## Of ICT and our education sector

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OMPUTER education in Bangladesh got momentum in the decade of nineties of the past century. There are now at least 25 universities and colleges which are imparting computer education to the students. Some are in the public sector and some in the private sector. Computer education has been taken down even up to the school level of course without thinking much whether there are teachers to teach the students properly

Computer hardware business people through different media and exhibitions every year are giving publicity to the citizens of the country that Bangladesh has a big potential of earning foreign exchange from export of data entry works, medical transcription works, web site design works, software government has also liberalised the import of computer and computer related equipment. At present import duties on computer and computer related equipment have been brought down to encourage thrust on computer and computer science education.

Let us see what is the achievement of the computer educated people in our country. During early 1990s some entrepreneurs purchased computers in large numbers to do data entry works by appointing local boys and girls. The data entry works were in English language, but because of too many spelling mistakes by the local operators the entrepreneurs incurred huge losses and had to abandon the venture. In spite of many students coming out of the universities and colleges no appreciable breakthrough could be made field of data entry works, medical transcription works, web site design and software design works during the last twelve years. In the field of medical transcription works which has a market of about US dollar 14 billion per year in USA alone, no breakthrough could be made because of lack of skill in English language

There is a small number of web site designers and no sufficient number of proficient software designers are available in the country. Our software designers know mostly Fox-Pro, Visual Fox-Pro, Basic and Visual Basic programming languages. These languages are not sufficient to procure software design works from abroad. Web site design works and software design works also require the kill in English language. For large software design works which are mostly available in the international market, skill is necessary in programming language like Oracle, Java, SQL Server and Developer 2000. The country is suffering not only from

shortage of senior programmers but also from shortage of system analysts. The basic education in computer science that is imparted in the universities and colleges is not adequate to take up works from abroad. For inadequacy in the skill of English language and higher programming language our ICT sector suffered tremendously although there is too much publicity that in ICT sector we have tremendous potentiality to earn foreign exchange.

My rough survey reveals that from ICT sector with 10 to 12 years effort we are earning hardly Taka one hundred crores per year now in foreign currency. Whereas although India started computer science education at the same time as we started. India is now earning more than US Dollar 7 billion per year from export of ICT works and their

training need to have experience in software design works at least for four years and their skill in English language may also be tested while giving admission. The tuition fee may be Tk 1000/- per month.

3. To produce senior programmers students may be trained for six months for learning the following programming languages. i) Oracle-20 students: ii) Java-20 students: iii) SQL server-20 students; iv) Development 2000-20 students:

Four teachers will be necessary and they are available in Bangladesh. The training programme may continue for two years for training four batches. The students to be selected must be having two years experience in software developments and good skill in English language. The tuition fee may not be charged more than Taka one thou-

report to the honourable prime minister suggesting long term strategies to be taken in this sector. This is a service oriented sector where appropriate human resource development may help our country to earn Tk 3000-4000 crore foreign exchange per year within 5-6 years time. Our students are no less intelligent, the only thing that is necessary is that they are to be

given proper education and training.

In the education sector there are many reforms to be made in order that our students can compete with their counterparts in the world market. Proper education primarily depends on a peaceful environment in the educational campuses and secondly on the capacity of the teachers to impart proper education to the students. Some people are thinking to ban student politics in the educational institutions. How is it will improve

lack of skill in English language affected the growth of ICT sector. At the moment Bangla medium education is maintained up to HSC whereas at the Degree level and Master's Degree level most of the Universities still maintain English medium in the science and technology faculties. Being weak in English the students find it difficult to pursue their studies by reading books in English. It is proposed that English medium education may start from HSC level as it was during the decade of sixties of the past century. Very recently I met an Italian who is a garments buyer and I asked him about learning of English in their country. He stated that boys and girls of the present generation are thoroughly taught English and can fluently write and speak in English.

It is already mentioned how badly

sector institutions. They are deprived of education in the institutions which are highly subsidized by the public fund and have better teachers to provide better education. This may be solved by setting separate questions for the 'A' level students in the admission tests based on the syllabuses of 'A' level.

Only in the IBA (Institute of Business Administration) in Dhaka University the admission test is not based on HSC syllabus particularly. Quite a good number English medium Student qualify in the admission test of IBA and their average performance has been found to be better than the HSC passed students. So to give equal opportunity to English medium students for entry in undergraduate studies, the education policy makers may examine the proposal.

All English medium schools may

be registered with the Department of Education of the government and they may be awarded some grants so that they may charge lesser tuition fees to the students. The secondary schools in most cases are suffering from lack of teachers proficient in English language. So our government may take up a programme of training at least 300 secondary school teachers per year for five years in English language. For imparting training to 300 hundred teachers per year, 10 teachers may be required and they may be available in Bangladesh.



#### All health information to keep you up to date

### Back pain

Almost everyone, at some stage in his or her life, will suffer more or less from back pain. Unfortunately, there are lots of misconceptions around

\*Bed rest is not the best way to cure back pain. A bad back can be so sore for the first week that nothing other than bed rest can be tolerated, but after a while, mobility is important when the really acute phase is over. \*Most back pains ultimately do not need any surgery. In many cases

back pain is temporary and will naturally heal itself, otherwise other simple measures like physiotherapy and massage may help. \*But it's not always true that X-rays, CAT scans or MRI can identify the real cause. Sometime, diagnosing back pain can be very difficult. If the problem appears to be a disc, orthopaedic surgeons recommend a

discogram, as this not only gives the picture of a disrupted disc, but also

\*Back pain is thought to be hereditary; so if your parents suffered, then take extra precautions

Some very simple tips

a. Keep away from putting on weight;

- b. Exercise on a regular basis walking and swimming -- they are ideal; c. During lifting, always bend your knees and keep your back straight
- d. If you smoke -- quit smoking (restricts blood flow to the spine).

#### Did you know?

Yelling too loudly too often can cause lesions on the vocal cords. Vocal cord means two thin folds of tissue within the larynx that vibrate as air passes between them, producing sounds that are the basis of speech

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earning is increasing every year. Indian computer science people could successfully operate in the international market because of mainly higher skill in English language and by learning higher programming languages.

In order to cope with the world market in ICT sector the following steps may be taken up immediately as a short term measure by the Computer Council under the supervision of the Board of Investment to augment export earning from ICT works.

1. Train 120 boys per six months for medical transcription works. Students may be admitted after taking written and verbal examination on skill of English language. The tuition fee per month per student may not be more than Taka one thousand. The class period may be for two hours and six days in a week. Six trainers will be necessary and it is learnt that there are no good trainers available in Bangladesh for giving training in medical transcription works. So six trainers may be hired from India which may require about Tk 72 lacks in two years. While imparting training not more than 10 students should be taken in one classroom.

2. Forty students in two sections may be trained for six month to become system analysts. Two local trainers may be appointed for training the students. The training may continue for one year to develop 80 system analysts in one year which will be sufficient at the moment. The sand per month

4. Twenty students may be trained for six months in web site design. One trainer will be necessary and that may be available in Bangladesh. Training of four batches in two years will be sufficient at the moment. The tuition fee may not be charged more than Taka one thousands per month. The students to be selected must have two years experience in software development and must have good skill in English language.

The whole training programme may not require more than Taka six crores in 2 years including the cost of the PCs and other equipment necessary and hiring spaces for training programme and also for the salary of the teachers. This much money may be available from our revenue budget without any diffi-The Board of Investment may

form a committee to explore the reasons of the failures in the ICT sector in Bangladesh, in spite of providing so many facilities. The committee may visit India and examine the reasons of India's success in ICT sector. India's ICT sector is one of the largest foreign exchange earning sectors in India now. The committee to be constituted by the Board of Investment may include two members from among the computer science specialists, one from the public sector and one from the private sector and one member from the University Grants Commission and submit

possible when political parties patronise openly student politics and protect armed cadres amongst students? Opposing student fronts of political parties very often fight with guns and explosives in the campuses making serious law and order situations. In order to get relief from such a

situation it is proposed that the

policy makers of the new education policy may adopt a policy of age limit for passing SSC, HSC, Bachelor's Degree and Master's Degree examinations. It is proposed that for passing SSC 16 years age limit may be given, HSC 19 years, Bachelor's Degree 22 years and Master's Degree 25 years at the maximum. This system is prevalent in the developed countries like UK, Australia etc. Those who cannot pass within the age limit will have to discontinue their studies in the public institutions. They may continue their studies in the private sector institutions which are not financed by the public sector. Government fund cannot be spent for some students for an unlimited time and block the opportunities for others. It is believed that with the introduction of such a system students will be much more serious about their studies and the teachers will also be serious in providing proper education to the students within the time frame. With this policy adopted it is hoped that student politics will be contained to a great extent and quality of education

Italy is one of the G-8 countries of the world. China, South Korea and Japan are hiring English teachers from USA, Australia and UK to teach English to their students. Almost all the books on science and technology available in our country are in English at the University level. So proper evaluation may be made by the new education policy makers to provide education at higher levels in English.

There are now more than 1000 English medium schools in the country which are managed by the private entrepreneurs. Day by day the popularity of English medium schools are increasing. They provide education to the students mainly through 'O' level and 'A' level syllabuses which are prepared by the GCE organisation in UK. The British Council in Dhaka supplies the syllabuses set by GCE and coordinates the examinations for Bangladesh students. Quite a good number of students now pass 'A level examinations which is considered equivalent to the HSC level. The syllabuses of the 'A' level and that of HSC are guite different. The 'A' level students find it quite difficult to pass the admission tests conducted by public sector institutions as the questions are based on the HSC syllabuses. In mathematics alone there are at least 12 chapters in HSC syllabus which are different from 'A' level syllabus. So the 'A' level students often cannot fare well in the admission tests of the public

# The holy month of fasting

AMADAN, the 9th month of the Islamic calendar is very special for the Muslims because in this month the Holy Quran, the Final Testament, was first revealed to Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) more than fourteen hundred years ago. On this occasion, Allah asked his servants to fast the whole month to thank Him for His great favour to the mankind and to celebrate the revelation of the Quran. That is why fasting during this month is obligatory for all ablebodied Muslim adults to show his/her gratitude to Allah.

Allah, the Majestic and the Exalted said in the Quran: "Ramadan is the month in which was sent down the Quran, as a guide to mankind, also clear (signs) for guidance and judgement (between right and wrong). So every one of you who is present (at his home) during that month should spend it in fasting, but if anyone is ill or on a journey, the prescribed period (should be made up) by days later. Allah intends every facility for you; He does not want to put you to difficulties. (He wants you) to comnlete the prescribed period, and to glorify Him in that He has guided you; and perchance you shall be

Meaning of fasting

Fasting (Sawm) in Islam means abstaining from eating, drinking, smoking etc. from the break of dawn until the sunset. All Muslim adults must fast. It is our Prophet's tradition to take a light meal before dawn and to break the fast with dates and water just after sunset. Allah's Messenger (pbuh) said, "Take meal a little before dawn, for there is a blessing in taking meal at that time' [Bukhari] and he also said, "the difference between our fasting and that of the people of the Book (Jews and Christians) is eating shortly before dawn".

Fasting does not mean staying away from food only. We need to watch our behaviour while we are fasting. The Prophet (pbuh) said, "Whoever does not give up lies and evil actions, Allah is not in need of his leaving his food and drink i.e. Allah will not accept his fasting." [Bukhari]

It is better to restrain the tongue from useless talks or gossip while we are fasting and also we should stay away from hearing evil talks too, because our Prophet (pbuh) said, "The back-biter and the hearer of back-biting are equal co-sharers of the sin".

other humanitarian services during Ramadan because this is a blessed month and during this month we get manifold rewards for any good work. This gives us a good reason to compete with one another to do good deeds in the month of Also, during this month we try to

read the Quran as much as possible because we fast to commemorate the revelation of the Quran as well, not to mention that reading the Quran at any time is very rewarding. The Quran is not just a Holy Scripture full of moral values; it is a handbook as well as the user guide for the humankind - dealing all aspects of our life. The people with wisdom want to verify the truth behind every assertion. A close scrutiny by its opponents and patrons alike proved that the Quran has been preserved unchanged from the time of its revelation and protected from human tampering. They find answers to all their queries in it to fill their spiritual void. Every year, during this month, Archangel Gabriel used to recite the whole Quran with Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) at least once. Even today, the Muslims around the world try to keep that old tradition alive, we read the Quran as much as possible during Ramadan.

**Exemption from fasting** Children under the age of puberty

and insane persons are exempted from the duty of fast and no compensation is required for them. - Men and women who are too old or too sick can pay compensation instead of fasting. - If a person is traveling or is sick,

if a woman is pregnant or is nursing a child can defer the observation of a fast. They can make up for it later. - A woman should not fast during her period of menstruation or during

her confinement just after childbirth. She must postpone the fast till recovery and then make up for it, a day for a day.

Penalty of voiding a fast

The fast of any day of Ramadan becomes invalid by intentionally eating, drinking etc. before sunset and the penalty of deliberately doing something that nullifies the fast is to fast sixty consecutive days. Or as an alternative, feed sixty poor persons sufficiently, besides observing the fast of one day against the very day. No penalty for mistakes

If anyone, by mistake, does something that would ordinarily break his fast, his fast is not nullified. The fast stands valid provided he immedi-

he is doing something wrong. For example, if someone drinks a glass of water by mistake, his fast still remains valid Benefits of fasting

A month long dawn-to-dusk fasting

is good for our physical as well as spiritual well being. The Quran tells

"O you who believe! Fasting is prescribed to you as it was prescribed to those before you, that you may learn self-restraint. .... And it is better for you that you fast, if you only knew." [2:183]

In fact we get twofold benefit from fasting -- physical benefit and spiritual benefit. Fasting does not have any adverse effect on our health; rather it takes an active part in the rejuvenating processes of the body and gives our digestive system some rest. Even little children can safely fast during the Ramadan from an early age. The extra nightly prayers during this month are like good physical exercise, which makes our body light and more flexible. Fasting improves our quality of sleep too. When we sleep the process of repairing our body and the brain takes place. Little sleep during the fasting month is more refreshing and satisfying than long hours of sleep otherwise.

Also, fasting, in which we abstain from supplying the body its biological needs, is a vehicle that takes our soul closer to Allah. According to a prophetic tradition, the Angels will distribute the rewards for all good deeds by the command of Allah, but the reward for fasting will be given by Allah Himself, the reward for fasting is the vision of Allah Himself. The Holy Prophet (pbuh) said:

"There are two joys for a fasting man -- one joy is at the time of breaking the fast and another joy is at the time of meeting with his Lord." [Bukhari and Muslim]

The Prophet (pbuh) also said: There is a gate in Paradise named Raiyan, people who fast will enter Paradise through that gate.' [Bukhari and Muslim]

A month long intensified religious activity not only make us a happy and content person, it takes us closer to Allah too. The Holy Quran indicates metaphorically that a journey towards Allah takes 50 thousand years in human estimate (Quran 70:4). At the end of a pietistic Ramadan we can rest assured that we have covered a considerable distance, in a spiritual sense, to reach our Destination to our Creator.

## Conscience of nation

call them conscience of our nation, those familiar faces and familiar names who represent us in matters of grave national concerns. It is not that we do not understand the gravity, but they tell us that certain issues should be regarded as matters of grave national concern. We see their faces on the television screen, on the dais of many conferences and seminars, on the streets leading peaceful processions of some sorts; we see their names on the leaflets as signatories, in news items of the esteemed dailies elaborating statements with their photographs, calling for action, etc. This, I presume, is a desired development contributing to the creation of a nexus of individuals and bodies to whom we the public can turn to in times of our grief to articulate our sufferings and to complain to the higher authorities. We, the general public, must have expressed our desire either vociferously or in a muted way to have such people among us. These familiar faces and names act on our behalf since we are not so well organised to express ourselves, or articulate our grievances. Also, it may be that we are aware that our expressions or articulations would not be heard by the authority, or would not get such media coverage. In other words, we have consented to a sort of community action, so that the authority can be put under pressure in a systematic manner.

These faces and names can sometimes make the higher authorities of the country change their mind about some planned activities, even after firm decisions have been taken. These faces and names represent the general public, they are our collective voice. They act on a variety of issues, which spring up as the call of the day, and we the public observe admiringly their dedications, their selflessness, their courage, their defiance of the rain or heat

of sun to press a point of argument. Take for instance, the problems of our capital city, Dhaka. The conscience of our nation has fought against indiscriminate tree-felling against exhaust pollution, against child abuse, against drug abuse against dengue carriers, against women trafficking, against corruption, against extortion, against mugging, against hawkers on the footpath, against obscenity on large as well as small screens and wall postendless and there will be more to be added in the future. The problems or vileness of the issues may have been brought up locally/nationally, or at times the idea of protests may even have been borrowed from the developed world.

I wonder how we, the general public, have become so clever as to assign these tasks of protesting and creating pressures to a handful of people, usually the same people. The fact is that this body representing us as the conscience of our nation has come into action out of necessity for the good of the society. No one of us has really authorised these people to represent us. Their organised events and gatherings do not always carry the names of any organisation thus projecting individual actions with the solidarity of hundreds making them non-vulnerable to administrative actions and so on. They are not politically affiliated. they are independent in thoughts and actions. On top, they are very civilised, they do not disturb the peace or order, and so they do not get arrested. So, we the nonaffiliated general public can give them our mute support without getting involved into any kind of shambles. Some may even call them civil society of some kind, but since they operate on floating organisational bases (that is, having no fixed one as such), they do not strictly fit into the politico-social definition of civil

society. We know that the people forming this conscience of our nation are not 'nobodies' in our society. They are highly literate people, writers, intelligentsia, cultural workers, and teachers in the highest seat of learning. They are often well established in one or more professions. I admire them. Their personal achievements and their individual track records through which they have come all the way to their present positions in the society are indeed admirable and sometimes awe-inspiring. Many of them defied hardships and sufferings on many major and minor matters to which we are all used to and to which many of us have suc-

I have faith in their ability to change the world. I believe that their selfless motivations should inspire others and may be they would imbue the authority to stay in the right lane when planning or deplanning, and when taking or not taking the activities and demands of these familiar faces whom I have collectively named conscience of the nation, I have a rude shock. I can well see that they are very much urban based, more concerned about the city's cosmetic presenta-

At the same time, they seem to be pro-establishment and pro-rich, and not as much pro-poor. They act in several robes, in tasks usually assigned to urban geographers, to traffic controllers, to cleaners of the city, to international environment activists, to morality preachers, to anti-mugging forces and so on. Their protests help the authority to gauge the barometer of sentiments of the status groups simplistically known in Bangladesh as 'barolok' as well as 'bhadrolok' combining the rich, the middle class, business people, aspiring bourgeoisies, government officials (often misusing power and authority), and so on. One may even suspect that their peaceful protests and demonstrations actually achieve a balance in the actions to be taken by the authority and the feelings of the general public, although the authority may not always understand that.

In cleansing the urban landscapes and air, they rather assist

ers, against commercialisation of ing decisions. Then as I start analys- advantaged social groups to of the fact that they are in fact supwhile in the process refusing to note their implications on other social groups, or to note how their actions demean the other groups. The problems they fight to redress the society from are often of superficial nature.

> This is all very well, however, but the fact remains that these noble people seldom take part in activities that could be called pro-poor. They talk of unhygienic drinks and foods sold openly on the footpath without thinking of the people who are forced to buy them for satisfying thirsts or hunger in the course of their daylong or nightlong economic activities. They talk of clearing the footpaths of the hawkers, without ever thinking that economically disadvantaged people of the city will be hard hit without many of these hawkers, not to speak of the hawkers themselves who pay rents and buy foods for their families with the meagre income from their 'unlicensed' business. They do not go to the government hospitals to observe the squalor, and total lack of humanity in the treatment of the poor.

They never go deep into the reasons of the problems, they do not try to make noise about the poverty of theories about poverty. This conscience of our nation is unconscious

affairs, just like the established civil societies, many of which publicly make noise against international development efforts while living of the very development money.

I am indeed amused by the pretensions of the self appointed conscience of our nation as well as those of the civil society. They claim to be our pressure groups in the manner of similar groups in the developed world. They blissfully forget that we have miles to go before we reach the historic, social, political and economic specificity of the developed countries. Nevertheless, I have faith in the

conscience of the nation. I still believe that with all their intelligence, knowledge, courage, good intentions, ideals that they must have cherished at some points of their lives and dream of an equitable society, they would tell us how to prepare ourselves for a total protest against undesirable things and bring about envisaged changes. Until then, they may not pretend to have become our voice, or the conscience of our nation.

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