

## Uncertain future of CUST medical students

*They suffer for no fault of their own*

THE situation prevailing at the Chittagong University of Science and Technology (CUST), where MBBS students are facing uncertainty as Bangladesh Medical and Dental Council (BMDC) has refused to register them, is unacceptable. The reason for BMDC not registering 1200 students is that the university administration had inducted more than the approved number of students.

We understand that, as per rules, students have to be registered before they sit for their first of the three professional exams without which they cannot continue their studies. Not only did the university authorities fail to ensure that the students were registered timely, they made students sit for the subsequent two exams, which is also illegal. We wonder why the BMDC had allowed CUST to go on with its teaching curriculum, knowing fully well that the university had let students sit for exams without prior registration. Why should, may we ask, the students suffer because of the fault of the university authorities? And there are instances when the Council had allowed registration even in cases exceeding the permitted number of students.

We also fail to understand why the appropriate government authorities did not take suitable action to correct the situation ab initio. Now so many students are facing uncertainty, of whom a large number are from foreign countries. This speaks grossly about the systemic fault and also tarnishes the image of the country abroad. The situation should be put right immediately and gross anomalies centring round the registration of CUST students need to be fixed. Those responsible for this unwarranted situation must be held to account and penalised.

## Cold wave sweeps the country

*Concerted efforts needed to minimise sufferings*

THE second spell of cold wave has begun to sweep across the country, including divisions of Rangpur, Rajshahi and Sylhet, since Saturday, the first day of the Bengali month of Magh. The country recently witnessed the first spell of the wave in the second week of December. The lowest temperature—5.5 degrees Celsius—was recorded in Rangpur's Rajarhat.

The situation is most acute in northern and south-western regions where the mercury has dropped significantly while other regions face a mild to moderate wind chill, according to the Bangladesh Meteorological Department (BMD). Although the cold wave is forecast to subside in the next few days, it is likely to persist in some regions for at least three more weeks.

The effects of the cold wave have been most severe for the poorer sections of society, particularly for the homeless, the elderly and children. Thousands are already suffering from pneumonia, asthma and other respiratory diseases. People are using dry leaves and twigs to light fires to keep themselves warm. Others are using plastic bags as makeshift blankets. As vehicles cannot ply the roads due to heavy fog, the daily lives of schoolgoers and farmers have also been disrupted.

Evidently, there is a lack of preparedness of the local administration in these regions which ought to be addressed to minimise the sufferings of the vulnerable as a result of the biting cold. The government should see to it that the affected people are provided relief supplies and that the relevant agencies are alerted about the heightened risk of road accidents due to low visibility. Furthermore, medical facilities in these areas, which are seeing a surge in patients afflicted with cold-related diseases, could also use aid in the form of manpower and supplies.

# US academia witch hunt?

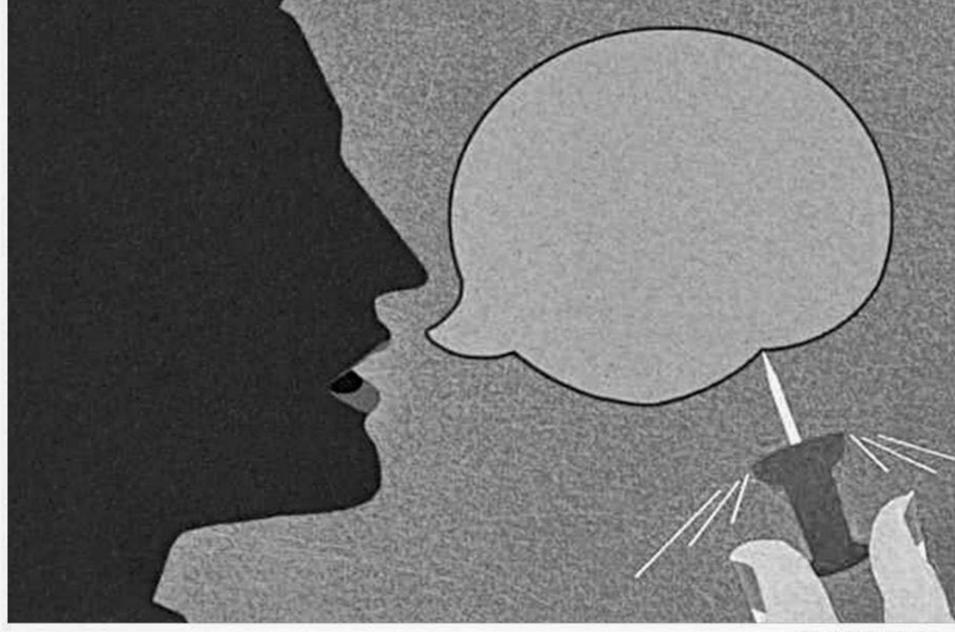


SYED MANSUR HASHIM

IT is disturbing to find that a new website called the "Professor Watchlist" has appeared in the United States on November 21, 2016, and according to the *New York Times* it accuses nearly 200 college professors of advancing "leftist propaganda in the classroom" and discriminating against conservative students which has been criticised as a threat to academic freedom...it

names those instructors who "advance a radical agenda in lecture halls." "We aim to post professors who have records of targeting students for their viewpoints, forcing students to adopt a certain perspective, and/or abuse or harm students in any way for standing up for their beliefs". That's the statement of Matt Lamb, an organiser of the site.

It is a project of 'Turning Point USA', a non-profit organisation that apparently aims to "educate" students about "true free market values." As further reported by the same newspaper, Charlie Kirk, founder and executive director of the organisation has written in his blog that "it's no secret that some of America's college professors are totally out of line", and that it was time to expose them. Indeed some professors have already been "exposed" by this movement and what is disturbing to note here is that we have a former professor from the



SOURCE: MARCUS BUTT

*And the biggest worry, of course, is that no one knows presently what the new education policy will be under President Trump. If anti-intellectualism is going to be allowed to flourish unabated then academic freedom is in the direct line of fire.*

University of Missouri who was found speaking on a video calling for the use of "some muscle" to remove a journalist from a student demonstration. The professor was fired by the university.

Is this the new face of America? Where intolerance is not only accepted but actively encouraged? It brings back sour memories of Senator McCarthy, who back in 1950 fuelled fears of widespread Communist subversion. He claimed that there were large numbers of Communist and Soviet spies and sympathisers in the United States federal government and elsewhere, and it created grounds for a massive witch hunt that destroyed many promising careers in different spheres of American society and government. Today, the Soviet Union does not exist, and the Communist "peril" has been replaced by "leftist" propaganda and it is still too early to

conclude that those dark times are returning to the US.

The existence of such a movement has created a lot of tension in academic circles between those who have decided to wait-and-see and those who wish to take the fight to the right-of-centre elements that are propagating the "Professors Watchlist". There are signs that some are not going to take this lying down. Indeed, a counter movement is already afoot. We find that the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) have delivered an open letter to Turning Point, USA requesting more than 11,000 faculty and supporter signatories be added to its list, as a show of support for those who have already been listed. The letter stated "The American Association of University Professors has supported academic freedom and opposed those who seek to curtail it for more than a hundred years, and will continue to do so, because the common good depends upon the free search for truth and its free exposition. The type of monitoring of professors in which you are engaged can only inhibit the process through which higher learning occurs and knowledge is advanced." Julie Schmid, executive director of the AAUP, added, "We are exceedingly concerned about the current climate for academic freedom and the implications for our society. This watch list is an unwelcome attempt to intimidate and silence voices on campus. It comes at a time when professors are being targeted with death threats and online harassment, largely not for their speech or activities in the classroom or on the job."

The battle lines are clearly drawn. And the biggest worry, of course, is that no one knows presently what

the new education policy will be under President Trump. If anti-intellectualism is going to be allowed to flourish unabated then academic freedom is in the direct line of fire. Indeed, that is what is being expressed by the AAUP which believes that the election result "threatens some of the core institutions of our democracy and may be the greatest threat to academic freedom since the McCarthy period." But then, some academics believe that the Trump era will be no worse than the Obama and Clinton eras, which were, according to some academics, even more authoritarian.

As stated before, it is too early to make conclusions on what the current administration's policies will be on education, particularly higher education. But from what has been reported in mainstream US media, groups such as Turning Point USA have the capacity to open up the Pandora's Box on racist slur and rightwing action on campuses nationwide. Such affronts to academic freedoms have plagued the country during the height of the Cold War, and rationality eventually forced the US Senate to censure Senator McCarthy, but not before causing extensive damage. Repetition of such historical mistakes in today's America is, hopefully, unthinkable, but should such forces be unleashed, they will not go unchallenged. To what extent the AAUP (and other likeminded platforms and alliances) will be able to counter extreme right wing propaganda will determine the outcome of this brewing battle.

The writer is Assistant Editor, *The Daily Star*.

## Ban Ki-moon's mixed legacy as UN Secretary-General

LYNDAL ROWLANDS

BAN Ki-moon ended his ten years as UN Secretary-General at midnight on New Year's Eve with his last official duty – dropping the ball at New York's Times Square.

"I'll be in Times Square for the ball drop. Millions of people will watch me lose my job." Ban wrote beforehand on Twitter, hinting at possible relief that years of ribbon-cutting, handshaking and selfie-taking were finally over.

Ban – a former foreign minister of South Korea and career diplomat – seemed to embrace these ceremonial duties tirelessly during his two terms as Secretary-General.

However, when it came to some of the

tenure," said Lewis, who is also a former Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF and a former Canadian Ambassador to the UN.

Lewis said that Ban could have done more to follow in the footsteps of former Secretaries-General such as Kofi Annan of Ghana or Dag Hammarskjöld of Sweden, two Secretaries-General admired for their ability to stand up to UN member states when needed.

"It's the difference between someone who'll use the middle ground to try and satisfy everyone and someone who says, my job is to lead this world in a principled way, upholding the charter and telling the member states when they're wrong

positions.

"I do think Ban got better over time. After the 2009 Sri Lanka crisis, he felt compelled to highlight serious human rights abuses. He is a moral man."

However, overall, Gowan said that Ban was considered too cautious in the face of major crises facing the UN. These include ongoing conflicts in Syria and South Sudan.

"The constant refrain I have heard from UN officials over the last decade has been that Ban has been too cautious and too concerned about protecting his own position in the face of major crises," said Gowan.

However, while Ban may have only had limited influence over the UN member

the UN bureaucracy is hard to manage, and peace operations are especially difficult to control," said Gowan. "But Ban never seemed to have a detailed operational sense of what the UN has been doing on the ground on his watch."

"When a big crisis hit a UN mission, or a sexual abuse scandal blew up, he always seemed to be on the back foot. I credit him with trying to do the right thing over cholera in Haiti, but he was slow."

UN peacekeepers from Nepal responding to the 2010 earthquake brought cholera to Haiti in part because untreated sewage from a UN base ran into local water sources.

At the beginning of December 2016, soon before ending his time as Secretary-General, Ban apologised for the cholera outbreak, but stopped short of accepting the UN's role in bringing cholera to Haiti.

"His apology was very much characteristic of the middle ground that satisfied only part of his role," said Lewis. "He never accepted the responsibility for the UN bringing cholera to Haiti. He only ever apologised for the consequences of the cholera. In other words, he stopped short of embracing an important matter of principle."

This may have been because a full apology could potentially open the UN and its member states to paying reparations to the people of Haiti, thousands of whom have already died due to the cholera outbreak.

Nevertheless, many saw Ban's apology as an attempt to make amends for one of the darkest aspects of his ten years as Secretary-General.

His tenure did see progress made in other areas, for example, Ban was considered to have progressed LGBTI rights within the UN by openly showing his support.

Ban's successor Antonio Guterres, the former Prime Minister of Portugal, took office on January 1, beginning his five year term with a message of peace to the world.

"We're hoping that Guterres will be a Hammarskjöld," said Lewis, referring to the Swedish Secretary-General who is admired by many UN aficionados for his dedication to the UN charter.

Ban is widely considered to be vying for the presidency of South Korea.



Ban Ki-moon

*"With the world in the state it now is in, we need a Secretary-General who speaks truth to power, who speaks his mind, who takes strong positions, and that has not been characteristic of the last several year of Ban Ki-Moon's tenure," said Lewis, who is also a former Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF and a former Canadian Ambassador to the UN.*

PHOTO: AFP

bigger responsibilities of the role, some critics argue he could have done more.

UN Secretaries-General have to tread a delicate path of diplomacy and bureaucracy. They are servants to the UN's 193 member states, but they also have a responsibility to be a "true voice" of the UN Charter, Stephen Lewis, co-founder of international advocacy organisation AIDS-Free World, told IPS.

"With the world in the state it now is in, we need a Secretary-General who speaks truth to power, who speaks his mind, who takes strong positions, and that has not been characteristic of the last several year of Ban Ki-Moon's

and when their human rights are being violated," said Lewis.

The charter is the founding document of the United Nations which was established in 1945 in the wake of the Second World War.

UN expert at the European Council on Foreign Relations Richard Gowan agreed that Ban chose to be diplomatic rather than disagree with UN member states.

"Ban is a traditional diplomat to his bone marrow. He always felt that offending big powers was a taboo," said Gowan.

However Gowan – who has followed Ban's tenure closely – noted that over time Ban began to take stronger

states' responses to the world's protracted disasters he did have responsibility for how the UN responded to them.

This includes oversight for UN peacekeepers – whose numbers swelled to over 100,000 during Ban's tenure.

UN peacekeepers have faced scandals, including allegations of sexual abuse, however it is the UN's tepid response under Ban's leadership to problems within peacekeeping that has attracted the most criticism.

Gowan argues that the UN's responses under Ban seemed in part to reflect his lack of understanding of the operational intricacies of the UN.

"Secretaries-General are not magicians.

### REJOINDER FROM UNIVERSITY GRANTS COMMISSION OF BANGLADESH

An editorial titled "Why more private universities? Authorities do not seem to be serious about quality", published in *The Daily Star* on January 14, 2017, has drawn the attention of the University Grants Commission (UGC) of Bangladesh. The editorial mentions that UGC is granting permission for the establishment of an additional 16 private universities. It may be mentioned here that the University Grants Commission does not have any mandate under the Private University Act-2010 to grant permission for establishment of private universities in the country. It is the prerogative of the Ministry of Education. The University Grants Commission only checks the accuracy of the facts and data in the proposal submitted for establishment of private universities to the Education Ministry by the promoters. The establishment of public universities is solely decided by the Government.

**Our Reply**  
 We stand corrected.