

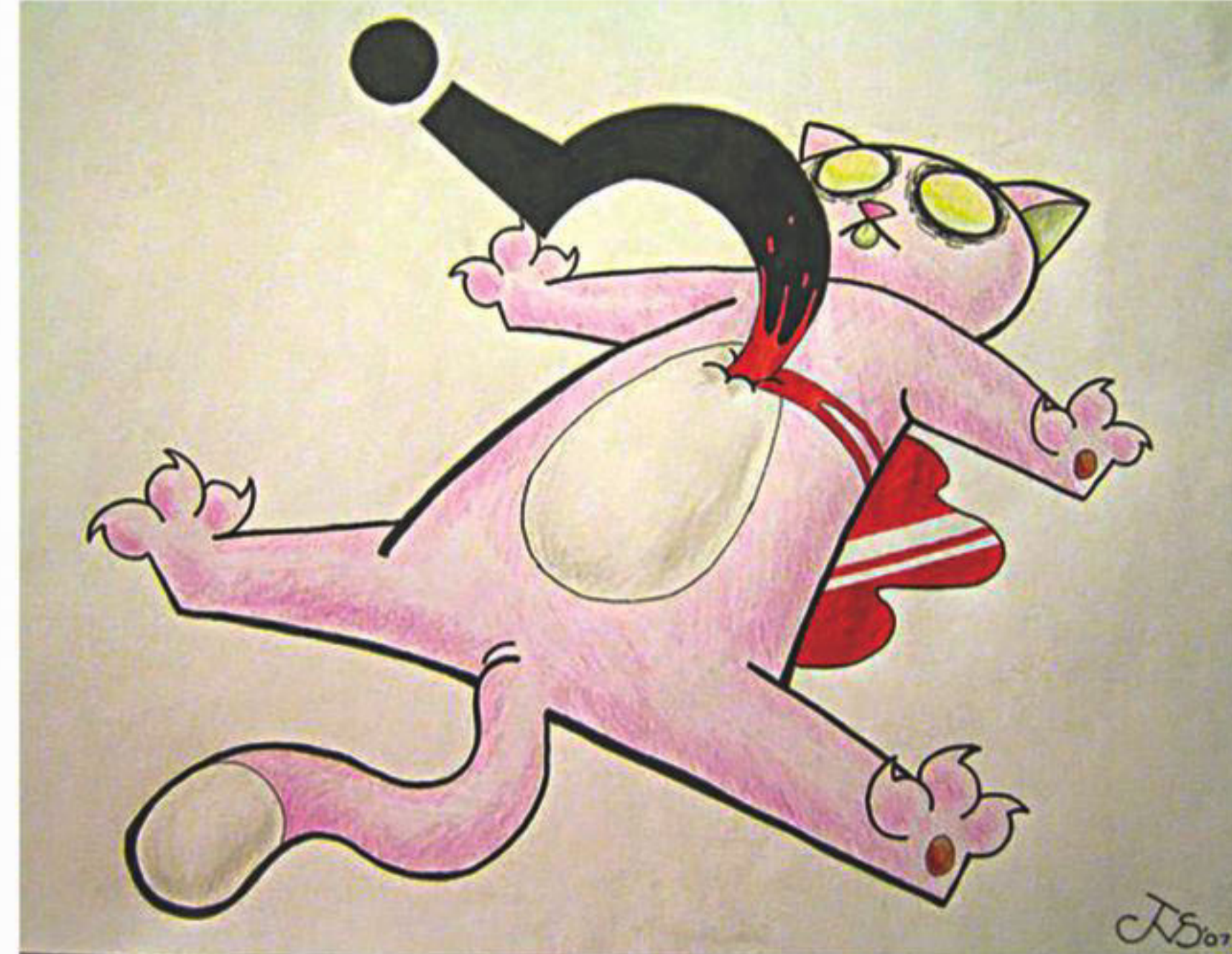
Curb your curiosity for your own sake



NO STRINGS ATTACHED
AASHA MEHREEN AMIN

MANY individuals who come to this country for the first time are enamoured by the overabundance of genuine hospitality that they receive from the local people. So much so that they are willing to overlook all the jarring notes—the sickening traffic, the nauseating garbage, the choking air pollution, the jaw-dropping disregard for rules, the lack of public toilets at crucial times and so on. Except perhaps one thing—the lack of privacy. That is something hard to digest for the uninitiated. Unwanted attention is usually reserved mainly for two groups—foreigners and women. Thus foreign women will be showered with extra dollops of undesired attention. Generally speaking, however, curiosity is a national trait and acting on it a national pastime—resulting in intense attention to what is none of one's business and it is not always out of any sleazy, knavish motive.

