

Godspeed to AUW

A potential force for positive change in our midst

THE inauguration of the Asian University for Women (AUW) in Chittagong is a happy augury not only for the women of Bangladesh but also for their counterparts in Asia who are presented with the unique opportunity of studying under the same roof. It will bring together different cultures and values in a wonderful melting pot in the very worldly pursuit of creating new human beings -- human beings that are empowered, skilled, motivated and ready to take up leadership in various fields, nationally, regionally and globally. Through a companionship and intellectual interaction they will develop a modernist vision of Asia and work for its implementation.

We congratulate all those visionaries associated with the establishment of the Asian University in Chittagong. We share Nobel laureate Dr Mohammad Yunus' hopes that the products of the university will imbibe the spirit and skill of building a society free of all kinds of discrimination. It is good to learn, as the chief adviser noted, that the AUW will earmark one half of its new enrolment for students who are the first in their families ever to enter university. The university actually aims at educating young women with particular emphasis on the inclusion of women from poor, rural and refugee populations. This is very touching and humane besides being principled, pragmatic and farsighted.

This is an auspicious moment for us all in Bangladesh, and especially for women. For, they not only get an access to world class education in their own vicinities but share all our pleasure and pride in hosting a window of opportunity to the women of Asia.

The dreams of the AUW will only be fulfilled if it can really be turned into an important force for positive change in the world.

The functionaries and faculty members of the university have a full measure of our felicitations and good wishes. Our hope is that the AUW will be a nucleus and the guiding light for creation of networks of young educated women throughout the regions. We are looking forward to its emergence as a centre of excellence of truly global standards.

Vandalism at VC's office

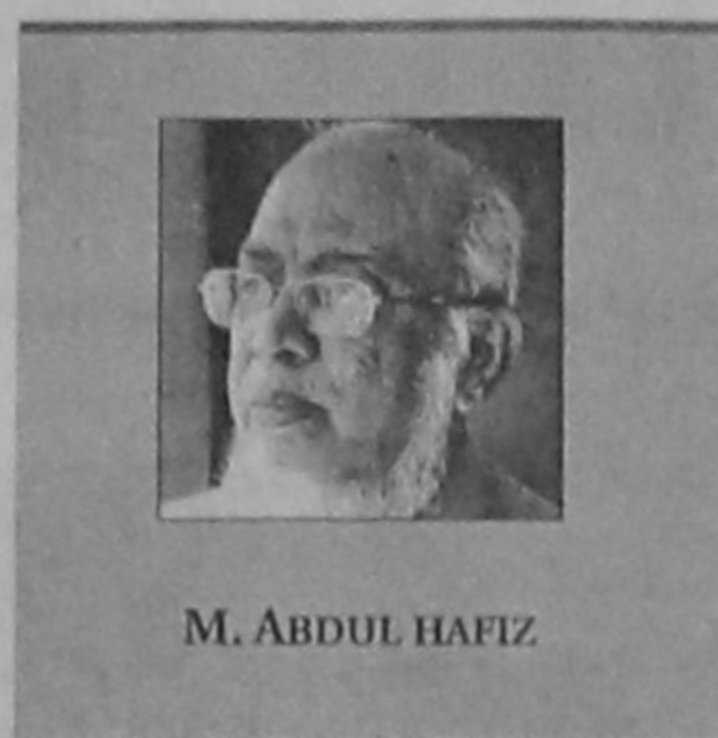
A reprehensible act

THE attack on the office of Dhaka University (DU) Vice-Chancellor ostensibly by some madrasa graduates was an exceedingly audacious act that evokes condemnation from every quarter. We are appalled to learn that about 200 students went berserk and vandalised VC's office when their demand for cancellation of a DU decision of not allowing admission to students who did not study Bangla and English carrying 200 marks each in their higher secondary or equivalent courses was not met by the VC. Though the VC assured them that the authorities would look into the matter in future since the decision for this year has already been approved by the deans' committee, the students refused to relent. They not only ransacked the office right before his eyes, they even threatened him of not letting the university run smoothly if they were not given admission.

We understand no such deplorable incident has ever taken place in the history of the university, which was the hub of all the movements that culminated in the creation of Bangladesh. The university and the office of the Vice Chancellor are held in high esteem by the people at home and abroad. It is an institution of immense repute that deserves respect; therefore, the authorities concerned must carry out a thorough investigation to identify the perpetrators and bring them before the law of the land. Why the madrasa students embarked on a disruptive course in front of the Vice-Chancellor instead of resorting to discussion with a better prospect for solution is a mystery that need to be gone into.

