

Confusion over literacy rate

Authentic figure vital for planning

RIGHT through the maze of differing statistics on the literacy status of our people, one arrives at a conclusion that resonates positively, on the whole. Over the years, we have made considerable progress in terms of the literacy coverage. The government, in so many words, put it at 62 to 65.5 per cent. But, according to a survey of the Bureau of Statistics, an agency within the government, it's around 45 per cent. The Poverty Reduction Strategy Programme has put it at 56 per cent. The official census figure 2000 is around 48 per cent. But Education Watch (EW), an NGO combine, has worked out the latest figure at 41.4 per cent.

The governmental propensity to exaggerating literacy figures has been pronounced. Just as we don't want to underplay any headway truly made so also are we averse to living with a lie, especially with regard to such an important development parameter. There is an analogy embedded in recent history. The erstwhile AL government claimed self-sufficiency in food; the present government has made something of an issue there by deciding to probe the former government's claim to autarky. Now it seems to be the turn for literacy.

We should not fudge figures. It will be self-defeating if we did so. Correct literacy rate is not only obtainable but it is also highly desirable. The literacy statistics need not be incoherent and varied. For, their veracity can be tested, to arrive at a single figure, against a criterion which has more or less been agreed to by all concerned: *possession of skills in reading, writing and numeracy relating to familiar contents and contexts and the ability to use these skills in everyday life in order to function effectively in society.* An authentic literacy rate, let's not forget, can be key to proper planning and a major tool for sustainable development.

We find Jahanara Begum's comments on the report to be misleading and ill informed, no doubt prepared by self-serving bureaucrats who always try to hide unpleasant facts from public representatives.

We strongly suggest that the government takes a serious look into the findings of the EW Report which is based on greater details needed for national assessment of this nature. Government would be well advised not to look at reports of this type negatively but cooperate with NGOs like CAMPE, who are trying to help the administration by projecting the real situation.

Mideast back to cauldron

Roadmap should be the name of the game

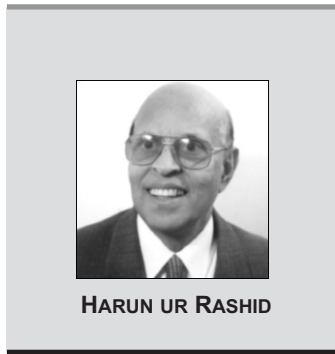
THE rejection of a proposed fresh lease to ceasefire by both the Israeli and Palestinian hardliners has undoubtedly dealt a blow to the peace process. The situation has hit a new low with deadly suicide bombings last week and Israel's retaliatory air-strikes on Hamas leaders. The Israeli policy of identifying the Hamas leaders, targeting them and killing them without even batting an eyelid would only provoke suicide attacks from the other side.

What is interesting to note has been America's patently predictable reaction to the recent events. While on the one hand it strongly condemned the suicide bombings by Islamic militants group as terrorist attacks, similar attitude was not evident in her reaction Israeli attacks on the Palestinians. Such a partial stand is not only unfortunate but unacceptable as well, especially at a juncture like this. It has by now become obvious that the earlier ceasefire is not working at all making the US-authored 'roadmap' more vulnerable than ever. And that's why the US should be extremely careful while reacting to developments so that their position is not construed as being stepmotherly to the Palestinians.

The latest spate of violence has once again sparked off a debate on Palestinian leadership. It has brought the tension between the two leaders, Arafat and Abbas, out in the open. While Arafat has been the epitome of elected leadership among the Palestinians, Abbas has yet to prove has standing with his people. He has the backing of US administration, but he is yet to rein in the hardliners and make them listen to him.

What the Israelis and the Palestinians have to realise is that the 'roadmap' is the only blueprint on the table for reconciliation and peace to ensue between them. The headway made in its implementation must not go waste.

US pre-war plans in Iraq went wrong



AS the old saying goes: "How do you make God laugh? Tell Him your plans." Some observers believe that this has exactly occurred in post-war Iraq. The US-British authorities thought that they had the best-laid plans for post-war reconstruction of Iraq and now they find themselves in a quagmire.

Where plans went wrong:

The US-British forces quickly dismantled in early April Iraq's Saddam Hussein regime and thought of smooth sailing with their pre-war plans. The planners anticipated problems but the fact is they anticipated wrong ones. . It was reported that 70 per cent of the pre-war planning was related to humanitarian needs. The post-war issues, such as refugees, hunger and disease that occupied the minds of the US-British governments never surfaced.

New and unexpected issues have emerged in post-war Iraq such as security, lack of oil, electricity and water. To all these added a misjudgment of the US administrator Paul Bremer. He demobilised the old Iraqi army as part of a sweeping plan to eradicate the Saddam Hussein's Baath Party. Violent street protests quickly forced him to reverse that policy, promising that some 250,000 Iraqi officers would receive a monthly salary for the indefinite future.

The US has been spending about US\$ 1 billion a week for its soldiers. The cost does not include the running of the administration in the occupied country and it was reported that rebuilding the country could cost an additional billion dollar a month. Then there is the question of Iraq's enormous debts and in recent days the major creditors agreed to restructure about US\$ 21 billion worth, but estimates of the total external debt, including war reparations to Kuwait, run well over

US\$ 100 billion dollars. Iraq can only raise such huge capital from commercial financial market but until Iraq is stabilised, no financial institution will lend money.

The US thought that a major component of the expenses in post-war Iraq would come from oil exports in Iraq (the country is endowed with the second largest oil reserves in the world). Now it is reported that source of funds from oil for rebuilding Iraq is running at less than 15 per cent of what was projected. The US civil administrator estimated that the loss of pipeline would cost Iraq US\$ 10 million a day.

and car-hijacking are the norms of the day. Iraqis are confused, frustrated and desperate for law and order. Water, petrol and electricity are scarce for Iraqi people. They see that the occupation forces live in the Saddam Hussein's palaces while their houses had been destroyed. The so-called "liberators" of Iraqi people have become targets for attacks.

The deaths of Saddam Hussein's sons did not reduce, as expected, the attacks on the US soldiers. The US reportedly now believes that an alliance known as "Jaish Mohammad" is believed to be

world trade are being dealt with by the world's multilateral institutions. Now the US is reportedly re-thinking to induce other countries to send their troops in Iraq because it has been too difficult and costly for the US-British alone to handle post-war Iraq. But unless there is a major role for the UN, no country seems to be prepared to dispatch their soldiers to Iraq. In fact at present those few countries which were at one stage willing to send their troops have suspended their decision after the attack on UN HQ in Iraq. Poland that sent troops is considering pulling out its soldiers from Iraq.

great influence over their followers. The only Ayatullah living in Iraq is the Grand Ayatullah Ali Sistani who possesses impeccable scholarly credentials. Ayatullah Sistani was neutral during the war but has so far refused to meet the US administration in Baghdad and his subsequent pronouncements will be crucial in determining the attitude of a large part of the Shi'ite community towards the occupying power. Another Shi'ite movement, called Sadr Movement, led by the young scholar Muqtada al-Sadr has emerged. He is in his 30 and is

In this connection it is relevant to quote what Pakistani Islamic scholar late Moulana Maududi said : " The theocracy built up by Islam is not ruled by any particular religious class but by the whole community of Muslims including the rank and file. The entire Muslim population runs the state in accordance with the Book of God and the practice of His prophet. If I were permitted to coin a new term, I would describe this system of government as 'theo-democracy'.

One thing the Shi'ite groups are all united on is a rejection of the US as an occupation force in the country. Although happy at the demise of the Sunni-dominated Saddam Hussein regime, all Shi'ite Ulemas both inside and outside Iraq, are less disposed to a political role for the US or its Iraqi exile allies. Political observers believe that Shi'ite resistance to the US presence will grow the longer US forces remain in the country. If that occurs, history will judge whether America's pre-emptive war on Iraq was prudent and wise. If the end of it all is the anarchy in Iraq where its citizens know no security, are starved on electricity and petrol, US's adventure in Iraq is a big, big gamble for neo-conservatives of the Bush administration.

Conclusion

Republican Senator from Indiana, Richard Lugar, Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, visited Iraq and appeared to be worried that the American people were being blindfolded to the true costs in blood and money of a war that had not yet ended. He reportedly said : " This idea that we will be in Iraq just as long as we need to and not a day more, is rubbish! We are going to be there for a long time..... Where does the money come from ? How is it to be disbursed and by whom?" These are the questions to which majority Americans want answers from the Bush administration.

A noted British journalist Robert Fisk recently wrote : " The Americans can reconstruct the dead faces of Saddam's two sons, but they can't reconstruct Iraq". It is worthwhile to remember that the Soviet Union quickly took Kabul in 1979, only to face a decade of warfare before withdrawing in defeat in 1989 from Afghanistan.

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

BOTTOM LINE

Republican Senator from Indiana, Richard Lugar, Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, visited Iraq and appeared to be worried that the American people were being blindfolded to the true costs in blood and money of a war that had not yet ended. He reportedly said : " This idea that we will be in Iraq just as long as we need to and not a day more, is rubbish! We are going to be there for a long time..... Where does the money come from ? How is it to be disbursed and by whom?" These are the questions to which majority Americans want answers from the Bush administration.

The occupation forces did not anticipate looting, smuggling of oil. Pipelines are being sabotaged. Millions of dollars worth of equipment and materials were destroyed or stolen after the fall of Saddam Hussein. It was reported that geological data, seismic maps collected on more than 200,000 kilometres of land in Iraq at an estimated US\$ 15,000 per kilometer were looted. The bottom line is that Iraq's oil industry is in a state of chaos and anarchy. In fact Iraq is importing oil from Kuwait and elsewhere.

Security situation in Iraq

Security situation is alarming in Iraq. In recent days the devastating bombing of the UN headquarters in Baghdad, the destruction of oil pipelines and water mains appear to demonstrate that no foreigner or Iraqi collaborator with the US is safe. Almost one US soldier a day is being killed in Iraq. The body bags now started to arrive in the US and the Americans are not obviously happy about it. They started to question for the first time the reasons for America's unilateral intervention in Iraq as presence weapons of mass destruction in Iraq that was the primary reason for attacking has not yet been found.

Although its dictatorial regime has gone, social evils, such as drug abuse, street gangs, lawlessness

America's concerns including global terrorism are now inextricably linked with multilateral actions. Jakarta bombing on 5th August seems to prove that invasion of Iraq failed to reduce the threat of terrorism that has become an international issue. Each country has to find new ways to raise the quality of intelligence gathering and sharing. The recent arrest in the US of a British arms dealer of Indian origin trying to sell a surface-to-air missile to an undercover agent was possible due to the intelligence sharing among the FBI, Russia's FSB and British intelligence. As "no man is an island", so also America is part of international community.

Political problems with Shi'ites

Besides these difficult issues, Iraq's majority Shi'ite community want the occupation forces to leave Iraq quickly and leave the question of governance to the Iraqi people. (54-65% of the Iraq's 23 million people are Shi'ite while 32-42% are Sunni Muslims). Of immediate concern to the US is the attitude of the Shi'ite Ulemas (religious scholars) to the former's presence as an occupying force. There are a number of senior Ulemas whose views are highly critical in this regard. Within the hierarchy of Shi'ites the most highly qualified Ulemas (Ayatullahs) have

charismatic with a large following. The Sadr Movement is gaining widespread acceptance among the urban poor, and has recognised Ayatullah Kazim al-Ha'iri, an Iraqi national living in the Iranian city of Qum.

