

## Glaring errors in textbooks

Identify those responsible

THE National Curriculum and Textbook Board has gone for damage control where mistakes in textbooks are concerned. Following reports in the Bangla daily Prothom Alo on the presence of glaring mistakes in the textbooks, not just in the matter of spelling but also in the presentation of facts, the NCTB has decided to go for corrections. That is welcome. But, then again, there is the all-important question of why the NCTB on its own did not spot the mistakes before releasing the books to students. That it did not only reveals the extent to which the board has declined in quality and performance.

If it were a simple matter of wrong spellings in the textbooks, corrections could come in easily. But what is simply unpardonable is that such embarrassing errors as mentioning Jami as the martyr Rumi's father have occurred. The question arises, therefore, of the quality of the academics approached by the NCTB to write for the textbooks. Some academics refused to have anything to do with the textbooks because, in their view, the honoraria offered by the NCTB were paltry. Obviously, the NCTB then did the next best thing, which was to rope in other academics who with their limited as well as faulty record cheerfully filled the textbooks with errors. The shame is not only that these academics clearly have holes in their credentials but also that the young were about to be taught wrong facts about our history, indeed about nearly everything else.

We welcome the move to correct the errors. Additionally, there is a huge need for an overhaul of the NCTB, which can be done through weeding out the coterie which has taken hold of it. And, of course, those teachers who put in wrong information in the textbooks must be speedily identified, in the national interest.

## Disappointment for the victims

Key brands fail to show up

TWENTY nine brands were invited to attend the Geneva talks held on September 11-12 to discuss a compensation package for Tazreen and Rana Plaza victims, eleven turned up. It is disheartening to learn from media reports that participating brands in the meet organised by IndustriALL and International Labour Organisation (ILO) failed to announce firm commitments to a compensation package for victims.

Where does that leave the victims? It is estimated that more than US\$74million would be required to fully compensate all the workers of Rana Plaza. Brands had been asked to provide less than half that amount. For Tazreen victims, the major brands were asked to provide a third of the compensation sought. The scanty attendance itself speaks volumes of how much importance international brands attach to workers' and victims' need for immediate aid. By not turning up at the meet, are we then to assume that international brands are not interested in helping the nearly 2,000 people who were injured or their families?

IndustriALL, the Clean Clothes Campaign (CCC) and the Workers Rights Consortium (WRC) presented a model for compensation at the Geneva meet. Of the many features, payment for pain and suffering and loss of income, both of which occurred in these disasters, were included. Although some brands such as Primark, C&A have provided compensation packages, what is needed is a comprehensive solution to address the problem. We certainly hope that major brands and retailers will work with the employers, the government and trade unions to come to such a solution in the immediate future.

## Updating factory inspection

S.A.MANSOOR

ALL factory inspections must be duly recorded. All factories should be issued an inspection query in two copies. The Inspection Department should fill in one section, giving all the data that is there in their record, related to the location and other details like products, people employed, shifts worked, personnel strength on each shift, etc. The other section will be a questionnaire, to be filled in duplicate by the factory authorities. The queries should be on specific points related to safety, normal and emergency accesses, location, type and number of fire fighting facilities, etc. The last section will be filled in by the factory inspector on his inspection, in the presence of the owner/manager, who should sign this part of the report.

All deficiencies and shortcomings must be spelled out in this last part of the report based on actual inspection, which should be on a scheduled working day, but with no prior notice from the factory inspector. If necessary, laws should be passed so that the inspector can impose fine up to Tk.2,000 for minor deviation! For major deviation, the owner has to be immediately informed in writing. In this case, fines imposed should be far higher!

However, given the corruption everywhere, there will be some failures. One way to encourage strict inspection may be to give, say, one third of the fines collected to the safety inspector or official who detects any safety violation and penalises the factory concerned!

The writer is a retired engineer.

## SUNDAY POUCH



ASHFAQUR RAHMAN

East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). In the process, he overlooked many fine details which ultimately affected the lives of millions in the region.

