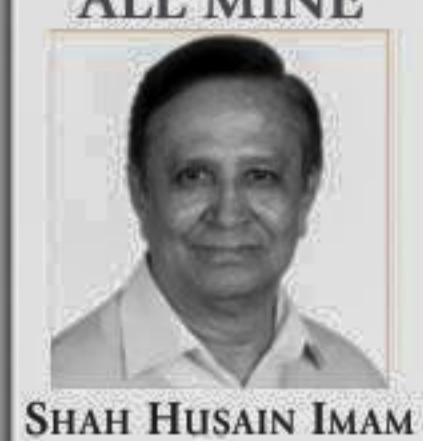


Politics of power, politics of development

PLEASURE IS ALL MINE



SHAH HUSAIN IMAM

THE Economist in its May 14 issue on Bangladesh made a point that couldn't be lost on any serious observer of politics in the country. The journal said that a type of rotating one party system has been in existence, which now may be retained without 'rotation'.

It is obviously referring to the alternating sequences in which BNP and Awami League held power with the winner taking it all and the vanquished drawing a blank. According to the influential weekly, even that binary political culture may be in for a change.

That you cannot get two bites at the cherry in the business of politics has been proven to the hilt in the long sequel to the January 5, 2014 general election. The BNP was hoisted, as it were, with its own petard; its boycott of the election translated into a lethal mockery of a movement that alienated the party, even from its own constituency.

It was only but natural that a one party centric election would have yielded a one party government with a semblance of academic, loyalist opposition as a necessary adjunct.

The expectation from a representative mid-term polls after what could pass as a technical and constitutional necessity was contingent on two factors. The first prerequisite was that the BNP agreed to holding such an election under the non-negotiable provision that the PM would be in charge. Far from it, the BNP's vengeance against the January 5 election spearheaded by unrelenting violence placed a perfect justification on the AL's platter to 'renege' on its fleeting promise of considering a snap poll.

This sets the scene, inexorably, for a general election in 2019 but none of the major parties are even preparing for that at this halfway stage,

except perhaps, the Jatiya Party with some aplomb. There is no clowning about JP's enthusiasm in the project; the party making no secret of its agenda to take advantage of the mainstream political void!

In the meanwhile, however, something of paramount importance lurks in the shadows. Election as a pillar of democracy tends to evoke today mistrust and lack of interest from the electorate – thanks to the degenerate handling of the local government polls.

At any rate, there is a serious point to be

There is a serious point to be made about the opposition bashing with all its ramifications. But when the BNP had been in power, particularly in its last term, it acted heavy-handedly against the then opposition Awami League.

made about the opposition bashing with all its ramifications. But when the BNP had been in power, particularly in its last term, it acted heavy-handedly against the then opposition Awami League. The party's acts were tantamount to finishing off the AL as evidenced in the August 21 grenade attack. Thus, it is history repeating itself and a de ja vu enacted.

The Economist article attributed Awami League's grip on power to two factors. First, the paradox of respectable GDP growth rate despite

odds in politics; secondly, the none-too-credible legacy of BNP in power or in the opposition being instrumental in the rise of terrorism. On the contrary, Awami League, in spite of its occasional malevolent signals about Islamic predilections and countering terrorism headlong remains the best bet for fighting religious terrorism through its secular ethos.

The Economist has pointed out that 'Nizami besides his war crimes was also convicted of involvement as a cabinet minister in a huge arms supply scandal in 2004' geared to hand in weapons to insurgents in India's North East.

Awami League needs to beware of the tensions within. Reports suggest controversies rage over unwieldy behaviours of ministers-MPs. 'Excesses' are allegedly rife among post-2009 and 2014 entrants to the ruling party bandwagon. The BNP-Jamaat converts in the UP elections are said to be unbridled, according to a prominent Bangla daily.

There is a palpable debate in certain circles over 'less democracy and more development'. They refer to China, Singapore and Malaysia where one party system exists to consciously speed up development skirting the elaborate consultative processes in a democracy. It is the matter of evolution for a country to accept a system or reject it.

By legacy, we are used to and comfortable with a democratic system fostered through credible elections the value of which is an article of faith with our compatriots. We believe development is perfectly deliverable in a democracy with value addition of egalitarian distribution of wealth and opportunities.

A country liberated on democratic, secular, pluralistic ethos through the sweat and blood of millions and a party heir to the dreams and values of the Liberation War cannot settle for anything less.

The writer is a contributor of The Daily Star. Email: shahhusainimam@gmail.com

SQ

HUMOROUSLY YOURS



NAVEED MAHBUB

ANNO UNCE MENT at Dhaka Airport: "Passengers are requested to proceed to Gate 3 ALPHA". BRAVO! An ALPHA male

may get it, but given that most of us are CHARLIE Browns, the DELTA (change) in the announcement will not ECHO with us masses as we FOXTROT towards departure gates that we can't identify.

