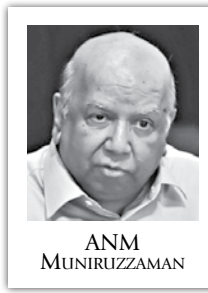


Quad: Quo Vadis?



THE increasing influence of China's activity, particularly in the South China Sea and Indo-Pacific region, has raised many eyebrows among western nations and members of the Asia-Pacific region itself. As a reactionary measure to compete and off-set the meteoric rise of the Asian superpower, America and its friends from the region, namely Australia, Japan and India, have used its platform—the Quad—to give the world an insight of what the future of competition against China might look like. Although China was not mentioned exclusively in the recent deliberations of the Quad leader's summit, the joint statement released by the White House stating, "... cooperation on the critical technologies of the future to ensure that innovation is consistent with a free, open, inclusive, and resilient Indo-Pacific" and "... meet challenges to the rules-based maritime order in the East and South China Seas," clearly hint at the push-back against Chinese influence. However, the initial function of the Quad was far from the current state of affairs in the region and its scope of operations has undergone several mutations in the last decade.

When Japanese Prime Minister at the time Shinzo Abe first proposed the Quad in 2007, he called for a "quadrilateral strategic dialogue" among the nations. However, this was not the first time these nations have come together for a mutual cause. The Quad members have worked before during 2004-05 in coordinating response to the aftermath of the 2004 tsunami in the Indian Ocean as a the "Tsunami Core Group". So, at the very beginning, the scope of operation between the nations was not for security. But fast-forward to the fall of 2007, after Abe's announcement, the Quad and Singapore conducted their first maritime exercise, expanding the scope of its operations. Just like now, the exercise left a notion of political ambiguity around what all of it would mean: would this be a simple exercise for cooperation? Or ultimately some

form of defence treaty?

A major obstacle came the way of the Quad as Australia opted out with the Australian foreign minister declaring in a joint statement that "they would not be proposing to have such a dialogue again." This marked the end of the quadrilateral security dialogue for quite some time. It was not until the November of 2017 that the group resurfaced again and since then, it has met regularly and worked at ministerial levels. The nations of the Quad each laid out its vision for a "free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific" in the form of comprehensive and separate official documents discussing their way forward.

With all things considered, and with Australia returning to the crux, all eyes are on the future trajectory of the Quad. Many analysts argue that it will evolve into a defence treaty—possibly a more structured NATO of Asia. A growing fear of militarisation of the region could see the light of day considering India, Japan and US have already been participating in the Malabar joint naval exercises with the recent addition of Australia. The Quad members have also been taking part in each other's multilateral exercises; most notable of which is the Rim of Pacific (RIMPAC)—the world's largest naval exercise—which is clearly an attempt to further deepen their defence ties.

The Quad may also look to expand its membership and reach out to other nations to form a more comprehensive collaboration regarding security. This can be seen to happen in two stages. Firstly, they would seek to acquire participation from major nations in the Indo-Pacific region. They have already exemplified this interest through naval interactions with South Korea in the form of exercise "Pacific Vanguard". New Zealand would also be a great addition as the nation already engages in security dialogues with its neighbours through the "Five Power Defence Arrangements" and the "Five Eyes" intelligence sharing mechanism, and this will only add value to the Quad's existing cooperation measures. Secondly, the Quad may look to include more allies in the west with influence in the Indo-Pacific. In this regard, France and UK would be suitable

options as they have major stakes in the region. France has extensive interests in the Indo-Pacific in French territories in the region. The French Republic is also a member of the FRANZ Arrangement with Australia and New Zealand and is a member of the Quadrilateral Defence Coordination Group with Australia, New Zealand, and the United States. The UK, on the other hand, has undertaken what experts describe as a "tilt" of focus towards the Indo-Pacific and their ties with members of

from south and south-east Asia into the clusters due to their strategic relevance.

The scope of operation of the Quad has not expanded to just include security. The "Quad Leader's Joint Statement" also displayed the four nation's commitment to tackling climate change. A more notable area of cooperation that the summit highlighted was equitable access for the Covid-19 vaccine in the Indo-Pacific. The Quad is not just confining themselves to conventional



International Navy ships assemble off the coast of Hawaii during the Rim of Pacific Exercise (RIMPAC) on July 26, 2018.

