

DUCSU ELECTION FIASCO

The burden of having eyes in a campus of the blind

Largest irrigation project under threat

WDB must act against sand, earth lifters

THE 18km-long main canal that was commissioned in 1998 which is connected to other secondary and tertiary canal networks, spanning some 300km to bring water to some 44,000 hectares of Boro rice cultivation land, is now under threat from unscrupulous sand and earth traders. This project is a declared key point installation (KPI-1) and is the country's largest irrigation project. When a project receives a KPI rating, it means that it is of vital national importance and is supposed to be protected at all costs. Unfortunately, we have found through our own investigation that this is hardly the case since, according to the local people, one of the embankments of the canal has been damaged at 21 points in Dima upazila.

Water Development Board (WDB) has stipulated of the canal and while its officials are quick to point out what great benefits the project has bestowed upon farmers through irrigation, there is no satisfactory answer coming forth on the presence of traders who have been willfully removing earth and sand from the embankments over the years. Unmitigated transfer of sand and earth has caused significant damage to the environment. Trees have been uprooted right down to their roots and local people are powerless to stop this because the administration has failed to act against people with vested interests.

How can a KPI be endangered in this manner? What is the point of spending thousands of crores of taka on such an important project when the local authorities turn a blind eye to such illegal activity that is steadily eroding the effectiveness of a project that brings benefits to thousands of farmers and plays a major role in ensuring food security? WDB's excuse for inaction, 'shortage of funds' is not good enough. Something needs to be done to take these illegal syndicates to task.

Unsatisfactory state of private medical education

The colleges need government's urgent attention

IT is alarming to learn that most private medical colleges in the country are running without sufficient number of teachers, let alone experienced teachers, and without the necessary infrastructure. According to a *Practical Alo* report, there is little scope for students to acquire practical knowledge in these colleges as a negligible number of patients visit these hospitals. Generally, 80 percent of medical education should be provided to students through practical classes—the rest is theoretical knowledge. But in some private medical colleges, students do not get to see patients even in their fourth year. The result is low pass rate in final exams. According to government estimates, in the last 10 years, only half the students who were admitted to private medical colleges passed the final exams. For a college which enrolls 50 students, it should have at least 177 teachers as suggested by the Bangladesh Medical and Dental Council (BMDC)—but this is not maintained in most of the colleges. How can we expect well trained doctors coming out of these colleges under such resource constraints?

Under these circumstances, the government should focus on quality rather than quantity. The government should ensure that the existing medical colleges have sufficient number of good teachers and hospital facilities with an adequate number of beds. Only that can ensure quality medical education.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Make Dapdapia bridge safe for use

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina had inaugurated a 610-metre-long bridge named Shaheed Abdul Rab Senapati Bridge (local name Friday Day) to show solidarity with the Kirtankhola river on Barisal-Kaukaata route on February 22, 2011. This bridge connects Barisal city with Pataakhali, Beryang, Bhola and some other localities. Every day, lakhs of people and thousands of vehicles pass over this bridge.

The problem is that at night time, it's totally dark. Not a single lampost on the bridge is working. So walking or driving over the bridge during this time is dangerous. The students of Barisal University often fall victim to muggers as they have to cross the bridge to go to university. Also, darkness increases the risk of road accidents. Besides, a pillar of the bridge broke two years ago and it still hasn't been fixed. I urge the authorities to take steps to solve these problems as soon as possible.

Ariful Islam Anu, University of Barisal

Thank you, New Zealand

It has been declared that women in New Zealand will be wearing the hiyah on Friday Day to show solidarity with Muslim women in the wake of the Christchurch shootings. The day is called National Scarf Day.

It is a praiseworthy and thoughtful gesture and we thank New Zealanders for this effort which will go a long way in giving the Muslim community some solace and a sense of belonging. We hope the world will learn from this act of compassion and love.

Nur Jahan, Chattogram



C.R. ABRAR

THERE have been some disconcerting developments at Dhaka University following the botched Ducsu election on March 11. The latest of these is the Provost Standing Committee's resolution adopted on March 18 urging the university authorities to take action against eight faculty members who dared to blow the whistle on the irregularities committed during the election. Needless to say, the teachers' assessment was consistent with what the vast majority of the voters experienced and what the print, electronic and social media reported on the day of the 'election'.

In building its case against the eight teachers, the Provost Committee accused them of engaging in 'unauthorised' monitoring of the elections, spreading 'untruth' and creating 'confusion'. It also found the teachers to be 'motivated' in 'tampering the image of the university.' In view of the perceived misdeemeanor of the concerned teachers, the august committee urged the university authorities 'to take action against them' for their 'condemnable' acts.

