

DU, RU teachers held

An unnecessary front is being opened

THE manner in which the five university teachers were picked up from their residences, for the purpose of questioning, without their family members or the university authorities having any information on their whereabouts for nearly 38 hours, violates the fundamental rights guaranteed by our constitution. Emergency cannot be a ground to mistreat our university teachers. Yesterday the two DU teachers were taken on remand under Emergency Power Rules.

Insofar as the original incident at the university gymnasium is concerned, the matter was handled in a very wise and mature manner, which we had commended the armed forces for in our editorial the following day. The next day's agitation by students and others witnessed senseless violence, which received wide-spread condemnation including in our editorial the day after.

But subsequently, the treatment meted out to the students near Aziz Supermarket and various parts of Dhaka University, teachers' quarters, and random beatings in various parts of the city, none of which behooves the conduct of the law enforcers, especially the armed forces. Finally, lodging of cases against thousands of nameless people (anywhere between 30 to 48,000) can only be seen as a device to harass innocent people. If good sense prevails, government will review this measure. All these are creating an atmosphere of fear and alienation and widening the gulf between the caretaker government and its backers, and us. This is the last thing that the army or the people want.

Instead of retribution and arrests we suggest that dialogue be opened between the teachers and students on one hand and the caretaker government on the other. A durable solution can come from understanding, which is only possible through dialogue. Dhaka University is not a mere institution, it is the symbol of pride as the birth place of all democratic movements in the country, ever since 1947. Don't treat this venerable institution lightly. The sooner a dialogue is initiated the better.

Weaving industry in deep trouble

Concrete steps needed to save their trade

FOR a trade traditionally reputed for its products, these are not good times. We speak of the difficulties that weavers have been going through over the last several years. As a report in yesterday's issue of this newspaper makes it clear, as many as 50,000 handlooms have been forced into inactivity in Tangail owing to the economic problems that weavers face. Those problems centre around the abnormally high prices of the materials they need to produce their goods. Essentially, it has been high cost yarn and dye that have forced many weavers in Tangail out of their trade.

In such places as Pabna and Sirajganj, the weaving industry has been badly affected by the floods, to a point where 100,000 weavers are now in grave difficulties as they have incurred losses to the tune of Tk. 62 crore. An immediate response from the authorities is therefore of paramount importance. In a condition where traditional trade is in many areas dying out or is being pushed out altogether (and here we note the predicament the jute sector finds itself in), it becomes critically important that the heritage yet in place be preserved. Some meaningful steps such as a rehabilitation of weavers who cannot reasonably go back to their profession must be taken. Then comes the matter of those weavers badly affected by the floods. Their hardship can be alleviated to some extent through arranging bank loans on easy terms for them. Let the modalities for such rehabilitation and loans be worked out by the authorities. Additionally, the allegations made about the existence of a syndicate responsible for the rise in prices of weaving-related material must be thoroughly investigated and the culprits brought to book. Again, the argument of the aggrieved weavers have made in favour of import of yarn and dye makes sense as such a step will give them a chance to go back to their trade through not having to depend on local syndicates for the materials in question.

The demise of an industry, especially one that has played a vital role in the lives of those associated with it and with their customers, is the worst that can happen in an economy. Let the weaving industry in Tangail, Pabna, Sirajganj and elsewhere wither away, let concrete action be taken to reverse the situation.

Death blow for jute



A.N.M. NURUL HAQUE

THE jute sector, which was the backbone of Bangladesh's economy over the past many decades, is now fighting a losing battle for survival. Lack of proper planning, mismanagement, and mindless plundering were largely responsible for the dimming gloss of the golden fiber that was once the largest foreign currency earner of the country.

Though the country's climate is very much suitable for growing jute, the environment-friendly natural fiber, the farmers are losing interest in growing it. Farmers who still grow jute cultivate it only on those lands that are not suitable for growing any other crop during that season. The indiscriminate closure of jute mills has a snowballing effect on jute cultivation.

The government nationalised the jute industries along with other industrial units, and the Bangladesh Jute Mills Corporation (BJMC) started its journey in 1972 with 77 jute mills set

BY THE NUMBERS

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up in the pre-liberation period. Following the sweeping nationalisation, the non-Bangladeshi owners, technical experts, and skilled manpower left the country. As a result, a serious vacuum was created in the jute mills.

On the other hand, the government appointed some inefficient persons with dubious character to run these jute mills. Eventually, the government was compelled to denationalise 35 jute mills between 1982 and 1985. Another 24 state-run jute mills faced closure at different times due to various factors, including mismanagement and rampant corruption. In fact, that was the beginning of the end of the jute era.

The World Bank (WB) is also blamed for the miserable state of our jute sector. The WB formulated the Jute Sector Reform Programme in 1991, and promised to provide \$250 million to the government to implement it. The main objective of the reform was to privatise all the nationalised jute mills and find ways to make country's jute sector viable.

But the WB provided only \$50 million, the first tranche of the loan, and stopped payment of the remaining \$200 million on the plea of slow action in the privatisation process. Such unfair treatment by the WB only made the ailing jute sector more vulnerable.

The government also formulated a number of policies to revitalise the jute sector, but all were in vain. The policies include signing of an agreement with the WB, titled Jute Sector Adjustment Credit (JSAC), in 1994. The objectives of the JSAC were revitalising the jute sector through privatization, restructuring debt, decreasing the number of labourers and looms, and upgrading technologies. The WB has so far provided Tk 1,500 crore to the government in loan under the JSAC. But the JSAC could not revive the jute sector.

There exists a strong perception that the WB put pressure on the government to shut-down Adamjee jute mills, and is now promoting India's jute industries by downsizing our jute sector. India set up four new jute mills

after the closure of Adamjee, and another three under-construction mills will go into operation soon, raising the total number to 92.

A big jute park on 152 acres of land near Kolkata is also going to be set up soon to cope with the growing demand for jute products in the global markets. India's Jute Compulsory Use Act facilitates the sales of jute bags in their local market by imposing restrictions on the use of all other packaging materials for grains.

It was the utter misfortune of the nation to watch woefully the closure of world's largest jute mill, which was the pride of the country, on July 1, 2002. The smooth operation of Adamjee jute mills during the post-liberation period was hampered largely due to political interference, mismanagement, and corruption. The people in power utilized the unit for their own purposes, without taking any initiative for saving the country's most vital industrial unit.

Bangladesh had dominated the global trade in jute for many years in the past, with 85 percent share in raw jute export and 65 percent share in

jute goods export. The total quantity of hessian, sacking, and CBC produced in 1972-73 was over 450,000 tons, which grew to about 563,000 tons in 1982-83. But the production of these jute goods dwindled to about 242,000 tons in 2005-06 due to lack of proactive policy support, sheer negligence, and indiscriminate closure of jute mills.

Bangladesh is now fast losing its foreign jute markets to India. The hasty decision to shut-down four jute mills in Khulna just on the ground of incurring losses was detrimental to the overall jute sector. Bangladesh lost a large volume of business in Ghana, Syria, Iran, and Sudan, as the buyers from these countries were apprehensive because of the closure of jute mills and were doubtful about delivery of the goods on time. These buyers have now moved to India.

A comparison of our jute exports with India's reveals that Bangladesh exported 14 lakh tons of jute goods in 1990, while India's share was only six tons, against 30 lakh tons of global demand. But the situation has been totally reversed now. The global demand for jute and jute goods has risen to 50 lakh tons, and India has seized the major markets. Bangladesh has failed to cope with the growing demand for jute goods in the world market with only 22 jute mills, as out of 82 mills 60 have already been closed.

The UN has declared 2009 as the International Natural Fiber Year. Bangladesh must not miss this

golden opportunity to tap the full industrial potential of jute, which is widely known as a versatile and ecologically safe natural fiber.

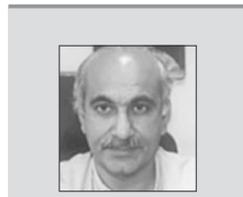
A world-wide movement is currently on to find a substitute for wood as raw material for paper. Paper pulp can be produced from jute, a system which was evolved through successful completion of a project called Biotechnical Application of Enzymes. Paper pulp made of natural fiber like jute was sure to draw the attention of all in today's environment-conscious world. Unfortunately, there was no further development of the project.

Bangladesh's jute industry, the biggest producer and exporter of jute goods in the global market, is now regarded as a "sunset industry." Ironically, the jute sector in India has flourished tremendously over the past few years, while it declined alarmingly in Bangladesh. Really, our jute sector is now at its last gasp, and all because of wrong policies, mismanagement, and rampant corruption.

The sun has not yet set fully. In our view, there still are possibilities for bringing back the lost glory of our golden fiber. All we need is the right policy, and its uncorrupted enforcement. Substantial rethinking by the caretaker government is the need of the hour for rejuvenation of our jute sector, without going for indiscriminate closure of jute mills.

A.N.M. Nurul Haque is a columnist for The Daily Star.

Chicken soup



M. J. AKBAR

FRUSTRATION is unprofessional in a government servant. It is a gesture of personal peeve, contrary to the ethos of governance, which must at all times be an expression of collective will. There are some unusual occasions that become even more demanding, as in the case of the Indo-US nuclear deal, when a decision must be raised above the limitations of executive authority and sifted through a national consensus, for it commits the nation to a course of action stretching ahead through four or five decades.

Ronen Sen, India's ambassador to the United States, has sullied a long and distinguished career by an uncharacteristic outburst that reeks of personal frustration. Whether he will enter the history books remains to be seen. But I fear that his description of the deal's critics as "headless chicken" will enter that vast vault in which the foreign ministry's memory bank is stored.

Sen did little for his reputation by compounding his mistake with a clumsy lie when he "clarified" that he was referring to the media rather

than MPs. Most of the media has, in fact, been supportive of his deal, and, in Sen parlance, the greater proportion of journalists thereby fall into the category of chicken with heads. In any case, journalists cannot stop such a deal. Members of Parliament can.

An interview, particularly one which has the stamp of a command performance, often reveals far more than it sets out to convey. The discerning try and read between the lines. But it is also useful to read behind the lines, into the mind of the nabob giving the interview. Stress and vehemence, for instance, are clues to motive, or a hint towards the next step being taken. The Ronen Sen interview should be read carefully for reasons other than the use of an unhappy phrase.

There is, by now, a familiar pattern in pro-deal arguments that breaks down with a little analysis of inbuilt contradictions. I shall give only one example. Sen asserts that every concern about guaranteed nuclear fuel supplies has been met. He then goes on to stress that the Hyde Act, signed into American law by President George Bush, will govern American decisions. (We have

BYLINE

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accepted this qualification in the 123 Agreement.) The Hyde Act clearly specifies that fuel supplies will be conditional upon clearance from the American Congress, which will require a certification of good behaviour by India across a range of issues.

It is possible that the government might float another line (already put into limited circulation) during the debates in Parliament: that a bilateral treaty takes precedence over American domestic law. This is self-deception, to use the kindest phrase. If this is true, why was the law needed in the first place? The government of India has repeatedly characterised Hyde as the "enabling legislation" on the deal, which of course it is. After the 123 Agreement was signed on July 23, Nicholas Burns, undersecretary of state and the chief American negotiator, said, on record, that "we kept reminding the Indian side, and they were good enough to negotiate on this basis, that anything we did had to fall within, and respect, the legal guidelines that Congress had set forth." Those legal guidelines are what is known as the Hyde Act.

Negotiators on both sides are agreed, and have said so publicly,

that the agreement must live within the parameters set by Hyde. Delhi has said that no provision of the Hyde Act has been breached in the agreement. How many more times do we need to hear such plain language in order to understand the import?

Sen also rules out any renegotiation of Hyde. This "cannot even be considered." If nothing can be altered, then it makes a nonsense of the government's current argument that the next stage of discussions, in Vienna with the IAEA and later with the Nuclear Suppliers Group, should be allowed to proceed while the Left's concerns are addressed. The Vienna talks are, in fact, an operationalisation of the 123 Agreement, since they are a consequence of its provisions. The outcome of these talks will be amicable, since that is pre-arranged.

Perhaps the most revealing part of this interview, done by Aziz Haniffa, is the section in which Sen's name does not figure.

The interview is divided into two parts. In the first, Sen is quoted directly. Then, mysteriously, the quotes are attributed to "senior diplomatic observers," named once in the plural and once in the singular.

These "senior diplomatic observers" are happy to be quoted, but very nervous about being identified. Why? Will they be imprisoned in Guantanamo because they are saying that no future government can abrogate this deal? Why were their quotes added to a Ronen Sen interview? Would it be wrong to surmise that these quotes came from Sen as well, but he requested that his name be kept out since he was being critical of a particular political party and calling its position a "childish tantrum"?

This unnamed but very senior diplomatic "observer" named the BJP, but he should have been even more wary of the communists. It is their opposition that has stopped the nuclear deal. The government made a serious miscalculation in its reading of the Left. Just because the CPI(M) supported a Congress-led government three years ago, it does not mean that the CPI(M) had become a wing of the Congress. The CPI(M) remains an ideological party, and there is a limit that it cannot cross without compromising its raison d'être. The Left's concern extends to the "strategic partnership" that is being developed by this government with the United States.

What is interesting is the belligerence with which the "senior diplomatic observers" condemned any thought of the deal being abrogated by a successor government.

This fits in with the latest strategy being pursued in some circles of the Delhi government.

The thinking is that Dr Manmohan Singh should go ahead and sign the deal, even though he has lost the

support of the Left on this issue. The alliance with the Left is dead for all political purposes, so why become hostage to its demands? However, there are still two stages of negotiations left before the deal can be inked. They can be hurried through with American assistance, but it will still need time, perhaps eight weeks or so. Till then, the Left needs to be placated, or hoodwinked, with the argument that these interim discussions do not amount to an operationalisation of the deal. The Left has set the condition that it will withdraw support only when the deal becomes operational. The deal will become operational, it will be argued, with various degrees of ingenuity, only when the prime minister of India signs a document, either with Bush or the American secretary of state Condoleezza Rice.

The worst that the Left can do at that stage is withdraw support, but the Congress will be ready to go to the country on the strength of this "achievement." The prime minister is convinced that he will obtain nationwide support for the partnership with America, and that he can lead his redesigned coalition back to power after an early general election. Further, he will not be hampered by leftist baggage in the future. In any case, since no future government can renegotiate what has been signed, the deal will survive even if the present government does not.

India was shining for the last government. America is shining for this one.

M.J. Akbar is Chief Editor of the Asian Age.

US presidential candidates and War on Terror



KAZI ANWARUL MASUD

WHEN the Westphalian concept of sovereignty was conceived, and the UN Charter which guaranteed territorial integrity of member nations was framed, the historical contexts were different from the threats posed now from failing states and non-state actors. While the Treaty of Westphalia heralded the end of the Thirty Years' War (1618-48) among European Princely states, and of the anarchic and non-regulatory inter-state affairs existing in Europe at that time, the UN Charter was framed with the hope that, thenceforth, inter-state wars would be banished forever.

The Organization of African Unity formed in 1963 held respect for borders as sacrosanct. The 1975 Helsinki Final Act expressed the view that "frontiers can only be changed in accordance with

GOING DEEPER

The Democratic party's presidential nomination seeker Barack Obama's controversial remark about military assault on Al-Qaeda camps in Pakistan, if necessary without the approval of the Pakistani authorities, also repeated by his rivals Mitt Romney of Massachusetts and former New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, appears to be a reiteration of the Bush doctrine of preemption.

international law, by peaceful means and by agreement." The basis of the Dayton Agreement between Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, and Serbia was full respect to sovereign equality of the contracting parties. But the European Union, though a "union of sovereign states," has become an organization in which member states have limited their sovereign rights in certain areas.

The reason the international community has remained so sensitive to the sanctity of sovereignty is that if secession is allowed unchecked then an anarchic situation would prevail in the world, threatening international peace and security. The Bangladesh liberation war received international legitimacy because it was not regarded as secession, like Biafra's attempt to secede from Nigeria despite wide-spread death and destruction that the Biafran war caused. The

Bangladesh case was accepted as the right of self-determination of all the people as a fundamental human right, and also because of the genocide committed by the Pakistan army in then East Pakistan. In the case of Biafra, the African States' orthodoxy that only former colonies could gain independence and form states stood in the way of the wish of the people of Biafra to be independent of Nigeria.

The world, however, has changed from the values of freedom propagated by the US during the cold war to oppose the communist menace that the Western world feared would be embraced by the developing countries. The end of the cold war and the demise of the Soviet Union, and consequent spread of democracy in the former Soviet colonies, described as the third wave of democratic promotion by Samuel Huntington, interpreted by some analysts as inevitable

because they felt that the erstwhile Soviet colonies were spiritually geared towards democracy that was rooted in their culture and that authoritarianism was foreign to them (one should not forget Soviet invasions of Hungary and Czechoslovakia), the drive by the West for defense of values of liberal democracy has now been enshrined in their foreign and defense policies.

The tragedies of Rwanda, Srebrenica, and Darfur, as in many other African countries, have given a push to the doctrine of the responsibility to protect. Paul Taylor (Sovereignty at the Millennium) has expounded the doctrine as the obligation by the sovereign states to the international community of their accountability for the license of sovereignty given to them. The states must be prepared to demonstrate to the satisfaction of the international community continued adherence to the rule of law, respect

to human rights (in particular to those of the minority community), and democratic practices. The same doctrine has been enunciated by Gareth Evans, co-chair of the International Commission on Intervention, and Tony Blair in his doctrine of International Community that he advocated to explain the Nato bombing of Serbia.

The UN World Summit of 2005 embraced for the first time the doctrine of the responsibility to protect, thus compressing the concept of unimpeachable sovereignty that the world had been used to since the UN Charter came into being. The problem arises with a misadventure like the invasion of Iraq, firstly on the premise of Saddam Hussein's readiness to strike the West with weapons of mass destruction and his links with Al-Qaeda, that proved to be false, and later to change Saddam Hussein's brutal regime and gift the Iraqis with democracy, which effectively resulted in a fractured Iraq immersed in internecine and sectarian strife, leading the country to a possible disintegration into three parts.

The Iraqi election of 2005 was directed more at establishing Shia supremacy over the Sunnis than attempting to establish democratic rights for an essentially tribal society owing primordial allegiance to tribal traditions. The lessons learnt from the Iraqi episode, and the reluctance

of countries of the broader Middle East to embrace pluralism, give merit to Francis Fukuyama's thesis that democracy constituting the "end point of man kind's ideological evolution" needs a certain level of economic development for sustainability. India, the largest democracy in the world, has somehow proved to be an exception to the conditions generally believed to be necessary for sustaining democracy.

The American concern, indeed the global concern of the 21st century, is to confront terrorism in all its forms. The locus of this evil, generally identified as rooted in Islamic extremism, is not only to be found in the West but in the developing countries of the East as well, which were no less victims of the Islamic extremists. These deviants from Islam believe many Muslim countries to be equally guilty of transgressing the limit of what they believe to be the "purist" form of Islam, like the West that has degenerated into a permissive society, thereby contaminating Muslim societies. But then, it would be naïve to ignore that the stringent drive by the Bush administration to rid the world of "all evils" through hard power has resulted in the anti-US feeling that has become a global epidemic.

This year's Pew Research Center

Global attitude survey of 45,000 people in 47 countries has shown pervasive disapproval of US foreign policy, widespread opposition to President Bush, and worsening anti-Americanism in the last five years. The uncaring attitude of the present US leaders about the global issues beyond security has resulted in anti-Americanism not only in the Islamic countries but also in Europe, Canada (83% feel that America ignores their interest), Japan and South Korea. Though seen through a different prism in 1842, Charles Dickens found Americans "rude, addicted to sharp business practices, hypocritical about liberty in the light of their treatment of blacks, and careless about where they spit tobacco."

The Democratic party's presidential nomination seeker Barack Obama's controversial remark about military assault on Al-Qaeda camps in Pakistan, if necessary without the approval of the Pakistani authorities, also repeated by his rivals Mitt Romney of Massachusetts and former New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, appears to be a reiteration of the Bush doctrine of preemption, or intended application of Professor Michael Byers' theory of exceptional illegality that would permit states to violate international law in truly exceptional situations where a

serious threat exists and the UNSC remains frozen.

It has been argued that under the regime of customary international law, developed long before the UN Charter was framed, it was generally agreed that preemptive force in self-defense was acceptable as long as the state exercising the right of preemption could demonstrate its necessity, and the use of force was proportionate to the threat. To prevent a threat to international peace and security from maturing, the narrow view of inviolability of national frontiers should be ignored, preferably with the sanction of the UNSC or, if needed, without it. Admittedly small and weak developing countries with failing governance would be up in arms against any such intrusion. But in cases where diplomatic and economic engagements fail to cure the anarchy, with spill-over effects in neighbouring countries (e.g. Darfur and DR Congo), then the global hegemonies may, in the teeth of opposition of liberal democrats, have no option but to use hard power.

Kazi Anwarul Masud is a former Secretary and Ambassador.