

# WISH LIST FOR 2015

## Any rainbow in prospect?

PLEASURE IS ALL MINE



SHAH HUSAIN IMAM

It is a pity not to have a political wish list for 2015, given that Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia have graduated into fully-fledged implacable political foes. But politics is such a generic term that you may not also readily reel off a torrent of expectations in some other important areas, too. They are in fact an intertwined

cast in a time-warp refusing to come unstuck from it. The accolade of being politically conscious may have several meanings: One, people have a passion for election, enthusiastically exercising the right to franchise whenever the opportunity presents itself. Although after election they are forgotten, even so; they keep up with their political interest; two, the consciousness translates into debating and forming public opinion on an issue touching their lives as soon as it emerges; three, in ideal circumstances, it is elevated as 'eternal vigilance being the price of liberty'; and last but not least, discontents have interminably triggered awesome majesty of the people irrespective of party affiliations.

When politics turns into business its algorithm comes into play. Profits multiply and are shared by the actors while the losses are for the people to stomach. In the face of furious competing interests over the last six years political violence claimed 908 lives including 171 AL workers killed by their own men; 29 public representatives murdered and 34 BNP men fell prey to internal feuding. The statistics have been gleaned from a prominent Bangla daily.

Despite democratic deficits, in the last one year, Bangladesh has got elected in 14 international fora, most important of which have been the membership of the highest human rights council in the United Nations, chairmanship of Commonwealth Inter-parliamentary Association and the presidency of Inter-parliamentary Union. In the international arena what matters is a civilian status quo currently ruling the roost.

State Minister for Foreign Affairs Md. Shahriar Alam was quoted as saying in a prominent Bangla daily that two months after January 5th election foreign governments in their formal discussions with Bangladesh counterparts kept from raising the issue of

mid-term polls. The chief of the EU's South Asian committee Mr. Jean Lambert told the press in Dhaka on December 10 that they were not asking for fresh election. The issue requires political resolution by the major parties of the country, he suggested. They look to the people of Bangladesh as the ultimate arbiter in the matter, an obvious thing to say if you are not being meddling.

Khaleda Zia's 7-point demand before the government centered around staging an all-inclusive fresh election through a dialogue as soon as possible or face a heightened movement. It is a wordy statement which in essence is more of the same we have known for last one year.

The only difference one notes is her ambitious expectation of an approaching mid-term election; her audience is clearly wider and her demand rather detailed. She has spoken of strengthening the Election Commission, releasing political prisoners and reopening all print and electronic outlets shutdown during Awami League rule -- all smacking of a nearing election!

She is in her elements when she says: "We have given them one year's time (as if they were willingly done so!); now we want election."

To this AL Publicity and Public Affairs Secretary Hasan Mahamud emphatically pointed to 2019 for the election, the copy-book AL reaction making no bones about its long look at power.

The AL leader, however, said: "Talks could be held to take the country forward." This complementary gift was contingent on the BNP severing its links with 'war criminals and militants.'

But Alexander Pope's words reverberate: "Hope springs eternal in the human breast." So we keep hoping that for advancing the country AL will engage the BNP after all. When and how is the million dollar question.

The writer is Associate Editor, The Daily Star. E-mail: Husain.imam@thedailystar.net

# Comfortably Numb

HUMOROUSLY YOURS



NAVEED MAHBUB

THE Director General of BSF defends border shootings as necessities without which the lives of its personnel are endangered. The indomitable BSF is scared of a lone Felani based on its fear of the girl power of Bangladesh. After all, 2 have successfully ruled 160 million ungrateful lot for over two decades.

So, it seems that BSF will continue its policy of shoot to kill, while we continue our policy of root for good-

will. Perhaps the DG is emboldened on the soil of Bangladesh by a string of high power statements, made on this very soil, based on perfectly circular logic with the head jammed up the behind. The World Bank loan is canceled and we get an instant patriot. Food prices shoot up and we are asked to go on a diet. The Hallmark scam redefines the term 'insignificant' (no it's not rubbish). The Rana Plaza disaster makes us hear about *nara chara*, aka, not to shake the pillars. The Sundarbans oil spill introduces the Oil Bengal Tiger. Oh, and let's not forget hippos in the Kaptai Lake.

You see, humans are deuterostomes -- when they develop in the womb, the rectal orifice forms before any other openings. Some of us just never develop beyond this stage while some become everything but deuterostomes -- they go through life being full of excrements.

And so, when a crisis hits, we are head over heels, literally, and let the mouth furthest from the ground do all the talking. We focus on whether a well is 273 feet or 400 or 600 feet deep while forgetting that even 4 feet is lethal for a 2 feet tall child. And who moved (pilfered) the lid, if there was one there at all? Oh that is no issue -- we are a nation used to open manholes, able to pull our murky selves out during our frequent dives in. Say what? That applies to adults? Oh, a child learns fast.

Our remedial actions, if any at all, are postpaid. It is a game of Russian Roulette to see how long it takes for disaster to strike. Score card: 4 years after allowing commercial vessels to navigate through the Sundarbans and we get an oil spill. Not bad. 2 years after keeping a 400 foot well open and a 4 year old



child falls in. Cracks develop at Rana Plaza... It may take years and a tragedy to put a lid on a deep hole, but we efficiently complete a rescue operation in less than 24 hours by finding nothing with a camera traversing not the entire length of a shaft. Hey, remember the guy looking for his lost wallet under the lamp post, not because he lost it there, but just because there is light there? So, we promptly lend a shoulder for the distraught father to cry on while Thesaurus updates its repository for the term 'good intention'.

Need an official statement to conclude an official operation, don't we. It is rightfully the minister, the mini-star of the moment, who makes his ministerial statement that there is no one inside the shaft, thus presenting us with a supernova, i.e., imploding star.

As the bags are packed, a CCTV camera technician, a 9th grader, an engineering student, a trader and a supplier, in other words nobodies, pull Jihad out of the well in 15 minutes with their own crude contraption. The Sundarbans spill required high tech but low tech was used, the Jihad tragedy required low tech, but high tech was used.

By providing a quick answer to a 'hoax', the local heroes prove once again that "Necessity is the mother of invention". Till then, it was "Necessity is the grandmother of inaction".

Thank God Jihad was eventually found, albeit in a lifeless form, otherwise wonder what other well intended consolation the father would have been showered with.

The tragic end of Jihad hopefully prompts the sealing of all open holes. While we're at it, let's include closing the facial ones which spew out ludicrous gibberish, each worthy of getting the 'Lifetime Pain in the Behind Award'...

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

Beldrich Moldan, a Czech minister, who said: "As a European you may like the US or may not like the US but you know it is the future." From this statement one can assume that the West largely depends on its 'guardian' partner. Is it not ironical for Americans to note that "a strong correlation between US involvement in international situations and an increase in terrorist activities against US," while Europe sits pretty as it is rarely targeted by "hostile elements." The West's economic power is sliding, which is eroding their political power. The West is already anxious about the sharp growth of Asian economies and apprehends that there it may soon find its glaze dulling if big Asian countries support each other by utilising their surplus resources for their mutual benefit.

Kishore Mahbubani feels that "for two centuries the Asians from Tehran to Tokyo and from Mumbai to Shanghai, have been bystander's in world history, reacting defencelessly to the surges in Western commerce, thought and power." That era, he thinks, is over. Asia is returning to the centre stage it occupied for eighteen centuries before the rise of the West. He further says that Asians have absorbed and understood Western best practices in many areas from free market economy to the embracing of innovative science and technology, meritocracy and the rule of law.

I think the west must come to terms with emerging reality by recognising the incremental Asian capability to dash the western desire to maintain its preponderance in world economy and its hold in technological innovations. Asian nations have successfully developed technology to enrich uranium, utilise fossil fuel and also to overcome environmental vagaries. Poor man's economy (micro-credit), disaster management and incredible development in outsourcing microchip expertise and technology are the outstanding sinews of Asian's rise to the current height. Asians must realise that the West will soon lose its prowess and therefore should expressly close ranks with the neighbours for mutual benefit.

The West should rest assured in the analysis of Mahbubani that Asia does not dominate but replicate. He suggests the West should gracefully share power with Asia by giving up automatic domination of global institutions like IMF and World Bank. Let UNSC not be dominated by the declining West through curbing its role as the world's arbiter.

The author is a former Director General of BISS, Dhaka.

# Asian giants are emerging

Z.A. KHAN

PEOPLE allege that America is destroying peace in the garb of making peace. It wants to continue to be the leader of the world and keep dividing nations by hook or by crook. That is why people say that America's dream is becoming a 'global nightmare'. The West led by America "is using international institutions, military power and economic resources to run the world in ways that will maintain their predominance, protect their interest and promote their economic and political values."

It is surprising to note how Democrats approve of Republican hawkish agenda that promotes its neo-conservative notion of absolute American supremacy and full dominance. They did not even oppose Bush's policy of 'pre-emptive strike' or 'regime change'.

In consequence, the world had to choose between war affirming rhetoric of the Democrats and war

mongering declaration of the neo-conservative Republicans. That is probably why Gore remarked that "America is ruled by one oligarchy with two names, Republicans and Democrats."

Once the European economy got a push from USA through Marshal Plan after World War II, it constructed a security umbrella christened North Atlantic Alliance Organization (Nato). They could hardly exert influence unless approved by the US as they depended heavily on America for utilising their vast resources.

The West knew about the availability of 'golden liquid' or fossil fuel in the Middle East, which was sure to become the major source of energy as coal was getting dearer. So they pitted most of the oil rich tribal Bedouins in a fratricidal war by running with the hare and hunting with the hound. Thus, they continued to maintain control over the sea lane that linked the oil rich Arab nations with the industrialised West. All attempts by the Arab nations to assert their freedom were subverted either by waging war with help of the power hungry monarchical elites or by toppling the 'detractors' by military coup-de-tat. Iraq, Egypt, Syria are a few examples.

The West led by USA intervened in Iraq and Afghanistan in the defense of justice out there. Alliance partners had to release billions of dollars to foot the war expenditure. Consequently, the American economy is feeling the strain and facing the wrath of the economically disadvantaged nations for their sliding economy.

I think it is the right time for the West to rethink about their conduct 'in defense of freedom overseas.' There are numerous global hotspots where the policy of West led by USA is controversial enough to feed the kind of rage that found vengeful expression at different times. One may ask how does the policy of 'pre-emptive first strike' correspond to the values of democracy, or do they practice what they preach? Are these actions a harbinger of the West's decline?

Not many across the world think these days as did

The sense of pity for not holding up a political wish card, however, is mixed with an irony. When you have PEW, a famous US-based research organisation, dubbing Bangladeshis as the 'politically most conscious people in Asia,' you take it as a well-earned compliment. It gives a heart-ache though, that in spite of the political consciousness of the people, politics is cast in a time-warp refusing to come unstuck from it.



**QUOTABLE Quote**

Opportunities are never lost; someone will take the one you miss.

Author Unknown

**CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph**

ACROSS  
 1 Lion sound  
 5 Free throw sound  
 10 Land in the sea  
 12 Aunt, in Arles  
 13 Soothing lotion  
 14 Crowd scene actor  
 15 Sense of self  
 16 Annual celebration  
 18 "Cool Hand Luke" star  
 20 "Scram!"  
 21 "No ifs, --, or buts"  
 23 USN rank  
 24 Piece of data  
 26 Makes a mistake  
 28 Milk producer  
 29 Fiji's capital  
 31 Tick off  
 32 Gravity studier  
 36 "Twilight" sequel  
 39 -- de la Cite  
 40 Online messages  
 41 Commerce  
 43 Battle site of 1914  
 44 Added to the payroll  
 45 Peruvian peaks  
 46 Quite a few

DOWN  
 1 Out of bed  
 2 River of Missouri  
 3 Permit  
 4 Gun, as a motor  
 5 Hearty dish  
 6 Like paraffin  
 7 Counting number  
 8 Tries hard  
 9 Trick-taking game  
 11 Lease signers  
 17 Conclusion  
 19 Bub  
 22 Inning with a stretch  
 24 Plant boss  
 25 Clumsy  
 27 Uncooked  
 28 Movies  
 30 One, for Juan  
 33 Small crown  
 34 Bygone  
 35 Impoverished  
 37 Ore source  
 38 Flamenco cries  
 42 Basketball net holder

**Yesterday's answer**

10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39
40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49

**CRYPTOQUOTE** 11-4

ONHP LNNTQ YQP AN LP AYOAPC, NAKPQO AN LP ORYSSNRPC, YIC ONHP DPRAN LP MKRPRC YIC CBVPOAPC. - DQYIMBO LYMNI

**Yesterday's CRYPTOQUOTE:** ONE OF THE ATTRACTIVE THINGS ABOUT FLOWERS IS THEIR BEAUTIFUL RESERVE. - HENRY DAVID THOREAU

**BEETLE BAILEY** by Mort Walker

**HENRY** by Don Trachte

**YESTERDAY'S CRYPTOQUOTE:** ONE OF THE ATTRACTIVE THINGS ABOUT FLOWERS IS THEIR BEAUTIFUL RESERVE. - HENRY DAVID THOREAU

**BEETLE BAILEY** by Mort Walker