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Rubana Huq

The business leaders and their Chinese whisper

May 5, 2012



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A few business leaders met

at a local hotel recently and the outcome was one of a Chinese whisper. One whispered, we are strategising for a dialogue; another sounded more formal and decided to hand the main course down to the incumbent leader of a trade organisation and the very next day, an emergency board meeting of the apex trade body was held, announcing, on behalf of everyone that the business community is seeking to ban “hartal”.

What constitutes a non-partisan mind? What gives rights to entities or ex-entities to negotiate between two parties? What is the difference between hogging the spotlight and actually making the point?

The history of Bangladesh has often had businessmen scurry between the different political party offices, trying to bridge gaps, connecting the dots and making statements in all colours, shapes and sizes. But has it ever done any good?

The essential points in the initiative are all overlooked. Where is the reference to the multiple panic calls from the buyers that we have to tend to everyday? “Oh!!! Hartal again? But we wanted to come!!” to which we have routine answers: “But everything’s fine. Radisson is only 5 minutes away from our office and factory! Work is unhampered. We are sending our trucks to the port after the hartal hours. No shipment is delayed. So, come!!!”

For how long are we going to keep on lying through our ugly teeth? Do our political parties realise what the private sector actually goes through to sustain the pace of growth? Thanks to all the savant monkeys who have predicted unsurpassable growth for RMG and have suddenly come to terms with a crude IMF realisation that growth is not happening beyond a 5.9% this year. Asia is slowing down. One, because the consumer circles are unsurely shifting across the globe; two, we know not where to anchor our loyalties anymore; three, like it or not, the West has emerged as a very dicey destination for many exporters. For how long can one listen to the Euro sob stories? For how long can one pay attention to the perennially threatening references to the U.S recession? For how long can one handle the Chinese playing with the currency and strategies every minute? For how long can countries like Bangladesh afford to be compared to yet struggling democracies like Myanmar and be told by retailers...“Oh, we’re going to be in Myanmar next month!” So, what? Really?

I have clear memories of 1/11 scenario when the business community was in dialogue with both the parties in order to resolve the crisis and return to democracy. The initiative backfired as more and more controversial business faces got arrested while some chose to trade secrets and opted for self-exile in lands like Singapore and Malaysia. Many who now head various trade bodies went into hiding. Many who manipulate markets went behind the bars. And a few from the outside were lobbying to get them out and ensure a safe passage for the entire business community. After all, if even one member of the community suffered, that would mean rough seas for the rest.



Looking back at 1/11, with General Moeen at the helm, and with a team of savant academics and policy practitioners, the country was taking the worst turn in history. That period was pregnant with new violence as democratic order failed. During 1/11, there were endless agitations, arrests, and protests from the political quarters. And from the side of the business community, there was also a strange and a complete complicity setting in, as trucks regularly reached the port, shipments got cleared, and exports. But did that stop the mass from protesting against an apolitical structure? No. Therefore, with time, we reverted to our same, old democratic system and values.

Democracy that stands against the master-slave connection, unfortunately also breeds the vicious cycle of repression and rebellion. With every deviation, every Prospero suffers and with every whiplash, a newer Caliban is born in the cycle that weeps when the clouds do not "open and show riches", rather walks and cries to dream again. (act 3, sc 2, Tempest) . The point is, are we being Calibanised today? Is there a new tongue of democracy that is being bred in our bodies? And, indeed, is there a need for fresh violence? Above all, should the business community get involved in this cycle of violence trying to negotiate between the political parties that yield no result, yet simply sidelines the main cause and creates yet another new by-line for the day?

If our position and opposition don't wake up to their nightmares and live them through, we'll never see the dawn. It will be a night prolonged with pain, treated with an acupuncture economy leading to a desensitisation of capital.

Instead of driving these points home, our business leaders seem to be more committed to looking good, sounding politically correct and protecting their own backs from the gods that rule the land. By what right does an apex body of businesses has to call for a ban on hartals? And what right does the opposition have to launch hartal trails, over and over again? Are we expected to forget that from 1979-1986, there were 100 hartals; from 1987-1995: 245; from 1991-2002: 827 and that one party or the other called them and that both BNP and AL were parties to violence? Then may I ask the trade leaders what prompts them from taking sides today? If I had a crystal ball, I would probably give it a shot and predict the future with a few sure slides of the same business leaders, running to their constituencies, becoming MPs and then taking turns to become the members of the opposition and then finally taking to the streets again, and agitating themselves.

