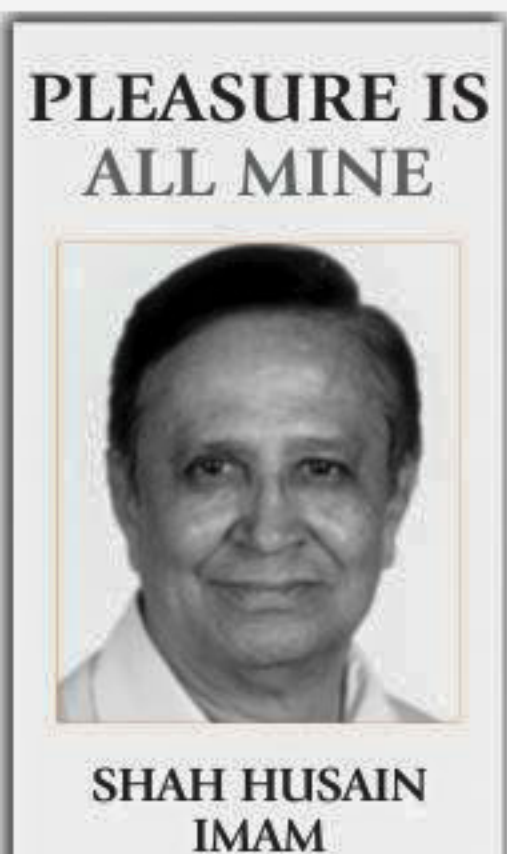


Try a committee of elders to melt the ice



SHAH HUSAIN IMAM

MA J E D Sardar, an old Dhaka icon, much revered in that part of the capital city well into the eighties, when asked about his reading of the prevailing political situation, said: "During the British we saw administering (*shashan*), in Pakistan times we experienced exploitation (*shoshon*) and now we are having speechification (*bhashan*)." His perspective holds even truer today. The verbal culture has become tongue-loose to a hysterical extent oblivious of the consequences of utterances reeled off on both sides of the political aisle.

Now that Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and opposition leader Khaleda Zia are not the ladies for 'turning,' to borrow the words of former and late British prime minister Margaret Thatcher, what options are we left with to wiggle out of the seemingly cast-in-stone political stalemate? It may interest the reader to exactly know what the iron lady Maggie had said: "To those waiting with bated breath for that favourite media catchphrase, the U-turn, I have only one thing to say, you turn if you want to. The lady's not for turning."

The occasion was Tory Party conference in 1980 where some of her own people including Ted Heath urged her to change her course on liberalisation of the economy which had spurred unemployment from 1.5 million to 2.0 million in a year. Note that it was an intra-party incident where somebody braved to sound a piece of advice to strong-willed Maggie. Is it imaginable that somebody in Awami League or BNP would voice a dissent on a matter of policy with their supreme leaders? To Maggie, it was a principled stance she was asserting and to Ted Heath it was equally important to bring up a bread and butter issue to the public domain. What our leaders are standing for? Honestly, something still more serious because this election entails survivability of democratic process, let alone warding off intrusions of extremist elements into the already unsettling political equations. It is also a battle of survival for the contending political forces because an unfair win by one will not only demolish the other but with it the winner as well goes down. Our prime minister is sounding uncompro-

missing on the principle of not having unelected persons to oversee the holding of next general election. That is perfectly in keeping with democratic traditions but are we ready for it yet? True, we have to begin somewhere but the approach would have to be constitutional not merely in terms of the ruling party's perceptions but also those of the opposition. The opposition leader's argument that there is a severe trust deficit between the political parties to allow for a traditional caretaker prime minister to see through the national polls, cannot just be wished away. Her pointer to a level playing field is generally well taken. And, as experience shows, every caretaker government dismantled the architecture left by the preceding political government to ensure free, fair and

of Bangladesh Group to persuade the major political players to sit for a dialogue. Among the influentials, Indian High Commissioner Pankaj Saran and Chinese Ambassador Li Jun have kept out of the group, but they are significantly interacting with political parties including, of course, the US Ambassador Dan Mozena who keeps a high visibility. But China which maintains distance from domestic matters, has through its envoy, called upon leaders of AL and BNP to sit across the table. The external concerns are understandable because of the stakes they have in Bangladesh and principally confined to helping a process of dialogue, their efforts stop short of brokering a deal. If it comes to that then it would be considered meddling, something Bangladesh's well wishers should be wary of.



If the services of nonpartisan elements in the civil society including constitutional experts were harnessed by both the major political leaders, then we would have by now reached a workable solution. Let's have a committee of elders constituted to proffer sane and constructive advice to both our leaders.

credible election. At any rate, the BNP despite its vigorous rejection of doing away with the caretaker system has yet to put its own constitutional formula on the table. Since the standoff is of an intense variety, one is naturally led to a quest for an arbiter, mediator or facilitator to bring the impasse to an end. The foreign envoys in Dhaka are in a state of anxiety at the thought of the deteriorating politico-economic scenario in the country. And they have organised themselves from time to time as Coffee Group, Tuesday Group and lately Friends

Yet, this may have raised a self-doubt as to whether we have run out of indigenous capacity to resolve our own political crisis. In fact, if the services of nonpartisan elements in the civil society including constitutional experts were harnessed by both the major political leaders, then we would have by now reached a workable solution. Let's have a committee of elders constituted to proffer sane and constructive advice to both our leaders.

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HUMOROUSLY YOURS



NAVEED MAHBUB

SO many great catches during the BPL. The unpaid players were grabbing anything that came their way. The bookies do high fives. Aha! There may just be a way to pay the players. Bookie #1: "So, how many no balls will be bowled in the first game?" Bookie #2: "Your guess is as bad as mine. There are no Pakistani bowlers playing this time." Nevertheless, the bookies bet on their chances and turn BPL, a gentleman's game, into a gentleman's club. Maybe there was also a bet to get out of the spot fixing scandal unscathed. Reactions pour in: The redeemed Mohammad Asif: "The cricketing world demands an immediate explanation on what happened to my 10%!" Navjot Sidhu immediately starts ranting something about cockroaches. At the time of writing this column, he was still ranting. The veteran Kapil Dev: "Boost is the secret of my energy." Ace spot fixer Salman Butt declines to comment, just says, "My last name is on the line." Family members are embarrassed: "He's my son-out-law." "He's an honorary member of our family." So, where is cricket going? Will it generate a new breed of players who will learn to hit shots which they hit to get out but looks like they intended to hit a boundary? And when did this evil creep into the game? According to historians, spot fixing goes back to the England vs. India Plessey Test of 1757. The English bookies were never taken to task, but the famous chucker Mir Zafar's grave, to this day, is paid homage to with death rattles. My daughter is baffled, "Baba, are you saying that a player is PAID to play badly?" I answer: "That's right. If you're good at something, you should never do it for free." So, it is a relief for the average bowler as the bookie instructs him: "You need to give twelve runs in the third over." The average bowler: "That's it?" So, who are these bookies? Don't they worry about destroying reputations? Nah. "Let others keep the reputation -- I'll keep the money." Are they sadistic? Certainly not, because if they were, they'd pay the bowler to give away at least twenty runs in an over while paying the batsman to score no runs in the same over. Perhaps they are merely like commentators, "Look at the pitch. Good betting conditions." So, all are now vigilant to detect the slightest indication of spot fixing. But the price is paranoia and physical anguish among honest players. "Gosh! I really need to scratch down there!" Skipper warns, "Better not -- might be interpreted as a signal to the bookies." "Am I a suspect for bobbing my Adam's apple?" Skipper: "No, you do that before every ball, so you're ok." But the game must remain pure. Do players forget so easily what's at stake? Maybe there should be a third parallel line after the bowling crease and popping crease which reads in bold, "LIFETIME SUSPENSION!" The ICC team's landing in Dhaka was the most anticipated landing since that of Neil Armstrong on the moon. If the accused are proven guilty, they will most certainly have fixed themselves a *not so pleasant* spot in the hearts of millions of cricket lovers in this country. Even with the best of soul fixing, the game now faces an insurmountable challenge -- of fixing hopes.

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Science education key to socio-economic development

AHMED A. AZAD

IN this age of high technology and globalisation it is expected that, to achieve sustained economic growth, developing countries need to capitalise on intelligent and judicious use of existing resources and intellectual capital. This is especially true for a highly populous country with limited land and negligible reserves of natural resources, such as Bangladesh.

