

These encouraging SSC results

We should now strive for a zero failure system

WE congratulate all the students and all the schools which have achieved record-breaking results at this year's Secondary School Certificate (SSC) examinations. The pass percentage of 70.41 is indicative of the vast improvement that has been made in the school leaving examination process. It is to the credit of the students, their teachers and their guardians that altogether 41,917 students have achieved GPA-5 scores. The increase in the number of schools with a pass percentage of 100 per cent, from 778 last year to 2,272 this year, is without question a remarkable feat. We expect that all the students who have succeeded at the SSC this year will live up to their reputation as they move into higher education.

Even as we celebrate these very appreciable results, we note that there are nearly 30 per cent of young men and women who have failed to leap across the fence. That only proves that there is yet scope for improvement in the system. In today's world, school systems have developed to a point where no student has to stay back in school because he fails to pass the examinations. That is a pointer to what we need to do in Bangladesh. In other words, without in any way compromising the aims of education, we must strive to develop a zero failure system in education that will permit no boy or girl to be left behind. The thought that those who have failed this year will lose another year or perhaps run into difficulties of various kinds is depressing. Additionally, there is the matter of the schools which stand to lose their monthly payment orders (MPOs) if they do not perform to satisfaction. That simply is no answer to the problem, for the priority here ought not to be one of penalising schools with bad results but make it possible for them to regain lost academic ground.

Life is forever a test. The SSC examinations are an early test for the young. For such reasons, the school leaving system should so evolve as to ensure minimum academic standards for all. But for that to be done, it is imperative for us to deal with the impediments in our way. The role of the education department is paramount here. If it can do away with the corruption within it and move on to playing a monitoring role in education, we can go a long way.

Plastic mix in road construction

A technology raring to be harnessed

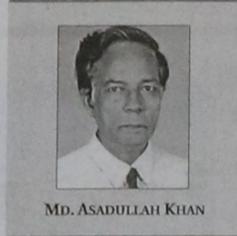
WHY such an innovation as blending plastic waste with bitumen to lay roads hasn't been brought up to the public so far? It is a question that naturally pops up given the multifaceted benefits derivable from it vis-a-vis the bitumen topped layers of soft brick fragments and brick slabs -- the conventional road construction technology. We felicitate Bangladesh Transport Foundation (BTF) and Practical Action, an international NGO, for their efforts in bringing to light the findings of the BUET laboratory tests and a study conducted by a team of planners, engineers and development administrators of BTF. The BUET, of course, has a big share of the credit.

Through trials of the method in three road building projects, Local Government Engineering Department (LGED) has reached the conclusion that the plastic waste binding of the bitumen provides cost-effective and durable roads instead of the fragile bitumen plus brick soled ones we have been stuck with. The trials show that road so built had 84 percent, 57 percent and 15 percent less cracks, depressions and raveling, respectively, than conventionally constructed roads.

If we have such roads, in maintenance costs alone, the country can save Tk1507.60 crore a year. The technology seems ideally suited in Bangladesh climate with her dense traffic load. Besides, the huge amount of plastic wastes that we generate can be recycled for road building purposes thereby reducing the amount of hazardous non-biodegradable materials in the environment. The technology has been successfully utilised in Canada, Brazil and the Indian cities of Bangalore, Mumbai and Chennai.

This is no doubt a commendable innovation. But the issue here is that precious improvisations have often gone down the drain because of vested interest groups who see benefits in continuing with conventional technologies that proved money spinning for them. Particularly in such a massive undertaking as road building that look-out may get the better of durability considerations. The emphasis, therefore, automatically falls on political will of the elected government to make the best use of the method invented by our scientists.

The plight of migrant workers must be looked into



Md. ASADULLAH KHAN

LURED by the promise of lucrative job offers, big money and better future, thousands of Bangladeshis have fallen victims to the unscrupulous brokers and fake manpower agents. Many of these illegal migrants have perished while crossing the rough seas and others have seen their dreams shattered by the cruel hand of fate. Many of them after being arrested by the police are passing their days in pain.

Over the years more workers have gone abroad and remittances to the extent of about US \$6 billion every year earned by about 5 million Bangladeshis living abroad have flown in. Alongside the hardship of the workers, their pathetic state of living and deprivation of many aspirants also have come to public attention.

Liton and his cousin brother Hamid of Ashulia near Dhaka had to sell their ancestral land, their last resources, to pay Tk 1,80,000.00 each to a recruiting agent for a job in Malaysia. The payment only ensured their passage to Malaysia. As soon as they reached Kuala Lumpur, the ordeal began.

