

Usain Bolt, not Michael Phelps, is the star of Beijing Olympics

Before they can be compared to Lewis, both Phelps and Bolt have to demonstrate Olympic longevity. Carl Lewis remains the only sprinter to repeat as the Olympics champion in the 100-metres, in 1984 and 1988. In spite of his world-shattering performance at Beijing, Usain Bolt has to demonstrate that he too is capable of sustained excellence with as much regularity as Carl Lewis.

Fakhruddin Ahmed

I have always admired Michael Phelps's swimming prowess, and along with the rest of my family have rooted vociferously and celebrated his stupendous successes. His unprecedented exploits in the swimming pool, both in Athens in 2004 where he was the superstar, and in Beijing in 2008 where he was also a superstar, left me speechless.

Until two months ago, when he broke the world 100-metres record in New York while defeating American champion Tyson Gay, I had not heard of Usain Bolt. Yet, I am certain that Usain Bolt's performance in the Beijing Olympics exceeded that of Michael Phelps's.

A track aficionado who has followed the Olympics since Rome in 1960 (superstars: Muhammad Ali and Wilma Rudolph), and who was fortunate enough to be a member and captain of Bangladesh Track and Field teams between 1966-71 and the record holder in 800 metres

(the disclosure suits the moment), the writer would like to think that he understands the nuances of the Olympics.

My beef with swimming is that, like the Winter Olympics, it is a rich man's sport. (Winter Olympics was not a part of the original Olympic movement). How many Jamaicans or Kenyans win medals in swimming? Swimming is dominated by the US, Europe, and Australia. From only 3 events in the first Olympics of the modern era in 1896 Athens, swimming events have ballooned to 34. Track and field has always been the centrepiece of the Olympics. Events in track and field have increased from 12 in 1896 to 47 now. Most of the increase is due to the inclusion of women in the Olympics in 1928.

Swimming events take place in a 50-metre pool. All events are multiples of 50. Swimmers traverse the distances in different styles: going forward in freestyle, in breast-strokes, like a butterfly, or going backwards in a backstroke, and a combination (medley) of all the

four. There are several relays for each of these styles and medleys, over varying distances.

The track and field equivalents of the swimming events are: running forward, running backwards, running sideways and a combination thereof within a 50-metre track. You get the picture!

The point is, swimming and track and field are in different leagues. Only rich nations can afford swimming pools and swimming programs. On the contrary, every nation, big or small, rich or poor, participates in all the track and field events. Track and field does not require much expenditure. That is why poorer nations win track and field medals, and winning medals in track and field events are an order of magnitude harder than in swimming.

Michael Phelps's performance in Beijing was sensational. By winning eight gold medals he smashed Mark Spitz's 7-gold medal tally of 1972 Munich Olympics (superstar: Mark Spitz). But to proclaim Michael Phelps as the greatest

Olympian ever is a bit of a stretch. Phelps should be compared to Spitz.

The writer attended the 1972 Munich Olympics in which Spitz won 7 gold medals all in world record times. Phelps won 8 in Beijing, breaking 7 world records. Spitz swam in a modest pool and wore swimming trunks that could have been purchased from a grocery store. Phelps wore laser suits, designed by Nasa, to minimise friction. To aid swimmers achieve world records, the Chinese made the pool 3-metres deep, instead of the traditional 2-metres, and designed the lane dividers as shock absorbers, to minimise turbulence. They also adjusted the water consistency, so as to make it more conducive to faster times.

With a pool engineered for faster times, enter Michael Phelps, the perfect human dolphin. His upper body is that of a 7-footer, while his lower body is that of a six-footer: the perfect combination for a swimmer. Even then, Phelps struggled in events that were 100-metres long, and excelled in events 200-metres long. In spite of everything that went in his favour, I still believe that Michael Phelps is the greatest swimmer ever.

