

# The dark side of globalisation

## THE GRUDGING URBANIST



ADNAN ZILLUR MORSHED

THE project of globalisation remains as contested as ever. In *Globalization and Its Discontents* (2001), Joseph Stiglitz criticised international monetary organisations like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund

(IMF) for advancing ideologically driven, market-based development mantras around the globe, often at the expense of poorer nations. Then there was Thomas Friedman's *flat world*—a contentious metaphor for a level playing field across the globe, meaning access to opportunities and decision-making is levelling out. One could question whether Friedman's flat world is inhabited only by multinational companies and their power-wielding CEOs. But is the world really flat for the little guys? Or, does the world consist of a series of insurmountable pyramids or rough seas for the people at the bottom of the food chain?

The world seems increasingly oblivious of some of the tragic protagonists of globalisation: the "illegal" migrants, who cross national boundaries without papers or undertake perilous journeys in search of better lives. A few days ago, at least 37 Bangladeshi migrants drowned in the Mediterranean Sea, on their way to Italy from Libya. It has been a heart-breaking spectacle. Their overloaded, inflatable boat was no match for the rough waters of the Mediterranean Sea. The project of globalisation is riddled with black holes that tend to swallow the little guys of the world. They are rarely mourned because they don't seem to matter. They are quickly forgotten as the dispensable, collateral damage of globalisation.

Recently, I came to know about a Bangladeshi who was arrested in Monterrey in Mexico and was brought to Houston by the

US Department of Homeland Security agents on charge of trafficking people to the US. Thirty-one-year-old Selim (not his real name) hails from a low-income family in Sylhet, in northeastern Bangladesh.

This is his globalisation: a journey from Bangladesh to Mexico, with the dream of coming to the US one day. At the age of 23, he first came to Saudi Arabia and worked there for a year. Then he embarked on a southward, overland journey to South Africa, where he stayed for a year or two. Next came a dangerous sea voyage from South Africa to Brazil on a cargo ship. He then spent four years in Brazil, working in different areas and developing a sound geographic understanding of the northbound land route to Mexico via Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, and Guatemala.

The terminus of that journey was the southernmost Mexican town named Tapachula, located in the southeast state of Chiapas in Mexico, near the Guatemalan border and the Pacific Ocean. He knew that there were other Bangladeshis in Tapachula. One of them owned a restaurant, which was also used as a "station" for Bangladeshi migrants on their way to Monterrey, capital of the northeastern Mexican state of Nuevo León and the third largest city in Mexico. Monterrey is an industrial centre hemmed in by mountains, about 230 kilometres from the US border.

Selim made Mexico City his base and claimed to have started a mobile business, specialising in selling brand-name clothing to department stores in both the Mexican capital and Monterrey. He married a Mexican woman soon thereafter, and learned to speak Spanish. He quickly developed another specialty, helping his compatriots to travel from Monterrey to Nuevo Laredo, a small border town on the banks of the Rio Grande, across from the US city of Laredo in Texas. For the migrants, this is the final destination before they "entered" Texas.

Soon, the Transportation Security Administration (TSA is an agency of the US Department of Homeland Security) staff, in



A migrant, who was rescued after their boat capsized in the Mediterranean Sea off the Tunisian Coast after they had left Libya, is seen inside a local Red Crescent chapter in Zarzis, Tunisia, May 11, 2019.

PHOTO: REUTERS

collaboration with Mexican law-enforcement agencies, began to monitor Selim's activities in Monterrey and Laredo. They amassed data on him. Finally, late last year he was picked up from a hotel in Monterrey and flown to Houston for interrogation. He was charged with human trafficking and is now undergoing trial in a US court.

When I learned about Selim's story, I was both saddened and fascinated. Without making any value judgement on his alleged complicity in human trafficking, I was thinking more about the dark side of globalisation and how industrious young men like Selim inadvertently become sacrificial goats at the altar of transnational movement and prosperity that globalisation had promised to all. In his imagination, Selim most possibly tried to make the world flat but it ultimately proved to be not-so-flat. The life of illegal migrants is perpetually sad, desperate, and insecure.

I was also fascinated because Selim, in many ways, exemplified the migratory history of globalisation. From ancient times, people moved from place to place in search of better opportunities. This has always been a fundamental human trait. The invention of nation-state and their political boundaries in the modern era restricted human movement and introduced the illegality of unauthorised national border crossing. While the neoliberal policies of globalisation promised unlimited movement of capital and labour across the globe, with a view to advancing free trade, the poor and the disenfranchised of the Global South increasingly faced a restrictive and xenophobic world.

The stories of young men from poorer countries embarking on dangerous journeys to reach the shores of Europe or the border of the US have become a quintessential narrative of the contemporary form of globalisation. The boat that capsized in the

Mediterranean Sea off the coast of Tunisia, killing at least 37 Bangladeshi migrants, included four brothers. Only one survived, who was seen on Al Jazeera television news wailing, as he informed his parents about the tragedy that had just struck his family.

