

In the classroom

Teaching methods must change

THE World Bank states what we have long known. A report on the state of education in Bangladesh on the part of the global lender makes it clear that teaching in the country remains textbook-based and learning is dependent on how well pupils can master facts by rote. In fact, the kind of interaction between teachers and students, normally associated with modern methods of teaching, is missing in Bangladesh.

By and large teachers in this country are averse to innovative classroom instruction because they are expected to ensure that most or all students are promoted to the next class or level. Bad performance by students will not only reflect on the teachers but also bring their educational institutions into disrepute. Besides, in circumstances where teachers, particularly of secondary level, are not paid well at all, they might be lacking in application.

There are other problems as well. Teachers in Bangladesh go through the tortuous process of having to take as many as five or six classes a day, a factor that leaves them drained of energy, to a point where they cannot be expected to give their best in the classroom. That said, the concept of teachers' training remains alien, leading to conditions where people with no real knack or fascination for teaching are in the classroom.

Over-all, what is crucial is for education to be given the priority it deserves. Allocating a mere three per cent of GDP to it is a downright shame, a scandal.

Another eye-opening environmental report

High time for action

THAT Bangladesh has ranked 4th from bottom in a survey conducted by World Health Organisation (WHO) on air pollution comes as a shock. The Ambient Air Pollution database is a compilation of data of 1,600 cities from 91 countries. To be ranked with countries like Afghanistan, which secured 2nd position is hardly salutary for a country like Bangladesh that is aspiring to become a middle income country by 2021. Our cities have not fared well in the assessment where Narayanganj comes in as the 17th worst polluted city and Dhaka not doing too well takes the 23rd position.

Putting these rankings in perspective, we find that a mere 12 per cent of people living in the worst hit cities breathe the air that conforms to WHO air quality pollution levels. By the world body's estimates, air pollution is now the single largest environmental health risk. The wilful dumping of industrial toxins and unregulated spewing of harmful gaseous pollutants from environmentally-unfriendly factories including brick kilns result in transmitting harmful substances like carbon monoxide, sulphur and nitrogen oxide and other pollutants into the air that is degrading the atmosphere and putting to risk the health of millions.

Department of environment, which is the regulatory body to handle and oversee pollution is undermanned to the point of being sorely unable to enforce its authority nationwide. The government has to meet this critical deficit. Key to a turnaround is in decisive political will to enforce coordination of all agencies involved in environmental protection.

Happy Mother's Day

I live, what your eyes saw

SHAYA FIRUZ RAHMAN

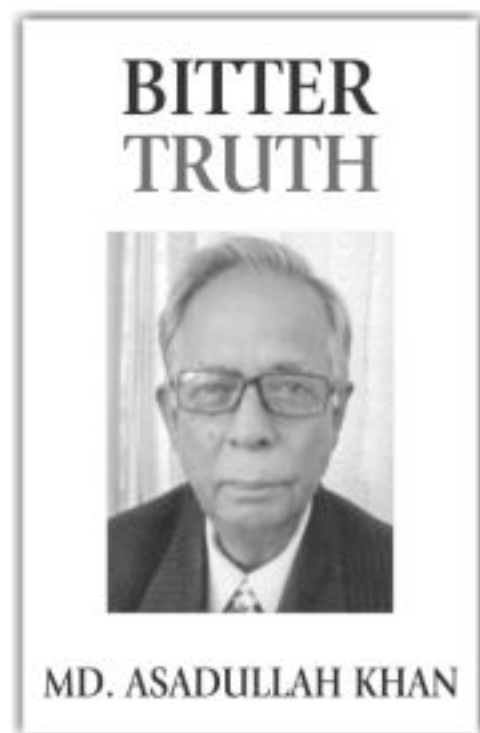
Everyone has special bond with Their mum but I have a different Relation with my mum, people say They want to follow their mum's dream But I say I'll live my mum's dream.

Every mum teaches their kids to see The world in different aspects But I see the world through My mum's eyes and that This why I find this world more Worth living for.

My friends tell me that I should Stop being a day-dreamer and Shouldn't believe in such miracles That never will happen but The dream I see with my open Eyes is the dream I am living in My mum's eyes.

The writer is a student.

Abduction and killing order of the day



WE see mafia groups enjoying the patronage of feuding political parties and rival business groups and striking terror all over the country. The cult of warlordism that began in early '80s has spread throughout the country. None of the major political parties is immune to the contagion. Most of the murders committed these days relate to either drug sale or drug money sharing, or control over illegal encroachment of land and markets built illegally. The media headlined the reports in 2013 about abduction and subsequent killing of Tawki, an A-level student, because his father and his associates launched a movement against some godfathers in Narayanganj.

We are no strangers to violence and atrocities, but it is impossible to explain the abominable ferocity of killing a minor boy to take revenge on his father. With incidents of abduction by criminals and allegedly by members of the law enforcement agencies rising sharply in recent months, people fear for their lives because an uninvolved person like Chandan Sarkar and some others were killed only because they were witness to this abduction.

In recent times, crime pattern has taken a new shape. Hired goons in the age group 16-30 are now doing the most atrocious jobs, ripping apart the age-old societal norms and value systems. Crime dossiers and lists of bad characters -- the foundations of detection -- are of no use since a vast majority of criminals are young novices and new recruits. Quick money seems to be the new 'mantra.' With family value already under stress and job market squeezing up, crime suddenly seems to be an alluring option. For them, crime pays!

Despite the fact that family members of ward councilor Nazrul Islam were pointing fingers at Noor Hosain, his long-standing business and political rival, from the beginning of his abduction, strangely enough, law enforcers at Narayanganj took no cognisance or showed total reluctance in either arresting him or even interrogating him. With Narayanganj police reluctant to interrogate Noor Hossain, and his accomplices, the main alleged culprits in the seven murder case, or even raiding his house for alamat immediately after the incident, the image of the police and Rab has again taken a beating.

People are prone to believe that those seven lives could have been saved if police and Rab had gone into action immediately after getting the complaint from Nazrul's wife. The whole episode remained shrouded in mystery because of police inaction. People wonder why the home ministry bosses remained inactive even when Nazrul complained to them that he feared an attack from Noor Hossain and asked for security only days before this tragic incident. Issuing red alert in the immigration

checkposts now seems to be a futile exercise and simple eyewash.

In the backdrop of such ominous developments, people are looking to the courts to intervene to see that justice is done. Terrorists and killers like Noor Hossain have evaded arrest and punishment because all these years they were protected by their political mentors belonging to all the parties. People now increasingly feel that unless the guilty are tried and convicted -- not just tried and then let off -- such goons are likely to flourish with ever increasing strength. At the same time, the highest court may summon those involved in Noor Hossain's underworld criminal activities and place them on the dock for answering charges of harbouring notorious criminals. Reports say that Noor Hossain has so far been indicted in 22 cases, including six for murder.

It will be interesting to see what happens to Noor Hossain and his accomplices accused of murdering seven persons in Narayanganj. They are still on the run. People are asking in anguished voices if raiding his house seven days after the tragic incident was intended to allow him to flee the country. People feel that it might have been so because it was alleged that some law enforcers were involved in the dirty deal with these criminals.

As revelations of his seamy career of building wealth through illegal occupation of numerous market places, property dealings with crores of taka, illegal possession of BIWTA land, sand extraction from the Shitalakkhya river and collection of huge amount of tolls every month through unfair business started trickling out, Noor Hossain got panicky and started hatching plans to eliminate those opposing him.

Immediately after the abduction of Nazrul and his associates, his wife Selina Islam rushed to the ruling party MP Shamim Osman, appealing to him to rescue Nazrul, pointing her finger at Noor Hossain. But Shamim Osman completely ruled out Noor Hosain's participation in the abduction at that time. Narayanganj people believe that in all such abductions, killings and criminal activities since 2012, the godfather families in Narayanganj played a big role, and some law enforcers there were just pawns in their hands. And now the alleged complicity of the elite force Rab makes it all the more painful.

An unlettered truck-driver in the '80s in Narayanganj, who could barely eke out an existence, Noor Hossain's has been rags-to-riches story like in the films. Fiercely ambitious, Noor Hossain knew the importance of two things -- godfathers and connections. This connection paid him off enormously.

As it appears, some in the governments in the past days might have protected and abetted Noor Hossain's criminal activities. At the beginning of his dirty life, Noor Hossain discovered that politics provided him both a cover and protection. And so he flirted with Ershad's JP in its heyday, then joined BNP at the most opportune moment and then AL to suit his convenience. As one looks at Noor Hossain's meteoric rise to power, one feels that the most dangerous "Mafia don" had been protected and patronised for a long time, otherwise how could he extract sand from the Shitalakkhya river despite 22 notices served on him by BIWTA? Noor Hossain and his likes buy social and political acceptability by allowing their mentors and godfathers to enjoy everything that they covet.

highly competitive society where the salaried middle class could not take the kind of risks implied by a political career; but it undermined the quality of Indian politics. Indeed, it excluded the educated professionals who tend to be a mainstay of democratic governments elsewhere, bringing middle-class values and convictions to politics.

In Europe, for example, middle-class professionals comprise the bulk of the activists, voters, and candidates for political office. In India, by contrast, their counterparts are too busy working to make ends meet to have time for activism. They lack the money found at the top of India's stratified society, and they have little access to the votes that lie at the bottom. As a result, middle-class professionals have largely abstained from the political process.

That pattern has allowed Indian politics to become increasingly populist, with candidates appealing to the lowest common denominator to win votes. Given this, growing disenchantment with Indian democracy among the middle class is not surprising. Some have even spoken of the "secession of the elites" from Indian politics.

That is why the participation of middle-class candidates in the current election is so significant. If the old pattern is being reversed, the change is almost certainly a result of India's economic transformation, which has enabled millions of people to join the middle class, bringing with them a new energy and dynamism. Hard-working professionals are no longer willing to sit on the sidelines while the political class makes critical policy decisions. Equally important, India's educated middle class will, in the not-too-distant future, become large enough to matter in elections.

To be sure, India's parliament already includes several educated young professionals who previously would not have participated in politics -- people with good degrees, a clear vision for the country, international experience, bright ideas, and the capacity to articulate them. But they are all children of politicians. Though the dynastic trend in Indian politics may be bending, it is far from being broken: This year, the BJP has nominated technocrat Jayant Sinha for the seat being vacated by his father, former Finance Minister Yashwant Sinha.

And yet, despite their hereditary advantage, this new generation of educated, articulate, and forward-thinking politicians is raising the standard of Indian politics -- a shift that the growing involvement of well-educated professionals will advance further. If the current trend continues, India's middle-class voters will have more representatives with whom they can identify, rather than having to pay allegiance to politicians for whom they constantly need to make excuses. That will be Indian democracy's salvation.

The writer is India's Minister of State for Human Resource Development. His most recent book is *Pax Indica: India and the World of the 21st Century*.

India's bourgeois revolution



IN 2009, when I competed in India's last parliamentary election, I was something of a rarity. I was not a professional politician. By contrast, all of the other candidates in my constituency -- indeed, most of the contenders across the country -- had devoted their entire lives to politics, many since their student days.

I was not born into a political family; I had no seat or political fiefdom to inherit; and I had entered the race without a political "godfather." I had not even lived in India for decades, having spent my adult life working abroad for the United Nations. Nonetheless, I managed to wrest a seat from the opposition Communist Party of India, which had won the two previous elections in my constituency, with a substantial margin of 100,000 votes.

This victory represented a slight crack in the well-guarded fortress of Indian politics, which had long been reserved for a small and largely hereditary circle. The only exceptions had been movie stars, whose popular appeal was based on fame, not political pedigree. Professionals who had built careers and reputations in other fields simply could not get their foot in the door.

But this may finally be changing. In the current general election, there are more non-politician candidates than in any previous poll. For example, Nandan Nilekani, co-founder of the technology giant Infosys, is running on behalf of the Congress Party in Bangalore, India's information-technology capital, against a five-term incumbent from the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

In Mumbai, the newly established Aam Aadmi (Common Man's) Party has nominated Meera Sanyal, a former head of the Royal Bank of Scotland's operations in India. And, in Chennai, the Congress has put forward the electronics engineer S.V. Ramani.

This amounts to a fundamental shift from previous generations, when politicians tended to come from either the top or the bottom of Indian society -- unless, of course, they were the nationalist leaders who won India's independence and comprised its original political class (and whose heirs have continued their legacy). They could be maharajahs or zamindars (landlords), with a feudal hold on their districts' voters and the time and money to devote to politics. They could also be semi-literate members of the underclass, who viewed politics as their only means of advancement and could appeal to others like them. For everyone else, the route to success was to study hard, pass their exams, and build careers based on merit.

Such an approach might be understandable in a

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Harmful side of some antibiotics

Fluoroquinolones are a popular class of antibiotics used to treat a wide range of bacterial infections including respiratory and urinary tract infections.

These drugs are available under the generic names: ciprofloxacin, levofloxacin, gemifloxacin, norfloxacin, ofloxacin etc. in different parts of the world including Bangladesh. But studies have found that fluoroquinolones are not safe drugs. These medicines may cause serious harm to humans that include sudden and potentially permanent nerve damage known as peripheral neuropathy. Other side effects of the drugs include detached retina (something that can cause blindness), acute kidney failure, depression, hallucinations and psychotic behaviour. The US FDA has been strengthening warning about the harmful effects of these drugs.

In Bangladesh, fluoroquinolones (ciprofloxacin, levofloxacin) are frequently prescribed without evaluating the side effects of these drugs on patients. I strongly feel that our medical practitioners and drug administration should review the potential damaging effects of these drugs and control their use.

Professor M Zahidul Haque
Department of Agricultural Extension & Information System, SAU, Dhaka

Bad manners in cricket

Cricket, over the centuries, has been noted to be a gentleman's game. But in Bangladesh, the opposite seems to be happening! Something must be deeply wrong with some of our cricketers and such cricketers should be banned from cricket.

Reports on Mahmudullah's indecent gestures were published in almost all English dailies on May 6. If Mahmudullah repeats similar gestures in future, he needs to be permanently banned by the BCCB from playing cricket at all levels. His gestures are beyond any norms of decency, which should not be allowed to be practiced in the field of cricket.

A cricket enthusiast
On e-mail

Why this tax on books?

A few days ago, for academic purpose, I purchased three books from Germany and ordered home delivery through FedEx courier service. I paid for the books online. When the delivery van of FedEx came to my office, I felt delighted, but to my surprise, the deliveryman handed me a bunch of papers called 'shipment arrival notice.' The shipment notice stated that I had to pay the stipulated 'tax/custom/duty' levied on the books and clear the shipment from the Customs House at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport or I had to authorise FedEx to do the same on behalf of me. Eventually, I authorised FedEx and paid taka 991 as tax on the books.

Can the authorities concerned do anything to review the imposition of taxes on books and revoke them for the interest of the nation?

Mohammad Rukanuddin
Assistant Professor of English
Ahsanullah University of Science & Technology

Comments on news report, "Keep Rab from investigation," published on May 6, 2014

Abbasuddin
Keeping away RAB is not enough, the politics that controls RAB should be replaced.

Shahin Huq
In her efforts to exterminate the opposition parties, Sheikh Hasina has given free license to the law enforcing agencies and various secret agencies to kill people. As a result, our police and RAB personnel have become corrupt. They are extorting money from the citizens and also killing those who cannot afford to satisfy their greed.

MH Khan
RAB's license to "kill" must be withdrawn. Gradually it has become a monster which has gone out of control.

Hardreality
When Rab first came into being, people had high expectations from this force as it was always running after high profile criminals. But politicians pushed that force so deep into controversy that its title "elite force" sounds like a mockery to people now. HC's order to keep the force from probe is the hardest blow to its reputation.

"Blessing, curse of N'ganj" (May 6, 2014)

Mohammad Rahman
Not unaware about the record of his atrocities, the PM, unfortunately, did not take any action against Shamim Osman, but rather allowed him to become an MP. This is clearly a slap on the face of Narayanganj's people.

"A Chandpur MP's son brokered it" (May 6, 2014)

Shahin Huq
It seems that government bigwigs were informed well ahead of time.