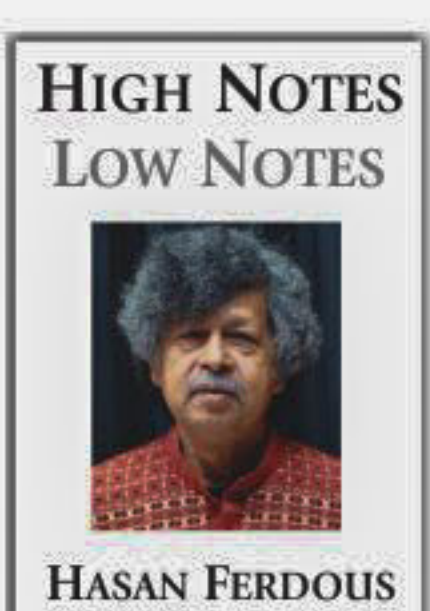


# Coming to grips with an absurdity called Trump



**HIGH NOTES  
LOW NOTES**  
HASAN FERDOUS

**P**EOPLE are still grappling with a reality that defies all logic. How could the most ignominious politico in America trump over the most experienced and best funded eternal Presidential candidate? All pundits predicted a clear victory for Hillary, giving Trump less than a 15 percent chance of victory. Trump himself was darn sure he was losing. He had already called the election rigged and the liberal media "dishonest" for playing Hillary's second fiddle even before the first vote was cast. Around 7 pm on Tuesday, the word from Trump Tower was that they were hoping for a miracle.

On the other hand, Hillary and her camp were so sure of victory that by Election Day they had nearly finalised the list of key appointments and made no Plan B in case this whole thing went South. By 11 pm, when it became clear that the goose was already cooked and Trump was readying himself for his unlikely feast, the Hillary camp was clinging to a mirage that Pennsylvania and North Carolina could still be in their bag.

But the miracle never materialised. Pundits, with egg all over their face, are now scrambling for a good explanation for this greatest political debacle in US history. It is even bigger than Truman's dramatic victory over Dewey. The New York Times called Trump's victory as a tragedy for America. Baltimore Sun called it a "sad day for America". The website VOX, popular among the millennials, trumping them all described it "a reminder of the unbeatable power of

racism in America." Quickly the streets of New York, San Diego and Massachusetts were filled with protesters who declared "Trump is not my President."

In simplest terms, the victory was a clear rejection of the rural white America of Washington's elitism. These folks, under tremendous economic stress due to globalisation and continuing economic depression, exacted a revenge on the rest of the

cross over the finish line. She had hoped, in addition to Blacks and Hispanics, women and the millennials would queue behind her. None of that turned out to be true. While she won the popular vote by a fairly large number – perhaps by as many as two million votes – she miscalculated her chances in battleground states, giving Trump a surgical victory in the Electoral College map. Even with traditional Blue States, such as Wisconsin and

big hoopla the night before the elections in Philadelphia. The optics were all wrong. Why would America elect a President who will give Obama his third term and continue with the status quo? Americans, unhappy with Washington and its business as usual, thought Trump was the change agent – not Hillary. He may have been boorish and highly inarticulate, but he promised to "drain the swamp" in Washington, a complete overhaul of the proverbial swampland. These were empty words – as was his promise to build a wall to stop "rapists and drug dealers" from Mexico and numerous others - but they found resonance with a White America that felt increasingly outnumbered by the darkies. Everywhere the White America looked, they saw a coloured person, whether African-American or Hispanic. "Give us our country back," they wailed in assent with Trump's call for Making America Great Again.

The results cheered one-half of America, but made the other half excruciatingly despondent. Unable to hide their anger and disappointment, many of them questioned the legitimacy of the election of a President who by all accounts had won fair and square. These emotions found their most articulate response in the words of Van Jones, a former Obama adviser, who called it a "whitelash". Explaining himself, he told CNN:

"People have talked about a miracle. I'm hearing about a nightmare. It's hard to be a parent tonight for a lot of us. You tell your kids 'don't be bully,' you tell your kids, 'don't be a bigot.' You tell your kids, 'do your homework and be prepared.' And then you have this outcome and you have people putting children to bed tonight and they are afraid of breakfast. They're afraid of, 'how do I explain this to my children?'

I have Muslim friends who are texting me tonight saying, 'Should I leave the country?' I have families of immigrants that are terrified tonight."

What is unspoken here is that the "whitelash" was largely aimed at Obama. He was the first Black President, a fact difficult to swallow for those who never accepted African-Americans – constitutionally only three-fifth of a person - as their equals. Within days after Obama's victory eight years ago, the Republicans vowed to make him a "one-term President." For the past eight years, Obama outfoxed them, frustrating the Republicans and their white cohorts every which way possible, implementing a large chunk of his agenda.

Not any more, White America has found its cheerleader in Trump, whose claim to political fame began with questioning Obama's birth on American soil, a deeply racist manoeuvre that heartened the white supremacists. By questioning a fact already proven by detailed documentation, Trump was encouraging White America to question the legitimacy of the Black President's ascendance to power.

Where do we go from here? Much of the Democratic establishment has begun its soul searching. The deeply despondent left is also slowly coming to grips with the reality. They are already talking about the next phase, which begins with gearing up for the next battle. In 2018, America will re-elect its House of Representatives and one-third of the Senate. By taking back the Congress, they can secure some democratic sanity in the balance of power in Washington and regain their continued viability.

The path forward, as put by the Weekly Nation, is "Moum, Resist, Organise."

*In simplest terms, the victory was a clear rejection of the rural white America of Washington's elitism. These folks, under tremendous economic stress due to globalisation and continuing economic depression, exacted a revenge on the rest of the country.*



PHOTO: AFP

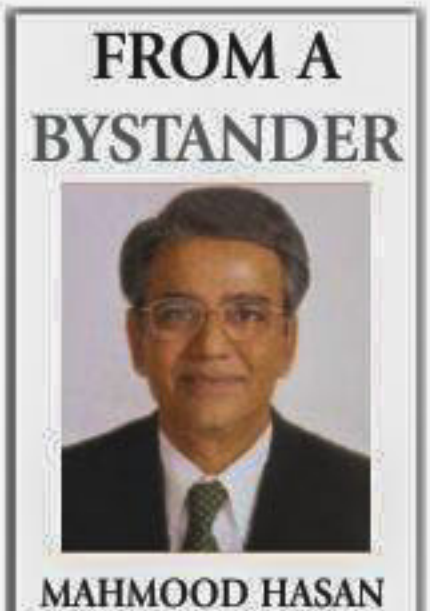
country. Everybody, including Republican strategists, had predicted nobody could win US Presidency without enlarging the tent that would accommodate members of the Hispanic and African-American communities. Donald Trump just proved them wrong.

Hillary's own folly was that she had put all her eggs in the "minority basket," hoping that the vaunted "Obama Coalition" would help her

Michigan, she took things for granted, opting not to campaign in these traditional bastions of liberal America.

The single most important reason for Hillary downfall, in my view, is the rejection by America of a candidate who came across as a typical Washington insider, keen on continuing a political dynasty and preserving Obama's legacy. She had gathered all her big guns – Bill Clinton and Michelle and Barack Obama – for a

# Modi's war on blackmoney



**FROM A BYSTANDER**  
MAHMOOD HASAN

**M**IDWAY Through his tenure, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has declared war against blackmoney holders. On November 8 he declared Indian currency notes of Rs 500 and Rs 1000 denomination were no longer legal tenders. People across India were panicked by this government move.

There were apparently several objectives for Modi to take this sudden drastic step – boost government revenue, crackdown on rampant tax evasion, curb illegal financial transactions, stamp out terrorism, and thwart black money holders from converting it into gold or any other physical asset. The "revolutionary" step is expected to suck out 86 percent value of Rs17.8 trillion in circulation.

Chaotic serpentine lines of people are seen in front of banks across India waiting to exchange their demonetised notes with new notes of Rs 500 and Rs 2000 issued by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). Modi said it was an act of "purifying" the economy. India is a cash-driven country and money becomes black when tax payable against it is not paid.

Old notes up to Rs 4000 can be exchanged for new notes at banks or post offices, if one does not have a bank account. Bank account holders can deposit any amount in their

accounts, but can withdraw only upto a maximum of Rs 20,000 per week. Those depositing Rs 250,000 or above will come under the Income Tax Department scanner. If tax evasion is detected the account holder will have to pay the tax assessed plus a hefty penalty of 200 percent of the tax payable. Thumbs of individuals who exchanged expired cash were marked with indelible ink so that they cannot reappear to change again.

Modi's move has revealed some baffling facts. Some estimates put the black economy at 40 percent of India's vast economy of over USD 2.0 trillion GDP (2015). In India 85 percent of people do not have bank accounts and 90 percent of transactions are done in cash. Real estate dealers are notorious dealing mostly in huge amounts of cash to avoid paying tax. Businessmen needing foreign exchange to import goods also resort to illegal transactions. Huge amounts of cash are illegally funnelled to voters during state and national elections. Rich women convert their husbands' illegal earnings into gold jewellery. Terrorist and smugglers use large notes. Cash bribes are always in large notes and people have tendency to stash their savings in cash in big notes under the mattress.

The demonetisation process will extinguish wealth held in those notes if it is not exchanged or deposited in banks by December 31, 2016. If it comes overboard then the government stands to rake in additional USD 45 billion in revenue. It will enlarge the income tax base in



A woman holds 500 and 1000 Indian rupee banknotes as she stands in a queue to deposit her money inside a bank in the northern city of Kanpur, India.

PHOTO: REUTERS

a country of 1.25 billion people, where only 3 percent pay income tax. Indian opposition parties have come out with severe criticism of the government move. Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal alleged that during the past three months thousands of crores of rupees were deposited in banks. This according to Kejriwal was done by BJP members who had black money and knew about the demonetisation scheme. He alleged that the real black money was in Swiss banksheld by Indians. Modi promised to bring that back but did nothing. Congress

leader Rahul Gandhi criticising the government said "There is no *crorepati* in the queue". Mamata Banerjee called for withdrawing "this draconian decision". Opposition parties are up in arms in the Lok Sabha criticising BJP for messing up the lives of the poor people.

The Supreme Court of India also stepped in directing the government to take steps to ensure that the common man was not burdened by its decision. "Discontinuing of higher denomination notes appears to be carpet bombing and not surgical

strike," the bench said. Economic experts welcomed the attack on black money but said that the current demonetisation would not be very successful as the old notes are being exchanged for new ones. In the short run there would be some contraction of money supply but soon the supply would become normal. There may be a negative effect on economic growth. The immediate positive effect of demonetisation will be lower inflation in the economy which currently stands at 4.4 percent.

However, worries are also there that if the money supply is not restored quickly there may be deflationary effect on the economy. Prices of consumer durables, cars, land, agricultural products, etc. will fall.

Further unscrupulous *hawala* agents may find ways to make more black money by charging fat commissions to change old notes for new ones. Besides, the new Rs 2000 note may not find takers as it cannot be converted into smaller denominations easily. These may land into the coffers of hoarders.

Economists say to totally snuff out black money from the economy all major financial transactions need to be done through banks and not in cash. But that is impossible in a developing country like India. Voluntary disclosure of income rewarded with incentives is probably a better strategy of converting black money into white.

It is a nightmare for RBI as it tries to replace old notes with new ones and keep track of income tax dodgers. While tax payers have welcomed the exercise, the sufferers have been the middle and lower income groups who are not income tax assesses, do not have bank accounts and keep liquid cash to run their daily lives.

Modi however, has asked people to be patient and referring to his "chai-wallah" days said, "My justice is little *karak* (strong)". Will Modi's war on corruption bring "*Acchhe Deen*" (good days) to the people of India?

The writer is a former Ambassador and Secretary.

**QUOTABLE Quote**

**CHINUA ACHEBE**  
*Anthills Of The Savannah*

While we do our good works let us not forget that the real solution lies in a world in which charity will have become unnecessary.

**CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH**

**ACROSS**

- Inclines
- Hill of film
- One with a record
- Kitchen come-on
- Tool with a bubble
- Lawn makeup
- Debate side
- Wee worker
- A lot
- Barber's tool
- Rushing amounts
- Foot or furlong
- Young horse
- Sorts
- Swing's Goodman
- Eastern monks
- Mouth part
- Guy's friend
- "That's it!"
- Exercise may increase it
- Follow as a result
- Disney's mermaid
- Appraised
- Pop

**DOWN**

- Reduced amount
- Trade fair
- Litmus reddener
- Neither follower
- Skilled shooter
- Crate
- Raw metal
- Flaring star
- Church reply
- Stop
- Song syllable
- Travel stop
- Strong-boxes
- Tire track
- One or more
- Pizzazz
- Director of "Downton Abbey"
- Cunning
- Drooped
- Minstrel's song
- Spring month
- Taunt
- Visitor to Siam
- Sunset setting
- Eager
- Listen to
- Friend
- Wish undone
- Historic stretch

**BEETLE BAILEY** by Mort Walker

HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE FOR THEM TO REACH THE GROUND?  
ABOUT 5 OR 6 MINUTES

EXCEPT FOR BEETLE, WHO LIKES TO MAKE A DAY OF IT

**BABY BLUES** by Kirkman & Scott

WHY DO YOU BOTHER GETTING A NEWSPAPER?  
WITH THE INTERNET, I CAN READ ALL THE NEWS, WATCH VIDEOS, LISTEN TO MUSIC, SEND MESSAGES...

CAN THE INTERNET DO THAT?  
HANG ON... I'M LOOKING FOR AN APP...