

Ranking system for our universities



- On the number of international students;
- On campus quality and status (including library and all other facilities), and
- Overall score.

A university can be in a good position, like Dhaka University, North-South University, Shajalal University of Science and Technology etc., but that does not mean that a less familiar university cannot surpass them.

Nowadays, the number of private universities is increasing gradually; consequently, the arena of higher education is becoming more competitive day by day. In today's "global village" this type of competition is not contained within borders, just as a country's economy is in contest with another country's economy. Similarly, a student from India studying at Harvard University is a competitor of a Bangladeshi student who is reading at Dhaka University. But it is worth mentioning that we are lagging too far behind in the global race.

The UGC has some plans that can light the candle of higher education. As an example, I want to mention the UGC Awards. To recognise and encourage university teachers for their fundamental research work and publication, the UGC introduced the awards in 1980. Twelve awards are given annually in the following areas:

- Arts and Humanities, Law and Education: 2;
- Social Science: 2;
- Physical and Biological Science: 2;
- Agriculture Science: 2;
- Engineering and Technology: 2;
- Medical Science: 2.

The value of each award is at present Tk.20,000 and a certificate and an Honourable Crest. So far, a good number of professors have been given this award for their contribution to fundamental research in the country.

It is a worrying aspect for all private universities of Bangladesh that they are not allowed to offer PhD due to lack of facilities, so we hope that facilities will be developed in course of time.

The UGC also offers different types of fellowships, which are vital for development of our country's higher education. If all universities encourage their teachers by giving such awards, based on their innovative work and research, it would bring better result for our country's higher education sector.

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OLIUR RAHMAN

HERE is no particular ranking among the private universities in Bangladesh. In 2004, the University Grants Commission (UGC) did the first ranking, which ranked North-South University as 1st. After that, no reliable ranking has been done," says WikiAnswers.com.

A reliable ranking system must follow reliable criteria for ranking. But it is worth mentioning that some web sites had tried to grade the positions of the universities through ordi-

nary selection/voting policy. The ranking of universities cannot be done through selection/voting; there are several criteria to measure the real position of a particular university.

The Times Higher Education (THE) World University Rankings system published their annual ranking result for 2010-11 on September 16 in collaboration with new rankings data provider Thomson Reuters. They collected data from more than 50 leading figures in the sector from 15 countries across every continent, and through 10 months of extensive consultation. The guiding principles

followed by THE in ranking the world universities, are:

- Teaching: The learning environment (worth 30% of the overall ranking score)
- Research: Volume, income and reputation (worth 30%)
- Citations: Research influence (worth 32.5%)
- Industry income: Innovation (worth 2.5%)
- International mix: Staff and students (worth 5%).

As from the general assessment on THE-World University Rankings Policy, we should evaluate the status of universities by their achievements in each particular field. The ranking system will show the achievement of each university in its each particular field, by which people may be able to know which one is better and how it has become better. Regarding our country, the scoring should be divided as follows:

- On research and innovative activities;
- On the quality of teachers;
- On the number of students admitted each year;

Freedom of expression



American Muslims: Facing growing "Islamophobia."

The challenges American Muslims face, therefore, are legal, political and intellectual. In relying on legal elements to forestall impediments in the way of religious practice, Muslims are retracing the footsteps of earlier American minorities that faced similar challenges.

RAFIA ZAKARIA

IN the early hours of June 21, 1990, a group of teenagers in St Paul, Minnesota, put together a cross from the legs of some broken chairs. The ringleader of the group then took his friends outside and across the street into the front yard of his neighbours, an African American family.

The teenagers fired the cross on fire inside the yard as an expression of racial hatred. Before long, the police arrived and the ringleader of the group was charged with a crime under St Paul's Bias Motivated Crime Ordinance. The law mandated that anyone who placed any sort of object or graffiti on private or public property that was intended to arouse anger, resentment or alarm on the "basis of race, colour, creed, religion or gender commits disorderly conduct and shall be guilty of a misdemeanor." The individuals involved were charged accordingly.

The case, RAV vs City of St Paul, was heard by the US Supreme Court on whether the city's

anti-bias ordinance was allowed under the First Amendment of the US constitution. Justice Scalia, delivering the opinion of the court, deemed the law unconstitutional because it impermissibly restricted political speech.

The court's opinion declared that under the First Amendment of the US constitution, no limits may be placed on speech when they referred to the content of the speech in question, making it impermissible to ban the burning of a cross or an American flag. The only exceptions to this rule, the court declared, were actual threats against specific people, which would then come under ensuring safety rather than political speech. For a curb to be placed the danger must be imminent and specifically intended rather than a general threat. Under the court's decision, the teenagers could not be charged with any crime because the anti-bias ordinance was itself unconstitutional.

The RAV vs City of St Paul case is illustrative of a cornerstone of American jurisprudence; the inability of government institutions to

legally limit freedom of speech or expression even when it causes deep offence and hurt to members of a religious or racial group.

Interestingly, the same First Amendment that prevents state institutions from limiting political speech also makes it legally impossible for them to interfere in the free exercise of religious faith in the public sphere. For example, the governor of New York, David Patterson, is opposed to the burning of the Islamic cultural centre in Lower Manhattan. However, the First Amendment that prohibits limits on speech also prohibits limits on the free exercise of religion on private property.

As these two examples illustrate, the First Amendment is a double-edged sword. It states specifically that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances."

As interpreted through centuries of American jurisprudence, it enables the expression of opinions and attitudes however repugnant and abhorrent they may be to the sensibilities of some. At the same time it also allows religious minorities, such as American Muslims, the ability to build their places of worship on private property regardless of how many Americans oppose the project due to

their own sensitivities.

Hypothetically, if American Muslims were able to win a case that allowed the burning of Islamic scriptures to be declared illegal, similar victories could be won by those who wished to prevent the construction of mosques.

American law, specifically constitutional jurisprudence, has long been a bulwark with which religious and racial minorities have constructed their freedoms even when social and political events render their beliefs repugnant to the majority. The American legal system, thus, is the last rampart of protection for a minority that is unlikely to ever have the power of numbers at the ballot box.

The recent controversies confronted by American Muslims regarding the construction of their places of worship demonstrate their precarious political position.

Few politicians in either the Democratic or the Republican parties have chosen to be vocal against growing Islamophobia. Recent statements by prominent Democrat leaders such as Harry Reid and Governor David Patterson substantiate the premise that American Muslims are orphans at the ballot box, with neither party welcoming their support. Despite the fact that they number at least two to three million, few American politicians are interested in obtaining their votes at the risk of appearing too pro-Muslim.

These developments are also paving the way for the normalisation of Islamophobia as a valid intellectual position. The actions proposed by Pastor Terry Jones were easy to condemn given their obvious hate-filled agenda. More pernicious are comments such as those made by Martin Peretz, editor-in-chief of The New Republic, a prominent publication of the American left.

Writing on September 4, Mr. Peretz said: "Muslim life is cheap, particularly to Muslims," and "I wonder whether I need to honour these people and pretend that they are worthy of the privileges of the First Amendment, which I have in my gut the sense that they will abuse."

Fortunately for American Muslims, it isn't up to Mr. Peretz to decide whether or not they are deserving of First Amendment protection. Not quite so fortunate is the fact that he is part of the growing number of intellectuals, mostly on the right but now also on the American left, that wish to paint prejudice and racism against Muslims as politically permissible.

The challenges American Muslims face, therefore, are legal, political and intellectual. In relying on legal elements to forestall impediments in the way of religious practice, Muslims are retracing the footsteps of earlier American minorities that faced similar challenges. The political and intellectual challenges, however, represent more complicated phenomena whose global dimensions and complex trajectories represent problems that demand innovative solutions beyond the language of the law.

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COMMENT

Health advisor's unpardonable remarks

SYED BADRUL AHSAN

IT is time to assess the remarks made by Syed Modasser Ali at Gopalganj Sadar Hospital a couple of days ago. The assessment is simple. By being dismissive of the principle of citizens' right to information and by publicly stating his intention of placing ruling Awami League elements in 13,350 positions at the community health levels, he has committed an act that is unhealthy and therefore unacceptable and, in the end, unpardonable.

The free-wheeling comments by the prime minister's advisor for health may have dented not just the integrity of the government he is part of. They also raise questions about the brazen manner in which political partisanship is being resorted to by individuals like the health advisor.

In its totality, Modasser Ali's attitude humiliates an entire nation, for he has pitted his political party against that nation through insisting that only his party members and followers be given jobs that by right should be open to all citizens, to be gained on the basis of merit.

The health advisor has spoken of the deprivation that Awami League workers went through after the general elections of 2001 and till the end of the BNP-Jamaat government in 2006. There is little question that as a party, the Awami League was at the receiving end of everything sinister the government led by Khaleda Zia was able to devise in its time in office. But that can in no way be an excuse for anyone to ask that every available post now be handed over to anyone who belongs to the Awami League or is a fan of it. Where have the interests of the country gone missing here? And under what law does the health advisor demand that his party be rewarded because it has suffered in the past, citizens be damned?

Syed Modasser Ali has not just shocked us with his point of view. He has also confirmed our feeling that divisive politics is yet abroad in the land, that indeed it promises to acquire darker shades of notoriety as the days go by. He has, in so many words, openly told us what we have long suspected: that the ideal of national unity under a leadership truly national in outlook and wedded to the principles of the War of Liberation is yet a pipe dream, that tribalism is the big, dark, dominant truth in our times.

We expected better from Modasser Ali. And we did because he comes of a profession, which prides itself in serving humanity, across politics, across colour, across gender, across faith. He has now disappointed us. He has infuriated us. And he has injected the fear in us that what he has said might also be the sentiments of many others in this government also.

Of course there are men like Obaidul Quader, able to sense danger that may arise through pronouncements of the kind Modasser Ali has made. But how many are there like him? And how will these few explain to the nation that Modasser Ali's remarks are but an aberration, that they are his personal opinions and do not reflect the views of the government?

For the government, indeed for the prime minister, there is a huge need for damage control in the light of Modasser Ali's incendiary comments. One does not require much wisdom to understand the truth that the health advisor's comments have left us all, citizens across the political spectrum, reeling in shock and seething in anger. He has undermined the position he holds.

It is now for the government to do a couple of things: it can disassociate itself from Modasser Ali's remarks and it can lean on him to resign. Indeed, the prime minister will be reassuring the country and will be taking a big step toward restoring public confidence in her government by making her health advisor go in the larger national interest.

For his part, Syed Modasser Ali ought to do the morally acceptable thing: he should resign on his own. He has damaged himself. He has called the high calling of his office into question.

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