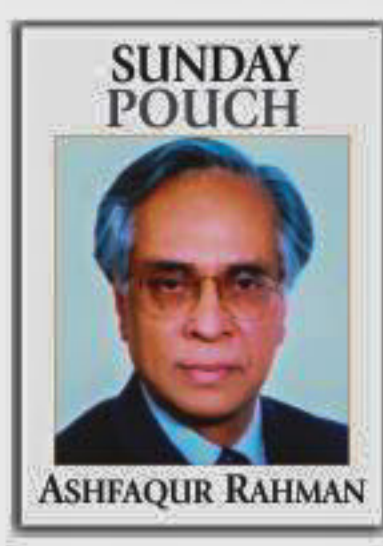


PM's expectations and people's hopes

In 2041, 70 years after the birth of the country in 1971, the country is likely to climb to the pinnacle of growth and development. In fact, none of Bangladesh's neighbours like India, Pakistan and even Sri Lanka is destined to be a developed country in such a short span of time.



ASHFAQUR RAHMAN

HOW much difference can a year make? Not much really. Perhaps it is incremental only when some economic indices fluctuate either up or down in a country. Yet, prospects of growth look different from the beginning of 2015 to the start of 2016. There is much expectation by the government that an upward trend in growth indices is likely to continue. But people hope that growth this year will be robust if enabling policies are put in place.

Just the other day, Win/Gallup international, the world's leading association in market research and polling, published the end of 2015 survey. A whopping 84 percent of Bangladeshis polled there said that 2016 would be a better year than 2015. Of this, 72 percent of the respondents said that they were optimistic about the country's economy. In fact, this hope was 72 percent higher than the hopes of other nations in the world.

A striking coincidence in Bangladesh is that our Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has expressed her optimism about the future prospects of the country's economy as well. This is in spite of the political difficulties with opposition parties and their various programmes. She is sure that those opposing her (read the BNP and the Jamaat) will not be able to prevail. In fact, some of the economic figures presented to the nation bear this out. In her recent address to the nation, marking the return of Bangabandhu in 1972 after his incarceration in Pakistan, she outlined among other facts that the country now ranks 45th, among countries of the world, in GDP size. Our per capita income is \$1314, which was only \$543 in 2006. The poverty rate has fallen from 41.5 percent to 23.4 percent. Out of a population of 16 crores, about 5 crore people are now in the middle



An aerial view of Shapla Chattar area of Motijheel, Dhaka's commercial hub.

PHOTO: STAR

class. Extreme poverty is now only 7.5 percent, falling from 24.2 percent in 2006. Power generation today in Bangladesh is 14000+MW from 3000+MW in 2009. Life expectancy is now 71 years from 66.5 years in 2006. All these speak volumes. Last year, the World Bank categorically said that Bangladesh was no longer one of the few Least Developed Countries (LDC) of the world. It has moved to the next higher level and is now a low middle income country. This is on the basis of its per capita income per year. The Prime Minister herself quickly predicted that Bangladesh by 2021 would graduate to a middle income country with \$4000+ per capita income. By 2041, the country will hopefully be a developed one. This is a ringing prediction that would belie all doomsayers about Bangladesh. Thus, in 2041, 70 years after the birth of the country in 1971, the country is likely to climb to the

pinnacle of growth and development. In fact, none of Bangladesh's neighbours like India, Pakistan and even Sri Lanka is destined to be a developed country in such a short span of time.

So what remarkable things are happening in Bangladesh now or are likely to happen in future that enables the Prime Minister to make such a bold prediction? In fact, certain obvious advantages have routinely been accepted here as the norm. Take the matter of the three great resources that this country possesses. First is the huge population. Crammed in a country the size of England and Wales, it has a unique history of a united struggle for independence. The common dream was not only for political freedom but also freedom from want and poverty, which has spurred this growing population to greater heights. The country has pulled its 160 million people now by its boot strap.

Over the past thirty years, it has sent over 10 million people overseas to help feed its huge population. Inside the country, the remaining population has been working diligently on its extremely productive soil to grow three crops every year on each piece of land. The land itself is irrigated by three river systems with innumerable sweet water streams, and the monsoon floods. The fecundity of the land is proverbial. People have worked laboriously, using the power of their innovation and quick adaptation. Bangladeshis have spun out so much from so little. Now that Bangladesh has a huge pool of expatriate population, the developed skills, crafts and improved knowledge of better practices are pouring into the country.

