

A loyalist's guide to Section 57



BADIUZZAMAN BAY

IN the world of graffiti, there are artworks that promote good vibes and positivity, and then there are those that promote hatred. But on the walls that stretched from the capital's Agargaon borough to Shishu Mela, a different kind of graffiti can be noticed. Subodh, the subject of this somewhat ambiguous artwork, is seen sprinting down the street, holding a cage, with a sun trapped inside it. The accompanying text urges him to run, because "time is not in [his] favour." Who is Subodh? Who or what is he running from? These are questions left to the imagination of the passers-by, but one particular explanation that sits well with the younger demographic is: Subodh is a young dissident who refuses to accept things as they are, and is running because his refusal—or defiance—makes him vulnerable. But what if Subodh didn't have to run away? What if he could find a way around all his grievances and learn to live and prosper? Subodh's character particularly resonates with those journalists and activists who refuse to accept things as they are, and are vocal opponents of a system designed to stifle opposition and tamp down diversity of opinion. It does that using Section 57 of the Information Communication Technology (ICT) Act, they say, and other laws with similarly vague and broadly-worded clauses. In their defence, the activists cite a report that says that a total of 391

cases were filed under the ICT Act in the first six months of 2017. Seventy-nine of them were filed in June alone, mostly under Section 57. So, if you're one of the more assertive denizens of our cyberspace and are worried about the likely consequences of your social media activities, here's a guide to Section 57 and how to dodge prosecution. First of all, stop deliberating. This might take some getting used to, but it's worth it. The fact is, the more you deliberate, research and question, the further away you are from having your peace of mind. Section 57 is not for the unthinking mortals. So stop thinking. May I add, as an aside, that it's also the safest thing to do? Secondly, and this is very important, have faith in the brains behind Section 57. These are the brightest brains in this country and they have blessings from some of the most powerful people this society has ever produced. A holy matrimony of brain and muscle resulting in the most useful legal document ever to be drawn up. The doubters shall remain in torment, but the believers, well, let's unspool point-by-point what virtues await them. Section 57, first and foremost, teaches you the beauty of belief. As Khalil Gibran said, "Doubt is a pain too lonely to know that faith is his twin brother." An absolute faith in Section 57 can bring you peace and give you a good night's sleep, and not to mention, keep you on the right side of the bars. Section 57 teaches you the virtue of silence. You keep your eyes closed, your mouth shut, and your nose and ears covered—and you will have that precious moment of quiet, undisturbed introspection in the gnawing sameness of your social



ILLUSTRATION: EHSANUR RAZA RONNY

media routine. A silence otherwise lost to reactive senses. Your allegiance to Section 57 will also make you a proud, obedient, law-abiding citizen. Now that we know that Section 57 is actually for our own good, it's time you adapted yourself to a more—how can I put it?—"healthy" code of conduct. Which means, from now on, you will stop writing about politics and public affairs and everything in between. If it's any consolation, your opinion doesn't really matter. Despite your misgivings and grave predictions through the years about its future, Bangladesh didn't come crashing down—quite the contrary—it has registered impressive growth in almost all sectors. The brave soldiers at the

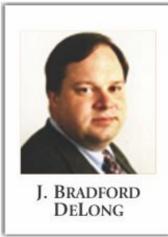
Ministry of Planning and Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics can vouch for that. Do people's sufferings bother you? You should learn to see beyond that and focus on the greater good. Have faith, if nothing else works for you. The next wise thing would be to stop "sharing." The dead goat will rot in a day or two but a Section 57 scar may last a lifetime. But if you must, share or write posts that do not contain "false information," "obscene material," "defamatory statements," "statements hurting religious sentiments," and "expressions that are likely to cause deterioration of law and order" or "tarnish the image of the state or an individual." Confused? Well, Section 57 can be a little vague on details but believers, real believers, know that these

