

Launch capsizes probe report

Findings are worrying

IT is not often that we get to know the findings of any probe report, least of all those related to accidents and loss of life. We have at hand now the findings of the committee tasked with probing the Pinak-6 disaster. The findings are highly disconcerting and expose an abject lack of concern for public safety, dereliction of duty, lax oversight and rampant corruption.

One of the aims of setting up such a committee is to find the flaws at every level, not only to take people responsible for the accident to task but also to take corrective actions that would help prevent future accidents. And we hope the authorities would do so. And it is not the captain of the vessel who alone is responsible for the accident but every one of those who had allowed such a vessel to operate in the first place.

It is not enough to merely suspend the surveyor whose role has caused the deaths of more than 100 passengers. The excuse of shortage of manpower in a sector which has to do directly with safety of human lives is totally unacceptable. And in this regard the DG department of shipping must also take the blame for the deaths.

We would want the report to be made public and would like the authorities to let people know as to what actions are taken to rectify the faults and punish all those in the chain of officialdom that have allowed the ill fated launch to operate since 1991 with major flaws.

Elusive railway tickets

Disservice to ordinary passengers

AS happened many times before, tens of thousands of Eid holidaymakers are facing difficulties in booking their passage home. It's already too late to increase the intake capacity for the swelling number of passengers rushing to travel by train.

Apart from the limited capacity, the blocking of tickets for VIPs, on-line complications and suspected black marketing deprive many ticket seekers of a chance to get it, particularly in good time.

Railways being a bulk carrier of passenger and a safe mode of transportation it is preferred to other modes of transportation. The resulting rush for railway journey cannot be adequately catered for by makeshift adhoc arrangements. In immediate terms, therefore, the answer lies in optimisation of available capacity through increased frequency of trips. In spite of inducting three special intercity trains little is expected to change as they will only replace the six severely damaged trains during the countrywide violence late last year.

On the longer term, to overcome the shortage in capacity, a master plan for the development of BR is needed, where issues relating to infrastructural expansion including increase in rolling stock and better maintenance should be specifically addressed. In addition to donor driven programmes for an overall development and modernisation of the railway as a part of the multimodal transport system it's time the private sector gets extensively involved in the endeavour.

Kashmir keeps turning up

EDITORIAL: THE HINDU (INDIA)

THERE has seldom been a time when the domestic politics of India and Pakistan have not intruded into efforts to normalise bilateral relations. When Nawaz Sharif spoke at the United Nations about a plebiscite in Kashmir, the Pakistan prime minister was not so much addressing India as he was audiences back home. Mr. Sharif has not yet emerged fully from his battle for survival against Imran Khan. The cricketer-turned-politician is now planning to widen his protests for Mr. Sharif's resignation. The doggedness with which Mr. Khan is seeking to topple Mr. Sharif, and the parallel demands for regime change by Tahir ul-Qadri, a maverick cleric with a large following, have further weakened Pakistan's democratic moorings. The Pakistan prime minister's tense relations with the army for a host of reasons -- his determination to punish former army chief Pervez Musharraf for the 1999 coup, and his avowed desire for friendly ties with India, to cite just two -- have compounded his insecurity. There is no doubt that the New York speech was a move by Mr. Sharif to blunt criticism by his opponents and detractors that he has been soft on India, and an effort by him to buy some peace with the army. Also, the Modi government's abrupt cancellation of the foreign secretary-level talks last month in retaliation for the Pakistan envoy's discussions with Hurriyat leaders in Delhi, did not help Mr. Sharif's domestic situation. The demands on Kashmir that he pressed at the General Assembly were those he had not raised for years, at least not since the historic 1999 Lahore Declaration, to which he and Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee were signatories.

The two sides seem dangerously close to turning the clock back on Kashmir, wiping out the progress made on the issue in the intervening years, when -- if the principal actors of the period are to be believed -- it was "a semicolon away" from resolution. The challenge now before India and Pakistan is to pull back before rhetoric hijacks the debate. That can be done only by restoring the dialogue, not by keeping a finger on the pause button, as India has done. It is encouraging that Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in his speech at the General Assembly, avoided a slanging match with Mr. Sharif, and instead reiterated India's desire for "serious dialogue" with Pakistan in an "atmosphere free of violence." That Pakistan remains eager to grasp the offer was evident in the conciliatory remarks made to The Hindu by Sartaj Aziz, adviser on foreign affairs to Mr. Sharif, after Mr. Modi's speech. Enough opportunities for dialogue have been lost already. India and Pakistan cannot risk the dangers created by a vacuum in diplomacy.