The irresistible curiosity to know what's cooking at the neighbour's has now been expanded to the higher powers—for our own protection as they say and not to be termed with such uncharitable terms as "state surveillance" or "muzzling dissent". Hence it is of utmost importance and hardly unusual for the state to want to



know exactly how you feel, what you think and the way you express your thoughts and if necessary take action, for the greater good, obviously. Of course you can have an opinion—as long as it doesn't differ with those who matter. Think of it as part of cultural etiquette—it is considered ill-mannered to contradict those who know more than you, like your parents (the powers that be), your elder brother (Boro Bhai). You must learn to respect those above you—in terms of age, wisdom, the number of lethal weapons they carry or the artillery of provisions in the law. If you

don't, well then you must lie in your own grave. Sometimes, in the literal sense, unfortunately. But human nature is incorrigibly contradictory. Humans like rules but they love to break them too. While they want to be led, they are always finding ways to oppose or argue. Think of our earliest ancestors where one tribesman just couldn't help but raise the bison bone in his hand in dissent during dinner when the heftiest of the lot insisted that you would fall off the edge if you ventured beyond the horizon to look for water sources, hence better stay put and at least die, albeit parched, on

solid ground! Even then it was basic instinct to differ, to disagree and express what one felt through grunts and growls or the rudimentary rules of sign language. But now we are "civilised" for goodness sake! We do not go around making trouble by saying all sorts of rubbish to embarrass our seniors, our rulers. Alright—if you must have a difference of opinion you may disagree about whether we should use bamboo instead of iron rods in buildings. Oh wait, maybe not—that too may be seen as a bit too risqué. Okay, how about dengue season—how to avoid getting it. But please, do not talk about how the city corporations have failed to kill the larvae of those tiny killers months ago when we already knew the disease would come—just like they did the year before, and the year before that. No, stick to the innocent basics—the Aedes mosquito, its characteristics, the times it may attack, the precautions you can take to make sure your home is not a breeding ground. Yes exactly, it's basically *your* fault. For those who just cannot keep their hands out of the filth and are prone to talk about uncomfortable truths of the state, poke your nose into the affairs of other states. Talk about the unfortunate Reuters journalists Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo, who, after 265 days of imprisonment for reporting on a massacre of Rohingya Muslims by security forces, were sentenced to seven years in prison for breach of the Official Secrets Act. Talk about how they were framed by government officials who

gave them confidential documents so that they could be caught under the Act. Talk about the American president who publicly termed the media as "an enemy". Talk about the Maldives where a president lost in the elections because the people were just tired of the unbridled corruption and draconian measures to silence dissenting voices. Perhaps you could even talk about how people's mandate eventually won despite the police raid on the opposition's campaign office a day before the elections and regardless of the fact that many international observers and journalists were denied visas during elections. By the way, did you know that you are one of Bangladesh's 26 million active social media users? The number could well be higher by now since that was last year's data. Now that our guardians have devoted a large part of their attention through an innocent fall to make sure you don't post, "like" or "dislike" something that would cause harm to you or your country, perhaps it is time to rethink the way we use social media. Share the ridiculous videos of Dhaka's growing number of upstarts—without comment please. Talk about cricket. Post all the cat videos and pouty faces you like. Refrain from things that don't concern you—for once just don't give in to your basic Bengali instinct to be inquisitive. Remember what they say about how "curiosity killed the cat"...

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PROJECT SYNDICATE

Trump's Darkest Days



ELIZABETH DREW

THIS isn't a good time to be Donald J Trump. Granted, it's been a while since it was, but this is the grimmest period of his presidency thus far.

Trump had dropped hints that he would pardon Manafort, but he was advised—and for once, he listened—that to do so before November's midterm congressional elections would be catastrophic for the Republicans and therefore him. Manafort apparently calculated that he could neither bet on a pardon later—what if Trump himself was in serious legal danger by then?—nor afford another trial. His plea deal with Mueller strips him of most of his properties and tens of millions of dollars, but he was willing to accept huge financial losses to avoid the possibility of spending the rest of his life in prison.

Aside from having his potential prison sentence reduced (to an unknown amount), Manafort also wanted an arrangement that would keep his family safe. After all, he would be giving Mueller's prosecutors the goods on some Russian oligarchs close to President Vladimir Putin—folks who are not particularly gentle toward people who betray them. Making matters worse, Trump's longtime attorney, Michael Cohen, has also agreed to cooperate with prosecutors. Cohen knows a great deal about Trump's previous business practices and has revealed that he arranged to pay women with whom Trump had sex (though he hasn't admitted it) for their silence before the presidential election. This, too, has put Trump in legal jeopardy.

And now the nomination of Brett Kavanaugh, Trump's selection to replace retiring Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy, is hanging by the slimmest of threads and could be withdrawn at any moment. Kavanaugh was a risky choice all along. Drawn from a list of other highly conservative possible nominees provided to the president by the right-wing Federalist Society, Kavanaugh stood apart for his extraordinary views

about presidential power. Kavanaugh has written that he believed that a president cannot be investigated or prosecuted while he is in office. This view that a president is above the law is unique (so far as is known) among serious legal scholars. Its appeal to Trump is obvious. Moreover, Kavanaugh's views are far to the right on other issues as well, and in his confirmation hearings he expressed them with no doubt. On other matters, including abortion rights, he was slippery in his responses, and there is credible evidence that he lied to the Senate Judiciary Committee on other matters. But almost all of the Republicans on the committee were prepared to push his nomination through quickly:

Even if the Democrats take only the House, life for Trump will become far more complicated, owing to the raft of investigations that the new majority would be certain to launch.

though he was an unpopular choice, he had the support of the Republican base, including much of the Christian right. This core support remained firm even after Christine Blasey Ford, a professor in California, came forward and alleged that a drunken Kavanaugh had sexually assaulted her when they were in high



PHOTO: CARLO ALLEGRI/REUTERS

school. Republican leaders were desperate to get Kavanaugh confirmed before the midterms, lest their voters stay home out of disappointment and even anger if he wasn't confirmed—in which case their worst nightmare, a Democratic takeover of the Senate as well as the House of Representatives, could come true. That was the situation when reports emerged about another woman alleging sexual misbehavior on Kavanaugh's part, though her story was less well grounded, at least at first.

Adding to the turmoil was the publication of Bob Woodward's latest book, *Fear*, which (like previous books on Trump, but to a greater extent and with more depth) offers a devastating portrait of a dysfunctional White House. In particular, the book—together with an anonymous *New York Times* op-ed by a senior administration official—showed how far aides would go to keep an incurious, ignorant, and paranoid president from impulsively doing something disastrous.

A *Wall Street Journal*/NBC News poll issued on Sunday, September 23, found Democrats leading Republicans for election to the House by 12 percentage points, an extraordinary differential. And it was looking increasingly possible that the Democrats could also retake control of the Senate. Trump had hoped not to be an issue in these races, but that outcome was inescapable. The Republicans had little else to run on.

Even if the Democrats take only the House, life for Trump will become far more complicated, owing to the raft of investigations that the new majority would be certain to launch, and possible impeachment proceedings. Were the Democrats also to take the Senate, Trump could be in terminal trouble. But then he may be anyway.

Elizabeth Drew is a contributing editor to *The New Republic* and the author, most recently, of *Washington Journal: Reporting Watergate and Richard Nixon's Downfall*.
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QUOTABLE Quote

DESMOND TUTU (b.1931)
South African Anglican cleric, theologian, anti-apartheid and human rights activist

I am not interested in picking up crumbs of compassion thrown from the table of someone who considers himself my master. I want the full menu of rights.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 "Hell's Kitchen" star
- 7 Heady drinks
- 11 Wise one
- 12 Dryer fuzz
- 13 Tribe symbols
- 14 Be too fond
- 15 Signs
- 16 Painter Matisse
- 17 Exceptional
- 18 Call in a bistro
- 19 Some Eurasian deer
- 21 Good times
- 22 Fitzgerald hero
- 25 Train unit
- 26 Made a sketch
- 27 Tangent

DOWN

- 1 Copter part
- 2 Kitchen come-on
- 3 Alma --
- 4 Vista sight
- 5 Some charity
- 6 "You betcha!"
- 7 Birch's kin
- 8 Pride youngster
- 9 Chaotic tendency
- 10 Beer hall mugs
- 16 Rashness
- 18 Swiss watch parts
- 20 Utah city
- 22 Fragrant flower
- 23 Short solo
- 24 Cursed
- 25 Alligator's cousin
- 28 Library stamp
- 30 Like the Vikings
- 31 Hearts
- 32 Choose
- 34 Force
- 36 Singer Zadora

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YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

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BEETLE BAILEY BY MORT WALKER

BABY BLUES BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT