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তারিখ ... MAY 30, 2000
পৃষ্ঠা ৭ কলাম ...

Hands off HSC Exams, Please

IN recent years, cheating at the SSC and HSC examinations has assumed such proportions that one wonders whether there is any justification of these tests at all. On Thursday last, the first day of this year's HSC examinations, it was once again the same tale retold. A huge number of expulsions aside, there were incidents of violence where expelled examinees and their associates went on a rampage to give vent to their anger and frustration. At one centre in Comilla, police were forced to fire a few shots to deter rowdy students and their allies, who laid siege to the principal's office. By and large, there was a sharp contrast between examinations at the urban and rural centres, the latter, needless to say, witnessing a 'festival' of cheating. Even the teachers played party to it.

But, in our view, what is the more worrying is increasing involvement of political elements in the whole process. In some areas, local leaders and their followers virtually spearheaded the 'mass cheating operations'. With their blessings, 'examinees' and their 'well-wishers' simply made a mockery of the examinations system, flouting the rules, both in and outside the centres, with disdainful ease. That is not the end of it, however. Top notches at the country's four education boards have, on more occasions than one, identified political pressure as a major impediment to their efforts to ensure fair and trouble-free examinations. Also, there have been allegations of political leaders pulling strings to prevent exclusion of some 'trouble-prone' centres.

It is unfortunate that whereas the politicians, irrespective of party affiliations, are expected to facilitate the examinations process, with maximum help extended to the education boards, they are doing just the opposite. The central leadership of the mainstream parties, especially the big ones, should issue a declaration condemning involvement of political elements in the examination process. Also, they should work out a provision to initiate investigation into such involvement upon allegations and dish out expulsion from the party ranks to anyone found guilty.