

Record attainments in SSC results

Congrats, but question about quality remains

THIS year's near-cent percent pass rate and a very high number of GPA-5 achievers in all streams of SSC examinations may have been cheery news on an overall basis. Failed faces are hard to come by; there is celebratory mood all around, even an auspicious ring to it. One could very well ask: If this is not progress, then what is? Quite true, but what we do need to see is whether we have promoted quantity over quality.

It is all very good that objective and creative content of curricula and question papers impelled text book reading and comprehension. This reduced dependence on note books or so-called made-easy guides and, one would expect, learning by rote as well. As contributory factors extra classes having been taken with emphasis on Maths and English are being highlighted as a pointer to due diligence on the part of teachers. On the positive side, the gaps between rural-urban schools are said to be diminishing but some 22 urban schools remain the most high-performing ones. At the other extreme are 24 schools from which none passed.

On the flipside, one cannot brush aside the leakage of question papers that has a negative impact on the quality of results. It has been reported many a rural school evaluated the scripts leniently so as not to lose MPO status.

In the end, whilst we wholeheartedly congratulate the successful candidates, especially the high achievers, we have reasons to worry over a large number vying for placement in a limited number of good colleges.

Narayanganj case investigation

Truth be uncovered quickly

THE Narayanganj seven-murder case has assumed a different character than other such cases of the past because of allegations of complicity of the country's elite force in the abduction and murder. And that is why the investigation process cannot brook any delay.

We are glad that the three Rab officials, against whom there is allegation of direct involvement, have been arrested and taken on remand, though belated. While it is a progress of sorts we cannot but express our concern that 6 of the accused are still at large. It is disconcerting too that the main accused and his cohorts, who were named in the complaint made by the victims' families, have managed to escape the surveillance of the law enforcement agencies.

We think that the government owes it to the public to explain how, despite the close watch, as stated by the state minister for home, the accused managed to give the police the slip. And we find it remarkable too that the location of the main accused has been identified by none other than Rab officials, so soon after he went missing.

We understand that there are several investigations being conducted by various agencies. What is essential is that the police investigation, which is the basis of future charge sheets and arraignments of the accused, should be completed as quickly as possible, and all the other investigations will hopefully supplement the police investigation. The truth must be uncovered and all those behind the gruesome killing must be exposed and brought to justice.

\$10 billion credit for Rooppur!

ABDUL MATIN

FINALLY, the cat is out of the bag! We now seem to know more about the cost of the proposed Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant, consisting of two 1,000 MWe reactors, to be supplied and built by the Russians. No, it is not \$1.5 to \$2 billion per reactor as it used to be announced repeatedly and confidently by the concerned authorities. I contested this figure on many occasions and argued that each reactor would cost about \$4 billion (DS January 1, 2014). I admit I was wrong. The actual cost of one reactor may be much more than \$4 billion.

A spokesperson of the Rooppur project disclosed in April that Bangladesh was negotiating with Russia for a \$10 billion credit to build the nuclear plant. It is, however, not clear if this will cover the total cost of the project since Russia normally finances only about 85-90% of the total cost. The rest of the amount is paid by the recipient country from its own resources. In that case, the total cost may increase to at least \$11.1 billion. We already took a credit of \$500 million from the Russians for a feasibility study and some preparatory works. Russia now wants an additional \$55 million to complete the remaining studies. The amount of \$555 million will thus be a part of the total cost which now comes to \$11.7 billion for the plant or \$5.85 billion per reactor, excluding interest during construction and escalation. The estimated cost of the plant thus increased by more than 2.5 times in less than two years!

The spokesperson did not explain how the cost of \$2 billion per reactor suddenly jumped to \$5.85 billion. Was it a deliberate attempt on the part of the management not to disclose the real cost to the public or was it their ignorance? I wonder which explanation will be more damaging. Whatever be the reason, the authorities owe an explanation to the nation.

By the way, Belarus lined up a similar credit of \$10 billion with Russia to build two VVER1200 reactors, each of 1200 MWe. We should, therefore, go for two VVER-1200 reactors, instead of VVER1000 reactors, at Rooppur for more power, improved safety and better economy. Since the capital charges of a nuclear plant constitute about 75% of the cost of generation of electricity, we must negotiate for very soft terms of credit and a long repayment period to reduce the cost of generation so as to make it competitive with imported fossil fuel fired power plants.

The writer is a former chief engineer of Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission and author of "Rooppur and the Power Crisis."

INDIAN ELECTION

End of legacy-bound politics?

KALEIDOSCOPE



SYED FATTAHUL ALIM

Indian National Congress, the party that holds the proud legacy of being the one that brought the country's independence. What is more, it is also the party that the founding fathers of modern India had built and worked for imbued with the ideals of secular nationalism. But so far as legacy is concerned, the victor, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), has nothing to write home about. Worse still, the politics and ideology it vouches for is non-inclusive, revivalist Hindu nationalism. Even so, Indian electorate has given an unprecedented mandate to this party to rule India for the next five years.

However, the leadership of the losing party, the Congress, remaining true to their democratic tradition, conceded defeat and bowed out of office respecting the fact that the election result was the verdict of the people. Congress President Sonia Gandhi accepted responsibility for her party's worst ever performance in its history. But even in the face of such debacle, she did not hesitate to congratulate Narendra Modi, the winner, on his success. It's a shining example of how democracy works.

What would be the reaction of any of our major political parties in a similar situation of electoral reversal? The patent response would be one of instant rejection of the election result with allegation of massive rigging against the winner and of blaming the Election Commission for its complicity in the rigging in favour of the winning party. The sad irony is we are yet to learn the spirit of elections and to consider a political rival not as an enemy, but as a partner whose existence is indispensable for a healthy democracy.

Now that the Indian electorate have expressed their will and choice about whose turn it should be now to govern India, political analysts everywhere are scratching their heads over what propelled the Indians to make this partic-

ular choice. Despite his tainted past as the Gujarat chief minister under whose watch (Modi, however, has denied his involvement and officially nothing could be proved so far against him) over a thousand members of the minority Muslim community were massacred in the infamous 'Gujarat riot' of 2002, one wonders why the Indian people have put so much trust in this man. Have the Indian public lost their faith in the high ideals of inclusiveness and secularism that the Congress and its leadership stood for? What did BJP or Modi promise to the Indian public, or what was so appealing about him that Congress or its leadership were wanting in, and miserably at that?

BJP's Narendra Modi was not talking about lofty ideals, neither was he burdened with the baggage of past legacies that Congress was. On the other hand, mired in corruption, presiding over a poorly performing economy afflicted with governance inertia, thanks to the slothful bureaucratic juggernaut, the Congress-led United People's Alliance (UPA) government had already overstayed its welcome. People were desperately looking for an alternative, a radical change in the leadership. Even the Congress's

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candidate, the charming, youthful Rahul Gandhi, the scion of the celebrated political dynasty of India, could not impress the voting public's mind. So, the Congress's fate was sealed. The public was looking for a new face and Narendra Modi just came in handy to fill in the gap.

Modi's positive sides were that he was promising development for the economy and jobs for the unemployed. Naturally, along with the rest, he caught the imagination of the 10 million new voters, too. But more than the promises he has made to the people, or for the personal charms, if he has any, the single most powerful factor that has catapulted him to the peak is the negative, anti-incumbency mood of the voters. The style of the pro-Modi campaign had also a lot to do. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, (RSS), the cadre-based ultra right-wing Hindu nationalist religious group that was behind this campaign, has worked to build Modi's larger than life image. No doubt, it helped him achieve a landslide victory.

By electing Modi, the Indian people have rejected the legacy-bound politics with an emphatic 'no.' Perhaps, it was necessary. But by extending their overwhelming support to Modi and through him to BJP, they have also unwittingly endorsed BJP's ultra-nationalist agenda. Only time will tell, if the Indian public have made the right choice this time.

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The growth helix

RUBANA HUQ

ONCE upon a time, disasters happened to the other people, the other person in the city, the others who we didn't know. Gradually, the circle began to close in and mishaps started happening to us only. People dying in the launches suddenly happen to be our children, our friends, our professors, and the kid next door. People being abducted and killed just happen to be our husbands, friends or brothers. Once media covered the others, today it covers us. Once the world was in the focus, today we are. The structure of public forum has expanded. Private has become public and public has effectively gone global. It's one huge world that we belong to where politics of fear and wealth play upon our psyche and we regularly watch witch-fearing men burning women.

Bangladesh today is in world focus and as a nation we cannot isolate our existential helix. We connect to the world and the world talks back to us. It's also a world of witch-hunt, and very often nations burn like paper cups crumpled in the hands of those have power. This is essentially a time where we watch the power of geopolitics playing a crucial role; this is essentially a time where maximum diplomacy must be invested to secure the best possible outcome. This is not a time to turn anyone away in the defense of nationalism. Post national tragedies as huge as Rana Plaza, we need as many friends as possible to muster global support.

A review of a recent Vietnamese error will possibly clear the air. Vietnam is the fifth largest textile and garment exporter in the world, having 4,000 enterprises, and having exported 20.4 billion in 2013 in textile and readymade garments, which accounts for 15% of GDP. And yet...Vietnam just made a huge mistake by playing the ultra-nationalism card. The Vietnamese government fuelled nationalistic flames by broadcasting videos of a Chinese coast guard vessel using water cannons against a Vietnamese vessel. That particular move led to 20,000 workers protesting against China in the Binh Duong province in the South of Vietnam, where more than 15 foreign owned garment and footwear plants have been set on fire. Mistakenly, many workers even burnt factories that belonged to South Koreans and Taiwanese.

China's deployment in an oilrig in the disputed waters near the Paracel islands in the South China Sea that led to the government publicising a particular event not only fanned protests but has also affected the bigger global picture where biggest investors are today questioning their faith in Vietnam along with the proposed Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) trade treaty which will benefit Vietnam while trading with countries like the US and Canada. For example, the Taiwanese have started calling their shots and have been pressing for an immediate solution while large companies like Nike are looking for contingency plans. I wrote the name of a company and a nation in a single sentence just because, in the globalised scenario, companies call shots in national and international issues and no sensible government should ever ignore that reality. Since geopolitical situations do lead to instabilities in supply chains and cause global concerns, it is imperative for governments to wake up to freshly negotiated terrains where the politics of global wealth outplays national politics...

I was in Madrid last week visiting a few brands. To my utter surprise, most of the stores carrying ladies wear had 90% of their products from India. Burning in rage, I bought a few blouses from the stores and have washed and rewashed them in the last 48 hours, testing the dimensional stability of the fabric and the appearance of the garments after being beaten up with rough detergents. To my utter disappointment, the garments, post-rough-wash, look fine and very, very wearable. The designs are great, the stitching is almost flawless and the handwriting of fashion is very evident all over the garment. It was only a few days

ago when the president of the Apparel Export Promotion Council of India was quoted as saying that India hopes to secure chunks of business from Bangladesh and China. I am sure it does.

A 15% year on year growth in India confirms that diversifying and stricter compliance has led to this growth miracle. A few years back, we were given a duty free opportunity with India. Yet Indian stores carry their own brands with pride...mostly made in India. Exporters like ourselves have tried breaking the barriers with a few better brands in India and have sported occasional exports to our neighbour, only to discover their requirement in inspection is tighter than most of the western brands! In fact, India is currently going through a reversal phase. Today, Shri Govindaraja Textiles is investing in Rockingham County in North Carolina in textiles. SGT is the largest spinner in India with 1.1 million spindles and has a workforce of 30,000 employees. Today's South Asia is now creating new jobs in the US!

What has actually happened to all of us in South Asia? Asian Development Outlook 2014: Fiscal Policy for Inclusive Growth -- released in April -- clearly states that despite positive growth, South Asia is one of the slowest growing sub-regions where the regional economy expanded by only 4.8% in 2013 with the hope of the GDP being likely to increase to 5.3% in 2014, which too is subject to successful reforms in India, the region's major economic player. In 2013, India's economic growth bottomed because of sudden draining of foreign investment and pressure on exchange rate. But, strong policy measures are being put in place so that India can push the growth to 8% in 2014.

And what about the rest of us in this region? Security challenges and macroeconomic issues bog Pakistan down to an expected GDP growth of 3.4% this year with an economy that has a high fiscal deficit and a low tax-to-GDP ratio of 8.5%. Both Afghanistan and Sri Lanka have a huge gap between domestic revenue and government spending. For Afghanistan, the expected GDP growth is set to be 3.5% and for Sri Lanka, it's 7.5%. For Sri Lanka to achieve this growth rate, massive administrative policy reforms are required. However, Sri Lanka is more than likely to survive any economic challenges as exports are likely to improve in the coming years as it has been performing better with its major export partners in the EU and the US. Nepal, which has a slow GDP growth of 3.6%, is expected to do better in 2014 with a 4.5% target, provided it tames its two-digit inflation, owing to weak currency, supply-side constraints and anticompetitive practices. Lack of diversification has strapped Maldives to a 3.7% GDP growth in 2013 with an expectation of 4.5% in 2014. Bhutan, which is expecting inflation to rise to 10.2% this year, has had a decrease to a GDP growth of 5.2%.

