

DB Overhaul

Discovery of the decomposed corpse of Jalal Ahmed from the overhead water-tank at the Detective Branch office in the capital and subsequent investigation into the murder case have led up to some extremely disconcerting revelations. Put together these pointed to one compelling truth: the Detective Branch of the Dhaka Metropolitan Police has really gone out of control and needs immediate overhaul. While there was an instant clamour among conscious citizens for an immediate intervention from the government to get things in order at the Detective Branch, the home ministry has been slow to act initially. However, a report carried in the front page of some leading Bengali news dailies on Monday suggests that the government has taken the matter into serious consideration and a thorough reorganisation of the branch is on the cards. Belated though, the ministry's activism in that direction certainly comes as a heartening bit of news as it underlines Home Minister Mohammad Nasim's commitment towards streamlining the law enforcement system.

The areas identified for complete overhaul show that the ministry has touched the heart of the matter. Plans to reduce the staff strength to 200, including 110 officials, in not only Dhaka but also in the three other metropolitan areas are highly pertinent. And, the induction of an accountability mechanism would certainly go a long way towards enhancing DB's efficiency and restoring its badly battered credibility. However, our suggestion is that the activities of other intelligence wings of the government, such as the NSI, Special Branch (SB) and the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) should also be reviewed, and brought under the supervision of a parliamentary body. That would not only ensure accountability of these organisations but also make them transparent to the citizenry thereby augmenting their faith in the law enforcement system. Moreover, the government must make sure that the intelligence agencies are modernised and equipped with sophisticated gadgets, and also the agents are trained for their tasks.

The intelligence agencies have so far been beset with multifarious problems. Complaints of high handedness, corruption, nexus with the crime cartel and, above all, partisanship have severely damaged their image. Custodians of law are now viewed as hands of horror by the regular citizen. But respect for the law enforcers is a precondition to the effective working of an enforcement system. We are happy that the simple truth has dawned on the policy-makers. We earnestly hope that this realisation would be translated into establishing a clean, effective and, of course, accountable law enforcement system.

Whither Task Force Report?

Strange it may sound though, it is true nevertheless that important recommendations of a Task Force constituted after the Gaibandha liquor tragedy in April 1998 still remain in the cold storage. The seven-member committee formed after sixty-nine persons had died following ingestion of methanol on 15 April last year made three specific recommendations: to control the use of methanol, to monitor the uses of methanol and to ascertain the total requirement of this poisonous spirit for various use all over the country along with its imports. But these recommendations were soon forgotten and not until the Narsingdi tragedy in which one hundred and fourteen people died was the new Director General of the Narcotics informed about the existence of such a report, according to a report in *Prothom Alo* on Monday.

Now who is responsible for non-implementation of the recommendations of the Task Force? The net result has been the tragedy at Narsingdi and who knows how many more lives will be lost in future because of the callousness of the authorities concerned. The Health Ministry should wake up now and take full responsibility for averting future tragedies. The failure of the ministry points to the failure in governance. Any more lapse on the part of the government can cause disasters in future. Instead of wasting time in fruitless political rhetoric and sensing conspiracies in whatever agenda the opposition is pursuing, the government must take up the challenging task of good governance for the benefit of the people who had voted them to power. We are appalled by the thought of many more reports being kept in the cold due to utter negligence of the concerned authorities while the people suffer in silence. The pattern seems to be: form a task force or probe committee when caught up in a storm and just forget about the report submitted by it at once the dusts have settled.

Who are They Fooling?

The old cliché of breaking butterflies upon wheels is holding true at the ongoing Higher Secondary Certificate examination centres. Things clearly have gotten out of hands, and therefore, the education secretary has strengthened the deputy commissioners (DCs) with the power to seek Bangladesh Rifle's (BDR's) help in need. Evidently here, the police were not deemed enough to check unprecedented unfair means at exam halls. Why? Are the police also backing the exam-hall blockheads? Resorting to cheating by a large number of examinees has created a state of anarchy all over the country, turning all exams into horseplay and also threatening to reduce the importance of certificates even more.

On the one hand, students those who go for unfair means have been proven themselves as extortionists; and that too, reportedly, with the help of some "bribeable" invigilators, and on the other, many of them have exhibited innovative — apart from might-is-right approach — jocular ways of cheating at the exam hall. A Bangla daily carried a photo-report unveiling a female candidate's chemise swarmed with a textbook look-alike. Similar examples are aplenty.

Now, who are these young unfair means-seekers fooling? Without any iota of doubt: "themselves". After crossing the SSC and HSC hurdles when they would realise what they have done, there'll be no remedy left for them. Admission into universities is bound to be the most arduous task for them. Moreover, if job-hunting and living a decent life are the prime objectives of our way of education then there are disappointments waiting for every one of those who 'fared with unfairness'. Workplaces would be the shock of their life. We don't want people who acquire educational attestation of this category, because these are unskilled, literally uneducated lot. We hope these rogues don't get a free run.

Education: In Search of a Policy

One basic thrust of the policy is to ensure that all citizens of the country have equal opportunity of access to education, certainly to primary and secondary education but also to other levels. Primary education is proposed to be extended up to class VIII, with secondary education consisting of classes IX to XII. This system is proposed to be put in place in phases to be completed by 2010.

programmes and projects and led educational activities be pursued, as has been the case in the past, without adopting a national education policy.

But in order that efforts can be mounted to promote education in a coherent manner, generating a momentum towards the best possible development of human capability for the best possible rate of national progress, an overall policy framework is absolutely necessary. In the absence of such a framework, policy, ad-hocism and piecemeal actions are more the norm than systemic imperatives. This state of affairs ill behoves the nation if it were to prepare for a major forward thrust in the 21st century.

Since Liberation, several commissions and committees have been appointed by the government to formulate a national educational policy. Reports have been submitted but, as noted earlier, a policy is yet to be adopted. The present government formed a National Educational Policy Formulation Committee in January 1997, which submitted its report in September of that year. In early 1998, a small committee was constituted to review that report, finalise policy proposals and suggest implementation and financing strategies. This committee, using the report of the earlier committee as the basis and after holding discussions with various stakeholders and reviewing the comments and suggestions offered by individuals and organisations generated on the basis of discussions on the proposals contained in that report drafted a National Education Policy covering various levels and types of education and suggesting implementation strategies along with possible ways of funding the major initiatives to be undertaken under the policy. In this piece I wish to highlight

some important aspects of this draft policy to the extent I am aware and given my understanding of the proposed steps and strategies.

As I see it, the proposed policy has been formulated with two basic goals in view, which are very appropriate in the context of Bangladesh. One is the promotion of ethical and human values, such as social justice, good behaviour, fellow-feeling, respect for others' views, devotion to duty, respect for human rights, non-communism, and patriotism. Promotion of leadership qualities is also an important aspect. The second overarching purpose is the applied side of education

subjects such as economics, commerce, science, computer, agriculture and so on. Liberal arts are not however neglected.

At the same time, for those who cannot go to school or remain in school because of poverty and other social reasons, the major emphasis has been given on non-formal education. Its purpose is to bring those left-out children within the fold of the educational process and to encourage and help them to pursue education at least to a level that enables them to participate in economic and social processes in a meaningful way. Another important aspect of the proposed educational policy is people's partic-

ipation in the process of ensuring that schools and colleges are properly managed, education is properly imparted, and quality of education is adequately ensured. In this process, continuous interactions among teachers, parents, members of management committees, local leaders, and local government officials will be encouraged, promoted, and facilitated.

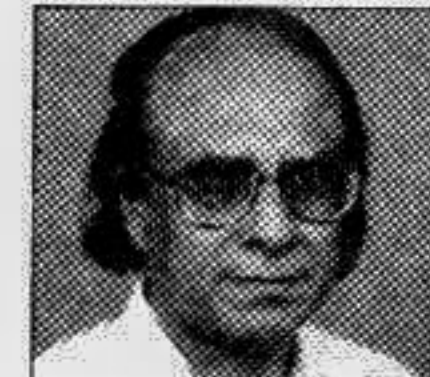
One basic thrust of the policy is to ensure that all citizens of the country have equal opportunity of access to education, certainly to primary and secondary education but also to other levels. Primary education is proposed to be extended up to class VIII, with secondary education consisting of classes IX to XII. This system is proposed to be put in place in phases to be completed by 2010. One very important purpose of the proposed longer duration of pri-

mary education is that on completion of primary education one acquires basic qualifications to participate purposefully in economic, social, cultural and political processes of the country.

While primary education is compulsory and universal, higher levels of education will depend on the ability of the students to pursue higher diplomas/degrees. Higher education and research in the sciences and technical subjects is duly emphasised. A major emphasis has been laid on the quality of education at all levels — primary to the highest degree. With that end in view, training of teachers of all levels has been duly emphasised. Strategies have been proposed for pursuing both these ends in an effective manner.

With a view to promoting an equitable educational system in accordance with the dictates of the Constitution of Bangladesh, all types of primary schools will be required to impart education of which the contents and quality will be the same and the medium of instruction Bengali. However, due emphasis has been given on English as a second language, which will be taught from class III as a compulsory subject; it may also be taught in classes I and II as an optional subject.

There will be three basic streams at the secondary level — general, technical and madrasa. In each stream, vocational education will form an integral part so that after completing secondary education one is able to take up a vocation if one does not pursue higher education for some reason or other. In each stream, there will also be certain common compulsory subjects. Overall, education to be provided in each stream has been so designed that, when the proposed new system of primary education up



Lest We Forget ...

by Qazi Kholiquzzaman Ahmad

and the development of expertise of various types and levels. The sciences, engineering and technical subjects and also the social sciences which are more directly concerned with economic activities are encouraged in this context.

Given that an overriding need of this country is to help the ordinary people to get out of their accommodation with poverty and backwardness, primary and secondary education, encompassing both the overriding goals stated above, have been given top priority.

Keeping in sharp view that the two levels represent both terminal and continuing education, the curriculum and importance of various subjects have been proposed. Side by side with the development of human qualities, emphasis has been laid on vocational training and more directly economy-related

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Sonia's "Foreign Origin" Issue

Will the Electorate Go for "Ram" or "Rome"?

Sonia may suffer on the "Bofors" count but is unlikely to receive any setback on the issue of "foreign origin" because most Indians have learnt to accept and praise Indians of foreign origin or even foreigners if they deserve it.

THE key players of the Indian political scene have jumped into the electoral fray after the Election Commission has set the time for the mid-term polls. The balloting involving 600 million voters will take place in September-October so that a new Lok Sabha is constituted by October this year. Under the Indian constitution, a new lower house of parliament (Lok Sabha) — which is directly elected by the people — has to come into force within six months of dissolution of the existing one. The upper house of the parliament (Rajya Sabha) is not directly elected by the people and legislators of the state assemblies are involved in the process of choosing its members. The elections to 544-member Lok Sabha is to take place every five years but its tenure seems reduced much less these days as successive governments have failed to run full term often causing instability, and forcing dissolution of the house and calling for snap polls.

The last elections in India were held in February-March last year, and the next one is due only after one and a half years. Most people and political parties feel that election in such quick succession is not a healthy sign for democracy and it also causes severe strain on national economy. However, it appears that there was no other option but to call the mid-term polls this time although a section of political pundits and analysts in India feel that all the options to avoid a snap poll under such a situation were not

exhausted.

Political parties have now swung into their respective electioneering strategies. Both major and minor political parties including the regional ones are busy finding new allies. They are also sharpening their weapons to use against the political rivals. The coming polls are taking place against a backdrop of bitter political relationship between the BJP-led coalition and the opposition on one hand and within opposition parties themselves on the other. The BJP-led coalition had to quit upon losing the confidence motion by only one vote after remaining in power for 13 months. The coalition feels that it could have remained at the helm for a longer period but its lifespan was cut short abruptly by the combined opposition's sheer negative political approach. The opposition was hell-bent upon not to allow the government to continue despite the fact that they themselves could not come up with an alternative as promised to the nation before pulling down the Vajpayee administration. Now Vajpayee and other leaders of the coalition are asking the electorate to "punish" those parties which have let them down through their verdict in the coming polls.

The Congress and other opposition parties are maintaining that they have done the right thing since the 13-month

rule by the Vajpayee government had done enormous damage and this should not have been allowed to continue. The opposition cites many examples like the anti-Christian tirade allegedly by some BJP forces, the unethical sackings of the naval chief, rising prices of essential commodities etc. as reasons for triggering the fall. As such, the acrimony is intense and each side is sparing no opportunity to take on the other on different issues.



On the other hand, bitterness within the opposition parties is obvious because some of them accuse each other of "betrayal" or of adopting a tendency guided by political meanness that prevented them from forming the new government in the aftermath of the fall of Vajpayee government. Rivalries within the opposition group is another dimension that may make the campaign for the coming polls acrimonious and intense.

Certainly there is a variety of the issues that the contending sides will seek to use against each other. But between the two

main political parties — the BJP and the Congress — the "foreign origin" of Congress president Sonia Gandhi is definitely the most sensitive. Although Vajpayee has said that he would not make this an issue, the BJP and some of its allies are unlikely to exclude this in the campaign that is slowly picking up. The Congress and Sonia Gandhi herself cannot be totally oblivious of the fact that the critics would exploit this issue to the best of their ability

and consequently, they have launched a counter-campaign. "Those failed to run the country, those seek to create tensions in the Indian society on communal and other lines, are now trying to whip up bitterness on my origin," Sonia said in a blistering attack on the BJP. Despite broadness demonstrated by Vajpayee, most BJP leaders are urging people not to let Sonia Gandhi's "foreign origin" round a foregone conclusion of the allies like the outgoing Defence Minister George Fernandes of the Samata Party has gone to the extent that Indian constitution be amended to bar those who are not of Indian ori-

gin to hold such offices as president, vice-president and prime minister. They argue that different nations have similar constitutional bar like the United States where none can become the head of the country unless he/she is of American origin by birth and Pakistan where a non-Muslim cannot hold the office of head of country and/or government. They also spare no efforts to vilify Sonia being an Italian and say people should decide whether they want "Ram" or "Rome," an euphemism for "Hindu" or "Italian". The "Telegu Desam Party" in southern Andhra Pradesh where it is the principal political rival of the Congress also echoes similar feelings about Sonia Gandhi.

Barring the hardcore segment, such arguments are unlikely to cut much ice among the conscious and saner section of the people. The critics say Sonia took many years to take Indian citizenship after her marriage to Rajiv Gandhi in 1968. By saying this they seek to drive home the point that she was not much keen to become an Indian national. The Congress turns the table on the opponents maintaining that when Italian Sonia married Indian Rajiv and chose to live in India, she embraced this country wholeheartedly. Supporters of Sonia say she also took painstaking efforts to learn Hindi and mingle with the In-

dian culture by wearing saris and maintaining a dignified posture. The virulent criticism against Sonia is on all will take feverish pitch before the polls but this may not favour the critics. On the contrary, this may have a boomerang effect on them in some states. However, if the BJP and others can convince the electorate about the "Italian connection" in the "Bofors arms purchase scandal" then this will certainly affect the Congress.

There are allegations that late Rajiv Gandhi and his "cronies" made fortunes from the "commission and kickbacks" on the huge arms deal with Swedish company Bofors where also an Italian business concern was involved. Critics say the involvement of an Italian businessman was possible due to Sonia. Sonia and Congress have steadfastly denied the accusations and said successive governments could not prove these allegations. Findings of the enquiry commissions are yet to be fully made public. Like BJP and other rabidly anti-Congress organisations, even some secular parties also question Sonia's connection in the "Bofors" scandal, and this allegation was largely responsible for the defeat of Congress and Rajiv in the 1988 elections. Sonia may suffer on the "Bofors" count but is unlikely to receive any setback on the issue of "foreign origin" because most Indians have learnt to accept and praise Indians of foreign origin or even foreigners if they deserve it.

To the Editor...

An earnest appeal to our political leaders

Sir, We, the O' and A' Level candidates have been studying very hard for our examination which starts on 17th May, 99 and concludes in June, 99.

We are afraid that if we face another halt during our examination, the British Examination Board is going to cancel our examination or we have to appear for the same during the night as an alternative. This will cause serious mental and physical stress upon the candidates. The same problem was faced by January 1999 batch, which consisted of 8000 candidates. If the same unexpected halt occurs this time, 12000 candidates will be great sufferers, as these unnatural timings have an adverse effect on our performance in the examination.

If the examination is cancelled, we have to wait for six months before we can sit for it again. This will culminate in the loss of valuable time from our academic years and a lot of money as these examinations are quite expensive. We believe perhaps our honourable political leaders will not be able to compensate for those valuable six months of our lives, if not the money.

The candidates are not the only sufferers, the loyal teachers, parents and guardians, the people concerned about this examination in Bangladesh, will suffer a lot, which cannot be expressed in words.

Our political leaders do say that, we, the students, are the future of the country. If so, we would earnestly plead, you, not to call any halt during our

the mentioned time above, that is between 17th May, 1999 up to June, 1999. We hope our political leaders will demonstrate their affection and kindness through cooperating, so that the examination could be concluded without such political disruptions.

Azman Ahmed Chowdhury
On behalf of

Tasaffi, Salwa, Anhita, Faisal, Wazed, Najma, Rafiq, Saqib, Zain, Safina, Rashaqa, Amayra, Nazat, Nafis, Fahad, Fatim, Nadya, Saber, Faeka, Shahrin, Anisa, Zain, Sifat, Nashed, Rafi, Tasnim, Rumana, Saadi, Tahsin, Farhan, Zunaid, Habib, Mainul, Ferdous, Sayema, Rajen, Modassir, Naziat, Riaz, Sadi, Wajed and many more...

Cream of the country

Sir, The news of the rowdy behaviour of the BUET students came as no less than a shock to us all. This is how the best of our students, the cream of our country behave, what then are our hopes? It indeed is a shame and very unfortunate for the whole nation that even the best of us can behave in such unruly way. That we have lost our values so much, that we don't have any principles or any sense of right and wrong, is really bad news for us all. Earlier, BUET was immune to this kind of lawlessness but now it looks like the virus has got it too like all other institutions.

Cheating in any kind of exam is very wrong and more than anybody else it hurts the student himself most. It is doubtful if anywhere else in the world students cheat as much as they do in our country, and it is

spreading like an epidemic day by day. In the USA when students sit for exam in the Engineering University and can't answer the questions, they just leave the paper and walk out of the hall. This is especially true for technical subjects. For if you become a doctor or an engineer with no knowledge of your respective subject, how can you then work? Either you will kill people or spoil your machinery or construction work, which may also lead to deaths or injuries.

So when somebody is punished for cheating, shouldn't the students have this much of judgement that this was for their own good in the long run? Also the sense of fairness that if one does wrong he deserves punishment. It is very sad indeed that we couldn't instill this sense of right and wrong and of fairness in our younger generation.

Is it the parents' fault too for not giving proper guidance or is it the teachers' fault for not being strict enough to maintain proper discipline in our educational institutions? The scenario is really very bleak and very worrisome indeed. It must be corrected timely before it is too late and our institutions start producing criminals rather than scholars!

Dr Rashid
Dhaka

A solution to power shortage

Sir, Instead of trying to blame the opposition for the current severe shortage of power, our PM should start considering about practical solutions. A few days back there

was a news item in the DS that we are heading for an even more serious situation by this time of year in 2000. There can be one immediate step towards preventing that situation. The Army can be given the job of curbing theft of electricity in the name of "systems-loss" which is a staggering 30-40 per cent in our country.

It has been heard that in another Asian country they were facing similar situation and now they have surplus power through the help of the Army. So, instead of using the Armed Forces for merely "guarding" the power-stations, the PM should consider to proceed in that direction starting from now. Let us, at least, begin the process of a rational solution.

An Anxious Observer
Chittagong

It puzzles us

Sir, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said at a reception hosted in honour of the ICC champion Bangladesh cricket team in April 1997, that a cricket stadium would be built in Dhaka very soon and it would be completed before the 1999 World Cup. Until then Dhaka stadium would be given to the cricketers. But instead the cricketers have been ousted from Dhaka stadium which is built mainly for cricket and has got all the facilities to hold international matches (it was given to the football federation). The cricketers were sent to the Mirpur stadium which was built for football and athletics.

"Gordan Greenidge is a rookie!" This was stated by Syed Ashraf Haque, General

Secretary of the BCB. Under the leadership of Greenidge Bangladesh not only became the ICC champion but also got the ODI status. So, how he (Greenidge) became a rookie overnight is a mystery to all of us.

The State Minister for Youth, Sports and Cultural Affairs, Obaidul Qader said at a function that the Bangladesh football team would play in the 2006 Football World Cup. How the Bangladesh team that failed to win the SAAF Football Tournament would play in the 2006 World Cup, we do not know.

Rather, it puzzles us.

Iqbal Ahmed
Dhaka - 1000

Racism in England

Sir, I would like to thank Dr Jaffar Ullah for writing a splendid article regarding the racism in England. I totally agree that in England, people are more reserved and tend not to associate with other nationalities besides their own. This view cannot be judged entirely upon racism.

However the article reflects certain points which I consider to be highly inappropriate from a certain point of view.

I lived in England for almost six and half years, as far as I can recall, I never felt at any point a victim of racial discrimination. Although there were times when one would consider oneself discriminated but not due to Racism. The East of London is where most Bangladeshis live — the famous Algate area. The Brick Lane to be precise have deshi restau-

rants, stores where local newspapers and magazines, local food and local made products all the way from Bangladesh are available. Even the street names are written in Bengali. One must be proud to call himself a Bangladeshi in that area. But what are the reactions of the English people living there?

Are they happy their part of their land taken away by immigrants? The area is located very close to the heart of London which means the streets and roads must be very well maintained, however the streets of Algate are considered one of the dirtiest in the whole of central London. Just like an average area in Dhaka where people obeys no law. Cars are parked in no-parking zones, footpaths are left uncleanness and it's not the cleaners to be blamed.

The point I am trying to state here is "Why blame only the English people, the Bangladeshis are equally at fault?"

I lived in Chelsea in an apartment block where most of my neighbours were European or English. Just like a typical Bangladeshi I did not have an English accent nor did I look European, but adapted myself to their environment. Therefore, I was treated with care and respect like the rest of the people lived in that building.

Similarly if a neighbour in my apartment block in Dhaka is a foreigner cooks pork chops and plays loud music and the whole building smells of pig, why should we tolerate that? It must be completely different then the rest of the residents in the block.

Arshad Hosen
USA