

Record get-aways: Smooth as knife through butter

Whether it is MLM Destiny fraud or the Hallmark scam in state-owned Sonali Bank neither the monies have been recovered nor the major players have been held to account. The Jubok scandal has had its 3 lakh clients still unpaid for the money they had invested. For the love of God, no one knows how long it will take to bring the scams to a satisfactory closure.

PLEASURE IS ALL MINE



SHAH HUSAIN IMAM

WITH crime and corruption incidence high, investigations derailed, arrests gone fugitive as accused with bloated chest roam free, and conviction rate the lowest of low, Bangladesh is a country of get-aways.

This is a sad outcome of systematic de-institutionalisation. Of course, the number of institutions has increased over time. Yet, we are left with little of their integrity after two and a half bouts of military or semi-military rule for 17 years and political vendetta ruining them, ironically since restoration of democracy in 1991.

But as they say, examples are better than precepts, so be it. In lands far and near, abuse of power and corruption by the high and mighty have been subjected to vigorous scrutiny of law. And, they have been convicted without mercy as they were supposed to be setting examples of public conduct from their high positions.

Former Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, once ranked as one of the richest and most powerful men in the world, was convicted of tax fraud. Even though his age exempted him from direct imprisonment he had to serve his sentence by doing unpaid social community work. A new Italian anti-corruption law made the Italian Senate expel and bar him from serving any legislative office for six years.

Nicolas Sarkozy, a former President of France, was criminally charged with corruption in July 2014 by French prosecutors. Unseated by socialist Francois Hollande by a narrow margin of vote, he is trying to bounce

back from formal political retirement. Nearer home in India, Siddhartha Shankar Roy, former Chief Minister of West Bengal (1972-1977), created a stir by demanding unimpeachable probity from his officials. He instituted a judicial inquiry against a secretary to the government who accepted a gift of a record player worth Rs 5,000 only. He was punished.

Fast forward to 2013-14 -- the corrupt have been making it to the front pages of Indian newspapers. Madan Mitra, Minister for Transportation in West Bengal government and Trinamool MPs Srinjoy Bose and Kunal Ghosh were arrested in Saradha Chit Fund scam. They have been facing CBI investigations.

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee went absolutely ballistic against Modi government and in part against media alleging the latter of "turning us into thieves."

Earlier on, Tamil Nadu's reigning Chief Minister Jayalalithaa had been jailed in disproportionate asset case. She has since been set on bail but her plea for advance hearing in the case was rejected by the Supreme Court. In spite of her sky-high popularity (154 people having died out of shock at her arrest) and her replacement O. Panneerselvam determined to keep an empty chair and old title for Jayalalithaa as the chief of the party, law didn't spare her.

This bears a testimony, loud and clear, to state institutions upholding the principle of equality before law without fear or favour. Actually, all the institutions of investigation, enforcement and judiciary worked in concert to deliver justice, perhaps in a more vigorous way because it involved a test of probity of a public leader.

Back to Chit Fund scam. This sent ripples beyond West Bengal into Odisha and Tripura and has a ring of familiarity with Multi Level Marketing (MLM) fraud in Bangladesh. Saradha Scam panned out through a consortium of over 200 private companies purport-

edly running collective investment schemes. The groups collected around \$ 4 to \$ 6 billion from over 1.7 million depositors before it collapsed in early 2013.

Anandabazar Patrika, in a series of reports in September 2014, inter alia, stated "Saradha Group engaged Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) to move money out of India. The JI allegedly used its brokerage from laundering operation to fuel its militant protests against the war crime trials of its founders and destabilise the Awami League government in Bangladesh."

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Meanwhile, ACC has given clean chits to 1,600 people in 8 months, including dead, non-existent persons.

Unsurprisingly, a UNDP study found Bangladesh as a top exporter of illicit money averaging \$ 800 million annually between 1970 and 2010. To cap it up you have the Washington-based research organisation Global Financial Integrity (GFI) finding that illicit capital transfer from Bangladesh tripled to \$ 1.78 billion in 2012.

Is it a Bangladesh of looters, grabbers and plunderers we had fought for? A question that haunts us even 43 years after independence, a supreme irony that, to be sure. With the 'younging' of Bangladesh, hopes kindle to usher in a Bangladesh of our dreams. We are approaching a knowledge baseline shift to be able to recreate a land suffused with equality of opportunities, fair play and rights-based values.

