

# Embracing our roots gives us stability



SHAHIDA RAHMAN

**B**ANGLADESH turns fifty this year, and so do I.

I was born and raised in Cambridge, England. For me, this is significant. While living in Western society, I

have been steeped in the importance of maintaining my cultural identity.

I have embraced my roots while living in the present. I speak English and I speak Bengali. As a young girl, I drew pictures of the Queen, watched *Play School* and *Bagpuss*, but I also spent many hours in the kitchen with my sister and mother learning to cook Bengali dishes. I am a 21st century British-Bangladeshi woman, well-versed in the traditions and culture of my roots.

Bangladesh is in the spotlight this year as it turns 50, and I feel some of that focus is directed towards me. Increased discussions about our family's roots and the history of our homeland have triggered my own children to think about why our connection with the past is so important.

Deep within, I know that embracing our culture is vital, but I struggled to find a clear response that might resonate with my kids. I searched my writings, studied my past and dug deep into my thoughts and beliefs to find an answer.

I found three: Embracing our culture

gives us stability. Sacrifice matters. And self-acceptance leads to acceptance of others.

**Embracing our culture gives us stability**

An unmanned ship breaks away from its moorings. As it drifts into the open sea and away from the shore, it is buffeted by gales and giant waves. It has no choice but to follow the wind. But imagine that ship with a captain, a crew and a compass. With the benefit of direction and experience, the ship can travel far and wide, safe in the knowledge that it can return safely to its moorings to rest and recover.

In this era of individuality and "being your own person", it is easy to feel as though you are a product solely of your own choices—a ship at the sea. But whether we admit it or not, our families, ancestors and culture are our captain, crew and compass. They create a stable place from which to launch our ship. These powerful roots help us enrich and make sense of our experiences as we travel into a magnificent but complex world.

**Sacrifice matters**

Throughout history, every generation has been influenced by the one before. My parents shaped my siblings and me, just as my grandparents shaped them. Through actions, discipline, beliefs, and personal sacrifice, each generation carves a path for the next. Over time, this path evolves with additional curves as well as bumps and repairs, but by embracing our culture and remembering the sacrifices



**'Whether we admit it or not, our families, ancestors and culture are our captain, crew and compass. They create a stable place from which to launch our ship.'**

FILE PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

made for us, its direction does not waver.

My father left his home in East Pakistan in 1957 seeking a better life for his family. He started in Cambridge as a cleaner, but after years of gruelling work and determination, he became the owner of two "Indian" restaurants in Cambridge (most Indian restaurants were run by Bengalis). He saved enough money to bring his family to England, and in 1963, during one of the coldest winters on record, my mother arrived.

Four years later, I was born—the same week that Bangladesh became independent. The significance of this is not lost on me. My father held himself to a brutal work schedule, sacrificing his own freedom and comfort, which paved the way for mine.

My parents bestowed on my siblings and me a rich knowledge of Bengali history and culture, and through their sacrifices we experienced opportunities and freedom they never had. In turn, I have tried to instil respect and pride for Bengali culture into my own four children and shared their grandparents' stories with them. They understand that their privileges and luxuries came from the blood and sweat, courage and sacrifices of their forebearers.

**Self-acceptance leads to acceptance of others**

When Bangladesh issued the proclamation of independence from Pakistan in early 1971, its first government (provisional government) drafted an interim constitution with

three fundamental principles: equality, human dignity and social justice. I am proud that my heritage links me with such an ethical and generous philosophy. I teach my children to value people over possessions and to reach out to those in need.

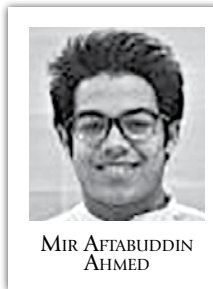
Studying, understanding and celebrating Bangladeshi culture and religion, while living as a British citizen, leads me to accept my links to my heritage. It gives me a thrill of pride to know that I am linked to such a rich and colourful history.

This cultural self-acceptance offers me a compass if I lose my way, but also keeps me grounded. Acceptance of my own culture leads to confidence in who I am and where I come from. This cultural confidence feeds open-mindedness and makes it easier to be accepting of other cultures, races and religions. This is critical when living in a multicultural society, and it paves the way for peace and acceptance within the wider community.

I am a British-Bangladeshi proud of my heritage and my family. I stand as a conduit that connects my parents and my children, and I trust that my children will continue to sail their own ships fully equipped with their captain, crew and compass. I am grateful that they seem poised to continue on our path of learning and growing from a foundation built by family, history and culture.

Shahida Rahman is a British-Bangladeshi author who writes historical fiction, non-fiction and children's stories.

# Reimagining public university admissions in Bangladesh



MIR AFTABUDDIN AHMED

**T**HE United Nations Committee for Development Policy (UNDP) recently recommended the graduation of Bangladesh from its Least Developed Country (LDC) status to that of a developing country by 2026.

With the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as its *prima facie* directional narrative, and its transition towards the middle-income status looming, Bangladesh is tasked with using its public education system as a medium for endorsing a rigorous, state-level investment in human capital. A prioritisation of developing well-rounded university graduates for the workforce will undeniably ensure sustainable development across the board, rather than accomplishing nominal advances in GDP figures that benefit only a handful.

Policymakers often refer to a 98 percent primary-school enrolment rate and the integration of ICT in classrooms as being examples of how the state has unrelentingly prioritised the education of its citizens over the past decade. Nevertheless, there is a grimmer picture when it comes to the quality of education. Currently, Bangladesh ranks a mere 112th out of 138 countries according to the 2020 UNDP Global Knowledge Index (GKI). The GKI provides a holistic assessment of the impact of education by evaluating composite measures of pre-university education, technical and vocational education and training, higher education, research, development and innovation, information and communications technology, economy and the general enabling environment.

Figures such as a 36 percent secondary school dropout rate amidst high enrolment numbers (BANBEIS, 2020) and a 11.56 percent youth unemployment rate (World Bank, 2020) within the purviews of a neoliberal economic system are symptomatic of deep-seated philosophical concerns when it comes to analysing an empirical return on education, as clearly reflected by our performance in the 2020 GKI.

In simpler words, Bangladesh has a dire need to revamp, rethink and reevaluate its education structures from top to bottom. And I think an intriguing area to focus on is defining a radical shift in the admissions processes for public universities and colleges.

The future of education lies in cross-disciplinary and experiential learning. The education system is, therefore, expected to create the basis for students transitioning into post-secondary studies to be adeptly prepared to engage in learning, research and solution-making from more than one academic lens. Unfortunately, our current system of standardised admissions processes discourages students to invest time and effort into developing skills beyond the classroom, making the childhood and schooling of students unnecessarily monotonous and intensely rigorous. We have all heard of instances of students enrolled in engineering or technology having proficient analytical and math skills, yet falling behind due to a lack of training, skills and knowledge when it comes to writing, public speaking or community engagement.

The blame cannot, and should not, be put on students. Standardised admissions systems that have pedantic academic testing schemes in place dissuade secondary school-going students from immersing themselves in

co-curricular activities, such as volunteering, sports, theatre, etc. This in itself creates a student body which is solely focussed on in-class learning, usually with the motto of "one subject, one degree, one profession". The impacts of this are stifled creativity and students being deterred from undertaking activities that they may be passionate about.

Now, this is not to say that university admissions systems should not incorporate entry tests into the enrolment process. In fact, most developed countries such as Canada, Australia and New Zealand do integrate standardised testing as a partial requirement when recruiting students for undergraduate programmes. However, in my opinion, it is important to have a holistic measure of identifying the strongest candidates for various programmes. An all-inclusive, three-pronged system that includes an analysis of secondary school results, entry examination testing and a co-curricular submission component is perhaps

Education Ministry in partnership with corporate stakeholders, public institutions and non-governmental organisations—can create the basis for a more skilful graduate base in the long run. As mentioned above, these schemes can be piloted across departments that have a smaller student body compared to mainstream programmes such as engineering or medical sciences. At the very least, this can be a starting point for reimagining our education system.

Over the past two decades, Bangladesh has prioritised Goals 1, 2 and 9 (No Poverty, Zero Hunger and Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure, respectively) of the SDGs. To make our economic progress sustainable and inclusive of the social development of a young population, it is crucial to put a national focus on revamping the education system.

Recently, Education Minister Dr Dipu Moni made the announcement that ethics classes will be introduced to students from the pre-primary to higher secondary levels in 2021.



PHOTO: STAR

a solid pilot scheme that can be tried across university programmes or departments with lower recruitment numbers. This can include departments such as political sciences, development studies or international relations.

With such an open-ended admissions process that involves departmental professors understanding the applicants more genuinely, it gives the students an opportunity to prepare for university life without being solely helmed in by the rigours of in-class learning. Having a well-rounded admissions process, which looks beyond academia, is therefore important for encouraging students to develop soft skills in the vicinities of leadership, communication, teamwork and adaptability—skills which, in the long run, are fundamental in shaping professional growth. Imagine university applicants having an opportunity to share their dreams and aspirations via an essay, and how much more university administrators can understand about their prospective students through such a component in the admissions process.

An open-ended admissions process can be subsidised through experiential learning initiatives across university programmes. The process of learning through internships and co-curricular opportunities (as part of a university programme) and experiential learning initiatives—promoted by the

Such policy decisions are a reflection of what Goal 4 of the SDGs ("Quality Education") entails, and what communities are required to strive towards. Promoting lifelong learning opportunities through equitable and inclusive education systems is an area which both the minister of education and the prime minister have put thought to. In fact, PM Sheikh Hasina has been vocal in her concerns about issues of mental health and lack of physical activities being key barriers to the progress of the youth. Therefore, the expectation from the government and from education stakeholders is their interest and ability to transition from the archaic, colonial-era enrolment and classroom experiences towards a more holistic approach reflecting the needs of today's students.

University admissions systems need to be altered to incorporate non-academic skills of students. If not, then Bangladesh will keep falling behind in truly resonating with what quality education entails—be this in our performance in the Global Knowledge Index, or in our growing concerns regarding youth unemployment figures. In the long run, the education system, in conjunction with a cohort of rigid graduates that the system is creating, will be a tremendous barrier in our journey towards the middle-income status.

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**CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH**

- ACROSS**
- 1 Bra parts
  - 7 Ship staff
  - 11 Quiz show fodder
  - 12 State frankly
  - 13 Take offence at
  - 14 Hunting garb, for short
  - 15 Happening
  - 16 Clan symbol
  - 17 Mansion part
  - 18 Second-largest nation
  - 19 List-ending abbr.
  - 21 Operated
  - 22 Wee
  - 25 Gift tag word
  - 26 Deceitful sort
  - 27 Come to
  - 29 Chow
- DOWN**
- 1 Scatter
  - 2 Famed Roman fountain
  - 3 Out of bed
  - 4 Gets satisfaction
  - 5 Milk buy
  - 6 Was inactive
  - 7 Georgia city
  - 8 Online
- embodiments**
- 9 Eventually
  - 10 Like some bobsledeers
  - 16 Sly's "Rocky" co-star
  - 18 Plane part
  - 20 Writer Anne
  - 22 Grateful reply
  - 23 Car price reducer
  - 24 Spy's crime
  - 25 Diamond sides
  - 28 Malden and Marx
  - 30 Burning
  - 31 Printer need
  - 32 Garden starters
  - 34 Ninny
  - 36 "East of Eden" brother



**YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS**

H	O	F	F	A	W	A	L	E	S
A	R	I	E	S	A	L	O	N	E
R	I	N	D	S	L	A	S	T	S
R	E	D	A	I	D	E	R	A	
I	N	S	U	N	O	S	A	M	
S	T	I	L	L	S	W	I	P	E
N	E	T	I	Z	E	N			
M	A	N	E	D	I	E	T	E	D
A	D	O	P	E	P	E	V	A	
R	O	C	E	S	C	R	I	B	
T	R	E	A	T	O	V	E	N	S
H	E	N	C	E	D	I	S	C	O
A	S	T	E	R	E	A	T	E	N

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**বাংলাদেশ উন্মুক্ত বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়**  
**Bangladesh Open University**  
পরীক্ষা বিভাগ, পাজীপুর-১৭০৫।

"শিক্ষা নিয়ে গড়ব দেশ  
শেখ হাসিনার বাংলাদেশ"

**বিএ এবং বিএসএস পরীক্ষা-২০১৯ এর ১ম, ২য়, ৩য়, ৪র্থ, ৫ম ও ৬ষ্ঠ সিমস্টার**  
**পরীক্ষার সময়সূচি**

তারিখ	বার	সকাল (৯:০০ টা থেকে ১২:০০ টা)		বিকাল (২:০০ টা থেকে ৫:০০ টা)	
		বিষয়	প্রশ্নপত্র কোড	বিষয়	প্রশ্নপত্র কোড
০৪/০৬/২০২১	তরুবার	বাংলা ভাষা - ১	1301	ইসলামিক স্টাডিজ - ৩	4304
০৫/০৬/২০২১	শনিবার	—	—	ইতিহাস - ৩	4302
১১/০৬/২০২১	তরুবার	ইংরেজি	1302	রাষ্ট্রবিজ্ঞান - ৩	4305
১২/০৬/২০২১	শনিবার	—	—	দর্শন - ৩	4303
১৮/০৬/২০২১	তরুবার	সিডিক এডুকেশন - ১	1303	সমাজতত্ত্ব - ৩	4307
১৯/০৬/২০২১	শনিবার	—	—	অর্থনীতি - ৩	4306
২৫/০৬/২০২১	তরুবার	সিডিক এডুকেশন - ২	1304	ইসলামিক স্টাডিজ - ৪	5304
২৬/০৬/২০২১	শনিবার	—	—	জুগোল ও পরিবেশ - ৩	4308
০২/০৭/২০২১	তরুবার	বাংলা ভাষা - ২	2301	রাষ্ট্রবিজ্ঞান - ৪	5305
০৩/০৭/২০২১	শনিবার	—	—	অর্থনীতি - ৪	5306
০৯/০৭/২০২১	তরুবার	ইতিহাস - ১	2302	সমাজতত্ত্ব - ৪	5307
১০/০৭/২০২১	শনিবার	—	—	দর্শন - ৪	5303
১৬/০৭/২০২১	তরুবার	রাষ্ট্রবিজ্ঞান - ১	2305	ইতিহাস - ৪	5302
১৭/০৭/২০২১	শনিবার	দর্শন - ১	2303	জুগোল ও পরিবেশ - ৪	5308
৩০/০৭/২০২১	তরুবার	ইসলামিক স্টাডিজ - ১	2304	ইতিহাস - ৫	6302
৩১/০৭/২০২১	শনিবার	জুগোল ও পরিবেশ - ১	2308	দর্শন - ২	3303
০৬/০৮/২০২১	তরুবার	সমাজতত্ত্ব - ১	2307	ইতিহাস - ২	3302
০৭/০৮/২০২১	শনিবার	অর্থনীতি - ১	2306	দর্শন - ৫	6303
১৩/০৮/২০২১	তরুবার	ইসলামিক স্টাডিজ - ২	3304	রাষ্ট্রবিজ্ঞান - ৫	6305
১৪/০৮/২০২১	শনিবার	অর্থনীতি - ২	3306	জুগোল ও পরিবেশ - ৫	6308
২০/০৮/২০২১	তরুবার	রাষ্ট্রবিজ্ঞান - ২	3305	সমাজতত্ত্ব - ৫	6307
২১/০৮/২০২১	শনিবার	জুগোল ও পরিবেশ - ২	3308	অর্থনীতি - ৫	6306
২৭/০৮/২০২১	তরুবার	সমাজতত্ত্ব - ২	3307	ইসলামিক স্টাডিজ - ৫	6304

**বি: দ্র:**

- পরীক্ষা কেন্দ্রে প্রবেশের জন্য মাঝ পরিধান বাধ্যতামূলক।
- শিক্ষা মন্ত্রণালয় কর্তৃক জারিকৃত কোভিড-১৯ ভাইরাস সংক্রান্ত স্বাস্থ্য বিধি যথাযথভাবে অনুসরণ করতে হবে।
- সিগনোকোডমুক্ত উত্তরপত্রের শিক্ষার্থীর আইডি নম্বর, প্রোগ্রাম কোড (২০) ও প্রশ্নপত্র কোড ইংরেজিতে নির্ভুলভাবে লিখতে হবে।
- মোবাইল ফোন ও ব্যাগ নিয়ে পরীক্ষার্থীরা কোন অবস্থাতেই পরীক্ষা কেন্দ্রে প্রবেশ করতে পারবে না।
- পরীক্ষা শুরু ৩০ মিনিট পূর্বে পরীক্ষার্থীকে পরীক্ষা কক্ষে প্রবেশ করতে হবে।
- পরীক্ষা আরম্ভের পর কোন পরীক্ষার্থীকে পরীক্ষা কক্ষে প্রবেশ করতে দেয়া যাবে না।
- পরিচয় পত্র (আইডি কার্ড) ব্যতীত কোন শিক্ষার্থী পরীক্ষায় অংশগ্রহণ করতে পারবে না।
- **De-Novo** রেজিস্ট্রেশনকৃত ১১ বছরের শিক্ষার্থীদের বিএ এবং বিএসএস পরীক্ষা-২০১৯ এ অংশগ্রহণের ১ম সুযোগ এবং ১০ বছরের শিক্ষার্থীদের সর্বশেষ সুযোগ।
- কর্তৃপক্ষ প্রয়োজনবোধে এই সময়সূচির যে কোন পরিবর্তন করতে পারবে।

**৪৫৫৫৫৫৫৫৫৫**

পরিচালক নিয়ন্ত্রক  
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