

Upazila Parishad: Victim of power politics

SHAKHAWAT LITON

THE Supreme Court in Kudrat-E-Elahi versus Bangladesh case observed that it is a unique feature of our Constitution that specific provisions for local government have been made in it. According to Article 11 of the Constitution the Republic shall be a democracy... in which effective participation by the people through their elected representatives in administration at all levels shall be ensured. This is one of the fundamental principles of State policy. In support of this fundamental principle, Article 59 of the Constitution has provided that local government in every administrative unit of the Republic shall be entrusted to bodies composed of persons elected in accordance with law, and the parliament through passing laws shall prescribe the functions of the local government bodies. The functions may include the ones relating to administration, work of the public officers, maintenance of public order, and preparation and implementation of plans on public services and economic development.

So, the upazila parishads, a crucial tier of the local government system, are supposed to be in control of local administration in light of the Constitutional provision. But the reality depicts a bleak picture. A recently released study on the functions of upazila parishad shows how the Constitutional provision has been ignored in reality. Supported by USAID-funded Strengthening Democratic Local Governance (SDLG) project, Unnayan Shammanay conducted the study in Kishoreganj's Bhairab upazila taking it as the model to assess the issue of "upazila parishad governance to improve service delivery."

In light of the Constitutional provision, the parliament passed the Upazila Parishad Act of 2009 empowering the parishads to

have control over the functions of 13 departments under various ministries at upazila level. In 2011, the parliament amended the upazila parishad act and empowered the parishads to have control over four more departments. But the study says none of the departments is still accountable to the parishads. This is a really peculiar situation as the parishads are supposed to supervise the functions of those departments which are not in reality accountable to the parishads! The officials of those departments care little about the parishads. The Upazila Nirbahi Officers (UNO), who are the chief executive officers of the parishads, lead the meetings of the parishads and influence decision making instead of providing secretarial service. Chiefs of different departments attend the meetings of the parishads but do not place working papers, rather they place agenda in bullet points.

What are the reasons behind the sorry state of the functioning of upazila parishads? The crucial reason is the government's policy of double standards. It has empowered the upazila parishads to supervise the functions of 17 departments at upazila level. But, according to the findings of the study, it has yet to enforce the law regarding the transfer of finances to the upazila parishads for paying salaries of the staff in those departments.

"Therefore, 17 departments working at upazila level are practically not accountable to the parishad, which makes it dysfunctional in terms of ensuring effective services by the government departments to local citizens," the study said.

The study's findings are correct that if the salary of the staff of the 17 departments is transferred to the upazila parishads and disbursed by the parishads, then they will be able to effectively monitor the functions of the departments and make them respon-

sible for their duties. This will, according to the study, reduce frustration of the elected representatives to the parishads. Interestingly, the national committee on the upazila parishads last year recommended the financial transfer of the salaries, but it is still waiting for approval.

If the government responds positively to the study's findings, it may largely empower the upazila parishads to have control over the local administration. This will also contribute to ensuring people's participation in local administration through their representatives in light of the Constitution. But the crucial question is: will the government do so? Such a move will reduce the power of civil bureaucrats at grassroots level of administration. The government relies too much on the administration instead of the elected representatives to the local government bodies.

The government may think MPs will be powerless if the local government bodies are empowered and allowed to carry out development activities. So, it prefers to allow MPs to remain in control of the local developments through the local administrations. And the bureaucrats also feel comfortable in such a situation as they do not need to follow the directives of the local government representatives. The bureaucrats exercise immense powers by maintaining good relations with MPs in their respective constituencies. Thus, the upazila parishads have been made victims of power politics. If the government really wants to honour the Constitutional provision on local government and democracy, it does not have any other alternative but to empower the upazila parishads, allowing the crucial local government bodies to have control over the local administration.

The writer is Senior Reporter, The Daily Star.

Knowledge Economy Index: Why we did so poorly

BIRU PAKSHA PAUL

BANGLADESH'S performance in research and innovations is awfully poor. Asian Development Bank (ADB) has recently published a report: Innovative Asia: Advancing the Knowledge-based Economy. ADB referred to the World Bank's Knowledge Economy Index where Bangladesh ranked 27th out of 28 emerging economies of Asia and the Pacific. Bangladesh fell below India, Sri Lanka, and Nepal in the rankings. Much to our despair, we positioned below even Pakistan in the index of knowledge economy. While we find ourselves 'an emerging tiger' before Pakistan, that tiger has turned into a cat in the race of economic knowledge with Pakistan.

Taiwan, Hong Kong, Japan, Singapore, and South Korea top the list with scores around 8 or above out of 10. Sri Lanka ranks 17th, India 22nd, Pakistan 23rd, and Nepal 26th. Myanmar saved us from being the last in the list. Sri Lanka's score in the index is 3.63, India's 3.06, Pakistan's 2.44, and Bangladesh's as low as 1.49. Any score below 3 would be regarded as 'poor' because the average score was 4.39 for the region.

Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Myanmar, being poor performers, have one thing in common -- they all devote a huge amount of resources in military expenditure. Some rulers find it politically expedient to increase the defense budget, bringing the allocation for Research and Development (R&D) to an irreducible minimum. This trend should not go unchecked in Bangladesh for the sake of our future.

A question may arise: who cares about the knowledge economy when our economy is achieving 6% growth? There is a problem indeed. The quantitative figures of growth and quality of growth are two different things, and the latter is more important to make growth sustainable. Eating fat and carbs or building muscles through exercises are two different tactics to gain weight. The first one is likely to cause health hazards and thus does not give a sustainable health. Similarly, growth without a knowledge base will run out of steam very soon. R&D can create more jobs in our manufacturing, which can give a strong basis of growth in the future. Otherwise, creating jobs for mobile phone recharging stalls or garments factories will not be sustainable given the growth of wage and automation.

Here comes the theory of knowledge and innovations that revitalised growth momentum in developed countries. Economists had thought that rich economies would see no growth when they reached a high level of development. But economists like Lucas and Romer came with the idea of endogenous growth; rich countries can reenergise their growth performance by further investing in education, research, and technology. Now, many developed countries grow no less than their developing counterparts. When thousands of jobs were outsourced from the US to China and India, the US created thousands more in innovations and technology. Herein lie the blessings of a knowledge-based path that constantly infuses new life in the economy to make growth sustainable.

Our ranking and scores in the knowledge economy index warrant urgent attention from the government. It's a wakeup call for the higher education industry where quality is appalling. University research projects take the lead in developed countries to empower a nation with new skills and ideas. While western private donors support many scholarships for research, our super-rich are busy with whitening their black money. Who will fund research which is still unappealing in Bangladesh? Education gets an inadequate amount, and it is more so for higher education. And the amount is ridiculous for research.

Apart from the constraints of funding, public universities have faulty policies for recruitment and promotion that do not require sufficient quality research. Most western universities, except for a few topnotch schools, do not hire their own graduates. Mixing and diversity add synergy to teaching and scholarship. Our public universities recruit their own products, sometimes through nepotism. Political clout, personal links, and academic malpractice reign supreme in many tenure and promotion cases. Then who would engage in the dry atmosphere of research when it is not needed to excel in the profession?

That is why we will see many professors, thanks to numerous talk shows, but we will hardly find their CVs rich in publications. When professors find research uninteresting, businessmen will not come forward to fill the gap. Public universities must change their recruitment and promotion rules to make it fair, competitive, and knowledge augmenting. Otherwise, Bangladesh will 'gloriously' rank 28th out of 28 countries in the knowledge economy index very soon.

The author is Associate Professor of Economics at the State University of New York at Cortland.

