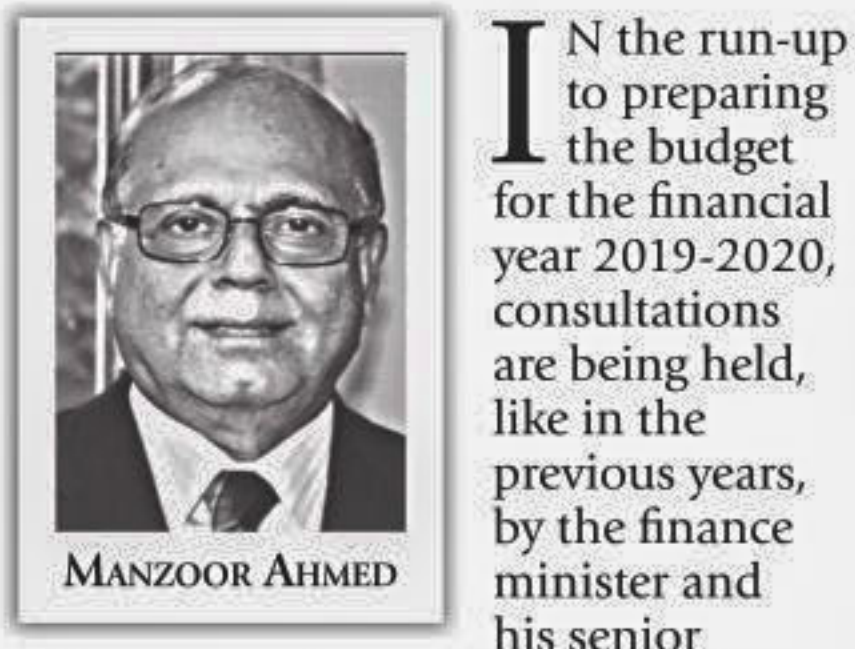


BUDGET FY2019-20

# Can it be the beginning of a 'decade of education' plan?



**I**N the run-up to preparing the budget for the financial year 2019-2020, consultations are being held, like in the previous years, by the finance minister and his senior colleagues with various stakeholders. As part of this dialogue, civil society bodies, especially the Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE), have been putting forth their expectations regarding a greater priority to education and better use of resources. In recent years, these pleas have not made a significant difference.

Public spending in education has remained stuck around 2 percent of GDP, although the absolute amount of allocation has grown. In priority-setting and use of resources, no significant change can be reported. Will the upcoming budget be any different? As the first budget since the parliamentary election and the regime's mandate for another five years of rule, can this budget mark the beginning of a decade-long plan for educational transformation?

The 2018 Awami League election manifesto promised, among other things, the highest allocation for education and its proper use; all-out efforts to improve the standard of education; banishing the curse of illiteracy; expansion of school feeding; investment in technical education and ICT to make education from school to university befitting the 21st century; a youth training centre in every upazila; and girl-boy ratio in higher education raised by 2020 to 100 percent from the current 70 percent. This is a good



PHOTO: STAR

agenda for a decade plan, if effective implementation follows.

As part of the "Critical Conversation" on Bangladesh's journey beyond LDC, organised by the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) on April 28-29, a session was held on the education challenges. In the session, Minhaj Mahmud, BIDS senior researcher, cited comparative economic analysis pointing out the need for improving "factor productivity" for labour by eight times in the next decade. This means, in plain language, a major enhancement of skills and competencies of students at different levels of education.

Prof Rehman Sobhan, Chairperson of the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), speaking about industrial

policy in the BIDS seminar, asserted that "democratisation of education and creating equal opportunity for quality education need to be the central agenda for the journey from LDC to a Middle-Income Country."

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), especially goal 4 on education, to which Bangladesh is committed, is an opportunity to address various challenges in education and necessary re-thinking regarding action priorities by 2030 focusing on the immediate future and beyond. The commitment of Bangladesh government, as reflected in various documents about vision and plan—the Seventh Five Year Plan 2016-20 (7FYP), Vision 2021, the Perspective Plan 2010-2021—needs to be critically examined from the SDG perspective.

It is time to underscore the crucial

task of taking up the agenda for addressing the quality deficits in education. It is human capability and human agency that can help achieve the national aspirations and the sustainable development goals for 2030. It cannot be gainsaid that failures in education hold the nation's future in hostage.

The new budget cannot be the full answer to the deep-rooted problems of education and development. But it can at least help set a course for change, leaving existing patterns and practices intact.

In the memorandum to the minister of finance, CAMPE, reflecting a range of views of its broad civil society constituency, highlighted a few key questions:

Firstly, can the new budget clearly

demonstrate the beginning of steps to fulfil the political pledges? Can it mark the beginning of a 10-year programme ("a decade of education") to fulfil the SDG commitment of inclusive, equitable and quality education for all from preschool to secondary level and lifelong learning opportunities for youth and adults? Unfortunately, no such comprehensive programme exists now other than one only for primary education up to grade 5.

Secondly, as part of the ten-year plan, can there be a programme of quality improvement of school education with new thinking and action to bring "the best and the brightest" into the teaching profession? Such a plan would include introduction of education and teaching certification as part of the four-year general college degree course (with assurance of quality and good management), as done in many countries, and setting up of a National Teaching Service Corps with high status, remuneration and a career path.

Then, can the budget mark the beginning of an upazila-based planning and management of basic education (pre-primary, primary, secondary, vocational and literacy/adult education)? This may begin with piloting in one upazila in each division as a precursor to a countrywide move in the next ten years.

The annual national budget is not the main vehicle for reforms in the education system. But it can signal a change in direction. It has to be more than an expression of intent. It has to be followed up with serious policy and strategy support from the top.

Dr Manzoor Ahmed is professor emeritus at BRAC University.

## Japan begins a new era

ASHRAF UD DOULA

**O**N May 1, 2019, Japan entered into a new era when the Crown Prince Naruhito, 59, acceded to the Chrysanthemum Throne following abdication, the day before, by his father Emperor Akihito, ending his nearly 30 years of reign, the first emperor to do so in 200 years.

The sacred ascension ceremony—during which a sword, a jewel and an official seal were handed over to the new emperor—was witnessed, among others, by the immediate successor to the throne, the younger brother of the emperor, 53-year-old Prince Akishino, his uncle 83-year-old Prince Hitachi, the Japanese cabinet led by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and a host of political leaders, academics and social elites besides a handful of journalists.

Following an archaic imperial household law, there was no female guest to witness the historic ceremony. The wife of the new emperor, Princess Masako, who will be the new empress, was also not present during the ceremony. The lone woman making history to witness the event was the only female member in Prime Minister Abe's cabinet.

Historically, the Japanese people including the government and the private sector follow a new calendar with the commencement of a new era, and will now have to change the calculation of dates, months and years accordingly from the day of assumption of imperial power by the new emperor.

There is also a tradition of naming a new era when a new emperor takes

power. The reign of Emperor Akihito was known as "Heisei", meaning "achieving peace". The new emperor's era will be called "Reiwa", with multiple meanings—"order and peace", "auspicious harmony" and "joyful harmony".

It is reported that the Japanese government had commissioned a panel of nine members to propose a short list of names for the new era, from which the name of Reiwa was chosen. While revealing the new imperial era's name a couple of weeks ago, Japan's Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga explained the meaning of the name as "culture born and nurtured while people beautifully bring their hearts together."

As in other monarchies in Europe and elsewhere, the imperial family of Japan is also closely followed by the Japanese people for they regard the imperial family as the direct descendent of the sun goddess. As a mark of reverence, Japanese commoners including the highest officials are not allowed to make physical contact (shaking hand, etc.) with the emperor or any other member of the imperial family. Any news or events involving the imperial family capture headlines in the media.

In 2002, a typical crisis arose in the royal household when then-Crown Princess Masako gave birth to their only child, a baby daughter. The birth of a female child, and not a male, ensued a great debate in the Japanese society with regard to the line of succession. As per the constitution, only a male heir can ascend to the throne. On the other hand, Prince Akishino, who was third in line of succession, also had two



Japan's Emperor Naruhito, flanked by Empress Masako, delivers a speech during a ceremony called Sokui-go-Choken-no-gi, his first audience after the accession to the throne, at the Imperial Palace in Tokyo.

PHOTO: REUTERS

daughters and no son.

Noticing a demographic challenge in the imperial family, the Japanese parliament after much debate almost came close to the amendment of the constitution enabling a female royal to ascend to the throne. However, in 2007, dousing all speculations and anxiety, the wife of Prince Akishino gave birth to a baby boy, which brought an abrupt end to the matter altogether.

Not unexpectedly, though, the ascension to the throne by the new emperor has once again brought the issue of the right to succession by a female royal in the center stage. The present prime minister of Japan, Shinzo Abe, has pledged to upgrade the women's role in Japanese society and diminish the patriarchal system. It can then be assumed that the practice will consequently make an inroad into the imperial household.

I was privileged to serve as Bangladesh Ambassador to Japan from 2006-2010, which gave me a unique opportunity to interact occasionally with Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko, Crown Prince Naruhito and Crown Princess Masako,

and other distinguished members of the imperial family.

While presenting my credentials to Emperor Akihito in July 2006, I was pleasantly surprised when he recalled with fondness his visit to Bangladesh in 1974 as then-Crown Prince and his meeting with our Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, adding that he was very impressed by Bangabandhu's stature and handsomeness. He also enquired about Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. In our subsequent meetings on various imperial occasions, he enquired about Bangladesh's social and economic developments.

Needless to say, Japan is one of the most trusted and time-tested friends of Bangladesh. Japan's contribution to our quest for development is undeniable. We also share many of the aspects of Japanese life. Thus, the continuation and further improvement of our bilateral relations with Japan is quintessential for the mutual benefit of both the countries.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is reportedly likely to pay a visit to Japan in the coming months. Her programme in Tokyo should hopefully include an audience with Emperor Naruhito and Empress Masako. Sheikh Hasina may wish to use the occasion to extend an invitation to the imperial couple to visit Bangladesh in 2022 when our two countries will celebrate the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between them, marking a new era of mutual cooperation.

Ashraf ud Doula is a former Bangladesh Ambassador to Japan.

**QUOTABLE Quote**

**ADAM SMITH**  
(1723-1790)  
SCOTTISH ECONOMIST, MORAL PHILOSOPHER AND AUTHOR.

*No society can surely be flourishing and happy, of which the far greater part of the members are poor and miserable.*

**CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH**

<b>ACROSS</b>	29 Harden	7 Star of the '84 Olympics
1 Lunch spot	30 Goals	8 Secret meeting
5 Terse	32 Kilt patterns	10 Star in Aquila
9 "West Side Story" role	34 Keg need	11 That girl's
11 Lisa's dad	35 Korean or Thai	16 Race loser
12 Star in Orion	36 Blackjack call	18 Influence
13 Unoccupied	38 Exams	21 Slam sound
14 Outback bird	39 Patriot Ethan	23 Mason of movies
15 La Brea fossil	40 Fraternal group	24 Mink's cousin
preserve	41 Easter lead-in	25 In danger
17 Ankle bones	<b>DOWN</b>	27 Stovetop item
19 Turn bad	1 Insertion symbol	28 Flower part
20 Clark's partner	2 Zoo resident	29 Map division
21 Writer Jonson	3 Diagram	30 Works leather
22 Fragrance	4 Sorbonne season	31 Wasn't thrifty
24 Path	5 Provide free of charge	33 Skin art, in slang
26 Puts in order	6 Strike caller	37 Ailing

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**YESTERDAY'S ANSWER**

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

**BEETLE BAILEY**

by Mort Walker

**BABY BLUES**

by Kirkman & Scott