

Love's labour never lost

SHIFTING IMAGES



MILIA ALI

A couple of days ago, while I was waiting at a traffic signal I noticed a thought-provoking bumper sticker on the car in front: "I am a proud parent of a Middle School Honor Roll student." My immediate reaction was bafflement coupled with disdain. I wondered why any parent would want to flaunt a child's achievement so blatantly! "And, should middle school grades matter enough to warrant this kind of bragging?" I muttered to myself, while staring at the sticker.

As these somewhat negative thoughts crossed my mind, I began to recall my own parents' joyful reactions to my seemingly routine accomplishments - my father taking pride in my Mathematics grades (being a Math buff himself) or my mother praising a particular song I sang. However, like most people of their generation, they used subtle words and body language to demonstrate their happiness at my small successes. More importantly, I could feel that their love flowed unconditionally. There were no caveats and expectations that I should surpass my peers in academic performance and no exhortation to meet "publicly stated goals" of excellence.

Parenting is a stressful and selfless task - above all, it's a labour of love. However, over the last couple of decades, social mores have undergone a seismic shift, driven by intense competitive pressures. Today, even four-year old kids need to take entrance tests to qualify for pre-schools. It's not surprising that, given the current dog-eat-dog situation, parents are under tremendous pressure to push their kids to the front lines. Consequently, they often feel compelled to embellish their children's achievements in an effort to give them a head start. Children too are continuously striving to keep up with societal and parental expectations. The result is a higher level of stress in family life.

On reflection, I began to empathise with the parent in the car in front. Perhaps this is a woman who makes three or four trips a day to take her child to the karate class or piano lesson and also cooks dinner for her family. And when her child transits into adulthood and becomes a famous pianist or may be a part-time clerk in a bank, she would hold on to these rare moments of pride and joy. There would be no expectations of gratitude, because parents give unconditionally to their children.

My car passed the "proud mom" and I glanced at her furtively. I wondered if she was on her way to complete yet another tedious chore for her son or daughter. May be to pick up a Halloween costume - an effort that she would make simply to bring a smile on her child's face. And in return for all the harrowing hours of carting her kid to after-school activities (crucial in today's competitive world), stressing over parent-teacher meetings, biting nails on "Report Card Day", the mom would only get the vicarious pleasure of public acclaim through the bumper sticker. Perhaps this "sticker moment" is all she would receive in return for the gargantuan efforts invested in her child!

In any case, who am I to judge the "proud mother"? The world has changed drastically since our times, given the enormous pressures of keeping a job, caring for kids, commuting long distances and struggling to keep one's head above water. But despite all the changing variables in life's equation, parental love remains a constant. As I reflected on the struggles of parenthood, my heart reached out to the woman in the car. I remembered all the sacrifices my parents had made for me; my eyes welled



up with tears at the humble realisation of how little I had given them in return. Like all precious things in life, we never appreciate the true worth of our parents until they are gone. As long as they are around, we tend to forget that they need to be nurtured, cared for or even pampered! Unfortunately, we can never go back in time and re-enter that sacred space to hold their hands and express our regrets about not having given them all that we could have.

Perhaps, some day when we are gone, our children will also gaze at the twilight sky as I am doing now and wonder why they didn't demonstrate their love for their parents more often. But then how can we blame them? They are overwhelmed with the demanding task of tackling the challenges of their children's lives. Just as we were while our parents toiled away to ensure that our lives would be as smooth as possible.

When my first child was born, my mother told me: "Your happiness will henceforth depend on the smile and frown on your child's face." I am reminded of her words each time I watch my daughter's emotional barometer rise and fall with the smile and frown on her child's face. . This is how it's meant to be - and always will be.

The writer is a renowned Rabindra Sangeet exponent and former employee of the World Bank. E-mail: shiftingimages@gmail.com

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker



BABY BLUES by Kirkman & Scott



Taking care of our senior citizens

BAZLUL KHONDKER

HELPAGE International, a UK based think tank, produced the 'Global Age Watch Index' which ranks countries according to the social and economic well-being of older people. The overall index is derived from four underlying indices such as income security (measured by pension coverage, living standards using GNI per capita, etc), health status (measured by healthy life expectancy by 60 and psychological well-being, among others), capability (measured by employment rates and education status of older people), and enabling environment (measured by access to public transport, civic freedom and safety).

Each domain has a value score, and the average is used to calculate the final ranking. Switzerland ranks top while Afghanistan is at the bottom of the list. Although Bangladesh's position is better than most of her South Asian neighbours, namely Nepal (70), India (71) and Pakistan (92), it's worse than some other countries such as Vietnam (41), Sri Lanka (46) and the Philippines (50).

fall in extreme poverty (2.7 percentage points, compared to 7.5 percent for the total population). Similarly, the fall in poverty for the population living in households headed by older people, is around half of that of the population headed by younger people (i.e. 5 percentage points, compared to 10.7 percentage points). This trend points to the possibility that the current policy mix in Bangladesh is less supportive of households where an older person is present. If this is the case, it is likely to undermine overall development gains in the future, particularly as Bangladesh's population is ageing rapidly.

Most of the elderly people in Bangladesh suffer from basic human problems, such as poor financial support, chronic diseases and absence of proper health and medicine facilities, exclusion and negligence, deprivation and socio-economic insecurity. The degree and extent of these vulnerabilities would likely intensify in near future, due to the faster pace of ageing, as well as the breaking down of the traditional family and community-based care system.

The Old Age Allowance (OAA) is the most

tax-financed benefit that provides less well off older people with a minimum income guarantee; Tier 2: a mandatory contributory pension scheme for the formal sector workers; and Tier 3: voluntary pension schemes - managed by the private sector (often employment-based schemes), which people can opt for if they desire an additional income in old age]. A care system can also be implemented and a number of economic and non-economic entitlements for elderly people also need to be introduced, as recognised in the recently cleared policy on ageing population in Bangladesh.

In this context, a separate budget could be prepared for elderly people. The concept of a child budget was introduced in this fiscal year. It is equally important to initiate separate budgets for the ageing population in Bangladesh, to not only provide assistance but also reap the benefits of a second demographic dividend. The first dividend occurs during the demographic transition process, when the working-age population increases as a share of the total population, and the percentage of

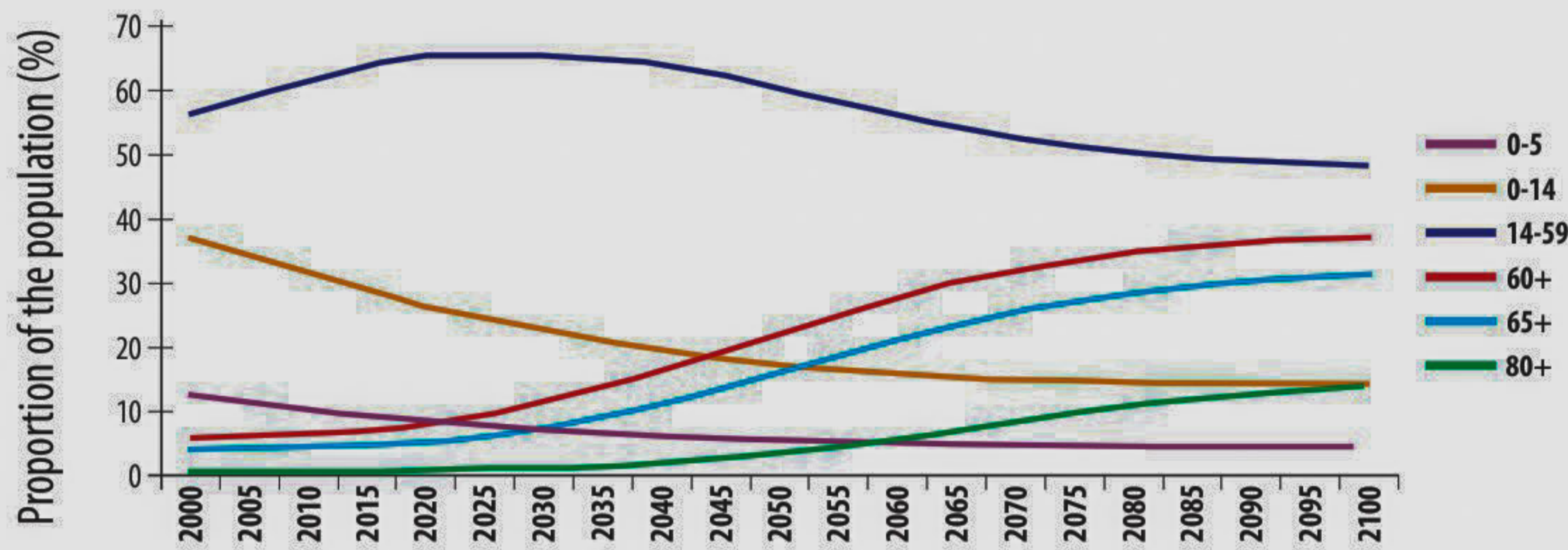


Figure 1: Changing population structure in Bangladesh (2000 - 2100) (Source: UN-DESA, World Population Prospects: The 2012 Revision)