The student wing of a religion based political party was allegedly behind masterminding the raid on the office of the VC and what followed there. If this is true, we cannot but express our concern over it. We hope the political leaders would ask their student sympathisers to show respect to teachers.

Return of the Cold War?



M. ABDUL HAFIZ

AFTER having met Vladimir Putin for the first time, President Bush claimed that he could look into the Russian leader's heart, and found a "good man" in it worth doing business with. Such hope soon came crashing down when American and Russian interests clashed violently in the Caucasus. Flummoxed at the development, Bush has thus far chosen to keep his cool, presumably taking it to be a minor aberration on the part of Russian invaders against one of the US client states in the region.

The reality around what has been brewing in the Caucasus is, however, far more complex, and dates back to the Soviet Union's collapse in 1991. It grew out of a historic transformation that brought to naught the concept of balance of power, enunciated as far back as 1648 in the Treaty of Westphalia.

Even if western scholars and think-tanks saw in the collapse of the Soviet Union the triumph of democracy and free market economy and hastily proclaimed the "end of history," it was a gross simplification of how history awards its verdict in the rise and fall

of powers. No wonder, soon the prognosis proved to be premature and preposterous.

After having emerged as the world's sole superpower after the fall of the Soviet Union, an unchallenged US embarked on a policy that showed scant regard either for Russia's own vital interests or its pride as a millennium old country and once-superpower that closely competed with the US.

As Russia, the successor state of the Soviet Union, lay supinely in a state of drunken stupor during the chaotic years of Boris Yeltsin, the US took full advantage to further weaken the country. Moscow's global and regional issues were summarily ignored, while the former communist states of Eastern Europe were integrated within the West's fabric of economic and military alliances.

Against this backdrop, it was inevitable that at some point Moscow would reassert its position, for no nation takes such humiliation lying down. A turning point came with Putin's strong and resolute leadership, coupled with the country's growing clout as an energy power. Obviously, that has altered tremendously its bargain-

PERSPECTIVES

Obviously, the US, which considers its interests threatened in the region, reacted, with senior US officials claiming that Russian action could not be permitted "in this era." They threatened Russia with unspecified "consequences" for the latter's action in Georgia.

ing power and given the country a newfound confidence, enabling the Kremlin to exert influence far afield even renewing nuclear bomber patrols near Guam and Scotland.

But it was in the Caucasus where an increasingly assertive Kremlin decided to put its foot down, helped unwittingly by an irresponsible Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili, who, by committing the tactical error of occupying the break-away province of South Ossetia, provided Russia with a solid ground to act with its own military incursion.

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Russia is least unnerved by the threat, for it holds a few potent economic and diplomatic cards of its own to parry any such "consequences." Whether it opts to play them will depend on what measures the US and its allies choose to impose, impacting both tactical and strategic cost benefit calculus

in Moscow as future events unfold.

Among the most obvious instruments at Russia's disposal, to dissuade hostile Western action, are its energy resources on which Europe relies heavily, though analysts differ on whether Moscow would put then into play in its confrontation with the West.

"The biggest card that Russia holds is its energy resources," said Alexander Golz, a Russian military expert, "but there is a lot of mutual dependence here. Russia can't use them in a big way against the opponents. If Russia stops delivering oil and gas to Europe, it would cut off a major portion of its national revenue."

According to him, the strong popular support for Putin was anchored largely in the country's prosperity. Most Russians will be loath to see that curtailed. The people are willing to share the anti-West rhetoric of the authorities as long as they are not asked for big economic sacrifice.

Other experts view the issue differently. They refer to earlier instances of the Kremlin using its control of energy to bear in international disputes. "The energy card is clearly a big one to play," said Bob Ayers, an associate fellow



Leading Bush up the garden path?

at the London-based think-tank Chatham House.

Ayers, however, acknowledged that any curtailment of energy deliveries would certainly cause a financial crunch, but argued that Russia could ride such a storm for some time while Europe could not. Chris Weafer, an analyst with the investment bank Ural Sib, forecast that Russian might soon try to flesh out plans for a new "Geo-Opec," highlighting Moscow's determination to boost its power through control of energy.

"One of many upshots of recent events is that Moscow is expected to pursue its global energy objectives with great vigour," Weafer wrote. The US and Europe, while equally worried, have reacted to the Georgian crisis in a strikingly different way, as they formulate whatever "consequences" they plan to impose.

