

The question of status over academic excellence

AHMED A AZAD

AFTER nine months of patient negotiations, discussions and representations, and after taking due care not to disrupt academic activities on campus, teachers of all public universities have finally gone on strike against recent moves to downgrade the professional prestige of senior professors through the new pay scale. Public sector school and college teachers, along with professionals, have also come out on the streets, but the most attention is focused on the status and ultimate employment ceiling of senior professors. Because their demand is just, and because of their collective clout, the government will have to agree to the demands of the university teachers sooner than later. But will restoring the order of precedence alone lead to a qualitative improvement of higher education?

Showing disrespect and indifference to teachers and professionals is certainly not the way to go about building a knowledge-based economy. Prestige and status of senior university teachers, and unnecessary comparison to civil and military bureaucrats, should never even have become an issue as university teachers are recruited from among the very best students in the country. They are, moreover, along with teachers at all levels of education, primarily responsible for nurturing and moulding the minds of the youth who go on to become leaders in different professions. The proposed increase in salaries is not any special favour being bestowed on teachers, as their emoluments are still far below those of their counterparts in neighbouring countries.

The case of other public sector teachers and professionals also deserve consideration. A 123 percent increase in salaries is certainly welcome, but status and societal recognition of their worth are also very important for all teachers, researchers, and health, agriculture and technology professionals. Those who live and work in non-metropolitan areas deserve special financial incentives to support decentralisation of services and benefits. A comprehensive solution is required for which one of the most important measures is the formation of a separate pay commission that not only looks after the interest of senior academics, but of all publicly funded teachers, and knowledge-related professionals in the country.



Students have strongly supported the cause of their mentors even though they have the most to lose in a protracted industrial action. It is, therefore, the duty of the teachers to look after the long term interests and legitimate demands of the student community. Even if their demands are met, university teachers should use their new-found unity and momentum to forge a broad-based coalition of teachers, professionals and students to formulate a roadmap for developing quality education at all levels that produces good citizens and a well trained workforce, and also build a need-based higher education system that caters specifically to the socio-economic development of the country.

The fact that not a single university in Bangladesh at the moment appears in the list of the best 400 universities in Asia (based primarily on research productivity and international recognition) would suggest that standards of higher education must have slipped. Senior figures in the education sector maintain that standards have not actually dropped but other

countries have done better. The reason why other countries have outdone us is because they have invested heavily in postgraduate research and in science and technology. Low research output in laboratory sciences can be partially attributed to high equipment and operational costs, but what excuse do we have for scientific disciplines such as mathematics and theoretical physics, or for social sciences and humanities? Research publication does not necessarily appear to be a critical determinant for career progression for academics in Bangladesh, and there is not much encouragement or incentives for those who carry out research under very difficult circumstances. Bangladesh does not spend enough on education or R&D and the meagre resources are spread too thin because of a lack of focus on national priorities, and absence of coordination in their implementation.

The biggest investment that Bangladesh could make in its own future would be in building internationally competitive science-based education with emphasis on postgraduate

research and innovation. These have been shown to be the biggest contributors to economic development in advanced countries and rapidly advancing countries of the developing world. Bangladesh could learn from the positive experiences of other developing countries. Malaysia has spent 20- 25 percent of its annual budget for the last two decades on education, and established five well-funded research universities. South Korea has achieved the status of an advanced economy by consistently spending around 8 percent of its annual GDP on education, and an additional 2-3 percent on R&D to preferentially support university-industry partnerships. India has established over 40 world-class postgraduate research centres (deemed universities), and Secretaries of all science-related ministries are on deputation from universities and research institutions. The Higher Education Commission in Pakistan, under the leadership of Professor Atta-ur-Rahman, has instituted two extraordinary measures. Academics and researchers can receive very attractive cash awards annually for measurable research productivity, and those exhibiting consistent and exceptional achievements are made HEC National Professors. It is possible for active researchers and HEC National Professors, irrespective of age or seniority, to have annual incomes higher than that of senior bureaucrats and government ministers. Many of the above initiatives are worth emulating in Bangladesh.

In developing countries that have made the most spectacular progress through education, research and innovation, the most significant determinants have been political will and enlightened leadership as demonstrated, among others, by Indira Gandhi in India, Mahathir Mohamad in Malaysia, Fidel Castro in Cuba, and Lee Kuan Yew in Singapore. It is hoped that our Honourable Prime Minister, who has on numerous occasions demonstrated the courage of her convictions, will provide the strongest support to higher education and science and technology, so that intellectual capital becomes the primary weapon for achieving the development objectives of Vision 2021 and 2041.

The writer is a retired professor of medical biotechnology who devotes his time (pro bono) to research capacity development in Bangladesh and establishment of collaborative networks of scientists of Bangladeshi origin.

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Making the most of the demographic dividend

SELIM RAIHAN

FOR long, debates among economists and social scientists on the impact of population change on economic development centered on positions that population growth either restricts, promotes, or is independent of economic development. Despite the merits of these views, a critical issue is largely ignored which is the age structure of the population that can change dramatically as the population grows. As people's economic behaviour varies at different stages of life, changes in a country's age structure can have substantial effects on its economic performance. This latter view relates to a 'demographic dividend' which can exert a large positive effect on the economy stemming from a favourable age structure of the country.

The demographic dividend is not, however, automatic. With the right kind of policy environment, this demographic dividend can attain the targeted objectives. This brings to the fundamental question: how do some countries make the most of the demographic dividend and why others don't?

A simple association between the demographic dividend and per capita income, as is shown in the scatter-plot, can shed some light on this issue. The scatter-plot is generated with the data of 124 countries for the period between 1950 and 2010 with five-year intervals. The demographic dividend is calculated from the data of the United Nations (Department of Economic and Social Affairs-Population Division), and is defined as the ratio of working age population to the dependent population. The per capita income data are from the World Bank WDI. Since demographic dividend might have a lag effect on per capita income change, we assume that the data of demographic

dividend for any particular year corresponds to the average per capita income data for the subsequent five years. For example, demographic dividend data for 1950 corresponds to the average of per capita income data for 1951-1955. The trend line (red-dotted) shows a very strong positive association between the demographic dividend and per capita income. Though simple, but even this scatter-plot tells us a very interesting story. If

