

UNIVERSAL CHILDREN'S DAY

How do we keep them in School?

EDOUARD BEIGBEDER

REMARKABLE progress has been made in recent years to expand access to education in Bangladesh, one of the most densely populated countries of the world. But at the same time, significant challenges remain if the potential is to be fulfilled.

Education is an area that we cannot afford to ignore. As Nelson Mandela said, it is the most powerful weapon we have at our disposal to change the world. For Bangladesh, education is the key to its continued economic growth, the means by which the poor can be lifted out of poverty and the guarantee of its future prosperity.

With more than 30 percent of the population aged under 15 and with about 40 million young people of school age, Bangladesh stands on the cusp of a demographic dividend which will only be realised if reforms to the education system are speedily implemented.

To reap the potential returns of the demographic dividend, the Bangladeshi government should continue investing in education; expenditure on education stood at 11.8 percent in 2015 but is forecast to decline to 10.9 percent by 2019.

In a country where one in four people still live in poverty, the quality of primary education remains a central issue, with unqualified teachers, inadequate infrastructure, poor nutrition and food



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security all affecting the quality of learning.

Furthermore, there are large variances between urban and rural areas in relation to education provision and across regional and gender lines—some districts have 40 percent fewer primary school completion rates. Children in the poorest households are twice as likely to suffer from education deprivation

(27 percent) compared to those from the wealthiest households (13 percent).

Many schools do not have adequate sanitation or menstrual hygiene facilities, while sexual harassment has been blamed as a major reason for female drop-out rates. Early marriages for girls and child labour are still widespread.

Working children, children with disabilities and children in remote areas and areas affected by disasters are often denied their right to education. Children with disabilities make up a disproportionate number of out-of-school children at all levels and are among the most marginalised at all levels of education. Only a fraction of children with even moderate-to-mild disabilities are enrolled in mainstream schools.

The government provides stipends to more than 7.9 million primary school children, including poor and those with disabilities. But progress has been slow in some areas when it comes to teacher recruitment, second-chance education and activity-based teaching.

There is also a chronic challenge of vacancies within the system—about 27 percent of head teachers' posts and 7 percent of assistant teachers' posts remain vacant. Many schools in some parts of the country are overcrowded and some run double shifts. Teacher supervision, monitoring and accountability require strengthening.

In fact, the unresolved problems in primary education have a knock-on effect for secondary education, where enrolment rates are less high.

The highest dropout rate is from Grade 8, which is 20 percent overall, 5 percent for boys and a staggering 37 percent for girls. There is a shortage of quality teachers, while home-to-school distances, the lack of a child-friendly learning environment, costs and

protection issues all being deterrents for girls to enter school.

Bangladesh also has the highest proportion of children out of school at lower secondary level (46 percent) in the South Asia region. The number of out-of-school children is particularly high in urban slums and hard-to-reach areas.

Many of these children are particularly vulnerable to violence and abuse, including child marriage, child labour, drug addiction, and violence.

It is estimated that more than seven million children and adolescents in Bangladesh (aged 5-17 years) are denied education because of child labour, especially in Dhaka, where the proportion of working adolescents is more than three times the national average.

The number of out-of-school children does not appear to be decreasing fast enough, despite progress in primary and secondary schooling.

On the positive side, the Bangladeshi government, with support from external development partners over the past three decades, has implemented several large-scale projects and programmes to improve access to primary education as well as the quality of education.

If the country is to improve its report card, it must now capitalise on the progress that has been made.

Edouard Beigbeder is Representative, UNICEF Bangladesh.

Trump and a tale of two Americas

ZIAUS SHAMS CHOWDHURY

MIDTERMS in America usually provide a perspective on how a president's first two years have impacted electoral sentiments. In 2018, Mr Trump energised his support base in the midterms, but he also inspired a large Democratic turnout. They have clawed back enough political leverage to create a situation in which he will have to tread carefully.

Trump aroused among his supporters a primal fear that immigrants were coming to take away their jobs, raising the threat of terrorism and putting their future at danger. He dispensed a huge pro-wealthy tax cut. He criticised European nations for exploiting the generosity of America and failing to meet their collective defence obligations. He intoned that the current dynamics of world trade have severely handicapped America and triggered a flight of jobs to other places: China, Europe, and so forth.

The strategy he followed propelled him to the White House and showed its effectiveness. In his two years he placed his trust in it. The Republican controlled Congress did little to address people's real concerns, and their popularity sank to a low. Trump's base stood behind him, although a segment of suburban voters, especially women, broke away and supported the Democrats. As midterms approached, the Republicans' general calculation was that the best chance to get elected was to remain tethered to Trump.

Trump recognised this reality. Feeling confident about his electoral oomph in the Republican-leaning states and districts, he campaigned with laudable energy and resolve in those areas. His calculus was to ignore the blue (Democratic) areas which he knew would stay with Democrats no matter what.

