

## Private medical colleges Adherence to rules and regulations imperative

HERE can be no doubt that the demand for qualified medical personnel in the country greatly exceeds the supply and that the government's decision to authorise private medical institutions in 1993 was inescapable. However, the fact that so many of these private institutions are below standard and produce medical practitioners who are startlingly unqualified or under-qualified is a danger that the government must move to rectify for the sake of the general public.

The privatisation of education institutions has not gone as well as hoped. It was hoped that these institutions would step in and provide opportunity to the vast swathes of the population thirsting for higher education and that the nation would itself be well served by a boost in the number of graduates. However, low standards and scant oversight continue to plague the private sector educational institutions.

This is precisely what is happening with the private medical colleges. Except, here the damage to society is even greater. The health and welfare of the people of the country are being compromised and this calls for greater government supervision.

The problem is two-fold. The first is that many of the duly authorised private medical institutions remain below standard and are unable to impart quality education to their students. The government must ensure that these institutions meet standards and that if they do not that they are shut down so as not to flood the market with unqualified graduates.

The second problem is several institutions exist only to take money from those who are desperate to receive a medical education but cannot find a berth at a reputable one due to lack of space. Some do offer rudimentary instruction, but far below what are needed. For instance, many of these do not operate under an approved curriculum and cannot offer internship opportunities.

For the sake of the students who are receiving a worthless education as well as the general public who must be ministered to by these under-qualified practitioners, the government must hold the wayward private medical college establishment accountable.

## Tigers draw a blank

Better planning needed to improve performance

AS Stephen Fleming and his boys made a clean sweep of Test matches and ODIs, the one-sided drubbing of our national cricket team is sinking in us as a deeper frustration with each passing day. The New Zealanders were clearly the better side and really deserved to win the way they did.

But what about our boys? They seem to be caught in an unending cycle of poor performance, with the 'Test status' sticking around their neck like the proverbial dead albatross. The fans are left to wonder whether the task of proving themselves equal to the test status, they acquired too quickly, is exerting a pressure they seem hard-put to handle. One would have thought that it should have boosted their morale to perform better.

The bowlers did reasonably well to restrict their stronger opponents, but the batting has been pathetic. Clearly, we cannot go far with this kind of batting which never clicks, not even when they have to chase a very modest total! Why can't the batsmen stay at the wicket and make runs as well? And why are they playing shots that are strictly prohibited in the book?

The present structure of domestic cricket and the way we are trying to build the national team have a lot to do with the way we are faring. Domestic cricket is seen as the breeding ground of top class players all over the world. But for some inexplicable reasons we are moving towards shorter and shorter version of it. So, technique and concentration are the big casualties. Then the rush towards new blood has also been an indiscreet move with the youngsters, given a break a bit too early, finding top class cricket a trifle heavy going. Of course, new players have to be encouraged and patronised, but we are unlikely to produce many talented players when the game is confined to one institution like the BKSF. The solution lies in organising more and more cricket at the school and college level across the country.

The cricket bosses have more reasons to worry than any time before. The sales proceeds on the first day of the Chittagong Test were abysmally low. That could well mean that even crowd support, one of our strong points, is dwindling rapidly.

MUZAMMEL HUQ

ALTHOUGH the world will not run out of oil tomorrow, the world is nearing the end of what might be called the easy oil. Even in the best of circumstances, the oil that still remains will be more costly to find and produce and less dependable than the oil being used today. This fact means not only higher prices, but also more volatile prices. This will make it difficult to see how rapidly oil supplies are being depleted, and even more difficult to know when the world would need to start looking for a new energy regime.

When does oil production peak? In theory, the production of oil reaches a peak when half the original supply has been pumped from the ground. This holds true for a single well or the collective behaviour of all oil wells on the planet. With half the supply consumed, it simply gets more difficult and harder to maintain the same levels of production.

Oil is a finite substance, and at some point, all the oil being discovered around the world will no longer replace the oil that has been produced, and global production will peak. The term 'peak' suggests a neat curve with production rise slowly to the halfway point, then tapering off gradually to zero. As the worlds approach the peak in production, soaring prices --

seventy, eighty or even a hundred dollars a barrel -- will encourage oil companies and oil states to scour the planet for oil. Oil companies and oil states will find it harder and harder to maintain current production levels and hence keep up with rising consumption.

Presumably, if one knows the total volume of oil the world had to begin with as well as the amount of oil that has already been con-

sumed and the amount that will be used in the future then one can predict the arrival at a depletion 'midpoint' and thus the production peak.

Since the dawn of the Oil Age beginning exactly on October 27, 1859, the world (mostly Western) has used about 875 billion barrels. Estimates of the amount of oil still in the ground are tremendously suspect, and there lies the crux of the problem.

