

# Hasina and Khaleda needn't be eyeball-to-eyeball

## PLEASURE IS ALL MINE

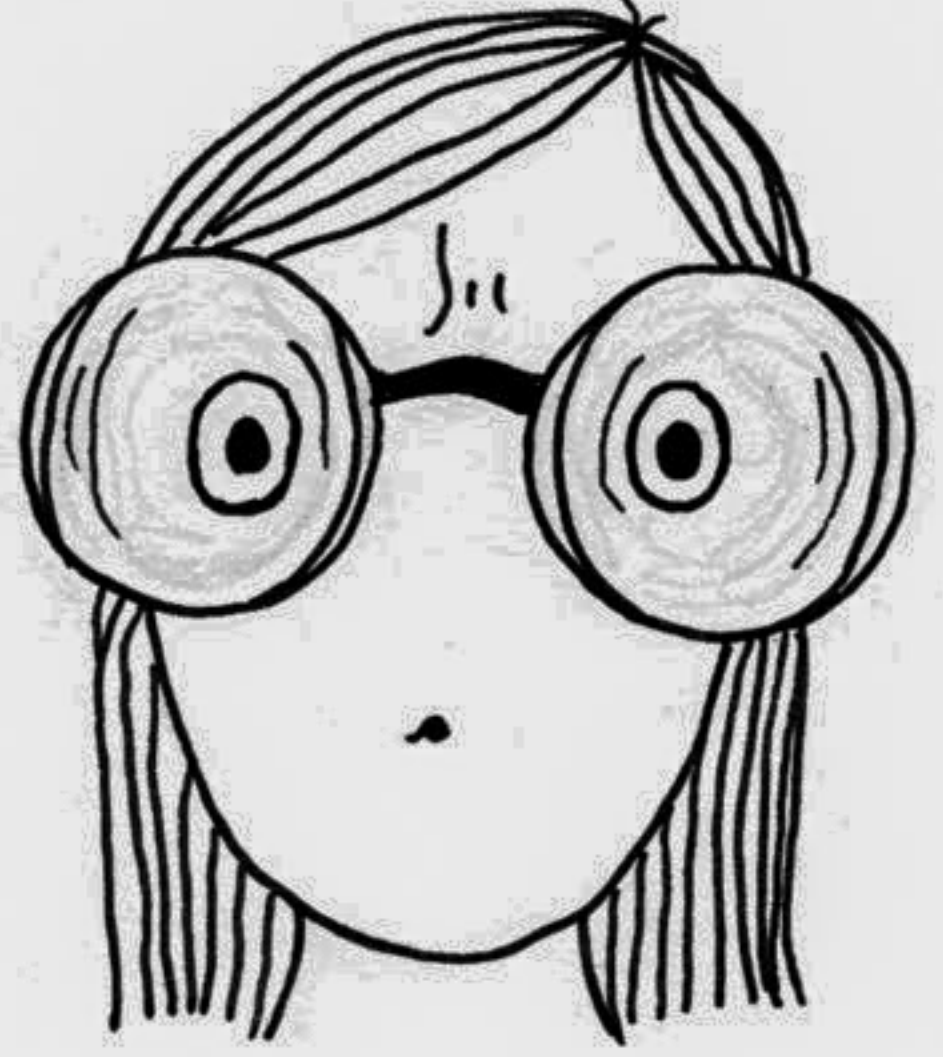


SHAH HUSAIN IMAM

**H**ASINA and Khaleda have the briefest of attention spans and the shortest of patience thresholds between them. They have endless complaints against each other and scores to settle, the former perhaps more than the latter, if you

greatly influenced the French Revolution obviously needs a recap from the memory lane. This Genevan philosopher considered the will of the people as the basis of good and benevolent governance. An anecdote unfolds an interesting insight: When a goldmine was discovered in Athens the citizens at first wanted to share the wealth among themselves. Soon enough they would revise the decision. They opted for using the new-found resource to build up their navy to defend themselves against Sparta. That then became the general will to act on, for the long-term good of the people.

