

Necessity of a policy for universities -- both public and private



From my earlier experience as a proctor in a public university I am highly worried about private university students' taking to streets and creating anarchy like the students of public universities. One of the major aspects a private university is proud of is its politics-free and violence-free campus.

I am not against student politics nor do I blame the students solely for their violent activities. But, very shockingly I have noticed that in time of crisis the student leaders and others related to the crisis do not act very responsibly. It is more shocking though that in our country the solution of a crisis comes not from the negotiation table but from actions such as blocking of highways, burning of vehicles and/or from acts of such other violence. Is it a failure of leadership?

I lose hope regarding the improvement of the situation in public universities when I see an efficient vice-chancellor like Professor Abu Yusuf failing to maintain a congenial atmosphere in Chittagong University campus.

Those who read *The Daily Star's* Point Counter Point page may have noticed some articles appreciating private universities and criticising public universities (by Prof Abdul Bayes, July 7; Prof Mohit Ul Alam, July 29; Dr. Binoy Barman, Aug 6). I certainly agree with the criticism of public universities, but things are not rosy in private universities either.

Just imagine how easy it is to get an A+ from some private universities and how difficult it is from public universities. What a mismatch between the two types of evaluation processes!

I cannot but mention an incident in this regard. One of my acquaintances, who is a computer operator in a coaching centre and whom I happened to meet after several years, requested me to search for a job for him and gave me a CV. I was surprised to learn that he possessed a Bachelor degree in CSE (Computer Science and Engineering).

When I asked him how he achieved the degree, he frankly admitted the technique of getting a certificate from a private university. I also noticed that he himself was highly ashamed to possess such a certificate without virtually knowing anything. This is not a stray incident, there may be more.

Interestingly, some private universities have created a golden opportunity for those people who need a degree, not for any job or for any such practical purpose but to use the titles as ornaments with their names. The first and foremost criterion of getting such degrees is to pay a chunky amount. This is lowering the image of higher education, not only domestically but also internationally.

Universities are autonomous bodies and are usually not interfered with by any outside authority, even the government. A university has its Act, Statute, Syndicate, Academic Council, Academic Rules etc. University authorities are entrusted with the power of conferring degrees. They evaluate their own students' exam scripts and conduct everything in the process of offering degrees.

I am not against private universities. I think it was a good decision of the government to take timely measures to pass the Private University Act (passed in 1992) because it was going to be increas-

ingly difficult for public universities to accommodate the huge number of H.S.C passed students seeking higher education. The Private University Act 1992 paved the way for private universities.

Over time, some of them have grown, but for want of proper care and control some have gone off-track. Who will bring them to the right track? I thank the government because, though late, it has taken some measures to do something by passing the Private University Bill 2010. I appreciate some of the points of this bill and I think that, if implemented properly, it will help in bringing some sort of discipline in private universities.

The universities of a country are the highest seats of learning and research. It is universities that provide guidance by creating leadership in all spheres of life. It is universities that are the repositories of intellectuals who lead the nation to peace and prosperity. But they are not able to maintain their standard because they have some diseases that must be cured, otherwise we will have to suffer a lot.

Just before our victory in the liberation war the anti-liberation forces killed many university teachers to cripple the nation. But now we are a free nation and committed to build "Sonar Bangla." Let the dream of the father of the nation come true. Let our government take an initiative, a plan of action to clear away all the evils that have affected some of our universities. Let us say together: "What is to be aimed that is to be gained."

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MD. ABU ZAFOR

This conditional statement may be exaggerated but not absolutely wrong today as far as the general notion of both the categories is concerned.

Almost everyday there is the news of violence/unrest in one or two of the

state-run universities. Editorials/ analyses/ letters are written on the issues but solutions seem to be a far cry.

Over the past few weeks or so the issue of private universities has come into limelight because of the government's decision to impose vat on the tuition fees of the students of private universities, and its subsequent withdrawal in the face of protest and violence. Some newspaper articles published on this incident criticised the decision of the finance minister and indirectly applauded the students for their victory.

Maoist insurgency trips up rising India

Poverty-reduction measures are crucial to undermining the Maoist insurgency and softening the impact of global economic processes on India's most vulnerable citizens. But when endemic corruption undermines these measures, the case for a globalised India has little to recommend it to the millions still below the poverty line.

ERIC RANDOLPH

THE Maoist insurgency raging through India's rural heartlands has come to dominate the domestic security agenda in recent months, but this internal struggle for power should also be seen as a vicious by-product of India's emergence as a global player.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh repeatedly describes the Maoists -- otherwise known as Naxalites after the town of Naxalbari in north India, where the movement's first uprising took place in 1967 -- as India's "gravest internal security threat."

That much of India's mineral potential exists in its poorest regions, where the Maoists are strongest, represents a direct threat to the country's growth trajectory at a time when it struggles to meet demand for coal, iron ore, steel and other commodities.

Although the Naxalite movement is somewhat diffuse, the primary threat comes from the Communist Party of India (Maoist), led by a Politburo of 13 members, with an estimated 10,000 to 20,000 fighters and pockets of influence in at least 20 of India's 28 states. A series of high-profile attacks dominated the news in 2010, including an April 6 ambush in the state of Chhattisgarh that left 76 paramilitaries dead and a May 28 train derailment by a Maoist-affiliated group that killed 148 civilians.

These attacks are but a few of a daily stream of reports of assassinations,

extortion and police gun battles. In the first six months of the year, 389 civilians, 177 members of security forces and 144 insurgents were killed, with the annual death toll expected to far outstrip the 997 people killed in 2009. By comparison, conflict in Jammu and Kashmir claimed 375 lives last year.

Critics blame the government's counter-insurgency surge launched late last year, nicknamed Operation Green Hunt, for increasing police battalions in affected regions without addressing underlying grievances related to poor governance, lack of development and the denial of basic rights to India's poorest citizens.

On the surface, the problem appears intrinsically internal. Former links to Nepalese Maoists were severed after the latter entered peace negotiations in 2006, while early support from China has long since dissipated in the face of improving Sino-Indian relations and the embrace of capitalism in both countries.

In contrast to many Islamist extremist groups, the Naxalites represent a traditional form of insurgency, with little interest in attracting global attention through attacks on international targets or use of internet-based propaganda.

Nonetheless, India's growing global stature fuels the Naxalite resurgence. Soaring growth rates of recent years, with the gross domestic product more than doubling to \$1.2 trillion since 2003, are to a great extent a product of India's economic liberalisation over the past two decades.

India's potential as a market for foreign goods, the growth of its services and manufacturing sectors, and its critical geopolitical position between China and Central Asia combine to make the nation a central player in 21st century international relations, a position reflected in a raft of free-trade agreements and its exemption from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

But while economic growth has benefited millions of its citizens, government promises to make that growth more inclusive of the poor through improved infrastructure, social-security programs and work-guarantee schemes have scarcely been realised. Most recent figures from the government's Planning Commission show that 41.8% of the rural population still lived below the poverty line in 2004-05, and here, Maoists find an abundance of potential recruits.

Moreover, as communications increasingly reach these communities, so does awareness that they are excluded from India's global success story. India has 550 million cell phone subscribers with around 20 million new accounts opened every month in 2010; the number of satellite TVs in rural areas increased by 49% in 2009 and 64% in 2010 -- often reaching the poorest through communal viewing.

In particular, remote tribal communities, lacking in basic government services, have become the core constituency for the Maoists. After years of exploitation by landowners and corrupt forest officials, India's tribals now find themselves awkwardly sitting atop some of the country's richest mineral reserves and on land allocated as "special economic zones."

The government sees these resources as vital to boosting foreign investment, ensuring future energy security and meeting soaring demand from domestic industry. By contrast, India's tribals view globalisation largely as a source of intrusion, dispossession and pollution.

Tribal protests against mining and

industrial projects have gained international attention through global campaigning groups such as Amnesty International and Survival International. One sustained campaign targets Vedanta, a UK-listed mining company, for plans to mine bauxite in the Niyamgiri Hills of Orissa, a deity for the local Dongria Kondh tribe.

The campaign has led to a number of shareholders, including the Church of England, selling stock on ethical grounds. Similar protests against land acquisition have delayed major projects such as the \$12 billion steel project planned by South Korea's Posco, also in Orissa.

Regardless of peaceful protests, India's economic trajectory exercises strong pressure to industrialise remote areas and expand India's relatively small mining sector, which currently accounts for 2.8% of GDP despite vast reserves of coal, bauxite, copper, diamond and many other minerals.

That pressure tends to be exercised through corrupt channels of state-level bureaucracy, facilitated by weak systems of property entitlement, that leave many of those affected without decent compensation or effective means of protest or redress.

These issues have provided the Maoists with the ideological underpinning by which to galvanise popular opinion. Theirs is essentially an extreme form of critique of the globalised, pro-capitalist direction set by India since 1991.

In the absence of legitimate governance, the Maoists often represent the only form of political representation available to tribal communities. Once entrenched in a region, their presence instigates a cycle of deteriorating security, an exchange of violence with security forces, which embeds them deeper within the local population.

The biggest obstacle to foreign investment in India remains stifling bureaucracy and rigid regulations on foreign

ownership, but the Naxalite insurgency and the violent trend of anti-globalisation is a growing source of disquiet for investors. The federal government has attempted to address some grievances of local populations through better protection of the environment and tribal property rights, or more equitable disbursement of profits to affected communities.

One example is the Forest Rights Act 2006, which aims to recognise ownership of land that a tribe or individual has traditionally cultivated. However, such initiatives often fall victim to corruption or bureaucratic inefficiency at local level, with reports in the press of legitimate claims rejected or ignored. Elsewhere, an attempt to give 26% of mining profits to local communities through a revised Mining and Minerals Bill faces vehement opposition from mining lobbyists, and would face implementation problems if passed.

In the meantime, the recent surge in

violence reflects a momentum that threatens government efforts to win the allegiance of local populations. Commentators urge improved governance and development, but the task is enormous.

As just one example, a 2007 report by the Centre for Environment and Food Security found that Orissa government officials had pocketed 75% of the funds allocated under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, the government's flagship anti-poverty scheme.

Poverty-reduction measures are crucial to undermining the Maoist insurgency and softening the impact of global economic processes on India's most vulnerable citizens. But when endemic corruption undermines these measures, the case for a globalised India has little to recommend it to the millions still below the poverty line.

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20 reinvented movies



WHY be predictable? Let's think of some new ideas for films. Thanks for the great comments -- I really had to laugh at the cheeky story of Angela and the mysterious stranger following in his car. Angela, you are one brave mother. Can't wait for

the follow-ups.

This is a rare internet dispatch from London (the place where I am living has no internet connection) so I have to make a special journey to read your comments.

I am staying in a charming little suburb of North London called Muswell Hill. It's not very sophisticated. When they showed the movie "Conan the Barbarian" here, the local newspaper people obviously thought: "That's a funny name and is there a country called Barbaria?"

So they "corrected" the name to "Conrad the Bavarian."

I was a big fan of fantasy, and guessed what it was meant to be, so I went to the movie but there was almost no one else there. I guess most cinemagoers in the town thought "Conrad the Bavarian" was a bio-pic about a German tourist or something.

Thinking about this reminded me of a game I used to play with my newspaper column readers.

Rules:

1. Change one letter of a movie title.
2. Think of a new story to match the revised title.

For example, Live and Let Die, the James Bond movie, could become:

Live and Let Dip: A tough swimming

pool guard strictly enforces the rules. But then one day he meets someone who changes his attitude forever.

Or how about this:

Pirates of the Caribbean could become Pilates of the Caribbean: A Frenchman on a beautiful island decides to start doing some stretching exercises. He talks about his life on the internet and becomes famous.

Here are some more (thanks, Tom, Pete, Diccon and Bob, readers of a certain newspaper for these):

Dive and Let Die: An evil scuba diver takes his enemies out for a dive and then abandons them by driving off in

the boat.

Tonal Recall: European has brain transplant so that he can speak Chinese with the correct tones.

Done with the Wind: The end of typhoon season is celebrated.

Empire of the Sum: Biopic of the rise of accountancy firm Ernst and Young.

Germs of Enderment: The story of the rise of AIDS in the 1980s.

Last Mango in Paris: French farmers ban imported fruit from Asia.

Coldfinger: Horror film starring a sadistic proctologist.

You Only Love Twice: Warning film about AIDS.

The Remains of the Bay: movie about the reclamation projects in Hong Kong waters.

FT: Tale of a pink, wrinkled alien.

Top Hun: Biopic of Mongolian warrior Attila.

A Fridge Too Far: Airline staff try to prevent domestic workers from taking heavy appliances as carry-on luggage on planes.

Sleeping with the Nema: A man takes constipation remedies before going to bed with unfortunate results for his linen.

Over to you!

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