

Violence in public universities

Tame the BCL

THE unbridled violence let loose by the student cadre of the Awami League in some public universities is extremely distressing. Saturday's attack on teachers of the Islamic University (IU) in Kushtia, and a few days before that on the teachers of Rokeya University, give one the impression that they can get away with anything.

Would the public be wrong in thinking that they have been assured impunity in their unruliness which, among other things, permits them to chastise not only 'errant' students but 'errant teachers' also. Reportedly, nearly 30 teachers of IU were injured when they were attacked by BCL activists inside the university in the teachers' lounge. And reportedly, the police contingent, as well as the local SP who was present inside the campus, did not do anything to protect the teachers. This is the second attack on IU teachers by BCL cadres in less than two months.

The teachers of IU had been abstaining from classes since September 8 of last year demanding the removal of the VC, his deputy and the registrar. And last month the government had accede to their demands, partly, by relieving both the VC and pro-VC. And the general students are fully justified in demanding immediate resumption of classes. But, while we agree that the academic calendar should never be disrupted, neither by the students, nor, certainly, by the teachers, setting upon the teachers to force them to resume classes under threat of death cannot be, and should not be, endorsed. Under the circumstances the academic calendar runs the risk of continued disruption.

Regrettably, the impunity with which the BCL cadres have gone about in these two, and other public universities, leads one to believe that their acts have the endorsement of certain quarters in the administration.

The Awami league must act on two counts immediately. Firstly, it must move decisively to tame its student cadre if it does not want its image to be sullied further and be seen as a party to what the BCL is doing. Secondly, it must go into the allegation of corrupt practices by the former IU VC and his deputy, to either prove or disprove the allegations leveled by the agitating teachers.

Fire in Bahraini labour camp

We are shocked at our workers' death

THE death of 11 Bangladeshi workers in the deadly blaze at a Bahraini tenement for expatriate South Asian workers comes as a distressing piece of news. Unfortunately it has become a pattern of Bangladeshi labourers dying of deadly fires in their living places. We recall the fire that killed 16 of our workers in 2006 followed by three in 2008 and at least 10 in 2012, let alone the last casualty figure.

The deadly fire incident is another reminder of poor safety conditions for our workers. Condemnations have been voiced in Bahraini media for the lethal mishap linked to hazardous living conditions. In the first place, they are required to stay in earmarked places and in buildings that are an apology for housing.

The building in which the latest accident occurred was unauthorised and therefore substandard being exposed to not only the elements of nature but also internal hazards. How could unapproved structures with small rooms in which 10-12 workers are crammed be allotted to South Asian expatriates employees?

The government should take it up with the authorities in Bahrain at the diplomatic level as well as with the employing companies. The workers deserve safe living and working conditions in consideration of the fact that they are benefiting the host country as well as their country of origin.

The deaths are family tragedies as the workers were the only earning members for the households they left behind them. They were working to change the lot of their families but now the latter are left in the lurch. The companies in Bahrain should pay adequate compensation to the victims' families.

We grieve at the loss of so many lives practically in the line of duty and express our heart-felt sympathies to the

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

January 14

1784
American Revolutionary War: Ratification Day, United States Congress ratifies Treaty of Paris with Great Britain.

1960
The Reserve Bank of Australia, the country's central bank and banknote issuing authority, is established.

1969
An accidental explosion aboard the USS Enterprise (CVN-65) near Hawaii kills 27 people.

1973
Elvis Presley's concert Aloha from Hawaii is broadcast live via satellite, and sets a record as the most watched broadcast by an individual entertainer in television history.

1999
Toronto, Ontario, Canada Mayor Mel Lastman becomes the first mayor in Canada to call in the Army to help with emergency medical evacuations and snow removal after more than one meter of snow paralyzes the city.

2004
The national flag of The Republic of Georgia, the so-called "five cross flag", is restored to official use after a hiatus of some 500 years.

KALEIDOSCOPE

Unfulfilled expectations



SYED FATTAHUL ALAM

UPON completion of the incumbent government's four years in office, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, in her address to the nation on Friday, has sought people's support for another term in the upcoming 10th Parliamentary election.

To justify her claim to a consecutive second term in office, she dwelt at length on her government's achievements during the last four years. Given her short speech, the list was rather long. And, of course, it all sounded hunky-dory.

Admittedly, the quantitative references she made of the revenue collection, budget size, allocation for the Annual Development Programme (ADP), remittance sent home by migrant workers, the amount of forex reserve, etc speak of something impressive. But is it not also the fact that those figures represent the cumulative sum of the progress in those sectors made over the years during the successive governments including the incumbent one?

The nation is not standing at the same point as it did, say, some 5, 10 or 20 years ago. Such achievements were claimed during all the governments of the past regardless of their being elected or non-elected ones. With time, everything is growing in number -- the population, the size of the budget, the volume of trade and commerce, and so are growing the transactions in the banks.

There is no doubt that the incumbent government has some achievements to credit. The attention given to agriculture under its able Agriculture Minister Motia Chowdhury has largely been behind the success in agriculture in terms of surplus food production. Similarly, Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid deserves credit for reaching the textbooks to the primary and secondary level students' doorstep and that, too, in time. The government's safety net programme has definitely benefited a section of the very marginally subsisting population. But is it not only expected of an



The people were looking for a guideline, a roadmap, for the transition to the next government through a fair and peaceful poll in which all the major parties could participate. But their expectations have so far remained largely unfulfilled.

elected government to deliver according to its electoral promise?

Unfortunately, it has become the practice among all our governments to beat the drum for some things that are purely their routine tasks as a government.

But in her half-an-hour long speech the PM did not say a word about the prevailing political standoff between the main opposition alliance led by BNP and the ruling Awami League including the grand alliance it heads. Neither was there anything in her speech that could be interpreted as a hint to engage the opposition in a process of dialogue to get over the existing crisis. On the contrary, in her speech marking the fourth and penultimate year of her current term, she made no change in her characteristic style of coming down hard on the opposition. From holding it responsible for bringing the infamous 1/11 to its agitation programmes and what she termed "subversive activities" along with Jamat-e-Islami in a bid to save the war criminals, to the comparisons she drew between the successes of her government to the lack

of it in the case of the previous BNP government and so on, she basically stuck to her characteristic style of opposition-bashing.

But in this election year, what the people were expecting was a critical self-assessment of her government's performance. People were certainly waiting to know from her about what the government has done in addressing sensitive issues like the secondary stock market in which thousands who invested their life-long savings had gone broke. Losing everything, some even committed suicide. Nothing has been done to bring the culprits involved in the scam to justice. Regrettably, the finance minister has dismissed those poor investors as mere speculators. The prime minister could at least hold out some hope to those hapless people. But she had nothing for them in the speech.

So went unaddressed the issue of Padma Bridge loan and the corruption allegation brought by World Bank and all the bad press that it received in the national and international media. The law and order situation that she claimed to be fine also

involved enforced disappearances like those of Chowdhury Alam, Elias Ali and others. Murder of journalist couple Sagar-Runi, the recent killing of Biswajit Das and the excesses being committed by the Awami League's student front, the Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL), etc also remained ignored.

Even if the government is oblivious, the people never forget. How so often the public, once they get the opportunity, have demonstrated that! The problem is that political parties, once in power, conveniently forget so many things.

The most important and nagging question that is haunting public mind at the moment is the government's latest stance on the issue of the election-time government and its form. Since her rhetoric-laden speech had all the features of one given on the election campaign trail, it was common expectation that she would at least say something about it.

Particular mention may be made of the main opposition BNP's demand to hold the election under a neutral, non-partisan caretaker government.

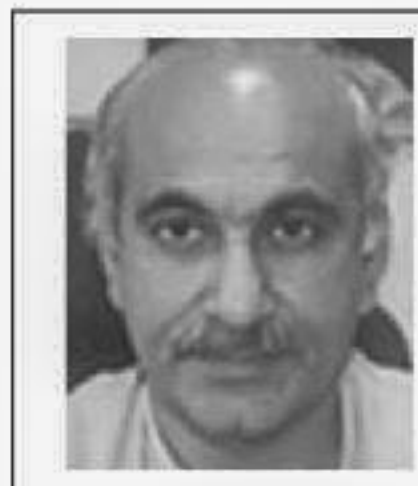
But as there was nothing in the speech for the opposition to feel reassured that their demand would be heard, the nation is left wondering how the next general election is going to be held. Now the opposition is still rigid on its demand with the added threat that it would not only not participate, but resist any election under the incumbent government, if their demand is unmet. Doesn't it all give the public enough reason for concern? Is the country then inexorably heading towards anarchy?

The people were waiting eagerly to hear from the prime minister answers to such vital questions. They wanted to know what specifically her government was going to do to address these vital issues in the next one year of her government. In sum, the people were looking for a guideline, a roadmap, for the transition to the next government through a fair and peaceful poll in which all the major parties could participate. But their expectations have so far remained largely unfulfilled.

The writer is Editor Science & Life, *The Daily Star*.
E-mail: sfallim@gmail.com

BYLINE

The habit of bending over backwards



M.J. AKBAR

As a conundrum, this one is hard to beat, possibly because it is uniquely Indian. Why has appeasement of hard-

liners in Pakistan, an avowedly communal state carved out of the two-nation theory, become a touchstone for secularism in India? If this were limited to an irony it would doubtless find its level in the varied folds of public discourse. As an artful strategy to legitimise the present UPA government's weak knees, it has more disturbing implications.

The subtext is subtle. There are only two sides to this coin of Manmohan Singh's realm: accommodation or war, a nonsense familiar to historians of Europe between the first two world wars. An ultimatum is the last resort, not the first one; and there are many stages in-between, as President Obama's policy towards Iran, for instance, indicates. But in the dictum laid down by Delhi, you either accept Pakistan's token verbiage, or risk derision as a hawk.

Pakistan's hard line towards India is held by the army, which takes the final call on India, whether in strategic planning or real-time response. Its thinking is rooted in Partition. India won freedom from the British. Pakistan won independence from India. Pakistan's fundamentalist patriots therefore locate the existen-

tialist threat from India. Expand or manoeuvre the matrix and a man wanted across the world for terrorism, Hafiz Saeed, gets transformed into a commander of the faithful doing his duty in a holy war on Mumbai. Does this make dialogue impossible? No. But it makes it more complex.

Singh, backed firmly by Sonia Gandhi, has no use for complications. He bends in the hope that one more storm will pass over. But between Pakistan's intransigence over terrorism, his own capitulation at Sharm el Sheikh within nine months of

gents within. But some instances are intended to send a larger signal. The gruesome killing of Lance Naiks Hemraj Singh and Sudhakar Singh was one such message.

Singh's answer was to pull out the most tired clichés from the store. The Pakistan High Commissioner Salman Bashir was "summoned" and told that barbarism was "unacceptable" over a nice cup of tea. Bashir dismissed India's accusations with contempt. His boss, Foreign Minister Hina Rabbani, used two words where her Indian counterpart used one, calling India's allegations "absolutely unac-

Dr. Singh bends in the hope that one more storm will pass over. But between Pakistan's intransigence over terrorism, his own capitulation at Sharm el Sheikh within nine months of Mumbai, a succession of Pakistan officials who taunt India on Indian soil, and the mutilation of two Indian soldiers this week along the Rampur-Haji Ali sector, Dr. Singh seems to have bent so far that he looks prostrate.

Mumbai, a succession of Pakistan officials who taunt India on Indian soil, and the mutilation of two Indian soldiers this week along the Rampur-Haji Ali sector, Dr. Singh seems to have bent so far that he looks prostrate.

The ceasefire line across Jammu and Kashmir is a misnomer. It is always on fire. Lives are lost periodically in the tension of conflicting responsibilities, as India guards itself from the enemy without and insur-

ceptable."

Examine Pakistan's version of events. Islamabad claims India started the firefight on January 6 in which one of its soldiers was killed and another seriously wounded. Pakistan did not summon India's high commissioner for coffee and photographs. It sent the 29 Baloch Regiment to extract two eyes for one. When India asked for an enquiry, Pakistan told India to jump -- into the arms of the United Nations. Pakistan marshaled its array of diplo-

mats to supplement action in the field. Dr. Singh ordered Indian diplomats and armed forces to freeze and "de-escalate."

Islamabad took the measure of Delhi in 2009 at Sharm el Sheikh, when, despite the international outrage over Mumbai and evidence of Pakistan's involvement, it was Singh who made extraordinary concessions to put together a joint statement. The text was not shown to India's National Security Adviser, M.K. Narayanan, who went ashen when he read the contents a little before it was released to media. Narayanan's silence was purchased with a ghostly residence in Calcutta, also known as the Raj Bhavan.

Pakistan's army concluded that it could get away with Mumbai, it could get away with anything. It has.

Pakistan's generals have measured the Singh government's girth, and discovered a circumference bloated by hot air. They know that the only reaction from hot air can be flatulence. They've the evidence they need. There were 57 cross-border violations by Pakistan in 2010, 60 in 2011 and 117 in 2012. Delhi's response has been a private, and sometimes public, campaign to reduce our forces on the border. If it takes two sides to go to war, it also takes a partnership for peace. Manmohan Singh has the look of a lonely man abandoned by the partner of his dreams.

The writer is Editor of *The Sunday Guardian*, published from Delhi, *India on Sunday*, published from London and Editorial Director, *India Today* and *Headlines Today*.