

Messy HSC Results

The country's four education boards opted for the preparation of results of the Secondary School Certificate (SSC) and Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) examinations through computers. It is for the second year running that the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET) computer centre has been doing the job. The main objectives of the move were to facilitate the process of announcement of results and also to remove the various discrepancies including manipulation by some dishonest employees of the boards.

However, this has not been an unmixed blessing. Some new problems have cropped up — a few of them are very serious ones. One such problem concerns the withheld results of about 12,000 HSC candidates who appeared at the examinations this year from the four boards. The Dhaka Education Board, after a week of the original publication of the HSC results, has attempted to make amends for its earlier lapse. It published the withheld results of about 2,500 students yesterday. The fresh results relate to not only another 1,500 successful candidates in the first division but also quite a few on the merit list. In fact, the new inclusions have upset the earlier merit list and the five securing the 20th position will now be out of the list altogether.

As far as we know the computer is not at fault for the incomplete or distorted results. The dislocations have taken place at various points starting from the filling in the answer script's tables to sending the marks to the BUET computer centre. The scripts went out of count. At best the publication of the withheld results is a delayed justice. But consider the agonies the candidates had to undergo for a week which would be subject-matter of legal remedy elsewhere. As for the publication of results of such a national examination, there is no scope for leading the candidates into uncertainties regarding their fate.

If the Dhaka Board has been somewhat prompt to correct the wrong, the other three boards are yet to follow suit. This means another 9,000 or so students are passing agonising moments over the outcome of their examinations. It appears that not enough home work was done before switching over to the computing system. Let the system be fail-safe to do away with such examination mess next time.

Offload Shares

Sponging small savings is something that capital formation institutions throughout the world work for. Individuals with peanut surpluses are universally sought after because of their sheer numerical strength to chip in a huge sum. Moreover, unlike the rather mercurial set of big investors they hold on to their commitment of money.

Our bank deposit and saving instrument rates having gone down, small savers are evincing a keen interest in the Dhaka Stock Exchange offerings. But the issues are extremely limited in number and variety. So much so that shares of certain companies have been oversubscribed by five times their initial offerings.

The government should help raise the stock levels on the share market not to depress the growing interest in it. The very first step it should take is offload its shares in different multinational companies on the DSE floors. Simultaneously, the oil and gas sectors, which are in the hands of the government, can also float their shares to the public.

The World Bank and some donor countries have been pressing us hard for a rapid disinvestment of our public sector undertakings including those providing us with the vital utility services. The government faces a dilemma in striking a balance between privatisation and maintaining a role in the fixation of utility rates. Given the shrinking aid prospects, we cannot be indefinitely reliant on foreign loans to bank-roll modernisation and expansion of services in keeping with a rising population. Neither can we meet the requirement from our own exchequer.

By floating its shares to the stock exchange market, the government can gradualise the process of privatisation, obviate its funding constraints to beef up the utility sectors and introduce accountability which the private share holders will demand as a matter of right.

Solo to South Pole

Perhaps no one single episode illustrates so graphically — tellingly indeed — the height of human courage and sheer endurance as the race for the South Pole between the world's most celebrated rivals — the Norwegian Roald Amundsen and Robert Scott of Britain. Scott's diaries, kept till his last hours is a saga of heroism that also inscribes the sacrifice of captain Oates as among the most memorable feats of man. But the best the diaries did was to impress upon mankind the near-impossibility of physically engaging the South Pole. Although the Everest was first climbed as late as in 1953, more than four decades after the conquest of South Pole by Amundsen, the Chomo Lungma has been humbled dozens of times over the last 40 years. Not so in the case of the South Pole. The world's bottom is decidedly far more formidable than the world's top.

To grasp the size of achievement that 41-year old Norwegian Liv Arnesen carved out last week one must know the nature of challenge that the South Pole poses to man. Arnesen is the first woman to reach South Pole all by herself. The terrain is such as no living thing — no plant life and no animal life and not even the common run of microbes with which the earth is strewn all over — can tick on in vast pockets of it. The pole is at the centre of a continent bigger than both Australia and Europe — and from the shore of Antarctic Ocean that bounds the continent it is at least a thousand kilometres of solid waste of ice 2000 metres deep on the average. This coldest spot on the earth has recorded .89 c below zero and the mean is -20 to -30 degree Celsius.

The frustratingly sketchy paragraphs reporting Arnesen's achievement, however, have elements that would daunt any man on earth. Traversing a maddeningly directionless surround of white for 750 miles all alone while carrying a 15kg backpack and pulling a 50kg sledge in tow all the way simply beats human imagination. She must be paid to have thought of it. And she must be something out of this world to have accomplished it. Congratulations to Liv Arnesen and to Norway.

THE Canal Digging Programme of late President Ziaur Rahman and before that, Bangabandhu's priority on dredging were reflections of the overriding importance placed by them in favour of drainage and irrigation. As the nation's leaders, they could perceive the true needs of the people. Floods are necessary — they knew it very well. What is urgently required is digging (and dredging which is basically digging) on a vast scale. From the choked up canal behind my own village in Dinajpur, to the mighty river Jamuna — the nation's vast array of waterways of all types and sizes are waiting to be resuscitated. Decades of neglect and centuries of continuous silt deposition have ruined the world's biggest river system. It is crying to be dredged, deepened and cleaned so that unimpeded high flows of water during monsoon season can be maintained.

No flood action but drainage and irrigation ought to be the basic task under any water development programme. It is a gigantic task. Billions of cubic metres of digging and dredging are involved and in order to bring about any meaningful result, and generate a substantial impact, the earth work must be accomplished within a period of 10 to 15 years and thereafter, carry on the maintenance work on a continuing basis. Given the massive scope of the work, to be carried out over 10 to 15 working seasons, of 6 to 7 months duration, each day's work should result in the movement of a mountain of earth. The dredging and digging of a million cubic metres of earth per day (during the working season), would mean two billion cubic metres of earth over a ten-year period. It would mean the world's biggest earth work ever attempted. How can this colossal task be accomplished?

The tiny little choked up canal at the back of my village needs to be dug up to restore its original water carrying capacity. Practically, in all the sixtyfive thousand villages of the country, such small-scale resuscitation works need to be carried out. At a higher level, the task would involve clearing of the obstacles and removing silt deposits from small rivers and canals which usually overflow their banks even in a normal monsoon season but remain practically dry from November till May. The next would be the massive dredging

THE atavistic inclination to outdo the cruellest of the cruel has been manifested in all horrific implications in the muck-ballyhooed mission launched by the Serb aggressors in the contemporary Balkan purgatory.

That they are still enjoying almost a mightily handed-down freehold in perpetuating the torment of the Bosnian people and government is a slur in the face of the mankind. We are even shy to mention that, because we have a great number of kind-hearted messengers and mercenaries around the world and yet our persuasions are still in the no-man's land of clandestine/manifest defiance. Despite the said good intention of the negotiators and mediators and the display of UN goodwill to save our souls in trouble, we are yet to see a halt to the blood-letting and the destruction. Only exceptions are the US-led offensives against the egregious god-worshipping of evil-intent mania of ethnic cleansing, Bangladesh

To the Editor...

Relief supply to stranded Pakistanis

Sir, First of all, we the stranded Pakistanis living in squalid camps of Mirpur and Mohammadpur in Dhaka extend our heart-felt thanks to District Administration for restoring suspended relief in the month of November. It may be mentioned that relief supply was suspended in July 1994. However, we are also indebted to our leader Hajaj M Nasim Khan who took initiatives to break the deadlock. We don't understand as to why stranded Pakistanis of Dhaka district have been made to suffer for several months may be because of a few persons with no footings at all and most of whom are allegedly criminals and social parasites rejected by society.

Though the scanty supply of relief of 3 kgs per head is not sufficient to cater to the requirement for survival but still it is helpful and conducive to administering the affairs of all camps. Because of suspension of relief administration of camps came to a halt creating mostly health hazard problems. We would like to draw the attention of the administration to the observance of Deliverance Day by, stranded Pakistanis in Dhaka on 26th October 1994. In this connection a mammoth meeting of stranded Pakistanis, coming from all camps in Dhaka and Narayanganj, was held at north gate of Baitul Mukarram mosque. It was overwhelmingly attended by more than 60,000 stranded Pakistanis including women and tiny tots. In this

historic meeting we gave our mandate in favour of forming fresh relief committees through election based on 'one card one vote'. The basis of 'one card one vote' will be very appropriate, operative, effective and above all less expensive. We also gave our mandate in favour of existing relief committees which may kindly be allowed to continue until elections are held. By this time relief for two months, viz. July and August 1994, has been supplied and distributed everywhere peacefully. On the other hand relief for four months, viz. September-December 1994 has become overdue with every possibility of lapse by the end of the year 1994 or may face both technical and administrative problems in getting renewed. In either case the poor stranded Pakistanis will be the sufferers. We recall here sadly that our relief for seven months, viz. July 1992-February 1993 has already gone to the cold storage. We would also take this opportunity to express our views on the criteria of candidates intending to contest elections to become a member of relief committee for stranded Pakistanis. It may be summarised as follows: a) All candidates must be a stranded Pakistani and duly enumerated and photographed by Rabita survey held in 1992. b) All candidates must be educated, at least matriculate, and must have good social reputation. c) In no way a candidate be a convicted persons, or under legal proceedings for moral crimes.

No Flood Action but Drainage and Irrigation: How it could be Done

The tiny little choked up canal at the back of my village needs to be dug up to restore its original water carrying capacity. Practically, in all the sixtyfive thousand villages of the country, such small-scale resuscitation works need to be carried out.

operations on the big rivers where there are perennial flows of water. Literally thousands of dredgers, of all types and sizes should be working during the dry season.

Apart from rivers and canals, the country abounds in derelict ponds, lakes, haors and horse-shoe riverbeds — locally known as 'baors' — creating a moribund stretch of waterbody. First and foremost, all these call for shovel and muscle power, and we have them in abundance. Mechanical dredging is the problem. We are short of massive investment funds required for the purpose.

Lack of Institutional Infrastructure

President Ziaur Rahman's Canal Digging Programme was an attempt to politicize the massive task and develop it into a national movement: like the way they did it in China. But unlike China, the desired institutional infrastructure which could mobilize people's participation for the canal digging movement was conspicuously lacking. To this day, we have only paid lip service to rural, institutional development. Given the critical organisational disability, President Zia's initiative quickly degenerated into numerous local conspiracies to reap a quick personal profit in both cash and kind (wheat to be converted into cash) from the so-called food for and rural works programmes.

Development in general calls for painstaking organisational buildup, detailed planning and finally sustained efforts on a continuing basis. It requires long hours of work, year after year. Only then solid foundations will be laid for sustainable development in the long run. Unfortunately, foundations remain under ground — there is nothing to show to the people. Secondly, popularity cannot be maintained in the long run, particularly for the political party in power. The grim reality therefore is that our political leaders have very

little faith in development.

We have to devise ways and means for national development in spite of the national government and the particular political party in power. We must develop — in spite of politics trying to pull us down.

A rickshawpuller, after the last general election told me, "Sir, it is no use changing the driver, we have done it so many times and nothing has happened; we have to change the engine". Clearly, he was talking of the system and the organisation — it was indeed remarkable that his faith was in institutions — not individuals. This gives me the confidence to suggest that political leaders are dead wrong in as-

WINDOW ON ASIA Shahed Latif

suming that strong foundations are of no consequence since they remain under ground — not visible to the general public. Popular appreciations do have tremendous depth and range. They have proved it three times since the second world war — in 1946, 1954 and 1970.

In the context of the massive water development programme of Bangladesh, the high levels of organisational development, detailed planning and sustained efforts on a continuing basis for at least 10 to 15 years call for strong local government institutions. Unfortunately the lack of faith of the political leaders in such institutions have eluded the nation of a massive historic initiative that is necessary for the water development programme. First, the political commitment of a very high order is necessary. President Zia had the vision since he initiated the campaign at the mass level. Unfortunately, the institutional back-up was next to nothing.

Three-tier LG System A three-tier local government system comprising the

Union Council, the Thana Council and the District Council should be set up. It is nothing new. The institutions were there before but due to deliberate neglect, the whole structure has now become derelict — same as the waterways and the rivers of the country. If we are serious about our own future since water development is basic to it, we must first of all reinvestigate the local government institutions and then the resuscitation of the waterways would be feasible. The Water Development Board will have a big role (the biggest in fact) to play. But that organisation alone with the help of its contractors and foreign funding

will be utterly inadequate to face the massive challenge. The political leaders in spite of their vested interests should appreciate this basic fact. And, without drainage and irrigation, all of us including the politicians would be washed away and fall into the depths of the mighty Bay of Bengal. In this connection, the grim reality of the sea level rise by the middle of the next century may kindly be borne in mind.

Once the local government institutions with adequate technical staff, elected representatives and with the power and the authority to generate their own revenue instead of perpetual dependence on the national exchequer are in place, detailed thana drainage and irrigation plans should be formulated. While major project planning covering more than one district should be the responsibility of WDB, the District Councils should be responsible for major district level projects, particularly those which involve considerable dredging operations. The coverage in terms of area and the technical intensity should

determine the jurisdiction for planning and implementation of a particular project. The Union Councils should be the implementation agents of the projects. They will be the contractors responsible for supply of labour, undertake actual physical works and earn their own management fees which may constitute the major source of revenue for Union Councils. At the planning stage, Union Councils will be responsible for providing inputs for preparation of thana drainage and irrigation plans. Lastly, WDB would have to exercise an overall monitoring control over the entire planning and implementation process so that an integrated approach to the national drainage and irrigation plan is always maintained.

Dredging on a very extensive scale will be necessary and existing capacity of the only one public sector organisation, owning practically all the dredgers available in the country, is totally inadequate. It will be necessary for all the riverine districts to develop their own dredging capacity as well as promote private sector dredger enterprises including construction of new dredgers at private dockyards. New techniques of low cost dredging, computer aided project designs and management should be acquired and extensive training facilities developed for the purpose.

Local-level Planning There is nothing new about the suggested planning and implementation process. It may be recalled that Thana Irrigation Plans were initiated in the 1960s and the low lift pump irrigation which is so common these days started as an outcome of those plans, which were again the component of the integrated rural development programme, commonly known as the Comilla model. The lack of irrigation and drainage planning at the local level is so conspicuous these days that one is not

at all surprised to find a tube-well for irrigation next to a canal with perennial flows of water. If properly developed, the role of water ways as drainage channels in summer can be easily reversed to provide irrigation water during the dry season. What is necessary is organisation, planning, implementation and maintenance at the local level, repeat at the local level. Therefore, it cannot be done without strong and capable local government institutions. Who will pay for the massive water development projects? The obvious answer must not be donor countries. World Bank and ADB. The local councils should pay for the initial preparatory, including planning, costs by charging the local-rate on land as a substitute of the old land revenue. Better drainage leading to land improvement should result in the imposition of a development fee — simply as a charge against services rendered. Irrigation water, on the other hand, should be considered to be a saleable commodity and the water rate charged on irrigated lands should pay for the cost of irrigation. Thus initial funding from external sources will be necessary. As development proceeds, the local councils should be in a position to generate increasing amounts of their own resources through local rates, development fees and water rates, which after meeting the cost of regular maintenance of completed projects, should leave some surplus to repay the funds borrowed to meet project costs or utilized as new capital funds for development. I once travelled for 34 hours by train from Shanghai to Canton — all along the eastern seaboard of China. In this long journey, the train went over several hundred waterways. Not only were there railway bridges, I found extensive water conservation, drainage and irrigation works, all completed, throughout the coastal plains of China. These were done neither in a day nor through the participation of only the central government at Beijing. The local Commune or Township as well as County governments played the vital role and accomplished the impossible — like a second Great Wall of China. This is what we need as well. But where are the Local Councils to do the needful?

Bosnia Harcegovina : Why So Late?

by Hubert Francis Sarkar

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must take some consolation in that she has sent her sons to fight off the perpetrators away, no matter what modest man and material strength this humble-spirited nation-state can marshal. Yet, the US government and their consorts cannot take much initiative if they are not welcomed by the great powers of Europe. It will not be much of some aside to comment that the hitherto misdirected punitivity of visualizing Europe and the USA to be a monolith-company in the concept of the supposedly mono-atheistic West is perhaps one of the biggest blunder imaginable, in all probability. It is all the more crystal-clear when put in the context of American great vision of unity in diversity and

then of European insularity, echoed by all those tawdry individualistic assertions. In this backdrop, the NATO is just as cripple as a lame duck. Evidently, the West is not a pervertedly indivisible entity anymore, not only because of synchronization of republicanism and altruism of the American people vis-a-vis profusely jingoistic ultra-modern nationalism of the zealots in Europe. They have also been in mismatch of temperamental bents. America being a mirror of the material world with all kinds of spirituality and Europe in general perceptions capable of being spiritual in only material terms. Consequently, the apple of discord has been thrown here; Europe is jettisoning Bosnians,

the native brethren, whilst America is instinctually readying to champion the cause of the oppressed people homelanding this part of Europe. The UN is doing a superb job in comparison to its very first convocation, no doubt, but it is just like handmaiding to the ignoble intentions of the warlords like Karadjics; interestingly enough, the grand show of power by the UN chartered countries even consummately is apparently nothing in comparison even to the tiny arms — and ammunition — depots of these micro-despots. The other power-sectors of the world are just as incapacitated. Misgivings about the mission of these alliances/associations, markedly

the UN, are multiplying day by day; the peoples of the world have come to a realization that this kind of cluster-organizations are no better than a grand showpiece in the comity of all nations, just nothing else than a courteous glance to the misdeeds and machinations occurring all around and yet no concrete resolve to fight off the evil either bilaterally through country-to-UN facilitation/mediation or multilaterally through the negotiating country and this or that mammoth trade-block. Even amid this critical equation of power-plays and power-puzzles, Bangladesh has taken a very noble stand; in no way can one belittle this small mite. It is the reflection of the inner grandeur of the heart of

