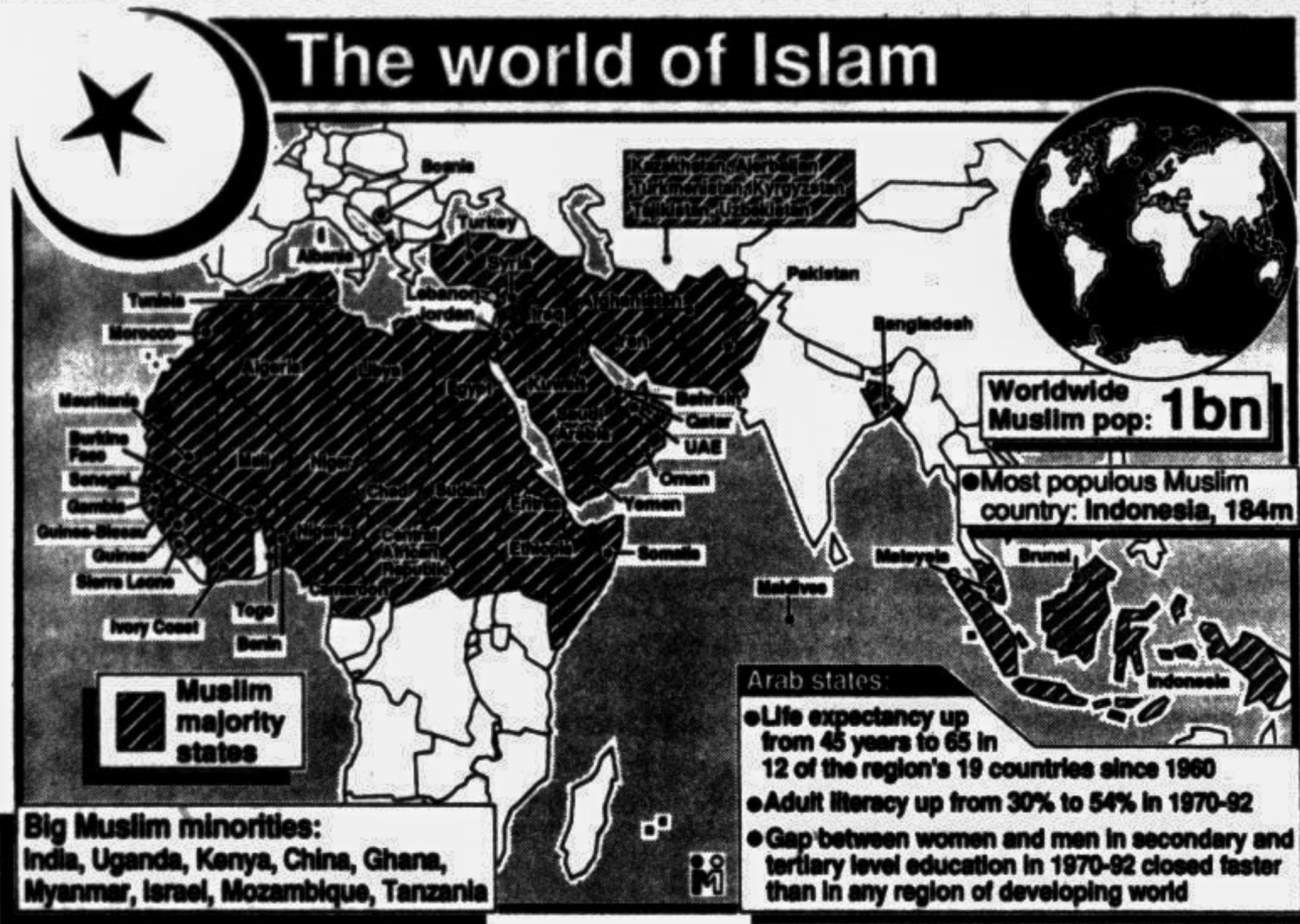


# 'Cold War II' Sparks Muslim Anger Putting Garbage in its Place

Daya Kishan Thussu writes from Penang, Malaysia

In the mainstream international media, Muslims are often portrayed as bigoted fundamentalists and the enemies of secular liberal democracy. A Gemini News Service correspondent analyses this misrepresentation.



**S**TEREOTYPING Islam as aggressive fundamentalism "is part of the West's ideology of domination and control," says Dr Chandra Muzaffar, director of Just World Trust, a non-government organisation based in Penang.

"It is designed to control economic resources — namely oil," he told an international workshop on "Images of Islam" organised by the Trust.

Negative media images of Muslims pervade the non-Muslim world, especially the West.

In the United States, there is a deep-seated prejudice against Islam — a religion often linked to Arab terrorism and perceived as a threat to liberal secular society. It is small wonder that in the recent Hollywood film *True Lies*, the villain is a militant Islamist.

That perception of Muslims was underlined immediately after the Oklahoma bombing in the US in April, which claimed 168 lives. Initially, this was blamed by the American media, without any evidence, on Islamic radicals. As it turned out, the outrage was carried out by members of the US far Right.

In Britain, the symbolic burning of Salman Rushdie's novel *The Satanic Verses* by a fringe of the country's one million Muslims was focused on by the media to reinforce the stereotype of Muslims as bigots.

In France, a cultural war is under way over the right of Muslim schoolgirls to wear Islamic dress. In the Balkans, prejudice against the Muslim Turks is widespread. In India, where Muslims comprise 13 per cent of the population, they are perceived as "anti-national". And in Russia, Muslims are seen, as witnessed during the conflict over Chechnya's attempted secession, as "drug pushers and bandits."

Ordinary Muslims have become the targets, when, in fact, Muslims have suffered worst in most recent aggressions — in Bosnia, in Chechnya, in Iraq and in Somalia. The US-dominated international media are central to what one Islamic scholar has called "collective

character assassination" — the process of demonising Islam.

Certain key Islamic countries such as Iran are portrayed on a regular basis as "rogue" or "terrorist" states. The mainstream media focus on the negative aspects of Islamic countries and exclude any positive developments. It is impossible, for example, to find a positive story about Iran in the Western press.

No wonder few people know that, according to the 1994 United Nations Development Programme's *Human Development Report*, Iran was among the top 10 performers in human development over the past 30 years. This was achieved despite US sanctions and huge debts, incurred by the eight-year war against Iraq.

And although the International Atomic Energy Agency has given Iran a clean bill of nuclear health, media images of the country continue to be those of chest-thumping "atomic ayatollahs" busily building an "Islamic bomb".

There is no reference to Israeli or Indian nuclear weapons as great a threat as communism once did.

Similarly, Islamic fundamentalism is projected in the press as a threat to Western civilisation, while other kinds of fundamentalism, such as Christian, Zionist or Hindu, do not receive the same opprobrium.

One reason for this is that the Islamic world sits on three-quarters of the world's known reserves of oil, crucial to modern industrial societies. This demonising of Islam fits in well with Western geo-political interests in arms and oil. It is no coincidence that the Middle East continues to be the biggest arms market in the world.

In the post-communist world, Islam is being portrayed not only as an ideological challenge to the West, but as a new security threat. Indeed, Whilly Claes, Secretary-General of NATO (the North Atlantic Treaty Organi-

sation, the West's main military alliance), has said Islam poses as great a threat as communism once did.

Already, NATO has developed joint military strategies with countries such as Israel, Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria to combat "Islamic fundamentalism."

A "Cold War II" is being waged against Islam, and governments such as those of Egypt and Algeria have a vested interest in promoting and sustaining this threat. And anyone who tries to bridge the gap between the West and the Islamic world is vilified.

A recent example is the campaign being waged against the German scholar, Professor Annemarie Schimmel, after she was awarded the 1995 Peace Prize by the German Book Trade.

With her 70-odd books on Islam, the former Harvard University scholar has tried to counter some of the negative stereotypes of Muslims. But many German intellectu-

als have protested at the prize being awarded to someone who supports "Islamic fundamentalism."

"Ignorance of Islam helps anti-Islamic propaganda," says Hans Koechler, an Austrian professor of philosophy and a veteran of Arab affairs. "Academic exclusion of the non-European and Islamic world leads to a cultural arrogance and a cultural naivete."

He suggests a need for change in curricula in western universities to recognise Islam's contribution to the development of the modern world.

In Penang, Muzaffar argues that the image of Islam in the West is "coupled with the deep-rooted, prejudice" against Islam in Europe. In fact, he says, "with few aberrations, Muslims have accommodated people of other faiths (in their lands)."

But why has Islam allowed itself to be demonised? Why can't the Muslims put their case? After all, some of the richest countries in the world, such as Saudi Arabia and Brunei, are Islamic.

Efforts to develop a pan-Islamic news organisation have failed to deliver because they lack what the western media enjoy — international credibility.

It is no coincidence that some of the more noteworthy Arab publications operate from London and Paris rather than from Arab capitals, where democratic debate and political pluralism are often discouraged by autocratic regimes.

Muzaffar says that given overwhelming western military superiority, it is not feasible for Islamic countries to challenge the West. Instead, Islam has to develop an alternative political culture, which reflects the essence of Islam — of purity, justice and equality.

He suggests a "radical non-violent" approach to redress the bad name given to the religion, which has nearly one billion adherents.

DAYA KISHAN THUSSU teaches journalism at Britain's Coventry University. Until recently, he was Associate Editor of Gemini News Service.

**F**IRST, I would like to refer to Recommendation No 10 of The Daily Star 'Save Dhaka Roundtable' held a few months ago. The Recommendation lays down that solid waste management policy should be formulated and that privatization of the collection process should be examined. Now the following are some additional comments on solid waste management policy:

**Privatization:** To provide civic services to its citizens is the responsibility of the city corporation. Whether the function of garbage collection is executed by the DCC through its own staff or by a hired agency is its own affair. Citizens will deal with the city corporation only.

**Citizen's responsibility:** To place the garbage in a suitable receptacle from where the city corporation can collect it easily is the responsibility of the citizen. I wonder why in our country the corporation undertakes to provide the bin also. Recently, in Gulshan office I met a visitor who had come with a representation that unless the masonry garbage bin was removed from his house front, he would not pay tax. I temporised with him arguing that it was less labourious for his maid to dispose of the garbage. He indignantly replied that dogs, cats, cows, etc. were raiding the bin and smelling all over his house. Admittedly, it is not justifiable to subject him to the smell of 20 other households. The solution to this dilemma is to compel each user to provide his own receptacle. If a person can construct a building or maintain an establishment, can he not construct a covered bin or a platform where tin drums can be placed?

**Practice in other countries:** In Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia, I have seen, in front of every house a covered drum which is emptied in the trucks and replaced by a municipal staff. In Jakarta, I found a house where a garbage bin was placed not on the roadside, but within the owner's premises with a door opening on the roadside. This is an example worthy of emulation. In Singapore, I found

apartment blocks to the collecting truck.

**DCC's Powers:** The corporation will collect garbage placed in a receptacle. It will not collect garbage from the road bed. Rather such action will be treated as an offence and the DCC should be empowered to impose fine on the individual user or the whole locality, depending on the circumstances.

**Responsibility of a building plan approver:** Before a building plan is approved, the authority should satisfy itself that the plan provides a garbage bin or a platform for placing drums within the premises. For a high-rise building, the authority should be satisfied that the plan provides for garbage chute to move the garbage to the ground level. This would be a big labour-saving device.

The writer is former additional Chief Engineer, Housing and Settlements.



Garbage collection on Dhaka street: Improper maintenance.

## How Proper is Primary Education?

by SMS Joya

**M**ANY will agree that the education system in Bangladesh is outdated and it is time the country considered changes both in the method of teaching and in what is being taught. To begin with, the existing condition of primary education needs to be adjusted, since it is the foundation of the whole education system. The wide gap between primary education in English medium and Bengali medium schools creates unnecessary discrepancies among the children who should be learning the same thing.

As a teacher in a nursery school, I have witnessed differences in the syllabi between the two mediums. The students of play-group in English medium were taught close to what was being taught in a nursery class in Bengali medium. In class one (Bengali medium) for example, where the emphasis on Bengali was obvious, the standard of English was lower than in English medium schools. However, what the KG-I (English medium) syllabus comprised of both in Bengali and English language was well balanced. It is not the question of how much English or Bengali is taught in which medium. But the question is: what and how much of the same age of two different mediums are being taught? It has been observed that the syllabi of English schools are more interesting where children are engaged in many fun activities, while in Bengali schools teaching appears to be too rigid.

With the prevailing differences of curricula from one school to another and between English and Bengali mediums, the objectives of primary education as suggested by the Commission of National Education do not seem to be in operation properly. It is now imperative to construct a curriculum which will be appropriate for the primary level and to generalise it for both the mediums. The curriculum needs to be updated and reconstructed with a quality improvement of textbooks which is the responsibility of the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB).

Following the first one or two years of pre-primary education, the primary level extends over a period of five years (class 1-5) and provides for children of the age group of six to 11 years. At the primary level the drop-out rate being about 57 per cent and the completion rate of about 43 per cent only, the Ministry of Education under the Fourth Five-Year

Plan (1990-95), has placed its policy to universalise primary education. However, to accomplish this objective it is necessary to make teaching effective in the primary schools first. The prevailing method of teaching can be improved by making it more interesting with the help of teaching aids, charts and projects. Then it is necessary to help the children grow within their limits to develop the sense of responsibility through team work. They need to develop the sense of perfection through project work and to recognise the importance of education through proper guidance. In simple words, the method of teaching needs to be interesting enough in order to reduce the number of drop-outs.

The teachers need to be well prepared as a basic to improving the education system. They need to go beyond being merely information givers. A teacher can be an idol to his or her pupil so it is important that his or her attitude impresses upon the students and that he or she accepts responsibilities to help the students develop an interest towards education. But a majority of the teachers in the country, particularly those at the primary, secondary and higher secondary levels, need professional preparation. There are many primary schools, especially English medium schools, where the teachers lack academic qualifications in addition to professional preparations.

Altogether, a thorough improvement is required to enhance the quality of primary education. The standard of curriculum needs to be updated and reconstructed in an interesting way. The final report on education in June 1994, brought out by the government together with the UNDP and World Bank, shows that the education sector in Bangladesh suffers from low investment and that the government needs to raise its budgetary allocation for education from the current 15 per cent to 25 per cent by the year 2000 to achieve better efficiency. In addition to this, students should be encouraged to think for themselves and develop their inner talents. Any real change, however, can only be possible if the government actively involves itself in trying to make primary education more standardised.

To conclude, the attention of the government is drawn to look into the matter with the view of helping the primary education become universalised.

## Credit Needs of Small and Marginal Farmers Reassessed: DONORS NEED TO COOPERATE

by Salma Chowdhuri Zohir

**O**NE of the findings presented in the workshop titled 'Bangladesh Agriculture in the 21st Century', held on November 5 and 8, 1995, asserted the fact that the small and marginal farmers do not have access to formal credit and hence credit should be targeted to them through group formation. As income and savings are low in Bangladesh, the role of credit will be to enhance investment, and hence, economic growth. Credit is also expected to smooth out consumption and alleviate poverty. But it is common knowledge in Bangladesh that micro credit through NGOs are targeted towards the landless while institutional credit is targeted towards large farmers, and hence the marginal and small farmers have no access to credit. Moreover, the World Bank, the organizer of the aforementioned workshop, seemed to have some

information gaps. The Deputy Governor of the Bangladesh Bank assured at the workshop that there is a credit programme for the marginal and small farmers for the poorest and most flood prone district in Bangladesh, namely, Kurigram. This project is in existence since June 1990, and is being co-financed by the Government of Bangladesh (GOB), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), through the German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ). This project is called 'The Marginal and Small Farm Systems Crop Intensification Project (MSFSCIP)' and is the first household based farm systems intensification project of the GOB. The project has been a great success.

But, as our culture is to listen to failures, the World Bank has hardly taken note of

the project. Since 1978, Bangladesh has been accommodating donor conditionalities. The time has now come to ponder about what strategies to adopt for increasing investment and economic growth. Bangladesh can make a great leap forward if the Kurigram model is adopted for rural finance. This is a model with one bank and one NGO for each district/upazila for the marginal and small farmers.

This will give the rural people not only access to credit but also access to research and technology, extension services, marketing, training and irrigation facilities. In the Kurigram project, integrated farming approach is followed, and there is also GO-NGO cooperation and institutional linkages. More importantly, gender issues are integrated into the project through the household approach to group formation.

Each household is represented by one male or female member of the household. The groups are formed on a self-selection basis and therefore has great sustainability power. The concept of the project evolved through the participatory approach since 1984 and is also closely related to the Fourth Five Year Plan of Bangladesh in which the objective was to mainstream rural women within the "whole farm system" approach. It is very flexible and adaptive to the local needs.

What should be the role of the Bangladesh Bank in this regard? Should it allow duplication of efforts to redesign another project for reaching the small and marginal farmers or should efforts be made to find out how much of the credit targeted for the small and marginal farmers are actually reaching the target group?



Reaching the benefit of credit to the household through female member?

One problem faced by the project at the initial phase was that the concerned NGO did not have any credit programme prior to this project and hence, the landless was also included in the target group. Could one of the solutions be that Grameen Bank, which was also funded by IFAD and is based on household approach to group formation could address the credit needs of the landless and reach the household mainly through female members while some others (such as, the RDRS) could concentrate on marginal and small farmers and reach the household through either male or female members? How far is reaching the target group still a problem?

Moreover, should the NGOs address the credit needs of the landless and marginal and small farmers while the public sector gives credit to large farmers? What changes in the project was brought about during the last five years. Finding answers to

these questions would enable us to identify constraints in reaching the target group and developing a rural finance programme for the 21 century.

Bangladesh would benefit a lot if donors would cooperate and share information and look into how to fine tune the Kurigram project towards meeting the needs of the marginal and small farmers.

Moreover, such models could also be tailored accordingly for the landless and large farmers. This will enable Bangladesh to claim: Small is not only beautiful but also efficient, sustainable and can cope with vulnerable circumstances.

The writer is a Research Fellow, BIDS. She was responsible for a paper on "integrating women" in the Kurigram project in 1991. The views expressed here are her personal views and do not represent that of the institute.



## Garfield

