

NOTICE

Please read our special 3-part series beginning tomorrow, titled "Muslim Brotherhood, Jamaat-e-Islami and global Jihad," by Taj Hashmi, a well known Islamic scholar, in the Op-ed page.

The Spin Doctors

HUMOROUSLY YOURS



NAVEED MAHBUB

VLADIMIR Putin just wanted Ukraine to let him in. After all, he won by a popular vote of 140%, including with that of Chuck Norris. But Ukraine had to be stubborn, to the point of shooting down a Malaysia Airlines Boeing 777 thinking he would fly overhead at the same time. 298 dead. Who knows how many more will die untimely deaths due to the stumble in AIDS research.

Ukraine blames Russia for arming the rebels with Buk missiles, which in turn shoot down a perfectly identifiable flying object. But rest assured it's not Moscow -- just plug in to Pravda.

Say what? Korean Air Lines in 1983? Hey, that was the Soviet Union, NOT Russia, you insular, ignorant capitalists! Besides, the Boeing 747 was an 'intruder' into Soviet airspace. All 269 on board dead.

So, can we now just complete the Crimean annexation and move on? Tootin' Putin has already lost precious time in getting a little closer to the pre *Glasnost* and *Perestroika* days and the mighty Warsaw Pact, the latter of which would never allow the downing of a civilian...

Say what? 1955. An El Al Lockheed Constellation is shot down by Bulgarian Migs, again for 'intruding' Bulgarian airspace. All 58 on board dead.

Ok, forget the Soviet bloc. NATO is alive and kicking guardian of the free world, which would never...

Say what? There was a NATO plot to shoot down a jet carrying Muammar Gaddafi? And a poor Iavia DC-9 in 1980 gets caught up in that operation and is presumably shot down by a missile with all 89 on board perishing.

Circling back to Ukraine. It blames the pro-Russian rebels with the Buk. How can Ukraine be blamed? It never...

Look, the 2001 Siberia Airlines incident was a case of a stubborn Ukrainian missile intended for a drone during a military exercise, which refused to unlock from its 'target', the Tupelov TU-154, killing all 76 on board.

USA. Hit while the iron is hot. Slam Russia for starting a conflict, for arming the rebels, for the Buk, for the loss of MH17, for its anti-gay laws, for...

Say what? 1988. The US Navy shoots down an Iran Air passenger jet. All 290 on board die. President Reagan apologises, but Vice President Bush calls Iran irresponsible for allowing a passenger jet with a flight path (way) over a warship 'engaged in battle'. Yes, the USS *Vincennes* just got armed with a brand new, multi-million dollar Aegis defense shield system. But even Microsoft can tell you that every new, complex system can have bugs. No big deal, like in this case, the Aegis mistaking the radar cross section of an Airbus A300 jumbo jet with that of a relatively mosquito-sized, US made (sold to Iran pre-1979) F-14 Tomcat fighter jet of the Iranian Air Force.

So, China. Here's your chance. Hit back at the US for the flak you've been getting. After all you would never...

Say what? You shoot down a Cathay Pacific DC-4 in 1954 thinking it was an attack on your Hainan Island? 10 out of 19 on board die.

And one of the bad boys of the Middle East? Israel. Nah, it's busy in Gaza. Besides, its weapons are state-of-the-art, won't make any mistakes, other than the usual 'collateral damages' of 'just' 700 and counting. It would never...

Say what? 1973: Israeli fighter jets shoot down a Libyan Arab Airlines Boeing 727. 108 out of 113 on board perish. Well, to be fair, the airliner gets lost and ends up in the Sinai Peninsula. Wait. Sinai? It's not the Negev. Concentrate, concentrate. It's been 'only' 6 years since the Six-Day War is over (with a victory) which is still within Israel's de-facto standard of post-war annexation period, applicable to the Sinai Peninsula.

And these are just peacetime 'accidents' with the victims having no relationships with the perpetrators. Let's not even get into the likes of Lockerbie...

They say you get more flowers at death than all those combined that you receive in your lifetime. The 989 who died in these 8 incidents, have been honored further as being pawns of spin doctors. Guys, if you really need to point fingers, how about take those pointing fingers and sticking them in where the conscience is leaking.

Meantime, if we choose to spend trillions on armaments as opposed to feeding hungry children, at least, let's make those weapons smart enough to identify a friend from a (true) foe. Till then, the average flying Joe, Jamal, Josef, Jasprit, ... are merely expendable statistics.

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Shadow across free media: Why?

PLEASURE IS ALL MINE



SHAH HUSAIN IMAM

SOMETHING is wrong with both the means and the end. In Gandhi's eye, when the means is bad the end cannot be good.

Fundamentally, it is the intent or motive that is pivotal to either adding to or unmaking a settled fact.

The case in point is the government's apparent move to restore DCs' authority to cancel declaration of newspapers. This was embodied in the 1973 Press and Publications Act

but subsequently revoked by Justice Shahabuddin, head of the interim caretaker government in 1991.

A fundamental fetter is going to be placed on free press by doing away with a priceless dividend from the harvest of 1990 anti-autocracy movement. This forward-looking step met one of the two demands of the journalist community at that time. The other one centred on treating libel and defamation not as a criminal but civil offence. This was to avert arrest of the accused journalist under CrPC, the matter being preferably left to a suitably empowered Press Council to hear the complaint and adjudicate it. Rather than considering such a proposal sympathetically, which would have been a value addition to journalists' working environment, what was once unfettered as a sign of progress is being set back.

Apart from the material negative change being visualised, the circuitous manner in which the government is going about revoking Shahabuddin's gift clearly lacks transparency in dealing with media -- dubbed as the fourth estate in a Republic.

We are baffled by the information minister's apparent lack of specific knowledge about the ongoing

moves in his own ministry. A ministerial committee formed to address the matter at its first meeting in February proposed a draft amendment under the title The Printing Presses and Publications (Declaration and Registration) Act 2014 to be enacted and applied against any media's 'anti-state role' or its 'hurting religious sentiments.' In the event, the DC would cancel the paper's or the media's declaration. In April, the committee held its second meeting and built on the outcome of the first one. The draft altered 'anti-state role and hurting religious sentiments' by rephrasing the offences as being 'anti-state or anti-religion.' But the cancellation will be ordered into effect by the information ministry or a court. The accused newspaper authority, however, will have right to defense. Within sixty days after the orders are passed the aggrieved party could file an appeal with the press appeal board.

The interpretation of what is anti-state or anti-religion is too serious a matter to be left to the judgment of officials. The minister has hinted that it will require a political decision. In any case, cancellation of declaration has always been a matter of political decision, which hasn't been quite above reproach, we have to say. Now vesting the authority in the DCs at the fundamental level makes the media all the more vulnerable to a draconian mindset.

If the government goes ahead with the move we would think that the judicious advice of the parliamentary standing committee on information ministry to refrain from it has been unceremoniously rejected.

Also interestingly, successive governments since 1991 did not feel the necessity for restoring the provision but this government is apparently keen on it presumably because it has become a control freak perhaps for reasons not difficult to comprehend.

It is free and fiercely independent media in Bangladesh that has so far won us international acclaim. Even our higher courts have often intervened in matters of public interest taking suo motto cognizance of newspaper reports.

Are we to believe that after the higher judiciary (impeachment authority being vested in the parliament) it is now the journalists on whom the heat is turned?

We are not being oblivious of some international media watch bodies making critical assessment about threats to life and limbs that our media persons get to face from time to time (Sagar-Runi murder case is the height of it). But the overall appraisal has been one of appreciation for Bangladesh media. The people keep faith with the media that is also catching up with the best in the wider media world.

Why are the joy and glory, reflecting positively on the government as well, being taken away from us? If these really are robbed-off the media, the country's image will lose in credibility and goodwill.

The signs and symptoms smack of inclement weather for the media. There are rumblings of menacing footsteps of an impending storm on freedom of press. Social Welfare Minister Syed Mohsin Ali, while referring to Narayanganj seven murder case, ranted: "You will show whatever you wish and by repeatedly doing so, you create a sentiment inciting the public ... hence, such a law is going to be enacted as will divest you of your freedom."

This sounds like an informed climactic comment that didn't come from the blue. The aggressive tone, texture and temper of some ministers' comments about the media have been known for sometime. The usual remarks are that the media have been overplaying their hands. For instance, Communication Minister Obaidul Quader could say that some newspapers carried three-year old pictures to portray the present condition of highways. Could the present day photographs have lied?

The bottom line is as Arthur Miller had written in *The Observer*, 1961: "A good newspaper is a nation talking to itself."

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An open letter for the people in Gaza

PAOLA MANDUCA, IAIN CHALMERS, DEREK SUMMERFIELD, MADS GILBERT, SWEE ANG, ON BEHALF OF 24 SIGNATORIES

We are doctors and scientists, who spend our lives developing means to care for and protect health and lives. We are also informed people; we teach the ethics of our professions, together with the knowledge and practice of it. We all have worked in and known the situation in Gaza for years.

On the basis of our ethics and practice, we are denouncing what we witness in the aggression of Gaza by Israel.

We ask our colleagues, old and young professionals, to denounce this Israeli aggression. We challenge the perversity of a propaganda that justifies the creation of an emergency to masquerade as a massacre, a so-called "defensive aggression." In reality it is a ruthless assault of unlimited duration, extent, and intensity. We wish to report the facts as we see them, and their implications for the lives of the people.

We are appalled by the military onslaught on civilians in Gaza under the guise of punishing terrorists. This is the third large-scale military assault on Gaza since 2008. Each time the death toll is borne mainly by innocent people in Gaza, especially women and children, under the unacceptable pretext of Israel eradicating political parties and resistance to the occupation and siege they impose.

This action also terrifies those who are not directly hit, and wounds the soul, mind, and resilience of the young generation. Our condemnation and disgust are further compounded by the denial and prohibition for Gaza to receive external help and supplies to alleviate the dire circumstances.

The blockade on Gaza has tightened further since last year and this has worsened the toll on Gaza's population. In Gaza, people suffer from hunger, thirst, pollution, shortage of medicines and electricity, and cannot get any means to earn an income. Power crisis, gasoline shortage, water and food scarcity, sewage outflow and ever decreasing resources are disasters caused directly and indirectly by the siege.

People in Gaza are resisting this aggression because they want a better and normal life and, even while crying in sorrow, pain, and terror, they reject a temporary truce that does not provide a real chance for a better future. A voice under the attacks in Gaza is that of Um Al Ramlawi who speaks for all in Gaza: "They are killing us all anyway -- either a slow death by the siege, or a fast one by military attacks. We have nothing left to lose -- we must fight for our rights, or die trying."

Gaza has been blockaded by sea and land since 2006. Any individual of Gaza, including fishermen venturing beyond 3 nautical miles off the coast of Gaza, faces being shot by the Israeli Navy. No one from Gaza can leave from the only two checkpoints, Erez or Rafah, without special permission from the Israelis and the Egyptians, which is hard to come by for many, if not impossible. People in Gaza are unable to go abroad to study, work, visit families, or do business. Wounded and sick people cannot leave easily to get specialised

treatment outside Gaza. Entries of food and medicines into Gaza have been restricted and many essential items for survival are prohibited.

Before the present assault, medical stock items in Gaza were already at an all time low because of the blockade. They have run out now. Likewise, Gaza is unable to export its produce. Agriculture has been severely impaired by the imposition of a buffer zone, and agricultural products cannot be exported due to the blockade. 80% of Gaza's population is dependent on food rations from the UN.

Much of Gaza's buildings and infrastructure had been destroyed during Operation Cast Lead, 2008-09, and building materials have been blockaded so that schools, homes, and institutions cannot be properly rebuilt. Factories destroyed by bombardment have rarely been rebuilt, adding unemployment to destitution.

Despite the difficult conditions, the people of Gaza and their political leaders have recently moved to resolve their conflicts "without arms and harm" through the process of reconciliation between factions, their leadership renouncing titles and positions, so that a unity government can be formed abolishing the divisive factional politics operating since 2007. This reconciliation, although accepted by many in the international community, was rejected by Israel. The present Israeli attacks stop this chance of political unity between Gaza and the West Bank and single out a part of the Palestinian society by destroying the lives of people of Gaza. Under the pretext of eliminating terrorism, Israel is trying to destroy the growing Palestinian unity. Among other lies, it is stated that civilians in Gaza are hostages of Hamas whereas the truth is that the Gaza Strip is sealed by the Israelis and Egyptians.

Gaza has been bombed continuously for the past 14 days, followed now by invasion on land by tanks and thousands of Israeli troops. More than 60,000 civilians from Northern Gaza were ordered to leave their homes. These internally displaced people have nowhere to go since Central and Southern Gaza are also subjected to heavy artillery bombardment. The whole of Gaza is under attack. The only shelters in Gaza are the schools of the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), uncertain shelters already targeted during Cast Lead, killing many.

According to Gaza Ministry of Health and UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), as of July 21, 149 of the 558 killed in Gaza and 1,100 of the 3,504 wounded are children. Those buried under the rubble have not been counted yet. As we write, the BBC reports the bombing of another hospital, hitting the intensive care unit and operating theatres, with deaths of patients and staff. There are now fears for the main hospital Al Shifa. Moreover, most people are psychologically traumatised in Gaza. Anyone older than 6 years has already lived through their third military assault by Israel.

The massacre in Gaza spares no one, and includes the disabled and sick in hospitals, children playing on the beach or on the roof tops, with a large majority of non-combatants. Hospitals, clinics, ambulances,

mosques, schools, and press buildings have all been attacked. Thousands of private homes have been bombed, clearly directing fire to target whole families, killing them within their homes, and depriving families of their homes by chasing them out a few minutes before destruction. An entire area was destroyed on July 20, leaving thousands of displaced people homeless, beside wounding hundreds and killing at least 70 -- this is way beyond the purpose of finding tunnels. None of these are military objectives. These attacks aim to terrorise, wound the soul and the body of the people, and make their life impossible in the future, as well as demolishing their homes and prohibiting the means to rebuild.

Weapons known to cause long-term damages to the health of the whole population are used; particularly non-fragmentation weaponry and hard-head bombs.

We witnessed targeted weaponry used indiscriminately and on children, and we constantly see that so-called intelligent weapons fail to be precise, unless they are deliberately used to destroy innocent lives.

We denounce the myth propagated by Israel that they care about saving civilian lives and children's wellbeing. Israel's behaviour has insulted our humanity, intelligence, and dignity as well as our professional ethics and efforts. Even those of us who want to go and help are unable to reach Gaza due to the blockade.

This "defensive aggression" of unlimited duration, extent, and intensity must be stopped. Additionally, should the use of gas be further confirmed, it will unequivocally be a war crime for which, before anything else, high sanctions will have to be placed immediately on Israel with cessation of any trade and collaborative agreements with Europe. As we write, threats to the medical personnel in emergency services and denial of entry for international humanitarian convoys are being reported.

We as scientists and doctors cannot keep silent while this crime against humanity continues. We urge readers not to be silent. Gaza, under siege, is being destroyed by one of the world's largest and most sophisticated modern military machines. The land is poisoned by weapon debris, with consequences for future generations. If those of us capable of speaking up fail to do so and take a stand against this war crime, we are also complicit in the destruction of the lives and homes of 18 million people in Gaza.

We register with dismay that only 5% of our Israeli academic colleagues signed an appeal to their government to stop the military operation against Gaza. We are tempted to conclude that with the exception of this 5%, the rest of the Israeli academics are complicit in the massacre and destruction of Gaza. We also see the complicity of countries in Europe and North America in this massacre and the impotence once again of the international institutions and organisations to stop it.

Taken from the official website of the highly prestigious medical journal, *The Lancet*. In a move transcending its academic field, it has issued this open letter that contains ground facts of the ongoing atrocities in Gaza and urged immediate action to stop the massacre. © 2014 Elsevier Ltd.

CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

ACROSS

1 Years gone by

5 Eight-tracks, e.g.

10 Small porch

12 Limerick people

13 Music's Lena

14 Pronouncements

15 Colony member

16 House head

18 Less powerful

20 Sheltered side

21 Proton's place

23 Print units

24 Falafel holder

26 Early carmaker

28 Hr. part

29 Store event

31 Pig out

32 Lab vessel

36 Sporting shoe

39 Yale rooster

40 Neigh sayer

41 Texas landmark

43 Cream of society

44 Doctrine