

One more CU student dies tragically

A number of questions need to be answered

THE tragic death of yet one more student of Chittagong University (it is the third in the last couple of months) is deeply disturbing. It is so because it happened in an unnatural manner, allegedly at the hands of some villagers. It has emerged that the death of Asaduzzaman was the result of a confrontational situation between students and villagers, portents for which reportedly existed. Adding to the tragedy is the fact that it was a case of mistaken identity that led to Asaduzzaman's death. Predictably, it led to consequences we are all too familiar with. Students of CU went on the rampage which in turn led to a suspension of on-going examinations. Moreover, a strike has been called by the Bangladesh Chhatra League to protest the young man's death.

It is a situation which calls for a thorough investigation on the part of the authorities. For the Chittagong University administration, it is important to inquire into the fact of why some students found themselves in hostile circumstances before the villagers. For the local administration, it is necessary to find out the reasons that led to anger and violent action on the part of the villagers, to a point where some of them ended up injuring Asaduzzaman fatally. That said, it is deeply regrettable that the young man, still alive after the grievous assault on him, could not be saved in the end. It is obvious that the university clinic, where he was taken after the incident on Thursday night, did not have enough facilities to treat him. That led to his being sent to Chittagong Medical College Hospital, where he died in the intensive care unit late in the day on Friday. The question which now must be answered is why he was not taken quickly to CMCH and why emergency measures were not applied to his treatment. The rather laid-back attitude of the CU administration, for that is what was, is to be condemned for all the right reasons.

Coming back to the incident that led to Asaduzzaman's death, there is little question that provocation played a part in the violent incident. Obviously, there is an intimidating atmosphere in the area which must be looked into and addressed head-on. One would have expected the teachers of CU to play a more pro-active role in seeing that their students stayed safe and well away from trouble. Be that as it may, it is our expectation that the men who swooped upon Asaduzzaman and his friends will be swiftly tracked down and brought before the law.

The death of a young student is always, in this country, the end of hope for his struggling family. Asaduzzaman's death has created a gaping hole for his near and dear ones. Our sympathies and prayers are for them in their time of grief.

Despicable misdemeanor

Where can the girls feel safe?

THE occasion was Nabobarsha and the place Dhaka University Campus. Both not just symbolically, but literally should be an association of most cultivated and refined thoughts. What could be a more ideal celebrative event evocative of the finest expressions of human sentiments of grace and greeting between brothers and sisters than Nabobarsha itself?

And right there it failed the test, so outrageously, that one is left wondering if one's daughter or sister is safe anywhere. Particularly, if the place is heaving with a sea of humanity.

It was all waiting to happen -- campus spaces left out for shopping as in a public bazaar, three concerts were simultaneously on and there were fewer exits than entry points, with crowds surging from all sides into waves bursting at the seams.

Rogues got to work, tugging at sarees of women, in few cases, accompanied by their husband, encircling girls, hurling obscenities at them and trying to molest them as panicky cries from harassed and helpless women rent the air. Good Samaritans rescued some victims as the police claimed they brought 15 women and girls to safety.

The most pertinent question that follows from the description is: what were the security arrangements put together to avert any untoward incident at the campus and around? What happened to the DMP's claims of adequate security arrangements having been made for the Nabobarsha celebrations? Some heads must roll; for, it seems there were gaping holes in the arrangements.

Reports suggest that university authorities didn't give permission for the concerts. Who then authorised the these that virtually gave a handle to the rogues? If the DMP had given it, did it consult Dhaka University authorities and make the organisers responsible for their respective programmes. Within certain limits, the organisers could be allowed celebrative programmes, but that only subject to manageability and adherence to rules.



Thirsty people, thirsty country

Every year, when the hot season sets in, water scarcity becomes the most crippling civic woe, but this year it has crossed all previous records. On top of that, the available water is not fit for drinking.

