

# Obesity on the rise



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**R**ECENT studies, both domestic and international, paint a bleak picture of children's health in the country. Malnutrition and obesity are on the rise in urban areas. Indeed, going by what has been made public by a research conducted by the International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, Bangladesh (ICDDR,B), we understand that 14% of urban children suffer from overweight problems while 4% are obese. This is hardly surprising given that our major cities including Dhaka have transformed over the decades into concrete jungles, where public spaces such as parks and playgrounds have systematically been downgraded nearly down to the point of non-existence. It has brought about fundamental changes in the way our children are now brought up in the confines of homes where computers, the internet and gaming consoles have replaced essential physical activity that are an essential part of a growing child's health needs.

And it is not just the lack of physical activity that is the problem. The food habits of children have also undergone a sea of change. With the global rise of the fast food phenomenon, a trend that has become part-and-parcel of our fast paced urban life, the constant bombardment of commercials in electronic and print media on foods that are anything but nutri-

tious and the general acceptance of parents that such foods are alright for consumption for children, all compound the problems of poor nutrition among children. Traditional foods are increasingly being pushed to the side to make way for deep fried foods and other foods, both solid and liquid that is rich in sugar content. High calorie diets that have little food value are effectively elbowing out traditional, nutritious, slow cooked foods. The World Health Organisation (WHO) terms childhood obesity "one of the most serious public health challenges of the 21st century" and not without reason.

For any child, tackling the social stigma that comes with a condition such as obesity automatically translates into psychological problems, and more importantly serious health issues. One simply cannot discount the fact that an overweight child is the butt of jokes in the schooling system. Such external circumstances lead to a sense of lower self-esteem, less than average academic scores and a general withdrawal from social interaction. When we look at some of the health risks such children face, studies have pointed out that obese children run the risk of developing various disorders like hypertension among other things. An obese or overweight childhood can easily run into adulthood and the chances of developing cardiovascular diseases increase exponentially. Indeed, there is also evidence that spinoffs from hypertension in children can translate into lower than expected life expectancy as they grow to adulthood.

So what is to be done? Given the

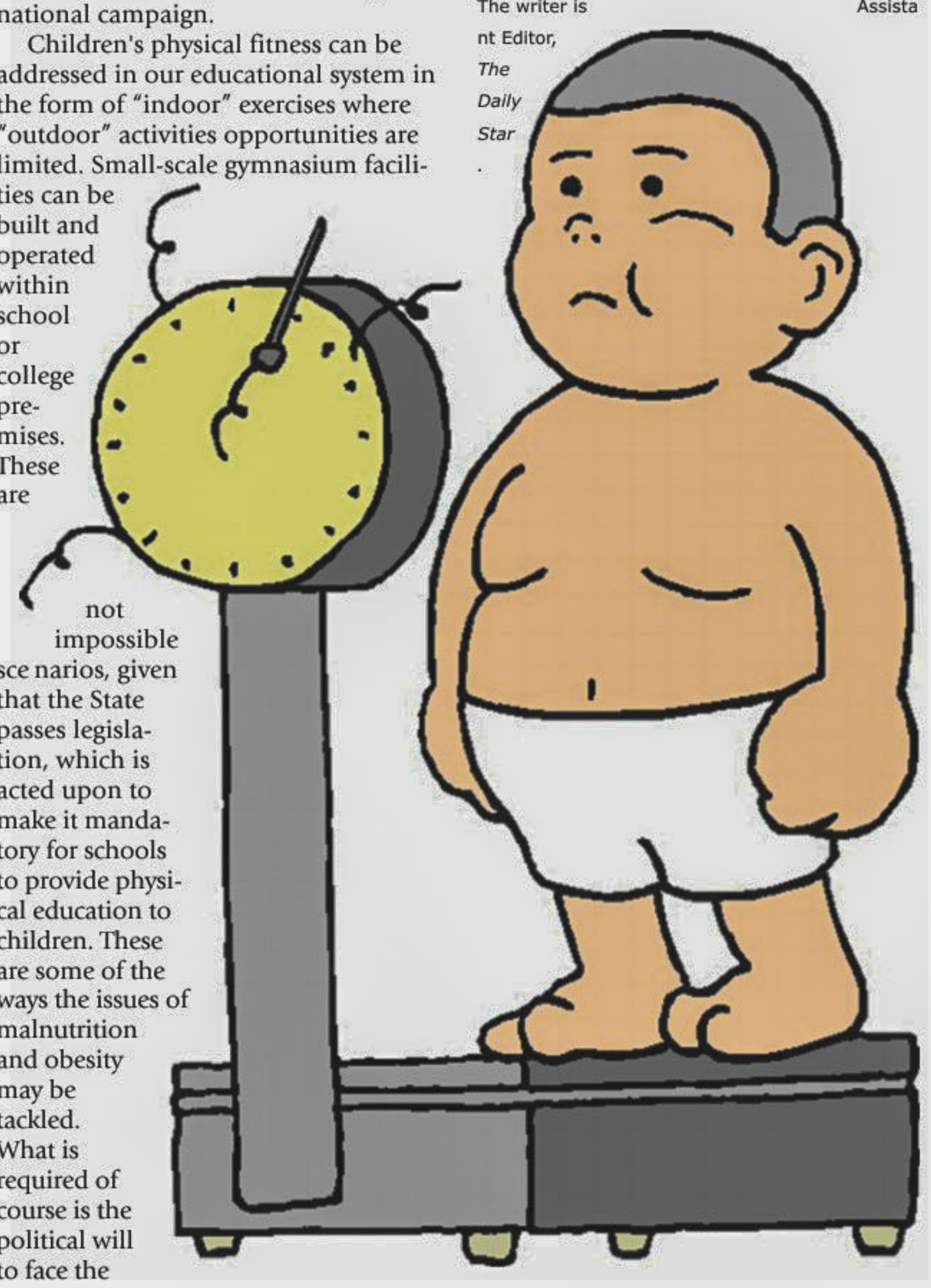
space constraints in cities like Dhaka where big business takes precedence over the quality of life for its citizens, i.e. every inch of green being transformed into shopping malls, commercial or private space and laws being formulated and implemented to that effect, raising a hue and cry over lost playgrounds obviously is not going to make much difference on the ground. What we can do is effect a change in mindsets, to cope with the realities of our urban existence and that begins with education. Treating the issue of obesity merely as a medical problem is obviously not going to bring desired results. Rather it is parents and guardians who need to be brought into any national campaign that targets better eating habits for children from a younger age. As pointed out by some health professionals, particularly nutritionists, a unified approach is required to manage the issue of obesity and that means developing mechanisms whereby different stakeholders ranging from health professionals to parents work together to stop the menace of poor choice in food intake to more rigorous exercise for our children.

Children need to be taught in schools and at homes to distinguish between good and bad foods. The media has to be part of any campaign strategy if we are really serious about handling the whole overweight issue. Parents need to be made aware of what their children are consuming and what they should be consuming. As responsible adults, parents need to take responsibility for the overall wellbeing of their children so that the next generation may have a better chance of not con-

tracting diseases like diabetes and heart conditions. In fact, more can be achieved at a family level than any national campaign.

Children's physical fitness can be addressed in our educational system in the form of "indoor" exercises where "outdoor" activities opportunities are limited. Small-scale gymnasium facilities can be built and operated within school or college premises. These are not impossible scenarios, given that the State passes legislation, which is acted upon to make it mandatory for schools to provide physical education to children. These are some of the ways the issues of malnutrition and obesity may be tackled. What is required of course is the political will to face the

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## New Bangladesh!



*While all are performing so well in their respective fields, why can't our political leaders perform like others do? Do they not want to be a part of 'New Bangladesh'?*

**ABDUL MATIN**

**O**VER the years, Bangladesh earned many titles. According to National Professor Mustafa Nurul Islam, the name of our country, 'Bangladesh', was first coined by Kazi Nazrul Islam, our national poet, probably in 1942. Much earlier than him, in 1905 to be precise, Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore called it 'Sonar Bangla' (Golden Bengal) in his famous patriotic song 'Amar Sonar Bangla'. It was accepted as the national anthem of Bangladesh in 1971. Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the father of the nation, dreamed of building 'Sonar Bangla' but did not live long enough to fulfill his dream.

Henry Kissinger, former national security advisor to US President Richard

Nixon, whose administration had opposed the creation of Bangladesh tooth and nail during the war of liberation, termed Bangladesh a 'bottomless basket' soon after liberation. Bangladesh was then struggling hard to rebuild its economy from the rubble of the war.

Decades later, Bangladesh became self-sufficient in food production, the second largest exporter of garments and the tenth top recipient of remittances. During her second term in office, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina introduced a new slogan, 'Digital Bangladesh,' to ensure "people's empowerment, establish transparency, accountability and good governance at every level and sector, and take government services to the doorsteps of the people".

Dan W Mozena, former US ambassador to Bangladesh said in 2013 that

Kissinger's remark was "totally wrong" and called Bangladesh "the next Asian Tiger." In his words, "...I call the country the next "Asian Tiger." Goldman Sachs talks about the emerging 11 countries, including Bangladesh. JP Morgan talks about the Frontier 5, including Bangladesh. A McKinsey report said Bangladesh could be the world's largest exporter of ready-made garments and household textiles. Bangladesh has the potential to become a big player in generic pharmaceuticals, building small and medium freighters, building tugboats, footwear, finished leather products, flowers, silk, frozen shrimp. Combine that with the ongoing agricultural revolution that is happening this very minute where you will have a Bangladesh that already has a rice surplus.

Bangladesh is the nexus of inter-regional trade, right in the middle of the Indo-Pacific economic corridor." What a contradiction with Henry Kissinger!

Bangladesh earned the latest title very recently. While listening to the commentary on the fourth day of the first test match between Bangladesh and Pakistan in Khulna, I came across a new term, 'New Bangladesh' coined by a foreign commentator. He was not talking about our progress in economic or social sector but about the tremendous improvement of the Bangladesh cricket team during the last two years. Gone are the days of a series of humiliating defeats and unpredictable performances of our team in batting, bowling and fielding. They have improved in all sectors and in all the categories of the game. They played extremely well in the

ICC World Cup, securing a berth in the quarter final for the first time. Had there been proper umpiring, Bangladesh could perhaps have qualified to play in the semi-final of the World Cup.

Recently, Bangladesh played three ODIs and one T-20 match against Pakistan, convincingly whitewashing the visitors in both the series. On the fourth day of the first test match, Pakistan collected a huge total of 628 runs in their first innings, against a score of 332 runs made by the host team. Pakistan were hoping, quite legitimately, to beat Bangladesh by an innings!

Bangladesh came back into the match remarkably well on the day. They first took the remaining five wickets to oust Pakistan before lunch. Taijul Islam alone took six wickets. When Bangladesh started to bat for the second innings, everyone was expecting that the openers would bat very cautiously to avoid a defeat by an innings. To everyone's surprise, the Bangladesh openers, Tamim Iqbal and Imrul Kayes, batted aggressively and scored a total of 273 runs without any loss at the end of the day.

On the fifth day, Bangladesh scored 555 runs for the loss of six wickets only forcing Pakistan to a draw for the first time in test cricket. Tamim Iqbal scored a splendid double century (206 runs) and his partner Imrul Kayes 150 runs. Together they collected 312 runs, the highest first wicket partnership record for Bangladesh and the fourth for the world. Well done, Bangladesh! This is what the commentator called 'New Bangladesh!'

If we look around, we find that our cricketers are performing well. Our farmers, garment workers, factory workers and expatriate workers are all performing well. Only one drawback is agitating the minds of the people. While all are performing so well in their respective fields, why can't our political leaders perform like others do? Do they not want to be a part of 'New Bangladesh'? Can't they simply practice what they preach?

The writer is a retired nuclear engineer.

**QUOTABLE Quote**

*The butterfly counts not months but moments, and has time enough.*

Rabindranath Tagore

**CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH**

ACROSS	DOWN
1 Bayou native	1 Cow's chew
6 Small sounds	2 "Caught you!"
11 One of Kirk's bridge crew	3 Best Actress Oscar winner in 2015
12 Excessive	4 Russian range
13 - Lama	5 Finger feature
14 Mission head	6 Young seal
15 Miseries	7 Made possible
17 Rail or quail	8 Best Actor Oscar winner in 2015
18 Woeful cry	9 Contended sound
20 Robust	10 Canary snack
22 Took the cup	16 That lass
23 Merit	18 Saddler's tools
26 Skater FratiAnne	19 Meat cut
28 Exemplary	21 Tag sale label
29 Allergy signs	23 Stupefy
31 "CSI" evidence	24 Wind indicator
32 Prayer end	25 Flair
34 Hen pen	27 Diver's place
36 Visitor to Siam	30 Letter after zeta
38 Came up	33 Wrath
40 Libya neighbor	34 Scout's base
43 Stable moths	35 Spoken
44 Ohio city	37 Deli call
45 Entreaties	39 Twisty turn
46 Pollster's find	41 Grenade part
	42 Young fellow

**Yesterday's answer**

Y	A	P	S	S	T	A	T	E	D
E	X	I	T	T	A	C	O	M	A
A	L	T	A	A	M	I	N	U	S
H	E	C	T	O	R	E	D		
		H	U	D	R	I	C	E	D
L	A	C	E	D	S	C	A	R	E
V	A	L	A		T	I	E		
V	A	M	P	S	P	A	C	E	D
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		R	E	N	T	A	C	O	P
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O	R	A	T	E	S	S	L	A	T
B	A	R	E	S	T	I	D	L	E

**CRYPTOQUOTE** 3-25  
MUVSJU BWMF YV AVRGA, OYVPMJO BWMF YV AVRERVV MLO MOO BWMF YV VQRPGYPMEEETSAJ SBL.  
-- UJAPR ERR

**YESTERDAY'S CRYPTOQUOTE:** PEOPLE WERE ALWAYS THE LIMITERS OF HAPPINESS EXCEPT FOR THE VERY FEW THAT WERE AS GOOD AS SPRING ITSELF ERNEST HEMINGWAY

**BEETLE BAILEY** by Mort Walker

**HENRY** by Don Trachte

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