

Annan Commission recommendation

Myanmar should heed them

So far the government of Myanmar has remained steadfastly unamenable to world opinion, muted that might have been, or to the calls of Bangladesh for a just resolution of the issue of the Muslim minorities of its Rakhine State. Regrettably, Bangladesh has been bearing the brunt of Myanmar policies in this regard for the last four decades starting with the influx caused by 'Operation King Dragon' in 1978. There have been regular inflow of the persecuted Muslims from the Rakhine State in recent times, spiked up last year in October when nearly 75,000 were forced to flee their homeland to escape the violence perpetrated by the Myanmar State forces and seek refuge in Bangladesh. UN probe missions and humanitarian aid and the media have so far been barred from entering the state.

Now that the Rakhine Advisory Commission, headed by former UNSG Kofi Annan, formed by the government of Myanmar, has suggested several measures for a "peaceful, fair and prosperous future for the people of Rakhine" the Myanmar government should heed the recommendations, as it said it would when the Commission was formed.

The crux of the problem, the citizenship law, must be changed to correct the gross injustice on the Rohingyas when they were disfranchised as citizen of that country in 1982. The more than a million Rohingyas are perhaps the most persecuted and vulnerable stateless people in the world. And, apart from the disruptions in the socio-economic life of the locals in Cox's Bazar and the economic pressure it has created for Bangladesh, the extremists find in the Rohingyas a good source of recruitment.

The Myanmar government should implement the four major recommendations of the Commission immediately and create the enabling conditions as suggested in the report for an equitable and permanent resolution of the matter. Excessive force is counterproductive. And letting the problem simmer would have very serious consequences for both the countries.

Support-staff shortage in public hospitals

Formulate a new policy to recruit staff

It was shocking to know that the recruitment for the posts of third- and fourth-grade support-staff members in the government-run hospitals has been at a standstill for quite a long time. As the government has failed to draw up a new recruitment policy after the apex court declared the previous policy followed by the military regime of HM Ershad illegal, an increasing number of posts fall vacant every year. According to a report published in this newspaper, an estimated total of 46,000 posts of support staff are vacant in public hospitals across the country.

Desperate to find a way out, the hospital authorities have resorted to a peculiar strategy of deploying unpaid or nominally paid staffers who have to depend largely on tips. The authorities are not to blame for this situation, nor are those who have no option but to toil away in exchange for a space to sleep and eat the leftovers of patients. It is the policy makers whose utter negligence and lack of a sense of responsibility have led to such a situation as crucial public health institutions continue to run on ad-hoc basis.

It's important to note that countless people, especially the less fortunate ones, are dependent on public hospitals. We call on the government to formulate and enact a new recruitment policy immediately to fulfil the vacancies in public hospitals so that they can function efficiently.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Vehicles on Dhaka roads

The rise in the number of motor vehicles on Dhaka's roads is, to some extent, the main reason for traffic gridlocks, resulting in massive loss of time and money. This scenario has been persistent for a while now, and it appears that it will stay that way, until city planners decide to do something about it. An increased availability of comfortable public transports could help reduce the number of private vehicles that occupy much of the road space.

We can implement the method of allowing vehicles with "odd" and "even" number plates to run on alternative days. This method yielded some positive results in Delhi. This system, if introduced on a trial basis, may decrease the number of private vehicles in Dhaka to a great extent and help minimise traffic congestion as well.

Sirajul Islam, By E-mail

Ctg's water logging problem

Inundation caused by high-tide twice, has led to the suffering of thousands of families living in the Agrabad residential area. All roads in the area are submerged under two to three feet of water, leaving people marooned between 12-5 pm every day. Over the last few years, the Chittagong City Corporation Mayors should have taken some initiative to address this problem.

Residents of the area suffer greatly as water enters houses, educational institutions and business offices. Every mayor had promised to solve the city's water logging problem, but none of them has done a thing.

