

## The freeing of DU teachers and students

*Drop torching case and review verdicts in good spirit*

THE freeing of eight Dhaka University students on Wednesday, together with the earlier release of four academics from detention, has certainly led to an easing of tension not only on the campus but across the country as well. The joy and sense of relief with which the freed teachers and students were welcomed back at Dhaka University speak of the respect and empathy that people have felt for all these individuals. The campus will now hopefully return to a pursuit of normal activities.

The need now is to build on the new spirit that has come into the national scene through the release of the academics and students. By responding to growing popular demands for positive action on the issue of the arrests, the government has demonstrated a degree of sagacity. Such action will undoubtedly lead to a return of normal conditions on the campus and already there are indications of classes and stalled examinations getting back on track. The freed teachers, in their comments after their release, have sounded a positive note on what now needs to be done. They have drawn attention to the noble and high traditions that Dhaka University has historically upheld. One would like the government to be sensitive to the general sentiments at a time when the country prepares for a return to democratic governance through general elections later this year. A truly good gesture in this regard can be made through dropping the case of the vehicle torching incident by the authorities. Let things begin with a clean slate.

There is one other point which the government, in a proper spirit of reconciliation, should be making note of. A number of legal experts have suggested that the convictions handed to three of the four teachers were based on 'poor' evidence. That being the case, a review be undertaken of the convictions and these be set aside.

Let the authorities reflect on the issue and come forth with a constructive approach to it.

## BCS examinations notified

*55pc quota recruitment still in vogue?*

AFTER a time-lag of two and a half years since the circular for the last BCS exam was issued, that for the 28th BCS exam, has just been published. The delay in setting the BCS exam on the roll is because of the irregularities in the 27th BCS exam which took time to be cleared from the deck including the corrective steps put in place to avert any recurrence of the same this time around.

However, the delay in resuming the process has left several job seekers ineligible as they have aged beyond 30 years, the upper limit for eligibility.

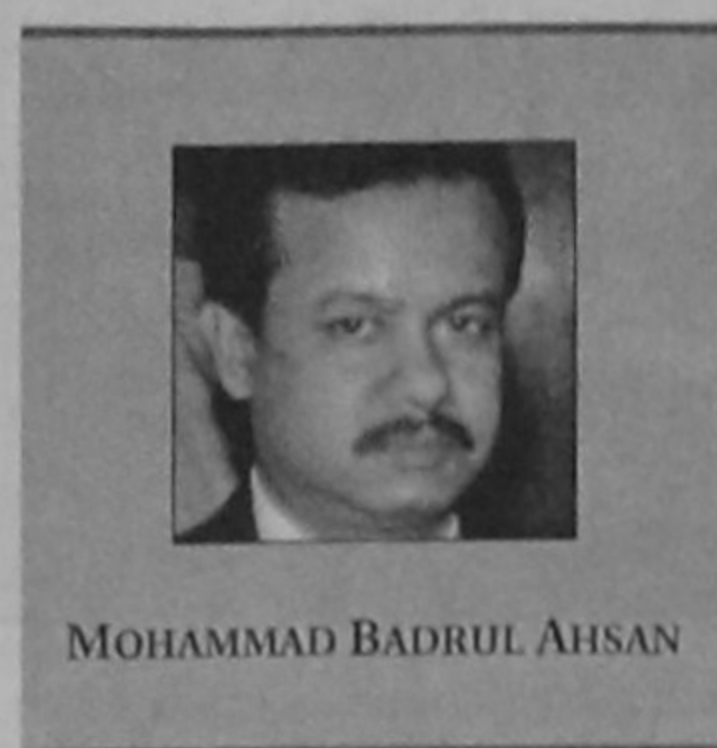
As we know the Public Service Commission (PSC) had been reconstituted against the backdrop of scandals of question leakage and variegated forms of corruption plaguing the 27th BCS exam under the old set-up. The new leadership has taken some prophylactic steps. As a matter of fact during successive governments the PSC's role as the recruiter of civil government officials for the republic had been systematically weakened -- thanks to pushing of candidates by politicians, favouritism and nepotism. The result has been that quality assurance went by default in many cases.

Equality of opportunity to get into the republic's services is an important right of the citizen. That's why uniform criterion is prescribed for eligibility to appear at the tests. So far so good, but it is of utmost importance that along with that in selecting the incumbents for government offices at the highest entry levels considerations of merit supersede that of quotas. But we begin with a structural problem there: the non-merit quota exceeds the proportion of jobs earmarked for the merit-list. The ratio is 55pc to 45pc of the total number. The quota dispensation, although understandable and perhaps justifiable to certain extent, opens avenues for less qualified candidates to be recruited. Besides, it can spawn corruption. Political governments have often used this slot to push in their favourites. This should be recast.

We believe also that the allowable number of appearances at the BCS exams should be fixed. No more than three appearances should be allowed.

It is a palpable public expectation that the reconstituted PSC should be able to streamline the examination system with the government helping it tide over some of the structural problems that still exist.

## Four brothers and a sister



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

THIS is a story from faraway Zimbabwe, from its Dzivarasekwa district to be precise. A group, which calls itself "the Four Brothers and a Sister" flags down vehicles on the road, pretending that they are traffic officers checking out safety measures. It includes four men and one woman, which is how it got its name. But in reality they collect bribe from the drivers and don't mind negotiating within the earshot of passengers.

There is a name for what they do. It's called confidence trick or con job, an act of swindling people after one has gained their confidence.

Come back home to a similar story, of course with a twist of its kind. The four brothers and their one sister are born out of the same mother, a golden womb, which carried these gems one after another. Here the brothers don't work with their sister, but

**We have heard about the brotherhood of crooks, but here we have the crookhood of brothers. Former US president Lyndon Baines Johnson said in a speech in 1963, "We hope that the world will not narrow into a neighborhood before it has broadened into a brotherhood." I don't know what he would have said if he were alive to see the brotherhood of our brothers. They have narrowed the world into a brotherhood dividing it into neighborhoods of them and us.**

with an impressive man who is married to her. Never mind; this is just a story. So what if it's a fact of life?

These men have done well in life and they have continued to do so for many years. What can you say, success at times is contagious. It's like a bad case of flu for the fortunate; the virus spreads even from a small sneeze or cough. The four brothers and their brother-in-law have been immensely lucky. Good luck runs in their blood.

Let us say, when the brother-in-law was a law enforcer, one of the four brothers was involved in a heist. They say he was an innocent man, given to drinking and easy life. They say he wasn't to blame for what happened. At around sixty, he was as simple-minded as a child. Others used his naive shoulders to fire their guns. It's said that the brother-in-law let him slip the net.

Eat your heart out, if you don't know what happened next. Many people have been thrown in jail on the same charges for which the brother was spared. You may say shame, but in this wicked world this is the name of the game. Powerful people protect their families, powerful parties protect their leaders, and powerful leaders protect their cronies. We are caught in a vicious circle of power struggle. More power for few people makes the rest of us more powerless.

This is the story of how corruption breeds, from greed and love of loved ones to dishing out favors to family and friends. Tell me frankly how is it different from the story of those politicians who are currently languishing in jail? It's perhaps a matter of degree, but surely not of anything else.

A mother gave protection to her sons, who gave protection to their buddies who gave protec-

tion to their minions. In another case, a sister looked after her sister, cousins and rest of the tribe. Down the line, others did the same thing, for spouses, children, siblings, uncles, cousins and friends.

If an iota of this story is true, then the four brothers and their brother-in-law are even worse. Educated, respectable and sophisticated, they have exploited their reputation to lower the same standards they have been busy setting for others.

Compared to those politicians, these men have more finesse. They are more articulate and know how to present things better. They speak well, look well, and they carry themselves in a more convincing manner. But this is exactly how they gained our confidence before they cheated on us. By all means what they have done is a scam.

It also raises a pertinent ques-

tion. What are these talks about honesty, democracy and patriotism if not clever contrivance for playing head games with the trust of people? Where is the decency that gentlemen should have consideration for others? Where is the decency if enlightened minds must take advantage of those who are living in the dark?

Yet, believe me, this is exactly what these five men have done. They have taken us for a ride, and covered up truth to save the neck of a beloved brother. May be the brother would have been acquitted in the court. May be he would have been convicted for his crime. Now we don't know since he was never brought to trial. The other brothers and their brother-in-law formed a shield to protect him.

He hasn't been proclaimed absconding either. The brothers have created a smokescreen so that he will be either forgotten by all or remembered by none. What can be a bigger con game than hiding a suspect behind the innocent façade of a calculated scheme? This is what the godfathers do when the police look for their men. They send them hiding underground where they stay until the coast is clear.

These four brothers and their brother-in-law have many admirers. And the admirers in our country admire not virtue but success.

Success creates the moral standard. Right and wrong are determined on the basis of what works and what doesn't. For these men, everything has worked, and success has given them confidence to take the confidence of gullible men before making fools out of them.

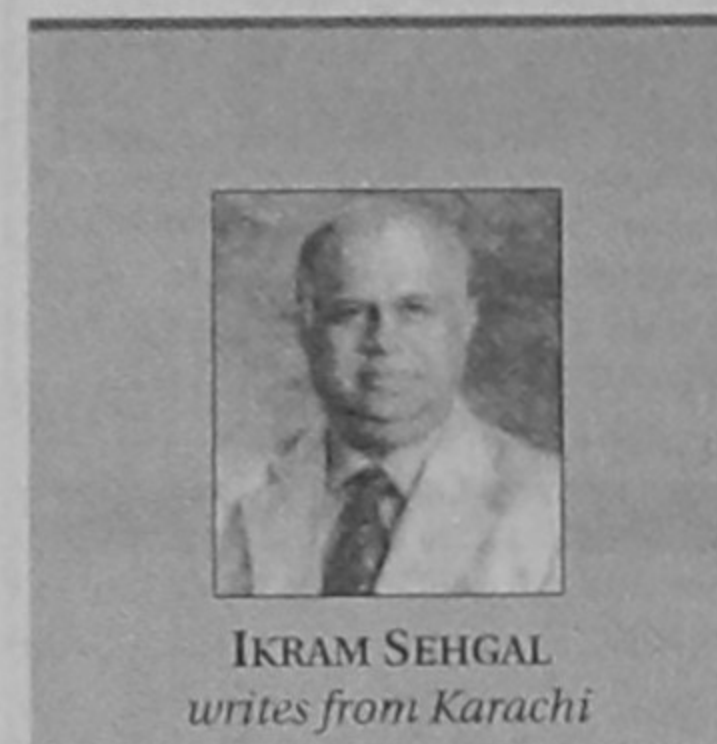
We have heard about the brotherhood of crooks, but here we have the crookhood of brothers. Former US president Lyndon Baines Johnson said in a speech in 1963, "We hope that the world will not narrow into a neighborhood before it has broadened into a brotherhood." I don't know what he would have said if he were alive to see the brotherhood of our brothers. They have narrowed the world into a brotherhood dividing it into neighborhoods of them and us.

Our four brothers and their sister's husband are bigger con artists than the group in Zimbabwe. They have tricked the entire population of a country whereas the other group tricks the drivers in a particular town. Take a guess and tell others if you identify who they are.

Otherwise, all characters in this column are fictitious. Any resemblance to any person dead or alive is coincidence.

Mohammad Badrul Ahsan is a banker.

## National compromise



IKRAM SEHGAL  
writes from Karachi

THE country seems to have been transfixed into immobility on the rail tracks by the on-rushing lights of an express freight train in the form of the February 18 elections. President Pervez Musharraf and his supporters are standing on one side of the tracks while the opposition political parties are on the other. From time to time, suicide bombers remind us that the situation can become far more explosive. Neither is prepared to blink first, i.e. any move by either side to save Pakistan from the approaching disaster will be taken as a sign of weakness by the other.

A recent meeting with the president during this hour of crisis only highlighted the country's Catch-22 situation. The word "dictator" does describe Musharraf in the technical sense, and yet does not do justice to him. Fully aware of the impending law and order, and economic and political problems, he willingly entered into a responsive exchange without "shooting the messenger bringing bad tidings."

Very few people wielding absolute power will enter a debate on issues that would certainly not be palatable. If he felt irritation or

impatience he did not show it. He did show his exasperation that every attempt at compromise he has made has been rebuffed, taken as a sign of weakness rather than a genuine attempt to resolve issues. He maintains his willingness to reconcile provided the opposition shows some reciprocity.

One is hoping that he has something up his sleeve; that something may be cooking on the back-burner, a desperate (and perhaps forlorn) wish that the country may be spared the catastrophe looming before us.

Even with all the charisma Ms. Benazir could bring to bear on the Pakistani electorate, the PPP as the single largest party may not get a simple majority in the present and in the foreseeable future. After her tragic demise, Asif Zardari has moved with great dexterity to shore up both the party and the family fortunes (pun intended). His own person being controversial among the party faithful who blame him mostly for the corruption stigma that smeared the Bhutto name, naming Bilawal as co-chairman was a masterstroke to preserve the party unity in the short term.

His stance for an early election

## AS I SEE IT

**The final onus of responsibility still lies with Pervez Musharraf as the incumbent ruler. While his prime mission is to get the nation united in the "war against terrorism," he has to prepare the masses to cope with economic recession, and oil and food shortages. His suggestion of a non-political, non-controversial PM may be summarily rejected by the opposition; why not test their credibility before the masses by asking them to name a few persons from whom he can choose?**

is also correct, to cash in on the sympathy vote. How long can he hold the party's loyalty in line, given his many weaknesses and the gradual dissipation of the Bhutto magic? It does not help that Fatima Bhutto and Zulfikar, Jr are waiting in the wings as the real Bhuttos.

The PPP's final tally will be directly proportional to the quantum of rigging in the Punjab; however, even a genuinely free and fair election would not get them more than about 90 seats, far less than a simple majority. His pre-election claims are simply jockeying for post-election advantage. If PPP does not join a national coalition government, the faithful will desert in droves to get in out of the cold they have lived in for a decade.

Personally, Asif Zardari badly needs the National Reconciliation Ordinance (NRO), without which he will be hamstrung in getting at the many bank accounts and other assets stashed abroad. He is smart enough to know that if the Western media gets at him his present lifestyle will suffer as they uncover issues, which he would prefer remain hidden.

Mian Nawaz Sharif showed

great presence of mind and political astuteness by heading straight for the Rawalpindi hospital where Ms Benazir was taken gravely wounded. Not only good for national amity, it was necessary to buff over the ethnic edges arising out of the assassination. Mian Sahib has recently been something of a surprise, along with a crop of a hair his political grey matter also seems to have increased.

The demise of Ms Benazir has made him the most popular politician in the country by default. Yet, his popularity in the Punjab does not translate into seats in other Provinces.

In his previous two terms as PM, he readily discarded mature political aides for closet Rasputins. Is he now capable of following good advice or, like Professor Stephen Leacock's immortal well-meaning hero, will he again jump on his horse and gallop off in all directions? The really street smart brother, Shabbaz Sharif, would be a more credible political compromise, but will Kulsoom Sharif and sons tolerate this?

There are signs that PML (N) could be ready to compromise "in the national interest" -- better

late than never! How the Brothers Sharif will ever come to any reconciliation with Chowdhury Shujaat and Pervez Elahi is beyond comprehension.

For Pervez Elahi, these elections are a "do or die" exercise. In addition to development efforts in the Punjab, he has also stacked the deck for a favourable election result. With his interests coinciding with that of Pervez Musharraf, the intelligence agencies are working overtime for him. With the new leadership in the army openly averse to following the "Turkish Army" model, this support will dissipate, and could even come to a dead stop after the senior promotions/postings expected in March. He has a vested interest in early elections. Every day of delay diminishes Pervez Elahi's hold over the Punjab bureaucracy. Post-March he may well have only a couple of dozen MNAs/MPAs with him; our elected representatives are infamous for never worshipping the setting sun!

Whether elections are held early or later, the vote banks of MQM, ANP, Balochistan national parties, independents, etc will remain intact. Qazi Hussain Ahmed and Imran Khan must be brought back into the electoral process. They will have more than limited nuisance value if they are kept out in the cold. Knowing that their performance will not match their rhetoric, staying out may well be their tactical preference.

There are unmistakable signs that the Pakistan army wants out of the political process. This process is already on in a measured way, the most significant being the recall of all serving

officers from civilian posts. If the army's hierarchy can distinguish between anti-state and anti-government, and get over its Afghanistan-fixation, it will avoid quite a number of unnecessary controversies.

When the military sets out to do something it is not equipped for, it is a recipe for disaster. On the other hand, it has shown in Swat that when it sets out on its prime mission, it does it very well. The media has also to play its own part, by impartial reporting and objective analysis. Freedom requires responsibility, compare our media's good fortune with that of more than a 100 countries, most of them Muslim and/or third world! A self-governing "code of ethics" must be applied without any intervention by the government.

The final onus of responsibility still lies with Pervez Musharraf as the incumbent ruler. While his prime mission is to get the nation united in the "war against terrorism," he has to prepare the masses to cope with economic recession, and oil and food shortages. His suggestion of a non-political, non-controversial PM may be summarily rejected by the opposition; why not test their credibility before the masses by asking them to name a few persons from whom he can choose?

Our rulers owe this country a concerted effort to turn a situation tailor-made for confrontation and disaster into an opportunity for lasting prosperity. This is only possible through national compromise!

Ikram Sehgal, is an eminent Pakistani political analyst and columnist.

## Turning up the heat

**It was compelling to watch all those psychological problems burst into the open on Monday night, just days before the South Carolina primary. Clinton and Obama's visceral dislike for each other was obvious, while Edwards stayed cordial -- but fought for equal time.**

RICHARD WOLFFE

FAMILY therapists might want to study the two Democratic get-togethers over the last week. Both were nominally about race in America, and both involved the same three candidates. One became known as the kumbaya conversation, in which the candidates embraced one another's records on civil rights and racial issues. The other was a blood-bath in which the same candidates slashed and sliced their way through one another's reputations, voting records and campaign quotes.

In Las Vegas last week Hillary Clinton insisted that Democrats needed to hug each other more

and start swinging at the real enemy. "We are so different from the Republicans on all of these issues, in every way that affects the future of the people that we care so much about," she said. "So I think that it's appropriate on Dr. King's birthday, his actual birthday, to recognise that all of us are here as the result of what he did, all of the sacrifice, including giving his life, along with so many of the other icons that we honour."

"We're all family in the Democratic Party," Hillary Clinton said in the cozy Las Vegas get-together. In Myrtle Beach, S.C., the family they most resembled was the Sopranos.

In Monday's debate Clinton

still lambasted Republicans -- but implied that some of her colleagues might admire them. "The facts are that (Obama) has said in the last week that he really liked the ideas of the Republicans over the last 10 to 15 years," she said, referring to Obama's previous comments about the Reagan era. "Now, I personally think they had ideas, but they were bad ideas."

After the two of them squabbled for several minutes -- including over who had the right to talk -- Obama tried to quash the notion that he was not a real member of the family. "What I said was that Ronald Reagan was a trans-formative political figure because he was able to get

Democrats to vote against their economic interests to form a majority to push through their agenda, an agenda that I objected to," he said. "Because while I was working on those streets watching those folks see their jobs shift overseas, you were a corporate lawyer sitting on the board at Wal-Mart."

Family disputes are never pretty, but any good psychologist would recognise the three classic defense mechanisms on display: denial, repression and suppression.

At last week's debate, and for most of the last year, the top three Democrats suppressed their natural competitive feelings for the greater family good. Perhaps at times they even repressed the resentment that simmered among them -- the nasty feeling that the others were standing in the way of their rightful position as the presidential nominee. Of course, they may have simply

been in denial, refusing to admit their obvious afflictions as ambitious politicians.

It was compelling to watch all those psychological problems burst into the open on Monday night, just days before the South Carolina primary. Clinton and Obama's visceral dislike for each other was obvious, while Edwards stayed cordial -- but fought for equal time. For the record, Obama threw the first punch about Clinton copying him on tax rebates. "That wasn't the original focus of her plan," he said. "I think recently she has caught up with what I had originally said, which is we've got to get ... tax cuts into the pockets of hard-working Americans right away."

That was only a glancing blow compared with the right hook he landed a little later on both Clinton and John Edwards on the issue trade. "It is absolutely true that Nafta was a mistake," he said. "I know that Hillary ... just last year said this was a boon to the

economy. I think it has been devastating, because our trade agreements did not have labour standards and environmental standards that would assure that workers in the U.S. were getting a square deal." Then he turned on Edwards for his vote for permanent trade relations with China.

This marks a new phase in Obama's campaign: the steel cage fight that his aides had long scorned. His fellow candidates were only too happy to jump into the cage with him.

Clinton accused Obama of being a lawyer "representing your contributor, (Antoin) Rezko, in his slum landlord business in inner-city Chicago." (Chicago businessman Rezko was indicted last fall on federal charges of influence peddling.) Obama said that, as an associate in a local law firm, he performed several hours of legal work in involving Rezko's housing developments. Last weekend Obama

returned more than \$40,000 in political contributions that had been linked to Rezko.

Rezko's attorney has said Rezko is innocent and intends to fight all charges. Edwards accused them both of engaging in "squabbling." Clinton and Edwards both swung at Obama for his votes on credit card interest rates, his scores of "present" votes in the Illinois legislature, and his health-care proposals. "Well, you know, Senator Obama, it is very difficult having a straight-up debate with you," said Clinton, "because you never take responsibility for any vote, and that has been a pattern."

Obama likes to say that voters need less heat in Washington and more light. If there was any light from Monday's debate it came in a simple contrast between how Clinton and Obama spoke about Republicans. Clinton insisted she was the best candidate to withstand Republican attacks in

the general election. Obama insisted he was the best candidate to attract Republicans in the general election.

But that was just a passing moment before they turned to the real dispute over who should lead the family. The old head of the family, Bill Clinton, was not onstage during the two-hour meltdown. When his name popped up, Obama complained that the former president had trashed him about the Reagan comments.

"Well, I'm here," said Hillary Clinton, displacing her husband. "He's not."

"OK," said Obama. "Well, I can't tell who I'm running against sometimes."

Whoever emerges as the head of the family, at some point in the next several weeks, one thing is clear: they are all going to need a lifetime of therapy.