

LATE S. M. ALI

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Better SSC results

Yet the glass is almost half-empty

T is always a pleasure to see students notching up creditable scores in exams, particularly when it happens to be, for them, their first major competitive test. It is heartening to see the SSC results of last year bettered insofar as aggregate pass percentage is concerned while the number of CGPA-5 achievers has made a quantum jump of almost 90 percent.

Congratulations are in order for the successful candidates and all associated with their attainment. Girl students continue to do well, but generally, the urban students have fared better than their rural counterparts. One cannot but also note the fact that cent per cent success rate continues to be monopolised by ten or so institutions of the country, most of which are in the capital. Perhaps this is something that the ministry of education ought to address as a priority. After all, a nation can claim to be well educated when the level of good education is spread across the country in equal measure. Like economic growth, good education must be distributed in an egalitarian manner.

At the risk of sounding pessimistic we see the glass as being still not quite full, in that almost 48 percent of the candidates has failed to make the grade. Although the percentage of unsuccessful candidates has decreased considerably in the last two years, the current rate of failure is disconcerting. One wonders what will the future of these candidates be?

While the authorities must be commended for bringing down the incidence of cheating at the exams we would like to suggest that it must be altogether banished.

Basically, the authorities must address the systemic lacunae that have resulted in as many as 409 institutions going without a single successful candidate to their credit. Although the number of such institutions has gone down, yet it is too large, suggesting some serious fault somewhere along the line. Also, the problem of weak management in many of the schools due to local politics must be addressed immediately. Overall, institutional changes must be effected to ensure that the failure rate is brought down radically.

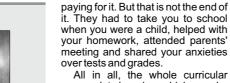
Testing mathematical talent

God speed to our participants

team of six Bangladeshi whiz kids is to represent the country at the 46th International Mathematical Olympiad in Mexico. This is for the first time that we are going to take part in such a high-profile mathematical competition. We take pride in the prospective maiden appearance of Bangladeshi talents at the world stage, but our triumph would be truly made if the team makes its presence felt, with some of our budding mathematicians winning medals and accolades, in the competition.

This presents a two-some opportunity: first, our boys and girls will get to know where they stand in terms of excellence in the global mathematical arena; and secondly, they are offered a chance to enhance the image of their country by some creditable performances. Given a congenial, creativity-unfurling atmosphere and the right kind of exposure, our boys and girls can do wonders as some of the children of expatriate Bangladeshis have proved in certain fields. A word of praise for the Dutch-Bangla Bank and Bangla daily Prothom Alo which came forward, in a pioneering sense, to extend both material and moral support to the Bangladesh Mathematical Olympiad Committee in selecting the whiz kids and proceeding with their plans for participation in Mexico. The selection process itself was an exercise in excellence with 15,000 candidates participating and only a team of five having been found eligible for the global contest in the end. Kudos to the organisers and those who came out successful. Mathematics is the staple of all major sciences. We are glad that our top academics are taking great interest in grooming those who show natural talent and knack for the subject for the world stage. We wish the team all the best.

The fog of education



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

books, newspapers and all the signs

research papers, letters, checks and

on the road. You have learned to write

grocery lists. You can watch televi-

sion and understand what you have

heard and seen. Most importantly

you can also speak well, talking to

others in the manner they understand

you and understanding others in the

So far this has been the educa-

ion of the head. What about the

education of the heart? What about

learning to become a good human

being? What about cultivating the

virtues of an enlightened soul?

What about the levitation of the

What happened when you went

to school, spent your days in the

classrooms, year after year, and

then went to private tutors, coaching

centres, libraries, and study

groups? Think how you worried

about examinations, term papers,

quizzes and grades! Not counting

he nightmares your parents went

through to put you through school,

first getting you admitted, and then

M.J. AKBAR

HERE is generally an iota of

truth in any swathe of Delhi

gossip. The certainties of

Delhi are more dubious. The cer-

tainty this week is that differences

between Prime Minister Manmohan

Singh and Congress president

Sonia Gandhi are slowly corroding

Logic suggests that this is

unlikely. There has been a clear

demarcation in the Congress

between Church and State with Mrs.

