

The white hippo in the shipping ministry and more

Good result, but then what?

A severe admission crisis looms ahead

MUCH as we had taken delight in the good performance of the SSC candidates this year we cannot but commiserate with those that have secured the highest grading of GPA-5 and yet may not be able to get admitted to the top notch colleges of the country. Admittedly, there will be a rush for the best colleges in the country by those top achievers but a real problem stares these student, and indeed the nation, in the face, which is that there are not many colleges that they consider worth getting admitted to. This is most acute in the case of Dhaka and Chittagong boards in particular.

This is unfortunately one of the ironic fallouts of good results. Every year there has been an increase in the number of students obtaining GPA-5 grade, and though the overall capacity of the colleges to accommodate students has increased over time, the number of seats in good colleges that top students vie for has remained constant. Thus, if students with the highest grade are not assured of admission to reputed colleges, just spare a thought for the prospect of those who have made lower grades finding seats in colleges of their choice. This unfortunately may lead to a large number of frustrated students seeking admission in colleges outside the country.

We have thus a real problem in hand. While one cannot fault a student, whatever may be his grade, to aspire for studying in a reputed college, it is for the state to ensure a uniform standard of education in most of the colleges. The one and only criterion that a student looks for in a good college is the number of students that obtain the highest grade in the HSC exam. And there are several factors that help achieve good results that are not found in colleges with lesser credentials. Thus, while the government must go for more colleges it must also ensure that all the colleges achieve a minimum and uniform level of excellence, which would see the end of students making a beeline for some particular colleges in the country while some fail to enroll even the minimum number of students stipulated by the government.

Home they brought the hero dead

A beacon of freedom

THE nation is paying back a bit of the great debt that it owes to the valiant freedom fighter, Birsresho Matur Rahman. His mortal remains have been brought back home from Pakistan after 35 years since his martyrdom. From here to eternity, the great son of the soil will rest in peace in the very land that he sacrificed his life for. It is a moment of joy and fulfillment for all of us.

Matur Rahman made a heroic attempt to stand by his besieged country in 1971. His patriotism and the urge to fight for the motherland were so overwhelming that he left his wife and two little daughters behind while trying to fly out of Pakistan on his way to Bangladesh. The sense of duty towards the motherland got the better of love and affection for his family. His mission was not fulfilled but that could by no means alter the truth that it was a deed of unparalleled valour. His mission must have greatly inspired the freedom fighters, then taking on the Pakistan army here in Bangladesh.

Many events having great symbolic value took place during the War of Liberation and the way Matur Rahman laid down his life was certainly one of them. His dream of joining the war was shattered in the sky; but death cannot destroy such souls, it can only glorify them.

His kith and kin and compatriots have long been demanding that the mortal remains of this freedom fighter be brought back home. It assumed the overtones of a national demand as more and more people began to feel that the hero of 1971, even in death needed to be amidst his own people. Today they will definitely be happy with the historic job done.

The Pakistan government has shown due sensitivity to our demand and agreed to send back the mortal remains of Matur Rahman for which we thank them. We also appreciate the initiative taken by our government.

Let the hero live in our hearts perpetually; let the posterity know that there was a man who sacrificed his life only because he loved this country and its people.



SHAHNOOR WAHID

SENSE & INSENSIBILITY

There is a never-ending flow of weird tales from that country. Last week this particular news of somewhat grave nature hit the headlines of newspapers of Golden Bengal. In fact, it's about real graves and a graveyard. Believe it or not, a part of that ancient graveyard has been hijacked by a high and mighty man and his wife to make some "windfall" profit by creating a road across and over the sacred bones of their sleeping ancestors.

WHEN people spend huge sums on a massive project that is destined to be rendered useless soon, we use a common phrase to describe it. We call it a "white elephant." Since white elephants in real life are unheard of, the enormity of the project, in terms of money and size, is best compared with such a mythical creature, quite metaphorically that is.

Now, how can we describe another project that is also horrendously costly and ludicrously large, but floats on water? It's a dream-come-true project, a gargantuan cargo ship to be precise, that the ministry of shipping is hell-bent on buying with an astronomical sum. Well, since it's a water-based project we may compare it with a hippopotamus because of its size. We may even baptize the ship with the name "white hippopotamus." Befitting, isn't it?

It also costs a good amount of money. But money is of no concern to the shipping minister of this super-rich country called Golden

Bengal. We heard that he felt nearly affronted when someone quoted the price of the ship at only Tk. 91 crore! What! Such a paltry sum! Being a high and mighty minister of a rich country, could he, or should he, sign a cheque for such a meagre amount? No way, sir. You have to understand his position!

Therefore, please enhance the price, escalate the cost, before minister sahib comes to office this morning. How much is it now? Tk. 130 crore? Good. There is a musical ring in the amount. You see, now it will take up the entire space on the cheque. Take one hundred and thirty crore only. Hmmm... now it sounds real good. Golden Bengal is a rich country, isn't it?

But, we are worried, very worried indeed, to hear that some spoilsports in the related parliamentary committee are not liking this extremely poverty-alleviating and poor-friendly project of the ministry of shipping. They are overtly jealous of the highly efficient minister and the way he is steering the ministry through

troubled waters. These ungrateful people want to complain about his "doings" to the prime minister of the country. What a preposterous proposition!

Shouldn't ministers enjoy total impunity while spending public money the way they want to in this country? It's a free-for-all country, isn't it? Then why should others interfere in their business? These jealous people termed the minister's decision to go for the expensive ship unilateral and rigid. Funny indeed. He is the one and only minister of the ministry concerned. Therefore, who else but he has the right to play around with the price before signing the contract? There is no room for others to poke their dirty nose in the affair.

And if the minister feels physically unwell minutes before a meeting of the committee on the issue then why should the members become so critical about it? Can't someone fall ill before important meetings? And the audacity of the members of the committee did not end there! They

even hinted at referring the case to the Anti-Corruption Commission! Well, let's wait and see what develops in Golden Bengal.

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Some readers found the news report uncanny and did not want to read the entire story. We believe "desecration" is a word not to be found in those people's dictionary. The contractors did not stop their road construction work even after a stop order was issued from some higher authorities. It is being whispered around that the man has useful connections with a prince living in the legendary "Windy Castle" in that country.



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So what do people do? They usually do the right thing. You see, collectively people always do positive things, though individually some of them may do bad things. Therefore, when the workers did not stop the construction work even after a lot of pleading, some religious-minded people destroyed the foundation pillars with their bare hands on Friday last. They could not allow defilement of the graves of their near and dear ones by some controversial people who became too greedy to make money.

The high quality dramas at the Election Commission of Golden Bengal continue to be staged every day, now behind newly-erected iron fencing to protect the performers from the cheering audi-

ence. Drama critics and media through the place from dawn to dusk for a glimpse of the performers and to collect the latest news about the new productions.

The performers have already attained the status of celebrities. They are now expecting calls from foreign countries to stage their shows. By now the EC has become as famous as the legendary "Globe Theatre" of London from the Shakespearean era. The name of the latest drama they have staged is: "To go door to door or not to go, that is the question." We heard that it's a powerful drama and tickets are difficult to come by these days. So one has to watch it on television.

Shahnoor Wahid is a Senior Assistant Editor of The Daily Star.

The vanishing fatherhood

CROSS TALK

The question we needed to ask last Sunday is what was happening to the fathers of today? Ambitious fathers want ambitious children. Some fathers are desperate to leave lots of money for their children. But somewhere the relationship between them is strained. Fathers are looming large as providers and procreators, but shrinking as role models. In so much as fatherhood is growing in impulses, it is vanishing as an institution. Prove me wrong, as my father would say.



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

LAST Sunday was Father's Day, a western concept to celebrate the place of a father in the scheme of life. A father is the progenitor, a male parent, whose seeds create new life in the womb of a mother, the other parent. It is the same concept as the crop rotation. Seeds planted in fertile soil grow up as crops, which again provide fresh seeds for the new season. Father and children, thus define one half of life cycle. The other half is defined by mother and children.

While watching the rerun of his movies, former US President Ronald Reagan once said that every time he looked at the young him on the screen, he thought of a son he never had. Every man yearns to be reproduced in the progeny, to sire children who will be as good as him, if not even better than him. In that sense, every father takes a chance when a child is conceived.

He is the venture capitalist of biological reproduction.

Is that enough reason to celebrate a special day for the father? Well, it makes commercial sense to celebrate any day so long as it sells flowers, cakes, gifts and cards while restaurants get busy with eager families who gather to treat their fathers. For that matter there are Mother's Day, Valentine's Day, Independence Day, and many other days to celebrate people and events.

But what does Father's Day signify except for the role of a man who holds the seed and then works hard to raise his crop (family). In many families, mothers also work to put food on the table. That leaves the singular role of biological reproduction which is embedded in the father's sexual formation as a man. A father is a man who does what is characteristic of his male virility. What is his credit in this?

Why does it need special recognition? Fatherhood is as natural as motherhood, an urge that works like gravitation, pulling men to copulate and preserve what they procreate. Some men take the vow of celibacy, never get married. These men never become fathers. Exception proves the rule.

Why celebrate what is so common? Most sons grow up to become fathers, pushing the supply stream of fathers through eternity. It is a fact of life, a dominant notch on the generation scale. But then it needs a stroke of luck in many instances. There are illegitimate and posthumous children who never see their fathers. There are fathers who never see their children. Some fathers rear their children knowingly or unknowingly from a distance through friends, relatives or orphanages. We come across such fathers in stories and movies, if not in real life

as often.

There are sayings about fathers and children. Like father like son. Chip off the old block. The acorn does not fall far from the tree. Father and children are bound in DNAs, their physical appearance, mental formation, attitudes and behaviours having many similarities. But then there can be striking dissimilarities as well. Good fathers can have bad children. Bad fathers can have good children. There is a game of chance in every filial experience.

It is this game of chance which is celebrated and commended on Father's Day. At least that was the idea when Mrs. John B Dodd first introduced the idea in Washington, US. She wanted to honour her father William Smart, a Civil War veteran, who raised his six children after his wife died. She wanted to recognize the strength and selflessness of her father in raising his

children as a single parent, showing that fatherhood was more than giving birth to children.

The first Father's Day was observed on June 19, 1910. In 1924 President Calvin Coolidge supported the idea of a national Father's Day. President Lyndon Johnson signed a presidential proclamation in 1966 making the third Sunday of June as Father's Day. Since then, Father's Day has become a day to not only honour the father, but all men who act as a father figure. Stepfathers, uncles, grandfathers and adult male friends are all honored on Father's Day.

In the manner of a river drying up as it moves further away from its source, Father's Day has lost its way over the years while its spirit faded into commercial interests. It is more ritual than devotion, more fun than faith. Somehow the significance of the day has been usurped by business instincts more than anything else. The father is now more ceremonial than role model. Often a miserable failure in supporting his family. Often unscrupulous with questionable integrity. The beacon-light figure of wisdom, knowledge, experience, tolerance, patience, courage, character and honesty is sorely missing.

Which accounts for the contradiction that is so annoying. People who have more money, have more

interest in Father's Day as their children tend to better appreciate their fathers for giving them comfort and affluence. The fathers who struggle hard to raise their families with meager and honest income, have neither the means nor the end to seek recognition. Perhaps children can never appreciate enough how much their fathers sacrifice for their success.

A Beijing-based recruitment company *Zhi Lian* conducted a survey about what motivates fathers most at their workplaces in China. Surprisingly, rather than fame, status or materials, over 80 percent of fathers interviewed say that children are the greatest strength that motivate them to work hard. It shows that father and children are close under the more traditional family setting.

The question we needed to ask last Sunday is what was happening to the fathers of today? Ambitious fathers want ambitious children. Some fathers are desperate to leave lots of money for their children. But somewhere the relationship between them is strained. Fathers are looming large as providers and procreators, but shrinking as role models. In so much as fatherhood is growing in impulses, it is vanishing as an institution.

Prove me wrong, as my father would say.

Mohammad Badrul Ahsan is a banker.

Non-economic factors of Tata investment

While the reasons for which foreign capital is short in Bangladesh can not be overcome overnight, any offer of FDI at this stage merits the highest consideration not only for immediate economic gains but also to take into account its contribution to confidence building of foreign capital. Tata's recent proposal of investment of up to three billion dollars needs to be seen and considered, in this light. In recent months Tata has made newspaper headlines and prompted expert analysis in the media as well as in seminars and scholarly discussions. Most of the analyses and discussions understandably have centred round direct economic gains for Bangladesh.

DR. M SHAH ALAM

GLOBALISATION may impact individual state development both negatively and positively. Amongst multifarious forces and aspects of globalisation which are at work to lead to divergent results, individual state skill to derive benefit from globalised world's interdependence in specific sectors is a big factor of development.

In an economic sense, global mobility of capital and labour is the single most important element of globalisation. Although, as Marxists would put it, a higher stage of capitalism based globalisation leads to imperialist tendencies to exploit foreign lands and resources. These are conditions which individual

states, presumably capital-starved, can use for their own benefit.

Capital always seeks profit and hence cheap labour. This has been one of the major reasons of huge increase in Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) under globalisation. FDI has been one of the major contributing factors in the industrialisation of newly industrialised countries including China, Taiwan, South Korea, Malaysia and Singapore. India, Thailand, Indonesia, Philippines and Vietnam are showing healthy signs of skillful use of foreign capital for their industrialisation. However, cheap labour is far from being the only factor of FDI. That capital could profitably use labour it needs *inter alia* good infrastructure facilities, peaceful conditions

meaning primarily absence of social and political unrest, efficient administrative and judicial mechanism to deal with problems that any investment encounters, and of course, safety of profit proceeds. In return, the country of investment ought to gain by way of industrialisation, employment and strengthening of national economy.

Capital's relationship with labour is ambivalent, seeking and pursuing each other in a peculiar way. This ambivalent cohabitation has always been a factor of capitalist development, but needs careful orchestration for healthy development. We in Bangladesh, a country with a huge reservoir of cheap labour, have so far reaped the benefits of globalisation in the form of exporting labour, but not up to

our potential and to the extent that many other developing countries have done. Nourished and regulated efficiently, it holds great promise for the future. On the other hand, our attempts to attract foreign capital to use our indigenous labour have not been very successful. This is one area where huge potentials of our industrialisation are hidden, for capital always follows cheap labour. The reasons for our dismal record are not far to seek -- first, socio-political unrest accompanied by inefficient legal-administrative system, and second, weak infrastructure.

While the reasons for which foreign capital is short in Bangladesh can not be overcome overnight, any offer of FDI at this stage merits the highest consideration not only for immediate economic gains but also to take into account its contribution to confidence building of foreign capital. Tata's recent proposal of investment of up to three billion dollars needs to be seen and considered, in this light.

In recent months Tata has made newspaper headlines and prompted expert analysis in the media as well as in seminars and scholarly discussions. Most of

the analyses and discussions understandably have centred round direct economic gains for Bangladesh. In negotiations between Tata and Bangladesh Board of Investment (BoI) and other relevant agencies naturally economic issues prevailed. Now it seems that the issues have boiled down to one major question -- use of gas and its pricing.

Gas is the main natural resource of Bangladesh, and its reserves are limited unless new gas fields are discovered. Moreover, the proposed price at which gas is supplied to Tata for their industrial complex is subsidy price, which is much lower than the international price. It is understandable that Tata would bargain for lower gas price, tax holiday, export facilities for their products and, maybe many other financial incentives to maximise their profit. On the other hand, Bangladesh would naturally weigh the proposals taking into account its own gains in the form of employment, infrastructure building, revenue earnings and use of products that Tata would produce. In fact, negotiations and expert discussions centred round these issues. Ultimately, Tata submit-

ted a revised proposal agreeing to raise gas price, though it was still lower than international market price, and to provide Bangladesh government 10% equity share.

Bangladesh side should definitely examine every detail of Tata's latest package proposal and should be guided by its prospective economic gains both in the short-term and long-term. And, of course, use of gas, gas price and the factor of gas reserve as well as the probability of discovery of new gas fields in the future should be on the minds of the Bangladesh side. While long-term economic gains and rational use of gas are the prime factors for our policy makers to accept or to reject Tata's proposal, some considerations of not immediate economic effect need to be taken into account. Although they may be in way called non-economic factors, they will definitely have positive impact for further investment.

At a time when Bangladesh desperately needs to boost its FDI, and has substantially liberalised its investment regime to attract FDI, Tata's investment proposal is likely to allay many of

the fears that haunt potential foreign investors in Bangladesh. Successful negotiations and actual investment by Tata will undoubtedly contribute to confidence building amongst foreign investors. Tata, as a group from our closest and biggest neighbour which shares many cultural commonalities with us, is in a better position to take up investment challenges in Bangladesh. It would of course be on the Bangladesh side to play its part skillfully to use Tata's offer to its best advantage and make a major break-through in FDI in the country.

Besides confidence-building, the other positive developments which are certain to follow from robust investment are (a) infrastructure development including getting into regional and international network of transportation and communication, (b) enhancement of work ethics and more provision for labour training, (c) possibility of transfer of technology, (d) exchange of corporate experience with local entrepreneurs, (e) more opportunities to apply international labour and capital standards.

Any major foreign investment

is a result of international economic cooperation which, as a manifestation of globalisation, is assumed to be based on the principle of mutual benefit to be judged not only by the immediate economic gains but also by the no less important accompanying factors such as being partners in the regional and global march for development. The days of plundering of national resources by foreign capital are over. Every state has the opportunity to weigh its own options for decision making. Under the prevailing international law and custom, every sovereign state reserves the right to reevaluate and revise its decisions on any ongoing foreign investment, if its national interests so demand. FDI is not merely a business agreement with a private foreign company, it is also entering into more intimate economic cooperation with the country of nationality of the company. Such cooperation strengthens the sense of partnership and contributes to mutual understanding and resolution of outstanding problems in many other fields.

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