

I had recently been asked to give a talk about “being an American Muslim in the United States.” Although wary of the uses and abuses of the term, I obliged.

Islam is a religion propelled by values, not race nor, theoretically, by blind tribal allegiances, I explained.

The ‘American Muslim’ identity which has been under constant investigation in the US media, politics and society is completely different from what American Muslims associate themselves with.

Award-winning investigative journalist, Nafeez Ahmed, concluded that at least 4 million Muslims have been killed by the US since 1990.

This excludes killings that have taken place in the last two years, or the countless civilians who perished during the US-sanctions on Iraq, starting 1991, which were enforced throughout the Clinton Administrations.

Yet, all this is meant to be ignored and seen merely as the issue of an obnoxious

Latinos and everyone else who did not subscribe to their skewed view of the world.

But Clinton’s words were a mere liberal spin on the same chauvinistic, racist and exclusionist culture that often drives the political discourse of the Right.

“If you’re a Muslim and you love America and freedom and you hate terror, stay here and help us win and make a future together, we want you,” Clinton said before a large audience, which

patience and strength of character in order to survive one of the most ghastly genocides in human history.

Precisely for this reason, the identity of the American Muslim is, at its heart, a political one, concerned with human rights, justice and equality, with black Muslims playing a tremendous role in confronting, challenging and clashing with the ruling white elitist order that controlled the US from the beginning.

It is the Martin-Luther King Jr.-Malcolm

OPINION

The recent transfer of a police official to the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) on February 23 shocked the people of CHT, and those on the plain lands who are aware of the sensitive situation in the region.

The transfer of a government official is a normal procedure that takes place regularly, so why was this particular one so shocking? It is because the police officer in question was allegedly involved in burning down the homes of Santals, an indigenous group, in November, 2016, in Gaibandha, Bangladesh. Many of the Santals whose homes were destroyed are still living under the open skies without basic facilities, like access to food, sanitation, and housing.

This was not just a gross act of human rights violation – it was a direct attack on the lives and livelihoods of indigenous people by a member of the law enforcement agency. It was covered widely by the media and is being monitored closely by national and international rights organisations.

This was, unfortunately, not the only incident in which we have heard about police involvement in crimes. Media has time and again uncovered such stories – from the report on police extorting money from small egg sellers published last November to big time narcotics smuggling. Not to mention their dubious involvement in extra judicial deaths termed as “death by crossfire.” In January, 2016, a few cases also surfaced of women filing reports saying that police officials had sexually harassed them under the guise of “searching for drugs” (Prothom Alo: January 20, 2016; Kaler Kantho, January 31, 2016).

When such practices have become a trend, it is indeed a matter of great concern for citizens. These matters should be dealt with immediately by the Police Headquarters, the Home Ministry and the government.

What is equally and more concerning is that an overwhelming number of corrupt officials who are ruining the image of other members of the force are not facing any serious consequences for their deeds.

In 2016, in a live conversation on social media, Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) Commissioner Asaduzzaman Mia admitted that police are involved in extortions. “I am not saying police do not extort money,” he said, but then, as a way of justifying the wrongdoing, he added, “People from other professions also do this.”

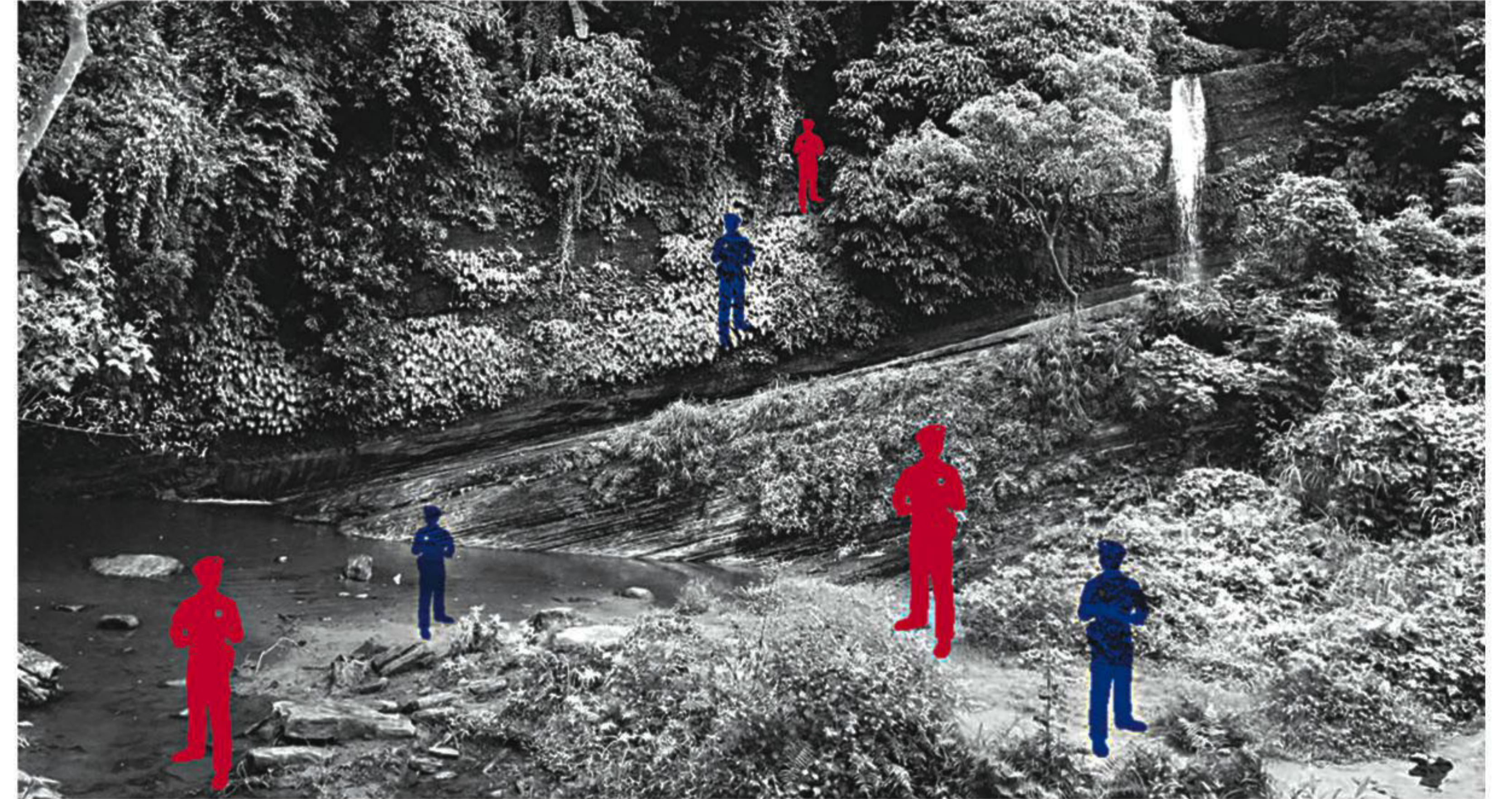
He then noted that the police high-ups conduct regular monitoring so that members do not extort money and that “stern action would be taken if allegations against any official are found to be true.” However, have the findings of any such monitoring ever been made public? And, what actions do the authorities take when an investigation is going on?

From January to August 2016, 61 officials were suspended from their jobs. Only five among them were forced to retire, according to the DMP (Dhaka Tribune, November 22, 2016). One media report also reveals that during the same period 8,736 officials – from constables to sub-inspectors – faced light punishments and 363 were handed down major punishments (besides suspension). It was also reported that sources in the DMP



MUKTASREE CHAKMA SATHI

# KEEP ONLY THE GOOD COPS, PLEASE



COLLAGE: KAZI TAHSIN AGAZ APURBO

We expect teachers to be knowledgeable, doctors to know how to treat patients, and in the same way, we expect the police to enforce, not break, laws.

include reprimand and suspension (please note that only being accused is enough). Sterner punishments could be forced retirement, demotion, cancellation of increment and cancellation of rank badge. For petty crimes, punishments such as salary deductions, reprimand or a warning can be given.

Now my question is this: are there any crimes committed by the police which can be classed as “petty”? After all, why do we need the police? It is so they can maintain the rule of law and people can live their lives in peace, isn’t it? We expect teachers to be knowledgeable, doctors to know how to treat patients, and in the same way, we expect the police to enforce, not break, laws. If law enforcers are breaking the law, we expect the authorities to take actions against them rather than worry about tarnishing the institution’s reputation.

Should a member of the police force who is under investigation or has been found guilty for a crime be on duty? How can we, the citizens, trust that that individual will not abuse his/her power again?

In the case of the official in CHT, it is not the first time a government official has been transferred there as “punishment”. Although no government documents identify CHT as the “penal colony” for bad officials, it has nonetheless become exactly that, with ministers even suggesting so.

In 2016, the media reported that, in an anti-tobacco day programme, Mohammed Nasim, Minister of Health and Family Welfare, said that doctors found smoking in hospitals would be transferred to

Bandarban, a district of CHT. In April 2016, a government official was transferred to Khagrachari, another district of CHT, as an apparent punishment for his involvement in using bamboo rather than iron rods during the construction of a government building. Fortunately, the district authority refused to have him in Khagrachari.

So, is CHT – a place which is much more at risk than other parts of Bangladesh of witnessing communal attacks and clashes – the dumping zone for government officials? The same officials who are supposed to act impartially and efficiently if any such incident occurs?

The CHT community was shocked that a police official, with photos all over the media showing him setting fire to indigenous homes, could be transferred to another area dominated by indigenous people. Most importantly – he is being sent to an area where communal attacks often take place.

