

Present predicaments and the way out ...

ENAM AHMED CHAUDHURY

For some inexplicable reasons, there appears to be a strange sense of complacency in the government. It could be because the government-party leaders do not quite know as to what to do, and how to act. They know that they have managed to land in a situation, and it is in their selfish interest to try and continue to be there, by hook or by crook, for as long as they can. And they perhaps know that under such circumstances, the best thing to do is to feel satisfied. And with a fake sense of confidence, to show Dutch courage, and to talk loudly, incoherently, irreverently and irrelevantly and also to act as such.

So much so that chief justice Khairul Huq, based on whose judgement the AL held the so-called elections to come to or to seize power, made a profound statement. In this country, said he, one doesn't know where the government is.

On the surface, there seems to be a lull, and this is because the nation is shocked, frustrated and almost dumb-founded to experience whatever happened on January 5, and the periods preceding and following it. This is where rule of law is being banished and democracy strangled.

Naturally the voice of the opposition is now subdued. Logically, there is no aggressive or assertive activity on the part of the nationalists and democrats. The party in power is intentionally misinterpreting the situation as the establishment of normalcy. But this is essentially a temporary calm. For a nation, particularly Bangladesh, with its history and tradition, with the spirit of liberation movement comprising longing for democracy, rule of law, equity and equal opportunities for all, cannot wait for long under an undemocratic regime.

Moreover, in spite of government run publicity and party propaganda one cannot but see the unprecedented scale of crimes and sporadic violence, nurtured by people in power. A nation cannot bloom and progress, democracy cannot thrive and economic activities cannot flourish under such conditions.

The looming uncertainties and absence of rule of law afflicting business and investment outlook have continued to persist with adverse implications for major performance indicators. This has significantly scaled down the over-all growth prospects. The slow-down of economic growth for the third consecutive fiscal year is likely to drag the GDP growth rate, in spite of the government claim to the contrary, below the threshold of 6 percent, as anticipated by all objective analysts.

For four consecutive months now, growth of export earnings has been declining: export growth was 3.9% during Jan-March of FY 2014 which was 16.6% during the first half of FY 2014 - July to December 2013. During the third quarter of FY 2014 (Jan-Mar 2014) growth of export earnings from RMG products sharply declined to 6.8%. Export earnings from non-RMG products declined more steeply by 8.3%, compared to the corresponding period of FY2013. Power production improved, but import of industrial machinery and materials registered substantial decline during the period, indicating low industrial investment. Collection of tax revenue by the NBR also indicates declining trends.

As the indicators related to investment failed to show signs of improvement, possibility of turnaround in the coming period looks very uncertain, and in all likelihood, would be negative. The recently published UNCTAD investment policy

review indicates the position of foreign direct investment (FDI) in Bangladesh as almost one of the lowest in the world. It is now only 6.5% of the GDP whereas the average of developing countries is 25.2%, Cambodia 59.4%, Vietnam 51.6%, the Philippines 12.4%, India 12.2%, Pakistan and Sri Lanka 11.4%, and all SAARC countries 11.8%. This is indeed alarming. With all the political uncertainties and with a literally unelected government in the seat of power, the abysmal corruption, inadequate infrastructure facilities with deteriorating law and order situation, it is highly unlikely that unless the situation improves, the efforts made by the government to attract FDI by high level foreign visits (like the current Japan one) will bear any significant fruit.

Public investment in the form of ADP implementation has also experienced the flow and dispersal of foreign aid has alarmingly slowed down. It is often argued that some of the government agencies do not show the required interest in implementing foreign aided projects due to stringent transparency mechanism involved, rendering practice of corruption difficult. In this context, the progress of priority projects, identified by the government individually after the assumption of power in January 2014 - the Padma Bridge, Rooppur nuclear power plant, metro rail, deep sea port, LNG terminal - all ought to be closely examined and monitored from the perspective of (a) appropriateness (b) timeliness (c) financing and (d) quality of implementation.

The awarding process of contracts should not compromise on the issue of quality and transparency, but what we see does not suggest that, awards of contracts on single-tender submission like the one recently done in the Padma bridge case, coupled with absence of competent international supervision is likely to be very costly, from all points of view. In the absence of adequate foreign aid flow obtained on easy terms, utilization of local resources and high-interest government borrowing will become counter-productive.

Lack of enabling business environment in the pre-election period seriously damaged investors' and businessmen's confidence, all the world knows that the environment will not improve due to continuing political uncertainty, rather, unless an acceptable and participatory general elections is held facilitating installation of a democratically elected government, the situation will definitely worsen.

The present state of lawlessness, violation of basic human rights, political tyranny, denial of democratic practices and arbitrary mal-governance has really touched the nadir. Parliamentarian Suranjit Sen Gupta said that 'these have crossed all limits'. Corruption has become so pervasive that, leaving aside big cases like share-market plunder, public sector bank loot, Destiny, Hall-mark, Padma Bridge, and departmental sale of government properties like textile mills and industrial units, even the gold medals, awarded with a lot of fanfare to a few distinguished foreigners in recognition of their friendly role during our liberation war, have been found to be fake. This deception at the state level involved, reportedly, the concerned minister and a few officials. What a shame!

People know in details about the gruesome and barbaric murders in Narayanganj, Laxmipur, Feni and many other places. In order to intimidate investigative journalists, the outspoken Editor of the Mathabhangha of Jessore was brutally killed like

Sagar and Runi, and his dead body was cut to ten pieces and put up at the railway platform for public exhibition. The ease and confidence with which the criminals are operating clearly indicate that they are not afraid of anything, they can act with impunity and that they feel that they can be protected by people at powerful places or in the government. The prime accused in the Narayanganj seven murder case admittedly talked with the local AL Member of Parliament and sought protection. The unfortunate thing is that in most of the cases of gruesome murders, daring abductions and other crimes there are proofs of evidence or suspicion of involvement, either direct or indirect, of AL party leaders MPs, ministers, officials to RAB and Police.

I feel there should be, as demanded by the leader of the opposition party BNP, Begum Khaleda Zia, a high powered probe committee to work into a few of these cases inter-alia suggesting warps and weaves for protecting the nation from recurrence of such horrendous crimes. Even RAB and Police have been accused of direct and indirect involvement in such crimes for money. As alleged, some cases, they also acted under political pressure. Indeed, every corner of the government has been politicized. People cannot now look upon the law enforcing agencies for protection. A sense of insecurity, freight and apprehension has gripped the nation. On top of these there is no democracy.

Instead of holding dialogue to make efforts for organizing fair and participatory elections, the government is trying to subdue the voice of the dissent. Regrettably, a political party has to obtain permission from the Police/authorities to hold any meeting, even if it is held in a closed door auditorium. The other day (26th May) the government prevented BNP from holding a closed door discussion meeting under the chairmanship of BNP. Eminent members of the civil society, educationists, senior journalists, cultural personalities, poets, lawyers, columnists, social workers, businessmen, retired government officers were all invited to discuss the present situation and to press upon the government to take urgent and immediate measures to counter this slide and bring the offenders to justice - even this was not permitted - a closed door meeting of such nature even though the police had been duly informed and permission taken from hall authorities.

The proposed meeting of the Supreme Court Bar Association was also not allowed to be held on the scheduled venue. Even processions and human chains are not being permitted quite often. Hundreds of cases have been, or are being filed against leaders and workers of BNP and its associate bodies.

Indiscriminate arrests and intimidation have become common place. There have been too many cases of abduction and killings in custody. By not allowing Begum Khaleda Zia to hold any meeting the ruling party has strangled the norms of democracy.

We have to come out of this dark and dismal quagmire. Our conscience should be whipped up and people should rise to end this intolerable state of affairs. The ruling party should be made to realize that the people of Bangladesh cannot be deprived of democracy for long. It is only return to democracy and re-institution of democratic practices that can reverse the nation's downward slide and save us from an impending disaster.

The writer is a development economist and advisor to the BNP Chairperson.

Indian Muslims: Neglected and lagging behind

India's future depends on Modi's ability to govern on behalf of all Indians

SYED NAZAKAT

THE numbers tell you half the story. At over 138 million, Muslims constitute over 13% of India's billion-strong population. That make India home to the third largest Muslim population in the world. According to a study by the Pew Research Centre, India will probably have 236 million Muslims in two decades time, on par with Indonesia (which has the world's biggest Muslim population). Muslims in India outperform their neighbours in Pakistan and Bangladesh on some social indicators, such as having lower infant mortality, and higher literacy and life expectancy. There is also a strong yearning among Muslims for education, including for girls. India has had three Muslim Presidents - and the current vice president is Hamid Ansari. Bollywood and cricket, two pan-Indian obsessions, continue to have their fair share of Muslim stars and the star of India's fast bowling attacks is pace bowler Zaheer Khan. India's most successful tennis player is Sania Mirza. And for the first time in India's history, it spy agency, the Intelligence Bureau (IB) is headed by a Muslim, Asif Ibrahim.

Yet it seems the good news essentially ends there. In 2005 then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh appointed a high level committee to report on the situation of the Muslim minority in India and suggest remedies to its deteriorating condition. Called the Sachar Committee report, it broadly showed Muslims to be stuck at the bottom of almost every economic or social heap. On educational front, 31% of Muslims are below the country's poverty line, just a notch above the lowest castes and tribes who remain the poorest of the poor. Only half of Muslim women can read and write. As many as a quarter of Muslim children in the age-group 6-14 have either never attended school or dropped out.

Overall, as the report point out, the literacy rate is just under 60%, lower than the national average of 65%. The report also noted that for many Muslim children especially poor ones the madrasas (religious schools) are the sole alternative for an education. And in way these madaras (though not as a substitute for regular schools) have become an important instrument of identity maintenance for the community. The community suffers neglect in government jobs. They continue to have a paltry representation in the government jobs - 3% in the powerful Indian Civil Service, 1.8% in Foreign Service and only 4% in the Indian Police Service and just around 4.5% in the Indian Railways, the country's biggest employer.

Of the 138 million Muslims in India, 31 million, or 22%, lived in the state of Uttar Pradesh, which is the most populous state of India with 13% of the total population. Three other states, West Bengal, Bihar, and Maharashtra had over ten million Muslims each. Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Jammu and Kashmir and Karnataka have five to ten million Muslims each. Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand and Tamil Nadu 3 to 5 million each, and Delhi, Haryana and Uttaranchal one to two million each. Generally, large states also have large Muslim populations, as expected. However, Punjab and Orissa, with populations of over twenty million each, had fewer than one million Muslims.

Many official efforts to direct help Muslim, for example by giving reservation, have failed. Funds get stolen, unused or diverted to non-Muslim recipients. Muslims are more likely to live in villages without schools or medical facilities and less likely to qualify for bank loans because of bias. Though India is a secular republic in which freedom of religion is formally protected, many states have passed anti-conversion laws, which target proselytizing. The main concern is the government's inability to combat communal violence and prosecute those responsible.

Yet the Muslims have to face an accusation of being pampered minority. Moving and migrating to different places is norm. Muslim migration to Muslim areas in India as described by the Sachar report is not good for Muslims. In many states the Muslims prefer to shift to the Muslim areas because of sense of insecurity in states prone to communal riots. These areas often lack basic facilities like water, sanitary, electricity, schools, transport and health care. Hence Muslim ghettoisation.

Seven years of the Sachar report and an economic boom later, are Muslims better off in India? There are only faint reasons for cheer. Perhaps the reason is also the community own failures. After all responsibility to prosper is not the government's job alone. Muslims have also failed to make use of opportunities say for example free education. Things could yet change, through good governance and politics.

After Narendra Modi swept to power in parliamentary elections, Indian voters have high expectations of his ability to boost the economy, but many Muslims are nervous about the rise of right-wing Hindu groups. Many Muslims worry about Modi's ties to the RSS, a radical group that envisions India as a sacred nation to which only Hindus truly belong. And they recall that he was Gujarat's chief minister in 2002, when Muslims were massacred in communal riots. The BJP surge has resulted in the lowest ever Muslim representation in the parliament. There are only 20 Member of Parliament - out of 543 - from the Muslim community. The BJP, unsurprisingly, has no Muslim representative in its 282-member parliamentary contingent.

Modi's allies say there is no reason for Muslims to fear a national government led by him, and in interviews, many Muslims agreed that he was elected to reform the faltering economy, not stoke the fires of religious hatred. All through his poll campaign he talked of development and good governance. His party, BJP won in 102 constituencies where Muslims make up at least one in five voters, up from just 24 of these seats in 2009. That indicates many Muslims voted for the Modi too. People in India and around the world will be watching whether he reaches out to minorities in the coming days. India's future depends on Modi's ability to govern on behalf of all Indians.

The writer is a senior Indian journalist based in New Delhi. He was awarded Henry Luce Foundation fellowship to promote excellence global religion coverage through the International Center for Journalists, Washington.

BEETLE BAILEY

by Mort Walker



HENRY

by Don Trachte



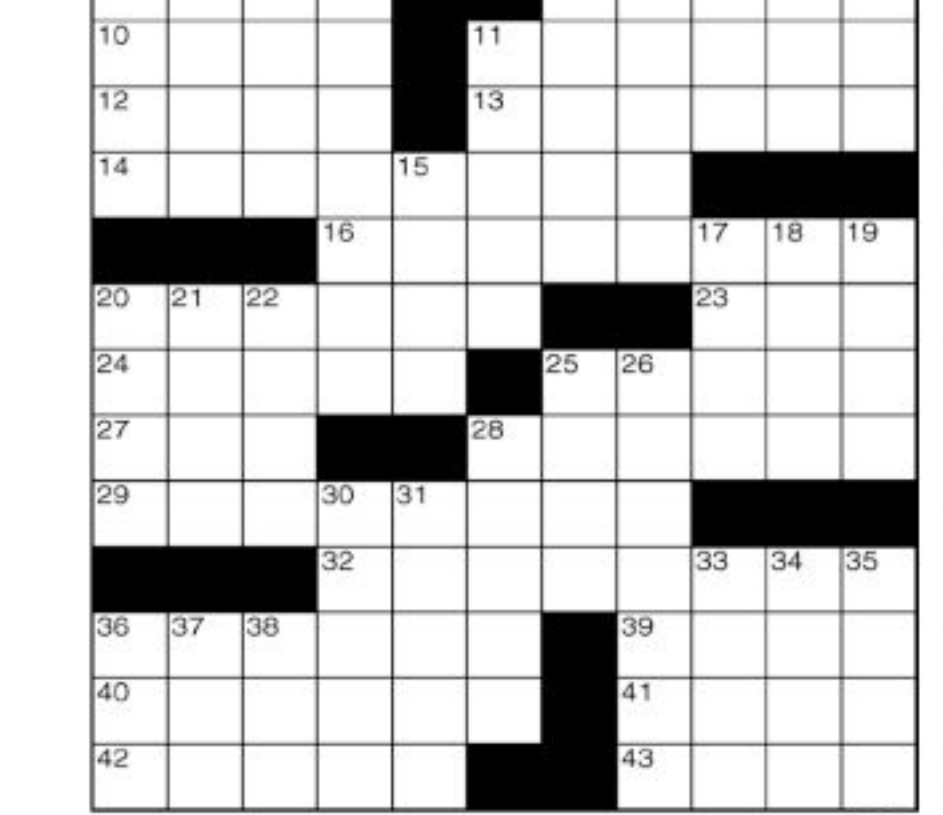
QUOTABLE Quote

Sometimes I think the surest sign that intelligent life exists elsewhere in the universe is that none of it has tried to contact us.

Bill Watterson

CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

- ACROSS**
- 1 Band's bookings
 - 5 Suggest
 - 10 Pop star
 - 11 Volcanic crock
 - 12 Boyfriend
 - 13 Started the bidding
 - 14 Central American capital
 - 16 European capital
 - 20 "Silk wood" star
 - 23 Noon, on a clock
 - 24 Blackens
 - 25 Scooter's kin
 - 27 Onassis nickname
 - 28 Lie
 - 29 European capital
 - 32 South American capital
 - 36 Go carousing
 - 39 Othello, for one
 - 40 Figures of speech
 - 41 Opposed
 - 42 Car parts
 - 43 Heavy metal
- DOWN**
- 1 Singer Barry
 - 2 Nantes notion
 - 3 Soccer score
 - 4 Sleep
 - 5 Cocoon residents
 - 6 Signs of trouble
 - 7 Immoral act
 - 8 Motel freebie
 - 9 Slugger Williams
 - 11 Appear unexpectedly
 - 15 Metal sources
 - 17 Trade fair
 - 18 Tall tales
 - 19 Flank
 - 20 Striker's foe
 - 21 By way of, informally
 - 22 Invasion
 - 25 Base meal
 - 26 Best
 - 28 Harvests
 - 30 Detest
 - 31 School events
 - 33 Solitary
 - 34 Letter after theta
 - 35 Like the Sahara
 - 36 Auction Signal
 - 37 Commotion
 - 38 2016 Olympics host



Yesterday's answer



CRYPTOQUOTE

KTJ KEVFEZJO: KTEK'M MALJASJ BTA BAONM YAO KTJ YJQJOC IAWJOSLJSK GHK QAJMS'K TEWJ KA KENZ KTJ PUWUCMJOWUPJ JVELUSEKUAS. -OASECQOJEIES

Saturday's Cryptoquote: COURAGEOUS PEOPLE DO NOT FEAR FORGIVING, FOR THE SAKE OF PEACE -NELSON MANDELA

A XYDLBAAXR is LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

CAREER OPPORTUNITY

NORTH SOUTH UNIVERSITY

The first private university in Bangladesh

North South University (NSU), the first private university in Bangladesh which follows North American standards, seeks applications for the following positions-

Information Officer (Front Desk), Registrar's Office: 2 positions

Qualifications and Experiences: Four year Bachelor or Master's degree preferably in English, Business, or Social Sciences. NSU Applicants will be preferred. Minimum 2-3 years work experience in a Front Desk job in an organization will be treated as added qualification. Candidates should be fluent in English and conversant with MS Office.
Age limit: Not exceeding 35 years.

Department Secretary (Dept. of English & Modern Languages): 1 position

Qualifications and Experiences: Four year Bachelor or Master's degree preferably in Business Administration / English / Social Sciences. NSU Applicants will be preferred. Applications with experience in related field will be given preference. Adequate skill in computing / MS Office are essential.
Age limit: Not exceeding 35 years.

Assistant Officer (Financial Aid Office): 01 position

Qualifications and Experiences: Four year Bachelor or Master's degree preferably From NSU in Business Administration / English / Social Sciences. Candidates with experience in related field (handling financial aid related affairs, student admission / registration, record-keeping and knowledge on university rules and regulations, acts, statutes and policies) will be given preference. Adequate skill in computing / MS Office is essential.
Age limit: Not above 35 years.

Assistant Security Officer: 04 positions (3 Male and 1 Female)

Qualifications and Experiences: Masters degree in any discipline (Arts, Science and Business) with computer literacy. NSU graduates with a 4 years Bachelor degree are encouraged to apply. The person having experience in operating and monitoring IP based CC TV, baggage and vehicle scanner, metal detector, explosive detector and modern electronic access and security control devices will be preferred. Well conversant in MS Word, MS Excel and other computer applications with good typing speed in Bengali and English. Retired Defense Services officers or with equivalent background with good health and excellent service track record will be given preference.
Age limit: Not exceeding 40 years.

Monthly Salary (for all positions): Attractive salary package & benefits will be offered to the deserving candidates.

Other Benefits : Provident Fund, Gratuity, Festival Bonuses, Group Insurance, in-house free Medical Consultation etc.
Only short-listed candidates will be called for interview
Candidates may apply with complete CV, two photographs, copies of transcripts by **11 June, 2014** by email or in hardcopy:

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