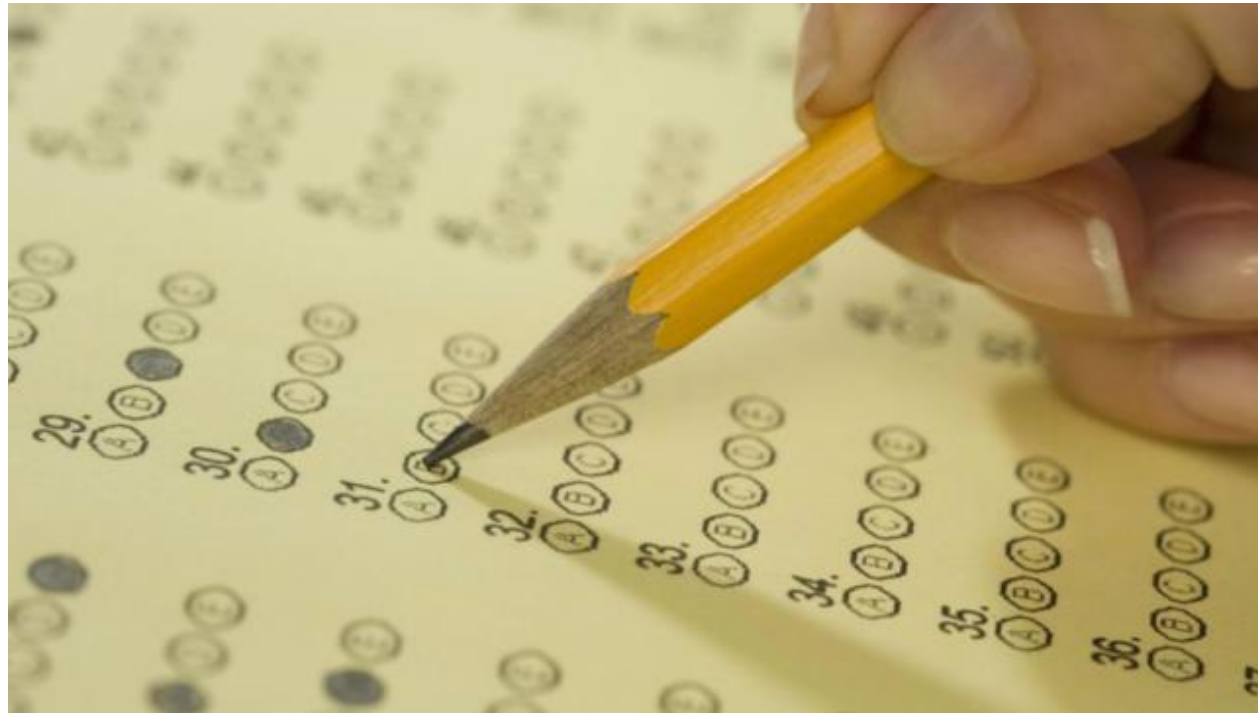


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## Finding lasting solutions to question leaks



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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 Tejgaon College also faced the same problem. But the most bizarre incident was when in some centres in Lalmonirhat, students were provided with question 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 leaks could be to drop Multiple Choice Questions (MCQs) from all board exams. If this can be done, the possibility of question paper leaks may be further reduced. The government has already decided to drop MCQs from Primary School Certificate (PSC) examinations from this year. And our state minister for education has also hinted at such a change in all public examinations. The sooner this is done, the better. As students and guardians might not appreciate dropping of the entire MCQ part altogether at one go, this can be done in phases.

Another reason behind the widespread question leaks could be the number of board examinations our children have to sit for. A study by CAMPE in 2014 found out that after the introduction of Primary Education Completion Examination (PECE), 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.

**Naznin Tithi is a member of the editorial team at *The Daily Star*.**

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