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# Madrassah education

The arguments, which are put up against the new education system, have been expressed by many scholars. According to them, science education would be the worst victim of the new secondary education system and the standard would inevitably suffer as a student will have to study 18 subjects carrying 1,200 marks with less importance on science and mathematics. They also say that the provision for studying an additional language (Arabic, Sanskrit or Pali) along with religion will add to the burden of the students. Only by bringing changes in the syllabus of the secondary education, the system cannot be called "unified" as it would not incorporate English medium education and madrassah education.

I appreciate this thought provoking argument but there is apprehension about the new system insofar as it relates to the word 'unification'. What about madrassah education, which is under scrutiny because of the recent spate of bomb attacks all over the country and the tumultuous situation with concern about 'fundamentalism', 'extremism' and 'fanaticism'.

As a hot issue, madrassah education has been targeted and politicised indiscriminately. As a result our society is going to be divided, and political intolerance and violence will become acute. The so-called 'secularism' and 'reactionary' debate and the politics of labelling are making our peaceful society unstable, and the misuse of our sacred religion is unacceptable. Above all, it is our children who are being used as political pawns in the name of religion.

As an extremely poor country, with stark ideological polarisation, this trend makes our lives tougher than ever before. With different ideology, mission and vision, madrasah students are being discriminated in terms of their professional lives and career opportunity and employment. So, why don't we talk about the assimilation of our different types of education system in one track? Why don't we think about a homogenous educated generation so that our society and its people cannot be divided? I would appreciate the government's unified education system if madrassah education could be included within the common minimum programme of education system. In rural areas, science, commerce and humanities groups are very difficult to run in every institution because, teachers and equipment are not available out there in every madrassah. Moreover, there is no opportunity for commerce education under the madrassah system. Science education is also a far cry for most of those institutions. So, a common minimum programme for Bengali track and madrassah education system can prevent all the disputes about our current education crisis.

Talking about de-emphasizing of science education in the unified system seems to me a little bit imaginary, and rhetorical as well. Of course, we do not need to create another Newton or Einstein for invention of the laws of motion and the Theory of Relativity, need we? It is already invented; rather, we should get it by heart and make practical use of it. Furthermore, every student would not pursue higher education in science. And, even the students of science group also need social, behavioural and moral education for their practical lives because, human beings are not instruments or machines, rather, social creature with certain values, norms and customs.

The government can minimise religious courses from madrassah curriculum and make a common religious education with a few options for all the students in secondary level. I think this assimilation process can give maximum benefit to our society.

Md. Harisur Rahman, JU



PHOTO: AFP

## How to counter religious extremism

To influence and encourage the young people not to be religious extremists: put massive advertisement in TV, radio and all newspapers against extremism, use verses from the Holy Koran against religious extremism. Bangladesh is a peaceful country and we, from all religions, like to live peacefully side by side. Offer good perspectives like education, practical training and jobs to the young people.

The government must pay monthly salary to the Imams of mosques and Priests from Mandirs and Churches, just like schoolteachers. The Imams and the Priests must speak every week against all sorts of extremism. In

madrassahs and schools, the teachers must teach the children tolerance and speak against religious extremism. To implement these make a new law. No political activities in schools/madrassahs (any student/teacher who does politics in the school will be expelled from it).

Offer amnesty to the people who are involved in such acts and give them life security and practical training and jobs to survive.

Make a deal with our neighbouring countries that they do not interfere in our internal affairs. They should not support/shelter/hide any terrorist/extremist/culprits from other neighbouring countries. If any neighbour does this, file a case in the International Court of Justice and bring it to

international attention.

Take an example like Europe. They never interfere in the internal affairs of their neighbours and they live peacefully side by side. Make a law with death penalty and confiscation of property for the people who instigate/incite/support any type of religious extremism.

Make a law with death penalty and confiscation of property for the people who shelter or provide help to the extremists. Make a law with death penalty and confiscation of property for the people who produce/hold/supply bomb making materials.

Hold regular regional seminars and training programmes for the Imams and Priests on democracy, international knowledge, religious tolerance, humanity, human rights and social problems in the family and community.

Reward people who help to catch religious extremists. Make massive advertisements on TV, radio and all newspapers regarding this.

Dr. Farid Majumder  
Darmstadt, Germany

## Saarc Meet-2005

The Saarc countries could do a lot to improve the economic condition of this region. But unfortunately the leaders assembled many a time but could not arrive at a good decision to improve the lots of the peoples. The Saarc charter needs to be amended because Saarc cannot raise any bilateral issues in its summits. All the seven (now eight) members have bilateral problems.

Sometimes bilateral problems hinder holding of meetings. The Saarc nations should learn from ASEAN, which is working as an effective regional grouping.

Mahbulul Haque Chowdhury  
Kalabaghian, Dhaka

## Would there be any investigative reporting?

Expensive cars, specially the gas guzzling SUVs are ubiquitous today in Dhaka city. While NBR or the Finance Minister would do nothing about it, even though the government has complete information on the owners of such vehicles, may I encourage some investigative reporting on these please? (DS had a small article on the luxury cars of Dhaka.) What if any young reporter collects the names/addresses of such vehicles from the authority that issues license plates, and then goes on to inquire how much the owners pay in annual income tax? It would be fun to see the numbers; it certainly would rattle some community leaders.

Sajjad Hossain  
One-mail

## Traffic jam near PMO

Every evening there's a permanent traffic jam starting from Mohakhali Flyover to the Prime Minister's Office. The Taka 200 crore flyover is supposed to reduce traffic congestion. It's even more unfortunate that the jam lasts for half an hour during 6:00 to 9:00pm on every working day. Therefore, the journey from Mohakhali to Farm Gate takes almost an hour. Usually, a bus can reach farm Gate in 10 minutes in a moderate traffic jam. People now waste their valuable time, energy and money on the road.

Immediate steps are required to lessen this jam in front of the most prestigious Office of the People's Republic of Bangladesh.

Mehadi Shameem  
Free School Street, Dhaka

## Shamima: A model for others

At first, I would congratulate Shamima for winning the Global Microcredit Entrepreneurship Award. She has brightened the image of our country and again proved that Bangladesh is an example of micro-credit playing a great role in alleviating poverty.

Bangladesh is a developing country and poverty is the main problem here. Actually, poverty frustrates all development efforts of our country. It creates other problems too. To alleviate poverty, empowerment of women and unemployment reduction are necessary.

The planners and decision makers should not lose sight of these goals.

Sujan Ghosh  
Economics Discipline  
Khulna University

## Election Commission

The commentary published in your daily recently on the present state of affairs in the Election Commission is praiseworthy and well appreciated by all and sundry. The Election Commission is an institution of our national pride but due to brinkmanship of a few people its reputation and acceptability is now at the lowest ebb.

The former CEC, with his long administrative experience and indomitable spirit, demonstrated

