

Ahmadias under attack

A blatant violation of people's religious rights

THE attacks on police by around 500 people, who were planning to evict the members of Ahmadiya sect from their own mosque at East Nakhla para in the city on Friday, are but an example of religious intolerance finding expression in most unsavoury acts of violence.

The news is disquieting, not least because the attacks follow the Kushtia incidents that forced some Ahmadiya families to flee their homes.

The plan to oust some people from their mosque was a blatant violation of citizens' right to have freedom in religious matters. It is also very likely to taint the country's image and send wrong signals to the outside world. Religious tolerance and attack on places of worship cannot simply go together.

If such acts are not nipped in the bud, religious obscurantism will continue to divide society and obstruct the emergence of a culture based on respect for the faiths of people, regardless of whoever they might be. The lesson to be learned from Friday's violence is quite clear: the fanatic elements are trying to disrupt social and religious harmony. We must not forget what happened in Pakistan after it failed to thwart the anti-Ahmadiya campaign in the late forties, which saw the fanatics pouncing on the members of this small sect. We must also remember what Shia-Sunni sectarian violence has done, and is still doing, to Pakistan.

Bangladesh has traditionally been a moderate country with no record of such intimidating outburst of religious bigotry.

It has transpired that a section of religious leaders are trying to arouse people to frenzied action in the name of violence to religion, instead of preaching peace and tolerance-- the real message of Islam. What they have conveniently forgotten is that divisiveness in any form will only add to social tension.

Friday's incidents also indicate that fanatic groups are working in an organised manner. Now, it is the duty of all sane elements in society to resist the disruptive forces. The government, for its part, should take a firm stand on the question of religious tolerance. It must not allow the bigots to decide who is a Muslim and who is not. The role of the Khatib of Rahim Metal Mosque in Tejgaon needs to be investigated by the authorities, as there is ample evidence that he instigated the mob.

Bangladesh is, and must remain, a country of religious tolerance and harmony.

Trouble in Hill Tracts again

Govt must speed up the implementation of peace treaty

THE newly surfaced controversy over the status of the chairman for an important taskforce to expedite rehabilitation of the internal refugees of Hill Tracts is one of the many hurdles in the path of implementing the peace treaty. Whether the chairman should be given the status equivalent to a state minister, undermining the deputy minister of the Hill Tracts Ministry, is an issue that should have been sorted out before the prime minister's office gave a nod to the appointment of the new chairman. As it is, the position was lying vacant for two long years ever since the former chairman stepped down to take part in the general election in 2001 putting all activities of the taskforce to a complete stop.

This along with delay in other significant aspects of the peace treaty can easily be attributed to the frustration that lead to an angry outburst by the tribal leader Santu Larma. He even threatened to bring the region to standstill unless their demands related to the peace treaty are met by the end of this year. Do we really want instability to return in the Chittagong Hill Tracts? In fact the frustrations and disappointments of last five years have led the tribal leaders to express their desire to go back to guerilla warfare. It's not so long ago when Santu Larma himself had said in public that signing the peace treaty was a 'mistake'.

The government must show total sincerity in implementation of the treaty. The plights and rights of the tribal community must be addressed sooner. We can assume that the ruling party either has accepted the treaty or they have serious reservations about it. The latter doesn't hold water, especially since the prime minister herself met the tribal leaders and pledged her total support to the implementation of the treaty. Therefore we fail to understand why it has been put on the back burner. The delay has divided the tribal leadership, illegal arms are being recovered by security forces from the region, armed clashes between the pro and anti treaty groups are frequent. We just hope that actions are taken before the situation gets out of hand. We urge the government to give the issue the seriousness that it deserves.

An encounter with violence

KAZI ANWARUL MASUD

IT was Friday the 7th of November. The time was after six thirty in the morning. After about a month I felt like going to Dhanmondi Lake for a morning walk (we have a group of elderly and retired persons who get together to sing and listen to Tagore songs, mostly anyway, and also for some gossip). Since I had missed the pleasure of the company of the group for a while I thought a brisk morning walk would do me some good. From my apartment I walked up to road 32 at the Dhanmondi residential area from where I took a rickshaw to take me to the bridge near road no 8. The distance by rickshaw would be about ten minutes by rickshaw. The sky was clear. The morning breeze was soothing. I was in good spirit. I felt good. As the rickshaw neared the Dhanmondi Mohila Complex I saw a motor cycle being driven by in the opposite direction. There were some other people on the road. I had no reason to give a second thought either to the motor cyclist or to the people around who evidently were also out for a morning walk.

Suddenly I found the motor cyclist coming up to the rickshaw-puller and started abusing him in very filthy language. I was surprised because I had not noticed any collision between the rickshaw and the motor cycle. The rickshaw was being pulled at a leisurely pace. Immediately I sensed some thing was wrong. As abuses were being hurled at the silent rickshaw-puller who to my knowledge had done nothing to merit such abuses I politely requested the abuser to let him go. He then put a hand on my knee and asked: Uncle, what do you do? I replied that after my retirement a few years back I was not doing any thing worthwhile. He then told me that he had a gun and unless I paid him five hundred taka he would shoot me and no one would come to my rescue. I silently agreed with his assessment of the situation and brought out my purse to give him five hundred taka (I had few hundred takas in my purse). But he suddenly snatched the purse from me and started to walk back to his motor cycle. When I requested him to give the purse back as it contained some important papers he abused me in filthy language and drove away. Before he left he shouted at me and told me that he was

known as "Munna of Dhanmondi" (as if I should have known of him or perhaps I should have). As I had no money left I told the rickshaw-puller to take me home so that I could pay him his fare.

Murder, mugging, dacoity, snatching of purse is every day affair in Dhaka. Yet I was surprised that it had occurred not at the dead of night but in broad day light; not in a dark alley but in the open in posh (!) Dhanmondi area; not at a lonely spot but in the presence of other people. I had thought of reporting the matter to the police but decided against it as they must be busy solving graver crimes than the one I was the victim of. Besides, a few months back several cars in our apartment complex had been burglarised which was immediately reported to the police who came to the crime scene for investigation. Till today I am not aware of any result from the investigation. All affected car owners have forgotten the incident by now. I still do not know whether I was an accidental victim or an intended victim of the mugging incident. Compared to the reports carried by our newspapers every day on law and order situation my ill-fated meeting with the mugger and consequent loss of money and papers would only add to the burgeoning statistics on crime already available with our law enforcing agencies. Yet it does leave one with a nagging thought as to what one should do to feel secure, unmolested, and unthreatened.

An interesting tabulation has been compiled containing comparison of human security definitions given by eminent persons where the referent object is the individual. Kofi Annan has put the following key values constituting human security where "economic development, social justice, environmental protection, democratisation, disarmament, and respect for human rights and human values" are present. In his view agents of insecurity can be both the state and individual and the

nature of threats can be in the form of repression, gross abuse of human rights, international terrorism, etc. Sadako Ogata (formerly of the UNHCR) is of the opinion that an individual may feel threatened politically, economically, militarily, socially, and environmentally by states, individuals and rebels as agents of insecurity. Insurance of individual security, according to Ogata, will depend on the capacity of states and citizens to prevent and resolve conflicts through peaceful and non-violent means, and the ability of the individual to enjoy without discrimination his rights and obligations that belonging to a state implies. She puts emphasis on social inclusion of the people or the people having equal access to the political, economic and social policy making process as well as to draw equal benefits from them.

confidence motion against the government. But then provision preventing floor crossing by members of parliament to vote their conscience, if needed, makes recourse to no-confidence motions academic. In the entire history of the United States, the epitome of Presidential system and division of power among three organs of the government, not a single President has so far been impeached out of power. If Nixon had not resigned following Watergate history could have been different. The recent California recall vote ousting Davis from the post of Governor and electing Arnold Schwarzenegger in his place is an exception because in the entire history of the US, Davis is only the second Governor to be fired by the people for incompetence.

How should then the citizens ensure

throwing it and substituting it by a more acceptable one". American writer and philosopher Henry David Thoreau wrote RESISTANCE TO CIVIL GOVERNMENT in 1849 in which he asserted that publicly disobeying the laws of an unjust government would encourage and bring other people to oppose that government's actions. Thoreau feared that the government itself, which was the only mode the people had chosen to execute their will, was liable to be abused and perverted before the people could take corrective measures. Thoreau wrote that the majority chosen by the people was permitted to rule "not because they are most likely to be in the right, not because this seems to be fairest to the minority, but because they are physically the strongest". He questioned the rationale of the citizens to "resign his

ity to deliver that they may find themselves forced to take measures which otherwise they would never contemplate to take. Jon Roland (Principles of Tyranny) finds the only security from tyranny is to maintain a framework of unbroken accountability of the government to the people providing for elections and guarding against concentration of power in the hands of the few. Lord Acton's proverbial observation that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely is a transcendental truth applicable in all ages.

In the sub-continent both the Indian and Pakistani Supreme Courts (albeit in different cases) judged that the enumeration of fundamental rights in the Constitution was aimed at putting these rights beyond the violative actions of both the executive and the legislature. The possibility of tyranny of the majority, originally conceptualised by Alexis de Tocqueville (Democracy in America 1835) revolved round the premise that once rapacious and arbitrary powers are arrogated by despots/oligarchs they may not have reasons to concern themselves with the welfare of the many. Since democracy per se does not eliminate the problem of tyranny, it may become necessary to call for account from the government with religious regularity establishing the practice into an unshakeable normative tradition along with the creation of pro-active "counter-majoritarian" institutions.

Since political authority is transient by nature in a true democracy the majority could be well advised to listen to differing opinions from within its ranks without branding them as "traitors/conspirators" and also to the criticism by the opposition. Since we no longer live in discreet national communities but in "overlapping community of fate" and since the neo-cons are ever ready to pounce upon "non-conformist" states which they consider as posing even remote threat to Western security, smaller countries should abandon intra-majority-minority confrontational politics regressing the pace of socio-economic development of the people, and where necessary make room for another group, more capable and acceptable to the people to govern.

Kazi Anwarul Masud is former Secretary and Ambassador

The question often debated is what to do with a government which fails to provide security in all its aspects to its citizens. Political scientists have devised over time constitutional means of redress. In parliamentary system one can take the recourse of no-confidence motion against the government. But then provision preventing floor crossing by members of parliament to vote their conscience, if needed, makes recourse to no-confidence motions academic. How should then the citizens ensure individual security?

UNDP puts key values on an individual's freedom from fear and want. Apart from preventing the individual from falling into the trap of poverty and hunger the state must shelter the individual from physical violence, crime, oppression, torture, discrimination, and human rights violations. Among G-8 countries Canada and Japan may be cited as examples of countries who value human security very highly. Canada puts key value on individual freedom from "pervasive threats to peoples' rights, their safety and their lives". Canada believes that individual security may be threatened by state failure, transnational crimes, religious and ethnic discord and conflict, state repression, violent crimes, terrorism etc. Japan, like UNDP, puts key value on freedom from fear and want and also emphasises the need for maintaining human dignity.

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individual security? British philosopher Thomas Hobbes argued that since human life in the "state of nature" is "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short"; people should seek security by entering into a contract in which individual power is yielded to a sovereign who regulates conduct. But if the sovereign fails to provide security, Hobbes argues, the sovereign may be overthrown by the people who will then enter into a new contract. But the process of change may differ. French Revolution was bloody followed by the Reign of Terror. In recent times Presidents Marcos and Estrada were thrown out of power by "people's power". These days Georgians are clamouring for the resignation of Edward Shevardnadze from the Presidency. Alberto Fujimori had to flee Peru to escape people's wrath.

US President Ulysses Grant accepted the right of revolution as an inherent one. "When people are oppressed by their government" Grant wrote in his Personal Memoirs, "it is a natural right they enjoy to relieve themselves of the oppression, whether by withdrawing from it, or by over-

conscience to the legislator since every man has a conscience... I think that we should be men first and subjects afterward. It is not desirable to cultivate a respect for the law, so much as for the right".

Though Thoreau's beliefs might have had influenced the non-cooperation movement of Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, in a civilised world respect for the laws is essential if the people are to live in peace and achieve progress. Besides, Mahatma Gandhi's non-cooperation was against the British colonial rule and that of Martin Luther King was against racism in America. One must also be cautioned that Thoreau was not nihilistic which repudiates all positive values and believes in nothing. Nor Thoreau is to be confused as an iconoclast. His total disagreement with the US government of the day was over the Mexican War (1846-48) which he saw as an attempt to extend slavery to the western United States. Yet Thoreau's philosophy could find relevance in some places of the present day world where the people are oppressed to the point because of government's inability

Israelisation of Bush's America

DR. FAKHRUDDIN AHMED writes from Princeton

EVER since the American people did not elect George W. Bush the President in 2000, he has been obsessed with winning the Presidential election in 2004. (For the record, Bush received excess of half a million less popular votes than Al Gore in 2000, and was anointed President by the five rightwing, Republican-Presidents-appointed Justices of the Supreme Court). As President, most of Bush's policies have been geared towards achieving "reelection." Since his father, George Herbert Walker Bush, the victor in Gulf War I in 1991, did not win reelection, George W. Bush uses him as a template for what not to do. The senior Bush broke his campaign promise of "read my lips, no new taxes" by enacting the biggest tax increase in US history, with catastrophic electoral consequences. The first act of the junior Bush was to enact a huge tax cut, dispatching the nation from huge surplus to a deficit. The senior Bush worked through the UN, won the support of the world for driving out Saddam Hussein's Iraq out of Kuwait, and was careful not to violate the UN mandate by going all the way to Baghdad. The junior Bush ignored the UN, and ridiculing the overwhelming opposition of the world to his belligerency attacked and occupied Iraq. The senior Bush and his Secretary of State, James Baker, stood up to Yitzhak Shamir's Israel when it demanded loan guarantees for settlements in the West Bank and Gaza. These days when Ariel Sharon asks junior Bush to jump, Bush's reply is, "how high?" Completing the Israelisation of America, junior Bush is now emulating Sharon's failed policies, and inflicting collective punishment on the Iraqi civilians by bombing civilian targets and blowing up civilian buildings in occupied Iraq, in response to Iraqi insurgency. Is that the way a true "liberator" acts?

There is a way for America to win in

Iraq, which Mr. Bush in his arrogance will never entertain. My father used to say that you couldn't ask for the blessings of someone you have insulted. First, you had to ask for his/her forgiveness. To win over the Iraqis, America has to apologize to the Iraqis for the repeated bombing of their country for 13-years and the crippling 13-year US-UK sponsored UN sanctions that killed millions of Iraqi men, women and children and turned a prosperous Iraq into an impoverished one. America also has to honestly explain its intentions vis-à-vis Iraq's oil reserves, world's second largest after Saudi Arabia's. None of this will work without addressing the fairness issue. If

The problem with George W. Bush is that he is a child of privilege, a C student and an underachiever who nevertheless managed to attend Yale and Harvard through family influence! He never had a proper job until he was in his forties, that too, as the head of a professional baseball team, the Texas Rangers. Unlike intellectual Presidents like Kennedy and Clinton, Bush does not read newspapers, but every night makes time to watch the 11 P.M. telecast of ESPN's "Sports Center!"

Mr. Bush likes to compare himself to President Reagan. The comparison does not go far. Mr. Reagan was in politics for thirty-two years, first as a

neoconservative cabal took over the Bush Presidency by becoming Bush's brain! A learned person has so much information stored in his head that he cannot be swept off his feet by an argument easily. He percolates the new idea in his head and assesses how it stacks up against similar information stored in his brain and almost by definition is judicious and moderate. A person, whose head is fairly empty, like our "incurious" President, can be prevailed upon to act recklessly and extremely. These days it appears that the American Presidency has been hijacked to serve not America's but Israel's interests.

generals and security chiefs are blasting Sharon's repressive policies, our President only heaps praise on Sharon and contempt on the Palestinians. So much for Bush's fairness!

During the 2000 campaign, Bush had criticized Gore for nation building abroad. These days, the only good news from Iraq that Mr. Bush can offer the American people is nation building! Labeling the Iraqi insurgents "dead-enders" (Rumsfeld), "terrorists" (Bremer) or everything in-between including thugs and Al-Qaeda (Bush) will not make the problem go away. The Russians had called the Afghan Mujahideen "bandits;" those "ban-

the local population (by bombing civilian targets, destroying civilian buildings and inflicting collective punishment on the Iraqi civilians, a la Israel, America is playing right into the insurgents hands!)

Mr. Bearden adds: "For every mujahadeen killed or hauled off in raids by Soviet troops in Afghanistan, a revenge group of perhaps a half-dozen members of his family took up arms. Sadly, this same rule probably applies in Iraq." Mr. Bearden ends on an ominous note: "There were two stark lessons in the history of the 20th century: no nation that launched a war against another sovereign nation ever won. (Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld, Wolfowitz, Feith, Pipes, Abrams or any of the other Jewish neocons never fought for America! How would they know?) And every nationalist-based insurgency against a foreign occupation ultimately succeeded." The Jewish neocons who manipulated President Bush into attacking Iraq may yet regret it. If America is forced to withdraw from Iraq, as seems likely sooner than later, that may not spell good news for Israel! Israelization of America can just as easily backfire on Israel! The searing memory I of Sunday, November 2, when a shoulder-fired missile brought down a Chinook helicopter in Iraq, killing 16 American soldiers, is of a President Bush in a particularly cheery mood, who did not even mention the incident in his speech. Bush is yet to attend a single funeral of over 400 US soldiers killed thus far in Iraq! Because attending a funeral will remind Americans of the bad things happening in Iraq and that is not good for his reelection campaign, his critics say! Why was the President so cheerful despite the horrendous American tragedy in Iraq that Sunday? According to Maureen Dowd of The New York Times, the President was off to a \$200,000 per person fundraiser to further fatten his already huge reelection chest!

LETTER FROM AMERICA

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America continues to cast its unfair vetoes to protect Israel's heinous crimes against the Palestinians, defying world opinion, no sugarcoated words will convince the Iraqis, or for that matter the Arabs and Muslims, that America is in Iraq for any other reason than to enhance America's and Israel's economic and military interests. That being the case, the Iraqi insurgency will only intensify.

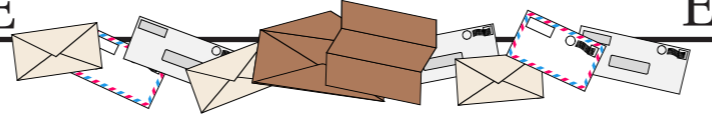
After eight years of Clinton, in 2000 the Republicans wanted to win back the White House so bad that they handpicked George W. Bush, who had the right pedigree and name recognition, and through character assassination destroyed the candidacy of war hero Senator John McCain, who would have been a much better President.

Democrat, then a Republican, including two terms as the Governor of California (1966-74) before becoming President. Reagan won two Presidential elections (1980, 1984) in landslides. (Mr. Bush won none.) Reagan had enormous political stature. Reagan would formulate a policy and ask his subordinates to carry it out. No subordinate would dare to manipulate him. Mr. Reagan talked tough, but acted moderate. Unelected Mr. Bush talks moderate but acts extreme. Unlike President Reagan, Mr. Bush, not a man of great intellect or political philosophy, asks his subordinates WHAT his policy should be, and HOW to carry it out. If your boss asks you WHAT his policy should be, you own him! This is how Deputy Defense Secretary Dr. Paul Wolfowitz and his pro-Israeli, Jewish

President Bush condemns any Palestinian misstep or crime with the speed of light, but has never, ever, criticized Israeli atrocities against the Palestinians. It was therefore ironic that recently four former heads of Israel's Shin Bet security service Yaakov Perry, Avraham Shalom, Ami Ayalon and Carmi Gilon "delivered a blistering collective criticism of Israel's tough military policies towards the Palestinians, saying Israel urgently needed a political solution to the Middle East conflict." (NY Times, November 15). It may be recalled that last month, Israel's army chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Moshe Yaalon, said that the network of restrictions placed on the Palestinian population had proved to be counterproductive, breeding greater militancy. While Israel's

"dits" forced Russia to leave Afghanistan in 1989! In an article in The New York Times on November 9, former CIA agent in Afghanistan, Milt Bearden, says that the Iraqi insurgents are employing the strategies crafted by Chinese military tactician Sun Tzu 2500 years ago ("The art of war."). The first is to attack the enemy's strategy. Expecting street-to-street combat in Baghdad, and none occurred, America had to modify its strategy. Next, attack the alliances (UN, Red Cross, Jordanian and Turkish embassies bombings, as well as countless attacks on individuals and groups allied with the US, including Iraqi Governing Council figures and Italian peacekeepers). Next, attack the army (which is intensifying with regular frequency) to inflict casualties and provoke a reaction that alienates

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.

Modernise the police

I have been following some of the proposals to modernise the police department of Bangladesh. I have a few suggestions in this regard: The government should develop specially trained and sophisticated police force for the major cities, like Dhaka, Chittagong, Sylhet, Rajshahi and Khulna. The police departments of these cities should be constituted of such specially trained police force. This is not a proposal to replace Rapid Action Force. In fact, RAF should be elevated into a full fledged SWAT team, with specially trained snipers and sharpshooters.

This force should be formed similar to the NYPD type police force. The minimum educational requirement should be a bachelors' degree. They would be trained in urban anti-terrorism warfare. Their pay scales should be comparable to the officers of Bangladesh army. Each major city should have fully equipped modern shooting facilities, where these officers would be required to practise a set number of hours per week. Each major city should have its own modern forensic laboratory with trained technicians. Each major city should have modern physical training facilities to

maintain physical fitness of the police force. The police should be trained on modern interrogation techniques practised in the western countries like the UK and the USA. The police officers should also be trained to speak both Bengali and English fluently. Only the best from other armed forces should be transferred to this special police force if necessary. The police officers should carry communication equipment and firearms similar to the NYPD. The existing police force should be replaced by the new one over a period of two years. **Sherif H Saeed**

NY, USA **Poet Shamsul Haq and freedom of expression** I have gone through the writing of Syed Shamsul Haq, "I speak of the freedom of the pen" (November 17) and he did not sound to be very convincing. He wrote it in response to the book "Ka", written by Taslima Nasreen. Not only he protested her book through writing but also went to the court. Taslima is a controversial writer and she attacked social and religious beliefs of our society. She never produced very quality writing and she used to long for popularity.

However, she managed some supporters in our country and certainly Mr. Haq was one of them. Her recently published autobiography has brought controversy again. She described her personal relationship with some of the country's prominent writers and portrayed them as lechers. Poet Shamsul Haq is one of the victims, nonetheless. Still, we will be advocating for freedom of expression since it is a democratic right. Poet Milton described it wonderfully in Areopagitica when he impassionedly uttered, "Banning a book is like killing a man.....". Though he was a puritan, Milton was very vocal against any form of licens-

ing and thus his "Areopagitica" became a masterpiece in advocating freedom of expression. Nonetheless, banning a book is never a good idea and Taslima has got the right to write anything. As a writer, she must enjoy this liberty. If someone feels insulted, he might go to the court. Freedom of expression should be upheld limitlessly everywhere whether we like to write-up or not. **Oil Md. Abdullah Chowdhury Save the Children Sweden-Denmark Gulshan I, Dhaka** *** This is in response to Syed Shamsul Haq's piece "I speak of the freedom of the pen" that appeared on

November 17, 2003. Something that should be considered absolutely personal has become public for these two writers ('he' and 'she'). Both of them are the conscious catalysts of the Western world. First, the duty was successfully done by 'she' bringing her intimate experiences to public using the pen, and then 'he' took the responsibility on his shoulder of advertising the book "Ka" in Bangladesh for accelerating their publicity at the cost of their prestige. The strictly personal matter is now a nation-wide gossip and probably soon will be an international one. The Western media is deliberate

whereas the Eastern is an instrument of the West and together they are contributing to make the issue public. These two writers are cent percent honest about abusing the freedom of their pen, and both 'he' and 'she' are using this issue to become more famous at home and abroad at the cost of their self-respect and prestige. With the license of their pen's freedom, they are hampering the freedom of the peace loving people. We hope that both 'he' and 'she' will perceive the truth. And we hope both of them will write for the betterment of society in future. **JM Taslim Kabir A Bangladeshi Perceiver**