

The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR
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Simplifying textbooks for children

Banning coaching alone will not suffice

WE welcome the move by Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid who has proposed to slap a ban on the private coaching racket that has allowed for many teachers to take teaching out of the classroom into the private domain. While an Act may be formulated to give the government decision a legal basis, things can only improve if the initiative by the ministry to modify 12 textbooks of Classes 9 and 10 goes through without a hitch. Indeed the concerned minister stated so recently at a press briefing that his ministry has formed two committees comprising academicians to review the curriculum and modify some textbooks and the work began last January after a series of stakeholder meetings held since May last year.

Our observation on the flurry of activity is that all is good if the simplification process goes through and recommendations made by the committees are actually implemented. There should be no doubt in anyone's mind that the hugely profitable private coaching industry will not take any of this lying down, but at the end of the day, it is necessary for the ministry to stand firm on the issue of quality education.

It is high time that textbooks are made student-friendly so that students may comprehend easily what is written. It is also imperative that school authorities be strict in their monitoring of teachers to ensure that the latter impart lessons with diligence at the classroom and not outside the schooling system. Only then can we hope to tackle the hugely damaging business of guidebooks and private coaching which is a massive drain on parents' incomes and a practice wholly unethical.

Food crisis in Sajek valley

People in desperate need of aid

PEOPLE in different villages of the remote Sajek union under Baghaichhari upazila of Rangamati have been suffering from a major food crisis for the last two to three months. In the midst of this crisis, falling bamboo price which is a major source of income for many inhabitants, poor road connection and a rise in the price of rice have only worsened things for them.

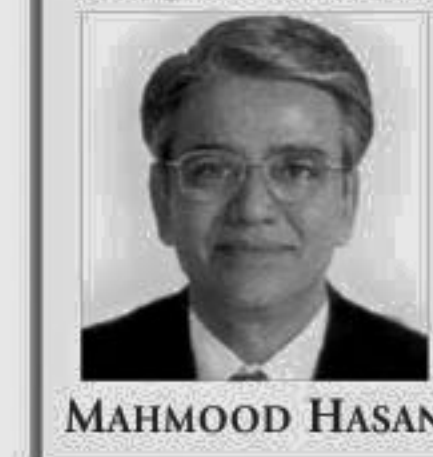
The situation has apparently gotten so bad that without urgent government intervention there is a great chance of people starving to death according to the chairman of Baghaichhari Upazila Parishad. Local representatives claimed that they have already written to their higher authorities in the administration requesting assistance but the government is yet to send sufficient aid for people in different villages.

The acting deputy commissioner of Rangamati said that his administration has already allocated five tonnes of rice for the affected area which were distributed among the people a week ago. This is, however, inconsistent with the claims made by local representatives who have said that they are still expecting the five tonnes of rice allocated for the disaster-hit people.

What is the reason for these contradictory narratives? The authorities must immediately get to the bottom of this. Moreover, assistance for the suffering people should be dispatched by the authorities on an immediate basis. And, given the gravity of the situation, the government should also, if necessary, involve the Disaster Management and Relief Ministry in aid distribution to ensure that any loss of life is prevented.

A new beginning for France?

FROM A BYSTANDER



MAHMOOD HASAN

THE first round of the French presidential election was on April 23, 2017. This time the opinion polls were right and the results came out as predicted. Out of 11 candidates only two candidates have qualified for the second round of voting scheduled for May 7. Almost 70 percent of the 47 million registered voters cast their ballots. The two anti-establishment winners are Emmanuel Macron, who got 23.9 percent of the votes, and Marine Le Pen with 21.4 percent.

The election is being held under a state of emergency that was proclaimed after the November 13, 2015 attack on Bataclan Theatre in which 130 people were killed. Then on April 20, 2017 a French police officer was killed in a shooting on Champs Élysées following which thousands of policemen were deployed across the country to tighten security for the election.

According to French election laws a candidate getting more than 50 percent of votes in the first round becomes the president without having to go to the second round. Since in the first round there are several candidates, the votes are split in percentage terms. Thus a second round is called for the top two winners of the first round. The investiture of the new president will take place on or before May 14, 2017, the last day of tenure of François Hollande.

Macron, 39, the youngest independent candidate since Napoleon, was economy minister under President François Hollande. He resigned last year and launched his centrist political movement En Marche! (On the Move!). Macron never held any elected post and is considered a greenhorn to the nasty intrigues of French politics. He argues he can rejuvenate the moribund French economy with his pro-European and pro-business policies. His support base comes from young urban progressives. Though he was a member of the Socialist Party he now claims to be neither liberal nor "Hollandist" (follower of François Hollande). Macron declared that, if elected, he will be the president of all France people.

Marine Le Pen, 49, leading the far-right Front National (FN), attracted much attention during this election because of her Europhobia among other things. Le Pen became popular with

voters for her strong anti-Euro, anti-immigrant and anti-globalisation platform. She has been touting slogans such as "French interest first", similar to Donald Trump's "America first". Member of the European Parliament, Marine Le Pen, who faces allegations of campaign financing (from Russia?) and fraudulent payments from European Parliament, claims that open borders and globalisation are the reasons behind France's socio-economic calamity. Le Pen announced she is the people's candidate for the presidency.

The biggest setback was for the two major parties – Socialists and Republicans – which have ruled France alternatively since WWII. Neither Republican François

politicians and are looking for an alternative to the status quo. People seem to be more concerned about the economy and trustworthiness of politicians rather than immigration or terrorism.

It was rather unusual that President Hollande, alarmed at Le Pen's popularity, called upon French voters to support Macron, as the values and principles on which France stands are threatened by the far-right candidate's rhetoric. Similar endorsements for Macron also came from Fillon, Hamon and others. A media campaign has also started to stop Le Pen from getting into the Élysée Palace.

But the most fascinating phase has yet

loyalty in the parliament to get legislation passed. Will Macron then opt for cohabitation?

France has had two instances of cohabitation. The first was under Socialist President François Mitterrand when Republican Jacques Chirac became Prime Minister in 1986. The second instance was when President Jacques Chirac appointed Socialist Lionel Jospin as Prime Minister in 1997. It was a novel political arrangement when the president appointed a prime minister from an opposing party and ran the government quite successfully. It was not a coalition form of government but cohabitation, meaning two



Narrow margins in the first round of France's presidential election show that the French electorate is deeply divided.

SOURCE: AFRICAWORLDNEWS.NET

Fillon (19.9 percent votes), the centre-right conservative, nor Socialist Benoît Hamon (6.35 percent votes), the centre-left candidate, got through the first round.

The second round of intense campaigning has already begun, amid reports of violent protests and vandalism in Paris, with each candidate spelling out diametrically opposed platforms. Two issues however will dominate the run-up to May 7 – EU membership of France and the state of French economy. Macron is focused on the economy, while Le Pen is trying to convince voters that EU has harmed France.

Deeply divided French voters consider politicians to be thoroughly corrupt. Voters rejected the established

to unfold in French politics. It is the upcoming French parliamentary elections that are due in June. The new president has to form a government headed by a prime minister. The president can choose anyone as PM, but normally the leader of the majority party in the parliament is chosen as PM. Assuming Macron makes it to the Élysée Palace and given the fact that he does not represent any political party, who will be his PM? Will he pick someone from the majority party, who may represent a different political persuasion – a Socialist or a Republican – presuming that one of these parties gets a majority in the parliamentary election? Picking a PM from outside the parliament will complicate Macron's job as the PM may not be able to command

different political ideologies existing side-by-side within the government.

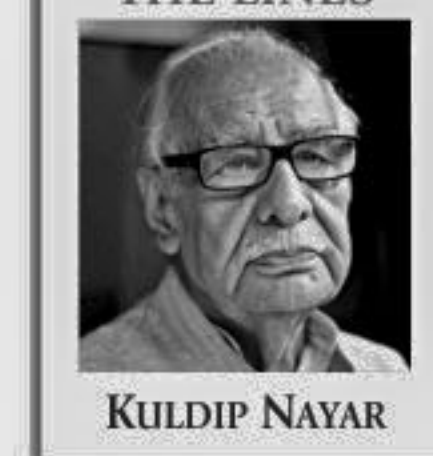
Interestingly, European Commission head Jean-Claude Juncker congratulated pro-EU Macron for making it to the second round. Brussels sighed in relief as they would not have to worry about Frexit.

The second round for Le Pen will actually be a referendum on Frexit. If people vote in the same numbers, Emmanuel Macron is likely to win the second round. But there can always be a slip between the cup and the lip. Assuming Macron wins, will that usher in a new beginning for the Fifth Republic?

The writer is former Ambassador and Secretary.

Another futile attempt to switch over to Hindi

BETWEEN THE LINES



KULDIP NAYAR

IT was then Home Minister Gulzarilal Nanda who brought the question of Hindi to the fore. This time, it is Union Minister of State for Home Affairs Kiren Rijiju who has done so. Many people in Tamil Nadu then self-immolated as an act of protest. Thank God it has not come to that stage yet. Nanda had advised the central government departments to write notes on the files in Hindi to express their opinion.

The latest is that Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) leader MK Stalin has accused the Centre of trying to relegate people who don't speak Hindi to second-class citizens and of pushing the nation into becoming "Hindia". The controversy had been generated after President Pranab Mukherjee accepted the recommendation of the Committee of Parliament on Official Language that all dignitaries, including the President and ministers, especially those who can read and speak Hindi, may be requested to give their speech or statement in Hindi only.

The President has accepted several other recommendations, including

making announcements on board aircraft in Hindi followed by English. However, Union Information and Broadcasting Minister M Venkaiah Naidu said the allegation that Hindi was being imposed is "completely false" and the government has "no intention" of imposing any language, particularly Hindi, on anyone.

The sharp reaction by leaders, particularly Stalin, indicates that Tamil Nadu at least is not yet ready to switch over. The issue is several decades old and yet it has not found any satisfactory solution. The non-Hindi speaking states

policemen. To normalise the situation, Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri reiterated Nehru's assurance that English would continue to be used as the official language as long as the non-Hindi speaking states wanted. The riots subsided after Shastri's promise, as did the student agitation.

But then the agitation had led to major political changes in the state. The DMK captured power in the 1967 assembly elections and thereafter the Congress never came to power in Tamil Nadu. The Official Languages Act was eventually amended in 1967 by the

the Hindi chauvinists. The BJP has several liberal leaders who realise that the pace of switchover to Hindi would have to be slow, keeping in mind unity and diversity. Apparently, they do not have much say.

The India of today is very different from what it was 50 years ago, with each linguistic group asserting its identity. The turmoil during the states' reorganisation process should be a warning. The idea of India can be jeopardised. The entire fabric can get torn if the sensitivities of the people are not allayed. What is the hurry? A few more decades' wait is too small a price to pay for preserving the nation's cohesion.

India has gone through large linguistic riots in the late 1950s and early 1960s following the Home Ministry instructions to different departments to make preparations for a switchover from English to Hindi as laid down in the Constitution. I wish this bilingualism would continue without anyone tinkering with it. But then Modi's men seem to be hastening the process without considering the sentiments of non-Hindi speaking people. The government wants to restrict the use of English to certain fields.

Yet, they realise that their haste can tell upon the country's unity. The non-Hindi speaking states, particularly Tamil Nadu, have accepted the Constitutional provision that Hindi is the Indian Union's language. But they want time to learn it and come up to the standards of people living in the Hindi belt like Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh or Rajasthan.

No doubt, Modi feels at home with Hindi and his sweep in elections is primarily because of the campaign he led in Hindi, somewhat Sanskritised for northern Indians. But he should remember Nehru's promise made in 1963 that both Hindi and English would continue to be the link languages for administration throughout the country. Nehru did not fix any deadline for the exclusive use of Hindi.

Heritage is linked with languages and therefore leaders all over the country will have to devise ways and means whereby regional languages get succour. Without a long-term plan to reinvigorate them, some regional languages would fall by the wayside as the days go by. How many regional languages will survive 50 years hence is anybody's guess.

