

## Welcome confidence-building proposals for business

Let these be implemented now

**W**E welcome the move made at the highest level of the caretaker government and its backers to jointly address the issue of dwindling confidence in the business community stemming from certain steps taken by the government. It is for the first time that Chief Adviser of the caretaker government and the Army Chief exchanged views with leaders of industry, trade and business in an interactive session designed to allay their misgivings about some of the impact of anti-corruption drive.

Some concrete assurances have been given to the business community by way of addressing their concerns. For instance, the National Coordination Committee (NCC)'s list of corruption suspects of 200-220 persons will be finalised and made public by the end of the current month. A list of 142 has already been released with that of the remainder 58-78 now being awaited. So at the end of this month, the business community would have a clear idea as to who will be pursued. Furthermore, there will be quarterly stock-taking of the level of business confidence and steps taken to fill in the gaps where necessary. The idea of Bangladesh Better Business Forum to be headed by Chief Adviser for public-private sector dialogues to reduce fear instantly strikes a responsive chord in us. Two specific concerns aired by business leaders are an unclear legal parameter of corruption and excessive red tape and undue harassment from bureaucracy. To address these the Chief Adviser has decided to form a Regulatory Reform Committee to review laws and remove unnecessary ones. Capacity building in select government institutions to facilitate business is a step that cannot brook any delay.

The real challenge is to implement the decisions. We have seen how directives given at the highest level were not being complied with at the institutional level. NBR and the banks are known to be asking questions about the source of money put in imports or deposited in the banks despite the highest level exhortations not to do it.

We have a set of 11-point proposal advanced by Army Chief General Moeen which are very important and of far-reaching nature besides being multi-dimensional. We suggest small groups of experts be formed to give a concrete shape to the proposals.

Now that the 'fear' of the business community has been allayed, we expect them to go full speed in giving a new impetus to the economy.

## Eviction of slum dwellers

Authorities must focus on rehabilitation

**I**N the last eight months, as many as 60,000 people have been evicted from the slums they used to inhabit. Even as they remain largely un-rehabilitated, comes news that the authorities plan to go for more such action against other slums as a measure toward reclaiming illegally occupied land. A pertinent question arises here: why must eviction without the necessary follow up rehabilitation take place?

A committee entrusted with the responsibility of rehabilitating those evicted was formed on 19 February this year. Incredible though it may sound, the committee, despite having been formed by the caretaker government, has largely been ignored. That is evident from the staggering number of those who have not been rehabilitated up to now. One would have thought the committee would be consulted on the matter, but obviously that has not been done. Among the people affected by these harsh measures have been young women employed at various garments units, rickshaw pullers and day labourers. What makes matters hard to accept is that despite specific directives from the higher courts requiring the rehabilitation of those to be evicted have not been complied with.

Such an attitude on the part of the authorities can only lead to some unintended consequences. On the one hand, it can send out the bad signal that judicial rulings can be flouted with impunity. Once such an impression grows, it is the concept of rule of law that takes a mauling. On the other hand, the failure of the authorities to rehabilitate people made homeless through the removal of the slums will likely spur many of their dwellers into taking up crime as a vocation. One hardly needs to point out how such a condition will add to the social problems we are already going through. In the circumstances, we ask the authorities to rethink the slum eviction policy. If the goal is merely to uproot slums and send their inhabitants packing without at the same time being serious about giving them new premises to stay in, everything becomes rather pointless and patently callous.

## About dictators



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

**G**ABRIEL Garcia Marquez studied the lives of Latin American dictators when he was writing his book *The Autumn of the Patriarch*. What he found was common knowledge. All dictators met one of the three fates. They either died in their beds at a very old age, or they were killed, or they fled.

If absolute power corrupts absolutely, then dictators are absolute in both ways. Whether they absolutely corrupt power before power absolutely corrupts them can be debated like which comes first between chicken and egg.

I have done my homework as well. I counted 34 dictators who are known as history's worst dictators, folks who are responsible for the death of 10 thousand to 20 million people. The list runs from Joseph Stalin of former USSR to Omar al-Bashir of modern-day Sudan. What I found was more or less aligned with

Marquez's conclusions, except that they came under few more categories.

Nearly half of them died peacefully, mostly in office, a quarter of them fled and died in exile and six of them were killed or executed, Adolf Hitler committed suicide, three were overthrown but are still alive and two of them are still sitting in power. Despite the many ways that life and career can end for them, the dictators are still significant in number. At this moment 70 out of 194 countries of the world are ruled by them. They exercise arbitrary authority over their citizens and cannot be removed from power through legal means. These tyrants suppress the freedoms of speech and religion, and the right to a fair trial. Some also commit torture, execute opponents and starve their own people.

What makes certain people dictators out of the millions? They are extreme people who

## CROSS TALK

The whole business of dictatorship is disturbing, because it's deadly concentration of power in one hand, which distorts many things. It's a kind of usurpation, probably the worst kind of it, when millions are constrained to live under one man's whims. But being a dictator means it doesn't bother him. It means one man has immense capacity to ignore the sufferings of many. That is also fates, one which all dictators have in common amongst them.

take extreme view of the world and they become obsessed with power until power makes them powerless. Marquez found something peculiar about the Latin American dictators, which might have had an influence on them. The most important amongst them were self-made men who were the sons of widows, the dominant figure in their lives being their mothers.

Even if an ilk of dictators is formed by mother's milk, other people have other ideas. All tyrants collect money and power, but they also amass bric-a-brac like the rest of us. Saddam Hussein liked to collect sci-fi fantasy paintings featuring menacing dragons and barely-clad blondes.

Adolf Hitler had a penchant for Bavarian 18th century furniture. Kim Jong Il is a video freak with 20,000 videos in his collection. Idi Amin loved racing cars and old film reels of I Love Lucy and Tom and Jerry cartoons, and

Joseph Stalin could spend hours watching John Wayne movies.

Do their material leanings speak of their minds? Peter York, a British journalist who studied dictators' decor for his book *Dictator Style*, recognizes that possible motives for collecting are compulsion, competition, exhibitionism, desire for immortality and the need for experts' approval. York has one more theory to add: the need for compensation. "Some of these people," he says, "were really very short."

Stephen Anderson, professor of neurology at the University of Iowa, has come closest to finding a biological basis for the urge to collect. In 2004 he showed that damage to an area of the prefrontal cortex can lead to hoarding -- the pathological cousin of collecting.

Anderson doubts that's the case with the dictators. When Venezuelan dictator Perez Jimenez fled on a plane in the

middle of the night, he was not so much worried about leaving the country as he was for the briefcase with eleven million dollars, which he forgot at the foot of the rope ladder of the plane.

One way or another, dictators show pathological strains in their behaviors. They want to rule by fear, but end up being ruled by their fears. An insight to the world of the fallen Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein revealed that he used to spend ever more time in the many bunkers beneath his ornate palaces.

He rarely slept more than one night in the same place. He received visitors only after they had been thoroughly searched and had their hands disinfected in up to three liquids. He used food tasters, and special teams tested everything he might touch including bed linens, toiletries, clothes and ink.

Many dictators suffered from delusions. Ferdinand Marcos of the Philippines believed that he was a combination of Caesar and Napoleon. "Papa Doc" Duvalier of Haiti had ordered to put down all the black dogs in the country because he thought one of his enemies, afraid of being taken prisoner and murdered, had turned into a black dog. Idi Amin of Uganda and Jean Bedel Bokassa of the Central African Republic were said to be cannibals.

Doctor Francia of Paraguay had ordered every man over

twenty to get married. Maximiliano Hernandez Martinez of El Salvador had ordered the country's street lighting covered with red paper to combat an epidemic. He also had invented a pendulum, which he hung over his food before eating to make sure it wasn't poisoned.

Juan Vincente Jimenez of Venezuela had a strange obsession with clairvoyance. He used to have his death announced and then come back to life.

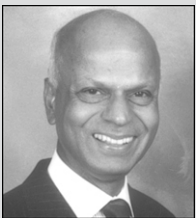
Thus the dictators are contradictions to themselves, strongmen who are inherently weak, their ruthless power, embellishing them with a larger-than-life image. Joseph Stalin was a pudgy man who used to be photographed on a raised platform to increase his stature. The self-glorification of Bokassa went so far that he had declared himself an emperor and wore the crown with his own hands.

The whole business of dictatorship is disturbing, because it's deadly concentration of power in one hand, which distorts many things. It's a kind of usurpation, probably the worst kind of it, when millions are constrained to live under one man's whims.

But being a dictator means it doesn't bother him. It means one man has immense capacity to ignore the sufferings of many. That is also fates, one which all dictators have in common amongst them.

Mohammad Badrul Ahsan is a banker.

## Barack Obama



CHAKLADER MAHBOOB-UL ALAM  
writes from Madrid

**B**ARACK Obama (full name: Barack Hussein Obama), the United States senator from Illinois and a contender for the Democratic presidential nomination, has got the rare virtue of coming across as an extraordinarily level-headed person in these increasingly polarised and polarising times when consensus building is usually frowned upon. As a result, he feels like a breath of fresh air to us who live in Europe.

I do not remember exactly why and when I started taking an interest in him. I think it was his name Barack (the blessed), which caught my attention. I did not expect a politician from Illinois to have an Arabic name. (His grandfather, Hussein Onyango Obama, who cooked for the British colonial officers in Kenya and later became a prominent farmer, was a Muslim). He has got a mixed race heritage. His father, Barack Obama, was from Kenya and his mother Stanley Ann was from Kansas. She was of European extraction.

Although much has been written about his sheep-herding father, it is only partially true. True, as a little boy his father herded goats, but those goats belonged to Barack's

grandfather. At the same time, he also attended the village school. From there he went to college in Nairobi. Later, he studied economics at the University of Hawaii, where he met Barack's mother.

Barack was born in Hawaii. Although I cannot consider him a good father (he abandoned Barack when he was only two years old), he turned out to be a brilliant scholar who got a Ph. D from Harvard, and held important positions in the government of Kenya. Then in July 2004, I watched Barack on the television delivering his keynote address to Democratic Convention. No doubt, it was a political speech laying out his policy positions, but it was also a sincere exposition of his incisive views on human rights, race, class, identity and conflict.

In the post 9/11 era of Bush's America, it was gratifying to hear an American politician say in front of hundreds of delegates: "If there is an Arab American family being rounded up without benefit of an attorney or due process, that threatens our civil liberties. It is that fundamental belief -- that I am my brother's keeper, I am my sister's keeper -- that makes this country work." I was impressed.

Since then I have followed him across the length and breadth of the United States giving speeches and attending conferences. Later, I learnt that before becoming one of the youngest members of the US Senate he had worked as a community organiser in Chicago, as editor of the Harvard Law Review, as a professor of constitutional law at the University of Chicago, as a civil rights lawyer, and as a state senator.

No story on Barack Obama can remotely be considered complete without mentioning the contribution made by his mother to what he is today, a brilliant orator, a pragmatic politician, and a man with clear moral authority.

Barack's father is remembered more as a myth than as a man. Barack's mother, Stanley Ann, who was born in Kansas, was a remarkable woman. Although born and brought up in a segregationist society, she had no traces of racism in her.

During the long absence of Barack's father, it was she "who was the single constant" in his life. In the preface to the 2004 edition of his searchingly candid memoir, *Dreams from My Father*, Barack wrote about his mother, "I know

that she was the kindest, most generous spirit I have ever known, and that what is best in me I owe to her." It is an appropriate tribute to an uncommonly decent and wonderfully generous woman.

While Barack's mixed race background has raised questions about his black "authenticity" in the African-American community, and prompted a string of racist hate mails from the so-called white community, it has also helped him not to have extremist views on race and identity.

Unlike many African-American politicians, he does not sound permanently aggrieved on racial issues. His emphasis has always been on reconciliation and not on confrontation.

After all, besides his mother, the people who raised him in Hawaii with great care and affection were his maternal grandparents from Kansas. Since he feels comfortable in both the communities, he can "work both sides of the aisle," This is the principal reason why he has so many passionate supporters in both communities and his fund raising campaign has gone so well.

Although he opposed the war on



Iraq from the very beginning, it would be a mistake to consider him a dove. He has made it clear often enough that if elected as president of the United States, he will not hesitate to use force to protect America's vital interests.

Now the question is: With all this, will he be able to win the Democratic nomination? Probably not. Although Obama has got a lot of charisma and an unbeatable oratorical flair, his detractors keep harping on his lack of executive experience.

He worked as a state senator for six years before becoming a member of the United States Senate, which office he has held for the last two years. On the other hand, his main rival for the Democratic nomination, Mrs. Hillary Clinton has been in the business of politics for the last thirty years or so. Besides, Hillary Clinton has inherited a uniquely efficient election campaign organisation from her

husband, President Bill Clinton.

But many polls suggest that Barack Obama has a better chance of beating Rudy Giuliani or McCain because of his vision and moral clarity. He is also "the most naturally gifted American politician after Bill Clinton." On issues like the invasion of Iraq, torture (Abu Ghraib), and violation of international law (Guantanamo) which have destroyed the moral and political standing of the US in the world, Mr. Obama has been very clear from the very start.

He has opposed them all. That is why he has earned the moral authority to repair America's broken relationship with the world. Bush has been such a divider that the Americans may want a unifier and a healer as their next president. Well, if that is so, Barack Obama is their man.

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## Shishir brings the charm of his cartoons to Japan

### CLOSEUP JAPAN

Cartoons, particularly those of political nature, have the power to convey the message on a particular topic much more forcefully than any written text on the same issue is capable of doing. And if the cartoonist turns out to be a master of controlling his pen and the brush, then we indeed get the message conveyed much more easily and many times more meaningfully. Shishir has that rare talent of being capable of not losing control and of keeping the touch of reality despite twisting the faces that he draws.

#### MONZURUL HUQ

**S**HISHIR Bhattacharjee has by now become a well-known personality in Bangladesh, as readers of country's largest circulated daily have been accustomed to seeing his witty drawings of known figures from the world of local and global politics in the front pages of the newspaper almost on a regular basis. They also adore those drawings, which provide a welcome relief from the harsh reality of the otherwise gloomy atmosphere of the political arena that we are used to seeing.

The messages Shishir's car-

toons carry are unique in the sense that, at a single glance, they can make readers laugh or feel sad, or arouse their sympathy for the personalities being drawn, or even get a sense of relief to know that what they think to be true deep in their minds can also be so beautifully portrayed through the touches of the brush of a master painter with the mindset of a deep social analyst.

Take the example of Tarique Zia offering a live, roasted, minicow to his mother by opening the lid of a large tray, as the leader of the opposition peeps with hungry eyes from behind the curtain at the back. You see the charlatan in our

political world, with the same face that we were accustomed to seeing on TV screens, but with the figure of a strangely shaped minicow, sitting right in the middle of the tray with a satanic smile on its face, and you need no further explanation to understand the crooked world in which all of them dwell.

Or in a slightly broader perspective, you understand the same surrounding of crookedness seeing US President George W. Bush kicking the back of the former secretary general of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, as the latter tries to get rid of the burden from his shoulder. And in another

completely different setting, you feel sad seeing Saddam as a caged lion waiting for the irony of fate.

Cartoons, particularly those of political nature, have the power to convey the message on a particular topic much more forcefully than any written text on the same issue is capable of doing. And if the cartoonist turns out to be a master of controlling his pen and the brush, then we indeed get the message conveyed much more easily and many times more meaningfully. Shishir has that rare talent of being capable of not losing control and of keeping the touch of reality despite twisting the faces that he draws. His Khaledda Zia or Sheikh Hasina are undoubtedly the same faces we are accustomed to seeing on TV screens. But a closer look reveals the ugly side of human nature that they nurture, or are simply ignorant of possessing.

And in dealing with the Islamic fundamentalists, Shishir is not hesitant at all to expose the behind the scene maneuvers of influential political figures who carefully nurture their existence with the

sole purpose of scoring political gains over their rivals. In one of his more forceful cartoons, an ugly and devilish looking Bangla Bhai is seen being given caring massage by a number of known and influential figures from our own political world.

Political cartoons in the media have a long history, probably running back to the days of early newspapers when illustrators played the role of photographers before the advent of the camera and the techniques of reproducing photos in newspapers. It was also during that early period that some of those illustrators tried to use a different method of conveying the message indirectly, by intentionally distorting figures and shapes of important personalities.

For the media of the time, there was indeed the need to be on the safe side, as powerful figures of the society could easily become vindictive and resort to intimidation if something had directly been said or written about them. Cartoons, seen largely as producers of laughter, diffused such possibilities to a certain extent, and allowed newspapers to carry

the message they otherwise were not allowed to do in a slightly different form.

The advent of photographic technology has virtually outmaneuvered illustrators from their known trade of being part of the newspaper industry. But one genre that survived the onslaught is the cartoon. It is particularly true of the society where there is little option left for people to speak their mind. Cartoons in such societies keep hope alive, amid the all-covering darkness. Even in the fully controlled media empire of the Soviet era, the satirical weekly "Crocodile" dared to touch issues that for others were considered to be simply taboo and, hence, untouchable.

It is said that when you cannot speak, you draw pictures. In fact, all our writings are the end product of pictures that our ancestors used to draw while expressing their feelings and thoughts during the early days of human civilization. We now live in the world of information, where pictures are no longer considered the right form for expressing the realities of modern life. So, in painting

we've moved to an ever-complicated form of abstraction, where the painters leave much of the task of interpreting the content and fathoming out the real meaning to us, the viewers. But one particular genre of painting that not only proved immune to this onslaught but also flourished is the genre of political cartoons that most of the print media all over the world are using extensively till today.

A number of renowned cartoonists, like David Levine of "New York Review of Books," have even elevated the position of cartoons to such a high level that there is not only respect and admiration for the artists and their works, but also a deep sense of affiliation and attachment with the messages the cartoons they draw carry. From this particular understanding, Shishir can be rightfully called as our own David Levine, as he too elevated the position of cartoons in Bangladesh from being a kind of filler in newspaper pages to something essential for understanding the reality of our society.

The Foreign Correspondents'

Club of Japan, the prestigious club of media representatives from around the world stationed in Tokyo, is for the first time focusing on Bangladesh throughout the month of September, as the exhibition committee of the Club decided to hold a cartoon exhibition of Shishir Bhattacharjee. The noted Japan-based Bangladeshi painter, Kazi Ghyasuddin, played a crucial role in arranging the exhibition of Shishir at the Foreign Correspondents' Club, and it was through him that the Club negotiated with Shishir who has sent 32 of his selected original drawings for the display in Tokyo.

All the works now being displayed had already been published in "Prothom Alo," and the media representatives of Japan as well as the guests of the Club are now having the rare opportunity to see for themselves the cartoons drawn by Shishir. Among the works are quite a few focusing on international politics, and also some of his noted works depicting the political reality of Bangladesh.

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