

Students have no Excuse

High school students, led by the candidates for the next SSC (Secondary School Certificate) Examination, are demanding reintroduction of the 'question bank' system. From all across the country reports are coming about the various methods they are resorting to in the articulation of their demand. They are clamouring for what a few batches of their predecessors had enjoyed. That is the only argument they put forward in support of their demand. Perhaps the substance of their argument is that advantage once granted cannot be taken away. However, education is too serious a subject to be guided by such a myopic rationale. In effect we are reaping what we have sowed. The introduction of objective-type questions in the SSC examinations was prompted by the fact that essay-type ones did not require studying the entire book on any subject. Students just prepared answers to a few questions and reproduced them at the examination halls either from memory or from a cheat. So the idea was to make the students read the whole book and attempt short questions. But pundits in our Education Ministry and Board thought of a shortcut, a question bank of 500 questions. Students' task now became even easier. They mastered the answers to those many short questions by rote.

Thus the original purpose of making the students go through the whole book was frustrated. Only three years back did the authorities realize that. So a move was taken to abolish the question bank; but in the face of vigorous protests, the government buckled and the candidates of two subsequent batches got the advantage back. It was, however, announced that after two years, the question bank facility would be withdrawn.

The way students are putting up barricades on busy roads and highways to the great inconvenience and suffering of the commuting public for what amounts to be a sectional educational demand is the most abominable trend worthy of outright condemnation. Students, following the tradition of violent political and trade union demonstrations, are organising themselves to stage increasingly aggressive campaigns. They have seen the tactic to be successful. They know the prevailing inclination to pamper students. If the government backs out this time, it will simply pronounce a death sentence on whatever little remains of educational discipline in the country. These students were given two long years to prepare for the new system. They cannot have an excuse.

Overdone Hoax

The ground situation in Bosnia has taken a favourable U-turn for rebel Serbs. Their infamous leaders stomp around with a greater impunity in a wider area despite carrying a UN-stamped seal of inditement on their fatigues as war criminals. Imagine the impish smile on their face after Zepa has fallen in their hands closely on the heels of their taking Srebrenica. Their unchecked eastern advance threatens

Bihac now. The UN-NATO impotence comes through it all so poignantly, what with the blandishment of the Rapid Reaction Force and the London Conference's dubious resolve to make the last stand in Gorazde. One almost calls in question the sincerity behind the London moot which offered on a platter — almost deliberately it seems now — an operational leeway for the Serbs on the eastern front. The Serbs cashed in on this killing two birds by one stone. The second bird is the ego satisfaction they have provided to the western powers by avoiding the tabooed Gorazde. It sounds almost like a scheme working in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

For an UNPROFOR spokesman to be declaring the fall of Zepa, unmindful of the gross contradiction in terms, bears the most pathetic testimony to a trampling down of the prerogative of the UN Charter by an indulgent party to date.

Two imperatives cry out for immediate fulfilment. The 17,000 Muslims who have been fleeing Zepa are courting a virtual suicide falling in the hands of the besieging and prowling Serbs who have already executed some of them and violated the modesty of Bosnian women. There has to be, therefore, a supervised evacuation of the refugees. The UN personnel and the Bosnian government representatives need working out the modalities for a supervised and safe evacuation, with the Serbs, if necessary backed by a NATO ultimatum.

Secondly, the OIC must go ahead with its plans to send weapons and other forms of material support to the Bosnian government now that the Western failure to lift the arms embargo on the Muslims and Croats leaves nothing in doubt. Let the powerful in the world make amends for their unconscionable duplicity in Bosnia by an overwhelming military action on the Serbs.

More of It

The Flood Information Centre of Bangladesh Water Development Board has issued a definitive warning of impending rains in August, which are likely to be as widespread over the Ganges and Brahmaputra basins as the early June downpour was.

The Water Development Board's forecast suggests that new areas are likely to be submerged since most of the tributaries, spill-channels and low-lying areas of the Brahmaputra basin are almost filled up by the recent flood waters. However, common sense tells us that in the event of incessant rains again there will be a further swelling in the water levels of the areas which remain flooded.

Clearly it is the water development and flood control authority that must quickly get behind the job of completing the repair work on the damaged embankments, groins or sluices, etc. Some key flood protection structures gave in this time as if they were made of sand. Actually this exposed our dereliction of duty towards vital maintenance work as people were allowed to tamper with certain embankments for living purposes.

The government's ongoing disaster relief operation will have to be re-strengthened with improved stocks of materials and by an efficient, wholly de-politicised coordination between the national secretariat and the district administrations to reach the majority with succour. Without being panicky, let's prepare for the worst.

WHEREVER people of different races, religions, sects and political persuasion, etc make up the population of a major metropolitan city, there is always a struggle for dominance, the pursuit of power and the sharing of the economic pie making for strange bedfellows. Given Karachi's major port city status and commercial capital importance, the competition is more intense and focused. To compound the problems, this is a city bereft of the healing balm of democracy. Not a single town or city in Pakistan has a local government, for that matter the whole country is without local government since the PML (N) government fell two years ago. The ruling PPP got a drubbing in the last general polls in almost all the urban areas of the country and is now unsure of itself in the rural areas, consequently it does not seem to have any intention of letting the Opposition exercise their democratic right of rule at the local government level.

This is in sharp contrast to the eloquent rhetoric about "democracy at the grassroots level" that Ms Benazir is so vociferous about, particularly when she is out of power. The logic being used to deny power to the Mohajir majority in Karachi is that if the majority got power they would deny the various minorities their legitimate socio-economic rights. This convoluted logic chooses to remain silent about the present situation in which power keeps going the rounds within a tight circle of vested interest who deny the majority their democratic due but say that this is on behalf of the minority communities, who in fact are as much deprived as the majority. Given that all this defies rational analysis, how do we as a city and as a nation climb out of this black hole?

On paper at least the struggle has presently turned from the killing streets to the negotiating table. The two main antagonists, the MQM (A) and the PPP, having consented to a ceasefire of sorts, this arrangement seems to have filtered down selectively to the warriors belonging to the law enforcement agencies or to the various militant groups, granted that RAW-inspired violence will continue to sabotage any peace moves. The body count has come down to 10-12 daily and even lower, climbing briefly for a day to 25 plus. That the talks

HASING "misplaced" papers is now one of the constant occupational hazards of serving in the Government of Bangladesh. For a conscientious official, it can also be quite an embarrassment. Consider the following situation — an ordinary citizen, at your suggestion, has sent you a filled-in application form, along with a number of supporting papers through the registered mail. It has cost him both money and time to fill in the application form, collect the necessary documents and send in the letter through the mail. He has also the little post office receipt to show that it has reached your office. But lo and behold, his papers are lost, or as they say in official parlance, "misplaced", all because of your non-operating despatch section. You make a thorough search, but how can you ever trace these? These have either found their way to the waste paper basket or else got thoroughly mixed up with another set of papers. Now, you have no way out but to apologise to that person profusely for the distress your office has caused him. At the same time, you also request him to send you another set of papers, knowing full well that the same story may be repeated!

Then there is the recurring complaint of files being sent but not received. During my career as a civil servant, I have been told many a time: "This file was sent to you three days ago, how come you have not received it as yet?" Yes the file may have been

To the Editor...

Of advocates' dress

Sir, The typical black coat or *achkan* for the advocates was prescribed in the Civil Rules & Orders (Vol. 1) sections 825 & 826 (Chapter 37) under the caption 'Dress of Advocates'. Published in 1918, the relevant section reads:

826(1). A black or white *chapkan*, *achkan* or buttoned-up long coat with trousers to match, and a black alpaca gown of the cut and shape of a BA gown; or

(2) If European dress is worn, then a black coat with dark or white trousers and a black or dark coloured plain tie and the gown.

Although our legal system has gone through changes over the years, the 'Dress of Advocates' does not appear to have ever been touched upon, during any past regime. The dress of advocates prescribed

The Battle for Karachi

Any metropolitan city in the world needs a system, at present Karachi hasn't got one because it suits vested political interests to run the city by remote control from Islamabad... In military terms, Karachi is vital ground in the national context, Pakistan's economic survival depends upon peace and harmony in this city. Without a unified command structure, this city is doomed.

are continuing despite the vitriolic statements from both sides is a hopeful sign that tacitly recognizes pressure to sort out the issues or risk being sorted out themselves. Having drained this city of its material resources and emotional resources, there is no sign among the militants on either side of any combat fatigue. The great silent majority of Karachi's population meantime lives on in deep anxiety and apprehension, not free of the considerable doubt about the city's continued existence as a viable entity. The bottom line is, can our children plan to live in this city in the future? For many Karachi is the end of the line, having burnt all our boats our backs are to the sea facing a nemesis born out of our leaders' vulnerability to greed and ambition. Unfortunately for this country nobody has really answered the question, who is this enemy?

Any metropolitan city in the world needs a system, at present Karachi hasn't got one because it suits vested political interests to run the city by remote control from Islamabad. The implementation of a comprehensive package of political, administrative and socio-economic reforms that are vitally necessary to resuscitate this dying metropolis of 10 million plus is overdue but how can this be done without a single local authority coordinating things? In military terms, Karachi is vital ground in the national context, Pakistan's economic survival depends upon peace and harmony in this city. Without a unified command structure, this city is doomed.

We have repeatedly said that to restore peace in Karachi, we must have immediate Local Bodies elections, the dangerous vacuum of leadership at the grassroots level needs to be overcome. Any reform attempted without a local body structure having the peoples confidence will never filter through to the populace or be accepted by it. The leadership derived from the legitimacy of the gun barrel will

take over completely, society will disintegrate so that only the language of bullets will be understood. Karachi's civic agencies must be consolidated under one Administrator or Commissioner or Lieutenant Governor or whatever (to be appointed for a fixed period of 1-2 years) but to be replaced later by a directly elected person who acts as a single clearing house for coordination and decision making. The present selfish policy is political expediency that may facilitate PPP's rule but it is constitutionally irresponsible and is a sure recipe for disaster as it negates the concept of accepting responsibility that evolves in any democracy upon the rulers

this remote control? And at what cost?

The MQM (M) gave 18 points, the Government responded by giving 21 demands. Lt Gen (Retd) Hameed Gul has a 5-point agenda to which he seems to have got tacit approval from the PM before meeting Alaf Hussain in London. To restore peace in Karachi, the MQM (A) delegation to the peace talks has now given over a list of 4 points in secret to the government side to consider. In a cauldron where guns and rockets proliferate in the hands of the thousands, restoring the mandate of the people to representatives elected by them is easier said than done. The MQM (A) will have

runs out of control while getting a life of its own. In such circumstances society has no choice but to hunt them down and eradicate them at source. The MQM (A) must take steps without delay to redeem its street fighters or they will be lost forever, for many of them it is already too late.

On the road to restoring peace in Karachi one must also clearly spell out who is in charge of restoring law and order in this city. For all intent and purposes the govt propaganda machinery will have us believe that the DG Rangers (Sindh) Maj Gen Mushtaq is the man in charge of restoring peace in Karachi. The Rangers may have been in the forefront of fighting militancy (when not instigating reaction by their actions), the DG Rangers is essentially a toothless tiger in the presence of the IG Police Sindh. The DG Police Karachi and his SSPs report directly to the IG Police Sindh. According to the given concept for command and control principles, all LEAs should really be reporting to Mushtaq or conversely Mushtaq should be reporting along with the other LEAs to IG Sindh or whoever is the person in charge. Does Mushtaq have access to fresh information from the Intelligence Bureau (IB) or any control over their activities? Widely believed to have now been adopted by the IB as foster-children, the MQM (Haqqi) was created by the ISI in 1991/1992 out of MQM dissidents, it is rumored that their present masters find it expedient in letting them run wild. For that matter what about the ISI and MI detachments in Karachi, does Mushtaq have access to their fresh hard information directly or does it come back filtered and useless with respect to the crucial matter of time?

It is patently unfair to take a professional soldier and give him ambiguous instructions in aid to civil power while putting him under many bosses and giving him uneven support from those agencies whose information

is vital to the fulfillment of his mission. Professional soldiers are trained to defend the nation, it is also unfair to provoke their ambitions and as such coerce them to try and conquer their own country on the strength of greed, ambition and 10 acres in Safura Goth. Furthermore, the attempt to create another Federal Security Force (FSF) type entity on the sly was pathetic and deserves contempt as it negates the concept of democracy which we glibly spout forth on every occasion. The lesson one learns is that the cardinal principle of a single command and control channel must be clearly defined and unambiguous as must be the statement of the MISSION, with all information concerning law and order available to Mushtaq fresh and without doctoring, in turn Mushtaq should report through the Administrator to the Chief Minister, or in case of Governor's rule, to the Governor. Mushtaq has been operating for the last six months blindfolded with one hand tied behind his back with political cheerleaders with vested interests exhorting him from the safety of Islamabad to exterminate all those considered "enemies" (or rats, depending upon one's preference as to the use of correct terminology).

