

Withering tulips on moral grounds

CHINTITO SINCE 1995

 NIZAMUDDIN AHMED

A *hobu*-diplomat has been caught (The Daily Star April 8; Shoplifting in The Hague: Bangladeshi diplomat to face music) far away in the Netherlands, having criminally pocketed a mobile handset. I thought the land was famous for training hydrology and land reclamation from the seas. If at all, he should have 'stolen' the Dutch technology to add acreage to the teeming population of a country that gave him enough book knowledge (A for apple, B for banana...) to go through an apparently rigorous selection process. Obviously that net has not been discovered by our public services examination committee to exclude the thief before the theft. Almost contemporaneously back at home, last Sunday to be precise, a rickshaw-puller, I dare not call him 'poor' for he is the richest among the rich, returned an iPhone 5S (worth Tk. 45K) to its rightful owner. The gentleman, the rickshaw-puller, not the disgraced trainee diplomat, called up the owner Saturday evening saying he found the set near Bashundhara City. The next morning, Md. Mizanur Rahman of Nature came to the house of the phone owner and was photographed happily handing over the set; thereby fulfilling his obligation. Salute, Mizanur Bhai. You are the 'freedom-fighter' we need in our fight against corruption. We need many more.

Three alarm bells rang in The Daily Star story: One, the apprehended Bangladeshi said that he was not the first 'thief'. Two, his denial, as is the customary response based on defence counsel. Three, some 'strong lobby' is trying to help him keep his job. Why? So that



Md. Mizanur Rahman of Nature, a rickshaw puller, handing over to its owner the mobile set he found on the street.

PHOTO: ZAMIL AHMED

in thirty years he can become our foreign secretary? Assistant Secretary on probation, Mahbub Shahid Shisir (his real name), told the Dutch police, as mentioned in the Dutch government letter, that "he followed several of his colleagues who committed similar offences and were successful in stealing items from different shops in The Hague." Who are his colleagues? Are they Dutch? Are they continuing in the Foreign Service? Contrary to his admission to the Dutch police, Shisir, when contacted by the newspaper, "denied his involvement in any act of stealing. He told The Daily Star that no such incident of stealing of mobile set had taken

place at all", and that "he has successfully completed all trainings and examinations during his three years' service in the foreign ministry but some people are trying to frame false allegations against him". So, the Dutch ambassador should be summoned, and the Foreign Office should lodge a strongly-worded protest against the false defamatory allegation of the Dutch police. Also in the same news item, a senior official at the foreign ministry, wishing anonymity, claimed "there is strong lobbying against any punitive measure against him..." Well, the rules as well as the strength of the interest group shall spell out the departmental action against him, but what holds for him in the

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works, or does it? But those privileged to receive formal education have no cause to look down upon the deprived. The disadvantaged may end up driving rickshaws, or slaving in a garment factory, or wiping sweat at a construction site, or sweeping the city roads at dawn, or toiling in the rice fields, or labouring as domestic help, but many of them have the dignity of an 'ambassador'.

The forthcoming city corporation elections is a case in point. Going by the revelation (DS April 8) in Chittagong alone, "fifty-nine councillor aspirants are literate and self-educated", meaning they do not have any formal education. About fifty of them have SSC and almost as many HSC degrees. Although there are a handful with bachelors and PGs, the port city is having the possibility of voting half-educated people to the city corporation, which is acceptable, as long as the elected reps carry out their responsibilities with integrity, sincerity, devotion and patriotism.

What is the point of an 'education' which does not teach us to distinguish between a tulip flower and a mobile handset? What is the use of that education which inspires fraudulent university teachers to lie in their professional application, and stops their biased (read debauched) superiors from taking appropriate action? Where did education fail that the virtuous line distinguishing the 'learned' and the 'corrupt' has vanished?

We need to catch ethics early. Preparing for BCS or for that matter any job interview should begin at infancy, not after graduation with the purchase of Notes from Nilkhet. Moral teaching should be imparted at all levels of education, including college and university.

Degrees are positive attributes, but only if paired with integrity; for alone they are no more than empty vessels.

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Does political unrest have a positive side?

ABDUL MATIN

I won't be surprised if the title of the article raises many eyebrows. We have so far heard about the negative side of the recent political unrest. We know how many innocent lives were lost, how many people have been maimed or suffering in hospitals from serious burns. We read about the losses in the economic sector, the losses suffered by the farmers for not being able to market their produce and the losses incurred by the business community plus the day labourers. We saw the agony of the HSC and SSC examinees whose examinations were rescheduled every now and then and the damages in the education sector due to prolonged suspension of classes. We also witnessed the risks undertaken by the people while moving from one place to another. Among all the negatives, how can the political unrest have a positive side?

The answer is simple. A glass can be half empty or half full at the same time. Whether it is half empty or half full depends on how one looks at it. It is said that every cloud has a silver lining. Similarly, it is possible to discover some positive aspects also in the recent political unrest, no matter how much damage it did to our country.

On April 5, the BNP chairperson left her office, surrendered in court and returned to her residence in Gulshan getting bail in two graft cases she had been charged with. She stayed in her office for three months and virtually conducted the movement singlehandedly. At the moment, there is a lull in both blockade and hartal throughout the country even though there has not been any official announcement of total withdrawal of the programmes.



If we carefully analyse the recent events, we can learn several important lessons. Initially, the people were scared of the violence in the streets and decided to stay indoors. Gradually, they began to move out, at the risk of their lives, ignoring the blockade and the hartal. It shows their courage and determination. The same people came out on the streets against Ayub Khan in 1969 and H M Ershad in 1990 and toppled their governments. This time, they came out on the streets defying hartal to prove

that violence does not pay. This is the most important lesson of the recent unrest which our politicians should always keep in mind.

The attitude of the people towards hartal has also changed. It has become evident that they no longer observe hartal unless the reasons are genuine or they are coerced to do so. A spontaneous hartal has practically become history now. If the intention of any hartal is only to change a government, there must be a clear outline of an alternative government with

a better past record of governance, transparency, honesty, respect for human rights and socio-economic development than that of the incumbent government. The people are least interested in changing a government only for the sake of a change.

The people did not also appreciate the imposition of blockade and hartal during the SSC and HSC examinations. The turmoil badly affected the education of our children from primary up to the university level. No nation will gain anything

by depriving education to the children. The children will never forgive us for the damage we have done to them. There should never be any political programme that adversely affects our education system.

The people have shown tremendous resilience during the turmoil. In spite of restrictions on movements, the supply of essential commodities has been maintained throughout the country even though the cost of transportation increased because of the involved risks, essential services like electricity, water and gas were not affected and our export earnings during last January through March remained normal. The farmers suffered losses but maintained the normal level of production. This resilience of the people of Bangladesh is unique. The present subsidence of the turmoil is really a victory for their courage, determination and resilience and defeat for the cowardness of the perpetrators of violence.

It is time for soul-searching for our politicians, particularly those who initiated the political movement without proper planning, without any understanding of the mood of the people and without any calculation of its outcome and continued it with unabated and irrational arrogance. The country will be immensely benefitted if they correctly analyse the events, take lessons from them and guide the future course of politics in a disciplined and civilized manner. This perception, if it ever comes in a fine morning, will surely add a silver lining to the recent political unrest and, perhaps, bring some solace to the souls of those who lost their lives during the movement.

The writer is a retired nuclear engineer.

QUOTABLE Quote
Walking with a friend in the dark is better than walking alone in the light.
 Helen Keller

HENRY BY DON TRANCHE

BEETLE BAILEY BY MORT WALKER

BY MORT WALKER

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS
 1 Diamond stats
 7 Peruse
 11 Continuing Story
 12 Opera piece
 13 Fancy salad ingredient
 15 Jazz genre
 16 Tale Teller
 18 Paper pack
 21 Warble
 22 Chatty bird
 24 Thurman of Film
 25 Salary
 26 Sticky stuff
 27 Schoolbag item
 29 Volcano shape
 30 Walrus' cousin
 31 Phoenix team
 32 Car part
 34 Boneless seafood item
 40 Fan's favorite
 41 Related
 42 Marshy areas
 43 Rider's seat

DOWN
 1 Fire result
 2 Golf Peg
 3 Lingerie item
 4 Car safety feature
 5 Spud
 6 Messy person
 7 Drake or Dre
 8 Memorable time
 9 Feel poorly
 10 River blocker
 14 Raid
 16 Bar Supply
 17 Laughable
 19 Bulb gas
 20 Planet circlers
 21 Eat late
 22 Chum
 23 Foot part
 25 Series test
 28 Caravan animals
 29 Ill-fated
 31 Bulgaria's capital
 33 Young ones
 34 Tell tales
 35 Marrying words
 36 Lumber unit
 37 Bizarre
 38 Like Abner
 39 Hydrocarbon suffix

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

REACT DARTH
 I G L O O O H A R A
 P O L A R C A N I T
 S C O T T O E
 H E A T H R O W
 E V I L E R A S E S
 M E D I C S I T U P
 P R E N U P S A R A
 E L E C T R O N
 A L E P A U L
 B O X E R B I D E N
 C A P R I I N A W E
 S N O R T C E D E D

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