

Why do our politicians consider themselves indispensable?

GREEK Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis resigned on July 6, saying he was told shortly after Greece's decisive referendum result that some other Eurozone finance ministers and the country's other creditors would appreciate his not attending the ministers' meetings. "I shall wear the creditors' loathing with pride," Varoufakis said in his resignation announcement.

Greeks voted overwhelmingly to reject creditors' proposal of more austerity measures in return for rescue loans, in the country's first referendum in 41 years. Paradoxically, his resignation came in the aftermath of the government's victory, not defeat, in the referendum. The referendum "will stay in history as a unique moment when a small European nation rose up against debt-bondage," Varoufakis said. He added that "I consider it my duty to help the PM exploit, as he sees fit, the capital that the Greek people granted us through yesterday's referendum."

In Canada, the conservative party has been in power for two consecutive terms, and it is very likely that the party will return to power as well in the next general election scheduled for next October. Yet, four cabinet ministers have called it a day over the last one year alone. All of them had their absolutely secured constituencies to return as MP in the ensuing election. The latest resignation was announced by the foreign minister and a three-term MP. "I will miss this place very much, and many of the people in it on all sides," the minister told the House of Commons. "But the time has come for me to start a new chapter in my life," said the 45-year old departing minister.

In sharp contrast to what is being practiced in all the Westminster democracies in particular, people of Bangladesh have never

seen an incumbent minister, in particular, or a politician, in general, to call it a day for any reason, whatsoever.

A few years ago, the Federal Immigration Minister of Canada resigned from her cabinet post, due to a sworn statement of an illegal immigrant and pizza shop owner alleging that the minister promised to legalise his status in return for feeding her campaign volunteers with free pizzas during the parliamentary election. Notwithstanding the fact that the accuser had multiple convictions on charges involving frauds and embezzlements in the Canadian courts itself, the minister had to resign on ethical grounds. After his deportation to his native country, the accuser retracted his statement. The ethics commissioner's subsequent clearance of her of any immorality did not give the minister her job back and she never returned to political life.

In 2002, the former president Dr. Badruddoza Chowdhury had no constitutional or legal obligation to resign when the BNP parliamentary party asked him to do so. The constitution has empowered the parliament, not any political party, to impeach the president under a set of well-defined circumstances, none of which was applicable for President Chowdhury. His decision to resign from his position was absolutely based on ethical consideration since he realised that he no longer carried the confidence of the electorates who elected him. BNP, in an unprecedented move in the history of parliamentary democracy, adopted a resolution supported by the then PM, asking the president to resign immediately or else an impeachment proceeding would be started against him. He was apparently accused of not attributing the status of the 'proclaimer of independence' to the founder of BNP in his presidential message, which is neither true nor in concurrence with the attachment of the constitution of the Republic. In fact,

President Chowdhury did uphold the integrity of the highest office of the land by not resorting to the brazen distortion of history.

I wrote a piece titled, "A self-respecting statesman's dignified exit," in which I eulogised him for his great statesmanship. I ended my piece with the following conclusion: "Metamorphosis of Prof. Chowdhury from a politician to statesman was rather rapid and stunning in many ways and his ouster was equally unexpected. His emergence from a politician to a statesman once again proved that, given

the opportunity, our society is not totally devoid of people who are able to conduct themselves to earn the trust and respect of all across our political divides".

However, after his resignation, did Prof. Chowdhury live up to our expectations? We would have been happier to get an affirmative answer to this soul searching query. Following his resignation, he formed his

own political party for which

he had to pay a heavy price in the hands of his former colleagues and comrades. A few weeks after his resignation, he joined a political rally in Paltan Maidan organised by a few left-leaning political parties, but his arduous and secret journey to Paltan Maidan, as was published in the media, sounded more like the escape story of a fugitive trying to fool his impending captor. His former party's 'intellectual' supporters headed by a former VC (who is now portraying himself as the principal protagonist of democracy), issued a statement urging the then PM to be tougher (as if what was being done by the state machinery and the cadres was not enough) on the 'enemies of democracy', which, probably manifested into the virulent attack on Dr. B Chowdhury, a new born 'enemy of democracy'.

As if that wasn't enough, Prof. Chowdhury, a former duly elected President of the Republic, personally ran for a parliamentary seat from two constituencies and miserably lost in both. Yet, now in his mid-eighties, he did not think it was high time for him to call it a day, as if the nation still needed his indispensable service. To offer his yet unexploited service to the nation, he has now joined hands with his former party and comrades to wage a 'mass movement' to 'restore' democracy under the leadership of the very leader on whose behest he was under impending impeachment from presidency some thirteen years ago.

The writer is the Convenor of the Canadian Committee for Human Rights and Democracy in Bangladesh.



OSCILLATING BETWEEN TWO WORLDS

SHIFTING IMAGES



MILIA ALI

US to Dhaka, I am filled with the joy that one experiences when coming back to one's nest at the end of a long day. Surprisingly, the thought of travelling back to my "other" home in McLean, Virginia, also generates a feeling of happiness. I long for the familiar sound of the neighbourhood kids playing in the nearby park, the solitary walks and coffee interludes with friends.

