

Admission Problem

Last year one young learner was pitted against 11 others in a tough race for admission to a prestigious girls' school of the city. The level of competition was more or less same for admission in other reputed schools as well. This year the race is expected to be far tougher. With no new quality school coming on the scene, admission into the few reputable ones is increasingly becoming difficult.

Admission rush is however not confined to the schools alone. Colleges that boast high performance, result-wise, and universities face the same pressure. Quite a significant number of the students coming out successful at the Secondary School and Higher Secondary Certificate (SSC and HSC) examinations find no seats for them at the next stage of their studies. In fact, the competition at the tertiary level is no less than that of the primary or secondary level. For admission to Dhaka University a candidate had to compete with 12 of his peer last year.

Naturally, as the problem of admission mounts, the guardians have to keep their fingers crossed about the fate of their wards. Those who can afford, send their children to schools, colleges and universities abroad. But for the large majority it is a case of anticipation and long wait. The hard truth is that education in the country is in a chaos. In the absence of a uniform and up-to-date syllabus, education at the primary level has three strands. The higher the level the more uniform the standard of education. At the primary level therefore the standards suffer most of all.

Resources, basic training of the teachers, various school facilities and social backgrounds of the students make a sea of difference in the competitive strength of the students. The way education is getting commercialised hardly leaves any scope for the students of the lower class to avail of a seat at one of the prestigious educational institutions. Removal or even reduction of social disparities is too much to ask. But a minimum standardisation of education is what everyone can demand. Otherwise, the access to opportunities will never be rational. People can now buy seats for their wards with fabulous sums of money. They could better invest their money in setting up new standard schools or improving the less enterprising ones. The government now spends big money on primary education. It should spend even more. But with the aim of improving the primary education to a level that eliminates the reason for admission rush for a few schools.

For Better Police Work

A Police Week has more importance than meets the eye. It can be a useful outlet for exchange of views between the public and the police. However, the opportunity to know each other better gets lost on a highly formalised and exclusive programme format. The generalities aired in a seminar or two, usually held over the week, hardly get past the meeting place. Moreover, what difference would these make in terms of police performance were they even disseminated when the public know them to be some fleeting and merely pious wishes. Besides, the week gets rather ceremonious.

We want the organisers to beat a different track this time. They do not have to fall for the same rituals year after year. They can make a much better use of the week. They have so much to say to the public as well as to hear them out on their crystallized feelings about law and order.

The old attitudes have not got us anywhere. The very mention of the word police evokes public reactions that are far from healthy. There are complaints of delayed action, hassle, palm-greasing and siding with the powerful. The police are griled and brick-batted. From the police side, the attitude has been one of rolling off the criticism from their bodies like the swans do with muck. Even though some of it was worth listening to. Hardly such a purely need-based relationship goes so awry. The mind-set on both sides has had us throw the baby with the bath water.

One way of overcoming this situation would be for the police to organise a series of open discussions with a representative cross-section of the people. Charmed circles usually have chummy views or, a cursory over-view of things. It is the person in the neighbourhood, whichever avocation he or she belongs to, that sees a lot of the cop and has daily use for his help. On this level, the civic rights organisations could be heard. On another level, the tradesmen and transporters have things to say. The ward commissioners are there. Finally, experts and publicists can put forward their invaluable suggestions.

The dialogue has to be a genuine one, not a PR exercise. Let the police make a soul-searching and share their problems with the public. Then, all concerned can work out an Action Agenda for the police force to perform.

Proud Host

As the proud host of *Biswa Jitana*, the second largest congregation of Muslims, after the Hajj, Dhaka has reasons to feel honoured. The fervour exuded by it is both devotional and fraternal. In the essence, it is a sea of humanity in a spiritual re-union for its own sake shunning crass materialism. From this point of view, the message rings with an element of universality.

The gravitational pull that the eastern bank of the tiny river Turag in Tongi exerts has thousands at home and abroad make it to the makeshift venue quietly and solemnly. That's where its tremendous impact lies. Little wonder, political leaders of all the major denominations in our country, duly impressed by its inner dignity and noble spiritual appeal, partake of this great occasion wishing that it will help bring out the best in the Muslims.

After a few days of concourse and solidarity between representatives from the Muslim countries as well as between the speakers and the audiences, the *Akheri Munajat*, we hope, will resonate with the calls for peace and prosperity in a conflict-ridden world. The ummah has itself suffered from division and an irresolute wavering in coming to the aid of Muslims in some flash-points. It's moral capacity in international affairs will improve from a change in that situation.

