## Finding the learning curve

On the occasion of National Education Day, we should honour the sacrifice of the students of 1962 by ensuring that no student is forced to live without education and to improve our system to the best of our abilities. We need to understand that our National **Education Policy** 2010 is not an absolute entity and scope for changes and amendment will always be there and errors can

always be

rectified.

QUAZI FARUQUE AHMED

HE National Education Day, which was observed on September 17, is a commemoration of the movement against discrimination and deprivation in education and for scrapping the unpopular Shareef Commission Report on education by the students in the then East Pakistan in the early sixties. On that day, school student Babul, bus conductor Golam Mostafa and domestic worker Waziullah sacrificed their lives in support of the movement of school and college students. I participated in the movement as an activist in the capacity of General Secretary of Dhaka College Students' Union. I was fortunate to preside over the first formal meeting on this burning issue at the Dhaka College cycle stand. The meeting was attended by student

representatives from Dhaka and outskirts of the city. It needs to be mentioned here that the 1962 education movement was initiated by the students alone without any outside influence; to be specific, not under the traditional partisan student leadership. The central student leaders could not foresee that such a huge movement would be possible based on academic issues and problems faced by the students. The momentum of the movement subsided when the then opposition leader H. S. Suhrawardy came to Dhaka from Karachi and met East Pakistan Governor Golam Faruk, persuading him to defer the implementation of the Shareef Commission Report.

This year Education Day was observed with a focus on the national resistance to terrorism and violence and the delay in passing of the Education Law, for which establishment of a statutory Permanent Education Commission could not be realised. The 54th anniversary of the historic moment was observed with the vow to

accelerate the pace of progress and peace in the face of recent terrorism and violence, which also involved a number of young students who study in private universities and madrassas. Apart from this pressing issue, the absence of appropriate allocation in education, disparity and corporal punishment - even after a court verdict banning it - heavy load of books on children and lack of supervision and accountability are other major concerns of the education system today.

It must also be noted that in recent years, the education sector witnessed several positive changes, such as free distribution of textbooks to primary and secondary students, reform in the curriculum after 17 years, introduction of creative questioning system, use of information technology in the publication of examination results, introduction of pre-primary class, development of the infrastructure of education institutions, stipends for girls, achievement of gender parity in primary and secondary education, introduction of school banking for students, induction of student cabinets to help understand the democratic practice, etc. However, the issues centring our

education system are many. Despite several attempts, the dropout rate in primary, secondary and higher secondary levels has not been decreasing as expected. It is still quite high. Poverty, child marriage, highpriced 'note-guide' books, compulsory coaching and weak teaching system are some of the main factors behind the high dropout rates. If, for example, one hundred students get enrolled in class one, out of them only 32 students remain till the intermediate level, the rest 68 students drop out of the educational institution. Though incentives in the form of stipends, distribution of free textbooks, school feeding programmes are ongoing, the



dropout rate continues to be a problem. The Bangladesh Bureau of **Educational Information and Statistics** (BANBEIS) disclosed this fact recently. Apart from the factors mentioned above, Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid has also stated that entrance of students in the job market due to poverty and failing in text and final exams are two other reasons why students prefer to drop out before completing their education. In 2014, World Bank released a report on the

state of education in Bangladesh, which stated that weak teaching methods and weak education foundation of students further aggravate the drop out situation.

Finland began the reform of its education system some 40 years ago. Today, Finland's school system is ranked at the top among developed nations, as measured by the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), and international standardised tests for 15-year-olds in

language, math and science. The most interesting aspect of their education system is that Finland achieved its success by breaking what are considered the customary rules of education. Finnish children do not begin school until the age of seven, when they are ready to learn, and schooling is compulsory for just nine years. School days are shorter and there are fewer class. Homework is minimal. There are no mandated standardised tests. There are no ranking, comparisons or competition between students, schools or regions.

Yet 93 percent of Finns graduate from academic or vocational high schools; this is 17 percent higher than in the US. Sixty six percent pursue higher education, the highest rate in the European Union. And Finland spends about 30 percent less per student than the US.

On the occasion of National Education Day, we should honour the sacrifice of the students of 1962 by ensuring that no student is forced to live without education and to improve our system to the best of our abilities. We need to understand that our National Education Policy 2010 is not an absolute entity and scope for changes and amendment will always be there and errors can always be rectified. Education is a dynamic concept. The process of adaptation and modernisation should continue while keeping pace with the development of knowledge and science. We can learn from Finland and adopt at least some of their strategies to ensure that dropout rates are kept at the minimum. With the help of practical experiences acquired during the implementation stage of the policy, and through the application of modern knowledge, science and technology, we can continue to enrich the policy.

