

## Universities shorthanded Body-blow to learning

**M**ORE than 1,000 teachers of our 17 public universities are reportedly out of the country now. This has made the student-teacher ratio drop off to a precarious 72-1. The teachers are mostly on study leave and many of them are working on lien for international organisations and local enterprises. At least 400 teachers of Dhaka University are doing part-time job in private universities and other organisations.

That gives a dismal picture of growing incapacity in respect of imparting education at the highest seat of learning. No wonder, the standards of education in the universities have been declining day by day. Campus unrest and student politics are often held responsible for the deterioration in the academic situation. Seldom are the teachers' overstay abroad or other preoccupations blamed for the poor academic performance of the universities. This negative factor can no longer be lost sight of as we devise ways and means to meet the demands for streamlining higher education on an urgent footing.

Obviously, the university authorities cannot prevent the teachers from going on study leave. But they can ill afford to lose control over the situation as they evidently have. Under no circumstances can they allow anybody to enjoy leave or any other benefit at the cost of academic needs of the students. If there is only one teacher for 72 students, attaining academic excellence will always remain a far cry. Many of the teachers are apparently enjoying leave in violation of the rules. Some of them have not even been heard from having drifted out of any contact with the universities.

The university authorities have so far been unable to take any effective steps against those teachers playing truant in violation of the service rules. The chairman of the UGC has said that the situation can change only if the teachers concerned show a sense of responsibility and commitment. But we believe strict observance of the rules must be ensured; and if the existing ones can not take care of the extreme cases, those then would need to be given adequate teeth. Simultaneously, we should perhaps have stand-by panels of qualified teachers whose services could be utilised in contingency situations on a short notice.

## Minister blames lack of funds

*But is that the real problem?*

**C**OUNTERING calls for his resignation in the wake of the twin launch disasters which have left 76 dead and over a hundred missing, Shipping Minister Akbar Hossain ascribed the failure to prevent river tragedies to lack of funds. According to the minister, the sector needs an infusion of Tk 200 crore a year and the ministry needs to also be fully empowered to take up projects and use funds as required if the disasters such as these are to be avoided in the future.

While there is no doubt that the water transport sector is underfunded, as are many sectors of our struggling economy, we are at a loss to understand how the man-made calamities can be laid at the door of a funding shortfall.

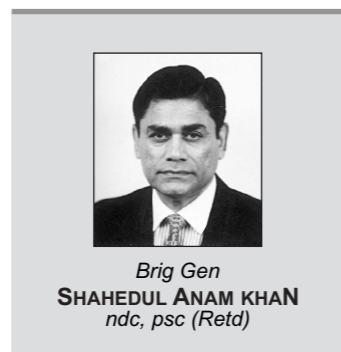
One problem with the current regimen is the fact that smaller launches that ply from the smaller terminals evade surveillance. But the question is: why?

In the case of the MV Lighting Sun, the principal problem appears to have been the fact that it was a B category launch that was not registered to sail in stormy conditions. In addition to this, it has been learned that the hull of the vessel was made of material thinner than the officially approved specification and that it had been repaired in over 156 spots. There was built-in imbalance which might well have caused the launch to capsize.

The 23 year-old launch was given a survey certificate last August in spite of these obvious flaws. It seems to us that this is where the real problem lies. Further compounding the mess is that the chief of the inquiry committee formed to probe what happened is reportedly none other than the person who had surveyed the launch in the first place.

Ironically, the minister's defense plays right into the hands of his critics. We could conceivably use a funding shortfall as a catch-all excuse for anything. We are, after all, still a developing nation with only modest resources available to us. But surely the point is to do the best with the available resources at hand, and if this is the best the minister can do with the resources he has at his disposal, as he seems to concede, then maybe he is not the right man for the job after all.

# Bomb blasts and Bangladesh's woes



**T**HE recent bomb explosion at the holy shrine of Hazrat Shah Jalal is the latest of the fourteen major incidents of explosions in Bangladesh in the last five years. Going by the press reports, the newly appointed British High Commissioner to Bangladesh was perhaps the target of the latest bomb attack. Not only were life and property damaged, these incidents have also damaged our reputation and credibility in more ways than one. These actions must evoke the greatest contempt from all.

What is perplexing is that none of these cases has been solved yet. Even more worrisome aspect of the issue is that both the major political parties have pointed their accusing fingers and blamed each other for these heinous crimes. Others have pointed their fingers at the radical religious elements while some have suggested that these acts were designed to create a

condition of flux internally, with ulterior motives.

Since none of the investigations, starting from the Udichi explosion to the one at the same site in Sylhet in January this year has reached any definitive conclusions, it is difficult to pinpoint the perpetrators of the crimes, their affiliations and motivations. What one comes across in the press regarding the identity of these people are good guesses

relative to the known terrorist groups) in the violence that was perpetrated in all these instances, so far. While this speculation may still hold true, the fourteen incidents over the last five years not only create a sense of despair, their timings and targets raise some serious issues.

It would perhaps not be inappropriate to ask why none of the cases has been resolved yet or, if

primarily due to the way these are preserved or are lost track of, cynics suggest, deliberately.

One cannot make too much of the importance of expertise and technological support in a successful investigation. There are instances where a single strand of human hair or a seemingly innocuous footprint has led to unravelling of a long unresolved mystery. Sophisticated technology and broad database have

political links of the crimes committed but investigate those objectively, without, fear, favour or regard for party affiliations. Intelligence agencies have been quoted as saying that they were unable to pursue militant links of some of the explosions due to pressure from government high-ups.

The next question that comes to mind is who are the perpetrators of these crimes?

means to foment political unrest within the country. This element may or may not be foreign inspired or externally instigated. However, no one can say with certainty which of these elements is responsible for this explosion or indeed for all the explosions that have occurred in the past.

It is felt that there must be a deliberate plan for capacity building in respect of investigations and crime control. In view of the recent developments, particularly post September 11, the intelligence agencies must focus and acquire expertise on counter terror intelligence along with their counterintelligence capabilities.

The government must pursue these cases most vigorously. Where need be, and the need is now, it should seek expert assistance from outside to get at the bottom of these cases. The negative fallout of the failure to unearth the perpetrators will breed further speculations resulting in further mutual recriminations.

These incidents are too serious to be commented upon perfunctorily. Unfounded utterances not only influence the investigations adversely, they also trivialise the matter and desecrate those that have lost their lives in these incidents.

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## WORTH A LOOK

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at best.

So far, analysts had taken comfort in the fact that Bangladesh was fortunate not to be thrown into the vortex of what can be described as classical terrorism, the likes of which are being experienced by both India and Pakistan and was till recently prevalent in Sri Lanka. What we had been exposed to so far were incidents where the criminals and the extremists resorted to tactics of terror to pursue their parochial aims. One did not discern any particular political motivation (as we understand by the meaning of the term

resolved why have the reports not seen the light of the day, nor would it be amiss on our part to venture some explanations in this regard.

First and foremost why these cases have resisted resolution is perhaps due to the lack or the flimsy nature of evidence, which failed to provide adequate clue or appropriate lead to build up a solid case. Coupled with this is the lack of experience and expertise of the investigating officers as well as lack of database. By some accounts, many of the physical evidence that are gathered either degrade over time,

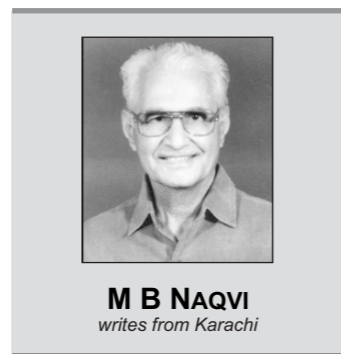
successfully traced the culprits of the recent Madrid bomb blast.

Perhaps the most disconcerting aspect of the whole issue of investigation and probe is the undue pressure, both political and extraneous, that is brought to bear upon the police. Consequently the cases get diluted, either due to tampering of evidence, or there is a lackadaisical attitude towards the probe. The matter of political pressure is borne out by the recent directive of the State Minister for Home to the high-ranking police officials that they should not concern themselves with finding

Possibilities of radical religious elements causing the explosions bear strong rationale. Of late there has been evolution of groups with religious hues bearing close links with external religious elements trying to gain footholds in the political arena. The imperious conduct of Bangla Bhai is one such instance. The latest attack in Sylhet may be an expression of resentment against the current UK-US actions in Iraq.

Another possibility that merits attention is the work of elements hostile to the government, who might have resorted to this

# No point being pessimistic



**A**LTHOUGH the technical level talks with India on nuclear Confidence Building Measures, scheduled for May 25 and 26, have been postponed at Indian request, it is too early to draw large conclusions from it. A note of worry can be detected in various news items: several have noted that this is the third postponement requested from India regarding scheduled talks. But this time round it is reasonable for India to ask for delaying these talks a little: after all government changeover was taking place and a new Foreign Minister would first like a general review of all that was going on and revamp or reorient any policy. There is reason that Congress government will carry on with the Peace Process.

In the earlier two cases, politics regarding what document were to be carried by Kashmiris crossing LOC and who was to man various checkpoints was involved. Not so in this case. This was a technical and official level meeting at which Pakistan was to propose a set of CBMs, christened Nuclear Restraint Regime. I understand that India has a good idea of what Pakistan is proposing. When India's former PM AB Vaipayee rode a bus to Lahore in Feb 1999, he signed an MOU with Mr. Nawaz Sharif regarding nuclear CBMs. Insofar as is known the substance of the CBM that India then had in mind differ from what Pakistan is now likely to propose. Ideas of both are based on what CBMs American experts have been advising to both. This will be one

agreement the two rivals will quickly be able to agree on. Indian proposal is realistic enough: talks on CBMs can begin two days earlier than the next Foreign Secretaries' scheduled meeting.

It is remarkable that these CBMs talks were kept separate by Foreign Secretaries in Feb last. These do not form part of eight subject groups because they were thought non-controversial. The two Foreign Secretaries will talk on the two toughest of issues:

1999 Kargil wars or through peace agreements like Tashkent Declaration of 1966, Shimla Accord of 1972 or Lahore Declaration of 1999. There appears to be little hope of any compromise. But leaving Kashmir question unresolved, now that both states have become the atomic powers, is too dangerous. Why? because if an issue cannot have a peaceful resolution, it will lead to war, as Kashmir problem has led to three wars and scares of several more.

Atomic weapons pose wholly unacceptable dangers to both India and Pakistan and it can now be said with solemnity that no cause, Kashmir included, is worth an atomic war. So, the negotiating table the two have to march. But whether they have the wit to find a modus operandi, is hard to say. A solution that saves the face of the two and provides substance of 'Azadi' the Kashmiris seek is the challenge for both. After the 57 years of history and the likely

backgrounds who can find solutions that will work.

But Pakistani delegates should also be carrying a detailed proposal to 'solve' the problems that have resulted from two rival nuclear deterrents, sitting cheek by jowl in South Asia. In Pakistan's case, it is called a Nuclear Restraint Regime. While one does not decry it, it needs to be critically evaluated. For a start, it is premised on a thoroughly pessimistic proposition: since the two states

the US and Soviets had no emotive quarrel of their own; they were fighting for intellectual constructs that left their peoples largely uninvolved. Hence deterrence seemed to work. In South Asia the position is wholly different.

As noted, the NRR comprises a series of CBMs. The story of CBMs in the Subcontinent is decades old; quite a few have already been in place for over a decade. What is the experience? Whenever military tensions rose too high, Generals on both sides rushed to reposition their men and guns. They always forgot about using the CBMs -- or may be these did not work as intended. Which is why the US diplomacy had had to prevent an Indo-Pak clash in 1990, 1995, 1999 and twice in 2002. The point is however simple.

CBMs, desirable though they are, cannot by themselves solve the dangerous, indeed impossible, problems that have been generated by two rival nuclear deterrents. The relative sizes of the deterrents do not matter. Even the use of one nuke on India is totally unwelcome and unacceptable to Indians. So is the impact of one Indian nuke on Pak soil is to be prevented. Total prevention of atomic exchange by making it impossible is what India and Pakistan have to achieve. NRR is a palliative, perhaps necessary, but it is no solution. All that NRR's success promises is that people and the Bomb will remain safe while the going is good (i.e. peace obtains). The bombs are to be kept safe for what? Why, for eventual use! There is thus something inherently defective about a détente -- limited as it always is -- on this subject. Let's have a proper solution that prevents war altogether and banish the trust destroying nuclear weapons.

MB Naqvi is a leading columnist in Pakistan.

## PLAIN WORDS

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Kashmir and security problems faced by the two states, with special reference to nuclear weapons that have been inducted on both sides. Insofar as Kashmir is concerned, little more than a review and reiteration of respective positions can be expected in the next encounter, though they can lay out an agreed programme of further talks on the subjects at varying levels.

Needless to say Kashmir is a fearfully complex issue. Basic stands of the two countries are not only wide apart but are mutually exclusive. Shorn of diplomatic verbiage, Pakistan wants a radical change in the constitutional status of Jammu and Kashmir State, especially with regard to its Muslim majority areas. India, on the other hand, is committed to preserving the status quo (i.e. Indian sovereignty over J&K state). There is no middle ground.

Which is where it is difficult to see what can come out of this new possible talkathon. These national stands have remained firm and they have not changed either through 1965, 1971 and

Given their present stances, Pakistan and India will go on colliding -- unless one side agrees to change its basic stance. Is that likely?

The second issue the two Foreign Secretaries will discuss is the nuclear question. It is not really an altogether separate issue. As one sees it, it has grown out of the womb of Kashmir issue. Whatever the Indians and Perkovich may say about the Indian pursuit of national grandeur and its regarding the nuclear capability as a currency of power, one remains persuaded that Mrs. Indira Gandhi ordered a nuclear test explosion in May 1974 in order to warn our ebullient Z.A. Bhutto to desist from dreaming nuclear dreams. Whether or not this is true, it does not matter. The fact is that 2002 experience shows that, given the presence of atomic WMDs on both sides, the basic stances of both sides on Kashmir are now an anachronism because they irresistibly lead to a clash; and clashing with atomic weapons is a madman's antic.

Which is where we all are.

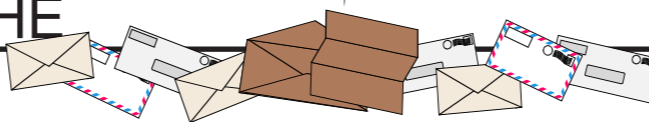
consequences of an atomic war, it is now imperative to satisfy all the three sides involved in Kashmir dispute with the substance of what they demand.

Obviously Foreign Service officers of the two countries are not the likeliest agents of such a quest for resolving an intricate and difficult problem. It requires the labours of the best Indian and Pakistani brains in both political and academic spheres. Ideally, statesmanship in those who lead the countries is what is to be looked for, in the first instance. Although excessive -- vulgarised -- pragmatism of politicians will be a hindrance in India, but it may have become impossible to find someone who can try in Pakistan. In the latter case, the incursions of the military in governance hobbles all and politicians have been reduced to manoeuvring for ministerial jobs, if they are on the side of the military they have to look for escaping the NAB's and intelligence hounds. No one here has time to ponder over larger problems. And yet the two people must throw up eggheads of various

have chosen to acquire atomic capability, the rest of the world can do nothing but accept this reality. The NRR seeks to prevent unintended (accidental) bunch of nuclear WMDs by strengthening the Command and Control System and implementing various CBMs, intended to prevent accidents, miscalculations or hasty actions based on misreading of radar screens. It is intended to provide a minimal assurance to each other that no one will wantonly unleash nuclear WMDs.

No one can honestly deny the need for this minimal Indo-Pak détente. But all said and done, compared to the huge problems created by these WMDs, NRR does no more than scratch the surface. There is no point in emphasising the origins of these ideas. But the issue has to be seen in perspective. South Asians cannot equate the east-west cold war and the long series of US-Soviets negotiations on disarmament and Mutually Balanced Force Reductions of their conventional armies with Indo-Pak talks on these issues. Why, because

# 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.

## Attack on envoy

I am flabbergasted at the bomb attack on H.E. Mr. Anwar Chowdhury, the new British envoy in Bangladesh. I heard this shocking news on BBC at 4:00pm on May 21. The Bangladesh-born British diplomat went to visit Sylhet. He had spent his childhood in Sylhet. I was shell-shocked when I came to know that Mr. Anwar Chowdhury had been attacked. Fortunately, he escaped the worst, but sustained leg injuries.

We were sanguine that the bonhomie between Bangladesh and Britain would be boosted with his appointment as the new HC. The attack on the British diplomat is certainly a political machination. It was an attempt to sabotage the British-Bangladesh diplomatic ties.

The downside in law and order, and poor performance of intelligence agencies are obvious at present. Over the last few years, sporadic bomb attacks have occurred in our country. In January last, some people were killed at Hazrat Shahjalal's shrine. But the government failed to bring the culprits to book.

Formation of a probe body is clearly not enough. The government has to be tough on the issue.  
**Molla Mohammad Shaheen**  
Dept of English, DU

## Honey with sting!

Good reporting on the background of production and marketing of honey in Bangladesh by the poor honey gatherers (DS May 15). The report was on Madhupur forest, but similar problems exist in the Sunderban zone. Where is the coordinated national policy on

honey (not honeyed tongue)?

The neglect of the authorities is due to the usual bureaucratic indifference, and the propensity of the cosmetic politicians to seek glamorous projects.

The middle class cannot buy honey regularly as it is too costly (around Tk 200 per kg). What is more ironical is that the upper class buy mostly imported honey, due to poor image problem of the local product (adulteration), as I was told by the shopkeepers. Bengal black goat and dairy and poultry farms are patronised by the VIPs before the TV camera why not add some honey?

The local retail price can be reduced; plus incentives offered for institutional assistance, technical and financial; finally opening up the export possibility. The government may review policy guidelines as to which

small and cottage industries need to be transferred to the formal sector for planned development and growth. The budget session is due soon, but the planned inputs to the finance ministry leaves much to be desired.  
**Abu Abd Dhaka**

## To the minister...

On May 17, 2004, a special notice from Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board was published in a newspaper. It said that all telecom service bills up to March 2004 had already been issued and requested the subscribers to avoid disconnection by paying all current and outstanding bills by May 20, 2004.

We know that 619 MPs owe the T&T more than 8 crore taka in unpaid telephone bills. We want to know why those telephones are

not being disconnected when for a single bill of a small amount of money the T&T does not hesitate to disconnect the telephones of common people? Why this disparity?

We want to bring this issue to the attention of the post and telecommunications minister and appeal to him to make sure that all are equal in the eye of law.  
**Nur Jahan Chittagang**

## Life of the gypsies

"Gypsy" means people who travel around and traditionally live in caravans. They stay in one place for 15 to 20 days under the open sky and shift to another. The groups consist of 10 to 15 families and there is a leader who maintains order.

The gypsies are left out of the mainstream of life. They are

deprived of the benefits of modern existence. I would request the government and the NGOs to look into the matter and help those people to adopt the modern way of life. Maybe, they would not agree but they should be given a chance!  
**Md Shafiquee**  
Dept of English, Karatia Tangail

## JU authorities' decision

We, some female students of Jahangirnagar University, are worried about the authorities' decision to allow girls to enter the boys' dormitories any time. The decision might not sound unreasonable, but given the track record of the university, the issue has become very sensitive. One may recall here that a girl

was raped on the JU campus recently.

We would request the JU authorities to give a second thought to the matter, keeping in view the ground reality prevailing on the campus.  
**Sumi, Rumi, Juin Bonna, Tania**  
Jahangirnagar University

## The bomb attack

The massive bomb attack on Hazrat Shahjalal (R)'s Mazar killed three people and left at least 70 others wounded, including the new British High Commissioner in Bangladesh. Mr. Anwar Chowdhury, the DC of Sylhet and other high officials. My question is, how could this happen in a civilised country?

Anwar Chowdhury is the first Bangladesh-born British who has been appointed HC to Bangla-

desh. It is a matter of great honour and pride for Bangladeshis to have him as the HC.

Actually, in our country lack of proper follow up to any investigation results in repetition of the same crime. Hence the formation of a judicial investigation committee to find out the facts and detect the offenders is the pre-requisite for bringing back law and order. It should be found out whether the law enforcing agencies performed their duties, since it is clear that a security lapse took place at some point. Proper treatment and compensation need to be given to the victims.

Finally, the issue should not be politicised by the parties concerned.

**Md. Al Amin Sagar**  
Dept of law, DU