Fernando Reimers--a Harvard university Professor and a specialist in primary education--suggests that education plays a vital role in establishing an understanding of democracy and democratic institutions. He has also argued that the poorly educated people become more vulnerable to extreme ideologies, and that in the interest of safety and security, it is imperative that a nation educates its citizens to protect them from such vulnerabilities.

Poor quality learning creates barriers for education's contribution towards a nation's economic growth and development. The current global economy offers unprecedented opportunities for countries with growth potential, and to take advantage, it is crucial to have a workforce capable of competing and participating in this global economy. Bangladesh is a natural-resource poor country, and poverty is an increasingly serious problem in large parts of the developing world; yet, unlike in the developed nations, improving quality of education in developing countries can spur rapid economic growth.

A World Bank study in Bangladesh has found that the likelihood of a household being below the poverty line declines by 37% when the head of that household has had only one to four years of primary education. A better quality education would do much more than just lift a nation out of poverty. While increasing literacy rates have been proven to reduce infant mortality rates and fertility among women, increase health and nutrition conditions of the population and farmer productivity, improved quality of learning achievements may also positively influence all of these outcomes.

In the end, economic progress and social development for Bangladesh in the twenty-first century will be defined by whether or not the nation can take a quantum leap in its educational experience. It will be a challenge for the nation to prepare its human capital with good quality education. And, good quality education must, in turn, begin with establishing higher quality of learning achievements at the very basic levels. There is now a tremendous opportunity for the newly elected government to make this most fundamental contribution to our nation: Step up to this challenge, improve the quality of primary education, and establish Bangladesh on a path to prosperity. This would be one of the most profound contributions to our nation, and the nation would certainly remember this as one of the major achievements of the incoming government.

(Writer is a graduate of Harvard School of Education and is an Assistant Professor of Russian at the US Air Force Academy. Dr. Khan's research involves International Education Policy and Education in Bangladesh)



Weird News

Dragons do exist

THE Komodo dragon is the world's largest flesh-eating lizard and living reptile. This amazing creature is only found in the wild on four small Indonesian islands, where they are vulnerable to disease, volcanic activity, and competition with feral dogs and man. It lives on the islands of Komodo, Rinca, Padar, and Flores. The Komodo is an endangered species and there are only about 5,000 of them in existence around the world, including a small number kept and bred in zoos.

This giant lizard can grow to 3 meters (10 feet) long, and has an average weight of 70 kg (155 pounds). Komodo dragons are dangerous predators with sharp serrated teeth more like a shark's than a reptile's. Swift runners, they can swim and climb trees, and they can use their tail as a weapon and swing it like a club. They find most of their food by smell. Like shakes they 'taste' the air with their tongues, which are deeply forked and collect scent molecules from the air. They have an acute sense of smell and can detect the scent of decaying remains from up to 5km (3 miles). While Komodos like to eat dead things, they also prey on wild pigs, water buffalo and deer. They have a huge capacity for food, often eating up to half of their body weight in one meal. They are also cannibalistic, sometimes eating their own kind. They eat almost all of a carcass, consuming flesh, skin and even bones. A large Komodo can swallow a whole wild pig; their jaws expand like a snake's.

Their bite is often lethal because the bacteria in their mouths is so poisonous that wounds often do not heal, and their victim, if it manages to escape, dies in a day or two. Although often regarded as pests, Komodos are not a serious danger to humans. In order to protect the dragon, the Indonesian government has made the islands of Padar and Rinca into nature reserves for both the lizard and its prey.