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Crying Over Spilt....

HUMOROUSLY YOURS

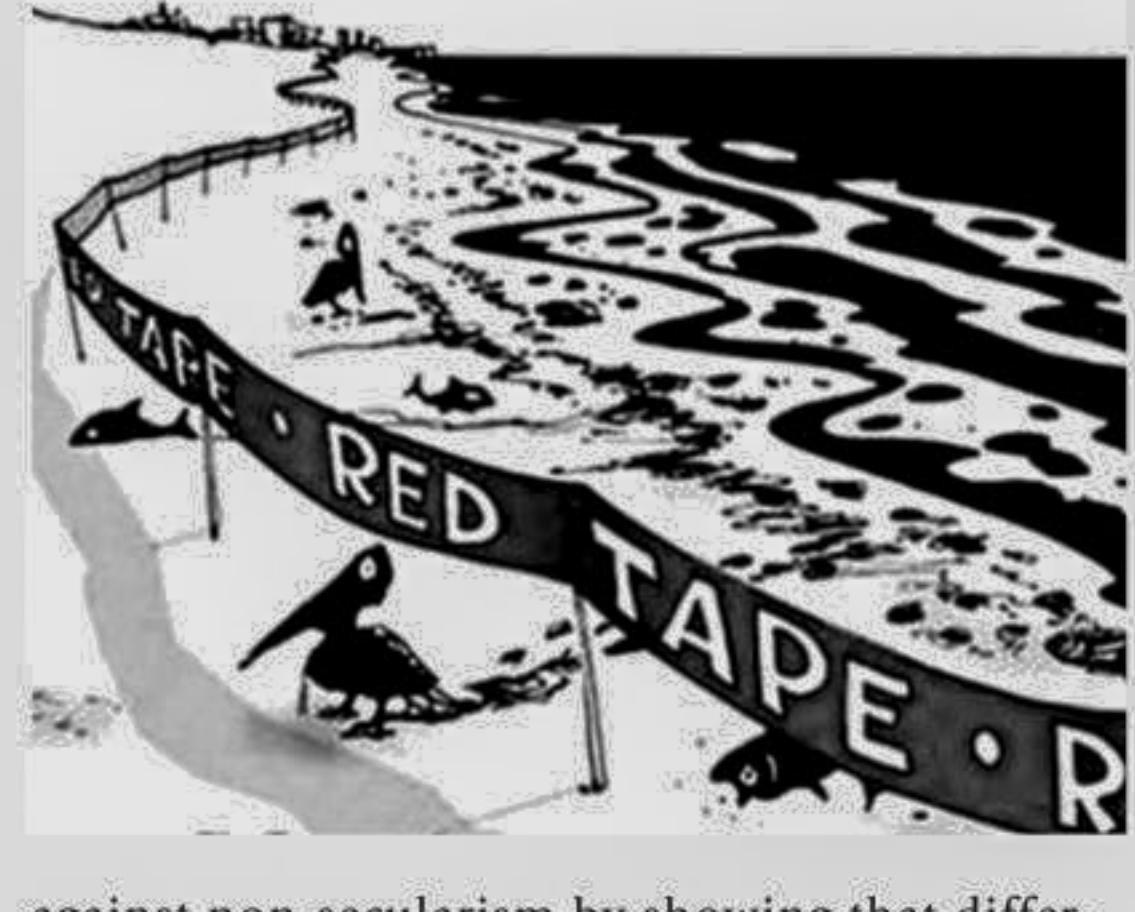


NAVEED MAHBUB

THE ancient boat discovered in Kuakata is left unscathed. Lucky, considering that it is a recreational sport for us to beat to death any strange being coming out of the waters.

So don't fret. *Operation Fingers Crossed* is powered by Taka 200,000 and 200 fishermen to scoop, soak, squeeze, sponge, store and then sell a third of a million liters of excrements from the *Southern Star 7* spread over a square mile area in triple digits. The money is sufficient as it will soon be easier to get the water out of the oil.

Is this a case of nonchalance of the powers-that-be towards the mango population that is now being directed towards the mangrove population? Quite the contrary. The concerned Minister assures us that the impact on the environment will be minimal. He is right. After all, he lives in Dhaka. The spill will not hurt the dolphins. Correct again -- it will in fact increase the dolphin population through increased underwater mating with all that lubrication floating around. That's not all. Now, the Royal Bengal Tiger can remain safe from the poacher by running across the Shela River, Chevron can inexpensively use ducks, crocodiles and dolphins to catch oil (they can also drill for water), we can run cars with water (that is, water from the Shela), the Sundarbans can be labeled as UNESCO's oil rich region, the Shela will now look (and smell) like the Buriganga with both boasting fish with lead, the Sundarbans can now be under BAPEX as opposed to the cash/resource strapped Forest Department while Bangladesh applies for OPEC membership, we now have a statement



against non-secularism by showing that differing elements (furnace oil and bio-diversity) can co-exist and finally, this incident is a brownie point for Rampal that the coal powered plant will not destroy the Sundarbans because after the oil spill, there won't be anything left to destroy.

So, throw away the net as the shrimp will float right to you. One regret, there is no tuna in the Shela, otherwise, we could inexpensively export canned tuna in oil.

The world has surprisingly remained as indifferent (oh, except for 'expert foreign' opinions downplaying the concerns of the tree huggers), while we, despite our meager resources, have not hesitated to lend a helping hand to Maldives by deploying BNS *Samudro Joy*. Oh wait, certain quarters in the US may have taken note of this great hunting trip (that has put more oil on birds than Kentucky Fried Chicken) by none other than the great hunter himself, Dick Cheney, who may be antsy to lobby for sending troops to the now oil rich Sundarbans...

Sur we had four years to avoid this catastrophe. But don't forget our motto: "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." So, for us, there is nothing better to inspire than a disaster. As we form a committee to form a committee to assess the far reaching impacts (who really cares if it's beyond the next elections), the BIWTA is revving up its dredging vessels to head towards Ghasiakhal. Funding? No problem. If anything is needed beyond the already allocated \$ 10 million for the dredging, we can raise the price of furnace oil, the cost of which will not be in Taka, but in bio-diverse life forms.

Meanwhile, sit back and relax. Look how long it's taking to clean up the piled trash in front of your house. And we're now talking about the vast Sundarbans and the Dead Sea, er, Shela... While you chill, fix a lemonade for the big boss. Then again, he might spill it and make the fishermen clean it up...

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The Taliban attack: Message Pakistan and the world can't ignore

ALI RIAZ

M ASS scale violence is sadly not uncommon in Pakistan, and the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) has shown few scruples in attacking civilians in the past, yet the massacre of school children in Peshawar on Tuesday is unprecedented by all measures. The attack on a church in September this year, which cost 80 lives, and that on a Shia shrine a year earlier costing 120 lives were ghastly, but they pale in comparison to what happened on Tuesday at a school campus. Simply stated, planning, coordinating and implementing, in cold blood, an attack on school children to kill as many possible was shocking even by the TTP's dreadful standards.

That the attack was conducted on the doorstep of an army cantonment and on the children of mostly army personnel was meant to send a clear message to the Pakistani military. The TTP spokesperson not only accepted the responsibility for the heinous act but justified sending the suicide squad saying that the attack was mounted to avenge a military campaign that had killed Taliban families. "We want them to feel the pain," he said. This audacious statement reflects both the strength and the desperation of the TTP.

For the past few months the military had been conducting a massive operation against the Taliban in North Waziristan. The military had claimed success in their operation as the number of attacks by Taliban declined. But this spectacular attack demonstrates that the military operation has not succeeded in destroying the TTP's capacity. The attack also reveals the desperation of the Taliban leadership. Taliban fighters seem to be on the back

foot in a region where they previously operated with ease but now their space has shrunk; therefore they wanted to take the fight to the military's doorstep hoping that it will provide them some breathing space in their own terrain.

Whatever thought lay behind the calculation, this attack will help the TTP very little. If the TTP had expected the retaliation to earn them some support among the Pakistani people, they are bound to be wrong. No amount of twisted justification will be enough to convince anyone that killing innocent children in their school can be supported. Even the arguments that the Pakistani army has been killing children in Waziristan for years, particularly since their latest military operation, or that the US drone attacks had resulted in the deaths of children, will not hold water in this instance. Some might attempt to highlight the class difference between poverty stricken Waziristan and the well-to-do cantonment neighbourhood and question whether the lives of children of the elites are more precious than those of the poor. However, morally speaking, deliberately targeting children and sending a suicide squad to kill them cannot be condoned by any sensible person, whatever their political persuasion. One can recall the 2004 siege of a Russian school in Beslan by Chechens, in which more than 300 people died. That did not help the perpetrators earn sympathy or support.

This massacre should serve as a turning point for Pakistani politics. There was no dearth of condemnation from Pakistani politicians since the incident began to unfold. From the Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (Pakistan Justice Movement) leader Imran Khan, all have described the attack as "barbarism." But they cannot shirk some responsibilities for the situation. One can hardly disregard

the fact that the lack of consensus among them as to how to address the Taliban as a militant force on the one hand and the grievances that help Taliban to fester on the other have contributed to, if not engendered, the situation.

On previous occasions, in moments like these, analysts and observers have reminded the political leadership of their

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responsibilities, but all attempts had fallen on deaf ears. Will this be another of those moments? It could well be different, because this strike was at the very heart of the military establishment, not only institutionally, but personally. It won't be surprising if the military now puts pressure on the civilian political leadership to provide the security apparatus with carte blanche. If the military takes that route,

this will put a serious strain on the fragile democratic institution. The onus, therefore, is on the civilian government to ensure that the military toes the line.

The army, despite its recent efforts to tame the Taliban, cannot claim that its leadership shouldn't bear any responsibility. For decades, reports suggested a nexus between the military, particularly its intelligence agency ISI, and the Taliban. History aside, there were recent incidents which indicated a relationship between them. Besides, it is not only about the nexus between the Taliban and military establishment, but the policy of cultivating and using militant groups like Jeish-e-Muhammad, Sipah-e-Sahaba as 'strategic assets' which needs to be scrapped altogether. It is time that the Pakistani military make it clear what they plan to do in future. If this event does not make them rethink, nothing will. In any case, this incident will put the various Pakistani institutions to the test.

Although the TTP spokesperson didn't say so, it's not difficult to realise that another factor might have influenced the choice of the target. In the past week, Malala Yusufzai received her Nobel Peace Prize at Stockholm. It was a reminder to the world that Malala survived a Taliban attack and that she brings a message of hope to children around the world, particularly those who are facing a similar situation. The continued support for Malala, or as one of my journalist friends has termed it, 'the global infatuation' with Malala, has exasperated the Taliban more than anything else. This was the response of the Taliban, an open challenge to the world. I don't think the world can ignore this message.

The writer is Professor and Chair of the Department of Politics and Government at Illinois State University, USA.

CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

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- 13 Movable illuminators
- 15 Little rascal
- 16 Descartes' conclusion
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- 20 Diamond unit
- 24 Virgil work
- 25 Clad
- 26 Twin of Artemis
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- 29 "Yes indeed!"
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- 38 Rollaway bed
- 39 Obtained

CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

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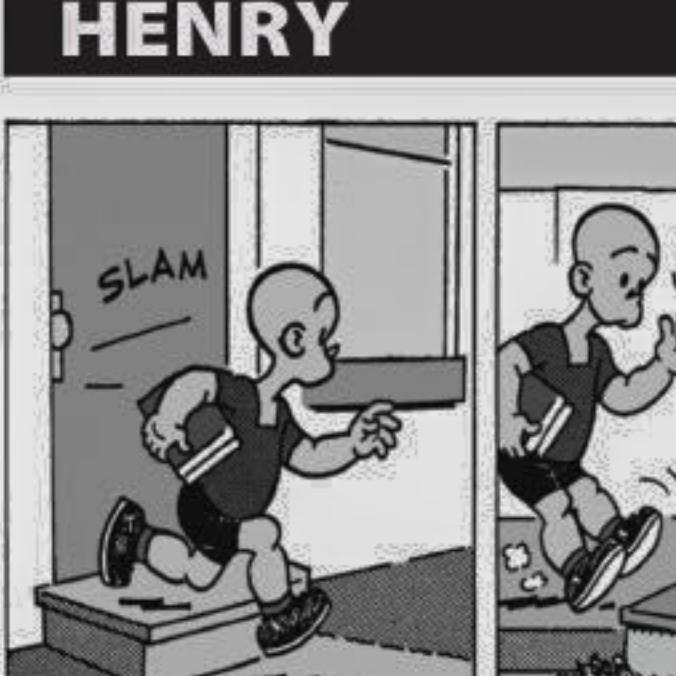
Yesterday's answer

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BEETLE BAILEY



HENRY



by Mort Walker