MD. MASUM BILLAH

WHAT the country is witnessing now for want of water is inevitable. People in cities and towns are fully dependent on the water supply and the comparatively conscious population can draw the media's attention to their suffering. This does not mean that rural areas are drenched with water. There is a severe water crisis there as well.

The whole country is thirsty. No attempt has been taken to quench this thirst, except for comments and ineffective measures.

The natural water flow has been diverted. When nature is obstructed, the effect is serious. Dams and barrages constructed in India to divert the water flow cause water scarcity across Bangladesh. The available water is seriously polluted. Population growth, rapid urbanisation, and discharge of chemicals from industries contribute to the deterioration of water quality and cause severe

health hazards.

India needs water to make her rivers navigable, and keep development works and industries viable. She has constructed dams and barrages to retain the water flowing down from the Himalayas during the winter and dry seasons, and to free the surplus water during the rainy season. Bangladesh would probably do the same if she were in India's position.

The adverse effects of the Farakka Barrage, commissioned in 1974, have started appearing over the last several years. The gradual process gave ample scope to our politicians to fool the people. Yet, what is happening now is practical and people cannot be soothed any more by politically diplomatic words. We don't have the power to fight with India for water. We don't have the power to frighten India to give us water. We don't have the diplomatic skills or force to extract water from India.

Dredging of the rivers is necessary, but not easy. The WDB, the local administration, public representatives, NGOs and

voluntary organisations can do this job. We should immediately mobilise all available resources and manpower for cleaning riverbeds during the dry season. Soil and sand needed to fill ditches and low lands, and to make bricks, can be collected from these riverbeds.

During the rainy season, no underground water should be collected, and only surface water must be used. If this is done, the environment will remain healthy and the water level will be high enough to satisfy the need during the summer season.

Domestic sewage, industrial waste and agro-chemicals have polluted the waters of the Buriganga, Balu and Sitalakkhya rivers. We need local government institutions to monitor and supervise location-wise decentralised water treatment plants. 60 percent of the water contamination is caused by industrial waste. 70 percent of infant mortality is caused by lack of safe water. Water quality has deteriorated by 16 to 20 times, as compared to 1976.

Several days back, the parliamentary standing committee on local government and rural development asked Wasa officials to stop all rhetoric and take noticeable steps so that city dwellers could see immediate results. In fact, Wasa alone cannot fight this problem. New initiatives need to be taken, which calls for

serious political will and decision.

Every year, when the hot season sets in, water scarcity becomes the most crippling civic woe, but this year it has crossed all previous records. On top of that, the available water is not fit for drinking. The poor do not enjoy the benefits of suction pumps, lift pumps, overhead tanks and reservoirs.

We experience heavy rainfall for two or three months, which is the best time to store rainwater. The roofs of all private and government houses must be so designed that rainwater can make its way into underground water tanks. This water is many times better than the present polluted water. If this is done, the city's water-logging problems will also be solved.

During the rainy season, all lowlands go under water. Water must be collected for treatment from this source. Now, only 15 percent water is treated and 85 percent is extracted from underground, creating a horrible situation.

Every year, the water level goes down by three metres, making the city more earthquake-prone. It is imperative that we deal with the whole affair pragmatically, without being politically biased and motivated. Time is running out.

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Why stability in Kyrgyzstan is important

In recent years, Kyrgyzstan has also been featuring in the US-Russian rivalry for control of Central Asia, as both powers have military air bases in the country.

HARUN UR RASHID

KYRGYZSTAN, a nation of five million people strategically located in Central Asia, is a poor, mountainous country with a predominantly agricultural economy. The country borders Russia and was a constituent republic within the former Soviet Union until 1991.

It shares borders with Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and China's Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, where a substantial separatist movement has been active.

China does not want the independence of the Central Asian states to stimulate dreams of statehood among their own Turkic Muslim Uygur peoples in Xinjiang. China's Uygurs have been militant in their desire to attain independence.

It supplies water to other central Asian states from its Pamir mountain water reservoirs and shares a border with Muslim-dominated Xinjiang province of China.

In recent years, Kyrgyzstan has also been featuring in the US-Russian rivalry for control of Central Asia, as both powers have military air bases in the country.

Most of the population is nominally Muslim, and there has been a growing interest in Islam among those seeking a new ethnic or national identity. The government is worried about inroads by jihadist groups like Hizb-ut Tahrir, and

there have been periodic outbreaks of fighting in the south.

China, Russia and the US are worried that if Kyrgyzstan becomes unstable and weak, then Islamic militants will intrude into the state and may create problems for Muslim-dominated areas of China and Russia, with spill-over effect on Afghanistan.

Tensions had been growing in Kyrgyzstan over what human rights groups contended were the increasingly repressive policies of the president.

The catalyst for the violence that erupted on April 6 in many towns, including in the capital city Bishkek, was anger over a sharp increase in prices of essential commodities and services.

President Kurmanbek Bakiyev has fled to the south of the country, and is trying to rally supporters from his power base of Osh and Jalalabad in the south.

The opposition leader and former foreign minister Ms. Roza Otunbayeva took control of the country after riots left at least 75 dead.

She said that the opposition coalition led by her would rule for six months before calling for elections. Meanwhile, parliament had been dissolved. She had the backing of the armed forces and border guards.

Ms. Otunbayeva said that what "we did was our answer to the repression and tyranny against the people by the Bakiyev regime."

Bakiyev came to power in the central

Asian state's "Tulip Revolution" five years ago. People expected a better life under him. But he gradually became intolerant and ruled the country like a dictator.

He gave his relatives, including his son, top government and economic posts and faced the same accusations of corruption and cronyism that led to the ouster of his predecessor Askar Akayev.

The president was grooming his 32-year old son Maksim as his heir. Maksim Bakiyev was due in Washington to attend bilateral consultations with the US.

Bakiyev insisted that he was still the legitimate president and condemned the uprising, saying the new interim government was "completely incapable" of imposing order.

He added: "If this so-called 'temporary' government that has appointed itself is prepared to begin negotiation talks, then I'm prepared to listen to them and see what they want." Otunbayeva has not made an official response to Bakiyev's offer of talks.

President Bakiyev had alienated foreign allies by playing Russia and the West against one another.

The Obama administration has sought to cultivate ties with President Bakiyev, angering the opposition after he vowed to close the US base at Manas on the outskirts of Bishkek. He reversed his decision after the US agreed to concessions, including higher rent.

Last year Russia announced a \$2.5 billion aid package for the country in return for Bakiyev promising to close the US air base. Instead, he renegotiated and allowed the US to stay.

Although Ms. Otunbayeva said that the supply line into Afghanistan from the US base would not be immediately be

affected, she warned: "We still have some questions on it. Give us time and we will listen to all sides and solve everything."

The US's concern relates to the possible closure of the base, which is a key transit point for US troops and supplies to Afghanistan. It is reported that last month 50,000 US and coalition troops passed the base en route to Afghanistan.

The new Kyrgyz leader thanked Russia for its "significant support," and Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin and Ms. Otunbayeva have already held telephone talks. 150 paratroopers are being sent to Russia's Kant military base, near Bishkek.

The deputy head of the interim government, Almazbek Atambayev, flew to Moscow on April 9 to hold consultations with Russian officials.

Later, another opposition leader, Omurbek Tekebayev, told Reuters that Russia had "played its role in ousting Bakiyev" and that there was a "high probability that the duration of the US air base's presence in Kyrgyzstan will be shortened."

Moscow has denied playing any role in the unrest. US President Barack Obama's adviser on Russia, Michael McFaul, insisted that this was "not some anti-American coup." He also denied that the unrest in Kyrgyzstan was a proxy struggle between US and Russia.

It is reported that President Obama discussed Kyrgyzstan on April 8 before signing the reduction of nuclear arms treaty at Prague.

Stability in the country will only come if social and economic conditions are improved by means of good governance and proper utilisation of aid money.

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