

IN FRONT OF THE BOX  
Tigers pounce back

The body language of the Tigers speak of a team enjoying their cricket, and their time on this stage. Grim and lacklustre, the South Africans couldn't provide a bigger contrast. Their pre-tournament position as favourites to make the final looking more and more tenuous. England and the West Indies were no doubt overjoyed with this result -- the cats are back amongst the pigeons to coin a cliché.



PAUL MASON

YOU'VE just come off two matches in which your batsmen have been care-

less and spluttered out sub-par totals, your bowling attack barely managed to scrape a single wicket, and in both games you've received a hiding that reminds you of the

dark days. How do you handle it? Creak and groan under the pressure? Allow yourself to keep on slipping? Watch your morale drop through the floor? Nah. What about thumping the South Africans and smile while you do it.

What a game. What a game. Though the win over India was significant in that it more or less sent the Tigers through to the second round, to me this victory was the more meaningful.

By crushing the Proteas in the Guyanese sunshine Saturday, the Tigers have put together two memorable victories in the same highest-level tournament: not through chance, or the benefit of a surprising wicket, but by clearly being the better side on the day.

Bangladesh may have finally silenced the chattering voices. No



longer should we hear "Bangladesh" and the words "flash-in-the-pan" in the same breath. No longer should we hear that tag "minnow." Bang-they're gone. And with it the Tigers have blown the Super Eights wide open. Everyone loves a giant

killer. Bashar spoke of the team going into the game with a plan to keep wickets in hand till the final few overs. It is one thing to have a strategy -- it's another to follow through, and I thought this was the

most assured batting performance we've seen thus far -- Ashraf's innings a case in point.

His combination of elegant strokes and audacious paddle shots will have the English county selectors sitting up and taking notice. The wagon wheel of his innings showing just how effective he was in the fine leg region. He well deserved the honours at the end. Omar has added a steady presence at the top of the order and has influenced those around him. Mashrafe has continued to show he can be considered a genuine all-rounder.

South Africa made two errors in judgement: by not opting to include the spin of Peterson in their line-up, and in allowing Bangladesh to have second bowl on a pitch that was only going to be less and less helpful to the batsmen as the day progressed.

Bashar on the other hand had correctly called these conditions before this match, and knew the wicket would suit his slow left-armers. The Proteas were slowly suffocated -- at one stage going 13 overs without a boundary. Not one

of the Bangladesh attack went over a five-run economy rate -- once again showing us the control we saw against India.

And most heartening is that this win was once again a true team effort. The Tigers have not allowed the speculation over Whatmore's future, or the heavy first losses to disrupt their cohesion.

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contrast. Their pre-tournament position as favourites to make the final looking more and more tenuous.

England and the West Indies were no doubt overjoyed with this result -- the cats are back amongst the pigeons to coin a cliché. But in the back of their mind, they will be wary when having to face Bangladesh, and rightly so. After all, just look at what happened to the number one team in the world. Howzaat.



A ban on campus politics

A.J.M. SHAFIUL ALAM BHUIYAN

WE have it from the horse's mouth that the University grants commission (UGC) is drafting a law to ban student and teachers' politics at the public universities. But, does the UGC have the authority to do so?

Doing politics is a constitutional right. History shows that both the teachers and students of public universities contributed to the birth of the country and nourishment of its democracy. The UGC cannot ban their politics. What the UGC can and should do is develop mechanisms to deny the exercise of partisan politics on the campuses, which in recent years has turned counter-productive.

Let us deal with teachers' politics first. A handful of teachers do partisan politics. Teachers' groups in various universities are not directly linked with any political parties, but are ideologically aligned.

A few teachers do politics for ideological reasons. They believe in a political ideology, and out of this conviction support, and work for, the expansion of its influence. Some do politics to protect themselves from rival groups.

Some teachers do politics to change their fate. Teachers in public schools, colleges and universities are underpaid. The remuneration they receive hardly pays the house rent, and they need extra income to meet other costs including, their children's education.

