

DU strike crosses critical threshold

A body blow to higher education

DHAKA University, the premier seat of higher learning and a trend-setter for other academic institutions, has been dysfunctional for more than three weeks, disquietingly exacerbating the existing session and examination jams in the process.

A combine of six student bodies called an indefinite strike last month, the crisis originating from a BCL procession coming under attack by the JCD activists. Academic activities in Dhaka University have come to a standstill. It was no doubt highhandedness of the most despicable kind meted out by the JCD. But can the opposition-backed student bodies hold over 30,000 general students hostage only because a rally was attacked? The general students are no stake-holders in this game, yet they are the ones paying the highest price due to inter-party confrontation.

The highly damaging impact of such indefinite strike is being felt in every aspect of the university's academic life. So many classes of different faculties couldn't be held. At least 600 exams had to be postponed. And it is not at all clear how many more days will be lost.

Any perceived rationale behind such strikes is weakened or badly diluted by the fact that the general students stand ignored. Besides, the way the strike has continued, it couldn't be anything but an imposition on majority students. The exercise goes against the interest of education, welfare of the students, and concomitantly, the interest of the nation. It is not clear who they are serving, but it is surely not the students.

The opposition parties do have a role to play here. They could try and dissuade student activists from following a self-defeating course which they are on. Likewise, the ruling party should see to it that its student front does not engage in disruptive politics.

The DU authorities have to end the deadlock by initiating a meaningful process of dialogue. And, for its success, the parties in the fray should be in a reconciliatory mood, instead of trying to obliterate each other from campus politics.

Children and the law

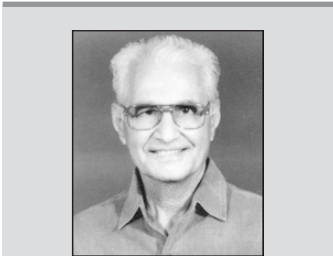
Determined approach needed to stop abuse

THE conclusion that can be made from the deliberations at the roundtable on 'Children in Trouble with Law' held jointly by The Daily Star and Save The Children UK, and participated by senior ministers, lawyers, child rights activists and NGO leaders, is that rights of child offenders in our country are not being protected by the law as it is applied, especially those in confinement. Though all the participants unanimously agreed that the Children Act, 1974 is fairly comprehensive and child-friendly, the unfortunate truth is that its provisions are hardly followed, thus violating the fundamental rights of children.

That the bodies and agencies that deal with child delinquency have no coordination among themselves only goes to show that the issue is not taken seriously. It seems that instead of taking a juvenile approach, the authorities while dealing with these children have been taking a juvenile delinquency approach. It is obvious that the treatment of juvenile offenders should be totally different from the adult ones; but in reality, what we have been witnessing over the years is quite distressing. Children less than ten years of age are being made prime accused in criminal cases, sometimes given life imprisonment terms or kept in jail with adult prisoners.

All these smack of insensitivity on the part of police force, lower judiciary, prosecutors and jail authorities. Though official figures show that more than 1500 children were freed from 51 jails around the country till August of the current year, the harsh truth is 1004 more children are still languishing in various forms of confinement. We are glad that at least the name of the correctional centre has been changed to a more acceptable name -- Kishore Unnayan Kendra, but we hope, not just the name, the activities at the centres should also undergo a complete transformation. Allegations of corruption and mismanagement at different levels, and most alarmingly, abuses committed against children have taken on an endemic character over the long haul. We also demand that the curriculum at these centres be mainstreamed into the general education system in order that they can compete with others after their release.

A historic beginning, again



M B NAQVI
writes from Karachi

INDIAN PM Manmohan Singh and Pakistan President Parvez Musharraf met in New York on Sept 24 thanks to the UN General Assembly's annual session. They produced a joint statement that has been described by Gen. Musharraf as a historic breakthrough. Then again, the two Foreign Ministers, viz. K. Natwar Singh and Khurshid Kasuri, met on Oct 1. The net outcome of these meetings was to *renew* the India-Pakistan dialogue that has so far drawn a blank, despite the two FMs' earlier meeting. This initial failure to resolve any of the eight identified disputes has to be purposefully noted.

The operative parts of the Joint Statement are: (a) to continue the bilateral dialogue, the purpose of which is (b) to restore normalcy and cooperation, (c) All Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) need to be implemented, "keeping in mind practical difficulties"; (d) the *piece de resistance* was (they) 'also discussed the issue of J and K' and 'all options for a peaceful, negotiated settlement should be explored sincerely'. (e) The two 'agreed that CBMs will contribute to generating an atmosphere of trust and mutual understanding so necessary for the well being of the peoples of both countries'. (f) Gas pipeline to India through Pakistan was recommended "in the larger context of expanding trade and economic relations between India and Pakistan".

