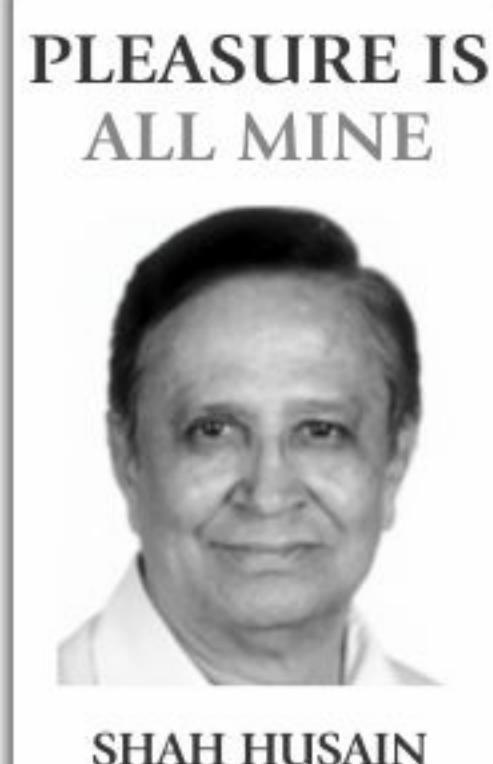


Replay of 2006, chapter and verse!



PLEASURE IS ALL MINE

ARE we any better off after the announcement of proposals and counter recipes by the ruling Awami League and the opposition BNP? Notionally perhaps, but not in reality -- as yet. On the contrary, the signs and symptoms are ringing familiar with those in 2006.

There are striking similarities between pre 1/11 and the current scenarios, however much incurable optimists may look for a last minute miracle. In fact, there has been nothing providential in the resolution of political crisis in Bangladesh. Only a reluctant realisation of the futility of uncompromising positions and the high costs of violence led to good sense prevailing in the end. In this sad political narrative the means has never been honourable with the end eventually being equally tainted by a sense of false triumph of a solution courtesy a parliamentary majority produced by electoral elections.

Senior BNP lawmaker Jamir Uddin Sircar rising on a point of order reiterated his leader's proposals for a nonparty interim government before the parliament addressing it to the Prime Minister. Mark that Khaleda Zia did not herself raise the issue before the parliament nor was she present in the House when Jamir Uddin Sircar did it. Nor did she have an adjournment motion moved by any of her party MPs, suspecting that it might be shot down by a voice vote. The ruling party should have promised the BNP an assured hearing in the parliament and a lively debate. It must encourage the opposition to move an adjournment motion formally and then try to meet them half way. Some element of the BNP's formula and some of the ruling party's proposal could be synthesised and integrated into a mutually acceptable accord.

Tofael grilling his proposal, Jamir Uddin Sircar replied: "We placed it for consideration by the Prime Minister. Let her decide on it."

Juxtapose this with what happened in 2006. Hasina, then opposition leader, herself placed the 14-party combine's electoral reform proposal in parliament. That time Jamir Uddin Sircar was played by the then LGRD minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan who responded to the then opposition leader's intervention saying that they were ready for a 'constructive discussion.' But AL leader Nasim pointed out that the then opposition expected a response from the Prime Minister and not from Bhuiyan.

In spite of the circuitous tally of events, AL and BNP were to open talks in October the same year.



AMRAN HOSSAIN

We suggest the PM make 'the maximum sacrifice,' a phrase she has used for reasons best known to her, and stand down as the constitutional head of the caretaker setup. Thereby, she will be endearing herself immensely to the people, create a niche in history for herself and may quite emerge on the winning side.

Several rounds of play-to-the-gallery parleys between Bhuiyan and Jalil drew a blank in the end. The next is history -- too well known to bear any repetition.

In the present context, we have now Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir and Syed Ashraf Islam trying to open a dialogue. Now the stakes are higher for both parties to come to a consensus on modalities of national election. A higher premium is being put on a collective capacity to stave off obscurantism and fast track economic development spearheaded by demographic dividends of a vastly young population.

Given their proposals, what can be the cut-off points between the two tangents of formulations? Apparently, none whatsoever because they are mutually exclusionary as one set requires a constitutional amendment and the other does not involve it.

Let's be focused on the AL's formula first because it is the party which has the initiative in its hands to be a game-changer.

We suggest the PM make 'the maximum sacrifice,' a phrase she has used for reasons best known to her, and stand down as the constitutional head of the caretaker setup. Thereby, she will be endearing herself immensely to the people, create a niche in history for herself and may quite emerge on the

winning side.

Let there be five plus five composite interim government of elected representatives. As for its head, selected through mutual acceptability criterion, he or she too could be elected by the parliament acting as an electoral college.

On BNP's proposals it has to reduce the number of advisers to be picked from the given limited number of erstwhile caretaker government advisers who might be available. The rest of the quota may be filled by activating the search engine among a range of reputable and physically fit persons. Just as we seek out the candidates to square up with the need for a ten-member advisory council, we extend the quest to get a chief adviser as well. Then the second part of the BNP's proposal acquires a relevance to have the selected advisers elected in the same manner as Speaker and women members are.

The rejectionist reactions from both sides to their respective formulae are blurring the vision of elements in the two sets of proposals that can be utilised in charting a meaningful pathway to holding the forthcoming national election.

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

Montagues and Capulets

HUMOROUSLY YOURS



NAVEED MAHBUB

WAS this the worst? At least it was not the first. Since 1976, there have been 17 US government shutdowns. The longest was for 8 years -- when George W. Bush was president.

Blame it all on the global economy. While the US was worried about Syria, Iran, China and North Korea, Canadian born US Senator Ted Cruz led the charge against (Kenyan born?) Obama and got the US government to shut down.

The Republicans didn't really want to shut the government down. They simply wanted to end the stalemate on the spending bill and get back to the important work of crippling the government. In fact, they were even hoping that John McCain would help them get their way. Good choice -- if there's anyone who can beat Barack Obama.

Repercussions were immediate. 800,000 non-essential government employees went on furlough while Congress continued to get paid. President Obama canceled his trip to Asia -- he didn't want to be in Indonesia not doing anything to solve the crisis when he could be in Washington not doing anything to solve it. 33% of the government ended up doing absolutely nothing, which was not bad considering that before the shutdown, 80% weren't doing anything. The International Space Station crew panicked and called Mission Control but only got voicemail. The Library of Congress shut down -- that's no issue, nobody goes to libraries these days anyway.

But there were brighter sides to the crisis. Eavesdropping on average citizens stopped. With the government partially shut down, citizens can claim to pay partial taxes. Thank heavens zoo animals were not euthanised. But with the national zoo closed, there were none to feed the animals or lock them up at night. Had the shut down continued, starving lions and tigers would have charged out of the zoo and devoured the fattest on Capitol Hill. Actually that might have been the answer to all the problems.

What about the public? A good majority of them were not in the least worried about the shutdown. They were more worried about the government turning back on. They hoped that the government would have stayed shut down long enough for people to realise that they can do without much of the Washington bureaucracy anyway.

Nevertheless, sensible minds felt it was imperative to keep the government from shutting down. After all, the country needed to keep the government working so they could continue to not do things on behalf of the population.

Oh well, it's all politics. As the great comedian Bobby Collins puts it, the word politics is derived from poly meaning many and ticks meaning blood sucking insects. Go figure.

Interestingly, while US dollars are smuggled out of Bangladesh every day and many here evade taxes, the Bangladesh government hasn't shut down while the US's had. Have to give Bangladesh some credit. Now, after October 25, it may be a different story. Till then...wait a second, that's TODAY! Ok, just do a search of the words 'Republicans' and 'Democrats' in this column and replace them with whatever words you wish, and you'll find a customised write-up, which will remain current for quite some time...

The writer is an engineer & CEO turned comedian (by choice) and the host of NTV's Grameenphone Presents The Naveed Mahbub Show. E-mail: naveed@naveedmahbub.com.

Legacy of a revolution

SHAHRIAR FEROZE

DOES the political slogan "Workers of the world, unite!" ring a bell? May be yes or may be no. But it was this simple political slogan that had bonded, united and strengthened the working class of Russians, leading to a revolt eminently recalled as the Russian or October Revolution.

The revolution led by the Bolsheviks 96 years ago on October 25 through an armed insurrection in Petrograd (St. Petersburg today) brought about the transformation of then Russian Empire into the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), replacing Russia's traditional monarchy with the world's first communist state.

Throughout the range of capitalist nations the October Revolution is usually interpreted as per their "own understandings," but realistically it was the first massive uprising led by the working class people. But, a revolution that was supposed to secure the rights for the working class with Marxism and Leninism failed and was misled by a group that had ultimately paved the path for dictatorship behind the façade of communism; and a ruthless one led by Stalin in the 30's who, like Hitler, believed in expansionist and oppression theories too. On the other hand, hopes for establishing a democracy failed. The Communist Party was meant to be a highly principled working-class force that would control the new government bureaucracy, but it did not happen.

Instead, the bureaucratic mode of functioning, combined with the brutalising effects of the Russian civil war transformed the Communist Party into an increasingly authoritarian body. Thus the goal of a great revolution was derailed.

For many years, the example of the Russian revolution of 1917 inspired workers and other oppressed

people throughout the world. It was noticeable not only during the massive international communist movement in the past century but also among many others inclined to challenge the established political and bureaucratic orders.

What's important here is: The Russian revolutionary experiences of October 1917 influenced later revolutions across the globe throughout

the 20th century, while its legacy and objective had been distorted by many quarters.

From the writer's lenses -- the October Revolution had occurred not only because the masses wanted to remove the Tsar along with his companions for the cause of a monarchy-cum-authoritarian regime, or for their voices to be heard for that matter. Its importance is not that it's only the first and officially recorded revolution led by the working class. The participants of the great uprising had a dream to witness democratic values, teachings and norms. They expected the communists to realise their dreams but events took a different direction. Lenin had failed to materialise the dream of the millions



but, whatever history's judgment of him, few Russian revolutionaries possessed Lenin's decisiveness and strength of vision for Russia's future.

The significance of the October Revolution was not lost on ruling classes and politicians around the world, especially in Europe. It was fear that the revolution would spread that had gripped the bourgeoisie. The fear

appeared true.

The post-revolution events in Russia had an impact in the Indian subcontinent significantly.

During the 1920s, inspired by what was taking place in the Soviet Union, activities of a whole generation of youth like Muzaffar Ahmed, S.A. Dange, Gholam Hussain, S.V. Ghate and others contributed to the dissemination of Marxist ideology in India.

The growing impact of Marxism-Leninism and the October Revolution's lessons on the rising Indian nationalist consciousness alarmed the British Raj at a greater length.

Most notably, the observance in 1927 of the tenth

anniversary of October Revolution generated a new interest about the Soviet attainments among the Indian intelligentsia, especially in Bengal, Bombay and Delhi. This occasioned the formation of small groups of youth who dedicated themselves to spreading the message of October Revolution among the toiling classes in the country. During the anti-Simon Commission agitation in 1928-29, there were stirrings of the Left-inspired labour protests also.

Relevant to mention that in 1927, Rabindranath Tagore went on a historic visit to the Soviet Union and was enormously impressed by the revolutionary transformations going on in there. In his Letters from Russia (Russian Chithi), he even remarked that his life would have remained incomplete if he had not undertaken that trip to the Soviet Union. Tagore's favourable impressions about the Soviet Union greatly impacted the public opinion in Bengal in favour of the revolutionary tide in the aftermath of the October Revolution.

Country, context and time may be different: but it could be a subject of debate whether Bangladesh in recent times is becoming a fertile ground for a massive labour uprising or not, since back-to-back carnages and disasters and protests against low wages had frequently resulted in violence over the past year.

