

Gunfight on DU campus

Rein in unruly BCL elements

BCL activists continue to engage themselves in incidents indicative of their method of settling or clinching any issue through applying force. Two factions of the ruling party's student wing traded gunshots on the DU campus on Tuesday, following a scuffle over the presence of a student in a DU dormitory.

It is pretty much obvious that the campus of the country's premier university is infested with armed goons masquerading as student leaders and activists. However, it is difficult to dismiss such internecine clashes as internal affair of a particular student organisation. Obviously, the whole academic atmosphere of the university is greatly vitiated by such activities. The general students get panicky and feel extremely insecure when they watch gunfights taking place on the campus.

This is, however, neither what the ruling party promised before the elections, nor what people expected of them. It is a long established truth that strident student politics is a major threat to congenial atmosphere in the educational institutions. And it is no secret that the major political parties have a lot to do with this problem, though they, too, are occasionally vocal against student politics in its present form. But the question is, what have they done to contain criminal activities committed under the cover of student politics? They have never gone beyond telling us that student politics has a glorious past, but invariably stopping short of acting to end the present sordid state. And they are not known to have done anything against the errant members of their student wings. It is a sad tale of keeping a potentially dangerous source of trouble alive, only to make petty political gains.

The fight witnessed on Tuesday between two factions of the BCL was triggered by their plan to establish supremacy through mopping up any opposition within their own organisation. And that is the root cause of things going wrong on the ruling AL's student front. Obviously, they will try to convert this supremacy into more perceptible things like tender manipulation and extortion.

The AL high command can ill afford to ignore the developments. Their student followers have become too powerful and too defiant to suit the needs of a university campus. They have to be disarmed before they cause more damage. And the top AL leaders have to take charge of the situation. The pure law and order approach can produce results only when there is no political interference and influence -- a truth realized and revered in theory, but not in practice. The ruling party has to do more than what they have done so far to deal with the BCL.

Freeing designated parking spaces

A good move but needed preperation

RAJUK in its recent drive to restore parking spaces from unauthorised occupants has demolished some structures on the Mirpur Road. In recent memory, it is for the first time that we are experiencing any such action by Rajuk to retrieve designated parking spaces lost to encroachment.

Paucity of parking space is a big problem in the capital city and one of the major reasons behind traffic congestion. So, any move to identify the establishments occupying public space and take necessary action against those is undoubtedly welcome, though a belated one.

For, unauthorised occupation of the designated parking spots on the important public thoroughfares of the city has been going on year after year under the very nose of Rajuk and the law-enforcing agencies. And emboldened by silence and inaction of the authorities concerned, the grabbers of public space have gone so far as to build even high-rise structures on different arterial roads thereby narrowing the roads further for traffic movement.

From the way the mobile court executed the Rajuk's clearing drive, it appeared that it was working according to the list supplied by the DMP on the basis of a survey it reportedly had carried out. We wonder, why Rajuk didn't carry out a survey of its own. In the latest drive in the Dhanmondi and Kalabagan areas on the Mirpur road, an authorised officer did admit that 'they have no copies of the designs of a number of buildings on the demolition list as those were given approval long time back and that Rajuk did not apparently preserve copies of the same. It bore the telltale mark of Rajuk's poor record keeping and the move seemingly undertaken without adequate preparations.

This may provide space for corruption, and even underhand dealings. So, it should correct these lacunae before such drives stand a chance of being truly effective and comprehensively result-oriented. Therefore, it is important that lessons are drawn from mistakes of such moves and they are perfected for future, because we believe that there is a stupendous need to rid the city of the continuing loss of designated parking spaces. And, any half-hearted move can prove counter-productive.

State of strategic discomfort

There has been no development on our side of the border that could compel such aggressive reactions from the government in Yangon. That is why the unwarranted build-up of conventional forces by Myanmar on the border leaves one to wonder, why? It is a matter of serious concern for us.

SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN

IT will not be an exaggeration to suggest that at this point in time Bangladesh finds itself in a very uncomfortable position, particularly with its eastern neighbour. This is in part external, caused by certain actions of our neighbours, while some are internally generated because of the policy adopted by the GOB related to strategic matters that are perceived by many at home as fulfilling the strategic requirement of a neighbour, which might eventually impinge our national security.

In the first instance Myanmar, our eastern neighbour, has reportedly amassed large numbers of troops that have very little relevance to its border security. There has been no development on our side of the border that could compel such aggressive reactions from the government in Yangon. That is why the unwarranted build-up of conventional forces by Myanmar on the border leaves one to wonder, why? It is a matter of serious concern for us.

On the other front, that is the Indian, our strategic location is proving to be a

headache for our policy planners. Contrary to some antiquated views that our position on the map is a strategic tyranny the reality is that our geographical location can be a boon for us, if we realise the significance and utilise that to our advantage. The question is, have we been able to do that sufficiently enough to best serve our national interest? That fact that our location invests us with tremendous power to call the shots has neither been realised nor utilised as a bargaining weight skillfully.

For today, we shall only concentrate on our neighbour in the east and take up the issues related to India later.

Admittedly, the eastern neighbour, one must admit, has not been on our strategic antennae continuously. Perhaps we took it for granted and there might have been a degree of sympathy for the military rulers in Yangon during the late seventies and up to the end of the eighties, there being a dispensation of the same ilk in Bangladesh during that time. But then there were frictional issues as in 1979, the Rohingya push in, and the border incident in early '90s, which had strained the relationship if

not damaged it. Perhaps it has also a lot to do with our "one neighbour" fixation.

While we had been neglecting Myanmar and did not even consider it worth evaluating its threat potentials, the government in Yangon had been building up its military to a point that has now reversed the force balance in favour of Myanmar by a factor, on the average, of 1:3.

The nine light infantry battalions that are now on the border, which make up three brigades, are supported by not only organic artillery, there are reportedly also heavy artillery and a regiment of tanks to boot, not to speak of two divisions that are in a state of readiness as a backup.

Under these circumstances one finds the foreign minister's characterisation of Myanmar's action as routine movement of troops as rather strange. And that is the moot point. Moving such a large element of a conventional force is not routine movement and is certainly against the norms of border management. Any such movement within a particular distance from the border, as agreed upon by the two sides, has to be notified to the other well in advance. One wonders whether that was done.

That brings us to the question, why the sabre-rattling by Myanmar? Is the posture a consequence of its special relationship with the PRC? Or does it have to do anything with the fact that even the US is now warming up to it, having failed to get the Asean to chastise

the Myanmar regime.

There are some that feel that this is a prelude to something more serious. That it is a preparation for resumption of maritime exploration from which it had to pull back with a "loss of face" in October last year.

One finds it difficult to subscribe fully to that view. Given that Bangladesh has chosen the option of arbitration, anything precipitous would disturb the status quo, something that Myanmar had undertaken not to do at the meeting of the two sides in Yangon in July this year.

Myanmar may feel that it was hard done by since it was within the line in the Bay that was readjusted to cater to the interest of both the parties. However, one understands that the readjusted line of 1974, offered by Bangladesh in 1979, was not formally accepted by Myanmar, and Bangladesh would like to follow the principle of equity which had been accepted as a principle of delimitation in 1982.

One would like to think that the rulers in Yangon understand that coercion or use of force will not help resolve matters. Outstanding issues should be resolved through discussions. As for Bangladesh, it is our conviction that our military is ready at all times to thwart any violation of our territory.

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The truth: Gandhi is less of a draw than Jinnah

It is curious that six decades after 1947 a debate on Jinnah can pack halls in Delhi and Mumbai but a discussion on Gandhi might not fill a front row. Is this because Jinnah offers the drama of a court trial, the speakers being advocates for defense or prosecution, and the audience a silent, but ultimately decisive, jury?

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IT is curious that six decades after 1947 a debate on Jinnah can pack halls in Delhi and Mumbai but a discussion on Gandhi might not fill a front row. Is this because Jinnah offers the drama of a court trial, the speakers being advocates for defense or prosecution, and the audience a silent, but ultimately decisive, jury? Jinnah, one of the great barristers of his age, would have relished the metaphor.

Has Gandhi become, in our subconscious, an irritating nuisance, a mirror before our guilty conscience? Who wants to be measured by the yardstick of a saint who was so disconcertingly honest that he turned his autobiography into a confessional? Jinnah, on the other hand, was so private, and even secretive in life that, in death, he is vulnerable to endless post-mortem dissection. Gandhi has become as ephemeral as an ideal. We can disturb the memory of Jinnah. Gandhi's memory disturbs us.

Where would Gandhi have been on his 140th birthday, October 2, 2009, if he were

not safely dead? He would have been on a fast in Maharashtra. Why? The state police has slipped into the public space a statistic made even more astonishing by the indifference with which it has been received: there has been, on an average, a riot every 20 days in Maharashtra during the last five years. Print media consigned it to a couple of statutory paragraphs inside. Television, crowded with high-decibel celebrities, ignored this completely. It seems that our innumerable guardians of secularism need familiar villains for their rage. Faceless violence is not attractive enough.

Gandhi placed the facts of violence above the politics of conflict. He would have been an inconvenient presence for those who profess to live by his creed today. As for the heroes of modern India: they would not recognise him. There is no way to reinvent Gandhi as a happy symbol of a rising sense, checking out the value of an investment portfolio at five every evening. It makes sense on every side to convert Gandhi into a token portrait on the wall of a government office.

Jinnah's problem, conversely, has been

that he has been appropriated, or misappropriated, by a range of vested interests; each determined to resurrect him in its own image, to serve its agenda. Pakistan's political elite, forced to compromise with the culture of theocracy, has converted the natty, lean, handsome owner of 200-odd London-tailored suits into a shalwar-and-cap chameleon. If, instead of being clean-shaven, Jinnah had sported a slight, fashionable beard, they would have extended the beard by six inches in official portraits.

Most Pakistanis would be shocked today to discover that Jinnah did not know Urdu, never fasted during Ramzan, had little interest in the rituals of religion, and that his concept of spiritual sustenance was very worldly indeed. Jinnah sent out invitations for a formal lunch-banquet in honour of the visiting Mountbattens for August 14, 1947, the day the new nation was born.

