

# Land of promise turned hell house of human stories

## PLEASURE IS ALL MINE



SHAH HUSAIN IMAM

Nobody will apologise to the bereaved, no contrition will be expressed by the perpetrators, or their masterminds, or indeed, those who called the shots from leadership positions. Try as they might to save their conscience by explaining the murder as part of political gamesmanship, people consider it as a patent betrayal of trust.

What a contrast this is to the Latvian PM Valdis Dombrovskis taking 'political responsibility' for the supermarket roof collapse that killed 54 people in what was termed an outright murder! Basically, a moral obligation was owned up as a political failure at the highest level. The outgoing Latvian PM had no hand in what would have passed for an accident in many countries, and yet he felt the guilt for it. Seen in this perspective, over the two decades we have had many resignations falling due through various debacles unsettling the lives of people that never took place.

There was no stay-put-in option for the ordinary souls, nor any option for evacuation to shelters in the face of the raging manmade storm. For they have to come out to earn their bread braving an imposed halt or countryside blockades unleashing all sorts of saboteurs. A sliver of Jim Jones' cult at play with his final words ringing to his blind followers: "It is no fear, it's friendly" -- the cyanide laced drink -- that consumed the lives of 900 of his hypnotised disciples in a lethal embrace.

The perfect imagery of a blockade victim was a small boy who refused to see the burnt face of his father, a three-wheeler driver who braved it out on the street so his dependants would have their morsels of food at the day's end. Then the boy tiptoes with his mother to close in on the side of the prostrate father and from a corner of his eye nervously takes a peek at

the face of a father rendered unfamiliar to him.

Even a stonehearted person would have a crevice oozing compassion for the small boy! Wouldn't he, wouldn't you, a normal human being? The story can be multiplied in the backdrop of four-day nationwide blockade ending today.

If conscience is the quiet voice that warns you not to leave your fingerprints, as Alberto Sordi said, he has been disproved hands down by the news that certain Jamaat-Shibir elements handed in a documentary to the police picturing their acts of vandalism to dare the law enforcers to catch them.

Indeed, there are no qualms, prick of conscience or compunction for the hardboiled terrorist elements and those behind the scene operatives. They are hirelings doing the bidding of their masters.

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Reports suggest that picket attacks claimed more lives than accidents occurring through cocktail blasts or torching of vehicles.

Chief Election Commissioner Kazi Rakibuddin Ahmad is an abiding bureaucrat but his statutory job requires something beyond going by the book. He has to combine in himself the roles of a confidence-builder, negotiator and conductor of a symphony called the general election. He reaches out to political parties with a neutral, trustworthy image to deliver a credible poll through participation of all stakeholders.

The CEC has to be, perforce, his own master, exercising a freedom of action when the situation demands. Does he appear to be in control of things though? Hardly, if you consider his sidestepping a norm requiring announcement of election schedule

through a consultation with all the political parties. But the CEC says now that if a consensus is reached between major political parties enabling participation of the opposition then the schedule could be changed. In fact, he has left enough room for maneuvering on this score. But the issue is why did you have to announce the schedules in such a harried and hurried fashion inviting a predictably wrathful reaction from the opposition? Moreover, the so-called pressure tactics definitely set back the process of understanding that had been flagged off, what if under the wraps of secrecy although an upfront effort would have exposed the less sincere side.

A precedent alluded to former Election Commissioner Shamsul Huda has it that he had rescheduled the last date for submission of nomination papers four times and the poll dates three times during his time. He recalled to me the instance of a reflexive action he took on hearing the news over television on November 20, 2008 that Hossain Zillur Rahman's parley to bring BNP over to the election had failed. Without losing any time he dictated to a TV journalist a news item shifting last date for submission of nomination papers from November 20 to 23. He used the respite to persuade the BNP to participate in the polls and in accord with their opinion deferred the date even to November 30.

