

Goodbye to the queen of kindness

AASHA MEHREEN AMIN

THE first time I saw Fayza Apa was in the newsroom of the first *Daily Star* office in Toyenbee Circle, Motijheel. She cut a flamboyant figure – her hair in a smart bob, her rather defiant attitude as she nonchalantly had a 'smoke with the boys'. I have to admit, I was, being the nervous rookie feature writer, a little awed by her, especially when I found out that she had worked in quite a few reputable newspapers including *The Daily Sun* of Pakistan (in pre-independence times), *The Morning Sun* (Pakistan), *The Bangladesh Observer* and *The Bangladesh Times*, before joining *The Daily Star*. She was an avid art critic who covered practically every exhibition in town. She also covered music and performing arts and had enviable connections with artistes of all genres. I also realised she was the face I had often seen while growing up during those BTV-only days; I remembered her forceful voice announcing: "This is Fayza Haq with tonight's news headlines..." In fact, in those first few months of my joining *The Daily Star*, she lived up to that intimidating image, blasting people for silly mistakes in their copies or for asking the wrong question, and was seemingly always a little highly strung.

But that was just a superficial visage. The real Fayza Apa was the most soft-hearted person in the world. She was frustratingly generous and kindhearted. Frustrating, because there was no way you could dissuade

her from buying gifts for you – and she bought gifts for practically everyone she knew and even for those she didn't. She earned the name 'Female Santa' for the extravagant presents she gave people, never forgetting birthdays, anniversaries, Eid, Christmas... or just because she felt like it. My room is full of things she gave me – bangles for my anniversary, earrings for my birthday, *saris*, *kameez* pieces, a whole stack of assorted books for some occasion or the other. The books, I recall with a smile, were the result of a negotiation – I had made her promise not to buy me expensive *saris* or jewellery and made a 'compromise' asking her to buy me books instead. The result was a deluge of books – from romance novels to books on renaissance artists to a full set of Sherlock Holmes. But what I cherish the most are the cards and little notes she would leave on my desk when she came by – words full of funny anecdotes or observations, and of course, so much love. She had a funny name for me, in fact she had nicknames for everyone – 'Cabbage Patch Doll', 'Little Princess', 'kid'.

That was what was so remarkable about Fayza Apa. She made each and every person feel so special, loved and cherished. And she made no distinction between people, indulging everyone regardless of their position in the office or society. She was warm and always concerned about other people, forever helping out those in need. In return she never asked for anything,



For Fayza apa, work always came first.

she was happy just to give. Perhaps it was her guilelessness and generosity that intensified her prolonged illness. Because she never spent any of her money on herself, only on others. She had lost her beloved Australian husband to cancer many years ago and had no children; thus she lavished all her love on other people. Sadly, there were some people who took advantage of her trusting nature, extracting huge sums

of her hard-earned money, money that could have treated her acute diabetes and other chronic ailments. She died at age 68, in a small room, paralysed after a stroke, in utter neglect. That is what she got in return for all her kindness and generosity.

Professionally, she was unbelievably hard-working. Rain, hail or storm, whether she was well or not, she would never miss an interview, going to far-flung areas of the city using

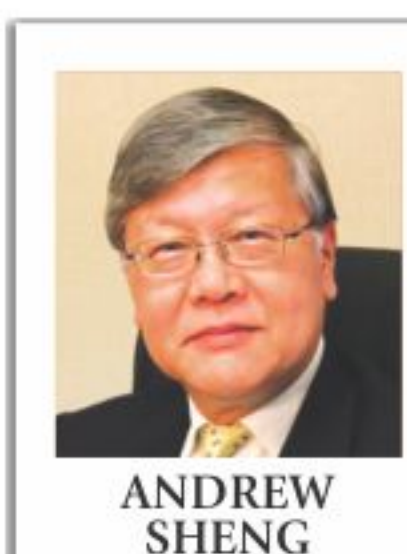
public transport, diligently recording and transcribing and producing a piece every few days. She was undoubtedly the most prolific art critic of her time, and there was no match for her in terms of her close relationship with the most acclaimed artistes and distinguished personalities – ambassadors, heads of cultural centres, visiting musicians, scholars and so on. She was a huge hit among the expatriate circles, among her

compatriots, young and old. I wonder what her thoughts were in those last moments of her life, early in the morning of July 7. Did she even know how many people would be devastated by her sudden departure, how painful it would be to feel regretful for not being able to lessen the hurt and deprivation she had experienced for so many years? Did she know that she would be missed so acutely and thought of so fondly? Did she know that she would be remembered by all the hundreds of artists she had written about, whose exhibitions she had covered, scores of colleagues at *The Daily Star* to whom she was like an elder sister, hordes of friends and relatives who had the privilege of being a part of her life, all those children of co-workers and friends who were showered with her affection?

It seems unreal to think she is really gone. All that comes to mind are snapshots of that kindhearted, wonderful soul – joking with us at the magazine section, having coffee at Alliance Française with her fans, that crisp, assertive voice that spoke impeccable English and sometimes a mixture of French, Urdu and Bangla when excited, her quirkiness that led to so many comical situations, that characteristic laughter. True to her nature, our dear Fayza Apa left us without any fuss, any grand farewell. But she has left us with a treasure trove of memories and the knowledge that no one will ever love us the way she did.

The writer is Deputy Editor, Editorial and Opinion, *The Daily Star*.

The biggest disruption is in jobs



ANDREW SHENG

THE 20th Anniversary of the Asian financial crisis and 10th Anniversary of the North Atlantic financial crisis brought back a sense of déjà vu—we have been here before.

Since last year's Brexit and Trump election, unpredictable politics was the major disruptor. But the underlying cause was the insecurity of the working class—adjusted for inflation, American median weekly earnings are today no higher than they were in the 1980s. Meanwhile, the CEO in an Indian IT firm earns 400 times the wages of his average worker.

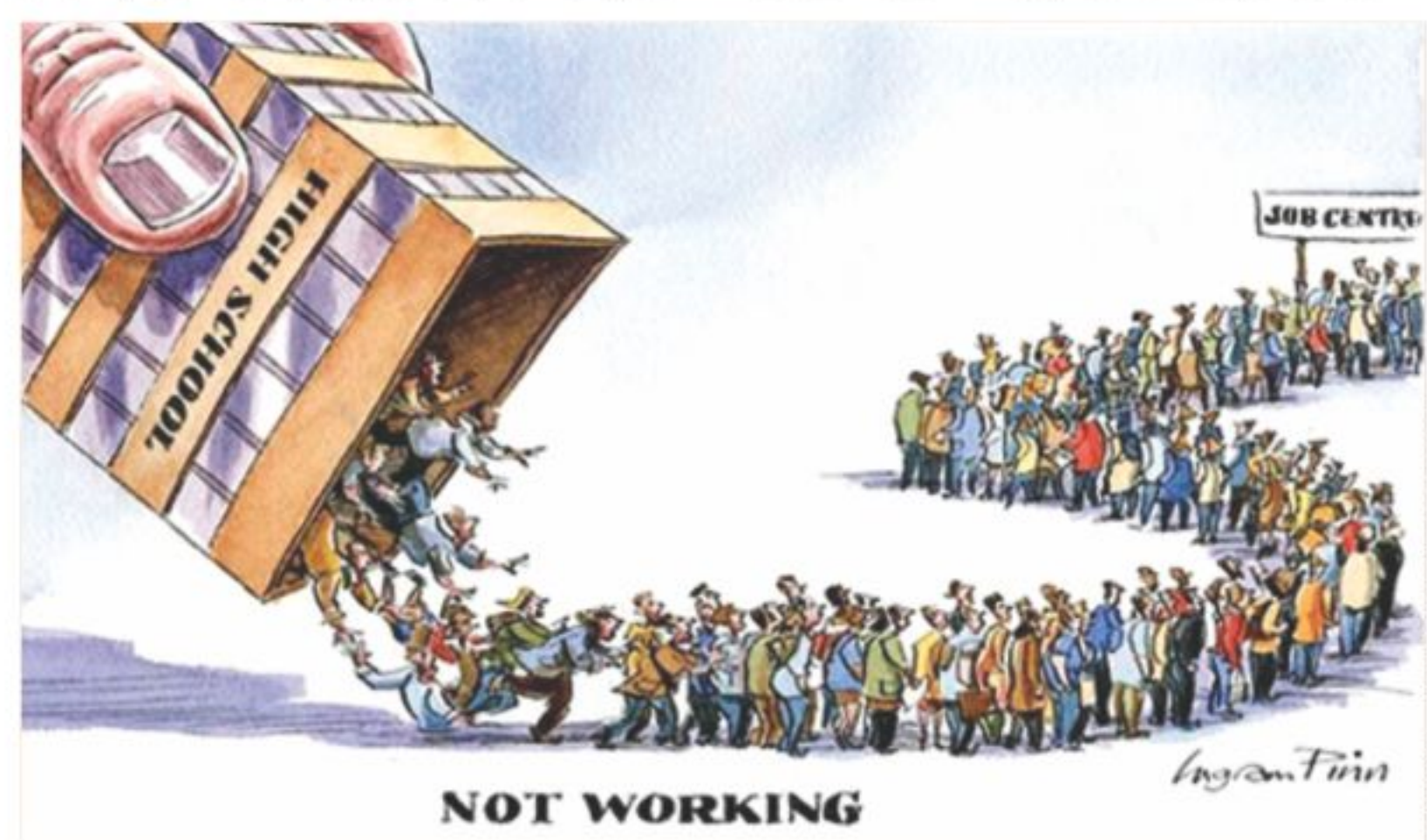
We can trace this severe job disruption to the convergence of several forces of demographics, climate change, technology and policy neglect.

