Comment

Other Worlds

You couldn't invent some of the details. On 18 February, for example, in *The Guardian*, according to Declan Walsh reporting from Islamabad, a bounty of £600,000 was offered by Muhammad Yousef Qureshi, mullah at the Jamia Ashrafia religious school in Peshawar, to anyone who kills the creator of the famous cartoons of the Prophet published back in September in the right-wing Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten*. The reward would include a Toyota car.

If the Toyota seems a grotesque detail, consider what he reportedly said. 'This is a unanimous decision by all imams of Islam that whoever insults the Prophet deserves to be killed and whoever will take this insulting man to his end, will get this prize'. — 'This killing will enhance respect for Islam and Muslims. Next time nobody will dare to commit blasphemy against our Prophet', so he told *The Guardian* over the telephone.

With whatever respect and empathy one can muster for the sensitivities of people of a very different culture from our own, reasoning with people who hold such views is surely impossible.

The mullah's supporters had just burned an effigy of the Danish prime minister — well, an all-purpose effigy, since the Danish prime minister's face is not exactly well known in the wider world. That protest was marginally more relevant than some of the others, such as ransacking branches of Kentucky Fried Chicken and the offices of a Norwegian telecommunications firm.

Most of the bounty would come from the Peshawar city jewellers' association, which offered $1m (£575,000): 'We can pay it in 24 hours after the confirmation they have been killed', according to Haji Israr Khan, president of the jewellers. 'We are confident some one will find them. They will not be able to hide like Salman Rushdie'. It would be 'a small price' to pay for vindicating the Prophet's honour. The rest of the money — the price of the Toyota? — would come from the Jamia Ashrafia religious school: 'There is nothing immoral about this', the mullah said, 'During his lifetime the prophet ordered the death of three people who committed blasphemy. We are doing the same'.

Admittedly, some treated the mullah's threats with contempt: 'This is just a publicity stunt', according to Tariq Ahmed Khan of the Pakistan Human Rights Commission: 'I have seen this mullah many

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times at receptions in the American consulate. He just wants to become famous like [Ayatollah] Khomeini in Iran'.

Well, perhaps. Nonetheless one might be prudent to avoid his supporters in the neighbourhood of Kentucky Fried Chicken outlets and Norwegian computer dealers.

Meanwhile, over the page, reporting from New Delhi, Randeep Ramesh opens a vista on a totally different world. He describes the nuptials of Vikram, the younger son of Sant Singh Chatwal, the US-based Sikh magnate of a business empire that stretches from an Indian restaurant chain to hotels. Three chartered jets flew in the guests. The wedding took in elephant polo matches and a masked ball on a floating Mughal palace in Udaipur, and concluded in a five-star hotel in Delhi.

The Chatwal story is a triumph of the American dream. Migrating from India by way of Canada, Mr Chatwal began with a take-away in Manhattan. He and his wife now live in an Upper East Side penthouse.

The guests included the cream of Delhi's film and fashion community, as well as family friends from abroad. Lakshmi Mittal was there, the Indian steel billionaire who lives in Hampstead, famous for throwing a probably even more expensive family wedding celebration in India, famous also for donating to New Labour. Back home in New York, and known as the 'Turban Cowboy', Vikram 'hung out', as they say, with Naomi Campbell, a famous 'model', a neighbour in Trump Towers. He once hired a 767 to take the 'rap star' P. Diddy for a 'rave' in Morocco. Both were at the wedding.

Among the hundreds of guests, few can have felt more inclined to wonder where they were than former US President Bill Clinton — 'fresh from visiting earthquake victims in Pakistan', as the dispatch reports. From the wretched of the earth in the wilds of Pakistan to luxury beyond belief in Delhi — paid for, admittedly, by success in New York — that must have been something of a jolt.

From one page to the next — from one world to another in culture and religion— from what can only seem the lunatic ravings of the mullah in Peshawar to the obscene extravagance of the wedding in Delhi — what a world of radically incompatible worlds we live in.

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