

An unrepentant Jamaat

Offer apology to the nation

THE Supreme Court has upheld the death penalty awarded to Matiur Rahman Nizami by International Crimes Tribunal-1 in 2014. The verdicts of the courts are based on evidence but Jamaat's reaction to it is reprehensible and unacceptable. By calling a hartal to protest the death sentence, Jamaat is, in fact, choosing to stand by its heinous role, of that of the local collaborator of the Pakistani killing machine, during the Liberation War. That the party has demonstrated its opposition to the ruling of the highest court of the land in itself amounts to contempt of court.

Nizami's role as the chief of Al-Badr, the notorious militia that has the blood of hundreds of Bengalis including prominent teachers, intellectuals and scholars on its hands, has been proven in the highest court of the land. It is, therefore, only appropriate that Jamaat accepts the verdict and offers a genuine apology to the nation for its atrocious war crimes in 1971.

The long arm of the law has finally reached Nizami. It is high time the party reconciled with the truth and accepted responsibility for what it had done in 1971. The trials of war criminals open the window to heal wounds that have been festering for the last forty-four years and offer an opportunity to move forward accepting the basic tenets on which the War of Liberation was fought -- the fundamental principles and values on which this nation is built.

The sooner Jamaat comes to terms with this fact the better for them, and the country.

Rail travel time to reduce

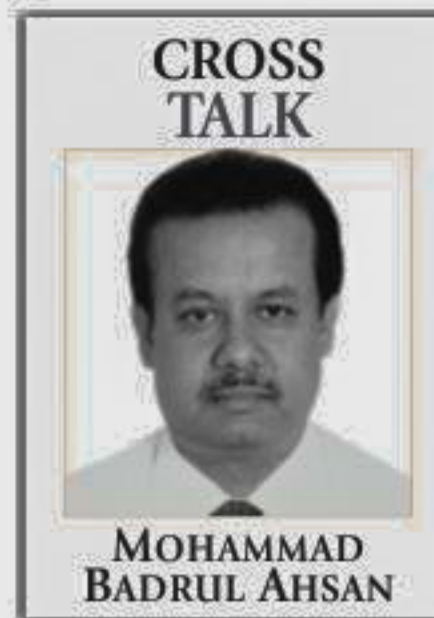
Now work on bettering service

WE are happy to note that Bangladesh Railway has introduced double tracks on another long stretch of Dhaka-Chittagong route which will reduce travel time between the two cities by more than two hours. Chittagong is the second largest city in the country and a major hub of both trade and tourism and the upgrading of this very important route is welcome news. We hope the remaining of the tracks would be double-tracked soon. This, we are sure, will attract more people to use the rail service and reduce the pressure on the highways.

That the railway is finally being prioritised that can service hundreds of passengers and a huge volume of goods faster is good news for commuters and businessmen. And while we applaud the government's efforts to better the railway infrastructure, it is hoped that improvements of the railway is not limited to better infrastructure only. The service has been plagued by unsatisfactory timekeeping, decrepit carriages, and a poor safety record. Needless to say, these factors have kept the railway off as the first choice for travelling long distances. With trains now able to ply simultaneously between the capital city and Chittagong, it is time for the concerned ministry to look into making railway more efficient.

Railway, in other countries in the region, plays a pivotal role in moving bulk goods. As Chittagong is also the largest port of the country, we would expect the necessary financial allocations to make use of appropriate technology in upgrading the signalling system, appointing requisite linesmen at crucial junctions and an overall improvement in the quality of service to support the newly expanded service.

Taking self shots in front of foreign mirrors



CROSS TALK

MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

IN his farewell address in 1796, the first US president George Washington warned against the influence of attachment of one nation for another. Needless to say, he saw it negatively because, amongst many other reasons, he feared that it could give to ambitious, corrupt, or deluded citizens the opportunity to betray or sacrifice the interests of their own country. It's another story that Washington didn't live to see his own country ignore his words. It's using influence to demand attachment from the rest of the world.

We as a nation exist on the other extreme of the spectrum. Excessive liking for all things foreign inspires that attachment in us like pellets attracted to magnets. Our love of foreign education, foreign passport, foreign homes, and foreign recognitions are at an all-time high. This high is comparable to those big budget Indian movies, which have got Indian plots, characters and music but are shot in foreign locations. Anything that causes anyone to release a sudden flood of feelings is cathartic. The viewers of Indian movies regularly have that experience when they get to satisfy their wanderlust on movie screens. A great deal about us is inversely comparable to that absurd filmisation. The places look familiar but people and their performances are strikingly alien.

For us that catharsis goes deeper. It must

be said before we delve into that discussion that many of our vital interests have foreign connections. Our two largest national revenue sources, garments and manpower, are tied to foreign markets. Many of our politicians and intellectuals are rumoured to have foreign allegiance. Our children aspire to study in foreign schools. Many of our affluent adults are obsessed with "second" homes.

Other things also have global reach with local roots. Health is one area where life is lived in this country but death is died overseas; obituaries show prominent Bangladeshis are dying in foreign hospitals at an increasing rate. Marriages solemnised at home are consummated abroad. Destination weddings are mixing vows with vacations. Holidaying is an equally big thing when those who toil in this country like to relax on foreign soil. We shop till we drop in foreign malls. Movies, music and television serials bring international titillations to national sensibilities. Nothing short of foreign terrorists could ever get us worried.

If people in other countries are in two minds, we are actually in three. We are consciously tribal, subconsciously national and unconsciously international. The concoction of all three levels gives us a deflected mental condition in which we hesitate to take everything but ourselves seriously. The easy way out for many of us is foreign association. We either readily recognise anything foreign or summarily seek some kind of foreign recognition.

What underlies the Indian predilection for movie sets in foreign destinations is the business sense to attract more audience. Breathtaking images of

mesmerising landscapes and tantalising cityscapes provide instant visual gratification. For many Indians it also must be an act of patriotic sublimation. They surely wish their country were just as picturesque.

It doesn't mean the Indian xenophilia is confined only to the camera frame. India also has foreign trade, diplomatic relations, migration, studies abroad, and a big enough Indian Diaspora to populate a country of its own. Bollywood imitates Hollywood and television shows are western adaptations, while home decoration, lifestyle, attires and eating habits are geared to foreign tastes.

In our catharsis, we are different from the Indians like cowboys are distinguished from rednecks in this famous American joke. It says that while both groups raise cattle, the rednecks get emotionally attached to their cattle. Indians spice up their lives with foreign elements. We don't find interest in life unless it's spiced up with foreign elements. Indians define everything foreign in their context. We define everything ours in the foreign context.

Ample evidence of it is flaunted on our billboards and walls and in newspapers where recipients and their supporters publicise it every time they win foreign awards. Some banks, which cannot satisfy their customers at home, hoist their awards on foreign stages. Some politicians, who are questionable to their own people, win trophies in international forums. Businessmen bag awards, activists acquire them, professionals procure them, and academics attain them. A nation turned inside out, as if nothing is authentic

unless it has the foreign stamp.

It's now suspected that many of these awards could be dubious and some of these could be even bought for money. And that's all the more reason why it has an irony to it. Those who are proud of getting foreign credentials never bother to know if their countrymen are proud of them.

If people in other countries are in two minds, we are actually in three. We are consciously tribal, subconsciously national and unconsciously international.

All things local - institutions, identifications and inspirations - are losing relevance. Our minds working like cameras are obsessed with taking self shots, but not so before standing in front of foreign mirrors.

The writer is the editor of the weekly *First News* and an opinion writer for *The Daily Star*.
Email: badrul141@yahoo.com

The case for freedom of expression

HEMAYET UDDIN

THE recent gruesome killings and attack of young bloggers, and the murder of a publisher by unknown assailants last year, allegedly recruits of religious extremists, fanatics and bigots, had shocked and angered the nation. These attacks and murders are a blatant attack on free thinking, free expression and on democracy itself and call for stern action by law enforcing agencies to apprehend and bring the assailants to justice and to root out the operating hideouts of the perpetrators.

It is intriguing to see bloggers being targeted by the extremists. I myself have never read any material of the bloggers but I would only imagine that some of their writings could possibly have been an opinion or interpretation on religious related matters that must have gone beyond the tolerance level of the bigots. I do not also believe that anything that may have been written were offensive to Islam as it would have created public outrage. If an individual should feel aggrieved over an opinion, verbal or written, there are legal provisions for the aggrieved to seek redress. No one has the right to take away another person's life for whatever reasons.

With the advent of the 21st century, we are confronted with a new form of vicious terrorism that is manifested in the name of religious extremism, intolerance and hatred. Religious extremism has emerged as a major issue of international concern. The perpetrators are vicious and without mercy in their bid to fulfill their agenda.

Military action and diplomatic initiatives involving the most powerful nations have made very little headway so far. The foot soldiers are recruited from young frustrated youths who are trained to be highly motivated in being intolerant to anything other than what they are taught to believe, and to carry out their killing mission without remorse or fear of the consequences.

This being the case, it is perhaps necessary to take a serious look at the concept of freedom of expression; whether it should be absolute or whether limits should be imposed when free speech can provoke violence. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights

together with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) has provided guidelines on responsible use of freedom of expression. Article 19(2) of the ICCPR states: *Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in*

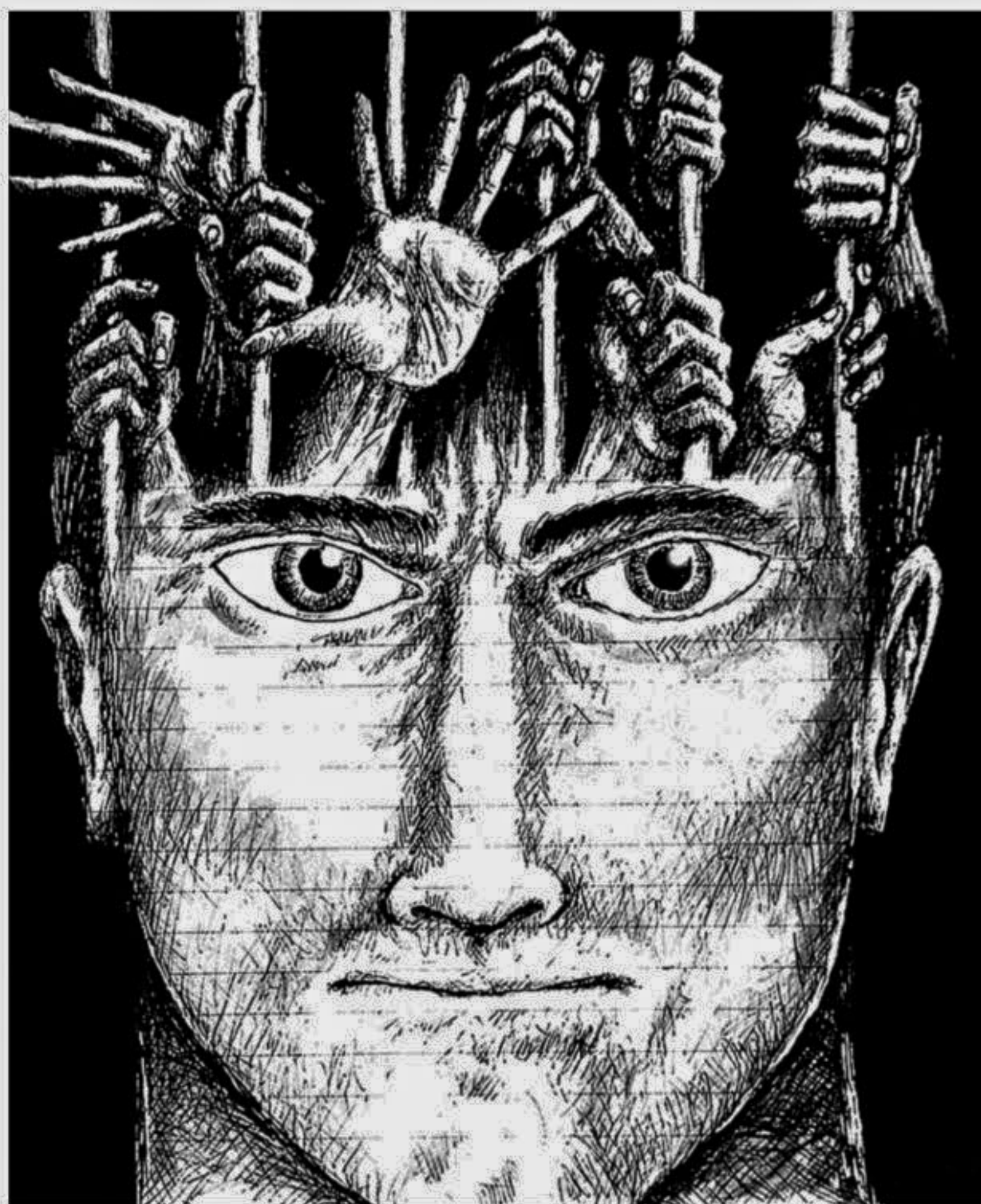
protection of national security or of public order or of public health or morals. Article 20 (2) of the ICCPR is unambiguous regarding the responsible use of freedom of expression stating: *Any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence shall be prohibited by law.* Under this provision, expression or proclamations that support religious

freedom of expression also has a cultural element that is often ignored. The conceptual divergence of views with the West on the scope of freedom of expression begins here. Ultra liberalism is perhaps at its peak in western societies and anything verbal, written or visual is given validation under freedom of expression. The liberal outlook on the issue is incompatible with many other parts of the world, including ours, where cultural values and social norms continue to be conservative, irrespective of religious beliefs.

