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Ethnic diversities

During my recent tour to the greater Sylhet area I had the opportunity to visit the Manipuri community at Madhabpur under Kamalgonj Police Station in the district of Moulvi Bazar.

On the morning of 09 January, we (my wife, two daughters and I) were on our way to Srimangol passing the previous night at the Manager's Banglow of Madhabpur Tea Estate owned by the National Tea Company Limited. (That was also a great experience for all of us to be guests of the Manager of a tea garden and his family. Thanks go to them).

Anyway, we rushed to a Manipuri house hearing



sounds of songs and rituals. That brought us to see a function of Annyprashan (formal food taking ceremony) of a six month old boy at that house attended by nearly one hundred people representing children, men and women.

On approach and introduction, we were well received by the priest and other community people. Even they were kind enough to offer us food dedicated to their respective Gods following the ceremonial part. I was amazed seeing the Manipuri's rich religious and cultural festivity and hospitality to others (strangers indeed).

A group of Japanese tourists with a local guide were also visiting the area at the same time. They were also well received by the community people.

While visiting the village I was amazed seeing frequency of temples and designated places for religious singing and dancing. (I wish to join the next festival).

This show how rich and vibrant the Manipuris are in their religious and cultural lives. Same goes for other ethnic and indigenous communities in Bangladesh. This is the feature of a multi ethnic, cultural and religious Bangladesh.

Unfortunately, this diversity is now under a growing threat and nearing extinction for various reasons. State agencies have apparently been failing to perform their due and expected role in this regard.

However, still we could make a change. And the beginning could be bringing back secularism as a core principle in the Constitution of the country. This would facilitate protection of religious and cultural diversities among others, which are crucial for a vibrant and civilized society and for ensuring human rights for all.

State affairs and religion should not be mixed up.

Dr. Uttam Kumar Das
Advocate
Supreme Court of Bangladesh
Ring Road, Adabar, Dhaka

War criminals

A fair trial must be offered to the alleged war criminals. We must remember that crime must be judged as per national laws relating to treason and crimes. If any political motivation interrupts the due process of the trial and diverts the independent course of law, the trials will become questionable.

Mufassil Islam
Human Rights Advocate
UK

Help me, please

Those who are blessed with money and who want education to spread, please help me.

I want to educate myself but do not have the means to pursue higher education.

Can anyone come forward to help me?
Md. Mosharof Hossain Khan
Saving Account No. 34117904
Agrani Bank
Senpara Branch
Mirpur, Dhaka-1216

OIC's role

Mr. Md. Humayun Kabir's letter headed "Role of OIC" published in The Daily Star's edition of 9 February 2009, reflects serious lack of information about what took place in the OIC immediately after Israel's military operation started in Gaza. Although I do not represent the OIC Secretary General in Bangladesh, I thought that it would be useful to put the record straight about the OIC which both Bangladesh and Turkey are long time members of.

Upon the request of Turkey, the General Secretariat of the OIC called the Executive Committee of the organisation to hold an expanded emergency meeting at Jeddah, on 3 January 2009, to discuss the developments and humanitarian tragedy in Gaza. Bangladesh was represented in the meeting by Ambassador M. Fazlul Karim.

Mr. Kabir or any of your readers can easily reach through Internet to the texts of the final communiqué of the meeting, statement of H.E. Mr. Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, the Secretary General of the OIC, and the press release launched immediately after the meeting. If needed the Turkish Embassy in Dhaka can also provide those interested with the copies of these documents.

Sakir Ozkan Torunlar
Ambassador of the Republic of Turkey
Dhaka

Statement of wealth

Following the Awami League's overwhelming victory in December 29, 2008 general election we welcome the formation of the democratic government headed by Sk. Hasina the daughter of our father of the nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

The structure of Sheikh Hasina's cabinet comprise some senior and experienced stalwarts; new faces and new blood are a pleasant surprise for many and it is a milestone in the political history of our country.

We hope that the government of Sk. Hasina would ensure a peaceful, efficient, fair and honest governance, bring down the prices of essential goods and commodities and thus facilitate economic progress and prosper-

ity of our country.

We feel prevention is better than cure. It is therefore imperative that all of us be very cautious, alert and dutiful from the beginning and our Prime Minister may kindly introduce submission of a yearly wealth statement in a prescribed form to be approved by the Members of our Jatiya Sangsad for all ministers, MPs and government servants for the sake of scrutiny, accountability and transparency, as and when necessary, in the interest of public service.

All is well that ends well!
OH Kabir
Wari, Dhaka

Undeclared censoring

Bangladesh is a fully democratic country now with no less a person than Bangabandhu's illustrious daughter at the helm. We have every right to believe that Bangabandhu's daughter with a totally democratic mind will never permit any ministry of hers to carry on secret activities without informing the people. But of late, we find that the TV channels (MOVIEMAGIC) mm1, mm2 and BBC Entertainment regularly go off the air at about 6:00am every morning. We enjoy some good movies telecast by these three channels. But it is really painful that right in the midst of these movies (sometimes in the beginning of some movies as well) the aforesaid channels (known as the E-16 service) are stopped every morning. A message is displayed on the screen: "Insert E-04 Card". It

becomes obvious that due to some secret instructions from the top, the E-04 cards are withdrawn to disrupt the said channels at 6:00am everyday. It is strange that the channels resume services automatically at about 7:30am. Will the Ministry of Information kindly let us know why these channels are 'censored' for more than one hour every morning?

As citizens of a democratic country, with a government enjoying the biggest people's mandate in our history, we certainly have the right to know the reason behind this strange and uncalled for interruption. We also hope that this unexpected activity of depriving the citizens of their right to information and entertainment will be stopped for good.

Abdullah Syed
Lake Circus, Dhaka

CHT Peace Accord

At long last the CHT Peace Accord is going to be implemented fully by the newly elected government. The accord was signed between PCJSS and the government on December 2, 1997 with a view to ending two decades of bush war. But the much expected result did not come into being fully due to interferences from home and abroad.

However, we hope that the new government will implement the Peace Accord soon and the people of CHT will live in peace.

Rasel Raymond Dio
A Seminarian
Bhatikar, Mymensingh

Political scene

I am not a politician and also not so aware of poly-tricks to twist certain things as many of our politicians can do, to their advantage. It will not be out place to quote here the late Bhutto of Pakistan. Replying to a question by some press people quoted as asking Bhutto, "Sir, it is said that you tell a bundle of lies, one thing in the morning and the other thing just the opposite in the evening", he was then quoted to have said as "I am a politician and that is a great quality of a good politician". Now, as a citizen however, I am politically conscious like many other fellow citizens of our country.

I welcome the political parties of grand alliance coming to power to form the national government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh with a great mandate of the people for a five-year term from now. I call it national. Because, once the government is in place to function, it ceases to be of any particular political party biased. Their role becomes neutral and so the government may be called a national government. As party politics runs counter to a democratic government, so it is discarded forthwith for a healthy political growth, development and culture in the country.

We expect the present government to rise above their petty party interests or parties they belong to, in the overall service to the nation fulfilling the people's aspirations. Let there be no deviation or distortion of any sort of the real meaning of the democratic government as "The government of the people, for the people and by the people."

We see a silver lining in the horizon with a small cabinet to start with. "Small is beautiful". All the members of parliament are to act as one whole body to shoulder the responsibility to deliver in order that our lost values and glory are back.

Engr. Shaheedul Islam
Gulshan-1, Dhaka

Mobile towers

It is a common feature at Dhaka city that most of the roof top mobile towers have been erected in the vicinity of residential areas disregarding the safety aspect of common people. When the government is regularly reminding us of the safety and precaution to be adopted in case of earthquake, the question arises as to how the authorities are allowing mobile towers compromising safety of lives and property of citizens.

If a tremor of moderate to high intensity strikes this region, there will be immense loss of lives not only from the damage of buildings but also from the heavy iron towers.

Just for the rental income of a few, the authorities cannot jeopardize the safety of the people. It is the responsibility of the government to ensure safety of the public.

Mohammad Shahidul Islam
A tourism worker

Law and order

The number of murders has increased after the AL led new political government came to power. Law and order is deteriorating day by day. Panic has gripped all of us.

The congenial atmosphere in the educational institutions has been disturbed. All are trying to evade political repression. We are appalled at the news of gruesome murders committed across the country. Political hoodlums are now free to establish a reign of terror. The law enforcing agencies have failed to maintain law and order in the post-election period. Our home minister has not succeeded in tackling the situation adroitly.

To me, blaming the opposition party blindly is tantamount to patronizing the felons. So, stop the politics of mudslinging and work with the opposition parties. Do not indulge the criminals. If the AL pays no heed to the call of the people, it will have to face the music like the BNP did. So, take a lesson from the election debacle of the BNP and fulfil the election pledges that will ensure your victory in the next national election too.

Molla Mohammad Shaheen
Lecturer in English
Leading University, Sylhet

Gaza situation

I am writing with reference to: "The Gaza Horror Show," by Forrest Cookson (Feb. 2).

Forrest Cookson must ask: Why is Hamas brutalizing fellow Palestinians in Gaza? Both Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and Hamas have been elected by the Palestinian people. Why are they slaughtering each other?

During the 2007 fighting for control of Gaza, Hamas was accused by Human Rights Watch of "violations of inter-

national humanitarian law, in some cases amounting to war crimes." These crimes include killing of non-combatants, killing of sick and injured inside hospitals and summary executions. According to Human Rights Watch: "Hamas military forces captured 28-year-old Muhammad Swairki, a cook for Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas's presidential guards, and executed him by throwing him to his death."

Such brutality of Hamas toward fellow Palestinians stands in stark contrast with the moderation it had shown to kidnapped BBC journalist Allan Johnston by arranging his release. But why Hamas showed no mercy to Swairki, a poor Palestinian cook? The answer may be that Hamas thinks that by electing the Palestinian people have given it the mandate to slaughter fellow Palestinians who support its rival Fatah.

The only solution to this bloodletting will be to ask the Palestinians to renounce violence and try to resolve the conflict though non-violent political means.

Mahmoud Elahi
Ottawa, Canada

Deprived officials

It has been reported that the govt has instituted a high-powered committee to review the cases of those civilian officials who have suffered at the hands of the four-party alliance rulers (DS: 30 January 2009). However, it is not very clear whether the same committee will also examine the cases of the officers of the defence forces. If not, then a similar committee may be formed to review the cases of the officers of the armed forces who were given similar treatment.

A sufferer
DOHS Baridhara, Dhaka

No results!

We, the students of Dhaka University, dept. of political science, have long been waiting for our honours results. Five valuable months have gone from our life since we appeared in our final exams. Still, we do not know when our results will be published. When we contacted the university authorities, we were told that the results would be published as soon as possible. But nothing is happening. How long shall we have to wait?

Aggrieved students
Dept. of Political Science
Dhaka University

Mosque incidents

It is a matter of great regret that over the appointment of the Khatib at the central mosque, sanctity of the House of Allah has been repeatedly undermined, that too with no sign of any settlement.

As we understand the CTG just before handing over power hurriedly appointed the present Khatib who is not reportedly acceptable to the majority devotees. There was no need for them to take the decision and it could have been left for the elected government to decide.

The Khatib is supposed to be the chief of Ulama of the country by virtue of his position and should be considered the most respected person in respect of religious authority. For such an exclusive post we need a well-qualified man of strong character and charisma. He is supposed to be a vastly learned man.

There should be a selection procedure by a board consisting of Ulama and religious scholars who should be trusted with the selection.

M. Amin Zakaria
Middlesex, UK

Is bottled water safe?

Scarcity of drinking water is a serious problem in the city these days. Assuming that the sea level has been shrinking down to the layers that do not provide adequate potable water, tube-wells as well as Wasa are falling far short in terms of their supply of water to the consumers.

Water from Wasa at different places in the town here in Chittagong is not clean; the case is at times worse in Dhaka as reports say --- colour of the water is reddish with a thick layer and a salty taste. As a result, people are suffering in many ways: i) Water is undrinkable doesn't matter how long you've boiled it, it gets worse ii) Clothes, namely the shirts and trousers that you and I wear washed by these water start losing the original colour.

Having found no alternative, people have to rely heavily on mineral water. Oh, problems keep on sticking, minerals being sold in big jars do not let us off the hook; rather they ruthlessly put us into more trouble as they, at times, as it has been reported by many consumers, contain some other things along with them. The other day, we noticed, to our awe, some tiny/slimy creatures in the jar!

Under such circumstances, we strongly urge the authorities concerned to closely monitor the hygiene factor in the companies that distribute jar water; they should formulate NORMS regarding the production of such water. Doesn't BST have prescriptions for such industries or business?

Rafiqul Islam Rime
Agrabad, Chittagong



Unequal war

Last month's 22-day bombardment and artillery onslaught on unarmed Gazans by the Israeli army is the most vicious attack on the Palestinians in such a small area. The attack destroyed their houses, offices, schools, mosques and so on and in the process killed

more than 1350 people including over 350 children. But why? Apparently all this mayhem was in retaliation for the so-called rocket attacks against Israel which by the way a western journalist called 'tin pot rockets' practically causing no damage so as to warrant

such a devastating response. Now one may ask why did the Hamas fire these useless rockets toward Israel?

The answer lies in the fact that for the last 18 months Israel had imposed total blockade around Gaza reducing the lives of its residents to utter misery. In such circumstances, it is only natural that the people would resort to some sort of protest with the means that they have, even if they are counter-productive, particularly when the world powers were doing nothing to get the blockade lifted! It is highly unlikely that Israel would have attacked Gaza in this manner had Hamas also been armed with similar weaponry!

A few days before Barack Obama took over as the US president, he was asked what he thought about the Israeli attack on Gaza and he replied that he would do the same if somebody threw stones at his house where his family was staying. Unfortunately, he did not think it proper to ask as to why would anybody attack somebody else's house without valid reasons

when the reaction was likely to be severe and very damaging. It is precisely because the big powers are unwilling or unable to put pressure on Israel to implement the UN resolutions asking it to vacate the occupied Palestinian lands that this problem has become so intractable now.

The sooner big powers, particularly the US, put sincere efforts into solving this problem the better it will be for all concerned. The US should not allow Israel to put unacceptable conditions to the Palestinians. It should just implement the relevant UN resolutions. Israel remains the strongest power in the region and no country in that region is capable of destroying it. It should rest assured that America will not allow anything to be done which will be detrimental to its security. At least, the Palestinians should have a state of their own instead of being in a protectorate of Israel.

Abul Mohsin
Shiddheswari Circular Road
Dhaka

