

# A policy or fallacy?

PLEASURE IS ALL MINE



SHAH HUSAIN IMAM

Almost anything under the sun has been put on the list of don'ts for the television and radio broadcasters. As if there was a grudging sense of loss of power at the way the authority and personnel of the electronic media were going 'scot-free' despite having committed 'culpable' offences in their eyes.

THE new broadcasting policy's contents and preliminary reactions thereto have been gushing forth in the public domain, much too in circulation that is, to bear a repetition. Considering this, I would like to confine myself mainly to a rebuttal of some claims made by the government in favour of unfurling the flag, as

it were, of a precipitate policy document on broadcasting media. I will also attempt a brief comparative analysis between our script of the policy and the policies that prevail in India, Great Britain and the USA.

In the first place, the government's claim that the policy is crafted with an eye to 'flourishing' the electronic media and that it is citizen-friendly and drawn out in public interest sounds like empty platitudes when the overall restrictive nature of it dawns on us. In the second, the claim that other countries too have similar broadcasting policies has to be taken with a grain of salt because each important country is propelled by its media culture to be reflecting the degree of press freedom it practises.

The new media policy on broadcasting in India, 2011 is described to be largely a 'force of good.' Vanita Kohli-Khandekar elaborates in an article in Business Standard, dated October 18, 2011 thus: "You will be slapped on the hand five times. This is your warning. After that you will be thrown out." That, in essence, is what one of the many changes made to the policy for broadcasting television channels in India last week, says. Most of the changes -- such as increasing the net worth for new entrants and prolonging the licence period -- are positive. They will, with any luck, help nurture the news broadcast industry back to financial health. They will also bring some sanity to the Rs. 32,000 crore, hyper-competitive, Indian television business."

Unsurprisingly, it is the 'five slaps' clause that has got all the attention. For 'it links the renewal of a broadcaster's licence to his having committed five or more violations of programming and advertising code.'

But a detractor saw no need for this. Argues Lulla, "Every one of the 650 odd channels in India are subject to the Cable Television Network Act of 1995 and to the uplinking and downlinking policy of 2005. Both state unequivocally that any violation of the programming code could result in shut down or suspension of a channel."

That is exactly the point. While issuing licences to various television and radio channels some stringent conditions are attached, and the information minister too admitted that the present broadcasting policy has been further developed around the licencing provisions. With the conditions laid out for licencing and the new policy, a deadweight befalls the electronic media. Actually, the renewal of licence button is there for pressing, why then dish out further restrictions?

There are laws in our country to tackle many of the offences detailed in the new policy.

Now turn to Great Britain, the BBC is a British public service organisation. It is headed by Executive Board which has overall control of the BBC television. The editorial guidelines are the BBC's own values and standards.

The Leveson inquiry instituted in the wake of phone hacking scandal in Britain recommended, among others, that (a) Newspapers should continue to be self-regulated -- and the government should have no power over what they publish; (b) There had to be a new press standards body created by the industry with a new code of conduct ...

In the USA, the First Amendment, as well as Section 326 of the Communications Act, prohibits the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) in Washington from censoring broadcast material and from interfering with freedom of expression in broadcasting.

William Pitt the Younger in a House of Commons speech as early as in 1783 had said: "Necessity is the plea for every infringement of human freedom. It is the argument of tyrants; it is the creed of slaves."

Why must a government which claims to be democratic turn illiberal in its approach to media?

It is a bloated and unfocused policy. Almost anything under the sun has been put on the list of don'ts for the television and radio broadcasters. As if there was a grudging sense of loss of power at the way the authority and personnel of the electronic media were going 'scot-free' despite having committed 'culpable' offences in their eyes.

One commentator who was called up to give his input at an earlier stage, suggested that the committee assigned to formulate the draft was not unanimous on the final shape of the document. It may have been adopted by a majority decision with the dissent brushed aside. Yet, the question remains, what was the hurry to present it before the Cabinet for its approval when there were some dissenting voices? It now comes from the top as an imposition. It has short-circuited the process missing out on important stakeholders' inputs. Instead, politically willed insertions were made, thanks to the mandarins.

Pending the formation of a statutory independent commission to implement the provisions, some of which are perniciously vague to invite arbitrary interpretations, it is the information ministry which shall put the policy in effect. Given the magnitude of the points at issue one wonders whether, caught up in a control rage, a craze for diversionary controversies, and a sense of megalomania, if you like, the government is set to implement the provisions without having the required infrastructure in place. This leaves a scope for reprisal against a media house 'crossing the line.' Given the wide gamut of offences consisting of those relating to armed forces, law enforcement agencies, officials with juridical powers like DCs who are being virtually 'indemnified,' there is no knowing from which authority a stick will be wielded against a particular programme or programmer.

Ending with Thomas Jefferson's famous words: "Where the press is free, and every man able to read, all is safe."

The writer is Associate Editor, The Daily Star. E-mail: husain.imam@thedailystar.net

## Time-Out

HUMOROUSLY YOURS



NAVEED MAHBUB

TWO siblings fight over the same toy. The first thing Uncle does is pull them apart, before there's any further physical harm. Exception, if the siblings are the children of Abraham and

the uncle is a guy named Sam.

Uncle Sam does get Israel and Hamas to silence their guns, while he opens up his arms, er, arms reserves for Israel as the latter runs short of ammo (I wonder why). Hmm. Let Thesaurus add another synonym for 'cease fire'. It's called 'time-out', just to re-load the guns...

Meanwhile, Ban Ki Moon has been screaming. His boys and gals at the (In)Security Council have been up all night to pass a resolution. All VOTE, one simply swaps the 'E' and 'O'.

The Israeli Justice Minister tells the UN to get lost. UN pouts its lips. Not fair -- you stayed up all night for nothing...

There, there, honey, it's ok. Look, you're like the sweet, harmless Facebook. Proposed resolutions are posts, debates are comments, 'Yay' votes are 'Likes', 'Nay' votes are 'Blocks', 'Abstentions' are no responses. In the end, the original post adds up to nothing.

Oh, I envy Ban Ki Moon -- a handsome salary for accomplishing nothing. For that matter, Netanyahu too, for he can single handedly reprimand the legislative and executive branches of the most powerful nation on earth after receiving US\$234 billion from the latter since 1948.

The Arab World has been admirably patient, perhaps exercising *Sabr* during Ramadan. Or maybe they were sleeping with US made ear plugs, or merely can't (don't) speak English, or the monarchs have all of a sudden taken to playing the fiddle as Gaza burns. As Ramadan draws to an end, they Google 'Moon' to find out the day of Eid. The search yields 'Ban Ki Moon' and that's when they learn about the Gaza crisis. And then, a collective: "Our thoughts go out to all the...oil."

But, thank Heavens there is a real ceasefire in effect, at least till the time of writing. The Germany-Brazil game has ended with a clear win. The tunnels and the rocket launchers have been destroyed. Objectives met. Congratulations on exceeding past performance records -- the kill rate of 2009.

If destroying tunnels and neutralising rockets and launchers cost 1,875 Palestinian and 67 Israeli lives, then Israel surely needs a lot more than just US\$3 billion military aid per year to upgrade its 'precision' weapons. Unless it took a shotgun approach, literally. Otherwise, even Ananta Jalil would have done a better job and told the world, "Most Welcome!"

Oh, what havoc the mighty can wreak with its wrath. I thought you lose if you get angry, unless, of course, you're Incredible Hulk.

Hmm, Hulk Yahu. Well, he surely has scored major points. What will soon follow is an unprecedented record employment rate, especially for the settlers. Their occupation? Occupation. He is then a sure shot winner if he runs again for office, hell, even the White House, with a campaign slogan: "Yes we can-nister". In fact, Obama's approval ratings have fallen because in America, the person most shown on TV is Benjamin Netanyahu.

As Bibi sticks around to moon the world, Mr. Ban Ki Moon may need to stick around for a while too. After all, he did say to both Israel and Hamas: "Stop fighting and take on the root cause."

The root cause. Exactly...

The writer is an engineer & CEO turned comedian (by choice), the host of NTV's *The Naveed Mahbub Show* and the founder of *Naveed's Comedy Club*. E-mail: naveed@naveedmahbub.com

# Boycott Greek strawberries

SHAHRIAR FEROZE

THE unprecedented inhuman verdict acquitting a Greek businessman and his associates, who shot and wounded some 28 Bangladeshis last year, serves as a stark reminder that on issues of human rights even a civilised continent like Europe has much to answer for.

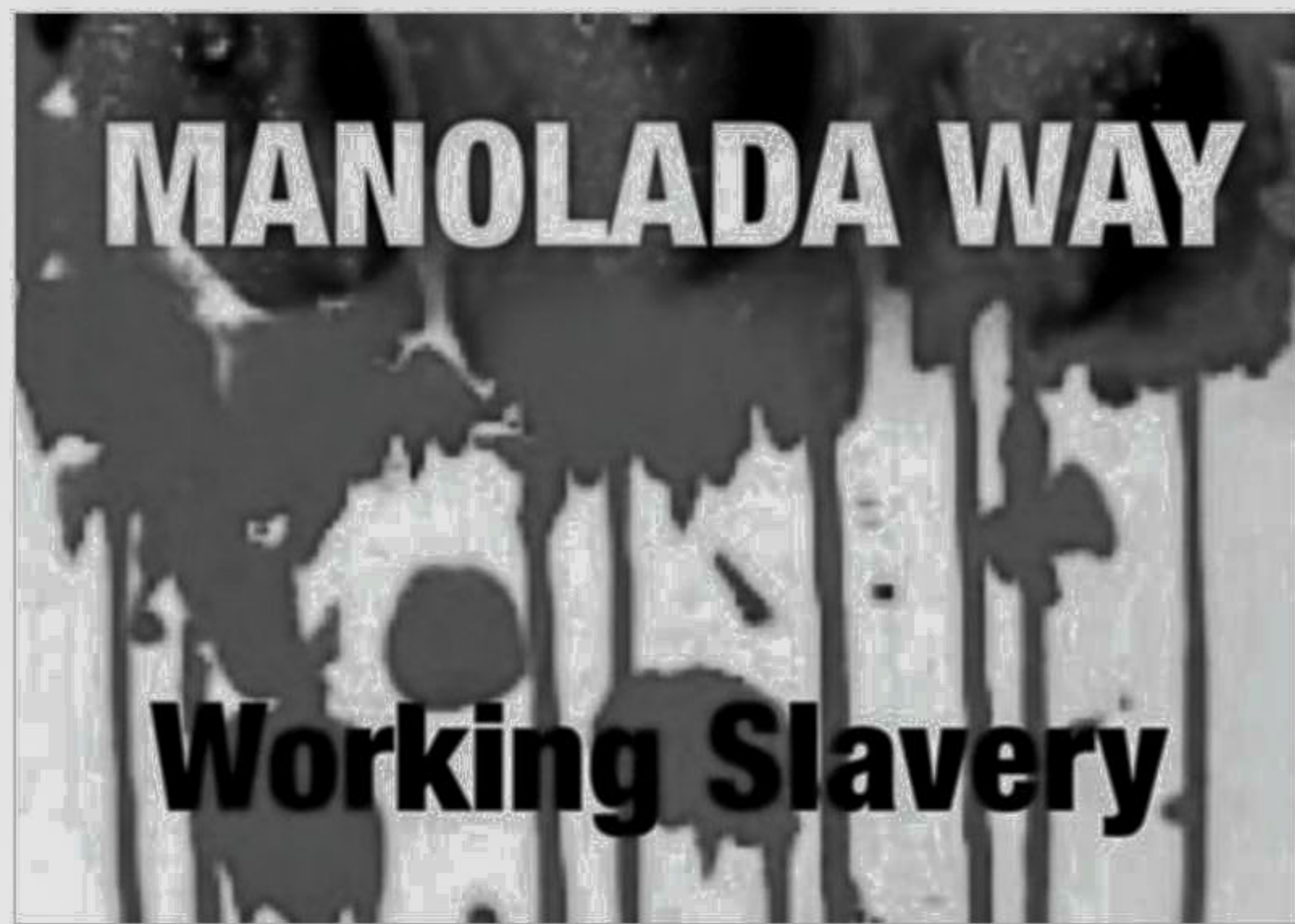
The shooting spree had occurred in a Greek strawberry farm last year when the owner and his cohorts took up arms as some 200 workers (mostly Bangladeshis) demanded their six months unpaid wages. Last week, over a year later, what they got was a verdict that not only denied justice but exposed the cruel and ugly face of Greek law. Our labourers worked in squalid conditions, and even without basic sanitation facilities. What baffles us is, who is the concerned authority to monitor and regulate our workers' human and working rights not only in Greece but in the whole of Europe? Well embassies and organisations are not enough.

Our message to our countrymen is: Think twice before you go to shop for strawberries imported from Greece. They are covered with the blood of our immigrant workers there. It's been a week since the verdict was announced, but where is all the hype of those global and European human rights organisations that desperately fight to establish the practice of labour compliance rules in our poorly managed garment factories? Who is there to brand the blood stained-strawberries globally like the many who shamefully brand our RMG products?

For those foreign critics who are extremely worried over the implementation of labour rules in Bangladesh, we have to tell them that they should also focus on the cruel flak that our workers are drawing working abroad. The Greek fruit industry's profit amounts to no less than a few hundred million US dollars every year, and it cannot escape one of its most notorious scandals of all time.

One of the lawyers for the victims, Moisis Karabeyidis, was upset over the verdict and so are we, and, like him, we want to see the case to be placed at the European Court of Human Rights at The Hague -- if the verdict is not reviewed by the Greek authorities.

Though part of the verdict gave two of the



accused sentences of 14 years and seven years -- they were also set free pending appeals. However, what worries us is that if the defendants are found guilty, but are not put in prison until after an appeal, we wonder how many criminals don't actually wait around but disappear instead? Moreover, the farmers admitted to the shooting, particularly the owner along with his foreman, then how could they not be found guilty? We expected the Bangladeshi embassy in Greece to have acted more responsibly in taking prompt measures to ensure and collect the six-month unpaid wages of our strawberry pickers. That, too, hasn't happened. Repercussion of the Greek verdict over the shooting of our strawberry pickers is likely to set an unwelcome example for other employers abroad.

However, it has been reported that after the social and political outrage over the acquittal of the four farmers by the Mixed Jury Appeals Court of Patras on the strawberry case, the prosecutor of the High Court of Greece asked to intervene considering the possible annulment of last week's decision. That may or may not be true, but the high-ups of the Greek judiciary must

seriously look into the matter.

As far as our message is concerned, fruit and vegetable products from South Europe, like the strawberries from Greece, are destined mainly for export to North Europe and Eastern Europe, and that's where our expat Bangladeshis should avoid buying them. In a broader picture, similar stories of abuse of our immigrant workers have been reported from Italy and Spain too, where migrant workers are over-exploited unlawfully in tomato, orange and other vegetable farms. We earnestly want our embassies to seriously investigate into these alleged reports of mistreatment. The dreadful shooting that took place in Greece's Manolada cannot be defined as an isolated incident either as such cruel treatment of Bangladeshi workers does not make the headline news. It's just difficult to believe that such outrageous act of barbarity and racism had happened, and justice -- in the land of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle -- was denied.

The writer is Current Affairs Analyst, The Daily Star. E-mail: shahriarferoze@gmail.com

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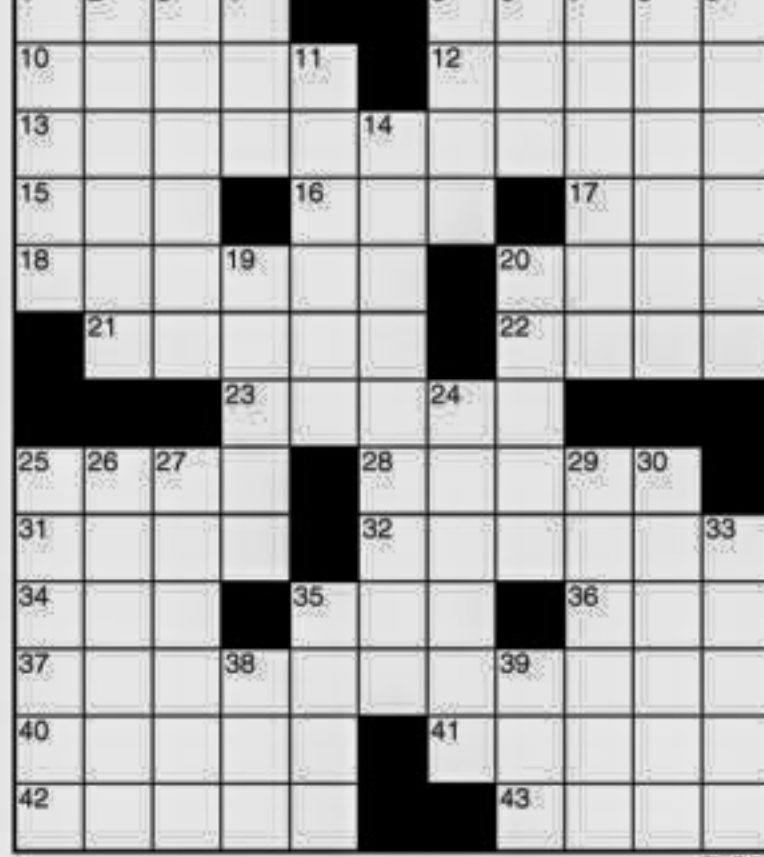
## QUOTABLE Quote

Failure is simply the opportunity to begin again, this time more intelligently.

Henry Ford

## CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

- ACROSS**
- Attention-getting sound
  - Namely
  - Lion features
  - Unescorted
  - Torching
  - Yale student
  - Astronaut Grissom
  - "-Kapital"
  - Modern
  - Royal address
  - Dansler's word
  - Danson and Nugent
  - Filth
  - Blanchett of "Blue Jasmine"
  - Spanish appetizers
  - Dry
  - Disparaging remark
  - Sailing hazard
  - Huge snake
  - Fish eggs
  - Declining
  - Chinese or Korean
  - Like some seals
  - Bird abodes
- DOWN**
- Earth's neighbor
  - Yellow hue
  - Semi owner
  - Fermi of physics
  - Fellows
  - Price holders
  - Antique
  - Surfer's car
  - Entering direction
  - Past and future
  - John Hancock, for one
  - Health topic
  - Spurred (on)
  - Dance moves
  - Get by
  - Beach robe
  - Stir up
  - River of Iraq
  - Down goddess
  - Less speedy
  - Cares for
  - Storage spots
  - Singer -- King Cole
  - River blocker



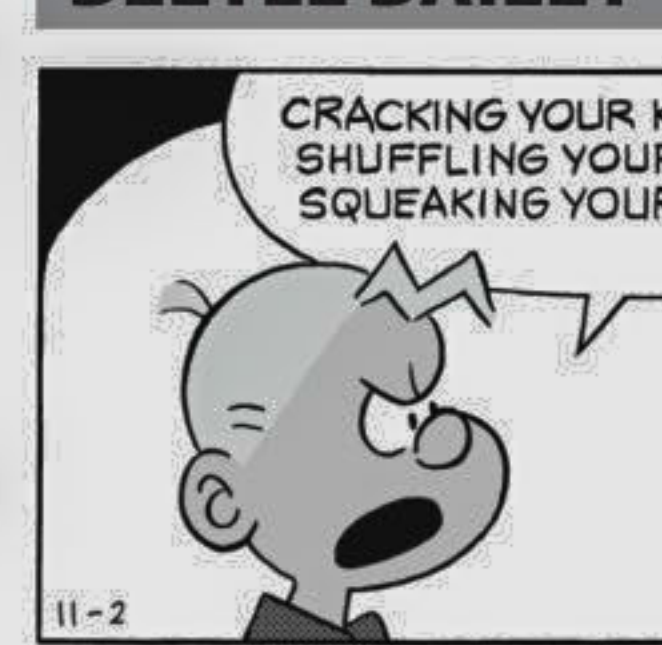
## Yesterday's answer

CLOG QUASH  
REBA UNITES  
AGES ADMIRE  
MISTAKE LEW  
STEAMER LIE  
NOD BEAR  
MARKS FORMS  
ALES WOW  
ILL ROLLBAR  
MOI ANDORRA  
EYELID VAIN  
DEVISE EKED  
DETER RELY

**CRYPTOQUOTE** 6-24  
ZKK H ZYI HY GAD QAZJQD GB NTBxD GAZG CBJDL QZJ'G CZID CD AZNNL. --YNHIDCHKHMZJ

Yesterday's Cryptoquote: YOU MAY WRITE ME DOWN IN HISTORY WITH YOUR BITTER, TWISTED LIES, YOU MAY TROD ME IN THE VERY DIRT BUT STILL, LIKE DUST, I'LL RISE. --MAYA ANGELOU

## BEETLE BAILEY



## HENRY



## by Mort Walker



## by Don Trachte

