Is this for real?

KNOT SO TRUE

RUBANA HUQ

i) WHILE Narendra Modi, the Prime Minister of India posted 11 sweet tweets in 'Japanese', just with the hope of strengthening the ties between the second and the third largest economies of Asia, right before he began his visit to Japan last Saturday, a Youtube video caught your columnist's attention:

"History is written by the victors…

Surely a war is going on and some of us will die. We will destroy all…(who oppose us)"

These lines are taken from an extremely well edited Youtube video that has been circulating in the net. A young man, clad in jeans and also suit, more spirited than his dad, who is a current lawmaker, lands with a chopper in his village, escorted by the police is delivering his speech to their constituency in English often translating the bits and pieces into Bangla. The young man in his three edited speeches spends a good 2-3 minutes in English, and then explains to his audience in Bangla that the nation does not serve the British anymore and is no more colonized. He is hyper-animated, theatrical and often sings to his audience in the same video. His sales pitch has his audience fooled…

ii) "One of the oldest and largest companies in the private sector engaged in manufacturing and export of textiles, pharmaceuticals, ceramics and jute yarn" , employing over "40000 people including 2000+professionals indirectly", which "exported goods over US Dollar 1.5 Billion" over the last ten years, has just requested authorities to club together its loan of Tk 5,245 crore as of June 30 2014 and reschedule for repayment up to 2026, to give a moratorium for 2.5 years and to charge interest at 10%. The quotation marks in the first complex sentence in this paragraph are taken from the copy of a private company's letter to the Central Bank last week. A company that has been so successful is apparently facing cash crunch and in "on the verge of closing down" as a result of the "politically motivated credit restrictions on the group from 2001 to 2008". Central Bank is nodding in agreement especially as the group has repaid over 800 crores over the last three years. Similarly, Anti-Corruption Commission is recently having trouble getting necessary information from the banks on defaulters including a group which has misappropriated over Taka 1300 crore from 12 banks. Banks are unwilling to disclose information on clients as they fear the impact on the already defaulting business houses. Tela mathaye tel dewa: This is the case of oiling the already oiled ones. While aspiring small entrepreneurs scramble for a few hundred thousand or so, the banks milk the greedy…

iii) A minister on Saturday has just claimed that the incidents of the assassination of Shaikh Nurul Islam Faruqi and Moghbazar's triple murder are "nothing serious", as they are "separate incidents" and are "not as serious" as they are being reported in the media. The best part is yet to come: the minister has also asked citizens not to be "worried" about it.

At a gathering on Saturday, many people had gathered at the Press Club to protest against forced disappearance. Their list of grievances could stretch to eternity. Amongst them, a few spoke including Shammi Akhter who lost her husband Khaled Hasan Sohel on the 13th of November 2013, 70-year old Ruhul Amin from Panchgar who comes to Dhaka every month still looking for his son, Imam Hasan Badal who went missing in March 2012 and even a brother of a missing Chatra League leader from Pallabi who claims that filing cases don't help and that he has been repeatedly told by the authorities to dish out cash if he ever wants his case to be solved.

We are all living in an era where third-order simulacra has become the real and where the reflection, portrayal, projection or the image has lost any connection to real things…

In a country where in between January 01 and July 30 2014, as per Ain-o-Shalish Kendro statistics, 88 deaths have been caused by cross fire and 11 by physical torture, 76 people have been picked up with 23 bodies being recovered later, where in 436 separate political incidents, 5652 people have been injured and 119 have died, the people of this country have nothing to be "worried" about. Is he serious?

Jean Baudrillard, the French philosopher and cultural analyst claimed that the Gulf War hadn't taken place and that what we witnessed was only a series of hyper real images on our TV screens. His reasoning was simple: Saddam was no enemy as he was a former US ally in the Middle East. In every sense of the word, Baudrillard was right. Till this minute, we all are also experiencing "the death of the real" in our media laden lives, where we connect more to sales pitches, self-promotion, sitcoms, virtual reality, and video characters like Lara Croft better than our own friends and family. The real is dead and is in tatters while the hyper real map is still quite intact.

And that is why the young man in a village in Bangladesh has his audience fooled; that is exactly why a top defaulter can pitch a new strategy and that is exactly why the minister is able to endorse a delusional reality. All truly point towards one fact: we are all living in an era where third-order simulacra has become the real and where the reflection, portrayal, projection or the image has lost any connection to real things…

An inflammatory video installation by a Chilean artist Alfredo Jaar's A Logo for America, had been flashing up at New York's Times Square from 11.57pm until midnight throughout August. For three minutes, on 45 different screens around the intersection of the Square, a projection of the continental map of the United States is captioned: "THIS IS NOT AMERICA." Then within seconds the American flag appears in flashing lights, accompanied by a shocking caption: "THIS IS NOT AMERICA'S FLAG." Amidst the blazing advertisements that sit right on the Square, this piece of art negates commerce and war and is in search of the real. This brings us to the ultimate question: Now, what is real in Bangladesh?

Starting from 56.6% in 1992, the poverty headcount ratio at the national poverty line came down to 31.5% in 2010; 84% of the rural population have access to improved water sources; School enrolments had gone up to 114% compared to the rest of South Asia in 2011 and Life expectancy at birth has increased to 70%; poverty gap ratio is expected to reach 8% by 2015. What else is real? 1971.

An obituary on Abdul Alim, who died at the age of 83 on Saturday, did not make us cry. A top Peace Committee leader in Joypurhat, thrice a lawmaker, guilty of 9 charges of genocide, murders, looting, arson and deportation who was jailed till death does not deserve tears simply because the spirit of 1971 still burns within each one of us in pride. Since that is the truth, then let only the real prevail in this land of ours.

The writer is Managing Director, Mohammadi Group.

The world of M.A.G. Osmany

SYED BADRUL AHSAN

MUHAMMAD Ataul Gani Osmany was sixty five when he died in 1984. In effect, and in terms of longevity, Osmany died a little too early. And yet there is the feeling that he had given his country all he needed to, that indeed by the end of the 1970s there really was little role for him to play. His Jatiyo Janata Party, the political outfit he shaped for himself, was but an extension of himself. It was not expected to outlast him. It didn't.

A not so successful politician Osmany may have been, but more significant was his role as commander-in-chief of the Bangladesh forces during the nine months of the Liberation War in 1971. It was to him that the Mujibnagar government turned for a shaping of guerrilla strategy. Osmany gathered around him the finest of Bengali soldiers of the Pakistan military --- Khaled Musharraf, K.M. Shafiullah, Ziaur Rahman, M.A. Manzoor, Abu Taher, A.K. Khondokar, M.K. Bashar and others --- to help devise the means of shaping and implementing a people's war against the Pakistan occupation forces. It was Osmany's finest hour. Only four years into retirement from the Pakistan army, an establishment that would not let him rise above the rank of colonel, Osmany had before him, in 1971, the onerous job of beating the Pakistan military in battle.

In the event, Osmany won his war and the nation its liberty. A grateful country promoted him to the rank of full general in April 1972. And then, in his new avatar as a minister in Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's government, he found an opportunity to bring his sense of discipline and incorruptibility to bear on the workings of the bureaucracy. Those were heady days and men of calibre and patriotic dedication were all around. Osmany was one of them, a man who easily convinced people of his faith in the power of democracy to change the destinies of nations. In January 1975, as the Fourth Amendment to the constitution came to pass, Osmany discerned a palpable threat to democracy. In his emotional farewell to the Jatiyo Sangsad, he left his colleagues in no doubt about the pain he felt. He had seen Ayub Khan, said he, which was why he had little desire to see a "Mujib Khan". He relinquished his seat in parliament and slipped into silence.

Perhaps he ought to have remained in that state. Ironically for him and unfortunately for the nation, Osmany accepted in mid-August 1975, with alacrity, Khondokar Moshtaque Ahmed's offer to be his defence advisor. That was certainly not his finest hour, seeing that for close to three months after the assassination of the Father of the Nation he served a usurper government. That phase ended on 3 November when the killer majors and colonels, along with Moshtaque and his team, were ejected from power. Osmany would not return to the limelight until mid-1978 when, as the presidential candidate of the combined opposition, he challenged General Ziaur Rahman, his former subordinate, at the presidential election the dictator had called. Together with other opposition figures, Osmany made a pilgrimage to the grave of Bangabandhu in Tungipara. At a time when Zia and his rightwing band of supporters held sway, Osmany could not expect to win. He didn't.

In the six years that remained of his life, General Osmany may not have become irrelevant in Bangladesh's history. But he was increasingly sidelined by a new generation of politicians and military officers asserting its presence on the national canvas. His Janata Party made little impact on politics. And he was quite unable to persuade citizens into believing that he had indeed transformed himself into a politician. The old military demeanour was seemingly always there. But the hauteur, the gruff voice, the intimidating moustache in effect concealed an individual who had his heart where it needed to be.

