

Registration of political parties

Regulatory framework long overdue

THE somewhat comical spectacle of 114 political parties, the vast majority of which very few members of the general public had ever heard of, being invited by the EC to discuss reforms to the voter list, has had the unintended effect of bringing the issue of the proliferation of such political parties to the fore-front.

Let us start by stating that there is nothing wrong per se in groups of like-minded individuals getting together to form a political party. Bangladeshis are by nature a fractious and political people, and it is only natural that these tendencies of ours would result in a vast outgrowth of political parties. The fact that many of these parties command the loyalty of no voters outside of the friends and family (if that) of the party leaders and founders, while amusing, is hardly an offence.

The proliferation of parties, however, does shine a spotlight, on one glaring problem in the Bangladeshi body politic. It remains a rich irony that while even the smallest of shops or businesses is required to be licensed and registered, that there exists no law requiring the registration of political parties and no statute regulating them. It can be argued that the very political parties that rule the country (now and in the past) have no real legal standing whatsoever to do so.

Unlike in all other spheres, there is no official criteria set forth for the formation of political parties. There are no regulations in place to govern their conduct and by-laws with respect to crucial matters such as funding, internal democracy, organisation, and structure. This is a shocking regulatory oversight, even more so when one considers that any political party has the potential to come to power as part of a coalition.

The reason for this is that registration and regulation has been uniformly opposed by the major political parties. We are at a loss to understand why this is. That political parties need to be brought under some kind of regulatory framework seems to us to be self evident. That such a measure would improve governance by subjecting the parties to some kind of discipline and creating some level of transparency and accountability with respect to their internal activities seems impossible to deny.

If the political parties really wish to be seen as serving the people's interests, and not their own, they would support a law requiring registration and regulation of political parties.

Fruitless juice

Drive against adulteration must be a round the year affair

MORE and more appalling things are coming out of the government's drive against adulteration. A test conducted by the BSTI has shown that the fruit juices that are sold under different popular brand names do not actually have the slightest trace of the substance that could justify their names. Rather, chemical and non-food grade toxic colours are used as ingredients for the "fruitless juice". People drinking such juice on a regular basis expose themselves to all kinds of ailments.

The Consumers Association of Bangladesh (CAB) actually did the random sampling and requested the BSTI to carry out the test. We fully endorse the proactive move which has already brought into light some mind-boggling truths of the world of food production, marketing and distribution. The goal is of course to make sure that the required standards are maintained by the food producers and sellers. But the point of concern here is the fact that the fruit juice companies that have been found to be selling standard products were all certified by none other than the BSTI itself. It is evident that there is no effective surveillance, once a commodity is cleared by the BSTI. And there is none to shoulder the responsibility of public health being endangered so conspicuously.

So there are two areas where the government must tighten the noose. First, there should be a permanent body to monitor food production and marketing. Seasonal or occasional raids on factories, shops or restaurants are not enough, given the magnitude and proliferation of the problem of adulteration. Second, the enforcement of law has to be strict and unconditional.

Obviously, the drive against adulteration should be transformed into a united movement where all the stake holders are expected to play a positive role.

The dishonest elements responsible for pushing consumers to death through adulteration must be given exemplary punishment. However, it is also imperative that the agencies in charge of keeping things on the right track perform their duties honestly. Their failures must not be lost sight of when all eyes are set on the sellers of adulterated foods.

Is there a need for a 'good definition' of terrorism?



WHENEVER there is a spate of terrorist bombings around the world, this sparks a renewed flurry of activity on the part of political leaders, academics and international civil servants to devise ways and means to grapple with the phenomenon. It is, therefore, not surprising, given the rise of incidents of terrorist activities, particularly after the so-called war on terror, to see the UN Secretary General not only implore the heads of states due to meet shortly at the UN to arrive at an acceptable definition of the phenomenon, he has also gone so far as to call for formulating a "good definition of terrorism."

So far, the international community has failed to come up with a simple definition that would be acceptable to all parties, not to speak of a "good definition." One wonders whether it would be at all possible, given the disparate perception of the term, to come up with what the UN Secretary Gen-

eral would like to see -- "a good definition of terrorism that we can all live with."

To some, the whole exercise may appear a bit absurd, that while so many are being made the victims of senseless suicide bombings, the international community is still seized with the problems of its definition. That is what begs the question of whether proper responses can be devised without actually defining what we are going to counter? And as the UN chief

to effect maximum destruction. Some scholars go so far as to suggest that terrorism has been criminalised. One would therefore not be wrong to surmise that terrorism was invested with a degree of ethical values in the past. One would have to accept, going by the events of the recent past, that there is indeed a significant departure from the motives and modus operandi of terrorism of the nineteenth and twentieth century, a difference that is marked by the absence of

people by the Whites." This sums up the element of "morality" and the motivation of terrorists!

While one goes about trying to conjure up an acceptable definition of terrorism, one feels that the job would be left half-done if one did not go into the whys and wherefores and the motivations that compel people to become suicide bombers. Seldom do we bother to peep into the minds of those that chose to act as human projectiles. It is imperative that we

method. The methods of the freedom fighters are bound by certain rules and behaviour that are consistent with their goals. Distinction is made in their choice of targets, where children and women and the unarmed are never equated with soldiers, where destruction is wreaked but only against oppressive regimes and their supporters.

Given the fact that terrorism is a multifaceted and multidimensional phenomenon, how does one define it? Most agree that percep-

even if there were an objective, value-judgement-free definition of terrorism, covering all its important aspects and features, it would still be rejected by some for ideological reasons.

That definitions are so very dependent on parochial perception is well illustrated in the series of activities and the number of proposals leading up to the adoption of UN resolution on terrorism. Three subcommittees were set up by the UN ad hoc committee in 1973 to "examine the definition, causes, and prevention of terrorism." So much was the house divided and for so long that it was not until 1987, when the international conference convened by the UN Secretary General to differentiate freedom struggle from terrorism, agree to identify terrorism with crime, that the relevant report was passed. Therein all act of terrorism were condemned, except those fighting for the cause of self-determination against foreign and racist and foreign regimes.

The fact that there are by one count 160 definitions of terrorism should neither detract nor prevent us from addressing terrorism for what it is, use of violence for attaining political objectives by inducing fear. There is a general consensus that lack of a universally accepted definition should not be allowed to inhibit our efforts to confront terrorist groups on the basis of a working definition.

The author is Editor, Defence and Strategic Affairs, The Daily Star.

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has himself admitted, its character is not a mystery. According to one expert, arriving at a working definition also has uses other than increasing our understanding of terrorism; by defining terrorism one can also define the preferred means of countering it. Sorting out the definition of terrorism is also essential if only to distinguish it from other forms of violence.

It is also important, while we are trying to define it, to understand that the character of terrorism has undergone changes over the last several decades. According to one expert, contemporary terrorism has become indiscriminate in the choice of victims. Its aim is no longer to conduct propaganda, but

morality.

It is difficult to disagree with those who want us not only to involve ourselves in what terrorist do but also go into why they do what they do, because not all "terrorist" activities were conducted with a spirit of cool detachment and wanton destruction. A Nobel laureate, once dubbed a terrorist, particularly by the US, had said: "I do not, however, deny that I planned sabotage. I did not plan it in a spirit of recklessness, nor because I have any love for violence. I planned it as a result of a calm and sober assessment of the political situation that had arisen after many years of tyranny, exploitation, and oppression of my

do so because, in the words of an Israeli engaged in the job of hounding out Palestinians, "Those who want victory without addressing the underlying grievances want an unending war."

It is also essential to distinguish terrorism from other types of violence in society, particularly from the tactics resorted to by the freedom fighters and liberation movements, because it is illogical to describe all liberation movements as terrorism, although they may resort to terrorist tactics from time to time, as much as it is to characterise all terrorist outfits as freedom fighters, although emancipation may be their ultimate objective. What separates these two is the

tion is one of the core problems in defining terrorism. One cannot agree more with those who consider such endeavour a "fool's errand." Yet this is necessary, all the more so, when the transformation of the meaning of the term is effected by the application of measures to combat it, to suit the political and strategic ends of some of the big powers.

Plethora of definitions exists, but no single one captures the entire character or nature of terrorism. There are as many definitions as there are those practising the trade or dealing with it or in it. It is most often a result of individual and parochial perception of the phenomenon. Most experts agree that

Please stop your hate speech, Mr. Friedman

DR. FAKHRUDDIN AHMED writes from Princeton

DEAR Tom: You have forced me to come out of my hiatus and are making me do things I hate: being rude and showing someone up, even in print. But, you have been impossibly difficult these past few months. Your pen is dripping poison. In the guise of the so-called "war of ideas" (your euphemism for "war on Muslims"), you are systematically attempting to destroy the credibility of the Muslims, their culture, their holy book and their religion. You have such a stranglehold over the American media that one has to seek avenues abroad to refute your lies.

In your July 22 piece, you accuse the Imam of Islam's holiest mosque in Mecca of saying the following: "calling Jews 'the scum of the earth' and 'monkeys and pigs' who should be annihilated.' Other enemies of Islam were referred to by Sheik Al-Sudayyis as 'worshippers of the cross' and 'idol-worshipping Hindus' who must be fought."

Incendiary stuff! In one statement he manages to alienate the world's Christians, Hindus, and Jews. I wonder why he left out the Buddhists! If it is true that he has really used that kind of despicable language, he has polluted Islam's holiest shrine, and I will be the first to condemn him and ask for his firing.

Here is the problem though. You attribute the information, not to an impartial and respectable source, but to "Memri Translation Service," and "Yigal Carmon, the founder of Memri, which monitors the Arab-Muslim media."

This is where you sink into deceit, Tom. What you hide from America is that Yigal Carmon is a virulent Zionist, whose organisation, Memri, is dedicated solely towards painting the most negative picture of the Islamic world to the west. (Does Memri have an agent in the holy mosque, I wonder.) Yet, to unsuspecting Ameri-

cans you pass off anti-Muslim Jewish extremist Carmon as a respectable mainstream American.

This crucial information changes the complexion of your expose entirely. You are so powerful Tom that no newspaper in America will dare to expose your deceit and publish this truth. Yigal Carmon supplying information about Muslim preachers is as believable as Baruch Goldstein fighting for the rights of Palestinians.

Since you want to be "non-

militant Imams' sermons inspire Muslim extremists, surely militant Rabbis' sermons must be inspiring, in your own words, "Jewish settler extremists who wrote 'Muhammad is a Pig' on buildings in Gaza." I can't wait to read your column denouncing Jewish hate speech.

Although through your grandiloquent theories you present yourself as a scholar on Islam, (after all, you coined the word "Islamofascists"), your understanding of Islam and the Muslims remains very poor. None of your

Muslim American condemnations of the terror attacks are sure to be featured prominently in the press and the electronic media. This is simply not true. After 9/11 Muslim Americans had to buy space in the newspapers to air their condemnations.

It is naive to think that all it takes for bin Laden to stop his madness is some kind of signal from Muslims. You may be better informed, Tom, but the fact is, like the rest of America, Muslim Americans have no clue as to what Osama Bin Laden and his band of

Salman Rushdie in 1989, most Muslims outside Iran dismissed it. To think that bin Laden and his murderous thugs will be chastened by the issuance of fatwa against them is ludicrous.

What gets stampeded in the rush to make Muslim Americans culpable is the fact that bin Laden is an equal opportunity killer. Over 500 Muslim Americans were killed in the destruction of the World Trade Center on 9/11. On Sunday, July 17, The New York Times published the photograph of a beautiful Muslim

Although terrorists couch their actions in religious garb for self-justification, their acts are fundamentally political. Any moderate Muslim eager to jump on the "war on terror" bandwagon is stopped dead in his track by three words: Afghanistan, Iraq, and Palestine. Just as it is disingenuous of the parents of the London bombers to be "surprised" by the acts of their madrassa-indoctrinated terrorist sons, it is a tad hypocritical for the apologists like you to pretend and to propagate the lie that western invasion, occupation, and destruction of Muslim lands have nothing to do with terrorism.

President Bush is head over heels singing the praises of democracy and freedom. He has forgotten an important phrase in the Pledge of Allegiance -- "justice for all." "Freedom, democracy and law and order" are the clarion call of the strong. "Justice" is the cry of the weak and the oppressed. America's founding fathers begged the British for justice, which was denied, only then they took up arms. "Justice" is the song the Muslim world would love to hear from President Bush.

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discriminatory," let us discuss what happened at the funeral of Israeli settler Baruch Goldstein who gunned down 29 Muslim Palestinians as they were praying the morning Fajr prayer during Ramadan at the Ibrahim mosque in Hebron in February 1994. The Rabbi at the funeral said, "Thousands of Arab lives are not worth a Jewish finger nail!"