Bangladesh happens to be facing new credibility challenges by the minute. Our identity, resolve and resilience are being tested in murky waters. There is no other option left for us but to win. While brands may be postponing orders in response to delays in implementing agreed fire and building safety standards to prevent further industrial accidents, the local scene must improve immediately. And, unfortunately, the local scene is far from being healthy. With pressures to relocate factories, gas connections are an endless nightmare. More than 200 factories are waiting for gas permissions while the 2009 restriction on new gas connection to industries still exists. Well, this is not 2009 anymore and we are in post-Rana plaza 2014 where we cannot afford to have lack of gas stopping us from setting up compliant manufacturing units. Adjustment in the national policy level seems to be crucial at this point of time unless the policy makers are ready to accept responsibility for a failure of the national economy.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Improving our cricket

The condition of our cricket is a little unstable now. The cricket authorities should look for new players at the grassroots level. Cricket fairs can be arranged in urban as well as rural areas, where players from the national team will come and encourage the boys and girls to become good cricketers. Cricket tournaments should also be arranged for school and college students every year. It is time to do something pragmatic in order to improve our cricket.

Shafkat Rahman
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Increasing public's access to justice

This refers to the article "Punctilio of advocates towards the courts" (May 13). A legal system consists of advocates, litigants, and judges. All these three have to work in harmony to serve justice. Also needed is a learned judiciary. Transparency and accountability—both are vital in the running of courts, and these factors make a democracy vibrant. There are laws for the judges and the lawyers, but there are no laws for the litigants. We cannot have a pragmatic system of justice unless we empower the litigants. And the proceedings of courts should be telecast live, as is the practice in countries like the USA and Canada. Justice should also be made affordable to the commoners.

Deendayal M. Lulla
Mumbai, India

Indian elections: A lesson for our politicians

Narendra Modi and his party BJP has secured massive victory in the recent Lok Sabha elections of India. However, Congress president Sonia Gandhi and vice president Rahul Gandhi have taken the responsibility for the party's defeat and showed respect to the verdict of people. Furthermore, they congratulated the winning party instead of making accusations of vote rigging. Their cooperation in the entire matter is praiseworthy. It's time Bangladeshi political parties learnt from their neighbour. Our politicians must learn the etiquettes of politics and stop playing the 'blame-game'!

Sabrina Samreen
Uttara, Dhaka

Comments on news report, "Governance goes down further," published on May 14, 2014

Mofi

See, how messy things are in every sector! I can't see how we will come back to normality again!

Barkat

One should not forget that the key to good governance is a democratically elected government. Otherwise, the government is illegitimate. And no illegitimate government can ever deliver, as it does not represent people, nor does it care for public good.

"Rab is not the real problem" (May 15, 2014)

M. Ashraf

The issue is that, Rab is as much at fault as the thugs who are using them. They have the license to kill.

"Make joint move to save Buriganga" (May 16, 2014)

Dr Gazi Ullah

Better late than never. Some industries of Bangladesh are damaging all the rivers and water bodies with untreated industrial wastes. It is not only damaging the rivers' ecosystems but also jeopardising our health.

Nazmul Haq

Good move. I also think people should be educated through mass media, workshops, seminars etc. about the importance of river.

"When doctors turn hooligans" (May 16, 2014)

Nds

Doctors in this country (there are a few exceptions) have always been hooligans in the sense that they have extorted people by taking exorbitant fees; now physical force has been added to it. Some enter this profession with the sole target of getting rich as quickly as possible and by whatever means available to them.

"Maya skips cabinet meeting" (May 13, 2014)

Mofi

This stance of Maya will bring more insult. I am surprised as to why he took that stand when his son-in-law and other two RAB officials were sent on forced retirements based on prima facie evidences. It's time Maya embraced the truth, only then he would be able to help himself out of this crisis.

Monju Huq

Please Maya, make it your final skip.