

Educational Waste

A frontpage report in this newspaper yesterday confirmed, in quantified terms, the impressions we have held so far about a disjointed education system prevailing in the country. The lack of connection is between the tiers of education as well as with the job market.

We have it on good authority of the Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics that of the 217,546 candidates who passed the HSC examinations this year, some 61,000, making up a little more than 28 per cent of the total number, will be totally disappointed in their attempts for admission to the degree level.

The mismatch between the turn-out rate and the availability of seats in the institutions of higher learning raises a fundamental question of policy. We are yet to determine the terminal stage of education for the large majority of our learners who, on leaving that stage, shall be immediately launched on a career, with chances of promotion in life as well.

The spread of functional literacy, primary education and lower secondary education has been an off-repeated goal and the budgetary allocation for the educational sector is also heavily weighted to these sub-sectors. But what is missing is a natural extension of this basic policy towards a slightly higher tier, say, for example, the diploma-level education that must be regarded as the terminal stage for most of the students in the country. Judged in this perspective, we find it inexplicable as to why the numbers of universities, general, technical and professional types, have unidirectionally increased in the public and private sectors without a pragmatic growth in the enrollment capacity of the diploma-level technical institutes. It is a meagre 1500 now.

The educational policy is overshot with contradictions in the very basics. Unless these are removed by the government, and an active cooperation from the private sector is secured by offering them fiscal incentives and equity support to raise new technical educational facilities, we shall have an increasing surplus of semi-educated and utterly frustrated youngmen and women in our midst.

A Leader of Rare Breed

When the title Sher-e-Bangla takes precedence over the man's name, we get an instant measure of the towering personality he was. The man who more than earned that epithet — the Tiger of Bengal — did everything on a level grand and classical. A man born to be at the top of every domain he got into, Sher-e-Bangla could not have left such a lasting memory for us to take inspiration from, had he lived for himself and acted for his own sake. As the nation remembered him on his 122nd birthday yesterday, this fact of living for his people has once again been made a focal point.

A K Fazlul Haq had the qualities of head and heart to achieve a place in the pantheon of India's leaders, any way. The crucial test was how he would accomplish that task. In that test he did not err and came out successfully to be known as a people's leader. There his greatness is ensured once and for all. Rare was his political vision and still rarer his love for the oppressed millions and the land of his birth. These are qualities in short supply in today's politics.

As the country passes from one deep crisis to another and there is no sign as yet of the current political impasse getting resolved, how we wish we had been fortunate to have had the leadership of his kind! By his own admission, Sher-e-Bangla also had his moments of despair and frustration. But that was because still higher was his aim, particularly regarding the well-being of his people. That's why he could — unlike many leaders of our time — confront his inner self with a clean heart. So, to show our true respect to this great man and leader we must emulate the broadness of his vision and place our people at the centre of all our activities, including politics.

Unwise Move

Since the historic handshake between Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and PLO leader Yasser Arafat in presence of US president Bill Clinton, the peace process in the longest troubled spot in the Middle East has charted a tortuous course. Rising hopes for a solution to the problem have been abruptly cut off many a time. For, the creation of an independent Palestinian state is still challenged by its enemies. A recent agreement between the PLO and Israel has, however, brightened the prospects for peace.

Just at the moment when things are looking up, an unfortunate development in Washington seems to pose a threat to the whole peace process. The US Congress decision to move the American embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem is fraught with dangers of destabilisation in the area. It will not only anger the Palestinians but also Muslims of other Arab countries as well as of the rest of the world.

We look at this move as being unwise, and against the letter and spirit of the Israeli-Palestinian peace accord. Shifting an embassy to a disputed area means adding an unnecessary complication to the peace process, apart from inviting a number of other risks. Hopefully, the Congress will review its decision through persuasion from president Clinton. Wise counsel should prevail.

Kohima: Too Distant, Too Alienated

People live in fear — the fear of security forces and the fear of the underground. Kohima is a dead city by 5 pm: the shutters of shops are down and the doors of houses shut. None dares to be on the street after dark

TWO flags fly at Kohima in eastern Nagaland. The one atop government offices is the tricolour national flag, which proclaims that the territory is part of India. The other, all white, flutters at the building, called the Peace Headquarters, to remind New Delhi that it signed a ceasefire agreement with the Nagas on September 6, 1964 at Chedema (near Kohima), where the white flag was raised first.

