

VC's Order

The order by the Vice Chancellor (VC) of the Dhaka University (DU) to admit 20 students in the Commerce Faculty without admission test was injudicious, to say the least. Why should he, as the chief executive officer of the University, undermine the administrative mechanism of his own institution, instead of upholding it? Why should he take an action that so fundamentally damages the image of the University as an independent body devoted to the pursuit of scholarship? Finally, why should he indulge in a behaviour that sets examples of circumventing well-laid-down procedures and casts a shadow on the very motive of his action? For the Vice Chancellor of an university should be as much an administrator as he is an upholder of principles, norms, values, integrity and independence.

In a press conference yesterday, the VC tried to explain the circumstances that led him to the action he took. From his explanation it appears that an elaborate exercise was undertaken just to accommodate a few students attending a reception by the Prime Minister. Is attendance to a function so important that University regulations need to be circumvented? In fact, if everybody else had agreed, it should have been the VC who should have opposed this special arrangement. For, after all, it is his duty, far above everybody else's, to uphold the sanctity and prestige of the University.

We know that as the chief executive of the University, the VC has, and should have, some discretionary powers. The question is how should he use such powers. Should he have used his discretionary powers to permit students to flout University rules and discipline? Once a precedent is set, of accepting such arbitrary and extremely questionable use of discretionary powers, then there will be no end of political and other pressures on the VC to do the same thing again and again. This will lead to a total breakdown of whatever academic discipline and standard is still left with our most prestigious institution.

Considering everything, we strongly suggest that the VC should reconsider his ill-advised decision. We strongly advise that the event should not be politicised, the possibility of which exists. There is also the question of the students. Are they going to become innocent victims of a course of action they were wrongly advised into following? Here the Admissions Committee and the Academic Council should decide. But, above all, regulations should not be violated, and no bad precedent set.

Not by Modernisation Alone

It is natural that all the best words, if not thoughts, are called in to make ceremonial occasions appropriately ceremonious. Chancellor Khaleda Zia's words on the occasion of the first convocation of the IPSA, the new top degree-awarding university of agriculture, were no exception. She has laid stress on 'modernisation of agriculture for boosting production and creating jobs through establishing agro-based small industries to face the formidable challenge of poverty alleviation'. But this is rather a much too simplistic line and behind it lurks attitudes championing the industrial civilisation as the highest virtue for all mankind. When advanced nations of the world are peering beyond the present into some post-industrial society of less waste and more nature, why should we set discarded models as our ideal?

Equitable land distribution, elimination of the socio-economic stranglehold of the big peasant on the small ones, securing the interests of the small peasants against all predator-advances from above are measures that must precede effective modernisation of agriculture. Otherwise the cities will be destroyed by swelling armies of pauperised small peasants and agriculture will suffer for decades in the hands of haters of farming bent on garnering the quickest and most money.

The IPSA sermon extols modernisation but of the methods alone and not of the man who would innovate and use those. The peasant is not a particularly pampered class in Bangladesh. His was the portion of that pejorative *chash* down the ages — and it continues. It is the fault of the society specially its upper crust that the repository in him of the oldest of man's composite sciences is not appreciated. He is more a practitioner of the sciences than a consumer of them like the high-minded townspeople. The surest way to poverty alleviation is to pay him enough for his knowledge, skill, service and above all production. Once the peasant has a semblance of buying power, Bangladesh's economy will have undergone a qualitative change, with poverty thrown out. This will be made the more difficult with modernisation of farming without recourse to related economic and social developments.

Caught Unprepared

The receding flood waters in some parts of the country are bringing in their wake diarrhoea and influenza. This was a foregone conclusion. The question is what precautions did the authorities take to head off the outbreak of water and air-borne maladies which reportedly have taken a toll of 10 lives in Sylhet and Sirajganj.

Knowing full well that water levels in the rivers and their channels swell and go down in alternating motions about this time of the year we sit back nonchalantly allowing the diseases to make an inroad and reel off statistics from hurriedly set up control room as if that's where all the efficiency counted.

Even though the tubewells might have been submerged in knee-deep water and are unworkable in the muck now, diarrhoea need not kill anybody at all. Such simple, low-priced and easily available things like the water chlorination tablets and the ORS can act as effective antidotes. Were these stockpiled in an adequate quantity in the easily identifiable and familiarly vulnerable places before the early floods hit us? The ORS is easily made all over the country, and these can flood the localities if not in sachets, at least by way of home preparations requiring very little skill. As for the water-purifying tablets it is ridiculous to think that a flood-prone country like Bangladesh does not keep them in abundance or distribute these freely. The flood-prone areas should have had them in advance.

The vested interests may not smell money in such tiny projects, but well, this government being answerable to the people, can not give them indulgence in a matter of life and death.

And, it behoved the government to demonstrate a better preparedness level since it has decided not to take any outside help to meet the flood's challenges which, otherwise, has done us proud.

We the Peoples' Try to Make Their Voice Heard

Tony Samphier writes from London

Date of birth: 26 June 1945
Place of birth: San Francisco, United States of America.

Mother: Planet Earth. Father: The victorious World War Two powers.

Weight at birth: 51 member states.

Fifty years older and 134 member states plumper, the United Nations is returning to its birthplace for some commemorative razzmatazz.

Threatening to spoil the show are the rising doubts about the organisation.

The accepted wisdom is that because the UN was frozen in the ideological ice of the Cold War for much of its early life, it should be modernised.

Across the globe, politicians, academics and pressure groups are huddled in conferences and seminars, trying to fashion a world body which more accurately mirrors the changed geo-political landscape.

A host of proposals for renewing the UN has emerged, but on one issue a consensus is growing — that the all-powerful Security Council should be more representative of the modern world: the current permanent membership should be redistributed more equitably among the world's regions, and the power of veto should go.

The organisation's post-anniversary credibility rests on how quickly it can break free from the grip of the post-World War Two "Great Powers" which continue to dominate the Security Council — Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States.

A more contentious issue is the democratisation of the world body. Specifically, does the UN need a new people-centred structure in addition to its main inter-governmental organs, the General Assembly, where the governments of all member states get together, and the Security Council?

Opinion polls show consistent support for the UN in most countries, but individual citizens have no direct route for voicing their demands to the UN. They have to go via their national governments, which rarely gets results.

Hence the official theme for the 50th anniversary celebrations: "We the peoples of the United Nations..." echoing the visionary words of the 1945 UN Charter.

The problem is to find ways of bringing in the people. The movement received a boost at the 1992 "Earth Summit" in Brazil, when

Discussions on the reform of international institutions at the Group of Seven summit of leaders of industrialised countries focused on scrapping agencies of little interest to the rich countries — such as the UN Conference on Trade and Development — and on increasing the power of bodies where the rich hold power, such as the International Monetary Fund. But elsewhere as the UN celebrates its 50th anniversary there is also pressure to allow ordinary people to have a voice in the world body.

non-government organisations (NGOs) succeeded in putting the previously closed world of UN conferring into the international media spotlight.

But although NGOs have dug themselves into parts of the UN system, the international diplomats and civil servants are constantly trying to win back lost ground. The off-hand treatment of NGOs by China and by the UN Secretariat in the forthcoming world women's conference in Beijing is a case in point. The NGOs are being treated as an aggravating adjunct rather than as an essential component.

Jeffrey Segall, leader of the London-based Campaign for a More Democratic United Nations (CAMDUN) argues for a "UN People's Assembly" composed of five delegates from each country. Each of the five would represent a different sector of society.

Former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev advocated a similar idea in a 1988 General Assembly speech.

But that does not by itself make the UN more democratic. Only elections can do that.

The idea goes back to the very founding of the UN. In a parliamentary debate on the UN Charter in 1945, British Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin called for "a world assembly elected directly from the people for the world as a whole, to whom the governments who form the United Nations are responsible."

Governments resist such a suggestion for fear that it would be the beginning of world government, which the UN certainly is not. Governments want to hold on to their national sovereignty.

But even UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali has said: "The time of absolute and exclusive sovereignty has passed." He has requested a thorough independent study of the UN's future mission.

Trisnka Childers, a former senior adviser in the UN, says that there was a time when the

battle of ideas in the UN was about sovereignty in the political and foreign policy dimension. Now the battle is about the refusal of a handful of elites in a handful of countries in the North to accept the democratic management of the commanding heights of the world economy.

In reality, the World Bank and International Monetary Fund — dominated by the major industrialised countries — are closer to being a world government, albeit a dictatorial one, than is the UN.

Childers opposes the drift towards "realism" in current discussions on the UN's future: "There are those who say we have to accommodate the negative attitude and behaviour of major powers and bend the UN around them. I totally reject this."

Childers has been working for years on the idea of a UN Parliamentary Assembly, which he and former UN Under-Secretary Sir Brian Urquhart outlined in a recent book, *Renewing the United Nations*.

The Assembly, they argue, should be based on universal adult franchise, using a system of proportional representation to elect UN parliamentarians from each member state. It would complement rather than replace the existing UN structure.

Childers is confident that his ideas are reaching a more mainstream audience, but is not starry-eyed. "There would be huge problems. But is it wildly impossible?" he asks, recalling the cries of "impossible" which greeted the suggestion for a European Parliament.

He believes a global assembly would develop over time, just as the European Parliament has evolved. Last year the European Parliament endorsed a proposal for a UN parliamentary assembly.

He recognises the obstacles posed by countries with no democratic experience, but responds with a knowing smile: "You would

have to introduce that experience, wouldn't you?"

"It simply takes political will and, above all, political courage. We should remember that what we call 'foreign affairs' are in fact the domestic affairs of planet earth."

GEMINI NEWS

UN: a helping hand



- Provides two million tons of food aid donated by 90 countries each year
- Immunized 80% of the world's children against polio, tetanus, measles, whooping cough, diphtheria and tuberculosis
- Promoted decolonisation and independence
- Eradicated smallpox
- Given international protection and assistance to more than 30 million refugees fleeing war, famine and persecution

International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking

Drug-abuse: How We Respond to It

by Shoib Shazzad Khan

In Bangladesh the problem has been showing an upward trend over the last two decades. During the post-liberation social upheaval, changes in the value system, personal and community frustration, economic crises, all seem to be acting as strains causing a spread of drug-abuse in the country.

THE word 'drug' is a synonym of 'narcotic' which has been derived from the Greek word 'Narcotic' meaning numbness. Narcotics have the characteristics of inducing drowsiness, sleep or stupor, a dazed state of helplessness and stupefaction especially with relief of pain. Nowadays drugs imply those agents that harm an individual as well as society, with a variety of side-effects. The use and abuse of drugs has been common since ancient times. For centuries man has been escaping everyday reality by using various chemicals procured from natural products in different forms. The use of narcotics dates back to such time as indicates that they were even available to stone age man. Most astoundingly, the seeds and capsules of the poppy have been found in the pile works of the Swiss lake dwellers four thousand years ago, and evidence suggests that the plant was deliberately cultivated.

The application of epidemiology to the study of drug abuse is relatively recent. Despite the long history of drugs and their use in society, the use of an epidemiological approach to the study of this complicated problem began in earnest less than two decades ago.

In the mid 60's there was a rapid growth of the counter culture in the USA. There was an expression of youthful rebellion against the predominant value system. Young people sought a widening of their experiences by lavishly consuming cannabis, LSD (lysergic acid diethylamide), etc. The use of heroin increased dramatically in the 70's. The same development took place among the youth of most western European countries almost simultaneously. However, during that period the use of heroin

among the youth of Asian nations was virtually unheard of, although the use of opium was accepted in some countries, especially among lower class people. Heroin abuse had spread to a number of countries with little or no previous experience of the problem, and the drug had begun to be abused in certain countries in the Middle East and Oceania, although opium consumption had generally remained stable or even decreased slightly. Subsequently, however, heroin abuse reached epidemic levels in a number of countries world-wide. Gradually, it became a cataclysmic problem in many Asian countries — Burma, Hong Kong, Macao, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, India and Pakistan.

Cannabis is widely used in many countries in Asia. Singapore and Thailand have reported an increase in abuse as have Malaysia, the Philippines, Japan, Burma, Hong Kong, Maldives and the Republic of Korea. Cannabis also remained the most widely abused illicit drug in Africa, Europe, USA, Canada and the Indian subcontinent thus affecting almost all countries and territories. The abuse of benzodiazepines is also very common in the countries of Americas, Europe, Asia and the Middle East. Though cocaine abuse has become a major problem in America

and Europe, it is still of lower profile in Asia. The African scenario is not very different from the global upward trend of drug abuse.

In Bangladesh the problem has been showing an upward trend over the last two decades. During the post-liberation social upheaval, changes in the value system, personal and community frustration, economic crises, all seem to be acting as strains causing a spread of drug abuse in the country.

on hospital reports, police and custom seizures, media information and observable trends. The abuse of drugs, especially heroin and cannabis, is reported to be more prevalent among the youth and they are more affected in rural areas, but the trend of spread towards rural communities is no less alarming. Cannabis is also found to be the most commonly used substance irrespective of social class. Cultivation of cannabis was however prohibited in the country from 14th December 1989.

In view of this alarming situation of drug abuse in Bangladesh, some government and non-government organisations have taken up several measures and programmes to combat the curse of narcotics.

Already the government of Bangladesh established the

Department of Narcotics control in 1990. There are frequent seminars, symposia, publications, informational and motivational activities taking place organised by different GOs and NGOs. A number of foreign agencies are also assisting and collaborating with the government and the NGOs to realise their programme activities against drug addiction. Very recently, on 18th May 1995, the Health Minister, Chowdhury Kamal Ibne Yousuf announced in a seminar at the National Press Club — organised by a leading anti-drug NGO — that very soon a new law will be promulgated to completely eliminate the curse of drug addiction from Bangladesh. The seminar was also attended by American Ambassador, David N. Merrill, who mentioned that the USA is very concerned about drug abuse and drug trafficking world-wide. He pledged USA's continuous support for the GOs and NGOs which are playing a vital role in combatting drug abuse in Bangladesh.

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OPINION

Save Dhaka Roundtable

Md Nurul Islam

Freder from the tension of execution, the authorities can devote full to matters of policy, designing projects, arranging finance, and raising revenue from developed plots.

MUNICIPAL FINANCE: There is a saying that villages pay taxes and towns enjoy it. Such an idea should not be allowed to persist. Cities should be self-sustaining. To that end municipality should exert to realize taxes from both private and Govt buildings, shops, rickshaws etc. A participant at the Roundtable pointed out that clusters of tin-shed colonies are exempted from tax. This should not be so, as the owner realizes Tk 700 — Tk 1000 per room from the occupants.

In the development areas of Dhanmondi, Lalmoni, even Banani and Gulshan many plots are still vacant. Municipality should have the right to tax these plots at the same amount as the adjacent houses or alternatively municipality acquire these plots at the original purchase price and construct houses thereon.

Govt gives grants to municipalities. But there are some Govt taxes to which municipality can rightfully claim a share. Examples are taxes on plane, train, bus and steamer tickets because the passengers do not pay the civic amenities.

Govt imposes urban taxes on shops, part of which should go to the municipality. Govt imposes taxes on sale of motor fuel, on registration of cars and trucks. Municipality should get a share of these taxes; after all, the vehicles pay on municipal roads.

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