What else was discussed we do not know. A contradicted report said that Siachin Glacier came up for discussion. But what progress, if

any, was achieved is not obvious. The controversial report said that Indian Army was afraid that once-agreed the "redeployment of the troops of both countries" takes place to positions before 1984 Pakistanis will come and occupy those heights. Now that the report has been denied, it is useless to go into the obscure details of where and how far should the LoC is to be extended. The position as it obtained between 1972 and 1984 in Siachin areas can however serve as a basis for agreement. Pakistan can and should provide the assurance

CBMs, although the two worthies believe that these (CBMs) "will contribute to generating an atmosphere of trust and mutual understanding so necessary for the well being of the peoples of both countries". Everything from an easier and more civilized visa regime and Khokrapar railway and bus links to the grave security problems created by two hostile Nuclear Deterrents is being treated as amenable to peaceful resolution qua individual problems through mere CBMs.

What is a CBM? Ordinarily it

or Pakistani authorities may not want Khokrapar rail and road links on security considerations. These are exaggerated difficulties not impossibilities.

Why have they qualified the phrase about CBMs with "practical possibilities", although the two have expressed a robust confidence that "CBMs will contribute to generate an atmosphere of trust and mutual understanding so necessary for the well being of the peoples of both countries". This walahalla of trust and mutual understanding is not

cisely in the joint statement detracts something from the rhetoric of historic breakthrough.

Let us not underestimate the problem posed by nuclear weapons in the arsenals of India and Pakistan. It is even more urgent and important than Kashmir. It is true that Pakistan's long hard pursuit of a Kashmir solution, conceived in a militant mind set, has sired nuclear weapons after 1971 experience. The Bomb was conceived as an equaliser for India's undoubted superiority in conventional arms. Origins of the Indian Bomb are myste-

into Lahore. Pakistan effectively rebuffed Vajpayee's offer of talks by Kargil operations. After that India did what it did in 2002.

The 2002 experience sums up the situation nicely. Kargil had shown that Pakistan was not afraid of the Indian Bomb. India's massing of troops for an invasion in 2002 showed that India was in effect saying: 'we are not deterred by Pakistan's nuclear weapons; we will invade despite them'. Notionally they were daring Pakistan to use its doom's day weapons first so that they will wipe it off the map later. The threat by either side was not idle; both have tremendous capability -- but only to cause destruction in the other. Neither side has any defence against such weapons. Well, anyone who believes in the doctrine of deterrence is living in a make believe world of his own; 2002 a real life war game with nuclear weapons. But neither could muster the courage to do the real thing. Let's all heave a sigh of relief that the two did not live up to their overly macho bravado.

But the damned issue remains alive and kicking: the two Nuclear Deterrents are staring at each other. The idea that enough "trust and mutual understanding" can be generated by CBMs needs exhaustive examination. What do Manmohan Singh and Parvez Musharraf propose to do after CBMs have created a better atmosphere? Neither faces the fact that CBMs are palliatives and not solution. If other issues remain unresolved, the two will speedily begin clashing again. Not only Kashmir problem has to be resolved -- to the satisfaction of Kashmiris, all Kashmiris -- the Nuclear problem too has to be resolved. Besides, many things like facilitation of travel and intellectual and cultural interaction -- are ends in themselves. They are the criterion of how civilized and peaceable the two are.

MB Naqvi is a leading columnist in Pakistan.

Prick of domination in EU

Two-tier system may help avert crisis

AKMA RAHAMAN *writes from Essex, UK*

FINALLY, the draft constitution of the European Union (EU) has been approved, which needs to be ratified by the member states in about two years time. Such constitution, in addition to consolidating the previous treaties, has also incorporated certain provisions, which if ratified, is likely to change the shape and structure of the union. Such constitution is a blueprint for a centralised Europe, based on the existing institutions of EU and on legal supremacy over its 25 member states. The principles of a federal government demand that the legislative, administrative and financial powers should be distributed in such a way so that both sets of government may feel equal in status. The EU has been given wide powers under the constitution. The union is given a group of powers which are called exclusive competencies and made a senior partner in another group called shared competencies.

Unlike the American states, the European nations have no exclusive competencies. Many of the powers exercised by federal government are listed in the shared category. There is not a list of exclusive powers of national government, although they retain all powers not otherwise listed. Such distribution of powers between the union and the member states implies an element of subordination of the national government to the EU. In a federation it is considered essential that the two sets of government, whatever might be the jurisdiction of their respective sphere of action, should be supreme in their respective jurisdiction. Such supremacy of the legislative bodies of national government has been undermined by

giving general primacy to European law in all the areas of the constitution. In addition to conferring more powers on the EU, the constitution unlike the USA, has made provision that such powers should be exercised by the unelected bodies, i.e. the Council and the European Commission.

The European Union, which originally started with six member states with the objectives of having a common tariff in order to promote economic activities among its members, has changed its strategy under the influence of France and Germany to acquire more powers for political integration. The surren-

make it more effective.

The concerns expressed by some groups about some provisions of the constitution, giving more powers to the union, may raise fundamental questions about the retention of British membership of the union in case the constitution is rejected by the British voters. Germany and France on one side and Britain on the other side are moving in opposite directions with regard to the ratification of the constitution. In the power struggle inside the EU among the major European countries, Germany and France played a vital role in preventing Britain from playing a significant role in the

French leadership for more integration. Britain and other countries, who want to reject the present constitution, may still remain as partners to promote economic activities as embodied in a patchwork of intersecting treaties and co-operative arrangements in which each of them should play their respective role in order to achieve its desired goal. Such two-tier system inside the EU, if operates effectively, should go a long way to promote economic activities and at the same time strengthen political union among the countries who want to go along this road. This should provide a golden opportunity

be better served . Their choice to remain as economic partner may provide scope to re-negotiate their terms, giving them the option to revoke the Maastricht, Amsterdam and Nice treaties originally ratified by the member states to promote political integration at the expense of the sovereignty of nation states, by stripping them of powers to govern them in a wide range of areas.

The question may arise whether or not the adoption of a two-tier system inside the EU should be adequate to solve the problems confronting it at present, having regard to the divergent views of the

to remain as constituent part of a federal Europe, should be judged from different angles having regard to their history, tradition, size of their population, location etc.

Despite the fact that France and Germany play a dominant role in the EU as equal partners, the French voters, unlike their political masters, have not yet forgotten their history about their resistance to halt the adventure of Germany to occupy them during the second world war. They may have every valid reason to remain under the apprehension that Germany, by virtue of their instinctive dominating tendency, may ultimately take over the control of the EU leaving France to play an insignificant role in the policy making matters. Belgium and Holland, who have a long history associated with their struggle to escape the domination of either Germany or France, may not be content to remain as mere provinces of Franco-German union. Spain and Italy, who have population as big as France, may not like to remain as junior partners in a federation dominated by France and Germany. Unless such questions can be answered with clarity it will be difficult to predict with certainty whether or not France and Germany will be successful in transforming the EU in to a federal Europe with more concentration of powers in the hands of their bureaucrats.

A K M A Rahaman (Sentu) is a retired British civil servant.

TO THE EDITOR

Return of an ideology

The three ideologies prevailing in the world are -- Communism, Capitalism and Islamand for the last 80 years Capitalism is dominating.

Ideologies do not end by the downfall of the states which embrace them, even if this downfall leads to the break-up and fragmentation of the states. This is what happened with Marxism-Socialism; all the nations and people which the Eastern camp was composed of abandoned it, and turned to Capitalism to build their lives upon it. So, the collapse of the USSR in the early 90's was not just the break-up of a state; it was the failure of an ideology.

Thus, in terms of universality, two ideologies remained, Islam and Capitalism. However, Islam did not become eliminated with the downfall of Khilafat in 1924 . Islam still remains a living ideology as more and more people are embracing it, and shaping their lives according to its basis. However, because of the conspiracy of the West and their agent rulers in Muslim lands, Islam

has been reduced to rituals only.

Realising these facts, the Muslims in many places have started to convey the message of the religion including the ruling system, social system, economic system, and judicial system and so on to the people around the globe. Now the West fears that the return of the religion in its full force will destroy its dominance over the world.

Musab Ibn Umair
BBA Department, North South University, Dhaka

The role of education
Education makes a man perfect, scholarly, philanthropic and modest. A blind man is deprived of the beautiful scenery around the world. There is no difference between day and night, light and darkness to his eyes. As such, a man deprived of education is really a blind man in the ocean of knowledge.

But do we ever think what kind of education makes a man scholarly? Is our present traditional educational system enough to meet these demands? Are we really satisfied

with our existing educational system? How many scholars, scientists, writers are coming out from our educational system? How many good teachers do we have today? Why our students read but don't learn, memorise but don't understand?

Hence, there is really a great vacuum in our educational system. Today it is the duty of the people holding high positions to find out this vacuum and fill it up.

Debasis Paul
Swamibag, Dhaka

Work together

In our country, the political leaders belonging to the ruling as well the opposition parties do not seem to attach any importance to important issues.

The government and the opposition should work hard to develop our country politically, economically and socially. The government should strictly follow the terms of government office, allow the high officials to complete their normal tenure of service, and refrain from extending

it.

Golam Ashraf
DOHS Baridhara, Dhaka

VAT on retail shops

The government has imposed Value Added Tax (VAT) on all types of shops including general stores. But general stores do not add any value to their items! VAT may be applicable to, say, a sweetmeat shop. Because in such a shop various items like milk, sugar etc. are mixed together to produce a new item which is sold at a higher price than the combined price of milk and sugar, and thus value is added. But in a general store, items are bought from wholesale market and sold as is without any change and thus without adding any value. Therefore, Value Added Tax should not be applicable to general stores.

In the light of the above, it is only fair that VAT should be withdrawn from those shops which sell items without any value addition.

Syed Farhat Ahmad Roomy
New DOHS, Dhaka

Why blame Islam?

Bangladesh has recently seen a diabolical grenade attack on a political rally, pushing the whole nation into shock and awe. I pray for the salvation of the lost souls and invite supernatural intervention to stop such apocalyptic incidents. But I am shocked and dumbfounded by the tendency to identify the terrorists with Islam through the term 'fundamentalism'. Since Udichi Bangladesh has experienced several bomb attacks on her people. But it is a matter of great regret and shame that the government always failed to unfold the crypts of the bomb attacks and bring the culprits to justice. Then on what basis the so-called conscious people try to establish a linkage between Islam and terrorism? To make it more clear, no Islamic organisation or group has acknowledged their involvement in these kinds of horrendous inhuman activities. Any hypothetical conclusion would inevitably mislead us from finding the real criminals and their motives behind these barbaric activities.

Islam and terrorism are not compatible. If any gang under the banner of Islam was ever found responsible for such murderous activities, they have just used religion to serve their own interest. Islam is a gift of Allah with the purpose of uprooting all evils from human mind and ensure peace, love, brotherhood, harmony and social bondage. Is it, then, sensible and wise to blend Islam with terrorism, cruelty, brutality? If we do not change our mind and fail to find the criminals, anti-Islamic countries, using these feelings, may find an excuse to interfere in our internal affairs.

Md Mojahidul Islam (Babul)
Department of English, Zahurul Haq Hall, DU

Eurasian poets

It is heartening to learn that Kaiser Haq has taken upon himself the task of introducing through your newspaper the great Eurasian poets in English whose presence was felt till the end of the British Raj. But it is more rejoicing that he made the beginning with Henry Louis Vivian

Derozio whom we remember--if we remember at all--as the person who had died very young having awakened the society against the evils that had blocked our road to the modern age of logical thinking and the associated freedom.

He had his ardent followers among his students many of whom were older than him while he had his influential detractors too. It is therefore quite understandable why we know so little, especially when his pen had stopped so untimely, that he was a poet too. The writer categorises Derozio as a Eurasian writer which he was no doubt. But are we correct while we describe him as an Anglo-Indian as was mentioned in the Oxford University press publication of 1923? Not perhaps. True, when we are evaluating his great endeavours as a social crusader or as a poet as well it is of little importance to judge whether he could be called an Anglo-Indian or not. But it is better still if we take the trouble to understand the contemporary history-of Bengal particularly, and feel the pulses of the Portugese

descendants in the British dominated Bengal. Derozio was a Portugese descendant, an Indo-Portuguese. Before coming of the British the Portugese had their presence felt in Bengal. They served as army commanders of the local rulers and in some particular regions they were themselves the rulers.

As the Portugese influence receded from the centres of power and the British tightened their grip over Bengal, the Portugese descendants gradually accepted Anglican names in their bid to get entry into the Anglo-Indian society. Perhaps this explains the presence of 'Henry' in the midst of 'Louis' and 'Derozio' that signify his Portugese descent.

With tears let us remember Derozio, the short-lived youth of Portugese descent, residing near today's Entally Market of Kolkara, who wrote in English and loved Bengal. While reading his poems it strikes me that 2009 will be his bicentenary year.

Asok Dasgupta
Old Park Street Cemetery, Kolkata