

DHAKA TUESDAY DECEMBER 4, 2001

We condemned it then, and do so now

BNP is doing what the AL was guilty of

HE police action against Opposition AL activists near the latter's central office at Bangabandhu Avenue during Sunday's hartal hours was ruthless. It went far beyond the limits prescribed for maintenance of public order. Basically, there was no question of any serious disturbances breaking out as these were foreclosed by the police having laid a siege to the AL office. AL leaders and former ministers stayed put in as the opposition activists were hopelessly outnumbered by the police and stave-wielding anti-hartal activists. This amounted to an impingement on the right to assembly which is thoroughly repugnant to any sense of democracy.

We cannot help cite two specific instances of police highhandedness on the day: first, so indulgent the police were of anti-hartal activists that the latter dared pounce on prohartal elements right inside a police van they were hauled up to. Secondly, AL MP Ahsanullah Master was roughed up by a clearly identifiable police officer and a couple of constables when the former had lurched forward to rescue some AL activists from police hands. How dare the police manhandle an elected member of parliament? This is highly outrageous. We deprecate it, demand punitive action against those responsible and would like never to see it happen again.

However, it will be worthwhile to refresh our memory on how BNP leader Sadeg Hossain Khoka was manhandled in the street as an opposition MP when AL had been in power. We criticised the then AL home minister Mohammad Nasim for allowing that to happen. Actually what we had accused the AL of doing at that time is being done by the BNP in a reversal of role, and that too, so early in the day to bode ill for the future.

Only a couple of days back the government put a ban on stick-wielding, fire ball-capped (mashal) processions. But in a shameless display of double-standard stick-wielding processions by ruling party activists were allowed into the trouble-spot on Sunday.

It is for all these double-speak and self-contradictions within the AL that the voters chose to be led by a BNP government this time around. We have a new government, a new party at the helm of affairs but the discredited old political behaviour continues to rule the roost. So, where have we moved ahead, where have we changed! Why must a ruling party, with so much hope pinned on it to turn a corner, adopt the sure formula of defeat? It's time they pulled back.

The inevitable tragedy of being Palestine

Time for the UN to take a role

OTHING creates a greater sense of inevitability than the events that are unfolding in Palestine. The recent suicide attack in Israel that left nearly 200 dead or injured has created a platform for a higher level of violence now. The US seems to be sending a signal of sorts to the Israelis that it is willing to tolerate a massive counterattack. Most certainly, the next round will wipe out more people. Both, innocent Palestinians and Israelis continue to pay a steep price for the politics of tragedy that has engulfed the region for many years.

The language of reprisal, protest and counter-protest doesn't say that both people have now become prisoners of history. But that's what they are. Once a large part of Palestine was emptied to establish Israel, the forces of violence were unleashed which will not rest until one party is totally subjugated. Given the trend of things and the logic of economic and military supremacy, the bells appear to be tolling for Palestine. And here the missing link is a sagacious UN role which must be forthcoming now. While the Palestine leadership is flawed, the public rage is genuine. But time has run away with patience and now only anger remains. Though Arafat has promised to hunt down those behind the attack it has hardly created any ripple and he most probably can't chase even if he wants to. Meanwhile, the West has decided to stand by whatever Israel does, it seems. It seems that there may be peace but it will be a forced rather than a fair one. Many people had put a lot of faith in the words of the world community leaders that there would be a just solution in the Middle East, stated when the Afghan war was peaking. But as events have shown, it's only an Israel-friendly solution 'that will do' and that means the end of what most Palestinians dream of.



