

Level of primary education notched up

Ensuring quality is the key

WE will address this from two different angles. Firstly, as a policy, enhancing the level of primary education to class VIII from class V is a very timely and well-thought-out move for which the government should be commended. It takes into consideration the socio-economic reality of the country since the 5-year basic education did really nothing to help a person acquire the minimum work skill which the new system of 8-year primary education will, hopefully, help do.

However, we would like to believe that the government is well aware of the challenges that it will face in implementing the new policy. It should tackle these on an immediate, short and long term basis addressing the lacunae in three important areas that affect the quality of primary education, namely infrastructure, trained teachers and financing. The budgetary allocation should receive more than the current 1.8 percent of the GDP to allow the plan to be implemented quickly and efficiently.

Secondly, another equally important issue is the quality of the current system that is hamstrung by certain inadequacies, in spite of the efforts of the government. Needless to say, these deficiencies affect the output and defeat the aim of primary education. And those are related to the quality and training of teachers, not to speak of the infrastructure deficiencies. While moving forward adds dynamism to a system, as the new policy will certainly do, moving forward without removing the current deficits and consolidating the existing system will inevitably result in the carryover of the existing lacunae. That will detract from the main purpose of the new policy.

Humiliated headmaster reinstated

A just and timely move

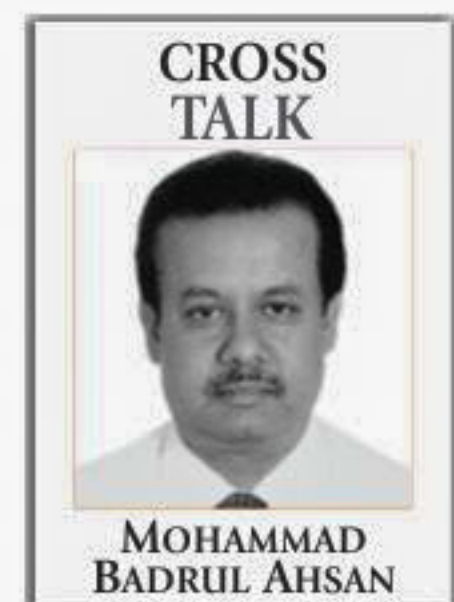
A primary probe report found untrue the allegation against the headmaster that he insulted religion, for which he was publicly humiliated triggering public outrage and a firestorm of protest on the social media. We commend the education minister for reinstating the headmaster and scrapping the governing body of the school.

Now the focus should be on two things. Firstly, an exemplary action should be taken against the defunct governing body members for suspending the teacher on false allegations and pandering to the wishes of the MP.

Secondly, action should be taken against the seemingly all-powerful MP who first abused his power to disgrace the teacher and is now maliciously trying to drum up support from religious groups to cover up his despicable act. If dehumanising a teacher is an abhorrent act, the lawmaker has indulged in an equally reprehensible act by communalising the issue. He has failed to realise the criminality of his behaviour and is arrogantly standing by his action. We condemn it. He has no authority to punish anyone on any charge, let alone a fake one.

Attempts by a sitting MP to exploit the religious sentiment of the public to alienate a teacher after robbing him of his dignity cannot be overlooked. It is a dangerous trend with very serious consequences and the government should do everything to curb it. At the same time the government should take this as an opportunity to prove that it is on the side of those who are powerless to protect themselves from the powerful and oppressive elements of society.

A TEACHER HAS BEEN TAUGHT HIS LESSON!



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

GREEK historian Herodotus, living in the fifth century, couldn't have known in advance that a headmaster was going to be humiliated in Narayanganj on the second Friday of

May 2016. But when he said that men trusted their ears more than their eyes, it set the standard of mob justice for all time to come. Those who've watched the disgusting video of that outrageous incident couldn't believe their eyes while ears burned with shame. The headmaster was doing earholding sit-ups while an all-daddy lawmaker wagged his finger, keeping count. When the exhausted and embarrassed victim fell on the floor after the third time, he was pulled up to stand on his feet. Then like a mechanical toy, the poor man was made to raise his folded hands to his forehead asking for forgiveness before a hysterical crowd.

Most people who had gathered at the scene had trusted ears more than eyes. Most of them had come to witness the punishment for a crime they had not witnessed. Mob justice is always swayed not by proof but by provocation.

The foreign media touted it as yet another instance of minority persecution. The teacher being a Hindu man has largely contributed to that apprehension, particularly when religious sentiments are being deployed to do dirty work for devious minds. What happened in Narayanganj was a low-down showdown, when powerful people exploited holy sentiments to settle an unholy score. The family of the student, who was disciplined by that teacher, may have pulled the strings to get even with him. The influential school committee members also saw an opportunity to get rid of him.

The teacher was allegedly roughed up by the unruly mob before the circus that followed. As far as this victim is concerned, he was already humiliated before the humiliation was recorded on video. The rest of us in this country have been humiliated afterwards. We have

been humiliated when the authorities sat on their hands, despite so many outcries across the country, when nothing happened after a number of ministers condemned the act. The final humiliation came for everyone in the final blow of cruelty after the school committee, instead of being repentant and apologetic, went ahead to sack the

none of these has happened until now, he is free to draw his own conclusion. I recommend he should consider this as an option. He should think as if wild animals have badly mauled him in a dangerous jungle.

In shame and despair, human chains around the country had people holding their own ears. It was symbolic, of course,

honour if doing a job well should cost them both?

This isn't to rule out the possibility that the headmaster in Narayanganj could have said or done anything wrong. But the public humiliation of a teacher has misled the moral compass, because more than a man was harassed on that day. An entire institution was stripped of its



Influriated by the incident of public humiliation of a school teacher in Narayanganj, netizens have stirred social media in protest.

headmaster. I would like to plead with this teacher to take comfort in the fact that while he bore the physical brunt of the humiliation, the sensible people of this country have felt the shame. And I ask him not to think he was targeted for his professional or religious denomination. We all live in a country, where the powerful have sadly and perversely taken the powerless for granted. I can assure him that in any civilised country, the lawmaker would have been arrested, the Parliament would have condemned their rowdy colleague, and the state would have rushed to the protection of the victim and his job. Since

a gesture to express solidarity with the victim and indignation for his embarrassment. One of the limitations of human condition is that it's confined to its own limitations. After initial reactions, this entire episode is either going to taper off or will be forgotten soon.

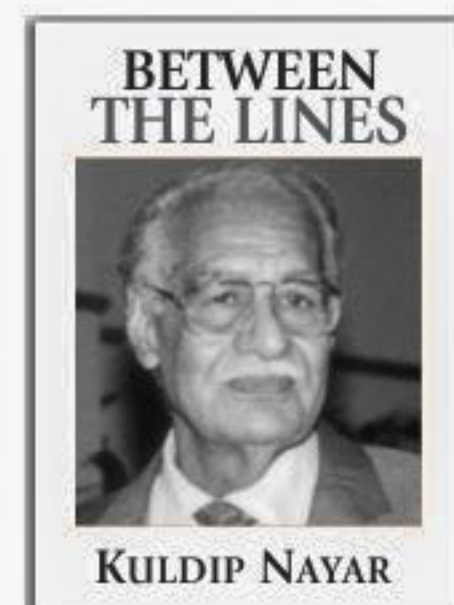
What will persist is the horror that, in future, will haunt every teacher in every school of this country. Teachers will think twice before taking a student to task, or grading papers, or even assigning homework. They will feel nervous to lance with the school committees, lest their intentions will be taken out of context and brutalised. After all, why should anybody risk their safety and

honour, its glory mocked as if neighbourhood kids taunted a raving madman.

Alexander the Great said he owed his living to his father and his life to his teacher. We grew up ingesting that same value, respecting teachers no less than parents because we knew and still know it for a fact that they've largely made us who we're. The lawmaker in Narayanganj must be holding repressed anger against his teachers. The sit-ups could be a Freudian slip to do unto them what they may have done unto him!

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The receding of the Congress tide



KULDIP NAYYAR

IHAVE no tears to shed over the reversal of the Congress in most of the five assembly elections—Assam, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal and Puducherry. The party must be feeling completely shocked, and should have been searching for reasons. But it has not yet come out from the illusion that its main strength is the dynasty.

So obsessed is it with this idea that the posters the party had put up for the polls carried the picture of Robert Vadra, Congress president Sonia Gandhi's son-in-law, who has been found tangled in land deals going back to the time when the Congress ruled Haryana.

The aspect which disturbs me the most is the success of the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP). It is gaining ground. Indeed, in all the five elections where it did not win the majority, the BJP has increased its vote share. This means that its credibility is increasing, not decreasing.

This should give alarming signals because it conveys that Hindutva, the death knell for secularism, is gaining strength. Had the BJP been on its own it would have sooner or later fallen into the pattern other political parties follow. But the BJP is supervised by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), which wants to convert the pluralistic India into a Hindu rashtra.

Despite this trait, which goes against the grain of secularism, the BJP is marching ahead. It is not that Indians, tolerant by nature, are losing their basic quality. It is because people are sick of corruption in every sphere of government activity, and they rarely find any scams or scandals tumbling out of the BJP.

Manmohan Singh was the best face the Congress had. Yet, scandals like the Commonwealth Games and coal block scams took place during his regime. In fact, it looks like he gave the best cover the party could have to indulge in rampant corruption. There is now enough evidence in the public domain to prove that Sonia Gandhi on the "advice" of her political secretary, Ahmed Patel, collected as much money as she could to oil the party machinery and the elections which the party fought.

True, Congress is becoming relevant because of BJP's parochialism. But the party's vice-president Rahul Gandhi does not have the stature which Prime Minister Narendra Modi enjoys. Therefore, if people were to be given a choice in the next Lok Sabha election between Modi and Rahul, the current PM may win hands down.

There is yet three years' time for the Lok Sabha polls. The non-BJP and non-Congress parties can cobble together some sort of an agreement, whereby they do not split their votes. They will have to decide upon the leader because people in India vote for the would-be Prime Minister, although we do not follow the presidential form of government. Whether or not

The pattern of voting and the places where the BJP has won show that the party has uprooted a well-entrenched Congress. What it means in real terms is not the success of the BJP's ideology but people's exasperation over corruption in the Congress.

the latter would be more suited to us is another debate.

One thing which is indeed worrying is the inroads that the BJP has made in Assam. But this is primarily because the migration of people from across the border was encouraged by the Congress itself. The then Congress leader, Fakruddin Ali Ahmed, who later became the president, would openly say that they won the election with the votes of 'Ali and coolie.' He was referring to Muslims when he said 'Ali' while the labourers from Bihar were termed as 'coolies'.

If Assam were to reopen the question of "outsiders",

thousands of people would come under this category. We have gone over this problem earlier and have uprooted and deported many people on this ground. When only Muslims are ousted and no Hindu is even questioned, the problem takes a communal turn. Should India, claiming to be a pluralistic and democratic polity, be doing so? And if it does, should the society claim to be secular?

Since Congress does not count much, at least for the time being, which party is capable of leading the fight against communalism is the question that stares at the face of the society. There is no doubt that leftist forces are committed on this point. But then they do not sell any more. Even after over 65 years, when the first communist government was established under communist ideologue EMS Namboodiripad in Kerala, the party has made no headway.

It is true that the magic of Narendra Modi, although less than what it was before, still has the power to captivate. His future depends on the jobs he provides, and how far he is able to raise the standard of living in the country. True, economic betterment can give a cover to the fundamentalists. But the development would have to be real, not a mere slogan as has been the case so far.

Fundamentalism would also have to be toned down. Modi realises that and therefore, has not taken any policy decision which indicates that the country has swerved from the path of secularism. His main problem is the RSS, which wants to saffronise the country as much as it can in the next three years when Modi's five-year tenure ends. Undoubtedly, Modi would want to return as the Prime Minister. But if by then the RSS shows its true colours, the BJP's return to power will be difficult.

The pattern of voting and the places where the BJP has won show that the party has uprooted a well-entrenched Congress. What it means in real terms is not the success of the BJP's ideology but people's exasperation over corruption in the Congress. If Modi or, more so, the RSS were to learn this lesson, the BJP could become more and more relevant as the time goes by.

The writer is an eminent Indian columnist.

COMMENTS

"India set to 'divert rivers'"
(May 17, 2016)

Saiful Alam Shelly

We should start real dialogue with India on this issue. I agree that India needs interlinking of rivers and the Indian Supreme Court directed the government of India to go ahead with the plan. But that does not mean that India should not care about the lower riparian country like Bangladesh. India should implement the project after a proper discussion with Bangladesh.

Md Raseel Uddin

Our government must do something so that we are not deprived of our share of water.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Rest in peace, Madan Shahu

The recent passing away of senior journalist Madan Shahu on May 8, 2016 has saddened many people in the country. In a few words, Madan Shahu was a noble person. He has passed into eternity but left all his good works here. A hard-working journalist, he always remained calm even under great stress. He was a kind person who would never hurt anyone. Let us all pray that he is in peace in his heavenly abode.

Shahabuddin Mahtab
Gulshan, Dhaka

Say no to smoking

Smoking has become a common practice among people all over the world. It's a very dangerous habit and may cause cancer, heart attack, high blood pressure and other serious illnesses. One puff of cigarette smoke contains fifteen billion particles of matter including nicotine, alcohol, carbon monoxide, arsenic and several other acids. These are all injurious to our health. Nicotine obstructs the normal flow of blood. The dangers of

smoking are many and that's why we all should avoid it to live a healthy life.

S. A. Murad Sarkar, Habiganj



"Invest in intellectual excellence"

I would like to thank Dr. A. A. Azad for writing on the above issue which needs urgent government attention. Bangladesh is fully committed to implementing the SDGs and the key element and measure for sustainable development is science and technology. Dr. Azad has emphasised on the development of human capital which undoubtedly is an important determinant of productivity and other

economic outcomes. Investing in intellectual excellence is particularly crucial in today's knowledge-driven economy. I hope the policy makers will take into cognizance and implement what Dr. Azad has so thoughtfully outlined.

Haseena Khan, Ph. D.
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