

Can it get any worse before it gets better?

PLEASURE IS ALL MINE



SHAH HUSAIN IMAM

THE way the nation is burning, we may call it forced self-immolation, a new coinage minted in devil's workshop, Bangladesh style. What result such innocent snuffed out lives will bring to the nation except more misery and add to the ranks of nameless martyrs. And what are they being typically told by the programme launchers? "Well, you have to bear up with some discomfort (read groaning pain in third degree burn, even death) for a greater gain" -- unabashedly meaning helping their tormentors to power.

Petrol bomb victim, two and a half-year-old Safir was inconsovably insistent on sitting on his mother's lap and similarly afflicted teenager Anik, missing out on a public examination, was doubly agonising shrouded in bandage.

The list is endless, so I have to crave the sufferers' indulgence for unintended omissions, plentiful as they are. Our heart goes out in sympathy for all the victims, knowing full well public memory is short and the leaders' even shorter!

But this resonates at once with all of us: The parents of Safir and Anik vented their feelings to the journalists: "For God's sake, stop all these," imploring the leaders, as though they were speaking out the conscience of the nation.

In politics, a feeler or a signal might be given out by the government to political opponent either as a matter of tactic or with the purpose of genuinely testing waters with her. A situation had been created by the government restricting Khaleda Zia's movement to her office for a couple of weeks. The government sooner or later needed to come to grips with it. Accordingly, police presence was withdrawn and the padlock removed from her gate.

Clearly some thought went into the relaxation on her movement (still an open question) as it coincided with the birth anniversary of late president and BNP founder Ziaur Rahman. One would have expected that she would read in the government's move a positive sign which, in part, she did when thanking the government for "its good sense." And, for moments, she appeared to suggest that she was testing the government's intent on how far it would force her up. Rather than using it as a respite and beliving public expectations she

Actually, the party leadership suspected that the government might have been 'laying a trap' to chaperon her to her residence. Such is the level of trust pinned on the government purely on the basis of assumption. What difference does it make whether she stays in her office or residence unless she is restored status quo ante?

For one thing, she didn't meet the general expectations which would win her some brownie points with the people. For the second, she refused to give the barely ajar window of opportunity a chance to

received intelligence reports suggesting that Khaleda would have converted her rally into a massive siege programme; and secondly, keeping her confined that long was prompted by suspicion that from Biswa Ijtima, a stream of people might have pushed towards where the BNP chairperson was. These are hypotheses remaining untested but clearly the government faces a dilemma here. How long can it deny the BNP a democratic space to function as an opposing political party?

Interestingly, State Minister for Home Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal explained away the withdrawal of police from in front of Khaleda Zia's Gulshan office by way of additional reinforcements placed on anti-blockade duty to save public life and property.

We think the government's counter-measures like offering 'bounty' to those providing information about bomb-making and petrol bomb throwers and its contemplating shoot-at-sight orders bear the possibilities of abuse. These should be rethought in view of the tendency in a divisive political society to be settling old scores with each other. In particular, the shoot-at-sight doesn't sit in with a democratic paradigm.

Meanwhile, provocative and intimidating utterances need to be scrupulously avoided so as not to stoke fire and let an impression of an unstable order take a firm hold of people's imagination at home and abroad.

Two solutions should be simultaneously applied on the agreed premise that there is no alternative to such a dual approach if we are to show respect to the principle of popular sovereignty. The BNP should at once withdraw blockades and hartals as the government reciprocates by removing restrictions on political programmes to be carried out by the BNP peacefully. At this stage, no more extraneous conditions need to be inserted into the equations for this minimalist programme of action. These could be taken up in time.

As Victor Hugo has said: "Nothing is more powerful than an idea whose time has come."

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

It Takes Two (Taka) to Tango

HUMOROUSLY YOURS



NAVEED MAHBUB

LOCKED minds spring to life. The former Opposition party's office is blocked. Counter measure: highways and railways are blocked. Counter-counter measure -- Viber, Tango and their

cousins are blocked. The stress level goes up and our arteries are blocked. Not to be outdone, one and two Taka notes are getting blocked. Kids, already blocked from schools and exams, are blocked from one and two Taka chocolates ('Rubbish'? No, they DO exist!).

