

China looks south



SYED MANSUR HASHIM

GOING by *The Daily Star* report published on February 14, we are witnessing a paradigm shift in Chinese aid to Bangladesh. Over a 25-year period starting from 1975, Chinese financial assistance totalled US\$656million high interest loans. Commitments rose 50 per cent to more than \$900million over 2011 – 2013 in new loans with nearly another \$900million in the pipeline. Indeed, Dhaka has sought commitments valued up to \$8.6billion “soft” loans for 14 important infrastructure projects. The projects range from barrages to rail links, sanitation to sewage, and information technology to road links.

What is of import here is the move away from hard loans to soft loans. It indicates that China is looking to partner with the government to significantly improve the country's infrastructure with interest rates as low as 1.5 per cent and repayment period of 20 years. It is not surprising that Dhaka has responded favourably to these overtures. Chinese loans traditionally do not carry the burden of “strings attached” that is synonymous to traditional western aid. Given the delay and diplomatic fallout suffered from the Padma Bridge project, it certainly makes sense why policymakers are warming up to what China has to offer, despite the clause that only Chinese companies must be involved in the projects for which loans are being availed. Of course that opens up other areas of concern. Recent cost overruns experienced in a number of projects being implemented on a government-to-government basis, such as the Dhaka-Chittagong 4-lane project.

But as pointed out by *International Monetary Fund* in a study recently, in 2014 “the region as a whole will experience 5.25 per cent growth in 2014, and emerging Asia is projected to grow at an even higher pace of over 6 per cent...however these steady gains will be undermined by a number of challenges in the coming year, from structural impediments and

delays in economic reform, to fiscal vulnerabilities and high inflation in some countries.” Structural inadequacies have always been a major Achilles heel for Bangladesh, ranging from power outages to poor connectivity whether road, rail or river. Chinese commitments have far outstripped that of the \$1billion line of credit offered by India principally due to the terms of payment offered.

Improvement of infrastructure remains very much at the heart of the march towards middle-income country status in 2021. Improved infrastructure allows for greater regional integration. According to *OECD's 2014 Economic Outlook Report*, “growing regional integration both among emerging Asian countries and with the broader Asian region would be a major asset in their efforts to rise into the high income ranks.” As pointed out by Dr. Fahmida

We need to address the Bangladesh capacity to better coordinate and select quality projects for utilising the foreign credit support.

Khatun, Research Director at Centre for Policy Dialogue: “China has also taken steps to address concerns of trade imbalance and is working to reduce tariffs imposed on jute and textiles, two of Bangladesh's major exports. Since 2010 China has granted duty-free access of 4,721 Bangladeshi products to its markets, provided that local value additions are at least 40 per cent. China's notable contributions to Bangladesh are the six ‘friendship’ bridges, a massive conference centre and a fertiliser factory in Chittagong through concessional lending. China is also seeking to mitigate Bangladesh's energy deficit by developing the country's natural gas resources. Bangladesh and China are also planning to construct a Bangladesh-Myanmar-China road link through Kunming to enhance economic cooperation.”

Significant challenges in terms of non-tariff barriers remain with India and China, but these fall beyond the scope of this article. As

do the political tensions that threaten to rip apart the fragile modicum of “normalcy” that appears to have returned. Nonetheless, the fact that Bangladesh is moving ahead with removing some major bottlenecks that have stifled connectivity, power, health and sanitation should be looked at in a positive note. Fostering trade across borders, transforming the country into a favourable destination for foreign direct investment, developing institutions that improve governance, improving the human capital through better education are all elements in the mixture to aid in achieving middle income status 2021. And improving infrastructure remains at the centre of that whole philosophy. What is required of course is the vision of policymakers to stick to roadmaps for implementing these crucial projects.

While we have been discussing the increased credit opportunities offered from Chinese end, we need to address the Bangladesh capacity to better coordinate and select quality projects for utilising the foreign credit support. *The Daily Star* reports on February 16, 2014 that Bangladesh has failed to use two third of the \$1 billion Indian credit in the last three years due to delays in implementing major Railway projects. The report suggests that the Indian side is ready to disburse the funds but due to several limitations on Bangladesh side, in particular, the relevant ministry's failure to implement the projects. The railway authorities had intended to use the Indian funds for its projects without conducting any feasibility studies. Subsequently, flaws were detected with the projects while awarding contractors. This is not an exception; rather it is precisely this sort of unprepared and professionally incorrect attitudes widely witnessed time and again in Bangladesh when initiating costly loan supported projects. As a result the project costs enhance, and poor project selection ends up costing the country. We need to change these practices permanently and the government's quality monitoring capacity should be enhanced if we want to utilise these foreign lines of credit to implement priority projects.

The writer is Assistant Editor, *The Daily Star*.

Why "North-American degree" ?

DHIMAN CHOWDHURY

THE PROBLEM

Some private universities require their potential faculties to have degrees of some specific countries. For example, the first private university, North-South University, since early 2000 in its recruitment advertisement wants the candidates have degrees from a reputed foreign university preferably to have a North-American degree. I talked to the UGC members and the concerned university authorities about this discretionary and racial advertisement. They then corrected the advertisement and put a fresh advertisement in *The Daily Star*, three days after on February 2, 2013, with 'from a reputed university' in place of 'reputed foreign university'. But the problem remains; some universities still continue with this mindless advertisement.

THEIR ARGUMENTS

These employers argue that they do not have enough time and resources to invite so many people to participate in the selection process. Second, these degrees are ranked higher formally or informally, particularly MBA degrees which was initiated in USA. Third, they believe that in the market economy where there is freedom of choice this practice is not an offence because they are taking the best products.

THERE ARE ALTERNATIVES

Universities can say 'degrees from globally reputed universities', instead of 'reputed foreign universities'. Otherwise, home country is not even allowed to participate in the process. And importantly, knowledge is not concentrated to a particular country or group of countries. When this kind of discriminatory recruitment advertisement appeared in Bangladesh in early 2000, I raised the issue in my MBA class. Almost all students opined that in the lassies-faire economy, this advertisement is nothing wrong. But when I explained the theory of knowledge, freedom, justice, human rights, constitution, all of them changed their minds and agreed with me that this kind of advertisement is based on commercial and self interest, and particularly short of knowledge. I then took the issue in our departmental academic committee meeting. There was divided opinion. Some were 'in favor of nothing wrong', some agreed with my stand, and others remained silent. However, subsequently, with my further efforts on that I believe I could convince the community.

BELIEF VS. KNOWLEDGE

Their recruitment practices are based on belief not knowledge. These behaviors violate the constitution of the country where every citizen has the right to prove one's worth if he or she satisfies basic job requirements.

Importantly, universities pursue global knowledge not only North-American knowledge or Bangladeshi knowledge. This behavior can also face the criticism of colonial education. Education under colonialism did not prepare students to be productive and participant citizens in independent modern states of their own. Colonial education denationalized the colonial student, denigrated his culture, and socialized him into the political culture of the imperial country (Coleman 1965: 36). That all North-American universities are better than others is a prejudice. This discriminatory practice is also inconsistent with the office of the country's President which approved all universities. This is also self defeating because it excludes their own degrees.

Beliefs, ideologies and self-interests are narrower; knowledge is broader. These beliefs have weaker justifications but to be knowledge there must be richer justifications. Human rights are broader than saying that they do not have time to allow more candidates. Other universities and their students and degrees feel insulted if they are not given at least an opportunity to the process. Their practice is also inconsistent with the theory of competition because it has a restricted or limited market; there are barriers of entry. There are studies (Gonzalez 2006) where hereditary CEOs generally underperform than market based CEOs. Again hereditary CEOs perform better but they must prove their worth and specifically when they have a degree from a reputed university. And market based CEOs do not underperform even if they do not have a degree from a good school. There are evidences of good leaders in many disciplines who graduated from unknown remote village schools and colleges.

PRINCIPLES OF JUSTICE VIOLATED

The constitution of the country provides equal citizenship and therefore every citizen must have equal opportunities. John Rawls (1971) added another requirement for justice and that is opportunities according to merit and performance. An employer has the right to employ the best candidates but how does it employ the best candidates is important. Amartya Sen (2003) emphasizes this process aspect of fulfilling liberty for deciding justice and injustice. Liberty is therefore a responsibility concept. Importantly, justice or injustice does not affect an individual alone but it affects his family members too. That is, justice or injustice is not an individual concept, it is also a joint and social concept. If an individual is deprived of his due opportunity, justice is denied not only to that individual but also to his innocent child.

A UNIVERSITY IS A GLOBAL INSTITUTION

A university is a global institution, a house of people of diverse nationalities and culture. And a graduate from a university is a global citizen. He learned global history, interacted with global people and global culture. He has diverse identities- a Bangladeshi but with high respect for Western individual liberty; a non-practizing Hindu but occasional beef-lover; a soft-spoken Bengali but enriched by the diversity of other languages and culture, a singer of Tagore song but fond of classical music; and the tennis champion but a football fan. Narrow single identity by region, political party or religion is not his way.

Knowledge never grew nor concentrated in a particular place. Once Oxford and Cambridge gave leadership; leaders of different countries graduated from these universities. Now USA universities have taken these positions. But a university teacher lives not by the place of his degree but by the knowledge he creates. Importantly, a university's success does not rest on teaching and exercising only the existing knowledge but in creating new knowledge.

SELF-DEFEATING

'North-American degree' or 'reputed foreign university degree' are self-defeating because the employer-university does not even recognize its own degree! If it is a newly established university, this requirement may be partly valid. But some universities even more than two decades old, still continue with this requirement. One of the reasons for this gross wrong belief is that private universities are operating round the clock even in weekly holidays; 9 am to 9 pm is the normal work time. They have little time to relax and think. Universities rather spend most of their time in teaching and administrative duties; research, cognitive and intellectual exercise are largely ignored.

The writer is Professor of Accounting, University of Dhaka. Email: dhiman_chowdhury@yahoo.com

Elections and democracy in Bangladesh

DR. MAHFUZ PARVEZ

THE journey towards democracy is not a novel phenomenon in Bangladesh. The people of Bangladesh struggled for democratic political system for long years. The process of democratization that started in Bangladesh following the liberation was not very encouraging. It has proceeded in the midst of ups and downs. The role of the government and the opposition was not conducive to democratizing the political system through free and fair elections and institutionalization during the recent past. From the perspective of political science a unique 10th national parliament started its journey. This parliament is unique in many ways, not merely one. In fact, this parliament is one of a kind in the history of democracy. The unique nature of this parliament is this: that more than half of the members were elected unopposed. The election was highly controversial and its credibility was questioned by national and international media and experts. More than half of the voting population could not vote in this election. The vote was boycotted in many places. Even where people did show up, the turnout was laughingly low. The party cadres made the number of votes cast more by casting fake votes. So, the legal support for this parliament might be perfect on paper, but the real picture is different. This parliament does not have the vote of the people.

Another reason why this parliament is unique is the absence of a legitimate opposition. It is customary for the head of the party to become the leader of the opposition. But the former president happily accepted an inferior post of 'special ambassador for the prime minister' while his wife became the leader of opposition. There are concerns that Ershad participating in the government might unfairly influence the Manjur murder case, in which he is an accused. Whatever the concerns might be, he is not in the government to uphold democracy, he is there to serve his own interests. It is not really hard to understand. Another government minister Anisul

Islam Mahmud is sitting in opposition. Apparently the line has been blurred if not removed between which is the government and which is supposed to be the opposition. So the picture is quite bizarre.

The opposition MPs made an opposition leader and they support their leader. But at the same time some of these opposition members are ministers as well. Therefore, they work directly under the Prime Minister. Parliamentary rules don't allow crossing floor, i.e. leaving one party on whose behalf a member was elected and joining the rival party in the parliament. How then these ministers will work without calling their functionality into serious question. It has become difficult to presume who will vote for which side; with one part of their allegiance to the Jatiya Party and the other to the government. JP MPs cannot be allowed to have two votes. This will surely create legal and procedural complexities and paradoxes.

From another perspective, the duty of the opposition is to challenge the government. But how will they challenge the government when they are the government. In the 9th national parliament a few MPs of different political parties participated in the government. Some of them were made ministers as well. Naturally, they did not sit with the opposition. The leader of one faction of the Jatiya Party, Anwar Hossain Manju, has also been made a minister. But he does not claim to be an opposition.

But the 'opposition' in the 10th parliament is keeping its position as the opposition and at the same time participating in the government. How can the party retain its characteristics of an opposition? How can this work? The reality is that the current parliament is an illusion of multi-party government. It should be patently obvious to any observer that this is a sham.

In the historical process of the parliamentary democracy, it can also be argued that failure to institutionalise the democratic institutions produced movements for free and fair elections in Bangladesh. Needless to say, Bangladesh inherited a long history of demo-

cratic movement. And democratic rights of the people were the result of the movement for free, fair, transparent and participatory elections. Dr. Mustafizur Rahman Siddiqui, Professor of Political Science, Chittagong University has rightly pointed out the history, success and failure of movements for free and fair elections in his recent book *Democratization in Bangladesh* (A.D. Development Publishing House, Dhaka, 2013). His findings and observations illustrate the long struggle for transition to democracy that started through the movements for ensuring free and fair elections and culminated in the movement for Non-Party Caretaker Government during the quasi-military regime of Ershad. Movement of similar nature has also become successful following the democratic transition in 1991 during the period of elected government. It was seen that only Non-Party Caretaker Government was the principal goal of these movements. Still this demand finds its reasonable space in the political arena of Bangladesh. Particularly, after the recent polls, the need for free, fair, inclusive, participatory, transparent and credible election is again getting its logical base. Dr. Siddiqui considered that the elections under the Non-Party Caretaker Government may not remain free from the allegations of the defeated party or candidates as it usually happened under party government in Bangladesh, but recent unique experience of 10th national elections established the reality that the Non-Party Caretaker Government is able to manage electoral functions comparatively better than the general elections under the ruling party. Historically, we can say that the institutionalisation of democracy and free and fair elections, which is required for democratic functions and stability, has been hampered in Bangladesh mainly by the ruling party contributing to the continuation of the movement for Non-Party Caretaker Government by the opposition political parties.

The writer is Professor, Dept. of Political Science, University of Chittagong. E-mail: mahfuzparvez@gmail.com



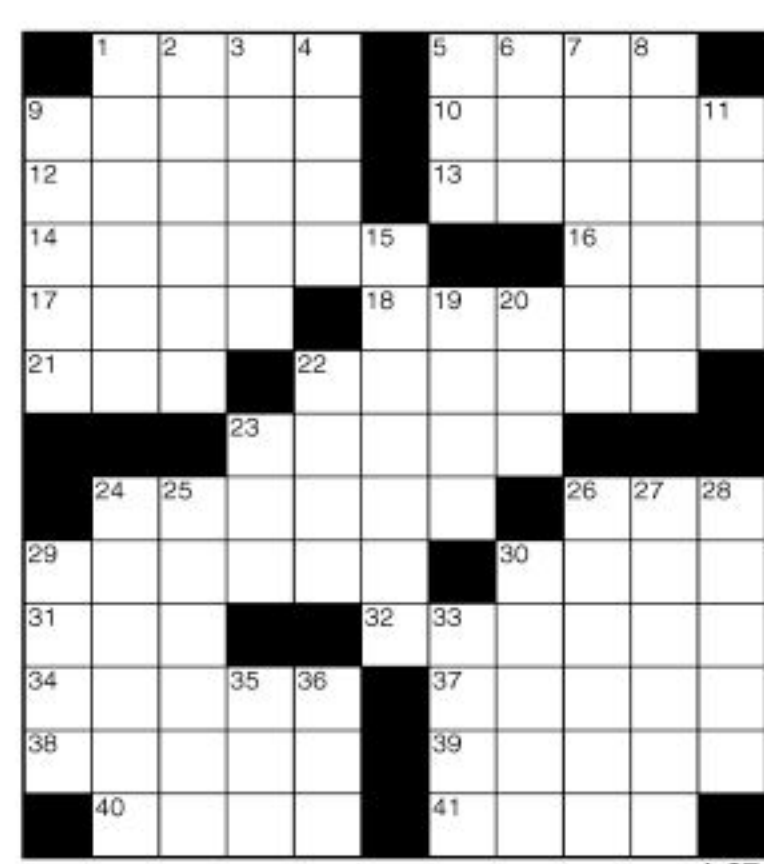
CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

ACROSS

- 1 Does a checkout chore
- 5 Brewing ingredient
- 9 San Diego player
- 10 Make suitable
- 12 Smithy sight
- 13 Singer Haggard
- 14 Shallow boats
- 16 Sprinted
- 17 Exam
- 18 Like this answer
- 21 "I - we there yet?"
- 22 Un-wrinkled
- 23 Fast
- 24 Eucalyptus eaters
- 26 Road goo
- 29 "Wait a sec!"
- 30 Mediocre
- 31 Sit-up targets
- 32 One-masted boats
- 34 Become excited
- 37 Playwright Edward
- 38 Sun-powered
- 39 Lendl and others
- 40 Butte's cousin
- 41 Wine list section

DOWN

- 1 Money worker
- 2 Counsel
- 3 Petty swindle
- 4 Egotist's focus
- 5 Deli meat
- 6 Poem of praise
- 7 Chatty bird
- 8 Diver's creation
- 9 Lasagna or linguine
- 11 Addition column
- 15 Chinese boats
- 19 Robbers' chasers
- 20 Singer Orbison
- 22 Farm sight
- 23 Turn sharply
- 24 Explosion sound
- 25 Marked down
- 26 "What a shame!"
- 27 Poplar trees
- 28 Valentine's gift
- 29 Crones
- 30 Figure out
- 33 Den
- 35 -- de deux
- 36 Important age



CRYPTOQUOTE

JS R UZTRI ZFCRSQT, TRQG LTZOFS
YROJQRXXA LXRAO R LRZI IGRI IGT
FIGITZ ZTRXXA XJWTO.

-- TXJMYRTIG ROGXTA.

Yesterday's CRYPTOQUOTE:

CHOOSE THE LIFE THAT IS MOST USEFUL, AND HABIT WILL MAKE IT THE MOST AGREEABLE.

-- FRANCIS BACON

Yesterday's answer



A XYDLBAAXR IS LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

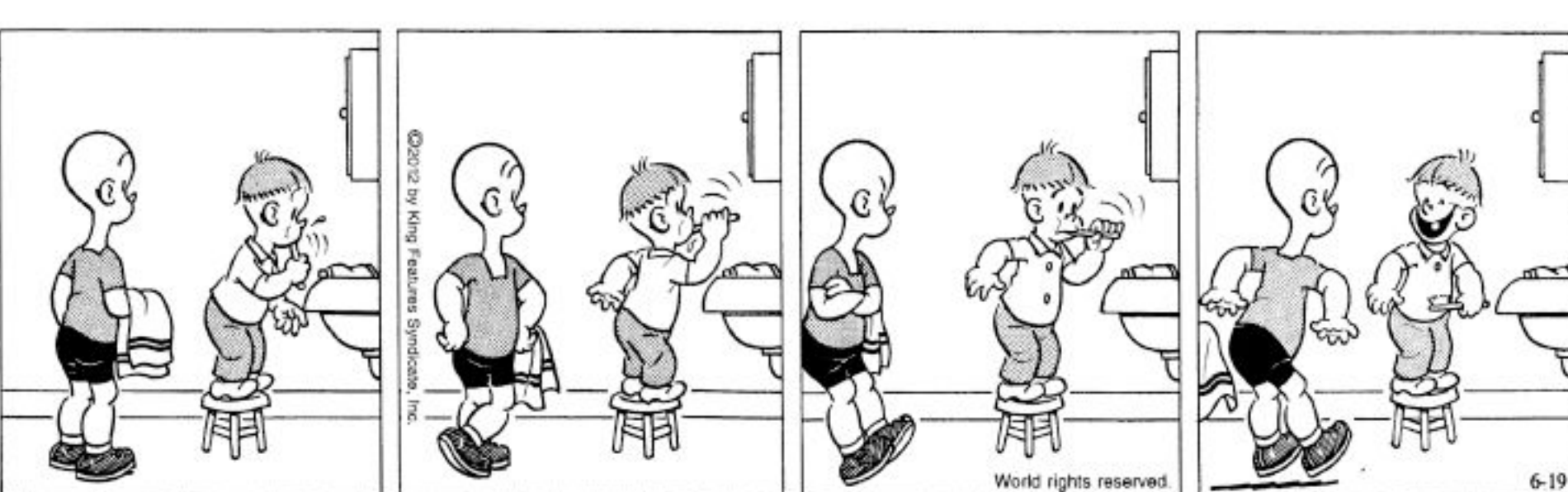
BEETLE BAILEY



by Mort Walker

HENRY

by Don Trachte



Everything has its wonders, even darkness and silence, and I learn what-ever state I may be in, therein to be content.

Helen Keller