

TANGENTS

BY IHTISHAM KABIR



A school in old Dhaka, 1998.

PHOTO: IHTISHAM KABIR

Admission Test

In 1970 my parents had a big problem. That problem was me. We lived in Sylhet and I attended Blue Bird School which went up to Class Five. At the end of 1969 I passed Class Five.

When 1970 came, the main goal in the life of Abbu and Ammu - my parents - was to get me admitted to another school so I could continue with Class Six.

Abbu thought I could attend his old school, Sylhet Government Boys' High School. I needed to pass their admission test. One winter morning in early 1970, on test day, he took me to the school. It was a beautiful setting on the bank of the river Surma. I sat in a large class room with several dozen other boys and took the examination, finishing before noon.

I returned home, had lunch and went about my business. The result arrived early afternoon: I had failed the test.

My parents were stunned and disappointed.

The headmaster of the school, Mr. Syed Amirul Islam, a strict but fair man, was a relative. That very afternoon my parents took me to his house. He and his wife (my Khala) welcomed us.

Abbu debriefed Mr. Islam on the day's events. After showing him my grades from Blue Bird - where I had stood first in class throughout - Abbu asked him if I could possibly take another admission test. Mr. Islam agreed. In the back of their house was a veranda facing a pond. He prepared a fresh test for me. I sat in their veranda and completed the test in the time allotted.

Mr. Islam took away the test to correct it. He returned soon, saying, "He has passed. The school will admit him."

But the day's events had jolted

Abbu. While he was grateful to Mr. Islam, my failure that morning had hurt his self-esteem. He decided against sending me to Government School.

This decision had profound repercussions for our family. Abbu and Ammu decided to move to Dhaka to find a better school for me. It took me years to understand the immensity of their sacrifice. The life of my younger brother and sister also changed dramatically.

When we reached Dhaka admission season was almost over; one exception was Dhanmondi Boys High School. I sat for their test. After I had finished, Abbu came to take me home. He scanned the exam and stopped at a Bangla question that was like a riddle. He said, "Oh, this is easy, here is what it means ... I am sure you got that?" Realizing I had completely misinterpreted the question I remained quiet.

I failed the test.

A few days later, Chhoto Fufu, my Aunt living in Dhaka, was able to arrange a one-off admission test for me at St. Joseph's High School. She and I went to the office of Brother Gerald Kraeger, the headmaster. He wasn't there so we sat and waited. When he arrived we stood up and he shook my hand. Then my Aunt and the headmaster sat down. I was bending down to sit when I realized Brother Gerald had not asked me to sit. So I stood up again. He smiled and asked me to sit down. Giving me a test, he pointed me to an empty room to work on it.

To everyone's collective relief I passed the test and started my new life in Class Six at St. Joseph's.

facebook.com/ikabirphotographs or follow "ihtishamkabir" on Instagram.

Sanitised by water!

Mobile court fines transport workers, passengers in Ctg

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

At a time when Covid-19 cases in the country are rising and health experts insist on strongly maintaining health guidelines, a section of transport workers are using just water to sanitise passengers in Chattogram.

The gross negligence to public health was caught by a mobile court yesterday, that fined 20 persons including drivers, helpers and passengers over different charges.

Executive Magistrate Md Omar Faruk of Chattogram District Administration conducted the mobile court in the port city's GEC and Wasa intersections.

Omar Faruk said during the mobile court, several buses were found with no safety equipment and sanitiser. "Most drivers and their helpers had no mask."

"Most sanitiser bottles in the buses did not have disinfectants; the mobile court also found some transport workers only used water in the name of disinfectants, deceiving public and raising health hazard," added Faruk.

Passengers were found not wearing mask during their ride, or maintaining proper social distancing inside the bus.

The mobile court fined 20 persons including driver helper and passengers with Tk 4,000 for not keeping sanitisers, using water and fake sanitiser and other charges.

Need diplomacy that ensures health rights, revives economy

International relations experts tell discussion

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh should go for robust diplomacy aimed at ensuring people's health rights and reviving the economy that are now being largely affected by the pandemic, said international relations experts.

The country needs to strengthen relations in all fronts -- bilateral, regional and multilateral -- and find ways how peoples' wellbeing gets the highest priority, they observed.

"The pandemic has demonstrated how health is so important for us. Apart from the economy, the most crucial thing for us is to make sure we can have access to the Covid-19 vaccines or drugs whenever that is developed," said Shamsher Mobin Chowdhury, former foreign secretary and ambassador.

Bangladesh's earnings from RMG exports declined by 18.45 percent year-on-year to \$27.83 billion in the outgoing fiscal,

from \$34.13 billion in 2018-19.

Migrant remittance in the outgoing fiscal reached \$18.20 billion, which is 10.87 percent higher than 2018-19, but officials and experts say it could see a downtrend, as several lakh Bangladeshis could return home in coming months. Also, there will be fewer new overseas jobs in near future, which means jobs creation at home will be a bigger challenge now, economists say.

Against such backdrop, the foreign ministry held a discussion with the former foreign secretaries and ambassadors -- Shamsher Mobin Chowdhury, Shahidul Haque, MR Osmani, Faruque Sobhan, CM Shafi Sami, AKM Atiqur Rahman, Md Abdul Hannan, Humayun Kabir, Ahmad Tariq Karim and Mohsin Ali Khan.

The objective of the virtual discussion on Thursday, chaired by Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen, was to get their opinions on the course of action by the

ministry against the pandemic.

The former diplomats said Bangladesh should prioritise strengthening relations with India, China, US and European Union for cooperation in health and economic sectors.

Asked, Shamsher Mobin said he could not disclose the contents of the programme that was held in the format of Chatham House that does not allow disclosures.

Bangladesh gets duty-free access to the European Union, Australia, Japan, India and China. "We need to best utilise these markets," Mobin said, adding, "We need to plan how we can explore sustainable new markets."

Prof Lailafur Yasmin of Dhaka University said in the changed geopolitical situation, many companies will shift from China to Bangladesh, and the government must seize the opportunity by improving conditions of investment.

"This will need strong economic diplomacy," she said.



BEFORE THE LOCKDOWN...With a part of Old Dhaka's Wari set to go under lockdown from today, residents of the area yesterday took every last-minute preparation to hunker down for 21 days. Geared in their headcaps, masks, goggles and face shields, they stocked up on groceries, poultry and vegetables, as authorities set up bamboo barriers on entry points to the area.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED



Left ignored for 11 years

No authority willing to take over Khulna's Bastuhara bypass road

DIPANKAR ROY, Khulna

Bastuhara City Bypass Link Road in Khulna has remained uncared for for nearly a dozen of years as no authorities are willing to take its responsibility, resulting in extreme public sufferings.

Khulna Development Authority (KDA) built the 2.37km road stretching from the city's Sheikh Abu Naser Specialised Hospital to Dumuria area.

KDA sources said the Tk 14 crore project started in 2003-2004 fiscal year and completed in 2008-2009 FY. Since then, there has been no maintenance work for the road.

Over the years, bitumen has got off the road, large potholes have developed all the way and finally it has become almost a clay road.

Important establishments like sector office of Border Guard Bangladesh, BNS Titumir, BNS School and College, Anchorage School, Naval Admission Centre, Naval Colony, Police Lines, Mujgunni Children's Park, Rayer Mahol Degree College, Imam Training Centre, and Bastuhara kitchen market are located near the road.

More than 2,000 people -- including students, and government officials and employees -- have to use the road on a daily basis, said residents.

The people living on the city's western part -- including Khalishpur, Daulatpur and Boyra areas -- can enter the central city through the bypass road. Hossain Ali, a resident of Modinabad Residential area, said, "How long will we wait for its repair?"

Hossain runs a poultry farm beside the road. Very often, eggs are damaged amid bumpy ride on rickshaw-van. "The situation gets worse during the monsoon when the road becomes muddy," he said.

The potholes have become so deep that vehicles get stuck in those and crane has to be used to lift those. Ambulance services are severely hampered along the road.

Although 11 years went by, neither Khulna Development Authority nor Khulna City Corporation (KCC)

and Local Government Engineering Department (LGED) came forward to repair the road, said Abdur Rob, a resident of Bastuhara area.

Initially, around 400 tank lorries plied the road on a daily basis. Now, the number has come down to 10 to avoid accident, said Sony Hossain, a truck driver from Khalishpur, who suffered multiple accidents there in the last two years.

"For the last three years, I haven't seen any ambulance using the road to go to Abu Naser hospital," he told this newspaper.

Last week, this correspondent



Bituminous surface has totally disappeared from Bastuhara bypass road in Khulna. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: STAR

found over 250 big potholes on the road of which both ends have become more deplorable. It is difficult for any kind of vehicles to ply on it as a recent rain has made it muddy. Besides, parts of it collapsed into the adjacent canals near the hospital.

WHAT AUTHORITIES SAY

Md Mortoza Al Mamun, executive engineer (project) of KDA, told The Daily Star that KDA usually constructs roads but does not look after those.

"One kilometre of the road falls in KCC area and the rest in LGED area. So, we sent letter to them on March 28, 2010 to take its responsibility. We

did the same again on February 6 in 2014, but to no avail."

"Now it is the responsibility of the two authorities to repair the road," said Mortoza Al Mamun.

Md Nuruzzaman Talukder, state officer of KCC, told this newspaper that KDA sent a letter to them to take over 1km from Abu Naser hospital to Rayer Mahol culvert, but no indication of length or width is mentioned in it. Besides, there is no data on illegal structures by the road that has no drain and footpath as well, he said.

Mohammad Hossain, assistant engineer of KCC, said, a private power

Introduce free internet packages for students: UGC

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

The University Grants Commission (UGC) has urged the government to introduce free internet packages for university students to enable them to attend online education.

In a letter sent to the education ministry on Tuesday, the regulatory body also sought grants or soft loans for students who need to buy smartphones to take part in online classes. UGC Chairperson Prof Kazi Shahidullah said they have sent copies of the letter to the post and telecommunications division; ICT division; and posts, telecommunications and information technology ministry.

"We hope to get a positive nod from the government. It is an important issue if we want online classes at universities to run smoothly," he said, adding "Universities should ensure at least 80 percent attendance of students in online classes."

UGC sought the grants/soft loan after an online survey of students and teachers of public and private universities showed at least 13 percent students do not have smartphones, according to Shahidullah.

All universities in the country were closed down on March 17, are currently scheduled to remain closed till August 6.

On June 25, UGC at a meeting with VCs of public universities urged universities to start offering online classes to avoid possible session jams.

Though most VCs agreed, they cited lack of facilities at institutions and uneven internet access of students as obstructions to implementing it. The VCs also sought internet packages for students so they can join online classes.

On June 22, the Association of Private Universities of Bangladesh had also called for affordable internet packages for students.

At an online press conference on Thursday, University Teachers' Network -- an association of public and private university teachers -- demanded a special allowance of Tk 3,000 per month for each student infected with the coronavirus. They demanded 50 percent waiver of all tuition fees at private universities.

The organisation also sought one-time or long-term scholarships, interest-free loan of Tk 20,000 for at least half of the students of public universities.

Steadfast to his oath

Doctor returns to practice after beating Covid-19, provides free oxygen service

ARUN BIKASH DEY, Ctg

Since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, there have been countless incidents across the country of medical services becoming scarce, from overwhelmed hospitals to shut-down private practices. And yet, there were hundreds of doctors and staff who remained resolute to their oath of serving patients.

Md Yusuf Faruqi Parvez is one of them, who put himself on the line and had to pay for it, but it did not deter him.

Since the pandemic began, Dr Parvez -- from Chattogram's Hathazari -- continued treating people at his two chambers; one at the upazila's Aman Bazar and the other at the port city's Rahattarpool area.

On May 31, Parvez tested Covid-19 positive. With fever and breathing problems, he was admitted to a private hospital in the city.

It took him nine days at the hospital to recover, after which he went into self-isolation for 21 days.

"When most doctors stopped private practice, patients fell into deep trouble," said Dr Parvez. "Though I knew I could be infected if I continued private practice, I never thought of absconding from my duties. Where would patients go if we all shut our doors?"

"When I tested positive, all I could think of was recovering and getting back to work," Parvez told this newspaper recently.

But this was not a one-off incident. Over the years, the physician has cultivated a reputation as a "doctor of the poor".

After obtaining his MBBS degree in 2004 from Chattogram Medical College, Parvez set up his chamber, but never set a fee for his patients, locals said. He treated insolvent patients for free and sometimes even helped them avail medicine.

From his first-hand experience with Covid-19, Parvez realised oxygen support can be the difference between life and death for patients, which is difficult to avail especially for those in rural areas.

Parvez bought 11 oxygen cylinders to provide emergency support to patients with respiratory distress, free of cost. He circulated his initiative through local public representatives of Hathazari upazila and through social media.

When Omar Faruque (49), a resident of the upazila, was having difficulty breathing, his family was in panic. "A relative gave me the doctor's phone number. I called and informed him of the patient's condition," said Rashed Liton, Omar's brother. "The doctor suggested primary treatment and sent his volunteers with oxygen cylinders on our way."

"They arrived within 15 minutes and we were very relieved," Liton said.

Another patient, Md Yunus (70), also received oxygen support from Parvez after he was having trouble breathing last week, said Fazal Ahmed, the patient's cousin.

"I have a plan to set up an isolation centre to treat Covid-19 patients who are suffering from mild to moderate symptoms," the Dr Parvez told this newspaper.



Dr Yusuf Faruqi Parvez