

Literacy rate riddle

Why such incongruities?

THE Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE) survey report on primary education has provided us with ample food for thought. It makes us sit up and take note of the miserable picture it portrays. It also springs a surprise in that its figures on primary education and literacy rate do not tally with those of the government. Whereas the government claims a 66 per cent literacy rate for people aged over 14 years, the CAMPE report puts it at 42 per cent. Also, the survey report says there is no difference in adult literacy rates between the six districts the government has declared "free from literacy" and those for the rest of the country. Such incongruities naturally give rise to questions as to whether the figures of the government or those of the CAMPE and other non-government organisations are correct.

The government and the non-government organisations could have had different criteria for literacy assessment. In other words, definition of literacy could vary from one study to the other. Such methodological variations could lead to differences in the outcome. That is not what it should be though. A standard methodology should be followed in the conduct of literacy surveys. The government must take a lead to make sure this happens. There must be a global standard for such studies that can be followed. Also, adult literacy programmes are not adequately followed up. Once an adult is declared lettered, the government should make sure he or she uses it for functional purposes to retain the skill and benefit thereby.

On balance, the country is saddled with a less than desirable literacy rate and the primary education system is in a pathetic state. Although there has been a steady rise in investment over the last ten years, going by the CAMPE report, the country has achieved very little. That 40 per cent of children aged between six and ten are deprived of primary education simply puts a big question-mark over successive governments' claim of success in this sector. It is not to say, however, that we have not made any headway. Gender equity in enrolment has been a major success and so has been a rise in recruitment of women teachers to 40 per cent. Still, a lot remains to be done.

Icecream making children sick at Meherpur

Tip of hazardous food hawking

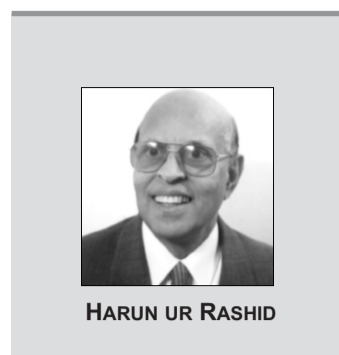
PERHAPS it takes a disaster of this kind to jolt us into realising how indifferent we have been to the sale of adulterated or bacteria-laden food stuffs in the market-place. There is complete lack of compunction on the part of those who hawk them while the authorities failing in their duties to check such food stuffs for edibility are practically abetting in the commission of a food crime.

There has been an extremely disquieting piece of news emanating from a Meherpur village in Kushtia: day before yesterday, as many as 50 children aged between two and ten, ate icecream and fell instantaneously sick -- much beyond the point of nausea. At first they had stabbing stomach pain and then vomiting that won't simply stop. The children, most of them toddlers, were promptly taken to Meherpur General Hospital. But even there lying prostrate on the hospital floor they were seen disgorging the poisonous stuff. But with the doctors' treating the children with saline they eventually came out of danger.

Did anybody in authority check the ingredients that went into the making of the icecream? Who would do that, because the icecream factory after all was operating without any licence? Yes, it has been ordered closed now; but then don't we have the distinction of being the sternest when the beans are spilled. Before that we had yawned over things as though they were not happening little realising that the insidious slow-poisoning of the children's health would have eventually taken its toll on them. Basically, the worrying thing is, there must be a whole lot of unauthorised icecream factories or assorted syrupy beverage dealers doing brisk business with the local authorities turning a blind eye to it. The BSTI should do something about it as the municipal inspectors took charge awhile.

The fast food outlets and variegated other restaurants need to be periodically inspected for what stuffs they offer and in what hygienic conditions. There should be no room for any corruption or malpractice where human health is at stake.

Caspian oil pipeline a snub to Russia



HARUN UR RASHID

THE Caspian Sea is the world's largest inland Sea between South East Europe and Asia. It is fed mainly by the Europe's longest river Volga. Its area is about 152,239 square miles (394,299 square kilometres), nearly three times the size of Bangladesh. Caspian Sea is thought to hold the world's third biggest oil and gas reserves. Five countries, namely, Iran, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Russia and Azerbaijan share their borders with the Caspian Sea and each of these countries are determined to explore and exploit the "black gold" to their economic benefits.

Both the US and Russia have been competing each other to

control oil from the Caspian Sea. The policy of the US appears to construct pipelines from the Caspian Sea, avoiding two countries -- Russia and Iran. On the other hand Russia wants to ensure the pipelines pass through Russia. It is a geo-strategic competition between the two to control the oil of the Cas-

share of proven oil reserves is set to rise in the 25 years to 50 per cent. That is an enormous power at the hands of OPEC to fluctuate prices of oil.

The US does not want to depend on oil from unstable regions and also wants to weaken OPEC's power to control oil prices. It seems

lic, to the Turkish Mediterranean port of Ceyhan via Georgia. This will be the first big pipeline from the Caspian Sea to bypass Russia. It is reported that in a letter to Azeri President Haider Aliyev earlier this year President Bush supported the pipeline saying that it would contribute to peace in the Caucasus

challenge to Russia's control of the Caspian basin.

Washington's goal of a US-backed pipeline would tie the Central Asian countries of the Caspian basin to the West both economically and politically. Another pipeline is to be constructed from Turkmenistan to Pakistan via Afghanistan. This

US oil rich states -- Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan -- on its southern Asian flank. They also believe that the US administration had pressured the oil companies to invest and building the above noted two pipelines would prevent Iran and Russia from profiting from Caspian oil and reduce centuries-old Russian influence in the region.

The US appears to be extending its influence slowly but steadily in Central Asia. Already Russia has allowed the presence of US soldiers in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan to fight war on terrorism in Afghanistan. This is the first time that the US has intruded into the backyard of Russia. Although President Putin did not object to the presence of the US in Central Asia, many Russian military Generals are reported to be not comfortable with the President's decision.

It seems that the dream of the US in weakening OPEC and controlling a substantial size of the global oil market is being realised.

Barrister Harun ur Rashid is a former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.

BOTTOM LINE

The US appears to be extending its influence slowly but steadily in Central Asia. Already Russia has allowed the presence of US soldiers in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan to fight war on terrorism in Afghanistan. This is the first time that the US has intruded into the backyard of Russia. Although President Putin did not object to the presence of the US in Central Asia, many Russian military Generals are reported to be not comfortable with the President's decision.

pian Sea. The US is utterly dependent on foreign oil supplies and imports about 24.1 per cent of its requirement from the Middle East. By 2020, the US is expected to import nearly two of every three barrels of oil it uses. The Oil Producing Exporting Countries (OPEC) exercise power to control oil prices. OPEC now controls 37 per cent of the global oil market. It is estimated that OPEC's

that at last the US has been successful in its strategy. Last month an agreement for a US-backed oil pipeline (US\$2.9 billion) from the Caspian Sea to Turkey via Azerbaijan and Georgia was signed in Azerbaijan by all the countries concerned in the presence of US Secretary for Energy, Spencer Abraham.

The pipeline will run from Baku in Azerbaijan, a former Soviet republic,

region. Consistent with Russia's policy to exclude the US from the development of Caspian oil reserves, in May 2000, work began in Turkey on a gas pipeline running under the Black Sea from Russia to the Turkish Black Sea port of Samsun. This pipeline appears to be in direct competition to the Washington-backed pipeline from Baku to Ceyhan which has posed a

pipeline bypasses Iran. Both the pipelines are expected to strengthen the US position on oil resources.

When the two pipelines are constructed, the US will have to depend much less on Arab oil. Caspian Sea oil will provide much more strategic flexibility for the US in international relations. Political observers argue that the US overriding aim is to cultivate a line of pro-

Achilles' heel of the Middle East?

KAZI ANWARUL MASUD

HOW does a proactive and intrusive multilateral instrument deal with a "delinquent" state? Can "delinquency" be presumed and the so-called delinquent state tried in the electronic and print media, primarily controlled by the intruder states, in the full gaze of the international community? How can the people of the world be assured that the intruders do not have a hidden agenda? Intervention done through multilateral instrument under chapter VII of the UN Charter gives relief to the world opinion because actions taken in the name of the UN, as Kofi Annan reminded President Bush last month, has a unique legitimacy that only the United Nations can provide.

In analysing some of these questions raised it may be helpful to visit The Bush National Security Strategy released on 20th September this year. The document underlines the Bush Administration's foreign policy aimed at (a) promoting human dignity through political and economic freedom; (b) providing security against terrorism and weapons of mass destructions; and (c) engaging with conflict areas and with allies.

In his analysis of the security strategy Marcus Corbin of the Washington Centre for Defense Information says that Bush strategy in emphasising "preemptive" attacks has expanded the "relatively uncontroversial topic of true preemption striking first against an imminent, specific, near certain attack to the far broader concept of striking first to prevent the possibility of longer term threat ever developing which might better be labeled as preventive war".

Bush strategy advocates adaptation of the concept of preemption legitimately conditioned by imminent threat most often a visible mobilization of attacking forces, to the capabilities of the objectives of present day adversaries. Presumption of imminence of attack can have destabilising effects. If the US can attack Iraq why not Russia continue its hot pursuit of Chechen rebels; India of cross-border terrorists who come from Pakistan held Kashmir, and China of Taiwan? True all these

cases are not the same but the principle involved is quintessentially similar. What is true for one is true for all -- can such a policy be tested against the touchstone of time? It has been said that the Bush strategy is the product of hubris of the few. US unilateralism requires contestation not because Saddam Hussain's continuance is of paramount necessity for the region but because of the fear of the many of this policy's almost inevitable destabilising effects beyond the Iraqi borders.

Bush strategy intends to use US power and influence to bring the hope of democracy, development,

deleterious by the percipient onlookers of the world. The most positive aspect of the strategy document is its origin -- the United States -- and not a monolith totally impervious to popular reaction. America's unflinching shadow -- the United Kingdom -- appears overstretched in her yet quixotic attempts to justify US unilateralism. Jack Straw responding to the Iraqi Foreign Minister's "blatant untruth" delivered at UNGA in September said, "By pretending that it is not so (Iraqi possession of WMD) Iraq has reinforced the need for UN Security Council to insist on intrusive inspection on an urgent time table"

national law, which is constantly being developed. Taking lessons from non-engagement during the early days of Taliban regime O'Brien vowed that Britain would not make the same mistake again. Because "military intervention despite the death and destruction it cause is sometimes the moral thing to do".

Michael Walzer formerly of Harvard and now of Princeton sees justification in a war of law enforcement by the victim or any other member of the international community -- "international equivalent of a citizen's arrest" -- provided the victim has been wronged (twin towers) or in imminent danger of

resolution also empowers him to go for regime change and promote the emergence of a democratic government in Iraq. White House spokesman Ari Fleischer in one of his news briefings made it abundantly clear that regime change is germane to the Congress resolution and that the "purpose of the authorization to use the military force will be to provide peace by changing the regime". Hopefully the proposed Presidential authorization to use military force would not cover countries like Lebanon, Syria and Iran or any country posing a "threat" to international security.

Multilateral intervention would

The endless list of crimes against humanity put at the doorstep of Saddam Hussein and his potential to cause havoc in the region may seem to pose a danger to the world... However as it is yet uncertain whether the Anglo-US efforts would find favour in the UNSC given Russian, French and Chinese reluctance to go for immediate military intervention, it would be prudent for the US to carefully assess all concomitant implications of sending its troops into Iraq.

free market and free trade throughout the world. Uncontestable goals; and should be welcomed by one and all but for the arrogant presumption of the concept of "American exceptionalism that with its democratic history and its strength the United States has a unique role to play in guiding the world towards a better future" (Marcus Corbin- *The Bush National Security Strategy* CD-1-26.9.2002).

Rhetoric of the divine pronouncements include: fight corruption, respect basic human rights, embrace the rule of law, invest in health care and education, follow responsible economic policies, nonnegotiable demands on human dignity, limits on absolute powers of the state, respect for women, religious and ethnic tolerance etc. Commendable objectives; but then these are already practiced in varying degree in the world. Even dictators speak of "real democracy" because traditional practitioners of democracy often forget their constituents in their unrelenting pursuit of money and power. Subordination of democracy promotion in big power "interest" should be seen as congruent to particular situation and not

being wronged. He believes that in a just war, once the aggressor state has been repulsed, it can also be punished (*Just and Unjust war*-Michael Walzer).

President Bush in his last month's address to the UNGA asked the UN to walk the talk on Iraq and its persistent violation of the UNSC resolutions 7th October at Cincinnati. He apparently moved away from his unilateral tenor by saying that "we will lead a coalition to disarm him". He refused to wait "for the final proof" -- the smoking gun -- that will come in the form of a mushroom cloud. He is convinced, as was President Clinton before him, that regime change in Iraq was the only certain way of removing this great threat to the United States. President Bush saw in the exit of Saddam Hussein "a student of Stalin," a dramatic improvement in the condition of the Iraqi people as had happened in Afghanistan after the Taliban left -- with a free Iraqi people able to share in the prosperity of the world, build democratic institutions and live at peace with its neighbours. He is now being armed by the US Congress with authority to use the armed forces. The draft

not necessarily conflict with the traditional concept of sovereignty. After the end of the Cold War increasing number of countries demanded of the others that they upgrade their governance to an acceptable international standard; that sovereignty was not a moral absolute but related to current circumstances; and that above the state there is a will of the international community also described as cosmopolitan society. Various proposals have been advanced to make states accountable for their behaviour, which include certificate of good house keeping by a designated UN agency; more liberal procedure for intervention (as in Haiti to restore democracy); responsibility for recognition and de-recognition of states by the UN etc (*Proactive Cosmopolitanism and the Issue of Sovereignty* -- Paul Taylor).

