

No freedom to poke fun?

KHOKON KAMALI

ON December 10, the government opened Facebook again possibly in view of proxy servers circumventing the ban and widespread public dissent. Whatsapp and Viber stayed closed until December 15. Hours after the unblocking of Facebook, Refayet Ahmed, the 28-year-old admin of *Moja Loss?*, was arrested by RAB.

It would be tempting to see the unblocking of Facebook as a victory. But was it? The government kept social media off for 22 days. There was never any admission that the block was not a very logical move. Terrorist attacks did not stop even after the block; the rationale changed every day, until finally it was about preventing sexual harassment.

According to a report by *The Daily Star*, the Deputy Director of Rab's Legal and Media wing said that Refayet was arrested for "posts against the government and state." This is an odd accusation to make against *Moja Loss?*, which is mostly known for parodies and lampooning popular culture, like Ilias Kanchan's videos remixed to top 40 international pop songs of the year.

Moja Loss? is unbiased and opposed to all political parties, which reflects the reality of most young people under 30. One of their recent posts is a mashup between Adele's song "Hello" and BNP leader Khaleda Zia's scolding of a police officer ("Is your home district Gopalganj?"). The BNP leader does not come across well in this



parody. There are also a few critical posts about the absurdity of the Facebook block, a view shared by many.

Moja Loss? is a funny, slightly rude, humour page on Facebook. The 'admins' of the page have the anarchic energy of *Unmad*, *Cartoon*, and *Rosh+Alo* in their heydays, along with Photoshop and video editing skills and an obsession with

cheesy Bangla films ("Chowdhury Shaheb!"). *Moja Loss?* has 6.91 lakh followers at the last count, and it is this number that may be the problem. Since the "No VAT on Education" movement, certain quarters are worried about social media as a vehicle for mass protests, although it is doubtful that *Moja Loss?* would be the vehicle for politicisation.

The timing of the arrest makes the message clear. You can have Facebook, but don't post any criticism of the government. It's high time we got legal clarification on this issue. Is it illegal to make comments criticising the government? If so, should newspapers stop publishing editorials and op-eds? If criticism of the government is now illegal, are the punishments different for online versus other media (newspapers, books, public events)? If they are different, why are they different? What is the logic?

There is currently a PIL (Public Interest Litigation) pending in the High Court, which challenges the 2010 block of Facebook. Writ Petition No. 4719 of 2010, in the matter of Section 46 and 57 of the ICT Act 2006, challenges the law that allows blocking of sites and also the law that states that online speech which 'hurts the image of the nation' may be punished by 14 years of jail (plaintiffs represented by Barrister Sara Hossain and others). There is also a second case challenging section 57 only, filed by Prof. Anu Mohammad, Prof. Ahmed Kamal and others. The hearings are currently ongoing, and we are waiting for the court to give a judgment.

Until the hearings produce a verdict, punitive arrests can prejudice proceedings. Refayet Ahmed is currently on bail but that's not enough. We urge the government and police to drop the charges against him. We want our daily dose of humour back.

The writer is an entrepreneur and social media enthusiast.

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A new beginning

SELINA MOHSIN

THE Commonwealth is unique with 53 member states linked by common goals. All members are equal and none have veto powers. It has no equivalent of the United Nations Security Council. The aim is friendly cooperation based on common values, which is also reflected in the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, held every two years.

CHOGM this year was hosted by Malta from November 27 to 29, and focused on the need for a new, innovation dimension to respond to the challenges of the current world. The theme, "Adding Global Value", is a serious step to make the Commonwealth more relevant in the 21st century.

The earlier 2011 CHOGM in Perth, Australia, was a critical meeting. An Eminent Persons Group (EPG) had been commissioned to prepare a report and recommendations on the challenges of reaching consensus from diversity and making such consensus more effective in support of democracy and socio-economic growth. Unfortunately, the summit was unable to reach an agreement regarding this report. When Britain, Australia and Canada requested that the report be published, they were opposed by India, Nigeria, Sri Lanka, South Africa and Namibia.

The report had recommended a mechanism to 'censure' member countries when a serious violation of human rights had occurred. In all, the EPG made 106 recommendations to make the Commonwealth more relevant and effective. The former Prime Minister of Malaysia, Abdulla Badawi, who was also the Chair of the EPG, cautioned that if the reforms were not implemented then the Perth CHOGM would be remembered "not as a triumph but as a disaster".

Sir Malcolm Rifkind, a member of the EPG, termed the summit's lack of consensus on the report a 'disgrace'. He stated that the Commonwealth faced a significant problem. It was not of hostility or antagonism, but more a problem of indifference. Its purpose and relevance was being questioned and part of the reason behind this was that its commitment to enforce the values for which it stands was becoming ambiguous in the eyes of many member states. "The Commonwealth", he stated, "was not a private club of the governments or the secretariat. It belongs to

the people of the Commonwealth". Furthermore, the Secretariat no longer has the reputation it enjoyed in the 1980s as a strong voice on human rights and against apartheid in South Africa, when, according to *The Times*, it "led the world struggle" to achieve democracy and rule of law.

Consequently, the current CHOGM attempted to rectify these weaknesses. It had to reinforce shared values above personal preferences, self interests and hidden agendas.

At the 2015 CHOGM, Baroness Patricia Scotland, a former British cabinet minister, was nominated for

opposed the proposal that India should decrease the use of coal fired electrical generation and other green house gases. India was represented by his External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj, while Bangladesh was represented by its Foreign Minister Abul Hassan Mahmud Ali.

The meeting's importance was heightened by the presence of the President of France, Francois Hollande and the Secretary General of the United Nations, Ban Ki Moon.

The CHOGM, held immediately before the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Paris, had a

The leaders also requested developed nations to spend US\$100 billion annually by 2020, to assist developing countries to counter the adverse effect of climate change.

Small nation states face threats of rising sea levels and it was proposed to write off their debts for undertaking measures to safeguard the environment. Comprehensive strategies and financial assistance were proposed for all developing states suffering from climate change.

To this end, Canada pledged \$2.66 billion over five years, the UK committed GBP 21 million for disaster management and GBP 5.5 million for ocean

attacks and escalating conflicts, counter-terrorism, peace and security were priority issues. The Commonwealth urged its members to fully implement the UN Security Council Resolution 2178 on terrorism and extremism, including quality education. Leaders agreed to a British proposal to create a new unit comprising experts to counter extremism. It would be run by the Commonwealth Secretariat. Australia committed \$2.6 million to this unit, in addition to GBP 5 million by Britain.

To promote sustainable development, the members adopted the "2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development". It called for all states to eradicate poverty in all its dimensions and to ensure that "no one is left behind". It agreed to assist member states on long-term debt sustainability through technical assistance and debt strategy formulation.

The importance of women's empowerment was given an added impetus and the very first Women's Forum with the theme "Women Ahead: Be All That You Can Be" was held prior to the CHOGM. It reinforced, among other things, to "leave no woman behind, including women with disabilities and women with different choices".

Thus, the CHOGM underscored the priorities of climate change, terrorism, migration, peaceful co-existence of people with liberal and diverse religions, efficient management of initiatives with measurement of political, economic and social success, promotion of democratic norms and respect for human rights.

The CHOGM 2015, as a new beginning, raised "distinctiveness" in all its priority areas. But to successfully achieve its goal, it requires adequate resources and every member state needs to make a contribution equal to that of its current economic strength.

In reinventing the Commonwealth, there are challenges in implementing the decisions of Malta CHOGM 2015 to "revitalise an organisation that has tremendous unexploited potential". It remains to be seen how committed all the members are in forging strong relationships with each other and the Secretariat through the Charter and Malta Communique in making the Commonwealth one of the most vibrant and useful multi-lateral organisations of the world.

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Britain's Queen Elizabeth II (centre), Malta's PM Joseph Muscat (2nd left), Commonwealth Secretary-General Kamalesh Sharma (right), and heads of states pose for a family picture after the opening ceremony of CHOGM in Valletta on Nov 27, 2015.

