

Militant threats nearer home...



SHAH HUSAIN IMAM

When life is an un-winded toy left to tumble, who is ashamed of brutalising death? The gore of death needs to be eliminated with a balanced sensitivity to the axiomatic truth that only the Non-Being who gives life is entitled to taking it.

The world is never short of threats and intimidation. The latest to be blurted out is from al-Qaida leader Ayman al Zawahri. He claims to have flagged off an Indian branch of his militant group 'spearheading' a South Asian front.

Set against Lashkar-e-Tayyeba's Taj Hotel massacre in Bombay, such a threat from al-Qaida with its presence in Pakistan and Afghanistan at once beeps under the radar. A Reuter report on Thursday quoted al Zawahri as boasting that Muslims in Bangladesh, Myanmar as well as Assam, Gujarat, Ahmedabad, Jammu and Kashmir in India would be 'happy' over the news. Although South Asia is no stranger to extremist ambitions, real or potential; yet there is a greater risk perception in the present security context of the region. The questions that beg answer are: Why India, Bangladesh and Myanmar are being targeted afresh? As for India, the election of rightist BJP to power may have produced non-secular sentiments, especially linked to Sangh Parivar as a perceived nurturing ground for induced counter extremism. Pakistan has grown politically simmering with Tehrik-e-Insaf leader Imran Khan and cleric al-Quadri launching a movement and placing the country on an undemocratic trajectory. Nawaz Sharif government mandated to power eleven months ago is taking the brunt of pressure from army chief Raheel Sharif who is thought to be claiming a prerogative on Kashmir policy. Strangely enough, a Bangladeshi ghost is apparently riding on Imam's shoulder. He has waged a movement around what he called a six-point charter and has readied a script of a 'softer' version of Bangladeshi caretaker model of 2007-08. What an irony of fate in a fragile democracy that has never got a chance to consolidate its roots in Pakistan! At any rate, Pakistani radicalism has been thriving on a handholding between Afghan and Pakistani Taliban as it sea-saws between dialogue with Pakistan and Afghan governments and non-cooperation with them. Bangladesh for its part has outlawed 12 extremist parties. Caches of arms are often

recovered. But circulation of small arms remains an issue. The government is stern in dealing with bigoted militant elements. Yet, stories of their attempted regrouping are unearthed by Rab from time to time. The latest threat from Al Zawahri may be seen in light of a sprinkling of Afghan and Iraq war trainees among Bangladeshis, suspected to be ducking somewhere. Then we must keep mounting our guard on prospects of terror or radical financing. Myanmar comes in the loop due to persecution of Rohingya Muslims in Rakhaine state of that neighbouring country. The refugees' radicalization overseas is reported in fits and starts. The beheading of US journalists James Foley and Steven Sotloff by ISIS and the threatened execution of a British journalist have had US President Obama and British Premier David Cameron react with shock and consternation. ISIS links this brutal response to US war in Iraq and its indecisive dealing with Assad regime in Syria. Obama realises that a unilateral cowboy-style Bush attack holds no answer. Seasoned American experts are advocating taking Iran and Saudi Arabia on board along with Shia and moderate Sunni elements thrown into the coalition. Cameroon, though determined to 'squeeze out' the ISIS of existence, is not in favour of placing British boots on the soil. The ISIS has even threatened Putin pictured

on a Russian plane for his arming Syria. It seems the Western dilemma is between repeating Afghan or Iraq mistakes and waffling through still fragile diplomatic approaches under UN auspices. An example of diplomatic software policy is illustrated by US University in Niger taking in brave escapee girls from Boko Haram's strangling grip and sponsoring their education through scholarships. Would Boko Haram given to its own variety of unbridled violence be chastised to the ways of civilised world? Growing in a funeral parlour home of her father's, a British woman had two indelible impressions etched on her mind that would guide her through life. First, she saw the dignity of the dead embalmed and groomed by her father before being put to the grave. Even corpses of criminals were treated with respect. The second gift she took emerging from the upstairs of the funeral home was her love for life. She embraced an intensely rewarding career in London. When life is an un-winded toy left to tumble, who is ashamed of dehumanising death? The gore of death needs to be eliminated with a balanced sensitivity to the axiomatic truth that only the Non-Being who gives life is entitled to taking it. The writer is Associate Editor, The Daily Star. E-mail: husain.imam@thedailystar.net



The court jesters are back!

SHAHNOOR WAHID

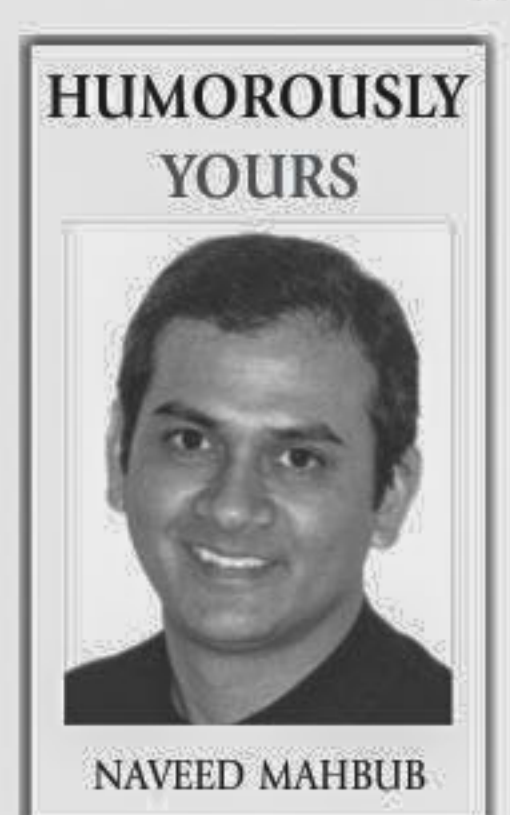
No matter what we say or write, some of the wise characters will continue to "entertain" the people with things they can do best- talk rubbish.

IN the days of the mighty kings and queens there used to be one or two court jesters in every court whose main responsibility was to entertain the nobility with outlandish words and acts of acrobatics. They were the comical sidekicks who would often disgust the gentlemen present in the court, but these clownish cronies enjoyed impunity of sorts from the king. History tells us that the presence of a jester in a court dates back from the time of the Roman Empire through to the middle ages. We find such jesters in many of the plays by William Shakespeare, who were usually known as Shakespearean fools. It is said that Queen Elizabeth -I was a great admirer of such jesters in her court or in stage plays. There were jesters in the courts of the Asian kings too. The latter day Zamindars of Bengal also employed court jesters for pure entertainment. There is hardly a Bengali who hasn't heard of Gopal Bhar, a legendary court jester in medieval Bengal. He was one of the nine gems (Navaratna) in the court of Raja Krishnachandra, the famous king of Nadia in the 18th century AD. Well, even though the days of the kings are long gone, continue to exist in the present era, of course in different guise. Many of them have joined politics to make the profession a bit more "entertaining". In fact, there are politicians who will not be remembered for doing any great service to the people but will be done so for doing or saying weird things - like their

ancient counterparts - court jesters. Many of them became presidents, prime ministers and MPs of powerful countries and took upon themselves the responsibility of doing the comical act like the jesters of the bygone era. These politicians of a special breed often bring comical interlude to otherwise a grim and mundane environment that politics often tend to create. We remember a mighty president of a mighty powerful country "entertaining" the world with his "wit" and "Wisdom" for eight long years. Some of his one-liners and two-liners are reproduced below to drive the point home. Looking at the national budget he once said: "It's clearly a budget. It's got a lot of numbers in it." Then he entertained the crowd with the following: "Yesterday, you made note of my -- the lack of my talent when it came to dancing. But nevertheless, I want you to know I danced with joy. And no question Liberia has gone through very difficult times." Here is another one: "I know what I believe. I will continue to articulate what I believe and what I believe - I believe what I believe is right." We have such jesters in politics in the neighborhood as well. Many of them have left politics but will be remembered for their "wise words". At home, not too long ago one such character declared in a public meeting that he would sweep the streets of the capital if his king (read president) had ordered so. I am sure hearing this declaration some of the municipality sweepers had some should panicky lest one of them had to lose his job. Thankfully, the jester soon vanished

into oblivion. Another clown of the same era had declared in another public meeting that two women getting together would "produce" nothing. Ironically, the same two women had thrown him into the gutter soon after. We remember another jester declaring his intent of catching the 'saturs' following a series of bomb blasts in the country. This clown had sufficiently entertained the people with his hairstyle and wacky comments while in power. To top it all, he even suspected a Hindu wounded man from the blast to be an accomplice of the fundamentalists who had blasted the bombs! There is no shortage of such people around today either! They continue to 'entertain' us with their verbal garbage. Nothing would deter them from saying or doing weird things in public meetings, and the worst part is they suffer from the delusion that they are educated, intelligent and witty. And they interpret the chuckle of the people as appreciation of their "intellect". They make the job of the news editors easy in selecting the lead story. And oh! How the naughty cartoonists love them! The source of fun and frivolity never dries up and as soon as they open their mouth - OMG! - All sorts of venom start to pour out to vitiate the environment. But, no matter what we say or write, some of the wise characters will continue to "entertain" the people with things they can do best- talk rubbish. The writer is Special Supplements Editor, The Daily Star.

Daddy Cool



NAVEED MAHBUB

"So, when would you like to have the baby?" "Whenever God wills!!" Not sure if our natural response is met by the nurse with a hint of disappointment. After all, a C-section is a (profitable) 'norm', rather than an exception mandated during fetal distress. The nurse

eyes my belly, perhaps a momentary lapse to offer me a C-section too. Fast forward five months. Wife's water breaks. We are in the emergency room. The nurse barks at me: "Attendant! Outside!!" "Apa, first of all, I am NOT the attendant. Second, you see that screaming young lady with a bulge? I am responsible for that. Third, I am the 'coach' - I am Lamaze trained to fully assist the doctor during delivery." The doctor comes. I tell her: "Her contractions are regular indicating she's three centimeters dilated." Not sure if the doctor is shocked or impressed. Her assessment shows I am bang on target. "Can we now please administer the epidural? We will lose the window of opportunity past six centimeters." Shell shocked at the 'attendant' giving orders. She manages: "The expert anesthesiologist will come at 9am, but the baby will be born before then." Try delivering this news to a woman going through the highest level of pain that a human can experience. I notify the boss in agony. I take the expletives like a real man. Torment on the doctors (more join in) continue. I am in the delivery room in full gown, cap and gloves. The baby is delivered the old fashioned way - no epidural, no C-section and with the mother on track for the fastest recovery. I discreetly check to see if there is a Normal Delivery for Dummies lying around somewhere. I cut the umbilical cord and recite the Adaan. "We're taking the baby to be washed and then to the nursery." What? Do you know that just about every one day old human looks the same? How on earth are you going to ensure I'm not taking home Kuddus' daughter and vice versa? I accompany the nurse all the way to the nursery. "No sir, nobody allowed inside." "Well, then draw open the curtains, I will not have her out of my sight for a second." So, from then on till we are back home, I am with the baby like the SSF is with the Prime Minister. Fast forward two years. DMCH (again) and Ekhlash Hossain, one of the twins. The agony of his disappearance and the ecstasy of his return. Kudos to the journalists and RAB. And sure, DMCH, for now introducing the ID sticker system to not allow babies without tags matching those of their mothers, to leave the hospital. Oh, and the additional CCTV cameras too. Ah! Utopia!! I'm sure the cameras will work without a hitch. Hey, those twelve hours when the cameras were all off during which time the 10 minute younger twin made his way out was surely an exception. I'm sure the guards will be of unquestionable character, never to let even a fly go by without matching tags. And the tags themselves? I'm sure the entrepreneurial spirit will not come up with a way to make fake ones. Meantime, hey you daddy, stay up! Mommy just went through labor and it's called LABOR for a reason. She needs the sleep. No need to get tired from nervously pacing outside the delivery room, puffing a smoke. That is an old fashioned (if a fashion at all) black and white movie. Let them all call you paranoid as you trust no one and don't let the baby out of sight for a single moment. This may be a tad simpler than cracking a nut with a sledgehammer by way of CCTV cameras, uninterrupted power supply, fool proof tags and yogi style guards. Happy parenthood. 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

QUOTABLE Quote

When you are courting a nice girl an hour seems like a second. When you sit on a red-hot cinder a second seems like an hour. That's relativity.

Albert Einstein

CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

ACROSS

1 Den

5 Hams' needs

11 Radius partner

12 Female grad

13 Headed out

14 Improvised in jazz

15 Purpose

16 Tarragon or thyme

17 Empire

19 Words with pickle, stew or jam

22 Iron output

24 Muscular power

26 Big planters

27 Pump or clog

28 Track events

30 Mix

31 Needle feature

32 Matt of "Today"

34 Verne's traveler

35 Sense of self

38 Feral

41 Ginger cookie

42 Old deliverer

43 Pinnacle

44 King's stand-in

45 High school student

DOWN

1 Doozy

2 Pub brews

3 Deduction

4 Scoundrel

5 "Bolero" composer

6 Burglar deterrents

7 Idiotic

8 Little devil

9 Low number

10 Blue

16 Deli choice

18 Move slowly

19 Essential state

20 Light filler

21 Really impressed

22 Confident

23 Waiting aid

25 Land in the sea

29 Catch-phrase

30 Program error

33 Deal maker

34 Renown

36 Ready and willing

37 Start the bidding

38 Knight's title

39 Superb serve

40 --out (be idle)

41 Plopped down

Yesterday's answer

GEMS SPRAY
AVAILABLE
TAKEAGANDER
ODETENTINT
REUBENPAUL
SPENDALEE
STEMS
CESTRATER
ANTSGLARED
FROCALORA
TAKEAPOWDER
AGENTWHEAT
NERDSODDS

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker

LOOKS LIKE OUR BATTLE EXERCISE HAS DETERIORATED INTO A WAR OF WORDS

FOO!

YOU'RE A BUNCH OF JERKS!

YOU COULDN'T FIGHT A FLEA!

THE ONLY THING YOU'RE GOOD AT IS GIVING UP!

BOO!

HENRY by Don Trachte

DID YOU KNOW YOU WERE BEING FOLLOWED, HENRY?

CRYPTOQUOTE 7-18

VNZ OXKZQSKLU EZFXG VSTDZ. ZDAN TXMISBD XU D ISFNVTZ BDVAN. ZDAN SGZ SO RSY XU D OYUJZ.

-- ZT LSAN

Yesterday's Cryptoquote: YOU WERE MADE PERFECTLY TO BE LOVED -- AND SURELY I HAVE LOVED YOU, IN THE IDEA OF YOU, MY WHOLE LIFE LONG.

-- ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING

A XYDLBAAXR is LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.