

Let 'varsities be ideal homes of knowledge

Uphold autonomy with safeguards against politicisation

A roundtable on Friday highlighted once more the ailments that the country's public universities have been suffering from. Obviously, a major ailment is the increasing level of politicisation that has undermined the functioning of the universities. The political activities of students together with the involvement of teachers, or a major section of them, in partisan politics has seriously affected the academic atmosphere of the universities. The hallowed places of learning that our universities once were are today in more ways than one a battlefield where the focus is by and large on the propagation of some political programme or the other.

Increasing politicisation has led to conditions where less than competent teachers are appointed to the various departments in the universities. Moreover, the clear political division among teachers along the lines of so-called blue, white and pink panels has demonstrated patently the fact of how classroom performance by teachers may have suffered through their loyalty to political parties. All of this raises once again the question of whether or not the University Ordinance of 1973 may have had a contribution to the making of the crises we have regularly observed at the universities.

One must, therefore, now tackle the grave matter of what can be done to salvage the universities from their present predicament. Clearly, there are some who would like the 1973 ordinance to go. But such a step would be fraught with risks. And that would be because any move to undermine or push aside the ordinance would put the autonomy of the universities in danger. We believe that our universities must be places where academic and research excellence is promoted, intellectual freedom is unimpaired with all the doors to knowledge flung open and idealism is shaped free from all sorts of political stranglehold.

That implies the creation of conditions where good, foolproof measures are in place on such issues as the appointment of vice chancellors. Additionally, appointments and promotions of faculty have to be made free of political and other such negative influences. In other words, the universities must have an atmosphere where teachers will be solely driven by a sense of academic integrity and act by their conscience while students remain steadfast in their pursuit of learning.

We are looking forward to internally evolving mechanisms of the universities, rather than externally imposed solutions, to have them operate as respectable institutions of higher learning that are at par with ivy league universities of the world. As such certain modifications in the ordinance without undermining its basic character are in order. In essence, strong safeguards towards keeping politics away from the universities need to be put in place. The bottom line: let us clean up the mess without drilling holes in university autonomy.

Citizenship to stranded non-Bengalees

A good move

THIS has been a matter that all governments since independence have kept away from. The caretaker government's move to consider giving voting rights and therefore granting citizenship to the so-called stranded Pakistanis or Biharis, after 35 years, is a bold step that deserves to be lauded.

In fact there has been an anomalous situation prevailing in respect of these people, which we believe the government's decision will clear the air about. Reportedly, some of the stranded non-Bengalees have been employed in government jobs, not to speak of their finding employment in private organisations, and many have already been included in the voter list and have exercised their voting rights in the past elections, both national and local. On the other hand many have had to live a most horrid existence amidst the most squalid of conditions in ICRC camps. We should also be aware of the fact that not all Urdu speaking people are beholden to Pakistan. Many of this category have been physically and psychologically a part of the country and have been fully integrated into our social and cultural life.

There are three categories of people who are covered under the general categorization of stranded Pakistanis. There're those pre-71 non-Bengalees who have opted for Pakistan after the liberation of Bangladesh. They continue to express their allegiance to Pakistan. And then there are those pre-71 non-Bengalees who have opted for the citizenship of Bangladesh. The third group is the progenies of these two categories, who were born in Bangladesh after 1971, and there are at least two generations of them, who have all the rights to be accorded the citizenship of the country of their birth.

We feel that the criterion set by the government of according citizenship is very rational. While the Bangladesh government can do very little on their own for those that have opted for and are awaiting repatriation to Pakistan, the rest two categories should be accorded their rights without any more delay. Apart from the legalistic point of view there is the humanitarian aspect that we cannot at all overlook. Many of these people have been deprived of their basic rights and are unable to access the basic facilities for a very long time.

Now that Bangladesh has moved to resolve the long standing issue, the resolution will only be partial unless Pakistan also acts to take back those that have opted to go to Pakistan.

The state of democracy



KAZI ANWARUL MASUD

"DEMOCRACY promotion" writes Francis Fukuyama, "should be placed in the broader context of promoting economic development, reducing poverty, and furthering good governance. The four objectives are interlinked in multiple ways: good governance is widely accepted as requisite for economic growth, widespread poverty undermines democratic legitimacy, growth reduces poverty, democratic accountability is often required to combat corruption and poor governance, and growth creates a favourable climate for democratic consolidation." (Should Democracy be promoted or Demoted The Stanley Foundation)

These are well known facts. The question that remains to be answered is about those countries which do not have the requisite factors generally regarded as essential for sustainable democracy. Some have argued that as "democracy is culturally rooted and not a universal good" and that as respect for sovereignty perhaps prevents, despite the responsibility to protect and the responsibility to prevent now having been

GOING DEEPER

It is generally believed that Third World countries are more sensitive about possible encroachment on their sovereignty than the developed countries, though the responsibility to protect and prevent is more applicable in their cases than in others. Rwanda, Srebrenica and Darfur are enough examples providing legitimacy to intrusive action by the international community. In most of these cases the absence of democracy had caused tension and conflict because of the absence of airing of grievances of the aggrieved to the policy makers.

accepted as essential elements of composite democracy, "authoritarian transition" as we have seen in South Korea, Taiwan and Chile, could be an intermediate step in the process of democratic transition.

It would, however, be fallacious to fall back on the Pakistani example that Stephen Cohen calls "moderate oligarchy," meaning a system comprising of the elites of the armed forces, bureaucracy, the industrialists, and the landed aristocracy as a modus vivendi for popular aspiration to be listened to. Elites like the Praetorian guards possess the nature of filtering only those "popular aspirations" for consideration that accord with their aims of accumulating more power and wealth.

The oligarchs often forget Immanuel Wallerstein's revealing observation (The Modern World System) that "in general, in a deep conflict, the eyes of the downtrodden are more acute about the reality of the present. For it is in their interest to perceive correctly in order to expose the hypocrisies of the rulers. They

have less interest in ideological deflection."

The US model, admired for decades in the past, has now become suspect in the eyes of the many due to dichotomy between American preaching of the merits of liberal democracy and its Iraq adventure, distinct from invasion of Afghanistan that was globally supported, reflecting the Bush administration's disdain for the UN Charter and its subjugation of international law to its domestic interest as expounded in 2002 National Security Strategy.

The reason for American disdain, ably propagated by the likes of Dick Cheney, Robert Kagan, and Richard Perle, is the firm conviction of the Bush administration (and perhaps the next Republican administration should it be elected, with Barack Obama, or Mitt Romney or Rudy Giuliani as president) that in the foreseeable future there cannot be a peer competitor to US hegemony.

Kagan's defense of preemptive force and its legitimacy are dependant on President Bush's exhortation to "adapt the concept

of imminent threat to the capabilities and objectives of today's adversaries" made in his 2002 National Security Strategy. Kagan further argues that "rather than conceiving of sovereignty as a government's inherent right to do as it pleases, we must recognize that it entails real responsibilities, both with respect to those who live within the state and also with regard to internal developments that can affect those who live outside it. This changing conception of sovereignty as a right to conceiving it as a responsibility has become more widely accepted in recent years." (America and the use of force: sources of Legitimacy Stanley Foundation).

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In the cases where authoritarian rule is cloaked in the guise of one party rule, as seen in China, many people would be content to receive economic goods unaccompanied by "social coordination," i.e. the liberty given to the people to constitute groups or assemblies in order to influence decisions affecting their lives. China applauders often forget that the country "faces immense problems, including pollution, diseases, poverty, inequality, corruption, abuse of power, an aging population and shrinking labour force (Keeping Tabs on China- Michael Schiffer of Brookings Institutions and Gary Schmidt of American Enterprise Institute)."

Though the World Bank predicts that China's GDP in terms of purchasing power parity will be \$25 trillion, surpassing the US's, China remains far from being a peer competitor and, on a straight dollar for dollar basis, China's economy is just the size of California's and per capita GDP stands at \$1300 as compared to nearly \$4000 for the US. Analysts are concerned that 26 of China's east coast cities account for 82% of China's import-export and trade led growth, excluding 900 million to one billion people from reaping the benefits of China's phenomenal growth.

This has the possibility of putting at risk "performing legitimacy" (the ability of the Party to provide economic goods) replacing ideology as the legitimating factor in the governance of China.

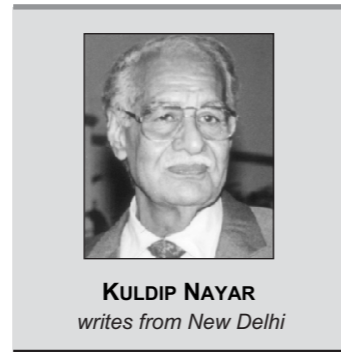
Pro-growth lobby in Bangladesh may wish to follow the Chinese model, with the hope that emphasis on fast growth rate and uninterrupted peaceful environment (banning of hartals and vandalism of private and public properties) would be beneficial to them.

Such a system would have the short lived advantages of increased GDP but would be laden with further inequality in the distribution of national wealth, thereby fracturing social cohesion. The argument for "authoritarian transition" to democracy is the low level of comprehension by the electorate of the issues confronting them and, hence, the results of an election being determined either by the "charisma" of the leaders of the political parties and the influence of money.

In view of the prevailing conditions in Bangladesh, particularly in the backdrop of the public's loss of confidence in politicians, it would be advisable to take the elections as only a first step on the road to a democratic setup while a body/bodies would continue to monitor the activities of the institutions that would sustain democracy in the long run.

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Rich India insensitive



KULDIP NAYAR
writes from New Delhi

A four and a half year-old child dies at Shimla in the Mall because the ambulance carrying him does not reach the hospital on time. The road is blocked by a throng of protestors from the ruling Congress and the BJP.

A panchayat in Haryana forcibly separates a newly born boy from his parents belonging to the same clan (gotra). Upper caste members kill a dalit who is acquitted by the court in a jat murder case. A policeman chains with his motorcycle a poor boy who had stolen a gold ornament and kills him in public.

A truck runs over four people of the minority community, which retaliates by fomenting communal trouble. On the face of it, there is nothing common in these incidents. They illustrate strong emotions. Yet, what strings them together are the society's insensitivity, the authorities' nonchalant attitude, and people's blind faith in tradition, which was wrong even when adopted.

BETWEEN THE LINES

Economic steps to ameliorate the condition of the poor are too meager and too slow. At least, the basic rights under the constitution should be available to them. Yet, if faith in the fundamental values of a democratic society is to be preserved, every citizen, whatever his class, caste or creed, has to display a degree of sensitivity and support for the rule of law.

It also shows the other side of the society. The social order is breaking up. The value system is weakening further. The common man is losing faith in decency because of hard, insecure life. The boy's death due to road blockade was described by politicians as "very unfortunate." There was no word of apology, no action by the authorities.

In the second case, two Haryana ministers defended the "tradition" and took the couple to task for having violated the sanctity of gotra. The state chief minister said he had received no complaint. The media focus made the police restore the child to the parents. They have left the state because they do not feel safe.

Haryana is the state where a dalit was murdered after acquittal. Thousands of dalits took to the streets in protest in the state and even in Punjab. But the hold of jats is so firm that the police are normally afraid to take notice of what they. Both the states are headed by jat

chief ministers. The police highhandedness in the death of a poor child is nothing new. There is hardly any such happening, which does not underline the police brutality. What shocks me is the lack of accountability in the force.

The other day the SSP of Moradabad was caught on a TV network beating the innocent by-standers. He was not even in uniform. The state government promised to consider the case after receiving the details. The matter rests there. The police in Bhagalpur have decided to go on strike after the dismissal of two policemen. The punishment was, in fact, overdue. The case has been hanging for 16 long years. The police were a party to the killing of persons belonging to the minority community. Still many have gone scot-free.

Communal rioting looks odd in a society which takes pride in pluralism. By this time people should have imbibed the basic tenets of tolerance

and sense of accommodation. A truck accident should have been treated as an accident, not as an opportunity to settle old scores. Leaders of the minority community should have intervened before the riots broke out.

In fact, the riots spread to Allahabad. Here the majority community was at fault. Such incidents had taken place earlier. But the number was small and the occurrence rare. A study shows that in the rioting people attack one another to kill and not to leave it to injuries alone.

This indicates many things, but one thing sure is that there is no normal outlet of grievances. Nor are there any serious attempts made to bridge the gulf between the two sides. Of what use is the annual growth rate of 9 to 10 percent when people have no concern, no sympathy for one another?

Granted that the government cannot do much in a capitalist economy to stop the rich getting

richer and the poor getting poorer. But the state can at least ensure the rule of law. The West, with all its faults, does so. The rich have a civic sense. The top echelons of the society in India, the upper castes, the jats, or the small-time politicians get away with the violation of basic laws.

Devoid of values, they are like animals on the prowl. But for the media attention, even the few examples of excesses would not come to light. With the yawning divide between the haves and the have-nots, the quarrel over the denial to the poor is going to intensify. The lower half is getting increasingly marginalised. How to enable them to earn their livelihood with dignity is the biggest problem the country faces.

Many are getting desperate, and 112 districts in 15 states are havens for the armed radicals. However reprehensible the use of force, they see no other way out. Yet I find that the common man is still inured to values which he has inherited, and he does not ordinarily steal or appropriate the other man's gains. He or she prefers to suffer silently and does not take to arms.

The question is not whether or not the suicide of farmers in the country is increasing. It is whether the present system is driving them to choosing suicide (112,000 in a decade) in place of slow death. Even the palliatives in the shape of government grants have not been of much help. A study shows that the

money does not reach the needy. There is too much red tape and plain corruption.

UP Chief Minister Mayawati is too busy buying property in Delhi to initiate something concrete for those whose holdings are shrinking. Is it not possible for the government to establish facilities to provide common services like ploughing, tending, and thrashing for the crop? The corporate sector, if asked to step in, can do so. But that would mean its entry into the agriculture sector, and this does not augur well for farmers.

Economic steps to ameliorate the condition of the poor are too meager and too slow. At least, the basic rights under the constitution should be available to them. Yet, if faith in the fundamental values of a democratic society is to be preserved, every citizen, whatever his class, caste or creed, has to display a degree of sensitivity and support for the rule of law.

Without being aware of what is right, and without speaking out when the wrong is done, there may come a day when the realisation of what is wrong may go. There is a thin line dividing right and wrong, moral or immoral. Once that line is erased, people do not know where they stand, whether on the right or the wrong side. It does not need a revolution to change this attitude. Mere concern for others will do.

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Campus police



A.N.M. NURUL HAQUE

THE government is contemplating formation of campus police to provide a safe and secure campus environment in the country's public universities, as the recent violence at Dhaka University (DU) spread like wild fire to other campuses and triggered an unfortunate episode. The government closed down all universities and colleges in the major cities and imposed curfew to crush the violence.

The TV channels of the country telecast the details of the strong police actions to tame the angry students, who were beaten up mercilessly. The capacity for rational handling of such a situation was found severely missing among the

BY THE NUMBERS

The campus police should be composed of educated and enthusiastic people, capable of responding to emergency situations that need specialized skills. They will provide security to campus properties and will prevent intruders. They will maintain working relations with other law enforcing agencies, and will develop an advisory system designed to send an alert to the university authority about possible terrorist attacks.

police. The police personnel (majority of them are barely educated) are not aware of DU students' role in our national movements. They treat the varsity students as knaves, as they sorely lack the sense to differentiate.

The battle between the agitated students and police in a very sensitive place like DU campus sent a strong and clear message to the government once again, that handling of the student community calls for care and compassion, and patience and prudence, not force. Coercive approaches always proved counterproductive, particularly when students' sentiments are concerned.

Police action in the female students' halls of DU at the dead hours of night in 2002 created a strong public resentment across the coun-

try that compelled the government to remove the Vice Chancellor, Dr. Anwarullah Chowdhury, to calm down the situation. Many senior teachers of DU were beaten up severely by the police as they protested such a police action in the female students' halls.

Another riotous situation occurred in the DU campus in May 2005, following the tragic death of a DU student under the wheels of a bus at Shahabagh crossing. Police beat up mercilessly the mourning students entering the campus.

Throughout the 86 years of its existence, DU has expanded enormously and enhanced its educational legacy and student population, which has now grown to thirty thousand. The Proctorial System of

DU, consisting of one proctor and eight asst. proctors (all are teachers except one), is mainly responsible for providing safety and security in the campus.

The proctors, who are given ample power in writing but nothing in practice, are totally incompetent for meeting the real need of this present time.

The relationship between the students and law enforcers has deteriorated significantly after the recent incident at DU. Not only the students and teachers of the universities, the conscious citizens of the country also think that law enforcers should not be allowed to enter the university campuses for handling students' agitation. Such a situation should be handled with velvet gloves, not with bullets and batons.

The idea for forming campus police to meet the safety and security requirements of the DU campus community was also discussed in the senate meetings in the past. But no concrete steps were taken so far to shape up such police considering its sensitivity.

To provide a safe, secure and orderly campus environment conducive to the successful pursuit of educational opportunities and accomplishments, the public universities of the country need police capable of establishing a professional and trusting relationship with the students, teachers, and other staff.

DU, the highest seat of learning of the country, practically became crippled during the tenure of the immediate past government. The academic activities of the DU had been tottering for the last several years due to frequent strikes by the student organizations, political violence, hartals, and work abstention by the teachers, resulting in enormous session jams leading to two to five years delay in academic schedules.

DU remained closed for 22 months four and a quarter years, from July

2000 to September 2004. Apart from the annual scheduled vacations of some 90 days, the university lost over 75 days a year on an average due to strikes and other impediments during the aforesaid period.

The campus police, either armed special police or unarmed security squad, should be quite different from the conventional police forces and must be under full control and management of university authority. They must not also be recruited and trained like the Railway Police (GRP).

The campus police must possess some qualities of head and heart, and should be featured by some special characteristics that suit the sentiments of the students.

A special team comprising of army, police, and university officers should be formed for recruitment of campus police personnel. They should be given proper training by instructors from the Police Department and other law enforcement and intelligent agencies, making them skilful in all security tactics.

The campus police should be composed of educated and enthusiastic people, capable of responding to emergency situations that need

specialized skills. They will provide security to campus properties and will prevent intruders.

They will maintain working relations with other law enforcing agencies, and will develop an advisory system designed to send an alert to the university authority about possible terrorist attacks. But the campus police will, in no way, seek any sort of assistance from other law enforcing agencies without permission from the university authority.

There are many universities across the world which have their own police to provide a safe and secure campus.

The Howard University in Washington DC has a very inventive Campus Police Department, which works cooperatively with the District of Columbia Metropolitan Police and other District of Columbia and federal government agencies. The campus police officers, who have been commissioned or licensed, maintain extremely close working relations with the Metropolitan Police Department.

The Howard University campus police exercise full police powers to arrest the offenders. They take search warrants from the court and

assist the prosecution process.

The Campus Police Department of Howard University is a composite of the five following sections. These are Field Service Bureau, Physical Security Bureau, Personnel Development and Training Section, Investigation Section and Operation Section.

The California State University (USA) Police Department provides the university community with a safe and secure environment in which to learn, live, work and grow. The University Police Department personnel are committed to a service philosophy of "Community Oriented Policing and Problem Solving."

The University Police Officers are sworn police officers as established by Section 830.2(c) of the California Penal Code. They have the same responsibilities and powers of arrest as other peace officers in the State of California.

The public universities of Bangladesh may take the help of these universities while planning formation of their own police forces.

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