

# Give yourselves a break

## PLEASURE IS ALL MINE



SHAH HUSAIN IMAM

**I**NVARIABLY, a *hartal* call has a casual and cruel footnote to it. The armchair bound announcer implores people to put up with the shutdown in greater national interest, imbued with a spirit of sacrifice. What 'greater interest of the country'



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would be served and how much more of a sacrificial lamb the people thrown to the wolves would have to be, might we ask the *hartal* imposer pointblank?

Giving pipedreams of better, honest and corruption-free governance, rule of law and pluralistic co-existence sounds like a big hoax. Where even going through the motions of democracy, far less working it in real life, is itself problematic, what else are the people to expect except being emotionally defrauded.

So, the opposition's tougher agitation programme is about partisan interest. Similarly, the ruling party's countering of agitation programme is driven by its self-interest. Thus the people figure nowhere except being caught up in the crossfire between the two parties and thereby getting punished for no fault of their own. Their fault is in electing MPs, so it seems.

The ruling party is, of course, obliged to protect the lives and properties of the people. In pursuit of this given agenda it often applies excessive force against the opposition. This is done both preemptively as well as on an ad-hoc basis.

A glaring instance, however, as to where the line should be drawn had been exemplified by the menacing overstay of Hefajat-e Islam at Shapla Chattar making government intervention inevitable at the eleventh hour. Whereas the action was regarded unavoidable, in the fallout though, the government has drawn considerable criticism in and out of the coun-

try for having jailed Adilur Rahman, secretary, Odhikar, for his alleged insertion of figure 61 as casualties on the human rights body's website.

As if the embarrassment to government had not been a cusplful already, what with callow billboard publicity campaign and tugging at the coattails of Prof Yunus' established integrity, the Adilur case was an avoidable ad-on. Due process should have been followed in his case.

In the mainstream, political issues are to be settled politically and not in the street. This commonsensical and potentially effective approach is sacrificed at the altar of a reprisal mentality drawing on the memories of BNP-time persecutions. It is as though 'I have turned one side of my cheek and then another for you to give a slap, and now it is my turn to beat the hell out of you.' But the humour somewhat dries out when you think of the runaway agitation by the Awami League including long spells of *hartal* and equally ruthless treatment of the then AL in the opposition by the ruling BNP.

Actually, cost of electoral loss has so spiked that none of the parties can entertain the thought of compromising on a bone of contention because it could be read as a sign of weakness and, therefore, a sure-fire way of running into a debacle in the end. Again, partisan interest is placed ahead of national interest which demands of the ruling and the opposition alliances to hit the middle

ground of green pasture of hope for political reconciliation. If rapprochement in a relatively simpler context compared with the very complex dynamics in some of the burning cauldrons around the world be possible in Bangladesh, it would be an endearing accomplishment to be globally shared.

But if we continue with the nihilistic type of politics, the consequences for the country's polity, economy, statecraft and governance could be perilous as never before. Add to the litany, the wakeup call heard from the newly unearthed Ansarulla Bangla Team factor and the possibility of Jamaat and other Islamist parties going underground or operating under a different label if they are not allowed to function normally.

Hefajet-e Islam is on the frontline of making archaic demands with a vote bank that both parties have tried to cultivate but falling short of approving of their charter of expectations.

The plain truth is unless the two major parties settle their differences on ways to hold the national election, militancy could sneak up by default. Where we need to build up the ramparts against attempted in-roads of Talibanisation, we cannot cavalierly play around with infantile politics so as not to nurture the seeds of division lying dormant beneath the social layers.

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# Operation Covert Storm

## HUMOROUSLY YOURS



NAVEED MAHBUB

**W**HAT? A double digit percentage increase in call rates? Oh wait, that used to be the mobile operator's billboard.

All mobile phone operators are in unison on the issues of SIM tax, 3G/VAT and billboards for a common cause.

Sahara Group fears that Bangladesh cricket team's jersey may see the same fate. Millions are now guarding their Facebook walls. Other cities are bracing themselves with billboards sporting: "It is prohibited to put a billboard on this billboard."

The repercussions have been stratospheric. Saudi Arabia and Malaysia celebrate Eid on Thursday. Bangladesh, in the middle, celebrates Eid on Friday. Even the moon is avoiding Bangladesh, lest it is covered with a billboard. The lunar memory is still fresh from Saydee on its cheeks.

