

## Treat DMCH

Things are falling apart at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital. Service as an idea went out of the window there long ago. Now its equipment are going out, thanks to 'invaders' who are running a pilfering business quietly and uninterruptedly in connivance with some of the lower tier staff of the hospital. Nothing is spared by them. Even ordinary stethoscope is on the 'vanishing list'. Nobody challenges them because the 'invaders' and their associates are dangerous people and police would not bother about the complaints.

It is true over the years a symbiotic relationship has grown between police and the criminals. But the real reason why police turns a deaf ear to complains against criminality and corruption in a place like DMCH is probably because it never got the 'message' from the top to concentrate on cases like these. When asked by our correspondent about police inaction, the official concerned of the law enforcing agency came up with an answer that summed up the whole situation, "we have more priority jobs than detaining invaders." It is true and we cannot quite blame him. He is only a product of a culture. A culture that has taught him to place these cases down his priority list. But public institutions particularly those in the health sector cannot suffer perennially because of this 'priority' problem. We urge the Home Minister to take a personal initiative in this matter. We believe an effective swoop on the den of these invaders will take care of a few evils in an around that area. The colonies of lower tier government employees around DMCH, BUET and Dhaka University have virtually turned into criminals' 'barracks'. Once these places regain their pure residential character, law and order will improve.

But mere tightening of law and order won't do. Efficient administration is what our dilapidated health care sector misses most. The government attitude in this respect is baffling. Despite repeated exposés of rampant corruption, insensitive unionism and CBA tyranny in all the state-run medical facilities, it has preferred to turn a blind eye. We had suggested earlier in this column that the government should form a task force to probe into the evils devitalising the government hospitals. Furthermore, we counsel it to think about banning all sorts of union activities in the medical facilities.

## New But Not Wholesome

In a span of only five years sixteen universities came into being in this country where it took almost eighty years to have ten. If the government instituted ten can be cited as models of laggardly development, the private sixteen can be said to have had a mushroom growth. The astounding or impressive appearance — more than three every year — of the private ones somehow rings a dubious note to people used to believing universities to be truly very lofty institutions in perfect tune with other such establishments of the world, all of dizzy intellectual height and encompassing the universe in both its physical connotation and its content of ideas and cultures.

There is indeed hardly a higher point reached by all civilisation than a university. Suddenly we awake to the fact that we have sixteen such new highest points of civilization here in Dhaka and Chittagong, and Comilla, housed in rented premises and manned, in some cases, by part-time teachers rushing about making rounds of different campuses.

The University Grants Commission has come to find many serious failings of these universities. It is strange to believe a university enrolling students without fulfilling all the statutory necessities.

This is education business as usual. We believe there are exceptions here too, trying sincerely to rise to the high billing they have forced on themselves. But, to believe UGC and also our horse sense, most have so far been ventures not well-thought-out. The UGC findings leaves one no option to think otherwise.

The question is why did the government feel so generous with this novel enterprise? A case of infatuation it seems in the inexplicable absence of any arrangement of monitoring or control with regard to academic standards and financial probity. There is here a very clear case of striking out the approvals of those that haven't yet fulfilled the first minimums. Those that stay after that must answer to demands of academic excellence to be able to cut out a deserved niche. To that end they should be subjected to monitoring and UGC discipline. And, please, no more of these fledglings now. Keep these 16 under strict observation for, say, five years and act according to assessments then made.

Universities and libraries grow and not just burst out each of God's days.

## Indian EC's Precaution

The Indian Election Commission has made more of a thought provoking rather than a conclusive pre-poll announcement of seemingly any exhaustive consequence. It has put a ban not on conducting opinion surveys as such but on publishing the results thereof, from February 14 until February 28 when the crucial mid-term election will have been practically over.

In other words, going by the AP news item that flashed the EC's orders for restriction, the pollsters in India would be able to conduct the opinion polls and publish their results in the run-up to the elections except on or after February 14, the day the hustings begin.

Two reasons have been cited for the EC's partial but operationally significant ban on opinion polls. In a country as vast as India with pervasive poverty and illiteracy, opinion polls are susceptible to manipulative deflections. The underlying implication here is that cross-sectional random sampling under those unwieldy circumstances can not be relied upon as the mirror-image of broader trends of voter choices in a huge and complex matrix of the Indian electorate. More to the point for the Indian Election Commission is the lurking possibility that such opinion poll results could unfairly influence voters in the forthcoming Lok Sabha elections. Most of the recently published survey results suggest that BJP could emerge as a single majority party but not with a sufficient number of seats to form a government on its own. BJP rivals are apprehensive of the snow-balling effect of such an impression circulating; because undecided voters craving for stable government might just like to help BJP gain a working majority.

What the Indian EC is doing for the sake of fair polls does hold a message for any functioning democracy in the world.

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