

An Open Letter to the Hon'ble Home Minister

by Shah AMS Kibria

A New Frontier

Humanists and rationalists from 22 countries formally met in the Indian capital New Delhi to announce the formation of an international alliance against fundamentalism on Friday.

Ethnic, religious and racial intolerance and hatred of varying degrees have swept different parts of Europe, Africa and Asia in the past few years.

In some countries inept and corrupt leadership may provide fuel to the fodder and end up turning their countries into a happy hunting ground for the fundamentalists.

Pampering the fundamentalists to derive immediate political gains returns in inconceivable backlashes.

Developing Tourism

A country projected in international media as the land of floods, cyclone and diseases can hardly attract foreign tourists.

There is again a debate over the role of the public and private sectors in developing tourism.

The same goes with most other places. From the point of conservation or preservation of our forest resources and places of historical importance the public sector's role has been unenviable.

At a time when tourism has emerged as the single largest employer in the world, we have no plan to develop either the tourist spots or the roads and highways for smooth communication.

Death of a Journalist

With the death of Monajatuddin, rural journalism is not likely to be the same again. A committed man Monajatuddin almost single-handedly fought against the urban-biased news in our journalism.

Monajatuddin spent his best years with the Sangbad. His stories published in that daily had the added quality of follow-ups even after years.

Monajat is dead now. But he has been a ground-breaker in an area still suffering neglect of the editors.

Dear Mr. Home Minister,

There is a well-known Bengali proverb which says that those who do not speak have no enemy.

A campaign was launched on the advice of the Election Commission, to recover illegal arms.

The blaze of publicity prior to the launching of the campaign must have been calculated to warn the terrorists that they should go into hiding while the going was good.

Let us take the transport sector. It is common knowledge that the bus terminals have become the den of criminal elements who masquerade under the

banner of the ruling party and collect regularly huge amount of tolls from the bus owners.

Yet the police netted only a few hundred arms in a week-long campaign.

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I questioned the authenticity of the documents. In a reply matter of fact way he replied that it was a 'No 2 category' licence which he got on payment of three hundred taka.

Again, here is a vast network of corruption operating right under government's nose.

Do you have any idea how insecure we all felt during the last few days even to venture out of the home with our cars?

The other day a brilliant young teacher of the Dhaka University was brutally killed by some unknown assailants in a main thoroughfare of the city.

gushed University colleagues and students, there is no word on the progress of the police investigation.

Mr. Home Minister, I did not want to raise the questions of political victimisation but this question cannot be shovelled under the rug; it is there to haunt the nation because most people believe that political protection and patronage is at the root of the whole escalating crime situation.

Can you deny, Mr. Home Minister, that there are armed cadres belonging to the youth or student wings of your party which have escaped the long arm of the law because of government connivance?

Accountability is the essence of a democratic system of government.

Accountability is the essence of a democratic system of government. In Bangladesh, the law and order situation has taken a nose dive under your stewardship and yet you have rarely, if ever, taken the people into confidence and spoken to them.

tors. Do you know, Mr. Home Minister, that Article 37 of the Constitution guarantees every citizen "the right to assemble and to participate in public meetings and processions peacefully and without arms."

Was it reasonable to close down almost a third of the city because the opposition was planning a peaceful demonstration?

As I said earlier, even if you do not give an answer to this open letter, you should at least read it to know the concerns and anxieties of the common people.

We publish this piece as an anguished outcry of a citizen who wants an explanation from his elected government.

Most people believe that the police knows very well who hold the arms. Bangladesh is a small and compact country and these thugs do not use their weapons under cover of darkness

