

Peace and normality: Not a tall ask

That the citizens have been going through many a sleepless night, workless day, threat to life and property, burning orgy and body blow to the economy is put down to opposition's hartal and oborodh programmes. It must be clear even to Khaleda's supporters by now that her alliance's calls for shutdown and blockade are fast fizzling into a fiasco.

PLEASURE IS ALL MINE



SHAH HUSAIN IMAM

"POSSESSION is nine-tenth of law" -- so goes the virtue of occupation in property rights. It appears the civil law aphorism holds true even in electoral politics by a telling twist of circumstances courtesy Sheikh Hasina.

One-tenth of space is allowed to a person having papers and documents to advance his or her claim to a disputed property. Such is the tenuous ground for the party which had boycotted the election, even resisted it with violence to ensure low turnout to peel off whatever little credibility it had any potential for. The January 5 polls may not have met ethical and moral standards, far less the expectations of the people, but legally and constitutionally, it couldn't be called into question.

The reality on the ground, though stranger than fiction, will have to be recognised. Sheikh Hasina technically stands reelected, again with four-fifths

majority, but without a popular mandate as the lifeless election eloquently articulated. To top it up, the new parliament is going to be either oppositionless, or with a loyal or divided opposition. Some in JP raring to be ministers in the cabinet cannot let go of a lifetime opportunity to be one. Thus we are looking to a parliament answerable and accountable to none other than the PM and the party chief.

Recall that during Sheikh Hasina's majoritarian rule in the preceding term with her three-fourths majority in parliament, the controversial 15th Amendment to the Constitution was incorporated. This sowed seeds of the phenomenal plant we have grown now of political invincibility fortuitously bestowed on the Awami League. Just as a fruit-laden tree descends so must she with her renewal in power show humility.

This command performance of Sheikh Hasina in pulling off a stunner through an effective sway over the loyalties of the state institutions can make her feel more powerful. But at what cost! The institutions have been diminished crying to be put in good repair. She may be prone to self-righteous unilateral moves that she must wary of since hopefully wizingen from past pitfalls.

The majority in the 10th Parliament has a redeeming feature in its potential for legislating political consensus on disputed issues going forward to a snap election.

The credibility of her regime at home and abroad will critically hinge on the order of priorities and the way she goes about using her power. She has to first set lawlessness right with a focus on protection of minorities; overall provide good, efficient and corruption-free governance. This if she wants to raise her stocks with the people for the election to the 11th Parliament, the pressure for which she will be hard pressed to shrug off.

Sheikh Hasina has to internalise the fact that she has won the election, but lost the count. Legitimacy is not given to her, she has to acquire it by taking politically correct steps. These should include a definitive timeline for a dialogue with BNP to have a fully participatory and inclusive election. Simultaneously, she has to give a roadmap for peaceful transition to 11th Parliament in consultation with all stakeholders. A start will have to be made in this direction within the first 100 days of her government.

Khaleda Zia's strategy of continuing movement alongside a recourse to discussion has failed because it predisposed constructive dialogue in a destructive ambience. Moreover, BNP's dependence on Jamaat-Shibir's muscle power to spearhead a campaign of terrorisation took away the party's shine on the sheen spruced up by anti-incumbency brush. Khaleda Zia has signaled in her recent interview with *The New York Times* that she might in time distance herself from the Jamaat-Shibir combine. Yet, her at best ambivalent position on war crimes trial puts her at a disadvantage with the pro-liberation and secular forces.

That the citizens have been going through many a sleepless night, workless day, threat to life and property, burning orgy and body blow to the economy is put down to opposition's hartal and oborodh programmes. It must be clear even to Khaleda's supporters by now that her alliance's calls for shutdown and blockade are fast fizzling into a fiasco.

People are desperate for peace. For that to happen they would have nothing of the intimidating atmosphere. Let the government set the imprisoned opposition leaders free and allow them to function. The opposition for its part needs to put an end to hartals and blockades all at once.

Who 'first' has always been dogging the steps of the political parties, whether it was opposition leader's hesitancy in reciprocating PM's call or their reluctance to step back from punishing programmes against the people or the former freeing jailed opposition leaders. The elusive first step must be taken now and whoever does it would have its standing with the people infinitely enhanced. The sickening behaviour must change once and for all.

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The return of Bangabandhu



JUNAIDUL HAQUE

BANGABANDHU Sheikh Mujibur Rahman returned to Bangladesh from imprisonment in Pakistan on January 10, 1972. He was accompanied by Dr. Kamal Hossain, who was also jailed in Pakistan. Bangabandhu had stopped in London and New Delhi on his way home.

He was our Nelson Mandela but in a Pakistani jail. Our War of Liberation was fought in his name under the leadership of his closest associates.

All great men begin humbly. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was a great organiser and a critic of Pakistani rule, and later of the military dictatorship of Ayub Khan. He spoke of the disparity between East and West Pakistan and the injustice meted out to the former. Slowly he grew in stature. His increasing popularity frightened the Pakistani government and they made the mistake of starting the Agartala Conspiracy Case against him. Bangalees put great trust in his patriotism and loved him. Progressive politicians united under Maulana Bhashani and the All Party Students' Union also supported him wholeheartedly. The Pakistanis were forced to release him and he became our undisputed leader.

Meanwhile, Ayub Khan handed over power to Army Chief Yahya Khan. The latter held an election and allowed it to be free, thinking that East Pakistan had many Pakistan lovers and Sheikh Mujib would not emerge victorious. But Bangabandhu's Awami League won 167 out of 169 seats and the whole world recognised him as our undisputed leader. But the Punjabi ruling clique was not ready to transfer power. The conspiring Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was behind them. On the night of March 25, 1971, thousands of unarmed civilians were killed. Political activists, students and even passers-by were gunned down. Bangabandhu was ready and declared the independence of Bangladesh. He courted arrest thinking that it would save Dhaka from total destruction.

It took us less than nine months to win independence on December 16, 1971. All this time Bangabandhu was in captivity. But world public opinion and his liberal image forced the Pakistanis to set him free.

The great leader first went to London where Prime Minister Edward Heath welcomed him. Then he flew to New Delhi, where he spoke at the Safdar Jung Airport with Indira Gandhi beside him, and mesmerised his listeners. He returned to Dhaka on January 10, 1971. Thousands

flocked to the airport to see him. His journey to Suhrawardy Udyan took more than an hour. Even on such a happy day a terrorist was caught with a bomb and a knife. He later admitted that he was sent to kill the great Bangalee leader.

The handsome leader had reduced by forty pounds in jail. He was a worried man there but not a frightened man. He thanked his people for freeing him and expressed his joy that we were a free nation at last. A man, a Bangalee and a Muslim die only once, he remarked. He had no fear of death. Now he would try his best to reconstruct his war-ravaged country.

We fought our noble War of Independence in the name of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, our best ever political leader, an orator of the highest order and a giant with the soft heart of a Bengali mother. Our women prayed for his release from jail and our people fought heroically for independence. We Bangalees proved to the whole world that we were a heroic nation and the leader who turned us into a confident and united nation was none else than Bangabandhu himself. Our losses were great but we were a free nation. Our future generations would not be colonial citizens any more.

As a ruler, Bangabandhu had to build the war-ravaged country from zero. That was not an easy task. The most powerful nation in the world was against our independence and their government was yet to forgive Bangabandhu. So they successfully created a distance between Bangabandhu and some of his most trusted men. Despite his best efforts, our great leader had failure as well as success. But he certainly didn't deserve death for that. That was a period when great nationalist leaders were not allowed to survive. Bangabandhu, Allende and the like had to embrace martyrdom and make way for military rulers, who served as yes-men to the mightiest nation. When we think of Bangabandhu's tragic death, we are engulfed with unbearable sorrow.

How do we remember Bangabandhu now? What is he to me? To our one hundred and fifty million people? He is the selfless leader who fought his whole life for an independent country for his Bangalee brothers and sisters. He achieved his goal although he had to leave tragically after a few years like quite a few third-world nationalist leaders. He loved his people them to a fault and they love him in return. As long as the Padma and the Meghna are there, Bangabandhu will be fondly remembered by his people.

The writer is a novelist and critic and a researcher on Bangladesh's history.

De-Voted

HUMOROUSLY YOURS



NAVEED MAHBUB

AND now, the results! Drum roll... A mudslide, er, landslide victory!

It was a fierce competition to see who draws more votes -- Election 2014 or Close Up 1. Thank heavens some were gracious enough to go and vote -- the polling officers were dying of boredom. The Chief Election Commissioner said, "Thick fog contributed to a thin voter turnout." He's correct about the fog - figuratively. Perhaps hundreds

of thousands of voters did show up, but could not be seen due to the thick fog.

But a large number of citizens remained de-voted. Now, that doesn't necessarily mean supporting those

who didn't participate in the election, but that they simply want to see the 1988 Seoul and not the 1980 Moscow Olympics.

There were also claims of some voters casting votes more than once. Nothing surprising. After all, the election comes once every five years and everyone simply wants to enjoy this rare experience over and over again.

Participation, no-shows, rigging -- these are all parts of the standard statistics. We also have a few unique additions -- deaths, injuries and attacks on Hindus, the favoured scapegoats. It's like the Three Stooges -- Moe fights with Larry and Curly gets slapped for no reason. Not sure why. I thought spiritual belief is wholesale and religion is merely retail.

Nevertheless, an election is an acid test, just like the O' Levels exams. Before the real thing, schools hold mock tests. Before the real election (when/if that ever happens), the January 5th one was a mock election,

literally. Oh I wish we had similar control over the invigilators...

Election 2014 is the twin of the movie *Battleship* -- a big budget flop, with the only difference that the election at least gave us a good laugh, an honest attempt to lift the spirits of a depressed nation.

Reactions pour in. The US slams the election while India endorses it (boy, the Devyani Khobragade saga is really spilling over...). The brand new powers-that-be may go Hollywood or Bollywood, but Bangladesh simply hopes it's Jollygood.

Meanwhile, the jails are continuing to get full, not with just the arsonists. Just how much capacity our jails have, we don't know. But given the increasing demand, perhaps the private sector can be invited to invest in expanding the prison infrastructure. A cheaper alternative may be to just turn the whole country into a jail with complementary guards already in place, courtesy of the BSF.

And hartals and oborodhs? Of course they must continue, since they have been proven beyond doubt to be absolutely ineffective. It's all based on Albert Einstein's theory: "Insanity is defined as doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results."

While continuing on with the vicious cycle, we have to swallow the fact that Election 2014 has been officially completed. Operation successful. It's just that the patient is dead. The election results shall hold, except in the case of *Farce Majeure*...

With voters participating in the election, the Constitution has won. With them boycotting the election, the neutral caretaker government system has won. All we need now is compromise, even if foolitics must continue, and all will have won.

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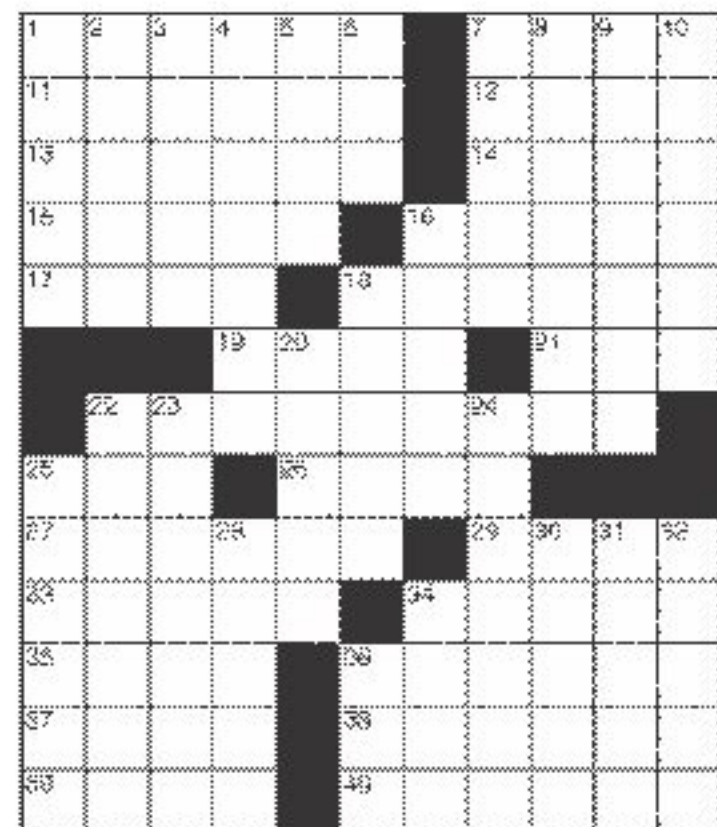
CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

ACROSS

- 1 Cone units
- 7 Claiming cry
- 11 Come to light
- 12 Capital on a fjord
- 13 Capital on the Hudson
- 14 High time
- 15 Barbecue rods
- 16 Boarded
- 17 Despise
- 18 Auto highlights
- 19 Taj Mahal city
- 21 Favorite
- 22 Wash. peak
- 25 Remote
- 26 Average
- 27 Battery ends
- 29 Printer problems
- 33 Low-lying lands
- 34 "Impression: Sunrise" painter
- 35 Eyeball
- 36 Japanese emperor
- 37 Deplored
- 38 Like some garages
- 39 Declares
- 40 Mortar's mate

DOWN

- 1 Hide away
- 2 Mea -
- 3 Planetary path
- 4 Running wild
- 5 Groan inducers
- 6 Bond, for one
- 7 Generous one
- 8 U-235, e.g.
- 9 Reformer Amelia
- 10 Shakespeare poem
- 16 Accra's nation
- 18 Calls out
- 20 Toy store section
- 22 Central American capital
- 23 Bus's kin
- 24 Only a few get them
- 25 Prefers
- 28 Title documents
- 30 Put on - (fake it)
- 31 Military award
- 32 Cache
- 34 Coal source
- 36 Custodian's tool



CRYPTOQUOTE

DFBGXNPHN YO DFBGYFH RJN RBILRB
YO L UQZYR; GYOPBIYO FBR TZRRYFH
YRYF L UQZYR OLXL.

- IYXNO DYFHRBF

Yesterday's CRYPTOQUOTE:

Always borrow money from a Pessimist. He won't expect it back.

- Oscar Wilde

Yesterday's answer



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



HENRY



by Mort Walker



by Don Trachte



QUOTABLE Quote

"The woods are lovely, dark and deep. But I have promises to keep, and miles to go before I sleep."

Robert Frost