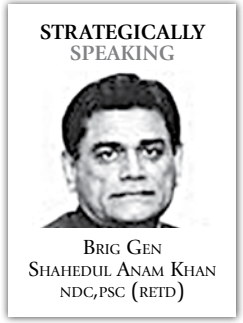


Myanmar Back to Square One



BRIG GEN SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN, NDC, PSC (RETD)

THE five-year ride on the tiger by Aung San Suu Kyi is over. She is back to where she had been used to living during the greater part of her political career (except for a brief interregnum of pseudo-democracy): behind bars. She has been devoured by the tiger that she was riding, or to be exact, appeasing over the last five years. Her deference to the Burmese military by staking her status as a Nobel Laureate, discarding her principles for her political survival, having previously been compelled to accept a constitution that made Myanmar a country with command democracy—dictated by 25 percent of military-nominated representatives and the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), the military's political proxy—has encouraged the military to act with impunity against its ethnic minorities.

It was the military that was really running the country all along, backseat-driving the parliament and Suu Kyi, who was made State Counsellor, in other words, prime minister, but who commanded very little space of her own. The real power lay not in the hands of those elected by the people but in the military. The quasi-democracy fooled the world, and the country was accepted in the comity of nations promising political reforms and democracy. Not only had the sanctions on Myanmar been withdrawn in 2011, but as of now, it is also reaping the benefits of a foreign investment that runs to the tune of more than USD 30 billion.

Myanmar had never morphed into a democratic state—it was never intended to, it being run by a constitution that was drafted by the military and validated through a two-phase referendum that was alleged to have been saturated by fraud and cheating, with government officials casting the votes,

leaving the voters out of the polling process. The armed forces under the new constitution get 25 percent of the seats in parliament automatically. The 2008 constitution also mandates that the ministries of home affairs, defence and border affairs be headed by serving military men, thereby giving the military control of the three most important ministries.

The latest military coup and the annulment of the election results marked the second instance where Suu Kyi and her NLD party suffered the consequences of military intervention and scrapping of the election results. In 1990, when the newly formed NLD got nearly 80 percent of seats, the military was quick to annul the results, peddling the familiar line that the country was too beset by internal conflict and discord to be ready for democracy. The 2015 election also went the NLD's way. It survived because its survival was promised by the then army chief, the same person into whose hands the powers of the state have been thrust this time. In September 2015, General Min Aung Hlaing, under US sanctions for human rights abuses against the Rohingyas, had vowed to respect the outcome of the country's November 8 general election, pledging that the military would not intervene, regardless of the results. This time, the results were too uncomfortable for the military. So the results were scrapped and a virtual martial law was declared on February 1.

The constitution empowers the Tatmadaw, the Burmese military, to intervene in case of an emergency. But was there an emergency? Can anyone take seriously the charges of election fraud which were rejected by the election commission itself? The question that everyone is seeking answers to is what made the army go for such a step when everything was seemingly going so well for them. During the last five years, it was Suu Kyi's government that was getting all the flak for their policies. The military atrocities on the Rohingyas—labelled as genocide by the UN, the US and others—have been steadfastly defended by Suu Kyi in all international forums.

Annulling the November 2020 election



Military supporters carry Myanmar's national flags during a demonstration in Yangon shortly before the military detained the country's de facto leader Aung San Suu Kyi and the country's president in a coup.

PHOTO: AFP

has to do with both the personal interest of army chief Min Aung Hlaing and the corporate interest of the Myanmar army. Min Aung Hlaing reportedly has been aspiring to become president after his retirement. But that was dependent on the military-backed USDP getting at least 25 percent of the seats. However, the NLD swept the November election and the USDP did worse than 2015, which put paid to Hlaing's desire of becoming president in the legal way. To quote an expert on Myanmar, "There's internal military politics around that, which is very opaque. This might be reflecting those dynamics and might be somewhat of a coup internally and his way of maintaining power within the military."

Furthermore, the army couldn't risk having the NLD at the helms with an overwhelming majority. There are also reports of rifts between Suu Kyi and the military on internal

issues, with the Rohingya issue becoming too weighty, despite the Chinese and Russian support in this regard in the UN.

The latest coup has several ramifications internally and externally. Democracy in Myanmar that had existed very tenuously has proved to be fragile and subject to the whims of the military. There is no guarantee of how long the one-year emergency period will actually last and how soon democracy will be restored. Given the military's predilection for power, one suspects the people of Myanmar may not be able to taste its flavour very soon. Myanmar had been emboldened by the unquestioned support of its policies—the Rohingya policy in particular—by China and Russia. This time too, China has blocked a United Nations Security Council statement condemning the military coup.

Going forward, Suu Kyi may not get the kind of international support that she had got

in the past when she was fighting to establish democracy. She is no longer considered an icon of freedom engaged in restoration of democracy and human rights, but rather someone complicit in the ethnic cleansing of the Rohingyas perpetrated by Myanmar military. In fact, in January 2018, former US diplomat Bill Richardson, who was a member of an international panel on the Rohingya crisis, had called for her to step aside because of her defence of the atrocities and her failure to promote democratic values as Myanmar's de facto leader.

Myanmar military's faith in China to back it against diplomatic onslaughts has paid off. And it will continue to defy not only internal public opinion but external pressure too. For China, Myanmar is too important a strategic asset to let go of. Given the enhanced strategic importance of the region, India, which shares 1600 km of border, has enormous security stakes in Myanmar, and may resist the urge to bring pressure to bear on the country. On the other hand, an effective sanction on Myanmar is doubtful. Past embargoes on Myanmar were circumvented, including by many western countries too.

As far as the Rohingya and other ethnic minorities are concerned, things might get even worse. Insofar as repatriation of Rohingya refugees is concerned, Bangladesh may consider it effectively shelved. If anyone in Bangladesh had thought that Myanmar was serious about repatriation, they were wrong. In fact, 2017 was the last phase of the Final Solution of the Rohingya issue that was started in 1962 by General Ne Win. The Myanmar military will see through the complete execution of the plan by divesting the Northern Rakhine State of all vestiges and traces of the Rohingya minority. The China wall stands between international pressure and the Myanmar military, and regrettably, the wall will prevail. We should accept the reality that to China, Myanmar is more strategically relevant than Bangladesh. And we should also brace for another round of Rohingya influx.

Brig Gen Shahedul Anam Khan, ndc, psc (Retd), is a former Associate Editor of The Daily Star

THE ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE PROJECT

What business and engineering students want from their universities

The Academic Experience Project is a faculty-student collaborative work aimed to glean insights about the experiences of tertiary-level students. Each Friday, The Daily Star publishes an op-ed highlighting its findings. This is the fourteenth and last article of the series.

ARNAB RAHMAN and SYED SAAD ANDALEEB

FOR the HSC students in Bangladesh, when it comes to choosing a field of study, business and engineering have generally been the top picks for a long time. To access the lucrative career opportunities that both fields offer, young students with starry eyes and dreams aplenty enrol themselves in these two fields in the university of their choosing. Needless to say, education in this country isn't cheap and these students have to pay for it with the hard-earned money of their parents, and sometimes from their own pockets. How have they benefited? Have these universities, entrusted with the responsibility of preparing the business tycoons and ground-breaking inventors of the next generation, been able to deliver?

The Academic Experience Project asked students in different universities exactly that question.

On average, business and engineering students remained neutral (on a seven-point scale) about whether their institutions were making them competitive for the job market. There was no hint of positive feelings or any expression of excitement in their responses! To the question of overall satisfaction with their institutions, business and engineering students seemed somewhat satisfied. What were the drivers of satisfaction for them?

Business students' satisfaction depended on the level of programme execution, the scope of the academic programme, the quality of faculty members, and on their sense of belonging and inclusiveness in their university. In simple terms, they prefer a programme that is executed well—a programme that focuses on experiential and peer-to-peer learning, problem solving, and is aligned with the demands of the job market. They want a



FILE PHOTO: STAR

'From intricate theories to puzzling equations, students have to really put in hard work to understand the nuances and theoretical twists. What they sorely miss is how to apply what they learn.'

programme that isn't too narrow in its focus, provides wider exposure to social and cultural issues, doesn't require rote memorisation to pass examinations, and is up to date with trends in the industry. They want their faculty members to be more helpful as students strive to learn. They want the faculty to stay updated and not teach from old notes, to make them enjoy their classes, and be an inspiring guru. They also want to feel like they're a part of their institution, a part of a community, where there is fellow-feeling and camaraderie among the students.

Unfortunately, the students rated all of

these dimensions "average or lower than average" when reflecting on their academic experience. In today's rapidly changing world, these views are very relevant and ought to be taken seriously. As the world of employment becomes more dynamic and globally connected, where critical thinking and problem-solving skills are of high priority to employers, and where the workforce is expected to show intuitiveness, creativity, and leadership traits to further the goals of a company, business education does not seem to have adapted to or incorporated these needs, nor have they adopted and implemented modern

teaching methods. Instead, their continued use of conventional methods of instruction, especially boring lectures supplemented with PowerPoints from which they just read, have simply been ineffective in building the human capital that employers sorely miss.

For engineering students, in addition to the sense of belonging to the institution and the level of programme execution, two other factors affected their satisfaction: faculty engagement and a sense of educational purpose. They contend that many faculty members seem distant or disengaged from their students. And they ask what the faculty are doing with their time that they can otherwise account for. The engineering students also rated each driver of satisfaction "lower than average" when they rated their university experience.

The above factors contain some of the most important criteria for delivering engineering education which has consistently been rated as one of the most desirable areas of study in our country. From intricate theories to puzzling equations, students have to really put in hard work to understand the nuances and theoretical twists. What they sorely miss is how to apply what they learn.

The knowledge that engineering students can learn, process, retain, and use depends on the teachers and how efficiently and effectively they make these subjects understandable, relevant, interesting, and engaging. Faculty engagement can also instil a sense of purpose among engineering students (e.g. how challenges were met during the construction of the Padma Bridge and how to become innovative structural engineers). When the faculty fail to imbue students with such a sense of purpose, the students become more interested in getting the certificate rather than truly learning and comprehending what their subject is really about. This is also resulting in

students losing interest and opting to switch career tracks by pursuing an MBA degree or sitting for the BCS examination, instead of becoming a low-grade and ineffective engineer in their respective fields.

Our findings corroborate what has been echoed in conversations and public forums for a long time, and leads to one conclusion: The education system needs a major overhaul to provide instruction that is holistic, relevant, and aligned with the next phase—JOBS! It needs to address not only the needs of the students who want to learn with passion and zeal; it also needs to understand the modern workplace in a rapidly evolving 4IR environment that demands certain traits and characteristics in their workforce, as well as exacting skills—i.e. both soft (human) and hard (technical) skills—that our conventional academic institutions have apparently ignored.

Our youth are the changemakers, the future, of Bangladesh, a nation aspiring to attain middle-income status in the coming years. They are the demographic dividend we need to harness quickly and resolutely, to take advantage of the receding window of opportunity before it closes. Education is the yardstick that will measure their ability to take the country forward. The least our academic institutions can do is to play their part by remaking themselves and taking the necessary steps to prepare the nation's youth (not just business and engineering graduates) for tomorrow. Can academia rise to the challenge? Can academics restore their pride of leading change and guiding the nation into a tumultuous future?

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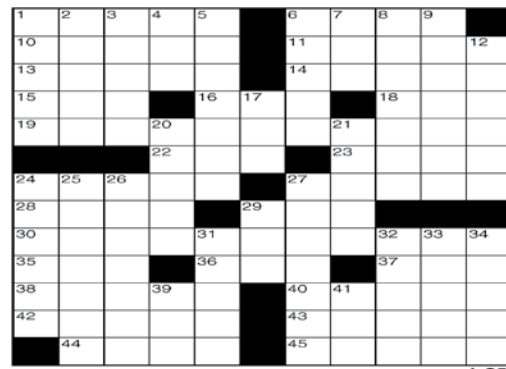
CONFUCIUS
(September 28, 551 BC-- April 11, 479 BC)
Chinese philosopher

It does not matter how slowly you go as long as you do not stop.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

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|------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------|
| ACROSS | 35 Print measures | often |
| 1 Antlered animals | 36 Clumsy one | 12 Return address name |
| 6 Disparaging remark | 37 Blend | 17 Soggy |
| 10 Burdened down | 38 Attack | 20 Ham it up |
| 11 Highway divisions | 40 Select group | 21 Complete |
| 13 Texas landmark | 42 Treasure stash | 21 Complete received" |
| 14 Ease up | 43 "Message | 25 Many paintings in the Tate |
| 15 Marshy area | 44 Relaxing resorts | 26 Convenient, as a store |
| 16 Possess | 45 Soccer or softball | 27 Ails |
| 18 Take the prize | | 29 Neptune's domain |
| 19 Salad bar protector | DOWN | 31 Map areas |
| 22 Convened | 1 Thick cuts | 32 Baja buddy |
| 23 Pine or palm | 2 Eagle's claw | 33 Bishop's topper |
| 24 Got to one's feet | 3 Wise saying | 34 Use, as force |
| 27 Ranch animal | 4 Tiara feature | 39 Eggs, in Latin |
| 28 Uncle's wife | 5 Caught some z's | 41 Cut off |
| 29 Take to court | 6 Informal language | |
| 30 Movie technique | 7 Research site | |
| | 8 Oblivious | |
| | 9 Senior citizen, | |

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YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

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

BEETLE BAILEY



BY MORT WALKER



BABY BLUES



BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT