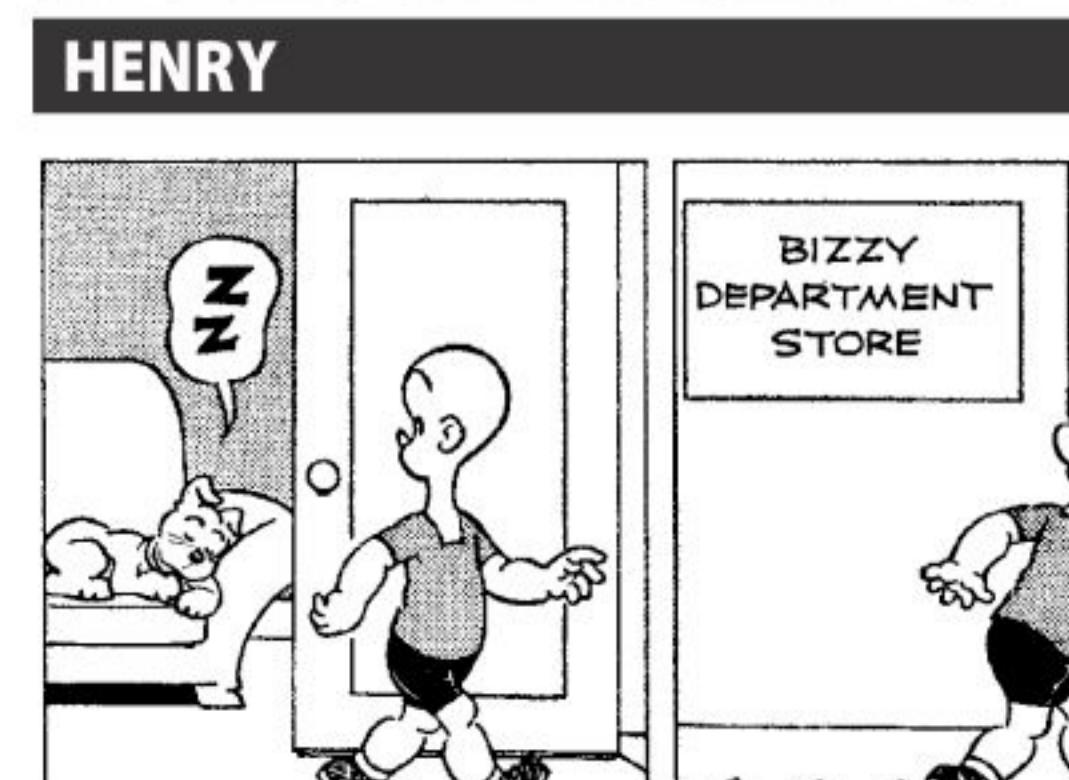
Nevertheless, October was not a coup conducted by a secretive and elitist band in pre-communist Russia. Above all, the revolution was about the mobilisation of the mass of ordinary Russians -- workers, soldiers and peasants -- in a struggle to change their world. That is to this day the most important legacy of the Red October.

The writer is current affairs analyst, *The Daily Star*.
E-mail: shahriarferoze@gmail.com