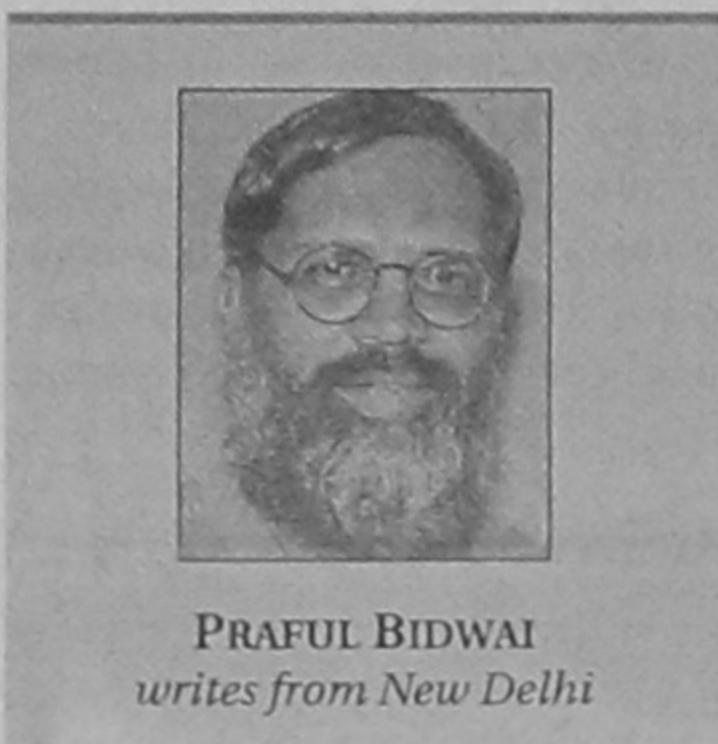
In a stark departure from the

past practices of the Bush administration, the US quickly took the military option off the table as a possible response to Russia over Caucasus. Jonathan Eyal of the London-based Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) aptly wrote: "The stage is set for confrontation. That's not what the West wanted."

In the meantime, after having made its point in the Caucasus, further confrontation is the least favoured option now in Russia. Notwithstanding the presence of all the elements and syndromes of renewed Cold War, reality seems to have dawned on both sides, and both are treading carefully to pursue their common global objectives concerning nuclear proliferation, resurgent extremism, climate change, and preservation of the common heritage of the mankind.

Brig (red) Hafiz is former DG of BISS.

Legitimising 'Moditva'?



PRAFUL BIDWAI
writes from New Delhi

M.R. Ratan Tata, one of India's best regarded industrialists, has dismayed many by deciding to shift the Nano car factory from Singur in West Bengal to Sanand near Ahmedabad in Gujarat.

The Singur agitation against land acquisition cannot explain the decision. Some alternative land acquisition formulas were proposed, which would have marginally raised project costs, but increased the compensation to farmers/sharecroppers. Tata Motors summarily rejected these.

Many states wooed it with incentives. Gujarat's offer probably wasn't more attractive than those made by Maharashtra, Karnataka or Uttarakhand, which must have matched the super-favourable treatment given in West Bengala subsidy estimated at half the project's cost!

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THE PRAFUL BIDWAI COLUMN

The Tatas chose Gujarat not for specific concessions, but because they were taken in by Chief Minister Narendra Modi's image as a dynamic, no-nonsense leader, and attracted to the "Gujarat Model" of development, based on rapid, haphazard industrial expansion at high human-rights and environmental costs.

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They were confident that Mr. Modi's ruthlessness, repressive labour policies, and despotically imposed "stability" would ensure the project's "smooth" implementation.

By making this move, Mr. Tata has bestowed legitimacy upon Mr. Modi's ghastly brand of politics. This was expressed eloquently in Mr. Tata's distinction between the "Bad M" (Mamata) and the "Good M" (Modi).

Last year, Mr. Tata famously told businessmen: "You're stupid if you're not in Gujarat." Now, he has put his imprimatur on Mr. Modi's "leadership" despite his connivance at a terrible pogrom of Muslims in 2002, executed by the sangh parivar.

Mr. Tata has behaved like any other businessman looking for low-risk investments and high profits. Within the logic of profit maximisation, it's hard to fault

him. But the Tatas are meant to be different: an enlightened, liberal-minded and ethical group driven by considerations larger than profit alone.

Mr. Tata's admirers believe he "can do no wrong." They also attach a mystical value to the Nano as a great managerial-technological achievement, priced at Rs.1 lakh and destined to become a middle class "dream machine."

However, as this column contended in January, the Nano is likely to have serious safety and maintenance problems because its design cuts corners and uses flimsy materials instead of solid, durable ones.

It's unlikely to meet elementary safety and emission norms while maintaining the one lakh-rupee price. It will choke India's roads, stoke rampant consumerism and resource waste, discourage public transport, and become a social and environmental liability.

However, the premise about the Tatas' exceptional nature involves

three propositions: it pioneered Indian industrialisation through Empress Mills and Tata Iron and Steel in the 19th century, and plays a highly innovative role under Ratan Tata; it has an unblemished labour relations and environmental record; and it's a model of corporate social responsibility, which averts aggressive practices.

The first half of the first proposition is undoubtedly true. The Tatas established textile and steel as swadeshi enterprises. They also set up other industries. But the group's in-house innovation has recently stagnated. It has expanded through acquisitions, like the \$13 billion Corus takeover.

Ever since he became the Tata chairman, Ratan Tata has tightened his family trusts' hold on group companies. Under the legendary J.R.D. Tata, Tata Sons Ltd. owned just 3% of their equity. Now, it holds a controlling share.

The Tatas' labour relations record is patchy. As historian Dilip Simeon has documented in his *The Politics of Labour under Late*

Colonialism, they promoted communalism and employed goondas in the 1920s and 1930s. Nelco was closed down after a prolonged lockout.

Many Tata projects have recently got into serious environmental conflicts in Maharashtra, Gujarat, Jharkhand and Orissa.

The Tatas admittedly run many charitable trusts. But Mr. Ratan Tata has also been lobbying for Dow Chemical being allowed to escape its responsibility for the aftermath of the Bhopal disaster as the heir of Union Carbide. He wants Dow to be freed of its legal liability to clean up the contaminated plant site, which has poisoned water and affected 25,000 people.

Under Ratan Tata's stewardship, the Tata group has turned aggressively acquisition-oriented. The Corus takeover created a \$7.4 billion debt. But that didn't stop the Tatas from taking over Jaguar-Land Rover. Labour unions in these companies don't feel reassured of job protection and good industrial relations.

On top of this comes the Nano factory's move to Gujarat. Implicit in this is an endorsement of Mr. Modi's style of governance, and above all, sanctification of his viciously communal politics.

The decision will be interpreted as an invitation to forget the haunting reality of the massacre of Muslims in 2002, the worst carnage of its kind in Independent India, and a major assault on secularism and democracy, from

which Gujarat hasn't still recovered.

The victims of the carnage continue to be denied justice, live in insecurity, and face all manner of harassment, including fake encounter killings.

The recent report of the Nanavati Commission has only added insult to injury by declaring the burning of a train coach at Godhra a planned conspiracy instead of an accident, and by giving a clean chit to Mr. Modi.

Mr. Tata's endorsement of Moditva is in line with a long process of the Indian industrialist class reconciling itself with it, helping erase the memory of the pogrom, and "normalising" Hindu communalism.

This is happening at a dangerous moment in India's evolution. Hindutva attacks on the religious minorities are rising in Orissa, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra. The minorities are also victimised in the name of fighting terrorism. The Indian state has shown no will to stop this and bring the culprits to book.

As the latest National Integration Council meeting showed, even Orissa Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik is willing to implement a ban on the Bajrang Dal, if the Centre orders one. But will the Centre do this, or duck the problem of communalism like the Tatas have done?

India's survival as a pluralist secular democracy hinges on this.

Praful Bidwai is an eminent Indian columnist.

A unique achievement

Prof. Sultana Zaman has dedicated her life to bring much needed relief to that abandoned crowd, and has been a pioneer in finding solutions. Although she maintains a low profile, the government has failed to give any recognition to her extraordinary achievements. Dr. Sultana and Dr. Jamal are brother and sister. This is a unique precedence for Bangladesh. Even worldwide, there cannot be many more brother and sister Professor Emeritus.

K. Z. ISLAM

PROFESSOR Emeritus Dr. Jamal Nazrul Islam returned to Bangladesh in 1983 after an outstanding academic career and teaching in Cambridge, Princeton and Caltech. His level is best summed up by an extract from a letter from Prof. John Pople: "I appreciate hearing from old students from many years ago. You were certainly a talented group, two (Brian Josephson and Jim Mirless) having gone on to win Nobel prizes in advance of me."

Dr. Jamal's classmates and contemporaries were an outstand-

ing lot, having produced four Nobel Laureates. Ironically, Dr. Jamal was a student of the same level as these Nobel Laureates. By returning to Chittagong in a misplaced sense of patriotism, he had forsaken his excellent possibilities of joining the four.

In 1985, Prof. Abdus Salam (Nobel Laureate) came to Dhaka to hand Prof. Jamal the first Gold Medal of the Bangladesh Academy of Sciences. An extract from a letter, which Prof. Salam wrote to former President Ershad stated: "Prof. Jamal Nazrul Islam's newly proposed institute at Chittagong should receive funds from the

government. Prof. Islam is one of the most outstanding physicists and he has been recently elected as the first Fellow of the Third World Academy of Sciences."

In 1998, he was awarded the Third World Academy of Sciences (TWAS) Medal Lecture. The medal was given at the tenth general meeting of TWAS in Trieste, Italy, in the presence of several Nobel Laureates.

In 1998, Prof. Islam was also awarded the Bangladesh National Award for Science and Technology. No other such award has been given before or after.

In 1999, a Bangladesh delega-

tion was sent to the International Science Congress in Budapest. Prof. Islam was not included in this delegation, but was a delegate from the Third World Academy of Sciences.

In the conference, Gen. Nuruddin noticed that Prof. Islam was hobnobbing freely with the other participants and was on first name terms with many Nobel Laureates. Surprised Gen. Nuruddin asked the Secretary (Ministry of Science & Technology, Bangladesh) why Prof. Islam was not included in the Bangladesh delegation. He replied: "Sir he does not belong to our party." Gen. Nuruddin, on his return to Bangladesh, proposed Prof. Islam's name for the Ekushay Padak (highest Bangladesh award), which Prof. Islam received in 2000.

Prof. Islam was made Professor Emeritus in 2006.

Let us now turn to Prof. Emeritus Sultana Zaman.

Mention mental retardation to anyone and notice the reaction of

revulsion. People want to keep their distance from mentally retarded and physically disabled people. But WHO estimates that about 3% of the human population is mentally retarded, and one in ten families either directly or indirectly are concerned with this problem.

Added with those physically disabled, it comes to about 7.5 million people in Bangladesh with either mentally retarded or physically disabled. Even when the Dhaka University Academic Council was discussing about having a department to deal with the education of this population, the reactions of some of the professors was of loathing.

Prof. Sultana Zaman has dedicated her life to bring much needed relief to that abandoned crowd, and has been a pioneer in finding solutions. Although she maintains a low profile, the government has failed to give any recognition to her extraordinary achievements.

She was a mother of three and

had no education. Whenever she went near a college, she longed to be part of it. She commenced her college education late in life, specialising in psychology and started working with the intellectually disabled in 1973.

After getting B.A and M.A from Dhaka University, she completed her Ph.D. from Emory University, US in 1975 (with theses on mental retardation). She worked in the Psychology Department of Dhaka University for thirty-three years and as professor from 1975 to 2000.

Apart from her work in the university, she immediately started an organisation for the challenged group named Bangladesh Protibandhi Foundation with a school named Kalyani. Working with the mental retardation, Kalyani also deals with the blind, deaf and physically impaired children. This Foundation has expanded its activities all over the country with more than six branches. All her services were on voluntary basis.

In order to generate quality intervention and management facilities for persons with special needs, and to create professionals in different areas of disability, Prof. Sultana had the vision to establish a facility to train individuals to develop themselves as specialists in different forms of disability.

The outcome was the Department of Special Education in the Institute of Education and Research (IER), University of Dhaka, in 1993; the first of its kind at the university level in Bangladesh, the first of its kind to offer B.S.Ed. and M.S.Ed. degree in special education.

Prof. Sultana has participated in thirty international workshops and seminars in seventeen countries and presented twenty-one papers. She was also the Visiting Professor in the Department of Special Education, University of Manchester for four months from April 1992. She has countless articles and books to her credit.

Among the numerous other voluntary community services of

Dr. Sultana are:

Child Guidance Centre attached to Psychiatric Department of Dhaka Medical Hospital from 1979 to 1983,

The Society for the Care and Education of Mentally Retarded Children, and was its president from its inception in 1977 to 1984.

Samaj Unnayan Songtha for a slum-cum-primary school for the deaf children and women.

Her awards include the Henry H. Kessler international award, Rotary International Award "Women for Women," Anannya, Bangladesh Scouts, Autism Welfare Foundation 2000, IER Award 2003, Agradoot Award 2008.

Dr. Sultana was made Professor of Emeritus in September 2008.

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K.Z. Islam is a freelance contributor to The Daily Star.