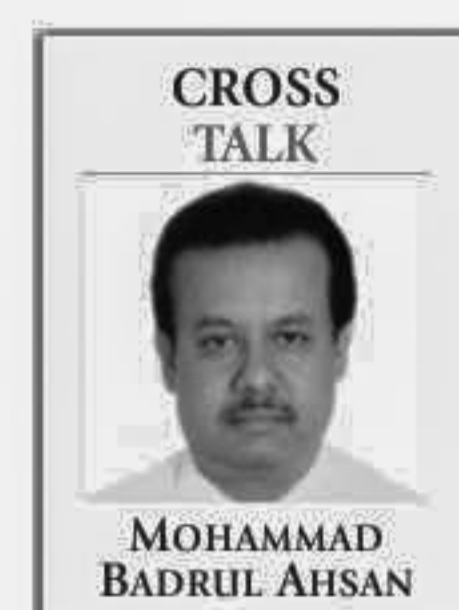


When ignorance is the pillar of knowledge

The Rohingya crisis The onus of resolving it is on Myanmar

THE Myanmar special envoy was in the Capital recently to discuss the Rohingya refugee issue which is the direct consequence of the Rohingya crisis. The PM has urged Myanmar to take back its nationals taking refuge in Bangladesh and has said discussions between the two countries could resolve the issue permanently. The recent surge in violence against the Rohingyas has sent about 65,000 of them fleeing to Bangladesh for refuge putting a stress on our resources and raising concerns over our security. This is in addition to more than 300,000 Rohingyas already staying in the country for years since the ethnic group was made stateless by a controversial 1982 Myanmar law, stripping them of citizenship rights. Myanmar's policy of exclusion of ethnic minorities, who constitute about 40 percent of its population, is what has created the problem. Rohingyas have been subjected to persecution by the state of Myanmar in the form of shooting of unarmed civilians, torture and rape, which according to the UN, could tantamount to crimes against humanity. Bangladesh, which has nothing to do with the making of the crisis and yet treated it as a humanitarian issue to the best of its abilities, has been facing the adverse consequences of the Rohingya persecution. Recruited by criminal syndicates, some Myanmar nationals have been engaged in antisocial activities in this country. Regrettably, some Rohingya refugees are exploiting our hospitality by misusing their status in the country. Myanmar's policy towards the Rohingyas is inhumane and unacceptable. Its government should look at history and take note that highhandedness as a state policy is unviable in the long run. Hate, prejudice and racism are evils that always find new victims. Today it is the Rohingyas. Who will be the next? It is the Myanmar government which created the Rohingya problem and it is solely its responsibility to find a lasting solution to it.



CROSS TALK
 MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

THE recent textbook fiasco has been a textbook case of how a dot becomes a circle. First we ignored the quality of teachers. Then we ignored the quality of students. There have been rumours that schools were being asked to liberally grade examination papers so that the greatest number of students could get the highest possible marks. Then we had the rude awakening that only a tiny percentage of these high achievers could actually cross the threshold of university admission tests. Now comes the fat in the fire. Textbooks are scandalously riddled with so many errors that one has to question the purpose of education itself. There's always an explanation for everything, and the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) surely has one. It has quickly formed a special committee to investigate the matter. Meanwhile, the government has already started distributing more than 362 million copies of textbooks among 42.6 million pre-primary, primary and secondary students. God knows how the NCTB plans to correct so many mistakes when so many books must have already gone out. Never mind the additional costs involved in cleaning up this mess. The

Forgotten is that education is neither lottery nor charity, but something that must be earned with hard work. Somewhere in our experiment with education, we have lost that message. Not too harsh to claim that we may have altogether given up on education.

stock market has mopped up billions of taka. The banks have squandered tonnes of money. Many projects have had humongous cost overruns, ending up spending double or triple their initial budgets. We have so much appetite for waste that one more wasteful case is just another drop in the bucket. Indeed that's nothing compared to how much it's costing our commitment

graduating under relaxed grading has deluded us like someone wearing loose-fitting clothes indulges in the satisfaction that he has lost weight. What has happened with these textbooks isn't rocket science. Those who wrote the contents were wrong from the start. If the word "heart" appeared in place of "hurt", that's probably how those writers knew it was spelled. If the

Ironically, NCTB appointed a committee to investigate, not before, but after the disaster has taken place. Had the editors monitored the writers, those who signed off contents monitored the editors, and some other body monitored the printers, this botched situation could have been avoided. Forgotten is that education is neither lottery nor charity, but something that



IMAGE: WILLIAM SHERRERD-SMITH

to education. The textbook tragedy enunciates that we're handling one of the most delicate businesses in our life less carefully than glassware and dishes in our kitchen sinks. The goofed-up textbooks are scary proof that in this country ignorance is the pillar of knowledge. So, the spelling mistakes and questionable illustrations, not to speak of poor printing in some of these textbooks, give us a chastening glimpse of the declining standard of our education. If we can't get things right at the beginner's level, imagine what it should tell us about the quality of higher education. If a little learning is a dangerous thing, we're dangerously learning too little. Utilitarianism is an ethical system that determines morality on the basis of the greatest good for the greatest number. Our education system is zealously driven by a caricature of that philosophy, laying more emphasis on quantity than quality. The high percentage of students

illustration shows a goat climbing a mango tree, it hovered in the twilight zone between fact and fancy. Keen minds argue it will teach children a false thing because goats don't climb trees. A sympathiser has claimed that it was meant to be funny so that children were also amused while learning. Eighty-five intellectuals of the country have signed a statement stating that the textbooks also clearly show a compromise with fundamentalist beliefs. One would like to think that a significant initiative costing billions of taka must have had its checks and balances. The writers wrote, editors edited, proofreaders scrutinised, and then a higher body must have signed off before all those books went to printers. If some of the pages turned out fuzzy or the binding was faulty, a quality assurance team should have detected those anomalies before final printing. All the layers responsible for the production of the textbooks were either dreadfully negligent or equally ignorant.

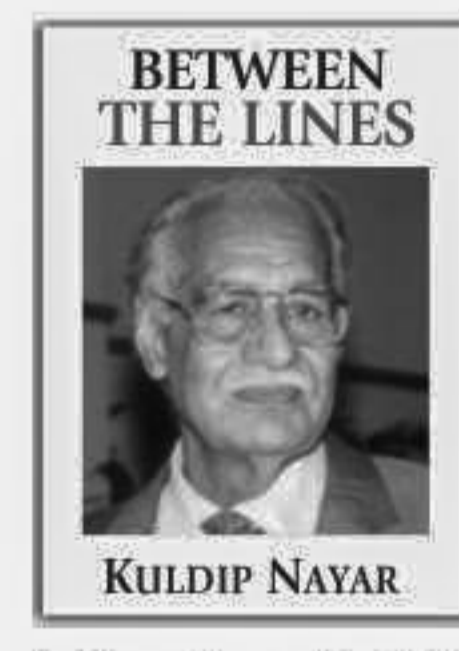
must be earned with hard work. Somewhere in our experiment with education, we have lost that message. Not too harsh to claim that we may have altogether given up on education. What remains is a certificate-spitting process that whets our lust for credentials than our thirst for knowledge. We have miserably failed education at once in its backward and forward linkages. Our schools swarm with ill-fated slaves, who carry the burden of books made ever heavier with sciolism and ignorance. Meanwhile, education has been eviscerated. Those who make policies, draw up curricula, design study materials, teach and study, they make a daisy chain of a zero-sum game, in which everyone else's gain has cumulatively bankrupted the ultimate beneficiaries: the students. Our nation is thriving at the expense of its children.

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Anti-dumping duty on jute goods

THE number of trucks carrying jute and jute goods to India through the Benapole land port has declined sharply after New Delhi imposed a high anti-dumping duty on Bangladeshi goods on January 5 ranging from US\$19 and \$352 per tonne. We should not forget that our products are allowed into the Indian market on zero-tariff basis under the South Asian Free Trade (SAFTA) agreement, and the argument being put forward today by the Indian authorities that the move has been taken to protect its domestic industry goes against the spirit of SAFTA. Jute remains the third largest earning sector of Bangladesh, and during the last fiscal nearly \$1 billion was earned from the export of the golden fibre, of which 20 percent went to the Indian market (which constitutes 8 percent of the Indian market). Hence the argument that Bangladeshi jute is undercutting Indian jute and "threatening the domestic market" falls flat on its face. Our trade deficit with India is massive and if we are now going to face such impediments on flimsy grounds, it will put a significant dent, not only on our exports but also on the sector as a whole. We hope our government will take up the matter in earnest with India to resolve this sticky issue. We should also make active efforts to diversify our export markets beyond the traditional markets so that such unforeseen shockwaves can be handled better. Lastly, any such sudden imposition of duty renders SAFTA ineffective, something that should be avoided by all signatory countries.

