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Students and politics

I am writing today with a heavy heart about a concern equally shared by many of the ex-DU students, after seeing so much of tension, violence and agitation being spread out across the colleges and universities of my beloved country.

More precisely, the environment on Dhaka University campus does not seem to be very much open and accommodating as it is supposed to be for many dissenting voices. Living in the 21st century globalised world, it is indeed very sad to watch that some of the so called student leaders of the ruling party will decide the fate of the thousands of students.

It breaks my heart, being a son of a freedom fighter, to see the kind of obliteration of my fellow countrymen to others only because they do not like them or believe in something different. Forcing students, who have rightful domicile, to leave the residential halls, barring them to attend lessons or beating some of them inhumanly while claiming to be part of the progressive block and ideology is nothing but self-denial and life of oblivion.

Bangladesh is a country where its constitution had guaranteed its citizens full democratic right of freedom of expression, association, speech, equality, fairness and justice, irrespective of their belief, sex, and race. Nonetheless, in practice, not only the University Administration had failed to facilitate those rights guaranteed by the constitution but also the elected government has failed to do anything.

It has always been the criteria to judge good governance on the basis of dealing with the minority view or opposition or the individuals not agreed with their opinion.

Where are those ideals that we were taught by our teachers? Why has our university

administration failed so miserably to uphold those century-old principles?

Let me conclude with the example of British Nationalist Party and National Front of France led by Jean-Marie Le Pen which preach the extreme of the ideas based on white supremacy in their respective countries; however, they were/are not banned even after repeated calls to do so. That is democracy.

I would hope and expect that under your leadership every student would be provided equal status, irrespective of their alleged political involvement with any ideology or blocks. In the absence of such identical treatment not only education would be hampered but also the image of the 'Oxford of the East', would be tarnished further.

Fuad Abdullah
London, UK

Depoliticise public institutions

The new popular regime has one basic undertaking: to depoliticise the established public institutions. We all have bitter experience of the adverse and negative cumulative effects.

This task deserves top priority, [and not the hurry to construct another bridge over the Ganges]. This policy announcement is awaited with eagerness.

The students' unions are also in turmoil--handling 'change' in a subjective manner. How the labour unions and the CBAs are going to be neutralised? These are backdoor development projects under each changing political regime. Why the diplomatic silence? Stop lobbying in the corridors of power.

The MPs should not be hidden godfathers in the districts, and at the lower levels of local governance. The divisional and district HQs are not developing. The idea of turning the divisions into provinces should be thor-

oughly debated in the JS [decentralise the overburdened Dhaka metro--the chain of kickbacks is longer in centralised regimes].

Start with neutralising the civil service. The ministers are discreetly silent on the existence of political syndicates operating in the background in every nook and cranny of the dry-cleaned society. Talk sensibly--not to get popular.

There is no network in existence in the current political culture--letters are never acknowledged or later responded to [as in the British era]. The problem is that the vast majority of the voters [especially in the rural areas] have no holding power to press home their grievances [no independent local governance].

Don't talk down, arrogantly--it repels; while humility attracts. Neutrality invites re-election!
AMawaz
Dhaka

Inaccuracy

An English language daily recently published an article "Utopia in the Constitution of Bangladesh" on its editorial page. It was written by a retired judge. The article appears prima-facie to be informative, among other things. Congratulations!

The writer quoted - Mahbubul Haq as "late chief of UNDP" - at one place in the concluding paragraph of his article. The information provided by him to all concerned about Mahbubul Haq - vide the article - is not fully correct. Late Mahbub ul Haq, I mean Dr. Mahbub ul Haq, the father of UNDP's Human Development Report was not "late chief of UNDP" but a special adviser to two of the UNDP administrators.

Let us work towards ensuring and promoting - in a sustainable manner - the correct information at the right time and place - for all.
Dr.M.S.Haq
One-mail

Political leader's misdeed

Recently a local political leader of Barabagh area under Mirpur-2 has set up a "kitchen market" at the entrance road of a residential area known as "Popular Housing-1". People from the adjacent areas use Popular Housing-1 approach road to go to Monipur School to drop their children. Popular Housing-1 is located at Barabagh under Mirpur-2 and this is a very busy connecting road between Monipur and Barabagh. At the starting point of the approach road the local leader has set up the kitchen market occupying the city corporation road. The market starts at 7:00am and continues up to 1:00pm. Different types of traders gather here and set their shops occupying almost 70-80% of the road to do their trading. During this time it becomes extremely difficult for us to go to school. The shopkeepers and some unruly boys tease the school girls while they pass through this road.

We are therefore, soliciting help from the City Corporation and other departments to close this market for ensuring a better residential environment for the residents of the Popular Housing-1 area as well as for ensuring a better and safe road communication for school children and guardians.

Resident
East Monipur
Mirpur-2, Dhaka

Vice chancellors

A vice chancellor is the academic and administrative CEO of a university. To understand the great importance of the post one must know what the principal function of a university is. Like all other educational institutions a university also propagates knowledge. But a university is different from all of them for the unique role it plays. A university creates knowledge, others do not. Therefore, a vice chancellor himself must have an outstanding academic career. He must have the academic excellence to create knowledge by carrying out research work himself in his own field of knowledge. He must also be able to provide leadership and guidance to other research scholars under him. The universally accepted yardstick to measure such academic competence is the number of publications he publishes per year in internationally reputed professional journals.

The next qualification required of a vice chancellor is his administrative ability to efficiently handle matters related to general, financial and academic administration. All professors with academic excellence cannot make good vice chancellors. But all vice chancellors have to be academicians perse.

In a society like ours, for a head of an educational or religious institution it is not enough to be firm and fair. S/he must also look firm and fair. S/he cannot be a political activist or conduct himself like a trade union leader. S/he cannot allow herself/himself to be carried away by any kind of sycophancy. Otherwise, he is not acceptable to all his students and colleagues who will naturally be holding different political, social and religious ideologies. To be so, a vice chancellor should be a person who is well known for his/her qualities of head and heart. In our country all our public universities have had chronic problems of misman-

agement, lack of discipline and, most important of all, intellectual bankruptcy. Because, most of the time wrong persons were made vice chancellors purely on political considerations. Almost every time competence was the casualty.

One may argue that it may not be possible to get vice chancellors with the above mentioned qualities. To them I humbly suggest to look for the CV/ bio data of the vice chancellors of the universities in our neighbouring country India. It is available on their websites.

To the best of our knowledge UGC, or any other authority, has never audited the academic works of our public universities. Taxpayers of this poor country have never been told how many professional papers to create knowledge have been published by different departments/faculties of a public university in a year. We never knew how many such papers have been published by an individual before he was made a vice chancellor or a pro vice chancellor.

It is good that after a long unusual break of two years we now have an elected national parliament.

May I request the members of parliament to find out through the ministry of education the number of professional publications our public universities have had every year in the last 25 years.

I would also request the appointing authorities to let the people know about the academic career and the number of professional publications to their credit of the persons who have just been appointed as vice chancellor and pro vice chancellor of Dhaka University, my alma mater.

Brig Gen (Retd) Syed Ashrafuzzaman
Mohakhali DOHS, Dhaka

Neglected students

Thanks are due to Syed Badrul Ahsan for speaking up, in no uncertain terms, about the plight of students in 'On dormitories and schools' (DS 4.2.09). The problem goes even wider.

I am trying to help a young student from one of the tribal minorities through university - not least by helping the sister he is living with who only has her salary from a beauty parlour. He earns a modest Tk 1,000 a month for one, early hour session at a health club, 7 days a week. I make that 33 taka an hour. No one can say he is not trying...

The finals of his bachelor's degree, at a government university, are in May and he informs me that, from now until then, he will be receiving no teaching at all! That is something only the Honours candidates will have. He has to do all his study, from the books he has bought, at home.

What is happening in the universities of this dear country? How can final year students cope with no teaching at all?

How can society make demands on the behaviour of the students, unless it also makes demands on the behaviour of the university teachers and the authorities that pay them - as well as any outfit that is abusing them?

It is surely not surprising if some young people, rightly or wrongly, feel that, if no one cares about them - and what is being dished up to them, in the name of education - then why should they care about anyone, or anything?

This is not merely a disciplinary issue but a caring one. Parents, teachers and society have no right to discipline the young unless we make it obvious, in deeds as well as words, that we only care about their BEHAVIOUR because we care about THEM!

Parliament session

The way the MPs are behaving in making parliament the focal point of all development and political activities is not producing any results due to the absence of the opposition from parliament on childless grounds and possible lack of quorum due to the absence of the government party members. The childish issue of sitting arrangement is condemnable by any standard. I think the outgoing speaker applied very bad judgment to make the issue, and the present speaker is equally ineffective to take the issue, and the continuous "no talk" policy between the two top leaders of the country. Why these two leaders of this unfortunate nation are not talking yet is beyond our apprehension. The political parties have changed their political strategy without any change in their policy!

Parliament has already become a personal debating club, and soon it will become "Paltan Maidan" when the opposition eventually joins the debating club after a successful negotiation through a third party - may be local or external. Some MPs with good track record and credibility have spoken in the media. They should take a more proactive role to solve the sitting arrangement problem before the people form negative views about the MPs and parliament. I would recommend the following measures to make parliament the focal point of development and politics. These are:



a. Sheikh Hasina and Begum Zia should take a responsible position to resolve the issue.

b. Stringent rules should be framed to ensure the presence of the MPs in parliament.

c. Parliament is not a debating club only, it is meant to discuss national issues and frame acts and rules to tackle any problem. This is how I see a parliament effective, not as a good debating club or indoor maids.

d. All treaties shall be presented in parliament and debated before signing with foreign countries. Only the national security issue can be discussed in camera but the main policy and strategy should be made public.

e. Two important issues have been raised in the ACC, and the issue of torture in custody. The ACC was more keen to go after the politi-

cians, leaving a big chunk of the civil and military bureaucracy out of their net. I think it is a very reasonable proposal to bring all the constitutional posts and bodies under the watchdog of parliament, Mr. MK Alamgir has mentioned about only one.

If the MPs, with exception, can exercise their free will to make parliament ineffective, as a citizen. I also want to exercise my constitutional right to remind them that they are not above law and above public scrutiny through neutral media reports. I would especially urge the neutral media to be very active in reporting any wrongdoing of the lawmakers, otherwise they will soon become lawbreakers. I beg apology to our respected lawmakers and the leaders if they find my letter not acceptable to them, but think about the people!
Areader, One-mail

JS stalemate

Although the outgoing Speaker Mr. Jamiruddin Sircar has proved his bipartisan role once again by putting the last nail on the board, I think it is not a big deal for the party in power to negotiate with the opposition by providing them one more seat in the front row of parliament. It will rather strengthen their image further to public.

People saw the step-motherly behaviour of the former Speaker. Of course, the then opposition, now in power, was not supposed to do that. People from their respective constituencies wanted them in parliament to talk for them. As they did not do that, they had to face lots of criticisms. But the same tradition cannot continue anymore. Both the parties should be more responsive and respectful of each other.

I therefore urge the party in power to reconsider the demand of the Opposition by providing them one or if possible two more seats at the front row without spending any more valuable time. They should remember that people are very much conscious now and they are observing each and every single activity of the government and opposition. So please do not make any further delay in negotiating with the opposition.
Md. Sirajul Islam Molla
Kanthal Bagan, Dhaka

Shab-e-Barat

Since Shab-e-Barat is not mentioned in the Holy Quran and since its status is disputed by the ulema groups, so we should not observe the day as a govt. holiday.

Let the devoted people offer nafal prayers at night but a holiday is not justified.
Mohammed Alauddin
Green Road, Dhaka

Traffic congestion



Dhaka is being held to ransom by the public transport system. The city buses and trekkers stop anywhere for any amount of time which creates artificial traffic jam. The driver does not even care to look behind to see how much traffic chaos he is creating. Sometimes buses create a road train by stopping at bus stops in a line. It can be often seen in all the busy areas in the city-- Mirpur, Mohakhali,

Farmgate, Rampura, resulting in pollution and health hazards for the pedestrians. They suddenly stop on the slightest signal without considering that they are driving on a public road which may lead to an accident.

The authorities concerned should take tough action against the erring drivers.

Mohammad Shahidul Islam
A National Tourism Worker

BNP and Zia

The BNP is clamouring as to why the name of the late Ziaur Rahman was not cited in the president's speech in the inauguration of the ninth parliament. They are very unhappy and hurt. Our reaction is 'why the hell?' Historically, Ziaur Rahman is not at par with the other national leaders of Bangladesh. His contribution towards the political movements, mass upsurge, emancipation, freedom of Bengali nation, liberation war etc. is not at all comparable to the contributions of Bangabandhu, Sher-e-Bangla, Moulana Bhashani, Shaheed Suhrawardy, Syed Nazrul Islam, Tajuddin Ahmed, Monsur Ali, Kamruzzaman, Gen.

Osmani etc. His name can not be taken at the same respect and honour as the above mentioned ones. Contribution of Ziaur Rahman is comparable with that of Shafiullah, Khalek Mubsharaf and other sector commanders.

We know the circumstances of how Ziaur Rahman was vaulted into limelight by Belal Mohammad and a few dedicated workers of Chittagong Radio Station. It was an act of God. Ziaur Rahman kept on cashing that 'good will' till the end. He entered into our political arena through the back door and was the supreme beneficiary of the killing of the founder of nation, Bangabandhu. Seventeen

coups were reportedly staged during his tenure of less than six years and he was killed in the last one. It is true that he was the founder of the BNP whose undemocratic constitution vests all the power to a single person-- the chairman of the party.

If the name of Ziaur Rahman requires to be included in the president's speech, why should HM Ershad be deprived? Factually, Ershad's contribution towards economic development of Bangladesh is more than that of Ziaur Rahman.

In our opinion, Ziaur Rahman does not merit or deserve a place among the 'big ones'.
Dr. SN Mamoon
One-mail

Public health issue

Every morning when I pass through the main gate of Kaderabad Housing in Mohamadpur, a bad odour comes to my nose & my mood changes. Common people use that place as a public toilet. We frequently see that vehicles of the DCC carry wastes, creating air pollution. Sometimes I see dead animals lying beside the road.

What can we do about these things? Can we appoint a strong public health team for every or jointly for two/three wards in Dhaka city and then in other metropolitan cities and finally all over the country? Is it impossible? I am a young veterinarian.

In our academic session we gathered lots of knowledge like zoonotic diseases (the diseases which transmit from animal to man), life cycle of various diseases, public health & so on. But we have no post in the Public Health Department. In the USA the chief of Public Health Department is a veterinarian.

We want a safe environment. The authorities as well as general people like us have to take necessary action to protect public health.
Md. Abdullah al Mamun
Internec doctor
Central Veterinary Hospital (CVH)