Just say "Gate 1A" please... Meanwhile, my flight is delayed and eventually canceled. No, it is not Bangladesh Biman, which has been faring much, much better in punctuality. But I do not yell, despite knowing that I will have to wait 24 hours to catch the next flight on the same airline operating just one flight a day in and out of Dhaka.

While there are 300 yelling passengers with an uncertain departure, I, despite having a thin fuse, remain calm and smiling, even assisting the beleaguered staff members, understanding that it's futile to fly on an aircraft with a faulty oxygen system. Better late than dead.

My Gandhi like demeanor pays off – I'm made to reach London on time for my show via two other airlines, oh and all upgraded. This is called service quality, denoted as SQ. Is it a mere coincidence, or more, that the airline code of Singapore Airlines, known for having the best in class service, is SQ? Hence my asking at the SQ counter at check-in during a different flight, "Is your flight on time?"

"What? We are ALWAYS ON time." The word 'delay' is not in their lexicon. Service quality and customer experience. The differentiator when it comes to a competitive market, knowing that every product and service is eventually a commodity. As such, there is also a term for national customer experience that determines the draw of 'customers' to the country.

So, where do we, as a nation, stand in this area? Well, let's first hear this comedy routine from my fellow comedian Jonathan Atherton, "The guy from Kerala is against the guy from Tamil Nadu. As soon as the guy from Delhi walks in, the Keralite and the Tamil are all of a sudden buddies and join forces. It's now South versus North. Then there's a Pakistani in the picture and the South and North become Indians and it's now India vs. Pakistan. Then a British walks in and the Indians and the (sole) Pakistani join hands and it's now the Indian Sub-Continent vs. the British. Finally when the American comes, it's the US vs. the Commonwealth. And now no matter who walks in, a Balkan, Russian, Chinese... doesn't matter, it's still the US vs. the rest. Thank you USA for uniting the world."

It is therefore perfectly normal that we in Bangladesh are divided along every line possible which is as faulty as the Madhupur fault line. But when it comes to facing the outside world, let us unite to put on the best customer service hat, else whether it's tourism, or FDI, we will be scrambling for customers like a sweater vendor on a July summer day.

The writer is an engineer at Ford & Qualcomm USA and CEO of IBM & Nokia Siemens Networks Bangladesh turned comedian (by choice), the host of ABC Radio's Good Morning Bangladesh and the founder of Naveed's Comedy Club. E-mail: naveed@naveedmahbub.com

THE OTHER NEWS



AMITAVA KAR

WHAT else is going on these days besides people getting bumped off or robbed of their dignity?

If it's international news that floats your boat: Venezuela has reduced the workweek

to two days for government employees amid a crippling recession that has led to food shortages, soaring prices, riots, looting and street justice.

How did a country with the world's largest oil reserve get here?

Or sports news: Usain Bolt has opened his 2016 season with a 100-metre victory in 10.05 seconds. After the race, Bolt, the fastest man ever timed, said he didn't feel smooth.

He is, however, determined to defend his 100m, 200m and 4x100 Olympic crowns in Brazil, seeking an unprecedented third gold medal in a row in all three events in what he has said will be his final Olympic.

Will any human ever run 100m in under 9 seconds?

Or news on the latest tech: Researchers from MIT, the University of Sheffield and the Tokyo Institute of Technology have developed a tiny 'origami robot' which can be swallowed like a capsule and used to remove foreign objects from the stomach.

When will engineers design a robot capable of eliminating "foreign objects" from human brains?

Or business: Only about 56.6 percent of the recommended remediation works have been completed by the member garment factories of Accord, a platform of 210 mostly Europe-based retailers. Of the 1,452 factories reviewed, 7 factories got pass mark, 57 are close to completing their corrective action plans while 1,388 factories are lagging behind. Fire and electrical faults were the most common.

No comment here.

Read all about it. Watch. Listen. Sleep—if she comes to you.

Now let's consider two stories that broke



Abdul Jabbar buys birds from poachers only to release them.

PHOTO: STAR

during the last two weeks but didn't make headlines or prime time TV. A young man named Abdul Jabbar from Lalmonirhat bought a rare bird from a poacher for Tk. 400 and released it immediately. For Jabbar, it wasn't a rare act of kindness. The newspaper hawk, who makes only Tk. 300 a day, often buys exotic birds from poachers to free them.

And then there is Bapurao Tajne from a drought-hit village in Maharashtra, India. When his wife was refused to draw water from a well because they belong to "lower caste", Bapurao took it upon himself to build his own. There was no hydrological study to

select the spot, he went by instinct. His wife ridiculed him but after 40 days of backbreaking work, Bapurao hit water. Now the entire community has access to clean water.

It's nice to catch such glimpses of human sublimity slipping through the cracks of hate and bloodshed. This is not to suggest that news of death and killings and accidents and wars are not important, but only to remind oneself that the news is selective and often parochial. And parochialism in the media drives the common practice that a great number of people have to die to make a story front page or prime time worthy, as

compared with relatively minor incidents like someone digging a well for his community or someone saving birds from poachers. One wonders what constitutes news at all.

Which was of greater significance in the Second World War, the war itself or the widespread use of penicillin? And while we are at it, what matters most in a war—victory or courage or the young dying? To make matters even murkier think about Anne Frank's diary, which documents that human love could not have existed without human hate. Who matters more to the world after the war, Anne Frank or Hitler? It is said that

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war is short and art is long, but there is no way to prove that.

Many years ago, Roger Rosenblatt, author and Harvard Professor, posed the question: What matters most in a piece about journalistic priorities? There is no easy way to answer this. To pin the question of significance on the emotions, on the elevated spirit, is merely to make one kind of choice.

Meanwhile, it is in the other news that life attempts to rediscover, rearrange and prioritise itself—in repose, at rest, until we get it right.

The writer is a member of the editorial team at The Daily Star.

QUOTABLEQuote

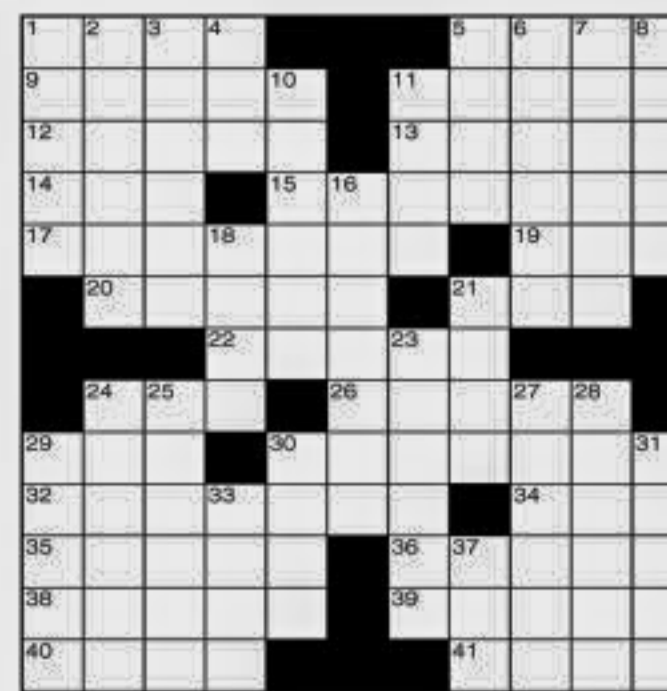


SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE

I have seen great intolerance shown in support of tolerance.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- Across**
- 1 Prudish person
 - 5 Pulsate
 - 9 Madrid mister
 - 11 Ship of 1492
 - 12 Rashness
 - 13 Writer Chekhov
 - 14 Nabokov novel
 - 15 Wounding superficially
 - 17 Reacting to pain
 - 19 Early auto
 - 20 Approaches
 - 21 Garden plot
 - 22 Be eco-friendly
 - 24 Wield
 - 26 Oscar winner Hunt
 - 29 "Exodus" hero
 - 30 Serpentine
 - 32 Signaling slyly
 - 34 Rawls or Reed
 - 35 Chinese or Korean
 - 36 Steer clear of
 - 38 Leases
 - 39 Billing info
 - 40 Border
- Down**
- 1 "Fiddle-sticks!"
 - 2 Scan, as data
 - 3 Preposterous
 - 4 Understood
 - 5 Crooner Crosby
 - 6 Whole
 - 7 Made amends
 - 8 Lively dance
 - 10 Do electrical work
 - 11 Hunger pain
 - 16 Pancreas product
 - 18 Grant of films
 - 21 Flex
 - 23 Cabaret performer
 - 24 Used a lever on
 - 25 Jacket part
 - 27 Widen
 - 28 Battery ends
 - 29 In the know
 - 30 Takes the prize
 - 31 Party attendee
 - 33 Winslet of "Titanic"
 - 37 Big truck



YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

M A N G E R T H E R O
A P O L L O H E R O
C E R E A L B O X E S
A T E A M
D I M E S A T E
H E R S M I S H A P
A V A V I C E G O
L I Q U I D S T E P
L I N D S T A R
C E S A R
B A L L O T B O X E S
O B O E A L P I N E
B E G S B E S I D E

