

THE FIGHT AGAINST HUNGER

BRAC founder and chairperson Sir Fazle Hasan Abed received the prestigious World Food Prize in Iowa, US on October 16, 2015. On this occasion, Sir Fazle gave a speech to the Borlaug Dialogue. Here we publish an article based on his speech.

SIR FAZLE HASAN ABED

Each year the World Food Prize Laureate delivers the Borlaug Lecture at Iowa State University, principally on the subject agricultural science and its potential to advance human progress. Not being an agricultural scientist myself, I have worked most of my life not primarily on science but chiefly on the empowerment of human beings to defeat poverty and hunger.

Almost 45 years ago, in December 1970, Norman Borlaug delivered his Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech in Stockholm. The Green Revolution was still in its infancy, yet it had already delivered spectacular increases in cereal crop yields in India, West Pakistan and the Philippines; and, as Borlaug rightly pointed out, for the millions who had long lived with daily hunger and were now fed by its bountiful harvests, the transformation of the Green Revolution must have seemed like a miracle.

At the time, the Green Revolution had still barely touched my native Bangladesh, then called East Pakistan. I was 34 years old in late 1970, living a comfortable life as a senior executive at Shell Oil, and going through a transformation of my own. A terrible cyclone had struck the coast of Bangladesh, killing hundreds of thousands of mainly poor people. The cyclone made me question the value of my comfortable corporate life in the face of such death and devastation.

Within a year, another cataclysm struck - a war for independence in which 10 million people left the country, most of them on foot, fleeing the Pakistan Army's attacks on the civilian population. By the end of 1971, an independent Bangladesh was born.

Tonight, 44 years later, I am able to look back at a life dedicated to eradicating poverty, hunger, illiteracy and exploitation. I would like to share some of the things I have learned on this journey, particularly about the relationship between hunger, poverty and power-



Sir Fazle Hasan Abed receiving the World Food Prize in Iowa.

lessness. We knew the process of rebuilding Bangladesh would be immense. It was one of the poorest countries on earth when we achieved our independence. Life expectancy at birth was a mere 46 years, and one in four children died before their fifth birthday. Our main crop was rice, but only 10 percent of cultivated land was irrigated, and we produced less than 11 million metric tonnes per year, against a need of about 14 million to feed our people.

In 1972, I started a relief effort in a remote area in the northeast of the country called Shalla to help returning refugees from the war. My personal transformation was now complete. While I valued the skills I had acquired working in the private sector, after confronting the conditions of poverty found in Shalla, I knew there was no way I could return to a comfortable corporate life. I resolved to commit the rest of my life to helping the poor extricate themselves from

poverty. The organisation now known as BRAC was born.

Today, thanks in large part to the empowerment of women, Bangladesh has seen one of the most dramatic declines in fertility rates ever seen, from an average of 6.4 children per woman to just 2.1. Changes in other basic indicators of quality of life, including life expectancy, child mortality and maternal mortality, have been equally dramatic.

After working in Shalla for some time, I began to see a more deep-rooted problem of powerlessness among the poor - a lack of agency, a lack of control over even the smallest aspects of their lives. Eventually, in our efforts to empower them, we entered into a series of dialogues with the villagers. We began an adult education programme based on group discussions.

When we began, I was convinced - as I remain convinced today - that, to achieve real empowerment, people need to be aware of their situation and develop a sense of self-

worth in order to change it.

One of the first words in our curriculum was "hunger," or *upash* in the Bengali language. People in the villages were very familiar with this word and concept, and the discussions became quite animated. Anyone who has ever felt pangs of hunger would have a visceral sense of what hunger is, but those who had suffered from chronic hunger had a deeper perspective. They said that being hungry was like being in prison, locked away in a cage, isolated from others, and unable to communicate with anyone else, except for others who were also hungry and in a similar state of powerlessness.

Breaking free from that cage, we learned, was not as easy as we had initially hoped. One of the problems we encountered was that local power structures in rural areas were exploitative, cruel and corrupt, with moneylenders, landlords and local elites often taking advantage of the landless poor in collusion with the local police and government officials. As a result, although they worked hard to survive, the work of the poorest gained little traction in terms of improving their living conditions.

We began thinking about what we could do to create those conditions. We introduced group-based microcredit without collateral, allowing people to borrow and invest in new seeds, fertiliser, and farming technologies without the high rates charged by moneylenders. We introduced homestead vegetable gardens, financed by micro-loans, to add nutrients to people's diets. Later, we began introducing entirely new crops, such as maize, which was linked to a poultry industry centered on female farmers. We built value chains for other industries, such as dairy, to benefit women who owned milk cows.

Today, I am pleased to say that Bangladesh has achieved self-sufficiency in food production. Though our population has gone up 2.2 times since independence, our food production has gone up 3.1 times. This has hap-

pened through widespread irrigation during the dry seasons, the introduction of improved varieties, more effective usage of fertiliser, and other changes to farming practices.

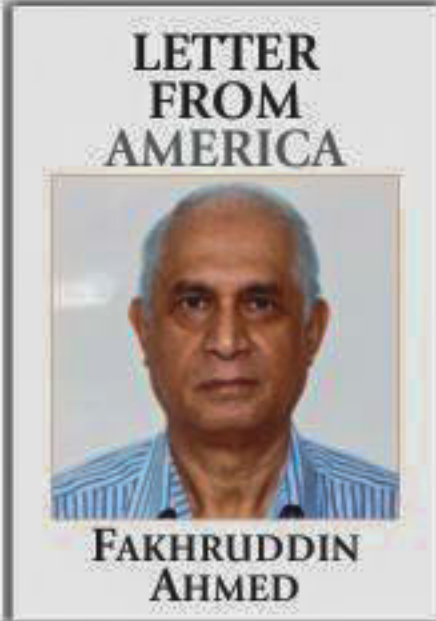
I saw that we would never bring down the fertility rate without bringing down the high mortality of children in our society. The problem was not merely that family planning services were unavailable, although that was part of it. The Government, to its credit, actually began offering free family planning services, but few were accessing them. In our own intervention areas, we succeeded in raising contraceptive usage rates from single digits to about 20 percent in the late 1970s. But we seemed to hit a ceiling there.

At the start of the 1980s, we launched a ten-year effort to teach mothers - 13 million in all - how to administer oral rehydration fluid to children with deadly diarrhoea, one of the biggest killers of children. Many people, including trusted friends and colleagues, were sceptical that a relatively little known NGO, which had not even begun to work at a national level until then, would be able to reach so many people and catalyse such widespread behavioural change. But this programme helped to reduce the rate of child deaths from diarrhoea by 80 percent. Together with the government, we also established a national immunisation programme that took the country from 4 percent immunisation coverage in 1986 to 72 percent in 1990.

I believe that the true promise of the Green Revolution means breaking free from hunger and fatalism, and that it is part of the ongoing process of becoming fully human - making people shapers of their own destiny, able to build their futures instead of holding out their hands in supplication, and to lead lives filled with meaning and purpose, transforming the world around them.

The writer is founder and chairperson of BRAC. (Exclusive to The Daily Star)

Ben Carson is Getting Away with Incendiary Rhetoric



LETTER FROM AMERICA

The Republican Party, aka the "White Party", is a lonely place for an African American. The Democratic Party is the home of the

blacks and other minorities. Democratic presidential candidates are guaranteed 90 percent of African American support. Over 95 percent of African Americans voted for President Obama in 2008 and 2012.

The nomenclature designating African Americans has undergone repeated changes. Up until the 1940s, they were referred to as "Negroes." In the 1950s, they were "Coloreds." In the 1960s, they became "Blacks." Around 1980, Rev. Jesse Jackson pointed out that, while every other group was known by their country of origin (e.g. Italian Americans, Irish Americans, Mexican Americans and Japanese Americans), only the blacks were referred to by their colour. He introduced the term African Americans for Americans who came from African countries.

