

Ailing medical education

Needs a major surgery

MEDICAL education in the country has virtually broken down due to shortage of teachers and lack of adequate physical infrastructure, according to a report by a leading Bangla newspaper. Most of the 105 public and private medical colleges are running with less than half the teaching staff required. Some of these do not even have proper classrooms, examination halls, medical skill centres and tutorial rooms. Libraries are small and contain few books. What kind of doctors can these institutions produce?

One does not have to be a rocket scientist to see a correlation between the dismal state of the country's healthcare system and the quality of education medical students are receiving. But it is unclear how so many—69 to be exact—private colleges have received approval from the authorities despite a 2014 objection by the Bangladesh Medical Association. Whose interests do the authorities serve - the ordinary people or those who set up such poorly equipped medical colleges, apparently, for profit alone? The public ones, on the other hand, are no angels. Reports of wrong diagnosis, maltreatment and harassment are frequent. It is thus not surprising at all that a large number of affluent patients go abroad for treatment. Who's got the poor man's back?

Healthcare is a fundamental right and the state seems to be failing in delivering it to citizens. In order to address the problem, the government should monitor and evaluate the performance of all medical colleges and ensure their compliance with the rules and regulations.

Social Progress Index 2016

Bangladesh has done well but can do better

IT is heartening to note that Bangladesh is one of the top performers in ensuring nutrition and basic medical care, and health and wellness, according to the Social Progress Index 2016. The study included 133 countries and was based on 12 components. Because of its poor performance in 9 out of the 12 indicators, however, Bangladesh was disappointingly listed as having made 'low social progress' only and was ranked 101st in the ranking.

The areas in which the country failed to impress the most were water and sanitation, shelter, access to basic knowledge, access to information and communications, environmental quality, personal rights, personal freedom and choice, tolerance and inclusion and access to advanced education.

While Bangladesh did perform laudably well in three broad areas, we should definitely refrain from wallowing in our success having failed to do the same in the nine others. And what we need to realise is that improving our performance in those areas is also very important. Because, in order to truly succeed in our endeavour to improve the quality of life for all citizens, we cannot simply focus on selective areas alone, but have to pull all the sectors together and improve our performances across the board.

Hence, the authorities should concentrate more on the areas where the country performed poorly, without losing momentum in those where it did well. Through inclusive and sincere efforts, we believe that improving living conditions for all, in each and every area of life, is achievable.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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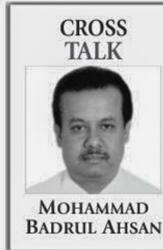
Waiting for a peaceful Rakhine

According to the UN, at least 30,000 Rohingyas have been displaced by the recent violence in the Rakhine state. They have been made victims of gang rape, torture, eviction, firing, assault, and carnage since the Myanmar army started crackdown on the Rohingyas. It is inhumane and unacceptable. The Myanmar government must stop the bloody crackdown on the Rohingyas and rehabilitate them on their land ensuring citizenship and security. Being neighbouring states as well as having economic and political interests, countries like India, China and Bangladesh have a responsibility to resolve the Rohingya crisis through mutual agreement. The international community should exert pressure on Myanmar to bring an end to the oppression of the Rohingyas. Aung San Suu Kyi came to power raising expectations that her government would address the woes of the Rohingyas and other ethnic communities who constitute about 40 percent of Myanmar's population. It is true that the Myanmar army still controls home affairs, defence and border affairs, making it almost impossible for the civilian government to make drastic changes on the state's stand on key issues. That said, Suu Kyi has a moral obligation to do everything in her power to end the persecution of Rohingyas.

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To live and die in surrogate democracies



CROSS TALK

MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

RUSSIAN leaders Vladimir Lenin and Joseph Stalin, in their spare time, used to make fun of Western sympathisers who blindly supported them. Lenin was so excited that he had even coined a

special term to describe those men. He called them "polyeznyii idiots", meaning "useful idiots." These are people perceived as propagandists for a cause without being fully aware of its goals.

Time will tell who is whose useful idiot between US President-Elect Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin. If the Russians have carried out the alleged hacking campaign to interfere in the US presidential election, then Putin has successfully pulled the strings from 5,000 miles away in Kremlin to put his man in the White House. Whether Trump knew about the hacking beforehand and how he is going to leverage the relationship with the Russians remain to be seen.

US President Barack Obama did the best he could in his remaining days at the Oval Office. He imposed sanctions on Russia and expelled its 35 diplomats in addition to shutting down two properties on American soil that the White House claimed were being used by the Russians to gather intelligence. These retaliatory moves followed the agreement between the FBI and the CIA that the Russians had indeed stuck their nose where it didn't belong.

For the time being, Russian President Vladimir Putin has abstained from reacting to the US moves, thus putting the brakes on further escalation of the tit-for-tat dispute between the two countries. The fickle-tongued Trump was quick to respond. He praised his soon-

to-be Russian counterpart for his "very smart" decision.

Obama's retaliation will prove as futile as expired medicine administered for a chronic disease. What follows the hacking scandal after Obama depends a lot on the man who is suspected of being its prime beneficiary. Donald Trump might let bygones be bygones for obvious reasons and roll back the US sanctions after he takes oath in two

American Civil War and the horror of the McCarthyism era. One section of the Americans is convinced that the Russians have manipulated their right to choose their own president. Another section insists that it's nothing but a ploy of the Democratic Party to justify its well-deserved defeat and undermine the Trump presidency.

If Russia is guilty as accused, it presents a bizarre twist to the antics of

as the leader of the "Free World".

Foreign interference has historically figured in the domestic affairs of many countries. Who should know it better than us, when every political party in this country is rumoured to have foreign connections? Foreign money and influence have systematically undermined popular will in Third World politics by manipulating elections. Many countries have hired foreign mercenaries to fight for them. The Americans are even fighting in Afghanistan and Iraq without being asked. The Russians are doing the same thing in Syria. In the 9th century, the Slavs had even invited foreigners, the Varangians from Scandinavia, to rule their country.

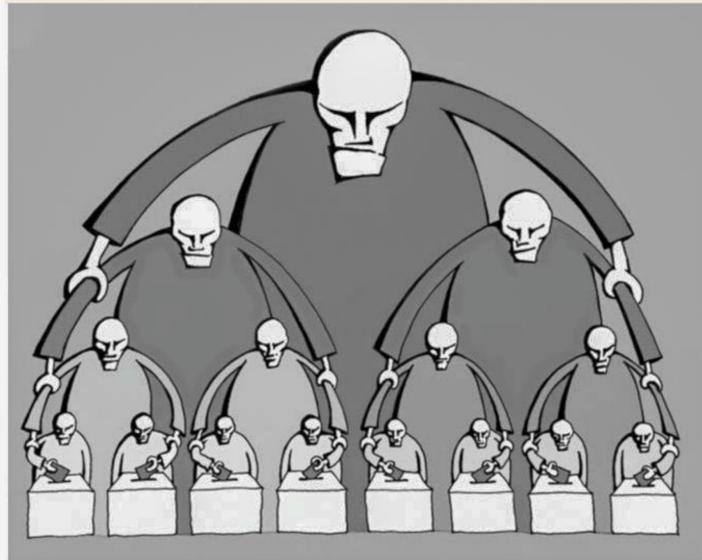
Adventurous men throughout history have led military conquests and risky expeditions. Explorers have discovered new destinations. Traders have chalked out routes to push their business. Scientists have linked places and eliminated distance. These achievements have created the global village in which we live today.

But that may be too close for comfort. The Cold War is heating up, and democracy is facing a new challenge: hackers can rig elections from thousands of miles away. In some countries, people are inured to this disappointment. The governments, which come to power, seldom are their choice.

Elections, which went out of people's hands long ago, will now go out of their countries. Voters will proudly vote. And, governments will be merrily made in the cyberspace. Nature has cuckoos laying eggs in the nests of other birds. A similar fate awaits democracy.

The people are the next useful idiots who will live and die in surrogate democracies. They will cherish their sovereignty, not realising it has slipped away already.

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weeks. Trump might ignore meddling out of gratitude for the Russians. Or, he might also choose to do it on the excuse of political gumption that he should have a fresh start with Moscow. It'll also depend on how doggedly the Democratic Party is ready to take this matter to its logical conclusion.

Meanwhile, the hacking scandal has created perhaps the most visible chasm in the American psyche since the

history that famously repeats itself. In 1991, the West had avenged Lenin's sarcasm by having a "useful idiot" in Moscow when Mikhail Gorbachev presided over the fall of Soviet Union. The first Vladimir (Lenin) must be laughing in his grave that one of his successors has turned the table on the West. The second Vladimir (Putin) has installed an unstable mind not only as president of the United States, but also

TRUMP'S PROPOSED TARIFF ON CHINESE IMPORTS What it means for Bangladesh

MOHAMMAD MAHABUB ALAM

ALTHOUGH Chinese products have provided consumers cheaper options, they are hurting US domestic production and the US manufacturing base has weakened dramatically over the last few decades. Acemoglu et al. (2016) estimate that the US has lost at least two million jobs from rising Chinese imports between 1999 and 2011. To stimulate the US economy, the country is considering imposing 45 percent tariff on Chinese imports. This article argues that the higher costs associated with the said tariff on Chinese products outweigh the benefits of stimulating the US economy and may have negative impacts on the US economy as well as on the global economy. In this process, other developing countries with low wages might gain from this situation because some businesses might shift from China as the Chinese products lose their competitiveness in the US market.

The US trade deficit with China grew to USD 365.7 billion in 2015 because US exports to China were only USD 116.2 billion while imports from China hit a new record of USD 481.9 billion. The latest trade data shows that the trade volume between the US and China is worth USD 472.8 billion as of October 2016, which is 15.7 percent of the US total trade (US Census 2016).

Half of the US imports from China are electronics or machines with the largest individual categories being mobile phones, tablets and laptops. By value, China is the source of three quarters of mobiles and 93 percent of tablets or laptops shipped to the US (CNBC 2016).

Though higher costs in China might prompt some US companies to move production back to the US, a more plausible destination would be other developing economies with lower costs such as India, Vietnam or Bangladesh.

The idea behind imposing tariffs is to make American companies more competitive with their foreign counterparts in the US market. But economic theory explains how the US consumers will suffer from such tariffs. With higher tariffs, Chinese products will be expensive to the US consumers and it is likely that the US consumers will end up buying fewer Chinese goods, and fewer things from anywhere else. Higher tariffs will put upward pressure on consumer prices as part of those tariffs would be passed on to consumers in the form of higher prices and downward pressure on real wages (wages adjusted for inflation) (NFAP 2016).

Higher tariffs on Chinese goods will help domestic businesses to grow and subsequently employment will grow to some extent as some inefficient domestic producers will be able to produce those Chinese substitutes at a higher cost that leads to higher prices, which is not



affordable to US consumers. Thus the costs to consumers outweigh those benefits of producers due to economic inefficiency in the domestic production system.

The composition of Chinese imports to the US suggests that shrinking sales of Chinese products would hurt American businesses and workers as many goods are assembled in China with parts coming from the US. Sluggish purchases of these so-called Chinese products would also reduce the sales of their American components. A study by the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco found that 55 cents of every USD 1 spent by an American shopper on a "Made in China" product go to the Americans selling, transporting and marketing that product. Therefore, suppressing Chinese imports would harm American shopkeepers, truck drivers and other people involved in the value chain.

With any imposition of tariffs on Chinese imports, China would likely retaliate by blocking American goods at its borders with tariff hikes as well as squeezing the market for renowned American companies such as Apple, Boeing or General Motors doing business in China (*The New York Times*, 2016). For instance, in 2009, the Obama administration imposed tariffs on tires from China charging that a surge in Chinese imports was hurting American tire makers. China fired back by imposing a tax of up to 105 percent on the US chicken feet (Fox News, 2016).

Any tariff barrier on Chinese imports will have negative impacts on the US investment and productivity. According to Moody's Analytics model, higher tariffs on Chinese products will lift overall consumer price index in the US. The Federal Reserve might come up with tighter monetary policy to contain inflation. Higher interest rates will weaken consumer demands and domestic investment will go down. Moreover, any disruption to trade patterns due to said tariffs would affect complex supply chains across numerous product categories and thus increase costs of production and depress US productivity.

Chinese exports will exacerbate as the US is the largest destination (18 percent of exports) of Chinese

products. It will be difficult for Chinese producers to find an alternative market such as the US. As for China, a complete halt in US goods' purchases from the country could hit China's GDP by up to 3 percent. The impact however would likely be smaller if the Chinese can manage to corner much of the market (CNBC, 2016). But managing such large scale economic fallout will be difficult for China due to the massive rise in public and private sector debt (*The Conversation*, 2016).

Though higher costs in China might prompt some US companies to move production back to the US, a more plausible destination would be other developing economies with lower costs such as India, Vietnam or Bangladesh. According to the Japanese survey, a factory worker on average earns USD 230 a month in India, USD 185 in Vietnam and USD 100 in Bangladesh, much lower than China (USD 463). Manufacturers in Southeast Asia would most likely step in to take the opportunity, but it will not be easy for them to ramp up production quickly.

Imposition of 45 percent tariff on Chinese products would not stimulate the US economy in the long-run as higher tariffs affect US consumption, exports, investment, employment, and productivity negatively although it seems attractive in the short-run. Potential trade war between the US and China will likely pull both countries into recession and dampen global trade. In this period of global uncertainty, developing economies with abundant labour supply and low wage rates, can gain substantially from the shift of global production system from China to other countries. Therefore, emerging countries like Bangladesh should grab any opportunity coming out from the shift of global production networks, be better prepared with necessary infrastructures and foster a better business environment to attract more foreign direct investment in comparison with its regional competitors such as India, Vietnam or Cambodia.

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