

# The Daily Star

Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali

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## Reception Politics Gets on Public Nerves

**I**T is the same story all over again. Only a last minute miracle, the possibly unlikeliest thing to occur in our bickering circumstances, can save the situation. As in the case of the ICC tournament victory in 1997 so also now with our feat in the World Cup cricket, the reception to our boys looks set to be devoid of any participation by the opposition political parties. While the Mayor of Dhaka today goes about holding his public reception with the PM as the chief guest on the dais, BNP has had separate plans to greet the Bangladesh squad on their arrival at Zia International Airport. They are also likely to hold a reception of their own for the team when it will have returned to the country after the World Cup Final on June 20. Now that separate receptions to the cricketers seem inevitable all we would implore both sides to ensure is that there is no unpleasant incidents to denigrate the occasion anymore than already done.

Our sister Bangla publication, the daily Prothom Alo carried a story yesterday based on comments from some members of Bangladesh's World Cup squad in UK which suggested that a 'reception phobia' has struck them just before they left for the country. Obviously, they are 'once bitten, twice shy' from the sour memories of the ICC victory receptions two years ago. Beyond an ironical fright of the receptions galore they have vented out a litany of charges about promises broken without the slightest of qualm that those were made publicly accompanied by a great fanfare following their triumph at the ICC championship in 1997.

We have three concerns to express today as the government, the mayor, the political parties, the corporate bodies, business tycoons, and what have you, lumber up to shower their most passionate greetings on the Bangladesh cricket squad on its arrival in Dhaka. First, **let there be no more politicisation of the sporting victory that should find us owning and celebrating it as a national glory cutting across all party-lines. If we fail to do so we will not only make ourselves a laughing stock before the world but also sow seeds of dissension in our small cricketing domain which is otherwise on the verge of integrating with the big world of international cricket.** This is not the time for small-minded political bickering when we are required to boost the morale of our cricketers on to a new pitch with a guarantee that a sportingly unified nation is behind them.

Our second concern is about unfulfilled promises in terms of logistical support to the cricketers. Commitments were made on the heels of the ICC success to upgrade the facilities but were soon forgotten down the road. When this time we get into a similar flurry we better take a pause and feel duly ashamed of the core pledges going unmet. Our third pointer would be towards the need for various groups and parties to deliver on the prizes they had announced for the cricketers of ICC fame two years ago.

We need to be focused today on what we can genuinely do to harness the new-found euphoria in upgrading the standards of our cricket to the top half of the international level. From that point of view, our policy digression has been shockingly counter-productive as is evidenced by the time and money we have spent so far in making the Bangabandhu Stadium fit for international cricket and then abandoning it to football. That approach won't simply do.

# The Death of a Couple in a Traffic Accident

**D**EATH is inevitable and sad, but particularly traumatic are the sudden and unexpected loss of lives in traffic accidents. A moment's carelessness on the road can cause a permanent void. With the death of near and dear ones, we all die a little, only that losing someone in a traffic accident so often seems like a tragedy that was not inevitable. Judging by the meagre number of vehicles that ply on its so-called highways, Bangladesh, I am told, has the highest proportion of road accidents in comparison to other countries. This does not seem surprising, for ever so often our newspapers are full of gory details on traffic accidents, so much so that a professionally discerning journalist remarked that by their recurrence, such stories are gradually losing news value. For Bangladesh it is a dubious distinction to have for which the authorities concerned have to accept the ultimate responsibility.

I write today about a couple who died of injuries sustained in an accident on the Dhaka-Chittagong death trap, that goes by the name of a highway in a country that seems to have a penchant for inapplicable superlatives! Considering the large number of accidents that occur on that and other Bangladeshi roads, 'killer roads' one might say, would be their more appropriate description. The couple, it can be stated, was not widely known. The husband, Ali Haider Khan, a government servant of the executive branch had retired about ten years ago. Lack of a pursuit reduces contacts beyond one's immediate milieu and the circle of acquaintances of a retired civil servant thus gets smaller by the year as must have been the case with Ali Haider Khan. However, to those who knew him and his wife Motiara Khan, they were a lovable couple, simple, warm and kind. In the Chittagong Division in general and in the Hill Tracts districts in particular, where Ali Haider Khan had spent about two decades of his distinguished career, they were widely known and liked. Starting as a junior officer he served as a Deputy Commissioner in the Hill Tracts for the unusually long period of eight years, a fact that spoke of his effectiveness and acceptability in a delicate assignment. This efficient, modest, and yet fearless civil servant rounded off his career as the Divisional Commissioner of Chittagong, a post he held for four years.

It was in the late eighties, while he was serving in the above-mentioned capacity, that our paths crossed professionally. I was High Commissioner to India then and both of us were members of the National Committee set up by the government to negotiate with the

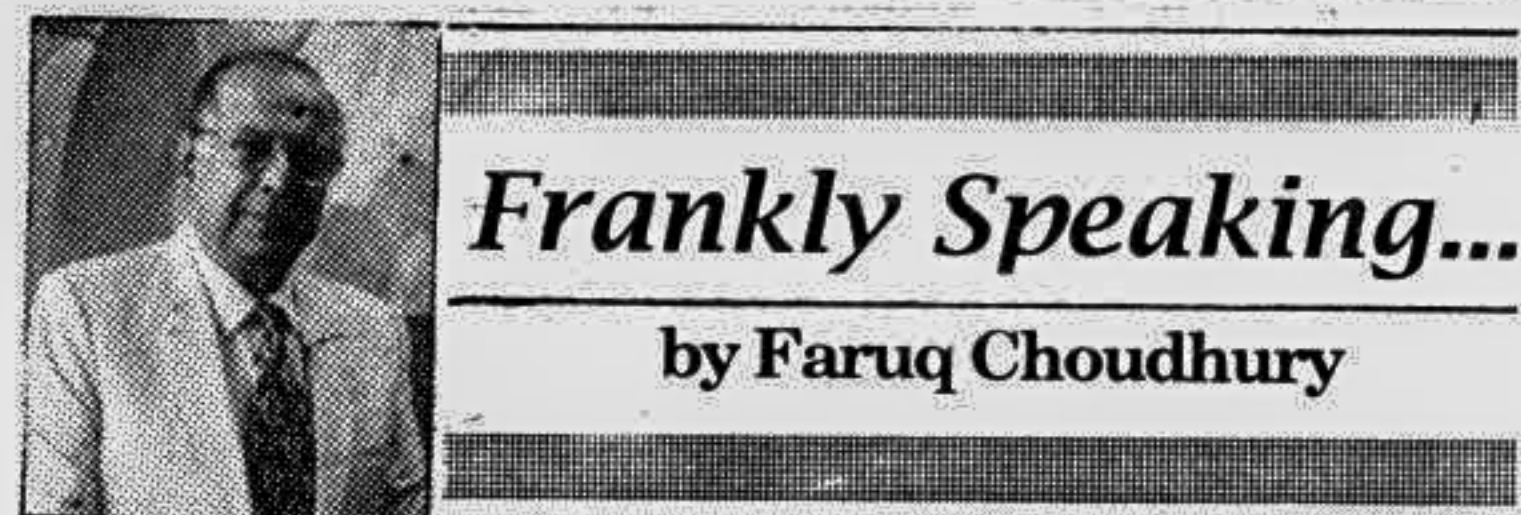
*What is needed now is effective coordination among the relevant agencies of the government, not only to improve and maintain the roads, but also to enforce highway discipline and a code of conduct for its users. Above all, there has to be quick punishment for the crimes of negligence that kill and maim people.*

tribal leadership. It was in 1988 that I led a delegation of Bangladeshi officials to the refugee camps in Tripura to persuade them to return home. I noticed that Ali Haider Khan was not made a member of our team. The going for us was rough in Tripura, for the refugee leaders had grave doubts about the sincerity and indeed the capacity of the Ershad regime in finding a just solution of the problems in the tribal region. However, I was surprised that many of the refugee leaders asked me as to why Ali Haider Khan was not in the delegation. They seemed to like him and admire him for his knowledge of local conditions and problems and for his belief in justice and fair play. His exclusion from the delegation turned out to be a negative factor. Later on I was told that this knowledgeable and popular official had aroused the jealousy of some, then in authority, and that as a result he was denied any meaningful role in the matter.

It was at that time that after a hard day's work in Chittagong, while having afternoon tea with him at his official residence, that he told me of a couple of things that brought forth the farsight and maturity of this conscientious civil servant. He told me in confidence that the problem in the tribal belt could never be solved by a military dominated government such as Ershad's and that in that sense he thought that both of us were wasting our time and effort. He was however optimistic that a democratically elected government, able to get into the bottom of the matter, would one day solve the problem. He was against any suggestion of compromising in any manner.

Bangladesh's sovereignty, but narrow and bigoted definitions of that term that hurt the genuine sensitivity of the tribal people, he said, should be eschewed. Years after he had retired to his modest home in Uttara, his inclusion in 1997 as a member of the present government's negotiating team with the Shanti Bahini pleased me. I went and saw him at his residence in Uttara after the Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Treaty had been signed, this time as a columnist rather than as a colleague, and found him elated.

He believed that in spite of the shortcomings of the agreement, which were not basic in nature, it would strengthen the unity of the country. He was aware that the way ahead could



## Frankly Speaking...

by Faruq Choudhury

**S**till be tough but was happy that a firm basis on which peace in the Hill Tracts could be established had been laid. It is an irony of fate that on May 26, 1999, just a day prior to the regional government in the Chittagong Hill Tracts assumed office, Ali Haider Khan died, as the result of a traffic accident on the Dhaka-Chittagong 'killer way' as did his wife Motiara Khan, only four days earlier. It was not in their lot to see normalcy return in an area they so dearly loved, and which Ali Haider Khan had served, in various capacities, for twenty long years.

The accident that killed them does not call for an elaborate description, for these take place on our roads with frightening frequency. A killer truck driven by probably an unlicensed or a fake licence carrying moron of a driver, trying to overtake a similar vehicle, gets on to the wrong side of the road

and crashes headlong against a vehicle coming from the opposite direction, killing and maiming. He then speeds along never to be seen or heard again in respect of the crime that he has committed. This is precisely what happened with the accident in question, that left in its trail, two dead and three including the driver of Ali Haider Khan's car, injured. There was, as usual, no traffic police in sight, no arrangement to carry the injured to a hospital and when providentially a microbus passing by came forward to help, the day May 7, 1999 being a Friday, admission into what in this country goes by the name of hospital, was difficult and inordinately delayed.

Five years ago, on June 5, 1994 to be precise, I had, in a published article, remarked about the dangers of the Dhaka-Chittagong road, pointing out at the lack of safety arrangements

on it. Since then hundreds of people have died or have been crippled and maimed by accidents on that road and dozens of articles like mine have been written. The other day I took courage in my wheels to travel on the road and found that conditions had further deteriorated. Traffic had expectedly increased, many more shops had sprung up unauthorised along the wayside and rickshaws were plying in certain parts of the road adding to the hazards. The road was still without a raised divider, making it a four lane free for all in both the directions with occasional side way intrusions. In fact I saw not a single sign that would signal at even an attempt by the authorities to exercise any kind of highway supervision or management.

Only once, hopefully I thought, I had seen one, but that turned out to be an illusion. In a secluded stretch of the road, where wayside unauthorised shops have not yet mushroomed, I saw a driver by his pulled up truck, in an earnest conversation with a policeman. Only yards down the road as I drove by, I noticed a sergeant waiting by his parked motorcycle. At last here was someone, I thought, to keep an eye on speeding vehicles. I realized



Who's going to be the next casualty?

that I was wrong only when I noticed that he was looking expectantly yonder at the policeman negotiating earnestly with the truck driver, completely oblivious of passing vehicles! The other day I read in the papers that an angry crowd had barricaded traffic on that highway for about ten hours. On that occasion a truck driver apparently had the audacity to offer the police only Taka 200, instead of the demanded Taka 500, whereupon he was assaulted by the police. He raised an alarm and the crowd descended and closed down the highway, disrupting traffic movement for nearly half a day. Apparently my sergeant had better luck!

Cannot the government at the least make a credible effort to bring a semblance of order and safety on our roads? Even instead of the dubious figures published by the authorities, hundreds perish every year on our roads. As a result thousands of people get directly affected. Cannot this problem receive a priority treatment? We do have the wherewithal to deal with the situation — the Road Transport Corporation, the police, mobile courts, patrol cars, motor cycles, police stations, jails and above all, laws and regulations the British had so thoughtfully left behind fifty years ago!

Road traffic in Bangladesh is increasing enormously and highway management therefore must receive priority, for road accidents are taking an ever-increasing toll of life in Bangladesh. We have miserably failed to manage the traffic congestion in Dhaka, which is turning from bad to worse every day. However traffic congestion on city roads slows down traffic, creates confusion and lends inefficiency to a capital's overall performance. But it does not kill, as does the free for all conditions on our inter-city roads. What is needed now is effective coordination among the relevant agencies of the government, not only to improve and maintain the roads, but also to enforce highway discipline and a code of conduct for its users. Above all, there has to be quick punishment for the crimes of negligence that kill and maim people.

Effective coordination is a *sine qua non* for sound management, and is more productive than ministerial words of wisdom that are pronounced with monotonous regularity in this country on all kinds of occasions. Since road management will involve powerful vested interests, unscrupulous politicians, corrupt officials and greedy truck owners, what is needed is political will and firmness at the highest level of the government. This is an area where, in order to save precious lives, the Prime Minister has to act urgently.

## Locked on the Line of Fire

Syed Talat Hussain writes from Islamabad

**I**NDIA'S Operation Flush Out, which started Monday with the aim to clean up the north of the Kargil mountain area across the Line of Control of what Delhi alleges are Pakistan's infiltrators, has already tensed up the whole region. Alarm bells of a possible showdown between the two traditional rivals are frenetically ringing in all the world capitals. And there are good reasons for the peal of panic to spread far and wide. For one thing this operation, in which gunship helicopters and jets took part, marks the toughening of the Indian stance against the Kashmiri fighters and against what Delhi calls Pakistan's material and military support to them. With Delhi vowing to continue its operation for another three months, and with Pakistan sounding stern warning notes of retaliation and fitting replies, there is no hope of a calm.

Moreover, Delhi's Operation Flush Out came after a rapid built up of tensions, which started some three weeks ago in the shape of border skirmishes and claims and counter claims from both sides of scoring victories and defeating the enemy's advances. This shows a tendency in the tensions between the two countries towards escalation and intensification, resulting in serious happenings. This is a dangerous trend. This shows that what might start as a 'limited' and 'localised', and 'containable' trouble between Pakistan and India, can graduate to a higher level of conflict spilling into a larger area, pushing both sides closer and closer to a more serious showdown.

No longer can the events of the Line of Control be considered to be small routine sparks of trouble. These now have shown themselves to be potential triggers of bigger disasters. This looks all the more likely because India has already tested the waters of international public opinion by using airpower against human targets in Kashmir. And its tests have been encouraging to say the least. Other than pleas of caution, and expressions of concern, India's air strikes have not gotten any raps on the knuckles. The United States State Department has issued a mild statement saying that the events show the urgency of resolving the differences between the two countries.

It is no coincidence, therefore, that India continues to say that it will carry out its operations and has even demonstrated that insistence by undertaking the third phase of its sorties. Expectedly, the result of the third sortie has been even more serious: it lost two jets and one pilot, with the wreckage of the planes falling in Pakistani territory. Already the action-reaction mode appears to have taken hold as every new development is only leading to a higher level of tense environment.

Another factor, which makes these developments around the Line of Control exceptionally dangerous, is that a new tract of territory has become a bone of contention between India and Pakistan. While the 5000m long LoC has been a cold border and shellies, a fiery exchange goes on around the fire line, still the two sides have always made their moves from static positions with a fair idea of the demarcation line. The Kargil region battle has changed that. It has brought in contention a critical sector which controls access to the Indian controlled Kashmir's capital Sri Nagar and even to Leh in Ladakh.

This means that in the coming months the two sides will be locked in an intractable wrangle over who controls which part of the area and who has violated whose land. A glimpse of this confusion is already evident in the downing of the Indian jets. The Indians had initially claimed that these jets had been hit in their airspace while on a Pakistan response was that these planes had trespassed its air space. This confusion of claims and counter-claims can easily fan the fires of suspicion and, as it happens on such cases, the flames can leap beyond imagination.

The most disturbing element in this equation is that there is no security net of confidence building measures in place. The DGMOs communications can at best prevent a sudden escalation but these are too little and too inadequate when it comes to defusing bottled up emotions and cooling flying tempers. In any case it is a little hard to believe that the military command on both sides of the border will be able to pump down passions for retaliation in case it believes that the other side has done wrong. The warnings from the two sides in the midst of this crisis have been harsh and hard. And while the events took place it looked as if the political leadership on both sides was following rather than leading their respective military's responses.

This situation has the making of a big unanticipated tragedy. In circumstances like these, there is need to go back to the civil code of mutual consultation and talks and negotiations. These cannot be handled by the military whose soldiers are trained to fight and for whom there are no grey areas between war and peace and friends and foes.

However, these talks and negotiations for defusing heightened tensions cannot take place in a vacuum and must follow a framework. Other than the broad framework of the Lahore Declaration, none is available. The two sides are yet to flesh out the many proposals for reducing the risk of an accidental war and a pre-emptive strike from either side in fear of attack. Since the Lahore Declaration both countries have spent more time in releasing each other's fishermen than in creating a system which could restrain the likelihood of an unwanted conflagration.

The consequence of this is that while there is a surfeit of warnings there is a paucity of effective steps to contain the build-up. The defusing process has been left to luck, chance and the hope that the two sides are not foolish enough to take their local troubles to the point of a war, a nuclear war. This is not reassuring at all, especially if the eye-ball-to-eye-ball confrontation continues.

South Africa under President Mandela continued to have a high profile in the community of nations. President Mandela's efforts in making a peace deal between Libya and the West was one of his highlights. South Africa's attempt to resolve the Congo crisis was appreciated. The President became the conscience keeper of the world and he performed the role with great vigour. We only hope that President Mandela's successor Thabo Mbeki would be able to lead South Africa in the next millennium with a multi-racial democracy working together unitedly with Africans, coloureds, Indians and whites.

The author is former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva

obedience continues to threaten civil society, not only in increasing levels of crime and violence but in areas such as lack of civic responsibility. Riots broke out when local council around Johannesburg began disconnecting illegal electricity connections. However, after an uncertain start, ANC government had been able to improve the quality of life of black people. Credit was given the way the government maintained fiscal discipline. Black trade unions have begun to exercise their economic power by using pension funds, worth about \$17 billion dollars. Black enterprises control some 2.5 per cent of Johannesburg Stock Exchange.

South Africa is one of the richest countries in Africa. It has a huge industrial and mining sector, 65 per cent of exports come from mining. Exports are roughly \$62 billion. It is self-sufficient in food. The GDP is around \$230 billion and per capita income is approximately \$4800.00. South Africa continues to attract US investment and a few

divisions are engaged for two years after giving the troops a short training of three or four months this is expected to yield tremendous result in terms of productivity. In this way we can also justify the huge defence expenditure. It is obvious that we can never fight a war against our prospective enemy. So why not utilise them for some productive purpose?

**Let's not be overwhelmed**  
Sir, As a cricket-loving nation, we have shown our mood fluctuating syndrome on earlier occasions. Expressing ideas, expecting something higher or even venturing our dislikes are all good gesture and reflect good frame of mind. But excess of everything based on narrow perspectives and whims lead us nowhere. Rather it has been seen that we had to swallow some of our own words and actions.

May I request everybody to refrain from such moves and also think before we commit anything. Now that we have participated in the highest forum, our association with cricket should be at the level of the game which is said to be the king of games and played by kings.

**Nasiruddin Ahmed**  
41, Kallyanpur, Dhaka

**Gender democracy**  
Sir, Press reports bring encouraging news of the females seeking their more empowered presence in the parliament (JS). As a gentleman I am all for it, having tasted the dispensation of the domestic home ministry for two decades. Democratic governance should be more disbursed at the people's republic level. Decentralise; the devolution is sometimes better tolerated.

