

DHAKA UNIVERSITY

Students face problems in absence of DUCSU

BSS, Dhaka

Demands for the election of Dhaka University Central Students Union (DUCSU) appears to be resurfacing again among ordinary students as the country's premier campus has not seen activities of the crucial student forum for over two decades.

"It appears that the Dhaka University loses its traditional academic character for want of the central student union," said Mamun Ahmed, a student of Economics department.

The ordinary students as well as university authorities, he said, are facing different problems, which could have been settled with a vibrant DUCSU as student unions are supposed to be the most effective academic forum of any university across the world.

"The absence of DUCSU has

contributed to the rise of unhealthy student politics in the past two decades when muscles instead of intellect dominated the campus," said Nasim Ahmed, a final year student of English department.

Dhaka University saw its last central student union election in late eighties as usual for one-year tenure amid a different political circumstance as the country at that time was witnessing a growing campaign against autocratic rule.

But even after the installation of successive democratic governments, little initiatives were taken to hold the DUCSU polls blaming the "unfavourable campus situation."

A number of senior university students said the student organisations backed by major political parties played the role of DUCSU pretending to stand by an ordinary student providing a valuable seat in

dormitories in exchange for loyalty to their parties.

Even a political student organisation evict ordinary students from the dormitories to be replaced by non-student hooligans or outside armed cadres, said Zafarullah Sobiel, a student of International Relations department.

Several teachers of the university agreed that the muscle flexing "cadres" would not have got access to the campus or the halls had DUCSU been in place to see the problems of the common students.

"A central student union or the hall student unions are also needed for the healthy entertainment practices and cultural activities on the campus, of which Dhaka University remained deprived for the past two decades," said Prof Ataur Rahman, a senior teacher of Political Science department.

He recalled the vibrant cultural and extracurricular activities like holding sports, debate competitions, staging plays and organising musical festivals on the campus under the auspices of DUCSU and hall student unions when Dhaka University said to have witnessed its golden times despite various difficulties.

"The more dangerous thing is that the absence of an elected student forum like DUCSU leads the student organisations to be unaccountable and as a result instead of mobilising student supports they tend to dominate the campus with muscle power," he said.

A former Dhaka University student and senate member preferring anonymity said the widely criticised "unhealthy teachers' politics" also was encouraged in the absence of the elected students forum.



Buddhist devotees celebrate Prabarana Purnima, a religious festival, at the Buddhist monastery in Chittagong yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Japan warns US over N Korea

AFP, Tokyo

A senior Japanese official has warned the United States that relations will suffer if Washington removes North Korea from a list of terrorist states, amid stepped up efforts to end Pyongyang's nuclear drive.

Relations between Tokyo and Pyongyang remain tense in part because of the communist state's kidnappings of Japanese civilians, an issue that arouses deep emotion here.

"If the US moves while completely ignoring the abduction issue, you can expect that relations between Japan and the United States will not improve," Kyoko Nakayama, special adviser to Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda on the kidnappings, told AFP in an interview.

Japan says North Korean agents abducted 17 Japanese, either from

Japan or overseas, between September 1977 and July 1983 to train spies who could then pose as Japanese when infiltrating South Korea.

North Korean leader Kim Jong-il admitted to the kidnappings in 2002, saying the regime had abducted 13 Japanese and allowed five to return home with their families.

Pyongyang, contrary to Tokyo's belief, says the others are dead and the issue is closed.

"Japan believes the eight (people) that North Korea claims as dead are still alive and are being used as translators or teachers," Nakayama said.

North Korea had also kidnapped people of other nationalities, including hundreds of South Koreans, she said.

"A country that does not free hostages is a terrorist state, pure and simple," she said.

The United States has promised

to seek "progress" in the abduction row, but Tokyo and Washington are at loggerheads about what constitutes progress.

Foreign Minister Masahiko Komura, speaking before a parliamentary committee Thursday, said that Japan wanted to see the kidnappers come home.

"We cannot say it is a 'solution' to the issue even if some of the abductees return to Japan, but we may be able to consider it 'progress,'" Komura said, as quoted by Kyodo News.

Japan has voiced unease since North Korea entered a six-nation deal in February to dismantle its nuclear programmes in exchange for aid and diplomatic benefits.

In the latest step, Pyongyang has pledged to permanently disable its Yongbyon reactor and declare all other nuclear programmes by the end of the year.

India tests Agni-1 ballistic missile

AFP, New Delhi

India on Wednesday test fired its nuclear-capable Agni-1 ballistic missile for the second time in less than a month and said the latest experiment was a "major success."

The Agni-1 has a range of 700 kilometres (420 miles), making it capable of striking at most targets in rival and neighbouring Pakistan.

It was launched from a missile test range in the eastern state of Orissa, officials from the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) said in New Delhi.

"The system that we tested today has more manoeuvrability and better re-entry technology than the missile that was launched on October 5," said a DRDO official who asked not to be named.

"It is a major success," the official added.

The launch was conducted by India's recently-established strategic armed forces, signalling Agni-1's official induction into the million-plus military, defence experts said.

Global warming predictions 'as good as they get': Study

AFP, Chicago

Global warming estimates are probably as good as they are going to get, according to a report out Thursday, which says that scientists have reached the limits of their climate models.

In the past three decades climatologists have used increasingly sophisticated tools in the effort to predict climate change -- but the specificity of those predictions has improved little.

In a paper in the journal Science, two US climate specialists argue that this is because certain feedback loops in climate systems boost the impact of greenhouse gases on the atmosphere in ways that modelers cannot reliably

predict.

The more likely the conditions are to create significant warming, the more uncertainty there is about the size of the warming effect because of the booster effect on these intermediate processes, they say.

"Small uncertainties in the physical processes are amplified into large uncertainties in the climate response, and there is nothing we can do about that," said Gerard Roe, an associate professor of earth and space sciences at the University of Washington in Seattle.

Among the feedback factors: a

warmer atmosphere holds more vapor -- itself a greenhouse gas -- which then amplifies the effect on temperature caused by the original increase in carbon dioxide.

Roe and colleague Marcia Baker devised an equation to help understand the built-in uncertainties. But they still don't expect it will help modelers narrow the range of predictions.

"We're pretty much there. Current modeling is about as good as it gets," said Roe.

He said the recent climate predictions by the Intergovernmental

Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) are probably the best guide to future climate change, and that policy makers should not defer difficult decisions in hopes of later getting better data.

"We have the best information we will ever have in order to make the choices we need to make," Roe said.

Earlier this year, the UN-backed IPCC predicted that a doubling of carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere would ultimately yield global temperature increases of between two and 4.5 degree Celsius.

Easing winds help Californian firefighters

AFP, Los Angeles

Easing winds offered Californian firefighters some respite on Thursday as they battled to contain blazes that have killed at least three and caused more than a billion dollars in property damage.

Some 1,700 buildings have been destroyed in the 18 wildfires that have erupted since Sunday, forcing about half a million people to flee their homes and scorching 172,000 hectares (426,000 acres) of tinder-dry countryside stretching from celebrity-studded Malibu to beyond the Mexican border.

California Governor Arnold

Schwarzenegger said three people were killed and 40 injured in the fires, the worst to hit California since devastating 2003 blazes which claimed 22 lives.

The fast-spreading infernos were fueled by powerful desert winds gusting across the region towards the ocean. The winds began to die down on Wednesday, and increased coastal humidity early Thursday enabled firefighters to make great strides in containing three of the five biggest blazes.

So far 1,664 structures, including 1,436 homes, have been destroyed while a further 25,000 buildings remained threatened, Schwarzenegger said.

Ex-Philippines leader Estrada wins full pardon

AFP, Manila

Former Philippine president Joseph Estrada was given a full pardon on Thursday just weeks after he was jailed for life on charges of stealing tens of millions of dollars from the nation's coffers.

The announcement came just days after Estrada, a former action movie hero, asked his successor -- President Gloria Arroyo -- to grant him a pardon in what his lawyers called the "national interest."

Arroyo's spokesman said the pardon was granted after the popular 70-year-old agreed not to pursue any other elective office. He said the pardon was granted under a policy of releasing prisoners who have reached 70 years of age.

Delhi urges military to be open in defence deals

AFP, New Delhi

India on Wednesday urged its military chiefs to ensure transparency in a swathe of multi-billion dollar deals due to be signed in coming years as the armed forces modernise.

"The urgent need of the hour is to change mindsets, in tune with the changing times where transparency and fairness are the buzzwords," Defence Minister AK Antony said.

He told commanders at the opening of a four-day conclave to "reduce response timings at every level."

A string of illegalities in arms contracts dating back to 1984 has led to delays in clinching major deals and has left the politico-military establishment wary of new scandals.

Antony said foolproof methods such as an iron-clad transparency

clause included in every deal would help rebuild the scandal-tainted image.

He called for streamlining of procurement procedures.

The commanders' conclave, opened by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, was also to review ambitious space plans and the turmoil in neighbouring Pakistan, Myanmar and Sri Lanka, a defence ministry spokesman said.

Singh in his address also called for an overhaul of existing military practices to "meet long-term strategic goals of India," officials said.

"The prime minister said changes (in arms procurement policies) must be carried out to ensure their practical implementation," a top commander attending the conclave said.

The prime minister also said the million-plus military must back India's strategic ambitions in the Asian region, he added.

US military may get control of contractors

AP, Washington

Congress is moving to put all armed contractors operating in combat zones under military control, acting on a Pentagon recommendation that could run into resistance at the State Department.

The Senate this month included such a requirement in its 2008 defence authorisation bill. Sen Carl Levin, chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, told reporters Wednesday he is confident the House will go along with the idea and include it in a final bill sent to President Bush.

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice was to testify Thursday about the subject before the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee.

She has ordered new rules for the private guards who are hired to protect US diplomats. They include increased monitoring and explicit rules on when and how they can use deadly force. The steps were recommended by a review panel that Rice created after a deadly Sept. 16 shooting involving Blackwater USA guards.

Rice also called for better coordination with the military, but did not explicitly act on a suggestion by Defence Secretary Robert Gates that combatant commanders have control over the contractors.

UN hosts conference on combating forced marriage

AFP, London

Britain kicked off a two-day European conference on Wednesday focused on sharing its experience in tackling the horrors of forced marriage.

Marriages without consent, or their refusal, have led to suicides and honour killings in Britain, shocking a nation generally deemed to have successfully absorbed immigrant communities and practices.

Britain considers forced marriages -- as distinct from accepted arranged marriages -- as a transgression of human rights and a form of domestic abuse and fears there may be many more cases than the ones it knows about.

The government has, however, decided against outlawing the practice, for fear that criminalisation would force the issue further underground, with victims unwilling to press charges against their parents. Rape, domestic violence and kidnap laws are used instead.

The conference heard from British government ministers, police detectives and forced mar-

riage "survivors" who have gone on to establish refuges and networks helping victims of the practice.

Delegates from across the European Union were told of shocking cases where women were murdered to uphold family honour, burnt themselves to death to escape forced marriages.

Victims are often disowned, considered dead by their families if they refuse to consent to such marriages.

Britain's Forced Marriage Unit (FMU), established in 2005, receives around 5,000 calls and deals with about 300 cases per year. However, officials fear this is merely the tip of the iceberg.

Men account for 15 percent of the cases. The majority of cases dealt with are individuals aged 15 to 24. Around 30 percent involve minors, some as young as 10 years old.

The FMU said 65 percent of the cases involved Pakistan, 25 percent Bangladesh, a small percentage in India, with the rest involving countries across the globe, including Ireland and Italy.

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