The meal had to be cancelled when someone realised that they were in the middle of Ramzan. Jinnah had been oblivious of the fact that observant Muslims had been fasting for three weeks.

Indian politicians have restructured Jinnah more subtly. Contemporary Congressmen needed a cardboard Jinnah as the all-purpose villain who could soak up all the guilt of Partition. An obstinate, communal hate figure was planted into Indian schoolbook history. This was then morphed into something more insidious.

When Jinnah's utility as the father of

Pakistan receded, he was transformed, surreptitiously, into the symbol of the guilt of Indian Muslims, who became the whipping boys of Indian nationalism as practiced on all sides of the spectrum. The Bharatiya Jana Sangh, forerunner of the BJP, latched on to this projection with great glee, since it perpetuated the politics of isolation and accusation.

Indian Muslims, in this construct, were genetically unpatriotic and therefore, deservedly condemned to the status of second-class citizens. When Jaswant Singh challenged this single-dimension mythology by lifting the record from the private domain of academic archives and flinging it into public discourse, he had to be expelled. He had spread the guilt to others, who were Hindus, and disturbed the equanimity of a half-truth.

The secular parties, whose expertise in the dynamics of electoral behaviour has always been more astute, quickly understood that fear is the easiest route to the Indian Muslim vote. Fear of the past, Partition, was compounded by fear of its future consequences.

Muslims had to choose between the communal cage and the secular trap. One offered a diet of gruel, and the other a scrap of cheese. After six decades, Indian Muslims are beginning to bang on the door of both the cage and the trap.

Mahatma Gandhi would have heard the clamour.

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Ending the Afghan war

At this stage of the Afghan war it appears to be proper for US to concentrate more on deal-making with the Afghans and less on their nation-building. The Obama administration may follow the practice of the British administration (when the British ruled the country) of buying, renting or bribing Pashtun tribes; but the US is reluctant to follow it.

A.B.M.S. ZAHUR

PRESIDENT Obama is being compelled to rethink his major foreign policy initiatives. With regard to the war in Afghanistan he is facing strong differences with foreign leaders. This does not mean he has nothing to show for his efforts. US relation with Russia has improved. However, disturbing developments like exposure by US and its allies that Iran is operating another secret nuclear facility, and US commander in Afghanistan Stanley McChrystal's demand for 10,000 to 30,000 more troops, are bothering him.

It is time for US to take a firm decision about its Afghan policy. Nato, the EU and other nations have invested heavily in stabilising the country over the last 8 years. As such, they may not abandon it because the Taliban are proving tougher than anticipated. There is a big gap

between goals outline by US administration and the means available to achieve them. This gap cannot be closed by sending more troops.

What is needed is true understanding about the extent of anticipated success in Afghanistan. There is nothing wrong in helping Afghans to develop their country. To give them a strong functioning central government and a viable economy will, however, decades.

Situated at the crossroads of Asia, throughout its history, conquering armies have marched through the green valley beneath its forbidding mountains, but no one has ever been able to subjugate its warlike fiercely independent tribes.

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administration (when the British ruled the country) of buying, renting or bribing Pashtun tribes; but the US is reluctant to follow it.

Afghanistan needs a Pashtun leader, and Karzai is not bad choice even if charges of corruption and vote rigging against him be true. There is no certainty that his successor will be more honest and efficient. In fact, the last election appears to have created an opportunity for building a national-unity government.

According to some analysts there are 3 ways to change security conditions in Afghanistan. They are:

- Increasing American troops,
- Increasing Afghan troops, and
- Shrinking enemy forces by making them outsiders or making them lay down their arms.

The third option has been successful in Iraq and this may also be successful in Afghanistan. There is no doubt that Afghanistan will remain poor, corrupt and dysfunctional for few more years. What is critical is keeping the country inhospitable for the al-Qaeda. Otherwise, there will be revival of the poisonous alliance between the Pakistani military and hard-line elements of the Taliban.

If we analyse the history of Afro-Asia and Latin American countries we can discover the interference of the powerful

states. Fortunately, in such a restless political situation, President Obama emerged as the most distinguished political leader committed to change the world's political scenario from restlessness to peace and tranquility. In fact, his pious intention has brought him the Nobel Prize for peace. We can, therefore, hope and aspire for the return of peace in Iraq and Afghanistan and amicable settlement of the US-Iran nuclear proliferation issue.

Since the Twin Towers tragedy, the world has not been at peace. This tragedy ultimately resulted in history's worst economic meltdown. Americans are still paying dearly for political restlessness in Iraq and Afghanistan. Even the US dollar has lost its stability appreciably.

The US administration must have been convinced through their experience during the last 8 years that a sophisticated system like democracy cannot be imposed on people accustomed to tribal culture for centuries. For implanting such a system we shall have to wait, perhaps, for decades. US success in Afghanistan should mean making the Taliban and al-Qaeda followers unacceptable to the common Afghans. This needs setting up of a pro-west central government in Afghanistan suited to the genius of common Afghans.

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