

Media manipulation

The action should concern all media professionals

THE concocted story and tailored image shown recently on London based television channel Bangla TV as that of Tarique Rahman being tortured on remand is but a vulgar attempt at maligning the government and the judicial system of the country not to mention the noble profession of journalism. The crudity of the whole episode speaks loudly of how low the perpetrators can stoop in their desperation to attain a political objective. It was devoid of truth and ethical standards that journalists must abide by in their professional work. The media world at home and abroad join hands to condemn the act with the strongest of words.

It is now widely known that the tailored photograph is actually that of a petty thief of Bogra taken one year back by a local photographer of The Daily Star. After doing necessary changes by Tarique Rahman's supporters it was shown on the London based TV channel as that of him in custody being tortured. The baseless news and the image have also been uploaded in some websites in a bid to generate sympathy for the jailed leader.

By resorting to such a contemptible trick the cohorts of Tarique Rahman have exposed their outrageous intentions and let the world know what they are capable of doing if given the opportunity. Thankfully, with the publication of the original photograph things have been put in their true perspective and the people of Bangladesh are now able to see through their machination.

We consider the odious act conspired by some 'journalists' as an aspersion on the good name and credibility of the entire media community and we once again condemn it in one voice. The media professionals must realise that unethical behaviour of any body pertaining to the media casts aspersion on all of us, both in print and in the electronic media. This may also be used by those who are quick to find any abuse in the media as an excuse to justify restrictions on it. We must guard against both -- media's abuse and attempts to restrict it.

On both counts the whole society, and media professionals particularly, must condemn this episode.

ADP implementation status

Will the pattern ever change?

A mid-term review on the progress of ADP implementation has revealed a dismal picture. Only 16 per cent of the financial targets has been met from July to November, 2007. At this rate, it is well-nigh impossible to implement the remainder 84 per cent in the next seven months of the fiscal year. Such an obvious statement, however, may not ruffle seasoned bureaucrats. For, in most years, at the corresponding point in time, the rate of progress on ADP had been rather low -- between 20 and 22 per cent. Of course, this year it has hit the nadir but that is just part of established pattern.

Most of the projects are in tendering process and it is after January 31 that the pace of implementation will pick up -- predictably in a break neck speed. Compressing too much work within such a limited time-span can only lead to compromising on quality and wasteful expenditure. It is likely to spawn corruption.

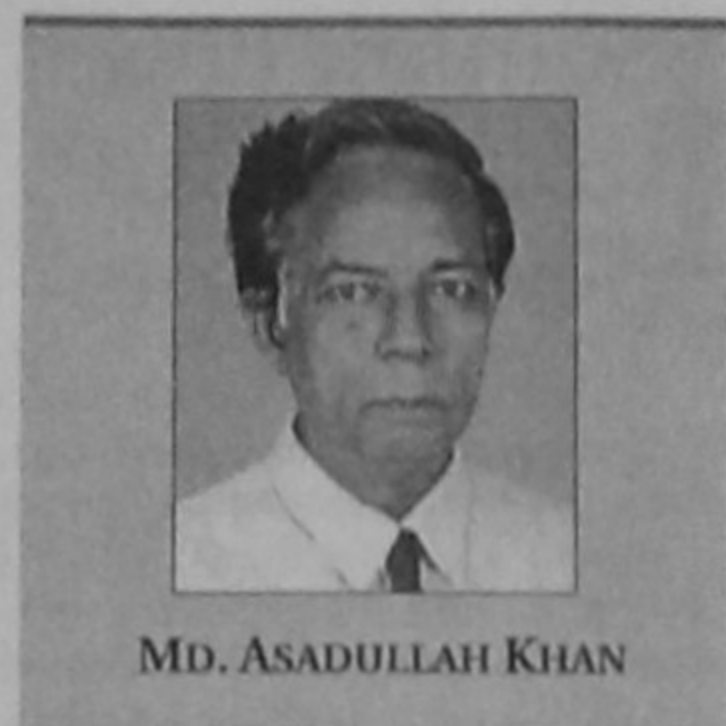
In hindsight, when the ADP for fiscal 2007-08 was launched in June last year we dubbed it as being ambitious but doable. Our argument was that the ADP having been a political pressure-free product of an interim government, stood a better chance of being implemented. But those expectations seem to have been belied.

The steps taken to ensure implementation of ADP have not apparently succeeded in providing the desired stimulus. It was stipulated that project directors would be appointed for the entire duration of the projects plus six months. Has this been followed? What about the secretaries' committee recommending a process to the advisory council whereby the procurement procedures were to be simplified (without diluting the accountability aspect)?

We know it for a fact that the Project Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation Division (IMED) had been marginalised in the past. Since it ought to play a hands-on role in the present scheme of things, we are hopeful that it is working energetically to exercise its writ.

There is some talk of a possible cut in the ADP expenditure to cope with price increases of fuel and fertiliser. If this comes about, we are possibly in for a reduction in the ADP size.

National University question leakage : Genesis of the problem



MD. ASADULLAH KHAN

THE incident of leakage of 2nd year Honours English compulsory questions for examinations 2006 of the National University for the second time on 12 January last has stunned the whole nation. Shockingly the examinations held once before on November 11 last had to be cancelled later on the same ground of question leakage. Nothing could be more shocking for a nation that has put the highest priority on education through budgetary allocation to be exposed to such disgraceful situation, especially for a university level education where men of sterling qualities are supposed to handle the affairs.

The whole nation seethed with rage over such a gross mismanagement and inept handling and indifference of the officials and even teachers to such a vital and important issue. This has brought one thing to the fore that the whole process starting from setting the questions up to distributing those to the different centres of the country lacked proper planning, security measures and efficient handling and a fool-proof and honest endeavour.

One cannot miss the fact that unpretentious boys and girls at the prime of their career were preparing to sit for the examination that would have given them a sense of confidence and aptitude for further exercise at either higher levels of education or entry into career service in government organisations or private enterprises. Understandably, when a student learns just the night before the examination or after presenting himself at the centre that the ques-

tion paper of the examination has been leaked out and some of his peers are making use of it, his sense of pride, confidence and competence gets totally shattered. Even the most meritorious student runs into despair, anguish and helplessness.

It must be a gross neglect of responsibility for people at the helm of the National University to have shelved their share of participation and onus of burden that put the credibility of the university and image of the nation at stake. This

attitude to learn or attain command, skill and proficiency. Throughout the country, in the lanes and by-lanes of the cities, towns or even thanas there has been a mushroom growth of coaching centres that go by the name 'ideal' or 'sure success' selling education in the form of 'capsules'. In fact, students taught in these centres are not learning the 'basics', rather they are stuffed with suggestions and answers of probable questions. These coaching centres, in a relentless bid to

centres in alliance with the Dhaka university departmental officials while many students were admitted to different departments of the Dhaka University in the past years with fake academic records has been established by a probe body formed in this connection by the university authorities. Teachers in the schools, colleges and now in the universities even want their students to be admitted in the tutorial homes they have themselves set up.

Actually the country is forging

planners have to work with a missionary zeal almost at the grassroots level. There are, of course, some solutions ready at hand to repair the damage and stop the rot from spreading further.

The government must enforce restrictions on the growth of coaching centres/tutorial homes. Centres that want to cater education this way must apply for registration detailing the names of the teachers, their experiences and the school, college or university they are working for. Government and

neglect right from the post liberation days with low priority in English teaching at secondary stage of schooling, namely in matters of selecting textbooks and almost total withdrawal at grammar in the school level teaching.

Knowledge of grammar is a sine qua non to learning of English at least in this region. Deficient students, inefficient teachers coupled with low quality texts have produced a blend that proved to be a deterrent to learning English and so the menace continues. In his relentless drive against corruption, ACC Chief Lt Gen (ret'd) Hasan Mashhud Chowdhury even saw the Chairman of the School Text Book Board with request to introduce topics in the school texts that help development of character from the early stage of life. And in a bid to bring about resurgence of the ethical values, morality and probity in the youngsters, it would be proper to re-introduce those topics taught in the earlier days.

Next we need teachers with singular devotion and commitment to teaching and such committed teachers have to be amply rewarded by the government. If we can honour our heroes in the games and sports, it is no less important that some of our committed teachers who are making ceaseless efforts in building the edifice of the nation should also be honoured in some way or other. Let me recall with profound respect the revered memory of a dedicated teacher (later headmaster of the school) I came in contact in my school days who was equally well versed in English, Mathematics and Bangla. Girindra Babu, the soul of Sakthira PN High School for long 30 years left a legacy of teaching that will be remembered for years to come.

In a society torn asunder by conflict and corruption and eroding fast under the influence of wealth and authoritarian spirit, we need the idealism of such teachers to show us the path of enlightenment, virtue and glory.

Md. Asadullah Khan is a former teacher of physics and Controller of Examinations, BUET.

BITTER TRUTH

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only pinpoints the fact that management of either teaching or conduct of examinations of the university is nobody's responsibility and we are masters at either passing the buck or appointing a probe body that hardly yields any result or removes the cancerous growth deeply rooted in the body politic of the university or educational institutions. This has, at the same time made it clear that the woefully inadequate, inept and also corrupt infrastructure in the university administration, especially in the exam sector needs to be cleared of the vices deeply embedded in the fabric of the university, to promote education and produce economic growth of the country through meaningful dissemination of education. But curative action is unlikely to yield fruit unless we introduce probity and accountability in the system.

Teaching and learning have in these days become a commodity for sale. Students in most of the schools, colleges and universities are not learning with desired amount of seriousness or with the

draw more students in their circle and may be engaged in some unholy alliance with other agencies that have access to university question papers. The recent English question paper leakage of the National University twice within an interval of two months speaks of one of the following possibilities: pilferage from 1) the press, 2) during dispatch in the transit, 3) during storage in the safe vault, and 4) unfortunately though, by the teachers and moderators who had framed the questions. All sources unfortunately point their fingers to the fourth possibility. The probe body formed by the university authorities, it is expected, would try to identify the culprit in the scam.

People can not rule out the possibility of a link of the coaching centres in our country in this racket partly because of their inglorious past and commercial nature. Administration in this country has hardly taken any notice of the activities of these coaching centres. The involvement of some coaching

ahead in a field where many countries fear to tread : the hazardous nature of teaching that does out modules of selected questions and their answers prepared by the teachers that doesn't bring about any improvement in the student's basics. Undeniably true, rather than giving the students the cherished objective, the system has bred corruption in the teaching profession beyond rectification. Allegations and evidences are there that question papers are leaked out by some unscrupulous teachers or exam officials in collusion with other agencies like tutorial homes or photocopy shops, certificates are forged and deficient students are sent up for appearing at the board and university final examinations in exchange of high monetary benefit. Since the ills have accumulated much earlier almost at the primary level of teaching, the nation has started paying the heavy price for this gross neglect, indifference and callousness of education planners.

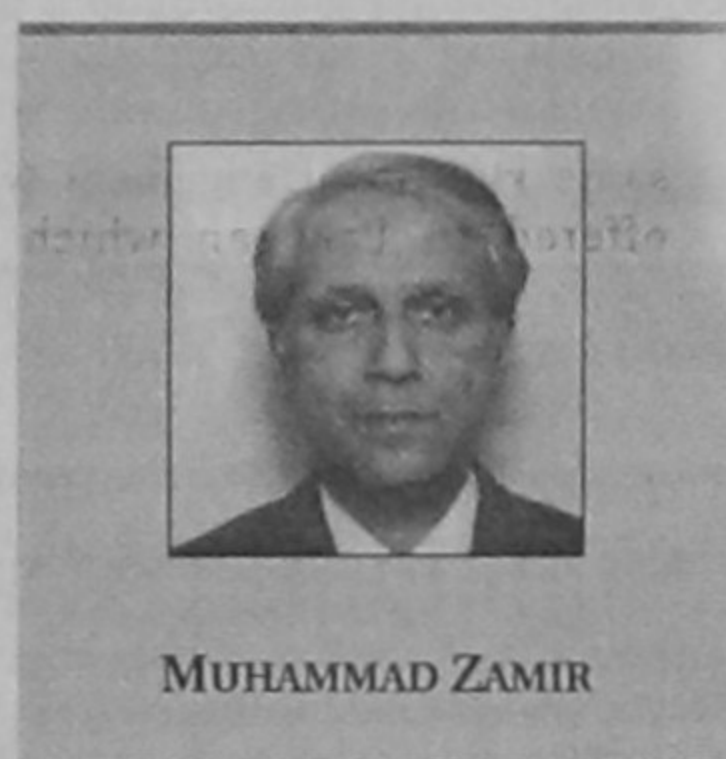
To stem this tide of total breakdown in the system, educational

UGC should see that teachers at the university level do not associate themselves either as teachers or advisers of the coaching centres.

