

HUMAN ASSETS INDEX

How well are we doing?

RAFIQUA FERDOUSI

AS Bangladesh braces for take-off from the LDC (Least developed country) status, the need for increasing attention on quality education and healthcare have become even more central than before. Not only are these two areas essential drivers of continued progress, they are also critical components of human development.

One of the major criteria of LDC graduation is the aggregated score of countries in the Human Assets Index (HAI). HAI is a composite index of education and health which is used as an identification criterion of the LDCs by the Committee for Development Policy of the UN. FERDI, an independent and not-for-profit think tank in collaboration with UNDESA (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs) has built a retrospective series of this index that tracks the improvements made by countries in this domain. In 2011, the HAI was available in an annual database covering the period 1970-2008 for 147 developing countries and the first update was done in 2014 by Closet, Feindouno and Goujon. At present, the index is available in an annual database covering the period 1990-2016 for 145 developing countries.

This new index focuses on two dimensions: health and education. The two health dimension indicators are the undernourishment prevalence index and the under-five mortality rate index. Likewise, the two education dimension indicators are the adult literacy index and the secondary enrolment index. The primary data for each variable of the Human Assets Index are rescaled and converted into index values using a max-min procedure and the aggregate index is then calculated as a simple average of the four components indices.



Ultimately, overcoming these systematic obstacles will require a lot more than just a generic focus on economic growth and poverty reduction.

Each component carries an equal weight of 25 percent in the HAI and the normalised scores vary between 0 and 100. In order to graduate from the LDC category, a country must have a score of 66 or above in the Human Asset index. Although Bangladesh already fulfilled this eligibility criterion for graduation in 2018, there are still some room for improvements, particularly in order to successfully overcome the post-LDC graduation challenges.

According to the new data set of the HAI, Bangladesh has made significant progress in the under-five mortality rate index over the years. Likewise, the score of Bangladesh has also steadily improved in the adult literacy index. There has been an overall

improvement in the aggregated score of the HAI index of Bangladesh as well. While Bangladesh's score in the secondary enrolment index continued to improve from the year 1990 and onwards, the score began to decline starting from 2004. The position of Bangladesh in this index improved for the second time around in the year 2012 to 2014. However, the score in the undernourishment prevalence index began to significantly worsen in the early 1990s and while some improvements were made in the later years, the score has remained stagnant for over a decade now.

This appears as a Catch-22. Because during the same period, the GDP growth of Bangladesh continued to

rise significantly and yet there seems to be an inadequate reflection of the upward trend of GDP growth on the undernourishment index of the HAI.

Similarly, Bangladesh still has a long way to go to further advance the state of adult literacy and secondary enrolment. In the traditional literature, it is often argued that there is a bi-directional causality between economic growth and human development. Nevertheless, contrary to popular belief, it can be seen that despite economic growth, there could also be systematic impediments within the individual components of human development. Ultimately, overcoming these systematic obstacles will require a lot more than just a generic focus

on economic growth and poverty reduction.

In Bangladesh, stunting is still quite a common problem and unfortunately the damage that it causes to the development in children is permanent. This alone robs people of many vital opportunities in life. Malnutrition can severely hamper the development of physiological and cognitive abilities in children which in turn can deprive them of fulfilling their full potential. Stunted children have weaker immune systems and consequently, are more vulnerable to diseases.

According to Unicef, the deficits in brain-cell size and connectivity in stunted children translate to a loss of between two to three years of learning. Furthermore, when stunted children enter the workforce, their diminished physical and intellectual ability can reduce their earning capacity by as much as 22 percent. Hence, it is evident that the cumulative effect of malnutrition has considerable impact on the broader socio-economic development of a country.

Numerous studies have already established that investments in both nutrition and education have a very high benefit to cost ratio.

In the post-LDC graduation phase, the government must focus on ensuring gender equity and increasing investment in the health and education sector of the country. Because without increased investment in human capital development, Bangladesh will struggle to meet the challenges of the post-LDC graduation phase. Therefore, all relevant stakeholders must flag this issue right away and adopt a well thought out and thorough strategy starting now.

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All The President's Crooks



ASHFAQ SWAPAN

IT'S not exactly breaking news that another accomplice of US President Donald J Trump has been found guilty and is contemplating at jail time. This is something,

alas, that has been occurring from time to time for a while.

This time around it's a relatively low-level if colourful minion, Roger J Stone. Stone now waits for sentencing to join our esteemed president's other pals in the slammer.

To date, the folks already doing time include Trump's former campaign manager Paul Manafort and his lawyer and factotum (read thug and enforcer) Michael Cohen. Former National Security Adviser Michael Flynn and deputy campaign adviser Rick Gates are awaiting sentencing to determine the period during which they, too, will enjoy the state's hospitality.

The number of scandals and hijinks have led to a bizarre phenomenon here that analysts call "scandal fatigue." You can almost feel the collective, exasperated, shrug of the public, and you cannot avoid the sorry conclusion that a lot of people are exhausting their capacity for outrage.

Now let me be clear. It isn't as if the office of the US presidency has always been as pure as the driven snow. From the Teapot Dome scandal in the 1920s during the administration of president Warren Harding, which forced a cabinet member to go to jail for bribery, to the recent past when the Watergate scandal forced president



US President Donald J Trump.

PHOTO: AFP

Richard Nixon to resign and the Monica Lewinsky scandal got president Bill Clinton impeached, scandals have rocked the US presidency from time to time.

But all those scandals pale when compared to what's going on today.

Here's a thumbnail sketch of select jailbird/felons who have graced the Trump campaign/administration, starting with Cohen, the latest Trump associate to get convicted.

Roger Stone, Trump's friend and adviser: Relatively small fry, but nonetheless a close Trump confidante. "For decades, Roger J Stone Jr played politics as a kind of performance art, starring himself as a professional lord of mischief..." *The New York Times*

reported. "He tossed bombs and spun tales from the political periphery with no real reckoning, burnishing a reputation as a dirty trickster."

Stone was convicted of obstructing a congressional inquiry of Trump, lying to investigators and trying to block the testimony of a witness. Charges carry a maximum prison term of 50 years, though he will likely get a much lighter sentence.

Paul Manafort, former Trump campaign manager: A sleazy hustler who seems to have walked right out of the pages of a cheap paperback potboiler. Before joining Trump's campaign, career highlights include lobbying for such international soundrels as Ferdinand Marcos of

Philippines, Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire, and Angolan warlord Jonas Savimbi. Later, he got involved with disgraced Ukrainian leaders and oligarchs and made obscene sums of money while he was at it, with a lifestyle to match. (He was partial to expensive mansions and sartorial flourishes like a USD 15,000 ostrich-skin jacket and a USD 18,500 python-skin jacket.) Currently a guest of Uncle Sam for over seven years after being convicted of tax evasion, bank fraud and witness tampering.

Michael Cohen, former Trump lawyer and fixer: Career highlights include making hush payments in 2016 to porn star "Stormy Daniels" (actual name Stephanie Clifford) to protect Trump during the presidential campaign. Earlier in 2014, threatened reporter Tim Mak of *The Daily Beast* following questions about rape allegations by former Trump wife Ivana Trump (she later recanted).

Subtlety is not Cohen's strong suit. He reportedly told Mak: "Tread very (expletive) lightly, because what I'm going to do to you is going to be (expletive) disgusting."

Cohen pleaded guilty to campaign finance violations, tax fraud and bank fraud. Currently serving a three-year term in prison, where, we are informed, he is having a whale of a time giving legal advice (he has been disbarred) to fellow inmates and regaling them with stories about Trump.

Michael T Flynn, former National Security Adviser: Pleaded guilty to lying to the FBI about speaking to the Russian ambassador. Awaiting prison sentence.

Rick Gates, Manafort's deputy in the Trump campaign: Pleaded guilty to financial fraud and lying to the FBI.

Awaiting prison sentence.

There is almost certainly more to come.

Rudy Giuliani, Trump's so-called personal lawyer: Up to his neck in dodgy stuff. The former New York mayor, once a national hero following the 9/11 attacks in 2001, has aged about as well as a slab of butter turned rancid. Loud, brash, and a bit of a loose cannon, his latest antics are at the centre of the impeachment inquiry in Congress. There is strong evidence suggesting he is pursuing a domestic political agenda on behalf of Trump in Ukraine.

"Federal prosecutors ... are investigating whether President Trump's personal lawyer Rudolph W Giuliani broke lobbying laws in his dealings in Ukraine," *The New York Times* reported.

"The investigators are examining Mr Giuliani's efforts to undermine the American ambassador to Ukraine, Marie L Yovanovitch."

Two of Giuliani's Ukrainian-born associates were arrested on campaign finance-related charges at an airport right before they were leaving for Vienna with one-way tickets. Reports said they have underworld connections in Ukraine.

You can't make this stuff up.

While America's judicial and governmental infrastructure deserve some credit for exercising checks and balances on an administration gone awry, one can't help worrying that the coarsening and sometimes outright criminalisation of governance has likely caused long-term damage that we are going to rue for a long time to come.

Ashfaq Swapan is a contributing editor for *Siliconer*, a digital daily for South Asians in the United States.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

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YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

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BEETLE BAILEY

THIS IS A FREE COUNTRY AND I HAVE A RIGHT TO FREE SPEECH!

THEN GO AHEAD, SPEAK FREELY

4-10

BABY BLUES

MOM IS REALLY A BEAR IN THE MORNING, ISN'T SHE?

YEP, YOU GOTTA BE CAREFUL.

I READ THAT IT'S SUPER DANGEROUS TO GET BETWEEN A MOTHER BEAR AND HER CUB.

MAYBE...

BUT IT'S WAY MORE DANGEROUS TO GET BETWEEN ONE AND HER MORNING COFFEE.

GRRRRRR

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QUOTABLE Quote

ROALD DAHL
(1916-1990)
British writer, a popular author of ingenious, irreverent children's books.

We have so much time and so little to do. Strike that, reverse it.