Remembering M.A.G. Osmany is a journey back to the study of a generation that has etched its story amidst the stars. We speak of the leadership that showed us the path to freedom. It was leadership which stayed with us till we arrived at the little hut, bathed in the glow of liberation, at the end of a hard twilight struggle.

(General Muhammad Ataul Gani Osmany was born on 1 September 1918 and died on 16 February 1984)

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What's in a name?

MAHMUDUL SUMON

THIS debate which I call the naming debate of the adivasi, seems to be an unending one. On the one hand we have a good number of activists and scholars who think that the term adivasi and the demand for constitutional recognition is an all important one. To another group, which also includes some scholars, this is all wrong. For this latter group, the term adivasi is not applicable for a country like Bangladesh. In such a situation, what is the role of a scholar?

Personally, I have worked on this issue for many years as a researcher. I have followed this debate from an earlier period. I have seen the early days of indigenous rights discourse in Bangladesh. There was a time when within NGOs and the rights discourse, debate ensued as to who would be called indigenous or adivasi in the country? Is it the Austroasiatic linguistic groups such as the Santals, the Oraons and others who currently live in small pockets of geographical terrains in the north-western parts of the country or the Tibeto-Burmese groups living in the South eastern parts of the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh? Historically, the former were categorized as aboriginal and the latter groups have generally been categorized as tribes in colonial discourses. But then both are imposed by the colonials. The term adivasi (as a translation of the term aboriginal came into prominence in the activism of some educated and Christianized groups in the 1930s for their development in Jharkhand).

The contemporary use of the term adivasi as a translation of the term indigenous by a cohort of civil society members in Bangladesh is definitely driven by a UN definition. This definition is not only applicable to Bangladesh but many other countries of the world as a safeguard tool for the minority population and their rights. Most notably these include some Latin American countries. The policy had been operationalized in Bangladesh from the early 1990s. However, after the initial years of some kind of acceptability of the idea, the issue got a big blow in 2011 when the 15th amendment of the Constitution was passed and the demand for constitutional recognition diffused.

The point I would like to make is that the applicability of the indigenous rights discourse has been contested because of its legacy with settler colonial states. Especially this has been the case with Asia, because here the context is different from settler colonies such as Australia or the USA. Commenting specifically on the recent discourse of indigenous rights at the UN, Bowen, a legal scholar noted that such declarations rested on the notion of a chronological gap between an initial people and a subsequent conquest, which does not apply for Asia and Africa. As "populations moved around and some absorbed others" Bowen agrees with a number of Asian and African scholars and state delegates to international forums who argued that the category "indigenous peoples" should be limited to the Americas and Australia. Thus, he opposed the development of such universal categories. Andre Beteille, an anthropologist from India, seems to share the opinion of the legal scholars. He noted that "tribe and civilization have co-existed for centuries if not millennia, and were closely implicated in each other from ancient to modern times" (1986: 299; my emphasis). On the Indian subcontinent, according to Beteille, the distinction between "tribal" and "non-tribal", no matter how it is framed, fails to correspond in any significant way with that between indigenous and settler populations. From this perspective, too the new term "indigenous" which came into currency in India in 1990s is a problematic construct for this distinguished anthropologist.

Yes, this is all true! But my question to the government is, is it because of this logic that the government is shying away from the indigenous rights discourse and activists' plea for constitutional recognition? Is this merely a technical issue? In this connection we must also bring this into our discussion that a number of Asian countries, even when they have had reservation initially, have recently adopted the discourse as it has captured the imagination of a class of people who are indigenous rights organizers in these countries. Nepal is a good example and indigenous rights movement has flourished there since then. India also seems to have softened on this issue although at the beginning, the state's policy makers were unsure. Will this information lead the government of Bangladesh to rethink its position with regard to adivasi rights discourse? I don't think so. It seems from various activities of the government's various activities that there is no clear understanding and policy recommendation on the part of the government. Its position is only expressed through various edicts and instructions.

The term adivasi is taken as part of an identity politics and in the initial years there may have been some confusion but now the term is gaining currency. And statist denial is one of the reasons for this ground making!

Such ambiguity on the part of the government is only fuelling resentment among the various quarters of the adivasi rights organization. One must not ignore that amidst all this policy indecision, the term adivasi, which came into use through various NGO driven initiatives, is becoming popular amongst a small middle class populace of the Chakmas, the Marmas and the Tripuras and many other groups in the country. What is important to note at this stage is that the term adivasi is taken as part of an identity politics and in the initial years there may have been some confusion but now the term is gaining currency. And statist denial is one of the reasons for this ground making! As in all identity politics, a source of antagonism is a key for identity formation and politics. By denying Bengali the status of state language, the erstwhile Pakistani regime once sowed the seed of antagonism that led to the rise of Bengali nationalism and eventually formation of Bangladesh. In an ironical sleight of history, we are seeing a similar unfolding of events in front of us and this time the cause of antagonism is the state itself. We know who advised the Pakistani rulers but do we know on whose advice the government of Bangladesh is working?

The bottom line is by repeated fiat (the latest being government orders not to use the term adivasi) the state is steadfastly helping to popularize the demand. Thus, as a scholar, it is not enough to look at whether the term adivasi is right or wrong, or technically correct or not. This would amount to a blatant realism which will not solve the problem. Although it is alarming that some of our scholars are doing exactly that. Instead, one needs to look at the issue from a constructivist angle. This calls for an ethical consideration never matched by realism.

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QUOTABLE *Quote*

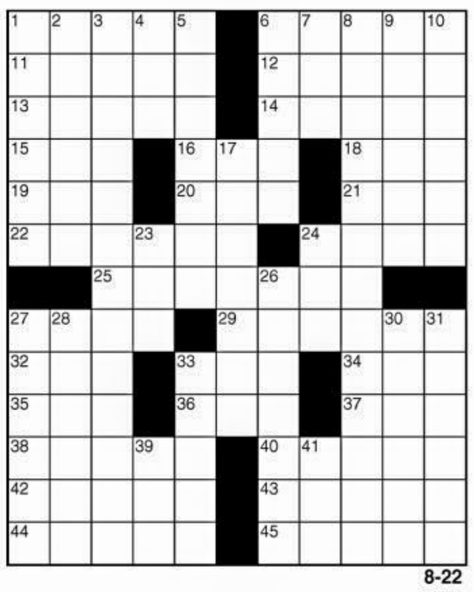
A man of genius makes no mistakes; his errors are volitional and are the portals of discovery.

James Joyce

CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

ACROSS
1 Concluding work
6 Easy runs
11 Clear
12 Before, in Brest
13 More sagacious
14 Delicious
15 -Alamos
16 "That's revolting!"
18 Part of RSVP
19 Yale supporter
20 Be litigious
21 Daiquiri need
22 Insurance type
24 Addition column
25 Driver's place
27 Deck worker
29 Floated on the breeze
32 Pipe waste
33 Road sealer
34 Shade
35 Game cube
36 Drop the ball, say
37 History chunk
38 Elevator lifter
40 Detest
42 Over
43 Freak
44 Computer jacks
45 Play direction

DOWN
1 Whimpered
2 Jim Palmer, once
3 Law student's goal
4 Apply
5 Reading
6 Turning tool
7 Some gametes
8 Fundraising, of a sort
9 Lead on
10 Fashions
17 Operation Desert Storm
23 Low digit
24 Clumsy fellow
26 Bombardment
27 Zany
28 Crumbly Italian cheese
30 Atlas section
31 More precious
33 Prom group
39 Set fire to
41 -- vivant



8-22

Yesterday's answer

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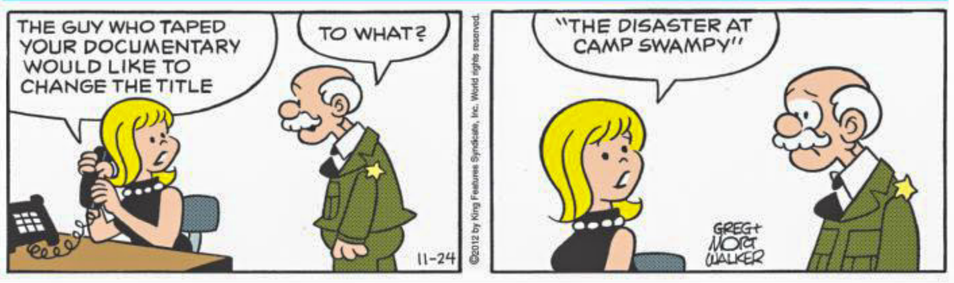
HENRY by Don Tranchte

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker



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