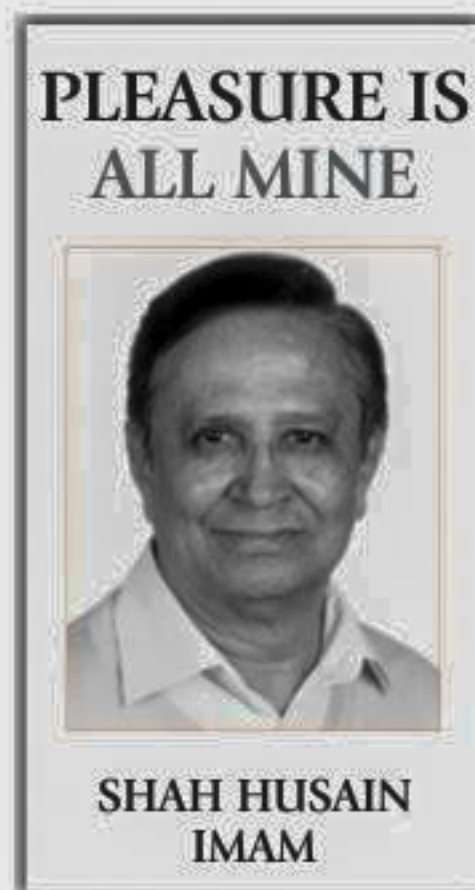


AAM AND KHAS POLITICS

Democracy the best defence

Intelligentsia in the country, no matter who they vote for, and the international community are steadfast in their belief that something needs to be done on a double-quick basis to roll back 'the cycle of violence' to normality. There has been a barrage of concerns voiced over the goings-on in the country undistracted by, or perhaps because of, other trouble zones with rumblings of menacing illiberalism.



anti-corruption bill failed to pass; after all he was heading a coalition government. This time around, people of Delhi returned him with 63 out of 70 seats in the city state's Assembly at the heartland of India, giving him a real second chance.

Now what does the outcome say? It is all about check and balance to BJP hegemony and arrogance of power, potential or real. In other words, BJP may have had a reality check. But in democratic niceties Modi is unfailing; he has assured all cooperation to the new CM - designate.

Arvind has promised complete transparency in administration, governance and service deliveries. Where he succeeds and where he fails and why, would be in public domain. What is quite interesting is that some of the unsuccessful candidates in the Delhi election said in a huff that they would return to Oxford or Cambridge; thus shamefully emphasising they have nothing to do with a non-elitist Aam Admi government!

Any message for Bangladesh? Yes, Arvind has vowed to pare down VIP culture which many in our country have become addicted to like butterflies to pollen.

By a strange coincidence with Arvind's dramatic reincarnation, a French-Italian HSBC employee blew the whistle of tax evasions by 25 Indian business magnates to the tune of around 25,000 crore Indian Rupees. Maybe it is the tip of the iceberg. Bangladeshi tycoons could not be far behind. Nationals of Bangladesh origin figure among those suspected of money laundering between 1985 and 2006 preliminarily estimated at around \$13 million. Further investigations are going on courtesy of French authorities.

THE beauty of ballot is there's always another day for the loser, or a quitter as in the case of Aam Admi Party chief Arvind Kejriwal. Earlier, he had resigned from the post of chief minister of New Delhi as a matter of principle. But his appeal as a potential messiah of common man held its ground. In fact, it only grew with time as he had to resign when his

Now warmed up, shall we turn to Khas politics? Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia have been called 'battling Begums' by the western media, *The Economist* in particular. The word 'Begum' derives from Urdu word 'Begam' -- 'Be' meaning 'without' and 'gam' translates into 'sorrow.' Therefore, the word Begum refers to a person without sorrow. But it is sad that they have been battling. And doing so incrementally with the updating of their respective narratives with newer frills.

They are not only battling, rather they're engaged in a knockout encounter vowing to fight-to-finish to the discomfiture of national and international audiences and to the peril of the country's huge economic prospects. Countries aware of Bangladesh's geo-political importance and its huge economic potential have a natural stake in our prosperity as a free, liberal and democratic state.

Intelligentsia in the country, no matter who they vote for, and the international community are steadfast in their belief that something needs to be done on a double-quick basis to roll back 'the cycle of violence' to normality. There has been a barrage of concerns voiced over the goings-on in the country undistracted by, or perhaps because of, other trouble zones with rumblings of menacing illiberalism.

The prime minister says she will not bow down to any pressure, internal or external, for a mid-term poll, that too under a caretaker government on which the BNP is insistent. Both BNP and AI remind one of the famous quote: "Ireland has only one plan: Plan-A. If Plan-A fails, then follow Plan-A."

But remember Sinn Fien and the British government had been at one level fiercely combative with their use of force but the government did not flinch from conducting private negotiations with representatives of Jerry Adams or McGuinness. The second 'private' track practically delivered the Good Friday Accord.

The PM has spurned a barely embryonic civic initiative to bring AL and BNP under the canopy of presidential good offices to strike a deal for peace. Her colleagues have linked some of the civil society leaders to 1/11 military-backed caretaker government of 2007-08. Whatever the fault of such a government having overstayed constitutional mandate and people's hospitality, let alone spawning corruption in the name of fighting it, AL emerged victorious in the end. That hits the nail on the head. The Tuesday

Club comprising diplomats of the USA and European Union carried out hectic shuttle diplomacy between the then opposition AI and ruling BNP camps to bring them to a sensible political settlement. At one stage, the UN was purportedly involved in using its influence to persuade the army to play a supportive role under a technocratic government headed by Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed to deliver the crucial election. So, international pressure worked in those extraordinary circumstances.

This is not to in any way court external pressures but to simply stress the point that when national capacity fails to cope with a runaway political crisis, we per force take recourse to good, effective counsel from friendly quarters.

Going by an opinion piece in *The Statesman*, "... Begum Khaleda Zia's party, with overt support of the Islamist militant, is engaged in a decidedly political movement against Begum Hasina's government by default." "But it is hard not to wonder over the agenda. ... when she chews over the anti-terror law and possible death penalty, Hasina somehow overlooks the critical distinction between a political movement and Islamist terrorism of the Pakistan variety."

The write-up ends on a startling note: "Whether or not the Begums achieve their objectives, they have between them brought Bangladesh under the international scanner ... almost a failed country in the perception of the world."

The international community's approach is however equivocal: It says violence, burning and manslaughter should be immediately stopped, primarily the finger being pointed at BNP. At the same time, it calls upon the ruling party to give space to dissent. Of course, they do not want to be meddlesome, yet moral persuasion could be tried by quarters acceptable to both sides. Root for the fact which is that the severely punished people of the country want an immediate halt to transport blockade and strikes so that they can exercise their right to life.

The AL is heavily dependent on the administration and police, which does not bode well for its political authority. This coupled with a BNP morphing into greater belligerency almost surrogating Jamaat leaves you wondering if you are looking at a militant resurgence by default.

Only a viable inclusive democracy can fend that danger off.

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MANIC FRIDAY

HUMOROUSLY YOURS



weddings and a funeral. Throw in Saturday, and we finish the shortest work week on the planet while proving to the world that we can accomplish in two days for which the rest of the world needs a whole five day work week.

Let me be greedy. How about a third working day, say, Sunday please, at least for the sake of secularism?

So, that leaves us with four days of hartal and oborodh, unless otherwise stated -- rain or shine, or should I say, slain or dyin'. Did I say rain? Hmm... Ever seen hartal/oborodh in Monsoon? Take a C-130 Hercules and spray some silver iodide on to the clouds. The artificial rain will cause massive de-agitation. After all, making the agitation movement costly has not worked by not lowering fuel prices (despite the global downturn in oil prices) with no lull in petrol bombs.

Ok, till the rains come in to wash everything away, let's work with a three day work week and four days of weekend. Now, that's for the plebes. For the fate-makers, it's three days of rest to gear up for four days of anti SSC/O'Levels stance/movements. Not a bad happy medium. Good enough for the kids to come up with the highest scoring yet shortest essay on 'A Journey by Bus' entering the Guinness Book: "I get on the bus. I reach my destination. No petrol bombs." Meantime, teachers finally and deservedly enter the highest salary bracket, considering the wage per working hour.

Profiteering aplenty too. After Canada and Australia, Syria is now beckoning Bangladeshis to migrate there with the slogan: "Hey, it's safer here!" Bangladesh goes live on Google Street View well ahead of many other countries -- though all we see is fire.

We may think that both camps remain terminally indifferent. Quite the contrary. There IS dialogue. There are two fixed monologues used interchangeably by the incumbent and the (effective) opposition, regardless of which party is the incumbent and which is the opposition at whichever time. And two monologues make a dialogue -- a dialogue with the candle burning from both ends.

But don't forget that the TV is on, more so now with longer hours indoors. Like Bollywood, Hindi serials, cows, saris and five o'clock shadows, the concept of Aam Aadmi Party may seep into Bangladesh from India. This may be a major paradigm shift from the current worldwide TPM -- Tea Party Movement in the US, Trinamool Party's Mamata in West Bengal and Torchings Per Minute in Bangladesh. Sure, the AAP here can be *Ami* and *Ami* Party, an AL leaning AAP, a BNP leaning AAP,...., but nevertheless, a force to reckon with. After all, stability sometimes comes with a triangular balance. And the Bangladeshi *aam aadmi* took five years to endure, another five years to endure more, another five years to endure even further and then took the final five years to attain an ungodly level of endurance. It is now poised for the long haul.

So is this like a packet of *biriyani* that everyone will be pleased with? No, and even some complain when given the greasy packet: "I prefer white rice." But it just may be an alternative to trying to put our noses in our ears and then trying to blow our brains out for the silver bullet (and please, that's a figurative bullet!) as there is no point in trying to apply formalin to an already rotten situation.

These are my passing thoughts, not my solutions. Remember, I'm a comedian and not a protologist. But if I say anything to offend anyone, please believe me. And then, forgive and forget.

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

Return of Aam Aadmi A new chapter in Indian politics?

SMRUTI S. PATTANAIK

THE astounding victory of Aam Aadmi Party in the Delhi Assembly election has again brought to focus the importance of regional parties and their ability to focus on local issues. The usual sadak, bijli paani and corruption issues that AAP has successfully focused since its inception as a party did make a difference. The negative publicity that was given to his 49 days tenure as the chief minister of Delhi -- "running away" from responsibility by resigning from the chief minister's post -- was converted into a firm promise of "paanchsaal, Kejriwal" and urged the voters to give AAP absolute majority for it to deliver on promises. This election from the very beginning was a contest between BJP and AAP.

BJP, in a bid to wrest the slogan of clean government from AAP, fielded Kiran Bedi as its chief ministerial candidate. Like Kejriwal, Kiran Bedi was also part of Anna movement that gave birth to AAP. However, she could not deliver BJP a victory largely due to the dissatisfaction within the party for bringing an outsider who, prior to the announcement of her being the chief ministerial candidate, was not even a member of BJP. Some keen watchers of BJP argue that she was brought in after BJP's internal survey showed that the party may lose the election.

BJP's mistake was that it saw Delhi as any other state. The capital has the largest middle class, belonging to diverse reli-

gions and linguistic groups. The middle class is also keenly watching how some fringe elements are blatantly pursuing their agenda and trying to cash in on growing polarisation. If, Arvind Kejriwal was an 'anarchist' as BJP portrayed; BJP, as an alternative to AAP, did not represent order and harmony. The recent attacks on church and the riots in Trilokpur in Delhi were fresh in people's mind. People in general and the middle class in particular would like stability which will boost economic growth and provide security. This sentiment was reflected in the Parliamentary election when Congress was voted out of power, and the same sentiments are now displayed again.

It needs to be underlined that the large support for AAP came from the youth, lower middle class and the poor who saw Kejriwal as one of them and who could deliver on their minimal need of clean drinking water and electricity. Delhi had 1.12 lakhs first time voters, and of the total electorate young voters constitute 1.31%. AAP was able to mobilise the youth and many volunteered themselves as political workers for the party and campaigned in the colleges and universities. The amazing tally of 67 seats compared to 28 in 2013 speaks of the volunteers who infused enthusiasm into a politically apathetic population with a surge in the turnout rate of 67 compared to 65 in 2013. BJP was routed in this election. The party which had 32 seats in 2013 was reduced to a poor 3 seats, with Kiran Bedi losing the election, and the Congress could not get even one seat -- a pathetic performance by

a national party. It is also apparent that supporters of both BJP and Congress overwhelmingly voted for the AAP. It also caught the imagination of Muslims in Delhi, who voted for the party unlike last time when a majority of them had voted for BJP. AAP had made it clear that it would not appeal to the voters on communal lines and had rejected Shahi Imam's fatwa to the Muslims to vote for the AAP. The left political parties and the Trinamool Congress who do not have any significant political presence in Delhi also appealed to the voters to vote for the AAP.

AAP wants to evolve as a party with a difference, and will not emulate other national political parties as it promises to start new politics. Though it wanted to capitalise on its brand as an uncorrupt party or party of the common man and contested the national election and won only 4 seats, mainly in Punjab, it is likely to go slow this time around. It needs to prove its mettle in governing Delhi and shed its image of an 'agitating party' which forgets that it is the ruling party.

The advantage that this party has is its youthful spirit, and is led by people who are younger and have managed to inspire youngsters that ability to change can happen with a belief in self rather than having a massive fund to win election. In a campaign carried by NDTV on 'no VIP' culture all the 70 contestants from the AAP signed a pledge that, if they came to power, they would reject the VIP culture that has become a symbol of political class in the country,

whereas such a pledge was around 50% for the BJP and Congress. Perhaps this has popularised Arvind Kejriwal as a people's chief minister.

The AAP victory also suggests that people would prefer regional parties in the state Assembly elections. Regional political parties focus on local issues that confront the people in their day-to-day lives, whereas national political parties have larger national and international agenda. This is reflected in the majority of states where state Assembly elections were held in the past one year; whereas Parliamentary election reflects very different trends. Taking this reality into consideration, Prime Minister Modi, after he assumed power, emphasised that the states would be given larger role in the foreign policy decision making.

After the results of Delhi Assembly elections started coming out, indicating a victory for the AAP, the prime minister not only congratulated Arvind Kejriwal but also promised to extend him the central government's support. This attests to the maturity of the political class to bury the acrimony during the course of election and connect the local issues with the national. Whereas national parties remain relevant to Indian politics and BJP will remain a preferred national party, the regional parties are here to stay and will remain a major political force in the country's politics. Thus, this election may not reflect the rejection of BJP as a political party but rather as a word of caution to take note of evolving politics.

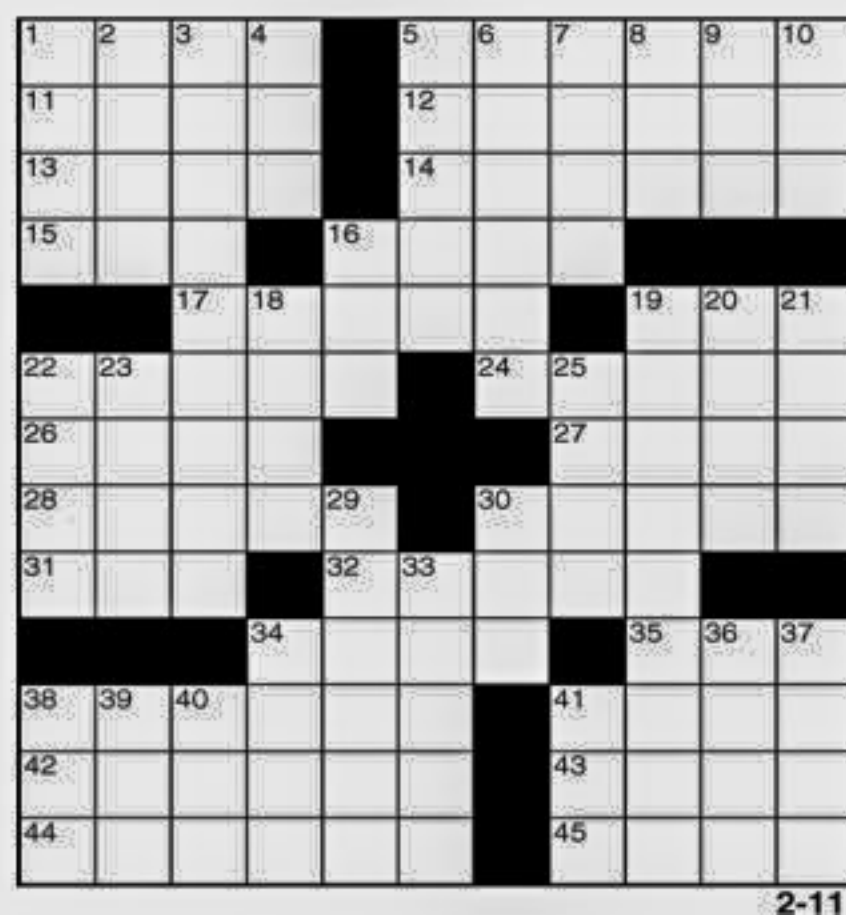
The writer is a political and security analyst.

CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

- CROSSWORD
1 Office worker
5 Penn, for one
11 Lotion additive
12 Different
13 Move smoothly
14 On cloud nine
15 Sea dog
16 Hive group
17 Singer Faith
19 Tourist's aid
22 Plant pest
24 Crumpet's cousin
26 Competes
27 Protracted
28 Stern with a bow
30 Bomb parts
31 June honoree
32 Pueblo material
34 Trojan War hero
35 Bowler, for one
38 "A Perfect Peace" author
41 Flying; Prefix
42 Twosome
43 Aspirin target
44 Stable group
45 Vortex
- DOWN
1 Wilson's predecessor
2 Singer Fitzgerald
3 Agnes of "Bewitched"
4 Congregants' seat
5 Chess piece
6 Except if
7 Sighed cry
8 Model buy
9 -- out a living
10 Spectrum end
16 Misbehaving
18 Traveler's need
19 Lake in Maine
20 Poet Sexton
21 Cribbage markers
22 Gung-ho
23 Tuscany city
25 Iron, for one
29 Sweet-talk
30 Hounds' quarry
33 Stuns
34 Nile serpents
36 Like the Sahara
37 Theater award
38 German cry
39 Cow call
40 Wilder's "- Town"
41 Zoo resident

Until lions have their historians, tales of the hunt shall always glorify the hunters.

AFRICAN PROVERB



Yesterday's answer

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

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker



CRYPTOQUOTE
CEOP GW E REXP TPS FPEN'R PLP: IDT'W INGTG GX FDB ENP INGLGTY, ETI IDT'W INGLP GX FDB'LP KPPT INGTGTY.

-- FDBN UDTRU GPTUP

Yesterday's CRYPTOQUOTE:
TOMORROW IS THE FIRST BLANK PAGE OF A THREE HUNDRED AND SIXTY-FIVE PAGE BOOK. WRITE A GOOD ONE.

-- BRAD PAISLEY

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.