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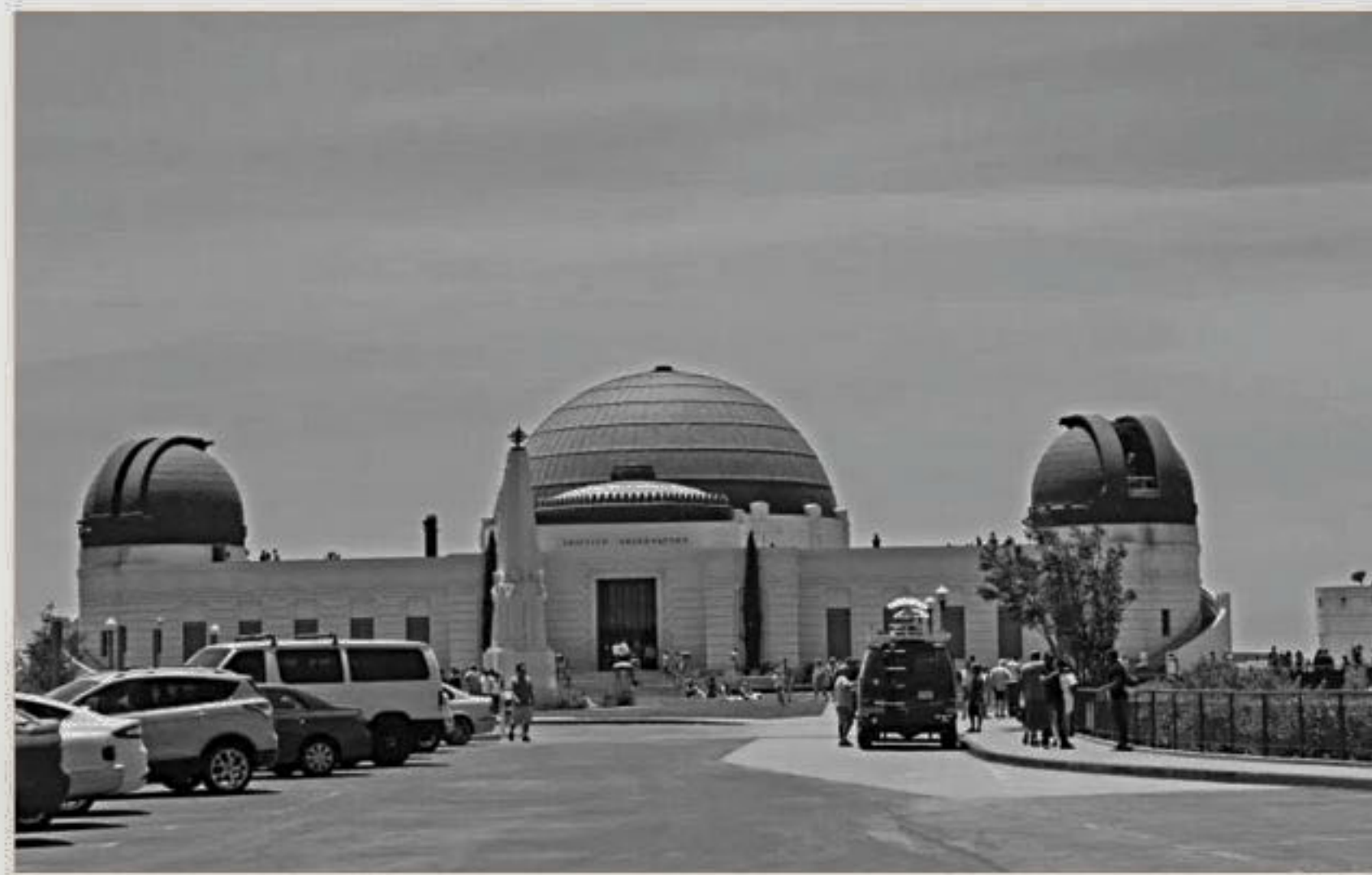
Griffith Observatory: Inspiring the future generation

MOHAMMED MUNIRUZZAMAN

GRIFFITH Observatory, an icon of Los Angeles, is the foremost leader in public astronomy and a hugely popular public attraction. The Observatory is located on the southern slope of Mount Hollywood in Griffith Park at 1,134 feet above sea level. We visited the observatory a few days back and spent several hours appreciating the extensive array of space and science related displays. Admission to the Observatory is free in accordance with Griffith's wishes.

12.20 km² of land surrounding the observatory was donated to the City of Los Angeles by Colonel Griffith J. Griffith in 1896. In his will Griffith also set aside funds to build an observatory, exhibit hall and planetarium on the donated land. Griffith wanted the public to access and appreciate the exhibits of science, particularly space science, kept in the observatory without expert knowledge on the subject. Reputed astronomers, architects and engineers helped design and construct the observatory that opened for public viewing on May 14, 1935. As we entered the building we came into the Central Rotunda that features painter Hugo Ballin's mural on the ceiling and a Foucault pendulum hanging from it, which was designed to demonstrate the rotation of the earth.

The observatory is divided into six sections. The W. M. Keck Foundation Central Rotunda, where we were standing, the Ahmanson Hall of the Sky



located in the east wing, the Wilder Hall of the Eye located in the west wing, the Cosmic Connection -- a 150 feet long hallway connecting the main building and the underground exhibits -- the Gunther Depth of Space Hall located in the lower level of the observatory, and the Edge of Space Mezzanine.

The centerpiece of the Ahmanson Hall of the Sky is a large solar telescope projecting images of the sun. Exhibits include an illuminated periodic table of the elements, path of the sun and stars, the seasons, the phases of the moon, tides and eclipses. The Wilder Hall of the Sky focusses on astronomical tools like telescopes and how they evolved over time. Other exhibits also include a huge Tesla Coil,

and a Camera Obscura kept inside a completely dark room that uses mirrors and lenses to project light on a flat surface.

The entry to the Cosmic Connection is marked by the Big Bang. The tunnel also depicts time that has elapsed since its birth and the history of the Earth. The Gunther Depth of Space Hall is dominated by a scale model of the solar system. The planets are shown relative to the size of the sun, which is represented by the Leonard Nimoy Event Horizon Theater. Below each planet is a scale showing each person's weight on it and other related parameters. The 150ft by 20ft photograph hanging on the wall, dubbed the 'Big Picture,' shows a portion of the Virgo Cluster of galaxies.

A bronze statue of Albert Einstein sitting on a bench ponders in the Depth of Space. In an adjacent room are two paper roll seismographs, one is attached to the bedrock and measures the seismic activities of the area, the other tracks the motion of visitors in the room. The Edge of Space Mezzanine overlooks the Gunther Depth of Space Hall and focusses on objects like meteorites and displays an asteroid impact simulator.

The observatory has featured in a large number of films, the most recent being *Valentine's Day* (2010), *Terminator Salvation* (2009), *Yes Man* (2008), *Transformer* (2007), *Charlie's Angels: Full Throttle* (2003) etc. The James Dean film *Rebel without a Cause* (1955) helped to make it an international emblem of Los Angeles. The Tunnel Entrance to the observatory on Mount Hollywood drive is the entrance to Toon Town in the movie *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* (1988).

The observatory appeared in a large number of episodes in various TV shows like *The Amazing Race*, 2010, *MTV Video Music Award*, *The Wonder Years*, *Mission Impossible*, *MacGyver*, *Star Trek Voyager*, *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* etc.

The observatory offers stunning view of the Los Angeles Basin, including Downtown Los Angeles to the southeast, Hollywood to the south and the Pacific Ocean to the southwest.

The writer is Professor of Physics Jahangirnagar University, Fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society. Currently on a private visit to the University of California, Riverside, U.S.A.

QUOTABLE Quote

"I do not believe in a fate that falls on men however they act; but I do believe in a fate that falls on men unless they act."

G.K. Chesterton

CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

ACROSS

- Loaded
- Bridge part
- Stephen Amell TV series
- Car quartet
- Muralist Rivera
- Whale's home
- Simile center
- Taking a sabbatical
- Work on a room
- Sea, to Simone
- Pickled pork dish
- Extremely
- Sauté
- Excellent, in slang
- Band boosters
- Defeats
- Cattle call
- Sea measures
- "Royal Wedding" star
- "The Simpsons" bartender
- Long look
- Tent anchor
- Become prevalent

DOWN

- Airport aid
- Van Gogh work
- Soup choice
- Greedy one
- Island ring
- Sushi need
- Soup choice
- Swells like a wave
- Pine-scented e.g.
- Hägar's dog
- Maiden name label
- For all of us
- Screen
- Abhor
- Gather together
- Zero of film
- Watering hole
- Like kielbasa
- Dispicable person
- Appears
- Diva's piece
- Cargo unit

Yesterday's answer

BAGS DARES
A LOUD ALERT
SOLVE MOMMA
END CAPTAIN
SEAMAN IIND
HARE TOSSES
CAN STAB
ORE ENSIGN
ADMIRAL CUE
STONE ELATED
TONGA EARED
SPEED DENY

CRYPTOQUOTE 5-20
 KZNDZMRHECMHENC ER XELB M
 DZBAEH DMZA: EH'R M XNH NI IWC
 WCHXVNW SBH HGB JEXX.
 -- DGZRHKNGBZ KMZLBZ

Yesterday's CRYPTOQUOTE:
WE ARE DRIVEN BY FIVE GENETIC NEEDS: SURVIVAL, LOVE AND BELONGING, POWER, FREEDOM, AND FUN.
 -- WILLIAM GLASSER

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker

SARGE ALWAYS TAKES THIS HIKING ROUTE

YEAH, THE KIDS IN THE AREA ARE WAITING FOR US

GREAT MORT WALKER

SODA COOKIES 50¢ ea CHIPS CANDY SOUVENIR 10-13

HENRY by Don Trachte

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.

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