Remembering Bangladesh's curriculum guru Prof MA Jabbar

Abdus Sattar Molla

BANGLADESH has completed three full cycles of the primary and secondary (grades 1-12) curriculum development and revision process, which began in 1976. Professor Mohammad Abdul Jabbar was the key person leading these cycles. Hence he is regarded as the guru of the national curriculum of Bangladesh. This father figure of the Bangladeshi curriculum was born in 1931 and breathed his last on January 15, 2016 in Dhaka.

MA Jabbar studied chemistry at the Honours (1952) and Masters (1953) levels in the University of Dhaka (DU). He was keen on education science and obtained the Bachelor of Teaching (BT) degree in 1956 from the Dhaka Teachers Training College (TTC). He then went to the US, studied pedagogy and was awarded an MA in Education from Northern Colorado University in 1961.

Although MA Jabbar's life of service began in 1954 as a college lecturer, his career took off in 1961 with teaching pedagogy at the Institute of Education and Research (IER), DU. However, he left his IER lectureship in 1963 and joined the Government of Pakistan as Assistant Education Adviser. He was promoted to the post of Deputy Education Adviser in 1968. In independent Bangladesh, Prof Jabbar was appointed the Deputy Adviser of Education in 1973.

A National Curriculum and Syllabus Committee (NCSC) was formed in 1976 with more than 40 members, chaired first by Prof Shamsul Haque and later by Prof Zillur Rahman Siddiqi. Prof Jabbar served as its Director and Member-Secretary throughout. His greatest contributions to the Bangladesh curriculum was made during 1976 to 1978 as the key person behind seven volumes of reports on curriculum and syllabus.

Prof Jabbar was the Director of the National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC) established in 1981. The NCDC was merged with the Textbook Board in 1984 and thus the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) was established. He was appointed the first Member (Curriculum) of the four-member Board of the NCTB in 1984. He served here till 1987. That year, he joined the National Institute of Educational Administration, Extension and Research (NIEAER) as its Director (Administration and Finance) and finished government service in 1988. NIEAER was renamed as the National Academy for Educational Management (NAEM) in 1992.

Prof MA Jabbar, however, never distanced himself from the curriculum process of Bangladesh. The second cycle of curriculum revision went on from 1986 through 1995. Prof Jabbar led the curriculum revision process, working with curriculum-makers more intimately this time as the Chairman of the committee.

As the National Education Policy 2010 was developed and approved, the third cycle of revising the national curriculum went on from 2011 to 2012 based on the new education policy. This time, Dr Siddiqur Rahman (retired Professor of IER, DU) served as the education consultant. Prof Jabbar worked as the Convener of the Technical Committee.

By dedicating his career to education and especially national curriculum matters, Prof MA Jabbar, in essence, became the father of the curriculum of Bangladesh, from primary through to higher secondary. He was such a

Professor Mohammad Abdul Jabbar (1931-2016)

dedicated curriculum-maker that just a day before his death in 2016, he came to the NCTB from his Uttara house to attend a curriculum meeting. Here, he felt chest pains and was taken to Labaid Hospital. He never made it home from this last curriculum meeting.

After his death, I urged the NCTB and NAEM authorities to honour curriculum guru Prof Jabbar by naming after him the library of one of these apex bodies of education where he spent most of his years. In 2018, NCTB crafted an auditorium adjacent to its library and named it "Mohammad Abdul Jabbar Auditorium". I thank the NCTB authorities for this noble gesture.

As mentioned earlier, Prof Jabbar's greatest contribution was in preparing the seven volumes of the National Curriculum and Syllabus, the very first curriculum documents in independent Bangladesh. This curriculum guru, while preparing lectures on curriculum for the NCTB staff in 2006, informed me that he brought about 1,500 copies of the said seven volumes to the NCTB in 1983 from his NCDC Office at Elephant Road. But only two volumes: Volume 2 (Lower Secondary) and Volume 3 (Middle Secondary) were found in the NCTB Library, and the rest were missing.

Realising the importance of these documents, I urged the concerned authorities for several years to search for the missing volumes, but they failed to pay heed. So, as a disciple of this guru, I started working on collecting the missing documents in February, 2020. Prof Siddiqur Rahman, Ex-Director of IER, DU lent me Volume 5 (Technical and Vocational Education); he also lent some rare education documents from the Pakistan period. Later, I borrowed Volume 1 (Primary) from the NAEM Library, Volume 4 (Higher Secondary) and Volume 6 (Teachers' Training) from education consultant Dr MA Ohab Mia. I found Volume 7 (Assessment and Examination) in the BANBAEIS Library, and made three copies (two for NCTB and one for myself) of each volume.

