

Why we couldn't protect Khadija



NO STRINGS ATTACHED
AASHA MEHREEN AMIN

REMEMBER Suraiya Akter Risha? The eighth grader of an English medium school in Dhaka, who was stabbed by her stalker, a man who worked at the tailoring shop she used to go to with her mother? Most of us will have forgotten the names of those bright young women – there are too many of them – victims of stalking, a crime that is apparently punishable by law that is rarely enforced.

Yes, the tailor was picked up from Nilphamari by the cops; it was easy, he was a nobody so the law enforcers just had to put pressure on his family members to get to him. But what about Khadija who has slim chances of surviving the gruesome hacking she was subjected to on Tuesday in front of dozens of people? Khadija, who had just finished an exam from a women's college in Sylhet and who would have sat for another one the next day, if it hadn't been for the ghoulis nightmare she had to go through. Many may question the callousness of bystanders who stood and watched or even took videos of that young girl being mercilessly stabbed on her head and all over her body. But when the attacker has so much political clout that even law enforcers are often hesitant about intervening, how much bravery can an ordinary citizen risk when there is no guarantee that there will be no repercussions even for saving a person's life?

The reality is this. No matter how much we boast about our high enrolment rates of girls, the overwhelming number of GPA 5s they attain and the amazing possibilities they have the ability to explore, the truth is that we have no way of protecting them from stalkers who will psychologically and sexually torture them and may eventually cut their beautiful lives short. It is a brutal truth that many will try to evade.

Not that there haven't been sincere efforts by activists and human rights lawyers to put an end to the abuse. As far back as 2011, the

High Court declared the stalking of girls and women illegal and directed the government to regard the offence as sexual harassment in the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act. According to the Act, the maximum sentence for sexual harassment is ten years of imprisonment, and the minimum is three years. This was in the wake of an overwhelming number of reports of women being killed, committing suicide after harassment and those who had stood up for them being attacked or killed by the stalkers. The HC bench delivered the verdict following

a public interest writ petition filed by Bangladesh National Women Lawyers Association (BNWLA), seeking protection of women and girls against stalking.

The court, moreover, ordered the government to set up separate cells at every police station that would address stalking cases and send monthly reports to the police high-ups, who, in turn, would have to hold meetings and take action against cases of stalking. The cells would submit monthly reports to respective superintendents of police, or commissioners of police, who

would discuss them at the meetings of District Development Committees under the deputy commissioners. Even mobile courts were recommended by the court so that stalkers could be apprehended quickly and punished (before a girl could be hacked to death or forced to take her own life to escape the mental trauma).

So how why haven't such laudable directives helped Khadija – and Risha and Tonu – remember Tonu? Or is her name to be erased from the books since so far even the cause of her death has been questioned, let alone her

murderers (those who caused her death, in case there is some confusion) identities? The answer to the first question is that despite the fact that the court's directives should be treated as law (when a specific law to address the said crime is absent) there has been absolutely no movement to do so. Had these directives been taken seriously by the relevant ministries and implemented by law enforcers, Risha and many other bright young girls would probably still be alive, Khadija would not be on the brink of death.

There is however a major difference in the case of Khadija and if we dare talk about it, in the case of Tonu. Khadija's attacker has been reported in the media as a self proclaimed activist of the ruling party's student wing who was once her tutor. According to newspaper reports, although the organisation has denied his membership, his Facebook status and some of his friends have said that indeed he belongs to that organisation. Funny how facts just change overnight.

And as for Tonu, whose smiling face in a yellow scarf is fast fading into oblivion, her killers who have the 'cloak of invisibility' over them, seem to have disappeared along with all the evidence surrounding her mysterious murder.

At the time of writing this, Khadija is still alive, barely though, her attacker has left her with serious skull and brain injuries and her doctors have not given us much hope. Our home minister has promised that Khadija's attacker will be brought to justice. The bloody video footage of a young girl being repeatedly slashed while onlookers do nothing would be considered in bad taste if we were living in a society where such barbarism was a rare occurrence. Unfortunately, that is not so, and without such footage, as horrific as they are, the gravity of a crime is not taken seriously and the culprits can get away by fuzzing the facts with influence and money. As the voice of the helpless, powerless majority, our plea is that the harshest punishment be given to all these sexual predators irrespective of their affiliations or badges. Let girls like Khadija breathe freely. Or just breathe.

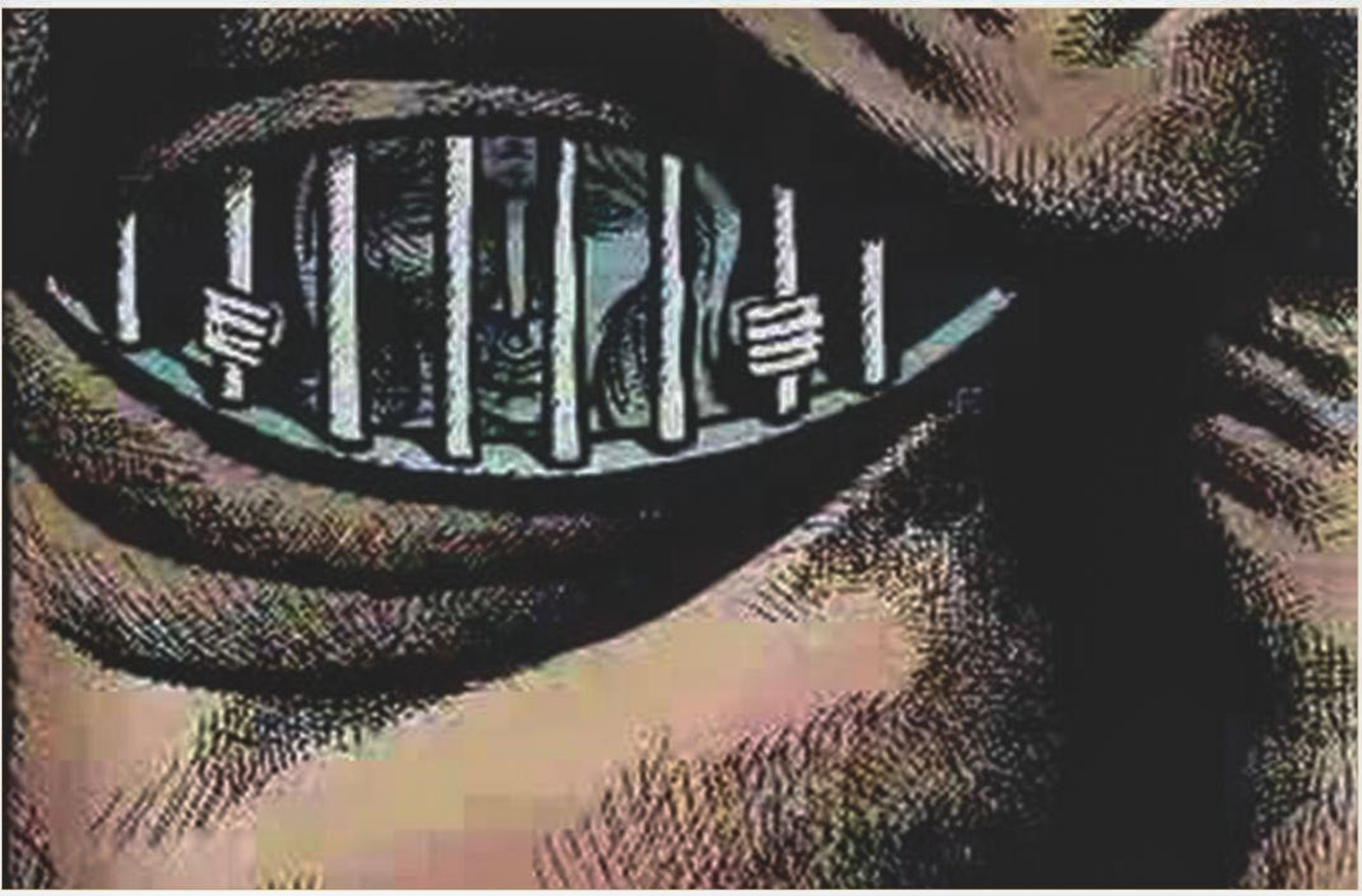
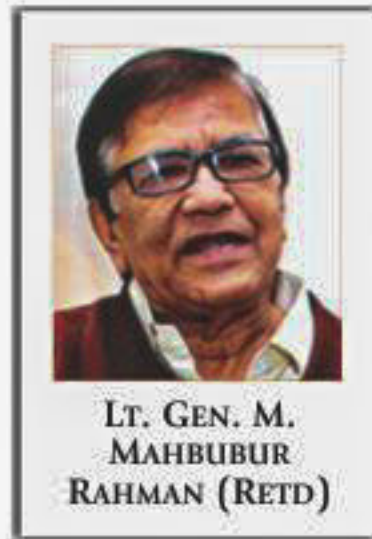


ILLUSTRATION: PINTEREST

The writer is Deputy Editor, Editorial and Opinion, The Daily Star.

A REMINISCENCE

Saluting a people's army



LT. GEN. M. MAHBUBUR RAHMAN (RETD)

About 40 years ago, when I lived in China, she had made a tiny footprint in global economy and political and military power. Today as I see China, I am totally amazed.

ON first of August this year, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) of China celebrated its 89th founding anniversary. PLA indeed has come a long way in its arduous struggle and challenging journey since it took its bloody birth in the armed uprising led by Zhou Enlai in Nanchang, the capital city of

Jiangxi province on August 1, 1927. The glorious history of PLA is a long saga of a protracted war of the Chinese Army against imperialist and reactionary forces. PLA went through a long revolutionary process. It started as Red Army, took different names at different times and situations and different theatres of operations namely New Fourth Route Army, Eighth Route Army and finally, all transformed to People's Liberation Army.

This great Army was led by great commanders like Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai, Zhu De, Chen Yi, Peng Dehuai, Nie Rongzhen, Ye Jianying, Liu Bochen, Shu Xiangqian, Ho Long and many others. It fought against Japanese aggression and Chiang Kaishek's reactionary forces, came out victorious and liberated the country. Post liberation, this great army continuously pursued highest combat excellence, struggled to consolidate the country's independence and sovereignty and always remained a bulwark of national defence as an invincible fighting machine.

PLA, true to its name always maintained its basic peoples' army character. It always bore in mind what Mao Zedong taught, "Army is more like a fish and people are like the water in a river." This has been the ethos of PLA and the essence of China's civil military relationship. The PLA was never isolated from the broad masses and always remained deeply involved in all national developments and socioeconomic activities. It played a dominant role in national reconstruction and infrastructure building and combating natural disasters like floods, cyclones, tornadoes, draughts and earthquakes. It has always enjoyed the utmost trust, confidence, love and respect of the people of China. It is an all pervasive force with multidimensional characters. It is a fighting force

par excellence with highest combat capability and readiness. It is a productive force beyond comparison and a workforce, the colossus of which the world has not seen before.

I recall that I had the opportunity to live in a PLA unit in a garrison very near to Beijing for a month in mid-1977. It was a part of the study curriculum, during my study in Beijing Modern Languages Institute (now university). Then President Ziaur Rahman who believed in strong Sino-Bangla relations sent me to China to study Chinese language for my future employment as military attaché in the embassy. In my outdoor study (kai men ban xue) I was sent to a PLA unit, I lived in the military barracks along with the junior commanders. There was no rank system in PLA at that time and officers were called commanders, and soldiers, the fighters. I wore their uniform, ate, worked, played and slept alongside them.

I was introduced to the great master military strategist of ancient China, Sun Tzu's epic work, Art of War and was given many tactical combat lessons. I was taken to the firing range to learn the skills of shooting. I found PLA soldiers were most accurate in their targets and never missed any shot. The PLA unit I lived in was fully self-sufficient to cater its logistic needs. It had its own uniform and shoe-making factory; it had its own agricultural fields to grow grains and vegetables, own farm yards to raise cattle and get meat and dairy products. The unit even ran a medicine factory to produce medicine for local use and the surplus to be sold outside.

In my language class text book, there were many simple short stories. I read stories of Baiquen Daifu (Dr. Norman Bethune), about how the Canadian doctor travelled thousands of miles from home to help the Red Army in its fights against Chiang Kaishek's reactionary forces, how he participated in the Long March and selflessly rendered his services in treating wounded soldiers, saving their lives, many a time giving his own blood. My textbook also contained stories of Lei Peng, the great soldier of PLA, who dedicated his life for the service of poor people and was always available in times of their crises and difficulties. The motto of PLA, he believed, was wei renmin fuwu - serve the people. Many such moving stories and their valuable lessons and my intimate stay

with PLA commanders and soldiers enriched and helped me to know and understand them very closely. They all left a deep impression and influenced me in my life and I still treasure them, dearly cherish them.

I went to China for study at a very significant period of her history. It was a time when the conspiring clique, the Gang of Four (Jiang Qing, Zhang Chunqiao, Wang Hongwen, Yao Wenyuan) had a total fall, and the so called Great Cultural Revolution, which caused untold sufferings to the people and the masses and brought chaos and disorder in the society, had met its ultimate demise. I saw the grand jubilation of Chinese people. I observed a deluge of flowing masses on the streets. Everybody - men, women and children, old and young - was thronging in the streets, carrying large banners, beating drums, blowing trumpets, ringing bells and shouting full throated slogans. I had never seen such a scene of human outburst of emotion in my life. I, along with all the students, teachers and staff of the Language Institute, joyfully joined the celebration. I carried a big bronze bell in my hand, which I was ringing all the time. We walked past the streets and reached Tiananmen Square where a million strong crowd had already assembled. For several days, the jubilation continued and I participated in all the rallies shouting slogans: Dadao si ren bang (Down with Gang of Four), Dadao wen hua da geming (Down with the Cultural Revolution).

Now as I reminisce my good old days in China at my home in Dhaka, a strange spell of emotion strike me; I feel nostalgic. It makes me immensely proud. I have always considered China my second home. I lived there in the 1970s and 1980s for more than half a decade. About 40 years ago, when I lived in China, she had made a tiny footprint in global economy and political and military power. Today as I see China, I am totally amazed. China today has emerged as a most vibrant and strong nation, already occupying the centre stage of world economy and power. China's phenomenal rise within the shortest possible time (only four decades or so) is a miracle story. And this miracle happened because of the correct leadership, pragmatic policies, national unity and solidarity, peace and harmony of the

country. The unifying factor and the stabilising core element has been always PLA, the liberator, the redeemer, the patriotic, dedicated, loyal and trusted friend.

I was invited to China by PLA in 1996 when I was the Chief of Army Staff of Bangladesh. General Fu Quanyou was the Chief of General Staff, PLA, and General Chi Haotian, the Defense Minister. I personally knew both of them. The Bangladesh Armed Forces received almost their whole military hardware from PLA. Our Armed Forces were built from the scratch with the help of PLA's support and assistance. I, as the first military attaché to China in the 1980s, am a witness, as to how PLA most generously supported to raise our Army, Navy and Air Force and to strengthen our defence capability that we possess today. The services that PLA rendered in equipping, arming and training of our total armed forces are immeasurable. That indeed is a yeoman's service rendered. During my meetings with CGS and the Defense Minister, I was loud in expressing my thanks and gratitude, and sought their unabated continuity with multiple returns. During that visit I also had the privilege to meet His Excellency Jiang Zemin, then President of China and Chairman of the Central Military Commission, the highest military organ of the country. President Jiang had said, "China has changed a lot. It is not the same China which you saw when you lived here in the 1970s and 1980s. It is a changed China, developed China and it is a new generation, a new leadership. The world is changing. I heard the Dhaka skyline has also changed. But in all these changes, one thing has not changed and it will never change and that is our relationship with Bangladesh, our policy for Bangladesh." He continued, "I assure you General, China is your friend and will ever remain a friend. Whatever may be the situation and time, she will be always beside you. The relationship between China and Bangladesh is a relationship only of friendship, friendship and friendship and nothing but friendship." His words still ring in my ear. I treasure them. I believe this epitomises the true relationship of our two militaries and countries.

The writer is a former Chief of Staff, Bangladesh Army.

QUOTABLE Quote

JOHN MILTON

For what can war, but endless war, still breed?

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- Canyon sound
- Pool sound
- Washer unit
- "Twelfth Night" heroine
- Royal address
- Hidden
- Goal
- Visibility lessener
- First Lady before Michelle
- "2001" computer
- Complain
- Stock unit
- Cloth tatters
- Lake near Buffalo
- Different
- King with a golden touch
- Acquire
- Sky shade
- Even
- Stipulations
- People
- Eyeball
- Diner dish
- Perlman of "Cheers"
- Damp
- Cockpit guesses

DOWN

- Different
- Change Component
- It produce sharp shadows
- Dedicated verse
- Sunpowered
- Town squares
- Lo-cal
- Broad st.
- Sermon subject
- Bowler, e.g.
- Shade
- Vaulted area
- Two fours, in craps
- Divya's piece
- Sediment
- Mariner's drink
- Assess
- Will name
- Oscar winner Luise
- Coffee, slangily
- Piquant
- Yarn
- Pooch pest
- Neptune's domain
- In what way
- Thurman of film
- Got together
- Lode material

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

AMOS RANUP
 SALON CALONE
 CREDIT CARDS
 ONOCEE ROT
 TELLER TINE
 REALM USER
 DYLAN
 DATE ILIAD
 AMEN MISCUUE
 NORWIG CAD
 CREDELTHOURS
 EASEL TASTE
 SLANT FEEL

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker

BABY BLUES by Kirkman & Scott