

# Goodness is unbelievable



CHINTITO SINCE 1995  
NIZAMUDDIN AHMED

**W**E have deeply eroded our human qualities, since when I cannot quite remember, although from a partisan point of view there will be as many opinions

as there are political shades, not so much about the societal abrasion as much about the occasion of social descent.  
The Awami League camp will recall 1975, Jatiya Party will try to forget 1991, BNP will always regret 2007, while the Jamaat keep on hoping for early 1971, for reasons that are close to their respective hearts, although opposing camps sincerely believe that some of the others are heartless.  
It is perhaps not only my conviction but a view shared by others that presently, it is almost impossible to be nice to someone without raising eyebrows; the only condition - the guy must have eyebrows. As soon as you bring out the Good Samaritan in thou, you are immediately put under the scanner, and the search (individually, communally and nationally) is on to find the reason behind your angelic self. Being nice without a reason? Improbable, incredible and implausible.  
For example: If a political leader is being kind to someone in need, say financially helping a father to let his daughter have a respectable wedding, there will be twitching of the lips, slapping of the forehead and a smirk lasting from Gulistan to Farmgate... "What showmanship! Could he not just give the money and keep away the photographers?" are questions that are muttered for only the soul to burn. Thou shall be on fire, but thou shall not perish. Psst! I made that up.  
Such negativity may owe its origin to the Hellenic period but, as most of you are aware, we can remember history only as far back as 1971, whence India politically, socially and economically came to side with us, as we launched our War of Liberation. But, there were lots of 'buts' not very long after we emerged victorious. "India had its own agenda for helping liberate Bangladesh," is one common stance that is aired with disdain. Could it be possible that India as a neighbour considered the carnage by the Pakistani army a vicious action that demanded humanitarian response? "Nahhh, they wanted to split Pakistan." Did they advise the Yahya-Bhutto gang to reject the 1970 polls? "Of course, they (the Indians), you know, have agents everywhere..."

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"Sir is also very keen on sports activities of students," you proffer.  
"That is because he wants to use the college platform for a position atin the national federation."  
"There is nothing wrong in that!" You are now on the defensive.  
"There is. He never helps out with the cultural team."  
"But, that is because Sir is not adept at performing on stage. Moreover, the teacher who teaches us history is in charge of the music society." You are now irritated. His success.

"Ah! Madam! She does that only because her daughter needs to get selected."  
"She sings on television," you persist.  
"Her uncle is a programme producer."  
"In one channel. What about the other?" You find it difficult to lower your voice.  
"They are all connected. It's a digital world, you know that."  
Suspicion abounds everywhere, and we are guilty of giving in.  
You become charitable due to religious beliefs or as an act of social responsibility. Assault on the street: "What's up, bro? Standing for Ward elections?" *Charity shall spread outside of the home because many will not survive without it.*

You visit an acquaintance in hospital. Reaction in your office: "Does he owe you any money? Don't worry! He will survive," he ends, laughing like a horse. Try it, the horse laughter, it is great for the lungs. Your office mate knows that. *Empathy shall prevail because often it is the best medicine.*

Your relative desperately seeks your expert help to find a good apartment to buy in a great location at the best price. Two days later, after a thorough search on the internet and several conversations with people in the know, even developers and realtors, you forward details of five such properties to your blood relative. Later, you hear from a third party. "He (meaning you) wanted to make money out of my purchase, how low can he get?" No lower than five feet four, if you were me. *Heads held high, we shall continue to offer our helping hand.*

You see your friend mingling with the wrong kind of person and mention this to her (usually) or (sometimes) him in the politest manner, showing utmost concern. *Byas!* The sky rips open. "You wanted to line maro but could not... you think I will let go? ... you are so, so jealous... you ...you..." One month and ten days later, your friend barges in. "Did you have to mince your words about a proven serpent? How could you do this to me?" Friends are forever (?). So you put your arm over a jilted shoulder. A thunderous bolt follows: "Don't you dare touch me!" *We shall continue to touch hearts because we are only human.*

Let me state this plainly: there are people out there, millions, who help others because they want to help. Period. There is no mother, marriage or money behind their nobility and generosity.  
The writer is a practising Architect at BashaBari Ltd., a Commonwealth Scholar and a Fellow, a Baden-Powell Fellow Scout Leader, and a Major Donor Rotarian.

# "Our man in Havana"



SHIFTING IMAGES  
MILIA ALI

**T**HERE was a time when leading philosophers and politicians dreamed of an equitable world, where the gap between the "haves" and "have-nots" would be virtually eliminated. The idea, inspired by the socialist theory of Karl Marx, was to create a harmonious and more economically balanced society. With the demise of the Soviet Union and the disintegration of the Eastern Bloc Economic Union in the late 1980s and early 90s, the socialist dream was shattered. This emboldened the stewards of capitalism to hastily declare their unmitigated victory. Today, more than 130 years after Karl Marx's death, unprecedented economic and social inequities have triggered a serious rethink of his socialistic ideals. This is a story that is still unfolding and needs to be addressed at a different level by experts and analysts.

of pragmatism over dogma, suspicion and deep-seated prejudice.  
It may be relevant to ask: what is the significance of President Obama's visit to Cuba (complete with cultural tours, a baseball game and even dinner at the Palace of the Revolution) for the citizens of the world? Does it mean that communist ideology has no place in a fast changing world? Or is the answer much more complex?  
A few signs are on the horizon. President Obama, in his speech to the Cuban nation, spoke forcefully about the need to improve human rights and allow democratic reforms. But he assured the Cuban leadership that despite the differences between the two nations, "we will not impose our political or economic system on you." The Cuban leadership in turn hopes to remove the crushing burden on the country's economy, imposed by years of sanctions. Moreover, with his impending retirement, Raul Castro is perhaps trying to initiate the process of change and "guide the country toward a more sustainable economic system."  
As Cuba opens up its gates, there is a sense of elation at seeing diplomacy and good sense prevail. But there is also a twinge of uncertainty and trepidation. Fidel Castro's Cuba, that was for decades shut out from the culture of lattes and burgers will probably transform under the temptation of its more glamorous neighbour. Traffic-clogged streets with high levels of carbon emission and neon-lit shopping malls are likely to contaminate its pristine beaches and architecturally eclectic squares and plazas. The chatter of smart phones will soon drown the haunting rhythm of the guitar played by the man in a street corner. The "revolutionaries" may be fired up by the opportunity to live the "American Dream." And soon Cuba may become yet another country with newfangled "communist-

capitalists" --- businesses and corporations ready to pounce on its yet untapped resources.  
Yes, we do have concerns about Cuba transiting into the "free world" given America's past failed attempts at liberalising and bringing "regime change". Let's also note that despite its dictatorial policies, Cuba has made tremendous strides in certain areas - especially in providing education and healthcare to all its citizens. This is no mean achievement, given the hiccups the US is still having with universal health coverage. Cuba is thus well positioned to serve as a model for nations grappling with the challenges of delivering efficient social services to their citizens.  
Despite all our reservations, we have reason to rejoice at this momentous event. Not only because an American president visited Cuba for the first time in almost nine decades, but also because of the thawing of a half-century of hostility that had degenerated into a war of egos. The history of the United States and Cuba is wrought with conflict, ideological battles and a rivalry that nearly sparked a nuclear war.  
President Obama rightly stated: "I know the history, but I refuse to be trapped by it." However, let's hope that both countries have learned some valuable lessons from it. The US needs to recognise that differences in political and economic systems are learning opportunities rather than sources of conflict, and that sanctions are hardly effective in promoting freedom and economic liberalisation. An important lesson for Cuba would be to avoid being washed away by the tide of change coming from across the ocean. Hopefully, the island nation will build on its past successes rather than throw the baby out with the bath water!