Our current business model centres on the post-war creation of a global supply chain that tapped global resources to feed American and European consumption, paid for largely by US dollars. Technology enabled this supply chain to be built, first by "unbundling production from consumption", an insight of Professor Richard Baldwin (The Great Convergence: Information Technology and the New Globalisation, Belknap Press, 2016).

The arrival of IT and telecommunications in the 1990s created the second unbundling, distributing knowledge and technology around the world faster, causing convergence between the advanced countries and the emerging markets. China was smart enough to use this opportunity to create jobs in manufacturing and

assembly during this period.

Baldwin thinks that the third convergence will be caused by cost reductions in moving people, using telepresence and telerobotics. But as advanced markets age and become saturated in terms of consumption, the emerging markets are facing rising populations through high birth-rates, growing stresses from rapid urbanisation, and inability of their governance model to adapt to new technology. The result is rising unemployment, especially amongst



SOURCE - ABROADSHIP.ORG

the youth. When you add climate stress and food shortages from drought, agricultural failure, corruption and civil unrest, the outcome is civil war and spreading terrorism.

Europe is a rich region with an unemployment level of 8 percent, roughly double that in the US, but as high as 11 percent in Italy and 23 percent in Greece. Worse, youth unemployment averages 19 percent across Europe, and as high as 41 percent in Spain and 45 percent in Greece. The situation is creaking at the seams, stabilised only with welfare subsidies.

Europe's neighbours, however, are facing serious climate warming

problems. The United Nations has already declared that large parts of Nigeria, Somalia, Yemen and Sudan are facing famine, partly man-made but largely from drought. Syria was previously a fairly rich country, but after four years of drought, civil unrest and regional interference led to civil war. The migration at the rate of over one million a year into Europe comes at a time when Europe is struggling with its own internal debt and banking issues. It does not take much imagination to predict

that if her neighbouring countries fall into disarray, there will be more migration into the cooler climates in Europe. With such social strains, European growth cannot recover as expected, and domestic politics will become more protectionist and inward looking.

Inward migration will keep wages low, whilst the rise of robotics and artificial intelligence will cut the need for existing workers. In 2016, an Obama Administration report estimated that just under half of existing jobs are at risk of being eliminated over the next two decades. This does not mean that jobs will not be created at the same time. The Gig economy means that more and more

people are working independently and part time.

The arrival of Uber and Airbnb has rebundled consumption and income. Consumption goods (cars and housing) are becoming sources of new income. Excess capacity is being utilised in the new sharing economy. But we have not yet found a way to use the excess capacity of labour. We do not have as yet a Uber-like labour sharing platform, mainly because trust is what prevents us from hiring services we do not know and trust.

Last month's BIS Annual Report warned about the rekindling of inflation, even as the US unemployment level keeps dropping. The Fed is keen to "normalise" interest rates, and even the European Central Bank and Bank of England have signalled concerns about inflation. A lot of analysts doubt that with increasing robotisation, excess capacity and flat wages whether inflation will flare up. Lower oil prices suggest that there are worries that the US and Europe may perform worse than expected. But with unpredictable geo-politics and climate change, conditions can

change rapidly. If the global food supply is shocked by drought or natural disasters, consumer prices may spike up fairly quickly.

Bottom line—the real fear is stagflation—growth stagnation with consumer inflation that worsens social inequality.

The job situation is perilous in many countries. McKinsey estimated that 45 percent of the global working-age population is under-utilised, namely, unemployed, inactive or underemployed. Furthermore, more than 75 million youth are unemployed, many in the high population growth/low GDP income areas, vulnerable to social unrest.

There is a generational gap in understanding the issue of job creation. The old supply chain benefited the large multinationals and local champions, at the expense of small and medium enterprises (SMEs). The establishment is owned by aging baby-boomers, whereas the start-ups are mostly the young. There are only 45,000 companies listed on the global stock exchanges, meaning that millions of smaller companies do not access public equity capital.

Yes, many SMEs fail, but as Silicon Valley (and even Shenzhen) experience has shown, their failure gave rise to new creativity and success at the next round. SMEs contribute to nearly half of GDP and two-thirds of job creation. They are the real drivers of change.

We face three crucial imbalances. The regional imbalance occurs because the wealthy countries are aging, whereas the poorer countries are still young. Within countries, the social imbalance stems from growing disparities in income and wealth. The job imbalance is even more skewed—the existing labour force fears retrenchment, whereas the young face intense competition for scarce jobs. These combine to create the swing towards populist and radical views for change.

Time for our policies to focus on the young and their job creation.

The writer is Distinguished Fellow, Asia Global Institute, University of Hong Kong.

This is a series of columns on global affairs written by top editors and columnists from members of the Asia News Network and published in newspapers and websites across the region.

A WORD A DAY



LIMERANCE
noun

The state of being infatuated or obsessed with another person

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

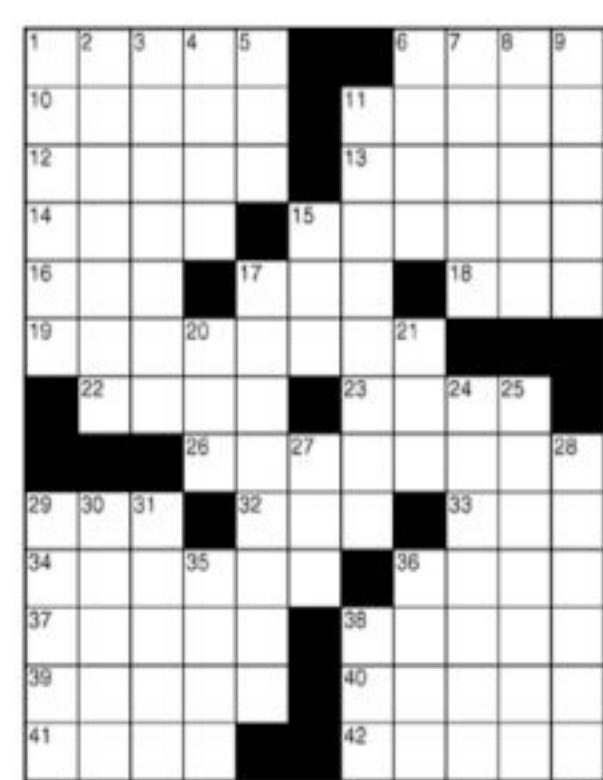
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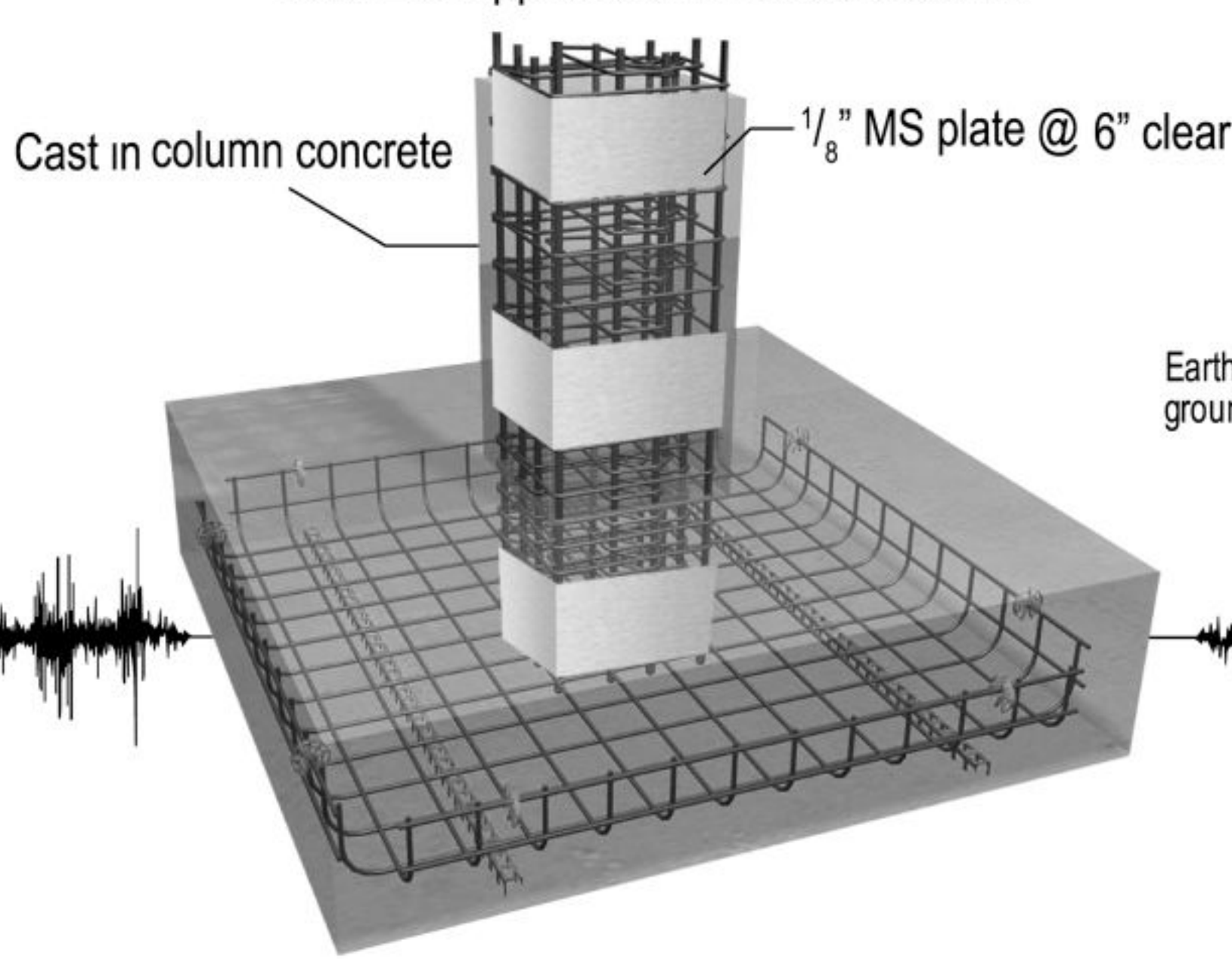


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