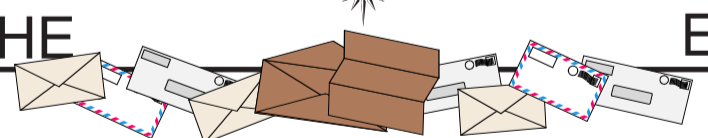
If regime change is followed by the Iraqi Kurds' demand for self-determination right under both the ethnic definition and minority definition of the term "people" and also if they put forward "oppression theory" argument then the intervention-

ists would have opened the Pandora's Box. Kurds and Iraqis have fought prolonged war in the sixties and seventies. Kurdish revolt collapsed in 1975 as Iran withdrew her support of the Kurds following Iraq-Iran border agreement. In 1988 the Iraqi government used chemical weapons against the Kurds killing thousands. Iraq's defeat in the Gulf War led to a 1991 uprising of the Kurds, which was brutally suppressed resulting in a million Kurds fleeing to Turkey. Of the estimated 26 million Kurds about one fifth live in Iraq. Dream of independent Kurdistan repeatedly thwarted in the Treaty of Sevres (1820) and the Treaty of Lusanne (1923) had never totally faded from the Kurdish mind. Indeed periodic Turkish incursions across the Iraqi border since no-fly zone was imposed in hot pursuit of the Kurdish rebels are a case in point. The most recent rapprochement between two rival Kurdish factions with American blessings may in the post-Saddam era give the autonomy to the Kurds in northern Iraq causing immense discomfort to Iran and Turkey.

The endless list of crimes against humanity put at the doorstep of Saddam Hussein and his potential to cause havoc in the region may seem to pose a danger to the world. In such a case Italian political scientist Danilo Zolo's "Legal Globalization" -- philosophically rooted in the Kantian idea of moral unity of mankind -- and articulated by Kelson's juridical thesis which basically propounds the primacy of international law becomes relevant. However as it is yet uncertain whether the Anglo-US efforts would find favour in the UNSC given Russian, French and Chinese reluctance to go for immediate military intervention, it would be prudent for the US to carefully assess all concomitant implications of sending its troops into Iraq.

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



Crime, corruption and leadership

Four ward commissioners have so far been killed by unidentified gunmen. It may seem to many people that criminals are being killed by criminals-- an ultimate result of penetration of crime and corruption in the leadership. We, the general people, do not want to see such unwanted fate of our leadership.

judiciary from administration and the appointment of an independent Ombudsman are must. And also a law must be enacted to bar the criminals from participating in local and national elections.
M. S. Uddin, Nagoya, Japan

Safer in jail!

The best place for criminal commissioners is the jail. They get protection by the police and the people are also protected from them.
Mogazzan Murshed
Dayazar, Dhaka

"Fuel-less electricity"

While reading several letters on "Fuel-less electricity generator", I was thinking of my school and college years. During that period I used to participate in National Science Fair organised by the Ministry of Science and Technology. First the best projects were selected from different corners of the country and then the central science fair was held at the Agargaon Science Museum premises. There were many good projects but a number of those were remotely scientific and full of tricks.

During my undergraduate days in BUET, I had a better understanding of those tricks. Many people who does not have any institutional knowledge of science and technol-

ogy bear in mind bizarre ideas of impossible projects and try to attract the attention of the general people by various means.

Therefore, I would like to suggest that a Professor from the Department of Mechanical Engineering of BUET do a thorough investigation on the invention of Mr Nazmul Huda.
M. Mushtaque
Pallabi, Mirpur, Dhaka

While there has been a debate going on on this subject, I believe some explanation of the patent process itself needs to be given. For example, one letter writer was of the mistaken opinion that filing for a patent is equivalent to scientific scrutiny. Without going into the debate whether this is a valid invention or not, I would like to point out the following:

Patent filing is a legal process. The award of a patent indicates that the owner of the patent was the first person to come up with an idea that others have not made, and that the idea is not already in the public domain or common knowledge. However, granting of a patent does not imply that the idea or invention will necessarily work.

Most patent examiners have technical background, and so they will probably reject claims that seem absolutely absurd. However, they are not experts in the various fields

of invention, and the patent scrutiny process does not include checking to see the scientific/technical validity of claims. Patent examiners limit their tasks to checking for prior art, and claims that have already been made in prior inventions. As noted above, this is basically a legal process.

So, anyone could come up with some idea and file for a patent, and has a very good chance of getting it, if the application is properly done and the idea is new (not necessarily workable). If the invention claimed does not work, then owning a patent will not do the "inventor" any good, because nobody will pay him or her any money to use the idea. And since patent process does cost quite a bit of money, one usually does not want to waste his own money in filing applications based on untested ideas, since there will ultimately be no financial payoff.

Of course, this is not to say that over the years lot of individual investors have not lost a lot of money backing foolish "inventions" just because there was a patent issued for it. A lot of that, again, was based on the mistaken assumption on part of the investors that since there was a patent issued, the invention had to work.
Shabbir Parvez, Oak Hill, USA

"One American's comments on the upcoming war"

Thanks to Mr. Ken Tozier for his sympathy for Iraqi people (October 9). But how did he determine that regime change would save the Iraqi people? Does he think Mr. Bush will let the Iraqi's to choose their own leader?

If there is a democratic election in Iraq, certainly a Shiite will become the new leader. For religious and cultural reason this leader will be tilted to Iran. Does Mr Tozier think that his President who has sworn in to protect American interest let it happen? Even if we forget Mr. Bush's personal, political and national interest, Iraq will become another failed state like Somalia or Afghanistan from this regime change. Please remember that it's Mr. Bush who will operate the war not a kind hearted person like Mr Ken Tozier. He will destroy Iraqi army, remaining infrastructures, take control of the oil fields and forget about the Iraqi people.

Like his father who asked the Iraqi people to rise against Saddam and then left them high and dry. And who will answer for the less than noble deeds of America? Who would bring the people to justice who supplied Saddam with toxic agents, virus and

components for the weapon of mass destruction? First, let us know about that.
Showrov, Dhaka

Extortion in the name of religion

A group of people are making the general people's, taxi-drivers' and baby-taxi drivers' life difficult at the taxi-stand near Indira Road (South-east corner of the National Assembly). These people pressurise everybody to pay a certain amount for their so-called "Khaja Baba's Urus of Rajab." If someone refuses to pay them, they threaten them. As a result taxi-drivers avoid the stand.

However, the funny thing is the Arabic month of Rajab is gone and now it's the month of Shaban. But they still take those forced subscription. As a long-time resident of this area I've never heard of any "Khaja Baba" in that area. Sometimes police force is deployed in the locality but they don't do anything to protect the general people and taxi drivers from these toll collector.

Would the authorities concerned please take appropriate steps in this regard?
Md Ibrahim Faisal
Indira Road, Dhaka

Smoking in

public places

Though I am an occasional smoker I too feel irritated when I see someone smoking in public transport ignoring the passengers health concern and irritation.

I request these smokers to avoid smoking in public transport and request the government to ban smoking in public places.
Mohammed Sohel Hara
Topkhanad Road, Dhaka

BOL to market WeP

Peripherals products It is rather baffling how the government is hell bent in turning Bangladesh into the biggest Indian market outside that country.

In a recent roundtable organised by *The Daily Star*, the business group in the country observed that Bangladesh must immediately impose trade barriers to most forms of Indian imports.

It was not too long ago when paper ran several reports on how a Bangladeshi company was bullied by the Indians and were forced to abandon exports to that country. Reading about WeP Peripherals Ltd, India's largest IT Peripherals company expanding business in Bangladesh is quite ironic, if not downright disturbing. Our Commerce Minister should

listen to our business community and all their concerns should be dealt with immediately.
AA, California, USA

Vigilance team

As per clause 70 of the Constitution there is provision for appointing a Nayapal (ombudsman) to check corruption, but no government has ever been able to form such independent powerful body as yet.

In the past while it was a presidential form of government there was a powerful team named Presidents Vigilance Team, to check and detect corruption and they were empowered by the President to take any action on the spot. Thus corruption was a bit controlled.

But nowadays there is corruption everywhere. There is no check and balance in any offices, either it be of the PM's office or of any Thana Nirbahi office. All are proud of doing "number two business" in the offices at the cost of any *nozrana* (bribe) big or small, and thus our country has topped the list of the most corrupt nations in the world.
S. R. Hussain, Gulshan, Dhaka