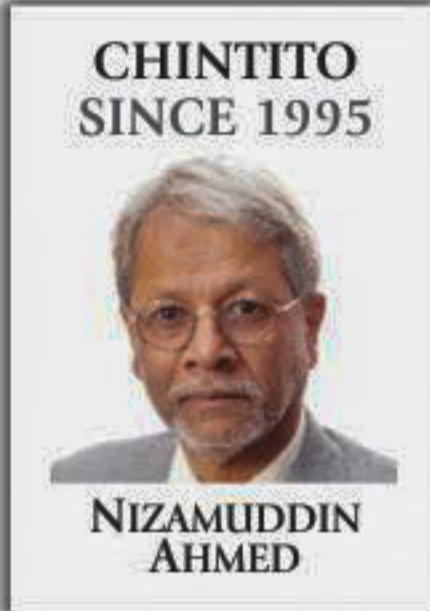


No apologies, I am not a candidate



CHINTITO SINCE 1995
NIZAMUDDIN AHMED

To be honest there has not been any clarion call from any quarters, least of all the fallacious source of all power, nor from any of my well-wishers, relatives or "true" friends for me to submit my candidacy for election to the Jatiya Sangsad.

The major parties have been full house for months with too many candidates in almost all the constituencies. In a few constituencies there are over fifty aspirants for a party ticket. The political parties would have been so much better off—and us—if they could put up a "no vacancy" sign but I guess that might nullify their status as a democratic entity and risk their registration.

Parties with smaller followings never drew blood for me (none should take this literally) because in any ambitious undertaking, one has to think big. Outwardly, the *idaning* fronts look large enough to garner some interest, but a band of one-man bands is no more than a five-man ensemble. I don't have to beat their drums, but the fronts too are full up to their backs.

I have given some thought, however minuscule, to being independent, which seems awkward given

industrialists and professionals for *chanda* to finance their respective campaigns. "Why on earth?" is a taboo question, and may land the inquisitive in hospital. The dumb has no enemy is most true in election season at all levels.

One baffling paradox is that every job advertised, from technician to junior officer, to executive to teacher, require experience of often three to 15 years. But to be an MP candidate, no prior experience is required; just bikes, mikes and trikes are good enough. Understandable that it is not possible for the rookie candidate to have any actual know-how, but experience at union, upazilla and district tiers should be a criteria. That also leaves me out this time round.

Another growing menace is political pedigree by bloodline or matrimony. A few within a political family do develop their persona by engaging long-time with the community socio-politically, where ancestral image is an obvious boon. But, there are others who bask on their "royal" descent or the veil of their wedlock, and wait to pounce at an opportunity. The latter has a negative effect on dedicated field workers, but here too "the dumb has no enemy" takes over.

My one good reason for not obtaining the party nomination form is not to add further difficulty for decision-makers at the helm of the party, most often the party chief. Yup! Kindness is an attribute



that that was our greatest acquirement in 1971. By one definition, having found all doors closed, unwelcome that is, these (no-way) non-aligned politicians venture to make a fresh start. Not my cuppa tea, and for me a nonstarter, because there'd be no one to second my nomination form. You, I mean I, actually need signatures of two legal voters to be a candidate for a seat in the parliament.

Having witnessed rally of candidates buying nomination forms from party office with much fanfare has instilled fear and doubt in me. I do not know a single motorcyclist, who would escort my digital procession; read one digit. And you, sorry I, need some five hundred bikers as a showdown with as many colourful T-shirts with my face on the front—gives you tickle but they cost money. And, I don't have any to spare for people I don't know. Frankly, they would not know me either.

Then there is certainty of further drainage of the fictitious fund. The companions to the party office shall have to be entertained morning, afternoon and evening, not by dance and comic alone.

Nourishing them in between is not mandatory, but hot cups of tea and coffee boils down to common courtesy. Or, they might boil over.

I literally dread being singled out by my party of choice from among a thirty others because then I would have to arrange a thousand bikes and their riders. All of them are not online. Then there are hundreds of candidates from my and other parties and fronts.

