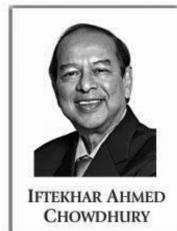


Of crises and kite-flying

Trump, Kim and the Singapore Summit



IFTEKHAR AHMED CHOWDHURY

WITH only weeks to go before the planned Summit between the two in Singapore on June 12, both US President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un seemed to

be focused on a spot of kite-flying, on the backdrop of crises, to test each other's nerves.

Mr Trump was conveying an impression that a great victory in deal-making, a practice in which he claims to have achieved perfection, was in the process of being won even before the negotiations commenced. In a series of articulations, both verbally and through Twitter, he seemed to be engaged in what appeared to be victory laps by his somewhat baffling confidence in the outcome of the talks a tad prematurely. In return for immediate "denuclearisation" (despite the fact that same words often mean different things to protagonists in negotiations), he was promising generous handouts to the rivals. Mr Trump's pitch, broadly, was: Give up the weapons that threaten us,

and we promise to make you rich. Alas, the opponent was not on the same page! For Mr Kim might have watched and concluded that the other side did not have a good record of keeping promises. The case of Iran could have come to his mind. Also, the unnerving recollections of the experiences of Iraq and Libya. So he might have seen wisdom in buttressing his faith, as any soldier as

hard to come by. For instance, as some would assume not unreasonably, Mr Kim has reacted negatively to the military manoeuvres by the US and South Korea in the neighbourhood. The somewhat daunting name given to it—Max Thunder—could not but have dented his sense of security. He did not buy that it was routine. In light of engaging



North Korea has warned that Pyongyang may cancel the summit between Kim Jong-un and President Trump scheduled for June 12 in Singapore, expressing displeasure at the possibility of Washington insisting on "unilateral denuclearisation".



PHOTO: REUTERS

exhorted by Oliver Cromwell would, in his adversary by also keeping his powder dry! Mr Kim took time to react, and when he finally did, Mr Trump was, surprisingly, or unsurprisingly, as some analysts would contend, caught off guard.

Mr Kim may have calculated that it would be imprudent to give up all his options, and then to wait for the reward afterwards. He might have gauged that the only reason he has been invited to travel to Singapore to meet his opponent was his wherewithal to be able to strike at the latter. It was unlikely therefore that he would give up that capability so readily and place himself at the mercy of the goodwill of his perceived foe, of which the recent examples, to him at least, appear to be

in peacemaking processes in the upcoming talks, routine acts of seeming hostility would be viewed as unfriendly signs in Pyongyang.

More importantly, the reference to the "Libyan model" would have seriously disturbed Mr Kim. In all fairness to Mr John Bolton, the US national security adviser who, when he had brought it up first, had actually the 2003 agreement between the US and Libya in mind. In accordance with that the Libyans were to transfer their rudimentary nuclear centrifuges to be dismantled. But his political master, Mr Trump, who did not perhaps care to check things out just as he is wont not to do, gave it an interpretation that may have actually confirmed the North Korean's worst fears: "The

model, if you look at the model with Gaddafi," Mr Trump sought to explain, erroneously and quite unnecessarily, "was that of total decimation. We went there to beat him. Now that model would take place if we don't make a deal, most likely." Mr Kim was not amused.

His sentiments were reflected in an unambiguous message from Mr Kim Kye-gwan, his vice minister for foreign affairs. This Mr Kim said: "We are no longer interested in a negotiation that will be all about driving us into a corner and making a one-sided demand for us to give up our nukes and this would force us to reconsider whether we should accept the North Korea-US Summit meeting." This was a Parthian shot, not fired at the end of a battle, but prior to engagement. This may have dampened the euphoric expectations that the achievement by US negotiators of a North Korean nuclear disarmament involving a "complete, verifiable and irreversible dismantlement" was just around the corner. But it may have perhaps helped to bring a more realistic situation to the fore.

The prospects of the Summit are by no means dead. But the recent exchanges are a wake-up call to all sides to be calm and rational, and not to assume that the other side is weaker and desperate to reach an agreement. Both parties will come to the table—as is hoped they will despite the exchanges—with the belief that a bad deal is worse than no deal at all.

North Korea will not easily give up its power of deterrence. Nor will, or should, the US allow for a major erosion of its sense of security only to obtain a result that should temporarily find a positive electoral or diplomatic resonance. When Greek meets Greek, then comes the tug of war. That test of physical and intellectual strength may begin but not necessarily end in Singapore this June.

