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ICDDR,B Alumni Association

The ICDDR,B was established by an ordinance of the government of Bangladesh in 1978, which was subsequently ratified by Parliament. Its predecessor organisation, the Cholera Research Laboratory (CRL), was set up under an agreement with the government of Pakistan, when Bangladesh was part of that country.

Both the CRL and the ICDDR,B have contributed enormously towards addressing the public health problems in Bangladesh. Their contributions have global implications. This has been made possible with the untiring and selfless efforts of many Bangladeshis over the years of their work at the Centre, together with the work of a few dedicated Western colleagues. However, the Centre unfortunately has also been responsible for some of its work, particularly related to vaccine trials, which have proved quite detrimental to the interests of Bangladeshis.

Those who had provided their valuable time and efforts in the activities of the Centre over the years since 1960 formed the ICDDR,B Alumni Association in 2002 upon their retirement from the ICDDR,B. The overriding objective of the Alumni Association is to enable the former staff of the Centre to continue to advance the mission and vision of the Centre on a purely voluntary and honorary basis as the bridge between the existing and the former staff, and serve as the ambassadors of the Centre, both within the country and outside.

After the formation of the Alumni Association in 2002 with around 400 former staff of the Centre, an Executive Committee was elected and a constitution was framed. The Alumni Association continued its activities, as per the constitution. However, suddenly on December 8, 2006 at the last general meeting of the Alumni Association, when the office-bearers of the new Executive

Committee were proposed, Dr David Sack, the immediate past Executive Director, quite arbitrarily and without any lawful authority, opposed the election of the new Executive Committee, and announced dissolution of the Association. This came as a big shock to over 250 alumnus who left the Centre totally frustrated and dejected. In this way, Dr. David Sack is denying the alumnus their right and privilege clearly in violation of the Association's constitution.

Through your daily, I would like to draw the attention of the relevant authorities of the government of Bangladesh as well as the Board of Trustees and the senior management and staff of ICDDR,B to set the Centre in order and once again allow the Alumni Association to carry on with its activities unhindered, as per the constitution.

President
ICDDR,B Alumni Association
Dhaka

making in crucial areas.

This body should have the power to look into the ministries' plans and progress.

Arafat Islam Tona, Dallas, US

Proposed UGC recruitment rules

This refers to the news item on the uniform rules to be formulated by the UGC for recruitment and promotion of teachers and employees in the public universities (DS, 23 June 2007). This should have been done much earlier in the interest of higher education. Some kind of guidelines (if not rules) were also devised earlier by the UGC but they were modified/changed to accommodate the group interests of individual universities to suit their purpose. Therefore, particularly during the last five years or so, many unqualified teachers were recruited and undeserving candidates got promotion.

The on-going enquiries by the committees formed by the UGC reveal some of the bizarre facts about recruitment and promotion of teachers in the public universities. It has been almost an open secret that political affiliation of candidates was collected beforehand and accordingly a selection meeting was staged. Soon after the 4-party alliance government came to power, the existing selection committees were reconstituted drastically so that the above activities could be made easy. There were instances in which the candidates had better academic records including publications and international exposure than some of the members in the selection committees! Disgusted and frustrated, a good number of senior teachers from public universities chose to join private universities in the country.

I would urge the UGC to look into the academic background of the members of the selection committees as well who were involved in the selection processes, doing a long-term damage to our higher education system. It must be remembered that once an unqualified or less qualified teacher is recruited at the entry-point, he becomes a liability for about 40 years for the department or discipline. Likewise, an unqualified teacher getting promotion to a higher post would contribute nothing.

The proposed recruitment rules by the UGC should also address this issue related to academic background, research activities and relevant experiences of the members of the selection committees.

Dr. K. Maudood Elahi
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Political reform

The journal 'Political Parties and Democracy' published by the Johns Hopkins University press and edited jointly by Larry Diamond, a senior research fellow in the Hoover Institute at Stanford University and Richard Gunther, a professor of political science at Ohio State University, reveals interesting facts about the trends of political parties in the global context. Though parties as institutions play a fundamental role in democracy, there is growing evidence of low or declining public confidence in parties in most countries. 'In membership, organisation, popular involvement and commitment, political parties are not what they used to be'. The contributors to this volume cover many regions of the world and evaluate the essential functions that parties perform in

different circumstances. Empirically, they analyze the changing character of parties and party systems in post-communist Europe, Latin America, and five individual countries that have witnessed significant change: Italy, Japan, Taiwan, India, and Turkey. They show that political parties are now only one of many vehicles for the representation of interests, albeit they remain essential for recruiting leaders, structuring electoral choice, and organising government. 'To the extent that parties are weak and discredited, the health of democracy will be seriously impaired'. This compels the political barons to go for time-friendly party reforms at a fast pace.

Party reform is a universal cry of the day but in Bangladesh the need is singularly imperative for reasons best known to all. The move is seriously on and thanks to the media for their detailed reporting on this topic. It is not our concern how the parties will introduce reforms and how far the reforms will serve the demand of the age, I just emphatically raise one question - for whose benefit are the reforms being made? The categorical reply is, the people, the ultimate political sovereign. The contemptible happenings of the past and the national humiliation that we have had to suffer are two basic postulates round which all reform efforts must revolve. The party leaders are wise enough to know where and how the veiled and open frailties let them down and how to effectively wash up the evils. We hope they will be resolute and fair in their admirable efforts.

I feel our leaders should firmly hang on to a five-dimensional core strategy. First, corrupt, convicted and undisciplined elements must never be enlisted as party members; secondly, there must not be any armed or desperado wings in any party; thirdly, the party constitution should be based on basic democratic norms with no single authority to brandish absolute power; fourth, transparency of party funds has to be ensured by annual auditing by established auditors and the report published for public consumption; fifth, each party will have a vigilance squad to monitor all expenditures from public accounts that will report its findings to the parliament.

There may be many more additives and subsidiaries to my loud overtures but the intention is clear. We simply long to see the badly overdue reforms come to reality bringing forth a brighter era of politics in the country. The politicians need to get free of their time-worn cocoons.

Mohammed Nawazish
Dhaka



Utilising rainwater

Rainwater harvesting is perhaps a new idea in Bangladesh, but it is bound to become a reality within the next few years at most. Scarcity of potable water is a reality today, in urban and more so in rural areas. Meanwhile, the water table is sinking lower day by day. Given the state of affairs; we have no choice but to introduce harvesting rainwater for meeting our day to day requirements of washing and drinking.

It is high time that our government gives serious attention to this alternative source of natural potable water; available as a gift of Allah. Today rainwater helps to partially mitigate seasonal raising of water table, and is also acting as a natural cleaner of roads and adding more water to ponds, lakes, rivers and other natural water bodies. Unfortunately, both surface and subsurface water of most ponds, lakes and other natural water bodies (which are fast declining) is polluted with dirt, refuse and associated dust and dirt being washed in by the rain.

Rainwater harvesting is the simple act of collecting rain before it reaches the ground and adulterated by the dirty groundwater. All it needs is a wide area of surface which could be

metallic, brick and mortar, or any waterproof material in which rainwater can be collected, like an open tank, or a big funnel, from which a hose or plastic pipe can run down to on ground or underground water tank for storage and use.

A very good example of rainwater collection and use I saw installed in a disabled person's home at Sathkhira, set up by an Italian NGO. The rainwater is collected over a large area on the roof and flows down to an underground storage tank. The system is large enough to meet the water requirements of around hundred people for most of the year. It is supplemented by a deep tube-well to meet the water requirements for the dry season and prolonged rainless days.

Given the shortage of potable water all over Bangladesh, we should go all out to develop and encourage rainwater harvesting as a primary source of potable water. The government should publicise this, and encourage and support NGOs to implement this vital source of free, quality potable water.

S.A. Mansoor
Gulshan, Dhaka



Student politics

It is highly regrettable that students in Bangladesh do not get the opportunity to train themselves to assume leadership positions in public and business affairs. Less than 5% students force majority of the students to stay away from their regular activities on campus in many public universities. It should be made an offence for any student or organisation to

force other students to abstain from their classes.

University authorities and the Bangladesh government should guarantee the security of all students. One or more leadership institutes should be established to train future leaders of the country.

Mohammed Shahidullah
USA

Pertinent issues

System without efficient leaders is powerless; leaders without an efficient system are tyrannical.

Therefore, we need reforms in the political system, government institutions and fill up the vacuum in the constitution.

We need to change the style of politics that was going on for the past two decades. By now, we have seen how menacing the political atmosphere could be. Politics was in the hands of two or three persons. Absolute power made them greedy and they had no accountability.

The political parties should come to the consensus that national issues should be dealt with collectively and all parties should engage themselves in dialogues on economic and foreign policies.

The parties should not call hartal. They should transfer themselves from the streets to the parliament.

All political parties should organise their councils every 3 years and candidates seeking election to party's top posts should be elected through secret ballot. Debates (in front of electronic media and party council) should be held amongst top contestants.

No person should stay as party chief for more than two terms. No person should continue as party president after becoming prime minister.

Funds and expenditures of all political parties should be made

public.

We witnessed failures in our country's parliament over the past few years. Parliament should carry the essence of a democratic nation. But our parliament lacks effectiveness.

A bicameral parliament is needed for bringing proper 'checks/balances' into the house. The lower house will ensure public perception of any bill and, the upper house should ensure effective and constructive policy making.

It is high time to bring in modification to Article 70. Members should be allowed to express their views in a more liberal way. Members should be given the freedom to choose right/wrong and go against their party's decision, if necessary.

Strong local/regional government is always instrumental in a country's progress. Our local government system definitely needs correction and till today the main theme of local government is missing. People's participation at regional level is missing and this issue should be addressed with a sense of urgency. Administrative decisions at local level should be made only after proper participation of grassroots workers. Local government bodies should be given the duty of making budgetary decisions at regional levels. Infrastructural developments should be carried out under their administrative supervision and monetary policies should also be framed by them. This will reduce unnecessary bureaucratic formalities resulting in loss of time.

Lord Brougham said, "Education makes a people easy to lead, but difficult to drive; easy to govern, but impossible to enslave." Thus, no politician can misguide an educated voter. Proper execution of voting right depends on educational values of voters. Our country's educational policies demand great time-effective reforms.

Our country has become divided into two political sects. Now, we have to integrate politicians, civil society and people from all walks when facing issues of great importance. A national security council should be appointed by the president which will overlook policy

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