

"What about the Indian Muslims?"

I wish to respond to the letter ("What about the Indian Muslims?" November 28). Just after the division of India Muslim population consists of 7-8 per cent, 10-12 per cent (approximately) for India and West Bengal respectively. This is now 12-15 per cent and 25-35 per cent for India and West Bengal respectively.

At the same time Hindu population in Bangladesh has come down to 10-12 per cent from 30-40 per cent and in Pakistan to less than 5 per cent from 30-40 per cent before partition, approximately. If this trend continues there will be more Muslim in India by 2070 and India will be the largest Muslim country within few decades. In spite of all the complaints the writer thinks that the Indian Muslims go through, the richest person in India is a Muslim (Premji). May be the writer should write to Premji, and ask him despite being a Muslim, how did he manage to be the richest person in India?

I suppose violence in India is communal and in Bangladesh is political? I feel so sorry for the minorities in Bangladesh, as most majority Muslim population do not want them and for India they are Bangladeshi infiltrators. They have become unwanted and forgotten people, still paying the price for independence even after more than 50 years. India may not be 100 per cent what it should be, the writer should visit India and judge for himself from direct first hand knowledge and ask the Indian Muslims--how many of them would like to emigrate from India to Bangladesh (while any where from 20,000-100,000 left Bangladesh during the past 6 weeks)?

D. Ray, on e-mail

This letter is in response to Mr. Shuja Alim's letter (November 26). It is hard for me to understand and rationalise Mr. Alim's point in response to Mr. Maitra's letter.

As a Bangladeshi I feel that we all have every right to protest any atrocities committed against our fellow minority citizens and Mr. Maitra did just that. It is unfortunately true that ever since the four-party alliance had come to the power, persecution against Hindus took place in Bangladesh. I don't see the relevance of drawing examples of minority tortures in India in light of the recent incidents in Bangladesh. Is Mr. Shuja trying to rationalise persecution of Hindus in Bangladesh by saying that it would not have happened if there were no religious oppression against Muslims in some other country?

In response to Mr. Shuja's allegations about riots and oppression against Muslims in India, I would like to point out that it is true that religious riots do take place in India as opposed to religious persecutions in Bangladesh against Hindus. Muslims in India do fight back when they are attacked unlike Hindus in Bangladesh who do not dare to fight back in fear of state sponsored Police atrocities. In spite of all sorts of oppressions in India, isn't it ironic that India is a secular country and Muslims are considered as equal citizens in a country ruled by Hindu zealots?

According to Mr. Shuja, incidence on Muslim tortures in India are not always reported in the Indian newspapers in detail, if that is the case, how did Mr. Shuja as a Bangladeshi, manage to report about such incidents in India living in Chittagong? I would appreciate if Mr. Shuja could site some solid examples (with proper references) regarding the minority situation in India. I would actually urge people like Mr. Shuja to hold some protest rally against the atrocities committed on his fellow citizens of Bangladesh as opposed to showing concern for other Muslims in a foreign country.

I see no point for Mr. Maitra to hold a protest rally against Indian tortures of Muslims since it is a domestic matter of Indian government. If Mr. Shuja insists on Mr. Maitra to hold protest rally as a concerned world citizen, I would also ask Mr. Shuja to hold a protest rally against killing of hundreds of Muslims in Pakistan in sectarian riots between Shias and Sunnis, killings of innocent civilians in World Trade Center in USA, killings of innocent Afghans because of the twisted and dirty politics of ISI and also to protest against Pakistan for betraying Taliban!

As a Bangladeshi living in USA, I have come across lot of Bangladeshi people who would do anything for a Muslim hailing from anywhere in the world than to even condemn or worry about the miseries of Bangladeshi Hindus. I have always wondered if religion takes precedence before nationality. Now I guess I have got my answer.

T Sengupta
New York, USA

SSF for Hasina

It is beyond our comprehension, why Sheikh Hasina and her associates started hue and cry for her SSF status. For the last 50 years that they did so many things for the

welfare of the people and people are still with them (Jananetri, Deshnetri, Jewel of the country etc.) then why they are so concerned for the SSF protection of one individual.

