

Good HSC result

Set up vocational institutes to build technical manpower

It is heartening to note the improvement in the performance of the HSC candidates every year. Alongside the students, to whom all the plaudits and congratulations are in order, the teachers and their parents must also rejoice in the performance of their wards. It is value addition to our brain pool that we feel happy about.

Over the past several years the good thing has been the rise in the pass percentage as well in the number of GPA-5 achievers. However, the matter of concern is not only the number of unsuccessful candidates but the hard reality that a very large number of the successful candidates would not be able to find admission in public universities. There are not enough seats as of now in places of higher education. And what we fail to understand is government's lack of efforts to add to the number of seats in the public universities. And private university education being expensive, only a few lucky ones can buy it.

We feel it is time that the state made a reality check and decided whether it can continue to ignore the plight of the large number of students that pass out of the colleges every year, who are left in the lurch with a future that is less than certain. It is imperative for the government to go for establishing more vocational training schools to provide training on technical subjects including IT and software programming so that they can find easy employment both at home and abroad. There is also a need for large number of nurses and paramedics in our country, not to speak of a heavy demand for them abroad, more so with the establishment of a large number of private medical hospitals and clinics. More of nursing and medical diploma colleges should be established and more girls should be encouraged to join the nursing profession.

We cannot but be also concerned at the high percentage, as much as 40 on the average, of failure in the HSC exam. This is far too high, and while the government has decided to take appropriate action against those colleges where the number of successful candidates is nil, we must have zero tolerance for failures in other institutions too. This wastage must be stemmed.

Musharraf's plans for Nawaz Sharif

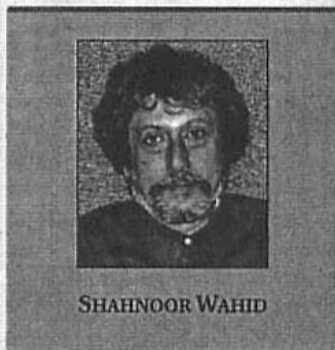
Pak president must not embarrass himself again

GENERAL Pervez Musharraf clearly refuses to see the writing on the wall. Despite the battering he has been getting in recent months, especially over his decision in March to sack Pakistan's chief justice, he remains unwilling to acknowledge his role in the making of his troubles. The fact that Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry was reinstated by the Supreme Court was a sign of the new difficulties the president would soon face. And they came soon enough. The judiciary swiftly released an arch Musharraf foe, Javed Hashmi, from what could have been a long spell in jail had the military ruler had his way. And then the court went for another landmark decision, this time to rule that exiled former prime minister Nawaz Sharif could return to Pakistan. Mr. Sharif quickly made it known that he planned to fly back home at the earliest.

Now President Musharraf has caused new consternation all around. He has publicly announced his intention not to allow Nawaz Sharif and his brother Shahbaz Sharif to land in Pakistan. But what if they do turn up? The general has a simple, almost outrageous answer to such a question. He says in that case they will either be placed under arrest or sent back into exile in Saudi Arabia. The Saudi Arabia factor appears to be working with Musharraf since it is his contention that the former prime minister had made a deal with him to stay out of Pakistan and in Saudi Arabia for ten years. According to Musharraf, therefore, by coming back home Sharif will be reneging on the deal. It is this attitude of the president that is worrying. He is keen on emphasising a deal that Sharif obviously made under duress, at a time when the latter had already been ousted in a coup. But he is oblivious to the thought that through taking such a position he is holding the Supreme Court in contempt. If he does try to prevent the Sharif brothers from returning home, it is quite likely that the judiciary will move again, this time to discipline him. It has already said that the deposed prime minister should not be prevented from returning to Pakistan.

President Musharraf must not place himself in an odd situation once again. In plain and simple terms, he should realise that a Supreme Court ruling holds considerably more value than an 'undertaking' by Sharif to stay in Saudi Arabia for ten years.

Must we go back to square one?



SHAHNOOR WAHID

No, we cannot afford to go back to square one. For that matter, we cannot even go back to square five or square three! In fact, we cannot backtrack under any circumstances, because the stakes are too high.

It's a high-stake game and the opponents are sly and ruthless, and apparently they have some powerful cards up their sleeve. So, we have no option left but to outwit the opponents and win the game. We have to go forward on the perilous journey, like Odysseus, to reach the shore of Ithaca and end the mission.

It is common knowledge now that there are forces out there trying their best to push us back to square one, back to pre-1/11, so that they may reinstate their rule of misrule throughout the country, once again. They want disorder to reign supreme because they

thrive in a disorderly society. They suffocate in a society that is trying to bring order back in life.

Now, who are these people who do not want order, transparency, discipline, and stability in society?

They are the black marketers, gold smugglers, diesel smugglers, electricity thieves, rice hoarders, land grabbers, toll collectors, lake grabbers, forest grabbers, and relief thieves who have been crowding the corridors of state power for decades. And this time they have gotten together to play their own kind of game, waiting for an opportunity to strike back at everything that stands for goodness with all their might.

So, last week, they thought they had one such opportunity knocking on the door early in the morning. They watched in dismay the peaceful settlement of the altercation between students and army

personnel at the Dhaka University playground.

They saw the opportunity vanishing in thin air. They were not ready to let it go to waste. It was an opportunity they had been waiting for. So, they got together in the dark depth of the night to conspire and plot to destabilise the government.

They quickly got into action, cooked up an "upsurge," and the nation witnessed wanton breaking of car windshields and windowpanes of office buildings. It was vandalism of the worst kind. They wanted to make it look like a student protest, but people saw only a few stray students and hundreds of hoodlums going berserk on the streets. As a result, people withdrew their support and sympathy and openly condemned the actions.

Student politics and student leaders

The recent student protest on

various campuses brought forth the role of some of the student leaders who allegedly have worked from behind to fan the fire on behalf of the political parties for their individual and narrow political gain. The very mention of the term "student leaders" continues to intrigue us.

Who are these people? What actually do they do on the campuses across the country? Do they help the general students in improving their education standard? Do they bargain with the authorities to take examinations in time, take classes regularly, and assess performance of students impartially? Do they take steps to improve the infrastructure, laboratory facilities, hostel facilities, research facilities, and teaching/learning standard of the institution?

They do nothing of the above.

SENSE & INSENSIBILITY

We had started with the warning of dark forces working together to push the country back to square one. The government has to be fully awake about the conspirators and take immediate actions against them. The reform agenda has to be fulfilled. Political arena must be cleansed of thugs and murderers. Democracy does not mean reinstating demons. The sacred precinct of our parliament must not be defiled once again by Lultooos, Faltoos and Bilttoos.



We have information that they are the licensed gangs of toll collectors who send their cadres to collect weekly tolls from shop owners and contractors. They come with two trousers and two shirts from their villages and eat free breakfast, lunch, and dinner in student halls. Within three years on the campus, they drive tinted Pajeros and live in their own flats in Gulshan or Banani. Aladdin's lamp? No, blessing of madam or apa.

The present lot of student leaders is quick to cash in on the reputation of the past leaders, who had shown great valour in our fight against the Pakistani rulers. But this has to be added here that many of those past 'heroes,' at a

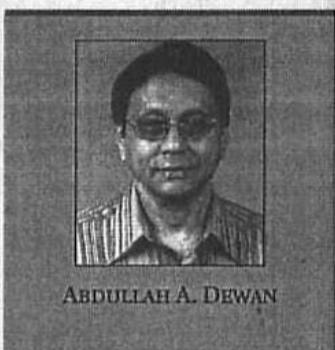
later time, forgot all about their ideology. It's sad, people do not consider them heroes anymore.

Square one...

We had started with the warning of dark forces working together to push the country back to square one. The government has to be fully awake about the conspirators and take immediate actions against them. The reform agenda has to be fulfilled. Political arena must be cleansed of thugs and murderers. Democracy does not mean reinstating demons. The sacred precinct of our parliament must not be defiled once again by Lultooos, Faltoos and Bilttoos.

Shahnoor Wahid is Senior Assistant Editor of The Daily Star.

