

National and International Issues My Perception

Shah Abdul Hannan

Preface of the Writer

“National and International Issues: My Perception” is a collection of editorials published in The Daily Asia Post in 2007 and 2008. I have written about four hundred editorials in the daily in that period.

The major writings in this book are related to national and international issues; human rights, women, religion and culture. I tried to analyze the current national and international situation in depth from an un-biased and fair angle as far as humanly possible. I think these issues are relevant and I believe we are facing some difficult situation in the field of Islam, culture, women and international relations. I hope this book will help sincere people in reaching correct conclusions in these respects.

I am thankful to my students Aminul Mohaimen and Poet Omar Bissas for planning of the book. I hope the book “National and International Issues: My Perception” will be helpful to the readers. If there is any mistake about facts and figures, please let me know. I pray to Allah (SWT) to accept my humble contribution for the good of Islam, Ummah and the humanity.

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Publishers Note

Shah Abdul Hannan, the eminent scholar, thinker of the current days born in 23 September 1939 in Mymensingh district and comes from the renowned Shah family of Katiadi in Kishoregonj. He is a pioneer in Islamic political thought, Islamic economics and social studies. He has earned a highly appreciable honor and symbol of Honesty for his outstanding contribution in Bangladesh Civil Service. He is involved in various educational and cultural activities. He is involved in many social works. He is also deeply involved in the activities of the various social organizations.

Shah Abdul Hannan is well known for his vast contribution in the field of Islamic knowledge and establishing the rights of women. His intellectual level is known to all. His thought and idea open the eyes of the generation. In his writing he always tries to be fair, honest to his judgment. He does not show any false or illegal attitude in his writings.

We requested Shah Abdul Hannan to give us an English book for the web publication. He gives us the book ‘National and International Issues: My Perception’. We are grateful for his response.

The major writings in this book are related in national and international, Human Rights, Women, Religion, Culture and Personalities. The essays analyse the current situation and give effective suggestions where needed.

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National

Special Program for Dalit Students

News papers have reported that good results in the SSC and HSC examinations seemingly fail to make happy the students from Dalit (lower caste Hindu community students) , as they fear that severe financial constraint will stand in the way of their education. At a reception program arranged for the successful Dalit students in this year's SSC and HSC examinations, the guardians and students from the community yesterday sought assistance of the government and non-government bodies for their further education. Government initiative alongside the NGOs' is essential to help the children from the community to pursue studies for a better future, said speakers at the program at Women's Volunteer Association auditorium in Dhanmondi in the capital.

Bangladesh Dalits Human Rights, Dalit Youth Forum and Nagorik Udyog jointly arranged the program to award reception to 38 students for their results in SSC and HSC. Many of the guardians, mostly unaware of the need for education, have already asked their children to stop studies while the underprivileged children, like others of their age, want to continue education until at least graduation in subjects like business administration or computer engineering. Kanya Kumari Kona, who passed this year's HSC examinations from Dhaka Commerce College and nourishes a dream to study in business administration, was a participant at the reception program. She broke down in tears, expressing fear that she would not be able to go for higher education. “My parents did not even imagine that I would pass the HSC examinations. Now I am receiving an award for my results. I wish I could study business administration at a public university. This is my dream but I fear I would not be able to do it,” said Kona. “My father who is a guard in a city hospital fears that he would not be able to bear my academic expenses, be it at a public or private university,” said the girl who had to borrow money to enroll in the college. “Only God knows how I have come to this stage. My friends did not help me with notes, suggestions or even textbooks and I could not afford private tutor or coaching,” she said. Similarly, Raju, Jyoti and Emon Chandra Das, who passed the SSC examinations with GPA A-, GPA A- and GPA B, said financial problem may force them to discontinue education.

“Only guardians of our community know how they managed educational expenses for their children, after meeting everyday expenses of their family. Most of them even do not know why education is important,” said Mony Rani, a guardian. The universities could introduce quota system offering an opportunity to the Dalit community students for higher education, said Dr Farzana Islam, professor of the Department of Anthropology at Jahangirnagar University.

We feel sad to know the state of Dalit students. This community has suffered throughout history. They were untouchables before in their own community, now this problem has reduced. As they still live in the bottom of the society a special program should be taken to educate those among them who have done reasonably well in their secondary education. This is the only way to change their social status and we request the government to make special scholarship program for them which will cover their all expenses of education. We also request the major NGOs such as Grameen Bank, BRAC, Muslim Aid to take special program for them

08.09.2007

Dhaka University's Prof Anwar Makes Strange Demand

A news agency has reported that Prof Anwar Hossain, one of the four Dhaka University teachers released from jail, yesterday urged the students to make a list of Chhatra Shibir members doing politics on the campus and launch another movement for the trial of war criminals. He said the activists of Chhatra Shibir, the student wing of Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh, will have to be identified to protect the university from destruction. "Identify those students who are involved in politics with Shibir. They have been derailed. We all will have to be united to bring them back to the path of light from darkness," he said. Prof Anwar, also the dean of Biological Sciences' Faculty, was addressing a "reception and solidarity" rally at the foot of Aparajeya Bangla at noon. "Students against Repression", a platform of the DU students, arranged the rally, marking the release of the DU students and teachers. Prof Anwar, also the Duta general secretary, said all progressive student organizations on the campus must activate their umbrella platform "Paribesh Parishad" to resist the "anti-state" activities of Chhatra Shibir. "We should work together to make the Shibir men understand that they are living in darkness. I urge the Shibir men to come back to the path of light," he said.

We are appalled at the partisan and venomous statement of Dr Anwar. He has betrayed the spirit of the student and teacher movement of Dhaka University to release him and others. Chatra Shibir was also a part of the joint student movement of the university. Dr Anwar has stabbed them from behind, he has incited other students to list the Shibir boys. He has also called to bring Shibir boys from darkness to light, this is an old tactic of some communists to re-educate the people as happened in China during now discredited cultural revolution.

We think action against him is due under law. Nobody is above law, neither students, nor teachers nor others. There is only one law in the country. In the name of sacred tradition of Dhaka university nobody can escape from the justice of the law which some people in the Dhaka university has forgotten.

25.01.2008

Making Motivated Accusations Does Not Help National Harmony

In a seminar in Dhaka, the speakers have alleged that religion-based politics is the major source of militancy as reported in the newspapers. Punishing a few of the militants cannot uproot militancy. Rather, an ideological battle against militancy needs to be launched, they added.

Bangladesh Heritage Foundation and Democracy and Human Rights Research organized the discussion at Bangladesh Institute of Law and International Affairs (Bilia) auditorium titled 'Militancy in Bangladesh: Against Democracy, Rule of Law and the Spirit of Liberation War'. While presenting the keynote paper based on a recent study, former ambassador and Bilia director Wali-Ur Rahman said there is no other alternative but to restrain militancy to upholding the spirit of Liberation War, good governance and strengthening of democratic culture. Rahman added that even during the state of emergency, Jamaat is still continuing its clandestine activities to spread religion-based politics through its organizations.

Jamaat at present controls around 60 percent mosques and mosque-based educational facilities in the country. The party has already set up at least one madrasa in every village to provide Islamic education, Rahman pointed out. He also added that Jamaat has established a strong network of followers across the country by investing a huge amount of money in the transport sector. Besides, it has organised a large number of party activists through mosques and madrasas in villages all over the country. Islami Chhatra Shibir, the student wing of Jamaat, has made a strong presence in five universities and 12 colleges in the country. Dhaka University is their next target. He also accused Shibir for organizing militant activities.

The above is epitome of motivated propaganda. The religious parties in Bangladesh area are active from a long time, some of them were started before 1947 when India was partitioned. We have not seen any terrorism by them in the last sixty years. They were part of constitutional politics, they took part in politics, they have internal democracy in the party and they follow democratic method. Religious persons did not take up any violent activity after their failure in 1857 to topple the British rule in India. The recent phenomenon of JMB is the result of Afgan and Palestinian issues created and sustained by the super powers.

On the other hand, we have seen leftist militancy of various kinds after 1947 in South India, in India, Naxalite movements in India and Bangladesh, ethnic militants movements in India and Bangladesh. In Bangladesh leftist militants are active in about 20 districts from 1972 and they are continuing their activities but these partisan people are not saying anything about them

Asfor Jamaat and Shibir, they have always denied such allegations. We know that they have been continuous victim of attack of left and other political forces. As regards Madrasas, these are not under control of any political organizations. The Qaumi Madrasas are under the control of Deobondi Ulama and most of them do not see eye to eye with Jamaat. The Alia Madrasas are in the control of local communities.

We feel such false allegations by any organization against others do not augur well for the country. We would ask Heritage foundations and others like them to desist from motivated propaganda.

13.04.2007

Repeated Arrests of Politicians Not A Sound Policy

News papers have reported that ASM Hannan Shah, adviser to the detained former prime minister Khaleda Zia, was arrested yet again, for the fourth time, at his house at Mohakhali DOHS in Dhaka Wednesday night, 24 hours inside his release from jail on bail. The police reached his house at about 8:30pm when he was talking with some leaders of the Jatiyatabadi Mahila Dal who went to greet him on his release on Tuesday.

A senior police officer, leading the squad, approached the BNP leader and asked him to accompany them. ‘You have to come with us,’ the police officer was quoted by an assistant to Hannan as saying. Mr. Hannan asked him why he should go with the policemen as he had come out of jail only on Tuesday evening. The police then took him out of the house few minutes before 9:00pm and drove straight to Gazipur. It is learnt that he had been arrested in connection with an extortion case filed with the Kapasia police. One Rashid Mollah filed the case on Wednesday against Mr. Hannan and others on charge of extortion. The army-led joint forces earlier arrested Hannan, also a retired brigadier, at his house along with his eldest son, Rezaul Hannan, on May 14, 2007. They were shown arrested in five cases filed with the Kapasia police. The two were released from jail on July 22, 2007 on bail granted by the High Court.

He was again arrested at his house on November 7, 2007 on charge of violating the Emergency Powers Rules by gathering people and assaulting some leaders of the government-backed faction of the BNP, including former army chief Mahbubur Rahman, at Ziaur Rahman’s grave during the observance of National Revolution and Solidarity Day. The Fatullah police on February 7, 2008 arrested Hannan again at the jail gate soon after he had been released on bail. A Narayanganj court sent him to jail, rejecting his bail prayer. A High Court bench of Justices Khademul Islam Chowdhury and Mohammad Abdul Hye issued the bail order on Sunday after Hannan Shah had appealed for the cancellation of the general diary. Hannan Shah was freed at about 8:00pm Tuesday from the Narayanganj jail.

We can not understand such repeated arrests of any person, in this case a senior citizen and politician, a former Minister and a former army brigadier. The police and legal system are there to protect citizens from harassment. If new cases are filed repeatedly, should a person be arrested every time? Is it not possible to show him as shown arrested and bailed out also in such new cases? If procedural changes are necessary should it not be done to stop harassment and political or other kind of victimization?

In the context of such apparent cases of harassment, we want to raise the issue of cost. Can average people meet the expenses of fighting such cases? In fact they can not. The reform of judicial procedure is a must to save common people from harassment. A motivated party including the government, if it so wants, can file number of cases, who will then protect in such situations? In the whole world Justice has become very difficult to get for most people because of cost and difficult. We believe we should go to simple

procedure in the pattern of judicial procedure of Muslim rule with of course necessary adaptations, providing for appeal and review but not giving up the simplicity. The system must be so easy that, in addition to the system of being represented by the lawyer, every defendant may

14.02.2008

Citizenship of Biharees Living in Bangladesh

News papers have reported that a high profile inter-ministerial meeting will decide today whether the Urdu-speaking stranded Pakistanis living in Bangladesh (who mostly migrated to the then East Pakistan from mainly Bihar in India) will be given citizenship and national identity cards. The home ministry which is under Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed has convened the emergency meeting. Top officials of different ministries and agencies are expected to attend the meeting to examine legal aspects of the issue, sources said.

Earlier, Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) ATM Shamsul Huda sent a proposal to the chief adviser to urgently settle the issue of about these stranded Pakistanis living in the country. The matter of deciding the citizenship of the people in the camps is very urgent for the reason that after introduction of the National Identity Card as a condition for delivery of a number of services, these people may lose access to many services they currently enjoy. Even renewal of a rickshaw license would require presentation of an ID and no ID will be issued to a person who is not a citizen of Bangladesh," CEC Huda said in a letter to the chief adviser on June 29. Secretary to the office of chief adviser and secretaries of the ministries of foreign, law, justice and parliamentary affairs, and food and disaster, Election Commission (EC) Secretariat, inspector general of police (IGP), director general of DGFI, director general of National Security Intelligence, director general Immigration and Passport Directorate, additional IGP (special branch) and legal adviser to the law cell of the home ministry have been invited to attend the meeting. In his letter to the chief adviser the CEC said immediately after the independence of Bangladesh two streams of Urdu speaking people were found in Bangladesh. One group, known as "stranded Pakistanis", had sworn their allegiance to Pakistan and wanted to go back to that country at any cost. Others accepted the emerging reality and swore their allegiance to Bangladesh and merged with the mainstream society and polity.

Of the 3,00,000 Urdu speaking people living in Bangladesh, 1,60,000 live in 116 camps set up by the International Committee of Red Cross (ICRC) in different parts of the country. Many of them were born after 1971 or were minor in that year, said Huda in the letter. "As far as the EC is concerned, there is no problem with regard to the Urdu speaking people living all over the country outside the ICRC camps. They are citizens of Bangladesh and have been listed in the electoral rolls by following the criteria set for the purpose. However, the commission is unable to register the Urdu speaking people living inside the camps as voters due to complications relating to their citizenship," sources said quoting Huda's letter.

We feel the issue should be settled taking a realistic position. These people were in a jeopardy at the time of emergence of Bangladesh and in the then serious law and order situation. Many of them opted for Pakistan as a security. It was ab initio wrong to ask them the question whether they want to live in Bangladesh or Pakistan. This question was wrong. All people living in the then East Pakistan became automatically became citizens

of Bangladesh as all Bengalees living in the area have become. We hope the government will take a wise decision in this regard soon as they have suffered for more than 35 years,

06.09.2007

Caution Needed About Orchestrated Propaganda of Some Newspapers

In a post in a major Bangla daily on 1.4.07, senior journalist and columnist Mr. Rizwan Siddiqi has written that systematic propaganda against some individuals and institutions are being made by some newspapers and they are inciting the authorities to take action against them. A particular newspaper has started war against nationalist forces and demanding removal of all people of nationalist trend from all positions in various institutions. He has urged the government not to take any action against anybody on the basis of motivated propaganda.

We share his feeling and we have also noted such phenomenon in a particular English daily and a two Bangla dailies. This is no journalism. Newspapers must not become propaganda sheets for some political interests and they should not be time servers..

Political propaganda had always been a problem, it seems that it has increased now. In a recent post published in Daily Naya Diganta on 30.3.07, famous columnist Mr. Mahmudur Rahman, ex-energy advisor, has written about systematic propaganda against Bangladesh since 2001 when four party alliance took power and how such propaganda against Bangladesh was assisted by certain local dailies.

We have noted after hanging of six JMB leaders extensive reporting about finding the god-fathers behind them as if the Bangladesh Police has not done anything to catch the responsible people for bombing campaign. As far as we know, the Police with the help of foreign investigating agencies have done everything to find out them and they have not given any quarter to anybody responsible if they found any clue.

We urge the authorities now to find out the foreign backers of these bombings and also of other criminal activities against Bangladesh.

02.04.2007

Bangladesh Interest in Its Economic Zone In Bay Of Bengal

A national Bangla daily in its lead news on 26th December has reported that Bangladesh has not yet published the map of Bangladesh Economic Zone in the Bay of Bengal which is required under international protocol in this regard and this will affect Bangladesh interest in this oil and gas-rich area. On the other hand both India and Myanmar have published these maps .In these maps , India has shown nineteen thousand square kilometer area and Myanmar has shown eighteen thousand square kilometer area which rightfully belong to Bangladesh economic zone on the basis of principles laid down in the Un convention on Law of Sea of 2001.The convention has laid down that map of economic zone has to be published within ten years and any dispute among neighboring states with regard to conflicting claims must be negotiated within the same time period.

We are of the opinion that, though we have three years yet left to do all these, any delay in this area will be harmful to Bangladesh interest. We have to contend with India which is a powerful state and has no record of just behavior in international relations. If we delay in publishing the map, there will very little time left for negotiation about disputed territory. We therefore ask the government and also draw the attention of Chief Advisor Dr Fakhruddin on this vital issue to take immediate steps in these regards.

27.12.2007

Awami League's Unilateral Cancellation of Agreement Is Morally Un-justified

Awami League has cancelled the five-point Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Khilafat Majlish stipulating recognition of Certificate of Madrasas, enactment of law recognizing the Prophet (sm) as the last Prophet, that certified educated Aims will be allowed to issue Fatwas (Fatwa is non binding religious ruling) and that no law will be enacted against the Quran and the Sunnah.

AL also cancelled all deals, agreements and seat sharing with different political parties in the grand alliance including 14-party coalition, which had been made prior to the cancellation of January 22 parliamentary polls. Awami League said, "We had made some deals and agreements with some parties as part of our election strategy centring the January 22 poll. Since the election was cancelled, those deals and agreements have automatically been cancelled," (AL Acting General Secretary Obaidul Quader)

AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil signed the MOU going to the Azimpur residence of BKM Chairman Azizul Haque on December 23 last year. At the time the AL general secretary repeatedly criticised the media saying that they misinterpreted the deal and claiming that the deal was not against the concept of secularism.

We are surprised at the political somersault of Awami League. Their arguments are seriously flawed. They could not cancel it unilaterally without consulting with the parties they reached agreement. They could not also cancel the seat-adjustments unilaterally when the election has only been deferred, election has not been held and the election will be held in near future

The cancellation of agreement with the Khilafat Majlish is the worst part of it. The points of agreement such as enactment of law recognizing the Prophet (sm) as the last Prophet, that certified educated Aims will be allowed to issue Fatwas ,that no law will be enacted against the Quran and the Sunnah and that Kaumi Madrasah certificates will be recognized are not of temporary nature. These points are by nature long term, even permanent to the Muslims.

We consider cancellation of such an agreement unilaterally as height of political opportunism of Awami League and reflects a sad state of politics in our country. The parties who have supported this move have also sided with political opportunism

14.02.2007

Agricultural Land Must Not Be Wasted

A news agency has reported that Finance Adviser Dr Mirza Azizul Islam has underscored the importance of having a massive resettlement plan in place for rural areas to save the shrinking cultivable lands. “We need to have a massive rural resettlement plan to encourage people to live in multistoried structures instead of their traditional wide houses so that we can save our valuable arable lands,” he said this while he was addressing the inaugural session of a workshop titled 'Housing Finance Market' at a city hotel. Bangladesh Bank Governor Dr Salehuddin Ahmed and World Bank country director Xian Zhu spoke at the workshop organized by World Bank. The finance adviser said it is very hard to motivate the rural people to live in multistoried buildings leaving their traditional sprawling houses. “It's very hard and sensitive too, as we know the rural people are accustomed to leaving in their own traditional houses,” he said. Dr Aziz said although it is not possible right now to put the rural people in multistoried buildings altogether, “but we'll have to do that in the future. ”Talking about the existing housing policy of the country, the adviser said there is still a scope to formulate a pro-active housing policy. Criticising the financial institutions for not having the habit of providing long-term house-building loans, the finance adviser emphasised providing housing loans to low-income group rural people too. Dr Salehuddin also underscored the need for a planned housing system in rural areas and said, “Housing in rural areas is eating our valuable lands.” He stressed the importance of putting rural houses in common places as those are built in a scattered manner reducing cultivable lands. Dr Salehuddin is also against construction of numerous roads across the country as those contribute to rapid loss of croplands.

We agree that we require to think more about housing and saving rural and agricultural land .Need for new housing for rising population and new industries are diverting a lot of agricultural land.We do not think yet that high-rise building in the rural area is the solution. High-rise buildings create many social problems and we should avoid them in rural areas, rather we can go for three or four storey buildings and housing finance may be organized in a manner which gives special preference to this type of building in rural areas.

We have seen that industries buy large chunk of agricultural lands in road-side rural areas, in particular. They are acquiring more land than needed at the cost of agriculture. Government should have a policy in this regard. Industries should not be allowed to acquire more than a particular limit of agricultural land without permission of land ministry.

29.01.2008

Dhaka Clashes between police and people.

We have seen clashes in Dhaka city between police and people around Baitul mukarram city center. The people were agitating against some parts of the recently announced women policy which has some parts which create confusion whether the policy violates the stipulation of the Quran with regard to inheritance. The confusion has been created because clause 9.3 of the policy says that new law will be made to establish equal right in all movable and immovable property. Any body can see that this new law will affect inheritance law in various ways. The drafting was indeed either foolish or very clever to deceive people. Islamic inheritance law is important for Muslims because it does justice keeping in view the liabilities of various parties. We are not mentioning the advantage for women in maintenance law of Islam and how it gives over-all edge to women when implemented. The policy has further created confusion by mentioning implementation of CEDAW without mentioning the reservations Bangladesh like many other countries has given to this document.

In any case these are no justifications for lawlessness. Some elements in press, in left political front have over stressed the clashes. Some people are calling it prelude to civil war and repetition of Lal Masjid of Islamabad. These are clearly motivated propaganda. There had been much more police-people clashes in all parts of Bangladesh, specially in Dhaka, even around Baitul Mukarram, during the last time of President Ershad, last days of Khalida Zia's government in 96 and 2006, at the beginning of present caretaker government in October 2006. At that time, these people did not say about civil war.

The present problem has been created by several quarters, not one section, first making a women policy which can affect some Quranic provisions, then govt's failure to amend the policy quickly. Continuation of movement by some Madrasah and political elements even after government's declaration that they will do nothing against Quranic commands and laws was also responsible. Then police excess in not allowing a delegation to submit a memo to the Chief Advisor, attack on police by some elements in Baitul Mukarram area, and provocative statement by Madam Rasheda Chowdury that this policy is in accord with the constitution without realizing that all rights are subject to law and basic principles of the constitution contributed to escalation of the problem. Some media and political people are trying to discredit Islamic elements only, they are trying to blame main Islamic party who are not involved in these clashes at all (as stated by them in press statements). This part of the press has never been fair in news generally, particularly about Islamic elements.

We ask the government to quickly review the policy and also ask the agitating public to stop unlawful agitation.

15.04.2008

Link Between British and Bangladesh Terror networks

News papers and agencies have reported that the visiting British Home Secretary Jacqui Smith has said there are links between British and Bangladeshi terror networks. She said the two countries will form a high level joint working group that will meet in June to thrash out details of 'practical programmes' on counter-terrorism, which might include sharing of information and counter-terror training. "Yes there are linkages between terrorism in Britain and Bangladesh," she said when asked if there is any link between terror groups in the two countries, but refused to divulge specific name of any militant group in either country. "Linkages are highly likely because of the nature of international terrorism. Terrorists travel widely, use dual nationalities," said Smith adding, the countries have a shared interest in helping each other tackle terrorism in both short and long terms. Smith said the vast majority of Britons, Bangladeshis, and British-Bangladeshis 'abhor' terrorism and are united to 'protect shared values of peace and freedom'. The counter-terrorism joint working group will be comprised of personnel from both government's ministries on security, foreign affairs, intelligence and police.

During her meeting with the chief adviser earlier in the day, Fakhruddin told Smith that the emergency power rules will be gradually lifted before the planned local government elections next month, reported UNB. He also told her that informal talks with political parties had already started to move ahead with the election roadmap. At the news conference Smith told reporters that she received 'strong assurances' from the chief adviser, the army chief, and the home adviser that institutional reforms and voter registration, among other preparations, are on track for the general election to be held by December. Smith said she thinks, along with the international community, that holding free, fair, credible elections is a very important pre-requisite for Bangladesh's international role. She said Britain has always been more comfortable working with democratic governments. Smith also said 54 cases of British nationals having been brought to Bangladesh under 'forced marriages' were reported to the high commission.

We have heard for the first time, the terror network connection of British and Bangladesh terrorists. We do not know what specific information she has shared with the government before mentioning this issue to the press in public. In any event we can not take anything as granted and the government has to be very alert about this.

On the issue of forced marriage, the government should look into the cases. In Islam there is no scope for forced marriage. As such the public awareness about this should be created. Forced marriage is invalid from the start and as such can be annulled by the court.

12.04.2008

Military Should Not Be In Politics: This Old Truth Should Not Be Forgotten

News papers have reported that former chief adviser to caretaker government Justice Muhammad Habibur Rahman said on Sunday that military intervention in the country's politics and administration cannot be salutary either for the country or the armed forces. "The present government will have to shoulder the responsibility for the undemocratic situation it has created in the country by altering the democratic system," he said. The former chief justice advised the government to remain alert so that it does not make any mistake by chance or by taking any over-enthusiastic or careless decisions. He was speaking as the chief guest at the National Citizen's Dialogue titled "National unity to face major challenges 2008" at the Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre in the capital. Bangladesh First, Bangladesh 2025 organised the three-session daylong dialogue chaired by Gono Forum President Dr Kamal Hossain. The participants approved a citizen charter in which they demanded a national dialogue to resolve the challenges of daily life. They urged the government to take effective action for holding the election according to the roadmap, controlling the prices of essentials, and creating stability in the country's economy. Justice Habibur said he is concerned whether power will be handed over to an elected government after smooth holding of the ninth parliamentary elections at this year's end. He cautioned that increasing discrimination in the society in the present situation when prices of essentials have gone beyond people's purchasing capability will increase instability and "there is possibility of being attracted to religious terrorism for its solution". He said the present famine-like situation could become permanent if reforms to and management of agriculture and water resources cannot be developed. He said, "We have amended the constitution thrice in the interest of just one person. Now if we pretend to be upholding the constitution while furthering an individual's benefit, it will not last long." Habibur said to amend the constitution a Constitution Commission can be formed. "But we do not get any confidence after observing little utilisation of the Law Commission. Because, top brasses in the government consider themselves to be big scholars and do not like advice from others," he added. "In the nine months ahead of the election we will not commit the mistakes we have already committed and help all concerned with the holding of a free and fair election. We will elect such parliament members who will be role models not only in politics but also on our way forward," he said, urging people not to waste their votes on incompetent persons.

We feel that Justice Habibur Rahman has spoken some home truth in this difficult time of our nation. We agree with him that it is good for military and nation that the defense force does not involve in politics covertly or overtly .We also agree with him that it is not time for tinkering with constitution. We ask all political and other forces to take note of his warning.

07.04.2008

Upgradation Of Railway System Is A Necessity

A news agency has reported that the caretaker government has formed a six-member high-powered committee to recommend a package programme for upgrading the Bangladesh Railway. The committee was formed at a meeting at the communication ministry, with Adviser Maj Gen (retd) MA Matin in the chair.

The committee headed by additional chief engineer (Mechanical) of Roads and Highways Department has been asked to submit its report within a month. The members of the committee are high officials from the railway, BRTC and the communications ministry. They will find out ways to improve the standard of passenger service and modernize the railway, and recommend the systems of implementing the plan. They will also find out the reasons behind the train accidents.

A consulting firm, engaged in carrying out feasibility study on installation of cord line by establishing double lines on Dhaka-Chittagong route, submitted its report before the meeting. The consultants recommended setting up a new cord line to Chittagong from Dhaka via Fatulla-Laksam route, by setting up double line along the existing rails between Dhaka and Chittagong, at a cost of Tk 7,800 crore. The distance of the Dhaka-Chittagong cord line will be 228 kilometres and it will take three hours to travel between the capital and the port city. The communication adviser said the government would consider the proposal for setting up the new line for upgrading the standard of passenger service of the railway.

Bangladesh Railway has badly declined over the last twenty years or more. This would have been catastrophic if the road system and bus-truck transportation would not have improved. Railway system requires a total new study, whether present railway lines are necessary, whether they can compete with the bus transportation and remain profitable, whether some lines should be closed or handed over to the private sector for management, whether the railway fare should be increased in a big way to make the Railways profitable. There are a host of questions and without a full study, the Railway can not probably survive as profitable organization. There are also the issues of excess staff and efficiency. We will now suffer as a result of neglect of the past. Even then we hope the government will take serious steps in the next 5-10 years to rehabilitate and upgrade the system".

30.05.2007

We Need Better Political Culture

News papers have reported that the Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh has protested the support of Awami League (AL) to left parties' demand for not registering religion-based political parties including the Jamaat and refusing the party its scale symbol. Terming the demand unjust and undemocratic, Jamaat Publicity Secretary Tasnim Alam in a statement yesterday said the AL is denying the reality by supporting the demand of some parties which are “isolated from people.” He further says that the the countrymen do not expect such an unjust and illogical attitude from a party like Awami League.

We feel that we have developed a very bad political culture, otherwise how such demand or support for such demand can be justified? The constitution of Bangladesh has enough Islamic ingredients which make it close to an Islamic constitution. How Islamic parties can be banned under such a constitution or even under any democratic constitution? The essence of democracy is to allow all forces in politics if they follow peaceful ways. Awami League has on many occasions worked with Jammate Islami in launching common movements in Bangladesh. Jamaate Islami is a democratic and law-abiding party. We hope all political forces will realize the need to co-exist .It is not a good strategy to enhance a political ideology by demanding banning of the opponent forces.

23.09.2007

Amnesty International Should Not Involve In Domestic Politics

Global human rights watchdog Amnesty International (AI) yesterday asked the caretaker government to try war criminals.” We want the present government to initiate some process. The future democratic government will have to take the issue forward. But some steps regarding that should be taken at this moment,” Irene Khan, AI secretary general, told reporters after attending a seminar on 'Campaign for Human Dignity' in the capital. Irene is leading a special AI delegation to Bangladesh to discuss human rights issues with the government, political parties and civil society on the eve of the first anniversary of declaration of the state of emergency. AI and Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF) jointly organized the seminar at LGED Bhaban at the launching of a six-day AI mission which will focus on rule of law with special attention to institutional changes needed for protection and promotion of human rights.”

After holding meetings with all the stakeholders, the AI will launch a memorandum on the state of human rights in Bangladesh through a press conference on Thursday.” We’ll say there how trial of all human rights violation incidents that took place in last few years can be held,” she said, adding they will also raise the issue of trial of such violations in 1971. Admitting that rights of both general people and political leaders are violated, Irene said, “We need a change where everyone, not only political leaders but also ordinary people, is protected by law and has the right of fair trial.”

We know that Amnesty is a respectable organization. However, we do not think involving in domestic politics is a part of agenda of Amnesty. Knowledgeable people know that the present demand by some quarters for war crime trial after 36 years of independence of Bangladesh has been raised for partisan political purposes, to malign nationalist and Islamic forces .This is obvious also from simultaneous demand by the same quarters for banning of Islamic parties. Every body knows that in a popular referendum extremist secularism of 1972 constitution has been overthrown and Islam was made a pillar of the statecraft. The left and extremist seculars have no support in the country, so they take political cover to reach their unpopular agenda. After all the war prisoners of 1971 war was released and the then President of Bangladesh gave amnesty to all people except specific cases of murder etcetera, there is no justification except partisan politics to raise such old issues.

We think the Amnesty has done grave error in this matter; this has become possible because the present secretary general of Amnesty is a person of Bangladesh origin and she has been influenced by a group. We hope Amnesty would realize its mistake.

06.01.2008

OIC to Launch \$10b Poverty Alleviation Programme

BSS has reported that Secretary General of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) Dr Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu has said his organization has drawn up an ambitious programme of ten billion dollars for poverty alleviation in the relatively less fortunate member nations. Bangladesh is certainly among the countries that stand to benefit from the programme," he said in an exclusive interview with BSS Chief Editor Zaglul Ahmed Chowdhury recently in Azerbaijan's capital Baku on the sidelines of a conference. He said Bangladesh's commitment to the OIC from the "Day One" of its entry in the OIC has been unflinching regardless of the fact which the government is in power in that country. "With unwavering commitment and a sizeable population, Bangladesh is making contribution to the causes of OIC in every possible way," said the Turkish scholar, now serving as the chief executive of the Jeddah-based body.

The three-day conference was on various aspects of media-related issues with particular reference to Islam and the Muslim community. The OIC sponsored the conference in cooperation with the government of Azerbaijan. Dr Ekmeleddin said the OIC is now very much in the focus as the organization is striving hard to make itself more relevant to the causes of its members as well as promoting peace and understanding across the world in a larger perspective. He said the organization is sparing no efforts to accomplish the twin objectives of Islamic cohesion on one hand and global peace and harmony on the other.

The OIC secretary general particularly referred to the position taken by the OIC on the cartoon issue on Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) by the newspaper of a European country and said the matter brought the Muslims and sensible non-Muslims under the same umbrella as great care is being stressed in dealing with sensitive matters. He said the Baku conference discussed all these matters with a view to promoting understanding and laid importance on the role of media in this regard. More than 150 participants included Lord Nazir Ahmed, British MP, media editors from Arab nations, the United States, Canada, Japan and other countries. Chief Editor and Managing Director of the national news agency BSS was the participant from Bangladesh. The conference was near-unanimous that the media needs to be more careful in dealing with a sensitive religious matter like the cartoon published in some European countries on Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) that hurt the sentiments of most people across the world. Many non-Muslim participants severely criticized such acts and said freedom of media must not be abused.

We think that the Baku conference has rightly emphasized the need for media caution so that passions are not raised of the simple-minded people who can never accept derogatory criticism of the Prophets and founders of religions. We particularly appreciate the OIC decision to allocate ten billion dollars for poverty alleviation. In two recent conferences in Dhaka and Colombo organized by IDB in association with Islamic Economics Research Bureau (Dhaka) and Muslim Aid (Colombo) it has been seen that Islam provides better alternatives for poverty –eradication through micro-finance, waqf (both cash waqf and asset waqf) and Zakat. We believe the OIC and Muslim governments can

benefit from the deliberations of the two conferences and take the help of these organizations in formulating their strategy.

07.05.2007

Why This Chorus For Banning Islamic Parties?

We are observing a chorus of some left and some liberal elements active in politics and civil society demanding banning of Islamic parties .Of course they say that they demand banning of all religious parties. Unfortunately some Awami League leaders are also demanding banning of any party with religious name which in effect only is directed against Islamic parties.

We may mention that the Awami League was originally Awami Muslim League and they continued to operate in Pakistan when Pakistan was fully democratic before first martial law of Pakistan. They contested as Awami Muslim league in 1954 election in the then East Pakistan and made electoral alliance with Nizame islam party of late Muolana Athar Ali. They never felt or said that their name was un-democratic, they dropped the name Muslim later for political reason, not because it was un-lawful or un-democratic. Islamic or Sikh or Hindu parties are no problem in democratic India. The names of Christian Democrat or Christian socialist is no problem for European democracies.

Why then this chorus? The only plausible reason is to deprive the voice of Islam, the greatest challenge against all Materialist and Godless civilizations, in the Parliament, so that no voice remains in the Parliament for Islamic law, Islamic values, education. No voice remains against immorality, pornography, indecency and nudity, against injustice of all kinds. Our education is still based on western value system and it is producing people who do not share the values of Islam properly and this is the mis- fortune for the whole Muslim nation.

The supporters of the ban also use clever covers such as we respect religion but we want to eliminate communalism and to free religion from the influence of state. Islamists understand what they mean, they want Islam to be no more a force in history, an active player in the world stage. They also forget that Islam and statecraft were always integrated throughout Muslim history except in colonial period. We hope this undemocratic trickery will fail. Islamists are much more trained now to tackle all difficult situation as they are doing in Turkey, Pakistan and Egypt.

13.11.2007

What Sort Of Judgments Are These?

News Agency has reported that a German court yesterday upheld a regional ban on teachers wearing the headscarf in public schools, rejecting the complaint of a convert to Islam. The Baden-Wuerttemberg state administrative court in the southern city of Stuttgart ruled that teachers may be kept from covering their heads in the classroom if they do so for religious reasons. The decision overturned a ruling by a lower court in July 2006, saying that the teacher had a right to wear the headscarf because Roman Catholic nuns elsewhere in the state wore habits when they taught at a public school. The plaintiff, who has taught at a joint elementary and secondary school for more than three decades, converted to Islam in 1984.

We are appalled in such judgments by a German court. We also express our resentment when educational authorities initially barred her from wearing scarf or Hijab which is a clear religious requirement for Muslim ladies. This sort of thing is going on in Europe in many places increasing only hatred among Muslims for the intolerance of some of the western authorities and governments. Muslims are charged of intolerance but we find such attitude, action and judgment more intolerant and against decency, democracy, human rights and religious rights. We ask European Union to do something about this as this problem has spread to several countries in Europe.

19.03.2008
(2nd editorial)

Chittagong Hill Tract Incident: Need For Long-term Solution

Newspapers have reported that Pahari Chhatra Parisad (PCP), an organization of indigenous students from the hilly districts, yesterday staged demonstration on Dhaka University (DU) campus protesting the attack on four hilly villages at Baghaichhori in Rangamati on April 20. PCP leaders and activists took out a procession that paraded different campus streets and held a rally in front of the central library that condemned the incident and demanded punishment to the people responsible for rampaging houses at the village. Leaders of several left-leaning student organizations joined the rally and expressed deep concern over the incident and demanded proper investigation into the incident.

PCP central unit President Rimo Chakma presided over the rally. Meanwhile, leaders of the seven left-leaning student organisations in a joint statement urged the government to form a judicial probe committee to investigate the incident.

We feel this incident in Chittagong Hill Tracts should be fully investigated by a high level judicial officer. We can not allow deterioration of Hill Tract situation, particularly because some foreign interests want its deterioration. The final solution is implementation of the agreement in this matter with Hill Tract leadership in its true spirit and letter. The government can not dis-honor its own commitment. If there is any problem it should be re-negotiated between the parties, no delay is good for Bangladesh in this regard.

25.04.2008

Student Behavior in Varsities: Strong Action Needed

Newspapers have reported that Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) leader Sima Islam yesterday demanded exemplary punishment to those who assaulted her on Dhaka University (DU) campus on Sunday.

Sima, general secretary of BCL Rokeya Hall unit, articulated the demand at a press conference at Madhu's Canteen at 12:00 noon. She said some BCL activists belonging to other faction attacked her when she protested their teasing in presence of BCL central unit President Mahmud Hasan Ripon and DU unit President Sohel Rana Tipu in front of the central library. Sima, a Masters student of the Institute of Fine Arts, alleged that the BCL activists swooped on her at the instigation of Ripon and Tipu. She urged university authorities and high-ups of Awami League (AL), the parent organisation of BCL to take immediate action against the persons responsible for the attack. Sima said she is feeling insecurity even in the hospital now.

In another news we find that Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD)-backed Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) yesterday demanded exemplary punishment to JCD and BCL cadres who assaulted two university journalists in Dhaka University (DU) campus on Sunday. In a joint statement, DU unit president and general secretary of the organization expressed their deep concern over the incidents. They said creating obstruction to the professional work of journalists is unacceptable. It is impossible to keep a friendly and democratic environment in the educational institutions beating journalists, leaders added.

We feel that the situation in university campuses are unfortunate on several accounts. The students by and large show aggressive behavior, particularly students related to most political organizations. Their parent political parties did nothing to build character. They could prescribe a set of books including some biographies, lives of Prophet (sm) and other great personalities as compulsory reading for them to build their morality. We urge this on major parties, particularly Awami League and BNP for their student organizations. Campus police organization also should be set up without delay. Partisan teacher politics should also seize. We have seen how a University teacher leader just after release from jail made accusations against an Islamic student organization. University syndicate should take action against such teachers.

24.04.2008

A New Plan for Rural Poor

According to press report, the government is going to introduce guaranteed employment programme in the next fiscal for the rural people during lean season. "The main aim of the programme is to provide work to any person who wants," Finance Adviser Mirza Azizul Islam told reporters at his office yesterday after a meeting of budget monitoring and resources committee. The adviser said if the government fails to provide work, it would try to compensate the persons during lean season with cash. The programme may offer cash incentive if there is no scopes for works, he added. "We are widening the safety net programmes following our experiences in the current year. Some new programmes targeting the poor will be introduced," Mirza Aziz noted. Asked, Dr Uttam Kumar Deb, head of research division of Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), said the scheme may seek to provide guaranteed employment to one member of every household below a threshold income level for at least 100 days a year, especially in the lean (monga) season. He suggested a minimum wage of Tk 150 per day. The government this month has already begun a Tk 100-crore project in the rural areas under which work will be provided to the unemployed people for daily Tk 150 each.

Leading economists like former finance adviser Dr Akbar Ali Khan have recently suggested introducing guaranteed employment scheme in rural areas amid price spiral of essentials including food items. The finance adviser said the government would also expand the safety net programmes in the next budget to give some relief to the poor who are hard-hit by the price spiral. On the guaranteed employment scheme, he said its details have yet to be finalised. The ministry is now working on it, while issues like budgetary allocation for it will depend on duration of lean period, working days in a month and rates of daily payment, Mirza Azizul Islam added. He referred to a similar programme in India titled National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) and said: "The new programme will be inline with the Indian NREGS." The NREGS provides guaranteed employment to one member of every needy rural household for at least 100 days a year, especially in the lean season. The Indian scheme of guaranteed jobs involves programmes of irrigation, public work and development of rural infrastructure, among others. A 2007 publication of CPD says the Indian government had allocated Rs 14,300 crore in the FY 2006-07 for NREGS. The Indian scheme says all adult persons residing in villages and 'C' class municipal council areas come under the programme. However, a person who is more than 15 years old but less than 18 can also be given employment under the scheme if there is no earning member in the family.

We welcome the new plan. It can be a good way to tackle rural poverty in lean season when the food price normally increases and also job opportunity in villages are very few. We do not know the details as these are being finalized. We should continue our development work simultaneously to create job opportunity in the country .We should also give more attention to agriculture and become surplus in food. This is quite possible as our economists and experts think. On the issue of the proposed new scheme we suggest maximum possible allocation.

08.04.2008

Indian Army General Jacob Wants Immediate Trial of War Criminals

United News of Bangladesh. Dhaka has reported that visiting former chief of general staff of eastern command of India JFR Jacob has demanded immediate trial of war criminals. 'The trial of war criminals can be held under the country's existing law. The government can take initiatives of holding their (war criminals) trials as the country people have already raised their voices for it,' he told reporters after placing wreaths at the National Memorial at Savar on Sunday. Maj Gen (retd) Laxman Singh, another member of the visiting Indian Army team, said, 'Being a fighter in the war of independence of Bangladesh, I must want trial of war criminals through special tribunal.' He said trial of German war criminals had taken place after 50 years of the Second World War. 'So I don't think there is any bar to holding trial against the war criminals after 37 years of liberation war,' Singh said.

We are surprised at such demand of the Indian generals when they are on a good will visit. This demand after all the Pakistani Army officers have been repatriated by Indian government and general amnesty has been declared by the government of Bangladesh in 1974 (except for murderers, rapists and arsonists of all sections), the demand is more of political nature and not a matter of justice. This is not an issue comparable with Second World War. In the case of second Great War, no such repatriation was made or no such amnesty was declared by the victors.

That the issue is divisive can be seen from newspapers of Dhaka, whereas Mr. Gayesshar Chandra Roy, Joint Secretary General of BNP has called it a political slogan (Naya Diganta), Mr Amu of Awami League has said the trial is still possible. We feel that Indian generals have done a mistake by involving in this issue.

31.03.2008

Domestic Violence Study Solution Lies In Education

AFP has reported from Paris injuries inflicted to women by violent male partners extends well beyond the short term, according to a 10-nation survey of domestic violence released on Friday. The World Health Organization probe found that physical and sexual abuse routinely resulted in troubled or aborted pregnancies, gynaecological or gastrointestinal disorders and various forms of chronic pain.

The study is the most far-reaching assessment yet into domestic violence in developing countries. In eight of the 15 urban and rural areas it examined, more than one in seven women subjected to domestic violence said they had been seriously injured at least five times by their partners. Not only the body is scarred by such violence, said the study, led by Claudia Garcia-Moreno of the WHO and published in the British medical weekly *The Lancet*. Consequences also included depression, anxiety, phobias and substance abuse, confirming that the effects of violence can last long after the brutality has ended. Most previous studies have been national in scope, and focused primarily on Europe and North America, he noted.

The percentage of the more than 24,000 women canvassed who reported having been physically injured by the men in their lives range from a low of 19 per cent in rural Ethiopia to a high of 55 per cent in the countryside of Peru. Other areas on the low end of the male violence spectrum include rural and urban Bangladesh (24.8 and 26.7 per cent) and urban Japan (26.6 per cent), while countries in which women suffered the most included Thailand and Brazil, in both rural and city settings.

The other countries included in the study were Namibia, Samoa, Serbia, Montenegro and Tanzania.

We are deeply pained at these revelations though these are common knowledge among people. The situation in Bangladesh both in rural and urban areas is also bad enough. It is a world wide phenomenon and we do not know of any magic solution. The record of men-folk in this regard is indeed deplorable. Long term solution of this chronic and probably oldest problem of humanity lies in education and also removal of poverty. We urge all governments, religious organizations, NGO's and UN relevant bodies to devise short and long term strategy in this regard.

05.04.2008

Political Parleys of The Government With Parties: Agenda Should Be Small

A local news agency has reported that the government is now working out the modalities of its much-awaited dialogue with political parties to hold a focused discussion with them.

"The modalities for the dialogue are being worked out," Syed Fahim Munaim, press secretary to the chief adviser, said yesterday. Although a schedule for the dialogue has not yet been fixed, he hoped that the discussions would start this month. Asked if detained BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia and Awami League President Sheikh Hasina would be allowed to join in the proposed dialogue, the press secretary said the modalities would determine every detail as to who would participate and whether the talks would be held together with all parties or separately with them. Meanwhile, IANS from Brussels yesterday reported that Foreign Affairs Adviser Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury told a meeting with Belgium think tank that the caretaker government intends to begin the political dialogue within two weeks. "It is our primary goal, indeed our constitutional obligation, to hold free, fair and credible elections. The response from all political parties and the public has been very positive," he said. The adviser said over 50 million voters have already been registered and the voter card would also serve as national identity card. "So far, everything is on track. What is left, however, is a dialogue with the political parties," the adviser said.

Meanwhile, major political parties, including the Awami League and the BNP, welcomed the much-awaited dialogue aimed at removing the doubts about the parliamentary elections. The parties said they would raise the issues of the release of the two detained former prime ministers, lifting the state of emergency and bringing down the sky-high prices of commodities.

The discussion of the government with the national political parties has been badly delayed. There was no point in such a long discussion with political parties by the election commission. In no country such discussion has taken place over more than four months. A simple questionnaire to parties was enough to elicit their opinion on certain issues relating to the election law and rules.

We also feel that no long discussion by the government is necessary. It should not focus on seriously divisive issues like amendments of the constitution. It should have a minimum agenda such as the election schedule, whether Upazilla election and national election should be held on the same date, how to maintain security during election time, how to handle the price situation and release of the detained senior leaders. A long agenda will produce nothing.

07.04.2008

Grassroot Public Hearing of People: It May Be A Good Way to Solve Problems

According to news reports Law Adviser AF Hassan Ariff yesterday urged the media to arrange grassroots-level public hearings so that people who cannot reach local administration for solutions to their problems or place their demands could be heard. "As a citizen, I would ask you to see whether public hearings can be arranged at grassroots-level for listening to their demands," the adviser said yesterday addressing a seminar titled "Is Amending the Press Council Act, 1974 a Must to Make the Press Council More Effective?". Suggesting such hearings could be organized at local press clubs, Hassan Ariff said he has heard that many people who cannot reach the local administration to talk about their problems contact the local press clubs instead. Bangladesh Press Council organised the seminar at the Jatiya Press Club on the occasion of World Press Freedom Day yesterday. Justice Kazi Ebadul Hoque, chairman of the council, presided over the programme.

Mizanur Rahman Shelly presented the keynote paper. He suggested updating the Press Council Act, 1974, involving the parliament in the appointment of the chairman of the press council, and appointing the chairman and a member for a three-year term. He raised a question whether the press council can ensure a responsible role of those involved with newspapers by only warning and censoring them. He placed "equipping the council with more powers" on the table. The programme saw lively discussion as some of the discussants underscored amending the Press Council Act, 1974 by giving it some "teeth" to punish breach of journalistic ethics while others said they do not want to see yet another regulatory body for journalists and rather want the council to remove obstructions and help journalists perform their jobs better.

The law adviser as the chief guest of the programme underscored the need for public consultations before broadening the jurisdiction of the press council.

"Massive public consultation is required to see if the reach of the Press Council Act needs to be broadened," he said adding that it should not be seen as the state's police power and it needs to be seen whether it reflects the people's hopes and demands. The law adviser joined others to say that freedom of the press is a must but there should be restraint on its use. "Journalists' freedom helps them in their professional work. But, in a democratic society, sense of responsibility is intertwined with freedom," he said urging journalists to be more responsible and honest. Delivering the welcome speech, Justice Ebadul said there is a lack of people's trust on the press council as many think it has failed to fulfill the expectations of the people and the journalists. He suggested widening the Press Council Act's jurisdiction to stop activities that go against journalists' code of conduct. He said journalists' track records should be looked into during issuance of accreditation cards. It needs to be considered whether state facilities should be limited or withdrawn altogether for newspapers that publish false and objectionable news hurting the rights of the people or the state. Jamil Osman, acting information secretary, backed Shelly's

suggestion to involve the parliament in the chairman appointment process and empowering the press council to criticise government activities regarding newspapers. He said it would be positive for democracy if the council had more power for punitive actions against people who breach journalistic ethics.

We agree with the Law Advisor that public hearing of the people at the grassroots level by the press may help in eliciting problems at the local level if the press then reports with due importance these local or grass root problems. The main news papers may try this good suggestion of the Advisor. However it should be held in a non-political manner with free participation of people. We also agree with the view that the powers of the press council should be increased so that the journalists who give abusive report can be given financial or other punishments. Journalistic ethics is followed more in breach in our country. We hope government will consider this point.

04.05.2008

International Group Suggestion: Can Never Think Beyond Their Own Agenda

An international organization focused on preventing deadly conflicts in a report said that a reformed, secular Awami League and BNP that respect the democratic rules, both internally and externally, is the best hope for democracy in Bangladesh and the best defence against religious extremism, according to report published in newspapers. Brussels-based International Crisis Group in its report on Bangladesh urged the caretaker government along with the international community to take credible steps ahead of the December 2008 general elections to restore democracy in Bangladesh. "If the government cannot bring the parties on board, it would carry the immediate risk of violent clashes and also increase the advantage militant Islamists are already quietly taking from the situation," says Robert Templer, Crisis Group's Asia Programme director. The report titled "Restoring Democracy in Bangladesh" notes, "The suspension of democratic functioning, the arbitrary and political nature of the anti-corruption drive and the military's intentions to embed itself into the country's political process threaten to create many more problems than they solve." The report released Monday says that the army-backed caretaker government came to power "in reaction to fifteen years of mismanagement and corruption by both Awami League and BNP-led governments". The government's "desire to reform the political parties, stamp out corruption and end undue political interference in the military is understandable, but the motives for military rule go further." It adds, "The military [backed] government has been unable to advance reforms within the parties and is causing the economy to slow. The country's foreign supporters have done little to walk the military back from its failing agenda."

In its report the International Crisis Group examines developments since this government took over in January, 2007 and looks at prospects for new elections. Although the caretaker government insists its plans to stamp out corruption and hold general elections by December are on track, its achievements have been patchy. "Even if elections are held on schedule, there is no guarantee reforms will be sustainable," says Michael Shaikh, Crisis Group's Asia Advocacy and Research Analyst. "But, if they are delayed, the risk of confrontation between the parties and the army-backed government will only grow." The report further said that "Prolonged military rule in Bangladesh has historically favored Islamist groups, directly or indirectly linked to violent extremists. Previous military rulers, generals Zia and Ershad, both cultivated Islamists for political support. Even without direct support, undermining the mainstream secular parties as the military has done during the emergency creates more space for others. As a Western diplomat said, 'by marginalising the political parties, the military are creating a vacuum that will be filled by the radical Islamists parties'."

We do support the genuine reform of parties which should come over time, not to be enforced by outsiders or interested quarters. However we find the real agenda of the report is to control Islamists in the name of militancy. Everybody knows the situations in October 2006 or January 2007 were not created by Islamic parties or groups but by left and so-called secular forces. The difficulties in all fronts after 1/ 11 was also the creation

of forces other than Islamists. But the report has brought in particularly the so-called Islamic militancy. Such unfair report does not help democracy which they want. They should have said also that any banning of Islamic party is an undemocratic step as demanded by some quarters but they did not make any such comment. We have no hope that these partisan western quarters will ever learn but certainly they can not stop rise of mainstream Islamic forces dedicated to service of the humanity and Muslim Ummah.

30.04.2008

1905 Banga-Bhanga Historical Event Remembered

Banga Bhanga day (a day remembering the division of Bengal in 1905) was observed in Dhaka on 16th October. A seminar was organized by Social Science Forum , a think tank specializing in social and human right issues, in Dhaka Press club. The meeting was presided over by Mr Shah Abdul Hannan, a retired secretary of the government and the chief guest was Justice Abdur Rouf, a former justice of the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh. The key note paper was presented by Mr Abdul Mannan a major scholar and writer on history of Bengal. Among the speakers were Professor Nazrul Islam of Jahangir Nagar University, Syeda Sultana Razia, Associate Professor of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology, Mostafa Kamal Majumder, editor, the New Nation and journalists and research scholars Mahbulul Huq, Mahezzaman and Ashraful Islam.

The speakers mentioned about the unjustified opposition of the then Hindu leadership of India who opposed the creation of the East Bengal province out of big province of Bengal Presidency which would have benefited the poorer sections of East Bengal and Assam who were mostly Muslims. Due to relentless opposition of the Hindu leadership the new province was annulled in 1911 and again merged into Bengal Presidency. The Hindu leadership compared the division of Bengal as division of mother Bengal where as the same Hindu leadership insisted on the division of Bengal in 1947 when Pakistan was going to be established and they would not allow the whole province to go to Pakistan.

In his speech the president of the meeting Abdul Hannan said that it is time to look into history dispassionately and he mentioned that early twentieth century was the time of serious friction between Muslim and Hindu communities. In that context the Hindu leadership was motivated by what they perceived to be Hindu interest though it was not enlightened interest of Hindu community. The issue was made a wholly political issue.

He said that time has come to go beyond the bitter memories of the past and build understanding in the sub-continent in the interest of peace and prosperity. India has a big responsibility in this regard but Bangladesh and Pakistan have also responsibility.

We agree with the views expressed in the seminar and congratulate the Social Science Forum for organizing the seminar

16.10.2007

Reform In Political Parties

Lot of discussion is going on in the country about reform of political parties. In Awami League Mr. Suranjit Sen raised certain issues. In BNP Janab Sadek Hossain, Ashraf Hussain and Saifur Rahman have also raised certain issues regarding reform of their party. Former whip in parliament and BNP Joint Secretary General Ashraf Hossain called for curbing the power of the party chief and end 'dynasty'. Only one day after Janab Saifur Rahman gave his interview on the issue.

However both major parties have stated that they would carry out reform freely after the political process is freed. Meanwhile Awami League secretary general has said that there should be consensus of political parties on expelling corrupt political elements otherwise corrupt elements expelled from one party will be rehabilitated in another party.

The discussion has raised some important issues. It is not our political culture to discuss internal political problem in public. It may also be said why these issues of family rule in the party, concentration of power in one hand, not holding regular elections in these parties were not raised before. In any case we feel that in the long run we may adopt the British and American political convention in this regard which allows free discussion on all party issues in public also. This will be better for democracy and this will help parties to improve their policies on a regular basis.

It is clear that some reforms are necessary in the party structures and the parties have to do that. We can only suggest changes and it is the duty of the parties to do these reforms after freely discussing them in the party forum. We also feel that nobody from among politicians or others should take chance of the present state of emergency to malign party leadership and hinder the reform of political process.

14.05.2007

12000 Thousands Lives Lost Road Accidents

News papers have reported that in a workshop held in Dhaka speakers have said that Fifty percent of the unnatural deaths, figuring around 12000 deaths occur every year due to road accidents in the country. To reduce the frequency of road accidents, the speakers also underscored the need for launching awareness raising campaigns. They were speaking at the inaugural session of a workshop titled 'Road Safety in Bangladesh: Constraints and The Way Forward' organized by Accident Research Centre (ARC) at the Council Building on Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET) campus. Inaugurating the workshop, Local Government and Rural Development Adviser Anwarul Iqbal said that the government alone cannot address the problem. Non-government organizations and other quarters should also help the government to this end. He, however, said that government has already taken up Road Safety Action Plan to reduce the frequency of road accidents. The adviser said Bangladesh has one of the highest fatality rate for road accidents in the world. In Bangladesh 160 people per ten thousand motor vehicles die each year while in USA the rate is 2 percent and in United Kingdom it's 1.4 percent. Buet Vice Chancellor Prof AMM Shafiullah said that one of the reasons of high frequency of road accidents might be that we are emphasising more on road transport. Secretary to the Ministry of Communications Dr Mahbubur Rahman suggested encouraging public transport to ease traffic congestion and reduce the frequency of road accidents. Director of ARC Prof Mazharul Hoque said that nearly 80 percent of the road deaths are of the age group 5-45 years, which have significant economic and societal impact.

Indeed the death rate in percentage terms per thousand vehicles by road accidents is much more in Bangladesh than most countries, probably all countries as we can see from the figure given by the Advisor. As so many other sectors, we have miserably failed in this sector also. We have lost much time and the road and traffic systems are a total mess. We have no suggestion except that there should be a plan prepared by the experts in this regard which should be implemented in the shortest possible time.

21.11.2007

A Final Solution of Rohingya Problem Is Needed

UNB Has reported that Foreign Affairs Adviser Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury has said this government will address the problem of Rohingya refugees in earnest with a view to resolving the crisis. The foreign adviser said this while he was speaking to the media following a meeting with Pia Prytz Phiri, representative of the UN High Commission for Refugees. "We discussed how bilaterally the UNHR can work together with the government to meet these concerns," Pia Phiri observed while speaking to the media.

We feel that it is necessary to solve this long standing problem of Rohingya refugees finally. This issue is continuing since the later part of nineteen seventies, for the last 30 years. The domestic situation in Myanmar has forced these refugees to Bangladesh, a few times they came in floods and in other times they came in trickles. The lasting solution is restoration of democracy and human rights in Myanmar. The leader of the opposition, who is also a noble laureate, is in house arrest for the last 15 years. Without restoration of democracy the problems of minorities in Myanmar can not be solved as their history has shown. The UN and major powers should try to solve the problem seriously. Bangladesh as a neighbor can offer a helping hand in this regard.

17.05.2007

A Party Out to Divert Attention

News papers have reported that the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) ATM Shamsul Huda on Monday said although war criminals should have been tried immediately after the country's independence, all the successive governments refrained from putting the anti-liberation forces on trial. Responding to a proposal for banning Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh from carrying out its political activities including its right to contest in parliamentary elections, the CEC said Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman provided amnesty to war criminals, but he also said people who had specific charges against them were not eligible for the amnesty. "It was you [politicians], who made anti-liberation leader Shah Azizur Rahman the prime minister after 1975. Anti-liberation people were made ministers of the immediate past government. Now how we are to go ahead disqualifying them from contesting in the polls?" the CEC asked. "Give us a mechanism, give us a proposal for approaching the matter," Huda said while holding a dialogue with Krishak Sramik Janata League (KSJL) on electoral reforms in the EC Secretariat conference room.

We are unable to understand the demand of a party KSJL which is hardly known beyond the district of its President Tangail demanding banning of a national party Jamaate Islami who are working in the country since 1955 except for a short period between 1972-75. The election commission is not the forum for such demand unless it is for sensibilisation and drawing attention of electronic media which normally they do not get. They should have gone to the Supreme Court to question the constitutionality of the Jamaate Islami. The party has raised all sorts of allegations against this national party in a forum which is to conduct election, not judge the history of the parties. The leader of the party says that Jamaate Islami was an agent of British colonialism which we have not read anywhere in any book of political history of the sub-continent. It seems that some politicians will never learn even after what has happened to the politicians in the last nine months. We deplore this de-meaning of politics

18.09.2007

About Indigenous People

Newspapers have reported that speakers in a meeting held in connection with the observance of International Indigenous Peoples day have demanded their right to their mother tongue, culture and land and ensuring constitutional recognition. Leaders of indigenous people alleged that their languages are still neglected; culture denigrated, wisdom and traditional knowledge overlooked, and sustainable ways of developing natural resources dismissed. They also said there are 45 ethnic groups in the country which are now facing the threat of extinction because 10 years have already passed but the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) Peace Treaty is yet to be implemented, and the indigenous day is to be celebrated officially. .

