

Stormtroopers in DU campus!

Who gave BCL the authority to intervene?

THE front page of most leading dailies yesterday was splashed with the news of the horrific attack by Chhatra League men on Dhaka University students demonstrating in front of the vice-chancellor's office on Tuesday. At least 50 students and two campus-based journalists were injured—one of whom sustained brain injuries—as they faced the wrath of Chhatra League men in the second such attack in just eight days. The agitating students were pressing for a four-point demand including punishment of BCL men for harassing female students a few days ago.

We are not in the least bit surprised by the audacity of the student wing of the ruling party to beat up students mercilessly with iron rods, cricket stumps and sticks. That so many college campuses in the country are being held hostage to BCL's politics—seriously affecting the physical security of students and creating an unstable learning environment—is well known. But despite a long rap sheet, BCL's grip over educational institutions is clearly far from weakening—thanks to the privilege of impunity they enjoy—as Tuesday's shameful incident shows. The ruling party, law enforcement, and the authorities of DU have continued to turn a blind eye towards the acts of violence perpetrated by BCL on campus which is why the latter feels emboldened to beat people to a pulp because they know that they will never face any consequences.

The fact of the matter is that BCL had no authority whatsoever to intervene in a situation that involves the agitating students and the university authorities. The matter should have been dealt with by the protesters and the proctorial team only. Campus law enforcement could also have been brought in to tackle the situation. Now, yet another committee has been formed to investigate the incident but we are concerned about the neutrality of the committee given the influence that BCL wields and DU authorities' inaction in the past.

Factories' disregard for environment

Uncontrolled disposal of waste

WHILE the garment and leather industries have immensely contributed to the national economy, their waste disposal mechanism remains a grey area. A photograph published in this newspaper on January 24 demonstrates why, as it shows waste materials being burnt as fuel to heat bitumen for road repair at Chittagong's CRB Satrasta Crossing.

It is not a new phenomenon in the port city. In Bakalia area, for example, nearly 50,000 residents used to depend on garment waste as cooking fuel. Burning these toxic by-products not only creates a suffocating situation in the neighbourhood, but also poses a serious threat to public health and environment.

This raises a broader question as to how garbage and waste materials are disposed of by the garment and shoe factories. Having a proper waste disposal system should be a prerequisite for establishing such a factory. In the abovementioned case, it appears that some factories might have sold their waste, or simply thrown them away, instead of ensuring their safe disposal as per the existing rules of disposal of these by-products.

We call on the ministries of industries and environment to make sure all licensed factories comply with their environmental obligations when it comes to waste disposal. Errant factories should be penalised severely. There should also be a comprehensive monitoring apparatus by these ministries to ensure compliance of the rules. The government's sloppy and hands-off approach may benefit the industries in the short term, but the public will suffer heavily in the end.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

Lessons from the Narayanganj incident

Narayanganj has recently seen political violence between two factions of the ruling party's local wing. Since Mayor Ivy stood up against the monopoly of the Osman family, she has drawn the wrath of Shamim Osman. Both are Awami League politicians and their continued struggle for dominance and power have led to the recent mess.

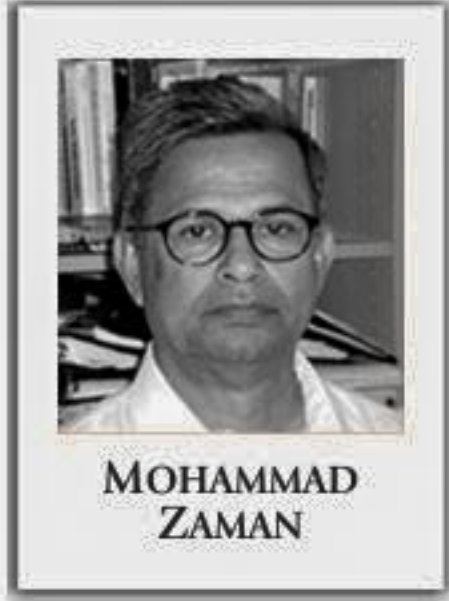
It is true that there should be competition between rival politicians. This is crucial in a democracy. But the competition should never turn violent. I would like to thank the ruling party for having summoned them. Their irresponsible acts caused injury to nearly a hundred people. Such irresponsibility cannot be acceptable. Shuva Das, By e-mail

Crop insurance for vulnerable farmers

It is evident that Bangladesh is highly susceptible to the adverse effects of human-induced climate change. Rising sea level, a variation of temperature and irregular rainfall are its notable signs which imposes a great threat to the agricultural sector. In addition, each year, many farmers endure huge losses due to natural hazards such as floods.

The government, policymakers and relevant stakeholders should work together to introduce crop insurance and take the necessary measures to make it available to farmers all across the country. SM Saify Iqbal, Dhaka

Rohingya repatriation must be voluntary



January 23, 2018 is currently on hold as some major tasks, including the final approval of the list of families for repatriation and setting up of repatriation camps on both sides of the border are yet to be prepared. The two sides signed an agreement on January 16, 2018 on "Physical Arrangement" to facilitate the return of Rohingyas to their homeland from Bangladesh.

According to the signed agreement, selected Rohingya families will be taken to the repatriation camps in Bangladesh. The UN refugee agency will then assess if the selected refugee families are willing to return and only those willing to return voluntarily will be handed over to the Myanmar authorities. The idea of voluntary repatriation stems from the 1993 agreement between Bangladesh and Myanmar, under which refugee repatriation first took place after a large number of Rohingyas crossed into Bangladesh. An estimated 200,000 Rohingyas are still sheltered by Bangladesh from that first episode of

The repatriation plan and processes have raised concerns among the Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar and the diplomatic circles and human rights groups.

ethnic violence and displacement in the 1990s.

Under the 1993 framework, returning Rohingyas must prove their identity, must fill in forms with names of family members, their previous address in Myanmar, date of birth and a disclaimer that they are returning voluntarily. The repatriated Rohingya families will be sheltered in temporary transit-camps in Rakhine until their homes are built and ready for rehabilitation. The agreement stipulates that the repatriation will be completed within two years of the

commencement of repatriation. Many, however, doubt whether this is a realistic timeline particularly when there is lack of readiness—including when it comes to confidence and a congenial environment for refugee repatriation.

Meanwhile, the repatriation plan and processes have raised concerns among the Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar and the diplomatic circles and human rights groups as well. First, there was literally no consultation with the Rohingyas or the UNHCR on the repatriation plan. Second,

government of the right to freedom of movement and citizenship and other basic rights of the Rohingyas; (ii) return of land and other sources of livelihoods and community rebuilding; (iii) construction of houses, schools and other community infrastructures burnt and destroyed during the army operations; (iv) holding the army accountable for the killings, lootings and rape of women; (v) freeing of innocent Rohingyas picked up during the counter-insurgency operations; and (vi) stop the listing of people with

return to their land and homes.

Amidst the ongoing military operations in Rakhine state and complete lack of trust and confidence in the Myanmar government by the potential returnees, any repatriation now, according to many rights groups, would be premature and dangerous. With more active UN support and assistance, both Bangladesh and Myanmar should first work on improving the human rights situation and create sustainable conditions for safe and voluntary return.



A refugee woman walks with her children at the Balukhali refugee camp near Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh.

PHOTO: REUTERS

the repatriation initiative is widely viewed as premature and too risky as people are still crossing the border into Bangladesh. More than 100 Rohingyas crossed to Bangladesh last week when preparations were underway in Rakhine state for the repatriation. Third, the situation on the ground in Myanmar, as evident from various reports and fresh arrivals of refugees almost every day, are clear indications that it is not safe for the Rohingyas to return. The military operation in Rakhine state is still ongoing; many, who recently fled Myanmar because of military operations in their villages, reported incidents of young Rohingya men being rounded up by the military. The newly arrived Rohingyas reported that they fled out of hunger and were unable to work in the fields and forests that provided them their livelihood.

This is further evident from the petition and the list of demands by the Rohingya leaders in Cox's Bazar, who claim to represent some 40 villages from Rakhine state—the epic centre of Myanmar military's destruction. The list of demands include: (i) public announcement by the Myanmar

photographs as "terrorists" in the state media and government Facebook pages.

The petition and the demands are clear indications of the complexities and challenges for Bangladesh and Myanmar as both countries plan to proceed with the repatriation of close to 800,000 Rohingya refugees to Myanmar. The video footage and narratives coming out of the refugee camps in Cox's Bazar suggest that the refugees are not ready and balking at going back until human rights situations improve and the Myanmar government can guarantee their safety, among other demands listed in the petition. One refugee woman, who recently fled to Bangladesh due to Myanmar military atrocities, reportedly said: "You can throw us into the sea, but please don't send us back...We will not go back to Myanmar." Another young refugee girl, who crossed to Bangladesh in November 2017 after waiting for a month in desperation on the bank of Naf River, said: "If we were willing to go back to Myanmar, we would not have stayed at the border for one month." Many refugees also reported repatriation to concentration-like camps as unacceptable; instead they want to

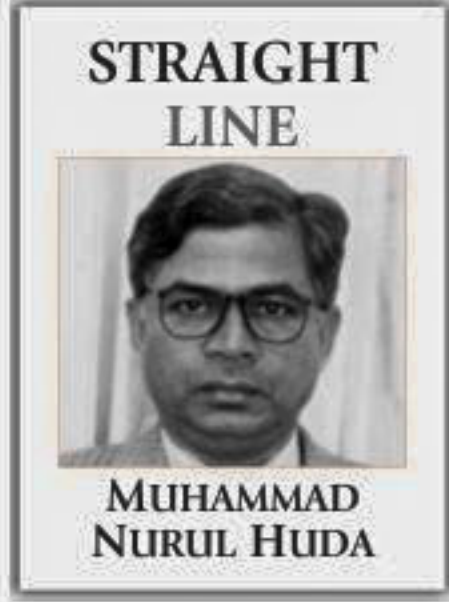
Repatriation should be safe, truly voluntary, and dignified. As already noted, the current situation in Rakhine state fails to come close to meeting any acceptable such standard.

The diplomatic community in Dhaka, particularly the British High Commissioner Alison Blake, US Ambassador Marcia Bernicat, and the Indian High Commissioner HV Shringla, expressed similar sentiments during a briefing this week by the Foreign Minister AH Mahmood Ali. The Indian High Commissioner stressed the need for better livelihood for the Rohingyas, which will ultimately require social and economic development of the Rakhine state and the region as recommended by the Kofi Annan Commission. In the meantime, the Myanmar government must create an environment so that the Rohingya refugees want to return home. Finally, it is up to the refugees to choose to go home, others should not rush or force any decisions on them.

Mohammad Zaman is an international development/resettlement specialist and advisory professor at the National Research Center for Resettlement (NRCR), Hohai University, Nanjing, China. Email: mqzaman.bc@gmail.com

POLICE RECRUITMENT

The worrisome abdication of power



repose the same in Police Headquarters for ensuring central recruitment, during the course of the observance of Police Week 2018. Such a proposition to renounce statutorily delegated power, quite clearly, runs against the time-honoured practice, and one could say, the human instinct to secure power and authority. There is a feeling that this move has perhaps not been prompted by professional interests.

According to unconfirmed reports, some superintendents feel reduced at the dilution of their effective recruiting authority caused by the increasingly disturbing extra-departmental intervention in the recruitment process. Reportedly, this extra-departmental quarter, being politically blessed, insists on recruiting their own candidates who, it is suspected, have handsomely greased the palms of such influence peddlers. As a result, undesirable candidates are being recruited with the Superintendent of Police, the regulation-mandated appointing authority, remaining a helpless onlooker.

In such a scenario, according to sources, some frustrated officers have resorted to the desperate move of proposing to renounce their inherent authority. By all accounts, this is a distressing spectacle. In response to the proposition, the Inspector General has very justifiably said that since the proposal requires regulation change, nothing can be done about it at this point of time.

Whether such a change is required



PHOTO: MUNIR UZ ZAMAN/AFP

may be debatable. However, the fact remains that one has to take a deep look into the suspected irregularities in the recruitment process of this vital organ of the State with all its attendant effects on the criminal justice administration of the country.

Looking back, one would find that during the period between 1991 and 2006, that is, during the terms of governments by the two major parties, bulk recruitments were affected despite the reservation of senior professionals in the department. The demands of the so-called emerging political requirements had to be met. In the process, ill-trained personnel were produced.

News about the unsavoury political influence on several layers of police hierarchy in the national newspapers was no surprise in the past. In fact, many senior police officers made specific mention of the pernicious political pressures being exerted on them with regard to appointments, transfers, and postings of different ranks.

These officials had also complained

about the recruitment of undesirable and unsuitable individuals and inappropriate posting, violating the usual procedure and disregarding the chain of command.

Upon scrutiny, it appears that the political executives did not realise that the police as a State organ was expected to be the relief-provider. They had ensured the entry of undesirable persons in exchange for material favours without appreciating the fact that appointees from a shady deal would turn into bitter and insensitive cops.

Under circumstances like these, it is only natural that bitter individuals occupying positions of power would behave abnormally. Such individuals remained preoccupied with the compulsion of recouping their initial investment at the earliest possible time. Quite naturally, the lure of the lucre took its toll.

The tragedy in the enforcement parlance has been that the real interests of the State were allowed to get diluted and mixed up with the interests of the

government of the day. Our politicians including those in the top positions of the State did not display an understanding or appreciation of its requirements and that of the government in a democratic and pluralist society.

Their myopia decimated professionalism and consequently, the sense of direction was lost. In such circumstances, the police hierarchy dipped further into a frustratingly lackadaisical scenario, and the interests of the State took a back seat, providing increasingly greater space to narrow partisan considerations.

In effect, we may have to appreciate that the responsibility for failure to improve the standards of police recruitment and training must fall squarely on both the politicians and the police professionals. They have not adequately risen to the occasion, but that does not mean that the unhealthy practice should continue to the detriment of public service.

Under the circumstances, recruitment standards must be improved by strictly curbing corrupt practices at the time of recruitment. Officers with a record of commendable honesty and integrity should be entrusted with the responsibility of conducting recruitment. This is important because the crux of good policing is the efficient and amiable presence of a well-qualified, trained and motivated constable. The need is to change training programmes from isolated, closed rigidities to integrated, interdisciplinary programmes for the preparation of sensitive enforcement professionals.

Since the method and system of recruitment of constables do not show any fault, the superintendents should remain the effective appointing authority as in the regulation. Passing the buck upwards is no solution.

Muhammad Nurul Huda is a former IGP and a columnist at The Daily Star.