

Modi-Hasina talks

Let the Indian PM's assurances have a timeframe

THE meeting between Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and the Indian PM Narendra Modi in New York on Saturday has been a significant event for two important reasons: First, it was much-awaited in the backdrop of several high level contacts which set the scene for the one-to-one contact at the highest political level. Secondly, this was the first ever meeting between the two leaders. The change of leadership in India warranted a measure of confidence building and fresh approach to fast-forward things from where these were left off by Congress government.

The get-to-know-each-other meet passed well with positive vibes of Sheikh Hasina impressing upon the urgency of concluding deals on Land Boundary Agreement (LBA) Protocols ratification by India and Teesta water sharing. As for the LBA, Modi said that it was just a matter of time. On Teesta issue, he assured of a serious pursuit of the consensus building process. Not even a tentative time-frame has been given. To his demand for transit, the Bangladesh PM stressed wider connectivity including Nepal, Bhutan and Myanmar.

Judged from this overall perspective, we urge the Modi government to realise that we have lots of expectations from his government because, among other things, his own party has greater majority in the Parliament than the Congress. Also, he can count on Congress Party's support as the two agreements were made with it when it was in power.

From the Indian PM's speeches at the UN and earlier pronouncements we are impressed at his emphasis on strengthening relations with India's neighbours. It is in that spirit we suggest the expeditious finalization of the two outstanding agreements with Bangladesh to set our bilateral relations on a win-win trajectory.

Register as Bengalis or....

A ploy to deprive Rohingyas of citizenship

ACCORDING to a news report carried in this paper on Sunday the Myanmar government has drafted a plan to offer the Rohingyas an option to register as 'Bengalis' or face detention in camps. This either-or-option for an ethnic group that has been living in that country for several centuries and suffering unbridled persecution there for a long time is really asking them to choose between the devil and the deep sea.

Bangladesh has a real concern about the Rohingyas and their plight in Myanmar. The world community has been aware of Myanmar government's effort to rid their country of the Rohingyas who has been living in the Rakhine State of Myanmar for centuries. Several hundred thousand of them had crossed over to this country on several occasions in the past. As of now more than half a million unregistered Rohingyas are living in Bangladesh about whom the Myanmar government doesn't seem to be interested in. And more than 30 thousand registered ones are still awaiting repatriation.

The apparent aim of promoting sectarian harmony and peaceful coexistence and resolving the issue of statelessness through citizenship verification is a sinister ploy to reclassify the Rohingyas and forfeit their Myanmar citizenship. Not only will it make Rohingyas living in Myanmar stateless, it will also be a great disincentive for those Rohingyas in Bangladesh awaiting repatriation to Myanmar.

For any Rohingya living in Myanmar for generations to register as Bengalis would be acknowledging that they are illegal immigrants and risk being in a limbo for rest of their lives. This is a recipe for continued sufferings of the Rohingyas, which neither the Myanmar authorities nor the international community can risk overlooking.

Adventurous to earn and generous to give away

GOOD news for photographers! Now, one can take a perfect group picture using an app called Perfect Shot. It uses the smile and eye detection systems in the camera and takes the shot at the perfect moment when everyone is smiling and no one is blinking. The developer of Perfect Shot is a 19-year old University drop-out named Meyer. He left a prestigious university without completing his undergraduate course in computer science to start his private company. Meyer learned computer programming by himself and is already a successful programmer. "Money-wise, I've been pretty fortunate. I've been able to support myself since just a year after I got started," he said.

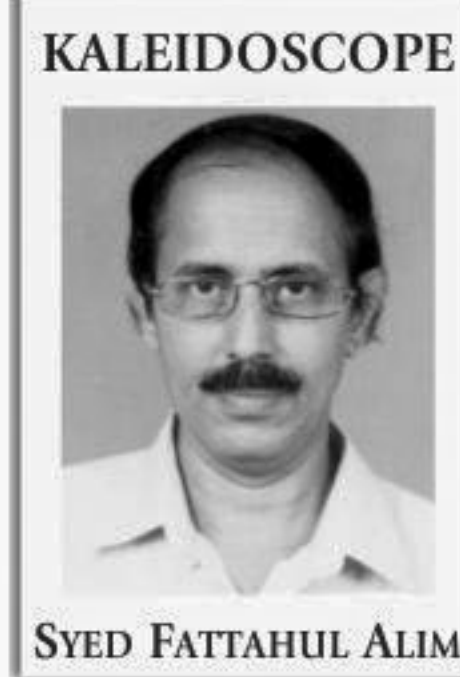
In a way, Meyer is following in the footsteps of Bill Gates and Paul Allen who dropped out of Harvard and Washington State University respectively, while studying at undergraduate level, to cofound Microsoft, the world's largest software company. It is too early to predict how far Meyer can go. Bill Gates is the richest person in the world with a net worth of \$85 billion while Paul Allen occupies the 77th position with \$16.2 billion. I came to know a very meritorious student of Bangladeshi origin who attended math courses at Princeton University while studying at school. His score at SAT is comparable to that of Bill Gates. He is now studying an undergraduate programme in math at Harvard but attends graduate courses. Even the graduate courses seem to be boring to him as he already knows most of the materials. There are other similarly talented students of Bangladeshi origin who are studying at the top US universities.

