

# Questions to prime minister and leader of the opposition

SHAFI AHMED CHOWDHURY

AN extremely tragic and horrific report, "Brutality Beyond Belief," was published with red heading on the first page in *The Daily Star* on November 5. The report was so painful, so horrific that except for a mad man or a dead man everybody would feel shocked, shattered and traumatised. The report had a gruesome picture of a burnt-out body that was looking like an alien. He was burnt by an arson attack by so-called "miscreants." Just look at his wretched father, he was seeing the charred body of his son! How can a father bear this?

The report also portrayed an extremely heart-breaking story of two minor girls Mahi and Moushumi who could not understand why their father was not coming back home. They are too



PHOTO: ABU BAKAR SIDDIQUE

*We are not the jonogon (people) that you politicians claim we are. Your jonogon are only the flatterers around you.*

young to realise that their father Mukul was dead because of arson attack. Moreover, there were many other stories covered in the report which would simply shake your bodies if you are a human.

TV channels had also shown the previous night, two tender-aged children crying helplessly and looking agape at their mother's heart-breaking wailing. Maybe they also failed to understand that their father Mostafiz was a victim of dreadful arson attack and would never come back to them again.

To some extent the heartbreaking tears of the tender-aged children and their mothers was bearable with heavy heart, although it is absolutely unacceptable that their fathers were killed by fire. But in the case of 14-year-old boy Monir the scene was so ghastly that he was looking like an alien from another planet.

Perhaps "people's leaders" Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia

didn't see the gruesome picture of the 14-year-old boy in the newspapers, or hear the heartbreaking sobbing of the tender-aged children on TV. Now the question to them is: how could you take your meals on the November 5? If you really love the people, it can be assumed that you would have simply lost your appetite that day after seeing pictures of the violence on innocent people and loss of life in helpless families. Moreover, it looked as if 14-year-old boy Monir could die very soon because 90% of his body was burnt.

There is no doubt that either of you will become prime minister of Bangladesh again. Before taking office you will have to sign the oath. But will you stop for a moment at the time of signing, and recall that because of your arrogance, haughtiness and ego the killers of your party killed or maimed so many people and destroyed so many families? It is for your headstrong attitude and self-centred interest that

common people are bullied, suffer and die on the streets. What a tragedy that even though you talked over phone for 37 minutes you could not settle anything! The reason is, you don't want to. The longer these acts continue the more you will be benefited. Our history says so. You always apply the classic technique of blaming each other, but never give concessions for compromise with goodness.

We, the common people, see the criminal-looking youngsters pouring petrol or gunpowder and setting alight busses or scooters even though there are people inside them. When we people can see them why can't the law enforcement authorities? If these criminals are caught and hanged in summary trials then no one would dare to do such things again. But neither Awami League nor BNP is willing to do this. Because either these people are their men or they want to take advantage of these blood-lettings, or both. In fact, it's like a well-defined, well-formulated political chess-game. There is a well-set series of moves which pave the way for getting to power and plundering the country. When we know these fire-setters are murderers, then why are you indulging them? Don't you feel for a moment how common people are becoming helpless and lost after losing their near and dear ones?

And lastly we are not the *jonogon* (people) that you politicians claim we are. Your *jonogon* are only the flatterers around you.

The writer is a social worker.

## Hawaii Six-O

HUMOROUSLY YOURS



NAVEED MAHBUB

this is a little too much to expect from those who see no further than the tips of their noses while giving out marching orders to hurl the fiery projectiles.

"We bear the pain selflessly," the Pied Pipers hear from taxpaying voters, loud and clear, uhm, I think, or should Nero play the fiddle a notch lower?

So, congratulations on another 60 hour *hartal*. There is something classy about *Six-O* that begs platinum membership to the elite ranks -- BBC has 60 *Seconds*, CBS has 60 *Minutes*, the Opposition (whoever that may be) holds *hartal* for 60 hours, elections are at T-minus 60 days, the Incumbent (again, whoever that may be) reigns for 60 months and the Nobel Laureate commits the morbid sin of crossing 60 years on this planet with his baby shred into 60 pieces.

This is the kind of thing that can damage single digit approval ratings.

The 37 minute phone conversation was a candle in the wind -- the closest to what American voters see in the form of a Presidential debate. Now, let the polls begin on who won this debate. Meantime, recent survey polls show that more people have walked on the moon than those who support *hartal*. Interestingly, there has been no ruckus for an interim pollster or a subsequent *hartal*.