Prof Mohammad Ali (Member, Curriculum of NCTB during 1995 to 1999) offered me a copy of the primary curriculum of 1991—the first attempt of a "competency-based" curriculum was made in this. Prof Siddiqur Rahman also lent me the primary curriculum of 2002. Being thus inspired, I collected the education commission reports as well, including the Maolana Akram Khan Commission Report (1951) from NAEM Library, and the Sharif Khan Commission Report (1959) and the Kudrat-A–Khuda Commission Report (1974) from Prof Siddiqur Rahman. I was also able to find all other education commission reports—Mafizuddin Commission, 1988; Shamsul Haque Committee, 1997; and Moniruzzaman Mia Commission, 2003—of the Bangladesh period on the BANBEIS website. On January 5, 2021, I submitted two paper copies of each document to the NCTB Library, which will also be uploaded to their website. I hope BANBEIS, NAEM and even the Ministry of Education can also upload these rare documents to their websites, in order to make them available to all and also to ensure they are not lost again.

However, I am yet to find three commission reports from the Pakistan period—the Ataur Rahman Khan Commission, 1957; the Hamidur Rahman Commission, 1964; and the Noor Khan Commission, 1969. All these were preserved at the NAEM Library as "confined documents", but as ill luck would have it, they somehow went missing. I urge the present NAEM authorities to collect the missing copies from wherever possible.

My lone campaign to preserve the works of the eminent Prof MA Jabbar will not be enough. All concerned, especially at the NCTB, must realise the need of preserving and studying these documents, at least before each revision of the curriculum as part of the "situation analysis".

By performing our educational duties properly, we can show our sincere gratitude and honour the memory of Prof MA Jabbar. I pray for the salvation of his departed soul and again, urge all concerned authorities to invest due efforts in education—the most basic of all attempts at national development.

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We need data protection regimes as much as we need data

Md AB Malek

A report estimates that Google gets over 3.5 billion searches daily and internet users generate about 2.5 quintillion bytes of data each day. As a result, the total size of digital data will be 175 zettabytes by 2025, which means that information will be more abundant than ever before. Data is now considered an asset class or new currency, sometimes compared to oil since it is harvested and refined in order to "produce" insights. Data is also not new, but a critical resource on the planet growing at an unprecedented pace that is characterised by a high degree of variety, as opposed to being a uniform entity. In the modern world, the advent of machine learning algorithms and the availability of enormous amounts of digital data has given birth to the concept of big data, big data analytics, data ethics, data protection laws, datanomics, data economy, data sovereignty, data surveillance, surveillance capitalism, etc.

Impetus and impacts of data usage

Data types vary immensely, ranging from being processed from satellite imagery to environmental data from sensors, mobile devices data, digital pictures and social media content, credit card data, court data, health data, web-generated data etc. With the development of infrastructure and more efficient data transfer technologies, the colossal accessibility of broadband connections at affordable rates has contributed to realising the digital rights of the people. A 2018 report suggests that there are more than 500 million internet users in India, 731 million in China, and 312 million in the US. The Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission's (BTRC) reported in December 2020 that the number of internet subscribers in the country stood at around 111 million.

PHOTO: **COLLECTED**

In such conditions, the rise of the Internet of Things (IoT), machine learning, artificial intelligence, automation and predictive analytics, along with growing interactions between data, transformative technology and people, are continuously constructing promising algorithmic-power and opening up new opportunities for tech companies, governments and people at large. As a result, the task of improving existing or inventing new products and services requires a massive amount of data being collected, processed, utilised and shared throughout the world. For example, Uber runs on data sharing between services providers and consumers. So do apps dealing with food delivery, groceries, banking, insurance, etc. Elon Musk's Tesla is also a data-based-innovation, which is improving the status of self-driving cars. Genomics work with sequencing data is looking forward to improving the status of health IT services. Accordingly, the world has already made a turn towards a data-driven decision-making and supporting paradigm.

However, there is also a growing concern that wherever power lies, there lies the potential for misuse and abuse. This is also true in the data landscape because data is, though useful, not a panacea; meaning that data can also introduce entirely new classes of risks and harm. Potential risks may come from eCommerce brands, tech companies and also public agencies, such as police and military use of facial recognition or body cameras, surveillance CCTV cameras, etc. Although it has a decisive impact on society, traditional governance frameworks and risk mitigation strategies are proving deficient in dealing with the pitfalls of too much data being concentrated in a few hands. It is necessary to deploy risk mitigation mechanisms in the collection, aggregation, sharing and analysis of data, as well as in the monetisation, storage and disposal of data.

