of learning.

Sheik Yassin killed

Sharon to blame for consequences

ISRAEL'S decision to assassinate Hamas founder and spiritual leader Sheik Ahmed Yassin with a missile strike in Gaza City on Monday once again shows the moral bankruptcy of its policies in the occupied territories. Seemingly not content with its unlawful military occupation, the Israelis long ago dispensed with democratic niceties as due process and the rule of law in the policing of the territories.

It is the continued denial of basic human rights to the Palestinian population together with the increasing brutality of the occupation that is the principal cause of terrorism that Israel suffers, and the extrajudicial killing of the wheelchair-bound Sheik Yassin as he left a mosque at daybreak will tragically only escalate the conflict.

But Israeli PM Ariel Sharon knows this. He knew that the killing of Sheik Yassin -- apart from the moral repugnance of the act itself -- would precipitate massive retaliation by the Palestinians and mortally damage the possibility of long-term peace between the two sides. What conclusion can one come to other than to suppose that this was his intention?

Palestinian public opinion is split between those who favour a two-state solution with a return to the pre-1967 borders, and those, like Hamas, who want a single Palestinian state within the pre-1948 borders. However, prior to Monday's killing, there was always realistic hope that Hamas and the other like-minded Palestinians would be convinced to accept a two-state solution and live in harmony side by side with Israel.

Now we fear that that hope has been extinguished.

Hamas has vowed revenge against Israel and, we fear, will now never be reconciled to a two-state solution. Indeed, the killing of Sheik Yassin, who was known for his moderation within Hamas, can only be expected to further radicalise even the more moderate of the Palestinian people. As a Hamas spokesman put it, "Sharon has opened the gates of hell."

Sharon has signaled with unmistakable clarity that he does not wish to live in peace with the Palestinian people. He does not want a two-state solution. He wants all-out war between the two sides that will only end when one of them is annihilated. That's the war he wants, and now, with the killing of Sheik Yassin, that's the war he will get. But let us not forget who it was who precipitated the tragedy that is about to break out in the Middle East.



ABDUL BAYES

WE were horrified to hear that Dr B Chowdhury -- an eminent physician and an ex-president of the country -- and his followers were attacked on their way towards Muktangon. Reportedly, this was the only legal venue that Dr Chowdhury and his alternative platform was permitted to use for a public meeting. The vivid video display in various TV channels and the newspaper reports that appeared on the following day, only point to the pitifully pale politics that the country is faced with. As we could learn, the purpose of going to Muktangon was not to do a devastating damage to the party in power but to hold a public meeting and announce the names of the people in the committee. Even if we assume that Dr Chowdhury had the capacity to create a panic for the government then, too, logically, he should not have been prevented from doing so.

One might not agree with what Dr Chowdhury had to say that day. There are many critics of his prescriptions pertaining to the country's present day ailments. But that is an issue altogether different. Democracy evolves in dissents. Democracy direly demands that every citizen of the country -- from an ex-president to the pedestrian -- reserve the constitutional right to criticise a

against price spiral, terrorism, toll collection, rampant corruption etc. Eminent leaders of the party had been tortured by the police and the cadres of the party in power. The state machinery had been devilishly used to contain the criticism by the opposition. Meantime, the axe also fell on the shoulders of others. Dr Kamal Hossain, an eminent lawyer was severely attacked on his way to

came under heavy attack by the alleged government party backed terrorists. Reportedly, quite a few consignments of exports by his firms were stopped, factories were destroyed. According to the owner, the estimated loss would be more than Tk.300 million. Production of commodities in these industries came to a virtual halt following the heinous attacks. Quite obviously, the victims were the poor

a signal with a disheartening note to the willing investors of home and abroad. The Finance Minister's fancy words on reforms, liberalisations and good policies on economic fronts are likely to bounce back in the face of a "liberalised" reign of terrorism.

That brings us back to the nexus between democracy and development. Not long ago, Amartya Sen -- the Nobel laureate

hope that the country should be put on an even keel by putting both freedom and development together.

Thus, the slogan of "pro-production politics" -- so much espoused by the present government -- seemingly sounds to be a fashion rather than a fact. Had it not been so, business community would not be on streets with sticks to demonstrate their hatred against the heightened rate of toll collection, terrorists would not have attacked the industries of Mr. Mannan and the overall law and order situation would not have deteriorated day by day. The party that came to power with the motto of eradicating corruption and terrorism appears to have forgotten its election commitments. The slip between the cup and the lip might cost severely -- realisable only after people in general takes to streets to save themselves. That kind of a scenario could be in evidence very soon unless the government takes terrorists to task. The government should show signs of sympathy to the dissidents. We hope that the politicians ruling the country are not forgetful of the lessons of history: oppressions and repressions only invite rejections by the public.

Abdul Bayes is a Professor of Economics at Jahangirnagar University.

BENEATH THE SURFACE

Not long ago, Amartya Sen -- the Nobel laureate -- wrote a book titled: *Development as Freedom*. The ace economist equated freedom with development. In fact, the other name of development is freedom. So any government that talks about politics of development should never bypass the issue of the politics of freedom. These two are not mutually exclusive but mutually reinforcing events.

government. Every political party has the right to hold public meeting -- be it for or against the government. The function of the state machinery is to ensure all those rights for the citizen. Unfortunately, this elementary democratic norm enshrined in our constitution had been denied to the opposition parties by a government that is oath bound to protect the constitution. For example, over the last two years or so, the main opposition Awami League had been facing the axe since it got down to the streets for agitation

CHT. Dr Humayun Azad, an eminent writer was driven to the point of death by the miscreants. All these have been happening before the eyes of the government sitting with an aim to contain the opposition.

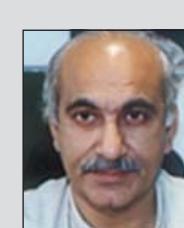
The bar before B Chowdhury is not the end of the story. In the rampage that followed, few industries of (Majlified) Mannan -- the front line face on B Chowdhury's new platform who recently resigned from the parliament in protest against misdeeds of the government --

employees with falling earnings and rising insecurities.

More often than not, we hear from the party in power that Hartal is bad because it adversely affects production and export. Opposition parties call hartals because they do not want production and exports for the country. But who would take the responsibility of stopping or slowing down the functioning of the industries owned by Mr Mannan and the consequent adverse effects on exports? Such an act of vandalism on manufacturing plants also, seemingly, send

wrote a book titled: *Development as Freedom*. The ace economist equated freedom with development. In fact, the other name of development is freedom. So any government that talks about politics of development should never bypass the issue of the politics of freedom. These two are not mutually exclusive but mutually reinforcing events. A government that forgets Sen's seminal observation simply tends to put the cart before the horse. Freedom forfeited amounts to development denied. We can only

The three rivers of UP



M.J. AKBAR

AND so, in the honourable state of Uttar Pradesh, my enemy's enemy is not necessarily my friend. That is the sharp message that emerges from the interminable alliance-building exercise on the eve of the war for the 14th Lok Sabha.

The price of hubris is paid in every tragedy. And yet it is pitiful to see the Grand Old Party, Congress, knock on any door like an ageing impotent in search of anyone who will say "yes". For a hundred years since its birth in 1885, UP has been the scene of the party's finest triumphs. Never was it more glorious than in 1984. Rajiv Gandhi lost the state in 1989, but destiny did not give him time to recover what he had lost.

His successors have been indifferent or worse. P.V. Narasimha Rao, of course, dared not step into the state after 6 December 1992. But he thought he could win by artifice what he had lost by cynicism. He entered into an alliance which buried the Congress.

He made a deal with the Bahujan Samaj Party of Kanshi Ram and Mayawati. The boomerang still knocks down the Congress three general elections later. The Congress gave legitimacy to a party aspiring to be the sole spokesman of a key Congress vote, the Dalits, a vote delivered to the party by Mahatma Gandhi. Kanshi Ram and Mayawati are not careless leaders. They have refused to return this vote to the Congress.

Sonia Gandhi was not as cynical as Narasimha Rao, but she was either indifferent or perhaps too enveloped by a sense of self-

esteem to see clearly. She has been in charge of the Congress for over six years now. The only part of Uttar Pradesh that seems to matter to her is Amethi, or perhaps Rae Bareli as a future resource base for her daughter Priyanka. I cannot think of a single issue, or cause, that she has fought for that might bring the Congress back in.