For the viewer, it is an impossible moment. On the one hand, you ask, why take such a deadly risk; you almost feel like blaming the undocumented migrants for their uninformed, poor decision that puts them in harm's way. On the other hand, you are tempted to feel empathy for these young men who just want a better life for themselves and their families. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2,262 migrants died trying to reach the shores of southern European countries in 2018. Of course, Italy and Spain can't take in migrants *ad infinitum*. But what can we do to create a just world with less income inequality? How do we reign in predatory capitalism that seeks to pigeonhole cheap labour in their blighted areas as the very ideology of its economic asymmetry?

When Selim was arrested in Monterrey, his parents were performing *umrah* in Mecca. They were unaware of what was happening to their son, who most likely financed their pilgrimage to the holy site (he reportedly charged each migrant USD 200 for reaching Nuevo Laredo). His younger brother was already in Brazil, hoping to reach Monterrey one day soon. Selim expressed regrets to the security officers who interrogated him for what he had done and asked them when he could possibly return to Bangladesh. He appeared unaware of the long prison sentence that awaits him. What is the state's responsibility to better inform its citizens about the perils of unlawful migration in a world that doesn't tolerate it?

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# Camouflage of a different kind

## CHINTITO SINCE 1995



NIZAMUDDIN AHMED

THE history of camouflage is as old as animals hiding in their natural habitat. Human beings, perhaps the greatest copycats, took quite a while but never looked back, especially since World War I when military forces massively exploited the craft.

Over the years, few of us can deny not having taken refuge in the art of disguise and deception at some time in our life.

Most recently, the media has claimed that the near-extinct Asiatic black bear has been sighted in the Korean De-militarised Zone. With the love-hate relationship between the two Koreas kept alive by the tact of international diplomacy, I would not rule out the possibility of the object viewed as being another case of camouflage. We will perhaps never know whether it was a South Korean or a North Korean in the black bear's costume, but given the desperation at the border for socio-political crossovers, I urge both sides to exercise restraint and never shoot at sight. We may have just saved a Yong-joon Park.

In our political culture (or lack thereof), the old guards in political parties are resentful about fresh faces taking over. "They have disguised themselves as party loyalists, but they belong somewhere else and do not have any contribution, especially during our bad days"—a common refrain used by those overlooked by party supremos.

The assumption is that if someone's vowels are in order (allegiance-efficiency-importance-oiling-utility), recognition would follow in due course. Merely being a party relic cannot be a criterion. So these new faces, barring a few, are not pretenders, but often the saviours of an organisation.

For instance, if a social or political or economic group is in need of an expert on climate change, and none among its seasoned members have a clue about carbon emission, melting poles, rising sea level,



SOURCE: WWW.PLAYBUZZ.COM

agricultural cost, poverty, hunger, disease and death—then those who do shall take over. No disguise required.

More dangerously though, we find ourselves pitted against fake medical doctors, although it is easier to imitate a PhD holder; no prescriptions are needed, and an occasional nod of the head in either axis adds value to the doctorate.

In April last year, RAB had arrested a fake doctor in Dhaka's Rampura. Only last month, another fake doctor was arrested from Tangail's Capital Hospital and sentenced to six months in jail by a mobile court. One wonders whether after release he will add FRCP to his name—Fresh Returnee from City Prison.

Some fake doctors serve for years before being identified as fake. A man allegedly stole the identity of one bona fide doctor including his Bangladesh Medical and Dental Council (BMDC) registration number to join

Bhangura (Pabna) Health Care Limited in 2012. He was caught in 2019 but by then, he had treated many a toothache.

Punitive measures, not necessarily a tooth for a tooth, may be a deterrent. In December 2017, the High Court asked Niramoy Private Clinic and fake physician Razan Das of Patuakhali to pay Tk 9 lakh as compensation for wrong treatment. He had left a real gauze inside a woman's abdomen. I wonder how many more are out there—not gauges, but such deceiving practitioners.

Paradoxically, another favourite with the lawbreakers is the law profession itself. Persons in the guise of lawyers have also been apprehended. Take Parvez Ahmed, who was not only pretending to be a barrister and a Supreme Court lawyer, but was giving expert opinion on television talk shows. I always suspected some of these know-all TV pundits. Bangladesh Bar Council, the licensing and regulatory body for lawyers,

identified the poser based on a complaint by one of its members. (*The Daily Star*, October 2017)

So there are fake doctors, lawyers, even engineers and architects, and lovers too, but to me, the heaviest blow to this nation has been dealt by government officials and employees masquerading as Freedom Fighters. Not an easy call.

We fought the Liberation War in 1971, the collective reward for which was the freedom of the nation. The struggle for independence actually began way before that, when monetary and service benefits began to be dished out to the undeserving. In July 2014, the Ministry of Liberation War Affairs found out about 35 government officials and employees having fake Freedom Fighter certificates. Needless to say, there are many non-government fakes as well.