With 60 days left until the elections, a lot can happen -- AL can budge, BNP can budge, or there can be a tsunami that destroys all of mankind. So, there is hope. Else, there is no light at the end of the tunnel, but rather, a slow motion train wreck in the making.

As voters get ready while being courted with U2's *With or Without You* or The Doors' *Come On Baby Light My Fire*, let's not forget that in order to get a

higher turnout at the polls, one will need an opponent. Only then, will voters throng to the polling stations and hopefully vote for whoever remembers they (the voters) exist.

December 2008 saw exactly that -- all out participation, voter ID cards and unending enthusiasm. Whatever the picture 5 years later, the consolation is that somebody HAD to win the elections. The only other alternative would have been for one to waste his vote on a third entity with no chances of winning. That way one wouldn't feel so guilty afterwards.

And let's not vindicate ourselves, the average voters, completely. Politicians come from Bangladeshi parents, families, homes, schools, towns, businesses, universities and are elected by Bangladeshis from the same list. So, this is really the best we can do, the best to be offered and the



best to make out of. If the output is garbage, then so was perhaps the input. We may scream about term limits, but we are likely to produce brand new repetitions.

With both sides sticking to their demands, January 2014 is looking to be a far cry from December 2008. But, there will still be two major sides, just as the US, the beacon of democracy, has never seen much from the Ralph Nader's. As a country still in diapers and going through growing pains, Bangladesh has plenty of time to put on its shades to look straight into a bright future. When the dust settles and there is another opinion poll, the only choices to pick from for the question, "How do you rate the performance of..." will be:

(A) A good job; (B) A great job; (C) An absolutely fantastic job; (D) All of the above.

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## Waiting for a way out

ALAMGIR KHAN

BD ANGLADESH has been reeling through political violence, and no end is in sight. A glimmer of hope shone when Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina agreed to talk with opposition leader Khaleda Zia on the phone. Then the red phone rang, and it was a dead phone! This is a mystery only the fictional Hercule Poirot could dare to solve. Then came the red letter day, October 26. Of course, it was a red letter day because it was about conversation over a red phone. A drama was written that day, unlike anything in the theatre world.

The people were entertained with a *deshi* version of Samuel Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot* by the telephonic performance of Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia. It has reached the zenith of absurdity in the theatre of politics in Bangladesh. The script of this conversation can be criticised as most boring by someone and acclaimed as most entertaining by someone else, depending on the point of view of the individual who bought the ticket to enjoy it. It was not expected to be published anywhere in the media, but it happened in a surrealist way. Max Brod published Frantz Kafka's writings after Kafka's death, clearly betraying his friend who requested him to burn them unread. This way our world has been enriched. Our media have betrayed our two most famous national leaders by publishing their telephone conversation, and this way our politics has been downgraded before the world.

The famous 37-minute long telephone conversation has multiple sides and so brings many things back into many people's minds. It reminded some people of John Reed's *Ten Days that Shook the World*. Compared with that, the 37 minutes should have shaken an area many times larger than Bangladesh. That day many people were shaken to find nothing shaken by it.

Now let's have a discussion about our *deshi* version of

*Waiting for Godot*. The prologue of this phone call drama moved around the theme "red phone dead and ringing." Did James Hadley Chase write anything like this? Then came the invitation to a dinner on the day of a strike, followed by the request to withdraw the *hartal*, with the refrain of 'no, no' in the background. Like a cinematic motif, the dead phone ringing subject came back again in the middle of the conversation. The dinner was arranged only for Khaleda Zia and anybody else she wanted. The invitation was for October 28. Khaleda requested the date to be shifted to any day after October 29 and even proposed October 30, only two days away. The war of words went on around 28 and 30. Again came the 'withdraw the *hartal*' sequence. It dragged on too long, interspersed with other things.

The beauty of this conversation is that the word 'withdraw' came up 27 times, 'no' 102 times and in contrast 'yes' only 13 times in those world-shaking minutes. There are "I do not want to quarrel here" and "You are already quarrelling," and more gems may be discovered in the depths through further study. But what you will not find for sure is what you are waiting for, holding your breath -- the solution to the crisis of the current dynastic, corrupt bourgeois politics.