the masses; through poverty and prosperity, they have never opted for annexing this or that land, notwithstanding the aggression first and then finally submission of the alien rulers and dignitaries; in the comity of nations, this is a rare virtue. While the people of Bangladesh are not warlike and should not resort to retaliatory overshooting against the enemies, they should never compromise on the proposition of peace. In this context, the principled stand against the ongoing genocide at Bosnia deserves to be much-hailed. America's firm handling of the pathetic situation at Bosnia-Harcegovina, matched by the broad-armed cooperation of some other well-meaning peoples elsewhere is all the sympathetic masses of the world expects as the last-ditch efforts to save the populations, or perhaps the last-ditch efforts to save the mankind from the inborn curses of the evil reigning supreme in the materialistic world that worships materials and no God.

statements and analyse them. I will mention only two of her statements, one from her early days in power and the other very recent.

In her early days in power, she spoke at a public meeting in Rangpur that no development work will be done in the areas if the people do not cast their vote in favour of BNP candidates. As if the country's exchequer was 'her' property. She was speaking in the bye-election meetings in Rangpur.

The second is her recent statement to use JCD to tackle the opposition. But how? Will BNP once again give arms to the JCD students as they had allegedly given during the movement against Ershad's autocratic regime? A BNP minister (now out of office) has proudly confessed this in a public meeting and it was also published in all the leading newspapers.

I have overlooked her other statements made in between these two statements because the list would be too long. Now, would Ansaruddin Ahmad, please tell who gets the first prize? Never mind, who gets the first prize. In fact, things speak for themselves. A government, if it is democratic, need not utter 48 times a day that it is a democratic government. We all will say that it is a democratic government. No certificate is required. Please, let us make the habit of calling a spade, a spade, and look for better future.

Syed Ahmad Faruque Dhaka

City's Wingy Scavengers

Sir, This is a letter of protest! When reading the Dhaka Day by Day 'City's Wingy Scavengers', Dec. 25, one cannot but think that the writer never has seen a crow from nearby. He calls them 'ugly', the result of their activities 'odorous'. Moreover he relates silly things that these birds take away food from children on the road and he mentions their 'killer instinct'. Let me stop here and point out that I sit quite often on my roof terrace and watch the crows to come and take a sip of clean water provided there. I have never seen a dirty crow. And ugly? With the silver grey neck, blue black wings, strong beak and feet and alert eyes: I wonder who can call them ugly! And killer? It is the law of nature not human compassion (?) which they follow. And let me wish the writer of the text could see this city after there

Irresponsible statements

Sir, It was interesting to go through the defense plea of Ansaruddin Ahmad published in the opinion column of your esteemed daily on 20.12.94 in response to an article of Mahfuz Anam.

Normally one could have easily ignored such opinions but for the arrogance it demonstrated. Ansaruddin Ahmad has said that it is Sheikh Hasina who must get the first prize on irresponsible remarks. Well, let us discuss and find out the truth. Ahmad has cited four examples of Sheikh Hasina's statement, though misquoting a lot and gave the verdict without comparing or weighing them against Khaleda Zia's statement.

Let us first discuss about Hasina's statement as cited by Ahmad. First one is that Hasina told that the British

Parliamentary delegation was brought to give ruling party a good character certificate.

Well, this is a simple statement. There is no threat, no tone of intimidation and above all there is no rudeness. I do not find, nor will anyone find any irresponsibility in it. Second was that at a public rally Sheikh Hasina asked the police to disobey the government. This is really funny. What she actually said was just an advise to country's police force so that they are not used by the PM who is also the chairperson of BNP, as she has been trying to use her JCD to tackle the opposition.

The third was that Sheikh Hasina implicated PM's children. If it is not true, PM's office can issue a rejoinder. The matter ends there. The fourth allegation of irresponsible remark by Hasina is a serious one. Ansaruddin Ahmad alleged that Sheikh Hasina threatened to erippled the country in December. There lies the basic problem with him and may be the likes of him. Like BNP and its leaders Ansaruddin Ahmad also failed to differentiate between the government and the country. Sheikh Hasina threatened to erippled the BNP government if demands are not met. But the feeling that BNP owns the country might have led to this confusion in his mind.

The above points surely do not mean that Sheikh Hasina has no irresponsible statements to her credit. Of course, she has too. Now let us cite examples of Khaleda Zia's irresponsible

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