

Is our education sector ready for the future challenges?



THE Goal 4 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is about quality education. The difference between the Millennium

Development Goals (MDGs) and SDGs in terms of education is that, while MDGs talked about ensuring enrolment and completion of primary education of all children, Goal 4 of the SDGs emphasises ensuring of inclusive and quality education for all and promoting of lifelong learning. The targets of Goal 4 include ensuring completely free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education for all girls and boys; access to quality early childhood development; ensuring equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education; increasing the number of youth and adults with relevant skills substantially; eliminating gender disparities in education; and ensuring equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable. They also include ensuring all youth and a substantial proportion of adults achieve literacy and numeracy; that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development; building and upgrading education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive; and increasing substantially the supply of qualified teachers.



development of society. Education directly enhances human capital and contributes to economic growth. The 7th Five Year Plan of Bangladesh envisages to achieve 8 percent GDP growth rate by 2020. At the same time, the government's other vision documents project for a 9-10 percent growth rate in GDP by 2030. In particular, Goal 9 of the SDGs aims to double the share of manufacturing in the GDP for the LDCs by 2030. If not doubling the share, even if Bangladesh wants to increase the manufacturing share substantially from its current level of around 18 percent, the country needs to invest

quite a lot in developing its human capital so that it can meet the demands of the industries. Other goals of the SDGs highlight the importance of quality education for a better quality of life too. However, there are genuine concerns that the current education system in Bangladesh is unable to meet most of the targets mentioned above. Despite the fact that Bangladesh made considerable progress in gross-enrolment in primary education for both genders, the country is seriously lagging behind in ensuring quality education for all. Because data for many of the targets related to Goal 4

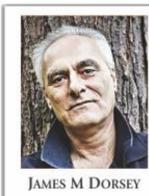
are not available, we have studied a few available indicators which are consistent with the goal 4. If we consider the average years of schooling as an indication of the status of education of any country, during the years between 2010-2015, this number for Bangladesh was only 5.1 which was higher than Pakistan (4.9) but lower than India (5.8). However, Bangladesh was far behind Sri Lanka (10.9) and some of leading Southeast Asian countries like Malaysia (10.1), Thailand (7.7) and Vietnam (7.8). Two important indicators related to the quality of educational

infrastructure are "percent share of trained teachers in total teachers in primary education" and "pupil-teacher ratio in primary education". During the years between 2010-2015, in the case of trained teachers, Bangladesh (53 percent) performed very poorly compared to India (77.2 percent), Pakistan (83.7 percent), Sri Lanka (79.1 percent), Malaysia (97.2 percent), Thailand (100 percent) and Vietnam (100 percent). In the case of pupil-teacher ratio, though Bangladesh (39.8) performed better than Pakistan (42.8), it performed worse than India (32.5), Sri Lanka (23.8), Malaysia (11.9), Thailand (16.1) and Vietnam (19.4). Regrettably, Bangladesh is among the bottom in the list of countries in the world with the lowest ratio of public expenditure on education to GDP, which is only 2.1 percent. This ratio is 3.7 percent in India, 5.4 percent in Malaysia, 4.3 percent in Thailand, and 5.3 percent in Vietnam. This is one of the reasons why the private spending on education as a share of household monthly expenditure is much higher in Bangladesh compared to those of other South Asian countries. According to the latest available Household Income and Expenditure Surveys of five South Asian countries, the share of private expenditure on education in the average monthly household expenditure in Bangladesh is around 5.5 percent, 2.6 percent in India, 4.8 percent in Nepal, 2.5 percent in Pakistan, and 1.9 percent in Sri Lanka. This suggests that the responsibility of education expenditure heavily falls on households in Bangladesh, and the government's role is yet to be ideal.

