

From 'tamarind' to 'flower queen'

AUDITY FALGUNI

ALLAMA Al Shafi, the spiritual leader of Hefajat-e-Islam, changed his tune saying he did not term women as "tamarind" but as "flower queens" (*phool rani*) whose fragrance everybody wishes to inhale. He further stressed in a public meeting at Hathazari that a handful of ministers of the present government have misquoted him saying he equated women with tamarind.

He said that women can work in offices and factories, but wearing a veil and in separate work stations. Junaid Babunagari, the Secretary General of Hefajat-e-Islam, echoed his leader's words that women will be allowed to work in factories but within *pardah*. He iterated that if the government does not allow them to hold their scheduled demonstration in Dhaka on November 15 they would launch a strong movement.

It's difficult to ignore the all-out vandalism carried out by your men on May 5 evening, who burnt numerous copies of the Holy Quran, uprooted the trees from road dividers, damaged the small shops of pavement hawkers, set fire to the Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) office and attacked Awami League office.

This nation has also witnessed the fabrication by some so-called human rights organisations who first claimed that the death toll was 2 lakhs, and then 50,000, on May 5 night. Then the number of deaths began gradually declining to 2,500, 500 and eventually 61. Being served a notice by the Ministry of Information to hand over the details of the 61 "dead" persons, they failed to do so, and some of the madrasa students reported to be "dead" by these HR groups were later found to be attending classes at the madrasas.

The government has already paid a heavy price in the last city corporation polls in four cities due to the propaganda of "genocide on May 5 night". The ex-mayors from Awami League in two (Barisal and Rajshahi) of those four cities had worked very hard for their people and for development, but in vain. Yes, the present government also has a number of failures. But it has some feathers of success too in its cap, like surplus in agriculture and power generation, reduction of

corruption in education sector, zero presence of extortionists and improvement of law and order, increase of reserve in Bangladesh Bank, safeguarding the national economy from global recession impacts, and of course the conduct of War Crimes Trial.

Thus, against the backdrop of demolition of Hindu temples by BNP-Jamaat axis between February and March; terming of the Shahbagh movement as an "assembly of atheist, wasted



youths" by the opposition leader; several attempts by a handful of presently banned newspapers and TV channels to unleash communal riot; several riot attempts in Bogra and Satkhira by Jamaat cadres through photo-shopping; and the recent attacks on the minorities in Pabna and Lalmonirhat, we need to revisit the pertinent points of 13-points demands of Hefajat-e-Islam and offer our answers.

Hefajat demand-1: Re-instatement of "Absolute trust and faith in the Almighty Allah" in the constitution as one of the fundamental principles of state policy.

Our response: The 15th Amendment to Constitution (published in October 2011) reads in its preamble: "[BISMISLLAH-AR-RAHMAN-AR-RAHIM (In the name of Allah [the Beneficent, the Merciful] /In the name of the Creator, the Merciful)." Thus our Constitution endorses Islamic faith along with faiths of other religious denominations as this State was born through the sacrifices of Muslims, Hindus, Christians, Buddhists, Bengalis and indigenous

people. Hefajat demand-2: Enacting blasphemy law to ensure capital punishment for maligning Allah, Islam and the Prophet.

Our Response: Section 295 A of Bangladesh Penal Code and Section 57 of the IT Act 2006 provides imprisonment up to 10 years and less than Tk.1 crore as punishment for such offence.

Hefajat demand-3: Arrest and stern punishment of the "atheist" leaders and bloggers of the Shahbagh movement.

Our response: The Shahbagh movement leaders have firmly denied the allegation of being "atheists." And some of the alleged bloggers are under trial.

Hefajat demand-4: Stop foreign cultural intrusions including free-mingling of men and women and candlelit vigils, and put an end to adultery, injustices, shamelessness etc. in the name of freedom of expression and conscience.

Our response: Adultery is punishable under Section 497 of Penal Code and section 75 of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) Ordinance 1976. Articles 27, 19(3), 36 and 39 of our constitution ensure equality in work, movement, freedom of speech and actions for men and women in every walk of life. So Hefajat's demand is contrary to our constitution. Millions of women in RMG, agriculture, teaching, banking, hospitals, police, military and other GO-NGO-private services would be jobless if it were to be so. That will be detrimental to our national economy.

