

Campus riots out of control

Government must act before rot sets in for good

THE only silver lining we can see to the current deplorable situation on the DU campus is that with summer vacation starting early, perhaps there will now be time and space for tempers to calm down and normalcy to return. This, however, is scant solace, and the time has come for the government to step in forcefully and ensure that peace is restored.

It is depressing to contemplate that not three days after a traffic accident took the life of a young female DU student, that this tragedy has apparently been forgotten, or at the very least overshadowed by the violence and vandalism that has engulfed the campus in its aftermath.

What we are now witnessing is little more than power politics being exercised by the cadres of the JCD, and the mourning for the deceased seems to have been pushed into the background. Essentially, the situation at present is that the campus has been taken over by ruling party affiliated activists who have imposed a reign of terror.

We should not have to point out that at this moment in time we have a democratically elected government with a duty to stamp out this kind of hooliganism. We are at a loss to understand the government's inaction over the past three days and urge it to take control of its activists and affiliates.

Similarly, we are disappointed at the toothless response from the DU authorities.

It seems that the fact that the violence is being perpetrated by ruling party men means that nothing can be done about it and that the relevant authorities' hands are tied. This is a tremendous blot on the record of the government and they must act quickly before the rot that is setting in on campus becomes irreversible.

Things have deteriorated rapidly. Students have been thrown out of their hostels and countless numbers have been beaten up. It is clear that the JCD has decided to take the opportunity to drive its rival activists from campus and to intimidate anyone who stands up to them.

The upshot is that normal university life is in ruins. We appeal to our political leaders: do not let politics destroy institutional life at DU. The damage being done to the nation and its future is incalculable, and the government must move to douse the flames before it is too late.

A ride through hell

Putting lives into unsafe hands

A prominent Bangla daily has published a very revealing news story. Based on first-hand experience of a minibus ride by two assigned reporters, it has, in fact, brought us up to date with the very high risks public mobility is exposed to on a daily basis.

The graphic descriptions of the booby-traps are amply confirmatory of the one-liner one often hears after an accident: it was just waiting to happen. Most of the accidents are no longer accidents these days; the fortuitousness is mostly gone. They are man-made and, therefore, fit to be called manslaughter.

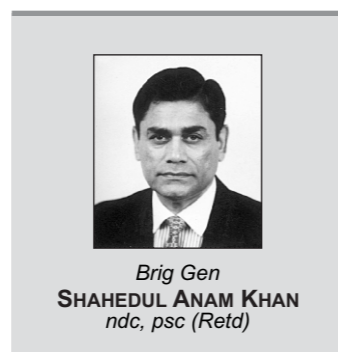
Buses and minibuses are the worst culprits purring on the engines as they take in passengers and overloading the jalopies even at the very start. Then on the way they would be shoving in more passengers making several stops in disdainful defiance of regulation stoppages. The driver will be frequently staring back at the minibus or bus approaching from the rear. Frightful of being overtaken on the time-table delinquently overshoot by passenger pickings earlier on they would overspeed in dangerous arcs now turning left and then swerving to the right in constant serpentine motions.

The findings are, indeed, devastating. On various city routes offences like arbitrary pulling over, reckless speeding contest even through an extremely busy thoroughfare, are daily committed, let alone untrained hands on the steering wheels with little or no knowledge of traffic rules, and drug or alcohol addicts on the drivers' seats -- all under the very nose of traffic authorities. To top it off, as one police officer has stated that during a decade into his service life, he has not seen any one having been punished because of a road accident. Punitive justice is missing.

The sheer number of buses and mini-buses on the city streets is a major contributory factor for the high incidence of road accidents. Over the last one year bus routes have swelled from 34 to 56; compared to 831 such vehicles in 2001 the number has now reached the 7000-mark. The road network comprising only 8 percent of the metropolitan landmass in stark contrast to the stipulated 25 percent, the scenario is horrendously accident-prone.

The saddest part of it all is that the plentiful recommendations for setting things right remain comprehensively unmatched by implementation.

Irreversible peace process or false dawn?



WHATEVER may be the compulsions of the two countries to climb down from their long-held positions in order to seek peace on a permanent basis, it augurs well for South Asia that the two long-time foes have now seen fit to not be bogged down by the baggage of history in their negotiations. The articulation of intent by India and Pakistan so clearly voiced in the statement that "peace is irreversible," demonstrates the commitment of the leaders of the two countries to peace, and perhaps also an acknowledgement that discretion is the better part of valour.

