

DU incident and aftermath

SYED MUNIR KHASRU

THE entire nation saw the chain of events from August 19-22, where a simple quarrel in a football field led to widespread street violence and anarchy and ultimately imposition of curfew. What actually happened in the field, I don't know, but let's assume that the members of the armed forces were at fault. What happened next?

The students and teachers demanded that the army camp be withdrawn from the DU gymnasium and the government apologise for the incident. Like many, including retired army officers who wrote articles in different newspapers on this issue and serving army officers speaking in private, I also believe that the army camp should not have been set up within the DU campus in the first place.

However, the government and the armed forces did respond quickly to the demands -- army camp was withdrawn from the DU campus and regrets were expressed. The thing should have ended then and there. But what did we see?

We saw riot, vandalism, army vehicle being set on fire, and so on and so forth. I don't know who these trouble mongers were -- whether they were ordinary students, or political students, or political activists, or hired goons, or evicted hawkers, or discontented citizens or ill-motivated usurpers. Among the different theories floating around, I have no data or intelligence to confidently state who these people were who fomented the unrest.

However, there seems to be a broad consensus that the incidents that spiraled out of control and spread like a bushfire even after the dispute was settled had to do with people and motives who hardly had any relation with the gymnasium incident. Even some office-bearers of the Dhaka University Teachers' Association

started distancing themselves from these incidents through public statements.

Bottom line is that I don't think that anybody, including the government and the armed forces, believes that the vast majority of students and teachers of DU were in any way involved with the untoward incidents that took place within and beyond the DU campus after the gymnasium issue was resolved. Whether actually some teachers of DU were involved in inciting and supporting the street violence -- I personally am not in a position to make a definitive statement.

However, the analysis of incidents and subsequent statements do indicate that there was involvement. The issue is to what degree and in what manner were the teachers involved and that probably is one of the major tasks of the investigation commission to determine. It won't be wise to make comments on a sub-judicial matter that is still in process. Let's hope that truth shall surface to put to rest the speculations that have been swirling around for a while.

What has been so disheartening and depressing is the issuance of a blanket statement by the general secretary of DUTA, which begs forgiveness "on behalf of the DUTA and as the parent of all students of DU."

The question is whether every teacher and student of DU was either involved in or supportive of the unfortunate chain of events that happened after apparently the gymnasium problem seemed to have been resolved. If that is not the case, then is it fair to speak in manner that drags people into incidents with which they may have nothing to do, other than being silent spectators or concerned teachers or students?

If anyone personally believes that he/she has done things for which he/she should beg forgiveness -- he/she is free to do that and take responsibility for his/her

acts. Dragging everyone into the net that belittles the entire community of teachers and students of DU in front of the nation is not something anybody relishes and certainly not the act of a responsible leader.

As stated already, we still don't know for certain to what extent the two DU teachers were involved in the civil disturbance that erupted in the streets of Dhaka and in other places. Nor do we know under what circumstances the general secretary made his statement. However, common sense dictates that it is not a good idea to have someone make public statement in the court premises while being surrounded by platoons of police and it hardly helps the cause of credibility.

The teaching community at DU does expect that teachers be treated by the law enforcers with propriety. Nobody wants that what is being told today is contradicted in the future under different circumstances. Let us call spade a spade and trust the words of the general secretary who claims to be speaking from the "bottom of his heart."

Armed forces are one of the most trusted and respected institutions of the country on whom we depend for protecting our sovereignty. They always have stood by the nation in times of all kinds of crisis -- war, natural calamities, disaster management, electoral process, and so on and so forth.

The scene of an army person-

being chased by anybody, let alone students, can never evoke good feelings in the mind of any conscientious citizen as members of the armed forces are people in whom we have put our faith to uphold the independence of the country. In one of my classes at the MBA program of IBA, I have students from the armed forces who expressed to me the sense of shock they felt to see people in uniform being chased by students on the DU

campus.

It has hurt their sense of self-respect and pride which is perfectly understandable. I heard the same feelings from my friends, relatives, and well-wishers in the armed forces who felt betrayed by these irresponsible acts, particularly after the camp was withdrawn and regrets were expressed. Many of us do empathise with the hurt that has been caused to our students, friends, and other members serving in the armed forces.

An attack on an army personnel is an attack on our national pride and no debate about it. As far as many of us are concerned it is the duty of any teacher to restrain students, who are expected to be emotional and not fully mature, if the students in their zeal start committing excesses and impulsive acts.

Hence, if these DU teachers believe that they have failed to perform their responsibilities or have done things for which they owe an apology they have done the right thing by apologising.

What is unacceptable is the collective approach in statements implicating the entire teaching community and students of DU in these undesired acts. This is not true. There are many teachers and students who were quite upset by the way things got out of control from a rather minor incident in a football field. The majority in the DU community were distressed by both the high-handed tactics of the law enforcers as well as the unacceptable gestures made towards members of the armed forces as it appeared in the newspaper.

It is indeed a sad day for the nation, when in front of the students and their parents, teachers end up with an image of being irresponsible professionals begging forgiveness in public for their acts and then claiming to be the "moral guardian of the students."

Already many of us while attending social events have to put up with caustic remarks for the position we teachers have

been put into. Does every teacher and student of DU deserve this? Should everyone be put into the same bracket? Does everyone have to put his/her head down for events which they did not support or took part in? Should the professional integrity of all be put into question for deeds of few, whatever they may have been?

Both the army, as represented by its officers and soldiers, and DU, as represented by the teachers and students, have a glorious history, tradition, and pride. These are the two most revered institutions of the country who have led the country in challenging times by playing pivotal roles from their respective positions.

From the war of liberation to strengthening democracy, each have played glorious roles in respective areas, including sacrificing lives for the country. If anyone had indeed done things to deliberately put these two institutes into a confrontational path by their words and deeds -- they owe an apology not only to the armed forces but also to the entire nation for their singular acts. It is not fair to put all in the same bracket since majority of us had nothing to do with such irresponsible acts.

A large portion of members of the armed forces and law enforcers are graduates of DU and nobody savours the scene of their alma mater being belittled in any way. In one of my own classes at IBA, about 12% of the students are serving officers of the armed forces. When the statement of the DUTA general secretary was being broadcast in the TV channels, I received calls from my friends and relatives in the armed forces who were no less distressed than us in seeing the plight of the respected seat of learning of the country.

If it is of any consequence, to my knowledge -- the chief advisor, the chief of army, and the inspector general of police -- all are graduates of DU and they

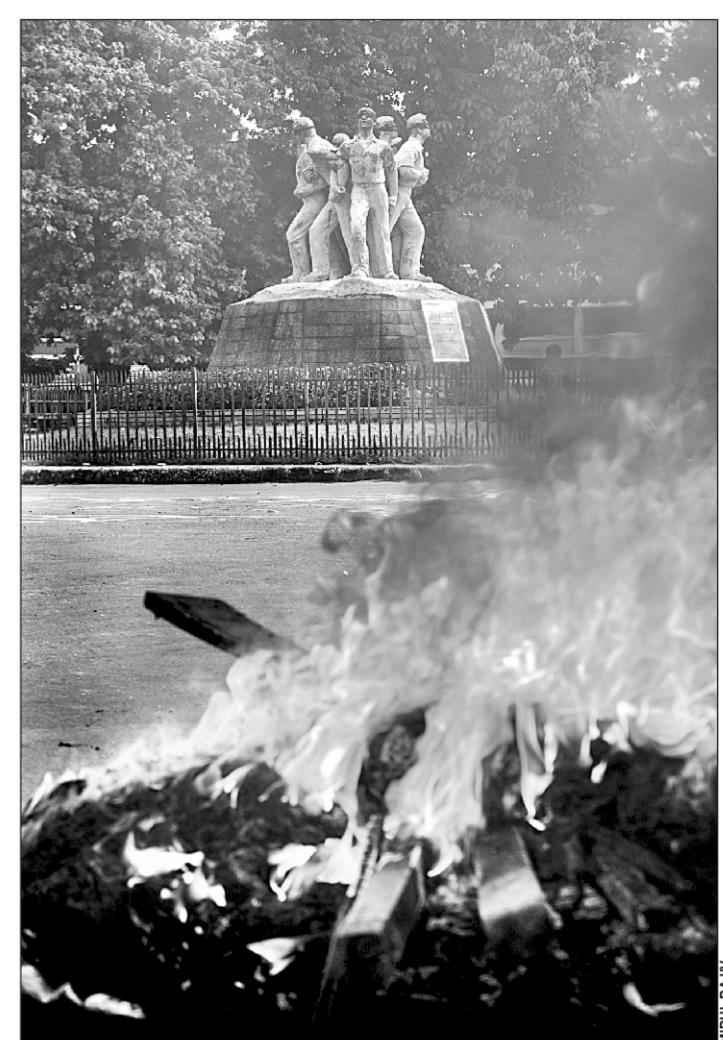
had spent memorable years of their lives in the same campus whose image is now being harmed. Hence, there is no reason to believe that they have felt any less disheartened and embarrassed by the unfolding of events in DU as did we. So who is scoring points here? Nobody.

From Nobel Laureate Professor Yunus to the intellectual martyrs during the war of liberation -- the history of DU in unleashing talent to performing acts of patriotism is second to none. From public services to private enterprises, from politics to culture, from scientific achievements to artistic works -- the alumni of DU continue to make an impact in different spheres of lives and have enriched the country through their intelligence, commitment, creativity, and patriotism. It is unwise to cast a shadow on such a prodigious institution for acts of few which are devoid of any collective endorsement from the larger community of teachers and students of DU.

Let me conclude with a positive note with a bit of optimism for the future. As all concerned are exploring possibilities to reopen the universities, a few measures are humbly suggested which will hopefully restore confidence paving the way for return of normalcy to the campus and beyond.

Since the gymnasium was the starting point of trouble and for the time being has a negative symbolic value, it is a good idea if as a goodwill gesture the government modernises the existing facilities at the gymnasium which have become obsolete due to lack of maintenance and inability of DU to replace old unusable equipment for financial constraints.

Secondly, one of the long standing complaints of the students of the dormitories of DU has been the poor quality of food that is being regularly served to them. By providing this incremental food allocation, the government can ensure



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that students have access to decent meal at affordable prices and under hygienic conditions.

This may remove the grievances that hall students have some of whom who were unnecessarily harassed by the law enforcers during this crisis.

Thirdly, some of the contents in the website of Bangladesh army related to this incident gives the impression of entire DU community being involved in this violence, it should be corrected as such wrong information does not help anybody. The confidence building measures are necessary to inject normalcy and to remove the prevailing negativity.

Syed Munir Khasru is a faculty of IBA, University of Dhaka.

Last and not least, let the curtain fall on this rather unfortunate incident between the two most powerful institutions of the country, which are symbols of national pride and have played complementary roles in times of national crisis.

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The burden of corruption fighters

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IN November 1999, shortly after his takeover of the government of Pakistan as president, General Pervez Musharraf established the National Accountability Bureau (NAB), through promulgation of an ordinance, to combat corruption and graft in the country. The first two chairmen of NAB were retired army officers (with rank of Lt. General); the most recent appointee is a retired civil servant.

The agency was charged with the responsibility of "elimination of corruption through a holistic approach of awareness, prevention, and enforcement." But the immediate job of the newly founded agency was to hound out

people suspected of robbing the country's exchequer to augment personal wealth. Among the famous public figures arraigned by the agency were Nawaz Sharif, the immediate past prime minister of Pakistan, and Benazir Bhutto, the prior prime minister.

In the first few years of its operation, NAB acted on information of incidents of graft and corruption by public officials, or on reports of abuse of office by public officials. The source of information was usually a complaint. According to the latest annual report, (2005) NAB received on average about 13,000 complaints annually, of which about 600 were enquired into, about 160 were investigated, but less than 50 cases were pre-

sented in the court.

This was done with an annual budget of about Rs 55 crores, and manpower of hundreds of officers and men spread all over the country. Despite its resources, the agency was stymied by sifting through the enormous volume of complaints to establish their veracity, following an arduous process of collecting evidence, and finally arriving at a prima facie case that could lead to prosecution.

By its own acknowledgement, in its initial years, the NAB could not follow its main mission of "elimination of corruption through a holistic approach of awareness, prevention and enforcement" because of its primary focus on investigating and prosecuting cases of graft and

corruption involving important public figures and government officials. There have been mixed results in this campaign. The agency was able to recover crores of rupees from "voluntary" return of graft money by several accused, including a former navy chief, and also successfully prosecute several law makers. But it has also either dropped or shelved cases started against important public figures (such as Nawaz Sharif) for political reasons.

Despite some impressive achievements by NAB in the first six years (conviction of some 400 people, and return of over Rs 13 billion), there has been criticism of the agency as well. Some people said that several of its cases were politi-

cally motivated, that it had been selective in prosecution, and that it lacked transparency in its process.

The agency refutes these by stating that it is an independent, constitutionally established body that is answerable only to the president, which, under current circumstances, makes the defense questionable.

Recently, the government appointed a retired civil servant as chairman, perhaps to deflect another criticism that the agency was army dominated. Acting on its original mandate, the agency also started to work on a comprehensive anti-corruption strategy aimed at creating public awareness and preventing corruption. International agencies, including OECD and ADB, have chipped in to

make this strategy a success.

The NAB experience is a subject to ponder on in our country that is awash with complaints and reported evidence of mass plunder of resources by public officials with a newly founded public agency charged to address these mammoth tasks. According to news reports we have about 150 politicians and businessmen at national level who have so far been rounded up on complaints of corruption and misuse of public office; investigations in a majority of which are still ongoing. To this, we have added two other high profile cases of public corruption that have attracted international attention.

There may be numerous other cases at district level, where a

plethora of complaints is being received and inquired into. The number of the pending cases, and the time taken for their disposal, may make people wonder if the substantive hard work of the new agency will bring the much desired result that we all seek.

The burden on the corruption fighters is onerous. The cheerleaders today can become stern critics tomorrow if the fighters slip. If the NAB experience is any guide for us, we need a transparent process in our anti-corruption fight, which would establish credibility and faith in the adopted measures -- both for us in the country and for the international community that is watching all our actions.

As I see it, for going forward the steps should include a fast completion of investigation of the pending cases, following a due process for prosecution, and promotion of an environment that supports a durable anti-corruption agency free from any political pressure or overture. For the first two, we need to help ourselves; for the third, we may need help and expertise from others. International aid agencies and our partners in development will be more than willing to help in this.

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NOTES FROM HISTORY

Chile: September 11, 1973

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SALVADOR Allende Gossens was elected president of Chile in September 1970. Having earlier made several electoral attempts to win the presidency, Allende, a Marxist, was now poised to enter the La Moneda presidential palace with 36.2 percent of the vote.

Little did his followers realise, at that point in time, that conspiracies and intrigues were already afoot to undermine his government even before it took office. Allende was expected to take over from the outgoing rightwing president, Eduardo Frei, on October 24.

But already the rumblings of discontent, most notably in distant Washington, were beginning to be heard. President Nixon and Henry Kissinger, his national security adviser, had tried in vain to prevent Allende from riding to victory because they felt that the rise of a Marxist leader through elections in Latin America would lead to disaster for capitalist interests. In a remark that sounded facetious before the election, Kissinger had remarked that he saw no reason why a country should "go Marxist" only because "its people are irresponsible."

Once Allende's triumph

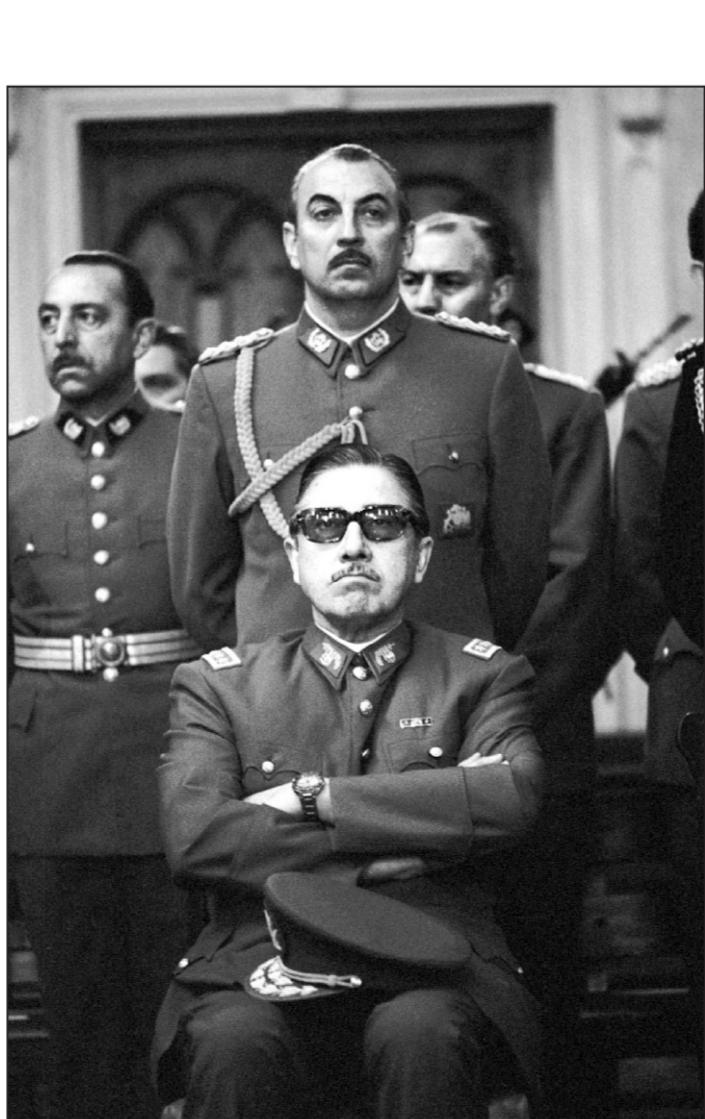
became a fait accompli, though, Richard Nixon went ballistic. In the Oval Office, he spoke to Richard Helms, the CIA director, and told him specifically that Allende must not be permitted to take office. Helms' notes reveal the paranoia that swept the White House that autumn.

This is what Helms noted down of Nixon's directives: "Not concerned risks involved. No involvement of embassy. \$10,000,000 available, more if necessary. Full-time job -- best men we have . . . Make the economy scream. 48 hours for plan of action."

Over the next few days, the CIA, with Nixon and Kissinger behind it, went looking for officers in the Chilean military to undertake the responsibility of keeping Allende from taking the oath of office. It was a difficult job, especially because Chile had, through all the long seasons of coups and illegitimate governments in its neighbourhood, held on to its democracy.

Another difficulty for the Americans, as they tried fomenting a putsch in Santiago, was the presence of General Rene Schneider, the chief of general staff and a man holding full conviction in constitutional government.

It was at that point that the Nixon White House hit upon the



undermine him. However, that was not the way things would turn out. Over the next three years, the CIA, with its agents scattered throughout Chile and Latin America, worked assiduously to bring down the Allende government.

Unknown to Allende, however, Pinochet quickly got in touch with the Americans on the ways and means of neutralising the government. Over the subsequent two weeks, Pinochet sought, and gained, the support of the air force, navy and police for a coup d'état against Allende.

In the pre-dawn hours of September 11, the soldiers went to work. By 6 am, Chile's major cities, including Valparaiso and Santiago, had gone under the control of the military. Shortly afterward, air force jets began strafing and bombing the La Moneda presidential place. Pinochet dispatched a message to Allende, promising him safe passage out of the country if he surrendered.

The president, as expected, rejected the suggestion with contempt and went on air to tell the nation he was determined to resist the coup. Around 11 am, President Allende, helmeted and holding an AK-47 in his hands, emerged at the doorway of La Moneda briefly before going back in. It was the last

the world would see of him. By early afternoon, the presidency of Salvador Allende was in ruins and a bloody, ruthless military was in control of Chile. The elected president of Chile was dead, presumably murdered by marauding soldiers.

In the days and weeks that followed, 3,192 people were officially murdered by Pinochet's goon squads. The soldiers raided the home of the Nobel laureate Pablo Neruda and ransacked it. The ailing Neruda, earlier Allende's ambassador to France, would die twelve days later, on September 23.

Over the months, thousands more would disappear or be murdered. General Carlos Prats, along with his wife, would be murdered in exile. Orlando Letelier, defence minister in the Allende government, would be killed by CIA agents in league with the Pinochet junta in Washington DC in 1976. The father of Michelle Bachelet, today president of Chile, would be tortured and murdered in military custody.

The rest remains a long tale of searing pain for Chile and its people.

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