The *Daily Star* editorial (October 30) called the script 'Phone call farce.' The whole thing -- reducing the matter to two individuals only, the hype about it, the preparation for it, the performance, and making it public -- has turned out to be a farce unforeseen in our history. But it was a farce not in the sense of meaninglessness, rather in the sense of a form of theatre that is amusing. What a farce is to our political leaders is a matter of life and death to our people. What followed it is a tragedy to those who lost and will lose their lives in the violence during *hartal*. The poor nine-year old Rahima, 'blinded by blind politics,' and 14-year old Monir and Sumi, victims of 'brutality beyond belief,' also failed to be amused.

The writer writes on theatre, education and socio-political issues. E-mail: alamgir@alamgir.com



## New WHO guidelines to end AIDS in Bangladesh

RUHAL HAQUE, THUSHARA FERNANDO and LEO KENNY

BD ANGLADESH'S swift and targeted response to HIV has had significant successes, but more must be done. Our approach must be united, vigilant and proactive. The new 2013 World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines and UNAIDS Treatment 2015 initiative are an exciting leap forward that put our goals of "Zero new HIV infections, zero discrimination and zero AIDS-related deaths" in focus. The global experience with HIV and AIDS is that it is not a problem that will go away on its own, or that can be managed as a status-quo; we must aggressively pursue the vision of an HIV free Bangladesh -- and we must do this now.

The new WHO guidelines recommend that anti-retroviral treatment (ART), comprising of medicines that can control the virus, begin when a patient's CD4 cell count falls to 500 cells per cubic millimeter of blood. CD4 cells are the white blood cells that HIV attacks, and is used as an indicator of any person's immune status once diagnosed as HIV positive, as these blood cells are responsible for maintaining a person's immunity. This is a significant change from the former guidelines, which recommended that ART begin when the CD4 cell count decreased to 350. Essentially, the new WHO guidelines recommend that people living with HIV receive treatment earlier, as recent evidence indicates that earlier ART will help people with HIV to live

longer, healthier lives, and substantially reduce the risk of transmitting HIV to others.

The current provision of ART services to people living with HIV in Bangladesh is commendable -- once people are identified as HIV positive with a CD4 count of 350 or lower, they usually receive the treatment and care that they need free of charge. The new WHO ART guidelines recommend that ART begin at CD4 count of 500, thus the number of people who require treatment in Bangladesh will increase remarkably, which presents a challenge. Bangladesh needs innovative solutions to strengthen outreach, testing, and counseling services; and to ensure that these are in the upazilas that need them. Achieving universal access to quality facilities and services will secure the future of the "Treatment as Prevention" paradigm; which requires provision of ART to all HIV-positive people, sero-discordant couples and pregnant women, regardless of CD4 count, in order to reduce the risk of further transmission.

The HIV/AIDS programme, led by the government of Bangladesh and supported by UNAIDS, WHO, Unicef and UNFPA, has had considerable success thus far and the overall prevalence in the country has remained below 0.1%. The prevalence of HIV in people who inject drugs (PWID) in Dhaka was 7% in 2007 and 5.3% in 2011, so it seems to be contained; and HIV prevalence has remained low (within 0 to 2%) in other key populations such as female sex work-

ers, men who have sex with men, and transgender persons.

However, the demographics of Bangladesh present considerable challenges to the HIV prevention programme. Bangladesh is a densely populated country, with enduring poverty, low levels of education, gender inequality and high level of cross-border travel.

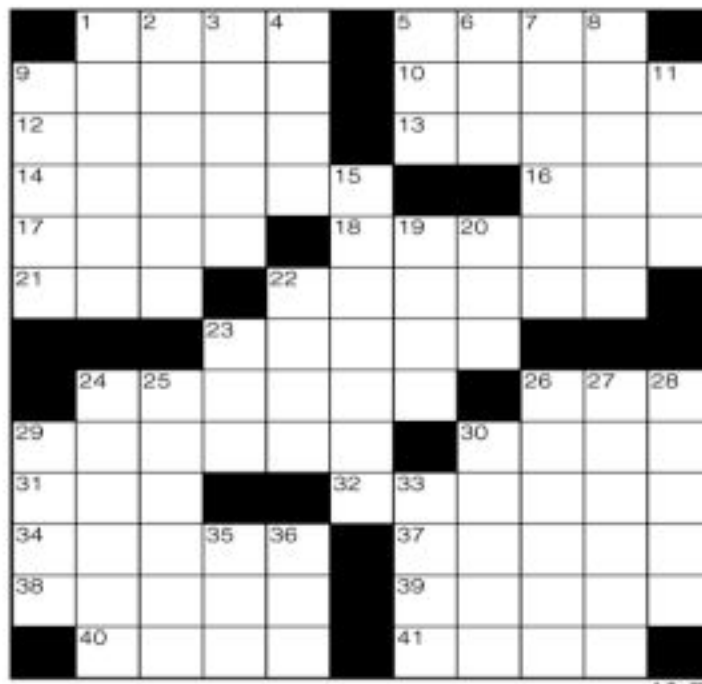
As the AIDS epidemic changes shape, so must the HIV prevention programme. Improved surveillance and a national management information system (MIS) will be the cornerstones of this new phase of Treatment as Prevention. Doctors, laboratory technicians, nurses and counselors need to be deployed to scale up existing services where more work can be done; community members need to be mobilised to enhance care and support services; and additional resources need to be targeted at the source of new infection, such as at-risk migrant workers.

Ultimately, we are united in our vision of a Bangladesh free of HIV and AIDS; the new WHO guidelines and scaling up of the Treatment as Prevention paradigm may be the future, based on country context and stakeholder consultations to take place as per WHO recommendations.

The writers are Minister, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Bangladesh, WHO representative to Bangladesh, World Health Organization, and UNAIDS Country Coordinator, Bangladesh, respectively.

By THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS
- 1 Plant part
- 5 Like cupcakes
- 9 First Lady before Michelle
- 10 Thesaurus author
- 12 Top floor
- 13 Seeing red
- 14 Painter's motion
- 16 Wee bite
- 17 Verve
- 18 Tried hard
- 21 Stimpy's pal
- 22 Fall guy
- 23 "Keen!"
- 24 Frangrances
- 26 Rented out
- 29 Walked with purpose
- 30 Capitol top
- 31 Mine rock
- 32 Flashing light
- 34 Obama's veep
- 37 Roused from slumber
- 38 Chapel topper
- 39 Tusk material