One very good reason, even excuse, for buying a nomination paper from party or for Sangsad is to keep toll beggars at bay. It is customary for candidates to knock on doors of businesspeople,

for anyone seeking public office. It is a tall task, choosing one from among dozens who qualify. It is sincerely hoped by the voters that party ticket hopefuls will also work for the chosen one as per party guideline. That will be the true test of a democratic politician.

Hundreds of forms have been sold. The act is an expression of solidarity for their respective *marka* by partisans, but in many areas people (whom they wish to serve) have suffered immensely on the road. The buy-and-sell endeavour is much needed for election fundraising, and indeed crores of Taka have been raised.

On a brighter side to this multiple procurement, in some instances contesting aspirants have posed as friends for Facebook after purchasing the forms. A form of festivity most appreciated, but such photos of parliamentary candidates from rival parties are also hoped for. We long to see the victorious and the losers exchanging sweets after the national poll results. In their vow to serve the country everyone is a winner.

This is a time to ponder: if all the well-meaning politicians, businessmen, professionals, journalists, academics, sports personalities and showbiz entertainers, who sought or even remotely thought of seeking party nomination got down to contributing meaningfully towards nation-building, ours would be Bangabandhu's *Sonar Bangla* long before any ADB, WB, or UN deadline.

Dr Nizamuddin Ahmed is a practising architect, a Commonwealth Scholar and a Fellow, a Baden-Powell Fellow Scout Leader, and a Major Donor Rotarian.

PROJECT SYNDICATE

India's Deadly Air



SHASHI THAROOR

AWAKENING INDIA

A friend of mine, a diplomat returning home after less than three years' service in India, was asked at his exit medical examination how many packs a day he smoked.

When he protested that he was a staunch non-smoker, the doctor commented that X-rays of his lungs showed otherwise. But my friend had never lit up. All he had done was breathe Delhi's air, three smoggy winters in a row.

It really is that bad. When November comes, India—and particularly its capital city—begins to choke on a thick blanket of smog that chokes lungs, corrodes throats, and impairs visibility. There are also industrial factories spewing smoke, charcoal braziers on the sidewalks keeping pavement dwellers warm, coal stoves used by roadside chaiwallahs (tea-sellers), and even the agricultural stubble burned by farmers in the nearby states of Punjab and Haryana. All of these air pollutants sweep into the capital city, with vehicular emissions adding to the dust that Mother Nature has already bestowed on Delhi in abundance.

Delhi had just three "clean air days" in the whole of 2017. But the worst air quality is in winter, when polluted air meets winter fog and is trapped, giving Delhi a greish opacity that reduces visibility, delays flights, and reduces the city's traffic to an even more polluting crawl.

The consequences are alarming. The number of premature deaths due to air pollution is rising. Poor air quality is now costing India at least 1 percent of GDP every year in respiratory diseases, reduced productivity, and increased hospitalisation, and may be reducing Indians' lifespans by three years.

According to the "State of Global Air" report published by the Health Effects Institute, the absolute number of ozone-related deaths in India rose by a staggering 150 percent from 1990 to 2015. The economic implications of

deteriorating air quality are equally ominous as well. A 2013 World Bank study estimated that welfare costs and lost labour income due to air pollution amounted to nearly 8.5 percent of India's GDP. Labour losses (in terms of number of man days, for example) due to air pollution totalled more than USD 55 billion in 2013, and premature deaths are estimated to have cost the country an estimated USD 505 billion, or roughly 7.6 percent of GDP.

Moreover, a recent study revealed that India's toxic air is also dissuading executives from accepting assignments in Delhi: people are turning down lucrative jobs in order to save their lungs.

In 2015, the New York Times' former South Asia correspondent, Gardiner Harris, explained that he was leaving his post prematurely because merely living in Delhi was damaging his children's health. Describing the asthmatic travails of his eight-year-old son, Harris wrote that Delhi is

dust"—respirable suspended particulate matter that becomes lodged in the lungs and impairs our breathing. A study of Delhi schoolchildren between four and 17 years of age, conducted by the Kolkata-based Chittaranjan National Cancer Institute, found that key indicators of respiratory health and lung function were 2-4 times worse than in schoolchildren elsewhere. And the damage was irreversible.

India needs to make improving air quality a national priority. It needs to create state and national action plans for clean air; set tough new targets for thermal power plant emissions, factory chimneys, and automobile exhausts; and establish a proper air pollution monitoring system.

And it needs to act fast. According to the World Health Organization, 13 of the world's 20 most polluted cities and towns are in India. More than a million Indians are dying every year because of bad air.

In the face of this national catastrophe, the government's complacency is appalling, but not surprising. Public discussion of India's deteriorating air quality and its effects on human health—and thus awareness of the problem—is startlingly limited. India's politicians need to design an action plan that generates a groundswell of public pressure on the government to confront the issue head-on. The Indian public, so easily distracted by issues of identity politics like temple-building and rewriting history, should be demanding something far more fundamental: the ability to breathe.

The satirical songwriter Tom Lehrer famously warned listeners that if they visit an American city: "Just two things of which you must beware/ Don't drink the water and don't breathe the air." Updated for India, it is a perfect song for a crisis that has become an existential threat.

The Indian public, so easily distracted by issues of identity politics and rewriting history, should be demanding something far more fundamental: the ability to breathe.

"suffering from a dire paediatric respiratory crisis," in which "nearly half of the city's 4.4 million schoolchildren have irreversible lung damage from the poisonous air." He and other expatriates were "pursuing our careers at our children's expense," and he concluded that it was "unethical for those who have a choice to willingly raise children here." So he picked up his kids and left India.

Most Indians don't have that choice. They must live with what the media often refer to as Delhi's "killer

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QUOTABLE Quote

MANLY P HALL
 (MARCH 18, 1901 – AUGUST 29, 1990)
 Canadian-born Author, Lecturer And Astrologer.

Once men died for truth, but now truth dies at the hands of men.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Fair
- 5 Cheese choice
- 10 Kagan of the Supreme Court
- 12 Caravan creature
- 13 More despicable
- 14 Find darling
- 15 Genesis name
- 16 Anvil's place
- 18 Social page word
- 19 Sweet drink
- 21 Skating spot
- 22 Whip up
- 24 Heathen
- 25 Accept without testimony
- 29 Bird on a Canadian dollar

DOWN

- 1 Common dice roll
- 2 Relish tray items
- 3 Pick
- 4 Indivisible
- 5 Surgery reminder
- 6 Bankroll
- 7 "Right away,
- 30 Current fashion boss!"
- 32 Pitcher's pride
- 33 Preserve
- 34 Clumsy fellow
- 35 Pocatello's state
- 37 Away from the office
- 39 Bottle size
- 40 Blundered
- 41 Decorate
- 42 Gangsters' guns
- 8 Peaceful
- 9 Glossy
- 11 Hotel giveaway
- 17 Salad green
- 20 Easy basket
- 21 Charged
- 23 Fitness expert
- Jack
- 25 Tawdry
- 26 Soup choice
- 27 Milan's -- alla Scala
- 28 Spotted
- 29 Boxer Ali
- 31 Looks after
- 33 Hokey stuff
- 36 This miss
- 38 Bruins legend

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

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

C	A	S	K	S	S	I	F	T	S
A	T	T	I	C	A	R	I	E	L
N	E	A	T	O	V	A	N	N	A
T	A	R	P	I	A	N	I	S	T
O	S	T	E	R	G	S	E	E	
N	E	I	L	S	E	T	H	S	
N	O	D	S	K	I				
A	G	O	R	A	O	N	C	E	
A	M	P	A	L	L	G	O	D	
G	E	O	R	G	I	A	C	A	D
A	L	I	A	S	M	A	O	R	I
P	I	N	T	O	E	R	A	S	E
E	A	T	E	N	R	I	T	E	S

BEETLE BAILEY BY MORT WALKER

WE'RE ALL OUT OF AMMUNITION, SIR

WE'LL HAVE TO FAKE IT

BOOM!! BY MORT WALKER

BOOM!!

BABY BLUES BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT

HEY! YOU GOT A FIDGET SPINNER! CAN I TRY?

SURE.

BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT

THIS IS KIND OF FUN!

...AND IT HELPS YOU FOCUS AND PAY ATTENTION, TOO.

YEAH.

KLONK!