Prof Rehman Sobhan, a renowned economist, inaugurated the programme at the Institution of Engineers .He said Bangladesh's independence was the culmination of the historic language movement in 1952 and the government should give proper honor to ethnic languages, cultures and traditions on the occasion. In the evening session, renowned Jurist Dr Kamal Hossain said it is the duty of a nation to establish the rights of its. Sanjeeb Drong moderated the programme where Indigenous leaders Raja Devasish Roy, former legislator Advocate Promode Mankin, European Commission Representative Francoise Collet, Royal Danish Embassy Representative Nathalia Feinberg, Major General (Retd) Amin Ahmed Chowdhury, UNDP Representative Prosanjit Chakma and Prof Sadeka Halim also spoke.

As far as we know the rights of the indigenous people of Bangladesh like all other citizens of the country are fully guaranteed in the national constitution. If there is any implementation failure, the government should take all possible steps to ensure their rights.

As regards their claim to education through their, we do not know how this can be implemented. There are about 50 such small groups, population ranging from a few thousands to a few hundred thousands, all together they are about a million people. Their mother tongue has no written form, so how these languages can be the basis of education? We believe in all their rights but they should not allow any politics to intervene in their cause which will not benefit them. We request the government to look into all their legitimate demands.

10.08.2007

Rehabilitation of River- Erosion Affected People: Regular Agency Needed.

Newspapers have reported serious river-erosion of Jamuna bank in Tangail area. Forty villages will be eroded in this area only. There are erosion prone areas in the banks of Padma, Meghna and other rivers. People lose everything as a result of erosion. This is a regular problem that occurs in the beginning and end of monsoon and flood season. The problem is most acute in the districts of Kurigram, Sirajganj, Tangail and Chandpur and every year a minimum of one lac people is affected and the figure may go up in some bad years..

Unfortunately there is no agency to handle this problem which causes so much misery. I submit to you an important suggestion regarding evacuation and rehabilitating people affected by erosion of land by rivers.. These people become very vulnerable after losing all their land and homestead.

Till the formation of an agency for this purpose, we feel that Bangladesh Red-crescent society (BDRCS) can be given the responsibility for evacuation and temporary rehabilitation of the affected people and the government may provide them a small fund of taka ten crore this year from its contingency fund for this purpose. The Red-crescent has the manpower, volunteers and experience for this task. They have to be clearly empowered for carrying out this job and all the government departments have to be directed to fully co-operate with them in this regard.

11.06.2007

International

Face-Lifting Of Capitalism In Davos

AFP has reported from Davos, Switzerland, that Corporate responsibility rather than profit took centre stage in Davos on Friday, as the annual get-together of business chiefs turned its attention to issues of health, aid and development.

Rock star activist Bono, billionaire philanthropist Bill Gates and UN chief Ban Ki-moon steered the conversation away from the global economy and geopolitics, towards issues such as malaria eradication, poverty alleviation and climate change.

The Davos event has long prided itself on showing the caring side of capitalism, although participants have often been criticised for trumpeting big ideas on big issues in public, while actually expending most of their energy on corridor schmoozing and backroom deals. Gates announced 306 million dollars (208 million euros) of grants to develop farming in poor countries, marking a major push into agriculture by his charitable foundation which has previously focused on public health. "If we are serious about ending extreme hunger and poverty around the world, we must be serious about transforming agriculture for small farmers, most of whom are women," Gates said. The cash injection is to fund projects to improve soil quality, milk production, irrigation and seed development in a host of poor African and Asian countries. A perennial participant at Davos, Gates on Thursday pitched a new form of capitalism to forum delegates that would better serve the neglected poor. "The challenge here is to design a system including profit and recognition to do more for the poor," he said, calling for a new form of "creative capitalism." He was to be joined by Bono, Ban and British Prime Minister Gordon Brown for a debate later on progress -- or the lack thereof -- in reaching the UN Millennium Development Goals. Brown, in an early public interview in front of delegates, called for the World Bank to take on an environmental role to fight climate change in addition to its development mission.

This year's Davos event has drawn nearly 30 heads of state or government, more than 110 cabinet ministers and several hundred corporate titans. The first day was taken up with talk of a looming US recession -- a subject that was to be revisited on Friday with a round-table discussion on the theme of "Global Economic Shocks: Perfect Storm Ahead?" Thursday saw the focus of debate switch to the situation in the Middle East and efforts to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

We also feel that capitalism has really played over-all not a very human role. It has failed to eradicate poverty in its rule for almost two hundred years .Its emphasis on profit as the single motive for production and its emphasis on value-free economy(positivism) has ruined at least a half of humanity.We feel, as Islam says, business and industry are a collective duty (Fardul Qifya—a duty some of the community must do as an obligation)

and its main motive should not be profit , rather it should be serving humanity. Profit will come as a natural course if prudence is followed bur this should not be main emphasis at the cost of social need, labor right or other human considerations. Following more or less these principles the Muslim society could reach great economic progress during the Umayyad and Abbasid period and poverty was eliminated because of economic growth and the institution of Zakat and Waqf.

26.01.2008

Columbia University President's Unbecoming Conduct

Despite the objections of the US media, negative propaganda and a hue and cry in recent days over Islamic Republic President t Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's address at Columbia University, he gave his lecture and answered students questions in Columbia on last Monday afternoon. On his second day in New York, and amid standing ovation of the audience, Ahmadinejad said that Iran is not going to attack any country in the world. He discussed in the speech about science and its abuse by various authorities, attempts to obliterate cultures of other nations, nuclear weapon issue and Iran 's commitment not to make nuclear weapon, need for further research about holocaust rather than blindly accepting some given statements and figures, about injustice to Palestinian nation and inspection of Iranian nuclear facilities. He also answered to a large number of questions.

At the outset he said about his complaint on the speech of the President of Columbia University who read a political statement against him. "In Iran tradition requires that when we demand a person to invite to be a speaker we actually respect our students and the professors by allowing them to make their own judgment and we don't think it's necessary before this speech is even given to come in with a series of claims and to attempt in a so-called manner to provide vaccination of some sort to our students and our faculty.", he said." Many parts of his speech, there were many insults and claims that were incorrect, regretfully. Of course, I think that he was affected by the press, the media, and the political, sort of, mainstream line that you read here that goes against the very grain of the need for peace and stability in the world around us." he further said.

We observe that the President of Iran gave a sober speech which shows his maturity and academic background despite his young age. On the other hand The Columbia University President made a political speech in which he called Mr Ahmedinejad a petty and cruel dictator, an un-educated person and so many other un-becoming things. This was indeed a horrible mis-conduct done by a senior American academic. This will de-mean the American academic community. We are horrified by this mis-conduct. We condemn such behavior. We also appreciate sobriety of the President of Iran.

27.09.2007

BBC Dis-Information on Turkish Hadith Project

BBC reported that Turkey is preparing to publish a document that represents a revolutionary reinterpretation of Islam - and a controversial and radical modernisation of the religion. The country's powerful Department of Religious Affairs has commissioned a team of theologians at Ankara University to carry out a fundamental revision of the Hadith, the second most sacred text in Islam after the Koran. This is kind of akin to the Christian Reformation, according to Fadi Hakura, an expert on Turkey from Chatham House in London, Turkey is doing nothing less than recreating Islam - changing it from a religion whose rules must be obeyed, to one designed to serve the needs of people in a modern secular democracy. He says that to achieve it, the state is fashioning a new Islam. "This is kind of akin to the Christian Reformation," he says. "Not exactly the same, but if you think, it's changing the theological foundations of [the] religion." Fadi Hakura believes that until now secularist Turkey has been intent on creating a new politics for Islam. Now, he says, "they are trying to fashion a new Islam." Significantly, the "Ankara School" of theologians working on the new Hadith have been using Western critical techniques and philosophy.

This news of BBC was totally unfounded and a normal scholarly investigation in line with agreed principles of Hadith examination was misrepresented. The Turkish Authorities have denied the allegation and has given a statement of clarification. It says, as a Directorate of Religious Affairs project nears completion, a resurgence in Western media coverage on the topic, including a BBC report, has focused on an alleged Turkish attempt to re-invent Islam to suit the political aims of the secular republic -- but the directorate says that the project is a return, not a re-creation. Turkey's Directorate of Religious Affairs launched the "Thematic Hadith Project" in 2006 to re-evaluate the hadith, the second most important source of jurisprudence in Islam after the Quran, with the objective of determining incorrect hadith attributed to the Prophet Mohammed, correctly interpreting misinterpreted ones and re-explaining certain hadith so that they may be better understood by Muslims.

A fresh look at the hadith collections -- the gathering of which began some 200 years after the death of the Prophet Mohammed -- and how they are utilized and interpreted within the framework of Islamic jurisprudence, while sure to generate a degree of criticism and controversy, is a far cry from attempting to change, in effect, some of Islam's most important historical records. On Thursday the Directorate of Religious Affairs issued a press release that expressed frustration with the coverage of the project by the BBC and other Western and domestic media outlets, rejecting the descriptions of "reform," "revision" and "revolution." "We believe that this academic and scientific hadith project, being conducted independent of domestic and foreign politics, will be an important step taken to convey the universal message of the Prophet Mohammed to the 21st century," the statement read. Also on Thursday directorate head Ali Bardakođlu spoke to the press at İstanbul Atatürk Airport while on his way to Saudi Arabia and commented that some foreign press organs had covered the project without doing sufficient research to back their claims. The directorate vehemently denies that it is attempting to create a new form of Islam for secular Turkey or for political motives, as

the BBC report suggests. Instead, it contends that it is taking a long-overdue look at the classical sources of Islam, contextually re-evaluating them for the 21st century to ensure that the texts can continue to be a guiding, relevant spiritual source for Turkey's millions of Muslims. In essence, a return to an original form of Islam that has been diluted over the centuries by various developments. Görmez underlined that the project is being conducted by the directorate with the assistance of 35 hadith scholars from several Turkish universities and expressed disappointment over seeing distorted news articles in Western media related to their project.

The BBC report and also Washington Post report in this regard was unfortunate. Any careless report in such a sensitive matter increases tension. The BBC expert is clearly motivated and deserves to be punished by the authorities. We hope responsible news agencies and newspapers will desist from such reportings.

01.03.2008

British Muslims Angry Over Police Excesses

Agency reports say that British Muslim families in Forest Gate, East London, voiced on Wednesday, February 15, their disappointment and frustration at a police report that justified last year's anti-terror raids on their homes, blasting it as a "whitewash." "I would have liked to have seen some people getting prosecuted," Mohammed Abdulkahar, 23, told *the Guardian* newspaper. Abdulkahar, who was arrested along with his brother Abul Koyair, 20, was shot in the shoulder during the massive raid on their home. Police released the innocent brothers a week later. Though a report by the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) demanded police apologize to the families for the "terrifying experience," it stopped short of faulting policemen. Calling the families at the area "victims of failed intelligence", the report concluded, however, that the level of force used in the raid was "inevitable given the threat the police genuinely believed they faced." Abdulkahar and his brother say the report is eight months too late and does not go far enough, saying all they had ever wanted was recognition that "we are not terrorists." "A lot of people understand we were innocent families, we were not what they said we were," Abdulkahar said. "We have still not had an apology."

Muslim families in the area said the IPCC report had given the police a "green light" to carry on with their aggressive raids. "It is completely clear that a crime of the utmost seriousness was committed on or before June 2, 2006, "a group of families said in a statement. "The lives of several law-abiding individuals were devastated, and the life of one of them seriously endangered."

British Muslim leaders have blasted anti-terror raids and subsequent arrests, which mostly lead to no charges. British lawmakers also warned that anti-terror police raids risk to harm relations with the Muslim minority in the country. Last week, two of nine Muslims arrested in an anti-terror raid in the central city of Birmingham were released.

We also urge the British government to take into account the feelings of the Muslims there. They are there mostly because of the British colonial empire and the immigration policy. The Muslims there, particularly the Muslim Council of Britain, is helping the government to track down the terrorists. They can not be victimized or stigmatized as a community.

16.02.2007

Agreement on Europe's future Treaty Relations

News agencies have reported that EU leaders on Saturday clinched a deal on Europe's future, agreeing the shape of a treaty to streamline the expanded bloc after striking a compromise with tough-talking Poland in all-night talks. At a pre-dawn press conference, German Chancellor Angela Merkel hailed a 'good compromise' over the voting system in the proposed treaty, the issue which had prompted Poland to threaten to block a deal at the EU summit which began Thursday. Unsurprisingly she looked a little tired after almost 24 hours straight of diplomatic cajoling, hectoring and impasse. British Prime Minister Tony Blair also left his final EU summit having secured valuable concessions on the treaty that he hopes will get it accepted by British lawmakers, without the need for an unpredictable plebiscite. Merkel said the agreement would give the EU, which has ballooned from 15 to 27 member states since 2004, the ability to act effectively. The new treaty will replace the Union's failed constitution, which was torpedoed by voters in France and the Netherlands in 2005.

Prime minister Jose Socrates of Portugal, which assumes the EU's rotating presidency from Germany next month, said Lisbon now wanted to speed up the treaty process. Blair, who leaves office next week, and newly elected French president Nicolas Sarkozy both sought to persuade the Polish president and his twin brother, prime minister Jaroslaw Kaczynski, to drop their opposition. The British leader, who hands over power to his more eurosceptic finance minister Gordon Brown next week, largely succeeded in sticking to the four 'red line' conditions he set for agreement on the new treaty — that Britain would not cede control over foreign policy, its judicial and police system, tax and social security rules, and an EU charter of fundamental rights.

We are happy that the EU members have reached an agreement on a very difficult issue which was holding up progress towards an agreed treaty for dealing with the issues which EU have to deal in various areas of interest. We want a strong EU because a uni-polar world is bad for humanity. It makes some powers arrogant, careless and aggressive as we are seen in the last six years of Bush Presidency. We also hope that EU will also sort out the issue of Turkish membership of EU quickly.

24.06.2007

Sri-lanka Peace Process Must Be Revived

Agency reports show that the Oslo-backed peace process suffered yet another blow last week when the rebels vowed to resume their campaign for independence and statehood, scrapping a 2002 pledge to agree to a federal solution to end decades of ethnic conflict." I don't think there is any possibility to revive the (Norway-backed) peace process," said Sunanda Deshapriya, director of the private Centre for Policy Alternatives think-tank. "If at all, the parties will have to think of a fresh initiative." Amid the spiraling violence, which has claimed 4,000 lives since December 2005, Norway's top peace broker Erik Solheim made a fresh call for the two sides to return to the negotiating table. "Norway is willing to go the extra mile to assist their peace endeavors at their request," he said. "As soon as the parties renew their peace efforts, we will be ready to do all we can to help." Solheim said Oslo remained in regular contact with Colombo and the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) despite the collapse of the last talks between the two in October.

Veteran Sri Lankan diplomat Nanda Godage expressed pessimism that those contacts would ever yield results. "I don't think Norway has a role in Sri Lanka anymore," Godage told AFP. "They, will, however, continue to ask both sides to re-commit to the peace process." Godage said neither the government nor the Tamil Tigers would want to attract international condemnation by being the first to declare the process over, but said it was for all practical purposes. Western diplomats said reading between the lines in Norway's latest call for peace underscored Oslo's frustration at the escalating violence and the moribund state of the peace process.

In June 2003, Sri Lanka's key foreign backers-- Japan, the United States and the European Union--hailed reconciliation efforts, pledged 4.5 billion dollars in aid to rebuild war-hit areas and described the island as a beacon of hope. The euphoria has long since evaporated. Both government officials and diplomats here agreed that neither the Tigers nor the administration of President Mahinda Rajapakse would formally withdraw from the peace process or the truce even though they were all but dead. However, both sides have made a mockery of the truce which was the centre piece of the drive to secure a settlement to Sri Lanka's separatist conflict, which has claimed over 60,000 lives since 1972.

We are very unhappy at this development in Srilanka. We were always hopeful that this long-running civil war in our friendly Sri-Lanka will be solved through peace negotiation with the help of Norwegian mediators. There was also great progress and cease-fire held for a long time. We are unable to understand the causes of reversal of this process. In no case the Srilankan problem between the government and the Tamils can be solved by arms. It did not work before also. We urge both the parties to return to the discussion table. The UN should help the Norwegian in this respect.

27.02.2007

Towards a Nuclear-Weapon Free World

News Agencies have reported that Russia's foreign minister urged the United States yesterday to freeze plans for missile defense installations in eastern Europe during negotiations and warned that the proposal intended to serve as a buffer against Iran could backfire. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov's comments, reported by Russian news agencies, suggested the Kremlin is unhappy that the United States has continued discussions on its plans to deploy facilities in Poland and the Czech Republic following Russia's counteroffer of joint use of a radar station in Azerbaijan.

"It's necessary for Washington, at a minimum, to freeze the deployment of missile defense elements in Europe for a period of study and negotiations on the Russian proposal," ITAR-Tass quoted Lavrov as saying. Lavrov also warned that the U.S. missile defense plans could hamper efforts to ease international concerns about Iran's nuclear program, RIA-Novosti reported. The United States has said the missile defense shield is intended to protect against a potential Iranian threat. Lavrov said there was no proof that Iran was seeking to develop nuclear weapons, but that the missile shield could further provoke the Iranian government, which is already facing international sanctions for its disputed atomic program.

The U.S. system calls for a radar screen in the Czech Republic to watch for missile threats, and 10 interceptor rockets in Poland to shoot down any missiles. Both Bush and Polish President Lech Kaczynski said Friday the system would not threaten Russia. The Kremlin argues that the system would undermine its nuclear deterrent. President Vladimir Putin, who has led Russia's bitter objection to U.S. plans to deploy a missile-defense radar in the Czech Republic and interceptors in Poland, surprised President Bush with the offer of joint use of the radar station in Azerbaijan, which borders Iran.

We feel that the basic issue is elimination of nuclear weapons from all countries. This can not progress principally for the US. The reduction of nuclear weapons of US and Russia is also on hold as the US is building new weapon systems. The present row over the putting up missile shield in Europe is totally un-necessary. It will create new tension. The Russian proposal is relatively better to watch jointly from Azerbaijan the nuclear development in the area.

We remind the philosophers and thinkers and statesmen that the world can never be safe with nuclear weapons. We should all work for total elimination of nuclear weapons. The UN and other international bodies should work in this direction.

10.06.2007

Turkey -Iraq Understanding Needed On Kurdish Issue

News agencies have reported that Baghdad is "absolutely determined" to end the presence of Kurdish rebels in northern Iraq, Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki told his Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan over the telephone Wednesday, the Anatolia news agency reported.

Maliki said his government "is absolutely determined to end the activities and the presence of the PKK terrorist organization on Iraqi territory," the semi-official agency said, quoting unidentified sources. He said he had given orders to the autonomous Kurdish administration in northern Iraq to take action against the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), listed as a terrorist group by Ankara and much of the international community, Anatolia reported. Maliki asked for "a new opportunity" to resolve the issue through diplomatic means and proposed talks, according to Anatolia. Erdogan responded that he was willing to meet Iraqi officials to discuss the issue, but warned that Ankara cannot tolerate "further waste of time," the agency reported. On Tuesday, Maliki held an emergency cabinet meeting and decided to send a high-level delegation to Ankara for talks. Turkey says the PKK enjoys free movement in northern Iraq, is tolerated by the region's Kurdish leaders and obtains weapons and explosives there for attacks across the border in Turkey. Faced with mounting PKK violence, the Ankara government says it is left with no choice but military action because neither Washington nor Baghdad are helping curb the rebels.

Meantime Turkish Parliament has authorized the government the right of hot pursuit to Turkish troops into Iraq to take on the Kurdish insurgents. We feel that it is not the time for Turkey to enter Iraqi territory without Iraqi consent which will not solve any problem, it will complicate the situation further. It is against international law to do so unilaterally. We request the Turkish government to work out a plan along with Iraqi authorities

19.10.2007

World Should Not Forget Situation in Somalia

The situation unfolding in Somalia is horrifically grim. According to the UN, it is the worst crisis in Africa; worse than the crisis in Darfur that outraged the world's conscience in an unprecedented way. The past few months was the nightmare scenario that many analysts warned against as John Bolton, the US Ambassador to the UN, in his last days, aggressively pushed for resolutions that would ultimately pave the way for Ethiopia to invade its neighboring Somalia under the pretext of a preemptive war to protect its national security and contain "the spread of terrorism." The mainstream media can no longer disregard the magnitude of the human suffering in that part of the world, graphic pictures of the grisly effects of a callously ignored preventable violence and starvation are making their way to the living rooms of millions of household- an ominous reminiscence of the early 1990s.

Pope Benedict XVI urged global intervention to help end the violence and starvation. "I am anxiously following developments and I call on those who have political responsibilities on the local and international levels to seek peaceful solutions that can bring relief to these people," said the Pontiff. A week earlier, the European Union passed a resolution that "strongly condemns the serious violations of human rights committed by all parties to the conflict," and called for "an independent panel to investigate war crimes and human rights violations." Accordingly, these turn of events have compelled Washington to dash for public relations damage control. Washington's image has been steadily eroding since the spring of 2006, when 'Operation Dung beetle,' a CIA covert operation that financed some of the most brutal warlords to hound after the Islamic courts became public news. This subsequently led to the June 2006 popular uprising that firmly established the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) and chased the despised warlords out of Mogadishu. The courts ruled for six months, described as the most peaceful period that war-torn Somalia has known since the civil war erupted in 1991. Washington viewed this as a threat, and ill-advisedly opted to support the Ethiopian invasion of Somalia which, in due course, led to the humanitarian and political mayhem at hand.

We feel that the world in general and the US and UN in particular have grave responsibility in this regard. As Abukar Arman, the freelance writer based in US, has written, Washington still has a chance to rectify its wrongs and play a constructive role in helping to stop the brutal bloodletting in Somalia, by pulling the plug on the Ethiopian occupation and initiating through the UN Security Council a resolution that would replace them with UN forces instead of the mirage of African Union forces. Similar points have been argued by Sadia Ali Aden, President of the Somali Diaspora Network in a debate hosted by the Council on Foreign Relations a few months ago. We hope international community will heed their advice.

30.11.2007

We Want Early Solution Indo-Pak Problem

News agencies have reported that India's Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said yesterday that peace talks with Pakistan had brought "positive results." The nuclear-armed neighbors launched a peace process in January 2004 to improve relations. Mr Singh has said that the dialogue was yielding results. "We have been working purposefully for all-round improvement of relations with Pakistan," he told parliament. "Efforts we have made are beginning to bring positive results. We will work resolutely." Singh said New Delhi wants "long-lasting peace, friendship and amity" with Islamabad, and that "peace and security in the region is the key objective of our foreign policy."

Singh's statement came a day after the two countries concluded their first meeting of a panel set up to fight terrorism jointly, amid charges by Pakistan that India was fuelling a tribal insurgency in its Baluchistan region. New Delhi Wednesday denied the charges, and said it handed over to Islamabad evidence of Pakistan's involvement in terrorist activities on Indian soil. New Delhi, however, responded with restraint in the aftermath of the firebombing of a Pakistan-bound train in northern India last month in which 68 people were killed, and did not hurl the usual allegations against Pakistan.

The main issue between the two countries is Kashmir. In 1948 India agreed in the United Nations and a resolution was passed in the UN to hold plebiscite to ascertain the wishes of the people of Kashmir but India failed to keep its promise. Later after 1971 war between the two countries they agreed to solve the problem by mutual discussion. It is 35 years now after this agreement but no agreement has been reached and only the people of Kashmir are suffering. The people of the sub-continent are also living under the shadow of a nuclear war.

We urge the countries to solve this crucial issue left undecided by imperial Britain .We feel some concessions have to be given by both parties but the crucial thing is the wishes of the Kashmiris. India, Pakistan and the International community should keep eye on this.

10.03.2007

Tibetan Situation

We have been watching the Tibetan situation deteriorating suddenly. The Buddhist Lamas have been demonstrating and there may have been many deaths according to some reports. The disturbance now has spread in the outlying areas. The Chinese government has taken tough line in the matter.

.Reporters Without Borders condemned steps taken by Beijing to prevent media coverage of demonstrations and an ongoing crackdown in Tibet and in provinces where Tibetans live. Foreign journalists have been stopped from entering the province and tight censorship has been imposed on the Internet and in the Chinese press. The authorities have since 12 March refused to grant foreign correspondents permits to enter Tibet and at least 25 journalists, including 15 from Hong Kong, have reportedly been expelled from Tibet or Tibetan areas. "The freedom of movement for foreign journalists had been one of the few positive developments ahead of the Olympic Games, but this is now being flouted by the Chinese government facing Tibetan protests," the worldwide press freedom organisation said. "Yet again the Chinese government is trampling on the promises it made linked to the Olympics and has preparing the ground to crackdown on the Tibetan revolt in the absence of witnesses." "Online censorship is also veering into racism, with comment items urging the killing of Tibetan separatists, while all independent news on the events is being censored," the organisation added. The authorities have refused entry to Tibet to foreign correspondents since 12 March and tourists are also being denied access, for security reasons, according to the authorities. One European correspondent confirmed to Reporters without Borders that requests for permission to enter Tibet faxed to the Beijing authorities have gone unanswered. Officials responsible for giving permits for Tibet stopped answering phone calls from 14 March. The Foreign Correspondents Club of China said at least 25 journalists, 15 of them from Hong Kong, had been expelled from Tibet or Tibetan areas, particularly Xiahe in Gansu province.

Tibet has been a tension point for a long time since Dalai Lama left Tibet in special circumstances. There is a government in exile of Tibet headed by Dalai lama. China thinks it is Chinese territory. Be that as it may, it is necessary to resolve this long simmering problem. The Chinese government should sit with Dalai lama and sort out an arrangement on the lines of Hong Kong. This may be the best solution

18.03.2008

Egyptian Local Election: This Is No Way of Democracy

We know from press reports that local election in Egypt was made an one-sided matter. The opposition decided to contest only ten percent seats not to scare the government party but even then ninety percent of ten thousand candidates fielded by Muslim Brotherhood (Ikhwanul Muslimoon) were not allowed to contest by hook or crook . Despit this high-handedness, the Muslim Brotherhood has decided to remain faithful to democratic route. Dr. Essam al-Erian, head of MB political bureau of Brotherhood has stressed that Muslim Brotherhood will remain committed to democracy despite its decision to boycott local elections which came in response to the government extreme oppressive measures and not allowing vast majority of MB candidates to run. ""The MB's decision to boycott local elections is an indication that there is no real elections to participate in; it is futile to go on such a farce", he asserted.

"All media and the Egyptian people witnessed the utter boycott of local elections; the ballot center supposed to include 1000 votes turned out to be very few number between six and twenty voters, as stated by observers. The NDP has prepared a farce in which he is the sole player and audiences as well...indeed the whole world abandoned such a farce", he added. Al-Erian said he is not sure of real forgery in the ballots, but forgery is something expected from the NDP not to win elections, for he denied other oppositionists to participate, but to prove the huge number of voters!

He added that the Egyptians couldn't believe such a farce. The low turnout is due to severe frustration and lost hope in reform, not due to the late call of MB to boycott elections; however the MB decision was compatible with the general atmosphere in Egypt. On the other hand, Abdul-Hameed al-Ghazali, political consultant of MB chairman, stressed that the group's boycott of such a farce is correct, because it is illogical that the group's members participate in elections from which their candidates were denied after having hundreds of judicial decisions placing their names in the ballots along with the government executives ignorance of such verdicts; consequently, such elections are against constitution and law.

In US, during State Dept press briefing on April 7, spokesperson Sean McCormack, was responding to questions about elections in Egypt and recent political developments. The very vague responses by the State Department spokesperson left no doubt that the current U.S. administration is not willing to push the issue of reform any further in Egypt, and the status quo is the preferred policy by the U.S. at least for the remaining of its term in power.

It seems the Egyptian government got it right! Taking full advantage of a heated presidential elections season and ineffective foreign US policy during this time; the Egyptian government heightened its harsh measures against political opponents and

continued to challenge the will of its people in achieving reform and create a democratic society.

Mr. McCormack says the US encourages lawful constitutional participation in Egypt's political process "according to Egypt's law and constitution" adding that people should be able to vote for the candidates that are "legally and constitutionally on the ballot". These statements obviously exclude the Muslim Brotherhood candidates, since the MB is banned by the Egyptian government which claims that allowing MB to exist violates the Egyptian constitution that prohibits the formation of political parties based on religion. Defying the logic as usual in the Middle East, the U.S government always chooses to support authoritarian regimes in face of the popular demands seeking democracy and reform which further undermines the U.S. credibility and increases anti-American sentiment.

When pressed by more questions from reporters whether the U.S. will "speak with Hosni Mubarak about a lot of the crackdown that they've been doing", Mr. McCormack reverts to the same line of Egyptian laws and constitution as if the U.S. government really gives a damn about these laws if they were not for its best interest.

We are at the state of affairs in Egypt. The argument is that since the MB is made "illegal"- ironically by its political rival- therefore, it is not allowed to compete for elections and play by the democratic rules which the U.S has been bragging about. The MB is simply being pushed to the extreme by those who constantly accuse it of being extremist'. Its members are deprived of any legal or constitutional rights because they belong to an "illegal" organization, but meanwhile reject all MB attempts to become a legal entity. If the Muslim Brothers reject democracy then they're terrorists and Jihadists, but if they declare their commitment to democracy, then they're using democracy to hide their real goals of Islamic state. It is a tough situation, and if it was not for the MB steadfastness and wisdom, the consequences would have been indeed bad for all. We feel that all democratic parties, more so Islamic parties, should never fall in the trap of dictators and they should patiently pursue democratic and lawful method in politics.

10.04.2008

What Has Happened To Turkish Ultra-secularists?

We have seen the news that the Chief Prosecutors of Supreme Court Of Appeals have filed a case for banning the ruling AK party for violation of their sacred principle of secularism. What violation they have done , they have withdrawn ban on wearing hijab or scarf covering head by the university students and to allow that they have amended a few sections of law. The case also demands exclusion of the President Mr Abdullah Gul and the Prime Minister Mr Erdogan from politics. Nobody has any doubt that some sinister gang has planned this.

The ruling party which came to power with thumping majority in a free election only recently has condemned this effort as an effort to derail the democratic advancement of the country. However as it appears in Turkish press the AK party has taken the issue calmly, not organizing any public protest and has decided to face it legally.

A Turkish paper reports that, the atmosphere within the ruling Justice and Development Party (AK Party) was one of shock on Friday when news hit the media in the early evening hours that the chief prosecutor of the Supreme Court of Appeals had applied to the Constitutional Court for the party's closure on charges anti-secular activities.

But they were quick to get over the initial surprise and resolved to remain calm at all costs at the end of an ad hoc meeting on Friday night. The AK Party has decided to set up a committee chaired by Deputy Prime Minister Cemil Çiçek to defend itself against Prosecutor Abdurrahman Yalçınkaya's indictment. Another decision that came out of Friday's meeting was to warn all party administrators and deputies not to speak to the media about the closure case unless instructed otherwise by the party administration.

The first official announcement on behalf of the AK Party was "Thinking about the future of Turkey is not just the duty of the AK Party. Those who hurt Turkey will pay in history for what they do. It is again our responsibility to invite our nation to act with common sense. We will, until the very end, own up to the responsibility of representing the nation entrusted to us on July 22. We will not allow the eradication of the democratic advances our nation has made. Some judicial organs should stop using the law as an instrument for power struggles. Everyone will need the law at some point. Democracy and the law cannot be poised against each other. Turkey does not deserve such a scene."

We deplore the Turkish development and request all human rights groups, the democratic governments and international organizations to take note of the situation and help Turkish government to face this obviously planned assault on democracy.

17.03.2008

Iranian Election Result

Western news agencies have reported that, in their language, the conservatives (in fact the party of Ahmedinejad and the government) have won 71 percent of the seats in parliament after legislative polls, according to partial results announced by Interior Minister Mostafa Pour Mohammadi yesterday. In the first official statement on the outcome of Friday's vote, Pour Mohammadi did not specify upon how many seats the partial results were based. The authorities hailed a turnout of over 65 percent in Friday's poll, far higher than the 1 western channels had forecast before election. "The nation's vote broke the enemy's back," the hardline Kayhan daily crowed on its front page.

We feel it is the endorsement of the present government's principled conduct in the international field. Mr Ahmedinejad has tried his best to improve relations with Iraq, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and other countries. He visited United States and frankly expressed his views. In the domestic field, like most countries in the world, Iran is also facing inflation government is trying to improve the situation. The western pundits too much highlighted the economics issues of Iran though everybody knows that even US economy is in deep trouble Iran is also trying to resolve the nuclear issue though dialogue with IAEA.

We know that there is question about the quality of democracy in Iran because candidates are vetted by a guardian's council. We feel Iran should do the necessary screening of the candidates through election commission where there can be some scholars also as members of the commission.

17.03.2008

This Is Israeli Peace Offer!

News Agencies have reported that Israel sent secret messages to Syria recently signaling willingness to give up the captured Golan Heights in return for a peace deal that would require Syria to distance itself from Iran, an Israeli newspaper reported yesterday.

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert had German and Turkish diplomats relay to Syrian President Bashar Assad that Israel is willing to hold direct peace negotiations and give up the strategic plateau, seized in the 1967 Middle East War, the Yediot Ahronot daily said, quoting officials close to Olmert. Syria did not respond to Olmert's messages, the report said.

Assad has recently urged Israel to return to the negotiating table. But he has not publicly indicated a willingness to accommodate Israel's oft-stated insistence that there could be no talks unless Damascus scaled back its ties with Iran, its main ally in the region, and stopped backing Lebanese and Palestinian militants committed to Israel's destruction.

In the past, Israeli and US officials have said privately that Washington does not want Israel to engage Syria, because of its ties to radical elements and meddling in Lebanon, a former proxy. But the Bush administration is also under pressure from allies, lawmakers and advisers who think Washington should warm ties with Syria in an effort to isolate Iran.

Israel and Syria have tried several times in the past to reach a peace accord, which both sides understand would require an Israeli pullout from the Golan. The last round of talks broke down in 2000 over the scope of the withdrawal, and Israel's demand for normalized relations.

We think that the proposal is a non-starter. It is just to show the fake peaceful face of Israel. The proposal is a conditional one that Syria should distance itself from Iran. It is not clear what is meant by distancing from Iran. Is it an acceptable demand? Will Israel distance itself from US whose foreign policy is the cause of ruin and destruction around the world. Why Syria would stop backing Palestinians who are locked in a freedom struggle for the last sixty years. So is the case of Hizbullah the defender of Lebanon.

The only way of peace is without delay the withdrawal of Israel from all occupied territories, dismantling of all Israeli settlements in occupied territories under UN auspices. A new UN resolution should be passed in this regard and US should not block this resolution if it has any sense of shame. The US is not a neutral party in the dispute. It can not solve any problem, it can only delay matters.

09.06.07

Kosovo Now Independent

Kosovo on Sunday declared its independence in the final fallout from the conflict-strewn break-up of the former Yugoslavia. Tens of thousands of flag waving people packed the capital, Pristina, as the Kosovo parliament voted a declaration of independence which insisted that the world's newest state would be 'dedicated to peace and stability.' The parliament also approved a new flag for the landlocked state of about two million people. While the United States and European Union are quickly expected to recognize the new state, Serbia is infuriated by the move and has been given strong support by Russia. The Kosovo police had to stop several hundred former Serbian army reservists – veterans of the 1998-99 Kosovo war – from crossing into the territory ahead of the independence declaration. The group broke through a Serbian police cordon at the Merdare crossing before being held back. On the eve of the declaration, the NATO-led peacekeeping Kosovo Force – with 17,000 troops from 34 nations – said it would intervene robustly to prevent any inter-ethnic violence. Belgrade, which insists it retains sovereignty over what it considers the cradle of Serbian culture and religion, has branded independence an illegal act and a geopolitical land grab by the European Union.

Independence would bring down the curtain on the long and brutal break-up of Yugoslavia in the 1990s that followed the demise of communism in Europe and witnessed the continent's worst atrocities since Second World War. About 10,000 people died in the 1998-1999 war as Serb forces tried to put down ethnic Albanian separatists. A NATO air war against late Serbian strongman Slobodan Milosevic halted the conflict and Kosovo has since been under UN administration. The declaration started a 120-day transition period and the deployment of a 2,000-strong European Union police and judicial team to help the transition. A constitution – based on a blueprint for 'supervised independence' proposed by UN special envoy Martti Ahtisaari that Serbia refused to accept – would come later. Russia blocked the Ahtisaari plan at the United Nations and Kosovo's independence declaration will be made without UN Security Council approval, despite its backing by Western powers.

We feel the independence of Kosovo has come very late. Yugoslavia was an unrealistic and was held together by Tito's communist dictatorship. It could not survive the death of Tito. Such multi-ethnic entities can truly survive in true democracy or old-time dictatorship. Bosnians and Kosovans suffered tremendously in the hand of Serbs for a long time, particularly after the death of Tito. Serbia is not still realizing the reality and Russia also supporting the Serbian position not on the basis of principle, rather on the basis Slav nationalism. Kosovo is becoming the third Muslim state in Europe after Albania and Bosnia, not counting Turkey. We hope the country will progress and it will maintain firm democracy and human rights and that it will also maintain rights of the small minority in Kosovo.

18.02.2008

Ban on Cluster Bomb

AFP has reported that a conference at Lima of representatives of non-government groups of 68 nations have recommended for banning the cluster bombs under the Geneva protocol on ban on conventional weapons.

We whole-heartedly support this move. Cluster bomb kills more civilians than army personnel. In the recent Lebanon war Israel indiscriminately used cluster bombs and most of these did not even explode. These un-exploded cluster bombs have become more hazardous and scores of people are dying as a result. It is also a time-consuming and expensive process to clear all these bombs.

We feel it is time to reach a convention on elimination of this bomb which mostly harms civilians. The manufacturing countries are not in favor of ban. We know they will try to delay the matter as they have tried in the past in respect of land mines. The people should continue to fight for the cause of elimination of cluster bomb till the objective is reached.

26.05.2007

US Iran Policy Based On Faulty Intelligence

News agencies have reported that US intelligence agencies have concluded that Iran halted its nuclear weapons program in 2003 and that the threat of international sanctions has worked in compelling the Islamic republic to back away from its pursuit of the bomb. These judgments were among the key findings of a long-awaited intelligence report in which U.S. spy agencies retreated from earlier assessments that were more hard-line in their view of Iran's nuclear ambitions and intentions. The document, and the nuanced tone it strikes toward Iran, is likely to generate fierce new debate within the U.S. government, challenging the positions of officials, including Vice President Dick Cheney, who have urged taking a hard line against Tehran. The report also concludes that Iran "does not currently have a nuclear weapon," and that the country is unlikely to be capable of producing enough highly enriched uranium to make a bomb before 2009 at the earliest. The findings were included in a National Intelligence Estimate titled "Iran: Nuclear Intentions and Capabilities" that represents a consensus view of all 16 U.S. intelligence agencies.

"We judge with high confidence that in fall 2003, Tehran halted its nuclear weapons program," the report says. "We also assess with moderate-to-high confidence that Tehran at a minimum is keeping open the option to develop nuclear weapons." But the intelligence community also acknowledged that emerging evidence has forced analysts to alter their views on Iran's intentions and capabilities. The changes portray Iran as more responsive to international pressure than previously thought. "Tehran's decisions are guided by a cost-benefit approach rather than a rush to a weapon irrespective of the political, economic and military cost," the report concludes. Overall, the report notes that Iran "is less determined to develop nuclear weapons than we have been judging since 2005."

We are surprised that US intelligence is so faulty in so many important issues. We have seen how the US launched its invasion of Iraq on such intelligence. The same situation now in Iran case. Iran has stopped nuclear arms program four years back but US had been threatening Iran also in the last four years almost by the day. We have no faith on US intelligence earlier report also. It is now apparent that US can frame up- intelligence or political bosses can interpret the reports as they wish. We hope US will stop threatening Iran now.

05.12.2007

Myanmar Situation Deserves Attention

AFP has reported that since Myanmar's military government ordered a massive hike of fuel prices on August 15, bus fares around the country have doubled, imposing a crippling burden on the people living in one of Asia's poorest countries.

Anger over the hardships caused by the price increases has sparked more than one month of peaceful street protests, with thousands of Buddhist monks taking to the streets in Yangon and other cities for the past week. The protests over the price hikes achieved a landmark moment Saturday, when 1,000 monks and an equal number of followers were allowed to pray outside the home of democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi. The Nobel Peace Prize laureate, wiping away tears, waved to them from behind the gates of her lakeside house, where she has been kept under house arrest for 12 of the past 18 years. The demonstrations have become the most sustained show of dissent against the military regime since a pro-democracy uprising in 1988, which was crushed by soldiers who opened fire and killed hundreds, if not thousands.

We feel that Myanmar is a classic case of abuse of power by the military which is continuing for the last fifty years and the world has done nothing serious about this sad episode. The UN, western powers or China and neighbors together could do a lot to relieve the situation. It is their great failure, particularly of China and US. They could not unite on this issue for political short-sightedness and as a result democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi, the Nobel Peace Prize laureate, could not take power though democratically elected and spending her long years in house arrest. We ask the UN and world powers to take some hard action against Myanmar Junta.

24.11.2007

A Most Tragic Assassination Of Benazir Bhutto

Benazir Bhutto, the former Pakistani prime minister, has been killed in a gun and suicide bomb attack at an election rally in the city of Rawalpindi. At least 16 others were also killed in Thursday's attack with another report saying at least 20 bodies were seen after the explosion which triggered violent protests across the country.

Police said a suicide bomber fired at Bhutto as she was leaving the rally venue in a park before blowing himself up. "The man first fired at Bhutto's vehicle. She ducked and then he blew himself up," Mohammad Shahid, a police officer said. Pervez Musharraf, the Pakistani president, reportedly chaired an emergency cabinet meeting after the blast. He later appealed to the nation to remain calm "so that the evil designs of terrorists can be defeated," state TV reported.

Nawaz Sharif, also a former Pakistani prime minister, told grief-stricken Bhutto supporters outside the hospital: "I assure you that I will fight your war from now on." He said he shared the grief of "the entire nation".

We are totally grieved and shocked at this heinous assassination. This is a great loss to Pakistan. She was a brave and colourful politician. He entered politics after her father was interned and later hanged. He successfully won elections twice and became Prime Minister. Despite human failings, as everybody has, she was a great leader, highly educated and articulate. She has always denied that she was acting for a great power. She said in one of her last interviews that her agenda is for her country and she listens to the biddings of her people. She was for people, particularly the poor, and democracy and she was against military dictators. She was twice deposed wrongfully. She was faithful to the constitution made in 1973 when her father was the President and which contained a proper fusion between Islam and democracy. The politics in Pakistan has begun a new phase of uncertainty. Army rule has never helped Pakistan except compounding problems. We hope and pray that Shahadat of Benazir will lead Pakistan to better and meaningful democracy and People's rule.

It is also time to resolve for all countries, Muslim countries in particular, to eradicate all forms of terrorism including bombings and suicide bombings. It is also the duty of major powers to look into their foreign policies whether they are by their action generating terrorism. We also ask for caution that Islam or Muslims in general should not be made scapegoat for immoral and inhuman activities of mis-guided groups or extremists

28.12.2007

Human Trafficking In All Forms Deserve High International Attention

In a seminar on 'Counter-Trafficking Intervention in Prevention, Protection and Prosecution for Victims and Trafficking persons in Bangladesh' speakers said that Human Trafficking is the second highest profitable business after arms trading in the world .They said illiteracy, poverty, unemployment and ineffective laws are mainly responsible for human trafficking in the country. In order to raise mass awareness about the horrific issue, human trafficking should be included in national curriculum, they added.

The daylong seminar was organised jointly by International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and Ministry of Home Affairs with the financial assistance of USAID/Bangladesh. With a view to combating human trafficking, the government in association with the non-governmental organisations in 18 districts has been implementing a three-year-long (September 2005 and September 2008) programmes focusing on three main objectives- prevention, protection and prosecution. The stakeholders from Dhaka, Khulna, Bogra, Thakurgaon, Chapainawabganj and Rajshahi presented their papers on regional scenario of trafficking at the seminar held at Pink Cassia Auditorium of Rajshahi Tennis Complex. Local lawyers, community leaders, journalists and civil society members also took part in the seminar.

Human Trafficking, partly women trafficking, is a menace to peace, harmony and social stability. We have heard about child trafficking for sex abuse and body parts by barbaric people. Women trafficking is wide-spread for prostitution which is so much debasing for women. It is unfortunate that world-politicians could not muster strength to outlaw all forms of prostitution .The governments keep loop-holes in the law which hinders its elimination. The wrong concept of freedom of profession has been a bane, prostitution can not be accepted as a profession as robbery or smuggling can not be accepted as profession.

We agree with the recommendation that this problem of human trafficking should be included in the curricula as an essay in Social studies or in the literature curricula.

13.03.2007

International Woman's Day and Empowerment Of Women

International Woman's day has been observed throughout the world on 8th March. This day reminds us all that in most periods of history and in most places women have been neglected, deprived and oppressed. Recent statistics also show that domestic violence is present in all parts of the world Western world is no difference. It is imperative to establish the rights of men and women fully.

In the whole world especially in our country the oppression on the women has a foundation. The oppression is not descending from the sky. The ideological foundation for the persecution on women by men and at times by women themselves is that generally people believe, particularly the men believe that women are somehow inferior to men. This belief originates from some erroneous ideas among the people and mis-understanding about some religious provisions. If we want to eliminate persecution on women from our Bangladesh, it cannot be done excluding Islam. We firmly believe that there is a framework in Islam, which can ensure the progress of women. Spiritual personality of all human beings, their Ruh (souls) are the same and so as 'human beings' all are equal. This is the fundamental foundation of equality among men and women.. Qurani says: "we have indeed created the human beings in the best of moulds." (Sura Teen). It did not say that the men only were created in the best of moulds. It means there is difference in our appearances and in our structures. But everyone is excellent in his/her form. We are children of Adam and we are members of the same family. All human beings are equal Khalifa or representative of our creator.

We should, therefore work for giving all rights to women, there is no difference in right in Islam of men and women except in a few areas because of the nature of responsibility Allah has given to men and women. In most areas the rights and duties are the same. We urge our government to do everything possible to ensure the right of womenfolk, our mothers and daughters.

We are, however, distressed to see in some articles published in another daily by an ultra-feminist (who has tried also to interpret Islam) asking the present government to withdraw the reservations on two provisions from CEDAW (convention on elimination of discrimination against discrimination). The convention has provided for reservations and most countries including western countries have signed the convention keeping reservations on few articles to protect special cultural, religious and social system. Bangladesh has now least number of reservations, in fact only two, to protect Islamic inheritance and family laws which are, in fact, superior to western laws. The article says that the period of caretaker government is the ideal period to withdraw the reservations. This is the strategy of mean people who want to get things done against public opinion in the period of un-elected government. Such government should not touch any sensitive issue. We hope this government will not heed to these people.

09.03.2007

Remembering Yeasmin, A Symbol Of Resistance

Yeasmin Day was observed as the National Day of Resistance of Violence Against Women. Kormojibi Nari held a programme on August 26 at Gallery Chitrak in Dhaka. Yeasmin was abducted from the road by some members of law-enforcement agency, later raped and killed. The effort to conceal the crime did not succeed and finally under public agitation, investigation was launched and culprits were punished, some of them were hanged.

Speaking on the occasion Iftikhar Ahmed Chowdhury, advisor to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, said that the murder of Yeasmin was a tragedy for the whole nation, which should never be repeated again. Sultana Kamal, human rights activist, said that one still notices that men feel superior even though women go out to work and earn wages apart from running the home. She too condemned Yeasmin's torture by the police.

Renowned artist Shahabuddin said that women have been the muses to artists, writers and poets throughout the ages. He said that when had read the news on Yeasmin, sitting in Paris, he felt like his own kinfolk were being assaulted. He said that in his own paintings women are depicted as helpless . He believes that there can be no progress in the country unless women move forward alongside men. Muniruzzman, the director of Chitrak, said that numerous artists like Fareha Zeba, Ahmed Nazir, Atiya Islam, Alokesh Ghosh and Jamal Ahmed were painting on canvas with acrylic to mark the day, keeping Yeasmin in mind. Fareha Zeba had a blanched face of the victim Yeasmin in the centre of her canvas. All around are the cruel hands of the evil men who had abused her. A big cross of scotch tape covers her face as she could not protest in any way. Her fearful face, immediately before the incident that night and the twisted visage after the tragedy are included in the composition. Ahmed Nazir's work features a whole collection of eyes full of disgust and surprise. The artist says that anger and regret are reflected most in the eyes. The expression in the eyes, done in black and red reflect the feelings of the average people of Bangladesh who remember the incident. This brings in the reaction of both men and women.

We may have forgottenthe tragedy of killing of a small virgin Yeasmin who was brutally raped and killed by those, whose duty is to protect. There are so many other stories such as the killing of Shabmeher, a 13 year old girl of Narshingdi , in a brothel in Narayanganj in the most painful manner by slow torture when she did not surrender to prostitution which her abductors wanted. They have become symbols. We can not observe all such days but Yeasmin and Shabmeher have become symbols, we should observe these to protest against brutality against women, again police torture and prostitution.

28.08.2007

Sexual Abuse Will Decline With Night Shelters

News papers have reported that sexual abuse and violence against street children would be reduced by almost eighty percent if night shelter centres can be set up, speakers at a press conference said yesterday. The press conference organized by INCIDIN Bangladesh was held at Dhaka Reporters' Unity auditorium in the city. Speaking at the programme, Executive Director of INCIDIN Bangladesh Ratan Sarkar urged the government to allow the unused government structures to be used as night shelters for the street children.

Advocacy Chief of INCIDIN Bangladesh Nasimul Ahsan, Rakibul Hasan, Mushfiqur Rahman, Aminul Islam and Ritu Das were also present at the press conference.

We whole heartedly agree with the proposal of the organization. We also wrote before that the City corporations and Municipalities can set up shelters for vulnerable women, single or with children. To build up a few night shelters in Dhaka where these women may take shelter in these places. In future temporary shelters in some government buildings or schools for cold –stricken people in bitter cold winter also have to be made for a short duration in winter.

02.01.2008

Labor Law Amendment

Speakers at a seminar on Saturday have said that the government should amend the Bangladesh Labour Act 2006 after consulting with labour, trade and legal experts and NGOs, according to press reports. They said without the involvement of legal experts and representatives of bodies concerned, the long desired changes would be ineffective and unable to fulfill the expectation of laborers in the country. The seminar, held at Cirdap auditorium in the city, was organized to discuss the 77-point draft recommendation introduced by Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST) for the amendment of Bangladesh Labor Act 2006. The speakers also demanded cancellation of a few sections in the Labor Act Amendment Ordinance 2008 that violate the fundamental rights of laborers. They welcomed the "mobile court process" in the amendment ordinance and stressed appointing labor law experts in the court for its perfect execution.

BLAST set a 77-point draft recommendation for the amendment of Bangladesh Labor Act 2006 after consulting labor representatives, legal experts, NGO representatives and trade union representatives to make the act timely, realistic and effective. In the recommendations, BLAST urged the government to ensure that the owners follow building code while constructing or demolishing a building. Children and teenagers should not be allowed in any sort of works in ultraviolet and risky area, it also recommended. Vice President of BLAST Justice Nayeemuddin Ahmed presided over the seminar while Executive Director of Bangladesh Institute of Labor Studies Syed Sultan Uddin Ahmed, Principal of Shilpa Samparka Shikkhatan Kabir Ahmad Chowdhury and Advocate Azadul Haque also spoke.

We agree with the main recommendation of the seminar that the government should consult legal experts and labor representatives. This negotiation and discussion should not be in a half-hearted manner, rather it would be over a few days, clause by clause. Labor is a sensitive issue and proper labor right is a part of human right. Any bad law can mar the relationship between the employers and the workers and seriously impair the economy. Similarly employers' representatives should also be consulted. The law should also take care of the moral side of the issue in addition to pay, safety and physical aspects. Women safety should be a special side, particularly their almost total safety in transportation from work-place to home.

20.04.2008

Unnecessary Arrests and Harassment

The news paper reports suggest that the government has decided to stop un-necessary arrests. The advisory council on law and order yesterday asked law enforcement agencies to hunt down the listed and top criminals along with their patrons instead of making wholesale arrests. The committee, at its first meeting since formation, ordered preparation of a list of 'real criminals' by cross-checking the lists of different intelligence agencies. The meeting, which was convened to work out the means for translating the caretaker government's law and order agenda into actions, also strongly considered rehabilitation of slum dwellers and street vendors evicted from slums and footpaths during the joint forces drive, as it fears the evicted might turn into a law and order threat, said meeting sources. The committee instructed law enforcement agencies to concentrate on arresting 'real criminals' rather than just increasing the number of arrestees.

We all know that that every day thousands of people have been arrested since the crackdown started. The present instruction is too late for those arrested in the intervening period. The government has indirectly admitted that such mass-arrest was un-necessary. They should have clearly outlined their policy in the beginning. We have no doubt that thousands of innocent people have been arrested in the mean time. We need not explain what it means in financial and psychological term for those innocent people. The best thing for the government would be to review their cases within next seven days and release the innocent and also compensate them if they believe in justice.

Our jails are now crammed with inmates already with very poor facilities and these mass arrests have complicated matter. We urge the government and all the law-enforcement agencies to be more careful and thoughtful in arresting people.

30.01.2007

Women's All Rights Should Be Ensured

In observance of International Women Day, the speakers in a seminar said that the Muslim scholars of the contemporary world have a positive view of women's rights and adherence to the tenets of Islam would help establish those, news papers have reported. The seminar was organized on Friday by two organizations, the Witness and the Assembly for Protection of Hijab, Bangladesh to mark the International Women's Day at the Jatiya Press Club. The speakers said that as a very progressive religion Islam liberated the humanity from various forms of oppression, and this included the liberation of women. Dr Syeda Sultana Razia, presented a paper on 'Freedom of Women in the 21st century' at the seminar presided over by Dr Meera Momtaz Sabeka. Former secretary to the government Hannah Abdul Shah, former DG, Bangladesh Shishu Academy Zubaida Gulshan Ara, editor of the New Nation, Mostafa Kamal Majumder were special guests at the function. Shahnaj Hamid, Mahbuba Rahman Ph.D., Sardar Farid Ahmed, secretary of Dhaka Union of Journalists and Kaniz Fatima, faculty of Darul Ihsan University took part in the discussion.

In her paper Syeda Sultana Razia drew a historical background to the movement for women's rights and said that the economically weak people mostly run the risk of being deprived of their rights. This applied more to women who are considered weak physically and mentally. The worldwide movement for empowerment of women thus basically called for making women economically self-reliant so that they acquire the ability and the power to take decisions independently. She said that opposition to the movement for the establishment of women's rights in the Indian Sub-continent came from not political organizations but religious and social practices. Thus the liberation of women here was slow. Women's progress would get a boost in the present century of globalization and satellite communication which has both good and bad aspects. The mass media alongside the social infrastructure would play an important role in settling the women's position in society in this era, she said.

Shah Abdul Hannan emphasized the need for viewing the case of women's liberation from the perspective of liberation of the humanity from oppression. Women are human beings first and women later. As human beings women should have all rights that are necessary and desirable for all human beings. In addition they should have special rights as mothers because they carry more than men the duty of carrying all human beings in their womb and rearing them after birth. They have special rights regarding motherhood and their health issues. Nothing should be done which harm their motherhood and health. He cautioned against a reported move to amend the Muslim family law and urged the government to refrain from making such attempts that might have far reaching adverse consequences.

Zubaida Gulshan Ara said that women should establish their rights not by physical force but through the use of wisdom using which they should carry men along. She called for proper awareness about rights at a time when global powers were carrying out large-scale

destruction in one part of the planet on the plea of the establishment of peace. Mostafa Kamal Majumder underscored the need for having a comparative analysis of women's rights situation under other religions and in different societies for a proper appreciation of their rights in our society. He said women's rights should be pursued in a modern, efficient and smart way instead of sounding like going backward.

We agree with the speakers. The rights of women have been more or less neglected in history. Only during the time of the Prophet and sometime thereafter women had genuine rights and honour. Thereafter even Muslims failed and women lost largely their right to Masjid, education, job and property. In the West the situation is queer, apparently they have all the rights but in reality they have become a kind of commodity and sex symbol, a resource for capitalist exploitation in advertisement and entertainment and such other areas.

We are happy that a balanced Muslim movement, even feminist movement has come up with balanced view for women, give them honor and rights but not to make them commodity. This is a welcome development.

08.03.2008

Media Is Harming Women Reputation And Honor

News papers have reported that a seminar titled “Images of women in TV commercials” has highlighted the objectification of women in commercial advertisements. The seminar was held at the CIRDAP auditorium on March 17 and was organized by Center for Development Communication with the support of Oxfam-GB Bangladesh. Noted media personality Muhammad Jahangir hosted the seminar. Professor Saurav Sikder of University of Dhaka, presented the main speech at the seminar along with a slide show featuring clips from different TV advertisements that often objectify women. He said that media policies regarding this issue should be precise so that the image of woman is not demeaned in the commercial,". Professor Sikder added, "It is very important to keep in mind the impact these ads have on the children. A young, impressionable mind can be highly influenced by what is being shown on TV."

We agree with the seminar speakers about demeaning women through advertisements. In fact it is a world wide phenomenon. In the West the ads of bras and underwear's are horrible with no sense of shame. The concept of unbridled freedom is the reason for so many shameless happenings everywhere. They may argue that there is nothing called shame, the indication of deeper disease. There is need for an international protocol in this regard for so many reasons including saving the honor of women and saving the consumers from deception. We call upon all to think over this matter.

19.03.2008

Recommendation of Ulama Committee on women Policy

We have seen the recommendation of some Ulama or Islamic scholars selected by the government who have submitted their report to the Law Advisor Mr Hasan Arif. The committee asked the government to clarify the phrase "women's equal rights to earned movable and immovable properties" and follow Islamic provisions on inheritance if the earned properties include inherited properties. Suggesting inclusion of guidelines "in the light of the Quran and Sunnah" while taking any decision regarding women's rights, the ulema recommended abolishing the section that suggests steps to implement the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Asking the government to withdraw Bangladesh from the convention, they said many sections in it go against the belief, spirits and culture of the Muslim ummah. Adviser Hassan Ariff expressed hopes that the recommendations will remove the "language or interpretation gap" created surrounding the Women Development Policy. The committee members did not support the attempts by a section of opportunists to create chaos by taking advantage of the situation, he told reporters.

The Islamic scholars said not only is it impossible to establish equal rights for men and women in the country, but in some cases, giving women equality would deprive them of their rights in many sectors. They proposed replacing the phrase "equality, equal rights and affirmative action" with "just rights". The committee also said the ambition of eradicating "existing disparities between women and men" is unclear and should be replaced by the phrase "existing disparities between women and men in light of the Quran and the Sunnah".

On the section that asks for giving women equal human and fundamental rights such as political, economic, social and cultural, they said "just rights" should be ensured for men and women in light of the Quran and Sunnah. They also opposed the provision of a child's being identified by both the mother and father, saying it "encourages sexual abuse" and pre-marital cohabitation. They recommended identifying a child by "legally married" parents. The committee observed that the policy's proposed penalty for child marriages is not in line with Islamic policy as the legal marriage age of 18 should not apply here because Islam states that a girl can be married as soon as she has "come of age". It recommended replacing the phrase "child marriage" of the section concerned with "discourage underage marriage".

The committee opposed inclusion of women in peacekeeping missions, saying it would make women insecure and it could tarnish Bangladesh's image. The ulema proposed cancelling the provision. They also opposed the provision that women "must be given equal opportunities and participation in wealth, employment, market and business", saying it clashes with the Quran's teachings. They proposed giving women equal opportunities and participation in these sectors in light of religious dictums. The committee specifically said one's inheritance rights should be determined by their own

religions. The ulema asked the government to cancel the initiative to reserve one-third parliamentary seats for women to increase women's participation in parliament and its application in local elections

We hope with the submission of the report and law advisor's assurance that the government will carefully consider the recommendation, the present agitation will stop. We feel that most of the recommendations are good .The use of the word equity in place of equality is better for all as in that case women can be in fact given more rights than men in suitable areas.

We can not however agree with the committee on its recommendation on abolition reservation for women in Parliament and in other areas. The quota in the Parliament is a matter of the constitution and service quota is a matter of other laws .Women policy has just re-iterated it. These Ulama should not have opposed quota because they did not oppose quota before. Parliamentary quota is there for a long time. It was also in Pakistan constitution.It is there in Bangladesh constitution. Some of the parties run by these Ulama never mentioned this point in their electoral manifesto. Special provision for relatively weaker section can be made under the constitution .This is in accord with Islam also as Allah says in Sura Qasas that Allah wants to favor the weak and deprived. It is good that these Ulama have supported women in services and in Parliament on the basis of merit. However special provision for women and Adibasis etc are quite alright .The committee, in fact, should not have talked about these issues at all. Their committee should have discussed about only matter or matters which are directly against the Quran or Sunnah The word equity is better but equality subject to its interpretation is also alright as in ninety nine percent cases (of fundamental rights, Ibadah, punishments, education and Dawah, charity, right to buy and sale , ownership, in fact every thing except a few cases)men and women are equal . Only in a few cases women have been given more right or men have been given more right. When the Prophet said that Arabs and Non Arabs are equal it means all human beings are equal (as Arabs and Azamis include men and women). This is the spirit of Sura Nisa Ayat 1 and Sura Hujrat. We should not forget basic equality of humanity in the heat of the present situation.

We also believe that the present law which makes child marriage liable to punishment though valid is necessary in view of abuse because of all-round ignorance in society about the values of Islam. Islamic state had always the right to stop abuse of lawful things.

18.04.2008

Punishment of Police Officials

News papers have reported that with a motive of cleansing police department, 15,405 cops had been punished in last one year since April 2007 for their misconduct and involvement in criminal activities and corruption. The drive to detect bad cops and ensure their punishment intensified after a new police unit 'police international oversight' was established in May 2007 under direct supervision of the inspector general of police. 'We have taken a number of initiatives to bring accountability and transparency in the police department grabbing the changed situation of the country,' said the police boss Nur Muhammad while inaugurating a web site at the police headquarters on Wednesday. The web site (www.pio.gov.bd) was launched aiming at tracking down both police and public involved in corruption and other unlawful activities. The aim of launching the web site was also to cleanse police from corruption, inefficiency and political interventions originated from corruption.

'Our objective is to identify and get rid of corrupt officials in the quickest possible time,' said additional police super Md Mahbubul Karim while giving presentation on the web site. He said it would also identify honest, efficient and dynamic officers so as to put the right people at right place. Headed by deputy inspector general Benzir Ahmed, the police international oversight was functioning all over the country, splitting into four wings and comprising field agents. 'Even from the remote areas, information is being collected and reported on 24 hours a day and 7 days a week', said Benzir Ahmed. IGP said that the initiative was taken despite having the limitations. 'But we believe that the countrymen, including Bangladeshis living abroad, would be benefited.' He said they were desperately trying to alter the current awful image of the police by turning it a people-friendly and service-oriented organization. Details of a complainant were not mandatory while he or she lodging it on the web site.

We hope the new arrangement under the present IGP becomes helpful in combating crime. From our discussion with various sections of the people we find that police corruption, harassment, beating in custody are continuing unabated. We feel that some more steps are necessary. Something like court martial should also be introduced in the police, any serious offence should mean at least dis-charge from service as this department deals with life and liberty of the people unlike many other departments. Special courses on human rights, teaching of religion in respect of the dignity and right of human being should also be included in the training program.

03.04.2008

Religion/Culture

International Hijab Solidarity Day Observed

International Hijab Solidarity Day was observed in Dhaka under the auspices of Assembly for Protection of Hijab, Bangladesh which is an affiliate organization set up in Bangladesh in line with Assembly for Protection of Hijab, UK. It was formed in the beginning of August, 2004, and they called for observance of International Hijab Solidarity Day on 3rd September every year. A seminar was organized in the VIP lounge of Dhaka Press club which was presided over by eminent political scientist Prof UAB Razia Akter Banu. The chief guest was former justice of the Supreme Court and former chief election commissioner Mr. Abdur Rouf.

The speakers said that in the beginning of 2004, a law was passed by the French Parliament effectively banning, among others, wearing of headscarf (Hijab) First, The Prime Minister of France declared such an intent and then President Chirac called it an aggression on France. This law has become effective from September 2, 2004 when the school year starts. The action of the French Government and the Law has hurt the feelings of all Muslims and religious people. France has said that this is against secularism. This is a misinterpretation of secularism. Secularism is not opposed to religious right. The speakers said that it is not aggression against France or its culture. This is also not a religious symbol, this is an obligatory rule of Islamic Law, to deny this right is denial of religious and human right. France has also said that this is a way of political protest. This is a figment of their imagination.

Hijab (whatever be the form) is a part of Islamic dress code. It is no part of political protest. In some states in Germany and political leaders in some other European countries have also called for ban of Hijab. So this is a big issue which cannot be ignored. If it is allowed then interference can come in other religious rights also of Muslims and non-Muslims.

We feel the Hijab Solidarity day is very important. It cannot be ignored. It is a religious issue. It is a human Right issue. Human and religious right are recognized in U.N Declaration of Human Rights. We are for human right of all people. We request all people of all religions to stand up for this issue. Otherwise religious right of all people will be affected in future. We request France to revoke this law.

03.09.2007

British Muslim Concerns

AFP has reported from London that the head of a major body representing British Muslims said the country must beware of fostering a culture like Nazi Germany and warned of "suspicion and unease" about Muslims in an interview on Saturday. Muhammad Abdul Bari of the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) said there was "a disproportionate amount of discussion surrounding us" and criticized the head of MI5 for "creating a scare" by saying Al-Qaeda was "grooming" children here. "The air is thick with suspicion and unease. It is not good for the Muslim community, it is not good for society," he told the Daily Telegraph newspaper and the BBC in a joint interview. "Every society has to be really careful so the situation doesn't lead us to a time when people's minds can be poisoned as they were in the 1930s." If your community is perceived in a very negative manner, and poll after poll says that we are alienated, then Muslims begin to feel very vulnerable. "We are seen as creating problems, not as bringing anything and that is not good for any society."

The MCB's assistant general secretary, Inayat Bunglawala, later told BBC radio that there was a danger of the threat from extremists being magnified "out of all proportion". "What you had in the 1930s was all sorts of popular fictions were spread about the Jewish community that they were responsible for all ills that were occurring to Germany," he said. "They were made into folk-devils and I think there is a danger that the word Muslim in the UK is becoming synonymous with bad news." Dr. Abdul Bari also said it was wrong to describe someone as an Islamic terrorist, adding: "We never called the IRA (Irish Republican Army) Catholic terrorists

We in Bangladesh also feel concern because a large part of Muslim community is from Bangladesh. It is never appropriate to identify any criminal activity or group with any nation or religion as Dr Abdul Bari has explained. The scare-mongering is the worst thing possible and it is not proper for any civilized and democratic state to stigmatize any particular community or religion. Unfortunately in this respect western media is no better, in some situation it is worse. It is the media which has created Islam-phobia with a purpose. We do not know whether British government will heed to the statement of MCB secretary general but we believe it will be better for them if they do.

12.11.2007

Introduction of Muslim Personal Law In Britain

News agencies have reported that Archbishop of Canterbury Dr. Rowan Williams has defended his call for the adoption of some Shari`ah aspects in Britain to resolve civil Muslim matters, saying his remarks were "well-researched." The Archbishop was not suggesting the introduction of parallel legal jurisdictions, but exploring ways in which reasonable accommodation might be made within existing arrangements for religious conscience," Williams said in a statement on his website.

His lecture and interview to the BBC on Thursday were a careful exploration of the limits of a "unitary and secular" legal system and how, in an increasingly diverse society, it might be able to accommodate religious claims, added the statement, which was posted late on Friday, February 8.

"In doing so, the Archbishop was not suggesting the introduction of parallel legal jurisdictions but exploring ways in which reasonable accommodation might be made within existing arrangements for religious conscience."

The statement said Williams was misunderstood and his remarks were in no way hasty but "well-researched." "His lecture was well-researched and involved consultation with legal experts, especially people with knowledge and experience of Jewish and Islamic legal systems.

He said Shari`ah should be introduced as an officially sanctioned legal alternative when it comes to civil issues concerning Muslims such as marriage and financial matters such as inheritance.

The Archbishop has won support from some British Church leaders, who said critics might be getting the wrong end of the stick.

The Bishop of Hulme Stephen Lowe condemned the "kneejerk" response to Williams' call.

"We have probably one of the greatest and the brightest archbishops of Canterbury we have had for many a long day," Lowe told the *Guardian* on Saturday.

"He (Williams) is undoubtedly one of the finest minds of this nation," he added.

"The way he has been ridiculed, lampooned and treated by some people and indeed some of the media ... is quite disgraceful."

The Bishop of Southwark, the Right Rev Tom Butler, said Williams was entitled to raise the issue of Shari`ah.

"What has been explosive is that his examples have referred to Shari`ah law, which is an emotive concept in our society. He is saying these Shari`ah councils in some places already exist informally.

"It might be better to formalize them under British law, to make sure they do correspond to British law. But there are real practical difficulties," he said.

British Muslim leaders have cautiously welcomed Williams's call, saying the Archbishop's comments have been misunderstood. They said the debate is getting out of control because people failed to understand that Williams meant the civil not the penal aspect of Shari`ah.

"We welcome his position for applying some Shari`ah aspects in Britain," Dr Daud Abullah, Deputy Secretary General of the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB), told IslamOnline.net on Friday, February 8, over the phone from London. "We believe that if this system is adopted, it will help remove some abuses and complaints facing British Muslims." "These comments further underline the attempts by both our great faiths to build respect and tolerance," said Mohammed Shafiq, director of the Ramadhan Foundation, an education welfare body. "Shari`ah law for civil matters is something which has been introduced in some western countries with much success." "I believe that Muslims would take huge comfort from the Government allowing civil matters being resolved according to their faith," he told the *Guardian* on Friday.

Muslim leaders said that whenever Shari`ah is mentioned, it usually comes to the mind with the false image of cutting hands and penalties, "It is not about the penal system. It is much more about civil system concerning marriage, divorce and inheritance." Abdullah said that British laws fall short of tackling Muslim issues of marriage, divorce, maintenance and inheritance "If a woman marries and she is divorced or her husband dies, she will not be able to get her dowry," he said. Under English law, people may devise their own way to settle a dispute in front of an agreed third party as long as both sides agree to the process. Shari`ah courts and the Jewish Beth Din, which already exist in the UK, come into this category.

We understand that only Islam-phobic persons are criticizing the Arch Bishop of Canterbury .This always happens when the issue is Islam or its related issues.We understand that he was only discussing the necessity of recognizing the majority of Muslims wishes to live by Islamic family and personal law. This is wholly commensurate with democracy, human and religious rights The Arch Bishop deserves praise for his courage for upholding religious law in the personal law area of the Muslims. This is being practiced in all countries of the sub-continent. This is the practice in most Muslim countries also.

12.02.2008

Islam Does Not Permit Taking Law in Individual Hand

AFP has reported from Lucknow that an Indian Muslim group has offered a 500,000 rupee (11,319 dollar) bounty for the beheading of controversial Bangla-deshi author Taslima Nasreen.

The president of the All India Itehad Council, Taqi Raza Khan, said on Friday he had declared the reward for anyone who carried out the "quatal" or "extermination" of the "notorious woman." "Taslima has put Muslims to shame in her writing. She should be killed and beheaded and anyone who does this will get a reward from the council," he said in a statement received in Lucknow, capital of northern Uttar Pradesh state. Khan said the only way the bounty would be lifted was if Nasreen "apologises, burns her books and leaves." "The bounty was not a fatwa as Khan, while a cleric, is not senior enough to issue Islamic decrees.

But it drew swift condemnation from one of south Asia's most powerful Muslim seminaries. The Ulama of Dar-ul Uloom in Deoband in Uttar Pradesh, a state with a large Muslim population, said the call to behead Nasreen was "un-Islamic" and that clergy should not issue such "fatwas." "Unnecessary edicts increase friction in society and people of other religions start treating Islam as a barbaric religion," Mufti Arif, who sits on the board of the fatwa committee of Dar-ul Uloom, told AFP by telephone.

We feel Deobond has done well by issuing this clarification. Islam does not allow anyone living in any country to take law in his hand. Law can be implemented only by the state functionaries. If the state does not punish the offenders against Islam and the Prophet, the Muslims can only demand for taking action against the offenders. It is the duty of the state to take action against such people who commit blasphemy.

Unfortunately Taslima Nasreen is continuing with her attack on Islam, Quran and the Prophet. These attacks do no damage to Islam as history has proved, every attack has led to more progress and consolidation of Islam. But she is really creating tension in the community again and again. We urge the Indian government to stop her from any criticism of Islam so that such tension can be avoided, We also ask the Indian government to punish anybody who incites murder and encourage people to take law into their hand.

18.03.2007

Azhar "Modern" Schools –We Can Take Lessons

Islam online news report from Cairo says that striking the right balance between general and religious subjects, a new brand of Al-Azhar-supervised schools are thriving in Egypt and attracting many parents who want to instill basic Islamic values into their green sibilings. "We need more of these schools to maintain the Arab-Islamic culture and identity of the young generations," sociologist Ahmad Al-Magdoub told IslamOnline.net. "This kind of schools is much overdue." Al-Magdoub said what is unique about these schools is the fact that they put science and religion on equal terms Al-Magdoub said he is confident that the graduates of Azhar-style schools will leave their indelible marks on society and become a source of pride to their parents.

Schools such as "Al-Ghad El-Moshreq" and "Memphis" have taken the initiative and launched Azhar-style grades a few years ago to meet a growing demand from parents, who want to enroll their children at religious but which teach also general and science subjects. Tariq Al-Mahdi, a teacher at Al-Azhar Memphis School, said the educational system in Egypt went awry and the country is in a dire need for such serious schools. "Education at state-run schools has completely collapsed, while private schools are widening the gap between students and society," he said. "Students could further develop some identity problems at such private schools, not to mention that they are ignorant of the basics of Arabic and the principals of their Muslim faith," said the teacher. "I have enrolled my children at one of these Azhar-style schools to make sure that they will always be in close touch with their faith."

Religious curricula in the new schools are supervised by Al-Azhar, the highest seat of learning in the Sunni Muslim world. "Al-Azhar supervises such schools in coordination with the Ministry of Education," Al-Azhar Department for Educational Institutions said in a statement e-mailed to IOL. "Al-Azhar makes sure that such schools abide by its rules. Violators will have their authorizations withdrawn," it added. "The schools also abide by Al-Azhar rules like segregation between males and females starting from the sixth grade," said Mohammad Saleh, an official at the Memphis Al-Azhar School. Students graduating from these schools will be granted Al-Azhar-sealed certificates qualifying them to join Al-Azhar University.

We believe that the school systems in the Muslim countries could benefit from the experience of the modern schools established by Al-azhar University. In particular our Qaumi Madrasas can start such schools and their students can then join either higher religious education or modern colleges and universities. We hope Muslim governments will study the system and use it in an appropriate manner suitable to the circumstances of each country.

02.07.2007

Media Responsibility

Newspapers have reported that eminent media experts of the South Asian nations at a conference in the capital yesterday called for greater responsibilities of journalists, and for ensuring their protection to strengthen democracy, the freedom of expression, and upholding of human rights. Journalists need to be better equipped to cope with the challenges of covering armed conflicts and violence, and need to stop glamorizing violence that might be commercially beneficial for the media, but harmful for the victims, they observed. The two-day Senior Editors' Conference 2007 on Media Reporting -- Armed Conflict and Violence, began at Sheraton Hotel yesterday with the participation of 22 senior editors and columnists from the member countries of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).

Some discussants said framing laws to protect journalists from the hands of vested interest groups involved in illegal trades, insurgents, and even from state machinery is important, while some others felt that a society that ensures rule of law does not need any law of privilege to protect journalists. The South Asian media leaders said there should be authentic media watchdogs playing manifold roles in improving the media, including playing a role in ensuring transparency and accountability. Asian Affairs Editor Dr Mizanur Rahman Shelley of Dhaka termed journalists 'unacknowledged legislators', and observed that the authorities should change their mindset and should be motivated properly to ensure free movement of journalists. "Worldwide advocacy campaigns are needed for free press that helps save the humanity," Dr Shelley, also the chairman of the Centre for Development Research, Bangladesh said.

We believe the conference has rightly highlighted the responsibility of the media. We see that the world is ruled by propaganda and not by justice or principles. Most journalists have also sold them out to owners or masters of media. This becomes evident when we see news of BBC, CNN and others , how the news is tainted and biased.

We support the need for protection of life and liberty of media people but they should also bring in their conduct a total commitment to justice and fairness in their stories, reports and analysis.

29.10.2007

Recommendations of International Islamic Law Seminar

An important international seminar on "Islamic Law: Its Application in the contemporary society" was held in Dhaka on 11-12 January 2008 at BIAM Foundation. The seminar was jointly organized by Islamic Law Research Center & Legal Aid Bangladesh (ILRCLAB) and Bangladesh Institute of Islamic Thought (BIIT). Mr. Justice M Ruhul Amin, Chief Justice of Bangladesh graced the inaugural session as the chief guest. Justice Khalilur Rahman, Former Chairman Shariat Appellate Bench Supreme Court, Lahore, and Former Rector, International Islamic university, Islamabad, Pakistan, Professor Dr Mohammad Hashem Kamali, Former Professor of Law, International Islamic University of Malaysia, Chairman & CEO, Hadhari Institute for Advanced Islamic Studies, Malaysia and Professor Dr Imtiaz Ghulam Ahmed, Dean of Faculty of Law, University of Kolkata, India attended as special guests. The concluding session was chaired by former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh Mr. Mahmudul Amin Chowdhury when the recommendation of the seminar was adopted.

The seminar recommended 12 points, the most important among these are education system is to be reviewed and in the curriculum Islamic values and norms suited for the present day needs of the society should be incorporated, further research should be undertaken in such areas as finance, political thought, administration of justice in particular, all universities and institutes of higher education should include teachings of Islam in general and Islamic law and jurisprudence in particular in their syllabus of the faculty of Law, some short courses on Islamic law and Jurisprudence should be introduced at universities and recognized research institutes. For Judges, lawyers, law teachers and other faculties, subjects of Islamic law, taught in Islamic Institutes like Alia & Qawmi Madrasahs and Islamic Centers, should be reviewed and all modern relevant researches and books should be taught at those institutes, the government should constitute an Islamic Law Commission to review the existing laws in the light of Islam and amend those as soon as possible, more scholars should be prepared having expertise in the *nusus* (the texts) of the Holy Quraan and Sunnah as well as the *waqaa'* (context of the present time) to meet the challenges of our time and those of the coming phases and . Ijtihad should be made in all spheres of life especially in the practical and modern issues, particularly collective Ijtihad with scholars from various disciplines.

We feel the international seminar has made very useful recommendations and we call upon the government, the Supreme Court, the universities, the Madrasahs and scholars of Bangladesh to take note of these recommendations. There is no need of hurry but this should be one of the objectives of the nation as great majority of this country want to live by Islam. There is no problem for any minority as civil and political rights will be same for all as has been spelled out in OIC declaration of human rights. The recommendations are also important for all Muslim states and societies.

14.01.2008

Systematic Campaign against Islamic Organizations

An English daily has published a report by their own reporters on a major Islamic student organization alleging it to be a terrorist outfit, in league with the terrorists, it has taken oath for armed struggle, it has penetrated another major student organization and that a part of Dhaka University teachers are backing them. We are taking notice of this because we are surprised at the nature of venomous report against a well-known major student organization working in the country for last thirty years within the limits of law and never were they found guilty in the courts of law.

The report says they took oath that "Under no circumstances we will denounce our allegiance to Islami Chhatra Shibir We will wage an armed struggle to establish Islamic law in Bangladesh." It appears to be a totally made-up story as Shibir is working for the last thirty years in Bangladesh, they have their constitution and literature, it never believes in the armed struggle.

The rest of the story that they are a terrorist outfit, in league with other terrorists, that it has taken oath for armed struggle, that it has penetrated another major student organization and that a part of Dhaka University teachers are backing them is all cooked up to damage the Islamic work in the country. The apparent intention is to mis-guide people and prepare ground for a crack-down on this major Islamic student organization and clear the field for other forces, particularly the ultra secular and ultra-left.

This un-principled daily has not mentioned that the leftist and secularist student organizations have illegally and effectively 'banned' the activities of Shibir and they can not work fully openly in Dhaka and some other universities and educational institutions. This paper is all the time mis-reporting about BNP, Jamaate Islami and Islamic student organizations. This is the type of venom-spiting news papers with which Islamic organizations contend with but as we all know truth in the end wins.

13.05.2007

They Will Never Understand Islam

News papers have reported that the members of the Constitution Drafting Committee, who drafted the 72 constitution of Bangladesh, on Sunday called for national unity to stop use of religion in politics, establish spirit of the liberation war and ensure social justice to all. The discussion was organized by the Constitution Drafting Committee at the National Press Club in the city to mark the 35th anniversary of framing the constitution.

“Some quarters attacked the freedom fighters in the name of religion to breach our national unity, but they failed. There was no communalism in the state affairs in our tradition and our constitution was also framed in line with that spirit,” said Dr Kamal Hossain, chairman of the Constitutional Drafting Committee. The value of non-communalism had been here much before the liberation war of the country, he said, emphasizing that fair elections must be held to ensure that parliament is represented by people's true representatives.

Awami League leader Suranjit Sengupta, another member of the Constitution Drafting Committee, said there is no scope in his party to compromise on the issue of secular democracy, because the creation of Bangladesh was based on language, not on the religion. “It is the constitution of the country that can solve the crisis created following the recent remarks of Jamaat-e-Islami leaders,” he said. Barrister Amir Ul Islam, another member of the committee, said integration between religion and politics is not wise, attributing that such integration caused many conflicts in this region and elsewhere in the globe.

We are at a loss to understand why suddenly most left and secular elements have joined in this chorus to ban religious parties, in effect Islamic parties. It is the old story of all the jackals joining in the howling of one jackal.

Dr Kamal Hossain has said that national unity is needed for stopping use of religion when unity is much more needed in so many other matters. In the 36 years religion or religious parties have done no harm to the country. What Kamal Hossain means by communalism except Islam? This is a euphemism for attacking Islam's effective role in the state and society.

Mr.Suranjit is palpably wrong, Bangladesh was not created for secular democracy. At the time of freedom struggle this was not mentioned but it was said that the objective is to remove economic injustice. Moreover a referendum with more than ninety percent majority endorsed the amendment to introduce that faith in Almighty Allah shall be the basis of all state actions.

We feel the whole out cry of these elements of the left and the so-called liberal elements is to stifle the voice of Islam in the state craft and wide open further the immorality, indecency, selfishness and un-principled behavior as is happening around the world under secularism .This is in part because these people never looked into the core of Islam, did not try to understand Islam from the great scholars of Islam. That is the reason they do not know that Islam and state had always been together in history in Muslim lands except when the Ummah was under colonial occupation. We pray that these people would see light and leave darkness.

06.11.2007

Valentine Day in Our country

We in Bangladesh did not know or observe the Valentine day even 10 years before. It is a newspaper and a group of business houses who are propagating this day. The purpose of that newspaper was obviously to introduce another western value. The purpose of the business houses was of course more sales, increase of one such day mean sales in terms of hundreds of millions of taka and billions of dollars in some countries. It is the commercial interest which is ruling the matter, the common people can not go deep into such matters. For the fashionable youth fun is more important than value.

What is the history and origin of this festival, known as "Valentine Day" or "Festival of Love": The Festival of Love was one of the festivals of the pagan Romans, when paganism was the prevalent religion of the Romans more than seventeen centuries ago. In the pagan Roman concept, it was an expression of "spiritual love". There were myths associated with this pagan festival of the Romans, which persisted with their Christian heirs. Among the most famous of these myths was the Roman belief that Romulus, the founder of Rome, was suckled one day by a she-wolf, which gave him strength and wisdom. The Romans used to celebrate this event in mid-February each year with a big festival. One of the rituals of this festival was the sacrifice of a dog and a goat. Two strong and muscular youths would daub the blood of the dog and goat onto their bodies, then they would wash the blood away with milk. After that there would be a great parade, with these two youths at its head, which would go about the streets. The two youths would have pieces of leather with which they would hit everyone who crossed their path. The Roman women would welcome these blows, because they believed that they could prevent or cure infertility.

Saint Valentine is a name which is given to two of the ancient "martyrs" of the Christian Church. It was said that there were two of them, or that there was only one, who died in Rome as the result of the persecution of the Gothic leader Claudius, c. 296 CE. In 350 CE, a church was built in Rome on the site of the place where he died, to perpetuate his memory. When the Romans embraced Christianity, they continued to celebrate the Feast of Love mentioned above, but they changed it from the pagan concept of "spiritual love" to another concept known as the "martyrs of love", represented by Saint Valentine who had advocated love and peace, for which cause he was martyred, according to their claims. It was also called the Feast of Lovers, and Saint Valentine was considered to be the patron Saint of lovers.

One of their false beliefs connected with this festival was that the names of girls who had reached marriageable age would be written on small rolls of paper and placed in a dish on a table. Then the young men who wanted to get married would be called, and each of them would pick a piece of paper. He would put himself at the service of the girl whose name he had drawn for one year, so that they could find out about one another. Then they

would get married, or they would repeat the same process again on the day of the festival in the following year.

The Christian clergy reacted against this tradition, which they considered to have a corrupting influence on the morals of young men and women. It was abolished in Italy, where it had been well-known, then it was revived in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when in some western countries there appeared shops which sold small books called “Valentine’s books”, which contained love poems, from which the one who wanted to send a greeting to his sweetheart could choose. They also contained suggestions for writing love letters. (The above quotation is excerpted, with slight modifications, from www.Islam-qa.com)

Focusing more on the question in point, we can say that there are forms of expressing love that are acceptable in our culture and religion , while there are others that are not acceptable .We do recognize happy occasions that bring people closer to one another, and add spice to their lives. However, we are against blindly imitating others regarding occasion such as Valentine’s Day because of its history and practice which generates indecency and promiscuity.

13.02.2007

Some Intellectuals Think Islam Take People to Middle Ages: A very Bad Misjudgment

Some newspapers of Dhaka has reported that some eminent citizens on Saturday said giving in to their pressure of Islamists on Women Policy issue would push the country back to the Middle Ages. They said the agitating groups are misinterpreting Islam when Muslim countries across the globe have moved away from the traditional provisions to keep pace with international development. They urged the government to deal with the situation with a strong hand if it does not intend to fall back to the dark ages. They said these at an opinion-exchange meeting on "Women's Constitutional Rights: Perspective--Women Development Policy and Recent Debate".

Nagorik Uddyog organised the programme at the BIAM Foundation in Dhaka. The report says that the meeting saw a number of citizens' representatives express deep concern about the demonstrations and recommendations of an ulema review committee aimed at blocking the long-awaited policy announced by the chief adviser on March 8. "If mollahtantra [theocracy] succeeds, the country will plunge into darkness. The mullahs have vetoed the much-awaited policy," noted Prof Khan Sorwar Murshid who presided over the programme.

Questioning the rationale of the violent protests when the policy is not at all "that much revolutionary", he wondered if all in the government had agreed upon the policy. "Why did the government become lenient towards them?" The review committee members represent the "savages" who demonstrated in Dhaka and Chittagong, he said, adding, "The word of a public servant or a Madrasa student cannot be the last word."

"How come some advisers rushed to the ulemas and formed a committee after the chief adviser had announced the policy on behalf of the council of advisers? And why a religious quarter was given the task neglecting experts and rights activists," Human rights activist Khushi Kabir said the policy was formed not only basing one religion, it aims at development of women irrespective of religion and giving in to the group's pressure would mean paving the way for turning the country into a fascist Islamist state. Asking the government to make its stance clear regarding the policy, Bangladesh Mahila Parishad President Ayesha Khanam pointed out that the policy is not for Muslim women alone. Most of the Muslim countries have moved away from traditional provisions over the ages, Bangladesh has also done that. There are only a few cases like the inheritance issue where we are maintaining it here, Shahdeen Malik said referring to Resolution of Muslim Marriage Act, 1929 and the law regarding custody of children. "It cannot be done in the case of inheritance because there is a shortage of people to talk honestly about it with an open mind," he said. Blasting the role of the Baitul Mukarram Khatib, former finance minister AMA Muhit said there is no provision for priesthood in Islam. The participants demanded stopping religion-based politics and use of mosques for political purposes. ABM Musa, Syed Abul Moksud, Zafrullah Chowdhury, Badiul Alam Majumder, Farzana Islam and Ruhin Hossain Prince also participated in the discussion.

We have several comments. The government has created this situation by hurriedly passing this policy without a debate in the Parliament .This was not desirable. We also deplore the comments of these intellectuals as if there was nothing in the policy against the faith of the Muslims. We have seen that some words and sentences were against core teaching of Islam.

These intellectuals have called Islamic state will be a fascist state which is just a false propaganda. They have said Islamists or Islam will take Bangladesh to Middle ages. This is another propaganda gimmick of no substance. In fact modern materialist, hedonist ,immoral and vulgar practices and culture , of which they are so ardent lover, have taken humanity to much worse situation than Ayyame Jahiliat , in moral and human sense not in terms of machine and comforts. It is not true that most of the Muslim countries have changed inheritance law. May be one or two countries where things are being reverted.

The Ulama have not asked for moon, they have asked change in about ten sections out of about one hundred and fifty sections. They in fact have agreed to all rights to women subject their interpretation in the light of the Quran and Sunnah. We have written in another editorial that we do not support their demand for canceling women quota in services and Parliament and their demand that women should come in general list along with others .It is not essential that every word of their demand has to be accepted. We are surprised that they have called on government to reject the report of the Ulama committee altogether. We have seen how these members of civil society continuously press the government on all sorts of issues. The Ulama make such demands very rarely. We do not find these intellectuals demand not to listen to Ulama and Islamists in any sense based on moral foundation.

27.04.2008

Education

Development of High level Research Laboratories Needed

A national daily has reported that government, non-government and corporate bodies have decided to donate some Tk 263.49 crore (2635 million) to the Dhaka University fund to solve the students and teachers' accommodation problem, increase research and other facilities of the university. The Government will allocate directly Tk 188.59 crore and Tk 45 crore through University Grants Commission (UGC). Besides, Japanese government and Dutch Bangla Bank will donate Tk 30 crore.

Sources said the government is approving the projects of the university on a priority basis as Chief Adviser Dr Fakhruddin will visit Dhaka University (DU) to inaugurate the Senate Building on April 10. Of the amount, Tk 40.39 crore will be spent on construction of a 10-storyed new residential hall for 1,000 male students, Tk 29.24 crore for female students, Tk 28.62 crore for a 12-storeyed tower building for the teachers, Tk 11.81 crore for F Rahman Hall extension building and Tk 11.88 crore for TSC complex, sources confirmed. However, Tk 6.75 crore was recently approved to increase food subsidy, sports and vehicle facilities. Of them, Tk 2.50 crore will be spent on food subsidy to the students, Tk 3 crore for sports and cultural facilities and Tk 1.25 crore for buying three new vehicles and repair. Besides, the university authority decided to build a tower of 66 flats for the young teachers at Babupura with their own fund. The government will also allocate Tk 27 crore for scholarships of the DU teachers while Dutch Bangla Bank is donating Tk 1 crore for constructing research building and Japan is donating Tk 20 crore for making a Centre of Excellence. The new dormitories in the name of Moulana Bhasani will be made at the location situated between Surja Sen and Muktijoddha Ziaur Rahman Hall and female hall for 500 students will be constructed in front of the Fazlul Haque Muslim Hall.

We feel all these are very good but one core sector is being neglected that is high level research. We pointed out in the last year that our laboratory facilities for high level research is very limited. We also proposed that each major university should develop one state of art scientific research laboratory and adequate fund for research also should be available for an appropriate number of research scholars. The universities that can be selected for these are Dhaka University, Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology, Agricultural Univesity Mymensingh, Shahjalal Science University in Sylhet and then some other universities. Ministry of Education may decide which university should develop which special research facility in which scientific area. This may require about taka 500 crore in the next five years, this year a fund of 200 crore may be allocated for this core issue of great significance for the future of development of the country.

We may also mention that BCSIR laboratory has good research capacity but its research fund is poor, all budgets is virtually for pay and salary. This should be looked into, there should be fund for research as a separate head other than equipments and salary account.

21.03.2008

Assessment of Kaumi Madrasah System Must Be Fair

In an article published in a national daily the writer Azfar Aziz has said “I should reiterate again -- it is high time, may be the last one, to take a bold strategic decision on this (Kaumi Madrasah) issue of utmost national interest, however tough and daring it may seem to be, because the consequence of not doing that may prove disastrous by many more degrees, recovering from which may even be impossible. “He has also termed the system as “anti-people and anti-social in nature as anti-Islamic in spirit? “He further says “May be the governments since 1971 have all along been aware of their reactionary nature but none of them could muster enough moral and political courage or had enough integrity to ban them. But the recent proofs that many of these Kawmi madrasahs are hotbeds of al-Qaeda-type, and probably al-Qaeda-linked, "Islamist" militancy gives utmost urgency to abolishing these breeding places of many social, political, economic, security, and religious evils. “

We are concerned that such allegations are being made against a system which is one hundred and fifty years old and is in existence in India, Pakistan, Burma, Nepal, Sree Lanka, Afganistan and Bangladesh. The system was established first in Deobond around 1865 CE when British administration destroyed most of local education after the movement of Indian soldiers for independence in 1857. The system gives religious education and basically includes in its course Arabic language, Fiqh or Islamic law, Hadith and the Quran. Its text books are essentially same as Alia system of religious education or the Islamic studies department of the modern universities in Bangladesh and in the West. Its course does not include anything distantly related to violence.

Madrasah students were never involved in violence in the last one hundred and fifty years until the CIA involved them in the Afgan war against Soviet Union. Even in recent violence in Bangladesh by JMB and others the involvement of Madrasah system students is 23 percent and of modern school and college system is 77 percent as stated by an senior military officer in a talk show.

Professor, a Professor of Political science in an American university made several trips to Bangladesh and his study has been published and he did not find any link of madrasah curricula with violence.

We agree that Madrasah system require reform, it requires introduction of some modern subjects, diversification of courses (instead of one masters degree called Dawra, they can offer also Dawrah courses in Economics, Business administration etc by adjustment of syllabus in the higher classes), replacing old textbooks by recent works on Tafsir, Hadith and Fiqh. But basic reform is needed in the modern stream of education also which is basically producing people without firm values and robot like persons who know only how to earn money without having human values.

We urge all to make a proper assessment of the system and not to be carried away by propaganda against Madrasah system in the West.

14.05.2007

Any Change in Private University Act Require Caution

We have seen mostly reports criticizing the Private Universities. These reports hardly highlight the great role the private universities have played in spreading higher education and stopping youngsters from going abroad only because seats were not available in the public universities.

It has been reported in a daily news paper that the interim government is going to formulate the Private University Act, 2007 making it mandatory for each private university to have a single campus, a deposit of Tk 25 crore as FDR, less than one-fourth part-time teachers, and stop offering medical degrees. According to the draft law, authorities of the universities violating the law will be sentenced to a five-year simple imprisonment or a fine of Tk 10 lakh or both."We've already prepared the draft of the Private University Act, 2007 and forwarded it to the education ministry," said Prof Nazrul Islam, chairman of University Grants Commission (UGC)."The education ministry has also sent the draft to the law ministry, which may change some rules and regulations before placing it to the advisory council meeting," Prof Islam added."At any day the draft is likely to be approved at a meeting of the advisory council," said a high official of the education ministry. In light of the proposed Act, the UGC has already declared illegal branches of 56 foreign universities, around 100 outer campuses and 40 private medical colleges. The UGC has also asked them to stop enrolling students from this year.

According to the proposed Act, no outer or external campuses, even in the name of study or admission centres, can be set up. Under the new law, a private university has to maintain only one campus, whether in Dhaka or elsewhere. However, the proposed Act relaxes the restriction on possession of campus land. Now a private university has to have minimum two acres, which was five acres previously. But the universities will have to get permission from the government and deposit an extra Tk 2 crore before expanding the campus, if necessary.

The Act also restricts the number of part-time faculty members. Part-timers should not exceed 20 percent of the faculties of a private university. Besides, a public university teacher is not entitled to work as a part-timer or consultant in more than one private university. Previously, only Tk 5 crore had to be deposited as FDR (fixed deposit receipt) for operating a private university. But the proposed Act increases the amount to Tk 25 crore. According to the new Act, the president will be the chancellor of all private universities. A professor having 20 years of academic experience is eligible to become the vice-chancellor. Besides, private universities will have to hold regular meetings of syndicate, academic council, curriculum committee, financial committee and teachers recruitment committee. All of these bodies will have to be formed according to the rules of Dhaka University.

Leaders of the Association of Private Universities of Bangladesh have meanwhile strongly protested against the government move, saying some of the rules in the proposed Act will change the basic structure of the private universities. "We welcome the caretaker

government if they make the move to amend the Private University Act, 1992 and Amendment, 1998. There is no need to formulate a new Act for operating the private universities," said Abu Quasem Haider, vice-president of the Association and founder chairman of Eastern University.

"The government should withdraw the proposed Private University Act, 2007," he added. Prof M Alimullah Miyan, vice-chancellor of International University of Business Agriculture and Technology, shot down the idea of the new law. The caretaker government is going to make the law without consulting the representatives of the private universities, which is not right, he added.

We feel there is no crisis in the private universities to necessitate a total scrapping of the earlier law. A few changes may be necessary which can be done by amendment in the existing law. The pivotal role of the founders should not be disturbed because they took all the pains to establish the universities .We know there are some very good some outer campuses (the name given by the government) approved by the government .At the most the founders may be asked them to convert them into new universities over a period of time .Any tough measure will only add to the burden of the already over-stretched and burdened government

03.11.2007

Death of a Great Bangladeshi Muslim Scholar

Reports have come through news papers and web –mails of the death of respected scholar and thinker Professor Mohar Ali in his sleep in London on Wednesday morning aged 80. Born in Khulna in Bangladesh, he was a scholar of history, Seerah (historical account of the life of the Prophet Muhammad (sm) and Hadith. He was a Professor of History at the Islamic Universities of Madinah and Riyadh for two decades before moving to England.

Shaykh Mohar Ali made several important contributions to the fields of Islamic history and the spread of Islam outside the Arab world. His work provided an incisive new dimension to the way Muslims view contemporary issues and their historical contexts. He distinguished himself with his clear exposition of Orientalism. His four-volume classic titled A History of the Muslims of Bengal (1985), is regarded as one of the most reliable sources on the effects of Islam on the political and cultural life of the region. His other works include the Quran and the Orientalists (2004); Pre-Islamic Arabia and its Socio-Religious Condition (2002); A Word for Word Meaning of the Quran (2003); Sirat Al-Nabi and the Orientalists (1997); The Bengali Reaction to Christian Missionary Activities, 1833-1857 (1965). He was buried at Gardens of Peace Cemetery, Essex, UK.

We mourn the death of this great son of Islam. He was one of the major scholars on history and Islam produced in the sub-continent. He was neglected in the country of his birth. With death, we hope his scholarly contribution will come to the fore and he will be given due honour. His historical works should be translated by the Bangla Academy and his Islamic contributions should be translated and published by the Islamic Foundation.

15.04.2007

We Mourn Death Of Khatib Baitul Mokarram

We deeply mourn the death of Maulana Obaidul Haque, Juma prayer leader of Bangladesh national Masjid Baitul Mokarram. He died after a massive heart attack in a Dhaka hospital at 11 p.m. on Saturday, 6th October 07.

Maulana Obaidul Haque passed from Deobond Madrasah and later taught in Dhaka Alia Madrasah which is the most important Madrasah of the Alia system in the country. He was involved in various national activities in social, economic and educational sector. He was the Chairman of the Cental Shriah Board of Islami banks, Chairman of Central Shariah Board of Islamic Insurance companies, apart from being Chairman of many other Shariah councils.

His most important work was that he was the President of the Board of editors which wrote the Codified Islamic Law in several volumes. Along with him Justice Gazi Shamsur and other luminaries worked in this project.

This has been made in modern style in the form of sections under various subjects though the book essentially followed classical opinions and require updatation in future to meet current realities and circumstances.

He was a national figure and played important part against terrorism, in defending Islamic causes in the country, defending Islamic banking system and most recently in solving the cartoon issue created by a section of the press.

The nation has lost a father figure

07.10.2007