Uttar Pradesh, or, for that matter, Bihar, Congress leaders tend to go into denial when confronted with the obvious, or become accusatory. But this is the

Bihar. It has ceded Bihar to Laloo Prasad Yadav, and finds that it is being marginalised even from the margins. The justification is that the defeat of the BJP is more important than the recovery of the Congress. This suits Laloo Yadav brilliantly, because he eliminates a political danger from one end of the spectrum. Laloo Yadav is conscious that not only might he be defeated by the BJP, but also that the Congress could occupy his space when the sins of power corrode his strength.

nationally. The facts of Uttar Pradesh are even more tortuous than those of Bihar. The Congress looks isolated and pathetic as it waits for favours from Mayawati long after she has publicly stated that she has none to offer. There is nothing personal about Mayawati's decision. It is not in her political interest to revive a party that could retake her voter-base. When Mulayam Singh Yadav offers a sliver of support, he wraps his offer with taunts that are both personal and political. The Yadav

Saraswati. It has dried up. But the riverbed has not yet disappeared, although further mismanagement of the party could ensure this as well.

Self-inflicted wounds continue to main the Congress. Sonia Gandhi has just hurt the Congress badly in Assam.

The Jamiat-i-Ulema-i-Hind is a national and nationalist organisation that fought alongside the Congress in the freedom movement, and has remained with the

alienation was utterly unnecessary.

The after-effect has been immediate. The Jamiat will put up four candidates in Assam, thereby almost certainly ensuring Congress defeat in those constituencies. It has also urged Muslims to vote for the AGP elsewhere and even hinted that they could support the BJP where the 'candidate' deserves the vote. The number of votes the BJP gets thereby is less important than the fact that the 'untouchability' barrier has been broken.

You cannot become an Indira Gandhi by simply walking like her. You also have to behave like her. Congress alliances are trouble-free in two states: Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra. In Tamil Nadu the Congress has solved all problems by surrendering all ambition; this happened long before Sonia Gandhi. Maharashtra is fine because the Congress and the Nationalist Congress Party are simply factions of the same party. They know each other's strength and have claimed their share with minimum acrimony.

But in Andhra Pradesh, the Congress has once again allied with a Telangana regional party from a position of weakness. A few seats more cannot compensate for the loss of credibility in a state where the Congress is a natural claimant for power.

Weakness may be useful in any compromise that serves the present, but it can never win the future. There is an immutable law of alliances, a law that holds for any party, whether it be Congress, BJP or the CPI(M). Two lines of Urdu poetry sum it up well:

Kaise bazaar ka dustoor tumhe
sambhaon
Bik gaya jo woh kharidar nahin
ho sakta.

It is almost impossible to translate the sentiment into English without an element of bathos, but I will try:

How should I explain the law of
this marketplace?

He who has been sold can never
be a buyer.

M.J. Akbar is Chief Editor of the Asian Age.

BYLINE

What better metaphor could there be for Uttar Pradesh than a river? Mayawati commands the river of Dalits propelled by occasional tides of engineered Muslim or other-caste support when her candidate is outside her caste. Mulayam Singh Yadav feeds off a river of backwards and Muslims, and must strain every nerve to prevent either from breaking out into tributaries of their own. The BJP flow has been widened ever since it joined some backward castes to upper-caste Hindu support. The Congress, once appropriately considered the mainstream, is now reminiscent of Saraswati. It has dried up. But the riverbed has not yet disappeared, although further mismanagement of the party could ensure this as well.

Five years ago, the BJP and the NDA surprised Laloo Yadav in the general elections. The Congress did no analysis. It has done absolutely nothing, apart from cadding a bit of power, to spread itself and gain from the ebb of Laloo Yadav. This leaves the BJP-NDA as the only alternative. If therefore there is voter resentment in the coming general election, the only beneficiaries will be the BJP-NDA combination. The paradox should be evident to all but the simple-minded.

