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Mahasweta Devi is not the first

A photograph was published in The Daily Star (Dec 20), where noted Indian writer Mahasweta Devi was showing the medal of the French award 'Officer Des Arts et des Lettres' that she was just awarded.

The Daily Star mentioned that she was "the first Indian author to receive the award which is one of the highest and most prestigious French civilian awards." To put the record straight, another noted author, Dr. Lokenath Bhattacharya, received the same award in 1991.

Ramendu Majumdar
Central Road, Dhaka

Prevent corruption

For the third time, our dear country has been termed as the most corrupt country in the world. Thousands of comments can be heard from rival political groups as, apparently, they are trying to find "who is responsible!". Obviously political groups will never mention their parties' involvement. All right, have a look at the national dailies. Almost all the time the cadres of the ruling party are involved in extortion, mugging and murder. Even if the police arrest them, we see no justice.

Lots of types of crimes can be mentioned but one of them I think is really grave. The rich people of our country do not pay taxes (instead they like to bribe the politicians). How can a country run without taxes? These people are really heartless.

To control these economically motivated crimes and all other types we need an Independent Anti-Corruption Bureau. In our country's perspective, no party government can ever do justice when it comes to anti-corruption measures (Think, on an average, how many criminal cases are there against an MP, minister, party bosses and their cadres).

The two major political parties have always promised to set up the institution but they really don't want such a institution. In fact, some of the parties' big bosses may have to leave the country once IACB comes into being. But, let us not forget, without justice we would have no peace or prosperity in the long run.

Md Hossain
Physics and Astronomy, University Of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada

A great sense of rumour!

Every time the AL leader Sheikh Hasina makes a comment, she reminds me of two other world leaders. One is Donald Rumsfeld who has recently won an award from The British Plain English Campaign for his legendary lin-

31st night



It is only two days, and we will see another new year. In the recent years we have noticed that following the modern western customs, massive celebrations take place on the new year's eve. Some rich people as well as clubs and hotels make business by arranging night parties and offer many ways of enjoyment like drinking, music, dancing, etc. And many people of all sorts are in mad rush to join in these year-ending gatherings.

Though these parties are full of fun, they have negative sides as well. Many awkward incidents had taken place in the past. On account of drinking liquor, some party-goers lose their control and indulge in senseless violence like fighting, breaking things and misbehaving with others. In order to be the centre of attraction, many society girls adorn themselves in such dresses in these parties that only raise bestiality in some men.

Dancing is the worst part of these night gatherings because some people use it to make physical contact with dancing partners which ushers in relationship problems in many cases. With the midnight approaching, these parties become so wild in fun and frolic that dignity of women are not safe at all. Not only in late night parties but also in roads and streets, some people create disorder. They throw paint, mud on passers by and damage motor vehicles in the name of celebrations. Loud thud of crackers and bombs go on continuously till the clock bells announce a new year which are really irritating.

In fact, there is nothing wrong to celebrate the year-ending night, but the way it is now celebrated can only undermine the value and dignity of our customs and traditions. So, we should not follow something which is not consistent with our sense of morality.

Rubab Abdullah
Dhaka Cantonment, Dhaka

are in a million.

Anyway, coming back to our home-grown talents, every time something bad happens in Bangladesh (a launch accident, for example), Sheikh Hasina somehow gets all these rumours in advance where it is all BNP's fault. She says we know the BNP did this and so their government should resign, but she provides absolutely no evidence! Someone should tell her that a launch accident is not reason enough to start a guerrilla war against an elected government. Of course, the government must be held accountable and they should explain to the public why it hap-

abuse she faced from the BNP. If Nelson Mandela can go to jail for his people, why couldn't Sheikh Hasina go to parliament for her people? Then again, some of you are probably laughing at me for comparing a legend like Mandela with Sheikh Hasina. My apologies.

Sheikh Hasina could do with a bit of "sense of reality" rather than "sense of rumour".

Azad Miah
Oldham, UK
Squabbling officials at the PMO

Your correspondent deserves

serve and have served the HOGs from day one of establishment of that office, have not changed. They have all demonstrated one unique quality; to be able to create a solid wall between the HOG and the rest of the government and the people.

No one would argue that a PM needs a secretariat to assist her running the government. But what is important in this set-up is to realise the needs of the PMO and their powers and functions. Ours is a parliamentary government. This means that the PM with her ministers are responsible to the people through parliament. The PM in this system of government is first among equals and the ministers enjoy a great deal of power and responsibility. Their approach to the PM therefore should not go through any scrutiny at the PMO except clerical and administrative. Unfortunately, in our system the PM's secretariat works as a parallel government and just not that; it supersedes the functions of the ministries in terms of recommendations placed before the PM. What actually happens in the PM's office is that except those files that are routine, ministers have to nurture favours of the people at the PM's secretariat to get their files placed before the PM for her decision.

It is therefore no wonder that the people at the PMO have emerged so powerful. And as it happens with all bastions of powers raised illegally, cliques arise at the PMO among those who now have fallen apart because they are unable to manage the cake they have acquired illegally and distribute it to everyone's satisfaction; everyone at the PMO that is.

The officials must only provide to the PM secretarial assistance and nothing more. As for the political secretaries, they should be told forthwith that their advises are to be restricted only to political matters and on no occasion to the actual workings of the ministries. The PM needs to do this quickly so that she does not suffer the consequences that all her predecessors did.

Shahjahan Ahmed
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

"DS report on PM's visit to DU"

Referring the above mentioned letter by Dewan G Ahmed published in the DS (Dec26, 2003), I would like to express my views on it.

Although I don't completely disagree with Mr. Dewan's opinion, I think the title of that news report should not have been "DU students protest PM's visit". The title was, in my view, somewhat misleading. Certainly not the majority of DU students or a large portion of them did protest the PM's visit. So it should not have been titled as a protest by the "DU students". On the question of neutrality or bias, I would like to share my experience here. I have been reading the DS since I was a ninth grade student -- almost grew up with the DS. And the question of its neutrality has been raised quite a few times. I think, the DS always tries to be neutral and publishes relevant and authentic news. Sometimes I felt that the DS supports Awami League while sometimes I felt it supports the BNP.

I believe, this happened due to my personal feelings for a particular party. After reading the said news item (DS Dec 23, 2004) on PM's visit to DU, I would like to say that it was a justified report with a misleading heading.

Enayet
Ontario, Canada

BJP and communalism

After reading a letter from MK Barua on this issue, I am hoping he or she is fairly knowledgeable about India and its current political affairs. So I would like to ask for a few statistics and comments on some thoughts I have about his/her letter.

What percentage of Indian population are Muslims? Please compare that with the number of Muslim leaders or active supporters of the BJP. Is there a discrepancy? If yes, then what is the root cause of that? Let me guess, is that because the majority of Muslims in India are extremists against whom BJP had declared its crusade?

I find the logic you wanted to establish by saying "I know so many people who cannot be termed as Muslim-bashers or communal but voted for the BJP" and then going on to name a few BJP leaders who "by no means can be tagged as communal" quite flawed. For example, if you have a group with say over 50 per cent members having a proven track record of criminal activities and a few who are not so bad, would you not say that you have a criminal gang? Or would you try to term them as the saviours of society?

Actually, I see no difference between the BJP being in power in India and the Jamaat sharing power in Bangladesh. Unfortunately, I think there are some groups of growing number of educated people now-a-days, perhaps like you, who have sud-

denly become so zealous for their religious identity that they are blindly helping directly or indirectly the cause of these once not-so-popular fundamentalist political parties. And this form of active support from the intelligent and educated part of the society is something these parties had always lacked, I believe. So I ask you it is not a fundamental duty of an educated, intelligent and a truly religious Hindu or Muslim to forsake these parties that spread hatred in one way or the other?

Just think how many innocent lives could have been saved if these parties didn't have our support for their fanatic cause.

Masrur Khan
Sydney

Ahmadiyya issue

It is with interest and shock that I read your article, 'Bigots demand bill declaring Ahmadiyyas non-Muslims' (December 26, 2004). These bigots obviously have nothing better to do than come up with unfounded theories. Other than the Almighty Himself, who is to judge who is a true Muslim and who is not? And even if the government were to label these fellow Muslims as non-Muslims, will that really make them non-Muslims? Just because there is a decree saying that Ahmadiyyas are non-Muslims, will that make these poor fellows any different in the eyes of the Almighty? What validity does the declaration of an earthly state have compared to the omnipotent powers of the Almighty? And where does this call to label the Ahmadiyyas non-Muslims end? Will these bigots then want to expel the Ahmadiyyas? Will they also call to declare Shi'ahs as non-Muslims as well? Are they going to turn against groups practising other religions? Will they then start telling the rest of us who is a real Muslim and who is not? Unhindered, the acts of this group can only lead to one thing: fundamentalist extremism like the Taliban, and we -- the majority -- cannot just stand by and let that happen.

Ahmadiyyas have done nothing wrong against us or anyone else. They have not caused pain or suffering to anyone. They have not imposed their beliefs on others. Their belief is slightly different than ours, but just because they are different, should we oppress them? Our nation was founded on the principles that oppression of one group by another is not to be tolerated. We must all uphold those principles today. Too much blood has been spilled for that principle, and all Bangladeshis have the duty to ensure that oppression of that kind never takes place on our soil again.

Wasim Choudhury
New York

On reading the article on Ahmadiyyas I felt somewhat disappointed with the title of the article which brands those who do not recognise the Ahmadiyyas as Muslims and those who are fully in support of such a bill are bigots. While the threats against the said politicians should be condemned, the fact that Ahmadiyyas are non-Muslims should be made clear. The article is deficient on this account.

Muslims should follow the opinions of scholars unless they are scholars themselves. It is the unanimous verdict of all contemporary scholars who are aware of the movement that Ahmadiyyas are non-Muslims. Ever since British colonial rule when this movement was initiated - scholars of the subcontinent were unanimous in placing them outside the fold of Islam. In fact, like all other non-Muslims, Ahmadiyyas are not allowed to enter the holy precincts of Mecca by the order of the Saudi government.

While the finality of prophethood is clearly mentioned in the Holy Koran and authentic Hadith - they have disowned the prophetic traditions and created doubts in the interpretation of words.

While Muslims should respect the rights of the Ahmadiyyas to believe and practise their religion, we cannot accept them as Muslims -- they are not. By delaying the matter, the MPs are making lengthly an issue already resolved by other Muslim countries. They should act promptly.

Sharif Hussain
London, UK

How much they take from us?

The Daily Star on December 26, 2003 was packed in a cellophane cover when the hawkler threw the paper at the gate of my house. I was a bit late to collect it from there. I was puzzled why the DS rapped the paper like this as it was not 31st December or no special edition. Later, I found that the advertisement of Lipton says you will get three tea-bags and understood the reason. But to my utter dismay, I found that no tea-bags were attached. How much those tea-bags cost? Two or three taka per piece? How much they take from us in monetary terms?

Tanvir Ahmed Siddiqui
6th Batch, MBA Program, DBA, JU

Overbridge to

Attempt on Musharraf's life

Within a span of ten days, two 'suicide' attempts have been made on the life of Pakistani President Gen. Pervez Musharraf. The president has been very lucky to escape death both the times. The Pakistanis think it is an act of the Islamic fundamentalists or the Al-Qaida

Pakistan has a bad record regarding the killing of their leaders. The first prime minister, Liaquat Ali Khan, was shot dead in broad daylight while he was addressing a public meeting on the playground of Rawalpindi's Gordon College after hardly three years of Pakistan's independence in 1947.

In 1968, Field Marshal Ayub Khan, the then president of Pakistan, escaped an assassin's bullet while he was addressing a public meeting in Peshwar, just 200 km from Rawalpindi. Two years later, Ayub was dismissed by his chief of the army General Yahya Khan. Two years later, Yahya himself was removed from power strangely by a civilian politician, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, a former member of Ayub's cabinet, with help from General Gul Hasan, the then chief of general staff.

In 1978, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the colourful prime minister of Pakistan and father of latter-day prime minister, an even more colourful Benazir Bhutto (who became prime minister twice, a record for Pakistan) was hanged by Gen. Ziaul Huq who ousted Zulfi in a military coup to become president of the country. Benazir herself has been banished from Pakistan and now lives in London and Dubai, more or less like a gypsy.

Ziaul Huq, the iron man died in a C-130 crash while he was returning to Islamabad, Pakistan's capital. It is not known what caused the crash, but a lot of people think it was some kind of a plot by his enemies whoever they were.

The Irish Republican Army, better known as IRA, commented after they failed to kill a British conservative prime minister, Mrs. Margaret Thatcher,

"She has to be lucky all the times, we have to be lucky only once". Margaret survived the IRA threat but it is now for Musharraf to be "Lucky all the times".

Fayaz Khan
Joar Shahara, Dhaka Cantt.



ease traffic

Having returned from Delhi last week, I was impressed by the projects adopted to improve traffic problems inside the new city. The first was the smaller version of flyovers. These are made in two phases, one following the other simultaneously as the flyovers progress to completion.

Prefabricated 2.50-metre broad RCC blocks covering half the total width of the two-way road has a bowl like crescent base which has nine holes through which 15cm iron rods pass to join each block to the other. A chain of eight such blocks joined together stands on a pillar

the size of pillars seen at the Mohakhali Flyover. Each chain of blocks has a three-lane road over which flows traffic from one direction. Over the other chain of blocks supported by another pillar flows

the traffic going the other direction. At the joint of the two chain blocks is the road divider that separates the flow of traffic from the two directions.

Unlike the Mohakhali Flyover, which has awesomely huge prefabricated blocks needing even more awesomely large cranes to lift them into position, these smaller versions are much easier and far less cumbersome in all aspects of engineering and construction works.

The other thing that impressed me in Delhi, especially in NOIDA was the concept of having overbridges of the width of the road passing below it, instead of having circular roundabouts and traffic lights. Roads approaching the main city road from either side pass under these overbridges. This enables the bulk of the city's traffic to pass without hampering the flow



on the main roads. Those taking left or right turn simply take the left most lane which goes down to join the flow of traffic below. The overhead bridges are made in the same fashion with 2.50 metre prefabricated blocks on smaller pillars and assembled one half at a time.

The idea of removing the railway line now passing through Dhaka city and connecting the airport directly to Kamalapur via Shajahanpur marshy land is a very pragmatic one. It will reduce traffic clogging in the city and open yet another outlet to the city's traffic.

Md. Mahmoodul Haque
Gulshan, Dhaka

NYT editorial unfairly smears Bangladesh

Dr. Ahmed's December 23 article regarding the editorial in the New York Times (Dec. 14, 2003), The Risks of Journalism in Bangladesh) dismisses the Times' conclusion regarding deterioration of journalistic freedom in Bangladesh by hiding behind the assertion that such freedoms are inherent in a democracy. Instead of addressing whether such a system is indeed prevalent in Bangladesh, I would like to draw your readers' attention to the extensive list of press freedom violations documented by Reporters Sans Frontiers (RSF), a non-partisan international

organisation committed to promoting press freedom, in its 2003 annual report on Bangladesh. The report concludes:

[In 2002] With more than 110 journalists physically attacked, 130 threatened and 25 arrested, the toll under Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's government was exceptionally heavy.

Source: <http://www.rsf.org/>

Surely, Dr. Ahmed cannot accuse RSF, which has been a vocal critic of Israel's suppression of the press in the Palestinian territories, of succumbing to a "Zionist stranglehold" or fostering a

"colonial arrogance" towards Bangladesh. Indeed, such arguments are divisive and only serve to cloud a discussion of the prevalent deterrents to uninhibited and independent reporting, a vast majority of which has nothing to do with Israel. So while some progress has been made towards the establishment of a free and dynamic press corps in Bangladesh, Dr. Ahmed's conclusion that "Bangladesh is one of the safest countries in the world for real journalists" seems premature. There is still much work ahead.

Edward Al-Hussainy
Washington, DC



guistic talent when he said "...there are known knows; there are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns; that is to say we know there are some things we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns -- the ones we don't know we don't know!". The other leader is L K Advani who comes out occasionally and says "this is Pakistan's fault, that is Bangladesh's fault and that many millions of illegal Bengalees are living in India". But the man doesn't provide one single hard evidence to back his claims. I wonder if Advani even knows how many zeros there

opened and what they intend to do to prevent similar things from happening in the future. But to hold the government accountable, we need people who can read map and find their way to the Jatiya Sangsad, rather than dancing on the street killing mosquitoes with their placards! We are aware that the four party government deliberately bullied AL in the parliament and its members were not behaving like responsible leaders.

But if Sheikh Hasina was wise enough, she could have used it to her advantage. She should have attended parliament to represent the people no matter how much

kudos for a fact revealing report "PM plans to shed her squabbling staff" (December 26) on the state of things at the PMO. The most revealing aspect of the report was that the PM was unaware of the squabbles.

Unfortunately, this is not the only PM living with such a hornet's nest so close to her seat. Every head of government (HOG) before her lived with a similar situation. With this PM, because of the nature of the individuals in question, the squabbles have come to public attention. In fact, there is a public perception that while the HOG and party changes, the people who