Peter Rebeiro, By E-mail

BCS and a demographic chaos



NAZMUL AHASAN

EVERY morning, just after Fajr prayers, a long queue of readers can be seen in front of Shahbagh's Central Public Library or Dhaka University library,

waiting for their turn to enter. The Central Public Library holds an enormous collection of more than two lakh books, some of which are quite rare, and countless magazines and newspapers, but these aren't what most people go there for. Instead, they take their own books with them, and the library's air-conditioned space is just a better place for people to read them. The readers are mostly young, those who have graduated recently or a few years ago. To describe them more precisely, they are BCS examination candidates, and with them are their BCS guidebooks. AHM Kamruzzaman, the librarian, told me that he has seen this trend develop rapidly over the last four to five years.

And, the last few years in particular have been quite extraordinary. Since 2007, Bangladesh has been enjoying a precious demographic period, the much-talked about "demographic dividend", meaning we now have more working-age-people than their non-working counterparts. Some South East Asian countries have accelerated their economic development and growth by harnessing the power of their youth population. A country in this period of its history is expected to invest heavily in education and health (not on gigantic infrastructure projects, as we do) because they will help this window of opportunity last longer and create long-term jobs. It has been consistently predicted in too many indexes to mention, that our economy will perform well in the ensuing years, considering the fact that we are currently growing through this demographic dividend. PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC), one of the largest professional service networks in the world, predicts that reaping this demographic dividend largely lies in our ability to create jobs for the growing number of young people.

We, however, are failing to live up to the expectations on that front. This is

evident by the upward trend in the interest of young graduates to sit for the BCS examinations. Over the years, vacancies in government organisations have remained more or less the same, but the number of candidates has only increased. This year, the number of students registered to sit for the BCS examination stands at nearly four lakh—highest in history and nearly 40 percent higher than that in the previous year and is equal to the entire population of the Maldives. As many as 171 candidates are fighting for a single vacancy.

One could legitimately argue that

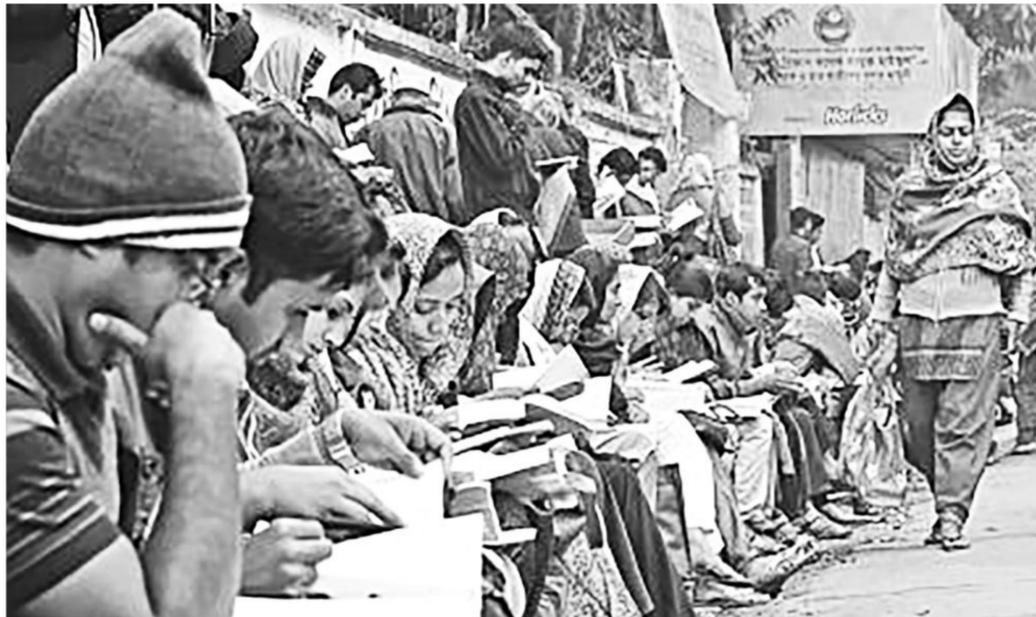


PHOTO: STAR

several factors contribute to this new phenomenon. First, as most analysts puts it, interest in government jobs surged in 2015, when the government restructured its pay-scale to increase the salaries and benefits of public servants nearly twofold. Second, security in government jobs is impregnable. Third, the typical family pressures force young people to incline towards the public sector, even if they have good prospects in the private sector. Such attitude largely derives from the presumed insecurity in the private sector, the lucrative post-retirement benefits of government jobs

and social status one gets to enjoy in government jobs.