Precisely known to all, National University is conducting examinations of the bulk of the students in the country at the degree and Masters level and most worryingly question papers of this university have been leaked three times within the last three months and leakage of English question paper has occurred twice within an interval of two months despite blacklisting a few academic staff, suspension and termination of services of some exam officials of the National University.

All indications suggest that the malaise is deep rooted and a simple dose will not cure the cancerous spread. Shockingly true, other than a handful of qualified and efficient teachers available in some of the places, the country suffers from a general dearth of experienced teachers in English in most of the schools and colleges. Sadly true, English teaching suffered abysmal

Palestine and the Middle East peace process



MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

THE recent Annapolis Conference and US President G.W. Bush's visit to the area has thrust the Middle East issue again to center-stage. The last time the United States convened a full-blown Middle East summit, at Camp David in 2000, it collapsed. The vacuum left behind was filled a few months later by violence that continues till today -- at a much lower level, but it never stops threatening to get worse.

It would appear that the Annapolis meeting in the USA was initiated last November with the hope that the Conference would not only kick-start a new series of meetings between Israel and the Palestinians but would also trigger off serious discussions between the two parties aimed at tackling the biggest differences they have between them -- the 'final status issues' (FSI) -- the futures of Jerusalem, Jewish settlements and Palestinian refugees, as well as borders, security and relations with their neighbours.

The Conference was a success of sorts. Forty-nine countries (minus Iraq) gathered at the United States Naval Academy to witness diplomatic theatre that cast peace between Israelis and Palestinians as part of a broader struggle against extremism in the Middle East. The Israeli and Palestinian leaders committed themselves to negotiating a peace treaty by the end of 2008, setting a deadline for ending a conflict that has endured for six decades.

The agreement stopped short of the binding negotiating outline that many Palestinians had hoped for, but it revived a peace process that the United States had left

dormant for seven years.

Its success, both sides subsequently remarked, would depend in part on how vigorously President Bush pushed Palestinianis and Israelis toward resolving the core issues (FSI) that have bedevilled peace negotiators since 1979. Annapolis has nevertheless plunged the United States back into the role of an Arab-Israeli peacemaker -- an approach Bush had previously shunned -- at a time when wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have helped bring the American

"agreed" resolution of the refugee issue. It may be recalled here that Israeli officials have been adamant that Palestinian refugees have a right of return only to a future Palestinian state, not to Israel.

The region stands today at a crossroad that separates two historical phases: pre-Annapolis and post-Annapolis. It would, in this context, be pertinent to refer to a post-conference remark made by Prince Saud al Faisal, the Saudi Foreign Minister, who politely clapped after the speech of Israeli

development projects, including a sewage treatment plant in Gaza, an industrial park in Jericho and an industrial zone in Hebron.

Massive pledges of aid, beyond that sought by the Palestinians, recognised that the worsening economic crisis in the West Bank and Gaza Strip was threatening to undermine all of the hopes of peace. This meeting also reiterated that the economic well being of the Palestinians was an essential precondition not only for the building of a successful Palestinian state but

Israel and the West Bank) remembered that his role was that of an honest broker. The US Administration has to remember that any attempt to effectively revive the Middle East peace process and resolve the continuing uncertainties over Iraq and Iran (during his discussions with Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States) will require a wider approach. This is vital for any progress towards peace and reconciliation.