It is important to mention here that Bangladesh's education sector also suffers from huge disparities. The disparities are observed between regions and between rich and poor. There is a high degree of inequality with respect to access to quality education as poorer people and people in remote rural areas have limited access to higher education and quality educational institutions. The existing education system is also not very conducive to developing a strong base in the education sector, as quality, access and opportunities vary considerably across the English medium, Bangla medium, and Madrasa systems, as well as between public and private educational institutions. What needs to be done? Some major reforms in the education sector are much warranted, which should include improvements in the quality of institutional mechanism in the education sector, modernisation of curriculum, substantial increase in the supply of trained teachers, harmonisation among different educational systems, reduction in disparities and unequal access to education by improving and expanding educational infrastructure across regions, and putting due emphasis on secondary and tertiary education, vocational training, and skill development. For this, there is a need for a substantial increase of the ratio of public spending on education to GDP from its current level of 2 percent to at least 4 percent in the coming years, and making such spending more efficient.

Dr Selim Raihan is Professor, Department of Economics, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh, and Executive Director, South Asian Network on Economic Modeling (SANEM). Email: selim.raihan@econu.ac.bd

Saudi women gain access to stadiums: More questions than answers



SAUDI Arabia's decision to allow women to attend sporting events in three of the country's stadiums raises as many

questions as it provide answers that go to the core of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's reforms and the kingdom's sports policy. The announcement that women, long barred from stadia, would be granted access to stadiums in Riyadh, Jeddah and Dammam came weeks after the kingdom lifted a ban on women's driving. The moves were designed to project Saudi Arabia in a favourable light at a time that it is seeking to attract badly needed foreign investment.

It was not immediately clear whether women would have access to any sporting event of their choice nor was it evident that the decision would affect wide-ranging restrictions on the encouragement of women's sports.

Saudi Arabia has until recently rejected demands by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) that women be granted the support and facilities to compete in all sports. Operating in a legal metherland, middle and upper-class women have been able to expand into other sports such as soccer through private clubs and associations.

The partial lifting of the ban on women's access to stadiums may also be related to concern within the IOC of greater government interference in Saudi sports, a sector that has always been tightly controlled by the state. Saudi officials worried that the kingdom like Kuwait and Pakistan could be suspended after Turki Al Asheikh, the president of the General Sports Authority (GSA), replaced officials in virtually all Saudi sports associations with the exception of soccer, since his recent appointment. Soccer may have been excluded to ensure that Saudi Arabia's qualification for the 2018 World Cup in Russia was not jeopardised. The IOC suspended Kuwait and Pakistan because of alleged government interference.

Asheikh's appointees included Princess Reema bint Bandar bin Sultan, the first woman to head a mixed gender sports federation. Princess Reema, a successful entrepreneur and daughter of former Saudi ambassador to the United States, Prince Bandar bin Sultan, was last year appointed to a Cabinet-level position in sports governance. The tighter Saudi grip on sports governance as well as the lifting of the bans on driving and stadium access fits the pattern of Prince Mohammed's reforms that are focused on economic diversification and rationalisation coupled with necessary but limited social reforms and a crackdown on any form of dissent.

They also stroke with Prince Mohammed's recent declaration that he would steer the kingdom away from the Wahhabi ultra-conservative interpretation of Islam on which it was built and towards a more moderate form of the faith. The prince did not define what moderate meant and, despite his reducing the



The announcement that women, long barred from stadia, would be granted access to stadiums in Riyadh, Jeddah and Dammam came weeks after the kingdom lifted a ban on women's driving.

PHOTO: AFP

power of the religious police and allowing forms of entertainment like music, film and dance that were long banned, has yet to crackdown on religious hate speech, including against Shiites, and endorse religious pluriformity. Saudi Arabia remains a country in which non-Muslim worship is banned.

So far, Prince Mohammed's moves fit a more general trend among autocrats who realise that their autocracies need to be upgraded to ensure survival. To achieve that goal, autocracies need to be able to deliver public goods, create jobs and economic opportunity and cater to a

modicum of aspirations of largely young populations. Prince Mohammed's reforms, laid out in a document entitled Vision 2030, were geared towards that goal.

Saudi Arabia's need to shed its image as an inward looking ultra-conservative kingdom is fed not only by its foreign investment requirement but also by its dispute with Qatar, the world's only other Wahhabi state, and its rivalry with Iran.

Qatar, unlike Saudi Arabia, has been able to project itself as a more forward-looking country, despite a five-month-old Saudi and United Arab Emirates-led boycott justified by

allegations of Qatari support for militancy and political violence, because it does apply numerous restrictions associated with Wahhabism in the kingdom. As a result, in stark contrast to Saudi Arabia, Qatar boasts one of the world's highest women's participation in the workforce.

Saudi Arabia and the UAE have so far failed to garner international empathy for their refusal to enter into unconditional negotiations with Qatar. The two countries have insisted that Qatar accept a set of intrusive and humiliating demands that would curtail Qatari sovereignty

before they engage in negotiations. Qatar has rejected the demands and proven so far capable of compensating for difficulties caused by the Saudi-UAE-led diplomatic and economic boycott.

Ironically, the partial Saudi lifting of the ban on women's access to stadiums gives the kingdom a leg up in its rivalry with Iran, the only other country that does not allow women to attend men's sporting events. Iran has so far successfully resisted pressure from international sports associations, but is likely to find that more difficult in the wake of the Saudi move.

Commenting on Prince Mohammed's reforms, Amnesty International this week suggested five crucial elements that would give his plans credibility: an end to death penalties given that Saudi Arabia's is one of the world's top executioners; allowing freedom of expression; an end to discrimination of Shiites, halting discrimination of women including abolition of male guardianship, and stopping the killing of civilians in the Yemen war.

"The months since the Crown Prince's appointment, have seen no improvements, instead, it's already dire rights record has continued to deteriorate," Amnesty said in a statement referring to Prince Mohammed's promotion in June from deputy crown prince to crown prince.

Dr James M Dorsey is a senior fellow at the S Rajaratnam School of International Studies, co-director of the University of Würzburg's Institute for Fan Culture, and co-host of the New Books in Middle Eastern Studies podcast. He is the author of the book *The Turbulent World of Middle East Soccer* among several others.

QUOTABLE Quote



JORDAN B PETERSON
CANADIAN CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGIST AND PROFESSOR OF PSYCHOLOGY

Most people who are cowards disguise their cowardice as morality. And they claim that their harmlessness, which is actually a consequence of their fear and inability to be harmful or dangerous, is actually a sign of their moral integrity. And that's a really bad idea. If you're an axe murderer but you don't have an axe, that doesn't mean that you're moral.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

1 It's true	shown	7 Like some plaques
5 Clip	32 Merchant of music	8 Rio Grande city
9 Left on a liner	34 Price addition	10 Alley prowler
11 Pop stars	35 Spry	12 Squad car sound
13 Mercutio's pal	36 Full of energy	17 Slangy agreement
14 Musical speeds	38 Romantic sort	19 Tiny
15 Avenue tree	39 First State capital	22 Like Vassar since 1969
16 Burma, today	40 Comfy place	
18 Flood-gates	41 Sunset site	24 Enjoy a favorite book, say
20 Language ending		25 Of the kidneys
21 Like draft beer		26 Region of Spain
22 "Let's go!"		27 Clock numeral
23 Supporter	DOWN	28 Barrel pieces
24 Little hopper	1 Going rates	30 Watchful
25 Suggestive	2 Twin of Artemis	31 Ply
27 Turns suddenly	3 Frank	33 Brewpub choices
29 Geological period	4 Uno plus due	37 Depressed
30 When a show is	5 Some breads	
	6 Yemen port	

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

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

BEETLE BAILEY BY MORT WALKER



LOOK! SOLDIERS! HI, ARMY GUYS! BAM! BAM! BAM!! SOMETIMES I DON'T KNOW IF THIS IS AN ARMY CAMP OR A ZOO. MAYBE IT'S BOTH!

6-30 ©2017 by King Features Syndicate, Inc. World rights reserved.

BABY BLUES BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT



STOP IT, WREN! YEAH, STOP IT. DON'T! YEAH, DON'T. MOM! WREN IS ANNOYING ME! YEAH! TELL HER THAT'S MY JOB!