



# Saving Private Lion

**HUMOROUSLY YOURS**



NAVEED MAHBUB

SCHOOL education is like flying economy class -- kids packed in class rooms, which are nothing more than converted bedrooms (oh yes, with attached bathrooms), like sardines. Studying with a tutor in 'batches' is flying business class.

But there are the rare parents reprimanding their kids: "Don't you dare go to any private tutor. The tutor will come to you!" Aha! Studying one on one with your very own private tutor is flying first class -- personalised learning on demand with options to rewind ("Sir, can you explain Newton's 2nd Law of Motion, five times over?"), fast forward ("I won't study today...") and pause ("Please wait, let me go and watch the Hindi serial first...").

Exercise? Forget it. Oh wait! The kids do get to run in between tutors -- from the doorstep to the car. To make up for the lost calories in single digits, throw in the extra value meal of fried chicken with extra large fries and the very conscious Diet Coke. I say do away with the TV remote and have the kids get up and change the channel for you. That at least gets them to burn off a few French fries.

The end result? A mass production of book smart, overweight and sedentary stars of tomorrow. Ok, ok, let's not forget the plethora of Golden A's, to the point that Dhaka Airport Customs is on red alert.

I thank the Government for making it compulsory to get primary education. And I thank all the parents for making it compulsory to get private tuition.

It's not that to get into a school all one needs is a pen. It's just that parents don't want to take any chances. After all, it is the coveted Golden A that is the golden key to the golden future, not knowing that it could very well be the shortest journey to a golden handshake.

But life comes without a manual. The ritual of regurgitating spoon-fed answers, not to mention the clever ways to beat the system (ok, euphemism for cheating) gets us to the professional drawing board to be able to list, at best, the ten reasons why a problem can't be solved, rather than finding the eleventh answer that just might. Oh, and English? We have aced it by spending twelve years learning ABOUT the language as opposed to learning THE language. A double dose of sedatives in the race to compete on a global footing. Hence, the need for the expert expat to lead the charge, while we, the perceived lions, remain the champions of mediocrity.

Yet, we eagerly await the next great local hero with the next great answer to the classic interview question, "Tell me about yourself."

Why do I get the feeling that I already know the answer?

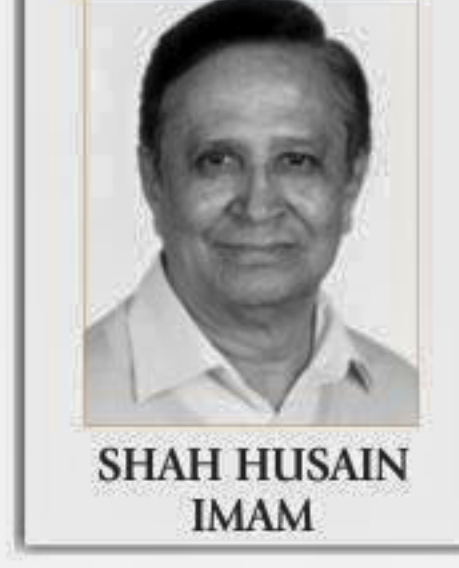
The writer is an engineer & CEO turned comedian (by choice), the host of NTV's The Naveed Mahbub Show and the founder of Naveed's Comedy Club. E-mail: naveed@naveedmahbub.com



# 'Conspiracy' glass ceiling: RMG breakthrough

We can be a strong contender. That, not only in spite of Tazreen and Rana Plaza but because of them, the latter making us wiser and resolute to push ever newer borders.

**PLEASURE IS ALL MINE**



SHAH HUSAIN IMAM

Second largest exporter in the global apparel market are at work to pull us down.

The occasion was the Apparel Summit last week which concluded on a very positive note. Bangladesh's quest for reaching the \$ 50 billion mark in garments export by 2021 received encouragement in a constructive face-off between our garments exporters and manufacturers and the foreign buyers, brands and Accord and Alliance minders.

When the prime minister says something, it is taken seriously. And it should be because she is privy to information and trend analysis that others may not have had access to. Interestingly though, her important remark has gone off the radar sooner than one had expected it would. Perhaps, political overtone was read into her observation at the summit; but some garment sector leaders do nod at her flagging off the concern.

The prime minister has been only discreet not to specify the quarters that have been scheming to damage our reputation. Garment sector leaders tend to hold the view that compliant industries have been targets of

labour disturbances, alleging incitement from the weaker factories.

Also they say that adverse news about the sector gets disseminated abroad from various rights groups and lobbying sets in to highlight the downside of the sector. The blame-game apart, there is little denying the fact that so far the industry has largely thrived on the exploitation of the workers. Now with donor, buyer and foreign consumer pressures being exerted on the employers, remunerative salary of workers comparable to that in other competing countries appears within reach.

After Tazreen and Rana Plaza, improvement of working conditions and safety standards for the workers looks attainable as well.

