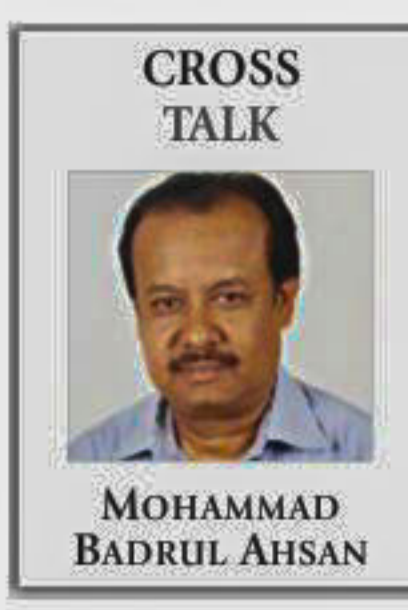


# Who's going to save politics from money?



**CROSS TALK**  
MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

**B**EES make honey, but it's easier said than done. They have to fly 55,000 miles and visit roughly 2 million flowers to produce a pound of honey. One bee colony produces 60 to 100 pounds of honey in a year. An individual bee's contribution is only 1/12 teaspoonful in its lifetime.

These correlations between flowers and bees hit home after the 136th IPU Assembly concluded in Dhaka on April 5. Fifteen hundred guests from 131 countries met for five days. Added together, these participants flew thousands of miles and clocked in thousands of hours if the number of participants is multiplied by the number of hours spent on deliberations. What they eventually produced is an ounce of wisdom that inequality is the mother of all evils.

Hence, the assembly concluded that politics must be saved from the clutches of money and organised lobbies. That precious conclusion echoed the famous fable about a group of mice, who had once gathered to discuss how to deal with a marauding cat. The mice decided that a bell would be placed around the cat's neck, so that they knew when it approached them. When one mouse asked who would volunteer to place the bell on the cat, others made excuses.

In 2015, the President of Bangladesh resented that politics had gone into the pockets of businessmen. That year, the Chief Justice of the country more specifically claimed that 80 percent of the lawmakers were businessmen. In 2013, the number of lawyers in Canada's House of Commons had slipped to 15 percent, while double that number came from business and



SOURCE: WWW.SIMONATACHE.RO

consulting backgrounds. Four years ago, the composition of the Australian Parliament showed the highest percentage of members, 25 percent, had a business background.

In 2010, the National Social Watch in India found that over the past decade there had been an exponential growth in the numbers of businessmen getting elected to the Lok Sabha as well as occupying the Rajya Sabha. This year, the lawmakers from 131 countries reinvented the wheel. They somberly concluded in Dhaka that money in politics is a serious problem.

But that foregone conclusion doesn't solve anything. Yes, the problem has

been identified, and ironically so in a country, which must be one of the world's most fertile grounds for money-based and debased politics. The closest concentration of moneyed men in politics, perhaps, is the Trump White House. The net worth of over 100 top officials show that this iconic address for the US president houses the highest number of multi-millionaires in its history.

The IPU proclamation at best is an undertow in a surging tide. Money reigns like a monster in our life, and everything about us has money as its bottom line. So, how is anybody going to save money from politics? This

question is particularly relevant for the parliaments of the world, which are creaking under the oppressive burden of money.

Thus the well-meaning resolution has the contradiction of wiping windows with dirty rags, or washing clothes with dirty hands. Politics is now so mixed up with business that underlying currents connecting both are indistinguishable. It's almost impossible to win party nominations or elections without money. It's absolutely impossible to win business deals without political connections.

What has happened is a sordid synergy between the politicians and

businessmen, moneymaking being their primary and common goal. So, politics is packaged like a business deal, and business is campaigned with political zeal. Who can separate them when these birds of the same feather have so doggedly decided to flock together?

This doesn't rule out the possibility that there are some sincere politicians and businessmen amongst us. But each of them is like that lonely bee whose singular contribution doesn't count much. Money and power have so badly contaminated each other that what's needed is an exchange transfusion. The procedure involves slowly removing a person's blood and replacing it with fresh donor blood or plasma.

Viral infections are hard to treat because viruses live inside a body's cells. A similar challenge persists between money and politics. Those who are powerful are moneyed, and those who are moneyed are powerful. Both are relentlessly perpetuating the self-serving vicious circle lodged between them.