A XYDLBAAXR is LONGFELLOW

On letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

10-9 CRYPTOQUOTE

B Q W L D J F X Y W B Y D V H

W V T D F X Q Y D, V Q D ' U D Q D P E

B U W L D Z D U W W D X Y L D F

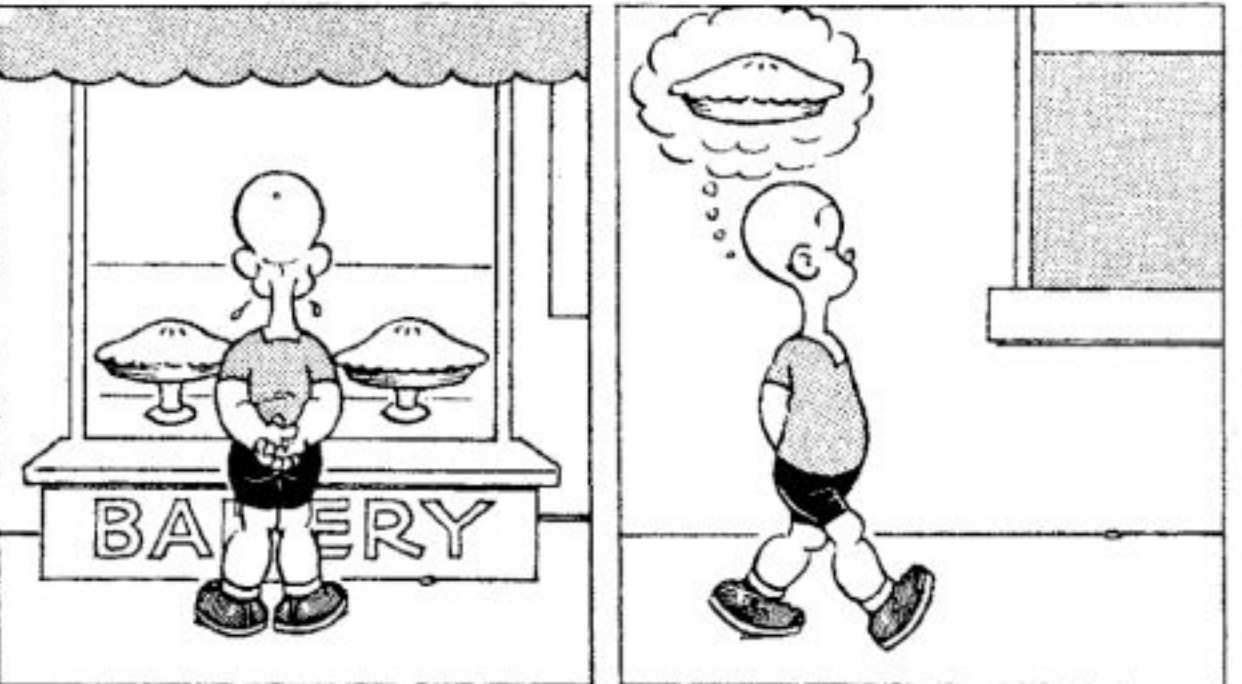
- K X T X B T X P X

Yesterday's Cryptoquote:  
GOOD JUDGMENT COMES FROM  
EXPERIENCE AND EXPERIENCE  
COMES FROM BAD JUDGMENT.  
-- FRED BROOKS

BEETLE BAILY



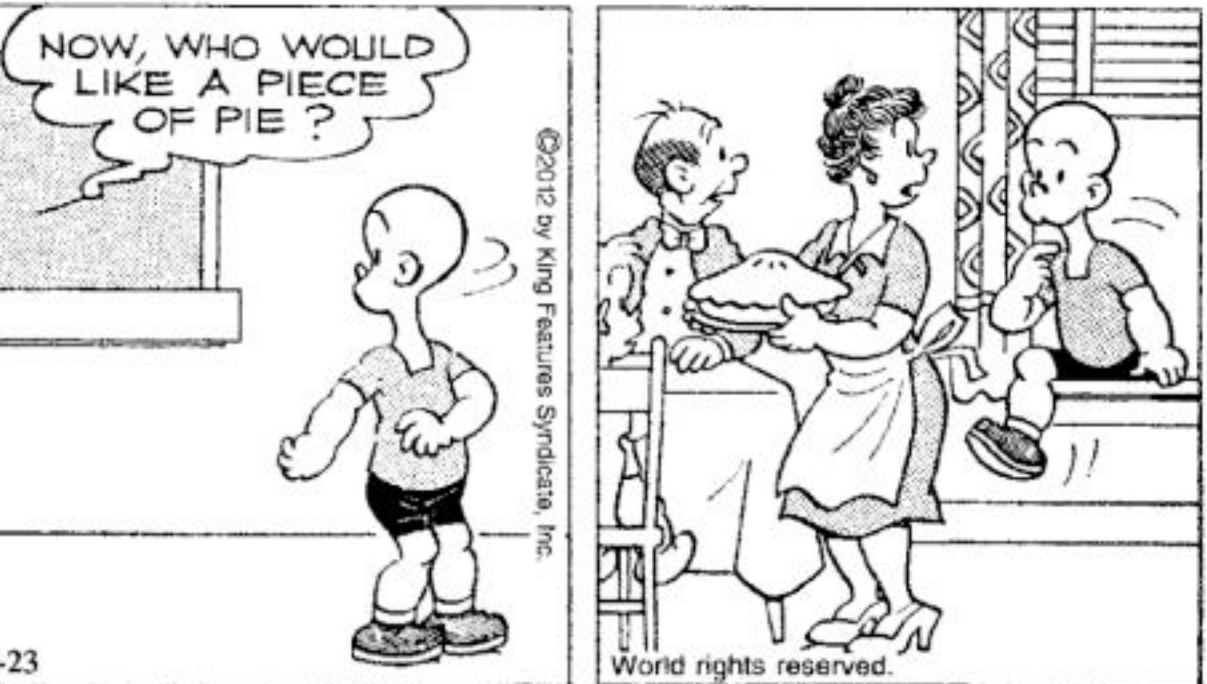
HENRY



by Mort Walker



by Don Tranchte



## QUOTABLE Quote

"I was asked once, 'You're a smart man. Why aren't you rich?' I replied, 'You're a rich man. Why aren't you smart?'"

Jacque Fresco