OVE, fear, rage, tears, all find space in our readers column. People write with

hope and in anger. Some are looking for a bit of stolen fairness, others hunt for a place to vent their rage Recently we got a letter from a voung lady who complained that although her father was a liberation war hero and an army officer, in fact he was a sector commander, he wasn't even asked to the national function on the Armed Forces Day. She has a right to expect. To be part of special occasions where the areatest sons of the soil converge is singularly significant. By denying him, they are denying the privilege that is due to him. When it comes to 1971, that rage is more obvious and palpable. Didn't we shed blood and give our best for creating Bangladesh? What is the use of creating a state and fighting a war if one can't have access to the just booty? Isn't

that what a war is all about? How can we be denied? I do know who her father is. He is an extremely courageous soldier

and a patriot. I know this because have spent nearly 25 years scouting the history of how this state was constructed and how the seeds of inequity were sowed even as the battle for supremacy was on. How the battle lines for the have and have-nots were drawn long before the war had reached its concluding

months. A war I now no longer understand.

WE were shooting a video on the experience of women in 1971. The place was a placid orchard in Kushtia. The women sat on a mat on the fruit strewn ground and we listened to their tales. Fateh Bewa sat in torn white rags. She had heard about the shooting and come to tell her story. She started to speak last, shaken by age and infirmity.

ernment property. He lies buried now, my son Mohammed, buried without his head. Tell me, son, have we become liberated?" Finally she broke down and wept in strange

gusts. As the shooting was over and we were packing up with sombre faces, she with her bent back came to where we stood. Then she took my hand and shook me and said, Mohammed, Mohammed. Won't you come home?" I had become her

honours and honorific. We demand privileges in the name of those who never had any. Having constructed a state which has the starkest division between the rich and the poor, we weep if our children can't study in foreign universities, if we aren't given a cushy contract, denied our right to build a million dollar house in Gulshan or Baridhara. The war of 1971 has become for most people the right to claim the spoils, which might go

elsewhere. It was a war of the many

but peace belonged to a handful.

After all, that's when the distribution

of resources took place.

The sector commander's daughter and other children

STRAIGHT FROM THE HEART

Let's face the big fact. In this Bangladesh, we have managed to install a system by which the rich get all

the chances and the poor get none. Now I can understand the rich getting most chances and the poor a

few but how does this equation of total denial fit in? We are ready to take to the streets for denying

residential rights to our political leaders, of not allowed to speak in the parliament but parliaments, full

of the very rich, never speak of the poor and hartals are never held for the rights of the poor either.

Bangali called Kader -- still alive and safely in Haluaghat -- and thirty years after the attack, they still wait for a full meal. The metaphor of a full belly has achieved mystic proportions in that place where the women took to being day labourers and beggars in the Nalitabari Bazar to survive and rear their children. A woman after all these years weeps. "Buried my son and husband in the same grave. No shrouds, no bath, just bloodied corpses. Fed my

other children banana

shoots...banana shoots...nothing

except that for day..nothing except

that...even if I starve I will never

leave the grave of my husband and

my son."

Let's face the big fact. In this Bangladesh, we have managed to install a system by which the rich get all the chances and the poor get none. Now I can understand the rich getting most chances and the poor a few but how does this equation of total denial fit in? We are ready to take to the streets for denying residential rights to our political leaders, of not allowed to speak in the parliament but parliaments, full of the very rich, never speak of the poor and hartals are never held for the rights of the poor either. Only our private sorrows interest us and after 30 years we have managed to legitimize our right not to be bothered by the wretchedness of the poor. Honestly, this is no mean

achievement. I remember, in 1990, a man offered his daughter to me to take away, no questions asked. It happened in Rangpur. That was the least he could do because left with him, she would certainly starve. What options were there except to give her away ? A pity I didn't take

But I have taken much and like * * * * * * the letter writer is a member of a NOBODY has ever bothered to privileged class. I know much about recognise them, let alone feed your father and know that all his them. In the vastness of Bengal's problems are a result of political green, these people have learnt that conflict. It will blow away soon. But after 1971, the biggest reality they vou probably, like me, are not know is that they have to starve. It's related to anyone who starves. Like a terrifying sentence for some crime they have committed but don't know me, you are hurt by the indignities of our society where we belong. But what.. I don't think we have the grammar to learn let alone underwe don't even know of the indignity stand the language of starvation. called life, which can be liberated People, who starve, many because only by the mercy of death. We are of the war, which took so much siblings and your pain is mine. And away from so many and gave so thank God, we will never know what much to so few, don't understand pain strangers go through. Thank the connection. Wasn't this war God, thank God.

about eating enough ? About sending kids to school ? About a serene old age ? About knowing there is something called a future?

Afsan Chowdhury is a Senior Assistant Editor of The Daily Star.

Her voice was choking, her words almost incomprehensible

"When my son wanted to go, I held him back. Thrice I held him back". He said, 'if we don't go who will liberate the land? Don't worry if I die, seven and a half crore people will call you 'ma'. Sk. Mujib will come and bless you personally." He bade good-bye thrice and was gone.

"They arrested him in November and kept him in Mohini Mills. I got a chance to see him. They had tortured him. I couldn't see his face only his hands, his two bleeding hands. I could give him nothing. I just washed his hands, held his hands as long as I could.

"They killed him and chopped off his head. They buried the body without the head. I looked for his head but couldn't find it. I went to the railway authorities and asked for his body but they wouldn't give me that. They said he was buried in government land and there was no permission to remove anything from gov-

prejudice.

have never been hit like this. Others quickly took her away as she kept on staring at me, calling out. A woman beggared by the war, widowed by the war, a war that stole her only son away leaving only insane

son in her grief demented eyes. I

have faced death many times but

DOES anybody ever ask what happened to the poor who made up of 80 per cent of the fighting force, who joined the war because their villages were hit and took to war to save their families? Who died like flies and went back to the villages without awards or rewards? Who don't ever claim or don't even know that they have to claim or have a right to any claim because they fought in a war?

In a country where more than 50 per cent of the people go to bed hungry, we are consumed by our right to state-sanctioned land, property and awards not to speak of

ity, made infinite by the deprivation, due to a war they had never excepted, participated without being asked and then made to suffer without any fault, can't even complain. Not having had the chance to be educated, they can't even ask and live out their days waiting for death as their only

reward. IN a village called Shohagpur in the district of Sherpur, we visit a village where all men were killed by the Pak army in a matter of two hours. They were led there by a

Censoring history, defiling reason: Taliban in the sangh's soul

those who see history as a truthful account of reality, which demands continual reinterpretation,

from those who yoke history to narrow "nation-building" agendas. This second lot is sowing preju-

to understand Indian art, literature, rampant superstition, and wide-

dice, hatred and hubrislike Hitler did with his Master Race myth. They will poison young minds.

PRAFUL BIDWAI writes from New Delhi

S if the assaults on Indian democratic sensibilities by education minister M.M. Joshi and Co. weren't enough, Prime Minister Vajpayee has joined the Hindutva chorus rationalising the censoring of history textbooks by the National Council for Educa-The present controversy is not a dispute between Liberal-Left scholars and others. It separates tional Research and Training.

No worthy democracy can tolerate the rewriting of history, however "inconvenient". Such censorship makes nonsense of the long process of deliberation over syllabi, author selection, expert consultation, and legal contracts through

Crucial here is the tailoring of truth to The paragraphs deleted from

Professor Thapar's textbooks say together! "beef was served as a mark of honour to special guests" in ancient India, but that "in later centuries, Brahmans were forbidden" from eating it. This is undeniably true, but

Bharati, a sleazy RSS front. His villains are "Macaulay, Marx and Madrasas", all incredibly lumped

Hindutva wants to erase one central truth about India for 2000 vearsits plural, multi-ethnic, multireligious character. As Professor Amartya Sen says: "It is futile to try

astronomy, and sculpture. But other civilisations, Chinese, Arab, Persian, Greek, Roman, etc., also had achievements

* * * * * *

Many worthy things impelled led AL Basham to write The Wonder That Was India. But there were ugly things too: Dalit oppression, social inequalities, gender discrimination,

through wars and contestations between numerous powersdomestic empires and principalities, as well as the British. French, Dutch and Portuguese. The map of "India, Burma and Ceylon" might have folded some other way. Hindutva denies all negative

aspects of the past. It therefore

cannot reform the present. It ration-

alises and perpetuates past horrors

civilisation, beginning with the "Islamic" conquest of Sindh. The "Buddhist" and "Hindu' periods are treated as pitiable voids or aberrations. Scholars like Pervez Hoodbhov and Mubarak Ali have analysed such biases and elisions.

pluralism and the Babri mosque

In Pakistan, history is taught

through compulsory "Pakistan

Studies" courses. It jumps straight

from Harappa to the next "real"

They razed it.

Hindutva's brand of history neatly parallels these. It minimises all Moghul achievements, including the Taj Mahal, or presents them as "Hindu" artifacts!

The present controversy is not a dispute between Liberal-Left schol

In all these years, I haven't met a freedom fighter -- of all kinds -coming from the better classes who isn't better off than he was before sorrow as company. the war began. It doesn't matter if * * * we admit or not but privilege has flowed to a small group. The major-

This outlook has to change with the United States realising the supreme importance of averting any alienation from the Arab or Muslim world before it is too late.

/nich textbooks are produced

The NCERT's present targets are outstanding historians like Professors Romila Thapar and R.S. Sharma. It ordains that the censored portions must not be taught, not even "discussed"

The censorship process originated with Mr Joshi who has no business to judge history. It was executed without informing the authors, or undertaking a content review.

Indian historians have been muzzled and vital truths about the past, like casteism, suppressed.

These were at odds with Hindutva's version of history which glorifies India's past and presents it as a series of "Hindu" achievements, unmatched elsewhere,

against passages which say there is no evidence of any ancient settlement around Ayodhya, or of Krishna's presence in Mathura. This runs counter to the superstitious belief that Rama and Krishna were actual historical, not mythological, figures.

Hindutva's ire is also directed

not to the BJP's liking.

The BJP's new line is that Rama and Krishna are historical. The axe has also fallen on discussion of the rigidities of the caste system.

The BJP has itself linked this censorship to its electoral agenda in Uttar Pradesh and Punjab.

Disgracefully, the "authority" cited for this censorship is an appalling book of hatred, Bharatiyakaran ke Virodhi, by one Dinanath Batra. who doesn't even qualify as a thirdrate historian. Batra heads Vidya

seeing the extensive interactions across barriers of religious communities

> "These include Hindus and Muslims, Buddhists, Jains, Sikhs, Parsees, Christians... and even atheists and agnostics. Sanskrit has a larger atheistic literature than... any other classical language."

music, food or politics without

The BJP-RSS cannot stomach this. Its fear of facts is rooted in ignorance and a deep inferiority complex about Indianness. This demands that everything in India's past must be great, the past is a continuous Golden Age, interrupted only by "aggression".

Ancient India undoubtedly had many accomplishments: in literature, dance, drama, mathematics (although not "Vedic mathematics").

India interacted with the world and received a great deal from Arabs in administrative systems. revenue management, music, chemistry, medicine, even couture. It gave a great deal to the world too. Indians should be proud of many thingsfrom Ajanta to Khajuraho, Konark to the Taj, the Cochin synagogue to Armenian churches. But they ought to be ashamed of sati, illiteracy, tyrannical village life,

spread deprivation and disease.

religious strife... Understanding this means confronting, not censoring, the past. Such understanding is important if we are to relate to our present.

Hindutva makes this impossible. India is not "eternal". All of South Asia as we know it today was created over the past 500 years

verv welcome to see the rubble of

pending in the Indian court system.

D. Ray, on e-mail

science.

This sets Hindutva apart from the Freedom Struggle, which inspires progressive politics in South Asia. The Freedom Movement had two components: opposition to Imperialism and internal social reform. Both were crucial to its popular appeal. All elements in that Movement

shared this orientation. Hindutva didn't. The RSS was not part of the Movement, but a colonial collaborator. It rabidly opposed social reform. To sustain that opposition today.

Hindutva must distort history, excise facts, lie. In this, Hindutva is no different from the Taliban. The Taliban couldn't stand pluralism or "dilution" of Islam. They destroyed the Bamiyan Buddhas to "purify" Afghanistan.

The BJP-VHP-RSS couldn't stand

ars and others. It separates those who see history as a truthful account of reality, which demands continual reinterpretation, from those who voke history to narrow "nationbuilding" agendas.

This second lot is sowing prejudice, hatred and hubrislike Hitler did with his Master Race myth. They will poison young minds.

Is this how we want our children to grow up, thinking all those who are different from us are our enemies? Is that education? Is this how we will build a plural, multi-cultural tolerant South Asia?

No more hartal, please

Dear Sheikh Hasina, with our earn-

ing we can afford only rice and fan.

May be you don't know what fan is?

It is a Bengali food -- residual water

from boiled rice. If you have no rice

Praful Bidwai is an eminent Indian columnist.

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE

The quiet Beatles

The news that George Harrison died touched me deeply. With all the thinas aoina on in the world right now we might forget how the Beatles changed the world and preached the message of peace and love.

Harrison was the quiet Beatles, he didn't write too many songs but the few he wrote were delightfully different and powerful both in lyrics and composition. Frank Sinatra once told that "Something" was the best love song written in the last 50 years and how about "While my guitar gently weeps", a bitter sweet melody, and the inspirational "Here comes the sun". Even if you have never heard Harrison, we, as Bangladeshis, should honour this great man

For those who don't know about it, Harrison was involved from the beginning of the birth of our country with the Concert for Bangladesh. The Concert for Bangladesh has been described as George Harrison's finest hour. It was arranged at short notice following a call from the Indian sitar player, Ravi Shankar -- a friend of George Harrison.

Ravi Shankar asked him to help with a benefit concert to raise funds for refugees pouring into India from the newly created state of Bangla-

desh. The money raised for Bangladesh far exceeded all expectations. When the British and American governments insisted on taxing sales of the accompanying record, Harrison himself paid the 1.5 million to do so. dollar tax bill. Thanks to George, the benefit gigs that later was arranged. inspired by him, like Band-aid, Farm-aid and more recently con-

certs for the New York victims have helped save many lives. As Bangladeshis we should be more than grateful to this wonderful

man and I have to add that it is a pity that we, as a country, haven't recognised his contribution at the time of our darkest hour. I'm sure many of us aren't even aware of the great deed of this quiet Beatles. I'll end with a quote of Harrison about his

own music, "And so my music, it doesn't matter if I did it 20 years ago or if I did it tomorrow. It doesn't ao with trends. My trousers don't get wider and tighter every six months. My music just stays what it is, and

Zayed Abedin Austin, Texas

As a teenager in 1971 I was amazed to know about the "Concert for Bangladesh" and the great musician George Harrison who arranged it. I

that's the way I like it"-- truly a great

often thought about his compassion for a nation, fighting for freedom whom he didn't know, and singing to raise funds for them. At that time it needed courage and inner strength Chittagong

But what have we done in return? Was he ever invited as an honoured quest to be present at the celebrations of our independence? Was he ever thanked properly? As a nation we often fail to honour the right person at the right time

As a grown-up, today I would like to say a prayer and shed tear in the memory of George Harrison and would like to say " Thank you, dear friend"

Yasmin Zaman Uttara, Dhaka

Intoxicated with power

In the name of routing out terrorists, America is terrifying the whole world. It has been disclosed that America's next targets are Iraq, Somalia and Yemen. We are really upset by this news. Iraq has suffered enough, why subject it to further sufferings? It's inhuman.

We also feel very sad and apprehensive about the future of Afghanistan. Different factions of the Afghans will try to take control of the country, will strive to be in power

resulting in bloody feuds, the outcome of which will be disastrous and would jeopardise the very existence of the Afghans. Nur Jahan

Curtail cost

As one of the measures for saving foreign exchange, we would suggest that all travels at government level may be done in commercial airliners.

These travels may be made by economy/business classes. All foreign travels be reduced to the minimum. The benefit to the country has to outweigh the cost. Shahabuddin Mahatab Dhaka

"What about the Hindus?"

I thank you for your kind consideration for publishing my letter.

I am writing this in response to the letter of Mr/Ms. Mahmud. Leicester, UK written in response to my letter on November 30.

First, I stand by my facts and figures. I do not agree many of the statements written in reply. It is of note that we view only our perceived problems and thoughts. Mr./Ms. Mahmud described Bangladeshi

Hindus: how they feel, behave, their attitude and loyalty regarding India and Bangladesh. Many of the Hindus in India feel exactly the same way about the Indian Muslims' feeling, behaviour, their attitude and loyalty towards Bangladesh or Pakistan and India. There are plenty

of evidences for this on both sides. As regard, problems for the Muslims in India: poverty, illiteracy etc. as mentioned by Mr./Ms. Mahmud are quite true. But these are just not true for the Muslim exclusively. This is also true for the Indian Dalits. low castes Hindus. tribal (argued as one of the reasons

for North Eastern Indian insurgency). For these, Indian Muslims and the country are both responsi-

Obviously, we shall find each other's faults and argue and write without any end.

Only way to end this is to finish the unfinished business not completed in 1947. Resettle all the Hindus from Pakistan and Bangladesh to India and all the Muslims to Bangladesh and Pakistan. This is not impossible task though this appears seemingly impossible. It will take time. This will solve the past, present and future problems for forever. I don't think there is any choice about it but to implement.

Lastly, Mr./Ms. Mahmud, you are

TO THE EDITOR EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

Babri Masjid - a single regrettable JS session ends episode has brought so much We must be proud of BNP and its shame to India! I humbly suggest to allies. At a time of national crisis, in keep an open mind when you visit both our economy and law and the Barbi Masjid rubble and ask order situation, it is heartening to whv? As there are not one but plenty of well known rubbles as well as ruins in your backyard too. Unlike last session of the JS. your rubbles and ruins at least and as usual, never ending court case

get back at Hasina. MA

Opposition leader

If some one don't attend the JS, can he/she claim herself/himself as an opposition leader and enjoy the benefits of JS? Not attending the JS even after being elected by the people's mandate is a kind of cheating and a person who has real feelings for the country should not act so irresponsible

I am an active freedom fighter But what is the contribution of Sheikh Hasina and her sister in the creation of Bangladesh? Now a days people worship quality rather remember afresh the valiant patriots than personality. If some one wants to profit his/her personal interest at the cost of national interest history will not excuse them. They should learn from the past.

Tarun

Bandarban

Manchester, England

"We are ashamed" The captioned letter by Kamal Haq (October 30) and the views subsequently endorsed by a number of readers indeed prick our con-

Aren't we entitled to get even a simple one-sentence apology, 'we are sorry for what we have done in 1971' from the people who most actively collaborated with Pak Army during our Liberation War? Yes, we are ashamed and more so in this month of December when we

who made supreme sacrifice for our tomorrow Let us seek apology from the collaborator of Pak Army. M.R. Chowdhurv

Monipuri Para, Dhaka

see that the new government stuck to its parliamentary priorities for the Pity that the only priority was to on demolition of Barbi Masjid is still

you can eat Polao, we can't. So it doesn't matter whether you resort to hartal. But if we have no earning for Dhaka a day we look for the dustbin.

Man made virus!

Could one of your readers please inform me, why did the Aids Virus firstly choose to infect young homosexual men? I have never heard of a virus having prejudice against people's sexual orientation. Could Aids be in fact a man made virus? Paul Reed

Klanto Jhalakati

Although we are both Bengalis, what are play, fun and politics for you is suffering and starvation for