

Attack on Gono Adhikar Parishad members condemnable

This cannot be the norm in a democracy

WE are deeply disturbed by the way the Bangladesh Chhatra League members attacked the leaders and activists of Bangladesh Gono Adhikar Parishad—a newly formed political platform—as they went to pay tribute to Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani on his death anniversary in Tangail on November 17. Reportedly, around 50 Chhatra League leaders and activists of Maulana Bhashani Science and Technology University (MBSTU) attacked the Parishad entourage, injuring its Convener Reza Kibria, Member Secretary Nurul Haque Nur, and many other activists. Sadly, up until now, no one was arrested in connection with the attack.

In recent times, Chhatra League members attacking their political opponents or any groups with different political views seems to have become the norm. We have seen how Chhatra League men attacked the activists of BNP and other political parties in the past, and how they regularly engage in violent clashes in our public universities over establishing their supremacy on campuses. This also reminds us of the attacks that the ruling party's student front carried out on the activists of quota and road safety movements. But what defies logic is: Why would they attack any individual or a group of people, or even a political party, for paying homage to Maulana Bhashani, one of the founding leaders of the country? Why couldn't they stand a simple act of paying respect to one of our national heroes? Was it because it was done by a newly formed political group? Was it because they spoke about establishing people's rights and democracy in the country? Barely one month has passed since the platform was formed, and the Chhatra League members attacked them in public already. This is an ominous sign for our democracy.

There is a clear pattern of attacks on parties that the ruling party does not approve of. While the party in power brags about people's democratic rights on the one hand, its student wing continues to carry out regular attacks on people with different opinions and political views on the other. Reportedly, it is the 20th time that former Ducus VP Nur has been attacked by Chhatra League men.

What is also concerning is the role of the law enforcers: we have not seen any initiative from them to take action against the attackers up until now. What is stopping them from arresting the attackers?

We strongly protest the attack on the leaders and activists of Bangladesh Gono Adhikar Parishad, and hope that those involved in the attack will be punished as per our law. If we as a nation want to function as a democracy, people's democratic right to express their opinions and hold political activities must be respected by all, including the Chhatra League leaders. The sooner the party in power realises it, the better it is for the country.

Dengue costs lives, leaves behind debts

Govt must do more for dengue prevention, consolidate healthcare system

WE are disheartened to learn about the findings of a study conducted by the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS), which revealed that the poorest households in the country spent 139 percent of their monthly income for dengue treatment. On average, families of dengue patients in Dhaka had to spend Tk 33,817. But what is most alarming is that the findings are based on data collected this time in 2020. Dengue trends indicate that the surge of infections is worse every alternate year, which means that between 2019 and 2021, last year was the year least hard-hit by the disease. The numbers also reflect this as cases reported in 2020 were only 1,045 compared to the staggering 101,354 in 2019. This year, there have been around 26,000 cases of dengue infection so far, as confirmed by the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), with numbers still rising this month.

All of this implies that, not only are more people going to suffer financially for treating dengue than last year, but they will also have to bear these costs at a time when the pandemic has pushed 19.54 percent of the population into poverty, as per data by the Power and Participation Research Centre (PPRC) and Brac Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD) data revealed in August. Many patients' families last year dealt with treatment costs by draining their savings and borrowing from friends, relatives, and even loan sharks. Treatment at private hospitals also cost more than double than that in public ones, on average. While the threat of Covid-19 infections has become somewhat subdued over the past few months—with 244 cases being recorded yesterday—it does still exist, and our healthcare system is now being presented with the challenge of increasing dengue infections.

We would urge the city corporations to ramp up existing awareness programmes against dengue in their respective areas. It could also be useful for the government to broadcast awareness tips through television and social media. Experts say that mosquito repellents may work to kill dengue-carrying Aedes mosquitoes, but they can also be harmful for human health. Such information must reach the public effectively, so that they know exactly which measures will be most helpful when combating the dengue surge.

The government should urgently try and make dengue treatment more affordable for the public, particularly in public hospitals. Additionally, authorities should also ensure that our healthcare system is well-adapted to treat dengue cases effectively this year, so that we do not face a dismal situation similar to that of 2019.

PECE Exam Board: What it says about decision-making in education



MANZOOR AHMED

THE Ministry of Primary and Mass Education has doubled down on its insistence not only to continue the nationwide Primary Education Completion Examination (PECE) at the end of Grade 5, but giving it a permanent institutional form by proposing the establishment of an examination board to conduct it. This stand by the ministry raises serious questions about how education decisions are made—and in whose interest.

reform plan for school education, to be introduced in 2023, foresees no public examination before the Secondary School Certificate (SSC) examination at the end of Grade 10.

However, the primary education ministry's plan to establish an exam board, a draft law for which has been circulated for eliciting public comments, flies against all professional and technical judgements. Studies by Education Watch, as well as opinions expressed by educationists, parents and teachers, have detailed how the high-stake public examination for young children fails to add any value, and actually harms both the students and the aims of quality education instead.

The assessment of learning to determine what students have learnt and how

stage for young children is not to brand them as success or failure, pushing them into a competitive mode, but to take a reading of how the schools and teachers are doing their job. It should be more an assessment of the school system rather than of the children. This is the direction better-performing education systems have moved towards.

The trend is towards formative assessment of students in a classroom by teachers as a part of instruction to help students learn better, and rely on summative assessment of students to measure how the school system is performing. This is a live issue in education discourse and there are lessons and experiences in this regard that have to be taken into account. In Bangladesh,

It is necessary to find out if students are acquiring the basic foundational skills of reading, writing and counting, critical at the primary school stage, and what can be done to help schools and teachers to do a better job to this end.



The stress of taking a public examination is something our primary school students can do without.

FILE PHOTO:
ANISUR RAHMAN

The primary education authorities have ignored the plea repeatedly made by educationists, ever since it was introduced in 2009, to give up the nationwide public examination at the end of Grade 5. The National Education Policy, 2010 had envisaged primary education to be extended to Grade 8, and a local assessment at the end of Grade 5 at the upazila level. The prolonged school closure due to the Covid-19 pandemic forced the authorities to forego the exam in 2020 and 2021. Meanwhile, a curriculum

schools and teachers are performing in helping students learn is not the issue. It is how this should be done, what should be measured, how it may affect young children, and how the information can be used for improving learning outcomes. It is necessary to find out if students are acquiring the basic foundational skills of reading, writing and counting, critical at the primary school stage, and what can be done to help schools and teachers to do a better job to this end.

The main purpose of assessment at this

the National Student Assessment surveys undertaken periodically suggest lessons that should be considered. A highly telling point is that the NSA findings reveal that the majority of primary students do not achieve basic literacy and numeracy skills at the end of primary education, in sharp contrast to 90+ percentage success rates in PECE. This is another piece of evidence—if this is needed—that challenges validity and reliability of PECE as an assessment tool.

As the schools resumed operation

Toilets: The only shame is the water we waste



DEBRA EFROYMSON

TOILETS do not, admittedly, make for a great dinner table conversation—though a few younger people might disagree. In fact, most of us are embarrassed to talk about toilets at

all. But sanitation is an enormous health issue. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that around 2.3 billion people in the world lack basic sanitation facilities such as toilets or latrines, contributing to various diseases. It is time to move beyond the shame we feel in talking about toilets to serious consideration of solutions. And what better day to talk about them than today, World Toilet Day?

Admittedly, I can't help but laugh when I see signs that declare an Open Defecation Free Zone, but one of my dogs was magnetically attracted to the results of open defecation, and so I realised how common it is in outdoor spaces here in Dhaka. We need more free public bathrooms for the safety and comfort of all our residents, as well as expanded sanitation in lower-income areas.

The simple solution is not, however, to simply try to guarantee that everyone has access to a flush toilet. Most of us, when we flush the toilet, don't think about the utter stupidity, in an overpopulated world with insufficient clean water, of dumping our waste into clean water and flushing it all away. Nor do we tend to reflect on where the waste goes. "I think that you should really make people understand how stupid it is to poop into clean water," says Cecilia Lalander, a researcher in environmental engineering at the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences in Uppsala. In addition to the international shortage of water, sewerage treatment requires enormous amounts of money and energy, and a lot of that sewerage gets dumped raw into rivers and oceans.

Decades ago, when I was working in the tiny Central American country of Guatemala, I used a composting toilet for the first time. It was in someone's home, though the ones I've used since are generally outdoors. It was clean. There was no smell. There were no cockroaches. It was pretty simple to deposit things in

the proper holes, then to toss a little ash or sawdust in with the faeces. It was a remarkable contrast to the many latrines I had used, which are temporary, stink, and attract roaches.

I have since had the opportunity to learn a bit more about ecological sanitation, ecosan in short, which includes marvels like composting toilets. (Something I had not known is that urine contains all the valuable nutrients;

Another principle, mentioned above, is that clean water is far too precious to be wasted in toilets. Toilets are the biggest user of water in people's homes. We could either use grey water—water recycled from sinks—to flush our toilets, or use composting toilets. Clean water should be preserved for the uses for which it is essential.

Composting toilets are gaining popularity at festivals and rural homes—

composting toilets. The toilets reduce the spread of diseases like cholera and typhoid, create jobs, and restore local environments. The compost supports agriculture and reforestation efforts in Haiti, providing valuable nutrients and improving the ability of soil to sequester carbon. The compost also contributes to climate adaptation by promoting plant growth, stabilising soils, and reducing the impact of flooding and droughts.



A man walks near a toilet sign at the Reinvented Toilet Expo showcasing sewerless sanitation technology in Beijing, China, on November 6, 2018.

FILE PHOTO: REUTERS

dilute it with water and it makes a great fertiliser.) A few simple principles are helpful. Waste is not a useful concept—everything we treat as waste is potentially a valuable resource that can be put to good use. This is certainly the case with our so-called bodily wastes, which are full of important and difficult to obtain nutrients that we need to grow food. A circular economy would take all kinds of "waste," including manufactured products at the end of their lives, and turn them back into resources. We should certainly be doing that with what we otherwise flush down the toilet.

and beyond. There are sewerless buildings even in the United States. For example, the Bronx Zoo in New York City decided to forgo an extremely expensive sewer connection, instead installing composting toilets. The Bullitt Center in Seattle—a six-storey, 50,000 square feet building—also uses composting toilets. In San Francisco, the new office building of the Public Utility Commission treats wastewater, which is then used to flush toilets, reducing water consumption by 60 percent.

In Haiti, Sustainable Organic Integrated Livelihoods (SOIL) is building

We have a lot to learn from these great examples.

Finally, I must recommend a wonderful book named "The Big Necessity: The Unmentionable World of Human Waste and Why It Matters," by Rose George. George dives (literally) into the world of sewers as well as discussing toilets, helping us overcome our shame and understand the need for more ecological solutions to our great sanitation crisis.

Debra Efraymson is executive director of the Institute of Wellbeing, Bangladesh, and author of "Beyond Apologies: Defining and Achieving an Economics of Wellbeing."