

How late can a Late Lateef be?



NO STRINGS
ATTACHED

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I am not sure who came up with the expression *Late Lateef*; perhaps it was given to some poor soul named Lateef who just couldn't be on time for anything (I can totally relate), but it definitely is a dominant cultural trait in this country and displayed abundantly in practically every sphere of life. Hence the term has stuck on representing that unique concept called "Bangladeshi Time" (BT), which, ironically, in real terms happens to be 10 hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time and six hours behind GMT.

Seriously though, we all know that to a significant number of Bangladeshis, "time" is relative. When the invite says "7pm," it is perfectly normal to arrive an hour or two late, because it is very likely that if you do turn up at exactly the time stipulated, you will find the hosts still pondering on their wardrobe for the evening, and your timeliness will prove to be quite inconvenient, if not a nuisance. It's a little tricky, however, if invited by an expatriate with little or no initiation into the quirkiness of BT, or those fellow Bangladeshis who have acquired the colonial expectation of punctuality; for these people, 7 pm is 7pm – not 8:45 or 10pm.

Thankfully, these days even the most extreme forms of tardiness can be blamed on the soul-sucking traffic jams in Dhaka – so much so that hosts actually look guilty when you turn up late with a traffic sob story, and will even apologise for dragging you all the way just for some chit-chat and a bite to eat.

Although being "fashionably late" is a Western concept of a person arriving late (a maximum of 10 minutes to half an hour) to an event to show one's superior social status and just how busy and important they are, in Bangladesh it has been stretched to curious limits.



ILLUSTRATION:
BIPLOB
CHAKROBORTY

Government projects seem to be particularly afflicted by this phenomenon, causing years of delay before completion and at phenomenal cost increases.

two major committees responsible for monitoring the said project, not choosing the right contractors, including non-professionals in the committees, and problems in land acquisitions – to name a few. The boring reasons for the delays include a lack of coordination among the implementation bodies and the absence of transparency and accountability. All this was unearthed by a study by the Implementation Monitoring and Evaluation Division (IMED), which is a government body with this tongue twister of a name. Imagine that, even the government is befuddled by the level of tardiness of its own projects that have budgets of thousands of crores of taka, but not enough to employ enough personnel to write up project proposals and do professional drawings. A conundrum, indeed!

Another extreme display of *Late Lateefism* can be amply found in the case of public procurement, especially of medical equipment. Take the X-ray machine that has not been switched

on since 1995 at a health complex in Kulaura (Moulvibazar). The facility had 50 beds, but there was no one who could operate the X-ray machine for the last 25 or so years, so patients have had to go to a private clinic and bring the reports back to the health complex. *The Daily Star* correspondent who unravelled this mystery in 2019, also found a doctor in the emergency department telling a man who had injured his foot to get an X-ray done from outside.

Similarly, according to a 2020 report in this daily, a 20-bed hospital in a remote union of Sunamganj district was found to be sitting idle because the authorities had not yet recruited doctors, nurses, etc because of "bureaucratic" tangles. Instead of medical care, the hospital was providing a hangout place for gamblers and junkies while transforming its grounds into an open garbage dump.

Such stories of "lateness" can be found all over Bangladesh, and particularly in the case of the health sector with expensive, much-needed equipment becoming show pieces, such as the state-of-the-art ambulance with ICU support costing Tk 1.5 crore, sitting pretty in a garage of Rajshahi Medical College Hospital for two years; the authorities did not have the time to recruit the staff to make the ambulance operational. Apparently, this was because of Covid. Mind you, this report was done in 2021, during the pandemic, and having this life-saving equipment up and running would have done its job: save lives.

As mentioned before, lateness is a relative term – what is late for one may not be so late for another. When a company like Bapex (Bangladesh Petroleum Exploration and Production Company Limited) sends letters to prospective jobseekers for a vacancy after a mere *eight years*, should this be considered a tad late? Especially, considering that the candidates who had applied have, in these eight years, moved on with life: finding new jobs, getting married, having children as well as growing older and crossing the age limit given in the advertisement? Perhaps the officials responsible had sleepwalked into a time warp, where they were stuck for eight years. Perhaps they were just incorrigible *Late Lateefs*.

We must do better with our stamps

A stamp represents the image of a country, hence requires some care in designing



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As a young boy, I had several thousand stamps in my collection. Back then, receiving a letter in the post meant new stamps! I still remember receiving my first stamp of Ireland, attached to a letter received from a pen pal. Yes, back then we had pen pals. We communicated with them through the postal service – in most cases, we never even met.