The above ranking is not surprising given that in the current context of the developmental priorities in Bangladesh, the matters relating to older population have been considered a sideline issue. Due to the overwhelming importance of other pressing issues such as infrastructure, energy, poverty, hunger, malnutrition and climate change and given that the share of old age population is still low (i.e. only 6.8 percent of the population was aged over 60 years in 2010), the ageing issue may likely to remain in the sidelines for foreseeable years. However, the share of elderly population is growing fast in Bangladesh and the country will reach the 10 percent threshold - when countries are considered ageing-by around 2026. By 2050, the over-60s age group will comprise a massive 23 percent of the population.

Data suggests that older people may have benefitted less from development gains in recent years. A comparison between 2005 and 2010 Household Income and Expenditure Survey finds that for people living in older headed households (defined as those aged 60 and over), extreme poverty has fallen by less than a third of the overall

significant scheme, in terms of coverage, as it provides social protection in old age. The tax-funded OAA is a social pension paid to poor older people. The scheme which was introduced in 1998, currently covers 30 percent of the population aged 60 and over with low monthly transfer amount of Tk. 500 per beneficiary, requiring budgetary allocation of 0.14 percent of the GDP. This figure compares poorly with the pension scheme of Nepal - (expenditure of 0.35 percent of its GDP, covering over 70 percent of older population) and Lesotho (expenditure of 1 percent of its GDP covering over 70 percent of the older population). Furthermore, the majority of poor older people in Bangladesh miss out from the OAA benefits mainly due to targeting errors (over 50 percent of benefits go to non-poor older people and almost a third of the benefits go to those below the age of eligibility).

Instead of the currently pursued piecemeal approaches, Bangladesh needs to adopt a comprehensive plan of action to tackle this issue. The plan of action may include redesigning the existing Old Age Allowance system by introducing a comprehensive pension under a three-tiered system [Tier 1: a

both young and old dependents decreases. The second demographic dividend results from an increase in adult longevity, which causes individuals to save more in preparation for old age. This increase in savings can thus contribute to capital accumulation and economic growth. Interestingly, the second dividend (1.31) has been found to be larger than the first dividend (0.59) by almost two times in East Asia, indicating that the region has benefited greatly from the second demographic dividend. In case of South Asia, the second dividend (0.69) is also found to be substantially larger than the first dividend (0.10).

The increase in ageing demographic is taking place at a time when the pattern of life is changing, kinship bonds are weakening and the family composition is undergoing a rapid transformation. Due to various factors, traditional extended family and community care systems are breaking down. If we don't act now with concrete strategies, the elderly might find themselves in a veritable perilous situation.

The writer is Professor, Department of Economics, Dhaka University. He can be reached at Bazlul.khondker@gmail.com

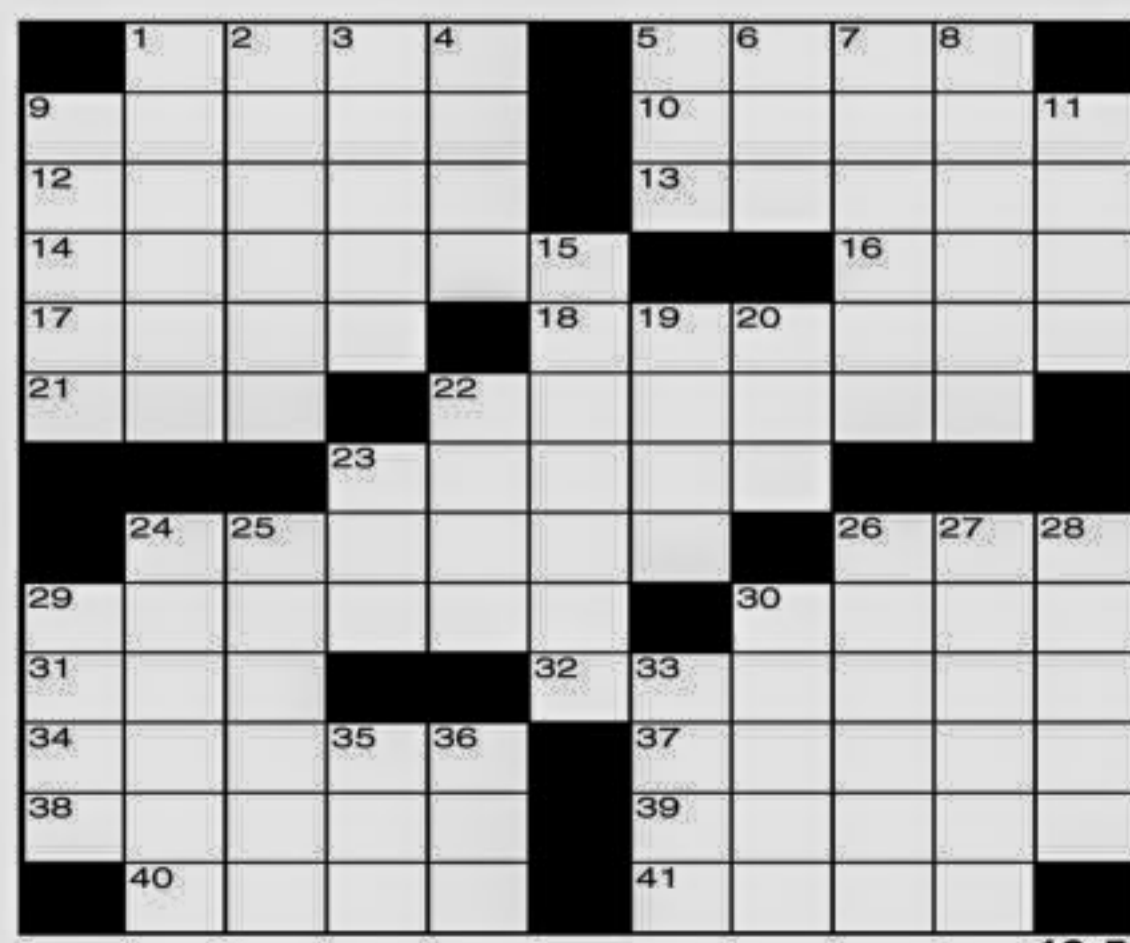
CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Look after
- 5 Try for a fly
- 9 Craze
- 10 Tennis setting
- 12 Make law
- 13 Mumbai's nation
- 14 1935 Astaire movie
- 16 Ewe's mate
- 17 Pennsylvania port
- 18 Beneficial
- 21 Toronto to D.C dir.
- 22 Uses an aerosol
- 23 Veggies for picklers
- 24 Attractively old fashioned
- 26 Topper
- 29 Seek aid from
- 30 Fizzy drink
- 31 Glutton
- 32 Head honcho
- 34 Group of top players
- 37 San Diego player
- 38 "A Fish called _"
- 39 Van Gogh's home in France
- 40 Halt
- 41 Noted Virginia Family

DOWN

- 1 Fancy homes
- 2 Site for nursery rhyme blackbirds
- 3 Alcove
- 4 Facts and figures
- 5 Bio. or chem.
- 6 Took the title
- 7 Hepburn of "Charade"
- 8 Court doings
- 9 Doles (Out)
- 11 Pack down
- 15 Bun worn on the head
- 19 Worry
- 20 Owns
- 22 Spades or clubs
- 23 Soup buy
- 24 Sales goals
- 25 Pressing
- 26 Pamper
- 27 Cherishes
- 28 Book parts
- 29 Turn to slush
- 30 October birth stone
- 35 Commotion
- 36 Guidebook feature



B A S S
O S T I A
U S U R P
T E N I S
S N I V E L
T O E T A P P E R
T I C T A C T O E
H I G H M A S H U P
A N N B A N S H R O
R H I N O T O T E S
P A T I O E V O K E
S T E P S A P A R

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER



NORTH SOUTH UNIVERSITY

The First Private University in Bangladesh

The only Bangladeshi university where all faculty members have foreign Master's or Doctorate degrees primarily from USA, Canada, UK and Australia

Department of English and Modern Languages

Fall 2015

Certificate in English Proficiency (CEP)

CEP is a certificate course for you if you are interested in improving your general proficiency in English. The CEP program primarily focuses on productive and receptive skills i.e speaking, writing, reading, and listening, and then it makes some reference to business and occupational English. Special emphasis is given on enhancement of vocabulary and competence in grammar. Certificates are awarded upon satisfactory completion of the course.

Course Fee Tk. 7000 only
Course begins: 16 October, 2015
Duration of course: 3 months
Class days: Fridays, Class time: 09am-12pm (CEP)

CEP course is taught by highly qualified and experienced faculty members

For information, please contact the Department of English and Modern Languages

NORTH SOUTH UNIVERSITY

Level: 09, Room: NAC 957

Bashundhara, Dhaka-1229

Tel: 5568200, Ext: 2021

E-mail: tanja.azmeen@northsouth.edu