If she really did something good for the people and people are with her then she should not be worried at all for her security. Secondly, we find it mischievous when her supporters denounced the government plan to scrap the SSF. Did this person ever protested against the unprecedented murders, killings, looting, raping and total misuse of the past government. Where was his conscience at that time? We, the civil society earnestly hope that you would highlight these issues to the common people and the cost of maintaining such SSF for Sheikh Hasina and family.

Nasir
Dhaka

The present government has decided to scrap the bill on special security facilities for Sheikh Hasina and her sister, Sheikh Rehana in the name of saving 5.1 cores of taka per year. I do agree with the government's step to scrap such law, as no one should be above the constitutional law.

My appeal to the government to also scrap the bill which was passed to provide special security facilities for the outgoing President and the Chief Advisor of the caretaker government. That would be more important and realistic in saving money of the state exchequer.

Gopal Sengupta
Montreal, Canada

Parliament and the people

In the 1970 Pakistan national elections the Awami League got the absolute majority, and the PPP was in the minority for the ensuing National Assembly. To allay the fears of the minority party

Non-resident Bangladeshi teachers on minority issue

We express our grave concern about reports published in various newspapers (including *The Daily Star*) of communal violence against minorities in Bangladesh. If these news reports are accurate, then such development is a matter of deep concern. We believe that all citizens of the country irrespective of religious belief and religious identities should be able to live in peace, free from violence, intimidation, fear, harassment and mistreatment.

We urge the newly elected government to demonstrate its commitment to public order and law by quickly ensuring safety and security of the country's minority communities and by bringing the criminals to justice. Ensuring the full rights of citizens is the prime responsibility of the authorities.

Indeed, a criterion to judge a country's commitment to the principles of freedom and justice is its treatment of minority communities. The authorities can retain public confidence by quickly putting to an end violence and lawlessness. We urge the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh to act decisively and resolutely to protect minority communities from harm and to punish those responsible for violence and other crimes irrespective of their political affiliation, privilege or power. We also request independent citizens, media, and social and human rights organisations to ensure that they do everything possible to protect the lives and the property of minorities.

We cannot be and will not be silent to crimes against our fellow brothers and sisters.

Signed:
Signatories are listed below (affiliations of the signatories are provided solely for identification) in alphabetical order:
Dr. Ansar Ahmed, Baldwin-Wallace College, Ohio, USA
Mr. Arif Ahmed, Ikonami Limited, UK
Dr. Raisuddin Ahmed, International Food Policy Research Institute, Washington DC, USA
Professor Syed M. Ahsan, Concordia University, Canada
Professor Sheikh A. Akbar, Ohio State University, Ohio, USA

party MPs. The whole idea, I thought, was to coax and cajole the opposition to take active part in the parliament but it seems the ruling party MPs will do everything possible to give the opposition enough excuses to stay away from the parliament. How long will this madness continue, do we dare to ask? It's about time they looked around at the misery and sufferings of people around them, it's time to recapitulate that they are there to work for the

in the ground, we beg for alms for development programs, and then curse the donors because they perhaps are giving us less than we want or expect.

Letters to the Editor consistently bash America for helping us and then expecting something in return. Like our support in fighting terrorism. It is time that we made a decision to export or not export gas. Time to take the money we can earn from it and put it to use, even if necessary under the auspices of an outside organisation that can monitor the spending of the money we earn.

And it is time to stop bashing America. American business companies (oil companies are business companies not donor companies), and the American Ambassador for promoting their agenda. We send our Prime Minister to the United States to tell the president he should allow Bangladesh citizens in the United States illegally to remain in the United States. They are only missing the proper paper and legal right to be there. If our Prime Minister can badger the United States to allow our illegal to remain in the United States, and badger the United States Congress to give us unlimited economic rights and means in the United States, we should accept that they have the right to tell us to export and use the money we earn to develop. In any case we should not accept their money or money from any other donor if we cannot be responsible and try to help ourselves.