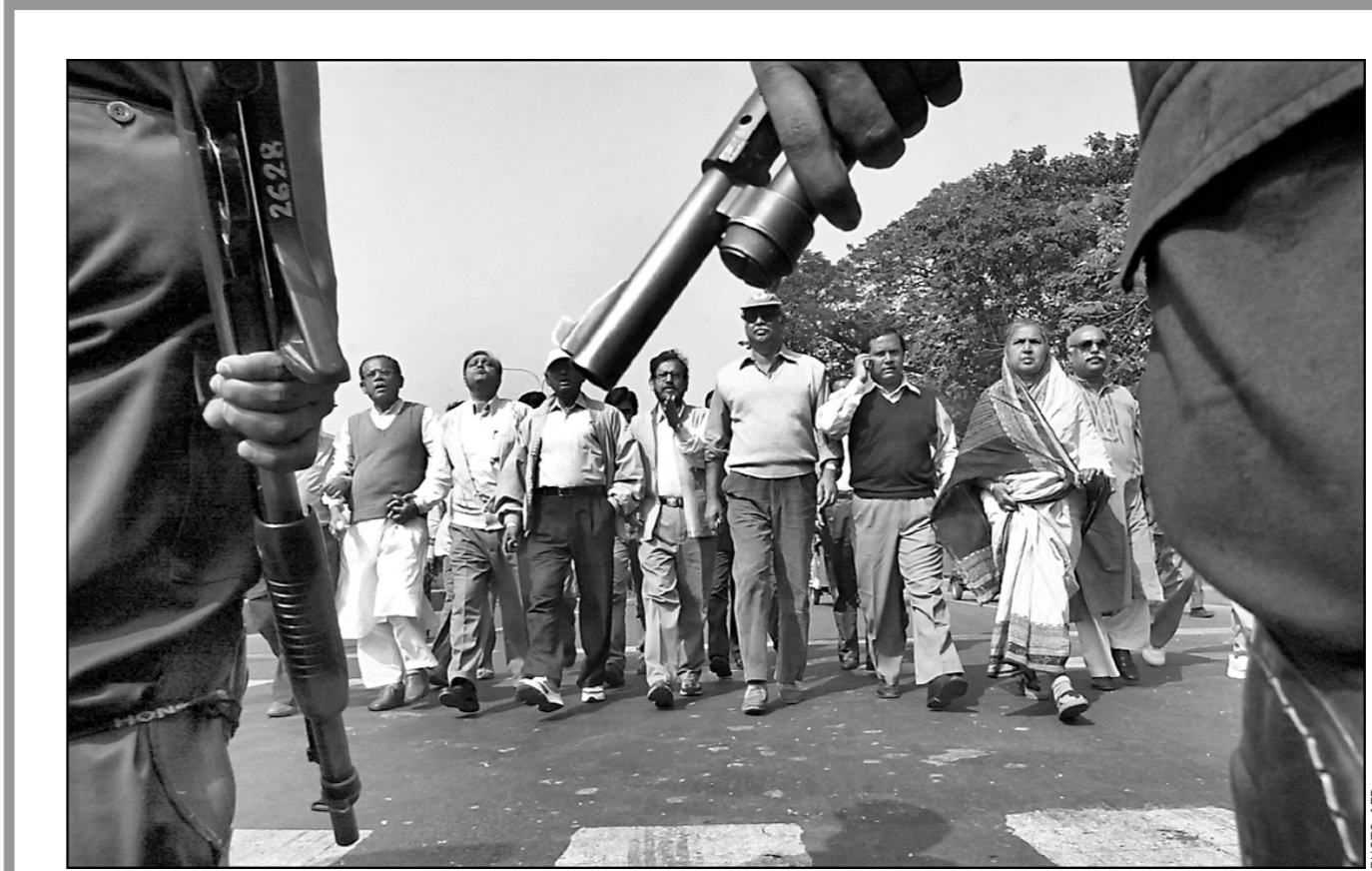


PHOTO: AFP

# Governing by fear and power

Governments in Bangladesh manipulate the public using the fear factor and the show of power, to throttle any opposing viewpoint. This tendency is common for countries having no depth of political grooming, which try to exercise democracy without respect to democratic values.

Politicians governing such countries, and Bangladesh is an example of that, use both fear and power to reinforce their grip on the people. Most political systems, be it monarchy, dictatorship or democracy, use power and fear as tools of governance. Dictatorship by definition usually follows the open and visible approach of the fear and power factor of

governance, while democracy uses subtle ways of coercion and submission of people. Both have one aim - perpetuate their rule!

That's why the proverb "power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely", has survived the test of time. The dictator that Mao was, said clearly "power comes from the barrel of the gun", without mincing words. Sweet talking democrats, be they of the "left" or "right" variety call it, "facing national threat," or "the enemy within" to justify and legitimise their exercise of fear and power.

Looking behind the scene, governments of such coun-

tries in turn mistrust the armed forces, and find ways and means to keep them in check. The rulers in history glorified their armies with colourful uniforms, gaudy badges of rank, medals and other accoutrements. They were given a share of the booty of war, grants of land and similar largess to keep them under control. Present day governments adopt similar exercises in pomp, show, creating comforts and other lavish benefits, to keep their armed forces in good humour!

Our society today has been conditioned to these opportunistic manipulations of both the despotic and democratic variety;

from presidents and prime ministers, elected or otherwise. Our people are no longer sensitive to the subtle interplay of fear and power, which have become the normal tools of governments. Gradually, the difference in modus operandi between the dictators and the democrats of these two factors has more or less merged. Their difference in utilising these twin tools of governance only defines the level of overall development or otherwise, and nothing else. In this usage of fear and power what is "sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander"!

Manipulated  
On e-mail

pragmatism to steer the last national election to its successful holding.

The EC must repeat the feat in the next general elections to fulfil popular expectations.

Rezaul Haq  
Lalmai, Dhaka

## Slow-moving Saarc

The importance of Saarc cannot be over-emphasized. Set up in December 1985 jointly by the heads of state/government of seven countries - Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka - with great enthusiasm and fanfare for the welfare of their people, Saarc is home to 1.4 billion people. Every 5<sup>th</sup> man or woman on earth belongs to Saarc.

But unfortunately compared to EU formed in 1957 with six member countries and ASEAN founded in 1967 with ten countries, Saarc has not been

able to make any remarkable and significant progress during the last 20 years.

We don't understand why Saarc moves at a snail's pace and why it has achieved so little in two decades. What is wrong with Saarc, who is responsible for the comatose grouping?

Twice postponed, the 13<sup>th</sup> Saarc Summit was finally held on November 12-15, 2005 in Dhaka. The summit is an annual event but so far only 12 summits have taken place in different Saarc countries.

We are constrained to feel that due to length and breadth, height and weight of giant India her neighbouring countries have to accept the pleasure and desire of New Delhi on all Saarc matters.

We are of the opinion that India may kindly accept the decision of the majority members of Saarc on socio-economic and political problems of the region for the sake of economic

development, peace and prosperity.

OH Kabir  
Dhaka

## "News notes" of SWM

The news notes "Eid festivals go on while people die" published in SMS (November 11) has touched my heart deeply. It is really very pathetic that people were celebrating Eid when a large number of munga-hit people were suffering through extreme distress.

Arefin  
Baily Road, Dhaka

## 'AkTel Exceed'

Recently, AkTel launched a package called 'AkTel Exceed'. I must say that the package won't serve the customers. Its advertisement on the newspaper was presented very attractively in a tabular format. But printed at the bottom left corner of the page were

words which informed that the connection charge for each call was an additional Tk. 2.40! This piece of information totally changed the whole concept of the offer and most disappointingly, it was displayed inconspicuously and could easily be overlooked.

Moreover, Tk. 100 needed for users to migrate to this package seemed quite incredible in the face of the new additional charge.

Toma  
Mohammadpur  
Dhaka

## Another girl takes her life!

"What a piece of work is a man! How noble in reason! how infinite in faculty! in form, in moving, how express and admirable! in action how like an angel! in apprehension how like a god! the beauty of the world! the paragon of

animals!" (In Hamlet, Shakespeare's description of man).

Yet when we read the news that Nazma Khatun of Durgapur, a rape victim, was forced by us to suffer beatings, threats, and humiliation, and the custodian OC evaded with the "compensation" from the rapist, we are shocked. The worst was that she became the object of others' desire and the entire legal system was totally heedless and ignorant, and hence Nazma eventually committed suicide to escape from even worse degradation.

Will the fragments of the civilised people of Durgapur and elsewhere come forward to substantiate that we are (or some of us at least!) the remnants of what Shakespeare had claimed?

Tajul Islam  
Gulshan-1  
Dhaka-1212

## The Summit

We have got the opportunity to be the host to the Saarc Summit for the third time. It kicked off its journey twenty years ago and still remained as a platform of practising rhetoric at the regional level. Experts say that it has done very little to change the fate of 150 crore people of this region. Among whom, 60 crore earn below one dollar per day and live in abject poverty. But this regional body was formed twenty years ago aiming to eradicate poverty through meaningful regional cooperation and collective efforts among its member countries.

Regrettably, we have passed twenty years through arranging twelve majestic summits without nothing for the betterment of the people who are living in this region. The monster of poverty still haunts the people of this region. In a nutshell, the aims and objectives of this body were not fulfilled at all. The Secretary General of BEA (Bangladesh Economic Association) Prof. Abul Barkat views that eradication of poverty through this forum is not possible, which he said in a recent interview with a Bengali daily.