Centre-state relations going sour



BETWEEN THE LINES
 KULDIP NAYAR

ONE development which has gone unnoticed in the confrontation between Trinamool Congress and the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) is the delineation of relations between the centre and the states. When the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) protected the West Bengal BJP office, it gave a message that the centre was the ultimate authority, and it had its own force to ensure implementation of its word. When West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said that they too "were a government," she threw down the gauntlet to the centre that the state was supreme in their own affairs. India is a federal polity. The states have their autonomy as spelled out in the Constitution. The Supreme Court has said in many judgments that the centre could not run roughshod to suppress the states in their own spheres. This is the same old story: the state's assertion against the centre's. It has happened in the case of certain states earlier. Kerala, which often has communists at the helm of affairs, was disturbed many a time by New Delhi, including imposition of the president's rule for the first time ever in the country. Soon after independence, E.M.S. Namboodiripad was the chief minister of Kerala. He differed with New Delhi, ruled by the Congress, which wanted to extend the Preventive Detention Act. But Namboodiripad argued that it was a way of the British rule and did not fit into the democratic structure of the country. He opposed the enactment. Among the chief ministers, he was the

only one to do so. Chief minister B.C. Roy of West Bengal, present at the meeting, was so offended that he chided him, snidely adding, "You were the only patriot among us." Namboodiripad did not budge from his stand and merely said that he did not want to join issue with him. But he wanted his 'no' to be registered. When it came to his party whether or not to endorse his stand, it gave him full support. However, it did not take long to prove what he had said. Soon after, the centre faced the railways strike. The Kerala government supported the demands of the railway staff. The

Central - presided over by the Union Home Minister. The purpose was that the states could discuss the matter among them so that they could iron out the differences before it came to Parliament. The councils lasted till the Congress ruled both at the centre and the states. When the other parties came to power in the states, the arrangement did not work. The experiment ultimately ended in 1977 when the Janata Party, a combination of several parties, ruled the centre. It was given out that the zonal councils were not required because the party in power represented all of them. Even otherwise, the centre-state relations have not been cordial,

states. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and BJP president Amit Shah will go to any extent to extend its rein. Their pre-poll speeches in recent times indicate what the party has in its mind. To a large extent, the BJP cause has been served by the family feud in the Samajwadi Party (SP). Although Mulayam Singh has said that he was the party chief and would see to it that there was unity in SP, his brother Shivpal Yadav appears to be the spoiler. Chief minister Akhilesh Yadav has the majority of MLAs with him and there is no question of him being displaced. It could only be a storm in a tea cup, but it has dented the image of the party. Akhilesh is bound to gain because his image before the voters is that of a clean person who was trying to govern transparently. His welfare measures will also stand him in good stead. Not surprisingly, even the Congress wants to have a pre-poll alliance with SP to prevent BJP coming to power. The scenario in Punjab is no different. The Akali-BJP combination may still get a majority because the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) does not have a Punjabi face to project, as if it is from the state itself. In Uttarakhand, the Congress may scrape through after how the BJP tried to dislodge the Rawat government before the court's intervention. In Manipur and Goa, the local elements may come to matter the most. But one cannot rule out the BJP's ascendancy when the Congress no longer remains the only alternative. Whatever the outcome of the polls, the BJP-ruled centre cannot turn a Nelson's eye to the developments in the states, particularly West Bengal where it is the weakest. The daily bickering between Trinamool Congress and BJP will only aggravate the situation and drive the public to question the very democratic system itself. The writer is an eminent Indian columnist.

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encouraged workers in Kerala threatened to set the central government's offices in the state on fire. New Delhi deployed the CRPF to protect its properties. This was an odd situation to face when the state's police force would not do anything to ensure that no harm came to what belonged to the country, not a particular state. Fortunately, there was no showdown because the central government accepted the workers' demands and the strike was averted. The fallout of the threat of railways strike led to the creation of zonal council - East, West, North, South and

particularly ever since the BJP came to power. It tends to enforce its ideology on states ruled by parties other than the BJP. The RSS is its foot soldiers. This is resented by the opposition. If the BJP continues to formulate such policies which reflect its ideology, the coherence of the very federal structure is threatened. The elders in the BJP should look up and take necessary measures so that the unity of the country is intact. But, unfortunately, with five states - Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Punjab, Manipur and Goa - going to the polls, the BJP is bent on adopting all possible methods to capture power in these

the writer is an eminent Indian columnist.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Save the reserve trees
 Of late, illegally cutting down of reserve trees has taken a massive form. Poor surveillance and failure to ensure exemplary punishment to the culprits is increasing the misdeed. A massive number of reserved trees were cut down illegally in November last year from Tangail's Madhupur reserve forest. Many of these trees are rare. The story does not end here. Recently we have seen illegal cutting down of trees from the reserve forest of Tanguar Haor of Sunamganj. This is hurting us and raises questions regarding the role of the concerned authorities. I would like to draw the attention of the higher authorities of the forest department to disclose why they have failed to stop this and request them to save the reserve trees. Md.Tarek Aziz Bappi Dept. of Political Science University of Dhaka