

Unity over Division



AMITAVA KAR

SADIQ Khan's strength is that he exemplifies the city he is set to run as its mayor. "I'm a Londoner, I'm European, I'm British, I'm English, I'm of

Islamic faith, of Asian origin, of Pakistani heritage, a dad, a husband," he said in a recent interview with *The New York Times*. He was born in South London, to immigrants from Pakistan, and grew up in a public-housing project. His father drove a bus, and his mother was a seamstress.

While his Conservative opponent Zac Goldsmith was busy exploiting racial and cultural stereotypes about Muslims through a dog whistle campaign, Sadiq's campaign focused on bread-and-butter issues like the cost of housing and transportation. In the end, the nasty campaign of Goldsmith hit a solid wall and Londoners told him to get lost. There is a limit to how far bigotry can go to win popular votes. In his acceptance speech, Khan said that he was "proud that London has today chosen hope over fear and unity over division."

The 45-year-old new mayor has enough credentials for the job. A human rights lawyer by profession, he was elected to Parliament in 2005, appointed Parliamentary Under-Secretary Communities and Local Government in 2008, and Secretary of State for Transport—a cabinet position—in 2009 under Labour Prime Minister, Gordon Brown.

Sadiq has taken a hot seat. To run a



Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, with his supporters.

PHOTO: AFP

city with an acute shortage of affordable homes and a creaking, overcrowded mass transit network is by no means going to be easy. And unlike his counterparts in the US and Europe, the amount of hands-on power that he will enjoy is limited.

He has a lot of great ideas about how to provide more affordable housing to low-income people but any major decision needs the approval of the central government. When he needs extra money above an annual budget of \$24.5 billion for more police or an expansion of the city's railway, he has to ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, a Conservative who may be reluctant to

pay for Labour ideas.

Would he be a successful mayor? Well, strong convictions precede great actions. He has promising plans to improve residents' skills and speed up the construction of a new underground railway that will run from London's south-west to its north-east. Most excitingly, he wants to expand the power and scope of mayorality—puny in comparison with its New York equivalent—pledging to lobby for new tax-raising abilities.

His pro-business programme is also interesting. It seems to be more about what firms can do for the city - things like building infrastructure and houses,

raising wages and giving policy advice - than what the mayor can do for firms. And the best thing going for him, by all accounts, is that he is an efficient and likeable manager, aware of his weaknesses and open to new ideas.

Sadiq's victory sends a powerful message to bigots everywhere. That religious prejudice might be real but it is ultimately a losing proposition. That the kind of divisive strategy that has so far worked for the Donald in the US is unlikely to be a formula for winning elections everywhere.

And it wasn't for former Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper. When he started playing the anti-Muslim card

as he sought re-election last year, he was trounced by his opponent Justin Trudeau who ran a more inclusive campaign. Like most Londoners, Canadians made it clear that there is no place for religious bigotry in their secular societies.

The calm, unyielding yet racially and religiously inclusive campaign of Sadiq Khan has come to symbolise all that is most impressive about London: its diversity. About a quarter of its residents are foreign-born, and one-eighth Muslim. But he is not the first Muslim to hold important office in Europe. Sajid Javid is the British Secretary of State for business, a cabinet rank. Rotterdam, in the Netherlands, has had a Morocco-born Muslim mayor since 2009. Across Britain many councilors - typically in the Labour party - and 13 MPs are Muslim.

The win, which garnered more than 1.3 million votes, reaffirms London's multicultural image at a time when Europe's anti-immigration parties have been making inroads in recent months, fuelled by rising public fears following the attacks in Brussels and Paris. Lord Hain, a former Labour cabinet minister, said, "In the dominant British city, probably the most important city in the world, to have a Muslim mayor is an important statement."

And yet the fact remains - many of those who demand that Muslims in the West prove their fidelity to secular values have not yet begun to internalise these values themselves.

"Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

The writer is a member of the editorial team at *The Daily Star*.

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US Media: Free but not trustworthy?

SHAFIQ RAHMAN

THE world recently observed the World Press Freedom day. The UNESCO-sponsored day has brought attention to the challenges of freedom of expression and the press in the developing world. Consequently, the situations of media, which are appalling in many countries due to war and conflict, also came under scrutiny. However, media in developed western countries, especially in the United States, is usually left out from the scrutiny. Media in the US enjoy freedom; but how well are they serving citizens?

Recent events in the US shed light on the contemporary conditions of media in America. First, a recent survey finds that only six percent of Americans now trust the press. American Press Institute, University of Chicago and the Associated Press conducted the study in February and March this year, polling a representative national sample. The trend of citizen's trust on media has been downward for some time, but this is the lowest rating ever.

Moreover, while addressing the White House Correspondents Dinner, President Obama took a swipe at the American cable television giant CNN. The event was meant to be humorous, and the host (usually a comedian) and the president usually talk about different issues in a lighter tone. It's customary that the speakers "roast" (take comedic swipes at) politicians, journalists, actors and other well-known personalities. President Obama, pointing to Jake Tapper, who recently left ABC News (American Broadcast Corporation) to join CNN, quipped that Tapper has "left journalism" to join CNN.

Media, especially electronic media, also came under fire for their coverage of presidential candidate Donald Trump who has become the presumptive Republican nominee, surprising many. There are multiple reasons for his rise but critics are already pointing fingers at media. Trump received a disproportionately high volume of air time throughout the campaign. One might say that the coverage was not all positive, but we need to remember that negative coverage is also publicity. Trump, longtime host of a successful reality TV show, understands media and thus, manipulated media coverage by constantly creating controversy. Media, on the other hand, failed to ask tough questions to the candidate or



the network television expanded their news operation and largely separated from entertainment television. However, in the 1970s and 80s, the line between news and entertainment began to blur and this continued for decades. The result is today's 'infotainment'.

Media's pursuit of infotainment became full-blown exercise during Donald Trump's campaign. Trump would tweet in the middle of the night and electronic media, especially cable television, would spend the whole day talking about those tweets! Except during the debates, media as a whole failed to ask him tough questions on his outrageous claims. Trump made claims about erecting a wall along the US-Mexico borders - media did not press him hard enough about why and how the wall would be made. Some in media questioned the utility of the wall, given that the net migration from Mexico has dwindled. The same can be said about media's handling of Trump's trade and foreign policy proposals.

Infotainment helps media's profit margins because it's relatively inexpensive to produce a talk show than put together a quality news programme. Over the years, newsroom budgets have been slashed, news staffers downsized and many foreign bureaus closed. Therefore, mixing news with entertainment was welcomed by media executives. Some of the infotainment programmes, especially the politically charged conservative talk shows (for instance, The O'Reilly Factor hosted by Bill O'Reilly) drew larger viewers. People watch those talks shows not to obtain information but to enjoy combative encounters, personal attacks, and most importantly, to identify with and reinforce their already-held political views.

As political economists and other critical scholars argue, turning news into entertainment not only benefits the corporations financially but also help ruling elites maintain the status quo. The classical function of news is to inform citizens of critical issues so that they are better able to exercise their rights and keep democracy in shape. A diluted version of news, which is akin to entertainment, certainly cannot perform that function. It's important that we pay attention to what is going on in the US currently, because we have too often seen the US model being replicated in other countries.

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press for answers from him, thereby failing to frame the discourse; instead, it was dictated by Trump.

So what is ailing the US media? The framers of the US constitution enshrined freedom of press, expecting that a free press will function as the fourth estate and keep democracy in shape by informing citizens of important issues and mounting a robust criticism of the government. The fact that only 6 percent of the country's people trust media is a strong indicator that media there is not functioning the way it should. There were times when people trusted the US media, and it exerted tremendous influence on political processes. The classic case of the Watergate scandal and the fall of Nixon are often cited to illustrate exemplary investigative journalism and media's pursuit of important issues. Americans considered Walter Cronkite as the most trusted man in the country when he was a CBS news anchor.

So, what changed? A lot of things. But perhaps the most significant change is the cheapening of news, which academic scholars referred to as "infotainment." Infotainment is the blending of news and entertainment - both in content and delivery. The tension between information and entertainment always existed, but professional editors always maintained a firewall between the two. On the other hand, media executives always favoured entertainment over information, because entertainment-oriented programmes attract large audiences and it's good for the bottom line of the corporations. History shows that when radio and television were becoming popular forms of mass media, executives heavily favoured entertainment programming. They resisted the idea that successful news programming was even possible in electronic media. Daniel Hallin, in an article titled "Whatever Happened to the News?", recounted the history of television news in the 1960s, during the golden age of television, when

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A WORD A DAY

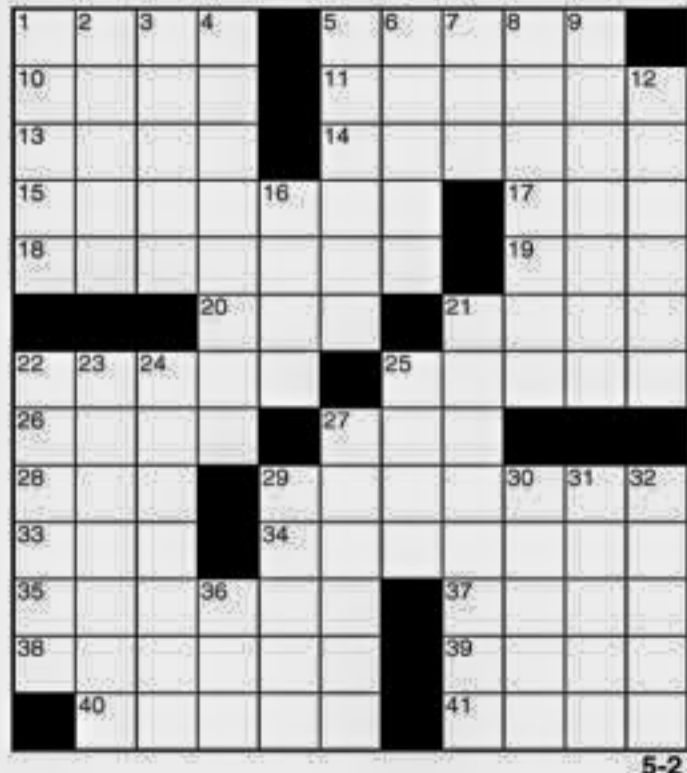


LONGUEUR
(long-GUHR)

A long and dull passage in a work of literature.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
- 1 Applaud
 - 5 Strong winds
 - 10 Tibetan monk
 - 11 Immediately
 - 13 Related
 - 14 Big-billed bird
 - 15 Bomb unit
 - 17 In the style of
 - 18 Get
 - 19 Min. part
 - 20 Twisty turn
 - 21 Cooped (up)
 - 22 Temple scroll
 - 25 Atmosphere makeup
 - 26 Amorous archer
 - 27 Abel, to Adam
 - 28 Farrow of films
 - 29 Barometer unit
 - 33 Peas' place
 - 34 Creamy sauce
 - 35 Author Leonard
 - 37 Pub pints
 - 38 Make numb
 - 39 Embedded spy
- DOWN**
- 40 Wasn't thrifty
 - 41 Really impresses
 - 1 Wood-working aid
 - 2 Magic Johnson, once
 - 3 Pedro's pal
 - 4 Cure-alls
 - 5 Crocs' cousins
 - 6 Make amends
 - 7 Singer Reed
 - 8 Packs away
 - 9 Triangle type
 - 12 Makes law
 - 16 Rear end
 - 21 Comprehensive view
 - 22 Helped out in an office
 - 23 Baltimore team
 - 24 Driving aid
 - 25 Driving sport
 - 27 Mum
 - 29 Singer Carpenter
 - 30 Submerged
 - 31 "Hello" singer
 - 32 Romantic dozen
 - 36 Lyric poem



YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

SITOUT TOGA
ATEASE ARAB
RANTED CELL
GLOMS DOGIE
EYRE CASALS
AWOL NET
KALAMAZOO
MAP LEIA
APPLET CLIP
SIREB SHANE
STOP STAPLER
EAVE AIRIER
SLEW TRYSTS