As with their nomenclature, their politics also changed over time. From the 1860s to the 1930s, blacks belonged to the Republican Party, the party of Abraham Lincoln, their emancipator.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt's "New Deal" which included projects and programmes to get Americans back to work during the Great Depression, and Social Security for the retired, began the

process of weaning the blacks away from the Republican Party towards the Democratic Party. President Lyndon B. Johnson completed the process by enacting the "Great Society" domestic programmes such as Medicare, Medicaid and Older American Act, and fair housing, Civil Rights and Voting Rights Act that specifically benefited the blacks.

In response, Republican Richard M. Nixon adopted the "Southern Strategy", which sent subliminal, racially charged dog whistle messages to white southern Democrats to entice them away from the Democratic Party to the Republican Party. That process was completed by President Ronald Reagan, who cynically kicked off his 1980 presidential campaign near Philadelphia, Mississippi, where three young civil rights workers - James Chaney (who was black), Andrew Goodman and Michael Schemer (who were Jewish) were murdered by the Ku Klux Klan in 1964. White Democrats who followed Reagan into the Republican Party are known as "Reagan Democrats."

The only way an African American "alien" can succeed in the Republican Party is by saying things which the Republican base wants said, but would destroy a white candidate if he said it. This is the role that the soft-spoken retired African American neurosurgeon Dr. Ben Carson, a political novice, has accepted with aplomb.

Here are some of Carson's diabolical comments about President Obama: 1) "Obama is a psychopath"; 2) "Obamacare is the worst thing that has happened in this

country since slavery"; 3) "Not sure there will even be an election in 2016" (Obama will cancel the elections and stay on); 4) (under Obama) "We live in a Gestapo age"; 5) "Obama may be guilty of treason." If front runner Donald Trump or any other white Republican candidate had said all this, his candidacy would have ended right then and

meat to the Republican base by saying that a Muslim American President would be unacceptable to him. Reminded that the US constitution has no religious test for the presidency, Carson doubled down by stressing that a Muslim American president would be acceptable to him only if he renounced the Qur'an! He then

control in Germany was partly responsible for the Holocaust. If the Jews had guns, Holocaust could have been avoided, he argued. This drew a sharp rebuke from the Anti Defamation League who reminded Carson that it was Nazism, and not the lack of Jewish guns that was responsible for the Holocaust. Jews did acquire and use guns in the

college shooting of "cooperating" with the shooter by not charging him, as he would have done. This drew sharp response from survivors who said that Carson had no idea how it was to face an armed mass murderer.

Carson recounted an event in a Baltimore Popeyes (chicken) restaurant thirty years ago when a gunman held a gun to his ribs. Did Carson charge the gunman? No, he calmly said, "I think you want the person behind the counter." That Carson calmly redirected the gunman towards the helpless cashier drew charges of hypocrisy and cowardice. Besides, Carson's story does not add up. Baltimore police said they had no record of robbery at a Popeyes restaurant at that time. Further, Carson is supposedly a vegetarian. What was he doing in a chicken joint?

Carson's claim of being a good neurosurgeon has also come under scrutiny. It turns out that several medical malpractice lawsuits had been filed against him. One patient, a Caucasian young woman, came forward, called Carson a liar who ruined her life. According to the woman, her family begged Carson to surgically remove only the diseased portion of her brain, and no more. Carson ignored their plea, took out the whole section, leaving the young woman partially paralysed and disfigured.

Dr. Ben Carson has pandered his soul away in order to be the president, which he will never be. In the process, he has revealed himself as not only a crackpot, but also as an intolerant, ignorant bigot.

The writer is a Rhodes Scholar.

Carson's attack on President Obama is akin to a slave praising slavery. Because Carson is doing the Republican base's dirty work, he is being consistently rewarded with a second place finish in the polls.



there. But, Carson gets a free pass. Carson's attack on President Obama is akin to a slave praising slavery. Because Carson is doing the Republican base's dirty work, he is being consistently rewarded with a second place finish in the polls (around 18 percent). Carson continued to feed red

went on to "explain" that a Muslim is bound by his religion to apply Sharia law to any job he holds, and something incomprehensible about kafir. It was nauseating to listen to Carson pass off his utter ignorance of Islam as his expertise!

Carson then waded into another controversy by suggesting that gun

Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, only to be massacred by the Nazis. Fully armed Czech, Polish and French armies also fell to the Nazis.

In an attempt to endear himself further to the Republican base for whom gun ownership is sacrosanct, Carson seemed to accuse the victims of the recent Oregon community

A WORD A DAY



NEMOPHILIST

[ne-'mo-fe-list]

One who loves the woods

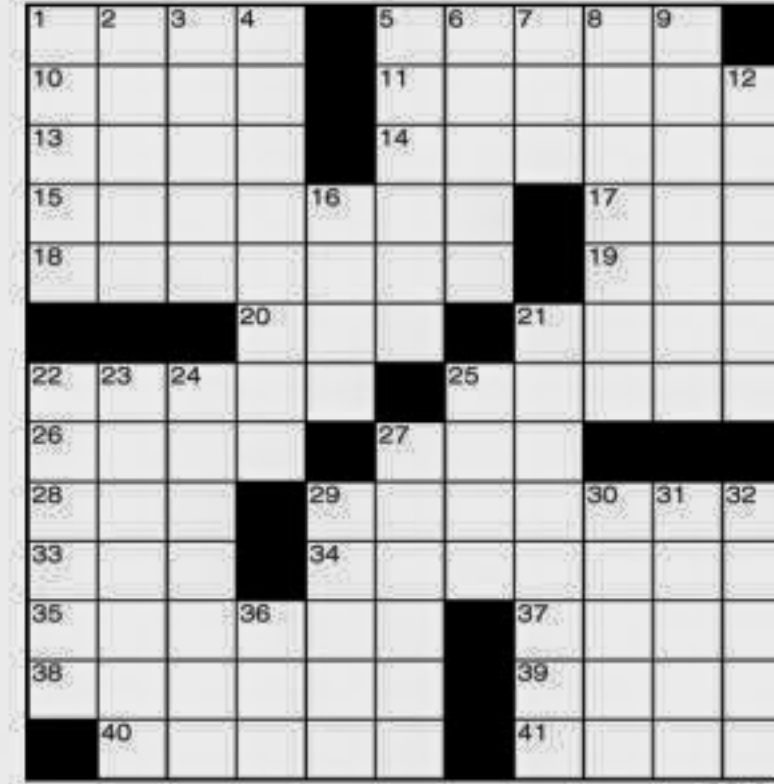
CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- Not nude
- Played a role
- Hawaiian port
- Music's Santana
- Stratford's river
- Lawyer's customer
- Cooling ingredient
- loss (baffled)
- Likes better
- Old horse
- Blusher's hue
- Medicine amount
- Calculated a total
- Champagne poppers
- Race tipster
- Father's boy
- Rock producer Brian
- Prate
- Lawyer: Abbr.
- 34 Start without a key
- Game official
- Like -- of bricks
- 37 Writer Hemingway
- 39 Stow cargo
- 40 Irish poet
- 41 Was aware

DOWN

- Title holder
- Bible producer
- Without help
- Calming words
- Treaty
- Phones up
- Numerical prefix
- Mrs. Roosevelt
- *You're better off not knowing*
- 12 Wells Fargo vehicles
- Obey
- Pedestrian's intersection warning
- Relaxed
- *It'll be okay*
- Bicolor picture
- Parka
- Leg revealing pants
- Ribcage setting
- Moon of Saturn
- Wear away
- Extend, as a subscription
- 36 Stephen of *The Crying Game*



YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

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

BEETLE BAILEY

by Mort Walker



BABY BLUES

by Kirkman & Scott

