

Varsity students' clash

Most unwarranted, most deplorable

THE violent clash that involved the students of two public universities in Dhaka on Saturday leaves one wondering whether the huge amount of money parents are spending on their children for their higher studies are being spent to produce educated youths and future leaders of the country or bunch of vandals that are ready to fall at each other's throats at the flimsiest of excuses. The incident was most unwarranted and most deplorable.

According to reports appearing in this newspaper, students of Prime Asia University and Southeast University located in the Banani area of the capital were involved in pitched battle causing damage to more than 100 vehicles. More than 15 buildings were vandalised by the feuding students. Not only that, being situated right in the heart of a business-cum-residential area with a major road running through it, life was disrupted and traffic held up for several hours, causing immense suffering to the public.

Although no one is sure why it happened, apparently, it all started over alleged stalking of a female student of one university by a male student of the other. Of course stalking is a very serious offence and was quite unheard of in the past, particularly in educational institutions. It is inconceivable that students who are striving to achieve excellence in intellectual fields will stoop so low as to indulge in an act which only the most inebriated ruffians do. Equally reprehensible is the violent reaction that followed. First altercations followed by fistfights and then all-out violence. And what was the fault of the owners whose vehicles were damaged or for that matter why were the buildings and the small shops made targets of anger? And who will compensate their loss?

One would hope that the authorities of both the universities would go into the incident and take steps to ensure that such things were not repeated. And it is not just enough to close down the universities, those responsible for giving the lead must be identified and taken to task, and the loss sustained by the public in terms of damaged property must be made good.

World conference on domestic violence

Safe shelters save lives

WOMEN around the world are subject to all kinds of violence and in most cases their attackers are their partners or their in-laws, and who lose their lives because they cannot escape from the abusive environments they are trapped in. Safe shelters are therefore crucial in every society as they may be the only place for an abused woman to seek safety in. The second World Conference of Women Shelters that ended on March 1 in Washington with 96 countries participating indicates the extent of this crisis.

The four day conference organised by the US National Network to end Domestic Violence and the Global network of Women's Shelters highlighted the innumerable ways that women are victim of domestic and other kinds of violence. Some of the most important agendas of the conference were to discuss how the number of safe homes could be increased, how existing shelters for women could be improved and how better counselling services could be provided to victims.

According to the findings, it was established that women victims all over the world have to face many obstacles before they finally are able to get help. At the same time when are able to reach these shelters, they are significantly benefitted.

Another point the conference raised is the huge cost domestic violence burdens a country with in terms of health expenditure, legal and economic costs. If women are being abused at home, they cannot be productive citizens. The cycle of violence, therefore, continues and creates an unhealthy, unhappy society.

While preventing the violence is an ongoing crusade for every nation, governments must come forward to provide more safe shelters for victims with the help of existing organisations that are already doing commendable work in this area, and do so immediately.

Where are our doctors?

SHAMIM HOSSAIN and WAMEQ A RAZA

WHY in his right mind would a doctor, well-bred and educated, want to spend a single minute away from this wondrous megacity of ours, and that too, to treat those who have no money in the villages? Doctors from our country do not and will not spend time in any village for their noble profession. The air outside the city limits is much too clean for money to be floating around, ripe for plucking.

Our honourable premier has been, is, and will continue urging the doctors to stand by the impoverished rural population of Bangladesh. The media coverage of these events is intense as the proposed punishments are thrown about in the air awaiting implementation, if the doctors do not act in accordance to their Hippocratic Oath to treat all who need help. Now the pertinent question is, have these threats ever work, or will they ever? Not very likely

Unfortunately, it appears as if ideology, ethics and integrity have been running perilously low in recent times among many of our finest professionals, while those who may actually possess such attributes are all but marginalised. Where the culture and the mindset of no holds barred, when it comes to personal gains, prevails, and those who do dare to attempt such practices are ridiculed and termed stiff or daft, how, in our right mind, could we expect the doctors to give up the abundance of comforts in the city or deny the lure of easy money to listen to the prime minister to ensure healthcare for the marginalised? Our experience would tell us otherwise. An anecdote from a leading heart surgeon recently mentioned in passing that he had lost Tk. 80 lac in the last stock market debacle. It, however, didn't put a dent in his wallet as there was plenty more where that came from.

All the denizens of our country would vouch that good treatment is only available in Dhaka. A visiting prime minister, after inspecting the Square Hospital, commended Bangladesh's healthcare system, and said that our neighbours should learn from us. Reality check, is good care really available for the general population, leaving aside the top echelon



DAVID LEAHY

Repetitive conditioning has encouraged this behaviour by our valiant doctors. Money over ethics has been thoroughly ingrained into their psyche. Toothless threats and soft words do not pose enough of an encouragement to make our doctors think otherwise.

of the society who can actually afford care in the likes of Square Hospital? Most likely not. In fact these money hoarding tendencies have reached such frenzied heights that it is common for doctors to suggest "Caesarean" instead of normal delivery for expecting mothers. A check-up by ophthalmologist would entail waiting in a line before the doctor pokes around in your eyes for roughly 30 seconds before he moves on to the next patient while his assistant writes down the prescription. After all, getting Tk. 500 per patient, what rational doctor wouldn't want to maximise his patient load?

Repetitive conditioning has encouraged this behaviour by our valiant doctors. Money over ethics has been thoroughly ingrained into their psy-

che. Toothless threats and soft words do not pose enough of an encouragement to make our doctors think otherwise. Au contraire, it is possible. But there need to be those among the elites who wear the same clothes and have the same degrees with the boldness and integrity to make it happen. After all, who among us does not realise what's best for him.

These doctors spend so much time and energy, not to mention money, to become doctors. Why should they go to remote villages? What is there for them? Public health organisations and their like-minded have been trying for years to implement a system where trainee doctors would spend some time in remote villages providing treatment before receiving their licenses. But people in the

| The New York Times EXCLUSIVE

Starving Iran won't free it

HOOHAN MAJD

THERE'S an old saying, attributed to the British Foreign Office in colonial days: "Keep the Persians hungry, and the Arabs fat." For the British -- then the stewards of Persian destiny -- that was the formula for maintaining calm; it still is for Saudi Arabian leaders, who simply distribute large amounts of cash to their citizens at the first sign of unrest at their doorstep.

But in the case of Iran, neither America nor Britain seems to be observing the old dictum. Keeping the Persians hungry was a guarantee that they wouldn't rise up against their masters. Today, the fervent wish of the West appears to be that they do exactly that. Except that the West is doing everything in its power to keep the Iranians hungry -- even hungrier than they might ordinarily be under the corrupt and incompetent administration of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

It is no surprise that the March 2 election -- Iran's first national poll since the disputed one of 2009 -- was held without any excitement on the part of middle-class voters or the participation of liberals opposed to the regime. Such candidates have been systematically eliminated from the political scene, accused of being Western stooges or traitors.

Western sanctions, once "targeted" and now blanket, are turning into a form of collective punishment. They are designed, we are told, to force the Islamic government to return to the nuclear negotiating table. Western politicians also seem to believe that punishing the Iranian people might

lead them to blame their own government for their misery and take it upon themselves to force a change in the regime's behavior, or even a change in the regime itself. But as the old British maxim recognized, deprivation in Iran is a recipe for the status quo.

Iran's government and its people have never been isolationists. But as sanctions take their toll on the livelihoods of Iranians who want to continue to do business and communicate with the outside world, their energy to question their government's

The change that most Iranians are hungry for is economic, and while they are consumed with the struggle to make ends meet, work second and third jobs, and in some cases send their children into the streets to beg or sell knickknacks, they are less concerned with their secondary hunger: political change.

In Iran, political change cannot be brought about by coercion, sanctions or exiles and their enablers, despite what American politicians might think. Instead, it will come slowly too

that the West wants to dictate to Iran.

Iranians do not take kindly to being dictated to. It reminds a proud people of their nation's weakness in the face of greater powers. Iranians will neither blame their own government for the effects of sanctions simply because we tell them to, nor will they overthrow the ayatollahs, however much we prod them to.

But with a strong economy, the middle class will return to a more influential political role in society. After all, it was most visible during the reformist years when relations with the West, political and economic, were at their best and when the government, under virtually no foreign threats, found it hard to completely ignore their demands.

Indeed, it was that same middle class, still well fed even after four years of Ahmadinejad's rule, that rose up in 2009, demanding their civil rights. And it is what's left of that middle class that continues to protest human and civil rights abuses today.

The ever more stringent sanctions imposed on Iran may be "biting," but they are also stifling voices for change -- voices that simply cannot be heard at a time when the population is threatened with an economic chokehold or, worse, with being bombed.

Sanctions will neither change the regime's behavior nor ignite a Persian Spring -- not as long as the Persians are hungry, and scared.

The writer, an Iranian-American journalist, is the author of *The Ayatollah Begs to Differ* and *The Ayatollahs' Democracy*.

© New York Times. Distributed by The New York Times Syndicate.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

March 5

1931
The British Viceroy of India, Governor-General Edward Frederick Lindley Wood and Mohandas Gandhi (Mahatma Gandhi) sign an agreement envisaging the release of political prisoners and allowing salt to be freely used by the poorest members of the population.

1933
Great Depression: President Franklin D. Roosevelt declares a "bank holiday", closing all U.S. banks and freezing all financial transactions.

1933
Adolf Hitler's Nazi Party receives 43.9% at the Reichstag elections. This later allows the Nazis to pass the Enabling Act and establish a dictatorship.

1953
Rumours are circulating in Moscow that Joseph Stalin, the long-time leader of the Soviet Union, is near death.

1956
The United States Supreme Court upholds a ban on racial segregation in state schools, colleges and universities.

1970
The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty goes into effect after ratification by 43 nations.