The Prime Minister herself, in her recent term of office, seems to have changed some of her personal and collective priorities. She is

determined to stick by politically, so that she can build an invaluable legacy. She knows that she can in no way match the gargantuan achievements her father, the founder-architect of Bangladesh. What she can do is leave behind a mark, as a builder of modern Bangladesh. Take the case of eight or more specific projects she has initiated to push Bangladesh forward. These include the Padma bridge, the deep sea port, the metro rail, the tunnel under the Karnaphuli river, etc. She seeks an inherent legitimacy that will be the hallmark of her time and place in history. Just look at some of her other handiwork. She initiated a process of establishing peace in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. She pursued with relentless vigour the trial of war criminals and has addressed some of the crippling geo-political problems with neighbouring giant India. She has crafted a foreign policy that keeps her other giant neighbour China as a close friend and a useful fulcrum whenever needed.

But as Bangladesh develops, its people seek more. Two things seem to bother them; one is the growing corruption and delinquency within the country, the other is due diligence in politics. These twin malice seem to pull back the country. The Prime Minister now has to switch gears. She has to have zero tolerance on both these issues. She has to detoxify the society, especially within her political party.

There are silver linings in the dark sky, however. Digitalising the country, if pursued relentlessly, can help reduce corruption in the delivery of public services and private entrepreneurship. But there is more to it. Clean governance and an impartial judiciary is a sine qua non here. The other priority is to reorient politics to allow democratic dispensation in policymaking and policy delivery. The Prime Minister must lead in both these matters. Let us see how much the government can deliver on both in 2016.

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Involve fathers in childcare

LAILA KHONDKAR

AROUND 80 percent of the world's men and boys will become fathers during their lifetime, and virtually all men have at least some connection to children in caregiving relationships. Despite this, the practice of engaging men in caregiving is virtually invisible in public policies and discourses. The first-ever State of the World's Fathers (SOWF) report is urging us to think and take actions about this. The report is a landmark analysis of fatherhood that draws evidence from hundreds of studies covering all countries in the world with available data. Published by MenCare, a global fatherhood campaign, the SOWF report is intended to provide a periodic, data-driven snapshot of the status of men's contributions to parenting and caregiving globally, and addresses four issues related to fatherhood; these are unpaid care work in the home; sexual and reproductive health and rights and maternal, newborn, and child health; men's caregiving and violence against children and women; and child development. I am going to focus on unpaid care work in the home and child development.

Let us review the status of work by women and men, and the implications. Women continue to spend between 2 to 10 times more time than men caring for a child or older person. These inequalities persist despite the fact that women today make up 40 percent of the formal global workforce and 50 percent of the world's food producers. Isn't it interesting to note that men's unpaid caregiving has not kept pace with women's participation in the labour force? Each day I meet Bangladeshi women from different socio-economic status who are engaged in

economic activities and perform caregiving responsibilities without support from their partners. Even in Europe, which as a region has achieved the greatest degree of equality; women do 26 hours of domestic and care work on average per week, as compared to nine hours per week for men. The double burden carried by many women reduces their ability to contribute to the household economy, as well as to develop their own skills and talents outside the home. In a study in Latin America and the Caribbean, more than 50 percent of women aged 20 to 24 said that their unpaid responsibilities in the home were the main reason they could not look for paid work. Isn't this a familiar scenario in Bangladesh as well? Don't all of us know women who could not enter the job market or had to leave jobs after having children? Many women cannot pursue higher education or professional development opportunities due to their role as caregivers, which means they are not able to realise their full potential.

According to the report, a lack of supportive policies, particularly paternity leave for new fathers, is part of the problem. Between 61 and 77 percent of fathers say they would work less if it meant that they could have more time with their children. However, although maternity leave is now offered in nearly all countries, only 92 countries offer leave that can be taken by fathers. For half of these, the leave is less than three weeks. Iceland seems to be the world champion in men's use of paternity leave. On an average, Icelandic men take 103 days of paid leave, but it is still only a third of what women take.

What are the benefits of involving men on caregiving of children? Well-designed leave policies for fathers have the potential to

transform gender relations at home, at work, and in society at large. A study from Sweden showed that every month that fathers took paternity leave increased the mother's income by 6.7 percent, as measured four years later, which was more than she lost by taking parental leave herself.

