

ENIGMATTERS

End of bin-laden

Will it end extremism?

AFTER nearly ten years of the destruction of the Twin Towers the alleged mastermind behind the attack and indeed behind many other terrorist attacks before and since, mostly against US interest, has been killed. Reportedly, he was taken out from his lair in the town of Abbotabad in Hazara, a border district in the erstwhile NWFP of Pakistan.

It was perhaps a matter of time before the Americans caught up with and destroyed the symbol and the motive force behind the spate of religiously motivated terrorist acts in the world. And it is time that we deliberate on the implication of his life and death, both for the world, and, more importantly, the region of South Asia which has been transformed into the focus of the US-led war on terrorism.

It is true that for many Muslims bin-Laden was a symbol of resistance against US hypocrisy and double standards. And some may have looked up to him as one that could stand up to the Americans. It was that anti-US sentiments that Laden had so skillfully exploited all these years and no doubt many had become ideologically, if not organically, associated with him. But it is also true that a vast majority of the Muslims did not agree with his method of work. Killing of innocents was abhorrent to the religion that Laden aspired to establish over the world, and yet very few among the vast majority that disagreed with him, picked up the courage to protest.

Physical elimination of a leader is one thing, overcoming his ideological hold, however restricted that may be, is quite another.

Though bin-Laden's methods were violent, an element of his appeal was due to Western hypocrisy in dealing with Muslim issues, especially that of Palestine.

We would like to add that with bin-Laden's death the image of Western hypocrisy will not be erased so the West should work towards eliminating that impressing by striking at the roots of injustices against them.

We in Bangladesh should do everything to eliminate all forms of extremism and religious bigotry. bin-Laden promoted a brand of religious extremism that we must totally abjure and do everything to build a democratic and tolerant society.

World Press Freedom Day

New media for freer democracies

TWENTY years into the declaration of World Press Freedom Day, today, the media landscape has been greatly transformed, a change brought in largely by the internet and new media. This year's theme for the day is thus quite rightly, "21st Century Media: New Frontiers, New Barriers". Yet, the objective of observing the day and of the spirit behind it, remain the same -- the freedom of expression and freedom of the press as a basic human right.

Without a vibrant press there can be no vibrant democracy, as we have seen in the case of Bangladesh which underwent clampdowns on the press from governments and military rulers almost since its very inception. Throughout the decades of democracy too, it has faced many threats, from governments and, increasingly, corporate pressures, to outright closures of television and news channels, newspapers and the blocking of internet sites by the state. Individual journalists have been vulnerable to threats, with several local journalists being killed in the south-western region of the country some years ago, cases in which justice is yet to be served. True, the press in Bangladesh enjoys more freedom than in many other countries in the world, but the culture of impunity of those who pose a threat to journalists and media freedom must be removed in order to ensure freer media, leading to a more transparent and effective democratic state.

The government's commitment to building a digital Bangladesh is in tune with today's global theme but ways to utilise it to its full potential -- such as by providing widespread access to the internet and promoting it and social networks as platforms for democratic discussion and civic participation, the importance of which we have witnessed in the Arab uprisings this year -- must be borne in mind.

On this day, we reiterate our hope that our media will be given maximum freedom to perform its duties -- a freedom which it in turn will exercise with responsibility. The press should be seen not as an opponent but as a partner in democracy and development.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

May 3

1715
"Edmund Halley's" total solar eclipse (the last one visible in London, United Kingdom for almost 900 years).

1849
The May Uprising in Dresden begins the last of the German revolutions of 1848.

1916
The leaders of the Easter Rising are executed in Dublin.

1939
The All India Forward Bloc is formed by Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose.

1942
World War II: Japanese naval troops invade Tulagi Island in the Solomon Islands during the first part of Operation Mo that results in the Battle of the Coral Sea between Japanese forces and forces from the United States and Australia.

1945
World War II: Sinking of the prison ships Cap Arcona, Thielbek and Deutschland by the Royal Air Force in Lübeck Bay.

1990
Latvia to declare independence. Members of the Soviet Republic's new parliament meet to discuss breaking away from the USSR.

1991
The UN declares the World Press Day.



MOHAMMAD ALI SATTAR

Osama bin Laden has been killed by US forces inside Pakistan on Sunday. His death shook the world in more ways

than one. Osama had made a niche in all homes, either as a qualified terrorist bombing the innocents or as an Islamic hero fighting the American devil. His "end" was so important that it was pronounced by the US president himself.

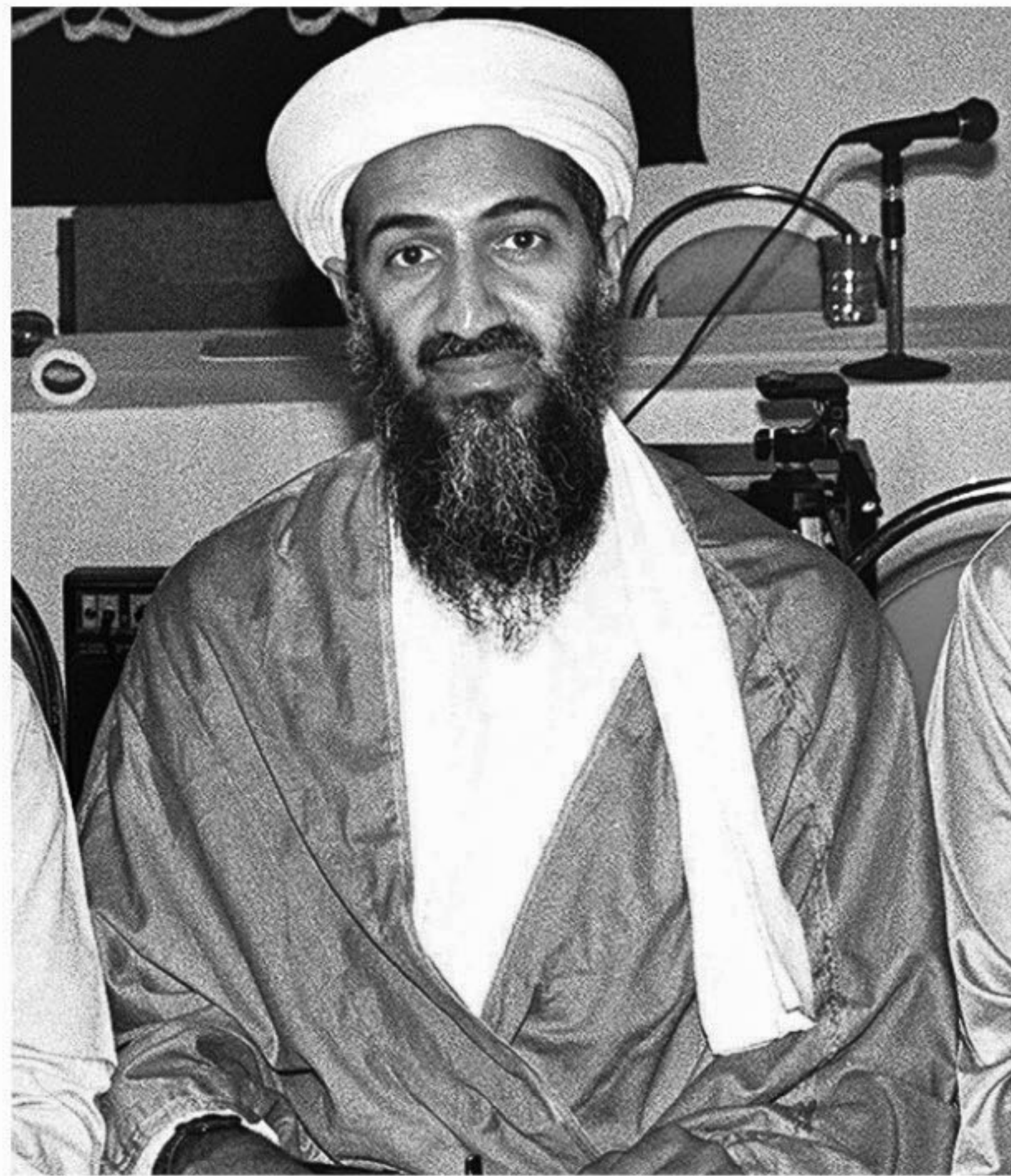
The raid that killed Osama Bin Laden was revealed first on Twitter. Details of the operation and public reactions are pouring in from around the world with anxious minds making their reaction known via online news editions as well as through social networks.

So far the US media and administration have expressed their happiness but were guarded in expressing their sentiment about the immediate reaction of al-Qaeda. They feel that the US and its allies must be particularly vigilant in the following days, weeks and perhaps months to face the reactions from al-Qaeda fans and sympathisers. US allies naturally hailed the killing while many preferred silence. Palestinians condemned the killing.

For Obama this might not be the end of al-Qaeda but certainly an end of a big chapter. A long a tedious search for the man who was responsible for the destruction of Twin Tower, striking the Pentagon and causing deaths to more than 3,000 innocents, has finally ended. For Obama and many Americans this is an incredible moment that has come after a long pursuit, with lots of resources and time invested. However, it's too early to presume that the Americans are safe even after his death.

Osama has been gunned down almost when he was out of steam. His al-Qaeda has been slowing down to a great extent over the last five years or so. The wish to hit American targets either did not hold or could not be carried out due to weak strategy and tactical errors. The US and its allies

US wins a battle



The US and allies are likely to use this opportunity to permanently neutralise al-Qaeda. But it's unlikely that al-Qaeda will die anytime soon.

laboured hard to neutralise the networks by keeping the regional leaders on the run. Osama's influence or interest in Afghanistan has not been visible lately. The operational effect of al-Qaeda has died down to a great extent.

The absence of any al-Qaeda element in the recent and ongoing Arab uprisings is something that cannot be overlooked. US and its allies believe that the Arabs who took to streets against their rulers are trying to redeem their dignity and rights through peaceful or non-violent protests unlike what Osama had been preaching -- violence and terrorism.

Osama had been a US favourite once. He was trained and sponsored to fight the Soviet troops in Afghanistan in the 1980s where he founded al-Qaeda. He returned to

Afghanistan in the 1990s, and trained Islamist militants from across the world in camps allowed to function by the ruling Taliban. Honeymoon between the Oval Office and Osama was soon over when US decided to disown him. Osama became a cave-man. He had been chased for the last one decade by the US intelligence and troops and finally killed.

Afghan President Karzai was quick to react by trying to come clean. He said it now proves that Afghanistan was never a sanctuary for the terrorists. Gopalapuram Parthasarthy, former Indian High Commissioner to Pakistan, commented: "Are the Pakistanis now going to claim they did not know he was there in their country? Either they are incompetent or complicit in this. This is between

the US and Pakistan. (In India) we'll be amused observers of Pakistan's mute protestations."

Statement from Pakistan's Foreign Office says, Osama bin Laden's death illustrates the resolve of the international community including Pakistan to fight and eliminate terrorism. It constitutes a major setback to terrorist organisations around the world. al-Qaeda had declared war on Pakistan. Scores of al-Qaeda sponsored terrorist attacks resulted in deaths of thousands of innocent Pakistani men, women and children. Pakistan has played a significant role in efforts to eliminate terrorism.

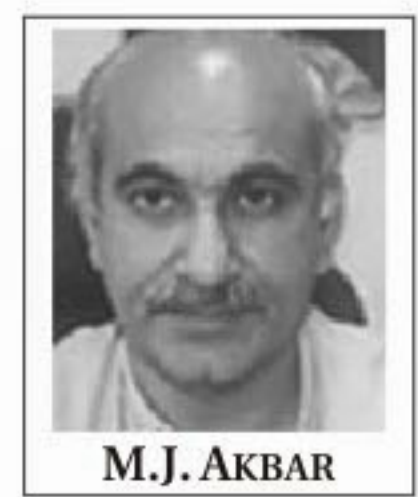
As a frontline state Pakistan is fighting the Taliban insurgency for the US and has been regular target of their bombings. Innocent Pakistanis are also killed by US drone attacks inside Pakistan. Now with the death of Osama in Pakistan it has invited the al-Qaeda wrath. The al-Qaeda will, in all likelihood, retaliate by striking inside Pakistan. They won't consider who pulled the trigger. Osama was killed on the Pakistan soil. Pakistan cannot pacify the al-Qaeda by putting the blame on the US. It also cannot answer the allies as to how Osama was able to get close to the Pakistan Military Academy in Abbotabad? Does that mean the Pakistan army was aware of his presence in their vicinity? Or something more than this?

Osama is gone. His death is bound to have repercussions. Ayman Zawahiri will have to prove his ability as the next leader. Smaller leaders might try something different to prove their capability as well. For now al-Qaeda might slip into paralysis. The US and allies are likely to use this opportunity to permanently neutralise al-Qaeda. But it's unlikely that al-Qaeda will die anytime soon. Osama is a figure who would be reflected upon. New planning will get underway in the caves of Afghan mountains as also in the Oval Office in Washington. For now the US has won a battle but the war continues.

The writer is Assistant Editor, The Daily Star. Email: md.sattar@thedailystar.net

BYLINE

The power behind the throne



M.J. AKBAR

Power changed hands in the third living generation of Britain's House of Windsor through the touch of a finger. It happened during the most dramatic part of a wedding ceremony, when Prince William began to place the ring on the finger of Kate Middleton, a beautiful young lady of common rather than aristocratic birth.

Either the jeweller who fashioned the ring is an ass who couldn't get the measurement right, or the very happy Kate had put on weight since her meeting with the jeweller. Since the latter is unlikely, the first must be true. The groom struggled to get the ring onto his bride's finger while a breathless world watched on television cameras.

There is not much distance between awe and farce; a few more seconds of struggle and the magic would have begun to peel. Judging the dilemma perfectly, and without losing an iota of composure, Kate deftly took William's hand and brought the ring home to what should be, if all goes well, its final resting place.

We know now who will be in charge when Kate and William become Queen and King of Britain and those former bits of the old British Empire that will have them. There are at least three firsts in these nuptials. This is the first British royal wedding in which 50% of the

union is not royal. This is the first time that the bride is older than the groom: William's mother, Diana, was only 19 when she married the much older Charles. And, unlike in the case of Diana, no one is interested in whether Kate is a virgin, or indeed whether she lost her virginity to William. The British royal family has joined the egalitarian spirit of its 21st century subjects.

The extraordinary, and even moving, success of the British royal family lies in its unique ability to step back in order to move forward. If their remaining peers around the world

would be so foolish as to test his will against theirs.

There is something about this royal, even majestic, aura that supercedes reality. Would anyone be caught wearing trousers with a sergeant-major's red vertical slash running down the side from waist to shoe? But there they were, William and daddy Charles, at the wedding, dressed in what is surely the very opposite of a pinstripe, and managed to look elegant.

So much of British royal procedure, from decor to decorum, not excluding the faux haughtiness of underlings

A marriage is an occasion for tradition and sentiment, and one's first wish is of course that the marriage is blessed with happiness. The track record of Queen Elizabeth's children, or her sister, is not a triumph of marital bliss.

understood just this much they would not be in the trouble they are now. No period in history has seen as much change, evolution, war and upheaval as the last century.

The Windsor genius has enabled this dynasty to change before they were changed by tides outside their control. They stepped away from supreme, "divinely-sanctioned" authority, in gradual stages, without any fuss, and blossomed into an imperturbable institution that is a magnet for national social cohesion. No elected British prime minister

who populate the palace, is the stuff of potential cartoons that, from a distance, it looks immensely fragile. But it is as strong as silk.

If you or I tried a display of pomp, we would merely look pompous. On Friday, the Windsors turned out all the pomp in the world and it seemed totally befitting. The one area that they might want to tweak towards modernity could be in their names. It is still all Henry Arthur Louis Witherspoon-Cutlery in the guest lists. Research reveals that one of William's pre-Kate girlfriends was

called Davina Duckworth-Chad. No judgement on the girl, but it is a relief to the rest of us that he didn't marry a surname which was a combination of a publishing firm and African nation.

Some leeway is possible in titles, of course. The moment that the heir but one got married, William became, thanks to the gracious generosity of mummy, the Duke of Cambridge, the Earl of Strathearn and Baron Carrickfergus. The Cambridge bit is quite nice; after all it has a great university. But by the time you descend to the Barony of Carrickfergus you are competing with limericks.

A marriage is an occasion for tradition and sentiment, and one's first wish is of course that the marriage is blessed with happiness. The track record of Queen Elizabeth's children, or her sister, is not a triumph of marital bliss. William is a child of a family that broke in the glare of a merciless media. His mother Diana took revenge against real or imagined slights with a ferocity, and a succession of bizarre boyfriends, that became the subject of relentless gossip.

But tradition, the plasma of this bloodline, is not about mistakes but about recovery. Kate, it seems to me, is steely and level-headed enough to nourish a functional family as her contribution to Windsors. Thank God she comes from "common" stock. She has, thereby, common sense.

The writer is Editor, The Sunday Guardian, published from Delhi, India on Sunday, published from London, and Editorial Director, India Today and Headlines Today.