Instead of engaging in soul-searching on what is generally recognised by most students and faculty members of Dhaka University as yet another missed opportunity in democratic practice, the highest seat of learning (rightly claimed to be the birthplace of democratic struggle of the nation) and taking action against those who were instrumental in thwarting such an effort, the committee demanded action against those who essentially narrated what they saw with their own eyes and what the voters, the students, told them.

The committee's use of the term 'unauthorised' raises some interesting questions. In their rebuttal of this charge, the accused teachers reminded the committee that the much-cherished Dhaka University Order, 1973, accords all faculty members proctorial power and it is that prerogative that they had chosen to exercise on Election Day. The teachers further claimed that the chief returning officer (CRO), the person entrusted to conduct the election, was duly informed of their plan and had granted verbal permission. One can assume that the CRO, being cognisant of the provision of the 1973 Order, granted permission. So far the CRO has not denied the claim that such permission was granted. Onus therefore lies on the Provost Committee to clarify on what ground it termed the concerned teachers' action 'unauthorised'.

The priority of the provosts is worth noting. Their March 18 resolution did not address the concern of the overwhelming bulk of the students who claimed election irregularities with hard evidence that was corroborated by media reports. The committee failed to recommend actions against those responsible for such a debacle. One wonders if any of the members of this group raised the question whether they, in their capacity entrusted to conduct fair polls, had really delivered the tasks that they were mandated to do. This election not only raised hopes of the students of Dhaka University, it was also keenly followed by people at large.

The Provost Committee's claim that it did not receive a single complaint of election irregularity is revealing. Does it betray the fact that aggrieved students did not expect a fair investigation from the hall administrations that in their view, had failed to remain impartial? Or is

it because they feared retribution from the high and mighty who, in reality, call the shots on campus? With such widespread allegations of irregularities, if the intent was right, could not the Provost Committee suo motu institute an investigation?

The assertion that the teachers had 'tampered' the image of the country could not be further from the truth. The Ducsu election has not only frustrated the voters, it has also disappointed the CRO who was honest enough to express his 'embarrassment'. Even the pro-vice chancellor (administration) owned up saying, 'We have to bear the responsibility.' The immediate past vice chancellor also acknowledged that the election was marred by controversies and irregularities and blamed the university administration for the fiasco.

Can the convener of the Provost Committee please explain, if the eight teachers are culpable in 'tampering the image of the country' with ulterior motives, 'why aren't those senior functionaries of the university and the ex-vice chancellor guilty of the same charge?'



PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Some facts need to be put on record. The Ducsu election was long overdue. It took 28 years for the university authorities to hold the polls, that too only after a series of protests, including hunger strikes by general students, and intervention of the higher judiciary. In the preparatory stage, while talks were underway between student groups and the university administration, the latter rejected all major demands of the opposition student organisations. Included among those were shifting the election to a later date, setting up the voting centres in the academic block rather than student dormitories, increasing the voting time period by a few hours, and sending ballot papers and boxes to the voting centres on the morning of the election—not the night prior to the election. The pro-government students' organisation opposed these demands. Not surprisingly, none of these innocuous and reasonable demands were accepted by the university authorities and no reason was assigned for the rejection.

The university authorities also need to explain the following: (a) why some hall administrations turned down the reasonable demand of the contestants and

their supporters to show the empty ballot boxes before the polls began; (b) why bagful of stamped ballot papers were found in one hall and blank ballot papers were found outside the voting centres in another hall; (c) why actions were not taken when obstacles were created when non-resident students wanted to vote, through intimidation and by jamming the booths (causing inordinate delay in casting votes) to discourage voters waiting in the queue; (d) why the ballot papers did not have serial numbers as is generally printed to ensure that an accurate number of ballot papers is printed and to track which set of ballot papers goes to specific centres; and (e) why the ballot papers and boxes were sent to the student dormitories in the evening before the election when those places are only minutes away from the administrative block.

It is morally incumbent upon the university authorities to provide a satisfactory response to each and every question raised above before it considers any action against the eight teachers on the advice of the Provost Committee.

It is significant that all eight independent candidates won Shamsunnahar Hall polls. The success is attributed to the overnight vigilance of the voting centre by the female candidates and their supporters of the hall. This led many to speculate that if the polls were truly fair, then such results might have been replicated in other halls and the central students' union.

In an environment vitiated by partisan politics, the eight teachers, mostly young, reported what they witnessed with their own eyes. They had done so to ensure that the university remains a place where students can freely exercise their democratic rights, including the right to franchise and the freedom to express. In a situation where there's an ever-shrinking democratic space, it is in everyone's interest to uphold the sanctity of the university. The sooner the university authorities, including the Provost Standing Committee, acknowledge this, the better it would be for the institution that is on the threshold of celebrating its foundation centenary.

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White supremacists, western civilisations and eastern migrations



HABIBULLAH N. KARIM

IN 1889, Rudyard Kipling crowed, 'Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet.' But the East and the West have been mingling ever before his time and forever afterwards.

However, human perceptions on civilisational attachments are swayed more by violence inflicted on our abstract identities than by anecdotal evidence across all shades of grey. Since the Gulf War began nearly three decades ago and in the aftermath of the twin-tower terror attack in the US by Arab-origin terrorists, when the US and its NATO defence allies concocted military intelligence to justify pre-emptive invasion of a sovereign Iraq leading to millions of innocent people killed, injured and displaced, the world has never been the same again. And adding to the burning embers in Palestine and later

that are well-endowed economically and politically. For the last 50 years, that mantle has been in the hands of North American and Western European nations. It's no wonder that displaced people from many of the strife-torn Muslim countries have been emigrating to North America and Western Europe.

Large-scale migrations have taken place throughout history and countries in the Middle East and South Asia have hosted such migrant communities for millennia. However, ethnic Latin-American, African and Middle Eastern migrations in recent years have given rise to concomitant ethnic tensions and frictions in the host nations. In this backdrop, terror attacks on civilians by religious and political ideologues, ranging from sympathisers of white supremacists to 'Muslim jihads', are taking place at regular intervals in many countries of the world. By this measure, the apparent conflicts between Eastern and Western civilisations seem to bear out the 'intractable' cultural differences hysterically preyed upon by Samuel Huntington in his

terrorism and hate-mongering from one end of the earth to the other.

Anti-immigration sentiments are surging in the US, UK, France, Germany, and other countries of the NATO defence compact. This belies the fact that the US population is almost fully comprised of migrants while most European ethnicities are infused with the DNAs of many other ethnicities—some intra-regional while some are external. What this means is that such ethnic bias of the ethnic majority in any given country is prejudicial and often politically motivated.

In this rolling sea of hatred, a white supremacist terrorist from Australia chose to mow down 50 defenceless Muslim civilians as they gathered for their weekly prayer congregation in mosques in Christchurch city in New Zealand—the eastern-most and southern-most country on the planet. That such a heinous atrocity could take place in such a remote and peace-loving country was a real shocker to everyone. What, however, has given hope to people across the world was the way people of all ethnicities in New Zealand came forward unitedly to show solidarity with the aggrieved Muslim community. The way that tiny minority of immigrants and refugees were embraced by their neighbours' whole-hearted outpouring of empathy, collegiality and brotherhood—from haka dancers of the indigenous people of New Zealand to non-Muslims joining the Friday Muslim prayer congregation for two minutes of silence—is an epic on how to turn a tragedy into an opportunity for upholding human dignity, how to turn a scene of carnage and ignorance into a calm sea of love and tranquility.

The kind and emphatic leadership of Ms Jacinda Ardern, the New Zealand prime minister, has been truly exemplary and will remain an inspiration for other leaders around the world on how to mitigate the sufferings of affected people after a tragedy and how to rally the whole country and communities together in the face of barbaric treacheries inflicted on any community. On behalf of the migrant Bangladeshis who lost their lives in the Christchurch massacre, we can only hope that our government will invite the New Zealand prime minister to visit our country so that we can show our respect to this great leader and commiserate with their heart-rending grief. New Zealand, a remote bastion of western civilisation, has finally shown the world that East, West, North and South, all can inhabit this planet together and in peace.

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The far-right group 'Pro Chemnitz' stages an anti-immigration protest in Chemnitz, eastern Germany, August 30, 2018.

Afghanistan, wars and civil strife have engulfed Iraq, Libya and Syria where overwrought emotions pose a threat to escalating tensions that may spark much wider multi-country warfare with the real danger of pulling in the biggest military powers of the world.

In these increasingly turbulent times, peoples of war-torn countries are fleeing their homesteads in droves in search of peace and security seeking shelter in countries

famous 1996 book *Clash of Civilisations* where his own insecurities led him to advocate white supremacists fears in the garb of an academic analysis.

Even though the airwaves are dominated by the perceived fears and insecurities of peoples around the world, rearguarded by populist and parochial potentates adding fuel to fire in most situations, it is no wonder that we have frequent outbursts of