

SEE NO UNFIT VEHICLE!



Is religion the cause?



MILIA ALI

SHIFTING IMAGES

THE tragic events of September 11 marked a phase of widespread religious turmoil, culminating in the prevailing sentiment of Islamophobia ... even a "Clash of Civilisations." It is convenient to blame war, oppression and violence on religion because it provides us with a suitable scapegoat. However, the great wars in history were not fought for religion. And the worst genocides of the last century -- Hitler's murder of the Jews and the massacre of Armenians in Turkey -- were perpetrated by secular nationalists who hated their religion.

Recently, religious scholar and historian Karen Armstrong has added her voice to the ongoing debate about the underlying causes of war and violence. In her new book *Fields of Blood* she refutes the prevalent belief that religion is at the root of all wars. Speaking at a book presentation in Washington, Armstrong traced the history of Crusades and Jihads and examined humanity's earliest societies to argue convincingly that with time "notions of the sacred were supplanted to the warrior ethos" to suit man's thirst for power and supremacy. According to her, even the wars waged in Europe in the name of religion were due to the reformist split within Christianity. Armstrong also draws attention to the fact that people of the same religious denomination fought with each other for land, empire and authority. For example Pope Paul IV went to war against the Catholic Philip II of Spain and the Catholic Kings of France allied with the Ottoman Turks against the Catholic Habsburgs. In a similar vein today numerous Muslims are killed by terrorist attacks perpetrated in the name of Islam. Hence we need to ask: Is violence triggered only by religious fanaticism or should factors like inequity, political repression, and injustice be plugged into the equation of the "Jihad"?

The fact is that more brutalities and killings have been committed for nationalism and secularism than for a religious ideology. Religious reformer Martin Luther, the first European to propose the separation of church and state, believed that the sovereign, independent state reflected the vision of the sovereign, independent individual. Yet in the 1525 peasant revolt against the oppressive policies of the German princes, Luther supported the merciless slaughter of the peasants. In his view they had committed the cardinal sin of mixing religion and politics. Similarly, the United States was ravaged by one of the most deadly civil wars within 100 years of independence despite the separation of the church and state at its inception.

While most modern historians and scholars have connected violence to religious manifestations like Jihad in Islam or Christianity's Crusades, Armstrong's book explores each faith --

The fact is that more brutalities and killings have been committed for nationalism and secularism than for a religious ideology.

Critics of religion claim that blind religious faith and unbridled fervour motivate the insane killings and brutalities committed by sane and decent people. Armstrong, however, points out that it is not religion that generates violence. It is due to the cumulative pressure of invasion by outsiders and internal oppression that "secular grievance morphs into religious crusade." For example, after years of Israeli blockade and land occupation, Yasser Arafat's secular Palestine Liberation Organization has segued into the Islamic Resistance Movement, or Hamas. Also Israel, founded as a secular haven, has become a "Holy Land" after half a century of Arab encirclement.

The debate about the causes of war and violence will continue. But here is a thought to reflect on: Journalist Christopher Hitchens, a noted critic of religion, subtitled his book *God is Not Great* as "How religion poisons everything"... Perhaps it's time to think about "How everything poisons religion!"

The writer is a renowned Rabindra Sangeet exponent and a former employee of the World Bank. E-mail: shiftingimages@gmail.com

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF TOLERANCE

Celebrating the power of tolerance and social harmony

DAN MOZENA

ON November 16, the world community will observe the 19th United Nations International Day for Tolerance. This day highlights the vital contribution of tolerance toward building and sustaining peaceful, harmonious communities that thrive from diversity of thought, religion, and ethnicity.

As I crisscrossed Bangladesh in my quest to visit all 64 districts, I experienced firsthand the rich mosaic that is Bangladesh -- a mosaic of different ethnicities, religions and cultures, a mosaic that reflects the beauty and majesty of wonderful Bangladesh. I was deeply touched everywhere I went by the strong Bangladeshi tradition of different religious groups living side-by-side in peace and harmony with respect for religious differences. I saw the beautiful diversity of the traditions of the great religions of Bangladesh: Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity. I saw this diversity, too, in the tapestry of ethnic groups -- Garos, Manipuri, Tripura, Chakmas, Khasis and others -- who have lived in harmony with the Bengali majority for hundreds of years and who continue to live side-by-side in friendship to this very day.

I believe this powerful tradition of social harmony is one of Bangladesh's greatest strengths. This is why it is so jarring when a minority community suffers an attack. Such attacks do not reflect the Bangladeshi tradition and spirit of tolerance; such attacks are aberrations often driven by motivated interests who sow discord as they seek to reap

financial or other profit by taking advantage of the vulnerable. I support Bangladeshi citizens and their leaders as they speak out against intolerance and hold accountable those who commit violent acts.

Bangladesh is not alone in confronting these challenges. As the world has recently witnessed in the racial confrontations in Missouri, America, too, is dealing with intolerance.

Elsewhere around the world, other communities are struggling with the violence of war, blatant disregard for human rights, outright injustice, discrimination, and marginalization. These problems are largely born of fear and intolerance, and work to break down communities, families, and individuals, affecting the overall well-being of society. This day speaks to the importance of tolerance and acceptance in achieving important public health objectives, especially for those living on the margins. I believe there can be no social progress without tolerance; where intolerance thrives, all suffer.

Social inclusion and tolerance ensure equal opportunity for all, regardless of background or beliefs, and enable full and active participation of every member of the society in all aspects of life. Tolerance is the foundation for peace, and it requires treating everyone -- even those who are different or who hold different ideas -- with dignity and respect. It means respecting and embracing differences to strengthen the nation to the benefit of all.

I believe that America, Bangladesh and all peace-loving countries of the world can

work together to combat intolerance, to promote tolerance.

Working together, we can germinate the seeds of tolerance by engaging men, women and children of all backgrounds and beliefs, by engaging all elements of society: government, schools, NGOs, private sector, media, and others. Collective action can make a difference. By understanding the causes of violent intolerance, we can combat it; we can reduce it. A free media can play an important role in exposing the causes and perpetrators of intolerance.

I applaud efforts such as the "Stop Violence, Build a Peaceful Nation" campaign launched by UNDP and 15 NGOs on October 2 -- the United Nations International Day of Non-Violence -- to generate greater public awareness of and support for Bangladesh's traditional values of social harmony and tolerance. Initiatives such as this promote public discourse on the importance of tolerance and the need to preserve this proud Bangladeshi tradition.

On this International Day for Tolerance, we here in Bangladesh and citizens around the world should reaffirm the right of all persons to live free of discrimination and marginalization. Closer to home, we should recommit ourselves to supporting all Bangladeshis as they build on their traditional values and aspirations to construct better futures for themselves and their children. Let us together recognize and celebrate the great Bangladeshi traditions of tolerance, peace, and social harmony.

The writer is U.S. Ambassador to Bangladesh.

A hallmark of humanity

PAULINE TAMESIS

SUCCESSFUL human development underpinned by respect for human rights requires strong public ownership of the principles of rights and freedoms and equality that can only be fully enjoyed in a tolerant and peaceful Bangladesh.

Intolerance, particularly forms that lead to violence, can often undermine human rights and freedoms, has a chilling effect on those rights and contributes to an environment that challenges the very nature of human rights. Tolerance and human rights are inseparable in many ways and together with obligation invoke a strong sense of pride about how a society treats its members and equally how individuals behave to others in a society they share. Public cultures that are imbued with a strong sense of tolerance and civic patriotism are celebrated as a hallmark of the spirit of humanity.

Societies that are tolerant are envied throughout history. When societies that were once tolerant fall into parochialism they decay. The traits of prejudice are distrust, suspicion and violence. Those of openness are trust, understanding of difference and engagement.

At one level, tolerance can be understood as a freedom for any individual to decide on how they want to live their life and fulfil the pursuit of their own potential and happiness. On another level, it can also be seen as how society respects the right of an individual to make these decisions and live according to them however different they may be. At its heart are human rights and the right to lead a life that people chose freely without oppression or restraint. It is about protecting those rights and the diversity that exists when we recognise those essential fundamental and civil and political rights that make societies free.

It is diversity that makes our societies so interesting and creative. The accep-

tion of pluralism leads to the kaleidoscope of ideas, thoughts, and cultures that have always interacted around the world. When we embrace difference we open access to many viewpoints and knowledge, cultures, lifestyles and choices. If we reject it we suppress these voices, their experiences and deny their contribution to society. By refusing to recognise this we effectively choose to live in a single-lensed and hermetically sealed room where we fail to see the richness of society and the world.

There are social consequences of intolerance and it can often manifest itself in violence. This violence is almost always against the weak and vulnerable, the marginalised and oppressed. It is often violence that is arbitrary and it is always violence that stems from a lack of real understanding about these communities. Where an intolerance to opposing viewpoints is displayed this can lead to radicalisation of moderate voices frustrated by not

having their concerns discussed. When this is a mindset, we simply miss the opportunities that diversity has to offer. There are also economic costs from the exclusion that it brings with it.

Tolerance above all requires putting prejudices aside and defeating them, it is learning about others, accepting and embracing a range of opposing views and belief systems. And this is only possible in societies that can reflect these differences and accept that conversations and engagement are the friends of tolerance. In the modern world culture is more diverse as belief systems co-exist side by side and we should remember it is this co-existence that makes for societies that are great.

We have an obligation to promote understanding. This means engagement, a curiosity to find out about others in society regardless of how different they appear. By embracing diversity we are acknowledging that our background beliefs may diverge at

times on issues. However, this does not negate the ability of communities to reach a consensus over fundamental aspects of the society they share. On the contrary, it offers an opportunity to enrich this process and enhance the universal values of human rights.

In Bangladesh, human rights remains at the heart of the development work we invest in and by empowering communities to take control over their own destinies we are seeing rapid changes in the country. These will accelerate as the country moves towards its ambition of middle income status. As these impact on more peoples' lives it is important that virtues such as tolerance remain at the centre of society and the community to ensure diversity and the freedom to make choices about the way individuals wish to live their lives is respected.

The writer is Resident Representative a.i., of the United Nations Development Programme.

When we embrace difference we open access to many viewpoints and knowledge, cultures, lifestyles and choices. If we reject it we suppress these voices, their experiences and deny their contribution to society.

QUOTABLE Quote

Life is not a problem to be solved, but a reality to be experienced.

Soren Kierkegaard

CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

ACROSS

- Hooded snake
- Sneaker feature
- Parting word
- Blood line
- Fuses
- Yawning, perhaps
- Much
- Cheering cry
- Letter after pi
- Drill need
- Mideastern peninsula
- Carnival attraction
- Bucks
- Joseph Conrad's "..." of Six"
- Friend of Pooh
- Spanish king
- 31 Energy
- Bellow
- 32 Man with a cape
- Dyeing art
- 38 Medicine amounts
- 41 Rust, for one
- 42 Stroll
- 43 Trait carriers
- 44 Eric Clapton song

DOWN

- Crow cry
- Pindar poem
- "Rock Around the Clock" singer
- Give a makeover
- Land-locked European nation
- Forbidden
- Shingle setting
- Misstep
- Put away
- 10 June honoree
- More acute
- Speed checker
- Came up
- 20 "I Spy" co-star
- 21 Lazy sort
- 22 Snappish
- 23 Diner order
- 25 Outfit
- 27 Like humans
- 31 Jobs
- 33 Ocean motion
- 34 Italia's capital
- 35 Swamp
- 36 Log chopper
- 37 Malleable metal
- 39 Angled pipe
- 40 Vast expanse

Yesterday's answer

T	R	O	T	S	P	A	L	E			
H	O	N	O	R	W	I	R	E	S		
O	M	E	N	S	R	E	E	D	S		
M	U	L	E	V	I	S	A	G	E		
A	L	I	V	E	T	S	E	X			
S	U	F	F	I	X	E	S				
S	E	T	S	O	K	A	I				
S	E	T	S	S	O	F	F	I	C	E	S
B	E	T	A	L	F	T	A	P			
U	N	H	O	L	I	H	E	R	A		
S	N	A	I	L	C	O	D	E	D		
C	U	R	L	I	A	L	O	N	E		
H	I	P	S		B	E	N	D	S		

CRYPTOQUOTE 9-24

PFWFE TSMVVR; QT HUN KU, HUN'II
 PFWFE ZFV NO QP VBF YUEPQPZ.

-- YESEIU VBUYSR

Yesterday's CRYPTOQUOTE: SOMETIMES WHEN YOU INNOVATE, YOU MAKE MISTAKES. IT IS BEST TO ADMIT THEM QUICKLY, AND GET ON WITH IMPROVING YOUR OTHER INNOVATIONS.

-- STEVE JOBS

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker

THANKS FOR VOLUNTEERING, BEETLE.

WHY DID ALL OF YOU TAKE A STEP BACKWARDS?

HENRY by Don Trachte

A XYDLBAXR is LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker

HENRY by Don Trachte