What is significant is the fact that both sides have eschewed war as an option for resolving bilateral problems, particularly the problem of Kashmir. What is also happily missing is the rhetoric in their statements and the rigidity in their respective stances. Of even more significance is the fact that while

neither has totally moved away from their original position on the core issue of Kashmir there is an appreciation of the other side's view.

While all sorts of motives have been attributed to President Musharraf for the change in his stance towards the entire gamut of peace, survival and national interest must have been upper-most in his mind in taking a position that many see as a climb down on his

time. While we know enough not to pin too high a hope on strategic developments between India and Pakistan, one cannot but be affected by a feeling of optimism that stems from the very palpable change in stance of the two countries towards bilateral issues. It is more evident in the case of Pakistan, where President Musharraf's recent statements suggest a departure from its earlier position

rather than a stumbling block. President Musharraf has even taken some of his countrymen by surprise; reportedly, the liberals in Pakistan who are also protagonists of an equitable resolution of Kashmir are perplexed at his pronouncements.

Pakistan appears to have accepted the fact that for India any redrawing of the map or exchange of territories is non-negotiable, but Musharraf would like to see that as

therefore it needs to be on regional basis, on a peoples basis." This is virtual repudiation of a previous position in which the President had said Kashmir should be divided along religious lines.

Also gone is the demand for the independence of Kashmir, that has now been replaced by President Musharraf's suggestion that they should be granted maximum self-governance, in line with their wishes. (Pakistan has denied that

Minister who, according to reports, "praised Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf's proposal to demilitarise a part of Kashmir and give it autonomy, saying these proposals could be considered if the India-Pakistan dialogue remained on track."

However, while in India there is a bi-partisan consensus on the approach to the peace process, there appears to be not too many takers in Pakistan of the President's proposal; there are various stakeholders who feel that the Pakistan President has offered such unilateral concession in respect of Kashmir which has caused an impression of Pakistan's undue haste under external pressure to solve the Kashmir problem.

It would be unrealistic to expect a problem that has resisted resolution for the last fifty-seven years to be resolved overnight. President Musharraf's peace formulations notwithstanding, there are home constituencies whose unease at his fast-track approach he must allay. It is also imperative that the third party in the dispute, i.e. the Kashmiris, be allowed full participation in any dialogue on their homeland.

Along with the Kashmiris let us also hope that the peace process is indeed irreversible. As one eminent Indian journalist put it, "the two warring neighbours are headed towards a new dawn." Let's hope it is not a false dawn that meets them.

The author is Editor, Defence and Strategic Affairs, The Daily Star.

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part. Be that as it may, if the prospect of peace between the two countries is enhanced by the changed position that displays an attitude of flexibility and accommodation, then neither the compulsions nor the motivations but the final outcome is what should matter.

The fact that both have relented from their respective hard stands -- "only Kashmir" for Pakistan and "all issues" for India -- as a precondition for a dialogue, and the attitudinal change of the two South Asian rivals demonstrate the fact that neither have allowed their hearts to get the better of their heads this

on Kashmir.

The Pakistan President made some very substantial remarks on Kashmir while addressing South Asian parliamentarians on May 20 in Islamabad. However, it is not for the first time that President Musharraf has come out with a formula for solving the Kashmir dispute. But this time he has chosen to draw a time-line for it, suggesting that the Kashmir solution, "should be done within the tenures of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and myself." No wonder India feels that the Musharraf is moving too fast for its comfort. And it is not for the first time that the

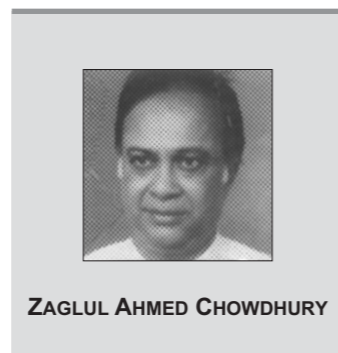
point of take-off for a solution rather than a stumbling block.

What must come as very soothing to India is the fact that Musharraf has accepted India's internal political compulsion regarding Kashmir, which India regards as a symbol of its secularism, that a Muslim majority "state" can survive in a Hindu majority country. Musharraf's acknowledgement of India's compulsions is amply expressed in his recent statement, "We do understand India's sensitivity over their secular credentials and therefore it [the solution to Kashmir] cannot be, maybe, on a religious basis. So

President Musharraf had made any remarks on autonomy or semi-autonomy for any part of Kashmir, almost ten days after his statement was published). Analysts are still trying to cull the significance of his statement regarding the Line of Control, about which he said, "A lasting solution lay in rendering boundaries irrelevant."

Implied also in the Pakistan President's remarks is his willingness to call off the insurgents provided it was matched by the withdrawal of Indian forces from the valley. His suggestions to demilitarise Kashmir have also been echoed and welcomed by the Indian Prime

Is a South Asian parliament viable?



THE idea of a parliament in the South Asian region is not very new, although some quarters feel that the concept is premature and unlikely to take shape in the near future. Those promoting the idea of the South Asian concept do not foresee the emergence of this parliament in the immediate future either, but what they stress is that it should be pursued and should come through at an appropriate time, even though it may take many years.

Some, who see this as a distinct possibility, say that this might take over a decade because of the complexities involved in the matter, but what is important is that the ball must be set rolling, and a South Asian parliament (SAP) will become a reality one day. The idea is being coined largely in the line with the European parliament, notwithstanding the fact that Europe and South Asia are not similar, and the recent crisis in the EU caused by the French "no" vote on the constitution.

On the contrary, the two are different in many ways, the most important being that European political and economic advancement is far ahead of South Asia. True, South Asia is not a continent as such, but it is the most populous region of the world having more than one fifth of the mankind. The region has been coming up in global discussions for some time now, particularly with the emergence of Saarc twenty years ago. As Saarc is becoming a known

forum -- albeit with some criticisms about its slow progress in achieving its objectives -- the concept of the SAP is also coming increasingly to the fore. Admittedly, only few see this as a viable possibility in the immediate future. However, this view has not deterred the concept being advanced by different quarters associated with the region.

The promoters of the concept concede that such a parliament in

of the South Asian countries in Pakistan dwelt upon the matter in great detail when the whole issue came for discussions -- analysing the pros and cons of the concept from different angles without being unnecessarily euphoric about it. The five-day conference brought in leading parliamentarians of the region, cutting across their national and party divides, with a view to discuss several issues pertaining to close cooperation among the

League (Quaid-e-Azam) to opposition Peoples Party and Muslim League (Nawaz), and parliamentarians from the six-party Islamic alliance MNA and the largely Karachi based MQM.

From Bangladesh, twelve lawmakers -- five from ruling BNP, four from main opposition Awami league, one each from Jamaat-e-Islami and Jatiya party, and one independent member -- took part in the conference.

decade or two, but it is time to initiative moves in that direction, the parliamentarians agreed. To begin with, the conference proposed creation of an intra-parliamentary union in South Asia. Saarc may agree in principle to create a South Asian parliament and appoint a group of experts responsible before the Saarc Speakers Forum to prepare a comprehensive report and timeframe to establish it through an

However, the second paper on the matter by Pakistan's noted parliamentarian and thinker Aitzaz Ahsan was not as enthusiastic as that of Dr. Muni, although he broadly supported the concept of the SAP. A lawyer by profession, the Pakistan Peoples Party lawmaker sounded caution in forwarding the concept in haste as he felt this requires sufficient ground work and other preparations.

The conference witnessed lengthy discussions on the issue and members were divided whether the process should start immediately or not, but all were unanimous on the need of the SAP. Most of the members were of the opinion in line with Dr. S.D. Muni, although they stressed the need for caution as well. Indian communist MP Nilotpal Basu was particularly in favour of the position of Mr. Ahsan while most other favoured immediate initiatives.

Finally, the conference came out with agreed resolution: "To ensure greater role of the elected representatives of the people in regional cooperation, the participants overwhelmingly endorsed the view to initiate a process of moving towards the creation of a South Asian parliament, with of course, caution as expressed by some participants, while taking into account the pros and cons of its creation in stages. A full fledged SAP may take a decade or even two, but it is time to initiate process in this direction."

In any case, the issue of South Asian parliament is now gaining more and more prominence -- despite the impression and belief that it is unlikely to emerge in the near future. But the SAP is now being talked about in responsible and important quarters and as such it may be a reality some day. This, when it occurs, will certainly be a great leap forward for the region -- home of more than 1.4 billion people.

Zaglul Ahmed Chowdhury is Senior Special Correspondent of BSS.

MATTERS AROUND US

A full-fledged SAP may take a decade or two, but it is time to initiative moves in that direction, the parliamentarians agreed. To begin with, the conference proposed creation of an intra-parliamentary union in South Asia. Saarc may agree in principle to create a South Asian parliament and appoint a group of experts responsible before the Saarc Speakers Forum to prepare a comprehensive report and timeframe to establish it through an evolutionary process.

the line of the European parliament is handicapped on several grounds, but insist that this can be floated, taking into account the distinct features of the region. They agree that the political maturity of Europe and the broad similarity among countries there on matters of their policies and approaches on global issues helped the European parliament come into being, and this is in somewhat sharp contrast to the South Asian region.

Nations of this area in many cases do not see eye to eye on global issues, and what is more unfavourable is that rivalry and enmity among some members of the region at bilateral level makes the parliament here a reality difficult. Then again, the promoters argue that this was the case for Saarc when the idea was mooted, but this has become a reality and the SAP will also be the same, belying scepticisms that persist in certain quarters.

A recent important high-profile conference of the parliamentarians

Saarc nations, but the focus of the gathering was on the prospects of a South Asian parliament.

In fact, this was the main theme of the meeting held under the aegis of the South Asian Free Media Association (Safma), a regional body of prominent media people, which earlier held gatherings on different issues with the meeting in Islamabad/Murree mainly for the parliamentarians although editors, senior journalists, and experts were also there.

From India, more than thirty lawmakers came from practically all major political parties ranging from national political parties like the Congress, BJP, CPM, and CPI, to regional parties like Rastriya Janata party in Bihar to Telegu Desam in southern Andhra Pradesh and National Conference in Jammu and Kashmir, who have representation in the federal parliament.

Hosts Pakistan had similar representation, including lawmakers from ruling Pakistan Muslim

Same was the case with Sri Lanka. There is no functioning parliament at present in Nepal, and their delegation chose not to attend as one of their colleagues was not allowed to leave the airport. However, media, civil rights activists, and others came from Nepal. Needless to say, two other small nations within the Saarc family -- Bhutan and the Maldives -- were not much in the reckoning as far as the regional parliament is concerned, for obvious reasons.

The parliamentarians during the long discussions -- mainly on the basis of two key papers presented by two experts -- discussed the nitty gritty of the issue and adopted resolution in this regard. The conference overwhelmingly endorsed the view to initiate a process of moving towards the creation of an institutional interactive mechanism for parliamentarians of South Asia, keeping in mind the concept of a South Asian parliament.

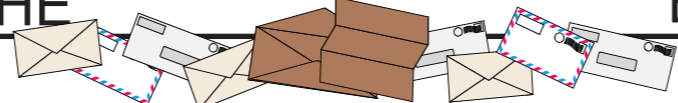
A full-fledged SAP may take a

evolutionary process.

One of the key papers on the issue was presented by Dr. S.D. Muni of Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, in which he broadly espoused the cause of the SAP and went into detail on the matter, including how it should be viewed as a viable and more importantly representative for all the member nations so that none considers it a dominant platform of the big countries, notably India.

He had done plenty of research on the subject, recollecting how it has come to the fore as well as drawing analogy with similar parliaments and of course the European parliament. Dr. Muni's concluding remark was that it is possible and the concept should be pursued from now on so that a South Asian parliament is not a distant goal. However, he was not euphoric as he was also aware of the problems and obstacles that may stand on the way, but the bottom line is that this should emerge for the larger interest and identity of the region.

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.

Odd language

At public meetings or in parliament, I often hear our eminent leaders of the ruling party using the word "tenara" and "tenader" to indicate the members of the opposition. "Tenara" is not commonly used in decent language. Moreover, it sounds funny because it reminds me of the ghosts and evils of "Thakur mar juli" and "Gupi Gaen Bagha Baen". There is a common way being used in most of the ghost stories, "...Rater bela tenader nam neya baron". Means it is not permissible to utter their (ghosts) names at night. Instead of "tenara", one can use "onara" and instead of "tenader" the word "onader" can be used if anyone has problem with uttering Bengali "Chandro-bindu". "Onara" sounds much better than "tenara".
Cantara Wali Ruhi
BBA, Dept of Mgmt, DU

Develop the port city

Now that the Chittagong (CCC) mayoral elections are over, it is time for the government to focus

on the rapid development of the port city as a commercial hub. There is a big advantage: the Mayor has been returned for a third term (8th to 12th year), hence it would ensure the continuity of development projects; and he has eight years' experience of the bottlenecks and local problems and psychological barriers. The noisy politicians in Dhaka clamour a lot about the development of the ports, but at the end of the day the physical results are rather invisible. Speeches are for motivation, not announcing statistical data.

The port has to get number one priority, followed by the building up of a deep sea port. It is hampering our exports (and imports) due to longer time factor for various transactions, and higher cost of business at the port offices and counters.

Modernisation of management system is still a long way off. Readymade packages are available in the market (for project planners) for instant installation, starting with larger computerisation footprints. The port's land and water exit/entry points have

to be expanded to control congestion. How far have we succeeded?

