

The Qur'an forbids killing without justice

Negotiation is better than war



MUSLEHUDDIN AHMAD

weapon against you."

If Al-Zarqawi's version is seen by the west as the basis for killing/beheading, then great injustice will be done to Islam. But Qur'an says "...Take not life which Allah hath made sacred, except by way of justice and law: Thus doth He command you, that you may learn wisdom". (Sura Maida). This is exactly the position of all the democratic countries where capital punishment exists. The capital punishment must pass through the highest court of justice. Qur'an also says ".... if anyone slew a person --

brutal killings including suicide bombings.

Jihad

The word Jihad shakes everybody because of the way this is being used by some of the fighters. They use the name of Islam/Allah so that they can convince many who do not have correct idea about Islam. Jihad is an Arabic word and its correct meaning and application must be understood properly. For example, if a chain-smoker firmly decides to give up smoking, this is Jihad for him against the bad habit.. So fighting

Almighty God i.e if any one prevents others from worshipping/praying to God and God alone -- this applies to all people of Faith, not specifically related to Islam -- then Jihad seems to be in order. Secondly, if any one is thrown out of his own home forcefully, he will certainly fight back and that should legitimately be seen as Jihad. This is why the people term it as Jihad when they fight against occupation.

Invasion of Iraq illegal

So far as Iraq is concerned President Bush's invasion of Iraq has

absolutely not. The countries concerned rightly treat them as "enemies" but it is high time for all of them to negotiate with these enemies and come to an acceptable agreement. Negotiated settlements are always better than war which destroys human lives. This is the only way to make the world safer. Let the UN deal with them effectively. It is high time to reject the Israeli jargon of "no negotiation with terrorists". If two Iraqi women scientists held by America were released, two Americans and one Briton Ken Bigley held by Iraqi rebels could be saved and freed. There was reportedly a decision earlier to release Iraqi nuclear women scientists (no WMD found - why hold them at all?), but because the hostage takers demanded, it was not done and in the process three precious lives were destroyed. Now how the blame is to be apportioned?

'Not all Muslims are terrorists'

A Saudi columnist A Rahman Al-Rasheed said (*Time* Sept 20) "Certainly, not all Muslims are terrorists. But with deep regret, we must admit that almost all terrorists are Muslims." No, this is not correct. Timothy Mc Veigh who bombed Oklahoma government building about four years ago and killed dozens of Americans was not a Muslim. The massacre in terms of death in Waco, Texas some years ago was carried out by religious zealots who were not Muslims. The members of Basque separatists ETA in Spain, who have been responsible for killings of hundreds of innocent people are not Muslims. The two radical religious sects fighting a deadly battle in Northern Ireland for decades are not Muslims. The genocide in Bosnia was not done by Muslims. The genocide carried out in Sabra and Shatilla Palestinian camps under the sponsorship of Ariel Sharon was not the acts of Muslims.

Now the Muslims have been put in the forefront because their land and homes are under foreign occupation. The Muslims are entitled to fight the occupying forces but nobody can support some of their methods including suicide bombings, beheading of civilian. At the same time, people will condemn the occupation and the occupation forces' atrocities against the people of occupied land in the name of killing terrorists in their alleged hideouts.

Israeli atrocities in Gaza

The USA has again vetoed the resolution that called for halting the Israeli attacks and killing of men, women and children. In one week of military operation in Gaza, Israel has killed over 80 Palestinians which include at least 19 children. It is also madness of Hamas that it sends one or two Kassam rockets to Israel which generally do no harm to Israeli civilians except the last one which killed two Israeli kids and that led to the present disproportionate military operation. And against the killing of two Israeli kids which certainly deserves world condemnation, Israel killed 19 Palestinian kids. Only Almighty God knows when the extremist Hamas leadership and international terrorist Ariel Sharon and his associates would come to their senses.

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The root cause of the present form of world wide chaotic situation which is branded as "terrorism" -- eg. fight against occupation, for freedom and autonomy etc -- must be identified and serious negotiations must commence with the fighters with a view to finding an acceptable solution. There is no military solution to these conflicts -- absolutely not. The countries concerned rightly treat them as "enemies" but it is high time for all of them to negotiate with these enemies and come to an acceptable agreement. Negotiated settlements are always better than war which destroys human lives.

unless it be for murder or for spreading mischief in the land -- it will be as if he slew the whole people." (Sura Maida). These are all Almighty God's words revealed through Qur'an and these must have been revealed even earlier through Moses in Torah and Jesus Christ in Ingeel (original Gospel). So it is unfortunate that the radicals quote certain things either out of context or probably from controversial hadiths just to justify their

against anything bad for any one or for the society/nation, could be called Jihad.

