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Religion and politics should not mix

The latest murders of the Shiite Muslims by Sunni fanatics in Quetta almost immediately after another shooting of Shiite police recruits in Baluchistan shows what is wrong with mixing politics and religion in Pakistan. These are not isolated events. Sunni and Shiite fanatics have been slaughtering each other for long in Pakistan. The killing of fellow Shiite Muslims by Sunni fanatics in a province ruled by Sunni religious party is no different from the other communal fights.

The only difference is that in Pakistan, it is the Muslims who are slaughtering each other. It is ironic that in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, both Sunni and Shiite Muslims are afraid of each other. Such a country has no right to speak for the Muslims of Kashmir. As most Kashmiris are Sunnis, the admission of Kashmir into Pakistan would multiply the number of Sunni majority, and increase the fear of the Shiite minority.

This explains that when religion and politics are not separated, religion comes under the corrupting influence of politics. Unless Pakistan and India find some ways to keep religion out of politics, anarchy will continue in the name of religion and both countries will be destabilised from within.

Such countries, where communal disharmony prevails, Jeffersonian philosophy that a political system is something public in which every one must accept a common ground rule and religion

is something private - a matter for the individual conscience, should be adapted. It is a great pity that India, which calls itself a secular state, is ruled by Hindu nationalist BJP and Pakistan, which calls itself an Islamic state, Sunni Muslims and Shiite Muslims consider each other as enemies.

Unless both India and Pakistan can take a conceptual leap to separate religion from politics, intractable conflicts within their own borders and communal disharmony will continue to exist.

Mahmood Elahi
Iris Street, Ottawa, Canada

Aquestion

Let us imagine that a few non-believers i.e., non-Muslims have attacked a mosque and killed some Muslims who were saying their prayers. Then what would we see in our country? Hundreds of madrasa students, activists and leaders of the various Islamic parties including the *Khatib* of the *Baitul Mukarram* mosque would stage vigorous demonstrations all over the country condemning the heinous act. They would even call a *jihaad* or a holy war against the non-Muslims. And as a part of it they would attack the non-Muslims and destroy their properties.

Now let us see the other side of such an event that took place in the Pakistani city of Quetta recently. On July 4, 2003 about two hundred Muslims were saying their *Jumma* prayers in a mosque. At that time a group, who are also Muslims, entered the mosque and blasted bombs. This blast killed 48 persons and injured 61 others. Ironically not a single leader or activist of the

Islamic parties condemned this heinous act.

If attacking of a mosque by non-believers i.e., the non-Muslims is a heinous crime then attacking by the believers i.e., the Muslims should also be regarded the same.

Dear leaders and activists of our various Islamic parties including the *Khatib* of the *Baitul Mukarram* mosque, whose crime will you consider or say a more heinous one?

Iqbal Ahmed
New Eskaton, Dhaka

Ammo haul controversy

The haul of huge ammunition has created lot of controversy in the country. People were awed at the size of the haul and expected to have a clear picture. But irresponsible comments of responsible persons have crated confusions. The Home Minister's remark in the parliament proves the immature stage of investigation. The leader of the opposition came up with natural defence but also made some comments that invited quick reaction from the armed forces. The police headquarters has provided clarifications, though not sufficiently substantiated.

Proper investigation of the ammo haul is necessary for national security. I put forward some points that needs careful consideration.

1. The size and type of ammo and explosives is highly indicative. Our criminal gang leaders are not big enough to order one hundred thousand ammunition of same type for their consumption.

Perhaps local ammo market is not that big. More over the ammos are made without manufacturing signs with deliberate intentions to hide the origin. This can be done only when someone has complete control over the manufacturing plant and all such plants are state controlled. Rdx type explosives are also too technical to be made with non-professional facilities.

2. Sabotage theory also should be carefully examined. For large-scale sabotage, well-organised underground organisations are a pre-requisite.

3. The most plausible possibility appears to be the corridor theory, where unscrupulous smugglers are using our land. In past the Purulia arms dropping and big arms catch in Cox's bazar indicate such possibilities.

Finally I want to say again that the incident involve. So a thorough, unbiased and piercing investigation is necessary.

Sonia
Uttara, Dhaka

A Khulna story

Though presently living in Dhaka, my home actually is in Khulna. So the ever-deteriorating law and order situation of Khulna makes mesad.

Khulna is an important district for trade and commerce. But the present unlawful state has made it impossible for a businessman to do better, and for common people to lead a normal life. Recently two policemen were killed in an attack and at least six policemen have been killed over the last four months in Khulna.

