

Question paper leak again Credibility of public exams in jeopardy

PRIMARY terminal examinations, the first gateway for several lakhs of youngsters to make it to the secondary level have made a blemished start, to put it mildly. Successive question paper leakages have actually placed the credibility and quality of exams under a question mark.

We observe to our great surprise the same denial mode as had been experienced with other well-founded allegations of question papers having been out on Facebook or websites ahead of exams. While guardians complain of similarities they have detected between leaked questions and those distributed to students on test dates, the primary and mass education minister first denied and then added that he could not have ignored it. But he argued that neither the DCs nor the officials of primary education directorate or the ministry found anything suggesting leaks have occurred. He also added that versions from various places put the percentages of common questions at 30, 50 and 70 -- in that range. So on that basis, how could he have drawn a conclusion? He even suspects that some people may be out to spoil the credibility that the examinations were being held smoothly.

It is this attitude that keeps the government from making a serious probe into repeated incidence of question leaks and devise ways and means to combat the menace. Coupled with a change of mindset, a fool-proof vigil and unforgiving accountability structure needs to be put in place. The immediate imperative is to focus internally, ferret out and punish the guilty and then plug the holes.

Latif's surrender Law should run its course

LATIF Siddique's dramatic surrender to the law on Tuesday has ended all the furore created at home over some impolitic and reckless remarks that he made while abroad. It is noteworthy that despite his earlier acts of bravado, the former minister and presidium member of the ruling AL has finally seen reason to submit himself before law. Now it is up to the government to see that the law runs its own course and the matter brought to a closure.

One is constrained to note, however, that some mystery was allowed to shroud his arrival and eventual exit. Especially, the way he vanished into thin air after arrival at the Shahjalal Int'l airport from Kolkata hardly speaks well of how the issue was being handled. Thanks to the PM's direct order to the home minister, the police finally went into action.

What Latif has had to face for his irresponsible remarks should be a lesson for our politicians. We hope, to avoid future embarrassments, the government would make it mandatory for people holding public offices to follow some code of conduct, particularly when visiting a foreign country.

Let Latif face his comeuppance. But have not some of our political parties, including pro-Islamic ones, by raising hell over the issue betrayed an attempt to make a political capital out of it? This must stop as the law takes its own course.

Remembering Baba

SHAMA BIJOYA MILON

EACH year goes by and as the end of November rolls around, I think of Baba and his life. There is so much I want to say and so many questions I have that will forever remain unanswered. I spent this past summer working in Bangladesh and talking to my acquaintance, relative, or friend to glean new aspects of his life. After hearing everyone's stories of my Baba, I am truly humbled. Everyone from the custodian at Dhaka Medical College to a physician in Netrokona district hospital had a wonderful story or anecdote about him. However, the picture remains incomplete, and will always remain this way. This is perhaps the most difficult aspect of his death for me. Others will mourn him for the person he was, the service he provided, and for the friend they lost. Ma will grieve for her slain husband, the boy she knew since she was a young girl; *dadi* will lament for her eldest son, *phuppi* and *chacha* for their brother, and *boro ma* for her grandson, whom she helped raise and will never see again.

I will mourn for the memories I never had, for the father's day cards I never got to give him, for never being scolded by him, to never know the sound of his voice, or understand the depth in his eyes. The truth is, for me, and for the future generation of Bangladesh, Dr. Shamsul Alam Khan Milon is an enigma, a murder unresolved, and a political dream unfulfilled. Every year, I like to write something small to commemorate him, so that we, as a nation, may venerate his endeavours for social justice and democracy in Bangladesh. As a second-year student in medical school, I am constantly reminded of my father, his work as a physician, and the legacy he left behind. How can my generation live up to the efforts of our forefathers and realise their dreams?

In the midst of Bangladesh's constantly turbulent political climate, let's remember this: a man was murdered for threatening authoritarian rule; a man sacrificed his life and family to help his country; a man was brave enough to stand in the face of oppression and speak out for what was right. We also have to be courageous and work towards a better future for ourselves. No matter what your opinions on politics, Bangladesh, democracy, or even social justice, I urge you to take this day and reflect on what each one of us can sacrifice, big or small, to help the world and its people reach its full potential and be what Baba envisioned it would be one day, fair and free.

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MPs enjoy no or unlimited immunity from arrest?

SHAKHAWAT LITON

BY surrendering to the Dhanmondi police station on Tuesday, sacked minister Abdul Latif Siddique has saved the police, the state minister for home, and the government as well, from being embarrassed further. What the police and the government policymakers have done since his return to Dhaka on Sunday night has raised questions about their sincerity to enforce the law. Siddique, who flew into Dhaka from India, has been facing around two dozen arrest warrants issued by different courts in connection with cases filed in 18 districts against him for his derogatory remarks hurting religious sentiments of people. Non-action of the police on Sunday night at the airport drew criticism. Some religion-based organisations had threatened to enforce countrywide hartal for Thursday if Latif was not arrested by Wednesday.

On Monday noon, State Minister for Home Affairs Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal came up with a ridiculous explanation for not arresting Latif at the airport on Sunday night. By saying that the permission of the Speaker was required to arrest Latif as he was an MP and the parliament was in session, the state minister put the onus on the Speaker. Speaker Shirin Sharmin Chowdhury did not take much time to clear the legal position. She dismissed the state minister's interpretation of the law regarding arrest of an MP. Yet, Latif could not be arrested until he surrendered at the police station at around 1:30 pm on Tuesday. It was reported that Latif surrendered in line with the advice of the government high-ups. However, the drama brought up some crucial questions, like whether MPs can be arrested when the parliament is in session.

The privilege, known as immunity against arrest, MPs enjoy during sessions of the parliament was first introduced for British MPs around 700 years ago. At the beginning it was a convention, according to which an MP could be arrested for a certain period. The time frame began 40 days before the beginning of the parliament session and ended 40 days after the session was prorogued. The MPs, however, could not enjoy the privilege for many years. The convention got legal coverage in 1770. Since then, they have been enjoying the privilege for avoiding arrest in connection with civil cases only. It does not provide them any immunity against criminal charges.

In 1815, an exceptional incident took place in the House of Commons. A British MP who had escaped from jail took a seat beside the Speaker's chair in the chamber of the House of Commons. The Commons had yet to begin the business of the day. That MP was arrested again prior to the beginning of the sitting. The matter was sent to the privilege committee of the House of Commons to

examine whether the incident inside the chamber undermined the privilege of the parliament. The committee observed that the parliament's privilege was not undermined and thus there was no need to take action against the officer who had made the arrest. The rationale behind such immunity is significant. It helps MPs to discharge their roles in parliament uninterrupted.

MPs in India also enjoy immunity against arrest in connection with civil and revenue cases for a certain period of time, which begins 40 days before the Lok Sabha goes into session and ends 40 days after the session is prorogued. They, however, do not enjoy immunity or privilege against any criminal charge.

The interesting thing is that members of our Constituent Assembly had enjoyed such immunity only for a few months immediately after the country's independence. The Constituent Assembly Order 1972 had provided that a member of the assembly could not be arrested in connection with any civil or revenue related cases for a certain period. That time period began 14 days before the commencement of the session and continued for another 14 days after the session was prorogued. The Constituent Assembly was dissolved following the framing of the country's constitution and the Constituent Assembly Order 1972 ceased to have effect.

Currently, our MPs do not have any privilege or immunity against arrest. Our constitution enacted in 1972 empowers the parliament to make a law to determine the privilege of its members. But the parliament has yet to take such a move. Or it can be said none of the successive governments moved to make such a law to determine the privilege of the parliament and its members. Now, if a law enforcement agency needs to arrest an MP on any charge, they need to inform the Speaker about the arrest. The Speaker, according to the rules of procedure, informs the House, if it is in session, about it. Law enforcement agencies need permission of the Speaker if they want to arrest any MP within the premises of the parliament.

So, what the state minister said about requirement of permission of the Speaker to arrest Latif was wrong. Why, then, did the police fail to arrest Latif? Interestingly, law would have taken a different course had Latif been a member of an opposition party. In the past, none of the home ministers talked about the Speaker's permission to arrest any opposition MP. This shows that the law has two meanings and applications -- one for the ruling party MPs and another for the opposition MPs. MPs belong to ruling party enjoy unlimited immunity from prosecution for any wrongdoing while their rivals in the opposition camp have nothing. The double standard exposes the fragile state of the rule of law.

The writer is Senior Reporter, *The Daily Star*.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Throw the book at Latif

Being a Muslim and bearing a Muslim name, Latif Siddiqui was not expected to pass such derogatory remarks which hurt the feelings of all Muslims, not



only of Bangladesh but of the entire world. Action has been taken as per the law of the land which should be implemented without any doubt or excuses.

I strongly feel that the country's peace and harmony should not be thrown into a chaotic situation just for the wrongdoing of a single citizen. Let the law run in its own course.

Professor M Zahidul Haque
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It's a mockery of exam!

I was a student of an English medium school last year but I shifted to a Bangla medium school this year in class VII. While appearing in the JSC exam of this year, I found a state of serious disorder in the exam hall. All the students were talking and discussing possible answers of MCQ; some students kept open their answer scripts so that others could copy from those. And to my surprise, all this happened in front of the invigilator but she did not say a word against this. When I finished my exam and came out, a friend of mine whose seat was in another room told me that their invigilator told them most of the answers. Later I heard from my class teacher that it is common all over Bangladesh.

I would like to request all to stop such unethical practice. I think there is no use of taking such exams which actually ruins our future. Such activities will just raise the pass rate, but won't enhance the knowledge of the students.

Rukaiyah Binthe Javed
Bright School & College, Donia, Dhaka

Best wishes to Mashrafe

One of the most admirable names in Bangladesh cricket team is Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, also known as the Narail Express. His career was hampered by injuries several times and he has undergone a total of ten surgeries on his knees and ankles. He even missed the World Cup in 2011 due to injuries. Every time he was injured, people thought it might be the end of his career; that he might not come back again in the team. But every time he proved us wrong.

Mashrafe has been announced the captain of our team once again. He has not only made a comeback but also proved his worth to lead the team once again. Mashrafe will be leading Bangladesh Cricket Team in the upcoming matches against Zimbabwe and the hope of the whole nation will be on him. His performance as the team captain is very crucial for him because BCB is searching for the best person to lead the Bangladesh cricket team in the ICC World Cup 2015. Mashrafe has got the opportunity to prove that he can be the one to lead the team. Our best wishes to the new captain of the Bangladesh team.

Fahad Alam, Sharmin Jahan, Raisul Islam, Anuvob Kumar Behani
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Comments on news report, "Govt was aware," published on November 25, 2014

Redgreen

Without any blessings from the top, Latif Siddiqui would never dare to enter Bangladesh. There were many episodes connected with his arrival. It is beyond doubt that the law enforcing agencies are puppets in the hands of the ruling party.

Nds

Strange; if he is not allowed entry into the country, how can you take legal action against him? Besides, his citizenship has not been cancelled by the government, so how can he be disqualified to live in his homeland?

"Jaywalking has to be curbed" (Nov. 24, 2014)

Snr Citizen

Jaywalking is dangerous and absolutely unsafe! More planning and education are needed to reduce this practice.

"Book on 1971 genocide wins Cundill Prize" (Nov. 22, 2014)

A freedom fighter

A great recognition of the truth we have been telling the world for more than four decades. Thanks to Prof. Gary Bass.

Our persistent water crisis

A.S.M.G. KIBRIA

IN recent decades, Bangladesh has made remarkable progress in supplying safe water to its citizens, yet serious disparities in coverage persist across both rural and urban areas. Although the government has numerous water initiatives underway, it has never properly addressed the social vulnerabilities of women and children in rural villages that can be linked to water stress.