These are expected and valid arguments. One could also credit a number of motivational platforms and personalities on social media, who encourage candidates and help them prepare for the battle. The role of these motivators behind this phenomenon remains largely underreported, but to understand their influence over job seekers, let me tell you that their work earns them hundreds of thousands of followers on Facebook alone.

One unintended consequence of their apparent honest endeavour is that too

many candidates had received too much motivation and took up the aim of becoming a civil servant way too seriously. Often described as "Sonar Harin" (golden deer), first class gazetted jobs, however, remain elusive for many students, particularly because the motivators fail to tell them that no matter how hard they try, only a fraction (one percent) of them will succeed. In the process, countless number of students will have spent the invaluable time of their youth, in the endless and vain pursuit of gaining their dream job—"Sonar Harin".

Yes, preparing for the BCS examination increases the possibility for one to succeed in other public examinations. But that an entire generation of brilliant graduates are desperately vlogging to get a government job speaks volume about our inability to generate good quality jobs in order to capitalise on their endless potential. Experts agree that investment in the private sector is far from enough, resulting in the creation of less employment in the sector than expected. The education system, with little public investment, produces graduates less interested in pursuing research or

building their own enterprises, than seeking government jobs.

While we must explore how best to utilise our current demographic dividend, we cannot afford to overlook the possibility of a demographic chaos looming large on the horizon should we continue on with our failures. The growing number of BCS aspirants is a symptom of a larger problem, one that we should best address sooner, rather than later.

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ASEAN's march into the digital economy



ANDREW SHENG

years.

ASEAN was born literally out of the ashes of colonialism and the Vietnam War. It started as a security pact, but gradually evolved into an economic and financial community that is not yet a cultural common, mainly because of its celebrated diversity.

Today, ASEAN comprises 10 countries, covering a land area of 4.4 million square kilometres, 3 percent of global total, with over 625 million population or just under 9 percent of the world population.

Its combined nominal GDP is already over USD 2.8 trillion and if counted as a single entity, it would rank 6th in the world, behind the USA, China, Japan, India and Germany.

The region is geographically blessed, located within the fastest growth zone in the world, with natural maritime access to India (growing over 7 percent), China (6.5 percent) and global markets as a hub of the global supply chain.

Within ASEAN, the younger countries (Cambodia, Myanmar, Laos) are growing over 7 per annum, whereas the members with over 100 million population (Indonesia, Philippines and Vietnam) are all growing 5-6 percent.

The ASEAN+3 (China plus Hong Kong, Japan and South Korea) grouping is expected to grow around 5 percent per annum in 2017-8, buoyed by domestic consumption, despite some protectionist headwinds. This is almost double that of the advanced countries and emerging markets in Latin America, Africa and Middle East.

Despite regional tensions and rivalries, ASEAN remains the pivot to maintain balance, cool heads and a zone of peace and stability.

Today, ASEAN plus China's share of global trade already exceeds that of the United States, as more and more ASEAN members accelerate their trade linkages. ASEAN+3's participation rate in the global supply chain is over half of exports, higher than the US (40 percent) and Euro-area (just over half).

The region is home to some of the world's oldest and richest biodiversity resources, including tropical forests, maritime reefs and nearly 13 million square kilometres of sea.

What is holding back the region's growth rate is the lack of infrastructure

development. The Asian Development Bank has estimated that ASEAN countries need to invest over USD 60 billion a year in infrastructure until 2020 to maintain their growth, but current infrastructure spending is around 3-4 percent of GDP compared with the desired rate of 5-8 percent of GDP.

The infrastructure is needed not only to improve domestic and regional connectivity, but also to deal with basic needs such as water, electricity, health and climate change amelioration investments.

Most studies show that there is no shortage of long-term savings to fund infrastructure investments, but there are still serious gaps and barriers to match the demand and supply for funds.

The game changer may arrive in the area of technology and innovation. A 2016 study by Temasek and Google suggested that just six ASEAN economies (Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore,

change our consumption patterns, but also our production through the Internet of Things (IoT), and even governance models.

A 2015 Frost and Sullivan report for SGX estimated that by 2020, the IoT market (interconnected devices) will have a market size of USD 79.3 billion by 2020, growing at a 26.8 percent CAGR.

ASEAN is well positioned to advance IoT, because its middle income market has both IT skills due to good basic education and innate adaptability to new technology.

Out of the top 20 global Internet countries, 11 are in Asia, of which 4 (Indonesia, Philippines, Vietnam and Thailand) are in ASEAN. Outside the US and India, Facebook's user base is huge in Southeast Asia, of which 126 million are in Indonesia. Malaysians have 50 percent more chance of using Facebook for business reasons than the world average. For example, Philippines earned USD 25



Thailand and Vietnam) will become the fastest growing internet region in the world, with over 480 million users by 2020.

This group's Internet economy (mostly e-commerce) will grow by roughly 14 percent compound annual growth rate (CAGR) to USD 200 billion by 2025.

The reasons for the fast growth are because the region has a burgeoning young population with 70 percent under the age of 40, with rapidly growing spending power.

ASEAN e-commerce adoption also occurs faster because the region lacks advanced country retail distribution systems and is ripe for technological disruption.

My own gut feel is that ASEAN's digital transformation will be faster than just e-commerce adoption. The reason is that digital transformation will not only

billions in revenue from business process outsourcing (BPO) in 2016, providing over 1.3 million jobs.

The World Bank has estimated that BPO revenues could soar to over USD 50 billion and creating another 1.3 million jobs by 2020. Thailand, already a major auto-components manufacturer and processed food producer, is aiming for Thailand 4.0 to upgrade her digital capacity in manufacturing and services, much in line with China's Internet+ and Made in China 2025 strategy and Europe's Industry 4.0.

A Malaysian startup called Grab is already successfully challenging Uber within ASEAN in vehicle hailing platforms.

In addition to e-Commerce and IoT, the next wave of productivity will come from innovations in social technology. McKinsey Global Institute has estimated that improvements in digital social



technology can increase the productivity of workers by 20 to 25 percent (McKinsey 2012).

The young in ASEAN are discovering that social media technology can help mobilise social action fast, with the result that coordinating large scale and complex projects through the use of smart technology and artificial intelligence is only just beginning.

ASEAN countries can therefore utilise digitisation and internet technology to improve on energy and resource usage, reduce pollution and increase their overall productive capacity.

Nowhere is this more important than in upgrading the quality of our food and agriculture production, as well as increasing the productivity of our congested cities. For example, Go-Jek, a mobile phone app, has more than 250,000 drivers in Indonesia, helping to reduce traffic congestion, delivery times and convenience to traffic clogged cities like Jakarta.

The ability of social media to improve coordination within bureaucracies, facilitate Big Data analysis and artificial intelligence in making smarter decisions, is only beginning and ASEAN is leading the world in piloting many experiments in this field, mainly because of its diversity in culture and stages of development, that provides a natural competitive gene pool of innovation.

Critics of ASEAN have complained that ASEAN succeeded by muddling through.

Muddling through is not muddle-headed. It is a practical, perhaps somewhat messy way forward, preferring pragmatism and reality over theoretical elegance.

It is precisely because ASEAN evolves through consensus and cultural mixing that slowly but surely forms its own adaptive model of survival with resilience.

Onward, ASEAN for the next 50 years!

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