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Congrats



PHOTO: AFP

Nobel Prize season is going on. The Swedish Academy awarded John Maxwell Coetzee the 2003 Nobel Literature Prize. On this, I felicitate Mr Coetzee for this gorgeous feat. Typically, this award is a slap on South African apartheid. He got the Booker Prize twice. I think the jury board of the Nobel Committee is judicious and sage enough to pick out suitable person. In future, Nobel Prize would be above controversy. We should panegyrisse the great personalities. If we fail to do so, our civilisation will smash in time.

Hats off to Mr Coetzee!  
Molla Mohammad Shaheen  
Dept of English, University of Dhaka

toring and Supervisory levels. If the present government is to "retrieve" its self respect to some extent including upholding the image of the country it should take the following actions with immediate effect.

1. Make a speedy inquiry into the cause of the failures. Identify the people responsible and take harsh punitive measures, not just suspension but outright termination across the board including people at the supervisory levels and not a mere technician here or there.
2. Make public the findings and punitive measures taken.
3. As an immediate corrective measure the Speaker should address an official letter to the Secretary General of CPA "apologising" for the lapses.

Frankly today I am reminded of that famous saying in English "With a friend like you I do not need enemies". Indeed with a government like that of BNP, Bangladesh does not need enemies.

Shamsher Chowdhury  
One-mail

I had decided not to write anything on the boycott of the opposition from the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) conference that is being held in Dhaka because no matter what I write, it is not going to make any change.

But the mismanagement and chaos that have distressed such an important international event compelled me to write something on the subject. How could such an important conference be in such mess?

The mismanagement has gone to the extent where the Commonwealth Secretary General arrives in Dhaka without any official reception at the airport. Can you believe this in a country where VVIP arrival and departure are considered one of the most important official events? How could this happen in a country where it has been made one of the solemn duties of our cabinet members (no matter how large the cabinet is) to line up in a row on the runway (no matter how important matters they might be pending at their desks) just to bid farewell or to receive our own Prime Minister with due festive and fervour every time she is on official visits! Reception of the opposition leader at the airport is no less colourful than the Prime Minister herself. Although there would not be any official protocol to receive the opposition leader at the airport (understandably so given the relationship between the two parties), it has become customary for thousands of party workers to flood the airport area to receive their beloved leader! Perhaps the whole conundrum is just a reminder of how chaotic our political system is with the non-cooperation, arrogance and incompetence of the two major political parties.

If for one day, I was given the chance to say just two words to our political leaders at the parliament (on one of those rare moments when the opposition is not boycotting the parliament), I would have said to our great politicians, "grow up". Only if they listened to me!

K M Zubair Sadeque  
Duke University, USA

Bureaucracy needs to be liable

In Bangladesh, with the removal of any political party from power in democratic way or other movement, the mass and media always expose the irregularities, political dishonesty and scandals of the departing government. And it has become our culture when a new party comes to power it brings corruption charges and takes legal actions against its rival political individuals.

For this, many politicians, MPs and ministers have been jailed with or without genuine reasons though they are able to escape through loopholes of our legal framework. Anyway, whatever happens regarding politics, general people are very much aware of politicians' deeds and misdeeds and can change a government if they lose their confi-

dence in it.

But general people don't know what to do with many corrupted civil servants. Corruption like bribery is the most common practice of these officials. Without paying bribe, people cannot get their works done usually. In many cases, a government employee takes bribe even for doing the legitimate work. Since, he is not transgressing the rules for doing the work, he receives extra money without hesitation. Those immoral government servants maintain a high standard of living and enjoy luxury with the extra income they get from bribes. Even they are respected with awe by their colleagues. Nobody knows the actual remedy against these dishonest officials. Their crimes remain unnoticed and unpunished and they are irremovable from their position.

So, not only the politicians but also the bureaucrats should be liable to law if they resort to unfair means of making money and their crimes should be disclosed in public as well.

Rubab Abdullah  
Dhaka Cantonment, Dhaka

The Islamic extremists

In last few months the law enforcing agencies have become aware of many hidden activities of Islamic militants in the country. Police recovered a big amount of arms and ammunitions from these people after capturing. In some cases the police found that these Islamic militants have direct connections with the components of the present government. Especially the relation between the extremists and the Islami Oikko Jote is very much exposed to the public. IOJ leader Amini in a recent public meeting openly disclosed that his party controlled almost eighty percent of the kumi madrasahs which are the main centres of these militants. The government has no direct control over these madrasahs, even the high ups at the education ministry don't know what the students are taught in these madrasahs. In some recent incidents the police found that students are taught Lathikhela, Karate and even arms operating in the madrasa premises.

They are taught to fight against the existing laws of the country. The students are taught by overturning the government by force will enable them to implement the Islamic rule in our country. Even if they are died in this process they will be given a seat in the heaven as they are the martyrs.

The teachers teach them to participate Islamic agitation anywhere in the world to claim a birth in the heaven. As a result we find Bangladeshi young men are dying in Afghanistan, in Kashmir and many other countries in the world in the name of Jihad (war for religion)

Education and hostel opportunities are free of cost in these madrasahs and ninety percent students of these madrasahs are the sons of poor and illiterate parents who think there sons are in the safe hands of hujurs (Islamic scholars) and the hujurs will surely lead them into the path of heaven.

Thus the image of the country as a moderate Muslim one is greatly hampered by these extremists. It is the high time for the government to check the activities of these unruly people.

Nabed Noman  
Amborkhana, Sylhet

Natural gas price increase to "international" level

I refer to the continuing news items about natural gas energy price increases to International levels 'demanded' by the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank.

How does the concept of "international level" come into play when deciding what the selling price of gas will be within Bangladesh? The sale price should be a reflection of the production cost, with margins

Bangladesh - third time lucky?

Once again, Bangladesh has been ranked the most corrupt country in the world in the Transparency International list ("Bangladesh hits the bottom for third time", The Daily Star, October 8, 2004). This is very distressing. Do you think that we, as a nation, could try and bribe the TI and get them to move us from the top spot?

Z Ahmed, Virginia, USA

I am writing about the latest Transparency International (TI) report released on 08/10/03, which ranked Bangladesh as the most corrupt nation for the third straight year. This is definitely not the biggest achievement that we should be proud of, and instead of playing the "blame game", I feel the government should work to wipe out the corruption, and in doing so, change the perspective through which other nations look at us, for a change. The reasons behind

this debacle should be unearthed (it is quite obvious though!) and more strict actions should be taken to fight corruption.

Corruption not only "pollutes" the environment of our country but it also does not do any good to enhance our reputation as a progressive developing country. Foreigners are discouraged to invest in this corrupt environment, and to top that business personalities in our own country are also discouraged to contribute to the economy. I feel, to be worse than Nigeria, Pakistan, Myanmar and Kenya is really adding salt to the wounds. I hope we are aware of this fact and will be able to heal the wounds before its too late.

Aranya Syed, Dhaka

The Transparency International has brought out their annual list of the most corrupt nations in the world and there

you go, Bangladesh came in the first place for the third year in a row. Congratulations! Who said that we, Bangladeshis are good at nothing? Three times in a row should earn us some kind of a prize. I was so humiliated to see the report on CNN few minutes ago (Oct 8). Is this how the world going to know Bangladeshis: the most corrupt people on earth. What a shame!

Let me guess what the government reaction is going to be tomorrow: 'the report is false, baseless, exaggerated ...' and I also would guess that the BNP government somehow is going to blame the AL for it even though they left power two years ago. Déjà vu.

Amar shonar Bangla -- a hopeless place. Somebody give me a visa so I can run away and live somewhere else.  
Monir, Uttara, Model Town, Dhaka



Cheers! It's hat-trick time!

PHOTO: AFP

Clean up the mess

Dr. S. Amin's letter (Daily Star 3/10/03) "on forgery at BUET" exposes the deep-rooted chaos in his department. He has himself pointed out that a teacher was "convicted for immoral acts", another was censured for "mis-deeds", his departmental dean has "reported" about the irregularities by his two teachers in the press and another convicted teacher has (actually not) implicated his colleagues for forgery and so on -- so many unfortunate happenings in a single department. In fact his department, as also his statement points out, is known for its notoriety. Why not he tries quietly to clean up the mess in his department rather than going public? It is his failure as the Head.

Shumon  
Dept. of Civil Engineering, BUET

Hosting the CPA conference: A grand failure!

Much has been talked and written about the 49th conference of CPA in Bangladesh. Once again we have seen how our inept civil servants can disgrace the whole nation. Lately, we have met this humiliation of knowing that the organisers of such a grand conference couldn't recognise the flags of our neighbours, India and Sri Lanka; let's not talk about Australia, Canada, Cyprus or Fiji. We have the solace that a young MP is courageous and sagacious enough in singing the national anthem in front of a thousand dignitaries.

I heard the story of Commonwealth Secretary General Mr. Don McKinnon's ordeal at Zia International Airport from an Indian friend

first. He read in an Indian daily that the Commonwealth Secretary General Mr. Don McKinnon was not recognised by the people who were supposed to receive him. The saga continued as he was poised to be sent to a 'wrong' hotel and Bangladeshi officials were unaware about the whereabouts of the Secretary General.

All these events are taking place just because of the usurping power of the parliament and its secretariat have taken in to their hands without involving the ministry of foreign affairs. It is indeed a usual matter for us to take as much power as we can consume, and beyond that. For the sake and pride of the nation, who has the hat trick crown of the 'most corrupt country', we must stop usurping power in all respects and aspects in Bangladesh. Time ran out even many years ago. Now we have to run faster than time to earn grace, glory and honour by retrieving the lost time that has been incessantly earning us disgrace, humiliation and ignominy.

Ahmed Mohiuddin  
One-mail

The 8th of October 2003 has been one of the worst days for me in recent times with the news of the CPA Conference being marred by serious lapses of the management coupled with the Transparency International's recognition of Bangladesh topping the list of corrupt countries. This is downright outrageous and debilitating for any conscious citizen of the country. Bangladesh is not new to hosting of International Conferences and hence no "conspiracy" theory please. What happened was a classic example of negligence of duties on the part of the concerned officials including those at the Moni-

added for profits and future expansion. Taking these factors into account gas price in Bangladesh should be 50 per cent of the price that the WB and ADB are trying to force down our throats.

The other fundamental question is the comparison of income level in Bangladesh to International levels? There has to be a correlation between people's income and price of utilities. It is criminal to force Bangladeshis with per capita income of \$400 per year to pay for gas and electricity at same "international prices" with population of USA, having a per capita income of \$24,000!

Natural gas and its conversion to electricity are utility products which any responsible government is duty bound to provide at the cheapest cost to its people. Bangladesh does not import natural gas or electricity, and present sale prices are well above actual cost of production. So arguments about 'subsidy' etc cannot be put forward either to justify price increases.

Low energy prices are essential for Bangladesh to reduce manufacturing production costs and be competitive in exports. Only by exporting more can we achieve accelerated levels of growth to reach momentum for self-sustainability. Acquiescing to WB and ADB 'demands' for price increases will keep us chained to continual poverty.

Putting it bluntly -- the real reason for WB/ADB to demand 'interna-

tional' gas price level is to increase the already bloated profitability of Unocal et al in Bangladesh, and to pave the way for these companies to ultimately take over the entire hydrocarbons sector in Bangladesh.

Finally, let us consider that natural gas prices in USA are at around \$5.00 per MCF this year, compared to median \$1.20 in Bangladesh. Can we survive if \$5.00 per MCF is taken as "international" benchmark for Bangladesh as well?

Baffled and outraged.  
A. Ahmed  
London, UK

Weekly holidays

I agree with the views that Mr. Jamsheed Taher shared on the letter regarding weekly holidays published in The Daily Star on 5<sup>th</sup> October. He mentioned a few valid points but he forgot to mention one point which is that if Friday is converted into a working day then people will tend to go home right after the Juma prayer rather than returning to the work place. All the offices will remain empty therefore. In order to prevent this situation from taking place I believe that Saturday should be a half working day and Sunday hereby be declared as a full day holiday (International). The other benefit of working a half day on Saturday will be that offices that are affiliated with the Western World and the US will have the chance to complete their homework on Satur-

day morning. As far as being in line with the Arab world's Friday holiday is concerned we have already put neon sign in Arabic at the Dhaka International Airport showing solidarity to the Arab countries. I believe that, it is time for the Federal Chamber of Commerce and other Chambers in Bangladesh including American Chamber of Commerce (Amcham) and BOI (Board of Investment) to start this debate regarding weekly holidays for the welfare of Bangladesh. Due to the fact that we observe Friday as a holiday, it has resulted in a hard hit in the DFI (Direct Foreign Investment) sector and also we do not see much local investors. I understand that there was an investment made in Malaysia recently which displays that our own people choose to invest outside of the country rather than in Bangladesh itself due to the fact that we lose about three to four days in a week due to the Friday/Sunday factor.

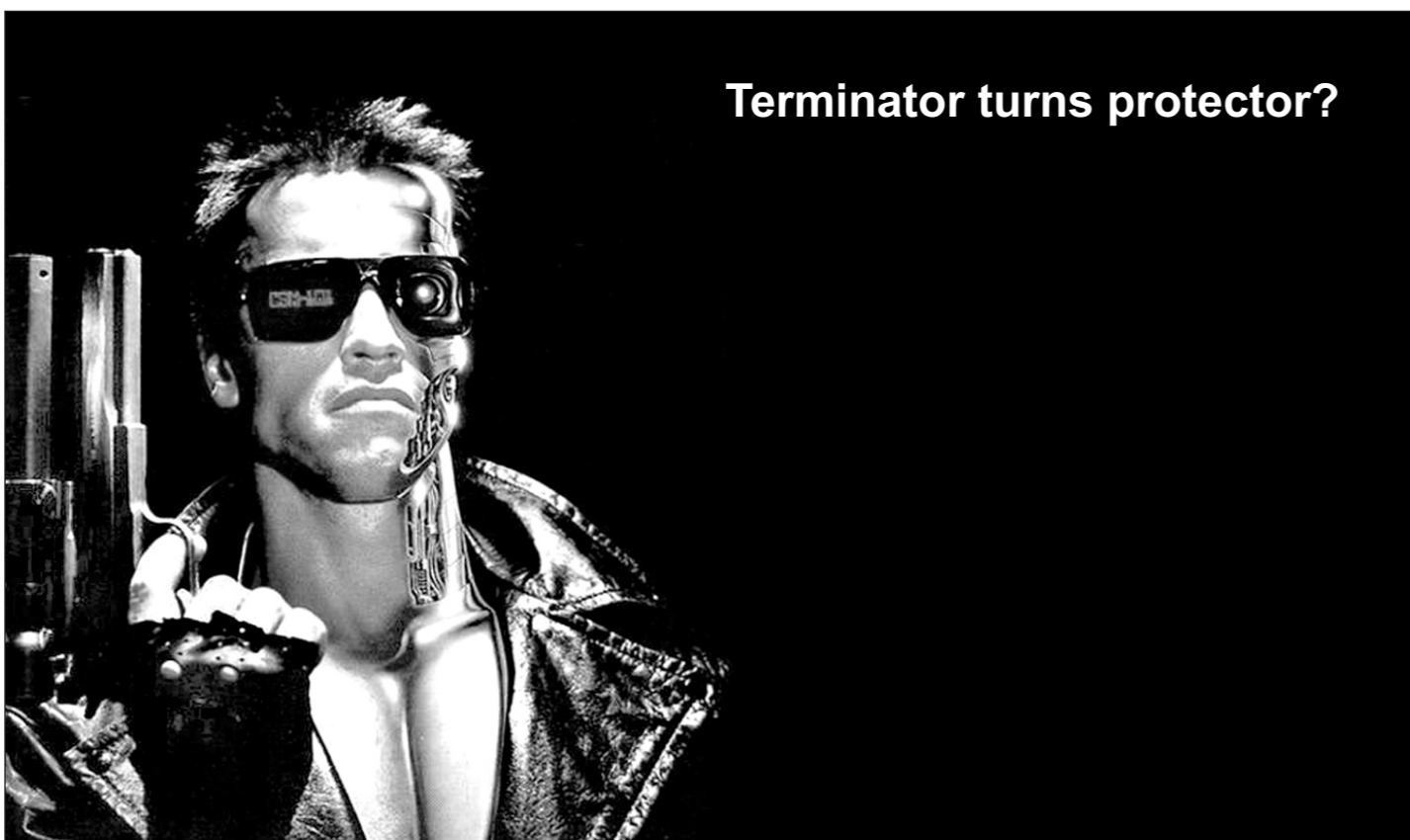
Emran  
Gandaria

In the wake of the new century, where all other nations in the world are thriving hard in the competition to make their products and services available in all possible means; we, the Bangladeshis people, find ourselves in a handicap position due to our own holiday practices. The international business here comes to a virtual stop from Thursday through Sunday, while we have our half day holiday during the late

hours of Thursday they don't find us here after lunch, similarly on Saturday they observe a half day holiday and we don't find them during the other half of the day. Thus we end up having only 3 full working days (Monday through Wednesday) to finish off with our international correspondence.

We all understand that in the changed world order we no longer have to follow the Middle Eastern region for our holiday patterns. Today a dynamic nation takes its own decisions in making the choice for their holiday practices and other vital issues. I hope people from all walks of life will voice their concern on this critical issue and build up a solid common stance, so the government realises its high time to change the holiday patterns to the international standards (half on Saturday and full on Friday). This way we can save a lot of hassle and confusion in respect of timing. Even the Friday prayers can bustle with more people on a working day during and extended lunch periods.

Mohammed Sajjad Hara  
Gulshan, Dhaka



Terminator turns protector?

The recent allegations of Arnold Schwarzenegger's past sexual misconduct has most certainly "sexed-up" his bid to run for election in California. The broadcast of these revelations appears more to do with raising TV ratings for the various chat shows and increase the sale of the tabloid press, rather than to embark upon a genuine discourse on the moral dimension of his sexual misconduct. In addition it might also encourage the despondent voters to take more of an active role in the political process.

This issue raises the classic question of individual versus the society. First point to highlight is that far more numerous and serious sexual crimes that are pervasive, are not receiving the same level of attention by the media that they deserve. Which immediately raises doubts on the motivation for raising the issue of Arnold's past sexual misconduct. What is more stark is the fact that somehow the American societies expectation of a higher level of ethical behaviour towards the opposite sex then what has been shown by Arnold, which is a very mild case when compared to the likes of Monica and Clinton as an example. Furthermore, the expectation for such behaviour is more of a by-product of the recent craze to achieve gender "equality" rather than a belief in certain ethics, since in the

vast majority of the cases it is the male species that initiates the hunt resulting in sexual harassment.

Coming back to the issue of the individual versus society. The influence of society is no doubt far more dominant in shaping and influencing the behaviour of the individual then the code of ethics that may be upheld by the respected individual. Fashion, music and film industries are the trend-setters, influences the young and the old through the power of mass media and consumer culture. Liberal democracy along with the popular culture is constantly pushing the boundaries of freedom in the realms of sexual activity, thus agitating the sexual instinct constantly. An example of this agitation is the revealing clothes (particularly for females) that are constantly deployed by the fashion, film and the music industry as trends setters, which are often justified under the pretext of expressing individual freedom rather than honestly admitting that it's purpose is of enticing the opposite sex. The same trend-setters glorify the acquisition of multiple female partners as a sign of manhood, and every teenager to adult aspires to what they say "score".

Arnie is simply a product of such a climate as he went about womanising. Take the recent chart hit from the two Rumanian

sisters, "Cheeky girls and cheeky boys", where the lyric goes on to state "don't be shy come and touch my bum", is exactly what perhaps Arnold did. As a consequence of this notion of "freedom", American society is exhibiting its promiscuous nature, rampant sexual debauchery, and she is one of the largest producers and consumers of pornography. Promiscuity has reached epidemic proportion whereby the notions of marriage vows, adultery and fornication have been rendered meaningless. Under such circumstances how does such a society expect individual to exercise restraint unilaterally to the isolation of everything else, a behaviour that more appropriately be expected from lets say the Islamic "fundamentalists". A good analogy is perhaps expecting the masses not to consume drugs whilst making it available and fashionable by the society around the individual! Hence this self-righteous criticism of Arnold's past conduct illustrates hypocrisy and naiveté, for which many around the world has labelled America as an "immature nation". Evidences of immaturity, confusion and naiveté can be found by a cursory glance at the numerous laughable and at time moronic chat shows, Jerry Springer being the most prominent.

Yamin Zakaria, UK, London