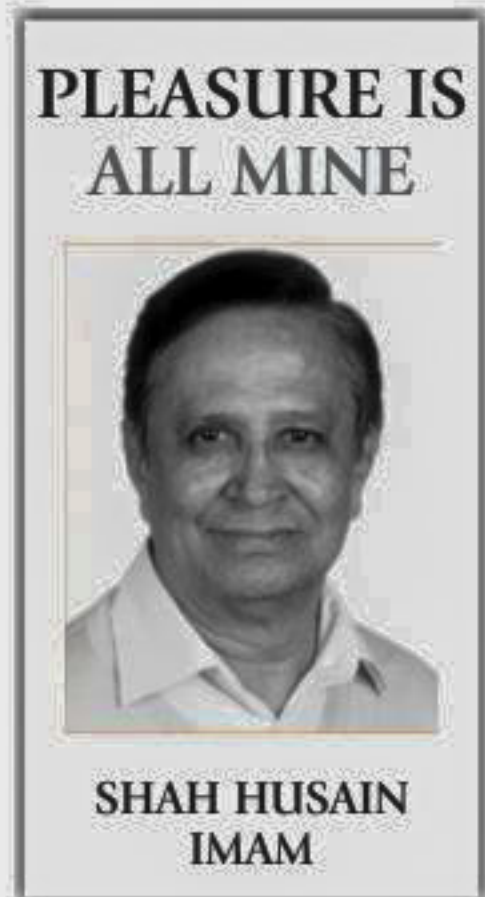


Prioritise fusion of priorities



SHAH HUSAIN IMAM

The point is when Bangladesh government is so open-minded and far-sighted in building bridges across the Asia-Pacific region, why don't we see a matching reflection on political management at home?

THE contradiction is telling between conduct of foreign policy and that of domestic affairs. In the geopolitical realm, we see a manifest positive energy; on the home front, a negative variety of power is on display.

The government exercises considerable affirmative freedom of action in international and regional matters, but the same doesn't hold true in the management of domestic affairs. This is borne out by the following mystic of disconnect. The government has been freely cultivating relations with China, Japan, Russia, India and the USA without causing hiccup in any pair of bilateral relationship. Take the fact that these big countries are not geo-politically on the same wavelength nor do their interests converge, nor their equations with each other and visions for future identical. A segment of international media speculated that Japanese PM Shinzo Abe lately traveled to Bangladesh and Sri Lanka to offset China's 'mounting' influence in South Asia. In that tapestry of thinking Narendra Modi's visit to Japan was placed in the perspective of Japanese overtures to Bangladesh and Sri Lanka -- 'countries with a growing influence in economic and political domains'. A new direction in Russia-China relations is perceived as 'Russia reorients to the Orient', supposedly because of Putin's possessive Ukraine policy that has had it veer away from the West, particularly USA. How

much of a piece in the puzzle this is has yet to unfold. To recap from an earlier column 'Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and the Maldives being maritime countries exude significant potential for securing Indian Ocean sea lanes in the eyes of China and USA, of course with implications for India.' In fact, Indian journalist Amitabh Mukherjee, a contributor to Geopoliticalmonitor.com titled a recent article with a question mark: Is Bangladesh the Newest addition to China's 'String of Pearls'? We have heard of USA's 'String of Pearls' and now we have the Chinese one in what appears to be an exaggerated academic apprehension. Breaking through all these smokescreens, the AL government is pushing right ahead with a much wider range of connectivity vision beyond Indo-Bangla transit or trans-shipment corridor issues etcetera. Agreeing with former ambassador and secretary M. Humayun Kabir one can only see a wider gamut of inter-linkages emerging in the Asia-Pacific region. BIMSTEC encompassing Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand is a case in point. It is consistent with Japan's Bay of Bengal growth belt. Another symbiotic relational concept Bangladesh is moving ahead with, is BCIM Economic Corridor involving Bangladesh, China, India and Myanmar. The joint statement issued at the end of Shinzo Abe's visit to Dhaka envisioned qualitative growth in the bilateral relationship on the basis of Comprehensive Partnership. The moving force of such ties will be pursuit of peace, democracy, respect for human rights, and rule of law. Japan is keen to make big investments in Bangladesh prompted by its China plus policy. For this to happen, the stress on congenial investment climate cannot be lost sight of.

The point is when Bangladesh government is so open-minded and far-sighted in building bridges across the Asia-Pacific region, why don't we see a matching reflection on its political management at home? One feels good about the AL government's success stories in translating foreign policy into tangible foreign relations, with most of the global economic powerhouses evincing keen interest in Bangladesh's future. To optimise and sustain the possible gains, a strong and hardworking leadership is as much imperative as an assured stable political future. An undisturbed length of violence-free atmosphere is indispensable for rapid economic growth through the goodwill and cooperation of friendly countries. It appears to keen observers that the AL government is possessed by an instinct of self-preservation and perpetuation. This perception is reflected on the government's control freak over media and judiciary. The values of Liberation War if one delves deep into the subject are immutable and that is where its staunchest defense lies. Freedom is the most precious and prized attainment of a country that none of its citizens is willing to compromise. Conspirators, saboteurs and enemies against freedom have been always binned by history. One need not live in the past affirming one's belief in the fact that liberation of a country is the most non-controversial possession of a country. And, more than four decades of its existence and cumulative growth in spite of odds stand testament to all these. Ending on a George Barnard Shaw gem of a quote: "We have no more right to consume happiness without producing it than to consume wealth without producing it."

The writer is Associate Editor, The Daily Star.

Mission Impossible?



NAVEED MAHBUB

AMERICA, the melting pot. As one of Bangladeshi origin who is an engineer and a Muslim stand-up comedian, I sure stand out from the pack. Perhaps that helps me win the Best Male Comedian title at the 2007 Original Las Vegas Comedy Festival. And so, I have a HUGE following...of FBI agents! I assure them, "I LOVE America and everything about it - apple pie, baseball...water boarding. I LOVE all things American...made in China. For America, I will do Jihad!" Not a good joke to crack on stage in post 9/11 America. After all, there is domestic surveillance going on. As I call my buddy Balan Dinesh in India, "How goes in Bombay?" Homeland Security freaks out: "Code Red! Code Red!! There's a plot to bomb the bay!!" And so, India changes the name from Bombay to Mumbai. And then my Western friends go: "Dude! You're a Muslim. You can have FOUR wives!!" Four wives? Over my dead body! Four wives mean four mothers-in-law. That alone will lead a young man to go and blow himself up. That's what I call another version of *Four Weddings and a Funeral*! Imagine at Valentines calling the restaurant: "I'd like to make a reservation for five in an intimate corner. And four roses please." And then all five (well, six if there's a driver, seven if you are a hot shot with a body guard) get nice and cozy on the romantic drive to the restaurant in the Toyota Hiace Commuter. Oh, and the bumper sticker sports 'Soccer Mob'. And buy a house? That's not as 'Husband and Wife as Joint Tenants', but as 'Husband and Wives as Joint Tyrants'. Ok, ok, so as not to get a *Fatwa* on me, or being labeled a 'blogger', let's clarify. We can have four wives, under the strict condition that all four must be loved and treated one hundred percent equally. That means, the song *I Just Called to Say I Love You* is a conference call. Now, it is impossible for us mere mortals to love four women absolutely equally. Those who have two timed know very well that behind every failed man, there is the other woman... And so, I blame the terrorists for giving the one billion peace loving Muslims a bad name. As a Muslim comedian, I join in on the *Mission Impossible* as do Ahmed Ahmed, Maz Jobrani and Dean Obeidallah on their *Axis of Evil* comedy tour and Azhar Usman on his *Allah Made Me Funny* campaign - just to demystify the propagation of CNN and Fox News. And finally, at Ann Arbor Showcase comedy club in Ann Arbor, Michigan, a US Army Staff Sergeant comes to me after my performance: "Sir, I loved your act. But more than that, I learned more about your religion than I did during my two year tour of duty in Iraq." Mission partly accomplished. No more arriving at US airports two days before the flight for security checks or being stripped down to the thong or not being able to greet my friend Jack warmly as I bump into him at the terminal, "Hi Jack!" And so, we settle down with much more mundane comedy...Not so fast! It seems that September 11, IS gory videos, Al Qaeda opening up a South East Asia 'branch office', World Suicide Prevention Day (wonder how Al Qaeda observes this day or if one of its operatives man the Suicide Hotline...) all seem to be too close to each other for anyone's comfort. Ahmed, Maz, Dean, Azhar - we gotta get back to work on *Mission Impossible II*. We comedians will continue with the truth - you just laugh, ok? That is when the eyes are closed and the mind is wide open...

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

The struggle for minimum wage

DR. ABDULLAH SHIBLI

THIS year, September 1 was observed as Labor Day in the USA and in many other countries. Labor Day, like May 1st in Bangladesh, is a national holiday in the USA, and is an opportunity to celebrate organized labor's strengths and its contributions to the US economy. Ironically, three days after Labor Day, on September 4th, dozens of demonstrators in many US cities were arrested for participating in protest marches to raise the minimum wage level. The two events happening in quick succession in one of the richest countries in the world highlight an issue that has emerged time and again in many shapes and forms across the globe. What would it take for us to pay the workers who toil to make the food we eat and the clothes we wear a decent living wage? I found this question asked repeatedly on social media in recent months. And, it is no secret that minimum wage is a life and death issue not only in the developing world, where workers often work 60 to 80 hours in factories under harsh conditions stitching shirts and jeans, or grinding away in farms, fishing vessels, orchards, and chicken farms, but also in most developed countries including the USA. So, the sixty-four billion dollar question is, why do we fail to guarantee the basic needs of the workers at the bottom of the pyramid, who report for work every day, but enjoy very little fringe benefits and paid holidays, and often endure extreme hardship for the comfort of a few? India, China, and Bangladesh are but some of the countries where on various occasions attention has turned to low wages and poor working conditions. As these countries enjoy rapid economic growth and provide the cheap electronics and brand name clothing to the voracious Western consumers, the media and organized labor often raise their voice against the "sweat shops" in the East. Equally important, now it has also been focused on workers in USA,



where many industries, including fast food, service, grocery stores, agricultural farm, and home health sector, to name a few, which employ workers who toil at minimum wage, or less when there is poor enforcement of minimum wage laws (MWL). Fortunately, there is no cause sacred to politicians and advocates of social justice than minimum wage. Whether you look at the US or Bangladesh, minimum wage legislation is often the hallmark of any political campaign as well as progressive thoughts. More than any other slogan, higher minimum wages can be regarded as an easy one for any aspiring political or leftist leader. So, why do we witness such pushback from various circles? It would not be an exaggeration to assert that there is intense resistance even in rich countries and modern world history is replete with bloody clashes between camps supporting and opposing MWL or increase in minimum wage. Apart from universal franchise, minimum wage increase has always drawn the largest crowd and strongest voices since the industrial revo-

lution began! Minimum wage paid to, or average wage of, ready-made garment workers has recently received global attention in the aftermath of industrial accidents in 2012 and 2013 in Bangladesh, even though the accidents were caused by fire and structural failures, and would have not been addressed by increasing minimum wage. However, the media and public policy has grabbed on to minimum wage legislation because the idea of "sweat shop" in developing countries raises a red flag in the public mind. Resistance to increased wage comes typically from two sources: Employers and economists/policy makers. And they form a strong band. Employers see any increase in minimum as an attack on their profit margin. In this view, it is a zero-sum game. What workers receive is taken out of the pocket of the owners/managers. The origin of this belief is a simplistic microeconomic model currently used in all textbooks. This model has repeatedly been challenged by economists who took the lead from Piero Sraffa.

Another line of defense comes from employers who contend that it is against the interest of labor to raise wages whether in a tight market condition or in situations where underemployment prevails. According to this view, if price of labor goes up, employers can resort to using less labor and more capital per unit. However, this can be questioned. In a country such as Bangladesh or India where capital is expensive and returns on capital high, there is no economic rational to increase capital intensity. It is curious that in the midst of all this, the president of the global retailer H&M Karl-Johan Persson has warned against raising the wage level for garments workers which might adversely affect Bangladesh's competitive position. He said, "Many companies buy into Bangladesh, not just us. The country must also take into account that jobs could be lost to other countries," Persson told Die Welt. "The garment industry provides four million jobs that are paid well in relation to other jobs. Textile workers earn about as much as a teacher," he said. While this line of attack might be well-intentioned, it is certainly very poorly considered. If the supply side of the market, i.e. the retailers, the buying houses or the garment manufacturers foresee any rise in the cost resulting from higher wages, it is incumbent on these parties to determine how the rise is to be mitigated. I will offer my arguments on this matter in a subsequent article. Allow me to mention that empirical evidence on the impact of MWL on labor market in the USA is inconclusive. And, from a global perspective, minimum wage is akin to human rights, and the positive impact on income and welfare easily outweighs the downward effect on the real income of fast-food consumers or customers of ready-made garments.

The writer is an economist, who lives and works in Boston, USA.

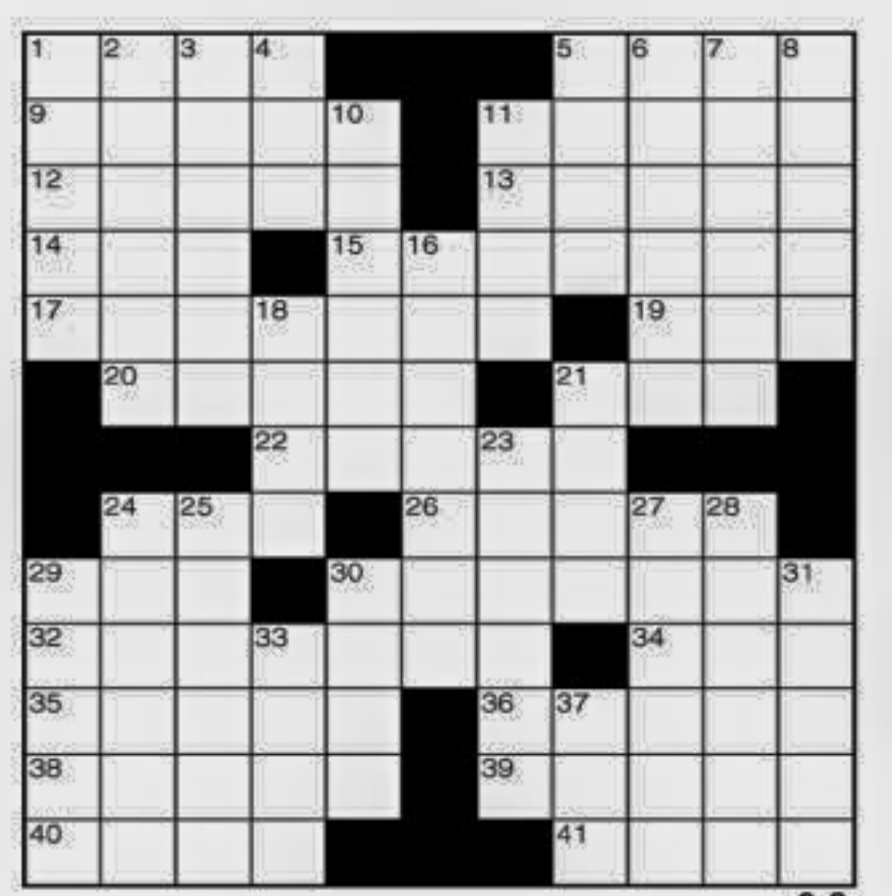
QUOTABLE Quote

When I was young I thought that money was the most important thing in life; now that I am old I know that it is.

Oscar Wilde

CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

- ACROSS
- 1 French friends
 - 5 "Nonsense!"
 - 9 Bar mixer
 - 11 Because
 - 12 Led Zeppelin's "Whole--Love"
 - 13 Hungry, probably
 - 14 Verb for you
 - 15 Purpose of certain machines
 - 17 Like active beacons
 - 19 Rebel general
 - 20 Real bargain
 - 21 Director Craven
 - 22 Tag number
 - 24 Easy victim
 - 26 River to the Caspian Sea
 - 29 Put in stitches
 - 30 Darning
 - 32 Undecided
 - 34 Baseball's Hodges
 - 35 Opera songs
 - 36 Bakery output
 - 38 Some change
 - 39 Light lunch
- 40 Border
- DOWN
- 1 One of the Titans
 - 2 Julianne and Demi
 - 3 Purpose
 - 4 Canine command
 - 5 Tough spot
 - 6 Available for reference
 - 7 Play parts
 - 8 Bushy boundary
 - 10 Canapé topper
 - 11 Crooned
 - 16 Pep up
 - 18 "Ed Wood" star
 - 21 Fuse together
 - 23 Winding dances
 - 24 Be furious
 - 25 Storefront sight
 - 27 Male escort
 - 28 Zoo resident
 - 29 Word separator
 - 30 Overlook
 - 31 Forest clearing
 - 33 Appointment
 - 37 Ewe's mate



Yesterday's answer

MORASS HIFI
ARABIC EDIT
REPARATIONS
SERIF
OPEN MEAT
MILD MIRROR
ALASAD BIO
TENDON SOLO
REEF TARS
CABOT
SEPARATIONS
ARID NARNIA
WAGE SLEEPY

CRYPTOQUOTE

MSH XY IZUIXEUZFJDL UJX
IZUIXKSWRXZFJ JFD URYJI LY MFRR? DSFI
SUOF DSF LUTF FJFTH -- DSFTYDSFZ

Yesterday's Cryptoquote: THE AUTHORITY OF THOSE WHO TEACH IS OFTEN AN OBSTACLE TO THOSE WHO WANT TO LEARN. -- CICERO

BEETLE BAILEY

by Mort Walker



HENRY

by Don Trachte

