

Recruitment of qualified teachers crucial

Zero pass rate of rural schools in SSC

We are worried to learn that 109 educational institutions in the country have had zero pass rates in this year's SSC exams. The students of these schools have failed despite the fact that the teacher-student ratio of these schools is above the national average of one teacher for 42 students and international average of one for 30 students. If so, then why such a debacle in the results?

The main reason identified by the educationists is the lack of qualified teachers at the secondary schools in rural areas. Particularly, there is a lack of specialised teachers in English and Math. This explains why most of these students have failed in these two subjects.

It is also common knowledge that many of the teachers in rural schools do not take classes regularly and leave schools at lunch-breaks. Our reporters have found that a number of these schools are running without headmasters and have a very low student attendance rate. All these factors combined must have contributed to this bad result. We wonder what the government institutions in charge of overseeing the activities of these schools have done all these years. Do they even visit these schools?

Needless to say, primary and secondary schools in the rural areas are in desperate need of qualified teachers, which the government must ensure that they get. At the same time, schoolteachers' monthly remuneration must be increased to a satisfactory level so that qualified people are interested to come to this profession. The government should also consider implementing the recommendations of the national education policy formulation committee-2010, which proposed a separate pay scale for teachers and formation of teachers' service commission for recruitment.

Dismal state of luggage handling at HSIA

Ground handling should be privatised

LEARNING luggage at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport (HSIA) is notoriously slow and it can take hours for passengers to get their luggage. The issue has finally been acknowledged by the Civil Aviation Minister AKM Shahjahan at a meeting recently. We wonder if a push by the minister will help civil aviation authorities (CAAB) wake up and take notice of the terrible state of affairs that passengers must contend with. It is not only a case of delays, but theft of passengers' luggage has also been a rising phenomenon. The apparent lack of accountability of staff belonging to the national carrier which is presently responsible for ground handling at HSIA means that there is no real incentive to improve the quality of services including making the operation faster as in other international airports in the region.

There has been some talk of a new ground handling policy in the works that would allow for CAAB to call tenders to appoint private operators for ground handling services. This is indeed the need of the hour because an airport's ranking is linked to how good its operations are and given the fact that passengers have to wait for hours for their suitcases to travel from airplanes to the carousels, a little competition in this area would do HSIA and its passengers a world of good. We hope that CAAB prepares the policy as soon as possible so that tenders may be floated and ground handling operations may get the much needed boost.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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An exemplary police officer

Recently, a photo went viral on social media showing an on-duty female police officer providing first-aid treatment to someone who was involved in an accident near the Mahakhali flyover area. Sub Inspector Sobnom Akter Popy, when she heard of the accident, had immediately rushed to the spot.

She herself drove the bus, which had caused the accident, to clear the congestion and allow other vehicles to move ahead. She also rescued an injured staff and provided him with first aid treatment, and then sent him to a nearby hospital.

What SI Shobnom did was exemplary. Had most police officers been like her, perhaps the public perception about law enforcement agencies would have changed altogether.

Md Zillur Rahaman, By e-mail

Staying safe during thunderstorms

Around 24 people across the country died in a single day recently after being struck by lightning. This shows that many people still do not know what precautions to take during severe thunderstorms.

The government should initiate countrywide awareness programmes. When there is lightning, people should find a safe place to stay, ideally indoors.

At the same time, all buildings should have proper earthing systems so that can the risk of damage by lightning can be reduced. The media should also do its part to raise awareness.

Md Zonaed Emran, By e-mail

Scrapping of Iran nuke deal and the dangerous path of populism



STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING

FIRST it was the Transpacific Partnership then the Paris climate agreement and now the Iran nuclear deal that President Trump has succeeded in torpedoing. As for his latest action, he may well feel satisfied that he has at last seen through the implementation of his election promise to do away with what he sees as a bad deal. But his allies, who are cosignatories to the deal, and who had tried to prevail on him unsuccessfully not to go down the dangerous path that such an action might lead to, disagree.

And only Trump and Netanyahu think Iran has been in violation of the deal. Netanyahu excelled himself in a superb theatrical performance a few days back, regurgitating decade-old information. He accused Iran of secretly developing nuclear weapons. But is that not what every nuclear weapon aspirant does? Israel still hides the fact that it possesses nuclear capability—a capability some western countries had helped it to acquire.

Netanyahu had opposed the deal from the very beginning, but with Obama he could cut no ice. Ultimately he got his way with Trump, to see Iran which he considers his worst enemy in the Middle East, to be divested of any capacity to defend itself. With Iraq diminished, Iran was but his natural

Double standard notwithstanding, the Iran nuclear deal was the best arrangement that ensured Iran capping its nuclear programme alongside the easing of nuclear related sanctions on it.

target and on which Israel's long-term and Trump's short-sighted parochial interest found mutuality. The Israeli prime minister's showmanship was well orchestrated and synchronised to suit Trump's narrative and lend weight to Trump's declaration on the deal that he was about to make. It fooled no one. Perhaps Trump has not bothered to see the recent polls in the US that show an overwhelming 63 percent of the people there do not want it scrapped.

The US president's action mirrored a unique feature of South Asian

international scrutiny to confirm that it has no intention to use its nuclear development programme other than to meet its energy needs. In fact Iran had suspended its nuclear weapons programme in 2007, a fact that the American intelligence agencies had confirmed. That in itself is a big concession. But that only demonstrates Iran's transparency and honesty in the face of a completely immoral stand of certain countries who insist that Iran must never have nuclear weapons. And some of these very countries had helped

imperfect world, despite the much vaunted concept of sovereign equality, where some countries claim to be more equal than the rest, no one country's national interest can or should merit priority over another. But that double standard notwithstanding, the Iran nuclear deal was the best arrangement that ensured Iran capping its nuclear programme alongside the easing of nuclear related sanctions on it.

But Trump's action may not be related entirely to the current US administration's distrust of Iran. It wants to conflate other issues, in Syria and Lebanon in particular, with the deal, to exert pressure on Iran. There is perhaps in the minds of the hawkish lobby to see a regime change in Tehran hoping that ratcheted up pressure by re-imposing sanctions might just help effect that change without realising that the new dispensation, in the most unlikely event of a change in Tehran, might be even worse than the current regime.

Abandoning the deal would in fact, if anything, help the hardliners close ranks with the moderates in the face of what will be seen as a direct assault on Iran's security and economic interests. And Iran may well consider nuclear weapon an option, something it has not done so far. It may not sit idle should Israel launch a pre-emptive proxy attack on Iran's nuclear facilities.

Trump's decision has not only set a dangerous precedent in terms of the sanctity of future international agreements, but also opened the way for future conflicts. However, predicting anything at this point would be going ahead of time. We await Iran's action on ground, not comments. The questions one might ask are: Is the deal dead without the US? Can it survive with Iran and P4+? Will it be wrong for Iran to think that scrapping the deal was only an excuse to push it to a corner to compel a precipitate action from it? Abandoning the deal without an alternative solution suggests that is so.

Trump is set on a dangerous path that his policies prod him on to. But history shows that such policies, stimulated by utterly selfish nationalist and populist considerations, are self-defeating and often lead to one's own ruin.

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PHOTO: SAUL LOEB/AFP

US President Donald Trump signs a document reinstating sanctions against Iran after announcing the US withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal on May 8, 2018.

politics—renounce and do away anything that has the predecessor's name on it. He has tried, not fully successfully though, to do away with Obamacare, and now has scrapped a deal that bears Obama's fingerprints. With the moderate Tillerson out and the hawks like Bolton and Pompeo in, the fate of the deal was made even more inevitable.

The Iran Nuclear Agreement was a deal painstakingly arrived at between Iran and the P5+1 countries and finally inked in July 2015. Since then the IAEA, the only watchdog that we should believe, has certified regularly that Iran has been in full compliance of the agreement.

Much credit must go to Iran for having subjected itself to very intrusive

Israel to develop nuclear capability, and even suppress knowledge of Israel's retaliatory nuclear strike plan—code named “Samson Option”—should it be attacked. Israel is a nuclear power, though undeclared.

If one country can justify possession of nuclear weapons on moral grounds as a deterrence capability, and that sits well with the nuclear brahmmins, why can't these brahmmins cede the very same right to another country to attain similar capability to defend itself and maintain its national interest? Is it not justified to subject the Negev Nuclear Research Centre to the same scrutiny that Iran has willingly subjected its nuclear facilities to?

Even if we were to accept that in this

Finding lasting solutions to question leaks

NAZNIN TITHI

THERE has hardly been any news in the media about the ongoing HSC examinations that started on April 2. And that's probably good news. Only some of our Bengali dailies have been publishing special pages where experienced teachers give examinees precious advice on how best to prepare for the exams—an old practice of our newspapers. The lack of news gives a sense of relief and hope that the exams this year are being conducted properly.

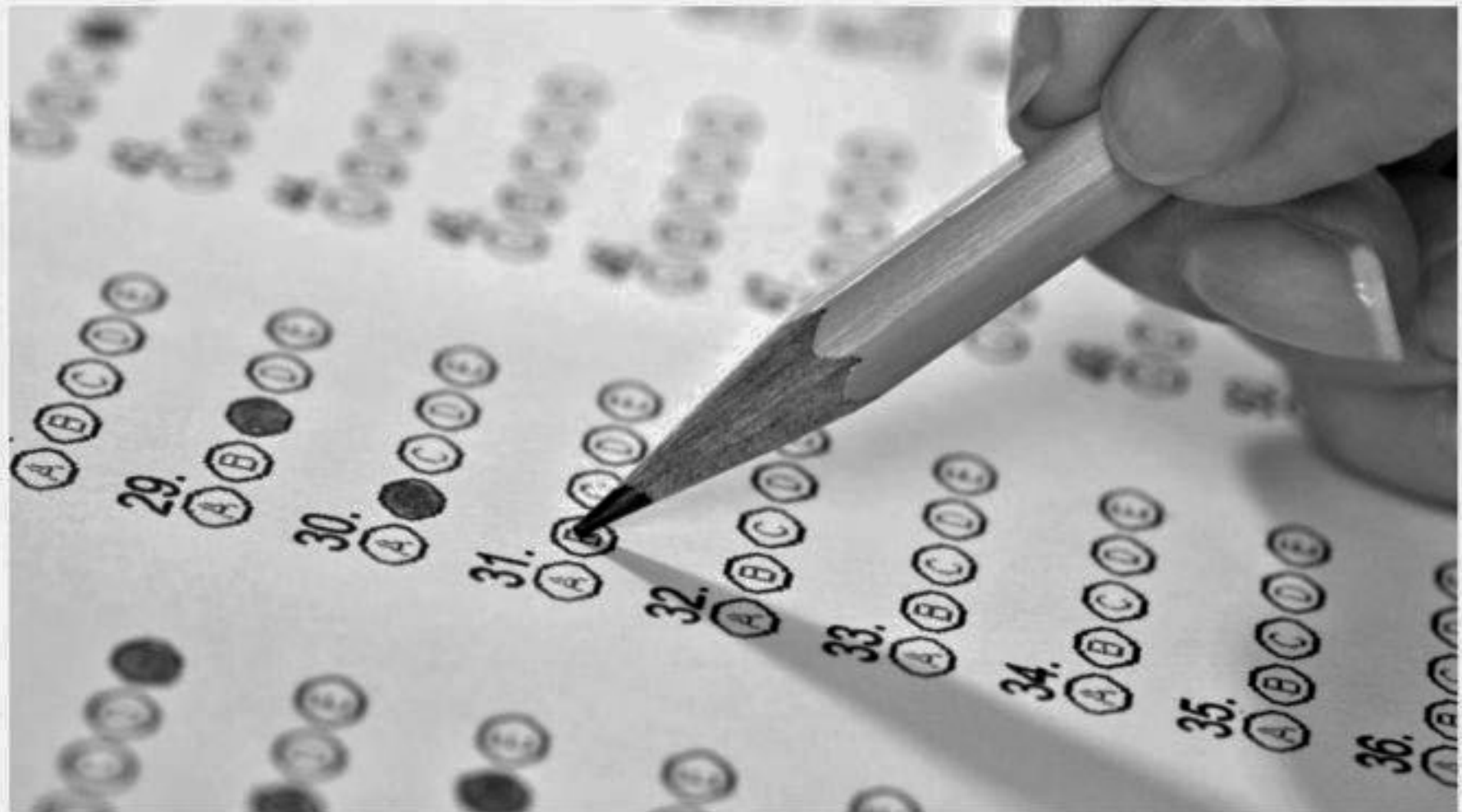
It would be hard to remember the last time that an important public exam was held with no reports of question paper leaks in the media. Over the last couple of years, question paper leaks during public exams have become a norm in the country. Last year, question papers of almost all public exams—from PSC, JSC, SSC and HSC to the public university admission exams—were leaked prior to the exams.

And this year, after SSC question papers of 12 out of the 17 subjects were leaked—which set a new record in the country—it was obvious that the government was struggling to contain the leaks. Thus students, guardians and people in general were not much assured by our education minister's words when he said, “From the experience of the SSC examinations, we have taken stricter measures this time. We have also taken stricter strategies. So, we can say that we have done everything humanly possible to prevent question leak.” (*The Daily Star*, April 2, 2018). We all doubted the effectiveness of the measures that were taken, because similar steps taken during the SSC exams turned out to be futile.

But this time the government's sincerity and coordinated efforts to prevent question leaks seem to have actually paid off. So far, there has been no news of question paper leaks during the ongoing HSC exams, the written part of which will end on May 14. Needless to say, the measures taken by the ministry were well thought-out; these included closing down all coaching centres until the end of the exams, prohibiting the use of cell phones in the vicinity of the centres (only the secretary of the exam centre has been authorised to use a basic mobile phone, and not a smartphone, during the exams), determining the set of questions through a lottery 25 minutes prior to the test,

making it mandatory for the examinees to enter the centres 30 minutes prior to the exams, etc. These steps combined seem to have worked wonders for which the government deserves appreciation.

However, there have been some reports of anomalies and mismanagement which should not have taken place under any circumstances. Reportedly, in some exam centres, wrong sets of questions were provided to the students. For example, students of Viqarunnisa Noon School & College were provided with the wrong question set during their Biology first paper exam. A similar incident took place with the students of a college in Jamalpur during the ICT exams, as they were also given the wrong set of questions. Students of



Saint Joseph School and College and Teigaon College also faced the same problem. But the most bizarre incident was when in some centres in Lalmonirhat, students were provided with questions of 2016's HSC exams. These issues must be addressed properly so that not a single student has to suffer because of the authorities' mismanagement. It must be ensured that the answer scripts of those who were provided with the wrong question sets are hand-checked.

Except for these few problems, there has been no major debacle in the HSC examinations this year. Maybe, replicating the measures in future exams could go a long way in stopping question leaks. But we must also remember that these are only temporary solutions. To find a lasting solution to this problem, we need to find out the

root causes of question leaks and address them properly.

Our educationists believe that there is a big connection between question leaks and the coaching business. Just shutting down coaching centres during exams is not enough. The coaching business should be stopped once and for all. This has also been the demand of guardians for a long time. According to a recent *Prothom Alo* report, the draft Education Bill—which bans coaching centres, private tuition, the use of guidebooks, etc.—was finalised by the education ministry in September last year, but is yet to be submitted to the cabinet division for approval. This bill needs to be passed immediately.

Another effective way to stop question

Another effective way to stop question leaks could be to drop Multiple Choice Questions from all board exams. If this can be done, the possibility of question paper leaks may be further reduced.

education in primary schools became examination-centric, students became increasingly reliant on private tutoring, and most students, school teachers and private tutors became heavily-dependent on guidebooks. The study also found that to get high scores at any cost, many students, coaching centre owners and examination hall supervisors got involved in malpractices including leakage of question papers. Considering the above-mentioned situation, we must come to a decision regarding the need of public examinations such as Primary School Certificate Examination (PSC) and Junior School Certificate Examination (JSC) for students at those levels.

The failure of the government to check question leaks during this year's SSC exams has clouded all the good initiatives the government has taken in this sector in the past few years. Thus stopping question leaks during the HSC exams was crucial for the government to gain back people's trust. Now that the government has passed that test, it should gear up efforts to finalise the Education Bill, implement the National Education Policy 2010, and also take measures to reduce school dropout rates and recruit quality teachers for improving the quality of education. It is only through providing quality education to the students that we can move away from an examination-centric education system—a priority if we are to tackle the problem of question leaks at its core.

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