Public school and college teachers manage the extra money by offering private tutorials. For university teachers, private tutoring is not an option. Some of them work as consultants for various government and non-government organizations. Some do politics to get cheap university housing and lucrative positions in government organizations. University housing contributes to a better life. Positions in government

organizations bring name and fame and financial benefits.

Finally, some university teachers are politically active because the existing appointment system in the public universities encourages them to be so. In the public universities many important positions such as vice chancellor (VC), dean, and syndicate and senate member are filled by election. For example, at the University of Dhaka (DU), the senate, comprised of teachers' representatives, government nominees and committee members, elects a panel of three members for the chancellor to appoint the VC from.

The president of the republic, who is the Chancellor of DU, chooses one of them as VC, with recommendation from the prime minister's office. When the BNP-Jamaat coalition rule, the VC is appointed from the White group of teachers, and when the AL rule, the VC comes from the Blue group.

Teachers elect the deans of their respective faculties through ballot. The syndicate and the senate, the policy-making and administrative bodies, are formed by the elected representatives of teachers and nominees of the government.

The vote-based appointment system allowed the practice of partisan politics at the university, but rarely put the right person in the right place. The persons who got elected, notwithstanding their quality as academics, felt obliged to serve their voters and political patrons instead of working for the enhancement of the quality of teaching and research at the university.

Appointments through voting also encourage the recruitment of new teachers to strengthen the group in power. Teachers' groups show more interest in recruiting voters than promising scholars.

In order to make the public universities free from partisan teachers' politics, the UGC needs to work on two fronts. It needs to eliminate the

economic and systemic flaws. The systemic problem can be removed by developing a new method of appointing VCs, deans, and syndicate and senate members, and strengthening the system of appointing teachers.

A search committee comprised of the representatives of teachers, employees, university administration, UGC, and ministry of education, and a distinguished academic, can select the VC of a university.

A similar committee can select a dean. The UGC can appoint the syndicate and senate members from distinguished academics, and people of other professions, who are willing and capable of contributing to the development of research chairs, funds and centers.

To reduce the chance of recruiting voters as teachers, every department should have a search committee comprising the department chair, a senior academic who has expertise in the area of the discipline, which needs a teacher, a teachers' representative, a graduate student representative, and an undergraduate student representative.

These search committees will have strong eligibility criteria for potential candidates, and make the short listed candidates give a public talk explaining their future research and teaching goals, pedagogical styles, and why they should be considered for the position. Teachers, students, and employees should have opportunity to ask questions and make comments on the talk.

Only the teachers' association should have an annual election to elect its executive committee, which will nominate teachers to various university committees including the search committees.

Alongside the removal of the systemic flaws in the case of university appointments, the UGC must think of providing economic incentives to curtail teachers' political

activities. The UGC needs to fix higher wages for the teachers, and the allocation of sufficient funds for research. Private universities are a good example here. They pay a higher salary and get better service from their faculty members.

Let's think about student politics at the public universities. Similar to the teachers, a handful of students are involved with partisan politics. Unlike the teachers' bodies, student bodies are directly linked with the political parties. Political parties such as the BNP, AL and Jamaat control their student wings with muscle and money.

A handful of students do politics because of ideological reasons. Many do so because the musclemen of various political parties force them to do so. A few do it to command influence and enjoy illegal political and economic benefits with the help of musclemen.

To get rid of the present form of student politics from the campuses, the law enforcement agencies and UGC need to act in tandem. The law enforcement agencies need to take care of the musclemen. And the UGC needs to make a regulation banning political parties from having student wings in the campuses.

Then the campuses will be free from strikes, rallies and processions in support of any leader or political party. In no other country do political parties have student wings on the campuses, and students working as the pawns of political parties.

If the goal of the caretaker government and UGC is to improve the academic atmosphere at the public universities, they should mull over the above proposals.

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OMAR MOHAMED

TAKING advantage of the current political regime, civil society leaders are offering various suggestions to the government for initiating numerous institutional reform packages. Radical reforms of the Election Commission and the judicial system were long-time demands of the civil society leaders.