M.M.Haque
Gulshan, Dhaka

Protect the Minorites, please

This is in reference to Kh. S. Omar Faruk's letter "Protect the minorities, please" (November 16) of San Dimas, California mentioning about a Dr. Chanchal Chatterjee getting an appeal signed by an audience at a Durga Puja festival in Los Angeles organised by the Dakshini Bengali Association of California condemning the attacks on the Hindus in Bangladesh.

The same Dr. Chatterjee published a letter in The Hindu of Chennai (14 November). This states, interalia, that four million Hindus have been "subject to rape, murder, loot and intimidation by fundamentalists in collaboration with the Bangladesh Government" and that 0.4 million of them have fled to India. He bases this information on a press report but didn't mention the source of it.

people and not to hit at a fallen party against whom the people have already given their verdict.

An unhappy citizen
Dhaka

Nirmul Committee

Can any one please tell me, what is the real function of Ghatok Dalal Nirmul Committee? How do they run their expenditures? They have office in Hanover, Germany and some other cities in Europe. I heard in Germany when they have meeting, they offer some people even hotel accommodations. Is it at all necessary to have international offices of this committee?

Klanto
Barisal

Don't export gas

I am a Bangladeshi staying in Botswana, former Dhaka University student of Pharmacy. I strongly condemn the effort of our present government to export natural gas to any other country. We should utilise our gas as maximum as possible in different sectors.

Shahed
Botswana

Gas export

Recent press reporting and letters to the editor of various English and Bangla dailies mention that there are no economic reasons or benefit shown in favour of gas export. That gas exports will only raise per capita income minimally, and that Bangladesh will never become a country of middle income as a result of the export, as propounded by the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, and the U.S. Ambassador to Bangladesh.

While I agree that the per capita increase may be minimal, the cumulative funds will allow Bangladesh to develop schools, facilities, infrastructure, and at least move towards being a modern country in the 21st century, and one at least attempting to move towards self sufficiency. As we are now, keeping our resources

Mr. Tanweer Akram, A.T. Kearney, Virginia, and Columbia University, New York, USA

Dr. M. Imam Alam, University of Northern Iowa, Iowa, USA
Professor Syed Saad Andaleeb, Pennsylvania State University, Pennsylvania, USA

Professor Fahima Aziz, Hamline University, Minnesota, USA
Mr. Syed Abul Basher, York University, CANADA

Professor Anis Chowdhury, University of Western Sydney, Australia
Professor A. R. Chowdhury, Marquette University, Wisconsin, USA

Mr. Mahmud Farooque, New York Academy of Sciences, New York, USA
Professor Ahsan Habib, Adrian College, Michigan, USA

Professor Kabir Hassan, University of New Orleans, New Orleans, USA
Professor Anisul Islam, University of Houston-Downtown, Texas, USA

Dr. Selim Jahan, United Nations Development Programme, New York, USA
Professor Azizur Rahman Khan, University of California-Riverside, USA

Professor Farida Khan, University of Wisconsin-Parkside, Wisconsin, USA
Dr. Abdul Momen, Saudi Arabia

Dr. M. G. Quibria, Asian Development Bank, Tokyo, Japan
Mr. Selim Raihan, University of Manchester, UK
Professor Salim Rashid, University of Illinois-Urbana Campaign, Illinois, USA

Mr. Adnan Rubai, State University of New York-Binghamton, New York, USA
Professor Omer S. Sher, Algonquin College, Canada

Professor Fazley Siddiq, Dalhousie University, Canada

Chatterjee appears to be closely associated with the Human Rights Committee for Bangladesh Minorities (HRCBM). The website (www.hrcbm.com) shows its address as POB 5493, Santa Clara, CA 95056-5493 and objective to conduct a "world-wide campaigning movement to protect the human rights of the people of Bangladesh, especially minorities". The web home page contains over 60 references to Bangladeshi and Indian media articles on minorities and also five photographs with the following titles: "Rape and Murder!"; "Brutality!!"; "Horrors of Chittagong!!"; "Sponsor a Family!!"; and "The Disgrace!!"

Even more revealing is the website guestbook containing messages from individual Hindus and Muslims. Their common feature is intemperate thoughts in bad English. Your readers can decide for themselves what kind of an organisation

HRCBM is. Incidentally, on 14 November I wrote a letter to The Hindu commenting on Chatterjee's letter. This was not published.

M. Iqbal
Dhaka

Bête noire

Congratulations *Daily Star* for publishing a series of investigative reports on minority oppression. All kudos to your Roving Team for taking the perilous journey to remote villages of Bhola to cover the issue, they are the vicars of bray. Had you not taken the pain to publish these series, awareness would not have raised among 122 intellectuals to urge the government to take legal steps against some communal, fundamentalists and "riot-mongers" nor the SP of Bhola would have been removed for his alleged failure to prevent atrocities on Hindus.

But, there is one letter that needs to be discussed, "Harrowing tales of depravity" by Mr. Asfaque A Choudhury (November 14). One wonders what Mr Asfaque means by "play the minority card". Doesn't rape of a thirteen-year-old child and the atrocities committed on them tantamount to violation of Child Abuse and Human Rights irrespective of their religion, cast or creed? What has this got to do with the playing of minority card?

I suggest that Mr. Asfaque read the article "Including the excluded" by Mr. Kuldip Nayyar, (November 18) in which Mr. Nayyar mentions about the rise of fundamentalist in Bangladesh. Perhaps, the article would help Mr. Asfaque to change his

opinion. If it doesn't, then I am afraid that these kinds of letters will be the future foundation stone for the cult of Talibanisation in Bangladesh.

Mr Ashfaque has said in his letter that it has made us sick and tired, of reading constantly about "Nakphul". If Mr Ashfaque is a Bengali then he should know that "Nakphul" is not only regarded as an ornament, it holds sentimental and symbolic value. Reading constantly about Nakphul reminds us of our lost tradition and doesn't make us sick and tired. One should value the sentiments of other religion rather than mocking it.

Instead of making the Hindus feel safe and comfortable in their sovereign country, Mr Ashfaque's letter adds fuel to the fire, leading to xenophobia. Has he ever thought that such an attitude may bring repercussions to the millions of Muslims in our neighbouring country?

Billy I. Ahmed

Metered taxi needed



Mrs. Rita Abedin of Chittagong in her letter dated 26 November has very rightly stated that the residents of Chittagong are deprived of many civic facilities such as taxi service. It is over two years now that metered taxis are in operation in Dhaka. It is unfortunate that the government has not taken any step so far to introduce similar metered taxi service in Chittagong or in any other cities.

We the residents of Chittagong request the government to provide metered taxi service facilities in Chittagong.

Mrs. Rosy Anwar
CDA Avenue, Chittagong

Dhanmandi,
Dhaka

De-Talibanise Pakistan

Had the US declared Pakistan a rogue state immediately after the 1993 WTC bombing(s) the September 11 attacks on the WTC could have been averted.

India has the second largest Muslim population in the world. Pakistan is not the custodian of either Islam or the world's Muslims. Therefore, the US should stop treating Pakistan with kid gloves. A non-Pakistani military tribunal should try all the Pakistani terrorists and army men caught in Afghanistan. The US should not be hoodwinked by Pakistan's lies, pleas, false promises and crocodile tears. Pakistan has never respected any written international commitment to this day. In case (God forbid) these Pakistani terrorists and army men are allowed to return to Pakistan they will never be tried. Instead, they will be allowed to resume their terrorist activities afresh with a renewed vigour to destabilise and terrorise India, Afghanistan, CIS and Western countries. Pakistan uses terrorism as an instrument of its foreign policy. Therefore, the war on terrorism is incomplete unless and until it ends in Pakistan.

Syed Tanveeruddin
Mysore, India

Society's burden

It is a matter of utter shame that students not only cheat in exams but actually demand the 'right' to do this undisturbed!