The JS Standing Committees are said to be losing valuable time sitting over periods of enforced idleness as the progress of work is slower due to lack of proper secretariate logistics support. Press reports indicate that the UNDP is implementing a scheme for the strengthening of the JS Secret.

But there is no news about orientation programmes for the MPs for more effective use of the House. The debates are not debated; and the rebates offered to other parties are said to be not enough.

**Abul M Ahmad**  
Dhaka

**Trees at Osmani Uddayan**  
Sir, I have been following with interest the news and comments on cutting down of trees in Osmani Uddayan.

I entirely agree that cutting down the trees of Osmani Uddayan will be a disgrace of first magnitude. Has anyone heard of the 'Chhipko andolan' of Ms Medha Patkar? Let someone organise such a movement and I am willing to join in spite of my age (70).

Is anybody listening?  
**M W Ali**  
Dhaka

**Troops and mills**  
Sir, Nationalised sectors of Bangladesh are incurring around Taka 2,000 crore loss annually due to labour unrest, low labour productivity, mismanagement etc. If troops are engaged to run these mills and factories by rotation. Wages on labour payment can be saved and due to strict discipline productivity will be much higher. So instead of loss these factories would earn handsome profit.

Out of the seven army divisions, if three

## Friday Mailbox

**Cutting trees: a suicidal attempt**  
Sir, I don't understand what prompts the government to take the destructive plan of cutting 11,000 trees of the historic Osmani Uddayan only to build a conference venue. There is no dearth of such venues in our country to hold an occasion like NAM conference. The government should hit upon more constructive plans for the betterment of the country other than cutting trees and erecting monuments. The whole world in general and our country in particular are facing the terrible threat of environmental problem.

Under this circumstances, it will simply be a suicidal attempt to cut 11,000 trees of the historic Osmani Uddayan on a flimsy ground of erecting a conference venue. This will cause most crucial predicament, especially for the city dwellers that have few open fields in the city to have a fresh breath of air.

Apart from the environmental bad impacts, economically it will be a matter of great imprudence. Any luxurious and glamorous programs of a country should be in commensurate with the strength of its economy. Unfortunately, our government is spending a lot of money doing some unsubstantial things and erecting some unnecessary monuments whereas more than 80 per cent of the population are living under the poverty line. It is unbecoming of a country like Bangladesh to take ostentatious programs whereas her economy is receding day by day. The establishment of Bangabandhu International Convention Centre (BICC) for the upcoming NAM conference is really an extravagant attempt because we have many venues to arrange the NAM conference.

The initiative that Prof Sirajul Islam Chowdhury has taken in this regard is really great. The movement he has launched has won my heartiest appreciation. I hope the movement Professor Sirajul Islam Chowdhury has launched should be taken seriously by all quarters of people leaving all partisan barriers out of consideration.

**Mahmudul Hasan**  
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Views expressed in this column are the writers' own. The Editor may or may not subscribe to those views. The Editor reserves the right to decide which letters should be published.

## Political Landscape in South Africa

by Barrister Harun ur Rashid

**S**OUTH Africans went into polls on 2nd June to vote in a general election that marks the end of charismatic President Mandela's administration and ushers in a new era. More than 18 million voters of the total population of nearly 42 million were supposed to cast their votes. Of the total population, 77 per cent are black, 11 per cent white, 9 per cent mixed race and 3 per cent Indians. Fifty per cent of the people live in urban areas and 36 per cent is under the age of 15. Literacy rate is more than 76 per cent.

The New National Party of former President F.W. de Clerk, Democratic party, Inkatha Freedom Party and United Democratic Movement fought against ANC capitalising on the ANC's inability to deal with crime, corruption and economy. Furthermore, these parties harped on fears of a one party state in South Africa if ANC would secure two-thirds majority. They claimed that democracy would be in danger.

ANC's President and probable successor to President Mandela, Thabo Mbeki (56) said that to vote for ANC was to vote for peace. Indications are that voters were buying the message. In 1994, ANC obtained 82.6 per cent of the votes and the opinion poll suggested 65 per cent support for ANC.

In the election campaign the opposition parties highlighted the government's failure to deal effectively with crime. In one year 25,000 murders took place in the country. They alleged that the ANC leaders were reluctant to act firmly against corrupt