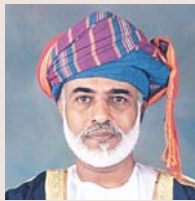


COMMENTARY

ROYAL SPEECHES



Speech of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said on the occasion of the Opening Session of the Majlis Ash'shura

21/12/1991

In addition to this, one of the main tasks of every member is to give particular attention to the welfare and development of his local community.

To be concluded

In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

IN this respect, public cooperation has had a significant effect. Your first duty is to hold on to these gains by endeavouring to release the Omani citizen's creative energies, bring out his latent potential, develop his talents and skills and enable him to make a greater contribution. In doing so, he will be inspired by his glorious history and his legacy, which regards work as having a high value in human terms and recognises that it should always be accorded the respect and status due to it.

Each and every one of you is required to work for the national interest and carry out his patriotic duties with wholehearted devotion.

TALKING BLUNT TRUTH TO NATO

DEFENCE Secretary Robert Gates spoke bluntly to America's Nato allies on Friday. They needed to hear it. America's key strategic alliance throughout the cold war is in far deeper trouble than most members admit. The Atlantic allies face a host of new and old dangers. Without more and wiser European military spending as Gates rightly warned, "a dim if not dismal future" and even "irrelevance". The secretary is retiring at the end of this month, which is likely one of the reasons he jettisoned the diplomatic niceties. But not the only one. As he made clear, this country can no longer afford to do a disproportionate share of Nato's fighting and pay a disproportionate share of its bills while Europe slashes its defence budgets and free-rides on the collective security benefits. Nato's shockingly wobbly performance over Libya, after the Pentagon handed off leadership, should leave no doubt about the Europeans' weaknesses. And while America's Nato partners now have 40,000 troops in Afghanistan (compared with about 99,000 from the United States), many have been hemmed in by restrictive rules of engagement and shortages of critical equipment. Too many are scheduled for imminent departure.

The free-rider problem is an old one but has gotten even worse over the last two decades. During most of the cold war, the United States accounted for 50 per cent of total Nato military spending; today it accounts for 75 per cent. Gates was right when he warned of America's dwindling patience with allies "unwilling to devote the necessary resources or make the necessary changes to be serious and capable partners in their own defence". Decades of underinvestment, poor spending choices and complacent denial about new challenges have created what Gates called a "two-tiered alliance". He is right that too many of its members limit themselves to "humanitarian, development, peacekeeping and talking tasks", and too few are available for the combat missions the alliance as a whole has agreed to assume.

Libya, a mission much more directly linked to the security of Europe than of the United States, strikingly illustrates the consequences. Fewer than half of Nato's 28 members are taking part in the military mission. Fewer than a third are participating in the all-important air strikes. British and French aircraft carry the main burden. Canada, Belgium, Norway and Denmark, despite limited resources, have made outsized contributions. Germany, Nato's biggest historic beneficiary, has done nothing at all. That should frighten every Defence Ministry in Europe. What if they had to fight a more formidable enemy than Muammar Gaddafi's fractured dictatorship? Hopefully, his likely successor, Leon Panetta, will keep pushing hard. A two-tiered military alliance is really no alliance at all. - *The New York Times News Service*



Founder, Chairman and Editor-in-Chief
Essa bin Mohammed Al Zedjali
Deputy Editor-in-Chief
Anees bin Essa Al Zedjali
Vice-Chairman
Mohamed Essa Al Zedjali
Chief Executive Officer
Ahmed Essa Al Zedjali

Editorial: 24811953, Fax: 24813153; E-mail: editor@timesofoman.com
Advertising: 24812685, 24813207, Fax: 24812624
Circulation: 24817992/3, 24812148, Fax: 24818270



Printed and published by: Muscat Press & Publishing House
P.O. Box 770, Ruwi, Postal Code: 112, Sultanate of Oman.
Subscription: RO70 per year.



An ode to a 'pucca' Indian



MEHRE ALAM

THERE was something about Maqbool Fida Husain that almost every journalist who met him in his forced exile days noticed, unfailingly. What's more, most of these scribes ended up creating the edifice of their stories on this particular facet. But then, there was an irony here.

These words were — in almost cent per cent cases, according to my guess — hardly spoken at all! And yet, one ended up 'reading' it almost every moment one spent with him. His eyes would say it. His body language would churn out ample indications. Those bursts of sudden, almost unannounced, silence would say it all.

Having had the fortune of spending some precious time with him and among the few ones to interview him in detail in his 'exile' years, I almost found the decibels of those unspoken words deafening.

Now, let me put to rest this puzzle straightaway. One is talking about the man's yearning for his native country.

That's the reason I was least amused to read what Bollywood's *dhak dhak* girl Madhuri Dixit, one of Husain's favourite muses, had to say about him: "He was a *pucca* Indian at heart".

Madhuri described in a few words what most of our fraternity of scribes have always known: Husain's unconditional love for his country. One almost feels like saluting her for putting our words into her mouth.

Yesterday, as Husain Sahab was laid to rest at Brookwood cemetery at Woking in Surrey, south of London, I couldn't help feel that tinge of a piercing, and strange, melancholy. And it was time for nostalgia as well.

I still remember how confidently Husain had told me, much to my amazement, that he would be visiting India soon, during that interview in a villa in Jumeirah in Dubai, in February 2007.

When? I had promptly asked. Silence... I repeated my question. Silence again. Waiting to lap up a scoop of Himalayan heights, I had persisted with my 'when'.

This time, there was some bodily movement, some awkward stances, some uneasiness, a deep breath. I got the message. So I changed the topic almost instantly, mindful of the fact that this was going to be a detailed interview, and not a quickie.

On the hindsight, it all seems more unreal than real now. A 95-year-old man, globetrotting, mainly Dubai and London, and later Qatar, but unable to visit a land that he had so loved, even breathed!

An artist whose brush so finely captured the nuances of a great eclectic culture, but those very creations not getting an iota of physical space in distinguished art galleries in that very land!

One could agree, or disagree with the charges his critics levelled against him, depending on one's definition of rationality. Those in the former category had been most vocal over the past few years so one could hear them from a long, long distance, loud and clear, bang on target.

Those in the latter grouping had been barely audible. If they were able to mumble a word or two, they would almost always get blown away in the hustle and bustle of the din.

Without delving into the polemics of this particular facet, one would rather ask a few questions to oneself, now that Husain is no more.

Did Husain love India?

Was Husain a less patriot than those who had been baying for his blood all along?

Did he hurt the feelings intentionally, or whether he just went ahead about doing — what all he painted — at the call of the artist within him?

And, if he had indeed hurt the feelings intentionally, did he ever say he was not ready to disown some of his own works, or that he was unwilling to tender an apology?

Also, did he not face the ire of the members of his own community on account of his creations, albeit a film called *Meenaxi: A Tale of Three Cities*, and not a few pieces of painting that had earned him the ire of a section of the majority community?

And now a question for those who loved him: did they do enough to convince the 90-plus man to catch the next flight back home, or, not to surrender his passport permanently? Didn't the political class fail him?

And last, but not the least: did he breathe his last longing to at least once touch the land that had given him the wherewithal to shine on the world stage like an international jewel?

By now, we all know of his last wish to be buried in the land where he breathed his last. So, a supplementary question: was that fair enough?

What his youngest son Owais said, when asked for a comment on behalf of the family after his death, perhaps best summed up the momentous occasion and the momentous man they called the Picasso of India: "There were many absences, but even in his absences, there was a lot of his presence..."

It is this presence that I was talking about.

“On the hindsight, it all seems more unreal than real now. A 95-year-old man, globetrotting, mainly Dubai and London, and later Qatar, but unable to visit a land that he had so loved, even breathed

READERS' FORUM



NEW INDIA ASSURANCE

"Insure with New India and be secure"

A loud voice cannot compete with a clear voice, even if it's a whisper

BARRY NEIL KAUFMAN

1,500 external scholarships available to the deserving Omani students. This gesture shows how concerned His Majesty is for the well being of his people. Education, especially in science and technology, is essential for the development of any country and His Majesty has rightly

recognised this by increasing the number of scholarships. His Majesty always plans well for his people, thinking for their prosperity. In the last forty years, Oman has grown by leaps and bounds. His Majesty has brought peace, stability and order in Oman. The scholarships will help

Omani students to absorb new and emerging knowledge from other countries and get exposure to new technologies.

Vivek Pai
Wadi Kabir

India indeed needs a second freedom movement

I agree with the writer of the letter, *It's indeed India's second freedom movement* (June 9). India needs a second freedom movement. In the world's largest democracy, it is the citizens who are responsible for the nation's deteriorating state of affairs. They fail to elect honest people as their representatives. Religion and cast play major roles in influencing the election process. It is easy to mislead the illiterate masses. The media is at fault too. They allow some to propagate blatant lies.

Soman Sanku
Rustaq

Maoists are still killing policemen with impunity

The Maoist menace in India has reared its ugly head once again. After lying low for the past few

months, the ultra Left wing extremist forces killed at least 18 police and security personnel in the past 72 hours. The impunity with which India's biggest internal security threat has been rearing its head in Chattisgarh shows that the government's claims of success against the Maoists have been hollow. In fact, the threat and menace have been growing with its tentacles spreading across the length and breadth of the country.

Nikhil Padnavis
Muttrah

Youth's murder shows the state of affairs in Pakistan

I can well understand the feeling of shock and horror the writer of the letter, *Pakistan youth's murder by troops shocking* (June 11) expressed. The incident is truly appalling. It shows to what extent Pakistan has become a police state. In fact, I have been given to understand by friends and kinsmen back in Pakistan that such things are happening in the country with alarming frequency and in dozens.

Aaqib Shaikh
Ruwi

Some taxis are adding to the summer woes

I have a word of caution to deliver to all your readers and I take this opportunity to do so. Please look before you board a taxi in Muscat. I found out to my horror that there are some taxis plying on the streets of Muscat which are without ACs. And these taxis normally cash in on gullible and unsuspecting commuters. All such taxis keep their window glasses closed to give an impression that the car's AC is on. But once you board you will get boiled inside. I would like to urge the authorities in Muscat to kindly look into the matter, and in the interest of the commuters, they should carry out random checks of the taxis. How could such taxis be allowed to ply on roads? This apart, there are many taxis which are so old and have such uncomfortable seating arrangements that even after travelling a short distance in them can give the commuters horrible back pain. Should such taxis be allowed to ply any more? Shouldn't there be a fixed life span of the taxis?

Pratap Kutty
Wadi Kabir

Ramdev's illness has raised pertinent questions

I am completely shocked to see Indian yoga guru Ramdev falling so seriously sick in about nine days of fasting. There are so many Indian politicians who are believed to have fasted for days on end, without falling ill so badly. The name that comes to my mind is that of Mamata Banerjee, former Indian railway minister and currently the chief minister of West Bengal. As recently as about three years ago the lady went on a hunger strike for 26 days and yet she looked feisty. Ramdev falling sick in nine days has raised a few questions in my mind. Either Ramdev is physically a weakling despite his yoga prowess or else politicians like Banerjee never really fasted. They all ate behind the screens. I believe both my suspicions are right.

Charu Kumar
Ruwi

New scholarships will augur well for Oman

His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said has instructed to make an additional 7,000 internal scholarships and