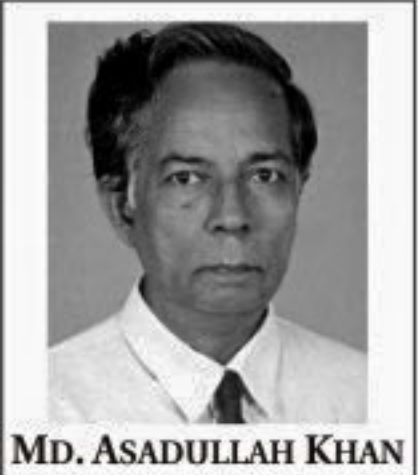


BITTER TRUTH

# Racket in school admission must be stopped



Md. Asadullah Khan

THE struggle to raise a nation's standard is undergone first and foremost in the classroom. What has established this idea so unshakably in people's minds is a recent, and to many a rather alarming, phenomenon -- the new intensity of global economic rivalry. The key to economic progress is deeply rooted in a nation's advancement in scientific learning and skill in the application of technical knowledge and a free and unfettered atmosphere for the growth of creative skills

Jobs in industries, manufacturing and services call for more than button pressing automaton. They will require workers who are educated. While in many countries international comparisons are already being used as a catalyst for educational reform, we have shown appalling apathy towards achieving at least a meaningful standard.

Economists and educational experts in the Asian region are now convinced that higher investment in education coupled with the initiative to develop human resources has helped South Korea reach the top.

Seoul launched an aggressive effort to curb excessive spending on tutors and reduce a burgeoning, untaxed service industry, mostly dominated by foreigners. More important, it seeks to promote egalitarianism among students by disallowing parents a chance to buy their children a "superior" education.

Private tuition and coaching centre-based education are chipping away at the edifice of the education system and destroying merit and growth of intelligence of the students. The problems are lack of resources and declining quality. The government must provide in public education what parents are obliged to buy privately.

In compliance with the High Court directive on a writ petition by some aggrieved citizens, the ministry of

education has formed a committee to prepare a list of teachers involved in coaching business. The government must ensure a better living and housing facilities for teachers through enhanced salary and other amenities commensurate with market trend of essential commodities.

The nation today is faced with a serious crisis -- educational institutions from the primary to the highest level suffer from mediocrity, a terrifying vacuum of quality, antiquated laboratories and teaching methods, migration of talented teachers and an appalling lack of interest exhibited by the students in pursuing higher education. Mere earning of a degree or a certificate without qualitative improvement in the quality of education has pushed the nation to the sidelines.

Class room teaching has suffered because some greedy teachers force the students to go for beyond-the-class tutoring. These coaching centres are allegedly engaged in an unholy alliance with other agencies that have access to admission test question papers of some universities.

While access to education is a fundamental constitutional right for every child, some schools are charging exorbitant fees much above the Tk.5,000 stipulated by the ministry of education during admission. This is simply extortion in the name of disseminating education!

The percentage of pass in the primary education terminal examination this year has seen an increase of 97.26%, but the quality of education, experts opine, has not shown a remarkable improvement. Of equal concern is the dropout rate, especially of girl children, in class 5 -- which is still one-third of the total number

*Private tuition and coaching centre-based education are chipping away at the edifice of the education system and destroying merit and growth of intelligence of the students.*

admitted in class 1 -- in the rural schools due to poverty of the parents.

Quantity at the cost of quality has done the greatest harm to a nation struggling to achieve competitiveness on a global basis. Shockingly, enthusiasm for a career in science is waning countrywide. People having better background in science find lucrative jobs elsewhere and are not keen to take up teaching or research as a career.

Even though the government has given high priority to primary and secondary level education, it is not functioning properly. Let us leave aside higher education because, through the World Bank and IMF's tinted glasses, higher education is a sector where large amounts of government money were spent on subsidies! But when the World Bank stressed the need to protect elementary education up to SSC level because it felt that the social rates of return in these sectors exceeded the returns in higher education, and because investment in "universal literacy" helped improve equity and remove income imbalances, things hardly improved.

Scholarships and mid-day meal introduced at the primary level to encourage the underprivileged groups to attend school will be of no use unless the structures are there and amenities for teaching are available. Schools are in a mess, struggling hard for existence. If there are no schools, no commodious classrooms, no teaching, no quality education or no access to education, the exploding population will be forced to live below the poverty line. Consequently, they will be incapable of getting proper jobs or any means of decent living.

The root cause of the abysmal poverty in the country and decline in the quality of education and dropout from schools is linked to bad economic policies we have pursued since liberation. Bangladesh is a poor country because poverty has become a constituency which is carefully nurtured by politicians of every hue. So they spend vast amounts on grandiose schemes that amount to little more than charity. Since charity definitely begins at home, most of the money gets funneled directly into the capacious pockets of officials and village level politicians. Poverty continues to exist because no government has given the poor the tools with which they can themselves better their lives.

If this were not true, the politicians would build schools worth their name so that vast numbers of underprivileged Bangladeshi boys and girls could have access to education, and the children of the poorest of our people could have a chance to rise above the poverty line.

But if politicians did all these things, it would become that much harder to persuade the people to vote for silly reasons through exhortations of slogans.

We need teachers with devotion and commitment to teaching, and such committed teachers have to be amply rewarded by the government and the society they serve. If we can honour our heroes in games and sports, as we did recently by rewarding the women's cricket team for attaining "one day status," it is no less important that some of our committed teachers in the primary and secondary level, who are working ceaselessly in building the edifice of the nation, should also be honoured in some way or other. 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 and glory.

.....

The writer is a Columnist of *The Daily Star*.  
E-mail : aukhandk@gmail.com

## Telecommunication sector under threat

FAHMIDUL HAQ

THE latest news in the telecom sector is "International Terrestrial Cable (ITC) license holders will be allowed/issued International Internet Gateway (IIG) license by default." The ITC license holders have already had meetings with the Ministry of Post and Telecommunication (MoPT) and Bangladesh Telecommunication and Regulatory Commission (BTRC) on the matter.

The reason they have shown in issuance of IIG license in their favour is that, as Bangladesh Telecommunication Company Limited (BTCL) and Mango Teleservices Limited (Mango) are holding both IIG and ITC licenses, if they are not given IIG license then they don't have any valid business case with ITC license only. One may be surprised to know that MoPT and BTRC may be considering such a request.

Issuance of the IIG license to ITC license holders would clearly cause procedural and legal difficulties for which the government/BTRC could come under questioning. If ITC license holders are of the opinion that BTCL and Mango are a threat to their business and they don't have any valid business case with ITC license only, then we may conclude that these five ITC license holders have submitted incorrect/wrong business documents/feasibility reports without assessing their business risk factors; or they don't have any clear idea regarding ITC business; or BTRC/MoPT have failed to assess bidders properly and awarded these license wrongly. Before bidding, these ITC license holders knew that BTCL as an incumbent would be allowed one ITC license by MoPT/BTRC and Mango, as a prospective bidder for ITC license and as per the ILTDS Policy-2010, would also be awarded ITC license.

If the decision is taken to give IIG licence to ITC license holders, the telecom sector will face a lot of difficulties.

Since the independence of Bangladesh, the governments and the regulator have never entertained any such unjustified request of any license holder or acted with the policy "one type of license is free if you are awarded another type of license." Thus, it would be unwise for MoPT/BTRC to consider dependency of one license on the other license (i.e. ITC license impact on IIG license or vice versa). Issuance of IIG license to these ITC license holders would just create a very bad precedence.

The application for BWA/WiMax license by Mango Teleservices Limited is under processing by MoPT/BTRC. Mango is holding IIG & ITC license too.

*MoPT/BTRC should not, under any circumstances, promote any entity for doing monopoly business, or do anything that is not in line with their policy.*

Thus, if the ITC license holders are awarded IIG license, then existing BWA/WiMax License holders, i.e. BanglaLion and Augure (Qubee), may also claim IIG and ITC license by default from the MoPT/BTRC. In addition, Mango Teleservices Limited and the two other ITC license holders would also claim for NTTN License by default from MoPT/BTRC, as Summit Communication Ltd. and Fiber@Home are currently holding NTTN and ITC license.

If the existing five ITC license holders are awarded IIG license by the MoPT/BTRC, then the other prospective bidders for IIG License may go to court for third-party remedial measures. It would just stop the whole procedure for the issuance of these licenses.

Issuance of IIG license to the existing ITC license holders would also create a monopoly business environment, because of which the subscribers would suffer at the end of the day. It is now clear that these five ITC license holders have already made a consortium and are asking for undue favour from the MoPT/BTRC. They would also work as a consortium regarding tariff. But we have seen that the subscribers never get benefit from such business consortiums.

Issuance of unjustified IIG license and/or any other license (IGW, ICX, WiMax, etc) would just promote illegal business activities by those operators as there would be no valid legal business case. We may refer PSTN business case in this regard.

Issuance of IIG, IGW, ICX, ITC, NTTN, WiMax license to the existing license holders would be a clear violation of the spirit of the original ILTDS Policy (ref ILTDS Policy 2007), which encourages democratic participation in telecom sector and discourages monopoly. This would create an unhealthy business environment, because of which the whole telecommunication sector would suffer.

These five ITC license holders, in addition to the IIG license, have also applied for IGW, ICX licenses. Now, if they are awarded IGW and ICX license, then the existing IGW License holders (BanglaTrac Telecommunication, NovoTel & Mir Telecommunication) and ICX License holders (Getco Telecommunication & M&H Telecommunication) could also ask for IIG licenses. Which, in turn, would promote more monopoly business environment and no new entrepreneur would be allowed to enter this sector.

MoPT/BTRC should not, under any circumstances, promote any entity for doing monopoly business, or do anything that is not in line with their policy.

.....

The writer is Associate Professor, Department of Mass Communication and Journalism, University of Dhaka.

## Port State Control: Different Interpretations & applications

FAZLUR CHOWDHURY

MARITIME shipping is probably one of the oldest businesses in the world. It is also by nature perhaps the most international business. It cannot be regulated by any national law because its activities go far beyond the borders of any nation. There are many international conventions and protocols that regulate safety and security of maritime operations and protection of the marine environment. There is no international police force to ensure compliance of the provisions of these treaties.

Member states of the International Maritime Organization, being parties to the instruments implement them in their role both as flag state of the ship concerned and port state where the vessel may call. The responsibilities are complementary to one another. It is the primary responsibility of the flag state to ensure that ships comply with all international safety requirements no matter where they are. It is the responsibility of the port state to ensure similar compliance by all ships operating within its jurisdiction.

Port State Control (PSC) is done for and on behalf of the flag state. The administration must ensure that the visiting ships maintain the same standard of safety as their own ships. The philosophy is that life and environment are important, irrespective of the ship's ownership. That is why a ship may be detained if, in the opinion of the inspector, allowing the ship to proceed to sea may pose danger to life, property or environment. Unless there is genuine threat to life, property or environment, a foreign flag ship is normally not detained. In case of a detention, the flag and port state administrations work together to rectify the deficiencies to a mutually satisfactory level.

In order that ships are not inspected repeatedly one port after another, member states have formed regional networks (known as memorandum of understanding -- MOU) under IMO guidelines for coordinated inspections. It is all done in the spirit of cooperation for the common cause of safety, security and environmental protection.

Unfortunately, things have changed. Greed has replaced cooperation with corruption, where an inspector finds a number of faults to threaten a ship with detention. A suitable bribe allows the ship to continue for the deficiencies to be rectified in the next port or some time later. There is another way. The inspector finds some defects and then recommends a good local workshop for the job. The inspector gets his reward from the workshop.

Recently, we have been coming across another problem -- state sponsored extortion. The recent

*Port State Control (PSC) is done for and on behalf of the flag state. The administration must ensure that the visiting ships maintain the same standard of safety as their own ships.*

economic recession has forced many countries to tighten their belts. The Spanish government instructed the Treasury Office inspectors to increase survey and inspection work to raise an additional •4 billion. The Spanish Law Article 115.3 Law 27/ 92 requires the master of a foreign ship to give truthful declaration of any deficiencies of the ship.

If the PSC inspector finds any fault or deficiency other than what is stated by the master of the ship, then the ship is served with an arrest order by the harbour master. The ship is then fined anything between •60 and 90 thousand. The ship is not released until the money is paid in cash or by bank guarantee. Most owners prefer to pay cash because bank transactions take time and the ship remains stranded. The whole operation in any Spanish port is coordinated by the Government Head Office of PSC in Madrid. We understand that normally non-EU ships are victims of this operation.

The above practice is wrong and unlawful. It is certainly not expected from an EU state. Spain must change its domestic law, which is not consistent with international law. Any state can have standards higher to those specified in international conventions (for its own ships) but cannot apply or impose that to visiting foreign ships. The provision of PSC under SOLAS, LL, MARPOL, STCW and other conventions are for safety, security and protection of environment. PSC provisions are not supposed to be used for raising revenue. This is because fines/ penalty cannot replace safety.

Ships may be detained for safety reasons until the threat is removed. The order of arrest is normally issued by a court against lien or claim and has nothing to do with safety. Besides, PSC is supposed to be exercised by surveyors belonging to the national administrations and not by officials of the port authority, who have vested interest with period of stay of the ship for collection of fees and charges.

The matter, unless immediately rectified by the Spanish government, should be taken up on the floor of the IMO for violation of ethical standards specified in international conventions. European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA), of which Spain is a member, should also look into the matter. Spain should be suspended from the Paris MOU until it fully respects international law, practice and procedures. The world community of shipping must not remain silent. We have to expose this sort of state sponsored illegal acts. We must name and shame all involved in such activity so that no other state can think of doing such things.

.....

The writer is a retired Marine Consultant.  
E-mail : fazlu.chowdhury@btinternet.com