

Only radical kindness can drive true reform



RUBAIYA AHMAD

THIS was nearly a decade ago, when we set up Obhoyaronno, the country's first animal welfare organisation with a mission to end dog culling in Bangladesh. We were young and innocent, with unrealistic hope in our hearts and a very clear line of demarcation between good and evil. It was us vs them. "Us" were the animal lovers, who bore kindness in our hearts and would set the world straight. And

little boy's bald head. Some wounds were old and scabbed over, while others were more recent, oozing pus. When I asked who did this to him, he said that it was his stepfather, who had been using the little boy's head as an ashtray for years. The boy couldn't stand up to his stepfather, so he took it out on the puppy. I will never forget the eyes of that little boy. They were dead, reflecting no emotion whatsoever.

The first ever criminal case we ever filed from Obhoyaronno was in 2011, against a group of young men in Rampura who had beaten a dog to death. This was way before the new Animal Welfare Act was passed in 2019; the punishment for the said crime, according to the now-defunct Cruelty to Animals Act, 1920, was a Tk 100 fine and up to three months' imprisonment (under the new law, it's six-month imprisonment and a Tk 50,000 fine).

However, it was unprecedented to arrest anyone for animal cruelty—especially if it's an animal of no economic value, such as a dog—let alone convict him. I had pulled all my strings to have those boys arrested. The news was published in local as well as international media. I felt a huge sense of achievement on the day of our first hearing. This is also when I met those boys for the first time. Three young men, not looking any more lethal than the boys who work at Obhoyaronno. They couldn't understand why they were in handcuffs for something they had been doing all their lives and were applauded for. If sent to jail, these boys would have surely been beaten and brutalised, and come out as hardened criminals. I explored ways for them to mandatorily volunteer at Obhoyaronno, but there was no such system in place. We ended up dropping the case.

We stopped filing criminal charges after that and decided to focus more on policy and legislative reform for the following reasons. First, punishment doesn't work—it never has, it never will. We seek revenge when we seek punishment, and revenge never leads to reform. There is something sinister about rejoicing at someone else's pain and suffering, even if it's your enemy, and a state that doesn't look

radical a concept.

Secondly, our legal system is broken, corrupt, and can be manipulated by anyone with the right connections. I used my connections to have those boys arrested. I could have bribed the system to keep them in jail without any proper legal proceedings, and no one would question me. I would have also justified it thinking they deserved it.

On top of that, the arrest was

cats, but not so much for the millions of cows, goats, chickens, and fish we unnecessarily kill every day. Selective compassion ends up teaching us no compassion.

We haven't done our part in creating a more compassionate society. These kids fail us because we failed them. We discontinued our humane education programme at Obhoyaronno because it took too much time and money. I knew better. I saw what education could do, but resources were always limited, and no one wanted to invest in something as intangible as compassion. After all, you cannot quantify the impact of compassion on a spreadsheet, and those who need it the most don't matter.

Finally, punishing powerless people is a cop-out. We convince ourselves that we have done our part, because the real job is much harder and requires sacrifices that you and I aren't willing to make. The real culprits will continue to kill or dislocate or maim animals systemically to avoid responsibilities, or gain popularity, and we will continue to applaud them.

How about dismantling our own faulty moral compass and starting afresh with nothing but compassion in our hearts? How about remembering that most of us, despite our education and upbringing, are capable of causing serious harm to others when we feel scared or threatened? How about empathising not only with the victim, but also with the offender, who is so broken that they can no longer feel empathy? This society is begging for some radical changes. How about we start being radically kind?

Rubaiya Ahmad is the founder and chairman of Obhoyaronno - Bangladesh Animal Welfare Foundation.



A radical change has to happen within us to realise and internalise that all life forms have equal value.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

to rehabilitate people validates as well as encourages this barbaric and regressive behaviour. The understanding of human rights in this country is so poor that it is accepted that prisoners will be treated poorly under police custody. Anything less than brutality is not acceptable, and rehabilitation is too

possible because those boys were from lower-middle-class families. I knew rich boys who kept animals locked up in the garages of their palatial homes. I never went after them. I could no longer ignore my own glaring hypocrisy. I also became aware of how I was more eager to speak against cruelty to dogs and

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"them" were the animal abusers, who needed to be weeded out.

One day, I came to know about a severely wounded puppy in a local slum and went running to rescue him. A young "man" had allegedly put out cigarettes on the puppy and left him with multiple burn wounds, which got infected. The puppy was barely alive. I was boiling inside and wanted to do the same to the perpetrator.

When I saw the perpetrator, my heart sank. It was a young boy, no older than my five-year-old nephew. I saw that someone was way ahead of me and had already left similar burn wounds on the

Thinking big beyond the LDC graduation



MOHAMMAD ZAMAN

BANGLADESH is a surprising success story. Emerging out of war and destruction in 1971, few in the world had any optimism about the country's future. Today, Bangladesh is a rising economic power, as evident from its

graduation from the least developed country (LDC) category to the developing country group. For Bangladesh, it's like a rebirth, as we see the consistent growth and success stories on many fronts. This graduation is another testament and a major milestone in the development journey of the country.

Back in 2018, Bangladesh met all three United Nations (UN) eligibility criteria—per capita gross national income (GNI), human asset index (HAI), and economic vulnerability index (EVI)—for graduation. Indeed, the country achieved higher than the required scores in GNI—USD 1,272 (minimum requirement is USD 1,230)—HAI—72.8 (minimum requirement is 68) and EVI—25 (requirement is 32 or below). Thus, Bangladesh's performance was well and above the thresholds in all three areas. But due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the normal three-year period for transition was extended to five years. The graduation will now formally take place in 2026. Bangladesh hopes to be in the upper middle income countries (UMIC) group in 2031, and, finally, achieve the developed country status in 2041.

Against this backdrop, there is a new hope in the country for a much better and brighter future. However, there are some absurd concerns among many due to the loss of access to cheaper lending money for development assistance, loss of duty-free and quota-free export, and a more competitive export market in the post-graduation period. This has reportedly made many "worried" in the ready-made garment (RMG) sector—particularly because of the loss of the generalised system of preferences (GSP) for Bangladeshi products. It is expected that the five-year transition period to graduation will provide the government

and other stakeholders enough time to deal with the upcoming challenges—including capacity-building and general preparedness.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina presided over much of the economic development and progress achieved in the country over the last 13 years. As a result, her government is largely credited for taking the country to this new height. The prime minister, at a reception in her honour, gave a clapback to the

is moving forward, with an estimated per capita income of more than USD 2,000 in 2021—more than the per capita income in India and Pakistan. In a recent statement at parliament, the prime minister reiterated her promise to make Bangladesh a developing country. "We will have to take many steps to move Bangladesh forward; we are also taking preparations (to that end)," she added.

Since Bangladesh continues to grow, there

should be a robust and effective Covid-19 recovery plan and strategies for healthcare services to ensure protection against the pandemic in order keep the wheels of the economy running. The pandemic is not over yet, and can potentially turn into a major health crisis, with new deadly variants surfacing every other month. The public healthcare system needs special attention to ensure better assessment, tracing, and medical

poverty reduction have already been lost due to the pandemic and the consequent loss of income opportunities by the poor. Moving forward, the economic recovery plan must be based on human development measures, such as re-training, education, health, poverty reduction, food security, and gender equity and empowerment. The huge global shifts require the right skills, new perspectives, and understanding to navigate the uncertain future.

Third, climate change, internal displacement, and migration will turn out to be major obstacles to development for Bangladesh. According to the updated Groundswell report of the World Bank, published in September 2021, the South Asia region may see 40 million internal climate migrants by 2050; of them, more than one-third are likely to be in Bangladesh. Despite the progress made so far with climate adaptation in the country, the issue of internal climate migrants or displaced people has not been adequately addressed. In this context, the protracted Rohingya crisis has placed a strain on the economy as well as created various socioeconomic, environmental and security issues for Bangladesh that demand urgent solutions from the international community.

Finally, steps should be taken to make the cherished transition more sustainable in the post-LDC period by strengthening democratic institutions, human rights, justice and equity, striking out corruptions at all levels, including public services, and establishing the rule of law in the country against any nepotism and practices of political protection. There is also a need for exposing misinformation and, at the same time, better communication with people for engaged citizenship.

Bangladesh has truly come of age in its 50 years as a development model. The LDC graduation presents many opportunities to aggressively brand the country globally. If this can be done, Bangladesh can easily become a member of the developed country group by 2041. We are all for it.

Dr Mohammad Zaman is an international development specialist and an advisory professor at the National Research Centre for Resettlement of Hohai University in Nanjing, China.



FILE PHOTO: AFP

Now is the time to prepare Bangladesh for the post-LDC graduation period.

"bottomless basket" storytellers. She credited, with her usual humility, the hard working people of Bangladesh for the country's graduation to the developing country group. Under her leadership, Bangladesh's GDP tripled from USD 103.5 billion in FY2008-09 to USD330.2 billion in FY2019-20. Even during the pandemic, the expected growth rate did not fall as much as feared. The economy

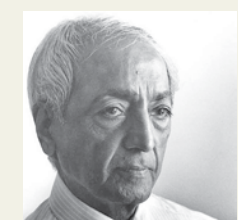
are good reasons for thinking big and beyond the graduation as an overriding message for all—the elected leaders, politicians, bureaucrats, policymakers, business owners, investors, educators, and other partners in development—to recognise and pursue some specific development objectives in order to navigate the uncertain future ahead.

For Bangladesh, the first and foremost goal

treatment to rebuild resilience against the pandemic.

Second, the pandemic has once again widened the gaps between the poor and the rich in terms of wealth and income inequality. The growing disparity and inequality will further marginalise the poor and the most vulnerable groups in the country. Some of the gains achieved over the years with regard to

QUOTABLE Quote



JIDDU KRISHNAMURTI (1895 - 1986) Indian philosopher

There is no end to education. It is not that you read a book, pass an examination, and finish with education. The whole of life, from the moment you are born to the moment you die, is a process of learning.

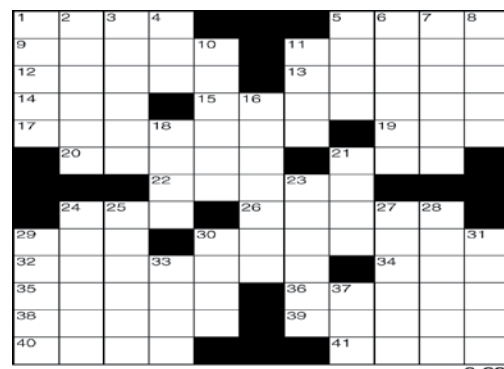
CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Urban pollution
- 5 Running pros
- 9 Like lions
- 11 Singer McClachlan
- 12 Cousin's dad
- 13 Suspect's story
- 14 Narrow inlet
- 15 Diminish
- 17 Undesirable consequences
- 19 Rented out
- 20 Tramps
- 21 Garden visitor
- 22 Texas player
- 24 Sandy color
- 26 Used oars
- 29 "Exodus" hero
- 30 Get taken in by

DOWN

- 1 Blue character
- 2 Crazes
- 3 Available for emergencies
- 4 Hair goo
- 5 Become tiresome
- 6 Maryland player
- 7 Item on a hospital
- 8 Computer key
- 10 Clears, as a windshield
- 11 Sea dog
- 16 Of the southern hemisphere
- 18 Bank offering
- 21 Cereal holder
- 23 Wheeled
- 24 Bartered
- 25 Under the weather
- 27 Wipe out
- 28 Gizmo
- 29 Burning
- 30 Belongs
- 31 Staggers
- 33 Ore source
- 37 Old hand

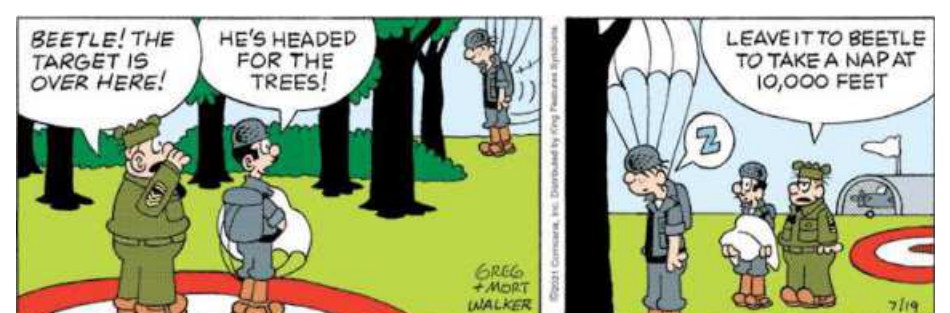


YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS



BEETLE BAILEY

by Mort Walker



BABY BLUES

by Kirkman & Scott



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