When one asks, how much oil is left in the ground, one is talking about two kinds of oil, proven and undiscovered. Proven is the term used for oil in fields that have

already been discovered but not yet pumped out. According to the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), one of the most widely quoted oil agencies in the world, the world's proven reserves stand at 1.7 trillion barrels, over half of which are in the Middle East. Undiscovered oil, by contrast, is oil whose existence has not yet been confirmed by the drill but is strongly indicated by various geological markers. Undiscovered oil is the excit-

ing oil -- the stuff of romantic stories. In theory, undiscovered oil fields are scattered around the world, but certain regions, are favoured, i.e. Siberia, Western Africa, Eastern South America, and the Caspian. According to the USGS, undiscovered oil amounts to perhaps 900 billion barrels. Adding proven and undiscovered oil deposits together, the total stands at 2.6 trillion barrels. Given the fact that world oil consumption now 80 million barrels a day, continues to grow at the rate of 2 percent per year, a 2.6 trillion-barrel count would reach its peak around 2030 or slightly later if

world consumption for oil reason or other slows for or reason or another.

The problem is that both numbers, those for proven and for undiscovered, are doubtful. Estimates of proven reserves are routinely exaggerated for economic and political gain. Generally speaking, oil producers raise their reserve estimates in only two situations. When new discoveries are made or when some new assessment methodology reveals that there is more oil in existing reserves than previously stated. But none of the six OPEC countries had made any significant new discoveries during 1980-2003 periods, nor has assessment technology suddenly improved.

Many oil optimists, including the USGS, believe that a huge amount of oil remains to be found (as stated earlier) -- anywhere from 1 trillion to 1.5 trillion barrels. The problem is, few places on earth remain where all that oil could be hiding but oil companies have not already explored. Oil is a not a random geological event,

something that can occur just anywhere. It is the product of complex geological processes that take place only under certain quite specific conditions.

Petroleum systems exist all over the world and comprise anything from small entities producing just a few hundred barrels a day to the massive systems in the Middle East that together account for half the world's known oil reserve. Yet for all their variety, all petroleum

systems operate according to a set of rigid natural rules.

Oil, in other words, is a relatively rare phenomenon, produced only in certain geological spaces, under certain conditions. Worldwide there exists approximately six hundred petroleum systems capable of producing commercial volumes of oil and gas. Of these, four hundred have already been explored. The remainder exists in places like the Arctic or in deep offshore waters, remote and difficult to explore. Oil companies will turn to these difficult areas only after exploiting the more accessible oil.

In fact when one charts the average volume of oil that has been discovered each year since the beginning of the 20th century, it becomes clear that new oil is indeed getting harder to find, year after year. The volume of newly discovered oil climbed steadily upward from 1859 to 1961. Since then oil companies have found, on average, a little less oil each year -- with the exception in the late 1990s, as big finds were announced in the Caspian region, off the shore of West Africa, and in the Gulf of Mexico. In fact, since 1995, the world has consumed 24 billion barrels of oil a year but has found, on average, just 9.6 billion barrels of new oil annually. According to a study by Wood Mackenzie Consultants, the oil industry is finding less than 40 percent of new resources of oil it needs to keep the base of known reserves from shrinking.

Right now, an army of experts, many of them former oil company geologists, have devoted themselves to calculating the date of the peak and are busy producing highly detailed and gruesome post oil peak scenarios, most involving worldwide recession, political chaos, and military conquest of the Middle East by desperate industrialised nations led by the United States.

Muzammel Huq is retired General Manager of GramenBank.

# Two-thirds majority and people's expectations

MUSTAFAZUR RAHMAN

A state to function effectively, its citizens need to agree on the rules of the game. If the rules are observed, then the decisions are accepted as legitimate. Constitutionality is a precondition of the rule of law and the continuity of the form of government.

A good constitution must provide protection for the citizens' right and freedom on which the state must not be permitted to encroach and a constitutional change should be hedged about with labourious formalities, necessary to deter ill-considered experiments and forestall hasty decisions. Bangladesh constitution requires the support of two-thirds majority for amendment to it -- except for Preamble or any provision of article 8, 48 and 56 -- which the coalition government enjoys.

Our constitution was framed in a hurry under special circumstances after independence in 1971 accommodating 150 national and 150 provincial assembly members of Pakistan time. This is how the idea of 300 members came in. The constitution flipped-flopped from presidential to parliamentary, and then from single-party BAKSAL to military rules and then to multi-party system. Like constitutions of many other countries, ours also provides for democracy to be realised through parliamentary polity and also elected local self-government.

We can't say, our present constitution does not have good provisions, but people's right and freedom, and the responsibility of the executive branch of the state are abridged and compromised here and there. This is probably natural for any constitution moulded by a

party or government in power to provide for unbridled power minus accountability and responsibility that go with power. Such provisions are good for government machinery but undesirable to the general people and even the parliament members not in a position to exercise executive power.

What is apparently good for the party in power immediately turns to be unbearable when the party goes out of power. The adminis-

tration they themselves happen to politicise starts treating them differently. The parliaments hardly bothered so far to take up changes in the provisions of the constitution or laws, to make them compatible to a free people.

Many thought of it, but as the job is colossal and does not bring immediate financial benefit, it was deferred by most regimes. Meanwhile, the changes made so far are either superficial or intended to give more discretionary power to some sections of administration. This gave rise to scope and practice of abuse of power, which in turn developed mistrust among parties in power and the parties out of it.

The parties remain locked in mudslinging and the bureaucracy rules the country without well-thought and responsible political guidance in the interest of the people in general. The caretaker Government system is an innovative mechanism born out of that mistrust. This may however be given a better shape supported by

a non-party National Security Council on permanent basis. It is generally viewed that the present parliament membership is a part-time job. There is chronic lack of quorum and parliament boycott. This is encouraged by the constitutional provision of article 70 that takes away the fundamental rights and freedom of parliament members in exercising their conscience in voting in parliament.

It is argued that election is

of progress, destruction of the development potential, perpetuation of causes of poverty, voluntary subordination to dependence on external dictates, non-establishment of the office of Ombudsman, non-enforcement of compulsory education, non-introduction of real non-party, effectively functional local self-government, and mismanagement of national economy that should be geared up to prepare the nation for economic take-off in a right

There are confusions about whether investment by TATA is in our interest and shall be allowed, and whether foreigners should be allowed to buy land here under any condition, whether purchase of land or natural resource directly or indirectly should at all be considered as foreign investment, what should be the conditions for selective foreign inward investments (which Japan and S. Korea consciously resisted and restricted in their early stage), what should be

roads, bridges, flyovers, railway, etc.?

These may be guided by incorporating general provisions in the constitution so that we do not have to falter and tumble in every steps of decision making with respect to approval, planning and implementation even under any changed circumstances. A lot of educated homework is necessary. There is no scope of shortcut and oversimplification. Time is running out very fast.

With two-thirds majority, the coalition government can take responsible initiative to pave the way for framing comprehensive development policy and plan without tumbling at every step and work on comprehensive constitutional amendment that can also provide for alternative to Hartal, and a mechanism of institutionally checking social disorder by introducing scientific local self-government and Koban (Police Box) system of Japan that is successfully adopted by presently advancing South East Asian countries.

People expect and pin hope on this government to do something great and farsighted by using, not abusing the present opportunity. If they happen to do it with trust in people, I believe, people will not betray them in the coming election as well. Trickery may not pay in the long run. Incidentally, the author has already presented a proposal for such comprehensive amendments to the constitution to the Ruling party as well as some members of other parties for study. A good system that is good for the people and the state is also good for politicians of any thought and philosophy. Politics may then be a healthy politics of competition to serve the people better and to debate on serious national issues.

Mustafzur Rahman, PhD, is Chairman, The Institute of Development Strategy, Dhaka. The views expressed are of the author's own and not necessarily of the organisation he represents.

With two-thirds majority, the coalition government can take responsible initiative to pave the way for framing comprehensive development policy and plan without tumbling at every step and work on comprehensive constitutional amendment that can also provide for alternative to Hartal, and a mechanism of institutionally checking social disorder by introducing scientific local self-government. People expect and pin hope on this government to do something great and farsighted by using, not abusing the present opportunity.

## TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE

## EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

### "Ohio has failed the world"

"Ohio has failed the world" was one of the most juvenile reactionary things I've read anywhere outside of discussion forums. Though buried in that ridiculous ramble were a few shadows of fact, the overall content was about as focused as a 15-yr old in a first-run civics class.

The reason the self-important Democrats lost the election is simple: it is exactly this type of self-loathing rhetoric and holier than thou preaching about what is best for 'you' that has alienated a thinking voter. How dare anyone be so arrogant to tell people what is best for them. The author is a case study in this point. The Democratic party and those who support it can no longer disguise this element within the ranks. You will see a continuing trend to the further right if you cry-babies don't stop with your rhetoric. Learn this lesson; this is a free republic and by its very nature those who chose to live here do not like to be told by anyone else what is best

for them. We the people can and will decide for ourselves.  
Concerned  
One-mail

Obviously you do not understand or comprehend the social structure, moral, ethical and family values of the majority of the citizens of the United States. We are not all evangelical Christians, "red-necks", illiterate or uneducated. We do not believe that the likes of Bruce Springsteen, Eminem, Bon Jovi or the rest of Hollywood nor do the elitist espouse the values, morals or ethics for us.

The Democratic party has lost touch with the true values of the people.

Kerry began his campaign with lies about his military service, snubbed the "common" people, never had the courage to take and hold a viewpoint about a subject, but went with the latest poll to determine his position.

Sir, as for you, when you have been out in the real world, worked

for a living, paid taxes, owned property, raised a family, and served your country you will understand. Your implied values and your statements are exactly what the majority of the citizens of the United States are tired of hearing and having showed onto them by the courts.

Dave House  
Clarksville, VA

Zaied Ali wrote a Point-Counterpoint article on Sunday November 7. I wanted to note that while I thought some of his musings were a bit presumptive it is interesting to note that Greg Palast, the investigative reporter who first pointed out voter fraud in Florida in the 2000 election, has found irregularities in Ohio and New Mexico. He found that Gore won in Florida by thousands of votes and is now learning that Kerry probably won in Ohio.

Jeremy Mooer  
Fort Collins, CO

Concerning the very biased viewpoint of the article "Ohio has failed the world" by "Zaied Ali". It is

quite simple, really. Mainstream America rejects the trend towards International Socialism and, for the most part, Fabian Socialism. With a little luck, Thesis, Anti-thesis, Synthesis is about to make a 180 degree turn.

To those readers who may not know what I'm talking about, I would highly recommend you do some research. The year 1884 is a good place to start. Question what you have been taught, and remember: "history is written by the victors", so you will have to dig for the truth. Hopefully some of that is left in your part of the world.

Jmallernee  
One-mail

### 'Hunting season' begins

I am a regular commuter of buses in Dhaka city. I am quite accustomed to the harassment by police sergeants that bus drivers are subjected to. The violation of the unwritten and unconventional norms leads to the inspection of

'papers' containing a Tk 100 note in general case. (In special cases it may rise to some 500). The police 'inspection' is crossing all limits as the Eid is nearing. Now at a 'strategic point' there are some four or five sergeants, instead of the usual one. And even the custom of inspection in case of violation of 'unconventional norms' has become null and void. They are charging the bus drivers at will. "Ami ki rong (wrong) korlam?" (what mistake have I done?) kind of plea is going to deaf ears.

Generally, there are two conductors in a bus-- one is there to collect the fares and the other to call people and more importantly keep an eye on the sergeant who sometimes hides in a nearby shop apparently to commit a 'wrong' and then to get the money. To my utter surprise I saw some buses employing an extra conductor with the sole objective to watch for the sergeants. Bus drivers also say that besides the 'strategic points', new points have been discovered and manned by sergeants.

Even we, the passengers, sometimes have to sympathise with the unfortunate bus drivers who get 'caught' twice or thrice, in the span of some ten to fifteen minutes.

Saif  
Dhaka

### Deaths in Thailand

I read the letter written by Mr. Barua (DS Nov.1, 2004) with disgust. Whenever Muslims protest the murder of fellow Muslims, their governments, news media and the very air they breathe is condemned as being 'sectarian', and 'biased'. It is statements by people like Mr. Barua that divide people in the name of religion.

A massacre is a massacre, no matter how it is reported. The Daily Star is one of the best newspapers around, and its reporting is always balanced, unlike some newspapers around the world. I pray for those brave people killed in Thailand because of their religious faith and for protesting

against injustice. Hopefully, Mr Barua will do the same.

Shomit Chowdhury  
One-mail

### Huda's theory on Hasina's security

The Daily Star reported on November 4 that Communications Minister Nazmul Huda, while commenting on the August 21 grenade attack, said, "Although it's claimed that the target was the Awami League president, there's no doubt in the public mind that the Almighty had ensured the security of the opposition leader" adding that it proved that by the grace of Allah no one will be able to kill the Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina, and "And for this, by the grace of Allah, the opposition leader will not require the Special Security Force (SSF) or any special security measure for her protection." By the minister's logic, since there have been no attempts on the life of the prime minister and the

president, there is no need for any special security measures for either of them. Should we assume that their security details will be eliminated until they come, God forbid, an attack? The fact is that Bangladesh has factional and confrontational politics; violence and confrontation are a way of life, decorum is minimal, and political leaders of major parties are viewed as enemies of each other. And we have all grown to see peaceful demonstrations or gatherings being attacked by opposing political parties.

As it is the responsibility of the government to provide security to the general population, it must be the responsibility of the government to provide security as is necessary and appropriate-- and not dependent on politics or divine intervention-- for those public figures. It must not dismiss the issue of security so lightly.

MM Huque  
New York