

The Other Woman

CLEAR AS MUD



AHMEDE HUSSAIN

BORN in the womb of a military dictatorship and in the hands of a notoriously unpredictable leader, Jatya Party (JP) has indeed come a long way.

Before the mass upsurge of 1990 that had witnessed the ouster of the JP from power, the party's strength had indeed never been tested. The two elections that it had won with an overwhelming margin were when it was in power.

Having said that, the party shocked its critics in the February 27, 1991 election, in which it had bagged 35 seats, winning as many as 11.9 percent votes. With its leader Lt Gen (rtd) Hussain Mohammad Ershad in prison and the big guns of the party either in hiding or in jail, most of the JP candidates could not even do proper electioneering. The election had witnessed a surge in votes of the rightists and centre rightist political parties, and it will not be difficult to tell how many seats the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP; 140) and Jamaat-e-Islami (JI; 18) would have got if the JP's charismatic leader had been given unfettered access to the ordinary voters.

Twenty four years on, the JP's votes have remained the same. At least that is what the stats tell us. In the last year's one-sided election, the party had got 34 seats (11.31%). This is surprising for some of the JP candidates had won their parliament berths uncontested, and with the main opposition BNP boycotting the election after calling it farcical, Ershad's side was supposed to put up a good show.

Instead of seeing the absence of BNP in the election as an opportunity, the JP



handled the polls the way one would deal with a necessary encumbrance. What now seems a strange strategy, the party leadership quite deliberately split itself in the line of anti-election (Ershad) and pro-election (Rowshan Ershad) camps. Ershad threatened to commit suicide if he was forced into joining the polls and declared the said intention with a gun in hand and all, and his wife called her faction the real party with some JP faithful suddenly clamouring around her.

The biggest opportunity that the JP has missed perhaps came before last year's national election. The party could have gone to the voters with a pro-people agenda, insisting on a fight

in all the 300 seats as a prerequisite for its participation in the polls and it might have tried to come before the electorate as an alternate to the Khaleda-led alliance. But the JP had failed to do that and it failed miserably even to become an opposition in the parliament.

Hedging its bet in such a manner saved Ershad from serving some prison term in a graft case or something even more life threatening--a total revival of Gen Abul Manzoor murder case. The Awami League had done to the JP what all the ruling parties had done to Ershad since he has been overthrown from power--the powers that be coax the deposed dictator into toeing the

line, and when he refused to buckle, the proverbial stick is brought and the General would listen.

In a nutshell, that has been the sole political strategy of the JP--to save Ershad from further humiliation, in the party lingo it roughly means a prison sentence. The policy has so far been completely successful in attaining its goal, as the party Chairperson hasn't had to go to prison for 14 years. But it has destroyed the JP as a political entity. It claims itself to be the main opposition, but some of its MPs are holding portfolios in the Sheikh Hasina-led Awami League government, and apparently they have refused to step down even after Ershad has told them to do

so. To make matters even more grievous, Ershad himself has been made the Prime Minister's Special Envoy. Not only that, there are instances when Prime Minister and Awami League supremo had to intervene to resolve disputes between JP MPs. There have been newspaper reports according to which the party Secretary General and once firebrand student leader Ziauddin Bablu publicly supported the AL mayoral candidate AJM Nasir Uddin in Chittagong. It would not have caused much of a stir if the JP did not have a mayor nominee in the country's commercial capital.

Farce after farce fate, it seems, has piled upon the JP; and more might be in the offing. The AL has made some inroads into the party heartland in Rangpur. The JI, too, has some popular candidates in the division. In the local government body election that took place last year, the JP candidates got a heavy beating and the 'main opposition' was reduced to a non-entity. Party discipline is also in tatters, so is its diminishing visibility as an opposition party. If properly strategised, the JP could have given the BNP a run for its money, but now the party itself looks like a wrong bet.

Bangladesh has two main opposition parties now, and both of them are led by women--one in the House and the other on the street. Rowshan Ershad, the leader of the opposition in the parliament, is soft-spoken and is often praised by the PM herself. She is far from the kind of leaders we have seen gracing the seat that she sits in. Then again the JP is no revolutionary party either, over the years it has been reduced to a henpecked opposition, crushed to the rubbles is its potential to become a real centrist political party.

