

DHAKA TUESDAY DECEMBER 25, 2001

Praise the police that catch themselves

But police reform can't wait

couple of policemen have been arrested by their peers for trying to spirit away money recovered from looters. The fact that the police didn't hesitate to organise an identification parade and arrest their own kind is laudable indeed. The fact that the police continue to be involved in crime is enormously disturbing.

There is no secret about what the police does nor about the image that has been built around them. Over the last thirty years, it has reached a point where people no longer can think of the police only as law enforcers. Unfortunately, a number of well-documented cases have demolished a large part of their reputation. Which is why the present case needs to be applauded.

But instead of just blaming the police a few facts can be considered. The police are in general very poorly paid, have few facilities, lead hazardous and extremely stressful life and suffer from low self-esteem. They are constantly exposed to situations where any of the factors mentioned can explode into a criminal activity. A poorly paid man who can access millions without any accountability or fear of the law is always prone to crime even if he is a policeman.

We should also face the fact that the average government servant doesn't enlist to serve mankind. Like all other professions, this is about making a living. The whole notion of public service is very weak in this society. When volunteer public servants like politicians don't practise any code of ethics, it's unfair to expect the poorly paid policeman to remain honest especially when he is brutally used by political servants.

Thus, instead of praise or criticism of a single incident. it's reforms in general that need to be ushered in. Unless police reforms are tackled seriously, the strange situation of crime and honesty will continue to prevail because the system needs healing not just the individuals in law and order.

But the police can't be reformed in isolation either. We can't have the police beyond temptation when the rest of the governing structure remains unreformed and runs itself at will. Plus the dominant role of the police as crime fighters appears to be overshadowed by their role as managers of political agitation. Politicisation of the police and using them for political ends are grave matters that won't come under any admin reform agenda. It's bigger than just reforming the police. It's about reforming the system within which the police have to play a defined role.

Merry Christmas

Its message of peace, love and compassion should reasonate

REAT emotions and noble thoughts well up today as we greet our Christian brethren in Bangladesh and rest of the world on the occasion of Christmas, a festival of love, mirth, charity and fraternal ties. This is the first X'mass of the new millennium and much that the world has changed since the last one the appeal of the messages of the day has appreciated in value not merely because of the changes but also in spite of them. That goes to attest to the intrinsic worth of the Christian value system which has tenets in common with other religions in the world with very large followings. Peace and love are the hall mark, the rock-bed, and the essence of all great religions, of books or even otherwise. So, when politicians, states, terrorist networks, ethnic groups and the like fight one another and these are something sought to be passed off as clashes of civilisations and cultures with an imputation that religions are per se in conflict, a grave injustice is done to the very high place the latter has in the hearts and minds of people throughout the world. So, basically to a true follower of Islam or that of Christianity who have co-existed for centuries at the social level, neither any contemporary reference to any threat perception nor any historical allusions to wars in the hoary past can alter their compulsions of interdependent livina.



AFSAN CHOWDHURY

HERE is joy in the air. The government has decided to ban rickshaws from the

Panthapath Road. Fresh batch of policemen are deployed to make sure that delinguent rickshawpullers don't charge in with their muscle powered steeds and upset the government's plan to ensure that traffic jam is reduced. Dhaka's traffic jams have now achieved legendary status. Elsewhere outside Dhaka. they ask in awed voices, about it. Is it really true that people spend two

hours a day in jams? Dhaka has been battling traffic iams for long and must now take drastic steps. Banning rickshaws have always been a favourite way of tackling the problem. It's no longer politically convenient to speak on behalf of the rickshaw. Plus the children of the powerful need to go to school in chauffeured limos. There are many that have never taken public transport. Rickshaws are a problem and the faces behind the rickshawpullers even more so.

IT was 1971 and a time when death lived a few moments away. The rickshawpullers were poor even then. A man had travelled in a rickshaw and planted a bomb, which went off and made international headlines. But he had been noted. He didn't even know that he had been recognized. That night a

Muslim phobia?

After the last rickshaw dies

DOES the man ride in a car now.

windows misted by the humming

AC? I only know about rickshaw

pullers. I know that they have a work

span of ten years or so. After that his

body collapses. He is by that time

riddled with TB or some other perni-

cious diseases. Rickshawallahs

don't have pensions and provident

funds, no gratuity, no medical sup-

port. They die and with great aplomb

with their family in tow. The slums of

Dhaka are full of such noisy deaths.

When the sound becomes too loud,

of our urban management success.

Behind the shadows of their dead

Slumless cities are an indication

we evict their homes as well.

rickshawpuller came and warned him. That man had nothing to gain or loose from the war. The bomber escaped that night in that same rickshaw and was deposited in the puller's home inside a slum. The house was raided that night but he was not found and so saved. Next day, he went away to safer lodgings in the old city. Two months later the country went free. He never saw the rickshawman again.

vehicles. The rickshawpullers' world is too far away, too strange. They exist on the fringe of our imagination. Solidly rooted only in our nightmares.

THE young girl took me deep inside the slum zone of Johuri Mohallah. She was about 13 years and wore the uniform of a charity school. Her house was made of split bamboo rails. It was on a platform and through the space between the

parked ourselves late at night Going to Sukhumvit, where I had medical business, took an hour. It was incredible to see so many and so thick jams in a city. Dhaka was so peaceful, so easy to move through then in comparison. I remember sitting on the pavement of a hospital in Soi Asok for an hour and fail to

fatal because nobody could reach

cross the street. People in motorbikes would weave through the gridlocked cars and deliver people to destinations. Heart attacks were

DURING one of the agitations that lead to fall of governments I was covering them for the BBC. The strike had been called as a final push and it had gone for days. It was a struggle for democracy and emancipation. I was walking the streets to see how it was going when I saw a few rickshaws ridden by men in haggard faces suddenly emerge. Within seconds they were attacked and demolished. The men began to howl as the democrats beat them

I know that rickshawallahs have

savings for three days. After that

they have to go out for work or

starve. This was on the 10th day of the

"Excuse me, why are you break-

"Don't you know that there is a

" What about democracy of the

rickshawpullers? And what right

recognized that I was a journalist

working for an international agency.

It probably saved my life but it prob-

ably didn't save the rickshaw pull-

ers. What does one do when even

the last resort is taken away?

strike. I went to the strikers.

movement on for democracy?"

ing up the rickshaws?"

have you got to do this?

became very violent.

the existing standard of reasoning and logic but also social priorities. I once suggested to a very powerful general that maybe we could consider banning cars -- at least limiting them -- and think of guality rickshaws and public transports as the basic platform for managing the problem. This general said, "Thank God, mad intellectuals of Dhaka are not given the right to decide. This is exactly why we have martial laws."

He was right of course. If you don't have anything to do with rickshaws in any part of life, don't see rickshaws as a socio-economic and a traffic problem, the decisions will follow that way. Slums, rickshaws represent a reality we can't accept let alone understand. It would have been shocking if we did otherwise except banning them from the streets.

IN the Children's Correction Home I meet a young boy of I4. He has come from the coastal belt and used to run a rickshaw. He was arrested from a protest meeting of rickshawpullers. They were protesting the closure of a road to them. The boy is a sole earning male in the family. His father is as usual a TB patient and he takes the drugs to Barisal once a month. He is charged under the Public Safety Act. He breaks down and weeps

"We are politicians and who are "Please get me out of here Sir. I vou? A razakar?" It suddenly had nothing to do with the meeting. I have to make a living. What will I would have been attacked but happen to my family if I don't work? for the fact that the leading agitator

I don't know what will happen. I am just a journalist. I just take notes

ONLY the fittest survive. Bangladesh may be poor, Dhaka may be poor but those who decide the country is managed are, thank god, not so. They are fit.

TRAFFIC jams are caused by rickshaws and not by the relation-Afsan Chowdhury is a Senior Assistant Editor of ship between vehicles and space. This articulation is not just a sign of

The Daily Star

lost track of a sensible approach, rational thinking and a rightly directed crisis management. Instead they fell trap to common human fallibility like vengeance resulting in senseless regulations; they are cruel too.

This hatred would in fact so easily paralyse the American nation that has a history. In the whole scenario the American government's stance has been that they were good and loved freedom and it is 'these people' who are bad and hated it. The vapid answer came from an arrogant national culture that has lost its talent for healthy quilt.

M J Zahedi is an eminent columnist in Pakistan and formerly the Editor of the Khaleez Times

Of course not, they would immediately protest and, most probably, reject the questions as biased and prejudiced

Thirdly, one fails to understand why the Muslim world has been singled out yet again? Why the same questions are not being asked from Israeli tourists and travellers to the USA. Many of such travellers must have had military training and they have been using Arabs as targets, even while in training.

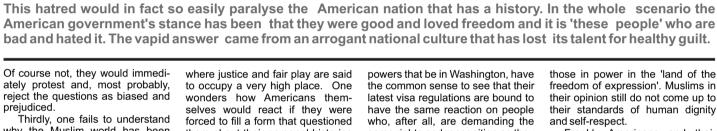
Moreover, why not ask the same questions from Europeans? As a matter of fact, every European country has had to deal with the menace of terrorism. In fact, through

wonders how Americans themselves would react if they were forced to fill a form that questioned them about their personal histories and past activities. Beyond doubt such a questionnaire would indeed be repugnant and unacceptable to any American who is innocent of the implied accusations. Why don't the

the common sense to see that their difference perhaps for some of

those in power in the 'land of the freedom of expression'. Muslims in their opinion still do not come up to their standards of human dignity and self-respect.

Frankly Americans and their power-people have for the first time been subjected to a gory and undesirable crisis. But despite being the hub of management sciences, they



latest visa regulations are bound to have the same reaction on people who, after all, are demanding the same rights and recognition as they do? Any human being with dignity and self-respect would be offended by the new visa rules imposed by the Americans. But here lies the



LETTER FROM KARACH This hatred would in fact so easily paralyse the American nation that has a history. In the whole scenario the

bodies, nobody knows how they THERE used to be a time when live. The urban poor especially rickshawallahs are the strangers we Bangkok was considered the have the right to dispossess and mother of all traffic jams. I rememultimately demonize. We hold them ber stepping out and facing a long ride to everywhere. I reached the responsible for our urban chaos, our hotel four hours after the airport urban filth, our life itself. Our law-If I remember correctly, there makers, our decision-makers and scene was over. We reached the was not a rickshaw in sight. place called Bunglampo where a even our lawgivers all move in cluster of UN offices were and

girl suddenly broke down. "Nobody hospitals on time. You needed to understands what my father goes have a right address, near a hospital if you wanted to stay alive through. His body is shattered and he can't work anymore. He has to At a place called Bhubensarai, was the guest of a Bangladeshi who live on our income. My mother bade good-bye the night before. He works, brothers work, sister works. had to leave for five in the morning Still there isn't enough to eat. Why should I stop working?" She went on for his AIT office. Coming to Sukumvit took an hour and after that way. After some time her father tried feebly to comfort her, barely reconfirming the ticket, the return journey took three hours. In the morning, the taxi listened to a traffic

too strange. They exist on the fringe of our imagination. Solidly rooted only in our nightmares.

STRAIGHT FROM THE HEART

The urban poor especially rickshawallahs are the strangers we have the right to dispossess and ultimately

demonize. We hold them responsible for our urban chaos, our urban filth, our life itself. Our lawmakers, our

decision-makers and even our lawgivers all move in vehicles. The rickshawpullers' world is too far away,

able to speak through his laboured breathing. In fact he isn't a human being. He is just a dot on some channel on the radio in a bid to reach research paper. He was just a voice in my radio series on working chil-

rails, winter sunlight drifted in. The

the airport on time. Life is decided by the traffic. Nobody moves, visits dren. We have vanished him and with that his problems.

Bangkok's problem is that car owners far outrun the road space. More cars than road because infrastuctural development can't keep pace with prosperity of the new wealthy class. Solving Bangkok's traffic problem became a major development project later.

From this standpoint it's a pity that Sharon has asked Israelis to resist Arafat's visit to Bethlehem, the birth place of holy Christ on the Christmas day! At a time when Tel Aviv has waged a unilateral war against the Palestinians Arafat's visit to Bethlehem, which is under Palestinian control, is symbolically stretching a helping hand to religious harmony in a divided region.

The world is so riven by acts of terrorism that the messages of peace love and universal brotherhood have gained importance as never before in the history of mankind. We appreciate the special significance of Christmas in a world not merely beset with troubles but with searing poverty as well.

Merry Christmas to our readers.

ational of any particular Muslin country, as such one will be correct in assuming that the decision will affect all Muslim countries of the world including Bangladesh.)

M.J. ZAHEDI

HE news that the United

States of America will now

introduce and impose new

visa regulations to control

and monitor the entry of Muslim

males between the ages of 16 and

45 by asking them to fill in a new visa

form has come in for criticism in the

local media. The new form would

enquire about the visa applicant's

past and personal background. (The

news item does not specify a

'The Nation', published simultaneously from Lahore, Islamabad and Karachi, said that if the USA was looking for a way to alienate and isolate the entire Muslim world and 'to guarantee that their search for global consensus and support was scuttled, this was it'. The form seeks primarily to find out if they have had any military training or experience, as written in the 'Counter-Terrorism for Beginners' guidebook.

By stereotyping more than a billion Muslims the world over and accusing them of being potential terrorists -, the US has shown that its own approach to the problem of alobal terrorism is based on little else but fear, panic, hysteria, ignorance and prejudice.

The policy brings to limelight several unanswered questions. First, would any potential terrorist answer such silly questions honestly and truthfully? Who in his right mind would accept and that too in writing that "Yes, I have been a terrorist before"? Secondly, would any American or

European agree to such questions?

all these the USA has only helped in glorifying the same people whom they regard as terrorists and a threat to their national security. The basic moral high ground that needs while conducting such a campaign has been missing

By this irrational and thoughtless approach, they have merely strengthened the cultural, political and ideological boundaries between themselves and the Muslim world. By blacklisting over two dozens of Muslim countries the world over, the USA has made it even more difficult for Muslim states to support them in their campaign The campaign underliably is underwritten by racist bias and prejudice. The Americans, at least those at the helm of power, seem to have lost all sense of balance and judgement and think of all Muslims as potential nijackers or mass killers.

Would someone be able to avoid being labelled a racist if he or she stereotypes an African American as a potential mugger or rapist? American political correctness apparently stops short at the borders of the Muslim world; it still is all right for them to brand Muslims in general as a threat to their cherished way of life

Bangladesh: Love It Or Leave It!

ESAM SOHAIL writes from Kansas, USA

IS words were calculated to cause us acute distress and embarrassment. In one sermon, the government's chief imam, has insulted our heritage and caused grave damage to our image as a tolerant and moderate society If, in the coming months, Western markets are even further from our reach and thousands of more textile workers lose their livelihoods the nation can thank Maulana Obaidul Haque's intemperate and disgraceful remarks at the National Eidgah that were splashed around the world in minutes. In expressing his sympathy for the likes of Mullah Omar and Osama bin Laden, the preacher showed acute disrespect for the departed souls of the dozens of Bangladeshis who were killed in cold blood by the terrorists on the

fateful morning of September 11. The Khatib of the National Mosque, as The Daily Star's editorial so eloquently pointed out, is supposed to be a government servant. His opinions and beliefs are

made public under the shield of a government-funded programme and pulpit. His task is not to divine our foreign policy or denigrate our culture. We have elected representatives to direct the nation's international affairs through the various embassies and high commissions The learned cleric should apply to get into the foreign service if he wishes so much to get some hands on experience in foreign policymaking. Or better still, he can put his money where his mouth is and head over to join his jehadi brothers in Chechnya or Pakistan.

The maulana should carefully think the latter option specially now that he has made his opinion of our Bengali culture so painfully clear From the sheltered pulpit of a sacred congregation, Obaidul Haque made mockery of the three thousand year old tradition of Pahela Baishakh, the Bengali New Year. He hinted that somehow it was un-Islamic to celebrate the ancient festival. Un-Islamic? Does the gentleman believe that Islam

no concern of ours unless they are started in Bangladesh immediately after he was named khatib of Baitul Mukarram?

Let us call a spade a spade. The quarrel that Obaidul Haque and his k have with Pahela Baishakh is a deeply cultural one. These folks have never reconciled to the idea of 'Bengali' or 'Bangladeshi' identity. They wanted to make us pucca Pakistanis once and now they prefer to make us into pseudo-Arabs. For thirty long years they have tried to convince Bengalis that the only proper Muslim is someone who wears a head-scarf and speaks in a foreign tongue. To these selfappointed arbiters of Islam, somehow Bengalis are not quite Muslims yet and, therefore, have to be made ess Bengali and more Muslim! And if that agenda involves denigrating our culture and projecting us as ntolerant, so be it, the thinking I have nothing against goes. Chechnyans or Palestinians or Kashmiris (the khatib's latest favourite people), but frankly I am quite comfortable being Bengali. And proud of it!

Maulana Obaidul Haque has every right to his opinion, no matter how strange that opinion is. But personal integrity would demand that if he dislikes Bangladesh and her culture so much, he should take up residence in a cultural clime more suited to his peculiarities. I am confident that some mosque in the Gaza Strip or Chechnya can use a ehadi maulana better than we can. We can take care of ourselves, in both the temporal and the spiritual sense, without the learned clergyman's help.

Many years ago I spotted a bumper sticker on a car speeding through Dhanmondi that sums up the essential feeling of overwhelming majority of Bangladeshis: "Bangladesh-Love It or Leave It". And if Maulana Obaidul Hague doesn't want to leave Bangladesh, at least he should be persuaded to leave the pulpit of the nation's premier house of worship. Those who hate Bengali culture have no business drawing sustenance from Bengali money. Or, for that matter, leading Bengalis in prayer.

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE

Journalism in the Muslim world

Journalism in the Muslim world distresses me with its nearly total absence of analysis and independent thinking. Our news may come from AP, UP or whatever, but must our interpretation of that news also come from there?

I refer to your page 10 of the Friday, December 14th issue of Daily Star. Out of twelve headlines on that page, ten of them deal with the clash between the west and the Muslim world. The photographs on the page also add to the overall picture that Muslims are in a state of crisis. But the captions that go with the pictures tell a different story!

The mindlessness with which the news agencies' captions are often repeated in the Star is abysmal. Here is a picture of people buying items for sale in Kabul and the caption below it reads: "Several

fully-veiled Afghan women buy cosmetics at the Froshga market in the centre of Kabul yesterday. As the month of Ramadan ends soon

people have been preparing to celebrate the first Eid-ul-Fitr holiday after 5 years of Taliban rule with good food and formal dress." Does the Daily Star really think

that the Afghan people were enjoying their Eid this year? Western non-Muslim readers might swallow such outrageous nonsense, but your readers surely will not. Mujahida Lunceford, on e-mail

Sahabuddin Ahmed's obligations

The US has developed a unique tradition that Presidents of Federal Government devote their energy, goodwill and resources in establishing libraries in their names after their retirement from the office of the President. It has helped in remodel-

ling their social values. This is a good example, which can be adopted in all circumstances.

President Justice (retd) Sahabuddin Ahmed has recently retired. We earnestly hope that he will begin the tradition in Bangladesh and establish a library in his name so that incumbent President Professor Badruddoza Choudhury and other Presidents in future can uphold this tradition. This will create a dignified example in our society where social values are eroding every day.

Will Sahabuddin Ahmed rise to the occasion, respond to the time and give his comments regarding the matter Dr. Badiuzzaman

Dhaka

Why were they foraiven?

I think there are mainly three rea-

sons why a major section of people wants to forget/forgive the past, especially the Razakar issue.

The word Razakar has been misused so much that it has lost its meaning. A group of politicians and intellectuals have ascribed that term to anyone who has a different opinion. If you support BNP, then you are a Razakar. May be you were not born before 71, but if you support Pakistani Cricket team in world cup final instead of supporting England or Australia, you are a Razakar. I have also heard or read, it's your mentality what makes you a Razakar, no matter when you were born (implying you may not be a war criminal, but you don't support AL). As a result, to many Bangladeshi belonging to post '71 generation, the word Razakar is a mere rhetoric. Also, Razakar becomes a hot issue, only when AL is not in power.

as usual (in fact they were close allies during anti-BNP movement). Also, there were alleged Razakars in Hasina's government. Only when they are not in power, AL intellectuals start shouting about Razakar. So, to many of Bangladeshi it is a tool which is used by AL supporters to achieve their vested interest.

The third reason is there is no vision about what to do with Razakars and how to do that? Apparently, no government is willing to do anything about it. As I mentioned AL government didn't do anything. Past and present BNP government, in their oppositions' opinion, are Razakar themselves So how do we want to solve the issue? There was a movement named GHADANI, I am not sure if it exists today, was a failure. So far I remember, they filed a lawsuit which Bangabandhu's government didn't resulted in giving back citizenship to do any thing about war criminals, his Golam Azam. So, what to do with

daughter's government was silent the war criminals? How to bring them to justice? Is it possible to file lawsuits against them on individual basis? If we are serious, lets come out with a plan.

> I don't think anyone is against trial of killers. All I would like to point out is if we don't have a plan, then what's the use of un-stabilising and dividing the nation? Only uttering the word Razakar is of no use. Building the nation is far more important than that, if the Razakars want to lend a hand -- accept it. Zaki. on e-mail

Freedom from tyranny

We earned freedom in December 1971, but the political tyranny continues till today, as the citizens have become hostage to bad leadership and worse politics through the years. The politicians cannot run themselves or the country, and had to give way from 1975 to 1990 to other experimenters.

Basically we the people are to be blamed for compromising with quality. There is too much quantity in politics, and the learning is towards mercenary leadership at different levels of the political workers.

EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

It appears we need another December 16 for the start of another phase of national struggle for earning freedom from vile politics Hus

Dhaka

Ban on hartal I am quite unanimous with the points interest. raised in the DS editorial "Ban on hartal" (December 8). Yes, I am tired and bored of the hackneyed and unpleasant mindset of our politicians. They are not to serve the

Yesterday in the letter "Why were Rajakars forgiven?" Razakar was spelt as Rajakar and in the letter "The Kahtib's Baishakh" Khatib as Kahtib. The errors are regretted.

people but themselves. Some most-

talked about national issues such as

hartal, student politics, etc bear the

regrettable testimony of their selfish interest.

Hartal and student politics are

two of the greatest evils ruining our country. The politicians are well aware of it. But whenever an opportunity arises to rid of these evils, the Opposition enters the picture and

creates hindrance in the process. People's interest and well being have no value to them.

But where there is frustration there is also hope. And so I dare to hope that our politicians will be politic enough to seriously consider the vital issues concerning national

Mohammad Shamimul Alam Arambagh, Dhaka

Errata