

CJ's resignation

We are not surprised

THIS is the first time that a Chief Justice has tendered his resignation. That we feel is the most honourable course for him to take since he was left with no other option. But the antecedents to his departure have indeed left a bad taste in the mouth. And that we think could well have been avoided, and the country could have been spared the very unpleasant episode that prefaced his resignation. The affair fits the very well-known aphorism of the dog being given a bad name and then hanged. The highest judiciary of the country did not deserve it. It should not be forgotten that Chief Justice Sinha had given some landmark judgments during his tenure, particularly on the trials of war criminals.

The situation is unique too since the CJ is resigning under a cloud of allegations against him that seem to suddenly emerge after he made some observations in the 16th Amendment judgment which the ruling party and the government found unacceptable. But may we ask if all the other misdemeanors on the CJ's part have been committed during his present tenure in office?

It is not that an individual's reputation is at stake. The image of the highest judiciary, an indispensable organ of the state, regrettably, has been severely dented. The matter calls for a serious introspection of the likely consequence of the resignation on the independence of the judiciary. Let us not forget the underlying issue, the 16th Amendment, which has to do with the independence of the judiciary. And the matter calls for an equitable resolution which should ensure both the independence of the judiciary and the strengthening of democracy.

Also, as we have repeatedly stressed in the past, nobody is above the law and by the same token, nobody is below it. And the CJ should answer the charges. And he must be given all legal options to defend himself. And it would be our hope that Chief Justice Sinha would afford of all the opportunities to defend himself.

Myanmar's Rohingya policy damaging Bangladesh

It must be compelled to solve the problem

IT is estimated by a leading think tank that Bangladesh would need Tk 7,126 crore to provide food, shelter and other support to the Rohingyas until June next year. And that is because humanitarian support provided by international organisations may not continue for long, which means that Bangladesh will have to bear the majority of the expense, and should be wary of security risks, terrorism, spread of diseases, trafficking of women and children and illegal drug trade in the south-eastern region.

Since August 25, more than 613,000 Rohingyas have entered Bangladesh fleeing persecution in Myanmar, making Bangladesh the fourth largest host country for refugees. For a country with such a large population of its own, this has been a major burden, one, which the international community is yet to fully realise, or at least that is how it seems.

Despite persecuting the Rohingyas for months, the Myanmar government still shows no remorse or willingness to stop using violence, while paying lip service to calls for peace. The international community has, meanwhile, done little more than issue statements which has not helped to stop the hostile actions of the Myanmar government towards the Rohingyas and its neighbour, Bangladesh. Our two friends China and Russia too have, to our great disappointment, opposed any strong international condemnation of the Myanmar government's belligerent actions.

We understand that in geopolitics, every country has its own interests. However, should economic and political interests supersede human values? Can the lives of human beings be measured monetarily? These are questions that we would like to ask the international community. Meanwhile, we urge our government again to reinvigorate diplomatic efforts to end the crisis urgently.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Shameful incident in Rangpur

It sounds all too familiar. Like Ramu and Nasirnagar, tensions flared up in Rangpur a few days ago amid allegations that a man belonging to the minority Hindu community “demeaned Islam” in his Facebook post. Tensions culminated in protests leading to bigots burning down homes of local Hindu villagers.

There can be no justification for committing indiscriminate attacks against an entire community for a misdeed (we do not know whether it is true at all) of a single person. It is shameful that we have failed to save our minority, once again.

It is unbelievable that our law enforcers have not yet learned how such events eventually end up. They did not take any precautions to prevent the obvious. In the aftermath, they had to exercise force which unfortunately claimed two fatal casualties. The local community and political leaders must have been at fault. They failed to act responsibly and assuage tensions.

We, as a nation, must wake up. We must condemn such racial and communal incidents unequivocally if we want a just and equal society.

Masudur Rahman, Chittagong



PHOTO: COLLECTED

NAZNIN TITHI

ONE of my teachers at college would often say, “Even if you take a walk through a (public) university campus, you will learn many things about life.” The recent feud between teachers of University of Dhaka reminded me of her and the countless stories she would share with us about her university life—stories that were set in the backdrop of the glory days of the university. I wonder what she would think now about the highest seat of learning in the country.

Going by the reports published in this daily, on November 2, two factions of the pro-Awami League Blue Panel teachers got into a row at a meeting at TSC. At one point, the proctor of the university allegedly assaulted a professor of the sociology department, Jamal Uddin. Afterwards, both the factions blamed each other for the incident. The faction loyal to former vice chancellor Prof AAMS Arefin Siddique demanded immediate removal of Proctor AKM Golam Rabbani, while the teachers of the other faction, loyalists of incumbent VC Prof Akhtaruzzaman, have protested the alleged assault of the proctor by Prof Jamal Uddin. The division between the two factions started a few months ago over the senate polls and the appointment of the vice chancellor. With the recent incident, this division has widened.

