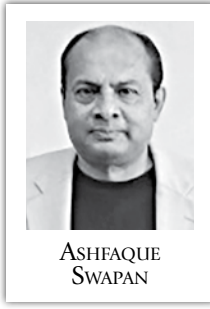


And you thought the US presidential debate was boring?

Trump brings the gravitas of professional wrestling to a hallowed US tradition

"Have you no sense of decency, sir? At long last, have you left no sense of decency?"

-Attorney Joseph Welch to Sen. Joseph McCarthy during the Army-McCarthy hearings on June 9, 1954. McCarthy went on a notorious red-baiting, gay-baiting witch hunt in the 1950s, ruining many careers.



ASHFAQ SWAPAN

US President Donald Trump could give Caligula a run for his money. The deranged, violent Roman emperor had once made his donkey a consul, but Trump is

no slouch when it comes to outrageous behaviour.

At the first presidential debate in Cleveland, he ripped apart all etiquette and civilised norms in one of the more hallowed quadrennial traditions of US politics: the US presidential debate. The debate between Trump and his Democratic opponent Joe Biden was like a train-wreck, awful to watch.

US presidential debates are decorous, staid affairs—and something of a bore. Debaters are too cagey and apprehensive, like two boxers eyeing each other warily, reluctant to get into an actual fight.

I shall presently reflect upon this disaster of a debate, or the lack thereof, and how this affects the political horse race. But first, allow me to express my outrage.

Trump's shameless, unseemly bullying marks this debate as a shameful,

historical landmark in US political history. I cannot remember a single political event in the past 50 years in the Western world remotely comparable to Trump's unpardonable behaviour.

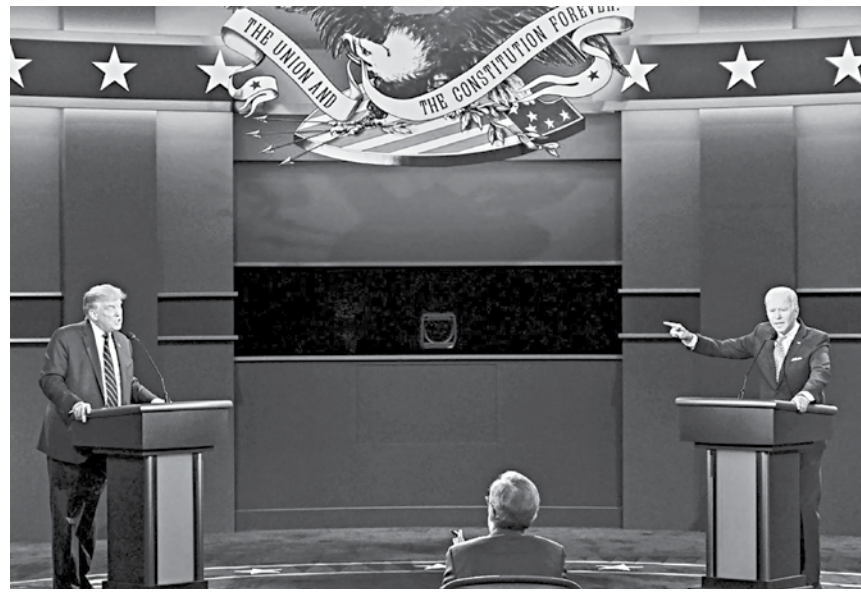
After it was over, I rubbed my eyes and pinched myself. Whew! Did that really happen? Or did I slither down a rabbit hole like little Alice in Lewis Carroll's "Alice in Wonderland" and crash into a surreal dystopian netherworld?

But that's just Trump being Trump. He has kicked off the guardrails of norms that protect and sustain US democratic institutions. From a callous disregard for Congress to using the White House as a political prop, Trump has sullied, defaced and devalued all that has come before him. Then there's his cringingly juvenile predawn tweets and constant, wearying mendacity. Unique among any Western democratic leaders, he has refused to pledge to a peaceful transfer of power if he loses. He continues to make unfounded claims of massive fraud of mail voting, undermining public trust in elections.

His debate strategy was about as subtle as a bazooka. The plan was to harangue Biden so relentlessly that he barely had a chance to speak.

The debate comes at a critical time of the US presidential campaign. Biden leads substantially in national polls and in most of the battleground states where the results will be decided. On top of that, Biden is doing well in several states which Trump won in 2016, thus enlarging the field and forcing the Trump campaign to spread itself thin. Early voting has already begun and there is no time to turn the tide.

Trump decided to go for broke because he figured what worked for him



Trump and Biden take part in the first US presidential debate at Case Western Reserve University and Cleveland Clinic in Cleveland, Ohio, on September 29, 2020.

PHOTO: REUTERS

in 2016 ought to work for him in 2020.

The problem for Trump is that the political landscape has changed. There's no significant third party to siphon off support, and Biden is nowhere as reviled as Hillary Clinton was. His lead is also more solid.

The biggest challenge for Trump is the fact that he no longer has the, well, trump card that he did last time. In 2016, he was an outsider offering to shake up the system. This year he is an incumbent saddled with a global pandemic, an economic meltdown and nationwide social unrest. Surveys continue to show that voters are deeply dissatisfied with his handling of Covid-19.

Biden may benefit from the debate. Notwithstanding Trump's attempts to muzzle him during the debate, he stood his ground. He was often articulate, and no longer will Trump be able to call him senile and make it stick.

The whole idea of a debate with Trump is absurd. He is the classical carnival barker, hustling, promising wonderful things which, generally, have very little relationship with the truth.

The question is whether it will wash. One remarkable thing about this election season is how stable public opinion has been. The US is going through a global pandemic, economic meltdown and nationwide social unrest

over racism, but you wouldn't be able to tell that by looking at polls during the year. The needle hasn't moved all that much.

That's bad news for Trump, because Biden has been comfortably ahead most of the time. Trump has to make something happen. Fast.

That awful tuggish performance during the debate was probably Trump's idea of a game changer.

Only the game may not change. Biden was quite adept at underlining critical points. One was that the threat to Obamacare will throw tens of millions of people out of health coverage.

Trump's insistence that he had a plan rang hollow, as did his defence of his administration's handling of Covid-19. He made big promises of early vaccines, but again with no proof, as usual.

Pollsters say public concern about Obamacare and Covid-19 are hanging like a millstone around Trump's neck. For all his fireworks and bluster, it's not clear his remarks will convince sceptics.

At the end of the day, his performance was vintage Trump. It was loud, brash, flamboyant and crude. Here's a man who revels in tabloid glory and the faux glamour of being a celebrity who plays a tycoon on TV, not the other way around.

His strategy to hustle, paint the Democrats as the radical left, and generate enough racial fear backfired in 2018. Democrats swept into power in the US House.

He is trying the same strategy for November. Will it work? Trump's constant talk about mail voting fraud suggests even he is not sure.

Ashfaq Swapan is a contributing editor for Silicooner, a digital daily for South Asians in the United States.

Abu Osman Chowdhury: An unsung hero of the war of liberation

MUHAMMAD ABUL HOSSAIN

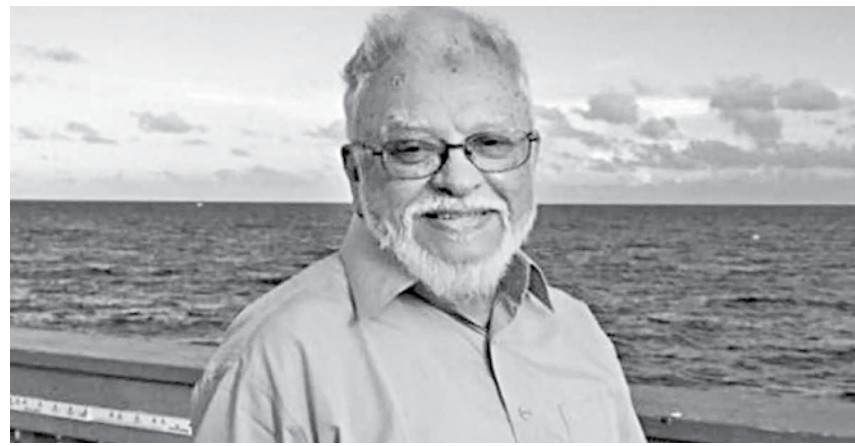
NOT many people today may be aware of the contributions made by Lt Col (ret'd) Abu Osman Chowdhury, who died on September 5, 2020, in our War of Liberation. Abu Osman Chowdhury, then a major and commander of the 4th wing of East Pakistan Rifles (EPR) located at Chuadanga, revolted against the killing of innocent Bengalis on the night of March 25, 1971 by the Pakistani military, and set up South Western Command with the elected representatives of Chuadanga. Meanwhile, the Punjabi SDO of Chuadanga was passing information about the revolt through telegrams and telephones. Before the non-Bengali officers, Junior Commissioned Officers (JCOs) and others serving in the EPR could undertake countermeasures, they were neutralised pre-emptively. The treasury was seized to meet the future expenditure of the Liberation War efforts.

On the night of March 25/26, a company of 155 personnel of the 27th Baluch Regiment reached Kushtia under the command of Pakistani Major Shoaib. They were deployed in Kushtia Police Line, VHF Station and Telephone Exchange. Three companies of the 4th wing of EPR along with police, Ansar, the local youth and Awami League supporters attacked the Pakistani positions at 3:45 am, leading to the fall of the Police Line. Twenty Baluch soldiers were killed, and the rest ran away. Simultaneously, the VHF Station and Telephone Exchange were attacked at 3:45 am under the command of Major Osman. Losing 25 soldiers, Major Shoaib asked for reinforcements and air

support from his superiors. His request was declined, and so he started fleeing towards Jashore—leaving 90 dead bodies behind—with the remaining 65 soldiers in 6 jeeps, 1 pick-up and one 3-ton truck. He was in his jeep at the front of the convoy, with its lights turned off. The jeep fell into a roadside ditch while trying to avoid a broken culvert 25 miles off Kushtia on the Jashore-Kushtia road. Osman's forces then attacked them and killed 56 Baluch soldiers. The remaining nine ran away to a nearby village, where the villagers also killed them including Major Shoaib.

In India, Major Osman reportedly handed over 40/50 KGs of gold and 40 millions of Pakistani Rupees to the government-in-exile. Few doubted that he probably did not deposit all the money and gold he seized from the treasury. This rumour, unchecked and unchallenged, was making the rounds and gradually snowballed. Major Osman's heroism and bravery would extinguish all propaganda but this rumour left a stain on his career subsequently.

Later, the South Western Command was divided into two sectors: sector 8 and 9. Major Osman was entrusted with the command of sector 8. In August, he was suddenly and unceremoniously dumped as the Assistant Chief of Logistics, a non-functional position. Concerned people were given an idea that he had to be posted elsewhere to make way for Major MA Manzur, as the latter was senior to him. Major Osman himself was senior to three other sector commanders. Any one of these three commanders could be placed elsewhere to accommodate Major Manzur. As well as sector 8, Manzur was also given



Abu Osman Chowdhury (1936-2020).

PHOTO: COLLECTED

the additional charge of sector 9 after Major MA Jalil was removed from his post. Instead of giving Manzur the additional charge of sector 9, Major Osman could be entrusted with the command of that sector.

At the Officers' Training Academy in Murti, Siliguri, we heard that Major Osman fought far better than other sector commanders. So he became an icon to us. His sudden posting as Assistant Chief of Logistics saddened us. MA Rouf, ex-president of East Pakistan Chhatra League and MP, had been the Political Motivator of the training academy as well as the Freedom Fighters' Training Centre. He confided in SK Kamal and me that General MAG Osmani had not been happy about Osman's style of command and activities. He replaced him with Manzur on the pretext of honouring a senior. Major Manzur allegedly unearthed some objectionable

activities of his predecessor as per instructions of the commander-in-chief. Rouf Bhai concluded: "Indian intelligence agencies caught two EPR soldiers with a huge amount of money inside a bank. Under interrogation, they confessed that they were hired by a senior Bangladeshi army officer to assassinate Major Manzur!"

The gallantry award for Liberation War was declared in December 1973. All sector commanders were awarded Bir Uttom, except Major Osman and Major MA Jalil. Even Major AR Azam Chowdhury, second-in-command of the 4th wing of EPR under Major Osman, was awarded Bir Bikrom. According to Azam Chowdhury, if he got the Bir Bikrom award, his commander Osman should have been given "Double Bir Sreshtho". BDR Captain Muzaffar Ahmed, a Bir Protik officer who fought under Osman as a Naib Subedar in 1971, made a similar comment as he

told me: "Sector commanders are Tigers and Major Osman is the only lion of the war-time army."

As director of the Supply and Transport Directorate, AHQ, Abu Osman Chowdhury came to Jashore Cantonment on an official visit in 1972. Astonishingly, Col Manzur, commander of the 55th Brigade, Jashore, instructed Major MA Matin, president of the Mess Committee, not to organise any reception dinner nor accommodate Major Abu Osman Chowdhury in a VIP room! To justify his action, Col Manzur confided in us the story of the so-called plot to assassinate him by Major Osman, which I first heard about in Murti from Rauf Bhai. Anyone who knew Lt Col Osman could never believe that he could be part of such nefarious schemes to embezzle funds or assassinate a fellow comrade.

While his contemporaries were given a minimum of two promotions, he got only one (from Major to Lt Col). Besides being deprived of any gallantry award, his performance and seniority remained unrewarded even in terms of promotion. Last but not the least, he was prematurely retired in 1976. In Pakistan, there is a commemorative plaque in memory of the 155 soldiers of Baluch Regiment at the Baluch Regimental Centre and a memento containing the names of the troops killed in the battle against the 4th wing of EPR in Kushtia. Probably, the Awami League government honoured Major Osman with the appointment of Zilla Parishad chairman and award of Swadhinata Padak as a consolation.

Muhammad Abul Hossain is a retired major and a freedom fighter.

ON THIS DAY IN HISTORY



OCTOBER 1, 1949
People's Republic of China established

In Beijing, with most of the Chinese mainland held by the communist People's Liberation Army, its dynamic leader, Mao Zedong, proclaimed the establishment of the People's Republic of China on this day in 1949.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- | | | |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|
| ACROSS | 32 Suit pieces | 14 Cavalry sword |
| 1 Enlist | 34 Compacting, in a way | 16 Pancake topper |
| 7 Iron or wood | 40 Vaccine type | 17 Musical speed |
| 11 One way to shop | 41 Broad street | 19 Monk's leader |
| 12 Flying: Prefix | 42 Like paraffin | 20 Hold responsible |
| 13 Putting on the air | 43 Tell | 21 Pop |
| 15 Jeweler's unit | | 22 Mend |
| 16 Dance bit | DOWN | 23 Iris setting |
| 18 Spill the beans | 1 Write hastily | 25 Tennis star |
| 21 Colors | 2 Count starter | Monica |
| 22 Ineffectual | 3 Suffering | 28 Enticing |
| 24 Sleeve filler | 4 Girls in the family | 29 Make disappear |
| 25 General address | 5 Open, in a way | 31 Burner setting |
| 26 Inlet | 6 Still-life fruit | 33 Wound remnant |
| 27 Apartment with a staircase | 7 Some livestock | 34 Road rescue |
| 29 Igloo shape | 8 Maui souvenir | 35 Pitching stat |
| 30 Spot for laps | 9 Caterer's dispenser | 36 Not strict |
| 31 Locale | 10 Marsh | 37 One - million |
| | | 38 Bolt partner |
| | | 39 "My word!" |



YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

R	E	M	U	S	L	O	A	N	S
A	G	E	N	T	E	L	I	O	T
G	O	L	D	A	N	E	R	V	E
E	R	A	S	A	M				
A	L	F	R	E	S	C	O		
B	U	R	G	S	A	V	A	G	E
B	L	O	O	D	P	E	R	I	L
A	U	G	E	R	S	R	I	G	S
C	I	A	B	R	I	O			
A	D	L	I	B	A	M	I	S	S
M	O	O	R	E	R	E	V	I	S
P	L	E	A	D	A	S	Y	E	T

BEETLE BAILEY

BY MORT WALKER



BABY BLUES

BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT



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