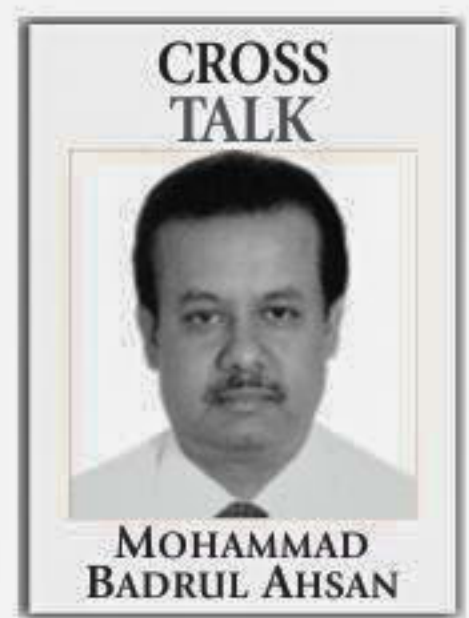


How shall we find our way back?



CROSS TALK
THE Union Parishad elections, being held across the country, make it relevant for us to talk about the taxon navigation amongst many other things. It's the ability to directly sense the

again when people's choice is going to win elections? Shall we ever have the laws again to punish the guilty and protect the innocent? When shall our politicians be honourable again? When shall people be the source of all power instead of being the appendage? Even rubber has its elasticity, which is the ability to return to its original shape after it has been stretched. Everything

scandals are stretched so that culprits can escape. Even the grades in schools are stretched to stretch the number of graduates. The greatest amount of stretching is being done to spoken words when anybody can say anything without taking responsibility. And as we condone this stress on the gift of gab, mouths after mouths are churning out doublespeak. By the time the roulette ball eventually loses its momentum and falls into one of the pockets of the wheel, we might forget the number on which we had placed the bet.

what has been scattered in this country? For argument's sake, let's assume this country suddenly wakes up and wants to fix things. Who is going to do it? Who will decide what is right or wrong, sinful or virtuous, wise or stupid, and useful or useless? Where shall we find the skills lost in guile, knowledge lost in ignorance, efficiency lost in manipulation, and decency lost in denial? Who is going to see that more left-hand drive flyovers won't be built in this right-hand drive country? Who is going to ensure that the post-mortem of a young girl raped and killed won't miss those obvious facts again?

A new education law in the offing

A good initiative but address the lacunae

A draft education law, conforming to the recommendation of the National Education Policy -2010, has been put up for public comments. We feel the law is timely and contains several important provisions, and the government should be lauded for it. The subjects fixed for the various classes are very relevant and so is the bringing of English medium schools under a strict regime. The law has reinforced the provision of the constitution which makes primary education a right of the children and has reclassified the stages of education into four.

The laudatory measures notwithstanding, there are serious lacunae therein that require rethinking like the method of fixing fees for the English medium schools and the provisions on private tuition and coaching centres. Certain areas need elaboration too, like the qualifying age for the pre-primary level. The government has to address several very distinct dimensions of the proposed law, namely, ensuring cent percent enrolment in free pre-primary, funding and equitable distribution of funds. Also there are several loopholes that lend the law to misuse and need to be plugged. An oversight mechanism shall have to be put in place to enforce the provisions.

Although laws ought to be backed by adequate punitive provisions it seems that this law, that deals with an innocuous subject as education, has a surfeit of penal provisions. Funding the scheme will pose a challenge given that shortage of funds has impeded, among other things, infrastructure development of schools and colleges. There are a large number of dilapidated schools waiting for repair. Children risk their lives to attend classes in buildings that have been declared dangerous but no repair work has taken place despite those being declared dangerous for several years. We feel that inbuilt in the law should be provision for attending to these matters in the shortest possible time.

Last but not the least is the sensitive issue of private teaching and coaching centres. Not all students have uniform capability to learn neither do all teachers have identical teaching capacity. While we do not want coaching to be imposed, which is done by some teachers currently, we feel some students do have need for special and extra attention, and should not be denied coaching. It is a good initiative, but requires some vital changes to be more effectual.

place where one wants to be, which is how cats return when dumped miles away from home. These ongoing elections add to the quandary, if this nation losing its way, is going to find it back!

When elections are voterless, streets are lawless, politicians are mindless, officials are careless and the rest of the country is clueless, the sign of drifting is evident. And if this drifting continues for some more years, shall we remember where we started? If we don't know how much we will remember, how shall we know how much we will have forgotten?

It's said that animals navigate with their memories. Rats and dogs follow the scent trail because they remember scents. Worms follow chemical trails, moving in the direction that increases the concentration of chemicals that attract them. When a goose is migrating north for the summer, one of its strategies is to sense the planet's magnetic north and go toward it.

How do we plan to navigate? How do we plan to get back to our original place? Shall we ever have those days

For argument's sake, let's assume this country suddenly wakes up and wants to fix things. Who is going to do it? Who will decide what is right or wrong, sinful or virtuous, wise or stupid, and useful or useless?

about us is being stretched. We're stretched in words and actions. We're stretched in our doubts, fears and convictions. Truths are stretched; so are lies. Election results are stretched so that unpopular candidates can win. Financial

Another fundamental skill that enables animals to find their way home from great distances is their ability to relate their locations to other places. For example, a pigeon can detect north using its magnetic sense, but that doesn't help if it needs to go east. For that, it has to add the additional knowledge of knowing the relationship between north and east. That's what we humans call the sense of direction.

Does anybody know which direction we are heading? If nobody knows the destination, who knows how far we have moved from the origin? If we speak to confuse and act to conceal, how do we tell whether or not we have passed the threshold?

Hence, the question isn't how much we have rolled out but how much we have to roll back. That we have let the genie come out of the bottle isn't half as challenging as putting the genie back in the bottle. Shall we ever succeed in moderating the excesses or gathering

How are the wanderers of a wasteland going to make it fertile again? What will enable them to erase the mischief that has seeped into the rocks of this nation? Will it be possible to rehabilitate those minds addicted to easy money and quick success? Can we reel in the kites soaring in the sky of insincerity and recklessness? When will minds imbibing fantasy get back to their senses?

It's hard to find an alternative leadership in this country because our leadership has left us with no alternative. Minds marinated in greed and opportunism, the fight for prestige and principle is entirely forgotten. If anybody is fighting for anything, it's not to make things better, but better to take things under his or her own sweet control.

The writer is editor of the weekly *First News* and an opinion writer for *The Daily Star*. Email: badrul151@yahoo.com

A new education law – Will it help?

MANZOOR AHMED

HOW important is it to have an overall law for the education system and what can it do to solve the many problems in ensuring the management and quality of the system?

Education Policy 2010 anticipated a comprehensive education law to serve as the legal basis to guide the work in the education system. A draft was prepared and put on the website for public comment in August 2013. Comments were made, pointing out inconsistencies in the draft and stressing that it did not meet certain expectations. A new draft was recently posted on April 3, 2016, on the Ministry of Education website, asking for comments by April 10 (www.moedu.gov.bd).

Many countries have constitutional provisions regarding the right to education and laws for implementing these rights. UNESCO produced the document "The Right to Education: Law and Policy Review Guidelines" in 2014, which asserts that "the right to quality education... cannot be achieved without strong national legal and policy frameworks that lay the foundation and conditions for the delivery and sustainability of good quality education."

Do the provisions in the 67-clause draft law lay the foundation for fulfilling the right to education and delivery of quality services for all children?

The law provides for compulsory education to include two years of pre-primary education and eight years of primary education. A managing committee is required for every institution. A person can head only one managing committee, prohibiting MPs and other influential people from heading multiple school committees. All institutions are required to be registered with the government in order to operate as an educational institution.

A core curricular content is made mandatory for all types of schools at the primary and secondary level. English medium private schools preparing students for external examinations will have to teach Bangla and courses on Bangladesh studies.

Teacher selection bodies will select eligible teachers, and schools will have to appoint teachers from the list of those deemed suitable. Second chance alternative programmes will be offered to students who drop out of schools or miss their attendance. A permanent education commission will be set up to advise the government on education related concerns.

Notebooks and guidebooks, as well as private coaching and tutoring, are to be banned under the threat of jail terms and fines. Can these prohibitions be enforced? The answer lies in ensuring that dependence on guide books and private tutoring are rendered unnecessary by changing the nature of public exams and by improving the style of instruction in schools.

The Act itself can only mention the broad provisions. Many of the provisions are qualified by the phrase "as determined by rules and regulations to be specified by government authorities." We are all way too familiar with many laws in the book which are not implemented and do not make a difference in people's life.

The devil is indeed in the details. Will the provisions of the law be backed up by the capacity and motivation of the people responsible for carrying out these provisions and supported by strong political commitment and accountability? In this regard, the

Permanent Commission can play a role, if it is set up in the right way, with the right people, and equipped with the necessary authority, personnel and resources. The Commission can advise on the rules and procedures to be framed and may have a role in assessing their application.

Are there elements missing in the law which are important for achieving the objectives of the Education Policy 2010 and goals and aspirations of the nation regarding education?

The Act has no mention of adequacy and efficiency of resources and budgets for education or criteria and principles for education resource mobilisation and allocation. A rights and equity-based education system, for example, requires that public education resources are allocated equitably – by applying certain criteria – among upazilas, proportional to student population in

education under a Ministry of Tertiary Education.

There could be pre-service preparation for future teachers by introducing education as a discipline in the degree programme, and establishing a national teaching service corps, to raise the status of school teaching and attract talented people to the profession.

A code of conduct for students (as well as for teachers) could stem the tide of indiscipline, violence and criminal involvement of student organisations linked with political parties. The nurturing of a democratic culture and behaviour through elected student unions in institutions – a hallowed tradition that disappeared in recent decades – could be revived by the Act.

The Act is liable to be in conflict with the spirit and provision of the public and private universities Acts – compromising self-regulation of universities. Although

Cheat-fest in HSC exam

Fox guarding the henhouse

CHEATING allegations in public exams have always dogged students in this country but the scene at Adakhola High School of Jhalakathi during the HSC and equivalent exams, as exposed in a picture published in this newspaper a couple of days ago, defies all imagination with teachers aiding the unethical practice and local officials turning a blind eye to it.

Some students claimed they paid off the teachers to buy this "privilege". And the teachers—the builders of the nation—returned the "favour" by allowing examinees to copy from cheating sheets. When that proved inadequate, they wrote the answers on the blackboards.

The bizarre incident gives a glimpse of not only the falling education system of the country but also the level of moral degradation. If the pupils were taught properly, they wouldn't need to resort to unfair means in the first place. What kind of citizens are we producing here?

Without an understanding of right and wrong, what will they have to offer to society and nation? What do we say to the other students who prepare hard all year long?

Teachers, many experts believe, play a greater role than parents in shaping the moral fibre of students. The teachers and the local officials, partners in this crime, should be seriously dealt with.



COMMENTS

"What awaits Tonu? Questions arise after so many days" (April 5, 2016)

Yasmin Parvin Khan
Public memory is short-lived. They are just waiting for people to forget Tonu's case just like the other incidents.

"Bangladesh may enter list of risky nations again" (April 4, 2016)

F Sanji Sultan
The absence of rule of law in Bangladesh is the main reason behind this.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

Protect Gangamati reserve forest

Recently, we have come across a report which states that trees in Gangamati reserve forest are being cut down and sold in the market. Local goons in connivance with some forest officials are doing this. These half-a-century old trees were planted to protect the coastal region from natural disasters. We request the government to protect this forest from the greedy clutches of the plunderers.



PHOTO: SOHRAB HOSSAIN

Power at the cost of people's lives?

We are horrified by the action of the police who opened fire on people in Gondamara union of Chittagong's Banskhali on April 4, in which four people were killed and many more injured. Thousands of people were protesting against the government's move to set up a coal-based power plant in the area which will be a threat to their life and livelihood and result in an environmental disaster. Government's thirst for power

production may turn out to be an Achilles heel because people are not happy with the proposed Rooppur nuclear power plant and the two coal-based power plants at Rampal which might destroy the Sundarbans.

So for the sake of the country and the people, power plants should be set up taking into considerations the overall well-being of the people.



Nur Jahan Chittagong

The writer is Professor Emeritus at BRAC University.