

Playing ping-pong with rule of law!

PLEASURE IS ALL MINE



SHAH HUSSAIN IMAM

We are second to none in losing focus on a tale-tell crime and bringing up 'broader issues' or going to the 'root causes.' Thus we exhaust our intellectual and creative reserves on deflections off-course rather than advancing with a focus to solve an issue within its own confines.

We are puzzled but not surprised at the prime minister's criticism of some 'overenthusiastic' people filing writ petitions in the seven murder case. These, in her words, are hampering the executive's functioning. The PM was quoted as saying, "We know when and what steps should be taken. But what would the executive branch do if the judiciary performs the duties that are basically under the jurisdiction of the executive?" Conflict of jurisdiction among the three organs of the state -- executive, judiciary and legislative -- is as undesirable as it is unexpected because the Constitution, as the supreme law of the land, has defined their roles ideally within a framework of checks and balances. If powers are concentrated in one hand they become susceptible to abuse which is an anathema to the concept of a People's Republic. Coming to writ jurisdiction of high judiciary, it is invoked as an entitlement to constitutional remedy to any impingement of fundamental right enshrined in the Constitution. Now the right to live is the most sacrosanct of fundamental rights. And, where it appears to be threatened it may cause a writ petition to be filed by an

aggrieved person and accepted by the higher judiciary to give a ruling on. The High Court last Sunday directed the government to arrest the three retired Rab officials for their alleged involvement in the Narayanganj seven murder case. That the ex-Rab officials have not yet been arrested is being explained away by the home ministry in terms of the HC not having specified any time limit for their arrest. Therefore, it does not constitute any disrespect for HC nor is the government in breach of contempt of court, it has been argued. But there is an unmistakable urgency implied in such a direction of the court, if only for the sake of upholding public interest including retaining the efficacy of forensic evidence which has a way of withering with the passage of time. Well, after torrential words and rhetoric hype in the media spewed out by some ministers, the serial murder case is pushed on to a procrastination trajectory, perhaps the same old story retold about major murder incidents over the years. For, the special committee formed to probe the serial murder has filed an ad-interim report requiring a full month to make its final submissions. Meanwhile, arrest of those implicated and even have had a prima facie case arrayed against (which is why they were laid off in the first place), or the overall status on the seven murder case get shrouded in ever newer layers of mystery. Or is it a can of worms vested quarters are desperate to stop from tumbling down the road? The prime minister, however, paused meaningfully to say: "Where would he (the

guilty) go, no matter if he is a relative of any powerful element (he could not escape)." She warned Awami Leaguers against the likes of Nur Hussain who switched from Jatiya Party to BNP and then to AL. This realisation of how an element despite having a plethora of cases against him had been wrongly patronised should sink in the minds of party leaders for their future guidance. This is basically a reflection of criminalisation of politics feeding on brawn and ill-gotten money. We are second to none in losing focus on a tale-tell crime and bringing up 'broader issues' or going to the 'root causes.' Thus we exhaust our intellectual and creative reserves on deflections off-course rather than advancing with a focus to solve an issue within its own confines. In the process, fresh leads will have been lost under the debris of wrangling as the culprits either vanish into thin air or pay their way out under the sly-eyed benefactors. In the meantime, the air will be rife with oft-repeated commitments to 'equality before law' or 'no one is above law,' or 'the guilty however powerful cannot escape justice' as public amnesia sets in till another gory event sends chill down their spines. Something remarkable will have to be done to bring a satisfactory closure to the Narayanganj case to mark a departure from a whole series of sensational murder cases hanging fire.

The writer is Associate Editor, The Daily Star. E-mail: husain.imam@thedailystar.net

Whose Lift is it Anyway?

