

## CROSS TALK

## New records set in HSC

### Worries persist over admission

CONGRATULATIONS are in order for all those who successfully completed high school this year. This year's results show a significantly better passing out rate than 2011. With more than 8 out of 10 candidates passing HSC and GPA-5 achievers across all eight general boards in the country increasing to more than 25,000, i.e. an improvement of about 41 per cent, all point to an improvement in quality of education. Major indicators for such performance are better performance in subjects like English which had one time been an Achilles heel for HSC candidates. This year's performance across most education boards points to an average of 80 per cent students passing the once dreaded subject.

While it is the successful candidates who steal all the glory, it is easy to forget that nearly 19 per cent in Dhaka board and about 32 per cent candidates in the worse performing board, Barisal, failed to pass at all. One may only ponder upon their fate. Equally worrisome is the fact that as with last year, some 24 educational institutions failed to graduate any candidate. The question therefore is precisely what steps will be taken to improve the lot of failing institutions. The other room for concern is that the urban-rural disparity in terms of achievement remains, in spite of the assertion of the education minister. This is evident from the fact that only one of the twenty top-performing institutions under Dhaka Board is from a rural area.

Looking into the future, the euphoria of having attained such high grades does not automatically guarantee a deserving candidate's admission in a prestigious institution. With more than 25,000 GPA-5 achievers competing over a mere 3,700 seats available across 18 public universities and medical colleges, the reality is that only one in seven candidates will get admission. That, unfortunately, is a very sorry state of affair. For the rest, it will mean enrolling in subjects and institutions that are less than top notch. While one may take comfort in the education minister's claim that new institutions such as colleges and universities are being approved, we are yet to know where and when these will become operational.

## Escalation in Syria

### The UN must weigh in immediately

THE crisis in Syria appears to be reaching a decisive phase. With the civil war now close to the capital and with the deaths in an explosion of some senior figures in the regime on Wednesday, the enervated nature of the Assad outfit becomes all too obvious.

While no one would condone the tragic happenings in the country, it is nevertheless true that what is happening today is largely a consequence of the regime's obduracy. It has never had the time or the inclination to read the writing on the wall. With the Arab Spring causing havoc in Egypt, Tunisia and Libya, President Bashar ought to have had the foresight to go for change. That he did not is symbolic of sadness to the extreme.

The explosions and deaths in Damascus do not, of course, spell the fall of the regime any time soon. But the fact that those who have died were close to Assad is a hint of the bigger tragedy that may lie ahead for the regime.

For President Assad, the opportunity, however dwindling, is still there for an honourable exit. He cannot be in denial mode any more. Neither can he pretend that external forces are arrayed against him. His regime has over the months killed hundreds of citizens with little thought to the consequences. Now that the war is coming closer to Damascus, he must act in a way that does not lead to a recreation of the chaotic conditions which characterized Libya in the final days of Muammar Gaddafi.

For the international community and especially for the UN, it is time to come together in the interest of Syria's people. A regime which kills its own people without qualm does not deserve to survive. Bashar Assad has his options

# A nation like a family



MOHAMMAD  
BADRUL AHSAN

GEORGE Lakoff, a professor of linguistics at the University of California at Berkeley, writes in his 1996 book *Moral Politics* that a

nation is a lot like a family. He does the mapping between these two entities: the homeland as home, the citizens as siblings, and the government or head of the government as parent. Once that is established, the rest is common sense. The government's duty is to citizens as a parent's is to children.

That's exactly how it should be. Lakoff says the government will work in a country like a parent does in a family. It will provide security to protect us; make laws to tell us what we can do and cannot do; run the economy to ensure we have enough money and supplies; and provide public schools to educate us.

The metaphor tells us what we need to know. Nations largely depend on their governments, families on parents. Governments enforce law and order, and parents enforce discipline. Governments build infrastructures and parents build characters. Governments give incentives, and parents give encouragements. Governments are responsible for fairness, justice and equitable distribution. Parents have to see that all their children get love, care and equal treatment. There are children of varying ages

in a house as there are citizens of varying interest groups in a country. Parents arbitrate quarrels amongst children, when the older ones try to bully their younger siblings. Food at the table must be equally available to all so that each can eat according to his appetite and nutrition. There will be bright children and poor performers, but parents are responsible to see that they get equal opportunity and the same attention. A government can be no less

votes of less fortunate people. A truly democratic government belongs to all people. Ideally, it shouldn't belong more to some and less to others.

That brings us to the crux of the problem in this country. The country is comparable to a house where parents are away most time of the day. The children are unruly, free to do what they like. They fight, empty the refrigerator, and dump their clothes all over the place. They

Lakoff's metaphor is a perfect fit. Our government is largely absent from the home that we call our country. Our roads are in chaos. Neighbourhoods are unsafe. Universities are unmanageable. Parliament is lopsided. Bureaucracy is hamstrung. Intelligentsia is indifferent.

The average citizens of this country are living like neglected children in an inadequate home. The big brothers dominate them with the blessings of their governments. The big businesses, politicians, bureaucrats and musclemen exploit them while their government chooses to look the other way.

It's perhaps because we no longer metaphorically see our country in terms of a family. But then that is how the rest of the world views their countries. Mother Russia, Mother India, German Fatherland and Uncle Sam in America show how the countries and governments relate themselves to families. When soldiers die in battlefields, countries refer to them as sons and daughters.

Once it was the same thing for us as well. In 1971, we fought for our motherland. We still speak of those women who were violated by the Pakistani soldiers as our mothers and sisters. Freedom fighters who died are the glorious children of this land.

As it is, a nation is meant to be a collection of families. It works fine when governments hold families together, not if some families hold governments together.

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responsible. It has citizens of divergent clouts and interests -- the clever ones, moneyed ones, muscled ones, crooked ones, brilliant ones and boorish ones. It has men and women. It has the children, the minority and the majority. It has the literate and the illiterate. It has the privileged and the underprivileged, the aristocrats and the riffraff, the strong and the weak.

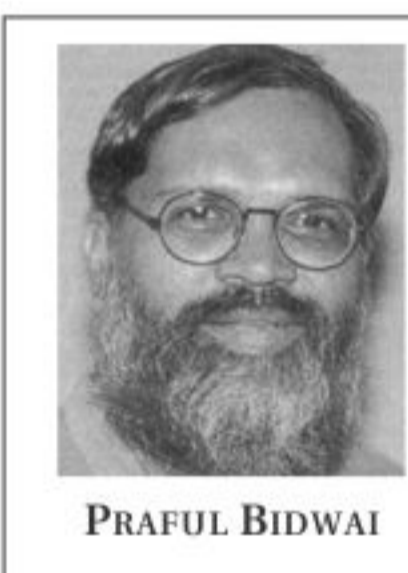
Needless to say, the government has a critical role to play in the life of a nation. It has to be strict, fair and alert to protect the rights of its citizens. While all governments are elected with the money of the rich and powerful, they also need the

ignore their studies, don't do any cleaning and the older ones deprive the younger ones in terms of food, space and other shared amenities.

Parents return late at night like governments do before elections. They hardly have time to inquire about all the kids and rush to judgments based on the accounts of those kids who can suck up to them. Kids also learn to be smart and tell their parents what they want to hear. They enjoy their freedom and indulge in bad habits. They skip classes and grades slip. They learn to tell lies because they know their parents don't have the time to catch them.

## PRAFUL BIDWAI COLUMN

# BJP has lost its way



PRAFUL BIDWAI

THE Bhartiya Janata Party leadership has again succumbed to a habit. It has abjectly capitulated to blackmail -- in

this instance, by scam-tainted former Chief Minister B.S. Yeddyurappa of Karnataka, the only Southern state it rules. It has changed the CM for the third time in 11 months, when the Assembly elections are less than nine months away.

Jagdish Shettar, a Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh recruit of the Lingayat caste (like Yeddyurappa, his rival), has become the CM. Mr. Yeddyurappa lobbied for him for a crass reason: to remove his successor Sadananda Gowda, a Vokkaliga, who wouldn't let him cut enough dirty deals.

The Karnataka BJP has for all intents and purposes been reduced to a Lingayats-only party. The Lingayats form just one-fifth of the state's population and cannot ensure the BJP's victory without other castes/social groups' support. In the past, the BJP did reasonably well in Karnataka because its adversaries were divided and it had a base among other castes, such as coastal South Karnataka's Brahmins and Bunts.

The BJP will in all likelihood lose the Karnataka elections and suffer further erosion of its base, which has shrunk not least because of Mr. Yeddyurappa's notorious collusion with the Reddy Brothers' gigantic racket in the illegal mining and export of iron ore.

The likely damage from the change in political leadership won't be limited to Karnataka. The pervasive corruption which flourishes wherever the BJP rules has undermined its claim to be "a party with a difference," unlike the corruption-tainted Congress.

The upper-caste elite gravitated towards the BJP nationally because it claimed to be disciplined and relatively clean -- until it came to power. They were willing to overlook its dependence on the rabidly communal RSS because the Sangh would impose some discipline upon it.

However, the BJP has since been tried and tested, and found wanting. The RSS no longer disciplines it adequately. The BJP has proved as corrupt, criminalised and opportunistic as any other party. Indeed, it's even more opportunistic because it greedily allies with parties which reject its Hindutva core-ideology.

Factionalism flourishes in the BJP at every level. In Rajasthan, 52 out of its 78 MLAs, led by former Chief Minister Vasundhara Raje revolted against Gulab Chand Kataria for leading an anti-Congress political *yatra*, and threatened a split. The *yatra* was called off. This will affect the party's prospects in one of the few states where it can improve its performance.

In Himachal Pradesh, a faction led by four-time MP Maheshwar Singh quit the BJP. In Uttarakhand, former CM Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank ensured that prospective CM B.C. Khanduri would lose the recent Assembly election -- and his own seat.

Unlike in the past, regional factions don't take the national leadership seriously. This leadership is itself divided, with poor legitimacy. BJP national president Nitin Gadkari has no claim to leadership other than the RSS's backing. He is a small-time provincial leader, with

no political competence. Recently, the RSS humiliated him by forcing him to drop Sangh full-timer Sanjay Joshi from the BJP's national executive at the insistence of Gujarat CM Narendra Modi, who despises him.

Mr. Modi had refused to campaign in the recent state Assembly elections in protest against Mr. Joshi's nomination as the BJP's election strategist in UP. He ignored the RSS's repeated pleas to campaign. The RSS swallowed the insult.

Mr. Gadkari was rewarded with a second term as president. But he won't have an easy time with his detractors,

including the entire "second-generation" leadership, especially top parliamentarians Sushma Swaraj and Arun Jaitley.

The national executive virtually anointed Mr. Modi as the BJP's likeliest prime ministerial candidate in 2014. In response, Mr. L.K. Advani boycotted his public meeting. But now he says Mr. Modi has been "systematically and viciously maligned".

Mr. Advani may be in trouble because the RSS, which ousted him from all party posts, wants him to reduce his activism. A senior BJP leader is quoted as saying: "Everyone has a 'use-by' date and those who do not recognise this cold fact themselves run the risk of irrelevance."

Disunity in the BJP was again exposed during Mr. Modi's recent battle with Bihar CM Nitish Kumar of the Janata Dal (United). Mr. Kumar chose a business daily to pour cold water on Mr. Modi's ambition to become the prime minister-

rial nominee of the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance, by saying the leader should be secular and acceptable to every constituent.

The reporter in question is close to Mr. Jaitley. Mr. Jaitley and Ms. Swaraj don't trust Mr. Modi, but are themselves rivals.

Gripped by factionalism and a leadership crisis, the BJP is going rapidly downhill. It played its cards remarkably badly during the presidential nomination, losing the initiative to the Biju Janata Dal in Orissa and the AIADMK in Tamil Nadu, and backing a candidate (PA Sangma), who himself admits he'll lose unless there's a "miracle."

The NDA -- down from its peak of 24 constituents, to just seven -- is badly divided on Mr. Sangma, with constituents JD(U) and Shiv Sena deciding to back the United Progressive Alliance candidate Pranab Mukherjee. Going by many indicators, including BJP CMs' lavish praise for him, many BJP lawmakers will cross-vote in Mr. Mukherjee's favour.

It's highly unlikely that Ms. Mamata Banerjee, the Congress's difficult ally in West Bengal, would stay neutral in the presidential contest. She has declared that her party will vote, but will announce its choice 72 hours earlier. She will be hard put not to back Mr. Mukherjee, a fellow-Bengali.

Meanwhile, the RSS-BJP's proclivity to shield Hindutva extremists may bring it more embarrassment. Lt-Col. Shrikant Purohit's disingenuous attempt to explain his involvement with terrorist outfits like Abhinav Bharat by claiming he "infiltrated" them as a military intelligence officer has drawn flak from the army, which says he wasn't authorised to do so and violated the rules of service.

The BJP has no national-level leader worth the name. Only divine intervention, if that, can help it bounce back politically.

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## THIS DAY IN HISTORY

July 20

**1402** Ottoman-Timurid Wars: Battle of Ankara Timur, ruler of Timurid Empire, defeats forces of the Ottoman Empire sultan Bayezid I.

**1941** Soviet leader Joseph Stalin consolidates the Commissariats of Home Affairs and National Security to form the NKVD and names Lavrenti Beria its chief.

**1949** Israel and Syria sign a truce to end their nineteen-month war.

**1951** King Abdullah I of Jordan is assassinated by a Palestinian while attending Friday prayers in Jerusalem.

**1960** Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) elects Sirimavo Bandaranaike Prime Minister, the world's first elected female head of government.

**1974** Turkish occupation of Cyprus: Forces from Turkey invade Cyprus after a coup d'etat, organised by the dictator of Greece, against president Makarios.

**1980** The United Nations Security Council votes 14-0 that member states should not recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.

**1989** Burma's ruling junta puts opposition leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi under house arrest.