For the past one decade some places in Bangladesh namely Dhaka, Chittagong, Rajshahi, Khulna and even the remotest villages like Chokoria of Chittagong and Meherpur of

Kushtia have become busy recruiting centres for people seeking their fortune abroad. Every month hundreds of young men like Liton and Abdul Hamid -- all of them unemployed and mostly from low income families take foreign route with dreams of finding better jobs and making better money. While some strike it rich, many end up in hell holes, only to get deported to their home country as paupers. And yet others like the 11 Bangladeshis who

perished in the boat tragedy in 2005 off the coast of Morocco meet an even crueler fate.

It is also the get-rich-quick dream which fuels the vast network of manpower recruiting agents and brokers, many of them fake but notoriously emboldened to run this trafficking business because they enjoy the patronage of a group of law enforcers, passport and immigration personnel and airport staff, as pointed out by the members of the Task Force that visited Malaysia after a series of reports relating to harassment of Bangladeshis workers. Also terrible working condition, low wages, and in some cases non-payment of wages were revealed by the frustrated returnees to the officials of the Ministry of Manpower and Overseas Employment.

Shamsul Alam returned to Bangladesh after staying in Malaysia for about 2 months and a half. He has lodged a complaint to the Ministry of Overseas Employment asking for return of the fees he paid to the recruiting

agent.

The plight of 32 young men of Meherpur and 70 such aspiring migrant workers of Dhunat of Bogra is sadder still. While the young men from Meherpur paid Tk. 1,85,000.00 each to the recruiting agency through a broker, only 18 of them could avail the trip to Malaysia, 32 of them are moving from door to door for the last six months without any hope of getting ticket and visa for the host country, rather they are being

begin with the job. Meanwhile a report appearing in The Daily Star on June 26 quoting Saudi Arabian newspaper Arab News indicated that 45 migrant workers, mostly from Bangladesh were deprived of their dues by Nukhba, a Saudi Arabian Medical Services company and are stranded in the kingdom now without money and legal papers such as release paper since their contract expired in 2006. From Malaysia to UAE to Saudi Arabia, it's a long story of

mis-treatment and harassment of our men by the foreign employers with really no one to mitigate their suffering or speak for them. While some of these hapless youth are carpenters, masons, plumbers, drivers or cooks, a majority comprise unskilled labourers with moderate education, and some even have university degrees. Mamun and Hanif had graduated from a college in Khulna but, as it is the case with millions of Bangladeshi youths, these educated youths could not find any suitable job in the country to eke out a living. The prospect of good income and a comfortable living after a few years' stay in a foreign country is irresistible, and they become easy prey to brokers. With organizational headquarters in Dhaka, these brokers swoop down on gullible youths in villages.

Reports have it that some recruiting agencies operating a clandestine recruiting business as early as in 2001 in collusion with some officials in the government circles have so far sent thousands of young men to different countries who are now languishing in different jails in those countries. The recent investigation by the Task Force has identified at least 18 recruiting agents who are involved in this corruption racket in collusion with some members of Bangladesh Migrant Workers Welfare Association in Malaysia and a section of officials of Bangladesh Embassy in Malaysia. The smuggling of illegal migrants is a thriving few hundred crore taka a year business. On an average, a few thousand youth are illegally sent to different countries every month through a well-knit network of shady recruiting agents who have links with local touts and international syndicate.

Undeniably true, remittances earned by migrant workers account for a major chunk of foreign currency reserves boosting the economy and contributing to the development of the country. Yet the travails of the migrant workers are many, starting from the heavy burden of agency fees to fraud to poor working conditions to unfriendly environment that make their lives harder and harder.

It is also undeniably true that unstable political situation in the country, closure of once vibrant industries like jute and consequent lack of employment opportunities have propelled them to flee the country in search of jobs and better living elsewhere.

But when it is linked with the national economy, just and right conditions reasonably must prevail for them everywhere. The government must do everything possible to ensure this much for the migrant workers.

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

BITTER TRUTH
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after borrowing from different sources. Ironically, payment of such a hefty sum of money ensured his journey up to Kuala Lumpur. This far and no farther. After his arrival in the land of hope, he was taken to a health centre and an X-ray of his lungs was taken. The mould report declared him unfit to resume work in Malaysia, but was not handed over to him. He and the members of his group who failed to get any job as per contract moved to several factories as illegal workers but the terrible working condition, 16 hours work-day, non-payment of wages for the period he and 47 members of his batch worked in different factories shattered them physically and mentally.

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reportedly threatened with dire consequences should they pressurize for getting the money back or complain to higher authorities. Those 70 young men from Dhunat could however reach Malaysia, but they are passing their days in the host country without work, food and shelter.

True, after the Middle East dream vanished in recent years, many young men have drifted towards Malaysia despite the horrifying stories of harassed and traumatized Bangladeshis still living there. Sadly true, Malaysia in an effort to check the flow of Bangladesh workers, for reasons not known, has put stringent immigration formalities in the airport and even afterwards. They now check finger prints along with photographs after verifying the visa. The workers on their arrival are put up together, sometimes 30-40 in one room by the agent till all the paper works is completed in the host country for the worker to

action against him for the Gujarat carnage. The centre has been found too timid to do so. Now he is blessing action against writers who point out that things have not returned to normalcy and that the state remains divided on communal lines.

For example, political psychologist Ashish Nandy wrote early this year that "Gujarati Muslims too are 'adjusting' to their new station. ment in the commission of offences under sections of the IPC."

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"This is a blatant attack on the freedom of expression. How can a free press, an integral part of a democratic society, exist if Modi is so touchy about even the mention of the riots in which 2,000 Muslims were killed? I am encouraged to see that some 170 intellectuals, including academics, writers, film makers, journalists and activists, from all

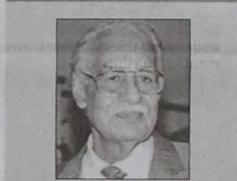
to return. I met many of them who want to go back to their homes and who are willing to forget and forgive if given a chance to restart their lives. Modi's party, the BJP, is busy devising strategies for the next general election and coining slogans for electioneering. Probably, the Gujarat example goes down well in some Hindi-speaking states. It's a pity that the BJP has no compassion when it comes to the Muslims. But I don't expect even a modicum of rethinking in a party which has dreams of establishing a Hindu rashtra and anointing Modi as the Prime Minister after L.K. Advani.

I recall the example of Bhindranwale, a Sikh fundamentalist, in Punjab. He could have been dealt with otherwise and the marching of forces into the Golden Temple was not justified. After all, the place is the Sikhs' Vatican. At that time the Sikh community should have asserted itself and blocked Bhindranwale from occupying the space which belonged to the nation.

New Delhi's failure to take on communal forces has created in Gujarat an atmosphere where even a person like Nandy cannot highlight the truth. Mind you, it has taken 40 years for Gujarat to be what it is today, a purely Hinduva haven. This may happen in Kerala and Islamic fundamentalists may close Gujarat. New Delhi has so far stood helpless in the case of Gujarat. That is to be deplored. Would the centre remain inactive in Kerala and other parts where extremists use Modi as their role model for propagating communalism?

Kuldip Nayar is an eminent Indian columnist.

Gujarat remains challenge to secularism



KULDIP NAYAR
writes from New Delhi

THE two states which I have visited in the last few days are Kerala and Gujarat. They are hundreds of miles apart, but I saw something common between the two. Kerala in the south is left of the centre and Gujarat in western India is right of the centre. Both are headed by persons who are ideologically fundamentalists. Kerala Chief Minister V.S. Achuthanandan is committed to communism which has Stalin as its hero. Gujarat is headed by Narendra Modi, a fundamentalist in Hindutva drawing inspiration from the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS).

Mahatma Gandhi, who won us independence, does not figure in the ideology of both. Nor does his picture hang in the politburos of the two. At the Communist Party headquarters in Kolkata, you can see the pictures of Marx and Engels. At the RSS headquarters at Nagpur, the photos of Shivaji and Maharana Pratap Singh are on display, suggesting the militant side of Hindus. Even when I have inquired the reason for the absence of Gandhi's portrait, they have

simply shrugged their shoulders as if he does not fit into their scheme of things.

What I found most disturbing was the incipient Islamic fundamentalism beginning to creep into Kerala. Some 40 years ago, Gujarat had the first Hindu Muslim riot. From then onwards the Hindutva forces have kept on pushing through propaganda and at times through communal riots to be where they are. They have more or

less achieved their objective when the Gujaratis themselves do not distinguish between Hindutva and Indian nationalism.

The disturbing trend in Kerala can still be stopped by liberal Muslims leader. Instead, the money is sought from abroad -- it is alleged that Pakistan's ISI is making large contributions -- to finance fundamentalists to help them buy the best of properties at key places. The Left is unhappy. They are the ones fighting against fundamentalists, the BJP hardly figuring anywhere.

Why I am expressing my horror in the manner in which Gujarat has undergone a change. It was a secular society before the communal

debate which the terrorists are trying to degenerate into an anti-Hindu campaign.

India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, had said that fundamentalism among minorities could be curbed. But if the majority community were to take to fundamentalism, the country would go fascist. India has, by and large, followed his principles of secularism. But where probably the nation has failed is in Gujarat, which is behaving as if pluralism does not suit the genius of India.

In this kind of atmosphere, institutions adjust themselves to the wishes of the master. I saw the fear of Modi all around. He has been taunting the centre to take

Denied justice and proper compensation, and as second class citizens in their home state, they have to depend on voluntary efforts and donor agencies. The state's refusal to supply relief has been partly met by voluntary groups having fundamentalist sympathies..." I experienced this when I was at Ahmedabad early this week.

What Nandy has stated is the truth without any embellishment or exaggeration. Things are in fact worse. Still, the state has issued a notification to grant permission to the police to file a criminal case against him. The notification said: "There is prima facie evidence against the accused for his involve-

over the world have issued a joint statement condemning the anti-democratic forces "that claim to speak on behalf of Hindu values sometimes and patriotism at other times, especially in Gujarat, but who have little understanding of either."

The ball is now in the court of the Gujarati middle class, whether living in the UK, the USA or in India itself. They must speak out because it is their name that is being dragged through the mud and it is they who are being blamed for changing their values to chauvinism and narrow-minded obscurantism. At the same time, they should ensure the rehabilitation of Muslims who were ousted from their villages and not being allowed

Learning and teaching English

DR. MD. MOSTAFIZUR RAHMAN

THE process of developing students' proficiency positively prevails in the communicative approach. For example at the primary level, grammar-translation method has been introduced to develop students' grammatical foundation, sense of parts of speech, tense, sentence, structure development etc.

From class VI to class XII, there has been communicative approach introduced for students' implicit learning. Even at tertiary level, e.g. the degree level as well as honours level, a compulsory English course has been provided. The course mainly attempts at developing students' proficiency in the language components -- reading, writing, speaking and listening. In its writing section function of words, transformation of sentence and other grammatical elements are also provided.

For HSC English, right forms of

verbs, writing correct/true answers etc. are originally based on students' grammatical proficiency. Transformation of words and sentences are also well designed in the exercise of most of the lessons of most of the units of the text book. Summary, paragraph (as per sequence or hints), report, dialogue and story writing are also based on grammar. Grammatical knowledge is essential to write these items correctly. Grammatical items are not absent in the SSC and HSC level, only one has to pay attention to.

Communicative English is a modern approach in which a way of spontaneous learning is implied. It is the most remarkable characteristic of communicative English that in this process students are encouraged highly to practice four basic skills of language -- reading, writing, speaking, and listening, finally without paying heed to grammar in a

Proper environment of English teaching and learning may be created by recruiting efficient trainers to equip the school teachers with special mind-set and modern English approach. TT Colleges and PTIs may be used as venue to conduct the course and minimum five to ten teachers may be recruited for each institute with attractive terms and conditions of their services.

natural and subconscious process as it often occurs in the case of first language of every nation. And after developing the proficiency on four skills, learners must have to correct the grammatical production of the language while using the skills in various social situations. In both texts of SSC and HSC level there are certain grammatical exercise options kept in box at the end of almost every lesson of every unit which are to be marked and taught by the class teachers. And these are indeed instructed for the teachers to implement among the students.

But, perhaps due to commercial attitude, irresponsibility, inefficiency etc. the teachers don't involve the students with the instructed grammatical items for practicing and developing grammatical proficiency. Since our teachers' mindset and teaching are still based on traditional methods and thinking, it seems still not well sensed or realized that there are certain grammatical presence in the communicative approach. For this reason, along with the communicative approach the traditional grammar has already been introduced in the syllabus of class VIII, IX and X.

Another problem is that the questions are not unpredictable because viewing the minimum suggested/selected items of composition students are able to answer in the exam hall. Even the items of seen/unseen comprehension which is an integral part of communicative approach, also come common to the students while taking part in examination with very minimum reading. At the same time teachers are very much liberal in examining and marking the answer scripts which should considerably be maintained by the teachers. Questions should also be unpredictable so that students' real

proficiency or development of creative faculty of mind can be really ensured.

teachers on communicative English through grammar-translation method. Experts on English language may be assigned to determine the area of the course as per the need of the primary, secondary and HSC level. The course may also be divided into four or five semesters. The participant will have to show efficiency in each semester to obtain the degree. In the case of English language teaching, importance should be given to the primary level as it is the foundation of our learners and primary teachers should also be trained up through this course.

Proper environment of English teaching and learning may be created by recruiting efficient trainers to equip the school teachers with special mind-set and modern English approach. TT Colleges and PTIs may be used as venue to conduct the course and minimum five to ten teachers may be recruited for each institute with attractive terms and conditions of

their services. Teachers below forty years of age from primary and secondary level will be invited to participate in the course through an admission test compulsorily. At the same time unemployed graduate or masters degree holders may complete the course to obtain the degree on English. This degree may be one of the important criteria in the recruitment process of the teachers at both primary and secondary level.

Minimum three teachers with this degree may be determined as the vital condition for academic recognition of the schools by the Education Board. Through this teachers will be encouraged to obtain the degree at their own cost and the school authority will feel interested to support them in all respects.

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