

SUNDAY POUCH

Decline in science education

Address root causes

Research by the non-government organization Bangladesh Freedom Foundation reveals a drop in science education at secondary and higher secondary levels in our country. In a competitive world dominated by science and technology, it comes as disheartening news. It goes without saying that newer scientific innovations in today's globalised world are integral to development and economic growth. Most countries are providing ample opportunities for their scientists to come up with cutting-edge inventions. However, advancement in scientific research is not possible without having science education strengthened at school and college levels. If we really want to keep pace with the outside world and make a mark in world economy, we will have to start by putting a special emphasis on science education at secondary and higher secondary levels.

The report has cited that business education helps students get a job in financial institutions and corporate sectors. But we think that science education is instrumental in improving productivity both in the industrial and agricultural sectors. Countries that are progressing rapidly have linked science and technology to economic development priorities. Unless a nation has a scientific temper, it will always be at the losing end of the bargain with other countries.

Therefore, the committee formed by the education ministry to find ways to popularise science education should come up with a comprehensive plan to give it a central place in the education policy. Steps should be taken to create more jobs for science students. Furthermore, the UGC should allocate a lot more money for research facilities at the tertiary levels to keep our aspiring scientists from going abroad.

We urge the government's immediate intervention in this sphere because it is the prime minister who has advocated the vision of a digital Bangladesh. How can we possibly materialize this vision unless increasing number of students embrace science education?

Buriganga channel under siege

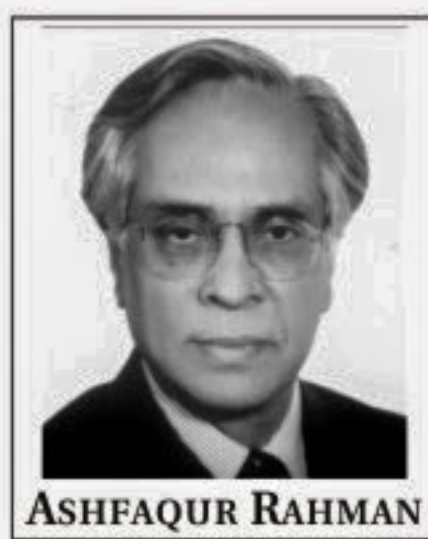
Can we expect tough action against encroachers?

THE callousness with which we have of late been treating matters of public concern does not bode well for the future. In the recent past, we at this newspaper have written extensively on the horrific manner in which rivers have been encroached upon, to a point where they are not only being narrowed but are also causing problems of navigation. Besides, we have conducted well-publicised campaigns, along with environmental organisations, to save our rivers. Unfortunately, after much sound and fury on the part of the administration about reclaiming the rivers, a kind of sloth appears to have come into the whole enterprise.

Which now brings us to the matter of what is being done to the second channel of the Buriganga. As a report and an accompanying photograph in yesterday's issue of this newspaper have clearly shown, the second channel is now as good as hostage at the hands of encroachers. Once a vibrant canal in the south-western part of the capital, it has now been reduced to a dumping ground for waste as also a site pieces of which can be gobbled up by individuals and organisations. The more embarrassing aspect of the situation is that all this illegal seizure of public property is being resorted to by people with political clout, which is a sure sign of how quickly the channel could end up turning into a tale of the past. There is, of course, the Environment Conservation Act 2000 under which no wetland can be filled up without any environmental clearance. But that law now flies in the face of the rudeness with which the second channel is being treated.

The issue has predictably and justifiably raised concerns among environmentalists as well as larger sections of society. We believe it is time for the authorities to go for tough action against those who have been indulging in the crime. And by tough action we do not mean the usual eyewash which comes in the wake of media reports on such violations of the law. In the past, news reports on environmental issues have been followed by the encroachers breaking down some constructions and then waiting for the furore to subside before they could go back to their nefarious activities. Let that not be repeated here. Our environment is under threat. Our rivers and other water bodies are at risk from criminals in the guise of respectable people. It is time to flush these criminals out and have them pay for their transgressions.

Why not proportional representation?



ASHFAQUR RAHMAN

THOSE who wrote our constitution opted for democratic governance because they wanted to build a society where divergent

views on national issues would be welcome. Through discussion inside the parliament, policies would then be formulated, which would be to the benefit of the people. Though such debate may raise heat in parliament, the authors thought that it would not in any way vitiate politics and polarise our society.

But this was not to be. The two main political parties, the Awami League (AL) and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) had alternatively formed the government every five years with a majority. But it was seen that the party that commanded majority of the seats often overwhelmed and cowed the opposition. A vicious cycle of political revenge and counter-revenge was injected into our politics.

Various group coalesced on either side and the society itself seemed divided. But this was not what the citizens wanted. They had sought a political system that would advance their interests, keeping society united, in order to be able to release their creative energies for economic growth.

In Bangladesh, the people are now fatigued with the shenanigans of some of the political leaders who run down each other in the name of democratic politics. They are not only denigrating themselves but are also damaging social cohesion. Our bureaucracy, our educational institutions, our security forces all seem to be sucked into this political whirlpool. When are we to see an end to this?

According to some experts, it is the electoral system which we practice that polarises our people and tends to cause fissures in our society.

We practice what is called "first past the post" electoral system. We award a seat in the Jatiya Sangsad to a candidate who receives the most votes in a political constituency.

The candidate need not even get a majority (50%+) of the votes. Any candidate getting the most votes is declared the winner. Many say that this electoral system, in theory at least, if dominated by two political parties, supports the growth of a relatively stable political system. The two major parties in Bangladesh come alternately to power.

But in practice, what we have seen is that the party which returns with a clear majority in parliament often rides roughshod over the electorate. It employs various tactics to see that its

constituency in that constituency.

The number of seats that a party wins in this election then becomes proportional to the extent of its support among voters. Every person's vote is counted.

So, in a multi-member constituency, if we constitute a 10-member seat and the Awami League wins 50% of the votes, it will receive 5 of the 10 seats. If BNP wins 30% of the vote, it will get 3 seats. If the Jatiya Party gets 20% of the vote, it will win 2 seats. But if the fourth party does not reach the minimum threshold figure then it would be out of the race.

The Election Commission will only have to see that the size of the constituency is big enough to accommodate election of several members from the

The D'hondt formula counts the total votes cast for each party in a multi-member constituency and then divides the number first by 1, then by 2, then 3, right up to the total number of seats that is allotted to that constituency. The distribution of votes to each candidate from a party is the number of votes cast for his/her party, divided by the candidate's rank within the party. The candidate with highest distribution figures stands elected.

In the next step, the party which wins the highest number of seats in the country forms the government. It could either be a majority, minority or a coalition, according to how voters spread their votes across few or many parties.

An important aspect of the proportional system of representation is that no single party in the country will be able to sweep the polls and establish a "tyranny of the majority." Several parties contest the polls and each party's voter support is taken into account while deciding parliamentary seats. This ensures that no one party can get overwhelming number of votes.

More than 88 countries around the world now use the proportional system of representation. This includes countries like Japan, Australia, Norway, Italy, Indonesia etc. But elections to the US Senate and the House still use the British "first past the post" system. So, elections to the House of Commons in the UK and to the Lok Sabha in India follow the old system.

Our prime minister and the leader of the opposition may give this proportional system some thought. Maybe this could be the way out of the political mess we are now entering. They may suggest improvements to the system as to how best it can serve our needs.

Proportional representation could indeed prove to be a game changer in Bangladesh.

The writer is a former ambassador and a regular commentator on contemporary issues. E-mail: ashfaqur 303@gmail.com

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writ rules the roost. This creates deep dissatisfaction among the people. The "first past the post" system is therefore also called "winner takes all" system. How belittling it is to the voters as well as to the opposition!

If our present electoral system seem somewhat defective, then can we not consider using the proportional representation system applying "the D'hondt formula"?

The proportional system is quite simple. Instead of electing a member of the parliament from a single member constituency, as is now done in Bangladesh, we can elect several members from each political constituency. Voters in this case do not cast their vote for a candidate, but vote for a political party of his/her choice run-

constituency to the parliament.

The proportional system provides more accurate representation of political and ethnic minorities, fewer wasted votes, higher level of voter turnout, better representation of women, greater possibility of majority rule, etc.

There are three basic but different ways to calculate results from a proportional election. They are the party list, mixed member and single transferable vote (choice voting). Each of these calculations is well laid down and different countries adopt the calculation which suits its genius.

However, an easy way to calculate proportional representation, was shown by a Belgian mathematician, Victor D'hondt, way back in the mid-nineteenth century.

Rudd's exit a loss for Asia

WILLIAM CHOONG

LIKE an Energizer Bunny, Kevin Rudd just refuses to give up. Last week, he told reporters in Washington that he would resign as Australia's foreign minister. Sensing that Rudd was out to grab his old job back, Prime Minister Julia Gillard -- who had deposed him as premier in a party coup in 2010 -- challenged him to a leadership poll.

On Monday, she emerged the winner. Rudd consigned himself to the backbench and no longer sits in the cabinet.

The banishment into exile is understandable -- and should be welcomed. After all, Rudd's challenge has sparked a civil war in the Labor Party -- the best gift that the Liberal-National opposition could ask for.

Granted, the former foreign minister enjoyed a meteoric rise to the highest office in the land. His story is that of a child from a struggling Queensland family who made good. Wonkish, with a cherubic-looking face, he was regularly mobbed by Australians at shopping malls across the country.

I was living in Canberra when Rudd ascended to the premiership in 2007, putting paid to 11 years of Liberal-National rule. My landlady gushed over Kevin, as many Australians called him. "Kevin 07" was displayed on car bumpers and T-shirts across the capital.

But Rudd is a study in contradiction. His public persona stands in jarring contrast to his private side.

In 2010, veteran journalist David Marr published an award-winning essay titled *Power Trip: The Political Journey Of Kevin Rudd*. He interviewed scores of people who had worked

closely with the then leader.

The conclusion: Rudd ran a dysfunctional government. He worked his bureaucrats to the bone but refused to sign anything on paper. One minister resorted to getting himself on the same flights as the then leader to get some face time.

The dysfunction was largely due to Rudd's inner rage, Marr surmised: "Rudd is driven by anger. It's the juice in the machine. He is a hard man because the anger is hidden by a pub-

The departure does not portend a significant change in Canberra's approach to Asia. But without Rudd, the region will see the loss of a reasoned and pragmatic contribution to what he once called a "conversation" about Asia's growing alphabet soup of multilateral organisations.

lic face, a diplomat's face. He's a politician with rage at his core, impatient rage."

Some supporters of Rudd contend that Gillard played a key role in his 2010 ouster. That is true. However, she was but only one among many Labor power brokers involved in that coup. In the run-up to the Monday contest, Gillard finally revealed what journalists like Marr have been saying all along -- Rudd's government was plagued by "chaos and paralysis".

"In my view, Kevin Rudd is an excellent campaigner," she said. "But government requires different skills. Government requires consistency, purpose, discipline, inclusion, consultation." That was indictment enough.

In the final analysis, Rudd should never have challenged Gillard. He had flourished, and would have continued to flourish, as Australia's top diplomat. He could have learnt from Hillary Clinton. Formerly a fierce presidential rival to Barack Obama, she graciously accepted her appointment and is now a highly effective United States secretary of state.

As for Rudd, his challenge has now left the Labor Party in a dilemma.

It is true that many voters support

for the East Asia Summit and the Asean Defence Ministers' Meeting.

In 2009, Rudd trotted out what has essentially become a shared Asian approach to China's rise -- regional countries would engage China but, to prepare for the event in which things go pear-shaped, they would keep the gunpowder dry.

At a private meeting, Mrs. Clinton had asked Rudd about how to deal with China. Calling himself a "brutal realist," he called for "multilateral engagement with bilateral vigour." If "everything goes wrong," the US has to be prepared to "deploy force," he added.

WikiLeaks' release of the discussion at the meeting stirred up some controversy, but Rudd's thesis is not rocket science. One has to look only at the way that the US has implemented its "pivot" to Asia. Washington seeks to engage China, but it is keeping its options open in case such a strategy fails.

In one of his last appearances as Australia's foreign minister, Rudd also fashioned himself as a staunch advocate of China and Asia.

Speaking at the Munich Security Conference last month, he chastised Europe for distancing itself from the growing economic clout of the Asian region. In vintage Rudd fashion, he warned that Europe risks going into an "early grave" if it does not get its priorities right.

Like Icarus, Rudd flew too close to the sun and crashed. But his self-inflicted fall has damaged not only Australia, but also Asia.

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THIS DAY IN HISTORY

March 4

1913
First Balkan War: The Greek army engages the Turks at Bizani, resulting in victory two days later.

1980
Nationalist leader Robert Mugabe wins a sweeping election victory to become Zimbabwe's first black prime minister.

1991
Sheikh Saad Al-Abdallah Al-Salim Al-Sabah, the Prime Minister of Kuwait, returns to his country for the first time since Iraq's invasion.

2007
Estonian parliamentary election, 2007: Approximately 30,000 voters take advantage of electronic voting in Estonia, the world's first nationwide voting where part of the vote casting is allowed in the form of remote electronic voting via the Internet.