

Natural disasters and uninterrupted education

MD ABDUL QUAYYUM and OLI MD. ABDULLAH CHOWDHURY

MANY readers are likely to have come across the powerful photo and news published on schools affected by flood in northern and central regions of Bangladesh in *The Daily Star* on August 4, 2016. The photo of schoolgirls, wading through knee-deep floodwater at the premises of a school in Tangail Sadar upazila to attend classes, spoke more than a thousand words. Education in emergency deserves more attention in Bangladesh, one of the most vulnerable countries in the world to climate change, and children have to bear a disproportionate brunt of its effects.

In Bangladesh, children comprise 39.7 percent of the population. A prosperous future is contingent upon the opportunity for these children to grow as able and competent citizens with equality and without discrimination. It is, therefore, obligatory for the country to provide a congenial environment for children to reach their maximum potential. Government's efforts for children's wellbeing have been sincere and sustained. Bangladesh is among the first few countries to ratify the two most significant global treaties that protect the rights of children namely, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

Formulation of the National Children Policy 2011, National Children Act 2013, and National Child Labour Elimination Policy 2010 are significant steps in ensuring a better life for each and every child across the country.

Bangladesh enters the era of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with a solid development base arising from progress on several Millennium Development Goal (MDG) targets. Adequate education will drive productivity of young adults and



Students of Hoshne Ara Hasan Girls High School, Tangail, wade through floodwater to attend class.

PHOTO: STAR

ultimately economic growth in the coming decades. Despite all this significant progress, poverty coupled with natural disasters prevent many children from enjoying their right to education, which is embodied in the UNCRC. Bangladesh is also committed to ensure primary education for all children. Article 17 of the Bangladesh Constitution specifies that the State shall adopt effective measures for the purpose of establishing a uniform, mass-oriented and universal system of education and extending free and compulsory education to all children.

Compulsory Primary Education Act, 1990 and Primary Education Development Programme (PEDP) also show the importance of basic education for all children.

However, all these policies and programmes are often defeated by the ever changing climate of Bangladesh that often leads to natural disasters. Impacts of disasters such as cyclones, floods, flash floods, riverbank erosion on children's education are severe and harmful. It damages school infrastructure, disrupts educational activities

and displaces children and their families. Children also lose their learning materials. The UNICEF report states that on average, 900 schools suffer severe damage from floods, cyclones and river erosion every year in Bangladesh. More than 4,666 schools are affected by disasters per year. In the past three years, natural disasters – particularly cyclones – have disrupted the education of more than 1.5 million children.

If we want to achieve the SDG's, there is no alternative but to ensure education of the children before, during and after any

emergency. Preparedness, quality, participation and coordination are key principles while delivering education during any emergency situation. Preparedness for disaster allows time to think through the impact on schools, effect on the education system, ways to support the most vulnerable groups and how to gauge the response of other actors in advance.

In Bangladesh, there is no common guideline for school emergency response and it is not addressed significantly in the country disaster management plan and policy. Different development agencies like Save the Children are working with the government for the development and standardisation of these guidelines under the comprehensive school safety theme through DIPECHO-8, an action plan supported by the European Commission. NGOs have been providing non-formal primary education (NFPE) to out-of-school children principally in remote disaster-prone locations, including coast, chars, haors, and hill tracts since 2007. Education was suspended after Cyclone Roanu hit the coastal areas, but with support from international donors like IKEA Foundation, non-formal primary education was resumed quickly in Cox's Bazar through Save the Children's operated SHIKHON programme.

Bangladesh sits on a three-way junction of major tectonic plates, and dangerous pressure is building along a fault line, according to research published earlier this year. The situation could unleash a massive earthquake, putting children's lives and education at high risk. We need to get our act together right now to protect the future of Bangladesh by redefining the role of institutions in both education and disaster management.

The writers are Senior Manager, Communication and Media, Save the Children, and Senior Officer, Communication, Save the Children. Emails: abdul.quayyum@savethechildren.org, oli.chowdhury@savethechildren.org.

Bankruptcy in pension system

A crisis in modern society



TOM PU-CHIH HSIEH

THE bankruptcy of public pension funds is an issue worldwide. According to a recent study conducted by Allianz, pension systems in most Asian countries are "fragile and unstable."

Hong Kong and Singapore are the only countries in Asia to rank within the top 20 nations worldwide for pension sustainability.

Western countries face the same problem. There is a gap of USD78 trillion in pension funds among the 20 richest countries in the world.

In Germany, France, Italy, England, Portugal and Spain, pension fund liabilities amount to more than three times each country's national GDP.

In Taiwan, the pension issue is particularly severe.

Civil servants have taken to the streets to protest the government's plan to cut their benefits, while a smear campaign accuses them of causing the pension system's woes in the first place.

It is unusual that teachers, soldiers and public servants - usually seen as some of the most stabilising forces in society - should take to the streets and protest their own government.

Of course, it is not fair to make civil servants the scapegoats for the pension system's impending bankruptcy. After all, the system was designed by the government.

But it is also hard to neglect the fact that in Taiwan, the average monthly pension for civil servants is at least three to four times higher than that of those in the private sector.

Not to mention that funds for civil servant pensions are derived primarily from taxes

paid by companies and non-public sector workers.

It is similarly difficult to overlook the depravity of a system that allows a retired civil servant to earn a pension three to four times higher than the salary of a hard working young person.

These factors have sown discord among the populous.

They likewise make it difficult for ordinary workers to lend a sympathetic ear to the retired civil servants asking the government to bail-out their pensions.

If the government follows the doctrine of legitimate expectation and pays retired civil servants what they have demanded, it will crowd out government funding for other social welfare projects. After all, it is not only the pension system for civil servants that is facing bankruptcy.

Dissatisfaction is a natural response for ordinary workers and has allowed the call for cuts to civil servant pension funds to go viral.

It has caused disputes between civil servants and non-public sector workers. Threats to social disorder are growing stronger.

Threats to pension systems worldwide

Two major factors threaten the pension systems worldwide: reduced birth rates and the widening gap between the rich and the poor due to economic liberalisation.

Pension systems require contributions from the workforce to function. If more retired people receive pension payouts and fewer working people contribute to the fund, the system is doomed to fail. That is, unless the government steps in.

This is already happening in developed countries. Baby boomers are now at retirement age but find their pensions shrinking because fewer people are contributing to the pool, a consequence of



the reduced birth rate. Baby boomers, especially civil servants, are asking the government to allocate taxpayer funds to the pool to fulfil past promises.

It is estimated that Taiwan's pension system for civil servants will be depleted in about ten years if no drastic changes are made to the current system.

Some younger civil servants even said they will stop contributing money to the retirement fund, as its imminent bankruptcy means there is little incentive for them to contribute.

Another phenomenon in capitalist countries is growing wealth inequality.

In recent years, almost 90 percent of global wealth has been concentrated in the hands of 10 percent of the population in the name of economic liberalisation.

Although there seems to be a big difference between the economic situations of civil servants and non-public sector workers, actually, in relative terms, both groups belong to the new poor.

A responsible government should never teach one poor group to hate another poor

community by identifying the latter as a scapegoat.

Irresponsible politicians may seek to divert the public's attention from its inability to manage the country's finances by creating social conflicts, but they will ultimately face the consequences of tearing the country apart.

Pension system reform

Taiwan's government is preparing to make laws to alter its Income Replacement Ratio, which is currently the highest on Earth. A retired civil servant in Taiwan usually receives more than 100 percent of the ratio, while in most countries the ratio usually ranges between 50-70 percent.

Other methods for pension reform are also up for discussion, such as delaying pension fund contributions until retirees reach a certain age, providing lower

payouts to retirees and mandating higher monthly contributions from working people.

Besides encouraging systematic reforms to pension funds themselves, a good government should always try to revive the economy and encourage the rich to reinvest their profits in the country.

