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Human shield to stop a war



The situation in Iraq has become absolutely distressing for every peace loving people in the world. No doubt it has become an insane situation. But we can do many things not to feel so powerless.

I got glued with BBC on January 28 when Tim Sebastian was interviewing an ex-US marine and Gulf War veteran Ken Nichols O'Keefe in Hardtalk. The ex-US marine was speaking with full conviction about his anti-war campaign known as 'human shield' to stop attacks on Iraq. With glaring eyes he was speaking about leading the campaign and said that

his action has nothing to do with supporting the Iraqi regime, but is an effort to stop the war. He has gone that extent to surrender his US citizenship to protest against this plan of aggression. It is not only him an anti-war campaigner from Gloucestershire Ms. Grace Trevett is also threatening to become part of a human shield to stop attacks on Iraq. If war goes ahead she will become part of a human shield to try to stop attacks on civilians. The number of campaigners is increasing. They are willing to put themselves in the firing line should US and British forces bomb Iraq. They plan

to identify potential bombing targets such as power stations and bridges and act as human shields to protect them.

It is hoped against hope that once these campaigners get there and gather enough people along the route it may have some effect to prevent attacks on Iraq. Iraq has made clear that the peace campaigners will be welcome. Can we do something from Bangladesh not only on the merit of a country with vast Muslim populations but also as a peace loving citizens?

Aif Sani, Gulshan, Dhaka

staff correspondent and other staff behind the scene have proved that a responsible free press can make the public strongly conscious against the evils. Wide publicity of concerned issues in your esteemed newspaper will help to raise public awareness and confidence among the environment-loving citizen of the country.

Shamsher Khan, Dhaka

The Daily Star obviously knows the name of the person who claims to own the plot in the lake. Why does the report not include the pertinent details, like who this man is, what does he do, etc?

The details of the people involved are relevant to the story because they have continued to grab land in the lake despite widespread public revulsion.

Naming the owners and their businesses would probably be far more effective than this report.

Kireti, Dhaka

An undeclared war

It is deplorable that we are once again discarded by our powerful friends, however our penitence should not bind us to explore the real fact that if we are wrongfully victimised by our friends with other intended motives.

On many levels, US and Britt's current plans to fight international terrorism raise questions about its moral clarity. In this regard, they both articulate policy in idealistic terms but apply it in realistic fashion. If the objective is to limit terrorism then both U.S. and Britts must continue to pressure those who already have them, which essentially start from their own territory. In US, since 1976, sixty thousand arm cadres graduated from Virginia Military Academy, who, in fact, return into South and Latin America to destabilise and oust their respected democratically elected Govt' with a tacit support from Washington. Columbia and Venezuela is the current burning example of the US sponsored policy. Britts provide the safe haven to numerous rebel groups. For the Bush foreign policy team, the United States and Britts now exercise power unimpeded by partnerships, alliances, and rules--and without apology for its imperial status.

In this situation, as a nation, it is shameful and heart-rending to watch both of our respected political party without an intellectual meaningful discussion, to formulate a joint voice to protect its Muslim majority from unnecessary harassment, is busy with mud-slinging one another. Why can't we go above party politics and think with neutrality of the true reason behind the inclusion of Bangladesh as a terrorist pruned society? None of our politicians, in any way is responsible for this 'not so sudden' policy change of US, which was about to happen, irrespective of the comments made by our previous Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

Britts first, and then Americans have deceived the world by portraying themselves as upholders of human rights, justice and freedom and believe that America is not an invading colonising country. We all know that "how the West was won"; with a mask of missionaries, they annihilated whole nation, subjugated Indian sub-continent and the rest of the world. An independent study by Foreign Policy in Focus, here, in US, suggests that those countries who stationed US troops for whatever reasons in their land, loose their independent foreign policy because they face a strong arm-twisting tactic by US.

Nasim Islam, USA

and long lasting milk product convenient for use. It seems that the milk product's standard was hijacked to replace milk fat with the so-called vegetable fat. This was made possible by not defining fat as milk fat in the standard, probably omitted deliberately.

The producer of Condensed Milk claims, that it contains vegetable fat instead of specified milk fat. Do we know what kind of vegetable fat it is? According to my knowledge of food science, there is only one kind of edible vegetable fat available in Bangladesh, which is hydrogenated vegetable oil known as 'Vanaspati' or 'Dalda'. However, the prevailing brand is only a little less expensive than butter oil i.e. milk fat. Since the manufacturers of Condensed Milk are sharp business men, I have a feeling, that they may be using a much cheaper version of vegetable fat called Palm Stearin which is, to my knowledge, is not recognised or classified as fit for human consumption. Palm Stearin is the fraction of Palm Oil which solidifies at low temperature like coconut oil, but is used extensively in Bangladesh to manufacture soap, including the so-called 'Halal' soap. The liquid portion of Palm Oil called olein, due to its cheapness, is already used to dilute other type of vegetable oil, like soybean oil. However, it is rarely marketed directly to the consumer as Palm Oil for cooking, even in the country of its origin namely Malaysia.

It is imperative that our Government comes out with a credible statement about the nature and sources of the so-called vegetable fat contained in the so-called Condensed Milk, which seems to be a dubious and mislabelled product, made by mixing sugar, water, powdered skimmed milk, emulsified with unacceptable vegetable fat.

Dr M Mujibur Rahaman Dhaka

Long on rhetoric

President Bush has delivered his much awaited State of the Union address. But he is long on rhetoric but short on substance. He has promised some new evidence next week by Colin Powell. How obliging at last for the world has heard of such evidence for months without however any of it coming to light. The world is beginning to doubt the credibility and if and when such evidence comes the world may doubt its veracity.

Given the startling decline in

stock market, rising unemployment, and economic stagnation, the President's priority clearly should have been other than a war with an enemy far away and far remote, a war that is dividing the world and dragging the economy downwards. And still, George Bush is making us believe war is peace. There must be a staggering disconnect when a chorus of the converted is contrived to "market" a war.

Is it a strange coincidence that America is only at peace when it is at war with others? The chronicle of wars by America since the World War II is long; China, Korea, Vietnam, Cambodia, Nicaragua, Iraq - to name a few. Will the American people be led to believe that the fear and terror their power evoke in other weaker lands is the best insurance for their own long term security?

Hussain, Dhaka

Some thoughts

First of all I would like to congratulate you on successfully running the most impartial newspaper of Bangladesh and also would like to thank you for making it available online so that we can keep up with the latest news of our country from overseas. I am indeed grateful to *The Daily Star* for that.

Due to work pressure and hectic life on the foreign land, it is sometimes a little difficult for me to read the news features and editorials thoroughly. But the overall impression I had from some of the editorial comments was the "Operation Clean Heart" received a fair deal of criticism from *The Daily Star*. It sounded like the whole thing did more damage to Bangladesh's image and there had been severe human rights violation that we should worry about more than anything else.

I was wondering, as when I visited Bangladesh mid last year I heard that almost 300 people were murdered and over 100 rape cases for one single month (I think March 2002), if there is any magical solution to sterilise the conditions of this country that will have no casualties or collateral damage or side effects. I also wonder, isn't this like one of those situations when you have only two bad choices and you just have to stick to the one which is less harmful?

The reason I am writing all these is I, with all my heart, want to come back and live a safe and decent life in Bangladesh. But as soon as the prevailing situation of corruption and overwhelming power of unlawful forces come to my mind, I just think that will only remain in dreams.

From the latest news, I get the feeling the law and order situation in Bangladesh is again on rapid decline. So I would be eager to know what comments will *The Daily Star* make in regard to these circumstances.

Masrur, On e-mail

"Well done Sheikh Hasina"

This is in reference to Mr Khalid Rahman's letter (January 29). I also respect his views, but with certain reservations.

Lying by political leaders, is practically the definition of politics in Bangladesh. The former Prime Minister's pledge that no hartals would be called by her party even if her seat was on the other side of the Parliament House, that she would not participate in the Parliamentary sessions nor take oath (after the announcement of the results of the last election) are only a few of the numerous examples. Well, if those issues were falsified, why not this? As for the addition of that large 'bindu' I would like to remind Mr Khalid that this incident occurred after our inclusion in the list, and thus has no bearing with the topic under discussion. And about Jamaat being present in the government Sir, we are democratic. If the people's decision is to be accepted, Jamaat has all the right to be a part of our present government.

I still hold fast to the belief that Sheikh Hasina's actions at that crucial time are extremely deplorable. But I agree when Mr Khalid say it is a futile discussion now. It really is time we concentrated on unity and proper patriotism. I am sure, ultimately, history will decide who is

truly to blame for our misfortune.

Nabila Idris Class IX, Sunnydale School, Dhaka

This is in response to Mr. Khalid Hasan's letter (January 29). May I guess correctly that the cat is now out of the bag so far blind following of a particular person is concerned? Nabila Idris (27th Jan) has not said that person is aspiring to be another 'Karzaif'. She was only highlighting that the Opposition's propaganda had added some fuel to the fire. The lone super power has some countries in mind on the basis of some criterion including religion. So it commenced blacklisting them in groups [23 so far, some more names may be in the pipe line].

As for Bangladesh, they waited for some quising. On getting one, reinforced by a local power, they announced the name instantly: "He that waits to beat a dog will easily find a stick." The question at issue was of that 'stick', pure and simple. The point for consideration was if that role befitted our honourable Leader of Opposition and former Prime Minister: washing one's [own country's] dirty linen in public [in foreign lands]. Is it not a unique and unparalleled case in a contemporary democracy?

Abul Hasan, Dhaka

Of a gender just culture

In the past three decades of freedom, Bangladesh has evolved in the

try are not inevitably engaged in income generation activities rather a substantial number are confined to the household, which is mainly attributable to lack of proper opportunities, environment and traditional patriarch obsessed family which still control over our social system. It appears incoherent for educated women to be restricted to household depending entirely on the earning from a single source, which often becomes a burden and precipitant factor for sub standard living.

This scenario appears distressing when the South Asian women are dominantly ahead in comparison to the male counterparts in education, technical professions and actively in the decision-making process, we do not seem to be exerting adequate stress to women endorsements. To move Bangladesh forward in harmony with the South Asia regional advancements, the Ministry of Women Affairs need to stress and support in different forms through strict enforcement of quota and provision of funds for developing entrepreneurship activities for women. When the organisations start to follow the allocation system as per directives, it acts as the counterbalance to women's exclusion from spheres, reduces their marginal existence promoting stronger role in decision-making. Organising piecemeal improvements through small projects will result frail changes, rather governments, corporations, academic and financial institutions, technology

on-going election?

About a month back, prior to the commencing of the UP election, CEC earnestly demanded the army deployment on poll duty. But no preventive measures have been taken by the government so far to avoid this sort of untoward and chaotic situation. It is very disappointing that the government is not paying heed to the CEC's repeated request although it's now very urgent for the government to get rid of the pervasive allegations of rigging,

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"CEC's appeal paid no heed to by the govt."

violence, security lapses and intimidation in the poll.

The government's stand-off on the army deployment has, in the meantime, has created a lot of questions which are still unanswered.

a) Why is the government so indifferent about the deployment of army on election duty?

b) Doesn't the government want the election to be held in a free and fair manner?

d) Why does the government appears so wavering to reach a decision regarding army deployment at the most vulnerable areas in particular?

e) Isn't the government discouraging the responsive and spontaneous voters to vote the right person?

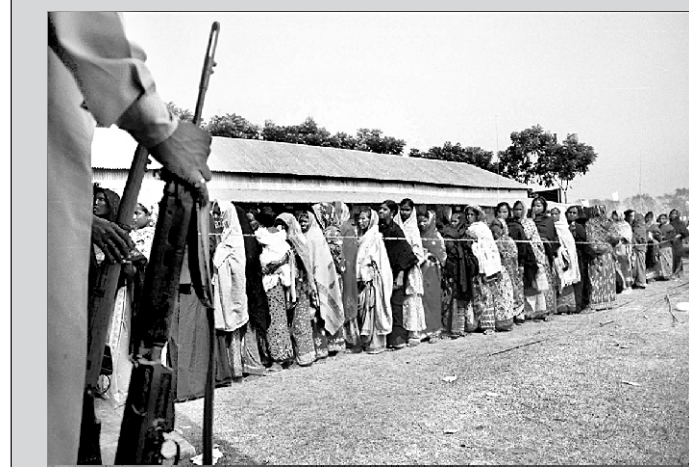
g) Why does the government seem unbending although almost all the NGOs engaged in monitoring the election, field level officials and the political parties, barring the ruling party, expressed the need for the army's presence UP poll booths?

Sk. Nahid Neazy Teaches, Summer Field International School, Dhaka

global environment with prominence as a country that preaches and survives on democratic values. The literacy rate is inspiring in an upward trend with special emphasis to gender balances that imply practices of equality principles. The most advantageous part is having a separate Ministry for Women and Children Affairs to assert influence on implementing issues related to women and children. The government has a directive to allocation of thirty percent to fill vacancy by women, which equally demonstrate strong value on women empowerment.

However, a grey area surrounds as the directives are enforced neither in government nor in the private sector. It is a vital issue of the Ministry to strongly monitor whether the quota has been fulfilled in all levels of the system in both public and private sectors, nonetheless every organisation should be accountable to entail this mandate in different ranks and levels.

All educated women in our coun-



festivity also needs protection

and a society as a whole must promote an environmentally sound and sustainable forms of gender just principles towards a prosperous nation building.

Kishwar Sayeed Dhaka

"Whither"

This is in reply to the letter by Dr. Elahi (January 30), actually I did understand that he was using whither in a rhetorical sense.

By the way, in regards to the letter writers to *The Daily Star*, most including myself aren't exactly the paragons of grammatical exactitude. However, the usage of the word whither may be appropriate in matters of grave and serious character or rhetorically as you had. A quick look at the Letters Page will tell you that this usage has been overextended, we have letters on whether the trees/world peace/cute girls etc.

Because of this, surfeit of letters beginning with whither, the whole

rationale of its usage that of a grave and serious matter becomes redundant.

In the end Dr. Elahi, it boils down to a question of style.

Kim Dhaka

INS list

I was rather surprised to see a number of letters in your Letter Page implying that fundamentalist terrorists are active in Bangladesh, and that this was the reason behind the current INS decision, based solely on two observations: first, that the current administration is a coalition that contains members of a Muslim fundamentalist party, and second, the unexplained bomb explosions.

If (as these correspondents appear to be suggesting) religious fundamentalism has already become entrenched in our government, there would be no reason for these supposed "fundamentalists in power" to carry out terrorist activities like exploding bombs in cinema halls. The arguments put forth by these correspondents are naive at best, and intentionally specious and fallacious at worst.

In addition, given that there still appears to be no evidence as to who the perpetrators were, why is there such a rush to consider them to be home-grown religious terrorists?

Dr. Shaad M. Ahmad Stanford, California, USA

This is in regards to all of the letters

violence, security lapses and intimidation in the poll.

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Sk. Nahid Neazy Teaches, Summer Field International School, Dhaka

on the INS' new requirement requiring unregistered Bangladesh citizens, within a certain age bracket, living in the US. The AL is pointing fingers at BNP and BNP at AL or, the far-fetched explanation on the sale of natural gas verses US INS list, or anything similar, has nothing to do with the decision of the US to include Bangladesh on the list. Though the majority of the countries on the list have a Muslim majority population, is not the main contributing factor (example: North Korea). The important factor here is that US is trying to protect itself from further destruction in the future.

The US must protect itself in whatever way it possibly can and no one can blame US for that. If the table were turned, Bangladesh would do the same thing.

Quazi Hasan San Diego, Ca, USA

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Baffled FM

I see that the FM has concluded his pointless trip to the US with the same bafflement that he had begun. It is not very difficult to understand why we were put on the INS list. We have former collaborators and fundamentalists in power with BNP who have publicly voiced support for the Taliban and Iraq. Most of our papers carry extremely one-sided editorials blaming the US for everything, from global warming to AIDS. Our government is vicious in dealing with its enemies and critics but goes easy on the criminals in its own ranks. We have even reached another milestone by being probably the only country in the world to promulgate an indemnity proclamation pardoning custodial deaths.

So there is no reason to be baffled.

I also see that Iraq didn't come up in the discussion. Therefore when Colin Powell shortly after meeting with the FM, announced to the media that the US would have allies in any unilateral actions against Iraq, conclusively did not include us. Why didn't the FM take the opportunity to clarify BNP's position on a war with Iraq?

In sum, it was a wasted trip. But what more could you expect?

Azad, Dhaka

"Wanted: A pied piper for Dhaka city"

S. Chowdhury (January 29) was precise in pointing out the semblance between our Mayor and that Mayor of Hamelin. Dhaka is neither clean nor it is safe for living. The police pay heavy bribe to have a post in Dhaka Metropolitan and that means, to realise that amount of money, they have to get the money back from the people of the city. The criminals reign supreme in certain areas of Dhaka and if they don't the Police do. The end result is that the ordinary citizen has to pay everyone he meets in a khaki or blue uniform!

The city is not clean either, whatever the measures are taken. The removal of two-stroke vehicles solved half the problem of pollution.

The other half lies in the hand of the Mayor. He just has to be kind enough to tell his Ward Commissioners to clean up their individual areas. But who has the time from opening ceremonies, closing ceremonies, etc to do all this work!

Just let the city of Dhaka rust in peace.

Haji Mohammad Isam Dhanmondi, Dhaka

I was absolutely astounded to read Mr. Chowdhury's letter (Wanted: A pied piper for Dhaka City).

He seems to be engrossed more into the fairy tale even more than his son, I'm afraid. He doesn't realise that reality is much harsher than fiction and all problems don't have solutions as easy as calling the pied piper and getting rid of the trouble-makers.

He is blaming our Mayor for no reason at all. For any positive outcome to take place, it is necessary to take strict action by the Mayor, but how can he take any action if there is a financial constraint? In the year 2001, the tax rates were cut dramatically by the former government. As a consequence of that, the new government finds it difficult to meet all the current expenses. For this reason, the tax imposition (excise duty) has been increased, due to a requirement of higher capital. Now, when there is an increase in the revenue of the government, then all your complaints can be paid heed to.

I would request Mr. Chowdhury to think twice before he makes any comments regarding our Mayor. Remember, when you point a finger at someone, three of your other fingers point back at you.

Amer Junaid, Dhaka

Condensed Milk controversy: Do we know what is in it?

Since the Condensed Milk controversy has gone to the Court, perhaps the full story behind its misleading standards will come out. The Bangladesh Standard 896:1979 for the milk product was formulated to make a wholesome

Women's football

This is in reference to Ms Munasir Kamal's letter in regard to a recently cancelled women's soccer match between a team from India and Bangladesh.

First, if I may add that I have been outside of Bangladesh and haven't returned there since 1996. So it came as a total surprise to me when I read about this soccer match. I had no idea that Bangladesh has changed so much as to the point where women are now participating in soccer matches.

Not going to the debate on whether women in Bangladesh should play soccer or not, I would like to specifically address some of Ms Munasir Kamal's comments which I have issues with and rather take as a direct insult to all conservative and tradition following people.

Though not exactly sure what Ms Kamal's definition of modern world is, but I believe that by her definition, I am currently living in one of those (the U.S.) if I am not mistaken. Well, if modernism means the collapse of moral values of any sorts, and abusing freedom in the name of freedom itself, then I sure have to say that there are plenty of it here. Though on the surface it may look all bright and shiny from outside, having lived it for over a decade now, I have to say if this is what Ms Kamal's definition of "modernism" is, I sure would recommend an urge of caution to her and all like minded people. With an astonishingly high divorce rate (67% the last I checked) and lack of trust and respect for family and society in general, I would definitely not prescribe this recipe of "modernism" to Ms Kamal or anyone else. I feel this is nothing but



A different ball game

a recipe for disaster in the long run.

Atif Alam, Dallas, Texas, USA

Our apparent phobia of women being involved with sports has made me quite curious.

I wonder from where we derive this desire to lock up women? Or

may be our fundamentalist friends feel inadequate by liberated women?

I don't know the answer, but rest assured Bangladesh is a fertile ground for psychoanalysis.

Shonku, Dhaka

It never seizes to amaze me just how patronising some people can be. I just read Mr. Yahya's letter (January 27) on how we should "put women in their place and if force is necessary to chastise those fallen ones".

First of all, I would REALLY like to know just WHAT place Mr. Yahya is talking about. If he means that they should just stay at home and be home makers, it's about time he returned to the dark ages.

Then he talks about how some individualists and their ideas are taking our country down the drain. If he opened his eyes and faced reality for just a few moments, I'm sure he would see that the degradation of our society is solely the result of illiteracy and hypocrisy; definitely not the result of giving women equal opportunities that they rightfully deserve.

Purity in a given society can be achieved only when we have mutual and EQUAL respect for each other and their beliefs and ideas. Segregation was never an answer, and I'm sorry to inform Mr. Yahya that it will never be either.

Shabbir Khan, Houston, Texas, USA

I find some of the letters coming in on the cancelled football match

very disturbing. I would have thought there wouldn't even be a debate on it. How can we call ourselves moderate when we have fundamentalists driving away visiting players? The whole incident must have been very traumatic for all the people involved. If some people have an objection to a particular sport, say female mud wrestling for instance, they can simply choose not to watch.

This brings me to another point, why is it that public display of affection towards members of the opposite sex is considered immodest and objectionable?

Masood Rana, Dhaka

I am writing this letter in response to Mr. Ahrar Masud. The excuses shown seemed awkward to me. I would like to point out the fact that taking out my daughter for a walk everyday is not an exercise which can be compared to the intense exercises needed for football!

"Living in the society and abiding by its norms is a culture which any sensible man or woman must appreciate"-this statement confuses me. Is there any rule such as men and women are forced to abide by the so-called DOS and DONTs of society? It is a fact that the society is changing.

Football is a game. We need inspiration to improve in any type of game rather than complaining about the environment. A positive approach towards the idea of woman playing football should be taken.

Nayeem Pitbull On e-mail