The writer is an eminent Indian columnist.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

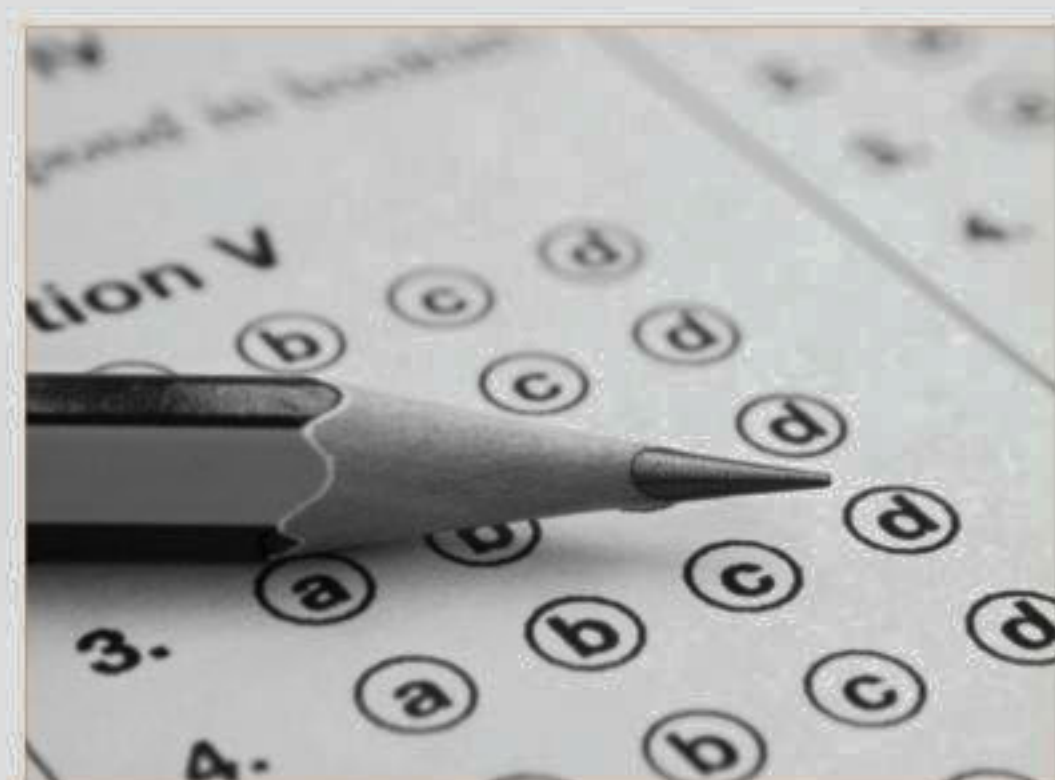
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A malpractice far too common

Question papers getting leaked the night before public examinations has become somewhat of a culture in Bangladesh in the present day which is why the news of leaked question papers of the Janata Bank written test does not surprise me at all. But it does force us to wonder where this country is headed. If we can't even stop the youth from unethically obtaining question papers, what chance does the government stand of tackling bigger concerns like militancy and violence among the youth?

The government shouldn't let this culture of impunity breed anymore. It deprives the ethical, deserving candidates of reaping the benefits of their hard work, and violates basic human rights by failing to treat everyone equally based on their merit.

Md Jonny Hossain
Nilkhet



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repeat Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's assurance that the switchover to Hindi from English will take place only when the non-Hindi speaking people say that they are ready for it. His categorical statement disappointed Hindi fanatics but the nation on the whole heaved a sigh of relief that India had retrieved from the brink.

The anti-Hindi movement gained momentum in the then Madras state where college students demonstrated against the switchover in 1965. Soon after, a full-scale riot broke out in Madurai sparking off a minor altercation between agitating students and Congress Party members. The riots spread all over the state and continued unabated for a couple of months.

They were marked by acts of violence, arson, looting, police firing and lathi charges. The then ruling Congress in the state had to call in paramilitary forces to quell the agitation. But their involvement resulted in deaths of nearly 70-odd people including some

Congress headed by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi to guarantee the indefinite use of Hindi and English as official languages. This effectively ensured the current "virtual indefinite policy of bilingualism" of the Indian Republic. There were also two similar but smaller agitations in 1968 and 1986 which had varying degrees of success.

In fact, within the very first fortnight of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's regime, the central government offices had received a circular that Hindi should be used on social media. This was an attempt to enter through the back door. The non-Hindi speaking states spotted the fugitive move and protested against it. New Delhi readily withdrew its step and declared that the circular was meant only for the Hindi-speaking states.

The latest statement by Union minister Rijiju has only rekindled the fears of non-Hindi speaking people. And they are afraid of what may happen tomorrow. I am convinced that Modi's government is guided, if not goaded, by