

Ducsu election should be covered by CCTV



GOLAM MORTOZA

AS the long-awaited Ducsu election is nearing, the issue of "co-existence" has widely been in discussion for some time now, just as the issue of "level playing field" was in discussion before the last national election. The Dhaka University administration claims that there is "co-existence" of all the student organisations on campus, including in the residential halls, and all the student bodies have been carrying out their political activities freely.

However, of the 14 student organisations that are active on the campus, including the Chhatra Dal and the left-leaning bodies, 11 claim that there is no environment for "co-existence" in Madhur Canteen, the residential halls or anywhere on campus. According to them, everything is controlled by the Chhatra League alone. Chhatra Dal alleges that they are barred from entering the campus and the halls. If any link between any student and the Chhatra Dal is found, he is beaten up and ousted from the halls right away by the members of Chhatra League. In Chattogram University, a Chhatra Dal leader was recently assaulted by the activists of Chhatra League after he came out of an exam hall after sitting for his exam secretly. The Chhatra Dal has alleged that the situation in Dhaka University is far worse than in Chattogram.

In the DU residential halls, the teachers who are given the responsibility to look after the well-being of students do not help the students in case they are attacked by the Chhatra League. Torture in the guestrooms and the gonooms is also quite common. Many Chhatra Dal leaders and activists are residing in the halls concealing their identity. If they become active during the Ducsu election, they won't be allowed to stay in the halls post-election. Their fate would also be the same if the election is not held.

The view of the left organisations is pretty much the same, as they claim that the Chhatra League do not want to give them the space to voice the rightful demands of the general students. The activists of the left organisations came under several attacks by

the Chhatra League during the movement against sexual harassment on Pahela Baishakh, and also during the recent quota reform and road safety movements.

But the Chhatra League claims that they do not harass or torture anyone and do not believe in control. They are saying that the activists of Chhatra Dal who are genuine students of DU can come and reside in the halls. Their statement confirms the fact that the leaders and activists of the Chhatra Dal are not staying in the halls currently.

What is noticeable here is that it is the

quota reform movement were brutally attacked several times and many of them were arrested. They were threatened by the Chhatra League but they never backed away or changed their position. There is a visible support for them from the general students. The left organisations including the Chhatra Union were always by the side of the general students during all the student movements. Thus, the main competition in the Ducsu election might not be confined to the Chhatra League and the Chhatra Dal only, if it is held in a free and fair manner.

fair manner even during the military regimes. If the Dhaka University authorities are really sincere about holding a free and fair election, they should consider taking the following measures:

i) For ensuring a "level playing field" and establishing "co-existence" of all the organisations, the university authorities must wrest the halls of residence from the control of outsiders, and must not shy away from their effort should there be resistance from the BCL.

ii) It must be ensured that everyone, except those who are against our liberation, can carry out their political activities on campus freely.

iii) Eleven of the 14 student organisations on campus demand that the polling booths should be set up in the academic buildings, not in the halls. It will not be comfortable or even safe for the activists of the Chhatra Dal and the quota reform movement—who were ousted from their halls, which are controlled by the Chhatra League—to go to their respective halls to cast their vote. Also, as around 60 percent of the DU students live outside the campus, it should not be a problem for anyone if the polling booths are set up in the academic buildings. What Mujahidul Islam Selim, a former Ducsu VP, has said is very significant in the current situation: "The Ducsu election should not become a nocturnal expedition." If the polling booths are set up in the halls, the chances of manipulation will be high.

iv) Dhaka University teachers are separated into three groups, namely blue, white, and pink. But the two committees that have been formed to evaluate the guidelines of Ducsu election and to conduct the election are comprised of teachers belonging to the blue group only—which is backed by the ruling Awami League. Only one member is included in these two committees from the pink group, backed by the left organisations. There is no member in these committees from the BNP-backed white group. In Dhaka University, there are teachers who are not directly involved with teachers' politics and who have the credibility to conduct the Ducsu election in a fair manner. They could be given the responsibility to conduct the election. But if that cannot be done, there is still a scope to involve the current and former members of the teachers' union in the process of evaluating the guidelines and

conducting election-related activities. The university administration has held discussions with the active student organisations on campus. If it can hold similar discussions with the teachers of the blue, white and pink groups before finalising the guidelines, there will be less scope for controversy.

v) It is not as if a fair election can be ensured only by setting up polling booths at the academic buildings. For holding a fair election, the authorities can consider bringing the polling booths under CCTV coverage. The CCTV cameras should be installed in a way so that it will be visible from a distance, to check if the ballot boxes are staffed beforehand. And the Chhatra League can benefit from this step and disprove, with the help of CCTV footage, any potential allegations of unfair intervention in the election.

All the entry points to the campus including the Madhur Canteen and the open spaces can also be brought under the CCTV coverage. The CCTV cameras already installed at various points of the campus should be examined to see if they are effective at all. The quality of the cameras should be ensured for getting clear footage.

The CCTV footage will prove if the free movement of students (voters) has been ensured during the election. If the activists of Chhatra Dal, Chhatra League or the quota reform movement carry out any violent activities, that can be proved also. Most of all, CCTV cameras will be very effective in identifying the casting of fake votes, ballot stuffing, and interference by anyone in the voting process.

It is not at all difficult to bring the entire campus including the residential halls under CCTV coverage. The CCTV technology is used during the Bishwa Ijtema or the Pahela Baishakh celebrations to ensure security of people. It can also be used to ensure a free and fair Ducsu election. The money it will cost is not much. We need to remember that many students were killed on DU campus in the past. So, precautions must be taken during the upcoming Ducsu election to avoid any violence on campus, and the CCTV cameras can play an effective role to ensure the security of the students.

Golam Mortoza is a journalist. The article was translated from Bangla by Naznin Tithi.



Speakers including former student union leaders of various public universities at an open discussion on the Dhaka University campus in front of the Aparajeyo Bangla. PHOTO: STAR

Chhatra League who are talking about whether the activists of Chhatra Dal can come to the campus or stay at the halls—and not the university authorities. Such an environment was not created in a day. The situation may improve to some extent if the authorities can take some effective measures centring the Ducsu election.

The code of conduct fixed by the university authorities for the Ducsu election is similar to that of the national election. The rule that former student leaders cannot participate in the election campaigns does not make any sense. The former leaders and activists of Chhatra League, Chhatra Dal, Chhatra Union and other organisations should be allowed to come to the campus and campaign for their candidates. The former leaders of Ducsu should also be allowed to do so.

Ducsu elections were held in a free and

Toxic air is harming our children with every breath that they take

We need to see cleaner, renewable sources of energy and we need better waste management to prevent open burning of harmful chemicals... We cannot let children breathe toxic air. Speaking up for one's children is a first step.

JEAN GOUGH

ALL day, every day, even while they sleep, tens of millions of children in South Asia are being seriously harmed by toxic air.

South Asia is leading the world in this respect—and not in a good way. Here, air pollution now kills an estimated 130,000 children under five every single year.

It is a staggering fact that twelve million babies in South Asia are breathing air that is six times more polluted than the international limits set by the World Health Organization. This means that South Asia has three-quarters of the global total.

The full impact of breathing harmful air is not visible to the naked eye, but the Air Quality Index measures how toxic the air is. A measurement of 0-50 is "good", 50-100 is "moderate", 100-150 is "unhealthy for sensitive groups" (including children), 151-200 is "unhealthy", 201-300 is "very unhealthy", and 301-500 is "hazardous".

In the four-day period between

January 8 and 11, the number reached 417 in New Delhi (hazardous), 310 in Kathmandu (hazardous), 328 in Dhaka (hazardous), 510 in Kabul (hazardous), and 234 in Karachi (very unhealthy). These large numbers mean deaths; and they mean serious, lasting harm.

A cough, sore throat or sore eyes are the common things that we notice. But the real damage is far more serious. The most dangerous air pollutants of all are the smallest particles. They reach deep down into the lungs. From the lungs they pass into the bloodstream. In the bloodstream, they circulate around the body.

Air pollution is a severe and growing threat to people of all ages—but it is particularly bad for children's health and development. There are three main reasons why children are particularly at risk:

First, children breathe faster than adults. A typical adult takes between 12 and 18 breaths a minute. A 3-year-old child takes 20 to 30 breaths a minute, and a newborn takes 30 to 40. So young children are breathing in the



A bus moves through a cloud of dust avoiding pipes, sand and other construction materials kept haphazardly on both sides of the road in East Rampura, Dhaka.

polluted air 2-3 times as much as adults are.

Second, children's lungs and other organs are developing. This makes them particularly vulnerable to dam-

age. This can have both immediate effects—such as causing asthma—and long-term effects—such as reducing their lung volume for life.

Third, the youngest children are also

in danger because the barrier between the bloodstream and brain is not yet fully formed. The air pollutants can cross from the lungs to the bloodstream, and from the bloodstream to the brain. There, they actually cause brain cells to inflame. This damages the brain cells and affects the child's cognitive and intellectual development.

Today's generation of children will be affected for life and as adults, we have a pressing and serious duty to reverse this horrendous trend.

This is why we need to see cleaner, renewable sources of energy and we need better waste management to prevent open burning of harmful chemicals, but of course the precise solutions vary across the region. We cannot let children breathe toxic air. Speaking up for one's children is a first step.

But more than this, we need to see governments respond and take urgent and pro-active action in order to protect the young generation.

Jean Gough is Regional Director of UNICEF in South Asia.

A WORD A DAY

AUBADE
NOUN

A poem or piece of music appropriate to the dawn or early morning

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

1 Hoosgow
5 Swirly prints
10 Lucy's brother
12 Scrooge, for one
13 Saw
14 Biscotti flavor
15 Quick taste
16 Mess up
18 Chess piece
19 Asian entertainer
21 Battery unit
22 Spade, for one
24 Provinces
25 Faulty
29 Driving sport
30 Duds
32 Band blaster
33 Sis's sib

DOWN

1 Informal talk
2 Straightened up
3 Place for some blackbirds
4 Weaver's creation
5 Poet Khayyam
6 Sewing aid
7 "Foundation"

34 Fare carrier
35 Pageant topper
37 Practical
39 Start
40 More reasonable
41 Thatcher creations
42 Pucker-inducing

8 Lot action
9 Lott from Mississippi
11 "Now you listen!"
17 Indy auto
20 Personnel
21 Drop in
23 Arm art
25 Game piece
26 City on the Rio Grande
27 Llama's cousin
28 Pencil part
29 Croc's cousin
31 Reviewer Roger
33 Night fliers
36 Game caller
38 Dieter's no-no

Write for us. Send us your opinion pieces to dsopinion@gmail.com.

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

N	O	S	I	R	D	U	D	E	S
U	T	I	C	A	I	S	O	U	T
T	O	N	E	S	E	D	U	C	E
B	O	G	P	O	T	A	B	L	E
A	L	L	S	A	P	L	I	D	
R	E	E	L	R	O	W	E	D	
	P	O	T		P	A	D		
B	A	T	I	K	R	E	S	T	
M	I	R	M	I	S	A	C	E	
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R	I	S	E	S	F	U	S	E	D

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker

I'D LIKE TO COME IN AND WRITE A STORY ABOUT HOW HARD OUR SOLDIERS WORK

I'M SORRY, HONEY, I CAN'T LET YOU IN

I CAN'T LET THE WORLD KNOW HOW MUCH OUR GUYS GOOF OFF

BABY BLUES by Kirkman & Scott

I THINK ZOE'S DANCE LESSONS ARE IMPROVING HER SOCCER GAME.

WANDA, SHE STILL AVOIDS THE BALL.

BUT LOOK HOW MUCH MORE GRACEFULLY SHE DOES IT NOW!