Hefajat demand-5: Stop turning Dhaka (the city of mosques) into a city of idols and setting up sculptures at intersections, colleges and universities.

Our response: Sculptures exist in a number of Muslim countries. Besides Articles 23 and 24 ensure the proper conservation of our historical and archaeological heritage. Bangladesh is also a signatory state to the Unesco convention.

Finally, today, when Bangladesh women like Nishat Majumder and Wasfia Nazreen are conquering Mount Everest, the 13-points demands of Hefajat-e-Islam should not cause our march of progress to revert to the darkness of the medieval age.....

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Hartal and our conscience

MD. KHAIRUL ISLAM

TIME and again leading political parties have failed to resolve their differences through dialogues and discussions. Instead, the preferred path chosen by the major opposition party is calling *hartals*. The destructive elements of hartals are now sweeping the nation, crippling the economy and our way of life. Welcome to the country where the leaders ask the citizens to stop working and hibernate for days.

Political parties claim *hartal* as their constitutional right, notwithstanding the sufferings of millions of people. Interestingly, the party in power preaches against the use of *hartal* but invariably changes its position when it becomes the minority party. All political parties, however, are in complete unison on not passing laws that will make *hartal* illegal. Thus, their hegemony over public lives continues. So our expectations that all differences will be resolved in the parliament remain unfulfilled to this day.

Boycotting of the parliament by any opposition party is fundamentally undemocratic. But this practice has become a norm rather than an exception. Mandatory attendance by all the members is a prerequisite for democracy to function and flourish. People elect their representatives so that their hopes and aspirations are represented in parliament. A dysfunctional parliamentary system is bad for the rest of the government machinery as it breeds corruption.

The scale of success of *hartal* is ironically measured in terms of the degree of destruction and destabilisation of public life. As a prelude to the ferocity of the upcoming *hartals* vehicles and properties are burnt the night before the actual commencement of declared time. Death and destruction inflicted on the people are justified in the name of democracy. In the earlier days *hartal* was usually called from dawn to dusk. But today it

has become a continuous affair for three to four days. If the trend continues, the public won't be surprised if hartals are extended to a week or beyond.

Hartal was once a useful tool during the pre-independence era, but that time is long gone. *Hartal* then had the support of the people of all levels to weaken the occupying force. Mahatma Gandhi used similar tools in a nonviolent way to drive the British away from then undivided India. But once the occupying force is gone the destructive practice of *hartal* should cease. We have imported democratic type of government from the western world but nowhere in those regions is *hartal* practiced, rather such activity is deemed as a serious criminal activity.

Unfortunately, in our country *hartal* has come with no expiry date. True practice of democracy comes with a lot of responsibilities, knowledge and sacrifice. People elect their representatives for nation building and serving the citizens. During *hartal*, that trust is broken.

Lawmakers become the law breakers and the public are made to pay the price. The destructive dimensions of *hartals* cannot continue in the present form. Citizens should not give the politicians a blank check to bring untold misery on themselves. Judiciary must define the scope of *hartal* in detail. Picketing can be justifiable minus the destructive elements of *hartal*.

Acceptance of *hartal* is a mockery of our judicial system. It is a scar on the conscience of our intelligentsia, a bad deal for our people and a sore thumb for the foreign nationals and diplomats.

In Vatican City, Cardinals lock themselves up in a room for days in the process of choosing a Pope by consensus, discussions and voting. What a sight billowing white smoke would make in the skyline of our Sangsad Bhaban should our politicians adopt similar procedure.

The writer is a marine chief engineer.

Playing with people's interest

MAHFUZZUR RAHMAN

OUR political parties are now in a very combative mood. Whenever the general election approaches, after every five years, they flex their muscles to stage show-downs, jolting the nation. There is no exception this time, too. The same old drama is all around -- all in the name of democracy. The fight we have been seeing for the last few months between the two major political camps over the nature of the election-time cabinet is nothing but deplorable. Things have become so messy that people now have started asking whether the time for civilian rule is running out!

