



PHOTO: REUTERS

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF SOLIDARITY WITH THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE

A primal scream for freedom



AMITAVA KAR

WHILE paying lip-service to a two-state solution—agreed upon in principle by the government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority in 2007—and to a currently non-existent diplomatic process, Israel is practising an approach that can be, at the most, described as “conflict management.”

And the Palestinian attacks, carried out mostly without the operational support of any Palestinian movement, seem born of a growing frustration among young Palestinians, disillusioned by the failure of leaders of both sides to offer any prospect of ending Israel’s 48-year occupation of the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza.

The Palestinian president, Mahmoud Abbas, has become a bystander, neither condemning nor endorsing the attacks while Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu’s position, in the words of one other than the US president Obama, “has so many caveats, so many conditions that it is not realistic to think that those conditions would be met at any time in the near future.”

Four decades ago Israel made the fateful decision to choose expansion over a solution, rebuffing a full peace treaty offered by Egypt in return for evacuation from the occupied Egyptian Sinai, where Israel was launching extensive settlement programmes. And that has been a regular pattern—to disregard whatever agreement is in place, while Hamas observes it—as Israel has officially recognised—until a sharp increase in Israeli violence elicits a Hamas response, followed by even fiercer brutality by the self-described “most moral army in the world.”

Israeli accusations of Palestinian incitement to violence contain some truth, with some young Palestinians taking inspiration from calls to extremism. But we might ask why those calls have landed on such impressionable ears. Human rights lawyer Raji Sourani, who has remained in Gaza through years of Israeli brutality and terror, reported that a lot of Palestinians preferred death to living a life devoid of dignity and pride. “The

institutionalised disregard for Palestinian life in the West helps explain not only why Palestinians resort to violence,” Middle East analyst Mouin Rabbani said, “but also Israel’s latest assault on the Gaza Strip.”

There has never been a war between Israel and Palestinian—it’s always a top military power unleashing massive firepower against an occupied Palestinian population. For instance, no Israeli civilians were killed by Hamas in 2013 or 2014 before Israel Defence Forces launched Operation Protective Edge in the Hamas-governed Gaza Strip last July in response to the killing of three Israeli teenagers. On August 26, 2014, Israel and the Palestinian Authority both accepted a cease-fire agreement after a 50-day Israeli assault on Gaza that left 2,100 Palestinians dead and vast landscapes of destruction behind. Sixty six Israeli soldiers, six Israeli civilians, and a foreign worker were also killed. The great disparity between the casualties on the two sides once again shows the disproportionate action of the Israeli military.

By attacking civilians in their homes, bombing hospitals, schools and infrastructure, Israel gave up the principle of attacking only military targets. If Hamas’ rocket salvos which caused only one death violate international law, in what terms can we describe the Israeli violence?

For how much longer is the status quo tenable? An offensive every two or three years or an escalation, sometimes called “mowing the lawn” in Israeli parlance, can hardly be called a strategy. By adopting policies that have turned the country into one that is despised and feared, Israel is marching blindly towards moral deterioration and possible ultimate destruction.

“Contrary to what Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu believes, the main existential threat facing the country is not a nuclear-armed Iran,” Shlomo Ben-Ami, a former Israeli foreign minister, writes. “The real peril is to be found at home: the corrosive effect of the Palestinian problem on Israel’s international standing.”

The perpetual denial of the rights of the Palestinians, many believe, is the most important factor in fuelling radicalisation in the West and elsewhere. In both Iraq and Libya, Western military intervention and the

overthrow of dictatorial regimes resulted in complete chaos. Irish journalist and author Patrick Cockburn rightly points out that Western military intervention destroyed the vision of national unity that could hold feuding tribes and religious sects together. Extremism has rushed into the void, providing many young men with a sense of identity, purpose and vision. Ziauddin Sardar, the Pakistan-born, London-based scholar writes in *The Guardian*, “Extremism is not only a religious issue; it is also a product of politics. And tackling extremism requires changing politics as much as changing religious outlook.”

The US and British foreign policy have a direct bearing on nurturing extremism. The suffering of the Palestinians, the occupation of Iraq, the byproducts of the “war on terror” are not amenable to lofty speeches or “deprogramming” techniques.

