

Fuelling the fire over Al Aqsa



PHOTO: AFP

FROM A BYSTANDER



MAHMOOD HASAN

DEATH is everywhere - in Jerusalem, West Bank and Gaza. Everyday young Palestinian men, allegedly caught hurling stones at the other side, are being shot dead by the Israeli Defence Force (IDF). Since October 1, 2015, 56 Palestinians have been shot dead by Israeli forces while 1,900 Palestinians, including 391 children, have been injured. Eight Israelis have been killed from stab injuries.

It all started with Israel trying to change the "status quo" of the Al Aqsa Mosque (Haram al-Sharif) - the third holiest site for Muslims, after Makkah and Madina, situated within the walled city of Jerusalem. The Jews, who call it Temple Mount or Har Ha-Bayit in Hebrew, also consider this site to be sacred to their beliefs.

During the Ottoman Empire, Jews were allowed to visit Temple Mount but were not allowed to pray there. Jews could only pray at the Western Wall, also known as the Wailing Wall but not enter the holy site. Thus a status quo was initiated.

When Israel occupied Jerusalem in 1967, the status quo was renegotiated and the Jerusalem Islamic Waqf, which was under the Jordanian Ministry of Sacred Properties, was entrusted to administer the Mosque.

Since 1967, Israel has repeatedly tried to change the delicate "status quo" that had existed for centuries. Jewish zealots claim that Haram Al-Sharif was built on the site of a Jewish temple that Romans destroyed centuries ago. Radical Jews apparently want to replace the Mosque by building a synagogue in its place. These reported attempts by Israel to forcefully change the "status quo" have fuelled violence between Palestine and Israel.

On July 26, 2015, the Israeli police forcefully entered the Mosque and 19 mosque security guards were injured in the ensuing clash. Israel then imposed restrictions on women (*mourabitoun*) and men (*mourabitat*) under the age of 30, who probably consider themselves to be defenders of the 'noble sanctuary', from entering the Mosque compound. Entry of other Muslim worshippers into the Mosque compound has since been restricted by Israeli police.

In mid-September 2015, Israeli police escorted dozens of radical Jews into the holy site to mark the beginning of the Jewish New Year, thus sparking off the current round of violence.

The first Intifada (Palestinian uprising) lasted from 1987 till the signing of the Oslo Accord in 1993. In 2000, when Israeli Opposition leader Ariel Sharon forcefully entered the Haram al-Sharif, the second Intifada was triggered, lasting until 2005. Both Intifadas were led by

Palestinian political parties.

But now it is a leaderless uprising. Young Palestinians have used knives and sharp weapons to attack Jewish settlers. They have apparently acted individually and not under any instruction or in any coordinated manner. They have not used firearms or bombs, as was seen in earlier clashes. None of the mainstream Palestinian parties - Fatah, Hamas or Popular Front for Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) - is involved in the current spate of violence. Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas has refused to condemn the violence and urged protesters to remain peaceful.

As expected, the IDF freely used heavy weapons to shoot down attackers and suspects. As fear gripped Jewish settlers, checkpoints sprung in the city to curb the movement of the Palestinian people.

What is exceptional is that this young generation of Palestinians has only seen occupation, brutal killings, systematic destruction of Palestinian homes, illegal Jewish settlements and Israel's dehumanising treatment of Palestinians. Unemployment and poverty is their constant companion. This generation

scale down the hostilities. US Secretary of State John Kerry met Netanyahu in Berlin on October 22. Kerry also met Abbas and King Abdullah in Amman on October 24. Abbas told Kerry that Israel must maintain the "status quo" so that peace can be ensured. Thus, there seems to be no sign of a break in the ensuing violence.

All this seems to be a result of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's new coalition cabinet that was formed in May 2015. Netanyahu's Likud Party leads a coalition of four extreme rightwing parties - Kulanu, the Jewish Home, Shas and United Torah Judaism. Netanyahu is in the clutches of these ultra-Zionist lobbies, as he has a precarious majority of 61 out of 120 seats in the Knesset.

Netanyahu himself is a hardliner and believes in complete Israeli sovereignty over East Jerusalem, including the Al Aqsa Mosque. He has openly been funding some of the Jewish extremist groups, such as the Settlers Movement and Temple Institute, whose main aim is to demolish the Al Aqsa Mosque and build a synagogue there. As long as Netanyahu continues to patronise these Jewish fanatics

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knows that they have nothing much to lose except their lives. They are also deeply frustrated about the fact that their leaders have failed to achieve the state of Palestine, even after 22 years of negotiations. The older generations of Palestinian leaders seem alienated from the younger ones.

On the diplomatic front, on October 16, at Jordan's request, the UN Security Council met to discuss the spiralling violence. While Secretary General Ban Ki-moon called for restraint, the French proposal to deploy monitors at the holy site was rejected by Israel.

On October 21, Ban Ki-moon visited Jerusalem and Ramallah to meet Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas. Both Abbas and Netanyahu accused each other for the escalating violence with diametrically opposed narratives. Neither appeared ready to

over the "status" of the Mosque complex, the current confrontation and violence will continue.

The worry is that the current wave of violence can turn into a devastating religious confrontation. If that happens, it will make way for ISIS, from neighbouring Syria, to gain a foothold in the otherwise secular Palestine and cause havoc, thus creating new complications in the Middle East region.

Palestinian Intifada is an ongoing process. Palestinians have never accepted the occupation of their homeland by Israeli forces. There has never been a period of peace, only lulls; and so the Palestinian resistance and struggle goes on. Israel's attempt to change the "status quo" of the Al Aqsa is a dangerous act; one that can lead to a full-scale Intifada.

The writer is former ambassador and secretary.

THIN IS beautiful?

SHIFTING IMAGES



MILIA ALI

RECENTLY a friend invited me to a fashion show in aid of a worthwhile charity. The show and its designers will remain unnamed since they are irrelevant to this column. I am not much of a fashion buff - in fact, I am quite clueless about the latest trends in clothes and accessories. This is not to say that I do not admire well dressed men and women - it's just that early on in life I realised that I didn't have a natural flair for fashion and wisely chose to dress with conservative caution, rather than stylish adventure!

Since the show was of detached interest to me, I paid little attention to the sartorial elements. However, I marvelled at the effortless grace with which the women (and some men) exhibited the latest styles. What struck me most was the fact that none of the female models could have weighed more than a 100 lbs. They strutted down the runway with their nearly invisible bodies carrying their chic outfits, as if their body frames served as hangers.

As I watched the gaunt women perform the catwalk, I recalled an article that I recently read about the

look slender and sleek in business suits since they are expected to be agile, aggressive and quick on their feet. Unfortunately, the trend has gripped the taste and imagination of teenage populations in many countries. Youngsters today are conditioned into believing that having a model-like body is one of the prerequisites of beauty and success. Consequently, more and more young people are following punishing exercise regimes and lean diets. Anorexia is on the rise - statistics reveal that the number of youngsters hospitalised in the UK with eating disorders has doubled in the last three years.

This was not always the case. If we look back at the heady days of the past, beauties such as Hollywood's Marilyn Monroe and Elizabeth Taylor, Bollywood's Madhubala, Bengal's Suchitra Sen, and even model Cindy Crawford, look positively curvaceous compared to the sylphs of today. And they are no less attractive.

The prime culprits in projecting the "thin is beautiful" image are the advertisers. They appeal to women's insecurities in hopes of selling them the idea that buying the advertised clothes and accessories will magically transform them into nymphs from fairy tales. One must admit that the models look seductive and sensuous with their carefully crafted clothing and accessories, not to mention the



anxiety and pain that models go through to meet the stringent standards of the fashion industry. Model agencies invariably scout for tall, lean and angular "objects of desire". And during the course of employment, they are ruthlessly unforgiving if the needle on the weighing scale moves up even a fraction. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the ideal body shape used as a starting point for a fashion collection is one that may be on the brink of starvation.

The question is: "Why do modern designers use models that are stick thin and 6 feet tall, when the average woman is curvy and is only about 5 feet 3 inches or even shorter?" In the 60s and 70s, male designers dominated the fashion industry and one could conveniently blame them for being misogynists. But today, scores of talented women designers and ateliers have entered the fashion market. Yet, the physical metrics applied to female models have hardly shifted.

In fact, the "thin is beautiful" syndrome has permeated so deeply into the modern psyche that thinness is also equated with success. Many of us think that people who are thin have not only greater control over their eating regimen but also have a greater command over other aspects of life. Even the business world seems to be attaching preference to people who

choreographed settings. But the truth is that in real life, one can seldom live and look that way.

This realisation seems to be gradually sinking in and markets are responding to the fact that the bulk of consumers don't fit the profile of the emaciated models on display. Neither do the exotic fashions suit the tastes of the hordes of women and men who live "normal" lives. Consequently, fashion magazines are catering to the needs of ordinary mortals who want to dress elegantly but not outrageously. Some designers are tapping into this hitherto unexploited clothing market for average-sized women and men. But, perceptions take a long time to change. Meanwhile, we must accept the fact that society puts a higher premium on looks and careers, rather than a contented and well-rounded (pun intended) life.

As you may have guessed, I did not bring back an enhanced fashion sense from the fashion show. However, it made me realise the sad truth that even after 100 years of struggling for female emancipation, a woman's worth is still being measured by how much (or how little) physical space she occupies on this earth!

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QUOTABLE Quote

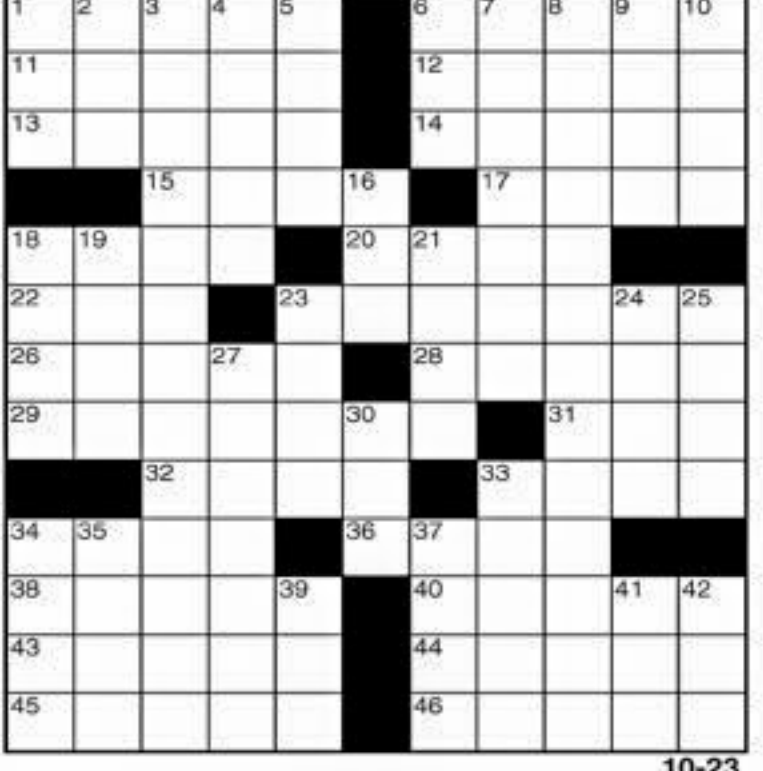


GHALIB

Whoever can't see the whole in every part plays at blind man's bluff

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- | ACROSS | DOWN |
|--------------------------|------------------------|
| 1 Used a broom | 1 Place for a mud bath |
| 6 Used a sponge | 2 Expert, in slang |
| 11 Irritated state | 3 Riding skill |
| 12 Ano start | 4 Contented sounds |
| 13 Blue hue | 5 Abound |
| 14 Police ID | 6 Fly catcher |
| 15 Columnist Bombeck | 7 Like many a knight |
| 17 Old autos | 8 Walking skill |
| 18 Bother | 9 Therefore |
| 20 Loafers | 10 Bucks' mates |
| 22 Curator's concern | 16 Tad's dad |
| 23 South Africa neighbor | 18 FDR pooch |
| 26 Slow tempo | 19 River of Russia |
| 28 Fielder's goof | 21 Exploits |
| 29 Fake names | 23 Misplaced |
| 31 Daiquiri need | 24 Pawn |
| 32 Aardvark's lunch | 25 Valuable rocks |
| 33 Talks and talks | 27 Rap style |
| 34 Early video game | 30 Twisty turn |
| 36 Checkout act | 33 Bulldog fan |
| 38 Dublin natives | 34 Snowman prop |
| 40 Suspect's story | 35 Test type |
| 43 Art class staple | 37 Grant of films |
| 44 Out of bed | 39 Brood watcher |
| 45 Violinist Mischa | 41 Pollen collector |
| 46 Saudi Arabia neighbor | 42 Tavern |



YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

WEST STEP IN
ARCH CANINE
FIRE ATTEND
TEAMSTER
WEE RESTS
MALTA SEPIA
ELI REP
SANDS AMASS
ANGEL CAW
GOL ES LAW
MALAWI HILLO
ABIDE INTO
DETERS EGOS

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker



BABY BLUES by Kirkman & Scott

