

Sagging Standard of Education

WHAT could be more poignant a testimony to the shocking slide in the country's educational standards than the fact that success rates in secondary and higher secondary examinations this year have been the lowest in five and three years respectively? At both levels, there has been a decrease of some 15 per cent in the passing rates — from 55.48 and 53.40 per cent to 40.36 and 37.47 per cent respectively. Now these two tiers of the country's public education system are left practically overburdened with some 316,702 and 536,283 failed examinees. In all likelihood, most of these students would reappear in next year's SSC and HSC examinations. So, the five education boards will have to deal with almost double the number of examinees that usually take SSC and HSC examinations every year. Such a huge load is bound to have a paralytic effect on the whole system. In other words, while the schools would have to reinvest some more academic hours towards readying the unsuccessful candidates for the tests, the boards will need to spend more in terms of money, time and energy to accommodate them in the examinations system. Overall, it is an unmitigated debacle and seriously calls for a rethink on our education strategy.

The harsh truth is that the system does not encourage quality education. We need to find out where the flaw lies. True, education accounts for nearly 15 per cent of the national budget. But, as percentage of GDP, it stands at just over two per cent, significantly lower than in other countries of South Asia where the average is at three per cent. Also worrisome is the fact that 97 per cent of the budgetary allocation for education is spent on teachers' salary, leaving virtually nothing for resource management, research, teachers' training etc.

Budgetary aspect aside, we cannot help blame the teachers for the debacle. Obviously, they are not living up to their responsibilities. Either they are not equipped and/or committed to impart knowledge to their students. They seem eager to give students private tuition in lieu of money, instead of facilitating the learning process of the students in the classroom.

Basically, the problem boils down to poor educational administration. The education ministry, therefore, should invite the leading educationists in the country for a brain-storming session to devise ways and means to ride out of the crisis at the earliest lest we are thrown by the wayside of a fast growing global mainstream.

Local Value Addition Pleaded

BANGLADESH government's attempted circumvention of the US pressure on her to withdraw restrictions on formation of trade unions in the Export Processing Zones (EPZs) has apparently met with disfavour from the US Trade Representative Office in Washington (USTRO). Chairman Rosenbaum of the GSP subcommittee of USTRO while reacting to our Export Processing Zone Authority's formula for selecting representatives to the proposed workers' welfare committees thought that this fell short of recognising workers' right of association thereby compelling him to recommend for a 50 per cent cancellation of GSP benefits to Bangladesh. The US President is the final authority in this matter and coincidentally our Prime Minister goes on a visit to the USA early next month. Abul Hassan, the State Minister for Foreign Affairs, who will accompany her to the US, is likely to try and persuade the GSP subcommittee chairman to see Bangladesh's point of view on the issue. Hopefully, even a partial withdrawal of the GSP facility will thus be averted.

That said, we now turn to the ups and downs in our story relating to the retention of GSP facility. Questions about use of child labour in the garment units and 'fake' certificates of origin etc had arisen in the past but thankfully we have solved these to the satisfaction of the US authorities, sometimes even becoming a model among developing countries like in the case of the accord on child labour.

Our suggestion to the government and the RMG sector leaders is that whilst we try not to miss out on the quotas we should not allow the passion for sheltered market to get the better of our best judgement, especially when the withdrawal of MFA as a whole is only four years away. Let us concentrate on building backward linkages to our garments industries for local value addition and self-reliance in the manufacturing processes with our export prices becoming competitive in an open, global market with no preferential access accorded to anyone.

Security for Businessmen

LEADERS of the Dhaka City Shopowners' Association (Dhaka Mohanagar Doka Malik Samity) met the DMP Commissioner at the Rajarbag Police Line auditorium on Saturday and apprised the police boss of the existing situation in city markets. They have very rightly identified three areas of concern for the shopping malls, arcades and centres: traffic jam, toll collection and terrorism. The delegation leaders informed the police commissioner that traffic jam discouraged the buyers from visiting the shopping centres thereby ruining their business. They complained against the traffic police on duty who do not bother to do their job but show interest in collecting tolls from the trucks. The leaders believe that if the traffic police performed their duties properly things would be different. The police allegedly do not also take into cognizance offences of toll collection and terrorism even though these might have been reported to them by the victims.

The business leaders also expressed their dissatisfaction over the speed of the investigation in the recently instituted Shipu murder case in which the son of a ruling party MP is allegedly involved. As the business leaders were talking to the DMP commissioner they were perhaps aware that another of them was shot and killed on Friday night. Such murders are being committed almost every day in the capital. Though the DMP commissioner assured the Association leaders of removing all difficulties of the shopowners through the joint efforts of the Association members and the police, he did not forget to blame the national press for misreporting. He does not believe the situation is bad. We think he should look around with his senses open to make his own judgement right.

A Storm in a Tea Cup

Finance Minister Yashwant Sinha has said that the complaint of rich states will be taken up separately. Still, the basic point remains. Why, after 53 years of independence, some states are too rich and some too poor?

states in the Union when he talks only about the developed states. Facts do not, however, indicate any discrimination. The Finance Commission has not changed the proportion of funds which the rich states have received in the past. The increased share of backward states is not at the expense of rich states. It has gone up because the commission has proposed the transfer of larger chunk of revenues, from 29.1 per cent to 32.45 per cent, nearly 3.35 per cent more, to the states. This has meant a hike of Rs. 11,000 crore — Rs. 54,000 crore against Rs. 43,000 crore.

If the rich do not help the poor, the entire philosophy of assistance by North (the West and Japan) to South (the third world) falls to the ground. Affluent countries are obliged to help poor nations. At so many international forums have we warned the developed countries that uneven economic growth in the world would lead to an explosive situation. Why don't we apply the same maxim to our own country? The situation is reaching an explosive stage in poor states. And one can see straws in the wind. UP and Assam have become ungovernable. Conditions in these states have deteriorated to such an extent that there is neither law, nor order. The aggravating factor is that they have practically no resources to fight poverty or

unemployment. Most people in Assam, Bihar and UP — Orissa and Rajasthan can be added to the list — continue to live on the periphery. How can they be blamed if successive chief ministers have failed to deliver the goods? There is corruption, graft and misuse of funds. It is not a fault of the inhabitants of these states. Rulers should be punished, not the ruled. The meeting, which Naidu held in New Delhi to unite the better of states, has not given

them the money they have used to develop themselves. Thanks to one banking system in the country, the deposits in the banks in Assam, Bihar, UP and Orissa have moved to the well-off states. What it actually boils down to is that the savings of the poor have benefited the rich. The World Bank and the IMF too have given most of their loans to affluent states like Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra. Naidu may say that he is seeking financial justice. But

come political. The ruling National Democratic Alliance (NDA) has 303 seats in the 546-member Lok Sabha. Naidu's Telugu Desam Party has 27.

This number is crucial. The withdrawal of its support from the NDA can begin a process which can bring down the entire edifice of government at New Delhi. The BJP, the dominant partner in the government, realises the danger. That is the reason why every effort is being made to play down the situation. Suggestions have been made in private to rich states that they will be compensated through one package or the other for the 'loss' they might suffer at the hands of the Finance Commission.

However, it looks as if the protest raised by the developed states is only a storm in a tea cup. The crisis, if any, is disappearing. Finance Minister Yashwant Sinha has said that the complaint of rich states will be taken up separately. Still, the basic point remains. Why, after 53 years of independence, some states are too rich and some too poor? After five decades planned economy — the Planning Commission approves annually a state's plan — there is more hiatus between developed and the underdeveloped than before. Rich states are getting richer and poor poorer. The government should appoint a commission of

economists, public men and other experts to find out reasons for the lopsided development and the mistakes committed. This assessment is more important than the constitution's tentacles day by day.