Their bone of contention is the polls-time government as there is deep suspicion among the political parties that a partisan government cannot hold a credible election as it always tries to influence the election outcome. Out of this mistrust, they had put in place the caretaker government and then boasted of doing something great -- a unique election-time administration! They did indeed, but by force, without going for any referendum. The same quarter that had unleashed violence across the country to have the neutral system introduced dumped it within minutes, arguing that the country should be governed as per the political system practiced in other democracies of the world. This time too, they did it without going to the people to know what they actually want. The question of referendum comes here as our leaders always talk about democracy in their every breath.

If the constitution of a country is its sacred document, any attempt to amend it should be in the greater interest of the country and its people, not in party interest. Bringing change to it requires people's specific mandate. A general election gives a political party or an alliance interim power to govern the country, ensuring its accountability to the people through constitutional bodies. Being voted to power with absolute majority does not mean it has got the people's

mandate to change the charter at its sweet will. Doing things on the basis of a broader consensus is something always amiss in our political culture, for which the people have to pay a heavy price ultimately.

We have little hesitation in saying that the democracy that takes away power from the people and manipulates their will does not suit Bangladesh, a country that has glorious records of Language Movement and Liberation War. Bangladesh has no reason to deviate from that. But unfortunately most of our institutions, including the administration, the judiciary, the Election Commission, the Anti-Corruption Commission and other constitutional bodies that are needed for a well-functioning democracy, have been undermined over the years through politicisation.

In Bangladesh, the premiership has emerged as the strongest institution of the state. In a parliamentary democracy, the prime minister is always more important to the political process, but there should be checks and balances. You cannot expect a functioning democracy when the prime minister exercises authority with virtually no control.

The institutions which are required for good governance have not been allowed to develop since our political leaders always try to retain power through maneuverings rather than winning the hearts of people with good governance. They do not have the guts to follow their hearts. What the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) of Khaleda Zia did in 1996 is now being repeated by the ruling Awami League of Sheikh Hasina, distorting the common concept of democracy. The BNP is enforcing general strikes one after another in whose interest -- party or people? How could the ruling Awami League claim itself to be democratic by going for sweeping arrests and clamping restriction on public rallies? Simply outrageous! People should not be held hostage to the whims and egos of just two leaders.

As there is no sign in sight of any consensus

between the two powerful ladies, the hope for the 10th parliamentary elections is mingled with deaths and disappointment. If they fail to reconcile, the country may have to pay dearly as the opposition says it will enforce more general strikes unless the current regime quits, paving the path for a fair election.

Rumours have it that an unwarranted situation may again emerge towards the end of December if the country slips into violence due to failure of the two major political camps to reach an understanding over holding a credible election.

Gossip is also there that the much-talked-about phone conversation between Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia was staged as part of groundwork of a vested quarter to prove that these quarrelling ladies cannot reach a consensus. But it is true that the problem that could have been resolved by Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia in their one parley is now spinning out of control, jeopardising the country's nascent democracy and the thriving economy.

There is no denying that the caretaker government system cannot be a permanent system for overseeing elections. But these two powerful ladies could have worked together to strengthen the Election Commission to hold fair polls. Instead, they used their political clout to politicise it as part of their efforts to perpetuate their power. At the end of the day, it is the Election Commission that holds elections. An all-powerful Election Commission with the help of media can ensure much better polls. Where there is a vibrant media there is little scope of vote fraud.

