

Students' dependence on guidebooks

What are teachers there for?

THE use of below par textbooks in our educational system has given rise to a most disturbing trend. A large number of students now cannot do without guidebooks that are not part of the curriculum, but rather specialise in assisting students in getting a good score in the ever increasing number of examinations they have to sit for, starting as early as class-V. The irony is that some of these guidebooks have been banned by the government but are being sold openly.

According to both teachers and students, many of the textbooks are so abridged that it is difficult for students to get a good understanding of the topic being discussed. Lack of coherence between contents and exercises, between textbooks in different classes and the absence of context in terms of the material textbooks cover, make it difficult for students to build their own perception regarding what they read.

To make up for this shortcoming, students often rely on various guidebooks or question and answer sheets handed out to them at coaching centres. And it is by memorising their contents that students are trying to do well in their examinations. But is it wise to simply churn out increasing number of students having a degree, instead of producing educated minds that can lead the country forward through their understanding and innovativeness?

As the purpose of a teacher is to play the role of a guide, in order to reduce students' dependence on guidebooks, teachers should be better trained to simplify topics for them. Authorities should make textbook content easier for students' to understand through input from experts and reduce the emphasis on examinations as opposed to education.

Brutalities for dowry

It shames us

IT is unfortunate that after long 45 years of Independence, Bangladeshi women are still facing various forms of gender discrimination and gender-based violence in their everyday life. Domestic violence seems to top the list and often, it is because of the wife or her family's failure to meet the unreasonable dowry demands of the husband. This has led to violence and the death of hundreds of women every year. Between January and September this year, 99 women were killed and 93 more were physically tortured in dowry-related violence, says Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK). In the most recent case a man cut off his wife's tongue and slashed the tendon of her left leg for Tk 5 lakh dowry in Sylhet. It is alleged that her husband and in-laws have been torturing her for dowry since her marriage in 2008. The statistics along with the shocking tale of brutality speak aloud about the vulnerability of Bangladeshi women in the domestic sphere.

Despite a number of laws and ordinances criminalising dowry and related violence against women, its pervasive presence indicates to poor implementation of these regulations, particularly the Dowry Prevention Act, 1980. In most cases, the victims seek solutions outside the court as legal battles cost too much and take too long. The ASK statistics reveal that only 73 cases regarding dowry related violence were filed in the first nine months of this year. In most cases the perpetrators managed to get away through various legal loopholes. It needs not to be emphasised that enforcement of laws to stop this illegal practice and dowry-related violence have to be improved radically. In addition to that, there must be mass awareness through all kinds of media that the practice of dowry is a crime and a social curse.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Puffer fish and death

It was alarming to read the report on puffer fish poisoning published in this newspaper on 11 December, 2016. We need to take immediate steps to avoid these types of deaths. Primary school authorities should make students aware of the dangers of such foods. Meanwhile, NGOs could take up the responsibility of distributing posters, leaflets, and books creating awareness of such dangers among rural people. Such initiatives will help minimise such tragedies.

Shafkat Rahman

BIAM Model School and College

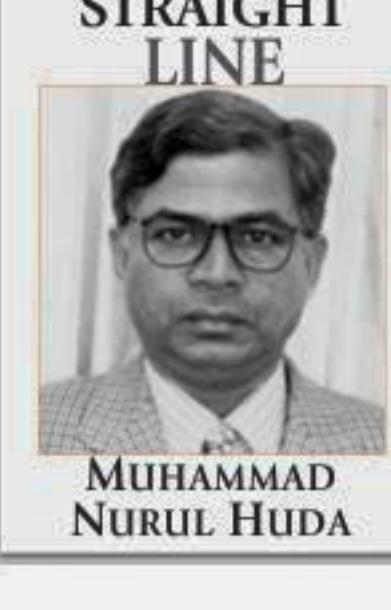
We must prepare for natural disasters

The Cyclone Vardah has left the huge trail of destruction in terms of floods, damaged property and multiple deaths in India and neighbouring areas. The whales stranded on the Tiruchendur Beach in Tamil Nadu, India are yet another clear reminder of the consequences of climate change.

It is imperative that all countries around the world take note of these frequent incidents begin to prepare for nature's repercussions to environmental damage. We must plan out strong strategies and prepare the funds necessary to tackle any oncoming environmental emergencies.

P. Senthil Saravana Durai

Mumbai



STRAIGHT LINE

MUHAMMAD
NURUL HUDA

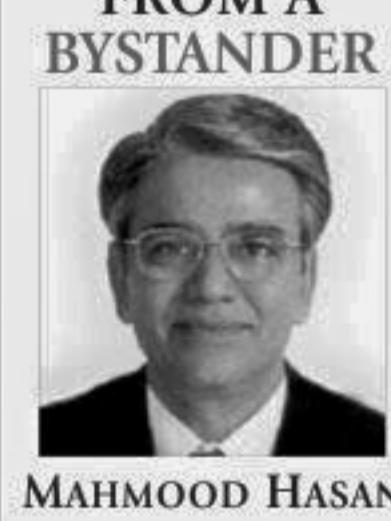
IN big business and commercial parlance, one comes across the now familiar concept of 'Corporate Social Responsibility' (CSR) that, in real terms consists of promotional

activities geared to improving the acceptability and image of an organisation. The concept is perhaps rooted in the realisation that businesses need to focus beyond the profit only motive and thus beyond the traditional modus operandi. Curiously, in the sphere of law enforcement also, a realisation is slowly but steadily dawning in many parts of the world that better service delivery and consequent image building can be better achieved by also venturing beyond the traditional mode of policing.

The cynics amongst us may say that let policemen earnestly and lawfully concentrate on their core duties and that would be enough to salvage their bruised image. Some would go even further and add that police need not become people-friendly, just let them move away from an adversarial posture and not behave like the enemy. For such people venturing beyond traditional statutory duties by police would be a plain waste of public money and time and a harmfully stupid idea to toy with.

While the subject clearly is debatable, one may indeed benefit by looking at the extra length some of our police officers

Refreshingly for us, at least some police officers have ventured to think and act beyond the traditional methods of law enforcement with a view to building social harmony and cohesion.



FROM A BYSTANDER

MAHMOOD HASAN

which is free and fair. Is it really possible to cheat votes in a country which is unquestionably the global leader in information and communication technology? But this is exactly what is being debated in different circles in America and elsewhere.

Let us begin with President-elect Donald Trump, who several months before the election came out with allegations that "large scale voter fraud" was occurring in the election and that the system was rigged. He even went on to say that he would not accept the results of the election, if he lost. These allegations were made in a well-planned manner as Trump started falling behind in opinion polls. Surprisingly, he kept declaring that he will win the ballot.

Broadly speaking two issues have come forth very prominently that raises grave questions about the integrity and reliability of the voting process. First, serious irregularities in voting have been reported in at least 23 different States. There were 600,000 allegations of vote rigging that swamped Twitter, according to the UK based think-tank Demos.

Second was the alleged interference of Russia through cyber-attacks to rig the election.

These irregularities have taken place at two stages – at the party primaries leading to conventions and during the election. For instance, emails released by WikiLeaks showed the Democratic National Committee (DNC) was biased in favour of Hillary Clinton, such as handing over questions to Clinton ahead of time and voter fraud that cost Bernie Sanders 184 votes. Similar fraudulent practices apparently also took place in

have gone beyond the usual call of duty. Admittedly, the officials who, under adverse conditions, dare to swim against the current deserve public recognition. This is especially significant for an organisation like police who need to enlist public cooperation and earn their trust by demonstrable public-spirited acts in good faith.

Perhaps it is the above thoughts that prompted two police officers, namely late

Manikganj since 2012.

Habibur Rahman went beyond the call of statutory duty in a most admirable manner in that he was successful in significantly changing the life style of Bede community (gypsy) of Savar area in Dhaka district. He had appreciated quite early that love and compassion for the deprived and underprivileged can be an effective and durable weapon in the fight against crime. While conducting anti-

women of Bede polli (gypsy village).

Habibur's notable achievement was to help a young man from this community who had studied pharmacy, to get a job in a pharmaceutical company. The young man in question was refused by potential employers mainly because of the stigma associated with his community.

Interestingly, in many parts of the United States, the concept of 'Safety Beyond Policing' campaign is comprised



Late Rabiu Karim devoted his free time for disadvantaged children.

Rabiul Karim, Assistant Superintendent of Police who died fighting the terrorists in the Gulshan Holy Artisan Bakery attack in July last, and Habibur Rahman, formerly Superintendent of Police, Dhaka district, who dared to think and act out of the box and thus made significant contribution in social bonding and cohesion.

Rabiul Karim was distinctly different from the beginning in the sense that he was both conscious and caring about people and the environment. No wonder that even before he put in five years of active public service, he was instrumental in establishing a specialised school named 'BLOOMS' for physically and mentally challenged boys and girls in Manikganj district. He also established a primary school named 'Nazrul Vidyashiri', which is catering to educational needs of several villages of

narcotics operation, Habibur Rahman realised that the 'Bede', steeped in centuries-old regressive social customs, had to be salvaged from the twin scourge of drugs and crimes for their durable integration in the mainstream.

Habibur had to grapple with the reality that the Bede, for sustainable rehabilitation, needed both education and training to obviate the compulsion of early marriage and resorting to criminal habits. But he also understood that the needed social actions were too important to be left to the politicians and social reformers only and that he could do his bit as a committed public servant. Consequently, a special coaching centre was established to provide vocational training through 'youth training' programme. This helped in starting a readymade garment factory for vocationally trained 150 young girls and

of residents who do not want the authority to invest in hiring more police officers. Such residents are of the view that safer and healthier neighbourhoods are strengthened by addressing poverty and that can only happen by truly investing into the communities. They are of the opinion that police do nothing to address the socio-economic conditions that cause crime.

Refreshingly for us, at least some police officers have ventured to think and act beyond the traditional methods of law enforcement with a view to building social harmony and cohesion. They and potential fellow compatriots have miles to go. One may visit Savar and Manikganj to see manifest public-spirited acts by these two committed police officers.

The writer is a former IGP and a columnist for *The Daily Star*.

Rigging the Presidential election in America

SHOCKING details about election fraud in America were reported recently. As one of the oldest democracies, America prides itself in having perfected its election process,

favour of Donald Trump against other contenders of the Republican Party during the primaries.

Voting irregularities range from – multiple voting by an individual voter; voting on behalf of the dead; absentee ballots; voting by ineligible voters; tampering of voters registration; voter suppression; etc. The other serious phenomenon of fraud was tampering with the computerised voting machines.

Professor J. Alex Halderman, of University of Michigan, described how

recount of votes in Wisconsin, Michigan and Pennsylvania. Clinton campaign also supported Stein's effort. Enraged Kellyanne Conway, former campaign manager of Donald Trump, dismissed the move saying, "a bunch of crybabies and sore losers..". Trump also joined in saying that there was no basis in evidence and that he had lost the popular vote to Clinton because "millions" of people voted illegally. Isn't it curious that Trump still believes that there was illegal voting? This brings the issue of popular vote



Americans casting their ballots in the US Presidential election.

PHOTO: AFP

the voting machines could have been hacked. Attackers probed election offices and spread malware into the machines rigging them to shift a few percent of votes in favour of a desired candidate. The malware were probably designed to remain inactive during pre-election tests, do the dirty work during the election, then erase itself when the polls close, leaving no trace. Edward Snowden of WikiLeaks shared a video just before the election that showed someone breaking into a voting machine using a different memory card. Halderman provided an affidavit in which he said that "cyber attacks influenced the result".

The issue of vote fraud was further strengthened when Dr. Jill Stein, the Green Party candidate, spearheaded the

versus electoral vote, and also the issue of faithless electors to the fore. In the final count of votes Hillary Clinton got 2.8 million popular votes more than Trump. This happened because of the State election laws. If a candidate gets majority of the popular vote in a particular state, then all the designated Electoral College votes go to that candidate. Clinton won the popular votes in some of the most populated states, which swelled her popular vote numbers, but was not enough to put her across the 270 electoral votes required to clinch the Presidency. Allegations are also there that some faithless electors have switched side to vote for Trump.

In another development, the FBI agrees with CIA that Russian cyber-

attacks on American political organisations were aimed at helping Donald Trump win the Presidency and damage Hillary Clinton's candidacy. CIA assessment is based on circumstantial evidence from the leaked emails of DNC by WikiLeaks. WikiLeaks could not have accessed these emails without the help of Russian intelligence. Moscow however, strongly denied any involvement and demanded proof from CIA for the allegations. If the Russian role in the election is true, it proves the inability of the Americans to protect themselves against cyber warfare.

Donald Trump, who had shown unusual softness towards Vladimir Putin during the campaign, dismissed the CIA assessment saying, "These are the same people that said Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction". Trump definitely knew about the malicious Russian intrusions. Has he not asked the Russians to dig out the lost emails of Clinton? That is probably the reason why Trump is not making any hue and cry about the result now. But now in hindsight one smells conspiracy. Indeed, this was a novel way to rig elections.

President Obama has threatened retaliation against Russia and has called for a full report on allegations of Russian interference in the election.

There are vehement denials of irregularities by a section of the media, while equally vigorous assertions with proofs have been made by others. Some have suggested that there may have been few instances of irregularities. The point is not how many cases of rigging actually happened, but that the system is fallible.

Allegations of vote rigging are not new in America and did not change election results. There were allegations in 1876, 1884, 1916, 1960, and most recently in 2000 between Al Gore and George W. Bush. People around the world have always looked up to America for its democratic stability and free and fair electoral process. That process seems maimed now. America has lost the moral high ground to lecture other nations on credible elections.

The writer is former Ambassador and Secretary