It is learnt that one fifth of the population of the globe live in this region and 40% of the total poor also live here. Across the world, the number of people who earn below one dollar per day is 110 crore, of whom 40% live in this region. The poverty rate of the Saarc member countries is not the same.

The statistics of the people who live below poverty line is depressing. In case of Sri Lanka it is 25%, 30% in India, 50% in Bangladesh and 42% in Pakistan.

The statistics of regional trade is rather bleak. Among the member countries, the volume of trade is only 2%, whereas it is 66% in case of EU, 21% in ASEAN countries and 50% in case of NAFTA. But it is possible to mount the volume of trade among the Saarc countries.

The twice postponed meeting has finally ended in a peaceful environment sans unwanted happenings, thanks to the beefed up security net in the capital. But the summit could be more fruitful if participation of the civil society and general people were possible.

Siraj Ud-Daulah  
NCC Bank Ltd, Sylhet

# Power of Love

A long time ago in China, a girl named Li-Li got married and went to live with her husband and mother-in-law. In a very short time, Li-Li found that she couldn't get along with her mother-in-law at all. Their personalities were very different, and Li-Li was angered by many of her mother-in-law's habits. In addition, she criticised Li-Li constantly.

Days passed, and weeks passed. Li-Li and her mother-in-law never stopped arguing and fighting. But what made the situation even worse was that, according to ancient Chinese tradition, Li-Li had to bow to her mother-in-law and obey her every wish. All the anger and unhappiness in the house was causing Li-Li's poor husband great distress.

Finally, Li-Li could not stand her mother-in-law's bad temper and dictatorship any longer, and she decided to do something about it!

Li-Li went to see her father's good friend, Mr. Huang, who sold herbs. She told him the situation and asked if he would give her some poison so that she could solve the problem once and for all.

Mr. Huang thought for awhile, and finally said, "Li-Li, I will help you solve your problem, but you must listen to me and obey what I tell you." Li-Li said, "Yes, Mr. Huang, I will do whatever you tell me to do." Mr. Huang went into the back room, and returned in a few minutes with a package of herbs.

He told Li-Li, "You can't use a quick-acting poison to get rid of your mother-in-law, because that would cause people to become suspicious. Therefore, I have given you a number of herbs that will slowly build up poison in her body. Every other day prepare some delicious meal and put a little of these herbs in her serving.

Now, in order to make sure that nobody suspects your when she dies, you must be very careful to act very friendly



towards her. "Don't argue with her, obey her every wish, and treat her like a queen."

Li-Li was so happy. She thanked Mr. Huang and hurried home to start her plot of murdering her mother-in-law. Weeks went by, and months went by, and every other day, Li-Li served the specially treated food to her mother-in-law. She remembered what Mr. Huang had said about avoiding suspicion, so she controlled her temper, obeyed her

mother-in-law, and treated her like her own mother. After six months had passed, the whole household had changed. Li-Li had practised controlling her temper so much that she found that she almost never got mad or upset. She hadn't had an argument with her mother-in-law in six months because she now seemed much kinder and easier to get along with. The mother-in-law's attitude toward Li-Li changed, and she began to love Li-Li like her own daughter. She kept telling friends and relatives that Li-Li was the best daughter-in-law one could ever find. Li-Li and her mother-in-law were now treating each other like a real mother and daughter. Li-Li's husband was very happy to see what was happening.

One day, Li-Li came to see Mr. Huang and asked for his help again. She said, "Dear Mr. Huang, please help me to keep the poison from killing my mother-in-law! She's changed into such a nice woman, and I love her like my own mother. I do not want her to die because of the poison I gave her."

Mr. Huang smiled and nodded his head. "Li-Li, there's nothing to worry about. I never gave you any poison. The herbs I gave you were vitamins to improve her health. The only poison was in your mind and your attitude toward her, but that has been all washed away by the love which you gave to her." Do you realise that how you treat others is exactly how they will treat you?

There is a wise Chinese saying: "The person who loves others will also be loved in return."

God might be trying to work in another person's life through you. Send this to your friends and spread the POWER OF LOVE.

Atiq  
One-mail