

# The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR  
LATE S. M. ALI

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## Samad the tree planter

An inspiration for all

WHEN rickshaw puller Abdul Samad Sheikh cannot sleep one night, it is because he couldn't plant a tree that day. Strange as it may sound, this person, hailing from Vagondanga village in Faridpur sadar upazila's Aliabad union has been planting a tree every day since he was 12 years old. Now aged 60, Samad puts those of us, who prefer to sit in our plush chairs in air-conditioned seminar halls and cry hoarse about deforestation, to shame. Here is a man who has planted and nurtured 17,532 trees in the last 48 years and is vocal against locals who do not bat an eyelid before cutting down a tree.

A humble man of humble origin, who earns a meagre amount as a rickshaw puller, his daily earning of Tk. 100 goes to pay for family needs and purchasing a plant for his daily passion. It is not a wonder that his offspring look to his hobby as a noble one, especially in this day and age where powerful interests are busy clearing up the land of this natural resource, in the name of "development". People of the locality find Samad to be a man who is demure in his outlook but one who is always there to lend a helping hand to anyone who requires assistance.

We salute Samad and his singlehanded contribution to preserving nature. One man's hobby that turned into a passion spanning nearly half a century, let his efforts be an example to us all. While we can draw inspiration from his example, the authorities can use his selflessness to promote social forestry nationwide.

## Primary school staffing

Fill up the shortage quickly

THE figures are horrendous but true. More than 45,000 posts of teachers in the government primary schools in the country are vacant and more than 25 percent of those are without headmasters. These figures were revealed in the parliament by the Minister of the Primary and Mass Education ministry recently. While the country has made commendable progress in the field of mass education recognising the fact that primary education is a fundamental right, there are a number of weak areas that are hindering the attainment of the objectives of the system. One of the challenges is poor quality of education, which is caused by both the quality and the number of teachers. As it is, the existing number of teachers is much below the ideal student-teacher ratio of 30:1 which the government is trying to achieve.

We wonder why there is such a large gap in the number of teachers and headmasters. Surely the situation has not occurred in a day or a month or a year. This has accreted over a period of time exacerbated by several associated matters. We feel that the process of recruitment should be made less lengthy and cumbersome apart from making the process transparent where selection of the best candidates must get preference over any extraneous consideration. And the recruitment cycle should keep in mind the natural waste in the number of teachers at all levels that occurs every year. And since all the encumbrances related to appointment of headmasters have been removed, there is no reason why the vacant posts of headmaster's cannot be filled up on urgent basis.

# Love Bangla but do not hate English

OPEN SKY



BIRU PAKSHA PAUL

THE two tests my school friends hated the most were English and Math. When I was a college boy at a Dhaka residential school, one of my friends did not eat egg for breakfast on the date of English exams lest he scores less in the subject. I used to sit beside him at the dining hall, take his egg on top of mine so that my protein level went up to help me write down long-memorised English essays. Our guardians poured uncountable blessings on children particularly on the English exam day. That is our cultural take on English. We are the only nation to fight for our mother tongue, and probably we are the only nation that forgot against which language we fought in 1952. It was Urdu, not English.

Now the social sentiment has suddenly started punishing English following the general exodus of Urdu elements after 1971. English has been a poor victim of all anger, furor, and often-imprudent attacks as if this hysteria would improve the culture of Bengali as a language. Why have we started thinking that Bengali and English are perfect substitutes and thus mutually exclusive? Can we not devote more energy to improve Bengali rather than divert our whole energy to fight English like ethnic cleansing from all spheres of our functional life?

The current battle against English is impulsive and confusing. After political independence, we are in a different phase of earning economic independence where English has been and will be playing a crucial role in promoting our growth. Who can ignore the language of the globe in this age of gradually ascending globalisation? Who can ignore the economics of language when it comes to English?

America and Europe are outsourcing their call centre jobs to English-speaking countries. India outpaced China in that race. A time will come when India will give up those jobs, which Bangladesh would be able to attract if the country can develop a smart English-speaking generation. Otherwise, countries like Sri Lanka and Vietnam will pounce on those opportunities. English will help bring new ideas, technology, and familiarity with the state-of-the-art communication skills.

Our poorest performance in the Knowledge Economy Index is largely attributable to the education system and the treatment of English. Countries like Hong Kong, Singapore, and Taiwan remained well ahead of their neighbours in that department. Their emphasis on English as a vehicle to outreach the globe was extremely sincere. After dealing all matters in Bengali, our bureaucrats and professionals are less likely to outshine Sri Lanka or India in overseas advocacy meetings. Perfection in English at the institutional level can best be achieved through state-level directives and encouragements. Bengali is our love, but English is an investment for the sake of openness and growth.

What damage we have done in the past to our education quality in the name of loving Bengali is irreparable. General Ershad even went that far to make

English non-mandatory to earn bachelor degrees — a cunning ploy to pretend enormous passion for Bengali. The middle and lower middle class people felt trapped in those cheery sentiments. But the upper class understands the economics of language and therefore sends their kids to English-medium schools, ensuring their comparative advantage in securing top notch jobs and foreign scholarships.

The middle-class sentiment of hating English has thus sharpened the class difference and income inequality. And some government orders, particularly in the month of February, to circulate Bengali in all spheres of activity are worsening the situation and confusing us on what would be our direction. The use of English in Indian academic and professional life is widespread. China had a mindset of learning no language other than its mother tongue for long, but

remained the most powerful vehicle to understand different economies and peoples.

Therefore, learning more than one language has been suggested in all excellent universities. The international expansion of Bangladeshi diaspora requires elevated practice of English at home so that the second generation of emigrants can access their parents' motherland more comfortably with ideas and technology. Let us think about the long-run interest of the economy and accelerate the practice of English in academic and professional spheres more actively. If the economy does well, Bengali will stand firmer across the globe.

Every nation loves its mother tongue and so do we. However, we gave blood for our mother tongue, and that invariably justifies our quintessential emotion for Bengali. We are special on earth. Our literature is



PHOTO: STAR

they changed the strategy. When China is coming out of its monolingual stubbornness and training its government officials with more English and international exposure, we are moving backwards. China is doing so just to equip its workforce with adequate capacity to handle international deals and to tap global resources. These should be our priorities too.

The economy backs the power of a language. In the 1990s, I noticed that the Japanese learning centres in Sydney failed to accommodate the rising demands of students. But the queue soon began to wane when people realised Japan's unending slump. In the 2000s, China superseded Germany and became the third largest economy, gravitating millions of students to learn Chinese. Despite this shift, English always

superbly rich. Are there any parallels of the words: *Aamar Sonar Bangla Aami Tomay Bhalobasi (My golden Bengal, I love you)*? Are there any words more emotive than these to make you tearful: *O Ma Tomar Charan Duti Bokshe Aamar Dhori Aamar Ei Deshete Janmo Jeno Ei Deshe Te Mori (Oh Mother, I hold your feet in my breast. I was born in this land and I want to die here too)*? Let us dig deeper into Bengali and derive immense pleasure and pride. But that does not call for a crusade against English. That is rather a twisted form of loving Bengali. And that is not what we fought the language movement for.

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## PROJECT SYNDICATE

# Restoring faith in globalisation



CARL BILDT

I must confess that I am a firm believer in the benefits of globalisation. To my mind, the gradual interlinking of regions, countries, and people is the most profoundly positive

development of our time. But a populist has now assumed the United States presidency by campaigning on a platform of stark economic nationalism and protectionism. And in many countries, public discourse is dominated by talk of globalisation's alleged "losers," and the perceived need for new policies to stem the rise of populist discontent.

When I was born, the world's population was 2.5 billion. I vividly recall a time in my life when many people feared that starvation would soon run rampant, gaps between the rich and poor would grow ever wider, and everything would eventually come crashing down.

We now live in a world with 7.5 billion people, and yet the share of people living in absolute poverty has declined rapidly, while the gap between rich and poor countries has steadily closed. Around the world, average life expectancy has increased from 48 to 71 years — albeit with significant differences between countries — and overall per capita income has grown by 500 percent.

Just looking back at the last 25 years, one could argue that humanity has had its best quarter-century ever. Since 1990, the share of people living in extreme poverty in the developing world has fallen from 47 percent to 14 percent, and child mortality — a critical indicator — has been halved. The world has never seen anything like this before.

A similarly bright picture emerges from other indicators. Fewer people are dying on battlefields than during previous periods for which we have data; and, at least until a few years ago, the share of people living under more or less representative governments was gradually increasing.

This spectacular progress has been

driven partly by advances in science and technology. But it owes at least as much to increased economic interaction through trade and investment, and to the overarching liberal order that has enabled these positive developments. In short, globalisation has been the single most important force behind decades of progress.

These days, trade is often wrongly blamed for shuttering factories and displacing workers in developed countries. But, in reality, the disappearance of older industries stems

in these industries now often head for the lights of rapidly expanding cities, where they fill jobs that could scarcely have been imagined just a few decades ago.

For most people around the world, life before globalisation was poor, brutal, and short. And yet today's anti-globalists have turned nostalgia into a rallying cry. They want to make America — or Russia, or Islam — "great again." Each may be rallying against the others; but all are rallying against globalisation.

Economic conditions were certainly



primarily from new technologies that have improved productivity and expanded the wealth of our societies. Likewise, rising inequality, real or imagined, has far more to do with technology than with trade.

To be sure, there are not as many farmers today as in past decades or centuries; Lancashire's cotton mills, Pittsburgh's steel plants, and Duisburg's coal mines have closed; and there are far fewer workers in Northern Sweden's vast forests. The children of those employed

less favourable in the years following the 2008 financial crisis, but now employment and economic growth are rebounding pretty much everywhere. Real (inflation-adjusted) GDP has been rising for 15 consecutive quarters in the eurozone, and all European Union economies are expected to grow in the next few years. Meanwhile, the US economy is already doing well — unemployment is below 5 percent and real incomes are rising.

Of course, many societies are

undeniably experiencing a growing sense of cultural insecurity, not least because many people have been led to believe that external forces such as migration are eroding traditional sources of peace and stability. They are told that a return to tribalism in one form or another is a readily available coping mechanism. Their mythical tribe was great in some mythical past, so why not try to recreate it?

Such thinking poses a serious threat to the world's most vulnerable people. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goal to eliminate extreme poverty worldwide by 2030 is entirely dependent on continued economic growth through trade, technological innovation, and international cooperation. Erecting trade barriers, engaging in digital mercantilism, and generally undermining the liberal world order will severely harm the extreme poor in Africa and other underdeveloped regions, while doing nothing to help coal miners in West Virginia.

The strong will always manage, but the weak will bear the burden of a nostalgic protectionism that erodes the benefits of globalisation. At the World Economic Forum's Annual Meeting in Davos this year, Chinese President Xi Jinping was the one extolling the virtues of globalisation, while many Western business leaders wandered the halls trying to sound concerned for the supposed losers of the process.

The communists are keeping the globalisation faith; but the capitalists seem to have lost theirs. This is bizarre — and entirely out of sync with past performance and current facts. We have every reason to be confident in a process that has delivered more prosperity to more people than anyone could have dreamed of just a few decades ago. We must not be shy in defending globalisation and combating reactionary nostalgia.

We can have a brighter future — but only if we don't seek it in the past.

The writer is a former prime minister and foreign minister of Sweden.

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(Exclusive to The Daily Star)

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### Nature lover par excellence!

The write up about rickshaw-puller Samad Sheikh of Faridpur was very deservedly published in your front page on February 18. It was indeed an exemplary and newsworthy write-up! Here is a man sincerely dedicated to a wonderful and worthwhile desire to spread greenery by planting fruit bearing trees around his locality. His desire is noble and inspiring.

This worthy man deserves all our help and recognition. I wonder if our Honourable Prime Minister can arrange to provide him with some monetary help. Perhaps you could set up a fund and encourage your readers to donate whatever they can to the initiative.

S. A. Mansoor  
Dhaka

### Mashrafe should offer his captaincy in test cricket

Mashrafe is undoubtedly the most successful captain in Bangladesh for both ODI and T20s and his services are direly missed during the test matches. I believe he would be a great asset for Bangladesh as a test captain. He could bowl limited overs and leave the bulk of the bowling to the younger pacers. He would also be a very useful batsman in the lower order, but his main role should ideally be captaincy.

Aminur Rahim  
Mohakhali