conditions are actually an exercise in cleansing your negative thoughts. In any case, you'll learn the art of self-censorship, which is not such a bad idea. Self-censorship can lead to invaluable artistic expressions. Ask Anisul Hoque if it is not true. These conditions may also work as safeguards against the release of your basest instincts. Imagine the world, for example, descending into chaos because of one man sending lewd emojis to the wife of another! And always remember to say nice things about the nice people in sleeveless black coat. If William Congreve were alive today, and in present-day Bangladesh, he would've said: "Hell hath no fury like a man in black coat scorned." So, yes, you're safe as long as they're happy. That

being said, the desire to criticise seems to be hardwired into our brains. We can't always control it. So the next time you find your fingers itching to write a damning post on someone, try Donald Trump—he doesn't mind really. But why spread negativity when you can light up someone's world with your erudite opinion on the wonderful topics such as khichuri on a rainy day, Apu Biswas' fitness, the art of bunking office, or India's cow ministry? You can also write about fast-food takeaways, cricket, automobiles, the 19 classic types of selfies... The more I think about it, the more I grow fond of Section 57. Sometimes I feel as if my brain is not well fitted to fully grasp the wisdom behind it; other times I feel like we're not doing enough to spread its universal messages. Maybe we need a Newspeak of our own to purge our brains of bad thoughts. Maybe we need to introduce a chapter on Section 57 in our school curricula so that children can grow up appreciating its values. The children will also have learnt an important lesson early in their life: that freedom of speech doesn't necessarily have to include the freedom to question, disagree, debate, or criticise. That it means only the freedom to speak as directed. And who better to direct it than the wise promulgators of Section 57? Subodh didn't have to run if he had learned these lessons early in his life. He could train his mind to stop questioning, ignore whatever was going on around, and turn time back in his favour. Badiuzzaman Bay is a member of the editorial team at *The Daily Star*. E-mail: badiuzzaman.bd@gmail.com

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The new socialism of fools



J. BRADFORD DELONG

ACCORDING to mainstream economic theory, globalisation tends to "lift all boats," and has little effect on the broad distribution of incomes. But "globalisation" is not the same as the elimination of tariffs and other import barriers that confer rent-seeking advantages to politically influential domestic producers. As Harvard University economist Dani Rodrik frequently points out, economic theory predicts that removing tariffs and non-tariff barriers does produce net gains; but it also results in large redistributions, wherein eliminating smaller barriers yields larger redistributions relative to the net gains. Globalisation, for our purposes, is different. It should be understood as a process in which the world becomes increasingly interconnected through technological advances that drive down transportation and communication costs. To be sure, this form of globalisation allows foreign producers to export goods and services to distant markets at a lower cost. But it also opens up export markets and reduces costs for the other side. And at the end of the day, consumers get more stuff for less. According to standard economic theory, redistribution only comes about when a country's exports require vastly different factors of production than its imports. But there are no such differences in today's global economy. In the United States, a balance-of-payments surplus in finance means that more Americans will be employed as construction workers, capital-goods producers, and nurses and home health aides. Similarly, a surplus in services means that more Americans will work not only as highly educated (and well-remunerated) consultants in steel-and-glass eyeries, but also as, say, janitors and housekeepers in motels outside of Yellowstone



PHOTO: AFP

Globalisation leads to both net gains and large redistributions. In the US for example, with the shift in employment from assembly-line manufacturing to the services sector such as health care, there seems to have been a redistribution in income in terms of gender, not class.

National Park. At the same time, a deficit in manufacturing may create more manufacturing jobs abroad, in countries where labour costs are low relative to capital; but it destroys relatively few jobs in the US, where manufacturing is already a highly capital-intensive industry. As Stanford University economist Robert Hall has been pointing out for three decades, more Americans are employed selling cars than making them. The commodities that the US imports from abroad embody a significant amount of relatively unskilled labour, but they do not displace much unskilled labour in America. So, at least in theory, the shift in US employment from assembly-line manufacturing to construction, services, and caretaking may have had an impact on the

overall distribution of income in terms of gender, but not in terms of class. Why, then, has there been such strong political resistance to globalisation in the twenty-first century? I see four reasons. First and foremost, it is easy for politicians to pin the blame for a country's problems on foreigners and immigrants who do not vote. Back in 1890, when politicians in the Habsburg Empire routinely blamed Jews for various socioeconomic ills, the Austrian dissident Ferdinand Kronawetter famously observed that "Der Antisemitismus ist der Sozialismus der dummen Kerle": anti-Semitism is the socialism of fools. The same could be said of anti-globalisation today. Second, more than a generation of inequitable and slower-than-expected economic growth in the global North has

created a strong political and psychological need for scapegoats. People want a simple narrative to explain why they are missing out on the prosperity they were once promised, and why there is such a large and growing gap between an increasingly wealthy overclass and everyone else. Third, China's economic rise coincided with a period in which the global North was struggling to reach full employment. Contrary to what the followers of Friedrich von Hayek and Andrew Mellon have always claimed, economic readjustments do not happen when bankruptcies force labour and capital out of low-productivity, low-demand industries, but rather when booms pull labour and capital into high-productivity, high-demand industries. Thus, neoliberalism does not just require

open and competitive markets, global change, and price stability. It also depends on full employment and near-permanent booms, just as economist John Maynard Keynes had warned in the 1920s and 1930s. In recent decades, the neoliberal order failed to deliver either condition, most likely because doing so would have been impossible even with the best policies in place. Fourth, policymakers did not do enough to compensate for this failure with more aggressive social policies and economic and geographic redistribution. When US President Donald Trump recently told upstate New Yorkers that they should leave the region and seek jobs elsewhere, he was simply echoing the past generation of centre-right politicians in the global North. The global North's current political and economic dilemmas are not so different from those of the 1920s and 1930s. As Keynes noted then, the key is to produce and maintain full employment, at which point most other problems will melt away. And, as the Austro-Hungarian economist Karl Polanyi argued, it is the role of government to secure socioeconomic rights. People believe that they have a right to live in healthy communities, hold stable occupations, and earn a decent income that rises over time. But these presumed rights do not stem naturally from property rights and claims to scarce resources—the coins of the neoliberal realm. It has been ten years since the global financial crisis and the start of the "Great Recession" in the global North. Governments still have not repaired the damage from those events. If they do not do so soon, the "isms" of fools will continue to wreak havoc in the decades ahead. J. Bradford DeLong, a former deputy assistant US Treasury secretary, is Professor of Economics at the University of California at Berkeley and a research associate at the National Bureau of Economic Research. Copyright: Project Syndicate, 2017. www.project-syndicate.org (Exclusive to The Daily Star)

A WORD A DAY



GODWIN'S LAW

noun

A theory which postulates that as an online argument grows longer the probability of one party comparing the other to Nazis approaches 1

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

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| 1 Top grade | 33 Downhill course | 8 Director May |
| 6 Smart guy | 35 Acted grand-motherly | 9 Arrest |
| 11 Clear | 38 Dancer Castle | 10 Toll |
| 12 Head, in slang | 39 Sports spot | 16 Some clubs |
| 13 Wild party | 40 Like urban areas | 20 Prepare for surgery |
| 14 Painter Rembrandt | 41 Lingerie buy | 21 UFO pilots |
| 15 Humphrey's "Casablanca" co-star | 42 Contest form | 24 Flowery ring |
| 17 Suffering | | 25 In abundance |
| 18 Expert | DOWN | 26 On cloud nine |
| 19 Arms collection | 1 Reception aid | 27 Gift |
| 22 Went ahead | 2 Strut | 28 Penitent person |
| 23 Refuse | 3 Fell behind | 29 Fix |
| 24 Biographies | 4 Manual reader | 30 Egypt's Anwar |
| 25 Old fellow | 5 Put out in installments | 34 Elvis' middle name |
| 27 Road goo | 30 "Amadeus" role | 36 Final part |
| 31 Stopped fasting | 6 Band booster | 37 Time unit |

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YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

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BEETLE BAILEY BY MORT WALKER



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