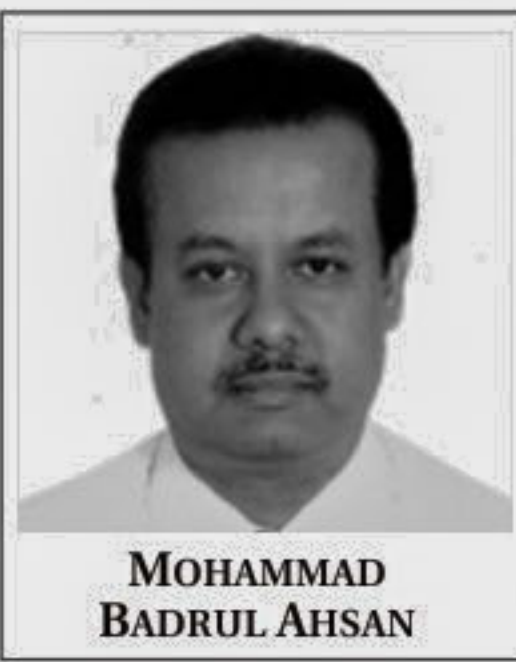


CROSS TALK

How happy is Bangladesh?



MOHAMMAD
BADRUL AHSAN

PAKIS TAN has ranked higher than Bangladesh in the World Happiness Report 2012, holding the 85th position

against our 104th. Even India lagged behind in the 94th position despite Pakistan's reputation as a country rife with terrorism, religious extremism, political violence, and corruption. Which leads us to this rightful question. What is happiness if contentious politicians, suicide bombers and trigger happy gunmen can make a happier country? Occupied and war-torn Iraq has also topped Bangladesh in the 98th position. How does it make sense, particularly when the conclusion goes against the very grain of premise? "While basic living standards are essential for happiness, after the baseline has been met happiness varies more with the quality of human relationship than with income," the report read. The quality of human relationships in countries going through violent political and sectarian upheavals is as contradictory as a cheating husband being honest.

The report cannot be underestimated. It's the work of a team of experts commissioned for a United Nations Conference on Happiness, under the auspices of the UN General Assembly. Columbia University's Earth Institute prepared the report, edited by none other than its director, Jeffrey Sachs, and two happiness experts, Richard Layard of the London School of Economics and John Helliwell of the University of British Columbia. It was published in the first week of last month.

The rankings have been done on a scale of 0-to-10, based on what is

called "life evaluation score." The happiest four countries in the world are Denmark, Norway, Finland and the Netherlands with an average score of 7.6. The other extreme of the spectrum has the most miserable four: Benin, Central African Republic, Togo and the Sierra Leone with an average life evaluation score of 3.4. Pakistan scored above 5, India barely touched 5 and Bangladesh fell short at around 4.8.

Bangladesh's percentile ranking

health, family and job security as well as political freedom and government corruption. This time measurement used a different approach. Instead of treating happiness as a correlation between personal contentment and income, the economists focused on other factors.

John Helliwell, a co-editor of the report, listed those other factors as "family and friends, good health, material sufficiency, freedom, and the pleasure of living in a justifiably

Richard Layard of London School of Economics, who is also one of the editors of the 2012 happiness report, found that Bangladesh was the happiest nation in the world, when the United States ranked 46th and the UK 32nd. The survey was published as a book by the Penguin Press. Back then India was the 5th happiest nation, while the people in most rich countries including Austria, Netherlands, Switzerland, Canada, Japan and others proved much unhappier than their poorer counterparts in countries like Armenia and the Dominican Republic.

Why did Bangladesh top the list back then? The survey showed that people in this country, one of the poorest in the world, derived far more happiness from their small incomes than people in more affluent countries did from their relatively large bank balances. That survey, if you ask me, made more sense, because happiness is rooted more in wanting what you have than having what you want. You can buy a bed with money, as the saying goes, but you cannot buy sleep unless you mean to spend your money on sleeping pills.

In the *Peanuts* gang, a comic series by American cartoonist Charles M Schulz, its characters Lucy, Snoopy, Charlie Brown and others defined happiness as a warm puppy. The Beatles believed happiness was a warm gun. U.S. statesman and thinker Thomas Jefferson ranked happiness third in priority after life and liberty. But English writer G.K. Chesterton thought happiness was like religion; any attempt to explain was going to destroy it.

That's what must have happened between 2005 and 2012. Nations fighting for something are happier than us, because we are happily fighting for nothing.

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SADATUDDIN AHMED AMIL

Happiness is rooted more in wanting what you have than having what you want. You can buy a bed with money, as the saying goes, but you cannot buy sleep unless you mean to spend your money on sleeping pills.

in happiness is roughly 67 amongst 156 countries. That puts the country in the dilemma of someone waiting in a long queue; he cannot decide whether he should worry about how many people are ahead of him or find satisfaction in how many people are behind him. Roughly 67% countries are happier than Bangladesh, 33% being more wretched.

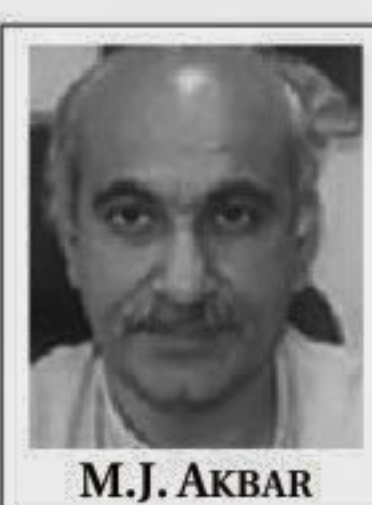
Now what goes into the "life evaluation score?" It's a measurement that includes such factors as

trusting community and nation." The ranking tells us that we have performed poorly on those counts compared to even countries which are virtually living in a state of war. It's not that the report could be wrong, but somewhere it fails to make the logical connection.

True, Bangladesh has its share of political challenges. It also has social disorders: corruption, crime, poverty, and population burden. Yet an earlier World Happiness Survey conducted in 2005 by

BYLINE

Big statues don't cry, unless...



M.J. AKBAR

THE thought has occurred to me before, but seems more relevant now. If you are lucky in life, you become a statue

in death. If you are super lucky, you turn into a giant statue, majestically distinct from the torso-sized apparitions where it is impossible to determine whether our hero had a sparse moustache or merely the misfortune of a diarrhetic bird dropping by for a rest and a chat on his head. The great icons of a nation get disfigured on a mammoth scale, whether it is Gandhi dominating India's Parliament or Lincoln staring grimly from America's Mount Rushmore. It needs distance to get sufficient perspective on such majesty. No man is a hero to his valet, possibly because the valet stands too close to nose hair.

Since we all die in hope, even those of us condemned to hopeless existence, we must presume that there must be some great Cabinet in the Sky presided over by a Gandhi or a Lincoln. Gandhi must be looking down upon the scattered governments across the land he liberated and wondering whether his heirs had gone quite mad or were merely venal. In the Mahatma's case there is of course nothing personal in this. His blood-heirs are author-academicians like Rajmohan Gandhi or bureaucrats like Gopal, men of impeccable integrity and blessed with a self-esteem that has nothing to do with any political

thermometer. But since Gandhi was father of the nation rather than merely father of a family, his concern over the slow and steady destruction of his legacy must surely induce more than a passing twinge.

If Gandhi's extended band of freedom warriors are spending their evenings in his heavenly company, the gloom must be pervasive. I assume that heaven is heaven because there are no political parties. So the Indian circle around Gandhi possibly extends to Savarkar and Shyama Prasad Mukherjee. Can

pal tormentor of public lives. The small camera is the perfect prison for gargantuan appetites. Bangaru Laxman was only caught with his hands up. These days, politicians seem keen to be caught with their pants down.

One would imagine that they would be more careful about sex than money, but the culture of *laissez faire* that has seized the powerful seems immune to the potential of hazard. Delhi, which is pretty hum about graft, is still in visible grip of exhilarating rumour after it

now the relevant metaphor for Delhi. What do you think bothers them more, corruption or stupidity? It is possible for great empires and aspiring nations to survive the occasional bout of greed, as long as it is occasional rather than endemic; but stupidity can be devastating. I fear that some of the headlines of India's current ruling class are more prone to idiocy than they are to theft. It is even possible that some of them get caught out because they have padlocked their senses to ego.

It is the job of a leader to control such an epidemic. But our leaders are either helpless, which is not encouraging, or complicit, which is not acceptable. It is only the searing heat of public pressure that occasionally forces accountability. No one resigns, and no one is dropped, except for fear of electoral consequences. The guilty have also acquired the extraordinary capability of behaving as if nothing ever happened. Delhi is a glasshouse. Everyone whispers but no one throws stones.

You never see a laughing statue, for laughter is not heroic: even the laughing Buddha is a bit of a joke. Those ambitious sculptors who try and catch the Mahatma's beatific smile only manage to turn him into a toothless question mark. But you can always see a statue cry. Just go out and take a look during a shower. It must be raining heavily in heaven these days.

The writer is Editor of *The Sunday Guardian*, published from Delhi, *India on Sunday*, published from London and Editorial Director, *India Today* and *Headlines Today*.

