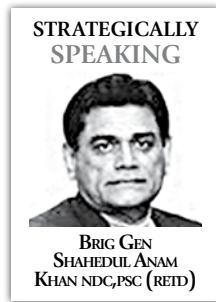


Student politics and Ducsu: O tempora o mores!



STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING
BRIG GEN SHAHEEDUL ANAM KHAN, NCD, PSC (RETD)

IT is not hard to detect the deep sense of remorse in the writer of the article, "Incubator of democracy or lessons to subvert it?" It was carried in this paper on March 11 in the op-ed pages marking one year of the Ducsu election. The piece is a lucid commentary by one who has dedicated his life to education, on the illustrious past of students' politics in Dhaka University. It is also a rather rueful prediction of the future state of students' politics, and of the institution as a whole, which at one time was known as the Oxford of the East, and the Dhaka University Central Students Union (Ducsu), earning rightly the honorific of the second parliament of Bangladesh.

It cannot be lost on those that value democracy and regard the period students spend in the highest seat of learning, as the period of gestation of their democratic mind. The Ducsu election in 1990, held under a pseudo-democratic government headed by a military autocrat, was a much-maligned period of our history. And what is inexplicable is the fact that in the 28 years between then and March 2019 during the democratic governments of the time and the much-vaunted democratic era, not a single election to the central students' body of DU was held. And even this election was held after a Supreme Court order, delivered

in January 2019, made it mandatory for the DU authorities to hold the election. One wonders what the objective conditions were that stood in the way of the democratic governments allowing the students of DU to exercise their right to choose as to who amongst them would represent them and put forward to the administration their views on issues that concern their welfare and interests directly.

The Ducsu election of 2019 had evinced keen interest in all quarters. In fact, the print media and this newspaper in particular had exhorted the authorities in a series of editorials in the months preceding the election to ensure a free and fair atmosphere for voting. What eventually transpired by way of election mirrored, regrettably, very realistically the national election in many ways. That the election was fraught and going down that way was evidenced in many of the decisions and actions of the administration topped finally by the announcement imposing a limit on the number of journalists each media house would be allowed to assign to cover Ducsu polls.

For those who have had the good fortune of passing through the portals of this once famous university, the happy nostalgia is marred by the vision of an ominous future that the current state of students' politics portrays. After being in a near moribund state for the good part of three decades, not only has the prospect of a healthy students' politics receded even farther, the only forum of the students to practice the precepts of democracy, and being nurtured in what the author of the article calls, incubator of democracy,

the Ducsu, has had the last nail put in its coffin after the much delayed and eagerly anticipated elections to the student body in March last year—marred by alleged rigging which was confirmed by the media and the central body made dysfunctional by the BCL with the administration in connivance. The results were as expected except teachers conducting the elections, the moral guides of the students, shed their principles, ethics, scruples and human values only to ensure victory of the ruling party student body and thereby became complicit in the immoral act. The optimism was short lived. A lot of hope was pinned on the election primarily to restore the state of

did not go to the BCL candidate. It was bagged by a candidate who had led the quota movement and who himself was subject to physical assault for his role in the movement. The purpose of the student's union is to have a union free from influence of not only the university authorities but also keep aloof from political control. That lofty ideal has long been thrown out of the window with student politics being misappropriated by student wings of political parties. The much-hoped for change with a VP not belonging to any party but having the support of the majority of students was dashed when the VP himself was subjected to nearly a dozen physical assaults and intimidation in the last one year, not only in Dhaka but even outside. He was even barred from attending his office on several occasions. Why so when the VP, Nur, was "blessed" by the PM when the former met her in Ganabhaban after the election? Are we to believe that only the BCL has the right to run student politics in DU? Anybody not in its favour will be anathema? Unfortunately that is the bitter reality and nothing will change unless student politics is freed from political control, and unless the university administration sheds its political hat and act in a nonpartisan manner. Until then Dhaka University's credentials as the incubator of democracy, whose students were at the forefront of our national movements since 1947, and initiator of many of those movements, cannot be restored.



Ducsu VP Nurul Haque Nur being taken to hospital following an attack on him and his followers allegedly carried out by Muktioddha Moncho and Chhatra League men on DU campus on December 22, 2019.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

that of the post of vice president. The stigma of a rigged Ducsu election, not even witnessed during the Pakistan era, was stamped on this election too. And as one observer put it, the conduct of the election by the DU administration and the teachers associated with it, was a classic lesson on how to rig a student body election. It is a pity that the

students' politics to its glorious past. In spite of the BCL winning all the major posts in the central body and in the halls, the newly elected body has not been allowed to function at all in the last one year. In fact, everything was done to make the body non-existent. And that is because the most aspired for post, of the vice president of Ducsu,

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Bangabandhu's development vision and the unfinished work



NAWSHAD AHMED

THE Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, was a visionary leader whose birth centenary is being celebrated this year. It will be a way of showing respect to his vision and a journey he led towards building a new nation whose progress he was not able to see with his own eyes. As we are about to celebrate one hundred years of his birth on March 17, 2020, we need to explore how much and in what ways the country has progressed and where we are yet to achieve the desired goals.

First of all, we can make some comparison of quantitative progress made since the time of independence of the country in 1971 till now. In terms of the total size of the economy, GDP was only USD 8.7 billion in 1971. GDP in 2019 stood at USD 350 billion. The total size of the country's development budget was only Tk 501 crore in 1972-73 which rose to Tk 523,190 crore in 2019-20. GDP per capita rose from less than USD 100 in 1972 to USD 1,800 in 2019. The country already achieved food and fish self-sufficiency. Total food-grain production increased from 9.7 million metric tons in 1971 to 35 million metric tons in 2019. The GDP growth rate in 2019 reached 8 percent. In 1971, more than 80 percent of the population lived below the poverty line and had an average life expectancy of 48 years. The poverty rate has now declined to about 20 percent and life expectancy has risen to 73 years.

Bangabandhu's development dream was to build a prosperous Bangladesh,

free from poverty, hunger, corruption and exploitation. His dream was to establish the rights of the people and build a society based on integrity, equality and justice. In 1972, in a constituent assembly speech he said that, "We have to put a smile on poor people's face. The people of Bangladesh have to survive and so require a minimum amount of food." He prioritised both agricultural development and industrialisation; agriculture sector will provide food for the people and industry will generate income—both of which were required to reduce poverty.

Bangabandhu's dream of successfully establishing the country as a role model of sustainable and inclusive development was embodied in the First Five Year Plan (1973-1978) of the country. The plan's objectives were: to reduce poverty, to expand the output of essential consumption items, to

arrest inflation, to increase GDP growth rate, to attain self-sufficiency in food-grain production and to reduce the population growth rate. On the first anniversary of independence, in 1972, Bangabandhu said, "We will turn this war-ravaged country into a golden one. In the Bengal of the future, mothers will smile and children will play. It will be a society free of exploitation. Start the movement in the fields and farms and the factories. We can rebuild the country through hard work. Let us work together so that the Golden Bengal shines again."

Bangladesh made significant progress in agriculture, fisheries, poultry and cattle sector and quite good progress in manufacturing, garments and medium and small enterprises. However, there are yet many challenges in our social sectors such as in health, nutrition, and education. The government adopted the National

Only cash or food assistance will not address poverty fast enough. Money and food combined with delivery of quality health, nutrition and education support, clean water, vocational training and behavioural changes will help reduce poverty.

Public services delivered now is not well coordinated. For example, child survival interventions which require health, nutrition, water and sanitation, birth registration and early childhood development are not provided according to the required quantity and quality, affecting child mortality and morbidity rates in the poorest of families. Although about one third of under-five children suffer from malnutrition in the country, most of the burden falls on the poorer families. By increasing synergy between service sectors, the impact on child nutrition and child survival in the poor families can be improved since it will address the interrelated underlying causes of malnutrition and child mortality which are disease, lack of antenatal and postnatal care, poor immunisation of children and their mothers, limited availability of clean water and poor hygienic practices.

With many successes to mention, we still have a long way to go in our struggle to eliminate poverty and vulnerability, and improve the quality of life of the majority of the people. We are currently focused on building many mega projects that were initiated by the present government—but which should not take our attention away from the urgent need for investing more in the social sector, for promoting skills and creating jobs for the educated youths, diversifying exports, tackling corruption and strengthening the banking sector. With the adoption of the right policy decisions, we will achieve our mission of transforming Bangladesh into an upper-middle income economy by 2031 and a developed one by 2041.



Bangabandhu's development dream was to build a prosperous Bangladesh, free from poverty, hunger, corruption and exploitation.

Social Security Strategy (NSSS) in 2015 to address poverty. The government also increased budgetary allocation towards social safety net programmes in recent years. In 2018-19, a total amount of Tk 64,176 crore was allocated from government budget for social safety net programmes. The allocation was 13.81 percent of the annual budget and 2.53 percent of GDP.

However, in our efforts to reduce poverty, we need to remember that it is a multidimensional issue. Only cash or food assistance will not address poverty fast enough. Money and food combined with delivery of quality health, nutrition and education support, clean water, vocational training and behavioural changes will help reduce poverty in a sustainable manner. Therefore, all public services should proactively and effectively target poor families.

Dr Nawshad Ahmed is an economist and urban planner. He worked previously as a UN official in Bangladesh and abroad.

QUOTABLE Quote

GEORGE CARLIN (1937-2008)
American stand-up comedian

Just cause you got the monkey off your back doesn't mean the circus has left town.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS	30 Some Quidditch players	7 French president
1 Benefit	32 Lodge makers	8 Fortunate
5 Door part	34 Track trip	10 Gets serious
9 Rough peaks	35 Test programs	11 Relaxing resorts
11 Flower part	36 Self-respect	16 Device for a book lover
"Help!" drummer	38 Kitchen fixtures	18 Decisive win
13 Tag info	39 Muscular power letters	21 Miami team
14 Battleship	40 Thomas Hardy heroine	23 Understands
15 Lab containers	41 Garden areas	24 Shirt part
17 Check recipients		25 Brightens
19 Barracks sight		27 Cat
20 Sleep sound	DOWN	28 Bartered
21 Rooster's mate	1 Wash thoroughly	29 Monk's leader
22 Grammar topic	2 Stands	30 Porgy's love
24 Ready to go	3 Dorothy, for one	31 Gushes forth
26 Current of air	4 Easter find	33 Moving trucks
29 The whole amount	5 Annoying fellow	37 Umbrella part
	6 Individually	

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YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

A	R	A	B	I	C	W	E	E	D
R	O	M	A	N	O	A	L	L	Y
T	W	I	S	T	O	F	L	I	M
S	O	L	I	D					
S	T	E	W	T	E	A	L		
P	O	U	T	W	I	N	N	E	R
O	U	R	D	A	N	N	E	E	
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T	W	I	S	T	O	F	F	A	T
H	O	L	E	T	E	A	S	E	R
Y	E	L	L	E	S	T	H	E	R

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker

BABY BLUES by Kirkman & Scott