

Girls Do it

This is perhaps for the first time that the top three places on the merit list of the Higher Secondary School Certificate examinations have been secured by girl students. While the Dhaka Board produced this unprecedented brilliance for girls, the Comilla Board did not lag far behind. Here also the top spot has deservedly gone to a female student. Such individual brilliance can be an exception to the rule. Then a school or college can produce, through painstaking care, excellent results for year or even a string of success of the highest order.

The just published results have proved to be more than individual students' or school's flashes of brilliance. As a general rule girls have fared better than their counterparts, boys. Except boys of the science group under the Jessore Board, girls have a higher success rate in all groups under all the Boards. This really is an achievement for us all to savour and celebrate, particularly in the context of the decade of the girl child. At least for once the girls have triumphed over the boys in a most telling manner. If this signals a collective awakening for the girls and also a stretch of the performance in other areas, there is every reason to be optimistic about the country's future.

Although any sex bias is bound to be unhealthy for smooth social development, there is however one strong reason for giving a pat on the back of the female of the successful HSC examinees on the occasion of their achieving the glory. Vulnerable as the women are, they really need such encouragement through creation of precedents by themselves. No precept can be of much help for the weak and the socially discriminated. On the positive side, the superior performance by the girl students may whet the rivalry between them and the boys.

Our exuberance poured over the girl students' success should not blind us about the overall failure as reflected in the HSC exam results. The average percentage of successful candidates this time is 39.88 per cent. This means that more than 60 per cent were unsuccessful. What a colossal wastage of time, energy and money! Can the country afford this loss? The very system of learning and judging the merits of students seems to be faulty. It is the system that needs to be improved. Finally, no political considerations should be allowed to determine the rate of pass at the examinations.

Show More Respect for Religious Minorities

It is good that the Opposition has reduced the duration of the December 24 barricade programme ending it at 2 pm. Good but not enough. It was good only because the earlier slip of forgetting that the whole week ending December 24 would have positively harmed the observance of the holiest day on the Christian calendar the very next day — the birthday of Jesus Christ, the Saviour. The improvement now effected is no improvement at all for it is more than a point of convenience that is involved here. The principle of respecting the sacred days as well as rites and rituals, congregations and festivals of the different religious communities of the land, perhaps unwittingly, has been struck and the new timing doesn't at all help repair that impairment. The opposition parties have all the reason to be wary, very very wary of not hurting the sensibilities of any broad section of our people lest they be taken for an insensate bunch poised to play foul with the citizens' norms and values.

It is wrong to say Christmas is a festival of only the Christians. In a national society the non-Christians would all like to ensure that all in the land rejoice on the happy occasion — and that Christmas be a festivity for all in the land to join. It applies the same way to the Eid and the Puja. When this is the ideal we should move towards in our duty of consolidating our nationhood, even a half-day barricade programme on December 24 amounts very much to a rude blow to that march. The Opposition can certainly do without such unwanted *faux pas*.

This year the 23rd is a Friday. All wishing to join with their families and kinsmen residing away on the 25th needed only to squeeze in a casual leave on the 24th to reap the full benefit of a three-day holiday of fun and frolic and bonhomie. The barricade on Thursday, of whatever duration, throws a bucketful of cold on that happy prospect. We feel sorry for the affected. And we are sorry also for the Opposition who must now be seen by many in a very odd light without being truly lacking in respect for anyone's holy days.

The Excluded Areas

Prodyot Kumar Chaiti was going to the examination centre. He was going by a rickshaw from his Rajshahi University hall accommodation. He was taking his masters examinations. Some miscreants — no need to probe belonging to what — stopped him and dealt him blows with various weapons. The severely hurt Prodyot was rushed to the Rajshahi Medical College Hospital in a critical condition.

The government of Bangladesh, without any proclamation to this effect, has been treating all the university campuses as 'excluded areas'. Crimes of all kind, specially violent ones involving killing of students, are immune to law of the land. Why and for what? And how? The government doesn't by this do anything good to its theoretical hold on the politico-administrative conduct of the society. Not only the moral authority but also the plain and ponderous legal-administrative authority of the government takes a good beating by such pockets of exclusion to law and other formulations of social norms. It is not that the present and particular government is harming itself only by such. It is harming the institution of government beyond easy and early repair. This suits well the campus goons. But how does this benefit the government?

It is only too normal to ask of the government the number of deaths on the campuses due to student violence during its tenure for which it must be answerable — and the number of convictions against those. The government's failure to ensure security in such highly organised and supervisable areas as university campuses does not speak highly of their performance as something qualifying them to govern.

No one has so far been arrested in the Prodyot case. We hope it is done before the tenuous security situation on the RU campus slides into absolute non-existence.

