

The right direction

Shahrin Hussain Tania ("Who is right? Laden or Bush", November 26), your question for showing you the right direction to choose the right path under present circumstances depends on you. All you need to do is to read the history of America.

All these human rights questions, women rights, children rights, minorities rights are US propaganda. When someone serves America's interest, he/she is allowed to do anything. When you don't do what they want you to do then you become a terrorist.

If bin Laden is bad then what about Fidel Castro? Why is CIA trying to kill him for such a long time?

Tarun Bandarban ***

In her letter "Who is right? Laden or Bush" MS Tania wanted somebody to show her the right direction. I would like to suggest one for her consideration.

The disastrous uneven fight between Israel and Palestine should be quite heartbreaking to us not as Muslims but as human beings. We should feel pain in our heart for the people who lost their lives in Twin Towers and Pentagon as human beings in spite of the fact that the USA is not a Muslim country. We should have felt, as human beings, in the same way as we feel now for the sufferings of Palestinians even if they were Christians or Jews.

I am afraid most of my compatriots would not take so much interest in the sufferings of Afghan people if they were not Muslims by faith. We took little interest in the killings of Afghans by Afghans during the fights between the Taliban and Mujahedeens in mid-90's while civilian Afghans got killed in thousands. We should also have felt for the helpless Afghans who fell prey to the killings by their fellow Afghans as we feel now for they getting killed by the alien bombardments.

In Bangladesh we usually pray only for the well being of Muslim Umma (nation), instead of praying for the well being of the world community.

Faruque Hasan
Dhanmondi R.A, Dhaka

Violation of minority rights

I would like to share a hadith with all the readers, which came to my notice recently.

This hadith is significant in terms of recent incidents on violation of minority-rights in our country. According to this hadith, Rasulullah(sm) said that, in any Muslim country, safeguarding the rights of the non-Muslims is a sacred duty of the Muslim government, if anyhow the right is violated; Rasulullah (sm) will take side with those non-Muslims (whose rights were violated) against his own followers on the Day of Judgment.

My intention of this letter is to reiterate the importance of safeguarding the rights of minorities from the Islamic point of view as well as to remind our religious leaders of their ardent duty to raise their voices against such oppression.

Zafar Hadi
California, USA

What about the Indian Muslims?

This refers to a letter "For Bangladeshi Hindu community in Australia" (November 14) by Mr. Prabir Maitra. I fully agree and sympathise with Mr. Mitra for his concern about the atrocities on the Hindu community in Bangladesh. Atrocities on the Hindu community has been committed in Bangladesh after the election of 1st October 2001 and these atrocities are of political nature and are not actually communal, because along with atrocities on the Hindu community there has

been incidents of some atrocities on the Muslims as well. While we are on the subject of recent atrocities on the Hindu community in Bangladesh, which are mainly of political nature and a very rare occurrence in Bangladesh, the Muslims in neighbouring India are facing atrocities and oppression throughout the year in some part of India or the other. Since Mr. Prabir happens to be originally from Bangladesh I am sure that he will bear me out that cases of atrocities and oppressions on the Hindu community in Bangladesh has always been very few and rare, while communal riots, atrocities and oppression on the Muslims in India is a common thing and these incidents in India are not always reported in the Indian newspapers in details, as it is done by the print media in Bangladesh.

Can I request Mr. Maitra to please hold a protest rally against the atrocities committed on the Muslim community in India and also to write to an Indian newspaper addressing the government, leaders and people in India to look into this and to try if they can do something to stop or at least reduce such riots, oppression and atrocities which results in the killing of thousands of Muslims and destruction of Muslim families/homes and creating distrust between the two major communities not only in India but the entire sub-continent.

On our part we sincerely urge and request our Prime Minister and the authorities concerned to take strict and proper action against all such atrocities/excess committed against the minority community in

Gopal Sengupta
Montreal, Canada

It was really sad to read the news item that some so-called intellectuals condemned the arrest and rejection of bail petition of Shahrir Kabir on the plea that he was a freedom fighter.

Our question is does a person by virtue of being a freedom fighter is above law even if he commits an offence?

We feel ashamed to see that these so-called intellectuals don't have minimum respect for democracy and to the rule of law. To them, justice is not served if the verdict goes against them.

Nasir, on e-mail ***

In relation to the news of the arrest of Mr. Shahrir Kabir we would like to draw your attention to the following expression of international concern and indignation.

The International Institute of Social History (Amsterdam, the

huge amount of hospital money of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSSMU) by unprecedented corruption and issuing office order suitable for themselves.

After being converted into a university, they are charging money for almost for every investigation for both admitted and non admitted patients, but in reality the money goes to the doctor's pocket rather than hospital fund. 40 per cent of the proceeds are taken by the doctors and other staffs but the machine, reagents and other materials including the infrastructures are supplied by the hospital which amount more than 60 per cent of the charged money.

Interestingly the professors, doctors and the staffs are paid for their routine works as monthly salary. How can they take money twice for the same job? How would it sound if WASA or DESA people take 40 per cent of their collection (whatever happens to national checker) or the bankers take 40 per cent of the deposit. I think this is corruption of highest order.

I urge the Prime Minister, the Health Minister and the Anti-corruption Bureau to investigate the matter as it is reported that in three and a half years they have plundered a few core taka and that too from the patients.

MAM Howlader
Mirpur, Dhaka

Perspective

Mr. Afsan Chowdhury's "Straight From the Heart" column ("The case of a poor Asian Bangladeshi Muslim", November 27), deserves

Political appointments

Much has been written about the appointments of new VCs and Pro-VCs in different universities in the wake of the change in the political regime. Most commentators have rightly pointed out that such appointments violate the spirit of university autonomy and reflect the extent of politicisation of university administration. The same political considerations apply in the case of appointments to some other very high positions that are mostly filled by university teachers; these positions include the chairmen and members of the Public Service Commission and the University Grants Commission.

An unfortunate consequence of this process of political appointments has not been much in public knowledge. Ideally, only persons with outstanding professional career are to be appointed to these highly esteemed positions. I have looked at the academic record of those who have been appointed to these positions during the last 10-15 years, and an astonishing, though not entirely unexpected picture emerges. Many of the appointees have second classes/divisions throughout, from Secondary to Master's level-- a truly mediocre calibre indeed! There are some with even third classes/divisions. The irony of this situation can be seen if one considers the fact that, among university teachers, it is not easy to find someone who does not have a single first division/class in one's entire academic career. It is amazing how the present system picks up those rarest of birds!

I do not wish to suggest that a person with an all-through mediocre academic record cannot excel professionally in his career. Nevertheless, the grim statistics may give a clue to the kind of teachers who thrive in university politics.

Ikram Habib
Banani, Dhaka

Bangladesh.

Shuja Alim
Agrabad, Chittagong

Toll collection

Your article "Toll collection at 10 points in city" (November 25) imparts a denial by Maj. Qamrul Islam, a newly elected BNP lawmaker regarding his link in toll collection in his constituency.

Accepting his denial we would like to know what is he doing to try and stop toll collection in his area.

Apathy to blatant criminal activities within ones constituency makes that MP an accessory to those crimes.

MAI, on e-mail

Misappropriation of hospital fund

It is reported that some teachers and influential staffs with the connivance of administration plundered

movement. Valiant resistance forces like Hamas and Islamic Jihad radicalised it in the mid-80s by contending that it was precisely the moral and political frailties of a secularist/socialist approach that had actually helped cripple the armed struggle for regaining occupied land--brooking no compromise with Israel--that they vigorously advocated. I reckon that, for all the blood and gore involved and the (as yet) unattained goal of full Palestinian statehood, Hamas and Co. have clearly the right idea.

Thirdly, of course we're not part of Arab or Middle-Eastern history. The despicable Arab prejudices against Bangladeshi "miskins", that Mr. Chowdhury cites, are only part of the larger prejudices directed against most non-Arab "converted" Muslims (Pakistanis, Malaysians and Indonesians included). Our abject poverty compounds the misery. The Bangladeshi passport, that Mr. Chowdhury refers to, is an embarrassing liability, in most airports and visa offices in the wider world, not just those in the Arab world. Fortunately, my experiences with young and older Arabs have been truly satisfying. I've had fantastically friendly, open and gracious Egyptian, Iraqi, Syrian and Lebanese friends in school and beyond.

In Britain, Mr. Chowdhury may derive small comfort from the fact that, at least he isn't regarded as some contemptible "miskin". However, the fact that Bangladeshis and Pakistanis happen to be the most marginalised, segregated, ever-poorer, minority community in Britain, is a discomfiting reality he fails to acknowledge. Young disillusioned and despairing Muslims in the West seek to reassert themselves. Islam is a powerful implement in that drive for recognition and respect in a hostile, increasingly alienating environment. Older Muslims in the West seem to do the opposite: they cringe in fear and shame; constantly apologising for "distorted" Islam and defending what they consider to be "true" Islam. Quietism is the other obvious option.

I too, like Mr. Chowdhury, lament the cross stereotyping and the shutting down of spaces in our cultural and political discourse. Demonisation trumps true dialogue; mindless chauvinism militates against tolerance and mutual respect etc. Sure, it's not for Bengali (Bangladeshi) Muslims to champion the causes of others. But, I reckon that this doesn't preclude a proud, sensitive, worldly Bengali Muslim from feeling genuine outrage at, or denouncing the gross repression and injustices inflicted on the Palestinian people by a Zionist Israel; on the Iraqi civilians and children by a savage U.S.-led West; on the Kashmiris by a barbaric India; on the Chechens by a demonic Russia; on innocent Afghans and their country, by again, an America-led coalition etc...

Finally, I cannot overstate the

benefits, the media and civil society have greater responsibility to build public opinion and consensus. Our gas resource is such an issue where national interest should be put above all".

The Daily Star poll will be indeed helpful in reflecting public opinion on this important issue along with many other national issues. I am sure people from home and abroad will participate in it if a poll is conducted.

Nazim U. Ahmed
Calgary, Canada

Keep us informed

Kindly do follow-up stories on minority repression so that justice is

done to the oppressed and such repression is curbed.

Khaleda Zia's government had earlier set a 100-days goal and I understand that curbing terrorism is part of her agenda.

I would like *The Daily Star* do follow-up on that too. We the common people would like to know their achievement so far.

The media definitely plays a vital role and *The Daily Star* is doing a superb job in this regard.

A Ahmed, on e-mail

The cult of Laden in Bangladesh!

It was with shock, incredulity and dismay that I was able to witness mass pro-Bin Laden demonstrations via the BBC World news service.

How was this possible-- in the light of the fact that Taliban and Osama bin Laden in their time were sponsored by the erstwhile oppressors of East Bengal, namely the West Pakistanis, who, while Yahya Khan was in power were responsible for the killing and persecution of countless Bengalis in East Pakistan? The outside world, including India, supported your liberation, and now we witness mass support for Osama bin Laden, a deranged fanatic! Is it now the wish of the Bengalis to be ruled in future by a Saudi Arabia controlled by Osama bin Laden? Is Bangladesh, like Afghanistan, to become the fiefdom of a radical Saudi Arabian oligarchy? Do you wish to be dominated by the Arabs?

Have the people of Bangladesh have forgotten their roots? Or do they wish to become the vassals of an imported creed? From here, in Europe, I am able to report that after the September 11th attack and Osama bin Laden's open support of it, the shocked reaction of people here was to say that what Osama bin Laden believes in is not religion-- but "mental disease".

The elections in Denmark brought to power strong anti-Islamic, Danish nationalist parties and as a result, Muslim minorities in this country are having a very hard time indeed. After the 11th September attacks Muslim foreigners are being openly isolated and shunned by most of the populace. Do the Bangladeshis also wish to be shunned by those who in the 70's supported them against the tyranny of Yahia Khan?

Do Bangladesh wish to forfeit the good will it enjoyed in the past? Let someone make these misguided zealots come to their senses and repair the damage to Bangladesh's prestige, before it is too late!

Theodor B. Goschal
Copenhagen, Denmark

Weekly holiday

The weekly holiday may be shifted to Sunday (with Saturday as half-day), as many offices in the importing countries (the West especially) are closed on Saturday.

Public service is a duty, and duty to the fellow persons and the society is obligatory. Trying to please one and deny it to others is discriminatory. The criterion is maximum service to the maximum number for maximum benefit to the nation. Thereby there is no bar to the Friday midday prayer (two-hour break).

There is a global recession on, especially after the Black September hit. Bangladesh, economically and politically weak, and overpopulated, has few options left, and cannot afford the luxury of Thursday-half and Friday-full holidays. We have to confirm, and there is no infringement on religion or religious practices (if it is a religious issue, and, weekly holiday is not a political issue).

Why the local leadership (in all sectors) does not like to confirm? Is it more a political issue than a religious one? Islam is a religion of the golden mean-- the last perfected religion. The devotee has direct access to his Maker, without any intermediary, unlike in some other religions where it is mandatory for a devotee to pass through the clergy and a place of worship. For a Muslim, the manner of offering the daily prayers for five times has been made flexible and practicable, to suit the variations in the environment in daily life.

The religious-political parties and religious parties have to review the situation in national interest, take a stand, and come out with it, to carry the public opinion forward.

HUS
Dhaka

"The victims of visa restrictions"

I am responding to a letter "The victims of visa restrictions" (November 19). The writer indicates that Bangladesh is one of the countries facing visa restrictions. That is not true or accurate and may cause resentment among many of your readers.

The author has added Bangladesh in list, even though Bangladesh is not listed in the official press release that was released by the US State Dept. I have verified this with all the published reports here in the

favour of the harassed minorities and severely tortured activists of AL by the present government. The brutality started just after the oath taking of the caretaker government and it reached the highest point during the election week and afterwards. It seems like there is no government in the country to protect the citizens belonging to the opposition parties and to the minority community. The oppression has even exceeded the torture meted out by the Pakistani army and their collaborators during the Liberation War in 1971.

The government should immediately release Shahrir Kabir and stop killing, rapping, torturing, threatening, looting, and harassing of the Awami league supporters and the minority community.

The coalition of Razaaker, Taliban and vote riggers would not be able to stay in power if a people become intolerant.

Mohammad A. Siddique
New York, USA

I would like to congratulate you and your team for performing a great job by reporting about the atrocities on minority in Bangladesh. You have worked under extremely difficult conditions and reported the truth to the world. Not only the Hindus but the whole civilised world should thank you and your team for taking such a courageous step. Please accept our heart-felt appreciation.

I would like to call upon the government of Bangladesh to immediately release Shahrir Kabir before international hue and cry begins.

At a time when most of the people remained silent, Mr. Kabir was among the very few who spoke the truth. He is a true journalist and a social worker. We are indebted to him.

D.K. Das
Canada

USA. I would greatly appreciate it if you could run a disclaimer on that letter. You may also note that the author indicates that 26 Arab/Muslim countries face restrictions, but when you add the countries that he has listed it adds up to 27. That is because Bangladesh has been added by the author without any validation.

Faizal Chaudhury
Chicago, Illinois, USA

"Gas export and public opinion"

I fully agree with Zakaria Khondokar of USA ("Gas export and public opinion", 26 November) to conduct public opinion on gas export. It is really an important national issue as was observed by me during my last 21 years of service with Petrobangla, Bapex, Occidental and Unocal corporation as petroleum geologist.

I fully agree with Zakaria's comment "At times when business leaders prefer their own interest over national, politicians and bureaucrats become corrupt to trade national interests for own

benefits, the media and civil society have greater responsibility to build public opinion and consensus. Our gas resource is such an issue where national interest should be put above all".

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Fertiliser-- a source of pollution

Nitrogen fertiliser has long been known as a source of water pollution. But a Californian scientist says it also fouls the air.

Pamela Matson is an environmental chemist at Stanford University who specialises in tropical agriculture. She says, fertiliser often rises into the atmosphere in the form of several kinds of nitrogen gases, each of which causes trouble.

Nitrogen oxides, or 'NOX,' which is an air pollutant, or as ammonia, which also can be reactive in the atmosphere and deposited downwind. Nitrogen oxides damage the ozone layer.

Nitric oxide contributes to the smoggy haze that's bad for human health. And nitrous oxide is a greenhouse gas that could add to global warming.

The world uses 80 million metric tons of nitrogen fertiliser each year, and Matson says that could double within a few decades.

She says, development in the tropics is driving up those numbers. Ten years ago, most of the nitrogen fertiliser that was applied around the world was applied in the developed countries of the world, in the northern latitudes. But today, probably half of the fertiliser is applied in the developing countries of the world.

The United Nations expects human population to reach nine billion in coming decades.

World demand for food will rise right along with it. Matson says, we need to find sustainable ways to

Give them some time

I read Mr. Syed N Wadood's letter "How Can the Home Minister Sleep" and wondered how quickly people and their opinions change.

The writer was talking about the Home Minister who went to the house of the murdered Principle Gopal Krishna Muhur with police protection. So what? Can't the Home Minister have police protection or is there a specific law that the Home Minister cannot have police protection? Then Mr Wadood talked about the increasing rate of crimes. Well, weren't these crimes going on during the Awami League rule? Minorities are being tortured, no doubt about it, but how can you say for sure that the tortures are being carried out by BNP? It can also be done by the Awami League who are trying to prove that BNP is taking revenge on the minorities for not voting them. Politics is a complicated game and we are just mere spectators of this game. So, I would like to advise Mr. Wadood not to deduce things before getting any solid evidence.

Nobody and I mean nobody goes violent when he is happy. He celebrates, and doesn't go around torturing people. When one is defeated, he is angry and out of anger, he can go to any extremes, which will may be the case here. Give him time and then see for yourself how the Home Minister or any other minister can sleep.

Amer Junaid
Banani, Dhaka

"Negotiations with LTTE"

I read your article "Negotiations with the LTTE" (November 23). The heading caught my attention as every Sri Lankan feels that we need peace not ethnic, religious, power or political chauvinism.

Please don't publish articles like this. The writer started with complaining that Mr. W did not give peace the priority but he later went on complaining totally against it. It is very sad to say that people like him are the main reason as to why we have not achieved peace.

When someone starts something good there are someone to blame or complain and if they fail to achieve their goal, the same are there to complain.

If you see the world now you find that here is no country without problem as no family is without problem. We must always find ways to be united, be understanding and forgiving. That is good for our children in the family likewise for the children of mother Lanka. Peace is golden. God Bless Sri Lanka

A Sri Lankan

Draw result

The Daily Star is undoubtedly the most popular and lone international standard daily in Bangladesh. But I am very sorry to say that it has some limitations. Why does not you publish prize bond and lottery draw results? Is there any reason and explanation not to publish these draw results?

Tofazzal, on e-mail

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