The confusion, more than contradiction, that the two flags convey describes the unsettled conditions which obtain in Nagaland. People say they have not accepted integration with India. But the impression in the country is that the problem has been sorted out, except for the insurgency of some 7,000 underground militants.

Indeed, the state of Nagaland, India's 16th, came into being on December 1, 1963. The constitution was amended to give it a special status through article 371 (A). Both developments were the sequel to a number of efforts the Nagas and the government made to straighten the issue.

In August 1957, there was the Naga People Convention (NPC) but it broke up on the inclusion of words, 'within the Indian Union', in the first resolution. The convention, at its third meeting, proposed a separate state for Nagaland in India under the External Affairs Ministry. But many wanted consultations with 'those who were fighting in the jungles'. That has not taken place till today. Still, Jawaharlal Nehru announced in parliament on July 28, 1960, that India had accepted the Nagas' 'desire' for a separate state.

What was accepted was a temporary arrangement 'to create' conditions for talks. People await the dialogue for a 'final settlement'. Most Nagas believe the NPC was a mediatory, not a negotiating body. Talks have yet to materialise and the rider is that they should be 'without any pre-condition'.

Chief Minister S C Jamir of the ruling Congress argues: "No pre-condition should be set by any side and the dialogue should be unconditional." His only viable political opponent, Hokushe Sema, of the N D Tewari Congress, alleges that 'the promise to strive at a settlement of the Naga political issue has been reneged...' (Two factions of the Congress are the only political parties in Nagaland). Others are also making the point that only a settlement will normalise the situation.

Yet, the Nagaland population of 12 lakh goes about its business as people in other parts of India do. The same law administers them and the same IAS or IPS takes care of the knitty-gritty of the government. Ten per cent of Nagas are government employees. The basic necessities and luxuries come from the plains since they live in villages perched on mountains. The central assistance is generous, nearly Rs 30,000 crore in the last 32 years. The state has gone to the polls seven times from its inception, returning their members to the assembly by more than 60 per cent of votes, a bigger turnout than the rest of India. (Each candidate spends more than Rs

50 lakh).

But these are at best the symbols of integration. They lose their validity when people consider them a necessary evil until they get what they want. Independence is a passion, nay an obsession, with the Nagas. They have a child-like belief that they will secure it one day. Sometimes it looks as if they are chasing a rainbow, which runs across the flag that the Federal Government of Nagas adopted when it declared independence on August 14, 1947, after the British left.

British left. So did we. Why should you subjugate us?

As far back as 1929, when the Simon Commission came to India to assess the quantum of power London should transfer under the supervision of the Viceroy, the Nagas gave it a memorandum, which said that they were "Quite different from those of the plains" and had "no social affinities with the Hindus or Muslims." Significantly, they said, "We are looked upon by one for our beef and the other for our pork." (They eat both). The Naga territory was

federal structure with defence, foreign affairs and one or two more subjects staying with New Delhi. But no apparatus will work if they do not have the feeling of ruling themselves.

They are suspicious of New Delhi. They have reasons to be so because there is hardly any Naga family which has escaped the repression. From April this year the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act has been introduced in Nagaland to give the security forces untrammelled powers. In fact, the Nagas first introduction to free India has been through the security forces, with all its excesses and brutalities.

Only on March 5 this year did a convoy of theirs ram amuck and fired indiscriminately, even with mortars, upon the people in Kohima to counter the underground's 'firing', which turned out to be a tyre burst. Seven people were killed and 16 injured. But for the timely intervention of conscientious Director General of Police Chaman Lal, things would have gone out of hand. There has been so much scare since then that the other day hundreds of people at a football ground in Kohima ran helter-skelter when they heard a balloon bursting in their midst.

In reality, people live in fear — the fear of security forces and the fear of the underground. Kohima is a dead city by 5 pm: the shutters of shops are down and the doors of houses shut. None dares to be on the street after dark. One reason given for the heavy use of drugs and

drinks is that the evenings are too long.

The administration does little to oust fear because it helps it keep the people quiet. Many underground live with ministers, who use them to bash up critics or kill rivals. More underground Nagas die in inter-tribal warfare than at the hands of security forces. Ministers' vehicles have been used for carrying black money. One such vehicle, when checked by the police, produced a letter from a minister to say that the Rs 5 lakh belonged to him.

Nearly 80 per cent of the money that comes from the centre for development goes allegedly to the pockets of ministers, officials and their hangers-on. Every head of the department gives the underground their 'share' before he distributes salary among the employees. There is hardly any shop or office in Kohima that resists extortion. There has been no progress worth the name. Roads hardly exist; no government school has come up; no professional college nor any hospital. The Nagaland University, in the process of taking shape, reeks with corruption.

Still the Nagas, 95 per cent Christians, remain very religious. Every village has a church and every church a priest. But the preachings have made no dent on corruption or infighting. When I asked a woman teacher about the future, she uttered the word, 'despair'. That probably sums up the feelings of Nagas. They are despairing because they do not know if they would ever get rid of security forces or the underground. Their despair increases when they realise that the cult of gun has taken over their land.

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

"We have never been part of India," they say. It is true in the sense that the British never brought the area under their close, regular administration. Khonoma, village of Z A Phizo, who is revered as father of the nation, has the remains of a British contingent which was defeated in 1879. A stone slab was fixed some years ago to commemorate the defeat of the regiment and the Nagas' victory.

Last year another slab was installed at the village entrance to list the names of the 46 Nagas, who died at the hands of India's security forces. The inscription says: "They gave their lives for vision of a free Naga nation." Recalling those days, village elder Pturoko Khate says: "India became free when the

left as the 'Naga Hills Excluded Areas' in British India Act of 1935.

One month before the British left India, a delegation of Nagas met Mahatma Gandhi, who said: "The Nagas have every right to be independent. We did not want to live under the domination of British India but I want you to feel India is yours." He assured them, "If you do not wish to join the Union of India, nobody will force you to do that." The observation is repeated by nearly all Nagas to point out that they have yet to make up their mind on the relationship with India.

Still it appears that they may not be averse to a formulation that safeguards their identity or, for that matter, their nationality. Many fancy a

OPINION

THERE is no doubt that we did not want this kind of turn of events to a democracy came possible through the general election of 1991. What went so grievously wrong about the whole prospect of democracy is perhaps less important today than the rude awakening that perhaps we as a people are not fit for democracy. This feeling is strong in many now that gold is apt to turn to sod in our hands. And the political events have taken such a turn now, we apprehend the coming weeks are going to produce the most horrifying events to witness.

The big question is whether we can afford such calamities. It is never a practical question in politics to finger-point, to blame a political party for a wrong; in the rather intriguing game of politics, it is all a question of maneuvering and the wrongs are made rights and the rights wrongs. In the vortex of agitating politics old issues die down, are replaced by new ones looking at best, suspect. To clarify: the Indemnity Act should have been revoked in order to put the killers of Bangabandhu under trial, but that is not the issue AL has come to the street with. Why? AL's stand is understood: it wants to go to power first, and then to sort out the killers. Secondly,

why and how can AL launch programmes along with JP and JI (its arch rival)! The question is again one of strategy.

Similarly, how a non-partisan but politically conscious citizen judges the issues — for example, how much wisdom was there in the decision by the Opposition of deserting the Parliament, or still, how much essential it is to claim for a Caretaker Government when one parliament brought to existence by the efforts of such a government has had the most traumatic life — is quite different from how the issues are being politicised in public speeches, mobilized through aggressive-looking processions, or bomb-hurling actions. While the government, in its turn, by way of resistance, translates everything into bare police action.

The big question is rather how the issues are arranged craftily, managed to thrive, or conveniently forgotten. One good example to support this view is the failure (or utter forgetfulness) on the part of the Prime Minister or her train of speakers to mention the bizarre incident of Dinajpur in the public meeting of September 1, the govern-

ment party's birthday. The very omission is indicative of the plain truth that the government party has no explanation, and for this reason no defensive argument either as to why the police had to do (killing 7 people) what they had done, in addition to shying away from the more ethical question as to why the police morale failed (raping or killing the girl) so miserably at Dinajpur.

