

Campus death

Exemplary punishment needed for the culprits

THE death of a student leader belonging to the Chattra Moitree of Rajshai Polytechnic Institute (RPI) due to violence is most unfortunate and regrettable. The fact that the perpetrators belonged to the Chattra League must be a cause of severe embarrassment to the ruling Awami League. The matter assumes even more poignancy when it turns out that the deceased belonged to the student wing of one of the AL's coalition partners.

It seemed for a while that the spate of campus violence, perpetrated by the BCL immediately after the assumption of office by the AL, had subsided. But we were wrong. We feel that the AL high command is yet to get full control of its student wing; evidently not enough has been done to make it entirely malleable to party fiat despite the PM's clear directives. And it seems, too, that there is no one to take effective charge of the CL.

It is quite natural that there would be a period, at the initial stage when a party assumes the reins of power, when the focus is entirely on running the government, with the top party leadership engaged in managing the affairs of the state, thereby causing loss of grip on the party grassroots. But for a party like the AL, that should not be grounds for lax internal party control that creates indiscipline and causes not only embarrassment to the party but may even be the cause of decline of people's confidence in the party itself.

Predictably, the post-incident action of the party will be restricted to restating its position that no one would be allowed to vitiate the atmosphere in the educational institutions and that stringent measures would be taken against the culprits, with little substantive action. Such a state should not be tolerated by the party; it certainly will not be tolerated by the people.

We suggest that the government address the matter of ill discipline of its affiliates seriously, particularly of its student wing. A strong message must be sent to the cadres that consequences of such behaviour will be unforgiving.

We understand that several Chattra League members of the RPI have been arrested and some have been expelled from the party. We want exemplary punishment for the culprits, which should not only be quick but should also be seen to have been delivered. No one with such violent disposition deserves to be called a student or has the freedom to roam the premises of educational institutions. Authorities of these institutions must play their part to stop campus violence. Understandably, some are hesitant to act against government party affiliates. For the sake of peaceful academic atmosphere they must take stern action against the offenders irrespective of party connection, and which the government must back up fully.

We also feel that the party leadership should rethink the management of its affiliates and how to strengthen the mechanism of internal party control. More must be done to inculcate a new ethos in the party cadres that helps materialise the much vaunted politics of change.

Railway safety concerns

Structural measures imperative

RAILWAYS have become something remote as far as our choice of options for long distance travelling goes. It hardly ever makes news like addition of railway tracks, new trains to the fleet or a marked improvement in the amenities, because all this can only be a drop in the ocean. Usually, therefore, it makes news for wrong reasons hogging headlines following disastrous accidents that were mostly avoidable.

But such mishaps were just waiting to happen given the rundown railway tracks, outmoded signaling system, unguarded level-crossings and frequent mechanical and human failures. To top it off, the railway administration has been in comatose as far as enforcing safety standards goes.

We would concentrate on three drawbacks that will have to be overcome if we are to raise the safety standards to acceptable levels. These relate to doing away with unauthorised railway level-crossings, encroachments on railway tracks and meeting the shortage of technical hands.

It is surprising to note that many level-crossings were set up courtesy the LGRD ministry while laying new roads without the knowledge, far less permission, of the Bangladesh Railway. This is a serious coordination lapse at an operative level of vital importance to public safety. High way engineering and railway engineering are not the one and the same thing. Since the responsibility of looking after an unforeseen, even an improvised railway crossing falls on the already meagre railway staff, how unguarded these would be can be easily imagined.

Secondly, trespassing on railway tracks by squatting hawkers, makeshift shops and slumming is a major hazard in the metropolis and other cities and also a prime cause for accidents. It is time such habitation and business activity along the tracks is discouraged at the ward levels with their relocation elsewhere under a programme that seems currently missing.

The overarching need is to strengthen technical manpower base in the railway in a marked way so that the critical dependence on overworked and fatigued personnel can be obviated. What can be a more glaring measure of low priority accorded to the railways than the fact that no new hands have been recruited in the last quarter of a century.

AUGUST 2004 CARNAGE

Getting to its bottom is paramount

We need to put an effective end to the trend that helps criminal elements to enjoy political patronage and wherein criminal activities are accorded respectability for so-called political compulsions. We have to ensure that middle class professionals with laudable credentials and with roots to the people are not squeezed out of the political market by muscle and money.

MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

MANY well-meaning citizens may not have appreciated the extension of time for investigating the August 21, 2004 case of attempted assassination of Sheikh Hasina. The time allowed, we are told, is for proper and sustained investigation with a view to prosecuting the actual criminals and their abettors. It has also been informed that startling cover-ups are coming to light that need to be properly unearthed.

All these appear to be valid justification for lengthened investigation. What, however, is baffling and tragic is that a case of such magnitude was treated so poorly and with such apparent criminal intent by those in authority.

While extreme views advocating and implementing annihilation of the political opponent has been a sad socio-political reality of our society, there is a paramount need to stop that once for all. Many political murders have not been investigated properly while some cases are still under investigation and some have been perfunctorily looked into.

Such a state of affairs point to the supreme necessity of a comprehensive investigation of

the incident of attempted assassination of Sheikh Hasina because that is expected to be an example-setter in the criminal justice system in whose effectiveness and impartiality there is a disturbing slide.

To recollect, the multiple grenade assault of 21st August, 2004 was clearly a manifest attempt to wipe out the entire leadership of the mainstream political party. The damage already caused with its far-reaching ramifications cannot be brushed aside. The double figure deaths and crippling injuries of hundreds should make us wonder if the state organs investigating the incident and the then political authority did realize the enormity of the dastardly attack.

We may also recollect that the investigation of the above incident was not taken in right earnest that it deserved and the first indication of that was the unpardonable failure to protect and preserve the scene of occurrence. There was allegation that physical evidence was tampered with and destroyed. The field units did not act with desired speed and circumspection. The question is, did this happen because of the so-called instruction from above? The culpability of all concerned, high

and low, need to be established.

Equally important would be to recollect the sad murder of Mr. Kibria, the former finance minister, whose untimely death left ominous portents for budding politicians of the desired breed in Bangladesh. Mr. Kibria, it may be remembered, had impeccable credentials in a scenario where many politicians do not make serious efforts to endear themselves to the electorate.

His cruel annihilation from the political arena sent a disturbing signal to decent folks who were desirous of taking to public life. The premonition is: are we creating a situation where brats will occupy the centre-stage of politics for a painfully long time? The abettors of Mr. Kibria's killer need to be booked and tried.

Let us remember that the quality of public life and its leaders will have a special meaning for those who are keen to see the flowering of democratic institutions and tradition in our volatile environment. Therefore, the proper investigation relating to the grenade and bomb blasts acquire special significance because in doing so we will be able to establish our credibility as an orderly and law-abiding society and reduce space for rogue elements in political affairs.

Let us not forget that the inaction and the resultant incapacity characterizing each incident of grenade and bomb explosion in the not-too-distant past hangs heavy on the national scene.

The guardians of public life can prove their sincerity by concrete actions like proper registration of cases, energizing the intelligence network for unbiased information, collection of material, physical and

circumstantial evidence and finally ensuring expeditious investigation. The political executives have to demonstrate determination and agreement to go by the book. In fact, the public functionaries must be facilitated to conduct themselves in a manner which establishes quite clearly the distinguishing line between government and state interests.

We need to put an effective end to the trend that helps criminal elements to enjoy political patronage and wherein criminal activities are accorded respectability for so-called political compulsions. We have to ensure that middle class professionals with laudable credentials and with roots to the people are not squeezed out of the political market by muscle and money. There is a considered view that the interface between the political feuds and intense power struggle, on the one hand, and violence of different intensities, on the other, is provided by the underworld to which the political leaders of some stature are connected in a shady way.

The assassination attempt on Sheikh Hasina should be viewed with utmost concern because fair investigation and trial of the foot soldiers and those behind the dastardly attack may help in restoring sanity and normalcy in the political power transaction. It is time to prove that state organs shall act by the book in spite of the political colour. Let there be a realization that the interests of political governments will vary and power will change hands but never shall the regulatory functions of the state be allowed to assume a partisan character.

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Implementing the new European vision

The Lisbon Treaty has made the European Council a separate EU institution in its own right, with specific competencies. It is being anticipated that this will bring together its semi-permanent President, the Heads of State and Government, the Commission President and the HR/VP... to provide the EU with the necessary impetus for defining its political orientations and priorities.

MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

THE Lisbon Treaty has eventually entered into force on 1 December 2009 - after almost a decade of hesitation and agonizing negotiations. This has been good news for Europe. There are still a few grey areas and pending issues that need to be addressed but the new Treaty is a step forward with the potential to enhance the efficiency, transparency and legitimacy of an EU of 27-plus.