But the prime minister's pointer should not get lost on us. It merits dispassionate dissection through the lens of reality on the ground. United States is the single largest importer of Bangladesh apparels, a basket worth \$ 5 billion. US buyers, brands and minders at the summit have sounded upbeat in doing business with Bangladesh, so the US is not on the list.

India has a \$ 30 billion worth of internal garment market. Its 45 million-strong middle class can buy our products. The strong points about India are the low transportation cost and accessibility to foreign brands flocking to India to buy garments. We couldn't take advantage of the 46 items listed for duty-free access to India, largely because of non-tariff, regional barriers, not excluding visa restrictions, as some would like to point out. A top garment sector leader chipped in to say that 30 Bangladesh factories having supplied apparels to Indian Lotus brand have not been paid yet. Overall, options are there to be taken through vigorous economic diplomacy

and synergy of interests.

Garment industry has come a long way in forming backward linkages. It is almost self-sufficient in accessories, washing materials, embroidery, dyes and chemicals. In the knit category we import 20%.

It is in forward linkages that we face a big deficit in fashions and designs. That is where the newly inaugurated Apparel Excellence Centre can play a useful role.

One strategic move, as Salam Murshidi, the President of the Exporters Association, suggested to me could be for Japan to set up a composite textile industry to meet the demand for fabrics.

But we need a robust pricing support from the buyers. A dozen shirts sold at \$ 26.50 ten years back. The cost of production has increased at least by 15% to 20% since; yet the same price is being persisted with. We have been promised stepped up orders but along with this should come about a price notch-up.

The China plus is being touted for the competing countries, a prospect that comes about following China going high-tech in garment industries. Bangladesh is not the only candidate, the list including Cambodia, Myanmar and Vietnam. But we can be a strong contender. That, not only in spite of Tazreen and Rana Plaza but because of them, the latter making us wiser and resolute to push ever newer borders.

As for the prime minister, she has to stand the strain of being right all the time, as Peter Ustinov so imaginatively configured.

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# The death of a rainforest

QUAMRUL HAIDER

TO most people the ocean is the personification of depth and immensity. For this reason its pollution seems impossible. But for rivers, it's an entirely different story. While oceans belong to no one, rivers belong to nations and their people.

River water is less dense than ocean water. Oil with a density greater than one gram per cubic centimeter will sink in the river, but float in the ocean. Hence, oil spills in rivers are of great concern because they will threaten not only surface resources, but also a wide range of subsurface aquatic organisms linked in a complex food chain.

Ever since it was announced that a coal-fired power plant will be built within a stone's throw of the Sundarbans, environmental scientists and activists at home and abroad have raised alarms about the disastrous effect it will have on the ecologically sensitive bio diverse rainforest.

Unfortunately, all the warnings fell on deaf ears.

The recent sinking and spillage of more than 350,000 liters of furnace oil in a river in Mongla, 40 km NNE of the Sundarbans, should ring the alarm bell anew. Otherwise, it will be the prologue of the tragic play The Death of a Rainforest, scripted by the energy Czars and directed by the Government of Bangladesh.

What happens to the oil that is spilled in the water? All oils, regardless of types, contain some volatiles. About 25% of the volatiles evaporate within three months, becoming an air pollutant. Nearly 60% of the remaining mass, relatively nonvolatile compounds that are lighter than water float on the surface, where they are broken down over the next few months by bacterial decomposition and photo-oxidation. The remaining 15% is a dense asphaltic substance that sticks together and sinks to the bottom in huge globs. It is these black, tarry lumps that will wash up on the banks



of the Sundarbans.

How will oil spill affect the Sundarbans? Vast stretches of the unique mangrove swamps will be blackened. Mangrove forests are highly sensitive to oil toxicity. They can be further damaged by cleanup activities. Because they grow so slowly, replacing a mangrove tree can take decades. Consequently, animals

that depend on the mangrove environment for their survival will die.

Oil will kill plants and animals in the estuarine zone of the Sundarbans. If the layer of the spill is thick enough, it will smother creatures unable to move out from under it. Especially hard hit will be the barnacles, mussels, crabs and rock weed (a type of algae). Their recovery after an oil spill may take two to ten years. Oil will also wash up on the banks, killing organisms that live there.

Water birds will be affected differently. Swimming and diving birds will become covered with oil, reducing their buoyancy and impairing flight. The insulative value of feathers will be lost and the birds will quickly die of exposure to cold water. As for the water-dwelling mammals, such as dolphins and porpoises, they will have unusual lung damage and adrenal hormone abnormalities.

Although injury to the vegetated above ground habitat is often the most visible impact, the effects of oil spills

on bottom-dwelling or benthic organisms are of paramount concern because of the multiple ecological processes and ecosystem functions that these organisms support. Oil will kill the benthic organisms, such as crabs. However, those benthic organisms that survive may accumulate oil in their tissue, making them inedible. Oil spill will also contaminate the flesh of the commercially valuable fish, thereby endangering the livelihood of the fishermen.

The ocean is large, the nights are dark and detection of oil spill is difficult. The rivers are narrow, they are shallow and any oil dumped into a river, even in the darkness of night, will become visible after sunrise. And if the spills occur frequently in the waters of the southwestern part of Bangladesh, the last act of the play The Death of a Rainforest will be staged sooner than later.

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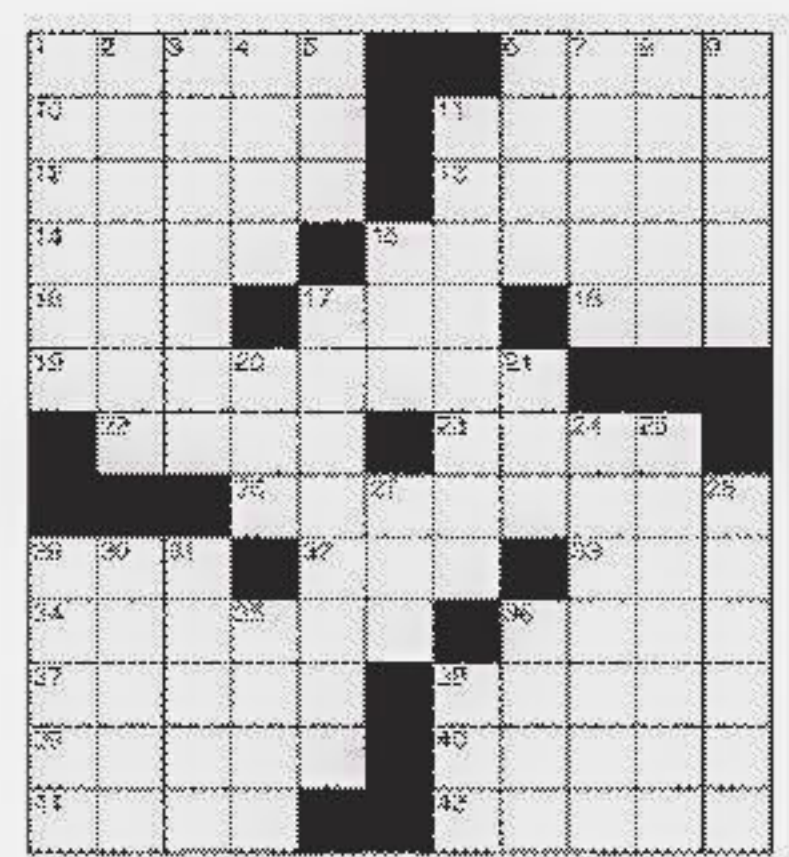
**QUOTABLE Quote**

A life is not important except in the impact it has on other lives.

Jackie Robinson

## CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

- ACROSS**
- Ship poles
  - River of Arizona
  - Like draft beer
  - Saudi Arabia neighbor
  - Overly theatrical
  - City-based
  - Train units
  - Make happy
  - Fall mo.
  - Take in
  - Moines
  - University of Arizona team
  - Somebucks
  - Annoys
  - Youthful indiscretions
  - Holds
  - Diner dessert
  - Tear
  - Recently
  - Tortoise's rival
  - Prolonged attack
  - Sculptor Henry
  - Cornered
  - Invited
  - Jazz club units
- DOWN**
- Poor
  - Kremlin setting
  - Tummy relief
  - Take by surprise
  - Price holders
  - Mole, e.g.
  - Richard of "Chicago"
  - Michael Jackson lyric
  - Renter's paper
  - Queen -lace
  - Christmas season
  - Pod item
  - Like most movies
  - Grass drops
  - Hit show letters
  - Sing-along music
  - Mixed, in a way
  - Tell tales
  - Swift
  - Party givers
  - Burning
  - Winter weather
  - Along time
  - Radiator part
  - "Oh, wow!"



## Yesterday's answer

VEGAS RIGUP  
 AVAST ALONE  
 PASSINGLANE  
 ODE FOE HEW  
 RESULTS ERE  
 NEE RAVE  
 SEMIS BIDES  
 CLOT BOO  
 RED SULTANS  
 AGE PRO POI  
 PASSINGSHOT  
 ENTER NOISE  
 STYLE ANDES

**CRYPTOQUOTE** 10-16  
 WOV DVURUZ IDBVH AGVUZ'W XRM BU  
 WORW FOVZ BW AGVU, BW BU IREVA R  
 HGDV DVUXVIWSEV ZRHV.  
 - ERPDVZIV Q. XVWVD

Yesterday's Cryptoquote: **CRIME IS COMMON. LOGIC IS RARE. THEREFORE IT IS UPON THE LOGIC RATHER THAN UPON THE CRIME THAT YOU SHOULD DWELL.**

-ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE

## BEETLE BAILEY

by Mort Walker



## HENRY

by Don Trachte

