

## Congratulations to successful HSC candidate

*Urban-rural gap in education needs addressing though*

THE results of this year's Higher Secondary Certificate examinations have caused mixed reaction among the students and all others concerned. Mixed because the overall pass rate has gone down by 4.42 per cent compared to that of last year as also the number of students scoring GPA-5. However, it must be emphasised that as much as it is important to ensure that the maximum number of candidates qualify it is also equally important to maintain a high quality of education.

Some colleges, mostly in the urban areas, have achieved 100 per cent success. Figures show that in comparison to the past, this year 81 more colleges have joined the list of cent per cent scorers. But this is a success story of the more privileged institutions and it hardly reflects the reality on the ground, for there are 41 colleges where not a single student could qualify.

Such paradox in performance by the examinees notwithstanding, we congratulate those boys and girls who have come out successfully in this year's HSC exams. At the same time, we express our sympathy for those who failed to make it this time.

The teachers of some colleges across the country have blamed the introduction of new curriculum in English for the poor performance of the students. But apart from introduction of a new topic, that is, grammar, in English, there are also other important issues one can hardly lose sight of in this context. For instance, it has become clear from this year's HSC exams that the urban students are doing better than their rural counterparts, especially in English. One can see this disparity even between the bigger and smaller urban centres.

The most plausible explanation for this anomaly is that the urban schools and colleges have better learning environments, including better teachers, and they can afford private coaching. Such facilities are beyond the dream of the rural students. And such discrepancy has been becoming more pronounced.

With the passage of time, the urban-rural disparity in the sphere of education is becoming wider and deeper. The gap has to be bridged. It is time the government provided special attention to the rural schools and colleges and extended necessary financial and training support for them to get over the situation in the shortest possible time.

## New buses on city roads a good idea

*But basic problems must be handled first*

THE spirit behind the decision to introduce an articulated bus service, or buses with increased passenger capacity, on city routes is understandable. There can be no denying that traffic movement in Dhaka has of late acquired horrendous proportions. It will certainly lessen citizens' worries if serious, purposeful moves are made to ease their movement on the roads. However, there is also the truth that a mere introduction of new vehicles on the road will turn out to be quite pointless where facilitating road traffic is concerned. And there are some rather pertinent reasons behind such observations of the traffic situation.

We appreciate the idea of the introduction of jumbo buses, as these vehicles under the articulated service are sometimes referred to. The bigger question, though, is whether these new buses will instead of solving our traffic problems in fact only add to them. Which brings up the matter of the severely constricted road network all across the city at present. In recent years, a number of measures --- taking rickshaws off large roads, building underpasses and footbridges, et cetera --- have been taken to ease the flow of traffic. They have not worked to our full satisfaction, one reason being the progressively large number of cars, buses and trucks and other vehicles that hit the roads nearly every month. And, of course, a glaring impediment to easy movement on the roads remains the sheer brazen manner in which the roads get clogged through haphazard parking nearly everywhere in Dhaka. That happens because of the impunity with which people, especially those concerned with markets, shopping malls, business offices, hospitals and private universities, have constructed their structures with little thought to the requirements of parking space on their premises. The authorities have by and large turned a blind eye to the issue. There is too the matter of the roads being taken over by vehicles which do not qualify for plying on those roads. Add to these problems the audacity with which homeowners dump construction materials on public roads and streets, thus adding to citizens' plight. The authorities are blissfully unconcerned about such transgressions.

That is the picture before us. We therefore suggest that before any decisions are made about adding more buses on city routes, the basic problems about traffic movement be handled first. For starters, a swift assessment should be made of buildings that do not have parking space in them. Let the owners be subjected to scrutiny by mobile courts and, subsequently, let appropriate punishment --- through cancelling leases and the like --- be meted out to them. The same should apply to those who occupy the roads by dumping their construction materials along them. It is not newer vehicles that will make life easier for us. It is a clearing of the roads and punishment for those who commandeer them that is of essence. The rest will follow.

## Tweedledum and Tweedledee

The outcome of the council could be foretold from the way the events were unfolding. Yet, Sheikh Hasina, who leads the government with a comfortable majority in the parliament, could have dispensed the president's post to someone else -- new, fresh and more energetic -- instead of holding it for the sixth time. But that cannot happen in power politics, more so in a country when both are complementary to each other.

M. ABDUL HAFIZ

THE AL's 20th National Council was already on the cards. It was going to take place after an unusual hiatus of seven years. It was a difficult time, packed with equally unusual events. Obviously, the council raised a great deal of curiosity both among the public and the party men. The media-savvy Awami League adequately drew the attention of media outlets, which, alongside romanticising the party as the catalyst of our history's big events, dutifully collected the views of a cross-section of public as to what their expectations were from the council. In response, there has been an apparent clamour for a new leadership to emerge from the historic occasion. Has that been achieved?

The outcome of the council could be foretold from the way the events were unfolding. Yet, Sheikh Hasina, who leads the government with a comfortable majority in the parliament, could have dispensed the president's post to someone else -- new, fresh and more energetic -- instead of holding it for the sixth time. But that cannot happen in power politics, more so in a country when both are complementary to each other. Any ambitious leader would like to hold all the levers of power of power

in his or her hand. Therefore, in a strictly stage-managed exercise, she was "elected" the party president without any dissent, debate or free expression of views -- the absence of which is the first syndrome of an authoritarian mold.

Failures lead one to ensure a firm grip on everything that comes her or his way, more so when a huge parliamentary backing, which is also indicative of public support, fails to produce results in controlling law and order or unruly traders. As a result, public dissatisfaction piles up, pushing the power wielders to respond to the problems clumsily. The insult meted out to poor Abdul Jalil through his unceremonious exit, or Sohel Taj's mysterious resignation, were avoidable. A nice send-off to Jalil would make the AL's rich tradition richer, and the presentation of brass tacks on the minister of state for home could spare the nation worrisome speculations.

On assumption of AL's presidency Sheikh Hasina, in her cliché-packed 45-minute speech, propounded many pious words. She had done the same when she assumed power in January last. But the conduct of her party activists belies what she says, or, for one reason or another, she has failed to control them. And the mayhem continues ad-infinitum. Yet, power and influence make a heady brew, intoxi-



Where is the change?

cating one who tastes it. That's the reason the prime minister couldn't stick to her unwillingness to bear the burden of the AL presidency. Within moments, she was back in form and forgot that she had politely refused to shoulder the burden of the AL presidency any more. Nevertheless, the six-time president of the Awami League looked stale.

The Awami League has always been in its elements when in opposition, but more often than not bungled in government. In just a little over six months, the AL government faced the Pilkhana tragedy, the unrest in the garments sector, a new challenge regard maritime delineation, the return of immigrant workers in droves, and the large-scale smuggling during the BDR reorganisation. These are apart from corruption, the broker-based administration, property-grabbing, murder, dacoity and

extortion.

The festivity seen in the Bangabandhu International Conference Centre (another trivialisation of the hero?) as well as the celebratory mood of the government may fade soon as we start dealing with issues like border, trade, water, and so on, with India, which has taken us for granted ever since the AL came to power. During her last stint in government, Sheikh Hasina showed pragmatism by holding back on some of the sensitive issues on India's wish-list. The country is nervously awaiting her intervention, while some of her minister have been talking irresponsibly on the same issues.

In the meantime, the quest for a new AL leadership has resulted only in a Tweedledum and Tweedledee situation, although optimism is alive as its fruition.

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## Bringing money home

An elaborate overseas job policy has become essential to explore new job markets and also to retain the existing ones. As such, since a policy is linked to many important issues relating to manpower export, it should be formulated very soon for greater interest of the country.

A.N.M. NURUL HAQUE

DESPITE gloomy projections by several donor agencies, remittance flow from expatriate Bangladeshi workers has recorded a 22% growth compared to the last fiscal year, amid ongoing global recession. The amount remitted by them has touched the highest-ever peak of \$10 billion in the just-concluded fiscal year.

Many countries all over the world also depend on remittance to keep their economy ticking in the global remittance market, the size of which is worth \$450 billion.

According to the World Bank, India, China and Mexico retained their positions as top remittance recipients among the developing countries. India received a remittance of \$45 billion from its expatriates during the last fiscal year, followed by China, which received \$39 billion.

Other countries in the top-10 list of remittance recipients are Philippines, Poland, Nigeria, Romania, Egypt, Bangladesh and Pakistan.

Although remittance growth has shown

an upward trend in the last fiscal year, Bangladesh Bank has warned that this growth may not be sustainable, as this unusual rise may have actually happened because of the return of the large number of expatriates after losing their jobs.

According to Bangladesh Economic Review, more than 55 lakh Bangladeshis were working abroad till April 2009. But a huge number of them have returned in the meantime. In view of Mauritius's decision to send back 6,000 Bangladeshi workers, there is genuine fear of retrenchment turning into a deluge.

Malaysia cancelled the visas of 55,000 Bangladeshi workers a few months back, and Rumania has refused to accept more than 10,000 Bangladeshi workers. Such a devastating development in our overseas job sector calls for serious attention of the concerned authorities.

Bangladesh, a country where industrial investment is wretchedly stagnant and expansion in the agricultural and service sectors is simply not able to cope with the ever increasing pressure of unemployment, very badly needs to find employment

opportunities abroad for its labourers.

Bangladeshis who seek manual jobs abroad are mostly poor and uneducated. In order to be able to feed their families two decent meals, they opt for any sort of job abroad by selling land to meet the high demands of the manpower agents. But even in that heart-rending deal, many of these people don't get jobs.

Some of them, as an aftermath, lost their lives abroad and others lost their last resort. Many families, who paid Tk.5 to 6 lakh by selling-off family properties at throw-away prices, were virtually ruined. Such fraudulent activities by these unscrupulous agents still exist, as they are not adequately taken to task by the government.

Foreign exchange earnings through remittance by the expatriate Bangladeshis have now overtaken the quantum of foreign exchange earnings through exported items. Manpower export has now reached the top of the country's capacity building agenda, both for foreign exchange earning and mitigation of the unemployment problem.

Sadly, the county did not have any elaborate overseas job policy although more than 55 lakh Bangladeshis are working abroad and their home-sent remittances account for a sizeable amount of our total foreign currency earnings. The current level of remittance in Bangladesh is able to offset about 65% of the trade deficit of the country, if the remittances are not used just for consumption.

In December 2001 the government

initiated a move to prepare the overseas job policy, following which an inter-ministerial committee was formed to make recommendations.

In early 2003 the committee made a 44-point recommendation and former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, on March 4, assigned a secretarial committee headed by the foreign secretary to finalise the draft.

Most countries, including the emerging giants China and India, have well-defined structures and policies in place with a view to help their expatriate workers. Any citizen of Sweden can get cash endowment of \$30,000 to find jobs abroad, for which the World Bank provides the funds. Philippines has got an active retraining and allowance program for its retrenched migrants.

The record remittance flows to Bangladesh, even under global economic recession, imposes a good deal of responsibility on the concerned government bodies to formulate an elaborate overseas job policy, if they really optimise on global job opportunities. The government can do it by taking a cue from the countries with astounding success in the manpower export.

An elaborate overseas job policy has become essential to explore new job markets and also to retain the existing ones. As such, since a policy is linked to many important issues relating to manpower export, it should be formulated very soon for greater interest of the country.

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## Delhi's grand strategy

Finally, whatever policy India adopts will have to take into account Asia's two other great players: China and US. New Delhi is currently building strong ties with both Beijing and Washington by following the "Manmohan Singh doctrine," which stresses economic diplomacy and engagement. But this doesn't guarantee that relations with either country will be easy.

SUNIL KHILNANI

INDIA has long aspired to a role in redefining the global order. Ask why they deserve it, and most will point to their nation's size, its rich culture and tradition, and its special legitimacy -- the product of the nonviolent freedom struggle against British rule and India's triumph as a secular democracy.

Ask for more details on exactly how India should redefine the global system, however, and things get murkier. That's because India's foreign policy has been about saying no -- playing out a Gandhian boycott on the international stage. Throughout the Cold War, New Delhi refused to take sides, avoiding international pacts and steering clear of markets and trade, all of which it saw as skewed in favour of the powerful.

This approach was initially a product of India's economic and military weakness. Today, however, India is an economic powerhouse and, increasingly, a diplomatic one as well. The country's economic

boom seems likely to continue, thanks to a high savings rate, strong investment, and a young population.

The global crisis will temporarily slow India's rapid growth, but its economy is less export-dependent, and its financial system is more regulated than many, ensuring a quicker recovery. The country may not be poised to become a superpower, as some of its citizens like to imagine. But as its might expands -- including military muscle -- New Delhi needs a clearer sense of how to use it.

Analysts like to lament the fact that India lacks a grand vision on the scale of Beijing's "peaceful rise" doctrine. But formulating a decisive strategy is much more difficult in an open democracy with many different definitions of the national interest. This lack of cohesion is not necessarily a disadvantage. It ensures that when India does finally get around to defining its world view, that will be after intense debate among its diverse social and economic groups, which should ensure that the new policy reflects something like the true will of the people --

not just that of policy wonks in New Delhi.

For a sense of how this process works, consider the bruising battle over confirmation of the US-India Civilian Nuclear Agreement: what may have sounded like cacophony actually helped to refine the terms, ensuring that the final deal better reflected India's interests -- for instance, by keeping several plants off-limits to inspectors.

Given the complex nature of Indian politics, it's too soon to say what any grand strategy will eventually look like. But one can get at least a sense of it from looking at the various external pressures it will have to account for. Here several facts are key. First, India is still home to the world's largest concentration of poor people. New Delhi is going to have to use its growing global clout to inject their interests into international debates.

As India negotiates on agricultural terms of trade, access to energy, or climate change, this or any future government must push for greater equity -- not by rejecting globalisation, but by making it more inclusive.

Second, India finds itself in the world's most threatening regional environment, surrounded by unstable or authoritarian states: Nepal, Bangladesh, Burma, Sri Lanka, and, above all, Pakistan. To manage, New Delhi will need to balance toughness with magnanimity; unilaterally offering trade liberalisation, for example, could help integrate the fractured region.

Finally, whatever policy India adopts will

have to take into account Asia's two other great players: China and US. New Delhi is currently building strong ties with both Beijing and Washington by following the "Manmohan Singh doctrine," which stresses economic diplomacy and engagement. But this doesn't guarantee that relations with either country will be easy.

India's bond with US, though strong, will be seriously tested if India suffers another terrorist attack originating in Pakistan. As for China, Asia's other most dynamic economy and dominant civilisation, the potential for conflict is greater. The two countries may share many interests on economics and trade, but experience shows how easily nationalism can trump such rational concerns.

India's emerging strategy should not try to balance these or other great powers. Instead, Delhi should use its diplomatic skills to strengthen its voice -- in order to win permanent membership to the UN Security Council, for example. But India must also show the courage to venture into zones of conflict and meet threats with vigour. It is as a bridging power -- between rich and poor, between the world's most powerful state (US) and its most populous one (China), and between the various religions that make up its own rich mosaic -- that India can best define its new global identity.

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