

ANTONIO GUTERRES -

The next UN Secretary General

Foreign Donations Regulation Bill – 2016

Will curb public scrutiny of constitutional bodies

WE are constrained to say that in legislating the Foreign Donations Regulation Bill – 2016 the government has used its legislative power to enact laws to prevent public scrutiny of its performance as well as of other constitutional bodies. This will severely curtail the basic right of the citizens, who have elected their representatives to the parliament, to ventilate their views and opinions on these bodies.

There are several queries with regard to the said law. While stating what 'derogatory' comments will constitute a criminal offense, the term has not been defined leaving a wide scope of arbitrariness in applying the law. And we wonder why it is only the foreign funded NGOs that have been singled out. Does it mean that the local NGOs can pass so called 'derogatory' comments?

And what are the constitutional bodies that one is talking about? These are primarily the parliament, the EC, the ACC and the AG. Are we to believe that the MPs are above board or they are not capable of committing error in performing their job? Is the EC not capable of malfunctioning or for that matter the accountant general's office, which deals with the financial discipline of the government departments? So they can't be questioned for any mistake? Will raising the issue of lack of quorum in the parliament, or the misdemeanor of a people's representative, be deemed as derogatory which a foreign funded NGO cannot make but a local NGO can? Why is the government not willing to accept fact based criticisms and comments from all quarters?

We do not feel the need for such legislation. The parliament is fully empowered to deal with any derogatory remarks directed towards it by anyone.

Solar irrigation system

An innovation worth cultivating

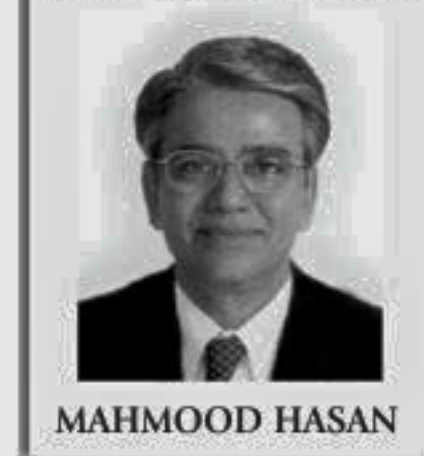
BECAUSE of uninterrupted water supply and cost advantage over diesel-based pumps, irrigation using solar power is becoming more and more popular among farmers. Since 2012, 358 solar-based irrigation pumps, for example, have been installed to water crops. We welcome such innovation and believe that the benefits that can be harnessed from solar-power irrigation, particularly in terms of them being more environmental friendly, calls for an expansion in their number.

Forty percent of the massive amount of diesel that the country needs every year goes towards the running of 14.32 lakh irrigation pumps. Some 1,700-1,800 megawatts of electricity is also required for irrigating rice fields during the boro season. In a country always suffering from the shortage of both, increasing the number of solar-powered irrigation pumps can greatly reduce such dependencies. The advantage in terms of getting water easier when using solar-based irrigation is another major boon.

All things considered, ways to improve farming using solar irrigation systems should be seriously looked at. Particularly important is to provide support services for solar irrigation systems locally so that repair and service work can be available for cheap and on an immediate basis to farmers. Many an innovation in our country has been left to rot in the absence of such services. The same shouldn't be allowed to happen in this case.

One concern that the authorities must keep in mind is the scarcity of land which makes solar-based irrigation on a large scale difficult. Thus, the authorities should plan well in installing these devices so that maximum benefit can be extracted from their use.

FROM A BYSTANDER



MAHMOOD HASAN

THE hunt for a successor to Ban Ki-moon has come an end at Turtle Bay, New York. Ban Ki-moon completes his second five-year term by the end of December 2016. As the 71st General Assembly went into session, UN corridors were abuzz with three issues – transparency in the selection process of Secretary General, selection of a woman Secretary General and reform of the United Nations, which has 193 member states, some 30 agencies and programmes, and 41,000 staff.

In the 71-year history of the United Nations, four out of five geographical groups held the Secretary General's post. Western Europe had three Secretary Generals (Trygve Lie, Dag Hammarskjold and Kurt Waldheim), Latin America had one (Javier Perez de Cuellar), Africa had two (Boutros Boutros-Ghali and Kofi Annan), Asia-Pacific had two (U Thant and Ban Ki-moon). This time around it was Eastern Europe's turn - in diplomatic jargon, it was 'Buggins' turn'.

