

# A ceasefire between the battling Begums!



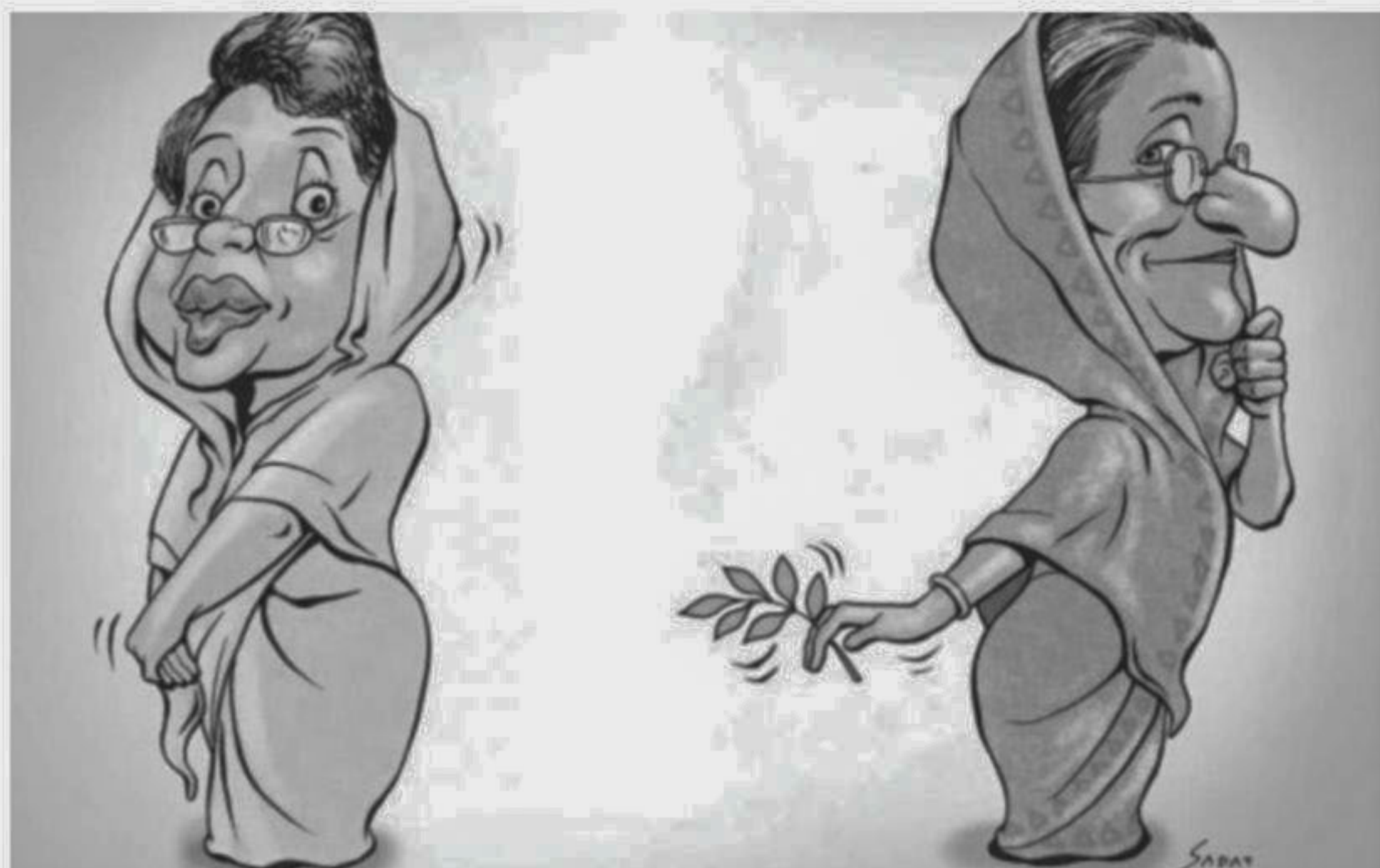
SHAH HUSAIN IMAM

**PLEASURE IS ALL MINE**

**N**EW realisations appear to be dawning on the leadership of Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), especially on its chairperson Khaleda Zia. The latest indication of an apparent change of heart is the party avoiding any knee-jerk reaction over the confirmation of death sentence by the highest court against its senior leader Salahuddin Quader Chowdhury. BNP has not called for hartal.

Once wired up to call hartal on almost any pretext, BNP lets go of a more serious reason to make an impulsive announcement of protest against Salahuddin's turn of fate. The party merely reacted in a soberly worded statement saying, it was 'upset, surprised, aggrieved and shocked' by the verdict.

What a sea-change has come over BNP, by past standards! The party's stock argument against opting out of hartal and oborodh had been that it had its back against the wall so it had no alternative but to go for them. Now by a twist of fate, when the party has indeed its back to the wall it is doing the exact opposite: religiously keeping out of violent political programmes. Actually, it is as well that they are doing it and should continue to do it; for, the bloody and burning orgies carried out by them isolated them from the general masses. Besides, their violent politics with Jamaat as its spearhead corroded the credibility of the senior partner.



Another twist in the tale is that where previously Sheikh Hasina wanted to draw Khaleda Zia into elections on her terms, now it is the latter who is trying to draw the Prime Minister into calling a snap election.

The underdog image or martyr complex that BNP wanted to cultivate with the people in the face of 'persecution' couldn't work to their advantage because serious blunders had been stacked against the party's image.

And Khaleda Zia admitted to some of the major follies in hindsight, one wished if such

faltering had been averted by her in real time. First, the BNP chairperson regretted, according to some reports, that she did not respond to Sheikh Hasina's telephonic invitation for talks citing that she was occupied with a pre-announced political programme. But wasn't talking, a part and parcel of politics, clearly more important than a violent partisan programme? Secondly, when Sheikh Hasina put forward a 5 plus 5 BNP-AL formula of representation in the interim government headed by the incumbent PM, this too was dismissed out of hand. The final nail was driven in the coffin by

the BNP's refusal to participate in the January 5 polls in spite of a fair chance of its good showing. Our point is, at least, BNP could have tested the bona fides of the AL on its overtures rather than perpetuating distrust in national polity.

As reported in a prominent Bangla daily, Khaleda Zia went conciliatory to a point where she asked, "Why should we not be seeing each other's face; we should be talking like we once did to craft the changeover from the Presidential to the Parliamentary form of government?"

Khaleda has been out of power for eight years with another four years in prospect. Holding BNP together would be challenging given that our party politics is sustained on a patron-client relationship. BNP out of power lacks in such gelling chemistry. In contrast, AL, having remained out of power for 21 years, held its ground because of strong ideological moorings and grassroots base. In power, it has the added advantage of a patri-mony.

In this context, AL is under no pressure to call a mid-term election, even though there are occasional feelers that the party might go for it to consolidate its position and establish its legitimacy. The scheme of things should have space for a strong constructive opposition party so that Bangladesh takes its place with other advancing democracies in the world.

BNP needs an add-on to its new set of self-realisations, which is this: Let Khaleda Zia refrain from celebrating her birthday on August 15, an affront to the solemnity of mourning the assassination of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

The writer is Associate Editor, The Daily Star.

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## Eid holidays on NYC school calendar A historic decision

*In this tense environment of growing Islamophobia in the US, the New York mayor's decision most definitely signals a positive new direction. We need to focus on the similarities that can unite, not the differences that tend to divide people.*

LAVINA AMBREEN AHMED

**I**N the Western world it is hard to come across any "positive news" about Muslims these days. But there it was -- all over the media. New York Mayor Bill de Blasio in early March this year made a very welcome announcement for American-Muslims. The mayor announced that public schools in New York will be closed to observe two of the most important Muslim holidays - Eid ul-Fitr and Eid ul-Azha, starting from the current school year 2015-2016 beginning in September. This is by no means, a small accomplishment. And this decision did not happen overnight. It took a group of American-Muslim activists in New York City almost nine years to persistently campaign for this change to happen. If the public schools in a culturally and religiously diverse city like New York can be closed for Christian and Jewish holidays such as Christmas and Rosh Hashana, why not for Muslim holidays, they argued. Although the "Big Apple" is not the first city to incorporate the two Muslim holy days into their academic calendar (other American school districts that also observe Eid festivals are New Jersey, Massachusetts, Vermont and Michigan), it is the largest metropolis in the United States to have taken this major step, making it a historic decision for the country as well.

For Mayor De Blasio, the action was taken to make good on his election campaign promise in 2013, to make New York City a more tolerant, inclusive city. In his speech, he said it was "a matter of fairness", to honour the growing number of Muslims in the community. Muslim students currently comprise about 10 percent of the 1.1 million student population in New York's public schools.

There are many debates centering on this decision. However, the big question is, how this decision can help in fighting the media-engendered negative stereotype of the "Muslim terrorist" -- or bluntly, the racial profiling that all Muslims are "potential terrorists" or "terrorist sympathisers" in the US and elsewhere.



Before and after this decision was announced, several violent shootings happened in various parts of the U.S. this year alone. But there were two recent incidents that occurred almost one month apart that were very similar in terms of the premeditated nature of the attacks and the age of the perpetrators.

In the first incident, 21-year-old Dylann Roof opened fire in a historic Black church in Charleston, South Carolina and murdered nine African-American citizens who were engaged in a prayer meeting on June 17. In his own admission, he wanted to start a "race war". He openly expressed his racist agenda and hatred for African-Americans on social media.

The second incident involved a 24-year-old American-Muslim man in Chattanooga, Tennessee. On July 16,

Mohammad Youssuf Abulazeez opened fire in two military recruitment centres killing five Marines and wounding others before getting killed in the gunfight that ensued between him and law enforcement officers. He wrote blog articles about Islam and expressed his absolute devotion to his faith.

Immediately following the Chattanooga shootings, there was widespread speculation whether Abulazeez had a Jihadist agenda, and the mainstream media framed the story of the accused as a "seemingly normal, Kuwaiti-born naturalised US citizen, who became disillusioned and radicalised recently". Shortly after the incident it was revealed that Abulazeez was suffering from severe depression for many years. But depression or not,

the Chattanooga incident was considered a terrorist act. In the Charleston killings, however, the shooter Roof who was arrested immediately, was described as "mentally ill" and a "racist".

I do not have any problems with Abulazeez being labeled a terrorist and the violence he perpetrated categorised as a "terrorist attack"; but for the sake of fairness, shouldn't Roof also get the same treatment in the media - meaning get the same label of a "terrorist" and his crime be considered not simply a "hate crime", which it most certainly is, but also an act of terrorism?

The main difference in these two cases is obvious -- Roof is Caucasian and Christian and Abulazeez was Arab and Muslim. So, it seems the "terrorist" label is only reserved for a chosen

group of people who are usually "brown and Muslim". That seems to be the default response to violent shootings in a country where gun violence and mass shootings are rampant, and firearms are easily accessible to anyone seeking them, with little to no background check required.

Therefore, in this tense environment of growing Islamophobia in the US, the New York mayor's decision most definitely signals a positive new direction. Interestingly, Mayor de Blasio pointed out the similarities and connection between the three largest monotheistic faiths in the world, namely, Christianity, Judaism and Islam. That was, in fact, the most significant part of the mayor's speech. We need to focus on the similarities that can unite, not the differences that tend to divide people. "If we can honour the religious holidays of the other two faiths, it is about time we include Muslim holidays in our city's school calendar," he said. The speech was fresh, it felt like a genuine attempt to establish a culture of religious tolerance, as well as an interest in understanding Islam to make Muslims feel more involved in the decision making process of their own community.

If Christians, Jews, Muslims - religious or not - can accept the notion that the core values and principles of Islam are not that different from Christianity and Judaism, and the mainstream Western media do not always accurately present Islam, people will be able to coexist in a uniquely diverse city like New York and set an example for other US states and even countries to follow. The mayor stops his mostly right-wing detractors by simply referring to the United States constitution. "The United States is a nation that was built to be multifait and multiethnic." Kudos to the New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio for taking this bold and timely decision to usher in a new era in US politics.

The writer is a lecturer in the Department of Mass Communication and Journalism, University of Dhaka.

### QUOTABLE Quote

**DR APJ ABDUL KALAM**  
(OCTOBER 15, 1931 - JULY 27, 2015)

FOR GREAT MEN, RELIGION IS A WAY OF MAKING FRIENDS; SMALL PEOPLE MAKE RELIGION A FIGHTING TOO.

### CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

**ACROSS**

- 1 Blazer part
- 6 Fresh
- 11 Be penitent
- 12 Concert venue
- 13 Little brothers, typically
- 14 From the area
- 15 Try out
- 17 Spur on
- 18 Surgery souvenir
- 20 Facility
- 22 Suffering
- 23 Paint board
- 26 Some elbows
- 28 School paper
- 29 Turns abruptly
- 31 — out a living
- 32 Film unit
- 33 Barney's buddy
- 34 Another name for Jupiter
- 36 Ukraine city
- 38 "Don't Cry for Me" singer
- 40 Minor blunders
- 43 Home design
- 44 Sanctioned
- 45 Bumbling
- 46 Company suits

**DOWN**

- 1 Pool unit
- 2 Had a bite
- 3 Group with lots of letters
- 4 Door sign
- 5 Reduced amount
- 6 Mineo of movies
- 7 Incites
- 8 Presidential protectors
- 9 Small setback
- 10 New Haven School
- 16 Assam export
- 18 Wee drinks
- 19 Lobster part
- 21 Pub pints
- 23 Make lots
- 24 Appropriate
- 25 Took in
- 27 Bird's perch
- 30 Yellow-stone grazer
- 33 Oscar's roommate
- 34 Empire's foes
- 35 Kitchen sight
- 37 Vacation spot
- 39 Gallery fill
- 41 Snap
- 42 Ave. inter-sectors

Yesterday's answer

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

### BEETLE BAILEY

by Mort Walker

### BABY BLUES

by Kirkman & Scott