

STRAIGHT LINE

What are they graduating to?

Patently unbecoming

THE dignity of an occasion like the upcoming 46th convocation at DU was sullied on Wednesday at TSC, the venue for distribution of some gift items to the graduating students. Several hundred of them, many from different colleges and institutions under DU, were seen scrambling for the gift items and taking away more than they were allotted in a pre-convocation distribution ceremony.

This severely marred what could be a simple, joyful ritual that was supposed to be a warm-hearted precursor to the convocation, the proudest day in student life, when graduates receive degrees on successful completion of their academic courses.

Minimum sense of decorum and propriety were expected of graduates while receiving the gifts because their snatching them away not only left a detestable impression on the teachers and onlookers but also may have denied others of their allotted quota. The expectations were roundly belied.

We have seen public functions being at times spoiled by indiscipline and disorderly conduct which may have begun by a few and then spread all over totally unmindful of the organisers' or other participants' sensibilities. This happens particularly in the shape of scavenging on food packets.

But that it would take place on the premises of the highest seat of learning like Dhaka University for nothing more than a mug and a penholder for male students and handbags for female students is utterly shocking and deplorable. The graduates were supposed to be the epitome of dignity and honour based on a high degree of self-esteem because we look upon them as the future leaders of the country. If this is morning showing the day then we have so much to worry down the road. We would like the DU authorities to bear the incident in mind and devise ways to avert its recurrence in future. The students should also subject themselves to a sobering self-scrutiny.

The Odommo Chattagram initiative

Chittagong's potential must be developed fully

THE Daily Star takes immense pride in what in a sense is re-launching of the port city through 'Odommo Chattagram' initiative. The gala opening at the M.A. Aziz Stadium yesterday has lifted the curtains on a 12-day event, which will, among other things, reveal the rich 1400 year-old history of Chittagong, display the diverse culture of the region, and deliberate on the ways and means of developing the huge economic potential of the region, the port in particular.

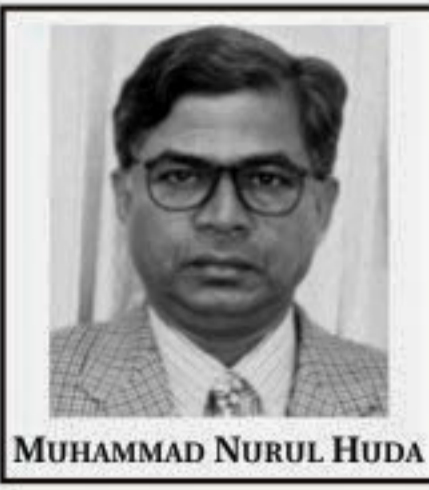
Chittagong has shown to the rest of the country the various facets of its indomitable spirit at various times in our long history including the anti-British movement and the War of Liberation. And it has shown its resilience by bouncing back after every natural calamity. Therefore, the name 'Odommo Chattagram' is, we feel a true reflection of the character of the people of Chittagong, and which must be narrated to the rest of Bangladesh. It is through this initiative that we commit to become a part of the future growth of Chittagong.

The importance of Chittagong to the country's economic development can never be overemphasized. The only seaport is being sought by our neighbours, it being more economical for their foreign trade. And if it has to become a world class port it cannot be so with having a world class city. And it is not a question of if, but how soon we can get the deep seaport going. The need to develop Chittagong's hinterland is very urgent indeed. And one cannot think of a world class port if it did not have the benefit of good communication links to other parts of the country and to the region including a world class airport.

It is through the 'Odommo Chattagram' initiative that the issues will be delved into by the relevant experts, hopefully resulting in definitive pointers for the policy makers which The Daily Star will project and pursue.

We take this opportunity to thank all those that have associated with us in this venture; and we feel very happy to say that, in keeping with the importance of Chittagong, The Daily Star has felt it appropriate to bring out a Chittagong

The mounting defiance



MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

THE Daily Star front page photograph of students barricading a main street in the capital city and

clashing with law enforcers demanding that police free 26 students who were arrested earlier in connection with a bar fight over free drinks depicts an appalling social scene. Elsewhere in the metropolis enraged students took to the street for the second consecutive day and vandalised a number of vehicles. Still others set ablaze a passenger bus in front of Dhaka College that spread panic in and around the area.

