

A blow to the fundamentals of the Constitution

Incorporate suggested changes into the Digital Security Bill

WE are extremely disappointed and shocked that a parliamentary standing committee report on the said Bill has been placed before the House without a single substantial change. The role of the JS body in this regard is disappointing. We are constrained to suggest that the parliamentary body has not only abdicated its duty as the representative of the people to protect their interest, it has, by its inaction, also relinquished its oath-bound obligation to defend the constitution by upholding its fundamental values, one of which is the freedom of speech and the media. It has failed the people woefully.

The government may put up bills in a manner that would suit them. But it is for the MPs, the people's representatives, to ensure that in fulfilling the government's agenda, the rights of the people are not trampled and constitutional guarantees are not abridged. Forwarding the report on the bill as it is to the parliament only suggests that the JS body did not take the public concerns, especially those of the media, seriously since not a single point suggested by the editors, journalists and media bodies has been incorporated. What is equally shocking is that the body has deemed it fit to revalidate an archaic, colonial and anti-people act like the Official Secrets Act.

We need hardly remind that in the day and age of technology, the digital platform has become an integrated and inseparable part of all media, and any effort to stifle it will in effect choke the mainstream media and thus the freedom of expression. In trying to prevent digital crime, the government will end up throttling the digital space.

We urge the parliament not to rush through its passage, reconsider the whole process and listen to the concerns raised. There is still time till the bill is passed to prevent an anti-people law from being enacted.

Classes dislocated for MPs programme

Schools are not for private use

WHEN a sitting member of parliament (MP) decides to turn a secondary school in his constituency into a party centre for his personal use, and that too for three days during which time no classes were held, we pause to think how power goes to one's head. The school was handed back to its management with food leftovers which just goes to show how low an esteem the lawmaker holds of the educational institution, its students and teachers.

We would like to know precisely why the school's management committee did not protest this treatment, and instead condoned the action of the MP saying that there was nothing wrong in using the school premises since it was adjacent to his house. The incident occurred recently at Dhoakholia Coronation High School and College in Bera upazila and we are told that students are finding it very hard to bear the smell of stale food left behind.

It would seem that government property nowadays is treated as personal estate by some people's representatives. Apparently the feast was an attempt by the lawmaker to clinch the party's nomination in the upcoming elections. If this is the sort of behaviour we are going to witness from our lawmakers, then what hope is there to instil any worthwhile values in our children? They are learning from their "guardian", as the MP claims he is, that displaying utter disregard for people is perfectly legitimate.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Irregular Bangladeshi workers in Malaysia are in danger

On September 5, *The Daily Star* published a story on Bangladeshi migrant workers in Malaysia, reporting that the Malaysian government had started a massive crackdown to round up undocumented workers. Currently, more than a million Bangladeshi workers live in Malaysia, nearly half of whom are "irregular".

The drive started from July 1, 2018 following the end of a two-year rehiring period. The Malaysian government fixed three agencies to deal with the regularisation applications. Nearly all irregular workers applied for permission, but a lion's share of them haven't been regularised.

Many of these irregular workers went to Malaysia in search of a better life in exchange for their savings. Therefore, they are now trying to avoid getting arrested and living miserably in makeshift camps. In such a situation, the Bangladeshi government needs to intervene and engage with its Malaysian counterpart to solve the issue more amicably.

M Soman, Dhaka University

Bangladesh's super-wealthy population is rising

Recently, a New York-based institution, Wealth X, has released its World Ultra Wealth Report 2018, according to which, Bangladesh, which is only just on the path to becoming a developing country, has the fastest growing ultra-wealthy population in the world.

The finding is alarming because, according to the government's own data, the gap between the poor and the rich is increasingly widening. This begs the question whether the economic growth that Bangladesh has experienced over the last few years is exploited by a coterie of super rich individuals.

Mohammad Zonaed Emran, By e-mail

Reviving DUCSU: Do's and don'ts



MANZOOR AHMED

FTER almost three decades, the election of the Dhaka University Central Students Union (DUCSU) may be held under pressure due to public demand and nudging by a rule of the High Court. The last such election was held in June 1990. Ironically, restoration of democracy and toppling of the military-backed government in 1990 by a mass movement marked the end of this exercise of democracy in academia. Will its revival now meet the expectations of students, citizens and well-wishers of education?

It has been said often, justifiably, that there is a glorious history of students' involvement in national politics, especially during the state language movement and in the 1960s and 1970s when students were the vanguards of citizens' voice on important national issues. Students then showed the way to political leaders at critical moments.

Politically conscious and active students, a minority among the general body of students, who were inclined towards different political ideologies, had their own organisations. A spectrum of political views was reflected among these organisations. They protected their independence and were not directly linked to or affiliated with major political parties of the country.

As a general rule, the elected student union was concerned with extra-curricular, cultural, sports and creative campus activities, working collaboratively with the university authorities. The elected union and the independent organisations had separate spheres of activities, except when a critical national issue arose that agitated the public in general, such as the language movement and the Pakistani regime's education commission reports.

It is helpful that the DUCSU election would be held in the new year after the parliamentary election is over. The education authorities and the government need to follow up this election with student body elections in all universities.

The character of the student organisations changed during the military rule of Ayub Khan in the 1960s when his henchman provincial governor Monaem Khan assigned the government intelligence branch to create the National Student Federation (NSF). Its job was to oppose, harass and intimidate genuine student organisations and the general student body who had no sympathy for the authoritarian regime.

Financed, armed and protected by the authorities, NSF had the license to use any means including violence, extortion and other crimes to subdue their opponents. NSF thugs even assaulted professors with impunity.

The approach used by the Ayub regime to control student organisations cast a long shadow.

The post-1975 military regimes in Bangladesh followed Ayub's playbook to create their own loyal student organisations. Unfortunately, these authoritarian practices and attitudes became deeply rooted in the political

Professor Anisuzzaman, and Professor Serajul Islam Chowdhury had made this appeal. Three of them are no more today.

Sir Fazle Hasan Abed, in a speech at the Higher Education Assembly at the Senate Hall of Dhaka University, said, "It embarrasses me to recite the litany of problems that have been listed in the news media and research reports. It is long and painful—the wrong side of student politics leading to many kinds of crimes that would be credit to a mafia godfather."

Sir Fazle went on, "The pernicious influence spreads to dormitories, campus life, admission of students, question leaks, tenders and contracts for university business, safety of female students, and even the appointment of staff and teaching personnel" (Higher Education Assembly, March 11, 2018).

The onus of bringing about a change in this situation, first recognising that as a serious problem, is largely on the ruling regime. Recent events in relation

formal or informal panel, and should be without the label or affiliation of the student organisations, especially those linked with political parties.

Call for nominations, scrutiny of candidates, campaigning, conducting election and declaring results should be completed within a short time, preferably in no more than two weeks.

There should be clearly stated rules and regulations for the election process including the nomination rules, campaign activities and modes of propaganda, and expenditure limits—discouraging the election to be a lengthy, high-stake and expensive operation.

The university authorities and the residential halls need to take control of allocation of seats, dining halls and general discipline in residential halls in order to ensure that the voters list and the voting process are not marred by intimidation.

An election monitoring board comprised of respected and known-to-be



Speakers including former student union leaders of various public universities talk about holding DUCSU polls at an open discussion on the Dhaka University campus in front of the Aparajeyo Bangla.

PHOTO: STAR

culture of the country.

In the post-1990 era, the political parties also found it expedient to continue with the practice of maintaining and supporting their own student arms. Occasional calls for delinking political parties and student organisations and including such a stipulation in election regulations for people's representation fell on deaf ears. The ruling parties also found it convenient to do away with elected student unions in universities and colleges. Student politics was completely taken over by the major political parties and main student bodies lost their independent existence.

It is in this context that the five most distinguished educationists of the country felt it was necessary to cut the umbilical cord of student organisations to their political parents. In April 2010, when the National Education Policy was about to be announced, Professor Kabir Chowdhury, Professor Zillur Rahman Siddiqi, Professor Jamal Nazrul Islam,

to the public service job quota movement and student protests about road safety do not augur well.

Will the student union election be a replay of the battles fought in parliamentary and local elections in the country—riddled by violence, flouting of election rules, and complaints about preventing voters from voting, stuffing ballot boxes, and partisanship of election officials?

It may well be a charade if a free play of the student arms of the ruling party and the other parties is not seriously restrained by a deliberate decision of the political leadership and offering necessary support to university authorities to conduct a fair and clean election. It may be too much to expect at present in the charged atmosphere created by the upcoming national parliamentary election. At the least, some essential conditions for holding a fair student body election must be fulfilled.

Nominations should be for each individual position, rather than as a

non-partisan faculty members should be appointed with the task of monitoring compliance with the election rules and the authority to cancel candidacy for serious violations of rules. The board should be allowed to set its own procedures for doing its job and all cooperation should be offered to it by the university authorities.

The "Don'ts" would be the opposite of the "Do's" listed above. The university authorities and law-enforcing bodies need to pledge not to play favourites directly or indirectly among candidates in the student union elections.

It is helpful that the DUCSU election would be held in the new year after the parliamentary election is over. The education authorities and the government need to follow up this election with student body elections in all universities and colleges applying the same ground rules.

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Manzoor Ahmed is Professor Emeritus at BRAC University.

How long-term planning can work

POLITICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE



SALEEMUL HUQ

BANGLADESH has a strong tradition of medium term planning through the periodic Five Year Plans, of which we are now in the 7th Plan. At the same time, the country has a large number of professional planners both within the Planning Commission as well as embedded within the Planning Department of every ministry who help develop the sectoral plans for each ministry.

This is a strong foundation of human skill and capacity based on which the country can now move towards making longer term plans for different sectors as well as for the country as a whole. There are already a number of sectoral and national plans being developed for longer time scales. These include the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Climate Change goals which all have a time horizon to 2030.

Very recently, the government has also approved the development of the Delta Plan which will have a time horizon until 2100. Only the Netherlands (with whose

assistance Bangladesh is developing it) has done a plan for such a long time horizon so it will be quite a daunting task for us. At this time horizon, it is likely to be more of an aspirational goal rather than a detailed plan.

Finally, we are expecting the prime minister to soon unveil her Vision 2041 for Bangladesh which will be more of a vision for the country than a specific plan.

Under the above circumstances, the country will need to modify the standard processes for the Five Year Plans by the Planning Commission in order to think about the longer-term vision and to involve not only all the different parts of the government but also other stakeholders from outside the government. In other words, it will not only have to take a whole-of-government approach but also a whole-of-society approach.

The government is well aware of this need and has already put in place a special unit in the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) to monitor the implementation of the SDGs under the leadership of very senior people. They have already started ensuring that each ministry develops its own SDG-related targets and ways of monitoring them.

Civil society actors and academics have also set up

groups around each of the SDGs for implementation and monitoring progress.

In the realm of climate change, the government has already developed the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) as required under the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and will be preparing the National Adaptation Plan (NAP) soon. At the same time, the Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan (BCCSAP) of 2009 is also being updated with a new time horizon of 2030.

While all these ambitious planning processes are to be lauded, the proof of the pudding will be in the eating, and unfortunately while we are relatively good at making plans, we are less good at implementing them effectively and on time.

Hence, as we move forward to the next phase of our long-term planning, both nationally and sectorally, we need to improve our implementation of the plans, which in turn means improving not just monitoring and evaluation (m&e) but more importantly, our monitoring, evaluation and learning (mel).

One big difference between medium-term and long-term planning is that the latter must be a learning-by-doing process where the learning must be systematic and sustained in order to understand what works and what doesn't, and then scale up what works and avoid what doesn't.

Another excellent tool for enabling planners as well as others to participate more effectively in the long-term planning as well as visioning process is the use of Scenario Development where groups of stakeholders develop their long-term vision and then work backwards to develop the plan to reach their vision.

This can be done for both the sectoral and the national planning processes. A recent scenario development exercise linking SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) with SDG 13 (Zero Emissions) done by Oxford University, Oxfam and ICCCAD with experts from the Planning Commission and relevant ministries developed several possible scenarios (some good and some bad, but all equally plausible and possible) and then shared with the Planning Commission to discuss how to make the good scenario a reality and avoid the bad scenario. More such exercises will be very useful going forward with long-term planning for the country.

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