

Putting democracy at the heart of our common future



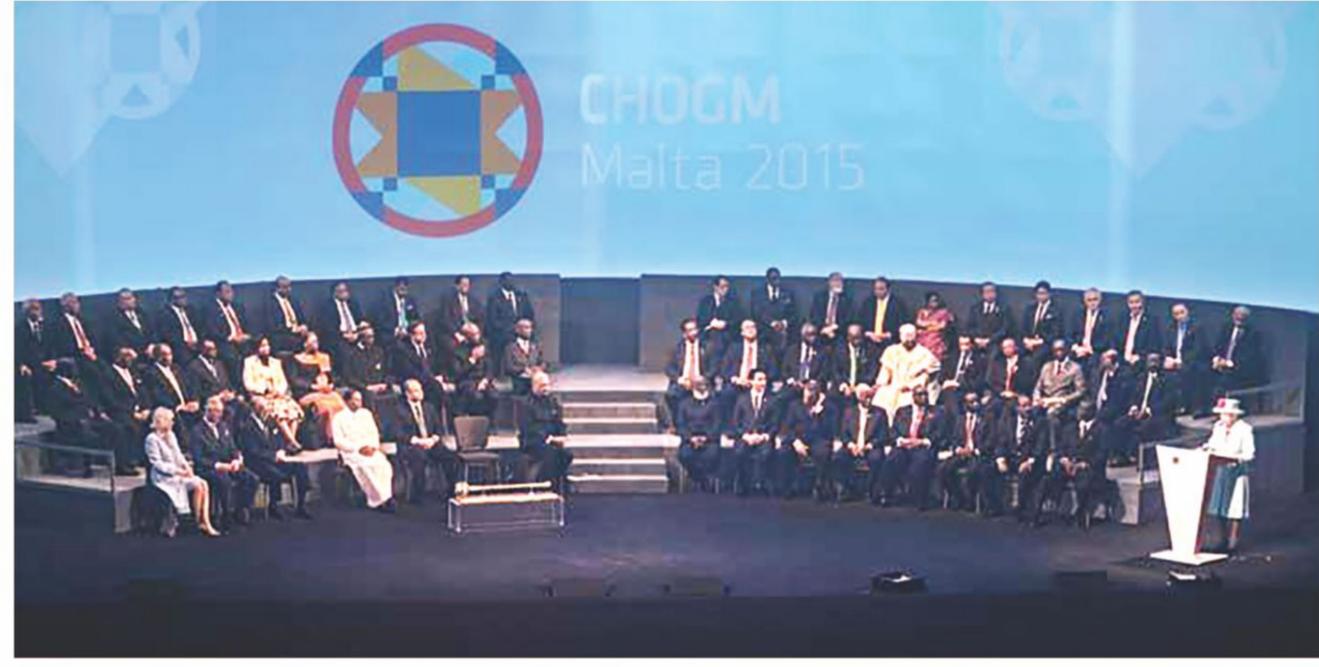
AKBAR KHAN

THE theme of the 2018 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM)—“Towards a Common Future”—was announced recently by British Prime Minister Theresa May on the margins of the United Nations General Assembly Meeting in New York. The theme will form the basis for discussions at next year’s Commonwealth Summit, the biennial meeting of Commonwealth leaders last hosted by the UK in 1997. The timing could not be more auspicious, coming against a backdrop of Brexit and a UK pivot towards a “wider world” foreign policy. Expectations are running high for a successful Summit which it is hoped will renew and revitalise the UK’s trading relationship, amongst other areas, with the Commonwealth family while raising the bloc’s profile in the UK, especially amongst young people who are mostly unaware of the nature and benefits of belonging to one of the world’s oldest political associations.

In a 2015 poll of British schoolchildren conducted by the Royal Commonwealth Society, only 7 percent could identify a Commonwealth flag; only 23 percent could correctly select three Commonwealth countries; and only 50 percent could correctly identify the Queen as the Head of the Commonwealth. With approximately 60 percent of the Commonwealth’s 2.4 billion citizens across its 52 countries currently under the age of 30 years, the importance of young people identifying with the Commonwealth and embracing its values is now urgent and pressing. This is why the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) has led the way through its innovative CPA Roadshows for young people which visit schools and universities across the Commonwealth with Parliamentarians to discuss the importance of democracy and to give voice to the views of young people. According to Prime Minister May, the Summit will pursue an ambitious agenda focused on realising a more prosperous, secure, fair and sustainable future for all Commonwealth citizens. Importantly, at a time when trust in government and public institutions is falling, the challenge for Commonwealth leaders will be to lift the Commonwealth Summit from just another international junket into a dynamic, empowering global force for good that captures the imagination of all citizens, is transformative of Commonwealth values for their benefit, and which champions change for the marginalised and excluded in our societies while celebrating inclusion and diversity in all its forms, whether based on gender, race, ethnicity, cultural or sexual orientation.

The high-water mark of the Commonwealth, proudly standing against the scourge of apartheid in support of its peoples, needs to be reignited again in the 21st century, with the Commonwealth positioning itself strongly and unequivocally beside its citizens in the fight against climate change, inequities and inequalities that cause so much poverty and injustice in our societies, especially in our small and vulnerable states which make up over 30 of the Commonwealth’s 52 nations.

At a time when several of our core Commonwealth political values including democracy, rule of law and the separation of powers are under attack across many Commonwealth countries, it is vitally important that the upcoming Summit and resulting outcomes help to galvanise the efforts of civil society, ordinary citizens, the



Queen Elizabeth II delivers a speech during the opening ceremony of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting 2015.

SOURCE: AFP FILE PHOTO

young and old, women and men, academics, Parliamentarians and governments to come together in support of democracy as a central tenet of our common future. A keen focus on realising the development outcomes of the Summit will be essential to renewing and revitalising the credibility of the Commonwealth in the minds of ordinary citizens, many of whom have been left behind by globalisation and yet to feel the tangible benefits of belonging to this longstanding “sleeping beauty” of a political association, especially if the Commonwealth is to survive for future generations.

Central to realising the Summit outcomes is the key role of Commonwealth Parliaments. Parliaments are unique institutions sitting at the centre of a network of

accountability that reaches into the executive and other branches of government, the political party system and to the public. No two parliaments are the same as each will reflect their own unique historical evolution, but what all parliaments have in common is a capacity to strengthen democracy by acting as powerful agents of change for the improvement of their nations.

In our Commonwealth, it is the role of parliaments and our elected representatives to forge, develop and implement the Summit outcomes which should align themselves with the 2015 UN Sustainable Development Goals. These goals underscore the importance of the close relationship between democracy and development. As the former UNDP Administrator Helen

Clark has stated, the principles which underpin the new development goals go directly to the importance of active, effective, honest and fair governance at all levels, and lying at the core of a flourishing democracy are the values of good governance. As a guarantor of democracy itself, parliament has a duty to represent the people it serves—and it discharges this responsibility by being an inclusive, accountable, open and transparent public institution.

The run up to the UK Summit in April 2018 will be marked by a number of important Commonwealth gatherings showcasing the potential of the bloc as a global force for good by placing the importance of citizens at the heart of its mission rather than governments.

The first of these important gatherings scheduled for early November will see the Parliament of Bangladesh hosting over 600 Commonwealth Parliamentarians at the CPA’s 63rd Annual Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference.

Critical issues affecting every aspect of the lives of our Commonwealth citizens will be discussed with the ambition of deepening democracy and reaffirming a collective commitment to create a fairer Commonwealth that promotes good governance and protects fundamental freedoms as we move towards realising a common future.

Akbar Khan is the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA).

The 4th Idiot

HUMOROUSLY YOURS



“Sit down! Sit down!!”

JUST like when Usain Bolt and his cohorts dart off at the sound of the pistol, there are at least 10

has been cleared for take-off. But, this time, I am that agitated passenger as the Air India flight is taxiing. I jump out of my seat, rush to the front of the aircraft and frantically tell the three flight attendants who are prepared to wrestle down this maniac: “You gotta

get me off this plane, now!”
“Calm down sir. What happened?”
“I’ve left my mobile phone, wallet and laptop at the gate security checkpoint!” And I’m flying off on a two-country trip!
“Do you have your passport?”
“Yes...”

“Then, please take your seat, we will notify the captain as soon as we’re at cruising altitude and he will radio Dhaka Airport about this.”
In hindsight, there are two things I could’ve done in order for the plane to return to the gate and disgorge me. One, tell them I didn’t have my

passport, or two, be the “4th idiot” and do what one of my fellow engineers did in the movie *3 Idiots* – pretend to have a heart attack. And when you’re off to two countries with an empty pocket and without the most important electronic devices of the 21st century, you ARE this close to getting a heart attack.

Let’s not get into how this all happened, which still remains a mystery. But what I DO promise myself is to never make eye contact with the person who approaches me at the traffic light asking for money to go back to his village from being stranded in Dhaka after getting pickpocketed. I vow to not question that story, whether true or false. What I also vow is to make myself a much better comedian as the only option for survival upon arrival in Kolkata is to perform on the street for dough.

But there is a happy ending. My items are salvaged, the contents meticulously documented and carefully guarded. When my wife goes to retrieve the items while I’m on my trip, she is interrogated for half an hour so as to establish that she is my lawfully wedded wife – by way of showing multiple photos of us together on Facebook. The verification process continues as the questions are asked by the security lady:

“Do you know how much money your husband has in his wallet?”
“Ma’am, do YOU know how much

money is in the wallet of YOUR husband?”

The lady does her best to suppress her laughter.

“Does your husband have any photos of yours in his wallet?”

“We have been married for 19 years. If he [still] has any pictures of mine in his wallet, I’ll be surprised.”

The lady bursts into laughter. This HAS got to be the comedian’s wife. The goods are handed over. And I get the good news sitting in Singapore, my next destination, while my hosts in each of these two cities are my local saviours.

With no mobile phone, no laptop, limited access to information, a near empty pocket (with payments from my two shows in Kolkata and Singapore), I DO exactly what the captain said on the fateful flight – I kick back, relax and enjoy my flight of five untethered days. Best of all, passing through airport security is a breeze – I have no laptop to take out of the backpack, and nothing to empty out of my pockets.

I may be the true idiot in the form of the 4th idiot, but finally, I give myself my own, long-deserved, undivided attention.

Naveed Mahbub is an engineer at Ford & Qualcomm USA and CEO of IBM & Nokia Siemens Networks Bangladesh turned comedian (by choice), the host of ATN Bangla’s *The Naveed Mahbub Show* and ABC Radio’s *Good Morning Bangladesh*, the founder of Naveed’s Comedy Club.
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“Of course, there can be the rare occasion of someone, not quite aware of aviation safety norms, all of a sudden faced with the need to relieve himself just as the aircraft has been cleared for take-off.”

PHOTO: AFP

QUOTABLE Quote

FYODOR DOSTOYEVSKY
RUSSIAN NOVELIST AND PHILOSOPHER

It takes something more than intelligence to act intelligently.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 29 Ticked off
- 31 Clumsy guy
- 32 Obtain deceitfully
- 36 Bit of glitter
- 39 Stout of mysteries
- 40 Accolade
- 41 Head out
- 43 Notched, as leaves
- 44 -- alia
- 45 Scatter
- 46 Pub missile

DOWN

- 1 March honoree, for short
- 2 Tara family name
- 3 Citified
- 4 Campaign pro
- 5 Musical close
- 6 “Once -- a time...”
- 7 Spanish punch
- 8 Draw out
- 9 Parade site
- 11 Striking people?
- 17 Checkers side
- 19 Transcript no.
- 22 Tel Aviv native
- 24 Affinity
- 25 Franklin’s wife
- 27 Toe count
- 28 Redeems, as a check
- 30 Night flyer
- 33 Persona non --
- 34 Jimmy, e.g.
- 35 Bring to bear
- 37 Face feature
- 38 Enlarged
- 42 Finish

BEETLE BAILEY BY MORT WALKER

BEETLE DOESN'T LOOK SO GOOD
DON'T WORRY, HE'LL BE OKAY
HE CAME WITH A 100,000-SMILE WARRANTY

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

A	L	A	S	K	A	A	S	T	O
B	A	N	T	A	M	S	C	O	W
E	S	T	A	T	E	K	A	N	E
M	E	N	T	A	L				
R	A	S	P		I	N	L	E	T
A	C	T		S	A	L	T	I	N
B	R	A		L	Y	E		O	D
B	E	L	L	I	E	S		N	U
I	S		L	L	E	T		I	S
I	N	S	E	A	M				
A	M	O	S		A	B	A	T	E
L	O	N	E		R	E	G	I	M
L	O	S	S		T	E	P		P

BABY BLUES BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT

WHERE'S HAMMIE?
FAKING A BATH.
OH, GOOD.
WAIT, DID YOU SAY "FAKING" OR "FAKING"?
MOM, HE EVEN PAINTS THE RING AROUND THE TUB!
AWW! SO REFRESHING!