Track sprint records are broken by hundredths of seconds. The best the great Carl Lewis could do was 9.86 seconds in the 100-metres. Usain

Bolt became the first sprinter to take the world's 100-metres record into the 9.60s, to 9.69 to be exact. Had he not been so surprised to find himself so far ahead, and not started celebrating 30-metres from the finish, he could have taken the record down to the 9.50s. My prediction is that if Bolt runs the perfect race, he could be the first sprinter to take the 100-metres record into the 9.40s; almost one full second better than the legendary Jesse Owens in 1936.

I never imagined that I would see anyone approach American Michael Johnson's incredible 200-metres world record, set at the 1996 Atlanta Olympics, (19.32 seconds) in my life time. Yet, running all alone, Usain bolted past that in 19.30 seconds.

Bolt then linked up with three other Jamaican speed merchants including the former world record holder Asafa Powell, to smash the record of 37.40 second, set by the Americans including Carl Lewis in 1992, and took it down to 37.10 seconds. This is unheard of! Sprint records are never broken by 0.3 seconds!

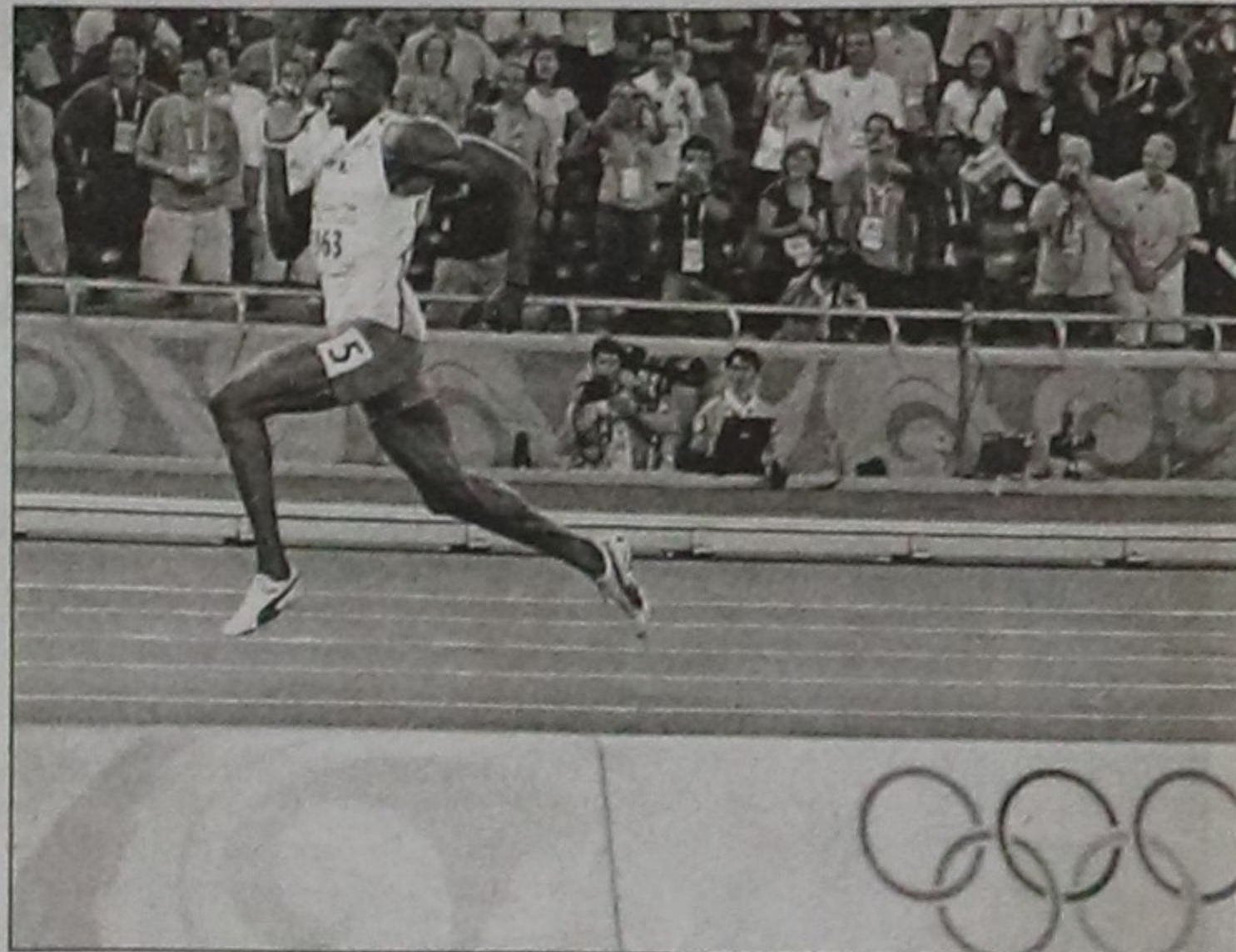
If Bolt and his Jamaican teammates had exchanged the baton as well as the Russians do, the record would have gone into the 36-seconds range. What makes this more incredible is that Usain Bolt had run four races on his way to 100-

metres gold, and another 4 races on his way to his 200 metres gold, before running the third leg of the 4x100 relay. I have never seen a 6-foot 5-inches man run so fast with such quick leg turnover.

Longevity is an essential part for Olympic greatness. The great Carl Lewis was a member of five US Olympic teams -- 1980 (Americans boycotted the 1980 Moscow Olympics, protesting the Russian invasion of Afghanistan in 1979), 1984 (Russia boycotted the Los Angeles Olympics in retaliation; superstar: Carl Lewis), 1988 (superstars: Carl Lewis and Jackie Joyner-Kersey), 1992 (superstars: US basketball "dream team") and 1996 (superstar: Michael Johnson), on his way to nine Olympic gold medals.

Lewis won two golds in the 100 metres, one gold (and a silver) in the 200 metres, two golds in the 4x100 relay, and four golds in the long jump. Just as both the American men and women relay teams did again this year, had the Americans not dropped the baton in the preliminary rounds of 4x100 relay in 1988, Lewis would have won at least another gold.

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Bolt-ling towards gold.

1984 and 1988. In spite of his world-shattering performance at Beijing, Usain Bolt has to demonstrate that he too is capable of sustained excellence with as much regularity as Carl Lewis.

The Chinese ought to be congratulated for hosting such a spectacular Olympics. Their 40-billion dollar Olympic expenditure and state-supported training programs paid handsome dividends in terms of national pride and gold medal haul (51, many in lesser events). For sixteen days the world forgot about China's human rights abuses, repression

in Tibet and Xinjiang, and its intolerance of dissent. China spent 300 million dollars on the opening ceremony alone; an extravagance possible only in a spendthrift totalitarian regime; something the democratic host of the 2012 Olympics, London, will not and cannot match.

Nevertheless, the world could not but have noticed that in technology, in wealth and even in sports, China is going to be the leading world power in the 21st century.

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Finally, the clock has turned back

This latest show of resolve by the elects only goes to prove the manifest truth: how entrenched corruption is in Bangladeshi system, where party affiliation is perceived to be far more important than local or indeed national progress.

S. I. ZAMAN

THE gods in Greek mythology condemned Sisyphus to ceaselessly roll a rock to the top of a mountain only to see it roll back where it lay at the beginning, and to roll it back to the top and see it roll back, and so on and so forth ad infinitum. And what better way to mete out a dreadful punishment than this futile and hopeless labour.

It seems Bangladesh too is condemned to suffer the fate of Sisyphus -- forever seeing a shimmering light at the end of the tunnel only to see it fade away at the end, and to see yet another light only to fade again. For well over three decades, politicians, bureaucrats and the corporate syndicates have

been playing with the destiny of Bangladesh only to share the profit and to exploit, to impoverish, to deprive the teeming million for whom the bell of good fortune never tolls.