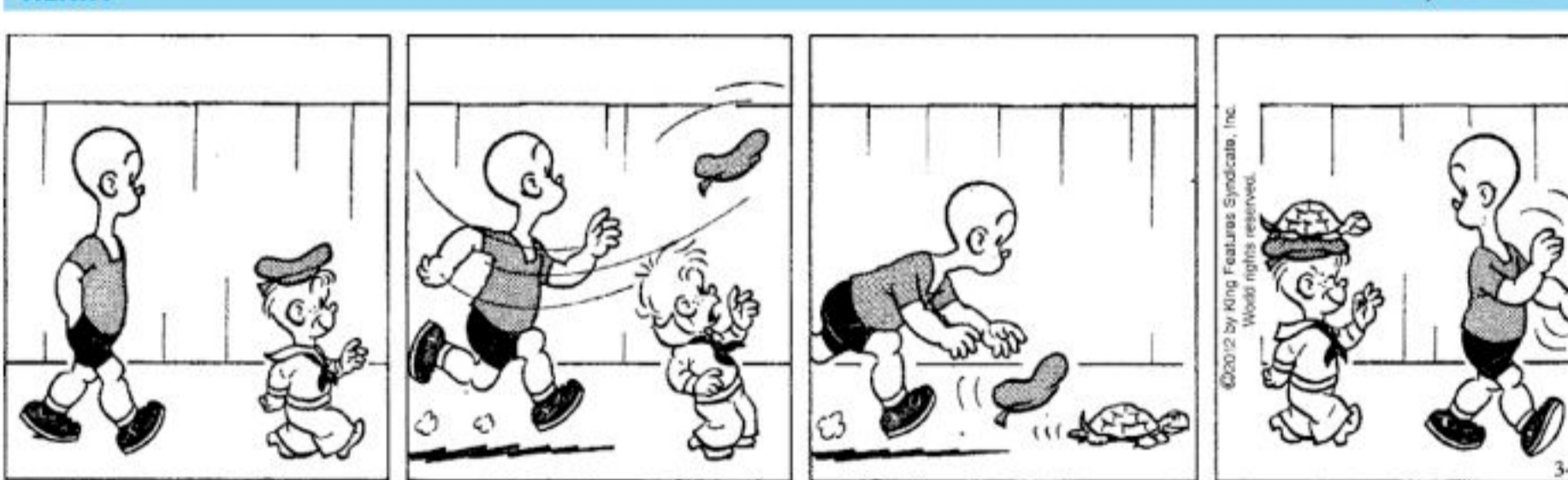
But things are unlikely to change in a fragile democracy like ours as long as the leaders do not change their attitude. The democratic spirit, we feel, should be in hearts, not in words. We are sorry to say any politics that ignores people and their needs is not politics but a crime.

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By THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Start a hand
- 5 Set off
- 10 Father Degas
- 12 Romantic one
- 13 Use four-letter words
- 14 Supreme justice Kagan
- 15 Tennis feat
- 16 Took the wheel
- 18 Looked lewdly
- 20 Really impress
- 21 Sunup site
- 23 Moring need
- 24 Concord
- 26 Boot part
- 28 Sign's need
- 29 Spots
- 31 Tiny worker
- 32 Changed course
- 36 Showed score
- 39 Tim Man's prop
- 40 Annual visitor
- 41 Court rapper
- 43 Bother
- 44 Turn outward
- 45 Kenton and Getz

DOWN

- 1 Car sticker
- 2 Draw out
- 3 Concur
- 4 — Palmas suffix
- 5 Out of the wind
- 6 Warsaw native
- 7 Mean
- 8 Subscript
- 9 extension
- 11 Does ushering work
- 17 Six-pt. scores
- 19 For fun, for short
- 22 U2
- 24 Cham-pionship
- 25 Roof topper
- 27 Jargon
- 28 Success-fully imitate
- 30 Planning time
- 33 Dance party attendee
- 34 Wield
- 35 Shoulder muscles
- 37 School near Windsor
- 38 Tampa Bay team
- 42 Gardner of movies

Yesterday's answer

10-10

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.

10-11 CRYPTOQUOTE

JITGKIX ETQZ TGI LWZJIROO
 KO MCR VROM SRMCTL NTZ
 LRWPKIX GKMC MCR
 LWZJIROORO TN TMCRZ
 HRTHPR. — FWZP YQIX

Yesterday's Cryptoquote: INEVERHADA POLICY; I HAVE JUST TRIED TO DO MY VERY BEST EACH AND EVERY DAY. -- ABRAHAM LINCOLN

QUOTABLE Quote

"For to be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others."

Nelson Mandela