In the past incumbent presidents in the first term have seen their party in the House and the Senate lose in the midterms but they went on to win a second term regardless. Two good examples are Barack Obama and Bill Clinton.

Right now, volatility is brewing in the US political landscape. Once the president takes office, he is not the president of one party but of the whole country. His primary duty, historically observed by all presidents before, is to be a healer, to stabilise and unify. This paradigm, unfortunately, has atrophied alarmingly in recent decades.

Trump did not create the culture of partisanship. He embraced it and took it to a new depth. JFK in his inaugural address in 1961 famously said: "If a free society cannot help the many who are poor, it cannot save the few who are rich." Ronald Reagan, the Republican hero on whose watch communism dissolved in the former Soviet Union, pursued policies that won over a swathe of traditional Democratic voters. They came to be known as "Reagan Democrats". How distant that kind of idealism appears today when we look with agony at American politics...

Mr Trump's acrimonious standoff on November 7 in the White House press briefing with CNN's Jim Acosta highlighted his rift with the media once again. Acosta was asking him about immigrants, and whether the president worried about possible indictment from the Russia investigation. "You are a rude, terrible person," Mr Trump raged. Acosta was banned from appearing in White House briefings. CNN later sued the president and several of his aides and Acosta's press pass was restored after a federal judge ruled in CNN's favour.

The media across the spectrum rallied behind him. PEN America, a group that works for the protection of the free press, called the revocation of Acosta's press pass "a clear attack on the First Amendment." A free media is a fundamental pillar of democracy, and it channels people's sentiments. President Truman, when asked how a journalist should be tackled if he asks an awkward question, replied: "If you can't take the heat, get out of the kitchen."

After the midterms, Trump said that he hoped to cut bipartisan deals but threatened "war-like posture" if the House investigated him. He has vulnerabilities: non-disclosure of his tax returns, his family's business

practices, alleged Russian interference in his 2016 campaign, and others. These are genuine issues on which Democrats should exercise their constitutional oversight role. But if he wants to be pragmatic and strike deals, as he may, they should cooperate.

Trump's hasty appointment of Matthew Whitaker, a critic of the Russia investigation, as acting attorney general after Jeff Sessions resigned was met with controversy. Even some Republican senators, notably Mitt Romney, said that the investigation should not be obstructed. The Democrats are asking Whitaker to recuse himself from overseeing the investigation.

Of the 100 women who are now in

Congress, 60 are Democrats. For the first time two Muslim women and two African-American women have been elected. Trump's hostility to the demographic they represent and his demeaning rhetoric about women have something to do with their empowerment.

Whether or not Trump wins a second term, some of the things he has done will endure for a long time. He has pushed the Supreme Court far to the right by appointing two young conservative judges. The big tax cuts that have already doubled the deficit to over USD 1 trillion are another issue. He has brought immigration to the centre of debate.

The president has colossal power to shape

the tone of engagement. His voice drowns out that of any other in America's political scene. It remains to be seen if he will realise that bitter polarisation that breeds hate crimes ultimately benefits neither him nor the nation.

America has historically played a laudable role on the world stage. The Marshall Plan revived war-ravaged Germany. Ronald Reagan played an instrumental role in the unification of Germany which is today a paragon of democracy. But Trump's policy is to pull America away from engagement with the world. His recent visit to Paris to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the end of the First World War did not go well. French President Macron pilloried Trump's self-definition as a "nationalist". He called nationalism "a betrayal of patriotism". An acerbic exchange followed between the two.

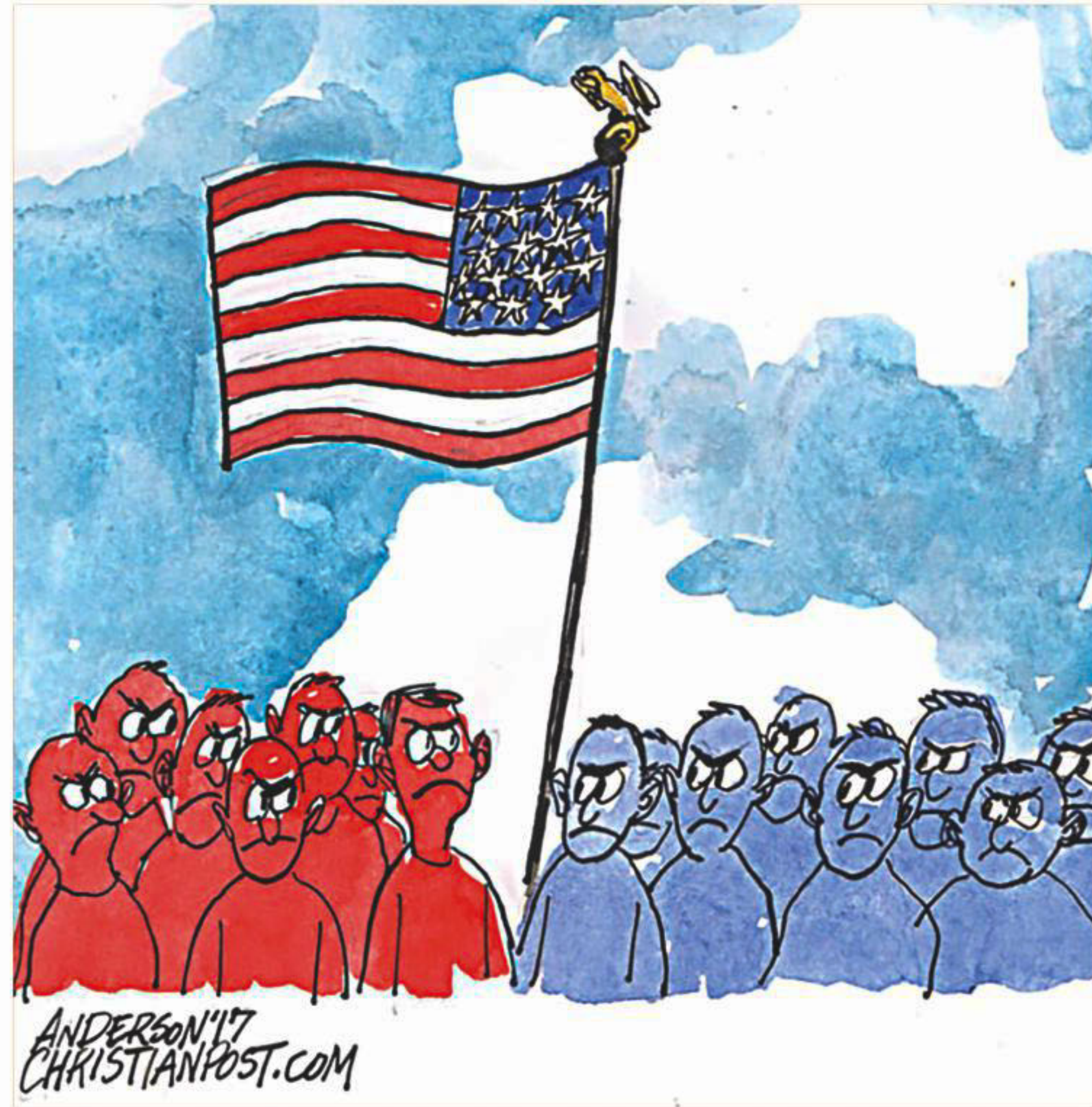
On the issue of climate change, he has threatened to end America's important role in combating global warming, thus creating widespread anxieties.

He tried to begin a constructive dialogue with North Korea and resolve that country's worrisome nuclear imbroglio. We have to see whether his initiative will deliver something good. Arguably, there has been some reduction of tension.

In the Middle East it is questionable whether the decision to move the US embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem helps the cause of stability. His unilateral withdrawal from the P5+1 deal to curb Iran's nuclear programme has created discord with other signatories.

The atmosphere of angst has never been so acute in America. While the president and the two parties will seek to pursue their political goals, that should not come at the expense of peace. How American politics shapes up in the next two years is being anxiously watched by other nations. What happens in America radiates beyond its borders. Trump can do more than anyone else to set the right tone.

Ziaus Shams Chowdhury is a former ambassador of the Bangladesh government.



QUOTABLE
Quote

EDWARD SNOWDEN
(B. JUNE 21, 1983)
FORMER CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
EMPLOYEE TURNED WHISTLEBLOWER

I do not want to live in a world where everything that I say, everything I do, everyone I talk to, every expression of creativity or love or friendship, is recorded.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

1 Potential law

5 Traveling

9 Love affair

11 Showed fear

13 "Sweet Dreams" star

14 Rolling

15 Chick holder

16 Somewhat

18 No longer working

20 That girl

21 Begat

22 Pills, in slang

23 Fuming

24 Gift topper

25 "It's -- real"

27 Rental choice

29 Home of the Trojans

30 Like early sci-fi monsters

32 Composer's work

34 Shade

35 Circus worker

36 Decorate

38 Sighted

39 Catcher Castro

40 Concludes

41 Turn down

DOWN

1 Farm machine

2 Sights

3 Bruce Springsteen song

4 Big galoot

5 Plant pest

6 "Hold on!"

7 Bruce Springsteen song

8 Hollered

10 Brought up

12 Fabric workers

17 Went ahead

19 Qom's country

22 Manner

24 Handout seeker

25 Police raids

26 Houdini feat

27 Day light

28 Impulse relay

30 Flock makeup

31 Doherty of the Mamas & the Papas

33 Oboe part

37 Pop

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YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

SLAM HANOI ONION OCT TEASER PETE GRE NE DASC RATE TEAMUP TEACHER PARIS CLEAR ELATE HASTE AFIRE LAMER DRAMA SKE USES

BEETLE BAILEY BY MORT WALKER

BABY BLUES BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT