

Disproportionate attention to proportions



KNOT SO TRUE

RUBANA HUQ

HE has millions of followers, 2 thousand-acre estates according to official count, 28 kilograms of gold, 10,000 saris, 750 pairs of shoes, and, of course, a salary of Rs.1.00 per annum. A film star turned politician, chief minister for four times, she is the latest case of the Modi-fied Indian government which has just jailed her for possessing disproportionate assets. It's all part of the new drive of driving corruption away from the government, which has itself close to one-third of its members being tried for one charge, including one who has a murder case hanging over his head. Jayaram Jayalithaa, one of the most colourful and controversial females in Indian politics and a cult personality, often referred to as 'Ammamma' ('Mother') and sometimes 'Puratchi Thalaivi' ('Revolutionary Leader') with her filmy history of having acted in over 140 films, is 66 has just been delivered a verdict in a case that was filed 18 years ago. The female politician, prisoner No. 7402 in VIP cell 23 in the Central Prison at Parappana Agrahara, is to stay in jail for four years and has just been fined Rs. 100 crores...

A leading Indian newspaper carried photos of Deepika Padukone's cleavage three Sundays ago and has suffered the backlash of the world. True, if we can look at 8 packs of males and not violate male sexual space, why does print media zoom in on a woman from that close a range and get away with it? Two subse-

quent tweets of Deepika claiming that she was indeed a woman and that by publishing pictures of her very proportionate proportions, the newspaper did not do justice to the concept of 'news.' This has gone on forever. Politics of sexuality has not been a new case. For years, the male gaze has penetrated way beyond the accepted cultural realities. On a separate note though, Deepika's tweets couldn't have come at a better time... her new film needed that last push of publicity.

While women in power and spotlight have often contributed to their own downfall and disgrace, the fact is that there has been a surge in the unimaginable attack on professional women and the innumerable acts of inhumanity on disproportionate proportions have become part of a regular discourse all over the world.

While women in power and spotlight have often contributed to their own downfall and disgrace, the fact is that there has been a surge in the unimaginable attack on professional women and the innumerable acts of inhumanity on disproportionate proportions have become part of a regular discourse all over the world.

Sameera Salih Ali al-Nuaimy was a lawyer and was publicly executed by the Islamic State fighters in Iraq, just a week ago, after having been tortured for days.

She was an Iraqi woman promoting women's rights. Her family was barred from burying her just because she had posted comments on Facebook condemning the destruction of mosques and shrines in Mosul, an Iraqi city in the north. The trend of attacks on professional women is continuing in Iraq, a state where 8,493 civilians are reported to have died this year.

While your columnist was deciding to list a few more international stories of abuse on women, Taslima, the eighteen year old working for her came and announced that breakfast had been served. The oldest of the four children of Fazul Rahman of Tarail Thana of Kishoreganj, she was sold to slavery at 10. Long before puberty, she was given away to a 22 year old young man. The advantage of handing his ten-year old little one to a mature man was to see his daughter secure in a marriage that required no dowry. Eight years after that 'golden' deal, she has ended up at our home, making our beds and dusting the dust off our furniture. She is young, restless and even with the slightest hint of flirtation with the male staff in the house; I warn her against the male gaze. She bears marks of abuse on her arms and she's also short of hearing as a result of being repeatedly beaten. It took her dad Tk. 4,000 to have her stitched up the last time she was abused. A mother at 12, she has two daughters today who she can't visit, let alone talk to. Her youngest sister is 11 and her father is contemplating handing her over to yet another "eligible," "mature" man in the village who too claims no dowry. Taslima has vowed to stop this "transfer" with her life.

While the young Taslima serves me tea,

I am busy reading up on the stats of child marriage in South Asia, where 24.4 million young girls get married before they are 18. Bangladesh tops the list with a 66%. India hosts 47% of child marriages happening all over the world with Nepal following closely behind with 41% and Afghanistan trailing with 39% and Pakistan 24%. But most fortunately today, there are also stories like the one of Laxmi Sargara, an 18-year old woman who just had her child marriage legally annulled in northern Rajasthan state. This is thought to be the first case of its kind in India. Laxmi was just one and her bridegroom Rakesh only three when they tied the knot. Laxmi Sargara has defied the 'khap Panchayats' -- village councils -- and has managed to shame the practice that apparently prevents "social corruptions" or "western influences."

Today, there's Zeynep Fadillioglu, the 59-year old female architect designing mosques in Istanbul and Qatar; there's a pretty, petite and blonde Rena Dourou who's just been elected the new prefect of Athens; and there's a Salma Khatun, the Bangladeshi cricketer leading the Bangladesh team to the finals at the Asian Games. Therefore, today is the day to redesign the structure of public and private spaces for women, which has been violated for too long a time all across the globe. South Asia only needs to demonstrate the best intent to battle child marriage and excesses against women. And all we need to have is a Medusa in each one of us, so that our gaze turns the predator to stone every time he plots against the woman and every time his gaze follows her body.

The writer is Managing Director, Mohammadi Group.

Timetable for political party registration

M. SAKHAWAT HUSSAIN

In the aftermath of the much talked-about one-sided election on January 5, 2014, it is in public perception that the Election Commission (EC) could not establish good, acceptable electoral governance. Whatever little that was achieved in the past witnessed sharp decline. Even the recently held upazilla and union elections have shown lack of voters' confidence in the system. Reports say that voter turnout was minimal, and that sufficiently proves lack of interest in voting and indicates declining faith in the EC, which it has, I would like to believe, taken note of.

There are serious misgivings about the performance of the institution that is entrusted with the task of ensuring free and fair elections at all levels under Article 119 of the Constitution, which has been further aggravated by the EC announcement that it would not register any political party before 2018.

The aim of a political party is not only to propagate its ideology and programmes to achieve the ultimate goal, i.e. ruling the country for a specified period as per the constitution, but to also implement those through ascending to power with people's mandate. To achieve that, a political party has to participate in elections as a body. As stated earlier, though particularly not mentioned in the constitution, the EC recognises political parties of the country as main stakeholders.

To establish a lawful relation with the parties as per RPO Chapter VI A, political party registration was made mandatory. Registration comes into play for elections only, and does not in any way restrict citizens' right to form associations at their will. Registration of political parties is, however, not unique to Bangladesh. It is there in many advanced democracies where political parties are legitimised through provisions of the constitution. On the other hand, where the constitution is silent, a separate law enables political parties to participate in elections through registration. For Bangladesh, the concept is new.

However, the aim of mandatory registration is multiple. One, it establishes a client relationship with the EC and political parties. Two, it helps parties establish contacts with grassroots level workers whom they intend to represent by participating in elections. Three, it checks mushroom growth of political parties that have the aim of corrupting the political and electoral system.

Be that as it may, the above mentioned Chapter of the RPO and rules made for the purpose are not to create hindrance to the growth of political parties, but to encourage and assist more and more parties to organise to face the electorate. However, parties interested in participating in elections have to register under certain conditions. Once the conditions are met a party has the right to be registered. What a new party may need is sufficient time to prepare and propagate its ideology to face the voters, and such time must be provided by allowing aspiring parties to register well before the next election. Since party registration is one of the jobs of the EC as laid out in the RPO, it is their solemn duty to see that political parties are given enough time to prepare for facing the voter. The provision however does not mention a time limit for such registration. Thus, the EC must make a policy to specify period of notification as it exists, like in the case of yearly updating of voter list.

In a recent newspaper report it was said that a timetable has been set for next registration of new parties, which is to be in 2018. That means no new party can get registration even after fulfilling all conditions laid by the RPO before 2018, i.e. 4 years from now. Question is why does a party have to wait for 4 years to register, though the Rule says EC has to issue notice for such registration?

Notification, like voter list updating, should be made every year with the aim of being prepared to conduct election at short notice; it could be a mid-term term election. It is in the air that in the backdrop of the flawed election of January 5, the government may decide for such a snap election much before EC's stipulated time. If it is true, such one-sided decision of the EC could be misconstrued, something that it can ill afford.

Though no time limit is set by Registration Rule 2008/11 August 26, 2008 Article 3, the spirit of the rule must be interpreted in a positive manner. Such a long interval set by the EC would only cast doubt in the minds of people under the prevailing political limbo. It is, therefore, suggested that registration of political parties should be at least an annual affair, if not biannual. The EC would also need considerable time to scrutinise the documents asked for, and for making ground verification of the applicant as per the provision of the relevant law. The EC must, therefore, workout a permanent timetable for registration of political parties and publish it as notification. Otherwise, such denial would further create faith deficiency. And it is faith in the institution which is one of the important guiding principles of holding a credible election.

