

Good ideas gone bad

CHINTITO SINCE 1995



NIZAMUDDIN AHMED

ERSHAD Shaheb perhaps had a Maoist idea when after seizing power in 1982 he proposed, ordered and then displayed what he and his cohorts at the time thought would become the trendiest phenomenon since Marilyn Monroe lost her purdah to the winds.

His chosen luxury to bicycle from home to office on a barren Cantonment road while wearing a 32-tooth smile and being guarded by over two dozen security personnel tucked in four-wheelers was never the epitome of civil Dhaka, but it made good photographs for the media and good pumping for his ever-so young heart.

Considering himself a popular *palli bondhu* (friend of the villages), the military president wildly dreamt that urban commuters would follow suit, abandon buses and cars, even motorcycles, and the capital would be Beijing. The bicycle revolution never took place because the roads were unsuitable, vehicular traffic was rowdy, and almost nobody knew Chinese.

Quixotic Ershad today should be happy to see cyclists on our roads, including ladies, increasing manifold. The roads are however still dilapidated, drivers appear to have recently migrated from hell and we wish we knew Chinese to understand what deal they are brokering with Myanmar over Ro... shhh! The Pope recently got back from Nappayidaw.

Ershad Shaheb's propagandist idea would not be the first nor the last public endeavour to be rejected by the



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PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

powers that be, that is—in case we forget—the people, because they were not made aware, nor involved in the decision-making or sought for approval.

Another day, another government in 2002 slammed a ban on bags of polythene a few micrometres-thick (that must mean very thin) because they were clogging our drains, up to which point the government's finding was correct, the idea suitably buoyed by recurring flooding of city streets. However, the slapstick ban was no less than severing the head to relieve a headache because the vast majority of the population had no clue about all the fuss.

Housewives lost sleep wondering

how they would carry home gooey goods from the market, and husbands with gooey fingers felt helpless. Seizures and fines could not deter the practice. As recently as February this year a mobile court not only seized 127kg of illegal polythene bags from superstores and bakeries in the capital's Mirpur, but also fined the guilty nearly Tk 3 lakh. But the bags, they are not going away.

Embargo on factories that manufactured polythene bags could not cut the supply. Net, cotton, jute and paper bags became trendy, but the so-called polybags remain a favourite with vendors and the public. A suppressed underground revolution sustained and the polybag emerged

victorious with all its competitors reduced to the ranks. This despite information, admittedly known only among the learned, that food wrapped in polythene can cause cancer.

In another *jhatika* move, one fine morning in 2012, residents in posh residential areas of Dhaka and Chittagong awoke to three big, and I mean big, surprises at their front door. There was this green and a yellow and a blue thing made of plastic. I say "thing" because 75 percent of the residents and their households did not know what they were and what they were for, and 15 percent did not know which one was for what, and the 10 percent that proba-

bly had some idea were fast asleep; 11 am was early.

In no time, three in the family and *buas* too in some houses claimed ownership of the bulky bins without even thanking the Department of Environment (DoE), which distributed some 60 thousand colour-coded bins for trash segregation.

The green bin meant for kitchen garbage and organic waste became a laundry basket, the yellow one for plastics, glass, metal, and paper was soon filled with toys for keeps, and the red one for battery, electrical and other toxic wastes took over as rice storage.

DoE's 3R Pilot Project for "Reducing, Reusing and Recycling" of domestic wastes, despite the support of the respective City Corporations at least in distribution, failed to take off because there was no effective education or training, and publicity to build awareness among the end users.

The Rebuff, Reject and Refuse project reached comical proportions when even the very few residents, who cooperated with the system by depositing separated rubbish in three different coloured bins, saw their garbage being emptied collectively in a City Corporation van for onward journey to perhaps a dumping station. The rubbish were all relieved to be reunited after their short-lived painful separation.

Most recently, DNCC and DSCC worked together to "decorate" simultaneously some parts of Dhaka municipal areas with blue and yellow waste bins along pavements. No separation of blood from battery, or glass from paper, or between food and metal, many of the tin canisters did not last a week. We were dumping waste around it, not in it. Some were

full beyond the brim, neglected and not emptied. A few months later, some were humiliatingly lying face down on the sidewalk, with passers-by offering bemused pity at best. The lucky ones had been stolen and perhaps found a home, or probably ended up in a metal workshop where they are likely to be given a new shape and a more productive life.

As will be evident from the Tk 5 crore joint municipality exercise that went bust, citizens would rather steal and mutilate equipment, and make fun of a project without realising that much of it was aimed for their quality of life. Citizens are seemingly reluctant to adopt welfare measures enforced on them externally.

Most public ventures, such as non-formal education, work because the communities were involved in the decision-making. The beneficiaries were informed and alerted on the cause and effect of an undertaking. Suspicion breeds faster than mosquitoes when external ideas are imposed on the populace.

Culpability of taxpaying citizens remaining uneducated, untrained and unmotivated about the philosophy of life remains with the government, the municipality and the concerned authorities. Well, to some extent, our education system (for those fortunate to find an institution of learning) can feel responsible. However, if we are uncooperative towards an initiative it is because we choose to be so. To progress as a society, helping hands should be a two-way traffic: service from the provider and cooperation from the public.

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The right to quality education

MUHAMMAD MAHDY HASSAN



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ON December 10, 1948 the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). UN member countries have observed Human Rights Day on December 10 every year since its inception in 1950. It bears special significance for Bangladesh. The independence of Bangladesh in 1971 capitalised on the basic human right to self-determination. This day reminds us to stand up for our rights and those of others. All human rights enshrined in the UDHR are still relevant to us today.

Based on the demands of the present time, we need to set some priority areas, particularly the right to inclusive and equitable quality education (IEQE). It is not only a human right in itself but is also of paramount importance for the exercise of all other human rights. Due to its importance, sustainable development goal 4 (SDG 4) provides a detailed outline and set of indicators and targets in order to ensure IEQE. In defining IEQE, Unicef emphasises quality learners such as early childhood development; quality learning environments such as inclusive school environment and quality of infrastructure; quality content such as student-centred, non-discriminatory, standards-based curriculum structures; quality processes such as continuing support for student-centred learning; and quality outcomes.

Hence, it is crucial for us to realise the importance of IEQE keeping the needs of the next generation in sight. We have to advocate for ensuring IEQE because Bangladesh is under obligation to ensure IEQE as a UN member state as per the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Article 13 and UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Articles 28 and 29. Our commitment has been reflected in Articles 15 and 17 of the Constitution, and other

domestic laws and policies such as the Compulsory Primary Education Act, 1990; the Rights and Protection of Persons with Disabilities Act 2013; the Perspective Plan 2010-2021; Vision 2021; National Sustainable Development Strategy; and the Seventh Five Year Plan 2016-20.

However, evidence shows that despite the huge success towards increasing access to education and enrolment rates, in practice, Bangladesh still has much to do to ensure IEQE. Also, enormous gaps between laws and policies, and practice and implementation compound the challenge since domestic laws and policies have not yet adopted the principles of IEQE. Unesco's "Right to Education: Law and Policy Review Guidelines" asserts that "the right to quality education... cannot be achieved without strong national legal and policy frameworks

that lay the foundation and conditions for the delivery and sustainability of good quality education."

But the provision of education stated in Articles 15 and 17 of the Constitution is still not justiciable, though many countries have constitutional provisions regarding the right to education and laws for implementation. If we look at India, we will find that in the 86th amendment of the Constitution in 2002, free and compulsory education for all children aged six to 14 has been included in the Constitution as a fundamental right. The Act makes it obligatory for the state to ensure that every child gets free elementary education. Unlike several other countries, the Indian Constitution does not stop at the inclusion of a provision but also makes the government accountable for ensuring that a child attends school. Even in the Philippines, the

amendment to the Constitution declares that the state shall protect and promote the right of all citizens to quality education, at all levels, and shall take appropriate steps.

In the Compulsory Primary Education Act 1990, the coverage and quality remain poor. The "compulsion" aspect has not been well-publicised. In the Rights and Protection of Persons with Disabilities Act 2013, the minimum age for admission of students with disability to school should be raised in comparison to that for normal students. Special methods should be applied for the examination system of students with disabilities.

In the proposed Draft Education Act 2016, there is no mention of adequacy and efficiency of resources and budgets for education, or criteria and principles for education resource mobilisation and

allocation. A rights- and equity-based education system, for example, requires public education resources to be allocated equitably, by applying certain criteria, among upazilas, proportional to the student population in each upazila.

In an article in *The Daily Star* titled "A New Education Law: Will it Help?", Professor Manzoor Ahmed wrote that the Act may be in conflict with the spirit and provision of the public and private universities' Acts, compromising self-regulation of universities. Although self-regulation and autonomy have not worked out as expected, the solution may not lie in handing more power to the bureaucracy in the ministry of education. Education policies in Bangladesh have not adopted IEQE. The National Plan of Action (NPA) takes a "needs-based" approach rather than a "rights-based" one, and, therefore, lacks the urgency and the commitment entwined with the latter. The scarcity of reliable and consistent data on the magnitude and educational status of marginalised children adds to the problem.

To ensure the right to inclusive and equitable quality education keeping SDG 4 in sight, the government and relevant stakeholders should take the following policy recommendations into consideration: (i) include human rights education in the national curriculum, from primary to tertiary, taking into account the requisites of a secure career in the digital age; (ii) revise proposed Draft Education Act 2016 in light of the principles of IEQE and pass it as soon as possible; (iii) implement the existing laws against child marriage and promote the education of the girl child in particular; (iv) implement the Bangladesh Persons with Disability Welfare Act 2001 and the Rights and Protection of Persons with Disabilities Act 2013 to make strides in ensuring inclusive education; (v) adopt the principles of IEQE in legal and institutional arrangements; (vi) amend the Constitution inserting "right to IEQE" provision as a fundamental right in Part III of the Constitution; and (vii) ensure accountability.

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JSC examinees take the examinations in a dilapidated classroom at Charkazol High School centre in Galachipa upazila of Patuakhali. Poor learning environment and infrastructure is one of many reasons why quality education in our schools is lacking.

PHOTO: STAR

A WORD A DAY

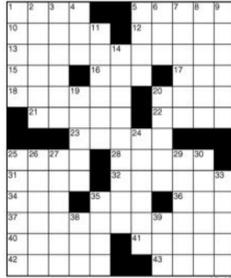


PAREGMENTON
noun

The juxtaposition of words that have a common derivation, as in "sense and sensibility"

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
- 1 Maid's target
 - 5 Frighten
 - 10 Vision-related
 - 12 Finishes last
 - 13 Blackout aids
 - 15 Gift tag word
 - 16 Target
 - 17 Aunt, in Acapulco
 - 18 Bank activity
 - 20 Thatcher, for one
 - 21 Judi of "Iris"
 - 22 Wallet bills
 - 23 Very beginning
 - 25 Roman censor
 - 28 Assesses
 - 31 Get — the crack of dawn
- DOWN**
- 32 More pale
 - 34 Visibility lessener
 - 35 Feel queasy
 - 36 "My word!"
 - 37 Night game needs
 - 40 Dodge
 - 41 Church contribution
 - 42 Shows fondness
 - 43 Russian refusal
 - 1 Tips, as a hat
 - 2 Digital transfer
 - 3 Go hungry
 - 4 "— the season..."
 - 5 Slender
 - 6 Gear part
 - 7 Tv's Kutcher
 - 8 Stop working
 - 9 School papers
 - 11 Probability
 - 14 Urban transport
 - 19 Silver bar
 - 20 Gear part
 - 24 Like old streets
 - 25 Like a jail-bound perp
 - 26 Twin of Artemis
 - 27 Catch stealing
 - 29 Fourscore
 - 30 Be quietly furious
 - 33 Bowler's button
 - 35 Fruit drinks
 - 38 Poem of praise
 - 39 Gimlet base



YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

MATT ATLAS
ODOR REINED
LOKI METTLE
TRENTON ILL
SENIORS WEE
SWEAT DRY CART
KIND PARSE
ANG TANDEMS
TEA ONTARIO
ERRATA MALL
REDIAL OSLO
DELLS MESS

BEETLE BAILEY



BY MORT WALKER



BABY BLUES



BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT

