

## Learning national history is important

HISTORY is important; national history is more so as a people cannot remain a people if they forget what binds them. A national failure on this issue came up glaringly in a sample survey that the Planning Commission conducted interviewing 576 citizens in the 16-60 age group, who live within two kilometres of 12 killing fields in 12 districts, with most of the respondents having completed primary schooling and many having bachelor and master's degrees. The survey findings show, as New Age reported on Friday, one in three does not know when the nation celebrates Independence Day, one in four when the nation celebrates Victory Day and six in 10 that the occupation army of Pakistan and its local collaborators murdered Bengal intellectuals on December 14 during the nation's struggle for national independence. Worryingly still, only 1 per cent of the respondents could name all the seven Bir Shreshthas, freedom fighters who died in action during the war and were decorated with the highest gallantry award, and 54 per cent of them could not name even a single recipient of the highest gallantry award. This brings to the fore our collective failure in making citizens, not all though, how to view our country and its place in the past.

Such a failure could have profound consequences for the politics of the country and on people's being its citizens, who are not so if they are not focused. The failure to instil in people an understanding of the country's national history appears to have stemmed from other failures. The curriculum is not designed in a way to make learning history important, and joyful, to students. The teaching of facts and dates and the unimaginative way these are taught, which appear mostly boring to students, will need to be overcome. These occasions should be celebrated and observed with due fervour, not just as rituals, in schools and colleges. History projects and excursions could be a way to make students understand their past. History often changes, to become one-sided, when changes in power take place, leading to a tussle between traditional or official historical narrative and alternative historical approaches. Such tussles, as are prevalent in society, often only keep students, or young minds, off the discussion on or study of history so as not to be deprecated by their peers or even elders. What is grave in this is that politicians and managers of the state have so far failed to take notice of this fact or even if they did, they have failed to act accordingly.

In what has come about, the government now has to reform the curriculum, balancing the official historical narrative with alternative historical approaches, in a way so that learning history gives people an understanding of their past and instil in them a conviction to march forward based on that past. It is high time we needed to understand that history repeats itself but mostly when we forget history, the most important aspect of a nation's sense.