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Chittagong port



Apart from the consequential effect of the recent political unrest, the container terminal at Chittagong port has almost come to a standstill due to the alleged dispute regarding handling of the gantry-cranes by private sector. No one apparently seems to comprehend the seriousness of the problem entailing immense cost to our economy both in terms of stranded RMG export as well as price-hike of imported consumer goods. This serious situation starting with the rehab/modernisation plan of the port is perhaps decade-old and very rightly attributed to the intransigent attitude of the "popular" Mayor with utter indifference to national interest. This situation if allowed to continue will have far reaching deadly impact even in normal condition without any "abarodh". In fact this is a man-made obstacle arising out of egoism on the part of individual/s having no concern of national interests. The repeated fear and SOS-cry through media by all concerned organisations responsible for the vital export/import trade of the country so far

failed to draw the attention of appropriate authority for any redress.

The other day I had the opportunity to go through a message from a shipping agent in Chittagong to their principal abroad which reads: "With the closure of CCT, there is no other facility for loading/unloading gearless vessels. As a result, 11 gearless vessels have now piled up at Chittagong (2 at berth and 9 waiting in the outer anchorage). These ships are counting huge losses every day in terms charter-hire, fixed operating cost and loss of earnings as well. At the same time, consignees for the cargoes on board these ships are looking at huge financial losses, as there are raw materials and accessories for the garment industries, which are urgently required to meet the deadlines for winter fashions in the west. More than 6000 TEUs containers are currently held on board the subject vessels. All efforts on the part of CPA and Bangladesh Steamer Agents Association failed to resolve the deadlock. There is no alternative available

to ease the situation".

The above picture with the prevailing state of affairs is causing consternation in shipping circle of Singapore and elsewhere abroad, which is bound to give us a worst image for trade/industry worldwide with consequence of incalculable economic losses for every one in the long run. In the past use of armed forces to deal with emergency in port right from the early days of our independence had been a practice and it is again time to consider similar measure now to save the impending disaster. With due regards for the political cause, there is no relevance to this deadlock with the present turmoil. This is an honest opinion without any prejudice to the issue in any respect.

Authority must act on war footing now in consideration of the magnitude and dimension of the crisis since there is no way we can allow our isolation from international trade.

Z. Rahman, Gulshan, Dhaka

Admission forms in the net

Every year students and their guardians face enormous difficulties in collecting admission forms for schools, colleges and universities. Authorities concerned are not paying heed to this perennial problem. Even unscrupulous people make lot of money with admission forms exploiting their (students/guardian) difficulties. We saw even the students union in some medical colleges made huge amount of money with admission forms. I don't understand why the authority concerned does not utilise the easy, hassle-free way of posting the admission forms in the web sites. We have web sites of Education Ministry, Education Boards. We can easily upload common school, common college and common varsity forms in the web sites. I request the honourable Secretary of the Ministry of Education to take steps to upload admission forms in the Ministry's or Education Board's website. It takes only few minutes to upload the forms the softcopies of which are also available with the educational institutes. The institutes do not need to worry about money they collect for the forms. We can submit bank draft for the amount with the filled-in form. I hope it saves innumerable man-hours and avoids the hassles we face for collecting admission forms.

Dr. M M Mortayez Amin
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10 questions to the politicians

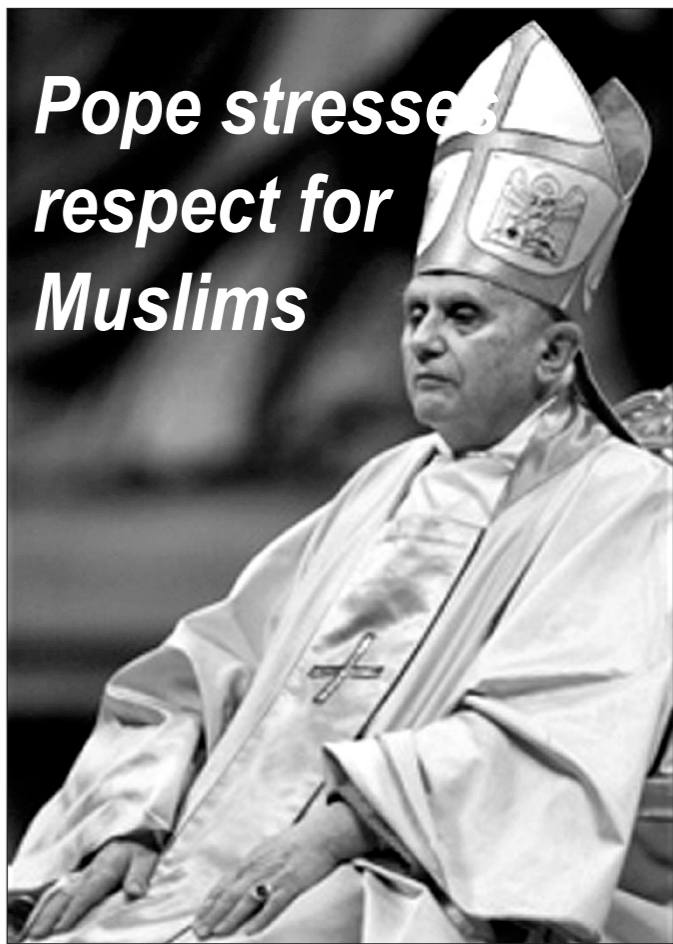
I am an expatriate Bangladeshi, working in Kuwait as a graphic designer. We are very much concerned about our country's recent political unrest. Everyday

we are feeling shame and embarrassment before the foreigners for this reason. This is damaging our dignity and pride internationally. There are thousands of objections we have against our politicians. I think now we are passing such a critical time that, it will not be wrong if we limit some democratic rights of the political parties for some time, as they are continuously failing to agree on anything. I want to ask our politicians 10 questions:

1. Are you really able to read the people's mind?
2. Are you observing the reactions of public in media (without wearing own political glass on your eyes)?
3. Why you seem so shameless?
4. Why are you being driven by muscle rather than brain (in this 21st century of wisdom)?
5. Why are you choosing "continuous blockade" rather than "continuous dialogue"?
6. Do you really like democracy (as, one of many definitions of democracy is "art of compromise" but you have no compromise at all)?
7. Are you thinking that you are the "majority" in the country (I mean, how many percentage of the people are doing politics)?
8. Political parties should run the country; but if they fail then what is the solution? In that case should people will be slaughtered for no fault of theirs?
9. "We don't want political violence any more in the country" -- how can we say this effectively to you?
10. Are you accountable to anybody (don't say: to the people; because this is vague or bluff)?

If you are a politician, my questions above are to you. Is there any brave-heart politician who can answer all these questions to the public or in media?

Abu Taiab Mahmudur Rahman
Kuwait



Pope stresses respect for Muslims

Pope Benedict XVI who was just on a friendship mission in Turkey said Christians and Muslims should reject violence and expressed "total and profound respect" for Muslims, as he attempts to defuse a row between Islam and the Catholic Church. The Pope drew condemnation from across the Muslim world in September when he quoted the words of a Byzantine emperor who fought the Ottoman Turks and linked Islam to violence. He is also seen by some as anti-Turkish for comments he made as a cardinal in which he appeared to oppose Turkey's EU membership bid. The Vatican now says it is not opposed to such a move. The pontiff reiterated that and gave Turkey support for its bid to enter the European Union.

That is indeed the best way to bridge the civilisations earnestly. In today's multi-religious and multi-ethnic societies only mutual trust through constructive approaches alone can bring peace to the world. Any mischief played, deliberately or otherwise, by the top most leaders including the religious personalities being held in high esteem would provoke criticism and incite violence leading to terrorism. The Pope would do a great service to mankind if he keeps in mind that each word he utters has significance and, therefore, persons of his stature should tread very cautiously in making statements concerning other religions and cultures in public. There is extreme sensitivity about the attitude of the Christian West towards Turkey, and the Pope's visit may be a focus for those concerns.

Dr. Abdul Ruff Colachal
Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi

On a cup of tea, please

As a former fellow resident of Tennessee and a fellow graduate of Vanderbilt University and as having lived in Bangladesh for the past six years, I too shared in the pride of the whole country at the recent news of Dr. Yunus being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. As Bangladesh usually only makes the international news for things that would generally be considered bad news -- it was with great thanks that we all celebrated in the announcement of such good news.

I congratulate Dr. Yunus for taking the opportunity of exerting his leadership role in making a bold proposal for the formation of a coalition government in order to find a way out of the current political crisis. As a foreigner, I have no role in proposing

any specific political suggestion as to how Bangladesh should resolve the current crisis. I will not offer any comments as to the specifics of Dr. Yunus' plan.

What I do wish to say -- is that any proposal for resolving the current crisis will not be successful in the long-run until the leaders of the two major parties at least drink a cup of tea together and inquire about the well being of their respective families.

As I previously said, I have lived and worked in Bangladesh for the past six years. Since coming to this country, I have probably drank about 5,000 cups of tea. You do not have to be real close friends with someone in order to share a cup of tea with

them. Drinking a cup of tea together is just a sign of normal behaviour in Bengali culture. Whenever I go to a new place and meet new people, we always end up drinking tea together. This is just what people do in Bangladesh.

To my knowledge, the current leaders of the two major political parties have not spoken a word to each other in the six years that I have been in Bangladesh. They do not attend any government meetings together.

When one leader speaks in parliament, the other does not attend the parliament session. Just last week, they were both present at the same public ceremony to honour the military services in Bangladesh.

Both leaders sat within a few feet of each other, but all of the newspaper reports that I read about this meeting said that not only did the two leaders not speak to each other; they purposely avoided even gazing at each other.

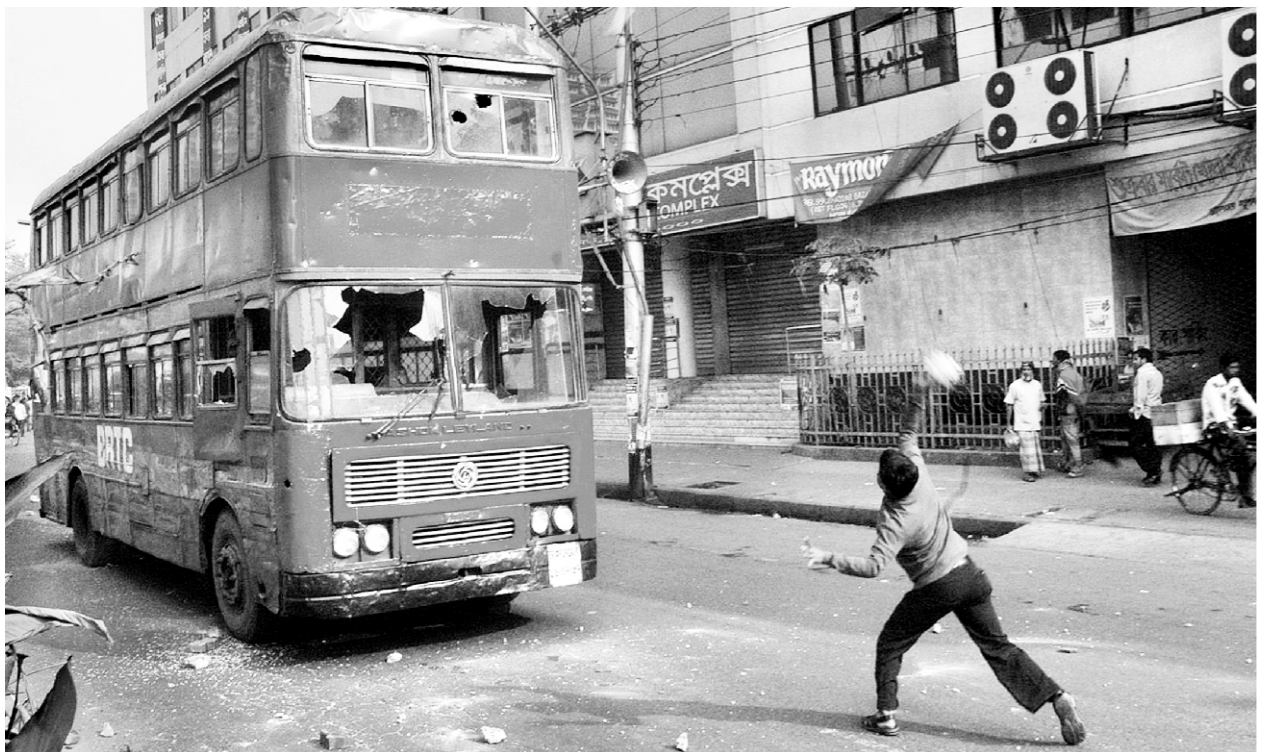
This is just not how Bengali people behave in my experience. Even people who do not like each other at all are willing to sit in the same room and talk with each other and inquire about the well being of their families and drink a cup of tea together.

So, while I highly regard the proposal of Dr. Yunus, I suggest that he make another public proposal. I suggest that he should publicly invite both leaders of the two main political parties to his house for a cup

of tea. Each leader could bring with them one person, possibly the secretary general of their respective party. No one else should be allowed to come to the meeting. No press should be allowed at the meeting. I suggest that no political dialogue even be allowed at this first meeting. The two leaders would just be asked to sit in the same room, look each other in the eye, inquire about the well being of their families, and have a cup of tea together. I suggest that drinking tea is the first step in any long-term resolution of the crisis that currently faces Bangladesh. (I would suggest 'lal cha' be served as that seems more Bengali than milk tea.)

Don Mark, Kushtia

Caretaker of democracy



Bangladesh has had three successful elections till now. By successful I mean that in each case the party in power has agreed to peacefully relinquish power after losing in elections -- which is not always the case in developing democracies. Each of these elections was held under the vigilance of a caretaker government and the results were accepted by both the major parties.

Due to the success of this system for over a decade it seemed that caretaker system could possibly rank as one more Bangladeshi contribution to the rest of the world in terms of institutional innovation. Such ideas gained more relevance after George Bush won his first election in 2000. The counting and recounting of Florida presidential ballots reminded us of the many

similar problems we have and may be some of those problems might not have occurred had the Americans adopted something similar to our approach.

Unfortunately, now, the limits of caretaker system have been exposed and people are having doubts as to its viability. It seemed like a brilliant idea at first: once the elections are over, normal govern-

ment and normal life resume. Unfortunately, this easy and, seemingly, cheap solution has taken a big casualty: the venerability of the judiciary itself. No longer is it sufficient to have a retired chief justice (or justices) in the caretaker government.

The honourable justices themselves are now discussed and analysed and their neutrality brought into question. That is, the justices themselves are being judged. I don't know how many Bangladeshis realise this or are concerned about it but we are about to lose the sanctity of one of our

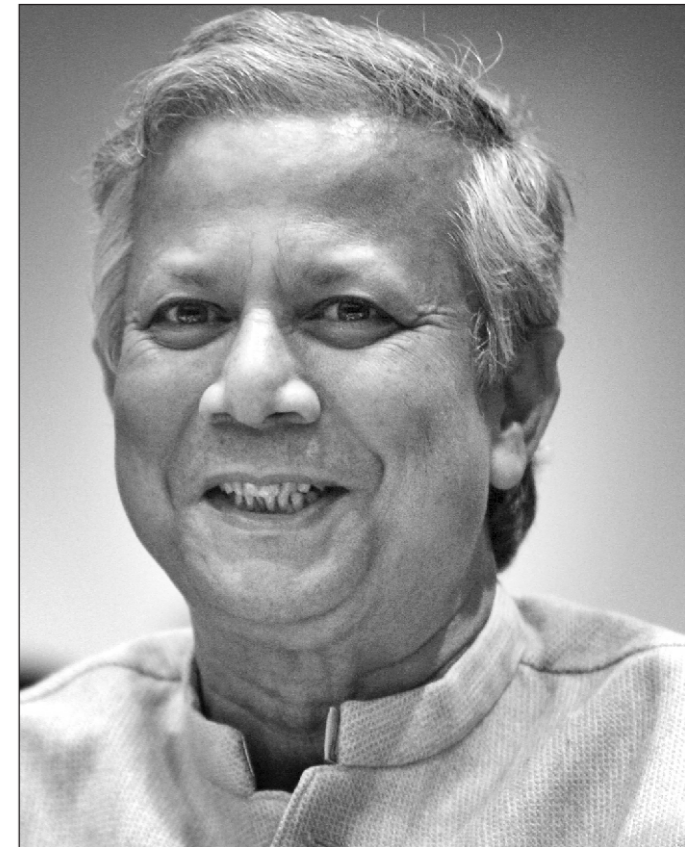
most respected institutions in the process. I am not blaming any particular party for this, since it is in the nature of things. A chief justice having contact with politics is like a mother superior going to a disco: in the beginning it's lots of fun but it can create problems later. Even if this contact is in the form of a caretaker government.

I hope that in the end sanity will prevail and we will find some alternative method of protecting our democracy. Until that happens we can only keep our fingers crossed.

Siddiqui
On e-mail



Yunus formula



We have just heard on the BBC Bengali service the outline of Prof Yunus' "New Formula" for peace, election and prosperity in Bangladesh. We have also heard the immediate reactions of two senior politicians, Mr Tofael Ahmed of the AL and Mr Noman of the BNP, on the same BBC Bengali service.

Both of them have politely disagreed with the "New Formula" because it lacks ground reality and constitutional mandate. Mr Ahmed has further suggested to Prof. Yunus that he could take initiative to prepare level ground for all parties to participate in the election.

Frankly speaking I am not in favour of Prof. Yunus joining politics.

Nevertheless he has already chosen his own option to advice the political parties and politicians. We hope that he will accommodate political views in his compromise formula while fine-tuning his "New Formula" for peace, election and prosperity in Bangladesh. The nation expects him to be a problem solver.

It is very difficult to think of a national coalition government comprising of the members of the same political parties when we look at the terms of references Prof. Yunus has mentioned. It appears that he just tossed up an idea to break the political impasse responding to the popular feeling.

If election can be held preparing the desired level playing field for all major political parties participating, why there will be any necessity to form a national coalition government as an interim arrangement? I fail to understand the need for such an interim arrangement. The idea of power sharing will not act as pacifier keeping the major concern for free and fair election in abeyance. This would create the most quarrelsome governmental institution one can imagine.

Save democracy from being a sinking ship. Good luck to Prof. Yunus. Good luck to our democracy.

A reader
On e-mail