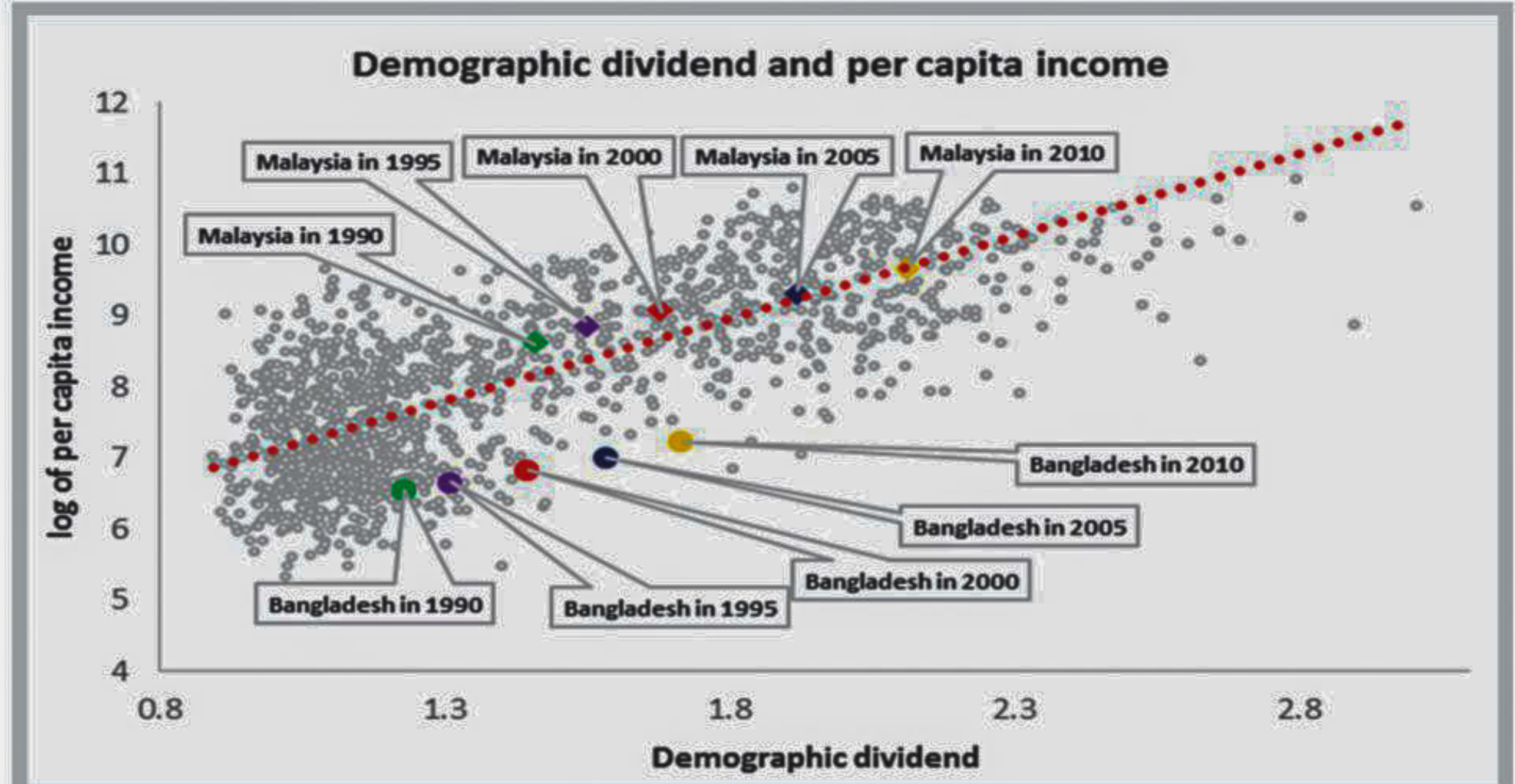
compared to Bangladesh, Malaysia was much better able to utilise its demographic dividend to raise its per capita income during the period under consideration. For Bangladesh, the concern is that the country is yet to exploit the demographic dividend it has, and over time, the distance from the trend line has enlarged. Interestingly, in 2010, Bangladesh had a demographic dividend similar to the one Malaysia had in 2000, but

explanatory variables are the log of demographic dividend (as defined earlier) and two interaction variables – first one is the interaction between log of demographic dividend and South Asia dummy and the second one is the interaction between log of demographic dividend and East Asia dummy. We also add a few other control variables such as fixed capital formation as percent of GDP, government consumption as percent of

significant signs: the ratio of fixed capital formation to GDP, the ratio of government consumption to GDP, the trade-GDP ratio and manufacturing export to total export ratio have positive and significant signs, and the under-five mortality rate has a negative and significant sign. The demographic dividend variable has a positive and significant sign and the size of the coefficient suggest that 1 percent increase in the demographic dividend leads to 0.24 percent increase in the per capita income. Both South Asia and East Asia interaction dummies are positive and significant with coefficients 0.87 and 1.71 respectively, suggesting that these two regions have larger positive effects of demographic dividends on the rise in their per capita incomes than the global average. However, the effect is double for East Asia compared to that for South Asia.

How did the East Asian countries make the best use of the demographic dividend? Evidences suggest that compared to the South Asian countries, most of the East Asian countries were in a better position to successfully capitalise on shifts in their age structures to gain a boost in economic productivity. The critical policy areas that made the difference included investment on youth development, expanding access to family planning, investment in infrastructure, public health, education, especially female education and skill development. Also, decisive policy emphasis was on promoting both labour-intensive and skill intensive jobs, savings and openness to trade and foreign investment.

