

Will Trump's USD 400m debt be a threat to US national security?

A report by The New York Times that US President Donald Trump did not pay federal income taxes has raised the question about how much impact it will have on the upcoming US election. Ali Riaz, distinguished professor of politics and government at Illinois State University in the United States and a non-resident senior fellow at the Atlantic Council, talked to Golam Mortoza of The Daily Star on the issue. The interview was taken before the presidential debate held on September 30.

Will the issue of tax evasion by US President Donald Trump affect the elections?

Mr. Trump's already weakened moral position will, in all likelihood, further deteriorate in the coming days. Because paying taxes is a sensitive issue in the United States. Everybody has to pay taxes. People here believe that they are playing their part for society through paying taxes and that they are entitled to certain rights in exchange for paying taxes. On the other hand, there are those who do not want to pay taxes. A majority of them are the supporters of Trump who think the state is taking away a lot of money from them already. But these people also have to pay taxes. Now that they know that their leader does not do so, it will create a kind of emotional and moral pressure on them. However, we do not know if they will change their mind about voting for Trump. The fact that Trump didn't pay taxes means that he didn't play his role in ensuring national security and that he didn't pay a penny for the country's healthcare system. Although he has repeatedly said that he has done a lot for those who have returned from the war, he didn't agree to give a single penny from his own pocket. These are some of the issues Mr Trump will have to deal with.

Trump spoke against The New York Times report last Monday by claiming: "This is fake news, I have paid a lot of taxes." Is this just another untrue statement by him? Or are there any chances that questions might arise about the Times report? What is your observation?

It cannot be denied that Mr. Trump sometimes paid taxes. He paid USD 750 in federal income taxes in the year he took office

as president and also the year before. But he did not pay any taxes in 10 years of the 15 years from 2000 till 2015. Mr. Trump claimed that he paid USD 95 million in taxes in 18 years. But he took back USD 72.9 million from the federal government. Although he has taken various tax credits through various loopholes in the system, he did not pay the taxes he was supposed to.

So he has taken tax credits according to the law. Can that be questioned?

It has not yet been proved that he did anything illegal. Maybe he did this within the purview of the law. However, when a politician takes advantage of the loopholes of the law, it becomes questionable. Here in the US, politicians, especially those who became presidents, have tried to show people that they did not try to take any advantage of the legal loopholes despite having the scope to do so. President Jimmy Carter once even said that he should pay more taxes than what he did then. He not only said that but also paid more taxes than what he was supposed to. You can also take an account of the taxes paid by other US presidents in the first fiscal year of their term. President Barack Obama paid more than a million dollar in taxes. So, the key issue here is the ethical aspect of taking advantage of the system.

What kind of a situation might the Times have to deal with under the circumstances?

The New York Times would not have to face much trouble because they have enough evidence and documents in support of their report. We know what Mr. Trump will do. He has waged a war against the media in the last three years and a half. He speaks or tweets



Ali Riaz

more or less every day against the media, especially against the liberal newspapers; he calls the media "the enemy of the people". He doesn't like The New York Times at all. Which is why he will continue to attack this newspaper through these statements. But I don't see any reason to worry that it will be under any legal pressure; there is no such law. If Mr. Trump's lawyers think that there is any gap anywhere, they can at best go to the court. In that case, the Times will be able to deal with the issue through the legal process.

Joe Biden, Trump's rival in the upcoming election, paid USD 37,42,974 in federal income taxes while Trump paid only USD 750. Trump is known to be richer than Biden. Don't you think it will have an impact on the election?

Electoral politics in the US has become so polarised that I don't think or hope that there will be a major crack in Trump's support base. But as is always the case, there are people who remain in the middle ground. Although the number of such people is very low this time, this issue can have an impact on their opinion. But that will depend on how well they understand all the information. Apart from Trump's tax evasion, The New York Times report also pointed out another important fact: the amount of Mr. Trump's debt, which will have to be paid in the next four years.

What measures will he take to repay this huge amount of loan? Is his personal debt becoming a threat to national security? The big question is, from where will this money come? Who will give Trump the money and in exchange for what? These questions are already being raised. If elected, he will be president for the next four years, in which case he will be financially liable to some quarters.

Any businessman can have debts, they can take loans. Trump's main identity is, he is a businessman. So why do you think this is such an important issue?

He can of course have debt as a businessman, but as a president, he cannot. The president owes USD 400 million to someone and he is supposed to pay this money within the next four years. How will he pay this money? Will national security be disrupted? We can't say for sure that it will disrupt national security but ethically, it is a big risk. Mr. Trump is a businessman but he is no longer just a businessman. As a businessman, he should have taken care of his debt long ago. The question of ethics comes when, even after taking charge as president, he is financially

liable to someone or some quarters. The question is, if a president goes to the White House with such financial liability, will it affect his work in any way? Trump has always said that he is a successful businessman. But as it turns out now, he is not. To take tax credits he now calls himself a failed businessman.

The unfortunate truth is that President Trump has paid less taxes than what I have in the last 15-16 years, and sometimes he didn't pay taxes at all. This should be a big issue for any ordinary middle-class American citizen. However, I am more concerned about whether or not his USD 400 million debt will become a threat to America's national security.

Speaking of ethics, how sensitive is the American society about this ethical issue? President Trump has been criticised for many of his statements and deeds before. However, do you think the present controversy has created the most critical situation for him?

Not only on ethical grounds, but strategically too, the situation in which he is going to the polls has really become challenging for him. The things that he has said in his years as president and some of his actions even before that were always considered ethically unacceptable to people. But that may not be the case now. That does not mean that people have accepted everything. The question of ethics is still important in American society. But are those who care about ethics the majority in society? We will know that in November or maybe even before that.

The interview has been translated from Bangla by Naznin Tithi, a member of the editorial team at The Daily Star.

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF NON-VIOLENCE

We must confront organised violence with organised love



OF MAGIC & MADNESS

BADRUZZAMAN BAY

WHAT does it mean to be nonviolent in a world full of horror and chaos, not to mention weapons and instruments of every kind created to inflict pain? Is nonviolence simply the absence of violence, a preference for order and lawfulness? If

its purpose, as Martin Luther King Jr. once said, is to "develop a sense of shame in the opponent, and thereby bring about a transformation and change of heart" in them, how tactically correct is it when you face opponents who have no inhibitions about using force and no desire whatsoever to learn or sympathise? How long can you remain nonviolent, physically or internally, in the face of such overwhelming odds?

As we observe the International Day of Non-Violence today, these are questions that haunt nonviolent activists and strategists struggling to find an effective antidote to the injustices that abound in the world. Violence today is more structural and lawful, cloaked in the discourse of national interests. You get branded "unpatriotic" for peaceful protests against state action and policy. You get vilified for challenging the status quo, or not accepting the dominant narratives in blind faith. You get arrested or worse even for speaking up. This is a far cry from when the luminaries of the nonviolence movement put it at the centre of political action, asking followers to offer their body as a crucible for their oppressor's change of heart. Does it still work when you, for example, confront not just individuals but also a carefully crafted system of abuse built on the collective interest of its beneficiaries—which is unlikely to change regardless of what transformation individual oppressors go through?

Even Gandhi, whose legacy of nonviolence

this day honours, was aware of the questions of practicality associated with this approach. But he was driven more by its spiritual possibilities (he called it "the first article of my faith") and less by what it offers in terms of dramatic solutions. To unpack his idea of nonviolence, one needs to understand what nonviolence is and is not. It is not passive acceptance of oppression, nor a mere rejection of violence. It is not for the fainthearted either. The Gandhian philosophy of nonviolence or civil disobedience as a driver of social change involves active and

wise strategies. But with the change of time and growing disillusionment with people's capability for revolutionary change, activists had to move the goalposts too. Changing hearts through a display of suffering is no longer a key objective. Meaningful change can come through targeting the system for which creative and compelling forms of nonviolent action are needed. American political scientist Gene Sharp likened this process to one of a combat situation that demands of its "soldiers" courage, discipline and sacrifice. "This view of nonviolent action as



PHOTO: JOSE LUIS MAGANA/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

Peaceful anti-racism protesters lie on the pavement near the White House with the names of people killed by police written on their shirts on June 6, 2020.

sustained participation in diverse peaceful methods that require both faith and patience on the part of the activists. "Nonviolence is not a garment to be put on and off at will. Its seat is in the heart, and it must be an inseparable part of our being," he said.

What this means in practical terms is that we must be patient, have faith in the humanity of ourselves and others and pursue

a technique of active combat is diametrically opposed to the popular assumption that, at its strongest, nonviolent action relies on rational persuasion of the opponent, and more commonly it consists simply of passive submission," he said.

As repressive regimes and pseudo-democracies around the world get more violent and resistant to change, nonviolent

activists must also be equally persistent, defiant and combative. We need to "wage peace" harder than they wage war. But how?

The Covid-19 pandemic, among other things, has brought to a halt the unprecedented levels of mass mobilisation seen in recent years. Since the pandemic struck, there has been a near-cessation of mass demonstrations, rallies, protests, sit-ins and other such forms of street mobilisation. But this, according to a report by The Guardian in late April, does not mean that "people power" has dissipated. The writers of the report identified about 100 distinct methods of nonviolent action that include physical, virtual and hybrid responses that people are using to voice concerns, express solidarity and press for change.

The report described how people—many without leaving their homes—are adapting to remote organising, building their bases, sharpening their messaging, and planning strategies for what comes next. Among the various methods used are car caravans, *vaccerolazos* (collectively banging pots and pans inside the home), walkouts from workplaces with health and safety challenges, free online medical-consultation clinics, mass donations of protective gear and sanitiser, pop-up food banks, community mutual aid pods and crowdsourced emergency funds, live-streamed readings, musical performance from balconies and rooftops, toolkits developed for civic action, drones adapted to deliver supplies, disinfect common areas, check individual temperatures and monitor high-risk areas, etc. "Many movements are moving their activities online, with digital rallies, teach-ins and information-sharing," it added.

And of course, there is then the Black Lives Matter movement which has been largely inspired by the peaceful civil resistance led by Martin Luther King, whose famous saying—"nonviolence demands that the means we use must be as pure as the ends we seek"—remains an important lesson for all followers in the tradition of nonviolent resistance. It's

true that the Black Lives Matter movement has been undermined to some extent by isolated incidents of violence and rioting but it remains by and large peaceful to this day, despite many provocations.

It is impossible to predict the long-term effects of these initiatives but these are important reminders of flourishing people power in the midst of this global crisis. We have seen many of these new tools and forms of nonviolent action used in Bangladesh too. We have seen crowd-funded and volunteer rapid response led by individuals and social organisations to support disadvantaged groups. We have seen activists organising webinars and Facebook Live sessions to highlight critical issues that need to be changed. Many have launched initiatives against domestic violence by coordinating caring duties and mutual support. Many are also organising peaceful street protests for various causes, braving risks of infection as well as brutalities by police and elements associated with the ruling party. Private-sector actors have also come up with various measures to reduce sufferings. These are all different forms of what some activists rightly called "organised love", geared to express solidarity and demand appropriate action by the state.

Nonviolence is not just a way of life, nor a means to quick fixes. You don't claim to be nonviolent by simply refraining from a violent response. It's a political strategy to harness innate people power, to persistently demand change and do your part as a socially responsible being while pursuing creative methods geared to that end. Those frustrated by its apparent lack of teeth should constantly remind themselves of the time-tested virtues of peace, love and reconciliation as well as the potential of nonviolent action for affecting greater change, if utilised properly. The pandemic has taught us to be creative in that regard. Let's stick to that.

Badruzzaman Bay is a member of the editorial team at The Daily Star. Email: badruzzaman.bd@gmail.com

QUOTABLE Quote



WALLACE STEVENS (1879-1955) American poet.

It is the unknown that excites the ardor of scholars, who, in the known alone, would shrivel up with boredom.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

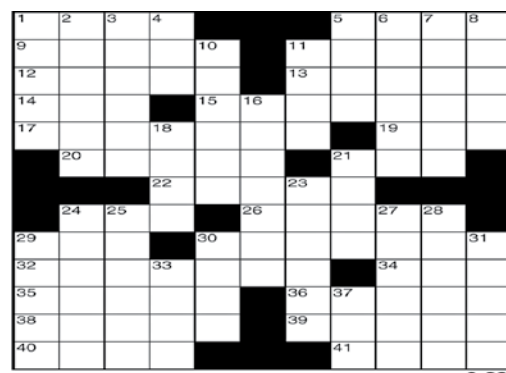
ACROSS

- 1 Racket
- 5 Muffin makeup
- 9 Inverted v
- 11 Move smoothly
- 12 Last letter
- 13 Head out
- 14 Decimal base
- 15 Joined a melee
- 17 Fished with a net
- 19 Attempt
- 20 Grate stuff
- 21 Corn core
- 22 Fall flower
- 24 Butter bit
- 26 Egg outlines
- 29 Vacuum's lack
- 30 Moved on all fours

- 32 Talked like a Texan
- 34 "Exodus" hero
- 35 Opera's Callas
- 36 Chaser of Bugs
- 38 Florence's home
- 39 Lane of film
- 40 Head, to Henri
- 41 Manipulative one

DOWN

- 1 "Ivanhoe" author
- 2 Phone feature
- 3 Sports spots
- 4 One of the "Little Women"
- 5 Gusted
- 6 Theater district
- 7 Adjective
- 8 Poor
- 10 Cafe fixtures
- 11 Delighted
- 16 Do museum work
- 18 "Could you repeat that?"
- 21 Gullet
- 23 Steered clear of
- 24 Sea rover
- 25 Turkish peak
- 27 Andean carriers
- 28 Peaceful
- 29 Let in
- 30 Potter's stuff
- 31 More dreadful
- 33 Devious trick
- 37 Lucy of "Kill Bill" modifier



YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS



BETLE BAILEY



BY MORT WALKER



BABY BLUES



BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT



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