The writer is a renowned Rabindra Sangeet exponent and a former employee of the World Bank.

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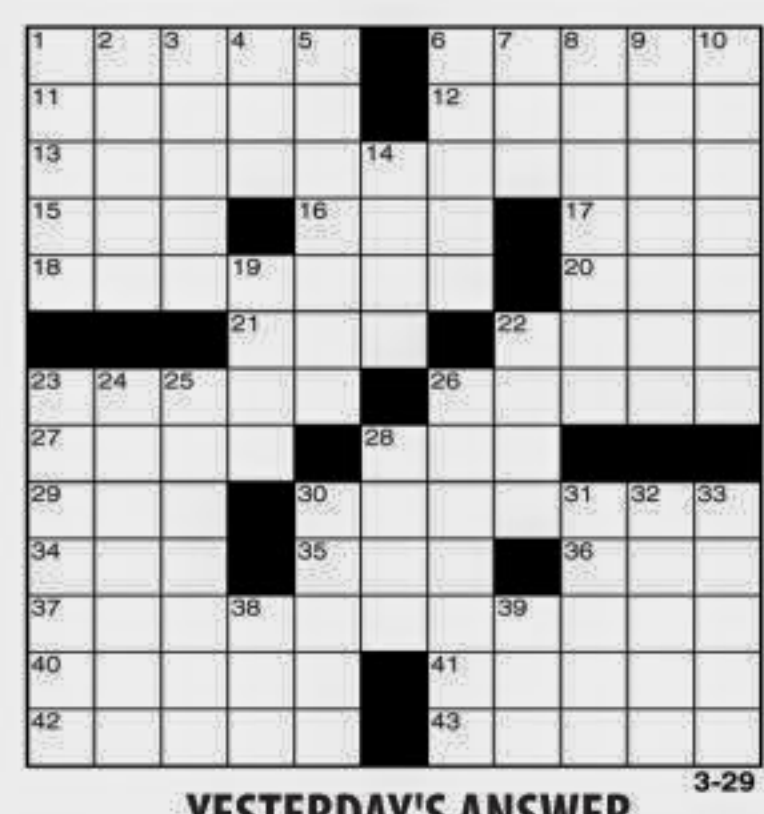
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## CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**  
1 Farm towers  
6 Prom transports  
11 Grownup  
12 Take as one's own  
13 Preparing to pick something up  
15 Fall back  
16 Sheltered side  
17 Memorable time  
18 Voter  
20 Week part  
21 Sweetie  
22 Mosquito attack  
23 UFO flyer  
26 Had a feast  
27 Minimal change  
28 Peruvian coin  
29 Decay  
30 Cook's pan  
34 Small bill  
35 Sewing aid  
36 Vining plant  
37 Obliging to appear in court  
40 Writer  
41 Dancer Castle  
42 Peevish
- DOWN**  
1 Dark fur  
2 Perfect  
3 Fencing move  
4 Hoary  
5 Blue-veined cheese  
6 Saloon quaff  
7 Marrying words  
8 Made oneself at home  
9 Run  
10 Got off course  
14 Very bright  
19 Atkins of country music  
22 Potential law  
23 Circus star  
24 Like Simba  
25 Purposes  
26 Murdering  
28 Tattoo site  
30 Like cacti  
31 Cat's nine  
32 News item  
33 White-walls, in Whitehall  
38 Period  
39 Mine find!



**YESTERDAY'S ANSWER**  
S L A N G   S T A G  
C O L O R   C A R A T  
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B A B A R   D I C E R  
I V A N   S E E  
T A K E T H E F A L L  
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F L A K E   E V O K E  
F E V E R   N I N E R  
D A N E   D E E D S

**QUOTABLE Quote**

**JANE GOODALL**  
(British primatologist, anthropologist and UN Messenger of Peace)

Only if we understand, will we care. Only if we care, will we help. Only if we help shall all be saved.