There is scientific evidence that children need at least one deeply involved and dedicated caregiver to thrive, and that this can be a man or a woman. Evolution has left men as deeply biologically wired for emotional connections to children as women are. Moreover, fathers with close connections to their children live longer, have fewer health problems, and are more productive and generally happier.

Gender equality will not be achieved unless men are engaged in the care of their children and families. "When fathers take on their fair share of the unpaid care work, it can alter the nature of the relationships between men and women and children, as both fathers and mothers will have more time for their children, women are released from some of their 'double burden,' and fathers get to experience the joys, satisfactions, and stresses of caring for their children," said SOWF report author Nikki van der Gaag. "Taking up roles as caregivers also offers men the opportunity to begin to break free from the narrow concepts of manhood and fatherhood, providing their sons and daughters with positive role models, improved health and development, and higher hopes for the future." The SOWF report reaffirms that fathers matter for children and that caregiving is good for fathers. This will help in beginning to lay the groundwork to influence future policies and programmes around the world that address the current lack of men's and boys' equitable participation in caregiving.

Rigid gender stereotypes and the harm these bring to women, children, and men themselves also have to be addressed.

Some of the recommendations of the report are: states should adopt and implement parental leave policies for both mothers and fathers that guarantee paid parental leave that is equitable and non-transferable between parents. States should adopt and implement policies that specifically encourage and support fathers' and caregivers' involvement in early childhood development, care, and education. How long will it take for us to recognise that parenting is a shared responsibility and take appropriate policy actions

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to introduce parental leave for fathers? The policy decision will have to be supported by campaign to bring changes in social attitudes that still consider women to be solely responsible for rearing children, and performing caregiving and other household responsibilities.

Achieving true gender equality demands a revolution in the lives of men and boys, which includes their full participation in domestic life.

The writer is Director of Child Protection, Save the Children.

QUOTABLE Quote

NAPOLÉON BONAPARTE

Courage isn't having the strength to go on - it is going on when you don't have strength.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- Prepares for a trip
- Snow formation
- Once more
- Circle spokes
- Disco's Summer
- Without stop
- Hold tightly
- Some amount of
- Dove
- Personnel head, at times
- Cutlery
- Jack of nursery rhymes
- Slyly sarcastic
- "What a shames!"
- MUSIC'S Lady--
- Trips
- Mouth part
- Bangkok native
- San Antonio landmark
- Next year's sophs
- Cowboy contest
- Boise's state
- Hearty dishes
- Showy flower

DOWN

- Spot to jot
- Before today
- Energy drink buy
- They have tasty legs
- Trap
- Surprise visitors
- Sprinted
- Notion
- Helsinki native
- Orderly
- Pen fill
- Days gone by
- Trade fair
- Flying: Prefix
- Gray fly- catchers
- Small-bottles
- Border
- Oceans
- Skin art
- "Well, that's obvious!"
- "The Godfather" group
- Jelly buys
- Oodles
- Walk through water
- Kitten cry
- Granola bit
- That woman
- Vert.'s counterpart

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

B	R	O	W	S	C	U	B	I	C
R	E	L	I	C	O	P	I	N	E
A	M	I	S	H	N	I	N	J	A
C	O	V	E	N	S	G	U	S	
E	V	E	A	U	S	T	E	R	E
D	E	S	U	N	E	A	S	E	
		A	Z	T	E	C			
S	A	V	E	A	S	M	A	B	
C	A	V	E	R	N	S	A	V	A
A	L	A	S	T	O	L	E	N	
B	A	L	S	A	A	M	O	N	G
A	M	O	U	R	R	I	N	G	O
L	I	N	E	R	S	T	E	E	R

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker

DID YOU MAKE ANY NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS?

ONLY ONE... STAY OUT OF YOUR SIGHT

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker

I DON'T THINK YOU CAN...

HEY! WHERE ARE YOU?

PRACTICING

BABY BLUES by Kirkman & Scott

HAMMIE, WOULD YOU LIKE TO TELL YOUR FATHER HOW YOU MANAGED TO DIG UP THE YARD, CRACK THE DRIVEWAY AND RUN YOUR SHOES ALL IN ONE DAY?

BABY BLUES by Kirkman & Scott

PERFORMANCE- ENHANCING SUBSTANCES.

YOU ATE MY CHOCOLATE DONUTS??

DO NOT BRING THOSE THINGS HOME FROM THE OFFICE ANYMORE!