

# Stick with the parliament

**PLEASURE IS ALL MINE**



SHAH HUSAIN IMAM

The opposition's first day in parliament saw a genial atmosphere; no abusive language was traded and a tenor seemed set for an engaging session. But the next two days changed the mood.



A leopard never changes its stripes. Chameleon, literally a certain species of lizard, however, keeps changing the colour of its skin. The first one is a metaphor for political rigidity and the second of expediency and opportunism. Both are used as pejoratives. Still, if you ask me which one is a lesser evil, I will say, the leopard. That is because the animal speedster refuses to change, and is therefore, a known quantity. But the exclusive kind of lizard of American origin sloughing off its skin to emerge in a look is deceptive and scary.

At issue is the drama enacted around the opposition's rejoining of parliament. It is plausible that the BNP went to parliament to save their membership at the nick of time. Even though they had no compunction in enjoying perks and privileges during absenteeism like their immediate predecessors, it has become a part of the cavalier culture.

There can be two gracious ways of looking at the issue. One, isn't saving membership better than en masse resignation from parliament enacted by AL in cahoots with Jamaat in 1995? The move forced the then BNP government's hands into conceding the now-defunct caretaker system. In a reversal of the scenario that option remains a possibility with the BNP and Jamaat resigning wholesale from parliament in protest against AL not yielding ground on nonpartisan headship of an interim arrangement presaging one-sided election.

Secondly, after 83 days of continuous absence in parliament, the BNP MPs still had a week to spare before the 90-day mark to regularise. But they chose to attend the budget session on the inaugural day, Monday, a marker of recognising that they have an important piece of unfinished business to settle with the government. This should not be lost on the ruling party.

Of course, the government had taken the well-judged decision to let off BNP leaders --

MK Anwar and Barkatullah Bulu -- from prison to enable them to attend the JS session. This by itself, however, is not enough to create a condition conducive to a dialogue; the other captive BNP leaders need to be released to that end.

The first woman Speaker of the parliament has been lavished with superlatives by the ruling party MPs but the opposition entered the parliament after the Speaker's speech to make a point or two. Leader of the opposition on entry, however, greeted the new Speaker. There was an element of subtle humour when an opposition MP while wondering over a non-MP becoming the Speaker made a point of the AL's refusal to accept an unelected person at the helm of an interim caretaker arrangement!

The opposition's first day in parliament saw a genial atmosphere; no abusive language was traded and a tenor seemed set for an engaging session. But the next two days changed the mood. The textile minister could not resist the remark that like 'military autocrat Ziaur Rahman destroyed country's politics by grabbing state power the same way he did with the jute mills by denationalising them.' That provoked the first walkout by the BNP. The second was waiting to happen when the foreign minister said, 'Tarique is not a politician but a fugitive.' Were these comments called for, especially in the context these were delivered? Commonsense says, not.

For the BNP's part, breaking the previous record of boycotting the budget sessions of parliament which runs into five goes down as an act of irresponsibility. But then they have decided to dissect the budget in the discussion phase which is a positive record breaker.

Truth has many shades in Bangladesh; one

has difficulty penetrating the layers to get to the authentic version of it. Most baffled are the foreigners as country's politicians depending on their affiliations gleefully read conspiracies into each other's positioning and action. And whilst their followers dance to the tune of their mentors the general mass are resigned to a fait accompli. So decimated has been the psyche of the people that many of them have lost the capacity for independent judgment.

Think-tanks and research bodies like CPD, TIB, Odhikar, international watchdogs on human rights and the media though overlooked by the political parties except where they are critical of the opponent remain repositories of independent viewpoints. But as Oscar Wilde has said, "An unbiased opinion is always absolutely valueless", the well-wishers of Bangladesh of which we have a plenty are only biased towards the country's bright future.

The ruling party with a brute majority bulldozed legislations through the parliament, mostly to serve its ends. And, the opposition have tried to use street power in vain to topple the government. After having vaulted new heights of self-glorification (read abdication for the opposition!) and handholding with jihadis and the youthful liberals as the case may be, both have dropped thudding on the concrete surface of realism.

Are they still playing to the gallery or to their international constituencies or to the dictates of national interest is a question that would hopefully be answered sooner rather than later.

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# Never a dull moment

**HUMOROUSLY YOURS**



NAVEED MAHBUB

WITH a wife and two daughters, I swim in a sea of hormones every single day. I do so gladly. For once, I'm happy to be a minority.

My eight year old tells me, "Baba! You need to buy me a bicycle!"

"Why?"

