

Over two lakh students waiting in uncertainty

Admissions crisis is unacceptable

THE decision to centrally initiate this year's college admissions through an online system may have been well-intentioned but its poor execution has left two lakh students still without a seat in a college. The technical glitch, for which the education minister has apologised, has also resulted in many meritorious students being forced to accept whatever college that has been assigned to them rather than the ones they had enlisted as their preferred choice. This bizarre crisis has left these young people, their parents and teachers in frustration and despair.

It is unfair that even after qualifying in the merit list so many students are still in uncertainty because their names were not included in the first two lists. The seats of most of the well reputed colleges have been filled up so there is very little chance that the remaining students will get into an institution of their first or even second choice.

The Dhaka Board's failure to update data about the seats and other admission-related information and the inability to complete the list of so many students in such a short time by BUET, which was responsible for this task, are largely to be blamed for this nightmarish situation.

It is unacceptable that such an important task as this should be carried out in such a shoddy manner. The future of a student largely depends on what kind of two-year college he or she can get into. The government must immediately take steps to make sure all these waiting students are absorbed into such institutions without their having to lose valuable time from their academic year. It must also make sure that next year there will not be any such technical glitches that turn the admission process into such a colossal mess.

Import of substandard wheat

Some unanswered questions

THE issue of import of poor quality wheat will certainly leave a poor taste, literally in some cases, in the mouth of the public. Several questions have arisen from the handling of the issue. What, for example, are we to make of the food ministry's claims that the quality conforms to the contract specifications when the BCSIR report states that the samples supplied to it showed that the quantity of broken and shrunken kernels exceeded the specified limit? And as per government rules such food grains should be rejected.

Why, we ask, was a shipment that was substandard *ab initio*, accepted in the first place? We would also like to ask why the food ministry was entrusted to conduct the inquiry when it was the food ministry that was a direct stakeholder in the imbroglio. Why wasn't an independent inquiry ordered in the matter? The people would like to know what the actual parameters of food grain import are, and what safeguards are applied to ensure safe consumption of the cereal.

It seems that the government has been at great pains to defend the indefensible. It is trying to justify an import that, from reports appearing in the media, is substandard and unfit for human consumption. And instead of taking steps to see that such things don't recur, it is trying to pull the wool over our eyes. This will set a very bad precedent if not rectified.

COMMENTS

"Arrest big fish"
(July 6, 2015)

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Humayun Kabir

Administration/law enforcing agencies lack fishing rods to catch these big fish!

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Kamrul Hasan

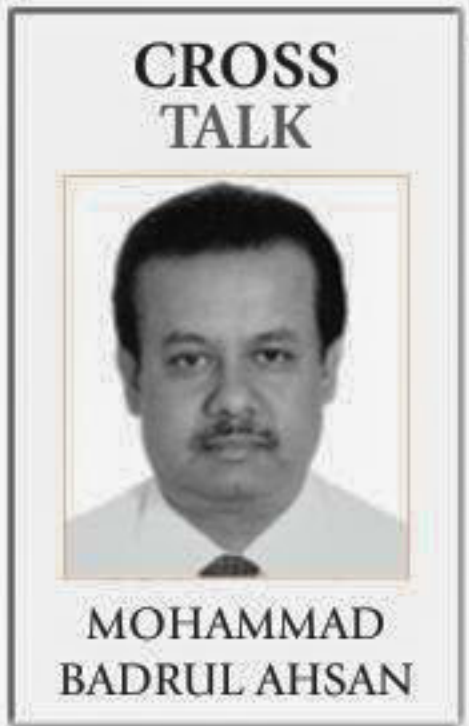
Thanks, Mr. Chief Justice, for your statement but don't compromise with politics for your position.

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Sheikh Tashdeed Ahmed

The big fish will never be caught. Why even bother asking?

Every man's mask is also his face



CROSS TALK

THE chief justice of Bangladesh has recently assured us that the judiciary, like any other public institution, could be fairly criticised. He cautioned against any criticism that may unfairly undermine its integrity and soil its reputation, and nobody could have said it better than he did, besides killing two birds with one stone. He reminded those who forgot that the judiciary is a public institution. Then again, he warned those who take potshots at the judiciary just because they have their axes to grind. Criticism must be responsible and legitimate, he said.

To do justice to our chief justice, he has made a profound statement. It encompasses not only his own line of work but also other spheres of life. Our nation is helplessly stuck in the pretension trap, which is a gap between belief and utterance. It's a no-man's land between hypocrisy and hallucination where what appears isn't always apparent.

In that sense, the highest judicial officer of the country has rendered a

universal evocation. And that evocation is true everywhere like a daisy chain. If all the people of this country stand in a single file line, they will make an unending stretch of confusion. Every man's mask is also his face.

The crux of this confusion is explained by Jorge Luis Borges in his one-paragraph short story *On Exactitude in Science*. A great empire created a map that was so detailed it was as large as the empire itself, but when the empire crumbled, all that was left of it was the map. French philosopher Jean Baudrillard used this story with a converse twist. The people of the empire spend their lives ensuring their place in the representation is properly circumscribed and detailed by the mapmakers, while the reality crumbles away from disuse.

The allegory speaks of our fate, because we are living in the map and the empire is slipping away. The constitution is a part of that map. So are the legislative, executive and judicial branches of the government, the police force, the newspapers, academic institutions, streets and markets that form the contours of laws and livelihoods to protect the lives and dignity of people. Ironically, while mapping it out the mapmakers are simultaneously wiping out the terrain.

The soul of this nation is screaming under the burden of this contradiction.

People cannot complain against anybody when they are wronged. They cannot blame anybody when they get oppressed. They cannot name anybody when they are threatened. They give bribes, extortion money and increasing space to illegitimate demands and unreasonable encroachments. They don't get to cast their votes, yet are forced to believe they have an elected government!

Thus, the people of this country are living in the reality which doesn't exist for them. The mapmakers have overtaken the empire, and nothing is what it seems. It's a crime to criticise crime in the perverted manner of Shylock's dilemma in William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*. People cannot shed a drop of blood no matter who cuts the flesh from their chest.

The textbook definition of criticism is that it's an act of expressing disapproval and of noting the problems or faults of a person or thing. But an expression of disapproval isn't always about finding faults. If a patient cries in pain, it's not necessarily a complaint against the doctor. Neither is it so when someone lets out a shriek if another person steps on his or her toes.

The wretched often rage against the heavens to console their souls. It's their last resort of some sort for the same reason aching boils are broken to

extricate pus. It's also for the same reason that railway lines have gaps, allowing room for the rails to expand due to the friction caused by the running of trains.

The afflicted souls in this country have no room for expansion. Their quiet anguish howls inside them like cold air trapped in the valley. They have nowhere to turn; even worse they have no escape or release. They are hopelessly captive in their own republic.

That's the biggest problem, which belies everything. The wicked have created many layers to conceal their mischief. They speak the right words and keep a straight face. It's amazing how zealously they try to be politically correct when practising wrong politics.

Style supersedes substance; the cosmetic conjures the magic. And nothing is black and white except for the written words, which too are fading into a fog of gray. We have got fancy names for fancy things, but nothing explains why the wronged always have to worry about being right as well.

If no man can be wise on an empty stomach, what to expect from the aggrieved souls? It's more so when those who should come to their rescue are relentlessly pushing them into distress.

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Can the Greek Referendum offer any lessons?

ABDULLAH SHIBLI

IN a historical referendum on July 5, 2015, the Greek voters overwhelmingly sided with the current government in its debt negotiations with its European partners. From a very narrow perspective, it was a victory for the governing Syriza Party, but provided only a temporary respite for the government which finds itself overwhelmed with debt, a banking crisis, and commitments made to its voters that could very well lead Greece on the path to years and years of uncertainty and downward economic spiral. Any economic and political crisis in Europe is bound to have ripple effects of the emerging countries of Asia, including Bangladesh, and unless the Greek crisis is resolved soon, the uncertainty in the financial markets will soon have a negative influence on Bangladesh and its trading partners in South East Asia.

For the newcomers trying to understand the latest round of happenings in Europe, the genesis of this crisis can be traced back to the period of 1999-2007 when the Greek government borrowed heavily to fund its extravagant projects, including the 2004 Summer Olympics in Athens. The extent of its indebtedness was concealed by the government, and Greece managed to cover up its budget deficit to the extent that its debt-to-GDP ratio rose to 127 percent in 2009 and to 146 percent in 2010. Greece faced the twin challenges of inability to service its international debts and meet its domestic obligations. In May 2010, the IMF, ECB, and European Commission (EC) offered a bailout package of more than 110 billion Euros on a quid pro quo basis: Greece promised to undertake a programme of structural reforms (drastic spending cuts, tax rises, and labor market and pension reforms), austerity measures, and privatisation in return for the loan to be released in four tranches.

Unfortunately, Greece dragged its feet in implementing its side of the bargain, and needed a second bailout in 2011. Matters took a turn for the worse in December 2014, when the Syriza Party forced a new election, which it won in January and threatened to scale back the austerity measures and scrap the deal worked out with the Eurozone countries. To cut the long story short, after six months of back and forth, Greece's debtors offered a new package in late June which the prime minister decided to place before the voters. In the meantime, the Greek banks are running out of money and Greece defaulted on its loan repayment on June 30; a 1.5 billion euro payment on a 21.2 billion euro total debt owed to the IMF. A full-blown default by Greece could potentially lead to instability in the financial market, severely limiting Greece's access to international loans, and curtailing economic activity further. Greek economy is currently in a state of shock, having taken the brunt of earlier budgetary and fiscal restrictions pretty hard after five years of austerity and reeling from a 25 percent unemployment rate.

