

## The Educational Challenge

In her inaugural address to a conference on primary education, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on Tuesday underlined the need for uniform educational standards in the country. The issue has seldom, if ever, received the attention of policymakers. That the Prime Minister is alive to the problem augurs well but we are interested to know if her government has any specific plan to take the bull by the horn. The absence of a comprehensive policy on education has been responsible for wide variations in the standards of education. Now there reigns a virtual chaos at the primary level of education.

It is a Himalayan task to narrow the qualitative gaps in the three streams of education on offer. Even if we do not take into account the various methods and curricula within a stream — private English medium to be precise — there is little chance of effecting comparable standards between the general primary education and madrasa education. Both primary and madrasa education cannot compete with the English medium schooling for reasons understandable.

There is, however, no question of bringing the three streams at par by lowering the quality of the best among them. The effort should be directed towards raising the standard of the other two lagging far behind. We are really bored of hearing the same statement that education has received the highest budgetary allocation. Now we would like to see results. Is the allocation enough for delivering what is needed for a country that boasts enormous human resources. To ensure the resources' meaningful utilisation we need modern and scientific education. But we are still stuck in the three-stream dilemma. When opportunities at the primary level are so discriminatory and a little more than one-third of the population barely qualify to be literate — not to confuse with the more fortunate ones' functional literacy — it is too much to expect that the human resource can be made desirably productive.

What we need is a radical reform of our education system. We need a vision of education that will bring out the best of our human and cultural traits. We have to create people of peace, ethics, professional ability and self-respect. For all this, foundation has to be laid at the primary stage.

## Drug Situation Terrible

Bravo! The Home Minister went out on Tuesday on an incognito Harun-al-Rashid-style expedition to get the feel of the drug underworld. He was not without his Masroor — police top boss Azizul Huq. In a bustee near the Magh Bazar railway level-crossing, they found three youngmen buying phensidyl — three phials at 120 Taka each. The police boss enquired if the seller could supply him 300 phials readily. Yes, was the ready reply.

Keeping intact their cover they went up to Demra police station to lodge a complaint against the regular trafficking. The response from the station people fell far short of the required.

Afterwards the same night Home Minister Rafiqul Islam described the situation to reporters as terrible. Well, Minister Islam must be knowing that he hasn't seen even the tip of the narcotic iceberg. The expedition must see his resolve to swoop down on drug trafficking. And this has become immensely more urgent in the backdrop of Eliadah McCord's amnesty.

If any one knows his Bangladesh, he knows what do the youths, impecunious and opulent alike, do after dusk. A great many of them, that is, Minister Islam would find a far more important quarry in the so-called pharmacies of the towns in the interior — starting with, say, Narayanganj. The business, for many of them, is dealing in narcotic drugs. The phensidyl circle could perhaps be broken with comparative ease. But not the more dangerous one — the roaring business in opium and cannabis derivatives. It seems that a whole generation has fallen for these and is more than halfway being lost to society.

We congratulate the minister on his expedition but at the same time caution him that this would only whet our thirst for much more better things to come on the law and order front.

## World-class Cuisine

Bangladeshi food can be a world-class cuisine. So said a prominent headline on yesterday's Daily Star front page. One who knows the matter and is also Bengalee enough would possibly take the position that our national dish had always been up to world's best standards — only that the world did not ever have a chance to know it. Perhaps mainly because Bengalees never went for empire building.

The leaders of the Bangladesh Caterers Association in UK who are now in city spoke on Tuesday in a seminar held to impress upon government the importance of the Bangladeshi catering enterprise in UK. For the government the same occasion presented a chance to encourage expatriates to invest in Bangladesh. It was the catering leaders who confidently expressed the hope that, if there were right planning and management, Bangladeshi dishes could also win the world as has been done by the Italian pizza. So very true. Which Bangladeshi dish would offer pizza a competition? It is *chicken tenduri*, according to them. But how much 'Bangladeshi' is that dish?

Going uncompromisingly for the genuine and authentic — the real stuff — is a surer key to success in the market-place. The merchandise you offer must carry with it culture which would sell it high and also more. Nevertheless, there is no harm in beating others in the *tenduri* game also. But there are some other *mughlai* meat dishes peculiar to Dhaka and doubtlessly top class. *Rezala*, for one. And then there are the famous *chaaps* and *glassies* of mutton which the enterprising brave ones should not forget about.

