

# Gorai River: Can it flow round the year?

M. INAMUL HAQUE

front page picture in *The Daily Star* (October 21) showed the Gorai River at Kumarkhali Railway Bridge, with its bed covered by silt. It is an old story that has continued since the Farakka Barrage was opened in 1975. Due to diversion of about 40,000 cusec flow from the Ganga River towards the Hoogly River, the Ganga River flow towards Bangladesh drops suddenly in October, leading to silting up of the off-take of Gorai River. Many efforts were made through dredging to open this off-take, but resulted in failure. Now the question arises, can the Gorai River ever again flow round the year?

On October 20, a group of environmental activists held a press conference in Dhaka to express concern about India's plan to construct 16 more barrages on the Ganga River. They feared that more diversion from the Ganga River would leave the southwest region of Bangladesh dry, affecting crops and the mangrove forest of the Sundarbans. They quoted opinions of several Indian activists, including one minister of Bihar, that constructing more barrages on the Ganga River would also affect the environment and people of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.

The Ganga River originates from the Himalayas, and flows southeast through the plains of north India towards Bangladesh. Before crossing the border, it bifurcates at Jangipur; the minor right hand branch Bhagirathi River passes through India to the sea, and the left hand major branch crosses the border and flows about 250 km to meet the Jamuna River at Goalondo. Going 110 km to the southeast, it meets the Meghna River upstream of Chandpur. The Ganga River, with total length of 2,550 km., finally falls into the Bay of Bengal about 150 km downstream. During the nineteen fifties, sixties and seventies, India built several diversion barrages over the Ganga River and its tributaries for irrigation projects and navigation. These resulted in lesser accumulated flow in the Ganga River towards Bangladesh during the dry months.

The dispute between India and Bangladesh over sharing Ganga water started since commissioning of the Farakka Barrage in April 1975. The 2.245 km barrage, located about 18 km from the international border, started diverting around 40,000 cusecs of Ganga water to the Kolkata Port. A 37

km link canal connects the Ganga River from the upstream of the barrage to the off-take of Bhagirathi River at Jangipur. The usual flow of Ganga River inside Bangladesh before 1975 was recorded between 65,000 to 70,000 cusecs at Hardinge Bridge. After commissioning of the Barrage, and gradual increase of withdrawal further upstream of the Ganga River, flow inside Bangladesh reduced to about 10,000 cusec only.

The then prime ministers of Bangladesh and India, Sk. Mujibur Rahman and Mrs. Indira Gandhi, signed an interim agreement for sharing the Ganga waters at Farakka on April 18, 1975. This agreement provided minimum 44,000 cusec of water to be released from Farakka at the period of diversions. It expired on May 31, 1975. The second agreement, concluded by President Ziaur Rahman and Prime Minister Morarji Desai on November 5, 1977 for five years, guaranteed minimum 34,500 cusecs of water to Bangladesh. After its expiry, two Memorandums of Understanding were concluded in 1982 and 1985, but those expired in 1988. There was no sharing agreement of the Ganga water between India and Bangladesh from 1989 to 1996. On December 12, 1996, the third water sharing agreement was signed by Prime Ministers Sheikh Hasina

and H.D. Deve Gowda for 30 years. This agreement allotted minimum 27,633 cusecs of water, but without guarantee.