The might of money in its cataclysmic impact has undermined the concept of dignity. Its purchasing power turned our minds into commodities, evermore ready to be transacted for a price than accepted for potentials.

Power is now a function of money, and money is a function of power. The rest of us are squeezed between them like hopeless slaves, happily licking their chains for taste of freedom. The prophets of false hope know and beware that honey is toxic in boiling water!

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*The might of money in its cataclysmic impact has undermined the concept of dignity. Its purchasing power turned our minds into commodities, evermore ready to be transacted for a price than accepted for potentials.*

## The bell also tolls for you



SHIFTING IMAGES  
MILIA ALI

**T**HE Pahela Baishakh festivities bring out the best in us Bangladeshis. Apart from its creative and cultural aspects, Pahela Baishakh serves as a unifying force, giving us a sense of comfort and security in our Bengali identity. The simple joys of sharing a *machh/bhat* meal with close friends and singing songs of "new beginnings" keep us connected to our roots.

As I reminisce about the Pahela Baishakh celebrations of my youth, I am disturbed at the thought of how much the world has changed. We are virtually living on the edge—constantly irked by some negative occurrence that jolts our conscience and dilutes our small moments of undiluted happiness.

The past few weeks have been especially traumatic. At the end of March, US air strikes, intended for ISIS fighters in Mosul, killed more than 200 civilians. In early April came the chemical attack (reportedly by the Assad regime) in northwestern Syria, killing at least 70 people, including children. The horrifying images were unbearable to watch and generated shock and outrage all over the world. Within 72 hours, President Trump retaliated by bombing the airfield from which the chemical gas attack was launched. Although aimed at censuring Assad, this only added to the number of casualties. The Syrian dictator still remains defiant. While world leaders continue to debate and analyse these actions, ordinary people like me are deeply alarmed and shocked at the havoc wreaked on the lives of innocent people.

In the midst of the massive global unrest, an incident on a United Airlines flight last week touched a raw nerve. A video clip shared on social media showed security officers at a Chicago airport forcefully dragging a passenger along the aisle of an aircraft in an attempt to offload him. The Asian-American man was asked to get off to accommodate crew members on an overbooked flight. When he refused, saying he was a doctor and had patients waiting for him, police officers used physical force to remove him. In the video clip, the injured man was seen running back to his seat, blood flowing down his lips, muttering, "I want to go home, I want to go home."

The victim is still in a hospital being treated for injuries and trauma. The video has triggered an

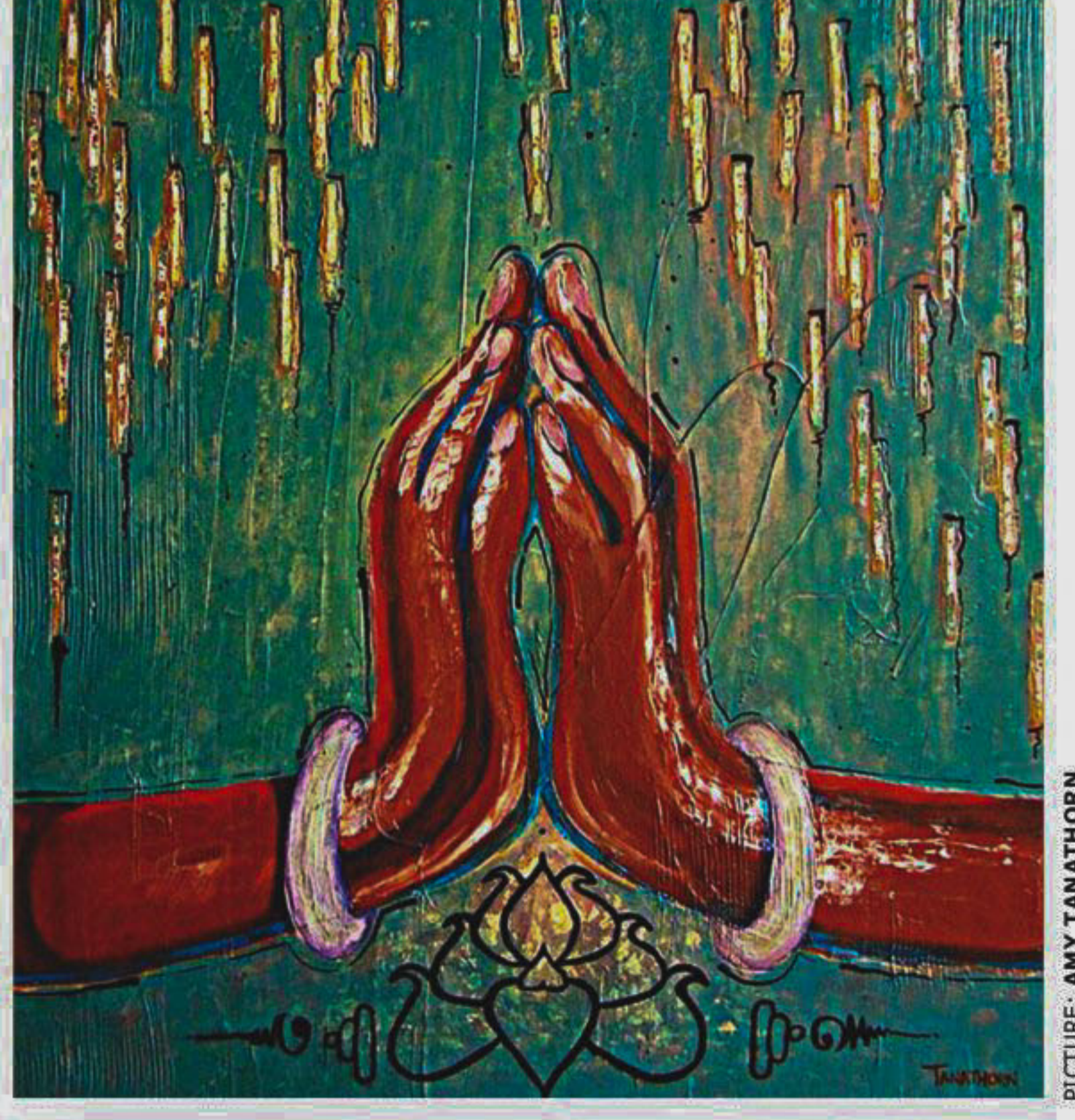
outrage, and people in the social media are talking about legal recourse, financial compensation and an unequivocal apology from United, which the company CEO was forced to give.

But what has been nagging my conscience is the fact that few have raised the issue of compassion and empathy. Surprisingly, people inside the aircraft did not protest when they watched a fellow passenger being maltreated by the authorities. No one even offered to help the injured man when he came back hurt and traumatised. There is little we can do to voice our frustration against Assad's brutal attacks on his own citizens. But when an innocent human being is physically abused and humiliated in our presence, should we not show our compassion for him in more proactive ways than just posting a

and needs someone to hold her hand? It appears that compassion and kindness have become negotiable commodities and we give them only when we expect something in return.

Many would say this kind of compassion seems mushy or is a display of moral one-upmanship. They also fear that empathy and compassion may lead to unnecessary emotional burnout and ultimately take a heavy psychological toll. But then, should we accept what we know to be wrong because we believe it doesn't affect us directly?

The fact is, if it affects our world, it also affects each one of us. Try as we might, we cannot escape the angst caused by the cries of hungry children outside our doors or the threat of random terror attacks in a



PICTURE: AMY TANATHORN

video clip on social media? Why didn't someone stand up and say "let's all boycott this flight"? If nothing else, this would have sent a strong message to the airline's management.

Regrettably, we are becoming increasingly selfish and callous. Is it because we now communicate through the internet rather than direct interaction and have lost the human touch? How many of us spend quality time with an elderly family member unless there is a pressing reason? How often do we visit our ailing relatives? Or a friend who is going through depression

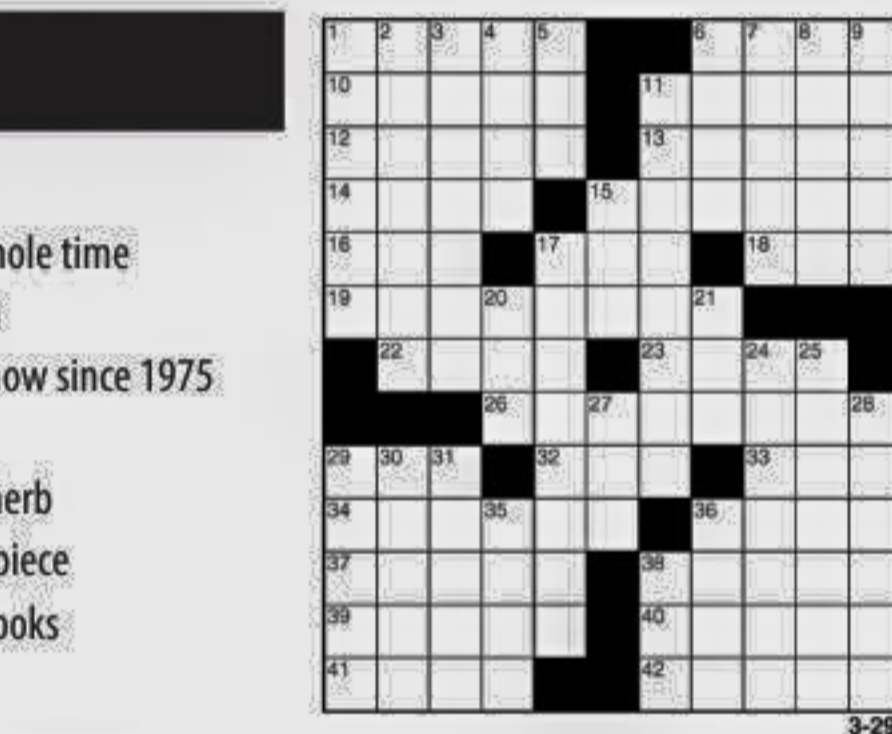
volatile and unbalanced society. No matter how insulated we believe we are, our fate is closely linked to those around us.

The beginning of a new year is not just a time for celebration; it's also a time for reflection. With the advent of the Bengali New Year, it may be pertinent to remind ourselves that "no man is an island," we are all a part of the "whole." Let us not ask "for whom the bell tolls", for it also tolls for you and me.

The writer is a renowned Rabindra Sangeet exponent and a former employee of the World Bank.

### CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- |                             |                     |                               |                        |
|-----------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------|
| <b>ACROSS</b>               | 22 Authentic        | 42 River to the Rio Grande    | 15 Wrath               |
| 1 Let up                    | 23 Edit menu choice |                               | 17 The whole time      |
| 6 Put away                  | 26 Old Nash autos   |                               | 20 Saloon              |
| 10 Pass along               | 29 Hounds' quarry   |                               | 21 NBC show since 1975 |
| 11 Myanmar, once            | 32 Spanish article  |                               | 24 Evil                |
| 12 "Atlantic City" director | 33 Got together     | <b>DOWN</b>                   | 25 Pizza herb          |
| 13 Disney mermaid           | 34 Titania's king   | 1 Preparing for war           | 27 Chess piece         |
| 14 Fan's favorite           | 36 Forum wear       | 2 Words before asking a favor | 28 Long looks          |
| 15 Glacial period           | 37 Arrested         | 3 Door opener's words         | 29 Raid                |
| 16 Original                 | 38 Ping producer    | 4 Like most NBA players       | 30 Bush's successor    |
| 17 Bible boat               | 39 In the thick of  | 5 Look over                   | 31 Odorless gas        |
| 18 German article           | 40 Speculate        | 6 Confident                   | 35 Skating spot        |
| 19 Casino patrons           | 41 Tug              | 7 Musical chord               | 36 Drink too much      |
|                             |                     | 8 Last letter                 | 38 Soak up             |
|                             |                     | 9 Cardiff's land              |                        |
|                             |                     | 11 Tension relievers          |                        |



**YESTERDAY'S ANSWER**

S	E	A	T	S	N	O	L	T	E
A	L	B	E	E	O	H	A	R	A
D	O	N	N	A	S	U	M	M	E
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T	E	R	R	O	R	S	O	D	E
	O	R	E	P	O	O	R		
T	R	O	U	T	P	E	N	N	S
W	E	N	T	M	I	A			
O	F	T	F	E	A	S	T	E	D
P	E	R	I	O	N	A	V	A	
A	R	I	E	L	W	I	N	T	E
R	E	A	L	M	S	E	I	N	E
T	E	L	L	S	T	E	N	T	S

**A WORD A DAY**

**ERUBESCENT**  
adjective

*Red or reddish; blushing.*

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