

False vanity and false friends



BLOWN IN THE WIND

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WHEN 12 members of Charlie Hebdo were shot dead for their alleged blasphemous depiction of Prophet Muhammad, the freedom-loving mass all over the world, particularly in the West, rushed quickly to identify themselves with the French satirical magazine. An attack on Hebdo was presented as an attack on the freedom of expression, although the magazine was stigmatised even in France for its "resolutely provocative" insistence on the right to be controversial, despite the risk of fanning racial tension. We did not see any such mad rush for championing the freedom of expression when Al Jazeera correspondent Shireen Abu Akleh was killed while covering Israeli army actions in the occupied West Bank, or when her pallbearers were attacked, causing the casket bearing the slain journalist to be dropped during her funeral. The contrast can be construed as a lesson in realpolitik—that the rules are different for the strong and powerful. It is also a lesson in the hypocrisy of which there is no short supply.

At the India Today Conclave, Indian Foreign Minister S Jaishankar exposed the hypocrisy of the West, saying, "You use the dichotomy of democracy and autocracy... You want the truthful answer—it is hypocrisy. Because you have a set of self-appointed custodians of the world, who find it very difficult to stomach that somebody in India is not looking for their approval." The recently ousted prime minister of Pakistan, Imran Khan, unsuccessfully tried to echo a similar sentiment, but unfortunately for Khan, his country did not have the democratic infrastructure and authoritative voice of its cousin across the border to assert itself. His miscalculated trip to Moscow threw his story at the wrong side of history. Sri Lanka made a similar mistake by aligning too much with the China bloc—now it must return to the IMF fold for a bailout. Will Durant, the American philosopher



VISUAL: SUSHMITA S PREETHA

who authored The Story of Civilization, aptly puts it, "History reports that the men who can manage men manage the men who can manage only things, and the men who can manage money manage all." Let me give an example of managing men with money, which is pertinent to this piece on hypocrisy.

The UK government has recently signed a controversial 120-million-pound pact with Rwanda to send asylum seekers 4,000 miles from their country. Rwandan President Paul Kagame, who has a track record of silencing political opponents and violating human rights, allegedly agreed to the proposal to pose himself as an ally to the West. Bangladesh, too, received a similar offer. A World Bank report earmarked a USD 2 billion fund for integrating the Rohingya refugees into their host countries. Bangladesh said no to the suggestion of "extending (the) Rohingyas the right to own land, property, businesses, rights of election and mobility and equal rights in employment as exercised by Bangladeshi citizens as part of the integration process," according to our foreign minister (Anadolu Agency). Earlier, we heard of Saudi Arabia pressuring Bangladesh to give passports to 54,000 stateless Rohingya refugees living in the kingdom. Again, Bangladesh said no.

Any act of defiance is not taken lightly by the "custodians" of world order. A determined aggressor can see a flurry of wrenches thrown at their development works. In extreme cases, there can be military actions. But usually, there is a blend of hard diplomacy and soft power that characterises the non-military acts of coercion. The capillary nature of power ensures that some of these acts are enacted by their regional or local actors. The onrush of Rohingya refugees, for instance, has been used to manufacture China's connectivity to the Bay of Bengal through Myanmar. The idea of religious intolerance has been used to cause a butterfly effect on the other side of the border to argue a case for pushback. History is being rewritten to justify the settlement and resettlement of migrants. The dominant discourse in West Bank finds its uncanny echo in Assam or Arakan.

A true friend will praise to encourage, while a false friend will flatter to deceive. We need to learn how to present ourselves to protect against false flattery.

As the Russia-Ukraine war enforces a realignment of the West and its allies in global politics, we are seeing an orchestrated rift between democracy and development. Sanctions are imposed on West-created machinery that was created to curb radical terrorism. One of our security forces has come under Western sanction for their misuse of power in throttling human rights. I am

not condoning their actions, but I am merely sharing my observations on the consequences. The trained cats have caught the mice for their masters; now there is a new rule for the fat cats as there is a new demand from the dogs. Apparently, as part of the sanction, their foreign assets will be frozen and their travels will be restricted. Fair enough. But where were you when money was laundered? Why offer lucrative visa schemes or second home options to entice the corrupt mass to sing to your tunes?

The West needed the cash inflow from the developing world to help its economy—the Russian oligarchs, the corrupt businessmen, politicians, and civil and military bureaucrats from the developing world to siphon money to their "swift" accounts. Then faced with an internal crisis, they will not lose a moment to throw these imported fortune-hunters under the bus.

The West will sing your praise as long as you serve their purpose. There is little comfort in the indexes that are presented to us on a daily basis to give us a false sense of comfort. The proverbial wily fox will praise the crow's singing prowess to coax it to drop off its cheese from its beak. Only in our case, the cheese is our natural resources such as gas, access to our port or our maritime and road routes for regional connectivity, or our generosity to accommodate a displaced population. And the slingshots aimed at the crow, in case the cajoling does not work, may include a ban on food items, currency manipulation, leaked documents, immigrant workers or export items.

With Pakistan and Sri Lanka providing examples of consequences of "determined aggressor," we need national unity more than ever. We need to know who our friends are. A true friend will praise to encourage, while a false friend will flatter to deceive. We need to learn how to present ourselves to protect against false flattery. We need to equip ourselves with the language to offer a true and multidimensional view of Bangladesh. This is something that has been done by both the major regional actors: India and China. If we aspire to join the next league, we need strategic investment in international communication that will see through realpolitik.

We need consensus on climate goals



RMG NOTES

MOSTAFIZ UDDIN

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ARMENT makers, governments, NGOs and fashion retailers all agree on one thing: carbon emissions in the clothing production must be reduced. Our industry is one of the world's most emissions-intensive, and it is simply not sustainable in its current format.

While it is a positive sign that we all agree on the need to take action, there is a lack of consensus on what action to take and the level of urgency required.

Fashion brands and retailers hold all the cards here. It is they who set climate targets with the ultimate goal of achieving net zero emissions in their own operations and supply chains. The problem is that these targets differ greatly from one retailer to another. Some fashion retailers have set targets for 2030, some have gone for 2040, some are even talking about 2050.

Now, the question is whether anybody is keeping track of all these targets. This whole area has become complicated. It feels at times as though the RMG industry is being pulled in different directions, with new climate targets being announced every day.

The fact is, if the fashion industry wishes to achieve its climate goals, it will be almost completely dependent on apparel suppliers. About 90 percent of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions occur in fashion supply chains. Retailer operations in the West have mainly switched to renewable energy. Logistics networks are making the transition to electric vehicles and so on. Suppliers are where the challenges lie.

Already, as suppliers we are getting the message from fashion retailers, our buyers, about the need to reduce our environmental impact and become less carbon-intensive. The challenge, however, is that there is a lack of unity in these requests. All fashion retailers, as discussed above, are working at a different pace where climate is concerned. This means that all are placing different demands on suppliers. As a supplier, I could be working with five different fashion brands, each of which is working towards a different climate target, with varying degrees of urgency.

This is a huge problem. Climate is the most important issue of our time; surely,

we need industry consensus on this issue? Surely, the whole fashion industry should be working towards a single, unified climate target?

There are several benefits to having one goal. First, it means we are all on the same page. Governments, NGOs, suppliers and their customers are all unified on what we are trying to achieve and when we are trying to achieve it. If one customer is talking about the climate targets of 2030 while another is talking about 2050, this could create confusion among some suppliers. Let's agree on one target and work to achieve it.

Second, with a unified target, it is easier to hold our industry to account. If fashion retailers are not held to account, there is little incentive to change. We know from experience that targets will be missed and profits prioritised. Clear, unified targets and consensus on this issue make it easier to track what our industry is doing on climate issues.

Now, the question is whether anybody is keeping track of all these targets. This whole area has become complicated. It feels at times as though the RMG industry is being pulled in different directions, with new climate targets being announced every day.

Third, a single, unified climate target means that laggards are exposed. If a few leading retailers all set the same, ambitious climate target, others would be forced to follow. If not, they would immediately be set apart as laggards. At the moment, with so many targets and so much confusion, it is easy for individual businesses to do what they like, and there is little scrutiny.

Finally, one climate target would help governments and policymakers adapt. Say, for instance, fashion retailers mainly adopted a 2030 net zero target. In Bangladesh, that would mean we would have no choice but to transition rapidly to renewable energy.

Some may say eight years is not enough time to make such a transition. In response to that, I would say that there is nothing like one, clear goal to focus all our minds on. We all know that renewable energy is the way forward for fashion

supply chains. This shift is going to happen anyway, so why not make it now? If our government knew that some of their biggest exporters risked losing huge orders if they did not rapidly transition to renewable energy, surely they would act now.

The alternative, with uncertainty

around targets, is that the pace of change is too slow. It is easier for policymakers to procrastinate when targets and goals are unclear. Excuses are not so easy when we all know what we need to do and when we need to do it.

We urgently need consensus on this critical issue. There is no time to waste.

গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার বাংলাদেশ পুলিশ কমান্ড্যান্ট (পুলিশ সুপার) এর কার্যালয় ইন-সার্ভিস ট্রেনিং সেন্টার, টাঙ্গাইল দরপত্র বিজ্ঞপ্তি নং-০১/২০২২-২০২৩

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