

Moments of truth and time for a rethink

PLEASURE IS ALL MINE



SHAH HUSAIN IMAM

JOHN F. KENNEDY didn't have an all size-fit quote for different kinds of victories or defeats. So he said pointedly and in a worldly-wise way: "Victory has a thousand fathers, but defeat is an orphan." Revolutionist Che Guevara almost said the same thing about guerrilla war. What is a confidence builder among unsure people is conquering a terri-

By the look of things, the AL considers its re-induction in power a redefining and game-changing moment. Otherwise, how could the AL be so sure about the sustainability of a poorly mandated government so as to stretch its luck to 2021, a cutoff mark for the country to be a middle income one. I could only quote Rabindranath Tagore to explain this feat of overconfidence: "What people come to expect, they start believing in it."

A combination of factors has favoured the AL's version of self-powered politics: The party may be a better choice in the eye of the world than the BNP if the prospects of religious extremism, radicalism and Talibanisation are to be knocked out of the radar screen where these keep peeping and bleeping. This is a dangerous world we are living in where money and lethal materials pass hands at the drop of a hat of godfathers and mentors of hara-kiri operatives. Today it is burning, tomorrow it can be suicide bombing, were we to drop our guard.

That is why the pendulum has gradually swerved towards the AL in the face of mounting brutality and violence with which Jamaat-Shibir elements spearheaded BNP's countryside blockades and hartals that turned peaceful hamlets and city corners into killing fields. So audacious Jamaat has become that it allegedly sent out letters to Hindu families in Satkhira threatening them to leave Bangladesh within a certain time limit.

Although the BNP would not admit the boycott of the January 5 election as a defeat, yet that the party is in a beleaguered, and somewhat orphaned, state will not be contested even by its best well-wishers. On the sidelines, its conversion into a 19-party alliance with the inclusion of JP (Zafar), at best passed off as a non-event with a squeamish suggestion of a spent force in a quixotic handholding with a major party possibly reduced to facing an existential challenge.

If the BNP thinks that it can whip up a street movement to unseat the new government it considers illegitimate, it had better abandon the

idea. Even with a live issue centering around the 15th Amendment and restoration of caretaker system it failed to ramp up an agitation mostly because it settled for violent rather than constitutional means. What is more to the point, the government ensconced in an opposition-less parliament and left with unbridled executive power, would only be rationing space to the BNP for any expression of dissent as deemed fit by the power that be.

As if BNP's predicament was not bad enough already, a former judge who acquitted BNP senior Vice Chairman Tarique Rahman in a money laundering case in November left the country for Malaysia 53 days after delivering the judgment. The ACC is currently investigating 'discrepancies' in the wealth statement of the judge who retired after giving the acquittal verdict for Tarique Rahman.

May be the upcoming upazila elections will be a breather for the BNP. If the party can claim significant number of seats of chairman, vice-chairman and member of the upazila parishads it could hold this up as a measure of its popularity.

BNP has a sizeable vote bank with right-of-centre ideological moorings based on a nationalist mantra. To my mind, liberation and nationalism are such attained and settled facts through struggle and sacrifice that they cannot be the staple of any political party at the expense of another. Take into account the fact that 60% of the population comprising youth are completely disenchanted with distortion of history for political expediency and want war crimes trial brought to its logical conclusion. A new genre of leadership concerned with the present and the future will have to evolve if the country has to develop to its full potential.

The AL in such a context, and particularly in view of the initiative being solely in its hands, may have a serious rethink on engaging BNP in an effective dialogue to reach out to each other by way of finding a way forward to be holding a credible and participative election.

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So-Bank Redemption

HUMOROUSLY YOURS



NAVEED MAHUB

MALAYSIA cracks down on illegal migrant workers, Bangladeshis included, who have been busy keeping the cities clean. Meanwhile, Mother Bangladesh remains a Mother Teresa -- opens up its welcoming arms for the whole world to bring in gifts of valuable expertise such as

bomb manufacturing (manuals included), VoIP operations and counterfeit money printing.