Isn't this always the case? Isn't this exactly why corporate greed should never tread the grounds of public service?

The business community should stop playing God, and instead plead with both the parties, under a non-partisan platform, to stop unleashing irreparable damage to the portrait of the country that could have been drawn, at least ten years ago, in colour and not in a rash charcoal.

[Rubana Huq](#) — a poet, columnist, researcher and a readymade garment exporter.

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9 Responses to "The business leaders and their Chinese whisper"



masuda reza on May 9, 2012 at 8:12 pm

The wise through an excess of wisdom are made fools...

Quid quid agas...prudenter agas..Et respice finem!!!!

To every soul there openeth a way and a way and ways...

The high soul climbs the highways

The low soul gropes the lows



And in between on the misty flats

Charlies who love the gift of the gab ...drift to and fro...!!!

Bunch of thugs and galoots in the guise of society cream in Bangladesh...in reality... nothing but dregs who have made their loot...they call wealth on the blood of the poor downtrodden...spinning wonderful yarns in their controlled medias and having great kicks in watching their YARNS in black & white...You can fool some of the people all the time and all the people some of the time...but you can't fool -IQ20's all the time....Yahoos



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zubair M latif on May 8, 2012 at 7:05 pm

This is a very well-written piece. But these business leaders have a huge stake in the future of Bangladesh. If they want to take a joint initiative to create a more conducive environment for commerce, then we, as rational citizens should not oppose such a move. We are no longer a young nation. Do we have to face hartals for the next 41 years?

Like or Dislike:  0  0

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amin on May 8, 2012 at 6:15 am

Read all the comments. I think the bdnews24.com has published the comments which are ONLY appreciating the article — all the sweet comments on the 6 business leaders. But these leaders should first see their face in the mirror including the writer and her husband, one of the six business leaders, Anisul Huq.

Businessmen in our country stoop to any low and always look for undue advantage. Their role in the share market scam is all too known. And the less we talk about their record of loan defaulting, the better. It is the greed of the business people that has made our country what it is today. So instead of pointing fingers at the politicians, do some soul searching.

Publish this comment of mine if you have the guts.

Like or Dislike:  1  0

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Sajjad on May 7, 2012 at 12:05 pm

Good that someone come out so boldly on an 'unpleasant' issue. Alas! If only the business community in Bangladesh found their strength in alliance on a non-partisan platform!

The faces do not give that hope.


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M.S.Choudury on May 6, 2012 at 10:42 pm

Well written piece. With controversial business leaders like Salman, Azad (present president of FBCCI) at the helm of decision making, we are unlikely to see any fruitful results from any dialogue with the political parties. Whenever, you see that Salman is in any forum one smells something dubious. Azad has no credibility; he is a stooge of the government. So, get the business leaders who are trustworthy and carry good image; send them to the parties with ideas acceptable to the mass, you will see results.


Like or Dislike:  1  0

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sujaul islam khan on May 6, 2012 at 3:02 pm

Thanks Rubana. wish anybody in the parties or the chambers could look beyond themselves and quit thinking in the feudal colonial mindset and think like citizens of a nation which is on the path of being way better off and also keep pace with the young generation of today who can actually be decent people and even Sakib al Hasan.

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[Helal Ahmed](#) on May 6, 2012 at 5:47 pm



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Very good writing. Love the flow as if she is talking with her audience here and now. Enjoy your writing.

Like or Dislike:  0  1

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Golam Arshad on May 6, 2012 at 8:27 am

Rubana: Sounds great! And I quote from your brilliant piece, "...connecting the dots and making statements in all colours, shapes and sizes. But has it ever done any good? NO! No! We all like to play in "Primary Color" and act to the tune in GOD. Circle of same (Business Leaders) hays the horn, and blows the dots!!! Will it CHANGE Rubana? Never say NO! God Bless your ideal heart!


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ruhul amin on May 5, 2012 at 8:51 pm

We want ban on hartal but I think it will not be possible. I think the ruling party will not agree either.

Like or Dislike:  0  1

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