The world is going veg — slowly but steadily. There is a whole world there to be won for the Bengalee entrepreneurs.

# The De Beers Make-believe

With the knowledge that Indian origin stuff may not be entirely acceptable to the Pakistani palate if it is found coming from India, De Beers is probably the "Trojan Horse" being used as the acceptable face camouflaging the Indian connection and the direct contribution that every Pakistani citizen who can afford diamonds will make towards the Indian economy.

NEARLY 50 years after Pakistan became an independent country, the diamond people have discovered we exist and seem to be coming to town in rather a big way. Having flouted a bevy of teasingly clad models wearing expensive diamonds and hip-hugging saris in front of a very select and wowing audience, De Beers is now seductively talking about "inexpensive diamonds for the average Pakistani pocket."

Since this South African diamond conglomerate is hardly a philanthropic institution and the sales promotion in Pakistan is being locally handled by an experienced advertising/PR firm that has obviously done its homework, they probably know something that we don't. According to most analysts, Pakistan is in a deep economic crisis, the average man in the street, the middle class and the moderately wealthy have all been hit hard in descending order of misery, i.e. the most miserable are synonymous with the most poverty-stricken.

Even the upper middle-class and moderately wealthy (the upwardly mobile or "yuppies") have food and utility bills rather than diamonds on their minds.

So have the De Beers market analysis team gone bankers in trying to penetrate such a rapidly disintegrating market or have they suddenly discovered a hitherto latent love for Pakistan that has aroused their philanthropic instincts?

Given Pakistan's strong parallel economy (may it last long!), rapid decline of the Pakistani Rupee against most international currencies, the growing enthusiasm of revenue officials with respect to ferreting out real estate acquisitions (and the official and/or unofficial tax thereof), the increasing lack of lustre among the "upwardly mobile" for gold as a hedging asset, etc., diamonds may have acquired a new meaning for so many reasons, prime among them being as a status symbol in this very material world for the *nouveau riche*.

Someone had the effrontery in this poverty-stricken land to display diamond-studded jeans, it is believed that there was no dearth of buyers for this sickening monstrosity.

Selling diamonds to suit the common pocket in Pakistan may not be a sick joke after all! Those Pakistanis who have a penchant (and the where-withal) to acquire these "inexpensive" diamonds need to have a short course of introduction in diamond's commercial history vis a vis South Asia. Most of the world's commercial diamonds (at least 75 per cent) arrive uncut in India at a comparatively low price. India being not only the largest market for the finished products but also the biggest as far as expertise for the cutting and polishing of uncut diamonds.

After a sophisticated "finishing" process, the diamonds assure a new value, much in excess of the relatively cheap labour that went into value addition to its finishing stage e.g. a rough, uncut diamond worth \$1000 may

Education, transport and medicines are mostly out of their reach, theirs is a 15th century existence with 20th century problems. There is a social obligation here that requires not only the government to make a sacrifice but for those also who can afford diamonds to at least try and do so. However one cannot pragmatically expect many of those being targeted by De Beers as potential customers to suddenly discover a social or a moral conscience and help the helpless in any positive way, the least they can do is to restrict to some extent the spending the country's hard-earned foreign exchange in unnecessary purchase of these non-productive but expensive precious stones.

This is particularly galling because almost all the value addition from the diamond's rough uncut stage goes directly

undermine Pakistan's economy and thus compromise its national security, this is a hard fact of business.

To rouse the patriotic instinct may be good in theory, in practice those who can afford diamonds will certainly keep on buying them. The De Beers presentation will ensure that the make-believe becomes economic reality. Given that our girls will continue to covet diamonds as their best friend, what the government can do is to ensure that maximum of the diamonds are only imported in rough uncut state in order to develop the local industry for cutting and polishing. Our many generations of cutters and polishers need remedial training and upgrading to modern sophisticated methods. Like it was done in India, De Beers could perhaps help fund a couple of such institutes for professional precious minerals so that our private sector gets the expertise through the whole spectrum of value addition for the many gems and precious stones found in Pakistan.

De Beers could further help by re-purchasing most of the finished products and marketing it themselves in the rest of the world in the same manner as they are doing for India, targeting us presently among the many potential suckers (loops, buyers) in the world. Let our girls have diamonds but these should be finished in Pakistan by Pakistani craftsmen so that the value addition remains within the Pakistani economy.

The attraction for diamonds being quite strong in Pakistan, the second largest market after India in Asia, the products being blatantly peddled by De Beers could only be done so when backed by diamond-studded clout. Those who normally manipulate the puppet strings of our policymakers are not adverse to the lustre of diamonds. It translates into hard currency quite easily. Make-believe or not, when you have plenty of money, you have plenty of clout. But when you have diamonds, you have the loyalty of those with plenty of clout in Pakistan forever (with apologies to Ian Fleming's "Diamonds Are Forever" for using the similarity very much as intended).

## AS I SEE IT

Ikram Sehgal writes from Karachi

now fetch \$5000 6000. In the next stage when they are set in a necklace, bracelet or any other piece of jewellery, the value addition thereof from its primary uncut stage may be in many multiples, i.e. it may climb to many times the \$ 5000 6000 value.

Diamonds may be a girl's best friend but for a country as impoverished as ours and acutely feeling not only the rising costs of imports but a burgeoning import bill as well in the face of dwindling foreign exchange reserves, even "inexpensive" diamonds may be a luxury that we can ill afford at the present time.

Literally a stone throw from our five-star hotels in Karachi where the De Beers diamond extravaganzas are usually held as a "sound and light" show, people live in make-shift shelters without running water or plumbing or gas. Whatever electricity they get, if they manage it, is by the time-honoured method of illegal connection, the "Kunda". Bereft of clean drinking water, they can hardly manage one square meal a day.

into the Indian economy (already a \$ 5 billion trade). For every piece of finished diamond that our girls may be buying to buy, the finishing cost goes to Indian craftsmen (cutters and polishers), an expertise not only handed down through generations but added to by adequately funded training institutes.

The difference from the original state to the finished stage notwithstanding, its commercial value may be even more expensive when sold to Pakistan depending upon what the jewellery designer or the diamond merchant is likely to get.

With the knowledge that Indian origin stuff may not be entirely acceptable to the Pakistani palate if it is found coming from India, De Beers is probably the "Trojan Horse" being used as the acceptable face camouflaging the Indian connection and the direct contribution that every Pakistani citizen who can afford diamonds will make towards the Indian economy.

There is no conspiracy theory here or a grand design to

## To the Editor

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

### BIRDEM affair

Sir, Your analytical review on the BIRDEM affair published in The Daily Star on July 27 has hit the nail on the head. It is beyond doubt that we need less government interference to be able to progress. The various NGOs and the donors' confidence in them have proved this beyond doubt. In fact, the private sector in the business has also made great achievements with less interference from the government. In this context, we must learn to get out of the grip of the "red tape". And when we talk about the democratic process we must learn to live with opposition and opposite views and opinions.

Your newspaper has always tried to give the correct perspective at different times on critical issues. It is very encouraging to see you continue to do so. You have our full support and encouragement.

Akku Chowdhury  
Banani, Dhaka

accounts to President Abdur Rahman Biswas. Accepting the report the President has said that proper audit was very much helpful for financial discipline in public sector.

We agree with the statement of President. We also thank Comptroller and Auditor General for the pains he has taken in preparing the reports. We, however, wonder how many government servants read those big volumes of audit, accounts and finance reports; follow and maintain financial rules and discipline. Moreover, what benefit do the members of the public derive from the leviathan but incomplete audit reports?

There is a general complaint that many facts and figures about income, expenditure and loss are not readily available in various relevant government offices including the Ministry of Finance, Bangladesh Bank, Bureau of Statistics or even the office of Comptroller and Auditor General and so on and so forth.

We would highly appreciate if the Comptroller and Auditor General kindly furnish us with a yearly statement showing the total of income, expenditure and loss incurred by the government yearwise from the financial year 1972-1973 to the immediate past financial year on the following heads of account through a Press Release for information and perusal of the members of the public for the sake of accountability and transparency.

1. Amount of revenue income, expenditure and loss.
2. Amount of export, import and deficit balance of payment thereof.
3. Amount of ADP
4. Amount of foreign loan/loan received and repayment thereof.
5. Amount of system loss in electricity and water supply.
6. Amount of expenditure on pay and allowances of ministers, MPs, government servants and employees of public sector corporations.
7. Amount of loss in public sector corporations and autonomous bodies.
8. Amount of expenditure on TA/DA for ministers, MPs and government servants and employees of public sector corporations on foreign tours.
9. Amount of expenditure on purchase, repair, maintenance and POL of government transports.
10. Other information, if any.

O H Kabir  
6, Hare Street, Wari, Dhaka-1203

### The presidential speech and vote of thanks

Sir, The treasury bench reportedly declared that since the President did not follow their prepared speech in full and read his own modified version they would not bring in the motion of vote of thanks as the President had violated the norm.

When we first read about the controversy prior to the speech we were a bit perturbed, but later felt relieved when we found that a compromise had been reached between the President and the government and the President delivered the speech.

It seems now the general public have much to worry about. Are we again going to be plunged into the episodes of non-issues being forced into issues?

It is quite acceptable that government will prepare the speech materials and the President will read the same. But was it morally right to insert in the speech materials which are of controversial nature and even to such extent, as the government party knew well ahead, that the wordings would not conform to the principles upon which the President stands?

It seems now that the government would like the nation to swallow the wording "father of the nation" and they wanted to have the wish fulfilled by no other person than the President through his speech. We appreciate the stand taken by the President to have deleted the controversial part.

We like to see our President as a prestigious head of state (even though he is a titular one) and would urge the government not to divert the national attention away from the real problems which the party in power has been entrusted by the people to address.

Nurul Bashir  
Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

### Bangladesh Betar and Joy Bangla

Sir, The letter under the heading "Questions bag" which appeared on July 27 in The Daily Star drew my attention. As there were some comments about my letter written on July 22, I think I should say a few words, more.

I am very much aware that before 1975, Radio Bangladesh was called Bangladesh Betar and even before that during the liberation war, freedom fighters set up Shawdhin Bangla Betar Kendra at Kalurghat in Chittagong.

Now the question is, who changed the name? Not any outsider who invaded our country and had aversion to Bangla words. It was changed by persons who fought for the country's liberation and whose mother language was Bangla. May be Radio Bangladesh

seemed to them more befitting. For the last 21 years it had been in practice, so what will be gained by changing it?

As for "Joy Bangla", it was the slogan of the Liberation war, now we are not at war and our country's name is Bangladesh not Bangla. So, would "Joy Bangla" convey something special? I think, we should not become too emotional.

Nur Jahan  
1390, East Nasrabad,  
Chittagong.

### 'Follow the example!'

Sir, Recent news items about Eliadah McCord, an American girl sentenced to lifetime for drug smuggling, being freed from jail under a presidential amnesty, has caught my attention. The visiting US Congressman Bill Richardson has described this as a "humanitarian and noble gesture of the Bangladeshi government."

This incident can be an example for us to follow. Why can't we take this opportunity to arrange for the freedom of many innocent Bangladeshi citizens abroad? Why can't we initiate an international campaign to free our citizens imprisoned abroad, perhaps for less serious crimes? Are the powers of diplomacy of our foreign missions so poor?

I kindly draw the attention of all the authorities concerned in this regard and hope that tactfulness and courage will be exercised in the speedy release of many Bangladeshi nationals imprisoned abroad. We certainly expect this much from our government!

Farzana Yasmin Mannan  
27, Dhanmondi R/A  
Road No. 2, Dhaka-1205

### Power of a poetry

Sir, The other day I was going through an anthology of British and American poetry when suddenly a remark by Samuel Taylor Coleridge about poetry attracted my attention. He said: "A poem is that species of composition which is opposed to works of science, by proposing for its immediate object pleasure, not truth."

But Coleridge's observation is not true in case of all the poems composed by several great poets of the world. There are many poems which provide moral instructions, courage to fight back for establishing moral values, peace, truth and justice to the society. As study reveals, in the ancient times, advice about farming used to be conveyed through poetry, e.g. Georgics of Virgil contains a lot of practical advices about farming, in Bangla, Khonar Bochoh' also one can find a lot of practical advices.

M Zahidul Haque  
Assistant Professor  
Dept. of Agric. Extension  
BAI, Sher-e-Bangla Nagar,  
Dhaka-1207

# Learning from East Asia: Lessons for South Asia

by Professor Rehman Sobhan

The following are excerpts from the author's address of welcome at the recently held International Seminar on "Learning from East Asia: Lessons for South Asia" organised by the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD). The author is Executive Chairman of CPD.

THE process whereby the countries of East Asia, in a historically short period, transformed themselves from largely agricultural, undiversified backward and stagnant economies into the most dynamic part of the global economy has deservedly been proclaimed as the East Asian miracle. This miracle first transformed Japan which moved, within a quarter of a century from a war-devastated economy to become a global economic superpower. Then the four tigers, South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore moved from poor agricultural or entrepoteur economies into modern industrialised upper middle- and even upper income economies, again within two decades. Now, over the last decade, we have witnessed the dynamism of the South East Asian economies of Thailand, Malaysia and most recently Indonesia which are transforming themselves almost as rapidly as the East Asians. However, most remarkable of all has been the transformation of China, which in the last decade, has emerged as the world's fastest growing economy, to the extent that it is now predicted that in the next quarter of a century the GDP of China could exceed that of the United States.

The countries of South Asia who today, after nearly half a century of national existence, remain mired in poverty, in a state of structural atrophy and appear to be taking a painfully long time to reform themselves onto a sustainable growth path which could help alleviate our pervasive poverty, all have much to learn from our Eastern neighbours. To understand the nature of the East Asian transformations, must be for us in South Asia, part of a learning process which is worth a thousand text books on development economics and paper policies built on consultancy reports. Our fellow Asians have transformed themselves, before our eyes. The East Asian countries thus remain living demonstrations of the art of the possible in the development process.

Yet we in South Asia, whilst trying to understand and in part follow the East Asian experience, should not do so blindly. Each of our countries have our own socio-political inheritance, our own institutions, culture and historical circumstances, so that the very process of applied learning needs to be treated as a highly skilled task to be assimilated with sensitivity and understanding. We will try to understand the capacity of the East Asians to attain sustained economic growth, alleviate poverty through effective policies and sound governance. We will in the process try to understand the limitations of South Asia and particularly Bangladesh in this area to help us understand what aspects of the East Asian experience are appropriate to our conditions.

Attempts to diagnose the East Asian experience have, in the last few years, attracted the attention of the multilateral development agencies, academic scholars of development and even the attention of discerning policymakers in particular developing countries. We hope that the efforts invested by the Centre for Policy Dialogue, an organisation designed to bring together political leaders, scholars, business leaders, NGOs and professional expertise to collectively search for solutions to Bangladesh's myriad problems, will serve some positive purpose. The Centre is engaged in an ongoing study on the "Learning from East Asia: Lessons for Bangladesh". Development where we hope to maintain an ongoing research interest in analysing the East Asian experience and drawing upon it to see what is serviceable for Bangladesh. This process remains designed to influence policies to build a better future for the people of Bangladesh.

As the ultimate measure of Bangladesh's commitment to the goal of economic transformation, we are privileged to turn to Sheikh Hasina, the Prime Minister of Bangladesh. Faced with not only the need to familiarise herself with the practice of governance after two decades of absence of her party from office, she also has to cope with the enormous problems facing any Prime Minister of Bangladesh. I interpret this as a measure of the priority she attaches to the development of Bangladesh, her readiness to learn from the experience of others and above all a refreshing openness of mind to new ideas. We hope this will be a tradition she will set for her administration in the years ahead where she and her colleagues will be receptive to knowledge, from within and without, in discharging their historic responsibility to the people of the nation.

## OPINION

### Neutral Media

Nahasha Kamal

The Editor of a certain daily has vowed to write three editorials a day in order to meet the demands of his readers or may be to quench the thirst of his readers. However, the kind of news items that has been finding prominence in that daily as well as the issues that the editorials have been highlighting, certainly in my opinion, do not meet the genuine desire of the readers' quench or their thirst. The editor says fit to devote the second editorial on July 10th to the threat of the BNP chairperson and to begin the last paragraph: "The prime minister could have perhaps ignored the veiled threat (what was veiled about it is not revealed) of agitation against the alleged government action on party cadres of the opposition camp."

And the editorial says about Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina: "Why make such statements, and so early in the day too? The new government is only in its third week"; while the paper itself is carrying news items everyday (those three weeks) of people being killed, detainees being committed, etc. (Uttara, Segun Bagicha, Apollo market, etc.) Why is the editor so concerned? Is it the prime minister's reference to the conspiracy theory of destabilising her government? And the editor did not even quote her exact words as given in the daily's heading: "Giving political colour to mischiefs won't be tolerated. PM"

The truth can be gleaned from the BNP chairperson's own mouth. She pointed out a couple of weeks of the new government, the law and order had seen a serious deteriora-