Brainwaves, powered by blocked Carotid arteries, leading to a chain reaction of one hell of a block party!

While we're at it, how about throw in the good old hartal, arson and burning up of people alive? Besides, it IS chilly. Notice the topic of Global Warming has subsided these days (then again, there is plenty of Local Warming). We need to re-ignite our pyromania to keep the chill at bay. After all, we can't quite expect the elite to huddle into public buses (while going through the 'inconvenience' of having to carry two Taka notes for petty change) or those with opposing ideologies to hug each other to stay warm.

Dhaka. A party town, in all respects. We remain comfortably numb as live humans are bar-b-queued right in front of our eyes.

But our apathy has finally given in to a collective uproar as the pain finally hits home. The pain of Viber being blocked (gee, nobody had the vibe this was coming). And what's up with WhatsApp? Maybe a clandestine team from Bangladesh is already in Silicon Valley to identify all future applications through perpetuity to block so that we are left with only those that run on the Atari.

The pain of tethering an untethered society. The pain of seeing a clutter free home screen on our smart phones and not so smart phones. The pain of having youngsters, including ourselves, going to bed early. The pain of actually having a social conversation. The pain of the guys not being cheap skates and actually spending money to send SMSs to their girlfriends.

If this is all it takes to stop the nationwide mayhem, I am fine with two condensed milk cans and a long piece of wire for my communications while the GPO remains open. Pigeons? Nah, they will join the ranks of humans to be roasted alive, albeit for a square meal.

Are the perpetrators of oborodh upgraded, or are we backdated? I don't know. But if the blockages from both sides are for the purpose of a larger good, I'm sure blocking bombs, arson, mayhem, corruption, money laundering, murder, rape, nepotism, eve teasing, gender discrimination, dowry, smuggling, land grabbing...oh, and blocked minds, can serve a noble purpose. But it will take two (Taka) to Tango.

Till we see *Tango Unchained*, I look forward to a normal Bangladesh, aka, the perpetual traffic jam, because the only time the nation is one is when we are stuck in traffic. During the idle hours in traffic, enjoy the sequel to the tune *Video Killed the Radio Star* -- *Viber Killed the GP Star*. Oh, and enjoy Pran's commemorative one and two Taka chocolates.

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



declared that blockade would continue till "people's right to vote was restored." A dangerously open-ended agenda for the current outlook on politics. She doubled the hostile programme with a 48-hour hartal ending today with more bloodletting, burning and maiming as nobody's business.

Her decision unfortunately overruled the reported counsel of some senior members of BNP standing committee to the contrary. They pleaded for less exacting alternatives adding that continuation of oborodh was unrealistic and that it risked unpopularity for the party.

open fully ending the bizarre atmosphere of non-communication between the two major political parties.

To most people's thinking, this is the BNP's second blunder after its boycott of the January 5, 2014 election. Let not these be weighed on the same scale but the same mental process seems to have been at work in both cases.

On the basic issues of preventing Khaleda Zia from holding public rallies and keeping her confined for two weeks, government leaders have had informally two explanations: First, they purportedly

Political turmoil in a climate sensitive year: Need for restraint in Bangladesh!

MD, RASHED CHOWDHURY

THIS article might be a surprise to many readers, as they think: "What does climate have to do with the current political turmoil in Bangladesh?" Studies have found strong causal evidence linking climatic events to human conflict and violence across a range of spatial and temporal scales and across all major regions of the world. Those studies also found that the magnitude of climate's influence is substantial: for each one standard deviation change in climate toward warmer temperatures or more extreme rainfall, median estimates indicate that the frequency of interpersonal violence rises 4% and the frequency of intergroup conflict rises 14%. These results make me extremely apprehensive. However, instead of linking current conflicts and climate in Bangladesh, I would like to share a few examples from some of the global climate 'hotspots,' where civil or political conflicts are directly related to changing climate. During this time of increased globalisation, we need to learn from these examples. Bangladesh is also considered to be one of these climate sensitive 'hotspots.' By touching on the base of the current political turmoil in Bangladesh, my goal is to disseminate some of the most crucial climate and conflict-related information to enhance the climate and conflict knowledge-base, which may help expedite extra precautionary measures for the country.

It is arguably true that the current stage of political turmoil (as of today) is not

linked to changing climate; rather, it is man-made. However, if the situation continues to worsen then the impact of changing climate, particularly this year's El Niño, which tends to bring a drier than normal climate in January-February-March (JFM) of 2015 that may further complicate the current crisis. Drought is widely believed to relate to conflict because it may lead to local scarcity and increased resource competition; fresh water is one of the most vital resources for human existence. Fortunately, this year's El Niño is a weak event and it is now fizzling out. Therefore, while a drier than normal year is the most likely event, a severe drought is unlikely for JFM of 2015. However, even a drier than normal spell can contribute to existing social violence. Bangladesh is particularly sensitive to social unrest in any drier than normal year, as water scarcity is a common problem during the dry period. We are relatively less resistant both in our personal and professional lives during any dry summer. In addition, as the year advances, it is unclear how the El Niño condition will manifest this summer (June-July-August of 2015). Some scientists argue that we may have a second El Niño year in a row, while others tend to disagree.

There are many regional examples where social conflicts began with some disagreement among the major players or parties and ended up with serious mass killings during an El Niño year. For example, the Sudanese government, NGO officials, and some scholars have pointed to the drought in the mid-1980s as a partial explanation

for the conflict and killings in Darfur (Moon, Ban-ki 2007. "A Climate Culprit In Darfur," Washington Post, June 16: A15). Other studies that systematically tested the economic consequences of drought-related phenomena for armed conflict found that negative deviation in annual precipitation in sub-Saharan Africa substantially reduces national economic growth, and thereby indirectly increases the risk of civil war. Other research findings also found that a small percentage change in precipitation lagged one year increases the risk of armed conflict in sub-Saharan Africa, and even countries with more freshwater per capita also run a higher risk of armed conflict. While historians have argued that El Niño or drought may have driven global patterns of civil conflict in the distant past, a new study (Nature 476, Aug 25, 2011) directly associated planetary-scale climate changes with global patterns of civil conflict by examining El Niño. The study concluded that new civil conflicts arising throughout the tropics double during an El Niño year relative to a normal year. This result, which indicates that El Niño may have had a role in 21% of all civil conflicts since 1950, is the first demonstration that the stability of modern societies is strongly related to the global climate. Bangladesh also had serious civil conflicts and political unrest during some of the previous El Niño years: 1970-72, 1982-83, 1991, and 2013-14.

For the past several years, Bangladesh has been marred by a spate of political crises with frequent strikes, attacks, and blockades

preventing businesses from functioning normally and hurting ordinary citizens' ability to go about their lives. The latest episode of political volatility began on January 3 of 2015 and clashes between opposition supporters, ruling party activists, and police resulted in the deaths of several anti-government protesters. On January 20, the BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia appeared in public for the first time in two weeks and announced that the blockade would continue until the government created a congenial atmosphere for a free, fair election. She also called upon the government to take initiatives to resolve the current stalemate politically.

Based on these on-going activities, the situation looks like it's getting worse day-by-day, and we don't really see any hope for a quick solution. In addition, if 2015 develops into an El Niño year it would further exacerbate the possibility for conflict. The overall situation is frustrating, as we don't really understand whom to blame for it. However, what is certain is that something is wrong and it needs to be fixed right now! Therefore, in order to avoid any unwanted conflict or social violence, the government and all other political parties (including civil societies) should seriously consider incorporating this 'highly sensitive climate issue' into their political agendas, and should take extra precautions to fix the current problem before any more dangerous conflicts erupt.

The writer is the Principal Scientist (Graduate Faculty) of the 'Pacific ENSO Applications Climate Center', University of Hawaii Manoa, USA. Email: rashed.uh@gmail.com

