

Crusading children: Fault in our stars... or ourselves?



KAUTILYAN KRONICLES
At least two truisms can be said about children: every mother and father goes out of her/his way to build the best possible future for them; and the state does not have a choice but to follow suit. Yet children

increasingly question where they are being taken, what future awaits them from policies taken or left untouched, and how commensurate have adjustments to technological developments been. Children's resentment is not an isolated phenomenon, but pervasive; nor is it just a contemporary outburst, but historical. Though the notion "children crusades" can be traced far back, the growing institutional disconnection this entails (with family, education, law, or government) begs urgent reassessment.

Of course, the most referenced children's crusade is the one that might not have been at all. Ostensibly in 1212, or thereabouts, Stephen of Cloyes in France and Nicolas of Cologne in what was to become Germany led troops of boys across the Alps into what today stands as Italy. Ships would then carry them into their mission: to liberate the Holy Land in the Middle East from Muslims. Whether just a story, or a historical anecdote amply bloated for public consumption, both motivations and aspirations demand remedial attention.

Among the motivators could have been a clarion church/papal call, escaping poverty, or digesting rumours spun by well-heeled kidnappers and slave-sex-traders. Since influence at such a youthful age shapes adulthood, we can better understand why, for example, anti-Islam western sentiments may not be new, that is, prompted by Syrian refugees swarming into Europe, or terrorism being associated with Muslims. Deeper medieval drum-beats echo too. Alternately, children could also learn from their own trials and error, the discrimination faced, and the hatred flung. In that sense, 13th-century children do not differ from their Rohingya,



In this May 3, 1963 photo, Birmingham police officers take signs from young people participating in the Children's Crusade. This effort was part of the larger Birmingham Campaign of 1963, a widespread movement aimed at ending segregation in Alabama's largest city.

Syrian, or Yemeni refugee counterparts today: they could/can go either way, become a helpless victim (and thereby boost unnecessary alleviation expenses upon society), or fight back over time against the "criminal" practice of their perpetrators.

Fast-forwarding to more modern times, in May 1963, school children in Birmingham (Alabama) protested that desegregation was unfolding too slowly to make a difference. Martin Luther King and Ralph Abernathy "activated" only as a last resort. It paid off. Even though many were arrested or manhandled by police within a week, the concessions earned turned into the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

Fast-forwarding even farther, we saw the March 2018 "March for our Lives" movement against lax gun-control in the United States by children. Centred in Washington, DC, a city synonymous with selling laws to the highest bidder, the movement sparked a nation-wide outburst involving over a million students demanding universal background check for gun purchases. Triggered by the February 2018 Parkland (Florida) shooting of school children, the protest exposed lenient laws feeding a trigger-happy gun-toting or gun-trading population segment. No lessons

were learned from a similar April, 1999 Columbine High School shooting in Colorado. With more guns than people in the United States, by a 120:100 ratio, the post-Christchurch shooting March, 2019 New Zealand gun-clampdown exposes the contrasting case of tightening access to killer instruments. A less dramatic and sporadic but more widely felt sentiment also played out on that same Christchurch shooting day: inspired by a 17-year-old Swedish, Greta Thunberg, a global protest sought to energise environmental protection actions.

All of these children's crusade cases carry identical features: external influence upon children, or around them resulting in adult-like actions; the resort to risky action by children, whether crossing the Alps into Italy in the 13th century, confronting a racist police force in Birmingham, or standing up more forthrightly and without qualms against the pivotally powerful National Rifle Association in the United States, or similar environment-dispensing organisations; and ultimately a widening wedge between children and institutions from such lapses.

Dhaka's students fall into this plight. The repeated student deaths caused by either callous or evil-headed bus-drivers or bus-

conductors have reached a tipping point. Like in the 13th century, our unarmed children may also search for their "lost chord", or "holy-land", that is sovereign rights over judiciously using pedestrian crossing against an armada of "enemy" vehicles. As in Birmingham, 1963, our students mobilised quickly against the blatant Airport Road killing of two students in mid-2018. Even by assuming away the infiltrating anarchists exploiting those 2018 protests, our high-school students managed traffic control far more effectively, fluently, and respectfully than even our paid traffic wardens. Yet, in a maddening March 2019, Abrar Ahmed Chowdhury was not the only victim of highfalutin bus-driving, and Progati Sharani was not the only murder scene: a motorcyclist was similarly killed in Shewrapara (Mirpur),

They need more collective nurturing of the kind their parents give them personally at home. Harming, hurting, or hacking them inflicts a mortal blow on a crucial portion of the country's future. Road-rage, particularly against pedestrians or any human user, must be outlawed immediately if we are to materialise our future goals and look more civil. No killer bus-driver or bus-conductor should even think of shielding behind the bus-owner's back or name. Murder is murder, and in any civilised society, the law must be played out in full, without favouritism, demands, or fear. It is the only anchor of a civil society.

