

## FOCUS

## Set Code: Whose Fault?

by Chandra Shekhar Das

JULY is the cruellest month. Certainly for about three thousand Secondary School Certificate (SSC) examinees, who to their utter horror, found their names missing from the list of successful candidates for no fault in their academic preparation.

Despite being the front-ranking students of their respective schools they flunked because they forgot to mention the code number of their question sets in their answer scripts, and the computers, deployed in the process of evaluation, did the rest. The result is a general mood of confusion and chaos.

While it is too early for the traumatised students to make any attempt in order to defend themselves, their parents are already out in the sun, exploring every possible way between *dharna* at the offices of the authority concerned and reverberating processions to have some sort of justice meted out to their wronged kids. The question remains: how wronged and what just?

The whole issue of this unfortunate development has an air of chicken-or-eggs-first sort of argumentative potential when it comes to the question of imputing the genuinely responsible party. For a simple legal interpretation, the otherwise good shell-shocked students have got what they deserved and are left with the pains of paying the price for not observing an integral condition of the major maiden examination of their life.

Writing the code number in the answer script is one of the basic exam-doses they must have had in a large quantity before walking into the halls. The fact that these youngsters failed to give attention to the nitty-gritty centering round the examination proper is quite clear because a conspicuously greater percentile of the examinees were not oblivious of the value of writing the code number in the answer script, and seemingly, had no problems in getting their deserved.

Ideally and logically, the three thousand students distributed in the SSC examinees of '96 under Dhaka and Jessor boards in various proportion should have showed similar understanding of the importance to the code number. Because the government agency in charge of the examination, Board of the Secondary Education carried out vigorous campaign both in electronic and print media to increase awareness about the system among the examinees. But then there are so many things between heaven and earth that are not dreamt of in our philosophy. Who can deny the huge gap between a proportionately satisfactory performance and rigorous routine of rehearsal?

As the first major examination of life SSC can be a very daunting prospect and students with less talent for details are more likely to goof things up than force out admiration by scoring a perfect ten. This is however no excuse for

forgetting the necessity of set code the ability to keep things like this in mind is a part of the examination.

Perhaps, the only saving grace for the erring students in their fancy of avoiding a 'raw' deal is the role of the invigilators, the missing link in the cause effect analysis of this mess. In a transitional period of a particular system those who are assigned with the task of monitoring the whole process of execution, have probably the greatest scope for influencing the outcome. Quite clearly, the invigilators concerned with these students failed to discharge their duties even moderately either from the moral or professional point of view. It could be callousness or it could be want of awareness on their part about the advent of the more technology-based system.

Any attempt to vilify the introduction of computer as a reflex reaction for this problem should be resisted. No amount of emotional or sentimental outburst should be allowed to snowball into a backlash against technical trials. We can only march ahead with time and not retreat.

Although it is not as important to gauge invigilators' responsibility as it is to come to a decision regarding the fate of the students, still, it comes as no small wonder that nothing has been heard from any quarter in this respect though quite evocative scenes of guardians' disappointment and demonstration have been ga

lore in the last few days. Board of Secondary Education and Education Ministry, the twin targets of appeal and overtures of the guardians for leniency to the defaulting students have so far adopted a policy of profound silence. Why?

According to ecologists, a country needs at least 25 per cent of forest areas for maintaining proper weather and atmospheric condition. But out of our 56,000 sq. miles of land we have only 8893 sq. miles under forest cover i.e. less than 7 per cent of our land area, whereas India has 22 per cent, Japan 63 per cent and Myanmar 67 per cent of their respective land area under forest cover.

A land survey has shown

that we have 2620 sq. miles of forest in Sundarbans. 5920 sq.

miles in Sylhet, Chittagong and Chittagong Hill Tracts. 338 sq. miles in Madhupur and Bhawal and only 15 sq. miles in Barendra Bihari areas of Rangpur and Dinajpur districts. Everyday more and more trees are being hewed down by the people for their fuel needs. As a result, the rainfall has greatly been lessened, atmospheric temperature has increased and more and more lands are becoming sandy deserts losing their fertility for good. The spectrum of nature is also losing more of its green areas due to the extension of city areas. Therefore, planned plantation

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of millions of saplings has become the need of the day.

Our Forest Department has given greater importance to the Tree-Plantation Drive this year than it gave in previous years. A Plant Exhibition is going on in the city to give impetus to the public in planting saplings. It is also very encouraging that the Forest Department has already taken a Four-Year City Afforestation Scheme for Dhaka and all other big cities of the country and the neighbourhood areas of all the cities. According to this project information, more and more city areas would be covered with trees and more

parks will be created increasing green spots with scenic beauty. Timber and fruit saplings will be planted along all the roads, road-links, parks, offices, educational institutions, residential and industrial areas. The Mayor of Dhaka, the chief of RAJUK, and all the Divisional Commissioners have been entrusted with this special duty. All the other government and non-government agencies have also been instructed to have special funds for the afforestation drive. It has also been made a part of their duty to nurture the saplings throughout the whole year so that, for the sake of our very existence we shall have to plant and take

programme does not become an annual ritual only.

During the past years it has been found that due to indifference, and sometimes allegedly even with active help of Forest Dept. personnel huge number of trees have been felled and snuffed out. The general public also spoil many saplings due to their negligence. Sometimes due to lack of inter-departmental co-operation many saplings of one are being destroyed by the other. Therefore, great awareness should be created among the public as a whole that for the sake of our very existence we shall have to plant and take

care of trees, otherwise we shall be extinct from the face of the earth in near future.

Our newly elected MPs can create a great impetus among the public by playing an active role in bringing their entire constituencies under the Tree-Plantation Drive by planting millions of saplings themselves along with their party workers and entrusting the latter to nurture the saplings. They can also motivate the public creating a sort of competition mind among the public and reward those who can create good examples in planting and nurturing saplings. It is heartening to think that there already exists a competition among all the city authorities for enhancing the natural beauty of their respective cities and the Dhaka Metropolitan authority had won this magnificent award last year. We hope that other city authorities also will follow the suit. In all cases the ultimate beneficiaries are the public. Therefore, they have also got an important role to play in improving their own ecological condition.

Our politicians should give more fillip to the people by creating examples of planting and taking care of saplings in and around their own houses, ponds, walls and along the roads. It is only by the co-operation of the greater mass that the Tree-Plantation Programme can be made a success.

More publicity should be given through public seminars, discussions, etc. and more incentive through supplying the saplings at lower costs and giving training how to plant and take care of them continuously. An account should be kept of the number of saplings planted in each year and also of how many of them have survived the next year. We should also find out the causes of death of the trees which did not survive. By only taking special care we can save our plants to grow and thus save ourselves.



100m/160km

## Tree People Wage Holy War against Drought

Ecological revolutionaries are waging a liberation struggle in Zimbabwe. The enemies are drought and erosion, the weapons are trees, and the fruits of victory are both earthly and spiritual.

Paul Spencer Sochaczewski writes from Harare

A community leader in central Zimbabwe raises his right fist in the air and shouts: "Pamberi nehondo vemutu!" (Forward — the War of the Trees)!

This is the war cry of the Zimbabwean Institute of Religious Research and Ecological Conservation (ZIRCON).

Its founder, Inus Daneel, says he created ZIRCON in 1972 "out of sheer necessity". The countrywide was "turning into a moonscape" because of drought and erosion.

ZIRCON has planted 1.2 million trees through an imaginative approach which places tree-planting in the context of traditional spiritual values as well as the country's 1970s *chimurenga* liberation struggle against the white rule of the old Smith regime.

ZIRCON operates in Masvingo region, near the Great Zimbabwe Ruins. It counts some 328 chiefs and 65

headmen among its supporters.

Some people in this dry region have to walk five kilometres to get water. Daneel observes.

"Only one in 17 trees planted in Africa survives. Here we have a survival rate of 20 to 30 per cent. This is a link between faith and earth-keeping."

One chief among ZIRCON's supporters, S M Mugabe, notes that its objective is to shift the war of liberation to the land, and make it both practical and spiritual.

Another leader, Chief Murinje, adds that the independence struggle unified Christians and traditional believers, and says: "The need now is to bring them together for the War of the Trees."

The practical side of this ecological war means planting trees to stop erosion and provide fuel, fruit and fodder.

The spiritual side means

recognising that the diversity of tree life represents Zimbabwe's varied spiritual and cultural traditions.

ZIRCON works with traditional healers and chiefs, and also with many Christian churches.

All Zimbabweans realise the importance of rain. With drought a recurrent problem, water is crucial, and tree-planting is seen as a means of creating a damper climate and of protecting the soil and water table.

My introduction to a ZIRCON planting event took place with traditional tribal priests who brewed beer under a cork tree — part of an ancient rain-making ceremony.

My guide was Chief Murinje. Like most members of ZIRCON, he has taken a tree name, in his case *muuyu*, great baobab.

The graves of our forefathers are naked (devoid of trees), he explained. "We're ashamed. Our ancestors are watching what we do here. If

they approve, they'll send rain."

During the ritual, I was named *mushavi*, or fig. I planted trees with Chizu, an 11-year-old girl. Her name was *mutobge* (custard apple).

One hot afternoon in Zano village, I joined about 50 bishops of various African independent Christian churches who sprinkled holy water on ground that was soon to welcome tree saplings.

Bishop Mutikizizi, tall and elegant in a scarlet robe and light blue cape, white scarf and six-pointed crown of scarlet cloth and sequins, offered communion to the villagers and blessed the little saplings they held.

He heard confessions of sins, including ecological sins. One woman nursing a baby admitted: "I've cut a living tree without planting one to replace it."

An old man confessed to clearing natural vegetation in order to grow crops on river banks.

"I failed to manage contours on steep land," another man said. Yet another admitted to letting his goats overgraze pasture land.

Daneel believes that ultimately, unrepentant ecological sinners will find themselves barred from participating in the Eucharist.

The Rev Solomon Zyanaka, ZIRCON's general secretary, notes: "We fought for the land, but once we got it, the land was eroded. The traditional healers and tribal chiefs emphasise the war and bring back customs that were thrown away by white rule. The [Christian] bishops look at our work as taking responsibility for the creation."

As with most wars, the ultimate objective of the War of the Trees is peace.

"There is a correlation between sins and drought," Chief Murinje observes. "We need peace at all levels — peace within ourselves, and peace with the Earth."

— GEMINI NEWS

## The Daily Star Entertainment Guide



Beverly Hills on Star Plus tonight at 12:30

Report: 24 Hours 4:00 BBC World

Report: inc. World Business

Report: Asia Today/24 Hours 5:00

BBC World News 5:10 Newsnight.

CHANNEL V

7:00am Rewind VJ Sophiya 8:00

Jump Star! VJ Trey 9:00 Frame by

Frame 12:00noon The Vibe VJ

Luke 1:00 By Demand VJ Trey

2:00 Rewind VJ Sophiya 3:00 Big

Bang VJ Alessandra 4:30 By

Demand VJ Trey 5:30 Music

Update Tokyo 6:00 Rewind VJ

Sophiya 6:30pm The Vibe VJ Luke

7:30 First Day First Show 8:00

Big Bang VJ Alessandra 9:00

Videocon Flashback 9:30 Classic

Rock 10:30 First Day First Show

11:00 House of Noise VJ Luke

12:00pm The Ride VJ Trey 1:00

Hayash 2:00 By Demand VJ Trey

3:00 Billboard 3:00 US Countdown

5:30 Frame By Frame

STAR Sports

6:00am This is the PGA Tour

6:30am Vtions 7:00 Teenage

Murica Ninja Turtles 7:30 Gi Joe

8:00 Saber Rider And The Star

Sheriff 8:30 The Adventures Of

Black Beauty 9:00 Aerobics Qz

Style 9:30 Nanny And The

Professor 10:00 Mr. Belvedere

10:30 Burt Wolf's Menus 11:00

E! Features Flapper 11:30 Gabrielle

12:30 Santa Barbara 1:30 The

Film Diwani on Zee TV today at 4:00 PM

STAR PLUS

6:30am Vtions 7:00 Teenage

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PTV

8:00am Tawat Aur Tarjumah

9:00am Dukhni 10:00 Dukhni

11:00am Dukhni 12:00 Dukhni

1:00pm Dukhni 2:00 Dukhni

3:00pm Dukhni 4:00 Dukhni

5:00pm Dukhni 6:00 Dukhni

7:00pm Dukhni 8:00 Dukhni