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you imagine a heavenly discussion between them about a ghost which won't go away, Bofors, and the more recent phantom that is so tawdry it invites more contempt than censure: the spectacle of former BJP president Bangaru Laxman slipping a wad of notes into a drawer while a hidden camera captures idiocy for posterity? Are they having a good laugh, or have they broken down into a flood of tears?

The wonder that is modern India is not that a Bangaru episode happened a decade ago, but that the private camera remains the princi-

pal has forwarded the incriminatory tape. The false dollops of morality are silly: "It isn't the sex that interests us, but the compromise of public duty." You bet. Some of the more creative ministers are kind enough to satisfy both impulses, for prurience as well as bribery.

How does such colourful theatre look from the sky? In Milton's *Paradise Lost*, the wonderfully etched Satan describes his core competence: turning Heaven into Hell and Hell into Heaven. The Mahatma and his peers must be wondering which nether region is

JU VC should step down

No moral authority to lead the 'varsity

THE recent developments in Jahangirnagar University are a shocking reminder of how politicisation in universities can bring about a menacing stalemate in academic activities, taking a heavy toll on the general students' learning process. After several days of demonstrations by both anti- and pro-VC teachers and students' groups, the situation took a turn for the worse with some students and two teachers launching into a fast-unto-death resolve. But a delegation of striking teachers in the meanwhile met the prime minister and called off their strike on her assurance, but the students have not relented. They demand the incumbent vice chancellor's resignation for his alleged involvement with various irregularities.

The BCL cadres, as if to stoke the fire, attacked the anti-VC teachers and students while chanting pro-VC slogans. This was not only uncalled for but also a proof of the VC's direct link with a students' party that has been notoriously responsible for numerous incidents of violence on the campus.

We think the VC has lost his credibility along with his moral authority. A VC's position is grounded not only on his being appointed to the high office, but also on his moral standing. A VC must be a reverential persona commanding respect from the whole body of teachers and students. He may entertain the idea that he has the support of the BCL cadres to continue in his position which in fact is all the more reason why he should be resigning for denigrating his position as a partisan VC. His continuity as the custodian of the one of the highest seats of the learning can only jeopardise the functioning of the university. His position is no more tenable.

All things considered, we expect the vice chancellor to resign. If he lacks sense of dignity, then we are forced to demand his immediate removal in order to protect the interest of general students, save the university's reputation and allow it to function as a major educational institution of learning and research. We also expect the government's instant intervention so that a healthy environment of education is restored sooner rather than later. A university cannot be held hostage to one man's ego.

Corporal punishment taken to new heights

Institutional intervention called for

WHEN we are greeted with horrific pictures of young girls taken to task by none other than their Principal who, in the name of meting out punishment for failing to complete the task of praying regularly during the holidays, gives them a 'taste of hell' by branding them with a hot poker; we are literally at a loss for words! The incident that occurred at an all girls madrasa at Namashyampur in the capital city's Kadamtali area is not the first of its kind to be reported, nor is it likely to be the last.

Whether we like it or not, such medieval forms of punishment are indeed part-and-parcel of disciplinary action that is regularly handed down on students in some madrasas. Many an incident goes unreported, the ones that do make the headlines is where the victim could not keep silent about the torture. It is torture in one form or another that defies logic as to how such gross violations of child rights can be inflicted on children by monsters in human form! Hence it makes sense to the Principal as she landed the hot end of the poker on her victims explaining that they must experience firsthand, how it will feel when they face the 'fires of hell' for sins committed on earth.

There is serious need to review the working of such institutes. Do teachers hired to teach students have the requisite skills, and also possess the right psychological makeup? The brutality of 'corporal punishment' and the causes for these need to be identified and addressed without further delay, if

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

May 4

1799
Fourth Anglo-Mysore War: The Battle of Seringapatam: The siege of Seringapatam ends when the city is invaded and Tipu Sultan killed by the besieging British army, under the command of General George Harris.

1886
Haymarket Square Riot: A bomb is thrown at policemen trying to break up a labor rally in Chicago, Illinois, United States, killing eight and wounding 60. The police fire into the crowd.

1970
Vietnam War: Kent State shootings: the Ohio National Guard, sent to Kent State University after disturbances in the city of Kent the weekend before, opens fire killing four unarmed students and wounding nine others. The students were protesting the United States' invasion of Cambodia.

1989
Iran-Contra Affair: Former White House aide Oliver North is convicted of three crimes and acquitted of nine other charges. The convictions, however, are later overturned on appeal.

1990
Latvia proclaims the renewal of its independence after the Soviet occupation.

1994
Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and PLO leader Yasser Arafat sign a peace accord regarding Palestinian autonomy granting self-rule in the Gaza Strip and Jericho.