But clearly, I didn't learn to fully appreciate the value of my stamp collection then, as I traded it all with a neighbour just so I could buy seven blank TDK-D90 tapes to record the full catalogue of Pink Floyd, released by Rainbow at Elephant Road (our primary source of music in Dhaka back then). My only consolation for that naive and ignorant act is that I was young.

Collecting postage stamps – also known as philately – used to be one of the more common hobbies before the advent of the franking machine and the email era. It was encouraged by teachers and family members, as it tickled the curiosity of the young mind to learn about other countries of the world and their cultures, flora, and fauna. Stamps often bear images of characters and characteristics of the country they represent.

My grandfather, Hakim Habibur Rahman, from Old Dhaka, was a passionate collector of various items of historical significance. He was one of the founding members of Dhaka Museum, where most of his collections are still on display. The Bangladesh Post Office issued a stamp worth Tk 8 in 2003 commemorating his contributions to Unani medicine, his contributions of historically important artefacts to the Dhaka Museum, and his books of historical and architectural significance, including *"Dhaka Ponchash Bochor Aage (Dhaka 50 Years Ago)"* (first published in 1945). I'm obviously very proud to have that stamp in my collection.

I don't know whether it was because of the fact that my grandfather was a collector, or the inspiration derived from the commemorative stamp of him that hangs in my living room, or whether I deeply regret having traded in my stamp collection as a child, but I recently restarted collecting postage stamps, and have been buying mint commemorative

stamps on a regular basis.

As someone who is passionate about my country and world music, I was delighted to come across the stamp issued by the Bangladesh Post Office commemorating the 50th anniversary of The Concert for Bangladesh held in New York City in 1971. But, as happy as I was to add this to my collection, upon closer inspection, I was extremely disappointed to realise that such a significant commemorative stamp was one of the most poorly curated and designed stamps issued by the post office. The designer has not only downloaded low resolution images of the two artistes represented in the stamp – namely, the legendary Pandit Ravi Shankar and George Harrison of The Beatles – from the internet, they also were not bothered to find an actual photo of the album cover for the concert; that, too, was downloaded from the world wide web.

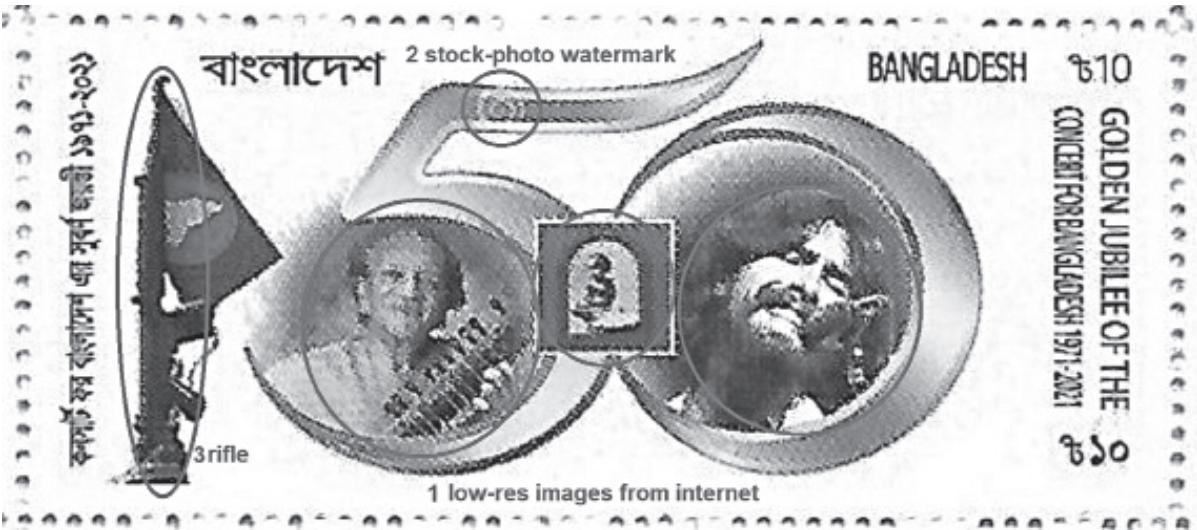
But what's even worse is that the designer copied a stock photo of the number "50" from the internet and didn't even remove the watermark (usually put on stock photos which are required to be purchased).

We are not talking about someone copying a design to put on their 50th marriage anniversary invitation card – this is a government-issued stamp, similar to a currency. The original designers of the artworks could, in fact, claim copyright infringement for the unauthorised use of their designs/photos.

Above all, a photo of a rifle is put next to the artistes who have forever fought for peace. As most readers may recall, The Concert for Bangladesh was organised to raise money to feed the destitute refugees, not to fight or finance the Liberation War.

The Concert for Bangladesh is a matter of pride for us – not only because it bears the name of our country, but also because "it was one of most moving and intense musical experiences of the century" (Ravi Shankar, *The Concert for Bangladesh* DVD sleeve, reissued in 2005). Through an emotional appeal from Pandit Ravi Shankar to do something to "relieve Bangladesh," the concert was organised by former The Beatles member George Harrison to raise international awareness and to raise relief funds for the refugees from then East Pakistan, especially children who were starving to death. The concert bears particular significance, as it was a call-to-action responded to by some of the most prominent musicians of the time, including Bob Dylan, Eric Clapton, and another The Beatles member, Ringo Starr. It was the first-ever benefit concert of such a magnitude, one which set in motion a precedent for future fundraisers of similarly epic scale, such as LiveAid, FarmAid, and others around the world.

Our postage stamps represent our



▲
The commemorative stamp for the 50th anniversary of The Concert for Bangladesh held in New York City, with the errors marked.

PHOTO:
COURTESY

country, as they travel to all corners of the world bearing the name of Bangladesh. Commemorative stamps are of greater importance, as they signify the country's history, ethos, and culture. The stamp commemorating the "50th Anniversary of The Concert for Bangladesh" issued in 2021 does exactly the opposite of that. It showcases a clueless, ill-begotten, and poorly designed illustration of ourselves. It is not only a failure on the designer's part, but also symptomatic of the ignorance of all the high officials who

inspected and approved it before it went to print.

The "50th Anniversary of The Concert for Bangladesh" stamp was meant to showcase the pride of us Bangalees, and tell a story that inspired generations to engage in philanthropy through music. Instead, it represents a shoddy work misrepresenting us as a nation. The stamp should be cancelled and withdrawn, and replaced by a carefully curated and better-designed stamp, as we expect all stamps of Bangladesh to be.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

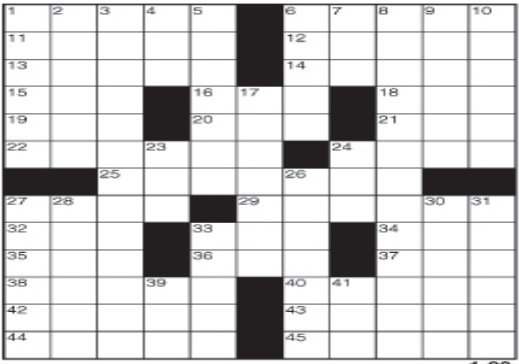
- 1 Cut, in a way
- 6 Computer woe
- 11 Catcher's spot
- 12 Blow one's top
- 13 Jimmy Smits series
- 14 Singer Travis
- 15 Be inquisitive
- 16 Mideastern fruit
- 18 Zero
- 19 Enjoy Aspen
- 20 Top pitcher
- 21 Mamie's husband
- 22 Jug part
- 24 Addition column
- 25 Poe story focus
- 27 Endure
- 29 Native groups
- 32 Drama division

- 33 Floral ring
- 34 "– Clear Day"
- 35 Avril follower
- 36 Holm of "The Hobbit"
- 37 Lawyer: Abbr.
- 38 Capital of Ghana
- 40 Cartoonist Trudeau
- 42 Picard's first officer
- 43 Cow feature
- 44 Some files
- 45 Does some modeling

DOWN

- 1 Dive sound
- 2 Denali setting
- 3 Long insects
- 4 Greek vowel
- 5 Moisture

- formation on lawns
- 6 Brink
- 7 Lyricist Gershwin
- 8 Old auto parts
- 9 "Rabbit, Run" writer
- 10 Modes
- 17 Summer cooler
- 23 Period
- 24 Yves's yes
- 26 Raise
- 27 Hedy of "Algiers"
- 28 Spiny tree
- 30 Menu choice
- 31 Revelers of myth
- 33 Deceitful bunch
- 39 Gym unit
- 41 Bustle



TUESDAY'S ANSWERS

H	A	T	E	R		T	A	C	I	T
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R	I	P	E	N		N	I	X	O	N
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I	S	A	I	A	H			B	O	S
M	I	D	D	L	E	W	A	T	C	H
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A	L	A	M	O			M	A	U	D
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