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## Counting our chickens (Statistically speaking)

KUNDHAVI KADIRESAN

IKE many, I remember the warnings of parents and teachers to never count your chickens before they've hatched, and to never keep all your eggs in one basket. But moving beyond the clichés have you ever stopped to wonder just how many chickens there are in Asia or the world? And how many eggs must hens lay each day to feed us all? These lighthearted questions in fact carry a serious message. If we didn't know how many chickens we could produce or how many eggs they could lay, our food value chains would begin to fall apart. The same important facts must be known for all food produced. Supply must meet demand.

We know counting is important for a myriad of reasons. We count the number of people on the planet and we mathematically project a rise in population - by 2050 the world's population is expected to grow by another two-billion topping out at more than nine billion - and we rightly worry about whether we will be able to produce enough food to feed everyone by then.

So ensuring that we can accurately count our chickens or our sheep, while correctly predicting our supplies of rice, fruits, vegetables and crops, are critical. Unfortunately, we don't always get the count right and some countries are better than others when it comes to collecting agricultural statistics. That's why it's time to work together to improve the way we

gather these statistics worldwide. The UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), is working with our member countries and partners to improve these agricultural counts. Since 1950, FAO has been a leader in agricultural censuses by providing technical guidance to countries that conduct their national censuses every ten years. More recently, our member countries have asked us to find ways to improve the methods of gathering statistics and to provide guidance on sustainable production, livestock, forestry,



fisheries and how to analyse impacts from

climate change.

To implement better practices on statistical gathering, and to share best practices on agricultural and rural statistics between countries, FAO and our partners are supporting two major initiatives. One is called the Global Strategy to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics and the other is the World Programme for the Census of Agriculture 2020 (WCA 2020). The Global Strategy, provides the vision for national and international statistical systems to meet 21st century challenges, including poverty, food insecurity, global warming and the sustainable use of land and water resources. The WCA 2020 is providing governments with a new approach to comprehensive data collection

on the structure of agriculture and it facilitates international comparisons. A new global census round is getting underway this year and, for the first time it will include aquaculture as well as capture fisheries.

In order for national policy makers to intervene in agricultural production, at the right time and in the right place, they need reliable statistics. The data provided by these national censuses will form the foundation for building better systems that collect more recent and periodic information. For the first time, this new round of censuses will look at the impacts that greenhouse gas and ammonia emissions are having on agricultural activities.

This month professional statisticians and census leaders, who are likely to play a role in

the planning and execution of the next agricultural census in their respective countries, are meeting in Bangkok to discuss WCA 2020. A total of 21 countries from Asia are participating, including Bangladesh.

But all this attention is about more than just numbers and ways to count. As mentioned, statistics are the foundation of world agriculture. They underpin all agricultural decisions and work, and provide valuable information to meet challenges such as food insecurity, poverty and climate change.

Let's not forget that agriculture provides the primary source of food for humans, feed for animals, fibres for clothes, and material for fuel and housing - all things needed by a growing world population.

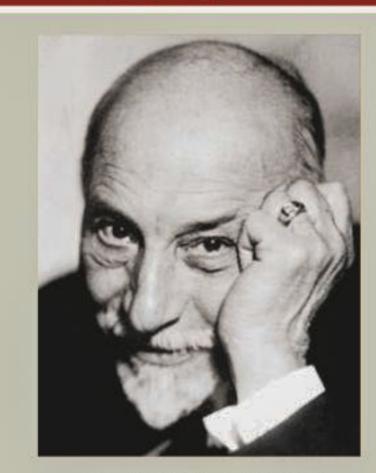
As we work together and with others to meet the world's Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, the WCA 2020, implemented during 2016-25, has the potential to help provide valuable data to ensure many SDG targets will have been accurately met. We need to be sure that when shepherds bless and count their sheep they will have arrived at an accurate tally. To feed the world of our children and their children, we shouldn't count our chickens before they hatch.

The writer is Assistant Director-General and Regional Representative for Asia and the Pacific, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).

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**LUIGI PIRANDELLO** in Six Characters in Search of an Author

Dife is full of strange absurdities, which, strangely enough, do not even need to appear plausible, since they are true.

## CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

**ACROSS** 

1 Was nosy 6 Barn-raising group

11 Debussy suite

12 Musical pace 13 More than sufficient

14 Short putt 15 Garage occupant

16 Ike's boyhood home 18 Sewaringin vow

19 Ruin 20 Checkers choice

21 Jazz legend Brubeck

23 Bread-making need

25 Physics particle

27 Hit letters 28 Useful skill

30 Shoelace problem 33 Relaxing site

34 Great Leap Forward leader

36 Is for two 37 Clay workers 39 Pie dish

43 Genetic copy

40 Inventor Howe 41 Calls out

44 Be penitent 45 Ditties 46 Signs a lease DOWN

2 Arbor 3 Ad-libbed bit 4 Long swimmer 5 Fantasy

1 Calm

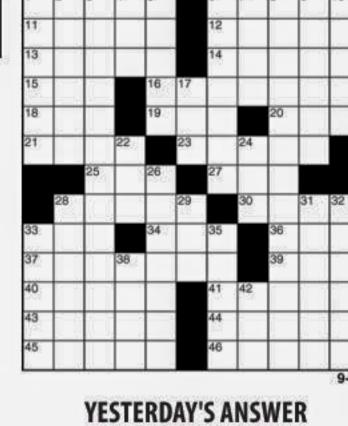
6 Dresses 7 Cook's creation 8 Takeoff 9 Piano type

10 Gave an edge 17 Port spot 22 Dawn goddess

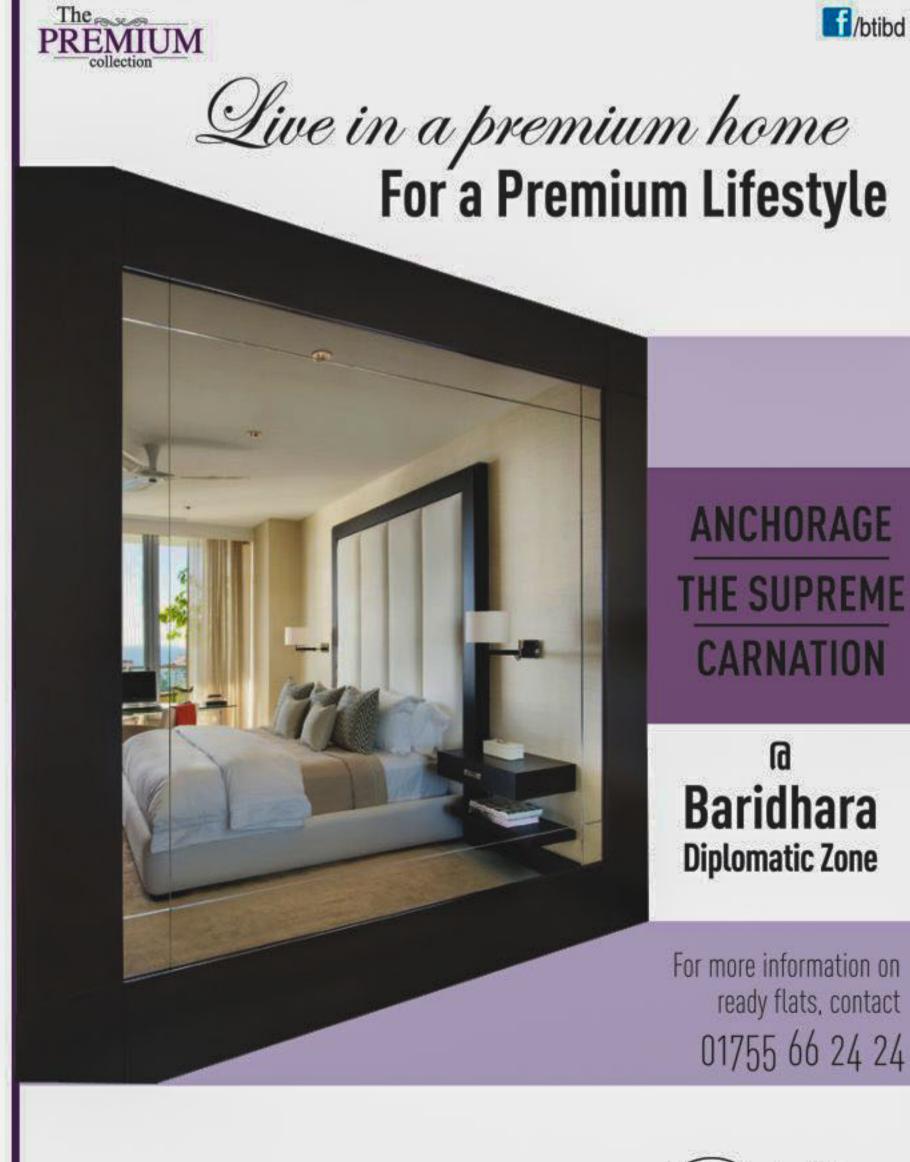
24 Place of refuge 26 Formidable rivals 28 God of light 29 Paving goo

31 Set straight 32 Past and present 33 Blueprint data

35 Film prize 38 Zesty flavor 42 Numbered rd.



BARB AVER CHANGE TOBY LONDON SWANLAKE NAMESAKE SILENT RICECAKE NEWARK EVADES RA ABES TAXED





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