

How much is enough?

ANAM A. CHOUDHURY

NEVER before has Bangladesh been so well poised to embark on growth strategy and realise the long held dreams of the people of this country a peaceful and prosperous Bangladesh. But our chronic political instability and our political leaders' failure, whether by design or incompetence, to accommodate the concerns of the opposition parties to help create peaceful political environment make Bangladesh a difficult destination for investment.

Bangladesh has sophisticated elite, a well educated middleclass, and a strong sense of national pride. These are good grounds for believing that it can emerge out of this political deadlock, but unfortunately our politics is rolling on wheels of inevitability. As long as the eye for an eye mentality dominates the thoughts and behaviour of our politicians, there is little hope for a peaceful solution to our problems. An offer of compromise by the government would not necessarily be a sign of weakness. The stronger a leader is the more of a duty he or she has to make the first move.

In Western countries, most problems are solvable, as they sincerely believe that "politics is the art of compromise." When Obama became president of the United States of America, he invited Robert Gates to stay on in the Pentagon, and Gates agreed to work for the new administration. Republican Gates was the most important player on the Democratic national security team

for a couple of years.

President Obama also appointed his arch-rival Hillary Clinton as the secretary of state. It was a remarkable gesture. "That tells you most of what you need to know about President Obama's political savvy and his ability to bring others to the table to solve problems." We know from experience that in our country no political problem has a final solution. For most of our leaders, every solution is an admission to defeat. For us history is always a living reality.

Critics claim that, as part of a carefully laid plot to win re-election, the government has very shrewdly dismantled the system of

electorate is still puzzling over her decision. Maybe some politicians don't want to understand what the electorate is feeling.

If democracy is to flourish in Bangladesh, a fruitful dialogue is a must, and the alternative to democracy is a dead-end. As we all know the best guarantor of political stability is democracy. If there is one quality both the parties have shown so far, it is stubbornness. Amid growing popular frustration with the usual confrontational politics, angry voters are wondering if our political leaders really believe what they say or if they just stake out a position that suits them politically.

future. Now BNP is trying to stoke the fires in the streets, endangering peoples' lives and livelihood to realise its demand for restoration of caretaker system, but it scarcely talks about the difficult choices that lie ahead, like how to achieve economic growth and how to tackle climate change.

Our future growth will have to come from new industries that create new products and processes, and we must employ modern technologies to make our factories and offices more efficient. Global trade and technology lifted hundreds of millions out of poverty in many poor countries and we have to defeat poverty as well. We need to think both regionally and globally, which will require a wide range of policy changes and cross-party agreements on important issues.

Our country is gradually turning into a remittance dependent economy like the Philippines. Changes in the earnings of people start from fundamental changes in the supply of and demand for certain kinds of labour. Our policymakers should adapt their policies to these structural shifts and train our low-wage low-skill workforce into high-wage high-skill workforce. If we can build more technical and vocational schools and colleges, increase investment in science and technology and reform our education and training system, this country could be the one of the largest contributors to the global workforce. Everyone wants that the leaders of both the major parties should change their tune and refashion their policies and politics to adjust to this new reality.

The writer is a former investment banker.

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caretaker government. Surely Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will do everything to win a second term in power and naturally try to do so from a position of strength. Personal stakes are high -- not a single serving prime minister of this country has ever won a re-election bid. BNP's primary objective is to deny her a second term at any cost.

Our political leaders are not ignorant of each other's political manners, habits, thoughts and feelings. Unfortunately, Sheikh Hasina does not like the very sound of the term "caretaker government" any more, yet she has not offered any alternative. The

The prime minister is yet to say what she actually thinks about the BNP's demands. Perhaps she is in a tricky position. Refusing the demand risks election boycott by the BNP; concessions might give a wrong signal to the voters that the game is up for the Awami League, since the language of victory and defeat seems to be the only thing our leaders understand.

On the other hand, the BNP's conduct is bizarre and indefensible because most of the time it boycotted Parliament, allowing the ruling party to single-handedly draft new legislations on a host of controversial issues concerning the country's economic and political

We need your renewal: Come, Holy Spirit!

MARTIN ADHIKARY

ON Pentecost Sunday Christians celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the first disciples of Christ living in despair two thousand years ago. Pentecost is one of the five great Christian festivals: Christmas, Good Friday, Resurrection, Ascension and the Pentecost. The theme of the work of the Holy Spirit of God runs throughout the Bible testifying to all the works of God and the renewal of lives, and brings hope for all people of goodwill in a situation of hopelessness and despair. So Pentecost has great Christological, experiential and humanitarian significance. It brings hope and strength of new life to people.

The Bible, as a whole, depicts the works of the Holy Spirit as opposed to those of the fleshly or carnal mind. We see this clearly mentioned in the Epistle to the Galatians. Two millennia ago Paul wrote to them: "The works of the flesh are plain: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing and the like. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control..." (New Testament: Galatians 5:19, 22).

The Holy Spirit will come to dwell in our hearts and empower us when we acknowledge our weakness in our fight against the desires of the flesh and all our sinfulness.

We live in a sin-sick world! We sin against God as we sin against other people. We live in a world today which is full of inhuman activities. There are always sins against people

who are weak and who are innocent, and against women, children, and the have-nots. They are sins committed by those in authority and those who have power. Instead of serving the people they crush them, they create an environment where one cannot live with honour and dignity. The Holy Spirit guides us towards the welfare of our total personality: body, mind and soul. It is the Spirit of God that which enables us to live life worthy of the crown of creation, a truly human life. So the Holy Spirit is the transforming agent of God for his creation.

All people have the urgent need to repent for their failures, and trust in the Holy Spirit so that they overcome the devil. There is always the constant need for renewal of our minds,

thoughts and our whole beings. We need to receive spiritual illumination for understanding the Word and Will of God and the inspiration from the Holy Spirit for us to be vehicle of God's grace for other people, serving and caring for them.

The human race is facing too many problems. The dilemma and the problems that the world is in is a spiritual one. So the solution has to be spiritual. This is true for all human beings, who are trapped sin. Let our prayers today be that the transcendental gift of the Holy Spirit continues to renew our lives that we may be effective in the renewal and healing, peace and reconciliation that our world cries out for. Let this prayer be for all people irrespective of any religious affiliation for we celebrate life in God's Spirit, which is for the renewal all of his creation.

The writer is Principal, College of Christian Theology, Bangladesh, and a social worker.

Professor Muzaffer Ahmad: In Memoriam

MUNIR QUDDUS

PROFESSOR Ahmad will be remembered as a fearless activist-scholar who was never afraid of speaking the truth. In his long and distinguished career, he served the nation as a public servant, an educator, a civil society leader and a human rights organiser. In all his wide-ranging activities he studiously tried to be above partisan politics, concerning himself solely with the welfare of the ordinary man and the society. As the condolence messages from across the political spectrum demonstrate, he was successful in staying above narrow political interests that has been the bane of the nation in recent days. In this and many other ways, he was a role model for many.

Some of us have known him as a teacher, mentor and even as a senior colleague in our student days and professional lives. As an educator, he taught business ethics and related disciplines and was a beloved teacher to a generation of students. The list of his students is long and distinguished, including Professor Muhammad Yunus, the 2006 Nobel Prize winner for peace. His students remember him as a brilliant lecturer who would always make time for them and would graciously write letters of recommendations for them as they sought career opportunities at home or abroad. As an academic administrator, for a number of years, he led the Institute of Business Administration (IBA) in Dhaka University with great distinction, building it into one of the finest centres of higher education instrumental in producing future business leaders for the country.

Although a graduate of the economics department at the University of Chicago, widely considered as the bastion of free-market economics, Professor Ahmad was well aware of the limitations of markets and those of capitalism. As an economist he worked in the area of industrial economics (including readymade gar-

ment export industry), as well as topics in political economy. Among his many rich and varied publications, by his own admission, he was most proud of his 1980 book on state enterprises co-authored with Professor Rehman Sobhan, Public Enterprise in the Intermediate Regime: A Study in the Political Economy of Bangladesh.

Over the last two decades, his untiring efforts in building a strong homegrown environment movement have been a great success. As the President of Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon (Bapa), he led a number of successful initiatives that firmly established the pro-environment movement in Bangladesh. His other prominent role in civil society was as the founding member and chairman of the board of Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) and SUJAN, to oversee the objectives of good governance and combat the scourge of corruption in Bangladesh.

Professor Ahmad was a noted public speaker and above all a distinguished public intellectual. He was a scholar who did not confine his considerable intellect to academe, but had the courage to step into the real world to improve the lives of all Bangladeshis, especially the poor and oppressed. He will be remembered as a role model of all that is good in Bangladesh.

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(The Executive Committee of the Bangladesh Development Initiative (BDI) expresses its deep sadness at the passing of Professor Muzaffer Ahmad, an exemplary and inspiring public intellectual. Professor Ahmad was a genuine Bangladeshi patriot, scholar and civil society leader. BDI members mourn the loss of a brave and articulate scholar and wish to recognise his courageous leadership and his many contributions to the cause of education, anti-corruption, protection of the environment, economic development through building a robust civil society, and poverty alleviation.)



Prof. Muzaffer Ahmad

SHIFTING IMAGES

Changing lives by 'degrees'



MILIA ALI

IT is graduation time in the United States. Last week I was conversing with a close friend over a graduation dinner, and the topic veered toward the increasingly unaffordable cost of education. During the course of the discussion my friend said: "Education

has now become the most expensive commodity. My granddaughter, who is in second grade, attends a private school costing \$30,000 per year!" It took me a few seconds to absorb the impact of the statement. Education is a commodity? And, the price tag is \$30,000 per year for elementary school? Multiply this figure by eighteen years of school and add four years of undergraduate college tuition and board (which may range anywhere from \$25,000 to \$50,000 annually for private institutions) and what we have is an estimated expenditure of about \$700,000 per student for a Bachelor's degree.

Of course, I need to clarify that this is the upper end of the cost spectrum and my friend was referring to an elitist private school education. The fact remains that most kids in the US graduate from public schools free of cost and then apply for financial aid or student loans for completing their college education. However, the cost of education has been escalating. Even the relatively cheaper State Universities have raised their tuition because of budget cuts by state governments.

Consequently, most students are being pushed to borrow at high interest rates, prompting President Obama to sponsor a Bill to reduce the burden of student loans. As these reflections raced through my mind, I couldn't resist asking my friend: "But why does your daughter send her child to an exclusive private school when there are excellent public schools in the Washington Metro area?" "Well, you see we need to ensure that our children enter the job market with a competitive edge. A private school and Ivy League university education offer you exactly that," she responded. "Apart from the brand name, one can tap into the social network of university friends who are motivated and more likely to succeed in the job world."

The sad reality is that soaring education costs are compelling parents to calculate the tangible benefits of an expensive college degree. Young men and women with a Bachelor's degree from a US university may accumulate a student loan anywhere between \$25,000 and \$100,000! With the job market taking a downward slide

I must confess that I, too, aspired for an Ivy League education for my kids because I believed that a good education would not only provide a secure professional future, but also prepare them to face the challenges of life with more confidence and equanimity.

in recent years, it is becoming increasingly difficult for graduates to re-pay loans. Many parents are thus questioning whether it is worthwhile for their children to get a college degree. In their view, if an expensive education does not ultimately translate into a hefty salary, the investment is wasted.

Does this mean that college education is in danger of becoming redundant? Research indicates that university education has increased benefits for society through higher tax returns and greater civic participation of the graduates. However, detractors of college education point out that a large numbers of college graduates are serving tables, driving cabs and employed in jobs which don't, necessarily, require a Bachelor's degree. They argue that some kind of job skills training can well be rolled into the Higher Secondary School curricula. In addition, the examples of successful college-dropouts like Mark Zuckerberg, Bill Gates and Steve Jobs have made young people sceptical about the benefits of completing four years of university. Advocates for college education, of course, assert that among thousands who drop out only one may emerge as a successful entrepreneur or innovator like Zuckerberg or Jobs! The rest are lost in the struggle for survival.

What, then, is the alternative to college education? Vocational education may be a viable option for acquiring skills in a particular field and finding suitable employment with a degree that costs less and can be completed in a shorter time. Another evolving option that is being aggressively explored by leading universities, including Stanford, is on-line education.

Whatever future course higher education may take, I have problems accepting the idea that the benefits of education can be weighed in terms of dimes and cents. I must confess that I, too, aspired for an Ivy League education for my kids because I believed that a good education would not only provide a secure professional future, but also prepare them to face the challenges of life with more confidence and equanimity. I still hold that a college degree is not merely about gaining productive employment. It opens up opportunities for personal growth by molding the contours of one's character. As Albert Einstein said: "Education is what remains after one has forgotten everything he learned in school."

If I have the freedom and means to choose I shall insist that my grandchildren get a solid college education ... wouldn't you?

The writer is a renowned Rabintra Sangeet exponent and a former employee of the World Bank.