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LEBANON situation

Israel is bombing the Lebanese civilian facilities and infrastructures at its will on the excuse that the Hezbollah fighters are hiding their weapons under civilian shields. If that is believed by the gullible, the question is why Hezbollah has to hide their weapons (not of mass destruction) under civilian cover. Doesn't it show how limited this organisation's resources are to stand up to the Israeli forces? Why then Israel is bombing Lebanon indiscriminately?

I have been mulling over the way, if there is any; in which a weak state can defend itself. If a state other than Israel cherishes the capacity of defending itself, the 'international community' is going to declare it a terrorist state, a rogue one, a member of the 'Axis of Evil' or even invade it to get rid of the Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD). So, isn't it a rational obligation of the international community to defend the defenceless states? Not in

reality! Lebanon is being pounded for none of its crimes. The only foreseeable reason is a group that has taken hostage two Israeli soldiers based in the southern part of the country. For that Lebanese towns, villages, roads, bridges, buildings, ports and airports are being destroyed by Israel along with hundreds of people. Why doesn't the international community come up with a programme to strengthen the weak Lebanese armed forces so that Lebanon becomes capable of exorcising the Hezbollah?

Are we going centuries back in terms of civilisation as the world is tilting day by day to the 'Might is Right' notion?

Ahmed Mohiuddin
Dhaka

We are watching with horror the monstrous behaviour of Israel. Hezbollah seized two Israeli soldiers in a bid to exchange Arab prisoners who are being held in Israel, and, instead of negotiation, Israel

has gone berserk. Air strikes on Lebanon are going on relentlessly, scores of innocent people are losing their lives and airports, bridges, power stations, highways are being destroyed.

It is not a secret from where Israel is getting the support to act unilaterally. Without the United States' encouragement Israel would never have dared to commit such atrocities. The Bush administration is looking on indulgently, and blaming Syria and Iran for the situation, not a word of reproach for Israel. It is turning a blind eye to Israel's demented actions. What hold Israel has over the United States that the latter finds no fault with the Jewish state? But then the United States itself is a country which did not hesitate to destroy Iraq and Afghanistan; so they are alike, having the same cruel, unjust attitude.

Nur Jahan, Chittagong

Islamic fundamentalism, extremism and the sharia

Md. Anwarul Kabir's article, "Fundamentalism, extremism and Islam" (The Daily Star, July 7, 2006) is replete with inanities which are so common in writings on Islam. Once again, efforts to come to grips with uncomfortable facts get short shrift, while the facile 'Islam is a religion of peace' slogan abounds. It is essential to go beyond mere slogans if Islam is to be seen as part of a pluralist world.

Kabir stresses that "Islam forbids offensive fighting", "Islam only allows Muslims to fight a defensive war", and goes on to quote the Koran in support of his view: "Fight in the cause of Allah against those who fight you, but do not transgress limits..." (II:190-193). It is easy to find in the Koran verses that do not fit Kabir's quotes on defensive fighting: "Fight those who believe not in God nor in the Last Day, nor hold that forbidden which hath been forbidden by God and His Apostle, nor acknowledge the Religion of Truth (even if they are) of the People of the Book, until they pay the Jyzia with willing submission, and feel themselves subdued". (IX: 29). It is impossible to see this verse as Kabir suggests. It bears emphasis that the latter verse is as authentic as the one Kabir quotes, and a Muslim has to accept them as such. Those who make use of verses like II: 190-193 have also the responsibility of reconciling it with a verse like IX:29.

Similarly, Kabir makes much of *sura Kafirun* (CIX) " Say: O ye that reject Faith! I worship not that which ye worship. Nor will ye worship that which I worship... To you be your Way, and to me mine." This early Meccan *sura* is a reflection of the natural defensiveness, hesitation and tentativeness that marked the early years of the propagation of Islam. The ambience changed dramatically in Medina, and hence in verses revealed in Medina. It would be illogical to suggest that this early Meccan *sura* overrode a verse of the late Medina *sura* like IX:29 quoted above.

Neither is it helpful to suggest, as Kabir does, that "Sharias should be modified to address our present problems, following the guidelines given in Koran, Hadith, and Sunnah..." I look forward to his coming up with 'modification' in concrete areas of the sharia that does not conflict with some basic tenets of the Koran and, crucially,

with the individual interpretations of these tenets and 'guidelines' all tenaciously held by their proponents to be the only acceptable interpretation. That any effort at modification of the sharia is also likely to run into a wall of insuperable resistance, is clearly brought out by a letter on the subject by Ali Ahmed (letters, July 14) who contends that since the sharia is based on sources like the Koran, the Hadith and Sunnah, "we should treat them as divine rules and so there is no scope for amending them."

Given the polarity between the 'reformists' such as Kabir and those, like Ahmed, to whom any reform of the sharia is unthinkable, chances of significant changes in Muslim religious thinking may appear remote. The only other possibility is that the modern Muslim would personally interpret the sharia in light of present day reality and seek to regulate secular life and try to find their place in a pluralist world. An increasing number of Muslims may in fact be doing just that. And to my mind rightly so.

Mahfuzur Rahman, One-mail

Investment for whom?

Today we live in a global economy, therefore, every country welcomes foreign investment. We don't know how many countries have changed their fortune by foreign investments. But the number will surely be pretty high. Without profit nobody invests money. In foreign investment, both sides think of profit. Certainly, any deal will favour the stronger side. Foreign investments have not brought the desired changes in our context.

Our women know sewing work from childhood. Parents are encouraging that work. Therefore if they get a bit of training with modern equipment, they become professional workers in garment factories.

So foreign investments have flowed into the garment sector. But workers' living conditions remain unchanged. They have no security at workplace, no vacation, no recruitment law. It is a story of deprivation.

So matters must improve in this area before foreign investment can have a positive impact on our lives.

Sumon Dutta
One-mail

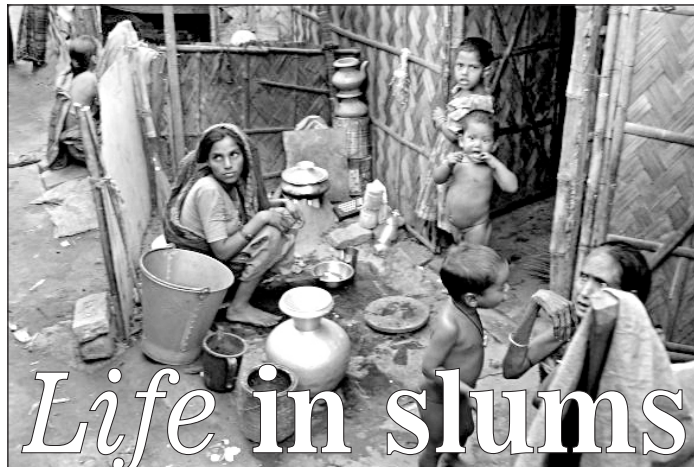
Police do it again



Our police force has retained their tradition of ruthlessly beating anybody and everybody, and this time they did it to the ill paid and impoverished schoolteachers. I, myself being a teacher, still do not hesitate to respect my schoolteachers by touching their feet, because

my present position is definitely due to them. It seems that our police force have come from a different world with a colonial mentality and are devoid of basic education, not to speak of civilised behaviour.

KME, Dhaka



Life in slums

When life is shattered with oppression and sufferings, can we expect any prosperity from that life except futility, distress and disappointment? Because, human life is restrained by the basic demands and their acquisition and by the whole social atmosphere. Here, this oppressive situation is the real perspective of the vulnerability of slum dwellers.

The unhygienic environment surrounding every slum is polluting the atmosphere of the whole city. The government should take the necessary steps to improve living conditions in slums.

Mehedi Hassan, Ibrahimpur, Dhaka, Cant

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6X2

14X3