The matter took a more shameful turn when, on September 22 the same year,

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the ministry through a circular withheld a 2013 enlistment of a senior government officer, a secretary no less, as a Freedom Fighter and cancelled the FF status of four other secretaries. The Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) had earlier reported to the ministry that their Freedom Fighter certificates were "illegally issued". In abusing his power, the ACC said, the then State Minister for Liberation War Affairs had bypassed the relevant law and the mandatory recommendation of the Jatiya Muktiyoddha Council.

Seeking glorification as the greatest sons of the soil, war allowance for life and other advantages, the five put on the garb of valiant fighters but their fraudulence lasted only a few months.

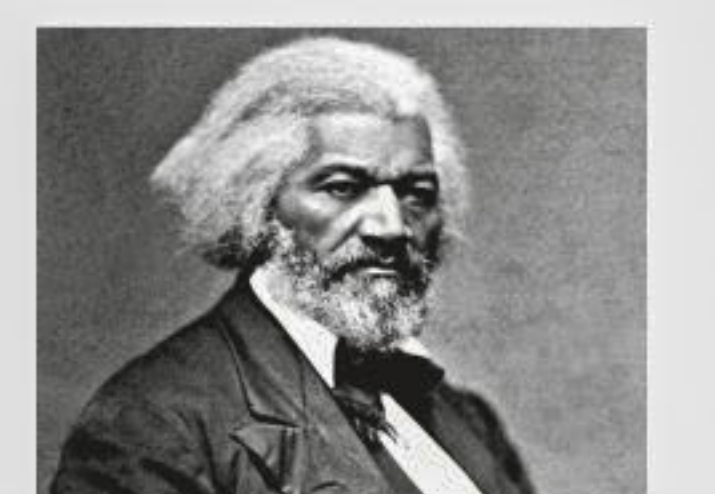
In the public domain are equally harmful, bogus "chefs" and talkative "servers" who emerge only during Ramadan. Using their left hand and right, these marauders take over the streets and the alleys with iftar items, sprinkled with spit, as they shout out to draw attention of the fasting population to their wares.

Hygiene has never been our forte. Although the staff in several outlets wear gloves and mouth covering, bare hands and dusty layers continue to rule the streets. Buyers, weary from office and heat, clean hands the last thing on their agenda, will poke at a food item, pick it up for close inspection before putting it back on the platter, only for the following unsuspecting buyer to come along, purchase and consume it. By the way, I have seen a tea-man let out a full sneeze on his uncovered cups and spoons, milk and sugar.

We need our media, especially television, to embark on campaigns to address several social issues including fake professionals and the risks that they pose. Parents and schoolteachers can play a very constructive role from the early age of a child. We have to groom ourselves professionally, whether we are signing a document at the ministry or serving a hot cup of tea by the roadside.

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## QUOTABLE Quote



FREDERICK DOUGLASS (1818-1895) (American social reformer, abolitionist, writer, and statesman)

A battle lost or won is easily described, understood, and appreciated, but the moral growth of a great nation requires reflection, as well as observation, to appreciate it.

## CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

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| <b>ACROSS</b>       | 32 Music genre    | 8 Concert extras       |
| 1 Movie pig         | 36 Fizzy drink    | 9 Oozed                |
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| 10 Chosen few       | 40 Prologue       | 17 Make a choice       |
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| 14 Joust need       | 44 Calendar items | 24 Raptors' home       |
| 15 Lennon's love    | 45 BLT base       | 25 Summer cooler       |
| 16 Desk type        | 46 Ascend         | 27 Pharaoh's symbol    |
| 18 Janitorial tool  |                   | 28 Stop                |
| 20 Wrathful         | <b>DOWN</b>       | 30 P lookalike         |
| 21 Inning count     | 1 Submerged       | 33 Half of Hispan-iola |
| 23 Composer Rorem   | 2 With no help    |                        |
| 24 Shade            | 3 Intolerant sort | 34 Story meanies       |
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| 29 Blunders         | 6 Egg outline     | 38 Cruise stop         |
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YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

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## BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker

A GROUP FROM THE PENTAGON IS COMING. WHAT DO THEY WANT? GREG & MORT WALKER. THEY WANT TO KNOW WHAT I'M DOING. I'LL TRY TO HELP YOU THINK OF SOMETHING.

## BABY BLUES by Kirkman & Scott

OH, HANNAH GO LOOK IN THE TOP OF THE CLOSET FOR PRESENTS. WHY ME? BECAUSE IF I GET CAUGHT BEING NAUGHTY, IT WOULD BE A HUGE SHOCK TO MOM AND DAD. BUT WHAT IF I GET CAUGHT? IT WOULD BE A WEDNESDAY.

WRITE FOR US. SEND US YOUR OPINION PIECES TO dsopinion@gmail.com.