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Talibanisation of Bangladesh



What happened recently should be a wake-up call for Begum Khaleda Zia's government and party. It was good of her to finally recognise that the country was awash with terrorists and extremists and to launch a campaign against them.

SAN-Feature Service: What has been a matter of constant denial by the Dhaka government has now come to be proved. The reference here is to the spate of bombings of August 17, which clearly confirmed the existence of al-Qaeda-like minded terrorist groups in Bangladesh.

On the morning of August 17, around 500 bombs blasted simultaneously in 60 cities and towns across the country, targeting government buildings, courthouses, public parks, shopping centres, and busy streets. Fingers of accusation are pointed to Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen of Bangladesh (JMB), an outlawed Islamic extremist group, especially with thousands of leaflets in Bengali and Arabic being found at the bombing sites carrying the name of the group. Only those who believe in conspiracy theories and accordingly hold Western, Zionist, or Indian intelligence agencies responsible for any destructive operation have said otherwise.

In these two-page leaflets, the JMB demands the setting up of Islamic laws, describes democracy as an anti-Islamic concept that has been introduced by Kafirs (non-believers) and Mushriks (pagans), threatens to Qital (all-out killing), and prescribes severe punishment for the American and British leaders.

Since the mid-1990s, there have been many reports warning of Bangladesh's gradual slide towards becoming a new hub of Islamic extremists. This became more obvi-

ous after the BNP came to power in 2001 through an alliance with the Jamaat-e-Islami (Jei), a mainstream political party that maintains strong ideological ties with a party bearing the same name in Pakistan and that is sympathetic to al-Qaeda and the deposed Afghan Taliban. The Jamaat and other Islamic parties have employed their partnership with the BNP and position in the ruling coalition government to actively support and give shelter to Muslim extremist groups and individuals, including those who entered Bangladesh illegally from Arab and Asian countries. After all, and regardless of their names and banners, they share one ultimate goal: the replacement of Bangladesh's current democratic multi-party system with a Sharia-based government.

Such covert protection of extremist groups has helped the latter become capable of establishing themselves and of launching bomb attacks on public rallies and movie theatres, persecuting the minority Ahmadiyya Muslim community, or oppressing non-Muslim citizens, liberal intellectuals, secular journalists, and members of the opposition Awami League (AL).

Prime Minister Begum Khalida Zia's government has remained silent and indifferent, something that can only be explained by Mrs. Zia's intention to appease her Islamist partners and ensure their support for a longer stay in power. In fact, the government has established a tradition of denying international and Western reports concerning Bangladesh, only to reverse its stand and acknowledge such reports under pressure and the fear of international sanctions.

Dr. Abdulla Al-Madani, On e-mail

Hurricane Katrina

Mankind is utterly powerless and at times helpless even in this age of ultimate technological advancement when capricious Nature strikes in its full fury. The misery and suffering of the survivors is depressing. Our heart goes out in sympathy for thousands feared drowned in what could be America's biggest natural disaster in a century.

It is very sad for us to know that more than ten thousand people have died.

Md Sakibur Rahman Khan
Zigatola, Dhaka

Bibles, we have our weekly publication (the weekly Pratibeshi) in Bangla. Most of our priests are now from Bangladesh (previously American priests led the churches in remote villages also).

Mr. Sarkar has pointed out the disadvantages of studying religion without understanding it. Education is not just memorising textbooks. If I follow the ideology of my father of having eight children I doubt very much if this ideology will be accept-

instant, countries like Honduras and Sri Lanka have offered assistance to the US. Bangladesh has also offered one million US dollars for the victims.

Not that the US needs any help as such, but it is the thought that counts in a situation like this.

Javed Helali, Pflugerville, TX

HC's verdict

I have been following the debate on the HC's verdict on the Fifth Amend-

ment, poor quality of education, women empowerment and not on issues of the past. It is true that the HC verdict was historical in its own right, but to debate over it is completely pointless. Whatever happened in the past cannot be changed, so it is time we move on and solve the problems that our country will be facing in the future. I urge the opposition and the government to move forward and discuss issues that will affect the lives of the general public.

Sheikh Tanjeb Islam
Sunway University College, Malay-sia

US law. Mr. Sajjad had all the opportunities to file appeals and he exercised all his rights for nine years. Where was the US judge wrong? No US judge is allowed to bend the laws.

In the US nobody is above the law, it does not matter whether the person is the President or Chief Justice.

According to him, the US is engaged in human rights abuse. This is his opinion but to the majority of the US population it was to protect human rights which Saddam Hussein violated every day during his reign.

Haider Ali, On e-mail

Coloured democracy!

Is there a colour index in democracy? May be it seems so; given that the so called champion of democracy sitting in the White House is doodling while New Orleans drowns! Democracy for the blacks and other non whites comes from the end of the barrel or bomb, if they are away from home shores of the land of the white.

Historically, the blacks were brought to slave away at the roots of the tree of democracy and free enterprise. Now that the tree is full grown, they should be grateful for being allowed to reside in this white land of milk and honey, and partake of some of the tree's fruits.

Good Christian Samaritan that Bush claims to be, does not want to interfere with the wrath of God let loose on the minority black states. This is the classical case of the Christian fundamentalist at it's best! So what if millions are in hunger? The choppers are busy in Afghanistan and Iraq bringing in democracy to the coloured through bullets and bombs which takes precedence over the suffering and drowning blacks. They should thank their lucky stars that the Good Samaritan has sent six truck loads of food and medicines! Beware the free press trying to darken the image of the WASP (White Anglo Saxon Protestants). Neo Cons at the White House of "democracy". After all, in the overall national interest of "security" and "solidarity" even the "free" press can be brought to heel. Beware!

Democracy Watcher, Dhaka

No ban on hijab in France!



I write to you on the report "Moudud against ban on hijab." I am a French citizen and I want to say that people are spreading wrong information about my country. There is NO ban on the use of hijab in France! The law says clearly that you are not allowed to wear hijab inside primary and high public school (you can in private school). That is all! You can wear it in the street, in the movie theatre, in the restaurant, at the university. So the law minister shouldn't be surprised that "such a discriminatory law has been passed in the country."

Aubron Pierre-Henri, Gulshan 2, Dhaka

able anywhere in the present day world.

Thomas Gomes Bhura
Monipuripara, Dhaka

Assistance to US

As of the afternoon of the 3rd

ment of the Constitution. It just shows that we as a country are debating on petty issues, rather than addressing the main problems that we are facing. Both the government and he opposition should be debating on the dollar crisis, the

Global security

Today the people, those who think about the future, must ask one simple question to themselves- how can we fight terrorism without using weapons.

Britain, Spain and the United States, these three countries got united to free Iraq people, and they were attacked by bombers. Do these countries have any idea how they will protect themselves or the people of this world? Many say Iraq will be a second Vietnam but it seems the situation is going to be even worse.

To fight against a terrorist we must know about him, what is his aim, why he has chosen the path of violence. They cannot move into any country and start a war, they need to have more clear ideas - how they will solve the problems and how to make the world a safe place to live in.

Tahsin Hyder
Maple Leaf International School
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

Shab-e-Miraj

I was reading Syed Ashraf Ali's article on Shab-e-Miraj with rapt attention.

While Islamic literature testifies that the Miraj did take place between Allah and Holy Prophet (pbuh), it has to be taken as a spiritual journey.

Allah is omnipotent and omnipresent and to limit him with human imagination would be a grave error that led to the birth of mullahism (i.e. fundamentalism which ignores the role of metaphor in religious text). Let's not promote it.

It would be a grave mistake to turn the most significant spiritual experience granted to the best of mankind, the best of all the prophets, Holy Prophet, into a fairy tale!

Mirza Ghulam Rabbi
New York, USA

US immigration laws

I have read with amusement the letter written by Mr. A. F. Rahman regarding the deportation of Mr. Sajjad Ahmed Bipu from the US. I doubt very much if the writer has any respect for law.

According to US Immigration laws, a person cannot become a resident if he is involved in hate crimes, nazi government, prostitution, persecution, etc. Mr. Sajjad made a written statement in his application that he was involved in persecution. This is a violation of the

An appeal to Tanvir Mokammel

We have come to learn that the government has put a ban on the show of your film, 'Karnaphulir Kanna'. We know that you often make films to portray the bleak sides of society and to protest social injustice. My earnest request to you, please show those films only inside the country to prick up our conscience; but not outside the country. Showing those films in international film festivals may bring you fame, but those shows will only further besmear the already bruised image of our country to the outside world. It is we who are to fight against the injustice and the fundamentalism prevalent in our society. Foreigners can do little, and we should not involve foreigners in our national crusade/jihad against injustice being done to the minorities, both religious and ethnic. As we do not have oil, the western countries will take little interest in us; and we should not expect that they will come forward wholeheartedly to help us get rid of injustice and fundamentalism in our society.

Alongside the request to you, I would request the government to withdraw the ban on the show of 'Karnaphulir Kanna' inside Bangladesh.

Faruque Hasan, Uttara, Dhaka

Adulteration of news

In present-day world the media's role is crucial. Therefore, in the West, a professional journalist may sometimes appear more influential than even an influential minister. So, the need of honest and sincere journalism is always welcomed in society.

But what will happen when journalism aims to safeguard the interests of a specific group or party, disregarding its due role? How one values journalism when it hides fact for fostering certain interests? How will people look at the newspapers when they are silent towards exploitation by the business companies only to get some money into their pockets through advertisements? Obviously, it results in public suspicion and distrust towards media.

Nowadays, it has become a persistent trend that news is adulterated. This happens not for the



PHOTO: AFP

Oil prices

Presently, we are observing that fuel prices are rising in the global market. As the government buys fuel from world market at international rate, now it has to spend an additional amount for buying oil. But the government gives subsidy on oil price and sells it in the

domestic market at a lower price, which is the lowest in South Asia.

Now the government has to spend \$ 2 billion for buying oil. This is creating pressure on foreign currency reserve. On the other hand, as oil price in neighbouring India is almost double, hun-

dreds of tons of fuel is smuggled out to that country. In Myanmar, per litre petrol price is one dollar.

So it was the right time to take the unpopular decision of increasing oil prices.

Suman
Dhaka University

reason that individuals who provide the news lack proper information, but for the fact that they tend to hide the truth. Thus comes the major slip in news quality spanning disappointment of those, of course the majority, who want to know the truth.

So, this is really one type of adulteration of news items. Mobile courts of the government can strive to curb food adulteration, but what can be done to stop adulteration of news? Only the newsmen can help us in this regard. They have to be guided by their conscience.

Mosleh Uddin Shamim
Chittagong University

Food adulteration

The activities of our mobile teams have been welcomed by the general people. The history of food adulteration is not so brief in our country. Many businessmen have admitted that they have to pay monthly bribe to certain corrupt BSTI officials. Since BSTI is also a corrupt agency, it is not easy to stop adulteration. The government should try to clear the BSTI of corrupt elements.

We appreciate our government for becoming active against food adulteration, even though it's a little late. And we the general people also hope that the government will activate these mobile teams forever so that nobody dares to adulterate foods in future. Otherwise, all these stage dramas will be worthless.

Amir Mohammad Khan
Dhaka University

Obscene films

While I was waiting at a bus stand, I noticed that there were about 20 men in a tea stall watching a cable TV

English language movie. I found this interesting as the movie was in English with no Bengali subtitles - but all of the men were still very interested in the movie. After watching for a few minutes it became apparent that what was so interesting about this movie. The fact is that this movie was full of scenes that are totally inappropriate for and unacceptable to Bangladesh culture. The movie was being shown in a public place at 8:00 in the morning. It was embarrassing to me that this type of vile entertainment has become common in Bangladesh.

I call on the cable operators to refrain from showing such things.

Mr. DMS
Kushtia

English medium education

Many guardians force their children to go to the so called English medium schools. They think their children will not learn English without going to an English medium school. They also think our educational system is not appropriate for their children.

But they should not forget where they completed their primary education. Now what is their position? Don't they know English? Can't they teach their children? In all English medium schools, the textbooks come from abroad. So the students cannot learn much about their own culture and history. They will not know how we got our freedom. Can it be good for society?

Md. Saroar Hossain
EEE, RUET
Proud Bangladesh!

We fought the liberation war to free our great nation. About 34 years after we are proud of the 'democracy' that we have. We as a people are indeed an ingenious lot. We have given a new meaning to the word democracy. In our democratic country, political parties create armed battalions out of their student wings. In our democratic country more votes are 'bought' than 'obtained', and ballots are burned, rather than counted. Our ministers think media is the greatest enemy of the country. But we have a great sense of pride: we defend our country against any degrading remark from foreigners. When an outsider says our country is a breeding ground for terrorists, we vehemently oppose. So, what do August 21, 2004 and August 17, 2005 prove?

There are no terrorists in our country. So why Transparency International tagged us as the most corrupt country in the world? We commemorate it by posing it as a question in the BCS preliminary exams. Our country is not on the verge of a fundamentalist revolution - so what the number and might of extremist groups are increasing by the hour.

We Bengalees are in constant denial: we experience everything yet we see nothing; we suffer atrocities yet we do not protest or prevent. We are too proud to admit that there is something wrong with our country. It is more important for us to save the face than to save the soul. But isn't it more logical that we try to eliminate the causes of our problems, rather than hiding our shame with false pride?

Farah Tasneem
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

BSF atrocities

On 31 August it was reported that the Indian BSF had killed three unarmed

Bangladesh civilians. Abu Taher and Delwar Hossain were day labourers who were shot and killed in Brahmanbaria as they were lifting sand from Shalda river. Afsaruddin was a farmer who was shot and killed while working on his cropland near the border at Ranisangkail in Thakurgaon.

A human rights organisation (Odhikar) recently reported

that the BSF has killed 328 Bangladeshis in the last five years. The foreign ministry should demand compensation from the Indian government for the family members of all the Bangladeshis civilians who have been killed by the BSF.

The Indians must accept that Bangladeshis are human beings, and they must respect our human rights. An armed soldier has no right to shoot an unarmed farmer or labourer. If the BSF finds any Bangladeshi civilian on the Indian side of the border they

have the right to capture him and return him to the Bangladesh side, but they have no right to kill him. They have no right to cross the border into our territory, and they certainly have no right to capture or kill anyone on our territory.

In the fiscal year 2004-05 Bangladesh imported Indian goods worth 12,000 crore taka. Indian companies are making a lot of money by selling their goods in Bangladesh. Thousands of Indian workers are employed to manufacture

these goods. We should use this as a bargaining chip. The BSF must stop shooting Bangladeshi civilians and the Indian government must pay compensation for each of the 328 people who have been killed. If they refuse to comply with these demands within one month, we should stop all import of goods from India.

Zahid Hasan
Banani, Dhaka



PHOTO: AFP