"If my friend Raimana can have a bicycle, so can I!"

"Hey, if Raimana goes and jumps into the river, will you also jump into the river?"

"No Baba! I will go and take her bicycle!"

"You think you're too smart, eh? Do you know that at your age, Abraham Lincoln used to walk five miles to school every day?"

"Yes Baba, I know that. And at your age, he was already a President!"

If this is a game of tennis, she leads 30-0.

She fancies this guy (dude, if you are thinking of anything funny about my daughter, remember, I have no problems going to jail!)

"Baba, he's got the metrosexual look!"

What? Metrosexual? What on earth is that? The first time I hear this word, I picture somebody who is attracted to public transportation! "Oooh! Look at that hot BRTC bus!" Well, during hartals we DO literally see hot BRTC buses...

As I dress up for work, she tells me, "Baba! You look awesome! Just like Rajinikanth!" Brutally honest...

But we are unfair as parents. We impose the DELL Philosophy on them -- they must be a Doctor, Engineer, Lawyer, else be considered a Loser! And that's why we rejoice the first words of our children -- not *Baba* or *Mama* but *Anterior Cruciate Ligament*. The lullaby we sing to our kids at bedtime is the theme from *Grey's Anatomy*.

And the restrictions in their love lives, while we make the decision to emigrate to the West. "You must marry a Bangladeshi!"

So, a son comes and says, "Dad, I'm in love." And then sheepishly adds, "...with Robert..."

"What?"

"You heard me right, Dad! This is Robert and I love him. You are so yesterday! You

have to realise that love is not only between Adam and Eve, but it can also be between Adam and Steve!"

"You have brought disgrace to the family! Could you not have gotten hold of a good Bangladeshi boy?"

What about swearing? Oh, come on, let's not kid ourselves. They know all the interesting words that we don't even know exist. But that never stops us from making sure that no matter how angry we are we don't swear in front of them. I blurt out in front of my kids, but quickly check myself, thank heavens! "You shut the f..... front door!"

But finally my daughter does utter the unthinkable four letter word. My wife places me on the prosecution dock, "She picked this up from you, didn't she?"

Uh, oh! Trouble! I ask the daughter, "Did you really say that word?"

"Yes Baba!"



She looks down, ashamed.

I approach her slowly. I grab her. I then take her into my arms.

"That's my baby! I'm so proud of you!"

Our kids will enrich their vocabularies with colourful words anyway, just as we did -- thanks to the environment. Might as well learn from daddy -- at least we can cherish a lifelong father daughter bonding.

Oh kids -- never a dull moment. We men love our kids -- and everybody else's wives... Just kidding! I love you, my wife of fifteen years, my best friend and my CIO (Chief Inspiration Officer). But there is always a small reminder of who's the boss as I smile at my wedding band and see the world's smallest handcuff...

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# Dhaka and Delhi: A tale of two cities

MUHAMMAD AMINUL ISLAM

WHEN Delhi was the capital of British India, a conglomerate of British colonies and princely states, Dhaka, quintessentially, was a sleepy and tranquil divisional headquarters of Bengal (of course, with the glaring exception of 1905-1911, when Dhaka was heralding its prominence as the new capital of a new province of Eastern Bengal and Assam). In those days Dhaka, being part of Bengal, used to think at least twenty four hours earlier than the whole of India (obviously including Delhi), if Gokhale was correct. In the course of history, Delhi emerged as the capital of independent India and Dhaka as the capital of Bangladesh. Obviously, Bangladesh inherited the legacy of Bengal as the only Bengali speaking independent country. Delhi has emerged as the not only the capital of India, now it is the city where Arundhati Roy, the conscience of our time, and most recently Pawan Kumar Bansal and Ashwani Kumar are living. Though Dhaka still enjoys a half hour's advantage over Delhi in the international time zone, it is now Delhi who has turned the table -- thinking at least twenty four years ahead of Bangladesh.

It is quite a puzzle why Arundhati Roy is so important? Is this because she was the awardee of the much coveted 1998 Man Booker Prize for fiction for her novel *The God of Small Things* (1997) or for her political activism in environmental and human rights causes? In case of environmental and human rights causes, the list is quite tall, provocative and in some cases equally and strongly denounced by both Congress and BJP -- from Narmada Dam project (saying that the dam will displace half a million people, with little or no compensation, and will not provide the projected



irrigation, drinking water and other benefits), the US military invasion of Afghanistan (with the argument that the war was in retaliation for 9/11), criticism of Israel (in 2006, along with Noam Chomsky, Howard Zinn, and others, Arundhati Roy signed a letter in *The Guardian* called the 2006 Lebanon War a 'war crime' and accused Israel of 'state terror') and support to the independence of Kashmir. But what took Arundhati Roy to the height of guardian angel of our times is when she denounced the plea that 'the collective conscience of the society will be satisfied if the capital punishment is awarded to the offender' in case of the hanging of Afzal Guru.

The case of Pawan Kumar Bansal, the Railway Minister is quite interesting. There was no charge against him. It was his nephew, Vijay Singla, allegedly extracted 900 million rupees from an official of the railway's policy making board



and was caught by the police. But the case against Law minister Ashwani Kumar is unique. In all eagerness he doctored CBI report on coal scam (undermining the autonomy of CBI) on coal block allocation to the Supreme Court. But why did they resign or more crudely were sacked? It was the opposition in the Parliament who made this possible. The opposition was so vociferous and made the proceedings of the Parliament so difficult that something had to be done. In the process the Parliament sessions have to be prorogued two days early.

In the not so distant past, the most brilliant and articulate politician of India, Shashi Tharoor, had to quit his cabinet post on certain misdemeanor charges and Telecom minister Andimuthu Raja had also to quit for causing a loss of about £22bn to the exchequer by failing to follow proper procedure in the award of licences to run mobile phone

networks in India in 2008. Interestingly the audit report of Indian C&AG triggered the downfall of both Ashwani Kumar and Andimuthu Raja.

With so much so about Delhi, what about Dhaka? Dhaka has also its own protagonists, its own bunch of Ministers who are performing no worse than Pawan Kumar Bansal, Ashwani Kumar and Andimuthu Raja. It has Ministers with almost equivalent records and still keeping their jobs, braving the media with all wit and humour. Dhaka only lacks two. It has no Arundhati Roy to denounce those who attempt to 'simplify what is complicated or complicate what is simple'. And who in Dhaka has the moral and intellectual courage to urge 'to respect strength, never power!' In the absence of Arundhati Roy Dhaka is crawling before the power, never caring about strength.

More notably Dhaka lacks a Parliament that is broadly bipartisan involving treasury and opposition where both elect Speaker and Deputy Speaker respectively. Dhaka lacks a Parliament that works, that makes the government accountable, compel it to be more transparent and sack errant Ministers. Thus the government fails to be inclusive in governance and representative in character. With Parliament non-functioning, the basic tenet of accountability to the people in the Parliamentary democracy is absent and Dhaka is suffering from a total 'regulatory capture' where government prefers to remain insulated and distant from the people's interest. As such the regulatory role of the government is withering. With these dashed away the hopes and aspirations of the people for the protection of law. Thus Dhaka lags behind Delhi in at least twenty four years and Delhi remains ever elusive. Is Delhi really so far away!

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**ACROSS**

1 Big fish story? 5 Chart 8 Chow — 12 Reverberate 13 Commotion 14 Loosen 15 Sense 16 Result of canonization 18 Liberty 20 Supermarket section 21 Fellow 22 Former M&M's color 23 O. Henry's specialty 26 Realm 30 Distant 31 Complete 32 Rage 33 Holly-wood hope 36 140-character message 38 Conger, e.g. 39 Prohibit 40 Islamic

**decree**

43 Ennui 47 Haphazardly 49 Church service 50 Active one 51 Gist 52 Family 53 Raced 54 Noshed 55 Maintained

**DOWN**

1 Comic Fox-worthy 2 Computer brand 3 Roller coaster 4 Grave 5 Lawyer

**Solution time: 21 mins.**

**Yesterday's answer 4-30**

**CRYPTOQUIP**

DABSBTBP LFV-XWGB KGBPW MKS  
ACGLPW RX PLNBPR MKCNAX  
K TWPCR, W'V KRRGB XAB  
PBR CFX DKR WFF DWFF.

**Yesterday's Cryptoquip:**  
FOR AN AIRPLANE TO GET OFF THE GROUND, I SUPPOSE IT NEEDS TO HAVE FLYABILITY VIABILITY.

**Today's Cryptoquip Clue:** F equals L

**BEETLE BAILY**

**SARGE MAKES SUCH UNREASONABLE REQUESTS**

**WHAT DID HE WANT THIS TIME?**

**A 20-LAYER CAKE!**

**HENRY**

**by Mort Walker**

**by Don Tranchte**

**QUOTABLE Quotes**

"Children have never been very good at listening to their elders, but they have never failed to imitate them."

**James A. Baldwin**