Is it a coincidence that anything that starts with a 'b' is susceptible to being grabbed? Billboards, *beels* (lakes), buses (requisitions), bourses, businesses, bags, buffaloes, buildings, tantalising body parts beginning with 'b', bank (deliberately singular)...

No. The billboard blitz is a PR campaign, and a brilliant one, executed at a speed that is in the league of Gen. Norman Schwarzkopf. The flak is for the Panzer method. Perhaps the highly anticipated Harvard Professor has already started his work. He just needs to be both strategic as well as operational.

But we have overlooked many good sides: Bangladesh is finally on the Top Ten Billboard charts...!

We may finally have an alternative to land grabbing -- it's called brand grabbing.

Customer complains, "But I wasn't aware of the hidden fees!" Just answer, "It's written clearly. Not our fault that the billboards are covered." It is a drive towards decency to cover the otherwise bare billboards. The billboards are being protected from the elements -- especially aerial bombardments from birds.

There is also benefit for the mere mortal. You hit the car in front of you. Just tell the other angry driver that you are a patriot and were just trying to read the billboards.

Hurry! Scramble to take advantage. TV channels can air a new *Peek-a-boo* reality show: "Guess what's under the billboard?"

Companies can score major brownie points by having hologram billboards. They display the ruling party and their own messages, depending on the angle of viewing.

A cheaper alternative to the hologram is to have a little perforation on one side of the ruling party billboard to sport the original volunteer underneath. The big billboard on Airport Road opposite Hotel Regency: "Heart attacks reduced 27%" and peeking through the side is the red lips chips ad, or, "Road accidents reduced 19%" with "Truckers Association" grinning through, or "Affordable healthcare" with the nose cone of an air ambulance getting ready to taxi...

Gosh, I'm edgy! But I do value my freedom. I'll have to swallow my ego and ask my father-in-law, a diehard ruling party man, the only other favour other than asking for the hand of his daughter 15 years ago, "Help!" Hope he does, for he is still mad at me for barring him from replacing the Jamal painting in our living room with a billboard.

Oh, how I wish George Orwell was around to write his sequel, '2013.'

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# Blood-stained Dollars and Euros!

## DR. AKMA QUADER

**D**OES Bangladesh need blood-stained Dollars and Euros? An emphatic no. It is getting too costly!

The garment sector has contributed to the country's economy over the past three decades visibly. Today the gross contribution of the sector is about \$20 billion annually. The net is about \$6 billion after deducting imports by the sector. It has generated more than 3.5 million jobs, and more than eighty percent of those employed are rural poor girls in their teens and twenties.

Those who work in this sector are exploited by their employers, and they do not enjoy the rights and privileges afforded to their counterparts in Europe and North America. In the name of globalisation, free market economy, and competitiveness, the working conditions here are harsh, demanding and unsafe. The workers, especially the women, appear fragile, un nourished and tense. They are under-paid and often not regularly paid. The owners are a new breed of capitalists who could be more humane. There are exceptions, but only a handful.

Frequent accidents like the Rana Plaza disaster, Tazreen fire, or Phoenix and Spectrum collapse are examples of unsafe and hazardous workplace. These are the tip of the iceberg. Hundreds have lost their lives, thousands injured and maimed. These are man-made disasters but cer-

tainly avoidable through enhanced compliance. The root is the insatiable greed of the owners with little or no concern for the life and safety of the workers. The sector has no role model of a safe workplace, is not well-regulated, and lacks enforcement of compliance.

Hypnotised by buzzwords like free market economy and globalisation, we have failed to realise that clothes are no longer stitched in New York, London, or Paris, and the textile dyeing and finishing industries of North America and Europe are closed largely because of the stringent compliance requirements of safety at workplace, minimum hourly wage, labour rights, social benefits, health insurance, pension funds, and environmental standards for discharging effluents. Why should it be different for our workers in Bangladesh? Even in China, what was once the booming hub of RMG, the minimum wage at the lowest level is 1500 Yuan a month (about \$250) and there is rigid enforcement of environmental requirements. And in the US and Canada, the minimum hourly wage is \$7-8.



