

Women's space in parliament

Tokenism in a new garb

THIS is an anti-climactic disappointment bordering on betrayal of the women's cause. After keeping the whole nation waiting for two and a half years in an animated anticipation of a qualitatively improved female representation in the Jatiya Sangsad, the government seems set to dish out an apology. A very poor apology at that, given the expectations rising before being shot down.

As if to bare the lack of conviction and the opacity in regard to the female berth in parliament, the proposal approved by the cabinet came in a package: women's reserved seats, mandatory display of portraits of the president and prime minister and deadline for swearing in MPs-elect by an out-going Speaker. The very wholesale amendment-related approach sounded tactical in that it appeared to create a distraction.

Just to centre on the women's representational issue, the government has decided to raise the reserve quota for female MPs in parliament to 45 from the previous 30-seat accommodation. The process of entry will be selective rather than elective with no constituency to such reserved seats. Barring an increase in the number of seats by 15 and distribution of the total 45 seats to all parliamentary parties, subject to the caveat that a party has at least eight seats in the JS, it is old wine in a new bottle, as the expression goes.

What the government is bent upon doing comes as a rude shock to the women activist groups or the civil society at large who have put forward well-argued cases for enhancing women's participation in parliament by an increased presence through direct election. Since the original provision for reserved quota was not renewed in time, the question of amendment came about. Thus a golden opportunity presented itself for bringing the necessary changes in the representational character of the women MPs. But this is now being lost.

Law Minister Moudud Ahmed regards direct election as 'impractical' based on an argument we believe to be assailable that the size of the electorate for women's constituency would be 13-15 lakhs. The main point is, does it not renege on the electoral pledge of the BNP? It's for all to see, it does.

Alternative dispute resolution

A remedy for justice delayed

WE agree fully with chief justice Syed JR Mudassar Husain who opined that Alternate Dispute Resolution (ADR) being cheaper and speedier than the traditional justice system, can largely mitigate the sufferings of the poor population. Those who fall victim to *fatwa* in rural Bangladesh could also be saved. There is no doubt that over the years the rising expenses of legal system, inordinate delays in the disposal of cases and the huge backlog have not only shaken the confidence of people in the judiciary, but also encouraged arbitrary justice like the so-called *shalish*. And that's where we failed to meet the demand for justice.

And that's also where the CJ's recommendations for ADR hold out a promise for sustainable solution to the crisis. Building awareness at the community level on conflict or dispute resolution and creation of regular corps of trained and efficient mediators/neutrals upon whom the judges or the disputing parties can rely for this process are pivotal to the establishment of such a system. It will also be a clear move away from the arbitrary, vested interest group-sponsored derailment of justice.

Mostly the tiffs or complaints from smaller causes snowball into long-drawn-out conflicts that contribute to the mounting backlog of cases. This problem can be addressed through the alternate dispute resolution method.

Indeed, we need to take practical measures to let our citizens to get justice and get it quickly. It's time the government gave serious thoughts to an alternative procedure so that the less privileged of the society have quick access to justice.

Those who organised the regional workshop on ADR have our felicitations.

Public universities in peril



ABDUL BAYES

THE public universities (PUs) in Bangladesh, to say the least perhaps, are now in peril. Almost in all the universities, classes are not being held regularly. The guns and the goons are growling getting into the system of operations of PUs. Allegedly, rules and regulations of the universities are being violated incessantly to make the highest citadel of learning lose the last glimpse of hope. Close on the heels, session jam has been skyrocketing. Meantime, Dr Humayun Azad, an eminent writer and professor of Dhaka University was brutally assaulted by butchers' knives. The brutal assault on the eminent writer just added fuel to the already flared up flame in campuses. The nation roared with condemnation and academic activities stalled forthright. Teachers, students, and employees and politicians of all walks continued agitation against the wrath.

Of late, PUs have become points of attack by a certain quarter of the public. The reasons are not far to seek. There are admittedly some holes which need a

sealing. But the sickness in the system of governance of PUs aggravated from the very beginning of the assumption of power by the present ruling coalition. Within a month or so, the first attack was marshalled against Dhaka, Jahangirnagar and Rajshahi universities by removing the elected VCs and replacing them with people 'acceptable' to the ruling party of the day. These

harping on this point against demand for stepping down), so an elected VC cannot be removed till the tenure ends. But democracy is what democracy is perceived by the ruling parties.

As opposed to elected VCs, the selected or 'imposed' VCs soon started to show their sincerity in serving the master. Police entered into a female students' dormitory of Dhaka University to

removed with the stroke of a pen but without showing any reason whatsoever. What has been happening to NU now? Newspaper reports point out the crimes and corruptions taking place there. Hundreds of employees are allegedly being recruited at whims. Again, allegations of serious violations of rules and regulations are being raised by even pro-BNP papers and persons.

worst of all. All academic and administrative activities are stalled now. JU had to suffer set back from the on going movements of teachers and students for a long time. The session jam that could be curtailed by eight months or so by the previous regime, rose to the peak of 14 months or so. JUTA raised allegations of rampant corruption, insidious inefficiency and

the file to foil the mandate. Of course from government's side the argument could be that one of the losing candidates filed case against the results. So what? Had the High Court stayed the results? If not then government should have quickly taken the decision of appointing a new VC for JU from the panel of the liberal BNP stalwarts (God knows what would have happened if the elected three were from Awami camp!).

The implications of the dilly-dallying is far reaching as far as JU is concerned. I think the present VC should have gone to the government to say: enough is enough. Please put in someone to save the institution. Meantime the university is suffering a serious blow. Admission test, reportedly, has been postponed from the stipulated 13 March. All administrative works are stopped excepting few formalities. It may so happen that JU might have to suffer setback in the absence of judicious decisions by the government.

It is unfortunate that the policy makers are apathetic to the ongoing ailments of the PUs. It is not surprising, perhaps, given that their children have to go abroad or at least have a place in expensive private universities. But what about the children of the lower middle and low income groups who wait to get into PUs? What about building of a nation that looks forward to see the PUs perform better? So far the price of 'personal promotion' has been heavy for PUs and let us downsize the costs as early as possible.

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BENEATH THE SURFACE

It is unfortunate that the policy makers are apathetic to the ongoing ailments of the PUs. It is not surprising, perhaps, given that their children have to go abroad or at least have a place in expensive private universities. But what about the children of the lower middle and low income groups who wait to get into PUs? What about building of a nation that looks forward to see the PUs perform better?

appointees assumed power at the dead of night with no respect to the norms and customs of an institution called university. Everybody was shocked by the way they stormed into the offices of the VCs. However, mounting protests against such acts could hardly come by quickly as the initial periods were marked by a sense of insecurity.

Storms have been brewing over as these universities have historically been ruled by an act of the parliament made in 1973. Accept it or not, the rules suggest that the VCs of these universities would be selected by the Chancellor from a panel of three persons elected by a body of senate members. As an elected government would not expect a removal till its tenure is completed (so far our PM has been

beat up the inmates. It was alleged that the then 'imposed' VC was an accessory to that devilish act. Dhaka University had to reel under protests for a long time till the then VC quit to represent the country abroad. Then came the killing of a student in BUET by the armed miscreants of the JSD that put off the light of learning for a pretty long time.

The caretaker government led by Latifur Rahman injudiciously removed the earlier VC of the National University (NU), Dr Durga Das. It was not expected from a short-lived government that was not supposed to look after regular appointments. However, Dr Momin Chowdhury sat on the chair without knowing, perhaps, that the axe could also fall on his shoulder. Very soon it happened. Dr Chowdhury was

The Islamic University at Kushtia had also been reeling under regime of the present administration. Classes, examinations and overall academic environment are being threatened by the movements of teachers and students. Interestingly, a fraction of the 'pro-BNP' teachers there joined hands with pro-liberation forces to speak against the odds. The main allegations are that the present VC recruited a lot of 'Jamaat oriented' teachers.

Rajshahi University now a days hardly sees any light of learning. Islamic Chhatra Shibir allegedly threw out JCD men from the campus and everything that can happen there is happening.

In Jahangirnagar University (JU), the situation seems to be the

Jamaat feeding by the present administration. The good news was that after all the odds, in the face of fierce protests, the present 'imposed' VC was forced to declare an election for the VC panel on 19 February 2004. Surprisingly-but not sordidly perhaps- the government backed panel led by the existing VC failed to pass the test of popularity. A record breaking event took place on 19 February when another panel led by liberal BNP men stole the lead by winning all three positions (also majority of other seats).

From 19 February till the writing of this column on 7 March, there was no appointment of the new VC. Generally, it takes three to four days or even at best a week to appoint new VC. But the government is allegedly sitting on

Understanding globalisation and economic development

NEHAD CHOWDHURY

DEBATES on globalisation tend to elicit vehemently extreme views on its economic impact. Such discussions are frequently followed by related, and confusing, debates on trade policy and economic development. Most of these discourses are unproductive because they are poorly informed and incorrectly framed. Essentially, globalisation offers policymakers a wide range of options for national economic policies and the optimal solution depends on individual country characteristics. The confusion surrounding these issues is partly the result of ambiguous empirical evidence regarding the economic effects of globalisation, but mostly because some basic issues germane to globalisation are not widely appreciated. I present some context and an analytical framework for understanding the interaction between globalisation and economic development. These perspectives allow us to address development policy in a more constructive manner.

Let us first appreciate some impressive facts about global economic trends since the early nineteenth century (from Angus Maddison, OECD). World GDP grew 40-fold between 1820-1992 with a corresponding 8-fold growth in income level per person (but with divergent regional trends). The volume of global trade increased by a breathtaking 540-fold. In 1820 the income spread between the richest and the poorest regions, Western Europe and Africa, was 1:3. This inequality widened steadily to 1:16 by 1992 suggesting we are collectively worse off than ever in terms of income distribution.

In fact, these are the best of times. The increasing divergence

between the richest and the poorest nations evokes a sense of despair, but even the poorest nations are on average better off. Per capita income in Bangladesh has increased by over 250 percent in the last two decades. Bangladesh's human development indicators exhibit equally impressive gains. It is therefore amusing to hear the frequent claim that the quality of life was better in past generations. In raw economic development terms this is clearly not the case for the typical Bangladeshi.

available for consumption. Economists recognise there may be welfare losses for some individuals due to market-dictated changes in income distribution. Even in the scenario with economic losers, it is theoretically possible to make everyone better off by some policy-induced form of income redistribution. In reality this is not easily practicable. But greater openness can only explain an increase in intra-country income disparity; it does not explain the increase in differences in income levels between the rich and the poor regions of the world. So how does

cognitive potential. But what does the empirical evidence suggest?

There is a vast extent of research literature that affirms a positive relationship between trade-inducing policies and economic growth. Notable authors that proffer such evidence include Jeffrey Sachs (Columbia University), Jeffrey Frankel (Harvard University) and David Romer (University of Maryland). The IMF and OECD unequivocally endorse global integration as a necessary condition for economic growth and convergence -- the process by

multinational companies (MNCs) on productivity in multiple industries in four large developing countries (Brazil, Mexico, China, and India). In almost all cases, investments in developing countries by multinational companies fostered innovation and productivity increases. Therefore, barriers to foreign investment and trade can create a competitive disadvantage for industry in developing nations. On the other hand, targeted incentives, by creating distortions, rarely have a positive effect and often create harmful unintended consequences. The policy implication is

early 1990s. Mexico (1995), Southeast Asia (1997), Russia (1998), Brazil (1998), Turkey (2000, 2001), and Argentina (2001) have all experienced crises stemming from high levels of external indebtedness and sharp reversals in capital flows. These characteristics are directly attributable to the tighter integration of financial markets. Many proponents of globalisation would argue that the problem does not lie in globalisation, but in the absence of an international financial architecture that mitigates the effects of such crises.

The lesson for policymakers in countries like Bangladesh is that trade policy should not form the basis of an overall growth and development strategy. A country's development strategy must be constructed around country-specific characteristics in a manner that efficaciously manages the trends associated with globalisation; this does not necessarily dictate greater economic integration through increased trade and capital flows. Two shining examples of countries that benefited from conscious efforts to restrain the forces of integration are Chile (following its stabilisation plan in the 1970s) and Malaysia (following the Asian Crisis), countries that instituted draconian capital controls. Globalisation is an inescapable reality that offers choices for national economic policies; these policies must be made consistent within a framework of principles that appreciate individual country characteristics. If policymakers are able to maintain these perspectives, the best of times are indeed ahead of us.

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How do we then link globalisation to economic development? Globalisation refers to the increased interconnectedness of nation states through networks of trade, travel and communication.

Some basic economic theory (primarily related to trade and capital flows) can explain how global integration affects economic performance. There are essentially two types of economic effects. The first is a one-time effect on welfare that results from moving from a closed economy to a relatively open economy. The second is the effect on long-term growth performance -- a permanent change in the rate of growth following greater openness. We deal with each of these in turn.

Overall economic well-being increases with greater openness to trade simply by increasing the total production of goods and services

which poor countries close the gap between themselves and richer countries. However, the direction of causality remains unresolved: Does growth result in conditions conducive to increased trade? Or do policy-induced increases in trade engender more rapid economic growth? Dani Rodrik (Harvard University) and others argue that methodological problems leave the results "open to diverse interpretations." Many related questions simply remain unanswered, but it is clear that openness to trade has been relatively favourable to countries that were relatively wealthy to begin with; hence the widening gap between the rich and the poor nations. Again, this does not mean that poor countries were necessarily hurt by integration.

trade affect economic growth? Is the effect different for rich and poor countries?

The safest answer to almost any question in economics is "it depends." This is true for the question "is free trade good for growth?" Independent of the choice of growth model and empirical evidence (no single growth model is universally accepted by economists), there is reasonable agreement that technology is a significant determinant of growth. Therefore, to the extent that globalisation facilitates the exchange of knowledge, capital (through foreign direct and portfolio investments), and labour, it also increases the transfer of the associated technologies relevant for increasing productivity. This extends to technologies in medicine, agriculture and nutrition, which increase lifetime human

that "governments can more effectively grow MNC investments by putting the basic building blocks of productivity in place, through strengthened power, transportation, and legal infrastructures, and the enactment and enforcement of clear and consistent official policies."

In 2003 the McKinsey Global Institute analysed the effect of

globalisation that began in the

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OPINION

Attack on Humayun Azad: Contemplations

ROBAET FERDOUS, TAZIN AZIZ CHOWDHURY, MD. NURUZZAMAN, BIMAL BARUA, HAKIM ARIF, SALMA CHOWDHURY, ASHAQUE HOSSAIN, SHANTANAU MAJUMDER, GOBINDA CHAKRABARTY, AKSADUL ALAM, MD. MASHIUR RAHMAN, ABDUZ ZAHER, MEHER NIGAR.

rather thin, bespectacled, unobtrusive man with a shock of graying hair, puffing away at his cigarette unconcernedly in a corner of the Arts Faculty Teachers' Lounge -- this is the Dr. Humayun Azad that most of us know. Acclaimed novelist, poet and linguist and undoubtedly an exceptional teacher the man has diverse sides to his talents as well as to his nature. Outrageously outspoken, firm in his own beliefs, a champion against anything that he feels is unfair. A person who doesn't belong to any party white, blue or pink; he had demonstrated in the streets during Ershad's regime, the Awami League tenure as well as the BNP rule. His personality, brilliance and intellect inspire and awe; his wit, humor and eccentricity amuses one and all.

The news flash on the 27th of February changed the picture, it was hard to recognise the dazed, lost looking, profusely bleeding image on the TV screen as Dr. Humayun Azad. This incident has changed the equation for all of us on campus.

The news stories everyday are bad enough to depress and demoralise anyone. Many of our friends have stopped reading the newspapers because things aren't getting any better. The numbers of crimes are increasing, the

stories are becoming more horrific and blood-curdling. It seems that the society all around us has disintegrated and degenerated completely. People have lost all social bindings, moral values and human qualities and have become worse than wild animals stopping at nothing to fulfil their own selfish ends. There appears to be no such thing as law and order or justice. The law enforcers are hostages to political affiliations or up for sale to whoever can afford their services.

But we still felt safe, cocooned by a false sense of security that these atrocities wouldn't affect us, after all what could we possibly do to annoy or upset anyone. At the country's highest seat of learning we thought these things wouldn't encroach upon our mundane existence. We felt confident that we still had our freedom of expression, freedom of thought and beliefs. The 27th of February shattered all our illusions.

How could terror and repression so boldly strike one of our own in the very heart of our campus? What were the law enforcement agents doing? What about the plainclothes police and police informers and intelligence personnel who are supposedly roaming around us constantly? Why are we paying for and maintaining such agencies if they fail to perform the very duty that justifies their existence? Is their sole purpose to protect the ruling elite and spy upon prominent members of the opposition? Don't they owe us, the common people and taxpayers anything?

The month of February is important to us; we mourn the brave 'Bangalees' who died to retain our mother tongue. 21st February marks the

stirring of our freedom movement. We always commemorate this solemn occasion by holding a month long 'Boi-mela'. But what happened this time? Someone went and cold-bloodedly attempted to murder one of our most prominent writers with butcher's knives. Is this what we have become? We can pre-plan, pre-meditate and execute a plan so brilliantly. We can befriended a person, take advantage of his trust and simplicity, chat with him for hours and then brutally stab him in the back and then we can flee like the cowards and traitors that we actually are into the darkness of the night?

The rumours are endless the mud slinging predictable. The Ruling Party condemns the Opposition and vice versa, most people blame Muslim militants. When will the mutual accusation stop? Will we ever be secure, anywhere again? Will the attackers ever be identified and punished? Or will they escape unscathed and free to repeat their crimes? Or will this incident be buried and blurred by other irrelevant issues as countless past ones have been?

Nowadays people are afraid to go to the 'Boishakhi mela', afraid to go to Dhanmandi lake, afraid to send children to schools or parks, afraid of going to the bank, they are afraid inside their homes, afraid to go shopping, afraid to go anywhere, afraid of speaking, afraid of everything, they are even afraid of living. This fear has become part and parcel of our existence. After all we are ordinary people not VIP's, CIP's, MP's or politicians. They can feel safe in their air-conditioned, bulletproof protective shells. We can't we don't have money, power, influence or political clout. We can't buy or barter our safety. So our lives are of no value, we are worthless. What happens to us doesn't

bother anyone. It seems as if this nation doesn't belong to us, it doesn't need us, since no one cares for us or bothers about us.

Humayun Azad was correct in questioning in one of his novels, "Is this the Bangladesh we wanted?" After all the common man doesn't belong to this country. Humayun Azad is fighting for his life today because he dared to protest, he dared to question, he dared to criticise, he dared to exercise his right of freedom of expression, he dared to speak out. His fame, popularity, intellect and goodwill couldn't guarantee his safety. What about the rest of us? Will we be attacked and silence too? Is this a warning for all intellectuals and freethinking, open-minded, progressive people?

Who is going to give us back our sense of security and well being? Is this insecurity going to gnaw away at our souls and waste our lives? Will any political party ever be able to give us genuine security and safety? Does any of our politicians really care about us? Or will they continue bickering amongst themselves and using us as mere pawns in their power plays? Dear politicians, can any of you assure us about our safety? Can any of you guarantee that we won't be stabbed or shot or roasted or hacked to pieces tomorrow? Because we are really disappointed and frustrated by all of you, it doesn't make a difference which party is in power or who is the PM; the equation of our lives remains unchanged: insecurity, frustration and fear loom all around us. When will things really change for us?

The writers are young teachers of Dhaka University