

The rhinocerine politician



NAVEED MAHUB

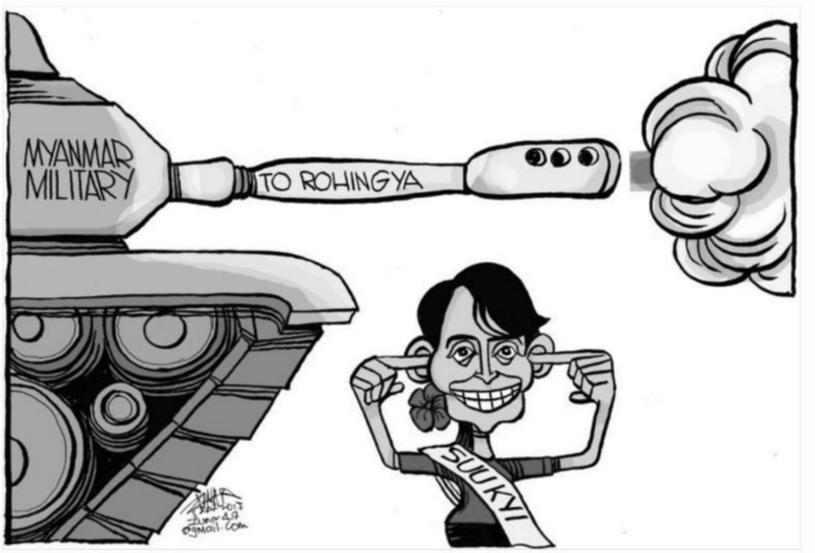
700 years ago Marco Polo came to Burma and discovered the unicorn, which was in essence the rhino. If he would have come here today, he would have discovered many with the skin of the rhino. But if a future incident could have been used as a reference, I

would have cited one particular rhino skinned person missing the UN General Assembly session as a means to protest the punishment I received in school for missing assembly.

But rank has its privileges. Aung San Suu Kyi addresses not only the UN General Assembly, but the whole world in the form of addressing her own nation in the Queen's English. Who cares if many of her local audiences don't understand the actual words, they are already dancing in front of jumbotrons strewn across the city while the world collectively groans: "Surprise, surprise!" The plethora of euphoria exposes a lot of oral cavities. That's a first—I thought most Myanmar go to India for dental checkups because at home, they are NOT allowed to "open their mouths"...

The State Counsellor also doesn't open her mouth on the atrocities in Rakhine. Did we really expect anything else a day after the speech of the military chief? Remember, 25 percent of Myanmar's parliament is reserved for the military. Thank Heavens that 25 percent of the members of the incumbent National League for Democracy are not reserved to receive military training. One thing is for sure, a hell of a lot more than 25 percent of the mind of the Myanmar's State Counsellor is made up on where she stands.

I wonder if Suu Kyi was ever the client of the famous Myanmar astrologer, E-Thi, aka, ET, aka, Extra Terrestrial. ET was blind and with a speech impediment. Thus, with Suu Kyi in front of her, ET saw no evil and also apparently heard



no evil and spoke no evil. Meanwhile, the exodus from Rakhine continues, not without leaving many a dead behind, probably lowering Myanmar's already low average life expectancy of 57. I'm sure the Myanmar authorities would deny this and say it is still 57 as their measurement sample includes ONLY those who are "defined" as citizens of Myanmar.

Meanwhile, our PM rightfully stays clear of asking President Trump for any help on the Rohingya refugees, as he would have answered: "We will provide all the resources...to build a wall on the Naf and Teknaf would pay for it." While on the subject of the POTUS, if he can name Kim Jong Un as *Rocket Man*, he can perhaps at least name Aung San Suu Kyi as *Balkit Woman*.

Lesson learned—give the Nobel Peace Prize to someone NOT during their incarceration, but

AFTER their release AND AFTER a healthy "probation" period. Look how well it worked out in the case of Nelson Mandela. If Suu Kyi can get one Nobel Peace Prize, Suchitra Sen deserves three—one for being under house confinement herself for way longer than 15 years, one for being under this confinement on her own volition and one after getting out of her house while not forcing anyone else to leave his own home.

I guess we have to come to accept that Aung San Suu Kyi is no longer a little girl with a little doll called the Nobel Peace Prize. She has matured into a seasoned and rhinocerine politician.

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In memory of Lt General Khwaja Wasiuddin

ANEELA WASIUDDIN

TODAY marks the 25th death anniversary of my father-in-law Lt General Khwaja Wasiuddin (1920-1992), a patriotic army officer and diplomat in later life. Mere words cannot do justice to the memory of the kind of person that he was. I knew him as a very caring, decent and humble human being, although many would consider him to be a very strict, highly-disciplined man who had never refrained from speaking his mind for the rights and dignity of the Bengalis.

His immense love for his country was manifested throughout his career and life.

Khwaja Wasiuddin came from an illustrious family background. His father Khwaja Shahabuddin was the governor of Northwest Frontier Province of Pakistan and a minister in the central cabinet while his mother, Farhat Banu, was a niece of Nawab Sir Salimullah and a member of the Bengal Legislative Assembly.

As I write about him today, I am reminded of some of his confidential documents that I had come across, which showed what a giant of a man he was, with a heart to match it. His achievements are indeed legendary, and in those letters, I found ample proof of a brave and honest person who stood tall against all odds.

He would always express his views frankly and bravely to his immediate superiors, in a way that would not be misunderstood, regardless of the consequences. During his stint in Pakistan, Khwaja Wasiuddin wanted to install pride amongst the Bengali soldiers. Speaking in the pro-



Lt General Khwaja Wasiuddin

vincial language was forbidden in the army at that time. Bengali officers, being of a minority group, did not dare to speak their language in public.

But Khwaja Wasiuddin set the precedent by writing his name in Bangla in the nameplate in front of his house in Rawalpindi. He did not stop just there; he read his speech in Bangla at his investiture ceremony as the Colonel Commandant of the East Bengal regiment in Chittagong. He then read his speech in Bangla in Lahore and Sialkot at the presentation ceremony of the National Standard of Pakistan to the 4th and 5th East Bengal regiments.

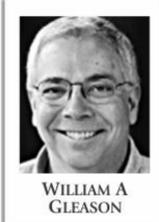
To quote Major General Khalilur Rahman, who was present at the ceremony, "The General Tikka ('The Butcher of Bengal') listened to his speech standing behind him in Sialkot like a lamb. The Pakistan authorities were bitterly critical of this audacity of a Bengali, but could do nothing about it officially. Such was the personality of General Wasiuddin. Such was his spirit of Bengali nationalism which dared and awed the mightiest of the Pakistanis."

These are just a few instances of Khwaja Wasiuddin's courageous stand and his enduring love for Bangladesh. There are many more documents of great historical significance. I wish I could share them all. Some might say that he was of Kashmiri origin who settled in Dhaka and was not a Bengali. To them I will say this: my father-in-law was a Bangladeshi by his own choice and, I must add, a very proud one at that.

Aneela Wasiuddin is the daughter-in-law of Lt General Khwaja Wasiuddin.

PROJECT SYNDICATE

The literary magic of Harry Potter



WILLIAM A GLEASON

THIS summer, at literary festivals and bookstores around the world, readers celebrated the 20-year anniversary of the debut of the first book in JK Rowling's Harry Potter series—*Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (re-titled *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* in the United States)—and with good reason. Since the young wizard's first appearance on June 26, 1997, the "Boy Who Lived" has become the "Icon Who Endures."

Over the last two decades, the Harry Potter series has expanded to include seven novels, with a total of 450 million copies in print, including translations into more than six dozen languages. The eight films spawned by the books have grossed USD 7 billion, with Harry Potter-themed toys and merchandise garnering another USD 7 billion. For those of a certain age and literary mindset, it is difficult to recall a day when global audiences weren't spellbound by Rowling's creation.

That is why it is startling for me to recall the sour reception that my students gave *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* in the fall of 1999, when it appeared on the syllabus of my Princeton University course on popular literature, "American Best Sellers," which I had been teaching since 1993. A survey of popular writing from the seventeenth century to the present, the course invites students to consider how and why particular best-selling works have captivated their audiences. At the end of each term, I let the students select the final book as an exercise in popular taste. In 1999, they chose that first Harry Potter novel.

Potter-mania had hit America's shores hard that year. In June, the series' US publisher rushed the hardcover edition of the second book, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, to bookstores. It published the third book, *Harry Potter and*

the Prisoner of Azkaban, along with the paperback edition of *Sorcerer's Stone*, on September 8.

By the end of that month, Rowling's novels held the first three slots on the *New York Times* fiction best-seller list, while the paperback *Sorcerer's Stone* sat atop the paperback list. The magazine *Time* had even put the bespectacled wizard on its cover. You couldn't turn around without knocking into Harry. My students were eager to see what all the fuss was about.

Boy, were they disappointed! For them, it was second-rate blather, nowhere near as

the start, these students were in precisely the wrong demographic to appreciate the phenomenon as it was unfolding. Too old for new children's books, and too young to have children of their own (as I newly did at the time), they were quick to insist that despite its current popularity, the series would soon fade from memory. The following autumn, in 2000, the next cohort of students also picked *Sorcerer's Stone* for the final text, and, like their peers, they confidently dismissed it.

Fast-forward to the spring of 2007. I was again teaching "American Best Sellers,"



worthy of their attention as the cherished series from their childhoods, such as *The Chronicles of Narnia* or *The Lord of the Rings*. Despite being only a few years removed from those childhoods, they laid into Harry Potter with the same fervour as many of the notoriously negative adult reviewers: "Derivative." "Poorly written." "Clichéd." "Cloying." For them, Harry held no wonder, no warmth, and no wit.

My students' antipathy surprised me, but in hindsight, it should not have. Though adults comprised a significant portion of the Harry Potter audience from

after having set the course aside for a few years. When it came time for the students to choose the final book, they went with *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*. I braced myself for their criticisms.

This time, however, the reviews were glowing. This new group, born between 1986 and 1989, had first read Rowling as pre-teens and early adolescents, not college students, which meant they had practically grown into young adults alongside Harry, Ron, and Hermione. The same thing happened in the fall of 2010. For both of these groups, "We grew up

with Harry Potter" was a motto, not a label. Would Harry fade from memory? Not on your life.

I've taught my Best Sellers course twice since 2010, and both times the students have chosen a non-Harry Potter novel to end the semester. Is it Potter fatigue? Not likely, judging from the reception the series continues to receive in the other course in which I teach Rowling's work, "Children's Literature." Here, it is my choice to put a Harry Potter novel on the syllabus. Instead of *Sorcerer's Stone*, however, I assign *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*—my favourite book of the seven, which marks the series' shift from children's literature to young adult fiction, through its complex treatment of fidelity, betrayal, rage, and mercy. It is also the favourite of many of my students.

But how long will Harry Potter's popularity hold? Each time I teach "Children's Literature," I start with a poll: "Which books on the syllabus do you remember reading as a child?" In 2010, 86 percent had read *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*. In 2012, that figure rose to 94 percent. But in the years since, the percentage has dropped—to 87 percent in 2014, and to 81 percent in 2016.

This is all unscientific, I know. But I'm curious: will it fall under 80 percent next spring, when I teach "Children's Literature" again? Will my students from 1999 and 2000 be proved right, with Harry Potter fading from relevance, never to become an enduring classic? Or is there an equilibrium point ahead, where the percentage holds steady without declining further?

Perhaps Harry's 40th anniversary will provide the answers. Until then, I'll happily keep inviting him into my classroom.

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(Exclusive to The Daily Star)

QUOTABLE Quote



ROSA PARKS
ACTIVIST IN THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

I have learned over the years that when one's mind is made up, this diminishes fear; knowing what must be done does away with fear.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- | | | |
|---------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| ACROSS | 31 Pants part | 7 Glasgow native |
| | 32 Edmonton player | 8 Dapper fellow |
| | 34 Gaunt | 9 Poem of praise |
| | 35 Playground game | 10 Slugger Ott |
| | 38 Dangerous | 16 Skin woe |
| | 41 "In - veritas" | 18 West wing worker |
| | 42 Get ready | 19 Black-mailing |
| | 43 A fan of | 20 Gather |
| | 44 Upright | 21 Liberal study |
| | 45 Mature | 22 Brazenness |
| | | 23 War of 1812 port |
| | | 25 Cruise stop |
| | | 29 Bonehead |
| DOWN | 1 Antlered animal | 30 Pants part |
| | 2 Ring of light | 33 Bumbling |
| | 3 Sending abroad | 34 Au naturel |
| | 4 Slight, in slang | 36 Poker price |
| | 5 Cardiff's land | 37 Evil fighter |
| | 6 Van Gogh work | 38 "That's gross!" |
| | | 39 "The Matrix" |

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

G	A	E	L	D	A	M	U	P		
A	R	M	O	R	I	N	A	N	E	
T	A	B	L	E	T	E	N	N	I	S
E	R	R	S	A	T	I	S	E		
D	A	Y	J	O	B	C	L	O	T	
T	O	J	A	L	L	L	A	N	A	
R	E	E	S	E						
M	I	L	E	S	T	A	R	N	O	
A	M	I	D	A	R	N	O	L	D	
S	P	A	T	W	O	R	I	O		
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BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker



BABY BLUES by Kirkman & Scott

