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Barbarism in Iraq

Once the myths and legends of weapons of mass destruction had evaporated, the coalition forces claimed instead that this was a war to liberate the Iraqi people -- to overthrow an unpopular and tyrannical regime and bestow all the blessings of civilisation and democracy on the people of Iraq.

That Saddam was a tyrant is beyond doubt. However, the systematic torture of Iraqi prisoners -- now exposed to the entire world to see -- by the coalition forces of occupation have shocked the world, and demolished the lie that this was a war for the human rights of the Iraqi people. Let us be clear. The excuses of British and US government officials that these are the criminal acts of 'rogue elements' or a few bad apples will cut no ice. Each new appalling photograph published demonstrates just how widespread this abuse is. In fact, these are not isolated crimes, but part and parcel of the philosophy of the war.

The invasion and occupation of Iraq was no war of liberation, but an act of naked aggression against what was supposed to be a sovereign state, leading to the forcible occupation of a country by foreign troops against the will of the people.

Facing the mounting resistance of the occupied people, a massive use of force is required to maintain control. The response of the coalition to the

attempts of the Iraqi people to liberate themselves is typical. Send in more troops, kill more Iraqis, and torture those you capture.

In the twelve months since the US declared victory, 677 coalition personnel have been killed in Iraq, 506 more than those killed in the war. It is probably unprecedented in modern history that the aftermath of a conflict has claimed four times as many lives as the conflict itself. The exact number of dead Iraqis is not known. Current estimates claim a figure of around 18,000.

Each passing day brings new and more shocking revelations. Now it seems there are a further 1,000 digital photographs to be published. As usual, the military only admits what cannot be denied. As we are now learning, these initial pictures represent only the tip of a vast and extremely ugly iceberg.

We have entered a new epoch, an epoch of a new struggle. We can only hope that the conscience of world citizens would be able to put an end to the barbaric outrages being perpetrated in this war, a barbarism which is inseparable from the war itself. We all shall look forward to those unvanquished men who retrace the path of conquest surmounting all barriers to win back the lost human heritage.

Dr. Pinaki Bhattacharya
Purana Paltan, Dhaka

were settled in Bengal and had adopted this country). If the question of mother tongue is raised, then perhaps many Bengalees like Nazimuddin or Suhravardhi would have been out of race. If we are to concentrate on political personalities, then also there is nothing to be so sanguine about the results as Sirajuddawla has been left out and Golam Azam has been ranked ahead of many prominent Bengalees. A poll like this may provide some clue as to the people's perception of their heroes, but is never conclusive.

Report the truth

We have heard and read enough against our journalist brethren who fear to call a spade a spade and forget objective journalism, like some of their western comrades! In the guise of nationalism and hatred towards our major religion or fundamentalism, they at times canvass for chauvinism, communism and pluralism and even endorse impiety (knowingly or unknowingly). Sadly though, many of them, in the name of struggle against fanaticism, endorse and patronise impiety and "irreligiosity"!

I suggest them to follow and practise the valuable gospel of the great Asian Leader Mahathir Mohamad who said, "Report the truth even if it's bad." "Don't be a spin-doctor, don't distort news and don't have your own agenda".

AF Rahman, On e-mail

BDF conclave

The three-day BDF meeting has ended with stern provisions imposed by the donor agencies. The donor groups castigated the government for endemic corruption, downslide in law and order, lack of transparency and accountability and good governance. But they are very happy at the success in macro-economy. The vice president of World Bank, Mr. Pratul C Patel, reprimanded the government for its failure to provide public security. Finance Minister Saifur Rahman shrugged off the donors' allegations. He argued that donors could not meddle in our internal affairs. This is very optimistic to be self-reliant. That is praiseworthy. But our ADF banks on donors' largesse. Donors are not our foes.

If we want to be self-reliant, we need to boost our economy. We have to attract FDI and for this law and order should be restored, corruption needs to be eradicated and democracy in true sense should be practised. The donors' prescription may be the panacea for our country. We should not jettison their therapy.

Molla Mohammad Shaheen
Dept of English, DU

Attack on Ahmadiyas

I was alarmed to read about an impending attack by fundamentalists on the Ahmadiya community of Patuakhali. I note that on the very same day, the government assured international donors that it would take steps to improve the law and order situation. Does it not realise that harassment of thousands of citizens shows a complete lack of law and order? Bangladesh needs investment in the industries sector

to develop its economy. But foreigners (and even Bangladeshis, particularly expatriates) are not going to risk their money in a country where there is obviously no concept of public security. Lack of law and order will result in foreign money staying away, and local money remaining hidden away in safe investments as wealth rather than job-creating industries.

The government should immediately deploy the police, or even the army, to protect the threatened people. It is simply a myth that we can develop our society without establishing the rights of the public.

Zeehan Hasan
London School of Economics, London, UK

Bangla Bhai and police administration

Lawlessness has engulfed a large part of Rajshahi, Natore and Naogaon districts with the emergence of a self-proclaimed Islamic militant group just over a month ago. Jagrata Muslim Janata, led by Azizur Rahman, widely known as Bangla Bhai, started a cleansing operation against the outlawed Purba Banglar Communist Party from April 1. Newspaper reports say that this militant group has killed five persons and injured dozen others over the past 38 days. It also reports that at Bagmara, the band has decreed compulsory prayers. It is mandatory for men to grow beard and women to wear burkha (veil) when outside their homes. Local people claim that the police, district administration and some leaders of the ruling party have been supporting them. My question is that to flush out outlaws the operation of a militant organisation cannot be supported. In addition to that, to legalise the operation and draw sympathy from the people they are using religion, which is contrary to the basic teachings of Islam.

The situation in the northern region might go out of control and it will have a big negative impact on security in the long run. And their activities are also undermining our religion, Islam. The government must take stern action against those involved in the unlawful activities.

Malik Akram Hossain
Hong Kong

Unutilised Cancer machine at DMCH

The news items on the above subject in your daily (May 10) has drawn my attention. It is a pity to see such irresponsible behaviour of the DMC management. The statement of the doctors cannot be an excuse. These specialists are

commercial people (with a very few exception) who always prefer to see patients in their private chambers, tell not only lies but also shift responsibility to others. I have experienced their inhuman attitude and irresponsibility when my young daughter (only 27), a student of Masters in Health Economics Unit of DU, died of ovarian cancer on 25 April, 2004. About 40 thousands women die in Bangladesh every year due to ovarian cancer. The lady professional rightly says that more than 75% cancer patients can be fully cured, if diagnosis and treatment are done properly. I had been working on monitoring and coordinating the whole gamut of procurement of Health Logistics for about three years from the planning perspective. In fact, procurement of health logistics (particularly the foreign procurement) is the responsibility of the Director of Central Medical Stores (CMSD) under the Directorate of Health Services. It is observed during HPSP planning period that after a long persuasion, CMSD could collect the requirements of a big wish list of items and instruments without proper specification and even knowledge of operating such machines and equipment.

Since most of those highly sophisticated and costly instruments are procured with the IDA donors' funds, it has to go open bidding and with a neutral specification and there is no scope for mentioning any particular brand or preferring a particular company's item. It is not only barred by IDA procurement rules but also by the country's financial and procurement rules and procedures. Procuring such goods takes a long time, not less than 12-15 month. Getting the requirement list, CMSD tries to get a neutral specification. But the request provided by the specialists cannot provide specification in most cases. The specialist doctors always prefer the branded machine which they handled during training abroad. This creates a lot of problems for making specifications of machines/instruments for the health care system. In certain cases, CMSD even had to hire expatriate consultants for preparation of specifications. As such, a lot of time had to be lost. After completion of formalities the CMSD goes for bidding, and bids are evaluated technically by those specialised doctors/professors. When they approve the matter, financial evaluation is made at the appropriate level of authority according to financial involvement of the procurement. Sometimes it goes to the ministerial purchase committee and even to the prime minister. There is little scope for the ministry's officials

to choose any particular company at their will. So blaming the ministry for importing obsolete machinery is not right.

Ziauddin Ahmed Khan
A retired government servant, Dhaka



PHOTO: AFP

Extinction of animals

Any living being on earth dies after a certain period. But now-a-days animals are being eliminated ruthlessly. Animals live safely in the forests. But whenever humans have to fulfil their needs, they kill animals mercilessly.

Thousands of years ago, dinosaurs lived in this world but over time they have disappeared. Humans did not kill them, they were eliminated in a natural process. But the wild elephants in Africa are being killed today for their tusks as ivory is very valuable.

Today they are cutting down big and tall trees in the rain forests of Amazon and Africa and gaining millions. But by cutting trees they are breaking the natural cycle of living beings. Without trees the animals have to leave the rain forests and most often they die. Thus pandas in China are being eliminated due to the selfish desires of human beings. They now cut down trees for various purposes--for shelter or living, for money and business. Humans are the masters of the world and so they do whatever they want according to their needs. Population problem in the present world is a big issue and for their survival people brutally kill animals.

I believe that by killing animals, people are breaking the laws of the natural cycle of living. The environment is becoming more polluted day by day which would also harm human life. So, it is time to think deeply about the truth that animals are part of the natural world and people are not supposed to kill them for their own benefits.

Hasna Hasan
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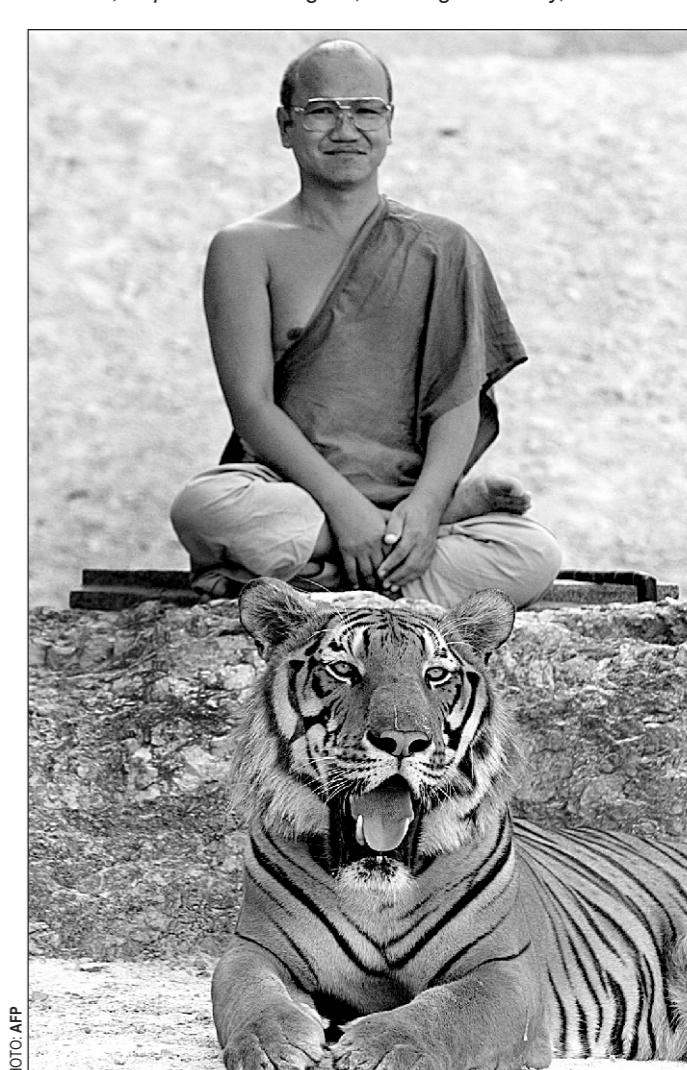


PHOTO: AFP

Ershad Shikder's execution

The execution of this notorious criminal may appear to be a triumph for justice. However, how does this benefit the families of the fifty odd people that he is known to have murdered? For some families, he very likely killed the only earning member. How are these families surviving? Ironically, his own family members, i.e. his wives and sons are now fighting over who will get what inheritance. However, his wealth was built up through illegal means and it is very likely that some of it belongs to the people he murdered. Who is then the rightful owner of the property? I believe the families of the murdered victims are the rightful inheritors. The government should take steps to find out the original and rightful owners of the wealth that Ershad Shikder had amassed. They should get a share of what he left.

Abdul Mannan, On e-mail

US marines

I do not know where Syeda Akthar gets her information from, but many of the facts in her letter about the US marines are not right. First of all, the US marines are not less privileged than the army. In fact, the US marines are considered an elite force. That they write such things as "Search and Kill" and "Blind Killer" on their vehicles is not a sign of bloodlust, but of their confidence and high-motivation, of doing what they were trained to do to fight a war.

Second of all, Timothy McVeigh was not a marine, but an army infantryman. And his Gulf War experience had nothing to do with the bombing of the Murrah Federal Building, but his growing anti-government view had.

Soldiering does produce mental stress, and can lead to violent behaviour like Fort Bragg but to wash the US marines with such a wide brush is unfair.

Niraj Agarwalla, On e-mail

Finance minister's remarks

Thanks for your balanced views expressed in your editorial dated May 11, 2004, regarding Finance Minister Saifur Rahman's remarks on elected governments taking orders from donor nations.

Mr. Saifur Rahman's veiled references to the recently disclosed abuses in Iraq by US military personnel does not in any way mitigate the fact that Bangladesh does not want to deal with the country's graft problems and the apparent lack of accountability of the top officials in

the administration, both past and present. On the other hand, in regard to abuses in Iraq, the accountability process has already started with the highest ranking officials (Defense Secretary Rumsfeld, Joint Chief of Staff General Myers and others) testifying before Congress recently. Court-martials have already been set up for the perpetrators of the abuses. The United States is not perfect, but at least Congress and the Executive branch are trying to deal with the problem.

Bangladesh has never and will not address the issue of corruption because corruption is so pervasive that when the shit hits the fan, that is, the accountability process begins, the heads of many powerful officials (political and bureaucratic) will roll.

What bothers me is that whenever the graft issue comes up, Mr. Saifur Rahman, in addition to using the two convenient tools of defence -- the media and comparison with other countries (as referred to by the Editor) -- has consistently blamed the United States over the years in spite of the fact that it (USA) has been very generous to Bangladesh since its independence. The finance minister should be cognisant of the fact that the United States government is accountable to taxpayers. It is our hard-earned money that goes into the coffers of the Bangladesh Treasury, which is systematically looted by officials, from the top to the bottom.

The notion that the world owes aid to Bangladesh is embedded in the minds of the officials running the Bangladesh government, past and present. Aid is not a God-given right.

Mr. Saifur Rahman also holds the portfolio of Planning. He needs to start planning for an aid-free future for Bangladesh. Otherwise, he will be dealing with pesky and intrusive donor nations for a long, long time.

I feel sorry for the majority of the people of Bangladesh who are struggling just to survive in spite of regular floods, tornadoes, cyclones, droughts, interminable strikes, extortion, plunging law and order situation and corrupt officials. The truth of the matter is that aid hardly reaches these struggling poor people. And, that bothers the donor countries.

Enayet Kabir
New York, USA

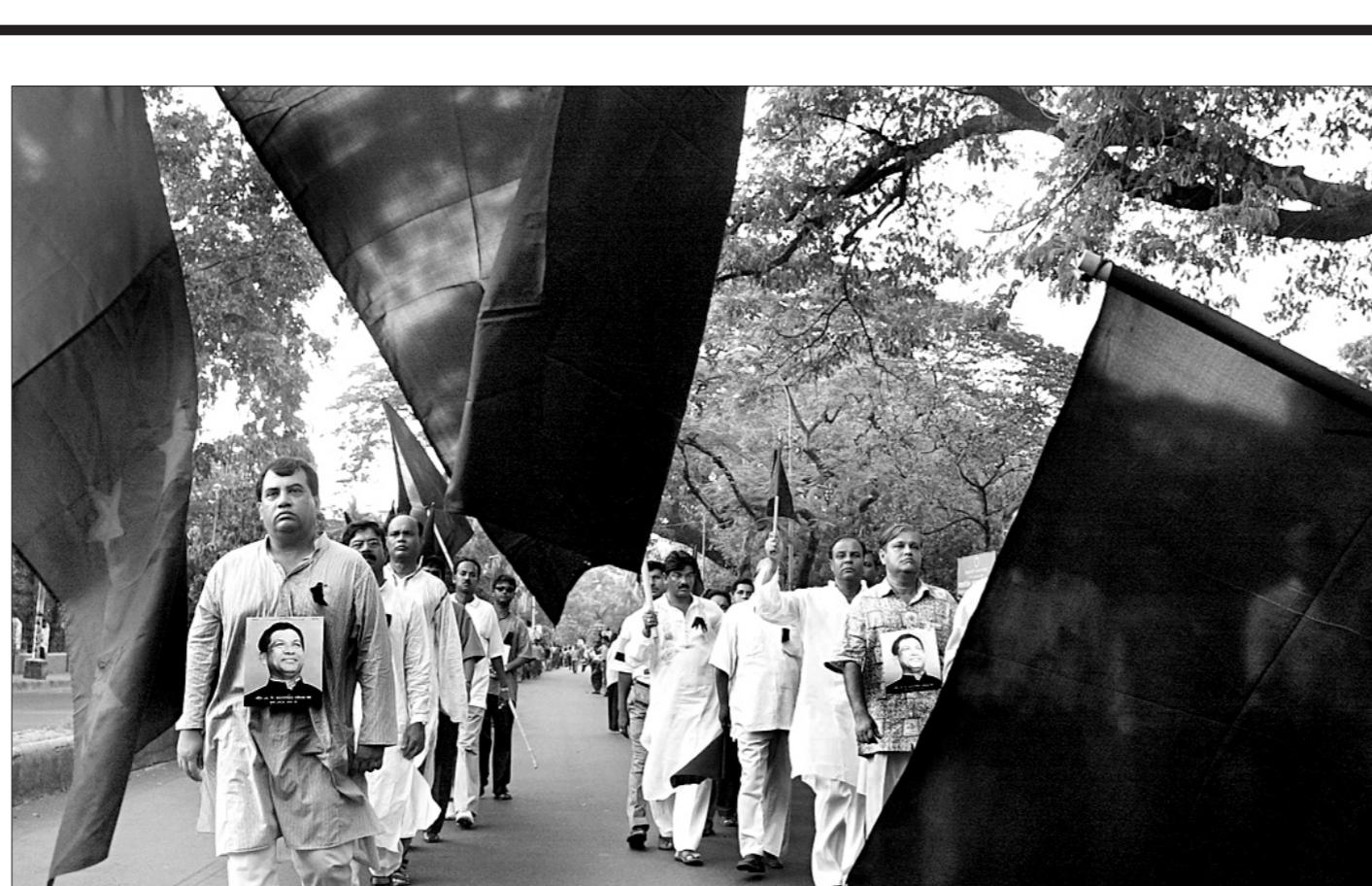


PHOTO: AFP

Ahsanullah Master's Janaza

I would like to know why the ruling coalition decided against sending any representatives to Ahsanullah Master's Janaza held last Saturday. Or is it that the thought hadn't occurred to them at all? Irrespective of which party Mr. Ahsanullah belonged to, he was a Member of Parliament. Even if every Member of Parliament did not wish to turn up at the Janaza, which I believe they ought to have, at least every party in parliament should have sent a representative to the Janaza of the murdered MP.

Have our politicians and political parties decided not to uphold any democratic norms or decencies? Do they not realise that some incidents or events warrant a rise above partisan politics? This was shameful!

Shameran Abed
New York, USA