

# Let the talks BEGIN



The solution to our current impasse will come through talks among the political parties and other stakeholders to arrive at a consensus on major national issues

A.B.M. NURUL ISLAM

**W**INTER in Bangladesh with its balmy weather used to be a time for festivities. *Gaye holud* and marriages, date juice, *pithas* and winter vegetables, migratory birds from Siberia landing in droves on cool waters, hordes of Bangladeshi Diaspora from across the world flying in to revitalise their connection with their motherland made for a festive time.

Now we have, particularly in winter, cocktail bombs, *hartals* and blockades as New Year gifts to mar the mood of the nation.

How have we come to such an impasse?

Caretaker government (CTG) system has been declared unconstitutional by the apex court of the country. So how come BNP insists on restoration of this system? Yes, the apex court recommended two more elections under the CTG system. But as far as I understand, the executive branch of the government is not bound to accept a recommendation of the judiciary. More importantly, did BNP

read the mood of the electorate prior to the January 5, 2014 election? Five consecutive victories in the mayoral elections including that at Gazipur (an AL stronghold) should have made amply clear how the wind was blowing. AL was fearful of BNP's participation in the election and set a trap, and BNP just walked into it.

Why should the nation suffer for BNP's lack of foresightedness? Moreover, the destructive activities they are carrying out now, they did all that with much greater intensity last year but the government did not fall nor is it likely to fall this time.

So why not pause and think how to achieve the goals peacefully?

It is worth noting that mistrust in the CTG system started when the then BNP law minister (2001-2006) hit upon the brilliant idea of extending the retirement age of judges by two years so as to have a chief advisor of their choice. CTG is no panacea either. Just look at the situation in Pakistan now.

AL is no saint either. The way they are denying BNP to carry out

its normal political activities is making a mockery of the term democracy.

This has to come to an end.

Ours is a nation with immense possibilities. The once-derided "international basket case" is now quoted for its achievements in microfinance to climate adaption, from human development indices to scaling mountains all over the world. Shakib and Salma top their respective cricket all-rounder lists. During the Rana Plaza tragedy, the most difficult rescue efforts were made by daring unpaid volunteers. Our youth is our greatest strength.

The solution to our current impasse will come through talks among the political parties and other stakeholders to arrive at a consensus on major national issues like empowering the Election Commission, national energy policy, sharing of river waters with India for all cross-border rivers etc.

Let the talks begin, and the ruling party needs to take the initiative to set the ball rolling.

The writer is a former BAEC and IAEA official.

# Bangladesh's maritime security needs beefing up

NAHELA NOWSHIN

**A**n arbitral tribunal established under Annex VII of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) helped end the 40-year-old maritime dispute between Bangladesh and India on July 2014 by delimiting the maritime boundary between the two countries. The award delivered by UNCLOS was hailed as a big win for Bangladesh as, of the disputed 25,602 sq.km, Bangladesh secured 19,467 sq.km (76% of what was claimed). Two years prior to this settlement, the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS) solved the maritime boundary dispute between Bangladesh and Myanmar, the verdict of which was considered to be largely in favour of Bangladesh. Now that the nation is safe from being permanently sea-locked and has been granted unimpeded access to its continental shelf, what's next?

With geo-strategic interests of giants like the US, India and China intersecting at the Bay of Bengal (BoB), there is no denying Bangladesh's rise as an important maritime centre in the international stage. If the "String of Pearls" theory is to be given any credence, China's port construction projects in Chittagong reinforce the vitality of this region to the Asian economic powerhouse. Likewise, the "Indian Maritime Doctrine" outlining its ambitions of naval strategies and presence in the region has kept the government of Bangladesh on high alert regarding the urgency of our national security interests in the BoB. Encouraged with a defence cooperation seeking China's support in protecting our maritime security and acquisition of maritime dispute settlements with India and Myanmar, the logical way forward for us seems to be to explore the abundant natural oil and gas in deep waters. But there's a bigger problem at hand.

