

FROM CRISIS TO CHANGE

Education will sustain the revolution



BLOWIN' IN THE WIND
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Let's take a moment to reflect on the remarkable year of 2024 as we approach its final act. Our national annals will remember 2024 as a conduit of change. The 53-year-old country shook off its midlife crisis and reinvented itself. The spark that came from students spread as a flame of mass uprising. The gale, akin to Kazi Nazrul Islam's poetic nor'wester, swept away the old and breathed new life into the stagnant system. The flag of a new beginning heralds new possibilities. But history tells us that revolutions don't sustain themselves. For changes to happen, we need a structural base and a superstructural vision. Education can help us attain such long term, systemic, and sustainable change.

The call for reform started with a desire to end all discriminatory practices. The mass endorsed the demand through their wholehearted participation, toppling the regime that had alienated itself from the

a tendency to reclaim politics from the vantage point of those close to the power centre. The reformers' fixation on ideological purity became apparent when they challenged the credentials of certain members of a proposed committee. Rewriting history to suit one agenda is a policy of the old. The new government must be forward-looking enough to craft an education system that equips students for a rapidly changing, complex, interconnected world. Standing on the isthmus of change, we must avoid any form of myopia. We need to realise that by the time our students graduate, they will be competing on a global platform for jobs that don't even exist today. Given the exponential growth of technology over the last decade, it is clear that the frontiers our youth will inhabit a decade from now will be drastically different from our current ones. Our educational policies, therefore, need to find the right balance between

opportunities, our youth can deliver at the highest level. The challenge for us is to create a condition where our students are motivated enough to learn. The ongoing wave of change has resulted in a sense of false empowerment and a disregard for institutional authority. By forcing authorities to publish half-baked results, cancel

employment. It's quite fashionable to cite successful university dropouts like Bill Gates and Mark Zuckerberg to encourage students to start their own businesses, oblivious to the fact that most startups fail. We rarely acknowledge that even the renowned entrepreneurs met the required high scores for admission into the world's top universities. There is no

the highest standards of pedagogical practices, social democracy, and cultural homogeneity for its survival. In contrast, countries like Türkiye and Chile, which have incorporated indigenous models, have yielded better results in recent years. The current government's task is to adopt a locally rooted but globally connected education model. The

thinking of ourselves within the deltaic confines. Bangladeshi-origin students in the United Kingdom outperform their peers, with only Chinese and Indian students surpassing them. This is not a fluke; it is the result of a structured, inclusive education system that prioritises competency and equal opportunity. It pains me to reflect on the stark contrast between Bangladeshi students excelling abroad and those floundering within our own borders. The pain intensifies when you consider that our students are falling behind without any personal fault. Their poor performance in literacy and numeracy skills is largely due to an education system that is plagued by abrupt and ill-conceived reforms, which are rolled out without adequate research or preparation. The education system leaves untrained and underpaid teachers to grapple with new methods. Students bear the brunt of this chaos. Petty interests such as commercial benefits and political gains exacerbate the situation.

We can learn our lessons from the Global South. Countries like Vietnam and South Korea have modernised their systems while remaining rooted in their cultural contexts. We must chart a similar path, combining global best practices with our indigenous realities. Our national vision should be ambitious yet grounded, aiming to produce informed, capable global citizens prepared for the challenges of the tech-driven world. The curriculum of the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) rightly prioritised critical thinking, technological proficiency, and a deep understanding of our own cultural heritage in its framework. However, the textbooks failed to translate the policies, exposing our inability to generate content and develop materials.

As we step into 2025, let this moment of upheaval galvanise us to action. Our students' revolution demands more than just rhetoric; it demands real, sustained change. Let's honour their bravery and vision by establishing an education system that fosters their potential and ensures a brighter future for Bangladesh. Now that the storm has passed, we must rebuild with purpose and clarity.

