

Happy birthday to JU



ABDUL BAYES

JAHANGIRNAGAR University (JU) started its functions on 12 January 1971. It was established as a purely residential university -- the only one such in the country -- and its syllabus initially aimed to be comprised of only science-based subjects. Later on, arts and other subjects paved their ways to the spectrum. Since it's a residential university where students and teachers are required to live in the campus, its size continues to remain small. Quite obviously, lack of infrastructural facilities stood in the way towards expansion. I remember that during the period 1971 to 1996, JU received only Tk. 40 crore or so as developmental allocation. During our time in administration during 1996-2001 -- thanks to the earlier government -- we managed to bag home Tk.44 crores within a span of just five years! Any way, small though, JU is a beautiful campus -- one of the few I have ever come

across at home and abroad. Its lakes and landscape lure birds to fly from faraway northern countries especially in winter when also a lot of visitors come to watch them. The university has one open stage or mukta moncha -- also the only one such in Bangladesh. It is located 30 kms north of Dhaka city. I have been teaching there since 1975.

The university is governed by

to follow suit. Thus for time to come, my name could be associated with the university day that I started. And I firmly believe that every VC should do something which would go a long way to uphold the image of the university. Second, I thought that every year on this particular day of 12 January, the 'old' and the 'new' should get together to glean the growth of their campus and if possible, help

tain the continuity of the festival. This year on 12 January, the present administration successfully managed the celebration. Ex-teachers and VCs were honoured with crests for their contributions, students and teachers exchanged their sweet and sour memories and the whole campus assumed a look of a different kind. I am proud that the plant I planted as a VC has tended to grow as a tree in subse-

teacher, I feel frustrated and furious too. On the university day, one of our promises could be to get rid of the session jam that grips many of the departments of JU.

One needs to recall one of the earlier submissions that session jam in academic institutions go to mean low productivity of the academic factors of production, mainly teachers. When session jams are alive, arguably, teachers

growing fast. Public universities like JU should bear in mind that the axe of the jam falls heavily on the poor than on the rich. Again, private universities grew not so much on the basis of their wisdom as it is on heels of the woes of public universities.

During our presentation on the university day, Professor Amrul Islam Chowdhury (a former VC) and myself emphatically emphasised this point. But there are "sycophants" who liked to praise the administration and VC to eke out some benefit from the mercy that is supposed to pour out of the praise. A VC should always treat these sycophants with suspect. I can only hope that the present administration of JU would pay heed to the critics like us rather than to those running after the cream. The sooner the realisation occurs, the better it is for the image of the administration and the institution.

JU could become one of the best and beautiful centers for academic pursuit. For that to happen, the administration should devote its full attention in managing funds for its expansion and development. Teachers and students together should rise on their toes to raise the image of the university. I wish the institution to be a centre of excellence in this part of the world. Happy birth day to you, JU.

Abdul Bayes is a Professor of Economics at Jahangirnagar University.

Splurging on government vehicles

Accountability at the lowest ebb

OF late, misuse of government vehicles in utter disregard of the rules has been in the news. But recent reports, particularly in The Daily Star, have revealed a deeper malaise in the system of accountability, or more precisely, in the system of non-accountability.

Not only has the Establishment Ministry not submitted report as asked for by the Standing Committee on the misuse of almost 4000 public transports and their present status, our very in-depth report also reveals that many of these vehicles are where they do not belong, being used by those that are not authorised to do so.

The moot point is why these vehicles, most of which were purchased at very high costs have not been deposited to the government transport pool after completion of the projects they were attached to? And this is what begs the more fundamental question, which is, did we need to buy these luxurious and highly expensive vehicles in the name of development and poverty alleviation? The ostensible reason for purchase of these vehicles is for making field visits, which to our mind can be just as efficiently performed with less expensive, less luxurious but sturdier vehicles.

Use of plush vehicles for development projects is not only incongruous in concept it also betrays insincerity and lack of commitment on the part of the planners and officials towards the stated goals of development in the country.

The other corollary to the issue is, if the costs of these vehicles are defrayed from our development funds, most of which are received as loans, why is it that our development partners go along with such wasteful purchases? The whole question, we must add, revolves around the attitude towards development policy and planning.

Such luxury vehicles naturally attract attention of the high ups. It seems to us that these vehicles are brought not so much as to make field visits but to serve the needs of the top brasses.

It must be stressed that not only should the missing vehicles be accounted for, purchase of luxury transports on the plea of development should cease forthwith.

Vanishing trick with tickets

Where is the strategy to stem it?

HOMEBOUND people find themselves in great difficulty when scrambling for bus, train or launch tickets before any major festival. Most of them are fleeced by the black marketeering and swindling lot who take control of ticket sales whenever there is heavy rush of passengers.

This year's prelude to Eid-ul-Azha is no exception, though it was expected to be something of that, in view of the government's stronger grip of the law and order situation as perceived in certain circles. People are standing in excruciating long queues for advance tickets, but only to be told in the end that all the tickets had been sold. The railway authorities had decided to sell not more than four tickets to one individual as a possible way of countering black marketing, but it seems the move has not paid any dividend. The least said about the buses and launches, the better. As it always happened in the past, the disappointed people have to buy passage in the black market paying a lot more than the normal fare.

It is evident that the passengers are cheated in a planned way by the bus and launch owners and the railway staff. Unfortunately, the authorities concerned have failed to find a way out of this mire. Let's face it: as the demand for tickets far exceeds the carrying capacity of different modes of transport, it creates an opportunity for foul-play by the devious elements. What is hard to comprehend though, is why the decision-makers fail to foresee the problem and arrange for an adequate number of trains, buses or launches to meet the contingency. We hear about some additional trains or steamers being introduced during festivals, but as the situation suggests the extra arrangements do little to lessen the passengers' woes.

The government seems determined to maintain law and order before and during the holy festival. Deployment of Rab personnel in bus and launch terminals does indicate that law and order is high on the government's agenda. But the presence of the law enforcers is not enough for the people desperately looking for tickets. The relevant authorities should stringently enforce laws against black marketing of tickets while at the same time pressing more trains and buses into service keeping in view the huge rush of Eid-time passengers.

China -South Asia economic interaction can be of great mutual benefits



ZAGLUL AHMED CHOWDHURY

SOUTH Asia's potentials for forging and enhancing multi-faceted cooperation with its giant neighbour are enormous and if exploited, these can be of immense benefit for both sides. No concrete ideas and steps were taken before exactly in this direction even though nations of this region felt that such interactions with China could be extremely fruitful. China, the largest country in the world in terms of population, is presently catching global attention as an emerging economic power. The politically socialist country has adopted innovative open economic programmes and is assuming itself as a strong economic power in a rather amazing speed by maintaining a commendable steady annual growth over the last several years. The country is also open to economic and other cooperation with neighbours.

Being a vast country, some of its provinces are close to South Asia and central Chinese government has encouraged these provinces to forge closer cooperation with South Asian nations under a broader framework of Sino-South Asia cooperation. It is heartening to note that following initial negligence or lack of interest, two sides are now coming closer with specific measures to promoting cooperation in economic, trade and business, communications and other

fields. A recent conference in Kunming, capital of Yunnan province, termed as "China-South Asia Business Forum" has shed enough light in this area and the ball seems to be now rolling.

Yunan province, seen as EChina's gateway with South East and South Asia, had launched the "Kunming Initiative" a few years ago, but without much progress till now. However, the idea has been praised by all concerned parties, and of late concrete steps are being considered and discussed for

made any mark at all. However, an overwhelming majority seems to feel that there is no reason whatsoever for turning pessimistic about the SAARC, whose progress howsoever small may be, is remarkable in the given situation. Resource constraints and other factors including major political differences at times acted adversely for the forum. This needs to be overcome as the regional body is supposed to launch fresh vigour after the coming 13th summit.

When the SAARC was launched

one hand reflected forum's eagerness to tackle critical issues inextricably linked with economic emancipation and protocol on curbing terrorism, on the other, underlined the willingness to improve overall climate in the area as far as possible. But it is the core economic matters that will help improve the socio-economic conditions of the member countries, particularly the lesser developed ones, should now catch the imagination of the SAARC leaders in a far bigger way in their future

SAARC to place its points of views on different socio-economic issues before the world body. The UN agencies can also assist the SAARC in many ways, ranging from financial to technical aspects. It is necessary that the regional body should derive maximum benefits -- diplomatic, financial and otherwise -- from the world body as well as from other external sources in its quest for further invigorating and embellishing the SAARC which is no longer a nascent organisation. The forum should establish and widen

an event in right direction and top business leaders from the region attended it. Bangladesh's strong team was led by FBCCI president Abdul Awal Minto. What was noteworthy is the support from China's central government towards Beijing's economic cooperation with South Asia. China's assistant minister for foreign affairs Shen Guofang, traveled to Kunming from the central capital and assured the forum that his government would go all out in encouraging cooperation with South Asia initiated by the Yunnan province whose vice Governor Shao Qiwei is a driving force behind the regional and sub-regional cooperation. He is also keen for bilateral cooperation with Bangladesh and led a high powered team here last July to discuss concrete issues. He said Dhaka-Kunming direct air route is now a bright possibility and may take shape by the middle of 2005. When it finally does, this will help Sino-Bangladesh cooperation in addition to the regional framework. Bangladesh envoy Ashfaqur Rahman told the forum of his government's policy to explore all possible avenues for cooperation with China. But timely follow-up actions are important to turn the proposals into reality.

The SAARC on one hand must consolidate the gains and enhance cohesiveness among member nations and on the other widen its international interactions. After all, image in the outside world for a forum like the SAARC is important. SAARC needs to go ahead with its programmes and forge closer ties with nearby regions and interactions with China can serve rightly in that direction.

Zaglul Ahmed Chowdhury is a senior journalist.

MATTERS AROUND US

SAARC should establish and widen its links with other effective regional forums and multinational bodies for cooperation since the task before it is massive and it needs international support and assistance to carry out the planned programmes. The SAARC on one hand must consolidate the gains and enhance cohesiveness among member nations and on the other widen its international interactions. After all, image in the outside world for a forum like the SAARC is important. SAARC needs to go ahead with its programmes and forge closer ties with nearby regions and interactions with China can serve rightly in that direction.

multi-faceted Sino-South Asia cooperation.

SAARC's ties with external sources are important for its progress and effectiveness. It is in the threshold of beginning its course in the third decade. It was launched in Dhaka in 1985 and it is through the coming summit in the Bangladesh capital, which is now rescheduled for early February following postponement because of a severe natural disaster, the assiduously nurtured regional forum enters a new phase. The SAARC often comes in for criticism for the reason that it has not succeeded in delivering the expected results in twenty years.

Then again there are cynics, who believe that the forum has not

in Dhaka through the first summit, the most elderly Eleader, Sri Lankan president late Junius Jayewardene, cautioned that the new forum faced manifold problems despite potentials but hoped that it would go ahead weathering many a storm. Nearly nineteen years later, President Chandrika Kumaratunga of the same island state told the inaugural session of the 12th SAARC summit in Islamabad that the regional grouping now needs to swing more into effective action oriented welfare programmes.

The signing of agreement on South Asian Free Trade Zone (SAFTA) and stronger emphasis on unremitting efforts for poverty alleviation in world's one of the worst poverty-ridden region on

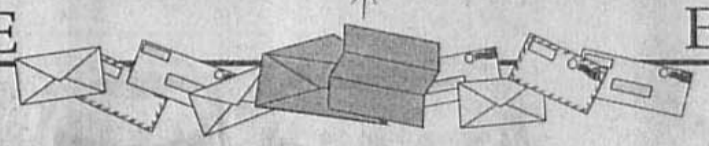
programmes. Expectedly, SAARC's programmes and priorities are expanding. The last Islamabad summit had taken up a series of programmes in the economic, social and other sectors and all these are commendable. It is imperative that the positive spirit is maintained through appropriate and timely follow up actions. SAARC with its resource constraints cannot do much and as such greater links with outside is important for the forum.

The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA)'s recent decision to grant "Observer" status to the SAARC has come at the right time before the 13th summit conference of the leaders. This new-found status will enable the

its links with other effective regional forums and multinational bodies for cooperation since the task before it is massive and it needs international support and assistance to carry out the planned programmes. The Dhaka-based Centre for Integrated Rural Development for Asia and Pacific (CIRDAP), which has gained sufficient experience in the field of poverty alleviation and rural development, can also be associated in the relevant areas of SAARC programmes since CIRDAP's activities and ideas are close to that of SAARC in several fields and many of the ideas are complementary.

Against this background, the "China-South Asia Business Forum" meeting in Kunming was

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.

Disaster forecasting

My attention has been drawn to a Daily Star front-page news report captioned, "Plan to link up with global disaster forecasting system" published on January 04.

As stated in the above report, an inter-ministerial meeting has decided to link up the country with global forecasting system on natural disaster and include tsunami in its Comprehensive Disaster Management Programme (CDMP). The meeting also decided to buy equipment to quickly respond to natural disasters like earthquakes, tsunami, and to start rescue operations whenever necessary.

I welcome the above decision which is appropriate and will ensure safety of the people and properties against natural disasters.

It is sincerely hoped that the

decision will soon be materialised. Professor M Zahidul Haque, Chairman, Department of Language, Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University, Dhaka-1207.

Appointment of BGMEA administrator

The news (DS 7.1.05) that the government appointed an administrator to run the affairs of the BGMEA, until the election of its Executive Committee, has really worried me. It has been said that the government did this in pursuance of a court's order though the press could not throw light on the contents of the petition on which the court gave this order. The news item mentioned that the BGMEA Executive Committee, though made

defendant in the case, did not get the opportunity to defend itself and that they did not even know about the case and the proceedings in the court.

The news item hinted that the concerned quarters had expressed the apprehension that it might be a move from the side of the government to control the upcoming elections to the Executive Committee of the BGMEA to keep the pro-opposition elements out of the process.

The way things took place may tend to induce people to suspect that the whole situation had been engineered and managed by the government. It might have done this purely on political consideration at the cost of national interest. I also feel that this undemocratic action of the government would irk the democratic nations of the West which are the main buyers of the

products of our garments industry.

Our appeal to the government will be that it will refrain from this type of activities prompted by sheer political interest. Md. Giash Uddin Pathan, Uttara Model Town, Dhaka

My window

Have you ever thought about what view a window can offer you? Grab a chair and just sit for a while. My window offers me the world. Funny though, how can it be mine? I mean it doesn't bear my name or there is no proof that the owner of this huge glass pane with brown frame is me. I don't even take care of its well being like all my other personal things.

My window--- I can see the hilltop and beyond, I can see the huge white cotton clouds from

here, the trees and the power poles that disrupt my view for further points against the never ending sky. The hill gives me a horizontal length of land where I see people jogging in the afternoons, or an old couple walking to get some fresh winter air. I even see jet trails with reference to the hill.

It's like the sky is on fire with white smoke. And then there is the usual trail of clouds passing by with greetings of rain or snow. But sometimes the window is meant to me because I have nothing to see just the cloudless sky. It's like staring at the open sea or ocean when you are on a boat and you see nothing over the horizon.

This hill reminds me of one hill I saw in the HBO series 'Band of Brothers'. The soldiers walking in single file through the sunset for their next mission, their next

command. But my hill provides a much joyful scene.

I like the moving things for best. I can see horses from the farm on the hill; white, black and even dark brown coloured ones. And then there are the crows. Amazing, here I thought that crows were only available in Bangladesh. But I was proven wrong. You can see the crows flocking up to a tree and occupying all the leafless branches. God knows what they do. Maybe chat around. And then all of a sudden you see the whole flock flying off into the horizon creating a black curtain. What a sight! Later on I can see far off on the electric wire poles lots of black dots together. I guess those are the same crows that just flew away from the tree.

The best time is the early morning. Sometimes I can see the

reflection of the sunlight on the hill. It's so heavenly. It's like nature is holding one of those big yellowish spotlights and focusing the hill for the rest to enjoy. What an amazing view!

Oh, but then another favourite view of mine is the hill with its snowy look. It's all white and looks so soft and glittery. It's like icing sugar, you know like when it's added on top of a cake. Seems like God has a shaker full of icing and just shook the bottle because all the treetops, the grass, the electric poles and wires are covered in that blanket of white. That's when I feel like rolling down that hill with all the snow.

Mahfuza, Karlsruhe, Germany

Tigers fight back

Everybody was heartbroken when the Zimbabweans set us a huge

target to save the Dhaka Test. But our openers are doing a great job right now as I watch the match live on television. They are showing the right kind of temperament and very good shot selection. It is really good going for us.

If the batsmen who will follow can demonstrate the same tenacity, the boys will come back to the match. Let's see what happens on the last day of the match. A cricket fan, Dhaka

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