

CROSS TALK

Buet situation unacceptable

Effective govt intervention missing

WITH the resignation of an overwhelming number of teachers and employees demanding resignation of Buet's VC and pro-VC, the ongoing stalemate in the premier institution of engineering education has further deepened.

The en masse resignation of teachers followed the VC's declaring 44 days' vacation of Buet in the face of the teachers' ultimatum demanding his resignation by Saturday.

What happened on Wednesday did not just come out of the blue. The campus has been simmering with angry protest demonstrations by teachers, employees and general students pressing the single demand for the resignation of the VC and pro-VC.

They have been complaining of irregularities in promotions and appointments since long.

Expressing his concern at the situation and referring to an ongoing probe into the allegations against the VC and pro-VC, the education minister has asked the teachers to sit and talk to find out a solution.

The teachers had gone on 28 days' work abstention since April 7, but joined their classes after assurances from the prime minister and education ministers that their allegations and grievances would be duly looked into.

But so far we have seen no tangible outcome of the assurances. Consequently, the teachers have now gone for mass resignation.

As the teachers, employees and students have opted for such an extreme measure, the VC has termed the teachers' action as improper and unacceptable. Such stubbornness from either side patently demonstrates the gravity of the crisis obtaining at Buet.

While the teachers are at loggerheads with the VC, at the raw end of the deal is the future of the students. They comprise the best ones among those who pass the higher secondary level exams every year.

Now that all the deans of faculties, heads of departments and institutes of Buet have submitted their resignation in a body to the VC expressing 'no confidence' in him this is something unprecedented and demands immediate attention of the government at the highest level.

We hope the PM will play a hands-on role and help resolve the crisis to restore normality to Buet.

Bringing women to the fore

Regional forum welcome

THE newly launched forum of women members of parliament of SAARC countries is the first of its kind. The aim is to promote a greater role for women leaders in South Asia. The platform, it is hoped, will help bridge the gap between women representatives in public office and the government machinery at large where women remain underrepresented and their needs largely ignored.

The idea of having a cross-border forum is to share experience and increase communication of women MPs that could in the long run act as support group female elected representatives to address the many areas where women in South Asia lag behind. Unless more women are elected to every facet of the governance hierarchy, there is little possibility of bringing about a more gender-neutral working environment. Having a greater voice in the decision-making process assists in the promulgation of policies that are not only more women-friendly but helps in bringing about changes in the work environment that lessen the likelihood of violence against women.

Although Bangladesh has made progress in increasing the number of women members in parliament to about 20 per cent of total representatives, much remains to be done. There exists general apathy in promoting women to crucial positions in mainstream parties despite the fact that both the major political parties in the country are headed by women. Without greater political participation of women in parliament, women's issues cannot truly take centre stage and they will not be able to achieve gender equality with men. Only when there is a significant presence of women at the different levels of the governance process can one expect a change in the fight for curbing burning issues such as violence against women and



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

WHEN US economist Joseph Stiglitz arrived in London to launch his new book *The Price of Inequality*, Barclays Bank's

Libor-fixing scandal had just hit the fan. It was a coincidence that these two events happened within the same week, but Stiglitz already saw it coming. He has reasons to believe that some bankers should go to jail.

The recent spate of financial scandals involving British banks has reminded many of the swashbuckling pirates, a long British tradition stretching back 400 years. Britain's merchant class created the largest empire in history using the techniques learned on the high seas. The East India Company led the way and successive British governments followed in its footsteps.

A BBC4 documentary recently claimed that the British history has been a tension between roundheads and cavaliers. Cavaliers live on a determination to go by their wits and deploy every tactic in their bag of tricks to get what they want. Then there are the roundheads: the civil servants, farmers, and people who work hard to hold together and maintain the business and social fabrics of their nation.

Many Brits are now caught in that tension. As a trading nation they understand they have to live on wits. But is it necessary to get dirty? Financial services, the arms industry

and the pharmaceuticals business are the UK's biggest net exporters. The citizens know their country's balance of payments is bad at the moment and it would be much worse if they have to withdraw from these businesses.

This is where comes in Joseph Stiglitz, whose theory of "asymmetric information" won him the Nobel Prize for economics in 2001. He is known for his critical view of the management of globalisation, free-market economists (whom he calls "free market fundamentalists") and some international institutions like the

good to the larger society. If we are talking about political clout, license, permits, nepotism and favouritism, the root of all evil lies in the privilege that some people have more access to information and business contracts than others by dint of money, family connection or political influence.

It is in the name of creating wealth and employment that the rich amass their incredible fortune, while the rest of the country is taught to count its blessings for being able to live on the breadcrumbs falling off their tables. But these rich people never feel safe because they always have to worry if

destroy them.

That is more or less the story of modern states. In some countries governments still show semblance of control, but overall choose to look the other way. The number of financial scams that rocked the USA should have filled its jails with bankers, auditors and credit rating agents. Instead the government chose to offer money to restore their institutions to original health. It is as impossible to think of a capitalist country without these crooks as the Vatican without the Pope, cardinals, patriarchs and diocesan bishops.

History has been dominated by various professions at various times, hunters in the pre-historic days, gladiators in the ancient days, ecclesiasts in the Middle Ages, scholars during the Renaissance, scientists in the 20th century, and businesses in the modern days. If you are a movie buff, you will know it. In *Shutter Island* starring Leonardo DiCaprio, the warden says: "There's no moral order as pure as this storm. There's no moral order at all. There's just this: can my violence conquer yours?"

Our new moral order has only chaos in it. It's just a storm where everybody thinks if his greed can conquer mine or yours. A pickpocket cleaning unsuspecting passengers in a bus shows as much conviction to ride out that storm as a banker in Armani suit. Moral dilemma is to wish they weren't the same.

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Rich people never feel safe because they always have to worry if social dynamics might come after them anytime and use state power to redistribute their wealth. They are, therefore, inclined to restrict that power and keep the state in a weak condition.

International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. But most of all he has launched a crusade against the economic and political power that has been amassed by the financial sector in recent decades, especially in the US and the UK. He strongly believes that this power needs to be broken if we are to build a more just and prosperous society.

Stiglitz wrote a series of articles in the 1970s and 1980s arguing that when some individuals have access to privileged knowledge that others do not, free markets do more harm than

social dynamics might come after them anytime and use state power to redistribute their wealth. They are, therefore, inclined to restrict that power and keep the state in a weak condition.

The most recent proof of that anxiety was clearly visible in the Hamptons, New York. Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney raised more than \$3 million over one weekend from the terrified rich. They gave generously because they believe that president Barack Obama is a communist who is out there to

POLITICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate change: Turning adversity into opportunity (Part 1)



SALEEMUL HUQ

BANGLADESH has gained international reputation as one of the world's most vulnerable countries (by some accounts it is in

fact the most vulnerable country) to the adverse impacts of human induced climate change. This undoubtedly presents the country's government and people with a very big problem going forward. However, there is a silver lining in this dark cloud that can allow us to turn adversity into opportunity if we can play our cards right.

There are two ways that this can be done. One is by focusing on the climate change problem and turning to climate resilient low carbon activities and the second is to make a significant paradigm shift in our overall development strategy towards a greener development pathway.

I will describe the first pathway in this article and come back to the second one (and the links between the two) in a subsequent article.

Addressing the climate change issue

This strategy in turn has two major components, one domestic and the other relating to international diplomacy. There are, of course, important synergies between the domestic and international strategies. The domestic strategy relates to developing climate resilient and low carbon actions and the international one has to do with projecting the country's image abroad. I will describe both strategies below.

Climate resilient low carbon development

The domestic strategy is to focus on the climate change problem and develop climate resilient and low carbon activities, pilot them first and

then scale them up over time. The government and non-government stakeholders in Bangladesh are well on the way to implementing this strategy. The government has already developed a far-reaching Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan and has started to implement it in earnest. The government has also set up two climate change funds, one with its own finance and the other with contributions from rich countries. Both the funds together have several hundred million US Dollars in them and are being deployed to implement the same Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan.

The successful utilisation of these funds by government ministries and departments as well as by non-government actors will pave the way

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Financing climate change actions

To give some idea of the amounts of global funding that are likely to be available to support climate change activities the rich countries pledged \$30 billion over three years (2010 to 2012), ramping up to \$100 billion a year from 2020 onwards. The latter amount would be almost equivalent to global development assistance to developing countries.

This global funding to support climate change actions in developing countries will be spread across mitigation (or low carbon development)

and adaptation (or climate resilient development). While Bangladesh may not be able to capture much mitigation funding, (as the country's emissions of greenhouse gases is already quite low), it can capture a significant proportion of the adaptation funds.

However, the ability to attract significant levels of global funding will not depend on simply asserting Bangladesh's vulnerability and poverty, but rather by demonstrating the ability to use funds effectively and transparently. Thus, if we spend the first hundred million that has been pledged so far well, then we may be able to attract billions in future. This depends almost entirely on our own performance and demonstrated absorption capacity.

If the government and people of

climate change diplomacy should become part of the training of all Foreign Service officers from now on). It should also be the main message of our prime minister, ministers and government officials when they speak at international climate change meetings.

This became apparent at a recent meeting of the Climate Vulnerable Forum held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, which was organised by the government of Bangladesh as the current chair of the CVF, where several speakers suggested that Bangladesh should propose at the next ministerial meeting of the CVF to be held in San Jose, Costa Rica in November 2012, that they should consider changing the name of the forum from Climate Vulnerable Forum to Climate Adaptive Forum. This would signify that although the reason for the countries to come together was originally their vulnerability to climate change, the reason for continuing the forum in future is to be proactively adaptive to climate change.

Conclusions

At the domestic level, if Bangladesh (both the government and non-government actors) are able to utilise the funds (both national as well as international) well over the next few years, then the amounts that can be expected from the global community will reach the same level as current levels of development assistance by 2020. The challenge, therefore, is to ensure that the activities being funded are reported and shared in a transparent manner and monitored effectively over the next few years.

At the international level the challenge is to change the image of the country from a negative one (vulnerable) to a positive one (adaptive) and shift the focus from the problem to the solution.

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THIS DAY IN HISTORY

July 13

1878
Treaty of Berlin: the European powers redraw the map of the Balkans. Serbia, Montenegro and Romania become completely independent of the Ottoman Empire.

1941
World War II: Montenegrins begin a popular uprising against the Axis Powers (Trinaestojulski ustanak), the first in Axis-controlled countries.

1973
Alexander Butterfield reveals the existence of the "Nixon tapes" to the special Senate committee investigating the Watergate break in.

2008
War in Afghanistan: Taliban guerrillas attack NATO troops near the village of Wanat in the Waygal district in Afghanistan's far eastern province of Nuristan.

2011
Mumbai is rocked by three bomb blasts during the evening rush hour, killing 26 and injuring 130.