

Sinister zealotry

What a disservice to religion

THE death of a man in Narayanjan on Friday evening in the bloody clashes between Hizbut Touhid adherents and local people is the latest example of how some religious extremists are pursuing their agenda and posing a serious threat to law and order in the process. The incident gives cause for concern.

The Hizbut men were reportedly distributing some leaflets containing their version of religion which the locals found highly objectionable. When the angry people tried to resist the move, they were attacked with hammers in a ruthless demonstration of frenzied action. We have to recall here that the Hizbut supporters used the same method to club people in Kushtia a few weeks ago.

An outfit like the Hizbut, whatever might be its real strength in terms of following, is a disruptive force that must be nipped in the bud. They have perpetrated two crimes in their bid to familiarise people with the 'teachings' of Islam as perceived by them. First, they have tried to distort the basic tenets of Islam, which are as old as the religion itself. They are perhaps not even aware of the fact that such distortion amounts to disservice to religion. Second, their strategy includes use of force in the process of 'educating' people -- a clear deviation from the teachings of Islam. They did not hesitate to kill and maim when confronted with popular resistance.

What we witnessed last Friday was a skirmish between people and the zealots representing a fanatic group. Recent incidents suggest that people will cooperate with the law enforcers if they launch a drive against such self-styled reformers who can only create chaos and confusion. It is their duty to keep vigil over the situation; take note of pernicious growth of religious fanaticism; and counter it through legal measures.

Though it is not precisely known what the Hizbut men are up to, it is clear that they have an agenda which goes against the principle of religious tolerance that people believe in. Such bigotry must be contained for harmony and stability in society.

Said no more

Intellectual world left poorer

THE passing of Edward Wadie Said on September 25 seemed to have drawn the curtain on an era of literary ethos that transcended the East-West cultural and political barriers. This outstanding Palestinian Christian was a humanist, academician, politician and an ardent lover of literature and music. He was a universal icon.

Born in Jerusalem in 1935, Said became stateless in childhood after a ghastly colonial machination created the Jewish state in the land of Palestine in 1948 by dispossessing a whole nation. The sordid childhood memory kept him glued to the politics of his nation, making him a member of the Palestinian National Congress (PNC) in 1977.

Said had the intellectual gift to realise, perhaps during his interactions as a student in the US, how the misperception and stereotype about the Oriental people blurred the rationality of Western scholars and policymakers. The backdrop to his most famous literary work, the Orientalism (1978), was coloured much by such a perception as he strove to expose the nexus between popular enlightenment and colonialism in the Western thoughts and discourses.

Said believed that colonialism was the most unfortunate thing to have happened to the people of the Orient and to their faith, culture and living. While this was reflected in his writings and utterances, seldom did he allow his emotions to spice up his academic and scholarly discourses. This lay at the centre of his huge universal popularity.

He relentlessly opposed Israeli brutality against his people, only to incur the wrath of the influential pro-Israeli lobby in the US. Undeterred, he kept opposing every aspects of Israel's human rights violations and opposed US policies toward Palestine.

The Jewish lobby tried to corner him in the 1980s, but he squarely neutralised his enemies in the 'Politics of Dispossession' (1994), the second book on the plight of his people. This treatise acknowledged the reality of the Jewish persecution under the Nazis, but argued against using that history as a rationale to make the Palestinians dispossessed. Ever since, he advocated a two-nation solution for the two distinct peoples of historic Palestine.

His resignation from the PNC in 1991 demonstrated the magnitude of frustration that this global scholar endured in silence. 'Culture and Imperialism' (1993), was his penultimate book and it contained an incisive analysis of the colonial mindset that stood as a stumbling block to subduing liberation struggles around the world. Said then emitted a strong message in the 'Out of Place' that displacement and dispossession of a people is the worst form of rights violation.

He was hurt more than many Americans after the 9/11 attacks on the US. But that was a time when he chose to immerse his pent-up emotions in the tune of music; busying himself with the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra, which he founded in 1999. His death leaves the Orient in a state of shock. He was rare and someone hard to replace.

