

New-look SEC

The long-awaited and volubly talked about shake-up has taken place in the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) billed as the watch-dog of the country's capital market. The replacement of Alamgir Kabir and Dr Shabubul Alam who ran out of their locus standi as members of the SEC by Faizuddin Ahmed and Emdadul Huq has rounded off a process of reorganisation set in motion earlier on with the easing out of its Executive Director Nawsher Ali to the Establishment Ministry. In tandem, the SEC also constituted an inquiry committee to plumb into the widely-suspected stock market scam by way of fixing the responsibility.

Although belated, the measures are welcome for the fact that these were direly needed to restore the much-dwindled confidence of the public and the financial circles alike in the way the DSE and the CSE have been operating. At any rate, since there is little scope for any better-late-than-never minimalist and resigned attitude to matters involving the financial market it will be worthwhile for the sake of long-term confidence-building to draw the right lessons from the inordinate delay incurred in jettisoning the officials concerned.

A month ago, the Finance Minister had promised publicly to move these men out of the SEC in two days' time but due to some inexplicable reasons the matter hung fire as a certain lobby worked hard in the vicinity of decision-making pleading for a *status quo* as the financial circles watched the protraction with trepidations. The delay unnecessarily paid put the finance minister's public position and commitment to bring swift changes in accord with the urgency of the situation then obtaining. Since, however, the men have been changed it does vindicate his position but at some cost to his credibility and with an eye-opening implication as to an important thing getting stuck up through powerful lobbying.

The bottom-line expectation is that the reorganised SEC will accelerate the hurtled pace of restoration of public and financial circles' confidence in the management and operation of our bourses duly beefed up by the early recommendations of the inquiry committee.

Arsenic Worry

Arsenic contamination is undoubtedly a grave threat now looming over our health sector. Already alarming predictions have been aired about the extent of arsenic contamination in Bangladesh specially, in the rural and areas adjoining West Bengal of India. An arsenic expert from across the border recently hinted the possibility of arsenic-contaminated population in Bangladesh being in the range of thirty to fifty millions.

This fearful image has received a welcome blow of sorts by the World Health Organisation (WHO) representative in Bangladesh. Talking to a news agency yesterday, Dr Wit Hardjotanojo was of the opinion that the number of affected population might not be as high as given by some sources. This surely comes to serve as a relief in our panicky preparation to court an imminent public health disaster though by no stretch of imagination should it imply our dropping the guard against the hazard.

Truth perhaps lies between the two rather contrary views on Bangladesh's arsenic situation. And the more pertinent and significant part of Dr Hardjotanojo's evaluation is that it is not an overnight development and calls for an analysis in a comprehensive manner.

This is exactly the area where the government attitude is falling short of public expectation. There is a growing sense of realisation that government's health department is perhaps yet to grasp the gravity of the situation.

It is about time the government, more specifically the health ministry made a proper assessment of the arsenic reality in Bangladesh and came loud and clear with its steps to combat it. By now people are more or less in possession of the information that arsenic problem is not something to be bottled and thrown into the Bay in a day. No one is expecting the government to come up with a formula of nine day wonder. But an, effective, viable and sustainable approach to fight the problem is definitely sought now.

Clamping the Joints

Rajuk has taken a laudable step to stave off building free-falls and collapses germane to the dangerously sloppy and amateurish construction plans we have woken up to lately. It has enlisted 800 engineers, architects and draftsmen and 212 consultancy firms as authorised agents for drawing up building plans for the public before these are put up to Rajuk for its final approval. That such a basic safeguard on the procedure was so far missing, does very little credit to the city development authority's image, let alone the surprises many of the existing buildings could spring to it owing to the seminal planning lapses stuccoed in the constructions.

Much as we are relieved by the procedural streamlining envisaged by Rajuk, we have two specific suggestions to make nonetheless by way of ensuring that the purpose for which the enlisting is being made is fulfilled.

We are anxiously looking forward to precautions being taken against corruption, nepotism and favouritism in the matter of selecting firms or otherwise choosing individual engineers, architects or draftsmen as authorised construction planners. In fact, we would like the whole enlistment procedure to be made public by Rajuk which badly needs recording its commitment to transparency on this score.

Why Should the Students Listen?

Dr A K Monaw-war Uddin Ahmad explores the ground and basis of request of the Vice-Chancellors to the President for de-linking politics from students as well as the universities.

SOON after the assumption of the office of the President Shahabuddin Ahmed made himself brutally frank in giving his opinion regarding a number of important national issues of the country. One of these is obviously the issue of student politics on the campus.

On 9 January, 1997, the Vice-Chancellors of nine universities met the President and made a request to him. According to *The Daily Star* the VCs request the President to: "Advise political parties to de-link student fronts".

While there is no denial that the VCs have earnestly made this request, the most nagging question is whether they have discussed and analysed the student politics and other relevant issues among themselves before making their request. I fully share their concern for the universities. They know that these institutions are financed by the government. As such, if not for any other reason but for the financial factor, they are accountable to the government through the Chancellor for the output produced by these higher centres of education. The deteriorating situation of the academic institutions of the country has made all of us concerned about their future. The VCs being the full-time principal academic and executive officers of these institutions are only expected to show their concern like any other responsible citizen of the country.

There are a number of reasons that are held responsible for the worsening of publicly funded universities. Many both within and outside the universities believe that student politics is one of the major factors responsible for this. There is hardly anything about its role in and contribution to campus violence that can be contested by any conscious citizen of the country. But before taking any decision regarding student politics number of related issues should be carefully analysed.

The concepts of university, higher education and the role of the various players/participants in the functioning and administration of the universities should be subjected to a fresh scrutiny in the context of a modern sovereign country.

It is my firm belief that the only and sole goal of a university is to produce good human beings. Only they can help promotion and growth of the society in the true sense of the term. The finance, management, administration, research and teaching at the universities are meant to provide the best possible education to our children. The universities are supposed to be the factories for producing the highest level manpower both in the physical and moral senses.

The societies and universities of other countries in this region of the world are in a great race to catch up with the growing requirements of the fast-moving world. Unfortunately even after 25 years of our independence, we have in practice miserably failed to define the role and jurisdiction of the universities in independent Bangladesh.

What is really needed is a comprehensive package of reforms to improve the situations. It is, therefore, necessary to chalk out an elaborate action programme to save the universities from further deterioration.

With this end in view I would like to make the following submission. First, it must be appreciated that the contribution of the student politics in Language Movement of 1952, popular upsurge of 1969 and Liberation Movement of 1971 is tremendous. That student politics in the colonial period played a vital role in the political and social movement of the country is an admitted fact. It is, however, also an objective fact that in this process the normal academic life at the universities were seriously disrupted. In the '60s, '70s and more so in the '80s, the student politics turned into armed violence. At times, this led to a situation where the university family in general and students in particular felt highly insecure. For all practical purposes, it has seriously undermined the whole moral basis of higher education.

It is in this context that we are to take the most painful decision and perhaps conduct the most complicated social surgi-

this University.

Students absenting themselves from their classes on the days of strike will be liable to forfeit their scholarships and stipends.

Article 7: No meetings of the students of the University other than the meetings organised by the University or by different Departments of the University or by the students' Unions recognised by the University, shall be held in any part of the University without the previous permission of the Proctor. No demonstration shall be organised within any part of the University.

A student found guilty of violation of the provisions of this section will be liable to punishment up to expulsion from

For a proper interpretation it is also necessary to read article 5(iv) (P. 25). It is also reproduced here.

Article 5 (iv):
No clubs, societies or students' organisation other than recognised unions or associations shall be allowed to be formed. No parties or entertainments shall be held within the premises of the university nor shall a student play musical instrument or use a loud speaker in the University premises during University

dication that for the greater national welfare we should not engage our children into politics? I am convinced that the only morally justified thing is to keep our boys and girls engaged in studies, character building and career development. They will get plenty of time to do politics after finishing their studies, if some of them are interested in politics. Therefore, what is needed is a consensus rather a national consensus on the issue of student politics.

Do we want our children to study at the university or not? If we want education for our children, then all of us must agree and bring an end to student politics on the campus once and for all. Two simple steps are necessary in this respect: i) political parties will observe their student leaders in their main party forums and close the activity of student politics, and ii) the university administration will implement the proctorial ordinance rather rigorously. If all concerned players/agents work on these two matters with sincerity and dedication, there is no valid reason as to why we should not be able to bring healthy environment on the campus.

However, there is a big 'but' in it. Why should the students in this article says that a panel is to be nominated by the Senate. But in practice this has turned into a full-fledged election contest between the two major political parties of the country. The politics of the teachers of Dhaka University to a large extent centres around this election of the Vice-Chancellor. The teachers of the University are divided into three groups, blue, white and pink. Blue is identified as a pro-Awami League group while white is considered as a pro-BNP/Jamaat group. These two are the dominant groups at the University of Dhaka. There are teachers who are also directly involved in the activities of the political parties.

The University Senate functions like political party platform. We have seen that Vice-Chancellors chosen through the present system work like party leaders. They are certainly the victims of the process of selection and the built-in defect of the process is that they are rather forced to work like that however earnest they might be. Our students these days also identify us as belonging to a group and or a party. Many teachers are found not to carry out their normal statutory responsibilities of teaching and supervision of students prop-

erly. In my opinion the VC should be appointed directly by the Chancellor and be accountable only to him. The Chancellor may seek the advice of a search committee. If this is adopted, much of the present teacher politics would be minimised. The service conditions of the VC should be similar to that of a judge of the Supreme Court. This would give him greater freedom to run the administration as per rules and regulations.

iii) The teachers must also give up doing group and or national politics on the campus. We have lost much of our prestige and dignity. Let there be only one identity of us, i.e. we are only teachers to our students. There are people for doing national politics. Let them specialise in their area and let us concentrate on our profession. Unless we can make ourselves the moral guardians of the students and teach them properly and effectively, they will not listen to us.

iv) I have already mentioned that Article 11(i) (page 10) of Dhaka University Order 1973 should be changed. For a proper functioning of an autonomous university, a few other provisions should also be reformed. The root cause of the politics of the teachers is the present system of election to various bodies of the university. In my judgment the election system should be completely dropped from the constitution of the University.

v) The Chancellor is an appellate authority of the University. The President is the Chancellor of DU. In a judgment delivered by the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court in 1992, it has been ruled that this appellate authority is an effective statutory remedy for us. But we all know that the Chancellor's office is not an independent office to dispose of appeal matters independently. By the implication of the 12th Amendment of the Constitution, the Chancellor's office is only a rubber stamp. I believe that the Chancellor's office should be made an independent one and it should have a separate secretariat. The mere fact that all University matters are processed through the Ministry of Education and office of the Prime Minister is a sufficient proof that the Chancellor's office is not in a position to work as an independent office. Many appeal petitions have been taken years and in most cases without any relief. Therefore, it is also necessary to make provisions of law so that the President can work as an effective Chancellor and he must have a separate Chancellor's Secretariat to deal with university problems.

Having said all these, we must bear in mind that putting the universities of Bangladesh in right order would be a stupendous job. We all need to change our attitude and confine ourselves within our own jurisdiction. Before asking students to give up politics we should correct ourselves, i.e. we should give up politics.

The writer is Professor of Economics and former Dean, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Dhaka.

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cal operations. At present, we have a democratic government where the Parliament is the ultimate guardian of the society. How long shall we waste our time, energy and resources by staging war against each other on the streets? Let there be all debates and discussions in the parliament and let our children receive the best possible education. This is not a question of framing new laws to ban student politics in order to bring healthy and peacefully academic environment at the universities.

Many think that our laws are too liberal and that it permits all these violences. It may be noted here that they are sadly mistaken. A careful analysis of the relevant sections of Dhaka University Ordinances and Regulations (as amended up to June, 1986) makes it crystal clear that there is no dearth of laws in this respect. The proctorial ordinances of Chapter VIII of DU, The Calendar Part-II, (pages 23 to 26) are sufficient to define the role of student politics at DU. For correct appreciation the articles 6 and 7 (PP. 25-26) are reproduced here in its entirety.

Article 6: No student of the University individually or collectively shall declare a "strike" of the University students nor shall a student prevent another student of the University from attending the University classes, Laboratories and Library.

A student found guilty of violation of the provisions of this section will be liable to punishment up to expulsion from

hours without the previous permission of the Proctor.

A breach of this rule will be treated as breach of discipline.

It appears to me that a proper interpretation of the proctorial ordinances of the University of Dhaka certainly makes it clear that student politics is illegal according to the written provisions of the law of this university. Application of these ordinances would mean that the university authorities cannot even hold a meeting with the different students' organisations now working as students' organs of different political parties of the country. Notwithstanding all the written provisions of law, it is an irony of the fate that VCs hold meetings with them. My understanding of the law is that it is not only illegal but also highly immoral. But I would like not to give too much emphasis on legal aspects. What is important for us is to change our attitude. A VC alone cannot change the fate of a university. We can, however, ask leading politicians of the different parties, particularly former student leaders, whether they would encourage their own children to be engaged in student politics. In these days I have not come across any one of them in student politics.

If student politics were so good and beneficial for the nation, then the former student leaders should now involve their own children in student politics. I believe that all of them prefer to keep their own children at a safe distance from student politics. Is it not an in-

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The Dhaka University Order 1973 has also made a provision for choosing a VC from a panel of three persons nominated by the Senate. Thus article 11(i) (page 10) says: "the Vice-Chancellor shall be appointed by the Chancellor for a period of four years from a panel of three persons to be nominated by the Senate on such terms and conditions as may be determined by the Chancellor and shall be eligible for re-appointment for a further period of four years."

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Facing the Reality, Not Political Gimmicks, Please

How can politicians say they are always fighting for the country, when they use the people who make the majority of the population for their own selfish goals? I am sure I will never get an answer to this.

finished their airport formalities and, perhaps, waiting to grab some dinner.

The protocol officer was embarrassed and apologised to me for the incident along with the immigration officer, but added: "You know we have many Bangladeshis staying here illegally. We have to be careful." I replied: "All apples in the basket are not rotten and the visa status should have been checked." "Why didn't you tell me you are our guest?" the immigration officer asked. I only said: "I have valid documents and you should have checked it and should not be phobic about the green passport."

Well, hello Canada! Of course was brief. As I placed my passport on the immigration officer's desk, he gave a glance, pressed a bell and said: "Oh! Bangladesh!" A senior immigration officer then escorted me to his room and asked "why I was in Canada".

Since he did not bother to open the passport to check the visa category (V-1/MULTIPLE), I decided to find out what was my offence. I explained I was in New York and thought would spend part of the Easter holidays in this beautiful country. I had enough to feed and house myself.

"Which places will you be going?" I answered. "To beautiful and professionally useful destination." Few more questions... but my passport remained on the table. Then entered the external affairs ministry protocol officer who wanted to know why was I being held up as the other three had

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