

CROSS TALK

HSC results are satisfying

There are some worries, though

WITH 75.08 per cent of students emerging successful at this year's HSC examinations, it appears that education at that level is on course in the country. The number of those who have achieved GPA-5 is higher than previously, which of course convinces many that the standard of education has gone up. Additionally, a remarkable degree of efficiency has come into the preparation, tabulation and announcement of the results. Where earlier it took the authorities ninety days to make the results known, this time that period has been slashed to fifty-seven. We therefore congratulate the authorities. And, of course, our heartiest congratulations go out to the successful candidates. They have earned their laurels.

And yet amidst all this euphoria about the high rate of success, it will not do to forget that almost 25 per cent of those who appeared at the examinations failed to cross the hurdle. There is real cause for concern here. In all this pretty staggering demonstration of success, why such a large number stumbled raises a few questions. GPA-5s apart, the majority of the students have registered simple passes. What does the future hold for them? There is yet another worry, which is that 24 educational institutions did not see a single student of theirs pass the examinations. In a system which guarantees almost no chance of failure, one is quite perturbed that whole colleges can come up with zero performance. As we ponder these questions, there is too the matter of whether such high percentages of success are any indication of an enhancement of quality among students. To what extent the system caters to the intellectual development of students and eggs them into knowledge-related inquiry is something we cannot ignore. There is always a difference between answering objective or quiz-like questions and formulating detailed responses to challenging queries.

Finally, there is the old question of whether the nation's universities are equipped to accommodate all these successful HSC examinees. In the past, how many were able to enter university and how many simply drifted away remains a question. It is not acceptable that those who clear their college examinations find that the path to higher education is blocked for many of them.

Resist mob lynching

Trust in the rule of law must be restored

IN yet another incident of mob lynching, villagers at Companiganj in Noakhali have beaten six alleged robbers to death.

Unlike the Aminbazar tragedy near the capital city on July 18 in which the victims were unarmed youths and students, in the present case the villagers fell on a firearms-wielding gang who had already killed a villager during an alleged act of robbery. The hue and cry raised by the frightened people at dead of night drew the angry villagers. They beat up six members of the suspected gang of robbers to death.

Given the circumstances that led the villagers to take law into their own hands rather than handing them over to the police, the incident testifies to people's growing distrust in law-enforcement agencies.

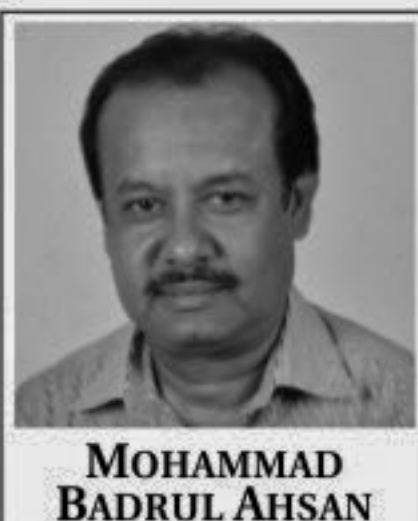
The incident also lays bare the fact that the villagers' level of tolerance has reached its nadir. Are we then to let the matter pass as another case of so-called mob justice?

By remaining passive on-lookers of such incidents of so-called 'mob justice' and not resisting them, we are implicitly supporting these outrageous acts of lawlessness to happen.

Granted the law-enforcers often fail to nab the criminals in time or bring them to justice, but has the community not also failed here, too? Have we ever cared to know, how many innocent people had to die in these acts of mob frenzy, just due to our sheer indifference?

We have to arrest this dangerous trend of ever-eroding faith in the rule of law. Before things slip out of our hands, we have to resist the trend. The government must look into the failures of the law-enforcers and do everything to restore people's confidence in the law.

The pardoning president



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

THE president has pardoned again. A forgiving man has forgiven now because

he has also forgiven before. A lot of people may be upset with him, but I think I understand the man. He has seen too much death in his life. The normal wears and tears. The genocide in 1971. The flames of violent politics consumed his wife. Then, of course, ageing has its daily dalliance with death.

I am sure the president went through a thought process every time he signed a pardon. It is possible that the political man got philosophical at that crucial moment. May be that is when the finality of life flashed before his eyes, and he was disposed to save another life with the power vested in him. A legal man himself, he knows nobody is guilty until proven. He must have given it a serious thought every time he overturned that truth. He let go of men whose guilt was proven clearer than daylight.

Others may blame it on politics, but I blame it on old age. Sophocles said many centuries ago that no man loves life like him that's growing old. We are all mortals but old age is more mortal for the same reason a burning fuse on a bomb approaches the certainty of explosion.

No question our president lives in that Chiaroscuro universe where life and death wage daily battles. It is possible that he occasionally forgets he is the head of the state, who must always keep the state in his head. But then aposiopsis does occur, and from time to time the head and the state drift apart.

Amongst the 22 questionable men who have been pardoned by this president, 21 were death-row prisoners and one, convicted of corruption, was sentenced to jail.

How will he ever realise how it has undermined the sanctity of his office! Presidential pardon is a privilege of power in the event of purported miscarriage of justice. It isn't the power of privilege that should be abused to carry out injustice.

The one and only common link amongst all of them is that they belong to the same political party, which has put this president in Bangabhaban.

In so much as he deserves to be in the Guinness Book of World Records for pardoning so many convicts during half the term of any presidency, it is for the same reason that his presidency has already shrunk in public perception. This president has set too many precedents to claim to be a national icon. It may seem that a

partisan president sits in a national office to serve his party men.

But then reputation follows the Law of Archimedes. The father of the pardoned convict has already boasted that this pardon has made his son famous in the country. Then he explained the dynamics of that fame, spitting out a long list of other famous men. His son is famous because all these famous men now know his name, the father said. Hope the president understands what

land politics.

Yet, the fact remains that they have killed. They have killed the husbands, brothers, fathers and sons of the citizens of this country. What about them and their right to justice? What about their fear, grief, frustration and desperate hope of recompense for the unspeakable horror of their losses?

The wife of the victim of the president's latest pardon beneficiary has asked if he could have shown similar mercy to the killer(s) of his wife. Others have done threadbare analysis of this presidential pardon in newspaper columns and television talk shows. I say all of it has been a futile exercise. There is no point in doing conversion therapy on someone who acts with conviction. The president must have carefully reviewed every petition for pardon and based his decision on political expediency.

Although it is hard to believe that he did it. He got all those atrocious men off the hook one after another. And how will he ever realise how it has undermined the sanctity of his office! Presidential pardon is a privilege of power in the event of purported miscarriage of justice. It isn't the power of privilege that should be abused to carry out injustice.

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A step toward trust with China

MIKE MULLEN

THE military relationship between the United States and China is one of the world's most important. And yet, clouded by some misunderstanding and suspicion, it remains among the most challenging. There are issues on which we disagree and are tempted to confront each other. But there are crucial areas where our interests coincide, on which we must work together.

So we need to make the relationship better, by seeking strategic trust.

How do we do that?

First, we've got to keep talking. Dialogue is critical.

A good bit of misunderstanding between our militaries can be cleared up by reaching out to each other. We don't have to give away secrets to make our intentions clear, just open up a little.

That's why I invited my counterpart in the People's Liberation Army, Gen. Chen Bingde, to the United States in May, and it's why he was my host in China two weeks ago. We broke new ground by, among other things, showing him Predator drone capabilities in detail and a live-fire exercise; the Chinese reciprocated with a tour of their latest submarine, a close look at an SU-27 jet fighter and a complex counterterrorism exercise.

Our discussions were candid and forthright. Chen made no bones about his concerns about American arms sales to Taiwan, and I made it clear that the United States military will not shrink from our responsibilities to allies and partners. He said the P.L.A.'s strategic intentions were purely

defensive; I said that neither the skills they were perfecting nor their investments seemed to support that argument.

Not exactly cordial, but at least we were talking.

Second, we need to focus on the things we have in common.

We're both maritime nations with long coastlines and economies dependent on unhindered trade. We both face threats of drug trafficking, piracy and the movement of weapons of mass destruction. We both want stability on the Korean Peninsula and in Pakistan.

rights in the South China Sea. We still don't fully understand China's justification for the rapid growth in its defense spending or its long-term military modernisation goals. And we don't believe that China should be allowed to resolve disputes in contested waters by coercing smaller nations. Instead, as Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton has made clear, we advocate a collaborative diplomatic process among all parties to resolve disputes under international law. And we need better mechanisms to deal

These are challenges we can tackle together, and missions we can plan and train for, and perhaps someday execute side by side. Our staffs signed a few initiatives in that regard, including a commitment to conduct joint counter-piracy exercises in the Gulf of Aden this year. Good steps all, but there is a long way to go.

We both recognise the need for coordinated international humanitarian aid and disaster relief.

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We still don't see eye-to-eye with China over military operating

with inevitable tensions. That said, these sticking points aren't all bad. It's all right to disagree sometimes, to have substantial differences. In fact, sometimes bluntness and honesty are exactly what's needed to create strategic trust. And we will need more of it. Our military relations have only recently begun to thaw, but China's government still uses them as a sort of thermostat to communicate displeasure. When they don't like something we do, they cut off ties. That can't be the

model anymore. Nor can we, for our part, swing between engagement and over-reaction. That's why the commitment by President Obama and President Hu Jintao to improve military-to-military relations is so important. Real trust has to start somewhere. And it shouldn't be subject to shifting political winds.

So, Chen and I are considering more frequent discussions, more exercises, more personnel exchanges. We both believe that the younger generation of military officers is ready for closer contact, and that upon their shoulders rests the best hope for deeper, more meaningful trust.

I'm not naive. I understand the concerns of those who feel that any cooperation benefits China more than the United States. I just don't agree. This relationship is too important to manage through blind suspicion and mistrust. We've tried that. It doesn't work.

I'm not suggesting we look the other way on serious issues, that we abandon healthy scepticism, or that we change our military's focus on the region. But we need to keep communication open and work hard to improve each interaction.

We can shrink from this opportunity, or rise to it. We can let narrow interests and suspicion define our relationship, or work toward more transparency, more pragmatic expectations of each other, and more focus on our common challenges. That would be a great start toward strategic trust.

The writer, a Navy Admiral, is the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

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THIS DAY IN HISTORY

July 29

904
Sack of Thessalonica: Saracen raiders under Leo of Tripoli sack Thessalonica, the Byzantine Empire's second-largest city, after a short siege, and plunder it for a week.

1014
Byzantine-Bulgarian Wars: Battle of Kleidion Byzantine emperor Basil II inflicts a decisive defeat on the Bulgarian army.

1921
Adolf Hitler becomes leader of the National Socialist German Workers Party.

1957
The International Atomic Energy Agency is established.

1965
Vietnam War: the first 4,000 101st Airborne Division paratroopers arrive in Vietnam, landing at Cam Ranh Bay.