

Cheating in HSC exams

Overhaul the system

THE appalling and widespread scenes of violence on the second day of the HSC examinations speak of an affliction so deep and pervasive that the mind reels in repugnance and horror. More than 9,000 examinees and 15 teachers have been expelled and at least 120 people injured. Mobs of examinees have turned on law enforcers and administrators with such righteous indignation as if to say that cheating is their unquestionable right.

It is a national disgrace. Not only is it undertaken in cold blood, with pre-planned subterfuge in which examinees are actively supported by guardians, teachers and 'suppliers' of cheating material, but also any attempt to thwart the evil design is met with demonic retaliation.

The much publicised strategies of vigilance during examinations have fallen by the wayside, in spite of beefed up contingents of law enforcement and administrative personnel. By treating the evil of cheating as a law enforcement issue alone, the authorities have been barking up the wrong tree. They must address a deeper malaise.

We need a complete overhaul of the educational system. Teachers, the essential service providers of education, have to be nurtured as a positive force. Inputs into this community must be divorced from political and vested influences. Education must be reinforced with resources, human and material, that match demand so that classroom learning, and teaching, reflect educational principles rather than the spurious aim of 'passing' examinations.

The examination system itself must be upgraded beyond the sheer cosmetic change that the new grading system accomplishes. New techniques that preclude cheating must become commonplace in order to weed out the dependence on learning by rote that dominates the system now. Is the Ministry of Education aware of the harsh reality that examinations that are regularly besieged by cheating scandals lose their credibility? The impact this has on the mental attitude of our youth, not to mention on the confidence that successful candidates inspire from society in general and international educational systems in particular cannot be ignored.

The authorities must realise that their single-minded devotion to law enforcement in examinations is meaningless unless accompanied by sincere and sustained measures to root out the causes of cheating. These precepts may be a tall order but they are within reach, provided the education of the next generation becomes a national priority.

Road digging scandal

Where stops the buck?

WE have seen hell break loose on scams. But seldom has a furore been raised over the scandal of reckless, corruption-seeking road excavation drives across the length and breadth of the city. In this pre-rainy nor-western season the usually pot-holed city streets have become pervasively water-logged. With the monsoons officially only less than a month away, the hardship of the people, insufferable that it is already now, has only begun.

It is the Water and Sewerage Authority (WASA) and T&T Board which are doing most of the excavation work now, the first one to lay pipes for water supply and sewerage lines, and the second one to put in cables for telephone connections. The gas authority, another utility service-provider, is not so much into digging right at this moment but is one of the players anyhow. All these authorities need the permission of Dhaka City Corporation before their contractors can put their shovels into the soil. It is alleged that contractors rather informally manage city corporation zonal officials and WASA or T&T engineers, and start digging the roads. Typically, even a recently-carpeted road would be dug up to lay a pipe or cable line, there being bribery both at the time of digging as well as that of filling in the excavated parts of roads. According to normal rules, the utility organisations have to notify their digging plans to the DCC and transfer money to the latter for subsequently doing up the roads. The 'trenches' mostly go underfilled. The city corporation is in charge of the surface drains. Some of its extended lines might not have had any opening for the water-flow, which could have been ensured in consultation with WASA *a priori*.

Mayor Hanif's demand for city government in 1994 under BNP rule went unmet. In reality, it boiled down to a coordination committee under AL rule in 1996 with LGRD Minister Zillur Rahman as convener and Mayor Mohd Hanif as co-convener. Since its inception until 1999 the committee held 12 meetings; yet, such has been the spirit of coordination at the top, let alone at the level of agencies, that where Zillur Rahman presided, Hanif did not turn up and vice versa. What a pity!

Deja vu all over again



BRIG (Rtd) M ABDUL HAFIZ

er now seems convinced that whatever he is doing is just what the country needs. He has emphasised the necessity also of carving a permanent role for the armed forces in the governance, perhaps through a National Security Council. In his perception this is the only way to ensure an unhindered democratic process in Pakistan the West is so obsessed with.

