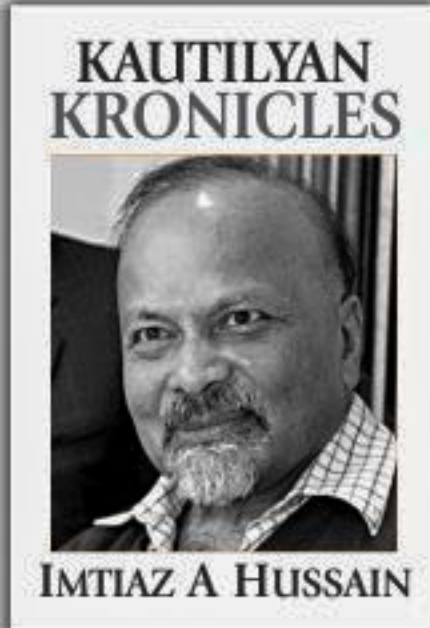


Puff the plastic dragon



IMTIAZ A HUSSAIN

PUFF was a mythological dragon, made famous by one of the original, 1960s, folk-rock bands, consisting of Peter, Paul, and Mary. He lived "by the sea", and would "frolc in the autumn mist" in a land they called Honah Lee. Portrayed as always coming out "with his fearless roar" every time little boys came to play on the sea-beach, Puff became irrelevant as boys grew up and turned to "other toys". A more glaring and graver irrelevance today is posed by the deep plastic plight suffocating our oceans.

In a gripping June 2018 *National Geographic* cover story entitled "Planet or plastic", we are informed how half of all plastic produced on this planet has been in this 21st century alone: Coca-Cola contributes 128 billion bottles to the half-billion tonnes of plastic jam-packing our oceans each and every passing year (not to mention choking fish gills and wrapping fish bodies till they perish), and slowly suffocating our own human existence.

Though these polymers were first introduced in the late 19th century, it was only with World War II that their usages proliferated and became popular: from saving lives in operation theatres and bailing air-force fighters through nylon parachutes to serving a wide variety of consumer needs, like buildings, transportation components, industrial materials, electrical gadgets, and textiles. Indeed, the largest plastic proportion is in packaging, boasting the shortest plastic consumer lifecycle of only six months (the longest lifecycles of 35-odd years get weaved into constructing buildings). Since 1970 (symbolically, our independence), plastic usage has quintupled, creating a footprint set to swallow human independence by, for instance, 2070.

LDC (least developed country) citizens have become the biggest culprits: our economic growth depends upon plastic consumption, with Manila's Pasig River becoming, until the recent reforms, one of the largest conveyors of plastic to the seas. Likewise, China's Yiwu International Trade City (in Zhejiang province) boasts being "the



Bangladesh generates around 381.36 tonnes of plastic waste every day while around 249.86 tonnes go to landfills. Degradation of the environment due to increasing plastic waste is a major issue in the country.

PHOTO: STAR

world's capital of everyday plastic". In fact, our own Brahmaputra-Ganges delta, where it is estimated more than 30,000 tonnes are dumped annually, is also among the largest plastic conduits to the sea. Almost all other major rivers east of Bangladesh, all the way up to China's east coast, deposit almost as much. Since these polymers can live for several centuries, proliferating numbers of boys along those deltas will never get to know or see Puff because, perhaps, of the very plastic toys they play with in the city.

Though this is all very common knowledge, the article elevates the "act locally, think globally" environmental mantra. Parents could begin by not gifting their ever-endearing children plastic products (this is

tough since, without enough of the right kind of education, those rising from lower classes will argue, "If the rich could do it, why must we foot the consequences?"). Nature can help substitute these with renewable materials. Much can be learned from one of the countries most damaging the oceans with plastics: Indonesia. It is also a pacesetter in experimenting with biodegradable plastic bags made out of edible cassava.

A motivated Bangladesh might explore if some of its own crops can help substitute plastic. Of particular promise is jute (our fabric with a never-ending "golden" trail of consequences), not the fibre but the stem: we have long utilised it to print paper, in fact, our paper industry is rooted in this practice.

With some ingenuity, that stem paper can be converted into biodegradable plastic bags. Many of us are already aware of gunny bags that can easily substitute for packaging in our supermarkets and other stores. Penny-wise businessmen may outlast their pound-foolish entrepreneur counterparts by stepping up to the plate, literally the global plate, to quickly, conveniently supply the huge international demand to displace plastics. Ingenuity must be coupled with far-sightedness: like the monsoon rains, jute is too readily available, demanding too little effort to maximise outputs, benefits, profits, and, above all, future mileage for our grandchildren, if we only put our minds to it, individually and collectively.

Perhaps the most multifaceted stride can be made with that cylindrical contraption so many of us just simply relish to hold between our fingers, as if our masculinity or nirvana lies in its outcome: cigarettes. One-quarter of each cigarette is all plastic, capable of being discarded in the most nonchalant way, even in the prettiest of gardens. Here we can hop, skip, and jump from Indonesia to Thailand, where a slow movement capable of becoming a tide very soon has gotten off first-base: picking up discarded cigarettes from the very pristine beaches, not just by hand, but through a subject-developed contraption that sifts the sand, trapping all pollutants larger than a certain size. That would automatically give the adjoining sea another lease of life.

Equally proactive, and motivator for us, have been Kerala fishermen. As John McKenna noted in a World Economic Forum article entitled "These Indian fishermen take plastic out of the sea and use it to build roads," J Mercykutty Amma, the Indian province's fisheries minister, launched a "Clean Sea" campaign whereby typical fishermen hauled in more than 25 tonnes of plastic bags and bottles in less than a year. In a country where the average person uses over 11kg of plastic annually, that is quite an accomplishment. Hats come off for him, indeed, for any other similar initiative or practice, past, present, and future, by any politician in any country against plastics.

Campaigns across our sweltering, congested city streets, parks, gutters, embankments, and the like would reap a harvest more fruitful for our future than what we are accustomed to. Only a change of behavioural norms would do the trick. Stopping purchases of plastic is a start. Whether we smoke or not, at least picking up the litter, anyone's litter, would be another. Indonesians and Thais have done so, and other countries have also started nudging towards liberating our appetites from bad consumption. We can do it too, if and only if we all take out future investments as we do our fasting, Eid visits home, or even vacationing in the world's longest marine-drive: with pleasure, purpose, and pragmatism.

Dr Imtiaz A Hussain is the head of Global Studies & Governance Program at Independent University, Bangladesh (IUB).

Sucker for Soccer



NAVEED MAHBUB

WELL, the World Cup continues.

The South Koreans are back home but are greeted with raw eggs. Thank Heavens, it's not North Korea; instead of eggs, it would've been ballistic missiles. Not sure if it is a coincidence, but South Korea is reducing its work week from 68 to 52

hours so that people spend more time with their families in order to boost the country's birth rate. Well, that's something WE in Bangladesh don't need, and in case if we ever DO, all we'd have to do is reduce by one hour our daily use of Facebook...

Back to soccer. 8pm and 12am midnight, for the past one month in Bangladesh, have seen the peak use of electricity and the peak consumption of junk food, only to be beaten by consumption by honeymoon couples during the longest lunar eclipse of the century on July 27. The games had even better viewership given the lull in Bangla serial dramas from across the border, thanks to the strike of their association of technicians (maybe they are also glued to Sony Sports). If anyone is happy from the blackout of these drama serials, it is Sultan Suleiman.

The soccer fever in Bangladesh is perhaps credited for the 2.4 percent increase in Facebook's share value from increased social media traffic on the topics of Argentina and Brazil. This propels Mark Zuckerberg to becoming the third richest person in the world in terms of net worth, toppling Warren Buffet, whose family has now probably deleted their Facebook accounts.

But I have to say, with two world-class football matches every evening, cricket has taken a back seat. Not only that, in comparison, cricket seems

rather slow. I had to watch some chess to realign my motor skills to upgrade cricket to a fast game again. And the Tigers help too—playing the game at a rapid FIFA style by being all out at 43 in their innings against the West Indies. Perhaps the Tigers are also suckers for soccer, finishing the game quickly to go back to the hotel to watch World Cup football, only to find out that there is no game that evening. Ok, ok, it was a class test, not a semester test—but in hand, football in mind.

Bangladesh is no longer in the World Cup, with Germany, Brazil and Argentina now becoming history and the World Cup now being relegated to being the European Cup. Even the lure of Kazan can't keep Brazil in the tournament—the city promises a piece of land to Neymar in return for a hat trick by him against Belgium. Neymar falls short (no pun intended), but the city keeps its promise, perhaps solely for Neymar's mettle in falling and getting up 30 times. Neymar literally bites the dust, while Suarez refrains from biting. Despite losing in the quarterfinals, Brazil does score two goals and Belgium only one—thus Brazil proves that giving, rather than taking, can also bring joy. And Brazil's same side scorer Fernandinho definitely deserves the Golden GPS.

Meanwhile, Argentinian flags remain hoisted all over Bangladesh—the Argentine squad may have left Russia, but the World Cup still has two Argentine referees. But Argentina HAS been in the finals in the past 32 years—in 1986 it's Diego Maradona with the "Hand of God" and in 2018 it's Nestor Pitana, with the hand of the referee.

The hopes of many were to see Messi and Neymar meet at Luzhniki Stadium, Moscow, but instead, they meet at Sheremetyevo Airport, Moscow.

But a surprise and quiet progress is by the English team. Funny, when it comes to games, Great Britain splits into three countries, though, in this case, it was to divide and knockout as the



Croatia's Ivan Perisic scores their first goal in the World Cup semi-final against England.

indomitable Croats force a Brexit (Britain-exit), or should I say, Exit (England-xit). England hasn't been in the finals since 1990, when Croatia was not even born and Prince Charles was Prince Charles.

Croatia continues to wow, just as its president, flying coach, sitting in the stands sporting the red and white jersey—not to mention her snazzy pictures going viral. It all starts with the surprise loss of Russia where the blame is to be heaped on I wonder who (the Russian Football Union or the KGB?)

So, now, we're down to the finals. Who will win in the finals is anybody's guess. If we really need to resort to a celebrity soothsayer, let's drop Paul the Octopus or Achilles the Cat but go for Kohli the Cricketer. For Virat Kohli seems to be the sure shot predictor—his team has never won the IPL,

he gets married in Italy and Italy takes a *Roman Holiday* from the 2018 World Cup, he supports Germany and it is *All Quiet on the Western Front*, he then supports Argentina and it's the *Malvinas* and finally, he supports Brazil and it ain't no *Mardi Gras*.

Do us a favour France and Croatia. Give us a good looking game, just like your two good looking presidents. And for Heaven's sake, please do NOT take it to penalty shootouts. Remember, the motto of the average viewer: The penalty for missing a penalty is a penalty...

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 the founder of *Naveed's Comedy Club*. E-mail: Naveed@NaveedMahbub.com

Do us a favour France and Croatia. Give us a good looking game, just like your two good looking presidents. And for Heaven's sake, please do not take it to penalty shootouts.

ON THIS DAY IN HISTORY



July 14, 1933
HITLER BANS ALL PARTIES BUT HIS OWN
Political parties are banned in Germany—only the Nazi party was allowed to exist

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
- 1 Baseball stats
 - 7 Cats and dogs
 - 11 Twist in agony
 - 12 Honolulu's island
 - 13 Historic Boston elm
 - 15 Fable writer
 - 16 Like sages
 - 18 Flying toy
 - 21 App makeup
 - 22 Donkey sound
 - 24 Fawn's mother
 - 25 Sense of self
 - 27 Apply hastily
 - 29 Swindle
 - 30 National symbol
 - 31 Foal's mother
 - 32 Labour leader
 - Chavez
- DOWN**
- 1 Cobbler's tool
 - 2 Half of hex-
 - 3 Feeding-time need
 - 4 Relaxed
 - 5 Low digit
 - 6 Hardens
 - 7 Dish with a crust
 - 8 Lobed organ
 - 9 Common article
 - 10 Take to court
 - 14 Like oxen
 - 16 Writer Virginia attraction
 - 17 Exemplary
 - 19 Belonging to those folks
 - 20 National symbol
 - 21 LP successors
 - 22 Chick's mother
 - 23 Bowl-shaped pan
 - 25 "Message received"
 - 28 Indiana team
 - 29 Like some wire
 - 31 Perhaps
 - 33 Commotion
 - 34 Near the ground
 - 35 Groom's promise
 - 36 Scary cry
 - 37 Go wrong
 - 38 Avoid the truth
 - 39 Statute



YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

A LOFT BESTS
SADIE OMAHA
HYDRA DUGAN
EMMY END
SHOWS OFF
EURO WAITON
ALARM TRADE
TALKUP TEROSS
STARWARS
SOBARIAS
UBOAT CLANS
ROUGE KLINE
FETED ISLET

BEETLE BAILEY



BY MORT WALKER



BABY BLUES



BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT



Write for us. Send us your opinion pieces to dsopinion@gmail.com.