Not to be outdone by incoming competition, we prove our technological mettle, putting the Anglo-French Chunnel Authorities to shame. A lone construction worker, inspired by his uncle-in-law, who in turn is inspired by *Shawshank Redemption*, successfully completes an eight foot tunnel without it caving in (the eventual confession is perhaps narrated by Morgan Freeman).

Now, that's first class civil engineering! This fellow should have been hired by Rana Plaza.

It's two years of painstaking digging while being considerate about noise pollution. Finally, a light at the end of the tunnel, literally. Damn! That's the pathetic ceiling light of the corridor!! Talk about taking a wrong turn. Wonder what expletives echoed through the lonely, dark tunnel while cursing the fellow who had given him the directions (GPS doesn't work underground). Let's face it, we are not the best when it comes to giving directions over surface, let alone underneath it.

Precious time lost. Time is money, again, literally. Hey, it could have been worse, like ending up in the toilet, or even lethal, like being a jack-in-the-box popping up right in front of the night guard.

He gets it right the next time around. And not only that, he finds Taka 14.6 crore neatly laid out on the table. How thoughtful. Nothing like a fully laid out table after a hard day's work. The bank should perhaps change its motto to: "If you're our neighbour, you won't have to stand in line. That's our 'hallmark'!"

After several strenuous commutes between home and 'work', he is tired. It's asking too much to count all that money. Might as well relax, watch the news which would tell anyway exactly how much was stolen.

Oh, what a mole! And a smart one too. He uses rice instead of flour sacks to stash the cash. After all, the 'dough' inside the latter would be a dead giveaway.

To transport the precious cargo, he hires a truck to Dhaka for Taka 12,000. Thank Heavens there's no Oborodh, else, the truck fee would have been the whole booty itself.

But alas, it's not a happy ending. Within two days, the Rab does a fab job to nab him and grab back Taka 16.19 crore.

Well done, men and women in black! So what if we're still short of Taka 21 lakh? The recovery here is far better compared to that of the Taka 2,686 crore scored by Hall-Mark through 804 LCs on a single day from this very bank, setting a world record of 3.3 LCs per minute. I wish all government agencies would work at such lightning speed...

Let's just look at this as a frugal Taka 21 lakh Dhallywood cliff hanger. *So(nali)-Bank Redemption*, based on the true story about the sensational lives of 500 and 1,000 taka notes. A *Bonnie and Clyde* version would not have been quite as sexy with a middle aged construction worker and his sexagenarian uncle-in-law as the partner in crime.

But the movie ends with a twist, leaving room for a sequel. How come it's the same bank twice in a quick succession of a couple of years? Why was the cash on the table? Was it an inside job? There is only one way to find out -- wait for Godot.

Till then, at least the law states that even the usual suspect is innocent until proven guilty. Then again, our reality: guilty until the phone starts ringing...

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tory, howsoever tiny, and holding it up as a mark of success conveying a sense that it could be replicated. So, winning a battle is important although the war may not have been won.

The kind of victory that AL has recently landed up with as a matter of technicality rather than of substance, may not have won it a thousand fathers but enough of cheery messages from important countries to go on with. It may have won a battle, will it or can it win the war?

President had to sing Hasina's song

SHAKHAWAT LITON

IF one goes through the president's address to the inaugural sitting of the 10th Parliament, one will not find any reference to any mistake, wrongdoing or failure of the immediate past government. President Abdul Hamid, in his 18-page address, portrayed a rosy picture of the past government's performance. He even claimed that the grand alliance government led by Sheikh Hasina has been fully successful in building a progressive, prosperous, modern and non-communal Bangladesh based on the spirit of the Liberation War, and establishing rule of law through holding trials of war criminals.

Thus, the president's address gave an impression that in the past five years there were no share market, Sonali Bank Hall-Mark loan and Padma Bridge project scams; no withdrawal of more than 7,000 cases earlier filed against AL men; no repression of the opposition by filing dozens of politically motivated cases against senior BNP leaders and putting them behind bars to thwart their anti-government movement; no violent and unruly behaviour by some ruling party MPs and activists with impunity; no extra-judicial killings by law enforcers; no forced disappearances; no presidential clemency to convicted killers; and no paralysing of the local government system and crippling of the Anti-Corruption commission.

Many other incidents occurred in the past five years for which the government was strongly criticised. Many AL MPs have strongly criticised the government for its failure to act properly on some crucial issues, including the massive share market scam and Sonali Bank Hall-Mark loan scandal. But all these issues were overlooked completely by the president in his address, and he wholeheartedly lauded the performance of Hasina's past government.

The so-called overwhelming successes as described in the president's address, however, could not ensure winning of the people's minds. The humiliating defeat of AL-backed mayoral candidates to the BNP-supported contenders in the five city corporation elections held in the middle of last year exposed the waning popularity of AL within a span of four

and a half years since it won a landslide in December 29, 2008 general election. People would have voted for the AL-backed candidates had the government's overall performance won their hearts. The BNP-led alliance very effectively used the government's failure to deliver on some crucial national issues. However, BNP's boycott of the January 5 parliamentary election was a blessing for the AL as it won a three-fourth majority.

It is very natural that the Hasina government will keep on vehemently defending the January 5 one-sided and controversial parliamentary election. The reason is clear. The election gave birth to the current parliament and the government. But the 10th Parliament did not elect Hamid as the president. He was elected by the 9th Parliament formed through a widely accepted election held in December 2008. So, he did not need to defend the January 5 election. But in his speech he repeatedly labelled the January 5 election as free and impartial. He claimed that "by re-electing this government, people have given them the mandate for building a Bangladesh in the light of the spirit of the great Liberation War, free from hunger, poverty, terrorism and communalism." In his view, the people cast their votes 'spontaneously.'

This claim is a distortion of facts. More than half of the 9.19 crore voters were denied the right to exercise their franchise to elect their representatives due to the unprecedented nature of the election. As many as 154 MPs, more than half of the total 300, were elected uncontested without a single vote being cast. Even the president himself could not cast his vote as the candidate in the constituency where he was registered as voter was elected unopposed. AL effectively managed the election by sharing seats with its alliance partners. In the remaining seats, voter turnout was low. The Election Commission put the turnout at 40% against a more than 87% turnout in the 2008 election. Given the facts, it is difficult to say that the January 5 election was free and impartial, and that the people have given AL the mandate.

The president hoped the new parliament "shall be an ever vigilant sentinel of democracy,

development and rule of law." How is it possible for this unusual parliament with no real opposition to meet the president's expectation?

He made another distorted claim. In his address he said: "For the first time, an elected government handed over power to another elected government by upholding the constitution. This has been a remarkable achievement in the area of democratic continuity." This is a reflection of Hasina's earlier claim made on January 19. But the fact is that the February 15, 1996 parliamentary election held under the then BNP-led government had seen the same phenomenon. So, the president's claim is not true.

The president claimed that a fresh spirit has been infused in various spheres of national life after assumption of office by the newly formed government. But the reality is different. The country has landed into a new state of political uncertainty. In his address, he acknowledged this indirectly by urging BNP to reach a consensus through dialogue by shunning the path of confrontation and anarchy. In so doing, the president put the onus on BNP for holding talks. He also urged BNP to cut ties with communal and terrorist organisations. He did not name any party, but it is clear that he meant Jamaat, a key ally of BNP. He made this statement in line with the Sheikh Hasina-led government's stance on it. Will it be democracy if the BNP has to follow the diktat of the government to cut ties with a party? Should we not allow the people to decide it?

