

F R KHAN

A Bangalee legend from the golden chapter of our history

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IN the limited scope of this piece, I intend to remember the role of a great Bangalee in our Liberation War of 1971 - the Bangalee who, through his contributions, became a legend in the engineering world. There is hardly a Bangalee who is not familiar with his name. He was Dr. Fazlur Rahman Khan, better known as F R Khan.

F R Khan was a resident of Chicago, and a senior partner and chief architect of Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, the world-renowned architecture and engineering firm. He was declared 'Architect of the Year' six times, including in 1971. Later, through the use of a special structural system of design, he designed the Sears Tower, the tallest building of the world at that time, situated in Chicago, which brought him global fame and recognition.

A few years ago, US President Barack Obama noted in a speech directed to the Muslim world, and delivered in Cairo, "An American Muslim built our country's tallest tower". In that speech, the man he was referring to was none other than our legend, the pride of every Bangalee - Dr. F R Khan.

On March 26, after the military crackdown began, Dr. F R Khan provided leadership to mobilise



F R Khan

Bangalees scattered around the United States. With the help of some prominent Americans, he set up the Emergency Welfare Appeals fund. He also founded the Bangladesh Defense League. Despite his busy schedule, Dr. Khan served as the chairman of both these organisations.

At that time, there were many high ranking Bangalee officers in the

Pakistani embassy in Washington, and the UN permanent mission in New York. Among them was the Vice Consul of the UN mission, Mr. A H Mahmud Ali (current foreign minister of Bangladesh), who dissociated from Pakistani Mission on April 26. In fact, he was the first serving Bangalee diplomat from any Pakistani mission outside India to

pledge his allegiance publicly to Bangladesh. Among others were S A Karim and Enayet Karim (second and third foreign secretaries of Bangladesh, respectively), S M Kibria (former finance minister) and A M Muhiith (current finance minister). Among them, Mr. Muhiith left the embassy on June 30 and remained in touch with the movement in the United States. On July 5, the Mujibnagar government issued a directive to the embassy officials to quit the embassy and set up the Bangladesh missions in Washington and New York. Although other officers were willing to transfer allegiance, promise of financial assistance from the provisional government was not enough for their sustenance. At this stage, Dr. F R Khan met with the officers, and promised them additional financial support until victory was attained in the Liberation War, leading to en-masse defection of all Bangalee diplomats and staff in Pakistani missions in both Washington and New York. At that time and situation, it is not difficult to extrapolate the depth of his love for the people of his motherland which motivated him to make such a promise.

After our victory in the Liberation War, Dr. Khan visited Bangladesh at the special invitation of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur

Rahman. In 1999, during the first government under the leadership of Sheikh Hasina, he was posthumously awarded the Shadhinata Padak.

In the early 70s, when I was studying at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign to pursue my doctoral study, I met this great Bangalee. Like me, he too came from Faridpur and as such, was a little partial in his affection for me. Incidentally, after Dr. FR Khan, I became the second Bangalee to receive a doctorate in Engineering from the said university's prestigious engineering school. Because of our common last name, professors at my school would often ask if we were relatives. At that time, he used to teach a course titled Tall Building Design, some eighty miles away in Springfield, a satellite campus of the university. An Indian roommate of mine from the Department of Civil Engineering was enrolled in the course, and although I was not a student of Civil Engineering, I used to accompany him to attend Dr. Khan's lectures.

After designing the Sears Tower - a building that Newsweek termed as the "best engineering invention of 1973" - Dr. Khan designed a number of famous buildings, including the John Hancock Tower and the Jeddah Hajj Terminal.

People would also be amazed to

know that he superseded 17 university alumni Nobel Laureates to be recognised as the Notable Alumni of the University of Illinois. In addition, he is known as the Albert Einstein of structural engineering and the best structural engineer of the 20th century. I am not aware of any other Bangalee who has been bestowed with such an honour.

It was a great loss to the world - the field of structural engineering, in particular - when on March 27, 1983 at the age of only 53, the legend bid us adieu forever. The news of his death shook everyone, as exemplified by the reaction of another war legend Justice Abu Sayeed Chowdhury, who said, "After reaching the highest spectrum of pursuit, he was a humble man, whose patriotism fascinated me. He spent all his life away from the country; how could anyone know the depth of his love for the people of his motherland; how could they perceive the cruel pain of anguish that was troubling him. He left us today, did not wait for Thanksgiving and did not allow us to say goodbye. The tears in my eyes are flowing as I started to write about him. Unblemished memories of him will always shake me as it is doing now, as long as I live."

The writer is the Convenor of the Canadian Committee for Human Rights and Democracy in Bangladesh.

How education and stimulation in early years can help children thrive for a lifetime

BJORN LOMBORG

TODAY, 99 percent of Bangladesh's girls and 97 percent of boys are enrolled in primary school. The great progress in primary education over recent years is the reason that the country has met the two Millennium Development Goals related to primary schooling: universal enrollment and gender equality.

The rest of the education story, however, is not so good. Concerns remain over poor education quality, and enrollment rates beyond the primary level remain low. And one important concern for education is something that appears rather separate: stunting, or the condition of being shorter than normal for one's age. It matters, because it holds back learning and development.

Investment in education holds promise to help move Bangladesh closer to the goals of Vision 2021 and beyond. What are the best ways to address the issues faced by the country's education system?

New research by economist Atonu Rabbani of the University of Dhaka suggests that there are several worthwhile strategies that could improve public education in Bangladesh. One is most promising of all: so-called psychosocial stimulation to help young children overcome stunting.

Six million Bangladeshi children, including 40 percent of kids under 5 years old, are stunted. It can be caused by inadequate nutrition or repeated infections during a child's first three years. The effects often last a lifetime: delayed cognitive development, lower productivity, poor health, and increased risk of certain diseases.

And the importance of early childhood development is crucial: Studies show that early development means higher intellectual achievement later in life, higher future income, and less criminal

activities. It can even lead to better health outcomes.

Fortunately, there's solid evidence for a strategy that can help stunted children overcome their early-life setbacks entirely and allow them to become just as healthy and productive later in life as their peers.

The analysis examined a project that was launched in 1986 in Jamaica. At the beginning of the study, stunted children between age 9-24 months lagged behind in both learning and productivity compared to non-stunted kids. During the course of the programme, stunted children were visited weekly by education social workers, who led play sessions to develop cognitive, language, and psychosocial skills. The visits lasted for two years, and the social workers also taught the mothers of the children how to do

STRATEGY	TAKAS OF BENEFITS PER TAKA SPENT
PSYCHOSOCIAL STIMULATION	18
STREAMING KIDS ACCORDING TO ABILITY	12
PROFESSIONAL AND BUSINESS TRAINING	5

the same stimulating activities with their children, so the effort lasted beyond the workers' end date.

The results of the long-term study in Jamaica could hardly be believed - the psychosocial activities had negated all the deleterious effects of stunting. After 20 years, the children in the programme had completely made up the gap to their non-stunted peers, as demonstrated by their equal wage and earnings levels. Stunted children who were not part of the programme, however, earned 25 percent less than the wages of the treated and non-stunted groups.

When translated to Bangladesh, the cost of such a programme is one hour per week for a social worker for each child, which would equal Tk.12,450 per child each year. And the benefits turn out to be incredible. An estimated wage

increase of nearly 20 percent is worth more than Tk. 1.5 million (Tk. 15 lakh) for each child over their working career. Each taka spent on psychosocial stimulation programmes for early education of children would do Tk. 18 of benefits.

The benefits from the stimulation programme were most promising, but other strategies that the research examined held promise to do good as well.

Among the various programmes studied, "streaming," or reassigning students into groups according to their levels of educational attainment, has shown promise to increase student achievement in a cost-effective manner. The experts conservatively estimate that in Bangladesh, every Tk. 7,800 spent on reassigning students according to their achievement levels could increase student test scores by nearly two standard deviations, which is correlated with earning higher future wages. The money would be spent throughout the five years of primary schooling and could also allow for hiring more teachers. Each taka spent toward these efforts would do about Tk. 12 of good.

On-the-job training for managers also appears to be a decent idea. It can help increase firm productivity and the wellbeing of employees, especially in sectors like the readymade garment industry, where schooling levels are actually lower for many new supervisors and managers. The return on investment in professional training would come from increased worker productivity. It may not be as large as human capital investment in early childhood, but it may be more in line with firms' incentives. Each taka spent on this sort of training would do Tk. 5 of good. A remaining challenge, however, is that there are still social norms that prevent women from achieving management roles, which hinders progress for many and



PHOTO: STAR

contributes to lower productivity.

What do you think? Is investing in schooling, and in early childhood education in particular, the best way forward for Bangladesh? Earlier, we saw how improving migration opportunities could provide benefits.

Where would you choose to spend money if you were in charge and wanted to do the most good for the country? Let us hear from you at <https://copenhagen.fbapp.io/education>. We want to continue the conversation about how Bangladesh

can do the most good for every taka spent.

The writer is president of the Copenhagen Consensus Center, ranking the smartest solutions to the world's biggest problems by cost-benefit. He was ranked one of the world's 100 most influential people by Time magazine.

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker



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