I have carefully followed changes in the political and strate-

Initiative. These in turn will not only serve the fundamental interests of the peoples of Palestine and Israel, but will also be a historical step towards achieving the peaceful coexistence of the Arab and Jewish nations;

(b) Recognizing that force cannot bring about durable peace. Only patience, dialogue and necessary compromise can beat swords into plowshares and make peace. The parties concerned must live up to their due responsibilities, show courage and vision and take confidence-building measures. One can only hope in this regard that Palestine will achieve internal reconciliation. It must be understood that only Palestinian unity can make their dream of peace come true;

(c) Creating an environment conducive to the peace talks. The Palestinian issue and other issues in the Middle East are inter-related and affect each other. It is therefore suggested that peace talks should also be restarted between Israel and Syria and between Israel and Lebanon. I believe that resumption of these talks on a parallel road track with the Palestinian-Israeli peace talks will promote each other. This is necessary to create a favourable external environment for the peace talks and to promote wider peace and stability in the entire Middle East;

(d) The international community on a priority basis should also try to increase capacity building of infrastructure in Palestine and extend greater humanitarian assistance and development aid to Palestine. Portions of the aid pledged in Paris needs to be disbursed immediately to make the implementing mechanism more effective; and

(e) The UN Secretary General should consider establishing a broad-based, balanced and effective multilateral process to facilitate and support the peace endeavour. Such a process should include the Organisation of the Islamic Conference and the Arab League in addition to the Quartet.

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POST BREAKFAST

One can only hope that United States President George W Bush during his recently concluded visit (his first tour as US President to Israel and the West Bank) remembered that his role was that of an honest broker. The US Administration has to remember that any attempt to effectively revive the Middle East peace process and resolve the continuing uncertainties over Iraq and Iran (during his discussions with Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States) will require a wider approach. This is vital for any progress towards peace and reconciliation.

image in the Muslim world to historic lows.

The reaction to the peace conference was far from favourable in Gaza, an area controlled by Hamas. Crowds of more than 100,000 protested the outcome of the conference and Bush's claims that it laid 'the foundation for the establishment of a new nation: a democratic Palestinian state that will live side by side with Israel in peace and security.' There was also skepticism about whether the United States would 'monitor and judge the fulfilment of the commitment of both sides' fairly.

The agreement arrived at went somewhat further than the Israelis had wanted, calling for an immediate start to wide-ranging talks aimed at reaching a final accord within 13 months but definitely fell short of the detailed five-page document that Palestinian officials had been seeking aimed at resolving all outstanding issues. There was also no reference to the Arab League peace initiative. That initiative, which was reaffirmed by Arab nations this year, called on Israelis and Palestinians to reach an

Prime Minister Olmert but pointed out that 'the time had come for Israel to put its trust in peace after it had gambled on war for decades without success.' He also significantly called on Israel to withdraw from the West Bank.

The Annapolis Conference was followed by the French government hosting an international aid conference aimed at reviving the Palestinian economy. Such a meeting was organised against the backdrop of international aid agencies and the International Committee of the Red Cross warning international stakeholders of a worsening humanitarian crisis in the occupied areas and the Gaza Strip.

Held in the middle of December 2007, its goal was to mobilise financial and political support for the Palestinian Authority to enable it to build the foundations for a viable state. Palestinian Authority official led by Prime Minister Salam Fayyad asked for about \$5.6bn (£2.8bn) in urgent additional funding over the next three years, to be used for budget support (to pay the salaries of government employees in different sectors) and the rest for

also that an economic revival was necessary for preparing the potential compromises that might be necessary for this purpose.

It would however be important to note here that more money will be meaningless unless there is a rapid change in the restrictions on movement imposed by Israel on the West Bank and the ending of the effective blockade of the Hamas-administered Gaza Strip. It must be remembered that economics, politics and security are all inextricably bound together. Israel unfortunately has shown little enthusiasm for easing such restrictions or in helping to create a sustainable mechanism that can lead to peace.

In a similar vein, it would be important for Washington to take a much tougher line with regard to Israel recently approving plans for new construction work in Israeli-occupied East Jerusalem and fresh settlements in occupied areas. Such steps would make progress that much more difficult.

One can only hope that United States President George W Bush during his recently concluded visit (his first tour as US President to

gic landscape of the Middle East since 1969 and witnessed several efforts aimed at finding solutions to the existing intractable problems. We have another interesting initiative in place. However, for this to succeed, there is need for flexibility as well as firmness. In my view, the following measures need to be undertaken for this purpose --

(a) Accommodating each other's concerns and keeping the peace talks on the right track. The state of Israel has been in existence for nearly sixty years, but for the Palestinian people, their dream of an independent Palestinian State has yet to come true. The Annapolis Conference and the hosting of the international aid meeting by the French have opened windows and doors. The parties concerned must now face up to reality and take bold steps in keeping with the trend of the times. It is important in this context to start negotiations on final status issues concerning the boundary, refugees and water resources. This will facilitate the establishment of an independent Palestinian state based on the Roadmap and the Arab Peace

Muharram teaches us to be just and honest

KAZI AULAD HOSSAIN

WE may recall here that a distinguished poet has aptly observed that the Muharram crescent has appeared in the sky so that the people of the world will once again start wailing recalling the martyrdom embraced by the beloved grandson of holy Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (peace be upon him)! Hazrat Imam Hussain (A), on the burning sands of Karbala more than 1400 years ago while fighting an unequal war on the day of Ashura i.e. on the 10th day of the holy lunar month of Muharram, with 4,000

soldiers sent by the local governor of Kufa on behalf of his master cruel hearted Yazid, son of erstwhile deceased Caliph Hazrat Muawia.

Mentionable in flagrant violation of the agreement entered into by Hazrat Imam Hussain (A) and Yazid's father Hazrat Muawia that after Muawia's death Hazrat Imam Hussain (A) would be the next Caliph of the Islamic state, Muawia illegally nominated his son Yazid in his life time to be the next Caliph. As a result Yazid flagrantly declared himself as the next Caliph and wanted to perpetuate the rule of his father.

A question may now arise as to

how Imam Hussain got himself directly involved in the aforesaid unequal fight? The reason behind was that the people of Kufa being oppressed by the governor, Obaidullah, invited Hazrat Imam Hussain (A) to come to their help. The kind hearted Imam could not keep quiet, and he decided to proceed towards Kufa with a view to helping them. Before he left for Kufa he, however, detailed his cousin Muslim to go to Kufa to ascertain whether the invitation extended to him was genuine. On receipt of a favourable reply from Muslim, Hazrat Imam Hussain (A)

left Medina with only a few soldiers and his family. While on his way to Kufa he heard the sad news of death of Muslim and as a result he was very much distressed, but he continued his onward march.

After crossing some distance the Imam and his party were intercepted by an Arab tribal chief Al-Hore and his cavalry. Consequently the Imam was obliged to change his route and proceeded by the western side of river Euphrates leaving Kufa on his right. But the governor of Kufa did not like the movement of Hussain (A) and his small party in the vicinity of Kufa.

He dispatched, as mediated above, 4,000 soldiers under the leadership of Omar bin Saad. When such was the position the Imam camped with his companions at Karbala on the bank of river Euphrates on the first day of the lunar month of Muharram.

The Imam proposed for an amicable settlement considering the plight of his helpless companions particularly in view of the hardship and suffering of the women and infants. But the commander of governor Obaidullah's soldiers declined to accept the compromise proposal. And neither

the revered Imam was allowed to meet Yazid so that he could discuss the matter with him, nor he was allowed to go back to the place wherefrom he came. Because of the blockade Imam's men were not even allowed to reach the bank of the river to take water for drinking.

Finding no other way out the Imam decided to fight this unequal war at Karbala without surrendering to the enemy. The enemy commander ordered heartless Shimar to take Hazrat Imam Hussain dead or alive to Kufa. All the members of the Imam's family embraced martyrdom. On the 10th day of the

lunar month of Muharram when the Imam was proceeding towards the river with his infant son on his lap for a little water to quench his son's thirst, a spear from the enemy side struck the son and he died then and there. The bewildered and aggrieved Imam then sat down in front of his tent and a little later another flying spear from enemy side struck his chest and he also embraced martyrdom.

When the enemy soldiers understood that the valiant Imam breathed his last, they immediately jumped on his body and desecrated it and lynched it in different

ways. This was inhuman and without any parallel in human history. This is how, the eye-ball and beloved grandson of the holy Prophet (SM), Hazrat Imam Hussain (A), laid down his life and embraced martyrdom some 14 hundred years ago for a just and noble cause in the month of Muharram. Thus the month of Muharram itself is significantly holy, however, for the most tragic incident in human history which teaches us to be just and honest, and fight for a noble cause.

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