The regime should note the increasing criticism in the press of strong centralisation syndrome in metropolis Dhaka (with a bankrupt parliament, and limping opposition suffering from deep political depression). The politicians have created a one-stop centre for their subsversive 'development' ventures, but the similar facilities are not available to the citizens at the divisional and district HQs. Where are the power-dispersal projects?

In principle, reduce the number in the government offices continues to be poor, due to lack of motivation and encouragement from the top. Unless the combined systems losses in the public sector could be reduced below 20 per cent, the growth rate cannot reach seven pc or above, necessary for take-off of the economy. The black-money factor in the changing GDP figure is never pointed out by the government. The coming budget has to be sensitive to the grey and black markets.

Now the new bridge on Mongla road network would encourage land-locked neighbours to utilise the port more effectively. Our coastal patrol fleet has to be strengthened to control rampant smuggling (from ships; refer to the news item of siphoning of oil for daily kitchen-market shopping alongside river oil tankers).

Huge expenditure on development projects mean little, so long institutional corruption cannot be contained. The regime should talk more about invisible background services such as honesty, dedication, efficiency, and reduction of red tape and bribe culture.

The importance of our ports is evident from another angle: the factories in the developed countries are being relocated in the developing countries, due to high labour and other costs. Therefore the brain-drain from Bangladesh would be in the slow lane in the coming decades, and port activities would leap. Are we prepared with long-term projection planning exercises?
Abdad Khan
Dhaka

Telephone policy

The government is losing a huge amount of import duties and taxes on import of mobile cell phones, due to large-scale smuggling (mostly through passengers' personal baggage). Used and old sets are being dumped into Bangladesh. The retail dealers do not display the prices in the show-cases. Why? No pre-sale literature on the numerous models are available in the shops. Then how to choose a set? Why the official monitoring is not buyer-friendly?

ICT imports can no longer be classified as luxury items, for obvious reasons. By reducing the duty on mobile phones and peripherals, the government can earn more. Smuggling is directly proportional to demand. If import levies are lower, smuggling would decrease.

SKD kits may be imported for local assembly, thereby reducing the retail prices further, discouraging the import of completely assembled sets. Now the factories are shifting to the developing countries; and GOB is aware of the incentives to offer through the EPZ.

The mobile phone market is now highly competitive. This is the time to flood the market with cheaper sets. Now small solar energy power kits are available for village homes, allowing recharging of mobile batteries in the rural areas. The fixed line telephone has also been opened to the private sector. Hence the levies should come down...earn more with lower taxes...
AAbad
Dhaka

Asian powerhouse

China is fast emerging as Asia's future powerhouse, with Japan enjoying sunset years after being beholden to the rising sun in the West -- the United States. The next nation with a billion people is India, but it needs more time to take off and make its presence felt outside S Asia and in the West.

China and India might compete in a friendly way, which is complementary rather than competitive. The basic idea is to keep the Asian trade confined mainly to the Asian countries, for two reasons: more long-term future business in the developing countries, and many of

these countries have high density of population. Asia is self-sufficient in looking after billions of Asians. Those who exploited Asia for centuries can rest for a while!

Chinese export goods are much cheaper, and the quality is improving fast. China is also able to offer technical assistance in mega projects in many fields, with expertise and services. EU is in the slow lane, and US impact on Islamic countries is eroding, due to indirect communal attitude and misconceptions.

The US is mainly interested in the natural energy reserves anywhere in the world, and the gripe against Iraq and Iran have super-thin layers of diplomatic deception. The attack on poor Afghanistan was to open a sea route to CIS energy products to the sea. US secured a foothold in Pakistan, and now India is also under its umbrella. How much longer the poor Asians would continue to rise remain subservient to the West!

It is a test for 'poor' Bangladesh, floating on gas, and with deep foundations of coal reserves (3.5 billion tons). Question: Tie-up with Asian friends or go West? Bangladesh has officially declared its look-East policy. Our EPZs have clicked (we need more modern ports). The layers of foundation have to be built up quickly, before the foreign non-Asian predators strike.

Bangladesh is the ideal base for China for entry into South Asian market (1.5 billion consumers) through the Asian Highway (construction delayed too long). Bangladesh has cheap labour, (as in China), hence complementary development and cooperation projects may be examined for evaluation. China (machinery), Bangladesh (human resources) and Pakistan (cotton) can clothe a large percentage of the world's consumers; while English-knowing young Indians have captured the IT outsourcing market (Bangalore ICT business is estimated to rise from USD five billions to fifteen billions within a decade).

Asia for Asians is not myopic stance. Asia is big, and can contribute to Asian prosperity for the next millennium, (looking at dying EU).
A Mawaz
Dhaka