In his famous speech in Cairo in June 2009, Obama talked in powerful terms about the humiliation and repression of the Palestinian people, raising hope of his administration playing a more active role in the Palestinian issue. The rhetoric has not turned into action. Instead, we have seen a dramatic escalation in Israeli aggression and the establishment of an increasing number of new Jewish settlements in the occupied territories, displacing thousands of more Palestinians from their homes.

Will US policy change? It’s not impossible. For some years there has been a good basis for public demands that Washington observe its own law that requires that “no security assistance may be provided to any country the government of which engages in a consistent pattern of gross violations of internationally recognized human rights.”

No conversation on “sustainable peace” can be meaningful without addressing the issue of Palestine. The raising of the Palestinian flag at the UN this September offers hope.

“Palestine belongs to the Arabs in the same sense that England belongs to the English or France to the French,” Gandhi observed.

The writer is a member of the Editorial Team at *The Daily Star*.

Zaglul Ahmed Chowdhury
A man of passion

MIR LUTFUL KABIR SAADI

It is hard to believe that a year has gone by since Zaglul bhai passed away. A distinguished journalist and columnist, Zaglul Ahmed Chowdhury died in a road accident in the city’s Karwan Bazar area on November 29, 2014 while he was on his way to a programme on ATN. He was former Chief Editor of state-run news agency *Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha (BSS)* and also an international affairs analyst.

I was closely associated with Zaglul bhai as a member of the Overseas Correspondents Association of Bangladesh (OCAB). He served in many capacities at this prestigious journalists’ organisation. Zaglul bhai was among the longest serving journalists in BSS where he worked as a diplomatic correspondent, special correspondent, head of the parliamentary team, foreign editor, and in-charge of the human rights desk. He also served as Managing Director of BSS. At the time of his demise he was working with *The Financial Express* as Consulting Editor.

He was connected with several prominent foreign media outlets such as *TIME* magazine, *JIJI Press of Japan*, *Times of India*, *Qatar News Agency* and *ABC News*. He authored a number of books, including *Bangladesh’s Relations with India, Myanmar and Nepal: The Impact on Citizens and Development and Global Flashpoint: South Asia and Middle East*.

All corners of society mourned the tragic death of Zaglul bhai. A huge number of people attended his *namaze janaza* held at the Banani Jame Masjid and also joined the *dua mahfil* held at the Gulshan Central Mosque. The cabinet adopted obituary reference on his death in its weekly meeting held at Bangladesh Secretariat with the Prime Minister in the chair. The government also suspended the operation of Mohona Hospital on Green Road in Dhaka for running without license where Zaglul bhai was taken following his accident but was not given proper treatment. The government formed a five-member committee to investigate the road crash that killed him.

The probe body headed by Mashiar Rahman, director (administration) of Bangladesh Road Transport Authority, investigated the incident. The probe report suggested that reckless driving and negligence of duties by the police and doctors were responsible for the untimely death of Zaglul bhai.

The report said that the driver and helper of the bus forced

him to get down at Sonargaon intersection which is not a bus stop. As soon as he put his foot on the road, the driver hit the gear abruptly. He fell and was seriously injured as a result, the report added. It further stated that on-duty traffic police requested pedestrians to take him to the hospital instead of taking him there themselves. No officials from nearby Kalabagan Police Station reached the spot on time.

The probe report pointed out that a number of onlookers took him to nearby Mohona Hospital (which has no government approval) where there were no on-duty doctors at its emergency unit. A doctor at the hospital’s operation theatre wasted around thirty minutes in the name of diagnosis, though the hospital did not have the necessary treatment facilities. They eventually sent him to Comfort Hospital on Green Road with an oxygen mask, as the doctor claimed the victim was alive at 8:41pm. However, doctors at the ICU at Comfort Hospital claimed that Chowdhury was already dead when he was brought to them.



Zaglul Ahmed Chowdhury

The report also came up with a 15-point recommendation to avoid similar accidents in the future. The recommendations include arranging adequate bus stops and law enforcers’ strict monitoring of traffic.

Zaglul bhai’s death was due to reckless acts by the driver who should be sanctioned the highest form of punishment.

Zaglul bhai was a courageous person and a resourceful writer. He used to write on current international issues and on subjects of interest to readers. He was known as an analyst on South Asian affairs. He always kept himself updated with the activities in and around South Asia and other parts of the globe. Throughout his long career in journalism, Zaglul bhai maintained impartiality in his conduct and profession. He always tried his best to adhere to the ethics of journalism, which is a quality very few possess. His death, no doubt, was a serious blow to the world of journalism. May his soul rest in eternal peace.

