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Secularism in politics



It is time the Awami League ditched secularism, as advised by one of its veteran leaders, ex-Mayor Hanif. As a disillusioned citizen for more than six decades, (British Indian, to Pakistani, and then a Bangladeshi since 1971), I admire the moral courage of Mr. Hanif. Paradoxically, most of the political leaders have become human barriers to development, when Bangladesh is poised to

take off. We have developed at a faster rate than most LDCs. There are two important basic issues. Secularism is included in Islam, the last perfected, simplified, practical religion, and it is not necessary to point it out separately (tolerance and patience).

Secondly, the vast majority of 140 million people live in the villages, around the poverty level; hence political technicalities and hair-splitting do not attract much attention of the majority of the voters; who look forward to a better simple life, to start with. If the base or foundation is good and solid, the structures and superstructures would take care of itself.

In Dhaka, the party comes first, then the nation (political ego and charisma). The two major parties were monopolising politics so long; hence it is a relief that a third group have started challenging the set syndromes. Politics must have fluidity for dynamic survival. Closed minds in public service are dangerous; they cause more harm than push development in the right paths.

Now religion has entered politics (all over the world), hence the perspectives have changed; and these have to be recognised by the fossilised political leaders, regardless of affiliations and polarities. What is regrettable is the use of violence in religious campaigns. Islam never supports force and coercion. The Muslims ruled non-Muslim India for several centuries, without forced conversions and use of threats or intimidations. A religion (any religion) is more a medium than a message; and the Supreme Creator is one, regardless of local names; (to reach Mt Everest, for example, the explorer could travel clockwise or anticlockwise, and reach the same goal). **A Mahasen, Dhaka**

Latest tragedy

The news has already reached even the remote places in our country, that a promising student has been killed. The mastermind, it is alleged, is a powerful OC. How and why such an innocent brilliant student has been killed? Who will answer this question?

The present government is very much assertive to eliminate all kinds of anarchy and turmoil from the country. They are also trying their best to restore peace and prosperity.

So they must make sure that everybody gets justice, and no criminal goes unpunished. **A freedom fighter Rupgonj, Narayanganj**

Globalisation

Globalisation has become a buzzword these days. In the sense of globalisation the countries are like families of a village. The main aim of this process is to make a developed world. But in the modern times it is a burning question for the countries like Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal, Maldives, Sri Lanka whether it is a blessing or a curse.

The recent pressure on Bangladesh by the WB to increase the prices of fuel is the paradigm. In the name of protecting democracy, the developed countries and their followers are sending their troops to other countries like Iraq and Afghanistan and trying to have control over their state policy. These countries are also being culturally assaulted. Actually, the developing and least developed countries have hardly matched the development process of globalisation which the capitalists have. Globalisation should put the countries of the world in the same vessel and also in the same cabin.

It is high time for the developing and least developed countries to keep pace with the development process. But will the capitalists ever allow this to happen? **Whahiduzzaman University of Dhaka**

Tarnishing image

The ruling party has reportedly said that some quarters are busy blurring the image of our country abroad. They usually refer to the main opposition party.

I think the ruling party should concentrate on finding its own mistakes, instead of finding fault

with others. **Md Zoned Emran DU**

Ban on smoking

A law banning smoking in public places like bus, theatre hall etc i.e. in closed places was enacted by the parliament a few months ago. It has already come into effect. Surprisingly enough, whenever I go somewhere, I often see bus drivers, helpers and conductors smoking freely.

It seems that only the passengers will abide by the law, and others do not fall within its purview! **Shaikh A. Askar Baridahra, Dhaka**

Political leaders and people

There is hardly any PR, contract, get-together, discussion, exchange

of views and opinions between political leaders and members of the public. Our political leaders want to keep themselves in seclusion and away from the public. And so distance and communication gap between our political leaders, no matter whether they belong to BNP, AL, JP, JI, Gono Forum, Bikalpa Dhara or any other political party, and people are getting wider day by day.

It appears that our political leaders of the ruling and opposition parties are only interested in either clinging to power or capturing power by any means.

