

He Has Done Us Proud

The economics Nobel Prize was long overdue to Amartya Sen. So felt all outstanding economists of the world. Even so, the Wednesday announcement from Stockholm sent waves of joy around the sub-continent and the academic world of the West where Sen has had for long ardent and numberless admirers. But that ill compared with the sense of pleasure and delight and of achievement that swept Bangladesh and West Bengal. The economist-philosopher or socio-economist, also called the conscience-keeper of the economists, was after Rabin-drath Tagore, the second Bengali to be recognised with a Nobel in long 85 years. No doubt Sen himself sees the achievement from that angle as reacting to the news on BBC on Wednesday night he underlined the fact of his Bengalinness.

Although separated by 85 years the connection with Tagore is neither tenuous nor *kaktaliya* or *post hoc ergo propter hoc*. Tagore received his Prize not at Stockholm but at Santiniketan, the international school he had set up with the motto *Yatra Visva Bhabatyeka Needam* — where the universe snuggles in a nest. In building up this institution he had as his alter-ego a Sanskrit scholar, Kshitimohun Sen Shastri, of village Sonarang, Thana Tongbari, Vikrampur, Dhaka. For the many engineering needs of the burgeoning place, such as preventing soil erosion, Tagore brought in a bright boy from Calcutta A T Sen, an engineer without a certificate. A T was married to Amita, the daughter of Kshitimohun and in good time Amartya, their only son, was born in 1933.

Although Amartya passed his early years at Sonarang and Dhaka town, up to 12, to be precise, his whole formative years were spent at Santiniketan and a good academic base was laid. He first ventured into the world when 22 and there was no looking back for him as Cambridge became his second home.

Those close to him well know how his Bengali temper of culture and the Santiniketan influence of seeing man-in-nature as a holistic entity, as taught by Tagore, brought him to look for the roots of man's pains and sufferings. He used economics as a tool not only to unravel the truths of man's condition but also to say — and teach — this needn't be as it has so long been. And he was the one to say the poor is not always uncivilised and undeveloped. From his close knowledge of the Bengal society he could easily see and say that.

After Marx and Engels, Amartya Sen is the first in a century and a quarter to give economics a human face — something eminent scholars have likened to giving it a soul.

Radio Piracy

The mole in the armpit is too spooky for comfort. What is even worse, none is owning up the responsibility for tracking down the clandestine radio transmitter and its surreptitious operator. Our radio frequency is being illegally used to broadcast religious speeches of Jamaat MP Maulana Saidee, who when approached on it, reportedly shared the public surprise over the matter. This has been going on for more than a month now stirring the placid waters of our broadcasting world as the citizen's bafflement knows no bound at the continuing systemic failure to catch the trespasser in the sky.

Where has the system failed us? We have here a conflict of perceptions raging between the T&T Board and Bangladesh Betar as to whose field of competence it is to uncover the piracy incident such as this one. A high official of the Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board has suggested, on condition of anonymity, that the Board's responsibility was to allocate the country's radio frequency to Bangladesh Betar and that it was now for the latter to detect any illegal use of the frequency. The Director General of Bangladesh Betar has, however, spurned it saying to the effect that it was not Betar's job to find out the clandestine radio transmitter or the person or persons who engineered it. The T&T Board official says that they do not have any instrument to detect the illegal use of radio frequency. We do not know if Bangladesh Betar has it.

The incident has shown the chink in our armour. And to know a weakness in the system is a prerequisite for improving it, none could disagree on this. First of all, let's have an authoritative announcement as to whose responsibility in fact it is to ferret out the ethereal culprit. Presumably the intelligence agencies have a role too; if the law lacks specificity in terms of fixing the responsibility then it should be amended to provide for the same.

In these days of light-weight high technology portable transmitters could be easily available to dubious people. We believe the government in its own wisdom would forthwith mount effective surveillance on radio piracy after having plugged the systemic loopholes.

To Help Campuses

Five top intellectuals of the nation on Wednesday met with President Shahabuddin to express their concern over deteriorating university campus situation and sought his help in curbing campus violence. The intellectuals have acted laudably. President Shahabuddin has already done his best to call the nation's, specially the political parties' attention to the blistering problem. Nothing has visibly come out of all of his outspoken speeches. Now the intellectuals are asking him to do perhaps more.

The Jahangirnagar University situation was in particular discussed by the callers. The culprits were let out with quite benign punishment, they seemed to feel. The rapists and their accessories all belonged to a student party that has become an embarrassment to the government in this particular case. The root cause of it all is that while student parties use the parent political parties for power and protection they do not lend themselves to the latter's discipline. The easy answer is to disconnect all student parties from the political ones and allow the government to go about disciplining the student bodies by their own means, caring not for the connections that can linger.

There can be no panacea for the plummeting universities. But resistance to the decline must start somewhere. And the above is one crucial point. Another is full play to student power that JU students in general displayed in their recent resistance movement. The student parties have degenerated into stifling true student power and replacing it with mafia power. The teachers too have a role; it is sad that it comes so late on the list. While the beginning of the normalcy road must be made by political parties, the end part will lie with the university administration.

"Reflections in the Mirror"

Let me give you an example of my own hypocrisy. Do I recognize my poor neighbour-hood or kinship cousin? No. Or take the case of a young girl in spite of being ultra-poor has secured honours roll in her secondary examination. Have I lifted a little finger to put her through four years in the university? No. Yet I sneer at the West for their obsession with self and material goods.

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Another story, which is really a daily occurrence. A lady was going in a rickshaw in a residential area, perhaps for buying groceries. Suddenly a number of well-dressed young men converge on motorcycles. Her necklace and bag are snatched away. There are many bystanders and may be I among them. We are only on-lookers, clucking our tongues. There is a routine report in a newspaper next day. And we, who were there, go back to our own comforts. At best, a statement is issued by concerned intellectuals.

How about the rules and regulations for good behaviour? In fact, there are too many. One has to go through what Viceroy Lord Lytton called "a despotism of office boxes tempered by an occasional loss of key" to obtain a land registration certificate for one's ancestral land. If an investor wants to setup an industry, the one stop office becomes a hurdle race of sixty ob-

stacles. To stage a drama or a poetry recital various permits are required. And if I may plagiarize once again from Swapna Das Gupta writing about India, "cancelling a railway ticket involves one form and four ledger entries."

If there is one regulation, there are quite a few loopholes. The complex becomes straight forward when one has the right connections. Take the case of electricity fiasco in Mirpur-Kalayanpur. The tug of war between Desa and Desco results in

consistent blackouts for many households. At the same time, a quarter of the electricity connections in the capital city of Dhaka is illegal, and that perhaps is a conservative estimate.

But this is a minor delinquency. Let me talk about the privileged and the powerful. "There is a distasteful *quid pro quo* in the system", where one campaigns for maintaining traffic discipline by the rickshaw-puller and merrily jumps the traffic light in an official limousine. Let me illustrate with my own behaviour. Being privileged to have a telephone with which I can make direct international calls, I thought it

wise to be concerned about the well-being of the little people responsible for maintaining the line in the neighbourhood. As a cog in the state machinery they may be insignificant. But to quote Shiv Viswanathan and Harsh Sethi of India "they could be devastating as a spanner in the works."

I am afraid, I have been caught up in a mundane preface and deviated from what I really want to write about. Recently I read an engrossing political novel which should dis-

puted elder in the Pakistani Community was not there when his agitated compatriots burnt the book in the Plaza. Now that he was trying to calm down the militants and the liberals in his house, his daughter Latifa, helping her mother to cook the food was frustrated and angry. And she bursts out, "They all dream of power, those men. They're afraid of our generation. Listen, the Holy Koran says we are the caretakers of the world. We are polluting the planet, killing it, that is what we should be fighting about. And the rights of women."

Another character, a feminist deeply suspicious of an alien religion including her own muscular Christianity asks, "And when we talk about Muslims, I suppose we mean the men. Half of Islam must be female, but you'd never guess, would you? What comfort do we feminists have to offer to all those poor, abused sisters of toil who can be discarded as easily as you throw away a used book-licker."

As I was reading the book, news reports in my own country reminded me about what is happening here and now in Dhaka. An eminent writer and a poet who was in forced exile has come back to her own country to be with her ailing mother. But how dare she? She has written about the collective shame of our patriarchal heritage, may be a little too severely. And she may have hurt the sensitivity of the faith-

ful. It is only reasonable that they will vent their sentiments and protest. But what troubles me is the fact that God, the compassionate and the merciful, is never just a vengeful God of wrath.

Human kind is made in God's image. True faith must be reinforced by the freewill of women and men to learn the meaning of good and bad, of morality and ethical behaviour in humanistic terms. Her or his ethical behaviour is essentially a product of free will that embraces faith in rational conciliation of a healthy tension.

