

Education Results

This year's results of the Secondary School Certificate (SSC) examinations have been an improvement on the previous year's when the question bank was abolished. But the improvement of 10 percentage point has just pulled the proportion of successful candidates up to 52.14 per cent.

This, however, is not the only problem facing our education system. A news item carried in a Bangla daily on Tuesday has claimed that teachers, while examining answer scripts, find themselves helpless to take any appropriate measure even when they are almost cent per cent sure that the students had resorted to copying but somehow evaded the invigilators at the exam centres.

It is clear that a few reputed schools have bagged almost all the positions in all the five boards and the order continues downward to the villages where there may be a school house but not the required teachers or the vice versa and, in worse cases, there is lacking of both.

Now we would like to draw the attention of the country's educationists and policy-makers to a gross anomaly in defining the streams of education. What a monumental foolishness it is to divide education at this level into physical science and social science! What about Bangla and English?

A Great Event & Misgivings

The national cultural complex, whose foundation was laid by the Prime Minister on Tuesday, would, first of all feature a national art gallery, a national theatre and a national auditorium for musical offerings. This is too good to be true.

So on behalf of the actor-director, painter-sculptor, the musician-dancer and all who hold the arts dear to their heart, we congratulate the government. Having sincerely registered our appreciation of the government's great stride in the cause of culture, we would like to give vent to certain misgivings.

This cultural complex will be a wholly bureaucrat-managed thing. Very naturally, and as naturally one can then write off the chance of this complex's contributing a paisa's worth to our arts. If the government means the complex to be a worthwhile support for enrichment of our culture and life, the complex must run its affairs with full independence, as removed from government as is BBC or say the Sydney Opera House.

A government managed cultural facility is as meaningless as the Osmani Auditorium is in terms of Dhaka's cultural needs.

Welcome Shuttle

Lakhs commute between Dhaka-Narayanganj daily. In the British colonial times a train journey between the town cities was taken as a treat and hardly any one thought of taking other transports for this small travel.

On Monday the BR, however, started trying a different tack. A very welcome one. It handed over the service part of this Dhaka-Narayanganj commuter shuttle to a private party keeping to itself the running of the trains. Whereas BR have been receiving a 45-lakh taka yearly revenue when they ran the whole show, now they would receive Tk 65 lakh without having to spend anything on service.

Why should there be only seven trains in a day from one direction? What's preventing the running of more trains? If the reasons be technical, they can be removed at will. Why should it take 40 minutes to travel 18 kilometres? Both BR and its private partners must look forward to introducing a true commuting train. It can be done when travel time would be brought down to less than 25 minutes.

BNP's Second Eight-hour Hartal: What Purpose did it Serve?

EVERY action, specially the one which is pre-planned and deliberately organised, must have a well-thought-out objective or a set of objectives for its promoters to accomplish.

Hartal, specially country-wide hartal, is bad, regressive in character and should be shunned by all. This is the general view of the common people, whose sufferings are maximal. Hartal was conceived and practised as an effective tool by employees to redress grievances and obtain concessions from their employers.

The question now arises whether hartal, specially country-wide hartal, is a legitimate expression of registering political protests or not. Apparently, people will tend not to subscribe to its legitimacy. It is because such hartals have always resulted in enormous losses to the economy and caused immense hardship to the people.

What prompted BNP to undertake such unpopular measure? The answer, according to supporters, is not difficult to trace: The traditional means available for redressing grievances are no longer adequate and they have to follow this course...

There are well-defined and clearly formulated devices accepted universally for the purpose of meeting political grievances spearheaded by those who are out of state power from those who are in power. Political parties are supposed to use floors of the parliament for this purpose.

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litical instability that ensues will drive away incentives of foreign investors and hinder continuing growth of foreign trade and collaboration. If the span and days of hartal are longer, the resultant losses and inconvenience will proportionately multiply.

Why should then the BNP invoke such a veritable evil? More so, when the BNP leaders have consistently condemned



Currents and Crosscurrents

by M M Rezaul Karim

hartal all throughout since they took over power in 1991? Even this week, the Leader of Opposition emphatically stated that the BNP does not like to call hartals and cause troubles to the people.

The traditional means available for redressing grievances are no longer ade-

quate and they have to follow this course, rather reluctantly. The parliament, the primary platform for discussions is rendered less than effective due to step-motherly attitude meted out by the Chair, oft and on, at the behest of the ruling party.

meetings and demonstrations by the opposition became an anathema to the government party. This was evidenced, for example, when Awami League cadres violently prevented many from attending a meeting addressed by the leader of opposition in Laxmipur a couple of months ago.

cially in outlying areas have been lost in wilderness. Even incidents of death of their workers in police custody have gone up.

These are some of the factors that prompted the BNP to take the action as it did. This modus operandi was adopted as a necessary evil and for the purpose of envisaging a modus vivendi. But their hartals are taken hartals, limited to 8 hours only. The last one was conducted in protest against increased taxes and surcharges imposed by the government on common people.

In a bid to curb further attempts to call hartals, the government took stern measures of intimidation, harassment and detention on trumped-up charges of BNP workers where Awami League supporters were hurt on the day of last hartal.

Split in Janata Dal: Future of Indian Government

by Zaglul A Chowdhury

There appears no immediate threat to the Gujral government but it is a fast-developing situation where nothing like fresh polls or collapse of the government or even the remote possibility of a new government headed by Congress can be totally ruled out.

THE split in the Janata Dal, the main constituent of the 13-party coalition government in India, has come as a big shock to the barely two-month-old United Front government which is trying to give a semblance of political stability after a number of governments had to quit the office in a situation where minority governments were installed following the last general elections.

form government. As such, the collapse of the government led by Deve Gowda drew sympathy from the people since it was considered as a result of political opportunism of the Congress and more so of its chief. The BJP led by its charismatic former prime minister Atal Bihari Bajpayee and party president Lal Krishna Advani did make the demand that the country needed snap elections which would be the only solution to the crisis faced due to political instability.

True, the BJP was quick to come out with this demand earlier also when the previous United Front government headed by H D Deve Gowda collapsed owing to the withdrawal of support to the government by the Congress. But the suggestion of the BJP was not taken seriously by any other party or authorities concerned even though it was (and as) the main opposition party. It was because the UF government did not fall due to any problem within itself but because of unexpectedly earlier decision of the Congress to call-off its support.

he was made prime minister. The Janata Dal is the main constituent of the UF government and the prime minister of this party is first Deve Gowda and then I K Gujral. And it is because of the Dal's importance that the Congress, a partner in the government, and its president G K Moppanar, missed the chance of being at the helm of government after the collapse of the Gowda government.

But things started going against Yadav when it came to the fore that huge amount of money had been shown as expenses for the food of animals in the government husbandry. Many politicians and government officials are alleged to be involved in the multi-crore scandal known as the 'fodder scam' and Mr Yadav has also been indicted. The scandal-tainted chief minister, seen by many as a genuine friend of the poor, will, other as a result of populism, suffered another blow over the party elections for the post of presidency when his fellow party leader from Bihar Sharad Yadav challenged him for the post.

But the scenario is somewhat different now. The demerit by the BJP for fresh elections has been made this time when the crisis came not only from within the government, but more particularly the Janata Dal of prime minister Gujral.

overcome since the split has threatened the very existence of the Dal as a viable political force. The situation has opened up prospects of greater political crisis in India and fresh polls in the country.

At the heart of the trouble in the Janata Dal is its former president and chief minister of Bihar state Laloo Prasad Yadav, who broke away from the party and set up a parallel organisation called 'Rastriya' Janata Dal. Laloo Yadav was the main force for the Dal as he was the president and also the chief minister of Bihar, the second most populous state of India after Uttar Pradesh. The maverick politician rose from relative obscurity to become a heavyweight in the Indian political scene. As a young man, he took part in the political movements under the leadership of Jaya Prakash Narayan. He is widely seen as a political leader of masses since he would maintain a simple life, talk and conduct himself like a commoner. Janata Dal has two strongholds in India — Bihar and southern state Karnataka — and certainly Bihar is more important of the two and it is because of Laloo Yadav. When the former Dal president S R Bommal was forced to relinquish the obvious choice for the position of party chief was Yadav, who retained party's influence in Bihar despite many odds. He had a big say in choosing Deve Gowda as the prime minister of the country from his party and also threw his weight behind Gujral when

and instead decided to leave the organisation. He formed the new 'Rastriya Janata Dal' of which he is the president. However, most of the central leaders remained with Janata Dal.

Mr Gujral was in a difficult situation. Many expected him to ask the chief minister of Bihar to quit his official position after the CBI prosecution process began against him on the fodder scam. Governor of Bihar A R Kidwai gave permission of investigation against the chief minister after he was rather convinced of Mr Yadav's involvement although Yadav is denying the charges. Gujral, who cares for transparency in public life, faced an awkward situation but said he would have voluntarily quit the official position to facilitate impartial investigation had he been in place of Mr Yadav.

Demands within the party were that Mr Yadav should give up official position and strikes in Bihar by the opposition parties left the chief minister unrelenting. Now that he has set up the new party dealing a crushing blow to the ruling Janata Dal and possibly to himself by dividing a formidable force of which he was a key figure, the fate of his government in Bihar and that of the Gujral government in the centre have come in for discussions.

with him with the number of dissidents being less than 30 and those sitting on the fence and watching the developments number about 20. The new party has occupied the office of Janata Dal in Patna, saying it is their office Sharad Yadav, who has been elected as the new Dal president, is also from Bihar and said his party would never compromise with 'corruption', in an oblique reference to Laloo Yadav.

What about the fate of Gujral ministry? It depends on Congress support and this support still remains there. But Congress indicated that it might reconsider its support to the UF government after the split in the Dal. It means it may pull the carpet from under the feet of the government whenever it feels it is convenient. The country does not want new elections since it is less than one and a half years that last elections were held while normally polls take place after every five years. Congress will keep the government alive till such time that it feels such a decision will benefit it. Gujral remains close to Yadav to an extent despite the split in the party and the Bihar chief minister's supporting MP is unlikely to disturb this government now. There appears no immediate threat to the Gujral government but it is a fast-developing situation where nothing like fresh polls or collapse of the government or even the remote possibility of a new government headed by Congress can be totally ruled out. Luckily for the government, the leftists and others supporting it are with it along with an ambivalent Congress which appears to be supporting the government for some more time and this may keep Gujral government in power in the immediate future.

The rival group of Yadav or the new party said it would not disturb the government of Mr Gujral. Twenty-four MPs of Janata Dal's total 52 are siding with Mr Yadav. In Bihar most of the 164 party legislators are

To the Editor...

Micro kindness

Sir, The recent high-key Microcredit conference in USA highlighted one side of the coin, albeit a good one, in that the developed and industrialised countries, who are the traditional donors for development in the Third World, are mostly from the West and Japan (with some input from ASEAN just tickling in). In the process, the Grameen Bank concept got some publicity, and is likely to play a central role in the international lending pattern during the coming century.

But what is the key reason behind this western patronisation, or, and shift to, microcredit, now being orchestrated in low profile? This approach was pinpointed at the recent ADB high-level meet in Japan recently, where the donor agencies clearly cautioned that there was not enough money in the kitty to continue the aid pledges on the patron-level scale practised earlier. The World Bank has also started carrying the same message: expect less aid.

This is understandable. The richer nations are not that rich any more, as the scenario and the locations are shifting. The economic global depression of the '90s are exposing the financial and economic health of the G-7 and allies. Europe and Japan are on the decline, with declining internal and external markets, and the rates of unemployment continue to project a gloomy picture, especially in Europe (Russia and the CIS are not ready to play the Mamon game). The Americans do not earn a living by selling consumer goods; and the factories are shifting to Asia — to South Asia to be specific, because there is no other area (all surveyed or exploited, Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, ASEAN, Vietnam, Indonesia). Even the automobile factories are being relocated. The transfer of technology has psychological glitches.

The donors' game has to be played in the right key, for economic and trade advantages. Macro aid will now be trimmed to micro aid; and social issues will be attached to trade conditionalities, despite protests. It is their world, and they lay down the law. Therefore, the regional groups have to play their roles, shifting away from dependence on foreign sources. The mindset of the political leadership in the Third world countries has to change, to be able to provide better local service in the running of the state, and to ensure better exports.

Our SAARC, after the latest meet of the heads of the state in the Maldives, is still struggling to get together to launch the game to start, surrounding by a packed gallery, and a consumer market, of more than a billion people, who consume only three per cent of the member-states' products (and services).

The question to be faced is paradoxical: which is more important these days — politics or economics? Trade and rule, obviously. Our earlier generations could live in a small isolated world. The global village is too small to live anonymously. The days are gone when an Englishman would not speak to a stranger unless introduced formally.

The parliament

Sir, We watched a considerable portion of budget session in the Parliament at 1pm on television. I really enjoyed it and treated it as a game with goals drawn. As a rule, the finance minister submitted his budget for the fiscal 1997-98. It raised a few disputes around it. Some are saying it is a popular budget — they welcome it, and others claim it to be an anti-popular budget, and they reject it.

They have to know how to criticise economic issues on the basis of economics, but not in a political way.

Sometimes they agree together in the point to reduce their taxes, to allocate plots for their housing and other facilities. It may be mentioned that one MP cannot converge his opinions with that of the opposite one. This may cause in losing his or her membership in the Parliament. Is it a symbol of democracy?

Above everything else, they ought to be careful about the way they use their language and its pronunciation. When will we get our expected output from our Parliament?

Sabuj 514, Zia Hall, DU

Regional Tourism

Sir, One of the ways to bridge the trade imbalance between Bangladesh and India is to increase the number of Indian tourists in Bangladesh. Presently the tourist traffic is mainly one way i.e., from Bangladesh to India. We can attract Indians in various manners to visit the country. People who had migrated from Bangladesh may make a sentimental tour to their previous homes or to the homes of their previous generation.

Religious tours to places like Langanbandh, Sitakund, Sikh Gunadwara at Dhaka or parental home of Sri Chaitanya at Dhaka Dakshin in Sylhet. Cultural tours on occasions of Ekushe February or Pahela Baishakh or to Silaidaha. We

should promote vigorously to generate interest among Indians. Indian tourists may be of small or medium budget.

However, arrival of large number of them may bring in substantial money and help develop tourist-infrastructure thus paving the way for future influx of visitors from developed countries.

I urge upon Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism and Parjatan Corporation to give serious thought to above suggestion.

A Samad 75 Montpurpara Tejgaon, Dhaka.

Trees are gone

Sir, Mangroves in the coastal area used to protect habitats from tidal surges, land erosions and maintain ecological balance. Our every planning had or has been lacking with long-term perspective. Greediness easily can make us blind. The extinction of mangroves in coastal areas is the direct result of myopic planning of our successive regimes and unrestrained greediness of few elite. A vivid picture of Chakuria depicted by Karim Gregov is indeed devastating where no traces of trees but embankment, sluices and shrimp lands. Mangroves were destroyed in the past. Embankments are prone to threatening for onrush of rain water and wave action. Spending of public coffers is perennial phenomena. Traditional livelihood has been extinct.

We have lost Chakuria Sun-

rickshaw — for whom the middle tier is meant, long ago gave up using it. Recently, two traffic policemen are seen posted at two ends of the road to direct the rickshaws to use the road meant for them. But the rickshaws are, however, found to get down to the main carriage way, half-way through the road. The posting of the policemen appears to have been of no avail.

So, there is no justification of this middle-tier being retained when similar roads in front of Supreme Court/PWD Building were long ago merged with main road to make it wider. Presently, the main road is too narrow to accommodate both slow-moving rickshaws vying with fast-moving vehicles for space.

The authority concerned should take note of this and, immediately go for widening the road. At the same time, they should have the slabs forming the footpaths removed, as, at places it has given in, and, having disappeared under a hand-long weeds, have become a veritable death trap for the user.

C Motirud Dahr 53, New/Eskaton Dhaka-1000

Adoption

Sir, In Bangladesh, the Muslim society hardly adopts children in the families. This is despite the fact that the number of orphans are very high. If adoption were practised, many unfortunate orphans would have lived a meaningful life availing love, affection and education. Does Islam discourage adoption? I have very scanty knowledge about this. So far I know Prophet (PBOH) of Islam had an adopted son. I wish to be enlightened from the scholars on the subject.

While in developed countries, adoption is done from the humanitarian point of view, our orphans languish in poverty and some are taken in European countries by families. Historical perspective for our people not encouraged to adopt should be laid fare.

A Samad 75, Montpurpara Tejgaon, Dhaka

Noise pollution

Sir, I am a student of Class VII and a resident of Dhanmandi residential area. Recently, we have been greatly disturbed by the milking of the various advertisers. Our life is becoming hellish day by day. Recently, I read in your newspaper that Dhaka city has even surpassed Mexico city as far as pollution is concerned. So along with air pollution, noise pollution also must be controlled. My request to the authorities to allow the advertisers, the wedding parties, exhibition holders and other areas of milk to use it at only reasonable and strictly limited hours of the day.

For enforcement of all this, the police including police patrol should have the power to stop them. I also hear there is an organisation called BELA which works in the environmental field. They should come forward and help in these situations.

Rona Anwar Dhaka

Fake red passports?

Sir, The news item published in your esteemed newspaper on June 5, 1997, under the heading 'US embassy seizes 6 fake passports' took us aback. According to it, the consular section at the US embassy in Dhaka had so far detected six diplomatic passports issued against fake wives and children of six members of the parliament. The red passports were seized when the persons tried to get US visa. These facts were disclosed by Chief Consular Officer David Dreher at a press briefing on May 4, 1997. Not disclosing name, the Chief Consular Officer showed one red passport which has issued in the name of fake wife and children of an MP and several other forged passports which were issued against some members of a cultural group.

He also revealed that last year 35,000 people applied for non-immigrant US visa, about 46 per cent got it, of which about 25 per cent did not return after their stay in America. He commented that the figure is very high compared with other countries.

It seems that our people tend to excel in matters which in no way could be appreciated, it is very disappointing and shameful.

The people of Bangladesh are not dwarf or anything, what a change we would have seen if they used their intelligence for the welfare of the country!

Nur Jahan East Nasrabad, Chittagong

Derbans and topdying disease

For unknown causes may hasten to lose Khulna Sunderbans. There are small and large mangroves in our coastal areas. For our carelessness, myopic planning and greed these are on the verge of extinction and habitats of human beings and other wild lives are being threatened. Awareness is imperative to regain ecosystem of the coastal belt.

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