To compound matters further we witness the unbecoming behaviour of a large section of graduates of Dhaka University who set a disgraceful example by forcibly taking away convocation gift items in excess. The vice-chancellor of Dhaka University said that it was painful and shameful that graduates could stoop so low over such trivial things. The scale and dimension of the disorder quite clearly were unprecedented.

It would appear that we are oblivious of the reality that no city and no democracy can survive without law and order. Public interest requires promotion of law and order, not its denegation and destruction. The scenario of too many laws and too little justice and too much government and too little administration will not do. Order is

not a problem for the police only but also for the whole society.

According to some observers, the most remarkable fact of our political life is the absence of public response to the erosion of order in civil society. The near supine acceptance of many indignities and excesses inflicted upon citizens by arrogant authorities is a blight for which the entire privileged and well-off section of our society and all thinking people bear responsibility. The privileged pay lip service to the idea of social change in order to ease their conscience and they often

do not run in some pockets. In urban focal points there is lawlessness, which has aggravated the feeling of insecurity. To make matters worse, there is the near breakdown of the urban infrastructure.

However, for record it must be stated that many other countries have faced a similar situation at various stages of their history but their educated and privileged classes did not pronounce that their country was doomed. The fortunate in those countries played their part with responsibility and helped in bringing the country back

then how would we arrive at real solutions? There are recent examples which illustrate this inference. Urban unrest is taken merely as a law and order problem and treated as such.

In Bangladesh a great deal appears to be ad hoc and tentative and there is an impression that we are living from day to day. The question is, are we witnessing an institutional crisis of state authority? Black money holders and violators of other descriptions have created centres of power nearly parallel to that of the state, according to many discerning observers. However, for any programme of social and economic development to be durably implemented, it is necessary to fully establish the writ of the government and make it run throughout the country.

In the yesteryears there were public servants, professionals and politicians who practiced the frugality, simplicity and integrity enjoined by our religion. Now even the middle classes have developed highly acquisitive instincts and politics largely is a game of power, pelf and privilege. The question whether the good folks of earlier times succeeded or not is another matter but many young men now prioritise government jobs only in terms of money and power. They perhaps cannot deliver because they do not want to excel in life by being proud of their county and their vocations. We definitely need idealists and dreamers as distinguished from the money-minded and the avaricious.

The writer is a columnist of The Daily Star.

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venture to search for alibis for their callousness. One does not find the timely exertion of enough pressures for reforms and restructuring. No wonder, therefore, that the leadership in different segments of our country reflects the prevailing values and power structure of the society.

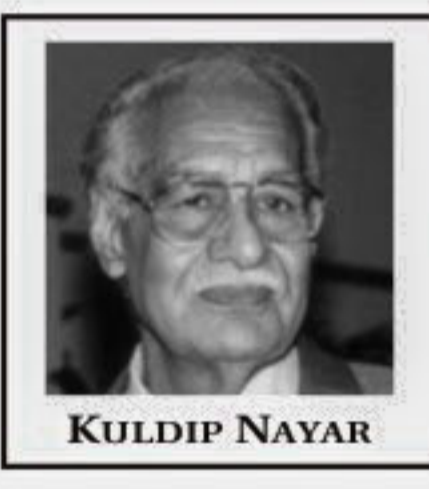
Our institutions are not in total decay, the present cracks and all the efforts to create an institutional vacuum notwithstanding. It is true that violence is widespread in our society. The writ of the government

on rails.

In contemporary Bangladesh there is a feeling that we are perhaps focusing too much on peripheral issues while ignoring the centre of the problem. At the political level, there is concentration on symptoms rather than on the disease. There is often emphasis on short-term simplistic solutions for complex problems. There is not much effort to embark on sustainable remedies. The obvious question is, if the problems are not appreciated in depth and the diagnosis made accordingly

BETWEEN THE LINES

Inside Pakistan



KULDEEP NAVAR

PAKISTAN has changed in some ways since my last visit one year ago. Terrorism is absent from

most parts of the country. Punjab has not experienced even a single incident in the last 15 months or so. Above all, terrorism is no more a topic in any discussion. I did not see any armed security person on the streets of Lahore. Still, people do feel uneasy and even insecure, but appear to have reconciled to the circumstances and the conditions.

In the same way, the Taliban do not figure in the daily discourse as was the case last year. No doubt, they are there and it is contended that the Pakistani army does not go after them as much as it does in the case of the Taliban in Afghanistan. It is apparent that fanaticism is not thriving any more, although an appeal in the name of religion has not lessened in effect. The *maulvi* is still a bugbear for all, more so to the liberals who seem to have toned down their voice of dissent.

Sensing that the establishment is not with them, the rightist forces have arrayed themselves on a platform, Council of Defence (DAFA), to pounce upon those who dare to think of peace and harmony. Leaders include Hafiz Saeed, who is connected with the terror attacks on Mumbai, and the India-baiter Gul Mohammad, former ISI chief. They fear that Islamabad may even make up with their top enemies, America and India.

However pernicious their hate campaign, there is a genuine desire among the people to have good relations with India. Despite all pressures, the common man on both sides has nourished good feel-

ings towards the other. Yet I have never seen before the surge for friendship which exists today in Pakistan. "We have wasted last 65 years in animosity," said many leading people. "Let us not waste any more time."

Elderly persons have a feeling that if the hatchet between India and Pakistan is not buried in their lifetime, it might not happen after they are gone because the youth is indifferent. However, I found many young girls and boys keenly interested in India and want to interact

the extremists have already begun threatening them of dire consequences if they entered into any trade relationship with India. Most significant is the news that cantonments have their walls full of slogans against India written in chalk. (Chalking is the common practice to spread an idea).

No doubt, the general perception is that the army is strong. But I did not find it throwing its weight about as happened even in General Musharraf's time. The military seems to have realised that a take-

Islamabad could go to push America for having killed some Pakistani soldiers. The army top brass is said to have indicated that it could not withstand the pressure of Washington. Although the US drone attacks are criticised, the people admit in private that but for the drone attacks Pakistan would not have got rid of Taliban leaders like Osama and Mullah Omar.

No doubt, the anti-American feeling is stronger than it was last year. But this is primarily because of Washington's pro-Kabul policy. Islamabad still wants Afghanistan as its strategic depth and it is irritated over Washington's policy to make Kabul strong. That the latter is close to New Delhi aggravates the situation.

Kayani is no friend of India but he does not see any purpose in wearing his anti-Delhi feelings on his sleeves. He finds America pressing him relentlessly to give up hostility towards India. Kayani realises that if Pakistan wants to get the military wherewithal he has to favour steps to lessen the distance with India. The decision to extend the status of "Most Favoured Nation" to India had his nod. What he probably does not realise is that the peace lobby in Pakistan has expanded beyond his estimate.

Nawaz Sharif has no hesitation in saying that he won against Benazir Bhutto in 1991 on the plank of peace with India. He proposes to raise the same issue in the next election in 2013. Some elements in the ruling Pakistan People's Party too see the point. It is not, however, surprising to find the emerging Imran Khan not following suit. Maybe the army, his biggest supporter, still wants to reap some dividends by not settling problems with India once and for all.

The writer is an eminent Indian journalist.

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with their counterparts. But their main problem is the visa, which is "impossible" to get.

Trade with India is awaited with abated breath, not only because it would give a break to the deteriorating economy of Pakistan but also because it would provide an opportunity to have contact with India. The bonds of common culture, common traditions and common ethos are convincing more and more Pakistanis that their long-term interests lie with India, not with the Islamic world which the rightist forces are trying to sell all the time. This, however, is not the case with the media, which I found too involved in domestic happenings like our newspapers and television channels.

A few businessmen told me that

over would not be easy this time. The political parties are at daggers drawn but they have let it be known that martial law is out of the question. Nawaz Sharif told me that they would all stand by the Asif Ali Zardari government if there was any attempt by the army to push it out. I believe that Zardari has got such a message from Sharif who wants the army to be like the one in America or India.

I think the killing of Osama-bin Laden at his house in Abbotabad is the watershed for the army. People's confidence in it has been greatly hit. They find it "too flabby and too close" to America. A story openly told is that President Zardari had a meeting of top army officials including General Parvez Kayani and some senior ministers to find out how far

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

March 31

- 1889**
The Eiffel Tower is officially opened.
- 1959**
The 14th Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, crosses the border into India and is granted political asylum.
- 1991**
The Islamic Constitutional Movement, or Hadas, is established in Kuwait.
- 1991**
Georgian independence referendum, 1991: nearly 99 percent of the voters support the country's independence from the Soviet Union.
- 2004**
Iraq War in Anbar Province - In Fallujah, Iraq, 4 American private military contractors working for Blackwater USA, are killed after being ambushed.