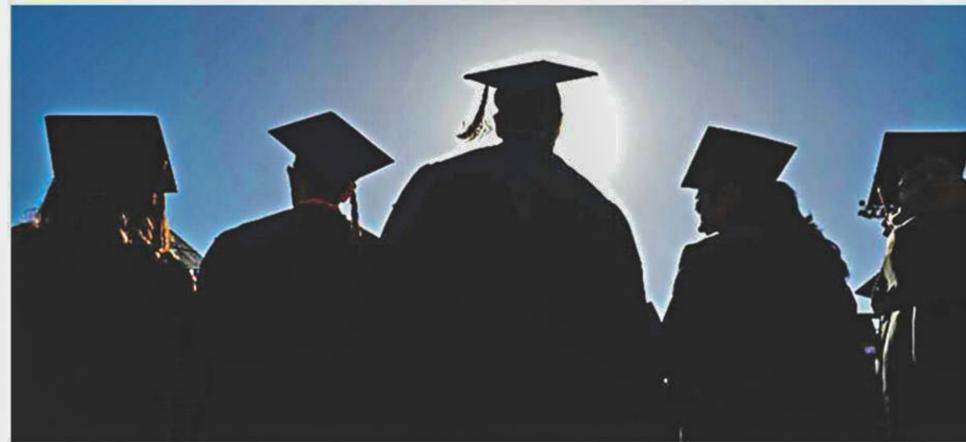


The case of prestige in higher education

SHAMSUL ARIFEEN KHAN MAMUN

Sooner had the results for the Higher Secondary and School Certificate (HSC) examination been published that strong deliberation regarding the problems and prospects of further education after HSC sprang up. Major print and electronic media covered the news giving utmost priority to the said issue.

Tertiary education is divided down two streams—one is 2-3 years long diploma and certificate courses in technical and vocational education and training (TVET) institutes; and the other is 3-years and above long degree courses in colleges and universities. An estimate showed that only 0.52 percent of people completed diploma, certificate or an equivalent degree, whereas approximately 95 percent students completed pass degree, honours degree, masters' or its equivalent degree and 2.63 percent students completed professional MBBS/BDS, engineering or an equivalent degree in 2013. Implying that, popularity of university-level degree among HSC graduates and their parents/guardians is very high. But labour market prospects of university graduates are bleak compared to TVET graduates. An estimate shows that 25 percent of TVET graduates are unemployed compared to 45 percent of university/college graduates. Despite



that, HSC graduates and their parents prefer higher education to diploma or certificate degrees.

In the 1950s, James Becker, an American economist, first explored the relationship between education and income and, thereafter, published his seminal work known as "the theory of human capital". Putting it simply, human capital refers to knowledge and ability of human beings. At that time, contemporary economists agreed that both human and physical capital are essential for a country's development. And the return to human capital is very personal. Here the personal gain is obviously nothing but monetary

gain. Consequently, in order to maximise personal gains, graduates aspire for higher education in their preferred university or college. Apart from that, there are facts that, asymmetric labour market information, social matters like social prestige and status where an HSC graduate lives, influence their decision about higher education. James Becker missed this point in his theory.

Experience shows that social network and connection play a vital role in the decision-making process of an HSC graduate's preferred destination for further education. In the decision-making process, an HSC

graduate or his/her parents are not aware of the implications of further education. More than two close relatives of mine, who live in the peri-urban city Savar have sent their sons and daughters to private universities to get a bachelor degree in business. A few months back, when I came across them, I asked why their parents had sent them to university. They replied that it is their perception that the prospect and prestige of a business graduate was very high in society. They were unable to verify their perception with any evidence as there is none available. The pity is that many parents send their children to pursue higher education in both

public and private universities, hoping that their children after graduation will get decent employment. Their expectation in terms of both economics and prestige fall flat when they find that their children, despite having a university/college degree, neither find any employment nor are they self-employed. The parents are seldom, if ever, advised to take an alternative direction of educating their children in TVET institutions.

In addition, in spite of enough information, some parents decide to send their boys/girls to university to maximise social prestige although their children do not have good pre-university academic results that make them fit to pursue higher education. In developed countries, the matter of prestige in occupational choice is totally absent. Once, at an Australian university, the Head of the Department of the School of Commerce, who was a Professor in Economics, very proudly said to me that his son was a carpenter. Similarly, I can recall in the Netherlands, where I attended a training organised by a big consulting firm, the top boss of the company told me that his son was a hotel receptionist. None of them felt shy to disclose the profession of their children. This is absent in our country and other underdeveloped countries.

In today's globalised world, we can no longer keep ourselves isolated from the rest of the world. It is important to change the social taboo associated with some professions. At this stage, the government and parents have crucial roles and responsibilities to fulfil. The government can set up "Employment Centres" (EC) in its remote administrative districts under the Ministry of Employment and Labour. The ECs will run a vital point of consultation (or share information) about employment or vacancies in home-based companies/firms/offices as found in developed countries like Australia or the UK. The centres may work as a bridge between the employers and potential employees. Finally, although it is not very easy to change the social outlook about TVET graduates overnight, the government may work to prepare a national qualification framework including TVET and university/college level degrees so that TVET graduates can attend university at any stage of their life to get a higher degree if they wish. This will enhance their social position to some extent.

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The Afghan conflict: How far away is peace?

BAISALI MOHANTY

In the recently concluded NATO summit, Afghanistan yet again surfaced as the boiling pot that witnessed off-beat power play in the last few years. As the conflict in the region continues to escalate, witnessing violence orchestrated by the internal disjunctions between the Taliban and ISIS in the region that has larger repercussions on global security, countries far-flung from Afghanistan seem to be rattled by the violent premonitions. It is pertinent to note here that Afghanistan has transformed not just as a sight for peace-building exercises but also as a major focal point for countries to establish their prowess by elevating global status and in doing so, engage in newer bandwagoning and balancing techniques. It is pertinent therefore to scrutinise some of the unusual actors involved in the conflict and thereby lay down a newer perspective to looking at conflict settlement in the rapidly enveloping humanitarian crisis.

Who are the peacemakers?

US presence in Afghanistan is barely unaccounted for; while forthcoming countries such as Uzbekistan, and the Gulf countries are scrambling for strategic footprint, the neighbourhood is no less pummelled by the Afghan bug. Following a slow weeding out of forces in Syria and Iraq, the US Air Force has amplified its deployment significantly in Afghanistan—recognising it as the main theatre of violence today. Two major conclusions emerge from their heightened strategic engagement: first, the tangible implications in the form of economic and trade opportunities seen as a crucial element of the country's national interest. And second, the subjective aspect of status and the larger narrative behind national security. As status elevation accorded to the peacemaker is a major objective for the big players including China, United States, India, and the European nations to engage in Afghan conflict for, security oozing from the turbulence

designed by the Taliban and ISIS compounded by the under resourced government forces to fight independently has brought all the above on their toes. While traditionally Afghanistan has been engulfed in big power politics, including the regional hegemony—India and China—tussling for greater global recognition, the Afghan conflict seems to have attracted newer players in large scale. Tashkent has recently announced it will host a peace dialogue between the Afghan government and the Taliban, advancing on the decade-long effort at establishing peace in the region. Both at the domestic and international stature, involvement in Afghan conflict is slated to complement progressively the former Soviet republic's image. In a conference previously, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev announced, "We stand ready to create all necessary conditions, at any stage of the peace process, to arrange on the territory of Uzbekistan direct talks between the government of Afghanistan and the Taliban movement."

Equally strategic has been the involvement of regional actors such as Turkey. The only Muslim country to hold a membership of NATO, Turkey has been rather consistent with its Afghan policy. It seems since antiquity, Turkey has held peace building in Afghanistan as a core element of its foreign policy outreach. Early this year, Turkey held discussions with officials from Taliban's Qatar office on forwarding a practical resolution for the Afghan conflict. This has been complemented with Turkey's attempt to strike a balance between its relationship with Pakistan and Afghanistan. While the Afghan government's growing dissent with Pakistan has further deteriorated the former's negotiation abilities with groups such as the Haqqani network and Taliban, Turkey has entered the scene as a befitting third-party mediator, differing with US on launching military strikes against Taliban which would incur larger humanitarian loss. Recently, Turkey held talks with Pakistan's Foreign



Afghan children watch a platoon of American soldiers, September 24, 2012. PHOTO: TONY KARUMBA/AFP

Minister Khawaja Asif to discuss the resolution of the Afghan conflict. To what extent this would bore fruitful results for major stakeholders as well as the Afghan government is contestable, owing to Pakistan's intentions which are more inclined towards ensuring a stronghold in Afghan functioning than on establishing peace. Nevertheless, Turkey emerges as an indispensable actor in the peace process, also owing to the role it has played in bringing the ousted Vice President Dostum back into the picture who has prominent allies in northern Afghanistan. In terms of humanitarian aid as well, Turkish government has made significant investment, around USD 1 billion in economic development projects, which have strengthened Afghanistan's infrastructure and education systems. Bereft the neighbourhood of Afghanistan, involvement of Asian

giants including Australia has been eye-catching. Sydney's concerns about the Afghan conflict adequately feeds into its agreement to increase troops in Afghanistan in the NATO summit recently. Last year, after a meeting with President Ghani Australian Prime Minister Turnbull conceded, "Since 2001, we have supported Afghanistan in its efforts to tackle terrorism and build a stronger, more stable and resilient nation."

Beyond peace and stability?

As countries across continents are eager to engage in peacebuilding efforts, heightening their international presence in the global domain, the question of when peace and what would that entail for the people of Afghanistan is far from the discussion table. Perversely, the United Nations reported that civilian deaths reached a

record high in the first six months of this year. According to the report, some 1,692 fatalities were recorded, with militant attacks and suicide bombs being the leading cause of death. In this scenario, the approach of exhaustive military attack seems largely unnerving and fatal, to say the least. Instead, bringing the dissenting factions to the table ought to be the focus for peacemakers involved. Equally worthy is the role of the locals, including women, who's concerns have often been ignored in the dominant narrative of peacemaking. According to the feminist approach to conflict resolution, inclusive dialogues that ensure adequate representation and takes into consideration the local factors of the region is the foundational element of peace building. And this immaculately applies to the prevailing scenario in Afghanistan that qualifies as a tough case for the major stakeholders involved. It has been a herculean task, even after increasing deployments in the region, to maintain the ceasefires for longer than a week at a time. Furthermore, what makes the feminist approach appealing is the post-conflict techniques that would preferably ensure a stable framework of governance and peace in the domestic realm. The Afghan conflict, in its present state, necessitates a bottom up approach to attain peace, whereby multiple stakeholders need to place high regard in universal values of human rights and diversity. The national security concerns or status perceptions or economic trade-offs will carry substantial value, however, at the core remains the underlining values and the procedural aspects that guides peace building. And in this scenario, universal values instead of restricted understanding of national interest ought to be the cornerstone for the institutional arrangement laden with the role of peacebuilding and conflict resolution.

Baisali Mohanty is a foreign policy analyst who writes on security and conflict issues focusing on Asia Pacific. She is a Senior Analyst with the Global Risk Insights and was previously associated with the Asia Council, Tokyo.

ON THIS DAY IN HISTORY



JULY 26, 2005
THE MAHARASHTRA FLOODS
Mumbai, India received 99.5cm of rain within 24 hours, resulting in floods killing over 5,000 people.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
- 1 Clutter
 - 5 "Shane" star
 - 9 Spoken
 - 11 Stay away from
 - 13 Extra-large
 - 14 Edison's -- Park
 - 15 Exalted verse
 - 16 Gruesome
 - 18 Tells
 - 20 Slugger Ott
 - 21 Backless sofa
 - 22 Flight cost
 - 23 Tapped item
 - 24 Stir-fry pan
 - 25 Turn suddenly
 - 27 Comic strip section
 - 29 New Haven student
 - 30 DC surrounder
- DOWN**
- 1 Course of study
 - 2 Dodged
 - 3 1959 Tony Curtis movie
 - 4 Long sandwich
 - 5 Eastern monks
 - 6 Birds, to biologists
 - 7 1967 Tony Curtis movie
 - 8 Comic Phyllis
 - 10 GI ID
 - 12 Holmes' creator
 - 17 Rooster's mate
 - 19 Declare
 - 22 Type-setting choice
 - 24 Alternative to a cane
 - 25 Gambling mecca
 - 26 Chooses
 - 27 Chest muscle
 - 28 New news
 - 30 More vile
 - 31 Agreeable answers
 - 33 Composer Bartok
 - 37 Island ring

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7-13

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

S C A R S L A P S
W I D E R C O N I C
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T A N G O S L A P
I R K S I R S
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T A N G I E R L A X
E N D E D I R A T E
S T O N E S U R E R
T E N T S T E X T

BEETLE BAILEY BY MORT WALKER



BABY BLUES BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT



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