

Campus violence spells disaster

BITTER TRUTH



MD. ASADULLAH KHAN

THE recent killing of Saad Ibne Momtaz, a final year student of BAU at Mymensingh and, just within two days, the murder of Rustam Ali Akanda, a fourth year student of political science department of Rajshai

University, both of them belonging to BCL, has sent shock waves across the country. These two incidents once again laid bare the unbridled BCL rowdyism that is turning the public universities into veritable battlegrounds.

Citizens are not only worried but also believe that these are not isolated incidents in one or two educational institutions but are part of the orgy of violence taking place across many public universities, almost all of which have ended in deaths. People only see that there is no end to these atrocities, rather such rowdyism continues to flare, indicating a slide to disorder and violence in the campuses of the universities in consequence of intra- or inter-party conflicts.

Concerned citizens urged political leaders to declare a moratorium on student politics, especially religion-based politics, for some years in universities and colleges. Student politics in recent times has taken away hundreds of promising lives from our midst, leaving the unfortunate families in a pall of gloom and shock. The golden and glorifying age of our patriotic political leaders and statesmen is a fading memory for many now.

It is high time for conscientious citizens to come out in public and express their outrage and revulsion against such politics. Many people whose voices seem to have been silenced by the upsurge of violent politics are still waging a battle to preserve those pristine values that kept the nation marching towards peace and prosperity, leaving the students absorbed in their studies.

People recall the days when students in the country had to abandon their studies and respond to the call of the time in throwing out the British Raj from this sub-continent. The heroic role of the students in the Language Movement of '52, anti-Ayub movement in the '60s, anti-education policy movement in 1962, mass upsurge in 1969 and Liberation War in 1971, can hardly be forgotten. But unfortunately, the spirit of idealism that once burned bright in many gave way to negative impulses during the successive rules of partisan politics in the last 43 years.

The signal these continued acts of violence in campuses give to the nation is ominous. It indicates the BCL cadres' complete disdain not only for the university authority and the interest of the students but also for the ruling party. The problem has stemmed from the university authorities' inability to hold central students' union elections for more than two decades. Public universities are no longer centres for higher studies but have turned into safe havens for gun-toting criminals masquerading as students.

People could never conceive that student politics would breed terrorism, murder, tender manipulation, extortion, admission trade and seat allotment business in residential halls of the public universities. Students have been used as tools in achieving the interest of some politicians and in climbing the ladder of power with all its concomitant privileges.

People can recall how a former president polluted the politics of the country as well as academic future of the students through distribution of favours to a handful of students by inducting them into the quagmire of dirty politics. These innocent boys at the prime of their life were lured to a life of darkness from light by the temptation of fast money made through unethical means. The journey to hell started from then. The campuses these days, as reports say, are arsenals of weapons that are being used freely by these young goons. Power and strength these days come from the barrel of the gun and not from academic pursuit and knowledge.

But this was never the objective that the parents had in mind when they sent their wards to join colleges and universities. What could be more shocking for parents than to see their sons, who were pulsating with life and enthusiasm, coming back home in a coffin as a result of campus violence?

Nobody would question the need for having student organisations on ideological basis. Students' philosophy of life and idealism are moulded and shaped by their exposure to world literature and history during their studies in colleges and universities. But to drag them into vicious politics on the pretext that national identity and sovereignty face a crisis amounts to inviting gloom for the country.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, when she was in power in 2009, gave up her role as the patron of BCL after she failed to rein-in the criminal elements in her own party's student wing. But this fine emotional gesture did not have any effect on the warring factions. During the last 5 years, conflicts, clashes and killings as a consequence of sharing money got through extortion and tender manipulation have continued unabated. The situa-

tion has come to such a pass that if the PM does not take steps quickly, we could find ourselves being ruled by thugs instead of a democratically elected government.

People wonder if the massive election victory has caused the leadership quality and political sagacity to atrophy instead of radiating the guiding spirit that people demanded and craved for so long? The student wing, far from being an asset, is destroying the party's image.