Another Ulema Ayatullah Baqir al-Hakim is the chairperson of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) and on 24 August he was a target for assassination for his support for toppling the Saddam Hussein regime. While Ayatullah Hakim provided support for the US during the war, he publicly opposed the formation of any US-led interim administration. SCIRI's position appears to be that it is willing to work with the occupying power for the economic reconstruction but not on a political basis.

The Shi'ia Ulemas are reportedly split between three methods of government in Iraq; (a) clerical rule like that of Iran, (b) a less public role but more advisory role in government in accordance with teachings of Islam and (c) a politically neutral approach as advocated by Sistani. Despite their differences, it seems that Islamic precepts would underline the basics of government. In the end, the attitude of majority Shi'ite community towards nature and type of government in Iraq will largely be determined by Shi'ite religious scholars.

OPINION

Protesting Delhi's water diversion plan

SYED MUHAMMAD HUSSAIN

WHAT amazes me is a reference that the 'protest note was given amid media reports ...' and that 'we've requested them not to do it we think it won't be wise'.

Are we to understand that our authorities have had no feed-back from our premier Mission in New Delhi and from the peripheral capitals, especially Kathmandu, on the development of India's massive plan for irrigation and power generation, which has taken shape over the last decade or so, and is now poised for implementation! And that our admonition and advice on India's wisdom would be well received and create the kind of ambience we wish to have for a fruitful negotiation. And now no less a person than the President of India confirms in a nation-wide address on his country's 57th Independence Day the "project to tackle droughts and floods in river-basin states as well as give them water and power security" (The Daily Star, 16 Aug 2003). And for us to have advised India not to implement it and to say it would not be wise for India to move ahead with such project, is a palpably immature response. It does not only display an utter failure to have monitored the progress of this massive plan of India taking shape over the last 20 years or so, but also demonstrates a sheer lack of serious, organized and rational response to highlight the sense of our deepest concerns and apprehensions. President Abdul Kalam's narration of the objectives of this mega project sums up precisely the needs of Bangladesh and her 120 million hapless citizens as well facing a stark future. All the Indian droughts and floods will gradually be shifted to our lands. They will increasingly enjoy water and power security' across the border while Bangladesh goes on carrying the river silt with ever increasing intensity into the Bay of Bengal, with most of the common river's drying up much sooner than later. We should at least wake up to the harsh reality of a small nation with a giant neighbour that the latter's wisdom

has always been, and will always be anchored in their own, exclusive self interest. It is only the political will, global support and diplomatic finesse that could underpin and advance our legitimate moral and lawful rights.

Secondly, the status of our serious concern at the Indian plan which is very much in an advanced stage should have warranted the use of a special envoy to Delhi, or at least, the deputation of our High Commissioner there to make the demarche at the highest possible official/diplomatic level directly. Acting Indian High Commissioner in Dhaka having been called at the DG-level is not certainly the appropriate conduit at this stage and a built-in signal of a very low priority will invariably seal the fate of our protest. A routine reply that the Indian authorities are looking at the con-

rally control the outflow because of her investment, her greater requirements and obviously because of her overwhelming presence in relation to Nepal's continuing national exercise would be to prise out as much return from these projects as possible. While power could be supplied upland, Nepal could start worrying about her increasingly diminishing share of irrigation waters for her own agricultural needs in upper reaches of these major rivers. Both the laws of gravity and India would be against and not necessarily in that order. In this context, Bangladesh as a lower riparian to India faces a different set of arguments as to why India's wide variety of needs outweigh the essential, life and death dependence of Bangladesh on waters from the Ganges, the Brahmaputra and other rivers."

had sent to the authorities from Nepal, that may be of interest: "India's master plan for positioning a series of projects of immense benefits to India -- hydropower, flood protection, navigation, is in readiness for India's entry into the 21st century, and of course, Nepal ... admirably providing a carriage for such a journey into future" (07 February, 1994). It appears that Bangladesh is providing the other wheel for the \$200b carriage that India is rolling out now.

It is deeply intriguing for us as concerned citizens to consider the possible reasons for such an atrophied stance of ours over a decade in defining our national strategy -- is it our sheer incompetence and abysmal ignorance? With a string of highly-rated water experts including knowledgeable senior bureau-

sequence: aa. Instruct our Ambassadors/High Commissioners in selected capitals to keep the host authorities informed of our position and concerns; bb. Brief the major political parties and leaders in the same vein, to help them to form a common national consensus with a view to sensitizing the people for peaceful expressions of the national rights and concerns, to help activate the government to achieve desired goals and cc. Brief similarly the Editors of major newspapers, magazines about our position and our basic approach for a peaceful process of resolution. Media has a critical and public opinion-forming role, in a judicious, responsible manner.

Simultaneously, an Expert Committee should be charged with the preparation of detailed position

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tents for a response in due course, puts us in square number one. And like the concerned Minister, the nation will lament that our advice that it would 'not be wise' for them 'to do it' has been 'again no avail.'

The authorities now have almost been pushed into some action, half-baked and apparently ill-informed and certainly, ill-prepared. That has been this nation's lot -- we do so little, so late and so badly.

In this context, some references to my article 'Water Resources Development-A Regional Rationale' that The Daily Star had published on April 7, 1997 will be revealing. "India has now got a huge door open for developing hydel power resources on the major rivers flowing out of Nepal as indicated earlier. Again, these large projects are expected to be located basically at the Nepal-India border as the rivers flow down into India, the lower riparian state. While India will natu-

I also commented more than six years ago that "Now even Brahmaputra's historic flow into the lowest riparian Bangladesh is facing a threat of being disturbed and reduced with the Tipaimukh barrage on the Indian side on the one hand and of sizeable diversion/withdrawals at the upper reaches in China to augment the flow of waters in the Arun river." In the same article, the following were among the specific recommendations: "It is necessary for Bangladesh to monitor such developments and assess their adverse impact on the quantum of water that finally crosses into Bangladesh. And obviously on such likely scenarios, Bangladesh has to develop her own strategy and approaches for negotiations to ensure up-holding of her long-term interests in this exceedingly vital field".

And let me also recall the following from one of the 60-odd reports, I

crats (and many of them have been one way or another operating over the last two or more decades) it is perhaps not the explanation. The other obvious possibility of a sympathetic mole favoring a no-action approach with strategy of lowest possible resistance, (who are also active on pro-gas export front, on allowing adverse trade balance to grow to an incredibly high level and in other such sell-outs of national interests) is something our parliament and government should seriously investigate as a measure of urgency. One simple term of reference would suffice and that is -- why we do not have our strategy options worked out in respect of (i) the Ganges Treaty, (ii) the JRC matters/issues relating to common rivers and (iii) the withdrawal threats scenario/active plans of the upper riparian countries. WHY?

Meanwhile we should have taken the following actions in proper

papers with alternative strategies for various probable scenarios. Facts and figures and solid, logical and rational arguments should be the basis for the presentation of our case both to India and to the world (especially all the relevant international and regional institutions and organizations), as the time comes. Secondly, we must select a small group who will have the knowledge and would be articulate in presenting the case in an impeccable manner and above all, who are prepared to take on the other side's points and arguments with confidence. The leader should not just be reading out prepared statements without the ability to expand, explain and respond on his own during formal as well as informal discussions with his counterpart. This would require him to be thoroughly conversant with the subject and capable of marshalling all arguments and rebuttals on his own

steam. This Group should be sent to some crucial capitals and world bodies to make appropriate presentation of our case.

This issue, and indeed quite a few other subjects as well, requires the best of preparation, the best of briefing and the best of presentation.

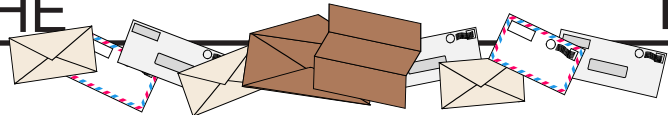
We must launch a website on the problems we face -- facts, figures, relevant references, incontrovertible arguments, without hyperbole or naive comments -- a serious move for global information on a serious issue that we are compelled to face. Let the voice of a small country under duress be heard across the frontiers.