Indeed, the clock has almost completely turned back to where it was in pre-1971. Except for the Emergency Rule, everything else is symptomatic of the classic Bangladeshi letdown. It's a letdown for the people of Bangladesh, the vast majority of the ordinary citizen who may never again have the opportunity to free themselves from the yoke of BNP-AL hegemony.

Among intellectuals, political pundits, and even in the corridors of power, there's an aura of a kind of reconciliation or rather a perception of forget-what-we-said-let's

do-the-election. The messianic passion that we saw in the CTG and ACC to rid the society of all corruption has lost its force. The issue of reform in the political parties has been quietly buried under the carpet. All that fury, resentment, and bitterness against the political grafts that were currency only a few months back are now seemingly shrouded in antiquity, as though to say: "Corruption? What corruption?"

As I wrote before, this is a nation which is quick to jump with a cry of condemnation and equally quick to forget it for other profitable leeway. Indeed, come December, we will see one of either BNP or AL in power once again to enact a hegemony that will be even more aggressive and exploitative than ever before.

CTG is now all compliant and all conceding! All talks of grafts and political crimes are conveniently shunted aside to make way for the reconciliations and compromises with the two largest parties -- it's as though all is forgiven, come let's play election! And rest assured, in a couple of months' time, all charges against the begums and their minion acolytes will be withdrawn, so as to make way for the begums and their cohorts to run for office once more.

I feel let down by the CTG -- we trusted you to make a mark, a rare precedence, a paradigm on the history of this wretched nation, a past which is littered with a sum total of flagrant abuse of power and exploitation of a vast poor class by an elite class of wealthy ministers and their corporate cronies. Indeed, it's a shame on us collectively as a nation. It's indubitably a paradigm shift of the classic kind.

These days the advisors of this CTG are concerned more with meeting the demands of the parties. At least when the other begum was

given parole the word "parole" was officially mentioned, but now that seems to have lost its connotation. We are not hearing parole, but the word "release" is reverberating. The high-profile criminals who are languishing in jail right now will soon be out on "executive order" just so that both the major parties would agree to run for the election -- it's as though Bangladesh is doomed unless the begums and their cronies take over the helm!

I could see this coming! Things began to go awry when the ACC and the CTG began to get bogged down in a slippery legal battle with their high profile law-suits, a treacherous battle they hadn't seen coming. Let's face it -- it's one thing to condemn a criminal and the crime, but quite another matter to actually prove it!

And inevitably, as always the burden of proof lies with the plaintiff. Failing that, the condemned walks free. And when the state itself is the plaintiff, taking on a garb of

evangelical mission to do justice by pledging to convict the arch criminals who have committed the gravest of crimes, well, that's a tall order for a nation as wretched as this!

It is now clear that the ACC and its lawyers have not done sufficient groundwork to build up their cases. As far as the high profile prisoners are concerned, it is feared that the cases against them may not hold water i.e. the loose ends of the cases are staying loose and furthermore their cases are as flimsy as a pantomime show. As a necessary corollary of abuse of power is the manipulation of the law and the judiciary. The previous "democratically elected" governments were no different -- the leaders and their cohorts who have so far been indicted on corruption charges, kept their "papers" clean for any future contingency such as what they are facing now.

I was overtly supportive of this CTG when they took over power 19 months ago. Right now, my support for them is waning. However, right

now CTG is walking on thin ice -- it's losing support from all walks of life -- it's credibility is at an all time low -- and it's making matters worse than what it is by getting bogged down in a petty partisan debacle by seemingly trying to satisfy their (the two main parties) every demand.

The proof of the pudding is in the eating! And quite naturally, EC needs to be tested on how credible and robust their reforms have been. What better way than to take the recent local election as a test case -- and lo and behold, the biggest proof is the latest show of reluctance from the mayor-elects to relinquish their partisan loyalties and party memberships.

So much talk of the need for a non-partisan local government, a non-political mayor, and now this! It's as though the clock has indeed turned back to where it was 19 months ago. This latest show of resolve by the elects only goes to prove the manifest truth: how entrenched the corruption is in

Bangladeshi system, where party affiliation is perceived to be far more important than local or indeed national progress.

So what is looming ahead?

This is the scenario: Third week of December 2008. The emergency has already been fully lifted. People are going about their daily businesses as they have always been, but with a pinch of disillusionment. The old protagonists are back in full swing -- both the begums, Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina, are running for election -- they have been acquitted or rather exonerated -- all charges have been withdrawn due to lack of "substantial evidence" (official explanation), even though there is considerable circumstantial and documentary evidence. All the other BNP and AL bigwigs are back in business -- it's like the gold rush is in full swing and the pioneers are rushing in.

Dr. S. I. Zaman is a university professor writing from the Middle East.

Youth culture and our future

So here lies the crux of the matter: if we have nothing in common, not our live-styles, not an integrated education system, and not even a unified national identity, who can we turn to for future leadership? Who will give our children a better future and a national identity to be proud of?

NABILAH KHAN

WHEN a few years ago I wrote about the importance of an English education in our lives, I ignorantly expressed my views from a narrow English medium mindset. Incidentally, after four years of an American education and once again returning home, I have started realising the importance of all three kinds of education in a Bangladeshi life -- Bengali medium, English medium, and the madrassah system.

Having gone to English medium schools most of my life, I was always conscious of the ever-present gap in peer association between the students from the three types of educational backgrounds and the supposed superiority of an English medium school education.

I cannot remember any extra-curricular events, national, religious

or even political affairs that ever brought us in contact with our peers from Bengali medium schools and madrassahs during my school years.

I would swear that there was a distinction even in the minds of my family members who attended either Bengali schools or madrassahs. In their view, we were the all elitist, fast society children with no roots or pride in either our religion or our nation.

Looking back, I can only remember hearing about or seeing students from these other two educational backgrounds on television shows or reading about their events in newspapers. In contrast, I think I knew almost all of my peers giving O and A level examinations from the various English schools by either their names or their faces.

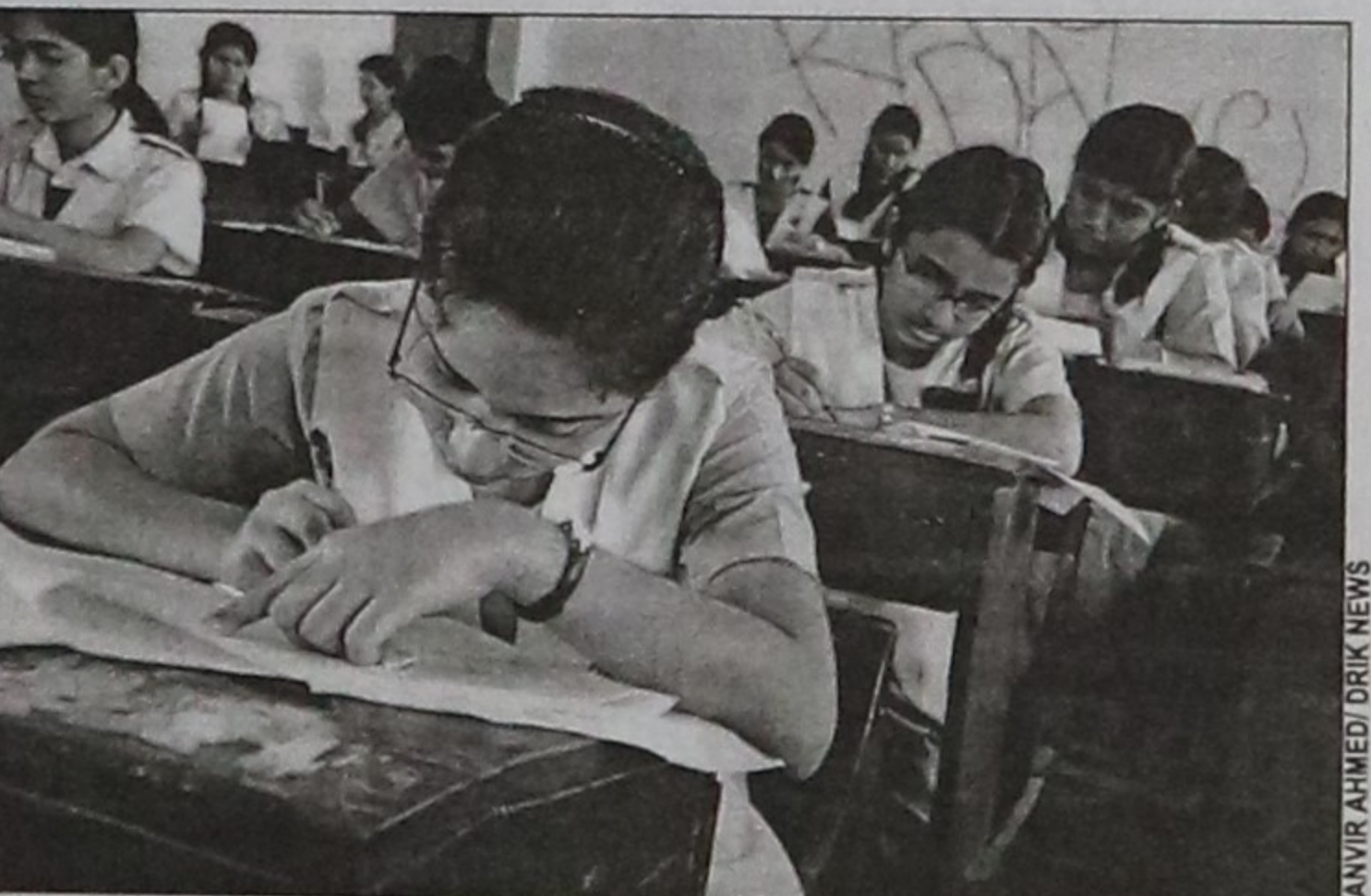
Now the questions is whether the issue arises from a distinct lack of educated and qualified political leaders in whom we can put our trust to lead Bangladesh in the future.

One of the reasons I say this is an unfamiliar concern is because I have recently started thinking about how this lack in leadership and our political fracas seems to be a direct result of a crisis that started right in our youth, a crisis that stems from a lack of a unified national education system.

In 1972, when Bangla became the official language of the newly independent nation of Bangladesh, it was also the official medium of instruction in all schools and colleges. At the same time small, informal, private schools came up, initially to preserve English at the school level and especially for the children of the diplomats.

The introduction of madrassahs came about even before the time of the British, in about 1197 when the first Muslim leader of Bengal, Ikhtiaruddin Muhammad bin Bakhtiar Khilji built a mosque and madrassah in his capital Gaur.

While the Bengali medium education came to be greatly influ-



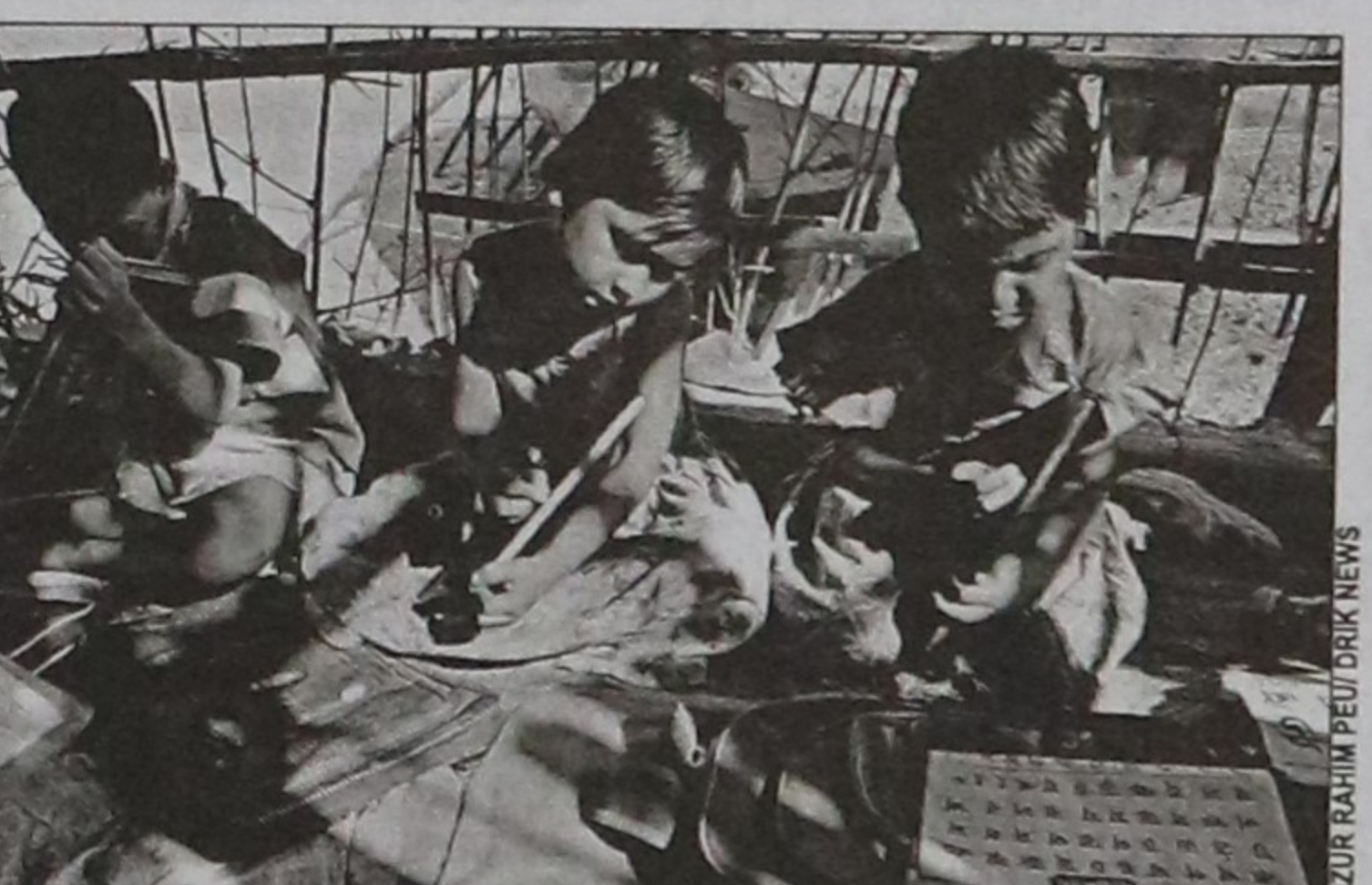
Shall the twain ever meet?

enced by the constant change in political leaderships and the history books reflecting the history of Bangladesh in perspective of whichever political leader took control at the moment, the madrassah education became immersed in only promoting religious education and leadership and leaders like our Prophet Muhammad's (SM) and his dictates. And at the other end of the spectra, we the children of English medium schools spent our time learning about the attributes of leaders like

US president Abraham Lincoln.

With such a deep variation in the education and the influences in our lives from such a young age, it is of no surprise that the Bengali, English, and madrassah educated children have chosen such different paths to lead with absolutely no middle ground.

While the children of Bengali medium schools go on to become involved in the leading political parties while at college and universities and consider further careers in politics with minds already



beseached by the manipulated history learnt at childhood, we the children of English medium schools take on entirely different roles.

Many of us go away to Europe and America, seeking a unified education system and live styles which somehow seem more familiar to us than the one in which we were born. And it is thus not surprising that few of us rarely ever choose to come back to this nation, a nation whose reality we never really had a connection to begin with.

And on yet another partition are

the children from the madrassahs, recently in the global limelight, intent on spreading their Islamic influences whether be it through political parties and welfare organizations or through more radical paths.

So here lies the crux of the matter: if we have nothing in common, not our live-styles, not an integrated education system, and not even a unified national identity, who can we turn to for future leadership? Who will give our children a better future and a national identity to be

proud of?

I admit that I make a lot of generalisations in portraying the lives of children from English medium, Bengali medium, and madrassah education and the lives they choose to lead in the future.

There are numerous people of Bengali medium background choosing to live abroad, many of English medium who have returned to our country and many in madrassahs who run schools and businesses in Bangladesh or have chosen to live abroad also.

But I doubt anyone can refuse to admit to this enormous gap that exists between the educations of children from English and Bengali medium schools, and madrassahs, a distinction that is encouraged by our broken education system.

I do not think it is possible to ever achieve political peace and prosperity as a nation if we still have no common interests and goals. Can we ever encourage our children to respect each other and work towards becoming effective leaders when we do not even have a system in which they can consider themselves equal?

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For coffee lovers, plop goes the weasel



HERE is a vile myth going around that Asia has great food, but totally sucks in the beverages department.

This is complete rubbish. Okay, so maybe chateau-made vintage wine from France is marginally more pleasing on the palate than factory-made Chinese snake bile wine.

But what if you need something to remove enamel paint from your metal-ware? The Asian product is far superior. I suspect the lazy French have not even considered this important application for their products.

Worse still, I was horrified to

overhear an argument yesterday about whether coffee from Italy or Seattle was the best in the world. The answer, of course, is neither.

Asia is the only place on the planet producing coffee pre-pooped by weasels. Those of you who think Starbucks is the planet's best brew should try this classic Asian drink.

Weasel poop coffee, known in Asia as kopi luwak (coffee of the forest cat), has been enjoyed by coffee aficionados for years in Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam, and other parts of Asia.

The stuff only occurs when a wild weasel (in most cases, actually an

Asian civet cat) goes out for lunch in the forest. Using his powerful nose, he detects the finest coffee cherries and eats them. Enzymes in his stomach break down the outer layers and mysteriously transform the flavours of the inner bean, which he poops out whole.

Coffee production staff hang out at popular weasel toilets and pick up the fresh poop to take away. (Now there's a job you really want.) They wash it and roast it lightly so as not to spoil the flavour. They then grind it and serve it as coffee in the Asian style: strong, topped with condensed milk, and served in a glass tumbler.

The bitterness-free coffee tastes delicious (but only if you mentally block out the words "weasel poop" for the whole time you're drinking it).

The stuff is now being exported worldwide, and is officially listed as the world's most expensive coffee. It's been available in Australia for some time, but earlier this year it went on sale in London, at Peter Jones Brasserie (not to be confused with Peter Jones' brasserie, which is another story), where it is called Caffe Raro and costs \$100 a cup.

I notice that several shops describe it, inaccurately, as "regurgitated by a weasel" because they think

it sounds better than "pooped by a weasel."

My reply to that: if "regurgitated by a weasel" is your strongest advertising line, boy, do you have a marketing problem.

I enjoy coffee, but I'm no addict. Are you? Use this easy checklist to tell. You are a coffee junkie if:
• Your coffee-grinding machine is your mouth.
• You're Employee of the Month at the local Starbucks and you don't even work there.
• You're so wired, you pick up FM radio.
• To jump-start a car, people just

attach cables to your hands.
• The Energizer Bunny thinks you need to calm down.
• Your birthday is a national holiday in Columbia.
Anyway, I asked my argumentative pro-Seattle and pro-Italy friends whether coffee distributors in their countries even bothered to pass their coffee beans through the digestive tracts of wild animals. They just gave me this sort of blank look. So much for the superiority of western beverages.

Outrageous weasels can contact our columnist through his website: www.vittachi.com.