

A long overdue UN resolution

Myanmar should grant citizenship to Rohingyas

IN a much-awaited move, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution on Monday urging Myanmar to grant citizenship to its Rohingya Muslim minority including equal access to services with other citizens of the country. We welcome this development wholeheartedly because Bangladesh has been at the receiving end of the repercussions of the ethnic conflict in the Rakhine state in the shape of Rohingyas fleeing their hearths and homes seeking refuge in Bangladesh. From time to time Bangladesh in the past had to bear the brunt of the influxes and there is a large residue left to be repatriated, an issue that is under negotiation with the Myanmar government.

We, for our part, have been urging the Myanmar government to accord citizenship rights to Rohingyas; in fact, we have been emphasising to the international community that it intercede in the matter.

However, we note that the UN resolution welcomes "continued positive developments in Myanmar toward reform and in that light we are hopeful that Myanmar will address the citizenship issue of the Rohingyas without attaching the condition that they will have to identify themselves as 'Bengali.'" It is important to note that the European Union drafted the resolution which was adopted by consensus, thus reflecting the urgency and earnestness of the world body to end the statelessness of Rohingyas in Rakhine state of Myanmar.

Violence against women

When will we say enough is enough?

A report by renowned women's rights organisation, Bangladesh Mahila Parishad, states that more than 4,500 women and children were subjected to murder, rape, acid attack, physical torture, suicide and other forms of violence against women in the country last year alone. At least 939 women were raped, of whom 174 were gang-raped and 99 killed, while 431 women were tortured and 236 women killed because of dowry.

The statistics are extremely alarming, especially when we consider that they constitute only a fraction of the total number of incidents of violence against women which were reported in 13 major Bangla and English newspapers. We know that an overwhelming majority of cases are never reported to the police because of complex factors including lack of access to justice, insensitive state institutions and patriarchal social norms that insist on blaming victims.

It goes without saying that all women and girls have the right to live free of violence. A state and society that is unable to respect women and children, provide due security and ensure justice cannot claim to be civilised, democratic or inclusive. If we are to effectively address gender-based violence, we need to undertake a multi-faceted approach that not only seeks to sensitise state institutions, institute and implement progressive laws and secure justice, but also works to change embedded patriarchal norms that devalue, disrespect and dehumanise women.

Gender-based violence is not a women only issue, but one that involves us all. Change must begin at home, and the fight for establishing a gender-just society replicated at all spheres of society.

This is 'Monkey Business'!

ABDUL MATIN

SINCE 1926, at least three films, one TV series, one musical, one band, one album and about half a dozen songs, including one by Michael Jackson, were named Monkey Business. Now we are watching a live comedy which some may call 'Monkey Business!' It casts President Barack Obama and North Korean leader Kim Jong-Un as the main characters, though acting in the background!

The show unfolded with the release of a comedy, The Interview, made by Sony Pictures Entertainment. It shows a fictional attempt to assassinate Kim. This infuriated North Korea. A cyber attack soon knocked out thousands of Sony's computers. The hackers threatened US cinema chains not to show the comedy. They obliged. An FBI investigation revealed North Korea's involvement in the hacking. North Korea denied the allegations. Obama vowed to respond. North Korea threatened to attack US landmarks after claiming that the US government had been behind the controversial movie.

The internet in North Korea was disrupted. Sony released the comedy for public view during Christmas. North Korea called President Barack Obama "a monkey" and blamed the US for shutting down its internet. Washington denied the allegations. It may be mentioned that North Korea often uses undiplomatic language against US leaders. Earlier this year, they called US Secretary of State John Kerry a wolf. In May, their news agency published a dispatch saying Obama has the "shape of a monkey." Washington condemned the comments as "ugly and disrespectful."

The movie thus turned into a live comedy! How will it end? This is anybody's guess but some US cyber security experts gave some interesting clues. They suggest that the findings of the FBI accusing North Korea for the hacking of Sony's computers could be flawed. According to them, the arguments put forward by the FBI in support of their claim are not conclusive. It is also suspected that a Sony insider might have helped the hackers.

North Korea is yet to react to this new revelation but this must be what they have been waiting for. Nobody should be surprised if they say: "Aha! Now it is crystal clear. Knowing that nobody would watch this stupid film, Sony's CEO Michael Lynton staged a drama in collusion with his friend Barack Obama. This is nothing but a publicity stunt. How else could this filthy comedy become the number one online movie ever released and make \$15 million in just four days? Obama saved Michael from bankruptcy. Surely, a grateful Michael will reciprocate. Will he make a fat contribution to his friend's party fund? This will be the finale of the 'Monkey Business' comedy! Ha ha ha!"

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

Disowning errant cops

STRAIGHT LINE



MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

THE new Inspector General of Police, A.K.M. Shahidul Haque has said that he will disown offending policemen and would pursue a zero tolerance policy towards criminal offences by deviant policemen. He added that disowned policemen will face legal action.

While erring lawmen should not deserve any quarter, it would be proper to recognise that maintenance of law and order has increasingly been rendered more difficult and the balance of power within our society has turned precariously against the forces of peace. Additionally, the policy makers do not agree as to what is actually expected or wanted from police agency. There is a wide chasm between the ideal and the reality, and the image of the police is tarnished consequently.

It is felt that legislative and administrative firmness and consequent social control in the form of approval or disapproval of police action can motivate the police to become just, fair and law abiding.

Despite warnings from authoritative quarters, some enforcers of law have violated the law without understanding that in the process they have bred contempt for law. The question is: Are lawless police officers in demand in areas affected by crime and disorder? Are believers in the rule of law and followers of straight legal methods considered to be "softies" and adjudged unfit? Are the public primarily interested in short-term spectacular results that are often illusory? Is there a pernicious double standard in law-enforcement?

The people in Bangladesh understandably do not want their police to resort to third degree methods; nor do they expect their lawmen to shoot people dead in questionable encounters. As in every democratic society our citizens expect our police to operate under the constraints of the rule of law and within the bounds of civilised conduct.

Coming to countervailing measures, the first remedy, according to a considered view, is to substantially do away with the lackadaisical attitude of senior police officers resulting in slackness and looseness in supervision. When serious transgression of law by police is suspected upon

prima-facial evidence, such officers should lose no time in registering and investigating criminal cases. Delay in taking desirable action should be adjudged as supervisory negligence. Swift action would calm public fears and will act as effective deterrent to potential errant officials.

A significant facet of enforcement deficit relates to police inaction quite often remaining unnoticed and the defaulting officials going scot-free. The scenario is one of policemen not taking initiative in dealing with situations. Therefore, inaction must be met by severe punishment as that aberration is becoming a disturbing part of contemporary police culture.

The executive organs of the state, including the police, cannot afford to claim any immunity from wholesome criticism of their actions by members of the public with a view to ensuring administrative efficiency, justice and social defence. The police have to remember that "whoever occupies a public position must accept an attack as a necessary, though unpleasant appendage to his office." They have to respond positively to their critics.

With respect to torture in police custody, the medical officers should be objective and forthright in saying that injuries on the body of the suspect were deliberate and not caused by an accidental fall as may be the case. Further, the burden of proof may need re-examination so that lawmen do not use their authority and opportunities for oppressing innocent citizens.

In situations of physical torture by police that is palpably illegal, the lawmen, particularly the supervising complement, must not remain bound by ties of brotherhood and remain silent. Instead, they should volunteer to speak the truth and not prevent the same from coming out in the open. There must not be any misplaced sympathy for the delinquent official or efforts to save him in devious ways.

As far as remand to police custody is concerned, it is worth noting that the extreme recommendation of denial of such remand would mean a denial of opportunity to complete the investigation. However, to control and reduce the misuse of remand, the lawmen need to be empowered with scientific investigation and the opportunity to examine the suspect in jail custody. The investigator has to proceed from the evidence to the accused and not from accused to evidence.

It is felt that legislative and administrative firmness and consequent social control in the form of approval or disapproval of police action can motivate the police to become just, fair and law abiding. If the society firmly refuses to condone lawmen's unfair and illegal methods, the transgressions of the law by law enforcement official would gradually and satisfactorily diminish to the relief of public. A topical issue would be the desirable autonomy of police function of investigation and prosecution.

The writer is a columnist of The Daily Star.

Crackdown in Pakistan: Is it a mock show?

ZIAUDDIN CHOUDHURY

PAKISTAN authorities seem to have decided that enough is enough, and it is time to weed out the extremists that have been running a reign of terror so long in its North West corner. The government and its powerful army have drawn a twenty-point programme to stop the cancer of extremism and religious militancy that in last ten years claimed more than fifty thousand people, the last being the most senseless and mindless killing of one hundred fifty children. The steps include creating a paramilitary force to combat the extremists, capital punishment of persons charged with extremist violence, and monitoring and regulating funding sources of the religious institutions. We can only hope that this resolve of Pakistan is for real, and it will not go the way of past such resolves of Pakistan authorities that were more known for the rhetoric than for real action.

One wishes that this will to eradicate the evil that has spawned over the last two decades had descended on Pakistan years ago. This would have saved the country thousands of lives, endless amount of financial resources, and above all the image as an intolerant and bigoted society. Unfortunately, it was not to be so; because the powers that are today declaring war on the militants are the same who had once nurtured them and helped grow the monsters they are today.



Birth of the religious extremists or the jihadists (as they call themselves) in Pakistan is no accident. This was by design, with direct help of the powers that be in Pakistan, in particular the army that had always been the king maker of the country. The midwife of religious extremism was General Ziaul Huq, the army general who commandeered his way to presidency and later became the rallying point of the West to wage war against Soviet aggression in Afghanistan. He adroitly used the Western powers' reliance on him to wage this war with locally recruited guerilla forces, motivating them with Islamic zeal to fight a communist regime. With abundant resources showered on him by the West, Ziaul Huq, himself a firebrand Islamist, created seminaries all over the country that would turn out to be recruitment centres of religious militants who would initially fight the soviets as Mujahids (freedom fighters) but later form the seed for the Taliban forces. The Taliban of Afghanistan were the brain child of Pakistan's formidable army intelligence, who ironically would later also have a fraternity in Pakistan imbued with similar ideals.

Taliban-Pakistan army axis would have gone on merrily had it not been for the tragedy of September 11 that exposed the Taliban's shelter to the main perpetrators of the tragedy. Pakistan authorities had to renounce their liaison with the Taliban under duress and helped support US war in

Afghanistan to topple them. But in the change of guards, the Taliban simply blended and scattered all over, including slipping into Pakistan where they joined hands with their fellow sympathisers and blood brothers. Although this happened primarily in the territory adjoining Afghanistan, their ideological supporters were spread out all over Pakistan. And these supporters would also be within the army and its powerful intelligence branch.

Two powerful examples of such support were the fire-brand imam of Islamabad Lal Masjid, Abdul Aziz, and the leader of Pakistan Taliban Fazlullah. Abdul Aziz, who was a protégé of General Ziaul Huq, preached his bigoted religious philosophy and intolerance day after day for decades, vowing to establish his brand of religious ideals in the country defying the government. He trained his students inside the mosque in handling small arms, and at one stage turned the mosque into a fort when police tried to stop the militant students from attacking them. The mosque would later turn into a battle ground, leading to the deaths of many civilians. The fortress of extremist militants that grew under the nose of Pakistan's powerful military intelligence was broken for the time being, but its main leader Abdul Aziz continued to roam free later and preach his violent philosophy.

Fazlullah, a self-declared leader of Pakistani Taliban, similarly grew his forces under the very eyes of Pakistani authorities. With the support of more than 4,500 militants, by late October 2007 Fazlullah had established a "parallel government" in 59 villages in Swat Valley by starting Islamic courts to enforce sharia. For nearly a year he ruled without any nudge from the central authorities. The Pakistan authorities acted only after goading from the US and Fazlullah had fled the area. But he continued his recruitment mission of diehard suicide bombers who would wreak havoc in various parts of Pakistan. The latest carnage in Peshawar that took lives of 150 innocent school children was also reportedly masterminded by him.

There are many other such militant leaders who are heading one or the other faction of Pakistan Taliban, including Baitullah Meshud, the self-declared ruler of South Waziristan (reportedly killed recently by US drone attack), Samiul Huq (spiritual guide of Meshud), Sheikh Haqqani (Deputy Leader of Tehrik-e-Taliban), etc., who continue to operate in Pakistan. They have been able to operate and guide their forces under the nose of Pakistan authorities either because the authorities have never shown any seriousness to apprehend them or they connive at their presence. This is also largely because the king makers of Pakistan who created the Frankenstein of religious zealots to start with used them as pawns in the past to change power play in Pakistan suiting their objectives. That is why, even though the so-called war against terrorism began in Pakistan more than a decade ago, it never succeeded in weeding out the extremists from the soil of the country.

There may be a lot of skepticism about this latest phase of war against religious extremism in Pakistan, but one thing is certain; a second failure will not only pave the way for greater uncertainty about stability of Pakistan, but also peace in the sub-continent. What is spawned in Pakistan can affect and will affect the rest of the region. It is in the interest of us all in the region that this time Pakistan means serious business and the country's establishment, including the powerful military, bring this evil to an end.

The writer is a political analyst and commentator.

LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR

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Sir Frank Peters, lone crusader against corporal punishment in schools

I'm finding it difficult to find words to express my sincerest thanks both as a mother and well-wisher to Sir Frank Peters for his relentless efforts to eliminate corporal punishment in Bangladeshi schools. I have followed his anti corporal punishment campaign efforts since it began, but had no faith whatsoever in it ever being successful. When the law banning corporal punishment in schools was introduced, I was hopeful, but the beatings in the classroom continued for one of my children, although he attended a 'good' school. My husband and I both complained to the Headmaster and teacher, but they were set in their ways and reporting the lawbreakers to the police seemed pointless.

Both of my boys hated school. It was like daily punishment for them, with or without corporal punishment, and it showed in their exam results. One was so distressed he used to wet his bed the night before school holidays ended. His unhappiness tore my heart out.

A new progressive Headmaster arrived at the school this year who went to the senior classrooms, opened a general discussion on corporal punishment, read parts of a newspaper report written by Sir Frank and asked if they agreed and solicited their opinions. He then told the teachers never to use corporal punishment again.

May Allah award Sir Frank Peters immeasurably for his persistence to benefit Bangladesh.

Ferdous Imam and family
Mirpur 1, Dhaka

"Hail to the garment workers"

I refer to the above titled letter published in your daily on December 23. The writer has well recognised the hard work and dedication of the female workers of our garment industry.

Our garment workers really work hard and play an important role in the growth of our economy. They should get recognition for their matchless contribution to our garment industry. If they get our respect and recognition, they will be motivated and their overall performance will be even better. Thanks to those who really care about them and try to improve the quality of their lives.

Zubair Khan
India

We want true democracy

People of Bangladesh want a healthy political environment where true democracy will be practiced. We do not want to see bloodshed or violence anymore. My request to the Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and the opposition leader Khaleda Zia, please do not play bloody games with innocent people. Please ensure a good political environment in the country.

Mostafizur Rahman Dalim
BBA, IJUC

Comments on post editorial, "Was Dhaka University ever the "Oxford of the East"?" published on December 28, 2014

Mahtab Uddin

Given the context of Bangladesh, a moderate poor LDC, how do you even expect that Dhaka University can be compared to Oxford! Do you have any idea how much fund Oxford gets for its research? How much are their teachers paid? Do you have any idea how much we pay the teachers of Dhaka University? Despite limitations, very low salaries, there are so many departments with sufficient number of teachers having PhD from reputed universities. Yes, we know it is called Oxford of the East. And yes, those who used to call this knew that DU was not Oxford...

Mahbub Rahman

Dhaka University was never comparable to Oxford despite having some very good teachers and a common belief.

Saleh Tanveer

Let's forget the Oxford comparison. In the pre-independence days, we Bengalis proudly proclaimed that our standards were much superior than that in what is now Pakistan. This is certainly not the case anymore, not at least when it comes to the top flagship institutions.

Almost all our politicians saw their ascent into national limelight with little education and certainly with almost no appreciation for excellence in higher education. Should it be surprising that they should have a vested interest in ensuring mediocrity that will maintain a flow of semi-educated underlings armed only with political loyalty?

Chowdhury Saheb

Bitter truth about my alma mater...

Dev Saha

Good to see a myth busting snippet from Taj Hashmi. It used to be a quality university before the partition but we should not gloat about the university being the "Oxford of the East".

"What good intent?" (Dec. 30, 2014)

New Generation

Though the reason behind the "good intent" is unpredictable, it may not be out of place to say that maybe the authorities concerned were trying to find out whether there was any "conspiracy" by the opposition.