

Foreign Minister's futile trip

Disappointing for Bangladesh

DIPU Moni has returned empty handed but with bagful of oft repeated promises. We have every reason to feel let down. And we cannot but express our dismay at the Indian government's repetition of pledges without really doing anything substantive to deliver on those.

Looking back at the last five years of Bangladesh-India relationship is essential; and an objective stocktaking of what was delivered to India and what Bangladesh received in return is very much in order. As far as fulfilling of commitments we are afraid it has been largely a one way traffic from Bangladesh.

We find it inexplicable that India should cite internal political dynamics as reason for its failure to deliver after nearly two years of the signing of the additional protocol. And it should not be for our foreign minister to call at the doors of the opposition parties in this regard. She had tried to convince BJP this time to soften its stand on the Land Boundary Agreement (LBA) as she had done in the recent past to convince Mamata Banerjee to relent on the Teesta issue.

Bangladesh needs to make it clear to India that on it rests the onus of fulfilling the bilateral commitments made to Bangladesh. And it is for the Indian government to resolve the internal issues that stand in the way of it. And unless a definitive progress is made with regards to both the LBA and Teesta water sharing treaty in the next four months, the future course of the bilateral relationship is likely to receive a serious setback.

Life in harsh poverty

WB study merits consideration

POVERTY remains a menacing presence in the country, despite the otherwise positive indicators of development in a variety of areas. A World Bank study puts it all in perspective when it speaks of around 2.8 crore Bangladeshis living through harsh conditions in 1,144 unions dispersed across char, hilly and coastal areas. That is surely a worrying thought, given that these places have formally been characterized in the report as Hard to Reach Areas. The worry is two-pronged. First, we needed a World Bank study to apprise ourselves of the terrible conditions in which these people live. Second, we wonder why in all these years of much-touted development economics, the plight of these people was never brought to general notice.

A study of the report certainly makes dismal reading because these 2.8 crore citizens appear to be inhabiting a world out of the reach of modernity. When there are areas, especially in the char regions, where even safe drinking water cannot be ensured, there are reasons to question part, if not all, of the efforts geared to economic progress. Add to that the serious matter of high child mortality, again a result of poor or non-existent health facilities, and what you have is a situation absolutely at variance with what is happening elsewhere in the country. Natural disasters, we may as well inform ourselves, are phenomena that remain unchecked in these 1,144 unions.

Parliament ought to have discussed the issue on its own. Planning strategists should not have missed out on these hapless people. Now that the WB has raised the question, can we expect government and non-government action in the area? Poverty anywhere is an impediment to prosperity everywhere. It is a truth we cannot ignore.

Brutal behaviour!

S A MANSUR

A front page story published in a local English daily on July 27 reported that a female garment worker named Salma Akhter lost a finger when the boss at the factory allegedly hit her with a scissor for not attending a meeting. It is a serious criminal offense.

Apart from the civil case filed, the supervisor is also guilty of violating existing labour laws that warrants his dismissal from service. Is he still in employment? No supervisor is entitled to orally abuse or as in this case, physically abuse and injure any working person!

It seems that most garment factories are lawless places; and the workers are treated more like slaves; with inhumanly long working hours (possibly with very little overtime!) and no compensatory paid days off; which are specified in Factory Act and also



Standing Orders Act. Over and above, cruel and abusive behavior seems to be these workers norm!

Having worked in many factories in the Engineering and Chemical sectors for over forty odd years, I cannot imagine the inhuman conditions in garment factories after reading all about it since the saga of the 'Rana Plaza'. It seems garment factory workers are treated more as slaves than normal human beings are!

The factory concerned, must pay for all the hospitalization (outdoor or indoor), treatment, medicines and all travel expenses and related costs, to the garment worker for attending the hospital until full recovery. Full wages for the days lost due to the brutal accident with adequate compensation for physical disability of the damaged fingers (if it occurs) is their responsibility.

It is unfortunate, that these opportunist employers take advantage of the workers ignorance and cheat them out of their dues and compensations, that they are entitled to as per law!

The writer is an Engineer.

Theists and atheists

DR. A.M. CHOUDHURY

IN Bangladesh we have come across these words after a long time. In my student days, especially when I was studying at London University, one used to find students often discussing them. I remember while I was studying at Dhaka University in the early sixties, I attended a lecture by famous philosopher late Dr. Dewan Muhammed Azraf on the proof on the existence of God. I listened to the lecture with great enthusiasm but was greatly disappointed as the philosopher could not provide any proof. He argued quoting philosopher Kant about his argument in proving the existence of God. By using the argument that everything has a cause, starting from the very bottom of things. So the Universe whose existence we see and feel every moment must have a cause also and we call that cause God. But the argument fails there because we started from the causation theory and we fail at the last moment when we do not have an answer to the question of who created God. Belief in God does not come from philosophy, but from holy scriptures like the Holy Quran and other such books. In Bangladesh almost every individual whether literate or illiterate believes in God. They do not ask Dewan Azraf or Kant. They learn it from birth.

I therefore wonder about branding some people as atheists by some groups. One feels at one's heart about the existence of God. Even the most modern discovery in science points towards the existence of God. We know that recently genes of all living beings have been mapped. The gene are responsible for heredity. It has been found that there are a group of genes responsible for faith in God and they are termed as God genes. So science is not Godless. Recently at CERN laboratory at Geneva under a massively expensive experiment called Supercollider, a massive particle has been discovered. This particle is responsible for providing masses to other smaller particles and was termed as God Particle. So recent scientific discoveries all point to the existence of God.

Thousands of examples can be given about the existence of God from recent scientific discoveries. I give another example which we all face. This is about life and death. The process of life is so complicated that it does not resemble any complicated machine including a super-computer.

Let me recall some of my intellectual activities while I was studying in London for a Ph.D degree. I could find some time in spite of my heavy pressure of study of Mathematics and Physics for my degree. I became especially interested in communism because they used to claim it scientific. Usually there is a difference between natural and social sciences. A scientific theory is subject to experimental verification. If theory and experiment do not agree, it is not science. But in the case of communism where is the science? They had devised a



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mechanism called Dialectical Materialism which consists of dividing a proposition into thesis, antithesis and synthesis. For example a pre-capitalist society and a capitalist society form thesis and antithesis and they will resolve into a socialist society. There is no numerical quantity involved in this mechanism. How much of the antithesis will lead to synthesis? The antithesis can co-exist with thesis without being resolved into synthesis. Again antithesis and thesis may naturally resolve without going through a revolutionary process. But Marxists insist that thesis and antithesis are resolved through a process of revolution. This is in brief what is called Marxism. Actually, Hegel first proposed this dialectic theory and Marx claimed that he has put it upside down and made it materialistic. But in practice this is not usually observed with some exception like Russian Revolution.

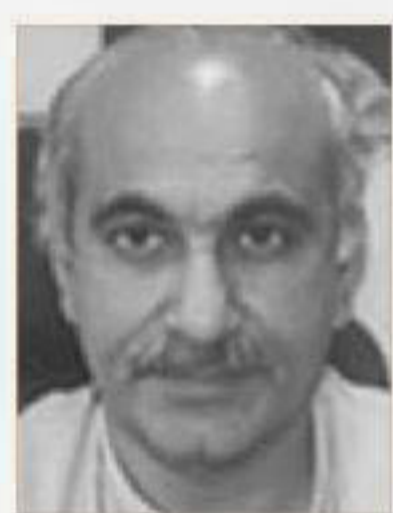
So in Bangladesh are there Marxists or atheists? There is a communist party in Bangladesh and I have observed behavior of its members as they perform almost all the religious rights like those of a religious person. Then are they really atheists? As for young individuals who have written in the blogs claiming to be atheists, they may have been joking. Such sensitive material should not be put in the blog.

So there is no case for further grouping of our people into atheists and theists. Our society is already divided too much and there is no room for further division. There are more than thirty political parties working in Bangladesh which look very strange. We should not aggravate this strangeness.

The writer is former Chairman, Space Research and Remote Sensing Organisation (SPARRSO).

The day of judgement

BYLINE



M.J. AKBAR

HUMAN nature, when in a good mood, takes pride in saving a fellow being from impending tragedy. A good case can now be made for saving a person — including one with an inhuman record — from continuing farce. It is time we organised a mass petition to end the presumed trial of Sajjan Kumar for inciting murder and mayhem during the anti-Sikh riots in Delhi 28 years ago. For nearly three decades he has escaped justice through one legal feat after another, abetted by authorities. This happened again last week. Why pretend? Send a simple message to the victims of 1984: Abandon hope, all ye who enter the Indian judicial maze.

As politics buzzes towards another general election; as conversation and opinion polls chase each other along an entertaining circumference; as reasons advance and propositions retreat; as issues climb on the graph of voter-impact, and reasons get dissected with a surgeon's scalpel, one gut cause for popular anger seems to have eluded the attention of pundits and their hangers on: justice. The wide spectrum of justice can breed paradox. Take the tragedy of mid-day meal deaths in Bihar. The rage of the poor is obviously legitimate. The principal and cohorts who poisoned impoverished children with insecticide are not mere criminals driven by greed; they have, at some subconscious level, a pathological hatred for the dispossessed, as if the poor do not deserve more than a dustbin. But at least one consequence seems bizarre. Bihar's teachers have gone on strike after the episode, arguing that serving meals is not part of their duties. They too claim to be victims of injustice.

Is there a rational connect between both grievances? Yes, collapse of government. The Supreme Court orders governments to provide meals in schools. The state government has neither the infrastructure, nor the will to create one. It makes no effort to match intention with ability. This is not a question of money. The cost of a meal is only a small percentage of resources needed to finance administrations that have bloated across the land. No state government can afford to accept this truth, for that would be political suicide in a democracy. So it does what it has learnt to do, encourage a practice built on compromise and theft. A meal scheme for children needs a professional process that can be held account-

able. Instead, government throws some money at teachers who are allowed to do what they want. There are cuts along the way as money travels from capital city to district headquarters, and then to the principal. Everyone is not as brutally dishonest as those in charge of the Chhapra school, or there would have been such calamities more frequently. But the system is wont to treat the poor as sub-human. The poor, they believe, eat dirt in their homes; why should they get any better in school?

A horrifying tragedy has exposed death by poisoning. There is a greater horror that has not hit the headlines: the slow poisoning of hundreds of thousands of children who are getting rotten food, just short of visible worms and insecticide. Slow death does not make news.

Injustice is not new in India. What is new, and long overdue, is demand for redress. Tribals have been marginalised for centuries, ever since they lost political control over their natural habitat in the green belt of forests along the midriff of India. Feudal India had no time for them, except occasionally as security slaves. Colonial India had no time for anyone except compradors. But even democratic India was indifferent or exploitative. The tribal demand for justice is being heard through guns.

Others have not turned to violence — yet. The poor still have some faith in democracy, and express their anger in elections. But a ruling class tends to treat time as an endless resource. Within the folds of time is an ignition box, which must be defused or it will explode. Corruption is another synonym for injustice, for it is robbery of people's resources. Corruption is not exchange of wealth between the rich; it is the people's money accumulating in limited pockets. The teachers in Bihar were not paying for meals from their salaries; they were siphoning off money collected from taxes. Those mobile companies who bought spectrum at deflated prices were also stealing from the national purse.

Justice is neither expected nor offered in a dictatorship, which is why it becomes such an intense demand when a dictator falls. But justice is intrinsic to democracy. An ordinary crime is punished through law; political culpability meets its fate in elections. When justice is denied, it lingers in the mind; you can dull its edges, as in the Sajjan Kumar case, but it will haunt you from some corner of the national conscience. Every election is a judgement on justice. The verdict may not be perfect, but it works.

The writer is Editor of *The Sunday Guardian*, published from Delhi, India on Sunday, published from London and Editorial Director, *India Today* and *Headlines Today*.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Open the JS premises to people

The Sangsad Bhaban premises have been closed for the general public since the last caretaker government took office. More than four years have gone and now there is no justification for keeping it off-limits in the name of security. A good number of people including children, women and senior citizens used to take morning walk in the fresh air of this area. Dhaka is a very congested city, but this place can give a temporary relief to many people. We request the authorities to open the premises for general people's use immediately.

Md. Shahjahan Mia
Satmosjid Road, Dhaka

Ground realities

Many readers may not have detected the almost ground-breaking approach taken by Syed Badrul Ahsan in his July 24 column "When women are endangered species." While the subject is not new anymore, it is almost unheard of in the media in Muslim countries to argue for gender equity without regaling the reader with the same, worn-out selective history lessons. What happened in 1013 is of little relevance to the world of 2013, and I appreciate Mr. Badrul Ahsan courageously pointing it out with examples. This is Bangladesh where the supreme law of the land is a Constitution that, for all its flaws, mandates the equal treatment of men and women before the law. Unlike Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan, our laws do not use gender as a qualifier for which citizen is able to wear which clothes, undertake what professions, travel in whose company, and testify in which court cases. Those pseudo-religious figures who encourage their audiences to act contrary to that Constitution and its subsidiary laws are deserving the contempt that is incumbent upon those who incite willful lawbreaking.

Esam Sohail
Kansas, USA

The last creature on earth!

According to a BBC report, scientists said that the last surviving creatures on earth will be tiny organisms living deep underground. Researchers used a computer model to assess our planet's fate billions of years from now. They found that as the sun would become hotter and brighter, only microbes would be able to cope with the extreme conditions that the solar changes would bring. If we don't want to be extinct someday, we should work on it from now on.

Bidit Chowdhury
On e-mail

Comments on news report, "A land of many Muslims but little of Islam," published on July 25, 2013

M. Ashraf

We have every right to be proud of our religious identity. Islam does cover political and judicial aspects of society. It should certainly primarily define us and our activities. Nothing has been stated about the rampant theft and corruption of the current government. Are they all not Muslims? Or is it ok for people of other religions to plunder public money? This article is nothing short of the regurgitation of ruling party propaganda.

Nds

How this most objective and impartial critique of the abuse and misuse of religion in this society can be seen in parallel to ruling party propaganda is really beyond my comprehension. Do even religious principles allow such opinionated and self-serving interpretation of an innocuous observation? Simply not fair.

M. Ashraf

People should really re-assess their position on fairness and comprehension of religion. Why does it appear unfair when the religion card is played by the bigots and ruling party alike? Or does one need to be highlighted and the other does not. Is that fair? Corruption in Bangladesh is more ingrained to greed and abuse of power than religion by the two major parties. Unfortunately, truth is a hard pill to swallow.

Nds

It is really an enigma to me how a country being at the top of the list of most corrupt countries consecutively for four or five times can claim itself to be the most religious-minded nation in the world. The claim itself constitutes an act of sacrilege. I think it would be more appropriate and objective to identify ourselves as the most hypocritical nation in the world. I will be happy if I am proved wrong.

T. Husain

Thank you, Brig Gen, for daring to write such an article. And I thank the editor too for publishing this sort of eye-opening write-up. But would the great Muslims of Bangladesh ever learn anything from such article?

mrdingdong

Religions only brainwash people.

agent_47

Then read the holy Quran and find out yourselves and preach/correct the masses. Or educate the masses so that they can read it themselves.

Having an opinion is one thing, but antagonizing the majority of the citizens of a country is completely another. This goes for the author too and his "strategy".

Zahir Karna

Mrdingdong's comment in my opinion is not productive. But the article raises very good points. And, you do not need to read from just one single source to educate masses about religion. Maybe people should look into more than one source.

Akash

The general Muslims in Bangladesh are mainly non-practising — they do not act upon the teachings of Islam, neither do they adhere to the universal human rights. The end result is quite easily predictable.

Sara

Using religion for personal gain is nothing new or specific to Bangladesh... people all over the world do it... for many religions... and have been doing so for centuries...