

Bangladesh's democracy in danger

BADIUL ALAM MAJUMDAR

DESPITE considerable opposition, elections to the 10th Parliament are finally over. The just completed elections remind us of the old saying that "the operation is successful, but the patient is dead." That is, the January 5 election, although 'successfully' held, could unravel our democratic system. Now only the surgeon's self-realisation of the missteps and skills to undo them can save the system. Elections were held on January 5 in the name of constitutional compulsion. It is true that due to the 15th Amendment to our

to hold genuine elections, and "the will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government." It goes without saying that elections where voters have the opportunity to vote, and are free, fair and competitive, can be called genuine and credible elections. Article 119 of the Bangladesh Constitution empowers the Election Commission to hold parliamentary elections. The Constitution gives the Commission 'reservoir of power' to ensure such elections (*Afzal Hossain vs. Chief Election Commissioner*, 45 DLR). Article 119 also empowers the Commission, according to the Appellate Division of the Bangladesh Supreme Court, to even "add to the statutory



STAR

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Constitution, national elections are required to be held during the last 90 days of the term of the Parliament. Our Constitution mandates democratic governance (Article 11). Elections are the very first essential steps toward such a system. However, elections for their own sake do not ensure democratic governance. They must be quality elections - elections where voters have real choice -- and the process and outcome are generally acceptable. More specifically, to be acceptable, elections must be free, fair and competitive, that is, genuine. Thus, our constitutional obligation is to create democratic polity through genuine elections. International laws and treaties also oblige us to hold genuine elections. For example, according to Article 25 of *The International Covenant on Civic and Political Rights*, a treaty we signed in 2000, "every citizen shall have the opportunity ... to vote and to be elected at genuine periodic elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret ballot, guaranteeing the free expression of the will of the electors." Similarly, per Article 21 of *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, we are required

rules" -- an authority normally preserved for the legislature -- to ensure free and fair elections (*Altaf Hussain vs. Abul Kashem*, 45 DLR). Thus, the Election Commission is obliged not only to hold elections, but to hold genuine and credible elections. Unfortunately, in the recently held elections, 52% of the voters were denied 'free expression of their will' as 153 persons were 'elected' as their 'representatives' without their going to the polling booths. In the remaining 147 seats, there were only 390 candidates, which was even lower than the much maligned February 1996 elections. Among the 41 registered parties, only 12 participated. On election day, voter participation was also very low. Consequently, January 5 election did not meet the requirements of genuine and credible elections, and our Election Commission has clearly failed to fulfill its constitutional and international obligations to do so. Thus, the legality of the recent election is not beyond questions, and it should perhaps more appropriately be looked as election held to save face rather than to meet constitutional requirements. And we are afraid that the

election would not gain acceptability both within and outside the country. January 5 election was marked by widespread violence. The violence is likely to continue as the opposition BNP called it an illegal election and rejected the results. In addition, at the grassroots level, those who voted would be targeted by the opposition and those who did not vote would invite the wrath of the ruling party. Unfortunately, minorities would be the easiest targets, which must be stopped at any costs. Another reason for the continuing violence is the agenda of Jamaat and Shibir. Jamaat-Shibir are opposed to the war crimes trials and they are determined to stop them and free the ones already convicted. Thus, they are likely to continue with their violent activities. However, the war crimes trial is a national priority and there is widespread public support for it. If the government now expeditiously settles the political disputes relating to elections with BNP, Jamaat-Shibir would not be able to get away with their violence as the public themselves would resist them. Since the will of the people is the basis of the authority of government, the moral authority of the newly elected -- elected through election which was not genuine and credible -- would be weak at best. In such a situation, the Hon'ble Prime Minister has three options open to her. First, she could follow the footsteps of BNP and unilaterally amend the Constitution to include provisions for the nature and scope of election-time government. After amending the Constitution, she could dissolve the Parliament to immediately hold elections to the 11th Parliament. Second, she could initiate dialogue with BNP and other stakeholders to come up with a negotiated settlement of all the outstanding issues, including the election-time government, and frame and sign a 'National Charter.' Such a Charter, fashioned in the pattern of the 'Joint Declaration' of the three alliances of 1990, could lead to sustainable solution of the political and election related problems we face as a nation. For this to happen, BNP will have to renounce violence and come to the negotiating table. Third, she could take a hard line, as she appears to have already taken, and use force to stay in power. Such a course is unlikely to be successful as history shows that no government, with its legitimacy in question, could stay in power by using force for long. However, this could make the situation more complicated and unstable, with disastrous consequence for the entire nation. In fact, this could push us into uncharted waters. I hope our leaders would show courage and wisdom to amicable and immediately settle the disputes, for people want and deserve peace and tranquility and go on with their lives.

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Gain without pain

QUAMRUL HAIDER

WHEN something changes by doubling at regular time intervals, the process is termed as exponential growth. The mathematics of exponential behaviour leads to a simple relation between doubling time and the rate of change. The approximate doubling time is determined by dividing 70 by the rate of change. For example, if something grows annually at a rate of 5%, the approximate time for that something to double is 14 years. This rule will be used to calculate the doubling time of two randomly selected Bangladeshi politicians' wealth. For most of them though, the umpteen-fold increase in their wealth -- fixed and liquid, in Bangladesh and abroad -- defies rational mathematical analysis. But first a primer on corruption and Bangladesh, two words that are synonymous, is in order. The whole world knows that corruption, considered worse than the oldest profession, is rampant in almost every sphere of life in Bangladesh. It is a way of life and an endemic feature of the country's political establishment. The cycle of corruption starts with the tenure of the political party in power. A parliamentary seat is immensely lucrative for some and their credentials for adorning the seats of this august house are not above board. In the words of Theodore Roosevelt, these so-called parliamentarians form an "invisible government owing no allegiance and acknowledging no responsibility to the people." They use their power to bend and break the laws of the land to amass wealth of gargantuan proportions. The piggishness of these lawmakers turned law-breakers makes the "other ten percent look bad." If we question the seemingly bottomless wealth of the nouveau-riche politicians, they rain insults on us with the nonchalance of a "spoilt royalty." One such royalty had the effrontery to aver openly that he could have amassed much more, but being "honest," he stepped on the brakes. What's the doubling time of this royalty's wealth? Assuming that his net worth 5 years ago was one crore, the amount in his piggy bank doubled every 23 months. If the million dollar property in Toronto is factored in, the doubling time comes down to 16 months. A minister, well-known for rewriting Newtonian physics with his "Theory of Horizontal Shaking," magically converted 5 lakhs into 3 crores with a doubling time of about 10 months. No wonder they don't want to relinquish power because it's so profitable. Bravo Bangladeshi politicians! Take a bow. Swindlers like Ivan Boesky and Bernard Madoff, who made billions of dollars through stock market scams and Ponzi schemes over long period of time, are perhaps crying foul at the achievements of their Bangladeshi counterparts in such a short time. A phrase which encapsulates the idea of no gain without pain is: "If little labour, little is our gains: Man's fate is according to his pains." Accordingly, the majority of us achieved success through pain and persistence, honesty and hard work, belief and courage. We may not be billionaires or multi-millionaires like some duplicitous politicians; we may not be living a life of glamour and glitter fueled by filthy lucre. We are, nevertheless, living a decent and happy life sustained by clean lucre. For us, there is no greater joy than overcoming all the obstacles in making our dreams come true. As for the two-faced politicians who gained wealth without any "pain," they should hang their head down in shame. They should read Tolstoy's *How Much Land Does a Man Need* -- a parable that shows the futility of our greed and lust for wealth. At life's end, all we need is a parcel of land -- six feet from head to heels -- long enough for our grave.

