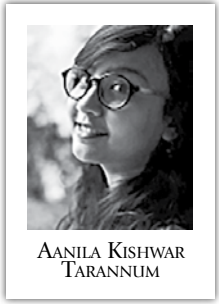


INTERNATIONAL YOUTH DAY

On broken things like the economy and young people’s spirits



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FOR the number of times I have seen older people address and advise the youth, I have seen very few instances of the former assuming the role of a listener. In every interview of a Famous Person, regardless of their relevance to youth-centric issues, there is one final question, “What would you like to tell all our young listeners/viewers/readers out there?”

The answer that follows contains some hollow words of encouragement, rarely going into details on how a young person in said interviewee’s industry can progress. “Most importantly, never stop dreaming,” they say. These are the words I grew up reading everywhere, from library books to celebrity conversation snippets on *Pratham Alo’s* entertainment page. For a while in the early 2000s, there was some glimmer of hope still, although climate change was already in our textbooks, and my mother couldn’t come up with a satisfactory answer when asked, “But this predicts the end of the world... why is this just a footnote in my [fifth grade] science book?”

At the time, the internet was yet to take over our lives, and I was shown and still had some hope for the future. I wanted to be a writer when I grew up, and no, the reason I speak ill of dreaming is not because I have apparently realised my dreams, but because I no longer know how to.

What do today’s youth have in

common with the economy? Both are broke(n).

A 2019 report on South Asian youth’s perspectives on education, skills and employment conducted by Unicef found that many young people in the region feel their education systems are outdated, leaving them unprepared for employment. Bangladesh’s officially reported unemployment rate is suspiciously low at 4.2 percent, considering I do not see a very positive picture in real life. The World Bank reported in late 2019 that one in three graduates in the country are unemployed, while female graduates are especially disadvantaged. There is no social security or safety net for the unemployed in Bangladesh.

None of this is particularly good for the economy or for young people’s mental health. They have little faith in the system, yet they are forced to survive within it. The Unicef survey reported that 23 percent South Asian youths receive inadequate support to improve employability, while 44 percent feel bribery demands and discriminatory, unfair hiring practices make it difficult for them to find work.

Meanwhile, there is a clear difference between the reality that we experience, and the one that older generations describe as still being real.

Imagine being a typical twenty-something on the internet. You start noticing a stark contradiction in the news you’re consuming—on one hand, corruption is rampant among politicians and businessmen, which is demoralising to anyone who is attempting to be successful through honest, hard work in this age of hyper-competitiveness. On the



Police baton-charge students near the BRTA office in the city’s Mirpur-13 during the 2018 road safety movement.

PHOTO:
COLLECTED

other, there are statements and promises from the government which paint a much rosier picture of the country—unemployment is low, GDP is high, and The System is working perfectly.

If the fault is not within The System, the fault must lie in the individual, we are told, and it is the twenty-something unemployed graduates and naive university students who just aren’t doing enough. Maybe if they watch a few more self-help videos, spend a little less money on nonessential items, and if they just dream a little bigger, The System would reward them.

Our education system, the subsequent frustration over employment, and lack of opportunity to pursue passions

crush young people’s spirits. I spoke to multiple university students recently, and I found that some have learned to think of themselves solely as units of production in order to cope with the extreme levels of competition and scrutiny they face. Among those who acknowledge how unfair the system can be regardless of their individual level of productivity, some are hopeful about bringing change, while some find it difficult to even imagine a future for themselves. For many, the present is dystopian enough.

While the apolitical youth continues to plan their lives out as an individual, those who are socially and politically aware feel frustrated. The memes are

enough to conclude that the kids aren’t alright. This pandemic and its trustee sidekick, the economic recession, have only added to the already existing grievances over lack of climate action, global rise in fascism and increasing inequality.

The world changed rapidly, but our institutions did not. The youth are capable, but they are not listened to. They are told to dream big, but they are not given the tools to realise those dreams. Older generations rarely empathise, “We survived The System, why can’t you?” they say.

The youth do not feel heard. They are given consolations and condolences when their peers are killed in road accidents, but demands for effective change in policy are rarely met. They are labelled as miscreants and traitors when they protest, their struggles are constantly trivialised, and legitimate demands for change are deemed as undeserved entitlement.

How can someone who has grown up as a global citizen plan for their individual future when they see little hope for the collective future of the world? Engaging the youth in global action is impossible unless those who make decisions and policies understand the youth instead of undermining them. Change, unfortunately, cannot begin with an unemployed twenty-something graduate buying a self-help book; it has to begin with the improvement of a corrupt system that landed said graduate in the unfortunate situation they’re in.

Aanila Kishwar Tarannum has spent most of her youth writing about the youth (and other things) for *The Daily Star*.
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Involving young people in tackling climate change and Covid-19



MD. NAZMUL HUDA

DURING an unprecedented time of Covid-19, this year, the world celebrates the International Youth Day. The theme for this year’s celebration is “Youth

Engagement for Global Action”, an appropriate focus which underscores the need for young peoples’—accounting for 16 percent of the global population—participation in political, economic and social life and processes at the local/community, national and international levels and strengthening their capacity to act and overcome the global challenges, including climate change and the Covid-19 outbreak. Although globally young people are attempting to address these pressing challenges, the abilities of the Bangladeshi youth are largely ignored and under-nourished, which impedes their prospects for concerted actions.

It is evident that climate change is interrupting weather patterns in every country on every continent, leading to extreme weather events, including sudden floods, cyclones, hurricanes, storms, rising sea levels, worsening water shortage, and polluting water supplies. These impacts of climate change affect the socio-economic conditions of women, children, and youth globally. The low and middle-income countries are particularly vulnerable to these impacts of climate change. For example, in the Global Climate Risk Index 2020, Bangladesh, Dominica, Nepal, Philippines, Pakistan, and Vietnam have been identified as the countries most affected by climate change. Such

a global challenge acts as a barrier to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This necessitates the participation of young people in global action for addressing climate change and its impacts on the socio-economic life of people across the world.

In the past, the youth attempted to address climate change through their active participation in climate activism, including lawsuits against fossil fuel companies in the United States. Similar lawsuits were actioned in Colombia and Pakistan to combat climate change and its devastating impacts. However,



Bangladesh has not seen such climate activism to fight against climate change and its impacts—nor to protect the endangered parts of the Sundarbans, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and the largest mangrove forest in the world, where a coal-fired power plant is being constructed. Such so-called developments harm the livelihoods of local communities and contribute to increasing carbon and greenhouse gas emissions, thus fuelling global warming and climate change. This highlights the

need for young people’s participation in political processes and climate activism, which may enable them to protest against these kinds of development policies. It is also vital to mobilise the youth at the local/community level so that they can contribute to preserving the environment and reduce the impacts of climate changes on the social and economic life of local communities.

Moreover, young people’s participation in environmental, social movements may prompt the government to adopt environmentally friendly policies. Such policies may motivate

national and international organisations to provide financial support for undertaking youth-led environmental projects, thus combating climate change and reducing its adverse impacts.

Globally, the coronavirus pandemic has impacted nearly all aspects of life of people from all walks of life. While high-income countries seem to be capable of tackling the coronavirus pandemic and its impacts, the low and middle-income countries have been most affected by the disease due to multiple factors including

limited resources, testing and treatment, inadequate political commitment and so on. For instance, Bangladesh, a lower-middle-income country, has been hit hard by the coronavirus pandemic and the country is in the fourth and last stage of Covid-19 transmission, according to the World Health Organization, which means that the disease has become native to the population as the numbers of cases and deaths have started to grow rapidly. However, the country adopted tardy and inadequate control and containment measures to fight against Covid-19. In this situation, the role of young people in combating the disease has become more critical than ever.

It has been reported that the youth have been playing an essential role in reducing the spread of Covid-19 globally. For instance, scouts are raising awareness about the transmission and prevention of Covid-19 across the world. In South Africa, young people have utilised music and dance to disseminate accurate information about Covid-19 and eliminate rumours and false information about the disease. In the United Kingdom, young volunteers have helped Covid-19 patients by providing food delivery services so that patients did not need to visit public places and communities, thus limiting the spread of coronavirus and easing the social life of Covid-19 patients.

In Bangladesh, organised by personal connections and social media applications such as Facebook, Messenger and WhatsApp, young volunteers have raised donations from wealthy people in the country and Bangladeshi immigrants living in different countries across the world. Then, young volunteers have distributed essential commodities (such as soaps, rice, lentils, and potatoes) free of cost at the local and national levels. In some

cases, the youth have spent their own money to provide people with daily commodities and prevent them from visiting public places, thus facilitating the normal life of the latter and contributing to control the spread of the disease across the country. However, such youth-led voluntary initiatives are not taken evenly in all parts of the country due to their inequitable participation in the political process, inadequate economic support and limited capacity. Therefore, the government should undertake initiatives for strengthening youth’s engagement in social, economic and political processes so that they can respond to the Covid-19 outbreak through health promotion and volunteering activities.

Together, many countries, including Bangladesh, have already evidenced the adverse impacts of the coronavirus pandemic and climate change. Active and vigorous participation of the youth in concerted actions can facilitate combating such global challenges and achieving the SDGs. Through adequate involvement in social, economic and political processes, the youth can play a more critical role in fighting against the Covid-19 outbreak and climate change than they are doing across the world. As such, it is vital to equip them with the appropriate resources (including financial support, political empowerment, knowledge, skills, education and technology) and ensure their meaningful participation and engagement in actions at the local/community, national and international levels for addressing the challenges posed by the coronavirus pandemic and climate change. This should be each and every country’s pledge to the youth.

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ON THIS DAY
IN HISTORY



AUGUST 12, 1877
Phonograph invented by
Thomas Alva Edison

On this day in 1877, American inventor Thomas Alva Edison made perhaps his most original discovery, the phonograph, and his early recordings were indentations embossed into a sheet of tinfoil by a vibrating stylus.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

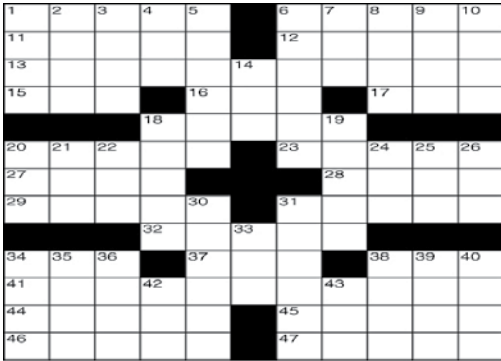
ACROSS

- 1 Music’s Paula
- 6 Patriot Ethan
- 11 Cat’s quarry
- 12 Treaty goal
- 13 Fail at a diet
- 15 Pig’s place
- 16 Badly lit
- 17 Sinking signal
- 18 Copper or cobalt
- 20 City leader
- 23 Like Loki
- 27 Baseball’s Rodriguez
- 28 Docking spot
- 29 Assertion
- 31 Sorceress of Greek myth
- 32 Misspoke
- 34 Dr’s org.
- 37 Concealed

DOWN

- 1 Guitar boosters
- 2 Boxing match
- 3 Obligation
- 4 GI-entertaining
- 5 Bank, at times
- 6 Early primate
- 7 Maui souvenir
- 8 Falls back
- 9 Cave sound
- 10 Catches
- 14 Funny fellow
- 18 Spirit

- 19 Ran easily
- 20 Buddy
- 21 Completely
- 22 Backer’s vote
- 24 Relieve (of)
- 25 Notice
- 26 Historic time
- 30 Dr. Jekyll’s alter ego
- 31 Snake-haired Gorgon
- 33 Mardi Gras city
- 34 Not quite closed
- 35 A lot of
- 36 Regarding
- 38 Painter Klee
- 39 Go by bus
- 42 Singer Redding
- 40 Finger count
- 43 Candle material



YESTERDAY’S ANSWERS



BEEBLE BAILEY

BY MORT WALKER



BABY BLUES

BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT

