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Middle East and the US

Edward B. Luttwak, an adviser at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington DC, recently wrote an Op-Ed in Toronto's National Post: "It's best to ignore the Middle East." In the article, Mr. Luttwak asserts that backward societies should be left to themselves as they are not capable to adapt to Western ideas of democracy and rule of law. They cannot be reformed or changed by using military power or political engagement. As for oil supplies, Mr. Luttwak says that "while attention is obsessively focused on the Middle East, oil supplies are more immediately threatened these days by political thievery in Nigeria, illiterate oil populism in Venezuela and Russia's kleptocratic oil nationalism, all of which reduce both current production and installation of future capacity."

His solution is to leave the Middle Eastern countries to themselves and let them try out their own future without the American support or intervention of any kind. Mr. Luttwak concludes "The operational mistake that Middle East experts keep making is the failure to recognize that backward societies may be left alone, as the French now wisely leave Corsica to its own devices, as the Italians quietly learned to do in Sicily. With neither invasions nor friendly engagements, the peoples of the Middle East

should finally be allowed to have their own history -- the one thing that Middle East experts of all stripes seem determined to deny them."

But the same can be said about Afghanistan after the Soviet forces left and Afghanistan lost its importance as a bastion of anti-Soviet warfare. The US policymakers seemed to have listened to the advice of Mr. Luttwak and left the Afghans to write their own history. But they didn't realize that the Afghans would invite al-Qaeda to help them write a new history as a terrorist sanctuary.

Left to themselves, the Middle East might become another Afghanistan and it may be naive to believe that the fanatics will not write a new history by carrying out another attack on the mainland United States, using the Middle East as their base. As a country like Afghanistan has shown, even highly conservative societies can become a threat to most advanced societies if they become victims of such atavistic forces like al-Qaeda and Taliban. To avert such a threat, the best course would be political engagement with as little military involvement as possible.

Mahmood Elahi
Iris Street, Ottawa, Canada

Student politics
It's refreshing to see the giant political parties opting for internal reforms. But I am more concerned about student politics. The parties have said nothing about their student wings which are playing a

negative role. I don't know why the caretaker government is taking time to ban student politics. It has become a threat to higher education in the country!
Rifat Mahbub
Edinburgh, UK

Birdem strike
Your staff correspondent's report (June 27) on the problems with contract based employees (doctors and staff) seems to have been triggered by "misunderstanding" and an "unauthorised" letter being issued without approval of the Board of Management!

There is nothing very wrong with contract employment, which is the modern trend, and is a reality. The undersigned has served for 52 years with four employers (three public sector) on contract basis. By virtue of the contract, I could move out to better jobs using my contract options, which is naturally a two-way agreement.

The fault lies in issuing an "unapproved" letter!
S.A Mansoor
Gulshan, Dhaka

How much land....
Ever since the creation of the good earth, millions of people have been born and millions have passed

away. Today's six billion world population will also be gone with the wind one day.

The powerful and influential people accumulated colossal wealth. What happened to them? Are they enjoying their fabulous wealth in the grave?
O. H. Kabir
Wari, Dhaka

Our cricketers
The progress of Bangladesh cricket team was unimaginable a few years ago, but now it is a reality. They are trying their best in every match. But the real problem is that their performance is not consistent. They can't hold on to their success for a long time. Still, what the players are doing is inspiring.

There are some quality players like Mashrafe, Shahadat, Ashraful, Razzak, etc in the team. So try your best, Tigers and keep it up!
Shatabdi Biswas
Student of Class VIII RPATC Rajshahi

ICB and small investors
I am a small investor and have one account with ICB for many years. Every year in the month of June, I go to the ICB office at Rajuk Avenue, Dhaka, and buy some shares of good companies to avail the income tax benefit for the year.

So, a few days ago I went to the ICB office and requested the staff to help me in selecting some good "shares" for investment. They told me that ICB could not give any such advice to the investors. He told me to go to the office of ICB Asset Management Company next door and discuss the matter. I went there and the staff told me to buy only AMCL shares. They could not suggest any other shares.

ICB was formed mainly to assist the small investors of our country. They have ceased to perform the main job and handed it over to an Asset Management Company. The question is WHY? Now what job the large number of ICB staff will do? This costs the nation a big sum of money and who gets the benefit?

I would humbly request our Hon'ble Finance Adviser to look into the matter and take corrective action.
Manzur Ali
Bara Moghbazar, Dhaka

Prevent smoking
Everybody admits that smoking is harmful for health, but smoking is still continuing openly even in public places. Govt actions to contain it are inadequate. I don't understand how a poison-grade item is sold in all places, even in small shops and restaurants. I would suggest the following steps to solve the problem.

(1) Cultivation of tobacco should be allowed only as an export item and permission given to cultivators for limited cultivation under government inspection for export, medical use and licensed consumption only.

2) Punitive action, monetary or prison terms, should be initiated for smoking in violation of the law.

(3) Public places or transports should be declared "no smoking zones".

Hope the above actions will go a long way in reducing smoking.
Mohammed Alauddin
Green Road, Dhaka

"Top two"
This is the proper time that the top two leaders of the top two parties voluntarily leave politics and make room for other leaders to come and prove their mettle in governing the country. An interesting comment by a queen of a country which I could remember is like this: "I love men not because they are men but because they are not women".

There are many other fields where they can contribute in nation-building activities which may bring good for the people of the country. People now expect them to do so for the greater interest of the country.

Voluntary retirement is better than any other form of quitting!
M. A. Alim
Ex. Banker Indira Road, Dhaka

Bangladeshis in Kuwait
I would like to draw the attention of the interim government of Bangladesh, the caretaker government, to our plight. We, Bangladeshis in Kuwait, are facing a real dilemma here.

Let me just highlight the ordeal that some of the innocent workers are passing through, they work here for the minimum wage of KD 18, or may be they sometimes don't even receive that remuneration for the hard work they do. Their living condition is often unbelievable.

Now, the majority of them work very hard, day and night. Some of them go to collect soft-drink cans and other debris from the dustbins in nearby localities to sell them at the scrap market. They sell leftover fruits and vegetables from bigger wholesale markets in front of residential localities, which, by the way, is prohibited in Kuwait. The municipality of Kuwait is very strict on these matters, since they do not possess any licence or document to carry on such a trade.

But yet these poor workers, on their day off, try to carry on these activities. Here in Kuwait there are various laws which discriminate the expatriates and fewer provisions are allowed for working.

My family and me have been staying here for the last 30 years and since last December 2006 we are hearing that we would not be allowed to have any valid documents renewed or apply for a transfer to a new job. Our embassy in Kuwait appears to be quite oblivious of our problems.

I hope the government will respond positively to my submission.
Rabeya Khan
Kuwait

Ashraful & Co.

It is a frustrating a reality that Bangladeshi cricketers, whom we fondly call the Tigers, have again conceded an innings defeat to Sri Lanka, though they've been, this time, able to extend the playing time for half a day more to their regular losses in mere three days of play!

In reply to the Lankans' huge total of over five hundred runs, our Tigers responded very feebly indeed -- they succumbed at only 89 in the first innings & after the follow-on they, however, showed some fight-back temperament. But surprisingly again, they got reduced to an all down stature immediately after their mock-defiance till five down at over two hundred -- they lost the rest of the wickets for only 27 runs!

However, if you try to dissect a little of the Tiger-show, you happen to notice, in your utter frustration, that the newly appointed captain Ashraful, after showing some determination for a longer period of time threw away his important wicket out of the blue. If you tend to explain his unbecoming & irresponsible extinction on the pretext that Ashraful was not getting runs which made him loft the balls, in mere frustration or anger, you are wrong. For, Ashraful & his comrades have to learn the basic truth that ball selection is a major point that they all have to learn and practise. And the vital point that they are missing is that doing good at Test cricket is a matter of temperament --- it is the absence of that temperament

that underlines their inadequacy in playing that version of cricket.

One more point, why should we all, including the media, praise them so high, or do we all get submerged in misplaced joy? Well, if we mean that we are encouraging them we should do it in a proportionate manner --- we should let them understand their weaknesses only to help them overcome the same.

On and on, cricket, like many other games, is a matter of temperament. Let our emaciated Tigers learn the basics fast and stop making themselves such a helpless spectacle on a regular basis.
Rafiqul Islam Rime
Lecturer, Department of English Premier University



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