The convener of the Blue Panel, Abdul Aziz said, “We will not hold any meetings of the Blue Panel with teachers who assaulted Prof Jamal and will wage a tough movement if he [the VC] does not punish the perpetrators.” Given the circumstances, there is little hope that this division will end anytime soon.

The incident has drawn widespread criticism from all quarters. Teachers and students of the university have vented their frustration on social media. Some senior and former DU teachers commented on the incident but most of them did not want to be named in the newspapers. While a few teachers said they didn't want to be named because they were ashamed of the incident, needless to say, there were a few who did not want to be named because of the consequences they might face if their names were revealed. And a large number of teachers, who are not involved in teachers' politics, have chosen to remain silent.

Over the years, teachers' politics in public universities has taken a turn for the worse. In the past we had teachers who gave us hope in times of need and led us in all our democratic movements. Back then teachers used to engage in politics because of idealism, for the

greater good of our society, while today they engage in party politics for petty interests—mostly to get promotions and important positions in various organisations which give them power and financial benefits.

The process starts with the appointment of teachers. There are allegations against almost all major public universities of the country of appointing teachers based on political consideration. It seems the university administrations don't care to follow the due procedure of appointment. Only a few days ago, a leading Bangla daily published a report on this “appointment trade.” The report revealed how the VCs of two public universities allegedly appointed a large number of teachers in exchange for money. When the report of

protesting the absence of student representatives in the senate. Earlier this year, at Rajshahi University two groups of pro-Awami League teachers got into a row over holding of a press conference to reveal “irregularities of the administration” in buying a guesthouse for the university (The Daily Star, February 28, 2017). However, the latest clash amongst teachers at DU is the worst example of teachers' involvement in party politics.

And while these teachers are busy in political squabbling, our public universities are plagued by a myriad of problems which remain unsolved. Question paper leaks of university entry exams have become a regular phenomenon, session jam is eating away precious time of students' academic life,

the kind of research expected of such an institution. For the fiscal year 2017–18, only two percent of its budget was allocated for research activities. Moreover, clashes among the various factions of pro-ruling party student organisations on university campuses make news headlines almost on a regular basis, but we never hear about any pragmatic steps being taken by the authorities to stop such violence. At a time when university administration and teachers' communities ought to concentrate on resolving these problems prevailing in their respective institutions, their involvement in petty political disputes and violence is a huge disappointment to the nation.

When I went to Jahangirnagar University campus earlier this year, I was surprised to see a banner hung over a



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PHOTO: STAR

their gross corruption was revealed in the media, the education ministry intervened and directed both the universities to halt the appointment process.

When teachers are appointed upon political consideration and engage in politics for personal interests, can we expect anything better from them? It seems as if these teachers are playing the role of party thugs—often engaging in scuffles with students and even with their fellow colleagues over petty issues.

In July this year, a group of DU teachers got into a scuffle with students when the students demanded the long-pending DUCSU election and were

quality of higher education is deteriorating due to lack of research activities, violent student politics is ruining the educational environment of the campuses, and so on.

Last month, when allegations were made that the question papers of DU's “Gha” unit entry exams were leaked, DU authorities outright denied the allegations, without even investigating the incident. While research activities are an integral part of higher education, our public universities have failed miserably to produce quality research works in recent years. Sadly, DU's yearly budget for research activities is too little to support

street in which general students of the university urged the teachers to come to classes instead of engaging in party politics. Who would have thought that a time would come when students would have to remind teachers of their responsibilities? We hope the teachers who prefer politics to taking classes (we hope they are only a few in number) will come to their senses. We would prefer to see the names of our teachers in the news for their academic excellence and achievements, not for their involvement in unhealthy party politics and violence.

..... Naznin Tithi is a member of the editorial team at The Daily Star.

PROJECT ■ SYNDICATE

The Siege of the Taj Mahal

AWAKENING INDIA



SHASHI THAROOR

religious colouring, perhaps it should not be surprising that even one of the world's most famous monuments has become a target. But that doesn't make it any less tragic—or destructive.

The Taj Mahal is India's most magnificent architectural wonder. Built nearly four centuries ago by the Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan as a mausoleum for his beloved wife, the marble monument was hailed by Rabindranath Tagore, India's only Nobel Prize-winning writer, as “a teardrop on the cheek of Time.”

But the tears this time are for the Taj itself. Its gleaming white surface is yellowing, owing to air pollution from nearby factories and cottage industries. Repairs are needed so frequently that scaffolding often obscures its famous minarets. The town of Agra in the state of Uttar Pradesh, where the Taj is located, is crowded and grimy.

Unsurprisingly, tourism is down: the number of foreign visitors to the Taj Mahal fell by 35 percent from 2012 to 2015, and domestic tourism has also declined. Those who do still show up are bowled over by the Taj, but often appalled at what they see around it. This past summer, the American basketball player Kevin Durant sparked a row with his graphic descriptions of the monument's surroundings.

But now the Taj is being rejected even by India's own government. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which now rules Uttar Pradesh, has apparently decided that it wants as little to do with it as possible. The reason comes down to religious chauvinism.

Uttar Pradesh's new chief minister, a saffron-robed Hindu monk named Yogi Adityanath, initiated the assault on the

Taj by condemning the state government's former practice of offering models of the Taj as gifts to visiting foreign dignitaries. Declaring that the monument does not “reflect Indian culture,” Adityanath announced that the government would hand out copies of the Hindu holy book, the *Bhagavad Gita*, instead.

Furthering this erasure, the Uttar Pradesh tourism department issued a brochure of the state's main attractions, but left out the Taj Mahal, the state's (and the country's) main tourism destination. The government, preferring to promote Hindu religious tourism, such as the attractions of the holy city of Varanasi, has denied any cultural

against Hindus, assaulted Hindu women, and converted millions to Islam. In this telling, this sordid saga of assault on Hindus culminated in the 1947 Partition of India by the British, which created Pakistan.

This is a highly simplistic interpretation of a complex history—one characterised far more by assimilation and co-existence than by religious conflict. But that doesn't matter to the Hindu chauvinists who constitute the bulk of the BJP's electoral base. They agree with the hardline Hindu chauvinist and BJP legislator Sangeet Som, who last month called the Taj Mahal “a blot on Indian culture” that had been “built by traitors” and “should have no place in

volunteers who specialised in attacking Muslim targets. He earned notoriety by calling India's most beloved film star—a Muslim—a terrorist. More recently, he urged the national government to impose a travel ban on Muslims, as US President Donald Trump has attempted to do.

Adityanath's attacks on the Taj, however, have sparked national outrage powerful enough to force him to visit Agra to assure an anxious public that his government is committed to protecting the monument. “What is important,” he grudgingly conceded, “is that it was built by the blood and sweat of India's farmers and labourers.”

This acknowledgement is only partly reassuring, as it enables another fringe position on the Taj: the late chauvinist historian PN Oak's claim that the monument was originally a Shiva temple named “Tejo Mahalaya.” Some misguided Hindutva elements have already been caught trying to perform a Shiva *puja* (a rite to worship Lord Shiva) there. The RSS, the parent body of the Hindu “family” of organisations that includes the BJP, has even called for Muslims to be prohibited from praying at the Taj.

For seven decades after independence, Indian identity rested on cultural pluralism. Now, the Hindu-chauvinist BJP is seeking to redefine India as a Hindu nation long subjugated by foreigners—not just British colonisers, but also Muslim conquerors. By stoking long-buried resentments and promoting hatred of Muslims, the BJP's *kulturkampf* is dividing Indian society, fragmenting its political discourse, and undermining its soft power in the world.

If the BJP is to avoid doing further damage to the Indian nation, it must recognise that the past is not a blunt tool for scoring petty political points. One cannot avenge oneself upon history: history is its own revenge.

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heritage funding to the Taj Mahal in the current fiscal year.

To outsiders, the BJP's campaign against the Taj Mahal might seem bizarre. Why would anyone, let alone a country's ruling party, want to undermine a universally admired—and revenue-generating—architectural marvel? And yet anyone familiar with the BJP knows that its attacks on the Taj are just one manifestation of the party's politics of hatred toward anything connected to the history of Muslim rule in India.

To BJP true believers, the Muslims who ruled India for centuries were foreign invaders who despoiled a prosperous land, destroyed temples and palaces, enslaved and discriminated

Indian history.” If people like Shah Jahan—who supposedly wanted to “wipe out all Hindus from India”—were part of India's history, Som said, “we will change this history.”

India's Hindu extremists have long considered it humiliating that a monument built by a Muslim emperor could be Hindu-majority India's most recognisable site. The difference now is that this is no longer a fringe group; its members are now in power in Uttar Pradesh, with enablers leading the government in Delhi.

Adityanath, for example, first gained attention for his incendiary anti-Muslim speeches—he spent 11 days in jail in 2007 for fomenting religious tension—and for leading a squad of