PHOTO: AFP

the Commonwealth within the region make a considerable asset for the Quad.

Instead of directly evolving membership, the Quad may also opt to take a "plus process" approach—QUAD plus three, etc., to collaborate with other major member states at various levels. This could be similar to how ASEAN conducts its ASEAN+3 cooperation. The Quad can also expand to work with and support smaller nations. These nations can act as "support clusters" to assist the operations and be a part of QUAD based activities and cooperation. It would be in the best interest of the Quad to lobby members

diplomacy but also exploring the new avenues of post-Covid-19 multilateralism. Many developing nations were left astray as they could not meet the demands for vaccines required to help fight the spread of Covid. It was initially China and Russia that came to their rescue as they shipped millions of jabs to these destitute nations. This not only strengthens bilateral ties but also bolsters their strategic influence. The Quad is perhaps looking to form its own vaccine distribution project to off-set the influence of that of China and Russia. However, this exhibition of "vaccine diplomacy" combined with the

Quad's expansion into regional security can prompt severe implications.

The Quad's attempts at countering Chinese influence in the region can cause a stiff rise in strategic tension based on strategic competition. Many have regarded China's quadrilateral discussion with Afghanistan, Nepal and Pakistan—otherwise known as the Trans-Himalayan Multidimensional Connectivity Network—as a "Himalayan Quad" formed as a counter, even though Beijing has stated that this cooperation is solely for mutual economic interests. Although a major reactionary measure is yet to have been taken from Beijing, it is likely that the Asian superpower may look to enter discussions with the Russian Federation for future deliberations on the region.

China will also look to its companions in South and South-East Asia to not have direct involvement with the Quad if they are to ensure relations with Beijing do not turn sour. Bangladesh has been the latest recipient of this as the Chinese ambassador to Bangladesh stated that should Dhaka join the "club", it would substantially damage bilateral relations between the countries, even though there was no formal invitation from any members of the Quad for Bangladesh. The remark gives us an idea of the important strategic role Bangladesh has in terms of future deliberations of the Quad and a glimpse of what a militarised future in the Indo-Pacific might look like—either you are against the Quad or against China.

Conclusively, going forward, Bangladesh and countries alike must tread very carefully regarding matters involving Quad operations. We must find innovative ways to manoeuvre diplomatically and use a "hedge-and-engage" approach whenever necessary. However, this is not to say that Dhaka should engage in any form of direct action or alignment. The best course of action would be to exercise all elements of strategic neutrality so that a bi-polar geo-political situation, like the Cold War era, does not arise in the region. However, such a future seems to be more plausible as days go by.

Major General ANM Muniruzzaman ndc psc (ret.) is the President of the Bangladesh Institute of Peace and Security Studies (BIPSS). Email: president@bipss.org.bd

'Moddhorater Ossharohi' vice chancellors



THE subject matter of this write-up is the ranking of the world's best universities. But I would like to start on a different note, quoting from legendary journalist Foyez Ahmad's book "Moddhorater Ossharohi" (roughly translated as "Midnight Horseman").

Foyez Ahmad and a few of his friends who worked in different newspapers used to live in a shared mess in Bhooter Goli, Narinda. Work at the newspaper offices usually took till 2-3am, with some spreading out newspapers on the table and sleeping there for the rest of the night while others like Foyez returned home.

That year, a major flood occurred. During the day, they could use small boats to reach the office but at night, with no boats available, everyone returned home wet from the waist down. Except for Foyez, Mohammadullah, assistant editor of *Ittefaq*, even caught a cold from constantly getting drenched on the way home. The "mystery" of how Foyez stayed dry was on everyone's lips.

One night at 2:00am, Mohammadullah told his friend Foyez, "I will go with you tonight. I want to see how you go home without getting wet." Foyez's work ended at 3:00am and the two friends left the *Ittefaq* office. In Hatkhola, close to the *Ittefaq* office, was a Christian graveyard which could be reached by crossing the rail line beside the Hordeo glass factory. Opposite the graveyard was the Baldha Garden and beside it, the road which led to Narinda. Many horses could be seen there, eating grass at the graveyard. After driving horse carriages throughout the day, the coachmen would leave their horses to graze at night.

Foyez had made friends with one such horse and would ride it across the flooded streets every night to the mess. That particular night, the horse rebelled at having to take two riders and Mohammadullah at

the back fell into the water. Foyez, however, still managed to reach home dry in the middle of the night.

The tradition of newspaper offices working till late no longer exists—reporters are not required to return home in the middle of the night. So what? These days, we are seeing university vice chancellors working till the late hours of the night. Professor Nazmul Ahsan Kalimullah, vice chancellor of Rangpur's Begum Rokeya University, is well ahead of others in this aspect—he works till midnight or even later at night. A few days ago, Kalimullah mentioned that he works 20-22 hours a day—meaning he only sleeps for a couple of hours. The vice chancellor who was present on campus for only 240 of the last 1,447 days—or who was absent for 1,207 days—most probably thought no one believed him. So, on the eve of his departure, he took a class at 3:30am at night.

It's actually difficult to not talk about the VC's antics. He was in the habit of taking a morning flight to Rangpur and returning home by evening. On one such occasion, he was at his campus residence when teachers and staff members gathered outside the bungalow with several demands. The next day, newspaper headlines read "Vice Chancellor Kalimullah left through the back door to flee to Dhaka".

He has literally acted in a Bangla motion picture. He even told *Bangladesh Protidin* that he is willing to take up the role of a male lead if approached. There are several serious allegations of corruption, including for teacher recruitment, against the VC. For example, he appointed his own mother as a member of the recruitment board. The University Grants Commission (UGC) recommended taking action against him after finding proof of corruption. However, the ministry remained indifferent and Kalimullah finished out his tenure.

Before coming to the discussion of university rankings, let us get better acquainted with several other vice chancellors.

Recently, in the middle of the night, several Chhatra League leaders demanding

jobs took position in front of outgoing Rajshahi University Vice Chancellor Professor M Abdus Sobhan's house. He assured them that he would give them jobs. The day before his tenure ended, he not only gave them, but also a hundred others, jobs. Here, too, the middle of the night came into play, as he must have spent the whole night readying the paperwork for these new jobs. The allegation soon came that he had accepted bribes in exchange for these jobs.

In protest that the VC could commit such an act, RU teachers locked the registrar's building. However, Sobhan's son-in-law broke in and brought out the paperwork in the middle of the night. This was ironic because his daughter and son-in-law did not have the necessary qualifications yet the vice chancellor modified the rules in order to appoint them as teachers. It has come to light that Sobhan also appointed a student who only passed class two and another who failed in one subject, as teachers.

Another vice chancellor has been accused of corruption as well as having affairs. Yet another had been using a university-owned car and took croses from university funds to buy another car for his son. It has been alleged that another vice chancellor shared the construction work commission with her husband and children. In a telephone conversation with student leaders, subsequently reported in the media, we learnt she bribed the ruling party's student wing leaders, with Tk 1-1.5 crore. The VC complained that the student leaders had demanded Tk 1 crore from her. The meeting with these student leaders took place at the VC's residence late at night, according to media reports. Based on the VC's complaint, these student leaders were removed from their posts. However, the vice chancellor is still reigning with splendour. As the time of her departure neared, she too followed the path of the RU VC—actively recruiting new teachers and staff even when they were not required, busily working on recruitment online. When students brought some legitimate demands to another vice chancellor, he called in the ruling party

student wing leaders and cadres to beat his students. He lamented that his students were militants, saying that tea, *singara* and samosa worth Tk 10 exemplifies the university's heritage.

Let us return to the issue of the best university rankings. The UK-based organisation QS publishes the list of the world's top 1,000 universities. In this year's list, no Bangladeshi university ranked in the top 800. The University of Dhaka and Buet are listed in the 800-1,000 rank. In 2012 and 2014, DU ranked 601 and 701 respectively. This means the quality of education at the university has deteriorated by 2021. In contrast, the 355th, 373th and 454th ranks in this year's list are occupied by three Pakistani universities.

In any case, the budget allocated for education is comparatively less in Bangladesh. This year's budget for DU is Tk 869 crore 56 lakh and the research budget is Tk 40 crore 91 lakh—which in terms of percentage is less than last year. Moreover, a large part of that research budget will be spent on the development of 56 laboratories in DU and for procuring equipment. The budget for actual research is minuscule. About 70 percent of the total DU budget is spent on wages and salaries. The situation in other public universities is worse. Teachers are also more active in participating in party politics instead of teaching or conducting research. Undoubtedly, these issues play a key role in declining standards and absence in top rankings.

However, the main reasons are the vice chancellors of these universities. For a university, the vice chancellor is iconic [I would use crucial]. He is responsible for the overall operation of the university. The activities of only a few VCs who have been appointed in recent years are mentioned above. Many other such incidents remain unknown. People accused of corruption are becoming VCs and getting entangled in financial and other scams while in charge of running the universities. A couple have been accused of scandalous affairs but none of them have been removed. The protests

carried out by students and teachers went in vain. The UGC ran investigations and recommended punishments based on their findings, but no action has been taken so far.

While such vice chancellors run our universities, we are lamenting that none of these universities appear in top rankings! If someone accused of corruption runs an organisation, you may find it in the corruption rankings, but it is highly unlikely that the organisation will be placed among the best of such organisations.

We talk about excelling in terms of various indices, ahead of our neighbouring countries. This is not untrue. However, the fact that we are lagging behind in terms of human resource development cannot be hidden by any means. We are only constructing buildings for primary, secondary, and higher secondary educational institutes. We have not improved the quality of our teachers/teaching.

Constructing buildings, roads, bridges and flyovers are essential for development. However, these do not translate to development on their own—they are simply supplemental to the process of actual development. Development mainly stems from human resource development. We have not given much attention to this, and the little focus we had is also shifting to other areas. If we look at the DU and JU buildings, we can see that wherever there was empty space, new buildings are being constructed. No efforts are being made for improving the quality of education, improving the students' living conditions and lifestyles, along with enhancing their studying capabilities. Even during this coronavirus pandemic, no noticeable efforts have been taken. We have abandoned the main development process and spent more time on its accessories instead. As a result, the iconic characters, the vice chancellors are now giving away jobs in exchange for money and stand accused of immoral charges. The worsening state of education and the educational institutes is slowly but surely apparent.

Translated from Bangla by Mohammed Ishiaque Khan

QUOTABLE Quote

JOHN STEINBECK
(1902-1968)
American author

Teaching might even be the greatest of the arts since the medium is the human mind and spirit.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Mature
- 5 Turkish bigwig
- 10 Gin mixer
- 12 According to
- 13 Eventually
- 15 Maui souvenir
- 16 Conditions
- 17 Bear's lair
- 18 Straying
- 20 Suvari of film
- 21 Suit material
- 22 Historic times
- 23 Baseball's Yogi
- 25 Analogy words
- 28 Comedian
- 31 Mix up
- 32 Punctual
- 34 With 27-Down,

DOWN

- 1 "— of Two Cities"
- 2 Errand runners
- 3 Whole
- 4 Game cube
- 5 Hound's hands
- 6 Fireplace bit
- 7 Web spinner
- 8 Montana capital
- 9 Sports spots
- 11 Cower
- 14 Book finish
- 19 Shady spot
- 20 Intended
- 24 Unpleasant-tasting
- 25 Jordan neighbor
- 26 Suppress
- 27 34-Across
- 29 Mickey's company
- 30 Current unit
- 33 Like some seals
- 35 Pretentious
- 38 Long, long time
- 39 Homer's neighbor

WRITE FOR US. SEND US YOUR OPINION PIECES TO dsopinon@gmail.com.

BEETLE BAILEY

BY MORT WALKER

ARE WE ALMOST THERE?
I HAVE TO GO TO THE BATHROOM
I'M BORED
I FEEL SICK
AND YOU WONDER WHY I DON'T WANT KIDS

YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

DEAF IMAGES
URDU RAMONE
GALL RAMEA
USELESS TEA
PERMITS RUT
ORS FIVE
TAHOE DUPED
IVAN TILERS
TAN HURLERS
LID ONESTEP
ELAPSE TUNA
SEXIER ODER
DEEDS PEEK

BABY BLUES

BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT

WHERE DOES THE DECIMAL POINT GO? HERE?? HERE??

WHY NOT HERE? OR HERE? HERE? HERE? HERE?...

I CAN'T WAIT FOR THE STORY BEHIND THIS.

YOU'RE NEXT, FRACTIONS!