HUMOROUSLY YOURS



NAVEED MAHBUB

I hold the elevator door at the parking lot for a good three minutes as the well dressed lady takes her time to get out of her BMW. As she makes her majestic entrance into the elevator, there is no 'thank you'. I have already pressed the button for my destination, the 2nd topmost floor. I ask her, "Which floor?" "The topmost one." Indifference. Having being deprived of two thank you's I had expected, I nevertheless complete my good deed of the day, "You're more than welcome." Then a house maid gets in. My lady friend orders her to get off, while pointing to the sign, "House staff not allowed to use the lift." She obliges. The Beamer lady is lucky that the one disembarking isn't Rosa Parks... Now, like in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, let's transport the elevator to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH). We now have our own version of *Grey's Anatomy* with all the actions of *Hawaii Five O* while christening DMCH as *St. Elsewhere*. Oh! The name of the show? *It's Whose Lift is it Anyway?* The use of the elevator leads to a quarrel between interns and patients' attendants, that leads to Dhaka University (DU) students vandalizing DMCH, that leads to doctors getting beaten up in Chankharpul, that leads to gates getting locked, that leads to ambulances risking being coffins on wheels (as if they already are not, thanks to traffic and peoples' nonchalant disregard to make way for them). Bill Clinton seizes the opportunity. He vindicates himself of his relationship with Monica Lewinsky claiming the encounter with the White House intern is nothing compared to that between patients' attendants and DMCH interns. And the DU students vandalizing DMCH? That's being short sighted. What if there's a retaliation or a raid on them and they are injured? Guess where they would have to come for medical attention... The disease is contagious. Rajshahi Medical College Hospital's standard medical history questionnaire adds another line: "Are you a journalist?" Sikder Women's Medical College Hospital doctor holds a journalist captive. Wonder if the doctor's name, literally, is *Trapper John, MD*. Is it that like India and Pakistan, Abahani and Mohammedan, we see neo-arch enemies among medical interns and patients' attendants, doctors and journalists? An assault on anyone, let alone on doctors, is unacceptable. The doctors feeling insecure is justified. But a strike? There is no generator or IPS for medical load shedding as the Hippocratic Oath turns into a Hypocritical Oath... So, how do we ensure the safety of the doctors? Perhaps the requirement for an MBBS degree should include six months of self-defense training. Let's face it. We are a proud people with inflated egos. The classic threat during an argument: "Do you know whose son I am?" ("No, but I'll ask your mom.") So, let's live and let live -- whether we are patients, attendants of patients, doctors or journalists. Let us disagree without being disagreeable, assertive without being aggressive, verbal (at best) without being physical. At the end of the day, we are interdependent -- without doctors there is no healing, without journalists there is no reporting, without patients there is no health care industry, without patients' attendants there is no personal touch and without medical equipment spared of vandalism, we might as well stay home with an appendicitis and kiss our behinds good bye. Let us ALL, not just the physicians, take the Hippocratic Oath. Meanwhile, I'm at another hospital attending to my sick daughter. To the total stranger, I smile only to get a look of suspicion, I greet with a *salaam* only to get a silent, "Sorry, come back on Friday" and hold the door open without expecting a 'thank you'. Oh, and I am STRICTLY using the stairs...

The writer is an engineer & CEO turned comedian (by choice), the host of NTV's *The Naveed Mahbub Show* and the founder of *Naveed's Comedy Club*. E-mail: naveed@naveedmahbub.com

Winning game without the queen

ALI NAWSHAD

In chess, it's generally a good idea to sacrifice a 'knight' in order to capture an opposing 'rook', or to sacrifice a 'rook' in order to capture the opponent's 'queen.' The pieces' standard valuations are useful for guiding basic strategic decisions -- but there are exceptions. Sometimes, sacrificing your queen for a lesser piece is actually your best option, and will save you from defeat or even lead you to victory. In such a case, it wouldn't make any sense for a player to insist on adhering to the principle that the queen shouldn't be exchanged for lesser pieces, as if that were an end in itself. The relative valuation of the pieces is just a heuristic - a "rule of thumb" - providing a useful simplification that often leads to good results. But in the end, all that matters is winning the game. A smart player knows to disregard a heuristic in situations where it would not actually further the ultimate goal. And here I am referring to "intellectual integrity and honesty," as lesser pieces, which ultimately wins the game, even if we lose the queen. Intellectual ideas and scholarly mindset depend on our academics, judges, civil society, journalists and all inquisitive minds. In *The Treason of the Intellectuals* translated from the original *La trahison des clercs* by French philosopher and novelist, Julien Benda describes eloquently what happens when the intelligentsias compromise their intellectual honesty for political reasons. Benda argues: "It is only when we are not in pursuit of practical aims or material advantages that we can serve as a conscience and a corrective. Those who transfer their allegiance to the practical aims of power and material advantage emasculate themselves intellectually and morally." In short, Benda asserted that once the intellectuals began to "play the game of political passions," those who had "acted as a check on the realism of the people began to act as its simulacra." But systematic suffocation and erosion of their moral and ethical values that shield scholarly aptitude derail creativity and promote mediocrity. And that is bound to thrust us into a cataclysmic future, a dark age from which there will be no light in the horizon.

We have irreversibly contaminated our academic institutions, and by doing so, have handicapped not only progressive minds but also the immune next generation. And that alone qualifies "treason" with our future generations, who are rightfully entitled for a better future. Winston Churchill once said that the best argument against democracy is a five-minute conversation with the average voter, and I often wonder if this will ever cease to be the case. Hence, the importance and logical expectation from the learned, knowledgeable, educated and scholars/experts. In *Freedom and the Colleges* Bertrand Russell claims to have no doubt that democracy is the best form of government, and yet, he said: "Against the danger of democratic abuse of power, the chief protection is a sound education designed to combat the tendency to irrational eruptions of collective hate." We need our intellectuals and civil society to contribute in a manner that encourages population that is rational enough and critical enough and well enough informed, so that politicians will leave a five-minute conversation with the average voter feeling neither smug nor depressed, but challenged. Our academicians, the trustee of morality, under the blanket of political protections, have abused and misused academic freedom. But academic freedom is tied with "responsibility" that sprouts out of loyalty to moral and ethical standards. As a responsible faculty of the civil society, academicians are compelled to go by evidences and facts alone, based on scientifically gathered statistically significant data and substance, not rhetoric, speculative opinion or vociferous oratory. It's essential to evaluate all ideas critically. The smartest people we know could be wrong; we should never accept something just because someone said so, or because it's tradition, or because it feels right intuitively. Our level of confidence in a proposition ought to scale with the level of available evidence in its support. Being skeptical of extraordinary claims is a good default position and we must be wary of turning faux-scholarly opinions and their useful heuristics into infallible dogmas to be followed blindly regardless of the actual consequences on

mass population. Nevertheless the quest for building and maintaining a functional civil society must not be halted. So the question remains, what is a civil society? Civil society is not the one that answers questions; civil society is the one that ponders "reason." And by doing so, it is curious, intellectually vigorous, although heavy on the wonder side and light on skepticism. Rational thinking allows progressive minds to combat centuries-long erosion of family, tribe, tradition and religion by the forces of individualism, cosmopolitanism, reason and science as well as less ignorance and superstition. We should exhibit enormous enthusiasm so that provocative questions bubble out of us. Nation building does not mean Wi-Fi on public buses; nation building is creating curious minds in our young next generation. In my view, the silver lining despite gloomy future and perhaps the most profound pacifying force is an "escalator of reason" within our future generation. As literacy, education, and the intensity of public discourse increase, people are encouraged to think more abstractly and more universally, and that will inevitably push in the direction of a reduction of political rhetoric. People will be tempted to rise above their parochial vantage point, making it harder to privilege their own interests over others. Reason leads to the replacement of authoritative rules with fair and universal rules. And it encourages people to recognise the futility of political agendas, and to see politicians as a problem to be solved rather than as a contest to be won. The 'true' intellectuals with traditional panoply of enlightened scholarly ideals of collective magnanimity should stand up in crisis moment to tell the truth no matter how unpopular it is (like Noam Chomsky, late Edward Said and late Howard Zinn did/does). Otherwise, only the most vociferous self-proclaimed intellectuals or the judges/journalists with price tags or the imprudent community, those have abandoned their attachment to fairness, will fill the vacancy with deliberate fabrications and deceptions that will remain permanently imprinted on our social drapery! And "Truth" will always remain forever hidden if we let

these 'faux' intellectuals and their symbiotic cronies any importance. We need to mute them all and challenge them with argument based on facts. If we don't trust an Imam to have a say in stem cell research or cloning, why should we let these fake intellectuals to have any say that is not based on scientific evidence. It is an insult to our god given intelligence and aptitude. Regrettably, our future generations will not hold the "Politicians and Co. Inc." responsible but the "intellectuals" who hold the "custody" of social justice, moral and virtuous values. While democracy depends on an informed citizenry, political indoctrination depends on ignorance. Therefore, we must encourage our next generation to have opinions on logical thinking, honest evaluation and the best evidence in reasonable and rationale way; "emotion" should play almost no role. But I don't insist that everything in life ought to be approached in a reasonable manner, as it's impossible to be 'too reasonable.' What kind of country would we live in, if everyone were constantly expected to provide good reasons for their beliefs and reasonable justification for their actions? If everything were open for discussion and reevaluation based on evidence and argument? Our future generation ought to be 'respectable reasonablists' and need to understand that some people are deeply attached to so-called "non-reasonable" doctrines. But future generation ought to proclaim the value of logical consistency and intellectual honesty, although others are free to define "reasonable" however they want: following ancestral tradition, religious belief, as long as such "practice" does not promote hatred, bigot, prejudice and injustice -- who are we to judge? As insistence on being undogmatic is just another dogma; and rejection of blind faith is itself a form of blind faith. We should agree to disagree and respect all opinions, with equal merit as our own, without being judgmental. As famous French author Aime Cesaire implied that no single opinion possesses the monopoly and is, therefore, absolute; there is a place for all opinions at the rendezvous of victory!

The writer is Associate Professor, Department of Oral Biology, University of Nebraska Medical Center.

QUOTABLE Quote

Democracy: The state of affairs in which you consent to having your pocket picked, and elect the best man to do it.

Benjamin Lichtenberg

CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

ACROSS

1 Two-masted boats

6 Stares stupidly

11 Lucy's friend

12 Allergic sound

13 Parasol offering

14 Get smart

15 Filming site

16 Merino mom

18 Brewed beverage

19 Powerful bunch

20 Big truck

21 Took a load off

22 Prefer to

24 Sicilian volcano

25 Cannabis extract

27 Garden starter

29 Comes onstage

32 Golf goal

33 U.K. fliers

34 Chop up

35 Hubbub

36 Ceremony words

37 Acting legend Hagen

38 Agitates

40 Showed over

42 Comic Kovacs

43 Madame Curie

44 Calendar items

45 Flair

DOWN

1 Polite answer

2 Wise goddess

3 "Why bother?"

4 Was in front

5 Tank top's lack

6 Greek physician

7 One in a hand

8 Question to a speeder

9 Seoul man

10 Bach work

17 ICBM part

23 Owned

24 Id-

26 Tells

27 In a panic

28 Writer Welty

30 Store business

31 Al Jolson song

33 Hills

39 Tell tales

41 Tie on the feedbag

CRYPTOQUOTE

DRWQ LZICQCSX CF IWFRK ZL FUZDL, U ZNDWPR WLK HDZAZNLK CLKCAARDRLUR.

-- WQIRDS UWVNF

Yesterday's CRYPTOQUOTE: THE ONLY CREATURES THAT ARE EVOLVED ENOUGH TO CONVEY PURE LOVE ARE DOGS AND INFANTS.

-- JOHNNYDEPP

Yesterday's answer

O	S	C	A	R		L	A	T	E	R
P	L	A	N	O		A	R	E	N	A
T	O	R	T	S		C	I	N	D	Y
P	A	P	I			I	T	S		C
E	L	A	I	N	E		F	A	D	E
C	A	R	D	I	N	A	L	R	E	D
O	C	T	O			C	R	A	D	L
S	K	Y				W	I	T		B
						C	A	L	I	C
I	N	B	O	X		S	L	A	N	T
R	E	E	V	E		T	U	R	B	O
S	T	E	E	D		S	E	D	A	N

4-4

A XYDLBAAX 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

WHAT'S ON THE AGENDA TODAY? NOTHING

THEN GET ME SOME "BUSY WORK"

YOU DON'T HAVE ANY LEFT. YOU'VE BEEN TRYING TO LOOK BUSY ALL WEEK

GREG+ MORT WALKER

HENRY by Don Trachte

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

11

12

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

26

27

28

29

30

31

32

33

34

35

36

37

38

39

40

41

42

43

44

45