

Train incident at Badda caused by negligence

Punish the guilty, ensure future safety

A passenger train that hit a fuel tanker lorry and burst into flames killing one and injuring many is an apt commentary on the state of safety in our communication and transportation sector. Mercifully, the casualty figures given the nature of the accident, is not high for death tolls in the hundreds for such disasters is not uncommon. But this is a terrifying reminder how close we are to tragedy at every step of our life and how negligent we are in trying to prevent them.

There are a number of rail crossings in the city and they are grim examples of death and injury waiting to happen. Those who have seen the operation of railway gate crossing will know that it is not taken seriously by anyone including the railway officials. The gates are not only closed very late but people tend to ignore them even after they are shut and many smaller vehicles cross long after the bars are down.

Not only is the public unaware about safety rules and regulations but there is no one to ensure their application either. Public bodies have public responsibilities and this is a clear example of what happens when responsibilities aren't taken seriously and guards are let down without any concern regarding consequences.

Nor do we know about the technical capacities of trains to stop at short notice. Media reports that attempts were made to stop the train but that failed. It would seem that the railway authorities are ill equipped to ensure safety and the trains are all running like death traps on wheels.

What must be contested as well is that it's an accident, a kind of a divine systemic failure that is unavoidable. We believe this isn't the case, and what happened isn't an accident at all. It was an incident that occurred as a result of gross negligence, complete failure and total disregard for the passengers' safety and irresponsibility towards safe keeping of state property by those involved.

We demand an investigation and appropriate measures to ensure that it never happens in future and those responsible for this incident are punished.

Attack on media rising

It's not just about violence

NEWS on violence against media outfits and journalists are becoming increasingly common. In fact one fears that they will soon reach a point when people will no longer bother about such news because such violations will be too common a fare. By ignoring the right to report, society is losing out on its right to know. It's not about press freedom anymore. It's about freedom to know about society itself. That is being threatened.

The incident concerning the *Prothom Alo's* Keraniganj correspondent is extremely disconcerting. His hands were crushed in a long spree of violence led by a group of Jubodal workers and he was left for dead on the street. Nobody has naturally been arrested in this connection.

Meanwhile intimidation and pressure from administrative and legal sources continue on many papers. This situation has been exacerbated by the fact that many of the journalists also wear political hats and some cases of motivated reporting have been noted. In a few cases, local commercial interests have also played a role in deciding the pattern of such incidents.

While all these are about press freedom from one angle, it's also about the increasing proximity of the reporters and the readers' space and the standards that need to be set for media to follow and others to respect.

We must do everything to protect media freedom because media is part of society and a muzzled media means a silent society, the first sign of autocratic governance. But the media should do some soul searching also to set guidelines to determine how media should conduct itself and rid itself of those elements who may use the media identity for selfish ends.

We strongly demand an end to the repression that media practitioners are being subjected to almost constantly all over the country. This is a crisis and must be recognized as such and proper actions taken immediately.

National flag in commercials

In your 11 July issue a commercial from HSBC has drawn my notice.

The national flag of Bangladesh has been very prominently used in their advertisement. Do our flag protocol and flag rules permit foreign or local business houses to use the national flag in their commercials?

Sirajul Islam
Professor of History (ret.), Dhaka University

"Ataturk the great!"

In response to Farah Islam's letter (July 10) on Kemal Ataturk, I would say that young Farah should not confuse Islam with Kemal Ataturk.

In the American School what World History she read I don't know, but Kemal Ataturk is universally recognised as a visionary, revolutionary, a great patriot and a statesman. His ideas on Islam were not confused nor he was anti-Islamic. The Turkish caliphate after Suleiman the Magnificent was declining fast due to corruption. It

was a rotten system which made Turkey the Sick Man of Europe. But there were people outside Turkey still considered the caliphate as the source of Islamic glory and pride.

But in fact that was ignorance not compatible with the real truth. Kemal Ataturk and his followers knew this well and took practical steps to save Turkey from the clutches of the invaders. He introduced changes in the society to bring his countrymen to the forefront of the modern world. He brought revolutionary changes in education, economy and separated religion from politics. His sole aim was to salvage his nation from poverty to prosperity, to bring them in the light of education and to save them from the clutches of the mullahs.

His admirers and enemies equally praised his achievements. Emerging nations admire him as a pioneer of national liberation. The world honours his memory as a foremost peacemaker who upheld the principles of humanism and the vision of a united humanity. So, young Farah, read more and understand. **Akbar Hussain**

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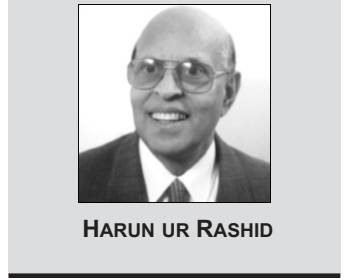
Unfortunately, simple truths are most readily forgotten and neglected. False smartness can easily pose as brilliance and usurp the place of real thinking; mere opinions attain the status of infallible truths. The thing is, thinking is real hard work. Shaw once observed that it is easier to make someone die in the battlefield than to make him think. I wish I had a student like Farah Islam. **A.K.M.Mohiuddin**
Professor, Department of English
Rajshahi University

Remuneration of MPs and ministers

The news of the enhancement has made me curious to know the relationship of remuneration of people's

separated from extreme fundamentalism. Many Western leaders including the British Prime Minister Tony Blair have underscored that moderate Islamic forces should come out strongly to drown the minority view of Islamic fundamentalism. It appears that Malaysian Prime Minister Dr. Mahathir Mohammad (76) spoke on behalf of moderate Islam during his recent visit to Washington.

The distinguished Islamic author



HARUN UR RASHID

AFTER September 11 attacks in the US, relations between the Western countries and the World of Islam remain tense. Although the West has consistently stressed that war on terrorism is not a war against Islam and Muslim people, many in the Islamic world are not impressed at their face value and find what they call "Islamophobia" in the West. Recently an eminent American-Palestinian academic, Edward Said, wrote: "I don't know a single Arab or Muslim American who does not feel that he or she belongs to the enemy camp and that being in the United States at this moment provides us with an especially unpleasant experience of alienation, quite specifically targeted hostility." (DS/28 June, 2002). The speech of the Director of FBI on 28th June before the mainstream American Muslim Council was criticised by right wing Americans because they perceived that the Muslim Council could not be free from the influence of 'fundamentalism' which was another name for terrorism.

Following the September attack, a deeper question has arisen whether mainstream Islam can be

late Justice Syed Ameer Ali said that "non-Muslims, unless they have made the teachings of the Arabian Prophet a subject of special study, have generally a very distorted conception of Islam" (*The Ethics of Islam, Reprinted by Islamic Foundation of Bangladesh, 1980*). All the three monotheistic religions—Judaism, Christianity and Islam—contain arguably within themselves the seeds of extremism and violence. Mr. Malise Ruthven in his latest book *"A Fury to God: The Islamist Attack on America"* (*Granta Publications*) pointed out that the visions of the "end of time" in which Christian fundamentalists such as Pat Robertson believe are not so far

removed from Osama Bin Laden's fantasies.

It may be noted that only under Muslim rule which began in the 7th century, were the three monotheistic faiths in Jerusalem able to co-exist in relative peace. It demonstrated the tolerance of Islam to other faiths. The Muslims respected the Holy Sepulchre, the Christian's most sacred shrine while adopting many Jewish beliefs about the

opposes the introduction of *Sharia* law in the country. He believes that Islam fulfils many principles that underpin Western democratic and universal human rights practices. He also calls for dialogue among civilisations and an ideological rationalisation in the conduct of Malaysia's foreign relations.

Indonesia's President Megawati Sukarnoputri appears to belong to the tradition of those Islamic liberals who hold Islam does not essentially

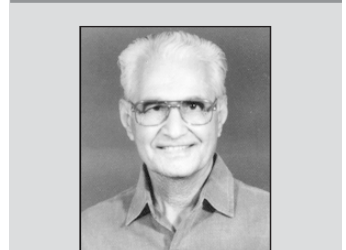
Tunisia and Morocco have been fighting against Islamic extremism. There is another development which is making a quiet revolution in the Arab world. That is the *Al-Jazeera* satellite television from Qatar. Although it is largely funded by the Qatari government, it appears to be the first of its kind in the Arab World, to operate free of much of the censorship that underlines the operation of its counterparts in other Arab countries. Its

structure in the Arab World. The recently released Arab Human Development Report 2002 by the UNDP was prepared by independent experts from the Arab World. Although the report refers to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a contributing factor to the ills of the region, it points out that the three main deficits of the Arab World are: (a) freedom, (b) women's empowerment and (c) human capabilities and knowledge relative to income. These deficits according to the report are not due to the lack of resources and the reports notes that in 1999 the combined gross domestic products of all Arab countries was about US\$ 531.2 billion dollars. In other words the oil revenues are not always reinvested productively and oil wealth is not co-related with progress in people's participation in the governments at national levels.

This report appears to be a frank assessment of the situation in the Arab World. Many political observers believe that the vacuum created is being filled by extremist Islamic organisations the West considers the main source of global terrorism. There is a view that if the US wants to purge global terrorism, it may wish to nudge the countries in the region to introduce inclusive political participation on the institutional level thus reducing the influence of extremist Islamic organisations. In this respect the Bush administration faces a challenge to which its response to the UNDP released report may have more effective consequences in eliminating terrorism than can be imagined at present.

Barrister Harun ur Rashid is a former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.

Part of the problem



M B NAQVI
writes from Karachi

THE shooting war that began on October 1 in Afghanistan has transformed itself into a more indirect, difficult and politically risky phase: it is to search and nab the 'defeated' al-Qaeda and Taliban fugitives -- where? It was in Afghanistan initially, to be sure. But thanks to demography, history and a highly porous border, this war has sneaked into Pakistan -- in fact in the Subcontinent. Inside Afghanistan this phase of the war is not going too well for the leader of the international Coalition against Terror. Why? because of those demographic and historic details: the fugitives being primarily Pushtoons and Islamic extremists of a particular kind, they find it easy, very easy, to cross over and find secure refuge in Pakistan through a historically-intended porous border -- the tattered Durand Line. Once in Pakistan, they can spread out and yet find safe refuge among supporters of the Islamic causes and anti American forces.

Which is where Pakistan is. The War is now well and truly inside Pakistan. The US is sure that it has won a military victory and there is no necessity of bringing in sizeable military reinforcements in the South Asian region -- here Afghanistan is included in the geo-strategic definition of the region, or sub-region as the American experts call it -- and only commandos and FBI, CIA and other agents are required. The

Americans have an inimitable way of 'persuading' other countries to become allies and, in any case, they marvelously succeed in recruiting Pakistan's military regime to fight terror alongside them. And it is doing so, if also without much political aplomb, though the American Special Forces (commandos) and intelligence operatives, present in required number and with required freedom to operate, are satisfied that Authority in Pakistan is cooper-

national Brigade in support of the Taliban regime and as such was worthy of support and protection, especially as their beliefs and world view were similar to Taliban's or other Islamic extremists belonging to the same or similar *maslak* in the Sunni sect. That is how even al-Qaeda men can find safe havens and support in Pakistan, irrespective of their nationality.

Pakistani security personnel have indicated that refuge in Paki-

found everywhere in the Subcontinent from Chittagong to Kabul and Kashmir to Kanya Kumar.

Some Islamic eyebrows are likely to be raised: This school or *maslak* to be described as majority Sunni sect's majority would be hotly contested by the more Sufistic *Brelvi maslak*; it thinks that the common run of (Sunni) Muslims throughout the Subcontinent is having been converted in the past by non-orthodox, but deeply religious Sufis

more fanatical Deobandis.

Historically there have been many ironies. Deobandis have proved to be more flexible politically in India. They defined the Muslim's collective (political) duty to be to establish *Ghalaba-e-Islam* (domination of Islam) over the whole world. But they quickly added early in their Seminary's life (Nineteenth Century) that this did not imply any military victory. It was to be done by persuasion and example of higher

and Taliban supporters.

Right now the many splinters and offshoots of the Deobandi *maslak* are in a state of shock after the defeat of Taliban and the reversal of Pakistan's policy on Kashmir. They feel betrayed after having been used. A combination of defeated, bitter and betrayed remainders of Taliban, Jihadis and sectarian terrorists are simultaneously in ferment: they are exceptionally against Gen. Pervez Musharraf, his regime and the so-called liberals whom they accuse of siding with *Busharraf*, the derisive nickname for Gen. Musharraf for his subservience to the Americans. These elements and their supporters are the declared enemies and the Americans mean to fight them -- in Pakistan.

Focus of the War on Terrorism has in fact shifted to Pakistan. The American media, to oversimplify, regards Pakistan as a part of the problem and not as a part of the solution of the problem of Terrorism. It is advocating the War to be fought vigorously -- on Pakistan soil. Hitherto nominally it is confined to only the arrest of al-Qaeda elements. But what it may eventually involve in view of popular support for the extremists and their infrastructure is anybody's guess. The regime's isolation from the people and even the US and UK makes its likely political moves increase its vulnerability. So far every outsider needs a united and strong Pakistan. But what of the future, in view of politically questionable schemes the military is floating to make its hold on power permanent? These may backfire and in any case will evince opposition. The US in particular appears to view these schemes to be divisive and deleterious for Pakistan's unity and basic strength.

MB Naqvi is a leading columnist in Pakistan.

PLAIN WORDS

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ating "fully" and suffering casualties in consequence.

Let's be sure who is who. The "enemy", apart from some non-Afghans and non-Pakistanis -- Arabs, Chechens, and other volunteers from other central Asian states -- most are Pushtoons. Now the latter can be Afghans or Pakistanis without making much difference to their basic self-identity or to their ability to cooperate, if their views coincide.

Thus most Taliban were Pushtoons and their having originated on the western or eastern side of Durand Line was immaterial. They shared the same religious and political beliefs and had a common world view as well as a shared commitment. The al-Qaeda, if it really exists -- many religious leaders in Pakistan assert that it is a convenient figment of CIA imagination -- comprised a brotherly Inter-

stan's Pushtoon belt for al-Qaeda can only be for short durations. It will be far safer and convenient for foreigners to spread out in various cities and depend on local supporters and sympathisers. This vital fact has to be kept in mind that the spread of Islamic fundamentalism -- that takes various shapes and forms, like Taliban's support, Kashmir Jihad, sectarian terrorism, *Tablighi* enthusiasm and support for al-Qaeda falls into perspective -- is more or less uniform throughout this predominantly Muslim country.

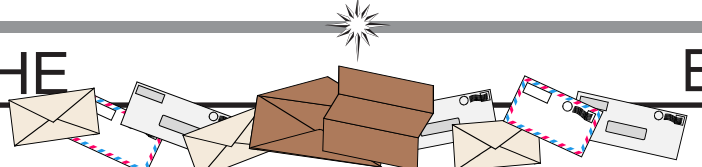
All these schools including the dozens of Jihad outfits belong to the majority Sunni orthodoxy, known as Deobandi *maslak*, and are distinguishable by the degree of their fanaticism and the subject of their special enthusiasm: Kashmir, Afghan Taliban or *Tablighi* mere militancy against sectarian and religious minorities. They are to be

-- they are the overwhelming majority of Muslims. They accuse Deobandis of having adopted the political technique of enabling their alumni to become unpaid Imams of Sunni Mosques, big and small, all over the Subcontinent. They can thus dance the tall claim that all those who come to those mosques belong to that *maslak*. Ordinary folks everywhere, the *Brelvis* assert, engage in typical *Brelvi* practices of organising Urs of various famous Sufis, taking out Tazias on tenth of Muharram, special *duas* called *Nazars* with communal eating and above all the widespread practice of venerating the pious *Pirs* by becoming their *Mureeds* (initiates). Looking at the panorama of Islamic reality in the whole region, common Muslims are found to be far more catholic, tolerant and acceptors of plural reality -- as compared to theoretically intolerant, rigid and

spiritual and moral accomplishments. They also defined Islam in a manner that Indian Muslims could accept a common Indian Nationalism and joined the common freedom struggle with Congress. Their day-to-day behaviour was far more tolerant than their less compromising beliefs indicated. In India they have remained in practice far more tolerant, hardly ever having started or participating in sectarian (anti-Shia) conflicts. This contrasted with the day-to-day behaviour of *Brelvis* who provided the bulk of supporters to the Indian Muslim League, often participated in communal riots and frequently in sectarian conflicts.

Within Pakistan roles have been reversed. *Brelvis* are the more quiet and a peace-loving part of society. All extremism has come natural to Deobandis. Adherents of this *maslak* comprise sectarian terrorists as well as Kashmiri Mujahideen

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The news of the enhancement has made me curious to know the relationship of remuneration of people's

representatives in other countries with the per capita GNP. And also the hours of service put per annum. Is there any such statistics?

MAH Dhaka

Forests

Your report on the forest department (July 5) brought no surprises. It is common knowledge that corruption is rife in this department while our meagre natural resources are plundered. Of course the money filters right up to the top in a reverse proof of the Trickle Down Theory. **Emile Dhaka**

DMCH

Well here we have it, Osman Ali vice-president of the Bangladesh Sarkari Karmachari Samity is the godfather of the DMCH area and is collecting tolls and selling drugs under the protection of the police and BNP leaders.

What will our conspiracy sniffing PM do about this? Since she finds time to lambast Sheikh Hasina and anyone else who criticises her, will she comment on this?

Maybe Tarique Rahman, will have a comment on this aspect of the activities of his party. After all, if the newspaper reports were correct, Tarique Rahman's job is supposed to strengthen and discipline the grassroots activities of his party. **Shonku Dhaka**

We want justice

Whenever a criminal act like murder, rape, extortion etc takes place the ruling party says "a santrashi belongs to no party" and then they ensure justice for the victim or the victim's family.

Even if the law-enforcing agency arrests the culprit soon they become free due to political influence.

The killers of Ahmedullah, a BUET student, who was shot dead in 1995, have not been punished till date.

On June 2002, BUET student Sony was killed in crossfire during a gunfight between two groups of BNP backed JCD on the BUET campus. We hope government will take necessary steps to establish rule of law in the society and will

prove that they do not support the criminals. **Abdus Salam**
Teacher, Central Jail Mymensingh

Thank you

Recently, The Shipping Minister has announced that the Ministry of Shipping has set up a 'Trust Fund' to help the victims of launch capsizes which is a common phenomena in our country. The Minister has also disclosed a few other measures the government is going to take for efficient management of launch operation in the river route of the country.

I'd like to thank our Shipping Minister for taking such a timely decision which he assured in the Roundtable conference arranged by The Daily Star after capsizing of MV Salauddin-2. In this regard I'd also like to thank The Daily Star for arranging such an important Roundtable.

J. Kobir
Mirpur, Dhaka
Congratulations

to BNP!

Since the BNP governments take over after a landslide victory in the last election I have been continuously asking myself -- why a party that was voted to power with two-thirds majority could not take even a single bold and constructive decision.

At last they have taken a bold step. Closing down of Adamjee Jute Mills. Hearty congratulations to the BNP leadership, particularly those who took the decision and carried it out.

I hope they will gradually be able to ban student politics also.

M Mahmood Banani, Dhaka

Check forgery

If I could have borrowed hundreds of corers of taka under fake bank accounts and got away scot-free I'd be one of the richest men in Bangladesh too.

Unless Beximco is brought to justice for their forgery, true entrepreneurs will never succeed in this country.

Death threat

This is in regards to the death threat allegedly made by the boss of Jamuna Group.

In the first place, wasn't it Awami League who initially gave permission for Jamuna's liquor licence?

Anyway when looking at Babar's allegations, keep in mind that this is the same man with whom M K Anwar refuses to work with if he were to be made the Home Minister. Babar is also the man who 'miraculously' has avoided any criticism for his ministry's utter failure. Poor Altaf gets all the flak while for Babar it's smooth sailing all the way. Remember next time when another innocent is killed in the crossfire of ruling party cadres that it's Babar's fault too.

I don't know if the boss of Jamuna group has really made these threats although I have no doubt that he is certainly the 3rd richest if not the richest man in Bangladesh.

Orlando Dhaka