

Education and not politics

No to teacher and student politics on campus

THE deliberations on whether partisan politics should be allowed on the campuses of educational institutions have touched upon a subject of immense national importance. It was a timely initiative of Nagorik Sanghati taken on Saturday at the National Press Club. We cannot but agree with the speakers when they said that students and teachers should not delve into partisan politics. We at the same time feel that more such discussions should be held by those who feel equally concerned about the detrimental effects of partisan politics on our campuses.

There is no denying that politics of the kind that we have witnessed over and over again on the campuses of the country was anything but hooliganism of the worst possible depiction. It overpowered all semblance of civility, decency and rationale and entangled students and teachers with the mainstream political parties and their narrow partisan and often corrupt agenda. As a consequence, the academic environment of the institutions was severely blemished and education suffered mortal blow. In fact, education became the secondary issue in many of these institutions while partisan politics became the number one pursuit.

When we recall the glorious chapters in our national history, we find the involvement of both students and teachers in every movement to right the wrongs and to establish the basic rights of the people. Nowhere have students and teachers sacrificed their lives for their country in such large numbers as they did in this country. But those illustrious people never for a moment thought about their narrow partisan interests or gain.

Our position on the question of partisan politics on the campuses has been very clear from the very outset. We feel every student and teacher has the basic right to take part in politics in the national context. But we are totally against giving space to partisan politics in educational institutions either by students or teachers. Students on the campuses should get involved in student welfare activities and they should not go beyond this parameter. Teachers should also refrain from creating division in the name of doing politics at the behest of the political parties they support. Their job is to teach and they should remain focused on this noble task. If they want to do politics they should join political parties and involve themselves outside the university premises. We believe there is a national consensus on this vital issue.

Winning against South Africa

It's a great boost for confidence

BANGLADESH'S victory against a formidable South Africa has caused the biggest upset in the ongoing World Cup cricket. The triumph against the Proteas was no mean achievement. The team's first ever victory against South Africa came about following two heavy defeats against Australia and New Zealand. Of significance also is the fact that the score made was the highest ever in the seven World Cup competitions Bangladesh has participated in, though the fact remains that the team had caused yet another upset when it defeated Pakistan in 1999. This victory was indeed a well-deserved one because it came after a well-fought battle. The Bangladesh team simply played superior cricket compared to its opponent South Africa. The team's agility in the field was particularly noticeable. One other aspect worth noticing was the performance of the lower order batsmen at a time when the Tigers were already struggling at 84 for 4, to finally reach a total score of 251.

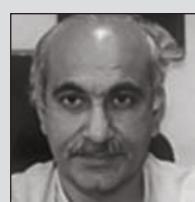
However, as much as we are delighted and happy with the excellent performance by our team, it is our belief that now is also the time not only to dwell on the victory alone and be carried away by emotion but also to critically analyze and assess the factors that led to the victory. Our players must also identify their strengths and weaknesses and work on them most sincerely as called for and thereby derive benefits from the lessons learned.

Now is also the time to sit back and think as to why and how formidable teams like Pakistan and India made an unceremonious exit from the World Cup. Our cricket experts and players must always remember that cricket is both a mind and team game. The collective efforts of a team are more important than a reliance on a display of sparks of brilliance by individual cricketers every now and then. If we are able to concentrate and become a quality team with high commitment and faith in ourselves, victory will be ours time and again. We should remember that there is no substitute for total physical fitness.

On a different note, let this victory teach us to be humble and yet strong. Once again we hail our cricketers for a victory well deserved.

Let cricket and Bangladesh be synonymous.

Gore's revenge



MJ AKBAR

Would Jesus have gone to war in Iraq? Part of the answer may lie in the fact that the question is being asked. Four Easters ago there was conviction, as much in the newsroom as in the White House. Doubt is a necessary precondition for peace, or at least reconciliation. The question was posed repeatedly on Saturday morning Easter TV programs, as a resplendent variety of pastors queued up to address dilemmas on war, peace and whether the church of poverty had been consumed by the church of prosperity.

miraculous ability of Baba Manjhi or Sanjhi to foresee your future for the usual cash compensation, as well as to warn you that every other astrologer in the city is a fraud.

But there is no creepy crawler at the bottom of the screen giving running details of the score or, worse, advertisements featuring the unique contralto of the Sachin Squeak. What bliss!

The only intrusion from Mars is the regrettable presence of the BBC, regrettable because BBC has the effrontery to attach World Cup news to its sports section. I see no future for BBC America in America if it continues this head-in-the-sand obstinacy.

Liliputization of paper giants and more



SHAHNOOR WAHID

SENSE & INSENSIBILITY

This time it was the turn of the paper giants to jump back in mortal fear. In a couple of hours, from twenty feet giants they shrank to attain the form of dwarfs, both physically and mentally. They screamed hoarse at the sudden change of fate, but their faint sound hardly reached the people of normal height. This time the same malnourished people

venom at the "ekti mahal" that is supposedly selling the country to some foreign bidders. This one act play went on and on, day in and day out, with no respite.

And while we were desperately watching ourselves sinking into the bottomless pit, thinking there was no way out of it, some amazing things began to happen, something straight out of a classic novel, or something similar to the real life drama surrounding the fall of Bastille. The malnourished people turned around, they stormed the citadel of power, they looked straight into the eyes of the bloated giants and they brought out small needles.

There was a time when these twenty feet giants walked about, the earth under their feet shook and everyone ran helter-skelter in mortal fear. They ate cakes and hollered mightily before the starving *jana* (people), and the malnourished people trembled in fear.

They roared like lions, they soared like eagles, and they struck like cobras. People looked in awe at the twenty feet giants sitting on the podium, spitting

change of fate, but their faint sound hardly reached the people of normal height. This time, the same malnourished people appeared like twenty feet giants before the shrunken, corrupt men.

Dynamics of dynastic rule

By now, the could-have-been-prince(s) of the could-have-been-dynastic-rule must have come to full realisation that this country is nobody's father's, mother's, husband's or uncle's property. By now the point has been driven home that the sons, son's friends, sons-in-law have no birthright on even a millimeter of this country.

Therefore, from here on, the very *khæesh* (wish) of sitting on the lap of one's mother with a lollipop in the mouth, and ruling over the people, has to be thrown in the gutter. Otherwise mother, brother,

son, et al, will find gutters not so comfortable a place to spend the rest of their lives.

They need to be told point blank that idiots have no place in the serious business called "running the administration and partaking in nation building." How can some morons, whose mental development has not come round full circle, handle something as solemn and grave as nation building? And, think of it, some of these morons were about to be put on the throne by the cunning players in the game of politics? Clever election engineers had set up a trap for the people to get entrapped in forever.

It's a shame that literate patriotic people have been keeping quiet for the last fifteen years, while the never-ending orgy of denuding the public coffers had been going on in broad daylight! It's a shame that many of the

educated illustrious sons and daughters of the soil had joined the corrupt political parties for halua roti (fringe benefits), forgetting their antecedents, their credibility, self-esteem and commitment to their own conscience!

It's a shame that most of them joined a party only to have the power and opportunity to pour scorn on the late respected leaders of the other party, in language most foul. They hardly had the faculty to comprehend that by doing so they only brought their late leaders to their own wretched level.

Enough is enough. Now, the million dollar question is: Shall we allow the same morons to return to power so that once again they can loot our wealth? The opportunity has been created by the people to banish them for good, and banish we must. Otherwise, at the first opportunity, these corrupt politicians would strike back at all of us with vengeance and renewed vigour.

Brainwashing young urban students

While we are concentrating all our attention on the tin-thieves, another quarter has been trying to consolidate its power base in Bangladesh. This time around they have targeted the urban students of affluent families, to

trap them into working towards destabilising social order and equilibrium.

The recent arrest of dozens of such young students from a secret meeting at Mohammadpur only proves the point. It is, indeed, a matter of utmost concern that new militant groups are coming up everyday in Bangladesh, despite the busting of the dens of some well-known ones.

Why such a proliferation of militant groups? Who are the people brainwashing young students to take up such a risky enterprise? There are reports that some teachers of private universities and other higher educational institutes are secretly organising such meetings to recruit students to carry out their plans.

How well the law enforcing agencies are empowered to track such destructive elements is an issue that has to be looked into. We feel that some specially trained detective bodies need to be created and deployed to collect information on the activities of the future militants, and catch them with evidence, along with their godfathers. To save this nation, tin-thieves and militants must be apprehended and put behind bars for good.

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collection of income-tax. Further, the then finance minister's observation "it is also not justified to impose wealth-tax every year on the market value of the wealth of an assessee" is very naive.

The owners of the properties whose value increases year to year enjoy the unearned increment without contributing anything towards the development of the country. To tax them is most justified, and not to tax them is unethical.

In conclusion, let me insist on re-imposition of wealth tax. This tax, with the present tax administrative set-up, is the least expensive to collect, and assessment is also least cumbersome. There is almost no additional cost to the government. The annual revenue from this source alone will not be less than Taka five hundred crore.

I think the decision to withdraw wealth-tax was political, because both the big political parties of our country consisted of a considerable number of big businessmen and industrialists who were deadly against imposition of wealth-tax. So, it was an unpopular tax to the then members of parliament. In this respect I would quote the great Malaysian, former prime minister Mohathir Mohammad, who said during his Bangladesh visit that: "Governments cannot always do popular things if they want to govern well, and doing the right things is often unpopular."

FHM Masoom is a freelance contributor to The Daily Star.

An appeal to reimpose wealth tax

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FHM MASOOM

IT seems that the present caretaker government is going to reform quite a number of vital sectors. We now expect that it will look towards augmenting the revenue of the government and reducing the prevailing alarming trend of increase in inequality of wealth.

The existing sources of revenue of our country seem to be inadequate, and the direct taxes are becoming difficult to collect in the face of repeated natural disasters and fluid political and social conditions obtaining in the country. Being bewildered by the low collection of income tax, the immediate past finance minister also approved the abolition of wealth-tax.

Wealth-tax was introduced by the government of Pakistan in 1963 with the intention of discouraging concentration of wealth in a few hands. It was adopted by the government of Bangladesh, and continued till June 30, 1998. The Finance Act 1999 repealed Wealth Tax Act 1963 and, instead, proposed to bring tax collection on the basis of wealth under the income tax law.

To give effect to this, surcharge was imposed at the rate of ten percent on the amount of income-tax payable by an assessee whose net wealth at acquisition cost exceeded Taka ten lac. The reason given for repealing the Wealth Tax Act was that the tax officers spent more time and energy on income-tax cases, which meant that they could not give adequate time or importance to assessment of wealth-tax. It was also thought by the then finance minister that there was no justification for imposing wealth-tax every year on the market value of an assessee.

The Finance Act 2002 proposed the withdrawal of the provision of imposition of surcharge. It was thought by the immediate past finance minister that imposition of surcharge with a bearing on

income-tax was a big distortion in the tax regime, and was repugnant to the ethics of taxation. He also thought that it was a totally immoral step to bring back wealth-tax in the guise of surcharge. So surcharge was dropped.

In this respect, I have got something to say about the sources of revenue in our country. Our government is heavily dependent on import duty and VAT. But these taxes are indirect taxes whose effect falls heavily on the average people, who are mostly poor. The only direct tax which hits the taxpayer individually is income-tax.

Here, also, the rate of tax has been so designed that it falls heavily on the marginal tax payers who are mostly composed of the urban middle class and the low middle class income earners. If they have to pay income tax in the highly inflationary condition existing in the country they are to pay through their noses, and so many of them are compelled to indulge in corruption.

On the other hand, the higher income earners are enjoying relatively low rate of income tax. In this sense, our income tax is not progressive but regressive. Let me emphasize that the middle and low middle-income earners are the backbone of the work force of the country. Taxing them unreasonably will hamper their productivity. Income-earners having annual income ranging from Taka one lakh to two lakhs are the worst sufferers.

To remove their hardship the minimum taxable limit should be raised to Tk 1,50,000 -- and the

marginal tax should be reduced to Tk 1,000.

Under the above circumstances, when the flow of foreign loans and grants is going to be lean, and the only direct tax, income-tax, is not equitable, then it will be sensible and practicable to re-impose wealth-tax, which is levied on the rich people only. Its re-imposition will augment the government's revenue to a considerable extent.

Wealth-tax is leviable at a certain rate on the net wealth of a taxpayer, as may be prevalent on the valuation date of each year. The net wealth is the aggregate value of all assets, reduced by all debts owed by the taxpayer, on the valuation date. This tax is payable only by individuals.

All categories of partnership firm and joint stock companies are excluded from payment of wealth-tax. In the matter of assessment and collection of wealth-tax it may be called a by-product of income tax. The procedure for assessment and collection of wealth-tax follows almost the same pattern as laid down in the income tax Ordinance, 1984.

No additional personnel are required to assess and collect the tax. It is easy to assess and collect the tax. There will be almost no additional cost to the government. It will take less time to complete the assessment than for income-tax. It will be more economical and less time consuming to chase one wealth-tax assessee to collect Taka one lakh than to chase 30 lower middle class income tax assesses who would pay Tk. 3000/- only per head.

Wealth tax Act 1963 was introduced in Pakistan due to economic conditions obtaining during that time. There was heavy concentration of wealth in the hands of a small number of people and families in Pakistan. Evasion of income-tax was widespread. Even promulgation of two Marital Law Regulations could not restrict that.

Concealed income was utilised for acquisition of property, and also for wasteful purposes.

news story on an inside page, is enough to indicate why. This is what appeared in the papers on Good Friday: "Six Americans and four British soldiers were killed in separate attacks around Iraq ... an American helicopter crashed south of Baghdad, wounding four soldiers.

Indeed, this lapse is not of their own volition. It was the policy maker's fault, by giving more importance to income tax than wealth tax. If equal importance was given to income-tax and wealth-tax, I am sure that the collection of wealth-tax would exceed the

room as in the White House. Doubt is a necessary precondition for peace, or at least reconciliation.

The question was posed repeatedly on Saturday morning Easter TV programs, as a resplendent variety of pastors queued up to address dilemmas on war, peace and whether the church of poverty had been consumed by the church of prosperity.

The contemporary heirs of the church militant, like Jerry Falwell, are certain that Jesus would have been an excellent commander-in-chief in a holy war between good guys and bad guys. Others are less sanguine.

Two thousand years ago the Romans were the bad guys, with some assistance from the Pharisees. Jesus was angry at usurers who cheated the poor, and false leaders who misled the innocent; he left way to Caesar. The Sermon on the Mount would probably be too liberal a manifesto for today's realists. But enough. This is a faith weekend, and this column is in serious danger of drifting towards being a sermon.

MJ Akbar is Chief Editor of the Asian Age.

BYLINE

Would Jesus have gone to war in Iraq? Part of the answer may lie in the fact that the question is being asked. Four Easters ago there was conviction, as much in the newsroom as in the White House. Doubt is a necessary precondition for peace, or at least reconciliation. The question was posed repeatedly on Saturday morning Easter TV programs, as a resplendent variety of pastors queued up to address dilemmas on war, peace and whether the church of poverty had been consumed by the church of prosperity.

temporary visitors.

This is what happens when you don't make Al Gore president of the United States just because of a few chaps in Florida. He takes his revenge by changing the climate of the world. Spring has arrived in New York, but instead of fragrant breezes through Central Park, the city is shivering under snow flurries and a wind that was so cold that Canada let it go to America.

In the BG era (Before Gore), sturdy New Yorkers would have called this unseasonal, put on their overcoats and gone off to church on Easter Sunday. But now we have to discuss the litany of a parallel faith, Earth Science, full of measure-

ments of carbon emission and dire predictions that the polar bear will be extinct in fifty years unless, of course, drought kills us all before that. Progress now is recognition of the evils of progress. Amen.

Al Gore may be able to convert summer into winter, and win an Oscar for being the prophet of gloom, but every serious political pundit believes that he cannot really win the next election for president.

Gore himself is in a mood to tease, saying no with such a heavy implied wink that it would take an extinct polar bear to miss the point. However, the pundits would prefer that he save his cash and stay at home. Why? Because he is still too fat to contest. Unless he loses about fifty pounds, he has no hope in this telegenic age. Television puts on ten pounds to your image, and Internet is worse, but that is where elections are won and lost these days. Weight shifts ratings down.

Has McCain slipped because of his expanding jowl? After all, we are still in the cosmetic stage of the campaign. Bill Clinton, who had begun to bloat as president, now looks like Cary Grant with a round nose, having cut down his consumption after his heart attack (barring ice creams, that is). Hillary is a bit stolid on the frame front, but fine. She has fat legs, but never shows them. That is why she always wears pants.

The campaign is about Iraq, and will continue to be so. One day's

surprise package of this election season, Barack Obama, who stunned the system by raising as much in the first quarter as the Clintons (\$25 million) is lean, lithe, limissom. His equivalent on the

news story, on an inside page, is enough to indicate why. This is what appeared in the papers on Good Friday: "Six Americans and four British soldiers were killed in separate attacks around Iraq