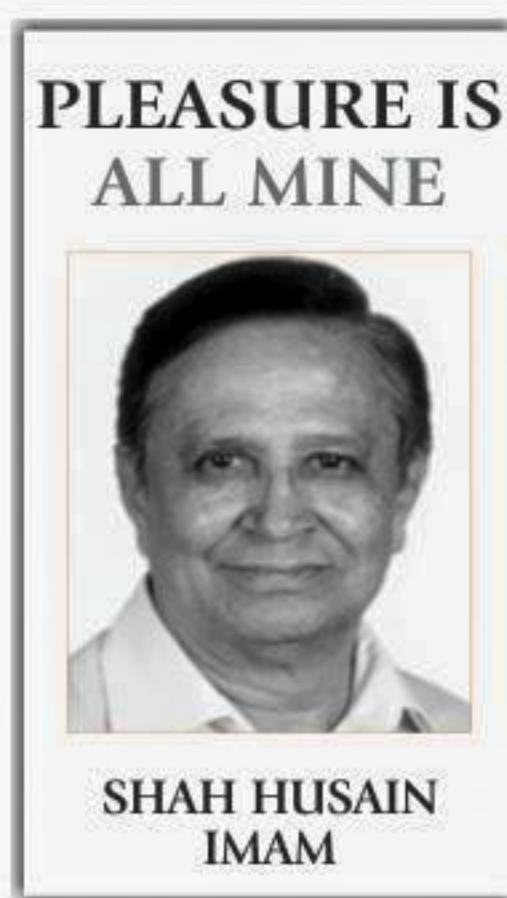


None is coming to the point yet

New labour law curtails workers' freedom



SHAH HUSAIN IMAM

PLEASURE IS ALL MINE

POINTED, though not discouraged. You see a quest for finding scapegoats rather than engaging in any productive session of self-examination.

HOLDING the party council would be an appropriate step at the stage to bolster the fragile AL morale and provide for a change of direction. Yet, the AL hierarchy is still not ready for internal face-offs.

PARTY Secretary General Ashraf was said to have advised the top leadership against holding the mayoral polls just now. Yet, once these were being held he chose to play anything but a hands-on role, his colleagues are apt to point out.

PRIME Minister Sheikh Hasina is not only putting up a brave face, she is also being defiant. She is dejected over the fact that the AL-backed candidates with better credentials and performance records as compared to their rivals' have been beaten hands down in the mayoral polls.

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standard of living actually falls after the transition takes place (unless the transition is gradually phased into). Since the revolt in Egypt was a people's movement, it was the standard "out with the old and in with the new" approach.

Even if Morsi had done everything right, the country would still have seen new problems arise because old problems could be solved, and this is exactly what happened. Replace Morsi with "President X" -- the outcome would be the same. Considering this premise, it only makes sense that the military remained in power for several months even after the "free and fair" elections.