Gandhi in charge of political man-

agement and the Prime Minister

entrusted with governance. Differ-

ences are expected in any human

and paralysing governance.

nanner they talk to you

spirit?

HAT have you learned

since you got educated?

You have learned to read

approach to learning, which goes by the name of education, is a formidable business. It takes up lot of time, childhood, teenage and a good part of youth. And if you are educated you would know what it means to have an opportunity cost. The

healthy and fresh springtime of life is

gone in the murky turkey of aca-

George Bernard Shaw was

somewhat skeptical of the whole

thing. "From a very early age I have

had to interrupt my education to go

to school", he wrote. Education

coops up students in the class-

rooms, away from the world, away

from the people, not watching how

flowers bloom, crops grow, rivers

flow and seasons go. Schools do to

children what nurseries do to plants,

raising them under managed condi-

tion for mass production of commer-

around us? Fight US Presidents

never went to college. The Group

What has education changed

cially viable humanoids.

demic performance.

Chief Executives of international banks are only high school graduates. Who has ever asked if Michael Jackson has earned a degree? Many players, politicians, entertainers, and business moguls, people who own wealth, possess power, throw tantrums and create clouts never finished school. Prince Williams of England earned a degree in geography with the second highest honours, the best grades the British

tion ceremony? The Queen of

England, the Duke of Edinburgh, the

Prince of Wales and the Duchess of

Cornwall, the proud relatives of the

royal graduate. Think who would

come to your graduation, if you

majored in geography? Forget friends and neighbours. Try your

own parents, and even they might

want to cop out of it! Education has

gone the way of religion. The poor

and less fortunate is full of passion

ate intensity, while the rich and

But this is not to undercut the

value of education. The Article 26 of

The Universal Declaration on

Human Rights recognises educa-

tion as one of the fundamental

human rights after food, shelter and

famous knows how to exploit it.

CROSS TALK

surprised if you find that on the spur of fervent examination, you have left yourself unexamined!

We have lost education in our quest for knowledge. We learn to examine life, but not to explain it because

more educated people live on questionable means than those who never went to school. It's the fog of

education which makes it happen. Look who is hiding inside your skin after you finish reading. Don't be

roval family has ever achieved! Guess who attended his gradua water. In 2000 participants from 164 countries pledged at the World Education Forum in Dakar to provide education for all because it is a catalyst for human development. Never doubt the power of educa-

tion, which improves the quality of life by enhancing the ability of households to manage health problems. improve nutrition and childcare and plan for the future. In the Philippines for example, maternal primary education has reduced the risk of child mortality by half and secondary

education by a factor of three. Life

expectancy rises by 2 years for every

essential for economic develop-

ment through increasing productiv-

ity of people, which allows them a

greater role in economic life, and

gives them the opportunity to earn a

better living. An adult with a primary

education earns twice as much as

an adult without any schooling. An

OXFAM study shows that in Niger,

the incidence of poverty is 70 per

cent in households headed by

adults with no education, compared

to 56 per cent for households

headed by adults who have not

been to primary school. In Uganda,

four years of primary education

So education is a vital thing. It is

1 percent increase in literacy.

raises a farmer's output by 7 per cent.

Lastly and most importantly education promotes political stability and democracy. One of the examples cited by UNESCO is that in Bangladesh, women with a secondary education are three times more likely to attend a political meeting than are women with no education. This is supposed to be the net impact of education, giving people the right and choice to be fearless. tolerant and free.

If compared to a locomotive, this

is where education fails to jumpstart

ts engine. People go to school,

learn the alphabets, arithmetic, art

and science of the universe, history

of the world, properties of matters

secrets of the human body, and the

knowledge to understand and

balance the material struggle with

spiritual sagacity. This is where

education somehow loses its steam

after the initial roar. People learn to

read and write, then specialize in

certain skills after which they go

back where they started just like a

nut with eroded thread keeps slip-

ping on the bolt.

groping in the darkness, both eventually led to make the same mistakes despite their varving levels of knowledge. The educated man returns to his instincts at the end of learning, his soul gutted by the same flames of greed, need and lewdness, which burns in the hearts of the unlettered and the unenlightened

Except for one difference, which is funny. When an uneducated man steals something, he goes to jail, and this is a stigma that stays with him. But if the educated man steals, he seldom gets caught and is hardly bothered if he does, goes through life without shame, and enjoys flaunting what he has stolen. His car, his house, the education of his children in foreign countries, their lavish weddings, his foreign trips, mindless shopping, and the sordid inequality between earning and spending.

Socrates laid the foundation of education when he said that an unexamined life wasn't worth living. t was comparable to walking blindfolded through a garden without appreciating its beauty and attendant sensibilities. But that examination has turned into fog, the biggest smokescreen of human civilization which hides vulgar instincts behind ianed innocence

We have lost education in our quest for knowledge. We learn to examine life, but not to explain it because more educated people live on questionable means than those who never went to school. It's the fog of education which makes if happen. Look who is hiding inside your skin after you finish reading. Don't be surprised if you find that on he spur of fervent examination, you have left yourself unexamined!

educated and the uneducated, one blinded by too much light and another

Hence, the difference between the

Mohammad Badrul Ahsan is a banker.

Goodbye Nehru, hello Bush

establish his authority on the four big offices of state that constitute the substance of power in any government: home, defence, external affairs and finance. The big four, Shivraj Patil, Pranab Mukherjee, Natwar Singh and P. Chidambaram, pay lip service to the Prime Minister and pursue their own agenda (or, as in the case of the home minister, non-agenda). The first three consider themselves unfortunate, in the sense that any of them could have become Prime Minister instead of the incumbent, and see no particu-

the Left, and indeed important sections of the country, with semantics. This was only a "framework' rather than a "pact". Intelligent ministers should not believe that either their opponents or their friends are foolish. A rose by any other name smells as sweet, but onions do not begin to smell like a rose if you rename them.

The objectives of the "framework" signed by Pranab Mukherjee and Donald Rumsfeld have been defined in Clause 3. The first is, "defeating terrorism and violent and not-so-peaceful purposes is thin. We claimed for decades that our nuclear programme was only meant for peaceful purposes until. to no one's surprise, out popped the bomb. Supposing Europe, which does not want a strong Iran either, be on the verge of acquiring nuclear this treaty (alias "framework") to join

These are not idle questions, Mr Mukherjee; nor are they merely rhetorical ones. I presume the

a formal visit to America in a week's time?

The third objective should have been signed by commerce minister Kamal Nath. India and the United States have agreed to protect "the free flow of commerce via land, air and sea lanes". This is the ultimate homage that a defence minister can pay to globalisation. Pardon my ignorance, but I had no idea that government policy had become so committed to globalisation that we were ready to introduce such a clause in a formal defence agree-

mandate. Under the careful guidance of Pranab Mukherjee we have rejected Nehru and embraced Bush. Welcome to the future, boys! It does not need a cryptologist to understand what this means. The second sentence is a direct and obvious agreement for Indian participation in what will be called the training of the new Iraqi Army and police (consistently being attacked by the insurgency). Against all this Mr Mukherjee has been waving the lollipop of coproduction. He has not been totally candid here either. American defence production is in the private sector, and I would be pleasantly surprised to see transfer of technol-

of the UN with the Bush doctrine that

seeks to build alliances for interven-

tion in third countries outside the UN

ogy from the private sector. Did the defence minister take the Prime Minister into complete confidence about the intricacies of the commitments he has made? If he will not answer, the Prime Minister must.