Indo-Israel relations

From obscurity to clarity

KAZI ANWARUL MASUD

ISRAELI Prime Minister's first ever official visit to India raised eye brows in certain quarters. Had it been some one but Ariel Sharon or had the visit taken place at a time when the Israeli treatment of the Palestinians was less genocidal (it is grossly brutal at best of times) then perhaps many members of the international community would have felt less of unease. Albeit it is every country's prerogative to interact with whoever it chooses to and invite whoever and whenever it wants to. After all, it is the essence of sovereignty. Yet international relations are not conducted on the basis of exceptionalism nor purely based on narrow definition of a state's self-interest. History of Indo-Israeli relations is a testimony to this internationally practised principle.

India recognised Israel in September 1950 but established embassy-level relations in February 1992. The pertinent question to be asked is why it took India four decades to send an ambassador to Israel. India's reticence was largely due to its perception of Israel through Islamic prism and India's argument that the establishment of Israel should have had the consent of Arab inhabitants. This, perhaps had influenced Indian decision as a member of the UN Special Committee on Palestine (in 1947) to vote for a minority plan which called for the establishment of a federal Palestine with internal autonomy for the Jewish population. When the UNGA voted for the majority plan India joined the Arab and the Islamic world in opposing the partition of Palestine. The 1956 Suez crisis brought Nasser and Nehru closer in the promotion of the non-aligned movement along with Sukarno and consequent marginalisation of the Indo-Israeli relations occurred. Israel, on its part, was indifferent towards India which was perceived to belong to the Soviet camp and as such was opposed to US-Israeli interests in the area. It took Rajiv Gandhi's pragmatic and non-ideological approach which was pursued by Narashima Rao and helped by a conjunction of international developments to finally result in ambassadorial exchange between the two countries. The international developments i.e. the end of the cold war, easing of international tensions, Arab willingness to negotiate a final settlement with Israel and, most importantly, India's determination to acquire technological and qualitative superiority in defense capability helped promote robust bilateral relations with Israel. Surprisingly, it

was the same India which demanded secrecy of Israeli Foreign Minister Moshe Dayan's 1979 visit to India that promoted a flurry of high level political, trade and defense related exchanges between the two countries after 1992.

One must recognise the validity of Indian disenchantment with the Islamic world over its totally partisan position on Kashmir issue in favour of Pakistan. Year after year the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) in almost all its meetings adopted resolutions at the insistence of Pakistan which castigated India on Kashmir. The 9th OIC summit at Doha, for example, recalled that the UN resolution relevant to Jammu and Kashmir has still remained unimplemented; reaffirmed the importance of the right of self-

and Soviet resolutions which generally supported Bangladesh's cause received similar treatment from the western permanent members of the UNSC. The resolutions moved by the USSR, US and Poland, according to Dixit, were most significant. The US consistently demanded an immediate end to Indo-Pak hostilities; withdrawal of their forces to pre-war boundaries etc. There was not a single reference to the political aspirations of the Bengalees or the manner in which these should be fulfilled in the US resolutions. The Soviet resolutions, by contrast, called for political settlement in East Pakistan and urged Pakistan to direct its armed forces to end all acts of violence. Dixit assessed that because of India's close relations and strategic equations with the Soviet

declaration after the visit stated a preference for a "multi-polar global structure" and opposed the "unilateral use or threat to use force in violation of the UN Charter and intervention in the internal affairs of other states" (a reference to US/NATO bombing of Yugoslavia). The two countries also shared common hostility towards Islamic fundamentalism (Russia due to Chechnya and India because of cross border terrorism in Kashmir). Putin's visit logically resulted in considerable arms purchase by India which still remains largely dependent on Russia for spare parts and technical assistance.

The terrorist attacks of nine-eleven quickened the pace of Indo-US relations through heightened relations with Israel. Coincidentally

relations are advancing by leaps and bounds? Palestine problem remains unresolved; Ariel Sharon's targeted killing of Palestinians and wanton destruction of property are unabated; the Middle East Road Map (ridled with Israeli reservations) is in tatters; Abu Mazen's brief tenure as Prime Minister was effectively sabotaged by Sharon's obdurate refusal to give him any chance to appease the militants. It has been suggested that India's ruling party BJP having a US oriented Pakistan obsessed foreign policy proposes a unique "core" alliance to fight international terrorism consisting of the US, India and Israel for which development of relations with Israel is of utmost necessity. Meanwhile, the US has been warned of two kinds of allies the first type would be partner in the war

terrorism can only be eradicated by addressing its root causes. Brajesh Misra's adamant refusal to consider the root causes of terrorism was refuted by Kofi Annan (on 22nd September) while addressing the Conference on Fighting Terrorism for Humanity: A Conference on the Roots of Evil in New York Kofi Annan called for understanding "this deadly phenomenon and carefully examine what works and what does not work in fighting it". He pointed out that terrorists are "often rational and intentional actors who develop deliberate strategies to achieve political objectives .We should not pretend that all terrorists are simply insane or that decisions to resort to terrorism are unrelated to the political, social or economic situation in which people find themselves". He warned that the world would delude itself if it thought that terrorism can be eliminated my military force alone and that just because "a few wicked men or women commit murder does not make a cause any less just" nor does it relieve the governments of responsibility to deal with legitimate grievances.

Brajesh Misra's enthusiasm displayed at the AJC annual dinner could be explained by the assistance given by AJC in the formation of India caucus in the House of Representatives with 160 members, perhaps the largest single country caucus formed in the Congress. Other reason could be BJP and Likud parties' anti-Islamism and conviction of Hindutva and Zionism. It is doubtful whether Misra's proposal of an anti-terrorism axis has the support of other political parties. Opposition Congress is reported to have found it perverse and reflective of BJP's obsession with Israel. India's other political parties are also reported to be not very enthusiastic about it.

While India's drive through Israeli route for closer ties with the US may be congruent with its security needs and political ambitions; one can not but wonder about the effects such a policy would have on India's 200 million Muslims; India's relations with the Arab world (estimated annual remittance by Indians working in the Middle East amounts to \$16 billion annually); the opportunity given to Pakistan to further intensify its anti-Indian propaganda in the Arab world. One hopes the NDA government in its determination to follow through the ideology of a segment of a coalition partner would not totally disavow a policy which served India well for several decades.

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Their fight against terrorism is unwavering, not duplicitous, and free from risk of the contagion of dissonance. Perfect examples of the second kind are India and Israel whose very existence, the argument continues, depends on daily fight with terrorism and in the case of India the constant fight with cross border terrorism in Kashmir.

determination of the people enshrined in the UN Charter; expressed concern at "the alarming increase in the indiscriminate use of force and gross violations of human rights committed against innocent Kashmiris"; noted the "rejection of Indian sponsored elections"; welcomed the "restraint exercised by Pakistan on the line of control despite repeated violations by the Indian army" etc. The tone and tenor of these resolutions, mainly drafted by Pakistan, generated anger at Delhi and indifference over time of these blizzards of pious declarations in pursuit of an absurd dream. India's disenchantment with Arab sympathy with Pakistan over Kashmir grew along with the increase of Islamic militancy in the Arab world.

End of the cold war obviously contributed to the reshaping of Indian foreign policy. Disappearance of the Soviet Union meant a great loss not only of a very important supplier of defense equipments but also its diplomatic support. In 1971 Indo-Pakistan war over Bangladesh one can realise the seminal role played by the Soviet Union in the birth of Bangladesh. Former Indian Foreign Secretary J.N. Dixit in his book Liberation and Beyond stated that Soviet Union had cast veto in favour of India seven times between December 4th and 16th against US and other Western sponsored resolutions. The Polish

Union bolstered by the Indo-Soviet Treaty of August 1971 the UNSC was prevented from taking any mandatory and punitive actions against India which could have frustrated the Bangladesh freedom struggle.

The scenario described above has evidently changed after the end of the cold war when friends and foes were clearly identifiable. During the 1970s and 1980s US maintained close relations with Pakistan using that country as a base for Islamic fundamentalist guerrillas' fight against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. The Soviet Union maintained economic and defense ties with India and supported her on Kashmir issue. But the collapse of the USSR as has already been stated left India looking for new friends, not to supplant but to supplement, Indo-Russian relations. Others, notably the US, despite her dire need for Pakistan in it's war against Afghanistan, was reassessing its relations from rhetorical to practical terms. This was demonstrated by President Clinton's five-day visit to India, first by a US President in decades. Though Putin's visit to India did not get equal media attention it was nonetheless a reiteration of one of the foreign policy fundamentals of the cold war era. Albeit one has to look at Putin visit from the point of view of per-nine-eleven complexities. During the visit Putin and Vajpayee were looking at each other as a counter to American pre-eminence in the world. The joint

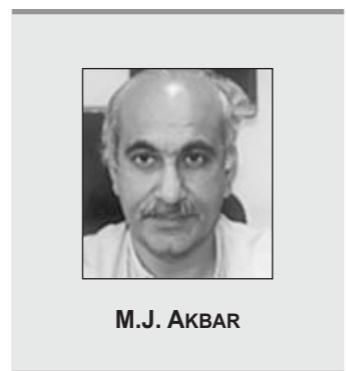
on September 11 an Israeli defense delegation headed by National Security Advisor was having meeting with Indian counterpart at Delhi to discuss common security threats. A strategic partnership was being built up from relative obscurity to the centre fold of Israeli foreign and defense agenda. Israel started looking upon India as an extension of her parameters of external strategic partnership beyond the Arab "envelope" while India's security environment was facing a burgeoning post-cold war Sino-Pakistan military relationship. Given Israel's considerable role in defense development India's gravitation to Israel was natural. India and Israel though lacking immediacy of threats from the common enemy faced hostile regional nations which had acquired ballistic missiles and weapons of mass destruction and these adversaries, in time, had the potential to become or align themselves with Israel's enemies. Post nine-eleven also brought about common perception of the two relating to counter terrorism. As Hindustan Times editorialised (September 11, 2003), both countries have known terrorism long before it became "international". The paper opined that Ariel Sharon's visit to India "finally removes the stigma that New Delhi had harboured about making its relationship with Israel come out of the closet".

The question which may very well be asked is: why now the bilateral

on terrorism out of convenience while the second type will consist of those countries that are already victims of "Islamic terrorism" and thereby opposed to religious activism out of conviction devoid of heteroglossia of alternate voices. Their fight against terrorism is unwavering, not duplicitous, and free from risk of the contagion of dissonance. Perfect examples of the second kind are India and Israel whose very existence, the argument continues, depends on daily fight with terrorism and in the case of India the constant fight with cross border terrorism in Kashmir.

Last year's January visit to India by Foreign Minister Simon Peres reflected a growing Israeli acknowledgement of common perception on transnational threat by Islamic militants. This was further fleshed out by Indian National Security Advisor Brajesh Misra while addressing the annual dinner meeting of the American Jewish Committee in May this year in Washington. At that dinner Misra advocated for the emergence of "a core, consisting of democratic societies which can take on international terrorism in a holistic and focused manner... to ensure that the global campaign against terrorism is pursued to its logical conclusion". He suggested that the US, India and Israel triad or axis would form the core of this "democratic alliance". Misra was sharply critical of "diversionary argument", especially the "motivated" propaganda that

Notes from a travel scrapbook



THE fastest way between Delhi and Hawaii is via Taiwan. You arrive in Honolulu eight hours before you leave Taipei. Astute readers who have been Around the World in Eighty Days with Jules Verne or David Niven will understand why. Somewhere over the Pacific Ocean the world begins, you cross the dateline and save one whole day of your life. Next question: what do you do with an extra day in Hawaii? Bad news for all those who have been spoiled by Baywatch into believing that ogling is time well spent. The Hawaii beach is not full of extras from Hollywood. It is full of Middle American tourists whose buttocks vary in direct proportion to their shorts. Anyone who is young, and pretty or handsome is hired as a waitress or a bartender, so the chances of meeting a Hollywood wannabe is much higher in a restaurant than on the sand. Needless to add, there is nothing called a free lunch in a tourist trap. Enjoy, but carry an extra credit card. The one thing that the Republic of China and the People's Republic of China share is pride in the past. To those unfamiliar with the two Chinas, the first is the successor state that Chiang Kai-shek established after being thrown out of Beijing by Mao Zedong's

Communists. They may now share a pride in the future as well. Taiwan's obsessive fear for five years has been that the Communists will invade and absorb Taiwan. It seems now that mainland China should be worried about being absorbed by Taiwan. Conquest these days is far easier through the power of the military. Mainland China may still be a one-party state (as Taiwan was, in effect, till 1996), but it is no longer a Communist state for the good reason that it does not believe in a Marxist economy. It has defused the social simmer that destroyed Soviet

head, knit my brows and started to think of deeper nuances. Did Confucius mean that it's not a big deal to greet friends from afar? I could see the point of that, particularly if they were of the kind that dropped in to share every sorrow. Or was old Confucius suggesting that since you were from afar you were automatically a friend? This made sense. Only enemies came from the neighbourhood. India vs Pakistan; Korea vs Korea; China vs China; Israel vs Everyone Else; Husband vs Wife. And so on. Only empire builders have enemies outside hearing reach.

than her temper. She spoke stilted Hollywood. Her idiot brother who had lost the magic talisman spoke fluent Chinese pidgin. The villain had a dark goatee and a perfect BBC accent. Arnold had no accent. An accent is not required in monosyllables: "I go!" "You come!" The heroine was cold to men, warm to battle and indifferent to advice. (I am not going to mention her name as this might be construed to have political undertones.) She ditched Arnie after he had saved her life at the gates of hell without a blink of an eyelid. Official statistics issued by the Directorate-General of Budget,

Later in the week, George Bush told the American people that Saddam Hussein had nothing to do with 9/11. So what was the war all about then? That is becoming the growing theme of the presidential campaign of 2004 that will determine whether or not George Junior will emulate his father as a one-term President. BUT the big campaign now is for California, with Arnie centre-stage. It is evident now that Arnie is honest: he is the same guy off-screen as he is on-screen. He is monosyllabic in real life as well. He is his language. His movie writers did not make anything up; they just placed a

can pray anywhere. A congregation creates a mosque; a mosque does not create a congregation. The imam was a gentle, avuncular visiting Egyptian. Relief again. An imam does not have to possess a beard that is more luxurious than his hair. Any believer can lead the prayers. There is no clergy in Islam. The khutba, or sermon was an instruction on how to come to terms with 9/11 peacefully, with head held high, without compromise on either personal faith or America. But the keepers of the mosque were more strict than comfortable. Religion is funded, and the piper calls the tune. Women were segregated rather than separated. At the Prophet's mosque in Medina women can pray behind the same imam as men, only divided by a notional line. In the only mosque at Honolulu they were offered a video vision of the namaaz. Why do believers from the subcontinent, whether Hindu or Muslim, become extra-believers the further they go from home? After lunch came the spiel from the brethren. Hawaii, he said, was of local origin; it was an Arab word that had been changed. Hawa = air in Arabic, therefore Hawaii was the name given by Arab merchants to Hawaii... The truth is not important; ownership is. There is nothing Arabic about Hawaii but if this irrational belief becomes part of the local Muslim angst, then they will do what they can to swallow the difference. AN American researcher Allen Konopaki, of Incomm Research, has produced these statistics for America: children smile 300 times a day, adults 21 times and teenagers 30 times. Come to Hawaii and the order is reversed.

MJ Akbar is Chief Editor of the Asian Age.

BYLINE

When I switched channels, CNN was showing a B-Grade movie as well, called Today in Iraq. Its hero, Colin Powell, was speaking from a new script. America wanted to get out of Iraq, the cost was too heavy, the boys wanted to go home, but they had to defeat terrorists first. The Iraqi on the street hoped, pointedly, that Powell would speak to more than his employees during his first visit to Baghdad. The CNN correspondent ended the story on an honest note. He called the American presence an occupation.

Communism by consumerism. Communism has evolved from ideology into a bureaucracy but what could be more natural in a nation traditionally ruled by mandarins? The mainland mandarins still scowl at religion; the offshore mandarins shrug and let people worship Buddha or Confucius. The difference is indifferent. "IT is a pleasure to greet friends coming from afar." That was the message on the official bag full of brochures and an obligatory tie from the government of Taiwan. Since Confucius said this, it must have a deeper meaning than the obvious, which, frankly, is pretty humdrum and could have been handed out by the local ad agency. So I bowed my

JETLAG opens up strange new worlds on television. Late night viewing is a sub-culture that defies understanding. The favourite movie star at two in a restless morning in Taiwan was Arnold Schwarzenegger, the world's most famous moral moron and candidate for election to the job of governor of California, America's most famous state and the sixth largest economy in the world. He is called a star of B-Grade movies. That is incorrect. The one that flickered across my screen was D-Grade. Its characters came out of a static template. The lost child prince was a brat, his butler a giggler. That was the comic element. The heroine had a face longer than her sword and a dress shorter

Accounting and Statistics show that 99.1% of Taiwan has colour television. I congratulate the .9% who have kept television out of their homes. WHEN I switched channels, CNN was showing a B-Grade movie as well, called Today in Iraq. Its hero, Colin Powell, was speaking from a new script. America wanted to get out of Iraq, the cost was too heavy, the boys wanted to go home, but they had to defeat terrorists first. The Iraqi on the street hoped, pointedly, that Powell would speak to more than his employees during his first visit to Baghdad. The CNN correspondent ended the story on an honest note. He called the American presence an occupation.

tape recorder in front of him. He believes that he will be elected governor of California by the consistent use of short sentences. He also makes Ronald Reagan sound like a Harvard intellectual. Is low IQ a liability in politics? No. You have to be shrewd, not brilliant. EVERYONE wants to be on first name terms with Hawaii. It is extraordinary, isn't it, that history is often rewritten before it is written. On Friday afternoon our hosts, the East-West Center, ensured that our eclectic discussions on Islam were completed in time for Friday namaaz. We were bused to a residence that was the local mosque. A mosque does not have to be topped off by a dome. You

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

Gas exploration

In a recent interview, the state minister for mineral resources and gas exploration said that the Shahbazpur gas field would be opened to commercial use within one and a half years. According to him, a 150 MegaWatt Power Plant has to be installed at Bhola and this Shahbazpur gas field will supply necessary gas to this project.

As a conscious citizen I would like to know whether a 150 Mega-Watt Power Plant will be a help to the severe power shortage in the adjoining areas like Barisal, Patuakhali, Jhalokati, Pirojpur,

Mongla, Bagerhat and Khulna. Will the ministry concerned give details of this Bhola Power Project? Such as, from where the fund for this project is coming; is it on BOO basis or a turnkey project or on credit supply offer; what is the time duration for completion of this project etc.? People are not happy with the progress of work in the gas and mineral resources area. Because, despite assurances from the ministry concerned Dhaka is yet to have sufficient gas fuelling stations as per demand. Even the month of September is passing, but the number of new gas fuelling stations has

not increased as promised by the ministry. So people are a bit concerned about any further new projects on gas and its future in Bangladesh. We all hope that the ministry concerned will do its best for a wider and commercial use of this resource within the shortest possible time. Mere statements in electronic media by the minister concerned will only put the government in a better light there. People like see results, not hear statements. **Shahid Hossain Dhanmondi, Dhaka Flyover hazard!**

The construction work of the Khilgaon flyover was started during the tenure of the past Awami league government. And it is going on causing serious problems for the commuters. Khilgaon is a bustling area and people of many localities have to pass through the roads where the construction has been going on. So, establishing a flyover here will certainly lessen the sufferings of commuters. But the slow progress of the construction work is really very hazardous for all of us, especially for those who will have to pass through this road regularly. It is wasting our valuable time and energy. I urge the

authority concerned to take necessary steps to complete the remaining work of the Khilgaon flyover as early as possible to end the suffering of commuters. **Nazmus Saquib Onze-Mail**

all the important roads remain jam-packed with vehicles. So, it has been an extremely miserable going for the citizens of Bangladesh. A sound communication system is very important for a country's development. But it is really unfortunate that our overall communication system within or without the cities is simply worsening. In order to travel only two miles in the city you may need 1-1.5 hours, which is really horrible. Reckless and haphazard driving by rickshaw-pullers and the bus drivers mostly cause traffic jams.

Many bus drivers do not have driving licenses and they are, in many cases, ignorant of the traffic rules. They stop their buses near the middle of the roads without any hesitation; because they know that law enforcing agencies are all dishonest; law can be bought by giving some bribes. The unplanned digging of roads is also one of the causes of traffic jams. And sometimes we find that the shops beside the roads occupy almost half of the road and thus cause traffic bottleneck. Parking system in Bangladesh is also very poor. Cars and other vehicles park

on both sides of a road (this is the most common picture) though it is prohibited. There have been no serious and effective measures to minimise the problems. The authority is doing next to nothing to alleviate the miserable conditions of people on the roads. So, we strongly want the authority to wake up and think about the matter very seriously in order to help the people out of the morass. **Md Ashique Haque Dhaka**