It is no wonder that people along the India-Bangladesh border have to walk over the demarcated border routinely to do shopping or to send their children to meet relatives. Over time, this free movement has been restricted perforce by India by constructing a barbed wire fence along the border. To date, 75 % of the fencing has been completed. Bangladesh is literally collared by India. In the 21st century, when borders and fences are coming down in all civilised parts of the world, the norm in India is to build structures in order to hem in populations and generally be a nuisance to all.

In January 2011, a completely innocent father and daughter planned a cross-over from India to Bangladesh. The reason was that the father had arranged his 15 year old daughter's marriage in Bangladesh. Unfortunately, while crossing over, Felani's clothes got entangled in the barbed wire and she was unable to jump across. In desperation, she called out to her father for help.

Her shouts attracted the attention of the Border Security Force (BSF). Without any warning they peppered her with gun shots. She was hit and left dangling like a quail from the wired fence. Her father, who had crossed over, could not approach her for fear of being shot himself. For full five hours she remained skewered on the fence till she was brought down by the BSF to be subsequently handed over to the Border Guards Bangladesh (BGB). Felani was wearing gold ornaments when she was attempting the crossing. But when her body was returned the ornaments were missing.

The story of Felani hit headlines both in India and Bangladesh. It was a human story. The government of Bangladesh lodged a formal protest. But the BSF and the Indian authorities, apart from the routine apology, did not make any enquiry. Protests built up, especially in the social media in Bangladesh. The cry rose for justice for Felani.

# Felani dies twice!

THE border between Bangladesh and India has been the scene of killing of innocent civilians. It was drawn by a British lawyer Sir Cyril Radcliffe in 1947. He was tasked by the British colonial government to separate the Muslim areas from the Hindu majority areas, in order to carve a Muslim province in eastern India. His deadline was just two weeks. So Radcliffe, without the slightest understanding of the ground realities, drew the map of

The BSF always attributes any killing of civilians as 'deserving' because to them those who cross over are either terrorists or criminals. Felani was neither. She carried no firearms or drugs, nor was she running away after committing a crime in India. So what prompted the BSF to shoot at her? No warning shots, no arrests, only bullets in the chest. This was the first time she died.

Two years after the incident, the Indian authorities, in the face of national and international pressure, agreed to hold trial of a BSF constable who was identified as the person who shot Felani. A five-member General Security Forces Court was set up in a BSF camp in Sonari near Cooch Bihar in India. Felani's father and uncle, who were witnesses, were invited to give testimony before the court. After giving their testimony and a mere two day stay in India, they were asked to return to Bangladesh. The court soon after gave the verdict of not guilty. The Court noted that there was 'inconclusive and insufficient evidence.'

The verdict has caused great consternation in Bangladesh. Even people in India have decried it. Kirity Roy, chief of an Indian human rights organization, has said that the "image of India was tarnished by the verdict. The fundamental spirit of the Indian constitution was also defamed." The Bangladeshi Public Prosecutor, Abraham Lincoln, who accompanied Felani's father to India, said: "Murder has been approved through this verdict." The fear now is that this trial and acquittal will encourage the BSF to abuse its powers at will and kill more civilians at the slightest pretext all along this long border. The BSF, unfortunately, takes pride in its motto 'Duty unto death.'

Both Bangladesh and India are two big democracies, India being the largest in the world. The border between them is expected to be an example for the world on how two democracies can live side by side in harmony and peace. The track record of BSF is a sad narrative of human rights abuses and murder.

The Felani incident is a serious wake up call for India. Here was a 15 year old girl following her father to return to her home and hearth in Bangladesh to set up her own home near the border. She was felled by the bullet bought with the money of the democracy loving people of India. The authorities there put up a show trial of her assailant and let him go scot free. It was this kangaroo style justice that killed her the second time. The BSF has acknowledged this and will now hold a revision trial.

By the way, the social media in Bangladesh has already renamed the street in front of the Indian High Commission in Dhaka as 'Felani Street.' The young in Bangladesh want to remember the injustice done to this soul.

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STAR ARCHIVE

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## The problem of Kashmir

### BETWEEN THE LINES



KULDIP NAYYAR

playing up their boycott. If they had ignored the event, it would have passed without much notice. This was not the first concert. The late Jagajit Singh gave a *gazzal* programme in the heart of Srinagar.

A band from Pakistan played at Srinagar the other day. New Delhi was wise enough to treat it as a routine matter and gave the musicians visas. Nobody took any notice of it. The media too paid no heed. The Hurriyat, still equivocal about its demand for *azaadi*, voiced no protest against the Pakistan band. This only underlined the impression that the Hurriyat tended to tilt towards Pakistan.

The Hurriyat is a divided house. Some, led by Syed Shah Gillani, want the state to 'join' Pakistan. And the others, led by Yasin Malik, demand *azaadi*. Then there are those who are confused. Not long ago, when most Kashmiris, alienated from India as they are, favoured the integration with Pakistan, the Kashmiris would have voted for Pakistan if there had been a plebiscite. Today, a preponderant majority of Kashmiris, want *azaadi*. Yasin Malik has been able to veer them round from being pro-Pakistan elements to making them accept the demand for an independent, sovereign state.

Yet what the Hurriyat does not realize is that *azaadi* is an ideal, not a feasible proposition. When the British left India in August 1947, they gave the princely states an option to stay independently and they did not want to join either India or Pakistan. Maharaja Hari Singh, the then Jammu and Kashmir ruler, declared that he would stay independent. The landlocked state had to have the support of both India and Pakistan for access to the outside world. He did not want to depend on one.

With the Muslims in a majority in J and K, Pakistan expected its accession. When it did not take place, Pakistan sent its irregulars, backed by the regular troops. The Maharaja sought the help of India which insisted on the accession before sending its troops. He had to sign the Instrument of Accession Act.

The task of the Hurriyat is more difficult than that of the Maharaja. The two parts of the states are against *azaadi*. Jammu, the Hindu majority part, would like to join India. The Buddhist majority Ladakh, the other part, want to be a union territory of India. Therefore, the demand for *azaadi*

is essentially that of the valley which has nearly 98% of Muslims.

When India is in the midst of endeavour for polarisation and when a political party is playing a Hindu card, it is difficult to imagine that the ruling Congress or any other political party, including the Communists, would support the Hurriyat. Even otherwise, all political parties are opposed to the demand for independence, although some may go to the farthest in giving powers to the state.

Even 66 years after partition, the wounds inflicted because of the division have not healed. How does the Hurriyat expect the people in India to reconcile to another partition, however genuine and strong the sentiments of the Kashmiris are? If partition is again on the basis of religion, the secular state may not survive as it is. True, the 15 crore Muslims in India are equal citizens and they cannot be treated as hostages. But the valley's secession may have such repercussions which are dreadful to imagine. The constitution, guaranteeing equality to all Indian citizens, may be of no avail.

India and Pakistan have fought two regular wars on Kashmir, apart from a mini misadventure in Kargil. The valley continues to remain part of the Jammu and Kashmir state. Several thousand Kashmiris have died for the cause of *azaadi*. For India, they were insurgents. They were crushed by the security forces which too lost thousands. Even now some militants from across the border attack some places but are rebuffed. For example, on the day of Zubin Mehta's concert, a post of Central Reserve Police Force in the southern Kashmir was targeted with rockets. There was a *hartal* at Srinagar. But this exercise has been gone over by many a time before.

Yet both countries signed an agreement in 1972 at Shimla to end hostilities. They pledged to sort out their disputes, including Kashmir, through bilateral talks. This has held the ground for the last 31 years. A few meetings between the two countries have been held since. By all means they should hold further talks on Kashmir. But they cannot fructify unless one of them changes its stance. New Delhi considers Kashmir as its integral part and Pakistan would like to have the valley to merge with it. The Hurriyat continues to expect a solution which does not seem possible. Six decades have gone by. There is yet nothing on the horizon. International opinion is mute and it has left the matter for the two countries to settle.

The Hurriyat has to introspect and change its tactics. It has to prove that it counts. It should capture the state assembly if the Kashmiris are with it. It can have its own chief minister who could forcefully articulate the demand for *azaadi*. But does it have the following? It is easy to gather the crowd but difficult to convert it into votes.

