

A missed opportunity for Bangladesh

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It is a common phenomenon in many developing countries that government officials show a keen interest in attending conferences, seminars or workshops taking place in different parts of the world, expenses of which are borne by the government. Many of these programmes are not particularly important or mandatory, and attending them brings little or no benefit to our country or citizens.

There are, however, some international events that are crucial for a country and warrant representation from Bangladesh but for some reason neither the government nor its officials bother to attend them. The recently concluded Global High-Level Conference on Road Safety in the Brazilian capital city of Brasilia was one of them. This conference was important. It gave an idea of the magnitude of road crashes in Bangladesh and worldwide, the growing number of fatalities and the subsequent costs and consequences faced by the victims and the countries. Sadly, there was no Bangladeshi representative there for reasons unknown. It is alleged that this could be a result of the government's indifference or ignorance of this global problem. Perhaps officials and politicians are not as enthusiastic about this issue as we would have liked them to be because they do not seem to consider road accidents to be a serious or immediate problem that needs to be tackled!

Around 1,800 representatives from more than 130 countries joined the conference with one major objective - how to effectively tackle the new global epidemic that claims 1.2 million lives and injures 30-50 million others a year. A huge number of the injured face lifelong disability. The picture for Bangladesh is no less grim. WHO estimates that more than 21,000 people die in road crashes every year in the country. An accurate number of injured and those disabled by road accidents is not available. Experts estimate the number to be 10-15 times more than that of the deaths. It is strange that the staggering statistics revealed by WHO's latest global report on road safety are apparently not 'important' enough to draw the attention of concerned authorities of the country. Only a couple of months ago, three

government officials, headed by the senior secretary of the Home Ministry, visited Brazil for a weeklong trip to see how machine readable passports were being issued by the Bangladesh embassy there. The visit was not required at all, as the issue was technical. But they went there nevertheless, visited places and uploaded photos on Facebook before returning to Bangladesh. The trip cost about Tk. 1.5 million of taxpayers' money although it is a mystery what benefit this trip was to the country.

Given the magnitude of the problem, many other countries have sent their transport or interior ministers and senior government officials to the conference. They went back to their respective countries with a much clearer idea about the problems and

renewed commitment to improve road safety. The Ministry of Road Transport and Bridges of Bangladesh, unfortunately, had no knowledge to gain from this conference as there was no representation of the country.

According to the report of WHO, 90 percent of the road fatalities occur in the low and middle-income countries and road crashes are the leading cause of death for people aged 15-29. Deaths of so many economically active people place a huge burden on the victims' families and the national economy as well. The injured require long-term and expensive treatment.

WHO estimates that road crashes, which are preventable, eat up to 3-5 percent of the gross domestic product of a country. Considering this, the UN general assembly

this year, included two goals in its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Achieving the goals would be difficult unless road accidents are curbed. With this in mind, the UN has set an ambitious target: halve road traffic casualties by 2020.

The gathering of world leaders, experts, civil society members at the two-day conference in Brasilia was very important as they had brainstorming sessions on how to make roads safer. They debated on the existing preventive measures, discussed the extent to which they were effective and what else could be done to achieve the target.

At the end of the conference, the participating countries pledged to take adequate actions to improve and put in place the concerned laws, develop sustainable

public transport systems, update safety apparatus of vehicles, end flaws in issuing driving licenses, educate drivers, and make people aware about the use of seat belts and helmets in a bid to curb road accidents.

As per WHO's report, Bangladesh is among the 68 countries that saw increasing road crashes and fatalities. But it made no commitment or played any role in the decision making process of the conference that could have made a difference in this statistic.

I attended the conference as a WHO road safety reporting fellow and witnessed firsthand the sincerity of other government representatives to fix their next course of actions. There was even a separate session for countries of the South East Asian Region (SEAR). Representatives of SEAR present at the conference pledged to work together to curb road accidents in the region.

Despite being party to the Decade of Action Plan adopted five years ago, Bangladesh is not making adequate efforts to make roads safer. Corrupt practices in issuing licenses that allow unqualified drivers to drive vehicles, allowing unfit vehicles to ply the roads, impunity of reckless drivers are some of the major factors behind the continued increase in road accidents that snatch away lives and livelihoods. Punishment for driving under influence (DUI) - another growing reason of road crashes and deaths worldwide - is yet to be included in the law in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh is a country that has poor enforcement of law. Few drivers are seen using seatbelts and the same can be said about bikers using helmets. Talking over the cell phone while driving is a common scene on the roads of Bangladesh. Road safety of children and drunk driving are still little known issues in the country. The crucial post-crash care and treatment of road accident victims is also not considered a priority issue.