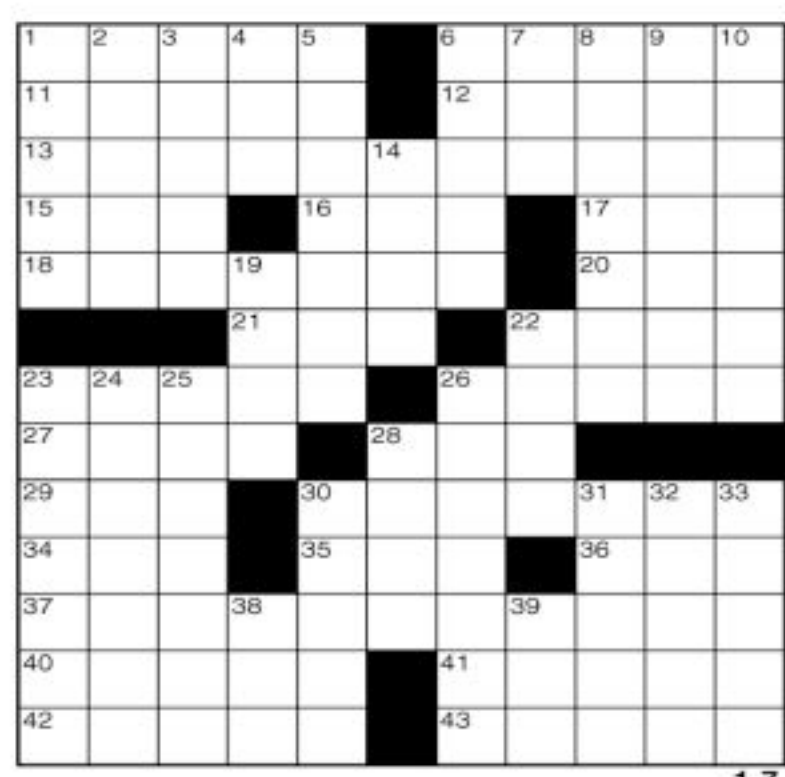
The crucial question is why did President Abdul Hamid, who has a long political career and is a widely acceptable person, deliver such an address to the inaugural sitting of the new parliament? The truth is that he did not prepare this address. It is the cabinet that finalised and approved the president's address as per the rules of business of the government. The president just let the cabinet to mindlessly use his high office to propagate a campaign for their partisan interests. In doing so, Hasina's government has proved that it will not hesitate to abuse any institution for its own interests.

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CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

- | ACROSS | DOWN |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1 Hockey scores | 1 Surprised sounds |
| 6 Nick of "Affliction" | 2 Earthy colour |
| 11 Sneeze sound | 3 Naval cries |
| 12 Decorate | 4 Singer Reed |
| 13 Pointer Sisters hit | 5 Wise king |
| 15 Be a snoop | 6 Finger features |
| 16 Squeak stopper | 7 Peculiar |
| 17 Negative link | 8 More wacky |
| 18 Bun seeds | 9 Vacuum tubes |
| 20 Cider girl of song | 10 Contest hopeful |
| 21 Sizzling | 14 Slimming plan |
| 22 New driver, usually | 19 Attention-getting sound |
| 23 Frequently | 22 Even |
| 26 Top prize | 23 How some cars stop |
| 27 Standard | 24 Plant leader |
| 28 Pub drink | 25 Subway, buses, etc. |
| 29 Note Dame's Parseghian | 26 Swindled |
| 30 Iditarod animal | 28 TV's Trebek |
| 34 Bear lair | 30 Ranch animal |
| 35 Casual shirt | 31 Saw socially |
| 36 Singer DiFranco | 32 Without break |
| 37 Pointer Sisters hit | 33 Euphoric |
| 40 Bangor's state | 38 Start of a count |
| 41 Correct text | 39 The Mon-kees' "Believer" |
| 42 Door sign | |
| 43 Pop | |



Yesterday's answer

ADAPT ATOP
MOLAR SERIF
ONICE SEDIGE
NOB ATE IMA
GRIND STONES
ILK RANT
STARCH COLTS
ARCH SIN
BIRTH STONES
EVE ETA AVA
RIATA DEVIL
SAGET ERECT
LENS LASTS

CRYPTOQUOTE
RO OXSOK ZDM ZF KZENT ZF ZJO UFAD
IWPE UFFY QDFAHK: NWPYM, NWPYM
NWPKF, NWPYM NEDPK WPY KMDAH.
-- LAYMY ZJO OXU ("OXU").

Yesterday's Cryptoquote: LOOK, DADDY, TEACHER SAYS EVERY TIME A BELL RINGS, AN ANGEL GETS HIS WINGS.
-- ZUZU BAILEY ("IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE")

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



QUOTABLE Quote
What matters most in politics is personality. It's not issues; it's not image. It's who you are and what you represent.
Frank Luntz