

Grim picture of youth employment

Create more opportunities

TWO very disconcerting issues have come to light in a report by the newly found Centre for Development and Employment Research. One, 25 percent of the population between 15 and 29 years is inactive, i.e. they are neither in the education cycle nor economic activity. And they number around 11 million. And two, an equally perplexing and a matter of equal concern, is the fact that the prevalence of unemployment is greater among the higher educated section of the youth.

It is surprising that, given the stress that the current government has put on education, such a large portion of our youth should be outside the ambit of the country's education programme. What needs to be determined is whether this is due to lack of opportunity or other factors. We also feel that there cannot be a more distorted scenario than young people with higher education finding no employment.

Given that more than a quarter of our population is comprised of youth the situation is grim and calls for the government to initiate proactive measures to address the situation on an urgent basis. We feel that neither of the two situations – uneducated unemployed and educated unemployed – is acceptable. The youths are the backbone of the society and our future, and if they are left out of the mainstream activity of the state it is only at the cost of our development and wellbeing. Along with relevant and appropriate education and vocational training for the youths, employment opportunities must be created for them.

Bamboo galore in public constructions!

What is the LGED doing?

THE revealing pictures of using bamboo instead of iron rod in various government buildings expose the poor oversight of the public construction sector as well the grave danger we are living in. In two recent cases, it was found that bamboo sticks were used in constructing two school buildings in Pabna and Jhenaidah. The educational activities of the two institutions are seriously hampered as the teachers and students are facing the risk of likely building collapse. There have been numerous examples of such gross violations of construction code: using bamboo for fixing railway sleepers in Moulvibazar, using bamboo sticks instead of angle irons in a RMCH building, to name a few.

Unfortunately, there is little initiative from the authority to address this dangerous situation. The Local Government and Engineering Department (LGED) is entrusted with the responsibility of these public works. The dilapidated condition of public buildings clearly indicates the rampant corruption and overall poor governance mechanism in this vital government body. In most cases, local contractors usually get work by using their political connection. Hence the local administration feels further constrained to take any action against such illegal practices. In the case of Binnadangi Government primary school in Pabna, the school authority expressed their frustration as they dared not to protest the faulty construction of the buildings in fear of reprisal from the contractor, who was also member of the then ruling party.

We urge the concerned ministry to look into this issue seriously. They should take immediate steps to repair these vulnerable structures. There is also an urgent need to revamp the governance structure in public constructions to check corruption and ensure safety.

The upside down era



KNOT SO TRUE

RUBANA HUQ

THIS year, many of us read about 'listening hairbrushes' taking control of our split ends, toothbrushes filming the inside of our mouths, beds reacting to a person's sleeping position, cars learning from the brains of drivers, like the Concept-i car by Toyota, which, with an advanced artificial intelligence system, can act as a faithful dog or a pining boyfriend. The gist of it all boils down to one thing: all products in the future will be geared towards developing relationship with the consumers. Truth is, we are living in an era when machines are taking over our lives, and our minds being replicated by artificial intelligence.

Two days ago, *The Washington Post* published an interesting story about two highly qualified software developers from Hyderabad. The two had fallen in love in America, returned home, and were all set to apply for their new H-1B visas. This extremely intelligent and rational duo was spotted orbiting the 'Visa Balaji' temple for about 11 times and leaving *tulsi* at his feet, promising to come back to orbit 108 times more in case the great 'Visa Balaji' blesses them with their work visas, helping their new sojourn. Is humanity looking for more beyond the material, while the material is guising its appeal with more heart?

Long ago, I used to watch my mother bake Upside Down cakes in her old, rusty oven. They came out perfect with the bottom part outshining the top. Actually, life today is similarly offering us more surprises than one is prepared for. For example, people woke up one morning and discovered that the stash of wealth that they hid below their mattresses were worth nothing. The vaults didn't make sense anymore; the bundles in bags and sacks added up to a grand 'zero'. That's what happened in India when the Indian PM decided on a demonetisation drive. All the 500 and the 1000 rupee notes became paper trash overnight. While the demonetisation drive was meant to drive out the black, ill-gotten wealth, it's actually the struggling middle class which suffered the most. In spite of best intentions, most of the times, what is intended is not what is achieved at the end and most unfortunately, while humanity evolves and marches ahead, most of our learning tools and lessons are being reversed.

For example, one fine morning, America, a country of democracy, decided to resort to vote for a Presidential candidate with a hair-trigger temperament and subject the whole world to his Twitter mania. His most recent one was to insult Meryl Streep, who he called "one of the most over-rated actresses in Hollywood", to defend his position of not having "mocked" the disabled reporter but simply having showed him "groveling" and finally insult the media. The list of other outrageous quotes of Trump includes him wanting to build a wall on the southern border of the US, Mexicans being rapists, Rosie O'Donnell being "fat, ugly", his beauty of being wealthy, his fingers being long and beautiful, his friends being gay but him being a "traditionalist", and being there on "7-Eleven" (instead of 9/11) after the World Trade

Center came down. The list goes on and includes one more of my favourites: "It's freezing and snowing in New York – we need global warming!" Apparently, it was a joke!

When was the last time we watched a President-elect contradict almost every statement he made? First he said that the hack could have been initiated by the Democrats themselves, then he chose to say that the Russian hackers probably accessed Hillary Clinton's emails, and then he said that he had information about the hacking that no one else knew but him and that he would release it by last Wednesday. And then he ended up supporting a claim from WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange that the group's source wasn't the Russian government. It's the same Donald Trump who initially even

countries which don't grieve about human rights. Are we then learning newer codes of humanity?

In fact, even in our part of the globe, we are watching reversals on a daily basis. Amongst many intriguing stories, a second page of this daily on Monday caught my attention. Convicted fugitive killers of Zubair of Jahangirnagar University's English department posted selfies from Genting Highlands in Malaysia. Shohan, one of the fugitives gone scot-free, had also posted his selfie on Instagram, enjoying a cup of Starbucks coffee. The Instagram post was most shocking. He had written: "Now I am a free bird... now I can fly." Have the definitions of guilt and innocence changed? Just like an upside down cake?

I worry. With so many reversals, surprises and regression, many core values are also being challenged.



PHOTO: WAKINGTIMES.COM

alleged that the summer hacker could have been somebody sitting on their bed weighing 400 pounds...

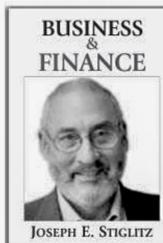
In times of increasing international surprises, many of us watched Rodrigo Duterte, President of the Philippines, bragging about having killed people with his own hands. He claims that the streets of the Philippines are much safer than before. In reality, crime went down in his first five months in office, with the country's index crime volume falling to 55,391 from July through November from 81,064 in the same period of 2015. On the other hand, murder cases increased by 51 percent to 5,970 with the police killing 2041 "drug suspects" in the second half of 2016. So while they have safer streets, human rights are being shamelessly outwoted with Duterte apparently faring well through siding with

Yesterday, I sat through an entire morning hearing a gender inappropriate conversation. An officer somewhere had not acted with "required" courage. I heard someone say: "O akta mohilar moto kaj korlo," meaning that an officer on duty had acted like a *mohila*, a woman. Every time this was repeated, I corrected the conversation but little changed in the tone of the discourse. Heartbroken, I turned to the newspaper and read that Mahila Parishad has reported that more than 1000 women were raped in 2016. With so many women in powerful seats in the government, with so many of us leading so many organisations, with millions of women working in the readymade garment sector, are we all silently watching unhealthy reversals? Are we all becoming upside down cakes in an era where hypocrisies, dichotomies, and paradoxes cloud our functioning environment in one form or the other?

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Trumpian uncertainty



BUSINESS & FINANCE

JOSEPH E. STIGLITZ

EVERY January, I try to craft a forecast for the coming year. Economic forecasting is notoriously difficult; but, notwithstanding the truth expressed in Harry Truman's request for a one-armed economist (who wouldn't be able to say "on the other hand"), my record has been credible.

In recent years, I correctly foresaw that, in the absence of stronger fiscal stimulus (which was not forthcoming in either Europe or the United States), recovery from the Great Recession of 2008 would

recovery were looking at the world through rose-tinted glasses. Economic developments unfolded much as I anticipated.

Not so the political events of 2016. I had been writing for years that unless growing inequality – especially in the US, but also in many countries throughout the world – was addressed, there would be political consequences. But inequality continued to worsen – with striking data showing that average life expectancy in the US was on the decline.

These results were foreshadowed by a study last year, by Anne Case and Angus Deaton, which showed that life expectancy was on the decline for large segments of the population – including America's so-called angry men of the Rust Belt.

be political consequences, their form and timing were far less obvious. Why did the backlash in the US come just when the economy seemed to be on the mend, rather than earlier? And why did it manifest itself in a lurch to the right? After all, it was the Republicans who had blocked assistance to those losing their jobs as a result of the globalisation they pushed assiduously. It was the Republicans who, in 26 states, refused to allow the expansion of Medicaid, thereby denying health insurance to those at the bottom. And why was the victor somebody who made his living from taking advantage of others, openly admitted not paying his fair share of taxes, and made tax avoidance a point of pride?

Donald Trump grasped the spirit of

Mexico respond? Trump may well understand that what he proposes will violate World Trade Organisation rules, but he may also know that it will take a long time for the WTO to rule against him. And by then, America's trade account may have been rebalanced.

But two can play that game: China can take similar actions, though its response is likely to be more subtle. If a trade war were to break out, what would happen?

Trump may have reason to think he could win; after all, China is more dependent on exports to the US than the US is on exports to China, which gives the US an advantage. But a trade war is not a zero-sum game. The US stands to lose as well. China may be more effective in targeting its retaliation to cause acute political pain. And the Chinese may be in a better position to respond to US attempts to inflict pain on them than the US is to respond to the pain that China might inflict on Americans. It's anybody's guess who can stand the pain better. Will it be the US, where ordinary citizens have already suffered for so long, or China, which, despite troubled times, has managed to generate growth in excess of 6 percent?

More broadly, the Republican/Trump agenda, with its tax cuts even more weighted toward the rich than the standard GOP recipe would imply, is based on the idea of trickle-down prosperity – a continuation of the Reagan era's supply-side economics, which never actually worked. Fire-breathing rhetoric, or raving three a.m. tweets, may assuage the anger of those left behind by the Reagan revolution, at least for a while. But for how long? And what happens then?

Trump might like to repeal the ordinary laws of economics, as he goes about his version of voodoo economics. But he can't. Still, as the world's largest economy leads the way into uncharted political waters in 2017 and beyond, it would be foolhardy for a mere mortal to attempt a forecast, other than to state the obvious: the waters will almost certainly be choppy, and many – if not most – pound ships will sink along the way.

The writer, a Nobel laureate in economics, is University Professor at Columbia University and Chief Economist at the Roosevelt Institute. His most recent book is *The Euro: How a Common Currency Threatens the Future of Europe*.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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No textbooks on the NCTB website

No textbooks either for the Bengali or English versions are to be found on the NCTB website. Not only that, other materials like teachers' guide cannot be found there either. There are many learning materials prepared by TQI-II, SEQAEP, SESIP and other government projects, but those too are not on the website yet. Neither are the learning materials, including video clips, by many NGOs and INGOs on the website.

In addition to fixing this, the government should make video clips of some important and difficult topics by renowned teachers and professionals or collect these and store them on the website for all.

I would like to draw the attention of our Honourable Prime Minister, Minister for Education and other concerned authorities to take action so that people can access these materials from the NCTB website free of charge and help Bangladesh to reach middle income status soon.

Mawduda Hasnin
Rajshahi



PHOTO: GREG BAKER/ AFP

Donald Trump grasped the spirit of the time: things weren't going well, and many voters wanted change. Now they will get it: there will be no business as usual. But seldom has there been more uncertainty. Which policies Trump will pursue remains unknown, to say nothing of which will succeed or what the consequences will be.

Trump seems hell-bent on having a trade war. But how will China and

be slow. In making these forecasts, I have relied more on analysis of underlying economic forces than on complex econometric models.

For example, at the beginning of 2016, it seemed clear that the deficiencies of global aggregate demand that have been manifest for the last several years were unlikely to change dramatically. Thus, I thought that forecasters of a stronger

But, with the incomes of the bottom 90 percent having stagnated for close to a third of a century (and declining for a significant proportion), the health data simply confirmed that things were not going well for very large swaths of the country. And while America might be at the extreme of this trend, things were little better elsewhere.

But, if it seemed clear that there would