Getting our act together on this issue is as vital for us adults as it is for the children. For us, we stand guilty of compromising the flawless raising of our children with the flagrant abuses of the law ourselves or through our silence (avoiding tax-payments or disobeying traffic signals, to illustrate): somebody somewhere will notice the discrepancy, and if too many adults keep making the same inconsistent behaviour, our fault will haunt the children's fate: destabilising their expectations only opens a can of worms.

With buses prowling upon the country's future assets, on the one hand, and the alarming growth of student-level drug abuses, on the other, the country's *weltanschauung* (world view) stands at a crossroads. Educational performances have been slipping, social media growing, and technological forces bombarding our adaptation capacities, all pushing Bangladesh towards some brink. Properly groomed (both at home and through the country's laws), our children are as capable of converting their parental and societal hopes into realities. They carry all the traits to become loyal party supporters in future elections if the party participates in that child's upbringing consciously, for example, through supportive legislations and safety precautions.

Ultimately, our future shadow of decency depends upon where we point our finger for our faults. Experiences show the fewer we ascribe to fate, the firmer our control of our own future.

Intiaz A Hussain is the head of Global Studies & Governance Program at Independent University, Bangladesh (IUB).

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while in Sherpur, Sylhet, another student was actually thrown out by a bus-conductor to his run-over death. Dhaka's traffic malaise has become a national malaise. It is an utter disgrace to decent law-abiding citizens to let bus-drivers and bus-conductors behave like hoodlums so openly.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina underscored the gravity of what is at stake in her Independence Day message: these students are the very future of the country, she said.

The role of universities in developing SMEs

THE business community, not only in Bangladesh but also in the world, is constantly pressing universities to change their traditional role of imparting knowledge to their students. In response to the community's

call, universities abroad are now playing three important roles: knowledge transfer, skills development, and involvement in economic growth of the society. As Bangladesh is a densely populated and developing country, Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) will definitely provide huge employment opportunities with a much lower investment. SMEs are expected to create jobs, reduce poverty, and drive resilient national economy. A recent survey has revealed that SME sector contributes about 25 percent to the national GDP, and accounts for about 40 percent of manufacturing output with 80 percent of industrial jobs and nearly 30 percent of the total labour force (Economic Survey, 2013). The Asian Development Bank reports that there are now over 6,000,000 SMEs and micro-enterprises in Bangladesh. The contribution of SMEs to economic growth, social cohesion, employment, and local development is being recognised. But due to globalisation and advancement in technology, SMEs need to know how to enter into the global value chain in order to sustain and be competitive. In this context, a question may arise as to how universities can engage in strengthening SMEs and

entrepreneurs. The answer to this question is straightforward. Universities have a wealth of research knowledge, talent, and network connections. The network of alumni working abroad is an invaluable resource for SMEs seeking to export overseas.

Universities can help SMEs in many ways from supporting entrepreneurs launch their business and developing technologies and new products and services, to providing students for fixed-term projects addressing business challenges such as new product introduction and international expansion. SME sectors like IT-based activities, high-tech industry, computer software and ICT goods, jute goods and jute mixed goods, telecommunication, electronic business, clothing, and shoe business, plastic industries, cosmetic industry, biogas plant, health care equipment, etc., are fast growing in this country. Universities can definitely help these enterprises to develop properly. Universities can offer professional development and staff training to help give existing team skills. And once enterprises start working with a university, it will design courses and assessments that meet the needs of local employers. At the early stages of establishing a small business, investing in technology and facilities can prove risky and expensive. Whether it is laboratory time, high-tech IT equipment or simply space to hold meetings, universities will be able to lend theirs for a small fee. If the field of entrepreneurs matches the interests of a local research team or department, they will work with the entrepreneurs to turn an idea into a real business opportunity. If an entrepreneur comes up with a new business but has no idea about its business implication, the

researchers of a university can solve it. Universities will find the relevant theory and then distil it into practical tools that the SME can use to drive business outcomes and improve the bottom line. Obviously, universities can host local economic growth hubs or business incubators to help small organisations and startups get off the ground.

The task of a university will be to bring academics and leaders of SMEs in the

applied research.

Universities are now integrating two goals: the goal of transmitting knowledge with that of emphasising the development of the individual student. Consequently, universities in many countries have shifted their teaching approach from "convergent" to a "divergent" one (Miriam Bar-Yam, et.al. 2002).

This "convergent" approach directs toward the teaching of a specified subject matter,



PHOTO: STAR

business, design, engineering and digital sectors together in a cluster in order to map and measure how they can support one another and to produce graduates who can possess innovative quality and thinking skills to become successful entrepreneurs. But universities in Bangladesh are unfortunately falling behind the best in the world, in terms of human capital, physical infrastructure and also in terms of teaching and learning and

whereas the "divergent" approach focuses on open-ended self-directed learning. The first approach is well-structured. As it is teacher-centred, the students in a class become passive recipients of knowledge transmitted to them and learning achievements are measured by some standardised tests. On the other hand, the second approach is flexible and student-centred. Students are active participants in the learning process, and

learning achievements are assessed by a variety of evaluation tools different from those used in the first approach.

The curriculum for an undergraduate programme is influenced by the social, physical, economic and cultural environment. Consequently, its development process will also change with the change of any such setting or settings. As the creation of jobs by entrepreneurs and SMEs is one of the most important priorities of our society now, society expects that our graduates can speak and write effectively, have high-quality interpersonal (teamwork) and creative thinking skills, be innovative and possess some understanding of the rest of the world. These are the qualities which are required to become successful entrepreneurs. Universities must pay greater attention to the quality of the education they provide to students and in redesigning curricula to meet the present expectations. Universities need to constantly rethink their goals and priorities, and also to understand how learning takes place. At the same time, researchers should understand the needs of the society and direct their research towards topics that will serve society.

Finally, it is extremely important that the government recognises universities as national assets that can have a significant contribution to the development of the nation. The government also needs to frame a national quality policy, ease access to finance, provide an adequate support system, and to set up flexible mechanisms to promote research collaboration between universities and SMEs.

M. M. Shahidul Hassan is Vice Chancellor, East West University. Email: vc@ewubd.edu.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Wise ones
- 6 Court player
- 11 Skip the ceremony
- 12 Un-escorted
- 13 Skirt feature
- 14 Borscht base
- 15 Braying beast
- 16 Binary base
- 18 Plopped down
- 19 Rented out
- 20 Tipsy
- 21 Even score
- 22 Hot, in a way
- 24 Unemotional
- 25 Drunkard
- 27 Pallid
- 29 Suds
- 32 Casual top
- 33 Farm grazer
- 34 Quarterback
- 35 Strange
- 36 Hold title to
- 37 Gum mass
- 38 States of mind
- 40 Give an address
- 42 Silver buy
- 43 Form 1040 user
- 44 Play groups
- 45 Creases
- 47 Even score
- 48 Flower parts
- 49 Prepared
- 50 Deteriorates
- 51 MPG-rating org.
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- 95 Give an address
- 96 Silver buy
- 97 Form 1040 user
- 98 Play groups
- 99 Creases
- 100 Even score

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

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BEETLE BAILEY



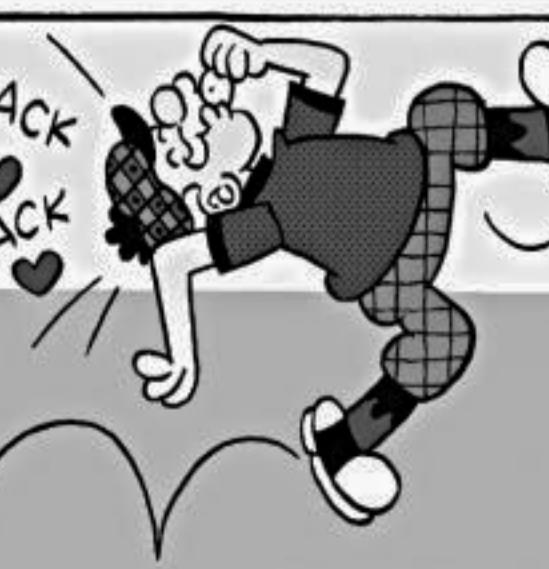
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BABY BLUES



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UMBERTO ECO
(1932-2016)
Italian novelist, literary critic, philosopher, semiotician, and university professor

As the man said, for every complex problem there's a simple solution, and it's wrong.

QUOTABLE Quote

KAUTILYAN KRONICLES

IMTIAZ A HUSSAIN

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