The writer is former acting president, Overseas Correspondents Association of Bangladesh (OCAB) and Fellow, 21st Century Trust, UK.

BEETLE BAILEY

by Mort Walker



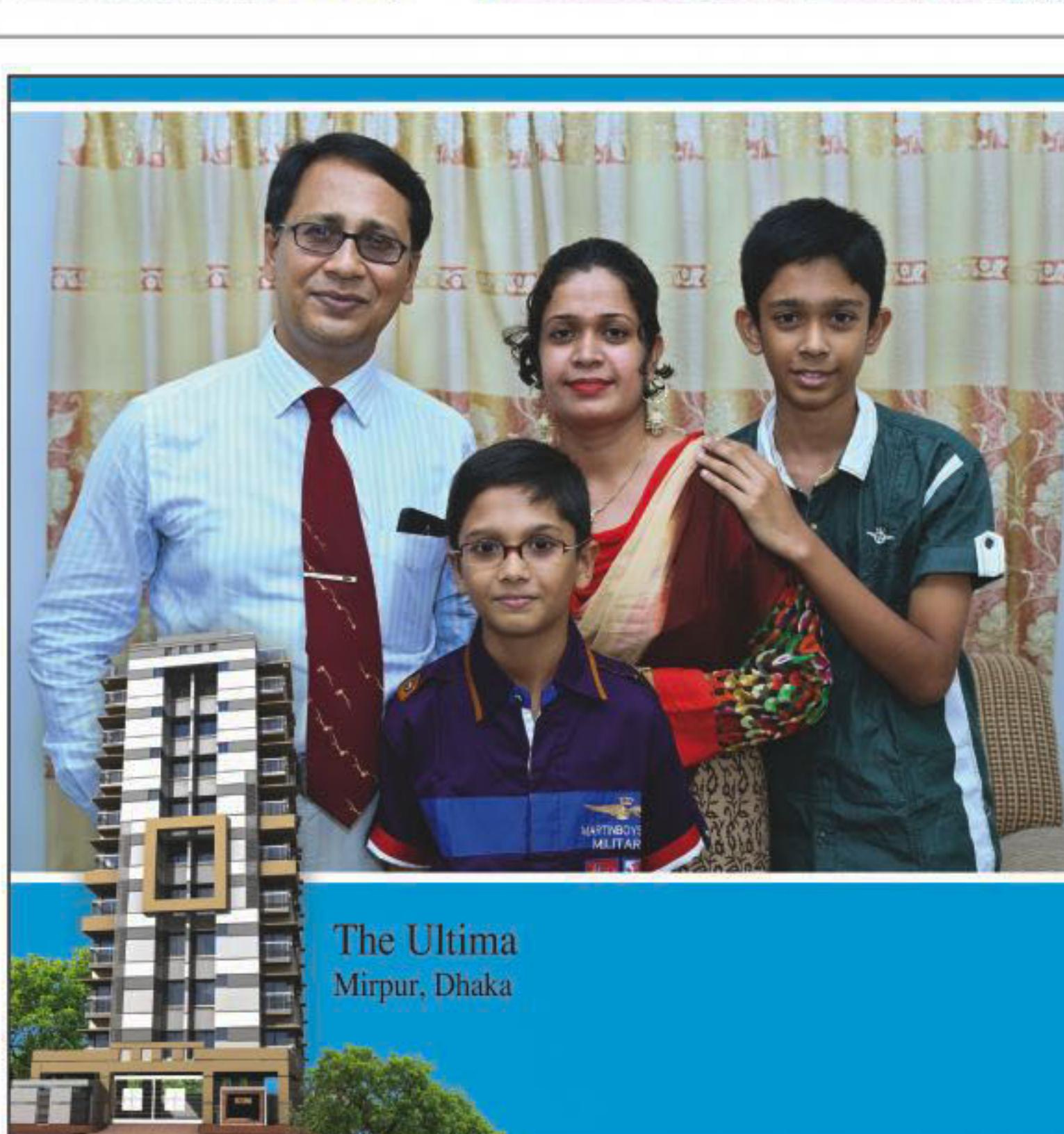
CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

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