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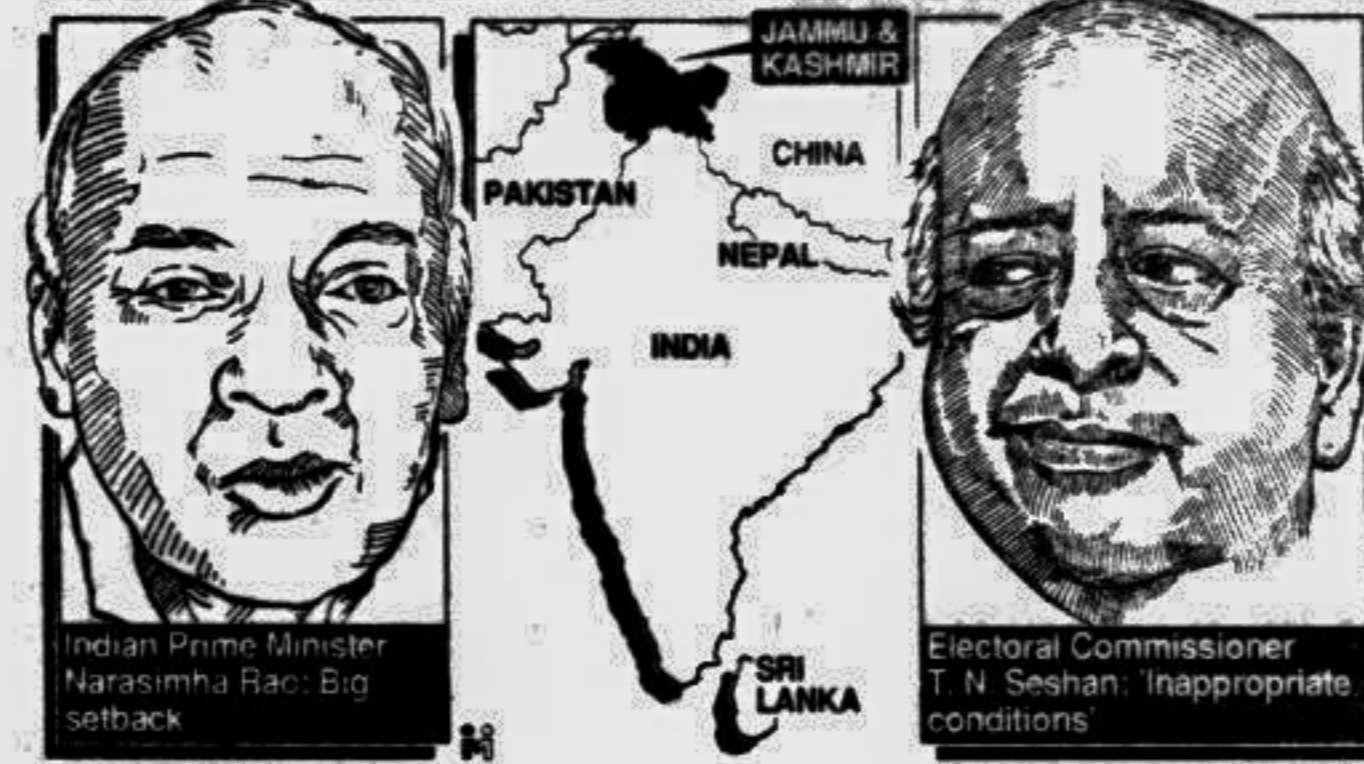
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Militants Triumph in Scrapped Poll

India's Prime Minister had hoped to reap the rewards of installing an elected government in conflict-torn Kashmir before next year's parliamentary ballot. But the plan has backfired.

Vetoed vote



reached its decision because the federal government had failed to concede greater autonomy to India's only Muslim-majority state.

The electoral commission's decision is a victory for Kashmiri militants and their political representatives from the All Party Hurriyat Conference, who are bitterly opposed to such polling.

Hurriyat members had issued threats against anyone taking part, saying the only ballot permitted would be a referendum on Kashmir self-determination, which was promised by Delhi in 1948 but never held.

Until now, the federal government had been confident of duplicating electoral strategies it had evolved in other terrorism-torn northern states, where long-run-

ning conflicts had been quelled in recent years.

Security and intelligence officials reasoned that since elections — however unrepresentative — over three years ago in Punjab had ended 12 years of terrorism, in which more than 20,000 people were killed, they would work similarly in Kashmir.

"A government elected even with a token voter turnout would have legitimacy," said one Congress Party MP.

Security officials also cited tactical reasons for holding elections in the troubled state in December, when snow chokes the passes between the two sides of Kashmir, preventing infiltrators from entering India from Pakistan and disrupting voting.

Rahul Bedi writes from New Delhi

Pakistan, which claims Kashmir and which seized a third of its territory soon after independence in 1947, has consistently denied Indian allegations that it sponsors and arms Kashmiri separatists.

But security officials in Kashmir's winter capital, Jammu, say they have prevented many armed infiltrators from entering over the past four months — reducing violence and creating a climate conducive to holding elections.

Elections were last held in the state in 1987. They were won by the National Conference in alliance with Rao's Congress Party, amid allegations of widespread vote-rigging, which fuelled the separatist movement.

Holding elections in Kashmir has been a priority for India, anxious to end the civil war which has caused it international embarrassment and criticism.

The continual extension of federal rule, a growing death toll and the presence of more than 175,000 army and paramilitary troops in Kashmir do little to support Rao's desired image of stability and secular governance, designed to attract foreign investment.

With voting now cancelled, Home Ministry officials said a state election

expires in January.

Rao had hoped to capitalise on a Kashmiri poll, and use the success to boost his chances in the general election, due in mid-1996.

Congress Party members believe it would have guaranteed their return to office. But now he will have to face censure for having suggested the failed idea.

— GEMINI NEWS

RAHUL BEDI, a freelance journalist, is the Indian correspondent of the London "Daily Telegraph" and "Jane's Defence Weekly."

