

Free/r movement of human capital is a necessity

PLEASURE IS ALL MINE



SHAH HUSAIN IMAM

THEY are not thieves, robbers or pirates but desperate jobseekers ready to give service in exchange for something to live on. They have a right to livelihood in this wide world we call Mother Earth. The appellation of the 'earth mothering' us is perhaps no longer cited as affectionately as before by the abandoned.

We have been jarred by screaming headlines like mass graves of ill-fated jobseekers dug out and duly buried and shivering rickety fugitives recovered in deep jungles, many of them Bangladeshis. The other headlines were '555 Bangladeshis among rescued boat people', 'Bangladesh migrants adrift at sea for 36 hours', '54 days of torture and starvation at sea'.

The concern reflected on the subtexts reading 'Myanmar, Thailand and Malaysia turning away boat people' with a common note of urging for a regional summit to address the issue head on. Let the urgency not slip out through the outpourings of palliative rhetoric creating a false sense of something being done about it after all.

Some European littoral states of Mediterranean Sea, considered favourite destinations by fortune-seekers, were also turning away the incoming trawlers or boats brimming with men, women and children, not even left with their last ounce of energy. As if some pariahs are floating close to their sacrosanct shores.

Our front page serial on slave trade creating a stir, the ANN network picked up from it and disseminated the shocking and region-wide relevant accounts of abandoned jobseekers, dead or alive.

Now is the right time to implore the world at large to find a sustainable solution to illegal migration which far outstrips

legal migration. Whipped by poverty and hunger in jobless circumstances, people become so gullible that even a dangerous misadventure has a tantalising romantic aura about it. This is fully exploited by the cross border rackets. Governments' agencies have known this but allowed themselves to be outsmarted in the long coastlines topped up by palm-greasing.

But are they to be solely blamed? The great walls raised by the recipient countries by bristling fences along their borders and flotilla of ships keeping at bay migrants from reaching their shores are, as it were, costing their eyes out of their heads. They incur huge expenditure in maintaining such flogging devices and the infrastructure to ward off the intrusion of what they term illegal migrants. They find it hard to discriminate between fishing boats and migrant carrying trawlers like they see in such attempted migration a whiff of imported extremism. Little do they realise that by a perpetuation of poverty in which they are being unwitting abettors they may well be actually nurturing militancy.

You add up the UNHCR costs for rehabilitation of the refugees and the various aid giving largesse, and you have the full picture of the debit side. So we ask for a cost benefit ratio to be drawn between relaxing restrictions on migrations and the benefits of harnessing the human capital of the populous countries in those with limited population or a negative growth in the populace.

The migration is the function of demand and supply as assessed by countries at a given point in time. They have to make projections for the future and accommodate the surplus labour from developing countries. It can all be choreographed with collective wisdom and knowledge to meet each other's development goals with a human face.

The world goes head over heels over free movement of financial capital but when it comes to free movement of human capital it sulks, cringes as if a physical invasion is in the offing.

We no longer get to hear about the need for a convention on free movement of human capital/labour which as far as one can remember had been put on the table nearly a decade ago but never figuring in

rights discourses all these years. This is a great pity and amounts to gross negligence of an agenda that even has not been reincarnated in the face of pressing circumstances surrounding the issue of migration of virtual economic refugees. This need is even further reinforced by the challenges of climate change staring in the face of humanity with none of the countries being excluded from the onrushing phenomenon.

This is in spite of a general human rights instrument embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948. This instrument provides that everyone has a right to a standard of living adequate for health and well-being of himself and his family, including: food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.

Were these words meant to be frozen in cold print and not lived up to?

The writer is Associate Editor, The Daily Star.



PHOTO: AFP

"TARGETING FREE THINKERS"

A branding battle in the world of radicalism

HASSAN MNEIMNEH

IN just over two years, Bangladesh has lost five dynamic, assertive, free thinkers to gruesome acts of deliberate violence. Ananta Bijoy Das joined the ranks of Oyasiquir Rahman, Avijit Roy, Professor Shafiqul Islam, and Ahmed Rajib Haider, in paying the ultimate price for practicing their universally recognised rights to freedom of thought and freedom of speech. Bangladesh mourns them, so does the world, in the shared conviction that the value of liberty for which they have fallen is the foundation of society, progress, and civilisation. The murderers may be ignorant pawns dispatched to terminate the lives of thinkers whose writings they may never have seen. Their masters, however, are calculating minds that have long departed from any adherence to shared universal values. Their crimes, in Bangladesh and elsewhere, are part of a conversation and a competition within their own world of radicalism. Understanding the extent of their divergence with the rest of the world is crucial in order to contain, and ultimately reverse, the looming danger.

