

Medical and dental college admission issue

Allegations must be looked into

THE Health Directorate announced the results of this year's medical and dental college admission tests, the leaked question papers of which had allegedly started to circulate in different social networking sites on the night of the exam. This year over 2,000 students have scored more than 80, which is about the highest mark in last year's admission test! Everything points to a serious discrepancy in the examination procedure. Five persons, which also includes a University Grants Commission official, have been arrested.

It is befuddling as to why the Health Directorate had to announce the results so hastily, especially when a controversy raged over the test papers.

Meanwhile, the High Court has rejected a writ petition for cancellation of the admission tests. The attorney general, however, has told the court an investigation will be conducted on the allegations of question paper leak.

Of late, leakage of public exam question papers has become so rampant that it will not be long before students feel discouraged to study hard. This is a serious obstacle to any effort to bring about a meritocratic society, where one's caliber alone will decide one's future. This is especially true for the medical and dental college admission tests, which literally decide the fate of the nation's health. It is time that the government formed an inquiry committee to probe into the alleged question paper leak. Also, the masterminds behind such crimes must be handed down exemplary punishment.

A platform to represent marginalised groups

They need to feel they belong

AN important indicator of how robust a democracy can claim to be is how well marginalised communities are treated. One of the most daunting challenges they face is having the land they have lived in for generations being encroached upon or simply taken away by land grabbers. While NGOs have been working for the land, health and education rights of various marginalised communities, when it comes to policy and statistics, these groups are barely visible. At a recent seminar, an economist has suggested that a national platform be created with representatives from all marginalised communities and NGOs working with them. The platform would make the voice of each group stronger and offer collective support.

The seminar focused especially on tea plantation workers and other marginalised communities of Madhupur Forest and in the northern parts of the country. It was for instance, pointed out that around five lakh tea workers had been brought to the region that is now Bangladesh by the British and even now, almost all of them are deprived of ownership of their land. Age-old discriminatory practices have kept these people in a state of eternal powerlessness.

Members of such marginalised groups, have voiced in the seminar, the constant insecurity they face in the wake of harassment and intimidation by land grabbers. The government, therefore, must be proactive to ensure that these people are not threatened or made to feel they do not belong in this country. It is expected of a democratic nation to promote cultural diversity and treat all its citizens equally and without prejudice. We hope the proposed platform materialises and offers the much needed solace to these vulnerable communities.

VIBRANT BANGLADESH

A branding that fits

OPEN SKY



BIRU PAKSHA PAUL

WHENEVER I used to pass through John F Kennedy Airport, the massive advertisement of 'Incredible India' would draw my attention. Despite being a country with diverse cultural traditions, India was able to come up with a single but enormously powerful sentiment - 'incredible' - to describe the country and attract global investors and tourists. Can't we think of an equally forceful qualifier for Bangladesh which will truly

define what we are? 'Vibrant Bangladesh', for example, is an apt description to not only reflect our economic fundamentals but to also attract the global market in a vigorous way.

Branding is a serious exercise of marketing. It is an articulated positioning statement where gimmicks do not work. A robust branding can help Bangladesh in the same way a niche branding can promote a quality product. We are one of the most commendable growth generators in the world, but most of our achievements remain unsung. While a person should be modest while doing publicity, the rule for a country is just the opposite: don't be shy, only drive for greatness. In this world of fierce competition, no one else will sing for us. An aid-hungry nation of the 1970s has now turned into a food sufficient dynamic economy.

Bangladesh is one of the few developing nations which remarkably accelerated its growth every decade since the 70s in a consistent pattern. Bangladesh's average growth over the decade was 1.5 percent in the 70s, 3.5 percent in the 80s, 4.7 in the 90s, 5.6 in the 2000s and 6.3 percent from 2010 onward. Thus, our economic fundamentals herald the testimony of vibrancy. We, however, have failed to convey this unique message to the world in a cohesive way.

The branding of 'Beautiful Bangladesh' is more of an aesthetic impression than of a developmental image. It will attract more tourists, whereas a vibrant Bangladesh will imply promising investment avenues and higher potential returns prevailing in this emerging economy. Investors need this psychological impulse to choose a destination. 'Digital Bangladesh' is more of a message to reflect the government's endeavour to modernise our life with the latest technology than of a compelling call for investors. This is not a predominant reflection of Bangladesh where the level of information technology is still low. 'Digital Bangladesh' can nevertheless complement a vibrant economy.

When we say, 'Stable Bangladesh,' it essentially claims that macro-stability is much needed to attract conservative and moderate investors. Stability in developed economies has reached a level of high tranquillity often found in the graveyard. That notion does not necessarily signify an appropriate hotspot for investment. Instead, aggressive investors are happy to take risks as long as the prospects of high returns are evident. And that is where

the Bangladesh economy is, as the average rate of returns is 15 percent or higher.

Since we do not think much of our branding, Japan has kindly come forward to fill the vacuum. Their attempt is much welcome and appreciable. But the symbol of the Bengal tiger to portray Bangladesh has turned into a kind of cliché. While the number of tigers in *Sundarban* is gradually decreasing, we continue to use this symbol in diverse fields such as sports, business, tourism and what not.

Bangladesh has remained vibrant in their growth performance over the last 40 years, and it will remain so for

Authenticity is the main mantra of any successful country branding. Malaysia's branding of 'Truly Asia' is authentic in characterising Asia's cultural bonds and economic vigour, which is present in the country. Sri Lanka's branding as 'Wonder of Asia' is an attempt to amplify the image of the country, but 'wonder' is susceptible to various interpretations. Instead another branding, 'Refreshingly Sri Lanka' is appropriate in depicting the refreshing journey of the island economy, which underwent a ruinous civil war. 'Amazing Thailand' is good to attract tourists and to arouse curiosity among investors in a way the word 'incredible' suits India. Some



at least another 30 years, before we exhaust the benefit of the demographic dividend. The added prospects of connectivity have already invigorated the growth potential for a country that must be regarded as a vibrant economy.

Bangkok's Suvarnabhumi Airport is truly *suvarna*, meaning golden. Thailand brands it as an 'airport of smiles.' Unlike some other airports such as ours, where officers behave like grumpy policemen as if non-VIP passengers are offenders or refugees, *Suvarnabhumi* renders an ambience of beauty, smiles and duty with excellence. Thus branding must fit the object. Improper branding becomes an object of ridicule. In the early 1990s, the government branded Bangladesh as an emerging tiger. However, in comparison to the other four Asian tigers - Singapore, Hong Kong, South Korea and Taiwan - that seemed to be an exaggeration, more than anything else.

strategists attempted to brand Pakistan as a 'Sufi country.' Sufism radiates peace, humanity, and liberal-mindedness, traits that do not appropriately describe current Pakistan. Rather, another branding of Pakistan such as 'Naturally Beautiful' fits the country better but is not necessarily attractive to investors. Profit-makers are not tourists or poets.

A comparative advantage for Bangladesh - whose macro-stability is probably in the best condition in the region and whose growth acceleration over the decades is impressive - is quite evident. Hence, the word 'vibrant' is extraordinarily powerful and is perfectly suitable for Bangladesh. Let us go ahead with a 'Vibrant Bangladesh' to build the future of our country.

The writer is chief economist of Bangladesh Bank.

Passenger launch accidents

TIME TO WAKE UP

MIR TAREQUE ALI, MD, MASHIUR RAHAMAN and N. M. GOLAM ZAKARIA

WORLDWIDE Ferry Safety Association (WFSA), a non-profit organisation dealing with the improvement of ferry safety globally, has recently published a list of top five countries for ferry (passenger ship) accidents within the period of 2000 to 2014, in which Bangladesh is at the top position followed by Senegal, Tanzania, Indonesia and Philippines.

Moreover, according to the study by WFSA, 95 percent of the total ferry accidents occurred in the developing countries, claiming about 17,000 lives including those missing.

According to International Maritime Organisation (IMO), a specialised agency of the UN responsible for ensuring global maritime safety, the situation has definitely reached to a worrying state in Bangladesh. Even though many of these accidents involve non-conventional domestic water-crafts that fall outside the IMO regulations, IMO feels the urgency to enhance the safety of vessels carrying passengers on non-international voyages in certain parts of the world like Bangladesh. In order to address this particular problem concerning the massive death toll due to launch accidents in our inland waterways, IMO and Interferry, the trade association for WFSA, have already started a ferry safety project for developing countries to significantly cut down fatalities through technical cooperation, workshops, etc. IMO and Interferry have already jointly organised a training course for launch crews in Bangladesh and since 2013, WFSA is running a ferry design competition internationally for students.

Surprisingly, the topic for the first competition in 2013 was to design a safe and affordable passenger vessel for the Dhaka-Barisal route. Considering the seriousness of this issue, IMO is already prompted to develop, adopt and implement safety codes for non-conventional water-crafts like passenger launches for developing countries like Bangladesh.

Undoubtedly, this could be an excellent opportunity

for our country to improve the safety standards of our passenger vessels. Thus we should straightway seek technical assistance as well as other relevant support from international organisations like IMO and Interferry. However, depending only on outside assistance would not be enough to solve this long-lasting problem; alongside this, we should form robust working groups involving stakeholders from different levels, academicians and local experts.

At present, a huge number of water-crafts are plying inland waterways without any valid document of permission like registration certificates and fitness survey certificates. A long-term plan should be formulated to gradually bring these vessels under registration and survey, which would not only improve the overall safety of ferries and other water-crafts but would also enable the government to earn revenue from these vessels.

A number of investigation committee reports on launch accidents have identified sunken-deck type launches as most vulnerable, especially at rough water routes. For example, after the M. L. Pinak-6 tragedy, around 15 sunken-deck type launches were withdrawn from service, but only temporarily. If we are really concerned about safety, then these vulnerable small-size launches should be taken away from service permanently as soon as possible.

Since a large number of vessels ply river routes without any valid documents, there is no reason to believe that licenced drivers would be employed to operate them. Moreover, currently there are only three government training centres in Narayanganj, Barisal and Madaripur, to train inland deck and engine personnel, which is way below the current demand. Both public and private sectors should take initiatives to set up more training centres to train inland masters and drivers. Meanwhile, the training course organised by IMO and Interferry will develop the knowledge of launch crews, thereby fortifying safety. However, until the government implements such courses for launch crews all over the country, benefits that can be availed from this training will not have a far reaching or long term effect. At the

same time, the current licencing system for masters and crews should be upgraded, incorporating practical tests of vessel operation.

At present a ship surveyor spends only 15 to 20 minutes for the yearly fitness survey of an inland vessel. On the contrary, according to Inland Shipping Rule 2001, a ship surveyor should check 21 different items while taking a survey. A survey certificate, thus, doesn't guarantee that the survey of the vessel was properly performed. It is true that with only four surveyors, it is not possible to properly survey around 10,000 vessels in a year. It is therefore of vital importance to appoint more ship surveyors as well as ensure that the 20-minute survey system be upgraded with strict monitoring.

Every year, especially during Eid and Puja, it is common to find launches leaving the Sadarghat terminal, filled to the brim with thrice their registered passenger capacity limit. According to the law, however, the traffic inspector should check the number of passengers on a vessel, among other responsibilities, before giving it permission to leave the terminal. A viable solution could be to ensure that passengers buy their tickets in advance, before entering the terminal to board the launch.

If a passenger vessel with watertight decks and adequate number of partitions capsizes, it still can remain afloat, thus providing sufficient time to rescue passenger. Unfortunately, due to a lack of watertight decks, when faced with an accident, most passenger launches capsize and sink immediately. Moreover, most launches do not have enough life jackets or lifebuoys and these lifesavers are never checked for before the vessel leaves the terminal.

The support from IMO and Interferry would definitely help to prevent launch accidents in inland waterways, but we need proper, timely implementation and strict monitoring to ensure that such accidents do not take place.

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COMMENTS

"BSF kills one, injures four"

(September 19, 2015)

Shawkath Srijon

Even if they entered India illegally, why does the BSF have to shoot them? They could have been tried under the law of the land.

Anonymous

They didn't go into Indian territory, rather they were killed and injured inside a Bangladeshi village along the border in Joypurhat upazila.

Farhath

This has been going on for quite long. Bangladeshi citizens often get shot and killed by BSF but no action is taken against them ever. Our government remains silent on this serious issue. It is just sad.

"KL against hiring thru' pvt agencies"

(September 16, 2015)

Salahuddin Jamal

Private recruiting agencies have miserably failed in the past. G2G is the best option.

"A new Master Plan for Dhaka"

(September 16, 2015)

Abul Naser

Old or new, plans will have to be implemented.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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More peacekeepers in UN missions

Recently I have come across news reports which state that the United Nations is keen to take more Bangladeshi peacekeepers in UN missions. Lauding Bangladeshi peacekeepers' professionalism and contribution to UN missions, UN Under-Secretary General for Field Support Atul Khare said the UN was ready to appoint more Bangladeshis to commanding positions soon. It is, indeed, very good news for Bangladesh. We believe that the Bangladeshi peacekeepers will keep up their praiseworthy performance.
Momtaz Begum
On e-mail



'Dislike' button on Facebook?

Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg recently said that a 'dislike' button is going to be added to the popular social network. It may be necessary to use the new button sometimes, but I wonder if it will be misused by users spreading hate and hostility. In my opinion, instead of 'dislike', an 'empathy' button should be added to Facebook by which users could express their reactions to posts about death or loss.
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