

Rationale for more private medical colleges

Dearth of faculty a major impediment

THE present government in its current term had already approved 24 private medical colleges. Now it is giving permission to open up an additional 11 such colleges. The question that comes to mind is why so many private medical colleges at this stage, especially when we have serious concerns about lack of requisite medical teachers to man these institutions?

Yes, we need to turn out more medical graduates given the extremely adverse doctor to patient ratio. But do we need to take a plunge in hot haste? In fact, closer scrutiny of rules and regulations governing the granting of permission to set up such institutions reveal that not all aspiring colleges meet requirements pertaining to infrastructure and other issues. Are we to assume that the purpose of the proposed colleges is to generate substantial admission fees, as had been witnessed last year? With rules on paper and little oversight, the admission fees galore exacted by some private medical colleges worked out to huge sums last year.

Even if the new medical colleges meet all necessary criteria with regards to land and building, the question of maintaining teaching standards including ancillary hospitals remains. With the number of private medical colleges set to rise to nearly 90, they will inevitably draw upon doctors, nurses and paramedics from government-run institutions. The bigger question at this juncture for policymakers, therefore, is that a balance should be struck between the public and the private medical colleges and hospitals in terms of their operational feasibility and efficacy.

Welcoming PM on return

Public inconvenience should have been avoided

THE ruling party leaders and workers turned out in large numbers on the city streets on Monday afternoon to receive the prime minister who was returning from the UN General Assembly session in New York where she was given a prestigious award. We rejoice over the fact that the PM has been accorded the South-South Cooperation Award for her contribution to poverty alleviation, which she has rightly dedicated to the country.

That said, we cannot but point to the practice of organising such a huge event without regard to the inconvenience it may have caused to the commuting public. For in their exuberance over the PM's winning the award, the AL members rode roughshod over the city's fragile traffic system creating a long tailback.

The reception in effect turned out to be a cause for public hardship, which it need not have been.

Experience suggests that massive receptions be not staged on the day of arrival itself. Public receptions can be held at a designated place with proper planning going into managing the event at a later date. Evidently, such considerations did not receive due importance in the planning of Monday's event.

Hopefully, the government would keep an eye to this in the future to avoid an occasion of joy turning unwittingly

Indonesia and September 1965



SYED BADRUL AHSAN

seventh one survived. He was General Suharto. And he would go on to set in place and preside over a kleptocracy for thirty two years.

The 1960s were electrifying times, not least because it was widely believed that President Sukarno was invincible, that he was friendly with the People's Republic of China and therefore was on an easy relationship with D.N. Aidit and his Partai Komunis Indonesia. To be told, therefore, that Aidit had been involved in a plot to take over the state was a rude awakening for many people around the world. Doubts about the supposed coup began to emerge as early as 1967, when Sukarno was finally pushed aside and the presidency was taken over by Suharto. The new ruler and his associates, Adam Malik and Sultan Hamengku Buwono, were in little mood for Sukarno to continue in office. The founding father of Indonesia would die in 1970, a sad, lonely man.

All these decades after September 1965, questions keep coming up about the realities behind the unfolding tragedy. How's this for a query? If six senior generals were murdered in their beds by the communist plotters, how is it that the seventh, Suharto, remained untouched? It is here that suspicions arise, about the coup actually being engineered by the Indonesian army, with the PKI being made a convenient cover for the crime.

In 1994, at a meeting of South Asian media practitioners in Kathmandu, Tan Sri Ghazalie Shafie, a former Malaysian deputy prime minister, let slip a truth that one could explore in detail. As he reflected on the birth of Asean, he let it be known that in 1964 the Tunku Abdur Rahman government kept in touch with a young Indonesian army officer named Suharto. That was all he said before clamping up. And remember that those were *Sukarno's konfrontasi* days with Kuala Lumpur. Was Suharto already in on a plan to push Sukarno from power?

Indonesians were put through long trails of fire within days of the incidents of September 30. The soldiers went on a rampage, rounded up communists and communist sympathisers, before dispatching them through pumping holes through their heads. Those they did not kill they maimed physically and psychologically. Even today, you will find aging school teachers once detained and tortured by Suharto's men reluctant to relate the tales of horror they went through after the fall of Suharto. Aidit was picked up by the army and was never

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Soeharto (right) and Soekarno during an Independence Day parade in 1967.

heard of again. It emerged years later that he had been summarily shot. Sukarno's very respected foreign minister Subandrio was tried and sentenced to death, though the conviction was later commuted to imprisonment for life. He was eventually freed in the final years of Suharto. He has never told the world of the ordeal he went through.

The journalist John Pilger, in his revealing work, *The New Rulers of the World*, gives you his own take on the coup and its aftermath in Indonesia and around the globe. A few weeks after the 'smashing of the PKI coup,' says Pilger, a number of western donors and representatives of multinational agencies met in Geneva to slice out bits of Indonesia and its resources for themselves. A proud country once led by a charismatic father figure swiftly passed into the world of faux capitalism, in much the same way that Nigeria fell into the grip of foreign oil firms. Ken Saro-wiwa would hang in Sani Abacha times because of his defence of Nigerian rights to the country's natural resources. Conditions were almost similar with those which Indonesia confronted between 1965 and 1967.

A million Indonesians were murdered in the months following the military take-over of the country. Tens of thousands disappeared without trace. Unlike the energetic search for truth and reconciliation which has led to the emergence of a new South Africa, unlike the travails which a resurgent Chile put Augusto Pinochet through, those who came after Suharto in Indonesia felt little need to delve into the truth of all that happened in the country through the long period of murder and mayhem in the 1960s.

Silence has been all. In a changed Indonesia -- affluent, democratic and happy -- that dark chapter has been consigned to the attic of history. A pity.

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Time for collective action

S.M. RASHED AHMED

MANY of us have been writing and publicly expressing through the media and in the public gatherings organised by civil society fora of the high cost to the nation due to sustained government attempts at denigrating Prof. Yunus and weakening Grameen. These, unfortunately, have seriously harmed the image of Bangladesh judging by reports in the international media.

The latest accusations against Prof. Yunus of alleged tax evasion on overseas income; of not taking permission before receiving the honorariums, awards, royalties from foreign sources between 2005-2011, etc.; and clarifications by Yunus, legal experts and eminent citizens, have been widely covered by the media. Without going into details, it is felt that such issues did not warrant a cabinet meeting and decision, especially when the nation is in the grip of a crisis on holding of a free and fair election with the participation of all parties, which may imperil its development and progress unless resolved peacefully.

The decision of the government to place Grameen Bank under the control of the central bank is a regressive step and defies all logic. It is virtually nationalisation of one of our best performing banks in contrast to the poor performance of the government controlled banks.

The latest broadside against Yunus could not have come at a worse time for us. Yunus and eminent citizens and friends in the international community are making serious efforts to resolve the political impasse so that the general election is held through participation of all parties. This would enable Bangladesh to exploit its potential to the fullest and attract FDI and support of development partners to overcome the challenges of poverty and development.

To achieve this goal we need domestic peace and stability; clean and stable government with a strong economy; a vigorous private sector fully supported by the government; rule of law; zero tolerance for corruption; highly efficient civil and police administration based on meritocracy; depoliticisation of all vital organs of the state and government including educational institutions; and a highly professional armed force for national defense to act as a bulwark against militancy and to overcome the challenges of manmade and natural disasters.

Concurrently, we need to adopt the doctrine of total mobilisation of the people, including compulsory military training, free universal primary education, technical education and excellent universities. This will impart a sense of discipline and order in the society and open up significant job opportunities for the youths. In the ultimate analysis, the best defense of a nation is an enlightened, educated and contended people, as Confucius said.

The inflow of yaba, phensidyl and other harmful

intoxicants and proliferation of drug peddlers combined with trafficking of women and children will eventually destroy the future of our youths and the nation, if those are not effectively curbed and eliminated with topmost urgency through exemplary punishments to the offenders.

Yunus' aim is to free Bangladesh from the clutches of poverty, and for empowerment of women and the youths. Following the success of his innovative microcredit programme and Grameen Bank, he has now embarked on his new concept of Social Business which is increasingly gaining worldwide acceptance, including in Bangladesh.

After the Rana Plaza tragedy, Yunus proposed an international minimum wage for garment workers to be

worked out for each country separately. To concretise the proposal he jointly launched a garment industry transparency initiative (GITI) with Prof. Peter Eigen, founder of Transparency International. This timely initiative should significantly help RMG workers and the sector.

It is time for a national consensus to utilise Yunus' services for the

larger national interest. BNP and its allies, including a large segment of the influential members of the civil society, have expressed unequivocal support for Yunus. It is sincerely hoped that the PM will positively respond to the call for consensus. That will help overcome the national crisis. We can then collectively approach Yunus to assist in the resolution of the political crisis, thus paving the way for a peaceful and credible election.

We need to intensify international lobbying for the RMG sector, and work with our development partners to help overcome the critical challenges of water, energy, food, climate change, poverty and development. Economic diplomacy backed by public diplomacy, people to people contact and exchanges, trade, and attracting investments through easing visa restrictions within Saarc countries, Myanmar, China and the Asean should be the major thrust of our diplomacy. This will give concrete shape to the concept of connectivity and will bring progress and prosperity to all of us.

We need to act now; there is clearly a gathering storm in the horizon which, if it breaks out, will inflict unpredictable toll on the nation and its people.