I must admit that both journeys generate a sense of apprehension. Coming eastward, after months of absence, I wonder if things will be the same – the intimate afternoon teas, musical evenings and impromptu dinners. Will I have problems phasing in? When travelling back to the United States, I am apprehensive about being disconnected with my surroundings.

It's interesting that we carry an image of home in our minds. An image formulated through years of experience and coloured by nostalgia. For example, Bangladesh will always be the home where I grew up singing Tagore melodies, dreaming of romance in Uttam-Suchitra style and fighting for the country's freedom. Not where religious extremists hack liberal bloggers in public and "perverts" accuse 13-year olds of stealing and beat them to death. In a similar vein, the America that I emigrated to two decades ago was the country that allowed even the ordinary to become extraordinary, through sheer talent and perseverance. As I prepare for my journey back, I am disturbed by the thought of a young

woman jailed for a minor traffic infringement and pushed into committing suicide and African Americans gunned down by white men because they look suspicious. True, the United States has been at the center of the race controversy for years. But it is also here that people have fought for civil rights and individual freedom. And that is the America I chose as my "home."

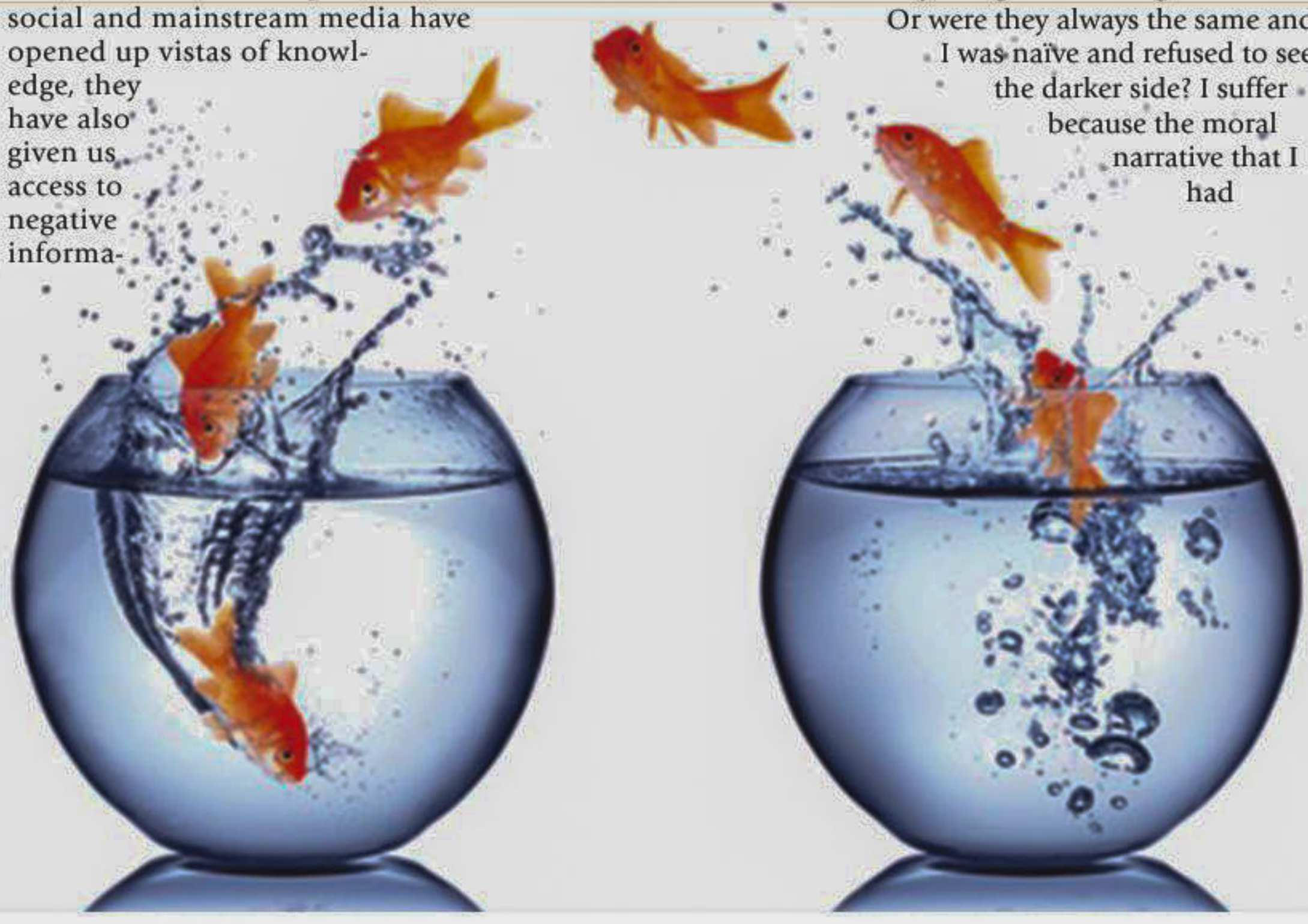
Unfortunately, today, violence, anger and hatred taint our lives, irrespective of the geographic location. I often wonder if this trend stems from an ideologically/religiously divided world. Or does it run deeper -- the anger spurred by the growing inequality and injustice that people are subjected to. But these anomalies have always existed. Why are they causing greater angst now? One explanation could be the communication explosion. Just as the social and mainstream media have opened up vistas of knowledge, they have also given us access to negative information that we have little time to absorb and assimilate. We are constantly bombarded with bad news and are encouraged to make quick judgments without processing layers of information. Hence, it becomes easier to commit and accept brutal acts with more equanimity and nonchalance. This may be a black and white interpretation of a complex problem, but it could be one of the many variables in the equation of the unrest we experience around us.

For ordinary people like us, the larger question is: how does one reconcile to a world where people are dehumanised because they are poor or they have a different skin color? How does one cope with a world where others are not allowed to breathe because they have disparate beliefs -- where hate and apathy often eclipse love and tolerance? As I shuttle between two homes, I wonder why things have changed so much.

Or were they always the same and I was naïve and refused to see the darker side? I suffer because the moral narrative that I had

believed to be true has eroded. The reference point of my values has shifted to a universe dominated by a culture of "anything goes." Sometimes I feel like a misfit -- whether in Bangladesh or in the United States. But then, once in a while I come across that rare person fighting for the garment workers maimed in Rana Plaza, or protesting against the injustices against blacks in Texas and hope is restored. I find comfort in the thought that just as there are those blinded by prejudice, greed and lust, there are also a few who are striving to amend things that have gone askew.

Perhaps the dislocation I feel is an integral part



Unfortunately, today, violence, anger and hatred taint our lives, irrespective of the geographic location. I often wonder if this trend stems from an ideologically/religiously divided world. Or does it run deeper -- the anger spurred by the growing inequality and injustice that people are subjected to.

of adjusting to the reality of a globalised, changing world. A world where Sandra Bland's suicide in a Texas jail hits us as hard as Rajon's desperate cries for survival in the suburbs of Sylhet. The truth is that we don't have to travel out of our hometown to experience change since we are "migrants through time." We often feel alien in our familiar surroundings because in life things are never the same as they used to be. Thus "home" is what we carry with us in our hearts wherever we may be!

The writer is a renowned Rabindra Sangeet exponent and a former employee of the World Bank. E-mail: shiftingimages@gmail.com

QUOTABLE Quote

Some people come in your life as blessings. Some come in your life as lessons.

- Mother Teresa

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

CROSSWORD

1 Sets of cards
6 Taken - (surprised)
11 German sub
12 Boston airport
13 French "thanks"
14 Untethered
15 Tarragon or thyme
17 "My word!"
18 Put out a new edition
22 St. Louis landmark
23 Shred
27 Baker's need
29 Plant life
30 Sawbuck
32 Cocoa servings
33 Estimated delivery times
35 Mass of gum
38 Italy's shape
39 Similar
41 Raises
45 Laundry problem
46 Mystical deck
47 Grasps
48 Comes down in flakes

DOWN

1 Rhythmic sound
2 Lincoln nickname
3 Neither follower
4 Short dog
5 Pig's pens
6 Like some franks
7 Scary shout
8 Wildly excited
9 Job for Sherlock
10 Patella's place
16 Deep groove
18 River vessel
19 Writer -- Stanley Gardner
20 Computer image
21 Spotted dog
24 One-sided victory
25 Spur on
26 Go by
28 Sandwiches with sauerkraut
31 Old roadster
34 Block-heads
35 Scrub
36 Singing voice
37 Watch part
40 Youngster
42 To's opposite
43 Highway rescue
44 Ave. crossers

Yesterday's answer

A	L	I	C	E		B	A	B	E	L
P	E	R	O	T		A	R	O	M	A
A	G	O	N	Y		R	E	G	I	S
C	I	N	E	M	A		A	L	S	
H	O	E		O	N	T	A	R	I	O
E	N	D		L	I	E	D	T	O	
				C	O	M	A	S		
	S	E	A	G	A	L		O	H	S
I	N	S	T	Y	L	E		N	A	P
M	O	P		S	A	R	T	R	E	
A	R	I	A	S		V	O	I	L	A
G	E	E	S		E	L	M	E	R	
E	D	D	I	E		S	E	E	M	S

BEETLE BAILEY

by Mort Walker

I'VE GOT TO SEE GENERAL HALFRACK!

GREG + MORT WALKER

SORRY, THAT'S AS MUCH AS YOU'LL GET TO SEE HIM ON GOLF DAYS

BABY BLUES

by Kirkman & Scott

I'M LATE! GOTTA RUN!

HAVE A NICE DAY!

WATCH OUT FOR THE--

BAM! OW! CRASH!

...BABY GATE.

SAVING WREN'S LIFE, SHORTENING MINE.