

## Indo-Bangla maritime boundary talks

Let an agreement be worked out at the earliest

THE fact of the matter is that no tangible results have been arrived at by Bangladesh and India at the end of their three-day conference on maritime boundary issues. And yet both the sides at the meeting held in Dhaka have described the outcome as fruitful, which is just as well. When one considers the fact that these talks took place after an inordinately long gap of twenty-eight years, one will surely describe the event as encouraging, to an extent. It must be noted that such issues as maritime boundaries are of crucial significance in relations between states. Indeed, they have international significance given that they are linked inextricably with such legalities as the Law of the Sea. The question therefore arises as to why Bangladesh and India, being such close neighbours, had to wait nearly three decades before getting down to discussing the issue.

All said and done, though, it has to be acknowledged that the very fact of the talks having taken place should be considered as progress of a kind. For its part, Bangladesh has presented its case rather forcefully, as was only to be expected, given especially the compulsions it has been facing as a result of the absence of a deal with India on the issue. That the meeting went off without rancour and that the two sides spoke of it in positive terms and in candid fashion is indicative of a healthy development that could be in the works. In this context, one notes that the expert committees, which surely will apprise their governments of the nature of the recent talks, will meet again. We would like to point out here that the committees should be meeting soon and fairly regularly rather than leaving the issue hanging for another long spell of time. Indeed, the recent meeting should have thrown up a programmed course of negotiations for the two countries. For the immediate future, such a course of action is essential because issues such as maritime and land border demarcation always demand a sustained, updated state of talks between the sides involved.

The urgency of a solution to the problem is particularly important for Bangladesh because of the economic imperatives before it. So far, the absence of an accord with India has prevented it from utilising the resources that are rightfully its own. As a matter of fact, a sense of deprivation where tapping its own gas, fishing and other resources is concerned has logically been working in Bangladesh's perspective. Such a gnawing issue ought not to be there between two close neighbours. And it will not be if Dhaka and Delhi are able, quickly and effectively, to work out a solution to the maritime issue.

## What a logic to fell trees!

The plan should be abandoned

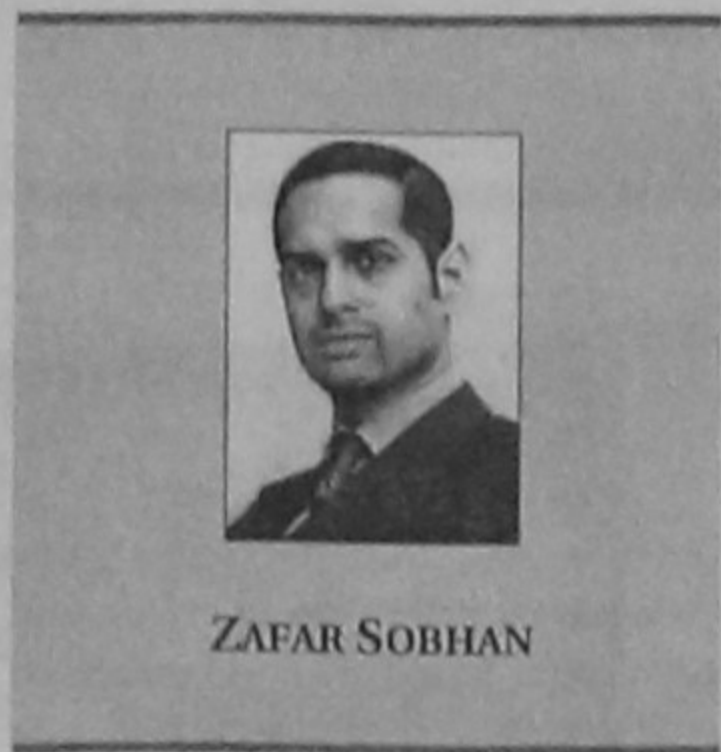
THE Jahangirnagar University authorities have evoked strident protests from environmentalists and students alike following their decision to fell a few hundred old trees on the campus. The strange move is being ostensibly taken to keep off the poachers who have been spurring away some of the trees for good money. Presumably, they want to rid the campus of the inviting trees. Rather than staving thieves off by effective security vigil, the administration seems to have taken a convenient route to appear in a salesman's role. The timber business will surely add to the university coffers; but at what cost?

The other reason cited for tearing down the trees is allegedly their moribund nature being 'detrimental to public health'. Frankly, this sounds more like fabrication than reasoning. This is unheard of, too, for most of the renowned universities around the world, let alone the subcontinent, have been epitomes of nature and human beings living in perfect symbiosis. As a matter of fact, JU campus' hallmark is its wooded landscape and its vast tree cover that has been a boon for bio-diversity and a home to 150 species of migratory and native birds. Besides, these trees enhance the aesthetic side of the campus and are good study material for botanists.

Our correspondent himself taking a close look at the trees found out that these are not moribund trees nor their trunks or roots spanning or penetrating into surrounding structures. So, we endorse the concerns of the environmentalists and the students of university and urge the syndicate to reverse the decision and have the trees continue to breathe fresh air into the overall ambience.

Simultaneously, the university administration should go the extra mile to prune the trees and treat them to grow new foliage, where possible. More importantly, plant more trees.

## Rebel warriors



Ami bidrohi, I the rebel warrior  
I have risen alone with my head held high  
--Asian Dub Foundation

IF there was any doubt as to what motivated the 13 Bangladeshi cricketers to sign with the ICL and whether they were justified in doing so, such doubt was removed by the draconian punishment handed down to them by the Bangladesh Cricket Board on Wednesday.

The ten year ban is totally disproportionate to any offence the players might have committed, and as one-time captain of the national team, Habibul Bashar, points out, this is the kind of action one would expect against someone involved in match fixing or some other kind of egregious practice, and that the players who have chosen to join the ICL have committed no crime that merits such punishment.

But in a sense, the BCB did the players a favour by demonstrating in clear terms the contempt the

## STRAIGHT TALK

The players should be an inspiration to us all. They don't want to be called rebels (I don't understand why: in this country such an appellation should be a badge of pride), but if they stick to their guns, they certainly will deserve to be called warriors.

board has for the players under its control (to say nothing of their contempt for the wishes of the cricket-watching public) and the arrogance they have when dealing with the players.

The attitude of the board is perhaps best summed up by the words of another ex-national team captain who is now on the board: "I am optimistic that they can [now] understand their mistakes and beg mercy to the board."

In fairness, this is a malady that is unique neither to cricket nor to Bangladesh. Professional (and amateur for that matter) sports the world over is marred by officious and arrogant bureaucrats who like to throw their weight around and think that the players, who are really the heart and soul of the game, are nothing more than chattel, and should do as they are told and be happy.

Sports governing authorities always act in this manner in order to protect their monopoly power as though they own the sport and it belongs to them.

That the ICC (cricket's govern-

ing body) has refused to recognise the ICL and then encouraged the member nations to take action against players who do join is nothing short of the worst kind of bullying.

Let's look at the situation with the Bangladeshi cricketers for a moment.

So they have chosen to play in the ICL. At the most basic level, the question is: Why shouldn't they? Why should they not be able to play for whomever and wherever they please? What gives the ICC or the BCB or anyone else the right to tell them where and how they can ply their trade (and to deny Bangladeshi cricket fans of the pleasure of watching them compete at the national level)?

The problem begins with the fact that the ICL is not recognised by the ICC. There is no reason on earth why the ICL and the ICC cannot co-exist. The only reason the ICC does not recognise the ICL is to protect the monopoly interest of the BCCI, the governing body of Indian cricket, and, indirectly, its own monopoly interest. Why anyone would sup-

port such a thing is beyond me.

As for the BCB and its response, again, there is no reason why the players cannot play for both ICL and the national team. There was no compulsion on the part of the BCB to ban or even sanction the Bangladeshis who joined ICL, and certainly the harshness of the punishment handed down by the BCB was entirely the board's own decision.

Now that they have been put in this unfair situation by the board, where they have to choose between playing in the ICL and playing for the national team, it is a bit much to criticise the players for lack of patriotism and commitment for choosing the ICL over a board that treats them with contempt.

By no means can playing for the BCB be equated with patriotism. Many athletes do not represent their country due to conflict with coaches or governing bodies. It is not a question of patriotism and to suggest that it is would be to equate the BCB and its management with Bangladesh -- a self-evident absurdity.

It is a question of personal and professional relations, how the players feel they are treated and valued. If they feel that they were undervalued or not treated with the respect they merited (and the board's subsequent actions strongly suggest that the players had a point), they have every right to leave.

It is not even as though the players adhere to the stereotype of the arrogant, swaggering prima donnas one finds in sports in other countries.

Anyone who has spent any time with our cricketers can readily confirm that they are, almost to a man, down-to-earth, humble, and respectful, nothing like the caricature of the spoilt professional athlete.

All they ask in return is to be treated with respect. Is that asking too much?

I would like to conclude by making one last point about the ICL. The fact that it includes a team from Pakistan and now one from Bangladesh is to be commended and stands in stark contrast to the ICC-sponsored IPL which has no Bangladeshi side and deigned to sign a grand total of one Bangladeshi cricketer.

You tell me: Between the ICL and the IPL, who is treating Bangladeshi cricket better, and why should the players not sign up for this league which at least includes them, and, more importantly, is willing to include Bangladesh in its ambit?

The ICL has at least brought the game to Bangladesh and included us in its calculations. Let me ask you this: What has the IPL done for Bangladeshi cricket and the country's cricket-watching public?

I really hope that the players stick to their guns. I fear that they might not due to the outcry and the severity of the punishment. But if the feedback of Daily Star readers is any guide, they have support of enough people who understand that it is the board that is being unreasonable, not the players, and are excited about the prospect of an ICL team playing out of Dhaka.

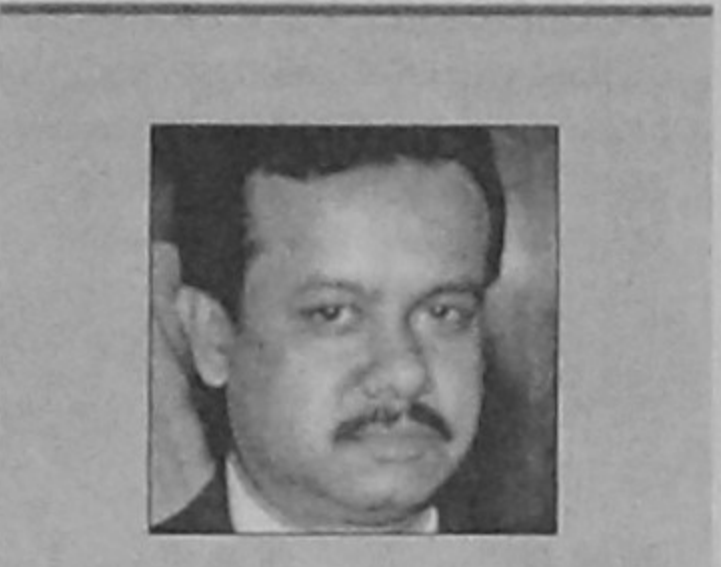
I won't blame the players if they back down. The board has raised the stakes dramatically, and no one likes to be called names or have their motives called into question. But I hope they don't back down.

They would be bringing cricket to Bangladesh in a way that the ICC-sponsored IPL never saw fit to, and in doing so would be showing us that they can stand up to bullying bureaucratic officialdom.

The players should be an inspiration to us all. They don't want to be called rebels (I don't understand why: in this country such an appellation should be a badge of pride), but if they stick to their guns, they certainly will deserve to be called warriors.

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## The unhappiness gap



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

IF we look at our history since 1971, people have either got the government they didn't want or wanted the government they didn't get. Right away we can discount the military regimes, which were the governments people didn't want. At other times, they elected government with expectations, which weren't met.

This time it has been a roughly fifty-fifty split. In the first half people thought they had got the government of their choice. In the second half, they aren't sure if this is the government they had in mind.

Where is the gap? Are people chasing an imaginary government, or is government chasing an imaginary people? Let me explain. One of the complaints against the African states is that the governments don't harmonise with the aspirations of their people. In other words, governments are imposed on people instead of people imposing themselves on governments.

## CROSS TALK

Where is the gap? Are people chasing an imaginary government, or is government chasing an imaginary people? Let me explain. One of the complaints against the African states is that the governments don't harmonise with the aspirations of their people. In other words, governments are imposed on people instead of people imposing themselves on governments.

Democracy is all about that spark. Government must connect with people.

Does that connection exist in our land? Does government know what people want, or do people know what type of government they would like? In most cases, the connection comes at the time of election. Then two sides are dislodged from each other. The government goes its way and people go theirs, until they meet again at the next election. Then the disgruntled people retaliate, and another party comes to power.

