

Flawed textbooks are as bad as murder of education

Policy makers have no stake in the education system

THE report published in the Jan 25 issue of this paper makes depressing reading. The impact will live on long after these flawed and badly produced textbooks perish. That is if people are left with enough skills to read anyway given the way the education system manages itself. This may not be a conspiracy by design but certainly one from negligence. Clearly, education isn't our national priority. And textbook contents have become a playground for political parties to fight out their petty wars.

Children have a right to free school books. However, like in every paper, they are being openly sold in the market leading to not just illegal profit but bottlenecking one of the most critical educational supplies. The loss of education time will probably inflict damages that we can barely calculate now. The education sector relates to the construction of the future and by neglecting it, we earn ourselves a dividend of illiteracy and ignorance.

How we look upon education is reflected in not just the shoddy printing, bad paper, hugely delayed delivery to schools but in what is written on the pages as well. The fact that the "facts" change with every switch in power means knowledge is not sacred but a servant of political parties. The distortion of history to suit party interest disregards not just a common past but people's right to knowledge. Unfortunately, we seem to have succumbed to the culture of convenient history rather than factual ones. We are not bothered by the damage because the partisan reality looms larger than the national one. We seem to have inherited absurd notions of right to manipulate the past. Like all intellectual oligarchies, we are disdainful of facts unless they can be used to further political gains.

One can't certainly get worse than this. Our leaders clearly prefer it this way because an educated, enlightened electorate could be a threat to manipulative politicians. As long as people remain confused, children fail to get properly educated and the mind is bogged by small mindedness ruling will be easier. It appears that the rulers have a stake in throttling the education system. This intellectual genocide is as deadly as the genocide of intellectuals. One death took place in 1971 while the other continues and on, year after year.

Education is the most precious treasure that we deplete ourselves of everyday. And yet we are unmoved.

Crime flourishes under umbrella of politics

Tongi deaths a frightening reminder of current law and order scene

THE death news of three people including a leader and two members of the party in power in Tongi fails to shock us. We are deluged by such death news and are overwhelmed by the sight of corpses, and we are unmoved.

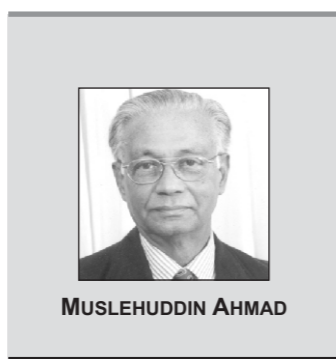
The killings occurred from internal feuds. It's now accepted that extortion will be here as long as the system of politics that we have continues. Violence has replaced ideology in our politics. In many cases, this has been legitimized as a new profession. The political space and the criminal space have begun to resemble each other increasingly.

Reports are also saying that the fight was over division of spoils collected from the Biswa Ijtema event. This congregation of Muslims, the second largest in the world, is a source of pride for many believers and the government also never forgets to present itself as a serious host. However, it seems the criminal activities are quite well established there and the devotees have to pay a price, directly and indirectly, for such activities. One wishes that the authorities would do their bit and make sure that even the Ijtema doesn't become an economic opportunity for politically well connected criminals to make money.

Politics and crime have become almost impossibly deep linked. One hopes that pious activities don't become the next hunting ground for criminals and protection money has to be paid for calling the faithful to prayer from the mosque. Many temples have already paid such dues and mosques could follow.

We demand that the incident is investigated and the culprits punished. This type of scenario is inevitable when crime is allowed inside the corridors of politics. One has to lay in the bed one makes and that bed increasingly looks like a coffin. However, we continue to demand that politics be decriminalized. Or one day the gatherings at Biswa Ijtema too may start getting smaller.

No ME peace move in sight during lull in violence



MUSLEHUDDIN AHMAD

ISRAELIS have been paying in blood for electing a rabid general turned politician as Prime Minister. Every general cannot be Yitzhak Rabin and become a good politician. But even Rabin had to die in the hands of an Israeli terrorist. Of course, there are terrorists in every country and in every nationality and so is the case with the Palestinians. But it sounds horrible when the elected leader is blamed directly for all terrorism that takes place in a country or a region. In such a situation all leaders of all countries are to be blamed for the terrorist acts in their countries. The main question is whether a particular leader and his party are supporting terrorism. In the context of the Palestinians the situation has been made extremely complex because of Israeli occupation which the Palestinians have fighting. So the issue has to be seen in that light and appropriate definition has to be applied.

However, nobody should condone terrorism including suicide bombings that kill innocent civilians and here the world has to see whether Yasser Arafat has any power and indeed some reasonable possibility to stop the suicide bombings. The answer is no. He and his Palestinian Authority (PA) do not appear to be in a position to identify each suicide bomber. Hamas and other radical Palestinian organisations are known entities but PA can not arrest all the leaders of those organisations. This will lead to a civil war within the Palestinian territory.

In the meantime, however, Arafat had some leaders arrested as per list given by Israeli Defense Forces (IDF).

Arafat has serious predicament too. His police and security establishments are under regular missile and tank attacks from Israeli defense forces. So Palestinian police and security forces are also not in a position to do their job of confronting or stopping suspected terrorists. But one has to ask why Israel with such vast military and

very little means to stop such terrorist attacks. Indeed, PA has been rendered ineffective by wrong Israeli policies and actions.

Sharon has put Arafat under house arrest and said Arafat would continue to be confined there in Ramallah headquarters office as long as it takes for him to arrest the killers of Israeli Tourism Minister. Arafat has openly condemned all these killings and also asked for ending all types of violence which was headed to by Hamas and also other radical

further complicated by the recent surge in the religious and cultural frictions. Added to these are the leaders like Sharon in many places around the world. The very democracy which seems a key to everything as defined by the western world often appears meaningless due to the strategic and political ambitions of states and individual leaders. The dictators are embraced and showered with sweet flatteries because they perform as desired. So the world's future in

calm in the area. Israel again attacked Palestinian TV and radio station and destroyed its infrastructure. The UN SG Kofi Annan "deplores the destruction of the Palestinian radio and television station in Ramallah by Israeli forces" and was very concerned by the major Israeli incursion into Palestinian city of Tulkarm. The EU also deplored this incursion, but apparently the US has not said anything openly yet about this incursion. Israel has also destroyed dozens of

Arafat so that he could move and work for bringing some sort of calm in the area. International community is also not stationing any neutral international observer group in the area which could monitor the developments and indeed could be a shield against such terrorist attacks. Arafat asked that such observers be stationed only in the Palestinian areas. This should not be opposed by Israel when observers will be outside its borders.

It's a terrible bloodshed that is going on in the area. Despite huge military strength Israel has been losing people in the hands of Palestinians. Israel has already lost over 250 people against about 860 Palestinians. Only a day before, a terrorist opened fire indiscriminately in the street of Jerusalem and wounded 40 Israelis and for that none cannot deal with the terrorists militarily. They are the desperate groups of people. It's high time for Israelis and also the international community to realize that the causes for such desperation should be eliminated in order to curb terrorism. Terrorism cannot be rooted out altogether any way as all causes cannot be eliminated. However, major events should be handled appropriately with proper understanding instead of just using military means. Armed action can kill some but not all; such actions can only disperse the terrorists all over and that may lead to widespread attacks on unspecified targets causing huge civilian deaths.

As the history shows, Sharon himself is a desperate man and he is more so when it comes to dealing with the Palestinians. Retired Anthony Zinni is too good to be a match for Sharon. No amount of prodding from Ziini can achieve anything; it has to be a direct White House prodding. But unfortunately the White House is too busy with Taliban and Al-Qaeda. Until that episode is reasonably over, Middle East has to wait and count the dead.

Muslehuddin Ahmad is a former Secretary and Ambassador and founder president of North South University

SPOTLIGHT ON MIDDLE EAST

It's high time for Israelis and also the international community to realize that the causes for desperation should be eliminated in order to curb terrorism. Terrorism cannot be rooted out altogether any way as all causes cannot be eliminated. However, major events should be handled appropriately with proper understanding instead of just using military means. Armed action can kill some but not all; such actions can only disperse the terrorists all over and that may lead to widespread attacks on unspecified targets causing huge civilian deaths.

security establishments cannot detect such attackers wrapped with killing gadgets and shoot them before they enter Israel for suicide bombings. For example, in the latest suicide bombing in Hadera where six Israelis were killed and dozens injured, the attacker in a black dress entered the birth day party hall with automatic rifle and sprayed bullets all around. Why didn't the party holders take adequate security measures by posting security personnel at the gate and indeed around the place? The country is at war with Palestinians and with all the suicide bombing threats all around, no security was in place and the bomber merrily ran into the hall and killed so many people! Whose fault is this? Is it Arafat who is totally encircled by Israeli tanks be responsible? Why not take those tanks away and put them in such vulnerable places within Israel?

As it seems, Israel itself does not have the adequate security plan for its people; it only goes after the Palestinian Authority (PA) which has

organizations. This led to considerable reduction of violence for nearly a month in the area. This was recognised by the international community, but unfortunately Israel failed to seize the opportunity and go for security and political talks with a view to reviving the peace process. Israeli Prime Minister Sharon has been adamant on one thing no negotiations under fire and said there must be complete calm in the area before any political talk could be undertaken. Sharon has been unreasonable. He knows why the latest Intefada started. It started with him and he made it a personal issue that this Intefada must stop so that he could take the credit that he finally stopped Intefada.

It is virtually impossible to have complete calm in the area which has been a battle ground for decades. Indeed, nowhere in the world there is complete calm; the world here is now in torment for one reason or the other. The gap between the haves and the have-nots has widened beyond limits and this has now been

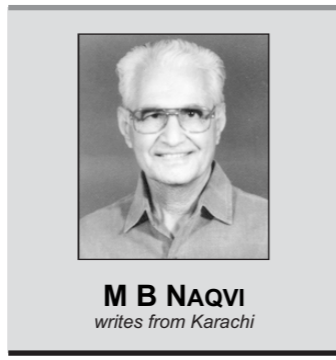
these contexts appears pretty gloomy and there is hardly any possibility to establish any further "calm" as needed by the inhabitants of the world.

It's, however, worthless to talk about complete calm when it comes to relations between Israel and the Arabs and particularly Palestinians. Israel reoccupied the Palestinian controlled territory namely Tulkarm breaking all earlier agreements and says it gave land to the Palestinians and it can reoccupy whenever it is necessary for rounding up the terrorists. The whole philosophy behind land for peace seems to have changed. Who gave land - is it Israel or Palestine? Basically it is the Palestinians who inhabited the land and Jews came with Moses from Egypt to the land of Palestine which they termed as biblical land. Yes, Almighty God asked them to go there and live in peace with others - the Palestinians who were already there. These are things the world community will have to note if it is interested to establish permanent

houses in Rafah where four Israeli soldiers were killed by Palestinian gunmen. Israel did this on the plea that these were empty houses and terrorists were using those as the platform for attacks against Israel. These were not empty houses and indeed Israeli destruction has made hundreds of Palestinian families homeless. This is nothing but state terrorism. If the PA had military strength, this would have led to a war, but this has not happened as PA has nothing and Israel is a military power indeed a regional super power with nuclear arsenal.

Such a military power seized a 50 ton armament shipment in the Red Sea and blamed PA for bringing the arms for terrorism. PA has denied this, but who accepts PA's denial? The intention is to lay blame on Arafat and PA for anything wrong that happens in the area. This sort of attitude cannot lead to a situation for a dialogue which the US and the EU are trying to hold. It is also unfortunate that neither the US nor the EU has asked Israel to lift the siege on

Needed a coherent India policy



M B NAQVI
writes from Karachi

MUCH mischief has resulted from the presence of intrinsically destabilising presence of nuclear weapons during the current crisis on the borders. They do possess an inherent deterring quality. So the two adversaries dare not use them and have made their confrontation look foolish: unable to take it to its logical conclusion, they find it hard to stand down while it appeared all too easy to mass troops menacingly at the borders. There will be time enough to talk meaningfully about the atomic arsenals later. Right now it is necessary to arrange mutual withdrawal that the two cannot do alone; its pointlessness will be too obvious. They needed a third party. As it happens, both sides have been competitively wooing the Americans and want them to help achieve their respective objectives. India's main wish is to see cross-border terrorism stopped in Kashmir with US help.

Pakistan has sought American good offices to diffuse the border tensions and help preserve peace in the Subcontinent. At least Pakistan has been asking the good offices of the US. The US was delighted in being tactically accepted as the honest broker by both the embattled nuclear powers, enhancing its role in the region. But in the US Secretary of State Colin Powell's strategy of keeping peace in South Asia, the ordering of immediate objectives is peculiar: he wants Pakistanis and Indians to begin talks on Kashmir and on 'all other matters' for building mutual trust ---

and only after that confidence building mutual withdrawal of troops is to take place.

This is strange. Here are two countries that are not on speaking terms, ready to rush at each other's throat, and they are being asked to start elaborate negotiations first with a view to earning each other's confidence. After mutual trust has returned, they will start withdrawing their troops and equipment from forward attacking position. Lay people would ordinarily advise

had not been available the two sides would still have to de-escalate tensions first by mutual withdrawals for the good and adequate reason that both are nuclear powers that simply cannot afford to use them. The experience since Dec. 13 last should convince both New Delhi and Islamabad that old-style coercive diplomacy, or gunboat diplomacy, does not now work the way it used to. Similarly the way Pakistan was conducting its Kashmir policy has proved to be counterproductive

more workable longer-term India policy that includes rational efforts to secure a democratic solution to the Kashmir issue through democratic means. Pakistan policies will grow from the Jan 12 televised speech of Gen. Pervez Musharraf, although this should have come earlier, soon after the U-turn in the Afghan policy. Its logic demands that all our stances, approaches and policies must be based on peaceful, in fact democratic, methodology. Pakistan itself has to democratise

contacts between the Indians and Pakistanis, full normalisation of ties between the two countries to at least the level they were before 1965 --- free mutual trade on the MFN basis, acceptance of SAFTA and SAPTA bases for the SAARC, seeking investments from Indians and investing in India and of course maximum cultural exchanges. A people-to-people friendship with India should be worked for, as the policy of controlled hostility has resulted in the crisis that grew out of

in this country. The basic orientation of both countries being what it is, each has a stake in the overall orientation of the other. A thoroughly democratic and secular Pakistan is in India's interests. Similarly, Pakistan has a vital stake in the Indian polity remaining secular, democratic and non-militaristic. Let each state pursue this aim. The two countries and their peoples have thousand and one commonalities of cultures, languages and literatures, races and of course common history.

Their social conditions are broadly similar and both have to live and prosper in not only the Global Village the world has become but in the globalised economy. There are plenty of issues where they need to work together. Ecology of South Asia imposes common tasks and makes cooperation an imperative. To revert to the Kashmir issue that has caused so much trouble already, it has to be seen that if it has to have an amicable solution, it will be a long haul. It requires a two-pronged approach. Let approaches to its proper democratic solution be sought by non-officials --- eminent personalities of this big Village. It can be implemented in the fullness of time, say 30 to 35 years. Meantime, there can be an interim and neutral sort of arrangements for the Valley to be negotiated between New Delhi and Islamabad.

The issue of sovereignty needs to be fudged or blurred, if it cannot be shared. Indeed, it need not affect sovereignties but should mean an effective demilitarisation of that part of Kashmir, full freedom to Kashmiris to travel to all parts of the old Jammu and Kashmir State, to manage their own affairs democratically and trade freely with both Pakistan and India, with the two countries jointly picking up the tab insofar as the Valley is concerned. Let Kashmiris progressively become a bridge between Pakistan and India --- to pave the way of a rational and democratic solution of this problem.

MB Naqvi is a leading columnist in Pakistan.

PLAIN WORDS

Pakistan actually needs a growing pro-Pakistan lobby in India and it should freely allow a pro-India lobby in this country. The basic orientation of both countries being what it is, each has a stake in the overall orientation of the other. A thoroughly democratic and secular Pakistan is in India's interests. Similarly, Pakistan has a vital stake in the Indian polity remaining secular, democratic and non-militaristic. Let each state pursue this aim. The two countries and their peoples have thousand and one commonalities of cultures, languages and literatures, races and of course common history.

these more than mere semi-cold warriors to start pulling back from the borders first 'without prejudice to their political positions'. This withdrawal itself will be the primary confidence building block. Formal talks can only begin after each side is sure that the other side is unlikely to make a sudden mischievous move. Why Secretary Powell has chosen an order of business that flies in the face of commonsense needs to be inquired into. Anyway, the US can only bring the two sides together; every other agreement has to be arrived at by these two together. At all events India and Pakistan have to live side by side in peace and they cannot ask the US diplomacy to be eternally there to persuade (force?) them not to go war or threateningly massing their troops on the borders.

They must have enough civilisation in themselves to coexist peacefully without external aid despite their differences. As a matter of fact, if the US good offices, --- the effectiveness of which is obvious ---

though earlier suppositions indicated otherwise. Hopefully they can now draw up the rules of coexistence in the special conditions of South Asia, as shown by the recent experiences. Doubtless, there is the frightfully difficult question of Kashmir with its titillate history. Experience has shown that a radically dissatisfied power, Pakistan, simply cannot use violent ways to agitate or take the Kashmir Valley militarily, the only area of Jammu and Kashmir state it wants. India would rather fight than allow any secession of Kashmir Valley. The BJP and Sangh Parivar in India might also unleash forces that would kill far too many Muslims in India, as Kuldip Singh has shown, should anything like that look like becoming a probability.

War is not an option now or later. But a recognition of this reality does not mean that Pakistan must necessarily accept the finality of the status quo. Only, it has to realise (a) that there is no quick solution to the Kashmir problem; and (b) that Pakistan has to have a new and

speedily in order the better to employ democratic methodology. That is how it can be more effective. The current military confrontation has shown that adequacy of military forces, nuclear and conventional, has no bearing on problems between India and Pakistan or for the solution of the Kashmir dispute, issue or problem. Once it is admitted that there is no military solution of Kashmir issue, the whole military approach becomes inappropriate, including Jihad with the gun. Political approach is the right response to the Kashmiris' aspirations. Pakistan's substantial military build down, especially in the nuclear sphere, will boost its credentials to talk peace and to gain high moral ground.

Whether or not India quickly responds, or is ready for early negotiations, our policies must be based on patient, peace-promoting ideas. We should now aim at exactly the opposite of what the Vajpayee government did in December last: work for restoration of maximum

December 13 attack on Indian Parliament that left no way out for either side. But what about Kashmir? It may be asked. Well, let us actually accept what we verbally say: there is no military solution to the problem.

If so, all militaristic approaches or methods must be eschewed in favour of recognising the true particulars of Kashmir imbroglio. If Kashmir issue is to be peacefully and amicably solved, what it requires is that Pakistanis have to mount a giant operation to convince the Indians that India will actually benefit --- economically and even politically --- more by being flexible and forthcoming to the Kashmiris. Indeed we must ascertain and understand desires and psychology of Indians to determine our policies: what precise *quid pro quo* can we offer, if any, to make them accommodating on Kashmir and become cooperative friends with Pakistanis. Pakistan actually needs a growing pro-Pakistan lobby in India and it should freely allow a pro-India lobby

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

Politicians should learn from the West

I think, rather I would say I am sure, Bangladeshi politicians need some political lessons from the West by living here as non-political persons for sometime to learn how democracies work here.

Since Bangladesh can't produce good, honest and educated politicians they need serious training in their job. The problem with all the Third World politicians is that they don't take lessons from history and this ignorance finally puts them into the garbage of history. We saw Sheikh Mujibur Rahman move from a very promising start to end in a mess. His whole life was an endless struggle for democracy but ended up in BKSAL.

Ziaur Rahman had personal honesty but was not farsighted. Ershad, turned out to be an autocratic. Justice Sattar knew no politics and ended in failure. Mrs. Zia and Sheikh Hasina led a bunch of weird politicians. They only excelled in Hartals. What a great achievement! And the people of Bangladesh became sacrificial

goats in the unholy politics of Bangladesh. No messiah on the horizon. Who cares?

Akbar Hussain
Toronto, Canada

Is milk essential?

Thanks to Umme Fatema Chowdhury for her letter (January 16, 2002). I also thank Nasreen Huq for initiating the debate. As a nutritionist I have reviewed different nutrition related books and journals and gathered some information about bone mineral calcium and its rich sources.

