

Breaking the silence



SHAH HUSAIN IMAM

RUMANA'S narrative is instructive for a whole range of people. To this, I come later. For the moment, in her present shattered mental and physical state, she needs

emotional support, specialised medicare as she awaits a miracle, something worthwhile to keep her busy with, and an assurance of a secure future for her and her daughter.

Above all, her assailant must be speedily brought to trial, convicted and punished. That way justice would be done to her, though the damage wreaked on her is irreparable.

We literally feel the pain of others as if it has been inflicted on us. If we don't, we won't be human beings. The co-sharing of physical and mental trauma of Rumana is because she is the flesh of our flesh and blood of our blood as part of the human race.

Although violence against women is almost a daily occurrence and our sensibilities have been somewhat blunted to it, yet, admittedly women's rights bodies have been alive to domestic violence. In spite of their activism and tough laws, however, the monstrosity of the crime grows.

Perhaps, it took the clawing into the sockets of Rumana's eyes to gouge these to blindness and gnawing at her nose like an eagle swooping at its prey to snatch away a part of it, to shake us to the core. This is the cruelest act of barbarity in the category of marital violence in recent memory.

It is a collective shame we must own up to, if we are to bring a change for the better in the escalated idle morbid workshop of devility around us.

Our consciousness ought to be aroused to realise how huge a task we face to provide security to women. And if the reactions don't lead to preemptive and deterrent action the whole point of the lessons thrown up to change things around will have been lost. The preventative and remedial approach should be bottom upwards, meaning we must begin at the root i.e. the family including extended family working our way through neighbourhood (very little of it in urban life!); community; workplace, law enforcement bodies, human rights organisations, NGOs in education and, above all, the state. Then only some change can be expected.

Agile safety perception on individual

and family levels is of fundamental importance -- imagine, a woman who came back home from Canada after nine months on a PhD course to complete her thesis without a supervisor for what she herself termed "the love of her family," and what she gets in return! The perpetrator husband had been treating her atrociously since their

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marriage in 2000 and whenever she protested he would apologise and promise not to repeat it, so says the victim. But he went on doing it as Rumana endured it silently, not even sharing it with her father. That was to prove catastrophic.

She placed family reputation, tradition -- in a word, middle class values -- above her personal security. This is typical of silently enduring agonies in marital relationship in many a family the victims should be wary about in good time. The behavioural trait is more pronounced in rural areas than in the urban but it is there.

When a husband raises his hand against his wife that is the first signal to be con-

cerned about the spouse's personal security. And for the victim to bring it up to seniors for timely counseling and intervention.

Women's role has enormously expanded outside of their homes with newer career and economic opportunities opening up before them. Contrasted with the exponential increase in the number of women taking up careers the male psyche generally has remained stagnant in terms of adjusting with the changing inter-gender dynamics.

Rapid progress of women in the working world has created tension in personal and family lives, the impact of which is being felt in diverse ways. The burden of adjustment is not shared equally by men and women, though ideally that should have been the case. We have a very long way to go before we reach a point of equilibrium.

The bigoted perspective adding to the confusion -- deliberately, because to them, a liberated woman means a liberated society.

When men do not find women in the way they are accustomed to seeing them, they tend to react; often violently, sometimes turning physical. Working women maybe treated with suspicion and jealousy

by their inconsiderate spouses (there are exceptions aplenty though) from an outright sense of inferiority. That Hasan Sayeed was driven by a suspicion-ridden control instinct to assault Rumana cannot be in doubt.

I cannot agree more with Sultana Kamal, the chairperson of Ain'O Shalish Kendro (ASK), who sees the entire challenge as "a huge task" -- a lot more to do in the embattled area that requires intensified, orchestrated and solution-oriented joint efforts by both women and men.

With her characteristic insight, she added: "Yes, we need policy, we need law, but these are only tools. So long as we don't muster the motivation and the ability to use them, and equally important, have the mechanisms in place to do so, these would turn out to be empty words."

Media has a significant role to play. Something that bore testimony to this is the High Court's suo moto rule to the police on the basis of newspaper reports to arrest Hasan Sayeed, which they did almost immediately. On the other hand, there is a need for some self-look too. We must strictly follow journalistic ethics, especially where sensitivity to a woman victim's reputation is involved.

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Peer-rivalry in the Pacific: A Chimeric competition!

IFTEKHAR AHMED CHOWDHURY

IN the near future the Pacific Ocean is unlikely to remain as calm as the name suggests. Large swathes of it, in mostly the West Pacific, could become host to nations engaged in naval competition for control. Two powers, each of which has begun to view the other as a strategic peer, are likely to take the lead. The two are America and China.

