

Incorrect HSC Results

Unsurprisingly, the correctness of the recently published results of the Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) Examinations has been questioned. Students who feel that they were the victims of massive computer errors have staged a demonstration, demanding re-examination of their answer scripts. Normally students don't need to organise any demonstration to get their scripts re-examined and results corrected. What they have to do is just apply for re-examination of the scripts in which they feel confident they were denied the marks expected by them. The agitated students could have taken recourse to that method; but in that event, the board would have been flooded with their applications and few people could have known about the errors made in the tabulation of results.

This is not for the first time that such complaints are being made. In the last series of SSC examination results quite a number of students got excluded from the merit list, thanks to the wrong handling of the computer. People are asking almost in a chorus for dispensing with the computer in checking answer scripts, obviously with a misplaced emphasis. For the fault of people operating it, in the widest sense of the term, computer is regretably being put in the dock.

The introduction of computer was meant to make the results error-free and quickly available to the candidates. On the second count, namely, swift announcement of the results, the purpose has been served well enough. But in no circumstances should this advantage be allowed to get the better of the first consideration i.e. mistake-free results. No board has the right to deny even a single student what he or she deserves. So before the voices against computer system grow louder, plug the holes through which the computerization goes wrong. Otherwise, we run the risk of abandoning a most advanced technology in a field where it is needed the most — and returning to the cumbersome, old and lethargic manual one.

Now It is Dhaka

Little Saqib was kidnapped on Tuesday from his kindergarten. By someone very close to his family, someone he trusted fully. That someone was acting for a group, presumably of university students, which was in a frenzy to get the 5-lakh taka ransom they had set on the child.

Police have so far caught one. This one presented himself to take the delivery of the ransom money and landed into the lap of the plain-clothes cops. Reports so far indicate that police are on the right track. In a matter of days the entire group may well be nabbed. Good. What about the child? Couldn't be harmed by the gang because of a sense of strong arms closing in on them? What is more important — catching the thugs or saving the child? Both. But how? This is not easy to answer. One thing is certain, police must move very carefully indeed. And at the same time very swiftly, too. They must not be allowed to be too late for Saqib to return home.

Chittagong has for some time past been living in this particular kind of cruel hell. An atmosphere of general insecurity regarding school-going children gave way to misplaced acts of violence there. But child-lifting for ransom has definitely come down there. Now the thing is in Dhaka. Police, and indeed society at large, must act in a manner that the nefarious thing's spread is nipped in the bud.

We want Saqib to be a hero, coming back to his parents' care in one piece and occasioning the beginning of tighter measures against the recurrence of such kidnapping.

Incidentally, child-lifting for selling of the victims to traffickers abroad has rather been an old and thriving business in and around the capital. Police have made several successful raids against lifters recently. This notwithstanding, there is no gainsaying that our police, and as such the government, have not been putting their mind to the job of eliminating this awful crime? Why?

A Welcome March

This is a most welcome thing to occur in perhaps many years. A march protesting the shameful clash between student terrorists over filing of tenders for a 4.5-crore Taka university job on October 25 materialised in the campus on Tuesday. And it was quite a march remarkable for its small size and the rather long route covered. It is unbelievable that something like it was indeed brought out in the Dhaka University campus.

Why so? Appeal was made to all student parties worth their names to join the demonstration against campus terrorism. None responded. And how could they? Nearly all of these parties have their own gangs of terrorists — feared and pampered. So the march had no strong quarters to back them. And still it came out. Ordinarily, in such cases of protesting against armed bullying, which often slides into regular tyranny, the number of protesters counts. There never was a bully that did not cower before a sea of protesters. If the Tuesday march lacked in number, that was more than made up by the courage of its participants.

As the march trod past university buildings students started joining it. And there were many who could not join but gave a big hand to the protesters. But all told this is not even a flicker compared to what giants the student parties are. Even so this is a very significant beginning of action against tyranny. More so because this has been mounted by students against their own exclusive kind of tyranny.

JUST a day before the Presidential Address marking the beginning of the 3rd Parliamentary year for the present National Assembly, Mr VA Jafarey, Advisor to the PM on Finance and Economic Affairs, made a "surprise" announcement on prime time national media that the Federal Government had decided to devalue the Rupee by 7 per cent and increase fuel prices by a commensurate amount while imposing some "temporary" regulatory duties (10 per cent on dutiable and 5 per cent on non-dutiable as long as the total tariff did not exceed 65 per cent). Wheat, fertilisers and import of power-generation plants under the energy policy (up to a maximum of 3000MW) were exempted. The official US dollar parity with the Pakistani rupee has weakened to Pakistan's detriment from Rs 31.85 to Rs 34.25, a difference of Rs 2.40. The Pakistani Rupee has thus depreciated Rs 3.28 or (10.59 per cent) from Rs 30.97 in the four months since the Federal Budget in June 1995. Unofficially it will be pegged closer to Rs 35 (an actual devaluation of 13 per cent), the figure it should "officially" cross by end-December 1995. One feels that the government should have gone the whole distance in one go instead of creeping to that figure.

Let us give Ms Benazir's Government credit for biting the bullet and taking drastic measures to correct the economic imbalance, better late than never. In the present political environment, it requires courage to acknowledge publicly that these were major deficiencies in economic management, particularly with respect to financial discipline. Obviously, the PM decided that enough was enough and in the national interest made a remarkable turnaround, tacitly accepting economic responsibility in the face of numerous ads in the media extolling the many virtues of the PPP Government's economic policies. It certainly required a superwoman effort to recognise that despite the immediate political consequences the economy needed drastic rectification if we were to avoid slipping into the bottomless gorge of economic apoplexy.

While she will face criticism for not listening to the economic doomsayers much sooner, i.e. at the time of the Federal Budget when Makhdoom Shahabuddin confidently assured us about something he had no knowledge of, that given the loose ends of mini-budget had to be in the cards. It was vintage Ms Benazir to first gamble that she would get away with it, then take bold and pragmatic measures when the chips were down. It was incumbent on the PM to take control of events rather than let the economy (and the country) fade out into oblivion.

The fiscal measures involve strict expenditure control with no extra-budgetary grants available, this would apply across the board to public sector organisations and autonomous bodies. Strict monetary policy will mean the control of additional liquidity that was running rampant due to lack of financial discipline.

The SBP Governor had recently highlighted the fact

The economy is in full despair and rampant inflation is very much on the cards. As much as the government may say otherwise, the fact remains that the devaluation and measures thereof is a mini-budget that has initiated a cycle of inflation.

that in the first two months of the financial year, July-August 1995, GOP had borrowed Rs 37 billion, exceeding its own target of borrowing of only Rs 30 billion by nearly Rs 7 billion with 10 months still to go. To ensure that further bank-borrowing remains under control, the credit expansion target of 13 per cent is to be strictly adhered to. Rates of concessional lending for exports and purchasers of locally manufactured machines (LMM scheme) have been increased, while small business loans, youth employment schemes, Awami tractor schemes, etc may be selectively phased out.

Coming within a few days of the publication of the most independent Annual Report of the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) in its entire history by the present Governor SBP, albeit at the risk of his own neck in visibly annoying the powerful, entrenched bureaucracy, her swift reaction is aimed at damage control. She has even started the process of eliminating waste and corruption by symbolically lopping off several dispensable heads (Chairman WAPDA, ADBP, CEC till date) but a few sacrificial lambs will not do. The PM must go the whole hog and revamp the whole team of her economic advisors that has landed her regime and the country in this murky economic soup.

The track records of these untouchable "indispensable" people will confirm how they keep changing their advice chameleon-like to suit the wishes of the current rulers suitably tailored to vested interest of their (the bureaucrats') choice rather than laying out the truth so that the rulers benefit from heedless such advice, both personally and for the good of the country.

In the face of devaluation of the Indian Rupee in mid-September 1995 and given the fact that we are in direct competition with them in the cotton and cotton derivatives sector, it was impossible to keep sacred the value of the rupee as pegged officially against the US dollar. Unofficially the rupee was already trading at Rs 33.60 to the US dollar, a depreciation of 5.2 per cent. By officially taking a leap beyond that mark to an official 7 per cent i.e. Rs 34.25 to the US dollar, Government of Pakistan (GOP) closed the gap to the Indian Rupee US dollar parity (unofficially Indian rupee is 36 to the US dollar) so that the handicap that our exporters face would be reduced, if not altogether eliminated.

Given that our textile sector has been virtually sick for the past year or so (and despite a very innovative rejuvenation package almost terminally ill), the measure will make our textile exports internationally more competitive and act as a delayed shot-in-the-arm to the textile industry.

Bad news never comes alone. Almost simultaneously (and certainly a coincidence), a World Bank study on Pakistan's agriculture sector concludes that revenue-generation to the volumes necessary for good fiscal governance is impossible when

agriculture is not being taxed in the same manner as the rest of the citizenry. The study strongly encourages a move towards direct taxes on agriculture income and land or both, replacing the current system of inefficient and inequitable resource transfer and commodity-specific taxation, with the possible exception of taxes on commodities in which Pakistan has market power.

The 70-page study authored by Rashid Farooq, principal economist, agriculture operation. World Bank argues that structural and

prices, rather prices should be market-oriented and all sort of support prices must go, transition to be phased over 4-5 years. (2) irrigation being lifeblood of agriculture, we must face problems of waterlogging and salinity, etc. reforms including institutional reform and market pricing of water. (3) reform of extension services, effective use of technology and best farming techniques, and (4) correcting distortion in land markets e.g inefficient distribution of land and inadequate system of land tenure stunts continue growth.

every acre pay. Our landlords with much large holdings (some even upto 50000 acres) because of ineffective land reform are mostly absentee dilettantes with no such compulsion.

Ms Bhutto must address disaster-in-the-making in the industrial regime. The reduction of tariffs across the board has seriously affected our manufacturing sector, one need only visit the PACE Department Store in Lahore to perceive the plight of our industrialists, particularly those who had invested in manufacturing consumer products. It may be cheaper to buy imported chocolates, milk, paper tissues, mineral water, etc, in contrast to our own domestic ones.

How can industry survive when we are becoming a vast consumer market for foreign manufacturers? One feels that punishment to the manufacturing sector for not supporting the present regime is being taken too far. We face a severe employment crisis in the future if action is not taken immediately to put up tariff barriers to protect our local consumer industry.

All things said and done, the fact remains that the economy is in full despair and rampant inflation is very much on the cards. As much as the government may say otherwise, the fact remains

that the devaluation and measures thereof is a mini-budget that has initiated a cycle of inflation. Those most affected will be the salaried class and those already living below the poverty line, viz (1) those who pay taxes but are forced to live within budgets of their own and (2) those who hardly can eke out a living and certainly cannot afford to pay taxes. Inflation is going to take affect the lives of the pensioners. It is imperative that Ms Bhutto takes legislative measures to index their pensions to inflation as, in one go their buying power has been reduced by almost 10 per cent, with inflation it is likely to be reduced by 25 per cent, a quarter of their earnings would be lost even before they see the colour of their money. As everyone knows, inflation feeds on itself, a blood cycle of frustration that is anathema to the middle-class and the poor who make up a vast majority of our populace. Who can we finally hold accountable for our economic shortcomings, this is the sorry history of every successive regime, elected or otherwise! Can we really expect change unless there is a genuine attempt at financial reform and accountability thereof, in particular a campaign against corruption in the upper levels of the hierarchy? Unfortunately, ours is a policy of blind servience without anyone having the courage to face up to reality and to tell the truth to the rulers — at least in time!

AS I SEE IT

Ikram Sehgal writes from Karachi

policy reforms are urgently needed to stop creeping stagnation in the agriculture sector. The study stresses opening the sector to market forces but allowing government intervention for ensuring pre-conditions of growth, poverty alleviation and environmental protection.

To reach Pakistan's potential for growth between 30 to 50 per cent four priority areas are, viz (1) removal of distortions like government involvement in output

Despite evidence that small farms are more productive than large ones, 25 per cent of Pakistan's farmland is concentrated in farms of fifty acres or more. In India where land reforms have been effective, wheat yield may be as high as 70-75 maunds per acre whereas in Pakistan we are quite content with 50 maunds per acre. People in India have small landholding and lack government subsidy, intervention, etc, they must make

Making a Mockery of Our Anxiety

by Mahfuz Anam

WILL she (PM) write? Yes, if she (AL Chief) replies. Will she reply? Nobody can be sure. Then suddenly you burst out in joy. She (2nd), answering a journalist's query said she would reply. Oh! what happiness. So now will she (1st) write? Nobody can tell. There is another sudden burst of joy. Yes, yes, she (1st) will write, because she (2nd) has agreed to reply. We don't have any idea what she (1st) will write, and what she (2nd) will reply. We are just happy that for the first time in nearly five years, our leaders — who are supposed to think about us all the time — have decided to write. But then what will she write? Will it be just an invitation for talks, or will she specify what she wants to talk about? For she(2nd) may not reply to the letter if she(1st) does not write what she(2nd) wants her to write. The whole nation holds its breath. "Please write" we say in our hearts, and keep on hoping that by some miracle will save us from violence and social and political disorder into which we are being inexorably dragged by political parties and leaders who refuse to put the nation and the people before their narrow interest.

She (1st) goes to New York, to address the special session of the UN General Assembly on the occasion of its 50th anniversary. We hope and pray that meeting so many world leaders, and being in such august company will broaden her vision, and on her return she will rise up above pettiness and mean behaviour. This forced respite, we hope against

hope, will give her time to think deeply about the problem in which we are in, and perhaps make a bold and creative move for a solution.

She comes back. And just about the time when we start feeling a bit hopeful that she will give the letter writing exercise some serious thought, quite suddenly her party secretary general is in a rush to deliver this all important letter. Why? When was it written? Did serious thinking go behind preparing it? It does not look like it.

Somebody from PM's office phones, and being told she (2nd) is home, rushes to deliver the letter only to find the house empty. The nation wonders, was she (2nd) home or wasn't she? If she wasn't than why say so over the telephone. If she wasn't home, then couldn't she be reached in her well known cellular phone? Is it possible to believe that nobody could reach her, to tell her about the important messenger, with the PM's letter. One has to stretch the realm of the possible to its very limit to believe that the AL chief was not reachable for good 20 minutes, when the BNP secretary general waited at her door.

Yes, it was a mistake on the part of BNP secretary general to come without an appointment. But didn't the gravity of the situation call for an accommodation of these trivial errors? What would have happened if she decided to overlook that fault? For the sake of creating a positive ambience, and to give possible negotiations a friendly start couldn't Sheikh Hasina be gracious and receive the

letter herself. A message that she was returning (from wherever she was) would have been sufficient.

Because she (2nd) did not receive her emissary, she(1st) decided not to receive the emissary of the former. So when AL's reply was ready, and they wanted to handed it over to the Prime Minister herself, she decided to play hard to get. Unlike BNP, AL sought an appointment. She(1st) was here most of the first day when the request for appointment came. Then she left for a district tour for two days. After waiting for two days, and after several hours of her return when AL did not hear from the PM's office, it decided to hand over the letter to BNP secretary general at his house.

Why wasn't an appointment given to the AL delegation? Well, the answer is a simple 'tit for tat'. Since Sheikh Hasina did not personally receive Begum Zia's letter, she will also not personally receive Hasina's letter. This is the level of behaviour of two top leaders, when the people are so very concerned about the future of our politics. It was publicly known that in case the PM gave an appointment, AL secretary general Zillur Rahman would have gone to hand over the letter. As in the case of Sheikh Hasina receiving BNP secretary general, so also Begum Zia receiving the AL secretary general, the occasions would have provided a chance for exchange of courtesies, personal pleasantries, and who knows, perhaps even of some political suggestions. Nothing much may

have happened, but at least some personal contact would have been there. Oh! how small we have become, and how we insult ourselves and our traditions.

The whole episode reveals to us, how seriously our leaders take the crisis that THEY HAVE TOGETHER CREATED, and for which WE HAVE TO SUFFER. While more and more of our people go below the poverty line, when we are physically becoming smaller because of chronic malnutrition, when recurring flood is pauperising larger and larger section of our people, when river erosion is devastating our villages and even some of our towns, we have to witness such a public farce.

The letters they are exchanging are not on a personal issues. They deal with the fundamental issues of peace, social harmony and governance. These matters affects us all, not only for the present, but for our future. The state and future of our democratic experiment, the growth of our economy, the prospect of foreign investment, the smooth holding of the next election (with all that is related to it), depends on the CONTENTS OF THEIR LETTERS. And yet, they enact such a farcical drama just — on receiving each other's letters. It is nothing less than mocking the people, and playing havoc with our anxiety. Can it come from anything but a deep disrespect for us — the people? And then they will come to ask us for our votes.

We cannot but express our outrage at this trivialisation of public concern.

To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

Save residential model towns

Sir, Recently, two notices for the Rajdhanee Unnayan Kartripakkha (RAJUK) came up in your esteemed daily. One was about Banani and Gulshan model towns and, at a later date, the other about Uttara model town. Both of the notices were on the same subject. In brief, some individuals have converted residential houses into commercial premises disregarding RAJUK's guidelines. Identity of these people was in the notices. Unexpectedly, some of them are well-placed persons in the society.

The Government Model Town Projects were undertaken to set up ideal environment for residential areas. In Dhaka, RAJUK oversees the guidelines it has given. Its allottees are honour-bound to follow those to give Model Town its shape. Thus when any allottee deviates from those and misuses the premises of residential zone, the idea of having a Model

Town is lost.

It is hard for me to accept, why this well-placed individuals have marred the setup and environment of the model town. They may have many plausible excuses but that are difficult to accept if we look at their status. To me, they might be having abode in other posh areas so they care less for these areas. Or, may be, they are too high in the society to care for others/neighbors' civic rights.

Somehow in the citation of the notice, the RAJUK flashed the cases of schools, clinics, NGO offices and petty shops, but not the more annoying dressing and packing factories of crabs, frogs, turtles, shrimps, garments factories, knitting mills, fish storages, fish auction yards and the last but not the least, mini dairy farms. These establishments run round-the-clock. Each has also its own peculiar irritating noise, fumes, smells, and polluting wastes. These have added another misery to

these areas, because they consume huge power. For these perhaps the PDB did not have any extra provision. So, these areas engulf in darkness (loadshedding) frequently. Which was unknown even two years back.

Though late, we thank the RAJUK for this bold step to remove these undesirable growths from the Model Towns.

A R Choudhury
Uttara, Dhaka

Security gates

Sir, Since when the responsibility of looking after the security of the life and property of the Dhakaites has been shifted from the shoulders of the Police? Has the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) authorised its Commissioner of Ward No. 45 and Lalmatia Housing Society to take care of security of this area? How come gates were constructed and persons were appointed to man them without having proper budget allocation of funds?

Now khaki clad persons are found to run about from door to door to collect the dues at the rate of Tk 50 a month or Tk 600 per annum. Is it a novel form of chanda baazi? Of all the areas, why Lalmatia and Mohammadpur are made the victims?

As a tax paying citizens, I

seek clarification from Home Ministry/Police/DCC in this regard.

Abu M Faiz
Rd 27, House 117
DRA, Dhaka

Bangla dubbed serials

Sir, Let me offer my congratulations to the Bangladesh Television (BTV) for undertaking an appropriate step to increase the number of viewers for English serials. Previously only English knowing people were the "viewers" of these English serials. But now the dubbing of the serials into "Bangla" have drawn a large chunk of the total BTV viewers as viewers of these serials. This has become a source of entertainment to those who only understand "Bangla".

Why should BTV lose the opportunity to increase the number of viewers of its programme even if someone thinks that this dubbing into "Bangla" is a wrong step taken by BTV?

Those who want to learn English from the conversations between characters such as "Moon" or "Gibbs" in *Dark Justice* are certainly not serious learners of any foreign language. This serial has phonetic of one particular area of the USA and the dialogues are too fast and

often without any grammar. These serials are meant only for entertainment and can in no way be compared with learning materials.

When someone is really serious about learning English, he or she can attend some educational institutions meant for that purpose and practice conversation at the academic level first.

However, let me express my gratitude and thanks to BTV again for entertaining millions of viewers who understand only Bangla through these dubbed serials.

Abul Ashraf
Mohammadpur, Dhaka-1207

Politics of roses

Sir, We are happy to learn that Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina had sent roses with her blessings to Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's grand daughter. It was really very thoughtful and imaginative of her and we appreciate it. We feel secured when we see good terms between our two leaders. How much more we would have appreciated it, if Sheikh Hasina had decided to send white roses to the Prime Minister as a symbol of making peace, it would have been a blessing to the whole nation.

We hope that the two leaders will strike upon a so-

lution which will end this political uncertainty and people will be able to have a sigh of relief and trust that they would not hesitate to do it for the sake of their country which got its independence at the cost of millions of lives of our freedom fighters.

Nur Jahan
East Nasrabad, Chittagong

Chittagong port

Sir, Chittagong Port is almost dead. Most of the vessels are unable to enter the port due to siltation and have to wait at the outer-anchorage for a long time to discharge their cargoes. Shippers have imposed surcharge for the delay and threatened to increase the surcharge by 50 per cent by the end of October, '95. Meanwhile, a study at Wellington Laboratory, UK has demonstrated that there is no hope of salvaging the port and recommended for its shifting. But a futile exercise of dredging at a huge cost is carried out every year. However, from the national point of view, it will be desirable to launch a crash programme to expand and increase the handling capacity of Chittagong Port without further delay.

Serajul Islam
Dhaka