

No disparity in primary and secondary education

Girls still lagging behind in higher education

WE are heartened to see that Bangladesh ranks highest among countries in the Asia Pacific region in terms of equal opportunities for girls in primary and secondary education, according to the Global Gender Gap Report 2014.

Introduced by the World Economic Forum in 2006, the report provides a framework for understanding the extent of gender-based disparities around the world. The report states that enrolment of girls stands at 50.1% in primary education, and 53% in secondary education, which is commendable.

However, the gender disparity in tertiary education is still noticeable and is a cause for concern for policymakers and educationists. Patriarchal structures and corresponding socio-economic reality in the country still downplay the importance of higher education in a woman's life, prioritising good marriage prospects over a successful career. Many girls are forced to drop out of school because of the sexual harassment they face on their way to and from their educational institutions, and are subsequently married off. Yet others are forced to take up low-paying unskilled jobs to support their families, unable to bear the cost of higher education.

The government must implement laws to stop child marriage, address sexual violence in communities and educational institutions, ensure that government incentives and free scholarships reach deserving students and take other necessary measures to encourage young women to continue schooling. At the same time, as a society we must place value on our daughters' education not so that she can make a good match, but so that she can take control of her own life.

Containing Ebola

We should mount vigil as well

ALTHOUGH Bangladesh has been fortunate not to have reported any case of the wildly contagious Ebola virus, there is hardly any room for complacency when it comes to vigilance. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has been advising all governments across the region to that effect. Already Ebola has claimed 5,000 lives, primarily in Africa, and there have been reported casualties in the western world. Although authorities have stepped up health contingency plans at principal points of entry to the country, media involvement is required to help raise awareness levels of the general populace.

Bangladesh is perhaps better equipped to deal with viruses, but experts believe adequate entry screening mechanisms still require a lot of work. Apart from that, it is imperative that people be made aware of how to detect possible cases of Ebola and what measures to take to quarantine suspected Ebola victims before the arrival of health services on scene. The apprehension is that social stigma and fear of the unknown could delay any Ebola-carrying patient from reporting the symptoms which can only expose others to threat.

Effective vaccines and drugs to combat Ebola on large scale will not become available for the next few months according to WHO, the principal tool to fight the disease will remain the government's preparedness to tackle any suspected case in the country. There can be no let up in screening of inbound travellers and it is here that authorities

How to sustain the wind of change in global economy?

ABDUL MATIN

DURING the early Christian era, Europe imported silk, cotton, paper, furs, etc. from China through the famous Silk Road. Arab traders brought exotic spices from India and Indonesia and sold them to the European markets during the medieval period. Muslin from eastern India, now Bangladesh, was a cherished item among the European royalty during the 17th and early 18th centuries. The Koh-i-Noor from India still shines on the British Crown.

Education in the East started with the teachings of Confucius (551-479 BC) in China and of Buddha (563 BCE to 483 BCE) in India. Nalanda University in India attracted students and scholars from Asia from the fifth century till its destruction in the late 12th century. The Moors brought oriental education to Spain during the medieval period. Leonardo Bonacci introduced the Arabic numerals, originated in India, to Europe during the early 13th century. Europeans made full utilisation of the contributions made by the Muslim scholars like Al-Khwarizmi, Al-Razi, Al-Farabi, Avicenna, Omar Khayyam and others to mathematics, astronomy, medicine, chemistry and other branches of science, and thus expanded their horizon of knowledge.

The Renaissance brought about a cultural revolution in Europe during the 14th to the 17th century. The discovery of new continents, the invention of printing machines, mariner's compass and gunpowder saw the growth of both colonialism and trade. Finally, the discovery of the steam engine in 1781 by James Watt initiated the industrial revolution that gradually transformed Europe and North America into economic powers. This transformation was possible because of the shifting of the fountain of knowledge from the East to the West.

We are now noticing a wind of change in the global economy. While the western world is struggling to overcome a period of economic recession, China, India and other neighbouring countries are experiencing annual GDP growth rates between 5.7% and 7.4%. Higher growth rates are predicted in the near future. If the present tempo of development continues, China will overtake the US economy, now on top, and India will displace Japan as the third largest economy before 2030. This will complete a full cycle of change in the global economy. Will the East be able to sustain this growth for long?

The answer will be yes if the East can simultaneously overtake the West in education, particularly in science and technology. If they fail, the economic boom of the East can't be sustained. Borrowed knowledge can initiate economic growth but only indigenous knowledge can sustain it. It is, therefore, essential that the East invests heavily in education while maintaining the growth in the GDP.

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BNP must come clean on Jamaat

STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING



Brig Gen SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN
 ndc, psc (Retd)

IT is hard to believe that the BNP leadership or its policy makers are not aware of the fact that the Jamaat is a greater burden now than ever before. The question is, was the Islamist party ever an asset to the BNP?

Without going over the history it has to be admitted that all the major political parties had hobbled with Jamaat since democracy was resurrected in the country in 1991, a fact that they conveniently want to avoid mentioning and would want the people to forget. If the military dictators used Jamaat to validate their policy and politics by exploiting public sentiments, it is disconcerting to see that the democratic political parties have followed the suit of the military rulers, and unabashedly too. Jamaat was a member of the anti-coalition alliances

common person had to endure for the greater part of 2013 in the so-called 20-Party Alliance movement where the public was the victim of the violence that was outsourced to Jamaat.

And that only reinforced the popular perception that it was not the interest of the people that Jamaat was concerned with but ascension to power. The BNP, and I must add its entire coalition partners, by going along with the destructive politics of Jamaat, has to share the blame equally for perpetrating the havoc on the people and also the loss that the country had to endure economically.

Notwithstanding the pronouncements of government leaders about the peaceful atmosphere prevailing in the country and the very dangerous statement, which is increasingly assuming the form of a dangerous chorus, that it is development which must take precedence over democracy, even the AL leaders feel uncomfortable at the prevailing form of democracy with a unique parliament that has necessitated rewriting of political science books.

No matter how much the AL flaunts the two achievements in the CPA and IPU elections, both of the victories are creditable and no one should detract from the achievements, the current political arrangement is not what the people want. However, any talk of a future movement by the BNP inspires more fear than any kind of prospect for a political movement for true democracy in the country.

The question is does the BNP need Jamaat for its politics? And the question has become even more relevant after the statement of Mr. Azmi that it would never be possible for the BNP to come to power without the support of the Jamaat. Albeit the comment was personal, but it would

not be wrong to suggest that Jamaat as a party feels the same regarding its relevance to BNP's politics. We have heard no reaction from the BNP to Mr. Azmi's comments either, but is difficult for one to believe that Jamaat has become indispensable for the BNP.

There is also confusion about the character of the BNP-Jamaat 'alliance.' One is also at a loss to rationalise the comments of the BNP that with Jamaat it is not so much an alliance; it is nothing more than an electoral arrangement and there is little fusion of its philosophy with that of Jamaat. One wonders whether it is possible to team up with anyone or any group without some shared fundamental belief. Needless to say Jamaat has become the proverbial burden of Sinbad. It has wrapped its legs around BNP's leg that is becoming increasingly difficult to unwrap. Unless BNP takes some hard decisions about its future association with Jamaat it will lose much of its credibility as a political party.

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formed against Ershad, and that is what had lent a great degree of validity to Jamaat's politics.

The trial and conviction of Jamaat leaders on charges of war crimes have brought its credentials as a political entity to the nadir of distrust. Jamaat's fate is now in the hands of the court, but the verdict notwithstanding, the BNP must come clean on its links with the party that stands guilty as an ancillary of the Pakistan Army which directly supported its scorched earth policy in Bangladesh in 1971. It is time to think whether Jamaat is a Bangladesh-only party, given that there exists a strong link with the Pakistan Jamaat, and the official reaction from Pakistan to the death sentence awarded to Mir Quasem for war crimes.

One of the reasons that BNP's much flaunted 'movement' against the government has not gotten off the ground is because of its association with the Jamaat. We have said before that the only reason why BNP has failed to muster the public in support of its demand for a fair, transparent and participatory election, that is very valid, is because of the unmitigated agony that the

The Asian paradox

THE ASIAN CENTURY



YOON-YOUNG KWAN

JAPANESE Prime Minister Shinzo Abe will meet on the sidelines, and, if they do, whether a substantive discussion to ease bilateral tensions will take place.

Of course, this is not altogether unreasonable, given the two countries' importance in shaping East Asia's future. Indeed, the uncertainty about whether two of APEC's key leaders will even speak to each other highlights the grim reality of Asian international relations today. The supposed "Asian century" is being thwarted by a paradox: deep economic interdependence has done nothing to alleviate strategic mistrust.

Given the recent deterioration of Sino-Japanese relations -- a decline that accelerated in 2012, when Japan purchased the disputed Senkaku Islands (Diaoyu Islands in Chinese) from their private owner to prevent Japanese nationalists from taking control of them -- the mere fact that Abe will attend the summit is a major step. A meeting between Abe and Xi -- their first since either came to power -- would offer concrete grounds for hope.

The Japanese government has made significant diplomatic efforts to orchestrate a meeting, with former Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda visiting Beijing in July to try to ease tensions. According to some media reports, in order to secure China's agreement to participate in a meeting during the APEC summit, Abe even agreed to acknowledge that Japan's claim to the Senkaku Islands is disputed. Given that such a move would imply that China's claim to the islands may have some legitimacy, Abe's possible concession on this point is no trivial matter; it could even mean that he will agree with China to restore the status quo ante. In that case, one hopes that Xi will follow Deng Xiaoping's counsel and allow the issue to be "shelved for some time" so that the "wiser" next generation can "find a solution acceptable to all."

That now seems to be a realistic possibility. Indeed, lately Xi seems to have softened his tone, if not necessarily his diplomatic line. For example, he allowed Li Xiaolin, the daughter of a former Chinese president, to meet with Abe, with whom she watched a performance by a visiting Chinese dance troupe in Tokyo. And Chinese Prime Minister Li Keqiang shook hands with Abe at the recent Asia-Europe Meeting in Milan.

One reason for Abe and Xi's newfound flexibility may be domestic political shifts in both countries, which have created a more equal balance between conservative, nationalist groups and more internationally-oriented business interests. With both leaders having

spent the last two years overcoming domestic opponents and consolidating their power, they may have gained confidence in their ability to compromise.

In Japan, Abe has satisfied his conservative supporters with cabinet resolutions to allow for expanded self-defense. Despite domestic opposition to Japan's new security doctrine, no politically influential group was able to organise an effective challenge to Abe's approach.

Now, as Japan's economic recovery stalls, the country's business sector seems to be pressuring Abe's government to work harder to mitigate the impact of its deteriorating relationship with China. According to a Chinese government report, in the first half of 2014, Japanese direct investment in China was almost 50% lower than during the same period last year -- a clear sign that Japanese business leaders fear for the future in Japan's second largest market. Meanwhile, in China, Xi has gained considerable confidence through his massive anti-corruption campaign, with the punishment of top military officers indicating that he has solidified his control over the People's Liberation Army (PLA). As a result, Xi may believe that he now has more space to address the country's economic slowdown, including by lessening the damage wrought by weakening ties with Japan.

If this assessment is accurate, the obvious next question is how much further Abe and Xi can move toward détente, thereby appeasing their business sectors, without losing the backing of nationalists, who tend to view the bilateral relationship as a zero-sum game. For Abe, the choice is whether to tone down his nationalist rhetoric and moderate his position on contentious historical issues. This would include halting visits to the controversial Yasukuni shrine (which honours, among others, 14 Class A war criminals who were executed after World War II) and abandoning revisionism regarding the Korean "comfort women" who were forced to provide sexual services to the Japanese Imperial Army. How Abe decides is likely to depend on his confidence in his political position.

Similarly, if Xi remains confident enough in his control of the PLA and truly follows China's official policy of "peaceful development," he will be able to take the kind of prudent approach that Deng advocated. This would entail recognising and trying to assuage the fears that China's rise is causing among its neighbours, as Otto von Bismarck did after German unification in 1871. Observers might then read his recent efforts to improve relations with Japan, not to mention Vietnam, as a genuine strategic shift, rather than a temporary tactical adjustment.

In this uncertain context, the APEC summit could shed much-needed light on the intentions of Abe and Xi, thereby providing crucial insight into the trajectory of Sino-Japanese relations -- and thus the future of East Asia.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Need for a modern air terminal at HSIA

There have been several reports in the local dailies on the deteriorating condition of Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport (HSIA). Recently an international organisation reported that HSIA is among the worst 10 airports in Asia holding its position as



PHOTO: STAR

9th. HSIA should have a new state-of-the-art air terminal near the present air terminal. In the last two decades, the number of airlines using the HSIA has increased to almost 30 with some airlines having several flights a day. HSIA is now bursting at its seams and cannot handle the rush of passengers and cargo. The mockery of dividing the present air terminal into Terminal 1 and Terminal 2 has created more confusion among passengers. Whichever terminal you use, eventually you land in the same check-in counters, immigration and boarding bridges, and arrival hall.

The present government has a plan to develop a mega airport far away from Dhaka which may take decades to develop and would cost around tk. 80,000 crores, or may be more. But the urgency of having a modern air terminal at HSIA is undisputable. I believe ICAO (International Civil Aviation Organisation) is also dissatisfied with the present situation prevailing at HSIA. If improvements are not made on an urgent basis, many airlines may discontinue their flights to Dhaka.

Ziauddin Ahmed
 Gulshan, Dhaka

Restore power supply at Kurmitola Hospital

After the country experienced a 10-hour long blackout on Saturday, power was restored to all parts of the country. But the newly established Kurmitola General Hospital is still facing blackout. Patients are leaving the hospital with or without the permission of doctors as all the services provided by the hospital came to a halt. There is no water supply in the hospital. Even all OTs and pathological departments are closed. Please take immediate action to provide electricity there to save thousands of patients.

Mir Habib Ullah
 On e-mail

Students suffer as Jamaat enforces hartal

The International Crimes Tribunal-2 has sentenced Jamaat-e-Islami leader Mir Quasem Ali to death for committing crimes against humanity during the Liberation War. As usual the infamous party he belongs to has called hartal.

The two million JSC and JDC examinees will be the worst victims of this meaningless hartal. I would like to request all political parties to keep the students out of their politics. Jamaat leaders, please do not make students suffer because of your mistakes and past misdeeds.

Palashalam freedom
 On e-mail

Comments on news report, "Exams hartal-hit," published on October 31, 2014

Md. Musfiqur Rahman

We humbly request all political parties to be more responsible in their activities.

"Faking freedom fighter identity" (Nov. 1, 2014)

Snr Citizen

These frauds who do not have an iota of ethics or morality must be punished. They are second-degree war criminals as they have looted benefits due to freedom fighters. Many real freedom fighters did not ever claim any benefits.

"Date with darkness" (Nov. 2, 2014)

Denim

Blackouts happen in developed countries also due to unknown reasons, but they are usually corrected after two hours. Whatever the reason may be, it is not acceptable in this age to have a blackout for 12 hours or more. It is most ironic that this blackout occurred due to overload of electricity. The computer system sensed the overload and started closing one power station after another and never stopped.

Snr Citizen

Such horrendous situation had never been experienced by Bangladesh before. Why did such a nationwide disaster happen? What were the shortcomings or technical hitch, or serious lack of maintenance, or sabotage, etc? I hope an investigation would be done for the future safety and to 'plug the leak.'