

Israeli belligerency

I cannot help but be angered by the recent Israeli bombings in Gaza Strip. The Israelis, fully backed by the White House, claim that they initiated these air raids out of "self-defence."

The Israelis and the United States claim that Chairman Yassar Arafat has not been coercive enough in his crackdown on the Hamas and Islamic Jihad organisations.

But what these two countries have continually failed to do is to give Arafat a comprehensive plan on how to accomplish this enormous task.

racy, and secularism

That theocracy is a medieval practice that has been seen in Ayatollah's Iran and Mullah Omar's Afghanistan. The price that has been paid in human and other terms has been extreme. Any attempt by whosoever to bring theocracy in Kashmir or in any part of the world should therefore be condemned and if necessary resisted.

I agree with Mr. Kuldip Nayar on his assumption that the only solution to the Kashmir problem lies in the implementation of the Simla and the Lahore agreement.

Jingoism and post-1947 communal mindset are not only going to be

I just finished reading Mr. Afsan Chowdhury's article, "The case of a poor Asian Bangladeshi Muslim" (November 27). I must say that it is well articulated, insightful, and poignant. Mr. Chowdhury seemed to truly speak his mind. I especially understand and appreciate the paragraph on non-Bangladeshis and Islam.

Living in the US for the past 11 years, I have seen people who would truly like to *become* Arab; this goes to the extent where one Bangladeshi gentleman I know would actually speak English with an Arabic accent! He is settled in Saudi Arabia now; I wonder if that is

money. If anybody refuses to pay they make it impossible not to.

As a citizen of the country, I feel it is one kind of crime. Holy Islam never supports this type of disturbing. We, who perform Ramadan, don't need any help to wake us up. Sirens and announcements from the mosque are enough to awake up the people who perform Ramadan. My appeal to the law and order agency is to take necessary steps to stop this process. We want to live in peace.

Atiqur Rahman
Dhaka

Banking rules

There are a boom in banks in Bangladesh and an intense competition for capturing more clients and capitals. For this purpose, some banks neglect banking rules. We have faced one problem with the Rupali Bank-- our payment being cut 45 per cent without consent of our bank since their customer's request of that even though they accept the full amount payment documents. This has also happened to others. I kindly suggest The Bangladesh Bank set up one Audit Department to supervise all the other banks and clear all illegal-banking activities.

Boris
Gulshan 2, Dhaka

Ban tobacco advertisement

In North America where I lived for many years, tobacco advertising is banned on television. The print media largely self-regulate themselves and will not carry tobacco advertising in order to provide a public service. This is unfortunately not the case here.

I have no quarrel with you on that score, but I fail to understand why you feel compelled to print the press releases of the tobacco industry such as the announcement of British-American Tobacco, in your issue of 5th November, that they are marketing a new brand of cigarette in this country. In the body of the release we are told that they come "in an attractive gold pack" and are of "exceptional high quality", and are also informed of the price. How do they determine that it is of exceptionally high quality, is it more lethal than other cigarettes? We must remember that this is the only product legally sold that, when used exactly as intended, causes illness and death. Many other products, some of which are restricted, cause harm if overused or abused, and some have beneficial uses. This is not the case with tobacco products, which have no redeeming feature whatever.

The purveyors of these deadly products, having been hounded in western countries where there is more concern for the well being of citizens. They are now retreating to developing countries where ignorance and the lack of political will permits them to continue their activities the way their predecessors did in mounting the opium trade out of the sub-continent and thereby subjugating almost an entire continent.

I can only hope that you will exercise some discretion in not playing into the callous hands of these merchants of death, by at least not running their press releases.

Syed Hamde Ali
The Palace, Bogra

Brutality Bangladesh style

I have sent you the picture of a man brutally beaten almost to death. He was accused of being a pick pocket. Is there a single person in Bangladesh who sympathise with this poor guy, who was "sentenced to death", just for purse snatching?

Anita Lee
Graduate Student, Harvard University

Frequent transfer

Whenever there is an order for transfer of a government officer, it is also stated therein, that this is being done, in the interest of public service. The only objective of a democratically elected government is to ensure the happiness and welfare of the people. If at any point there is a party/personal agenda, the welfare of people is sacrificed. The ultimate censorial power lies with the people.

In the present day world the business of running a government is complex, and it demands great knowledge on the part of public functionary and also honesty, integrity and vision.

It is also enjoined that a government officer should normally be at his post for three to four years, and he/she should not be posted in his/her own district.

One needs sometime to familiarise himself/herself in a particular position. The ministerial officials are exempted from the 'tenure' rules as they do not exercise any administrative/discretionary powers.

Our Prophet (SA) and the four Caliphs (RA) exercised their administrative powers with great caution and thought and this applies for all time.

Shahabuddin Mahtab
Siddheswari Road, Dhaka

Extradition and trial for AL criminals

In the wake of the Awami League government's defeat, many of its top henchmen and corrupt elements have taken refuge in the United States.

How these people could enter the US, when visa processing has been delayed and in many cases stopped for the rest of the citizens of Bangladesh is indeed a mystery.

It is the duty of the present government to investigate these activities, and levy severe penalties against them, and extradite them if necessary to stand trial for their crimes against people of Bangladesh. The Bangladesh government should investigate whether they paid any income taxes during and before their time in power. If not, their properties should be confiscated to pay their debts to the people of Bangladesh.

If we as a people are to rid ourselves of such criminals, we must make sure that they do not have the financial means to carry on their dirty work, nor the ability to take flight when they are out of office.

Mojammel Hossain
Tokyo, Japan

Afghan war

In Afghanistan fighting is going on between the Taliban and the non-Talibans for twelve years only to grab power. Hundreds of people are being killed and thousands made homeless every year.

In Pakistan the Muslims of different religions and groups are killing people. They are being killed both inside and outside their house, in front of their parents and even inside the mosques while saying prayers. Nobody ever protested against these killings as if everything is okay. Suddenly the Muslims and the religious groups became very active as soon as the US started bombing Afghanistan. Every Friday after the Jumma prayers they are protesting and demonstrating against the US as if the attack on Afghanistan has awakened them from deep slumber.

Iqbal Uddin Ahmed, *on e-mail*

Student politics and Sheikh Hasina

Shaikh Hasina's comment on Prime Minister's proposal for banning student politics is most unfortunate, to say the least. From the logical point of view, it commits the fallacy of bad analogy as students have been compared to the head of our society and the problems created by student-politics have been compared to headache.

Gone are the days when this perception of things were in vogue. Now-a-days students are not only the educated section of our people. Non-student and matured educated people are in abundance, now, in our society who are better able to think about the well being of society. Political parties also, now, have their think tanks to guide them and educated activists to carry out their plans and programs. So why should we need students to do these jobs? Do we see how our neighbouring countries are marching forward while we are being plunged into the abyssal depth of backwardness mainly because our educational institutions have been crippled by student-politics? Does not common-sense demand that politics should immediately be made a restricted zone for our students?

Some people sometimes argue that students should not be asked to keep away from politics while some of their teachers indulge in it and enjoy its fruits. But do not, we adults enjoy many things which are forbidden for our non-adult population? I am happy to see that our Prime Minister has realised the point. May I expect that the former Prime Minister who has half-a-dozen Ph.D. to her credit will also agree with her?

A.F.M.Obaidur Rahman
Deptt. of Philosophy Jahangirnagar University.