There is, however, a difference between our talented students and those of the States. While Bill, Allen and Meyer had the courage to drop out of universities to start private companies, our students are normally content with working for others after completing university degrees. Very rarely they start their own companies in pursuit of wealth. I do not advise our students to drop out of universities but there is nothing wrong in forming private companies after completing their studies if they follow the examples of Bill Gates and Warren Buffet, the 3rd richest person in the world, who gave away half of their wealth to charity. Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation helps to eradicate poverty, save lives and spread education among under the privileged people around the world. Salman Khan, whose parents hail from Bangladesh, founded the Khan Academy, a non-profit organisation, to disseminate knowledge in 23 languages free of cost.

Will some of our students be similarly adventurous to earn and generous to give away?

The writer is a former chief engineer of Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission.

Fighting the menace of question-leaking



SYED FATTAHUL ALIM

ensure that no candidate was able to engage in such dishonest practice of copying. The invigilators would keep a keen eye on the examinees and catch and punish anyone found adopting such unfair means. That was enough to hold cribbing in examinations in check.

Now things are not that simple. Modern digital technology has entered the scene, changing the modus operandi of copying. The earlier analogue method has now been replaced with its digital version. Copying is no more an amateurish job performed by an individual examinee on his/her own. The very recent experience of copying during tests held for students seeking admission in Dhaka University (DU) gives one the impression that copying has now 'come of age' as it has grown into a 'fully-fledged service providing business.' A highly skilled team of professionals are providing dedicated service to clients willing to buy their service. Once enrolled as their client, of course, after paying a substantial sum of money, the examinee will just get the end product (i.e. answers to questions) in the form of SMS, instructions on telephone and so on just sitting there at his/her table in the examination hall. Reports further have it that the prospective clients need not take the trouble of looking for the service providers in the market, who, needless to say, operate underground. That's because the service providers do the work of contacting their clients themselves and make the service available at the customer's doorstep!

Take the case of 45 persons including 32 students and one teacher arrested on charge of cheating and forgery during the admission tests for Gha unit under the social science faculty of the Dhaka and Jagannath Universities on September 26. What came out from the confessional statements of the arrested students and members of the forgery racket was mind-boggling. The members of the cheating racket meticulously organised the entire operation from contacting dishonest people willing to cooperate at different levels of the system that conducts admission tests under these universities to getting students who would buy their service to finding skilled problem-solvers to expert hands to manage the complicated operation of sending the solved answers to examinees at the examination centres! They had been neatly carrying out their operation until the lawmen intercepted it with their superior technology.

Rab personnel who were tracking the members of the racket since the night before the examination undoubtedly did a commendable job of catching them in the act from different spots in the city. The Dhaka University and

the Jagannath University authorities do also deserve plaudits for apprehending some of these culprits and handing them over to lawmen. These criminals, including the examinees who adopted such unfair means in the admission test, deserve no mercy but exemplary punishment under the law.

Allegations are there that culprits so arrested for examination-related offences often get away with their crime, thanks to lax application of law. It is worthwhile to note that the 1980's law, amended in 1992, against adopting unfair means in public examinations provides for awarding three to 10 years' imprisonment including fine. While the need for strict application of this law to punish culprits as a deterrent against the offence cannot be overemphasised the sheer pervasiveness of the crime demands more than just police action to curb it.

From the reports on the recent arrests of students and members of the examination forgery gangs, it becomes plain as day that it is a very powerful quarter that the law-enforcers are pitted against. For instance, members of the pro-ruling party student front, teachers, invigilators, even members of management committees of educational institutions were allegedly complicit in question-leaking crime. If the crime is to be rooted out effectively, it is also not necessary that all those culprits hiding within the very system that conducts public examinations should be ferreted out and brought to justice? Aren't those people destroying the sanctity of the examination system from within? Don't, for example, the black sheep among the invigilators who in blatant violation of the rules allowed some examinees to carry cell phones or other kinds of electronic devices in the examination halls deserve still harsher punishment? Is the long arm of the law long enough to reach and tap on all those high profile people's shoulders?

Small wonder, despite arrests of some errant examinees and members of the forgery gangs, there is no sign that the evil practice of question leaking or cheating in the examination is coming under control!

As evident from the foregoing, the nature of exam-cheating has, of late, undergone a massive change. It has gone beyond the level of arresting an errant examinee or two and their abettors to combat the menace. As a matter of fact, it has gone into the hands of a mafia that thrives on the huge money being transacted in the illicit exam cheating trade. Is it then any surprise that education itself has become commercialised? It is the dirty money in education that has left its corruptive influence over everyone linked to this sector -- students, their guardians, teachers, employees at various levels in the educational institutions, you name it. In such an atmosphere, who needs a real exam to test a learner's actual aptitude, if money can buy his/her educational certificate or right to get admitted in an institution of higher learning?

So, tackling the crime of question leaking or cheating in exams is not the job of the police alone. Nothing short of a crusade against corruption in the education sector, especially through freeing education from the influence of dirty money, can we hope to combat the menace effectively.

The writer is Editor, Science & Life, The Daily Star. E-mail: sfalim.ds@gmail.com

Europe's austerity zombies



JOSEPH E. STIGLITZ

IF the facts don't fit the theory, change the theory," goes the old adage. But too often it is easier to keep the theory and change the facts -- or so German Chancellor Angela Merkel and other pro-austerity European leaders appear to believe. Though facts keep staring them in the face, they continue to deny reality.

Austerity has failed. But its defenders are willing to claim victory on the basis of the weakest possible evidence: the economy is no longer collapsing, so austerity must be working! But if that is the benchmark, we could say that jumping off a cliff is the best way to get down from a mountain; after all, the descent has been stopped.

But every downturn comes to an end. Success should not be measured by the fact that recovery eventually occurs, but by how quickly it takes hold and how extensive the damage caused by the slump.

Viewed in these terms, austerity has been an utter and unmitigated disaster, which has become increasingly apparent as European Union economies once again face stagnation, if not a triple-dip recession, with unemployment persisting at record highs and per capita real (inflation-adjusted) GDP in many countries remaining below pre-recession levels. In even the best-performing economies, such as Germany, growth since the 2008 crisis has been so slow that, in any other circumstance, it would be rated as dismal.

The most afflicted countries are in a depression. There is no other word to describe an economy like that of Spain or Greece, where nearly one in four people -- and more than 50% of young people -- cannot find work. To say that the medicine is working because the unemployment rate has decreased by a couple of percentage points, or because one can see a glimmer of meager growth, is akin to a medieval barber saying that a bloodletting is working, because the patient has not died yet.

Extrapolating Europe's modest growth from 1980 onwards, my calculations show that output in the eurozone today is more than 15% below where it would have been had the 2008 financial crisis not occurred, implying a loss of some \$1.6 trillion this year alone, and a cumulative loss of more than \$6.5 trillion. Even more disturbing, the gap is widening, not closing (as one would expect following a downturn, when growth is typically faster than normal as the economy makes up lost ground).

Simply put, the long recession is lowering Europe's potential growth. Young people who should be accumulating skills are not. There is overwhelming evidence that they face the prospect of significantly lower lifetime

income than if they had come of age in a period of full employment.

Meanwhile, Germany is forcing other countries to follow policies that are weakening their economies -- and their democracies. When citizens repeatedly vote for a change of policy -- and few policies matter more to citizens than those that affect their standard of living -- but are told that these matters are determined elsewhere or that they have no choice, both democracy and faith in the European project suffer.

France voted to change course three years ago. Instead, voters have been given another dose of pro-business austerity. One of the longest-standing propositions in economics is the balanced-budget multiplier -- increasing taxes and expenditures in tandem stimulates the economy. And if taxes target the rich, and spending targets the poor, the multiplier can be especially high. But France's so-called socialist government is lowering corporate taxes and cutting expenditures -- a recipe almost guaranteed to weaken the economy, but one that wins accolades from Germany.

The hope is that lower corporate taxes will stimulate investment. This is sheer nonsense. What is holding back investment (both in the United States and Europe) is lack of demand, not high taxes. Indeed, given that most investment is financed by debt, and that interest payments are tax-deductible, the level of corporate taxation has little effect on investment.

Likewise, Italy is being encouraged to accelerate privatisation. But Prime Minister Matteo Renzi has the good sense to recognise that selling national assets at fire-sale prices makes little sense. Long-run considerations, not short-run financial exigencies, should determine which activities occur in the private sector. The decision should be based on where activities are carried out most efficiently, serving the interests of most citizens the best.

Privatisation of pensions, for example, has proved costly in those countries that have tried the experiment. America's mostly private health-care system is the least efficient in the world. These are hard questions, but it is easy to show that selling state-owned assets at low prices is not a good way to improve long-run financial strength.

All of the suffering in Europe -- inflicted in the service of a man-made artifice, the euro -- is even more tragic for being unnecessary. Though the evidence that austerity is not working continues to mount, Germany and the other hawks have doubled down on it, betting Europe's future on a long-discredited theory. Why provide economists with more facts to prove the point?

The writer is a Nobel laureate in economics, is University Professor at Columbia University. His most recent book, co-authored with Bruce Greenwald, is *Creating a Learning Society: A New Approach to Growth, Development, and Social Progress*.

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LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

"A week that may change the world"

The above titled article was published in your Op-Ed page on September 27. There is no question that climate change is an important issue. Across the world, people are suffering due to the effects of these changes. Yet aid agencies are unable to secure sufficient funds to help them because, of the one billion dollars spent globally every day on climate finance, only 6% goes to helping vulnerable people adapt to climate change today. The rest is spent on efforts to arrest such climate phenomena as might happen in the distant future. This is immoral; effectively valuing the lives of people yet to be born more than those in need today.

By promoting the scientifically unfounded belief that we can control the climate of earth merely by regulating our carbon dioxide emissions, Saleemul Huq, well-meaning and knowledgeable though he undoubtedly is, is unwittingly encouraging the continuation of this scandal, one of the greatest ethical tragedies of our time.

Tom Harris
Executive Director
International Climate Science Coalition (ICSC)
Ottawa, Ontario

Secondary issues get precedence over urgent ones

The government is spending crores of taka for not-so-urgent ventures and, large groups of people are going on foreign trips with public money which are not so necessary. Problems like shortage of electricity causing frequent load shedding, which demand urgent attention, are being totally ignored.

Then comes the horrible traffic jams from morning till late at night. Is anything being done to save the public from this endless misery?

Why are these big issues being left unsolved, while public money is being wasted on unimportant matters? Public money should be spent only for the well-being of public and not for unnecessary foreign trips.

Dr. Sabrina
On e-mail

They show total disregard for public's feelings

We are a nation that loves to make records which would be included in the Guinness Book of Records. On December 16, 2013 Bangladesh made the world's largest human flag, while on March 26, 2014 we made another world record: 2.5 lakh people sang the national anthem together. We spent a huge amount of money for organising these two events. We heard that more than 50 crore taka was spent for singing the national anthem.

Now we are going to make another world record. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has gone to the US with a 185-member delegation which is perhaps the largest ever in Bangladesh's history! Hard earned money of the people is being wasted for the pleasure trips of many who have no role to play in the United Nations General Assembly. These people will spend their time shopping, sightseeing and relaxing in the luxurious hotels.

By taking this huge entourage the ruling party has shown total disregard for people's feelings. They are in power and will do anything they wish.
Nur Jahan
Chittagong

Comments on commentary, "Protector turning predator?" published on September 26, 2014

Fareed Waki

A courageous write-up, and a solid argument as to why all democracies, and especially fragile ones like Bangladesh where democratic institutions are under continued attack by the state must preserve freedom of speech, freedom of the media and freedom of thought. Mr Anam is fighting the good fight for all of us.

Gulshan Dhaka

To be a journalist, one first has to take license from the government! We still have people who loudly preach that AL has been and is a democratic party.

"Are CIA and IS linked?" (September 25, 2014)

Sayed Rahman

The overnight creation of IS and its gigantic power shows something fishy. It is very difficult to believe that IS has emerged with that much power and no one is helping them. Time will say who are behind them.

"Deconstructing democracy" (September 25, 2014)

Masud Tarif

The writer has brought the truth to the readers. Considering all the facts and ongoing political situation, one cannot hope that a re-election will be held where all parties will participate to ensure democracy in Bangladesh. The approaches and activities of the current government never seemed to be keen on building Bangladesh as a democratic country. What they need is just power to oppress us.