The writer is a columnist and former Election Commissioner.

The US' unauthorised air strikes in Syria: Against or favouring Wahhabism?

PETER CUSTERS

SINCE the night of September 22/23, US fighter planes have been carrying out strikes with missiles and drones against targets in and around Raqqa, the city in the Northern part of Syria where the headquarters of ISIS's self-proclaimed 'Islamic state' are located. Four of the US's Middle Eastern allies are known to be taking part in these aerial strikes. They signify not just an extension in the warfare the US had previously launched against ISIS positions in Northern Iraq, but also herald a decisive break with President Obama's past efforts to wind down and bring to an end the US's involvement in Middle Eastern wars.

Once again as when the US had started its aggression for the overthrow of the Iraqi regime of Saddam Hussain (2003), the current air strikes are clearly illegitimate. They have neither been authorised by the Syrian government, nor by the UN's Security Council. Although the start of the bombardments inside Syria was preceded by efforts to craft a broad international coalition -- at meetings held in Great Britain (Nato), in France and in Saudi Arabia -- some of the US' European allies have expressly stated that the bombardments of Syrian targets lack a legal basis. Meanwhile, leading spokespersons of the US' Military Industrial Complex, such as army chief Dempsey and Defense Secretary Hagel, have speculated on an another imperial ground war, aimed at dislodging ISIS from Syria and Iraq.

To bring out the fact that the US' war on ISIS is controversial from the beginning, it is useful to look at the nature of Middle Eastern governments that have committed support to the US. For recruiting participants for its war plans and gaining logistical support and financial backing, the US in the first part of September, held a meeting in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, where 10 countries took part. In an editorial published in the US' most respectable daily on the very day the air strikes over Syria started, the coalition resulting from this Saudi meeting was described as 'the unlikely of coalitions'. This is because of the huge funding and other backing ISIS has been receiving from countries that joined the same Saudi

meeting. Yet only a few months back one had a hard time tracing reliable data in Western media or at internet on the history of ISIS' funding.

Some researchers of US think tanks, such as the Brookings Institution, were quoted as stating that ISIS has been mobilising support from Gulf states for years. Only recently has the world's mainstream press woken up to the fact that Wahhabi clerics and other backers have been voicing pro-ISIS propaganda on TV channels in Qatar, and that the Saudi and Kuwaiti government have not hindered, but allowed, ISIS sympathisers to publicly canvass for donors. Worse -- Turkey, Syria's neighbour, has been facilitating oil exports from areas ISIS controls. Indeed, one wonders for how long Western intel-



ligence agents active in the Middle East have been asleep.

US officials, pressed by these media reports, now argue that Gulf state governments should curb any funding of ISIS from their territories. But is the matter merely one of a lax attitude by Gulf states towards Sunni extremism? How come this issue is being addressed only now, whereas the rise of ISIS and other new al-Qaeda-type forces started way back in the middle of the previous decade, when US forces were battling against Sunni extremist groups in the context of their Iraq occupation? The point is of course that cooperation with Wahhabism has been built into the very strategy which the hegemonic Western powers -- first Great Britain, then the US -- have been pursuing for long. The UK did so from well before the founding of Saudi Arabia's Wahhabi kingdom (1932). Further, Western allies

such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar and other Gulf states may finally been seen to distance themselves from ISIS, but the reality is that the ideology and practices of these countries' rulers and their Wahhabi clergy closely resemble those of ISIS' top leadership! Just as in ISIS' 'Caliphate,' people who don't conform to the country's strict laws are regularly beheaded in Saudi Arabia. Just as in areas 'liberated' by ISIS in Iraq, numerous Sufi shrines have been demolished in the past. Saudi rulers have pledged to the US that they will help train fighters against ISIS, and have proposed that Saudi clerics inculcate these combatants with proper Islamic views. Yet is there any sharp line of demarcation between Saudi Wahhabism and ISIS's extremism?

Clearly, after over a decade of unsuccessful efforts to combat international 'terrorism,' US foreign policy is enmeshed in a web of self-inflicted internal contradictions. But then there may be other, hard reasons explaining the US decision to forge an alliance with cousins of ISIS' Sunni extremism. Qatar is probably the most telling example right now. Though Qatar's rulers profess their own variety of Wahhabism and have been enthusiastic supporters of Sunni fundamentalist forces operating throughout the Middle East for years, the tiny Gulf state's air base Al Udeid hosts the regional headquarters of CENTCOM, the command centre of US military personnel and hardware for the Middle East. Given the controversy over Qatar's role in helping ISIS get funding from people who have amassed oil wealth, its rulers have now been told to keep a low profile and tone down their

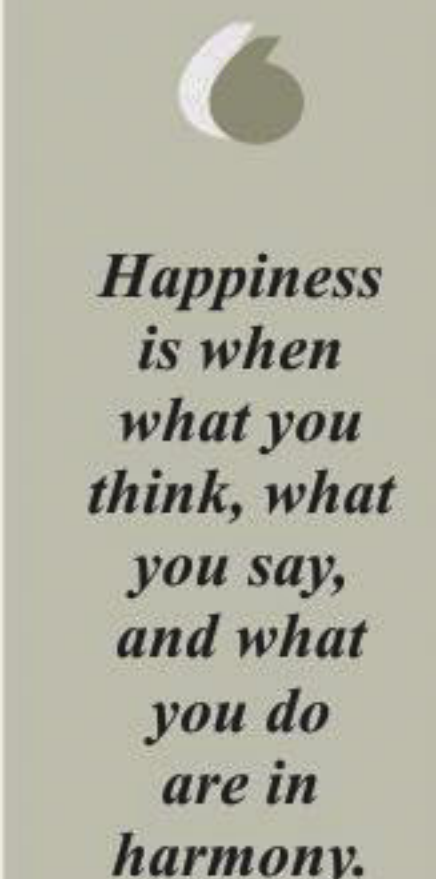
international role. Yet no incriminating revelations by US think tanks or press reports prevent the US from maintaining the closest possible arms trade-ties with the government of Qatar. In the middle of July last, US officials announced that negotiations had been concluded towards the sale of Patriot missiles, Apache helicopters, and other weapons, valued at \$11 billion! And this deal was stated to be the 'very biggest' arms trade deal of the US in 2014.

Some six years back, Obama was elected as their president on an anti-war ticket by the American people. Yet, being put under huge pressure from the side of the US' transatlanticised Military Industrial Complex, he has launched air strikes that are causing massive devastations and further disruption of life in both Syria and Iraq. Just a year ago, in September of 2013, Obama felt compelled to call-off air strikes planned against Assad's government in Syria. The evidence of the use of chemical weapons was shaky, and Russia mediated a sensible compromise. This time round, the relentless, nightly aerial bombardments are ostensibly directed against Assad's jihadi opponents, meaning that the barrel of Obama's gun is now pointing in the reverse direction.

The current air strikes were preceded by a publicity offensive that was well orchestrated, and a significant part of the public in the West believes the strikes are justified. Yet, as the above story on the new war alliance the US has crafted with Arab states indicates, by no stretch of imagination can it be argued that the current war systematically aims at weakening the international influence of intolerant forms of Islam. Already, critics argue that the air war only threatens to prolong, nay vastly increase, the suffering of people all over the Middle East, as did the wars initiated in 2001 and 2003 against the Taliban in Afghanistan and against Saddam's Iraq, respectively. The UN should immediately take the US to task and demand it halt its unjust war waged together with intolerant Wahhabi regimes.

The writer is a Researcher on Islam and religious tolerance, and author of *Questioning Globalized Militarism* (Tulika/Merlin, 2007). www.petercusters.nl

QUOTABLE Quote



Happiness is when what you think, what you say, and what you do are in harmony.

Mahatma Gandhi

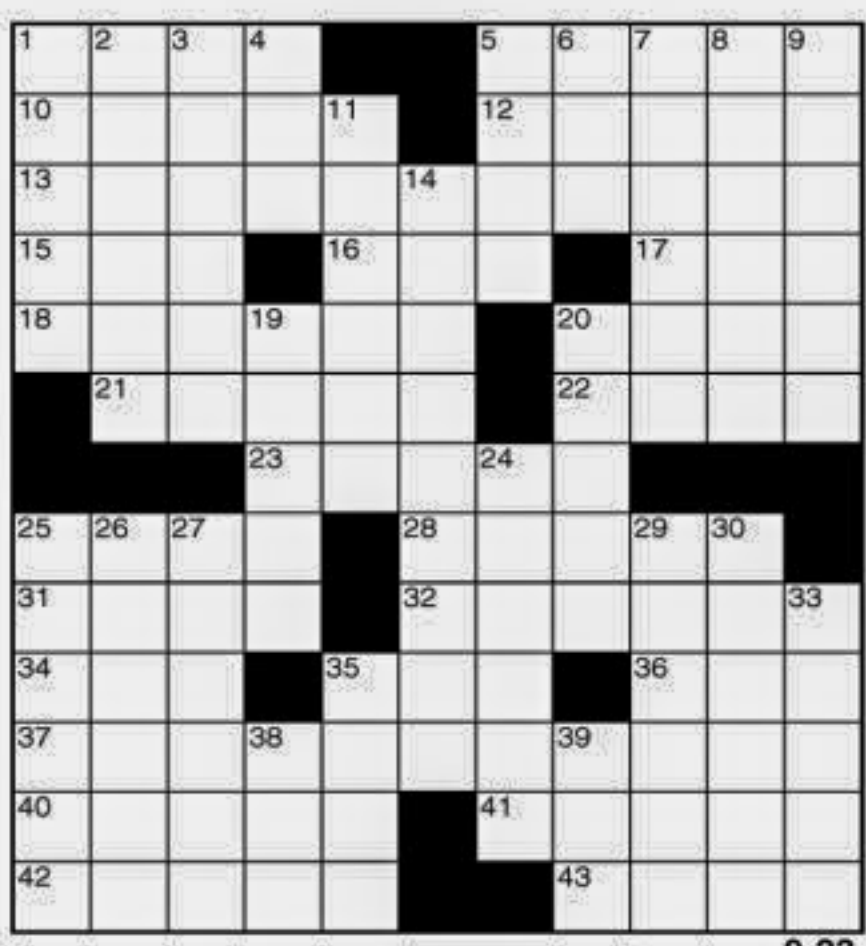
CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

ACROSS

- 1 TV's Lauer
- 5 Broadway failures
- 10 Portents
- 12 Ancient Greek colony
- 13 Homer hitters do it
- 15 Cool -- cucumber
- 16 Hosp sections
- 17 German cry
- 18 Bank, at times
- 20 Merriment
- 21 Shorthand pro
- 22 Reduced amount
- 23 Bart's mother
- 25 Con game
- 28 Delicate
- 31 Book unit
- 32 Ill will
- 34 Fury
- 35 Wallet bill
- 36 Earth-friendly prefix
- 37 Omit nothing
- 40 Houston player
- 41 Make blank
- 42 Sad sack
- 43 Picnic pests

DOWN

- 1 Ethical
- 2 Entertains
- 3 Lease signer
- 4 Blasting stuff
- 5 Little lies
- 6 Hawaii's Mauna --
- 7 Marked down
- 8 Components
- 9 Robe parts
- 11 Jungle queen
- 14 Perfect
- 19 "The Silence of the Lambs" director
- 20 Gather
- 24 Farm association
- 25 Nautilus shape
- 26 Tenor Enrico
- 27 Hollywood workers
- 29 Old supplier
- 30 Crop pest
- 33 Learning methods
- 35 Thunderbolt hurler
- 38 Three, in Torino
- 39 Coach Parseghian



CRYPTOQUOTE

PJXWYAW LHEHYHXOWX XEPSS SCFWX PYL
HYAQWPXW BQWPV CYWX, PX VOW IHYL
JSCIX CTV VOW APYLSW PYL JSCIX TZ VOW
JCYUHQW.

Yesterday's Cryptoquote: THE FIRST HALF OF OUR LIFE IS RUINED BY OUR PARENTS AND THE SECOND HALF BY OUR CHILDREN.
-- CLARENCE DARROW

Yesterday's answer

DRUG ABNER
ROSE REINER
ABOUT MEXICO
WORSHIP GEO
STYMIES MIN
ADS GAVE
SPARE KESEY
PAST CUT
ART MARGINS
DOOR ANTONIO
ELICIT IDEA
REDONE NICK
DETER GEES

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.

BEETLE BAILEY

by Mort Walker



HENRY

by Don Trachte