According to Unicef, 97% of Bangladeshis have access to tube well water. This has dramatically reduced the incidence of water-borne diseases such as diarrhea and cholera. But instead of developing modern water supply facilities to utilise surface water across the country, the focus of water management has shifted to heavy engineering development for flood control, river erosion control, and irrigation system installation. The relative inattention to household needs has had serious consequences, especially for Bangladesh's huge rural population.

Exacerbating the problem are the recent industrial boom, rapid urbanisation, extensive agrochemical use, and inadequate sewage systems. Each day about 2 million tons of untreated waste is dumped into rivers and their distributaries. Studies show that just one liter of waste is sufficient to pollute eight liters of fresh water.

Bangladesh gets 92% of its water from rivers originating mostly in India and China, with just 8% coming from local rainfall. The volume of water reaching Bangladesh is also under pressure from the enormous populations of India and China, with upstream construction heavily limiting the flow of water downstream into Bangladesh. This is not only constraining surface water availability, it is also significantly reducing the volume of groundwater in many parts of the country.

Water shortages are a problem shared by both rural and urban areas. Water supply in major cities is the responsibility of city authorities, but in rural areas that authority is missing. Some families install their own supply system but others depend on a common tube well. This haphazard management of water exposes the whole nation to serious health risks.

Demand for water in the capital Dhaka is 2.2 billion liters a day, while production is 1.9 billion liters a day. Chittagong, the second largest city, supplies 210 million liters each day against demand for 500 million liters. The water that is available is often reported to be dirty, odorous or contaminated. Tap water is not suitable for drinking, and public health authorities urge people to boil the water properly before using it. This in turn puts pressure on the country's already struggling natural gas supply. During a hot summer, the water shortage becomes unbearable for many.

Health authorities have meanwhile assured the public that tube well water is safe. But in the 1990s groundwater in Bangladesh was found to be toxic with

high levels of arsenic. An estimated 77 to 95 million people drink groundwater that contains arsenic levels well above the safe limit. This toxic element is not only causing disease, it even has implications for social lives. Because of the lesions and gangrene it causes, people are not welcomed at public gatherings, children cannot go to school, and young adults cannot marry. The health risks of arsenic are well documented but the social implications have yet to be addressed.

The problem is especially acute in the northern districts, which often suffer from severe drought. This is especially hard on women, as they are in charge of water for household use in Bangladesh. Rural women come under enormous pressure and water scarcity is often a cause of domestic violence.

Even in coastal areas where water is supposedly more available, women must often make several trips to fetch water from distant sources. Increased salinity has added a new vulnerability to already marginalised and disaster-prone coastal societies.

In the remote village of Bagerhat in Southern part of the country, water scarcity has had serious repercussions for marriage. Parents are not interested in matches that would send their children to villages where water is scarce. Moreover, the skins of young women are reported to have roughened because of the increased salinity of available water from nearby sources.

In an interview conducted by CARE, Padmabala Mondol (45) from Fultola in Shyamnagar Upazila said "No decent parent wants their daughter to marry a boy from such communities because their daughter has to travel great distances to get water, so marriages are taking place mostly among villagers."

Water problems stem mostly from an over-dependence on groundwater. Experts estimate that over the last decade groundwater has been declining at a rate of three meters per year. Rapid urbanisation and industrialisation are often regarded as achievements for Bangladesh. But this rapid, unplanned development has also created an acute electricity crisis across the country that has disrupted water production and supply. If the current rate of urbanisation continues and the government fails to take adequate steps, the future looks grim.

It is a daunting task to ensure sufficient, safe water for every single member of such a large population. With assistance from the World Bank, the Japan International Cooperation Agency, and myriad other NGOs, Bangladesh has made considerable progress in tackling the water crisis, and improving health and sanitation. However, isolated examples of success will only place more pressure on other sectors. Without a more socially inclusive water policy, this positive trajectory will not be sustainable.

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