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'Chander Gari'

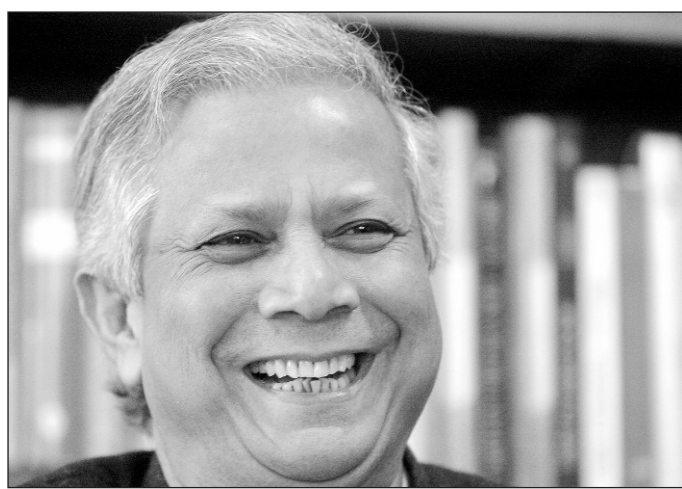
Part jeep, part pick-up van, "Chander Gari" is a strange vehicle that has a miraculous carrying capacity. One can see passengers clinging from the back, sitting on the roof, hanging from the sides--to speak nothing about those who sit inside. Even some folks, adventurous as they are, huddle on the bonnet in front of the front window. How the driver manages to see his way is a matter of speculation.

In addition to passengers, the vehicle also carries timber, vegetables, and other goods. Crammed with people or things, the vehicle moves at a decent speed through the narrow roads--medalled, gravelly or dusty--to the remote corners of Chittagong. Rain or shine, the vehicles must ply the arteries of the said place.

The illustrations on the sides of this carrier--balloons, rockets, and flowers-- are eye-catching. In fact, the motifs of these paintings are unpretentious and rather humdrum.

Those city-dwellers who wonder at the amazing carrying capacity of a tempo should see this vehicle, which often gives the impression of a dead beetle, swarmed with ants.

Zabed Wali
On e-mail



Prof. Yunus' comments

Prof. Yunus' comments must have touched a real raw nerve among political leaders. They are now trying desperately to deflect public attention from his statements lest it gives rise to a tidal wave of public discontent and stirs up the forces behind the current emergency into action.

They are raising three 'red herrings' in their desperation to deflect attention:

(1) Claiming that not all politicians are corrupt, so Prof. Yunus cannot condemn them wholesale.

But, they know and the public understands very well what Prof. Yunus meant. He did not mean all politicians; he meant the godfathers and top leaders of the major political parties.

(2) Claiming that many politicians have sacrificed their lives for the independence of Bangladesh.

Prof. Yunus is not talking about history. He is talking about politics today and everyone knows this very well. Mr. Ershad, first at the top levels of government, first instituted corruption in Bangladesh. The Awami League, true to its socialist roots, then brought it down to the grassroots level, and then the BNP maximised it to their own benefit.

(3) Casting doubt on Prof. Yunus himself.

The Nobel Peace Prize is an iron-clad armour that will deflect personal criticisms of Prof. Yunus by such unsaintly interests. He has already proved his sincerity and incorruptibility through a life of service for the Grameen poor. In this context, it is absolutely reprehensible of Mr. Abdul Jalil to try to discredit him by calling into question some aspects of the Grameen Bank approach, the very approach that has earned Prof. Yunus the Nobel Peace Prize --- the first time in history that a peace prize has been given to a person for service to the poor. Prof. Yunus deserves an immediate, unqualified and absolute apology from Mr. Jalil.

The civil society of Bangladesh and the greater public must dare each and every politician who claims to be incorrupt to forget the words and truly reveal their honesty and sincerity.

We must dare each and every one of them individually to declare their assets and income.

And, we must dare them collectively to pass a law that any politician and government official must declare his assets and income in totality before he can stand for public office.

It is only such actions, not words that can disprove Prof. Yunus.

Dr. Zahid Khan
Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

National ID card

Bangladesh is going through a crisis in holding a free and fair election. For a credible election, a correct voter list is mandatory. In Bangladesh, we never had a correct voter list; whereas, a fair election determines peace, stability and overall development of a democratic country. This poor country has already spent substantial amount of public money in the name of preparing of a voter list, updating the same and voter ID cards. We can't afford to spend huge amount of public money repeatedly for experimental listing. The system of complete population census, voter list and national ID card, is a continuous process and it should be done by govt. agencies, not by any company or organisation whose main objective is profit-making. If each ID card costs Taka 50 to 70 then for a family of 10 members it will cost Taka 500 to 700 which is excessive.

I sincerely believe the total project can be completed at half the cost and I have the expertise to do the job with the help of local govt., health dept. and related depts, imparting a few weeks' intensive training for fieldwork. I have worked in this field successfully in a foreign country for seven years. I'll be very much obliged if I can be of any help to the govt. or in broad sense to the nation.

Dr. Abu Saleh
On e-mail

As you sow ...

It is interesting and funny too to hear the reaction of the four parties and fourteen parties to CA's address to the nation for which they took much longer time. With humble submission, may I ask a question to the four-party alliance that, what have they done during their last tenure regarding issuance of voter ID card? Is it so that five years time was not sufficient for it? Or, they did not think about it because catching fish in troubled water was more desirable to them. My same question is to the opposition AL, they also avoided voter ID card during their tenure.

Similarly, as against the fourteen parties' demand for arresting corrupt godfathers, my question is, are they the creation of the predecessor regime only or a cumulative product of unhealthy politics of our politicians?

Both the groups expressed their annoyance over the sweeping remarks of Dr.

Muhammad Yunus blaming politicians of our country. I have not yet seen any rejoinder from Dr. Yunus against the expression of annoyance by our politicians.

I would like to say that, in democracy majority rules. It is the responsibility of the majority either to dominate the minority or to share the responsibilities of the misdeeds (if any) done by them. As such what I feel, Dr. Yunus did not consider it necessary to give any rejoinder over his sweeping remark against the politicians. Our politicians should digest the remark of Dr. Yunus whatever harsh it is, considering the proverb "As you sow, so you reap". Alas! Both the groups could not reap as they sowed (separation of judiciary) too.

Md. Habib Mansur
Amritala, Mymensingh Sadar

Voter ID is a must

In (possibly) 1973 parliamentary election, I went to vote in the designated polling centre BAWA School in Chittagong and found that my vote was already cast. The presiding officer smilingly informed me: "Oshubidha nai, aapnar bhot theek jaygai deya hoyechhey"(No problem, your vote has been cast in the right place.) Ever since, I have never been near a polling centre to vote (The readers are welcome to pass any judgement on this decision of mine). But when the leader of Moha Jote (14 + parties) Sheikh Hasina demanded voter ID with photo -- being one of her main demands -- before the country's 9th General Election is held, I supported this demand 100 percent so that I could make my own choice in a polling

centre after long 36 years! Now, according to electronic and print media, the Moha Jote has backed away from their demand of voter ID for reasons, which perhaps is not so difficult for general public to understand.

I, therefore, appeal, as a citizen, to the caretaker/interim government to make sure that voter ID -- preferably the National ID -- is introduced before the 9th parliamentary election is held. This is a golden opportunity for the CG/IG to do the country a great service -- no matter how long it takes to do. The CG/IG should consult the general public to ascertain what is good for the country, and not the (failed) political parties or the diplomatic community.

Ashfaq Chowdhry
Banani, Dhaka

Terrorists' godfathers

We should immediately halt the proposed execution of the pseudo-Islamic fundamentalists and instead invite the FBI in and interrogate them to find out who are their backers.

If they are executed, then all possibilities of finding out their political godfathers will be lost. So the civil society should rally to stop their execution and instead propose to interrogate them to find out who have been their patrons.

And then the patrons should be punished. Else this scar of pseudo-Islamic terrorism will not be healed.

Irshad Alam
Berkeley, California

Illegal arms for students

I was reading "Daily Sangbad" internet edition. There I read a news item about Sheikh Hasina. She was exchanging greetings on Saraswati Puja with students of different educational institutes. She said ex-president Ziaur Rahman had given arms to students. We all know that she meant JCD, student wing of the BNP. We all know about that news. My question is who gave arms to BCL, student wing of the AL? I am sure it was not Ziaur Rahman. He was not that unwise that he would give arms to his opposition. Who was/is that culprit who gave out arms to BCL activists? Will Sheikh Hasina answer the question?

Desh Premik
On e-mail

Shuffling of civil servants

The politicisation and subsequent removal or frequent shuffling of civil servants are going to have a serious impact on our civil administration. Big business - especially multinationals - is going to exploit the resulting vacuum of able civil servants. The residual sub-standard cadre is going to be no match for the devious strategies of the well-trained multinational executives. These executives will extract undue favours with lasting deleterious impact on our already poor revenue generation stream in exchange of promises to provide employment to civil servants' relatives or, even worse, invitations to cocktails for free drinks.

Such cases are rampant. However, they are done in such a style that the special favours extracted by the multinationals never surface. More importantly, these misdeeds of gigantic proportions, mostly in the form of various tax benefits, are camouflaged by widely publicized corporate social responsibility projects of limited impact on society. This makes it very hard for the civil servants to believe that the noble multinationals can be up to such deception.

I would, therefore, sincerely request the civil service to be ever vigilant against any such evil designs by the multinationals during this transitional period.

Delwar Jahid
Research Fellow
St. Paul's College
University of Manitoba, Canada

'Monumental

mistakes'

This is in response to the letter by Shapan Biswas with the above title, 24 Jan. Interesting letters and articles appear in The Daily Star every day. But the ones I find really interesting are those that beat around the bush for a while and then reveal their true colour, which is: the way the BNP-led government has run the country is wrong, all those bureaucrats and advisers selected by the BNP-led alliance are bad people, and this country will turn into a heaven if Awami League ran the affairs! Awami League, by the way, is one of the two biggest (disturbing) organisations in this country (the other being BNP, of course).

Now, going back to the list of monumental mistakes (according to Shapan Biswas) made by President Iajuddin Ahmed, may be the list is absolutely correct. But there is another mistake, which is a lot worse and far more damaging to this country than any mistakes made by AL, BNP, Ershad regime, or anyone else. It is the mistake the people of Bangladesh have been making since 1991. Yes, going out on the streets and dancing in support of BNP and AL is the biggest mistake we have been making!

If someone undermines our democratic values, damages our economy and puts the security of our country at risk, that person ceases to be a patriot. And they don't deserve loudspeakers to give long speeches of lies. They deserve a fair trial nothing more. The sooner we admit this the better it is for our country. Or, we can waste another ten years and thousands of Daily Star columns, beating around the bush. The choice is ours.

Azad Miah
Oldham, UK

Rajuk's awakening

On behalf of the thousands of city-dwellers who are thankful that Rajuk and the DCC have finally started the demolition of illegal structures around Gulshan Lake and other areas, I would like to register my delight at these authorities' recovery of their long-lost fortitude and sense of duty.

There cannot and must not be any letup in fulfilling their duty and foiling the dreams of those who knowingly flouted the law under the protective umbrella of powerful friends. Just as any other offender they should learn that their offence of land-grabbing is no less a crime and that they may avoid retribution for a while but the long arms of justice will eventually catch them.

Zahid Iqbal
Gulshan II, Dhaka

Term limit for politicians

The craziness we saw in Bangladesh is unbelievable; some politicians treat the country as their property. Perhaps flaws in our constitution have created them.

Please help promote term limit; two consecutive terms for MP's and only one single term for prime minister. We don't have shortage of qualified people.

I believe conscious people together can save Bangladesh through huge promotion of such move. Else this chaos will eat up most of our hard earned economic and other growths for generations.

Aminur Rahman
Sacramento, California, USA

Evicting illegal business



We thank the caretaker government for its effort in evicting illegal business vendors and demolishing outlawed structures all over the country. Such an effort is surely praiseworthy step, which in turn will give a different look to the country. But what happened at around 9:30 pm on January 22 near my house in Mohammadpur was an example of brutality, which terrified me greatly. Approximately 250 shanties got burnt from an abrupt fire, as reported by DS, in a slum near my house and up till now (23/01/07, 12.30 pm) it is not still revealed who caused this fire and why they did so to these impoverished people. Is it not likely that these shanties are being burnt

down in the name of demolition? Thousands of people of this slum are now homeless and their life is at stake since they have lost all their belongings. This fire must have been caused by a group of people who want to put a bad name to the recent move taken by the CG. We the inhabitants of the capital express our deep sympathies to these deprived people and simultaneously want the CG to reveal the source of the fire and give proper punishment to the criminals who were involved in such inhuman activity.

Nahid Ferdous, Mohammadpur, Dhaka



Fatwa

'Fatwa' is a much discussed subject in our country, especially in the recent past when AL signed an MAU with BKM. Recently in Zakiganj upazila of Sylhet arbitration has been ordered in rape case of a school girl. This measure amounts to a 'fatwa' which means a religious edict or a judgment after interpretation of religious laws, in this case Muslim criminal laws which do not take precedence over existing criminal laws. Traditionally 'fatwas' are widely proclaimed in our country and also abided by, for the fear of excommunication. But mostly 'fatwas' are given by moulvis who are not well-versed with Muslim laws and are devoid of sense of justice.

It will be relevant to mention the sources of Muslim laws so as to understand the complexity of the interpretations of laws. The Holy Quran, Hadith, Isma and 'Qiyas' are the primary sources of Muslim laws. 'Isma' is the consensus of opinion. It includes the explanations, elucidations and the decisions of the learned disciples of the Prophet (Pbuh). 'Qiyas' means reasoning by analogy from the Quran, Hadith and 'Isma'. In 'Qiyas', rules are deduced by the exercise of reason by the jurists. Among the Sunnis there is no such well-defined hierarchy among the religious teachers, as opposed to the Shias. 'Shiaism' is more dynamic and living. The 'Shiekhul Hadith', Ayatullahs or grand Ayatullah undergo an elaborate process of educations and

examinations. These processes make them real authorities on Muslim laws. It requires years of education, enlightenment and immense intellectual capability to become an authority on religious laws and practices. Contrary is the situation among the Sunnis especially in the rural areas. The half and ill-educated Moulvis are influenced by the rural elites whose interests are often contrary to the interest of the aggrieved and they are coerced into pronouncing a 'Fatwa'. These Moulvis are neither equipped nor authorised to give a rational opinion.

A common belief is that a Muslim is allowed to keep four wives at a time. 'Zaheran' or overtly the statement is true. But there are certain conditions attached to this edict or 'Fatwa', the first condition being that person is bound to mete out equal treatment to the wives. There are indications that it is not possible for a human being to treat two persons as equals. So, 'bateinan' or covertly polygamy has been discouraged. But a Moulavi always gives a 'Fatwa' highlighting the first part and concealing the more relevant second part. There are many more such instances.

Therefore, 'Fatwas' should be discouraged and declared illegal.

SN Mamoon
On e-mail

Guantanamo and beyond

Secret torture camps have become the symbol and order of the US politics in international arena. The US has set up labour camps to try, torture and kill the so-called suspected terrorists not only in Europe with the connivance of the respective governments, it has also done the same in other continents as well. One such revelation has come to light when the several countries including the UN chief strongly protested against the continuance of secret torture camps at Guantanamo in Cuba, a country that fights against the US hegemony tooth and nail.

The US detention camp at Guantanamo Bay, set in picturesque location, is now five years old. Tony Blair calls it an anomaly, but the evidence as reported in media for existence of torture camps is overwhelming. The torture camp Delta, which houses 470 men never convicted of any crime, has captured the attention of the global

media.

The US led forces fight terrorism with equally terrorist methods and thereby the USA negates values of liberty and freedom. That should be the starting point of any debate about what is acceptable in the west's fight with Islamist extremists. More than 750 men have passed through the camp, with nearly half being released. Many prisoners, past and present, have given consistent and repeated testimony of serious abuses and ill treatment. There is also significant evidence from US officials and government documents of widespread abuse at the camp.

The British detainees known as the Tipton Three allege they were also repeatedly beaten shackled in painful positions for long periods and subjected to sleep deprivation. They were also subjected to strobe lighting, loud music and extremes of hot and cold -- all meant to break them psychologically.

Other detainees have suffered beatings, sexual assaults and death threats. At least one man has been 'water boarded' -- tied to a board and placed under water so that he had the sensation of drowning. The regime at Guantanamo causes psychological suffering that has driven inmates mad, with scores of suicide attempts and three inmates killing themselves last year.

As is known now, Guantanamo is not the only US torture camp. Bagram in Afghanistan has been dogged by stories of abuse, and there are secret US prisons around the world where it is widely feared new horrors are occurring. One of the US's founding fathers, Thomas Jefferson, had once stated that any one who trades liberty for security deserves neither and will lose both.

One does not know, if the Bush administration would decide to trade in these tortured detainees in secret

camps all over the world as the hero of Russian novel by N. Gogol "The Dead Souls", written in the 19th century, did it by registering the dead serfs who died under landlords.

Interestingly enough, even US officials are even "shocked" that an inmate's head had been wrapped in tape for quoting from the Holy Qur'an. Another was humiliated for his religious belief and 'baptised' by a soldier posing as a Catholic priest. One official investigation found an inmate had been sexually humiliated and forced to perform dog tricks on a leash. Perhaps Mr. Justice Collins of UK is right when he declared on Guantanamo that America's idea of what is torture is not the same as UK's.

The USA, reeling under the heavy lashes of mischievous ideas floated by the neo-conservatives about imposing a new world order on the rest of the world, has no apologies either for such

secret torture camps being run by its various state funded agencies like CIA the world over or for its "war on terror" actually targeting the so-called Islamic fundamentalists.

As a country fighting for liberal values, democracy and rule of law elsewhere, particularly in oil rich West Asia, the USA should have been prudent in devising anti-terror torture camps and not to behave like a rogue state. Would President Bush, the assumed commander-in-chief of all such inhuman global operations against innocent people, think of considering alternatives available for advancing the US interests globally and also give up the terrorism plank increasingly used for domestic as well as foreign policy purposes?

Dr. Abdul Ruff Colachal
JNU, New Delhi