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No chance for peace!

## Those who support war!

In the confusion of their rhetoric, those who write to express support for the war on Iraq forget, that never in the entire history of Saddam's rule, has the lack and violation of human rights of the Iraqi people been an issue with the financiers, backers and facilitators of his policies. The gassing of the Kurds in 1988 was a small price to pay to maintain their status quo. Did not the US have relations with Iraq then?

In their collective amnesia the warmongers forget that issue of human rights came much later, and only in course of the continued attempts to bolster a case for war, when all else failed. If human rights was truly an issue with the US and UK, I am sure Saddam would have been dealt with 20 years ago and not after the death of several million.

The Washington Post, in an article on February 21st, 2003, outlined the post Saddam plan for Iraq. It anticipates that a military presence will be required for at least 10 years. Nowhere is the involvement of the locals or even the various opposition groups in exile mentioned. Initially, there was much talk about the formation of a government using the

Iraqi opposition. Much publicised conferences were held between the US policy makers and Iraqi opposition groups in Washington DC and in London. However, whatever transpired at those conferences does not currently figure into the future of Iraq. The buzz now is that the military presence is required since there is no one person or group capable of garnering the complete support of the Iraqi people. The truth is that those who are spearheading this assault are neither willing nor interested in considering the goals and desires of the Iraqi people, including the Kurds. Yet, disgustingly, it is their plight which has been used repeatedly as a case for war.

In the mad machiavellian world of the progenitors of war where Israel is a democracy to behold (MA March 12), I am sure the sight of this genocidal behemoth parachuting into the lives of the unsuspecting Iraqi populace will be a much heralded as dove of peace.

**Shomit Chowdhury, Dhanmondi, Dhaka**

## "Bangladesh's eastern strategy is excellent"

I am writing this letter in order to correct the pseudo geo-political analysis that Mr. Mudanna (March 12) has presented in response to Dr. Fakruddin's post-editorial (March 5).

First, in response to Mr. Mudanna's question, to what extent Bangladesh is responsible for the current deterioration of Indo-Bangladesh relation, all I can ask him is to read the history of Indo-Bangla relationship with an open mind. Without going back to the clichés such as the Ganges water dispute, Indian refusal to hand over Bangladeshi enclaves, the Talpatti island demarcation dispute, let's see who initiated the current debacle!

As the change of government took place in Bangladesh in the last election, from the very beginning, the Government of India adopted an aggressive attitude towards our elected government. What New Delhi did not realise is whether they like the current government or not, the incumbent government has been elected by the people of Bangladesh. Therefore, in international arena, as a representative of our people, this government is entitled to be respected.

However, that was not the case. Rather, it is India, which inspired and initiated the Anti-Bangladeshi Media reports in which New Delhi tried to portray Bangladesh as a den of terrorism, and those media canards against Bangladesh, were published in *The Daily Star* as well of which Mr. Mudanna appears to remain in complete ignorance. Later, Indian assault against Bangladesh took a new form: "push in" in which India sought to create ethnic tension by pushing in Bangla speaking Indian citizens into Bangladeshi territory.

Regarding the Bangladesh-China relationship, what Mr. Mudanna has argued is hilarious. For, Bangladesh is not Pakistan. Mr. Mudanna; nor is Pakistan as weak

as he suggests. It seems India cannot overcome the Pakistan syndrome.

Why does Mr. Mudanna subconsciously equate Bangladesh foreign policy to that of Pakistan? For, Bangladesh would follow a policy that suits itself best, regardless of what India prefers.

Mr. Muddana is right when he says that China has its motive behind courting Bangladesh. Who hasn't? Is India's foreign policy without motives?

Mr. Muddana's implied suggestion that China-Bangladesh friendship would not bear any fruit to Bangladesh, as it did not bear either for Pakistan or for North Korea can be only evaluated in the future.

Mr. Muddana is also right to state that changing friendship is easy but not geography, and I believe that the Indians would be better off should they remember this dictum while dealing with Bangladesh.

Finally, Mr. Muddana has exposed his hidden communal identity as he presents fictitious figures regarding increase in Muslim population in India while responding to Dr. Fakruddin's accusation of India's communal violence. For, what Mr. Fakruddin had pointed out, is chronic anti-minority pogrom of which Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, and Dalits are frequent victim such as the recent Gujarat riot.

The figure Mr. Muddana has presented betrays reality, since the 2001 Census of India, which is available online, shows that the total percent of India's Muslim is 12.12% that conforms the historical demographic trend.

For, as a minority myself and a proud Bangladeshi by birth, I can assure Mr. Muddana that despite occasional mishaps, we are doing fine compared to what happens in the neighbouring country. Although I do not suggest a rosy picture and do not deny insecurities and discrimination that occasionally we face in Bangladesh, but

such case is universal for all minorities and given the fact of prevalent lawlessness in Bangladesh, even compared to India, we are far better off.

**Partha Sen**  
Bangladesh

I cannot help reacting to the observations of Mr. Murali Muddana regarding the article of Dr. Fakruddin Ahmed on Bangladesh eastern strategy. I find it distressing that even after 31 years, many people in India treat Bangladesh with condescension which we resent and Mr. Muddana through his sermon has misquoted certain figures which need correction.

In 1947 the Muslim population in divided India was just below 10% which in 55 years has increased to just below 13%. In fact the present Muslim population of India is 130 million out of a total of one billion plus. One primary factor behind the upward trend of Muslim population is that many Dalit and low cast Hindus have found refuge in the religion of Islam.

I would like to ask Mr. Muddana some questions; why is India at odd with its neighbours and its own countrymen in Kashmir and seven sisters in the NE? Just blaming Pakistan and Bangladesh will not solve the problem. Has there been any riot in Bangladesh comparable in any way with Gujarat riots of 1969 and 2002? Were it just a coincidence that Kargil confrontation helped BJP to consolidate its hold in the Centre and Gujarat riot in 2002 to boost Mr. Modi's position there? Just before the recent election in four states, India embarked on a damaging but unfounded media campaign against Bangladesh.

I agree that we cannot change neighbours; so we should try to accommodate each other on the basis of equality.

**Sakhawat Hossain**  
Gulshan, Dhaka

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The Indian Army did remove our arms after the 1971 war was over. Please read the autobiography of Major General Moinul Hossen Choudhury, BB and Major Nasir's book. Both of the writers are notable freedom fighters.

One can also read the book of JN Dixit ("Liberation and Beyond") which stated that the Indian Army did take away the arms and ammunition of the Pakistani Army.

Another thing, the Indians should dictate our relationship with any other country.

**Sumit**  
Gulshan, Dhaka

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The accusation against the Indian Army was raised instantly by the Bengali freedom fighters such as Major Jalil and Major (later Major General, now retired) Mainul Hosen Chawdhuri, which had caused much sensation in the media and among the army officers of both Bangladesh and Indian origin, so much so that it bore headline news in Bangladesh and abroad; especially, in the UK.

In fact, it was the persistent protest of Major Jalil, the 10th Sector Commander, that he had raised against the action of the Indian Army, drew the media attention. The average Indian citizens are not aware of the established fact, although the Indian policy makers are well aware of it.

In order to describe the nature and extent of the activities of the Indian Army, in his memoir, "*Ek Geneeler Nirab Sakhya*" ("Witness of a Silent General"; Maola, 2000; P. 19-20.), the former Commander of the 2nd East Bengal Regiment of the Bangladesh Liberation Force, Major General (ret.) Mainul Hosen Chawdhuri Bir Bikram writes that after the war, he had noticed a sharp decline of logistics and other material goods, as he made frequent trips to the Dhaka Cantonment, and he suspected that goods and military logistics were being smuggled away by the Indian Army.

His suspicion was legally established, writes, General Chowdhury, sometimes in the beginning of 1972, when two army personnel of the Bangladesh Liberation Forces had seized a truckload full of refrigerator, furniture, crokaries and other military stuffs, which as it was later discovered, under the direct order of Brigadier Misra, was destined to go to India. Brigadier Misra was in charge of the Dhaka Cantonment, as he had established his Brigade Head Quarter (HQ) in the Dhaka Cantonment.

As an official complain was lodged against Brigadier Misra along with the stock list that was found in the truck, to cover up the incidence, the Indian Army had initiated a face saving "Field General Court Marshall" against Misra that took place at the Shilchar Cantonment in Assam of the Indian Army in which from Bangladesh, Major Sahed Selim (later, Joint Secretary of Defense), Captain Shafiq, and two other regular soldiers were sent to India as witness, although the verdict was never proclaimed!

Although, contrary to what Subarna Samanta (March 14) claims, instead of capturing the supposedly destroyed weapons of the Pakistani Army, the Indian Army had captured a huge quantity of sophisticated weapons intact, whose worth, in 1972 dollar value, was calculated around US\$ 500 million.

Surprisingly, in his memoir, "Surrender at Dacca: Birth of a Nation" (Manohar, 1997), Lieutenant General J. F. R. Jacob, the former Chief of Staff of General Aurora of the Eastern Wing of the Indian Army, provides a long list of what Indian Army had captured from the Pakistani Army. The tentative list of General Jacob includes 41 tanks; 50 guns/heavy mortars; 104 recoilless guns (anti tank); 18 piece of lined up F-86 aircraft in the Dhaka airport; and a large number of water crafts. (Jacob 1997; p. 157)

All these above mentioned weapons were taken away by the Indian army, which compounded with those of heavy guns, machinery, equipment, armoured vehicles, ammunitions, and logistical accessories from various cantonments in Bangladesh. According to the July of 1977 issue of London based Institute of Development Studies (IDS) bulletin (Volume 19, No. 1; P. 12), was adequate enough to raise self-sufficient four division of soldiers.

Consequently, the source of discontent between Bangladesh and India, among others, thus, was laid down from the very beginning by the Indian army personnel, a fact that even the high officials of India could not ignore, particularly, in reference to the systematic and well-planned removal by the Indian troops that, as Dr. Fakruddin Ahmed correctly asserts, rightfully and legally, belonged to the people of Bangladesh.

**Shibby Azad**  
Columbia University, USA

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I felt like screaming when I read Professor Sumit Mazumdar's letter (March 12) criticising Dr. Fakruddin Ahmed for his column (March 5) praising Bangladesh's eastern strategy.

In the aftermath of 9/11, The New York Times published an article describing how the Jews and Hindus in New York got together to make common cause against the Muslims. Mr. Mazumdar should look up that article, and numerous other anti-Muslim letters the Jews and Hindus had published in the American media after 9/11, rather than personally attacking Dr. Ahmed. A patriotic Bangladeshi like Dr. Ahmed is expected to focus more on the "two sentences" that Mr. Tom Friedman wrote about Bangladesh's secular democracy, rather than the "entire article" about Indian democracy!

Prof. Mazumdar's attempt to portray Dr. Ahmed as anti-Indian falls flat because Dr. Ahmed reiterates in the article Bangladesh's eternal gratitude to "Indians in general and the West Bengalis in particular for helping them gain independence." While the Bangladeshis admire India's virtues, they do not have to love India's faults! In his column in *The Daily Star* on February 1, Dr. Ahmed suggested that Bangladesh should honour Hemant Mukherjee, Late Mungeshkar and Ravi Shanker, and "name prominent institutions and monuments after Rabindranath Tagore." I don't know where Prof. Mazumdar was last year when the whole Indian

government machinery was accusing Bangladesh of harbouring Al Qaeda terrorists!

Didn't Dr. Ahmed say that he was not sure if the Borgis came from Burma? And it is true that part of the plot of "*Srikant*" is set in Burma. Prof. Mazumdar's letter would have been more credible if he acknowledged that Indian soldiers did take away arms from Bangladesh in 1971, and that India has not given Bangladesh equal-sized land in exchange for Dahagram and Angarpota, which they are legally obligated to do. What do you call this Mr. Mazumdar. Neither India nor Bangladesh should be criticised for looking after its own interest. And Prof. Mazumdar and those like him should not get paranoid every time China is featured prominently in Bangladesh's foreign policy!

**Akhtar Zaman**  
New York, USA

## Why President Bush is in a hurry?

It will not be unfair to say that the UN resolution #1441 passed by the Security Council against Iraq is patently wrong and immoral. It has put the onus on proving Iraq's destruction of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) on Iraq itself, even though several hundred UN inspectors are scouring the country with sophisticated equipment to discover the existence of such weapons.

Why is America so hell-bent on ousting Saddam Hussein? President Bush somehow considers him the biggest threat to America. By amassing troops, war materials, aircraft carriers etc. in and around the war zone; President Bush has put himself in a position of no return.

In the meantime, anti-war protests are getting louder all over the world including America because of the fact that the UN inspectors have so far failed to detect the existence of any weapons of mass destruction thereby putting Mr. Bush in an awkward position. However, anticipating their verdict, he has been rejecting the inspectors' findings from the beginning. But he still hopes to get another UN resolution authorising the use of force on Iraq despite the threat of veto by France, Russia and China.

The war against Iraq, evidently, appears more of a personal objective of Mr. Bush than against the so-called international terrorism. This is more than borne out in the way Bush is handling North Korea's nuclear activity and by his befriending with Pakistan President.

**Abul Mohsin**  
Siddheswari Circular Road, Dhaka

## War on Iraq

At the cost of a balanced debate *The Daily Star* has taken an implacably anti-war stand mitigated, I hope in part, by people like Mahmood Elahi and myself who have tried to present the other side of the argument.

President Bush gave March 17 the deadline for the UN to get its act together and follow through regarding Iraq. We are at one of those rare turning points in history and as befits such a time, I am reminded of Shakespeare's Henry V.

Just to give a little background, Henry V leads an English army to invade and conquer France. The outcome of this war will prove whether or not Henry has put aside his wild youth and become an effective leader and ruler, and whether he has the moral authority of a legitimate king-- in other words, whether or not God is on his side.

As Bush, Blair and Aznar Cry Havoc and let slip the dogs of war, we should put aside our doubts and follow them into this splendid adventure.

**MA, Dhaka**

## Iraq and the UN

I do not agree with Emile's view (14th March) that it is France and Russia who are now responsible for making the UN irrelevant. What about the US which praises, preaches and even pays UN's bills (as you have mentioned) when UN serves its interests, but suddenly changes colour and threatens to destroy UN when it doesn't? Is that the best way of upholding UN?

Instead of simply replacing the UN with yet another "Something Nation" -simply because it didn't

serve some big guys-, why can't we strengthen it and make it more useful? And to make UN more useful, the first thing we need to do is to make sure that the UN serves all its members with same interests. And to achieve that, we need to make UN a completely neutral body, so it doesn't serve some members more than others. Finally, for that to happen, we must get rid of the so-called Permanent Members! It is clear that the main reason why we are having so much fuss about Iraq is because some "Permanent Members" are trying to use their power to manipulate things in their favour.

If the US was so passionate about enforcing UN resolution, then why does it kill all the UN resolution against the terrorism committed daily by Israel? If Bush and Blair attack a sovereign country, they must be charged for war-crimes; just like Sharon, Milosovich and Saddam.

**Azad Miah**

women tourists barred from visiting one historical masjid or the daily barring of women worshippers from thousands of masjids? Has *The Daily Star* ever thought of this?

I find *The Daily Star* policy somewhat questionable. At a time when our critics are quick to label any Muslim country as 'terrorist' or 'fundamentalist', I wonder why a national newspaper chooses to give one-quarter of its back page to this particular news item? It hardly seems judicious or patriotic, not to mention fair.

**Mujahida Lunceford, Dhaka**

## Ayodhya excavations

I am not sure that I understand the point of the excavations at Ayodhya. Is it because it is assumed that a national newspaper chooses to give one-quarter of its back page to this particular news item? It hardly seems judicious or patriotic, not to mention fair.

**Mujahida Lunceford, Dhaka**

## Azores Summit: A final charade?



President Bush found time to travel well over thousand miles to Azores (off the Portuguese coast) for a lonely summit while rest of the world leaders are left desperately searching for peace. All indications point to an ultimatum to Iraq, to the Security Council and the world community at large. The course is set (might have been set long before when Mr. Bush chose to include Iraq in his famously uttered axis of evil speech). He did not find the energy to go "that extra mile" for diplomacy, extra ounce of patience and courage to make peace, for his own people and for the world at large.

While the summit agenda is undisclosed, it will take an incorrigible optimist to expect a last minute turning away from the brink of war by this axis of the reckless. The Azores summit looks more like a War Council. It is also an uncelebrated charade for those who keenly observe the body language and brush words coined by the relentless Blair and his underling Straw. Those who joined the road show led by Mr. Bush have taken over the lead.

Retrospectively viewed, the UN inspection regime since November 2001 looks more and more like a "charade" enacted to gain needed time to prepare and position for war. Those who do not want war have been lectured again and again by the UK and USA that resolution 1441 was unanimous and hallowed- above all others in its sanctity and inviolability. That too is a charade.

The latest case for war is a moral one, invented just when the inspectors are not finding any WMD. Is it anything less than yet another charade?

**Hussain**  
Dhaka

Oldham, UK

## How I will fight Bush

It seems clear to me that the Chief Justice of the World, George Bush Jr., is blind to the opinion of people outside the USA. He could only be influenced by two of the most important groups in America, voters and consumers. As I long time back have given up on the American voters, I remain with one voice that may be heard. From today, I am fighting Bush with the most powerful weapon available to me: my choice as consumer!

A single soldier wins no war. A single consumer wins no war. Bush wants to win his war by a massive mobilisation of his troops. Now, I am here to mobilise against him. But my war can be fought without loss of lives.

It is just so simple: take your time to read the label of the products you buy. Reject items made in the USA. Ask for local brands, or brands made in France, Germany or Russia. Tell your shopkeeper that you will go to another shop unless he keeps alternatives to the American brands. You may start with finding an alternative to the world famous soft drinks that too often finds its way to your table.

**Arild Klokkerhaug**  
Dhaka

## Ban on women visiting Shatgombuj Masjid

I am not too happy at the ban of women visitors to the old and beautiful Shatgombuj Masjid either, but I find *The Daily Star's* rather sensational coverage of the story oddly perverse.

More than 50 million Bangladeshi women are daily barred from attending the masjids all over the country, and this in direct contradiction to divine and prophetic injunction that the women servants of Allah should be allowed to go to the houses of Allah for worship. What is bigger and more troubling news is foreign

should surely think before making it a general rule.

When the Christian era began, some sites in Palestine associated with the life of Jesus began to be revered. The Romans, wishing to discourage the new religion, built pagan temples on many of these sites. When the Roman Emperor Constantine was converted, his mother, Helena, found it quite easy to locate such marked 'holy places' and built many churches on top of such temples. Should these churches be dismantled and Roman pagan worship re-instated?

It could be interesting in England where many places of Christian worship were built on pagan sites. I suspect that a lot of people would be rather upset if someone suggested, for instance, destroying Westminster Abbey and reviving child sacrifice.

**Angela Robinson (Rev Mrs)**  
The British School, Lalmitia, Dhaka

## GrameenPhone

I see that GrameenPhone has taken out more advertisements for their phone packages. In the first place I am grateful to Grameen for making mobiles ubiquitous in Bangladesh. However I do wish that Grameen would try to improve their coverage and service before trying to add more subscribers.

It is almost impossible to call a landline from a GrameenPhone, you'll have to try at least ten times. Secondly, it is not just difficult but impossible to call a GrameenPhone from an Aklol one. Third, the coverage of Grameen is very poor even within Dhaka. GrameenPhones for instance do not work in Agargaon near the Planning Commission or in front of the PM's office up to the Cantonment.

I'd rather wish Grameen solves its problems before simply adding more customers.

**Riki**  
Dhaka

## Why do I write?



Writing matters

I am a regular reader of *The Daily Star*, and the Letters Page happens to be my favourite because it is a wide forum that exhibits how our people think.

Recently I have not felt the necessity to contribute to this Page because others have voiced exactly what I wish to say. I am unanimous with the protests against the US-led war on Iraq, and disapprove our government's decision to ban CNG from the Bijoy Sarani to Sheraton.

Meanwhile, I have been pondering on a lighter topic. Why do people write?

Is it to change society?

Social change is a slow and arduous process and the writings of a single individual cannot influence the process a great deal, unless you are a revolutionary writer like Karl Marx. When we send letters to *The Daily Star* it is possibly to become a part, no matter how minute, of the process of social change and hope for a better society. When we write against injustice, it gets the message across to the oppressive holders of power that there are

some forces against them.

Do people write to become famous?

Every writer secretly craves recognition and is disappointed if his/her work is rejected by a daily/magazine. But the rewards are equally gratifying when articles do get published. It feels great when an acquaintance remarks, 'hey, I saw your writing on so and so issue in the newspaper!' I was very happy to once receive an e-mail from the in-charge of the Letters Page of *The Daily Star*. Recently I met Professor Syed Manjoorul Islam of the English Department of Dhaka University. Upon hearing my name, he at once recognised me as a proponent of gender equality and quoted a line I had used on this topic! I had never met him personally before, but to be recognised through my writings by an eminent scholar was very encouraging.

But none of the above reasons appropriately signify why I write. I write simply because I have an idea in my head, an idea that will linger until I share my thoughts with others.

**Munzir Kamal, Dhanmondi, Dhaka**