It is a common phenomenon that our leaders address big public meetings, hold press conferences, make accusations and counter accusations, give assurances and promises and launch various movements, plans, programmes, demands and hartals in the name of the people, claiming support of the people.

But how far are these practically justified?

How many people dare to approach and exchange views with political leaders? Our political leaders lead a luxurious life within the four walls of their palatial buildings under special protocol and security arrangements, beyond the reach of the people in general.

In order to improve the relation and understanding between our political leaders and people, it is imperative that our leaders open their doors and grant the citizens interview on different dates twice or thrice a month to discuss and exchange views on socio-economic and political problems and the law and order situation. **O H Kabir Hare Street, Dhaka-1203**

An ideal college

I consider myself lucky to be a student of Rafiqul Islam Mohila College, Bhairab, Kishoreganj. Before taking admission I didn't know much about the college. Now I am very much pleased to see that everything is well managed. The name and fame of this college has spread in all nearby districts. The academic performance of the college is very good.

The college is different from any other college. It is a quiet educational institution with no violence.

Bhairab is an important place, so the education authorities should consider setting up a university-college here for the convenience of a large number of students. **Nipa Bhatrab, Kishoreganj**

Is it civilisation?

We are living in the modern age. We call it the most civilised era. Whenever we think of a civilised nation, we grade America as number one in the world. We, the citizens of the world, irrespective of nationality, hold the same view that America is not only the richest country in the world, it is also very rich in every sphere of life. A civilised nation is supposed to have a civilised people.

We know there is no such nation in the world, which can surpass America particularly in the field of riches and wealth. Natural calamities

have appeared in America this time and "Hurricane Katrina" devastated Mississippi, Louisiana & Alabama. People are suffering beyond measure. Some places in Louisiana, Alabama & Mississippi are now almost unfit for human habitation.

Alas! What is happening in all these places? Criminals have taken control of the situation. Many have lost all their belongings because of looting. Who are committing crimes? I was deeply shocked when I heard of looting & even crimes like rape.

Americans should realise that human beings have limitations, even if they are Americans! **S.U. Salim Kalabagan, Dhaka**

HSC results

On September 26, 2005 the results of HSC exams under the education boards were published simultaneously. No doubt, the results were quiet satisfactory in comparison to that of previous consecutive five years.

Copying had engulfed our education system. But the government was determined that it would never let any student copy in exam halls and took austere measures to ensure an exam-like atmosphere in halls. We should appreciate the steps taken by the government. **Md. Abu Musa Nuria Islamia Madrassah, Ctg**

Vulgar films

I am sure nobody will disagree with me that pornography and vulgarity in our film industry has reached an extreme position that has made the film viewers reluctant to go to the cinema halls. The filmmakers seemed to be interested only in entertaining the viewers with vulgar exposure of the female anatomy.

I think they should concentrate on making decent films to attract the viewers, the majority of who want to enjoy nice movies. But that is not really happening. Not only that, they are using indecent posters in different places which can only have a degenerating influence on the young men and women.

M Akhter Hossain Masjidda, Sitakund, Ctg.

Anti-adulteration drive

A praiseworthy anti-adulteration drive is going on across the country, thanks to the reports published in The Daily Star. From street vendors to restaurant owners, the culprits have been punished as they are selling adulterated foods. But I believe this operation should be more vigorous during the Holy Ramadan which begins shortly. The Holy Ramadan is the month of self purification both mentally and physically. During the whole month thousands of iftar shops will be set up across the country.

The matter of regret is that they mostly sell "junk food" in an unhygienic way. So to save the people from eating poor quality food during the month, we request the law enforcers to come forward and take the necessary steps against the dishonest elements.

Muhammad Bin Abdullah Cox's Bazar

An apology

With head bowed in shame I would like to join Mr Shamsher Choudhury in extending apology to Mrs. Sarbajit Chakrabarty, wife of the DHC of Indian High Commission. I am sure there are many people here who are equally embarrassed by this ugly incident.

Living in Dhaka with social contacts with local people, Mrs. Chakrabarty must be appreciating that there are more decent people here than these crude, arrogant nouveau riche like the man who insulted her. I recall one front-page coverage in DS about a couple of years back which also dealt with a similar incident of a gentleman being harassed.

It surprises me that our foreign office has remained too inactive! Is it that the election is so close that nobody dares to offend the nouveau riche?

Iskander Meah Dhanmandi, Dhaka

Opportunists!

The DS of 28-Sep states that, "... transportation cost of per truck union from Pabna was Tk 6,000 three months ago. Now it is Tk 9,000 because of the fuel price hike ...". The price of diesel was actually increased from Tk 26 to Tk 30, i.e. Tk 4 per litre or about 15%. To travel a distance of about 160km from Pabna to Dhaka, the truck may consume 80 litres of diesel even if it runs 2 km per litre. So, the cost increase based strictly on fuel is Tk 320 only. And just for argument's sake, if we assume that the entire Tk 6,000 constitutes fuel expenditure, even then mathematically it comes to about Tk 6, 900 if the raise is based on the fuel price hike. **CNR Chittagong**

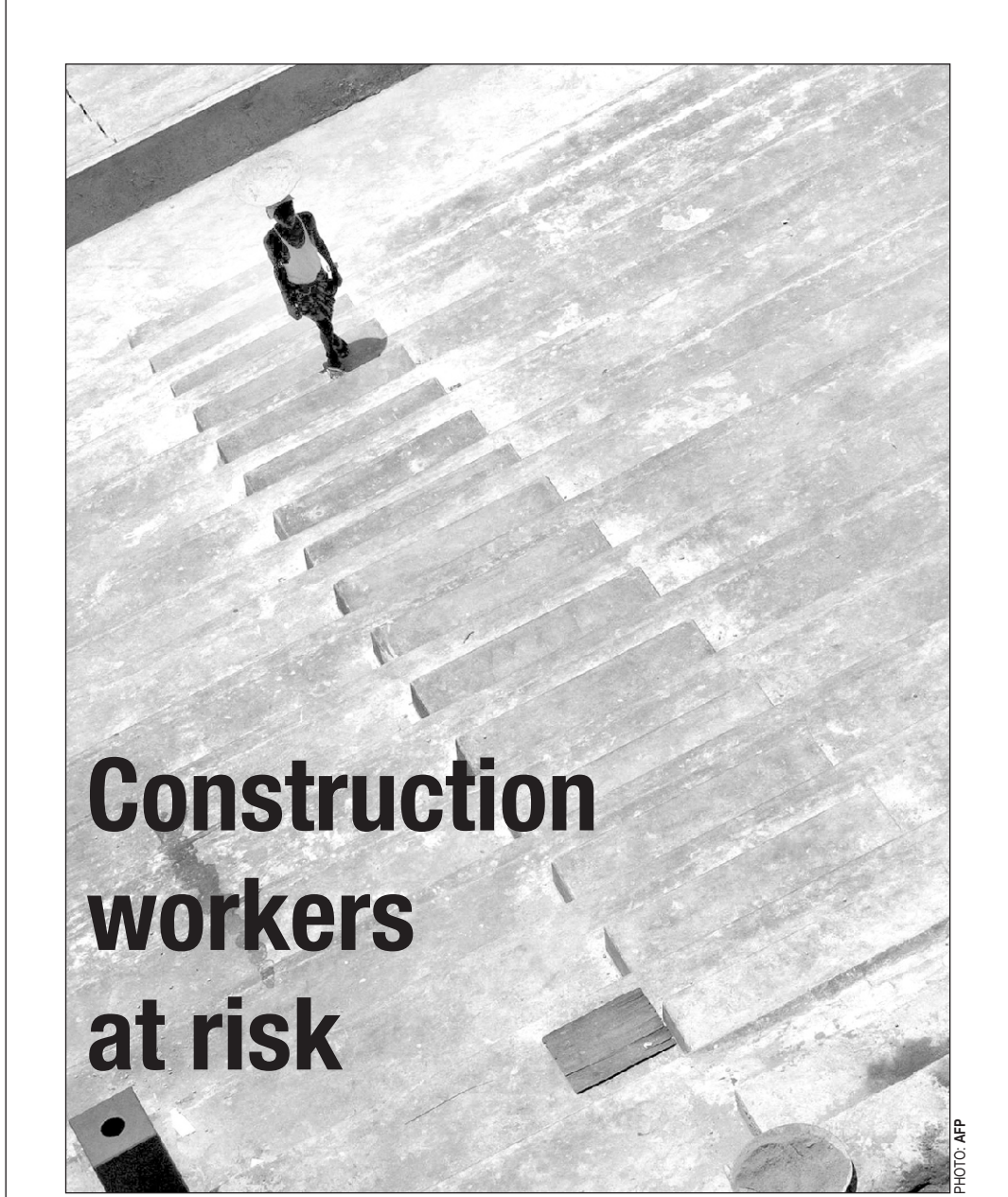
"Brand Bangladesh"

Thanks to Mr Mohammad Badrul Ahsan for his column "Brand Bangladesh" on Sept 30.

His column is specific in every sense. It is true that "Bangladesh" indeed is a very weak brand in all aspects; culture, tourism, good governance, politics, investment, manpower, attitude, you name it! That is why our people who go abroad for work or visit don't receive their due respect or fair treatment, specially in the GCC countries where Bangladeshi professionals and workers despite their hard work and skills are often paid less than their South Asian counterparts doing the same jobs. Just for a few rotten apples, the whole country's image is in tatters. It's shameful, it's sad. It hurts. I wonder what our so-called useless and corrupt politicians and officials are up to? **Mamun One-mail**

Oust Jamaat-e-Islami

As a supporter of the BNP, I humbly ask the leaders and the activists of the party: what is more important to them, to go to power again with the



Construction workers at risk

The building workers, who toil hard for constructing skyscrapers, contribute greatly to the sustainable economic development of our country. Frustratingly enough, very few people hardly wreck their brains trying to improve upon the miserable socio-economic plight they (the workers) go through and the horrible environment they work in.

To my utter consternation, I observe these poor workmen working at the higher floors without any helmet or any life-saving instrument. Thus they run the risk of serious and mortal accidents like falling from the buildings. The pieces of bricks and irons falling frequently from the building under construction may hit the workers working there and can cause death. According to the law of international building code, the workers involved in building skyscrapers must wear helmet for the sake of safety. Unfortunately, this law is not exercised in this wretched country. The owners of the buildings as well as the government never seem to think of their safety and welfare. Besides, the workers of our country are yet to be used to wearing helmet because of their lack of awareness.

These accidents can easily be averted or, at least, be reduced to a great extent if the workers wear helmet during their work. Therefore, the authorities concerned should take the necessary steps without any delay. **Ramprasad Banik, Jahangirnagar University**

help of the Jamaat-e-Islami or to save the country from the clutches of the fanatic party?

The slogan of the next election should be "Oust the Jamaat-e-Islami from the Jatiya Sangsad through ballot." **Iqbal Ahmed New Eskaton, Dhaka**

DU students

It is a matter of shame that some DU students have been manhandled by the on duty Ansar personnel. I am ashamed to introduce me as a student of the University of Dhaka which is also known as the "Oxford of the East" only because of the kind of incident that happened at the BSSMU hospital. It is reported that some of the resident students of Surya Sen Hall went to the hospital

and being barred by the on duty Ansars they came back to the dormitory and returned along with some terrorist friends to intimidate the hospital staff. The Ansars did their duty in line with the instructions of the hospital authorities, but the students declined to go by the rules. Despite being students of the country's topmost educational institution, what they did is totally unacceptable and unforgivable. They don't have any right to defy the rules set up by the hospital authorities and I can't understand on what basis they were involved in squabbling with the law enforcers. As far as I understand from my little experience, they might have been involved in the strident student politics prevailing in the country, and the political link might have encouraged them to act so rudely.

I believe the university authorities will take the initiative to stop recurrence of such incidents in future. **Anis Rahman University of Dhaka**

Islam and jihad

Islamist bigotry has seeped deep inside Pakistan no doubt but it would be wrong to say that Pakistan is the only country to blame for the Islamic terror in the world today. Every nation that has Islam as its official religion is to blame. A glance through jihadi publications easily available everywhere these days will convince everybody that jihadi menace will continue as long as non-Muslims exist on earth and not, as we wrongly tend to think, purely because of the Pakistani terrorists.

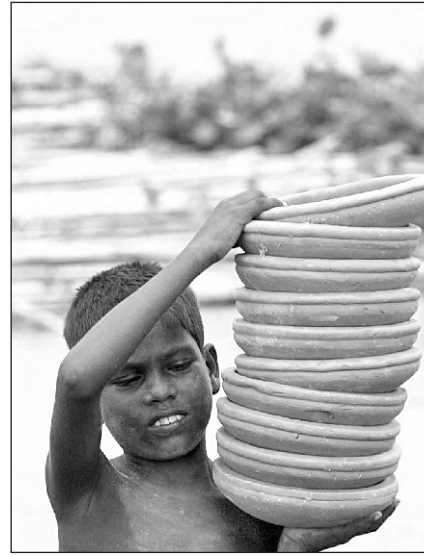
Having embraced Christianity (I am from an Assamese Muslim Qazi family) I have no desire to put forth my personal views on the touchy issue of jihad because I will then unnecessarily invite wrath of my own Muslim brothers and sisters whom I love. The object of the present writing is to facilitate your esteemed readers to make their own judgment as to the teaching of Islam on jihad. **Omar Luther King, Delhi, India**

Recognising Israel

It is understandable that more and more countries are trying to reward Israel for their withdrawal from Gaza. Even Pakistan is negotiating a diplomatic connection with Israel. As for Dhaka and Bangladesh, we should be ahead of the curb and take advantage of the situation. We can start by recognising the state of Israel and take away those words from our passport. We have a couple of bills in the Senate and ask the Bush Administration that we would recognise Israel on certain conditions. Which are:

1. Give us quota free access to the US market. Currently we are spending around 300 million dollars as tax.
2. Help us construct the Ruppur nuclear power plant.

I am sure the Bangladesh government can come up with some other good ideas. But as a beginning we can definitely start the ball rolling and get the necessary help for building our country in the 21st century. **Choudhury Hasan One-mail**



Child labour

number of working children aged 5-17 years in rural areas is estimated at 6.4 million as against 1.5 million in urban areas: As many as 93.3 per cent of all working children in the age group of 5-17 years operate in the informal sector. Agriculture engages 4.5 million (56.4 per cent children), while the service sector engages 2 million (25.9 per cent), and industry, 1.4 million (17.7 per cent). A total of 1.3 million children are estimated to be working 43 hours or more per

week. More boys than girls are engaged in this form of child labour across all age groups.

There is a direct link between child labour and education. Nearly 50 per cent of primary school students drop out before they complete grade 5, and then gravitate towards work, swelling the number of child labourers. The high drop-out rates are correlated with the low quality of public primary education, low adult literacy, low awareness of the

importance of education, teacher-student ratio (sometimes this goes up to 1 per 100), non-availability of learning materials, and the cost of education.

The level of awareness on the issue of child labour is still low. Society in general has a rather indifferent attitude towards the problem. In many cases, it is not realised that the children who are employed in, for example, domestic service, often have no access to education or medical care.

Children are working as maids and servants, in garment factories and engineering workshops, in the construction sector, as bus or tempo (three-wheeler transport) helpers, in the bidi (a kind of hand-made cigarette) factories, as roadside restaurant workers and street vendors, and in tea plantations and other agricultural sectors.

The government should look into the matter. **S Yasmin Dhaka**

Millions of children are employed all over the country. They work in factories, farms and in the service sector.

Official figures show that nearly a quarter of all families in rural areas have children who are employed.

The figure is only marginally lower in urban areas where the influence of the middle class is greater.

In 2002/03, the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) con-

ducted the second National Child Labour Survey (NCLS). This survey has been designed and conducted in the context of the commitments made by the government of Bangladesh, following ratification of an ILO convention. According to the survey, there are 4.9 million working children 14.2 per cent of the total 35.06 million children are in the age group of 5-14 years. The total working child population between 5 and 17 years old is estimated at 7.9 million. The total