

A necessary reality check in SSC results

Fair evaluation exposes gaps in learning and system readiness

The results of this year's SSC and equivalent exams, though not what many students expected, mark a welcome shift towards restoring credibility in public exam evaluation. It also marks a departure—decisively, one hopes—from the regressive trend of compromising the quality of pre-tertiary exams through auto-passes or subject/syllabus-related concessions, something that we have seen even in the early days of the interim government. We, therefore, commend the authorities for finally restoring merit-based assessment without succumbing to any sociopolitical pressure for higher grades. As education officials have said, this year's results reflect students' actual performance. That in itself is something worth recognising.

According to official data, the pass rate across all nine general education boards has dropped to 68.04 percent—the lowest in 16 years—while the combined pass rate in all boards (including general, madrasa, and technical) has fallen to 68.45 percent. The number of GPA 5 achievers has also seen a significant decline. Meanwhile, girls have once again outperformed boys in both pass rate and GPA scores, continuing a near-decade-long trend. Among the general education boards, Rajshahi recorded the highest pass rate at 77.63 percent, while Barishal dropped to the bottom with just 56.38 percent. Particularly worrying is the 53.87 percent pass rate in the humanities group, which is far lower than science (85.68 percent) or business studies (66.32 percent).

Naturally, such a sharp decline has caused concern among parents and educators alike. The question is, should we treat this as a disaster or as a reflection of ground realities that have long been masked? By all accounts, the answer lies in the latter. This year, examiners were reportedly instructed to evaluate answer scripts on merit. No extra or grace marks were awarded. But the problem runs much deeper, of course. School education has faced repeated disruptions and closures over the past six years owing to the effects of the pandemic and persistent political unrest. SSC students, in particular, often missed out on regular classroom learning from classes 6 through 10. The psychological effects of all such disruptions on young minds, which we have long anticipated, are becoming increasingly evident. Coupled with stricter marking and apparently more "difficult" question papers, especially in mathematics, it is little surprise that the results have turned out the way they have.

Each of these factors exposes troubling gaps in learning and system readiness that we must address going forward. But first, we should remember that poor results can lead to increased dropout rates, especially among girls and in rural and poorer regions—a trend we must prevent through prompt interventions this time. Equally importantly, it's time we stopped equating higher pass rates or GPA 5 scores with success. This obsession with inflated results has fostered a toxic culture of competition over the years and even led to many cases of suicide among students. What we should instead focus on is improving learning and eliminating the culture of frequent academic disruptions for the long-term future of our students and nation. The education sector is crying for reforms and systemic improvement. We must not fail to do that.

Prevent deaths from open drains

Latest tragedy highlights risks of Chattogram city's exposed drains

We are concerned by the continued deaths of people, including children, from falling into open drains in Chattogram city. Reportedly, at least 14 people have lost their lives after falling into open drains or canals in the city over the past six years, while many more have been injured. The latest victim is a three-year-old child who drowned in the city's Halishahar area on July 9. Reportedly, the child was playing near her home when the incident occurred. Earlier in April, a six-month-old died when a rickshaw fell into an open drain amid strong water flow at the Kapasgola area. The baby's body was recovered 14 hours later, from the Chakta canal. Tragedies like these have become a common occurrence in Chattogram, especially during monsoon, despite frequent protests against unsafe drains and the negligence of those responsible.

Over the years, the authorities have undertaken many ambitious and expensive projects to improve Chattogram city's drainage system and reduce waterlogging, but failed to do something as basic as covering all the drains. According to a 2023 report by this daily, nearly 70 percent of the port city's water bodies have been filled over the last five decades, while numerous canals have disappeared due to illegal encroachment. The city originally had 72 canals and now lists only 56, as per the drainage masterplan prepared by Chattogram WASA. This has led to severe waterlogging.

Last year, the Chattogram City Corporation (CCC)—which has frequently come under criticism for failing to prevent waterlogging—claimed to have covered nearly 80 percent of the unsafe spots near drains with slabs and built around 70 percent of the required retaining walls along vulnerable canals to enhance safety. But what happened to the rest of the drains and canals? How well-maintained are those that have been "secured"? The deaths of two children this year highlight the danger continuously posed by both unfinished work and poor oversight. How many more people will have to die before this problem is fixed for good?

We urge the city authorities to take immediate measures to prevent any casualties from open drains. Every exposed drain must be covered, and vulnerable canals must be secured. A 2021 survey identified 5,527 dangerous spots linked to canals and drains, all of which must be made safe without delay. Equally important is solving the city's persistent waterlogging problem that is directly tied to many of these tragic incidents. Moreover, officials responsible for the city's maintenance and development must be held accountable for their poor performance and negligence.

EDITORIAL

Tariffquake: Why Bangladesh economy must diversify or fall



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It hasn't been just a tremor; it's been a tectonic shock. The announcement from Washington, imposing a 35 percent reciprocal tariff (down from the initial 37 percent announced in April), has not only shaken Bangladesh's industrial heartland, but has presented a moment of reckoning: a sudden, challenging test of a nation's resilience, where the lifeblood of an entire economy is now under severe strain.

The numbers tell a stark story. Over 800 enterprises, their fortunes tethered to the American consumer, are now at "high risk." For a core group of 168 companies that ship every single product they make to the US, the tariff isn't a headwind; it threatens their very survival. We are talking about a torrent of commerce—a staggering \$5.05 billion from companies exporting to the US last year—now slammed against a formidable wall. The competitive arithmetic is just as grim. An existing average duty of around 15 percent is now compounded by the staggering 35 percent levy, creating a crippling 50 percent total tariff.

But this crisis was not inevitable. Vietnam acted, while Bangladesh waited. The result is a chasm. When Vietnam deftly navigated the diplomatic storm to secure a far more manageable 20 percent tariff, Bangladesh was left facing a significant loss of advantage.

Economists are calling it a "harsh economic blow," a contagion that will likely spread from apparels to footwear, furniture to food products. It threatens a social crisis of mass job losses—a devastating prospect for millions of female workers, often their families' sole breadwinners. The immediate plunge of the Dhaka Stock Exchange was merely the first, nervous tremor of a much larger

economic earthquake to come. On the frontlines, the despair is palpable. For the managing director of an apparel manufacturing company, a three-decade relationship with US buyers is on the verge of collapse.



VISUAL: REUTERS

Over 800 export-oriented enterprises in Bangladesh are considered to be at "high risk" following the 35 percent reciprocal tariff imposed by the US.

This sentiment is echoed by another leader in the RMG industry, who has warned of an existential crisis for his US exclusive firms. This dread extends beyond RMG, as the leader of an agro-processing firm has described how the mere threat of tariffs months ago was enough for US buyers to suspend orders.

Compounding this market anxiety is a deep-seated frustration, with the managing director of another export-oriented business lamenting the government's "significant shortcoming" in failing to negotiate with its US counterpart effectively, or even consult the very industry it is supposed to protect.

Idling on the sidelines, its expertise and its pleas to hire professional US-based lobbyists ignored. Worse still, the diplomatic strategy was built on a weak foundation. The hope that its Least Developed Country (LDC) status would garner sympathy met with the cold wall of realpolitik; as analysts have long known, Washington has not historically been sentimental in its trade dealings.

Of course, the crisis was ignited by a volatile mix of doctrine and drama emanating from the White House. But Washington's unpredictable policy environment does not excuse Dhaka's lack of preparation. Officially, the

How expat Bangladeshi footballers are reconnecting to ancestral roots

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Bangladesh, a nation with a long-standing passion for sports, especially football, has been experiencing a long drought in the sport for myriad reasons: poor performances on the international stage, inadequate domestic infrastructure, irregular and uncompetitive local football, absence of age-level and school competitions, lack of visionary strategies, and corruption among football officials. Gradually, even die-hard fans are losing interest, while the younger generations are more invested in European football.

However, a new ray of hope is quietly emerging, marking an immense potential for the sport in Bangladesh and offering the country a new global identity, thanks to the involvement of

inclusion can strengthen the bond with the vast Bangladeshi diaspora and foster a renewed sense of national pride.

For more than two decades, Bangladeshi football has remained confined to domestic competition, with no significant international success. Although local leagues retain loyal (if dwindling) followings, the international reach and competitiveness seen in other South Asian nations have largely eluded our country.

Then a new chapter began with Jamal Bhuyan, a Danish youth of Bangladeshi descent and now the national team captain, who pioneered this legacy in 2013 when he first joined the squad. While a few African footballers once expressed interest in representing Bangladesh after acquiring citizenship, they were ultimately unsuccessful.

In 2023, Norwegian defensive midfielder Tariq Kazi followed in Jamal's footsteps and joined the

talents—hailing from youth academies and clubs in the UK, US, Germany, Italy, France, Portugal, Australia, Sweden, the UAE, Spain, and Estonia—promise to inject fresh energy into Bangladeshi football. Their polished technical skills, tactical discipline,

lives to Bangladeshi traditions. Their multilingualism and cultural adaptability also make them excellent ambassadors for cross-cultural engagement.

Community-based initiatives such as school visits, local tournaments,



FILE PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

For more than two decades, Bangladeshi football has remained confined to domestic competition, with no significant international success.

physical conditioning, and professional experience are rare in the domestic arena. Their journeys—from life abroad back to their ancestral homeland—symbolise a profound devotion and connection to their roots.

These footballers play a significant role in uniting the global Bangladeshi diaspora. Bangladeshi living abroad make remarkable contributions to the socioeconomic and cultural life of their host countries. However, maintaining meaningful ties with Bangladesh often proves challenging. Football, as a global language and a powerful emblem of national identity, offers a unique way to bridge this gap.

The Bangladesh national football team's international tours—particularly in cities with large Bangladeshi communities such as those in the UK, US, and Middle East—transcend sport. They act as cultural touchpoints, rekindling national pride and fostering a shared identity among Bangladeshi living overseas. Second- and third-generation Bangladeshi living abroad often feel emotionally connected when they see players who share their heritage on the field. These athletes can become inspirational figures, linking global

and social media campaigns can help nurture a collective sense of pride. Interactive strategies like Q&A sessions, virtual meet and greets, and behind-the-scenes content will make these athletes more relatable, particularly to diaspora youth.

However, for this momentum to bear fruit, the BFF and relevant stakeholders must adopt a strategic and forward-thinking approach. This includes actively identifying talent within the diaspora, simplifying the path for integration, and creating long-term engagement plans. At its core, this approach must acknowledge that the future of Bangladeshi football lies not just within its borders, but in its diverse and dynamic global community.

These expatriate footballers are not merely players; they are emblems of a modern, globalised Bangladesh, driven by ambition and resilience. Beyond revitalising the sport domestically, this is an opportunity to unite the diaspora around a shared sense of pride. By embracing these players as cultural ambassadors, Bangladesh can build bridges that transcend boundaries—one kick at a time.

expatriate footballers.

The Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) recently organised a three-day trial at the National Stadium in Dhaka, participated by 52 expatriate footballers of Bangladeshi origin, aged between 14 and 27 years. This initiative forms part of BFF's broader strategy, The Next Global Star, aimed at recruiting Bangladeshi-origin players who play at club or academy levels abroad. These talented individuals, trained in various football academies and professional leagues—particularly in Europe—bring not only technical ability but also a strong desire to represent the national team. Their

national team, paving the way for others. However, the most notable breakthrough came when Hamza Choudhury, the only English Premier League player of South Asian origin, cleared all FIFA protocols and arrived in Bangladesh to serve the national side. Hamza's inclusion received overwhelming attention and motivated BFF to intensify its efforts to scout more expatriate talent. Subsequent editions of Fahmidul Islam (Italy) and Shami Shome (Canada) further energised fans and shifted media attention—albeit temporarily—from cricket to football.

Now, this new group of emerging