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A few dos and don'ts in the movement against sexual assault

#ResearchMesearch



NADINE SHAANTA MURSHID

U NPRECEDENTE D levels of outrage and activism surround the Pahela Baishakh sexual assault; we have finally reached critical mass: people are out on the streets and those who are not, are on social media fighting many a battle with individuals who still resort to victim blaming and slut shaming. These are

oft-used tactics to further subjugate women and take agency away from people who fight for the rights of women subject to sexual assault and rape. That the synchronised bomb-attack style sexual assault on multiple women have enraged so many people comes as a surprise in a nation where topics of sex and sexual assault have remained taboo, despite extremely high rates of sexual violence against women. This is a welcome change. So while we are at it, here are a few things we should add on to the list:

1. We need to demand the criminalisation of marital rape. By not criminalising marital rape we allow violence against all women to thrive. The system, if you will, sends the message that women can be touched without consent. If you can touch your wife without consent, you can touch anyone without consent, the message reads. We need to change that message. This is particularly important given that most violence against women are committed not by strangers (even though, as we can see, that happens too) but by people who are known to them, including men they're married to.

2. We need to demand the inclusion of sex education courses in schools and universities. For children and for adults who haven't had sex education. Part of that education is to demystify sex so that people don't go to such lengths to quench their curiosity. It's not unexpected that young men and women will be curious about their bodies and the bodies of others. But that doesn't allow them to touch someone else without consent. This message has to be taught and

taught again till it becomes part of who we are.

3. Women (and others who are marginalised) need to stand up for themselves. And men and other women need to encourage and support them when they do. For every person that was sexually assaulted on Pahela Baishakh there are hundreds and thousands of others who have been sexually assaulted in their lifetimes. We need to create a culture where people can stop excusing sexual assault as "accidents" or "mistakes" or whatever else that people use to excuse such vile behaviour. Even when the perpetrator is a relative or a family friend. They need to cut ties with them, and they need to be outed, even if it means

other people have chosen to assault her. Her honour is not what is at stake when she is assaulted. Her safety is. Her physical and mental health is. Her sense of control is. Her sense of trust is. But never her honour. Till we stop speaking about sexual assault in the same breath as shame and stigma, violence against women will remain a tool to control and assert power over them.

2. Eve-teasing. What is that? The poster of four men with "say no to eve-teasing" that made the social network rounds is not helping anyone. Great job in making men a part of the movement, that's a step in the right direction towards enhancing gender equality. But when you call it 'eve-

committed. If it worked with war criminals in Rwanda (and it did) it will work with rapists in Bangladesh. We need to give that a shot. If the ultimate goal is to ensure that sexual assaults and rape don't take place, people need to be on board with the idea that sexual assault affects people negatively in many ways and people who assault need to see the effect that their actions have on other people. For every man (and woman) who said they were asking for it, for every man (and woman) who justified the sexual assault on women because of what they were wearing or how they were wearing it, I believe that they actually believe that. That belief system needs to be broken. They need to see that these women were not asking for it, that just like they have the right to wear whatever they want, women have that right too. They need to be taught how to see women as human beings and not objects of desire or marriage. That is a lot of work. And, I repeat, castrating men won't do it. Mindsets need to change. Not body parts.

5. What was the protest with the *shari-churi* (sari and bangles) about? To cite my cousin Rubaiya of Obhoyaronno, to signify weakness? Unless the idea was to show that the *shari* and the *churi* are symbols of strength, you had no business using those symbols at the protest against police insensitivity and inaction. That takes away from the strength that you've garnered in making these protests a reality. You have strength in numbers, you have strength as individuals, and you have implicit strength in your cause. Please don't derail from the larger objective of making the world safer for women, the larger cause of inculcating respect for women, erasing the notion that women are inferior to men. By associating women with *saris* and bangles (only) you are inadvertently reducing women to those traditionally feminine symbols that depict only a certain kind of women, indicating that a particular type of women need to be protected, elevated. This notion that only certain kinds of women deserve respect is against the very grain of the movement that you have started.

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they're losing every friend they thought they had.

4. If you are being violated, please know, you don't deserve it. No matter what. And every time someone touches you without your consent, you are being violated. And nobody deserves that. Just because you are not bearing physical scars and bruises does not mean it did not happen to you.

And a few things to be mindful of:

1. Language. The language that we use to talk about rape, starting with that first report about Liton Nandi saving the "honour" of a woman, needs to change. A woman's honour is not dependent on whether she is raped or sexually assaulted. Her honour doesn't disappear because

teasing' - a word that marginalises the very essence of the problem of sexual assault and rape - you are taking away from all the work that has been done to change that language.

3. Protesting against sexual assault is a great first step towards change; however, justice does not equal to cries for more violence. We need to be cognizant of the fact that the calls for castration and dehumanisation of men won't change the problem that we have today. (And the parallels that are being drawn between rapists and animals don't work either. Don't do it. Dogs don't rape. Humans do.)

4. Restorative justice as a way forward. Yes, even in such cases where heinous crimes were

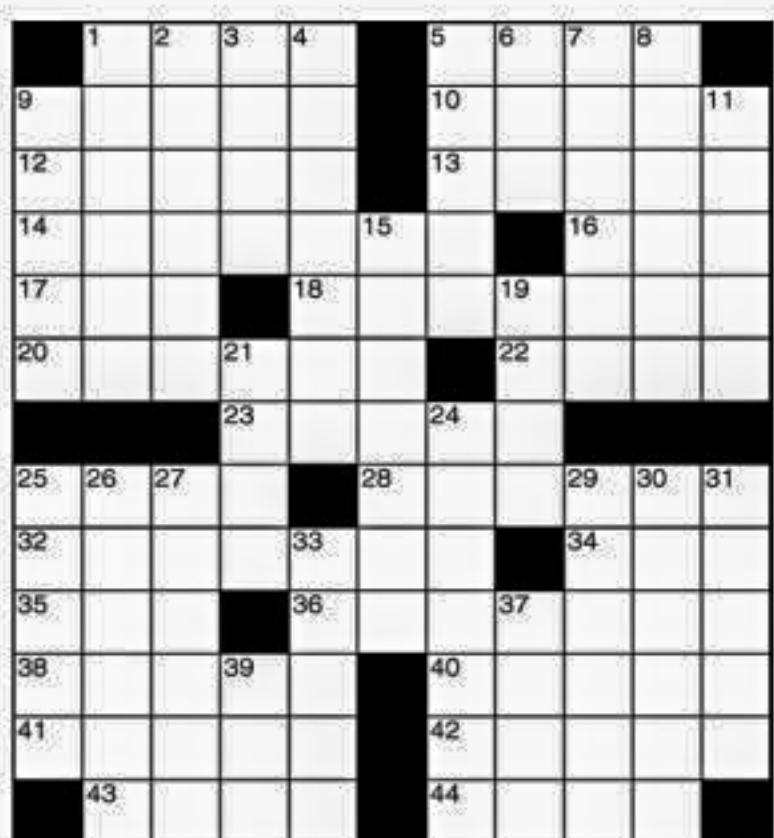
QUOTABLE Quote

The minute you become conscious that you are doing good, that's the minute you have to stop because from then on it's wrong.

Paula Fox

CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

- ACROSS**
- 1 Sweeping
 - 5 Small statue
 - 9 "Gay" City
 - 10 Dizzying designs
 - 12 Galleon's place
 - 13 Bulldog fan
 - 14 South-Western capital
 - 16 Homer's dad
 - 17 Greek vowel
 - 18 Michael Keaton movie
 - 20 Outcome
 - 22 Unctuous
 - 23 Edison's - Park
 - 25 Exchange
 - 28 Singer Kitt
 - 32 Carry on
 - 34 With it
 - 35 "Revenge" network
 - 36 Souvenir shop stack
 - 38 Roofing material
 - 40 Thrill
 - 41 Web-surfing need
 - 42 Paddy crops
 - 43 Turns right
- DOWN**
- 44 Crystal gazer
 - 1 Leave
 - 2 Game settings
 - 3 Plane fixture
 - 4 Easily defended
 - 5 "Gaslight" star
 - 6 - tree
 - 7 Deli buy
 - 8 Of the clan
 - 9 Tough puzzle
 - 11 Minute
 - 15 Gym goal
 - 19 Revolver, perhaps
 - 21 Game callers
 - 24 Prepares to shave
 - 25 Twitch
 - 26 Collection of posts
 - 27 game setting
 - 29 Homeland of Orpheus
 - 30 Home run king
 - 31 Church areas
 - 33 Checkout line count
 - 37 Tennis's Nastase
 - 39 Kickoff aid



Yesterday's answer

CASA DOOR
EXALT OWNER
DINER PEEVE
ELF AMENDED
SLOT CAR ART
ARIES DYED
DER TIA
SPAR MASTS
TIN RANSACK
ANDROID TON
BASES EVITIA
STONE MIMIC
ANTS PEAK

CRYPTOQUOTE 3-14
ZD WNJ'PM SNR AVUZSL AZBRVUMB, RGMS WNJ'PM SNR ONZSL VSWRGZSL. Z'A QNBZRZEM RGVR V ONMP AVUMB AZBRVUMB.
YESTERDAY'S CRYPTOQUOTE: EVERY DEFEAT, EVERY HEARTBREAK, EVERY LOSS, CONTAINS ITS OWN SEED, ITS OWN LESSON ON HOW TO IMPROVE YOUR PERFORMANCE THE NEXT TIME. - MALCOLM X

BEETLE BAILEY



by Mort Walker



HENRY



by Don Tranchte