Are the senior ministers indifferent to the Prime Minister because they believe that their jobs are in the gift of Mrs Sonia Gandhi rather than the Prime Minister? If that is true through Iran, or whether America's then the government of Dr

Defence minister Pranab Mukherjee's sunny smiles in Washington had clouded by the time he landed in Delhi. He tried to placate the Left, and indeed important sections of the country, with semantics. This was only a "framework" rather than a "pact". Intelligent ministers should not believe that either their opponents or their friends are foolish. A rose by any other name smells as sweet, but onions do not begin to smell like a rose if you rename them.

lar reason why they should accept his leadership. The fourth. Chidambaram, the weakest since he has no political constituency, and little to advertise except puff notices relationship, and inevitable when power is in play. The two may, for in backscratch media, has been

religious extremism". No problem with that. The second is "preventing the spread of weapons of mass destruction and associated materials, data and technologies". This is more interesting.

behaviour, in case you've forgotten,

was Saddam Hussein. The truth did

not prevent the launch of a horrible

war in which nearly two thousand

Americans and a hundred thousand

Iraqis have already died, a war

which co-signatory Rumsfeld says

might last another twelve years.

Would we have been required to

help America under the terms of this

"framework" had it been signed

three years ago? Saddam Hussein

was also called a terrorist. Would we

have been required to help elimi-

nate him or remove him from

power? These questions are rele-

vant not only because of the past but

because of the future. President

George Bush and Rumsfeld believe

Iran is in an "axis of evil", and

accuse it of promoting terrorism and

building nuclear weapons. Iran has

an advanced nuclear programme

that it says is for peaceful purposes.

The dividing line between peaceful

Clause 4E where he reaffirms that the two sides will "enhance capabilities to combat the proliferation of

defence minister has noted that he has signed such a commitment twice, not only in Clause 3 but also in

ment with the United States. I wonder if Mr Mukherjee checked with Mr Rumsfeld if America would, under this "framework" protect the free flow of gas in the proposed pipeline

BYLINE

joins Washington in declaring Iran to weapons. Are we then committed by

a campaign against Iran?

instance, have differing views on whether Satish Sharma should be inducted into the Cabinet or not. But to stretch that into a deathly Singh-Sonia confrontation is stretching the imagination.

Why? Simply because it is in neither person's interest to damage the government and neither has shown the tendency, as yet, to be suicidal. Could this equation change? Certainly. If Mrs Gandhi is persuaded that the BJP has weakened itself enough to give the Congress an opportunity for a breakthrough in BJP territory (the contiguous states of Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan and Gujarat), she could well set in motion a process by which the allies would seem to have brought the government down and forced another general election. But that

moment has not yet come. If Dr Manmohan Singh seems to be in office without being in power, it is because he has not been able to

encouraged by the example of his peers to behave similarly.

Is it a coincidence that two of the big four have created serious problems for the government with its principal ally, the Left, or is that merely an accident? The Left is not playing charades over disinvestments in Bhel or the Indo-United States defence pact. Its anger is serious. These are issues of hard politics and policy. The CPI(M) cannot risk alienating the working class in Bengal, which is the foundation of its strength, and which provides, at a rough estimate, some 70 seats to the party in Bengal (take away those seats and the Left Front's majority disappears). The Congress cannot expect the CPI(M) to accept a decision that affects its core interest in its citadel in order to keep an alliance afloat in Delhi.

Defence minister Pranab Mukherjee's sunny smiles in Washington had clouded by the time he landed in Delhi. He tried to placate

OPINION

Who defines "spread"? The last weapons of mass destruction' person accused of such nefarious

There is a sub-text to this clause that has not been addressed. India became a nuclear power without America's permission, or indeed without anyone's permission. America imposed sanctions against India, which became irrelevant over time. However, has the United States formally recognised India as a legitimate nuclear power, or are we still in an undefined penumbra? This has to be clarified. Otherwise, we become, paradoxically, an illegitimate nuclear state, and must, by the terms of this "framework" act against our own interests! As I said, all we need is a formal statement from Washington recognising India as a legitimate nuclear power. Did Pranab Mukherjee raise this point with his host Rumsfeld?

Will Dr Manmohan Singh, Prime Minister of India, and therefore responsible for everything that his defence minister has signed, raise this with George Bush when he pays

definition of freedom is slightly different from ours. I presume we leave each other alone when our definitions differ. But what was the necessity of accepting a clause such as this?

Two lines in the "framework" need to be read together, although they are distanced in the document. Clause 4B says that the two countries must "collaborate in multinational operations when it is in their common interest" and Clause 4J adds that they must "assist in building worldwide capacity to conduct successful peacekeeping operation, with a focus on enabling other countries to field trained, capable forces for these operations". There is no suggestion, incidentally, that any multinational operation should be under the aegis of the United Nations; a bilateral agreement is sufficient. India has therefore formally replaced the Nehru doctrine of

Manmohan Singh is in trouble because an animal with two heads will walk in different directions. To return to the classic analogy, the Church and the State work in the same country, protecting separate parts of a common interest. Mrs Gandhi named the Prime Minister. It was her right to do so after she revived the Congress. It is now the Prime Minister's right to name his ministers, and hold their performance accountable. It cannot be in Mrs Sonia Gandhi's interest if the government does not function. Who gains if Manmohan Singh fails?

If an animal with two heads cannot walk straight, then a cross-eyed Prime Minister cannot see straight either. Dr Singh has one eye on his duties, and the other on 10 Janpath. Realignment is essential for focus, and focus is critical for success.

working in multinational operations MJAkbar is Chief Editor of the Asian Age only through the blue-helmet regime

How poor-friendly is the budget?

SAIFUL ALAM

ESPITE severe criticisms the provision for facilitating whitening of black money has been kept in the finalised budget of Fiscal Year (FY) 2005-06. It may be that the Finance Minister (FM) is expecting black money, which may include reportedly those undeclared assets recently unearthed of 235 multimillionaire officials of the National Board of Revenue (NBR), to come as investment in various sectors. But the reality is just the opposite. According to an NBR report, only about Tk 1,800 crore has been whitened in the last three years, whereas many economists believe that there may be more than Tk 50,000/- crore black money in the country's economy. So in what appears to be a move to appease the business community ahead of next general elections, the FM has back traced on an emphatic pre-budget stand for discontinuation of a scheme to legalise black money which will frustrate the honest taxpayers as they have to pay a minimum 10 percent tax while the corrupt people should get immunity by paying only 7.5 percent

On the one hand, the government is apparently showing its tough stance against money laundering given the recent action against Bidisha, under the Anti-Money Laundering Act and on the other hand, the same government has allowed continuation of provision for whitening of black money in the budget. This is self-contradictory. Besides, internationally there are a lot of regulations such as antiterrorism and anti-money laundering laws. In such a context by allowing ill-gotten money to be whitened the nation will defy its

ment of his or her assets, if it thinks necessary. By keeping the provision in the budget the government has directly challenged the very core function of the ACC that has to a great extent belittled the necessity of its formation. Moreover, black money does not play any positive role in employment generation, production or any other sector. But it has a deep impact on inflation, which affects the

The budget does not have any measures that may be effective for local industries or their export cominternational obligations. A nation petitiveness. With 7.5 percent import cannot allow legalisation of illegal duties on basic raw materials along with problems of inefficient infrastrucmoney every year because this does not uphold morality and tures like ports and roads, it would be honesty of its citizens in the eyes of impossible for the entrepreneurs to the world community survive in the competitive interna-So the provision for whitening of tional market. Because 25 percent black money should have been import duty is already there on dropped altogether to improve the

readymade products. Tax difference image of the country, which regrettabetween raw materials and finished bly is being rated for the last few products is 17.5 percent, which is vears as one of the most corrupt illogical. To maintain the industrial countries in the world. It is also a clear sector's competitiveness either the violation of Section 26 of the Antirates of customs duties on basic raw Corruption Commission (ACC) Act materials should have been reduced that empowers the ACC to ask anyor duties on finished products

one to submit all necessary stateincreased

> On investment in the agriculture sector though the FM predicted it but he did not specifically say how. A national budget is supposed to give the nation a guideline but this document is devoid of any direction to attract investment. The FM has expected increase in revenue by 17.5 per cent but did not mention how he would achieve that. The budget did not spell out any measures for employment of the youths and women. Whereas one of the main objectives of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) is to create employment for the unemployed. But how will the government meet the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) ignoring the employment issue? The number of unemployed people would increase alarmingly due to the absence of any significant approach to this regard.