Social and family values have fallen to such a low level that youngsters believe that the only way to succeed is to cheat.

While we must blame the youngsters and teachers who support cheating attempts, the real issue is relevant to society as a whole.

Unless this responsibility is accepted, there will be no improvement. Things will become worse.

Apeemist
Dhaka

Political hate campaign

The hate campaign between the two major political parties is reaching absurd levels.

What are the citizens learning from the process and the standards set by the political leadership?

The politicians are causing irreparable damage to society and if the citizens don't become united our nation will never prosper.

Look at our educational institutions. It has become almost a battlefield.

The students are engaged in destructive politics and so as the teachers. The teachers are also reported to be engaged in consultancy and earning an income through dubious means; while cheating in examinations has become a profitable business.

There is moral degradation in every sector, led by political conduct.

We want to live in peace but who will save us from anarchy and bring back good politics.

Sarah Alam
Dhaka

Who is responsible? We have had a lot of discussions regarding repression on the minority community in October and afterwards.

I think it's appropriate to discuss and ascertain why this has happened and who is responsible for such a large scale of atrocities.

It's clear that as soon as the Caretaker Government (CTG) took over, it was time to settle old scores. As the CTG took over, it was busy making the administration neutral; thereby neutralising almost everything including law and order situations.

Everybody was having a holiday at the grassroots level without any accountability. After all who cares to be accountable to a 'Badshah of ninety days' who is busy only to hold an election?

Did CTG receive these reports of atrocities, or did they suppress them?

These 90 days 'Badshahs' have put the whole concept of CTG in disrepute and jeopardy? Surely they have made it difficult for the next CTGs to conduct their business as these ninety days are going to be 'free for all old score settling time' with no political party taking responsibility for whatever happens. The Chief Advisor and his advisors couldn't protect the minorities from the initiating process of rape and vandalism. They are responsible for what had happened to the minorities.

Thirdly, why go into trouble because nothing is going to change. A colleague once told me, "Why do you go into all this trouble of

ministers doing for a tiny country like Bangladesh.

Why don't the common people react? First, people can now understand that there is no use reacting. Secondly, you become the target if you react.

Thirdly, why go into trouble because nothing is going to change. A colleague once told me, "Why do you go into all this trouble of

What makes people support the extremists?

I am writing with reference to the letter "The cult of Laden in Bangladesh," by Theodor B. Goschal of Copenhagen (November 28).

Mr. Goschal has raised a valid concern about the followers of extremists in Bangladesh and Pakistan. To understand what makes some people to support the extremists, a look at pre-war Germany may be in order. William L. Shirer, renowned radio commentator for CBS Radio had left us an eyewitness report of the blind public support Hitler and his Nazis enjoyed in pre-war Germany in his *Berlin Diary*:

"Nuremberg, September 4, 1934: About ten o'clock tonight I got caught in a mob of ten thousand hysterics who jammed the moat in front of Hitler's hotel, shouting: 'We want our Fuhrer.' I was a little shocked at the faces, especially those of the women, when Hitler finally appeared on the balcony for a moment. They reminded me of the crazed expression I saw once in the backcountry of Louisiana on the faces of some Holy Rollers who were about to hit the trail. They looked up at him as if he were a Messiah, their faces transformed into something positively inhuman. If he had remained in sight for more than a few moments, I think many of the women would have swooned from excitement."

Similarly, veiled women in Bangladesh are shouting in favour of the Taliban, even though they have taken away all basic rights like education and health care from women in Afghanistan where they ruled. Women admirers of Adolf Hitler rallied for the dictator even though he wanted German women should return to kitchen and produce only children to serve the Reich. This shows that extremists can have enormous influence on their victims who would willingly accept their servitude. And this makes them so vulnerable. Thanks to massive display of American airpower, which broke the back of the brutal Taliban regime and helped Afghanistan's Northern Alliance to liberate their country, will also go a long way to liberate Afghan men and women from a nightmare provided the international community is ready to help reconstruction of the country ruined by the atavistic Taliban.

Mahmood Elahi
Ottawa, Canada

