

Centralising teachers' recruitment process

A move on the anvil?

THE education ministry is reportedly planning to recruit teachers for non-government secondary schools, madrasas and colleges centrally. To this end, a list of prospective teachers will be prepared according to merit through a test of candidates held by the National Teachers' Registration and Certification Authority (NTRCA).

Understandably, the government move, which aims to clip the power of the governing bodies of the local schools, colleges and madrasas in appointing teachers, is attributable to the widespread corruption and irregularities existing in the sector. But a question remains. Who is going to give the guarantee that the centrally controlled teachers' recruitment process will be above board? Furthermore, the authority is being burdened with the entire task of appointing teachers for some 19,000 secondary schools, 9,500 madrasas and 3,500 colleges of the country. It flies in the face of the policy of decentralising power to local authorities.

It cannot be overemphasised that the governing bodies of local secondary schools and colleges are neither controlled, nor run professionally. They turn into a hotbed of corruption and nepotism. Small wonder such evil practice has seriously affected the standard of education. The MPs, in many instances, influence the educational institutions under their constituencies by appointing teachers to suit their personal or political ends. Wouldn't it be wiser for the government to find ways to rid the local school management bodies of corrupt and incompetent elements and let the bodies operate under guidelines and criteria set by the education ministry?

Relaxing eligibility criteria of admission

Not a permanent solution

THE English Department at Dhaka University has been compelled to relax its requirements for admission after the shockingly poor performance of applicants hoping to pursue higher education in English. Although this move was necessary to fill the required number of seats and to give aspiring students a chance to study in the esteemed institution, we are concerned that the 'solution' is a band-aid one, addressing only the symptoms rather than the cause of the problem.

The admission tests and low success rate of students, not just in the English department but in general, have raised very crucial questions about the education system itself. We are concerned about the possibility of grade inflation -- of a skewed scale that conceals entrenched problems within the system.

We do not question the students' abilities, but that of a system that discourages critical thinking, creativity and engaged pedagogy. We are concerned about the quality of English teachers at the secondary and tertiary levels and the methods they are employing to inculcate interest in the language. Mechanical teaching methods, tedious exercises and uninspiring textbooks cannot produce students with a nuanced understanding of the language. It is high time we revisit what the students are really learning, and how.

Instead of blaming the DU departments for setting difficult questionnaires, the government would be well-advised to reconsider the implications of overlooking the shortcomings of our education system: of creating, in the end, an

Stay in your lane!

RIDWAN QUAIM

IT is the habit of drivers of vehicles to almost continuously honk while traveling in Dhaka or when stuck in traffic, and even in no-honking zones such as residential areas. Due to the excessive honking the roads in Dhaka are probably the noisiest in the world.

To improve the traffic flow, many of the major roads in Dhaka have been marked with lane markings to distinguish each lane. In addition, the lanes near the intersections in many of the roads have been demarcated with pavement markings to indicate to road users the lane they should use for their desired maneuver.

To maintain orderly traffic flow, drivers are supposed to drive within the lanes and inform other road users about their intention by turning on their indicators before changing lanes. At an intersection, vehicles are supposed to stay on the lane that is appropriate for their desired direction.

However, many vehicles in Dhaka are not driven within the lanes. They are often seen to be between two lanes, and sometimes two CNG-autorickshaws are seen going along side by side in one lane. Because of this, instead of having separate rows of vehicles traveling in an orderly fashion, vehicles are scattered all over the road, making the traffic flow chaotic.

Many drivers also do not use their indicator before a maneuver or turn and do not make their maneuver from the designated lane at an intersection. Vehicles are often seen to be abruptly changing lanes without using their indicator, forcing vehicles behind them to stop suddenly. Sometimes vehicles are even seen to be making a right turn from the left-most lane. This kind of driving behaviour disrupts traffic flow severely.