The current interim government has fulfilled these agendas. Now, along with many other proposals, demands are growing in different quarters for reformation of the Public Service Commission and banning of politics in public universities. Recently, the law advisor expressed his opinion about the political activities of the students and teachers in public universities. He also mentioned that, for the greater benefit of the nation, we should move forward to ban both student's and teacher's politics in the campus.

After such statements by the law advisor, we see mixed reactions from different quarters, including students, teachers, politicians, intellectuals, civil society leaders, and cultural activists.

Although the majority is in favour of banning politics in the campus, some commentators see it cau-

tiously and offer critical analysis of student politics in the history of Bangladesh. What follows is a reaction to such a cautious comment published in The Daily Star on April 6.

Some of the commentators label the initiative as "de-politicization of the university," and suggest that we need to rethink the issue of student politics by making a difference between "political mobilization for a cause" and "political mobilization for self-interest and power."

Any close observer of student politics in the campuses of various public universities will agree that we cannot categorize student politics like that. There is no political mobilization for a "cause" by students. It is true that we should not ignore the contribution of student politics to the history of Bangladesh.

Why do students engage themselves in political mobilization for any cause? Is it necessary? I am not in favour of the opinion that students should engage in public issues in the campuses of the public universities.

Times have changed. Local, regional, national and global issues have also changed. In the changing context, we should not equate the pre-liberation era with 2007. Of course, students will be aware of the political issues. But such awareness should not lead to practice in univer-



The rise in extremism (part II)

Many Indonesians do not fully subscribe to Arabization and view the rise of a fundamentalist form of Islam as a threat to their way of life and societal harmony. Not surprisingly one sees the emergence of non-political Islamic groups, the so-called liberals and moderates, competing for influence among the elite and the students.

BALADAS GHOSHAL

IN Malaysia and Indonesia traditional greetings used to be "selamat pagi," or "good morning." More and more, the greeting has been replaced by the Arabic "assalam aleikum." A few years ago, former president and influential cleric Abdurrahman Wahid suggested that Indonesians revert to customary greetings, and conservative Islamic leaders in Indonesia were outraged. This could be the tip of the iceberg for profound changes taking place in Islamic Southeast Asia and may have implications for other states throughout the region.

Fueling the new Islamic identity is the steady process of transformation as ideas, practices and finances flow from the Arab world. The transformation brings about conflicts -- not only within Islam as to its correct interpretation and desirable way of life, but also among Muslims and

others in otherwise tolerant and harmonious plural societies like Malaysia and Indonesia, where Islam once arrived, mostly peacefully, through trade.

This process of homogenization, or "Arabization" of Islam, emphasizes rituals and code of conduct more than substance. It stems from "the Wahhabi creed," a rigid branch of Islam exported from and subsidized by the government of Saudi Arabia.

Wahhabism is distinct in its destructive nature when religion is used by the state for political ends. Unlike other traditions that accommodate dissenting views, the Wahhabis claim to possess an undebatable vision of "true Islam."

Transformation of Islam in Southeast Asia is influenced by the globalization of political Islam. The internet has helped encourage uniformity of opinion in the Islamic world.

The inroads of the Arab Wahhabi and Salafi variant of Islam into

Southeast Asia and elsewhere have led to a growing assertiveness on the part of the fundamentalists. For them, to know the Koran is to know everything worth knowing. There is only one God, one book, one way of salvation, and the holy tenets cannot be questioned.

Such a vision of Islam leads believers to think of the religion as an absolute truth, that all other religions are false and that there can be no meeting ground between a Muslim and a non-Muslim. Dialogue, debate or reasoning is not permissible under such a medieval version of Islam.

The most appealing feature of Islam before the process of Arabization was its ability to blend with local traditions and practices, which gave it a syncretic and inclusive character, allowing tolerance and respect for other religions. Blending of indigenous beliefs and customs with Islamic faith allowed for the evolution of folk theater, like the "wayang" shadow plays, draw-

ing stories from the Hindu epics, turning them into indigenous cultural traditions.

Over the past three decades, however, the nature of Islam changed dramatically in Malaysia and to a certain extent in Indonesia. Wayang was banned in the Kelantan state of Malaysia for being "unIslamic." In Indonesia, the wayang is still a part of the Javanese culture despite pressures from the more conservative Muslims.