## Inadequate security on the seas

A lack of sufficient maritime security drastically reduces the chances to reap the benefits of our newfound maritime boundaries. Acts of piracy, illegal fishing, and arms and drugs trafficking top the list (in that order) in the trajectory of trans-national maritime crimes for Bangladesh. The Suritex Piracy Report released on August 2014 revealed that the combined number of piracy-related and armed robbery incidents amounted to 23 in the Bay of Bengal, 10 in the Straits of Malacca and 14 in Malaysia. The Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP) revealed that of the 18 piracy-related incidents during the first half of 2014, 2 took place in the BoB. *Jol doshus*

(pirates), with the help of their extensive network of local *mastans* (hooligans), plunder natural resources (fish, minerals) and collaborate in the embezzlement of arms. The BoB along with its adjacent rivers form the nexus for the illicit trade of Yaba and other drugs from Myanmar to Bangladesh.

Of illegal fishing and poaching in Bangladesh's marine waters, the illegal trade of *jatha* (baby Hilsa) is the most severe as the livelihood of 40% of fishermen depend on Hilsa fishery either directly or indirectly. Fish catch is considered illegal when fishing is non-seasonal, unlicensed, immature fish is caught, prohibited nets are used, or when it occurs during breeding period. A survey conducted by the UNDP revealed some glaring statistics: of the estimated annual sustainable yield of 3,89,000 metric tons of fish and shrimp, only about 1,18,000 metric tons are successfully harvested. A major portion of the remaining loss is contributed to exploitation and poaching by foreign fishing trawlers. Commodore Mohd. Khurshed Alam of Bangladesh Navy said that Bangladesh Navy and Coast Guard's ability to apprehend criminal activities is limited due to the lack of sophisticated surveillance and other monitoring systems.

## Way forward

Articles 33 and 73 of UNCLOS bestow littoral states with the right to exercise control necessary to protect their maritime sovereignty. More specifically, Articles 110 (right to visit) and 111 (hot pursuit) enable states to combat trans-national maritime crimes by allowing visits and checks of ships suspected of engaging in illegal activity, and pursuit of foreign ships by warships or military aircraft. Beyond the realm of international law, the Bangladeshi government must set its eyes on fostering regional cooperation with important players like India and Myanmar. The convention for suppression of unlawful acts against the safety of marine navigation adopted in 1988 is yet to be signed by these neighbouring nations. In addition, the Security Council's calls to criminalise piracy and amend national legislations seemed to have fallen on deaf ears. On the bright side, the US-Bangladesh dialogue held at the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS) gives hope for future cooperation. Formation of a coalition between the littoral states in the BoB and countries like Malaysia, Singapore and China must be considered to enhance maritime security in a region that has globally emerged to be a hotbed of seaborne trade and commerce.

The writer is a graduate of UCLA.

## QUOTABLE Quote

A people that values its privileges above its principles soon loses both.

Dwight D. Eisenhower

## BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker



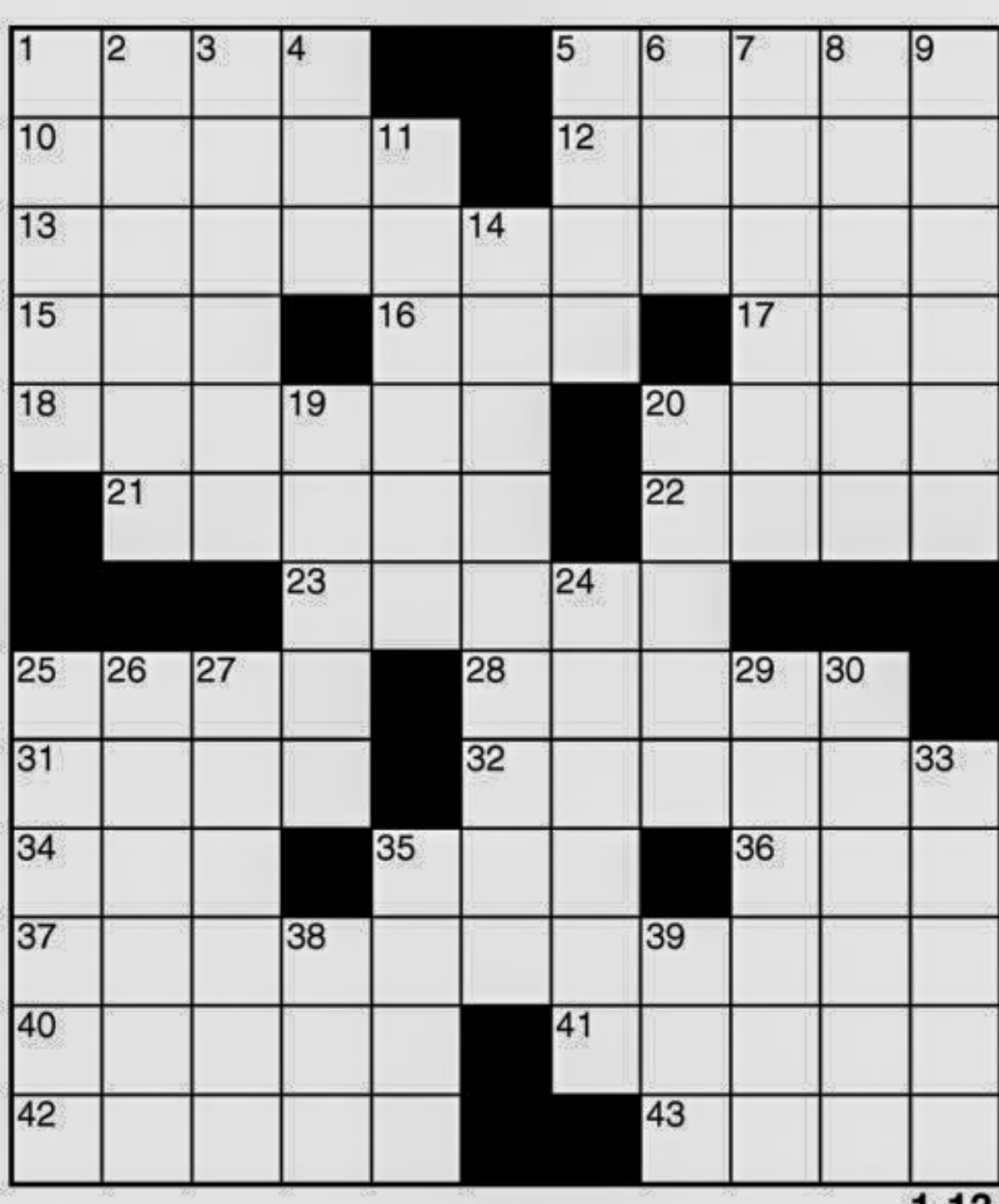
## HENRY by Don Trachte



## CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

- |                                |                            |                           |                                      |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <b>ACROSS</b>                  | 22 Pindar poems            | 43 Treat rudely, in slang | 19 Macbeth, for one                  |
| 1 Netlike fabric               | 23 Accumulate              | <b>DOWN</b>               | 20 Polite refusal                    |
| 5 Fountain treat               | 25 Reach across            | 1 Ship poles              | 24 Adage                             |
| 10 Friend of D'Artagnan        | 28 Hideaways               | 2 Baseball's Andre        | 25 Vector's counterpart              |
| 12 Plane part                  | 31 Stalactite setting      | 3 Quaint store            | 26 Convict's hope                    |
| 13 Fault                       | 32 Song words              | 4 Vert.'s counterpart     | 27 Redress                           |
| 15 Waiter's reward             | 34 Verb for you            | 5 Glasgow native          | 29 Giovanni of "Lost in Translation" |
| 16 Lab animal                  | 35 Luau dish               | 6 Deli meat               | 30 Fragrances                        |
| 17 JFK's predecessor           | 36 Arthur on TV            | 7 Tolerated               | 33 Wise ones                         |
| 18 Trio plus quartet           | 37 Like some Broadway hits | 8 Begin to burn           | 35 Victim                            |
| 20 Dickens girl                | 40 Pond growth             | 9 Marx collaborator       | 38 -- about (wander)                 |
| 21 Addict's program, for short | 41 "Beau--"                | 11 Brook                  | 39 Homer's neighbor                  |
|                                | 42 Slender                 | 14 1965 Western spoof     |                                      |

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