Once the election schedule is declared the CEC is all in all in matters relating to holding of the election. There is no mistaking that authority of his. Shamsul Huda applied his discretion changing the election schedule quite a few times driven by the motive of ensuring participation of all political parties in the election. And he succeeded. Although in the present context, building a consensus in the main centres around an understanding on poll time government, it is within the CEC's remit to approach all political parties to take them on board on finalising the election schedule so as to make the polls fully participatory.

We are not exactly looking for the likes of Indian CEC Sheshan of 1990s 'who dusted off election rules, enforced them vigorously' and instilled awe in the minds of violators of electoral rules about the authority of the EC. The institution he left behind has worked wonderfully through a series of precedents that constitute a well-established legacy.

A final point -- why must we dance around on the tiny pinhead of a constitutional technicality not to clear the deck for a peaceful transition of power?

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# Flying while migrant

## HUMOROUSLY YOURS



NAVEED MAHBUB

elements wanting to spend a few more precious moments with their loved ones flying off on one way tickets. Or perhaps the reason, as per the rule makers, is to ease the burden on free air conditioning and Wi-Fi that individuals from villages, hundreds of miles away, have surely come to avail. Or, maybe it is to de-clutter the peripheral visions of business class passengers, especially those from other countries, about to finalise their impressions of Bangladesh.

For the scary eyed migrant worker, the ordeal has just begun. Dry words at the check-in counter and the immigration desk, barks to stay clear of the Foreign Passport line, intimidating boarding card to be filled out and then, another layer of security check at the gate. And if there is a hartal or oborodh, don't forget the extra few days of camping out in the parking lot.

The boarding announcement is made. All to board in perfect hierarchical order -- first class, business class, platinum club, gold club, silver club, passengers with children and finally the proletariats flying on coach starting from the back of the aircraft.

Is there something wrong with the PA system, because we all seem to hear: "This is the last flight out of Dhaka." A stampede ensues. I manage to head to my favourite second last row seat only to discover that I'm the Pied Piper with a small army that has followed me all the way to the end of the aircraft.

The frazzled flight attendants start redi-

recting the exodus to their assigned seats. This will take ages. So, I sign up as a volunteer in helping passengers find their seats, stow their neatly packed bags (far better than the backpacks carried by passengers like myself, where we forget that we are hitting everybody behind us) in the overhead compartments, buckle up...I become a local hero. The feeling is priceless.

I smile and commence my power nap. When I'm up, the plane has started its final descent. I am energised and start filling out the heaps of arrival cards of my neighbours. Gladly so -- my few opportunities at penmanship, becoming otherwise extinct, thanks to the laptop and smart phone.

Profuse thank you's. Poor souls. Everything thus far is a picnic compared to the Ahlan Wa Sahlan that awaits them. How about our embassies distribute free copies of A Day Without a Mexican to the authorities of the host nations for going easy on them?

Meantime, let's at least welcome the migrant workers with open arms when they finally return to Bangladesh. How about a group CIP status? How about a simple "Welcome home!" that doesn't cost a dime, unlike for their loved ones, who have to pay once again to get into the arrival lounge to welcome the bread earners home.

But the state has one reception party awaiting without fail. The migrant workers going past customs officials is a scene from the Discovery Channel where the bears stand in the middle of a river scooping for fresh salmon. Smuggling in gold? Oh please. It's a toy plane for the son he hasn't seen since birth. Relax! No need for cavity searches, all gold interceptions are from tip offs anyway.

Oh well, we continue to kiss those taking dollars out of the country and diss those bringing the dollar in without fail and with consistency, even amidst all the political unrests. Till we say a collective thank you, I am happy that I have done my share to upgrade them from cargo to economy.

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# Bangladesh: Crisis and way out

ABDUR RAZZAQ

TODAY'S crisis has two origins: one judgment and one amendment. The judgment is the May 2011 Supreme Court judgment which declared elections under a caretaker government unconstitutional. The amendment is the June 2011 fifteenth amendment to the Constitution which abolished elections under a caretaker government.

On June 11, 2011, I wrote in The Daily Star expressing concern about the future of democracy. Citing the disastrous consequences of the 1857 American Supreme Court judgment declaring slavery lawful, and the 1955 Pakistan Supreme Court judgment declaring the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly lawful, I argued that the judgment declaring the caretaker system unlawful was wrong. I wrote: "We have to wait for the verdict of history." While history is yet to pronounce its final verdict, the amendment which abolished the caretaker government -- by using the Supreme Court judgment as a basis -- has already created a political deadlock. Urging the opposition to attend Parliament to oppose the bill for caretaker government abolition, I also wrote: "The country is on the verge of a political turmoil."

Constitution making is a Herculean task. It should reflect people's will and be legally sound. It took almost 11 years to frame the American Constitution, 9 years to frame Pakistan's first Constitution, 3 years to frame the Indian Constitution, and 2 years to frame the French Constitution. Amendment to the Constitution is nearly as difficult as its framing.

In July 2010, on the prime minister's proposal, a 15-member parliamentary committee was formed to amend the Constitution. Over a period of 8 months, the committee, consisting of all the front ranking leaders of the ruling alliance, consulted former chief justices, members of the legal profession, members of the civil society, representatives of political parties, and came to a unanimous decision to keep the caretaker system intact. In a meeting of the committee held in April 2011, the prime minister opined that the life-time of the caretaker government should be limited; but she did not ask for its abolition.

On May 29 the committee proposed to limit the life-time of the caretaker government to a maximum of 90 days. A day later, on May 30, the committee met the prime minister and made a U-turn, and decided to abolish the caretaker system. The only reason cited by the ruling party for this 'historic' U-turn is the Supreme Court's judgment of early May, which declared the caretaker system unconstitutional, although the same judgment permitted the government to hold the next two elections under a caretaker



government. The truth of the matter is that it was the wish of the prime minister to abolish the caretaker system.

Very hurriedly, a bill was drafted, which the cabinet approved on June 20 and placed before Parliament on June 25. On June 30, Parliament passed it by 299 votes in favour and 1 against. The speed with which the fifteenth amendment -- which amended a number of provisions of the Constitution -- was passed was unprecedented in the history of constitutional amendments of any civilised country. However, one thing is certain: in bringing the amendment the prime minister wielded "an authority that a Roman Emperor might envy."

Two thirds majority in Parliament is not always conducive to democracy. In 1983, during her second term, British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher obtained a huge majority in parliament. Francis Pym, a senior member of her conservative party, expressed concern that such a huge majority might not be good for Britain. In 1971, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's Congress party obtained 352 seats out of total 518. In 1975 she declared emergency and ultimately lost the 1977 elections. In Bangladesh, in 1975, if the ruling party did not have two thirds majority, Baksal could not have been formed and our political history perhaps would have been different. In Turkey, in 2011, The Economist urged the Turkish electorate not to give Prime Minister Erdogan's AK party a two third majority because that would be bad for Turkish democracy.

In Bangladesh, by dint of a two-thirds majority, the fifteenth amendment has made so many changes to the Constitution (including making certain provisions un-amendable), that it surprised both the constitution experts and the constitution framers. On a different note, an argument is now being advanced that the Constitution, in certain respects, has become

unworkable. An all powerful prime minister now reigns supreme. The head of the state, the president, has very little role to play in the affairs of the state. Once an election is held, the winner takes all. It is argued that to bring a balance, the president should be given more powers, and proportional representation, in a limited way, should be introduced to bring some checks and balances in parliament.

Bangladesh has not only come out of the sad days of a 'basket case country' but has, in many respects, according to the London based Legatum Institute, outdone its 'BRICK-branded' big neighbour India. Sadly, it is only our sick politics which is pulling us down.

On the caretaker issue, a problem has been created wholly unnecessarily. More than one opinion poll suggests that 90% of the people support a neutral non-party government during the elections. If the ruling party is in doubt it can go for referendum on this issue as is done in mature democracies. In 1975, Britain went to referendum on the issue of its entry into the European Community. Four decades on, by the end of 2017 -- if not earlier -- it will again go for a referendum on the issue of its exit from the European Union. In September next year, Scotland will go for a referendum to decide whether to remain within Britain or be independent. Bangladesh will have sufficient time to go for a referendum and amend the Constitution before the elections and, if necessary, ways and means can be found to postpone the election legally beyond January 24. It is for this government to find a way out of this crisis. Non-participatory elections will not solve, rather it will deepen, the crisis.

The duty of a politician is to avert crisis, not to create one. The world will remember President John Kennedy for averting a nuclear war in October 1962 with the Soviet Union during the Cuban missile crisis despite contrary advice given by his advisers. Nelson Mandela saved his country from a blood-bath by compromising with his arch-enemy.

Today's politics with all its violence -- the shut-downs, the burnings the killings and maiming -- are nothing but a repetition of the politics of two decades past. The 160 million people deserve better. Of late, Bangladesh has been on the international radar. Particularly, the recent New York Times editorial was very critical of the government and spoke of international sanctions. The country on the eve of its 43rd birthday is facing a sea of uncertainty. Tragedies similar to Shakespeare's Macbeth have taken place more than once in Bangladesh. The country cannot afford a repetition of those tragedies.

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SHAHRIAR FEROZE

THERE is probably one ethnic community in today's world that had endured inestimable hardship for establishing their rights that still continues, that's the Palestinians. Once again the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People has knocked at our door, for the 35th time.

Observance of 'the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People' had begun with a resolution during the stormy-seventies. In particular, Resolution 181 by the United Nations General Assembly is one of the momentous ones in the history of UN's resolutions. In short, it is the United Nations Partition Plan for Palestine. Observance of the day lies within dreams and spirits of the partition plan of UN Resolution 181.

Bangladesh, for over three decades, had steadfastly supported the Palestine cause as the bonding between the 2 countries only grew stronger. Like many times before, we express our solidarity with the Palestinian people with whom we share not only a common faith but also the tenacity to struggle.

Our bonding with Palestine began with the first high-level meeting between a Bangladeshi head of state and a Palestinian dating back to 1974 at the second OIC Summit in Pakistan between Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Yasser Arafat. Since then, the rapport between the two states had become stronger, and Bangladesh today is one of the 93 countries to recognise Palestine as a state since the Palestinian Declaration of Independence came in to being on November 15, 1988. Bi-lateral relation has thrived over the years.

We share a set of values with the Palestinians, and they are the values of independence, sovereignty and human rights.

As yet, the Palestinians have made considerable strides towards self-



A Bangladeshi postage stamp issued to honour the martyrs for Palestinian freedom struggle.

determination. Finally, as an outcome, the UN General Assembly granted the Palestinians the observer status at the international organisation in November last year, thus implicitly recognising a Palestinian state. The new status -- if observed carefully -- could give the Palestinians more weight in peace talks with Israel while giving them a greater chance of joining UN agencies and the International Criminal Court (ICC).

However, unlike the 34 previous occasions, this year's solidarity with the Palestinians will be marked in a different way. Because, as we approach the end of 2013 to a New Year, we are also about to enter a year that has been officially declared by the UN as the 'Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.' Just last week a resolution was adopted by the majority of member-states with 110 voting in favour, 7 opposed and 54 abstaining.

Let's finish with a famous quote by Albert Einstein: "It would be my greatest sadness to see what the Zionists (Jews) do to Palestinian Arabs much of what Nazis did to Jews."

Today, Albert Einstein is dead, but we share the same view also.

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By THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

1 Ontario tribe

5 Tag sale words

9 Caterpillar, e.g.

11 Fight site

12 Perfect

13 Touches down

14 Hr. part

15 Mistakes

17 Imbibing

19 Singer

20 Farm animals

21 General activity

22 Talley mark

24 Snub-nosed dog

26 Lion tamer's aids

29 Museum subject

30 Dances at the disco

32 Unhappy spectator's cry

34 Fresh

35 Really stoked

36 Steer clear of

38 Quick drives

39 Famous

40 Greek vowels

41 Walk in water

DOWN

1 Scale

2 Hams' needs

3 Before, poetically

4 Mends movies

5 Mecca

6 Plaque

7 Lady of Spain

8 Like some pools

9 Fresh

10 White rat, e.g.

11 Sleep like --

12 Boxing combos

13 Piquant quality

14 Fillmore, for one

15 Selected

16 On time

17 Perfect place

18 Target at a party

19 Ranked, in tennis

20 Degraded

21 Actions at auctions

22 Garbo, for one

23 Coop group

24 Promise

Yesterday's answer

10-30

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.

10-25 CRYPTOQUOTE

Q Q BEHUCGEHT CE VPP, QHC NOCNKVC G JNCY XGJ, VOM PGC CYETG XGJ QG JGPP CUNGM QGXUG FEH WNSG CYGK FEHU BEOXNMGOBG. - WGEUW JVTYNOWCEO

Yesterday's Cryptoquote:

IF YOU SPEND YOUR WHOLE LIFE WAITING FOR THE STORM, YOU'LL NEVER ENJOY THE SUNSHINE.

- MORRIS WEST

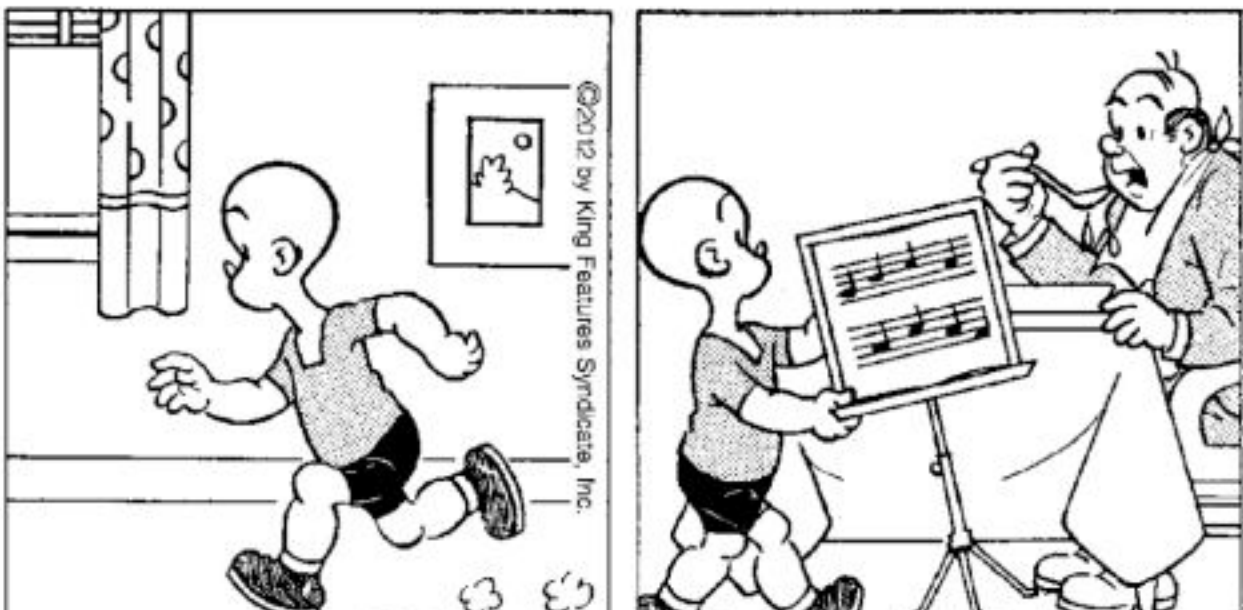
## BEETLE BAILEY



## HENRY



## HENRY



by Mort Walker

by Don Tranchte

QUOTABLE Quote

"Apparently, a democracy is a place where numerous elections are held at great cost without issues and with interchangeable candidates."

Gore Vidal