Let us collectively lift Bangladesh from the gloom, despondency and despair surrounding us, and build a new Bangladesh which would embody the ideals of our Liberation War and fulfill the hopes and aspiration of the youths, the poor and the vulnerable, particularly the oppressed women and the children of the slums who go to bed hungry and are deprived of elementary human rights to survive with dignity.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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The most powerful PM

PM Sheikh Hasina is probably the most powerful prime minister in the world. Nothing can happen without her will in Bangladesh. The government machinery and her party can not move an inch without her consent. It doesn't matter to her if all the people of the country want the election to be held under CTG. Election will be held under her leadership no matter what.

Md. Shahjahan Mia
Development Professional
Satmosjid Road, Dhaka

Sundarbans under threat

Sundarbans, the world's largest mangrove forest, protects our coastal lands from natural disasters and thus saves the lives of thousands every year. But now it is under great threat because of the Rampal coal-powered power plant project undertaken by the government. Obviously, Bangladesh needs more power plants but not at the cost of Sundarbans.

Bipul K Debnath
Dhaka College, Dhaka

Fix RMG workers' wage through talks

RMG industry is undoubtedly the major thrust sector in our country and garment workers are the driving force of this sector. But it is a matter of regret that the garment workers cannot lead a decent life with their minimum salary. So their demand for wage hike is certainly logical. Luckily, our government has realised the necessity of increasing the wage of the workers under extensive criticism from around the globe. But shipping minister Shajahan Khan's involvement to gain political leverage ahead of the election by winning the hearts of the workers was completely absurd because it instigated the workers.

One must consider whether the small and medium factories of the country are able to give the workers tk 8,114 a month. The role of the small and medium factories behind the country's sustainable development cannot be ignored. It is very important to fix the minimum salary of the workers through discussion in an atmosphere of understanding among the stakeholders.

Roman Mia
One e-mail

Comments on news report, "Army, admin asked to help," published on September 30, 2013

Shahin Huq

Such huge mass gatherings clearly show that opposition parties have greater public support, which the ruling party should understand. It should also be noted that no schools, colleges or madrasahs were closed to force students to join Khaleda's rally.

James Mason

Sheikh Hasina has already asked for a UN team to observe the elections to ensure their fairness. The absence of a CG is a step towards a more stable form of government and the military should remain impartial in these matters.

Zman7

Oh God! There is no respect for constitution! Indirectly, she is in fact asking army, police, Ansar-VDP and administration officials to "violate constitution" in favour of caretaker government. The last 3 lines of her statement in this report are nothing but a pure prevarication (to mislead people) against the incumbent government.

S. M. Iftekhhar Ahmed

Granted that abolishing the caretaker system was the wrong thing to do, but the opposition is not going about it in the proper way either.

ComilliaPride

It is indeed good news that there will be no demonstrations before October 25.

Mohamed S Rahman

Honourable opposition leader, do you and your party believe in democracy? Are you requesting military to interfere in our democratic process?

Shahnoor Chowdhury

I hope both BNP and AL will compromise in the interest of the nation.

"Temples rebuilt, not trust" (September 29, 2013)

ComilliaPride

Wonderful that BD is repairing these temples and homes; and I wish Myanmar did the same to Muslim homes and mosques that Buddhist people destroyed.

Jakaria Bulbul

Unless this horrible offence against humanity is subjected to severe and exemplary punishment, it will be a moral defeat for the whole nation as the constitution upholds the spirit of communal harmony.

Sara

Trust will not grow so easily after the horror...

THE BRUNEI TIMES

Syrian blight

EDITORIAL

EVER after 30 months of unrest and anarchy, calm seems a far cry in war-ravaged Syria. Though the use of the nerve agent sarin on August 21, which killed hundreds of people, has put the country on a different trajectory, there seems to be no cessation of hostilities between the regime and the rebels. An air raid on a high school in the northern rebel-held city of Raqa killed 16 people, including 10 students on Sunday, according to a rights group.

With no ceasefire, the basic prerequisite for creating an atmosphere for initiating a dialogue, the investigation by UN inspectors and experts from the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and President Bashar al-Assad's willingness to comply with the UN resolution to destroy its chemical arsenal, look futile.

It's exasperating that the obstinacy and rigidity of the rebels and the regime and the dithering by the UN and the international community resulted in a humungous humanitarian crisis, the world's biggest, according to the UN, rendering over two million Syrians refugees outside the country. The nearly three-year-old turbulence has claimed over 110,000 lives.

The schism between the opposition groups further deepened with several rebel groups severing ties with the Syrian opposition council based in Istanbul, which has been serving a link between the Western nations and the fighters, after US President Barack Obama retracted on his resolve on "limited strike" in the wake of a deal with Russia, a close ally of Syria. Amid unrelenting fighting and loss of life, the exercise in inspection and elimination of chemical weapons may not usher in the much needed calm. And moreover, what's the point of the investigation if it overlooks as to who had been behind the gas attack. The stand of Kofi Annan, the former UN-Arab League peace envoy, advocating a ceasefire by both the warring sides for creating an atmosphere for dialogue, holds good even now. Let's hope the signs of thaw between the US and Iran may augur well for peace in Syria.

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