Indonesia's very diversity -- in terms of ethnicity, culture and religious beliefs together with a fractious Islam -- has allowed the country to practice secularism amid pressures from more fundamentalist groups to adopt sharia, or Islamic law.

But inter-faith societal relationships in Indonesia society are slowly changing. Not long ago, Indonesians of different faiths commonly participated in one another's religious ceremonies. Muslim clerics reportedly use "fatwas" against such inter-religious social mixing, even in offices.

An Indonesian Christian businessman narrated his bitter shock to me when, in mid-1990s, his Muslim employees suddenly broke with tradition and refused to appear with

colleagues in a photograph for the company's New Year greeting card.

While in Malaysia one cannot marry a Muslim without conversion to Islam, such marriages were once common in Indonesia. Today, those marriages incur the wrath of the conservative Muslim groups.

The first major challenge to the Indonesian style of Islam came in the 18th century, in the form of a movement to purify Islam by removing aberrations that had crept into the faith through local customs.

A manifestation of this clash within Islam could be found in the 20th century Indonesia, in the division between the two Islamic political organizations, Masyumi and Nahdlatul Ulama, the former as the advocate of purifying Islam and the latter supporting the blending of Islam with local traditions.

When education was liberalized in the 1960s, more Indonesians studied abroad. Religious students went to the Middle East, where many studied Wahhabi and Salafi doctrines. Pakistani preachers arrived, offering strident Wahhabi interpretations of faith.

Traditional locally trained "ulema," religious leaders, were in large part displaced or undermined by foreigners. The spread of

madrassas, the conservative religious boarding schools funded by Middle Eastern money, throughout Southeast Asia has since confirmed the arrival of radical Islam. Even some "pondoks," or religious boarding schools in Indonesia, have also come under the influence of more extremist clerics.

Secular dictatorship is also culpable. Other than the slow process of Arabization of Islam in Indonesia, over-representation of Christians in public positions during the Soeharto administration also contributed to the Muslim-Christian divide in today's Indonesia.

In his attempt to clip the political wings of Islam, then Indonesian President Soeharto reduced space for democratic expression. Thus, mosques became the center for the expression of Islamic feelings and activities. As Muslims became more exclusivist and fundamentalist, the impact spread to other religious groups. After the Bali bombing, the region experienced a rise in Hindu rituals and evangelical Christian appeals.

In recent years, a demand that Indonesian Muslims follow sharia law has resurfaced, despite having been dismissed by the country's founding fathers at independence in

1945. In 2003, seven districts had faith-based laws in place including bans on alcohol or women going out alone at night.

Today, 53 districts, or more than 10 percent of all Indonesian regencies, live under some form of Islamic-inspired law. More places are expected to implement similar initiatives by 2010.

But the diversity of Indonesian society did not allow the spread of a unified version of Islam, which could influence every Indonesian. Only a tiny percentage of Indonesian Islamists espouse violence, but that has been enough to make the last seven years the bloodiest in Indonesian history since the pogroms of the 1960s.

At times of perceived threat, open-minded moderates and exclusivist fanatics close ranks and form united fronts of considerable clout, pursuing objectives that are not necessarily constructive.

The rumor that Christian organizations were sending guns to the Moluccas to boost the Christian force in the raging conflict a few years ago swiftly mobilized the Islamic jihad and, people say, the moderate Muslims in the armed forces, too. Across Java, Christians complain of church burnings and

intimidation by homegrown local militias. In Sulawesi three teenage school girls were beheaded as a warning to the Christian community.

Many Indonesians do not fully subscribe to Arabization and view the rise of a fundamentalist form of Islam as a threat to their way of life and societal harmony. Not surprisingly one sees the emergence of non-political Islamic groups, the so-called liberals and moderates, competing for influence among the elite and the students.

While the battle for the hearts and minds are welcome in a vibrant society, the growing influence of Islam and the attendant communalization of politics have planted seeds of social turmoil that threatens Indonesia's stability and affect the neighbors of Southeast Asia's largest country.

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