

# Nothing is impossible



AMITAVA KAR

SINCE the 14th century, the world has come to the Vatican, the walled, city-state within Rome, and never the other way around. That's changing with Pope Francis, a humble Argentinean - and son to Italian immigrants.

"How can they know what the common people want when they build a fence around themselves?" he once said to a friend.

Days after his election as the Pope, he celebrated the morning mass. But in the congregation sat janitors and gardeners, not the cardinals of the Roman Curia, the administrative apparatus of the Holy See. His Gospel was for the common man.

"The church asks all of us to change certain things," he said during one of his morning homilies. "She asks us to let go of decadent structures—they are useless."

Popes are expected to challenge society; Francis seems determined to bend the arc of history - by placing the poor at the centre of the Catholic Church that had been shattered by clerical sexual abuse scandals and is synonymous with theological rigidity.

"Many of the popes have certainly said the words about poverty," said Joseph Nye, political scientist and Professor at the Harvard Kennedy School. "But what Francis has been able to do is put a focus on it that isn't blurred or distracted by other things."

His compassion did not come out of thin air. While the Archbishop of Buenos Aires, he mobilised the church in response to Argentina's economic crisis of 2001-02, creating a cadre of priests assigned to the slums, opening food kitchens, schools, clinics and drug rehab centres.

Since then he has leveraged his popularity to address some of the most pressing global issues, emphasising the church's historic connection to the destitute. And he has made a lot of people uncomfortable by attacking the prevailing premise - that markets and the pursuit of wealth will lift everyone - as a false ideology where refugees drown at sea and women are forced into prostitution.

Some have called him a Marxist or a Communist. But Francis refuses to be placed neatly inside an ideological box. "He delights in confounding categorisations," said Austen Ivereigh, his biographer.

His harsh critiques of environmental degradation have seized the world's attention. Last June, in an encyclical on the environment, he wrote, "It is essential to devise stronger and more efficiently organised international institutions, with functionaries who are appointed fairly by agreement among national governments, and

empowered to impose sanctions."

To those who want to hear less of morality and see more of immediate policy, the Pontiff gave his answer in an interview in 2013. "The structural and organisational reforms are secondary. The first reform must be the attitude."

The question of how much he will change the world misses the point of how much change has already taken place. His recent call to the Catholic parishes, monasteries, and convents of Europe to warmly receive migrant families has had an immeasurable impact. While addressing the joint session of the US Congress last week, he politely reminded Americans that many of them are descendants of immigrants.

The shepherd played an important hand in the recent diplomatic thaw between the United States and Cuba. He had sent a trusted confidant, Cardinal Jaime Ortega of Havana, to the White House to deliver a letter to the President of the

unresolved issues, however, has alternately pleased and disappointed all sides. His push for the nuclear deal between Iran, the US and five other world powers bolstered the White House but angered Israel. The Vatican recognised Palestinian statehood back in June, infuriating the Israelis, but chose not to support Palestinians' effort to raise their flag at the UN earlier this month.

Regardless, the Palestinian flag, for the first time in history, will be raised at the UN, despite opposition from eight countries including Israel, Canada, Australia and the US.

All said and done, are the world's problems responsive to the kind of soft power Francis is deploying? The early reports seem to be mixed. When both the presidents of Palestine and Israel visited the Vatican last summer for a historic prayer summit, the three of them stood in prayer for peace. Just a few days later, the Israeli war machine launched an offensive on the Gaza Strip.



US President Barack Obama and Cuban President Raul Castro at the start of their meeting at the United Nations General Assembly in New York on September 29, 2015.

PHOTO: REUTERS

United States. In it, he offered the Vatican's full support for diplomatic talks the two countries had secretly been pursuing, in an effort to end half a century of bellicosity.

His letter, *Time* wrote, "offered symbolic shelter for both sides as they weighed the political costs of reconciliation. Francis's popularity as a religious figure in the US gave Obama cover as he cut a deal with godless communists across the Straits of Florida, while the Pope's credibility as a Latin American shielded Castro as he got in bed with Yankee capitalists."

Behind the scenes he is also trying to bring about a peaceful transition in Venezuela where the current government faces likely defeat in a parliamentary election this year - if it is free and fair.

Francis's mission to address serious and

"At present the smoke of the bombs, the smoke of wars, does not allow the door to be seen, yet that door has remained open from that moment," he told journalists on his way back from South Korea in August.

The pope who has strongly criticised American policy in Syria has wrapped up his first ever US visit. But President Obama and Putin are just getting started. The US and its allies are reportedly considering what was once unfathomable: a peace plan that would allow Bashar to remain in office, at least temporarily.

Real solutions for a fallen world begin with moral clarity. In offering it, Francis is pointing to what's possible.

The writer is an engineer-turned-journalist.

## Innovation in climate finance

POLITICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE



SALEEMUL HUQ

THE recent Champion of the Earth award conferred upon Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina by the United Nations Environment Programme

(UNEP) was, significantly, a recognition of the struggle against climate change of the government and people of Bangladesh.

Achim Steiner, the head of UNEP, in his citation mentioned both the Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan (BCCSAP) as well as the innovative Bangladesh Climate Change Trust Fund (BCCTF), where the Government of Bangladesh has allocated the equivalent of around \$100 million in each year's national budget to the BCCTF for implementing 44 programmes under six pillars identified in the BCCSAP.

The climate finance mechanisms set up in Bangladesh are unique and innovative features of climate finance, which other developing countries can learn from.

The first innovative measure was launched six years ago when the government of Bangladesh set up the BCCTF, now allocating the equivalent of around \$400 million towards tackling climate change.

The second innovative measure was to set up a parallel climate fund called the Bangladesh Climate Change Resilience Fund (BCCRF), at the same time, which consisted of contributions from development partners and totalled around \$130 million over six years.

While the BCCTF and BCCRF had different governance structures and the World Bank managed the latter, both funds supported actions identified under the BCCSAP, thus avoiding parallel donor-led activities with the government activities.

Both these funds have by now supported hundreds of actions by all relevant ministries across the country, and are now mainstreaming climate change into the national planning.

The third major innovative measure was to allocate 10 percent of each fund to the civil society and NGOs through the Palli Karma Sahayak Foundation (PKSF), which has supported hundreds of NGOs to mainly carry out Community Based Adaptation activities with the most vulnerable communities.

The fourth innovative step was the development of a public-private partnership, with support from the Bangladesh Bank to the Infrastructure Development Company (IDCOL) which has already delivered four million Solar Home Systems (SHS) around the country, through the private sector and is installing nearly 30,000 SHSs a month.

Thus, Bangladesh has been a pioneer of developing innovative climate finance mechanisms which include using its own funds, donor funds and private sector funding for both adaptation as well as mitigation.

At the moment the government is preparing to look at a brand new potential innovative climate finance mechanism to combat losses and damages from climate change. Such an initiative would keep Bangladesh at the forefront of climate finance innovations far into the future.

The writer is Director, International Centre for Climate Change and Development at the Independent University, Bangladesh. Email: Saleemul.huq@iied.org

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# Giving the noble profession its due

MD. RIZWANUL ISLAM

POSSIBLY most people with some degree of familiarity with the state of education in primary schools in Bangladesh would acknowledge that the quality of teaching in most of our schools is far from expected. In recent times, the Ministry of Education launched an initiative of distributing multimedia computers in primary schools around the country and teachers are being actively encouraged to use PowerPoint slides to enhance the quality of instructions in their classroom teaching. The public statements of the Ministry of Primary Education indicate that the government is pinning high hopes on the delivering capacity of the introduction of this electronic device in improving the quality of teaching in classrooms.

While the use of PowerPoint slides in proper conditions and with proper objectives may enhance the quality of learning in classrooms, any experienced teacher would also be acutely aware of its pitfalls; particularly its use for the sake of use only.

While many in our country find a simplistic positive correlation between the use of technology and enhancement of the quality of learning, PowerPoint slides may often mean less interaction between the teacher and students, or a machine taking over the classroom where the teacher becomes a peripheral observer whose only job is to supply the contents. In other words, the teacher may virtually delegate the task of teaching to the teaching aid technology. The successful use of PowerPoint slides requires not only mastery of the relevant technology and topics covered but also very meticulous planning and investment of time and effort on the contents of the slides. Indeed, it would require so much time and effort that

it is difficult to imagine that most of the teachers in primary schools, who are time pressed and awfully inadequately remunerated, are in a position to invest that.

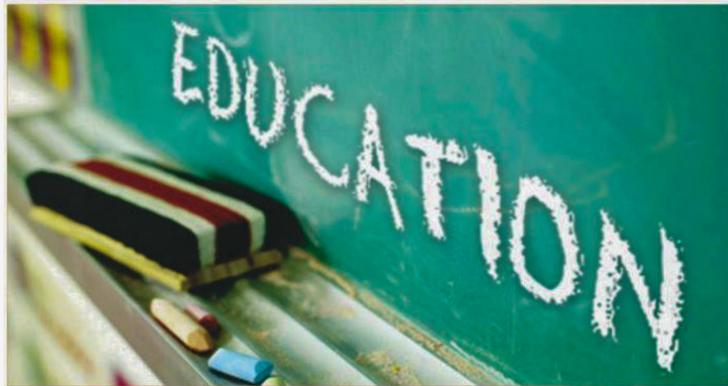
It is common knowledge that teachers in primary schools are so inadequately paid that it is next to impossible to attract talented candidates to teach in these schools. And most teachers have little option but to look for additional earning from private tuition and other activities. Hence, one of the interventions badly needed in the primary

failure of unions to really struggle for the cause of improvement of financial incentives and overall working condition of primary school teachers is not necessarily a bad thing. The trend in our country is quite different from many western countries where the union of school teachers is politically quite powerful because of their numbers and also because the administration recognises the importance of paying attractive salaries to teachers. They also recognise that the quality of teaching in primary schools is no

core responsibility. Some readers may not be aware that the teachers are engaged in activities as diverse as updating the electoral list, preparing catchment area map (map of the areas covered by the school), children census, awareness building on sanitation, tree plantation, vigilance on prevention of child marriage, formation of student councils and so on. Most of these activities have little or no nexus to education. Thus, often teachers in government primary schools are the public administration's default choice in launching popular campaigns or conducting surveys and for many of these activities they do not even have any financial or other incentives. Even when there are financial incentives, surely teachers being required to invest their time in this type of non-teaching related task would be unable to invest adequate time in teaching. In the current state of things, it is quite natural that time-pressed teachers cannot deliver their true potential.

Overall budgetary allocation of primary education is inadequate, and a comprehensive study could have revealing findings about where it actually goes. Currently, all the hullabaloo about the working salary and working condition of teachers is basically about the salary and status of public university teachers - for very justified reasons - but the situation of teachers of primary schools cannot remain ignored. Numbers and public relation exercises would not do any good to the millions of kids who are mostly from the underprivileged sections of the community. Like any other country, we need high quality teachers who are allowed to remain teachers.

The writer is an Associate Professor at School of Law, BRAC University.



education sector is the substantial increase of salary and reduction of non-teaching related administrative burdens of teachers. The administration is lucky that the union of primary school teachers in this country, which by the sheer number of its members should have significant clout, has never been able to pull its weight in improving the pay and working conditions of the teachers. Often adverse impacts of unions in this country may make many of us feel that the

less important a concern than that of colleges and universities. Hence, teachers in primary schools enjoy a decent salary in almost every economically advanced country and they are rarely encumbered by non-teaching related administrative activities.

In contrast, teachers in primary schools in our country, particularly those in government primary schools these days, are as much (if not more) burdened with clerical or administrative tasks as they are with their

## A WORD A DAY



AILUROPHILE

[aɪlʊrəˈfɪl]

a cat lover

### CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

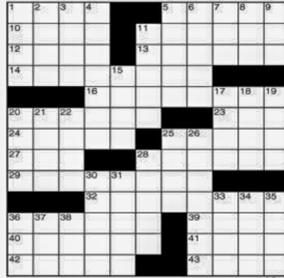
- 1 June celebrant
- 5 "Great"
- 10 Wander
- 11 Current unit
- 12 Early shepherd
- 13 Latitude
- 14 Longitude line
- 16 Protector
- 20 Secret stores
- 23 Father's Day gift
- 24 Dagger parts
- 25 Dagger part
- 27 Writer Tarbell
- 28 Disrobed
- 29 Like some of the Rockies
- 32 Sort of slip
- 36 Polux's twin
- 39 Writer Ferber
- 40 Saucer fliers
- 41 Goes bad
- 42 Mission head
- 43 Narrow cut

DOWN

- 1 Metric
- 2 Lounging attire

3 Declare

- 4 Tickle pink
- 5 Malign
- 6 Tip over
- 7 Flock holder
- 8 Memorable time
- 9 Spanish king
- 11 Rap sheet item
- 15 Membership cost
- 17 Romance lang
- 18 Staff member
- 19 Demand
- 20 Fashionable
- 21 Verdi opera
- 22 Big family
- 25 Boyfriend
- 26 Banks, at times
- 28 Berth places
- 30 Following
- 31 Unmanned plane
- 33 Revered one
- 34 Opposed to
- 35 Cartoonist Thomas
- 36 Beanie or beret
- 37 Copying
- 38 Rocker Vicious



YESTERDAY'S ANSWER



### BEETLE BAILEY

by Mort Walker



### BABY BLUES

by Kirkman & Scott