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Global economy in 2014

ABDULLAH SHIBLI

THE year 2014 will be a banner year for the world economy with moderate to vigorous economic growth, low inflation, and decent employment growth in most countries. However, there are some uncertainties looming in the horizon, particularly the prospect of uneven recovery in Europe, a slim, however, remote, chance of an escalation in tensions in the Middle East and East Asia, and the continuous tug-of-war between US Congress and President Obama over debt ceiling and budget negotiations that have the potential to bring the global economic recovery to a screeching halt. Let me elaborate.

Forecasts for world economic growth have been upbeat in recent months although some international agencies and forecasters have been soft-pedaling the strength of GDP growth. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) which consists of USA, Japan and most European countries, lowered its GDP growth forecast for the world economy from 4% to 3.6%. Other international agencies, particularly the World Trade Organization (WTO), World Bank/IMF, and the United Nations World Economic Situations and Prospects 2014 (WESP) report have echoed a similar trend for GDP growth based on slower growth in 2013 than originally forecast and the weaker performance in developing countries. This is based on disappointing performance by the countries banded together as BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) which have not had a stellar year in 2013, as originally expected. "Growth in Brazil has been hampered by weak external demand, volatility in international flows, and tightening monetary policy".

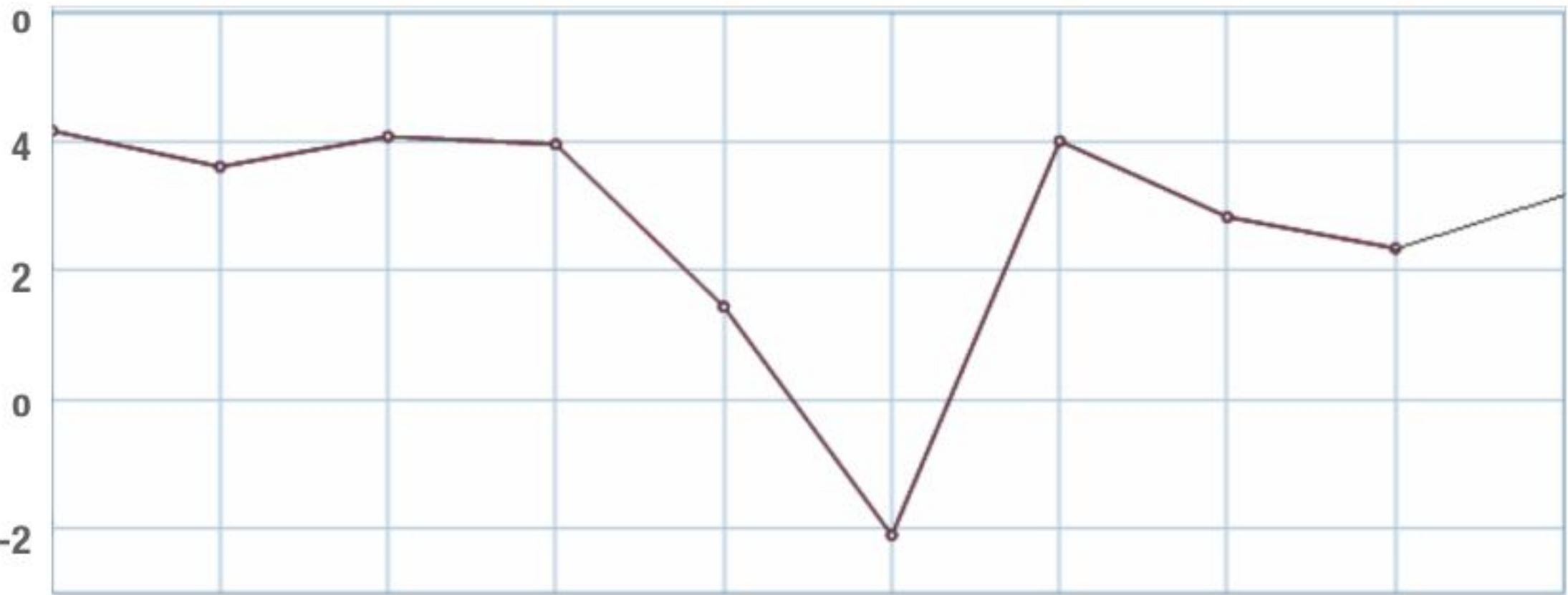


Chart 1: Recent World GDP Growth (2004-2013)

China has barely managed to hold its own, and could experience a slow down if it fails to address many of its problems (internal debt, real-estate bubble, and monetary policy), but could still show growth of 7.5% next year. India's economy is in the doldrums, and is beset by large current account and budget deficits complicated by high rate of inflation. While India's and Russia's GDP is expected to recover next year, the rate of growth at 5% and 3% respectively will not give the world economy the boost that might come from these countries. It is in this context that US and European economies are pivotal in providing the stimulus necessary to keep the world economy on an even keel. Having aired my reservations, I still expect the year 2014 to be one of the best in recent years. All indications are that global inflation will be low, given that oil and commodity prices remain stable, and barring any major external shocks, such as war, closure of shipping routes, or an open

pitched-battle between the Democrats and the Republicans in the USA. Growth: Most economic models predict that world economic growth will accelerate to the 3.2% to 4% range. These forecasts have emanated from the Conference Board, IMF Economic Outlook, and Wharton econometric models. A caveat is in order. When economists make forecasts they make certain assumptions about the parameters: price of oil, budget deficit, unemployment rate, etc. This year, while it is expected that there will be less volatility, countries where economic growth are somewhat uncertain are China, India, and Japan. In the USA, Congress and President Obama are at cross-purposes, which can be expected to continue as each tries to gain political advantages and that inevitably impacts the economy. In the European theatre, while France and Germany have had some success as they try to shore up the Greek economy and offer a lending

TABLE 1 EXPECTED GROWTH OF WORLD TRADE 2014 (IN %)		
REGION	EXPORTS	IMPORTS
Developed Countries	2.8	3.2
Developing Countries	6.3	6.2

hand to Ireland and Spain, it is not clear whether growth in the rest of Euro zone will be robust. Fortunately, and that is one reason most economists are optimistic, Greece is on the path to economic recovery and the threat to Euro, and the domino effect, has been less than in the last three years. On the positive side, Mario Draghi, President of European Central Bank, has come out in praise for the measures that the European banking industry has taken to prevent future crises that beset Spain and Greek banks two years ago. World Trade: In 2014, I expect world trade to grow rapidly, with WTO forecasting a 4.5% growth rate, with the developing countries leading the charge both in terms of exports and imports (see Table 1). De-escalation of tension with Iran the Group of Five hunkering down for serious long term bargaining. In addition, with the Winter Olympics in Russia and World Cup Soccer in Brazil, it is expected that good vibes will prevail. In a nutshell, my key predictions for the year 2014 are:

1. World economic growth will accelerate and may even reach the 4% level.
2. Europe will recover from the sluggishness and see robust job growth.
3. Developing countries will lead the recovery of world trade and provide a key market for EU countries.
4. Commodity prices, particularly of oil and gold, will experience a slight downward pull.

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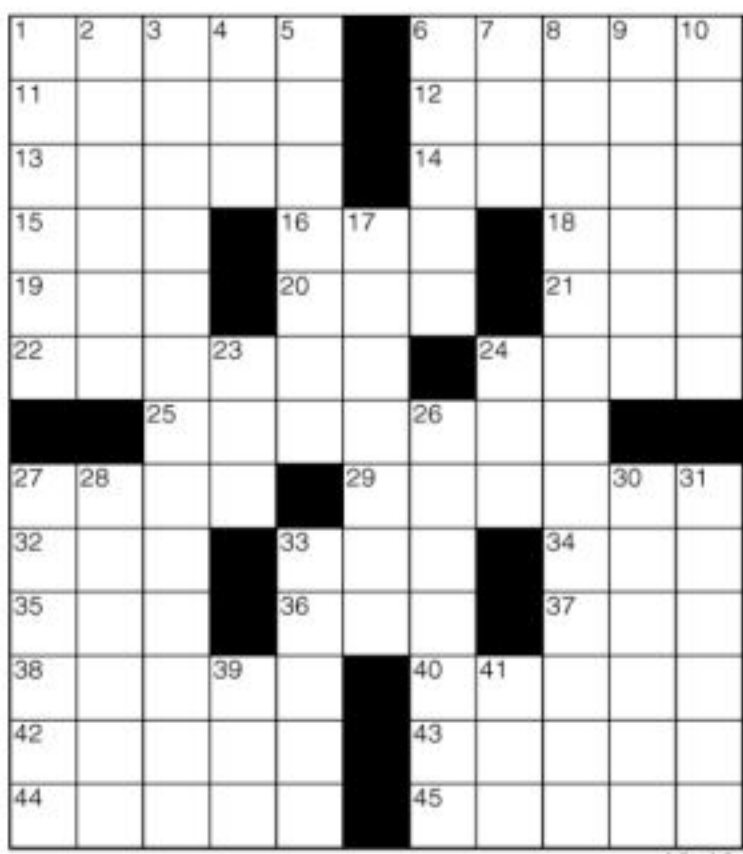
QUOTABLE Quote

If you wish to succeed in life, make perseverance your bosom friend, experience your wise counselor, caution your elder brother, and hope your guardian genius.

Joseph Addison

CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

- ACROSS**
- 1 "The Rehearsal" painter
 - 6 Like corsets
 - 11 Like xenon
 - 12 Laughable
 - 13 Kitchen come-on
 - 14 Available
 - 15 Course goal
 - 16 Mythical pipper
 - 18 Running bird
 - 19 Faberge creation
 - 20 CD's forerunners
 - 21 Track act
 - 22 Square dancer, at times
 - 24 Friend
 - 25 Rio native
 - 27 Mineo and Bartolo
 - 29 Grip tightly
 - 32 Old hand
 - 33 Movie role for George Burns
 - 34 John of "Harold & Kumar" films
 - 35 Bustle
 - 36 UFO fliers
 - 37 Hem and --
 - 38 Zellweger of "Chicago"
 - 40 Deal maker
- DOWN**
- 1 It's a wrap
 - 2 Incense
 - 3 "The Monuments Men" co-star
 - 4 Radius setting
 - 5 Desk accessory
 - 6 Detroit team
 - 7 Abby's sis
 - 8 "The Monuments Men" co-star
 - 9 Paint type
 - 10 Posse member
 - 17 Pinkish yellow
 - 23 -- Palmas
 - 24 Court feat
 - 26 Tar
 - 27 Welding byproduct
 - 28 Zealous
 - 30 Nickels and dimes
 - 31 Instructional guides
 - 33 Gaggle group
 - 39 Twisty fish
 - 41 Earthy



CRYPTOQUOTE
YVBYLA CMXXMB RMOQL EXMRY
ZQAARFAS. IQ BMO'S QUZQHS FS CYHN.
-- MAHYX BFKVK

Yesterday's CRYPTOQUOTE:
ONE SHOULD AIM NOT AT BEING POSSIBLE TO UNDERSTAND, BUT AT BEING IMPOSSIBLE TO MISUNDERSTAND. -- QUINTILIAN

Yesterday's answer

NICER CAJUN
APOLO AMUSE
BOOMS BIGOT
LOW BID
YAW EON COW
UPHOLD LOLA
CHILLY WILLY
CITE FEEDIN
ADE VATE WINE
HOTTEA
ZIP IT EXTRA
ALIKE SPEAR
GLEES TORTE

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.

BEETLE BAILEY

by Mort Walker



HENRY

by Don Trachte