Confrontational Politics Shattering Socio-economic Prospects

by Qazi Kholiqzaman Ahmad

If the same means are used by the opposition from one government to the next, the main casualty will eventually be democracy itself and the people's progress as the process will either lead to chaos with the structure of governance collapsing completely or another round of autocratic intervention.

As reported in news papers, the visiting British Secretary of State (foreign minister) has raised the issue of environment for investment in Bangladesh. This subject has in fact been agitating the minds of investors — both national and foreign (whenever an initial interest is shown or enquiry made). The persisting political uncertainty is of deep concern — not only to the investors, but also and more importantly in the larger context of the prospects of democratic social order in the country. The fledgling democracy in this country is now in serious turmoil and, unless the course is urgently corrected, its future is in jeopardy. The big promise into which the democratic process was ushered in by the people, by dethroning the ruling autocracy, with the help of the two major parties, BNP and Awami League, along with others, all working together, is now a mirage. The election of 1991 gave these two major parties the historic mandate of establishing democracy in the country and laying the foundation for the socio-economic progress of its citizens who had been exploited through the centuries until 1971 by foreign rulers and saw their trust with destiny in independent Bangladesh shattered by domestic autocracy. How unfortunate it is that the fresh political

wind that started blowing at last with the exit of the autocracy in December 1990 soon began to get polluted again. The pollution has since become so heavy that the society is getting choked.

It has become a sort of orthodoxy in this country that the ruling (clique or party) keeps telling the people that the government is pursuing a policy of production and that development has accelerated under its management, the benefit of which is accruing to the mass of the people. This is done as a one way harangue — in public meetings in which the leaders speak and people gathered or brought in hear and clap and through monologues of ministerial announcements and pronouncements carried by radio and television. Unfortunately, the present democratic government has failed to come out of that stereotyped behaviour of spinning out propaganda. A democratic government is not expected to live on propaganda. It must thrive on pro-people policies and actions.

The opposition has also failed to rise to the occasion. While it is legitimated in a democratic environment to

oppose the government if it behaves in a manner that is undemocratic and fails to give due consideration to the interests of the national and the people, the strategy followed in doing so cannot be the same as was used in throwing out the autocracy. The precedence created by not following norms and practices consistent with a democratic order can have a very unfortunate bearing on the future politics in the country. If the same means are used by the opposition from one government to the next, the main casualty will eventually be democracy itself and the people's progress as the process will either lead to chaos with the structure of governance collapsing completely or another round of autocratic intervention. Obviously, to stem this process, the political parties, both in government and in opposition, must shun self-serving politics for chair. Rather politics must be conducted in a manner that it serves as the primary vehicle of social progress. Indeed, in that context, it is legitimate that each political party should aim at forming the government but that aim should be sought to be

realized by persuading the people by explaining in clear terms what they stand for in terms of economic policies and programmes, social dimensions and political perspectives of progress, and international linkages. The practice so far has been to make generalized statements, appeal to the emotion of the people, and otherwise manage support at the local level.

The occasion of the marriage of the daughter of the Awami League president on 3 January presented a unique opportunity for the prime minister and the principal opposition leader, as they came face to face, to lay the foundation, by making appropriate gestures, for a negotiated settlement of the crisis in doing so they would have given the whole nation, as they were wishing the young newly-wed couple happy and prosperous future together, an invaluable present for a giant step forward. Many had hoped that such would be the case. But that was not to be. Obviously, statesmanship cannot be wished into play. In recent years we have seen arch rivals in South Africa meet and settle a long-standing bitter racial

antagonism and the Israeli prime minister and the Palestinian leader meet and initiate a peace process. A peace process has also been initiated in Northern Ireland, a place that writhed with religious hatred and killing for decades. The Government of Sri Lanka has also recently initiated negotiations with Tamil Tigers for resolving the killer ethnic problem. In each of these cases, rivalries have been of racial, religious or ethnic origin and of extreme bitterness and mortal hatred. But Bangladesh is inhabited by people of homogenous race, colour, creed and language; and about 86 per cent of whom are of the same religion. Why cannot the leaders meet and resolve their problems and give people a chance to build their destiny?

Poverty remains the number one problem in this country. Economic growth and appropriate policies to ensure equitable access of the poor to that growth are necessary for poverty alleviation. And for accelerated and sustained growth more and more investment is necessary. The British Secretary of State raised a very pertinent ques-

tion. Anybody who will be asked to facilitate or directly invest in Bangladesh will ask the same question: There can be no doubt about that. The productive base of the economy was seriously weakened during the 1980s due to low rates of investment, and the rate of investment has not solidly recovered since. That investment is not picking up is a clear testimony to the failure of the leadership to create the right conditions. Can they not shake out of the affliction that has blinkered their sights, and develop a larger vision to resolve with far-sightedness the nationally damning impasse, thereby creating the basic conditions for moving the economy and society forward? Let us resolve our differences ourselves, rising above petty self or party interests, let this sovereign nation not suffer again the indignity associated with calling in an external mediator. As I see it, the calling of an external mediator to preside over negotiations for resolving the differences between our government and opposition implies that we are either immature and incapable or a colonial mentality still haunts us.

The author is an eminent economist and President of Bangladesh Unnayan Parishad, a development NGO. He is a frequent contributor to The Daily Star.

Now self-determination is a recognised right, but realisation thereof is not easy. Uniform practice of states as to the recognition of the people is struggling for self-determination, rather to say *ius cogens* — peremptory norm — to support the struggling people is yet to flourish. Once there was a trend of communists *vis-à-vis* capitalists to support (through recognition) struggling people for the obvious purpose of containment of each other. Although these blocks exist no longer, yet the powerful states give subjective consideration towards the people for their infinitesimal gain.

We, from here, raise our voice in favour of struggling people — who are subject to oppression by subjugation, domination or exploitation — irrespective of their religion, sex or language.

Once western jurists assumed or asserted that the principle had no legal content, being an ill-defined concept of policy and morality. Fitzmaurice, a former member of International Court of Justice, finds that "the notion of legal right of self-determination is nonsense." On the surface it seems reasonable to let the people decide, it is in fact ridiculous because the people can't decide until someone decides who are the people.

Since 1945 developments in the UN and the influence of Afro-Asian and Communist, opinion have changed the position and western jurists now admit that self-determination is a legal principle. Once the whole concept was related to

colonised, people now that is, to the same extent, applicable for non colonised as well. Common article 1 of International Human Rights Covenant provides that "All people have the right to self-determination. International law states the contents of this right saying "that subject of people to alien subjugation, domination and exploitation constitutes a violation of the principles of equal rights and self-determination of people, as well as denial of fundamental human rights and is contrary to the UN charter". It is confirmed by the African Charter on Human and People's Rights which described the right of self-determination as "the right to free from bonds of domination".

Thus the rights protect people from being subject to oppression by subjugation, domination or exploitation because, as the African Charter clears, "nothing shall justify the domination of people by another".

So, now the conception of self-determination is not restricted to colonised people. Indeed, International Commission stated in the case of Bangladesh that "if one of the constituent peoples of a

Right to Self-determination and Chechnya

by Abu Ahmed Siddique

"All people have the right to self-determination; by virtue of that right they freely determine political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development."

General Assembly Resolution 1514 (1960)

state is denied equal rights and discriminated against, it is submitted that their right to self-determination will revive."

What has been stated above apart, the UN Charter itself contains Article 1(2) and 55 through which self-determination has been established as the law of the UN in resolution 637 A (VII) of 16th Dec 1952. The General Assembly recommended, *inter alia*, that the members of the UN shall uphold the principle of self-determination of all people and nations.

Thus the principle is part of the obligation stemming from the charter and is not recommendation, as conceived by many jurists. These references are merely of hortatory effect, but are in the form of authoritative interpretation of the charter. The advisory opinion of International Court confirms "the validity of the principle of self-determination in the context of international law".

Prima facie, there is conflict between Article 2 (7) "Nothing contained in the present charter shall authorise the UN to intervene in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state or shall require the members to submit such matters to settlement under the

present charter", and the Article 1 (2) and 55 yet UN organs do not permit Article 2 (7) to impede discussion and decision when the principle is in issue.

Who is to define the people as self? Western powers give, in this regard, subjective consideration to the people. Therefore, Chechnyans have failed to obtain recognition from them and thus the western powers have failed to show minimum consideration, a moral duty, towards the tragic events in Chechnya — indiscriminate bombardment, USA, the sole surviving superpower, to whom lies the responsibility of upholding UN objectives, because she enjoys the fruits of UN mechanisms, has remained silent about Chechnya tragedy and the struggle of the people has appeared to her as incongruous and preposterous. We do not know whether such sort of behaviour is because of spectre of communist menace — nuclear warheads, or rather because of instinctive hostility of the western powers towards the Muslim community. Otherwise USA and other powers are very much vociferous about the holiness of the UN laws, provided when those are against the nations who do not protect their

interest and rather a threat to the same and also provided that those must not go against the 'status-quo' of her allies.

We can't try USA for playing double standard and thereby using UN mechanisms for her own purposes, nevertheless we raise our strong voice against such sort of despicable gesture.

Chechnyans might be compelled to give up their indigenous feeling, for a short while of course, but this does not bring any material change towards our outlook as to the support of the struggling people, whatever their colour, language and religion be and wherever they are. Chechnyans, even being their struggle legitimate one and possessing all requirements of getting recognition from the world morality, have failed to get the same against Russia's illegitimate claim of territorial integrity. No state dares to challenge this illegitimate claim. Western countries have taken ostrich policy contending that the Chechnya crisis is absolutely Russia's internal affair, therefore, they do not intend to commit an act of *ultra-vires* — beyond jurisdiction, while the Muslims can do nothing because of their poor condition. Communists took

away many freedoms in the name of ideology defining some of them as opium, their successors standing free on the ashes of ideology fear Muslims not because they are threatened by them, rather because of their atavistic inclination towards denying fundamental freedoms and committing perpetration against humanity and human propensities.

After the recognition by the International Community of the disintegration as unitary states of Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, it could not be the case that any government which is oppressive to people within its territory may no longer be able to rely on the interest of territorial integrity as a limitation on the right of self-determination. Therefore, *uti possidetis* — limitation of territorial integrity can't be excuse in the case of Chechnya. It is befuddling or rather bewildering that the USA who recognised other independent states of Soviet Union now says that Chechnya crisis is absolutely Russia's internal affair. Now she sees Russia as a single unit.

And Russia — how she is handling the Chechnya crisis ossifies the prospect of democracy there, which is, now, very much essential and preponderant issue for her very existence. She should not be so cruel and unrelenting, as it is done through indiscriminate bombardment, towards the legitimate right of the Chechnyans. And lastly, "it is for the people to determine the destiny of the territory and not the territory the destiny of the people."

threats to his position and does not want Tiwari to emerge as a focus for dissidents within the party.

Yet the Prime Minister certainly wants the party to make a good showing in Uttar Pradesh in the 1996 general election.

A number of factors could be working in favour of a Congress revival in the state, which would boost Tiwari. But Rao is not to be underestimated. He has been written off in the past as colourless and lacklustre — like Tiwari. Already Rao has responded to post-election pressures by showing firmness — "long-term economic interests cannot be abandoned" — while preparing to ad a coating of sugar to Finance Minister Manmohan Singh's internationally applauded reform programme.

He told a meeting of industrialists that future generations would not forgive him if he allowed "a limitless flow of foreign investment and foreign technology into India."

— Gemini News
D K Joshi is a senior Indian journalist.

Threats to his position and does not want Tiwari to emerge as a focus for dissidents within the party.

Yet the Prime Minister certainly wants the party to make a good showing in Uttar Pradesh in the 1996 general election.

A number of factors could be working in favour of a Congress revival in the state, which would boost Tiwari. But Rao is not to be underestimated. He has been written off in the past as colourless and lacklustre — like Tiwari. Already Rao has responded to post-election pressures by showing firmness — "long-term economic interests cannot be abandoned" — while preparing to ad a coating of sugar to Finance Minister Manmohan Singh's internationally applauded reform programme.

He told a meeting of industrialists that future generations would not forgive him if he allowed "a limitless flow of foreign investment and foreign technology into India."

— Gemini News
D K Joshi is a senior Indian journalist.

The opening up of the highly protected Indian economy faces a setback as a result of the ruling Congress Party's dismal performance in the first round of state elections — and an apparently meek and weak-willed politician has emerged as a man to watch.

The threat to the pace of economic liberalisation is as predictable as the return to prominence of Narain Dutt Tiwari is unexpected.

Privatisation and the encouragement of foreign investment have been the main planks of Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao's government. Opposition criticisms have been shrugged off. But now the electoral rout of the Congress in two southern provinces — where they captured only 15 per cent of seats in Karnataka and less than 10 per cent in Rao's home state, Andhra Pradesh — has unleashed powerful voices from within the party itself.

Rao's main internal Congress detractor, Human Resource Development Minister Arjun Singh, told the party's powerful Working

'New Dynamic' Takes Over from 'New Delhi'

D K Joshi writes from New Delhi

Recent electoral setback in two southern Indian states has undermined the authority of Prime Minister Narasimha Rao and threatened his economic liberalisation programme. Senior members of the ruling Congress Party are challenging Rao's leadership.



Narain Dutt Tiwari: Rao's rival

Committee: "We should try to ensure that the hardships of the poorer sections is lessened rather than increased as a result of any decision that is taken in the name of liberalisation."

Tiwari — who once earned the nickname 'New Delhi

Tiwari" for his willingness to kowtow to the ruling powers — was even blunter.

He blamed Congress' defeats on the government's economic reforms, which he said had failed to gain momentum or to provide relief to the poor. People wanted food, clothing and shelter now and did not want to wait ten years, Tiwari said.