Knowledge-based sustainable development requires excellence in higher education and proficiency in scientific, technological and social science disciplines that underpin economic growth. Because of paucity of funds, higher education in Bangladesh has to be need-based and predominantly science and technology oriented. While higher education is an essential prerequisite for the development of knowledge based economies, both academic excellence and sustainable development are critically dependent on scientific proficiency and a strong technology base. Excellence in higher education and quality of research are very closely related; the highest ranking universities of the world also happen to be the best research universities.

Bangladesh has made some significant progress in higher education and in the science and technology sector. It currently has 104 universities and a tertiary enrolment which is among the highest in the world. Even with limited resources Bangladesh has made remarkable progress in agriculture and public

health. It is very fortunate in having a very large and young workforce, and the intellectual capability of its young population is second to none. Researchers and technologists from Bangladesh hold important academic and management positions all around the world, whose expertise could be potentially tapped for meeting specific needs. Why is it then that these existing advantages and capabilities have not translated into expected intellectual capital, and why is it that the research productivity of Bangladeshi academic institutions, as measured by publications and translation of research into products, hardly registers in global assessments of science and technology proficiency?

Science education is undoubtedly of paramount importance at all stages, but at the tertiary level it must be geared to meeting specific job demands and not be solely concerned with producing huge numbers of degrees that may have little or no relevance to the current and future development needs of Bangladesh. Locally relevant and multidisciplinary science curricula need to be developed to produce sufficient numbers of trained personnel required to meet the socio-economic needs of Bangladesh and its people, especially those



living in the non-metropolitan areas.

Bangladesh has a fairly good education policy; however, the successful implementation of this policy depends on the availability of a large pool of well-trained teachers, especially in science and mathematics, who are willing to live and work outside the big cities. Because of a dearth of suitably qualified local technicians Bangladesh companies often have to hire them from neighbouring countries. The government has established thousands of community primary health clinics but they are often undermanned due to shortage of nurses, paramedical personnel and doctors, or their unwillingness to live in non-metropolitan areas. The government and the University Grants

Commission should aim to strengthen existing teacher training colleges and polytechnic institutes, and convert at least some of the colleges under the National University into institutions for training more science and mathematics teachers, nurses, paramedical personnel and agriculture extension workers. Conditions should be created so that these professionals are accorded proper status and respect in the community. A substantial quota of fully-funded seats in colleges should be reserved for rural students, including medical and nursing students, who should give an undertaking that they will work for a specified time in the countryside. Appropriate positions should be created in partnership with the private sector, and attractive salaries and other incentives should be provided for employment outside the big cities.

The above measures, besides meeting the current socio-economic needs of Bangladesh, would hopefully also release the inordinate pressure on places for specialised higher degrees in universities, and in the process free some additional funds for postgraduate research, which is the required route to university teaching and to research oriented professions. Because of aspiration for postgraduate university degrees, and a demand for it by

employers even when not necessary, there is too much pressure on providing university places for school leavers. In 2012 there were 2.65 million students enrolled in tertiary institutions in Bangladesh, which is higher than that in Pakistan and the fourth highest in the developing world. But quantity does not necessarily equate to excellence, and due to a lack of adequate funds, and with available resources spread too thin, the overall quality of the large numbers of university degrees and their usefulness to Bangladesh's socio-economic development remain suspect.

Since postgraduate research in the scientific disciplines is extremely expensive, quality must take precedence over quantity. Research degrees at public universities should be viewed as a special privilege since education in public universities is virtually free; as such, admission should be based primarily on merit and aptitude. Postgraduate research and innovation is the passport to development of intellectual capital and national wealth creation, so it needs to be internationally competitive, focused primarily on national objectives and adequately funded. The science and technology proficiency required for the stated objective of reaching middle income status is very much dependent on excellence in postgraduate research and innovation.

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CROSSWORD puzzle grid with clues for Across and Down.

CRYPTOQUIP puzzle with a grid and a clue: "Yesterday's Cryptoquip: WHERE I LIVE I WILL PROBABLY NEVER BE TOO COLD BECAUSE MY HOME IS A FULLY FURNACED APARTMENT. Today's Cryptoquip Clue: H equals Y"

BETTLE BAILY comic strip panels showing a character in a kitchen and another character walking.

HENRY comic strip panels showing a character walking past a shoe repair shop.

QUOTABLE Quotes section featuring a quote by Leo Tolstoy: "Everyone thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing himself."