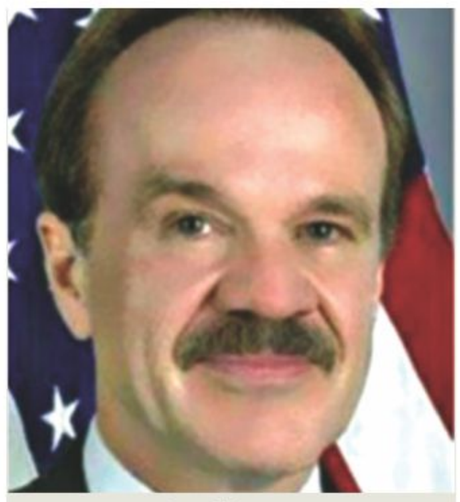
Bangladesh matters to America



Dan Mozena

Bangladesh's greatest asset is the people … the most energetic, dynamic, hard-working, creative, generous, entrepreneurial, and resilient people whom I know anywhere in the world.

AS many already know, I care deeply about Bangladesh; I am greatly inspired by the Bangladeshi people; and I believe strongly in the bright prospects for this country's future as Asia's next economic tiger. My profound respect for Bangladesh drives me to share my views on the current political situation and why the major parties must redouble their efforts to find a solution worthy of the people of Bangladesh.

I believe the Bangladeshi people are firmly committed to democracy; they need and want elections that are free and fair and credible. Thus, I am disappointed that the major political parties have not yet reached consensus on a way to deliver such elections.

As I write, I see on television the frustration and fear of the Bangladeshi people as violence rages on the streets and in the villages of this beautiful country. The continuing political impasse has taken a horrific toll on the fabric of the nation. Human rights and other organisations report that more than 400 people have lost their lives to political violence in 2013. Countless others have been seriously and often permanently injured. Destruction of homes and livelihoods has touched every corner of the nation. The minority communities have been disproportionately impacted. A palpable fear now permeates society … who next will be a target, witting or otherwise, is the question in everyone's mind.

How can the Sonar Bangla of Tagore's vision and of our shared dreams become reality in this context? The economy is reeling as farmers cannot market their produce or procure the seeds and fertilizer needed to plant their crops. Manufacturers cannot import needed raw materials and export finished products. Overseas buyers cannot place orders in confidence that products will be delivered in a timely way. Day workers go hungry for want of work as the political impasse stifles the economy. Students are frustrated as they cannot go to school; they cannot take their examinations … how can we prepare the next generation if they cannot even attend school?

If this political stalemate continues, the economic situation can only get worse. A couple of weeks ago I led a delegation of prominent Bangladeshi businessmen to Hong Kong. Our mission was to deepen interaction with the many American and other businesses based in Hong Kong, so Bangladesh could benefit from expanded trade and investment. The major apparel buying houses used our visit to deliver a tough message: each of the brands represented in the meeting had already crafted a strategy to exit their business from Bangladesh. Knowing that nearly half of the orders for Bangladesh's apparel exports courses through Hong Kong, the delegation and I were stunned by the powerful blow we had just received. Truly, the increasingly violent and destructive political impasse in Bangladesh packs potential to destroy a key sector of the Bangladesh economy.

This should not happen.

I believe most Bangladeshis want to live peaceful, prosperous lives. They seek the means to provide their families safe, secure housing, ample, nutritious food, good healthcare, and quality education for their children. I don't think this is asking too much. After all, Bangladesh is a rich country, blessed with fertile soil, ample water, perfect climate for growing three crops, significant reserves of coal and gas, and a key geographical location as the nexus of the 21st century's great trade route, the Indo-Pacific Economic Corridor. Of course, Bangladesh's greatest asset is the people … the most energetic, dynamic, hard-working, creative, generous, entrepreneurial, and resilient people whom I know anywhere in the world. Truly, Bangladesh could be and should be Asia's next economic tiger, which would lift millions out of poverty into middle income status, but the deepening political quagmire and accompanying savage violence are trashing the economy, as I noted earlier, leaving, I fear, the Asian economic tiger stillborn.