Against this backdrop, the government should wake up and take effective measures to make roads safer for all. If they fail to do so, the country, its citizens and its economy will continue to pay the heavy price of road crashes.

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Road accidents are rampant in Bangladesh, yet actions to make roads safer do not seem to be adequate.

PHOTO: STAR

Seventh Five Year Plan What are its shortcomings?

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It is apparent from the final draft of the Seventh Five Year Plan FY 2016-FY 2020 that the government has a clear vision for transforming the economy of Bangladesh from a rural-based agrarian economy into an urban-based industrial one. With a target of 8 percent GDP growth by 2020, the highly ambitious plan includes worthy initiatives like emphasising the

ones. According to the Labour Force Survey (LFS) 2010 by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 47.56 percent of the total employed population in Bangladesh is engaged in agriculture followed by 35.35 percent in the service sector and 17.52 percent in manufacturing and other industries. The vision of the government is in tune with this trend. The question is whether the goals and plans set by the government in the Seventh FYP are complying with this vision.

The report that has been produced by General Economics Division (GED) of the Planning Commission, as a background study for the Seventh FYP, written by Binayak Sen and Mahbubur Rahman, acknowledges the fact that agricultural modernisation requires a modest human capital requirement but when an economy is striving to be industrial, the 'skills-mix' should look very different. It clearly states that "only emphasis on below-primary or primary education will not be enough in this growth scenario; the focus needs to be given to secondary and technical education commensurate to the demand of the export-led labour-intensive manufacturing growth. Again, if the stage of growth is shaped predominantly by the service sector growth, the emphasis needs to be shifted to post-secondary and higher technical education and training." A mismatch between demand and supply of skills might be very costly for Bangladesh at this stage. The final draft of the Seventh FYP should have reflected this statement from its own background study on the whole but has disappointed its audience in many ways.

In the 'Plan Goals and Targets' part of the draft, for instance, there are only two targets dedicated to education and none of them talks about TVET. ICT has been heavily incorporated in various parts of the plan, including secondary, higher and madrasa education but not TVET.

One of the most crucial exercises while drafting such a plan is to analyse past failures and attainments. The chapter on 'Progress with TVET during the Sixth Plan' is quite vaguely written, lacking in proper statistical representation, analysis and interpretation. Likewise, the 'Major Challenges' part should have been more specific and backed by necessary data like the ones presented in other streams of education except technical and vocational education and training! Similarly, the 'resource allocation' part of the plan does not extensively explain how much budget will be provided for the TVET sector over the next five years. Also the issue of research and knowledge development in the TVET sector of Bangladesh has not been seen in the report. These shortcomings in preparation and presentation of the report can thus be (mis)interpreted by the audience of the plan as lack of research or attention to this sector.

The plan fortunately acknowledges the skills deficiency of migrant workers and has provided plans for training people for overseas employment. It also recognises the promotion of gender equity and special attention to disadvantaged groups and persons with disabilities.

It is apparent from the final draft of the Seventh FYP that the government

will be heavily dependent on the National Skill Development Policy (NSDP 2011) for the development of the TVET sector. However, instead of repeating the words from the policy paper, the plan could have been given a structured direction toward how these policies are going to be implemented with time bound targets. A constructive way to develop targets and goals is to follow the SMART criteria used by George T. Doran in his paper published in *Management Review* in 1981. SMART stands for: Specific - target a specific area for improvement; Measurable - quantify or at least suggest an indicator of progress; Assignable - specify who will do it; Realistic - state what results can realistically be achieved, given available resources; Time-related - specify when the result(s) can be achieved.

In order to avoid the mismatch of supply and demand of skills, it is important to plan from a demand-side point of view. Thus developing linkages between industries and polytechnics is a critical pre-requisite. The responsibility of the National Skill Development Council (NSDC), chaired by the honourable Prime Minister, is to promote technical and vocational education in close cooperation with industry, and handling the routine coordination with all the Industrial Sector Councils (ISCs). The role of the NSDC has unfortunately been missing from the Seventh FYP. It could have explicitly specified some targets to be fulfilled by this body over the next five years. The NSDC can contribute greatly in fulfilling the target of generating 13 million jobs which has been one of the

highlights of the Seventh FYP.

Policies and interventions alone cannot bring change in society. In Bangladesh, the profile of a TVET student is perceived as male, poor and 'left-out' from the general education stream. This long-established misconception needs to be rectified. The government and development agencies, through a planned social marketing approach, can promote the message that students of TVET can be well-earning, respected members of the society, that they can be employers and entrepreneurs.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have stressed the importance of TVET under Goal 4, which aims to substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship by 2030. Also, according to the SDG targets, the technical and vocational students of the LDCs are expected to be given a substantial number of scholarships by the developed nations by 2020. The Seventh FYP can be a head start for achieving these targets.

The importance and potential of the TVET sector is undeniable at this stage. Since the Seventh FYP is still a 'draft' and there is still scope for adjustments and improvements, the GED of the Planning Commission might consider revising the TVET part of the plan so that it becomes a complete guideline for the development of TVET and the system can be held accountable for its progress over the next five years.

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The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have stressed the importance of TVET under Goal 4, which aims to substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant technical and vocational skills..

incorporation of ICT, generating employment opportunities, and promoting gender equality. However, the plan has some shortcomings, especially when it comes to Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET).

The total number of polytechnic institutions enlisted by the Bangladesh Technical Education Board is 7,002, among which 293 are government organisations and 6,709 are private

A WORD A DAY

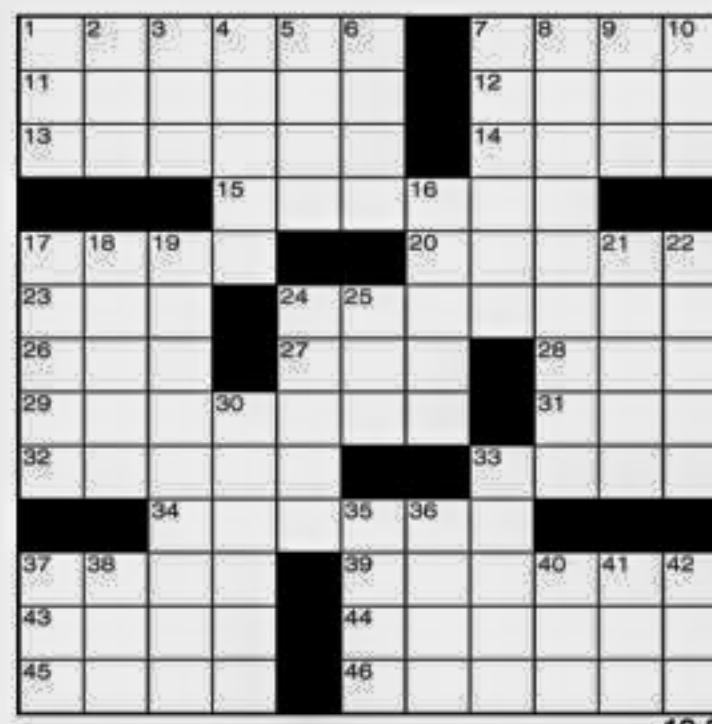


ANTHINE
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Violet coloured

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

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| ACROSS | DOWN |
| 1 Boston cager | 1 Take in |
| 7 "Let's go!" | 2 Juan Peron's wife |
| 11 Exaggerate | 3 Rent out |
| 12 Sushi need | 4 Journeys |
| 13 Sovereign state | 5 Pop star |
| 14 Concerning | 6 Volcano shape |
| 15 Skirt features | 7 Lunar sight |
| 17 Corny performers | 8 Mell Lazarus comic strip |
| 20 Old photo tint | 9 Halloween mo. |
| 23 Boxing great | 10 "The Matrix" hero |
| 24 Stifle | 16 Rockies resort |
| 26 USO audience | 17 Comics Viking |
| 27 Bullring call | 18 Innocence indicator |
| 28 Braying beast | 19 Colleague of Kermit |
| 29 Sit out the vote | 21 Magazine unit |
| 31 Stage signal | 22 Useful skill |
| 32 Turn red, maybe | 24 Speckled horses |
| 33 Sharpen | 25 Yale rooster |
| 34 Preposterous | 30 Past and future |
| 37 Pleads | 33 Exhausted |
| 39 Carter's successor | 35 Sacred chests |
| 43 Spur on | 36 Orderly |
| 44 Dojo doings | 37 Worthless |
| 45 Baseball's Willie | 38 Pitching stat |
| 46 Did salon work | 40 Guy's friend |
| | 41 Had something |
| | 42 Homer's neighbor |



YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

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BEETLE BAILEY

by Mort Walker



BABY BLUES

by Kirkman & Scott