Standing on the isthmus of change, we must avoid any form of myopia. We need to realise that by the time our students graduate, they will be competing on a global platform for jobs that don't even exist today. Given the exponential growth of technology over the last decade, it is clear that the frontiers our youth will inhabit a decade from now will be drastically different from our current ones. Our educational policies, therefore, need to find the right balance between accessibility and global immersion.

people with its partisan politics and industrial-scale corruption. Equity, therefore, must be the guiding principle of all reforms, including education. However, the delay by the interim government in forming an education commission suggests

accessibility and global immersion. There is no reason why we cannot envision our youth as world players. Recent ethnicity-based GCSE results placed Bangladeshi students only after Chinese and Indians. The data shows that given the right

HSC examinations, ransack colleges, or oust teachers, enough damage has been inflicted to give students the false impression that they can chase illogical terms. The feeling that students learn more from the web has reduced the authority of both schools and textbooks. As educators, the challenge for us is to create a pull factor that makes schools and education relevant for our students. The shadow structure that thrived outside the school system promoted coaching businesses and notebooks. Then there was this tempting idea that privileges skill over knowledge. In a country where nearly 28 percent of tertiary-educated youth are unemployed (2022), it was convenient for the government to champion entrepreneurship and skill-based courses for self-

substitute for a strong educational base at primary and secondary levels before one ventures out to pursue passion or hone skills. The previous government tried to bring in change by following a model from a culturally homogenous Scandinavian country with a strong Protestant work ethic. Traditionally, Finland prides itself on the best scores in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). Countries across the world tried to replicate the creative model to inculcate a sense of lifelong learning in their students. In Bangladesh, high-paid experts persuaded the previous government of the model's potential, shielding the fact that Finland's model is experiencing a decline in success. The influx of immigrants has challenged the model, which relies on

reformed curriculum should ensure that students from all socioeconomic backgrounds have access to quality education, bridging the gaps that currently exist not only in rural and urban areas but also in the three-pronged Bangla-English-madrasa systems. Equity also demands an objective representation of the nation's past, fostering a balanced understanding of history that can withstand political transitions. By embedding equity into the ethos of education reform, we can create a system that is resilient, inclusive, and forward-thinking, sparing future generations from the turmoil of abrupt and ideologically driven changes. By promoting the success of Bangladeshis abroad, we can go beyond the myopic vision of

Time to recognise women's contribution in agriculture



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Women's contributions in agriculture and their right to equal opportunities in this sector remain one of the most overlooked aspects of gender inequality. Perhaps this reflects a broader societal blind spot, particularly among urban communities that seldom look beyond their immediate realities to understand the silent struggles of women farmers. While issues of gender inequality in other domains receive widespread attention and advocacy, it is equally important to amplify the voices of those at the margins—voices that often go unheard in policymaking.

During a multistakeholder consultation in Bogura organised by the Power and Participation Research Centre (PPRC), which was focused on the post-change expectations of the masses, a woman farmer highlighted a glaring injustice in agricultural policies, saying that women farmers are not always officially recognised as farmers, and therefore are mostly excluded from accessing farmer cards. This exclusion denies them essential benefits such as loans, quality fertilisers, and other agricultural services. For some women, the way to access these benefits is through cards issued in the names of their sons or husbands. However, this option is not viable for everyone—single women, widows or those seeking independence are left without recourse.

The demand for equal rights and recognition brought to light a stark reality: women who contribute significantly to agriculture are still almost invisible in policy frameworks. The consultation revealed not just the depth of this inequity, but also the gravity of ingrained gender bias in agriculture that perpetuates inequality, denying women the tools they need to thrive and holding back the broader development of the sector.

Despite women making up 26.2 percent of the total employed population in agriculture in Bangladesh, they remain



FILE PHOTO: QUAMRUL ISLAM RUBAIYAT

Women farmers are still almost invisible in policy frameworks.

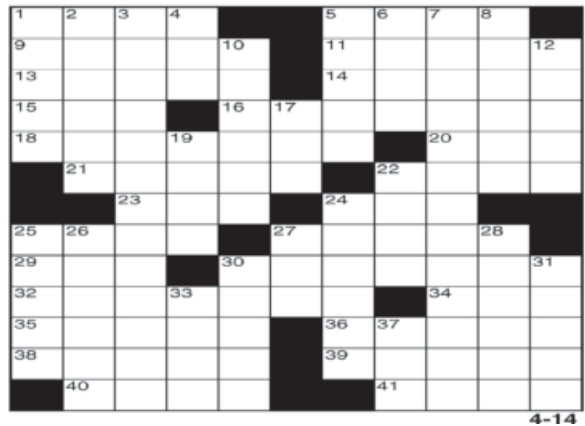
far behind men in terms of access to resources, land ownership, and decision-making power. This marginalisation is not unique to Bangladesh—it reflects a global pattern where women's contributions to agriculture are systematically undervalued. Even though 40 percent of women were expected to be included in the smart card programme, a study by the International Land Coalition found that only 30 out of 197 women surveyed across four districts of Bangladesh had access to farmer cards. This highlights significant policy failures in recognising women as farmers. During the PPRC consultation, it was evident that remaining excluded from the programme limited women farmers' access to loans, inputs, and market power, thereby perpetuating inequalities and undermining their livelihoods. Even when women overcome social barriers to participate in agriculture, they face wage discrimination. According to the Department of Agricultural Extension

women's ability to influence household and community decisions. Research shows that when women own land, they are more likely to participate in agricultural decision-making and contribute to community activities, leading to improved productivity and better outcomes for households. The insights from the PPRC consultation prompted me to dig deeper into the gendered dynamics of agriculture. The challenges that women face are not due to inefficiency, but stem from inequitable access to resources such as family labour, high-yield crops, fertilisers, and technology. Closing these gaps would significantly boost agricultural productivity while empowering women. Globally, women represent 43 percent of the agricultural labour force, yet they face systemic barriers that limit their contributions. The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) underscores this disparity, reporting that women fall behind men in access to land,

credit, services, and digital technology. Additionally, the burden of unpaid care work constrains women's opportunities for education, training, and employment. Social norms further reinforce barriers to resources and networks, stifling women's potential contributions to the agrifood sector. Recognising the contributions of women in agriculture is crucial for achieving economic empowerment, strengthening food security, and improving nutrition outcomes. Policies that validate women's labour and ensure equitable access to resources have the power to transform agricultural systems. Empowering women in this sector is not merely a step towards achieving gender justice; it is a cornerstone of sustainable growth and long-term development. The woman farmer from Bogura represents countless others whose voices remain unheard. Introducing initiatives such as farmer cards to formally recognise women as farmers is an essential first step. This recognition would open doors to critical resources like loans, high-quality inputs, and other agricultural benefits, enabling women to enhance their livelihoods and contribute more effectively to the country's agricultural economy. However, recognition alone is not enough. Policies must dismantle systemic barriers that have long marginalised women, including wage disparities, insecure land rights, and restricted access to markets. Addressing these inequalities will not only bridge the gender gap but also unleash the untapped potential of women farmers, driving agricultural innovation and growth. Donor-funded initiatives that support agricultural development, microfinance, and innovative startups often incorporate gender and social inclusion principles as core components. While these efforts contribute significantly to reducing disparities, they address only part of the challenge. A more transformative impact requires a stronger focus on policy reforms and systemic changes to ensure long-term equity and inclusivity. Women farmers are not merely participants in agriculture—they are vital to its future. No farmer should remain invisible, especially not the women whose labour sustains our food systems and fuels the hope for a more equitable and prosperous agricultural sector.

CROSSWORD
BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS
1 Church offshoot
5 Vegas game
9 License
11 Site of action
13 Davis of "Thelma & Louise"
14 Floor squares
15 Longoria of TV
16 Like Ingrid Bergman
18 Lawmaking bodies
20 Wide shoe marking
21 Some Picassos
22 Cpl's subordinates
23 Knee protector
24 GPS screen
25 Needing aspirin
27 Amber source
29 Greek X
30 Fortify
32 Daily grind
34 Busy one in Apr.
35 Door sign
36 Patriot Allen
38 Play part
39 Refine ore
40 Aphrodite's son
41 Crocus cousin
DOWN
1 Wise ones
2 Late hour
3 Fourth in the lineup
4 Great weight
5 Trio of myth
6 Parched
7 Ace's replacement
8 "Just a moment"
10 Frittered away
12 Arson yield
17 Director
Anderson
19 Call it —
22 Go by
24 Brawls
25 Farm units
26 Probability
27 Bird of myth
28 Kathmandu native
30 Uncovers
31 Talks crazily
33 Nevada city
37 "I don't need the details," for short



YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

R	A	S	P		T	I	M	E	R
A	N	T	E	S	A	T	O	N	E
I	N	E	P	T		R	A	N	T
S	E	E			E	X	P	L	O
E	X	P	I	R	E		C	E	E
				V	E	R	A	L	E
				M	A	Y	O	D	
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A	N	A			E	X	P	O	S
E	X	P	L	O	D	E		S	I
A	C	T	O	N		C	R	A	Z
N	A	T	A	L		S	E	G	E
S	T	O	N	Y			P	E	S

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