The Hurriyat, it seems, is riding to many horses at the same time. It wants to mean everything to everybody in the valley. And then it wants Jammu and Ladakh to stay with the valley. If it wants a sway over the entire state, it should win over Jammu and Ladakh which oppose the Hurriyat tooth and nail. To represent Kashmir, it has to have Jammu and Ladakh with it. Then the Azad Kashmir under Pakistan would also listen to the Hurriyat. The valley by itself has a weak case.

The writer is an eminent Indian Journalist.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### Electricity from sewage

An article on a new application of sewage titled 'Electromicrobiology' was published in your pages on 20th August. It is a new area of technology which has established the possibility of generating electricity from microorganisms, interacting with sewage that produces electricity.

Not being familiar with microbiology, I could not clearly comprehend the formation of conducting wires by microbiological action that enables electrons to move between high and low potential cells. It seems that this idea can result in having a fuel pack, similar to the common storage battery that we use in automobiles. I am sure that scientists concerned at BCSIR have already gone through more details about this new concept of generating electrical power with no need for conventional fossil fuel, or the need for dangerous and highly radioactive nuclear fuel for atomic power generation. I believe that in our national interest, our authorities should support our scientists to keep abreast of the unique new source of pollution-free power generation possibilities.

Engr. S. A. Mansoor  
Dhaka

### Justice for Felani

There have been lots of talks and criticisms since Felani was killed by BSF. That hue and cry has ignited further with the verdict of the trial a few days ago. Normally people like Felani and her family cross Indo-Bangladesh border regularly with prior arrangement with the security forces of both sides. But why she was killed so brutally is a big question. Why was her body hanging on the fence for five hours? Why did it take so long for the trial to take place?

Unscrupulous law enforcing members of both sides can do anything for money. Patriotism doesn't always work on the border. I urge both the Bangladesh and Indian government to investigate properly into the killing of Felani.

Dr. Muhammad Ali Manik  
Atlanta, Georgia  
USA

### Our disregard for rules

A photograph published on 8th September in a local English daily showed that a Hajj passenger onboard a Biman flight was violating flight safety rules by using his mobile phone. While onboard any aircraft, this practice is strictly forbidden. The person appeared literate and therefore well aware that he was violating an important safety rule onboard. This, unfortunately, reflects our countrymen's disregard for rules and regulations. Bangladeshis generally seem to be reluctant to follow rules, unless it is strongly and forcefully enforced. We always raise our voice for our rights while we easily ignore our own duties and responsibilities.

Confused Bangladeshi  
On e-mail

### Ted Rudow III's write-ups

The above learned writer is a frequent contributor to your column. From his letter dated 8.9.13 and others in a similar vein, it appears he is very anti-establishment and vigorously against US military involvements around the globe. Whatever the merits or demerits of these involvements and US foreign policy, the fact remains that only in a free, open and democratic country like the US, it is possible for people like him to make such vitriolic written outbursts against his own government and country as obvious from his letters. Had he been a citizen of Russia, China, or any of most third world countries (except perhaps India and a few other countries), he would have been behind bars long ago!

S. Ahmed  
Gulshan, Dhaka

### Comments on news report, "AL stays rigid," published on September 11, 2013

#### S. M. Iftekhar Ahmed

If they continue to be stubborn, it will only backfire on them. The constitution is not the word of God and can be changed to ensure the rights and desires of the majority of the nation's citizens. At such a crucial time, if the AL fails to pay heed to the international community or eminent citizens, then they will have no one else to blame when they will be hit with devastating results.

#### Mahboob Hossain

Field Marshal Ayub Khan, Tikka Khan, Yahya Khan were also rigid about not sharing power with Bangabandhu. It pains me when I see the daughter of such a leader following those notorious dictators.

#### Iftekhar Hassan

I do not like foreign pressure on an internal affair of Bangladesh. At the same time, I support PM's stand on constitution. However, based on situation on the ground, an interim government with elected officials from both parties is not a bad idea at all.

#### Shahin Huq

We pray and hope that good sense will prevail. This rigidity is harming Awami League's reputation the most.

#### K Ashfaq

If continuation of democracy means perpetrating another five years of AL-rule through rigged elections, then AL is not being democratic at all.