

A foul-mouthed president showers acid rain

PLEASURE IS ALL MINE



SHAH HUSAIN IMAM

WE have heard of a political banter of Churchillian fierceness. Of Stanley Baldwin, a former British prime minister, Winston Churchill had said once that he was "an epileptic corpse."

Douglas MacArthur, the fabled American General on the crucial eastern front during the Second World War was on record saying, "Eisenhower will make a fine president. He was the best clerk who ever served under me."

Those could be hard-hitting, painfully heart-breaking for the person at the receiving end, more so if it were one-sided. Most probably they were score-settling diatribes which in the civil society may pass for idiosyncratic license for successful, great personages.

We are aware of an anecdote indicative of hostility between two major players in international affairs. Cold War time Chinese Prime Minister Chou-en Lai on an occasion did not take the extended hand of the then US secretary of state John Foster Dulles to shake it in the reflexive standard form of greeting. Whether Chou did it deliberately or not, it went down as an embarrassing gaffe, understandably on both sides.

Then there were times when words like 'lackeys and lapdogs' poured lead into the ears of the so-called non-imperialist world. Also, we have seen the crude display of

megalomaniac reprisal by Idi Amin against his former British rulers. He would have himself carried on the shoulders of white men seated on a mounted perch to venues of international conferences.

Libyan leader Col. Gaddafi who fancied pitching tents wherever he went to had

innuendo, he called Barack Obama a "son of a w****", the last word being unprintable in civilised discourse. On the eve of his scheduled meeting with the US president in Laos on the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Summit, he was supposed to face unpleasant questions in the wake of

face and what his response could be when he met Obama, why should he have reacted so vulgarly?

He has a history of foul-mouthing; not only did he brand the US ambassador to Manila as a "gay son of a w****", he even sought to taint the reputation of Pope Francis's mother in similar fashion.

That he has won the election conclusively and claims he has 90 per cent Filipino support for his actions should not go to his head; instead, he should gain strength from these to be confidently upholding rule of law.

The net result of his outbursts has been a disrespect shown to an outgoing president and consequently, souring an otherwise solidly based US-Philippine relations. There is even a striking similarity between the preamble to the US Constitution and that to the Philippine Constitution. Manila has won a law of the sea case with her marine boundaries, which of course China is not agreeable to.

Does Rodrigo Duterte put across a negative signal to a cohesive littoral states' alliance for protection and exploitation of vast marine resources in the region?

Apparently, he makes no bones about retaining freedom of action. For, he says, "I am no American puppet. I am the president of a sovereign country and I am not answerable to anyone except the Filipino people."

All that is fine and dandy, but why lambast in a language there is no need for except to disrupt decent communication which is the basis of civilised conduct of human affairs?

Even assuming that the Philippine president was riled by journalists who were merely anticipating what he might



Rodrigo Duterte

PHOTO: AFP

foreign visitors kick their heels for hours before being granted his audience. Many who came for favour would privately fret and fume asking 'who does he think he has become'!

But all of these are surpassed by the depravity and vulgarity in the use of language by the Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte. In unheard-off

his having killed off 3,000 drug criminals without due process of law. Duterte had warned President Obama against lecturing him on human rights violations.

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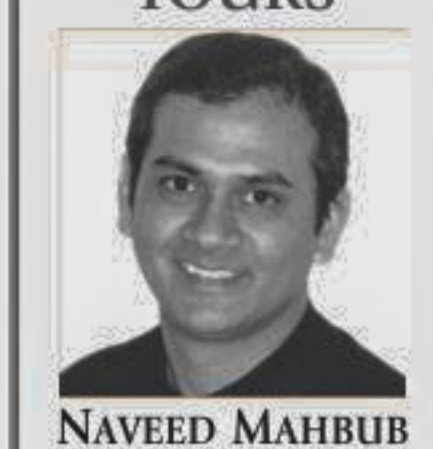
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Armed Conflict

HUMOROUSLY YOURS



NAVEED MAHBUB

LUCK has it that this particular airline doesn't provide the option for online check-in at Dhaka Airport. I am thus relegated to the dreaded middle seat. Simple math - 3

passengers, 3 seats, but why 2 pairs of arm rests? I'm talking about us farm animals in economy class.

The window and aisle seat passengers are at least guaranteed one arm rest. But what about me, in the middle? I am Palestine. My right arm and the left arm of the passenger on my right stake claim to the same arm rest called the Gaza Strip. My left arm and the right arm of the passenger on my left wage a silent war for the left armrest called the West Bank.

The West Bank occupier then lifts his right hand to cover his nose as he sneezes. He uses his shirt sleeve to wipe off the nose. Doofus, you could have used your left hand. Ha, ha! I seize the opportunity and my left arm finds a firm landing space. Ahh!

Having realised the loss of precious territory, the bull dozers swarm in. He places his arm (probably with some snot on his shirt sleeve from the recent sneeze) right next to the recently victorious left arm of mine. Thus starts the war of attrition as he slowly starts to push in infinitesimal increments, the same way we encroach the neighbour's unwallied property. For the next hour, it is an odd tug of war with two arms of two strangers almost intertwined like those of two lovers while desperately trying to (re)gain territory.

Meanwhile, luck has it that the



passenger on my right falls asleep and starts snoring. One gentle push with my right arm and his left arm lands on his lap. The jerk makes his snoring stop abruptly as he gasps for air like a drowning man. He is then immediately back in his slumber. I regain the Gaza Strip.

Basking in victorious glory, I settle down to take a nap. And it's just my luck that this is right when I am beckoned with the call of nature. On top of that, my nose is now itching like crazy, but with both arms now in firm possession (well, the left is still engaged in firing of rockets and the subsequent retaliation with Apaches and F-16s), I refuse to disengage my arms from their solid footings. I twitch my nose and finally lean forward to rub it (my nose) against the back of the seat in front of me as though I'm a little puppy. Heaven knows what the guy on my left is thinking. But who cares, my arms are finally resting. I pretend to fall asleep...

This is the cruel joke of aviation pioneers to enact the eternal human conflict in the high skies. We free ourselves of gravity, but we leave that little room for conflict. I guess that is why every conflict involves 'arms'. And that is what the British did when leaving the Jewel in the Crown. Ok, Muslims on the right seat and the left seat and the Hindu majority in the middle. 'Simple' solution. Wait, too simple. Let's create another armrest - Kashmir. Let the two adjacent passengers fight it out. And the Malvinas, and now the South China Seas...

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PROJECT SYNDICATE

How to help the Middle East

ISHAC DIWAN

IN Lebanon today, all the symptoms of the Middle East's current turmoil are visible. Newly arrived refugees from Syria and Iraq are joining Palestinian refugees who have long been here. The country hasn't had a president for two years, as rival political factions, reflecting the rising enmity between their Iranian and Saudi Arabian backers, are weakening domestic governance. Political corruption runs rampant. The garbage doesn't always get picked up.

But Lebanon also shows signs of resilience. Investors and entrepreneurs are taking risks to start new businesses. Civil-society groups are proposing and implementing useful initiatives. Refugees are going to school. Political enemies are collaborating to minimise security risks, and religious leaders advocate coexistence and tolerance.

Lebanon's resilience owes much to the memory of its painful civil war (1975-1990). By contrast, the rest of the region's experiences - which involve a long history of autocratic governance and neglect of long-simmering grievances - have fanned the flames of conflict. Syria, Iraq, and Yemen are now driven by war. Meanwhile, the Palestinians' worsening plight is still a perennial grievance on the Arab and Muslim street. In this maelstrom, new radical groups with transnational agendas are blossoming.

In the last two years, conflicts have spilled over national borders, threatening global security. The Islamic State has exploited long-standing Sunni grievances to challenge the territorial integrity of Iraq and Syria, creating a strategic vacuum in which Russia, Iran, the United States, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia now vie for power, sometimes through proxies, but increasingly through direct military intervention.

Each country has its own agenda. Iran seeks to project its influence in support of the region's historically dominant Shia populations, while Saudi Arabia pushes

back by arming rebel factions opposing Syria's Iranian-backed president, Bashar al-Assad, and by fighting what it views as an Iranian presence in its own backyard, in Yemen. As for Turkey, it opposes the creation of a Kurdish state, which became possible when Iraq and Syria came undone territorially.

With the region seemingly being sucked deeper into a vortex of permanent conflict, it is easy to believe that only dictators or religious bigots could impose any stability. But to think that is to forget past progressive uprisings, such as in Beirut in 2005, Algiers and Tehran in 2009, and the Arab Spring that began in Tunisia and spread throughout the region in 2011.

to ensure a peaceful political transition in these countries, violent groups had an advantage over ordinary citizens, and a crude fight for power ensued.

Violent revolutions can reach peaceful resolutions, but such an outcome is less likely where deep, unresolved sectarian grievances are in play, as they are in the Middle East. The renewed salience of old, intractable cleavages - reflected in the grievances of Sunnis in Syria and Iraq, of Shias in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen, and of Kurds and Palestinians everywhere - makes the current situation especially precarious. These problems were simmering beneath the surface of autocratic repression for decades. Now,

provides a good model for what to avoid in rebuilding the Middle East. The region does not need new borders and new protectorates, but rather better states, built to be resilient against ethnic divisions and less vulnerable to external influence.

Opinion polls indicate that the vast majority of people in the Middle East want to be governed by legitimate states that uphold the rule of law, protect civic rights, and promote coexistence among communities. This is a worthy goal that will require compromise and reconciliation at a global, regional, and national level.

For national actors to have space to find solutions, it is necessary to de-escalate tensions and find compromises - first globally, between the US and Russia, and then regionally, among Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Israel. The goal must be to reach a grand bargain that takes into account the major issues dividing the region, including the status of the Palestinians and Kurds, and creates conditions for viable political settlements in Syria and Iraq.

Addressing problems that have remained unsolved for decades is a tall order, but inaction is no longer affordable. And none of the major fault lines of the Middle East can be resolved in isolation anymore.

As Antonio Gramsci argued long ago in his *Prison Notebooks*, "The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born, and in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear." That is the Middle East's situation in a nutshell. Helping it build a new regional order will require all actors, great and small, to accept compromise, as the Lebanese have done. A war that leaves one side vanquished is never over.

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The West deserves a share of the blame for the current situation. It failed to end the long-standing Palestinian conflict, and it created new problems by dismantling the Iraqi state, funding mujahedeen in Afghanistan, and backing dictators who supported its security agenda in Iraq, Syria, Egypt, and elsewhere.

To understand where the Middle East is going, we need to look further back to comprehend how the region arrived at this point. Arab nationalism and its modernising aspirations began to unravel after the Arab defeat in the 1967 Arab-Israeli War and the 1986 oil-price collapse. National leaders maintained control through repression and used Islamic opposition parties as scarecrows to avoid political reform. National economies, weighed down by cronyism, delivered low growth, and governments lost legitimacy.

It was this strategy's untenability that led in 2011 to the fall of regimes - in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syria, and elsewhere - that pursued it. With no institutions left

Pandora's box has been opened, revealing an incredibly complex geopolitical puzzle.

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With the latest great-power interventions by the US and Russia, many are reminded of the 1916 Sykes-Picot agreement between Great Britain and France to draw new national borders in the region and divide it into spheres of influence. But, if anything, Sykes-Picot

QUOTABLE Quote

GEORGE CARLIN

If it's true that our species is alone in the universe, then I'd have to say the universe aimed rather low and settled for very little.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- Blubbers
- Crew member
- Concerning
- Battery end
- Caesar's land
- Come together
- Give for a time
- Staff symbol
- Appendix
- Not new
- Soak up
- Sulu portrayer
- Blood line
- Clear sky
- Used a mirror
- Brewpub offering
- Come together
- Concert boosters
- Come together
- Bivouac
- Provinces
- Fencing swords
- Canal sight
- Cheering wildly
- Cold weather
- Budget amounts

DOWN

- Belfry dweller
- Beame or Burrows
- Gala event
- Entices
- Comic Laurel
- Butter on the farm
- Penny words
- Best boxer
- Beat, but barely
- Coral structure
- Couple
- Memo letters
- Cabinet part
- Garden structure
- Primer character
- Beatles movie
- Refinery rocks
- Adolescent
- Catchall abbr.
- Love, in Lombardy
- Boxing punches
- Advanced exam
- Miles off
- Collection
- Back muscle, for short
- Dads to jrs.

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

E	M	M	A	M	O	S	S	C	O	W
L	O	A	T	O	T	T	A	W	A	
L	A	S	T	S	H	I	N	E	R	
A	N	T	E	A	T	E	R			
R	I	N	N	R	U	M	B	A		
R	A	N	D	S	P	I	E	L		
O	N	E	S	A	L					
F	O	S	S	E	P	E	T	T		
F	O	S	S	E	A	M	I			
P	L	O	W	I	N	T	O			
H	E	R	A	L	D	L	E	A	R	
E	V	E	N	E	D	I	S	I	S	
R	A	D	A	R	S	O	S	L	O	

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker

A STRAW IS NOT A GOOD CAMOUFLAGE, ZERO!
OH, YEAH? I BET IF I HIDE YOU WON'T FIND ME
I'LL GIVE YOU A MINUTE TO HIDE!
NOW WHERE DID HE GO?
GREG MORT WALKER

BABY BLUES by Kirkman & Scott

MOM! HAMMIE CUT MY DOW'S HAIR OFF AND TAPED IT TO HIS CHEST!
NOW I KNOW HOW IT FEELS TO BE A MAN'S MAN.
RIP! RIP! RIP! RIP!
AND NOW YOU KNOW HOW IT FEELS TO BE A WAXED MAN.