

Values tumbling like a can of worms

PLEASURE IS ALL MINE



SHAH HUSAIN IMAM

WE have a shiny sheen of socio-economic indicators, compared to those of most other South Asian countries—Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen never ceases to mention this. We may also rejoice in staging international events including arranging big cultural rendezvous. But

beneath all that glint and in stark contrast to it, three bizarre incidents took place recently revealing an underlay of dross.

We realise that not all small things are beautiful; some can be ugly, too. Contrary to the spirit of the New Year, a dotting parent overreacted to his daughter, a student of Class VI, having slightly underperformed at her annual examination. Instead of introspecting he vented out his spleens on her school teacher. Not content with merely giving him a bit of his mind, he beat the teacher up! The father went hysterical only because his daughter came second, and not first, at the exam! This created a furore among the teachers at the Harikandi Government Primary School under Zakiganj Upazila in Sylhet where it all happened.

That academic performance of a ward at the primary level falling by a wee bit can be made an issue of in such a brash manner, is not just a reflection of a weird mindset of an individual, but also of a social trend towards forcing an academic result by foul means.

We often hear of the adverse long-term effect on pupils carrying a huge load of curricula, and to pressurise them to be high achievers - unfailingly - can be stunting in the long run. But to seek top grades for them through coercion is to teach the ward the first lesson in unearned success.

Then we see an incident of role reversal with a questioning parent turning out to be the victim and the teacher/s the perpetrator. This happened on the premises of a pre-cadet school in Cox's Bazar Sadar Thana. According to newspaper reports, a guardian named Ayat Ullah went to the school and asked the headmaster as to why his son, Shahrier Nafis, didn't get A-plus at the promotion test from Class I to Class II. He also wanted to know why the admission and class fees were raised without prior notification. At one



stage, an altercation between the parent and the school headmaster ensued. Thereupon the headteacher called upon his colleague at the adjacent high school to come to his aid. But as both of them pushed Ayat Ullah he was thrown off-balance, falling down on the ground. Then, allegedly, the teachers tied him up, hand-and-foot. And, as the newspaper photo showed him lying prostrate, he was reportedly manhandled and even kicked.

Ayat Ullah filed a case against seven persons including the two headteachers along with other teachers in the local thana. Administrative actions were reportedly being taken with the parent having received medical attention sent home. Just see, how out of a petty cause, the intemperate attitudes of socially well-placed people could end up being so riotous!

Finally, you have the story of a desperate appetite for money coming into play from an unexpected quarter in an equally unlikely manner.

A news emanating from Comilla informed of an unrelenting blaring from a mike by none other than a headmaster of a school where an admission test for Class VII was going on. The announcement for the parents contained the following oft-repeated message: "Tomorrow at 11 am the results of the admission test will be declared. Do keep Tk 3,000-3,500 handy when you come to the school tomorrow for the admission of your child. And, to the teachers, the instruction is that you have to retain the question papers with you after the examination and a strict vigil so that when students leave the school, they leave without the question papers."

The headteacher was apparently so possessed by the likely dramatic effect (on the public) of his loud announcements to a targeted audience that he waxed completely insensitive to the disturbance he caused to the examinees by the high decibel sounds he made to din the message home. Well, he was operating on a very low level

of personal and professional dignity, so he could have been scarcely bothered about how the admission seekers fared at the test so long as the "fees" came pouring in!

The many critics of the headteacher's not-so-amusing methods couldn't have missed out on his sub-plot not to let go of the question papers to the students lest their parents had a basis to question the decision of the school authority to deny admission to any candidate who otherwise would have merited it!

This not to detract from a positive Bangladesh expanding as something of a quiet revolution but to strengthen, sustain and build up on it by steadfast adherence to a set of values based on the simple principle of social obligations to each other, the fountain-head of social bonding and collective well-being.

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Less is More

HUMOROUSLY YOURS



NAVEED MAHBUB

WHILE a student at Dhaka College, I never got to see the inside of my Section C classroom. But I vividly remember three things: the common room from the daylong carom games, the cafeteria for

its mouthwatering *samosas*, and the mini amphitheatre of Section A—that's right, Section A, which was NOT my section, where I never failed to show up for the Bangla classes.

I wasn't alone. Just about everyone from sections B and C were there too. And not only that, some of our friends from Notre Dame College trekked across town (and Heaven alone knows how they "bunked" their classes) and managed to shoehorn themselves into the gallery where students were already packed in like sardines.

We all gather in the massive gallery with two pathetic fans on a sweltering June afternoon to hear the most entertaining talk on topics not even remotely related to the assigned chapter that the teacher was (supposed to be) teaching us. The lecture goes nowhere beyond the first line of the whole chapter. This continues for the whole of the first year.

For raging teenagers with the nearby Balaka cinema hall and New Market beckoning (yes, the prehistoric entertainment from the analog days), this was the next best thing that could happen to us. This was *Anondo Mela*, live! And literally speaking. After all, not everyone is the one and only Prof Abdullah Abu Sayeed.

Surprisingly, very few of us are remotely close to what he is. It's not that we don't talk. In fact, we talk quite a bit but we simply can't talk. Wonder why there is a collective,

muffled groan when the chief guest says: "I don't want to lengthen my speech anymore..." which means he will go on for another 45 minutes. Just like there is always the one conversation hog at a roundtable like the one hogging up the coveted *biryani* potatoes at the wedding dinner table.

This automatically creates the poor listener. When someone calls, we look at the phone, stare at it for a few seconds while making a sure shot mental calculation, and then confidently put the phone down without answering it. More often than not, the caller has the reputation of embarking on an unending rant. Worse, there is an unfathomable blurry line between topics so

as to make it impossible to discern the segue and thus the window to interject is never in sight.

Now this, in turn, creates the rapid speaker. Knowing that we have poor listeners with extremely short attention spans who will cut you off at the knees any minute, we speak at a staccato Mach 2.2 speed. We have to squeeze in as much as possible before being shot down.

So, being the poor speaker, we're the poor listener, and being the poor listener, we're the poor speaker.

Is there an escape from the vicious cycle? "Obviously!" By the way, this is the most commonly used one-word answer (in

Bangladesh) to just about every conceivable question on earth.

"Are you working anywhere?" "Obviously!"

But to me, it sounds like: "[Yes, I'm working.] Obviously! [Why are you even asking me this stupid question? You moron!]"

This is the broad spectrum antibiotic to all conceivable questions to be faced at the IELTS (International English Language Testing System), prescribed by the mushrooming quacks. And why not? There is the exodus to Canada and Australia. Oh, and "why not?" is the other phrase in the frequent flier programme.

First listen, and listen carefully. It's ok to not get the question the first time around. Ask, rephrase and buy time in the process. Then, for Heaven's sake, be PC. No, not Politically Correct, but just be Precise and Concise.

"Would you like to join me for lunch?" "Why not? [That was a rather brilliant suggestion on your part, I must say, to ask me to have lunch with you.]"

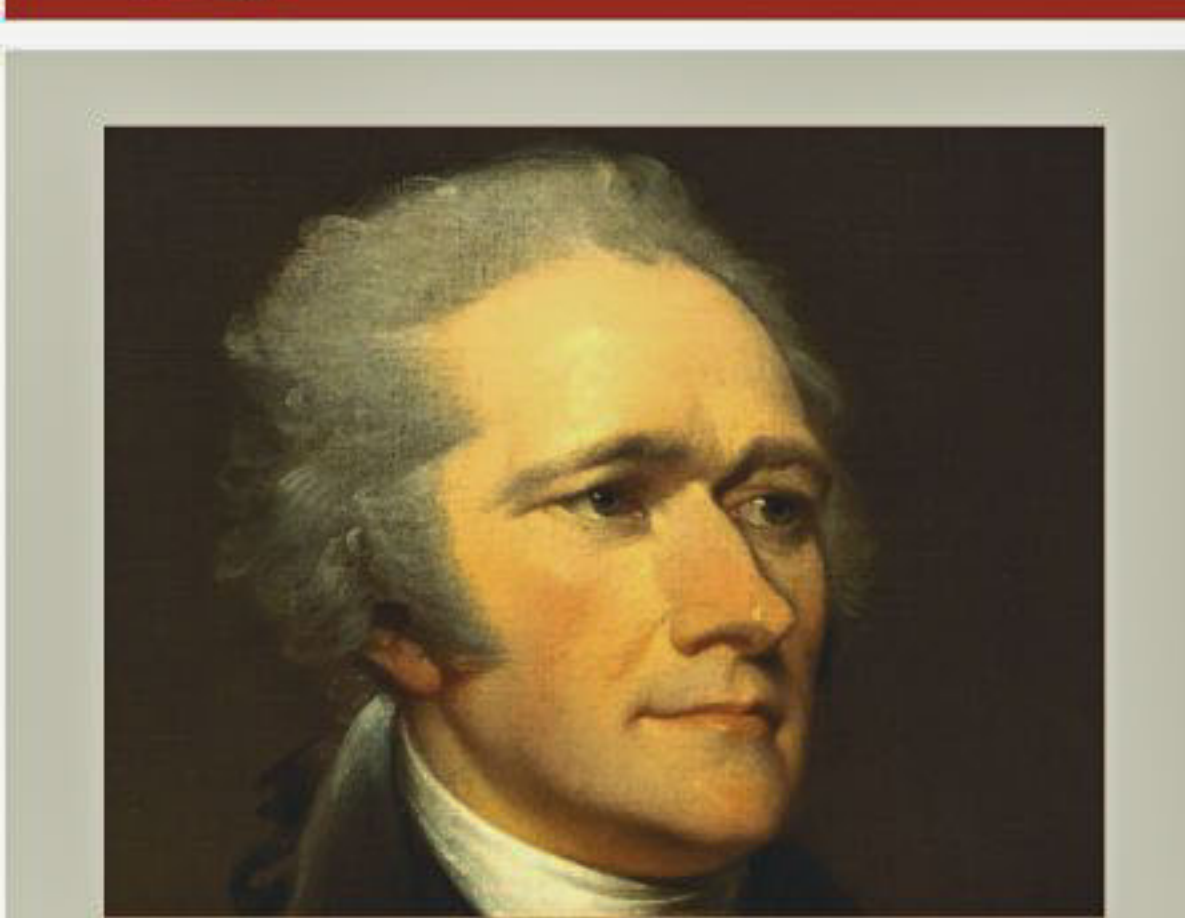
Well, at least we are now conscious of the need for good verbal communication skills. But let's forget the grand scheme, all I say is that first listen, and listen carefully. It's ok to not get the question the first time around. Ask, rephrase and buy time in the process. Then, for Heaven's sake, be PC. No, not Politically Correct, but just be Precise and Concise. Remember, less is more.

As Mark Twain said, "I'm sorry, I didn't get the time to write you a short letter." But when you DO get that time, you'll be able to explain how the bird escaped from the cage not only in just two sentences, but with both your hands in your pockets...

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QUOTABLE Quote



ALEXANDER HAMILTON

One of the Founding Fathers of the United States

Those who stand for nothing fall for anything

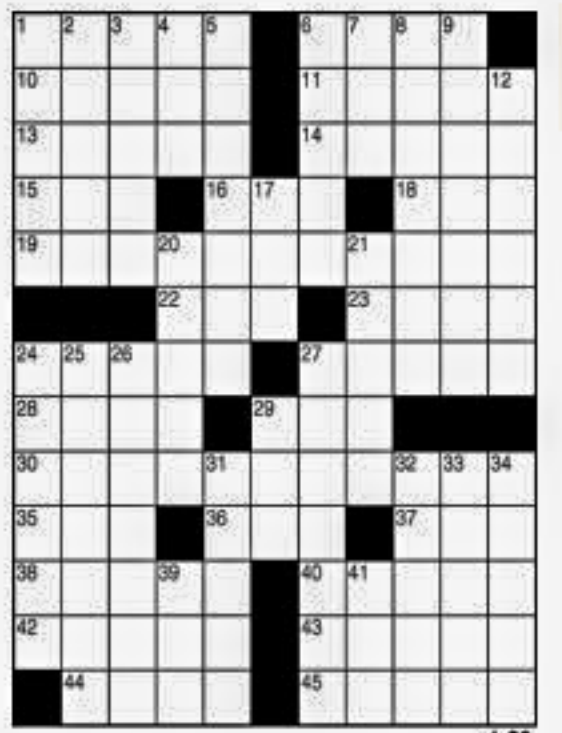
CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Croc's cousin
- 6 Couch
- 10 Cherish
- 11 In the lead
- 13 Highway divisions
- 14 Crooner Mel
- 15 Sense of self
- 16 Suit accessory
- 18 Hamm of soccer
- 19 Auto aroma
- 22 Had lunch
- 23 Writer Rice
- 24 "Beau--"
- 27 Come in
- 28 Poker payment
- 29 "— was saying..."
- 30 Freshener aroma
- 35 Fragrant tree
- 36 "My word!"
- 37 Opposing vote
- 38 Steer clear of
- 40 Low point
- 42 One of Lear's daughters
- 43 Writer Barker
- 44 High home
- 45 Moves carefully
- 7 Cry of surprise
- 8 Agitation
- 9 Piglet's creator
- 12 Casino worker
- 17 Wrath
- 20 Supply food for
- 21 Highly excited
- 24 Set electrician
- 25 Pep up
- 26 Closet use
- 27 Gist
- 29 Saloon order
- 31 Hollywood deal-maker
- 32 "The — near"
- 33 Artless
- 34 Radials, in Britain
- 39 German article
- 41 In the style of

DOWN

- 1 Greek physician
- 2 Wise saying
- 3 So far
- 4 Valuable rock
- 5 Put in other words
- 6 Fills completely



YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

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

BEETLE BAILEY



BY MORT WALKER



BABY BLUES



BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT

