

# Power is Knowledge is Power

CHINTITO SINCE 1995



NIZAMUDDIN AHMED

LOVE him or not, you cannot but be awestruck at the sheer bluntness, call it lack of guile, of Suranjit Sengupta for his candid pronouncement to government employees within 24 hours of their pay hike. Said the former Railways Minister: "Your salaries have now been doubled. People would expect a four-time increased service from you from now on, not charging four-time bribes". Mr. Sengupta said this at Dhaka while speaking as the chief

guest at a discussion on current politics organised by Bangabandhu Academy at the Kakrail auditorium of the Institution of Diploma Engineers.

The senior Awami League leader also said, "The government staff should have to keep in mind that they have been drawing salaries from people's money. So, they have to pay back the people in double regarding their work discharging their duties with skill and transparency."



About the statement of the minister without portfolio, there has been no official protest from any quarter, bribed or not. One gets the feeling Mr. Sengupta is now abundantly confident about his innocence in the 2012 bribery scandal, for he fears no backlash despite such open aggression.

On another front: Says the educator from atop a stony mountain in ancient Greece, "We have taught thee Economics for the past several centuries and yet after acquiring little knowledge thee regrettably accuse those very teachers of lacking knowledge". Tch! Tch! Finance Minister AMA Muhith said last Tuesday that the country's most educated section was demonstrating for the "lack of knowledge". Without being prompted by any external forces, least of all Hilary Clinton, who herself is smothering under a pile of old emails, public university teachers demanded an 'apology' within 24 hours, and the finance minister in his characteristic dignity and wisdom delivered in good time, saying he was sorry because his statement was 'insulting'.

Muhith Shaheb is a courageous person and previously too he had apologised, the rarest quality among our ministers, past and present. On Sep 6, 2012, facing a barrage of criticism both in and outside parliament, finance minister Muhith repented his remarks on the Sonali Bank loan scam, that the Taka 4,000 crore swindled by Hall-Mark Group was a paltry amount. "I should not have made the remarks.... I offer my apology. I'm withdrawing the remarks... There is a huge hue and cry about the forgery. I think I am now the most hated person in the coun-

try," he told the House. Back to Mr. Muhith's more recent comment, he may have saved the day this time by adding 'relevant' before 'knowledge'. However, the usually flamboyant minister is spot on with regard to some teachers who do little to enhance their academic ability once they are employed. They simply grow old and are promoted, and they grow older until one day they are 'qualified out of sympathy' to become professors and more.

On a third front, since July 4 (no relation to US fire-works) private university students have been agitating against the 7.5 percent VAT on tuition fees imposed in line with the government's 2015-16 budget. This one became nasty: students and police clashing and protesters bloodied on Wednesday, and last Thursday Dhaka was brought to a standstill. The National Board of Revenue (NBR) announced rather belatedly the same day that VAT was supposed to be paid by a university and not its students.

The lack of knowledge here has been in not taking the private universities on board. The NBR, along with the University Grants Commission, should have had groom-

ing sessions with appropriate university officers, explaining to them what it is now expounding in the face of the blockade, and the students need not have to know about it at all because it does not concern them.

The High Court has called to question the legality of the surcharge and it will be seen whether education after all is a commodity, or not. Lost in the melee is the fact that English-medium school children (okay their parents) are paying 7.5% VAT, and that too should stop if we go by NBR's most recent circular.

The danger here for our students and parents lies in the possibility that after the private universities, there may also be taxation imposed on tuition fees of private colleges, schools and kindergartens. I must add here that education at any level and by whatever means, private or public, is not an article of trade, and therefore not taxable. If need be, again only if the law permits, the government could perhaps derive taxes from land, buildings and other assets developed by private universities.

It is because of sincere private philanthropy that many of our children are finding a genuine desk under an authentic shade. Over the years, the lustrous performance of many private school students and university graduates is manifest demonstration of the system's success, despite there being some big bad apples in the cart.

Let us bring the students back to a VAT-less classroom.

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# The world wakes up to Aylan

SANJANA SADIQUE

THE picture of Aylan Kurdi, the three-year-old Syrian boy whose body washed up on the shores of a Turkish beach, has recently caused outrage around the world. The picture did more than just wake the whole world up. It showed us the sad realities of the effects of the Syrian crisis and the consequent desperate risks refugees are willing to take in the hope of better lives.

Aylan has been described in some media reports as a migrant, while others have called him a refugee. From a legal perspective, the words "refugee" and "migrant" are not synonymous.