Since the 2015 General Assembly, there have been loud campaigns from NGOs, civil societies and women activists that the next Secretary General should be a woman. There were 13 candidates, seven of whom were women, mostly from Eastern Europe. Three, of course, dropped out later for lack of support.

The election (or rather selection) of Secretary General has always been shrouded in secrecy. Mogens Lykketoft, President of the 70th General Assembly tried to make the nomination process transparent. In April 2016, he organised a "job interview" and a televised "debate" for the candidates in the General Assembly. Interestingly, candidates were often asked the embarrassing question whether they wanted to be a "Secretary" or a "General".

United Nations' responsibilities have

increased manifold today with fast changing technology, communication, commerce and ecology that link nation states into a global village. The world is also faced with multiple intractable challenges – the Syrian war, terrorism, refugees, human rights violations, the Palestine issue, ISIS, threat to Europe's security due to Brexit, an assertive China, a resurgent Russia, uncertainty of US election results, and lately the India-Pakistan conflict, etc. Geopolitical schism

uninspiring and lacking appeal. During his ten years as Secretary General, he had hardly come up with new ideas which could rally support from P5 and other members.

This brings the issue of reform of the UN system to the fore. The noteworthy idea put forth by the civil society, 1 For 7 Billion, is a single seven-year non-renewable term for the Secretary General. This will free the Secretary General from seeking renewal and make him or her

polls, a novel winnowing process. The 15 members indicated behind closed doors whether they "encourage", "discourage" or have "no opinion" of a candidate. The process persuaded repeatedly 'discouraged' some aspirants to quit the race. So far, the Security Council has had six straw polls – the last one on October 5, 2016.

Among the ten remaining candidates, only Antonio Guterres came out on the top. He secured 13 "encouraged" votes, no member "discouraged" him while two members had "no opinion". The nine other aspirants all had "discouraged" votes. Thus, Antonio Manuel de Oliveira Guterres (67), member of Socialist International, former Prime Minister of Portugal (1995-2002), who also served as chief of United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2005 – 2015), was selected to lead the United Nations. All veto-wielding P5 members openly supported Guterres. Since no member discouraged Guterres, his name was formally forwarded to the General Assembly for endorsement. The attempt to get the Security Council to nominate two candidates did not find takers. One wonders whether the process is actually democratic.

It would have been great to have a woman leading the world body, but is it necessarily a gender issue? Actually, the issue has been about appointing someone with courage of conviction, integrity and competence. After winning the Security Council's unanimous support, Guterres pledged to revamp the United Nations to boost its peace-making efforts and promote human rights.

In January 2017, Antonio Guterres will land at the high-profile bully pulpit of the United Nations as its ninth Secretary General. Given his long experience in the UN system, Guterres should be able to manoeuvre the difficult corridors of the diplomats' super bowl skilfully. One only wonders will he be a "Secretary" or a "General" or both?

The writer is former Ambassador and Secretary.



The new UN Secretary General Antonio Gueterres - everyone's favourite.

between the West and East is more pronounced now than a couple of decades ago. Conflicts and threats of war are fast changing the world order.

The world body has been widely criticised for being toothless and dysfunctional – unable to stop or resolve conflicts around the world. Frustrations with the UN led nations includes the concern to form separate groups to address security and economic issues facing the world – G7, G20, BRICS, etc. The outgoing underwhelming Ban Ki-Moon has been described as timid,

more independent and assertive.

The other proposal for reform of the Security Council relates to curtailing the use of veto by P5 members. In other words, amend the UN Charter and make it competent to handle contemporary challenges. But despite lots of research and discussions, the P5 had nothing to do with it. The P5 members consider 'veto power' their inalienable right. In fact, the P5 members are largely to blame for UN's ineffectiveness.

In choosing the new UN boss, the Security Council members used straw

PROJECT SYNDICATE

Reversing the medical brain drain

G. RICHARD OLDS

WITH physicians already scarce worldwide, demand for foreign-born doctors in the United States and the United Kingdom is stretching developing and middle-income countries' medical resources to the breaking point. In the US, for example, the shortfall of physicians could grow to nearly 95,000 by 2025, equivalent to 43 percent of all doctors working today.

