

Dying on holiday travel

Preventive measures imperative

NINETY lives were lost across the country during the just-concluded Eid holidays. There is the question of why Eid holidays or any holidays for that matter must be marred annually by the sudden, unnatural deaths of citizens on the roads, on the rivers and in train mishaps. Much noise is made before Eid of the security measures taken to ensure that no tragedy takes place as people make their way home. But tragedy does take place, with overloaded buses, launches, boats and trains making their way into the interior of the country. A launch is seen taking in passengers in excess of its capacity, with the authorities looking on helplessly. Similar is the story with buses and trains. Perhaps if there were more traffic personnel to oversee the workings of the launches, buses and trains, conditions would be better?

From here on, measures should be taken to increase the number of the various modes of transport people could avail of as they approach such holidays every year.

As for the accidents that have already occurred on Eid this year, it is only proper that swift inquiries be made to identify the causes and individuals responsible. Unless punitive measures are in place, people will go on dying even as they set out for home in good cheer.

For their part, travelers too need to exercise caution and patience to minimize the chances of accidents.

Private universities again

drawing flak

What answer education ministry can now offer?

WHEN the TIB had highlighted the corruptibility in certain private universities the education ministry raised a hue and cry, going ballistic about the findings. They said it was aimed at denigrating the image of private universities.

Now University Grants Commission (UGC), a body constituted by the government, has come out with detailed inadequacies and poor state of affairs in a good number of private universities. It has found out that majority of the 79 universities run without following rules, and have poor library, laboratory and research facilities. As many as nine universities operate in unauthorised outer campuses.

It's as surprising as it is shocking to know that twenty universities have no vice chancellors and that 61 run without any pro-VC.

We have been consistently emphasising the laudatory role that a select number of private universities have played to cater for higher education comparable in quality to that in some overseas universities. We are proud of them just as we are disappointed by the others which are run purely as commercial ventures. Their professional incompetence and casualness have brought bad name in profiling private universities in general, which is unfortunate and unacceptable.

It's all very good that the UGC has brought the deficiencies of the private universities to the fore. However, this raises a fundamental question about how an authority under whose watch the private universities are supposed to be working did not move to right the wrongs of several

Is this justice?

ABDUL MATIN

IT has happened not in an African or Asian country but in Greece, home of one of the oldest civilisations in Europe. It is reported that two men, including the owner of a farm in the village of Manolada, who shot 28 Bangladeshi strawberry pickers after they had asked to be reimbursed for the six months of unpaid labour, have been acquitted by a court in the southern city of Patras. Dozens were injured in the attack, including four seriously. Despite admitting shooting the workers, the two men—one of whom was also accused of human trafficking—were cleared by the court. The International Business Times terms it as an “unprecedented racist scandal.”

Migrant workers immediately protested the ruling in front of the court. One of the defending lawyers, Moisis Karabeyidis, said he feels “shame as a Greek” and may take the case to the European Court of Human Rights. “This decision is an outrage and a disgrace,” he said. “The court showed an appalling attitude toward the victims.”

Politicians and union groups have also criticised the decision. Vassiliki Katrivanou, an MP for the radical-left Syriza party, said the ruling sends a message that migrant workers “can die like a dog in the orchard.” Greece's biggest labour union said the decision was “against the public sense of justice and fairness.” A spokesperson of the General Confederation of Greek Workers (GSEE) said: “We express our dissatisfaction with the acquittal of a businessman and his associates who are responsible for the mistreatment of 200 workers, mostly from Bangladesh, at the site, who live in squalid conditions and without working rights and who had been left unpaid.” “It leaves room for new victims by closing eyes to the brutal, inhuman and racist character of the exploitation suffered by workers on the land,” she added.

Though there was no fatality, the incident, however, reminds us of the shooting of striking workers who demanded an eight-hour working day at Haymarket Square in Chicago on May 4, 1886. That happened in the late 19th century and resulted in the observation of the International May Day. How could a similar incident occur in the 21st century?

Imagine what would have been the reaction in Europe and America had this incident occurred in Bangladesh. Europeans are very vocal in protesting against injustices done to workers in other countries but some of them practice racist policies at home.

The government of Bangladesh should act immediately and decisively to stand by the victims of violence and injustice and appeal against the verdict that deserves to be condemned and reversed.

The writer is a former chief engineer of Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission.

Israel has no right to steal Palestinian lands

FAKHRUDDIN AHMED

IT is David versus Goliath in Palestine. Israel possesses nuclear, chemical and biological weapons of mass destruction. The world's fourth largest exporter of arms, Israel is teeming with the latest high-tech weaponry. It has the highest defense spending to GDP ratio. It boasts of a high standard of living (per capita income of \$35,600). Most importantly, Israel has the unequivocal political, economic, diplomatic and military backing of all western nations, notably the UK, and 100% backing of the world's only superpower, the United States.

Compared to the Israeli lion, Gaza is a mouse! Merely a strip, Gaza is only 25-mile long, and 3.5 to 7.5 mile wide. With an area of 139 square miles Gaza is 61-times smaller than Israel. Gaza is dirt poor and packs 1.8 million people, with a population density of 13,069 per square mile. Gazans have homemade and inaccurate Qassam and Fajr rockets which they have fired into Israel, and have dug some medieval technology tunnels to take the fight inside Israel.

In retaliation, Israel has unleashed its mighty military on the people of Gaza, pulverised a significant part of Gaza through aerial and naval bombardment, and artillery shelling. To date, Israel has killed about 1,400 Gazans, mostly civilians, women and children. Thus far, Israel has suffered 50 military and 3 civilian deaths. For every Israeli civilian death, 400 Palestinian civilians have been murdered.

Israel deliberately bombed Gaza's only power station, which supplies electricity, and powers Gaza's water supply and sewage system. This is clearly a war crime. One would have expected the purveyors of democracy, the West, to cry foul! They did not. It will be foolish to hold one's breath expecting the West to hold Israel accountable. They never do. Instead, they issue Israel a carte blanche to carry out state sponsored terrorism against Palestinian civilians. Netanyahu carries out atrocities supremely confident that Uncle Sam, which is in Israel's pocket, will always bail him out, and blame the Palestinians instead.

Harvard law Professor Alan Dershowitz spoke for the West when he said on CNN that those who criticise Israel's obliteration of Gaza are anti-American and anti-West. So, American and Western values condone Israeli genocide of civilians in Gaza? This is reminiscent of former British Prime Minister John Major's Freudian slip just before the first Iraqi war in 1991: “The WEST cannot tolerate Saddam Hussein's actions in Kuwait!” Realizing the faux pas, he quickly corrected himself: “The WORLD cannot...”

If Herr Professor is behaving badly, the US Congress is far worse. All 100 Senators and all 435 members of the House of Representatives (Congressmen) bend over backwards to support Israel to curry favour with the Almighty American Israeli Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), however unseemly it may seem.

The Senate voted 100-0 to proclaim, “Israel has a right to defend itself.” There was no mention of Palestinian civilian deaths. The House and Senate approved a resolution demanding that Hamas be disarmed. No sympathy was expressed for mounting Palestinians civilian deaths. Texas Republican Senator Ted Cruz threatened to block every presidential appointment until the FAA reversed its ban on flights of American carriers to Tel Aviv. The ban was reversed in 36 hours. Although the US “condemned” the bombing of children in the UN school, it did not hold Israel responsible!



The famously stingy House of Representatives moved at a breakneck speed to approve additional \$225 million in aid to Israel to bolster its anti-missile “Iron Dome,” which America had financed in the first place. No sympathy was expressed for the 1,400 Gazan deaths! It cannot be that humanity has forsaken the Senators and the Congressmen. Their mortal fear of AIPAC and other Israeli lobbies trumps every other consideration. Even Hillary Clinton blamed Hamas for provoking Israel!

Fortunately, the Senators and the Congressmen do not represent the views of the American people. The latest poll found that among 18-29-year old Americans, only 25% support the Israeli actions. The number rises gradually to over 50% among those over 60. The almighty Israeli lobby cannot control social media.

Through its absolute control of the US traditional media, the Congress and the presidency, the Israeli lobby had made sure that only the Israeli narrative is heard and

believed by the American people. However, these days the young people get their news from social media like Twitter and Facebook, not from the traditional news outlets. Pictures of Palestinian babies beings blown to smithereens by Israeli bombs go viral. And there is nothing Benjamin Netanyahu can do to counter the spread of the vivid truth.

Netanyahu used a lie as a pretext to attack Gaza. He blamed the criminal murder of three Jewish kids in the West Bank last month on

Hamas. (Jewish settlers roasted a Palestinian boy alive in revenge!). Hamas, which always takes responsibility for its actions, denied it. Although Israeli intelligence agencies backed Hamas' denial, Netanyahu nevertheless went ahead and attacked Gaza.

The 2012 accord between Hamas and Israel stipulated that Israel would end the blockade of Gaza in exchange for Hamas not firing rockets into Israel. Israel reneged on that promise. Gaza is still an open air prison. Israel controls its borders, its air space and its sea. It neither allows goods into Gaza, nor exports out of Gaza. It has made life hell for Gazans, while the world looked away. The only way the Gazans can draw the world's attention is through firing rockets into Israel, most of which fall harmlessly into unpopulated areas.

The world never asks why Israel is illegally occupying the West Bank which it captured from Jordan in 1967. The Oslo Accord of 1993 was supposed to result in a Palestinian state in the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem. While Israel got all benefits of Oslo upfront, such as diplomatic recognition from the world, the Palestinians got more Israeli settlements on their lands. In 1993 there were 190,000 Jewish settlers in the West Bank; now there are close to 500,000. Netanyahu recently said in Hebrew: there will be no Palestinian state! Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas is sitting at the negotiating table alone!

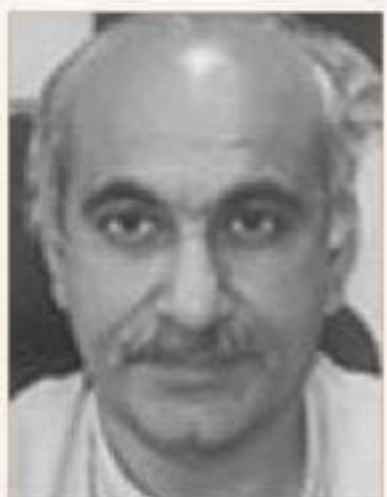
So, when Israel invokes the “right to defend itself,” may one ask what it means: Right to steal more Palestinian lands and build settlements? Right to deny the Gazans their right to life, liberty and pursuit of happiness? Right to perpetually hoodwink the world? Right to bomb and kill worshippers in mosques, patients in hospitals and children in UN schools?

A question for Humanity: Can those who nonchalantly murder 1,400 plus defenseless human beings be considered human?

The writer is a Rhodes Scholar.

July was a volatile month

BYLINE



M.J. AKBAR

creeds and temperaments.” In a memorable admonishment, Shivaji reminded Aurangzeb that the Quran called Allah “Rabb ul alamin, the Lord of all men, and not Rabb ul muslemeen [only the Lord of Muslims]... To show bigotry for any man's own creed and practices is equivalent to altering the words of the Holy Book...” Sir Jadunath dwells on this remarkable letter in both Shivaji and His Times, as well as in his History of Aurangzeb [Volume 3]. Equal honour to every faith is a pillar of Indian civilisation; and it this common moral and cultural inheritance that provides the enduring inspiration for our Republic. Shivaji's 17th century letter could serve as a preface to India's 20th century Constitution.

It is not the job of a column to lecture, let alone pontificate, but there are occasions when a reminder is apposite, even if the scale of an MP's provocation is minor compared to the far-reaching impact of an emperor's prejudice. The irrational, almost schoolboy-bully, anger of a few Maharashtra MPs who were served disagreeable food in a government hostelry is an immature misdeemeanour rather than government policy, but we must take it seriously, for the edifice of India's democracy is built by the innumerable bricks of individual and collective rights.

It is perfectly true that a man's religion is not written on his face, as an MP who sought to thrust a chapati down a Muslim server's mouth at the Maharashtra Sadan in Delhi pointed out. But in which script does one write the language of human dignity, the language that Shivaji made his creed? The question is particularly appropriate when the relevant MP claims to wear the mantle of Shivaji. We are talking of more than an affront to a particular religion; it was brash display of the arrogance towards a much larger community of the poor. This was negation of the central

message of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's election campaign, where he repeatedly stressed three core themes and reiterated them during his first major speech in the Lok Sabha: the foremost responsibility of a government is to work for the poor; development and jobs must go to every Indian, including minorities [“If one organ of the body remains weak, the body cannot be termed as healthy. We are committed to this...We don't see this as appeasement”]; and that India can become a modern nation, with double-digit growth, only when we make development into a mass movement, in the manner that Gandhi made the freedom struggle into a mass movement. The volatile variations that are now rising across public debate could throw the government off-message.

Some of the volatility is predictable if not explicable. The election results were an earthquake, and the after-shock tremors will trouble the earth for a while. There will be a fringe which claims justification for its views in the results. A few carpetbaggers will imagine that they can improve their chances of preferential treatment during the distribution of rewards by pandering to the fringe. But marginal facts should not be confused with a central reality. A government can only be run from an inclusive perspective. Home Minister Raj Nath Singh did well to reassure Parliament, and the nation, that such behaviour was unfortunate, and by implication unacceptable.

There are practical dangers in veering off-message as well. Politicians might be surprised to discover that voters have become volatile as well. Voters want delivery on what they were promised at campaign time; they are not interested in the sudden spout of a new rhetoric. Voters are not doctrinaire; they want jobs and homes and electricity and water and lower vegetable prices, and they want it sooner rather than later. They enjoy the luxury of electoral options, and have the ability to recognise a leader who they believe will deliver better than the competition. In state elections, candidates for chief minister will influence the outcome significantly. With power comes responsibility, of course; with responsibility comes a face and a name.

Narendra Modi has inspired a pervasive hope that the politics, language and governance of an arid past is behind us. No one expects results to be immediate, or transition to be easy; but the country senses an absence if he shifts to the background for even a week or a fortnight. The travails of July will soon be over. August needs a return of that fresh breeze.

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LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR

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Israel liquidating

Palestinian poor

Israel's policy is that in order to overcome this problem of the rights of the poor Palestinians, it will just liquidate the poor! That was the U.S. policy in Vietnam too, to literally try to wipe



PHOTO: REUTERS

them out. And if it hadn't been for world opinion, they would have. But the world was horrified at the things the U.S. did there. And that's just what is happening now to Israel.

The Israelis have always got the best propaganda in the newspapers and are pretending to want a ceasefire. In fact, they have come out a couple of times insisting on a ceasefire. They don't care what the U.S. government says or what the president says. As long as he keeps supplying them with three billion dollars worth of arms every year, they don't give a damn whether he agrees with them or not. He's giving them the guns to do it.

Ted Rudow III, MA
Palo Alto, CA, USA

Documentary on

Tajuddin

We are happy to know that a documentary film on Tajuddin Ahmed's political life is under production. Tajuddin Ahmed deserves to be projected as the most honest and committed Awami League leader whose contribution in the freedom of Bangladesh should never be underestimated by any quarter.

We fail to understand why the jail killing case has not been receiving due attention. The trial must be completed soon. 23rd July was the birth anniversary of Shaheed Tajuddin Ahmed; we pray for the eternal peace of this great leader's soul.

Anami
California, USA

Comments on news report, “Bangladesh goes one notch up,” published on July 25, 2014

Hafeejul Alam

Despite many shortcomings, overall, the AL-led government is doing better than any previous government of Bangladesh. The very effective role of the private sector and the NGOs are also to be taken into consideration. There is no room to be complacent, but at the same time there is no reason to despair.

Molla A. Latif

Evidently, Bangladesh is moving forward.

“Invest more in Bangladesh” (July 24, 2014)

PlainSpeaker

Investors flock and invest in a country where the workforce is reasonably educated and efficient and the law and order is helpful for keeping investment safe. Make Bangladesh business-friendly by establishing rule of law, building good infrastructure and educating the workforce.

SunLion

Yes, please invest so that the politicians may steal or rob more!

“UGC official suspended for bribery” (July 22, 2014)

Mofi

This suspension is a testimony to how disconnected our education minister is from reality. He vehemently protested the TIB report.

Mortuza Huq

What will the education minister say now about the TIB report? Now we know that TIB was right!

Hyder

UGC Additional Director Ferdous Zaman has taken Tk. 5 lakh as bribe from Britannia University. This is highly contrary to the UGC ethics. Hence he should be punished and sacked from his job.