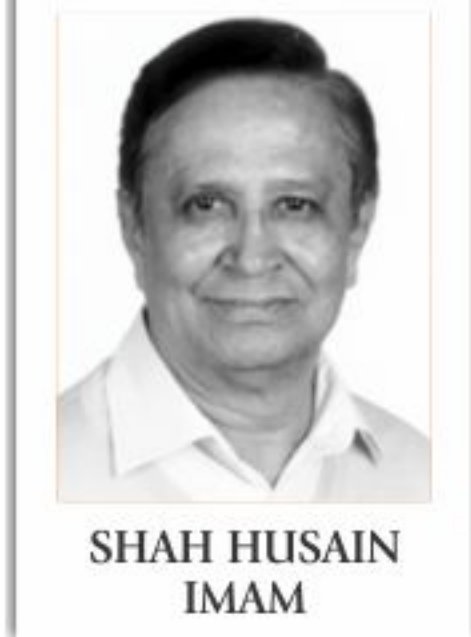


How defeated parties stay in contention

PLEASURE IS ALL MINE



SHAH HUSAIN IMAM

THE cases in point are paradoxically the Indian National Congress (INC) and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). The only similarity between the two parties is that both are down but not out, as the cliché goes. And the common challenge between the two is to reform. They both

appear to think that 'dynasty is the binding factor and dynasty removed, all the beads in the chain will split and disappear' and the parties may lose their existence. The same goes for the ruling Awami League party in Bangladesh. Its top leader will have to allow leadership to grow from ground upward right up to the helm. Practically, three structural changes need to occur in the major political parties: one, inner-party elections of office bearers at all levels; two, party and government leaderships should not combine in a single person; and three, these will lay the foundation for a culture of inter-party communicative relationship based on mutual accommodation and tolerance. In truth though, parallels cannot be drawn between current situations of Congress and BNP. The Congress' drubbing has come through a properly held election but the BNP's came through a different route. BNP would have us believe that Congress-led UPA government had helped the Awami League to go to power for the second term. Going by BNP's perception, India should have pressured the AL to pull back from election until such time as the two parties agreed to a

mutually acceptable pre-poll time government formula to oversee elections. India could argue that it didn't want to meddle in Bangladesh's political affairs. In effect, what stands out is the BNP's reluctance in seizing the offer of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to be part of an interim government clearing the deck for a participative national election. Having said that, Congress' predicament in India may have only begun. The grand old party with its 44 seats in the Lok Sabha is pitted against three regional parties which can deny the Congress the main opposition space in the Lower House. Jayalalithaa's AIADMK bagged 37 in Tamil Nadu, Mamata Banerjee's Trinamool Congress (TMC) 34 in West Bengal and Naveen Patnaik's Biju Janata Dal (BJD) in Odisha 20 making for a total of 91. If they combine and unify under a common platform they can function as a 'bloc' in the new House projecting a stronger profile than the Congress. The TMC is aiming at the post of Leader of the Opposition, the Deputy Speaker and the chairman of the Public Accounts Committee, a rather tall ask. Jayalalithaa and Naveen Patnaik may demand their share of what will be on offer. Alternative equations may be worked out between Congress and one or the other regional parties, who knows! At any rate, Congress may have to go it alone in the Lok Sabha but it will need more than the communication skills of Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi to make its voice heard. Priyanka may take her place in Lok Sabha perhaps through a by-election when due. As a fallen party with rich background it will surely receive courtesies but it needs the flair of the likes of Tharoor perhaps to mark a meaningful presence in Lok Sabha. What the Congress lacks in quantity will have to be made up for by quality of the messages delivered henceforth.

Not all is lost for it as the Congress-led UPA has a majority in Rajya Sabha for which it will be approached by BJP whenever any serious business of legislation requiring the passage through the two Houses would be involved. The Congress had seen worse days through post-emergency electoral rejection, stripping Indira Gandhi of her seat in parliament, her arrest on corruption charges, her release and finally on the back of weak unstable coalition governments, she staged a huge comeback on 'stability' plank in 1980. The objective conditions then and now are very different. Modi's resounding victory promises a strong government. Confident of meeting the people with a 'report card' in 2019, he is apparently looking to a decade-long leadership. If Narendra Modi stresses the Sang Parivar's philosophy and *parampara* (evolutionary inheritance) over the collective historical ethos of pluralism and secularist diversity India has grown up through, then he will be unleashing forces he wouldn't be able to contain. Morning, hopefully, shows the day and Modi's tenure has been launched with the right sensibility shown to the vanquished party and to countries in the neighbourhood, something people would expect to see flourish throughout his tenure. Recall a wallop of an entry a Bangladeshi listener made into his Facebook for BBC Bangla Service: 'BJP had first planned to stage the oath-taking on 21st May but realising that death anniversary of Rajiv Gandhi fell on the day, the party rescheduled the ceremony for 26th May.' Then he regretted that among Bangladeshi leaders such 'humility' (consideration) was sorely lacking. Came the punch line: 'When our opposition leader slices her birthday cake on the day marking the assassination of Bangabandhu Sheikh

Mujibur Rahman along with most members of his family, where is the humility gone?' The Congress has five years to reorganise the party with aspirational links to the youths and connect with the grassroots spearheaded, fostered and sustained by a strategic think-tank with a new alternative vision. Apart from the track-record of UPA2 riddled with scams, bureaucratic red tape topped up by undefined power equations between UPA chief and Congress President Sonia Gandhi and former PM Manmohan Singh, a weak campaign strategy misreading public mood scripted the electoral drubbing of the Indian GOP. Before the economy tumbled from the high growth rate to a single digit, employment opportunities shrank, cost of living spiked, the party should have called a mid-term election with the prospect of a decent showing. Elderly Congress leadership should have been circumspect to identify the tipping point and gone for testing popularity when the performance plateaued rather than started declining irreversibly. Maybe there is a message for Awami League here. Into its second term by an unrepresentative election, a big deviation from the Indian paradigm, the AL would do well to put an immediate stop to internal criminalisation of the party, complete some major infrastructure works, improve radically on governance and rule of law, revamp security and then hold a mid-term election. The party must remember the latest buzzword: 'Engaging is leveraging' -- against dealing with unknowns. This is to suggest that the AL and the BNP should engage each other and not confront each other as though caught up in an ancestral blood feuding DNA. The writer is Associate Editor, The Daily Star. E-mail: husain.imam@thedailystar.net

Finding Namo

HUMOROUSLY YOURS



NAVEED MAHBUB

A US dollar gets him a masala dosa and a soft drink. An Indian rupee displays a video on his mobile phone showing him how to cook that masala dosa.

Was this the thing that played strongly on the minds of the average Indian voters? Was it that the renowned dailies were starting to look more like *Hindustan Crises*, *The Indian Depress*, *The Bad Times of India* or the *Dainik Torture*? Was it that the powers-that-be were playing *Who Wants to be a Millionaire* in reverse order -- making millions first and then answering the questions later, if at all? Or was it that all previous campaign slogans of "Yes we can" eventually translated into "Yes we con"? It was perhaps a combination of all and more. But the fact remains that Ram eliminated Ravan, Obama eliminated Osama and perhaps this time, it is Corruption that eliminated Congress. Narendra Modi's BJP gets a sweeping victory over Sonia's Congress. I wonder if this is labeled as a case of a male beating a woman with a broom. Narendra Modi, aka, Namo -- the Rajinikanth of Indian politics. Maybe a Bollywood release is in order, *Finding Namo*. Well, the verdict of the world's largest democracy is here -- a Modi-fied government. And the Congress? It scores just under 50 seats. It can now form a WhatsApp group without missing out on any of its MPs (WhatsApp group member limit is 50). And the outsourced version of Ross Perot is noteworthy, with a flickering hope of a strong third voice. Alas, the Tata Nano has more seats than the Aam Admi Party (AAP). Now Tata, don't start getting any wild ideas about introducing the Tata Namo, just to score some brownie points. The elections may have been one of the most closely watched. The vote counting is a cliff hanger commentary: "And...BJP needs 272 to win!" "Uhm, in how many overs, *yaar*?" As an afterthought, perhaps paying 5 rupees to hear Modi's speech wasn't a bad deal at all, considering the nation paid a huge price for Manmohan Singh's silence. And the world? Well, Modi shows that to what length a driven Gujrati goes to get a US visa. Wonder if Mr. Obama is panicking. "Can I now get an Indian visa?" Don't know, if he has to fill out an application online and wait for an appointment date. Jokes aside, all eyes are on the warm handshake between Nawaz Sharif and Narendra Modi. Let's hope the cooperation goes far beyond the existing cases of fake Indian Rupees from Pakistan ending up at Hazrat Shah Jalal Airport. The felicitations from Bangladesh to Modi: "Congratulations! You may now relieve yourself of helping curb our disappearance cases -- thanks to Farakka, Tipaimukh and Teesta, we may just not have any rivers left." We wait and see how Big Brother takes care of the triple saline drip. For that, we may see an interesting bout of Modi vs. Mo-Di (Momota Di). Don't take too long M&M, as we might just turn into Mo-Di -- Moby Dick...

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

Modi's saffron cabinet

MAHMOOD HASAN

THE writing was large on the wall. For the past couple of years political observers and the Indian media have been predicting that Congress will go under at the 16th Lok Sabha elections. President Pranab Mukherjee conducted the oath to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and 44 other ministers on May 26. Senior BJP leaders described the event as 'celebrating India's democracy.' All the key ministries have gone to BJP stalwarts. BJP President Rajnath Singh is the home minister. Sushma Swaraj has been given the external affairs ministry. Arun Jaitley, who lost the election in Amritsar, is leader of BJP in the Rajya Sabha and finance minister, with additional charge of the defense ministry. All three are very close to Modi and are known to be hardliners. Surprisingly, senior BJP leaders -- L.K. Advani, Arun Shourie, Amit Shah, Murli Manohar Joshi and several others -- did not find a cabinet berth. Will they be accommodated when the cabinet is expanded in the coming weeks? Out of seven women ministers, six got cabinet posts. Grandniece of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Najma Heptullah (73), who was originally in Congress but joined BJP in 2004, is the lone Muslim minister and is in charge of minorities. Najma is a member of the Rajya Sabha. The other notable inclusion

was Maneka Gandhi, widow of Sanjay Gandhi. She is minister for women and child development. Somehow a Nehru dynasty scion is always there. Among the 44 ministers in the cabinet there are only 5 from the 18 parties that form the NDA. BJP is the only all-India party in NDA -- the others are state-level parties. The Shiv Sena (18 seats) and Telegu Desam Party (16 seats) are desperately trying to increase their representation in the cabinet. Modi has to consider regional representation in his cabinet when the cabinet is expanded. BJP has more seats than the threshold of 272 in the Lok Sabha. Since he will not be under any threat of "no confidence motion," will he overlook the demands of the regional parties? What is intriguing is the appointment of retired army chief General V.K. Singh as minister of state (independent charge) for North-East India. This is the first time a retired army chief has become a minister in India. What is even more puzzling is that General Singh is not under either the ministry of home or the ministry of defense. The seven states of North-East India are surrounded by China, Myanmar and Bangladesh. Will the general deal with the insurgency and the so-called "illegal immigrants" from Bangladesh (a home ministry subject) or with the Chinese incursion in Arunachal Pradesh (a defense ministry subject)? There were reports in the Indian media that Modi was in favour of opening a sepa-

rate division under the ministry of home to deal with the so-called "illegal immigrants" from neighbouring countries. One wonders whether V.K. Singh is in a camouflaged position under the ministry of external affairs. It will be worth noting his mandate. Interestingly, blogs and twitter have already started criticising Modi's choice of ministers. Apparently, some of the old guard of Vajpayee government, who are now in the Modi team, have murky pasts. What was smart of Modi was his decision to invite the Saarc leaders to attend his swearing-in ceremony. This is the first time that foreign leaders attended the swearing-in ceremony of a prime minister of India. All Saarc heads of government attended, except Bangladesh. As Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina was in Japan, Bangladesh was represented by Speaker of Jatiyo Sangsad Shirin Sharmeen Chowdhury. All the leaders had bilateral talks with Modi on May 27. Obviously, these meetings were not expected to take up substantive bilateral issues. In a way, through these bilateral meetings, Modi was probably defining his foreign policy priorities for South Asia. During the election campaign, Modi did not speak much about his ideas on Indian foreign policy. Hopefully, he will help revitalise moribund Saarc. Most surprisingly, some Indian media went for unusual coverage of Nawaz Sharif. It almost appeared like paranoia. There was practically no coverage of the other Saarc

leaders. Nawaz and Modi both have clear mandate of the people to engage in constructive endeavours. One wishes the same was true for Bangladesh. Bonhomie between the two leaders is needed for stable relations between the two nuclear states of South Asia. The unprecedented election campaign divided India sharply between the secularists and the Hindutva activists. Never before has India seen such polarisation. People have voted for BJP with a lot of expectations -- particularly the young generation, who have lot of aspirations. Turning around the sagging Indian economy and creating jobs for the young generation will be Modi's first challenge. He will get support from Indian corporate houses that had actually helped him get elected. Getting rid of corruption will be second. The third challenge will be to restrain the Sangh Parivar from going overboard trying to build "Ram Mandir" on Babri mosque site in Ayodha. If the Sangh Parivar goes for another "Long March" India's already dented credential of as a secular society will fade away. Modi's fourth task will be to resolve bilateral issues with Saarc member countries. Now that the government is well-settled, "Modi mania" should cool off and let the prime minister run the show. The first 100 days will determine which direction Modi's saffron cabinet takes. The writer is former Ambassador and Secretary.

Sunset rule for Khaleda's Munshiganj rally

FARID HOSSAIN

BANGLADESH Nationalist Party did not participate in the January 5 general election. It has suffered a setback -- not in the form of any election defeat but by losing its status as the main opposition in parliament. Since then, BNP has been on the run. Finding the once-governing party in organisational disarray, the government has decided to go after it and harass it as much as possible. The government tactic is evident from the obstacles the law enforcement agencies have created for BNP in holding public rallies in venues of its choice in the capital city and around it. On May 24, Bangladesh Jatiyatabadi Ainjibi Forum, a lawyers' front of BNP, was not allowed to hold a rally on the premises of the Supreme Court to protest what it called a spate of abductions, forced

disappearances and killings. The law enforcers put all the three gates of the building under lock and key and shooed away dozens of lawyers who tried to enter the premises. Some of them were reportedly detained. Similar police obstructions were also created when the opposition group wanted to hold a meeting at the Institute of Engineers. The lawyers eventually went to the National Press Club, usually off-limit for police, where BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia spoke in a crowded auditorium, which was broadcast live by most of the private television channels. So, if the government's intention was to prevent people from listening to the ex-premier it obviously did not work. The police went some steps further when BNP sought permission for a public rally in Munshiganj town on May 28. They placed at least 20 pre-conditions for the meeting that

was addressed by Khaleda, her first in the town in 14 years. Prominent among the conditions were that the rally had to be ended by sunset, no provocative speech would be made and sticks could not be brought in by the opposition activists while attending the meeting. The last one sounds sensible enough. Why should someone be allowed to carry sticks to a public rally? How about the two other conditions? Police warned the opposition leaders not to make any provocative speech. Interestingly, the condition itself sounds very much provocative. So is the sunset rule, which reminds us of a now-abolished order to the residents of Dhaka University's women dormitories to return to their rooms by sunset. The other day we heard a BNP central leader accusing the government of imposing a sort of

state of emergency in the country. The leader, Ruhul Kabir Rizvi, might have overstated the situation. But was he totally wrong? Despite the controversies surrounding January's election it was expected to produce a stable government that would focus its attention and energy on building a rapport with the political opponents. It is important for the nation forget the night-marish days that preceded the 10th Parliamentary polls and march ahead with a fresh vow to consolidate democracy. Instead, the government is going the other way. In going after the opposition the government is rather helping it regroup and steel its resolve to fight for its survival. Meanwhile, the ordinary people, upset by what has happened in Narayanganj and Phulgazi upazila in Feni district, are likely to side with the opposition, at least in the form of sympathy. There are plenty of such signals around for

QUOTE
Quote
Try to be a rainbow in someone's cloud.
--Maya Angelou

CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

ACROSS

- Distantly
- Cutting remarks
- Descartes and Magritte
- Stern with a bow
- Silver bar
- Word of German gratitude
- Wonder
- Arctic explorer John
- Colt creation
- Deep bow
- Stiff drink
- Hall of Fame catcher
- "West side story" role
- Hall of Fame pitcher
- "American Gigolo" star
- Girls in the family
- Dijon pal
- Cardinal cap letters
- Ray-gun sound
- Was vocal
- Each
- Carl's wife in "Up"
- Famed lover
- Canary chow

42 Tip off

Down

- Sills songs
- Oldest major league ballpark
- San-, Texas
- Old auto
- Await
- Simile center
- Texas basebatter
- Scott of TV
- Perfume
- Tries hard
- Surrounding
- "Only-" (NPR show)
- Atlanta basebatter
- Online merchant
- Place of worship
- Baltimore basebatter
- Skin problem
- Nervous horse, perhaps
- Nebula make-up
- Watch secretly
- Spots
- make fun of
- Promise

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

GOBAD LAPS E
ORATE ALOHA
TITAN SILAS
HOT TEATIME
ALL SAG CEL
MEET UNFED
CAR ETC
CROON CRAM
TAU SAL USA
ALIBABA IY
RISEN DOSED
OCEAN ELENA
TORT NERDY

CRYPTOQUOTE 4-17
JU'Z FKZJFH UN UFKSW K DNFU WNL UN HFKV K QKAKGSF ZWFFU UWKG JU JZ UN UFKSW KG KSSNPGUKGU WNL UN LHJUE. -WFGHOH.APSF

Yesterday's Cryptoquote: NO PASSION IN THE WORLD IS EQUAL TO THE PASSION TO ALTER SOMEONE ELSE'S DRAFT. -H.G. WELLS

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker

WHY ARE YOU STUCK ON BEETLE? YOU COULD HAVE ANYONE YOU WANT

MAYBE

YOU HAVE BRAINS, BEAUTY AND CLASS. YOU SHOULD HAVE BETTER TASTE

THAT'S WHAT I NEED... BETTER TASTE!

9-12

©2012 by King Features Syndicate, Inc. Word rights reserved.

HENRY by Don Trachte

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.