

WORLD PHILOSOPHY DAY

Humanity ignores 'philosophy' at its own peril

THE OVERTON WINDOW



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THE Greek word "philosophy" (philosophia) is a compound word, composed of two parts: "Philos" meaning love and "Sophia" meaning wisdom—thus translating to love of wisdom. As a subject, it has been central to life both in the east and the west for thousands of years, since the time of the famous ancient Greek philosophers such as Socrates, Plato, Aristotle and many others. Philosophy has had a vital role in the pursuit of knowledge in all the other fields and how civilisation itself has progressed through time. However, in the last few decades at least, the subject of philosophy seems to have lost some of its shine.

Despite the fact that the first university in the west was arguably established by the Greek philosopher Plato, modern western education today, which has been adopted by most of the world, has detached itself quite substantially from philosophy and the larger philosophical questions.

According to Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek, listed by *Foreign Policy* in its list of Top 100 Global Thinkers in 2012, in the last three to four decades, something unique has happened. "All the big naïve metaphysical questions were left to natural sciences or cognitive sciences." When people wanted to "ask the question, our universe, does it have a limit or is it endless," they would turn to quantum cosmology. If we wanted "to know do we have free will or not," we would ask "an evolutionary biologist or cognitive scientist." And in the meanwhile, "Philosophy got caught in the deconstructionist-historicist mode."

Thus the role of philosophy from being a discipline that explores the nature of knowledge, values, existence, mind, logic, reason, ethics and nature itself, was either replaced by other disciplines, or as in many cases, fell out of fashion.

Despite the fact that the first university in the west was arguably established by the Greek philosopher Plato, modern western education today, which has been adopted by most of the world, has detached itself quite substantially from philosophy and the larger philosophical questions. Questions such as: "what is the meaning of life?" Partly because, "The entire [modern] contract can be summarised in a single phrase: humans agree to give up meaning in exchange for power," writes Israeli historian and philosopher Yuval Noah Harari in his best-selling book *Homo Deus*. Further arguing that, "On the practical level modern life

consists of a constant pursuit of power within a universe devoid of meaning." As a result, although "Modern culture is the most powerful in history," we see it is at the same time, "plagued by more existential angst than any previous culture."

In a similar note, others have argued that, if philosophy is the search for wisdom, then five things that stand out about modernity are: i) We don't ask big questions; ii) We are vulnerable to errors of common sense; iii) We are mentally confused; iv) We have muddled ideas about what makes us happy; and v) We panic and lose perspective. This idea could be supported by the fact that depression, feeling of irrelevance towards one's own life and life in general, as well the tendency towards conformity, are now at an all time high, despite the unprecedented amount of

we are to find our true calling. Otherwise, no matter how hard we look and no matter in how many places, we will undoubtedly go through life without ever discovering ourselves.

And that is not something any of us can afford to do, according to Russian-American writer and philosopher Ayn Rand, who argued that, "As a human being, you have no choice about the fact that you need a philosophy"—which in other words "is an integrated view of existence." Given the nature of human beings and of universal and human reality, Rand believed that our only choice is either to define our "philosophy by a conscious, rational, disciplined process of thought and scrupulously logical deliberation," or let our "subconscious accumulate a junk heap of unwarranted conclusions, false generalisations,

of our technological advances, "It should trouble us that we are not thinking about what we are up to." Particularly because with the tools that we have discovered—such as nuclear bombs—not only do we now have the capacity to destroy our own individual lives, but life on a planetary scale. And if we believe, without asking, that life has no meaning, then pushing that button that ends all life becomes that much easier. "And those questions happen to be in the domain of what philosophers pay attention to," says Chomsky.

Returning to whether other scientific disciplines have made philosophy irrelevant or not, according to professor of psychology Jordan Peterson, science has produced a kind of "cutting rationality" which people use as an excuse to overlook some of the broader metaphysical questions that were often asked by philosophers. However, Dr Peterson believes it to be no more than a bad excuse, because what science has also done, besides making our lives increasingly more comfortable in the materialistic sense, is make it more burdensome.

Because, given the power humans now wield, they are now burdened with more responsibility—to steal a quote from Spider Man: "with great power comes great responsibility." And no one wants that.

However, if we look at it from a truly rationalistic perspective, we cannot avoid the fact that for human civilisation to survive now that we have attained the ability to completely destroy ourselves, we must be willing to voluntarily lift our share of the great responsibility at hand, and not shy away from it. And it is that great responsibility that can provide the modern man and woman with their collective share of meaning, besides the individual meaning that they may discover on their own separate paths.

So, is the need for philosophy now extinct? No. Philosophy, that is the love of wisdom, can never go extinct, at least for as long as human beings and human civilisation are still around. For one of the true characteristics of human nature is the pursuit of wisdom. Partly because it is on wisdom that human life and civilisation has depended on to survive—and must resume to depend on, if it is to continue to endure.



materialistic goods and free time we have at our disposal and the high living standards that we enjoy today.

Everywhere we look and nearly every life that we examine, we find the same feeling of there being something missing. One explanation for this could be that, besides not asking the big questions about the universe and the meaning of life, we no longer ask the big questions about our own individual lives. Questions such as: "What sort of a person am I?" "Who do I want to become?" "Is the path I am currently on, making me happy?" "Does mimicking the life portrayed on television and Hollywood films satisfy all my wishes and dreams as a unique human being?"

These are the questions that we must ask if

undefined contradictions, undigested slogans, unidentified wishes, doubts and fears, thrown together by chance, but integrated" by our "subconscious into a kind of mongrel philosophy and fused into a single, solid weight: self-doubt, like a ball and chain in the place where" our "mind's wings should have grown."

In an age where science has revealed so much about the human subconscious, how it functions and how it can be manipulated, leaving the levers of our mind's conscious and subconscious to chance, or whoever is willing to pull it but us, is a dangerous thing to do.

Similarly, according to philosopher and the father of modern linguistics, Noam Chomsky, having grown so powerful as a civilisation because

Indore Test: A nightmare for Bangladesh

CAPTAIN HUSSAIN IMAM

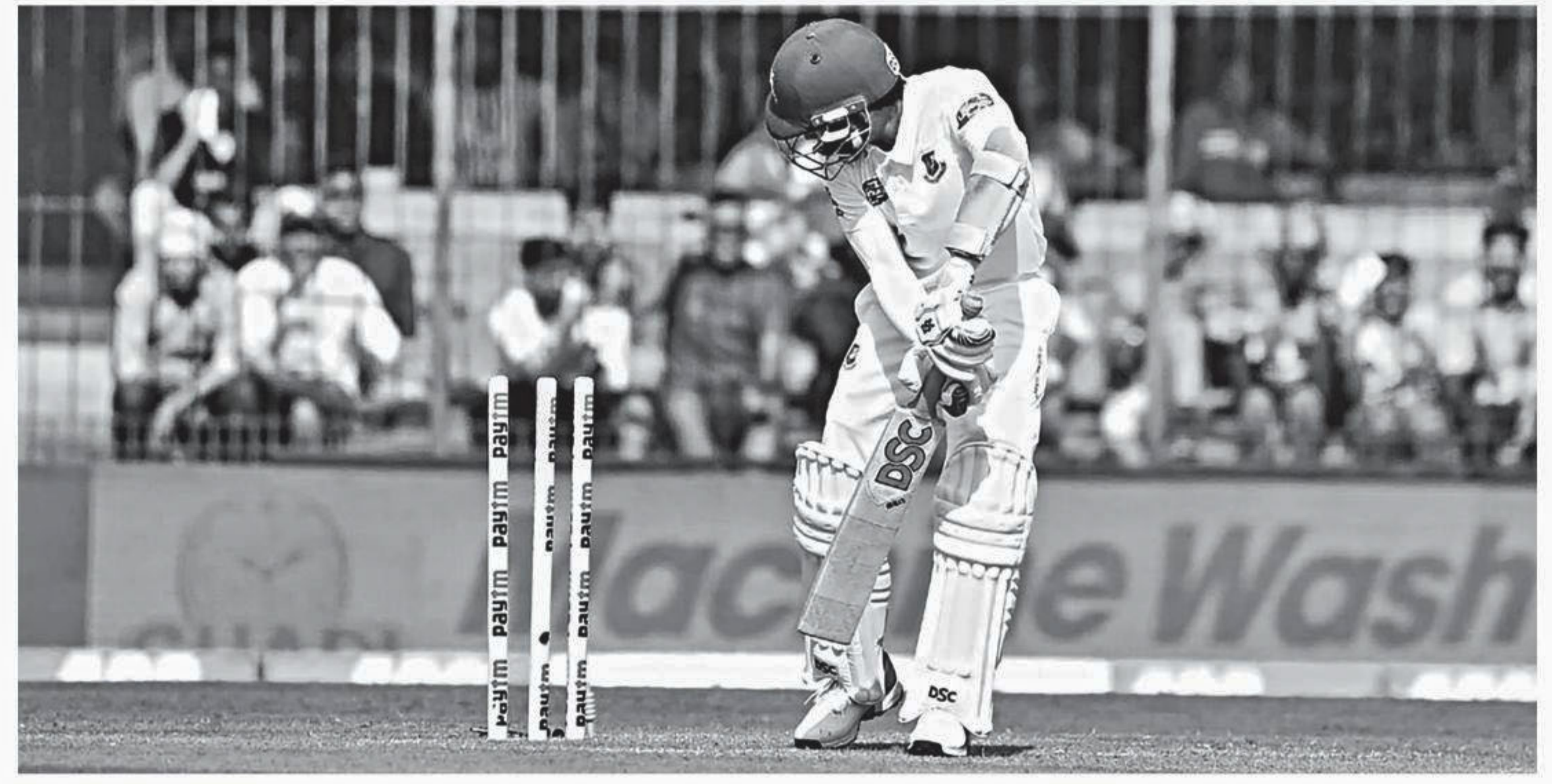
BANGLADESH Test Cricket is in a dismal state to say the least. Our Tigers have been brave in ODI and T20 matches but surely they have proved themselves unsuccessful in Test cricket. They have, with almost 19 years' experience in Test cricket, lost the recently held Test match against Afghanistan, which may be considered a new entrant as far as Test cricket is concerned.

Don't misunderstand me; I am a proud fan of Bangladesh cricket. It is out of sheer frustration that I have to come out with such a harsh statement about our cricket. When an international cricket team with 19 years of experience in Test cricket cuts such a sorry figure with a team like Afghanistan (without taking away the credit from them) what else can we say about it?

Cricket, as we all know, is a game of intelligence, dedication and application. The team management has to take into consideration the prevailing circumstances, understand the condition of the pitch, its own strength and the strength and weakness of the team against whom they are playing, and then take decisions as required.

Let's take the case of the just held Indore Test, the first of the two Bangladesh vs India Test matches included in the line-up for Bangladesh's tour of India. A five-day Test match ended in less than three days, Bangladesh conceding an ignominious defeat against India by an innings and 130 runs. It was indeed a nightmare for Bangladesh.

Bangladesh won the toss and decided to bat first. They were bundled out for 150 runs in 58.3 overs in their first innings. On the other hand, India batting second declared their innings at 493 for 6 with a 343 run lead. They didn't have to play the second innings. The ultimate result was a scintillating win for



Even Bangladesh's most experienced batsman, Mushfiqur Rahim, could not withstand the sustained onslaught of India's pacers on the first day of the first Test at the Holkar Stadium in Indore on November 14, 2019. PHOTO: AFP

India in less than three-days. India is a very strong team holding the number one position in the ICC Test ranking, whereas Bangladesh occupies the 9th position in the ranking. No wonder the Tigers had to face a tough challenge from India but everybody expected that they would put up a good fight. They have miserably failed in that respect.

Yes, India has, at the moment, excellent pace bowlers like Ishant Sharma, Md Shami and Umesh Yadav, world famous spinners like

Rabindrachandra Aswin, and superb batsmen like Virat Kohli, Rohit Sharma, Pujara, Agarwal, Ajinkya Rahane; but can we not say that Bangladesh are not lagging that far behind with potentially great batsmen like Mushfiqur Rahim, Mahmudullah Riyad, Mominul Haque, Imrul Kayes and Liton Das and spinners like Tajjul Islam and Mehidy Hasan Miraz, in the team?

Here comes the question of taking the right decision at the right time; here comes the question of prudence and intelligence. If

we take the pitch report and other factors into consideration, the captain of Bangladesh team, having won the toss was expected to field first. Instead, he chose to bat.

The wicket with green and dry surface was, according to the cricket experts, more favourable for bowling rather than batting first, but Bangladesh opted to bat. Even Indian captain Virat Kohli said, he would have taken fielding first if he had won the toss. The wicket was more favourable to pacers than spinners. India had three pacers and two spinners.

Bangladesh included only two pacers with Test playing experience of two to six matches only and two spinners in their 11-member squad. They could have included pacer Mustafizur Rahman in the team.

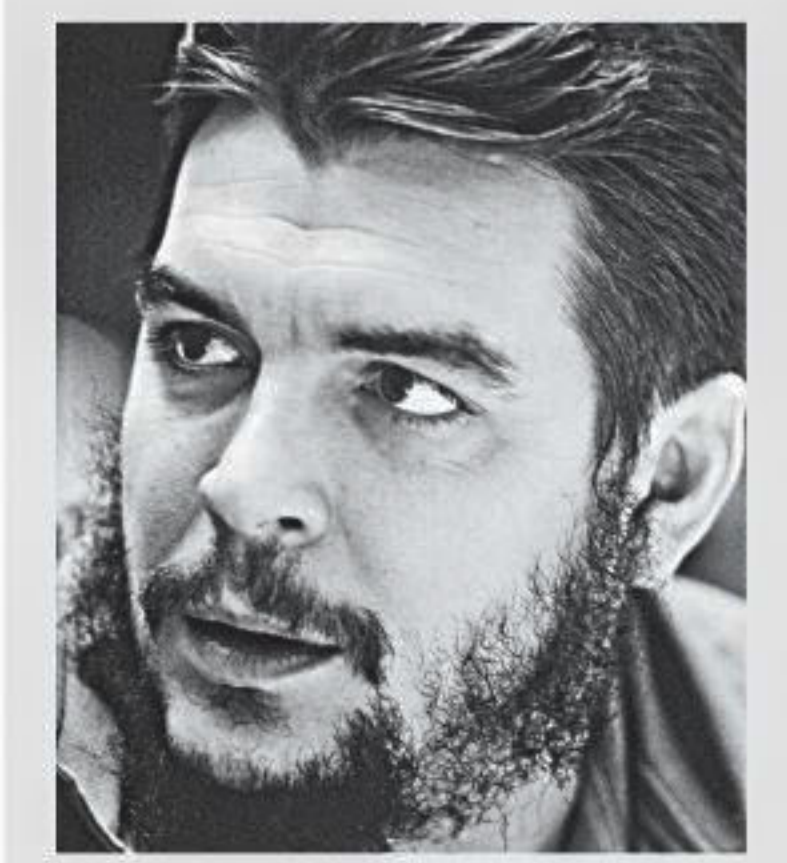
Nobody understands what on earth made the Bangladesh team choose to bat first and why they had only two pacers and two spinners. The Tigers knew their weakness in batting ability without the two top-class players Tamim and Shakib. Yet, they chose to bat first against three top class Indian seam bowlers on a bouncy wicket. The result was anybody's guess.

Bangladesh cricket, especially Test cricket, is going through a critical stage. The team must find ways to improve its standard as a Test playing nation. Cricket is a very popular game in Bangladesh. It has an unbelievable number of fans. There is no lack of cricket talents. There is no shortage of funds either. Cricket legends like Gordon Greenidge, Dav Whatmore and Cortney Walsh have been coaches for our boys at a huge cost. Yet why they are, more often than not, failing to live up to our expectations is something to worry about.

One thing is for sure that Bangladesh's domestic cricket has yet to come up to the standard required to produce good Test cricketers. One fundamental reason is that we do not have sufficient number of fast moving, bouncy pitches like that in England, Australia or South Africa. We are not accustomed to playing swing bowlers on our home ground. In general, our pitches are flat with low or no bounce. As a result, our boys find themselves at a loss when they go abroad and face fast, bouncy and swing bowling. Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) needs to look into this matter with the urgency it demands.

Captain Hussain Imam, Master Mariner (UK), is a retired merchant navy officer. Email: himam55@yahoo.co.uk

QUOTABLE Quote



ERNESTO CHE GUEVARA (1928-1967) Argentine-Cuban revolutionary

If you tremble with indignation at every injustice then you are a comrade of mine.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

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| ACROSS | 29 Section of a campus | 6 "Way cool!" |
| 1 Shard | 33 Subject of many arias | 7 Stuns |
| 7 Style of the 1920s | 34 Small donkey | 8 Was |
| 11 Second-largest nation | 35 Selfish cry | 9 Some linemen |
| 12 Sent packing | 36 Setting of a 1991 Broadway musical | 10 Black Sea port |
| 13 Subsidised | 37 Shortly | 16 Where Akitas originated |
| 14 Specialized mag | 38 Standing still | 18 "Hondo" star |
| 15 Soviet hero | 39 Salamander | 20 Flat fish |
| 16 Says jokingly | 40 School papers | 22 Fragrant flower |
| 17 Smart guy? | | 23 So far |
| 18 Squanders | | 24 Call for |
| 19 Soon, in memos | | 25 Mariner |
| 21 Stretch of years | DOWN | 28 " — You Glad You're You" |
| 22 Scrap metal sources | 1 La — (Milan opera house) | 30 Goats on |
| 25 Spruce juice | 2 Size site | 31 Stood up |
| 26 Sister of Emily and Charlotte | 3 Ridiculous | 32 Do's and — |
| 27 Subject of a will | 4 Rome surrounds it | 34 Soaking spot |
| | 5 Perfect place | 36 Was inactive |

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YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

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BEETLE BAILEY BY MORT WALKER



BABY BLUES BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT



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