The history of today's radicalism is that of modernity misfiring. Where it was meant to foster freedom and progress, it engendered a call for religious regimentation. By challenging the world's superpower, al-Qaeda (AQ) stood as the flag-bearer of this international radical fight. From Afghanistan to Algeria, Iraq to Yemen, franchises were authorised with the dystopian illusion that the world economy would be toppled, the international politi-

cal system destroyed, and a totalitarian order would be erected. It was evidently not meant to be. Instead the world fought back, fragmenting AQ's core, and forcing its subsidiaries to seek new venues.

One of them, the Iraq franchise, effectively sought to commit matricide. The mother organisation seemed ready to be inherited; it had lost its founding father, Osama Bin Ladin, and his second-in-command, Ayman al-Zawahiri, a hesitant leader, lacked the charisma and traction of his predecessor. Thus was born the claim of a caliphate, a global lordship, from Iraq. With military prowess, social media savvy, and Hollywood-style production quality for its prolific and ascendingly cruel releases, the new "Islamic State" in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) was a potent contender, claiming the allegiance of many factions and individuals across the AQ universe. To stop the bleeding with much fanfare, AQ proclaimed a new, presumably major, franchise, consolidating assets close to Zawahiri's elusive headquarters in Pakistan: al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS). Bangladesh, the subject of previous reflections by Zawahiri, was presented as an integral part.

However, while ISIS expanded and captured the headlines of world media, the impact of AQIS remained virtually nil. In an endeavour in which the appearance of success is a considerable part of the achievement of success, AQ was thus at a distinct disadvantage. AQ and ISIS represent two different methodological models in the pursuit of the radical dystopia. AQ seeks a revolution, while ISIS is based on conquest. The allure of ISIS, sapping away self-radicalised militants, deprives AQIS

from implementing its cell-based web approach in preparation for local or national takeover.

For AQ, in general, and AQIS in particular, ISIS constitutes a severe operational and methodological challenge. What Bangladesh has witnessed over the past months is AQ's best effort to articulate an exit strategy out of the impasse.

The 2013 Shahbag protests in Dhaka revealed the power of a mostly-urban, mostly-young, deeply secular popular force under-represented in party politics. It also revealed, in the form of the Hefazat counter protests, the existence of cultural fault lines in the nation, with opposing sensitivities displayed against blasphemy and assaults on the right of free expression. The murder of Ahmed Rajib Haider represents the culmination of a process of "distance radicalisation" through which local militants assimilate and practice the radical values system — one with no tolerance for dissent and in which human life is expendable.

Capitalising on the polarising effects of the *Charlie Hebdo* cartoons and murders, AQIS has found its calling in seeking to be branded the defender of the Prophet against any blasphemy. Recognising the "achievements" of Bangladeshi grassroots radicalism, AQIS has adopted its actions as a template. The murders, in relatively quick succession of Oyasiquir Rahman, Avijit Roy, and Ananta Bijoy Das, represent AQIS's embrace of the Bangladeshi militants and their assimilation into its network. With the killings, AQIS gains subject matter for its international image crafting — providing AQ with some hope to slow its erosion towards ISIS — while establishing local

presence in Bangladesh in line with its original revolution approach.

In addition to such primary operational objectives, AQIS expects that the defiant reactions from free speech advocates will display some excess that may contribute to characterising the demarcation line in Bangladesh is one between Islam and secularism, or Islam and atheism — a sought-after presentation that has so far eluded the proponents of radicalism in this deeply pious deeply secular nation.

Religious teachings can be excerpted and reconfigured to justify many actions. The murder of Ananta Bijoy Das, and many before him, may be portrayed as anathema to religious precepts by most, but could be presented as conformation to a version of them by some. This would be an ill-directed debate. Bangladesh is a country of law with a social contract that enshrines the fundamental rights to life, freedom of thought, and freedom of expression. While also constituting an assault against these universal values and rights, the AQIS murders are committed primarily for the "street cred" that AQ has been lacking in its new radical neighbourhood.

The Bangladesh authorities will evidently pursue all venues to apprehend and punish the perpetrators. Bangladeshi civil society, and in particular its active blogosphere, ought to ensure, through measured and principled responses, to deny radicalism any insidious gain from its crimes.

The writer is Principal, Middle East Alternatives, Washington DC. Special to The Daily Star.

LAUGHTER, The Best Medicine

HUMOROUSLY YOURS



NAVEED MAHBUB

WHO said we in Bangladesh don't laugh? Just watch a lady crossing the street and tripping over the divider. There is nothing more entertaining to us than the misfortune of our fellow beings.

So as to spare the likes of this poor lady, I choose to be a comedian, to provide a conscious, not accidental, stimulus for laughter.

"So you're a comedian, huh? Tell me a joke!"

I answer: "You're a doctor, right? Perform a vasectomy operation right now!"

In this duel, I lose hands down and comply, happily. Such is the life of a comedian, not too dissimilar to that of a commando, ready to be deployed anytime and anywhere with no notice. Even a police officer who pulls me over to check my car papers ends up asking, "Can you cheer us up for five minutes? We're having a rough day." I am a cheerleader right then and there, ending up with making a few more friends in uniform.

So, life continues as usual. "Naveed, please tell one joke's!"

Dude! One joke or two joke's? Decide! But I am polite. I answer: "Sure! I'll tell you a joke's! if you treat me to a cake's! and a coke's!"

Fun life? You bet. But not without its occupational hazards. When I ask a question I get more questions than an answer. "What? Are you serious or are you joking?" A chicken bone stuck in my throat at a party followed by my frantic gestures for help is met with laughter and applause till I turn blue, whereby I am finally rewarded with the Heimlich.

But I am serious about being funny (unlike some who are comically serious) despite many calling me a 'joker' engaged in 'jokery'. I remain 'on' every waking hour, observing for material and delivering on demand. It is this drive that gets me to win the title of Best Male Comedian at the 2007 Las Vegas Comedy Festival. I break the cliché, "What happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas" and soon after move from the US back to Bangladesh to spread the laughs.

However, telling a joke here is somewhat like blogging (as we have to come to define it), as one has to constantly look over the shoulder.

So, what really IS comedy? Well, it certainly is NOT about telling jokey jokes. It is based on facts. Add time to tragedy (ok, and some good jokes too) and you get comedy. Finally, comedy is funny, when the audience relates to it.

And thus, the President's speech at the convocation of Northern University is etched in history. He moves aside the script and speaks from his heart about his personal life, health, wife and the blanket of security around him. Standing behind him, the formidable SSF officer breaks into a smile and the Air Force officer cracks up completely. The audience, starting from the top brass to the students, are rolling on the floor. This is the essence of connecting with the audience, when the audience knows that the speaker is with them and not the script. Even the demigod is thus humanised.

I am sure the master of ceremonies, for once, didn't have to plead the audience with "Can you please clap?" but instead, for the sake of ending the program on time, with "Can you please hold your applause?"

So, the next time you see someone delivering humour, just take it all at face value and laugh it out. Otherwise remember, thinking too seriously is injurious to the smile.

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

QUOTE

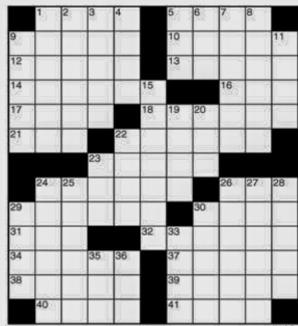
Why shouldn't we earn a livelihood? Don't we have hands, feet or intelligence? What do we lack? If we can do our husband's household chores, can we not use the same labour to work independently?

Rokeya Sakhawat Hussain

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
- Abound
 - Formal agreement
 - Monte-
 - Set off
 - Bitter
 - Like some eclipses
 - Rink footwear
 - Take advantage of
 - Musical sound
 - Cochise, for one
 - Put a stop to
 - Pertly sarcastic
 - Accounting check
 - Ranch pen
 - Puppy sound
 - Artistic California town
 - Billionth: Prefix
 - Coffee dispenser
 - Open-back footwear
 - Flag features
 - Foot connection
 - Arrangement
 - Take the wheel
 - Turn down
 - Storage site

- DOWN**
- Add
 - Gofer's job
 - Superior group
 - Style
 - Chum
 - "The Simpsons" clerk
 - Vancouver player
 - Like pulp novels
 - Social group
 - Pine or palm
 - Beach footwear
 - Sandbox toy
 - Museum topic
 - Certain
 - Sleeve filler
 - Hauled
 - Decorative
 - New York player
 - Not straight
 - Tricky puzzle
 - Use foul language
 - Last inning, usually
 - Highlands girl
 - Sprint
 - Secret agent



Yesterday's answer

BUSY CRAPS
ENTER RIVET
ACUTE ABATE
SOP MLB LIP
TOOTOO LOTS
PROVOLONE
RAKES
JARLSBERG
RULE EASEUP
ANT PEN LIE
NEATO ORATE
TAROT NATAL
OUSTS HERS

CRYPTOQUOTE
ZQRYHCHXA Z VFA NZT MD SLD FXKT
FGGFCSYXHST Z LYNZX DEDC LZO SF
QLFFOD Z CDKZSHD.
- NFCVDQZH OHDZAK

YESTERDAY'S CRYPTOQUOTE: A TRUE CONSERVATIONIST IS A MAN WHO KNOWS THAT THE WORLD IS NOT GIVEN BY HIS FATHERS, BUT BORROWED FROM HIS CHILDREN.
- J.J. AUDUBON

A XYDLBAXR 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