

Variety in employment

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SAADAT HUSAIN

HOW would you like.....to come up to New York and spend the day with me?"

Bill Clinton, former president, offering time with him as an incentive for donors to help pay off Hillary Clinton's outstanding debts from the 2008 campaign. (*Time*, May 31, 2010.)

I found the above invitation interesting not because it came from Bill Clinton, a former president of the USA, but because it opened a new area of job cataloguing. In a free market economy a person is free to trade his resources for a consideration so long as it does not invite social opprobrium.

An intelligent individual can rightly identify his marketable resources, protect and promote them, and negotiate with suitable buyers so that he can clinch an optimum price for his resources. For a run-of-the mill educated person a job means employment with the government, the local (autonomous) bodies, corporate entities or private employers.

It may be a white collar or blue collar job. Does not matter. It has to be a structured job with fixed remuneration at the

end of the month or week. The employed individual sells his knowledge, expertise and free time for a negotiated remuneration. We consider the person as employed and we are happy about it.

Actually, there are thousands of jobs and only a handful of them catch our imagination, far less our direct attention. People court many strange or outlandish jobs, beyond our normal perception, for subsistence. When we talk about self-employment we usually refer to pursuing farm and related non-farm activities, and professional practice in law, medicine, engineering, business, accountancy, consultancy etc. Established trade and industries are also included in the list, and they are myriad in number.

The theme of this paper is about the out of the way jobs which some people pursue for earning a living. At times, success in the pursuit of these jobs provides them with fortune far beyond moderate remuneration. They may also become celebrities in the process, but it depends on so many imponderables.

Unfortunately, most job innovators are not so lucky. They are poor people trying to eke out a living by treading an

uncharted path or pursuing an unusual job their fellow cohorts did not conceive of. I remember a poor person who would stand beside the road, demonstrate some rudimentary acrobatic feats, and collect tiny contributions from sympathetic passersby or onlookers as remuneration for his unsolicited efforts. Supply creates its own demand.

We were also attracted by the haranguing Kabulis, who sold cheap and unrefined herbal medicines to uninformed suckers at affordable price. Both the unskilled acrobat and the untrained Kabuli were poor people trying to scrape a living. I am still intrigued how they could maintain themselves or their families with the meager earnings which they garnered with all their efforts.

Thousands of job innovators are engaged in enterprises which are a parody of employment. The only good thing is that they do not consider themselves as unemployed, or create social problems as frustrated persons. A clear case of disguised unemployment.

We also have a phalanx of job innovators who carry out unethical transactions that yield them good returns. They are usually tricksters and underworld operators. Smugglers, bootleggers and gunrunners come under this category.

They innovate huge number of jobs and sub-jobs; unfortunately all at the cost of individual citizens, society or the country. Their efforts create employment, but it is dirty employment and does not show up in formal documents.

Actually, omitting these jobs gives a distorted picture of the real economic situation obtaining in the country.

Selling certain services sometimes brings us to the grey area of ethical correctness. Personal services range from highly technical expertise to unskilled amorous services. Advisory service, blessings service, advisory service, mystical touches, mentor service, protection service, escort service or simply providing time fixed company fall in this category.

Spiritual leaders of our country earn scads of money through giving audience to their followers. There is no extortion, no trickery involved in the transactions. The follower parts with his penny on his own volition because he feels that such audience is worth the transfer.

We have an interesting example from Bali, Indonesia, in this regard. Ketut Liyer has established himself as a faith healer not only to unenlightened rural folks but also to educated westerners, particularly ladies, who have to queue up to get an audience with him. He assures them of long life through some mystic counting and charge each of them \$25 for a single audience. Such stories abound in both developed and developing countries. He has been doing it for a long time, no one has charged him as a fraud or con-man.

I don't see anything unethical if someone sells his image resource through transparent transactions. If



Selling iftar: Seasonal employment.

some wannabe derives comfort and happiness by seeing and paying his spiritual leader or his idol he should be free to do so. The leader or the idol has no reason to be apologetic for transpar-

ently and ethically using his embodied resources, stature and image included.

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Where is our security?



Their security depends on us.

While national security deals with national borders and political sovereignty, the focus of human security is on protection from want and fear, and the freedom to live in dignity. In essence, human security ensures safety for people from violent and non-violent threats.

Z.A. KHAN

EVERYDAY our national dailies carry news of murder, acid throwing, extortion, mugging, stalking, land grabbing, theft etc. Such news not only troubles our mind but also makes us feel ashamed. Analysts opine that a broad majority of Bangladeshis suffer from a deep sense of perpetual insecurity, marginalisation, exclusion

from the "fortunate" segment of the society, indignity and violence.

There is no doubt that our society lacks basic security. Most of our people also suffer from uncertainty and fear and voice the apprehension that they may soon be alienated from the society, polity and even history.

It is a natural tendency to apportion the blame for deteriorating law and order situation on the law enforcing

outfits, who complain of lack of appropriate mechanisms, inadequate tools and the government's interference. Governments over the years have been neglecting the security of the many and did not take the human development agenda seriously.

Most of the development plans reflected the governments' eagerness to give priority to the development of facilities in around towns and cities while the majority of our people reside in the rural areas, thus exposing them to insecurity, political and economic instability and indignity.

The world has been concerned about human security for ages. It has attained a new dimension ever since Nobel laureate Prof. Amartya Sen and Dr. Mahbubul Haq attracted attention through their much researched concept of human development, which has gained appreci-

ation as a paradigm of human development.

They emphasised that we needed "a new concept of security reflected in the lives of the people and not in the weapons, one which is universal, global and indivisible." Although the focus and subject matter are distinct, they are also considered to be complementary to each other.

While national security deals with national borders and political sovereignty, the focus of human security is on protection from want and fear, and the freedom to live in dignity. In essence, human security ensures safety for people from violent and non-violent threats. It entails taking of measures to reduce vulnerability and minimise risk by taking remedial action where prevention fails.

Like other concepts of security -- economic security, food security, national security -- human security is also about protection. Succinctly, human security highlights the need to address the root causes of insecurity to ensure people's safety. Human security does not supplant national security.

The central strategy for promotion of human security is building an effective democratic state that values its own people and protects them to establish the government's legitimacy and state's stability. We know that when a state is externally aggressive and internally repressive and too weak to govern effectively, it threatens the people's security. A human security perspective asserts that the security of the state is not an end in itself, rather, it is a means of ensuring security of the people.

Rising unemployment and continued migration of people of low-income group who become homeless due to natural vagaries and delayed justice are but a few signs of insecurity in Bangladesh. Confrontational polities,

corruption and galloping prices of basic food items also contribute to our people's insecurity.

Our people are no longer prepared to take this state of insecurity as a fail accompli. We hear the vox populi crying out because of their undiminishing suffering. One apprehends that there might be a backlash if measures to up the ante are not taken immediately. Most people want:

- Protection from crime;
- Reduction of political violence;
- Respect for human rights;
- Easy access to justice and its quick dispensation;
- Equitable distribution of the state's wealth and resources;
- Service oriented bureaucracy free from political influence;
- Non-use of state security apparatus for regime security;
- Respect for political rights;
- Respect for rights to information.

We should recognise the fact that development optic highlights the positive dimension of the concept that absence of guarantee of people's security constitutes a powerful barrier to human development. We can think of the following to improve human security in Bangladesh:

- Addressing inequalities by equitable distribution of the state's wealth and resources. Remote rural areas should receive priority;
- Creating employment (skilled and unskilled) by promoting local resources based small and medium size labour intensive enterprise;
- Decentralising planning and execution of development plans to promote local participation;
- Ensuring construction of a governance structure that will be transparent and accountable;
- Reducing vulnerability caused by natural vagaries through damage

control, risk reduction and efficient disaster management. Red Crescent and other humanitarian organisations could be of immense help in this regard;

- Arranging distribution and recovery of agricultural loan. Monga areas should receive priority;
- Enacting stringent laws to discourage issuance of licence for procurement of small arms;
- With Bangladesh being on the transit route for drug peddling, strict anti-narcotic laws should be framed and implemented without delay;
- Protecting children and old people during political or social conflict;
- Building institutional capacity to discourage political highhandedness;
- Ensuring applicability of legal standards for violence below the threshold of armed conflict;
- Promoting democracy and cooperation among political parties to deal with all problems of violence and insecurity;
- Developing connectivity to integrate the nation into one society;
- Empowering ACC, RTIC, HRC and the Judicial Commission to punish violators of the rule of law.

Our people have shown tremendous resilience despite deprivation. Therefore, efforts should be made in concert to give a fillip to our human security situation. Our people desperately need to break the shackles of insecurity, which is possible if all our people, especially the political leadership (whose democratic credential is not beyond question), work hand in gloves to create a more humane society, polity and economy where they can live with dignity.

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New look for New York



SAMA BIN LADEN is building a 100-story terrorist training school at the former World Trade Center site in New York. The Jihad Towers (see pic) will be topped with a flashing banner saying: "Learn to kill infidels here."

That's what a Muslim friend told me as he took me to try out a new Taiwanese "jelly bubble coffee" shop.

I was highly skeptical, as you can imagine. "I don't believe one word of it," I said. "No way will jelly, bubbles and coffee form a palatable beverage for the

discerning consumer." I was wrong. It was good. No wonder Taiwanese drink shops are spreading around the world.

As for the setting up of a terrorist centre at Ground Zero, my friend said a buddy of his had seen it on US television news. "The terrorists were invited to New York by the liberal media," he added. Aha! That gave me the clue I needed. "Your buddy was taken in by Newt Gingrich," I said.

You gotta admire this guy Newt. Despite having the looks and intellectual/ethical capacity of the slimy water lizard after which he is named, he gets his absurd claims broadcast internationally. In fact, Newt is pretty much a one-man argument against having a free press. The governments of China and Singapore ought to pay him a fee. They probably do.

White House staff are right now working overtime to correct a belief among followers of Mr. Gingrich that US

President Barack Obama is (a) a Muslim; (b) born outside the US; and (c) an alien life-form sent to infiltrate earthling society.

My advice to Mr Obama's people: Don't fight it. If people think Obama is a Muslim, he'll get 1.1 billion extra fans right where he needs them -- in Asia and the Middle East.

If people think Obama is not American, he'll get a boost among literally billions of Earth citizens who have been turned off that country.

And if people think he is an alien life-form sent to infiltrate earth, folk with under-sized brains (like small children, nematodes and followers of Mr. Gingrich) will think he is "way cool."

Of course, there's always the chance that Mr. Gingrich may be right. Mr Obama's achievements are suspiciously superhuman. The guy won the Nobel Prize without getting out of bed.

People have been trying to pass the

healthcare and financial regulation bills since the dawn of man, 3.5 million years ago. Obama got them both passed on the same day.

Obama has other suspiciously non-human traits. He doesn't like ice cream, rarely takes alcohol and never drinks coffee. When he needs energy, he eats a mystery rectangular snack. Staff claim they are suspiciously, but they look to me like small slabs of kryptonite.

My files say people have over the past 12 months alleged that Obama is (a) an alien; (b) a superhero; (c) Jesus returned to earth; or (d) the Antichrist. No, wait. Those are the comments on my work appraisal form.

But let's all remember; life is so weird these days that nothing can be beyond belief.

Even the fact that jelly bubble coffee tastes good. Try some.

For more rules on driving, visit our columnist at: www.vittachi.com