Looking back at history, there were differences between the rationalists or the Mutazilites and the more orthodox, the Ghazalites. But the debate has never seen the naked aggression that we see today. The rightful faith of the faithful must be respected, so should be the questioning interpretation particularly when an interpreter is a lesser child of God according to the patriarchal norm. Protests are in order, but not the revoking of a citizen's right to be in her or his own country.

May be I am wrong. When a social order demeans women to be lesser beings, such moral and physical humiliations are but normal.

Women and children are assaulted and raped. They bear the social stigma not the perpetrators. We, the dominant members of civil society issue statements of condemnation and assuage our conscience. Have I, or may be many like me, asked for forgiveness from our mothers, sisters, spouses and daughters for our cowardly inhumanity? I do not know the answer, so I ask the question.

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To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

Excellent job

Sir, As conscious citizens of Bangladesh we would like to express our most sincere thanks and gratitude to the Army and the Navy personnel who have very successfully put under control, the chaotic traffic in a few major junctions of Dhaka city. It is amazing to see and a very pleasant surprise for all of us, who travel around the city off and on for different purposes either by car or baby-taxi or rickshaw or bus. It is undoubtedly an UNUSUAL EXAMPLE that has been set by the Army and Navy personnel in such a short period of time.

The Police Forces responsible for traffic control in and around the city, should take a good lesson instead of feeling jealous about it. We are confident, if the Traffic Police Forces sincerely try, jointly with the Army and Navy officers and realize the present chaotic traffic situation in the city and we are sure, if they are given appropriate in-service training, it will not be very hard to control the traffic all over the city.

We have, in the meantime, experienced and have physically seen few points like, Mohakhali, Kemal Ataruk, Bahadurabad, etc. As of late, the Prime Minister has asked the Army to assist the Traffic Police to ease the notorious traffic jam at specific points in Dhaka city and at some parts of the Dhaka-Aricha highway.

This has made a world of difference in the traffic jam situation. Our traffic sergeants and constables have been given a lesson by our army jawans. Why not attach our traffic cops for a crash course in traffic management at the Dhaka Cantonment?

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We feel, all conscious citizens of Bangladesh must also contribute some way or the other to make the greater portion of uneducated people in the society CONSCIOUS about better thinking and make them understand not to create problems for others but help each other. We need to circulate news letters, pamphlets, posters and use loud speakers side by side as well, to make everyone CONSCIOUS about what to do and what not to — when you are in the city main roads.

nani areas — how successfully the unruly traffic has been controlled by the Army and Navy personnel. It appears — sincere efforts never fail. All of us should come forward and appreciate this kind of excellent job that has been performed by the Army personnel in creating a peaceful atmosphere in and around above locations. All will agree that a long outstanding problem has been solved.

Excited about the excellent job done by the Army and Navy personnel in controlling traffic in Dhaka, we feel that all conscious citizens should contribute to making the city main roads safer and more organized.

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next six months are critical, revealing which way the country will go, thanks to the machinations of the politicians, and our local brand of vicious politics of displacement, by hook or by crook. The name of the game is vendetta — you should use the way; now we pay you back in your own coin."

With the major opposition not yet ready for an all-out resistance programme before the year is out, this is the period to nip things in the bud. Some very senior police officers have been retired, including the batches from the armed forces. Political arrests at high level have been initiated of raked-up cases (topically after 23 years?), in addition to large scale detention of opposition workers during the last two years.

Now the Freedom Fighter's group is flexing its muscle in no uncertain way in two directions. A purging is planned to remove the "unqualified" and the fake members (watch for political witch-hunting); and the senior civil service in being criticised from the inside by the government employees' FF association. Also rent-seeking, nepotism, cronyism are being openly practiced and cultured (not a new trend).

What all these hush hush activities add up to? Divide, purge and rule is a very old motto. Who suffer most? Not the politically vanquished, but the common man and woman hoping for the rapid development of this poor, poor country. The latter has become the opportunist politicians' hinterland, to practice all the arts, mantras, and voodoo of bad politics.

A Low-level Observer
Dhaka

Kosovo genocide

Sir, Ekram Kabir's article, "Kosovo: Airstrike may not be the solution" published in the DS on 12.10.98 is in reference. He deserves thanks as for the full length article giving details of the problem which the Kosovo Muslims have been facing.

Thousands Kosovo Muslims have been killed while nearly a quarter million rendered homeless. The blood bath is still going on but the big powers are playing the role of silent spectators. I wonder why Bill Clinton's conscience was not stirred at the Muslim's woeful condition? And why it did when two US mission were bombed in Africa so much so that he illegally carried out indiscriminate bombings on sites in Afghanistan and Sudan leaving several dozens of innocent people dead.

A permanent solution in Kosovo lies not by stop-gap arrangement or patch work. The internationally accepted means in holding plebiscite there under the aegis of the United Nations — nothing short of this will bring peace — not even air strike as pointed out in the article.

The majority are fighting for their right and last but not the least they too have armed cadre — the KLA (Kosovo Liberation Army). Therefore the Muslims there can't be subdued as those in Chechnya, Bosnia, Eritrea etc., could not be. The world leaders should understand and take appropriate action to save the unfortunate suffering people in Kosovo.

Abu Imran
34A, Suklaldas Lane, Dhaka-1100

Kosovo: Please make the points

Sir, We know, Serbs massacre, followed by Bosnia-style ethnic cleansing in Kosovo is killing hundreds of people. About 100,000 were forced to flee their homes for this. I came through the following points from an international magazine and I request the UN, Ambassadors and High Commissioners of Muslim countries and Foreign Ministers to do something about it.

(1) Conduct airstrikes on

Serb forces and order no-fly zone.

(2) Recognize Kosovo's right of self-determination.

(3) Force Serb army withdrawal.

(4) Allow Kosovos to arm themselves for defense.

(5) Allow journalists to visit areas of ethnic cleansing.

(6) Allow Red Cross and other relief groups to operate in areas of ethnic cleansing.

(7) Open diplomatic offices in Kosovo.

(8) Arrest war criminals sitting in Belgrade.

(9) Strengthen ties with Albania and Macedonia to assist the refugees.

Nilmoti
Dhaka

PM's view on Taslima and her critics

Sir, Recent views of the Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on the writer Taslima Nasrin as well as some extremists is appreciable when she is reported to have said that some people are over-reacting by giving call to murder Taslima against monetary reward for her blasphemous writings, utterances and TV interviews.

The PM reported to have said that "Taslima should also know that there is a limit to freedom of expression". Her writings are vulgar not feminist. I being a woman cannot read her books. Sheikh Hasina added, Her analytical brief remarks are appreciable.

At the same time it is important to remember that the religious-minded Muslims cannot forget the blasphemous anti-Islamic and anti-Quranic expressions of Taslima. We feel it is the responsibility of the government that either Taslima or the prototypes of Taslima must not repeat their blasphemous and anti-Bangladeshi writings and utterances.

ABM Shamsud Doulah
President
Council for Islamic Studies & Research
Dhaka.

Tale of a president

Sir, It is becoming a bit tiring, Mr Uttam Kumar Das of Logistic Shipping Services Ltd, Chittagong, not understanding what I wanted to say in my letter and attacked again aggressively. His letter was published on 2nd October, '98 and it seems that he is writing only for writings sake.

During the six years of Bill Clinton's presidency, America has prospered, so definitely he is a successful president. What I wanted to say is that if he really loved Monica and without hoodwinking people resigned from his post, the people would have appreciated his honesty and remembered him as a president who was very successful yet did not hesitate to give presidency for love.

Mr Uttam Kumar Das totally misunderstood my point and surmises that, I meant, if Clinton resigns for Monica, only then he would be a successful president.

In one place Mr Uttam Kumar Das wrote, "Hillary is still Clinton's wife. Is it possible on the part of a wife to share her husband or vice-versa?"

If Clinton remains married to Hillary and become unfaithful to her that would be sharing him with other women. So would it not be better for Hillary to cut off relationship with her husband who prefers other women to her?

Nur Jahan
East Nasrabad, Chittagong.

The rest is silence, and is heard no more

Sir, Whenever negative incidents like "misdemeanour by the DC with job applicants" or "batton charge by police on journalists in the very presence of home secretary" take place in our society, we get a report thereon the following day through the newspapers. Incidents, alleged incidents, usually are of such captions, "Lathi-charge on headmaster for his refusal to let the police use the school toilet", "Unsocial activity by Imam of a grand mosque and his prompt denial", "Libelous comment on the prophet by a renegade intellectual", "Counterfeiting US dollars by a reputable printing company", "Selling bullets to terrorists by a shooting club", "Throwing dredged sands into the same source", "Joint secretary detained at the airport with fake passport", "smuggling of watches through tiffin carriers" and "Incest by a nephew".

The list can be endless though I prefer to note only a few laconic and pithy ones. As soon as these alleged misdeeds take place, we usually, and almost unthinkingly come across news items that "Hundred and three teachers of JU" or "Fifteen intellectuals from women's association" or "eminent statisticians or politicians" from a certain opinion or party have submitted memorandums to authorities calling for enquiry and almost always for awarding "immediate exemplary punishment" on the offenders. Authorities also start moving their wings. Late at night a spokesman of the home or law or the ministry concerned in unequivocal terms declares that a "powerful commission or enquiry committee has been formed to give a report on the incident. The government is determined to punish the guilty."

Since June, 1972, I have kept an account of the memorandums issued and commissions formed. Up to September, '98, Eleven thousands memorandums calling for punishments and enquiries were issued to authorities while eight thousand enquiry committees/commissions posted by the government. But the primary output has been publication of 120 reports only.

A very few have been implemented and the rest after suffering "active consideration of the authority" got coldstored. And the rest of overwhelming majority? Silence and is heard no more. What can one think of this but a tactic for appeasing emotion and wrath of the riff-raff.

Shall these continue ever after?

Iftexhar Hamid
29, Nawabpur, Dhaka.

Rest in peace

Sir, On the eve of the first anniversary of their mother's death, Prince William and Prince Harry called on the British public to put a halt to the public outpouring of grief and mourning for their mother. From where we stand it is of course hard to believe how restrained and graceful the English had been in mourning for their Princes. Even though the public display of the grief might have touched the thin line of frenzies at times, but by all account English reserve and coolness prevailed. No naming of streets, bridges and colleges followed and there were no discussions, debates or television programmes which the people did not want to watch. The logic is simple. These are not necessary to preserve her memory. Her well-wishers and others those who were close to her ensured that if there were any beneficiaries out of this huge public interest — it must be the charities.

The loss was felt heartily by the people and grieving was spontaneous and genuine. Yet the Princes felt the need to call for a restraint. Diana and her memory should be left to rest in peace. Our simple minds, of course, find such sentiments

difficult to comprehend. How could they want to bypass the opportunity for immortality of their mother and to bask in the glory themselves and their yet unborn descendants for as long as they can?

Is there a lesson for us in here?

Shahed Morshed Khan
North South University
Dhaka

Ban smoking at Shishu Park

Sir, It is now scientifically proved that smoking, direct or indirect, is the cause of many deadly diseases including cancer. For the smokers, they have every right to smoke. It is absolutely their business. But they have no right to cause any harm to others and destroy others' health. But they are smoking in the buses, in public places, and where not? Even the Shishu Park is not free from the smokers.

A few days back I went to the Shishu Park and found the environment of the park totally unbearable. It is not expected in a place where a lot of children are coming everyday. They are being the worst sufferers of passive smoking. Even it might give negative impression on the child's mind. They might be interested in smoking, seeing this done by their senior ones. I think, smoking should be banned at Shishu Park and this is to be considered seriously. Because, children are the future.

So, we urge the people who smoke — please, take care of your health, and think about your child. You should provide your child a healthy and clean environment to grow up properly. It is your duty.

I think it won't be a tough decision for the authority concerned to ban smoking at Shishu Park. All that needed is just willingness.

Rifat Ara Jahan
Applied Statistics
ISRT, DU.

Why Do Serious Crimes...?

I was born and grew up in Chittagong University campus and had the opportunity to observe every situation. I strongly agree with Dr M Masum. I think that every paper of Bangladesh should publish this article. This is the best and true situation I have ever seen and read in a Bangladeshi newspaper.

I thank the DS for publishing it.

Mohammad B. Mobashir
Catalog Information Systems,
Dhaka

Better never than late

Sir, I was eagerly and hopefully reading the column "Why Shrouded Universities Bleed?" written by Mr Abdul Bayes on 3rd Oct. '98. But soon I realised that it is not the subject which made JU bleed. Unfortunately I felt that it was rather intended to divert public attention from that very stirring matter.

We understand, Mr Abdul Bayes' urgency of increasing various fees, charges to run the university smoothly. But why at this moment? When other issue is crying for salvation! This could have been written much when he was the Treasurer of the university (JU).

Umme Latifa Angura Begum
D/8, Pallohi Ext
Mirpur, Dhaka-1221.

Neo-liberals will rethink now

Sir, Congratulations to Amartya Sen for winning the Nobel Prize in Economics. It is a great news for every Bengali around the world. We all are proud of Dr. Sen. I hope winning of the Nobel Prize by Dr. Sen will encourage neo-liberals to rethink.

Paritosh Ghosh
Dhaka.