

## Letters to the Editor

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### **People need to have a heart: and brain too**

Pakistan's love to be in the limelight of controversies is beyond belief: the recent case in point is the death sentence handed to Aasia Bibi, a 45-year-old Christian mother of five in a remote village in Pakistan's Punjab province. Her crime: offering a bowl of water in humanity to a group of women farm workers suffering from the June heat last year.

Not only that bunch of illiterate village Muslim women declared Bibi and her Christian water unclean, the local preacher took to his mosque's loudspeaker to fan the verdict. Police intervened but far from protecting, they arrested and charged her with blasphemy.

Bibi was guilty of a more grievous crime: rather than swallowing the indignity, and exhorting her fellow Christians all across the globe to burn Qur'an and draw Mohammed's cartoons, she stood in stout defense of her Christian faith. To Pakistan's zealot mullahs, political opportunists and zombie public, this is unacceptable.

Ironically, the original blasphemy law was drawn up by the British in 1860 in the then Indian Penal Code. It was a ploy to keep the peace among the subcontinent's fractious diversity of faiths. After partition Pakistan inherited the law and added more to it but without due consideration to the societal need of a new state. So, even though there is no conclusive evidence against Bibi, her sentence is a mere morsel of sectarian appetite in a society which is otherwise ravaged by crime, lawlessness, political nepotism and corruption in high places.

As a Muslim I take great pride in the freedom given by Islam to practice one's own faith even in an Islamic state. Yet, it pains to see the ambiguous laws exploited in so-called Muslim countries to settle personal vendettas, or used by extremists to persecute religious minorities.

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