

Changes in exams

The approach should be proactive, not reactive

THE dismal performance of the students in this year's SSC examinations has triggered new brain waves of the decision-makers. Obviously, they could not overlook that more than 60 per cent of the examinees failed.

The government is reported to be contemplating changes in the public examinations system, which is held responsible to a great extent for the poor showing in the SSC examinations. It is a good sign that the planners have felt the need for doing something when such a huge number of students have stumbled at the very outset of their academic career, that is, the first public examination. Obviously, matters must change for the better as such a huge number of unsuccessful candidates means both wastage of money and time.

However, the government's action plan must take into account some relevant points. Even if it is true that the steps taken to check copying in examination halls account for the poor percentage of successful candidates, the fact remains that the education system has failed miserably to deliver the results expected of it.

The planners must tread carefully and do a lot of thinking since the task of raising the standard of education is far from simple. Mere changes in the mode of examinations may not bring about the desired changes in the overall system of education. A recent report published in a Bangla daily said that many schools outside Dhaka are desperately short of English teachers. It is difficult to suggest how students can learn this foreign language when there is no teacher. So the emphasis now should be on training of teachers which will ultimately raise the standard of classroom teaching. A number of recommendations and suggestions have been put forward in this respect by the experts and the government's task is to examine them carefully and accept the most suitable ones.

The idea of assigning the schools a greater role in examinations by allowing them to give 30 out of 100 marks will also work well in practice only if the schools have trained and qualified teachers.

The issue of changing the curricula deserves attention because we can ill afford to lag behind other countries in the region. The latest developments taking place across the globe must influence the making of the curricula.

Finally, monitoring the performance of the teachers alongside that of the students is necessary to streamline the system of education.

Return of Dramatic Performance Act?

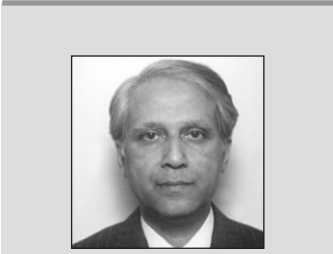
It can't be the only way to stop vulgarity in movies

WE are very concerned about the comment made by the Information Minister, Tariqul Islam inside the parliament on the possibility of reinstating the Dramatic Performance Act. The act was imposed by the British in 1876, more than 110 years ago, in order to block free cultural activities and gag freedom of speech. According to the law, no one could stage a drama without prior permission from the authorities. Theatre is one of the sectors in the country's entertainment business we can be very proud of. Ever since the independence in 1971, theatre became a part of the urban lifestyle, people starved of wholesome entertainment as well as thought provoking, intelligent sources of recreation flocked to Bailey Road, the hub of theatre activities in the city.

But they had only one fear since unfortunately the law had never been abolished, it could have been enforced to impede their passion at any moment. That fear had diminished ever since the then government repealed the act in 2001 after a long and hard struggle by the theatre activists. But now it seems that they might have to start afresh with their movement; at least that's how they could interpret Information Minister's comments in the House. He made it in response to a question by Jamat-e-Islami MP Delwar Hussain Saidi on the deteriorating standard of films at the moment. We want in favour of any action against vulgarity in the movies. But to do that, the thought of bringing back a law which is not only backdated, but also undemocratic.

And in any case, there is a censor board to check vulgarity, indecency in movies. If the censor board was honest, efficient and responsible, then the need to reinstate such a law does not arise in the first place. The government should take effective steps to make the censor board more active. All those years of struggle, hardship to abolish the act can't be allowed to be wasted like this. The government should realise that unless the concerned body to check vulgarity in movies get their acts right, then no law, whether it's old or new, can prevent it from spiralling.

Developed world's lack of focus regarding development agenda



MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

THE world witnessed early last month an assembly of world leaders in Evian, France. Billed as a G-8 Summit, it was expected that the leaders would address themselves to resolving important world problems. Unfortunately, despite the presence of several African leaders and also India, concerns of the developing world were marginalized to say the least.

The first such Summit was held in Rambouillet, France in 1975. It was attended at that time by leaders of the five largest economies in the world -- the United States, Japan, Germany, France and the United Kingdom. The leaders of the time wanted to remove themselves from the immediate pressures at home and spend a day or two discussion -- informally and face to face -- the important issues confronting the world.

The leaders at that time met in the shadow of a world economy characterised by stagnation and high inflation, a situation which subsequently led to the coining of a new word "stagflation." The leaders were greatly concerned with the need to jump-start the economies of Germany and Japan and reflate them in order to pull the world out of recession. One has to agree that they had some success in this experiment in Keynesianism on a global scale. Their successor in the 1980s, through the Louve and Plaza accords, continued their interest in economics. They attempted to deal with the wild gyrations on the foreign exchangers that had by then become disruptive. In this, they met with some modest success.

In principle, over nearly thirty years, these leaders focussed on matters that were not capable of

easy resolution through the established international organisations.

In recent times, the cosy group has grown to include Canada, Italy and Russia and for the purpose of brevity calls itself G-8. This year in Evian, they were joined by the President of the European commission, the president of the European council and several heads of developing nations. The idea behind the expansion in attendance was probably to focus more on important issues facing the developing world. Sadly, to the

The United States, for example, will pay out \$ 182.8 billion to American farmers in the next decade, while poorer nations can hardly afford to pay anything to theirs. This is particularly true of Africa. Yet, Africa's agricultural products are expected to compete against those from the developed world. Farm products from the poorer world can never catch up.

The cannot add the value of subsidy needed just to get to the same starting place as the products from developed countries. This

African economies. This, for example is affecting Mozambique and is roughly costing them about \$ 100 million a year in lost exports -- a considerable amount for a developing country.

The presence of the developing world leaders led some to believe that for a change, after Iraq and Afghanistan, the developed world leaders would focus on this detrimental question of subsidies, so that developing countries meeting later this year in Cancun could have some encouragement. They

in place at Doha for finding ways to dismantle the developed world's discriminatory subsidies are being allowed to fall apart. The G-8 made no progress in trade issues at all. This is disappointing, given the fact that the French had tried to take a positive step earlier this year Mr Chirac at that time astonished the leaders of poor countries when he reversed a long standing French position and offered to ditch export guarantees. This minor bit of accounting was indeed a important step, given the fact that Euro-

USA and the Far East were not addressed effectively. The Evian Summit offered little in the way of co-ordinated action with regard to such areas.

However, some aspects of the social agenda were tackled (HIV/Aids) and for that the meeting was a step forward. One might not agree with some of the decisions adopted by the leaders regarding economic elements in their agenda, but the fact that they sat down and discussed issues was noteworthy. Chancellor Schroder's comment towards the end of the meeting was interesting. It signified a new beginning when he mentioned that "it was clear that the past has not disappeared, but it is behind us." There is hope for the poorer developing nations in such a scenario.

One can only hope that the coming months will see greater effort towards compromise among G-8 countries on issues like cheaper medicines for the developing world and progress on improving water supplies in resource-starved countries. The Summit has seen repetitions of already diluted commitments given at previous Summits, but the more important thing is that the Summit has taken place despite the poisonous clouds lingering from the Iraq crisis. In this, we must thank God for small mercies.

I cannot conclude however without raising an important question -- as to whether the time is right to bring China into a Group of Nine. One needs to remember that China exports more manufactured goods than Canada, Italy or Russia. It has started a space programme to put a man on the moon. Its biotechnology research is also superb. If one values China's economy using the purchasing power parity approach, the 'it is already easily the biggest economy outside the United States' China has exhibited great maturity and responsibility in recent years on a number of wide-ranging issues ranging from trade to terror. It has also shown great leadership on resolving the North Korean crisis. China from all senses of the term is far too important to leave out in the cold.

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disappointment of most analysts, the attention appears to have been paid more on body language and their psychological meanings rather than important economic issues.

We are constantly being reminded that the problems of Africa and the Least Developed Countries are complex. It is also sometimes hinted that they are 'insoluble'. Yes, it is difficult, but now is the hour for the developed world to step forward and have the courage to take bold action. We need to bear in mind that about a billion people are living on less than \$ 1 a day and that 50 million people go to bed hungry every night.

The developing world expected that this time in Evian the leaders would be able to seriously consider a simple life-saving but costless political act. Oxfam has drawn the attention of the world to an important aspect. Very correctly they have pointed out that the G-8 should have decided to end the subsidies that they dole out to farmers in the developed world. Several economists have pointed out that these agricultural subsidies are crippling the lower end of the developing world.

criticism is not only aimed at the United States but also against the European Union and their Common Agricultural Policy that lavishes more the \$ 40 billion on its farmers each year.

It is true that under the Everything But Arms formula the EU has permitted LDCs to export their products into the EU on a duty-free and quota-free basis, but the holding back of facilities for export of sugar is hurting some of the poorer

have been sorely disappointed.

We should not forget that as a consequence of the anti-globalization protests that took place in Seattle in 1999, developing nations were led to believe that developed nations would find a framework to reduce agricultural subsidies substantially in the next few years. This was all supposed to be put into writing in Cancun, Mexico, in September.

Regrettably, the timetables put



Spies, lies and laws among nations

M. SHAHIDUL ISLAM

BEFORE attacking Poland in 1939, Adolf Hitler said, "I shall give a propaganda reason for starting the war. No matter whether it is plausible or not."

Latest exposures indicate that the US-UK led aggression against Iraq too fits into such a propaganda paradigm. The exposures reveal the true extent of a deep-rooted scheme to invade Iraq by 'sexing up' --and spinning at will-- the intelligence information used to justify the war, thanks to the piercing boldness of the Western media and the vibrancy of their democracies.

The exposures prompt one to ask, did the US have a *Causus Belli* to invade Iraq? Seems not. For, by exaggerating intelligence information, the US and UK conjured up the dreadful imagery of an Iraq that could assemble a nuclear bomb in 45 minutes to pose grave dangers to the US and its allies. It now proved to be an elephantine lie.

Wither legality?

The Iraqi threat bogey rationalized the US's acting in self-defense, pursuant to Article 51 of the UN Charter, although there was no evidence to prove that Iraq constituted a threat to the US in specific. Bypassing the Charter, the US-UK resorted to using the doctrine of preemptions as well as prevention--to destroy Iraq's stature as a counter-terroring power to Israel in the Middle East. Saddam's patronisation of the Palestinian *intifada* so flabbergasted Washington's Jewish lobby that the war became unavoidable.

In an emotional rush toward the war, the US did not bother to show an iota of respect to Article 33 of the Charter that necessitates the obtaining of facts in any disputed situation where the claims of self-defense are made on one side and rebutted by the other.

The US-UK coalition also acted in violation of Article 37(1) of the Charter that requires of disputing parties to refer the matter to the Security Council upon exhaustion of other means stipulated in Article 33-- such as negotiation, inquiry, mediation, conciliation, arbitra-

tion, etc. Bush insisted on no talks with Saddam.

As well, the US and UK invoked the cease fire resolution of April 1991 (Resolution 687), in which the Security Council linked the easing or lifting of sanctions to the disarmament of Iraq. As we now know that Iraq did not possess any WMD to pose a threat to the US, the

list of the locations, amounts, and types of WMD and proscribed missiles.

The war itself being a stage-managed affair according to latest revelations-- the US-UK cabal also dared to willfully disregard 7 years of UNSCOM weapons inspection; four years of surveillance; and months of UNMOVIC weapons

emperors-- Bush and Blair-- now find themselves nakedly exposed before the world.

A decade of conspiracy

The seeds of the second Gulf war were sown in July 1991 when the IAEA team discovered in Iraq several kilogram of highly enriched uranium (at least 25 kg needed to produce one atom bomb) and large stock of natural uranium.

But, by then, UNSCOM had destroyed all but two Iraqi ballistic missiles with ranges above 94 miles/150 km (the limit specified by the cease-fire resolution) and all Iraqi missile launchers.

Ever since, the spin-doctors of the intelligence community had field days in cobbling concocted anecdotes to make a strong case to invade Iraq. The main casualty of this dirty conspiracy is the global system that now stands languished in the midst of a credibility crisis burgeoned by the very people who ought to have preserved its sanctity.

Especially after the UNSC passed Resolution 1441 on November 8, 2002, the danger of war could have been averted if the US-UK heeded to Iraq's submission of a 1200 page WMD report on December 17, and continued with further inspection, as was requested by the UN.

The December 7 report was in compliance with Resolution 687, which required of Iraq to submit a

inspection. The UN was slapped on the cheek and laws among nations rendered dysfunctional.

After the war too, the Anglo-American coalition forces went into three months long investiture and scouring of Iraq, interviewed scores of Iraqi scientists, but nothing was found.

Tentacles of notorious spies

The war's justification was 'cooked up' mainly by Tony Blair's head of communication, Alastair Campbell, who had bent intelligence reports to win over the dissenters in the House of Commons. Anti-war sentiment being more virulent in the UK than the US, this surreptitiously contrived scheme was considered an essential remedy to quelling any dissent against the war. A tentacle of cross-Atlantic spies aided Bush and Blair to build the case against Iraq.

Amidst the spy-prodded alarm-mongers' disclosure that Iraq was on its way to becoming nuclear was claimed by Britain's M16-- a CIA official went to Niger in February 2002 to authenticate the veracity of a document that contained details of Iraq's 500 kg alleged uranium purchase from Niger.

The CIA official reported that the documents corroborating Iraq's attempts to buy uranium were false. Yet, the CIA handed over the documents to the IAEA. The IAEA's own investigation too found the documents as 'forged'.

The sequel was so well orchestrated that in his January 2003 State of the Union address, Bush emphatically claimed that Iraq posed a grave danger to US interests and convinced the Congress to consent to the waging of war against Iraq.

To make the case stronger, the US and UK even accused Iraq of

country.'

That third country is Israel, which even accused Iraq of sending its WMD to Syria during the thick of the UN inspections.

The issue has put Bush and Blair into emotional roller coasters. Clare Short, who resigned as the UK's international development secretary in protest at Blair's han-

having ties with Al-Qaeda, an accusation that even did not deserve an anecdotal mention in the White House's own document, *A Decade of Deception and Defiance*, by Iraq. The document was published on September 12, 2002.

Simultaneously, the strategic impetus to justify the war came from another White House document released on the same day. Titled as *The National Security Strategy of the United States*, a new military doctrine shifted US' military strategy away from containment and deterrence to preemptive actions against hostile states and terrorist groups developing WMD.

Then, in his presentation before the Security Council on February 5, 2003, Colin Powell listed 65 Iraqi sites as being in the business of developing WMD stockpile. Once again, the UN did not buy the Powell thesis due to 600 of its own expert inspectors having, by then, inspected 110 more sites in Iraq.

Genie out of bottle

The invasion of Iraq is a *fait accompli* to many although the CIA director, George Tenet, has let the genie out of the bottle by saying that Iraq's WMD 'report was a mistake.' He also attributed the blame to the British intelligence agencies as sources. British foreign secretary, Jack Straw, cleverly waxed over the embarrassment by saying, 'Britain can not disclose the source as the intelligence came from a third

dling of post-war Iraq, said on June 1 that Tony Blair had 'duped' the public over the danger of Iraq's WMD. Short added, 'The Prime Minister had knowingly led his country to war on a false pretext'.

Robin Cook, who had resigned before the war from the cabinet, said the government had committed a 'monumental blunder'. The UN' chief weapons inspector, Hans Blix, too blamed Tony Blair of committing 'a grand blunder' by feeding information that proved untrue.

While Bush proffered passing the buck onto the CIA's shoulder-- and the CIA blames the M16-- Tony Blair stands accused of misleading the House of Commons by saying 'Iraqi WMD could be launched within 45 minutes.' Blair's dreadful information served as the last straw to kick off an invasion of Iraq.

Yet, Bush is not off the hook altogether. In a Senate debate on July 15, Democratic Senator Edward Kennedy accused Bush of invading Iraq with 'shoddy, hyped and false intelligence'.

As well, the Economist magazine reported on June 7 that a disgruntled M16 official had leaked to the BBC that the intelligence on Iraq's WMD came from only one uncorroborated source which the Joint Intelligence Committee had been reluctant to validate so far. Jack Straw's mention of a third country without naming has cleared the fog. It was Israel that sucked in the US and the UK into a

Mid East quagmire.

Law and restitution

Hence, it is indisputable that the Downing Street spun intelligence material to overcome public dissent against the war. If the British intelligence materials were home spun, concocted and spurious, the CIA's acknowledgement of the acceptance of the same intelligence leads to two conclusive conclusions. (1) The war was illegal, and (2) Iraq needs restitution under international laws.

This is not the first time that the US showed its thumb to the global system. The International Court of Justice admonished the US in 1986 for bending law to suit its needs. In the *Nicaragua Vs. United States of America* case, the Court held that 'The US could not justify its aid to the Nicaraguan Contras on the claim that it was acting in collective self defense since there was insufficient evidence of a Nicaraguan 'armed attack' on the US'.

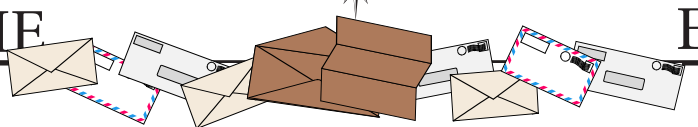
And, being a signatory to the 'General Treaty for Renunciation of War As An Instrument of National Policy' (US signed the treaty on July 24, 1929), the US had violated Article 2(4) of the Charter which prohibits the use of force in self-defense unless aggressed. The laws of war too prohibit anticipatory or preemptive strikes against another sovereign.

That notwithstanding, Article 1 of the accepted definition of 'aggression' states, 'aggression is the use of **armed force** by a State against the sovereignty, territorial integrity or political independence of another State'. Article 2 of the definition states, 'first use of **armed force** by a state in contravention of the Charter shall constitute *prima facie* evidence of an act of aggression'.

Since laws among nations do not lend any justification to the invasion of Iraq by the US-UK coalition, nations must come together to stop collectively the recurrence of such preemptive onslaughts against weaker nations.

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TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR



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Launch disaster

"I am not a person to quit. If I quit then who would work?" Akbar the shipping minister declared this to the Daily Star over a telephonic interview. (Dated 11th July). Bravo Mr. Akbar, what a responsible response it was!

Was that a comment coming from a veteran politician? I doubt it. If you were a reasonable person you would have quit before anyone starts asking questions about it. The number of dead bodies was enough to justify your action. The government should really take it seriously, it is time to take

measures to prevent future disasters.

Foyed Ahmed
Shamoli, Dhaka

Switzerland can serve as a model for multiethnic Iraq

Though the United States went to Iraq out of its own security concerns, the real beneficiary of Saddam's ouster will be the Iraqi people. And Iraq may be already on the way to become a freer society. Though sporadic attacks by renegade Saddam loyalists

continue, tentative steps have already been taken toward a more representative form of government.

Last week, the Interim City Advisory Council opened up for business in Baghdad. L. Paul Bremer, the U.S. administrator in Iraq, called the meeting 'perhaps the most important day for Baghdad since April 9, when coalition forces liberated (Baghdad)'. Khaled Basher Mirza, the council chairman, called it as 'a symbol of law and order that we all crave.' The advisory council is the product of 88 local councils formed throughout the capital to stop

looting and general breakdown of law and order following the collapse of the Baathist regime.

Despite threats by Saddam's heavily armed flunkies, more and more Iraqis are showing up for the meetings. Another City Council in the southern Shiite city of Najaf also began its deliberations by the end of the first week of July. These and other advisory councils are precursors to elected city councils after a nation-wide referendum to be held on an Iraqi constitution in a few months. Iraq's first governing council is expected to take shape by mid-July.

As Iraq is looking for a viable representative government where conflicting interest of various ethnic and religious groups can be reconciled, Switzerland can serve as a model. The majority of Swiss are German-speaking, one third are French-speaking and a smaller group are Italian-speaking. While the Germans, the French and the Italians elsewhere in Europe were embroiled in conflict and war, different ethnic and religious groups in Switzerland have been living in peace and harmony. The Swiss achieved this by allowing different ethnic and religious groups to be largely self-governing

in their local areas. The cantons (regions) and towns and cities (communes) have most of the administrative powers, leaving the central government with defence, foreign relations and taxation and broader financial powers.

The same system could work in Iraq. In Iraq, the Shiite Arabs are more than 60 per cent of the population. And yet, Saddam and his minority Sunni Arabs ruled the Shiite majority through brute force. As such, it would be natural that the Shiites take their rightful place in the society. But care must be taken so that the Sunni minority are not left out in the new system.

The Kurdish minority are also Sunni, but they have a distinct language and culture and they were saved from total extermination by Saddam through U.S.-imposed "no-fly" zone after the end of the First Gulf War in 1991. Since then the Kurds have been largely successful in setting up rudimentary system of self-government in their areas under the allied protection. The same can be expanded in the Shiite and Sunni areas. Using the Swiss model, three main Iraqi groups -- Shiites, Sunnis and Kurds -- can set up their own cantons and communes, leaving the federal

government with residual powers to deal with defence, foreign relations and taxation and national economic policies.

However, attacks by heavily armed Saddam loyalists will remain the greatest threat. These armed henchmen of the old regime must be thinking that if they could create enough coalition military casualties, the Americans might cut short their military and security presence in Iraq, allowing them to take over the country again. This must not be allowed to happen.

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