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Politics of education: Debate over student exams

ZIAUDDIN CHOUDHURY

AN interesting debate in Bangladesh over "quality" of education is currently keeping some of us amused over the topic as well as the debate participants. On the surface, the debate is a fallout of the pathetic performance in the recent Dhaka University intake exams by students who graduated from higher secondary schools recently. The results of the higher secondary school exams all over the country held by different boards were uniformly stupendous, with about 80% success rate, and an astounding number securing 80% or above marks (GPA 5). This is obviously performance per excellence and a cause for pride and joy for the students, their teachers and of course the parents. We all would have a national moment of celebration had the examination been an end in itself. Unfortunately, it is not. This is but one of the many challenges our students and their parents have to face before these youths can be ready for the work place.

It seems that the success rate of the higher secondary school exam and a plethora of GPA 5 did not prove enough to put the majority of these graduates through qualifying tests for admission into Dhaka University. Hence the debate, and hence the questions. Was the grading of the students in their school exams done with any



rigour? Was the overwhelming success rate really based on better student performance and better education? Or was the examination result politically motivated?

Each year nearly a million students take the HSC examination and the success rate in the exam has also been consistently rising from near 70% a few years ago to 80% this year. Every year the number of students riding on the top is also increasing somewhat astonishingly. It is debatable whether a higher success rate in exam or the ever increasing number of high achieving students is a testimony to better teaching and schooling or higher quality of education. But what we do know is the consequence of such huge number of high school graduates vying for limited spaces for higher studies in universities and colleges. The obvious choices of most the aspirants are the public institutions, both for their reputation and their lower costs. The institutions also must decide the most appropriate way to select who they should take and who they may not.

In most advanced countries higher education (that is university/college education) is not for all, the prime reason being that most jobs in the market place do not require college degrees. The other reason is the high cost of college education that very few families can afford. Hence, there is no great rush for admission in the universities immediately after high school. In the US, about 65% high

school graduates apply for and get to higher institutes of learning. And those who apply have to get through a rigid selection process that not only takes into account GPAs but also other college qualifying tests such as SAT, ACT, etc.

In our country, however, a college education is considered a must for job market as vocational institutions do not attract many parents. Our public universities get maximum draws from students and parents primarily because the fee is nominal, but also because they have greater name recognition. In any institution where there is a gap between capacity and demand, the demand is managed by competition among those who make this demand on the institution. Dhaka University and similar other educational institutions have to adopt policies to manage admissions that may include tests, which they have done recently.

There would not have been any debate had this admission management process of the university been viewed as a right of an institution to follow its own policy on admission as an independent entity. The debate has arisen because some of our educators and politicians have viewed the abject failure of the high achieving performers to qualify for admission as a commentary on the quality of education they received in schools, and opened a bigger question on the whole examination process and results.

How can students who excelled in their most recent government held exam perform so miserably in the admission tests? Was the process flawed or the results politically motivated to demonstrate government success in promoting higher quality in education?

In fact, none of this is true. Neither did the university authorities design a test to fail the students, nor did the people who manage the secondary school examinations manipulate these to demonstrate government achievement in education. What is true, however, is that despite higher turn-out at our school final exams year after year (which is actually a result of higher enrollment in schools) and a greater number of high achieving students, the standard of education has not kept pace with demands of time. The number of schools has increased, but not the quality of education at the

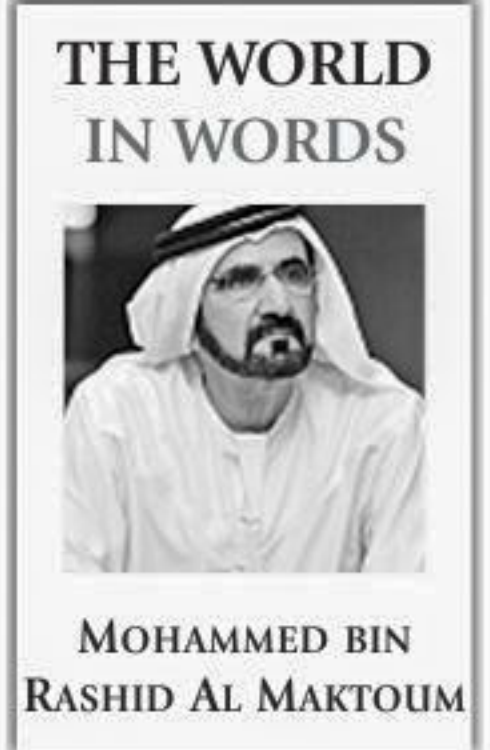
formative level. The primary schools are the nurseries of future education. If children do not have full grounding in literacy and numeracy in the formative years, they will not acquire these in higher levels. With weak fundamentals they get by later through learning by rote, or by selective reading only for exam purposes.

This leads to a bigger failure of our education system to turn out graduates who are fit for the job market with skills that are needed not only domestically but also internationally. It is not a wonder that they fail rudimentary admission tests because educationally not all of them can cope with the higher education they want to get. They just not have been prepared that way.

The debate and the blame game on failure of students at the university intake exam or attributing political motivation to exam results will not help the students in their aspirations for higher studies. What will help everyone is help for our teachers and educators to remove the deficiencies in our primary education and provide them with training and tools to upgrade their skills. This will help their students to acquire fundaments of literacy and numeracy that will guide them in higher studies.

Ziauddin Choudhury is a political commentator and analyst.

The intellectual battle against ISIS



MOHAMMED BIN RASHID AL MAKTOUM

world must unite behind a holistic drive to discredit the ideology that gives extremists their power, and to restore hope and dignity to those whom they would recruit.

ISIS certainly can -- and will -- be defeated militarily by the international coalition that is now assembling and which the UAE is actively supporting. But military containment is only a partial solution. Lasting peace requires three other ingredients: winning the battle of ideas; upgrading weak governance; and supporting grassroots human development.

Such a solution must begin with concerted international political will. Not a single politician in North America, Europe, Africa, or Asia can afford to ignore events in the Middle East. A globalised threat requires a globalised response. Everyone will feel the heat, because such flames know no borders; indeed, ISIS has recruited members of at least 80 nationalities.

ISIS is a barbaric and brutal organisation. It represents neither Islam nor humanity's most basic values. Nonetheless, it has emerged, spread, and resisted those who oppose it. What we are fighting is not just a terrorist organisation, but the embodiment of a malicious ideology that must be defeated intellectually.

I consider this ideology to be the greatest danger that the world will face in the next decade. Its seeds are growing in Europe, the United States, Asia, and elsewhere. With its twisted religious overtones, this pre-packaged franchise of hate is available for any terrorist group to adopt. It carries the power to mobilise thousands of desperate, vindictive, or angry young people and use them to strike at the foundations of civilisation.

The ideology fueling ISIS has much in common with that of al-Qaeda and its affiliates in Nigeria, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Somalia, Yemen, North Africa, and the Arabian Peninsula. What most worries me is that a decade ago, such an ideology was all that al-Qaeda needed to destabilise the world, even from a primitive base in the caves of Afghanistan. Today, under ISIS, adherents have access to technology, finance, a huge land base, and an international jihadist network. Far from being defeated, their ideology of rage and hate has become stricter, more pernicious, and more widespread.

The destruction of terrorist groups is not enough to bring lasting peace. We must also strike at the root to deprive their dangerous ideology of the power to rise again

among people left vulnerable by an environment of hopelessness and desperation. And, on this note, let us be positive.

The solution has three components. The first is to counter malignant ideas with enlightened thinking, open minds, and an attitude of tolerance and acceptance. This approach arises from our Islamic religion, which calls for peace, honours life, values dignity, promotes human development, and directs us to do good to others.

Only one thing can stop a suicidal youth who is ready to die for ISIS: a stronger ideology that guides him onto the right path and convinces him that God created us to improve our world, not to destroy it. We can look to our neighbours in Saudi Arabia for their great successes in de-radicalising many young people through counseling centres and programmes. In this battle of minds, it is thinkers and scientists of spiritual and intellectual stature among Muslims who are best placed to lead the charge.

The second component is support for governments' efforts to create stable institutions that can deliver real services to their people. It should be clear to everyone that the rapid growth of ISIS was fueled by the Syrian and Iraqi governments' failings: the former made war on its own people, and the latter promoted sectarian division. When governments fail to address instability, legitimate grievances, and persistent serious challenges, they create an ideal environment for hateful ideologies to incubate -- and for terrorist organisations to fill the vacuum of legitimacy.

The final component is to address urgently the black holes in human development that afflict many areas of the Middle East. This is not only an Arab responsibility, but also an international responsibility, because providing grassroots opportunity and a better quality of life for the people of this region is guaranteed to ameliorate our shared problems of instability and conflict. We have a critical need for long-term projects and initiatives to eliminate poverty, improve education and health, build infrastructure, and create economic opportunities. Sustainable development is the most sustainable answer to terrorism.

Our region is home to more than 200 million young people. We have the opportunity to inspire them with hope and to direct their energies toward improving their lives and the lives of those around them. If we fail, we will abandon them to emptiness, unemployment, and the malicious ideologies of terrorism.

Every day that we take a step toward delivering economic development, creating jobs, and raising standards of living, we undermine the ideologies of fear and hate that feed on hopelessness. We starve terrorist organisations of their reason to exist.

I am optimistic, because I know that the people of the Middle East possess a power of hope and a desire for stability and prosperity that are stronger and more enduring than opportunistic and destructive ideas. There is no power stronger than that of hope for a better life.

The writer is Vice President and Prime Minister of the United Arab Emirates and Ruler of Dubai.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Bangladesh-India relations

A few days ago, Bangladesh foreign minister AH Mahmood Ali visited New Delhi for the third meeting of the Bangladesh-India Joint Consultative Commission (JCC), where Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has called for concrete steps to promote Bangladesh-India trade and investment, as improved connectivity would promote economic cooperation and strengthen people-to-people ties.

We appreciate Indian PM's remarks. At the same time, we want to say that Bangladesh-India trade and investment shouldn't mean monopolistic business of Indian products in Bangladesh, as we see now. Better ties and connectivity come from a balanced relation, not from an unequal relationship.

Nurjahan Haq
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

Metaphors in communication

Metaphors are used to describe something by referring to it as an object that is different and suggesting that it has qualities similar to it. "Love is a rose, but you better not pick it," is a line from Neil Young's song sung in 1977 which is an example of metaphor. Metaphors have been used in poetry for centuries and its use in communication is also popular. In recent years, scientists, particularly, neuroscientists have been doing research on the dynamics of metaphors in language. Most of them have deduced a conclusion that metaphor is a fundamental constituent of language.

We can use metaphors in writing journalistic features to communicate things which are difficult to express in plain language.

Professor M Zahidul Haque
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Focus on quality education

We have known from news reports that of the total 40,565 examinees, 22,000 failed in English and only 2 students qualified to be enrolled in the Dhaka University's English department for the 2014-2015 session. This time, the university has made it compulsory for the applicants to obtain at least 15 marks in "Elective English", apart from the usual 20 marks in the general English, to be enrolled in the department.

The number of GPA-5 scorers at SSC and HSC levels has been increasing but the quality of education is not improving. We think the authorities should concentrate on providing quality education to the students rather than focusing on quantity.

Hasna Begum
Advocate, Supreme Court of Bangladesh

Comments on news report, "Cops capture 2 'ISIS recruits'," published on September 26, 2014

MH Khan

Only a dumb idiot can think of destroying lives. Our education system should teach our children how precious our life is. Nothing can be more important than living and preserving lives.

"Human rights under attack everywhere" (September 25, 2014)

Sayed Rahman

Honourable secretary general, it is not a new phenomenon to us. It has been occurring for a long time.

"Usefulness questionable" (September 25, 2014)

Genuine Musafeer

It could well be termed as 'an unusual event of extravagance'.

Rezaul Karim

It seems to be the start of the depleting of our foreign reserve that this regime has so far been taking so much credit for. These politicians do not work for the nation but for themselves. They will prove it again by gobbling up the reserve.

"Do not call it 'Eve Teasing'" (September 26, 2014)

Azad

Very true. The policymakers should consider the ideas put forward.

Guest

Excellent piece! I have often wondered why something so serious is simply called 'eve-teasing'. Men have defined experiences of women without adequate perspectives for thousands of years. The rise of feminism has helped break these 'stereotypical' male-voices and allowed generations of new 'gentlemen' like Dr Shabab join the movement to come up with new (and better) ideas!