*Frequent accidents like the Rana Plaza disaster, Tazreen fire, or Phoenix and Spectrum collapse are examples of unsafe and hazardous workplace. Why don't the conditions in this sector improve?*

Why don't the conditions in this sector improve in Bangladesh? Because the government, politicians, businessmen, industrialists, administrators, bureaucrats, professionals and NGOs are strands of the same vicious web of corruption and greed, claiming their portion of the blood-stained pie. They have abdicated their conscience in the name of emancipation, empowerment, and employment without a care for those who are driving the country's economy. Whose economy is it really

anyway?

Today those who own these factories and industries also own banks, insurance, shipping, universities, hospitals, malls and so on. Some are lawmakers and proud to walk in the corridor of power and some run NGOs for poverty alleviation. Their business establishments are built and operated by borrowing from the banks with minimum owners' equity. If they go bust, they lose nothing and their opulent life styles will not be compromised.

The RMG factories in particular, in many instances, are housed in buildings that are not built for the purpose. Such buildings include residential commercial buildings or vertical extensions of such existing buildings. The issue of building occupancy is completely disregarded. Designated departments for building inspection and issuance of permits do not enforce compliance, and can be bribed for continuing operations. The same is true for compliance with effluent discharge standards by the textile dyeing and finishing industries.

The buyers from Europe or North

America come to Bangladesh not as pilgrims. Rather they are here to maximise their profits. It is of no use blaming them for our unsafe factory floors and low wages. At best, they will send condolences after a tragedy like the Rana Plaza collapse with final fatalities exceeding a thousand souls.

Visit Wal-Mart, Sears, J.C. Penney, and Target stores in the United States and Canada, or similar stores, like Marks & Spencer and Tesco in Europe, to see the price tags placed on clothes stitched in Bangladesh. Even if 2-3 per cent of these prices were given to workers in Bangladesh, none would question whether the Bangladeshi workers were being underpaid and exploited. We now have learnt that payments of salaries, compensations, and treatment and rehabilitation of the workers of the Rana Plaza collapse, pledged by BGMEA and the Bangladesh government, have slowed down. This is certainly a disquieting, and ominous indication of broken promises. Let us hope that the pledges made shall be fulfilled.

My heart bleeds for those girls and boys lost tragically under the beams and slabs of Rana Plaza. And my hats-off to the volunteers who are the symbol of the brave hearts of Bangladesh responding to the call of duty for the cause of humanity. We are proud of you. We salute you all.

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**ACROSS**

- Porter's burdens
- Before
- Dull
- sound of impact
- Enticement
- Blend
- Abundant
- Opera show-stopper
- U.K. broadcaster
- Black, in verse
- Fight
- Like a lot
- Solid ground
- Entire
- Smack
- Zlich
- Bees' home
- Parsons or Gaffigan
- Slangy negative
- out a living
- One of the Brady Bunch

**DOWN**

- Spill the beans
- Emanation
- Determination
- Birthplace of Stars
- Luau
- "American"
- Ring out
- Barn bird
- Alaskan metropolis
- Vortex
- Aviv
- Get larger
- Lair
- Appomattox surrenderer
- Frequently
- Serengeti beast
- Chinese dynasty
- Choir member
- Sharpen
- Raise
- Above
- Lotto win
- Incredible
- Mandible
- Call day
- Make a comeback
- Wardrobe
- Bloodhound's clue
- Quarterback Tony
- Dispatched
- Mimic
- Foundation
- Didn't pay yet

**Solution time: 25 mins.**

**YESTERDAY'S ANSWER 6-27**

**CRYPTOQUIP**

TGD JGRMFO RL OFDBZTAAAC  
 VGTZUDW LDYTAD WDDG  
 BTGGCZUJ RMV DUDYC GTZWO  
 BTAADW BRYYTUW-WRDO?

**Last Cryptoquip: I THINK A NEW SOUTH ASIAN PUBLIC RULED BY ELEPHANTS WOULD PROBABLY BE KNOWN AS PACHYSTAN Today's Cryptoquip Clue: R equals O**

**BETTLE BAILY** by Mort Walker

SARGE SAID HE HAD AN IDEA TO MAKE BEETLE WORK

HA! ANOTHER ONE OF SARGE'S IMPOSSIBLE IDEAS

WAIT! THIS IDEA MIGHT REALLY WORK!

**HENRY** by Don Trachte

CHATTER CHATTER

RUGS

AH!

**QUOTABLE Quotes**

"The two hardest tests on the spiritual road are the patience to wait for the right moment and the courage not to be disappointed with what we encounter."

**Paulo Coelho**