The Bangladesh that we all know and love has achieved so much. It has slashed child-under-five mortality and maternal mortality. It has built from nothing a massive apparel industry that is now the second largest apparel exporter in the world. Once dubbed a "bottomless basket," Bangladesh in fact has become an overflowing basket of agricultural bounty as the nation has already become rice self-sufficient and is well on its way to becoming food self-sufficient. These are amazing achievements, and I am proud that America has been Bangladesh's steadfast partner in supporting many of these successes.

The Bangladesh I know, the Bangladesh I believe in, does not want these remarkable gains to be lost, to fall victim to this political impasse. The mother whose son was injured on a derailed train, the child whose mother was burnt on a bus, every parent, daughter, and son whose life has been irreversibly impacted by the political impasse … each is a Bangladeshi whose dreams, aspirations, hopes have been gutted at the altar of political ambition; each is a Bangladeshi who wanted only to get on with life and to take care of his or her family.

Elections offer an opportunity to demonstrate Bangladesh's commitment to democracy, an opportunity to fulfill the ideals won at the greatest cost in 1971, an opportunity to further build the future each and every parent dreams of for his or her children, an opportunity to show the world that Bangladesh can be/will be the next Asian tiger and will take its rightful place on the global stage.

There is much to be done for that to happen, however. First and foremost, the violence must stop. Violence of any kind is not part of the democratic process, cannot be tolerated, and has to stop immediately. The people of Bangladesh, whether of the majority community or of the minority communities, deserve the opportunity to elect their national representatives in a climate free of violence and intimidation. The nation's political leadership -- and those who aspire to lead -- must ensure the peace and refrain from supporting violence, inflammatory rhetoric, and intimidation. The United States encourages all political parties and Bangladeshi citizens to participate peacefully in the political process. Violence subverts the democratic process.

Second, the major parties must resume their dialogue and redouble their efforts to resolve the prevailing political impasse. With a modicum of goodwill from each side, the leaders can find a way forward to free, fair and credible elections.

Third, all parties and Bangladeshi citizens, including civil society organisations, have the right to freely and peacefully express their views. The government is responsible to provide space for such activity. Equally, the opposition is responsible to use such space in a peaceful manner.

I write today because the United States and Bangladesh have a decades-old friendship based on shared interests and shared values.

I write today because Bangladesh's vibrant civil society, its development achievements, its successes in women's empowerment are models for the world.

I write today to celebrate the relationship between our two countries, which has never been broader, deeper and stronger.

I write today because America stands with Bangladesh; America is a friend of Bangladesh with a shared interest in the stability, prosperity, and growth of the country.

I write today because I care … I care about the wonderful people of this great nation.

I urge the government … I urge the opposition … to seize the moment, to put the interests of the people first, to converge at the dialogue table with the will and commitment to find an agreed way forward to give the Bangladeshi people the elections they want, to give the Bangladeshi people the elections that they deserve.

An immediate, peaceful resolution of the current situation is essential … it greatly matters to America, and it matters even more to Bangladesh.

The writer is US Ambassador to Bangladesh.

JANUARY 5 ELECTION

To be or not to be held, and why?

MUSTAFIZUR RAHMAN

SHOULD or can the EC postpone January 5 general election?

ARTICLE 119 (1) of the Constitution stipulates that, among other election related functions, "conduct of elections to Parliament shall vest in the Election Commission which shall, in accordance with this Constitution and any other law (b) hold elections of members of Parliament."

Article 118 (4) of the Constitution stipulates: "The Election Commission shall be independent in the exercise of its functions and subject only to this Constitution and any other law."

Clause 11 (1) of the Representation of the People Order (RPO) 1972, which is a corollary of Article 119(1) of the constitution stipulates that "For the purpose of holding elections for constituting Parliament, the Commission shall, by notification in the Official Gazette, call upon the electors to elect a member from each constituency and shall, in relation to each constituency, specify in the notification (a) a day on or before which the nomination of candidates may be filed; (b) a day [or days] for the scrutiny of nomination papers; (c) a day on or before which candidature may be withdrawn; and (d) a day [or days], at least fifteen days after the withdrawal day, for the taking of the poll."

The above Articles and Clauses give the Election Commission (EC) the authority to announce schedule of election process independently for holding election (a) in the case of a dissolution by reason of the expiration of its term, within the period of ninety days preceding such dissolution, and (b) in the case of a dissolution otherwise than by reason of such expiration, within ninety days after such dissolution (Article 123 of the Constitution).

With the same authority, the EC can change the schedule within the time limit specified. It is further strengthened by an example in Clause (4) of Article 123 of the Constitution, which reads: "An election to fill the seat of a member of Parliament which falls vacant otherwise than by reason of the dissolution of Parliament shall be held within ninety days of the occurrence of the vacancy, provided that in a case where, in the opinion of the Chief Election Commissioner, it is not possible, for reasons of an act of God, to hold such election within the period specified in this clause, such election shall be held within ninety days following next after the last day of such period."

As to the January 5 general election scheduled for the 10th Parliament, questions have been raised about the potential for grave social disturbance and violence that may continue to threaten life and property of the people or the state close to or during the voting. To avoid or avert this danger in the continuing emergency-like situation, EC or even the chief election commissioner may postpone the election up to January 24, 2014, to allow some cooling time.

How rational and democratic is the declaration of majority candidates "Elected Uncontested"?

RPO Clause 19.(1) states: "Where, after scrutiny under Article 14, only one person remains as a validly nominated candidate for election as a member from a constituency or where after withdrawal under Article 16 only one person is left as a contesting candidate, the Returning Officer shall, by public notice, declare such candidate to be elected to the seat.

This provision violates the spirit of the "election to be decided by secret ballot" of Clause 26 of RPO, and "direct election" of Article 65 (2), which are given below:

Clause 26 of RPO says: "An election under this Order shall be decided by secret ballot and, subject to the provisions of Article 27, every elector shall cast his vote by inserting, in accordance with the provisions of this Order, in the ballot box, a ballot paper in the prescribed form." Constitution Article 65 (2) stipulates: "Parliament shall consist of three hundred members to be elected in accordance with law from single territorial constituencies by direct election."

In case of election contested by more than one candidate, the "Retuning Officer declares by public notice containing the name of and the total number of votes received by, each contesting candidate," but in case of declaration of a candidate "elected uncontested" without voting, the Retuning Officer or the EC cannot record the number of voters said to have elected him. Voting must take place to ascertain the number of electors, and if it is too low, the candidate is liable to even get his deposit forfeited.

If the provision of negative vote, i.e marking of the ballot paper with "none of the above candidates," would continue, voters' choice could be reflected better.

Can the candidate declared "elected uncontested" legitimately be an elected public representative in a democratic system? Fresh election proceeding should better be undertaken to allow the electors to exercise their voting right..

Is the requirement of signatures of one percent electors for an independent candidate constitutional in a democracy?

Article 66. (1) of the Constitution Clearly stipulates: "A person shall, subject to the provisions of clause (2), be qualified to be elected as, and to be, a member of Parliament if he is a citizen of Bangladesh and has attained the age of twenty five years."

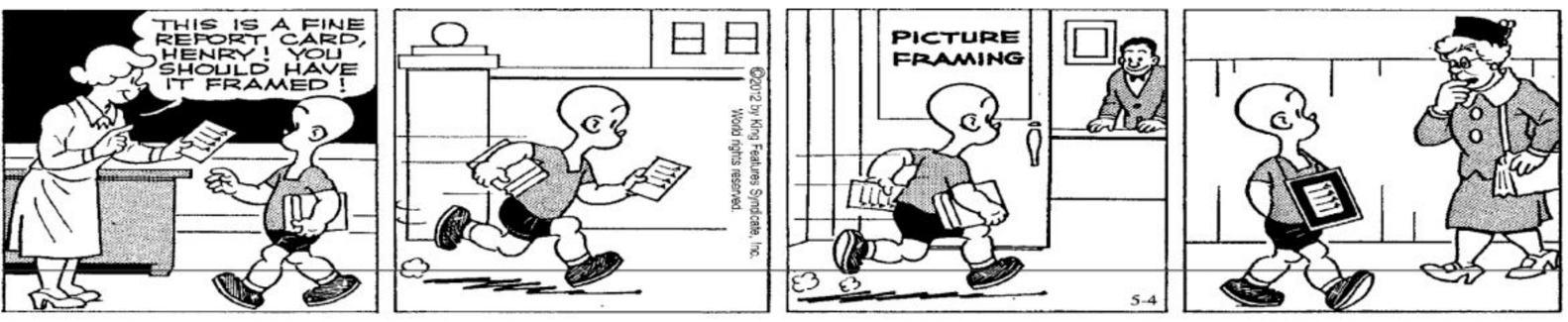
Clause (2) is silent about requirement of a list of signatures of particular number of electors of the concerned constituency for candidates. But clause (3a) (a) of Article 12 of RPO 1972 (amended 2008) requires a list of signatures of one percent electors of the concerned constituency only for an independent candidate (Provided that such list need not to be delivered if the independent candidate has previously been elected in any parliamentary election).

This provision is arbitrary, discriminatory and against the spirit of democracy and equality (Article 27) guaranteed by the Constitution. This provision may be treated as void.

The writer is Chairman, IDS.

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker

HENRY by Don Tranchte



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Admission Test: Friday, 10 January 2014 at 10:00 AM
Application Submission Deadline: Thursday, 09 January 2014

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QUOTABLE *Quote*

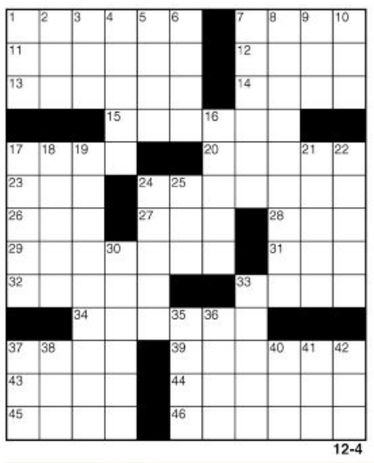
"And now we welcome the New Year, full of things that have never been."

-- Rainer Maria Rilke

CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

ACROSS
1 Fight
7 First Man
11 Devotee
12 Designer Wang
13 Crew activity
14 Gung-ho
15 Picked up quickly
17 Put together
20 Worry
23 Flamenco cry
24 Reckless jaunt
26 Crater part
27 Reverent wonder
28 Keats work
29 Dodged
31 Convent occupant
32 Door holder's words
33 African serpents
34 Delhi native
37 Lotion additive
39 Geriatrics topic
43 Bobcat's cousin
44 Cotton pest
45 For fear that
46 Useful skills

DOWN
2 Hubbub
3 Road rescue
4 Hackneyed
5 Letterman rival
6 Therefore
7 Film set on Pandora
8 Prayers
9 Onassis nickname
10 Fuming
16 Typed in
17 Principled
18 Full of energy
19 Military punishments
21 Make sense
22 Prom crowd
24 Blase
25 Need to pay
30 Cry from the first in line
33 Peruvian peaks
35 Corn Belt state
36 Brighton brews
37 Completely
38 Caustic stuff
40 Blvd.'s kin
41 "Vamoose!"
42 Golfer Ernie



12-4

Yesterday's answer

R	A	M	P	S	■	B	O	F	F	O
I	Q	U	I	T	■	A	L	L	O	W
P	U	T	T	I	N	G	D	O	W	N
E	A	T	■	R	I	G	■	E	L	S
■	■	■	T	U	X	E	S	■	■	■
L	A	P	U	P	■	R	A	B	B	I
O	X	E	N	■	■	■	V	O	I	D
P	E	T	E	R	■	G	E	T	T	O
■	■	■	R	E	B	U	S	■	■	■
A	D	O	■	M	A	N	■	P	E	A
P	A	T	T	I	N	G	D	O	W	N
E	L	I	O	T	■	H	E	L	E	N
R	E	S	T	S	■	O	B	E	S	E

CRYPTOQUOTE 11-25

EZDB XRZLO. IAGORWGZKO, GWRKEAO. JZW IGEIDG CRKQ KJIGCEATO QJHG KQG ARLQK KE POG KQG GWRKEARJD "CG."

- TJAX KCJRZ

Previous CRYPTOQUOTE:
When you have confidence, you can have a lot of fun. And when you have fun, you can do amazing things. -- JOE NAMATH

A XYDLBAAXR is LONGFELLOW
One 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.