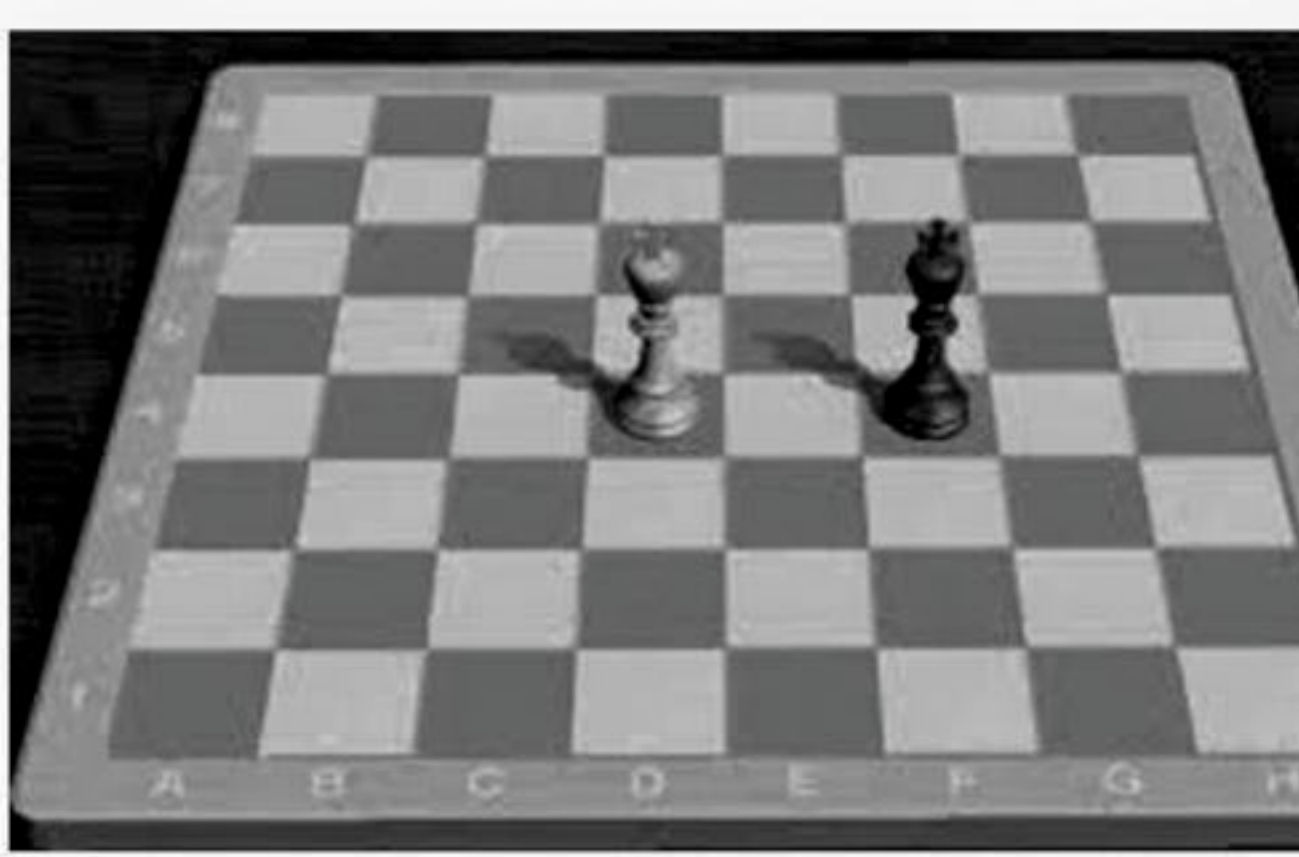
Mubarrak's government had earned the support of the West and a continuation of annual aid from the United States by "maintaining policies of suppression towards Islamic militants and peace with Israel."

That doesn't mean, however, the potential for working up religious sentiments among unsuspecting people is significantly curbed. On the contrary, a regressive ideology runs parallel to the modernist flair feeding on mentoring and financing of what is broadly known as Talibanisation.

One notices a certain delusional belief in the political classes that after all our situation is still a far cry from that in Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia, Syria and Lebanon. The Islamists in Bangladesh may not have retreated, they have only changed direction, let's not underestimate their capacity for unsettling things.

EXTRAPOLATING such results could portend a battering for the AL at the national elections and that is why the party needs to own up to the mistakes and pitfalls and go on a correctional path on the principal issues.

What are the options before the ruling party at the extremely limited time at its disposal for a turnaround in their situation? We ask this question in the belief that nobody is looking to another overwhelmingly majoritarian regime. Since the general election is due in January next year, the parliament would have to be



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dissolved sometime in October-November. In this scenario, the PM's repeated avowal of holding the election Westminster-style as in the UK should translate into concrete steps towards dissolving the parliament 90 days ahead of the polls.

The writer is Associate Editor, The Daily Star. E-mail: husain.imam@thedailystar.net

Yes, since Awami League by its brute majority rescinded the caretaker government system its change of intent is crucial in reviving the system. AL's compromise would be an act of generosity but the BNP's would be seem to be dependency on the AL's mandate to restore any semblance of a nonpartisan caretaker system.

BNP's agenda for toppling the government has not worked nor will its threats to force the government's hands into conceding its demand materialize, except by way of ensuring the country plunges into anarchy. In such a scenario, anything is possible—a narrowly participated election or no election or emergency and third force intervention.

Political use of Islam has received a setback from Shapla Chattar breakup of the Hefajat-e-Islam's concentric and defiant rally and its chief mentor Allama Shafi's anti-women obscenities. Simultaneously, the Jamaat-Shibir's monstrous terrorism campaign has effectively whittled down the party's bonafides to be representing Islamic values.

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Lest the worse comes to the worst, AL and BNP as major political players should opt for a dignified and productive formula for co-existence rather than mutual self-destruction. The redeeming feature is they are both centrist parties, the former left of it and the latter right of it. They can forge a common front to fend off militant politics realising that if the country stabilises, survives and prospers it is a win-win for all. And, we hold our heads high.

The writer is a lecturer of the Department of Economics at North South University.

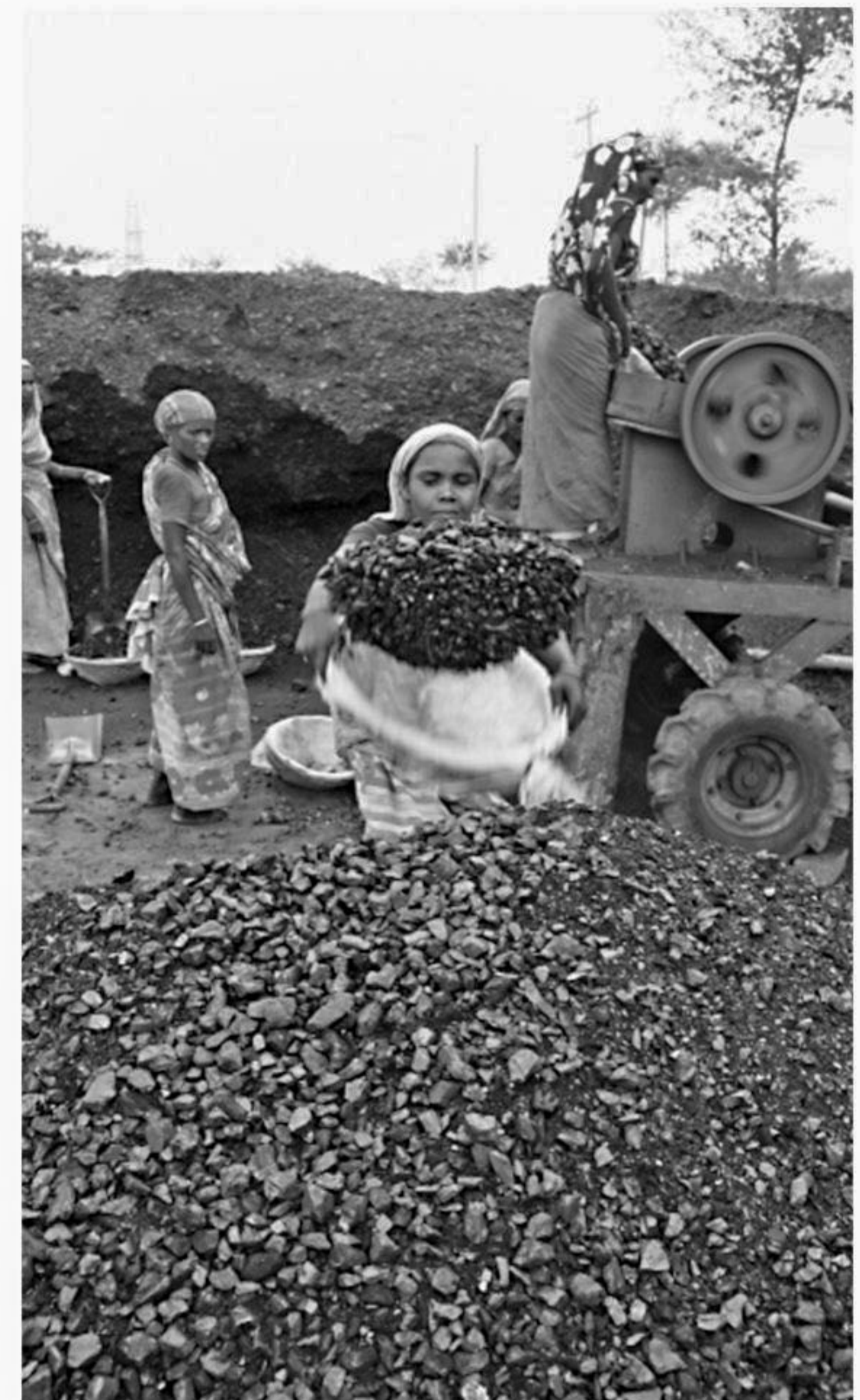
WAJEDUL ISLAM

THE new Bangladesh Labour (Amendment) Bill 2013 has frustrated our labourers. The Awami League government pledged in its election manifesto to amend the Labour Law 2006 and reform it in accordance with the principles of ILO core conventions and, of course, our Constitution.

According to Industrial Regulation Ordinance 1969, 25% leadership could be elected from outside if the workers wished. This law was scrapped in 1977. This is a conspiracy to weaken the trade union movement. Our workers are not educated, trained and equipped with bargaining techniques to face the employers. In the Tripartite Consultative Committee (TCC) meeting, the labour ministry said that if the members of the union so desired, they would be entitled to elect 20% of the members in the executive committee who are not employed in the establishment. The government has not followed this proposal, rather it proposed 10% for public sector and none for the private sector.

I think it is more important for the private sector because it is overwhelmingly larger than the public sector, and workers of this sector are more disempowered than their public sector comrades. Trade unionists involved in national and sectoral federations can effectively facilitate formation of unions at enterprises and build a credible trade union. Therefore, this new law will hamper the process of creating a conducive employer-worker relation.

The new law has not changed the existing requirement of 30% membership for forming a union. This is very important for workers. At present, there are factories where the number of workers is more than 20,000 or even 40,000. It is hardly possible to form unions in those factories following the present system of registration. It will take 7-8 months. In this time



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employers could dismiss the organisers. As there is no provision for ex-workers to join the union, it will not be possible to form a union with this lengthy registration process.

The Labour Law 2006 had the provision for payment of 5% profit to the garment workers. But now it will be applied sector-wise, where workers of a profit making industry will have to share their profit with non-profit-making industries of the same sector. If an industry fails to profit it is because of the inefficiency of the employers, not of the workers. Then why should workers have to share the burden.

There are few positive points in the new law, such as increasing gratuity and maternity benefits. In the public sector a woman gets six months leave but in the private sector she gets 4 months. The new provision says that if a woman worker joins work after four months completion she will get extra benefit for working for the next two months.

The writer is a veteran trade unionist.

Morsi: Pawn of a conspiracy?

RAISA AFSANA

PROTESTS against Morsi and his agenda of political Islam have been replaced by protests against the coup by members and supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood. When I read about the military ultimatum for Morsi to step down, I had a gnawing feeling that there was more to the story than meets the eye. Could this whole situation have been planned in advance? Was Egypt's first democratically elected government intentionally set up to fail? This may sound a little extreme, but the possibility at least deserves the benefit of doubt.

EMERGENCY law has been running in Egypt pretty much consistently since 1967, giving the military a strong hold over the economy and its resources. When the revolution started to oust Morsi's predecessor Hosni Mubarak, it received international support in favour of establishing a democratic state, as per the demands of the people. Egypt had been governed by secular law under Mubarrak's reign. However, when the presidential election took place in 2012, the only strong opposition came from the Muslim Brotherhood. What does this imply for (i) the Egyptian people; and (ii) the rest of the non-Arab world?

THE Egyptian population, although a Muslim majority, had been accustomed to a secular and egalitarian environment under Mubarak. Women's rights were upheld and those belonging to minority religious groups were included into all sectors of society. But rising food prices, widespread poverty, hunger and unemployment left a lot to be desired. By election time in 2012, Egyptians were already fed up with the then ruling administration's failure to deliver on economic grounds. Voting for Morsi and his ideology of political Islam was not their desired alternative, but the only alternative, to the military front. Presented with a classic dilemma, the people opted for Morsi. Was the decision collectively rational? Unfortunately, yes.

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standard of living actually falls after the transition takes place (unless the transition is gradually phased into). Since the revolt in Egypt was a people's movement, it was the standard "out with the old and in with the new" approach.

Even if Morsi had done everything right, the country would still have seen new problems arise because old problems could be solved, and this is exactly what happened. Replace Morsi with "President X" -- the outcome would be the same. Considering this premise, it only makes sense that the military remained in power for several months even after the "free and fair" elections.

Morsi was simply not given enough time to address the country's economic issues. Although it's been a year since he was elected, he was effectively in power for a much shorter time since the military remained in control for several months into his presidency.

Mubarrak's government had earned the support of the West and a continuation of annual aid from the United States by "maintaining policies of suppression towards Islamic militants and peace with Israel."

Now, if the military were handing over power to the terrorist, forgive me, Islamist group, shouldn't it be both the prominent international players? But when the mock-president, Morsi, was elected, there was no objection from the international community. No, they were so in favour of the tenets of democracy

that even an Islamist version of it would do! Well, at least for the time being. Morsi, here is what they knew and you did not. Democracy is a game of numbers and trying to establish political Islam is somewhat like teenage romance, ultimately not viable and is bound to fall apart on its own. So if the non-Muslim world was bothered by this, all they had to do was look away for a while and let the whim run its course. The reason is quite evident if you do the math -- on average, roughly 50% of voters in a country are women and out of the remaining 50% who are men, not all of them are Muslim. Therefore, obtaining an absolute majority in favour of political Islam is highly improbable, as good as impossible.

Although Morsi came to power with 51% votes, many of those who voted for him did not want political Islam; they simply wanted to be done with the military regime. Once that was achieved, Morsi's dogma became a lost cause. To speed up his failure and ensure that Egypt remains secular, Morsi was simply not given enough time to address the country's economic issues. Although it's been a year since he was elected, he was effectively in power for a much shorter time since the military remained in control for several months into his presidency. He merely had a few months to govern independently, and that's simply not enough time for any president in any country to solve any economic problem.

Morsi's only shortcoming was that his ideology was not a popular one. But claiming that he was ousted for not fixing Egypt's economic issues is insane. It takes years of planning and implementation to solve economic problems. No one can just wave a wand and make them go away. And when an existing system is being replaced by a new one it is normal for problems to worsen at first.

Whether Morsi's economic policies would have been effective or not in the long run is something we will never know, because the boot fell on him before he could do any of the groundwork for establishing a functioning democracy. The plug was pulled too soon, and it was done intentionally to make sure that what we are seeing today is the only possible outcome. Set up to fail, Morsi, you have been rationally duped. By who? Go figure.

The writer is a lecturer of the Department of Economics at North South University.

Crossword puzzle grid with clues for Across and Down. Includes a solution time of 25 mins and a list of words to be found.

Cryptquip puzzle with a grid and a list of words to be found. Includes a clue: 'Yesterday's Cryptquip: BECAUSE I WANTED TO KNOW HOW MUCH BEEF THE DINER DISH HAD. I ASKED "WHAT'S IN IT FOR MEAT?"'

BEETLE BAILY comic strip by Mort Walker. A woman asks a man about a 'thing' he forgot, and he says 'OH, I FORGOT'. The woman then says 'THAT MAN CAN'T REMEMBER ANYTHING!'

HENRY comic strip by Don Trachte. A woman asks a man about a 'thing' he forgot, and he says 'OH, I FORGOT'. The woman then says 'THAT MAN CAN'T REMEMBER ANYTHING!'

QUOTABLE Quotes "A life spent making mistakes is not only more honorable, but more useful than a life spent doing nothing." George Bernard Shaw