

Largest humanitarian organisation!

A letter "An American Opinion" was published on October 30 where a proud American echoed the voice of their government.

It is one thing to be proud and another thing to be arrogant. In fact the writer was so arrogant that he was not considering the facts but said whatever he liked (some-what like his own government)

In the letter America has been described as the "largest humanitarian organisation". This year America is spending a total (world-wide) of \$22 million for aid program and \$277,800 million for military budget. The writer's so-called humanitarian organisation is spending only 0.008 per cent of its military budget as foreign aid. And America is spending this peanut money so that it can control the rest of the world in every possible way.

Yes, we do need their money, their aid, not for feeding our children but for other development reasons. But don't you claim that you are giving it for free. You are giving this money so that you can have our support in whatever you are doing-- right or wrong.

As said in the letter "No one is asking you to come" is not entirely true. Every year in the form of DV lottery, the US government is inviting people to be their citizen. And these immigrants help the country a lot. The US government doesn't need to take responsibility of their education. They go to America and devote their working hour for this purpose. And of course they also enjoy a better life. So it is a win-win situation and don't you say that you are doing a big favour by letting us in.

We do not support terrorism of any kind. What happened on September 11 is unacceptable and who ever did it needs to be punished. But what the US is doing now is trying to solve all its problems forcefully. This may work for a short term but will never solve the problems completely. And if, like the writer, the US government also thinks that they can do anything and the rest of the world would support him just because it gives some aid then they are wrong.

Ratul
Paltan, Dhaka, one e-mail

I presume that by writing the letter "Another American opinion" (November 1), Matt from the USA expects Bangladesh to be as jubilant as the Afghans receiving peanut butter and crackers from the sky.

In his letter he mentions that Bangladesh has received over 2.5 \$ billion in aid and will receive 102 \$ million more in the year 2002. Yet he forgets to mention that Israel receives over 3 billion dollars in aid each year, so that it can kill more Palestinians. Yasser Arafat is labelled as a terrorist, while Aerial Sharon, who is responsible of the killings in the Lebanese refugee camps, is invited to visit the White House.

The US was against the formation of Bangladesh and supported the Pakistan army while they conducted their campaign of rape and genocide in 1971. Currently they have given safe shelter to the killers of Bangabandhu. All the US had to say about Bangladesh was as Mr. Henry Kissenger put it, "a basket case".

The performance of the American oil companies in Bangladesh is shameful. When hundreds of acres burnt in the Magurchara tragedy, the government of Bangladesh did not receive any compensation. Yet when the tanker Exxon Valdez ran around in Alaska in the late 1980's spilling thousands of gallons of oil into the water, the state of Alaska received over 10 billion dollars in compensation. Now we hear about the US interest in our gas reserve.

The duplicitous nature of American policy gives rise to terrorists and terrorism. The American policy is not about creating prosperity or democracy. It is about maintaining the status quo at all costs. From the Shah of Iran, to support of Saddam against Iran, and now by supporting the various monarchies in the Arab World,

America has made the nefarious side of its foreign policy very clear.

I don't blame Mr. Matt for writing the letter he did. He like most Americans get their news from news broadcast that contain nothing more than who lost their cat, and who was bitten by a shark. The American news media, which is funded through advertisement revenues and controlled by the Jewish lobby and various big business houses, cannot deliver any more than that without putting itself out of business. As a result, the majority of the Americans are deluded into thinking that aid really means aid, and that American troops are really sent to establish democracy.

I would suggest to Mr. Matt to delve into the activities of the US aid agencies and the lobbies that control US government and politics and then try to rewrite his letter. We don't need your paltry aid Mr. Matt; it is your foreign policy that is the basket case, not us.

Mojammel Hossain
Tokyo, Japan, one e-mail

Stop blaming the US

The citizens of a country which, as I write this, is pillaging a minority community (Hindus) have no right to criticise another which, at least, does not have state sponsored terrorism.

The terrorists bombed the United States and the US government showing quite a bit of restraint, asked-- with reasonable proof-- the Taliban government to hand the said terrorist over. The Taliban refused to do so. Then what the heck the US government is supposed to do?

Look unto yourself before criticising others. Try to correct the wrongs that are being done in your own country before poking your nose in external matters.

Joy
Los Angeles, California

Afghan's plight

"Not until the population are suffering are you sure that they are entirely 'submissive'" - George Orwell, '1984'. This has never been truer than with the People of Afghanistan.

It angers me to read the comments supporting the 'political and social triumphs' of the Taliban. Make no mistake, this is despotism-- the only thing that will save the Afghan people is freedom; freedom to choose, freedom to learn, freedom to vote, freedom to think-- this will never be allowed within the confines of a Taliban regime and is indeed what we are (in essence) fighting for.

Removal of the Taliban government is not only desirable; it is necessary to ensure the stability of the region. The UN has the funds and expertise to reform Afghanistan's social and economic structure, and this should be done for the welfare of the Afghan people and for no other reason.

Paul Reed,
Manchester, England, on e-mail

Whose anti-terrorism is it anyway?

America and some of his associates especially Britain are mounting air strikes on Afghanistan. If we look at the history of America and Laden we will see that both were closely linked. During the regime of Jimmy Carter, America supported thousand of Muslims youth for the so-called religious war against the Russian invasion in Afghanistan. Now they are themselves attacking the country.

I want to ask why America killed so many innocent Afghans. America does have a history of being involved in large-scale violence. In 1945 they dropped the Atom bomb on Japan and killed more than 3 lakh innocent people. In 1950-52 America took the side of one in the Korean war. From 1962 they were trying to kill Castro, the President of Cuba. In 1991, the Operation Desert Shield killed hundred of thousand innocent Iraqi people. They also killed Allende in Chile in

"The President under fire, unfairly"

I thank Mr. Mahfuz Anam for his commentary on the above subject. It was time that someone of Mr. Anam's stature and credibility defended the honor of this President, one who has served our country with integrity and distinction.

In the midst of provocation from both the major political parties, Justice Shahabuddin maintained serenity and calm and steadfastly refused to buckle down under pressure from any vested quarters. I salute him for his courage and nobility of character. I am not the only one to do that. This is one man, who is respected and admired by all and sundry, in towns and villages all over Bangladesh.

When the party in power uses the President brazenly as its mouth-piece as it did during the first session of the parliament, it does not belittle the President; it only diminishes the party in power. When leaders of the immediate past government accuse the President of partiality knowing fully well that his hands are tied by unseemly legality, it does not, again, belittle the President; it only diminishes their party.

It makes me really sad when a man like Justice Shahabuddin is not shown due regard and honour. And it greatly worries me about our country's political leadership that fails miserably to distinguish between mere glass and sparkling diamond. To me and I believe, to a vast majority of our people, President Shahabuddin Ahmed remains as a guiding light that is as sparkling as the most coveted diamond on earth.

Dr. Rafat A. Quyyum Khan
Dhaka, one e-mail

I was a great admirer of President Shahabuddin Ahmad but my feelings have been shaken up by his recent attributes and speech in the parliament. To me, those comments were very shallow and did not fit the stature of a personality like him.

It was widely publicised that the past AL government politicised every organ of the state. But their politicisation did not compel their own elected President to say 'Joy Bangla' at the end of any of his written speeches. But this time around, there is no evidence otherwise to suggest that he was not spontaneous enough to end his speech with 'Bangladesh Zindabad'.

I disagree with Mahfuz Anam on two occasions: once when he says,

1973 and Sheikh Mujib in Bangladesh in 1975. No human being can support the attack of WTC. Again nobody can support the bombing in Afghanistan.

Syed Naimul Haque
Dhaka

Should America support Israel?

Is it really worth supporting Israel?

- Is it worth the 200 billion dollars of American taxpayer's money sent to Israel since its inception?

- Is it worth the additional trillions of dollars American have spent for higher petroleum costs? (The Arab oil-weapon response to our pro-Israel policies)

- Is it worth the loss of our Constitutional Rights and freedoms?

- Is it worth alienating 99 per cent of the people of the Middle East for 1 per cent?

- Is it worth supporting a nation created by terrorism and ethnic cleansing and whose leader is a long-time terrorist, responsible for the death of 2000 men, women and children refugees in Lebanon?

- Is it worth supporting a nation that has committed terrorist acts of murder and destruction against the United States? (The Lavon

Affair and the attack on the American Navy ship, the U.S.S Liberty)

- Is it worth supporting a nation who spies on America? (The Jonathan Pollard Case)

- Is it worth supporting a nation who steals from America? (Such as the theft of enriched uranium for Israel's illegal atomic bombs)

- Is it worth supporting a nation that sells America's most secret defence technology to America's most dangerous enemy, the Red Chinese?

- Is it worth it to allow a foreign nation to have the strongest lobby in American government?

- Is it worth it when Israeli agents bribe American candidates with vast sums of campaign money so that they would put the interests of Israel over America?

Dr Lee, UK on e-mail

Gas export: An economic terrorism

The US government is forcing Bangladesh to export gas to India because the US companies will be benefited from this. Our government is also justifying this saying that it would be uneconomical not to export gas.

But if we export gas it will be

his oversight or lapse of judgement, and that is what we think it is, has been most unfortunate' and again when he says, 'this stands out today as Sheikh Hasina's single most popular action and will remain so in history regardless of what she or others may say today'.

Firstly, there is no reason to believe that a man of his stature will let an oversight to happen while making such a historic speech. Likewise judgement, on the other hand, is always a well thought out phenomenon.

Secondly, I'm now convinced that election of Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed, as the President was the single most political blunder of Sheikh Hasina's political career, without which she, probably, would still have been the Prime Minister of Bangladesh. The victorious write history, not the vanquished. BNP leadership has mastered enough acumen not to emulate the blunder of its adversary, albeit the promise of one of their leaders publicly before the election to elect a 'neutral' president. I, for one, do not blame them for going back from their promise.

Mozammel Khan, one e-mail

This in reference to the commentary written by Mahfuz Anam. As per constitutional obligation the President discharged his duties. It's very unfortunate, that AL after being defeated in the polls made all out efforts to blame the caretaker government and the Election Commission. Leader of AL alleged conspiracy hatched by the 6 party alliance (4-party Alliance + the Caretaker Government and the Election Commission) to defeat AL. It now includes the President as a conspirator. I would like to mention here that many observers viewed the following: a) the President was biased toward AL considering his speeches to the parliament & other official functions during its tenure, b) the Chief Election Commissioner was biased to AL as he was appointed by AL government against opposition of BNP and c) Chief Adviser was biased to the AL as it calculated that Justice Latifur Rahman would hold the position of Chief Adviser after his retirement as the Chief Justice. Possibly AL expected that these machinations would have some inclination for the AL. Public if not political parties shall give due honour to Justice Shahabuddin Ahmad for the role he played as the President of Bangladesh.

A.K.M. Ziaul Huda
Uttara, Dhaka, on e-mail

finished within one or two decades and can anybody imagine what will happen then? Many industries would collapse and many people would be deprived of electricity facility. Bangladesh being one of the poorest countries must not export gas under any circumstances, especially when only 5 per cent of the total population can use gas as fuel and only about 15 per cent people have access to electricity. Moreover, if we use gas for our industry, as domestic fuel etc it will be 33 times more profitable than exporting gas.

In the name of foreign investment KAFCO is using gas at a price, one third of the international price and selling fertiliser at a price that is three times more than the international market. To follow the contract the government had to purchase gas at price of 2.25 to 2.5 US dollars from Cairn and had to sell at a price of 1 US dollar to KAFCO. Evil desires of the foreign companies became evident when they inactivated Petrobangla and BAPEX although their performances were among the best.

In this way almost all the agreements that Bangladesh government has made and are going to make with the foreign companies will be helpful to accumulate wealth for some high government

officials and politicians at the expense of the very limited resource of hungry millions of people of our motherland. So we must be united to void all those unequal and unjust agreements because those agreements were made by keeping our common people completely and intentionally in dark.

Dr. Mahboob Hossain
The University of Asia Pacific, on e-mail

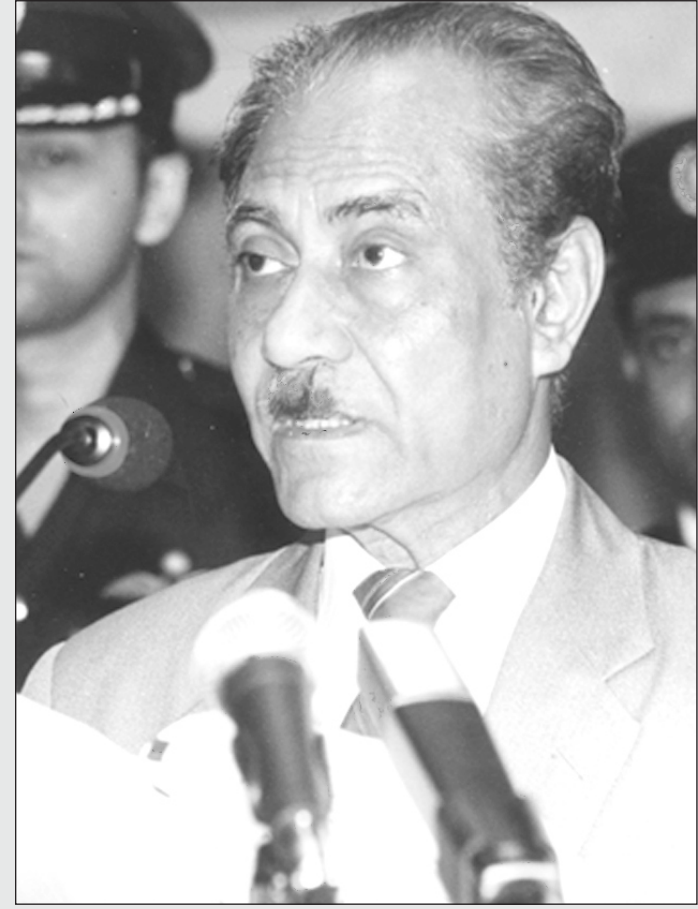
To sell or, not to sell-- gas that is!

The issue of selling gas to India will be the most important decision for the new government.

Already, there is some indication by the Finance Minister that the positive decision is in the horizon in this respect. Unocal caught the first wind, and started its public relation campaign by presenting the proposed gas pipeline from Bibiana gas fields to India. First of all, it should be mentioned that this gas field was discovered by our own BAPEX-- the neglected stepchild, with local experts and technologies.

Our Finance Minister is correct by saying that if natural resources are not utilised; they are not resources, as it does not contribute to the economic growth of the nation. But, hastily taken decisions under international pressure, will usher in a far greater economic disaster for our country than what we are in right now. I would like to caution our government by taking lessons from the "Nigerian Experience". In fact, our sour financial experience with Shangu should be used as a learning lesson for future business ventures with other big players of the oil and gas industries.

Also, everyone seems to avoid the issue of environmental damages done by these oil and gas companies in their third world ventures. As you know, their main target is profit-maximisation, rather than paying heed to the environmental concerns. Especially, US companies (oil and gas) are notorious for maintaining dual environmental standards for their domestic and third world operations. One of the US oil and gas giant Chevron, was in the spotlight even a few months ago in Nigeria, where they allegedly flew in hired guns to quell local activists who were protesting against the unwarranted practices by the company. The Magurchora disaster still resonates in our memory, and accidentally showed what Occidental Corporation was capable of. The government must formulate strict and enforceable environ-



ment laws to prevent and punish defaulting corporations in the future.

Now, going back to the Shakespearean dilemma of "To Sell, Or Not to Sell" gas to India is pretty complex, given the current geo-political scenario. Can we review and cancel existing "production sharing contracts" if deemed against our national interest?

And, doing so, how do we tackle the geo-political pressures from the countries involved? Can we take the risk of shooing away foreign investments and the efforts to turn around our country?

The government must be cautious and be forth coming about this venture. We will not tolerate another "East India Company" in the making, which will devour our resources for the second time around.

Nafees K, on e-mail

Gas export

Export of any commodity is one of the main sources of income for a country. Fortunately, we have got enough mineral resources in the form of natural gas. Like other countries we can utilise this resource by exporting gas. We can also use it as a weapon for negotiation for quota free entry to US/EURO market. This is high time we decided on gas export. And as for the opposition, they should act prudently about an issue that holds national interest.

Kazi Nasim Ahmed
Zigatola, Dhaka, on e-mail

We would be better off

Deciding whether to export gas to a neighbouring country or not is now BNP's responsibility, a party elected by the people for the next five years.

As a citizen, I would like to make some points into the issue. I guess our ministers realize the fact that the past government looted the economy and left us with an empty basket. We know our foreign reserve is at an all time low. To resurrect our economy, exporting gas would be beneficial. Only those who are blinded and biased by narrow politics would object to it. Yes we can keep the gas underground for another fifty years. But who would be benefited from this? People have high expectations from this government and they have to be very sincere about this matter, as it would effect our future generation.

If economy can be made stable by earning foreign currency by exporting gas, it is high time we do it. Any delay in this matter would

jeopardize our economy further.

Md Mahmudur Rahman
Bhuiyan Academy, Dhaka

Excellent editorials

I just want to congratulate for the quality, breath and thought provoking analysis and reporting in *The Daily Star* editorial. In my view, it's world class and I am so proud because you are a Bangladeshi paper.

Usually I read *The Times* (London) and *The Economist*, but I now I read those and *The Daily Star* in conjunction, to get a better idea of foreign policy and an Asian perspective and learn and be informed about Bangladesh.

It's only recently that I found your paper on the web and have become addicted to your editorial. In the last month, I have learnt so much more about Bangladesh--politically, economically and culturally. It's fascinating to know that papers like yours exist in Bangladesh. I only wish that the people and politicians could have the same understanding of geo-political and national issues like your editorial does.

Please keep up the good work. I am sure when I visit Bangladesh, I will read the print version.

Salam, on e-mail

Garment export

There is too much panic in the media on the alarming dip in export of garments.

In the importing countries a family has to buy clothes several times a year, as it is a semi-consumable item (not capital expenditure) and it is not that costly (as buying a car).

Therefore the market is likely to settle down to a new pattern after a while. You can't do without clothes, and garments are produced in the third world countries.

A Mawaz
Dhaka

Ban Nasim

On October 1, the Awami League Organising Secretary Mohammad Nasim said that if necessary his party would call non-stop hartal "in the interest of the country".

We think barring Nasim and like minded people from centre stage politics is in the interest of the country.

Will Mohammad Nasim or the Awami League ever realise what is good for Bangladesh?

AA
California, USA, on e-mail