Dr Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury is former foreign adviser to the caretaker government and is currently principal research fellow at the Institute of South Asian Studies, National University of Singapore.

Reducing Dhaka's waterlogging

Words not matched with deeds

WATERLOGGING has become a ritualistic affair in Dhaka. It is unfathomable how a city of over 16 million people still does not have a working storm drainage system.

Every year during the monsoon season, whenever a little rain inundates the entire city, we are accustomed to hearing platitudes of the public officials that the problem would soon be over. For example, the LGRD and cooperatives minister pledged last year that we would not witness waterlogging in Dhaka in 2018. In reality, however, there hasn't been any noticeable improvement of the situation.

If anything, it only gets worse day by day as remaining floodplains and canals are getting occupied by powerful locals, blocking the passage of rainwater, as is evident in one of yesterday's front-page stories of this newspaper. If the government really wants to reduce waterlogging in Dhaka, the order of the day should be recovering the occupied canals and water retention areas as soon as possible.

The fact that there are seven authorities to deal with Dhaka's drainage affair on a piecemeal basis speaks volumes of the lack of coordination among public offices.

In addition, every year the government allocates a huge amount of money in improving the city's infrastructure, including the existing drainage system, which obviously is not being properly spent. It's high time that misspending of public money was stopped and instead allocated where it is needed, such as in building a storm drainage system.

Living on Tk 85 a day!

Increase minimum wage of tea workers

IT is unthinkable how a worker can survive with a wage as low as Tk 85 a day these days. As ridiculous as this might seem, this is the wage the average tea workers of the country are getting after a whole day's work (from 8am till 5pm). It is less than one-third of the wage of an average farm worker, which is Tk 300. With a meagre income of Tk 2,550 a month, our tea workers can barely have two meals a day, let alone meet their family needs or send their children to school. Thus the tea workers' demand for a daily wage of Tk 300 is totally rational.

Around 1.3 lakh registered tea workers, employed in 156 gardens across the country, are probably the most disadvantaged section of workers working in the informal sector. These workers are deprived of even basic social and legal protections and employment benefits. There are no specific working hours for them and no standards for determining their wage.

While our tea companies have been making huge profits every year, lakhs of tea workers are struggling to survive with their extremely low income. In order to improve their living standards, their wage should be increased to a reasonable amount. For that a new wage agreement should be signed. And the government must remember that they have a role to play here, as this is not merely an issue of the workers and the owners. The government bodies concerned must not only oversee that these marginal workers are not deprived of proper wage but also make sure that they get employment contracts and overtime benefits.

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Why the growing unemployment rate should worry us

OPEN SKY



BIRU PAKSHA PAUL

WHEN I approached a car insurance company to discuss ways to reduce my insurance cost, the manager advised me to take a study course on defensive driving, which I passed four years ago. She argued that rules and ideas on safe driving evolve over time and so the government has made it mandatory for anyone to refresh his or her knowledge of safe driving every three years to earn the cost advantage. The same is true for an economy which may seem to be on a fast-growth track but the inherent risk factors must be reviewed every now and then for safe growth.

The fact is, despite satisfactory growth, Bangladesh's economy is developing a cavity in the labour market: growing unemployment. Recently, the US unemployment rate has hit 3.9 percent—lowest in the last 17 years. By contrast, the unemployment rate in Bangladesh is now possibly one of the highest particularly among the educated youth. Bangladesh's unemployment rate, which is around 4.5 percent, is not comparable with America's. Bangladesh follows the ILO definition which is quite loose and thus non-reflective of the actual situation in the market. In 2017, one BBS

above 12 percent—a mark that economists consider alarming. The US had crossed the 10-percent mark only twice in the last 70 years: during the recessions of the early 1980s and the late 2000s. The ILO definition is hiding the cavity, so we should instead follow the BLS definition to feel the real heat in the economy. If a thermometer shows a patient's body temperature as 100 degrees Fahrenheit, hiding the actual temperature above 104 degrees Fahrenheit, it is concealing the risk of death for the patient and thus misguiding the doctor.

The argument that the ILO puts to justify its loose definition of unemployment for the poor and developing nations is that the labour markets in these economies are not as developed as those in the developed nations. But that shouldn't be the reason to follow double standards. Understanding the differences in development is part of the learning and decision-making process. We don't follow different thermometers in different hospitals. Nor do we follow different definitions to measure economic growth and inflation—which are usually higher in developing countries for valid reasons such as growing opportunities in those nations.