BETTE BAILY



HENRY



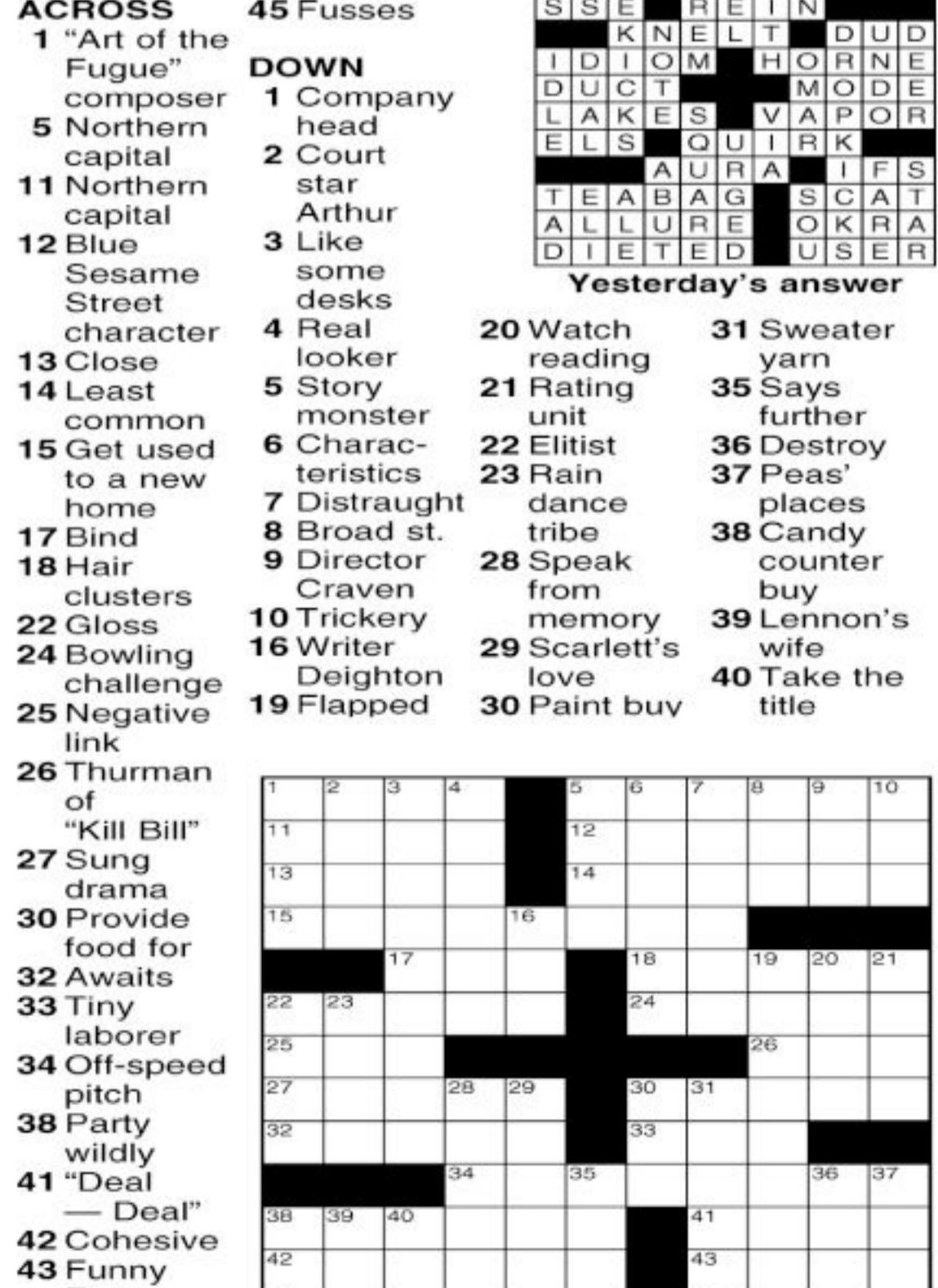
by Don Trachte

QUOTEABLE

Quotes

"The first lesson of economics is scarcity: there is never enough of anything to fully satisfy all those who want it. The first lesson of politics is to disregard the first lesson of economics."

Thomas Sowell



By THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS 45 Fuses

1 "Art of the Fugue" composer

5 Northern capital

11 Northern capital

12 Blue Sesame Street character

13 Close 14 Least common

15 Get used to a new home

17 Bind 18 Hair clusters

22 Gloss

24 Bowling

25 Negative link

26 Human of "Kill Bill"

27 Sung drama

30 Provide food for

32 Awaits

33 Bind laborer

34 Off-speed pitch

38 Party wildly

41 "Deal" -- Deal"

42 Cohesive

43 Funny

Fox

44 Flapped



1 2 3 4

5 6 7 8 9 10

11 12

13 14

15 16

17 18 19 20 21

22 23 24

25 26

27 28 29 30 31

32 33 34 35 36 37

38 39 40 41

42 43 44

45 46 47 48 49 50

51 52 53 54 55 56

57 58 59 60 61 62

63 64 65 66 67 68

69 70 71 72 73 74

75 76 77 78 79 80

82 83 84 85 86 87

88 89 90 91 92 93

95 96 97 98 99 100

9 10 11 12 13 14

15 16 17 18 19 20

21 22 23 24 25 26

