

Partisan influence in public universities

Meritocracy at a discount

IN Dhaka University, over 50 teachers and 70 other staff members have been recruited in the last 18 months through political influence. The disrespect and the aversion shown to the otherwise eligible candidates, while filling those posts, are causing brain drain and destroying the credibility of those institutions.

Over the years, most of the public universities provided employment to the loyalists of the party in power bypassing existing regulations and the recommendations of the University Grants Commission (UGC). Individual faculties too did the same despite the UGC's dispatch of a directive to the authorities not to employ anyone between July 11 to October 20, 2003. Given that the previous regime did little different, the trend is barring qualified applicants from finding employment in the nation's highest seats of learning. This is shocking and unfortunate for students, parents and the nation.

Specifically, the government-sponsored Doctors Association of Bangladesh is alleged to have indulged in such practices while employing people in the Bangabandhu Medical University (BMU). Many of the employment of the BMU took place without having published any notification.

The crisis is indicative of a number of dangers. Aside from violating existing directives and regulations, such employment modalities have had serious impact on the credibility of the public universities. As well, politicking in campuses has increased in the midst of an ongoing 'Cold War' between followers of the ruling party and the others who may or may not subscribe to any particular political creed. The poisoned academic atmosphere is causing students and teachers capable of pursuing education and career abroad to step out of the country.

Now that the management seems bent on transforming everything into its chosen mould, little is perhaps left in those institutions for knowledge-thirsty students and teachers. The crisis is destroying our education system and impacting upon our ability to produce graduates capable of discharging national responsibilities fairly and squarely. Something must be done to stop the trend sooner than later.

When would our cricket come of age?

One more disappointment to live down

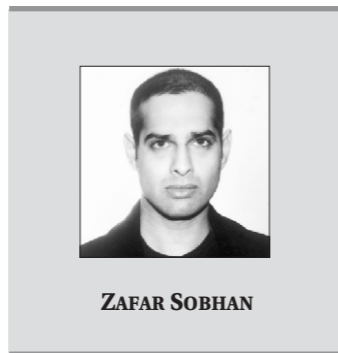
THE trail of debacles only lengthens for Bangladesh. The hopes that were kindled by the by our team in its encounters with Australia and Pakistan that it will come unstuck from the bad patch in its series with England, have been dashed. The double whitewash by the English team -- in the test and ODI series -- is particularly disappointing not just because it's a double tragedy suffered in home series but also because the forward foothold reached after the Australia and Pakistan series stands compromised by the backsliding in our performance against England. Because we are very much in a learning stage, lessons learnt earlier on should not be unlearned, even though each series might be a different ball game.

In the post-mortem of our latest performance, different reasons are being ascribed to the poor score-card against England: too much cricket within a short span of time; 'the volume of losing matches bringing down player performance'; and too much of experimentation with team selection. True, by and large we have crossed the hurdles of playing into the fifth day of a test match and into the 50th over in the one dayer version. We have quickly taken the wickets of world class batsmen by bowling to their weaknesses and some of our batsmen have skillfully played the pace bowling of the likes of Bret Lee and Shoab Akhter. Yet, when it comes to building an innings or chasing a 200-plus target, we invariably fail.

The English bowlers' strategy was to rout the Bangladeshi chances by bowling slightly short of length and with the advantage of their height they gave a bounce to the ball the Bangladeshis were hard-put to play. Their tactic worked. We should have had an answer for it.

Nothing wins more than a win; defeat is an orphan, more so, when we are yet to shed the infancy trappings. We must secure a victory against a good team to raise the level of our self-esteem. Let's see how we fare against Zimbabwe, the next series around.

Time to rethink Article 70



ZAFAR SOBHAN

IT'S the same old story. The AL has announced that it has no intention of joining the 10th session of parliament which commences November 16. "The question of joining the session does not arise," AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil told The Daily Star on Tuesday. "We will not go to parliament anymore, rather we will launch a unified movement against the coalition soon."

Nor is the AL the only party that sees no merit to opposition participation in parliament. Speaker Jamiruddin Sircar has been reported as opining that parliament runs more smoothly without the opposition present, and I suppose from his perspective this is true. Their absence saves him and his deputies the additional trouble of having to switch off opposition members' microphones when they are trying to address the chamber.

