

## Open fire on traders! Why such an extreme measure?

At least 15 traders were injured and eight were shot with shotgun pellets when the police opened fire and charged batons on them during a mobile court drive inside Banani Super Market on Thursday. The police opened fire following the order of a magistrate as a squabble broke out between the traders and the police, when the former allegedly questioned the drive and the fines imposed on them by the magistrate.

Even though the magistrate claims that shots were fired in the air, a photo published in *The Daily Star* clearly shows bullet injuries on a trader; his back was scarred with more than 100 pellets. According to the magistrate, however, the marks may have resulted from shots fired in the air which then fell on the trader's back! As to how more than 100 pellets could have plummeted from the air on one person is difficult to comprehend.

Reportedly the magistrates and police went there to evict illegally erected structures, but surely there is due process for such evictions. Why would a mobile court drive lead to such chaos that shots have to be fired on unarmed traders?

We have long been witnessing a high disregard for human lives from our law enforcers; that a magistrate, too, would show such insensitivity takes us by surprise. Our authorities need to refrain from taking such harsh measures in violation of civic rights and established rules for opening firing.

A probe should be conducted to determine who overstepped the boundaries. Those in charge of law enforcement carry a greater onus as high-handedness on their part tends to diminish confidence in rule of law.

## Urban children growing obese Malnutrition also on the rise

As per a survey published by the ICDDR,B 14 percent of urban children are overweight and a further 4 percent are obese. The survey on 'Obesity prevalence and adolescence in urban areas in Bangladesh' covered seven city corporations and the results are anything but comforting. Given the less than active life today's children experience in the concrete jungles that our cities have become, it is not altogether surprising to find obesity on the rise. What is surprising is that the quality of food intake by children between the ages of 5 and 18 years is anything but nutritious. The culture of fast food making inroads into regular diets of children; the lack of proper supervision by parents on what their children are eating combine to give rise to a very unhealthy situation.

Children's diets include items that are rich in sugar along with deep-fried foods like burgers and fried chicken. Health practitioners and nutritionists are equally concerned on the long term health implications this new trend represents. It is imperative that authorities take into account the huge expenditure that is bound to be incurred if we ignore the need for urban children to lead a more physically active life -- one that is however not possible today due to the lack of open public places. For policymakers, the chief concern is that entire generations of children are growing up consuming very unhealthy foods. This will lead to various illnesses associated with obesity, which in turn will have major ramifications for public healthcare in the near future.

# Obama's Drone War: Indiscriminate Killing and Selective Apology

STRANGER  
THAN  
FICTION



TAJ HASHMI

ingly selective.

The White House theatrical on April 23 was all about apologising for the accidental deaths of two Western hostages, American Warren Weinstein, and Italian Giovanni Le Porto. Obama mourned the tragic deaths as a "father and husband", and empathised with the relatives and friends of the victims. He didn't even bother to mention U.S. drones had killed several thousand Non-Western civilians (more than a thousand children in Pakistan alone) since 2004, let alone apologise for the deaths of innocent Pakistanis, Afghans, Somalis and Yemenis.

I wish Obama regretted, apologised, and mourned the deaths of thousands of non-Western victims of U.S. drone attacks, duly compensated the family members of the dead, and the severely maimed victims in Pakistan and elsewhere. Distressingly, Obama's only regret was U.S. drone attackers didn't know the presence of Weinstein and Le Porto at the al Qaeda camp in the first place. His regret implies, had the attackers been aware of Weinstein's and Le Porto's presence at the camp, they would have definitely called a halt to the attack. Conversely, there's altogether a different strategy for U.S. drone attacks. The attackers don't bother to know if there are innocent Pakistani, Afghan or Yemeni women, children and elderly in and around their targets.

The atrociously indiscriminate drone attacks, which amount to war crime from any definition of the expression, and Obama's appallingly selective apology reaffirm certain established facts. Firstly, it's obvious from the nature of the selective apology from the Nobel Laureate (in Peace) President that Washington not only considers some lives more important than others, but it also categorizes Western casualties of friendly fire as "innocent victims", while non-Western victims of such attacks are considered integral to the ubiquitous "collateral damage". "Collateral Damage" is again a repulsive expression. It dehumanises helpless human victims of American invasions in the Third World.

Secondly, Obama didn't mention that drone attacks violate international law; are grossly inhumane; imprecise; indiscriminate; and amount to extra-judicial killing of suspects, state-sponsored terrorism and war crime. Thirdly, he did not promise his administration would prohibit using

drones as weapons in the foreseeable future. He was rather upbeat about the rich dividends drones bring to America.

Although assassination as a method of Counterterrorism or CT operation is controversial, it appears to be an effective tool in CIA's Best Practices Manual. Despite Wikileaks' release of CIA's secret High Value Targeting (HVT) Operations Manual last year -- which hinges on assassination -- CIA has continued using drones in assassinating terrorists and suspects with impunity; its latest attack took place on April 12 this year. The U.S. Administration simply ignores the fact that only around 12 percent of drone attack victims are known militants.

American "Exceptionalism" being the determining factor in formulating U.S. foreign policy, which is mostly about its trumped up threat perception (at times America projects tiny Venezuela or distant Iran as a security threat), justifies drone attacks to kill a handful of terrorists and suspects, and thousands of innocent civilians with impunity, without any regret and remorse. The logic of American "Exceptionalism" justifies invasions of countries, violations of their sovereignty,

tional law, killing of innocent human beings, and even extra-judicial killing of known terrorists and criminals mostly backfire.

Americans should know their country can't enjoy the immunity from global reprehension, hate and retribution for killing innocent people and invading countries in the names of democracy, freedom and War on Terror. It's time for the Americans to realise that their country's double standards in the realms of diplomacy and warfare annoy, anger, agitate and humiliate people across the world. And as Evelin Lindner has pointed out: "Men such as Osama bin Laden would never have followers if there were no victims of humiliation in many parts of the world".

It's heartening that the Obama Administration has taken some bold steps in normalising relations with Cuba and Iran. It has recently punished those Blackwater gunmen who unjustly killed several Iraqi nationals in 2007. Better late than never! However, America's turning a blind eye to Saudi Arabia's illegitimate bombing of Yemen; the Saudi military intervention into Bahrain to crush the majority Shiite upsurge against the minority Sunni autocracy in March 2011; and last but not least, Obama's support for the illegal drone attacks in Pakistan and elsewhere reflect America's double standards and love for gunboat diplomacy.

We know drone attacks are not only ineffective in the long run, but are also counterproductive; they multiply the number of terrorists from among the surviving family members and friends of dead victims. It's time to reckon that all lives are equally important, some are not more precious than others. As Western nations deserve apology and compensations from America for killing their citizens in "friendly fires", Pakistanis and others also deserve similar treatment, and above all, an end to killing of their citizens by drones, bombs and death squads under any pretexts or excuses. Obama should waste no time to restore order in the home front, and make peace abroad by containing the overpowering Military Industrial Lobby. Selective public apologies to some people for involuntary killing by America, and its unabashed killing of Non-Western civilians at the same time, won't do any good to anybody.

It's time that Americans realize neither Afghanistan nor Pakistan poses any military threat to their country. Hence the futility of the drone attacks, which kill innocent civilians, and a handful of terrorists. These indiscriminate and illegitimate attacks simply alienate Muslims from America, and its phony War on Terror, especially in Muslim-majority countries which have been under American drone attacks, almost on a regular basis. Drone attacks are ineffective weapons against terrorism. They create more terrorists than they manage to kill anywhere. In sum, Obama's selective apology for the accidental deaths of two Western hostages in Pakistan is extremely insensitive, offensive and counterproductive to peace between America and the Muslim World.

The writer teaches security studies at Austin Peay State University at Clarksville, Tennessee. Sage has recently published his latest book, *Global Jihad and America: The Hundred-Year War Beyond Iraq and Afghanistan*.

*While American drones have so far killed thousands of innocent civilians and a handful of terrorists since 2004, the apology was disappointingly selective.*

changing regimes in various continents, torture, and assassinations. This lopsided logic does not care if the line between atrocious acts and war crime is very thin or non-existent.

In the backdrop of Obama's continued support for drone attacks that kill innocent people, and violate international law and sovereignty of countries not at war with America -- such as Pakistan, Afghanistan and Yemen -- it's quite puzzling as to what a U.S. President meant by his adherence to peace and promise to "Change". As a former attorney and legal expert he knows it well that killing of one innocent civilian -- when it should have been avoided -- amounts to committing war crime. The world never expected him to behave like another George W. Bush or another Machiavellian.

He should have realised by now that the Machiavellian dictum, "End justifies means" does not work. His immediate predecessor proved it at least twice, in Iraq and Afghanistan. Violations of interna-

## WORLD PRESS FREEDOM DAY

# Journalism can thrive in a digital world!

PAULINE TAMESIS

THE theme of this year's World Press Freedom Day, Journalism thrives! Towards better reporting, gender equality and media safety in the digital age outlines a few of the issues related to the role of contemporary journalists and media in our societies.

It recognises good journalism with high editorial standards reflecting a diverse range of voices and enjoying strong legal protection as an indispensable part of an open democracy. It does so whilst also alluding to the challenges facing the sector today even though digitalisation offers unprecedented opportunities for freedom of speech.

Exploiting the potential of digitalisation to transform society and the economy are key policy objectives of the Government of Bangladesh. Through its digital Bangladesh agenda, the government is working to increase access for communities to crucial new tools, information and services. With better access to government information and services, citizens and the state can potentially revolutionise how they interact and communicate with each other.

Bangladesh's national digital portal that currently aggregates data from 25,000 national and local government offices receives millions of hits a week and is helping bring public services closer to communities. Detailed instructions, explanations of customer rights and an opportunity to submit complaints related to 400 critical government services from land issues to safety nets and agriculture are all now easily accessible because of digital technology.

There are over 5,000 digital centres across all local government institutions to ensure universal access to these services including the poor. Over four million citizens access vital information monthly through these centres. The potential to expand accountability by increasingly embracing the right to information in departments combined with these digital windows and physical access points is unprecedented.

Together with the Prime Minister's Office the a2i programme supported by UNDP and USAID is continuing to invest in the future of these services which have cut waiting times and the costs of accessing government services by up to 90 percent in some service areas. Whilst the government is seeing



increasing successes in its digital policies, how best to ensure journalists and media continue to thrive in these digital spaces is a crucial question. Whilst digital offers exciting prospects it is important to recognise that realising a vision of a healthy digital environment requires a balance of credible actors developing in these spaces with diverse sets of critical voices and tools reflecting the diversity of society.

Digitalisation offers revolutionising tools to the journalism and news businesses and can encourage media producers to innovate opening up new opportunities for journalists to explore the world we live in and build new relationships with audiences. These have the potential to create exciting new initiatives empowering audiences and linking societies together in novel ways.

Creative and vibrant journalism, whether off or online, however, requires an equally vibrant media environment and the past year has seen some serious challenges to this space. Globally in 2014 a total of 118 media professionals were killed reporting news stories according to the International Federation of Journalists. A further 221 of their colleagues were imprisoned and many more were forced into exile, threatened or physically assaulted.

Here in Bangladesh no single event encapsulates the challenge of violence against freedom of speech more than the tragic murders of two bloggers in separate incidents in 2015. Whilst these attacks have quite rightly encouraged a discussion on freedom of expression and speech it is equally important to recognise that these incidents happen within the context of the wider environment.

In the past year Bangladesh's position has declined one place to 146 out of 180 countries listed in the press freedom index of Reporters Without Frontiers. We have witnessed incidents of harassment and intimidation of journalists recently, including of a woman journalist in Dhaka in March, and we have seen general pressures rise on the mass media as the first part of this year witnessed an escalation of political violence.

An early draft of a broadcasting policy too added to the general lack of consensus around how to improve the conditions for journalists and the media.

Given this backdrop for digital Bangladesh to fully exploit the potential of the digital revolution it is essential media is able to share this digital world and an enabling environment framed in forward looking policies has a key role in shaping this relationship.

It is perhaps here policymakers can

send out the strongest message regarding ambitions for the digital media of the future. A policy to encourage quality and independent journalism in both analogue and digital worlds in a secure environment will set a benchmark for media professionals and send a clear message to those that threaten freedom of speech in the media.

Lessons from around the world suggest when a legislative environment is strongly framed in freedom of speech protection media professionals are more creative and produce better journalism and they are able to contribute more to a society.

Regardless of whether this is writing for a local newspaper, on television or radio or online, good journalism requires journalists to seek stories in the real world, and if the legal framework defends freedom of speech and provides a safe, diverse and free environment for reporting, then the journalism that results is nearly always better.

A modern broadcasting framework highlighting freedoms rather than restrictions is a starting point and can be a strong statement of intent by stakeholders to continue to build a quality media sector.

The writer is Country Director of the United Nations Development Programme.

## COMMENTS

**"Morning promised good day for BNP"**  
(April 30, 2015)

Dev Saha

We shouldn't support this massive fraud that we just witnessed.

**"City polls free, fair: Claims PM, criticises media coverage"** (April 30, 2015)

Yves Marre

Congratulations to the new mayors. I thank them for taking up the enormous task of managing the incredible challenges to improve the quality of life in this huge and fast growing metropolis. I wish them all successes.

Barkat

If people had the freedom of choice, they will throw you out of Bangladesh for sure.

**"City election: Things we have lost"**  
(April 30, 2015)

M. Ashraf

Were we expecting anything less from this government? Rigging, corruption, and incarceration of the members of opposition parties-- the country is run like Germany in the mid 1930's.

**"See no evil, hear no evil. ...."**  
(April 30, 2015)

MAS Molla

Parrotting the words of government, the EC proves its unworthiness.

Salim Ullah

We have no words to pour out our condemnation for the utter failure of CEC in conducting a free and fair election. It has created another bad example for the EC and an undesirable hindrance on the way of our democracy.