It shows the extent of the helplessness of the people. On the other hand, the political leaders of BNP and AL are also being killed. As a result the trade and commerce are coming to an end.

So, it is urgent to improve the situation before it goes further out of control.

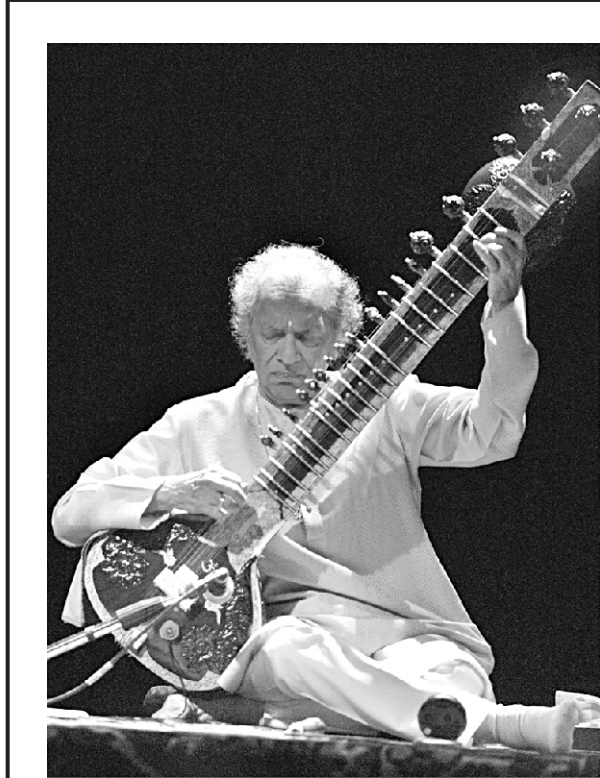
Nahid Nawaz
Mohakhali, Dhaka

The foreign exchange balloon

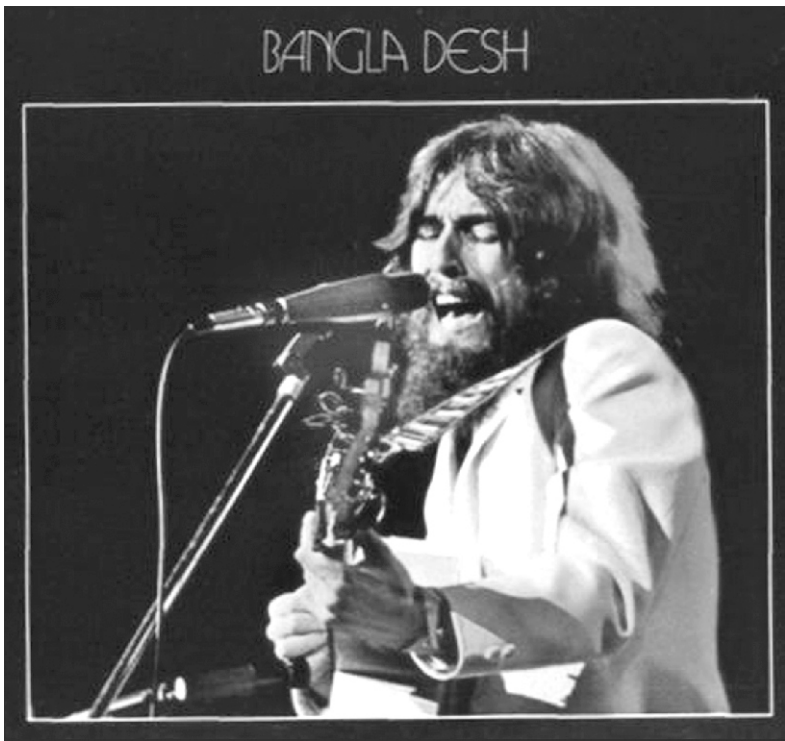
It appears that our financial planners have forgotten a widely used proverb the empty drum beats the loudest. They probably also suffer from a serious delusion regarding our current economic prospects. It is their bizarre thesis that if our currency is devalued according to our needs, then our exports will become more competitive. If you ask an economist he will tell you, what a country really needs is good supporting industries rather than cheaper factors of production.

We don't have any decent textile industry that can really support our garments factories. Neither do we have a good instrumentation and tools industry. These are essential to support our garments industry. What worries me even more is that all the factors that may cause an economy to collapse prevail in Bangladesh and slowly they will eat away our foreign exchange reserves far faster than we can replace them.

For Bangladesh, the most relevant is capital flight and huge trade deficits. The trade deficit and capital flight issues are made significantly worse by spending and investment habits of a huge majority of the affluent population in Bangladesh. There is an increased spending on education abroad. There is more spending on unnecessary foreign trips and on luxury goods far beyond what can be sustained by our fragile economy. Then we also have to consider the fact that incoming foreign direct investment has declined significantly over the years. The one thing that has astounded me is how blithely the government waits



Heroes overlooked



Recognising friends

The governments have so far given national awards to many distinguished persons for their contributions to our War of Liberation, in other words we have recognised and appreciated their contribution.

Unfortunately, contribution of two remarkable individuals -- renowned sitar

player Pandit Ravi Shankar and Beatles star late George Harrison, have not been recognised by any government so far. In 1971, they arranged a concert in New York in order to apprise the Western world about the horrific condition prevailing in the then East Pakistan. And this event undoubtedly

made an impact on the whole world -- this is when many people did actually come to know about the genocide and atrocities committed by the Pakistani Army on the unarmed Bangalees and wholeheartedly supported the birth of a nation -- Bangladesh. I think the government

should give national awards to these great personalities - Pandit Ravi Shankar and late George Harrison (post-humously) and thereby recognise their contribution towards the creation of Bangladesh.

Better late than never.
Iqbal Ahmed
Dhaka

Language of the powerful

It is interesting to note how the language is being continuously to cover up the lies and deception of this disgraceful war. Occupation has become "liberation". Murders of innocent civilians are described as "shootings". Free elections in Iraq has been frozen under the pretext of bringing "stability", which translates to how quickly the Iraqis would submit to an American pup-

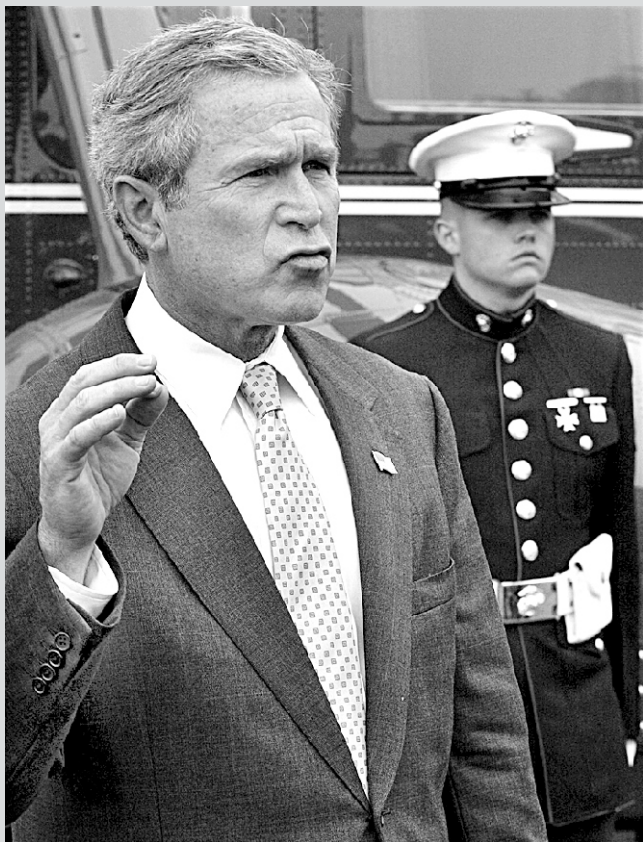
pet. "Reconstruction" of Iraq means to "award" the lucrative contracts to the US multinationals by the US administration. Justification for the war has now become an issue of regime change as opposed to finding WMD. Bush has now announced that he will find the weapons of mass destruction "programmes".

So now it is not about finding WMD but about

discovering the "programmes". What does a "programme" entail now? Perhaps a building with some empty shells, coupled with "evidences" presented from the Iraqi National Congress. Evidences may also include the "findings" of the "neutral" Anglo-Saxon (US, UK, Australia) inspection team, led by the US weapons inspectors. Perhaps the "programmes" might also include the inner thoughts of Saddam Hussein, and pages of documents. Documents were presented as "proof" prior to the war disregarding everything else. Which are still being waved as "proof" even though the "Al-lies" are unable to locate the alleged weapons physically on the land that they have total control over! Talking about documents, what about the recent confession about the forged document related to the alleged purchase of Uranium from Niger? What about the student PhD thesis that was used to construct the evidences? What about Tony Blair's 45 minutes? Or was that a misinterpretation and perhaps it should have been 45 hours or days!

How is justice supposed to prevail in the world, where weaker nations can be brutalised on basis of lies, forgeries, deception and PhD thesis, whilst the real criminals have no accountability.

Yamin Zakaria, UK, London



Faces of double standard

Bumper controversy

As a reaction to the accident of a doctor who had been dragged by a car-bumper to death, the government has interdicted the use of extra bumpers in cars.

But, should an accident be handled with the temerity that the government has shown in this case? Shouldn't the government have given it a more serious thought before making such decision?

Don't get me wrong. I do sympathise with the aggrieved family. I know such losses leave the dear ones irrecoverably empty and their future perceptibly changed. I also think that the driver of the car should be punished for his carelessness.

But, there is another aspect that has to be brought into consideration. The streets of Dhaka are swarmed with rickshaws. The car-owners use extra bumpers in the cars mainly to safeguard their vehicles against the spiky protrusions in the central part of rickshaw-wheels. A minor scratch in the car can cause its owner to pay the painting-mechanic something between five hundred to one thousand taka.

If hundreds cars get scratched and dented every day -- the number can actually be a lot more than that -- the owners, altogether, will be losing nearly one lakh taka. In a year the amount will rise up to more than three and a half crores taka. This is what will inevitably happen if rickshaws continue to ply the streets where the cars are not fairly protected.

A death can't be equated against any imaginable amount of money, since a life has more possibilities than what money holds. Therefore, bumpers had to be taken off someday. But, the government could have removed rickshaws from the streets of Dhaka before passing the order to remove bumpers from the cars.

Wouldn't that have been a more pragmatic way of discharging the case?

Asifur Rahman,
East Kafirul, Dhaka

Dr. Shahjahan Ali dropped his son and wife to the school on Mirpur Road. Then out of the blue, misfortune befell him and his family. A car hit the motorcycle he was riding and his left leg got entangled in the bumper of the car. As his horrified wife and pedestrians watched and shouted the doctor's body was dragged along the road. Whoever was driving the car wouldn't stop the car! Finally about a kilometre away the driver abandoned the vehicle and fled leaving the bloody and mangled body of the doctor. He was dead.

The death of the young doctor overwhelmed the citizens. Barrister Nazmul Huda, the minister concerned has acted fast. He ordered that all iron bumpers in cars, buses etc have to be removed by July 10. But most of the car owners consider this a wrong decision. As it may cause more accidents in future.

Bumpers absorb the hits and also protect the car and its occupants. The doctor didn't die because of the bumper, but because of the inhuman driver; or maybe he was scared of the public beating for his careless driving. The police nearby didn't do their duty, neither did other cars try to stop the runaway vehicle. Everybody who ventures outside knows the chaos, bedlam and lawlessness of Dhaka's traffic -- trucks and buses wouldn't obey the rules, rickshaws would come from opposite direction in one-way streets, drivers will honk and honk, pedestrians will not be careful in walking along roads or crossing such roads. So, what can we expect?

A car or a bus hitting a person and running away is not uncommon. But that doesn't seem to bother the police or the authorities. Maybe the novelty and gruesome nature of this fatality has caused national consternation.

Bumpers do serve a purpose. I hope that the government will withdraw this order. The end points of some bumpers sometimes protrude and can occasionally be hazardous. What can be done is to ask the vehicle owners to ensure that such ends of bumpers are bent inwards so that these do not act like a fish hook and catch unwary pedestrians.

the fact that our foreign exchange reserves have been bolstered by foreign aid. That is probably the most cruel joke. Do they not realise that this money is only temporary and will have to be repaid when the time comes? Even if it is a grant, there are obligations to be fulfilled in return for that grant. Thus grants and loans given as direct or indirect aid must not be counted into the foreign exchange reserves.

The profit that is earned by many local industries is not being properly spent for further development of our economy. It is not contributing to our foreign exchange reserves where that gross profit should be the main contributor to our meagre reserves. Unpromising and weak industries like software development and real estate are getting money that they should not. Industries like agriculture and handicrafts that really contribute to the earnings of the vast majority of Bangladeshis are being virtually ignored or capital deprived. Thus we are not taking care of industries that can really help us increase our foreign exchange reserves. In the end, we are really just blowing up a balloon that will burst when the pressure will become too much.

Ahsan
Dhaka

Life in DU

The letter by NSS on June 16, 2003 talks about the destructive way how the students of Dhaka University spend their time. It was indeed sorrowful for me to see the aspiration of a new comer to DU like NSS has shattered down seeing the life-style of the DU students. I can't but write a few lines about this, since I have the experience of studying in two universities -- finished my BA and MA from the department of English, Jahangirnagar University and now I am towards the completion of my MBA at the IBA of Dhaka

University. I also felt the same like NSS when I just entered here.

I fully agree with NSS that the path of a university life is a very risky one. One can follow the traditional way of life, one can build one's career concentrating on it from the very first day. My friends who led their life in a constructive way are on the way of gaining success, they knew it very well "miles to go, before I sleep".

When you are in a university, no teacher will come up to interfere. They will never tell you whether to smoke or not. It is your life; you have the complete liberty to make decision. And that is the beauty.

When it comes to managing a seat in a residential hall with acute stress crisis, one has to have some involvement with the political parties and that is very unfortunate.

Chatting at TSC is no harm if one can effectively use other time in studies or library works. May be sometimes in the near future we will consider the library our second home.

Md. Ashequl Islam
IBA Hostel, Dhaka University

Misleading masterminds

Finally the British Parliament has exonerated Tony Blair and his Government from charges of misleading the Parliament on the British invasion of Iraq. In doing so the committee members mentioned that Saddam Hossain tried to buy Uranium ore from some African country and thus he demonstrated his evil design to make atomic bombs.

Years ago I wanted to buy a Rolls Royce limousine. Does this mean that I wanted to hijack the Queen?

Fayaz Khan
Joar sahara, Dhaka cantt.

"Converting Muslims

to Christianity"

This is in response to Shabbir A. Bashir's letter of June 30 in connection with Mrs. Robinson's letter on the above caption published earlier in the D.S.

I do not understand why some of the readers like Mr. Bashir while protesting Mrs. Robinson's contention regarding "Converting Muslims to Christianity" brought irrelevant issues like brutalities committed by British against Muslim weavers of Dhaka during British colonial rule or whether Mrs. Robinson has supported Tony Blair during recent Iraq crisis etc.

To me the pertinent question is when Islam is very much a living religion, having a glorious and unique past, why we are hesitant regarding Christian missionary activities in many Muslim countries!

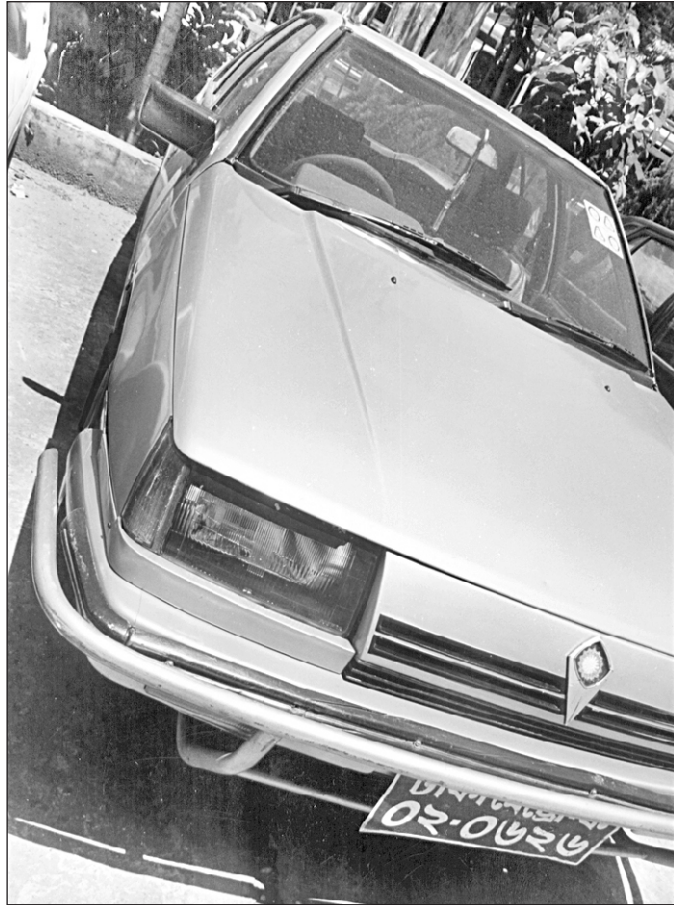
One of the major causes behind it probably the misinterpretations of Islamic injunctions by the *mul-lahs* whose knowledge of Islam is often very shallow.

Accusing Mrs. Robinson who do no good, rather let us build again a higher civilisation on the basis of Islamic doctrine as practiced by Hz. Mohammed (PBUH) and Caliph Omar, in respect of democracy, poverty alleviation, rule of law, judicial supremacy, good governance, true exploitation free society, absolute transparency in all level of government etc.-- which seems to be fairly tell now a days as most of the Muslim countries are out of touch of even a single aforesaid provision.

Ikobir
Dhaka

This is a reply to Rev. Angela Robinson's letter of the above title (July 4).

Did I say, "it is good for religious people to study their religious writings and world history and



Yes bumpers, no bumpers