The neologism "Chimerica" was coined by historian Niall Ferguson and economist Moritz Schularick in late 2006 to describe their symbiotic relationship. This referred to both cooperation and confrontation between the two countries. What we are likely to see in the Pacific is, however, competition. Interestingly, the term is also connected to a monstrous fire-breathing creature in Greek mythology, composed of many different animals in one body, called the "chimera." Over time, thanks to literateurs like Shakespeare et al., this has also come to mean a "foolish fantasy." It is now increasingly unclear as to what drives Sino-American relations -- cooperation, confrontation, or completion, or a combination thereof -- and also if there is an element of "foolish fantasy" involved!

At the recent Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore, US Secretary of Defence Robert Gates stressed that America means to keep its powder dry. He said: "The US Navy and Air Force have been concerned about anti-access and anti-denial scenarios for some time. These two military services are working together to develop a new concept of operations called 'Air Sea Battle' to ensure that the military will continue to be able to deploy, move and strike over great distances in defence of our allies and vital interests." Gates eschewed mentioning China by name, but it was crystal clear he was not speaking of Brunei.

What is the "anti-access and area-denial," known as A2/AD in strategic short-hand, that Gates was talking about? This is the belief among some American strategists that China's military modernisation aims at denying the US air and maritime freedom of manoeuvre in the West Pacific by targeting bases and ships with precision-guided missiles, a development designed to render the current "American way of war" prohibitively costly.

The result was the "Air Sea Battle Concept" (ASBC). Its stated purpose is: "To defeat adversaries across a range of military operations, including adversaries equipped with sophisticated anti-access and area-denial capabilities. The concept addresses how air and naval forces will integrate capabilities across all operational domains -- air, sea, land and cyberspace -- to counter growing challenges to US freedom of action." Relevant US strategic literature identifies China as the other party in a conflict. The ASBC envisions a two-stage campaign: First, the attempt would be to "blind" the Chinese reconnaissance strike complex and deny them accurate targeting capabilities through cyber attacks, electronic warfare, aircraft and other means. The second would involve "killing" Chinese assets in the mainland and seas, and a blockade of Chinese sea lines of communications. Procurements and weapon productions would be undertaken bearing these

objectives in mind.

The problem with this strategy would be two-fold. The Chinese would in all probability retaliate with a nuclear strike at the first stage, altering the nature of the combat prior to reaching the second stage, just as during the Cold War any aggressive move into Western Europe by the conventionally superior Warsaw Pact would have had the "trip-wire" effect of automatically unleashing Nato nuclear response. Secondly, new procurements would cost more funds, over and above the FY 2011 defence budget of \$668.6 billion, severely straining limited resources. And, currently, the US Congress is not in a generous mood.

At the Shangri-La Dialogue, China's Defence Minister General Liang Guanglie immediately rejected criticism of his country's "peaceful rise." That was his reaction in words. One must wait and see how they respond in kind. Such reply

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may be long in coming for time is not of the essence for China. For now, there are two "modernising" weapon systems that have been particularly worrisome to the Americans.

The first is the J-20 Stealth Fighter, that has been called a "game changer." This, equivalent of American F-22 Raptors as well as F-35 Joint Strike Fighters, is seen as rendering all air defence systems in the region obsolete. No radar systems array is capable of picking up stealth aircraft, and therefore it can remain undetected throughout its flight up to Guam without refueling.

The second is the Dong Feng (East Wind) 21 D, a precision-guided killer missile that supposedly can destroy a US super-carrier in one strike. It is said to employ a complex guidance system, low radar signature, and a manoeuvrability that renders its flight path unpredictable. It has the capacity to evade tracking systems, with the possibility of travelling at a speed of Mach-10, reaching its maximum range of 2,000 km in 12 minutes.

The Chinese naval doctrine has evolved over time. The mission was threefold: First, to keep the enemy within limits and resist invasion from the sea; second, to protect national sovereign territory; and third, to safeguard national unity and maritime rights. At the outset the interests to be protected were within the so-called "first chain islands" stretching from the Kuriles, Japan, the Ryukyus and Taiwan to the Philippines and Borneo. Later the goal seems to have been extended to "the second island chain," running from the Kuriles and Japan to the Bonins,

Marianas, Carolines and the Indonesian archipelago.

More than 90% of China's trade by volume is transported by sea, and two-thirds of its oil needs will be met from overseas by 2015. China also claims 1.78 million sq km of the South China Sea, including the Spratley and Paracel isles, with Vietnam, Philippines, Brunei, Malaysia and Taiwan being rival claimants, with some of them seeking US support and intervention.

Perhaps because of these reasons and also because, as some analysts believe, China will overtake the US economy by 2020 -- and an economy of that size would require to be protected -- China is consolidating its military power. However, its defence budget at \$497.7 billion is a fraction of that of the US. Nonetheless, the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) is the fastest growing force in the Chinese military.

Since 2000, China has procured at least 20 major surface vessels like destroyers and frigates, and at least 31 new submarines. It plans to build around six aircraft carriers, commissioning the first by 2015. Obviously, therefore, there are "blue water" naval aspirations.

Understandably, the Chinese have not taken kindly to the ANBC. Senior Colonel Fan Gaoyue, a Chinese analyst, has said it would further tilt the existing balance of power in the Pacific in favour of the US. There is a differential in the equilibrium the Chinese would tolerate. Beyond that they would react. The ANBC could, therefore, invite the Chinese to a destabilising arms race. More dangerous, it could lower the nuclear threshold for China, which sees itself as conventionally much inferior comparatively.

On the other hand, if the US idea in propagating ANBC is to reassure allies and partners in the region, this could have the opposite effect of delinking them. This will be particularly true if the Chinese attempts to respond to the new US initiative widen the power-gap between them and China, as is bound to happen. They would then be wary of continuing a partnership with a more distant player, the US, if it should arouse the ire of China and thereby heighten their insecurity.

If China should develop the capability in the process of such an arms race to hit US cities, which is a mathematical probability over time, then these Asian littorals would question the credibility of the key ally, however powerful, to put its own population in line for them. All this could result in the unwarranted destabilisation of an otherwise fairly stable region.

To prevent this from happening, all major actors involved must be circumspect and take special care. The room for unintended consequences, or what the writer Nassim Nicholas Taleb would call "black swan scenarios," will be large. In this connection, signals given and received, and perceptions developed, will be key in shaping behaviour of critically important states. Henry Kissinger had once written: "Confrontation with China should be the ultimate recourse, not the strategic choice." Wise words from a vastly experienced and intensely pragmatic thinker!

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I meet a real president



Nury Vittachi

LIKE other fearless journalists, this writer has met lots of terrifyingly powerful human beings, including presidents, prime ministers, heads of state, and nurses putting on white rubber gloves.

My basic rules for meeting scary people have been acquired through trial and error.

(i) Do not faint. (ii) Do not drool. (i) Bow but don't head-butt them. (Especially short, fragile people like the Queen of England.) (iv) Do not kiss them on the lips. (If you do kiss them at all, "no tongues" is a good rule to follow.) (v) Mumble in an invented language so you don't say anything embarrassing, etc.

But I had a feeling that the President of East Timor, whose name popped up in my engagements diary, was going to be different. Wikipedia showed Jose Ramos-Horta as a tiny, brownish, unshaven revolutionary who had spent much of his life dodging bullets, not always successfully. He probably wouldn't be a stiff, scary guy in a dark suit, and would likely be less frightening than most presidents I'd encountered, and all the proctology nurses.

In a private room at one of Asia's most expensive hotels, Raffles of Singapore, I waited with lots of dignitaries. "He'll be here in 30 seconds," a lackey announced. Right on schedule, President Ramos-Horta walked in -- and marched straight across the room to where I stood. "I've read your column," he said, pumping my hand. I'm not making this up. I was so astonished that my brain dematerialised, leaving me able only to make the following witty reply: "Ahsghdu hdgeb cljdjp exzjebd."

Now here's a question that has baffled me all my life. Why is it that when one desperately, desperately needs to say something intelligent, one's brain instantly transports itself to a parallel universe? What's the evolutionary advantage of that, clever commentators?

President Ramos-Horta turned out to be a totally laid-back head of state who liked teasing people. He announced that he was going to do something about Singapore's low birthrate problem. I was about to say: "Thank you, Your Excellency, please impregnate as many of our women as you like," when I remembered that I wasn't Singaporean so couldn't really grant him instant ownership of the city-state's females. Only Lee Kuan Yew can do that.

But President Ramos-Horta produced a packet of East Timorese coffee which he explained would "save Singaporeans from extinction" because it had "a very strong Viagra component." Handing it to Singaporean arts supremo Jenny Chua, he added: "It works for men and women." What a joker.

In the evening, Dr Ramos-Horta revealed that there was a downside to his being such a relaxed, accessible leader. He'd been at work one day when "New Message" beeped on his phone. It was from a student in his country complaining that he couldn't do his homework because there had been a power cut. "Pls restore power," the kid demanded.

El Presidente had no idea what to do, so he didn't do anything. A short time later, the power was restored. "Thanks!" said a follow-up message from the student. "No problem," said the president. A cool, funny guy can be president of a whole country. Who knew?

WARNING: If you live in any other country in Asia, do not text your president and demand that he fix your utilities. If you do, you'll soon find your utilities are the least of your problems.

Now if you'll excuse me, I need to see if my brain has returned.

For more please log on to <http://mrjam.typepad.com>.