

## Time for a strategic decision



Lead the way towards education, not violence.

The problem, however, cannot be wished away because it did not go even after the prime minister's stern and repeated warnings. There is too much money, power and freedom, without fear of the law, at stake for student leaders to voluntarily give up their stranglehold on public educational institutions. These leaders eventually also land in key posts in their respective political parties.

M. SERAJUL ISLAM

THE role of students, particularly of Dhaka University, in Bangladesh's political history is unique and inspiring. They led the Language Movement that laid the foundation for an independent Bangladesh. They led the 1969 popular uprising against Ayub Khan's military dictatorship that weakened Pakistan, paving the way for the emergence of Bangladesh. In 1971, they stood shoulder-to-shoulder with the political and military leaderships in the fight against the Pakistani military. Perhaps only here have students played such a role.

Nevertheless, in today's student politics, it is impossible to think they played those roles. Today, the activities of the Bangladesh Chatra League (BCL) -- the ruling Awami League's student wing -- is a national problem and embarrassment as it indulges in criminal activities right under the government's nose.

Incredibly, the prime minister has failed to control it after repeated warnings. The home ministry ordered the police to deal with the BCL's criminal activities but they too have failed. Student politics is, literally, an out-of-control Frankenstein.

Awami League leaders have made unbelievable accusations to explain BCL activities. Some of them suggested that opposition elements, notably the Chatra Shibir, who "infiltrated" the BCL have committed these crimes.

The link between the Awami League and its student wing is deeper than meets the eye where, by tradition, BCL leaders eventually become Awami League leaders. In addition, family and many other traditions tie the BCL to the AL, making "infiltration" almost impossible. To be told now that "infiltrators," and that too from Shibir, have "infiltrated" the BCL and are using it to commit criminal activities is so absurd that only those who propagate it fool themselves into believing it.

The "infiltration" theory would have made sense if they had suggested that the supporters of senior AL leaders in the BCL, who were cornered in the party, are carrying them out to discredit the AL. Otherwise, the "infiltration" theory is childish. Nevertheless, it points to a dangerous truth; that the AL has lost control over the BCL, and unless something extraordinary is done there is no way to restrain it.

The BCL problem is, however, not Awami League-specific. It is simply that, with the present government, the Frankenstein has

reached adulthood to challenge its creator. Other mainstream parties' student wings are quite capable of committing the same acts as the BCL, if their parties are in power. Therefore, it is now time to look at this as a national problem because it is destroying public educational institutions and, in that sense, the country's future.

A few facts stand out. First, in the past, national and international lures created and sustained student parties in our politics. In the 1950s and 1960s, students were motivated to fight for their language and culture and for political and economic rights, based on Bengali nationalism.

Second, they were motivated to fight for emancipation of the society's proletariat, or the downtrodden, through the strong appeal of communism. In other words, in those years, ideals and principles created the rationale for students to be drawn into national politics. Political parties involved with the same issues provided students with support and encouragement for their roles. In fact, student parties were, as today, wings of the mainstream political parties.

Bangladesh's emergence removed the nationalism lure that had brought students into politics. The Soviet Union's fall and China's changed stance in international politics removed the international lure. After independence, students felt compelled to remain involved in national politics to overthrow President Ershad's military dictatorship.

Since the return of democracy, all lures for political involvement have ceased. Students should have been allowed to sever their connection with national politics to pursue their studies. Instead, the political parties sustained and strengthened ties with their student wings.

Bereft of principles and ideals, student

politics paradigm shifted for the worse -- a consequence of the mainstream parties' conflict politics -- since 1991. Student wing leaders became political agents for the parties in educational institutions.

In time, an evil nexus developed where student wing leaders reaped the benefits of their political connections when their party came to power. These included financial benefits from tenders related to development works; distribution of dormitory seats for money; involvement in campus crimes, including sexual harassment of female students, all without any fear of punishment.

The BCL's recent demands that they should be given a quota of seats in educational institutions to sell openly to those seeking admission manifested the utter depths to which student politics have fallen.

The nation, unable to do anything, watched with growing concern as public educational institutions went from bad to worse. The civil society that could have done something, where the politicians were silent, never spoke about this nexus.

These indifferences allowed student wings to freely and openly indulge in national politics and bring its conflicts to the educational institutions; its corruption and criminality, vitiating the educational environment of these institutions thoroughly and completely.

Teachers, who in the past had never felt the need to organise under the banner of political parties, have also become involved. Thus, BCL activities today are logical and should not surprise anybody. Nevertheless, they cannot be allowed to continue.

The problem, however, cannot be wished away because it did not go even after the prime minister's stern and repeated warnings. There is too much money, power and freedom, without fear of the law, at stake for student leaders to voluntarily give up their stranglehold on public educational institutions. These leaders eventually also land in key posts in their respective political parties.

The evil nexus will be broken only when mainstream parties sever all connections with their student parties. Once that is done, the rest is a simple law and order situation because without political protection student politicians are no better and no worse than common criminals running from the law.

It is high time to free our educational institutions from student politics. It benefits only a handful of "political" students at the cost of the majority of the students who, apart from the inconveniences of studying in the midst of criminality, lose up to four years of their lives to session jams.

The BCL's criminal activities should be a wakeup call for the AL to take a strategic decision to sever ties with it. It should also be a wakeup call for other mainstream parties to do likewise for their own sake and the nation's future.

M. Serajul Islam is a former Ambassador to Japan and a Director, Centre for Foreign Affairs Studies.

## Farcical justice in Bhopal

The true Bhopal verdict was delivered within four days of the tragedy, in December 1984, not on June 7, 2010, when Anderson was smuggled out of Bhopal on a state government aircraft and then put on a plane to America. Since then we have witnessed a pretend-justice farce played out by government, police and the judiciary, including the Supreme Court.

M.J. AKBAR

CYNICISM is never irrational. The irrational, often wrong, sometimes right, are impelled by instinct, heart or even conscience. Cynics are morality-proof. They prefer data to truth.

Delhi has set the gold standard for cynicism. It operates on four axioms: public memory is a dwarf; anger is effervescent; media can be massaged at the appropriate moment; any public crisis can be assuaged with crumbs, while the promotion of private interests continues off-screen.

Jairam Ramesh's promise of a Green Tribunal in Bhopal is a classical instance of a crumb dipped in the pickle of hypocrisy. Where was this or any other tribunal in the last 26 years when the dead, the deformed and blind babies and the stillborn fetuses were a reminder that justice must be done? Or is this tribunal meant for the next onslaught by the dogs of chemical war upon the sleeping slums of Bhopal?

Who was Veerappa Moily trying to fool when he claimed that the case against Warren Anderson had not been closed? Why doesn't he keep the case open for a few more years, until God closes the chapter by taking Anderson away to whichever destination has been allotted to the butcher of Bhopal? A Group of Ministers has been appointed -- merely to buy time until the return of amnesia.

The true Bhopal verdict was delivered within four days of the tragedy, in December 1984, not on June 7, 2010, when Anderson was smuggled out of Bhopal on a state government aircraft and then put on a plane to America. Since then we have witnessed a pretend-justice farce played out by government, police and the judiciary, including the Supreme Court. The last is most culpable, since we hold a chief justice of India like A.M. Ahmadi to higher standards of probity than we do politicians or policemen. Ahmadi got his proper thank you note after he retired.

Chief judicial magistrate Mohan Tiwari's judgment served only one useful purpose. The sheer scale of its magnanimity towards the accused lit a fuse under the volcano of collective guilt. The lava is spewing from myriad crevices, scorching and burning many-layered masks that have hidden deceit for a generation. As memories were stoked, officials, some perhaps frustrated by the fact that their silence had not been rewarded, revealed how successive governments had intervened to slow down the judicial process and sabotage any chance of Anderson's extradition.

Union Carbide and its collaborators, including Indians of course, have sustained themselves with a lie, that it was an Indian disaster since the plant was built and run by Indians. The design is an exact replica of an American plant, and an American who was terrified of being tried in India was in charge of management.

The political establishment assumed that June 7 would be just another day in a long calendar, possibly punctuated by an occasional, futile scream. The court was fortified, and entry denied to petitioners, victims and media.

My one memory of this courtroom, gleaned from television, shall be of the smug grin of an obese policeman laughing at two old women, their faces contorted by rage and frustration, who knew that the system which had stolen their lives had also cheated their children in death.

Trust me: if thousands of politicians, or their cousins, the nouveau riche, had died on that apocalyptic night in Bhopal, Anderson would still be in an Indian prison, rather than in America, protected by his company, and the company that his company keeps. But only the poor died in Bhopal. We treat our poor as dispensable chattel whose death is meaningless in the economic calculus, since there is no shortage of supply. Bhopal is class war.

Is it surprising -- or not? -- that while even the Obama administration jumped in with some gratuitous advice, Dr. Manmohan Singh had nothing to say? Perhaps the prime minister would have been repetitive. In essence, the signal from Washington and Delhi is the same: forget the dead, get on with multinational life.

Barack Obama was not elected to ensure justice for the Indian victim. He is in the White House to protect American business, and defend the two-laws theory that motivates American international relations, whether in war or peace. When 11 American workers were killed in an oil-rig blow-up in the Gulf of Mexico, Washington demanded \$1.5 billion from BP.

Nearly 20,000 dead in Bhopal, half a million affected, and the total compensation is \$470 million. Do the math. Obama has promised to penalise BP for the current oil spill to the extent of many billions of dollars. Magistrate Manoj Tiwari wants only Rs.5 lakh as reparation from Carbide for mass slaughter.

When Exxon was fined \$5 billion for the Alaska oil spill, nearly \$40,000 was spent on the rehabilitation of every affected sea otter. The victims of Bhopal are, so far, entitled to \$200 each.

Don't do the math. It may turn you into a cynic.

The columnist is editor of *The Sunday Guardian*, published from Delhi, and *India on Sunday*, published from London.

## Surrounded by nuclear weapon states

Pierre Trudeau, former prime minister of Canada, once said about its next-door neighbour US: "Living next to you is in some ways like sleeping with an elephant. No matter how friendly and even-tempered is the beast, if I can call it that, one is affected by every twitch and grunt." No peace loving country, like Bangladesh, will feel comfortable in the company of so many nuclear weapon states, no matter how friendly they may appear today.

ABDUL MATIN

IT started with India, our nearest neighbour, which tested its first nuclear weapon on May 18, 1974, described by the Indian government as a "peaceful nuclear explosion." After a pause of twenty-four years, India carried out five more nuclear tests, between May 11 and May 13, 1998. One of the five explosions is believed to have used a thermonuclear device.

The Indian nuclear explosion of 1974 prompted Pakistan, its arch-rival and neighbour, to enter the race for acquiring nuclear weapons. On May 28, 1998 Pakistan conducted five nuclear tests in response to the same number by India more than a fortnight earlier.

North Korea is believed to have obtained nuclear secrets from Pakistan in exchange for its missile technology. The secret pact served a mutually beneficial two-way purpose. Pakistan gained the missile technology and North Korea the nuclear technology. On October 9, 2006 it announced that it had conducted a nuclear test followed by a second one on May 25, 2009.

Israel never claimed to have tested any nuclear device though it is widely believed that it has an arsenal of a good number of nuclear weapons. This enables it to bully its weak neighbours like Lebanon and Palestine every now and then.

Now there is more disturbing news. According to a human rights and democracy group based in Norway, Myanmar's military dictatorship is working on nuclear weapons with assistance from North Korea. So the chain reaction of nuclear proliferation has set in! Myanmar lies between two nuclear powers, India and China and is our second nearest neighbour.

Myanmar's involvement in nuclear weapons was revealed in a report by Robert Kelley, a

former director of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) based in Vienna, who analysed evidence supplied by Sai Thein Win, a former major and defense engineer of Myanmar.

The news prompted Senator Jim Webb, a democrat from Virginia, to postpone his trip to Myanmar, and the United States raised concerns about "growing military ties" between North Korea and Myanmar. The military junta in Myanmar promptly denied it was developing nuclear weapons, decrying such allegations as "groundless and politically motivated." The reaction of the Bangladesh government to the reported news of Myanmar's nuclear weapons program is not clear or, at least, has not been made public.

As a next-door neighbour, are we not concerned about this development? Can we remain indifferent to being surrounded by nuclear weapon states not only in the region but also all along our borders? What is our defense if, God forbids, we have a border conflict with anyone of them? Did we not confront conventional navy ships from neighbouring countries in our territorial waters in the past for one reason or another? How shall we confront in the future if such ships are equipped with nuclear warheads?

No, I am not suggesting that we too should do what others in the region are doing, but we must have an effective defense system to protect our territory and our sovereignty.

It may be mentioned here that, like Israel, neither India nor Pakistan is a signatory to either the nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) or the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). North Korea withdrew after signing NPT and never signed CTBT. Myanmar is a signatory to both NPT and CTBT.

Bangladesh, from its birth, has been a proponent of peace in the region. Bangabandhu



Too close for comfort.

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the father of the nation, declared that Bangladesh would be the Switzerland of the East. Accordingly, Bangladesh signed all international protocols like NPT and CTBT without any reservation.

Bangladesh refrained from any nuclear weapon program even though it had the necessary manpower in early 1970's to undertake such a program. Now the question is, who will come to protect us if any of our neighbours flexes its "nuclear muscles" to cow us down in case there is a conflict?

Is there any provision in NPT or CTBT that provides security to the signatories by the five nuclear weapon states if they are attacked by a non-signatory nuclear weapon state? No, I have not seen any. The instruments only have provisions for sanctions, which proved to be ineffective in cases of India, Pakistan and North Korea. Likewise, the sanctions are likely to be ineffective in cases of Iran and Myanmar too, if they really pursue nuclear weapon programs.

Under such circumstances, time has come to review and, if necessary, amend the provisions

of NPT and CTBT to include a collective guarantee of "nuclear security" by the five major nuclear weapon states -- US, Russia, China, France and UK -- to any signatory non-weapon state in case its sovereignty and integrity are threatened by any non-signatory nuclear weapon state.

If this is not done now, mere provisions of sanctions will not stop nuclear proliferation. The chain reaction of proliferation that started from Pakistan will continue to spread unabated to other aspiring countries.

Pierre Trudeau, former prime minister of Canada, once said about its next-door neighbour US: "Living next to you is in some ways like sleeping with an elephant. No matter how friendly and even-tempered is the beast, if I can call it that, one is affected by every twitch and grunt." No peace loving country, like Bangladesh, will feel comfortable in the company of so many nuclear weapon states, no matter how friendly they may appear today.

Dr. Abdul Matin is a former Chief Engineer of Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission.