

## GROUND REALITIES

# Save the village from 'development'

## Teachers' training remains a weak area

*Skill update severely lacking*

A report submitted by Planning and Development Unit of the Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education (DSHE) to the Education Ministry is a shocking eye-opener in quite a few ways. It unveils after three years of the creative method having been introduced at the secondary level of education that 30 percent of the teachers are unable to set question papers in the creative segments of the text books. Even this is a partial picture based on surveys of 4810 out of 18404 institutions. Which means absolute number of teachers unskilled in this particular area must be quite overwhelming.

The logic behind adoption of creative method has been to discourage learning by rote and reducing dependency on note books. The standard practice requires a thorough grasp of the narrative sections by students to be able to answer questions set in the method.

The skill inadequacy runs so deep that teachers buy question papers from external sources including deferent teachers' associations which have stepped in with their versions of question papers of, at best, asymmetrical qualities. Thus question paper setting has turned out to be a business with the ramification of some forced private tuition on the sides. Furthermore, possibility of question paper leaks is in-built.

In other words, the credibility of the proficiency test is laid open to question. The education ministry has been credited with organising the SSC and HSC levels of education with commendable results. In light of such performance, why should it leave such a lacuna to undercut the creative method in teaching and testing pupils? Clearly, one training session is perfunctory, so that a few more interactive engagements would have to be held to facilitate retention of a new skill being demanded. Understandably, the teachers are at sea without reference literature or, more importantly, authentic handbooks containing guide lines for setting question papers. These must be provided.

Actually, the general issue of intensive and extensive teacher training and retraining needs to be placed at the top of the education ministry's list of agendas for all levels of schooling -- primary, secondary and higher secondary.

## Law enforcers breaking the law

*Occupying precious pavement space*

IN the backdrop of no less than two High Court (HC) directives to free up pavements this year, the walkways for pedestrians continue to remain occupied by vendors of all shades and colours. What has come as a bit of a shock is that the police authorities themselves have set up camp occupying a large portion of the road and pavement on Mirpur road near Chadni Chawk market, one of the busiest shopping hubs of the city.

The move is farcical especially in light of the fact that on February 26 the HC directed the home secretary, police and two city corporations to remove all illegal structures from Dhaka pavements so that pedestrians may use them. Hence when the police themselves set up camp at a busy juncture like Chadni Chawk market, it lends credence to allegations of policemen taking toll from street vendors to allow them illegally to occupy public space and operate their trade with impunity. Then what are we to make of the statement issued by the Dhaka Metropolitan Police that they have taken special security measures to ease traffic jam during the month of Ramadan. If on the one hand, the police cooperate with city officials to clean up footpaths in some areas while on the other they set up camp in the middle of the road in other areas in the name of cracking down on crime, is this not all part of an eyewash campaign?

Certainly the authorities can do better than that. It is imperative for city officials to crack down on errant law enforcement elements who are flouting court rulings to evict all illegal roadside establishments and makeshift shops. A failure to do so would be on the one hand compounding woes of city dwellers already beset with multifarious problems but more importantly, it would aid in reinforcing the popular belief that elements of the police are in cahoots with offenders rather than being uphold-



SYED BADRUL AHSAN

ANGLA-DESH'S villages need to be saved from development. There must be laws, those which civilised societies observe

everywhere, that will ensure that no individual or group will mar the traditional structure of the village through steps that are a clear extension of lopsided urban planning. In simple words, the villages of Bangladesh, historically the underpinning of our heritage, a spur to its societal, philosophical and literary expression, must be preserved. And that can be done through keeping every negative developmental initiative at bay.

Yes, of course we would want our villages to develop. In a post-modern world, you cannot expect a village to remain detached from civilisation. Over the past three decades or so, a fairly large number of our villages and hamlets have been connected to the communications network through new roads being built and through old mud paths being transformed into paved pathways. Travel anywhere in Bangladesh these days. Chances are that you will not wrack your brains about the best way to go about your business, for there are highways and roads and reasonably good pathways that will take you to your destination.

That is development for you. What is not is the sight of all the brick kilns dotting the road on both sides as you travel from the nation's capital to places away from it. These kilns, spewing smoke and producing tons of bricks, occupy space that was once fertile land home to rice and jute, land which teemed with water and fish every time the monsoon season came round. You might argue that these brick kilns employ people from the neighbouring villages. And you could well be correct. But at what cost? There are hardly any more trees along the highways; there is little of the greenery which once caught your

imagination as you travelled away from the din and bustle of the city. But someone you know, someone having come by loads of money, feels free to take possession of a peasant's cropland and turn it into an environmentally hazardous region.

Development is not in reducing the village into narrow slivers of land housing a few hapless families through buying their land and stripping it of its natural elements. It is in making it possible for people in the villages to improve their standards of living through finding employment in places that matter to the economy. In recent times, young women and men who otherwise would have been compelled to work as servants, at outrageous wages, in insensitive urban homes, have come by self-

in the manner of a predator, gobbling up the pastoral landscape. It all makes you wonder. Why are our politicians and our administrators not waking up to the disaster that is about to happen? The moment you take away open spaces is also the moment when you condemn a way of life to death. Development, come to think of it, is fundamentally an enrichment as also a refinement of what has existed for ages. It is not in killing off history through genuflection to crude capitalism.

The new, modern homes that will be built on those rice fields will in time become home to a class of people whose adherence to suspect urban values will certainly not go down well with people who have inhabited our villages for generations

is a higher form of activity. It comes through building schools and colleges, through paving the old mud paths coursing past homes, through replacing culverts with proper bridges, through ensuring a higher production of paddy, through making sure the farmer gets a fair price for all the produce he grows on his land, through having the village and union parishads go about their time-tested jobs, through guaranteeing proper and quick medicare to those who live in poor circumstances. No development theory suggests that you cut down the mango tree, strike at the banana plant, murder the coconut and date palms and push bricks and mortar into fields of rice and jute and varied vegetables. You do not call it development when you bring urban squalor into the placidity of the village.

The village must be saved from predatory business instincts. In Britain, in Europe and in other global spots, the village is sacrosanct. It is not defiled. It is not humiliated. History has consistently accorded respect to it. Bangladesh ought to follow that precedent, unless it is willing to fall prey to a new, formidable environmental disaster.

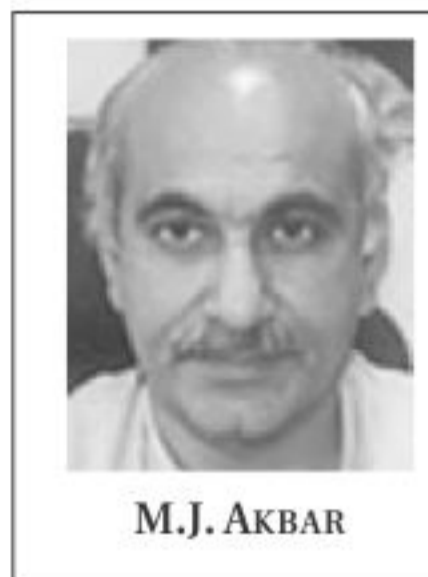
In Panchbaria, a village under Duptara union of Arahazar upazila in Narayanganj, a vast carpet of green, growing and glowing paddy reminds you of the magic inherent in the soil of this land. The good men of Panchbaria observe all this beauty with sadness in their eyes, though. Crass commercialism threatens to cast its dark shadow on this wonderful stretch of land. It dreams of an urban housing complex rising out of all that greenery, in all its glittering ugliness.

For you, for me, for this people's republic, it is a nightmare. It can be put to flight only when a brave government informs us, on the strength of the law, that the villages of this country will not be touched by uninformed men driven by sordid thoughts of material gain.

Where is that bravery?  
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## BYLINE



M.J. AKBAR

TIME heals, but, regrettably, rather more so in politics than in government. Time is rarely on the side of governments in des-

perate need of it. When the ship of state begins to leak, time, being a rascal, punctures a few extra holes in the hull. Any pragmatic captain knows that a limping ship must return to port or sink. But political captains tend to be counterintuitive. Loath to surrender control of the steering wheel, they head straight for icebergs in the hope that some miracle will save the crew and passengers.

The evidence against illusion is compelling. Do the math from the news floating in the air, and I am discounting the impact of Anna Hazare since conventional Delhi wisdom dismisses him as a has-been. I would not be too complacent about his silent impact, but let us leave this to one side. Examine the obvious.

If UPA had either opted for or been forced into a general election in, say, March this year, Congress would probably have won 11 out of Assam's 14 Lok Sabha seats. After the massacres and calamities of July, it will be lucky to win three. Time has stolen seats of an already embattled party, not revived its spirits. A train accident in Nellore reminded the country that it does not have a minister for railways, at least one who sits in

office. The massive blackout which was reported across the world, but was invisible to Congress spokesman Manish Tewari, generated widespread anger. Every story, from disparate corners, is threaded by one fact: Governance has collapsed.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh can't help looking helpless. He has a problem he cannot quite discuss in public but does surely admit in the privacy of his drawing room: The Congress has run out of talent. He

wants to fill two cabinets. But Congress has almost systematically degraded its ranks to the point where even its chief ministers do not quite measure up to a home ministry's needs. They could have looked towards Sharad Pawar, of course; but Congress culture forbids anything but second class jobs to those who keep it in office.

Congress did have one excellent option. Power would have been the perfect portfolio for Rahul Gandhi.

*The last phase of the UPA government will begin when the prime minister shifts from helpless to hopeless. He has not quite made the transition, since he thinks there is some hope left in his Pakistan visit in late November.*

did not promote power minister Sushilkumar Shinde to the home ministry on the very day of the blackout because he has some macabre sense of humour. He did so because he has no other option. Shinde is perhaps the only cabinet minister left with both the experience and maturity to glide calmly into this office. His has been a quiet but remarkable journey from constable to the man in executive charge of India's police forces. Some of the names circulating in Delhi for finance and home before Chidambaram and Shinde were given the jobs, are too embarrassing to repeat. There was a time when there were enough Congress stal-

The failure of his predecessors was precisely the kind of space for him to display administrative mettle, and set up his claim for leadership of the country. Someone has persuaded Rahul Gandhi that he can become prime minister of India if he dips his toe in the water now and then, in front of exulting television cameras, without actually going through the bother of learning how to swim.

It is not easy to govern India, or even broad parts of it. Young Akhilesh Yadav is discovering that chief ministership requires something more than a broad smile after being sworn in. The price of poor administration is steep, and extracted quickly. Rarely has any

stock plummeted as fast as that of Akhilesh Yadav in Uttar Pradesh. He has been in office for only some 20 weeks, so he has a chance to recover, but that will not be easy. You have to rule with both hands, think upon your feet; and work around the clock. Governance is about managing people, and the first thing they want is undivided attention.

Then they want decisions, particularly those that affect life and death, such as security during communal tension. The last phase of the UPA government will begin when the prime minister shifts from helpless to hopeless. He has not quite made the transition, since he thinks there is some hope left in his Pakistan visit in late November. Asif Zardari used Ajmer Sharif as a cloak; religion is Dr. Singh's excuse as well. Sentiment is no bad thing, but cosmetics do not heal wounds. They are ephemeral. The bubbles that swarmed across front pages when Dr. Singh became finance minister for a month have evaporated. If any animal spirits were released, they are not yet visible.

When Dr. Singh returns from Pakistan, he will have a year of real time left, if he is allowed to complete his full term. Six months are always hostage to a general election. One wonders what UPA can achieve in one year that was beyond its capacity in the previous four.

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## THIS DAY IN HISTORY

August 8

1918

World War I: the Battle of Amiens begins a string of almost continuous victories with a push through the German front lines (Hundred Days Offensive).

1942

Quit India Movement is launched in India against the British rule in response to Mahatma Gandhi's call for swaraj or complete independence.

1967

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is founded by Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand.

1974

President Richard Nixon, in a nationwide television address, announces his resignation from the office of the President of the United States effective noon the next day.

1990

Iraq occupies Kuwait and the state is annexed to Iraq. This would lead to the Gulf War shortly afterward.