

Adhocism and vested interests of individuals and groups, coupled with the still lingering slavish mentality and blind imitation of the West have dictated our national policies in all spheres of life over most of the time since independence.

The social sector has been the worst victim having the lowest priority in our development plans. Education was encouraged to be hijacked by unregulated commercial monopolies with mushrooming of new school systems, colleges, institutes and universities in various disciplines with misleading foreign names and dubious affiliations abroad. Most of them are fleecing the public and many among them are substandard. The government has now joined in and is establishing universities here and there for self-financing students. The change in the name of University Grants Commission to Commission on Higher Education and the Model University are some other direction-less cosmetic changes.

Medical education has suffered a similar fate because of the absence of a sustainable National Health Policy. A number of private medical colleges and universities have sprung up with active connivance of the Pakistan Medical & Dental Council and permissive attitude of the Government having no consistent policy on medical education.

The undeclared privatization of public sector teaching hospitals, in the garb of autonomy administered by an assortment of boards of governors and high salaried chief executives, principals, completely ignored the interests of the affiliated medical colleges. It has made a mess of patient care as well as medical education. The hospitals have become inaccessible to the poor and the medical teachers are frustrated and are agitating against the intimidating working environment. And as if this was not enough agitating a University

of Health Sciences is being established to further pervert medical education in the province.

It may be pertinent to recollect that the idea of a medical university is not new. Both the JPMC Karachi and KEMC Lahore were offered the status by the President and Prime Minister on more than one occasion over a decade ago. However the scheme was shelved as it was impracticable financially, and conferred little administrative or academic benefits on the institutions. It has now been resurrected through a hurriedly promulgated Ordinance at a place which is least suitable for the purpose.

The arguments advanced for the scheme by its perpetrator failed to define its aims and objectives or give any cogent reason for its justification. A university is a corporate body of higher learning - highest level of education - where one can study for a degree or undertake research. An undergraduate medical college with 50 self-financing students can hardly be termed as a seat of higher learning for "health sciences". It is also not made clear as to how such a tuition center will improve the standard of medical education. The creation of a single examining body for all the public and private medical colleges in the province comprising inevitably of the same faculty conducting the examinations, is certainly not a guarantee to achieve this objective.

The credibility of the new University is likely to be major issue. The degrees awarded by the Punjab University are recognized the world over. Our graduates are accepted abroad for postgraduate training and jobs on the strength of its reputation established over more

A new university

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their acquiescence inside the committee rooms are privately expounding its demerits. It is being widely imputed that the sole motive is to reward individuals-for services rendered-with hegemonies control over the entire teaching community of the province and the added attraction of the power of bargaining with private medical colleges for their recognition.

The unholly hurry to promulgate the Ordinance just before the induction of the new government does lend credence to such allegations. It is unfortunate that the rulers civil and military alike can be manipulated so easily by flatterers. The resignation of a venerable personality of the profession from the Board of Governors of the so called University within a couple of weeks and the reasons cited therein undoubtedly constitute a vote of no confidence on the scheme and its functionaries.

It is suggested that the elected government should reappraise the project and an independent committee consisting of elders of the profession, retired teachers and PMA representatives should be appointed for the purpose. Incidentally another absurd project - a medical city - whatever the name implies has recently been approved.

The term was originally used by Army Medical Corps for creation of a complex comprising of all the Armed Forces medical institutions in Rawalpindi with addition of more subspecialty units under a single command Prime Minister Junejo who was also the Minister of Defence shelved the proposal. Instead of creating a city in an area where it is least needed (a city viz. Sharif Medical City is lying

unutilized in the vicinity) the existing hospitals in and around Lahore should be upgraded by undertaking the urgently needed modernization repairs and expansion in them. The Committee proposed above should be entrusted with the task of scrutinizing the feasibility of this scheme as well. The report of the Committee should be made public for transparency and debate and it should be included in the proposals for ratification of these projects by the provincial legislature.

In the wider context monitoring by military teams, surprise checks and autonomy to teaching hospitals and similar cosmetic measures are no more than gimmicks for publicity with no long term goals or benefits. The real issues can only be addressed by formulating comprehensive, sustainable and consistent policies and then ensure their implementation. The systems have been corrupted and the institutions have been mismanaged. The systems have to be reformed and updated according to the demands of the times, but in the final analysis "only fools contest the system, whatever is administered best is best".

Provision of education and health care are the ultimate responsibility of the state. The state has to make a declaration of intent to accept and discharge this responsibility. A number of policy documents developed by successive regimes are available. The main problem in implementation has simply been the lack of resources. Our budgetary allocation for these sectors is among the lowest among developing countries and unless we change our priorities and enhance it by manifold the goals of human resource development capable of meeting the challenges of the postmodern world shall not be achieved and hence there shall be little progress in the country.

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than a century. How will the degrees awarded by this examination centre having dubious credentials be acknowledged by the foreign medical councils.

Shaikh Zayed Hospital has been accused by the machinations of a coterie of individuals since its inception. Its selection as the seat of the University will pose problems of its own. It is a federally administered institution while the university is chartered by the provincial government. The duality of control of what is supposed to be a single entity will not be conducive to harmonious functioning.

It may be recalled that Shaikh Zayed was originally proposed to be controlled by the Province but was later handed over to the Federal Government. The dispute over building/land which has already surfaced is but one example of the mismatch. Again Shaikh Zayed does not have the infrastructure which could fulfill the requirements of a university. It has not been allowed to develop into a center of excellence and its performance as a postgraduate institute has not been exemplary.

The medical profession is generally highly critical of this highly controversial project. Even those who nodded

Editorial
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