

Cheats galore

Time to reassess education testing systems

THIS year's Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) examinations had just the kind of a start perhaps we have all had anticipated and, needless to say, dreaded. That we could foresee mass cheating, wholesale expulsions and daylong violence at some centres on the first day of the examination has had nothing to do with clairvoyance. Such devious and despicable practices routinely feature in the secondary and higher secondary certificate examinations and, for that matter, any other public testing programme these days. We have seen this happen in the Secondary School Certificate (SSC) examinations this year, last year, the year before and as far back as one can remember. The authorities have tried out one measure after another to have some sort of a check on cheating, evidently without any success.

The situation has exponentially deteriorated cheats and their cohorts have grown in strength and confidence. Meanwhile, political elements and their musclemen have chimed in, causing complete system failure at most of the examination centres in the country. The reality is: except for a handful of centres at the heart of the capital and other major cities, SSC, HSC and Degree examinations have become a charade, where invigilators and other enforcement people play the onlooker, as examinees adopt unfair means. Even worse, at some places, invigilators and law enforcement people (police in particular) play the cohort to the corrupt practice, obviously not by choice but by compulsion. They have well and truly become the weaker side, now.

Against such a grim backdrop, would one be wrong in demanding discontinuation of SSC, HSC and Degree examinations? Maybe not. The government should wake up to the fact that the country's public testing programmes have become a major farce and completely lost credibility due to all-pervasive cheating. As we have said before, the time has come to give our education system a long, hard look. Also, we need to look into the social implications of the steadily growing phenomenon. It is no longer an issue of enforcement failure and should, therefore, be viewed from a different, broader angle and effective, appropriate measures taken at the earliest.

Another dengue tragedy looms

Mount a cleanliness campaign now

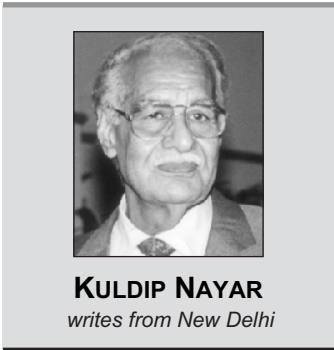
DENGUE fever has struck again. Four cases have been discovered in the city and there is apprehension that there may be unidentified cases elsewhere. After last year's experience, in which at least 93 people, mostly children, died from dengue fever, the least that we would expect from the Ministry of Health was that it would be better equipped to prevent a tragedy this year. It seems the Ministry has not learned from experience.

A year after the directorate of Disease Control was assigned to prepare the "National Guideline for Dengue Management," no such brochure is available. A standard for blood platelet level has not been defined and three platelet detectors, enabling separation of platelets from the blood for treatment of patients, already funded by the World Health Organisation, are yet to be installed.

The most effective preventive measure is to attack the root of the problem. Neighbouring countries faced with dengue outbreaks have reaped salubrious benefits by mounting sustained, grassroots level campaigns to clean up the breeding grounds of the Aedes mosquito. But far from undertaking such a move, our Ministry has been heard passing on the buck to ordinary citizens. We find this attitude callous and negligent. Environmental cleanliness is a public health issue that government must initiate and support. Ordinary citizens have to be made conscious of the pitfalls of providing stagnant reservoirs of water and dark breeding spots for the Aedes mosquito. Citizens must be mobilised and supported by government agencies at all levels.

The Ministry must not underestimate the dengue scourge. It has failed to provide appropriate tools, fill the gap in critical training material for the medical community and it is continuing to abdicate its responsibility to lead a comprehensive cleanliness campaign across the land. Dengue may wreak havoc on innocents this year as well, unless the Ministry of Health wakes up to its responsibilities.

Rewards and reservations



KULDIP NAYAR
writes from New Delhi

FOLLOWING the norms of democracy, the constituent assembly in India, justifiably, tagged the seats in the Lok Sabha and the assemblies to the number of voters in a particular state. The larger secured more members and the smaller less. Little did the constitution framers realise at that time that such a provision would reward the states without family planning discipline.

This has, indeed, happened. Over the years, Bihar, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and UP have increased their strength in the Lok Sabha and the assembly on the basis of population. All the five states are Hindi-speaking. They are situated in the north of Vindhya Hills and the states are known as BIMARU. The non-Hindi speaking states have felt irritated over their getting more seats.

The 2000 Census only confirms that the Hindi-speaking states continue to proliferate in population. They beat the country's annual growth rate of 1.9 per cent. Bihar's increase is 2.85 per cent, Haryana's 2.47, Madhya Pradesh's 2.18, Rajasthan's 2.49 per cent and UP 2.3 per cent. In contrast, the five states down the Vindhyas, are below the annual growth rate.

Andhra Pradesh registers 1.3 per cent, Karnataka 1.59 per cent, Kerala 0.90 per cent, Orissa 1.48 per cent and Tamil Nadu 1.6 per cent.

Incidentally, the yearly growth of population in Assam, which is supposed to have changed its demographic complexion because of illegal migration from Bangladesh, is only 1.73 per cent, below the country's average. It proves the hollowness of the state governor's alarming report that the people from

ing Committee of the Home Ministry, members from the Hindi-speaking states were as vociferous in their support as were members from the non-Hindi speaking states. None favoured the idea of population being the criterion.

Unfortunately the principle not to link seats with the population has not been applied to the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. The reserved seats for them may increase, lessening the number of seats in the general category. This is

across the border are taking over Assam.

It is clear that the increase and decrease of seats in the Lok Sabha or the assemblies on the basis of population was not fair from the beginning. More voters should claim more representation. But a way has to be found if the dictum distorts the system.

Parliament has done well to amend the constitution and freeze the number of seats at the strength prevailing today. Still, Uttar Pradesh has 85 seats in the Lok Sabha and Bihar 54. The amendment evoked no opposition from any political party in parliament. Both houses approved it unanimously even during the stalled proceedings in the last session.

I recall when the draft amendment was placed before the Stand-

bound to create bad blood between the upper and lower castes. Tagging seats to the population is as reprehensible in the case of dalits and tribal people as in others. The National Democratic Alliance has played politics.

To my surprise, most MPs are unwilling to join issue on the point of watering down any concession for the dalits and the tribal people. Political considerations have come to weigh in the minds of members so much that their attitude is dictated by what is good for the caste, not the society. Political parties do not want to take a stand which would annoy the scheduled castes and the tribes even remotely.

This brings me to the larger question of reservation. The extension to the law is given by parliament every 10 years, without any debate.

It seems to suit all parties, which have developed a vested interest in reservation because of electoral advantages.

When the legislation for extension of reservations in jobs and admissions to professional institutions came up for discussion a few months ago, I appealed to Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, who was present in the house, to put a time limit to the reservations on the basis of caste. Let it be even 50 years, two per cent tapering off

who constitute the creamy layer, are too powerful to allow anything which may give benefits to the lower half among the dalits.

With reservations for the backward, the problem has got still more tangled. A bigger front in favour of reservations has developed, although the dalits and the backward are generally at war with each other. The demand for reservation on one pretext or the other is increasing in the country, creating a strong feeling of inequality among

in the US to accommodate the coloured, is understandable in a democratic society but not permanent legislation on the basis of caste. Still worse is the reservation in promotions because the promotees under the rules have neither expertise nor acceptance. This is affecting work in government offices. Resentment against all this is rising. The sense of denial, accumulating day by day, may reach flash point one day. It may wash away all kinds of reservation. The nation must have the best. That is the reason why the armed forces have not accepted reservations.

The bug of reservation has lately bitten some Muslim leaders, if not organisations. Once again there is the same old talk which one heard before partition. They seem to forget how the Hindu-Muslim problem got aggravated in the wake of separate electorates introduced by the British. The gap has not yet been bridged.

The unkindest cut comes from a Sikh member of the National Minorities Commission. He has asked the MPs of his community to join hands to demand more representation in different institutions in the country. The safeguards, which have been guaranteed to the minorities in the constitution, are the nation's obligation towards them. But representation on the basis of community may spell ruin to the nation's unity. If every community wants to articulate its own agenda, what happens to the country?

It is sad that parochial thinking is spreading all over the country — sometimes in the name of community, sometimes caste or something else. This is telling upon the country's pluralistic thinking, ethos and the character of the state. India may disintegrate if the trend is not stopped immediately.

Bangladesh has to decide what degree of independence it wants

DR. FAKHRUDDIN AHMED
writes from Princeton

N O nation is truly independent. The United States has the highest degree of independence. Whenever Uncle Sam commands, everyone falls in line. When was the last time anyone voted against the will of the United States in the UN Security Council? As President Clinton once remarked, a Nyet is not necessarily a Nyet anymore (as long as the US keeps pumping dollars into Russia). All-powerful America, however, is not omnipotent, as the de-nosed spy plane that still remains grounded in China testifies.

America treads carefully on other powerful nations. During the cold war America went to extraordinary lengths to avoid upsetting the Soviet Union. These days, China is treated with kid gloves even when they detain Americans on a spy plane for an inordinately long time and even when they continue to hold the plane. The gloves come off when America deals with weaklings such as Iraq and Afghanistan. Every super or not-so-super power loves a weak opponent or a weak neighbour. That is why Israel wants a demilitarized Palestinian state and America wants a de-fanged Iraq. Only Bangladesh can decide whether it is in its own interest to be a strong neighbour or a weak neighbour.

America exerts its supremacy over its Canadian and European allies in a more subtle way. The net result is the same: when the Yanks speak the Canadians and the Europeans listen. Subtly breeds subtlety. At the height of Quebec separatist movement in the early 1980s, TIME magazine, that world dominating American institution, suggested that if the province of Quebec were to secede from Canada, there would be tremendous pressure within English-speaking Canada to join the United States. To that an English-speaking Canadian responded: "Canada is not interested in acquiring fifty more provinces!"

Europe realized that it could never compete with America politically and economically as individual nations. Since the 1960s, in a systematic, yet irreversible manner they

began pooling their resources as the European Community and recently have been quite successful in taking on America economically. As the European Parliament becomes more powerful, the parliament in member nations weakens. As the Euro glitters, the pound sterling loses its luster. All Community members sacrifice more and more of their sovereignty to become competitive politically and economically with their cousin across the Atlantic, willingly and subtly.

There is nothing subtle about the recent clashes between Indian and Bangladesh border forces. Sparks have been flying from the public on both sides. Not surprisingly, the docile Bangladesh government has developed laryngitis in the immediate aftermath of the incident. What is

an American.") Like the Indians, Bangladeshis have this instinctive affinity to anything subcontinental. Even during the Pakistani era when officially the relations between India and Pakistan were frosty, we always rooted for the Indian cricket team whoever they may have been playing. These days, although we may have our favourites when two sub-continental teams meet, whenever a subcontinental team plays an "outsider" we all fall in line and support the subcontinental team. We have so much to build upon; unfortunately events such as the recent border skirmish detract from our commonality.

I have no problem with the threatening letter of the unknown Indian that was published in The Daily Star, which seemed to have

for its assistance during Bangladesh's liberation war, both diplomatic and military, as well as for hosting millions of Bangladeshi refugees. To suggest, however, that India's motives were entirely humanitarian (as the West's intervention in Bosnia and Kosovo), and that India stood to gain nothing by helping to dismember its arch enemy (Pakistan) is an insult to every Bangladeshi's intelligence. Simply put, in 1971 India's and Bangladesh's interests coincided. India also has to understand something about the Bangladeshis. In spite of their extremely annoying propensity to greet strangers in Urdu, and Bangladesh's oft-expressed anger for the criminality of the Pak soldiers in 1971, present day Pakistanis in the West give the

that India is exploiting Bangladesh economically, and by amassing troops at the border threatening Bangladesh militarily.

Bangladeshis suspect that because of Bangladesh's perceived weakness, like a piranha India has been nibbling away at Bangladesh's border over the last 30 years, notwithstanding Mujib-Indira Border Pact of 1974. Bangladeshis also feel that India's shifting policies towards Bangladesh depending on which party is in power is tantamount to interference in its internal affairs. Although more Indians died in the recent border skirmish, many, many more Bangladeshis have been killed by the BSF forces over the last few years. Further, Bangladeshis living at the border complain that the BSF personnel

over 50 years. The way Mr. Advani was threatening Pakistan after India went nuclear in 1998, it appeared that Pakistan would have been in real trouble if it had not gone nuclear itself. The elder partner often times does not realize its patronizing attitude. During Bangladesh's liberation war Pakistan's former President Ayub Khan is reported to have said: "We did not dictate to East Pakistan. (Sycophant Governor) Monem Khan was free to do what he wanted!" A friend should be able to speak to his friend frankly. If India and Bangladesh cannot trust each other, they have to work harder at friendship. High-handedness by either side does not cement friendship, it only breeds resentment.

When Bangladesh purchased MIG-29s a couple of years ago, the nay sayers argued that since a few MIG-29s were not going to make Bangladesh a super military power there was no point in purchasing them. That is as idiotic an argument as saying that unless we can be like Einstein there is no point in studying physics. A nation's defensive capabilities have to be improved incrementally and through unwavering commitment. There are oceans of gap between Bangladesh's defensive capabilities and that of the United States. Our aim should not be to emulate the US but to acquire as strong a defence as we possibly can so as to deter any aggression. Bangladesh does not have any design on Indian territory; it would be nice to hear India say that it does not covet Bangladeshi territory either. These days a nation is not necessarily threatened only by its neighbours. Those who bombarded Serbia into submission first in Bosnia and then in Kosovo were not its neighbours. Bangladesh will remain as independent as the strength of its defensive capabilities.

surprising is that the usually vociferous Bangladeshi press is also suffering from a case of amnesia, possibly induced by the government. Therefore, it falls upon hapless columnists to put things in perspective.

There is no reason why Bangladesh and India should be anything but friends. We share the same history, culture, food, heroes and heroines and root for each other's sports teams. We grew up adoring the romantic movie pair Suchitra-Uttam, with Lata Mangeshkar, Sandhya Mukherjee and Hemanta Mukherjee providing our musical nourishment. Of course we all watch Hindi movies. Rabindranath Tagore remains our literary guru and his poem "Shonar Bangla" our national anthem. We look so alike that abroad we are always mistaken for "Indians" to which we politely dissent adding that we are actually Bangladeshis. (The same way Canadians demonstrate their negative nationalism by saying, "I am not

rubbed many Bangladeshis the wrong way. I salute the Indian for expressing the ire of his country in such blunt terms. (In this country if a writer wishes to keep his identity secret, his letter is not published). I am equally proud of all the Bangladeshis who wrote to protest his letter, although I believe that a letter from an anonymous source does not merit such scrutiny. I admire any Indian who puts the interest of India first, just as I commend Bangladeshis who do the same for their country. Where I have a problem is when a "Bangladeshi" starts putting the interest of India ahead of Bangladesh.

India should take a closer look at itself: why does it have border disputes with so many of its neighbours (such as China, Pakistan, Bangladesh) and even when they don't have border disputes, why do the smaller neighbours (such as Nepal and Sri Lanka) nurse genuine grievances against them. Bangladesh will remain eternally grateful to India

impression that they like the Bangladeshis. By and large Indians abroad echo similar feelings. As the recent border episode has illustrated, however, at times India is not sure what to make of us: are we Muslim fanatics, mini-Pakistan or mini-Afghanistan? The truth is we are none of the above. Bangladesh is a Muslim-majority moderate nation, whose history is deeply rooted in respect for culture, literature, ethnic minorities and other religions. The easiest way to upset Bangladeshis is to attempt to exploit them. When Pakistanis began exploiting us, the fact that we shared the same religion did not stop us from fighting them and expelling them from our land. (Very recently a Pakistani diplomat was expelled from Bangladesh for disrespectful utterances about Bangladesh's liberation war.) Although Bangladeshis have the highest regard for India, currently there is an all-pervading feeling in Bangladesh

routinely infiltrate Bangladesh, threaten and kill people, and steal from Bangladeshis. An inquiry should be conducted into the mutilation of the dead Indians. It is hard for me to believe that the Bangladesh Rifles personnel did that. There should also be an international inquiry about the recent incident, which I understand India is unfortunately unwilling to sanction.

Human beings have an innate respect for power. As children we are totally obedient to our parents. As we grow older and acquire some power of our own, obedience gives way to discussion. We do not give much thought to a street urchin until he says that he has a gun, when we give him full attention. We adjust our behaviour according to the stature of the person we are dealing with. So too do nations. No powerful nation hesitates to trample over the right of a nation unable to defend itself. Without strong defence Taiwan and Israel would not have survived for

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

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.



STAR PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Mother's anxiety
An anxious mother watches over her sick child, suffering from diarrhoea. There are hundreds more like her. At present, about 400 diarrhoea victims are being treated at the ICDDR,B, many of them children. Year after year, diarrhoea breaks out in almost epidemic form, mainly because of contaminated water and poor sanitation facilities. How many more years will we have to wait before the government takes concrete steps to bring safe water and adequate sanitation to all citizens?

Blaming Bangladesh

After reading Subhobroto's letter, it was obvious to me that he belongs to a fundamentalist group and lacks any sense of logic. I am a Bangladeshi living in the USA and I would like to say that people like Subhobroto belong to a minority group and most Indians I have met do not think like him, rather like Bangladeshi people. I would appreciate if my fellow Bangladeshis just disregard this Subhobroto's letter as an insignificant and politically motivated one, thus avoiding any sort of unnecessary "bashing-each-other-out-of-nothing" and focus more on other constructive issues.

Deshi
California, USA

I am shocked at the opinion that Subhobroto made calling us ungrateful. It is shocking because the opinion is not of an individual rather an echo of a typical Indian attitude. Whenever the Indians find an issue they scornfully remind us about 1971. Why don't they understand that in 1971 Bangladesh was merely a province of Pakistan and now it is a sovereign country. The year 1971 and 2001 are not the same.

As an independent nation, first we have to look after our own interest. We have given Berubari, waters of the River Padma, tolerated BSF invasion, kidnappings, pushbacks in the past along with India's insidious political, cultural and press aggression. Still we have to show gratitude! Do we have to show gratitude as long as Bangladesh exists?

As an independent nation, we have the right protect our border from any intruder, be it India or any other country.

Md. Aminul Islam Khan Rassel
Dhaka University

We are not ungrateful

This refers to the letter by "An Indian Bengali" ("Ungrateful nation", May 7). It would appear that the likes of the "True Indian" and "Indian Bengali" prefer working anonymously while condemning Bangladeshi character. If any of these writers were fortunate enough to have any connection with our War of Liberation in 1971, they must have known the valour and courage of our ill equipped soldiers and the young men of *Mukti Bahini* who were used as the vanguard of many attacks and in many cases as a shield against the Pakistani forces.

That is raw courage and reflects

the Bangladeshi character, unlike the characteristics we saw in 1984 when over 2500 innocent Sikhs were slaughtered for the fault of one man, over 2000 helpless Muslims were butchered for protesting the demolition of six hundred years old Babri mosque, Harijan villages were burned down, to name just a few.

However, the Indian help for our independence was indeed an investment, as according to Mahfuz Anam, the editor of this daily, ("India-Bangladesh relations: a wake-up call" May 6), a \$3 billion market for Indian goods, not to mention the thousands of crores rupees worth of equipment and materials removed from the soil of Bangladesh immediately after the war in 1971.

And yet we are called ungrateful? We would like to see if India can divert its attention to Myanmar (Burma) for better dividing! And before it starts dreaming of an independent Chakmaland, why doesn't India show us the way by giving independence to Kashmir and the areas called the Seven Sisters consisting of Mizoram, Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland etc where people are fighting against Indian atrocities and have waged a movement for their freedom? Maybe then they will become better

partners for India.
Ashfaq Chowdhury
Banani, Dhaka

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This is in reference to the letter "Ungrateful nation". If we look at the history of India, we will find that it was liberated from the English by the then Indian population (Indians, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis). What recognition does India give to its sub-continental brothers who helped them getting released from the yoke of slavery?

As for how the BSF soldiers were treated, if the Indians were aware of the border situation they would know that the BSF guards have made endless incursions into the Bangladesh side harassing, raping and killing innocent villagers. They were caught during their attack and were victims of a mob lynching, a concept quite popular in India as well (Bombay riots). And if Bangladeshis are judged by the actions of illiterate villagers, then they are no better than them.

In an age where progress is only possible through cooperation and integration as seen in Europe and the expansion of EU, those who believe in the ideology of separation and distinction will not succeed. Bangladesh is a large market for Indian commodities and India is a

logistical partner for Bangladesh. Don't let isolated incidents and ignorance deter the path of progress and cooperation for a better future and a sound relationship between the two countries. A great nation is one that can show restraint and understanding, not intolerance and ignorance.

A concerned individual
UK

Why revive nuclear power plant?

The prime minister's announcement to go ahead with the revival of the Roorpur nuclear power plant (April 11) is incomplete, as it does not tell the nation why Bangladesh is going against the global trend of discouraging such constructions. Many developed nations are closing down their existing nuclear plants. Why are we entering this controversial field deliberately?

Are we going to buy some second-hand plant lifted from another location that will be dumped on Bangladesh at a throw-away price? The MIG 29 stories are fresh in our minds.

A Husnain
Dhaka