As a matter of fact the decision for Musharraf to step into the shoes

of the presidency has apparently been taken. Only thing that still remains to be done is to find out some modality before August when the Chief Executive is expected to be installed as the country's next president. His handpicked cabinet has already endorsed the proposal for constitutional amendments for the purpose. The country's constitutional wizard Sharif Uddin Pirzada who was responsible for devising constitutional and legal cover to the rules of all earlier military dictators is on the job to find ways for General Musharraf to install himself as the country's next president. In the meantime the experts and advisers are debating several options from holding a referendum to temporarily activating the suspended parliament to legitimise the whole exercise.

Yet, whatever strategy may be adopted to perpetuate Musharraf in power and catapult him to the presidency and progress' only to the brink of disintegration.

Yahya Khan, on becoming president, pledged to give the state a realistic constitution by undoing interwoven parity, one unit scheme and the presidential system. The problem however started when he thought that the state interest could only be protected if he, as the representative of the military, continued as president and the quantum of power and the manner in which it was to be transferred to the democratically elected representatives would be his discretion. He had also ended the experiment in civil-military partnership at the top and all decision-making had been limited to his aides from the military. The consequence was the break-up of Pakistan.

General Ziaul Huq began by calling for a balance between the powers of president and prime minister, while repeatedly affirming the soundness of 1973 constitution.

PERSPECTIVES

Things have started looking up for Musharraf's regime in spite of a blanket condemnation in the beginning. In particular, the local government election and the regime's devolution plan have received wide support and even financial help from some of the western countries who are otherwise opposed to military rule.

IKE his predecessors Pakistan's Chief Executive General Pervez Musharraf seized power in October 1999 as 'a reluctant coup maker' only to free the country from the clutches of corrupt, inefficient and unpatriotic administrations and put it back on rail. The element of that reluctance in coup making has, however, disappeared in last eighteen months and as he consolidates his grip over the country's internal power structure the General has visibly developed real taste for power. Now half way through the timeframe so graciously granted by Pakistan's Supreme Court to the military to wind up its cleaning operation General Musharraf, in true tradition of the country's previous dictators, aspires to wear a new hat that of presidency.

The Chief Executive has made it abundantly clear through myriad gestures, press conferences and interviews that he is not going to retire when his tenure as Army Chief expires in October next. Not only that. In his view his role is required even beyond October 2002 when, according to Supreme Court ruling, democracy is supposed to be restored with the military going back to the barracks. Because the Gen-

eral now seems convinced that whatever he is doing is just what the country needs. He has emphasised the necessity also of carving a permanent role for the armed forces in the governance, perhaps through a National Security Council. In his perception this is the only way to ensure an unhindered democratic process in Pakistan the West is so obsessed with.

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OPINION

BNP in quagmire?

MOZAMMEL H. KHAN

IT is still unintelligible as to why the BNP Chief, instead of accepting the PM's offer for an early election after the transfer of power on 18th of April to Care-Taker Government (CTG), chose to go for a redundant confrontation, which even in the eyes of any political novice was never an winnable proposition. Even the staunchest supporter of the BNP could not elucidate any tenable reason for issuing an ultimatum to a duly elected government whose term not only expires itself in three months time, but also the government was willing to relinquish power within only 18 days after the deadline of the so-called ultimatum. What tangible benefit did the BNP gain by inviting upon itself the confrontation whose outcome was decided even before the start of the battle? Many hypotheses could be put forward to analyse the BNP's action.

From one angle, it could be argued that the BNP was not really ready for an early election. If the party was ready to take part in election in May, why could it not do it in June? In fact, it is the prerogative of the PM to declare an early transfer of power; the PM, by no means, needs any nod from the Leader of the Opposition to decide on her schedule. It was, by all means, an obvious fact to the BNP chief that it would be the CTG and the election commission that would decide on the exact date of the election notwithstanding the declaration of the PM that her party was ready to take part in election by June 12.

Secondly, if the PM's offer of transferring power on April 18 was not good enough to hold an election before the rainy season, why did the opposition call *hartaal* after the expiry of that period to mount

pressure in favour of the resignation of the government? In spite of their self-pleasing mockery of 'congratulating the people for their spontaneous support for *hartaal*' there must be many in the BNP camps, who have the enough political prudence to pre-assess the damage that would be inflicted on the sympathy for the BNP among the common masses.

If the BNP chief tries to roll her memory back only five years up the road, she would find that the civil servants did not defy her duly elected government that was formed after the general election of 1991. It was the voter-less election of February 15 that prompted the civil servants to desert the government albeit no call by the then leader of the opposition from any public forum to invoke their actions. The only apparent beneficiary of her *hartaal* is the force that does not want the completion of the Bangabandhu Murder Trial and the consequent execution of the convicts during the present tenure of the ruling party.

BNP chief has a big pool of advisors; many of them are very bright individuals who were in the high echelon of power in the successive governments. They have joined the party (like many in the AL) only to get elected in order to enjoy the status of the elected public life. They are not certainly bought by the cheap rhetoric of their political spokespersons that the 'government' is isolated from the people' due to *hartaal* and/or any such action. I have yet to come across any of them writing a piece enumerating a single meticulous reason of how the so-called ultimatum and its accessories have resulted in iota of benefit for the BNP. The contraries are many.

The whole business community of the country, irrespective of their political affiliations, was very critical

against the redundant confrontation and the tools, which were used in the process. They were unequivocal in pointing fingers at the BNP for this doldrums and asked them to shut the path of violence and settle the difference peacefully across the table. Aside from the very tragic loss for the families who have lost their dear ones and the main bread earners, the main casualty in the process was the economy of the country for which the ruling party's performance statistics would suffer to a some degree. However, they would be in a vantage position to put the blame squarely on the opposition.

Being disenchanted in her effort to lure the people in favour of her so-called ultimatum to dislodge the government, the BNP chief is now trying to exploit the unfortunate events that led to regrettable bloodshed on the India-Bangladesh border. Canadian Statesman late Pierre Trudeau, referring to Canada's relation with its giant neighbour, once said, "living next to the United States is in some ways like sleeping with an elephant. No matter how friendly and even-tempered is the beast, one is affected by every twitch and grunt". In Bangladesh, we can very well echo Trudeau's sentiments in terms of our relation with India. No matter how devoted a patriot one is, it would be moronic not to consider the vastness and the military might of our neighbour. The best course of action open to us would be to use the diplomatic means to defuse the tension and settle the disputes. This is the front where Bangladesh has the potential to match or even supersede the skills of her counterpart. As the former PM and the present leader of the opposition, the BNP chief has the burden to be more cautious and articulate in her

statement as it would be weighed heavily by our neighbour. Jingoism might win some instant votes, but it does not help to increase the flow by a single drop of water through the Ganges, nor does it help to get the support of any of our friends in the United Nations, in the long run. It only inflicts miseries on the people and cripples the nation. In her blustery speech in Sylhet, she has pledged to bring the village Padua to Bangladesh's control if voted to power, apparently through military might. If any of the citizens wants to know why the said village was not brought to Bangladesh's fold during ten years of BNP rule, what would be her answer? However, it is very reassuring to see that all sections of our society, especially the ones who were and are in favour of the creation of a sovereign Bangladesh in the first place, are reacting in a very pragmatic manner and more or less behind the diplomatic course the government is pursuing to normalize the situation.

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Credibility of our politicians, by and large, in the eyes of our people was never worse. The BNP chief is always in the forefront of that credibility crisis. What could be more cynical than to suggest that the ruling party was behind the tragic bomb blast at the *Baishakhi* function of the *Chhayanaut*? This accusation is, of course, completely in tune with her earlier expositions that the attack on Poet Shamsur Rahman, bomb blast at the *Udichi* function and the CPB meeting were all masterminded by the ruling party. The victims in all the above cases are either the personality or the institutions that are relentlessly working to promote the Bangali culture and the secular spirit of our liberation war. Why would the ruling party annihilate its own ideological devotees who are proven auxiliary forces of its own sustenance? Moreover, government already has to bear the moral liability of any such happenings in the society no matter who is directly responsible for the mischief. Following the *Chhayanaut* tragedy, I have personally attended half a dozen congregations in Toronto and in those meetings, condemnations were universal, and suspicions were squarely directed towards the evil forces that are opposed to our secular Bangali culture.

To her own workers and supporters, what kind of soul-searching explanation the BNP chief will offer for the ignominious fate her ultimatum has played with the people?

How the BNP Secretary General's statements, that 'this or that act will not save the fall of the government' or 'the fall of the government is only matter of time', will reflect of the prudence of the leadership on the morale of the party faithful is not too difficult to guess.

Among all the above negative scenarios, if the BNP leadership collects information from all the three hundred constituencies across the country, it would discover that Ershad's exit from the alliance is, in fact, a blessing for the BNP. For BNP with its own multiple candidates in every constituency, any kind of concession to Ershad's JP candidates (and for that matter to any other party's candidate) would have created more than one rebellious aspirant in every constituency. In Bangladesh politics, personal aspiration takes precedence over the so-called ideology, if there is any. Also in an election, tally of votes of any alliance of convenience is not a simple arithmetic; at best it would be logarithmic, where two plus two could be at most two and a half.

As compared to earlier two general elections, the BNP, this time

that it must first "clear up the political mess" before allowing any progress towards transfer of power to the civilians. This means that except those who are amenable to military's overall plan, the rest will find themselves eliminated from the country's political arena. Both Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif being away from the country are practically irrelevant in Pakistan's current politics. Under pressure PML (Pakistan Muslim League) is always pro-government. Therefore, a handful of Sharif loyalists and the leaderless PPI (Pakistan People's Party) supporters are not, at the moment, proving themselves to be a match for the military. So far, there is not the slightest indication that they may pose a threat to the present regime at any point in the near future.

Apart from that, things have started looking up for Musharraf's regime in spite of a blanket condemnation in the beginning. In particular, the local government election and the regime's devolution plan have received wide support and even financial help from some of the western countries who are otherwise opposed to military rule.

No one thinks that General Musharraf, Pakistan's fourth military ruler, can do differently. He has already stressed the need for a system of checks and balances in particular for all key players at the top. He has also expressed in no uncertain terms his desire to ensure 'continuity and sustainability' of the reforms that his government is currently in the process of introducing. The new rule of game currently being thrashed out by the Army refers to a "suitable framework" for the electoral process which not only weeds out the 'less desirable' politicians but also spells out a detailed power sharing formula prior to the restoration of civilian rule. Equally significant is the military mission

around, has to face a more formidable opponent. In spite of its failures to meet the expectation of the people in many sectors or many of the misdeeds of the party's MPs and the Ministers (and their offspring), the ruling party aspirants will have extensive development works across the country to show to their constituents. Their imprudent decision to stay away from the parliament deprived the party MPs to get involved in any development activities of their constituencies; their indiscretions to stay away from the municipal election has isolated many of their local leaders from the mainstream activities of the municipalities and their issue-less *hartaal* has constantly distanced themselves from the common people, specially at the big cities. However, for the same reason of the indomitable position of the ruling party, the inter-party conflicts will be much severe than before and invariably there would be many unofficial candidates in the election from the present faithful of the ruling party. Here lies the BNP's chance of cashing in on her opponent's disunity. As the underdog opposition party, it is expected that there would be more unity among the rank and files of the party and its multiple MP aspirants; more so for the fact that the draconian PSA might be hanging on the shoulders of many of them. So the BNP's only hope lies in its success to put up a single candidate of its own in each constituency, not of any other party, and that seems like the only ray of light at the end of the tunnel for the party which is badly in quagmire.

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Shahid? And also those police who are killed arresting someone, and many of our poets and writers and educators who died for their cause, as well those many soldiers who have died defending our borders or while peacekeeping for the United Nations?

M.M. Haque
Gulshan, Dhaka

Loadshedding
As a citizen of Bashabo area, we are really irritated with the frequent loadshedding occurring day and night. I realise that there is a deficit of electricity in Dhaka. But what is really frustrating is that while people in Bashabo, Goran, Mugda areas bear the sufferings of loadshedding regularly, the other parts of the city are supplied with sufficient electricity. This impairment in treatment is not appreciated.

Furthermore, there is no complaint centre. Although DESA has a phone number, nobody answers the call. For how long do we have to bear the burden of loadshedding?

M Hasan
Bashabo, Dhaka

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.

Woman's burden

Women workers are regularly paid less than men for doing the same job as their male counterparts. This woman labourer, working in a construction site, earns less for her output than a male. Employers acknowledge that women workers deserve equal pay, but still force them to accept lower wages. Society's male chauvinistic stance allows the exploitation of women and holds back development. Gender bias must end.

STAR PHOTO: AKM MOHSIN

Creating instability