

A for AHMED, B for BOMB, C for CLOCK

CHINTITO SINCE 1995



NIZAMUDDIN AHMED

NOT that I am very keen, except maybe for a selfie with the doorman to the envy of my Facebook friends, I have over the past week discovered a sure way to be invited to the White House; more so because of Mark Zuckerberg's interest in the most ridiculous of science-related stories.

Make an ordinary clock with the intelligence of an average Asian, take it to the school classroom, make sure beforehand that your teacher is an idiot (better still, also xenophobic), explain that clocks also go tick-tock, and with a name like Ahmed Mohamed, you are laughing all the way to 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington, D.C.

Those of you who have starry-eyed ambitions to pursue engineering education in the States, it may help you to reconsider before filling up the visa form that the first tutor who got to see the gadget he made (it was a clock) was ninth grader Ahmed Mohamed's engineering teacher, who said it was nice (how sweet!) but then told him he should not show the invention to other teachers. Why? Maybe because it looked suspicious from an engineering point of view.

Ahmed is only 14-years old, an impressionable age when the best among them strive to make an impression. The large briefcase-size clock was a contraption of wires, screws, electrical bits and pieces, and had its circuit board and a digital display.

Alarm bells rang across Dallas' MacArthur High School on September 14, when Ahmed's device started beeping during his English class and the teacher, being no engineer (hah!), thought it was "possibly the infrastructure for a bomb"; the school notified the police, and the Muslim teenager was handcuffed, detained and interrogated by officers.

Further damage to America's efforts to play down Islamophobia was controlled by a spontaneous tweet from Barack Obama, "Cool clock, Ahmed. Want to bring it to the White House? We should inspire more kids like you to like science. It's what makes America great." The president's message was retweeted almost 400,000 times within the first 18 hours.

Now Ahmed will be at the South Lawn of the White House rubbing shoulders with scientists, engineers, astronauts, teachers (I hope not his English teacher) and other students on Astronomy

Night on October 19, where he may hopefully continue to seek support for every other kid in the world who has a problem like this.

Ahmed was Ahmed at a news conference last Wednesday outside his home in Irving, and not bogged down by the fact that the police still had his clock, greeting a bevy of reporters with 'Aassalamulaiukum'. Traumatized as he is, Ahmed told a newspaper on video: "It made me feel like I wasn't human. It made me feel like I was a criminal."