But Jihad has, as far as my very limited knowledge goes (if other learned people have other views I would like to educate myself on this), has applications on at least two major areas. There could be other areas too but those must be based on the provisions of the revealed Books (original). Firstly, if any one declares war against

been declared by the Secretary General of the UN as illegal -- against the international law. There has been no specific UN approval (Res.1441 did not authorise war -- it mentioned "serious consequences" which could mean total economic sanction, blockade etc) for invading Iraq. Similar views were expressed by Presidential candidate John Kerry too. The other day President Chirac of France said Iraq war was illegal. All the UNSC members except the USA and UK opposed Iraq invasion. There is no WMD (the latest report of the CIA Survey Group clearly said that there was no nuclear, biological or chemical weapons in Iraq before the invasion, indeed since 1991), no link with Al Qaeda or Al-Zarqawi, no link with 9/11, 2/3rd of Iraq remained under no-flying zone controlled by the US and some allies, 12 years of UN sanctions led to deaths of million children and men and women etc. Then what was the justification of Iraq invasion which indeed has made USA and rest of the world more unsafe?

But it seems that because Saddam could possibly be a "threat" to Israel, and certainly not to the USA or UK, President Bush and Prime Minister Blair went for the invasion. Thus the invasion and subsequent occupation and installation of a "puppet" government in Iraq and all other army atrocities including prison abuses are against the international law.

UN must define terrorism

As I mentioned in one of my last comments on the subject, here comes the role of the UNGA/UNSC which should clearly define the word terrorism (recent UNSC resolution on 'war on terror' is not enough). This would help many countries to differentiate occupation resistance groups and freedom or autonomy seekers from real terrorists. Once there is an agreement on the definition of terrorism, it will be easier for many countries to join the real war against all forms of terrorism. Some form of terrorism always existed all over the world and it is absolutely necessary for all countries to combat terrorism.

Root causes must be removed

But the root cause of the present form of world wide chaotic situation which is branded as "terrorism" -- eg. fight against occupation, for freedom and autonomy etc -- must be identified and serious negotiations must commence with the fighters with a view to finding an acceptable solution. There is no military solution to these conflicts --

WORLD SIGHT DAY

Spectacles : Symbol of disparity?

DR. MD. KHAIRUL ISLAM

LOOK at Dhaka or any other big city, you will see many people, irrespective of gender and age, are wearing glasses. However, if you go into the villages, the number of glass users is gradually coming down. The deeper you go into the villages, the number decreases further; and, take a closer look, you will hardly see a woman is using spectacles. Therefore, can we make a general statement that the city-people have more eye-related problem than their village counterparts; that the average villagers have very good eyesight, and especially women have particularly better eyesight? No, it would be very incorrect to draw such a conclusion.

In 2001, the International Centre of Eye Health, an affiliate of London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine carried out a countrywide joint survey with the National Institute of Ophthalmology, Bangladesh. The results of the survey were alarming. The survey revealed that 16.4 percent of the Bangladeshi adults -- both men and women -- who are over 30 years of age, regardless of whether they are from villages or cities, have defective eyesight (refractive error). This means about 3.3 million people have a problem with their eyesight (<6/12). Similarly, 1.3 million children throughout the country, aged between five and 15, need to use glasses. Altogether, it is estimated that about 6 million people in Bangladesh need glasses. However, only 3 percent of these people actually wear glasses. This leaves 97 percent who do not, or for some reason cannot use glasses. Of this non-using group, that of the children is most threatening: poor vision not rectified at a young age tends to deteriorate, may become permanent, and lead the child to blindness.

Expensive and time consuming

The general process of taking up glasses in Bangladesh is time-consuming and expensive. If one feels the need of glasses, he has to go the ophthalmologist. They are the only ones who can give you prescription for your spectacles. Being able to consult eye specialists at the outdoors of government hospitals can be considered a stroke of fortune. So one is forced to visit the doctors who have their chambers in the flashy outlets making and selling the spectacles. After paying Tk 200 to 500 to the doctor, it is time to order your glasses. The seasoned salesman will talk to the patient into ordering a spectacle that could be priced at anything ranging from five hundred to five thousand.

Once the order is made, the customer has to come a second time to get his glasses. This means that the doctor's fees, the price of glasses, and the transportation cost for the two days would make a total of at least eight hundred to one thousand taka. For an average man, especially the poor, and particularly a woman, it is not possible to pay that much money or find out free time on two different days. This is how the spectacle becomes a symbol of affluence, and a symbol of economic disparity.

Not easily available for the poor and women

In 2003, Bangladesh National Institute of Ophthalmology, ORBIS and Sight Savers International carried out a joint survey and found out that there are 626 ophthalmologists in Bangladesh. Of them, two-thirds practice either in Dhaka or in the other divisional cities. Many districts do not have any eye specialist. This means that people in those districts wanting to take up spectacles have to travel away to other districts, and for that they need someone to accompany them, as they cannot see properly. Similarly, a woman cannot travel outside her village or district on her own. To stay away from home for two days, she has to have a relative's place to stay in that town. Thus it is not always possible for someone, especially a woman, even if she can afford, to arrange all these to take up glasses.

Paramedics can provide it

To make spectacles affordable and available to all is not

a Herculean task. As opposed to Tk 500 to 5,000 and a two days stay away, it is possible to get glasses at people's doorsteps at a much cheaper rate of Tk 50 to 100.

In countries neighbouring Bangladesh, like India, Nepal, Pakistan, and also USA and Great Britain, the ophthalmologists do not prescribe spectacles; rather paramedic level professionals named Optometrists do. The Indians have had this course running for the last thirty years. The paramedics are not as famous or expensive as the doctors or the specialists. After passing the tenth or twelfth grade, the paramedics or optometrists can take up a two-year-long diploma course. Once that is complete, they are qualified to prescribe for spectacles at a low price. And as there are more paramedics than doctors, they can work in villages; that is, not only can they serve the district towns, but also at a lower level. If the system is arranged in Bangladesh, the problems faced by people to whom glasses are not available will soon be solved. As the paramedics would not be as highly qualified, they could give their services and sell glasses at very affordable rate of ten to thirty taka. However, in the name of quality control and ensuring proper cure, our ophthalmologists have opposed such proposals in the past, and may do so in the future.

Duty of Health Ministry

None of our personalities in position took the initiative to start an optometry course in Bangladesh. There is also no sign that the government would take up such a step in the near future. So for the greater benefit of the masses, I appeal to the civil society to come forward and raise following demands to our Health Ministry:

- 1) Immediately start one- or two-year-long courses of optometry.
- 2) The government-run paramedical institutes should provide these courses, and thus create jobs for thousands of our unemployed youth.
- 3) The Health Ministry should permit private universities to start this course competitively, and should make the related rules more flexible. Health Minister is there to help the country and its people, and not to protect the private practices of the doctors.
- 4) The various banks, especially Grameen Bank and BRAC, should allow their clients long-term student loans, without any collateral, for their members' sons and daughters, so that they could take up these courses. Therefore, once they have completed the courses they can go back to their villages and serve the people.
- 5) Every year Lion's Club, the Rotary Club and other similar organisations spend a lot of money on various eye related activities. A portion of it can be used to finance a student taking up optometry; s/he can be then given the responsibility of eye care in his/her own locality.

Follow the cheap Chinese method

The price of glasses in Bangladesh is needlessly high. The technology of lenses is not a rocket science. A plain glass can be turned into a powered lens, and can then be trimmed and sized accordingly to fit into a plastic or celluloid frame. In village fanfares, colorful plastic sunglasses costing Tk 2 to 10 are sold to young children. The production cost of making glasses for adults, with powered lenses, can be kept within Tk 50. Recently, reading glasses, with transparent plastic lens (not plain, with readymade power), have been made available for sale in spectacles shops: they are Chinese and cost Tk 125 to 150. The production cost in the Chinese factories is below Tk 20. From this information it is clear that the spectacle business in Bangladesh has a cartel. If glasses can be made available everywhere to whoever shall need them, then this cartel will break or at least be not as effective.

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3X3

6X3

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