Many years ago, when the national income went up by 42 per cent after a couple of Five Year Plans, India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru raised a query:

To whom did the benefits go because the voice against hardships from all over had become louder than before? He appointed a committee headed by a 'progressive' P.C. Mahalanobis. The committee found "concentration of economic power in the private sector more than what could be justified as necessary on functional grounds." But it wondered "how far this is an inevitable part of the process of economic development, how far it can be justified in terms of economy of scale and full utilisation of scarce managerial and entrepreneurial resources." And how far the growth which has taken place is unhealthy and anti-social in its consequences.

Even though the radicals found the report grist for their propaganda mill, they could not make a convincing case against the private sector because the report itself was not categorical in its observations. However, the committee never found out why the sun of benefits did not shine on some areas. The present government should help the nation know.

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

even an iota of thought to the privations of people living in the conglomeration of backward states. They too are Indians. True, poor states, called the BIMARU, have far more population than they can afford to feed, teach or provide health-care. But what they need is a series of measures to control the birthrate, not the wall-like attitude to block any subvention to them. In fact, there has to be a leeway for the backward states to span some distance between them and the rich. Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Gujarat and Karnataka should also not

in the name of justice he is, unwittingly, strengthening the argument that backward states should be left to wallow in poverty and hunger. Their need is, in fact, greater. No doubt, Naidu has a clout. But this should not mean that his demand should reduce the ex-mando given to poor states. They too can turn back and say that their natural resources should not go beyond the boundaries of their states and that the money they deposit in the banks should stay there. The Prime Minister is naturally wary. The issue can be

Supplementary Report of Hamoodur Rahman Commission: Some Relevant Extracts

Third instalment

This is one of the most revealing parts of the Report contain as it does graphic description of Pak Army atrocities perpetrated with an extermination mentality and open admission by field commanders and officers to excesses committed on our soil in 1971.



Countless corpses like this lay everywhere on the streets of Dhaka and nearby towns. Photo: Dhaka 148-1971

"military action was based on use of force primarily, and at many places indiscriminate use of force was resorted to which alienated the public against the Army. Damage done during those early days of the military action could never be repaired, and earned for the military leaders names such as 'Changez Khan' and 'Butcher of East Pakistan.' While the military action was on, the then Martial Law Administration alienated the world press by unceremoniously hounding out foreign correspondents from East Pakistan, thus losing out in the propaganda war to the Indians completely." He went on to add: "on the assumption of command I was very much concerned with the discipline of troops, and on 15th of April, 1971, that is within four days of my command, I addressed a letter to all formations located in the area and insisted that loot, rape, arson, killing of people at random must stop and a high standard of discipline should be maintained. I had come to know that looted material had been sent to West Pakistan which included cars, refrigerators and air conditioners etc." When asked about the alleged killing of East Pakistani officers and men during the process of disarming, the General replied that he had heard something of the kind but all these things had happened in the initial stages of the military action before his time. He denied the allegation that he ever ordered his subordinates to exterminate the Hindu minority. He denied that any intellectuals were killed during December, 1971. He admitted that there were a few cases of rape, but asserted that the guilty persons were duly punished. He also stated that "these things do happen when troops are spread over. My orders were that there would not be less than a company. When a company is there,

there is an officer with them to control them but if there is a small picket like section, then it is very difficult to control. In Dacca jail we had about 80 persons punished for excesses." Another significant statement was made in this regard by Maj. Gen. Rao Barman Ali, Adviser to the Governor of East Pakistan namely: "Harrowing tales of rape, loot, arson, harassment, and of insulting and degrading behaviour were narrated in general terms.... I wrote out an instruction to act as a guide for decent behaviour and recommended action required to be taken to win over the hearts of the people. This instruction under General Khan's signature was sent to Eastern Command. I found that General Tikka's position was also deliberately undermined and his instructions ignored...excesses were explained away by false and concocted stories and figures."

About the use of excessive force on the night between the 25th and 26th March 1971, we have a statement from Brigadier Shah Abdul Qasim (witness No. 267) to the effect

that "no pitched battle was fought on the 25th of March in Dacca. Excessive force was used on that night. Army personnel acted under the influence of revenge and anger during the military operation." It has also been alleged that mortars were used to blast two Residence Halls, thus causing excessive casualties. In defence, it has been stated that these Halls were at the relevant time not occupied by the students but by Awami League insurgents, and were also being used as dumps for arms and ammunition stored by the Awami League for its armed rebellion.

Still another significant statement came from Brigadier Mian Taskeenuddin (Witness No. 282): "Many junior and other officers took the law into their own hands to deal with the so-called miscreants. There have been cases of interrogation of miscreants which were far more severe in character than normal and in some cases blatantly in front of the public. The discipline of the Pakistani army was generally understood had broken down. In a

command area (Dhoom Ghat) between September and October miscreants were killed by firing squads. On coming to know about it I stopped the same forthwith."

Maj. Gen. Nazir Hussain Shah, GOC 16 Division, conceded that "there were rumours that Bengalis were disposed of without trial." Similarly, Brigadier Abdul Qadir Khan (Witness No. 243) Commander 93 (AF) admitted that "a number of instances of picking up Bengalis did take place." Lt. Col. S. H. Bokhari, CO of 29 Cavalry, appearing as Witness no. 244, stated that "In Rangpur two officers and 30 men were disposed of without trial. It may have happened in other stations as well." An admission was also made by Lt. Col. S. M. Naeem (Witness No. 258) CO of 39 Baluch that "innocent people were killed by us during sweep operations and it created resentment amongst the public."

Lt. Col. Mansoorul Haq, GSO-I, Division, appearing as Witness No. 260, has made detailed and specific allegations as follows:

"A Bengali, who was alleged to be a Mukti Bahini or Awami Leaguer, was being sent to Bangladesh—a code name for death without trial, without detailed investigations and without any written order by any authorised authority."

Indiscriminate killing and looting could only serve the cause of the enemies of Pakistan. In the harshness, we lost the support of the silent majority of the people of East Pakistan.... The Comilla Canal massacre (on 27th/28th of March, 1971) under the orders of CO 53 Field Regiment, Lt. Gen. Yakub Malik, in which 17 Bengali Officers and 915 men were just slain by a flick of one Officer's fingers should suffice as an example.

There was a general feeling

of hatred against Bengalis amongst the soldiers and officers including Generals. There were verbal instructions to eliminate Hindus.

In Salda Nadi area about 500 persons were killed.

When the army moved to clear the rural areas and small towns, it moved in a ruthless manner, destroying, burning and killing. The rebels while retreating carried out reprisals against non-Bengalis.

Several civilian officers have also deposed in a similar vein, and it would suffice to quote here the words of Mr. Mohammad Ashraf, Additional Deputy Commissioner, Dacca, to whose evidence we have also referred earlier in another context. He stated that "after the military action the Bengalis were made aliens in their own homeland. The life, property, and honour of even the most highly placed among them were not safe. People were picked up from their homes on suspicion and dispatched to Bangladesh, a term used to describe summary executions.... The victims included Army and Police Officers, businessmen, civilian officers etc.... There was no Rule of Law in East Pakistan. A man had no remedy if he was on the wanted list of the Army.... Army Officers who were doing intelligence were raw hands ignorant of the local language and callous of Bengali sensibilities."

About the attitude of senior officers in this behalf, Brigadier Iqbalur Rehman Shariff (Witness no. 269), has alleged that during his visit to formations in East Pakistan General Gul Hassan used to ask the soldiers "how many Bengalis have you shot?"

The statements appearing in the evidence of Lt. Col. Aziz Ahmed Khan (Witness no. 276) who was Commanding Officer 8 Baluch and then CO 85 Mujahid Battalion are also directly relevant. "Brigadier Arbab also told me to destroy all houses in Joydepur. To a great extent I executed this order. General Niazi visited my unit at Thakurgaon and Bogra. He asked us how many Hindus we had killed. In May, there was an order in writing to kill Hindus. This order was from Brigadier Abdullah Malik of 23 Brigade."

The fourth instalment will appear tomorrow.

Exit the Communist!

How will Basu's exit influence Indian political scene in general and West Bengal in particular? What kind of impact would it put in other countries of the region where leftists are not much a force to reckon with, but are not irrelevant in political game?



support of all opposition groups in becoming the PM. The Samajwadi Dal in the critically important Uttar Pradesh led by Mulayam Singh Yadav and some smaller leftist parties in West Bengal like RSP and Forward Bloc opposed her. But Sonia, apparently being frustrated, also scuttled the secular centre-left opposition thought of Basu as prime minister. This time, the party was not unwilling to go to power, but it was largely for Sonia that Basu could not make it to South Bloel. Now at 84 and with a failing health, the West Bengal chief minister finds it difficult to carry out his official functions. Last month, he had to be rushed to a hospital in New Delhi after suddenly falling ill. For some time in the past, everyone expected that Basu would say adieu to politics, and this has come just two days ago. Notable communist leaders

are no strangers in the subcontinent. We heard of comrade Muzaffar Ahmed, S.A. Dange, EMS, Nambudripad, Moni Singh and others along with the big names like Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, M.N. Roy, Tridiv Roy Chowdhury and Khan Abdul Wali Khan. They did left politics in British days and later in countries that were cleaved from British-India under difficult circumstances. But few could earn national and international fame like Jyoti Basu who is considered as a most respected politician in India. As a young barrister, Basu was elected as a people's representative, as one of the three communist legislators, during the tag end of British rule, and he is leaving the scene at the twilight of his life.

How will Basu's exit influence Indian political scene in general and West Bengal in particular? What kind of impact would it cast in other countries

of the region where leftists are not much a force to reckon with but are not irrelevant in political game?

Certainly, Basu's retirement will affect the politics of India and intellectually developed West Bengal. Basu remained in the helm and succeeded in maintaining the cohesion of the Left Front for over two decades. He was instrumental in ensuring the victory of the Front in last several assembly elections. The combine is winning more than two-thirds of the total 42 seats for federal parliament Lok Sabha. Of late, a decline is discernible in the strength of the leftists. The new name that is being heard is Maitra Banerjee whose anti-left populism is attracting many, notwithstanding her own qualities as a simple politician. The question that is being asked in the Indian political quarters whether the leftists will be able to withstand the increasing influence of Maitra and her party Trinamul, a breakaway group from the Congress, when experienced Basu quits the scene. Undoubtedly, Basu's CPM, which heads the Front, will be under greater pressure to retain the political lead. Bhattacharya and other leaders whether from CPM or CPI or other partners of the

front lack the experience and charisma of Basu. And in the process it is not unlikely that they would be weakened. But the fact remains that the Front is an ideologically rich forum that has successfully mingled with the people. True, it has not succeeded in solving many problems of the state, particularly in urban areas, but overwhelming rural population are with it as they seldom question its sincerity in running the government. Achievements will speak high for the Front. Nevertheless, it will face tough resistance from Trinamul in the next assembly polls scheduled in less than one year's time. The political milieu of the largest democracy, India, will not be the same without Basu in the coming days.

We in Bangladesh owe a lot to this leader as he stood by our interests because of emotional attachment of linguistic and cultural proximity. Whether it was a deliberate ploy to expel many Indians on the pretext of "Bangladeshi" or settlement of the Ganges water issue, Basu took a rational position that helped us. Jyoti Basu says there is no retirement for a politician and more so for a communist. He will remain with the party activities. We pay our glowing tributes to the person who championed the causes of workers, farmers and toiling masses in addition to enhancing the image of Bengalis and people of this part of the world.