"Benefits of reform, like huge foreign exchange reserves, do not mean anything to the people, who are bothered about their immediate concerns," he stressed.

The words are strong for such an uncontroversial politician who until recently had been in political eclipse following his defeat in the 1991

general election.

He was catapulted back to prominence earlier this year by an uncharacteristic clash with Rao over tactics in the country's most populous and politically crucial state, Uttar Pradesh.

Congress holds only 32 of the 425 seats in the state assembly, and 70-year-old Tiwari accepted the almost demeaning small assignment of leading the moribund party there; a minor job for a man four times chief minister of his state and who has held the important portfolios of finance, industry, foreign affairs and petroleum at the centre.

He seized the opportunity, adopting a confrontational stance and demanding the withdrawal of Congress sup-

port from the minority government led by Mulayam Singh Yadav.

The tactic galvanised Congress workers in the state and raised hopes that their party could regain its old glory.

"Now you will see a New Dynamic Tiwari," he asserts, playing on his old nickname.

He has managed to re-create his image as that of a fighter willing to confront the Prime Minister, which gives him an advantage over the most public contenders for the top job. Arjun Singh and Maharashtra Chief Minister Sharad Pawar.

Rao, under pressure to reappear Congress' image before the next five state elections in 1995, is aware of growing

To the Editor...

A self-created crisis?

Sir, Vote rigging in elections or such allegation has been identified as one of the cardinal drawbacks to a fair election and thus gave birth to the present political crisis.

Understanding the gravity of the crisis, the government has taken a step to introduce the voters' identity cards and strengthen the present Election Commission. Now the question is, if a better polling system is introduced, what will then be the next issue to give birth to a political crisis afresh? (One tends to ask such question observing our politicians' behaviour).

However, it is felt that any issue can be made into a controversial one by our politicians only to give birth to a political crisis in the country no matter whether the general

people agree to that or not. What is really needed from our esteemed leaders is a more pro-people approach to politics.

Mottus Samad Chowdhury
Phullola Tea Estate, Sylhet

TV: Here and in

Bombay

Sir, In Bombay they throw away the TV sets to save their souls from tasteless programmes. I envy them.

We have reasons of our own to be apathetic to our own electronic media. Now as in the past it only succeeds to be the cause of national disgust. (It appears to me that the people in TV are so innocent that they do not devise any intelligent satire to vent their helplessness). Politicians at

large never fail to criticise the callousness and to promise reforms when in power. But alas! he who goes to Lanka.....

In a report of the BBC TV on obesity in America a retired Surgeon General puts the blame on TV viewing for hours together. No wonder obesity is not our national problem!

A reader

For better healthcare

Sir, The number of patients with heart and kidney ailments have increased tremendously in our country. But the treatment facilities for these diseases are very limited.

Moreover, there prevail doubts and confusions about the treatment procedure followed by our learned medical practitioners. Very often we hear from a heart or kidney patient

who has gone to India for treatment that according to the opinion of the Indian physicians, the treatment provided by the Bangladeshi physicians concerned were not correct. My question is, how far this is true?

Well, there is no doubt that both Bangladeshi and Indian physicians have the noble intentions for curing their respective patients through offering whatever treatment facilities available to them (I am ignoring the volume of expenditure here). Then why this confusion?

In my opinion, the Bangladesh Medical Association and the Indian Medical Council should arrange periodical case study sessions involving related physicians from both the countries for maintaining medical communication and therapeutic standard. This will

obviously help physicians of both the sides to share their opinions and also in unifying the treatment procedure. The monetary matter may be considered from the humanitarian point of view.

M Zahidul Haque
Assistant Professor BAI,
Dhaka

Pry scholarship examination

Sir, Recently, I went to my grandfather's house at Matlabgonj in Chandpur district. It was my winter vacation. During that time the Primary Scholarship examination was going on, and one of my cousins went for the same. But when she came back, she began to cry. I asked my aunt, "Why she is crying?" She told me that all the sirs were telling everybody, so she forgot

everything....

I also went to my uncle's house and asked another cousin, how did he do in the test. He said, "I was giving the exam, then a sir came to me and said, 'Why are you not asking me? You must take my help!'"

On the next exam day, I went outside for a walk with my uncle to a venue. There I saw groups of people, some here and some there, apparently guardians, writing notes and supplying to the students giving examination inside the hall.

If this so happens that sir telling everybody and guardians supplying notes, then what's the worth of reading and writing?

Md. Jabir
House No 10, Road No-7,
Sector 5, Uttara Model Town,
Dhaka 1230