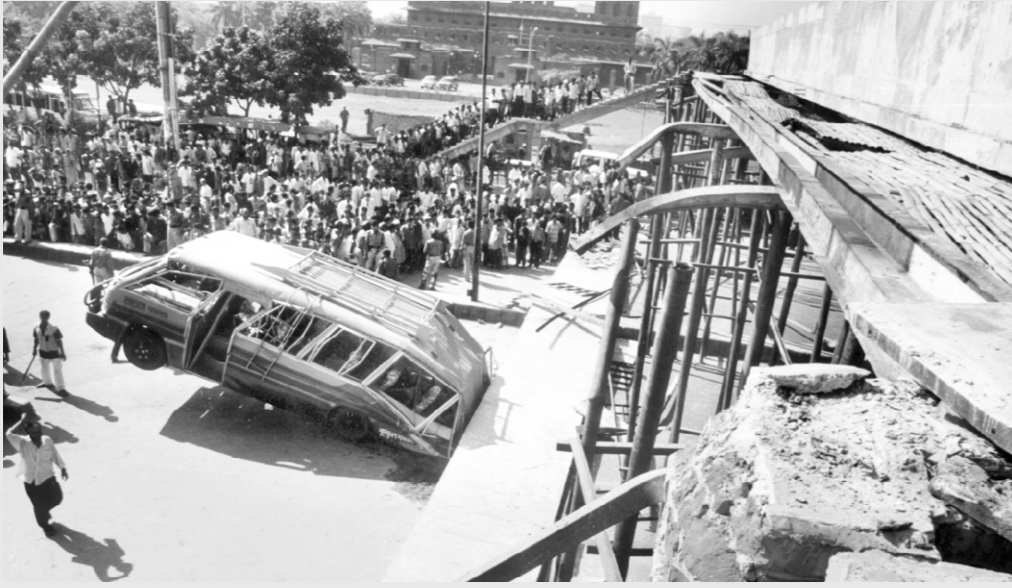
Where's the notification?

We have read with pleasure a news item published in your esteemed daily recently reporting that BTTB has finally reduced overseas call rates with effect from December 1. However, I have not yet seen any notification published in your paper, which no doubt is the leading newspaper in the country. Yesterday I phoned the BTTB overseas operator and a BTTB supervisor who could not give me any information beyond saying that they have heard about the reduction but did not get any official memo in this respect. When I asked whether there was any information centre of the BTTB who could give me such information they could not give me any information either. A few months ago the BTTB revised the NWD rates but so far I have not seen any notification issued by the BTTB.

BTTB not only failed to bring to their subscribers advanced technology, but also failed to maintain the old customer services viz, clock time, directory service and central complaint centres.

In the modern days of tremendous advancement in technology, there ought to be a central computerised complaint centre and fourth generation computer billing system

The foot-overbridge accident



On November 26, a girder of an under-construction foot-over bridge fell down on a running bus in front of the American Embassy, Baridhara resulting in the death of one person and injuring a few others.

Though I'm 84 and an engineer I could not but visit the spot. I went to the accident spot and was deeply frustrated. Is there no value of life of the people in this country? Under which criterion and quality the authorities concerned awarded the work to this company.

The first thing I observed is the scaffolding works were not up to the mark. For example, (a) No cross bracing was seen in between the pipe line fixing for scaffolding. The pipes, which are fixed, were found too old as well as rustproof. (b) For safety measures extra pipes should have been fixed on two ends of girder consisting of eight pipes on each end. (c) Small area was covered with MS Plate at the bottom instead of larger area for fixation of 4" Q M S Pipe. (d) Welding workmanship for the pipes were found unsatisfactory. (e) No safety measures were there to avoid any collision with vehicles.

Wasn't there any supervision from either side-- the concerned company or the concerned department-- during the construction of the bridge? The fall of girder might have been caused due to side deflection instead of upper deflection during the time of stressing-operation. The work of pre-stressed concrete girder is far better than the work of RCC girder and the technical side of PC work is also different from the later.

These sorts of technical based works should be awarded to companies which have got vast knowledge of technology as well as preparation of methodology and innovative ideas in the field of structure and pre-stressed concrete in the country. Needless to mention that these works should be supervised by a technically consultancy firm to prevent loss of innocent people.

Engr A Mukherjee
Baridhara, Dhaka

How is Arafat supposed to stop the followers of Hamas and Islamic Jihad if their members have witnessed the murders of their fathers, mothers, brothers, and friends at the hands of Israeli gunmen?

Arafat cannot be expected to have control over these emotionally explosive non-governmental groups.

If Israel wants the killing to stop, then they must get to the heart of the problem, instead of cowardly blaming Arafat's failure to uphold the peace process. And what is the heart of the problem?

It is the frustration and embitterment that the members of Hamas and Islamic Jihad possesses as a result of Israel's continued occupation of Palestinian lands.

So the simple solution is this, President Sharone: you want the killings to stop, then pull your armies, troops, and tanks out of Palestinian land.

Israel is completely unjustified by labelling these air raids in Gaza as "self-defence."

Sharone has unrelentingly criticised Arafat for not doing enough to help the peace process.

But how has Sharone helped by dropping a series of bombs on Arafat's headquarters? That certainly isn't helping the peace process.

But the fact of the matter is this, Arafat has no control over groups like Hamas and Islamic Jihad and therefore cannot be blamed for what they carry out, but Israel certainly has command over its army and therefore deserves complete blame in this affair.

Arafat has promised that he would try to bring members of Hamas and Islamic Jihad to justice, but he needs Israel's support in the form of a cease-fire to implement this plan.

Certainly, Israel has accomplished nothing with these air raids, but to only further embitter the Palestinian people and will undoubtedly lead to more suicide bombings.

Israel, rather than taking the role as the belligerent, impulsive idiot, needs to slow down and understand that as long as they continue this aggression, peace will never be achieved.

Arafat needs support and a comprehensive plan to crackdown on Hamas and Islamic Jihad, and then needs to be given the time to implement this plan of action.

But Israel and the United States have not given Palestine this opportunity, and therefore, the Israeli attacks in Gaza Strip can only be seen as premature, belligerent, and cowardly and certainly not in any way "self-defensive."

Farah Islam, *on e-mail*
On Kashmir, theoc-

dangerous and counter productive, they would most certainly bring permanent instability in the entire subcontinent.

After September 11, our belief in favour of secular-liberal democracy has been greatly strengthened. Despite its failings, we must cherish it today unless something better is available tomorrow.

The recent attacks on Hindus in Bangladesh are an example of revival of post-1947 communalism that we buried in 1971. The perpetrators in Bhola and Barisal and many other places of Bangladesh have given RSS in Delhi fuel to strengthen their communal politics.

Liberal and secular ideas need brains and intellects to grow; communalism just needs politics of hate that we see all across the subcontinent.

One remedy is for Bangladesh to return to the Constitution of 1972 that upholds secular democracy contrary to what it is now. And with an absolute majority in the Parliament only BNP can take this bold step. If they do this, the entire subcontinent would change considerably.

That would not only solve the Kashmir problem or the problems of Hindus in Bangladesh but the whole concept of SAARC would be emboldened. Our problems arise from our unwillingness to learn from history.

Samir Saha
Stockholm, Sweden

JS session

The first session of the 8th Parliament is over. In the 6th and 7th Parliamentary sessions Awami League and BNP respectively refrained from attending JS sessions for a long period.

Also in this session, AL didn't join the JS. We have heard that when the JS session is in motion, the cost per minute is seventeen thousand taka or more. For a poor country like ours it is quite a lot of money.

The MPs are elected by the people to attend the JS and represent their interest and find solutions for their problems. By not attending the JS a huge amount of money is wasted.

We also request the Honourable Speaker to see to it that no one wastes time on unnecessary topics as every minute counts.

We hope that the respected members of the Parliament will not linger on the past, will not harbour bitter feelings and only plan for the future and work together for a prosperous Bangladesh.

Nur Jahan
Chittagong

"The case of a poor Asian ..."

what you would call kismet. Some Bangladeshis over here face multiple problems: rootlessness, alienation from the mainstream culture, and yes, paranoia of their children going astray (drug abuse, illicit sex, thuggery etc). The solution: get thee to a mosque.

Regarding the paranoia, I wonder if they realise that these mainly youth-oriented dilemmas do exist back in the motherland, to a lesser or greater extent, but most people are not cramming into mosques and enrolling their children into religious schools to counter the obstacle. Often enough, second-generation South Asians pick up the full-fledged mosque membership all by themselves, young ladies in hijabs, gents in beards that cover their pimples. Maybe it is a way of filling in the social vacuum that creeps up on many in the Western superpower where they are neither black, white, nor Hispanic. I am keeping Mr. Chowdhury's article in my "good writings" folder, as I also write (maybe you can tell), and try to follow ideas from established writers. Once again, I enjoyed the writing, and look forward to the next piece.

Tamim Choudhury
Texas A&M University College Station, Texas, USA

Don't kill the migratory binds

Every year during winter, many migratory birds visit our country. But selfish and greedy people kill these innocent birds. These migratory birds increase the beauty of our nature Wildlife and they are an integral part of the eco-system. So, nobody should ever kill these birds. We should remember that without a balanced eco-system, we are doomed.

Sanjoy Kumar Bhowmik
College Road, Srimangal

Disturbance in Ramadan

Every year we who are residing in Dhaka City go through a disturbance during the month of Ramadan. For the so-called awaking the 'rujader' during the sehri time, some young men make rude noises. This disturbing process starts from mid night. The sound breaks the sleep of rujader who were asleep after completing their dinner and 'Tarabi' prayer at ten to eleven o'clock. Sometimes these sounds become so disturbing that sleep of babies and adults become impossible. And at the end of Ramadan they demand huge donation for their mad wake up call service. They come to every residence as a group and demand this

and easy bill collection system, if they really wish to remain in business. Otherwise as you have very correctly said technology will take over.

One more thing, I have seen in Makkah Sharif and Medina Sharif as well as in Kolkatta are privately licensed telephone booths spread all over the city. When a call (international or national) is made the caller receives a computer processed receipt showing all the particulars of the call. Its transparency is so convenient to users of these facilities. We have here unauthorised booths who fleece the callers or the BTTB. When these modern systems will be available to the public?

BTTB should issue booklets containing the current rules and tariffs for Overseas and NWD calls, per unit of half or full minute and the discounted call timings etc for the convenience of their subscribers.

Avery old subscriber
Dhaka

Tips for the new government

Hats off to the newly formed Government in declaring crusade against terrorism. This is definitely a positive move and a pre-condition towards democracy. Following are few tips for the new Government to follow, which I think, as a conscious

citizen, should take into consideration.

1. Strictly follow austerity in order to cut down expenditures including cutting the size of the Government.

2. Don't participate in anti-hartal activities even. People are tired of seeing political leaders on the streets. The people suffered immensely from all this. The present Government should abstain from doing so should Awami League call for hartal in near future.

3. The Government should not take any hasty decision that might go against the interest of the country regarding gas export. The Government should carefully handle this issue keeping in mind the interest of the country, the people and moreover giving no rooms to the Opposition parties to take advantage out of this.

4. All Ministers, State Ministers and Deputy Ministers should be accountable to the Prime Minister and the Treasury Bench members to the Leader of the Parliament in a true sense. The PM must set an example by taking actions against relatives of the party powerfuls in crime.

5. The Government should restrict those visitors entering the Bangladesh Secretariat who are found persuading the Ministers to gain personal benefits.

6. Having experienced from the

previous Government regime, the present Government should refrain from holding excessive public meetings, processions on the streets which causes enormous sufferings to the city dwellers and the business community arising out of traffic congestion.

7. The Government should not interfere into the activities of the law-enforcing agencies and refrain from interfering. They should be given freedom.

8. Action against terrorism and extortionist should be severely dealt with irrespective of party affiliation. It has been widely known that one of the main reasons Awami League has failed to come to power again was due to failure in combating terrorism and extortionists.

9. The Government should not use the media as their personal property. They should not excessively portray Shaheed President Ziaur Rahman in all media, especially on T.V. Excessive of anything brings negative impact as we have seen during Awami League Government.

10. Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia should not make any comment and attack personally on her political rival Sheikh Hasina.

Shamim Al-Rashid

Tophkana Road, Dhaka