A migrant is someone who goes to another country voluntarily in the hope of a better economic life. A migrant is not in fear of persecution.

A refugee is someone who flees his country because he faces an armed conflict or fear of persecution and thus needs protection of his basic rights. The 1951 Refugee Convention, an international treaty, defines "refugee" as any person who "owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it."

Under international law, states have a legal obligation to keep their borders open to refugees. Thus the term "migrants" is used instead of "refugees" in order to divert attention from the moral and legal responsibilities of states to grant protection to "refugees".

Aylan and his family were not migrants. Aylan's family was determined to escape from a war that destroyed Syria. They were escaping oppression in Syria and risking their lives to get away from intolerable conditions at home.

The terms should be distinguished from a third term, "asylum seeker". The United Nations High Commission for Refugees defines "asylum seeker" as someone who has applied for protection as a "refugee" but is awaiting the status. Asylum seekers are people who move across borders in search of protection but may not fulfill the criteria laid down by the 1951 Refugee Convention.

Aylan and his family boarded a boat that day having failed to go to Canada because they did not

qualify as "asylum seekers". The basis for their rejection was that refugees living in Turkey were not regarded to be in immediate danger.

Sadly, Aylan's family was also not granted exit visas by the Turkish authorities since they did not have UNHCR referrals confirming their status as refugees.

Other treaties like the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) also protect refugee children and they are said to be legally binding on countries. Under the CRC, states are required to "take appropriate measures to ensure that a child who is seeking refugee status or who is considered a refugee in accordance with applicable international or domestic law and procedures shall, whether unaccompanied or accompanied by his or her parents or by any other person, receive appropriate protection and humanitarian assistance in the enjoyment of applicable rights set forth in the present Convention and in other international human rights or humanitarian instruments to which the said States are Parties."

We do not want more incidents like Aylan's death taking over the news. Not just legally, but also morally, the world cannot afford to look the other way in the face of an impending refugee crisis. This crisis has raised questions about Europe's policies and whether the notion of the European Union is still relevant. In a globalised, yet highly fragmented world, Europe must shoulder its responsibilities arising from the present crisis.

We all have a shared responsibility towards the refugees and to act in limbo at the moment would only make matters worse. However, the reaction from the global community has been mixed. Some countries like Germany have voluntarily opened their doors while others have closed them for the refugees. Some countries like Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, UAE and Qatar have not yet accepted any refugees.

We need to regain uniformity and prioritise this issue at this time of crisis instead of shifting blame on others. States need to figure out if they are ready to make sacrifices for the betterment of humanity.

We should not let innocent children suffer the fatal consequences of our mindless national and international politics. The onus ultimately is on the political rulers to act like human beings first and politicians second.

Children are always the most innocent targets during a disaster and perhaps if it wasn't for Aylan, the world would still be sleeping.

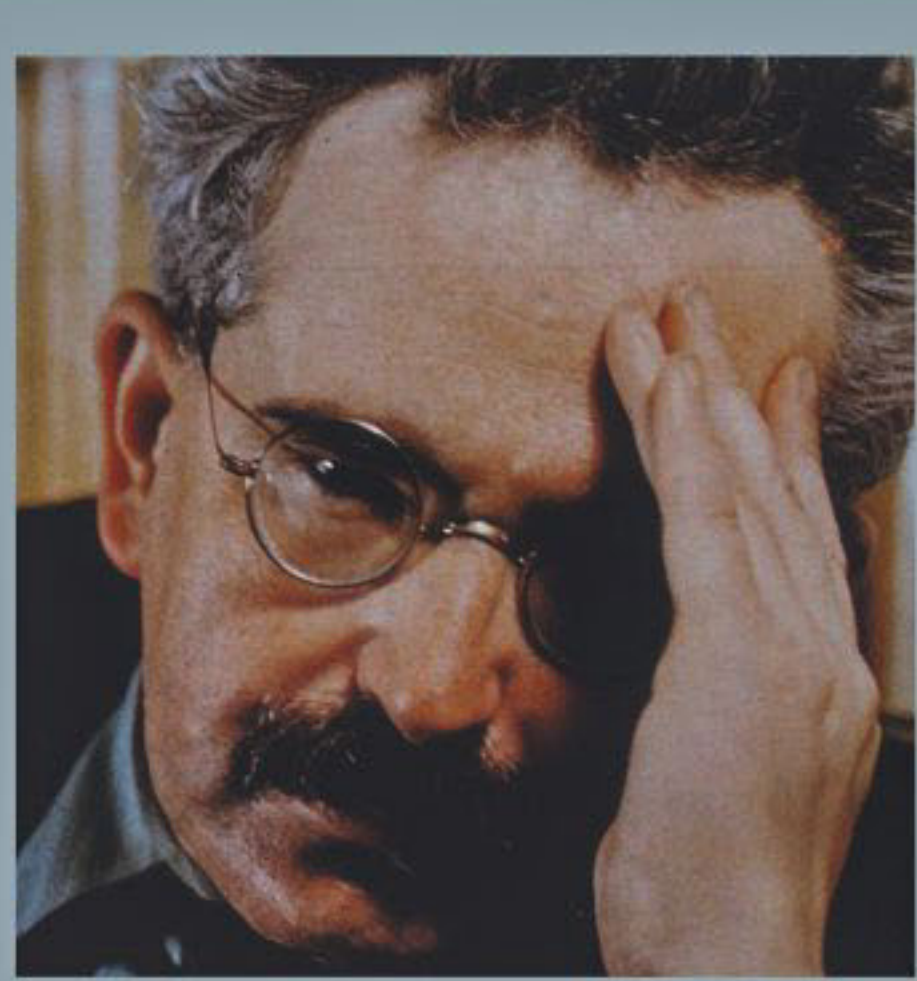
The writer is a lawyer with expertise in International Law.

## YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

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9-15



WALTER BENJAMIN

## QUOTABLE Quote

TO BE HAPPY IS TO BE ABLE TO BECOME AWARE OF ONESELF WITHOUT FRIGHT.

## CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

### ACROSS

- 1 Javelin
- 6 Mom's sisters
- 11 "A Fish Called --"
- 12 Girder material
- 13 Remote
- 15 Bullfight cry
- 16 Cinch
- 17 Columnist Landers
- 18 Packages
- 20 "My word!"
- 21 Mine rock
- 22 Chest muscles, for short
- 23 Merchandise
- 26 Champagne poppers
- 27 Pressing need
- 28 Funny fellow
- 29 Place for a pint
- 30 Support, with "for"
- 34 Sense of self
- 35 Co. abbr.
- 36 Brewpub product
- 37 From the very beginning
- 40 Michigan city
- 41 Justice Kagan
- 42 Confronts
- 43 Annoys

### DOWN

- 1 Downward arc
- 2 Music's Abdul
- 3 Door sign
- 4 Bustle
- 5 Roof supports
- 6 Grill waste
- 7 Salt Lake City player
- 8 Crystal buyer, perhaps
- 9 New Jersey city
- 10 Guile
- 14 Mosaic piece
- 19 " Fargo " director
- 22 Possum of the comics
- 23 Clean with a sponge
- 24 Bitter salad green
- 25 Stiffly awkward
- 26 He works at home
- 28 Custom
- 30 Presents
- 31 Site of a biblical tower
- 32 Unaccompanied
- 33 Alamo setting
- 38 Low number
- 39 Yale student

## BABY BLUES

by Kirkman & Scott



## BEETLE BAILEY

by Mort Walker



## অ্যাপার্টমেন্ট বিক্রয় ...

- দেশের শীর্ষস্থানীয় নির্মাতার ঢাকা শহরের বিভিন্ন লোকেশনে রেডি/প্রায় রেডি/চলমান প্রকল্পে প্রতিযোগিতামূলক দামে
- ধানমন্ডি (২২০০-২২৩৫ বর্গফুট)
- বনানী (২২৪৫ বর্গফুট)
- কাঁঠালবাগান (১১৮০-১২৩০ বর্গফুট)
- বড় মগবাজার (১৪৭০-১৬৭৫ বর্গফুট)
- সিদ্ধেশ্বরী (১৩৩৫-২০৬০ বর্গফুট)
- চামেলীবাগ (১৩৬৫-১৫৬৫ বর্গফুট)
- মতিঝিল (৮৯৫-১১৯০ বর্গফুট)
- বাসাবো (১১৭০-১১৮৫ বর্গফুট)
- মিরপুর (৯৬৫-১৭১০ বর্গফুট)
- বসুন্ধরা (১৬৪০ বর্গফুট)
- উত্তরা'য় (৮০৫-১৬০০ বর্গফুট)
- অ্যাপার্টমেন্ট বিক্রয় চলছে...

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