For those who think that peace will be restored to Karachi all of a sudden are mistaken. The hard task of clearing terrorists will be that of the LEAs. Give Gen Babar credit in disrupting the terrorist's communications channels by closing down cellular phones, pagers and some captive radios from civic agencies and as a consequence having some success in interdiction but it will not take the terrorists long to re-build the command and communications structure. The Battle for Karachi will not be over even if peace breaks out as the struggle against urban guerrilla warfare will continue for some time. Success will depend upon an integrated civilian administrative structure where the LEAs are focussed on criminal activity, not political action. The battle for Karachi cannot be won in geographical or material terms. The final struggle is for the heart and soul of this great city and this will be irretrievably lost unless those concerned with law enforcement exercise fairplay in the performance of their duties under the Constitution, all men (and women) being created equal.

AS I SEE IT

Ikram Sehgal writes from Karachi

upon assuming their seats of authority.

By depriving the masses of their elected local representatives, the transfer of power to the electorate as per the 1993 mandate is not complete. Since offence is the best defence the PM tends to fly off the handle whenever asked as to who is in charge of Karachi but her contention that the Governor or the Chief Minister is in charge of the city is regretfully incorrect and untenable as that is not their job, at least according to the Constitution that she readily refers to. The elected Chief Minister is the Chief Executive of the Province while the Governor is the titular Head. Pending Local Bodies election she should appoint a politically acceptable person of integrity as the Administrator of Karachi. Some of the agencies used for the remote control operations may even have turned rouge, having different aims and objectives to the supreme national interest. Can any person with any conscience give a coherent answer to the question, why

to reciprocate in order to create a suitable environment mainly by calling in its militants in from the streets with the knowledge that they may well not respond to such summons. In the greater interest of the majority Alaf Hussain is faced with Hobson's Choice, for MQM to turn their back on the gunman who have kept the movement alive would indeed be difficult.

Much blood having been spilled in the streets some of the militants have gone beyond the pale, being MQM (A) supporters on pro-forma basis only. Independently they may have gone into business on their own, i.e. turning to violent crime for their own greed. Some of them were criminals already before turning to political action. RAW has infiltrated the ranks of the militants and these few will also not respond to reason, the well-documented example of Sri Lanka is before us. This is the recurring tragedy of all militancy, in the name of freedom militancy is a license for urban terrorism that usually

The Miserable Despatch Section

Indeed, the miserable despatch sections of our offices are incapable of even handling the paper transactions of the colonial days when its volume was negligible compared to the present... But since filing and communications techniques severely lagged behind, the outmoded despatch section of the yesteryears could cope less and less with the emerging situation.

marked to me three days ago, but it is perhaps still lying with the despatch section at the sender's end. But since I am not very sure of my hunch, and I am under heavy bombardment from the other end, I reluctantly decide to personally look for the file in my despatch section, and after a thorough search last night about three quarters of an hour, my hunch has become a certainty. Then I spend another fifteen minutes accusing my accuser of not supervising his despatch section, and for wasting my time. In the end, I may have lost nearly an hour of precious time in a wild goose chase on a busy working day. Believe me, dear readers, the two situations I have described above are now common phenomena, a daily occurrence in each and every single Directorate, Department, Corporation and Ministry in Bangladesh. And all because of the lousy despatch system. I have, in fact, seen files and letters taking as much as a week to travel from one room to another in the same building, via the despatch section.

Indeed, the miserable despatch sections of our offices are incapable of even handling the paper transac-

tion of the colonial days when its volume was negligible compared to the present. Obviously, with the rapid proliferation of government activities, ever increasing use and improvement of the typewriter, the photocopier and the duplicator and the recent introduction of computer, the "wonder machine", the volume of paper transaction shot up enormously in

tent and the laziest office assistant to the despatch section, and that too to do such tedious and time consuming work all by himself? Is it not possible to make some efficient office assistants take turns to accomplish this work? Is it asking too much to assign a few more helping hands from among the surplus staff to get along with this work speedily and accu-

have the messengers and riders carrying files and letters been ever properly briefed about their work and responsibilities, let alone trained? Has any of them been ever rewarded or punished for the quality of his work? Fifthly, would be wide of the mark to assert that there is practically no supervision and monitoring of the work in the despatch section even by the Office Superintendent or the Administrative Officer or the Head Assistant, let alone the Bara Sahib? How many Bara Sahibs have actually entered and inspected the despatch section even once in their entire service careers?

Finally, do the registers recording file and paper movement have to be maintained so haphazardly and unsystematically, making it almost impossible for anyone to retrieve any information from these within a reasonable time?

Could we not maintain these registers not only in terms of "incoming" and "outgoing" files and papers but also subject-wise, Ministry-wise and by the type of documents (in case of letters, DO letters, official letters, public complaints, job applications, etc.)? Could we

not use some specific "colour combination for the register cover in addition to the title heading, in order to clearly distinguish one register from another, thereby helping the dealing assistant to trace the movement of a file or a letter in the minimum time? Could not the registers be shelved in an organised manner, again to ensure speedy retrieval? Could we not devise some way to reduce the amount of writing a dealing assistant have to do while filling in these registers, and thereby reduce his drudgery?

If we answer the above questions honestly and really put our mind to solving the despatch problems, I am sure we can find the appropriate solutions even without having to go for higher technology in filing and communications, which would require elaborate preparation and training, besides considerable financial commitment. On the other hand, we do not even require orders from above or any extra money to improve the present despatch section, on the lines I have suggested above. However, we do require two things, namely, the will to break the vicious cycle of harmful habits and consideration for the ordinary citizen who suffers unnecessarily because we officials constantly "misplace" papers.

The remaining part of the article "Budget 1995-96: A Close Look" scheduled to be published today is held over for tomorrow under unavoidable circumstance.

Making Government Work

by Analyst

recent years. But since filing and communications techniques severely lagged behind, the outmoded despatch section of the yesteryears could cope less and less with the emerging situation.

This is alright as an explanation, but would it be fair to say that we cannot make any headway with the existing despatch system? Surely, we can make many improvements in the existing despatch system and make it work, even though filing and communications techniques may not be modernised rapidly. Firstly, is it necessary to depute the most incompe-

rately?

Secondly, is it imperative to allocate the smallest and the dingiest space in the office for despatch work, as a result of which letters, reports, files and registers lie in messy heaps all over the place? Thirdly, is it not a fact that most despatch sections are also the gossip corners of our offices where subordinate staff get together for tea and *adda*, and in the process, further cream an already crumpled place, besides creating distraction for the despatch assistant who, as it is, is unwilling to complete his day's work? Fourthly,

76 years ago has been in use in the shape and design as it was first introduced.

One cannot but agree that while prescribing the dress, the climatic condition was not kept in view. It is absolutely impossible to work at ease in our hot and humid climate wearing the prescribed dress. The physical fitness of the persons wearing the dress was not seemingly taken into consideration. The courts (with the exception of a few over the country) hardly have proper ventilation and access to free air. At many places, including the Cox's Bazar, courts of Assistant Judges are housed in tin-shed thatched houses or in deserted godowns or in record rooms where there is always the danger of suffocation. In such an unhealthy sitting condition, almost everywhere dresses for advocates prescribed some sev-

enty-six years ago ought to have been changed much more earlier. But in disregard to priority that is deserved, the dress for advocates has nowhere been made a subject of discussion or review. It can hardly be denied that *chapkan*, *achkan* or buttoned-up long coat (at least of traditional designs) and the European dress as prescribed, can only be used in winter at best. Use of these are practically impossible in summer particularly under the existing facilities in our court rooms and the Bars. In the United States of America and in almost all other developed countries, practising lawyers need not wear any prescribed dress.

In our country, should there be any prescribed dress for the advocates? If the answer is yes then that must suit our climatic condition. And until such a design

is chosen, it may be most respectfully proposed that for advocates practising in courts, only the gown of the existing design be allowed for use over any dress that an advocate may like to put on. White trousers, white full shirt, white band may be a suitable combination.

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Increased divorce rate

Sir, In an editorial of a daily newspaper, the increasing divorce rate in our country and its cause was discussed. It was pointed out that working women appeared to top the list of divorcees.

Yes, it may be so and there

is a reason behind it. In former days women were solely dependent on their husbands as they were lagging behind in education, were unable to earn their livelihood themselves. So they had no option but to suffer silently the cruelty and injustice of their so-called masters.

Many even kept their sufferings secret from their parents as the knowledge would have only made them unhappy. But now-a-days the scenario has changed: Women are getting the chance for higher education, occupying responsible positions at work places and doing very well. But many husbands just cannot tolerate it, become jealous and frictions arise from this feeling.

A working woman has to see to all household duties in addition to her outside job. In that region, the husband is

just an onlooker, in most cases.

In one place of the said editorial there was a sentence that "husbands become jealous as their wives pass time well with their male colleagues at work-places and return home to say nice things about their male colleagues. Is that really so? I think it is the other way round, males with their insensitivity and unkindness can utter most horrible things. Most husbands, to prove their so-called superiority, act cruelly and unjustly with their wives. So, in these days, women who can live independently prefer it that way.

I have a firm belief that divorces would be on the wane if husbands were kind and understanding.

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