

President Bush's creed: I think, therefore, it is!

DR. FAKHRUDDIN AHMED writes from Princeton

President Bush is in political trouble not because of the insertion of sixteen untrue words in his State of the Union address in January to sell the Iraq war to the Americans, not because his approval rating has tumbled to near fifty percent and polls show him losing to the Democratic nominee in next year's presidential election, not because American soldiers are dying in Iraq almost every day, and not because the economy is tanking while unemployment is soaring. Bush is in trouble because a la pre-9/11, once again comedians have been emboldened to make fun of him. Recently, on his "Tonight Show" comedian Jay Leno interviewed a Bush impersonator. Leno: "Mr. President, have you noticed anything special in Africa?" Bush (impersonator): "Yes, there seem to be a lot more African Americans here!" Leno: "Mr. President, what do you know about Liberia?" Bush (impersonator): "A lot. My wife is a Liberian!" (First Lady Laura Bush was actually a librarian!) On the "Late Show with David Letterman" the comedian has a segment called, "George W. Bush Joke that isn't really a joke," ridiculing the President's attempts at being funny, which sometimes includes Bush's misuses, such as his mispronunciation of "nuclear" as "new killer!"

According to *The Washington Post* columnist Richard Cohen, Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* reported recently that in June George W. Bush had told the Palestinian Prime Minister, Mahmoud Abbas, that he (Bush) had gone to war in Afghanistan and Iraq on instructions from

God! Adds Cohen: "The purported instructions from God remain about the only explanation for some of what Bush has done -- not only overseas but at home as well. Repeatedly, the Bush administration has merely asserted something to be true, neglecting either to prove it or even to make much of a case for it. Iraq is a perfect example. At the

this is lacking, to be sure, but you have to take it as a matter of faith. Bush did. Similarly, it was a matter of faith that once the United States invaded Iraq, it would crumble. That was given. This explains why an insufficient number of troops were on hand when the war started. It explains further why, once the war was won, an insufficient number of

the Russians -- indeed, much of the world -- pleaded for more time. Bush, though, was acting as though he had received urgent instructions."

"The favourite Bush grammatical construction is the tautology: Something is bad because it's bad. A syntactic leap is made in which a certain cause will have a certain

candidate Joseph Lieberman, are now criticising the President!

Le us fast-forward to the present. While the killing of Saddam Hussein's sons, Uday and Qusay, may play well here at home, it may also reinforce the Iraqi perception that America wants more Iraqi blood on its hand. There is a dichotomy in the way the Iraq war is perceived in

seems to be buying the Bush Administration's assertion that the attacks on the US troops in Iraq are the works of "Saddam loyalists" or "dead-enders," which will cease with Saddam's arrest or demise. This is another of President Bush's belief without evidence. While that rosy scenario may play out, it is more likely that the average Iraqi view American occupation as another tyranny that has to be fought. If America wants to establish true democracy in Iraq, putting Saddam, whom the US is certain it will apprehend any day, on trial for his crimes against the Iraqi people, rather than killing him in a firefight will be a much better way to proceed.

The Iraqis, too, need to pause and think. If they succeed in driving out the US troops through guerilla warfare, what kind of people will take over the country? Mahatma Gandhi adopted nonviolent tactics to gain India's independence from the British; India has been a democracy ever since. Nelson Mandela's nonviolent creed won black majority rule in South Africa; a democratic and multiracial South Africa is fast becoming the envy of the world. Algeria won its independence from France in 1962 through guerilla warfare. The Algerians have not seen much peace since then, have they?

Iraq and in America. Contrary to American expectations, few Iraqis blamed Saddam Hussein for their economic misery. As far as the Iraqis were concerned, the devastating 13-year UN sanctions against Iraq, that killed millions of Iraqi men, women and children, were enacted at the behest of the US (and the UK), and it was the US, not Saddam who bombed Iraq. Saddam, as were his sons, is on the run. He has no time to coordinate attacks against the US troops. Yet, astonishingly, everyone

LETTER FROM AMERICA

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moment, the brouhaha is over Bush's assertion in his State of the Union address that Iraq had imported weapons-grade uranium from Africa. That turns out not to be true...

It is also not probably true that Iraq was importing aluminium tubing for its purported nuclear weapons programme. In fact, it may well be that Iraq had no active nuclear weapons programme."

"By the advent of the war, it was already clear that Iraq was not a nuclear power. It was also clear that it had no verifiable links to Osama bin Laden, al Qaeda and the events of Sept. 11." But Bush believed that it did. "He (Bush) believed -- virtually without evidence -- that Saddam and bin Laden were in cahoots. Why? It's hard to say, but probably because they were both evil. Evil leaders do evil things and they do them together. The evidence for

troops were available to control the country. The result has been a catastrophe -- the constant loss of American lives and an occupation that is costing \$4 billion a month. Faith is about the only explanation, too, for the rush to go to war in the first place. An argument could be made for war with Saddam. But since the threat from him was never imminent and was limited in any case to biological and chemical weapons, there was no need to rush. The French, the Germans,

effect -- never mind why. Things are stated with certainty, but the proof of them is not apparent. This may explain why Bush seems so sanguine about presenting evidence of an Iraqi nuclear programme that later turned out to be not true. It doesn't matter. Because it ought to be, it is." The sad thing for President Bush is that many of the neoconservatives and Zionists who had pushed the President towards the Iraqi war, such as US Senator from Connecticut and Presidential

Adivasis dream of education in mother tongue

DR. UTTAM KUMAR DAS

THE peoples belonging to different Adivasi or indigenous communities residing in Bangladesh are raising voices for their constitutional recognition and protection. The scope for getting education in their respective mother tongues has been added in their basic demands.

These communities are going to be more marginalised and extinct for various reasons including poverty; lack of their own awareness, education and state policy and actions; exploitation by mainstream communities; unplanned development activities etc., researchers and human rights activists observe.

The Adivasis, mostly living in the mainland of Dhaka and Rajshahi divisions have been losing their property for generations through 'false deed' cases. Land of such an indigenous inhabitant is sometimes recorded in another person's (non-Adivasi) name without any knowledge of 'real owner,' allegedly with official help. A researcher on the issue and Associate Professor at the Department of History Dhaka University, Mr. Mesbah Kamal says: the state has been supporting and patronising the majority who are dominating and suppressing the minority including the ethnic groups.

Bangladesh is a land of multi-racial and multi-cultures population. Though there are debates regarding who started to reside in this part of the world earlier but it's documented that people of these ethnic communities are here for time immemorial. They reasonably like to be termed as 'Adivasi' or the first settler. But the government terms them as 'Upajati' or sub-nation, which they

consider as derogatory.

According to official records, there are 27 ethnic groups in Bangladesh. But members of the communities concerned put the number at 46.

Their population is also debatable one. According to the 1991 census, Muslims constitute 88.30 per cent of the total population of the country while Hindus constitute 10.50 per cent, Buddhists 0.59 per cent, Christians 0.32 per cent and other communities 0.26 per cent. But according to racial identity, the census put the number of ethnic population at 1.2 million, which was 1.13 percent of total population. Their population was 1205,978. Among them 314,337 were in Rajshahi division. The Constitution of Bangladesh is yet to recognise their respective identities. For this Adivasis feel frustrated.

The language issue

The declaration of the 21st February as the International Mother Language Day by UNESCO raised new hope among indigenous communities in Bangladesh. Now the indigenous people hope that the government will consider their cause. "The significance of the International Mothers Language Day is to protect linguistic pluralism and protect and develop cultural diversity," says Mr. Sanjeeb Drong, a columnist on ethnic issues and Secretary General of Bangladesh Indigenous Peoples Forum. "But our government is yet to take any mentionable plan for protection and promotion of mother language, knowledge and culture of indigenous people." According to UNESCO, "...languages are not only an essential part of humanity's

cultural heritage, but the irreducible expression of human creativity and it's great diversity." So, government should take steps for providing the children of indigenous group the scope to get basic education in their mother languages. But most of the languages, about 40, spoken by the indigenous people in Bangladesh have no respective scripts. So the point is what will be the script. Researchers and language experts like

UNESCO estimates, 6,700 languages are spoken across the world. Due to globalisation and other reasons, however, half of these languages will be extinct by 2015.

In 1992, the UN General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities. As the only United Nations instrument that specifi-

order to encourage knowledge of the history, traditions, language and culture of minorities existing within their territories. Also, States are asked to implement national policies and programmes with due regard for minority interests.

The Universal Declaration of Language Rights, signed in 1996 in Barcelona recognises right to mother tongue as a basic right. Article 24 of the document categorically ensures: "All language communities have a right to decide to what extent their language is to be present ... at all levels of education..."

Bangladesh Indigenous Peoples Forum demand of the government to implement their five points, including steps for constitutional recognition and development of mother tongues of the Adivasis. Other demands are: establishment of a central institute with branches in different parts of the country for protection of language and culture of Adivasis, arrangement for getting primary education in mother language for Adivasi children, arrangement for broadcasting and displaying Adivasi language-based cultural function in mass media with participation of concerned artists and personalities and steps to include topics related to language and culture of Adivasis in university courses.

Activist Sanjeeb Drong, in a discussion meeting on linguistic rights of the Adivasis organised by the forum recently, hoped the government would come forward soon with necessary steps in this regard.

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All health information to keep you up to date

Deep vein thrombosis

DEEP vein thrombosis (DVT) can be very difficult to detect. Generally, a clot forms in the legs where the blood circulation is a bit sluggish. The symptoms include swelling, tenderness and pain, usually in one leg. Blood clots are often confused with muscle injury. If left untreated they can be fatal.

A clot usually forms in a vein and can travel up into the heart and into the pulmonary artery to the lungs. If a small clot lodges in a lung, it causes serious damage to the surrounding tissue.

If a large clot lodges in the main pulmonary artery, it stops the circulation and the result is usually fatal. This can occur after major surgery.

There are several other risk factors:

- o Family history of blood clots
- o Smoking/Taking the pill
- o Pregnancy
- o Plane travel

Most clots are detected in the legs by a test called Duplex Ultrasound. This is a form of echo testing of the leg, which shows the veins and determines if there is normal blood flow through them.

Once a clot is discovered, treatment is swift. The basis of treatment is to give drugs that interfere with blood clotting, and that stop the clot from growing any further. It also gives the body's own mechanism time to rectify and heal the situation.

Did you know?

Before you go jogging or running, be sure to do proper stretching exercises. If you don't, you may get leg cramps, other painful conditions.

Next: Kidney patients

Preparing woman UP members to face challenges

MD. ABDUL KADER and ADVOCATE SULTANA AKHTER RUBI

OUR society is based on cooperation between men and women; the state has equal consideration for each and every citizen. But the traditional rules, rituals and other regulations of our society often create discrimination against women. Woman's rights in true sense means that they are free to move, to talk, to participate in social, economic, political and cultural affairs of the country. Struggles are continuing for a long time to remove the obstacles from every corner of the society. At present it is necessary to make laws according to the reasonable demand and need of women in different socio-economic structures. Therefore, it is important to ensure women's rights and their participation from grassroots to national level.

Our constitution clearly states of equal rights of every male and female citizen in the country. In part II, section 10 of the constitution it is mentioned that "Steps shall be taken to ensure participation of women in all spheres of national life". In section 19(1) it is mentioned that "The State shall endeavour to ensure equality of opportunity to all citizens". In section 27 it is stated that "All citizens are equal before law and are entitled to equal protection of law". According to section 28(1) "The State shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth" and 28(2), "Women shall have equal rights with men in all spheres of the state and of public life," and 29(1), "There shall be equality of opportunity for all citizens in respect of employment or office in the service of the Republic."

The constitution does not make any difference between male and female. However, the male dominated society controlling the power structure is responsible for disparity. In 1997, for the first time, women MPs were elected to reserved seats which opened up a new horizon for women to participate in the political administration.

Union Parishad is the lowest tier of local government in our country. More than 90 per cent of the people are directly related with Union Parishad. This is the only local institution where all kinds of people can get the opportunity to establish their rights while the administration is directly accountable to the people. This is the nearest administrative

structure to the people. Therefore, if women get due respect and position in UP, then they are likely to receive the same in every sector of the society.

For the last 133 years males are reigning at the higher posts of the Union Parishad. This period has seen British rule, Pakistan period and more than 30 years of independence and democracy, yet the rights of women have not been ensured. Women got chance to vote at Union Parishad polls in the year 1956 but not even semblance of rights. Presently it is known to all that democ-



Face-to-face meeting with woman UP members

racy, development or poverty reduction, whatever it is, in true sense will not be possible if men and women do not work together. One thing should be remembered that poverty reduction is only possible when women will involve themselves in planning and implementation of resource mobilisation and empowerment. But there are several limitations even in UP article of 1993 that discriminate against women.

Prevailing limitations

- = Power of decision making and its implementation is limited.
- = No instruction to the Union Parishad to verify ownership of land.
- = Government employees working at UP level are not accountable to the elected member of UP.
- = Lack of opportunity for UP members to work with government employee and non-governmental organisation.
- = Lack of opportunity to make list of

resources at local level and utilise it for poverty reduction and thus ensure the right of the poor on the local resources.

- = No particular responsibility laid out for the female members to participate in social programmes and different activities equally with male counterparts.
- = No rule preventing early marriage.
- = Unequal position of women and no decision making role in family as well as society.
- = Lack of security for social mobility.
- = Dependency on others and no effective

share of property.

- = Lack of knowledge on the part of administration and police about women's rights and lack of justice in their system.
- = Lack of training for women.

In order to remove the social discrimination meaningful initiative should be taken. Such as, social economy has to be reorganised and redistributed for which the entire land reform is required, and women should be connected to every sphere of development work. Now that the women UP members have been elected they are aware of the problems of their localities. They must be preparing for accountability to the public. Therefore, functional initiative is needed to facilitate women UP members to discharge their duties and responsibilities.

In order to make the women folk more responsible the following may be heeded:

- = Local Government Ordinance, laws, rules, circulars, orders etc should be made easier, so that the women members

can easily understand and also arrangements should be made for their education and training.

- = Law of inheritance should be befittingly amended.
- = Initiative for registration of marriage, birth and death should be taken to avoid early marriage and trafficking and harassment of women folk.
- = Women UP members should be involved in village arbitration, specially for the trial of women offenders if any.
- = Employment opportunity for the women should be provided.
- = Women should be involved in natural disaster relief and rehabilitation, protection of environment and in other development work.
- = Participation of women folk in various committees of the locality should be increased.
- = Awareness of both male and female members should be increased in order to achieve the family, social and political rights of women.

Establishing rights of grassroots women: An NGO experience

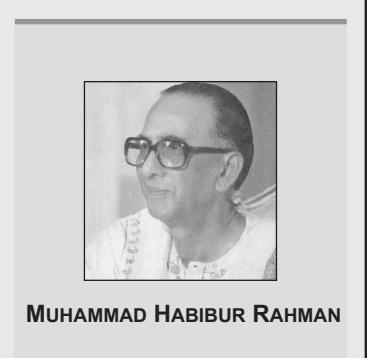
From its inception, an NGO -- Samata -- has been working for both male and female landless poor people. It thinks the local government should be strengthened for improvement of the poor. If this institution is allowed to work freely without any uncalled for interference from party politicians, the actual improvement of people and rule of democracy at grassroots level can be achieved. In 1997, 15 women members were elected from among the landless members of Samata. As a result, Samata was inspired to work more for women's rights and, this year 62 landless women have been elected as members. Since 2000, through establishment of Women's Advocacy Council (WAC) it has been working to check violence against women, organising movement against various discriminations WAC is assuring the girl child education, helping tortured and destitute women to get the right judgement, increasing the participatory and decision making role of women, and working to give them an access to property rights. Over these few years Samata could effectively reduce the incidence of dowry, divorce, polygamy, early marriage etc. in its working

area. Basically, WAC activists are doing the motivation work going from door to door. They are involving women UP members and deriving their full co-operation. As a result, women UP members are also getting more social status, and more opportunity to serve the society. Upazila Women Forum has been formed with the elected members of Union Parishad. This is a step forward in ensuring women's participation in various developmental activities.

- Besides this, over all steps necessary to establish the rights of women can be:
- = Empowering local government decreasing interference and control of the centre;
 - = Continuing training for women for both skill development and awareness creation.
 - = Ensuring equal rights of women over property inheritance.
 - = Reducing all kinds of obstacles in the way of women's participation and decision making role in socio economic activities.
 - = Providing all kinds of facilities, including official assistance, to the women (UP) members in order to facilitate their performance.
 - = Increasing transport and other allowances and honorarium of UP members without discrimination.
 - = Involving members of NGOs in implementation of the works of Union Parishad, such as: awareness creation; establishing legal rights; disaster management and environmental protection; birth, death, marriage registration and monitoring activities; checking violence against women, child and women trafficking; employment generation; training; listing local resources; distribution of khas land and water bodies.

Union Parishad is a hundred-year experienced organisation for social change and development. This local government institution can play a revolutionary role in democratic practice, women's empowerment and education. This organisation can do so many fundamental works at the grassroots level to alleviate poverty and implement development programmes. Proper empowerment and preparation of woman UP members for undertaking such activities will go a long way in achieving the goals.

Md Abdul Kader is Executive Director and Advocate Sultana Akhter Rubi is Programme Officer (Law) of Samata.



MUHAMMAD HABIBUR RAHMAN

Writings on the walls

Writings on the walls are vying for your attention. They are crying hoarse for your attention. All over the country wherever you may go Similar writings will you invariably follow.

The complainants cry "Ropes for the accused! Gallows for the enemy of the people! Hang him now! Hang him now!" The scions of the accused take a different vow: "Release our brother Ali immediately" "Withdraw all cases against Ali!" "Release our brother Ali unconditionally."

Abel's scions cry for Cain's blood, Cain's scions chew the cud. And asked with equanimity For Cain's pardon or indemnity.

Writings on the walls you can never miss It would be difficult them to dismiss: The demands for the release for the accused Or the demands for the noose for the accused.

Muhammad Habibur Rahman is former Chief Justice and head of caretaker government.