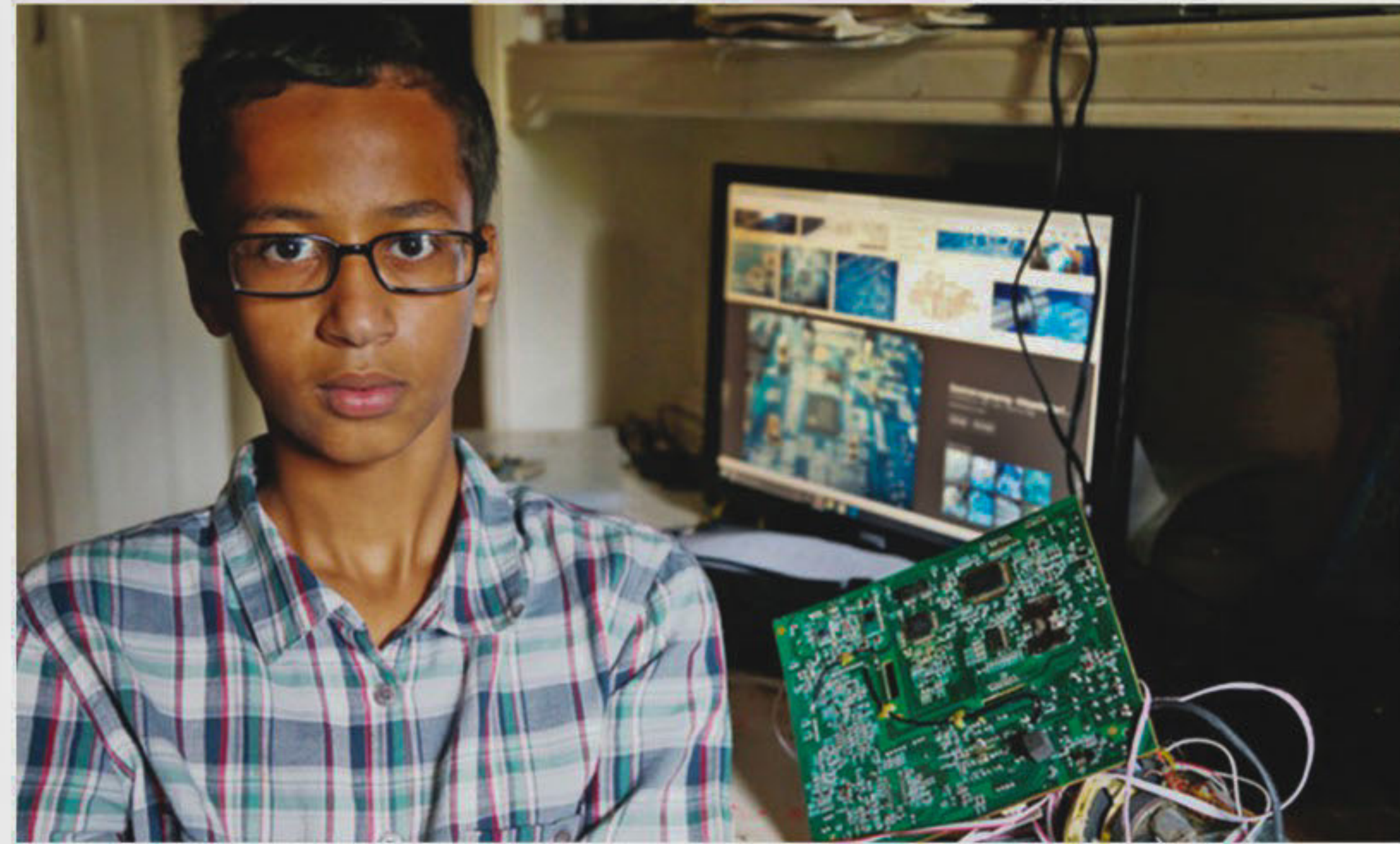
I am buoyed by social network comments from ordinary (yes non-Muslim) Americans, who simply abhorred the treatment meted out to Ahmed. From awful to devastating, from sad to

NASA now. And Fire his racist *** teacher!!! ... He's a kid!! He should have been able to trust his teacher. They're supposed to be mentors for our kids!! Not racist snitches going against them!!"

Danira Alihodzic posted: "The look on his face (while arrested) is breaking my heart! Is this how we reward a child who is advanced for his age?! Had he been white American, he would've made the town paper for a different reason entirely! It's nearly 2016 for the love of God!"

"Further evidence that racism and ignorance go hand in hand," wrote M Catherine Hazelton.

Stephanie Thomas Lmt thinks, "This poor kid, he's probably a genius & he's being 'taught' by ass hats..."



abomination, from outrageous to insulting, from ignorant to stupidity.

Posted Jordan Bumgarner on Facebook: "One of the greatest men I know is a Muslim, and I'm a Christian and we are very good friends. Ironic huh? Stereotypes are tearing this country apart."

Says MzKim Melvin: "The paranoia in this country is sickening! What are they going to charge him with being too smart for his ignorant Teacher?"

Wrote Vanessa Jane Warren: "This country is full of idiots including this jealous teacher!!! Praying for this child."

From Priscilla Chavarry: "He needs a job at

Says Joy Mitchell: "The teacher needs to have his teaching certificate revoked and criminal charges levelled against him. The cop who arrested him should also be fired. I hope this young man knows not everyone feels like those two asses do. Sue the school, go to college on the money and live well. Oh, and I'm Jewish!"

As for me, a teacher who does not know a clock from a bomb, or more importantly his/her student from a terrorist, SHOULD NOT TEACH.

The writer is a practising Architect at BashaBari Ltd., a Commonwealth Scholar and a Fellow, a Baden-Powell Scout Leader, and a Major Donor Rotarian.

A brush with an erudite patriot

SALAHUDDIN AKBAR

I was deeply saddened by the news of Social Welfare Minister Syed Mohsin Ali's death on September 14. I first saw him on the front page of *The Daily Star*, standing with a cigarette in his hand, a large audience in front of him. I began reading the news story only to find that he was from Sylhet, where also lies my childhood connection. His cigarette seemed to have had quite an impression on the whole nation!



Syed Mohsin Ali

Many months later, when I was visiting Sylhet to attend a syndicate meeting at Shahjalal University of Science & Technology, I was introduced to him. I was surprised and impressed with his command over English and found him to be erudite with versatile interests. I learnt that he had completed his high school education at St. Xavier's in Calcutta. That was probably the reason why I found him to be quite different from the image gleaned from the newspaper photograph. We also discovered that both of us had attended the same school for a brief time - Maulvibazar Govt High School, where other eminent personalities such as writer Syed Mujtaba Ali, founding editor of *The Daily Star* SM Ali and finance minister Saifur Rahman also studied.

During our conversation, I couldn't resist asking the honourable minister about his much-talked about picture showing him with a cigarette in hand at a school function. He just smiled and said: "You know, I was supposed to deliver a speech at BGB School in Sylhet Cantonment. I was very nervous to see the large crowd and decided that I must deliver a good speech. But I was completely blank! I could hardly organise my thoughts. Then I turned around and saw an officer and asked him, 'Brigadier, can I smoke?' He said, 'Yes sir.' As soon as I started smoking, I found my disjointed thoughts come running back to me in an organised manner and I was even able to instantly recall a few lines from a school poem. While smoking, I drafted my speech in my mind and delivered it so well that it came out like a well-drafted speech that won the applause of the audience. Now you see, if I had not smoked, I would have delivered a very dull speech and left the student audience disappointed." I couldn't help but laugh alongside him when he said this.

Undoubtedly, his remarks and disposition would sometimes create quite a stir in the media. But unlike shrewd politicians, he found it hard to resist saying his mind and his youthful exuberance made him appear naïve sometimes. But he had always maintained good relations with journalists and was even close to many leading reporters of the country.

His progressive personality and deep conviction in communal harmony was remarkable. He was a dedicated politician and social worker, a valiant freedom fighter. He tried discharging his duty with honesty and sincerity - a rare thing among people of his stature. He will not be forgotten. Syed Mohsin Ali will always be in our thoughts and prayers.

The writer is Additional Secretary to the government.

An attack on women's right to choose

LAVINA AMBREEN AHMED

ABOUT a couple of months ago, Planned Parenthood, (PP) the leading organisation well known for providing women with reproductive health services in the United States and all over the world, came under a series of vicious attacks by anti-abortion extremist groups that started a relentless smear campaign to stop its funding and permanently shut down all their offices in the U.S. PP is no stranger to strong opposition that includes - arson, bombing, violence and death threats to its providers ever since it started its journey of helping women take control of their own bodies and critical family planning decisions in 1916. The current battle against the organisation, however, seems to be more planned and hostile than the previous attempts.

It all started when an anti-abortion group, under the guise of a fake medical research company named Center for Medical Progress, released some undercover videos showing PP employees engaged in a discussion with prospective buyers to sell fetal tissues and organs for profit. The group claims their objective was to expose PP's illegal business, an allegation PP strongly denies. Legally, PP can donate fetal tissue for research in only three states and can charge a small fee for preservation and transportation purposes. After those videos came out, all hell broke loose. Most of the anti-abortion, pro-life activists belong to the conservative Republican Party - who had been vehemently against women's health care providers like Planned Parenthood for many years. And they jumped at this opportunity with renewed antagonism to cut off all federal funding and close their programmes for good. It is important to note,

PP gets approximately, \$500 million annually from the government for family planning and women's health related services. However, federal money by law cannot be used for abortion services.

According to media reports last month, the undercover videos were heavily edited and taken out of context to make a point against the organisation's mission. PP commissioned an investigation into the much-publicised "sting" videos and submitted the report to the Congress on August 27th. According to the report, the videos had missing footage which led to the distortion and misrepresentation of facts. In this ongoing heated debate, President Obama's government firmly stands with Planned Parenthood and is against defunding the organisation.

The fact that this situation is playing out in a country like the United States - a country, which has taken the lead when it comes to women's rights, is all the more alarming for women's movements everywhere else in the world. If Planned Parenthood - an organisation which has served women of mainly underserved communities for 100 years can encounter such fierce protests - what will happen to women's health care in developing countries? Planned Parenthood or Planned Parenthood Federation of America (PPFA) is not an organisation that is only important in the U.S. - through its international division, Planned Parenthood Global, has been serving in other countries by working with local advocates, medical service providers and community leaders for more than 40 years. PP Global works directly in several African and Latin American countries, but through its partner organisations and affiliates everywhere in the world, it provides invaluable support to countries like Bangladesh, India and other developing nations in Asia as well. One of the most signifi-

cant work the organisation does is to support efforts in developing countries to change the social, legal, and political viewpoint regarding access to comprehensive reproductive health care.

Simply stated, if PP loses funding in the country of its origin - the U.S., this would inevitably result in losing U.S. funding for women's health care programmes worldwide. Just like the "Global Gag Rule" (first imposed by President Reagan's administration, then later re-imposed by President George Bush's government) prohibited U.S. aid to be used for abortion services in foreign countries; this latest decision to defund PP would have a similar affect on maternal health care in the deprived developing world. (Note: When President Obama came to power, he lifted the Global Gag Rule).

The main reason the conservatives are so passionately opposed to PP is because of the abortion services it provides - which they oppose on moral and religious grounds. Interestingly, conservatives and liberals alike, many people regard PP as a centre that primarily provides abortion services. But a quick look at the organisation's website should dispel that notion. PP's programmes are varied, and include - birth control/family planning services, STD prevention, pregnancy support, general women's health care to mention just a few. In the 2014 annual report of PP, it is stated that abortion services accounted for only three percent of the more than 10 million services they provided.

However, this is such a serious political debate in the U.S. at the moment that it could lead to government shutdown this year. Congress has to come to a decision regarding whether to defund PP or not by September 30th. Lawmakers have to pass a federal funding bill by October 1st. All the 2016 U.S. presidential candidates from both Republican and Democratic parties are weighing

in on the PP issue and taking a stand to advance their political careers. Meanwhile, PP is aggressively fighting back the attacks to put them out of business. Through advertisements in all media outlets and counter campaigns to gain valuable public support, PP has shown that it is an organisation that is not intimidated by hostile threats and ready to fight back with equal determination.

When women activists are moving forward in the rest of the world, discussing progressive issues and concerns at the United Nations women's summits and other international platforms, the U.S. seems to be moving backwards when it comes to reproductive rights and women's rights matters. The issue with Planned Parenthood is a clear battle between Republicans and Democrats - the right and the left - the conservatives and the liberals, whichever way you describe it. It is a highly political matter. U.S. is constantly pointing out the poor status of women in developing countries. Yet it is beyond ridiculous that in this day and age a serious debate to defund Planned Parenthood, and potentially shutdown the government over women's reproductive rights decisions, is taking place in a country that boasts to have long overcome debates of gender equality and women empowerment.

As Cecile Richards, the President of Planned Parenthood Federation of America states: "Attacking Planned Parenthood is attacking women; who need preventive health care, cancer screenings and contraception. Health-care provision should never be political". Hopefully policy makers in the United States will come to their senses and recognise the importance of keeping health care separate from politics.

The writer is a freelance journalist living in the US.

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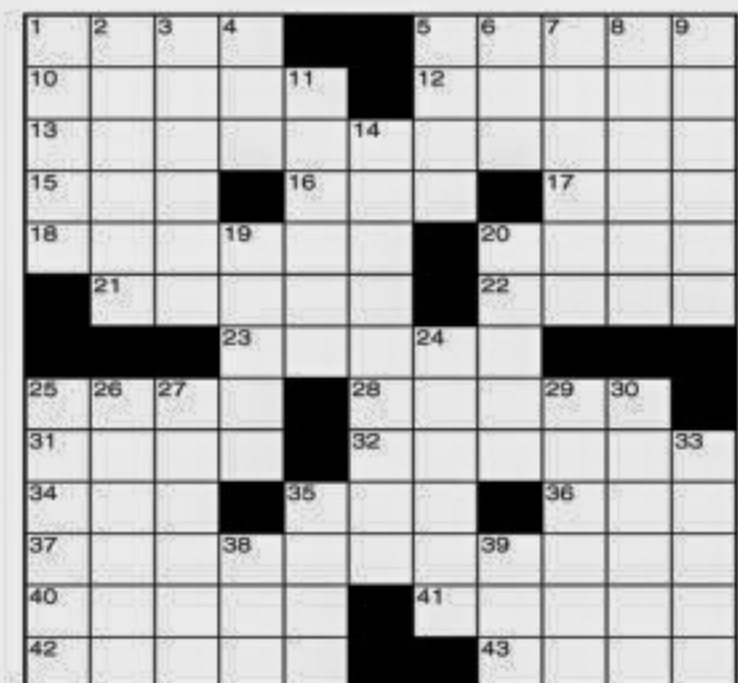
QUOTABLE Quote



MARIA MIES
PEACE IN PATRIARCHY IS WAR AGAINST WOMEN.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
- 1 Story
 - 5 Electrician's concern
 - 10 Verdi creation
 - 12 Love, to Luigi
 - 13 Cheap restaurant
 - 15 Ventilate
 - 16 Soak up
 - 17 Young one
 - 18 Ski event
 - 20 Print measure
 - 21 Long-legged bird
 - 22 Job for a plumber
 - 23 City of New York
 - 25 Englishman, for short
 - 28 Irrational fear
 - 31 "Why don't we!" for short
 - 32 Fiancée's agreement, for short
 - 34 One-time
 - 35 Regret
 - 36 "Fifth Beetle" Sutcliffe
 - 37 Symbol of wealthy beginnings
 - 40 Attempted
 - 41 Port- (French cheese)
 - 42 Bus units
 - 43 Brooklyn basketball team
- DOWN**
- 1 Frat party costumes
 - 2 Busy months for accountants
 - 3 Ogle
 - 4 Memorable period
 - 5 Homet's kin
 - 6 Little devil
 - 7 League newbie
 - 8 Beethoven Symphony
 - 9 "In the Night Kitchen" writer
 - 11 Classify
 - 14 Jewish high holy day
 - 19 British ones
 - 20 Flat surface
 - 24 Loving touch
 - 25 Wild parties
 - 26 Stop working
 - 27 Roma's land
 - 29 Sneaker part
 - 30 Depart hastily
 - 33 Fourthdown play
 - 35 Cincinnati team
 - 38 Old soldier
 - 39 Skillet



YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

CATS STEEL
OGRE HELLER
DIET INMATE
ELAPSED TIC
REDIALS ITA
R E N D C O B S
SHACK MONET
LUTE SOD
LIMP STAPLES
DOE PATIENT
ERASER EASE
RECENT CRUE
DEEDS EYED

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker



BABY BLUES by Kirkman & Scott