One of these relates to the introduction of a more centralised Brussels-based institutional set-up following the election of a semi-permanent president of the European Council (Herman Van Rompuy) and the installation of a new foreign policy structure with an EU foreign policy 'chief' (Catherine Ashton), supported by a European External Action Service (EEAS).

This new institutional architecture will challenge previous institutional arrangements, including the six-monthly rotating EU presidency. However, despite the change in the paradigm, an attempt has been made to provide more continuity and predictability in EU policy-making by establishing a new presidency 'system' for the European Council, the Foreign Affairs Council, the General Affairs Council, the specialised Council formations and the Council's preparatory bodies.

The rotating presidency has been replaced by an elected semi-permanent President of the European Council appointed for a two-and-a-half year term, renewable once. Internally, the President will be responsible for driving forward the work of the European Council and ensuring the preparation of, and continuity in this work.

Externally, the president 'shall, at that level and in that capacity, ensure the external representation of the Union in issues concerning its common foreign and security policy, without prejudice to the powers of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.'

The Foreign Affairs Council (FAC), which the Lisbon Treaty separates from the General Affairs Council (GAC), will be chaired by the High Representative, who is appointed by the European Council with the Commission President's agreement and is also a Commission Vice-President (HR/VP).

Consistent with the previous system, the presidency of all other Council formations -- with the exception of the FAC -- will be held by each Member State in turn on the basis of equal rotation. Details of exactly how this will work still need to be finalised by the European Council (by qualified majority). According to a draft decision added to the Lisbon Treaty, the presidency of all Council formations, except Foreign Affairs, will be held by pre-established groups of three Member States for periods of 18 months, with each member of the 'trio' chairing the Council for six months.

It does appear that the new presidency 'system' will create a hybrid situation in the two areas of general affairs and foreign policy whereas the original aim was to establish a non-rotational and thus more stable system. The new system will also be no less complex and multilayered than the previous one. Accordingly, it will take some time for the new institutional 'architecture' to be put into place fully and even longer to reach a new equilibrium.

Analysts generally agree that there is likely to be a first, transitional phase in 2010, followed by a consolidation period, which will most probably last until the end of Herman Van Rompuy's initial mandate in 2012. It is being hoped that by then, the new system would have been fully tested and reached a state of stability. Installing the new system will be particularly complex because the Lisbon Treaty lacks clarity in some areas, and at the same time entails checks and balances, opportunities and constraints that are not spelled out in detail.

It is apparent that the functioning of the new presidency system will depend on: (i) the decisions on their staffing and resources; (ii) the specific arrangements for their practical modus operandi, including new Rules of Procedure for the European Council and changes to the existing ones for the Commission and Council; and (iii) the way in which the Spanish and Belgian presidencies in 2010 will create precedents that might then be followed by their successors.

The forthcoming process will be monitored very carefully by a majority of EU Member States because they want to continue exercising their influence via that rotating Presidency -- regardless of whether they are big or small, old or new, more inter-governmentally-minded or community-oriented. They feel that this will enable them to articulate their own 'priorities' for their six months at the EU helm.

As a former Permanent Representative to the European Union, I feel that the specific role of the rotating presidency needs to be (re) articulated. This includes the important issues pertaining to the role of the rotating presidency in the European Council vis-à-vis its President, and in the realm of foreign policy (in the broadest possible sense of the term). These aspects also highlight the hidden problem of the new system as compared to the previous one: namely, the fact that the two pivotal figures in the traditional six-month Presidency -- the holder's head of government and foreign minister -- will have reduced relevance and

could be relegated to being subsidiaries of Herman Van Rompuy and Catherine Ashton respectively.

The new EU format has also created some other important bodies. This includes the Committee of Permanent Representatives (COREPER), which to be chaired by a representative of the Member State chairing the GAC, i.e. the rotating Presidency. There will also be the Political and Security Committee (PSC), which will monitor the international situation in areas, covered by the common foreign and security policy, and will be chaired by a 'representative' of the HR/VP.

All the other preparatory bodies of the various Council configurations (working groups, committees etc.), with the exception of foreign policy-related ones, will fall to the rotating Presidency. In short, many elements of the old six-monthly Presidency will remain in place for all council formations, with the notable exceptions of the European Council, the Eurogroup, the Foreign Affairs Council, and the Political and Security Committee. From that point of view the rotating Presidency will continue to play a key role in the Union's new institutional architecture and will chair the General Affairs Council and COREPER. It will also continue to exercise influence in the foreign policy arena and in the preparation of FAC meetings, even though the latter will be chaired by the HR/VP.

The Lisbon Treaty has made the European Council a separate EU institution in its own right, with specific competencies. It is being anticipated that this will bring together its semi-permanent President, the Heads of State and Government, the Commission President and the HR/VP, and that this matrix will be able to provide the EU with the necessary impetus for defining its general political orientations and priorities.

These are a lot of ambitious steps. We now have to wait and see how this vision translates into practice over the New Year and the following months.

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Economic future of West and potential of East

Decide your migration destination

The next twenty years are going to be a very crucial period for the world economy. As the global economic power is expected to shift from West to East, while choosing one's migration destination, one must be very careful inside this time-frame. One should decide where one should be and what currency one should earn.

M. ARIFUR RAHMAN

ANUSH, an Indian-born British software engineer, was declared redundant by his company in early 2009. He was given two months time to search for another job but before the two months ended, his company declared itself bankrupt and stopped its operations. Anush didn't find a job after that. Eventually, he failed to pay his mortgage and his house was repossessed. He, along with his wife, are now working in a superstore as sales assistants and struggling hard to pay their rent and utility bills and maintain their usual standard of living.

Anush is just one of millions who lost jobs in the aftermath of the most horrendous financial collapse in history. Anush and similar other may blame the government and crooked high-profile corporate heads and bankers for this mishap. But truly this is natural. When good times reach their peak, bad times emerge. And a long century of good times in the United States of America and the

United Kingdom is, thus, just over.

The streets of London today are full of job seekers -- people who lost their jobs last year and thousands of newly imported students and migrants deliberately brought by the British government as part of its economic policy. The British budget deficit is widening, government loans are skyrocketing, and funds for national security and benefits are diminishing. The Financial services industry, the biggest contributor to the UK GDP, is showing no sign of recovery. The value of pound sterling is depreciating almost every month and unfortunately no economic policy of Alistair Darling is working. USA, the creator of this financial fallout, is another misfortunate heading toward poverty, if everything in the world remains honestly uninfluenced. With more than twelve trillion in national debt, growing at compounding rates every second, with no real hope of generating ability to pay back in forty years, the USA is not far from becoming bankrupt. It's only China who's saving voracious American

consumers to consume more Chinese products until it finds a way to ditch the US economy and dollar.

Obviously, the haunted governments of USA and United Kingdom are not sitting idle. They are using their maximum talent to find solutions. However, all new heads of policy-making are using pretty old techniques to come out of this bad time -- slashing interest rates, printing more and more money and rates, increasing at tremendously high rates. However, cutting interest rates is failing to encourage investments, printing more money is endangering the economy with inflation and taxing incomes at higher rate is depleting living standards.

The level of income and living standards in these countries are set to go down by this way or that. If Britain and the USA want to rebuild their economies, they must convert themselves to low-cost economy like China or India. To win this fierce economic war, there are no ways left other than calling back all the industries that were shifted to low-cost developing countries over the last three decades. This eventually means that the struggling governments should abolish the national minimum wage rate or make it almost half of its current level. A lower minimum wage definitely will attract more investments than can cutting interest rates. Continuous pumping of money should be stopped right now unless it's extremely necessary to devalue the dollar or pound sterling quickly. However, whatever

steps are being taken, the dollar cannot be saved from falling in the near future. Like the British pound, the dollar will cease to be the reigning currency all over the world.

Over the last few decades, USA, United Kingdom, Canada and Australia have been the most attractive destinations for skilled manpower from Asian and other developing countries. The main sources of attraction were high levels of income, excellent living standards and social security provided by the governments of these countries, which no longer exist under today's economic circumstances. According to Jim Rogers, one of most influential investors in today's world, the choice in the 18th century was to migrate to Britain, the 19th century to USA and in the 20th century to China!

The next twenty years are going to be a very crucial period for the world economy. As the global economic power is expected to shift from West to East, while choosing one's migration destination, one must be very careful inside this time-frame. One should decide where one should be and what currency one should earn. Any wrong decision will cost one plenty. This is being experienced by recently migrated Asians and Africans in the United Kingdom, America and Canada.

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