Perhaps the PM had omitted mentioning Dinajpur because of a two-fold perception. Of the two major rival leaders, she believes that she still has the greater popularity, and the confidence-card up her sleeve is that she is an elected ruler of a parliamentary democracy. Thus anybody trying to remove her will face resentment both home and abroad. The other part of the perception is that she thinks the Dinajpur incident to be an stray incident and has not created an impact on the minds of the people, therefore, the less mentioned it is the better. This wary step has however brought her into a further dilemma in that her government has failed the crucial test of accountability. A more sensitive and pragmatic gov-

Mohit Ul Alam

ernment would have responded to a similar occurrence not by fabricating wishful official statements but by making a public apology side by side stating what punitive measures it had taken against the culprits and what steps it had adopted to prevent future occurrences like this.

What is more worrying is that in the PM's speech in spite of her usual verve and confidence, there was an unmistakable undertone of abandonment — abandoning herself to circumstances. Her strongly-worded warning to the Opposition, politically speaking, may backfire to the same degree, much in the same amount, as she had meant it to be taken as a threat. The Opposition is very unlikely to budge under threat at this stage. A warning when backfires causes the other side of the coin to show up, which is, in this case, anarchy. For this reason, the PM's 50-minute long speech was a disappointment on many counts. The most important one of which for the peace-loving thousands of citizens was that she unmistakably sounded as if she was at her tether's end, and that she could not care more than

What is Going to Happen Now?

to blind herself to how the future takes shape. So, consequent upon such speech if a sterner Opposition move started.

Now, coming to the other aspect of that particular speech, we should praise her for her unflinching determination to preserve the constitution even at life's cost. Because, as she rightly feels, she is voted to power not to do anything unconstitutional. That is quite an appreciable attitude, and coupled with her singleness of mind, this virtue will stand her in good stead. But, as we have noted earlier, in politics, as in life, what is right or wrong is less pertinent than how you handle an issue, even though it can grow out of a questionable premise. So, it is not the wisest thing to say that what the Opposition is demanding (the Caretaker Government) is unconstitutional and therefore to be rejected forthright, for the very reason that the main opposition party, AL, has been able to call both the JP and the JI to support it, and they have been drawing up programmes jointly which are, apparently, gaining mo-

mentum partly due to their united efforts, and partly due to the waning confidence of the people in the present government for its failure to check the rampant proliferation of crime and killing, violence and raping, and the rising prices of essentials. Should the PM and her party not take a more pragmatic step toward the problem by showing a concessive attitude to the Opposition so that a threat of a large-scale violence is avoided, this saving the country from a disaster like situation?

The reason this appeal is to be made to the PM is that, if she reviews the present political scene with a cool mind, she will realize that it is she (and her party too) who stands to gain the most by agreeing to open a dialogue with the Opposition over the caretaker government issue. The PM is going to complete her tenure early next year, when she does so she will go on record as having been the first PM to have been able to sit through her full-term. By giving consent to open the dialogue with the Opposition on the issue of the caretaker government she will not only broaden her image but will also relieve thousands of us of the anxiety regarding the political future of the country.

To the Editor...

Problems must have cure

Sir, Some of us on one pretext or the other pretend not to accept the social, economic and political realities of our life. And as such our problems and sufferings continue to grow unabated. When we come across a problem and we do not solve it at the right moment it takes a serious turn in course of time.

Living in this good earth is a tact, diplomacy, compromise and a discipline. We have not come to this world to quarrel among ourselves, deceive or to hate each other. So long a man lives in this world, he needs love and to be loved, food to eat, a house to live in, meet his socio-economic, political and biological requirements and to protect his human rights. When a man is dead his near and dear ones lament his passing away but soon he is forgotten and no more remembered by his well-wishers as before.

Our country of 120 million people is beset with myriads of problems.

Besides these, we are also faced with natural calamities like flood, drought, river erosion, tidal surge and international problems like unilateral withdrawal of the Ganges water, occupation of our territory Talpatty by India and so many other issues. Whether our ministers, public leaders both in the government and the opposition?

We demand that we must live in honour, dignity and peace. Let us not blame or malign others. Let us rectify and purify ourselves and make our people live a happy and contented life.

O H Kabir
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'Women under coercion'

Sir, 'Women Repression' is a big problem in our country and the dailies are publishing it everyday. In fact, a man and a woman are complementary to each other. The world can't go with only men or women. Co-operation and better understanding among them determine the prospect of a family and a society. So we must have to seek a true solution of repression on women. But in what way should we proceed?

Anybody, conscious of the society — is contemplating of the problems of women. BNWLA is the representative organisation of all those who think of the problems faced by women. BNWLA is trying to restore women's rights and to prevent repression women by laws in the government. No doubt framing — it is praiseworthy. I came to know about some thoughts of BNWLA by reading the article, 'women under coercion' — by Barrister Saima Ali on the 5th September '95 in the Focus page of *The Daily Star*. I have been much pleased to

see the nice interpretation of the misuse of Quranic laws in Bangladesh regarding polygamy and initiating divorce at will in her article. It's really sad that we don't know exactly about the laws of polygamy and divorce and we are prone to injustice. For solution of this injustice as well as prevention of women repression she has proposed to ban the privilege of man for polygamy and divorce at will. Because men are not obeying they are rather misusing them. Also she has admitted that polygamy is needful in certain circumstances and for certain men. Then, why should we ban a needful law? Will banning polygamy prevent men from going to Tanbazar? Tanbazar attractions can also deprive a woman and her child of love and responsibilities from her husband. We can raise the same question for banning divorce at will. Will it bring happiness to conjugal life? No, it will make the life miserable and may compel the victim to go for drastic actions like committing suicide and we know for sure there is no accountability.

It's obvious that only prevention of abandonment will not ensure marital happiness and social stability. Can one can think otherwise? Yes, we can. We are Muslims. We are to obey the Holy Quran. If we can make the spirit of abiding by Quranic verdicts — it will automatically prevent ir-

responsible polygamy and divorce. What need is there for remodelling of our thoughts and actions. I hope BNWLA will have research on the women's rights in Quran and will claim their establishment in the country instead of banning them so that we get a lasting solution of repression on women.

Dr Shelly
Dhaka Medical College

Selling of non-OTC products

Sir, Nowadays, medicine stores are seen in every nook and corner of the city. According to the regulations these stores are permitted to sell over the counter (OTC) medicines as well as those medicines which require a prescription to buy. But unfortunately many of such stores in the capital are selling different types of sedatives and hypnotics, or other medicines (which have sedative property as side-effect) without prescriptions and in this way they are providing cheap addiction to the young generation.

As a citizen of Bangladesh, I request the authorities to impose strict law so that this type of illegal practice no longer exists and thereby save the young generation from the addiction of drugs.

Asif Rahman
Faculty of Pharmacy, DU

Art Buchwald's COLUMN

The Big Question

I had oodles of questions for Tom Brokaw to ask O J, but unfortunately Tom was stood up. But Brokaw thought they were very relevant and urged me to print them even if he never got a chance to ask them.

1. Do you believe football is getting too rough and most of the injuries are caused by faulty equipment?
2. What is the greatest game you ever played for the Buffalo Bills, and who blocked for you?
3. You're known for running through airports. What was your best time ever at Chicago's O'Hare Airport?
4. Who was the most interesting person you ever met in Brentwood?
5. If a Bronco is your favorite car, what is your favorite dessert?
6. What was the scariest thing that ever happened to you?
7. If you had your life to live over again, would you still play golf?
8. Women say you are a risk-taker — true or false?
9. How many defense lawyers does it take to screw in a light bulb?
10. Have you ever done anything to embarrass the University of Southern California?
11. Do you think the LAPD is doing an adequate job?
12. If you found a glove on your lawn, would you keep it, try to return it to its owner or throw it to a barking dog?
13. Have you ever disappointed Tom Brokaw?
14. Do you think by posing for commercials that you are selling out?
15. Is Mark Fuhrman as nice in person as he is on television?
16. If you were a rosebush, what kind of rosebush would you be?
17. You've been such a neat guest. Would you come back again next summer when you finish another book?

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