

Professor Dr. A.A.M.S. Arefin Siddque, Vice Chancellor, Dhaka University and Mahmudur Rahman Manna, Covenor, Nagorik Oikko and well-known former student leader, talk to The Daily Star about the recent spurt of violent activities by the Bangladesh Chhatra League.

'If a student wing identifies wrongdoers then it is doing the right thing'

The Daily Star (TDS): BCL has come under strong criticism for some of its activities on university campuses. What is your administration's view regarding such destructive behaviour, especially on DU campus?

Professor Dr. A.A.M.S. Arefin Siddque (AS): Dhaka University hasn't been closed or its exams halted even for a single day over the last six years, which only goes to prove the commitment of the administration, students and teachers. I have noticed the dedication of members and students of different student wings, who are also DU students, in this regard. Some disconnected incidents do take place, for instance what happened at Shahidullah Hall. But we have identified the culprits and have suspended them temporarily. When we get complaints about our students, the administration doesn't care which party the student belongs to and we maintain academic discipline if and when needed. When there are 35,000 students on a campus, from different backgrounds, conflicts are bound to happen from time to time, but we try to minimise and control such actions.

TDS: The incident at Shaheed Minar, when some students refused to listen to the Proctor and behaved in a disgraceful manner, raises the question: are these students more powerful than the administration itself?

AS: We have to think about the overall situation of the country; a university is not detached from it. For instance, for the last couple of days, some students who could not pass the entrance exam are sitting at the Shaheed Minar. They, too, are getting encouragement. What can we do about it? Some incidents take place that cannot be addressed

immediately. For instance, as I mentioned, when you go to the Shaheed Minar, you will see students who don't have permission and they are fasting even though the High Court states one cannot fast there.

TDS: Reports state that the students protesting that day at the Shaheed Minar were BCL members.

AS: As I said before, whether or not someone is a BCL member is irrelevant to the administration. Many BCL members have been punished for their misbehaviour and even expelled.

TDS: It is reported that the



administration only punishes those that BCL identifies as guilty, often without conducting an investigation. Is there any truth in the matter?

AS: I have not read the said report, but if a student's wing identifies wrongdoers then it is doing the right thing. It is only natural that these wrongdoers would then be punished by the administration. We sometimes make decisions without an investigation when victims come and complain, for example, when Sharmin Murshid and her family came and reported the attack.

TDS: Reportedly, BCL members attacked aspiring candidates protesting the university's decision to disallow them from appearing twice in entry exams...

AS: This is totally false; it is propaganda. Shibir members were involved in this because they wanted to disturb the peace and sanctity of the campus. We made the decision on the entry exams to ensure fairness for all students. Both the protesting groups as well as the attackers were backed by Shibir. It is a conspiracy on their part to destabilise the campus.

TDS: For a long time we have noticed that there is almost a parallel power structure (to the administration) in most universities, whereby student wings, particularly the reigning student wing, exerts tremendous control over many aspects of the university, from enrolling in courses to getting seats in halls. What are your thoughts on this?

AS: This is not applicable to Dhaka University. Hundreds of crores of taka are allocated every year and are being disbursed and work taking place without any trouble. How? Because the allegation that student leaders come and extort from us is not applicable to D at all. There are student wings in every hall but it is the hall administration, under the provost, which runs and manages the affairs of the hall, not the student wings. I don't know about other universities, but we cannot judge DU on the same basis.

TDS: As an educationist, do you think it is fair to give BCL activists privilege in public service exams, as stated by PM's Advisor H.T. Imam?

AS: I believe that DU students can go anywhere, give any examinations and come out with flying colours. They are the best of the best, they don't need special treatment.

'A political party is granting unprincipled and unethical impunity to its student leaders'

The Daily Star (TDS): Though the misdemeanour of the Chhatra League activists in the public educational institutions of the country have been going on for quite long, it appears to have reached its peak now. What is your assessment of the situation?

Mahmudur Rahman Manna (MRM): First of all, it's astonishing to see that a traditional political entity like the BCL has so treacherously shifted from its goals and objectives. The student wing's contribution to Bangladesh politics and especially to the struggle for freedom is significant.

It's the BCL's internal defects and confrontational nature that's being blatantly exposed by recent events. Having a branch of BCL in Chittagong university is not very important. Its not like you'll lose power if you don't have a wing there, but it's shocking to see the reluctance to take any action against the errant BCL cadres.

What happened instead was that the PM's special advisor Mr. H.T. Imam consoled and supported the BCL leaders promising job security if they could somehow pass the written part of public competitive exams. It's an extreme example of a political party granting unprincipled and unethical impunity to its student leaders. You can say this phenomenon is common in the whole organisation.

It proves that the AL as a political party has become hollow, and in order to survive it is resorting to all types of unfair means. It has run out of political steam and inner strength. The party leaders seem to be living in a fool's paradise, thinking that there is no one to challenge them, as if, in today's Bangladesh, it is AL that is the supreme authority and it will reign for good.

It reminds me of the Ayub-Monem and Ershad regime. None of the regimes could comprehend that a

strong resistance was automatically being created as their unscrupulous dictatorial practices increased.

TDS: Chhatra League activists barred Dr. Kamal Hossain and others from holding meeting at Shaheed Minar in protest of a harassment incident perpetrated by some of its members. Even the university administration had to bow to their arrogance. It seems that one has to seek permission to hold any programme in public places like Shaheed Minar from Chhatra League rather than the university authority.

MRM: This comes from the govern-



ment's attitude of ruling by force. It happens because the ruling party along with its cohorts are afraid that they might fall any minute. The vibes of that fear is clearly noticeable in their unusual intolerance of any kind of protest.

Permission to hold meeting was granted to Broti, but since they participated without banner they were stopped from doing so. Participating with or without the banner is not an issue here. It is a silly excuse. The issue is that the meeting was not in favour of ruling party. This is similar to the incident of Pias Karim. The truth is that university authority cannot impose a ban on any

programme unless it is directed from the ruling party. The public are no fools.

A place like Shaheed Minar, where anyone can go and voice his/her opinion, is now a threat to the ruling class. Any public space that's open to the public has now become a threat for the government. Now, one has to ask permission from police to hold meeting in a public place. Why does one have to seek permission from the police? The propensity for turning Bangladesh into a police state is clearly there. It's a clear sign of suppression of the public's freedom to move and talk.

TDS: As a former student leader, what do you think is the way out of this oppressive political culture in public universities?

MRM: I think there is always scope for function and voicing one's opinion, no matter how oppressive the political culture is. It is we who have accepted that after every national election it is the turn of the ruling party's student apparatchiks to rule the public universities. When BNP comes to power, Chhatra Dal do what the Chhatra League is now doing. That's why Chhatra Dal do not have an ethical stance to protest Chhatra League's activities. Other student organisation are too weak to raise any effective protest. Had part of the control of Dhaka University been shared by the opposition parties then the situation would have been different. Even during the military regime we did not give in to their student organisation's oppression.

Another problem is that there is no effective leadership that can represent students' demands. Elections in student unions have not been held for over two decades. So the students cannot make their choices or voice their demands. In a broader sense, it is the effective leadership of students that our universities are missing.

Bangladesh falls behind Myanmar in offshore gas exploration

BADRUL IMAM

THE settlement of maritime boundary dispute between Myanmar and Bangladesh by the international court in 2012 was a landmark event for both the countries that were engaged in disputes on oil gas exploration issues near their mutual maritime boundaries. Since the settlement, Myanmar has moved forward with active programmes by engaging competent oil and gas explorers in its offshore blocks.