Mere growth numbers shouldn't make us blind to the risk factors such as rising income inequality and growing agitation among the youth. Economists are now pointing to jobless growth. Yes, better technology

Mere growth numbers shouldn't make us blind to the risk factors such as rising income inequality and growing agitation among the youth. Economists are now pointing to jobless growth.

economy is adding jobs more than the number of people turn unemployed since 2010.

In Bangladesh, where agriculture absorbs 40 percent of workers and 85 percent of our employees are in the informal sector, addressing the issue of jobless growth should be a top priority. The recent slowdown in job creation in the private sector should be treated as a looming threat to the economy. It happened because of the beleaguered banking sector particularly over the last two years. We celebrate 17 percent profit growth in the banking sector, but the relevant ministries failed to adopt any policy that would require the bank owners to add a reasonable number of jobs to the industry.

Also, what is the point of export growth if the garment factories are hiring at a declining rate? Our vast informal sector and the pro-rich tax policy are contributing to the rising income inequality and also affecting social welfare. Before celebrating the rising growth and increasing per capita income, we should be aware that the rich are taking the greater slice of the pie day by day. Our budget allocation for social welfare and education as a share of GDP is the lowest in the region. So is the allocation for infrastructure.

Almost 2 million jobseekers enter the market every year but the country cannot give formal jobs to even one-fourth of them. The recent quota movement can be seen as a product of the growing tension and grievances among the youth seeking jobs. Karl Marx was right to say that the unemployed will act like a "reserve army of labour". Since the country's capital market went through serious irregularities and the wrongdoers weren't often brought to justice, the banking sector is our only hope to help the private sector generate adequate jobs.

But the rising default culture, a weak central bank leadership, money laundering, and the finance ministry's excessive interference have greatly impeded the functioning of the banking sector in recent years. Concentration of bank loans in the hands of a few is another reason why job generation has slowed. The government must address these institutional factors to generate jobs at a faster pace and thus ensure safe driving on growth.

Biru Paksha Paul is an associate professor of economics at the State University of New York at Cortland. Email: birupakshapaul@gmail.com



Almost two million jobseekers enter the market every year but the country cannot give formal jobs to even one-fourth of them.

SOURCE: CORPORATESANGBAD

official made a joke on the ILO definition and assured me that a person working for an hour in the last month will no longer be regarded as unemployed. There are numerous studies where economists show how the ILO definition rarely finds anyone unemployed.

In contrast, the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) in the US conducts interviews of 60,000 households every month and defines a person as unemployed if he or she doesn't have a job despite having looked for one for four weeks in a row. If the BLS definition is followed, Bangladesh's unemployment rate will definitely be

and planned automation do reduce the number of jobs. That has been happening in the industrial sector and particularly in the garments industry at a steady rate. But that shouldn't be an excuse for jobless growth. For example, all the air trains in the Kennedy airport are unmanned. Also, once at midnight, I found no railway officer at the ticket counter at a Long Island station. Lastly, I had to buy the ticket from an automated vending machine. Since the technology boom in the late 1990s, most US companies are trying to adopt automation as much as possible, but still the US



PHOTO: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

Dhaka's congestion: A tourist's perspective

I am writing in response to the article "Traffic jam: The ugly side of Dhaka's development" by Abu Afsarul Haider in *The Daily Star*. While I agree with much of the article, I believe the piece failed to include one other area of review—its impact on local businesses. As the issue of congestion gets fixed or relieved, some jobs will become obsolete as a result. There will not be vendors selling newspapers, nuts, fabrics, fruits, etc., whenever traffic has stopped on the road. A lot of these people rely on congestion as their primary or secondary source of income. They will not have a future in a congestion-free Dhaka. Therefore, there must also be a solution to the transition of these people into other roles or to provide a level of financial support, as they acquire new employment.

I travelled to Bangladesh to meet my in-laws and, as a tourist and guest, I am appalled by the degree of congestion in Dhaka. I have been here for just two weeks, and yet I feel angry and tired every time I now step into a car. I cannot fathom the mental fatigue and aggression that the residents of Dhaka must surely endure after months—no, years of this madness.

The congestion of Dhaka is not a local crisis but a national one that threatens the economic growth of the tourism industry in Bangladesh.

Daniel Sloan, *By e-mail*