

RU ruckus

Disgraceful conduct

THE atmosphere on the Rajshahi University campus seems to have reached its nadir. The hooliganism and vandalism indulged in by a section of JCD men on Sunday is unprecedented in the history of RU campus conflict, and cannot be condoned. The violence was meted out by the student wing of the ruling party, and thus it is the responsibility of the ruling party leadership to rein in these elements and to ensure that things are set right.

The disputes that have resulted in Sunday's shocking display, of course, have an internal political character with feuding among teachers and students fuelling the fire of discord. This time the fault-line is between JCD activists who feel that teachers and students connected to the BNP have been marginalised and the Jamaat-leaning administration. One dispute which has been simmering is over the composition of a panel of probables for the VC's position and the other cause for complaint is over alleged partisanship in the apportionment of admissions quotas.

The rioting students who ransacked administration buildings, the Deans Complex, and science buildings, and even went so far as to assault some of the RU teachers, reportedly belong to the anti-Jamaat faction of the JCD. The faction leaders responsible for the destruction are on record stating that they resorted to violence due to the admissions quota issue, but it is generally accepted that they were also protesting the exclusion of a BNP-leaning pro-VC from the panel of three out of which the new VC will be chosen.

This kind of blatant political thuggery in an academic institution is highly deplorable. The faction responsible for the rampage should be held criminally and financially responsible for the damage they have caused. This will hopefully serve as a deterrent to future misconduct of this sort and send the message that this kind of behaviour will not be tolerated, even among student leaders from the ruling party.

This kind of organised political violence and intimidation is unacceptable. The ruling party must take responsibility for the actions of its student wing and move swiftly to put its house in order.

Fanatics at it again

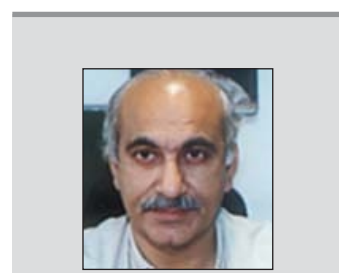
The govt must take a firm stand

THE Ahmaddiyas in Shyamnagar upazila of Satkhira district have sought government protection in the face of eviction threat issued by the International Khatame Nabuat Movement (IKNM) -- an outfit campaigning for declaration of the Ahmaddiya community as non-Muslim. The IKNM has distributed leaflets asking them to leave the place. This amounts to incitement of violence against a community, and should therefore be regarded as a culpable offence in the eye of law.

The local administration has assured the Ahmaddiyas reeling under threats that necessary steps would be taken to protect them. The government can not view this as an ordinary law and order situation, rather it should treat the issue as one having a direct bearing on the constitutional and legal rights of citizens to pursue their faith. Clearly, the situation has become complex enough with the followers of IKNM and other like-minded parties being undeterred in their mission against the Ahmaddiyas. This degeneration has a lot to do with the placatory attitude of the ruling coalition marked by their imposition of the ban on Ahmaddiya publications. That surely emboldened the bigots with a persecution mentality. Then there was another outrage over whether the members of the community had the right to use the term mosque to describe their place of prayer. The failure to be tough on the elements seeking to strip the Ahmaddiyas of their rights has created a situation where the fanatic elements are renewing the same threats against the community. The Shyamnagar situation indicates that the vilification campaign has been revived yet again.

The nearly 4,000 Ahmaddiyas in Shyamnagar are reported to be passing their days amid great uncertainty and a sense of insecurity. The government will be well-advised to immediately activate its law enforcing agencies and neutralise the elements posing a threat to peace. It is a question of safeguarding the rights of a section of people being relentlessly targeted by a fanatic group.

The next moment



M.J. AKBAR

A decision creates a moment. A moment creates an opportunity, and history rides on the wheels of opportunity. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and President Pervez Musharraf created such a moment with the bus between Srinagar and Muzaffarabad, and around it lie a range of opportunities and options that will shape the dialectic as well as the content of the India-Pakistan relationship. Significantly, opportunity could also lie outside the known script.

In that sense, April 6 could prove to be as significant as April 7. On the eve of the first bus to Muzaffarabad, militants attempted to sabotage the journey by the most brutal means conceivable -- by killing all the passengers. This was in line with their threat to convert the bus into a coffin. One would have thought that this, at the very least, would have ensured better security in Srinagar. Mercifully, the passengers survived both the inept security and the trauma of the attack. Remarkably, not a single passenger changed his or her mind about the journey. The extraordinary emotional scenes when the buses reached their destinations, and the courage of the drivers and passengers, proved beyond doubt how far the militants have moved from the sentiment on the ground.

Those who believed that terror-

ism would succeed clearly did not think through the consequences. Their guns were trained on ordinary Kashmiris, the very people they were seeking to "liberate". Death must seem like a strange form of liberation. These passengers were not "Indian agents" or partisan politicians. It was actually a welcome fact that the nuances of politics had kept politicians out of the first bus, and left the moment to ordinary Kashmiris with a vested interest in nothing more, and nothing less, than a peaceful reunion with

the passengers however placed Delhi and Islamabad on the same side of an important barricade -- the barricade against violence. The strong condemnation of the attack by the Pakistan media is an element of the same story.

Cynics carped. So what? What else should we expect from cynics? A fellow journalist from the audio-visual media asked me whether 18 people a day were going to bring eternal peace. I had to point out that 18 is an infinite number of time greater than zero. Indian television

physical one. For the first time since partition, the much-interrupted peace process has some real meaning for the Kashmiri people. For the first time in nearly six decades, the warmth on the dividing line comes not from the heat of artillery shells but from emotions beyond the reach of words. Only those who have been divided truly understand the meaning of partition. History created two nations in 1947. That cannot be changed. But no history, not even the history of tyrants, gives governments the right to destroy the lies of

weeks ago, thousands of Pakistanis came to Chandigarh to watch cricket and stayed to witness the future when thousands of Indians opened their homes to them. Independent nations must not punish their people and sentence them to life in a national prison. It was said once that while a British fort was meant to keep people out, Shah Jehan's Red Fort was built to bring people in. That is the difference that confidence, or absence of it, makes.

Is it possible that I am reading too much into a bus journey? That is

hard heads, not trembling sensibilities.

But while there is triumphalism in conflict, there is no joy in it. Any soldier who stakes his life upon his oath knows that he should be a government's last resort, not an adventurer's first move. A nation may be won by the sword, but it can only be built by the ploughshare.

Could there be progress? Of course there could. Could this burst of optimism degenerate into another swamp swarming with the usual dangers? Yes again, if Delhi and Islamabad treat the bus through Kashmir as a crowning achievement rather than the beginning of yet another difficult but no longer hopeless phase in their relationship.

It is not entirely fortuitous that President Musharraf has sought the excuse of a cricket match in Delhi and Prime Minister Singh has agreed to host him within less than a fortnight of the start of the bus.

That will provide the opportunity to set the parameters of the next phase of the relationship. There has to be a sustained and sustainable dialogue on Jammu and Kashmir, as well as pace in the ecological equation. India cannot shy away from Kashmir and Pakistan cannot shy away from trade.

There are creative opportunities awaiting thought. Imagination and initiative have set up a gas pipeline that both India and Pakistan have defended against an American objection. There is much thinking to do on subjects like nuclear doctrine, and the objective use of strength to protect our common economic interests. History awaits the next moment.

MJ Akbar is Chief Editor of the Asian Age.



Two buses on 7 April crossed a psychological barrier as much as a physical one. For the first time since partition, the much-interrupted peace process has some real meaning for the Kashmiri people. For the first time in nearly six decades, the warmth on the dividing line comes not from the heat of artillery shells but from emotions beyond the reach of words. Only those who have been divided truly understand the meaning of partition.

loved ones. In other words, the militants have succeeded in alienating those whose sympathy is essential to their cause.

They should have considered a second outcome. This was the first time that Delhi and Islamabad condemned the same terrorist attack -- and meant it. No government can permit terrorism to sabotage an international agreement. If anything, it strengthened the resolve to protect the bus route.

Islamabad has been careful about its position-play. While Prime Minister Singh and Congress president Sonia Gandhi went to Srinagar to flag off the bus, President Musharraf stayed at home. Islamabad treats the bus link as an "internal" matter between two Kashmiris. (While the presence of Mr Singh and Mrs Gandhi was welcome, foreign minister Natwar Singh might have resisted the temptation of a photo opportunity.) The attack

got hyper in its coverage of the attack, with some querulous microphone-holders virtually demanding that the bus be postponed if not scrapped. So what? Television is in the business of building ratings, not in the business of building peace.

The great question since 1 January 1949, the day a ceasefire line froze through Jammu and Kashmir, is whether this Line of Control has been drawn in stone or sand. It might seem unfashionably sentimental to say this, but I believe the tears of the Kashmiri people turned stone into sand. Dr Singh, Mrs Sonia Gandhi, General Musharraf and indeed Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee -- for it was during his tenure that the idea was mooted and gained strength -- deserve credit for listening to the aching murmurs of the Kashmiri heart.

Two buses on 7 April crossed a psychological barrier as much as a

kinship and friendship that keep human society humane.

I particularly enjoyed the remark of one passenger from Muzaffarabad who arrived without a single relative on our side of the Line of Control. Every Kashmiri was his relative, he said. Touché. It was extremely sensible of Delhi not to deny him an entry permit on such a technicality. If a tourist cannot come to Srinagar, where on earth should he go?

This warmth will melt more than the tensions of Kashmir. Punjab is already beginning to stir. A series of visits between leaders of the two Punjabs has already generated hope that Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus who speak the same language and share the same culture will rediscover a shared economy, a shared literature and a shared life. There has been a minor Punjab Olympics that generated great enthusiasm earlier this year. A few

certainly possible. Has my wish for peace edged out the considerations of realpolitik and the power of saboteurs from this assessment? Again, I cannot rule that out. I know I am on the "weaker" side. War is a swooping hawk. The words and associations that go with conflict are "tough" and "masculine" and "hardheaded" and "realistic" and, most artfully, "patriotic". Peace is a fluttering dove, vulnerable to a brat's stone, let alone the batteries of firepower. Peace is idealistic and therefore considered woolly-fuzzy. Peace does not march to the cadence of a martial band. Peace is a happy crowd thronging a bazaar rather than disciplined ranks in step with a heavy drum. Peace is feminine, and dismissed as weak; a pool of goodwill (never considered good enough) rather than a raging torrent distributing both positive and negative energy. Peace is limp, conflict is muscular. Nations are governed by

OPINION

Is national unity an illusion?

MOZAMMEL H. KHAN

AS it appears now from the current government version of history, ours, probably, is the only nation on the planet whose history does not contain the history of its creation! On any congregation not organised by any political party or its direct affiliates, either at home or abroad, any reminiscence of the authentic history of our war of liberation is considered as "political," as if the process of the birth of Bangladesh was an apolitical phenomenon.

A few years ago, two reputed constitutional lawyers of Canada while analysing the legalities of the possible separation of Quebec from Canada, observed: "After 1945, Bangladesh was the only country of the world which successfully seceded from Pakistan through armed struggle. However, the principal strength of that struggle came from the unparalleled election victory of Awami League led by its charismatic leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. The popular support he enjoyed was unheard of in a Western democracy."

It is an undisputed consensus among our people that the liberation war of 1971 was the most, and probably the only, glorious chapter of our history. It is like democracy; it is very stigmatised to portray oneself as not a believer in democracy, no matter how undemocratic the person is.

The effort to deny the credit by portraying someone else but Bangabandhu as the principle architect of that history has been a ceaseless phenomenon since his tragic assassination some thirty years ago. As the years passed, all successive (non AL) governments

went further and further in, not only eclipsing Bangabandhu, but totally expunging the only chapter of history for which each and every element of our nation who sided with it, either by participation or through allegiance to the concept, could have been truly proud of.

Every nation evokes the memory of its history's golden chapter in time of dire need of national unity. Paradoxically, ours is the opposite, where the recitation of veracious history has become the major divisive ingredient in our society. This year's celebration of March 26 by the government shattered all its previous records of falsification.

hours of the crackdown and met martyrdom. Likewise, Flight Lieutenant Matiur Rahman, probably did not even know who the declare was when his great patriotic zeal reigned over the love of his young children and wife, who were in enemy territory, in order to join the war of liberation of his motherland.

It is not only the effort to marginalise Bangabandhu from our history; it is the vilification of him that has attained a new height. A sitting minister who was a student leader during the liberation struggle and a propitiator of "scientific socialism" and an organiser of "gonobahini" to establish that socialism thereafter,

of 54,506 [square] miles is Bangla Desh ...Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman is the father of this new nation."

The public meeting further resolved, "This meeting is taking the solemn vow to carry out the struggle for independence resting full confidence on the leadership of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and urging every one, irrespective of party affiliation, to join the struggle for independence of Bangladesh."

Conferring upon himself with the distinction of making such a public declaration of independence on

ship" right after the liberation?

Another former minister, a current MP, and then a junior officer, has underlined Sheikh Mujib's ineptitude as a leader, since he, allegedly, did not pay heed to a group of Bengali soldiers' (stationed in Chittagong) advice to declare the independence of Bangladesh in early March. Without contesting the frivolous counsel, albeit not even attested by any authoritative account, it would be sufficient enough to rebut that the liberation war was not an adventure game.