Our Fight for Democracy: The Forgotten Issues

It must be borne in mind that since 1946, people have had the experience of casting their votes in several general elections which were free and fair. On all these occasions, people did exercise their free will with lot of hopes and aspirations — they all looked for a golden future. But it never came.

SEVERAL members of the Jatiya Sangsad (Parliament), belonging to all shades and colours, in government, opposition or elsewhere, told me (obviously very much in confidence) that regardless of all the safeguards and protection against rigging of votes, even if there is not a single false vote, and no commotion or fear to vitiate the election process — money would still be the most critical factor determining winners and losers at the next general election. According to estimates, around Taka two million is likely to be the minimum requirement for each constituency and more money you pour in like an everlasting, or atleast long-lasting, money-faucet, the chances of winning, regardless of party affiliation, will only improve.

You cannot beat money — even the Russians lost the cold war because of the lack of it. So must we not follow the market-friendly approach?

In three hundred contested seats, a total of Taka 60 crore, if not more, will change hands. To an economist, it is a huge transfer payment, capable of generating rapid inflation in the basically subsistence economy of the country which has a fairly narrow production base and not too many goods and services are bought and sold — notwithstanding the "glorious" market-friendly approach. Then, what is the big deal? What is the purpose of the big fight for Caretaker Government? If money is the all-important factor, if votes are bought and sold like chicken in the open market, then it is better for the parties and the aspiring candidates to launch vigorous drives to beg, borrow and steal, accumulate the desired cash liquidity for the contest of money. It is neither democracy nor election — it is gambling on a grand scale.

The caretaker government is considered to be the silver mean for the golden end of free and fair election. It is quite legitimate on the part of the opposition parties to consider that

unless and until the government itself has no direct interest in the results of the election, it is difficult (if not impossible), in the corruption ridden atmosphere of our country, to ensure that honesty will not only prevail but endure as the hallmark of the elective process.

Free-for-all

In spite of caretaker government, with no vested interests in its outcome, the general election is likely to be neither free nor fair. First, the chances are that instead of being free, it would become free-for-all. There could be a profusion of lathis, if not fire-arms, as an essential instrument of election campaign. The slogans and speeches are not enough these days: given the advent of the age of mastans, can we rule out the possibilities of genuinely free-for-all gun fights? If not money, terror should work. Perhaps money plus terror will assure candidates with the winning number of votes. Given the dominance of muscle men, which is inevitable, Mr Reza Ahmed a retired civil servant, age 70, told me the other day, "Regardless of the government, police etc., I am not going to the polling station, since I care more for my old life and wish to avoid all the chances of being hit by a stone, lathi or bullet." Perhaps in our situation, election should be fearless as well: otherwise it cannot be free. Will the political parties promise that role of mastans will be ruled out? I do not think so — hoodlums breed like insects at the time of election.

Next is the issue of fare election. Is it conceivable that the caretaker government, even of the most ideal kind, will be able to ensure that the game will be played — entirely with all the honest intents, there will be no vote buying, no under-the-table deals and all the decisions of the umpire, that is the caretaker government itself, will be

followed in real earnest? I do not think any one in his right mind can give a positive answer to this all important question.

It is the terror of money and muscle (though not necessarily in that order) — not the reign of the free and the fare, regardless of the caretaker government.

The real issues of the parliamentary election within the framework of our democratic system are the forgotten issues of establishing rule of law where everybody, regardless of his or her rank and status, is treated equally. Judiciary is totally independent and the police is fearless in maintaining law and order. The concept of the rule of law is the most fundamental issue at stake. The party in power, now and before, tend to

they all aspire to be. The powers and privileges of a democratic system must be shared. It cannot be the sole monopoly of the elected few at the national level, obviously by muscle and money — as explained earlier.

Expectations Unfulfilled

It must be borne in mind that since 1946, people have had the experience of casting their votes in several general elections which were free and fair. On all these occasions, people did exercise their free will with lot of hopes and aspirations — they all looked for a golden future. But it never came.

WINDOW ON ASIA

Shahid Latif

suffer from the ill-conceived paradigm that they have been voted to rule; therefore they are the law.

Another important consideration is that the national parliament is not the sole repository of all the democratic norms and practices of the nation. Unless a system of elected local governments is also made responsible for all local affairs, national parliament alone cannot be the basis of an adequate democratic system. Economic development is of highest national priority and a strong decentralized development management system ought to be installed to answer to all local problems to be resolved at the local level. The reluctance of politicians of all shades and colour to establish a strong local government system is the reflection of their utter lack of trust in the very process of democracy whose champion,

ferent. After almost a decade of deindustrialization, it was hoped that the people had voted for economic growth, rising incomes and expanding employment. Not that there has been no progress, but a lot more could have been done. As usual, the expectations remain unfulfilled.

As a voter I am sure that many like me are disillusioned, not because of the party in power but at the whole system of governance that we have put in place so far. As a citizen of Bangladesh, I am deeply concerned: democracy does not seem to yield the desired results. The hope for a better life, better than the miseries and agonies of today, is the basic aspiration that we so fondly cherish. But we inevitably fail and the dreams remain unrealized. So, please give me one good reason why any one party or individual should be voted to

power? In fact, ordinary people like me are losing hope in the glorified system itself.

The rickshaw puller was absolutely correct when he told me after the last election, "Sir, the driver has been changed many times, nothing happened — must change the engine as well." Basically, what he meant was that the system of governance should be changed. The sole central government cannot deliver the goods in the worst poverty-ridden country of over 120 million people. The system of government should start from the village level, the union council, followed by thana council and then the district council, each managed by elected representatives be autonomous and bestowed with their own revenue earning capacities. In addition, the proposal of "Gram Sarkar" (village government) with elected village leaders, striving for their own development, is a brilliant idea. The central government and the sovereign parliament come at the end. The task of development should be decentralized, so much so that people at various levels enjoy easy access to their own institutions where their own ideas and efforts to develop themselves would flourish.

Broad-based System

In such a broad-based system of governance, the power and influence of a single individual will be minimized. Consequently, the rule of law would prevail. People will vote not only members of parliament but many more aspirants would seek people's support while, thousands of elected office-holders will be engaged in governance so that no single party will dominate, neither will it be possible to secure power by money since power itself would be diffused throughout the various tiers of local government entities and only then the national government.

The big question, however, is whether our Parliament will ever appreciate the need of the nation at the cost of its own vested interests? It seems to me that neither the government nor the opposition are prepared to fight for the real issues of democracy.

Privatization in Turkey : New Chapter in Economy

Arshad-uz Zaman writes from Istanbul

Privatization, which will affect virtually every sector of Turkish economy, when completed within the next five years, is expected to bring US\$60 billion to Turkey's coffers.

After 11 years of on again, off again, Turkish Parliament finally took the decisive plunge to privatize her economy. With a vote of 195 in favour and 25 against, the Grand National Assembly decided on sweeping privatization of Turkish Economy.

The victory did not come to Prime Minister Tansu Ciller easily. She literally camped inside the Parliament for weeks, cajoled and arm twisted her mainly male colleagues, offered in night sessions Turkish delicacy Mantig (minced meat wrapped in salad leaf), she bargained with her coalition partner Murat Karayalcin, leader of the Social Democrat People's Party (SHP) for whom privatization is an anathema. In return Ciller had to promise support for SHP's Democratization bill, which must be debated in the Assembly immediately. Mesut Yilmaz, leader of the Opposition and President of the Motherland Party (ANAP) lent support after hard bargaining. Privatization as State Policy received decisive boost from late President Turgut Ozal, founder of ANAP.

The other important party Welfare Party (RP) stands for privatization and lent support easily. The just adopted bill thus has received comprehensive parliamentary support.

Privatization, which will affect virtually every sector of Turkish economy, when completed within the next five years, is expected to bring US\$60 billion to Turkey's coffers. Those which are lined up for early sale to public are: 1) giant iron mill Erdemir, whose 51% will be sold to public; 2) Petrol Ofisi .50 to 55% by block sale to public within six months; 3) Turkish Airlines, 30% by block sale and 15% to public; 4) Petkim (Petrochemicals), 40% block sale within six months and 20% within 10 to 12 months to

public; 5) Tupras (Refinery), Refineries in Izmir and Izmit are to be sold within five months; 6) Petlas (Tyre makers) 100% to be sold within three months; 7) Sumerbank (giant conglomerate producing a vast range of consumer goods), will be offered within two months entirely to public; 8) Havas (Aviation industry), 60% block sale within three months and 40% to public; 9) Electric, Meat and Fish combine, to be offered entirely to public.

With few exceptions Turkey's banks are state controlled. According to the present decision except for Turkish Exim Bank, the Central Bank, Halbank and Ziraatbank, all others will be privatized.

In anticipation of approval by Parliament the office dealing with sell off have drawn up a plan. According to this, from the projected sale for 1995, which is expected to fetch US \$ 5 billion, US \$ 1.4 billion are expected to come from sale to foreigners. The law passed by the Parliament will create a High Board of Privatization comprising the Prime Minister,

the Deputy Prime Minister and three Ministers. All decisions will have to be unanimous.