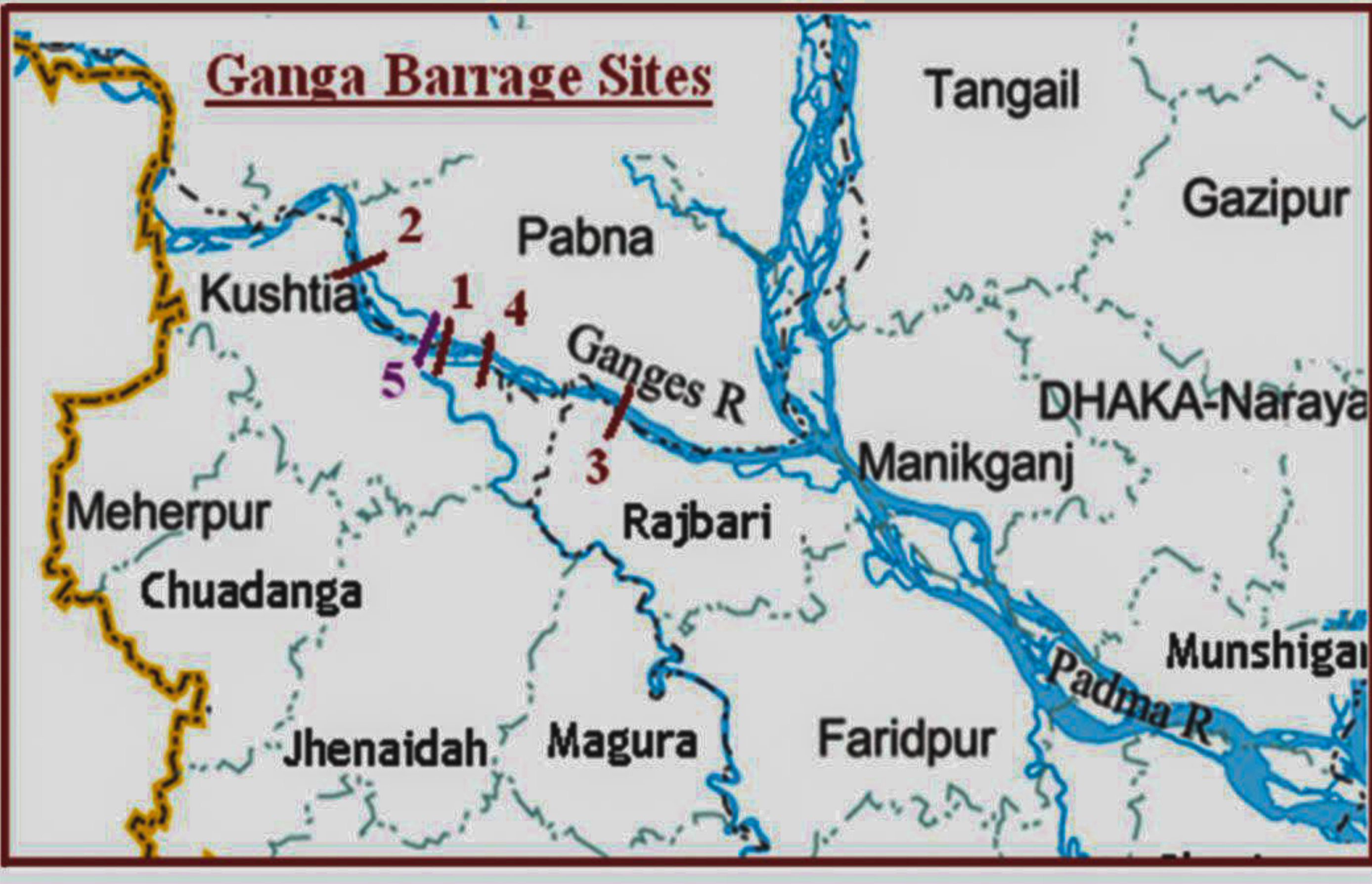
Due to increasing withdrawal of the Ganga River in its upstream inside India, its distributaries inside Bangladesh are slowly facing death for not receiving their winter flow. The Ichhamoti is dead, the Baral and the Chandana are dying, the Mathabhangra rarely gets flow during flood months, and the Gorai also gets dried up at its off-take during winter. As the Gorai is the main lifeline of southwestern Bangladesh, dredging efforts are taken to de-silt its off-take to keep the flow coming from the Ganga River. These attempts fail because the river gets silted again by the next year. Any dredging operation in a river cannot be sustainable if the river carries silt.

It was thought that a barrage over the Ganga River inside Bangladesh could divert water towards the Gorai River to keep it flowing round the year. Tippetts Abbett McCarthy Stratton (TAMS), a consultancy firm from New York, USA, proposed building the Ganga Barrage in 1963 at a location 3 km downstream of the Gorai River off-take. The barrage could not be built at that time due to political tensions between India and Pakistan. After independence, the

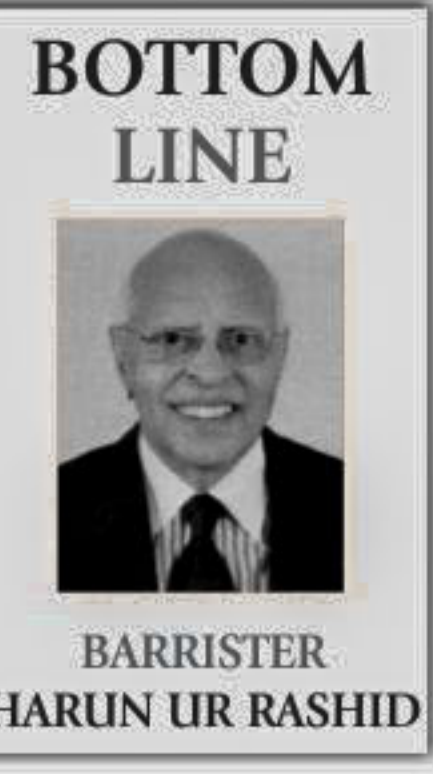
proposed Ganga Barrage site was changed in 1981 to a location 4 km downstream of the Pakshey Railway (Hardinge) Bridge, with the possibility of reducing the river training cost. But later, considering possible backwater affects up to the Indian territory, the site was again shifted in 1986 to a far downstream point near Habashpur, Rajbari. From this place the barrage will not be able to divert water towards the Gorai River.

In 2001, a study on the Ganga Dependant Area selected a fourth location for the barrage, near Thakurbari of Kushtia. There can be a fifth site very close to the off-take of Gorai River. In the eighties, Bangladesh constructed the Teesta Barrage to irrigate a large part of the northern region. With the experience of Teesta Barrage, Bangladesh can construct the Ganga Barrage with its own manpower, skill and technology. If the barrage is constructed upstream of Thakurbari, it will be possible to give gravity supply to the G.K. and Pabna Irrigation Projects, to irrigate greater Kushtia, Jessore, Faridpur and Pabna areas, and will be able to divert sufficient quantity of sweet water to the Gorai River round the year.

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# Gough Whitlam and Bangladesh



BARRISTER HARUN UR RASHID

FORMER Australian Prime Minister Gough Whitlam, a towering figure who led the nation through a period of massive change, died in Sydney on October 21, aged 98. He was prime minister from 1972 to 1975.

Australia was the first Western country to recognise Bangladesh (January 31, 1972). Relations with Australia started on a very positive note. Australia's first High Commissioner to Bangladesh, James Allen could speak Bengali. That gesture demonstrated the Australian government's goodwill for the new country.

Under Whitlam's instructions, Australia assisted diplomatically in the admission of Bangladesh to the UN in 1974.

His visit on January 19, 1975, was the first and last one by a prime minister of Australia to Bangladesh. The visit clearly demonstrated his desire for engagement with Bangladesh, which was born out of a nine-month War of Liberation. As an opposition leader he fully supported the War of Liberation by the valiant freedom fighters and also the open policy of entry to Australia of war-affected Bengalis.

During his discussions with Prime Minister Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, it was reported that he offered his good offices to normalise the relations between Bangladesh and Pakistan. The Bangladesh prime minister reportedly accepted the offer.

Within Australia, he changed its face with social, economic and health reforms. Whitlam took the ideas of social democrats in Britain and West Germany, and to some extent France, and tried to deliver a programme which was applicable to Australian circumstances. He was undeniably Australia's greatest social democrat.

Despite being in power for only three turbulent years (1972-75), Whitlam launched sweeping reforms of the nation's economic, education, health and cultural affairs. He stopped conscription, introduced free university education, pulled out troops from Vietnam, abolished the death penalty and reduced the voting age to 18 from 21. He introduced free universal healthcare for all Australians. Without this historic reform 1 in 5 Australians would be unable to afford basic health care in hospitals and visiting physicians.

Under his leadership, the last traces of the White Australia policy designed to exclude non-white migrants were also removed, and the Racial Discrimination Act was passed, ushering in a new era of multiculturalism for Australia.

He implemented free higher education, making hundreds and thousands of Australians the first in their family able to go to university. He legislated for no-fault divorce, so women could choose to leave an unhappy marriage without being financially burdened. He reopened the equal pay case, championing the rights of women to work and be fairly compensated.

He championed Aboriginal land rights, returning land to the Aboriginal people of the Northern Territory. He was also known for involving Australia's Aboriginal people directly in policy making and establishing free Aboriginal legal services.

Whitlam doubled funding to the arts, introduced legislation to form the Special Broadcasting Service for migrants, and created the Australia Council for the Arts.

He was the first Western leader to visit China and make his nation's relationship with Asia a priority. This decision and those which flowed from it have been responsible for much of Australia's economic and trade prosperity in the years. Chinese foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying praised Whitlam as an "eminent statesman" and an "old friend of the Chinese people." The official Xinhua news agency also paid tribute to the politician as "a dear old friend" and "a great helmsman in the China-Australia relations."

Conservative Prime Minister Tony Abbott called the Labor stalwart "a giant of his time," and instructed flags around the country to be flown at half mast while suspending normal parliament for the day as a mark of respect.

British Labour leader Ed Miliband described him as "a truly great Labour leader and a great Australian" who "changed his country forever." "Gough remains an inspiration to social democrats around the world," Miliband said.

Labor supporters will hold him in their hearts in the same way that Republicans in the United States will forever adore Ronald Reagan and the Democrats will John Kennedy.

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# No second chance?

MOYUKH MAHTAB

DHAKA University, once called the Oxford of the East, hardly makes headlines these days for its once "glorious faculty and academic excellence." Now student politics, fights and the occasional brandishing of a gun make news. Then there is the other kind of news Dhaka University makes, more related to academics, but no less absurd. First, we heard of question paper leaks, then of only 2 students passing the admission exam for the English department and now the drama regarding the eligibility of sitting for exams. It seems that over and over again, we keep repeating the same mistakes -- trying to cure the symptoms and ignoring the cause. Our myopic view of the education system has led us to the three-day ultimatum given by protesting students to the authorities demanding that they too be given a second chance at taking the admission test.

Of course, arguments by both sides are valid and each has its supporters. The students say that they were told of the decision after the admission exams and since it was unfair for them to

compete with older batches, they too should be given the chance. The authorities point out that to allow a second chance at admission creates unrest as students drop out to change courses and their decision will lead to an equal opportunity for all students. The students talk of fairness while the authorities talk of the need to abolish the coaching culture. But all the while, we tend to overlook the issues leading up to this.

Rasel, one of the students protesting the decision by DU authorities, says: "We were only told of this decision after the exam. I have never gone to a coaching centre, so is it not unfair to me that I had to sit for the exam along with previous batches but I will not be given a second chance?"

But only when he talks about the exam questions does he point to the true nature of our problem. He points out the absurdity of general knowledge questions, the answers to which one has to memorise within two months when the subject is never taught through school life. Now, no one can claim our education system to be good by any standard when getting a GPA 5 in SSC or HSC is still a combination of going to the right coaching centre and

memorising as much of the text books as possible. And then, somehow one's eligibility to a university is dependent on answering questions which school does not prepare them for. Exhibits -- the poor performance in Bangla, lack of basic English proficiency and having to memorise all of current affairs issues to get a coveted seat.

The question arises, if we actually had a proper standardised graduation exam which we take to complete school life, why do we even need an admission exam? One does not need to sit for a separate exam for Princeton or Harvard after taking the SATs. Each university has its own standards and students are picked according to their qualification. For all the talk of abolishing the coaching-centre culture of our students, we seem to do very little to discourage it at the school level. So it is absurd to suddenly leave all these students, all with 'good' results in their SSCs and HSCs, suddenly stranded.

Now, I would probably be pointed to matters more urgent right now, to the fact that we simply do not have the capacity to accommodate the number of students we have. But if a higher education depends on merit, then why should someone be dis-

counted for their age? And if this is an absolute necessity, did it have to be implemented right away? Rasel and other protestors who say, "we were not informed of the decision before taking the admission test. While we got less time for preparation, the previous year students got one year to compete with us," are right. The information should have been made public before the exams.

While the situation is fast turning to a point where the first side to give in loses, our crumbly education system remains untouched. The issue at hand is important, and some form of conciliation should be afforded to the students who are protesting. But when this blows over, it is imperative that the percentile of GPA 5's does not sway us into thinking that as a nation we are getting more intelligent each day. As number of students increase, the universities cannot keep up. The majority will look towards public universities for their education and if a balance between merit and fairness is not struck, then the problem will remain and absurdity will follow absurdity.

The writer is Feature Writer, Lifestyle, The Daily Star.

QUOTABLE Quote The hardest years in life are those between ten and seventy. Helen Hayes

CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph. ACROSS: 1 Finely chopped, 6 Zoo sights, 11 Make amends, 12 Battery end, 13 Titled woman, 14 1976 Sally Field TV movie, 15 Saloon supply, 16 Motel freebie, 18 Chowd down, 19 Umbrella part, 20 Wine choice, 21 Take in, 22 Frightens, 24 Gumbo veggie, 25 Reduce expenses, 27 Croupier's tool, 29 Goes driving, 32 Wagon puller, 33 Heir, at times, 34 Vast expanse, 35 Speedometer abbr., 36 Here, in Latin, 37 Vegas, 38 Heat home, 40 Newspaper essays. DOWN: 1 Air traffic devices, 2 Slanted type, 3 Classic Western line, 4 Hydrocarbon suffix, 5 Longs for, 6 Packed in boxes, 7 One or more, 8 "Sorry I woke you", 9 Book worker, 10 Singer Gomez, 17 "Camelot" song, 23 Lobster eggs, 24 Unconscious, 26 Dream up, 27 Crashed into, 28 Have hopes, 30 Informational file name, 31 Talks back to, 33 Recolis, 39 Central, 41 Be a snoop.

CRYPTOQUOTE 8-28 IVLN UB NVZ FKBN UFCKYNLGN NVUQQ KGZ OZLYGB UG BEVKKO? BZOS-ZBNZZE, BXCKYN LGT SYUZGTBVUC. - NZYYJ NZFCZBN IUOULFB Yesterday's Cryptoquote: WISDOM IS NOT A PRODUCT OF SCHOOLING BUT OF THE LIFELONG ATTEMPT TO ACQUIRE IT. - ALBERT EINSTEIN

Yesterday's answer WADER SCRUB ABOVE CAUSE DECAL OFTEN UNABLE DAM TAD MUM OMELET POLO PUNISHMENTS ESTE MATURE YES JAR MAY SAJAK TENSE ADORE ASTER DOTTY LASER 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. FOR THE LAST TIME, BEETLE, GET UP! WHY DIDN'T YOU GET UP? WHEN HE SAID 'LAST TIME' I THOUGHT HE WAS FINISHED. RING RING HELLO WE ARE CONDUCTING A SURVEY! WHICH ICE CREAM FLAVOR DO YOU PREFER?