

New form of exam fraud

Take immediate punitive action

EXAMINATION fraud has acquired a monstrous new face. The market has been flooded with a range of miniature answer 'guides' to facilitate cheating in the ongoing SSC and forthcoming HSC examinations. While one set of books measures approximately three square inches each, another variety contains computer printouts and is even smaller in dimension. We are appalled at this heinous innovation, and no less by the fact that such unauthorised books are being sold in the open market. Bookshops, particularly in the northern districts, have evidently been reaping quick profits from students procuring these special publications prior to the examinations.

We would like to know why those responsible for this criminal offence have not been apprehended? The authorities should have been vigilant in any case and especially during the pre-examination period. By allowing the books to go on sale, the authorities have abetted in the violation of a standing rule about note books. These books are nothing but an open invitation to cheating.

We urge the government to investigate this matter at once. It must mete out exemplary punishment to those found guilty of carrying out this pernicious business. Printers, publishers, retailers and abettors in the administration should all be made accountable.

It is crucial for the government to act firmly, with disregard for vested quarters in the interest of preventing a further erosion of values amongst students. The basic issue of cheating during examinations has dogged us for years. We have deplored the practice and we do so again. Streamlining and modernising of examination methods are critical elements that must be addressed on a consistent and long-term basis by the Ministry of Education. The system has to become relevant, workable and free from malpractice.

The government must send a clear message that any criminal act, such as this new level of fraud, will be stopped in its tracks. It must reinforce this message with long-term reforms, if the promise of equitable and qualitative educational opportunities is to become a reality.

Vajpayee govt shaken

Opposition out to kill

THE videotapes of an alleged scam in fake defence deals, currently on public showing in India, have sent the BJP-led ruling coalition reeling, perhaps too violently for it to find its feet back again anytime soon. The chiefs of BJP and Samata Party which form the very backbone of the coalition government, have themselves suffered an expose through the footage released by an internet media company to a hugely receptive political audience in India. In the ensuing fall-out we have seen the resignation of BJP president Bangaru Laxman and the suspension of four top defence ministry and army officials taking place, the latter particularly indicating the tentacular nature of the 'bribery scandal'. A probe is imminent and many heads will soon start rolling in a democracy that has acquired an epical reputation for pursuing corruption cases to great lengths.

The ruling coalition may have received a body-blow in three areas. First of all, the 'clean image' plank of BJP appears in tatters. Secondly, allies in the coalition may not like to share the burden of controversy in view of their stake in the forthcoming state assembly polls. BJP's own prospects at the polls might have come under clouds, too. Moreover, it could trigger a relook at the equations between coalition partners in the government.

The opposition Congress can derive some vicarian pleasure from seeing the BJP in tantrums over corruption charges of which it had more than enough while being in power. There is no immediate threat to the BJP-led government in India unless it comes from the insiders of the coalition themselves. But the country needs to be wary of technology's march in vivifying alleged dubious deals before the public eye.

The budget speech

THE difference was palpable. George W Bush was more presidential in his budget speech than in his inaugural address. He showed greater poise, confidence and sense of humour.

The warmth exuding from his persona radiated all around bringing smile on every face and spreading a spirit of conviviality that is rare in the House of Congress. He almost bent himself backward to build bridges across the political divide and for the evanescent moment succeeded in disarming political opponents. All these were achieved with aplomb and a good deal of theatricality. Inviting the Democratic Mayor of Philadelphia (where he lost by a big margin) and a Hispanic couple (who would benefit from tax cut) was a smart public relations gesture. His forte in establishing rapport with mixed audience was on view even on a very formal occasion. It can be safely said that whatever happens to his policies, his persona will continue to win friends. Unfortunately, in real life deeds matter more than words, even when the latter evoke pristine laughter. More than any one else, the President of United States will be judged by the policies his administration pursue and the contributions they make to the general welfare of people, not only in America, but around the world.

In his budget speech President Bush has given clear indications about the directions his administration will be heading in all the spheres that are now in the public domain. One of the ideological imperatives that he will be working under is to reduce this domain to restore as

George W Bush in his budget speech came off with flying colours as an amiable and warm person. As President of United States he fell short of expectations of many in America and beyond.

people as is feasible. Therefore, it was a forgone conclusion that in respect of re-engineering government he will be more earnestly committed than his predecessor. He promised tax cut in his election campaign as the most visible and potent instrument of reducing public expenditure and through it the reach of the government. His budget proposals deliver on this promise with great rhetorical flourish. As an additional justification he has mentioned the conducive effect it will have on the current economic slow down. The question that has to be asked here is: who benefits and when? From the tax cut proposals it is not difficult to see that people and business in the upper income bracket will benefit more than the middle and lower income groups. Notwithstanding the rhetoric used, there is no mistaking the reality that his constituency here is the big business and the rich who provided his campaign fund. Having invested in their chosen candidate corporate America will be getting its dividends in big dollops. For this reason tax cut proposals are not only inequitable but reek of sleaze, albeit in legal garb. As regards its impact on recession, it is common sense economics that by the time tax cuts have their effect the recession may well be over. Because of time-lag tax cut is not an effective and important instrument in countering economic downturn. On the other hand,

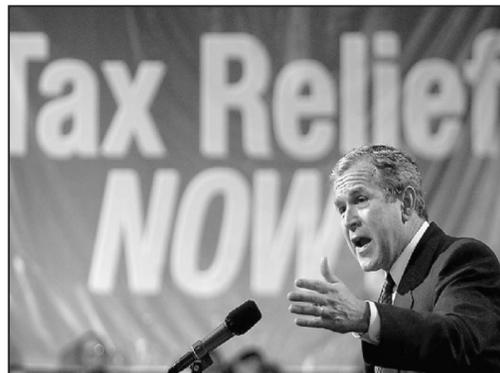
of fund that could be spent in such critical areas as education, health, medicare and providing assistance to the local government.

It was thought that in view of the tight contest in the election some of the major policy differences would be narrowed by President Bush in order to reflect bi-partisan spirit and respond to popular verdict. The budget proposal on social security disappoints this expectation. True to his campaign manifesto and declarations, the Budget allows part of the social security contributions to be retained by the individuals for investment in stocks, bonds or whatever so that they can earn more than the government does on pen-

tion here about the soundness of individual investment decisions and a constant, if not upward rising, level of income stream from such individual investments. One does not have to be a cynic to know that this investment will be fraught with such uncertainty and wild swings in income earnings that individuals with small income may end up poorer at the end. On the one hand, the Budget proposal through tax cut does not allow the government to contribute more to the social security fund and on the other, through individual investment will fail to guarantee even a constant level of earning on investment. With rising number of pensioners and dwindling social

fund into public (till it is disbursed to pensioners) and private (the amount allowed to the contributors for private investment) is a recipe for telescoping a disaster that is waiting to happen. There is no element of gambling here either as the odds are so patently stacked against the stakeholders. Obviously, this proposal was incubated in an economy cresting on the wave of high-tech shares to give more money to individuals to join the bandwagon. The fact that the dot-com bubble has burst making many companies bankrupt seems to have been overlooked. Along with tax cut, this move is also expected by the Bush Administration to jumpstart the economy through NASDAQ, the standard bearer of the new economy. If overheated activity in the stock market demonstrated what Fed's chairman Greenspan called "irrational exuberance," the budget proposals aimed to promote such investment are nothing short of wayward optimism.

Perhaps in deference to the man who nearly defeated him, (or perhaps actually did so) President Bush took a bow to environmental issues in general terms. But when it comes to policy specifics he contradicted the pledge with a sleight of hand. Pointing out that there was a gap between energy demand and supply and asserting that America should be self sufficient in energy, he disclosed his Administration's



Sermons on the walls

IF the walls of Dhaka were pages from a book, one could put them together and call it scripture. Read the graffiti on these walls and your skin will crawl at the scepticism that you may not have read anything holier ever before. *Sample 1: Everyone must earn his income by honest means. Sample 2: He is the most unfortunate amongst us who doesn't love his country.* If Moses had brought only Ten Commandments from the stones of Mount Sinai, the muses are producing many times more in a month on these walls.

Which reminds us of the Potemkin villages. Marshall Grigory Potemkin, one of the more artful lovers of Catherine the Great, accomplished many things during his long domination of Russia, but he is best remembered for an illusion. To impress Catherine with the prosperity she had brought to her subjects, he is said to have built handsome fake villages all along the route of her tour through southern Russia in 1787.

The walls create a similar illusion of a "moral village" for those who live and walk in Dhaka. But the abundance of moral speaks on murals are ineluctable props, which hide the sprawling density of charades behind them. Let us start with the men whose quotes are written on the walls as dictums for the rest of us. Those who ask us to shun violence resort to it most. Those who advise us to earn legitimate incomes are known to have made fortunes by unfair means. These

men speak of patriotic zeal as virtue, yet compromise its tenets in everything they do, except pretension.

Thus the sermons on the walls signify, if anything, the wall-mounted version of the lip service. Not only truth is hunted and trapped on those walls by these cunning men, but it is also caged and displayed like circus animals. How can terrorists tell us about the rule of law, profligates counsel on modesty and scoundrels coach on virtues of

jeopardy of doublespeak because it promotes double standard. When politicians double up as preachers, it dilutes piety in the periphery of political convenience. The opposite is true if it happens other way around. Piety is distorted by political passion when religious men interfere in political matters.

The words on the walls hang in the uneasy balance between sanctimony and sacrilege. In one sense, these words are political lampoons of religious sentiments.

time in history human beings through the power of their reason grasped truth of science and natural rights, the truth, which made them free. But the mural morals in Dhaka are holding that truth captive, undermining the intelligence and morality of ordinary people, this time not by king or the church but by their own elected representatives. What is it but indoctrination with false belief if people are asked to adopt what leaders are apt to

which set men apart from beasts? Do they realise that what they are doing in the excitement of politics are detrimental to the same ideals which make them leaders and the rest of us followers? John Adams, 2nd President of the USA, warns that no living man with power ought to be trusted so that the public liberty wouldn't be endangered. The writings on the walls merely confirm the truth of what he uttered. Politicians may be unscrupulous to make promises they don't keep, but they seldom make such a stupid show of their dubious characters.

Of late, there has been an interesting inscription on the wall of Bangladesh Secretariat on the Press Club side, which says that falsity in politics may bring temporary victories but the end result is disaster. One wonders whether the parliament member who is quoted for saying it actually believes in the import of his own words. Or, is it the Freudian trip of a guilty conscience to the cathartic vestibules of his subconscious mind?

Politicians write no more on the walls lest people start reading between the lines. Nothing lasts forever including the writings on the walls. But everything you write or say might be held against you in the election time. Your best hope is that people shall not remember. Or, you can erase everything you have written on those walls. I would say you go for the latter, because people may not forget that you have taken them for a ride.

Does it occur to anyone that the truths, which are written in falsehood on the walls of Dhaka by political leaders, who take well-meaning aphorisms and turn them into jokes, are the ramparts of our civilisation? Does it occur to them that they are tinkering with the most essential values of human society,

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dececy? Truth has the power to set straight perspectives like glasses adjust for declining eyesight. And perspectives are what shape the sanctity of souls, which get desecrated when truth is defiled.

So those who pontificate on the walls try to do the absurd. They attempt to create a moral high ground from the lowest points of their own characters. There is a particular part of the city where the walls are so laden with righteous words that it would give the impression of walking through the hallowed corridors of a cloistered world. Several weeks ago the face of the man whose quotes decorate

exasperated guardians, who wait outside various examinations centres during the Board examinations. He does all these in addition to posting his messages on the walls as if to scrounge up every opportunity to uphold virtue with the sincere intentions of a populist leader.

There is a third one who sends gifts to his voters besides having his words written on the walls. During the last Ramadan, he had sent packets of date fruits to his constituents with a note pasted on the top. The note reminded people of the blessings of Ramadan and urged them to fast. There is a double

Seen from another angle, these can be viewed as religious exploits of political passion. But one thing obvious in the mishmash of one with another is that it negates the force, which had brought about the Age of Enlightenment. The predominant impulse of that Age was that the King and the Church had indoctrinated the public with false beliefs to serve the interests of these ruling institutions. The false beliefs were meant to substantiate the inferiority of the ordinary people, in intelligence and morality, to royalty and the clergy. What had made that impossible task possible was the new development when for the first

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PHOTORIAL

Readers are invited to send in exclusive pictures, colour or black and white, of editorial value, with all relevant information including date, place and significance of subject matter. Pictures received will not be returned.

Health Ministry should stop these quacks!



WE THANK OUR READER, AZIZ AMIRUL FROM UTTARA, FOR SENDING IN THIS PHOTOGRAPH. WE WOULD WELCOME CONTRIBUTIONS FROM OTHER READERS!

Without requisite qualifications or licence to operate, tooth 'doctors' perform unhygienic and dangerous procedures on a range of patients who visit them in the Lalbagh area. The authorities turn a blind eye to these quacks, even though their 'treatment' often leads to serious complications on their mainly poor clientele. The Health Ministry owes each citizen the right to basic health treatment. How can it allow this malpractice to continue unchecked? Does it have any sense of duty towards common people?

The Daily Star and the Prime Minister

There is no question about the latent talent of Mr Omar Karim ("The Daily Star and the Prime Minister" February 25). In spite of losing 90 per cent credibility after The Daily Star editor Mahfuz Anam pointed out the gross factual mistake about the 'AL TV programme', I must admit, Mr Karim's English is admirable. Though I am not sure I can say the same about his ideas.

Mr Karim writes: "The fact that almost 30 years after independence we have this backdated and outmoded debate between the pro and anti liberation sides shows how backward thinking and rearward linking a nation this is." But in the preceding sentence Mr Karim says: "If you are not an Awami League partisan and possess an anti-Indian outlook, you will not be considered a pro-liberation type, even if you actively participated in the liberation war."

I wonder if Mr Karim would consider his own preceding statement as an example of the backdated and outmoded debate he decries? I believe that this discussion would not, and should not perish as a backdated one. If we, as a nation want to stand on our own feet, we have to know who amongst us are pro-liberation and who are not. How would people who didn't support the birth of Bangladesh, in the first place, be able to 'look for avenues to enhance the conditions of the people'?

I am not saying that all we should do is debate this matter. We should improve our condition through trade, economic development etc.

But why should we disregard the fact that people who didn't want Bangladesh once will never give even their one percent for the progress of the nation? Is it not important to identify these people?

Another statement by Mr. Karim that I find absolutely bizarre is "There are fundamentalists even in the US, which has a long tradition of secularism. These fundamentalists want to turn the US into a Christian nation. Their zealotry, and all their huff and puff is confronted generally by the public, government and the media by benign neglect. That has been a very effective method."

Mr. Omar suggests that we should not confront the fundamentalists 'by criminalising their activities or banning their ideological preaching.' Then what should we do?

Does Mr Karim live in a dreamland? Is he completely blind? Has he not seen how aggressive and dangerous our fundamentalists can be? Has he not read about US fundamentalists killing a police officer inside a church? Has he heard of US fundamentalists giving a 'fatwa' to thump a woman with 100 stones just because she has fallen in love? No he has not. Then why in the world is he trying to convince us to follow the people in the US in encountering these heinous elements?

I hope he has an answer.

Priyo Khan
Student
North South University
Dhaka

The Daily Star and the Prime Minister

government unable to come to grips with the situation. Why has the chief of the regional council, Shantu Larma, been kept out of the negotiations? Is he not the most appropriate person to communicate with the abductors?

This incident would become a major embarrassment for the ruling party if it is not resolved soon, in a peaceful manner.

A citizen
Dhaka

Minister's response

When the water resources minister Abdur Razzaq was asked on a BTV programme named 'Janatar Adalat' on February 8, why he had led the violent demonstrations after the verdict of the Bangabandhu murder case, he said that the "people's opinion was not reflected in the high court verdict". The minister further said "We want justice and appropriate trial". We do not understand what the honourable minister meant by 'justice' and 'appropriate' trial. A judge is not a person but an institution. The wise judges gave their verdict according to evidence presented by the advocates of the plaintiff and the defendant. It is not a people's matter while in court. After the verdict, AL activists went on the rampage ransacking shops and firing gun shots causing at least one people's death. A BCL armed cadre with a gun in his hand was photographed in different dailies the following day. But the minister did not utter a single word about it. We should be sincere and responsible in words and action.

Rezaul Huq
Kansas City, USA

Hostage drama

We are bewildered and frustrated by the continuing stalemate between the abductors of three foreigners in the Chittagong Hill Tracts and the government. It is almost a month since the three consultants were kidnapped. The government seemed to have found a way to enable the release of the hostages, but apparently, it was aborted in the last minute by a so-called media 'leak' about a ransom having been paid to the minister concerned.

Why is it taking the government so long to find a way out of this problem? Now, there is even more confusing information. It all smacks of something untoward and unsavoury going on in that area, with the

Peter H
Chittagong