

BUDGET 2017

Spend more on the scholars

AHMED A AZAD

IN the 2016 budget, the Bangladesh government made the highest ever allocation to the education and science sector. The education sector secured 14.4 percent of the annual budget and 2.4 percent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), but still fell short of the 20 percent of annual budget and 6 percent of GDP benchmark recommended by UNICEF. Allocation for higher education was less than 1 percent when at least 5 percent is required to be internationally competitive. The Research and Development budget in 2016 was less than 0.4 percent, of which up to 80 percent could be used to cover salaries and institutional overhead costs. However, the budget movement is certainly in the right direction. In the recent past, there have been encouraging indications from some policymakers and economic commentators about the importance and need for skills development and innovation for Bangladesh's socioeconomic development. The 2017 budget is also expected to be much bigger than the last one. Can we then also expect a much needed boost for higher education and science and technology?

The ambitious economic targets of transitioning to a middle income country by 2021 and an advanced economy by 2041 are only attainable by shifting from relying on cheap labour to knowledge-based economic growth. Bangladesh has been extremely successful in achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Sustained GDP growth of 6-7 percent over a substantial period has earned Bangladesh the status of a lower-middle income country, much of it on the back of agricultural, RMG and expatriate workers. Transition to the next stages will now depend on the attainment of goals that require skilled workers and research capacity.

Goldman Sachs picked Bangladesh as one of eleven developing countries with massive economic potentials. Rather than becoming complacent, we should try to take up this challenge and adopt and



SOURCE: QUOTEMASTER.ORG

implement measures in order to realise this potential. For a resource poor country with a large and young workforce, knowledge-based economic growth should be the way to go. Infrastructural improvements and tweaking of economic instruments may help marginally increase the rate of growth, but sustaining high GDP growth requires rectifying the serious shortfalls in higher education and science budgets.

It is the generation and utilisation of new knowledge and intellectual capital that creates national wealth required for socioeconomic prosperity. Instead of comparing ourselves to other LDCs, we should examine strategies being pursued by the ten potential economic powerhouses in the developing world with

respect to budgetary allocations. A country that we, and particularly our policymakers, can learn a lot from is South Korea - which shares with us the history of experiencing a devastating war. In 1970, the standard of living and economic status of war-ravaged South Korea was the same as that of erstwhile East Pakistan.

In 2012, however, the UN officially declared South Korea an advanced economy (ahead of China and India), while we struggled. South Korea's economic transformation didn't happen by chance. There was a national consensus to become an advanced economy within a set time. Strategies were adopted to achieve this goal. South Korea spent around 8 percent of its GDP on education and post-

graduate research and a further 2 percent on R&D in areas of national priority. The focus has been on skills development, PhD and postdoctoral research and government-industry-university partnerships (initially in the automotive and electronic sectors) aided by the highest per capita generation and utilisation of patents. Now the results are there for all to see.

Doctoral and postdoctoral researchers have driven the research engine for sustained economic growth in developed and rapidly advancing countries (such as China, India and Brazil). Many of these young researchers originate from economically disadvantaged countries like Bangladesh that also suffer from acute shortage of trained manpower. But after

failing to find suitable career opportunities in their own countries, they move to advanced countries and help create wealth there. This devastating brain drain needs to be stemmed and reversed by creating working conditions and research cultures that allow our brightest minds to carry out world class research on the most relevant topics.

We need to focus on research of highest national priority and adequately fund and coordinate it. Research results should translate into products and services through IP generation and technology transfers to industry.

The above issues were discussed at length at a day-long workshop on "Harnessing higher education, research and innovation for sustainable development of Bangladesh" held at Dhaka University on April 22. Active researchers from academia, research institutions and the pharmaceutical industry frankly exchanged views with senior policymakers, including the S&T Minister, a senior member of UGC, VC and Deans of Dhaka University, and other important high-level stakeholders. The discussion centred on strategies to bring about qualitative changes in the higher education and research sectors for socioeconomic development and national wealth creation. Senior policymakers gave patient hearing to the scientists and academics who actively participated in the discussions.

The fundamental changes in higher education and research needed to make Bangladesh internationally competitive requires substantial additional funding and coordination. This in turn will set in motion the "multiplier" and "knock-on" effects that can boost sustained economic growth to levels that are required to transition to an advanced economy. Hence, the biggest investment needed for Bangladesh's future is in education, research and innovation. Is this too much to ask from the government?

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IN REMEMBRANCE

A voice radio and TV will not forget

DR SHAMSUZZAMAN FAROOQ

FEW can forget the well-known voice of Serajul Majid Mamoon, an engineer by profession, and a celebrated newscaster and television anchor, whose first death anniversary was on May 2 this year. He had anchored many significant national events telecast live on Bangladesh Television (BTV) for over 35 years since our liberation. A successful engineer as well as television personality, his style of anchoring national events, including the national elections, made him a household name.

His induction in the world of art and culture began as a debater. He became the debating champion of Notre Dame College in 1959, representing his college at the East Pakistan Education Week in 1960 where he was adjudged the best debater. He was also very passionate about drama and directing plays, becoming the first to stage a Bengali play at Notre Dame College.

He started as a Bengali newsreader from the Dhaka station of Radio Pakistan in 1958 while waiting for the results of his matriculation examination. At that time, there was only one local news show aired in Bangla language for five minutes from the Dhaka

station. Including translating from English, a five-minute news reading in Bengali required investing up to two hours every day. Young Mamoon was not prepared for that, and he gave up after completing his first contract for fifteen days. He returned as a radio announcer in 1960 and very soon drew attention for his iconic voice. As a student of Ahsanullah Engineering College (now BUET), his cultural activities blossomed further. He switched to drama and acted in many radio plays - in both Bengali and English - and directed a few plays as a guest director until 1980. His second stint as a radio newsreader began in 1972 after the independence of Bangladesh. As a radio newsreader, he would announce his name as *Mamoon Serajul Majid*.

Dhaka Television began its journey in 1964. Mamoon passed the audition as a drama artist in early 1965, and acted in a drama called *Mistry*. During the Indo-Pak war of 1965, the frequency of Bangla-language news aired went up, and Mamoon was asked by the then Project Director of Dhaka Television, Kalim Sharafi, to help by participating as a newsreader. In those few months, he became a familiar face and began to enjoy the recognition, which motivated him to



Serajul Majid Mamoon

change his mind and stick to reading news in Bengali.

One aspect of Mamoon's student life less known to the public is that he was elected twice to the

Engineering University Central Students' Union, first as the organising secretary and then as the General Secretary. The period overlapped with the historic student

movements of the early 60s, when he had the opportunity to work with the student leaders of Dhaka University, many of whom later became known in our national politics. He was a natural leader and an ardent organiser. As a student leader, he is remembered by the professors of his time for his 'unparallel courtesy and gentleness'.

Immediately after graduating from the Chemical Engineering Department of EPUET (as BUET was known before independence) in 1966, Serajul Majid Mamoon worked at Dhaka Polytechnic Institute as a lecturer in Chemical Engineering and worked at the East Pakistan Small Industries Corporation (EPSIC) before joining Eastern Refinery Limited (ERL) in Chittagong. At ERL, he was one of the eight engineers who witnessed process commissioning and took over the operation from the French contractors. After ERL, he worked at Titas Gas and Petro Bangla, where he was in charge of the gas department, looking after the production and marketing of gas as well as expansion planning of the gas network. He was a leading energy expert in the government sector until he moved to the private sector in 1978 to start an energy consultation company, BRUTECH (Bangladesh Resources

Utilisation and Engineering Company). His first project was a study on gas pricing in Bangladesh. Later, he also excelled in the management of very large construction projects. Notable landmark projects completed under his care are Jatiya Smriti Soudho, Jiban Bima Bhaban, Shikha Onirban and Singtel building situated in Somerset Road, Singapore.

Serajul Majid Mamoon was a leading figure and dedicated organiser in the fraternity of engineers. He was actively involved with the Institution of Engineers, Bangladesh (IEB), for the last 50 years where he held key executive positions. He represented IEB in the Prokrichi movement in the late 70s. He was the Vice Chairman of the Bangladesh Professional Engineers Registration Board and Vice-President of the BUET Alumni Association.

This well-known newscaster made the best use of his talents, opportunities and resources to serve his family, friends, profession and the society at large with compassion, utmost dedication and honesty. In this world, he was rewarded with dignity and honour, and, most importantly, a fulfilling happy family.

The writer is professor, National University of Singapore.

QUOTABLE Quote

JULIAN BARNES
English writer

The greatest patriotism is to tell your country when it is behaving dishonorably, foolishly, viciously.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

1 Film editing transition	28 Laundry worker	7 Comfortable
5 Small nail	32 Series unit	8 Give a hand to
9 Big boat	34 Summer by the Seine	9 Stows cargo
10 Solemn ceremonies	35 Stroller user	11 Bias
12 Loser to Dwight	36 Warm areas	15 Harvest festival event
13 Paragon	38 Quarterback John	19 Canyon sound
14 Shortages	40 Coup --	21 Capone's foe
16 Imitating	41 Snail trail	24 Trample
17 Yale rooter	42 Some tourneys	25 Fancy parties
18 Gains in abundance	43 Singer Redding	26 Brother of Artemis
20 New South Wales port	44 Network junction	27 Numbskull

DOWN

1 To a great extent	29 Pulled in
2 Like marquetry	30 Odorless gas
3 Dessert fruit	31 Takes it easy
4 Sudan neighbor	33 Takes it easy
5 Invigorating	37 "I almost forgot..."
6 Relieve	38 Car takeback, for short
	39 Paris pal

BEETLE BAILEY

IT'S SO NICE TO SEE SO MANY OF YOU AT THE SERVICE TODAY

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

S	L	A	C	E
P	I	L	O	T
A	L	L	O	
R	A	W		
S	C	H	E	M
S	E	D	A	N
E	I	N	M	B
M	A	L	T	
O	D	D		
P	O	R	T	E
U	N	I	O	N
P	I	V	O	T
S	E	T	S	

BABY BLUES

WOW! LOOK AT THIS PLACE!

BABYPALOOZA

I'VE NEVER SEEN SO MUCH BABY STUFF IN ONE PLACE! REALLY?

I GUESS YOU HAVEN'T LOOKED IN OUR ATTIC LATELY.

I MEAN NEW AND UNBROKEN BABY STUFF.

BY MORT WALKER

SERVICE TODAY: FOR THE DOWN-TRODDEN AND DEPRESSED - BLESS THE MEEK

BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT