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No death penalty?

The alliance government is going to abolish capital punishment in Bangladesh shortly. If the law is passed without any delay, the government will be eulogised by human rights organisations like Amnesty International. But its aftermath may be disastrous for our country.

Capital punishment has been prohibited in many developed countries. In the US, the paradigm of human rights, death penalty is banned in a few states. If death penalty is abolished in Bangladesh, crimes will frog-leap. In our socio-economic context, death penalty is necessary to minimise felonies.

The prosecution system may be eased. Lethal injections may replace hanging. I hope the government will think anew before abrogating capital punishment in Bangladesh.

Molla Mohammad Shaheen
Dept of English, Dhaka University

has been by and large free from any major or even minor acts of terrorism since the days of 9/11. There have been unsubstantiated charges, some appearing even in some highly credible magazines as Time, suggesting, as the Canadians have come up with now, that Bangladesh is a hotbed of international terrorism.

Against this baseless assertion, there have been no acts of terrorism in Bangladesh, nor has any suspected international terrorist been located in our country. The surest sign of terrorist activity in any country now is the presence of the US agencies fighting Mr. Bush's war on terrorism. Has there been any large or small number of officials of the US security agencies visiting Bangladesh since 9/11? I don't know but if they have not been, as I think is the case, then Bangladesh is not a spot for international terrorism.

Then, what is the point of issuing these travel advisories? How many US and Australians (excepting the Bali case for Australians) have been killed or kidnapped overseas? Do these advisories serve any purpose in saving lives? If we look into the numbers, we will see that these advisories serve little purpose at all. They nevertheless cause immense economic hardships to countries such as ours that are now on the verge of being marginalised in the so-called move towards globalisation. A few US and Australian lives that are in presumed risk are considered more valuable than putting into actual risk millions of lives in our parts of the world. Why don't the US and Australian governments issue travel warnings for their soldiers in Iraq? Seriously, if the US and the Australians had not been in Iraq, then their citizens would not have been at serious risks anywhere save from traffic accidents and the like.

Sadly, actions such as travel advisories by the rich and developed nations increasingly motivate us to doubt the call for globalisation. We are in truth moving towards a world where the line is being drawn where US lives (and lives of people of the developed nations) are immensely more valuable than say Afghan or Iraqi lives or ours for that matter, where globalisation means total and unequivocal subservience to what the West thinks as right.

As one watches the unfolding US presidential election, one cannot help observing how Mr. Bush and indeed many other candidates have made Christian ethics as the core of their campaigns. To add to our pessimism, the global world could as well be a world dominated by Christian ethics! Let us also not forget what is happening in France with the hijab!

So, the editorial notwithstanding, why would the US or Australia care about what a travel advisory does to the teeming millions in Bangladesh or its image?

Shahjahan Ahmed
Dhanmandi RA, Dhaka

Dr. B's plan

It now seems Prof. B Choudhury is hell-bent on launching his own political party with the help of some like-minded politicians. I wonder who else is going to join his party when his son Mahi B Choudhury has expressed his solidarity with Begum Khaleda Zia's leadership.

Loyalty, like charity, also begins at home. This time, it is going to be a glaring exception.

Fayaz Khan
Joar Shahara, Dhaka Cantt

Reduce defence purchase, help the police

Polite, obedient, loyal, intelligent, courageous and efficient. These are the words one would find if the word police is de-abbreviated. These are not just words zipped in to that single abbreviation, but these are the qualities that a policeman should possess, the qualities that make him distinguishable and respected in society, reliable in the

scene of crisis. But police of our country means anything but those qualities. To say the least, police is the most corrupt sector of the state. What the police have not done over the last few years -- rape, murder, abduction, robbery, hijacking...all the crimes that one can name are being committed by police. Except for a few valiant and dutiful policemen, the rest of the department are infected by corruption.

One would rightly be curious as to what is wrong with police. What has gone wrong? The memory of the 25th March night is still alive. The legacy of sacrifice by the poorly armed policemen at Rajarbag is still remembered with pride and tears. So what is so wrong; why police have lost their identity?

Not long back, Ekushey TV made a documentary on the Sharda Police Academy. It found out that the accommodation and food were very poor below standard. What it did not reveal that a trainee have to pay for everything in the academy -- for his uniform, bedding, food, accommodation -- each and everything. If you don't give money, you get nothing. Though very strange, all the expenditures of the training are sustained by the state.

Even before coming to the academy, one has to pay money (big amount) to get himself selected. We really do want to know how one manages that amount of money? May be by selling land or other property, or taking loan with hefty interests. So the first and most important mission of a police SI after passing out from Sharda is to recover that money as soon as possible.

A young man had to give bribe to get himself selected, to get trained, to get a uniform. What service and loyalty can we expect out of him? If we have compelled someone to be corrupt at his moulding period, how can we expect him to keep away from corruption. Moreover the pay scale of police is so poor that it is impossible to run a family with that amount of money these days. After all, a policeman is a human being. He is a son of a father, a loving husband -- a part of society. The money that he gets goes nowhere near meeting even all his most basic demands. In

Ahmadias in trouble

Congratulations on your bold editorial (December 7) condemning anti-Ahmadia zealots who threatened a minority Islamic community in Dhaka with dire consequences for pursuing their particular brand of religious belief. Elsewhere in the country, a leader of the community was killed in the recent past; a whole village of Ahmadias has been given ultimatum to renounce their belief; Ahmadi mosques have been attacked; and members of the community have been subjected to abuse.

You are also right to demand that government take stern action aimed at those who initiated the demonstrations against the community and threatened it. Such action is an essential first step to put the genie of intolerance back into the bottle where it belongs. And that goes for all kinds of intolerance, be it towards a subset of belief or a different set of belief altogether.

Yet, the long-term answer to religious intolerance must come from the forces of liberalism and democracy in the country. In that context, one needs to ask: where are the leaders of 'mainstream' Islam who emphasise tolerance, referring, for example, to the well-known Koranic verse (II: 256), La ikraha fil-deen -- "Let there be no compulsion in religion"? Some of these leaders are already in positions of power to make a difference. They have a duty to speak up -- and be counted, in this case and in all instances of intolerance.

Mahfuzur Rahman, One-mail

The fate of the Ahmadias hangs in mid-air right now. The fresh wave of anti-Ahmadia movement, that sparked after the attack on the Ahmadi mosque in Nakhla para on November 21st, has asked the government to declare the Ahmadias as non-Muslims. Imam Hassan Mamtaji has said, "The anti-Ahmadia group would not be responsible for fuelling the rage."

In the past, Ahmadias had to face such extremism in 1999 when Ahmadias were killed. No substantial action has ever been taken against the

culprits.

Now, the Ahmadias are at the mercy of the government. It is up to the government to take firm steps against the disrupting mullahs and not give in to their demands. "There is no compulsion in religion", as Allah says in the Holy Koran and so it should be.

The Ahmadias must not be forbidden from calling themselves Muslims. They must not be afraid of offering their prayers in their mosques. They must not be snatched of their right to live like a normal Bangladeshi Muslim. The Ahmadias in Pakistan were declared as non-Muslims in 1974, thanks to the local mullahs. As a result, they are now treated as second-class citizens and prefer to leave their homeland.

I hope that the Ahmadias in Bangladesh won't have to go through such a tragedy, but it all depends on the verdict of the government.

Maham Bilal Khan, USA

Rein in the bigots

I am following the news of the anti-Ahmadia movement in the country, especially in Dhaka, with great alarm. The religious bigots are pushing the country to the brink. We are a tolerant lot. A few extremists must not be allowed to dictate terms.

The government must come down hard on all those fomenting religious intolerance. The ring-leaders, including those supporting the ruling alliance, must be punished severely. This is an acid test for the government.

AN Motaher, On e-mail

Don't overlook the danger!

Don't politicians in Dhaka know what a huge impact the current wave of anti-Ahmadia attacks is going to have on the country's image? All of Bangladesh's efforts to be seen as a nation of moderate, tolerant Muslims are about to be thrown away, unless the leaders of these radical Islamic groups are dealt with.

serious view on this issue and take some quick steps to salvage the reputation and glory of the police department. The major political parties must realise that police are for the security of the general people, and not for giving shelter to the armed cadres of any political outfit.

The government must immediately make the recruitment process

defence purchase and allot the money to reform police. The deteriorating law and order situation in the country is the most important issue to be attended now. It's the police who have to maintain law and order in the country. Otherwise, general people will take the law in their own hands and 'might' will become the 'right'... one might fear, it has already become.

Romeo Ahmed
Central road, Dhanmandi, Dhaka

Ward or 'word' commissioners?

Honestly speaking, I still do not have any clue why on earth I should vote for the ward commissioners.

What I found about them is that they are all losers. They fail to meet their promises. Most of them are uneducated (sorry, I don't have any other word for them) and only because of money they dare to contest the elections. Therefore, we badly need ward commissioners who will not speak much but work a lot.

Minhaj Ahmed
Uttara, Dhaka

VGF vagaries

The Daily Star in its 17 November issue carried a picture depicting irregularities in distribution of VGF (Vulnerable Group Feeding) allocation. The picture originates from one of the 'Monga' (famine) prone areas from the northern districts and it shows an old woman returning empty-handed after her futile bid to collect VGF allocation (her name was not on the list), while on the adjacent picture a young man with a smiling face receives the same allocation.

Well, this was not a unique case as the front pages of newspapers were flooded with even more bizarre and heartless cases of misappropriation. We have become tired and have ceased to react in such situations. Most of our pragmatic fellows might find themselves prudent enough to take all these to be granted. But as for the 'imprudent', there is no place to seek solace from.

It requires little wisdom to appreciate that the elderly people are the most vulnerable of the vulnerable. So it is natural that they

should be given priorities in making the list of the VGF receivers. This has been the case from its inception.

But we are worried to find frequent breaches in this practice. As far as my knowledge goes, representatives of the local government are responsible for making the list. They are people's representatives. They hardly can miss the fact that VGF is the only source of relief for the older persons can avail as other arrangements like Money for Work are applicable for those who can afford to deliver physical labour.

Had the list-makers kept themselves aware of the fact, perhaps the situations depicted on the picture might not have arisen. Our government should pay heed to this reality and instruct the local government officials, or make statutory provisions, to prioritise the elderly people in the VGF list.

Yasmin Ara Baby
Lalmatia, Dhaka

Ahmadia issue

I am writing in response to Mr. Akram's letter (December 8).

Yes, every religious group in our beautiful country has the right to practise religion, but he is not realising that Ahmadias are practising the religion in the name of being Muslims, which they are not. Ahmadi thinking is not Islam, it is not what our Prophet Mohammad (pbuh) preached for us.

The Ahmadi sect was created and funded by British rulers to create confusion and problems. The British tried a lot of other options to divide the Muslims, but because of the firm stand on the religion by our people we kept our religion alive.

Ahmadias can practise their religion as Islam not only admits but also insists on religious tolerance, but they are not part of or even close to Islam.

Belal Solaiman Atha
Ontario, Canada

Case against Sheikh Hasina

The High Court recently stayed proceedings of the frigate case pending with the lower court against former prime minister and Awami League president Sheikh



After that it will be useless to protest against demoralisation of Bangladesh as the next 'Taliban-esque' state in the foreign media (which is going to happen as a result of all this, make no mistake about it).

Talking about secularism and religious tolerance only when we want foreigners to come and invest in the country is hypocritical and will not work. Real tolerance means standing up for religious minorities and protecting their rights as Bangladeshi citizens.

Zeeshan Hasan
London School of Economics, London, UK

Hasina as learnt from the news published in DS and some other dailies.

I wonder why such a political personality, who might get the chance to lead the country once again, filed petition with the High Court to get the stay order on the proceeding of corruption charges, rather than boldly facing the proceedings in the lower court to prove her innocence.

In my opinion, it would brighten her image if she appeared at the lower court and faced the proceedings. We expect a frank and bold approach from our top political leaders.

Fakhrul Alam
Siddeswari, Dhaka

Koizumi's decision

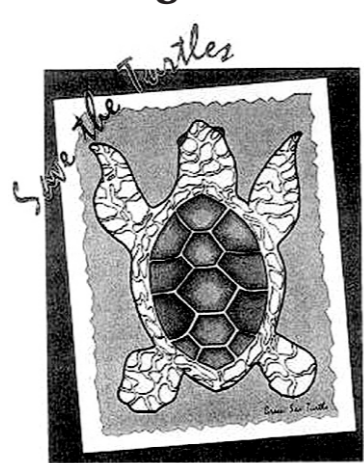


It was shocking to learn that Japanese Premier Junichiro Koizumi has remained adamant and bent upon sending troops to Iraq (jeopardising Japan's post-war policy), in spite of the recent slaying of two Japanese diplomats. After all, they don't have to send troops to become cannon fodder, and also to be known as enemies of Iraqis, while their presence won't do any good.

I want to make it known to the Japanese people that Koizumi had already made a mistake by giving support to the US, the actual terrorists, and has again put the Japanese nation in jeopardy by deciding to send troops to Iraq and deploy them for combating Iraqi people whose country had been taken over by force and forgery. Iraqis want to govern Iraq by themselves and want the current administration being run under the auspices of the UN, not the US and its accomplices.

AF Rahman, Dhaka

Warning: Bostami turtles



The recent deaths of the "gazar" fish in the ponds at the shrine of Hazrat Shah Jalal (R) in Sylhet is a warning for the Bayazid Bostami turtles in Chittagong. The same could happen to them. God forbid, if this happens Bangladesh will lose the only known endemic vertebrate animal of this country.

Bostami turtle (Aspideretes nigricans) is found nowhere else in the world. The authorities concerned should realise its significance and act before it is too late. Several attempts by wildlife researchers to transfer some of them to other places failed in the past. Scientists have been repeatedly

warning of such a situation (mass extinction) for the Bostami turtles but the *khadems* of the Bayazid Bostami shrine have not yet paid any attention to such warnings. If this turtle population is wiped out for any reason they will be gone forever.

So the authorities concerned, shrine committee people and devotees should think and act fast to at least take some of the turtles to any other place, may be the ponds on Chittagong University campus. This will ensure the continuity of this species in Bangladesh.

SMA Rashid, Baitul Aman Housing Society, Mohammadpur, Dhaka

many of the cases, a policeman becomes obligated to be corrupt; and then he gets used to it.

Over the last few years, people have lost all the faith and trust they had in police. If someone doesn't agree, please see the news of 27 miscreants being beaten to death by mob on 7th and 8th of December. It shows the general frustration and mistrust toward the state's law and law enforcing agencies. Partisan politics has contributed to corruption in police and mistrust of people toward them.

The government must take a

of police corruption-free, clean the police academy, and ensure a good standard of training and accommodation. It must chalk out an attractive career plan for the policemen and improve their salary structure. The government must make sure that a government employee can lead a reasonable life with dignity and status.

Every year, the state spends thousands of crores of taka for defence budget. A huge amount of this money is spent for arms and equipment purchase.

I think it is sensible to curtail

Lecturing about peace

The US is now threatening the whole world, saying it will attack in "pre-emptive self defence" (another cocky little magic phrase being tossed by some cold-blooded killers) any country that tries to develop WMD. The reason for such warning, according to the US, is that it wants to make this world a safer place and stop the proliferation of WMD. If you have any doubts about the sincerity of the US' position on this, let me assure you that I believe it 100 per cent! And that is why I think every country on earth should reply to US in an equally truthful manner, by taking the following actions immediately:

a) Withdraw from all non-proliferation treaties immediately.

b) Expel all UN inspectors from all of their nuclear sites.

c) Shoot down any spy planes going over their sky.

d) Use all available resources and start making nuclear weapons as quickly as possible.

Of course, the US will now be angry and tell them that they are not being sincere and their intentions are evil. In reply, they should tell the US that they are absolutely sincere in their determination to make this world a safer place, as long as the US itself is sincere. If the US is to convince the international community that it means what it lectures, then it should carry out the followings:

a) Cancel all programmes of developing mini-nukes immediately.

diately.

b) Reduce its stockpile of WMD, with an active programme of getting rid of all WMD.

c) Stop supplying WMD to Israel and Israel must stop all its WMD programmes and destroy all of its stockpiles.

If the US agrees to the above conditions, then let's send in the UN weapons inspectors to "all" countries and let them get rid of all WMD and truly make this world a safer place. But I know what I have written sounds like a daydream!

There is absolutely no way the US will ever get rid of its own WMD and it will always try to use any old treaty, law, lies, deceits and threats to undermine anyone who tries to

match its weapons. And so we can flush down all our hopes of a nuke-free world down the all-useful lavatory! We are back to square one.

And that is why I wrote in the beginning of my letter that, all countries should do all they can to develop nukes as quickly as possible. Because in the next 5/10 years, no country will be able to do anything without getting permission from Washington. The US will watch every country with hundreds of satellites and as soon as they detect any sign of a weapons programme, they will send in their fighter planes and bomb your country without giving any reason, any explanation and without telling anyone (some of you might say that the US has already adopted this

policy). In response, all you can do is make some pointless complaints to the UN and probably cry under your bed. That is why people should do all they can to either stop the US from establishing racist and double-standard ideas like "pre-emptive self defence" or they should take appropriate measures to defend their countries.

A world where one country can invade another country and still claim that it is "defending" itself, while the other country can't fire a missile to defend its own people, seems like an extremely 'sick one' to me.

Azad Miah, Oldham, UK