There thus seems little hope that the 8th parliament will function any more effectively than did the 5th or the 7th parliaments from 1991-1996 and 1996-2001 respectively (and let us say nothing of the short-lived 6th parliament).

On the surface, the AL's refusal to join parliament looks like the height

of irresponsibility. Why does the opposition have so little respect for the parliamentary process? But then let us pause for a moment to consider that the boycott of parliament has been a constant feature of our democracy. We didn't have much opposition representation in the 5th or the 7th parliaments either. Is it possible that there is a reason for this, other than the intransigence of our political leaders? As it so happens there is -- it is called Article 70 of the Constitution.

objective no doubt -- but I think that the available evidence suggests that the problem it has created is worse than the problem it was intended to solve.

The whole point of parliament is to serve as a forum whereby the crucial issues of the day can be debated. But there is very little point to debating an issue when the outcome of the argument is pre-ordained. Under Article 70, it does not matter how persuasively you debate or with what clarity

ment must craft legislation that has broad support. But once again, Article 70 essentially eviscerates this crucial parliamentary function.

It has become fashionable to criticise the AL for not being able to settle its differences with the government in parliament instead of taking to the streets, just as it was equally fashionable to criticise the BNP for its boycott of parliament when the AL was in the majority. I may have been guilty of such criticism myself. But

permitting them to vote in the first place. At least then they would be representing someone. Under the rules now in place a parliamentarian can represent no one other than his or her party leadership.

If we cannot trust our lawmakers not to sell their votes then the obvious solution is to simply dissolve parliament and have the country run solely by the executive branch, which is basically the reality of the current situation. Essentially we have a de

change that you wish to bring about. The way to create a functional parliament is to create a parliament that is able to function. First you must build the institution -- only then will it be possible for politicians to amend their behaviour accordingly.

It could be argued that I am being hopelessly idealistic, and that creating a functioning parliament will in no way impel change. Actually, I am being brutally pragmatic. Simply put, under the system we have in place right now, it isn't possible to bring about the change that is needed.

One can also argue that things will never change as long as the bitter bipartisan divide between the ruling alliance and the opposition parties continues. No politician in Bangladesh would dare brook his or her party's leadership even if it were permitted.

But the point is that right now it can never change. If we instituted the reform I am advocating then things might well not change for the better, indeed things might even change for the worse -- but the point is that such a reform at least makes change for the better possible.

Repealing Article 70 -- or at the very least amending it so that parliamentarians are permitted to vote against their party -- might not solve all our political problems, but it is a necessary first step to reforming parliament. There is no guarantee that amending Article 70 will cause parliament to begin functioning effectively -- but one thing which is certain is that parliament will never function effectively until Article 70 is amended.

Zafar Sobhan is an Assistant Editor of The Daily Star.

STRAIGHT TALK

Repealing Article 70 -- or at the very least amending it so that parliamentarians are permitted to vote against their party -- might not solve all our political problems, but it is a necessary first step to reforming parliament. There is no guarantee that amending Article 70 will cause parliament to begin functioning effectively -- but one thing which is certain is that parliament will never function effectively until Article 70 is amended.

Article 70 of the Constitution reads in pertinent part:

"A person elected as member of Parliament at an election at which he was nominated as a candidate by a political party shall vacate his seat if he resigns from that party or votes in Parliament against the party."

Now, I have no particular argument with the provision that you lose your seat if you switch parties. But the second provision -- that you lose your seat if you vote against your party merits a closer look.

When you take the time to think about it, this is an astonishing provision. It was included in the Constitution so that parliamentarians would not be able to sell their votes to the highest bidder -- a laudable

when you think about it, what is the point of the opposition attending parliament when there is no way for it to win any vote that comes to the floor? The opposition might as well stay away since there doesn't appear to be any function for it to perform under the current rules.

Now it could be argued that allowing a politician to vote his or her conscience is a laughable proposition in Bangladesh, and indeed this was the reason Article 70 was enacted in the first place. The idea was to create a system that would prevent parliamentarians from selling their votes.

But to my mind, even if parliamentarians do sell their votes, such a situation more closely resembles democracy than effectively not

facto presidential system of government. Article 70 ensures that our political system is parliamentary in name only.

Nor do I subscribe to the point of view that Article 70 simply reflects the political reality in Bangladesh -- that our elected representatives are so corrupt that it would be foolish to allow them to vote their consciences. Let me clarify. This may well be the political reality, but the point, surely, is to change it. It will never change under the current system. If we have a rottenness in the body politic, laws that accommodate this rottenness may be pragmatic, but they won't effect the change that we need.

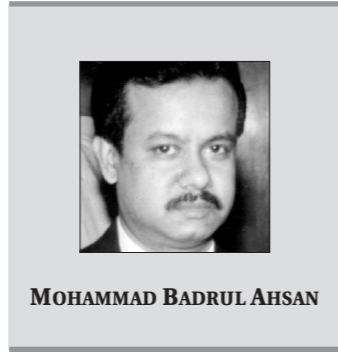
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Whose country is it anyway?



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

THE question has the surreal swiftness of a sinister quip. You don't ask this question in a democracy, because who doesn't know that the country is supposed to belong to the people. But does it really? Where are the people in the affairs of this country? They vote in the elections, they pay higher taxes, higher prices for utilities and essential commodities. They get kidnapped and killed, their daughters and wives are molested, and they get threatened by extortionists. But then they don't decide who runs their country and they become the victims of their own choice of government. These people have lost their country.

Whose country is it anyway? Does it belong to the people, politicians, bureaucrats, musclemen or businessmen? Who runs the show? People certainly not. They are forced to live in an isolated room in the nation's house. It has the absurd situation of a prison under seize. The guards are in the lock up, while the inmates are free. Say, eternal vigilance is the price of liberty. Whose vigilance is it for whose

liberty? The keepers turn into usurpers and the people are always the suckers in the end. There is the irony of a contrived suicide about the whole thing. The majority chooses its own minority and then wears that choice like a noose around its neck to hang by the rope of its own stupidity.

If anything, people don't own this country. So, when their elected representatives don't go to the parliament or misuse the power vested in them, people cannot do anything. Thus the source of all power has no power at all.

In his first inaugural address, Abraham Lincoln, the 16th President of the United States of America, proclaimed, "This country, with its institutions, belongs to the people who inhabit it." Does our country belong to the people who inhabit it? In fact, the people are the first for disasters and calamities. They are the last for progress and prosperity. The BMW, Volvo, Mercedes, shopping malls, cybercafes, bowling alleys, spas, restaurants, private universities and flurries of other amenities of

these days. We stress economic growth over political reform. We want economic growth, more exports, more foreign exchange earnings, interest rate management, and private sector development. We have more businessmen in politics and more politicians in business. The chambers of commerce, the trade associations, the business community as a whole, dictate the terms of our governance. Everything must make business sense, and every sense must mean business.

You can own a college or university with your money. What is education unless one can use it to earn money? Likewise, what is money unless it can be used to teach a few lessons? Businessmen own institutions where educated men teach business. How do you like it?

Where are the people in all these? Private gain is public policy. Individuals think privately within the family, and families think privately within the nation. Democracy is nothing but government, run by

virulent vices.

French revolutionary Maximilien Robespierre gave a speech at the Jacobin Club in 1792 when he declared, "I am no courtesan, nor moderator, nor Tribune, nor defender of the people: I am myself the people." Does that vaunted utterance answer our question? Are our people tucked inside the pride of our leaders? Where are the people if you ignore the streams of limbs that fill the streets, the smell of sweats that laden the air? Where are the people if you ignore the groaning moaning sounds of anguish under the crushing burdens of corruption and injustice?

Many centuries ago the struggle for democracy had started to give back power to the people. Now democracy has arrived like a runaway train, which forgot to pick up the passengers, who waited for it. It belongs to those who are at the driving seat and their families, giving joyride to ticket checkers, attendants and guards and their families. If you cut the long story short, a few families are having fun at the cost of many.

Whose country is it? I ask again. It belongs to a cabal of politicians, musclemen and businessmen, is the answer. What about the bureaucrats and the intellectuals? What about them? They are there to serve to the order. What about the people? They are the poster boys of democracy, who look cute without any real power. If anyone feels ashamed or ignored, it's time to get together and take your country back in your hands.

Mohammad Badrul Ahsan is a banker.

CROSS TALK

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It's only the rubberstamp, needed to win elections and abandoned afterwards. It happens again and again. If anything, people are eternally vigilant to be eternally abused.

The people are caught like chilies between the mortar and the pestle, between the government and the opposition. Each side has its echelons of activists, politicians, businessmen, bureaucrats, labors, musclemen and intellectuals. Each side is like a column of forces that relentlessly collides with another to crush popular will. Politics is more vengeance than vision in this country. Needless to say, it's an opportunity for those who make money.

modern living, these are for the few, not for the many. All our institutions are engaged to separate the people from their country.

As a matter of fact, the people are in exile in their own country. Who wants to know if they are happy? Who wants to know if their children are healthy, homes are safe and future is secure? Their government is not of them, by them and for them. Instead their government is off them, which tries to buy them, which tries to fool them. Democracy is a mere excuse to exclude people from the republic.

Whose country is it then? We have lots of emphasis on the economy

All of these have given us the ecology of money. We live in it and we breathe in it, our dreams, aspirations and convictions are shaped by it. Gone are the days of plain living and high thinking. Now one lives as plainly as one thinks, and one thinks as highly as one lives. Gone are the days of profound knowledge and pristine wisdom. Everything is connected to money. With credit cards and business cards, the world is in your wallet.

Money dominates conscience, money dictates common sense. You don't have to write correctly, you don't have to speak correctly. You don't even have to make sense at all. But nothing keeps you from anything.

public men thinking privately. These men think about their families, children, wives, in-laws, cousins, their minds sucked into the concentric circles of selfish propensities. Where is the collective will? Where is the consideration for others, which is the steppingstone of democracy?

We are divided as a nation, which further divides us as individuals in our political belief, moral conviction and social commitment. We waver between this life and afterlife, rogue ambition and religion, our unsettled minds falling into the formation of hypocrisy. We live amidst the erosion of our values, our vanishing virtues sucked out by the swirling vortex of

OPINION

Monstrous failures in english at the hsc level

M MAHBUB MURSHED

SHOCKING! Terribly shocking! The results of the HSC exams of six Education Boards were published on 13 October 2003. But alas! The number of failures of the HSC candidates has hurt our feelings; the strings of our heart seem to have been torn and we are shedding the blood of pain. The conscious class of our society cannot but express their utmost surprise and shock at the failure of the HSC examinees. But wherein lies the root cause of this tragic and pathetic failure? Who will bear the responsibility for this failure? Now it is time to look into the matter most critically. We have to investigate deep into the deplorable incident, though it seems difficult for the time being. It will take time to find out all the causes of failure of the students in general. Our country is lagging behind for many reasons, the monstrous failure in the education sector being one of them.

Bangladesh is one of the developing countries of the third world and the people of Bangladesh are, as delegates and observers from different countries remark with an air of satisfaction, progressing quite rapidly. But the picture of the total education system is

really unsatisfactory and regrettable when we find that the education sector, despite the hearty and active endeavour of the government to boost up and gear up the students of our country to rank among the world-class students, is retreating fast for some reason or other. It has been found that the failure and weakness of the students in English exceed all other failures and weaknesses. To understand the standard of English of the students, some specimen English sentences are given below.

"He go to school." "Their is many student in the school" "I goes to market." "The horse cans run first." "The boys swimming in the pond." "Are you see him yesterday?" "What you eat in morning?" Hence the serious need for investigation into the matter.

There are five international languages in the world and English has gained the topmost priority and status among them. English is now being used and treated as the first language in many countries because of its wide acceptability. In Bangladesh too, English has been given utmost priority and importance for practical reasons. The Bangladesh government has made English compulsory at all levels of education, beginning from class one to

masters, including engineering, medicine, and agriculture.

But the main factor that should be held responsible for the students' weakness and failure in English is the lack of proper guidance of the teachers, who are supposed to be well versed and have good command over the English language. But unfortunately, most of them are seen to possess very poor knowledge of English and are betraying their ignorance in class performance. They are mostly inexperienced, unskilled, untrained and lacking proper knowledge in English. There are many teachers in Bangladesh teaching English in primary, secondary and higher secondary levels who are unable to write a sentence in English in grammatically acceptable form. Moreover, their pronunciation is so poor and distorted that the students who learn English from these teachers can never acquire the ability to speak a single word or sentence in front of an audience. The teachers teach the students English in a way that is not the method of teaching English at all.

