

The victims of communalism

Thanks for your editorial (7-10-01) on post election violence and mentioning of atrocities on minority community. Actually at this moment it seems that nobody wants to take any responsibility whatsoever.

AK Sarkar
Motijheel, Dhaka, on e-mail

I believe there is far more than meets the eye in Dr. Asif Nazrul's Opinion (October 9). The author denounced the 'mentality' of the leaders of the South Asian People's Union Against Fundamentalism and Communalism who issued a statement protesting the harassment of minority communities during the elections just concluded.

The author makes an elaborate attempt to show how in 12 constituencies Hindu voters voted in large numbers -- and overwhelmingly for the Awami League. These are also the constituencies where, according to the author, Hindus are 'largely concentrated'.

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I have appreciated your courageous effort to let the world know

Jamat-e-Islami (some of whose leaders found a place in Mrs. Zia's cabinet) a party of liberal secularists? The statement of the South Asian People's Union does not seem out of order at all in that context.

Mahfuzur Rahman
New York, USA, on e-mail

After reading about the minority oppression in Bangladesh, I have become very worried about my relatives and friends.

What's wrong with it if a particular community supports a particular party? One can exercise his/her franchise in favour of anyone. It is his/her democratic right. Why would one be oppressed and tortured for it?

If another party wants to gain confidence of the minority people, it should strive to earn confidence of them, not oppress them.

I hope the newly elected government takes stern action against the offenders and protect the minority people. The print media like The Daily Star and all the conscious citizens should come forward and restore communal harmony in Bangladesh.

S.K. Chakrabarti
Singapore, on e-mail

I feel very sorry for our Hindu friends present conditions. Some people using them for their own interest. It is their duties to protect themselves. They should not allow them to use them for others interest.

Acitizen, on e-mail

We are very much shocked to hear about the repression and attack towards our fellow countrymen belonging to minority religion. We the expatriate Bangladeshis living outside the country condemning the attack on our Hindu friends. We were expecting that after a free and fair election the new BNP led Govt. would keep their promise of eradicating the terrorism from the country, but rather we see that our beloved countrymen are attacked and raped by some hoodlums and terrorists.

Md. Gazi Salahuddin
CA, USA, on e-mail

I have appreciated your courageous effort to let the world know

about the sufferings of "Minority Hindus" in Bangladesh. You have done a great job to send messages to the Govt. of Bangladesh and to the world. Hindus repression in Bangladesh is not a new phenomenon but this time the civilised world is getting the messages as well.

I am surprised to see the comment from our Home Minister who has termed press reports about attacks on the religious minorities (Hindus) "baseless, exaggerated and politically motivated". No doubt, Home Minister's comment will cast serious doubt among the minorities about his sincerity to protect them.

I am a bit angry on the Hindu leaders in Bangladesh for not going to the people. I must ask the Hindu leaders, go to the people, go to the Government, go to the foreign consulates, send letters to United Nations, send letters to Human Right Organizations, go and ask help from UNHCR for displaced people and do more.

Finally, I ask the Govt. to take stern actions to protect the minorities and bring the culprits to justice.

Pradip Saha
Dallas, US, on e-mail

I am quite concerned to read about the apparent sudden outbreak of terrorism against minorities and opposition activists in Bangladesh in various on-line Bangladeshi newspapers. There are allegations, accusations and counter allegations as well as clever spins depending on which version one reads.

As the eyes and ears of democracy, I call upon the media to carry out investigative journalism when it comes to reporting on the issue rather than fill their editorial pages with lectures. What does it take to figure out who are the responsible parties behind the cowardly terrorist bombs at Ramna Botomul on Bangla New Year? How much effort on the part of an investigative journalist does it take to figure out if there is any truth behind the new Home Minister's allegation that this current spate is a conspiracy by the Awami League and the minorities are being used to this end? Or could it be that these atrocities are really true and the BNP really is guilty of incompetence, inaction and even active support? We need action on part of the journalists but to safeguard ourselves from those politicians.

The new government clearly needs to restore law and order. It needs to protect the rights of all Bangladeshis regardless of their religion, creed, socio-economic circumstances or politics. Therefore, it needs to take stern action against terrorists or any other anti-social elements which threatens or compromises our daily lives.

Shahabuddin Ahmed is an exception. He should be persuaded to continue as the President in the greater interest of the Country.

14) As has been seen repeatedly in this Country and all over the world, truth ultimately prevails. God sees but waits. No religion in the world has preached dishonesty. Honesty and justice are essential. Only cleverness and mechanism cannot pay in the long run.

15) The government should behave everyday as if it is facing election tomorrow. Abdur Rakib Khan Abdur Rafiq Khan Dr. Rafat A. Quyyum Khan 2/2 Block-A, Mirpur Road, Mohammadpur, Dhaka

Factual error

Having gone through the article of Kuldeep Nayer "To have your cake and eat it too" (October 9), I would like to point out a factual error.

The writer mentions Lieutenant General Hamid Gul's association with Taliban movement as the ISI chief till Benazir Bhutto removed him after she succeeded General Zia as elected prime-minister in 1988. This statement is not totally correct.

Dr. Shabbir A. Bashir
Stanford University, USA, on e-mail

There is no denying the fact that Bangladesh has set an example to the outside world as a haven in maintaining communal harmony. We are in a far better position than India in maintaining communal harmony. We should unitedly work together irrespective of party affiliations to uphold and further cement the harmony. We should not forget that the minority groups are also working together hand-in-hand with the majority group in building Sonar Bangla.

Some stray incidence in harassing the minority is reported across the country by the BNP-led 4-Party alliance. Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia has promised the to take stern action in against those involved. Recently, Air Vice Marshal (ret'd) Altaf Hossain Chowdhury, the Home Minister while talking to the news-men stressed that the troublemakers irrespective of party affiliation will be brought to book. He further said that the Hindu community will be able to celebrate Durga Puja with due festivity disregarding the provocation from any quarters. This proves the present Government's sincere attitude towards the minority groups which will certainly help improve and maintain communal harmony in the country

Shamim Al-Rashid
Tophkana Road, Dhaka

Election is over and new government has started their activities in full swing. BNP this time came into power achieving overwhelming majority in parliament. We congratulate for their victory. We hope that they will bring good for country.

We feel very concerned when we are getting news about atrocities in everyday committed on minority communities in Bangladesh. No one can deny that minorities are the citizen of Bangladesh. To protect people from hoodlums is the prime duty of government. We want to draw attention to the secular forces within BNP to take necessary initiatives to stand behind minority community so that they can regain confidence to live without fear. Some evil forces are trying to get benefit from destroying communal harmony in Bangladesh. Home minister Sir this is not rumor. This is fact.

Asoke Kumar Bose
Canada, on e-mail

Having taken over, with some constraint, Benazir Bhutto replaced the ISI chief Hamid Gul by one retired Lieutenant General Kalimuddin alias Kallu. Hamid Gul not having accepted his new appointment tendered his resignation. One may recollect that by February 1989 the Soviets had withdrawn from Afghanistan leaving behind Dr. Najibullah and his defence minister Abdur Rashid Dostam to fight the seven party alliance of advancing Mujahideen i.e. IUM. Benazir Bhutto's first term did not see the fall of Kabul in the hand of Mujahideen.

By 1992 the seven party alliance was in Kabul but by then the civil war had started that could not be prevented either by ISI or CIA. Nawaz Sharif tried his best with the ISI backing to put Gulbadin Hekmatyar in the saddle but had to accept Borhanuddin Rabbani and his defence minister Ahmed Shah Masood. The internecine war continued all over Afghanistan. It was in 1994, Benazir Bhutto, in her second term, brought Taliban to the scene. She utilised ISI and the services of her ministers like Moulana Samiul Haque and Fazlur

Rahman, currently interned JUL leader, to patronise Taliban. In two years time Taliban captured 90 per cent of Afghanistan in 1996. Spectacular rise of Taliban, predominantly Pushtun, out of Madrasa's of Akora Khattak in NWFP and Beluchistan, were supported by the USA. However, it is said in all these years, retired Lieutenant General Hamid Gul ex-ISI chief having sacked by Benazir Bhutto in 1989 was the military adviser to Taliban movement. I may also add here that it was Mr. Gul Badin Hekmatyar and his party Hizb-i-Islam (Hekmatyar) that ISI and CIA mostly favoured. Hekmatyar's fanatically radical party was and still is affiliated with Ikhwan (Muslim Brotherhood), since the initial days of the Afghan resistance. He and his party was most favoured alike by Mr. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, Ziaul Haque, ISI chief's like General Akhtar Abdur Rahman and his Successors including that of Hamid Gul. M. Sakhawat Hussain ndc, psc (ret'd) NewDOHS, Dhaka, on e-mail

AL should talk sense

Since the declaration of the election results, the AL chief has raised a hue and cry over the poll result. Though the local and international observers have declared the election as free and fair, Sheikh Hasina accused of massive vote rigging. I would like to know from where did she gather such resounding "evidence" of vote rigging?

Sheikh Hasina could have done her party a huge favour by accepting defeat gracefully and thereby set a unique example in our political history.

I hope AL would shun the path of destructive politics and play the role of a strong opposition, if they at all care for the prosperity of the nation, the nation they claim has brought independence to.

SIA
Illinois, USA, on e-mail

Father of the Nation

I fully support The Daily Star Editor's appeal to the BNP chief to recognise Bangabandhu as the Father of the Nation. But it won't be an easy task.

Thanks to the Awami League's over-zealous handling of Bangabandhu and its indiscriminate use of his name in every trivial matter the image of Bangabandhu has been degraded from that of one of our topmost national leaders to that of an AL leader. Hence it would be really hard for the BNP to restore his earlier image. Another point to ponder is whether BNP would be interested to take this task.

Once Bangabandhu is freed from the AL shackle, I am sure nobody will have any objection to recognise him as the Father of the Nation.

Ehsanur Rahman
Dhamandi, on e-mail

Firstly, "... issues of history which, however important in understanding the past, have very little relevance to our present and future" is a scandalising statement. I beg to ask what the relevance of understanding ones past is if it has got no bearing on ones present and future life.

Mr Editor, recognition of the Father of the Nation by somebody who has not cared to do so in mere three decades will not make this ill-fated country united. One used to think of this country in terms of a secular state which to some patriots has become "moderate Muslim" country. One now gives it a hoot to the fact that those people are now in the process of joining the government machinery who had brutally killed ones most beloved and respected teachers. Selling garments products and IT professionals to Mecca of capitalism may seem the ultimate of patriotism to some, while others may argue in favour of an anti-global patriotic economy.

The party that has emerged as the single largest party in the parliament will have to think twice before taking revolutionary steps as suggested by your wise self. Because the small partners that they have may not turn out to be so small in this snake and ladder vote game. Ultimately status quo will prevail and more of enlightening commentaries will be on demand. Mahmudul Hossain Dhamondi, Dhaka, on e-mail

Mahfuz Anam's rather populist appeal advising Khaleda Zia to declare Bangabandhu as the Father of the Nation makes the cardinal mistake of interpreting history through the eye of politics.

Mr Anam looks at history emotionally, confusing it with politics. By asking Begum Zia to "recognise" Bangabandhu, he is asking a political leader to validate our history. We need a unified political symbol and Bangabandhu ought to be that symbol.

Mr Anam could have asked why is it that Bangabandhu has not become that uncontested national symbol? The answer would have been partly, that the dark episode of August 15 has always been treated politically. Our nation has suffered because we have failed to be honest about what happened in the past.

Mr Anam believes that by recognising Bangabandhu Khaleda Zia would "show respect for history". Is he talking about showing respect for Bangabandhu or for history? They are not the same thing.

I respect Sheikh Mujib immeasurably for what he did to liberate my country. But my respect for him diminishes when I assess his performance as an administrator, for his brutal restrictive policies in the post liberation years, for his tolerance of excesses committed by his hench-

men and his family. This, in my mind, is showing respect for history.

If Mr Anam is talking about respect for history, let him consider that historical assessments have not respected individuals but instead have respected truth. History does not judge nor make moral pronouncements; it narrates the facts of life as they occurred.

F.Mohammed
California, USA, on e-mail

The need of the hour is to recognise the unity of the nation and not 'recognising the father of the nation' as being debated currently (October 8).

My query is do we have to have a 'father of the nation' to survive as a respectful nation, while so many nations under the sun do not impose such a cult. In my opinion let us not try to impose someone on our people and bring disgrace to the man whom all and sundry do not worship. Sk. Mujib had been a valiant fighter and foremost among the national leaders like Bhashani, Sher-e-Bangla and Hossain Shaheed Suhrawardy. If we have to show respect to our national leaders and leave examples for our progeny we must not do something such as declaring unilaterally a 'father of the nation' and put up 'portraits' by regulation and then show disrespect by creating controversy and throwing down the portrait.

AF Rahman
Dhaka

Not again!

BNP led alliance won 2/3rd seats of the parliament. People have bestowed a great honour and trust on them. But immediately after they were elected they started to act unruly - occupation of MP hostel, university hall, oppression of the minority and so on. Are we going back to the same old days of anarchy and terrorism? We hope the newly elected prime minister will control terrorism with an iron hand and restore peace in society.

Shawkat Hossain
Lalmatia, Dhaka, on e-mail

Give and take

The notion of 'give and take' is an age-old concept that has become true to the US-Bangladesh relations. Here is how it should be played out: oil companies can export gas from Bangladesh if they get the US Congress to pass the bill for tax free entry of Bangladeshis into the US market. And with their mighty lobbying power in the US Congress (along with garments manufacturers lobbying efforts) the oil companies can pass this bill through the Congress in no time.

The US oil companies and their lobbying groups are a very powerful entity within the scheme of US politics. It was the oil company lobby that made possible the visit of Bill Clinton to Bangladesh. It is time for Bangladesh to become a player in the international arena by asking for things rather than begging for it.

Rashad Chowdhury
Maryland, USA, on e-mail

The question of re-election

If the AL chief meant only the party people when she talked about the people of Bangladesh, then it is true that the aspiration of people has not been expressed in the recent poll. And given that the aspiration of a majority people has definitely been realised in the recent poll. So any plea of re-election by the AL should be outright rejected.

If any election is needed it is the election of the position of the AL

chief. Do the Awami Leaguers want to replace her by a more sensible person to do better in the next poll or stick with her, should be the question now.

M.Hasan
UK, on e-mail

Expectation from the new govt

We expect the following to be implemented at the earliest:

- 1) Creation of ministries as promised.
2) Creation of 60 seats for women.
3) Abolition of 1974 Law and Public Safety Act.
4) Complete freedom of speech in reality and in action.
5) Complete freedom of newspapers in reality and in action.
6) Autonomy for Television and Radio in real sense.
7) Separation of Judiciary from Executive.
8) Fighting and crushing terrorism: (i) by law enforcement outfits. (ii) by creating a fund in line of Grameen Bank for giving small loans at a nominal interest rate up to maximum of Taka 25,000 or so to an

unemployed young people for self employment. This will create thousands of entrepreneurs.

9) Medical treatment in government centres from grass root to top level should be free. All these must be satisfactorily improved from their present positions. Foreign doctors and surgeons should be regularly invited so that local skills may be further improved.

10) The PM may be the head of her party, but as the PM, she needs to be the PM of the country of all people in the country, not only of her party people. Such should also be the case with all ministers.

11) The government employees must be strictly neutral. If a minister so desires, he/she may override the Government officer's views according to law. Government officers should be warned that if they are personally liable for decisions and actions.

12) The Speaker must wear the white flower of neutrality as in England, between person and person and between party and party with respect to existing laws.

13) Only a very few persons in this country have been able to establish such a reputation. Justice (Retd)

Afghan attack: A time to reflect



The attack

I have been appalled by people's lack of interest in the Afghanistan crisis. Have we become so immune that our national interests and individual problems stand far more important than the anguish of another nation?

Forget that Afghans are also Muslims but how can we forget that they are human beings, dying helplessly in the hands of powers that has far greater resources than them? I do not condone terrorism, but killing of helpless Afghans would neither end terrorism nor bring back the victims of WTC.

Would USA hand over a US citizen or a person who had been given US asylum even if the individual was accused of heinous crimes in another country? I don't think so. Then how can Afghanistan hand over Osama Bin Laden who has been given sanctuary?

However, a peaceful solution could have been found if the USA had not taken matters into hand by declaring war before any concrete evidence was found. They could have handed the matter over to the UN, which is just putty in the US's hands to be manipulated at their will. How many more Afghans have to die before the quench for revenge in the US would be over?

Sabeen, on e-mail

Anyone can understand fully the plight of the Afghan people. There's no denying of the fact that a great number of Arab people died in greater numbers over the years, through the West's support of Israel. I would like to see Osama Bin laden, stand up and say, that he would willingly give up terrorism, if Israel pulled out of Palestine and gave up all occupied lands. Then with the cards on the table, lets see how they react.

Rod Matthews
Lancashire, England, on e-mail

America on the one hand is dropping bombs on the Afghan people and on the other dropping rations to feed the starving Afghans!



...and the aftermath

It jumps on any country that dare to flout the UN resolutions, yet continues to arm Israel, killing innocent civilians and building settlements at will, contrary to UN resolutions.

It uses the UN, as a rubber stamp to validate its actions globally yet does not pay its promised share of contributions to the UN.

It says their action against Afghanistan is not a war against Islam, but its policies look otherwise. To control America's vindictive attitude, I suggest that all Muslims and peace loving people may stop buying American products so that their economy slows down and they can pay for less bombs, which one day may lead to a war-free world.

A lover of Peace, on e-mail

After all, the US President, British Prime Minister and their pundits cannot repudiate the Huntington theory on clash of civilisation. The Swedish Nobel Prize committee has amply proved that it is just that albeit clash of the Muslim and non-Muslim world, by awarding the Nobel prize for literature to V.S.Naipul.

Naipul, who returning to his roots in India, has not only professed rabid communalism but has openly advocated extinction of Muslim societies. If terrorist like Menecheh Begin could be awarded prize for peace, why not Naipul, at least he has a pen in hand.

Z.Ahmed
Dhaka, e-mail

America has launched the much awaited and much dreaded attack on Afghanistan. The imperial tone and tenor of the American rhetoric is also getting all too familiar; all this global coalition building is only a thin veneer on what truly is American coercion. The US President's warning to the world that "either you are with us or with the terrorists" should leave no one in doubt. Indeed, no one can accept terrorism as a way of expressing

dissent and seeking justice. It is equally impossible to accept the American policy that is unilateral and abusive. Insult is added to the outrage by the much publicised aerial drop of food packets to feed those terrified civilians fleeing for life.

The world outside America wants a world free of terrorism. But it equally aspires to a world that allows a voice and space to those who have been dispossessed (Palestine), unjustly victimised (Iraq) or marginalised by the sweeping powers of globalisation that enriches the rich.

Dr Zakir Husain
Lalmatia, Dhaka

I laud Arundhati Roy's courage and candour in articulating some of the nuances of America's putative 'war against terror' (October 4). I don't condone the carnage of innocent civilians in the U.S but it's time the ordinary Americans tempered their feelings and impulses with some hard, long-overdue realism.

Decades of misconceived and iniquitous American policies abroad-- particularly against the Arab and Islamic world-- are largely to blame for the violent backlash that everyone feels obliged to condemn.

Ms. Roy, to her credit, adeptly cites the true nature of American foreign policy. Mr. Bush is laughably off the mark by talking of others' 'envy' of 'freedom', 'prosperity' and 'the American way of life'; to explain what drives terror attacks against American targets. This is an attack on Muslims and Islam by the Christians.

Global 'terrorism' (not simply the self-serving American definition of the admittedly loaded term) is never going to be stamped out by U.S.-led coalition attack on Afghanistan. Targeting Osama bin Laden and toppling the Taliban, is clearly not the answer either.

Sajjad Husain
Dhaka, on e-mail