

LIVING LIFE LIKE A RHINOCEROS

It deeply saddens me that our "success-oriented" society has come to accept, and in fact admire, the qualities which make us ruthlessly competitive, uncaring, and impervious to criticism, bulldozing our way to the top.



MILIA ALI

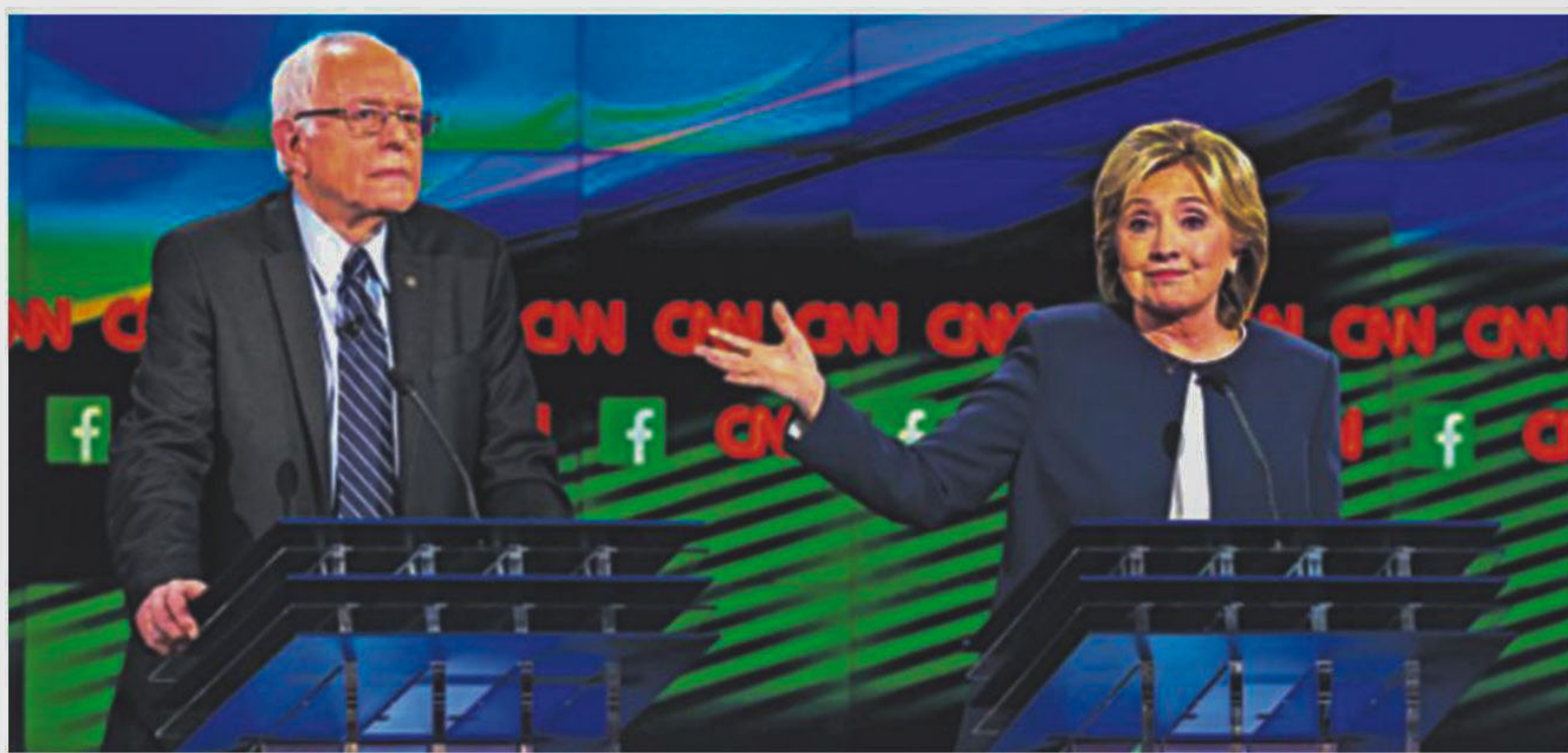
THE race for the United States presidency is heating up with the launching of the much discussed presidential debates. The debates are in a way, the "Greatest

Political Show on Earth" with the media publicising the US presidential elections as the contest for the "Leader of the Free World".

The Republican Party debates kicked off in August this year with the usual media hype and pageantry surrounding the political wrestling match. As most readers are aware, to date, Donald Trump seems to be ahead of the race owing to his outlandish pronouncements and characteristic obduracy. Despite severe media and public criticism for his gaffes on women and immigrants, he has stood his stance and continues to lead the pack of Republican contestants.

Last night (October 13), it was the turn of the Democratic candidates to unfurl their programmes and to express their positions on key national and global issues. Together with 15 million Americans, I too, stayed glued to the TV, watching the democratic heavyweights debate a wide slew of issues. The show provided some rare insights into the thinking of the candidates. However, my mind drifted toward a somewhat different track. As I watched the candidates spar with each other, as they deflected the sensitive questions, ducked the criticisms and superbly steered the debate to their advantage, I was convinced that politicians have the same thick hide whether in the United States, Bangladesh or elsewhere.

To be a successful politician, one must be thick-skinned, slippery and ingenious. It was amazing how Hillary Clinton deflected questions



about her email controversy and mishandling of the Libya Embassy attack, how Bernie Sander's stood his ground against gun control, being fully aware of the havoc gun violence has created in the country, how Lincoln Chaffee managed to convert his turncoat party record into one of adhering to principles. I marvelled at the resilience and steely nerves of the candidates and their unemotional handling of the accusations and counter accusations. This is perhaps the stuff politicians are made of, or perhaps, the material that vouches for success in life itself!

People argue that the good thing about hard-headed people is that they don't allow setbacks to deter them... this is euphemistically termed as "resilience". They may be right - Donald Trump seems to be surging in the popularity polls and political pundits declared Hilary Clinton as the winner

of last night's debate, since both display pizzazz - who cares about substance? At one point, Hilary confidently claimed: "I am still standing", in the face of severe criticism. The audience took that as a sign of confidence, grit and determination.

It deeply saddens me that our "success-oriented" society has come to accept, and in fact admire, the qualities which make us ruthlessly competitive, uncaring, and impervious to criticism, bulldozing our way to the top. Where does this put authentic people who are sensitive, emotional and are inclined to stick to their values and principles? I sometimes wonder: Is the end game all that we live for?

Friends have often criticised me for being "too sensitive" and letting my emotions come in the way of my goals. True, we sensitive individuals may not always reach the peak, but we are blessed that we feel, we emot, we

get hurt but we also let our love flow freely. The most painful failures in people's lives are the failures that involve relationships. And what does success matter if we have been insensitive to the pain we have caused to those we love or if people have moved away from us because we never "listened" to them.

I sincerely believe that there is something magically inspiring about living life intensely and sensitively. Let's not be afraid of wearing our heart on our sleeves, sometimes even exposing our vulnerability. It may mean we get hurt more. But it also helps us remain connected to our world and we become more open to receiving and giving love.

I suspect some readers are wondering how my advocacy for more authenticity in human interactions relates to the Democratic Presidential debate. The connecting tissue is the

almost universal acceptance of a politician's hypocritical tactic as an ingredient for achieving success. Many in the media are waxing eloquent about the participating candidates maintaining a detached equilibrium in the face of severe criticisms on critical issues. Their supporters are saying this is a true mark of strength and character. But I, for one, would have wanted them to react with more passion and intensity. I wanted to see their emotions - anger, outrage, dismay and grief - expressed in words and gestures at the controversies surrounding race, income inequity, gun violence. It would have convinced me that apart from being successful politicians they empathise with us ordinary people. And that they too are human like you and me!

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SUVs and Rickshaws

A Case Study of Privilege and Miscarriage of Justice in Bangladesh

C. RASHAD SHABAB

THE key facts of the case I analyse here are as follows: An underage driver crashed into two rickshaws. He was caught red-handed. Police officers who responded to the incident have given statements confirming that the perpetrator was drunk, that he did not hold a driver's licence and that alcohol had been found in the vehicle. He was taken into police custody. The perpetrator is reported to have family ties to the ruling party. He was released from custody that same day.

Not only does this sequence of events clearly demonstrate the dysfunctional state of the justice system in Bangladesh, but more interestingly, it sheds light on why the system has been made dysfunctional. Those in positions of power and privilege make the system dysfunctional because they benefit from the injustice a dysfunctional system inflicts upon the powerless as I illustrate below, using this case as an example.

The perpetrator of this particular incident is the son of a director of a private bank and the chairman of a boutique hotel in the exclusive Gulshan area of the capital. It has been reported that his family is connected to a former lawmaker from the ruling party. At sixteen years of age, he drives an SUV, but on this day he did so after sharing a picture of a bottle of twelve-year-old scotch next to the steering wheel with the caption, "My life > Your Life". In short, the perpetrator of this injustice was as privileged as they come, in stark contrast to his victims.

The victims who the press have been able to identify are rickshaw pullers, among the most visibly disenfranchised members of our society. When we exploit their hard manual labour for cheap transportation, we count our change, but not the ribs poking out of their



PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

malnourished bodies. We pass laws that ban them from our main thoroughfares, because those bare ribs compete with our polished cars for the scarce space on our public roads. In searing sun, and torrential rain, we are content to have them dressed in rags (and the occasional plastic bag), so long as our air is well-conditioned. When they break the laws we

have passed to favour our cars, our policemen beat them. When they scratch the paint jobs of our cars, our chauffeurs beat them. And when we drink and drive, we do not care if we kill them, because we know we will be able to buy our way out.

And buy his way out, our privileged perpetrator did. He walked free on the same day, and no case

has been filed in connection with this incident till going to press. When interviewed by a national newspaper, one of the rickshaw pullers who was injured in the incident said, "I need money more than I need justice." Thus poverty reduces the demand for justice. Another victim has confirmed that he has received Tk 8,500 in "compensation", and will not be filing a case. A national newspaper reports that police sources say they will not be filing a case because they are "facing pressure from above." And so the privileged benefit from injustice.

This case clearly demonstrates not only the existence and extent of dysfunction in the Bangladeshi justice system, but also why the system is made dysfunctional. We, the privileged elite benefit from an unjust system. When the laws favour our interests, we exert our power and wealth towards their ad-hoc enforcement. But when justice demands that we pay our due, be it for violations of traffic, tax, land zoning, or public health and safety laws, we choose to weaken and dismantle the system, law by law, officer by officer, institution by institution.

The social media outrage that has been targeted at this single, underage perpetrator is at best partially misplaced, but completely unproductive. This is not a case of one bad apple doing one bad thing. Rather, it is a symptom of privilege and poverty creating systematic injustice. And nothing will change unless we, the privileged hold ourselves to account for abusing our wealth and power to skirt the duties that justice demands of us. It is up to each of us to stop living in the nauseating spirit of this child's now infamous post: "My life > Your Life".

The writer is a PhD. candidate at the University of Sussex, U.K.

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QUOTABLE Quote

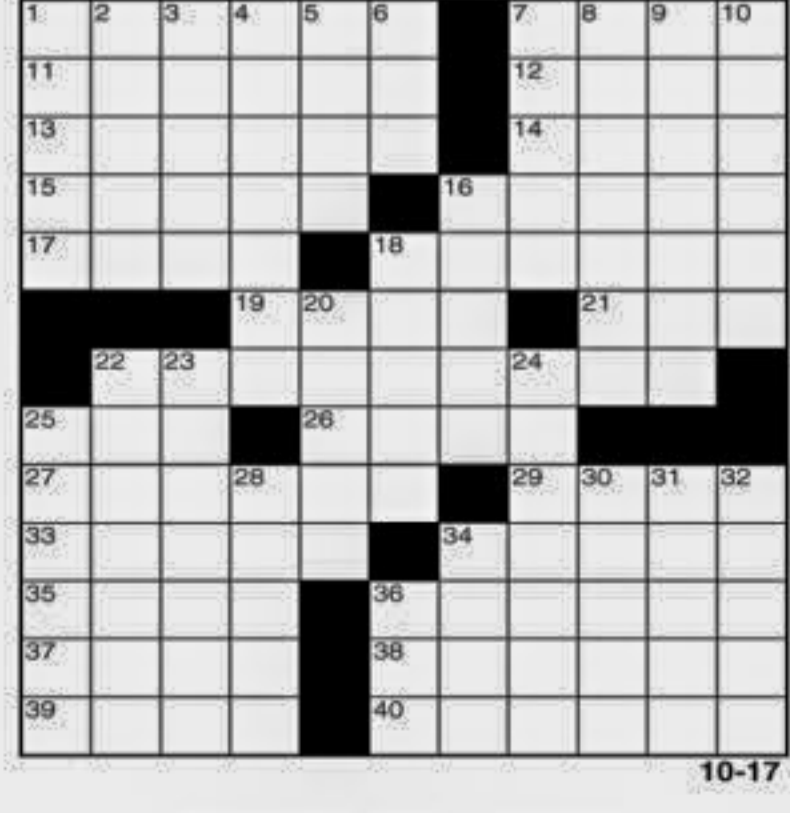


ILA MITRA

It became my foremost duty to fight as a co-fighter with the people of Bangladesh; to me it was an opportunity to repay my debt to the people of Bangladesh from whom I received so much - my life, my liberation.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
- 1 Surgical tools
 - 7 Set eyes on
 - 11 Margay's cousin
 - 12 Old Italian coin
 - 13 Excessively precious
 - 14 Malevolent
 - 15 City on the Mohawk River
 - 16 Director Sergio
 - 17 Dispatched
 - 18 Weevil's target
 - 19 Capital on a fjord
 - 21 Do something
 - 22 Historic traveler
 - 25 Apply ointment
 - 26 Give the boot
 - 27 Needing change
 - 29 Chuck
 - 33 Parking pro
 - 34 Standup guy?
 - 35 They may clash
 - 36 Wake up
 - 37 Monthly bill
 - 38 Slow passage
 - 39 ~ bien!"
 - 40 Lease signer
- DOWN**
- 1 Place
 - 2 Biting
 - 3 Become established
 - 4 One with a ballot
 - 5 "Brooklyn Nine-Nine" role
 - 6 Messy digs
 - 7 Bad driving weather
 - 8 Crucial
 - 9 Venezuelan river
 - 10 Knack
 - 16 Belt holders
 - 18 Sway
 - 20 Baseball team employee
 - 22 Baseball team employee
 - 23 Marine mollusk
 - 24 Hassock's kin
 - 25 Shunt
 - 28 Work breaks
 - 30 Ohm symbol
 - 31 Peaceful protest
 - 32 "Get out!"
 - 34 Body of law
 - 36 Manx, for one



YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

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BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker



BABY BLUES by Kirkman & Scott