The privatization bill could not have come at a better time for the Government of Tansu Ciller. Turkey is now in the last stage of negotiations for entering the Customs Union, an essential first step for Turkey for her three decade old ambition to become the first Muslim member of the European Union. The Customs Union agreement is due to be signed before the end of this year which would mean that all customs barriers between Turkey and the EU must come down by 1996. That the Turkish Parliament could muster enough political will to vote this far reaching privatization bill, when the Parliament is passing through tumultuous times due to recent putting off of Partial Parliamentary Elections, will no doubt be seen by the European as a positive sign. Partial Parliamentary Elections were slated for December 4 and the candidates, including the prominent Deputy Prime Minister Karayalcin, had entered the field. The RP want

to the Constitutional Court demanding scrapping of the elections pointing out that due to the virtual war in South Eastern Turkey, there had been massive migration and elections could not be held. Of the 22 seats up for election 14 are located in this mainly Kurdish region. The Constitutional Court decision was upheld by the High Election Board. According to the prevailing situation partial elections look highly unlikely before next spring. The majority party in the coalition, True Path Party (DYP) is not keen on early elections.

If the passage of the Privatization Bill has had a bumpy ride, the implementation is going to be far from easy.

Turkey's state run economy is almost as old as the 70 years old Soviet economy, which collapsed three years ago. The basic difference was that Soviet economy was based on Marxism and had a global focus, whereas Turkish economy came into the hands of the state due to totally different historical circumstances.

The victory of the forces of Ataturk, saw the departure of minorities, who controlled the economy. Secondly,

privatization people are made to follow the same with all rigidity for the sake of equity, justice and fair play.

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To the Editor...

After Bosnia now Chechnya?

Sir, Taking advantage of the differences, lack of understanding, disunity and the weak policy of the OIC countries a few European countries are constantly trying to harm many Muslim countries one after another.

We all know what actually happened in Bosnia. How and through whose policy of appeasement and encouragement the Serbs have killed thousands of Muslims, drove them off from their ancestral homes and occupied more than 70 per cent territory of Muslim Bosnia.

Not only the UNO and NATO witnessed the mayhem and genocide of the Muslims of Bosnia as silent spectators but the OIC itself, the Arab League and the Gulf Cooperation Council also played a very poor role politically, militarily, financially and diplomatically to save the Bosnian Muslims from the atrocities of the Serbs.

The Russians are now reportedly contemplating to repeat the history of the Serbs in Chechnya, predominantly Muslim republic of 1.2 million people located in southern Russia.

What Moscow did in Hungary in 1956 and in Czechoslovakia in 1968 is known to whole civilised world. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 is also not a secret matter.

Long lines of Russian T-55

clared their independence in 1991 after the present Russian President Boris Yeltsin himself declared the dissolution of the USSR.

Have not the OIC, the Arab League and the Muslim countries nothing to do save to save the Muslims in Bosnia and Chechnya? Can't they at least stop the supply of oil and voice their protest to the stand taken by Russia, the UK and France on this issue?

Time is passing out. We must act immediately without further delay. Can't we realize the gravity of the situation? United we stand, divided we fall.

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Sir, Drastic moral degradation throughout the globe today urges our moral conscience to pay attention to a recent widely talked about issue, viz, "A Proposal to the United Nations on Moral Development Approach: A New World Order for Peace" floated by a well-known educationist Dr Abu Obaidul Huque, Professor and Director of Bangladesh Institute for Advanced Science and Technology (IASTT).

There is no denying the fact that morality is the ultimate solution to the burning issues of the contemporary world, like AIDS, population control, environment pollution, violation of human rights, terrorism, oppression on women, drug abuse, smoking, etc. We firmly believe that this pro-

posal to UN on Moral Development is the root key to curb these social problems. And hence, we appeal to the UN and its member states to take up this timely proposal for the sake of meaningful and peaceful existence of mankind.

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Bus fares

Sir, Some years back when the Link Road connecting Agargaon and Mirpur Section-10 (Gol Chakkar) was under construction, the then President paid a visit to the site and asked the relevant authorities to complete the work on an emergency basis. A news item then published in the media stated that the road, when completed, will enable people to travel to Mirpur from Farm Gate in a shorter time and at a lesser expense.

No doubt a short time is now required and fuel consumption is also relatively less, but the transport people (BRTC, Bikalpa, private coasters etc.) are charging the same fare as was in practice earlier for the journey from Farm Gate to Mirpur, Section-10 via Asad Gate and Technical bus stop. It is a matter of dismay that the expectation as expressed in the press note about lesser expense was lost sight of and no authorities seemed to be bothered.

It is therefore, necessary that a reasonable fare based upon distance should be fixed not only for this route, but also elsewhere where anomalies exist on this account. And that

power? In