The crisis in Europe has already shaken up global



markets but only in a moderate way. The Euro has slid in the international market and is currently trading at 0.90 to the dollar, a drop from the recent high of 0.93 in April. But, the volatility in the financial market has been rather muted, and this can be attributed to many factors. Most importantly, the world market had already anticipated the turn of events, and market prices have factored in the risk element. Secondly, regardless of the public posturing of both European leaders led by German Chancellor Angela Merkel and EC Secretary General Jean-Claude Juncker on the one hand, and the Greek prime minister and finance ministers on the other, it is expected that European community leaders would leave no stone unturned to keep Greece in the Eurozone.

What's next? Could matters get worse if Greece drops Euro or leaves the EC? At this point it is unlikely that either of these catastrophes can happen. In various international forums, "Grexit" or the withdrawal of Greece from the Eurozone is not discussed as glibly as it was a few months ago since both sides have dismissed this option. However, some do not rule out the possibility of "Graccident", another possible scenario where Greece finds itself out of Eurozone due to some unforeseen circumstances such as a collapse of its banking system or a run on its commercial banks.

The future course of events on world market and economies farther away from the "zone of crisis" depends on the following key outcomes: Grexit or Graccident. Another payment deadline is coming up

for Greece and a default on July 20 of 3.5 billion euro payment due to the European Central Bank will have a damaging impact unless there is some agreement on debt restructuring prior to that. On the larger scheme of things, the impact on Asia will be marginal and its impact on GDP will be less than half a percentage point. If one reads the tea leaves, the outlook after the new Greek Finance Minister Euclid Tsakalotos' initial rounds of discussions has changed for the better, and there is a good chance now of reaching a breakthrough in the Greek crisis before the next round of payments are due.

All said and done, the impact on the global economy will be limited. The markets, as efficient as they are, have already internalised the results of the referendum and Grexit. Even if negotiations with the debtors keep dragging on, with the Greek economy muddling through with some stop-gap measures, the rest of the world might find a way of containing any far-reaching impact. Greece after all represents only 2 percent of Eurozone's GDP and while the suffering of the Greeks and its economic outlook worsens in the short run, it can be expected to recover within five to ten years.

Finally, what are the lessons for the developing countries from all of this? For starters, here are three basic ones: Don't live beyond your means; give your lenders the respect they deserve; and don't promise the electorate more than what you can deliver.

More on this at a later juncture!

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Spirit of Ramadan

The other day, I was on my way back home by bus. I found many passengers on the bus were counting down the time to reach home before iftar. But the traffic congestion was severe, making it difficult for everyone to reach home on time. It was five minutes before iftar but the bus was still motionless at Link Road, Badda. I bought a bottle of water from a vendor. Most of the passengers were buying iftar items from vendors to break their fast on the bus. I started drinking water from my bottle. I was pleasantly surprised seeing many passengers around me sharing iftar items with other passengers. Three passengers even offered me some iftar. It seemed to me that there was no stranger in the bus and we were all tied with the invisible thread of brotherhood. I understood that it is the spirit of Ramadan that makes us forget about class divisions and I wish this spirit would last forever within us.

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Pope Francis calls for climate action

Recently, Pope Francis called upon the world leaders to come to an agreement at the UN Climate Summit in December. He said in his message: "This is one of the defining moral and ethical issues of our time. The poor and vulnerable in developing countries are the most at risk for increased flooding, food insecurity, and climate conflict. We owe it to future generations to act boldly and quickly--to address climate change".

Although some scientists in some advanced countries including the US still debate on the matter of climate change and its impact, often expressing doubts about the authenticity of the science of climate change, climate change is real and is causing destruction in many countries including Bangladesh.

We hope that in the next UN Climate Summit in Paris, strong resolutions will be adopted to control the destructive effects of climate change, giving priority to the conditions of the developing countries of the world including Bangladesh.

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Faridabad-Gandaria Roads in bad shape

Faridabad-Gandaria is a well-known area in the old part of the city. About 7/8 lakh people live in this area. But most of the roads here are in bad shape. The road between Loharpool (K.B. road) and Postagola is in a dilapidated condition with so many potholes here and there. During the rainy season, water accumulates in the potholes on the road, creating extreme inconvenience for the passers-by. Due to bad road conditions, the area is lagging behind in trade and commerce. We request the authorities to take necessary measures to repair the K B road, Mill barack, Faridabad, Dhalkanagar Lane, I.G. Gate, Karimullahbagh and all other roads in the area at the earliest convenience.

Mahbubuddin Chowdhury
Secretary-General
National Association of UNESCO clubs in Bangladesh