In this merry-go-round, the relationship between government and people is somewhat like conjugal life. If it must work, one side shouldn't take the other for granted. David Brook has shed light on this subject. He analysed the people-government relationship in one of the most effective democracies in the world.

In The Happiness Gap, which appeared in The New York Times

last October, he wrote that the upcoming US election was going to be shaped by a gap. This gap exists within the individual voters themselves -- between "their private optimism and their public gloom."

Of course, David has illustrated his point. Franklin Roosevelt was able to launch the New Deal in 1933 because the American people wanted to change the country and their own lives. But that isn't true anymore. Now people want the government to change so their lives can stay the same. The current American voters don't want to be transformed; they want to be defended.

Here comes the happiness part. A Pew Research Center survey shows that 65% Americans are satisfied with their own lives, which is one of the highest rates of personal satisfaction in today's world. On the other hand, Americans are overwhelmingly pessimistic about their public institutions. Only 25% of them are

satisfied with the state of their nation. The 40-point gap in private and public happiness is the fourth-largest gap in the world, trailing behind only Israel, Mexico and Brazil.

There are more surprises. How often do we think that our government isn't on the right track? A whopping 67% Americans feel that way about their government. If we believe that our government is wasteful and inefficient, about 62% Americans share the same dim view about their government.

We aren't alone to have doubts about the future of our next generation. Sixty percent Americans think their next generation will be worse off than the current one. Americans today are more pessimistic about government's ability to solve problems. Eighty percent of them believe this Congress has accomplished nothing.

Do these figures ring a bell? In the highest democratic nation in the world, higher satisfaction in

personal life leads to lower satisfaction with government. In a less democratic country like Mexico, 76% people are personally satisfied. What does this tell us? Probably government doesn't play a big role in people's life. People are happy regardless of whether the government stays on the same page with their expectations.

The Pew survey puts Bangladesh with Pakistan, Indonesia and most of the African countries, because the relationship between rising income and increasing happiness is not very strongly evident. When compared with a country like Nigeria, Bangladesh has twice the per capita income but half the chance to be happy with their lives as the Nigerians.

What does it tell about our attitude towards the government? Do we want the government to transform us, or do we want it to defend us? Do we really care if we have a democratic government, or do we want a government that controls prices and provides security? Do we want a government that fights corruption, or do we want a government that creates more opportunities for more corruption?

One answer is that this nation is divided. A large majority wants the government to transform their lives. They want incomes to grow, savings to rise, and lives to improve. They want the government to create more jobs, build more roads, provide more sanitation,

and maintain law and order. There is also a small minority, one that likes to be defended. They like the government to change so that their lives continue to remain the same. They control the government and make it do their pleasure, giving them opportunity to increase and protect their wealth.

This is the gap. One group is unhappy because the government pays no attention to their wretched condition. Another group is unhappy because it can't make sure of a system, which will unchangingly change the government of their choice.

Lately, there has been a thought of rapprochement. Two leaders fighting in the name of the larger group might sit for talks. The initiative is coming from a member of the smaller group, a questionable indication leading to more questions. Whose leaders are these leaders elected by people? In the end, will people's government belong to people?

The country is seething with discontent. It's floating on rage. Democracy is an empty word, ringing hollow. The critical balance is that government belongs to people no more than people belong to government. Hope runs like a river between two unhappy banks. Who is going to build the bridge to close this unhappiness gap?

Mohammad Badrul Ahsan is a columnist for The Daily Star.

## An open letter to HSC graduates



ABDULLAH A. DEWAN

DEAR HSC graduates: Congratulations. What a display of excellence, the outcome of your hard work.

Report shows that countrywide -- comprising nine education boards -- nearly 6.2 lakh students took the HSC and equivalent exams. About 4.66 lakh, or 76.19%, of you have passed, showing a 10.59% increase over 2007 -- an outstanding record. What is even more amazing is that 22,045 of you have scored GPA-5, outstanding last year's 11,140 -- a 97.5% jump.

Your exceptional achievements have much to do with your hard work and pride, and I again applaud your success.

## NO NONSENSE

Being in student government, you should organise debates and seminars on national and international issues. Following the models in the US, politically ambitious students may engage in community service, work as interns in local and national government offices (such as election commission) and political party offices, and get academic credits.

Like all of you, I also read the comments of some detractors. In concert with some educationists, Notre Dame College Principal Benjamin Costa argued that the record, passing rate didn't necessarily reflect overall improvement in the quality of education. He was, however, gracious in crediting your parents and guardians for their contributions in your outperformance.

Viqarunnisa's Principal Rokeya Akhter provided the analytical and persuasive arguments behind your successes. She suggested that the examiners may have acted as instructed -- crediting full marks to fully correct answers to exam questions. You should rightfully ask: What's wrong with

giving "right grades for right answers?"

Madam Rokeya also credited the congenial academic atmosphere that prevailed over the last year (absence of unsettling acrimonious politics, frequent call for hartals, lockouts, and street violence). How can anyone deny that? Who can forget that a major political party called for hartal on a day of the SSC exam in 2006?

So, ignore the detractors' comments for the time being. The next real concern is that with so many brilliant performers among you, frustration may set in because of limited seats in your cherished institutions and areas of higher studies. Understandably, all grade-5

achievers will not end up in the institution and field of their choice. That doesn't necessarily mean you cannot repeat your excellence in the next stage of your studies in another institution.

An institution of learning becomes reputable by the quality of graduates it produces. It is true that the quality of teachers, library, laboratory, and all other technical facilities attracts good students to a campus.

It is also equally true that good students can put pressure and display challenges for receiving quality education, which in turn bring reputation for the institution. So, wherever you get your admission, make sure to put your

monies worth of efforts and demand the best you deserve.

The education ministry may keep track of your semester-wise academic progress, especially of those receiving various government scholarships and academic loans. That would also reflect the quality and progress of curriculum instructions of the institutions where you are placed.

Those of you receiving government scholarship must know that tax-payers' money is supporting your education. When it comes to politics, your participation should be limited to campus issues only.

As we all know, partisan politicians who have historically been openly patronising student politics and have contributed to academic indiscipline and campus violence will exploit you for their party and self-promotion. A political government won't impose restrictions to sterilise university and college campuses from the infestations of political parties, but you -- the GPA-5 and GPA-4 students can.

"Dhaka University students' elections are treated with such significance by the political par-

ties that they choose the nominees of DU students' union -- not the students," observed a former vice-chancellor, Emajuddin Ahmed.

Watch out for some of your teachers and instructors who will try to promote political views in the middle of academic lectures and/or during your class work related visits to their offices. Such discourses are an integral part of the learning process as long as you're allowed to express your views; I do it all the time with my students. What is important though, is not to be swayed or influenced by anyone else's political views.

More importantly, do not follow the footsteps of third rate, low caliber, and underachieving rowdy students whose priorities are politics, street protests, and promotions of national political parties. Many of these students will end up behind bars -- some may become politicians like many of today's corrupt and ill-educated ones.

Today's campus politics encourages mastering violence, agitation, hooliganism, kidnapping, and so on. Much like trade

unions, student organisations promote the political agendas of their affiliated national parties, and often do so under the tutelage of faculty groups.

Between 1991 and the 1/11 emergency, many student activists simply mimicked their national leaders' penchant for land-grabbing, extortion, assaulting the media, and brutally attacking the opposition. Just last week, 4 DU students were expelled for assaulting journalists.

All these illicit activities tarnished the image of student politics in people's discernment. Today, the quality of graduates, politicians, and civil servants has deteriorated relative to the pre-liberation period.

In Western countries, student politics are limited to activities that come within the purview of student government. They include academic programs, library facilities, classroom conditions, residential halls, dining, sporting, health, and security issues, and all other aspects of campus welfare.

Being in student government, you should organise debates and

seminars on national and international issues. Following the models in the US, politically ambitious students may engage in community service, work as interns in local and national government offices (such as election commission) and political party offices, and get academic credits.

Remember, you can be anything you want to be -- only if you equip yourself with knowledge. Here is a real life example.

Two friends from Comilla Victoria College got admitted into B.Sc. (Hons.) in physics in DU after receiving their HSC. After one month into the program, one left physics to do M.A. in economics and then pursued a career in civil service, retired as government secretary (now serving as Chairman of Energy Regulatory Board). The other one -- after completion of M.Sc., came to USA, received M.S. in nuclear engineering, then studied economics and is now an economics professor -- and also writes in The Daily Star on a weekly basis.

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