Rousseau's General Will finds resonance in



our Constitution which embodies the noble principle that the ownership of the Republic vests in the people. But successive governments in effect, if not professedly, have regarded people as a springboard to go to power and be not answerable to them in any meaningful way, except during the next election. We have even dropped the provision for referendum from the constitution which has proved patently useful in other countries to settle intractable differences between contesting parties. In our country, when available, it was only opaquely used in 'yes' or 'no' votes. Was that any reason to strike out that good provision from the statute book?

unroll some of the dark layers of history. To a realist, initiating a national dialogue may sound like a mission impossible, especially at this juncture. But what are talks for if not to pullback from a deepening crisis by the skin of our teeth, if necessary. Well, a cynic has to revise his or her opinion and so must the major players on both sides of the political divide to mull over some form of interaction. And this is precisely why: The first anniversary of the January 5 election has unveiled the costs of a pyrrhic victory twice over, the BNP-led alliance implementing a most violent blockade.

To think of four more anniversaries to come does send chills down the spines of people. For, in our culture of observing a day as bright and dark simultaneously by the AL and BNP, repetition is a given. Thus, it is compelling for the government to apply a brake on the prospect of continuity of annual celebration or denunciation of an election that couldn't be a hallmark of our democratic history anyway.

Actually, it hurts to think that we have proven a famous Mao Tse-Tung quote wrong. For, he had said: "Politics is a war without bloodshed (a dream in Bangladesh!), while war is politics with bloodshed."

When every other thing fails, we turn to philosophy -- the mother of all knowledge -- for light and guidance through an engulfing darkness.

Rousseau's General Will philosophy that

Once elected, we turn our back to the precious directive of popular ownership in the Constitution. Instead, we have been practicing politics as 'the art preventing people from taking part in affairs that properly concern them (Paul Valéry).'

There is a phenomenon observed in human beings called target fixation. In this, an individual becomes so focused on an observed object that the awareness of hazards or obstacles diminishes. The term target fixation was used in World War II fighter bomber pilot training to describe pilots flying into targets during a strafing or bombing mission. Somehow our politicians, like marksmen, are so focused on some of their targeted opponents that they collide with them with words they should not have uttered in the first place.

They prattle in rapid-fire fashion just like grains of paddy or popcorns 'bursting open noisily while being fried.'

Our dynastic-driven political parties, like 17th century Bourbon dynasty, in France, 'Neither forgets nor learns anything.'

We have turned the expression 'rhetoric' into a bad word or, at best, an empty cliché. Its origins, though, were as aristocratic intellectually as they were dignified. Aristotle considered rhetoric as a counterpart of both logic and politics and called it, 'The faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion.' To the great philosopher, audience appeal is a driver of persuasive method. In his scheme of things logos, pathos and ethos are the vital components of persuasion. Logos means rational principle 'that governs universal reason incarnate.' Pathos stands for pity, compassion and a feel for victimhood; and ethos is the moral force behind a persuasive approach.

Baby steps will not simply do, we have to make strides politically with an open mind breaking out of the trapdoor. The flagship of leadership rides the rough seas with the gaze fixed at the benign target of prosperity with security. The largesse for future Bangladesh awaits the patriotic rejuvenation of the youth to be delivered.

The writer is Associate Editor, The Daily Star.

# Democracy, elections and misuse of trust



MANZOOR HASAN, OBE

**O**VER the last few days my thoughts have kept wandering back to George Orwell's 1984. I took this opportunity to refresh my memory of this classic dystopian novel. 1984 is about totalitarianism, which tries to control every aspect of people's lives, including people's thought process and what they believe, even privately. 1984 is set in the late 1940s, but the totalitarianism that Orwell describes is based on the experience of Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. 1984 is a description of England under such totalitarianism -- a fictional situation. But 1984 is timeless because such a fictional scenario has often become the reality in many countries in the immediate past.

This brings me to the present and Bangladesh. Bangladesh is neither Nazi Germany nor Soviet Russia. It won't be unfair to describe Bangladesh as a multi-party democracy with free media and thriving civil society, albeit with some serious imperfections. But the recent political behaviour and language in Bangladesh have been irrevocably transformed since the general elections of January 5, 2014. The first anniversary 'celebration' and 'protest' by two main political parties have revealed the 1984 characteristics of our own political landscape.

In 1984 we come across slogans such as War is Peace, Freedom is Slavery and Ignorance is Strength. In Bangladesh today the equivalent slogans could be Abstention is Democracy, Obsequiousness is Friendship, Leader-worship is Freethinking. January 5 is either a 'Democracy Killing Day' or a 'Democracy Preservation Day.' A political leader is either being provided 'safety' as requested or being 'confined' against wishes. In George Orwell's 1984 slogans were important because the Party used them as a technique to break down the psychological independence of its subjects. The idea is that 'who controls the past controls the future. Who controls the present controls the past.'

The dominant narratives around the 2014 elections, pre- and post- January 5, are worth recalling from the perspective of both the major political parties in Bangladesh. If politicians generally keep repeating certain 'mantras' then they have complete political power over the present. So there will be a time when politicians will announce that 'two and two make five, and we, the citizens, have to believe it.' As Winston, the main character of 1984, thinks after he has been tortured in the Ministry of Love: "For, after all, how do we know that two and two make four? He sits at the Chestnut Tree Café and traces 2 + 2 = 5 in the dust on his table."

The January 5 elections and its aftermath has badly whittled away the foundational value of any society, that is, trust. The responsibility for the present disturbing state of affair rests with all of us, albeit

the lion's share must fall on the shoulders of the politicians as they have been specifically mandated to govern the country. There is a general feeling and growing but clear perception that politicians are not to be trusted. When it comes to 'trust' as an essential foundational value, it can be argued that there is a worldwide crisis. Trust is a declining commodity across the world, and democratic institutions don't necessarily enhance trust, and a case in point is the US. Although the US has had democratic institutions for many decades, interpersonal trust among Americans has declined over the last forty years. This trend is probably true of other industrialised countries, bar certain exceptions. But what is incontrovertible is the fact that this trust deficit is rather acute in the developing countries and the present-day Bangladesh is an appropriate and stark specimen.

So how do we explain the relationship between trust and other factors? Literature suggests certain pointers: the people of rich societies show higher levels of interpersonal trust than the public of poorer ones. Certain conditions encourage distrust, for example, poverty, poor education and quality of institutions. Under condition of extreme poverty, the loss incurred from misplaced trust can be fatal. Devoid of cooperation the main victim is 'trust.' Neither is education per se a driver for trust. "A society's level of interpersonal trust seems to reflect its entire historical heritage, of which her political institutions are only one component" (Warren, Mark E., 1999. Democracy & Trust, Cambridge University Press). The same author highlights two central factors that help to stabilise democracy: a culture of trust and mass legitimacy.

The former is the emergence of the 'loyal opposition.' Instead of seeing the opposition as traitors they need to be seen as trusted players, who will follow the rules of the democratic game. Mass legitimacy or mass support is a critical factor, especially during times of crisis. Democracy will only survive and thrive if it takes root among the public, as democratisation means trusting the public.

Bangladesh is presently very low on trust, which may ultimately give rise to totalitarianism. But as Orwell's predictions did not materialise, and democracy ultimately won in Europe with the fall of the Berlin Wall and disintegration of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, Bangladesh will hopefully continue to consolidate its nascent democratic process. Nevertheless, 1984 is a stark reminder that authoritarian governments can easily take hold by way of psychology of power and that manipulation of language and history can be used as mechanisms of control. Citizens will have to be ever so vigilant or else, in the language of 1984, 'Big Brother [will be] Watching You.'

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# Sony and Clyde

**N**ORTH Korean leader Kim Jong Il makes his son, Kim Jong Un, 28, a 4 star general.

"Son, I would have made you a Field Marshal, but you were out late last night with friends and crashed my car!"

"Daddy! Did I break YOUR father's car? I broke MY father's car. Not fair."

But daddy is not someone to spoil the kid. So, Kim Jong Un makes history, from having being commissioned in the North Korean Army when he was conceived.

Kim hits Facebook: "Yay! I am the President...forever!" The post gets 'Likes' by 130% of the North Korean population. This sets off a series of other high profile posts:

Obama writes: "@Kim, oh yeah? I am the President...again!" -- 'Likes' by 51.3% of US voters.

Not to be outdone, Pakistan's Raja Parvaiz Ashraf goes: "My name is not Raja for nothing..." -- Zero 'Likes'. The post is 'Report'-ed by Asif Zardari.

Chinese Premier Xi Jinping: "Guess Hu's out and I am Jinping in! Woo hoo!" -- 'Likes' by 11,000 Chinese delegates.

Myanmar's Thein Sein, also to prove Myanmar's coming of the digital age (accessing Facebook through dial-up...): "I just let Aung San Suu Kyi go out to buy some groceries and the West thinks I am bringing in democracy, ha, ha!" -- 'Likes' by Xi Jinping and Kim Jong Un.

Egypt's Sisi (with a thick accent): "Oh

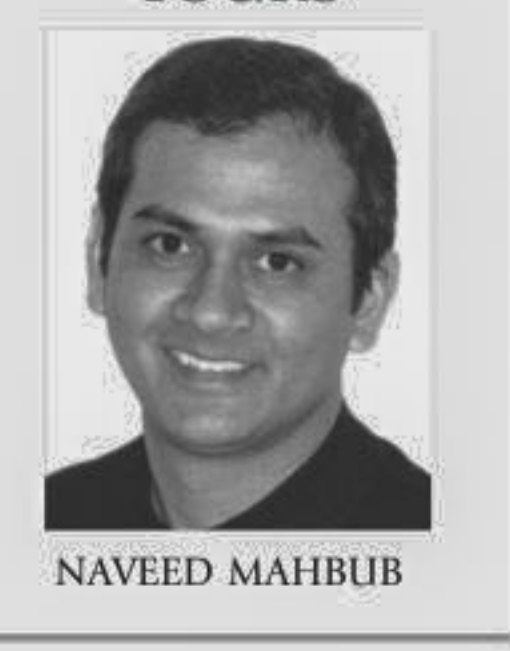
brother -- no, no, not that brother (HOOD)!! Oh, man, forget it" -- Followed by mass 'Unfollow'-ing from the Brotherhood.

Wait. Too much clutter here. Pales Kim Jong Un into insignificance. So, he wastes no time to up the ante against the South. But I thought he's the young, cool, tech savvy guy who'd warm up to the South. What's his gripe? Did Seoul not accept his Facebook friend request ('Recommend'-ed by Fidel Castro)? Or is it that all he wants is a Samsung Galaxy Tab?

And then Hollywood pokes the hornet's nest with *The Interview*, a comedy movie from Sony Pictures about an attempt to assassinate Kim. What follows is a massive cyber attack on Sony, bringing everything to an electronic standstill. The usual suspect, North Korea. But Pyongyang denies. After all, the Sony data is in English and Pyongyang never went to S@ifurs...

Release date of the movie in the US is Christmas Day, 2014. Now, the best thing about Christmas in the US is waiting to see what Christmas movie North Korea is going to allow the US public to watch. As for the hackers, they successfully

## HUMOROUSLY YOURS



NAVEED MAHUB

accomplish getting everyone to want to watch *The Interview* even if it is non-stop torture till the end. Perhaps a cue from Ayatollah Khomeini who helped boost the sales of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*.

In a land far, far away, takes place a disparate event that would have been fairly BAU (Bombs As Usual). But, here's another Streisand Effect -- sand trucks and blockades galore, enough to cause ripples to mark the one year

anniversary of the Birth of Democracy, or Death of Democracy, depending on whom you ask, played out in front of a nationwide captivated (yeah, pun...) audience.

Oh well, one can't really expect a large dose of freedom. So, it is best to continue to engage in self-censorship because we don't want to offend the sensibilities of anyone whose sensibilities probably need to be offended. After all, the question, "How's life in Bangladesh?" can only come with this answer:

"Can't complain, literally..."

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

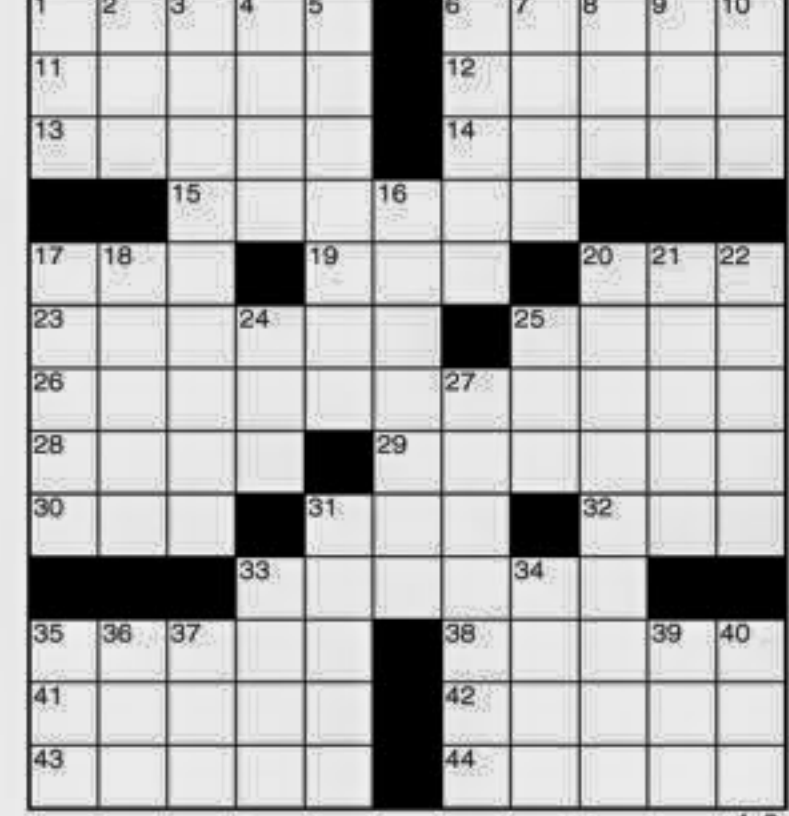
## QUOTABLE Quote

*Pull the string, and it will follow wherever you wish. Push it, and it will go nowhere at all.*

Dwight D. Eisenhower

## CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

- ACROSS**
- Spa features
  - Gives a hoot
  - Kind of committee
  - Less than right
  - Statue subject
  - Pick up the tab
  - Ritzy home
  - 'The Bells' writer
  - Essay
  - Keg need
  - Like lemon juice
  - "Dear me!"
  - Bridge bid
  - Cornfield pest
  - Way out
  - Brood watcher
  - Old hand
  - Pupil's place
  - Quarrel
  - Plane part
  - Unsuitable
  - Arrived
  - Deal maker
  - Manger fill
  - Skeleton makeup
  - Catch phrase
- DOWN**
- Sluggish's need
  - Hoopla
  - Mid-mashie, now-a-days
  - "Bonanza" son
  - Terrier type
  - Malicious
  - Land unit
  - Deplore
  - Seventh letter
  - Harden
  - Pros with bows
  - Quilt piece
  - Earthy colour
  - Like Peter Jackson's "The Hobbit"
  - Nervous
  - Marshal's group
  - Drops on the lawn
  - Lifeboat need
  - Conceit
  - Fourth down plays
  - Have a banquet
  - Golden Rule word
  - Truck part
  - Previously
  - Golfer Crenshaw
  - Butter square
  - Binary base



## Yesterday's answer

T	I	M	I	D	F	I	S	T
A	B	A	S	E	P	A	S	T
C	E	D	E	S	E	S	E	X
T	R	E	E	M	A	T	U	R
I	I	T	A	R	E	N	D	
C	A	R	A	V	E	L	S	
N	A	R	C	J	U	G	S	
V	A	L	M	O	M	L	I	P
E	R	O	D	E	N	A	D	A
N	O	S	I	R	G	O	T	I
O	M	E	G	A	I	N	I	N
M	A	R	S		G	O	N	G

**CRYPTOQUOTE**  
FQP FDRH NS FQP KPDGPE AR FN OPF QAR MPNMKP SENU YQPEP FQPI DEP FN YQPEP FQPI QDXPTNFWPPT.  
-- QPTEI HARRATOPE

**Yesterday's CRYPTOQUOTE:**  
THE WORTH OF A BOOK IS TO BE MEASURED BY WHAT YOU CAN CARRY AWAY FROM IT.  
-- JAMES BRYCE

**A XYDLBAAXR is LONGFELLOW**  
One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three Ls, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

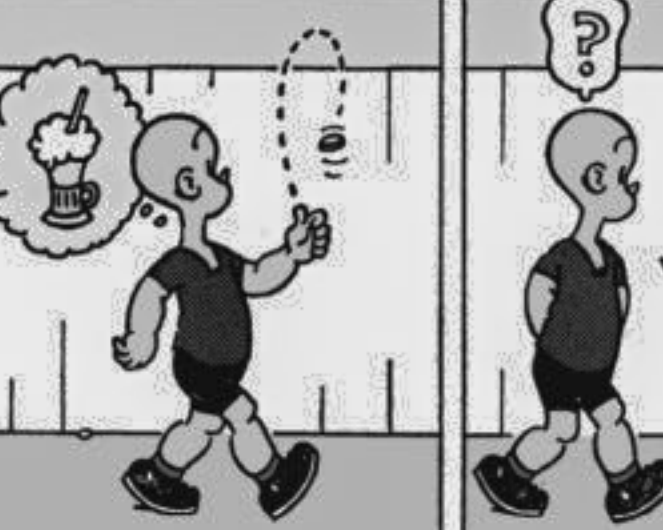
## BEETLE BAILEY



## by Mort Walker



## HENRY



## by Don Trachte