In the worst of times, draconian laws are framed. But when it comes to implementation, precious little is done. Since the AL came to power for the second time in early 2014, have seen in stunned disbelief the most audacious acts of terrorism and killings. The police in most cases stayed away from the scene. In the academic institutions, the destructive elements get hardly punished. Recalling the incident of 2009 at JU, six students were expelled for six months only for their involvement in violence. The PM must have noticed that there is a general disenchantment with the government's inability to do anything that hardly goes beyond the motions of governance.

Student organisations are extensions of the political parties, and are busy collecting money from any source possible instead of concentrating on issues related to studies, student welfare and employment opportunities after completing studies. Using the signboards of different parties, these armed hoodlums have sown the seeds of a new brand of politics that uses terror and corruption to consolidate power. Now all the political parties must think seriously about de-linking the student wing of the parties in the hope that the wounds will begin to heal.

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Gonojagoron Mancha: Disquieting developments

MOZAMMEL H. KHAN

REPORTS of differences among the leaders of Gonojagoron Mancha are disturbing. The renaissance of Gonojagoron Mancha took place at a historic moment, albeit with a limited purpose. It soon became a rallying point for the renaissance of patriotism, especially among our younger generations who had grown up hearing distorted and deceptive versions of our glorious history. Bengalis around the world know how this movement started and how it was being relentlessly led by a few youngsters, strictly maintaining its apolitical character.

Never before in our history had the news media around the globe come with such words of admiration for the movement, especially of its spontaneity, non-violence and devoutness. Headlines in the international media reflected the unprecedented non-violent movement in clear terms, especially in a country where violence is the order of the day. The Independent of UK wrote: "The war Bangladesh can never forget. The guns fell silent more than 40 years ago, but the scars of Bangladesh's short, bloody struggle for independence still burn to this day. But this is a country driven by a national agony at its creation which has never been fully addressed. The protest now happening outside the national museum is of an unprecedented nature, and on an unprecedented scale."

CNN, under the heading "The Spirit of '71 Rises at Shabbagh Square in Dhaka," reported: "Shabbagh Square is full of people from all classes, gender, religion and profession who have gathered there for one single demand, 'hang the war criminals until death.'" The Toronto Star wrote: "In Bangladesh, a revolution is unfolding to keep the country's secular character alive. For two months now, hundreds of thousands of people, from young men and women, aging former guerrilla fighters and grandmothers who still carry the scars of genocide, have occupied Shabbagh Square in the capital, Dhaka. The collective anger of a nation, simmering below the surface for more than 40 years, has been called the country's second war of liberation."

The new war, dubbed as the second war of liberation, was different from the first one in many ways. The weapons which were used in this war were not deadly; they did not kill or harm anyone, yet were as effective as the worst weapons technology has ever developed, if not more. The unprecedented "weapon" of silence exhibited spontaneously by the citizens across the country was more thunderous than the noise of the noisiest weapons, the light of the lighted million candles was more soothing and shining than the full moon, and the unison of voices singing Sonar Bangla was heard from Cape Town to Canada.

Dear young leaders,
It is disquieting to learn about the recent differences and bickering among the leaders, divided in different groups, on absolutely trivial issues vis-à-vis the reaffirmation of the intrinsic conviction of the people. Your movement has nothing whatsoever to do with religion, yet you have been dubbed as 'atheist' by a political group and a newspaper in particular. Although that newspaper is banned at this moment, others are still around inflating the causes of your differences with loathsome and imaginary stories.

It is the deep-rooted conviction of the masses that gave rise to your much-acclaimed Mancha, where the conviction ran so deep that even a poor rickshaw puller carried his passenger free if he was going to Shabbagh Square. "I have never seen such a scene in my life," a 40-year old shopkeeper told the media. "The boys have shown us how affectionate they are towards the country." In Toronto, I saw men, women and children people of age all age groups, braving subzero temperature, come together to declare allegiance to the making of history, where the spirit of '71 was rekindled.