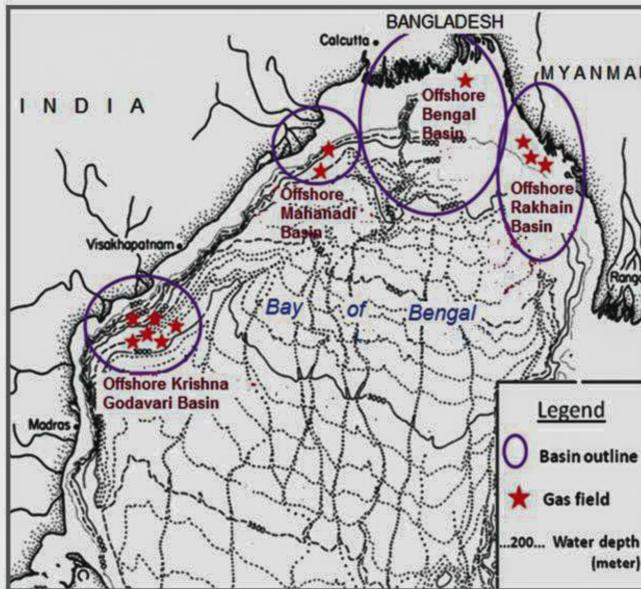
Bangladesh, on the other hand, has been slow and less active in venturing into any offshore exploration programme. From a geological perspective, it is now believed that the maritime boundary area between Bangladesh and Myanmar holds the most prospective oil and gas structures among all the offshore blocks of both countries, therefore, the next big discoveries in the Bay of Bengal are likely to take place there. Petroleum observers point out that should a single gas discovery fall on both sides of the boundary, the country that drills there first would get the most benefit from it as the underground oil or gas pool is blind to any geographic boundary.

Following the settlement of maritime boundary dispute, Myanmar redesigned its offshore blocks. In April 2013, Myanmar floated invitation for application for offshore exploration licences by international oil companies (IOC). A total of 75 IOCs showed interest, 61 were shortlisted and finally 30 submitted

formal proposal for block licences. The state-owned Myanmar Oil Gas Enterprise (MOGE) took about a year to finally award IOCs 20 offshore blocks, mostly in Rakhine basin off the Arakan coast south of Teknaf (Bangladesh) area. Among those awarded are Royal Dutch Shell, Norwegian Statoil, USA-based ConocoPhillips and Chevron, French Total and Italian Eni. Indian Oil India Ltd and Reliance Industries were also winners in some blocks. As per the rules of MOGE, the successful oil companies for the shallow water blocks are required to partner with a minimum of one Myanmar nationally-owned company. The companies have started exploration activity.

In contrast, the Bangladesh bidding round announced in 2012 received only lukewarm response from the IOCs. Bangladesh invited bids for 11 offshore blocks at that time. Only 3 shallow sea blocks were finally awarded to IOCs in 2014 and no bid was received for the deep sea blocks. None of the globally renowned oil giants applied for any block. According to the IOC representatives, the incentives for the IOCs to explore offshore, especially in the deep offshore, have not been up to their expectation. The issue of gas price has been at the centre of disagreement between the IOCs and the government.

In the 1970s, both Bangladesh and Myanmar had their respective offshore areas explored by IOCs. In both cases the exploration did not bring success and the IOCs quit with nega-



tive impression so far as oil and gas prospects were concerned. In the mid 2000s, gas exploration in offshore Myanmar turned around in a positive way. A number of major gas discoveries in the offshore Rakhine basin in Myanmar have shown that the area, previously condemned as only poorly prospective, is indeed one of the most prospective in the whole of Bay of Bengal. The discovery of Shwe, Shwephu and Mia gas fields in the offshore Rakhine basin was made by a consortium of Korean Dawee Oil and

Indian ONGC. Incidentally, India discovered similar, if not larger, gas discoveries offshore in Krishna-Godavari basin off the Andhra Pradesh coast in the south.

But how could Myanmar turn the Rakhine basin from an area of no or limited interest to an area where major oil giants have their eyes targeted for hydrocarbon. This was done by renewed and latest technology-based interpretation of the old geologic data. A new breed of geoscientists came up with new theo-

ries which negated the older interpretation and pessimistic outlook of the gas prospect. The new discoveries were made when drilling programmes were launched based on the new theory.

How would one put the new theories and discoveries in Myanmar in perspective of Bangladesh offshore gas exploration? On both counts, i.e. in terms of good quality reservoir and bacterial gas generation, Bangladesh offshore blocks, especially in the south east, stand out equally with Myanmar's. Furthermore, the Rakhine offshore basin in Myanmar and the southeastern offshore blocks of Bangladesh (off Teknaf-Chittagong coast) geologically belong to the same structural unit known as the fold belt. Therefore, the geologic processes that created the large gas pool in the Rakhine basin should theoretically also be at work in the adjacent Bangladesh offshore blocks. A logical conclusion is that the Bangladesh offshore blocks SS-9, SS-10, SS-11 and SS-12 hold the most prospects for gas. In addition, the other eastern offshore blocks have high probability of containing hydrocarbon.