Citizens and civil society and rights organisations should demand an explanation as to why officials, particularly those found guilty of crimes, are still active. We can also urge the government to not allow police officials under investigation to remain on duty and ask the responsible authorities to do their job and be dignified so that people can have faith in them.

Finally, the ministry can set an example by only keeping the good cops... because who needs the bad cops anyway?

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# AMERICAN MUSLIMS MUST STOP APOLOGISING

RAMZY BAROUD

The media’s ‘American Muslim’ is a suspect, a fifth column, potentially dangerous and more receptive to violence than every other collective identity in the US. While this contrasts sharply with real Islam, facts hardly matter in the age of American nationalism, predicated on cultural and religious identification and ‘alternative facts’.

Caught within this brutal, baseless logic, some American Muslims no longer define themselves around their own political priorities, nor do they mobilise themselves alongside their natural allies – those who come from historically oppressed communities. Instead, they have taken to apologising for their ‘Muslim-ness’, rather than demand an apology, justice and equality.

Many Muslims find themselves, as a collective, being forced to demonstrate their humanity, defend their religion and distance themselves from every act of violence, even if only allegedly committed by a Muslim anywhere in the world.

Long before the Trump Administration’s ‘Muslim Ban’ – banning citizens of seven Muslim-majority countries from entering the US for 90 days – Muslims in the US have always, to varied degrees, been embattled, collectively demonised, racially profiled by government agencies and targeted in numerous hate-crimes by fellow Americans.

In reality, hatred of Muslims goes back even before 9/11, and the US war in Iraq in 1990-91 – a hatred based solely on media fear-mongering and Hollywood stereotyping.

There is also an odd ‘discovery’ by various liberal groups that American Muslims are mistreated in their own country.

In truth, the cause of the ‘defenseless Muslim’ is used as a political tool, with Democrats and others attempting to undermine the actions of their Republican rivals.

The administrations of Democratic presidents, Barack Obama and Bill Clinton, both had horrific legacies of violence and discrimination against Muslim countries.

In a landmark study released in March 2015, the Washington-based group, Physicians for Social Responsibility, showed that the US self-styled ‘war on terror’ had killed anywhere between 1.3 million to 2 million Muslims in the first ten years since the September 11 attacks.



IMAGE: KAZI TAHSIN AGAZ APURBO

president and that the pinnacle of the American violence against Muslims can be reduced to a 90-day travel ban on selected countries.

Subscribing to this mischaracterisation reflects both ignorance and also complete disregard for the millions of innocent lives that have been lost, in order for the US to preserve its vastly dwindling empire.

At the Democratic Party National Convention (DNC) last July, former President Bill Clinton took the stage to articulate a retort to the Republican party convention’s hate-fest of Muslims, Blacks,

roared in applause.

For Muslims, feeling that their inclusion, citizenship and humanity are conditioned by a set of condescending rules, articulated by a white, Christian elite, is utterly dehumanising.

What Clinton has wished to forget is that an estimated third of the slaves who built his country were, in fact, Muslims – shackled and dragged against their will to assemble the United States, field by field, brick by brick. It is the slaves that mainly brought Islam to America, and it is Islam that armed them with the virtue of

X-type movements – backed by millions of black people throughout the country – that helped define the modern character of the black American. They led the Civil Rights Movement, exacting basic human rights at a heavy price and against terrible odds.

It is important that American Muslim youth understand this well, and that their fight for equality and human rights in their country is not a manifestation of some Democratic Party’s political game.

Those aspiring to be the ‘good Muslim’, the Uncle Tom, the ‘not-all- Muslims- are-terrorists’ type, can only hope for a second-class status. But those who aspire for true equality and justice ought to remember the words of American revolutionary, Assata Shakur: “Nobody in the world, nobody in history, has ever gotten their freedom by appealing to the moral sense of people who were oppressing them.”

The oppressors constantly try to redefine the nature of the struggle of those whom they oppress. For Bill Clinton, the issue is solely Islamic terrorism, never the terror inflicted upon Muslim nations by his and other administrations through a series of unjust wars and sanctions, killing millions.

The coloniser, oppressor, invader is always blind to his crimes. He sees only the violent reaction – however minuscule – of the people whom he subjugates.

According to the New America Foundation, alleged ‘Jihadists’ killed 94 people in the US from 2005-2015, during which time the US also killed nearly 2 million Muslims in their own countries.

Yet, the government media-driven, fear-mongering, anti-Muslim and anti-Islam discourse (for which both liberals and conservatives are equally responsible) has made terrorism the leading fear among Americans, according to a major national survey in 2016.

In his book, Wretched of the Earth, one of the 20th century most powerful revolutionary voices, Frantz Fanon, wrote, “Each generation must discover its mission, fulfill it or betray it, in relative opacity.”

For this generation of American Muslims, this is their moment – to discover and fulfill their mission, to define and assert who they are as the descendants of slaves, immigrants and refugees – the three main building blocs of America.

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