Art Buchwald's COLUMN

Bah Humbug

The big news last week was that Santa Claus and Ebenezer Scrooge decided to merge and become one major colossus that would be able to service holiday consumers more efficiently and at less cost than ever before.

In a press conference at the North Pole, Scrooge and Claus both said that what they were doing was not merging as much as "restructuring their organization."

In order to do so, the new company was going to lay off eight reindeer, 10,000 elves and Bob Cratchit, who would be offered a buyout similar to the one AT & T was offering more than 77,000 of its employees this Christmas.

Scrooge told reporters, "We have to fire everyone because our competitive environment has changed radically. It's much cheaper to deliver toys by UPS than by sled. And our company cannot enjoy the holiday season if we have to pay pension benefits to a bunch of dwarfs who are always getting old."

Santa Claus told the press conference that the merger was a perfect fit. Scrooge of Scrooge & Marley would be charge of the warehouse and keep the books.

"Once Bob Cratchit is fired and the company no longer has to pay health benefits for Tiny Tim, we expect to make a large profit. We're not the only ones to see that it that way. Wall Street was so taken by the merger that Santa Claus stock rose by 45 points. Ho! Ho! Ho!"

A reporter asked how much money was involved in the merger.

Scrooge replied, "Santa Claus gave me \$5 billion in junk bonds and a watch fob which he bought by selling his hair. I gave him a set of combs I bought by selling my watch. Santa will be chief executive officer, and I will be president."

"If you fire the elves, where will all the toys come from?"

"China, Indonesia, Tibet — any place but the north Pole."

"What about work for the elves?"

Scrooge answered, "We hope they can all find a second career, though that isn't our problem. Bob Cratchit came in to see me the other day and asked what he was supposed to do since he worked for Scrooge & Marley all his life. I told him what the other CEOs are telling their laid-off employees: 'Bah humbug. When Wall Street heard what I told Cratchit, the stock went up another 70 points.'"

A reporter addressed his question to Santa Claus: "When you merged with Scrooge, you gave up your independence. Don't you feel bad about that?"

"I don't feel good, but I had no choice. I had to make the best deal for the stockholders. Wall Street doesn't give a damn about Christmas. All it cares about is making money. If I had turned down the offer, some mutual fund would have taken me to court. I believe Scrooge and I will get along just fine. He has a lot of vision and he sees ghosts where nobody else does. That's a plus when you're pushing gifts. Ho! Ho! Ho!"

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To the Editor...

Monitoring election

Sir, I am surprised to know that Election Commission has refused to recognise and give permission to the pro-active citizens' initiative 'Fair Election Monitoring Alliance (FEMA)' and allow its volunteers to monitor upcoming general elections in the country.

This reflects the present government's intention and motive about which the opposition parties have been propagating. By not allowing independent observers to monitor the electoral process and observe the election-day happenings at the polling centres, it seems the government and the Election Commission have something to hide from the citizens.

In the present context, it's very important that the entire election process is made transparent to enhance confidence of the general people in the election process as well as in its outcome.

Masters (private) examination

Sir, The date of registration for students intending to appear at the 1996 Masters Examination as private candidates expired on 30th ultimo. It is believed that large numbers of students could not enroll themselves for some unavoidable reasons.

We feel if the time for registration is extended by the concerned authority, many a students would be benefited.

Would the National University authority be kind to the students? A T M Nurun Nabi A Guardian Khilgaon, Dhaka

Private lesson!

Sir, A teacher of a high school in Auckland, New Zealand has been charged with 56 counts of sexual assaults including 16 counts of rape of his students over the past few years.

been happening everyday world over?

Ponderable examples of marriages between teacher and his/her student are known to have resulted from either their illicit relationship or personal gains.

Now with a target of a better generation to be made, a thorough evaluation of present instructional materials and probable measures to improve them will help.

A developed teacher-student relationship will definitely be enlightening the educated community with regard to self control as well as mannerism, which will bar even teachers to take advantage of students and will discourage any unscrupulous attempts.

A code of standard behavior pattern may be fruitful to both students and teachers as much as to all others on and off campus to do away with any harassment or assault.

Discipline being the centre of a curriculum has to be emphasized with a view to achieving scholastic intellect.

Besides, why should a campus-man to be questioned by disciplinary body in case of alleged or suspected nuisance merits an enquiry against the backdrop of universal progress in academic pursuit.

M Rahman Zila School Road, My-mensingh

A new party

Sir, Now the businessmen and the industrialists have floated a party to act as a pressure group. They have said that their organisation is neither political nor non-political. At present all the businessmen and industrialists have got an association of their own. They voice their demand through this body.

All the businessmen and industrialists have their own and different political ideologies. It is not understood what kind of pressure will be exerted through this Andolon Party!

Mohabbul Haque Chowdhury Krastagan, Dhaka