The nation is not in any better shape than when you started the movement. Instead of a government that stood on a high moral ground, we now have a government, albeit not illegal but with very little moral standing. The trials of war criminals are far from over. The nation is receiving weekly sermons from a half-educated heir apparent of a major political party, sitting in a safe haven, on serious matters pertaining to constitution and the foundation and history of the nation's creation. The nation cannot afford to shrug them off as diatribes of a nonsensical individual since almost half of the nation supports his political party, knowing very well he would be at the helm if the party goes to power.

Echoing the voices and apprehensions of the millions, and specially of those of us who carried the baton of the battle of freedom and justice in 1971, may we solemnly urge you the leaders of the Mancha, in the name of our living heroes and esteemed martyrs, to put your act together, resolve the petty differences and get unified once again to assure the millions who want to feel assured that the baton of '71 is in safe hands. Please do not fail us, dear young leaders.

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Using our strategic leverage

SARWAR JAHAN CHOWDHURY

LOT of developments are taking place in the geostrategic domain of South Asia and also in Asia and its adjacent waters. The situation isn't as dire as it was in the Soviet era, yet the states are positioning and repositioning themselves in response to the developments and to maintain strategic parity or advantage. The Americans and the Chinese are engaging each other, but largely for cross purposes. India's aspiration to gain big power status, at least in the Asian context, is well known. To some, Russia is still a reckonable player in some parts of Asia.

There are important small and medium-sized countries caught in strategic confusion and working hard to strike a balance and retain some leverage. There are, of course regional, continental and international spheres, and to gain some free play in one sphere one may have to compromise some interest or leverage in another. South Koreans and Japanese host sizable American military units, which may seem to taint their sovereignty or independence, but does not actually. They gain great assurance by counterpoising their alliance with the mighty US against the belligerent North Koreans or the ever strengthening Chinese.

Bangladesh often fluctuates, to considerable extent, in its regional and international positions. The strategic picture changes with domestic political change. This is not good for proper guarding of Bangladesh's legitimate interests in the regional and international arenas. It may make us an unreliable international actor to many. To guard our core interests we have to have some reliability in that sphere, and of course gain required leverage to do that.

Bangladesh's case is complex. Its domestic incoherence is acute. It is related to the existing cleavage in core ideologies and perception of identity and recent history. And in those narratives our neighbours, Pakistan and India,

are placed in different lights. Relations with them in the regional geostrategic settings are often defined and redefined as per the divisive domestic political narratives. Although there are some instances of pragmatism, e.g. BNP's occasional moderate take on relations with India, or AL's reconciliation with China; yet, by and large, the essential agreement on foreign policy, and the external strategy thereof, is missing.

A vulnerable country like Bangladesh needs geo-strategic consistency for securing its vital stakes. Broad domestic agreement is a must on issues that dictate its international stance. There are unique strategic challenges already facing Bangladesh. For example, the present government wants to maintain good rapport with India and rely on its support for international acceptance; especially after the last exclusive general election denounced by most of the international community. On the other side, we have serious bilateral issues with our big neighbour. Moreover, it seems that a new centre-right government will take over, which doesn't appear to have good feelings towards Bangladesh, after the ongoing election there to replace a relatively moderate one. How is Bangladesh going to approach that government to solve, say, the vital and difficult water and land enclave issues?

The fluidity of projected scenarios and potentially unknown relationship quotient add to the tense uncertainty. Of course, much will depend on the gestures and practical actions of the new Indian government. Our geo-strategic policies haven't left us much room for an alternative course other than looking for goodwill from India. One vital counterbalancing country, Pakistan, is too sensitive for us as things stand.

Bangladesh is mostly a homogeneous country, unlike our big neighbour. Our strategic leverage may emerge from our external alliances or from our internal strength based on a supposed unity, or from a mixture of both. In Bangladesh-

India equation, we both need each other for different reasons, and these have some links to other big actors of the region or trans-region. Fulfillment of Indian needs must come at the same price as Bangladesh's needs. Both the needs have great weight.

Relatively silent struggle between the US and China on retaining and expanding their domain of influence, including in the Indian Ocean region, has significant influence in shaping many other strategic relations in the region or the continent. American concession of strategic space to India in relation to South Asia stems from their tacit, sometimes strained, alliance between them. It's true that the Cold War era alignments aren't there anymore and most international actors engage other important and relevant actors—may be in varying degree. Use of hard power in South, South-East or East Asia and their adjacent waters is largely off the table unless something unexpected happens.

The ideological landscape has changed a lot in the post-Soviet era. The contest has shifted from communist-free world line to liberal extremist and economic fault lines. Bangladesh maintains or tries to maintain rapport of varying degrees with most of the regional and international players like US, EU, UK, India, China, Saudi Arabia and even Russia. Our endeavour needs well thought out direction. We may need to devise or transform strategies smartly to retain some strategic leverage based on the changed external scenario and keeping in mind our core interests. But for that to happen we need to build as soon as possible a unified domestic paradigm on the core ideologies and values. An actor who is weak internally is handicapped in many ways in making effective moves externally.

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QUOTABLE Quote

If we had no faults of our own, we would not take so much pleasure in noticing those of others.

François VI de la Rochefoucault

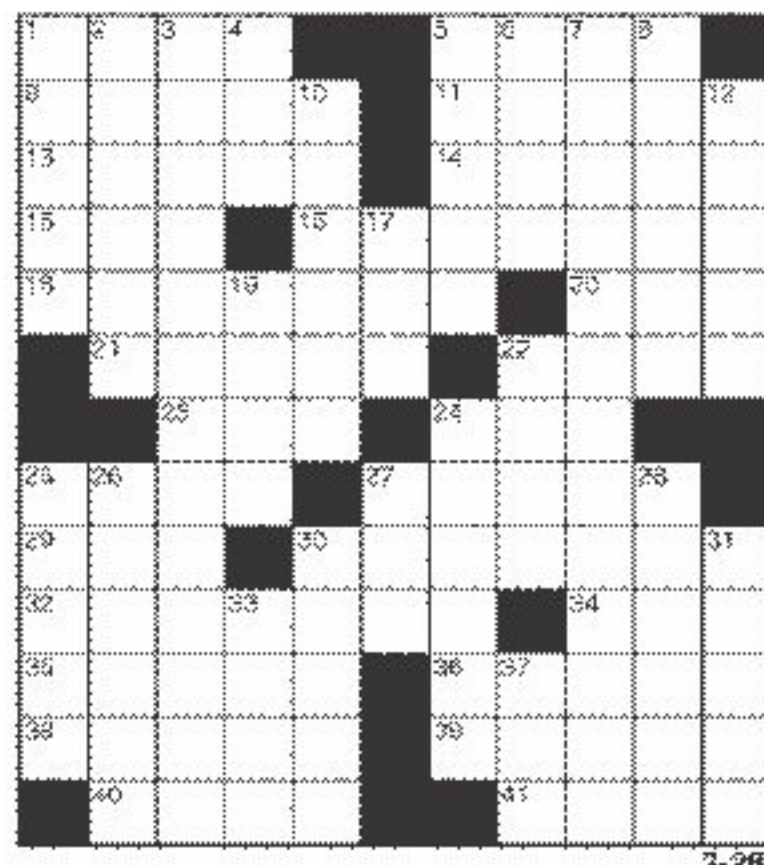
CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

ACROSS

- "Yeah right!"
- Alley prowlers
- Tier
- Grate stuff
- Dancer Castle
- Fine flour maker
- In the past
- Fear-inducing
- Mars
- Work unit
- Bra part
- Diamond corner
- Holster's place
- Young one
- Like the piper
- Wood strips
- "Not Unusual"
- Pizza slices, often
- Indigenous group
- Join the crew
- In proximity
- Grammar topic
- Personnel worker
- Petruchio's town
- lowa city
- Departed

DOWN

- Homer work
- River boats
- Jack Higgins book
- Kayo count
- Lawyer's workload
- Seoul setting
- Jack Higgins book
- Cuts off
- Station worker
- Grassy plant
- Gym unit
- Parched
- One and the other
- Touches base
- Recipe amount
- Venezia setting
- Golf position
- James Clavell novel
- Civil rights leaders
- Medgar
- Worry
- Under standing words
- Carpentry tool



Yesterday's answer

STAB ABASH
HANOI MALTA
AHEAD ALIEN
FOR SAND BAG
TEABAG AMA
EYES BUR
GUNS LEAP
CAT OBER
OLE AIR BAG
WIND BAG EWE
ELSIE HOGAN
REINS SNARE
SOLES ENDS

CRYPTOQUOTE

JSYQO JR OQJ DS ZDRSQDRYJYLD, YAO YLEO AJG ZDEO SDQ JR OQJ DS ROTDYLJYLD. - QLZAIQV E. RLMDR

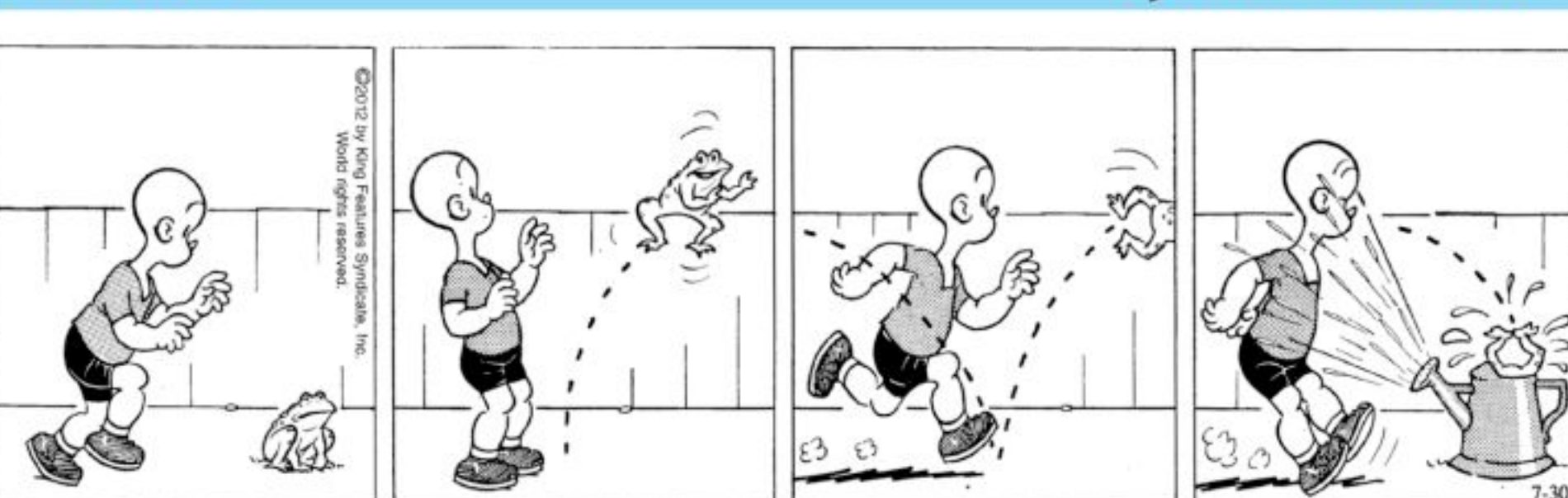
Yesterday's CRYPTOQUOTE:

NO MOVEMENT CAN EXIST TO BE CAUGHT IN A TIME WARP AND AFFORD IN A STATE OF SUSPENDED ANIMATION. - THEODORE BIKEL

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker



HENRY by Don Trachte



A XYDLBAXR is LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.