

This year's remarkable SSC results

And now comes the college admission crunch

HERE is little question that the results of this year's Secondary School Certificate examinations have been remarkable. With as many as 78 per cent of students qualifying in the examinations and with a clear jump in the number of those who have scored GPA-5, one cannot be in any doubt about the nature of the success. There are, of course, some institutions, 49 in all, which have had zero success. The vast majority of schools have, however, reasons to be happy with the results.

We take this opportunity to extend our congratulations to all those who have qualified at the SSC examinations. They have certainly deserved these results. More importantly, we think their teachers and parents are deserving as well of kudos for the guidance and encouragement they have given these young people. Beyond and above all that, we think the education authorities, with a dynamic education minister in the lead, have rendered commendable service to the country by not only conducting a good examination but also by making sure that the results of the examination are made available in a period of two months. Indeed, the efficiency with which this year's SSC results were disseminated to schools around the country, through various means of technology, is a remarkable commentary on the performance of the education boards and the education ministry. They have clearly demonstrated the possibilities that underline the priorities in our times.

A particular aspect of this year's SSC results is that there has been a good degree of performance in the rural regions. That is a remarkable achievement and shows the increased level of emphasis on studies in educational institutions in our villages. All said and done, however, we now face that old question of accommodation for these successful SSC examinees in the colleges. Predictably there will be heavy pressure on the colleges, which will clearly find themselves in a strait-jacket even if they go for a number of shifts in classes. The education minister has spoken of consulting the college authorities on the issue. That is welcome, but infinitely more important these days is the question of how productive a use we can make of all the young people emerging with such remarkable results from our schools and colleges. That calls for a prioritization of the goals of education, fundamentally through promoting specialized education in such areas as IT, teaching, medicare and the like.

It is not possible and neither is it desirable that all students undertake the courses that have traditionally been offered by colleges and universities. The time has now come for emphasis to be placed on developing skilled manpower, from the humblest to the highest levels. And if that is indeed adopted as policy, the government would be well advised to consider setting up institutions where students finishing SSC and HSC can move straight into higher studies in the specialised subjects they plan on taking up as a profession. In other words, human resource development ought to be part of the education we give our young in the future.

Outrageous incident in BIRDEM

Violence cannot be the arbiter of disputes

THE spectacle of two groups, one of which was the staff of BIRDEM, engaged in clashes in and around a premier hospital of Dhaka is detestable and abhorrent. The other group involved was students from another premier institution, Dhaka University.

If it was the use of a lift that led to the clash it seems that our patience has run thin and the threshold of tolerance has gone down so low as to allow a trivial incident to lead to altercation and eventually to degenerate into what can best fit the description of a pitched battle.

We fail to understand why the liftman had to respond with force when a patient wanted to have the use of the lift, reserved for service staff, for his ailing father, and what the justification of his associates was to join in the fray. We fail to understand why violence has to be the arbiter of arguments in a civilized society at least we claim to be civilised.

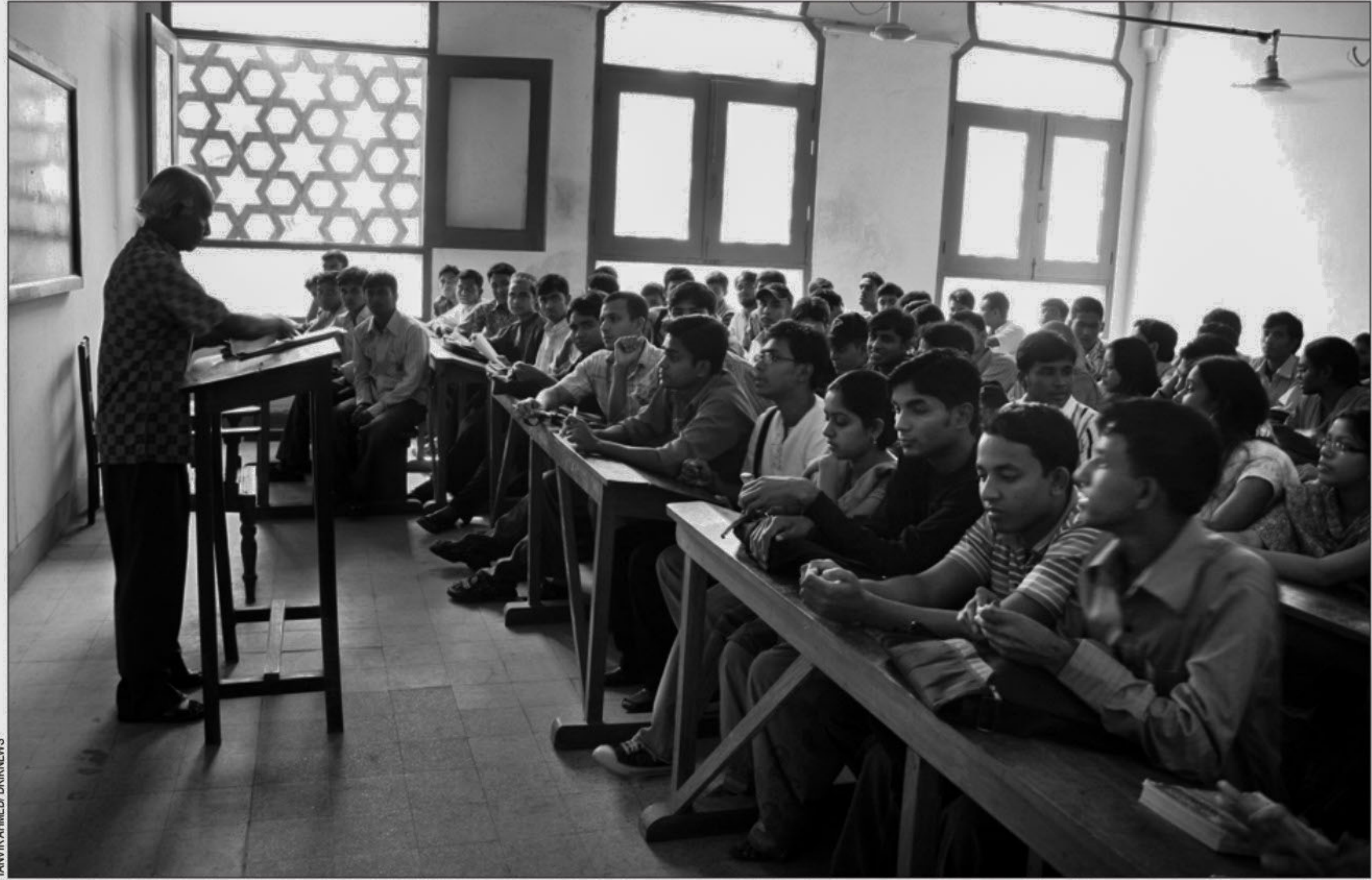
We fail to understand, by the same token, why the aggrieved student, without registering his complaint immediately, should come several hours later with his colleagues in a large number to seek redress. And why, after being assured by the BIRDEM authorities that appropriate action would be taken against the errant staff, should such senseless fighting follow? And why should the students set upon the hospital and lay siege to it and resort to vandalism? All these are mind boggling.

It is evident that there had been high-handedness on both sides, and both had indulged in excesses; one feels that with a bit of self-restraint this reprehensible incident could have been avoided. What the two quarrelling groups failed to realize was that it was the patients that were the ones who were the worst sufferers. The vandalism created panic in the surrounding areas too with severe traffic snarl up that lasted several hours.

While we feel that there should be a transparent inquiry into the incident and the guilty persons punished severely, we feel that there is a need also to look at the role of the police and other law enforcing agencies. One wonders why it took so long for the police to arrest the situation, given that the police control room is a stone's throw from BIRDEM.

The matter had been simmering since morning. It seems quite incredible that the police or the intelligence agencies did not get a wind of what was about to happen even when a group of several hundred students were moving from the university area towards the hospital. We think that there is a thing or two for the police to answer.

In the recent past we have seen minor incidents flaring up into violence which could have been settled amicably with timely police intervention. We feel it is time to think of a highly mobile rapid reaction force of the police, with the capability to interpose between such groups, and help bring about a peaceful solution without use of force, before the situation precipitates into violence.



TANVIR AHMED DRINKNEWS

You are what you study

The government should encourage vocational education and establish more public institutions that provide courses on different trades, modifying them to meet the requirements of the local and overseas job markets and extend the state's largesse to those institutions and their students.

SYED FATTAHUL ALIM

THE prime minister's directive to provide free education for all students at public institutions from primary to university level is undoubtedly a very bold step taken by any head of government in Bangladesh so far. Needless to say, this program will not cover privately run schools, colleges and universities. Even then, the number of students to come under this plan would be over 4 million considering that at present the total number of students in all private and public educational institutions from primary to university level numbers is close to 8.5 million. What is more, the prime minister also has a plan to provide stipends to meritorious students among those that already receive free education.

This is good news indeed for the parents and guardians from poorer households, since most of them cannot afford to bear the educational expenses of their children studying at the government-run schools and colleges even though those fees are not high as privately run educational institutions. Therefore when free

education is finally introduced educational expenses will not cause guardians and parents distress.

While the prime minister's decision is a highly commendable one in spirit, there is still scope to rethink certain aspects of this decision. There is no denying that free education from the primary to the secondary to the higher secondary levels is highly desirable for students before they enter the job market. But questions would still arise as to why the education has to be free for one who has chosen to pursue one's academic career at the graduate or the post-graduate level?

The holder of a bachelor or post-graduate degree from a university belongs to the class of people who are considered to have achieved excellence in arts, science or any other field of study. They may pursue still higher education from local and foreign universities. And producing scholars holding masters or higher degrees at the expense of the public exchequer hardly makes much sense when the country actually needs a large army of technically trained people to operate the rising number of mills,

factories and farms and at different other business enterprises.

If education is made free up to the master's level, then the tendency of every parent would be to provide his or her child with the highest available degree in the country. And that would create a larger number of highly educated youth, many of whom would be without jobs, while some would have to take jobs that do not match their specialisation, let alone those who would have to hide their real qualifications to get an odd job.

It cannot, however, be said that the students or their parents are responsible for this situation. In truth, they simply follow the dominant trend of society and do what others are doing.

Here, if anything, the priorities and focus of our entire educational system are to blame. We hardly understand the significance of graduate and post-graduate education. One cannot, however, blame these job seekers, who without question desperately need jobs. But what about the organisations that put out advertisements asking for masters or equivalent degrees for jobs that hardly require that kind of qualification? The sooner such practices go, the better.

Other than for teaching jobs at colleges and universities or in positions at public or private organisations that need scholarship in a particular field, one wonders what a master of science or arts is supposed to do at a desk job in a firm or public office where a higher secondary level education is sufficient.

Due to such upside-down priorities in

the education sector, every year colleges and universities are producing large numbers of graduates and post-graduates degree holders, most of whom find it hard to land even the most ordinary job, let alone jobs that suit their qualifications.

On the other hand, industries and different businesses often run short of skilled and technically trained people. The story is the same in the case of migrant workers. When overseas employers look for skilled workers from us, we cannot fulfil their demands. People with general education, even those with higher qualifications, do not serve their purpose.

Under these circumstances, the government would do well to design the education policy in such a manner that gifted students may get the opportunity to complete higher degrees under state patronage. On the other hand, the public institutions of higher learning should charge the students for their education, if they so decide. At the same time, the government should encourage vocational education and establish more public institutions that provide courses on different trades, modifying them to meet the requirements of the local and overseas job markets and extend the state's largesse to those institutions and their students. That would serve the people and the nation best.

Syed Fattahul Alim is a Senior Journalist.

The comforts and dangers of sin and stupidity

The most acceptable sin is clearly stupidity. It is possible that jokes have lent a slightly droll nuance to stupidity. Its dangers should not be underestimated, particularly when stupidity is harnessed to any interpretation of faith.

M. J. AKBAR

THE choice is admittedly difficult, but which of these three is the biggest threat to the social stability of India: greed, hatred or stupidity? Our polity is less vulnerable than our social compact, although the first can, logically, only be a manifestation of the second.

But the former is structured in legislation and held together by institutions that have won support across diversity. Social harmony is always under threat from human excess and bile, both of which escape the confines of reason with a reprehensible consistency.

There are some specialists who go the extra mile and combine two of the three elemental dangers. Pramod Muthalik, chief of the Sri Ram Sene, is a standard-bearer of this breed; hatred is insufficient as a spur, he needs the greasy lubrication of hard cash as well. Such men must hate God even more than they hate men: why else would they name their parties, designed for evil objectives, after a God?

Hindu belief places Lord Rama at the pinnacle of idealism; Iqbal, who was later adopted as the poet-laureate of the idea

of Pakistan (although Pakistan was born much after he died), called Lord Rama Imam-e-Hind. It is only when you cannot differentiate between good and evil that violence becomes your ethic and hatred your ideology; when you have obliterated humanity from your consciousness you have also eliminated any understanding of divinity. This warp of the essence is not confined to any faith.

Terrorists who butcher innocents, but name their outfits after the Prophet of Islam are exactly the same. Any Muslim will add *salle ala alaihe wa sallam* after mentioning the name of Prophet Muhammad. It means: "peace be upon him."

We wish the Prophet peace precisely because peace is the highest ideal in our world. Peace, salaam, is the ineradicable element of public discourse, whether to garrulous friend or monosyllabic, minimalist stranger. Only irreparably twisted minds besmirch the name of the Prophet by associating it with terrorism.

The world, as has been said with too long a sigh, is what it is, but that does not mean that we have to accept it as it is. We can take some consolation in the fact that there is broad consensus against hate-

fuelled violence, because it is clearly the greatest destabiliser. This consensus weakens considerably when we confront greed or stupidity.

Both seem to have rather more supporters than common sense might bargain for. There is even a theory that greed is good because it is the Rolls Royce engine of growth. It is hardly surprising that such notions are perpetuated by grabbers, who claim respectability on the basis of a partnership between greed and greed. Evidence to the contrary is building up at every level, individual, social, corporate, national.

When greed infects the soul of corporate power then it can cause havoc, whether in a hyped-up cricket tournament or the New York Stock Exchange. Greed is eating away the capital of capitalism, eroding the basis on which a successful contemporary economy has been created. Greed is regressive, self-destructive, and yet has been turned into the holy grail of progress.

Face it: it is the greed of a limited slab of India that condemns 80 per cent of our country to unacceptable levels of poverty, stark hunger and hopelessness. Each time the well-off look into a mirror, they will find one reason for the rise of Naxalism. The indifference of haves is the principal inspiration for the violence of the have-nots. Greed has a loyal friend, hypocrisy.

The most acceptable sin is clearly stupidity. It is possible that jokes have lent a slightly droll nuance to stupidity.

Its dangers should not be underestimated, particularly when stupidity is harnessed to any interpretation of faith. This week's evidence lies in some of the fatwas that are consuming the news cycle in this dull, post-Parliament season.

A fatwa, it should be clarified, is only the opinion of a cleric whose academic credentials are considered acceptable; it is not a law passed through a legislature and backed by the authority of the state. Still, even if an absurd fatwa damages one home, it must be repudiated.

Extremist clerics have misled Muslims by promoting bias against Muslim women with a consistency that is the prerogative of a closed mind. They have done their best to separate Muslims from modernity; now they want to divorce Muslims from the modern economy. This is a heinous travesty, since Islam rescued its first communities from the grip of jahalat, or obscurantism.

Dramatic displays of silliness will, but naturally, provoke headlines, but they will not travel. No Muslim is going to resign from an insurance company, or surrender his or her LIC policy because of a marginal fatwa from Deoband. The faithful have more resilience than some of their self-appointed preachers believe.

The fringe, violent, greedy or stupid, will continue to damage, but will never destroy India.

The columnist is editor of *The Sunday Guardian*, published from Delhi, and *India on Sunday*, published from London.