Unilateral and public declaration of independence without justifiable provocation could hardly command

Pakistan authorities declared an unjust and treacherous war." The corroborating words of the enemy General, Rao Forman Ali, also attested that sequential transition when he said, "after the postponement of National Assembly, he (Mujib) came to the conclusion that the combined forces of the Military and the PPP would not let materialise his desire to rule Pakistan. Therefore, he decided to be the father of a new nation."

Bangabandhu was the main force and the spirit of the Bengali nationhood. If anyone did anything to accelerate the process during the crucial nine months, at home and abroad, it was done invoking his name. It was he who unified the nation and brought us together to a height we have never reached either before or since. During the nine months of genocide, armed struggle, and untold sufferings, his name glowed ceaselessly in the hearts of millions.

In the words of affirmation by General Rao Forman Ali: "90 per cent of the people of Bangladesh were taken in by the magical power of Sheikh Mujib, and they were ready to sacrifice their lives for the creation of Bangladesh." It is imperative for any prudent leadership of the nation to evoke the only glorious chapter of history with a view to make it the rallying point to induce patriotism, an indispensable pre-requisite for national unity. Quite to the contrary, history is being revoked, not invoked, and the much-cherished national unity remains, forever, an illusion.

Dr. Mozammel H. Khan is a Professor and the Head of Mechanical Engineering and Quality Engineering Departments of Sheridan Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning, Ontario, Canada.

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It was reported that the whole of the stadium, where the official celebration of the independence took place, was decorated with the pictures of the late President Ziaur Rahman, portraying him as the sole leader of our independence. Seven *Birshresthas*' pictures were lucky enough to make their places in the stadium, only because they met martyrdom. If they were alive today, they would be persona non-grata at the venue of the celebration unless they would re-educate themselves with the "history" that they responded to the call of an obscure major to join the war of liberation.

Captain Mohiuddin Jahangir did not have the luxury to sit with a transistor and wait for someone's call when he valiantly fought with the Pakistani army in the early

recently made a disclosure that he was with Sheikh Mujib until the late hours of March 25 and that the Sheikh did not give any call for independence. He joined the war of liberation only after the "proclamation of independence" by Major Zia on March 26, a day ahead of Major Zia's actual declaration! The said minister also commemorated March 2 as the *Isthehar Divas* (declaration day) in the congregation of his current comrades.

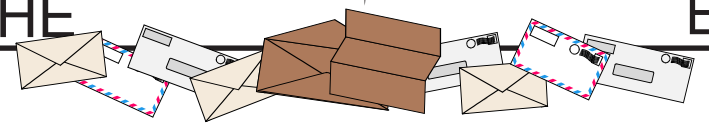
I am quoting an extract from that *Isthehar*, and from the resolution of the public meeting that followed on March 3 in Paltan Maidan that read: "Joy Bangla: Proclamation of independence. Independence for Bangladesh is hereby declared. It is now an independent and sovereign country ... The name of this territory

March 2, one can only conjecture how he could abase himself to assert that he joined the war of liberation only after he heard the call made by an unknown major of that time. It would be only natural to enquire that when he took leave of Bangabandhu on the fateful night of March 25, did Bangabandhu advise him to wait for someone's call to start the war of liberation for independence for which he takes great pride, even today, to read the declaration on March 2? If he thought Bangabandhu was such an injudicious leader, what logic propelled him to associate himself with the section of liberation force that carried Mujib's name? What pursuit prompted him to take another vow to establish his so-called scientific socialism under his "great leader-

the support of the international community without while the war of liberation would have been short-lived indeed. It would have been a self-inflicting catastrophe of astronomical magnitude at the expense of the ethnic cleansing of millions of more lives and of the subjugation of the Bengali nation for the foreseeable future. AL's six-point programme, as was endorsed by people in the general election, was a Magna Carta for quasi-independence, not for absolute independence.

To justify the transition from the mandate of a quasi to a complete independence, the formal declaration of independence (April 10, 1971) contained five "whereas" clauses that included: "whereas instead of fulfilling their promise ...

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.

Politics unable to deliver

Many informed and educated Bangladeshis are coming to the conclusion that the current debased political culture prevailing in capital Dhaka cannot solve the problems of the nation (generated mostly through corrupt political mores). Politics as a tool and method has failed; because what is called politics is not politics, but plain and simple corruption. Today the public service content in political projects is thin cosmetic, (just analyse how tenders for public works are handled).

The virus (misuse of power and influence; indiscipline, and absence of punishment) has spread to practically all the sectors of society. There is no clean group left to carry out the cleaning, and subsequent reforms. The scenario prevails in many developing nations (look closely at Africa and S America, not to speak

of Asia). The political parties are fighting amongst themselves in an isolated manner. There is practically no interface with the masses (voters). General elections have become meaningless. Since the politicians cannot be relied upon, there is one basic way to bring about a dramatic change shatter the black money market.

The system diagram or flow chart is too complex, as it is a multi-faceted operation. How to select and insulate the operators of this major operation? Can we run it without bringing in outside entities? Nowadays money can buy almost anything, then what is priceless when something valueless becomes expensive?

Look at the costs of an election campaign by an individual candidate. Genuine social workers (and future leaders) cannot serve from the political camp. Outside the political arena there is no support structure. The role of the NGOs is

different; it is non-political, and is more professional than national, while the people's representatives have to belong to some socially-defined group; which are, generally, the political parties.

Bad politics cannot be reformed in the larger presence of corruption and black money. Outsiders cannot, and should not, carry out this operation. Mass movement comes in. It is back to zero, but now the fight (targets) would be within the local societies.

Self-cleansing is not that easy. The price is very high, in lives and assets. None of the culprits would surrender, under the spell of black wealth (and temporary protection). It is not gardening; trimming the branches. The roots have to be uprooted.

What are the sources of national strength and stamina for this long campaign? The start has been noticed in many countries, but the tendency is to wither out after a while. The majority live

around the poverty line. A microscopic minority is riding the waves. So?

A start has to be made for generating public opinion for a united stand by the majority. It means revolution? There are short-cuts, but the abiding vicious circles are tenacious. More character is needed than numbers (quantity versus quality). There is dearth of good, honest leadership, willing to suffer with persistent patience and courage. The spirit of sacrifice has rusted. The IT age has increased the communication gap!

The awareness is there on what to do, but how to carry it out?

A Mawaz Dhaka

Why oppose 'direct purchase'?

Please refer to your report titled "Stop import through direct purchase to curb money laundering" published on 5 April 2005.

The report that Dhaka Customs House has requested the authorities to stop direct purchase abroad by importers was very amusing. It reminds me of another report from the last week. In that report it was said that the foreign buyers of Bangladesh's readymade garments demanded a change in the traditional international trade practice of opening Letter of Credit in the bank. In fact, all over the world import and export through opening an L/C in commercial banks is becoming obsolete as the buyers are now more inclined towards direct purchase. In this situation, it will be a regressive step if Bangladesh prohibits direct purchase. Sadly enough, the customs department has admitted its failure in controlling currency smuggling as well as under-invoicing related to direct purchase.

However, instead of requesting the authorities to prohibit direct purchase, the customs should

prove its competence in detecting under-invoicing and money laundering.

Asif Chowdhury Brussels

Jamaat funds

The Jamaat-e-Islami, a religion based political party, is doing brisk and booming business in Bangladesh, thanks to peoples' ignorance about religion. They mix up peaceful Islam with terror, hatred filled "Jamaat" Islam.

They have money. We wonder about their sources of funds. Jamaat was not a rich party during the pre-1971 years. We noticed various interesting and intriguing phenomena in the activities of this pseudo-religious outfit. Soon after Jamaat was declared "Halal" by the government in the late seventies, they started collecting funds and training the party cadres in right earnest. Eyewitnesses attest that Jamaat and Shibir cadres

were seen being imparted martial art training. These activities were probably part of their larger training programmes, which the party cadres undertook later on. The oil price boom in the Middle East opened the Golden Gate for funds of this fundamentalist party. Now, they and their sympathisers own several industries, banks, trading houses etc. This probably is not the end of the funding story.

Have we ever pondered how the sister/brother pan-Islamic parties of 'Jamaat' in Pakistan, Afghanistan, India etc. collect funds and are financed? Strange philosophy and justifications guide them. They are deeply involved in drug-trafficking, gun running, arms smuggling, extortion and what not. They propound and believe that funding of activities for the 'good cause' of the propagation of their way of "Deen" and Islamic revolution justifies the illegal methods of earning the money. There are ample exam-

ples in the countries concerned. Would the people and concerned government agencies start thinking and digging out the facts behind Jamaat funds?

TKM, Dhaka

Introduce cash card

Pre-paid mobile phone connections have become extremely popular within a short span of time in our country. No queue at bank counter, no hassle, no killing of valuable time are some of the advantages that make it attractive. However, the post-paid subscribers face problems while paying their bills.

My request on behalf of millions of subscribers is: introduce cash card which may enable the subscribers to deposit money to his mobile phone account anywhere at any time.

Md Nazmul Haque Sabujbagh, Dhaka