The writer is Professor, Department of Economics, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh, and Executive Director, South Asian Network on Economic Modelling (SANEM). Email: selim.raihan@econdu.ac.bd



we compare an East Asian country (Malaysia) with a South Asian country (Bangladesh) we find that both Malaysia and Bangladesh, during 1990 and 2010, were experiencing rising demographic dividends which contributed to the rise in their per capita incomes. However, Bangladesh has always been much below the trend line, whereas Malaysia was always on or above the trend line. This suggests that

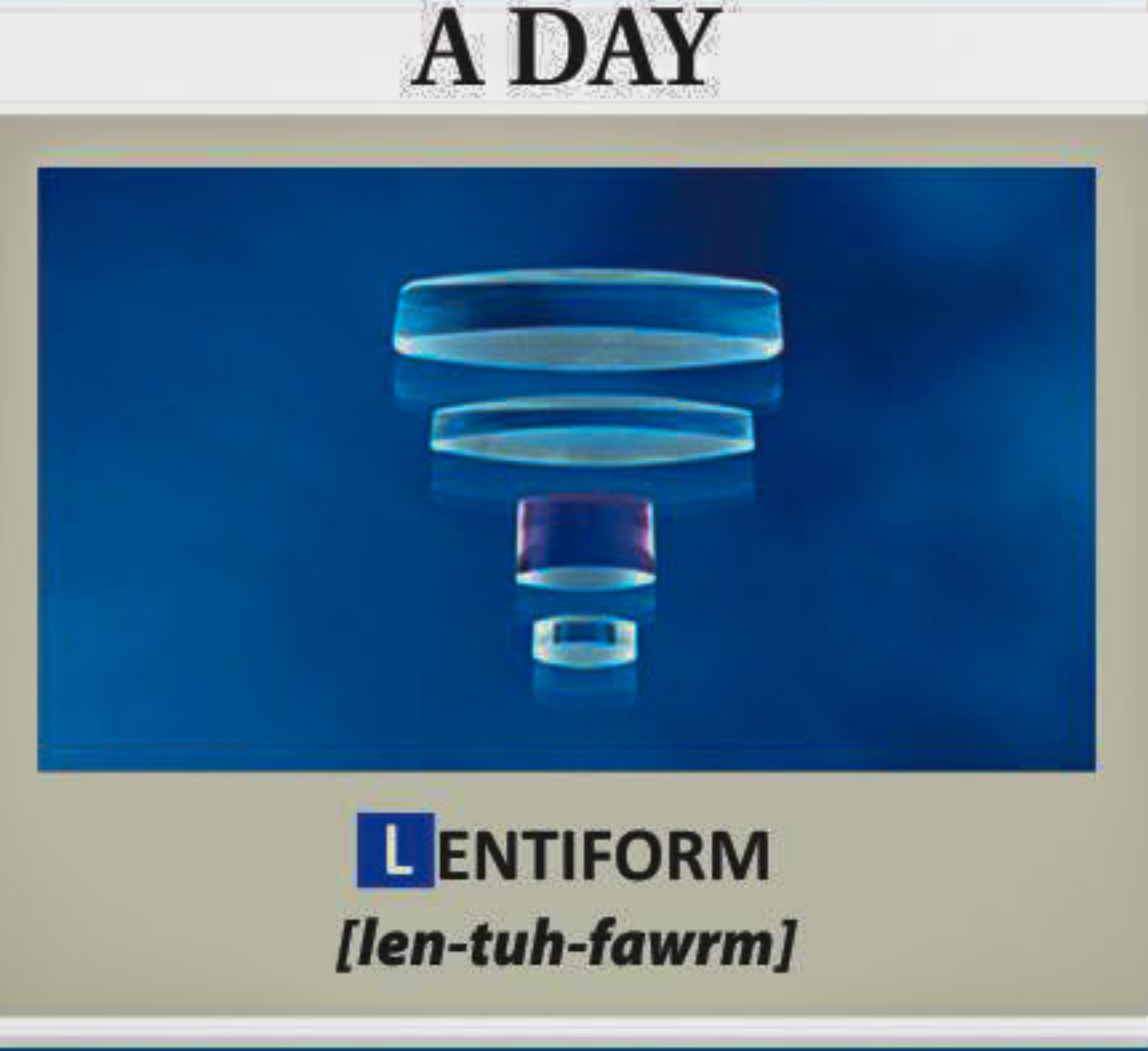
Bangladesh in 2010 had one-seventh of the per capita income of what Malaysia had in 2000.

The aforementioned analysis is also supported by results from a cross-country least square dummy variable (LSDV) panel regression of 124 countries for the period between 1950 and 2010 with data of five-year intervals. Here the dependent variable is the log of per capita income. The

GDP, trade-GDP ratio, under-five mortality rate and manufacturing export as percent of total export. As we did in the scatter-plot exercise, here we also assume that the data of demographic dividend for any particular year corresponds to the respective averages of all other variables of the subsequent five years. The LSDV panel regression results suggest that all control variables have expected and

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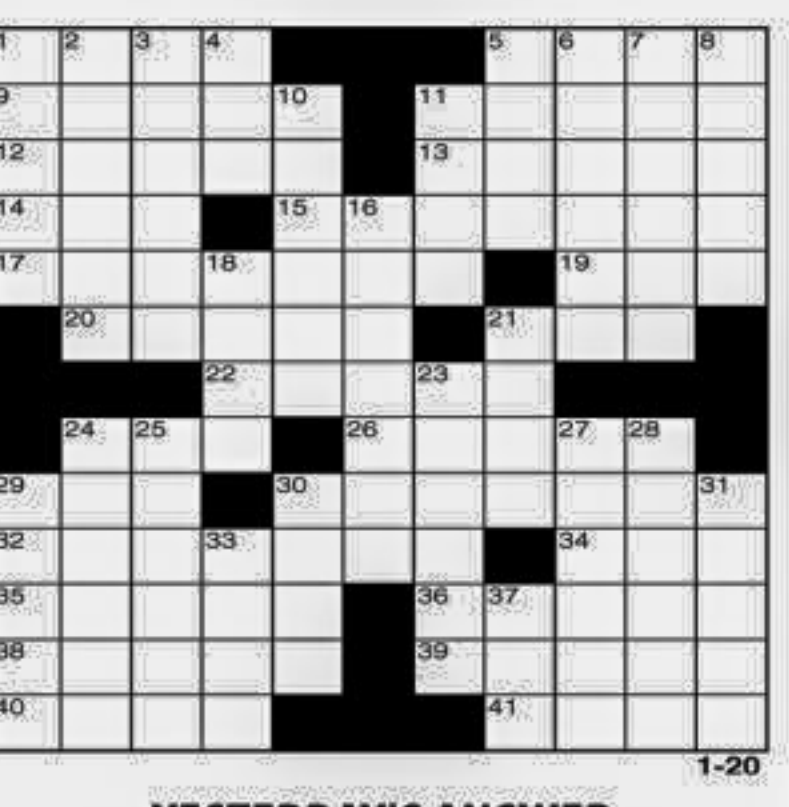
A WORD A DAY



Shaped like a biconvex lens

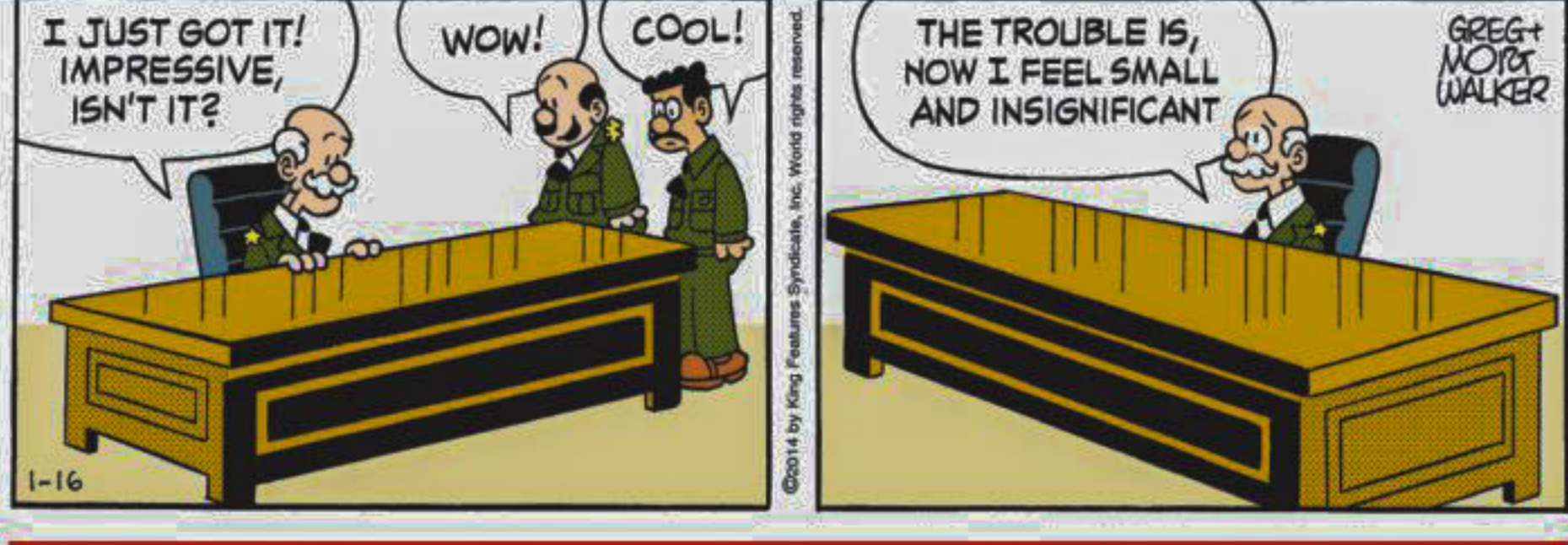
CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- Across: 1 Tropical tree, 5 Cell feature, 9 Disney mermaid, 11 Indian coin, 12 Hag, 13 Wed in secret, 14 Great weight, 15 Competed in a bee, 17 Ballooned, 19 Put down, 20 Murdered, 21 Blazing, 22 Pound parts, 24 Spots on TV, 26 Provinces, 29 Chowd down, 30 Got wind of, 32 Like ready-to-eat shrimp, 34 Diner dessert, 35 Sioux shelter, 36 Spanish resort isle, 38 Tipped, 39 Printer need, 40 Tirade.
- Down: 1 Porgy's love, 1 Accords, 2 Quiver contents, 3 Music's Hampton, 4 Fellows, 5 Male moose, 6 Brother of Artemis, 7 Iterate, 8 Squalid, 10 Caron of "Gigi", 11 Oboe part, 16 Mark Twain, for one, 18 Track count, 21 Shoe part, 23 College unit, 24 Goddess of Wisdom, 25 Intensify, 27 Like edelweiss, 28 Confiscates, 29 Fur tycoon, 30 Iditarod need, 31 Sweet-hearts, 33 Easter lead-in, 37 Short cut.



YESTERDAY'S ANSWER
 BAZAAR SCAR
 USED TO HALO
 THE DEPARTED
 SIEVE
 STUN ODDS
 SOAP BISECT
 OWN SAD MOO
 LEGACY SOUP
 DODO SENT
 ONICE
 THEREVENT
 WERE ENTREE
 OWED STOKED

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker



BABY BLUES by Kirkman & Scott

