



Putting the myth to bed

It is the World Cup and so everyone is interested and wants to sound relevant. Fair enough. Hence, even the most ignorant football follower will spew to you his favourite hyperbolic cliché, and you have to be man enough to take it.

QUAZI ZULQUARNAIN ISLAM

YOU have heard it all before. The Brazilians play *joga bonito*, more samba dance than football; the Italians are defensively solid, catenaccio reigns supreme; the Dutch are cavalier, they play with élan and imagination; the Germans are mechanistic and clinical, they take every chance that comes their way. African teams are tactically naïve, and their goalkeepers are very poor.

And Asia? People in this part of the world are small hence they fail to replicate the strength of European and African sides. And I nearly forgot the Americans, but of course, they are not interested in soccer. So why bother?

Every four years the World Cup swings into town and brings with it unwanted hacks who inundate you with clichés and stereotypes. But then again, it is the World Cup and so everyone is interested and hence, sound relevant.

Fair enough. Wants to even the most ignorant football follower will spew to you his favourite hyperbolic cliché, and you have to be man enough to take it.

Tough, but you can handle it.

What you can't is generally how people; and eventing, self-respecting, open-minded individuals, are reluctant to shed their prejudices and re-work their stereotypes. Myths are

seemingly imbedded into our psyche, to the extent that no amount of convincing with cold hard facts will set it straight.

Take the case of Argentina. A recent poll at our very own *The Daily Star* website showcased that the Albiceleste were the most popular team in the country. (Chances are if you are Bangladeshi, you support either of Brazil or Argentina). That is reasonable since, Diego Maradona exploded into the world scene at about the same time that the mass population had access to television in Bangladesh.

What is not understandable, however, is the most popular myth doing the rounds which states that Argentina has always been an attacking, attractive side, loaded with creative and talented players.

While the current side is full of players in the Lionel Messi mould, history begs to differ about past Argentine teams seemingly loaded with talented stars. On the contrary, Argentina have always been a tough-tackling, tactically organised side, boasting more of players like Gabriel Heinze than Lionel Messi.

In fact, the Argentina side of Italia 90 was so universally despised for their tuggish style of play, that the popular vote in the final fell to the Germans!

They nearly had more men sent-off than goals scored in their run to the final, and their

play was particularly so negative that FIFA held it up as an example of being forced into incorporating the back-pass rule! But try telling this to a fan.

And on the topic of Germans, they are supposed to be ruthlessly efficient and clinical, taking the few chances that come their way. Statistics will tell you otherwise. Since 1966, the Germans have created more scoring chances in the World Cup than any other team. Yes any, Argentina included. So consequently, holding stereotypes intact, they should be the highest scorers?

But no, that honour belongs to Brazil, who should then automatically be the side who play the most attractive football, right?

Wrong. The truth is Brazil has probably not had a side boasting of creative dribblers since 1982. In their last 11 World Cup games, the Brazilians have kept seven clean sheets.

In 1994, the tough tackling duo of Dunga and Thiago Silva precipitated their triumph, and in 2002, Ronaldo, Rivaldo and Ronaldinho succeeded on the basis of a rock-solid defence led by Lucio, Edmilson and Gilberto Silva.

The truth is, the last time the Brazilians tried to recreate *joga bonito*, was in 2006 and we all know how that ended.

And I can go on. The Dutch are supposed to be cavalier and enterprising but defensively suspect. Yet, they had the best defensive record of all sides qualifying for the World Cup and in 23 of their last 24 World Cup games, they have never scored more than twice.

On to African teams who are supposedly tactically naïve, yet Ghana are 1-0 specialists and kept out a Serbia side who had finished above France in qualifying.

And for those who believe that African goalkeepers can't field a ball, I give you Victor Enyeama, who almost single-handedly kept Lionel Messi out.

If you are looking for goalkeeping gaffe's England is your answer, although they are traditionally known to have safe hands manning the post.

The Asian's are supposedly small and frail, but both Japan and South Korea garnered victory over traditionally supposedly physically stronger teams in Cameroon and Greece, who by the way might be European champions but have never won a game in the World Cup.

Personally, I understand stereotypes. People crave reason, and "stereotyping" something helps them make better sense of the world. It's always easier if someone or the other is supposed to fulfill a specific function and does exactly that.

But in doing that if you tell me that England is stronger at the back since Fabio Capello took over, I will tell you that they kept more clean sheets under Steve McClaren than they did under the Italian. Strange, but true.

In the end, it is all gloriously uncertain, which is just how it should be. Is that not why we watch sports?

But I know at least one person agrees with me.

After labouring to a somewhat fortuitous 2-0 win over Denmark in their first game, the Netherlands midfielder Rafael van der Vaart, made an interesting comment: "We played like the Germans," he said, a twinkle in his eye, "and they played like us."

Times a changing.

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Vacancy: Foreign degrees only

They do not think that what they learn from research here is insignificant but it is the institution, or rather the country where the institution is, that matters to them. To them a degree from Bangladesh will never land them a respectable job even in Bangladesh.

HASEENA KHAN

I love my country and the people of this country, I fight for those who love this nation and embrace the name Bangladesh. But surely some of us have an attitude and mentality problem when it has anything to do with Bangladesh.

I am drawing the attention of the readers to two advertisements published in a local daily on June 6, and June 8, respectively. These advertisements are from two private universities for recruitment of their faculty. What I find disturbing in the advertisements is the qualification(s) sought for the candidates.

A Ph.D. degree for the position of assistant professor of a particular private university should preferably be from a North American/Canadian university! There are three main countries in North America -- which are Mexico, USA and Canada -- and a host of small countries like Cuba, Bahamas, Costa Rica, etc.

It is, therefore, assumed that this particular private university in question will give preference to candidates with PhDs from any of the countries mentioned above and not to candidates with PhD degrees from Europe, Japan and other countries, leave alone a candidate with a degree from Bangladesh.

What is even worse is the advertisement for the second private university, where the qualification sought for a lecturer position is a Master's degree, preferably from a North American University! This means that even our brightest graduates will be discriminated if there are even second grade candidates with a degree from USA? This really sucks.

These advertisements remind me of a different kind of ad which has bothered me. There are some house owners who, in their ads for rentals, mention "foreigners preferred."

There is something in our psyche for being negative about everything that is Bangladeshi. I am also reminded of storekeepers who sell beautiful sarees or other dresses that we wear, saying that they are from India or Pakistan even if they are made in Bangladesh. When probed they will answer that they do it for us because we are happy to know that what we are buying is not from Bangladesh!

As I have always taken to task such people who do not have any pride for the country I take very strongly to this attitude of the private universities. It is a blow to my pride and I am, therefore, writing to find how the University Grants Commission, and thus the government, can allow such a discriminatory approach.

However, in the backdrop of this blatant

anti-national approach, many a times we hear that private universities will recruit even not the best of our graduates if she/he has a member of the governing body to recommend her/him.

I may be taken to task for the recruitments made in public universities but I find that to be a different issue, which of course, has to be dealt with strongly. My intention for writing this article is the unconcealed lack of nationalism. If a candidate with a North American degree is the best let them take him/her, but why the biased preference?

No one will deny that the main driving force of modern day economy is knowledge, and also there is no denying that research forms an important component in all this. Even though there is a steady decline in students seeking admission to science subjects, we still get the best students coming to study biology.

Among the hundreds of students who graduate each year from our universities are brilliant young professionals who, if given the opportunity, would love to use their talent/knowledge here in Bangladesh -- they represent a constellation of "bright lights" or "rising stars" who, if utilised properly, can boost our national economy in a time of change.

Most of our students are extremely talented in research as well. This we discover when they come to us for their Master's thesis. I have always wished they would stay on to do a PhD here so that we may have the best brains to solve problems of national importance, which in the long run will bring a difference to our national economy. But almost invariably they all opt for a PhD in a foreign country, especially in the USA, because to them there is little

value of a PhD degree from Bangladesh.

However, they do not think that what they learn from research here is insignificant but it is the institution, or rather the country where the institution is, that matters to them. To them a degree from Bangladesh will never land them a respectable job even in Bangladesh. Even Dhaka University, where some laboratories are carrying out world-class research, fails to attract them.

How can we blame them when we have employers like the private universities who seek US/Canadian PhDs? Without the best minds in research how can we improve our economy? Why should I carry out back breaking research when our students face discrimination even in their own country?

Each year many of our students go to Japan for their PhDs. We are grateful to the Japanese government for this generous support which we got even at the time of global economic meltdown. We are also grateful for the Commonwealth fellowships for PhDs in Commonwealth countries, mainly the UK. Then there is Australia and many European countries which offer scholarships for MS/PhDs to our graduates each year.

These degrees without merit? However, this is not the question we should be asking ourselves. My question is, how can private universities be allowed to use such an unfair approach in their candidate selection, which to me paramounts to anti-national activity? Can our government turn a blind eye to such discrimination?

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Obituary of the Observer

The *Observer*, a chronicler of Bangladesh's tumultuous history, must not be allowed to die.

A.N.M. NURUL HAQUE

THE obit of the *Bangladesh Observer* is certainly sad news for the media world and many will mourn it. The news of the *Observer's* closure appeared at a time when the country's media is already shadowed by closures of a TV channel and a vernacular daily, although the *Observer* wound down for a different reason.

The *Observer's* squabbling owners decided to close the long-suffering daily on June 8 as journalists and employees who had been running the broadsheet since 1991 came out of the office after a labour court judge handed them cheques as per an agreement signed earlier between the employees' union and the daily's owners. The newspaper had been gasping for many years due to a dispute between its owners and employees.

The *Bangladesh Observer*, which was earlier *Pakistan Observer*, appeared in 1949 when there was no TV, satellite cable, internet and other social networks. It chronicled the lives and struggles of this land's people. The paper was banned in 1952 for its favourable stance toward the Language Movement and East Pakistan's provincial autonomy.

The *Observer* also played a vital role promoting communal harmony when a small-scale communal riot occurred here in 1964. Its role in helping to grow an enlightened class of Bengali intelligentsia and raising the common people's fundamental ethos earned recognition from all quarters.

The paper was secular in outlook and strictly shunned hints of communalism at a time when Pakistan was indiscreetly injecting communalism into the people's way of thinking. The well-laid-out policy that made the *Observer* purposive and effective in its treatment of news and projection of views will be remembered for many years.

The *Observer's* first editor, Abdus Salam, became a journalism legend for his outstanding editorship and professionalism. People would consider the paper's editorials and columns as a means of guidance on any political and social issue. It became a symbol of opinionated and responsible journalism. The demise of such a newspaper has made many feel diminished.

It was renamed *Bangladesh Observer* in December 1971 but the then-government brought it under state control in 1972. President H.M. Ershad handed over ownership back to Hamidul Haque Chowdhury in 1984. The paper's closure has marked an end of an era of opinionated and responsible journalism.

However, one may feel consolation that the *Observer's* closure may be momentary and the paper may reappear after it straightens all its tangles. The *Observer's* owners must realise that their squabbling had plagued the 60-year-old newspaper, which had the chance of becoming a milestone in media history.

A newspaper's closure is not saddening news only for the paper's journalists and employees who lose their jobs, but also for its readers who miss the paper's presence in the morning. When the owners of the *Rocky Mountain News*, a 150-year-old daily newspaper of Colorado in the US, announced their decision to shut it down on February 26, 2009, not only the journalists and paper's employees but also the dwellers of Denver city were in grief.

"It's very rare that you get to play the music at your own funeral, so you want to make sure you do it well," said John Temple, the newspaper's editor at a hastily called press conference while he prepared for the paper's final edition. Lynn Bartels, one of its reporters held a box of tissues over her head and called out to her tearful colleagues: "This is for everybody." The people, who were present in and around the *Observer* House on June 8 might have witnessed a similar scene.

The world is changing tremendously. The breakthroughs that one witnessed in the past decade have been enormous. People are increasingly embracing the internet and new gadgets associated with it, instead of print media. Millions of people now receive their news and information from the internet. The print media's agonising struggle to survive in the changing world is notable.

The internet, Twitter, Facebook and others represent a revolution in communication, empowerment and the making of public opinion. Their effect on our lives has been astounding. Millions of people have become part of an exponentially growing network. Not all are informed, and few are leaving their imprint on major issues facing them and other citizens.

Spot on Public Relations, a Middle Eastern PR agency specialising in social media, found that, as of May 2010, Facebook has more than 15 million users in the Middle East, easily surpassing the region's newspaper sales of just under 14 million.

This news comes just over a year after the social networking site was introduced an Arabic platform. Facebook added an Arabic interface only in March of last year, and since then 3.5 million users have been added, so there was very quick growth in the Arabian market.

Newspapers and news magazines have been instrumental in shaping the world. Fragmentation has become a semblance of new media. Instead of one TV channel, the country now has many. Google and others have dispersed hundreds of millions of users into the realms of the World Wide Web. Thus, the world has changed a lot.

Still, the print media has been playing a central role in our political, economic and social evolution for decades. It was and still remains a conductor of ideas, a tool and a delivery mode, though in today's wired world, this tool is considered archaic and stale. Publishers have looked for ways to ride the technological wave and almost all newspapers now have online presence to support print.

The *Observer*, a chronicler of Bangladesh's tumultuous history, must not be allowed to die. We once again affirm our hope that the *Observer* will reappear with all its vigour and dignity.

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