Challenges to student community



ABDULLAH A. DEWAN

It reads like something from a bad Hollywood script. At a time when our people have been brought to the brink of hysteria by the persistent price spiral and the calamities wrought by the floods (including snake bites, flood-related diseases, and a dangerous shortage of potable water), the nation's morale is dealt yet another severe blow in the form of a country-wide students' unrest culminating in a sine die closure of academic institutions.

Everyone wonders how and why an uneventful personal tussle between a peeved army man and an aggrieved student, both watching a campus football match, could turn into street riots with the police, resulting in burning of public and private properties reminiscent of the acrimonious pre-1/11 lawless politics.

One would naturally ask: Is the incident simply a temper tantrum, or is it a pretext machinated by some estranged pressure groups to trigger a larger movement against the government?

What was most unfortunate, though, was the attitude of the university faculty who openly supported the students' unruly protests instead of calming and

guiding them for realisation of their legitimate demands for the pulling out of the army and the police from campus grounds.

It's inexplicable why the university community would risk whatever reforms and good governance have been achieved since 1/11.

The students' and teachers' demand quickly expanded from removal of the army, and police from the campus to lifting of the state of emergency (SOE).

And why does the immediate lifting of the SOE constitute one of their demands? So far, SOE has infringed very little, if at all, on the freedom of the media, and not at all on academic freedom and intellectual discourses in college and university campuses, except outlawing hartals, lock-outs and abroads.

The countrywide students' unrest, joined by a select group of the faculty and roadside onlookers, instead of shortening the tenure of the SOE would now justify prolonging it until the 2008 election and the installation of an elected government.

The eruption may have also hurt the prospects for lifting of the moratorium on indoor politics -- a setback for both intra-party reforms and the proposed dis-

courses between the EC and the political parties surrounding the roadmap to the general election.

There is no denying that stationing of the army in the campus gymnasium caused inconvenience to students' athletic activities. A constant presence of the army on campus grounds is, in itself, an irksome spectacle, brewing pent-up tensions waiting to flare-up on any pretext and play.

The university administration shouldn't have dithered in persuading the authorities to withdraw the army camp from the campus grounds when it was first installed.

The demand for withdrawal of the army and the police from campus grounds is fully justified, whilst the brawl for lifting the SOE, and rioting on the streets, obviously seemed like playing into the hands of the politicians working to disrupt electoral reforms.

Now that the army has vacated the campus, the students should reassess their role in light of their academic objectives, dedication to campus discipline, and their concern for the safety of the entire academic community.

They should think about learning and preparing for the real world, and specialising in the areas

of their interest, rather than exhausting their stressed energy in protests and political unrest.

Historically, students have played a significant role in many national movements, including the 1952 language movement, the overthrow of Ayub Khan in 1969, the 1971 war of independence, and the 1990 "restore democracy and oust autocrat Ershad from power" movement. However, given what brought the SOE, the post 1/11 CTG, and the cascading reform initiatives in the judiciary, EC, ACC, PSC and so on, a another "restore democracy movement" must wait until the scheduled 2008 election.

Adviser Mainul Hossain's recent concerns that failure of this government would be grievous is a reflection of the government's realization of the brewing dissatisfaction of the people in many areas, including the persistent price spiral.

The government must also realise that its claim "no one is above the law" is being dismissed by the people as a mere catchphrase because of the obvious dilly-dallying in pressing charges against the country's allegedly most corrupt former prime minister, her son and her brother. People know "charges delayed are crimes

NO NONSENSE

All academic minded students everywhere must realise that a minor incident at Dhaka University, absolutely personal in nature, could not spread countrywide unless politically disruptive and violence mongering elements masquerading as students were working to derail the government's initiatives to lock up the corrupt and the criminals and conduct a free and fair election. Do the students want to be accomplices to their evil designs and causes?

bypassed."

As this government cannot fail, the army and all branches of law enforcement must act evenhandedly and not lose people's ultimate trust in them. However, the unfortunate brutality with which the police dealt with the protestors' is evocative of the repressive eras of the past, and grossly at variance with IGP Noor Mohammad's vision of a people-friendly police. Nonetheless, the students' irresponsible acts cannot be condoned either.