Bangladesh now has 26 offshore blocks, of which 11 are shallow sea and 15 are deep sea blocks. Since the maritime boundary settlement with Myanmar, Bangladesh has activated only 3 shallow sea and 2 deep sea blocks under Production Sharing Contract (PSC) with IOCs. These 5 blocks are held by USA-based

ConocoPhillips, Australian Santos, Singapore-based KrisEnergy and Indian ONGC. Recently, ConocoPhillips, which holds 2 deep sea blocks, expressed its intention to quit if the gas price was not increased, a demand considered unjust by any reckoning. Should ConocoPhillips leave, there will be only 3 offshore blocks active out of 26 blocks. This is not a reasonable exploration effort by any standard.

Bangladesh is planning to make multi-client survey for its offshore blocks before awarding them to IOCs. The advantage of multi-client survey is that the host country has a better negotiating platform because of the known data base for its blocks. But it will take more than a year for making the survey at this stage. It will be unwise for Bangladesh to keep the PSC activities on hold until the multi-client survey is completed. Bangladesh may launch block bidding for the known prospective southeastern offshore blocks and go for multi-client survey for the blocks for which little or no data are available. Bangladesh should also make it mandatory, like Myanmar, that IOCs which are awarded shallow offshore block must have a Bangladeshi company (Bapex for example) as partner. Bangladesh can build up its offshore exploration capability in this way. Bangladesh has to come out of its present status of 'too little too late' in oil gas exploration in the Bay of Bengal.

The writer is Professor, Department of Geology, University of Dhaka.

QUOTABLE Quote: Do the things you know, and you shall learn the truth you need to know. Louisa May Alcott

CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph. ACROSS: 1 Easy runs, 6 Washed out, 10 Accolade, 11 Marionette movers, 12 Some signs, 13 Marsh plants, 14 Cart puller, 15 Countenance, 16 "Prince -" ("Aladdin" song), 17 November 11 honoree, 18 Driver's license datum, 19 Word add-ons, 22 Filming locations, 23 Sanction, 26 Will do, 29 Casino action, 32 TV alien, 33 Keg need, 34 Wicked, 36 Wife of Zeus, 37 Natural slowpoke, 38 Like some messages, 39 "Oklahoma!" hero, 40 Unescorted, 41 Hula swayers, 42 Flexes. DOWN: 1 Poet Dylan, 2 Twin raised by a wolf, 3 "- to Live", 4 Muscle quality, 5 Fourth-yr. students, 6 Diner desserts, 7 Regions, 8 Narrow shelf, 9 English country, 11 Tax deduction, 15 Puzzle, 17 By eye, 20 Cavalry sites: Abbr., 21 Go downhill, 24 Took, as advice, 25 Like some bonuses, 27 Take wing, 28 Black suit, 29 Name on the Cardinals' stadium, 30 Tedium, 31 Choreographer Twyla, 35 Painter's medium, 36 Golf goal, 38 Truck part.

Yesterday's answer: GALE S H A G A R, A T O L L A L I C E, T O Y S O L D I E R S, O N A T I E L E I, R E L A T E S G A D, W E D H U G E, A W A R D N U D E S, R E L Y D E L, C A L F I X A B L E, A R E L A T L A D, D O G S O L D I E R S, E U R O S A D A G E, S T O W S Y O K E L. CRYPTOQUOTE: WYIOSLOW GMOZ RYN LZZYTJSO, RYN IJXO ILWSJXOW. LS LW HOWS SY JUJLS SMOI ANLBXCR, JZU VOS YZ GLSM LIQKYTLZV RYNKYSMOK LZZYTJSLSZW. - WSOTO PYHW. Yesterday's CRYPTOQUOTE: When we see the land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect. - Aldo Leopold

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker. I JUST FINISHED CLEANING IT, SIR. VERY NICE, JULIUS. TAKE OFF MY SHOES?!. I CAN'T HAVE YOU TRACKING DIRT IN THERE!. HENRY by Don Tranchte. 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.