The UN Human Rights Council adopted by consensus the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation sponsored UNHRC Resolution 16/18 under the title, "Combating Intolerance, negative stereotyping, stigmatization, discrimination, incitement to violence and Violence against persons, based on religion and belief". The spirit of Resolution 16/18 emanates from international human rights conventions and instruments that uphold the universality and indivisibility of human rights and the interdependence on and interrelations with each other. The resolution, irrespective of any particular religion, expresses concern at manifestations of religious intolerance and promotes a culture of tolerance and respect for others through a dialogue that emphasises respect for religious and cultural diversity. It gives the widest margin of freedom of expression, and reiterates the rejection of discrimination, incitement and stereotypes used by the other.

The core right to express ourselves freely should be defended to the last, but we must stand guard that the exercise of the right does not become a liability. Our young bloggers should be encouraged to go ahead and write and express without fear or threat of fear but keeping in mind that nothing in what they say or write offends the religious beliefs or sacred symbols of another faith. This would be the best guarantee of the right to unfettered freedom of expression and safeguard against its abuse or misuse.

The writer is a former foreign secretary and ex-director general of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation.



ARTWORK: PAULO ZERBATO

writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice. Article 19(3) states, "The exercise of the rights provided for in paragraph 2 of this article carries with it special duties and responsibilities. It may therefore be subject to certain restrictions, but these shall only be such as are provided by law and are necessary: (a) For respect of the rights or reputations of others; & (b) For the

hatred can be legally addressed when it constitutes imminent incitement to unlawful acts of discrimination, hostility or violence. The key phrase of Article 20(2) is "constitutes imminent incitement to unlawful acts of discrimination, hostility or violence", and I am sure the young bloggers never went to that extreme to provoke a violent repercussion.

COMMENTS

"Australia scrap U19 WC for Bangladesh 'security'"

(January 6, 2016)

Salekun Noor

We recently organised the Zimbabwe series and BPL; there wasn't any untoward incident regarding the security of the players.

Arshil Azim

Our cricket won't stop because of them.

Kazi Ahad Kader

It seems Australia keeps dodging playing with Bangladesh in fear of Banglawash!

"72,000 quake prone buildings in Dhaka city"

(January 5, 2016)

Somnur Monir Konal

I think the number is much higher than that.

Sayed Rahman

Well, then why are the authorities concerned not identifying these buildings and taking necessary steps to minimise the risk?

Arina

May Almighty save us from a mega disaster.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

A New Year rhetorical gift for PM!

It happened at the inaugural ceremony of the month long Dhaka International Trade Fair at Bangabandhu International Conference Centre on the very first day of 2016. When being profusely praised for her success in trade and the commercial sector, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina was attributed with a simile from an oft-quoted line from Shakespeare "Frailty, thy name is woman!"

In fact, in Hamlet Act I, Hamlet is speaking directly about his mother whose "O'erhasty marriage" offends him to his core and causes him to think her frail, or

weak, in all regards. Spiritually, she is frail because she has committed an unforgivable sin by marrying Claudius. It most directly foreshadows Ophelia's betrayal of Hamlet in Act III. In Hamlet's eyes, this is just one more betrayal by one more frail woman: "Frailty, thy name is woman."

The line generalises the attribution of weakness of character from one particular woman to womankind. So the export wing of our commerce ministry and Export Promotion Bureau who organised the show thoughtfully prepared and robustly delivered in their welcome speech such a New Year gift to the prime minister!

Anonymous
On e-mail

Our education system

The current situation of our educational institutions has shattered all our hopes. In the past, students used to respect their teachers and teachers were also dedicated. But nowadays it is different. Even question papers of almost all public examinations get leaked on a regular basis, but the people involved in these activities never get caught. Where are we heading?
Nur Jahan
Chittagong