This is not an argument against alliances; it is an argument against thoughtlessness. The Congress, once described by Jawaharlal Nehru as the central fact of India, must approach alliances from a different perspective. An alliance must be an exercise in strength, not an alibi for weakness. The Congress may no longer be the central fact of India, but at the very least it must be the central fact of any alliance, in the manner that the CPI(M) leads the Left Front in Bengal or the BJP leads the NDA

leaders of UP and Bihar are perched on a platform of strength; the Congress is a supplicant. What better metaphor could there be for Uttar Pradesh than a river? The size of UP should be measured not in geography but in demographics. There are three rivers meandering through the demographics of UP, and it is unsurprising if in many a "doaba" there is some mingling of waters. Mayawati commands the river of Dalits propelled by occasional tides of engineered Muslim or other-caste support when her candidate is outside her caste. Mulayam Singh Yadav feeds off a river of backwards and Muslims, and must strain every nerve to prevent either from breaking out into tributaries of their own. The BJP flow has been widened ever since it joined some backward castes to upper-caste Hindu support. The strength of the three fluctuates according to the tide of events. The Congress, once appropriately considered the mainstream, is now reminiscent of

Congress. While its network of activists and maulvis operate all over, its principal strength is in Assam. Traditionally, the Congress has kept one seat in the Rajya Sabha for a nominee of the Jamiat. Indira Gandhi made Maulana Asad Madni, head of the organisation, a Rajya Sabha MP, and Rajiv Gandhi continued the commitment. They were practical leaders who understood the value that the Jamiat brought to the party. Digvijay Singh, who is in charge of the Congress in Assam, understands the local ethos and knows the party's history. He recommended that Maulana Madni be given the seat again. Instead, Sonia Gandhi handed the seat to a certain Sylvius Condopan.

The fact that Condopan is a Christian may be incidental, but it is already fuelling speculation that such an unusual decision was taken under 'pressure'. The Muslims, who ensured victory for the Assam Congress in both the Lok Sabha and Assembly polls five years ago are feeling cheated. Such

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE

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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.

Bangladesh China friendship

Setting up of a Taiwan Trade Centre in Dhaka has provoked strong resentment from China. The basis of our foreign policy is 'friendship with all and malice to none'. For cogent reasons, political, geo-political and diplomatic, can we afford to offend or damage our historical and traditional friendship with China? No.

Our Foreign Minister Moshed Khan has rightly reasserted that Bangladesh has no reason to deviate from its 'One China' policy. It is surprising that the chief of BOI has said that he did not require any consultation with our foreign ministry before permitting a Taiwanese

establishment in Dhaka. The misunderstanding between Bangladesh and China that has been created due to setting up of a Taiwanese trade centre in Dhaka appears to be attributable to lack of knowledge and experience of the BOI chief. We understand that even an ordinary class II government officer knows it very well that as per government service rules and regulations, discipline and conduct rules, a government servant cannot make any direct correspondence or contact, nor receive any gift or award from a foreign country except through proper channel -- Ministry of Foreign Affairs. We do neither recognise Taiwan, nor do we have any diplomatic relations with Taiwan. It is not clear how

could BOI permit Taiwan setting up a trade centre in Dhaka without getting necessary clearance from our Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

We would request our Ministry of Foreign Affairs to take up the matter with the prime minister to settle it amicably with the foreign ministry of China in the greater interest of friendly relations between the two countries.

OH Kabir
Wari, Dhaka-1203

This refers to the letter on the same subject by Farhana Sultana, USA, in the DS issue of 10 March, 04. I want to stress the

fact that alcohol consumption was common in the civilisations that gave leadership to mankind since the earliest times. In modern times, all the nations which are providing science, knowledge, philosophy, etc. to the world are alcohol consumers.

I am not saying alcohol consumption is the reason behind the progress made by a nation. But alcohol consumption is part of life in many places in the world. It is for the individuals to decide upon the matter, depending on their faith and habits.

Ahsan Ali
Dhanmondi

Polybags return

To develop the environment and prevent blockage of drains, the government banned polybags in the country. The general masses also support this. On January 1, 2002, polythene usage was banned completely. But after two years, we are noticing polythene use again in the markets. Now it appears in a newer form. The salesmen give this free of cost.

There were two causes behind banning the polythene. First: to save the environment. Second: to create the market for jute bags. Once upon a time, jute was known as the "golden fibre" of Bangladesh. Jute made products were famous all over the world. But now there is no demand for our jute products. The government tried

to revive the demand for the golden fibre once again by banning polybags. But the idea has not worked well in practice.

Dr. Mustafa Abdur Rahim
Director: Samajik Shathya Kendra
Mirpur-7 Dhaka-1216

DUTA's strike