

Values tumbling like a can of worms

PLEASURE IS ALL MINE
SHAH HUSAIN IMAM

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!

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 doting 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.

Shah Husain Imam is adjunct faculty at the East West University, a commentator on current affairs, and former Associate Editor, *The Daily Star*. Email: shahhusainimam@gmail.com

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 *Anando 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...

Naveed Mahbub is an engineer at Ford & Qualcomm USA and CEO of IBM & Nokia Siemens Networks Bangladesh turned comedian (by choice), the host of ATN Bangla's *The Naveed Mahbub Show* and ABC Radio's *Good Morning Bangladesh*, and the founder of Naveed's Comedy Club. Email: naved.mahbub@gmail.com



CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 35 Fragrant tree
- 36 "My word!"
- 37 Opposing vote
- 38 Steer clear of
- 39 One of Lear's daughters
- 40 Writer Barker
- 41 High home
- 42 Moves carefully
- 43 Crooner Mel
- 44 Sense of self
- 45 Suit accessory
- 46 Hamm of soccer
- 47 Auto aroma
- 48 Had lunch
- 49 Writer Rice
- 50 "Beau—"
- 51 Come in
- 52 Poker payment
- 53 "— was saying..."
- 54 Freshener aroma
- 55 Croc's cousin
- 56 Couch
- 57 Cherish
- 58 In the lead
- 59 Highway
- 60 Crooner Mel
- 61 Sense of self
- 62 Suit accessory
- 63 Hamm of soccer
- 64 Auto aroma
- 65 Had lunch
- 66 Writer Rice
- 67 "Beau—"
- 68 Come in
- 69 Poker payment
- 70 — was saying..."
- 71 Freshener aroma
- 72 Greek physician
- 73 Wise saying
- 74 So far
- 75 Valuable rock
- 76 Put in other words
- 77 Freshener aroma
- 78 "My word!"
- 79 Opposing vote
- 80 Steer clear of
- 81 Low point
- 82 One of Lear's daughters
- 83 Writer Barker
- 84 High home
- 85 Moves carefully
- 86 Fragrant tree
- 87 "Beau—"
- 88 Come in
- 89 Poker payment
- 90 — was saying..."
- 91 Freshener aroma
- 92 Croc's cousin
- 93 Couch
- 94 Cherish
- 95 In the lead
- 96 Highway
- 97 Crooner Mel
- 98 Sense of self
- 99 Suit accessory
- 100 Hamm of soccer
- 101 Auto aroma
- 102 Had lunch
- 103 Writer Rice
- 104 "Beau—"
- 105 Come in
- 106 Poker payment
- 107 — was saying..."
- 108 Freshener aroma
- 109 Croc's cousin
- 110 Couch
- 111 Cherish
- 112 In the lead
- 113 Highway
- 114 Crooner Mel
- 115 Sense of self
- 116 Suit accessory
- 117 Hamm of soccer
- 118 Auto aroma
- 119 Had lunch
- 120 Writer Rice
- 121 "Beau—"
- 122 Come in
- 123 Poker payment
- 124 — was saying..."
- 125 Freshener aroma
- 126 Croc's cousin
- 127 Couch
- 128 Cherish
- 129 In the lead
- 130 Highway
- 131 Crooner Mel
- 132 Sense of self
- 133 Suit accessory
- 134 Hamm of soccer
- 135 Auto aroma
- 136 Had lunch
- 137 Writer Rice
- 138 "Beau—"
- 139 Come in
- 140 Poker payment
- 141 — was saying..."
- 142 Freshener aroma
- 143 Croc's cousin
- 144 Couch
- 145 Cherish
- 146 In the lead
- 147 Highway
- 148 Crooner Mel
- 149 Sense of self
- 150 Suit accessory
- 151 Hamm of soccer
- 152 Auto aroma
- 153 Had lunch
- 154 Writer Rice
- 155 "Beau—"
- 156 Come in
- 157 Poker payment
- 158 — was saying..."
- 159 Freshener aroma
- 160 Croc's cousin
- 161 Couch
- 162 Cherish
- 163 In the lead
- 164 Highway
- 165 Crooner Mel
- 166 Sense of self
- 167 Suit accessory
- 168 Hamm of soccer
- 169 Auto aroma
- 170 Had lunch
- 171 Writer Rice
- 172 "Beau—"
- 173 Come in
- 174 Poker payment
- 175 — was saying..."
- 176 Freshener aroma
- 177 Croc's cousin
- 178 Couch
- 179 Cherish
- 180 In the lead
- 181 Highway
- 182 Crooner Mel
- 183 Sense of self
- 184 Suit accessory
- 185 Hamm of soccer
- 186 Auto aroma
- 187 Had lunch
- 188 Writer Rice
- 189 "Beau—"
- 190 Come in
- 191 Poker payment
- 192 — was saying..."
- 193 Freshener aroma
- 194 Croc's cousin
- 195 Couch
- 196 Cherish
- 197 In the lead
- 198 Highway
- 199 Crooner Mel
- 200 Sense of self
- 201 Suit accessory
- 202 Hamm of soccer
- 203 Auto aroma
- 204 Had lunch
- 205 Writer Rice
- 206 "Beau—"
- 207 Come in
- 208 Poker payment
- 209 — was saying..."
- 210 Freshener aroma
- 211 Croc's cousin
- 212 Couch
- 213 Cherish
- 214 In the lead
- 215 Highway
- 216 Crooner Mel
- 217 Sense of self
- 218 Suit accessory
- 219 Hamm of soccer
- 220 Auto aroma
- 221 Had lunch
- 222 Writer Rice
- 223 "Beau—"
- 224 Come in
- 225 Poker payment
- 226 — was saying..."
- 227 Freshener aroma
- 228 Croc's cousin
- 229 Couch
- 230 Cherish
- 231 In the lead
- 232 Highway
- 233 Crooner Mel
- 234 Sense of self
- 235 Suit accessory
- 236 Hamm of soccer
- 237 Auto aroma
- 238 Had lunch
- 239 Writer Rice
- 240 "Beau—"
- 241 Come in
- 242 Poker payment
- 243 — was saying..."
- 244 Freshener aroma
- 245 Croc's cousin
- 246 Couch
- 247 Cherish
- 248 In the lead
- 249 Highway
- 250 Crooner Mel
- 251 Sense of self
- 252 Suit accessory
- 253 Hamm of soccer
- 254 Auto aroma
- 255 Had lunch
- 256 Writer Rice
- 257 "Beau—"
- 258 Come in
- 259 Poker payment
- 260 — was saying..."
- 261 Freshener aroma
- 262 Croc's cousin
- 263 Couch
- 264 Cherish
- 265 In the lead
- 266 Highway
- 267 Crooner Mel
- 268 Sense of self
- 269 Suit accessory
- 270 Hamm of soccer
- 271 Auto aroma
- 272 Had lunch
- 273 Writer Rice
- 274 "Beau—"
- 275 Come in
- 276 Poker payment
- 277 — was saying..."
- 278 Freshener aroma
- 279 Croc's cousin
- 280 Couch
- 281 Cherish
- 282 In the lead
- 283 Highway
- 284 Crooner Mel
- 285 Sense of self
- 286 Suit accessory
- 287 Hamm of soccer
- 288 Auto aroma
- 289 Had lunch
- 290 Writer Rice
- 291 "Beau—"
- 292 Come in
- 293 Poker payment
- 294 — was saying..."
- 295 Freshener aroma
- 296 Croc's cousin
- 297 Couch
- 298 Cherish
- 299 In the lead
- 300 Highway
- 301 Crooner Mel
- 302 Sense of self
- 303 Suit accessory
- 304 Hamm of soccer
- 305 Auto aroma
- 306 Had lunch
- 307 Writer Rice
- 308 "Beau—"
- 309 Come in
- 310 Poker payment
- 311 — was saying..."
- 312 Freshener aroma
- 313 Croc's cousin
- 314 Couch
- 315 Cherish
- 316 In the lead
- 317 Highway
- 318 Crooner Mel
- 319 Sense of self
- 320 Suit accessory
- 321 Hamm of soccer
- 322 Auto aroma
- 323 Had lunch
- 324 Writer Rice
- 325 "Beau—"
- 326 Come in
- 327 Poker payment
- 328 — was saying..."
- 329 Freshener aroma
- 330 Croc's cousin
- 331 Couch
- 332 Cherish
- 333 In the lead
- 334 Highway
- 335 Crooner Mel
- 336 Sense of self
- 337 Suit accessory
- 338 Hamm of soccer
- 339 Auto aroma
- 340 Had lunch
- 341 Writer Rice
- 342 "Beau—"
- 343 Come in
- 344 Poker payment
- 345 — was saying..."
- 346 Freshener aroma
- 347 Croc's cousin
- 348 Couch
- 349 Cherish
- 350 In the lead
- 351 Highway
- 352 Crooner Mel
- 353 Sense of self
- 354 Suit accessory
- 355 Hamm of soccer
- 356 Auto aroma
- 357 Had lunch
- 358 Writer Rice
- 359 "Beau—"
- 360 Come in
- 361 Poker payment
- 362 — was saying..."
- 363 Freshener aroma
- 364 Croc's cousin
- 365 Couch
- 366 Cherish
- 367 In the lead
- 368 Highway
- 369 Crooner Mel
- 370 Sense of self
- 371 Suit accessory
- 372 Hamm of soccer
- 373 Auto aroma
- 374 Had lunch
- 375 Writer Rice
- 376 "Beau—"
- 377 Come in
- 378 Poker payment
- 379 — was saying..."
- 380 Freshener aroma
- 381 Croc's cousin
- 382 Couch
- 383 Cherish
- 384 In the lead
- 385 Highway
- 386 Crooner Mel
- 387 Sense of self
- 388 Suit accessory
- 389 Hamm of soccer
- 390 Auto aroma