Pre-1/11 campus politics required mastering violence, agitation, hooliganism, kidnapping, and so on. Campus violence has plagued higher education. Much like trade unions, student organisations promoted the political agendas of their affiliated national parties, and often did so under the tutelage of faculty groups. Should the students allow themselves to become pawns of the corrupt and ill-educated politicians again?

Pre-1/11, student politics were guided by non-students cloaked as students. Over the last 15 years, many student activists simply mimicked their national leaders' penchant for land-grabbing, extortion, assaulting the media, and brutally attacking the opposition. Would the students like to engage in those illicit pursuits instead of focusing on their academic goals?

The pre-1/11 illicit activities tarnished the image of student politics. At the same time, the quality of post liberation graduates, politicians, and civil servants has depreciated significantly relative to the pre-liberation period. Shouldn't the students and faculties work jointly for improving academic discipline, rather than

promoting disruption in the learning environment on campus?

The post 1/11 administration in the country in terms of rule of law and overall governance, in my objective judgment, is better than any in the past. The judiciary and the Election Commission are achieving constitutional independence. Many more institutional reforms are in the pipeline. Why would the students rather turn back the clock to be ruled by a politicised and corrupt administration?

Students should always assess the quality of their teachers. Are they engaged in scholarly pursuits and dedicated classroom teaching? How many of these teachers are chasing money by moonlighting (consulting and part time teaching elsewhere) instead of devoting their time and attention towards helping their students reach their academic potential?

Shouldn't the students ask their strike-supporting teachers if they're taking a salary cut when the students are taking a class cut from university closure? All academic minded students everywhere must realise that a minor incident at Dhaka University, absolutely personal in nature, could not spread countrywide unless politically disruptive and violence mongering elements masquerading as students were working to derail the government's initiatives to lock up the corrupt and the criminals and conduct a free and fair election. Do the students want to be accomplices to their evil designs and causes?

Dr. Abdullah A. Dewan is Professor of Economics at Eastern Michigan University.

Pakistan's anniversary wish: Justice

The danger is that, if the present democratic movement for justice is deprived of international support and is left to wither, then it will be taken over by the forces of Islamic extremism. That would be a disaster not just for Pakistan but the entire Muslim world.

AHMED RASHID

A Sa tense and wary Pakistan celebrated 60 years of independence on August 14. There is no doubt that a profound movement of change has swept the country affecting many global issues - the struggle against Islamic extremism, the movement for democracy in the Muslim world and the danger of nuclear weapons. At the heart of the mass movement in Pakistan is a profound undercurrent that both the West and Muslims need to support - the demand for justice.

For four months, from March to July, millions of Pakistanis led by lawyers and other middle-class professionals marched in the streets to protest the arbitrary manner in which President Pervez Musharraf had suspended Iftikhar Mohammed Chaudhry, the chief justice of the Supreme Court. Ordinary people demanded jus-

tice, the rule of law, democracy and an independent judiciary free of control from the military. The lawyer protestors were reminiscent of those who had marched in 1945 in Indian cities before the creation of Pakistan.

When Chaudhry was reinstated by a Supreme Court bench on July 20, the verdict stunned Musharraf and was celebrated by the nation. For the first time in Pakistan, reinvigorated judges released unprecedented judicial activism. The Supreme Court swiftly issued pro bono, for the public good, verdicts on previously untouchable issues, such as examining the disappearance of political prisoners by the intelligence services and making the Election Commission independent of the military.

Before the verdict Musharraf had presumed he would easily win another term of five years as president and also be allowed to remain army chief by a supine parliament

that has done the army's bidding since it was elected in a blatantly rigged election in 2002. Musharraf's election by the national and four provincial assemblies would be followed by another rigged general election.

Since the verdict Musharraf has thrashed around in a virtual state of panic as he tried to re-impose the army's presence on the political scene - now toying with the idea of an emergency rule, now martial law, while at the same time trying to be conciliatory towards the opposition by meeting in secret with exiled leader Benazir Bhutto and unleashing a charm offensive on state-controlled television. The biggest threat to his plans is the Supreme Court, which has pledged to follow the rule of law. Any one of several cases now awaiting adjudication by the Court could bring Musharraf's house crashing down.

For a country that has been ruled for half its life by the military, the present mass movement against continued military rule is more profound than expected. Underlying it and emphasized by the new lawyer-turned-politicians is the demand for social and political justice. The failure over decades to receive day-to-day justice at the hands of the army, the courts and the political elite now drives public activism. The demand for justice is a natural corollary of the demand for democracy, but it is also a root cause for unrest and upheaval in the Muslim world today.

What Pakistan has been witnessing in the past few months is emblematic of a fundamental cause behind the instability and turmoil in many of the world's Islamic countries. The lack of justice permeates every aspect of autocratic Muslim societies around the world and is an essential argument used by Islamic extremists from Osama bin Laden to Taliban's Mullah Omar. They can do so because justice is not just a democratic demand, but also the fundamental promise of the Koran. The Koran is permeated with demands for justice for the

oppressed - be they Muslims or non-Muslim minorities or women. The most quoted Hadith, or sayings of the Prophet, also recount his dispensation of justice and his demand that all rulers do the same.

The lack of justice is a principal driver of the Talibanization now taking place in Afghanistan and in the Pashtun tribal areas of Pakistan. Where no social or political institutions exist or they have been totally corrupted and subverted, the first thing the Taliban offer is justice. When Islamic radicals occupy an area, they set up a sharia, or Islamic court of law - not because people necessarily demand sharia, but because such courts dispense quick, cheap justice.

The fortunate aspect of the movement in Pakistan is that it is led by educated middle-class professionals, determined to introduce justice through democracy not religion. This could have a long-lasting effect in helping win the wider struggle against extremism in the Muslim world.

However, the US administration retains tunnel vision in supporting Musharraf and army rule. The Bush administration failed to

plan for a post-Musharraf era and now ignores the justice-through-democracy movement. Influential presidential Democratic candidates point out what Pakistanis have long known - that the US dependency on Musharraf and the US \$10 billion aid money to the military since 2001 - has led to Musharraf and the army confidently double dealing the US on stopping Al Qaeda and the Taliban. In the face of failure within the desperate Bush administration, there is now open and dangerous talk of invading Al Qaeda sanctuaries in Pakistan.

With Musharraf hell-bent on persevering power, the risks multiply. Al Qaeda spreads its tentacles through several Pakistani proxies across the country, and a wave of suicide bombings target the army and police. In Balochistan a separatist insurgency by secular rebels, possibly backed by India and Iran, picks off Chinese workers - thereby creating a crisis with Pakistan's closest ally.

After 100 militants were killed in the army's July crackdown on the Red Mosque in Islamabad, where Islamic militants had holed out for six months, the

Islamists promised revenge. Intelligence agencies report that more than 600 students who escaped the mosque siege have become suicide bombers. Then there is the elephant in the room: Pakistan's 40-odd nuclear weapons. Washington is considering how to deal with loose nukes if anarchy spreads and radical army officers take control of some nuclear weapons. In the past Musharraf rejected US offers of technical assistance in securing the weapons, out of concern about losing sovereign control. In the current heightened anger against the US, amid talk of unilateral intervention in Pakistan, cooperation on the nuclear front may be even more difficult.

Since 2001, the Bush administration has refused to accept that political stability in Pakistan is a prerequisite for fighting terrorism and the army acting alone could not guarantee that stability. Washington presumed that because Musharraf represented the army's big stick there was no need to look further.

A more reasonable policy for the US to pursue and one that would help win back Pakistani

hearts and minds would be to support the immediate return of exiled politicians, early general elections monitored by international observers followed by a free and fair election for the presidency. Washington needs to help bring about a just political transition in Islamabad before it again insists that the army battle Al Qaeda. The US can then help ensure that the new elected political leadership works closely with the army to combat extremism. There cannot be a sustainable fight against extremists who pretend to fight for justice if those called to join the battle are not offered justice themselves.

The danger is that, if the present democratic movement for justice is deprived of international support and is left to wither, then it will be taken over by the forces of Islamic extremism. That would be a disaster not just for Pakistan but the entire Muslim world.

Ahmed Rashid is the author of "Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil, and Fundamentalism in Central Asia" and "Jihad: The Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia" and a correspondent for the Daily Telegraph.

© Yale Center for the Study of Globalization. All rights reserved. Reprinted by arrangement.