Commonwealth Secretary General, becoming the first woman to hold the post. Though the 2015 meeting was significant for the Commonwealth, it was attended by only 31 heads of state out of 53 member countries. The rest of the countries were represented by foreign ministers. The Queen, as Head of the Commonwealth, however, attended with the Duke of Edinburgh and the Prince of Wales.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi was absent as his government had

strong distinctive voice. It organised an important session on climate change and global sustainability while Hollande addressed a special session on climate change.

At the meeting, it was unanimously agreed that climate change is an "existential threat" to all states. Leaders present there hoped that the UN Climate Change Conference (COP 21) would produce "an ambitious, equitable, rule based desirable results... including legally binding outcomes."

based economy, while Australia promised Aus \$1 million for a new Commonwealth institution - the Climate Finance Access Hub. India pledged \$2.5 million to assist initiatives towards countering climate change and the Prince of Wales proposed GBP 1 billion for the Commonwealth Green Finance Facility to support environmental projects among developing countries.

Since the Summit was being held in the aftermath of the Paris terrorist

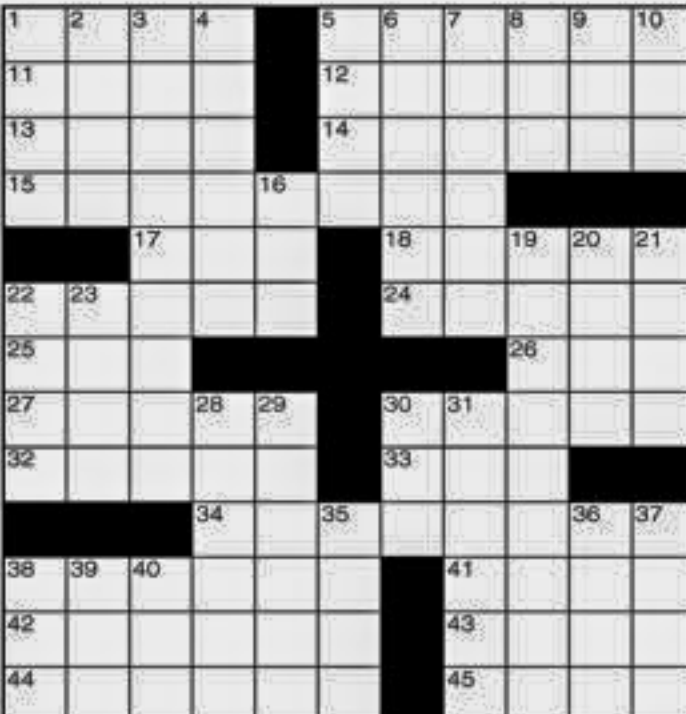
A WORD A DAY



BLIVESENCE
□ äblə □ vesən(t)s |
An act or the process of forgetting

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
- Fleet unit
 - Sheep, at times
 - Lush
 - Entertain
 - Fine study
 - Slow tempo
 - Course reservations
 - Operated
 - Stage comment
 - Pharmacy stock
 - Like some jackets
 - Memorable time
 - Suede shade
 - Track events
 - Sports spot
 - Ring
 - For each
 - Tried to hit
 - Congo setting
 - Blanchett of "Blue Jasmine"
 - Acrobatic dive
 - Litmus reddener
 - Orson Scott Card's "Game"
 - Mexican coin
- DOWN**
- Try for a fly
 - Take on
 - Weave together
 - Mail-related
 - Metric mass
 - Result of a bridge goof
 - Tennis star Andre
 - Turn sharply
 - Quarterback Manning
 - Old auto
 - Powerful bunch
 - PC desktop, e.g.
 - College head
 - Writer Ferber
 - Job extra
 - Persia, today
 - Galahad's mother
 - Deli device
 - Station worker
 - The Red Planet
 - Singer Redding
 - Make over
 - Maturity
 - Team backer
 - Disencumber



YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

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

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker



BABY BLUES by Kirkman & Scott