By creating investment opportunities and urging entrepreneurs to be more aware of their social responsibilities, the gap between the rich and the poor can be narrowed and the government can secure more funding to salvage the pension system.

The writer is Executive Editor, *The China Post*.

This is the tenth article in a series of columns on the global affairs written by top editors from members of the Asia News Network and published in newspapers across the region.



QUOTABLE Quote

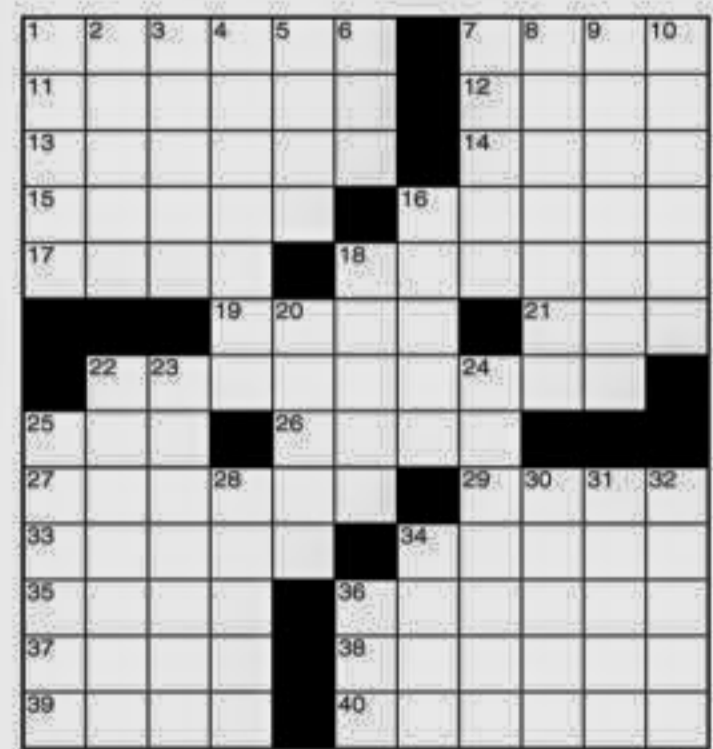


VIRGINIA WOOLF

Once conform, once do what other people do because they do it, and a lethargy steals over all the finer nerves and faculties of the soul. She becomes all outer show and inward emptiness; dull, callous, and indifferent.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- | | |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| ACROSS | DOWN |
| 1 Woolly mammal | 1 Polygon corner |
| 7 Swift horse | 2 Dr. Seuss' environmental character |
| 11 Ordinary | 3 Tag info |
| 12 Seedy joint | 4 Legal forgiveness |
| 13 Daily routines | 5 Rogues |
| 14 Big-scale movie | 6 Green and Gore |
| 15 Oxford features | 7 "Hello" singer |
| 16 Garment | 8 Snappy reply |
| 17 Alimony payers | 9 Ace, e.g. |
| 18 Magic word | 10 Call over |
| 19 Literary plantation | 16 Bananas |
| 21 Cargo unit | 18 Trim the topiary |
| 22 Practical joker's gadget | 20 Aids in crime |
| 25 Pool unit | 22 Fragrant flower |
| 26 "Orinoco Flow" singer | 23 Joined a mailing list |
| 27 Monticello, for one | 24 President before Millard |
| 29 Brisk pace | 25 One in front |
| 33 Hymn closers | 28 Battery end |
| 34 Classic 1953 western | 30 - lazuli |
| 35 Playful prank | 31 Bay |
| 36 Basic need | 32 Jury makeup |
| 37 Writer Bagnold | 34 Commotion |
| 38 Better ventilated | 36 Was inactive |
| 39 Painter Magritte | |
| 40 Secret meetings | |



YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

S	A	B	E	R	A	B	A	B	E	S
P	R	A	T	E	A	D	U	L	T	
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R	I	S	E	S	S	A	S	S	Y	

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker



BABY BLUES by Kirkman & Scott

