

# Still chasing after a 'dialogue'?

ABDUL MANNAN

A friend in USA called me and asked if the members of the civil society and those affected materially and physically by the impasse in the name of politics in Bangladesh still hope that there is a possibility of a 'dialogue' to defuse the crisis going on since Khaleda Zia called for a nationwide 'blockade' on January 5. Why not? I asked him. He had a ready answer. When the gates of Khaleda Zia's office-cum residence were shut when the prime minister visited the office to convey her personal condolence why should someone expect that the overall situation will improve? I tell my friend this was a non-political visit by a mother to console another mother on the untimely loss of her dear son, and politics should not be dragged in to further complicate the situation. My friend, who is not involved in any politics, was not convinced.

One does not have to be a political pundit or an analyst to conclude that whatever is going on in Bangladesh in the name of political movement is nothing but a demonstration of how much violence some politicians can practice and preach for their personal gains. It is just a version of 'organised terrorism.' In the first three weeks of the violence 34 persons fell victim to arson attacks and lost their lives, of which 17 were victims of petrol bombs, a lethal weapon newly intro-

duced in our problem ridden politics. The victims included children, women, public transport workers and ordinary people. Most of them had no connection with politics. Hundreds of vehicles were vandalised and torched. Rail tracks were uprooted. The everyday loss caused to the economy runs into millions of taka and the image of the country outside has been tarnished greatly. As of now, the only person who could perhaps stop this madness is Khaleda Zia.

While all violence was going on in the name of politics the nation heard the news of death of Arafat Rahman Koko, the younger son of Khaleda Zia. Since 2008, Koko had been living in Bangkok and Malaysia with his family and undergoing treatment. He was not involved in politics. It was learnt from family sources that Koko had a heart attack and expired on the way to hospital. Surely it shocked his mother and many of her party supporters.

The news was broken in the afternoon by the media and party loyalists thronged Khaleda Zia's office at Gulshan to convey their condolence. Many were expecting that someone from the Awami League would visit Khaleda Zia. It came as a surprise when electronics and on-line media suddenly broke the news in the evening that Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina was going there to console the bereaved Khaleda Zia. At around 8.45 the prime minister arrived at the



BNP's Gulshan office only to see that the gates of the office were closed from inside. Minutes before the arrival of the prime minister, Shimul Biswas and a personal assistant of Khaleda Zia announced to the waiting press that it would not be possible for the prime minister to meet Khaleda Zia as she was under heavy sedation. However, quite a few BNP and alliance bigwigs were seen going in and coming out of the gate during the evening and saying to the media that Khaleda Zia had instructed them to announce that the blockade would continue. No one ever said that she was under sedation.

She could very well have been under sedation, but senior leaders could have met the prime minister. Instead, the

prime minister was kept waiting at the gate and had to return without entering the office. This was too discourteous, and BNP leaders forgot that the prime minister is not only a person but also an institution. Moreover Sheikh Hasina went there not as a prime minister but more as a mother. Talking with quite a few senior BNP leaders it is now known that none of them had the courage to tell Khaleda Zia that the prime minister was coming. Some senior leaders, who chose not to be named, said that most of them were ready to receive the prime minister, but a telephone call just torpedoed everything. People throughout the country were pinning their hopes that though it would not be a political meeting it

would help in stopping the present destructive politics. Their hopes were just blown to the wind by the improper handling of the situation. Koko's body was brought to the country last Tuesday, and was buried in the Banani graveyard after a proper janaza. Even before his burial took place there were deliberate attempts from some quarters to mislead the people saying that Koko was denied burial at the army graveyard. If someone has to be buried at the army graveyard certain procedures have to be followed and requirements met. It has been learned that in this case the formalities were not followed or requirements met.

Everybody hopes that the present political stalemate will come to an end soon. People talk about a dialogue between the political parties to contain the ongoing violence. But the life and property threatening activities of the BNP-Jamaat axis will have to stop first. The mayhem must stop, the burnt victims must be cured, all sorts of violence must be denounced and condemned by the BNP and then only can any meaningful dialogue take place. The dialogue must be for the peace and prosperity of the country and not for going to power. Though historically nothing much was ever achieved through dialogue it is still possible, but sanity has to return before that.

The writer is a former Vice-chancellor, University of Chittagong.

Everybody hopes that the present political stalemate will come to an end soon. People talk about a dialogue between the political parties to contain the ongoing violence.

## AMERICA PIVOTS SOUTH, TO INDIA

# Could Bangladesh be next?

CURTIS S. CHIN and JOSE B. COLLAZO

BANGLADESH might not yet be on his agenda, but a much anticipated return visit to India earlier this week by US President Barack Obama could well signify that South Asia is, like Southeast Asia, finally getting some well-deserved US attention as part of the so-called American rebalance -- or what was once known as the "pivot" -- to Asia. That's a welcome change as America's policymakers wake up to the obvious, namely that there is more to Asia than China, and that an Asia strategy is more than a grab bag of programmes seeking to match China's efforts.

Yet, in his State of the Union address to the American public last week, Obama gave short shrift to Asia, while proclaiming past successes and outlining an agenda for further improving the US economy. "The shadow of crisis has passed," he declared, "and the state of the union is strong."

Pointedly, the US president chose not to use his 70-minute annual address to explain what can be a critical part of his economic agenda. That is, increased engagement and strengthened trade relations with the entire Asia-Pacific region, including nations such as India that rarely make the US headlines. Too often, East Asia alone has seemed the predominant focus of the U.S. policy pivot eastward. Understandably, there might have been no mention of Bangladesh given all that the US president sought to cover, but there also was no mention even of his then upcoming visit to India. Americans may well have wondered where their president had gone so soon after concluding his State of the Union address.

Now, fresh from India -- the first time a sitting US president has visited that nation twice -- Obama has some easy explaining to do when he lands back in Washington. Indeed, a real opportunity for expanded engagement is at hand, as ties improve between the US, the world's oldest democracy, and India, the world's largest democracy.

US State Department statistics about the benefits of US-India trade provide a rationale and a context for why Obama was back in Asia, and in India in particular:

- US-India bilateral trade expanded from \$19 billion in 2000 to \$95 billion in 2013, with US goods exports to India totaling \$35 billion, supporting an estimated 168,000 U.S. jobs;
- Cumulative Indian investment in the US totaled US\$9 billion in 2012, supporting 100,000 jobs;
- More than 850,000 Indians visited the US in 2013, and more than one million Americans visited India, the largest group of international tourists; and
- Approximately 100,000 Indian students, the second-largest group of foreign students, studied in the US for the 2012-13 academic year, contributing more than \$3 billion to the US economy.

With the International Monetary Fund expecting India's economy to grow by 6.3% in 2015 and by 6.5% in 2016, outpacing that of China, there is good reason for the US pivot to head southward, to India. These figures will grow if reforms take hold in India.

But, India should be only one part of comprehensive US engagement with an Asia-Pacific region that is wary of China's growing assertiveness, particularly in the South China Sea. China is already engaged across the region, economically of course, but also through development assistance, cultural exchanges, and educational programmes.

What might an expanded US pivot to all Asia -- a rebalance of the rebalance if you will -- include?

First, the United States must embrace a "business pivot" that goes beyond the large China marketplace, and that looks to opportunities that exist in South Asia and Southeast Asia. Already, U.S. investment in Southeast Asia surpasses that in all four BRIC nations

-- Brazil, Russia, India and China -- and can be built upon. This would entail a concerted effort to "geographically rebalance" U.S. efforts across the region, with a particular emphasis on strengthening economic ties with India and Indonesia among others, including Bangladesh. Longtime allies with which the United States has defense ties, including Japan, the Philippines and South Korea, must also be reassured that the United States is here to stay.

Second, the Obama administration and U.S. Congress must work to advance trade and commercial efforts that work for all involved. A bipartisan effort is needed to ensure adequate resources for a trade policy and a U.S. Foreign Commercial Service that benefits small businesses, not just big multinationals. Additionally, Washington must also set an example for the rest of the world by ensuring that intellectual property rights are protected, and that tax policies do not discourage business success by its own citizens, particularly American entrepreneurs, whether working directly in Asia or exporting product from America.

Third, U.S. companies must also do their part by acting responsibly in every market they operate. This may well entail going beyond the letter of the law in such emerging markets in Southeast and South Asia as Bangladesh, Cambodia, Myanmar and Sri Lanka,

The United States must embrace a "business pivot" that goes beyond the large China marketplace, and that looks to opportunities that exist in South Asia and Southeast Asia.

where regulatory deficiencies make it challenging to operate, but where U.S. investment and good practices can have a significant impact.

A central benefit of peace and stability in Asia -- a stated goal of the US rebalance to the region -- is greater commercial opportunities throughout Asia. Trade and economic ties can be part of the means to a strategic solution in the region, and not just the ends.

State visits to India, State of the Union addresses, and participation in Asia's annual array of summits may provide for beautiful photos, but what really matters is the hard work that follows. America certainly matters to Asia, but building the support of the American people and US Congress for strengthened economic and trade ties with not just India but the entire Asia-Pacific region -- Bangladesh included -- will also require US leaders who are serious about also explaining and showing that Asia matters to America.

Curtis S. Chin, a former U.S. ambassador to the Asian Development Bank, is a managing director of advisory firm RiverPeak Group. Jose B. Collazo is a Southeast Asia analyst and an associate of River Peak Group. Follow them on Twitter at @CurtisSChin and @JoseBCollazo.



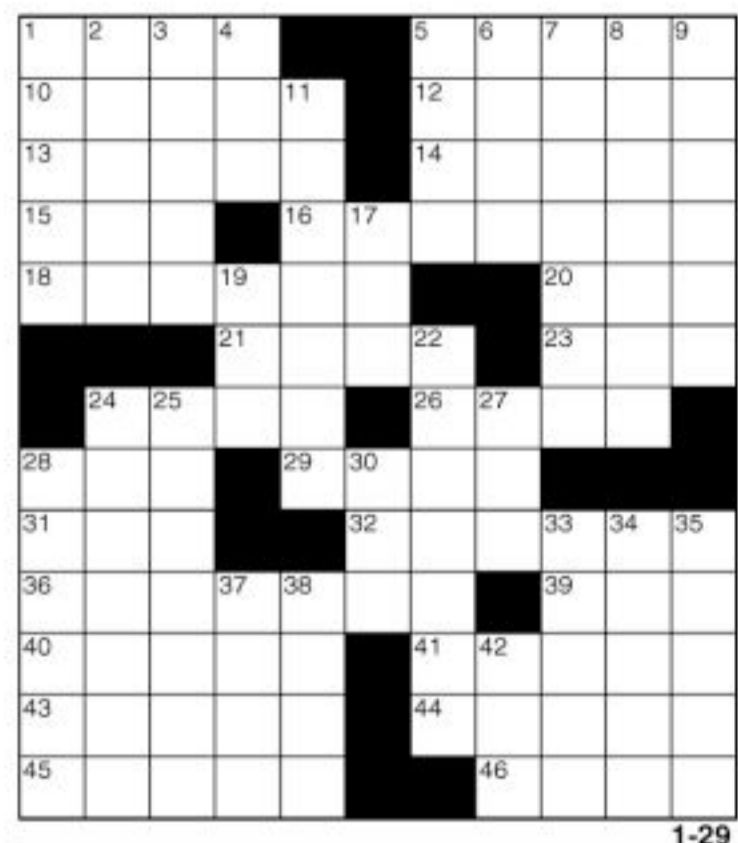
## CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

### ACROSS

- 1 Urban pollution
- 5 Comics Viking
- 10 Like some athletes' wrists
- 12 One of Kirk's bridge crew
- 13 Seething
- 14 "Water Lilies" painter
- 15 Tall tree
- 16 Mimic
- 18 Campaign backer
- 20 Reverent wonder
- 21 Sales dept. workers
- 23 Blue
- 24 Catalan painter
- 26 Low card
- 28 "folly to be wise"
- 29 Wine valley
- 31 Music's Yoko
- 32 Jazz fan
- 36 World War II fighter plane
- 39 Verb for you
- 40 Some messages
- 41 Skirt
- 43 "Taxi" character
- 44 Out of bed
- 45 Go undercover?

### DOWN

- 1 Inflexible
- 2 Opera's Callas
- 3 Dizzying posters
- 4 Obtain
- 5 Camel feature
- 6 Tar's call
- 7 Magazine holder
- 8 Passage between buildings
- 9 Was a fink
- 11 Ten-sided figure
- 17 Giant Mel
- 22 Noted gatekeeper
- 24 Barebones
- 25 Set apart
- 27 Ludacris' music
- 28 Locker room stack
- 30 "So that's it!"
- 33 Lead to
- 34 Old English forest
- 35 Wee
- 37 Sea wall
- 38 Thunder sound
- 42 Pot cover



## Yesterday's answer

W E D D E D A R G O  
 A R M A D A M E A N  
 X A V I E R A C M E  
 S N E E Z E  
 T I D Y P O P U P  
 A C E P O I N T T O  
 M A C A R C I T S  
 E M E R G E S V E T  
 S E P I A H E R S  
 T O N I T E  
 S L I T D O R S A L  
 P A V E O T O O L E  
 A X E D S O N N E T

**CRYPTOQUOTE** 12-13  
 Z EAGGEW JAG KI EABMG COQMWQ ZDZX Z  
 EKG KI UZFSTWQQ. MZCCX MZTOSSZM.  
 -- XKOF COVVEV IFAWTUQ

Yesterday's Cryptoquote: IT DIDN'T MATER HOW BIG OUR HOUSE WAS; IT MATTERED THAT THERE WAS LOVE IN IT.  
 -- PETER BUFFETT

**A XYDLBAAXR 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.

## QUOTABLE Quote

Democracy is when the indigent, and not the men of property, are the rulers.

Aristotle

## BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker



## HENRY by Don Trachte