New jobs are created through rural development and industrialisation but there is no indication of industrialisation in the budget. Here comes the question of sector where to utilise huge Annual Development Programme (ADP) of Tk 24,500 crore. By and large, it appears, the

huge ADP may be used -- given the fact that the number of projects has also been cut down from 1012 to 856 -- mainly to please the ruling party leaders and activists in the name of development activities that may increase corruption, break financial discipline and deteriorate governance.

Tariff cut in mobile set is just an eyewash because the duties on SIM cards have been raised at the same time. Reducing tax on SIM cards from proposed Tk 1.200 to finalised Tk 900 does not seem to pacify the anger of subscribers. Because a recent writ petition filed in the High Court on this issue shows that even Tk 750 per SIM card is much higher than what the total Value Added Tax (VAT) and supplementary duty (SD) would actually be.

However, there are a number of positive elements in the budget. Higher allocation for education, agriculture, health, rural development and infrastructure are welcome steps along with increased allocation for social security and safety net programmes like creation of seasonal unemployment fund for monga-stricken and fully retarded

people, fund for rehabilitation of retrenched and retired garment workers and enhanced honorarium for freedom fighters. Particularly appreciable is the emphasis given and resources allocated for educational facilities of girls and women. Other welcoming steps are a project for improving tax administration and setting up of an oversight regulatory body for private sector account and audit. Besides, introduction of the provision of imposing income tax rebate on donations at welfare and educational institutions is a very good step. Such system of rebate is in practice in most countries.

But the enhancement of corporate tax rate for non-listed companies is not an investor-friendly step. The decision to increase tax rate from 37.5 percent to 40 percent will affect particularly the service sector, as it will have a negative impact on investment. The increase of tax will work against the government's apparent policy of poverty reduction and employment generation since it will affect the small and medium enterprises (SMEs), which do not have the financial footing to be listed on the capital market.

The most alarming aspect of the budget is the increased expenditure in unproductive areas because to meet this increased expenditure the government will have to borrow more money from banks, which will definitely push inflation up further. This is expected to happen by the early next year, as by that time a substantial amount of money will have disbursed. As there is no measure in the budget to contain the inflation so the prices of essentials are likely to be on the rise that will affect the low-income people. As such the ambitious expenditure programme ought to be kept under constant review. Under no circumstances. the government should increase its borrowing from the banking system.

Similarly, the provision of increasing VAT will adversely affect the poor as the prices of essentials will shoot up following the collection of additional VAT that has been fixed at Tk 12, 675 crore which is Tk 2,070 crore higher than the revised budget of FY 2004-05. Already the prices of daily necessities have increased in the city market immediately after the proposing of budget in parliament on June 9. Many essentials including rice. vegetable, oil, pulses, meat, fish,

eggs and spices have reportedly marked an increase of Tk 2 to Tk 10 per kilogram. Prices of soaps and stainless blades have also increased. It appears that in a bid to enhance mobilisation of internal resources, taxes and levies, in some cases, have been imposed without considering their economic consequences. But it is well known that imposition of taxes and levies does not automatically improve the tax-GDP ratio.

Finally, the economy is already witnessing a twin shock -- a rising inflation rate and a deteriorating balance of payment situation because of domestic price hike and a jump in imports that have become costlier. It is apprehended by the economists that the inflated budget for FY 2005-06 and an increase in oil price in recent times will further fue

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inflation