

## Disappearing playgrounds

### Robbing children of a happy childhood

As per a report published in this daily yesterday, the Chittagong Outer Stadium, one of very few playgrounds available to children in the port city, is being used for other purposes. While half of the stadium is being used to build a swimming pool the other half has been rented out for a month-long expo. Sadly, this is part of a larger trend of vanishing open spaces—especially in urban centres—for both children and adults.

To say that it is disappointing that there are only about nine playgrounds in such a highly populated city (approximately six million) would be an understatement. To make matters worse, the very few playgrounds that exist are barely accessible as they are mostly used to hold fairs and rallies, or are undergoing construction to be turned into parks.

We doubt that the authorities responsible for this situation know just how precious these playgrounds are to children who have very limited forms of recreation to begin with. We also think that a basic understanding of the importance of open spaces to child development eludes the concerned authorities—including Chittagong Jela Krira Sangstha, the owning and controlling body of the Outer Stadium.

We would like to reiterate that playgrounds are essential for the healthy upbringing of a child and are vital to his/her mental and physical growth. But the way Chittagong's playgrounds are being encroached upon is robbing children of their right to a healthy, happy and playful childhood. We urge the authorities to urgently take note of this and bring an end to the misuse of the few playgrounds still available. They should approach this matter keeping in mind the welfare of children and think of ways to expand playgrounds, not destroy them.

## A tale of seven bridges

### Who looks after public suffering?

SEVEN bridges in Patuakhali and Barguna have collapsed and none has been rebuilt or repaired. And there have been casualties too. A five-year-old died falling into the canal and four others injured when the lone bridge on Sutabaria canal (in Dashmania upazila of Barguna district) collapsed on January 14. The collapsed bridges are a testament to the shoddy workmanship of contractors. We are shocked to learn that a steel bridge repaired in Patuakhali by LGED last November collapsed a mere five months after repair.

No one bothers to ask why bridges that are in a state of disrepair or those that simply collapse are not rebuilt. Have we ever tried to find out the inconvenience it causes hundreds or thousands of people who must cross a canal to get to work or to go to school? Where is the government's own internal audit on the work done by contractors under various departments of public works? These are valid questions but we hardly ever get any worthy response to the sheer waste of public expenditure from taxpayers' hard-earned money.

According to a report published in this paper on October 25, the chief engineer of Patuakhali LGED has promised that steps have been taken to renovate the steel bridge that collapsed in Pankhali village under Golachipa upazila. That is wonderful news. Why must an incident occur before repair work must commence is our question. We hope that the concerned department will take it upon themselves to do regular maintenance work on these bridges so that people in those localities don't have to use makeshift bamboo bridges to get from point A to point B.

# The lost purpose of education



SHAGUFTE HOSSAIN

THE University of Dhaka has long prided itself as the premier educational institution of our country. Since its establishment in 1921, it has come to be known as

the oldest modern university in Bangladesh, making significant intellectual contributions to the country providing education to over 30,000 students. Every year, thousands of students sit for the admission examinations and only a lucky few make it through. This year 98,054 candidates applied for 1,610 seats for three groups, and 71,549 of them sat for the test last Friday. 10,264 of them have secured pass marks, which means 85 percent have failed.

On Sunday, the admission test results for Gha (D) unit of Dhaka University (DU) were published. Allegations of the question paper being leaked before the exams had started emerging a couple of days earlier. It has been claimed that the allegations so far have just been allegations, in spite of several newspapers, including *The Daily Star* and many television channels publishing the news with evidence. As many as 150 activists have been participating in a protest demanding the formation of a probe committee for a thorough investigation of the question leak allegation. In spite of this, the authorities have stayed stubborn on their stance of denial.

Reports have further emerged that a Dhaka University student deposited Tk 1.50 lakh into the bank account of a suspected member of a racket, allegedly involved in leaking question papers. The money was deposited around 15 days before the university's "Gha" unit admission test after a special team of CID arrested the two BCL leaders from their dormitories hours before the admission tests on Friday.

Admission seekers, former and present students, and members of the society from all walks and spheres were distressed first by the news, and then by the DU's continuous denial of the allegations. The case statements released also said that a drive was carried out on Thursday night on information that a racket was

involved in leaking question papers of DU's "Gha" unit exam by the CID. The two BCL leaders mentioned above were arrested during the drive. There were whatsapp messages with images of question papers and admit cards of several admission seekers that were sent to other users.

The CID officials said that they have yet to draw a conclusion on investigating the matter and were trying to find out whether the racket and the reported "Gha" unit question paper leak were linked. However, such groups have been involved in leaking question papers of

abilities that we cannot trust that we can succeed without compromising our integrity? And why are we so afraid of failing?

Also, we might want to ask ourselves what the purpose of these tests is. Between grade one and grade twelve, we take four exams. Do any of these tests really measure what we have learnt? And while we are at it, let us also question what the purpose of education is. Aristotle, arguably the founding father of education, would say the purpose of the state is to educate the people in order to make them virtuous. But that purpose of

doesn't seem like a solution to me. I have strong faith in the creative ability of the youth and can guarantee that they will come up with a way to bypass this system as well. But this is the real question. How long are we going to keep breeding generations that are stunted in terms of intellectual growth and are solely pass/fail driven, not knowledge driven?

To be honest, I don't find it surprising that there is a demand for these services. Neither do I find it surprising that DU has gone on to deny all allegations. If they had taken a different stance on the matter, what would have changed? Corruption is rampant everywhere. Last month, Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) released a report that blatantly stated that corruption, bribery, money laundering and human rights violations continue unabated in the country and poses a severe threat in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

So why should it be surprising that such allegations are emerging and that the DU authorities have gone on to deny them? I am afraid that we are suffering from cancer and treating a headache. This isn't a one-off incident. It's just a symptom of a wider problem prevailing in society. A moral decay.

Since Sunday, left-leaning student organisations have been protesting on the DU campus, demanding postponement of the admissions under the "Gha" unit, and cancellation of the exam and punishment for those involved with the question leak.

And as a nation weakens from its pillars being eaten away by termites of immorality and corruption, we recite, with rigour.

*"Shokale uthiya ami mone mone boli*  
(I wake up in the morning and say to myself)

*Sharadin ami jeno bhalo hoye choli*  
(I hope I am able to stay on the good path all through the day)

*Adesh koren jaha more gurujone*  
(Whatever is commanded by the learned and elderly)

*Ami jeno shei kaj kori bhalo mone*  
(I hope I am able to do, with conviction)"

Sheer rigour and no understanding of the essence. Much like everything else we learn.

Shagufta Hossain is the founder of Leaping Boundaries and a member of the editorial team at *The Daily Star*.



Left-leaning student organisations have been protesting on the DU campus, demanding postponement of the admissions under the "Gha" unit.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

various public examinations like university admission tests and recruitment exams.

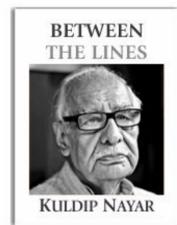
We might be tempted to get stuck on this particular act of immorality. But the fact of the matter is whether it is SSC exams, HSC exams, BCS exams or recruitment exams, the moral compass that guides the examination standards is seriously questionable. To begin with, if we accept the economic theory that demand creates supply then, why is there a demand for mechanisms that facilitate cheating? Why are we availing these services? Are we so de-capacitated or unconfident in our

education in modern society has somehow been lost.

Tests, if they exist, should be designed in a way that makes it impossible to cheat, or not at all. That would mean no MCQs and significantly more effort on the invigilator's part. Questions should be designed in a way that makes it impossible not to engage in critical thinking.

But what measures have been taken to curb this problem? The education minister has come up with the proposition that examinees must enter the exam hall 30 minutes before the exam starts. With all due respect, that

# Boundaries that divide us



KULDIP NAYAR

THE government of India has appointed Dineshwar Sharma, former Intelligence Bureau Chief as interlocutor to find a solution to Kashmir's

problems. This is not the first time that such an exercise is being conducted. New Delhi has had interlocutors in the past. Then instead of officials, ministers were appointed so that the issue could get urgency as well as immediate attention. But nothing came out of these exercises.

The Kashmiri leaders wanted more than what New Delhi would offer. There was no meeting point. Talks covered the gamut of problems. But the two sides were so distant from each other that the dialogue would not go very far. The Kashmiris want the Valley to be converted into a sovereign Islamic republic. This is something which India cannot give because it does not think that Kashmir is a disputed territory. It is considered part of the Indian union. I have visited Srinagar as an interlocutor many a time, but I could not offer anything near what they wanted.

What has disappointed me is the disappearance of a grey area, which was visible until a couple of years ago. The stances have hardened so much that even social contacts between Muslims and Hindus have got snapped. I am sorry to bring in a personal example. In the past, Yasin Malik would invite me to his house for dinner and conduct me to his house through the labyrinth of lanes.

True, he has turned into what is called a "separatist" but I vainly waited for a word from him. I do not believe that he did not know about my presence in Srinagar. The Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front he heads has posted his men at the airport to know who comes to the valley from India and elsewhere. Yasin Malik gets the "separatists" feedback.

I had Yasin's fast unto death broken on the condition that I would personally conduct a probe into human rights violations by the Indian security forces. He agreed to my supervision instead of the Amnesty International's probe and broke the fast. We produced a report and found Yasin's allegations mostly correct. The report was quoted widely by Pakistan to the embarrassment of the Indian government.

True, Yasin says that he is not an Indian. But our relationship was not built on the basis of nationality. Can bitterness snap even personal bonds?

Should I presume that I wrongly assumed certain things and that personal relations have no meaning in the face of political exigencies?

To cite another example of how personal relationships are pushed into the background for political purposes, another Kashmiri leader Shabir Shah is a changed person today. He was like my *chela* (disciple). He was then pro-India. Now he has changed into a staunch opponent. Yet, I do not know why personal relations should die. Is it the price that I have to pay for a change in Shabir's ideas?

Kashmir, no doubt, requires attention, especially for those who believe in a

told me how he was suspected even at a liberal place like Bangalore and harassed by the police.

Parties have reduced politics to the identification on the basis of caste and religion. People should assert themselves through liberal organisations or leaders and ensure that the poison of religion and caste does not spread. If the nation fails, Kashmir and many other parts of India may flounder in the muddy waters of religion.

It is in the interest of Kashmiris not to disturb the status quo until they can have something better. This is possible if the three parties, India, Pakistan and the people in Kashmir, come together for a

It must be mentioned that Atal Behari Vajpayee, to his credit, took a bus to Lahore. I was sitting behind him when he showed me New Delhi's telegram which said that several Hindus had been killed near Jammu. He said he did not know how the country would react about his trip to Lahore but he was determined to pick up the thread with Nawaz Sharif. The rest is history.

The Indus Water Treaty can be replaced with another treaty but the consent of Pakistan is necessary. When it has not been willing to allow the getting of electricity from the run of the river, it is difficult to imagine that it would agree to the use of rivers in the Indus system, even



We are in the midst of challenges to the very ideas propounded by Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, who won us freedom.

PHOTO: AUSEEF MUSTAFA/AFP

secular and democratic India. No amount of opposition should swerve them from their commitment. If they change, it means that their earlier stance was only a façade.

This holds true for the whole of India. We are in the midst of challenges to the very ideas propounded by Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, who won us freedom. It pains me to see that some voices have begun to appreciate the ideas of Nathuram Godse, who killed the Mahatma. Were India to question its ethos, the Muslim-dominated Kashmir would feel insecure. A Kashmiri Muslim engineer, who dropped me at the airport,

dialogue. New Delhi is not prepared for that because Islamabad has gone back on its promise not to allow its territory to be used by terrorists.

This was also agreed upon when Pakistan was under General Musharraf's rule. He went to Agra and almost signed an agreement with Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, until news had leaked, that India's then Information Minister Sushma Swaraj changed the draft agreement omitting Kashmir from the text. Since then the two countries have stayed distant. Musharraf's misadventure at Kargil has only aggravated the matter further.

though water from them is pouring into the Arabian Sea without being used for either irrigation or hydroelectric projects.

There is a tendency in Pakistan to link everything with Kashmir, which is a complicated problem and would take many years to solve. The revision of the Indus Water Treaty, which can satisfy both the countries, would add to the peace prospects. Let the treaty be discussed separately. The rest can follow. The only point to be taken into account is how the two countries can span the distance between them.

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### DU should investigate question paper leak

The allegation of question paper leak of Dhaka University's 'Gha' unit entrance test should not be ignored by the authorities. The apparent effort to suppress the allegation by the university authorities by publishing the results without any inquiry is not acceptable. A few perpetrators behind the leak even confessed to the Detective Branch of Police.

The quick publication of 'Gha' unit entrance test result was done not only to sweep the allegation under the rug but also implicitly emboldens such crimes. There is a high likelihood that the allegations are true, as media reports and police investigation suggest. The authorities should at least form a committee to thoroughly investigate the allegations instead of rejecting them prematurely.

Md Abulkalam Azad, By email

