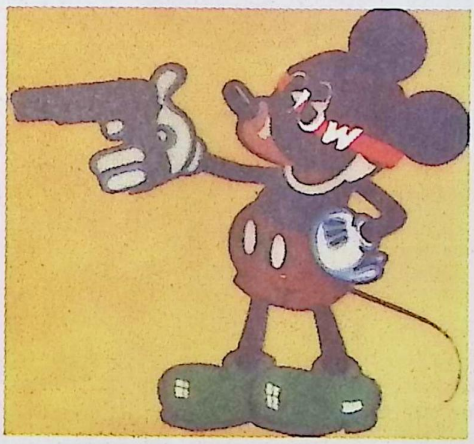
Cutely Criminal

AASHA MEHREEN AMIN

People often have a problem with their nicknames that they are stuck with for life because their adoring parents or grandparents just couldn't think that they could have any other name. I mean who would really like to be called 'Posa' (which means bad or rotten) or Boltu (as in bolt or nail) or even Square for that matter? But there are many who don't seem to mind having a rather 'informal' pet name, so much so that they put them at the end of their proper name. Thus even an MP might use a name like 'Potol' or 'Lebu' with no embarrassment at all. Which I find rather brave, considering all the cruel teasing they must have gone through when they were in school.

A fascinating aspect of this practice of name-calling is the way the most notorious and dangerous criminals are pet-named. I assume that the appellations have something to do with the way they look or the profession they were previously in, before, that is, they joined the world of murder and extortion. So we have the most feared gangster Kala Jahangir (rather racist if you ask me) who very few have seen but many have heard of and feared with a passion, a bit like Attila the Hun. In fact many Kala J wannabes have used his name to carry out an extortion or two just by threatening their victims over the phone. Then there is Murgi Milon who may or may not have been associated with poultry; we will never know as he died in that ubiquitous way that many criminals have died - in a 'crossfire'. There is also Pichchi (little) Hannan known for his diminutive stature, although he did commit the vilest of crimes and Sweden Aslam who got the name for fleeing to that genteel European country, after murdering a few people.



Real life criminals these days are really creating a lot of drama, even more than our celebrities. Some have innocuous names like Pintu who terrorize their neighbourhoods and get elected as MPs and also disguise themselves as lawyers while riding off into the sunset on a motorbike. Even Jesse James couldn't have beaten that.

Lately all the newspapers are obsessed with the international godfather Daud Ibrahim who has apparently 20 girlfriends just in Bangladesh, imagine the number of female contacts all over the globe! Daud's right-hand man has one of those cute names - Chhota Shakil who handles his network of thugs so discreetly that even his underlings don't know each other. Now there's a smooth operator for you.

The story of Daud gets even more intriguing, not to mention mind-boggling. A report says that the DB (Detective Branch) has 'squeezed' information from yet another Daud, Daud Merchant (alias Abdur Rouf) and Zahid Sheikh, like the last sliver of toothpaste from a spent, crooked tube, after which they arrested a butcher called Arif. Now Arif, who does not have any endearing pet-name although he could easily be called Koshai Arif or Butcher Arif, yet another Indian national and killer, has been living in Muhammadpur as a stranded Pakistani and then a Bangladeshi citizen, marrying a local girl and having two daughters. He even got a raise from his 'boss' from 10,000 taka to 16,000 taka because of his marital status. Thus when it comes to gangsters, the Criminal Exchange Programme between Bangladeshi and Indian Mafioso is getting along quite smoothly without any of those irritating visa hurdles that ordinary mortals face.

But let's not dwell on such high ups in the mafia world. Lets take the petty thieves. They have interesting stories to tell too, if only we have the patience to hear them when they get caught. A recent Prothom Alo report (May 21, 2009) talks about the sheer ingenuity of a professional thief called Tajul who has a thousand thefts in terms of 'work experience'. His latest exploit was entering into a shop to steal, when the rather largish shopkeeper who had been awakened from his slumber like the giant in Jack and the Beanstalk, roared (one guesses) and started chasing poor Tajul, who shouted out the code for 'lets get the hell out of here' which happens to be *Ismail* and swiftly escaped with his accomplices by jumping into his truck that was waiting for him. If you think this is impressive, there is more. These guys don't just have snazzy lock-breaking and grill-cutting devices; they also have three trucks and a microbus. They were caught however, with 3 lakh taka of stolen goods and 21 bottles of Phensidyl, presumably as part of the after party refreshments.

When asked whether he uses weapons for his flamboyant heists Tajul astutely says: "you don't need weapons to steal, you need brains". Take that as a lesson all you gun-toting, dagger-wielding brainless hooligans out there.

And if you are disappointed that these guys do not have the catchy names of the higher ups in the profession, Tajul's 19 year-old accomplice is called Modhu (honey). Now what could be sweeter? ■