Not only that. The environment necessary for teaching and learning English is totally absent in the schools and colleges of Bangladesh. The faulty method of teaching English is largely

responsible for the poor performance of the students. We know, there are four skills of teaching and learning a language -- listening, speaking, reading and writing. In order to write English correctly a student will have to learn the grammatical rules at the secondary level along with the above four skills. But at present, NCTB has introduced communicative method for teaching and learning English at the secondary and higher secondary levels. This communicative method is not as effective as the traditional method, as is obvious from the fact that a student who has passed the HSC exam cannot write or speak a sentence correctly.

On the contrary, a student who has passed the HSC exam in the traditional method can write English better. Its main cause is that in communicative method the teacher only helps the students understand the texts and know the meanings of the difficult and unknown words. After doing this, the teacher asks the students to answer the different forms of questions on the passage. Hence, very naturally, the learners learn only how to pick up the right word from the passage to answer the questions. The process requires the students to use only one word in most cases. This one-word exercise and

practice cannot enable a student to write correct English or communicate with other people properly, which is the main target of the present education system. It is thus seen that a student who knows nothing of English language and grammar gets good marks, at least pass marks, in the exam. It is because s/he could take help from his/her friend in the exam hall. Thus, after passing the HSC exam, when he enters into university and other institutions for higher education, he cannot secure even pass marks. This is really disgraceful.

The skills of teaching English, in the first place, are not being properly applied at present, though the syllabus of the higher secondary level is designed on the basis of the four skills. What I have said about the communicative methodology can be understood more clearly from the specimens of the question patterns of the HSC exam. Passage (seen & unseen)

- Q.1. True/false
- MCQ
- Filling in the gaps with clues.
- Information transfer.
- Open ended questions.
- Filling in the gaps without clues.
- Summarizing.

- Flow chart.
- Cloze test without clues.
- Producing sentences from a substitution table.
- Reordering sentences.
- Paragraph writing.

The HSC students are very rarely inspired to learn words or increase their vocabulary. Though they are sometimes told to learn the meaning of the unknown words, they are not taught the use, usage and derivatives of the words. As a result, they cannot properly apply or use those learned words in the right context.

The second cause is the lack of suitable class environment, that is, in the classroom the teachers don't encourage the students to talk English. "Practice makes a man perfect," goes the saying. Practice has no alternative. Therefore, lack of practice leads the students ultimately to fear and hesitation in which they cannot overcome even in the later part of their life.

Thirdly, the students are encouraged to memorize some selected and suggested compositions for passing the exams. The most shocking matter is that, when the students, who memorize compositions, do not find com-

mon topic for writing composition in the exam question, they get upset and nervous, and as such cut a sorry figure in the exam frustrating everybody.

- Now I would like to suggest some effective ways of English at the HSC level.
 - English grammar (parts of speech, articles, tense, voice, narration, sequence of tense, clause, formation of sentence, sub-verb agreement, different parts of a sentence, use of prepositions, phrases and idioms, basic sentence patterns etc.
 - The derivatives of words.
 - Encouraging the students to write compositions in the classrooms and identifying and correcting their mistakes.
 - Encouraging learning words from Eng-Eng dictionary with examples and illustrations.

Some items that are not effective for learning English should be removed from the HSC English syllabus. I have just given a hint of the thing. A detailed analysis is not possible within the space of this article.

English is a foreign language to us. Hence in order to learn English effectively the English syllabus should be reshuffled once again. In the present

day world, communication is the main theme. So, to reach our goal and fulfil the purpose of communication, we have to teach English in the schools and colleges following the most effective method of teaching a foreign language. When a child is born, it hears and learns the words that are spoken by its mother and the people surrounding it. A good plan should be made and a good amount of time should be spent to create a suitable environment for teaching English.

To sum up, I would like to say that the persons concerned with teaching English should make a concerted effort to pave the way for bringing about the students' success in English. We are a poor nation, and, if we are to make our rightful position in the modern world, we have to make double pace engaging all of our resources and merits. Since English is the most important and widely used of all the international languages, advancement in the use of English of our people might well be one potent way of increasing our pace of development so as to ensure our prestigious position among the developing countries.

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