When doctors are in short supply, the US and UK turn to countries like the Philippines to close the gap. But this leaves the Philippines with its own significant shortage of medical professionals.

The situation across Africa is no better. In Kenya, more than 50 percent of all doctors are now practicing overseas, leaving just 20 physicians per 100,000 in the population. By contrast, the United Kingdom has 270 doctors per 100,000 people.

To be sure, there is nothing wrong with doctors spending time working and training overseas; on the contrary, practicing in a variety of health-care systems is critical for producing experienced, well-rounded physicians. The fundamental problem is that medical staff and students are leaving the developing world en masse to train in countries like the US and UK, and then never returning to work in their own communities. Moreover, supplier countries often pay for that medical education directly or indirectly, without ever receiving any of the benefits.

To reverse this trend, we must allow medical students to train in world-class clinical settings, while encouraging them to return to practice in their home countries. This will not be easy, in part because practicing in developed countries is far more lucrative than practicing in the developing world, and doctors overwhelmingly prefer to work in the countries where they have trained. Any effort to stop the one-way flow of medical talent from developing countries will have to address these factors.

For starters, we should focus on where medical training happens. Students could complete their preclinical training, and a portion of their clinical training, in their country of origin, and then be given the option of completing a temporary clinical-training stint in the US or the UK.

Residency programmes are the last stage of the medical-training process, and they often determine doctors' preferred practice setting. When doctors from the developing world complete their residency programmes in the US and UK, they rarely return home. In fact, they are often given strong incentives to stay: permanent-visa status and a valid license to practice medicine.

Low- and middle-income countries should thus provide more residency programmes, and the US and the UK, which bear some responsibility for the current doctor-supply imbalance, should assist them with funding and know-how.

We also need to address the financial incentives that lure an unsustainably large number of developing-world doctors overseas in the first place, perhaps by obliging emigrating physicians whose home-country governments financed their medical-school training to pay the cost before allowing them to practice medicine overseas. Thus, doctors would become liable for the value of their subsidised training when they elect to work abroad.

This condition could be imposed through a

President and CEO, we have the CityDoctors Scholarship programme, whereby New York City students who receive full-tuition scholarships to medical schools must return to practice in New York City's public hospital system for five years after their training. If they do not return, they must repay the scholarship as if it were a loan.

Medical-training programmes in developing countries should also be considering how they can better direct future doctors toward meeting domestic needs. Students overwhelmingly come from affluent backgrounds, which often means they are from the biggest cities. More should be recruited from rural areas – which often have the greatest shortages – and then be trained in

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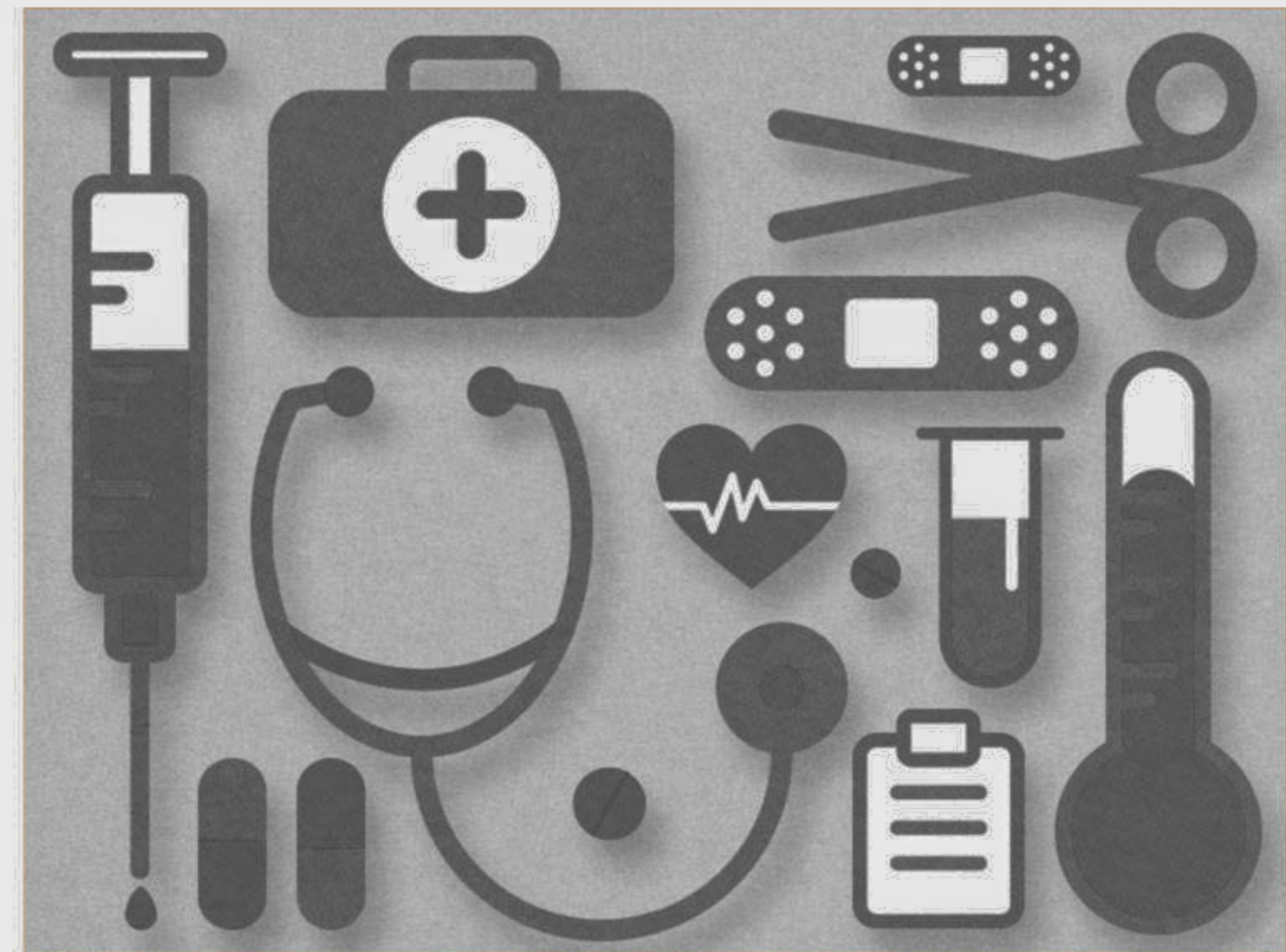


ILLUSTRATION: AMY NICOLE SCHWARTZ

well-constructed scholarship system that embodies the slogan: "pay it back if you don't come back." Under this system, fewer students who intend to work permanently overseas will accept government subsidies, and more money will be available for students who wish to practice in their country of origin, or for investments in healthcare infrastructure.

Trinidad has successfully implemented such a strategy – doctors who train overseas are required to return home for five years in exchange for their government scholarships – and the US has a similar programme meant to encourage students to practice in particular geographical areas around the country. At St. George's University, where I am

the settings where they are most needed. By broadening the geographical and socioeconomic talent base and identifying good candidates sooner, we could increase the likelihood that students will return to practice in their local communities.

We all have something to gain from globally sustainable medical-training practices, which will ensure that all countries' health-care needs are met. For developing countries, there is no other way forward.

The writer is President and Chief Executive Officer of St. George's University in Grenada, West Indies.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Tail end batting must improve

I remember a time in Bangladesh cricket when tail enders would make more runs than the openers and prevent the team from posting embarrassing scores. What happened to those days? Nowadays, whenever two set batsmen get out, the remaining batsmen crash like a house of cards. Why is that? Even if they were picked for their bowling, tail enders can make useful contributions with runs that can take the team home. I hope tail enders will take their batting more seriously in the matches to come in the future. Aminur Rahim, Mohakhali

Let's make Bangladesh great and affluent

We are a nation of winners. We have a heroic and prestigious history. Our economy is growing rapidly, with experts predicting that Bangladesh will be a developed nation within 2041.

However, some anomalies still continue to hinder our growth - ethical hazards, violence against women and children, gap between the poor and rich people, etc. Since we are a nation that never gives up, we have to get rid of these plagues anyhow.

We must take the matter into our own hands and take the initiative to make our country great. If we work together, we can surely succeed. Salman Mahmud Rasel

On email