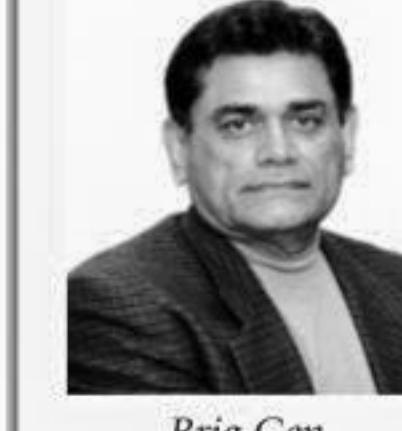
To ensure that other vehicles do not suddenly encroach on their paths and to warn other motorists against irresponsible and reckless behaviour drivers have to honk almost constantly.

Failure to drive within the lane, not using indicator before changing lanes or making a turn, and failure to make the desired move from the designated lane are considered as traffic offenses in many countries and offenders are penalised severely because these not only makes the traffic flow disorderly but also makes the road unsafe as they increase the chances of accidents.

To improve the traffic flow in the city, the traffic police must be stricter in penalising drivers for not driving within the lane, not using their indicator before a maneuver and turning from the wrong lane. This will also help reduce the traffic congestion, make the roads safer and also, most importantly, make the city quieter.

The writer is a transportation engineer working in Thailand.

STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING



Brig Gen SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN ndc, psc (Retd)

The Sunderbans -- "Sundar" no more

THE Sunderbans has been in the news from time to time for various reasons. Apart from its timber and tiger, both of which are depleting fast, there are the more than dozen 'Bahinis' who have their own turfs in that forest. Recently it was in the news again for the so-called encounter killing of 11+2 a day before Eid.

The Sunderbans has lured people of many kinds. Some were attracted by their pristine beauty, some by the awe inspired by the unknown and men's constant desire to discover the strange and the unfamiliar, while some were drawn in to it by sheer lust for the varied, vast and rich resources that the area held within it.

Our Sunderbans, the nearly 6,000 kilometer square of the world's largest tidal mangrove forest held similar magic. But it was never a safe place. Tourists dared but only to skirt the periphery; very few ventured inside for the threat was not only from the predator animals but predator men too.

The pride of the jungle and one of our icons, the Royal Bengal Tiger, is dwindling in size because the primary nature of the forest is being destroyed by gradual influx of humans inside the forest. And the vying for resources, particularly honey or liquid gold, has given rise to dozens of 'Bahinis' who become victim of each other's greed as well as the might of the law enforcing agencies.

While this was a large inhospitable tract infested with various bandit groups the government's writ ran but only with difficulty. Swatches of the Sunderbans became fiefdoms of various groups that clashed with the forest department officials continually. The forest guards were far too scanty in number to exercise the authority of the government on the entire area and more often than not came out second best in any confrontation with the armed gangs. The scenario changed with the induction of the Rapid Action Battalion, whose operations in the Sunderbans had a restraining effect on these groups, at least on their rent seeking activities. And in the process of combating the dacoits' firefight did take place resulting in the deaths of some of the gang members. Reportedly,

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since January 2017, 87 members of these virtual outlaw groups have been killed in firefight with the law enforcing agencies. Of the 26 killed in 2014 the recent Paikgacha deaths are perhaps the largest number killed in one single 'encounter.'

This time a group of 13 belonging to *Kashem Bahini* suffered death, and all but two, by all indications from the reports, may not have died in circumstances described by the police. This happened when the two largest religious festivals in the country were being celebrated. It came in the print media only after the papers appeared after the Eid holidays, when the authorities had had enough time to spin stories to give the killing a colour that is difficult to accept at face value. The TV reports were enough to make one form a fairly good idea of what might have happened in the 'encounter.' There are also the statements of as many as four local upazilla chairmen which contradict the police version of the circumstances of the deaths. These completely rubbish the deaths in encounter.

Admittedly, all those killed in the alleged 'gunfight' were hardened criminals. And they were actually apprehended by the locals while fleeing with a person they had just abducted. The locals, after delivering a round of mob justice on them, handed them over to the police. If they were killed in crossfire how is it that their bodies were badly mangled? And their condition at the time of being handed over to the police

The least the government should do is to hold a judicial enquiry into the incident to determine the real circumstances of the death and remove the questions in public mind. While the agencies have every right to self defence they can never be allowed to become the judge jury and executioner. Unfortunately, the practice of 'encounter killing' is not new. It was revived with 'Operation Clean Heart' and its ghost is still riding on us. There can be only one outcome of circumventing the process of law, which is indeed longwinded in our country, in this manner -- the law of the jungle in the country.

The writer is Editor, Op-Ed and Defence & Strategic Affairs, *The Daily Star*.

China's Silk Road revival

AWAKENING INDIA



SHASHI THAROOR

THE phrase "Silk Road" evokes a romantic image -- half history, half myth -- of tented camel caravans winding their way across the trackless deserts and mountains of Central Asia. But the Silk Road is not just part of a fabled past; it is an important feature of China's current foreign policy.

The historical Silk Road comprised an overland and a maritime route, both of which facilitated the transfer to Europe of South and East Asian goods and ideas, from Chinese tea to inventions like paper, gunpowder, and the compass, as well as cultural products like Buddhist scripture and Indian music. Likewise, the Silk Road -- primarily the overland route, which also passed through the Arab world to Europe -- gave China access to Indian astronomy, plants, and herbal medicines, while introducing it to the Buddhist and Islamic faiths.

Thanks to Chinese Admiral Zheng He, who steered his naval fleet across the Indian Ocean seven times in the early fifteenth century, the Chinese wok became the favourite cooking vessel of women in the southwestern Indian state of Kerala. Chinese fishing nets still dot the waters off Kochi.

In 1411, Zheng erected a stone tablet -- translated into Chinese, Persian, and Tamil -- near the Sri Lankan coastal town of Galle, with an inscription appealing to the Hindu gods to bless his efforts to build a peaceful world based on trade and commerce. Six hundred years later, Chinese President Xi Jinping is espousing a similar goal -- only he is appealing to political leaders throughout Europe and Asia to advance his cause.

In September of last year, in a speech at Kazakhstan's Nazarbayev University, Xi announced the so-called "Silk Road Economic Belt," a new foreign-policy initiative aimed at boosting international cooperation and joint development throughout Eurasia. To guide the effort, Xi identified five specific goals: strengthening economic collaboration, improving road connectivity, promoting trade and investment, facilitating currency conversion, and bolstering people-to-people exchanges.

The following month, the other shoe dropped. Xi, addressing Indonesia's Parliament, called for the re-establishment of the old sea networks to create a twenty-first century "maritime Silk Road" to foster international connectivity, scientific and environmental research, and fishery activities.

Chinese Premier Li Keqiang subsequently reiterated that goal at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit, and again at the East Asia Summit last year. Since then, the establishment of a modern overland and maritime Silk Road has become official Chinese policy, endorsed by the Communist Party and the National People's Congress.

Xi has emphasised that the goal of the Silk Road economic initiative is to revive ancient ties of friendship in the contemporary globalised world. But he undoubtedly has a domestic motive as well, rooted in the growing prosperity gap between eastern and western China.

The concentration of economic activity in the cities and special economic zones of the east has generated energy-supply and environmental constraints and bottlenecks that are hampering China's ability to achieve the sustain-

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able, inclusive growth that it needs to attain high-income status. The government hopes that the Silk Road initiative will make China's west and southwest regions the engines of the next phase of the country's development.

Nonetheless, the initiative's international dimension remains the most relevant -- and complex. Chinese diplomats have pointed to a constellation of mechanisms and platforms built or strengthened in recent years that could help maximise its impact. These include the Shanghai Cooperation Organization; the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Corridor; the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor; the Chinese-built Yuxinou Railway from Chongqing to Germany (and onward to north European ports); and the new and incipient energy corridors between China and Central Asia, as well as Myanmar.

Moreover, China has established the New Development Bank with its fellow BRICS members (Brazil, Russia, India, and South Africa) and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank -- institutions that will undoubtedly benefit from China's enormous investible surplus. Given China's prominent role in both, they could easily be used to provide financing for Silk Road-related programs.

But, though China may not struggle to finance its Silk Road ambitions, it is likely to face political resistance -- especially with regard to the maritime route. At a time when China's assertive stance in the South and East China Seas is provoking anxiety among its neighbours -- including Japan, Vietnam, the Philippines, and Singapore -- the Silk Road initiative has aroused significant geopolitical apprehension.

In fact, these fears have a strong historical basis. Zheng's expeditions involved the use of military force in present-day Indonesia, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, and India to install friendly rulers and control strategic chokepoints across the Indian Ocean. He intervened in the dynastic politics of Sri Lanka and Indonesia, abducting and executing local rulers. He even seized the relic of the tooth of Buddha, a symbol of Sri Lankan political sovereignty.

The countries along Zheng's route therefore recall his adventures not just as initiatives to promote trade and establish commercial links, but also as direct military intervention in their affairs, under the pretext of ushering in a harmonious world order under China's emperor. Reminding them of this painful past may not be entirely in China's interest.

This is not to say that the modern Silk Road would benefit only China. On the contrary, its overland and maritime routes could attract considerable investment to participating countries -- especially from China, as it seeks new avenues for deploying its vast reserves. But the modern Silk Road's establishment will also mark a step toward reinvigorating the ancient Chinese concept of tianxia, in which the Chinese emperor was considered the divinely appointed ruler of the entire known world.

Many Asians still remember Japanese efforts before and during World War II to create a "Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere" -- a self-sufficient bloc of countries, under Japan's leadership -- through conquest.

Might China be on a similar -- albeit less openly aggressive -- path?

The writer, a former UN under-secretary general and former Indian Minister of State for Human Resource Development and Minister of State for External Affairs, is currently an MP for the Indian National Congress and Chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs.

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LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

What about holding other Bodis to account?

There are a lot of people (especially politicians) like Abdur Rahman Bodi in our country who accumulate huge amounts of wealth illegally and hide that information from public view without mentioning it in their wealth statements submitted to the Election Commission or ACC. Hope sending Bodi to jail is not eyewash. Another pertinent question: when will the other 'Bodis' of the country, who are roaming around freely, be brought to book?

Md. Abdur Rashid
Dept. of Sociology
University of Dhaka

Save Kattali Beach's pristine beauty



ANURUP KANTI DAS

A beautiful picture of Kattali Beach in Chittagong city published in TDS dated 5 October caught my eyes. Your caption suggests exploration and development of the site as a tourist resort. For God's sake have a heart. You want them to cut down all the mangrove trees and build ugly huts there so that this pristine beauty is littered with garbage! Chittagong city has been destroyed already. Let us try to preserve some beautiful spots which have been spared the human onslaught. People who want to imbibe the spirit of nature should be able to go there on their own without the help of tourism industry.

Shahjahan Hafiz
Gulshan, Dhaka

Whither country's education?

Since the introduction of grading system, our governments have been fooling people with inflated results. Although the number of GPA 5 holders has increased over the years, we witnessed a drastic and catastrophic fall of overall standard of education. The horrifying results of DU admission tests bear testimony to this. In addition, leakage of questions is aggravating the situation. Despite all this, the minister concerned blamed the DU authority for this shameful result and advised it to amend the system of admission tests, which seems ridiculous and bears the ominous sign of further fall in the quality of education.

Sanat Singh Goswami
Gaibandha

Comments on news report, "Ebola measures look slack," published on October 13, 2014

Ayan Rahman

People coming from Liberia are not the only ones who could bring the epidemic with them. It's spreading. What if an infected American comes to Bangladesh? Screening should be done on everyone coming from another country.

"PM orders taking back mills, factories" (October 13, 2014)

Dr. Ahsan Habib

Sheikh Hasina is admitting now that there was a corrupt minister in her cabinet all along. It's tragic that she did not know about this when she routinely and steadfastly denied such allegations in the past.

"Removed from AL presidium" (October 13, 2014)

Ibrahim Zaman

Quite a fast and correct decision taken by the PM. People don't want lunatics in the cabinet.

"How to rob a bank in Bangladesh" (October 12, 2014)

Guest

Well, I agree with the writer without any doubt. Capital is "somehow" being drained out of the banking system which has resulted in the increase of interest rates for various loan schemes while the interest rates for various deposit schemes have been decreased to meet the cost of fund which includes idle cash. Thank you very much for bringing up this miserable state of the present banking system and its regulation through this pragmatic write-up.

Ratul

Thanks for such a wonderful presentation and informative write-up.