Milk is one of the rich sources of calcium. Milk is the sole food for all young mammals and the milk of all species have all the ingredients needed for growth in that species. Milk and its products are significant sources of many nutrients and it is important, especially with regard to children [Milk and Milk Products, Fat and Oils; Page- 375-383; Human Nutrition and Dietetics, Tenth Edition, Edited by J. S Garrow, W.P. T. James and A. Ralph, 2001].

Fresh milk contains 3.5 per cent

protein. It is rich in all essential amino acids except S-amino acids in which they are limiting to a small extent. It is also an expensive food for our country where a major proportion of population lives below the poverty line.

In this situation we have to think about alternative sources of calcium rich food for our adult population to meet their calcium requirement from available food sources. We can think about fish, especially small fishes or other fishes, which we can eat along with bones.

Any fish, which we can eat along with its bone, can provide calcium and protein together in a greater extent. So milk is not essential for normal adult population for our country to meet calcium requirement.

Amina Asma
Mohammadpur, Dhaka

NGOs: Reunify by denying politics

As a development worker I'm disturbed by the government's recent actions against NGOs. The govern-

ment can issue order but cannot check harassment of individuals.

The current strife between the government and NGOs as well as among NGOs themselves will have long deplorable impact on non-governmental development efforts. As is alleged, Proshika could not avoid the blame for whatever consequence the current situation will have. It was not necessary for Qazi Faruque Ahmed to go beyond his limit and publicly challenge some political leaders. He should have foreseen that political scenario changes and so does the attitude and power of political leaders.

However, he could have balanced the power had he not caused the division in NGO community. It is widely known that he played an upper hand in the recent conflict in ADAB and has recaptured its leadership. I had an opportunity to represent in an ADAB meeting where Mr. Faruque blasted against all leading NGO leaders and identified them as anti-liberation or fundamentalist element for not supporting his line of actions.

I believe that only way to neutralize government's current attitude is

to reunify all NGOs. There is no reason why NGO leaders will soften their attitude to each other first.

Sunit Mahapatra
Lalmitia, Dhaka

"Biswa Ijtema and our VVIP security"

I just read MA's letter of January 22nd and could not help replying immediately.

In his letter MA had questioned that if "the three most protected people in Bangladesh" can attend Ijtema where, according to him, they are vulnerable to attacks, then why do we have to face the inconvenience of roadblocks when they tour the city.

Here I would like to point out strongly to MA that people go to attend Ijtema to seek divine blessings, not to attack one another. There is a different atmosphere there-- of spiritual feeling. The question of being attacked or not does not arise at such times.

Md. Ghulam Murtaza
Dhaka

Pakistan: Apologise

and forget?

I take pity on Mr. Hasan for his letter on the 15th January 2002. If he was a true Muslim and aware of the history he could not have written in



Apologise please..

such a language to his fellow Muslims of today's Bangladesh what had been yesterday's Pakistan. Rather, he should have been apologetic instead of being sarcastic.

He should not forget that the glorious religion Islam was the unifying factor behind creation of Pakistan but, our leaders conveniently forgot the basic and failed to

treat the East Pakistanis as fellow Pakistanis let alone Muslims. Even today they are treating the immigrated Indian Muslims as "Mohajirs", forgetting their contribution and suffering towards the

creation of Pakistan. Islam does not allow discrimination of human beings let alone Muslims. The writer should also know the difference between the Genocide caused by the Pak Army on unarmed civilian populations and stray incidents involving Bengali and Non-Bengali Muslims. The bitterness was created by the

leaders. They have failed to motivate the people of different regions and instil national feelings among the people by treating them equally. Had Islam been the guiding principle behind the Constitution and Administration, Pakistan would not have been dismembered.

The writer should also know that a third party has become the beneficiary due to our own failures and internal fights. It is regrettable that we could not retain the geography created by our forefathers. By looking at the plight of the Muslims in India, he should have learnt his own lessons. So I would request him not to dig up the old score and spew venom, rather he should look for reconciliation. After all we were one Nation one day with religion as the common factor. By apologising to us they can make us forget the past wounds.

A.B.M. Zakaria, on e-mail

Apology: A rude word in the letter "About cricket" published yesterday was inadvertently not edited. The oversight is deeply regretted -Editor