

# A good start to the President's initiative

Let the amicable atmosphere endure

We are heartened by the successful holding of the first in the series of dialogues that the President has initiated with the political parties, on the appointment of a new Election Commission. Reportedly, the President's dialogue with the BNP chairperson and some of the other stalwarts of the BNP on the matter went very well. There is no doubt that his amiable disposition and long political experience, and his overall good standing with all political groups as well as the public, has a lot to do with such a positive development. The BNP too, has expressed its satisfaction over the discussion. This is the kind of amicable ambience that we want where dialogue is used to resolve intractable issues.

In this context it must be remembered that the president's authority is not just legal but, as it carries the weight of the flag, it is also moral. We echo the message from the PM that the opposition must follow the directives as given by the President. But for that process to take place unhindered, the President must be able to be guided by his conscience; and we are sure that he will always have the bigger picture in mind. The moral weight of the Head of State which the president is, cannot be quantified or articulated enough. The moral authority of his office is as significant as he chooses to use it.

It appears that both the PM and Khaleda Zia have reposed their trust in the President. It is therefore for him to suggest ways to resolve a seemingly difficult issue that would be acceptable to all.

# Rise in migrant workers' death

Take steps to prevent it

It is depressing to note that over the last decade the number of Bangladeshi migrant workers who have died abroad has witnessed an alarming rise. Disturbingly, bodies of 3,211 such hapless victims have arrived home this year alone. That most of these men and women were below 40, at the prime of their youth, makes the deaths unacceptable.

There is no denying that unskilled Bangladeshi migrant workers have to grapple with an array of physical and mental sufferings as a consequence of debt originating from high migration cost, low income and unfavourable working conditions. These ill-starred souls have to live on a poor diet, which, coupled with long working hours and a perennial anxiety have an adverse effect on their health. The prevalence of stroke or heart attack among such group of workers is a testimony to that.

Remittance, especially the kind sent by the country's extraordinarily resilient migrant workers, has long been the financial barometer of this country. It is a contributing factor in our growth and accounts for a large part of our foreign exchange reserve. Not only that, their blood, sweat and tears have been instrumental in some major changes that we now witness in our social fabric.

We find it beyond our grasp as to why the ministry concerned has not taken any concentrated steps to stop these avoidable deaths. We believe that it is incumbent upon the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment to probe into the untimely deaths and chalk out ways to prevent such tragedies from happening.

LETTERS  
TO THE EDITOR

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SOURCE: ANTREA LAURITA

The cruelty of dowry

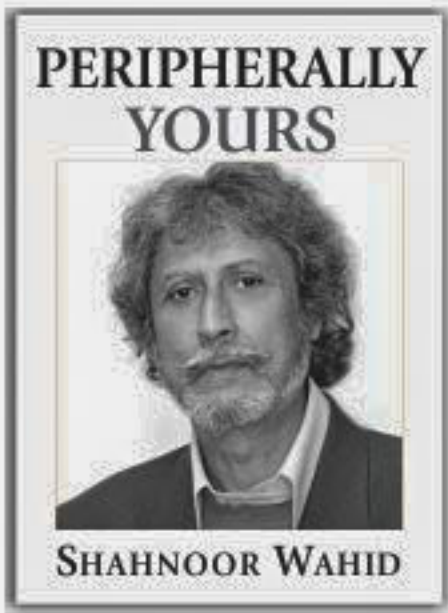
It is surprising to see the dowry culture still persisting in our societies. Worse still, the shameful practice is increasing at an alarming rate due to the ineffective implementation of the laws already in place prohibiting it. Some husbands and in-laws go so far as to abuse and even murder the bride if sufficient amount of money isn't paid. Many of these victims are girls who have had little or no education and no exposure to a professional life.

We urge the government to take immediate effective measures against these practices and ensure that the laws in place are upheld. Meanwhile we as a society must raise our voices against it. It is our collective responsibility to eliminate this social epidemic and fight for the equal rights of all family members of a household irrespective of their gender and social status.

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## ARCHER BLOOD

# An American's sacrifice for Bangladesh



SOON after the creation of Bangladesh, we came to know of the heroic yet risky stand taken by many foreigners, foreign journalists and Christian missionaries in defiance of the Pakistani military threats. They wholeheartedly supported the Bengali people in their fight for freedom from the occupying forces and extended all possible help to the people and the freedom fighters who needed shelter, food and medicine. In their heart and soul they loved Bangladesh, hence, they had genuine reasons for supporting the people's war of independence. Some of the missionaries have been living here since the 1950s and came to consider this land their home. But, what about an American diplomat who had no previous interaction with the Bengali people or had the opportunity to know them well enough to go beyond a formal hello? Would such a man, a distinguished gentleman from the Washington's elite pool of career diplomats risk everything — his next posting as an American Ambassador in a distant land — for the love of Bengalis? Would he sacrifice all that he looked forward to during the training period for the people he hardly knew well? The likely answer would be No.

But, Mr. Archer Blood, the then Consul General at the American Consulate in Dhaka, did exactly that and ruined his career as a diplomat. He never got that dream posting as an Ambassador ever. He worked in the State Department at a desk until he retired in due course. Let us remember him in this month of December — the month that gave us the much cherished victory over our enemy.

The Bangladeshi media came to know about his role in 1971 soon after the liberation of the country and published small reports on him. Some of our own diplomats had come to know about him and let the media know about his pro-Bangladesh activities as the head of the Dhaka consulate. But much later, about three or four years ago, we came to know in details about the heroic, yet risky stand, that was taken by Archer Blood and his staff members of the consulate from the book titled *Blood Telegram* authored by Gary J. Bass. Reading through the pages of *Blood Telegram* was like watching a flashback of the events of 1971 on a big screen, like a feature film. In fact, it was like reliving those fearful days when the line separating life and death had thinned down perilously for the people of East Pakistan.

The book chronicled the political developments in Dhaka, Rawalpindi, Delhi and Washington, simultaneously during the decisive moments of the history of making of a nation state - Bangladesh. *Blood Telegram* contains authentic accounts of classified telegrams between Dhaka, Rawalpindi and Washington, including responses, high level meetings, conversations, notes, comments, tussle between White House and the State Department, role of Henry Kissinger and the imperceptive diplomacy of president Nixon and much more, all on the basis of recently declassified documents by the State Department, White



Archer Blood and the historic "Blood Telegram"

House tapes and praiseworthy investigative reporting by some very courageous correspondents of the time.

Well before March 25, Consul General Archer Blood could clearly see through the US policy towards Pakistan on the question of the independence of East Pakistan as a sovereign state. He did not support further shipment of arms to Pakistani military that was mostly used on the Bengali population. He requested the State Department to go for a political solution of crises in East Pakistan as the only way out. He reported on the brutal crackdown on the unarmed civilians by the Pakistani military forces on the night of March 25 with machine guns and tanks in the strongest of words. He knew to his own frustration that most of those heavy arms and ammunition came from the US. He collected reports on the civilian deaths, arson attacks, rape of women, looting, etc., through his own sources and started to send them via diplomatic channels in coded form to the State Department, bypassing the American Ambassador, Mr. Farland, who was sitting in Rawalpindi. Despite warning of unpleasant consequences by the Ambassador, he remained steadfast in his position against overwhelming odds and sent telegram after telegram to Washington, regarding the genocide being perpetrated in East Pakistan by the West Pakistani military. His telegrams had initially worked at various levels of the then US administration and political circles to help gain an insight into the situation in East Pakistan despite Pakistani propaganda. But, President Nixon and Henry Kissinger were angered by Blood's



defiance and instructed the State Department to call him back to Washington.

About Archer Blood, author Gary Bass writes in the preface: "Archer Blood was a gentlemanly diplomat raised in Virginia, a WWII navy veteran in the upswing of a promising Foreign Service career after several tours overseas. He was earnest and precise, known to some of his more unruly subordinates at the US Consulate as a good, conventional man..." Appalled by the brutality and wanton killing of the unarmed Bengalis on March 25, 1971, and the following days, Blood and his colleagues at the Consulate decided to relay as much of this as possible to keep Washington updated. He wanted the US government to put pressure on the Pakistani government to stop the killings and send back the military to the barracks and go for political settlement. They continued to give details of the horrific slaughter of civilians in towns and villages. They mentioned the killings at Dhaka University, of students, teachers and general staff. One of Blood's cables used the term "Selective Genocide" and yet there was no response from his government. In Blood's words, his cables were met with "deafening silence."

Archer Blood and his wife were happy to learn of the creation of Bangladesh feeling that their sacrifice did not go in vain. Some freedom fighters of Dhaka stayed in touch with him as long as he lived. They had in fact invited Blood and his wife to Dhaka once to shower their love and respect on this front ranking freedom fighter of Bangladesh.

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# Donald Trump Performing in Shaw's 'Pygmalion'

JALAL UDDIN KHAN

BY common perception, perhaps even by consensus, the US is the best and greatest democracy in the world. However, in 2016, there is a President-elect with two Americas behind him and before him. America is unprecedentedly divided, following the big victory of Donald Trump. It was an unexpected victory that also led to a nationwide, though small-scale, unrest for a few days. Trump triumphed, but the protesters chanted, with every right and reason, "Dump Trump, Ditch Trump." The US is no longer as united as it was in the past or it is supposed to be. It is Trump and his right wing white supporters and surrogates—racist and nationalist—who were instrumental in engineering his triumph, as much as they were responsible for the uneasy demonstration after the election.

There has been a surge of white nationalism, not necessarily anti-Jewish but mainly anti-Muslim, in the US and Europe. The last American presidential campaign, especially on the part of the boastful, bullying and belligerent Trump, shares its indignity, unconventionality and anti-establishment message with the theme of shocking and stunning transformation in George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* (1913), as the title of the play itself suggests. Sculptor Pygmalion in the Greek myth dislikes real women but falls in love with the statue of a woman called Galatea that he himself made. With the help of the goddess of love Venus, the statue comes to life and both Pygmalion and Galatea become united. Similar (yet different kind of) transformative changes occur in the story of the play and the tale of Trump too.

Capitalist Trump has a lot in common with the socialist Shaw's proletariat Alfred Doolittle in the play. Putting aside the main (economic) difference between them (one being fabulously rich and the other a working class man, a garbage/rubbish collector), both are into immoral and improper womanising. Trump married at least three times and has had many extramarital scandals to his record. Always surrounded by Miss Universes, Miss Worlds, and other stars and actresses, he is known for making lewd and crude remarks and unwanted sexual advances towards them, bragging about his predatory impulses and

desires. Doolittle has had at least six wives and is still free from "fear and conscience."

Both Trump and Doolittle have had an un-fatherly and morally questionable and controversial relationship with their own daughters. Trump is on record having made obscene, inappropriate comments about his own daughter Ivanka as he did about many other women. In Shaw's play scoundrel Doolittle also makes money at the expense of his daughter, cynically exploiting her situations for money. Both have their unique brand of rhetoric, blunt and unabashed, that they have successfully exploited to their personal interest—one for his election win and

a large fortune and become, though unwillingly, a lecturer in moral reform under the banner of a reputable organisation. He was otherwise happy with his morally and socially loose and lax past. It remains to be seen whether Trump would feel the same way after facing the Presidential challenges in the months and years ahead.

Trump has also a lot of similarity with Professor Henry Higgins of *Phonetics* in Shaw's play. Both are unconventional and impatient in their own ways—Trump about the so-called Washington establishment and party bureaucracy, going in the opposite direction from the rest of society in most matters. So is Higgins, who is impatient

impurities in its idioms and expressions, Higgins also would not let the English speech be corrupted in terms of its phonemes and phonetic pronunciation. Higgins finds the accent of the native (English) working class as represented by Eliza utterly depressing and deplorable. She is however laudably trained by him, as the play proceeds, to achieve a perfect command of the science of speech, as perfect as that of an upper class English lady.

Linguistically, Trump is far from being a protectionist or nationalist; he is then a multiethnic globalised pluralist. Unlike Higgins, Trump can bear with his third and present wife Melania's original Slovenian accent as he did with his first wife Ivana's Slovakian style. He even proudly defended Melania for being able to fluently speak as many as six or seven languages, no matter what the level or quality of her accent is. His second wife Marla Maples' American accent did not matter much to him. It was not her speech or voice quality that drew him to her first or that prompted him to disengage from her later. In his linguistic pluralism and adaptability, Trump is similar to Colonel Pickering in Shaw's play. Pickering is an expert in Indian dialects, branding his expertise as the author of *Spoken Sanskrit*, as Trump also goes trending his business empire successfully, all bearing his name. Pickering is number two in the Higgins-Pickering transformational experiment on Eliza; he is, as it were, Higgins' running mate just as Mike Pence as the vice president-elect was Trump's running mate. Pickering is polite and polished and fatherly and kindly, just as Mike Pence is, compared with their number one respectively.

Both Trump and Higgins have their eccentricities, which are as alienating as attractive to many, as both have the power to transform the terms and trends of the society the way they want, like the mythological Pygmalion has his statue of Galatea transformed into a beautiful living woman. Wasn't Trump also able to electorally transform his originally Slovenian model wife Melania into the First Lady of the US? Trump performing Shaw's Higgins and Doolittle has really proven to be shocking and amazing, indeed!

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federal tax evasions and the other in his open and amusing advocacy of drink and wild fun. Both are notoriously scandalous and unembarrassed about what they do and say. Both are unaffected, unpretentious, and unmasked, in their body language as well as verbal expressions. In this sense, they literally speak their mind in relation to their own selves and their ideas of social criticism. They do so from their own point of view: Trump being a capitalist, protectionist, isolationist, exclusionist, and nationalist about what are in his view American interests, and Doolittle being proletarian and socialist.

Both of them profess to be anti-establishment. Both are able to recreate and transform themselves into something they could hardly expect: one suddenly entering politics from outside the establishment and getting elected American president, another managing to get recommended, though half-seriously, half-jokingly, to a generous philanthropist, only to get endowed with

with high society and its rules and niceties. Though not necessarily bad at heart, both are bullies to others and both are good at branding their names and professions: Higgins is the author of his *Universal Alphabet*, setting up his own laboratory for lessons in the science of speech, and Trump having his planes, towers, hotels, casinos and other businesses all bearing his name, including the failed Trump University.

If Trump is a racially and ethnically motivated "America-First" (on the basis of the basic "Buy American, Hire American" rule) in economic, military, and nationalistic sense with a bias for anti-ethnic diversity, Higgins is an "England-First" in the sense of the English language, which he thinks is the great language of Shakespeare, Milton, and the Bible and as such would not allow it to be tainted. Like his real life elder contemporary and English traveller CM Doughty, famous for his *Travels in Arabia Deserta* (1888), whose mission it was to purify English as a language of its