All these, I may emphasize, have to be done discreetly, over a short period of preparatory time, without unseemly media hype. The so-called intellectuals and elite members of the civil society have been displaying certain kind of polarization with the political changes in the country and are somewhat marked and dated. Political parties should be seen and heard in the public on the issues that the nation faces at its peril. The strategy is to keep all the appropriate channels open right from now on so that a cumulative wave of sympathy and support could be generated as and when necessary.

In my view, we have already been overtaken by events for reasons touched upon earlier. We should do everything possible in all fronts to prevent this from becoming a *fait accompli*, as was the case with Farakka. It will be naive to presume that India would easily agree to appreciate Bangladesh's lawful rights. We should redouble our efforts to find ways and means to ensure and safeguard our economy, ecology and the life and living of our people.

Syed Muhammad Hussain is former Secretary to govt. and ambassador.

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



Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

Let's talk about a global tyrant

The other day I was reading about Idi Amin's terrifying biography.

I wonder where were the eyes of the superpower US at that time. Or may be the US researchers could not find enough of natural resources to grab in the name of liberating Ugandans. Because at that time there was a real urge of getting the nation liberated. Uganda needed the "protector's help". Liberation does not come as a gift from anybody; it is achieved by the masses. And this achievement transforms

them. But maybe Mr. Bush defines liberation differently. What he feels is that occupying other nation's reserve and leaving the people of that nation in distress and disorder is liberation. So may be Idi Amin was a tyrant, but Bush is our global tyrant.

Arman Khan
Tejkunipara, Farmgate, Dhaka

Dhanmondi RA in the morning and at noon

Although is a residential area, Dhanmondi is the hub of most

English medium schools of the town and all these schools have more than one premises to accommodate the students of different classes. Besides, many clinics, hospitals and private offices are located in the area.

Every day the most critical time in Dhanmondi area is the school time i.e., from 7.30 to 8.30 in the morning and 12.30 to 2.30 in the afternoon -- one hour in the morning and two hours in the afternoon. For every student there is a transport, be it a car or a taxi or a rickshaw, for coming to school and going back home

Traffic in the area during school hours is horrendous. The unruly drivers make the situation more chaotic. On this issue the schools are, as appeared to me, as serious as they are for other issues like collection of revenues.

Traffic police are seen in some points, which are not at all adequate. They start functioning at 08.00 and by then the situation is already horrific. To ease the situation I suggest that adequate number of traffic police be set in every cross section during the school time and they should start functioning before

7.30 in the morning. My question is cannot these schools together do anything to ease the situation for which they are responsible?

Abdullah
Dhaka

College admission

This year the government has decided that colleges cannot take any admission tests. The college authorities have to depend on the GPA score of the students to evaluate their merit. But is it a prudent decision? Are the evaluation made by the boards quite up-to-mark? Do

all the students who appeared in the board-examination would enjoy the same opportunity? Does GPA score represents a student's real standard? I think these considerations are important before making such a decision.

From my personal view I can say: 1. Evaluation made by boards are not quite up-to-mark. Because the examination system does not provide a chance for a student to show his or her creativity, it rather inspire them to memorise some selected questions. Although there were some minor changes, there

has not been a radical change in the way questions are set. So the standard of the examination is still very low.

2. All the students do not get equal opportunities. A student living in the city gets better opportunities than a student living in the rural areas. So they must not be compared in the same scale.

3. Every single ministry of the government is thought to be a corrupted one. Education sector is not out of that either. So how can the college authorities depend on such questionable administration?

I support government's idea to eradicate coaching business. But this cannot be the way to solve it. To put an end to coaching business, education system needs to be reformed where the creative thinking of a student will be inspired.

I also think whichever decision government make should be discussed thoroughly and then it should be enforced. Implementing a decision with immediate effect may fire back and prove harmful.

Rajib Khan
Dhaka