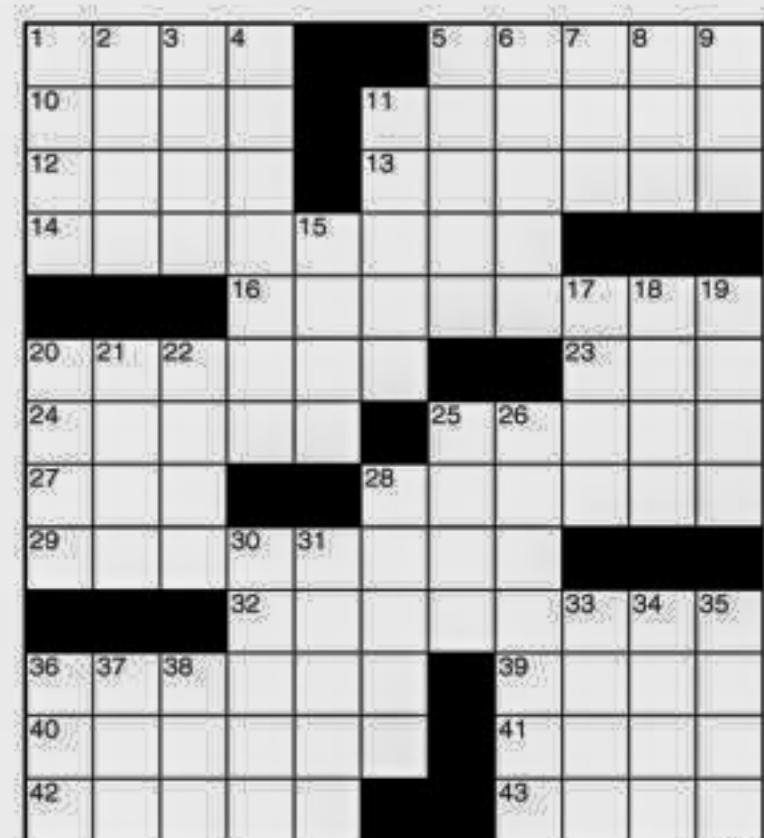
QUOTABLE Quote

Start by doing what's necessary; then do what's possible; and suddenly you are doing the impossible.

Francis of Assisi

CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

- ACROSS
- 1 Course activity
 - 5 Trouser material
 - 10 October birthstone
 - 11 Evening bash
 - 12 Opera star
 - 13 Firstborn
 - 14 Car part
 - 16 Car part
 - 20 Applies, as finger paint
 - 23 Zodiac sign
 - 24 Be miserly
 - 25 Wine buys
 - 27 Tiny worker
 - 28 Portions out
 - 29 Car part
 - 32 Car part
 - 36 Botch
 - 39 Clinton's veep
 - 40 Fly or flea
 - 41 Foray
 - 42 Gagger group
 - 43 Keats poems
- DOWN
- 1 Olympus group
 - 2 Mayberry kid
 - 3 Kilauaea flow
 - 4 Rail carrier
 - 5 Bridge costs
 - 6 Shoe specification
 - 7 Anger
 - 8 "-- Misérables"
 - 9 Rented out
 - 11 Appears
 - 15 Poet-singer
 - 17 To boot
 - 18 Yard units
 - 19 Chuck
 - 20 Carpet type
 - 21 "-- Lisa"
 - 22 Chow
 - 25 Chowder chunk
 - 26 Brisk tempo
 - 28 Take as one's own
 - 30 Ends of the earth
 - 31 Draw out
 - 33 Swamp croaker
 - 34 Pennsylvania port
 - 35 Some wines
 - 36 Mediterranean fruit
 - 37 Small bill
 - 38 Exploit



Yesterday's answer

S	A	F	E	W	A	L	T			
C	L	I	N	G	C	A	N	O	E	
R	I	N	G	O	A	R	G	O	N	
A	B	E	H	O	R	N	E	T	S	
P	I	S	T	O	N	S	L	E	E	
S	T	A	M	P	S	A	D			
				L	E	A	N	T		
D	U	E		P	E	A	K	S		
T	I	M		C	E	L	T	I	C	S
R	A	P	T	O	R	S		M	O	W
A	L	I	E	N		O	Z	O	N	E
C	E	R	E	S		N	A	N	C	E
E	D	E	N			P	O	E	T	

CRYPTOQUOTE 12-9 VGGFTMPLA PO HFOXLAPKNF GLH APAF-MFAMQO LG SQVMFUFH OLNPJ VAJ JWHVKNF QVXXPAFOO MQFHF PO PA LWH NPUFO. -- T. O. NFSPO

Yesterday's CRYPTOQUOTE: I AM WHATEVER YOU SAY I AM: IF IS WASNT, THEN WHY WOULD YOU SAY I AM. -- EMINEM

A XYDLBAXR is LONGFELLOW One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, 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

