

Commendable SSC exam results

Congrats to the high achievers

WE are happy to see that the results of this year's secondary school certificate (SSC) exams have surpassed that of last year's, with a pass rate of 88.7 percent. As many as 96,769 students received GPA-5 which, by all means, is a significant achievement. What set this year's results apart was students' smashing success in mathematics – a subject in which the previous class had fared poorly. We are heartened to note that the education ministry and schools have put special efforts towards ensuring that students shed the practice of learning their lessons by rote instead of internalising them. The outstanding results are a testament to what our students can achieve if only we put more emphasis towards enhancing the quality of education and exploring creative means of imparting knowledge.

It is also inspiring that as many as 99 percent of students from Underprivileged Children's Educational Programmes (Ucep) have achieved GPA-5, which goes to show that, given the opportunity and encouragement, children from marginalised section can break all barriers.

It is, however, disheartening that the poor performers were from 875 schools mostly located in the rural areas. Less than 50 percent students from rural schools passed the SSC and equivalent examinations for the third consecutive year, while the pass rate of madrasa students, who come from relatively poorer backgrounds, have also declined. Despite the poor performance of rural students in the past, we wonder what the ministry is doing to increase the number of skilled teachers, libraries, labs and overall academic environment in these schools. We must take cognizance of this urban-rural divide, and ensure equal quality education to all students so that no one is left behind in our pursuit of academic excellence.

Lack of infrastructure impeding growth

Policy initiatives needed urgently

THE true potential of the economy is not being realised because the infrastructure of the country remains inadequate in terms of skilled manpower, investment-friendly climate, lack of energy and power and issues related to making available more industrial land. Although relative political stability has been achieved, the lack of political harmony amongst the major political parties continues to cast a shadow over attracting requisite foreign direct investment (FDI) to the country. These and other matters came to light in the quarterly economic review carried out by the Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI).

The economy is being touted to grow at more than 7.0 percent, for which the investment-GDP ratio has to reach 30 percent; though FDI crossed US\$1.4 billion in the first eight months of the current fiscal year, we find that foreign investors are hesitant to commit more resources due to many bottlenecks in the country's infrastructure.

Lack of coordination of different government bodies and the Board of Investment creates more administrative hurdles for foreign investors. Without policy measures to simplify procedures to acquire land for industrial use and access other amenities such as reliable power, greater investments, whether foreign or domestic, will continue to stutter. The greatest concern remains with the sustainable and progressive development of the energy sector. Although power generation has increased, so has the demand for power and the demand supply mismatch has not truly been addressed. Prudent measures are required to address these problems in the near and midterm for the economy to achieve full potential.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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State to ensure the equal rights of minorities

People around the world sometimes think in a bizarre way; they think that the country belongs to only the majority (be it based on race, religion, ethnicity or nationality); the minorities are, thus, treated as second or third class citizens. Due to political pressures from the majority, laws are skewed to only protect their interest. Sometimes it immunises the majority from being prosecuted, even if they attack and infringe the rights of the minority communities. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the state to provide all its citizens with a system that ensures equality for all.

Dhananjay Roy
New York, USA

COMMENTS

“END of NIZAMI” (May 11, 2016)

Amaryllis Aster

He should have been tried when he was young. And those who are against his hanging should know what Nizami had done to the people of Bangladesh. It was a planned crime against humanity.

Sharthok Barua

Nizami is one of those culprits who wanted to destroy our country. He and his accomplices had been polluting the country so far. Now we can all breathe in free and fresh air.

Does it matter who's the next US president?

CROSS TALK



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

suspense lingers in the Democratic Party, where the dead heat still persists between Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders after the latter cut into the former's lead last week. Now that the scene for the US presidential race looks less cluttered, the ultimate question for the world to ask is whether it matters if any of these candidates is the next US president.

It obviously matters for Americans. A great deal of their future hinges on who goes to the Oval Office in January. But how much will the world change if any of these three US politicians wins the most powerful job in the most powerful country? How much will it influence the future of the rest of mankind, threatened by escalating political violence, terrorism, climate change, energy crisis, water shortage and economic slowdown?

Broadly speaking, each of these candidates is different. Hillary Clinton represents the status quo, and Bernie Sanders represents the progressive left. Donald Trump is an oddball, who might yank his country back to the Ice Age with his “America first” platform. He hates Muslims, immigrants, India and China, admires Russian president Vladimir Putin and approves torturing, leaving little room for political tolerance and free market manoeuvring. He threatens to pull out of NATO, and remove the US nuclear umbrella over Japan and South Korea.

If Hillary is elected, it might mean more of the same. She will probably run her government on cruise control, hesitant to change too much in terms of speed and direction. She might continue to distance the United States from its European and Persian Gulf allies, ridiculed as “free riders” by her predecessor Barack Obama, and forge

closer ties with Iran. But her election will boost the morale of women around the world by dint of being the most powerful person on the planet from their side of the gender divide.

Bernie, if elected, might give the rerun of the Jimmy Carter bonhomie and remain committed to improving the lot of the working class Americans. He is expected to be less hawkish in his foreign policy - more a pacifist than a warmonger. He might push egalitarianism and humanitarianism,

underlying implications of the US strategy will see a marked shift. The war on terror, the desire to rule the world and control its resources, pursuit of capitalism, and militarist ambition will remain the pillars of its engagement with other countries. The stage that once shifted from Europe to the Far East to the Middle East will now shift to the Asia-Pacific region. While the playground will change, it may still be the same old game.

So, whoever is elected the next US president will bring his or her style,

Doctrine to prevent the colonisation of the American continents by the European powers. Some of the doctrines had more profound and wider impact on the world than others. For example, the Truman doctrine committed US support for “free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures.” The Carter doctrine was restricted to the protection of the Persian Gulf.

Over the years, the US presidency and prestige have diminished, reaching its



ILLUSTRATION: DONKEYHOTIEY

while failing to tame the rowdies and the renegades swarming on the earth.

Donald, on the other hand, has the penchant for chaos that might radically upset the world order. Then again, the President Donald might be more sober than the candidate Donald. But much of the world, like many Americans, is uncomfortable with the idea of him running the White House. His unbridled tongue and uncontrolled temper evoke the memories of Russia's “Ivan the Terrible” in American politics.

The overriding question is whether the

experience and idiosyncrasies to the job. But how much will the job change? The United States will still remain the hegemonic pulpit interested in its self-interests. The ascent of Donald Trump has reflected a strain of American public opinion that favours conservative and harsh approach towards strategic alliances and international trade partners forging a new world order.

Every American president has evolved some kind of a doctrine to influence the world. The USA entered the world stage with James Monroe's namesake Monroe

nadir when George Bush lied to invade Iraq. The next US president will be caught between crisis of confidence abroad and clamour for conservatism at home. She or he might find it challenging to double-hat as the leader of the free world.

There's a mood change in America. There's a mood change in the world. It will be interesting to see who cuts to the chase first: the leader finds a new world or the world finds a new leader.

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A visit to Srinagar

BETWEEN THE LINES



KULDIP NAYAR

KASHMIR is normal in the sense that there are no stone-throwing incidents there. Militancy, too, is on its last leg. Yet, the valley is seething with discontent. You can taste it once you land there. It is difficult to ascribe a single reason.

Many factors are responsible for it. The most important one is the general feeling that India is all over, while Kashmir had given its control only over three subjects: Defence, Foreign Affairs and Communications.

The complaint is justified because it is for a unit to surrender as much sovereignty as it likes. The federation cannot usurp more subjects on its own. But New Delhi has precisely done that. This is what came in the way of Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and Shiekh Abdullah, who were close friends. The Sheikh spent 12 years in confinement. Nehru realised his mistake and had the Sheikh stay at the Prime Minister's house to make amends.

A similar problem plagues relations between New Delhi and Srinagar today. How does a chief minister stay in the good books of the centre, and give the valley a feeling of independent identity? This is a constant concern for political parties of the state.

Those who consider Kashmir as unalienable part of India want to undo Article 370, which gives a special status to Kashmir, and are betraying the Constitution on one hand and the confidence of Kashmiris on the other. Unfortunately, the ruling Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) has a different point of view, although Prime Minister Narendra Modi has not done anything to whittle down Kashmir's autonomy. But fear continues to pervade in the valley.

This is the main reason why accession to India has come to be questioned seriously. Those who seldom received any response to their slogan of independent Kashmir in the past, have now caught the attention of many. And, not surprisingly, their number is increasing everyday.

New Delhi has to appreciate the fact that the Kashmiris' desire to distance themselves from India may not be considered in any meaningful transfer of power from New Delhi to Srinagar. Yet, the impression that the Kashmiris rule themselves has to be sustained. The National Conference waged a long war to get rid of Maharaja Hari Singh and had an icon like Sheikh Abdullah provide a secular and democratic rule to the state. But the party suffered defeat in the assembly polls because it was seen as too close to New Delhi.

The People's Democratic Party (PDP) won because its founder, Mufti Mohammad Sayyed, kept his distance from New Delhi, without alienating it. The Kashmiris voted for him because he gave them a feeling of defiance. In contrast, Omar Farooq Abdullah

had to pay the price of National Conference's image of being pro-Delhi. Kashmir's links with India is too close to challenge it beyond a point. Still the opposition, however small, gives the Kashmiris a vicarious satisfaction of defying New Delhi.

Lord Cyril Radcliffe did not attach any importance to Kashmir. He was a judge in London who drew the line between India and Pakistan to establish two separate countries. He told me many years later during an interview that he never imagined that Kashmir would assume as much importance as it has in the subsequent years.

I recalled an instance when I was in Srinagar a couple of weeks ago to preside over the first anniversary of an Urdu magazine. Urdu has been unceremoniously ousted from all the states, including Punjab where it was the main language until some years ago. In

resistance to the militants from within the valley should be understandable because it is a part of alienation.

It is unfortunate that New Delhi did not give Kashmir the package which it had announced after the devastating flood there. There was no criticism of not honouring the promise by the media. No Indian leader pointed out to New Delhi that it has reneged from the promise. All these are interpreted in Kashmir as a deliberate sign of a cursory attitude.

I still believe that the 1953 agreement which gave India the control of defence, foreign affairs and communications can improve part of the situation in the state. The Kashmiri youth, who are angry over the state's status as well as the situation, can be won over with assurance that the entire Indian market is available to them for business or service.



PHOTO: AFP

Kashmiris must feel that their identity is not under attack.

fact, the language lost its importance in India soon after Pakistan made it its national language.

Kashmir feels strongly about New Delhi's step-motherly treatment meted out to the language. And it is generally believed that it is languishing in neglect because Urdu is considered the language of Muslims. If New Delhi were to own and encourage Urdu, Kashmiris would have at least one less reason to feel aggrieved.

People there are generally poor, like the rest of India, and they want jobs which they realise will come only through development, including tourism. But they themselves are not picking up guns or other weapons to drive out militants. One, they are afraid of them and, two, there is a feeling that the militants are trying to give them a sense of identity. Therefore, the criticism that there is no

But this alone may not do. New Delhi will have to withdraw all the Acts relating to the fields other than defence, foreign affairs and communications. The Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, which was promulgated some 25 years ago to meet the extraordinary situation in the state, is still in operation. Were the government to withdraw the Act, it would placate Kashmiris on the one hand, and make the security forces more responsible on the other.

Normalcy is also a state of mind. Kashmiris must feel that their identity is not under attack, and that New Delhi realises the importance of their desire. The restoration of the 1953 Agreement which gives New Delhi the control of only three subjects could retrieve the situation which, if not attended to, may only deteriorate.

The writer is an eminent Indian columnist.

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