Remember that? Now, if the Rabbi could say this in public in front of the cameras, I have a feeling that he and those like him say some pretty nasty stuff about Arabs and Muslims beyond the reach of the cameras. I agree with you that "we need to shine a spotlight on hate speech wherever it appears. The hate spreaders assume that they are talking only to their own, in their own language, and can get away with murder. When their words are spotlighted, they feel pressure to retract, defend and explain them."

If you really want to be "nondiscriminatory," Tom, why don't you ask Memri to secretly tape the sermons of militant Jewish Rabbis and expose them to the world? If phantasmagoric theories, so far, have panicked out. You labeled the 7/7 London bombing a "Muslim Problem," although a Jewish reader of The New York Times quickly corrected you: "It's a human problem."

In the article you say, rather shamelessly: "The Muslim village has been derelict in condemning the madness of jihadist attacks. To this day, no major Muslim cleric or religious body has ever issued a fatwa condemning Osama Bin Laden."

These are lies and you know it. I hope the following truths are not too hard for you to stomach. Ever since the London bombings, led by journalists like you, a chorus of criticism has been leveled against Muslim Americans for their supposed silence, with the innuendo that silence equals acquiescence. One only has to search Google to find (along with an avalanche of anti-Muslim smut) numerous Muslim American organisations that have unequivocally condemned the atrocities. The suspicion persists because of the erroneous belief that any

Al Qaeda maniacs are really up to. They have not consulted the Muslims and Muslims have not authorised bin Laden and his gang to speak or act on their behalf.

Yet, every time these lunatics carry out mayhem, for the rest of the world, cheer-led by those like you, it becomes, in your own words, a "Muslim Problem," with the insinuation that the lack of Muslim condemnation and "fatwa" (religious decree) against bin Laden empowers the gang. To assuage the anger of fellow Americans, Muslim Americans dutifully condemn the terrorists without really knowing exactly who or what they are condemning. The fact is: Muslim Americans or Muslims elsewhere have just about as much knowledge of, or influence over, bin Laden as has President Bush.

Unlike the Roman Catholic Pope, there is no temporal authority in Islam. Most Muslims abhor the issuance of "fatwa" because it is not religiously sanctioned. When Ayatollah Khomeini issued a death sentence fatwa against

Bangladeshi-British teenage girl killed in the London bombing. And in Iraq, Al Qaeda targets and blows up into smithereens several times more Muslims than American soldiers.

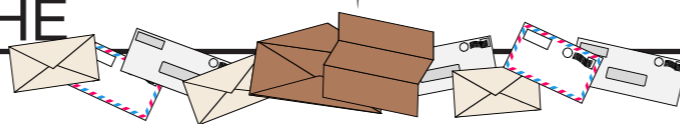
Muslim-detractors like your friend, Irshad Manji, are now citing verses in the Qur'an as inspiration for the terrorists. A particular verse has been quoted: "Whoever kills a human being, except for murder or other villainy, shall be regarded as having killed all mankind."

Supposedly, "except for murder and other villainy" is the "loophole" that inspires the terrorists. Nonsense. Self-defense is allowed in Islam. Muslims do not believe in "turning the other cheek" -- who does these days? If Muslims did not defend, all their lands would be occupied by invaders by now. While the terrorists will embrace this or any other verse as a blank check, for the average Muslims what constitutes "murder and other villainy" is a matter of intense scrutiny and debate. This certainly is not a "sin of Scripture."

Your own track record is not good, Tom. You have criticised Muslims for condemning the desecration of the holy Qur'an while remaining silent on the killing of the Iraqis by the insurgents, but you have never condemned the killing of civilians by the occupation forces in Iraq.

Please stop misleading America with lies and deceits, Tom. Practice truth and the truth will set you free.

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR



Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

Human rights and crossfire

These days the movement of some human rights organisations against extra judicial killing is really eye-catching. After each and every crossfire they express their resentment through seminars where they lay emphasis on the rights of the notorious criminals and also place the statistics showing who are being killed in the hands of the law enforcing agencies. But the most astonishing matter is that they never arrange such seminars or processions when a businessman or a law abiding citizen is killed by these criminals. These human rights organisations can show you the statistics of how many criminals have been killed by Rab in the last 6 month but if someone asks them the number of the common people killed by these miscreants, they will remain silent.

This attitude clearly implies their weakness for the criminals. Unfortunately, their hearts bleed not for the common people but for the criminals.

Their endeavour is to ensure human rights for those who are not human beings at all. The sufferings and pangs of the common people remain out of their focus. Actually, these organisations are selling human rights to the criminals for their own shake. The reason is that these human rights organisations are generally run by the lawyers and the criminals are their main clients. If they are all killed in crossfire the lawyers will be jobless. So they are trying desperately to protect them but the common people are aware of their malicious motive; that's why they are not getting public support. The people of Bangladesh want peace and a society free from terror. They are supporting Rab and also

helping them spontaneously in eliminating the miscreants. It is necessary for the human rights organisations to feel the pulse of the nation; otherwise they might become isolated from the common people.

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Changing social context

Entrenched corruption has made it easier to get something or a service without much effort. The use of money has changed. Once this road is travelled, exertion becomes a boring chore. Earning one's living by the sweat of one's brows sounds quixotic. The nation becomes soft, and looks for alibis.

Corruption encourages the cult of short-cuts. It becomes a bad habit, if practised regularly. Why bother

when money has become a universal solvent? Then what is the price of originality and creativity? It is a *kochuripana* life.

This sticky culture changes an individual's personality and character and applications in life. Honesty takes refuge in minority pockets, not strong enough to influence the mores of the society. The society is divided into black haves and white have-nots. It adversely affects the cherished goals of the new generation (viz. the students at the university level), and the values of life get confused. Ad hoc benefits become permanent fixtures in life. The traffic lights in life's paths glow in different colours. Navigation becomes a neglected science. No sail or rudder it is hidden remote control!

But at the lower economic levels, the traditional field works have not changed (food and agriculture, for

example). The black-marketeers control the market and distribution chains, changing the value system of rewards. In addition, punishment is minimal in the corrupt chains, causing injustice in evaluation exercises. Why labour when the reward is not rewarding enough?

One ethical factor comes in: the barkat in halal rozi (the blessing in honest earning). Easy come, easy go. That explains the huge rise in expensive trips for medical treatment abroad. There is meter for measuring the peace of mind, contentment, and happiness. Robberies and dacoities also rise, to share the loot! Now terrorism enters the arena, to extort compensation. There is no straight line in nature, or in human life.

Another area to examine is the effect of illegitimate wealth inside a family. The yellow signals are not difficult to decipher. Who ruin the

future generations?

Then how about damage control at the leadership level? Leadership in a changing society has numerous permutations and combinations. Today the bad (generally speaking) are ruling the good. The social scientists have to create awareness in the masses of the resulting repercussions. Why the political leaders stand apart, and dominate every niche of the society? Who are giving way, and who are resisting.

The MPs (peoples' representatives) have a pivotal role to play. What happens when the public trust is misplaced? The nation cannot develop. In the ADP, there are more physical projects than those to improve the mind. The politicians in power crave for physical visibility. Are we backing dark horses?

Women leaders have to get more platforms for improving the society. They have a complementary role to

play. This is not being emphasised at the official levels.

Who bother about changing mores? Let us have more bridges, culverts, and roads. The self-improvement roads can wait!

A Maher
Dhaka

Adulteration

The government drive against adulteration is a praiseworthy move. Your reports have actually opened a Pandora's box. Now it seems the authorities have wakened to a reality that they were expected to be aware of.

Adulteration is nothing new in this society. But even the dishonest elements had some scruples in the past and they were not really mixing anything and everything with foods. But the situation has changed. They do not hesitate to mix toxic elements with foods that could even cause

death. It is really horrifying to know that even the posh restaurants in the city are supplying foods unfit for human consumption. And that is true about many of the dazzling fast food shops.

I think profit making is not the only reason behind such activities. We as a nation do not have the needed sense of health and hygiene. Those engaged in the catering service are perhaps not aware that supplying stale foods is a criminal offence.

So the only thing that we can do about it is to apply the law very strictly. Nobody should be allowed to get away with adulteration and all such crimes. We have to realise that public health has a great bearing on our future as a nation.

Mansoor Raja
Dhaka