For these reasons, concerns have already been encountered in the sphere of public debate on the policy choices regarding the legal and ethical frameworks that apply to data. These include unethical or even illegal use of data insights, reinforcing a bias that already exists in society, and using data for purposes other than originally intended and without their consent. The pertinent questions here are—who should have control of the data? How should such systems be managed, or who should govern the data management, and who should have oversight over that governance? And again, under what conditions should data be collected, used, stored and disposed of? These questions revolve around the management of data availability, accessibility, usability, integrity and security, as well as concerns about ownership, impacts on trade and competition, implications for personal privacy and more.

The current legal landscape

Since most collected and processed data is held by private entities, there is little access to them, even for policymakers and researchers. Moreover, personal data may also be used for surveillance and monitoring purposes, if not effectively regulated. The optimal situation would be a world where data is ethically extracted, refined, distributed and monetised. This requires a robust regulatory framework that set out the rules for mining, owning, sharing and processing data in a responsible way.

The worlds' landmark law in this regard is the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR, 2018), which protects personal information from being used for monetary gain without the full understanding or consent of the people concerned. The 2018 Data Protection Act in the United Kingdom also deals with the regulation of personal data used by organisations, businesses or the government. In the US, there is a number of laws regarding data in the different states of the country. The most recent law with regards to data is the California Consumer Privacy Act (CCPA, 2018), which recognises some rights, including the right to know, right to delete, right to opt-out and right to non-discrimination. Australia also has regulations such as the 1988 (Australian) Privacy Act. However, Bangladesh and India are yet to enact any specific legislation on data protection to date.

As mentioned before, data breaches by private companies is now a profound legal and ethical issue. In October 2018, the UK's data protection watchdog, the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO), fined Facebook GBP 500,000 for its role in the Cambridge Analytica scandal that allowed a serious breach of the data protection law. In July 2019, the Federal Trade Commission in the US fined Facebook around USD five billion after an investigation into eight separate data privacy related violations, which was certainly record-breaking and historic. Data awareness and protection regimes are now becoming increasingly significant in the modern world, and there are few who can ignore the need for having such regimes. We, in Bangladesh, cannot afford to be complacent for much longer either.

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ON THIS DAY IN HISTORY

JANUARY 27, 1973
Vietnam War ended

The Paris accord ending the Vietnam War, America's longest war to that time, was signed this day in 1973, providing for an exchange of prisoners and for the unilateral withdrawal of US forces from South Vietnam.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS
1 Commercial award
5 Iron
10 Incurred, as debt
12 Enticed
13 Jockey Arcaro
14 Corundum, for one
15 Saloon quaff
16 Author Tan
18 Draw
19 Threaten
21 Tea time
22 Use force on
24 Happen
25 Lacking courage
29 Blacken
30 Follows
32 Very popular
34 Flock father
35 Moved carefully
37 Mary's TV pal
39 Tickle
40 "Great!"
41 Singing voice, in slang
42 Crooked

DOWN
1 White shade
2 Soup servers
3 Paragraph start
4 Arles assent
5 Stratagem
6 King, in Latin
7 Book worker
8 Salt base
9 Snide expression
11 Showy bird
17 "The American Language" writer
20 Cheering wildly
21 Cab costs
23 Naval officers
25 Riddle question
26 Relishes
27 Land west of the Urals
28 Make numb
29 Tawdry
31 Stylish
33 Lofty poems
36 Jargon suffix
38 Wheel part

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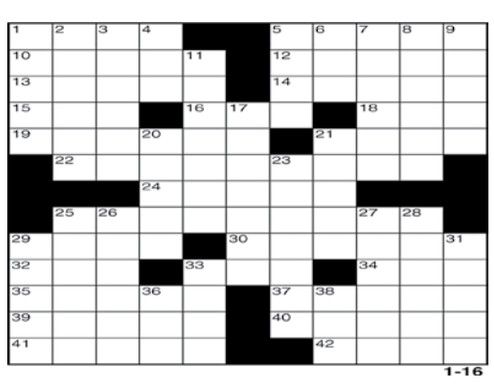

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YESTERDAY'S **ANSWERS**

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BEETLE BAILEY BY MORT WALKER

BABY BLUES BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT