

Have they gone mad?

From your daily, I learned that the AL leaders tried to convince the British Prime Minister of the present government's link to the Taliban. Was it not the AL chief who was making public statements criticising the U.S. and U.K. attacks against Afghanistan, which are targeted to get rid of the Taliban. Was it not Hasina herself who claimed a US conspiracy to put the BNP alliance in power? Was it not the AL leaders who claimed that our sovereignty would be compromised if foreign observers were to monitor the 2001 elections? Without even going into the hypocrisy of such contradictory statements, we can tell that AL is aware of the fate that the Taliban, and effectively the innocent Afghan people had to face. Is it not utterly irresponsible then for AL to make such baseless claims?

The Jamaat ministers are not my favourite either and I personally believe BNP made a big mistake by giving them the positions, but I would not even dream of calling the whole government Taliban or claiming that they have anything to do with it. I would never jeopardise my people by putting them at risk of US/UK wrath due to

such association! But may be that is because I have never tasted the joy of being in power over so many millions of people, ability to loot them, live like royalty with extorted money, buy mansions in Long Island, and then losing that sweet power to people's verdict. May be the AL leaders can do such enormous damage to the country's reputation and essentially ask for a war, because they themselves have enough money to get away - like their leader is now on vacation in the US rather than standing by the victims of what she claims to be "atrocities worse than that of 1971." What a joke!

A Concerned Citizen
Dallas, U.S.A.

Stop complaining

Complaining about our local problem to a visiting foreign dignitary reflects the mental qualities of the AL leaders. We came to know from different news papers that Sheikh Hasina tried to do the same thing during her recent visit in USA and UK although in Washington

she couldn't meet any ranking politicians.

What a shame for our country? Politicians are supposed to be honest and dedicated people who devote their life for the well being of the country. But what we see in Bangladesh is totally a different scenario.

We sincerely hope that good sense will prevail upon the Awami League and Sheikh Hasina, will accept people's verdict. The 'silent majority' has voted against their terrorism, corruption and bad politics. They still have time for self-purification. And they should not throw the country into uncertainty and despair.

Tarun
Bandarban

Govt has links with the Taliban!

Your news report of Januar 4 as to what Hasina said to Blair commands one comment only. "Is she mad"?

Javed Helali, USA



"So what about the Talibans...?"

"Pakistan and Islam"

I fully agree what Mr. Zobair Anam wrote in his letter "Pakistan and Islam" (January 5) that we are talking about a different generation of Pakistanis. I know many Pakistani families, living in the United States, who suffered the same kind of fate- as what Pakistani Army meted out on Bengali population - at the hands of Mukti Bahini. However they regretted what the Pakistan Army did in former East Pakistan. I am a Pakistani. My elder brother

personally relate to a life(s) lost on the highways of Bangladesh. Whenever I read about these horrific deaths I can't help but reflect back to a life that was lost not too long ago on the Dhaka-Chittagong Highway, a life that was full of laughter, happiness and above all hope.

With every death I relive the days following the horrible accident that took so much away from us. As an aftermath of the recent accidents, many lives are going to be changed forever, just as ours were changed.

lands, which were once covered by trees all the way from India to China, had trees that looked like candles on the alter of God.

They have been all cut down, particularly for fuel. Farmers are also clearing Nepal's steep mountainsides to build terraces for growing crops. Farmers hard pressed to grow enough food for this country that is doubling in less than 40 years -- its population landlocked-- go in and do terrace farming, cut away the vegetation, not realising that when they cut away the vegetation, they are cutting down nature's buffer zone.

According to Dr Fornos, all this nonsense leaves the land vulnerable to the annual monsoons. The heavy rains wash Nepal's topsoil away. That leads to more rapid runoff into neighbouring countries.

The most affected is Bangladesh which is a low-lying country crisscrossed with rivers that drain into the Bay of Bengal. Bangladesh has a long history of floods, and the loss of vegetation and soil on the mountain slopes of Nepal sends an ever greater annual surge of water into this small and crowded country.

Dr Fornos says, the situation in South Asia shows how environmental degradation does not respect national borders. The troubles of both Nepal and Bangladesh are only going to intensify as their populations continue to grow.

M. A. Obaydullah
Banani, Dhaka

Source of acid?

We frequently come across the tragic news of acid throwing. But, acid is not something used in our day to day life. Therefore if we intend to control crimes related to acid throwing, we should first control the easy availability of acid.

Dr. Lailun Nahar
Dhaka

A reality check

I obviously don't relish the prospect of a full-scale conventional-- much less nuclear-- armed conflict between India and Pakistan. But India has been unacceptably unwilling or unable to provide any respectable 'evidence' linking the Dec 13th attack to Kashmiri militant groups allegedly sponsored by Pakistan.

Mr. Vajpayee's regressive statements are eerily akin to those of Ariel Sharon's or Mr. Bush's. Having tried and failed to get Pakistan declared a "terrorist state" by America, India will doubtless try to use the present SAARC convention--aided by its allies-- to gang up

to isolate Pakistan and torpedo any meaningful dialogue toward conflict-resolution. Pakistan has not helped itself by its mostly defensive posturing, and incoherent, even contradictory, public statements (Gen Musharraf and Abdus Sattar routinely inspire ridicule and contempt for their fudges and U-turns). Just ask the Taliban and Kashmiri militant groups that are now the victims of Pakistani perfidy.

Pakistan must renew efforts to truly internationalise the Kashmir dispute now that India is willing to go to war over it. However, it has to learn to present a more robust case against India's savage subjugation

what we call 'geo-politics' and 'permanent national interests'.

Sajjad Husain
Dhaka

Windies-Pak series in Dhaka

We learnt that the Bangladesh Cricket Board has received draft itinerary from its Pakistan counterpart proposing to host their home series against West Indies as a neutral country. This is a great opportunity and we should grab it.

I think Eid-ul-Azha will not be such a problem if solved amicably, as apprehended by the Bangladesh

A. K. M. Nurul Absar
Dhaka

Muslim or not

Kudos to Mr Jamali for articulating his belief so openly. I fully agree what Arthur Miller wrote in his drama "after the fall" "I think finally one must take one's life in one's arms".

Oh yes it is. After all being a mature person means to take care of one's life as per one's practised principle and not to imposing or proselytising others. I am sure Mr. Jamali has seen that in the west, people are becoming more spiritual (not religious), abandoning organ-

ing to different creed, race and belief practitioner.

Just imagine how one Mother Theresa can make such a profound change. We do not need theologians to make ourselves holy, rather we need people like Sufi Rabeya, Ma Theresa, Baden Powell, Edhi of Pakistan, Mandela to bring peace and love and no more creed or organised religion.

Unfortunately the guardians of religions are too impatient to judge everyone hurriedly in this world.

Do they have any license, authorisation?

Certainly not. Because if you are truly blessed with the kindness of

not. It's a pity when in the Quran it has been clearly stated that women should cover their chest with the same cloth with which they cover their head, then none (I mean Muslims) should argue against that.

In *The Daily Star* some people wrote that by obeying Allah's rule people are confronting their own freedom of movement. That's ridiculous! Because when you are totally in control of Allah and when you can never ever go beyond the vicinity of Allah then how can one sense that he/she is a free wheeler?

Purdah for women is mandatory that is all right, but do you know there is *purdah* for men also? In the Quran men are ordered to walk in the streets by keeping their head down, eyes remaining on the ground. So, when men are roaming around with eyes widespread like torchlight, heads proudly high; how on earth you expect our female counterpart to be kept in the shell.

The exact paths of Islam should be followed by both the genders simultaneously. I did not find in the Quran that *purdah* should be imposed governmentally to women like in Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia or Iran etc. I support Bangladeshi government for not imposing *purdah*, that's good; but on the contrary, I do not support the fact that they are not raising awareness on Islamic practices.

M. S. Hamid (Bobby)
Old DOHS, Dhaka

Human chain

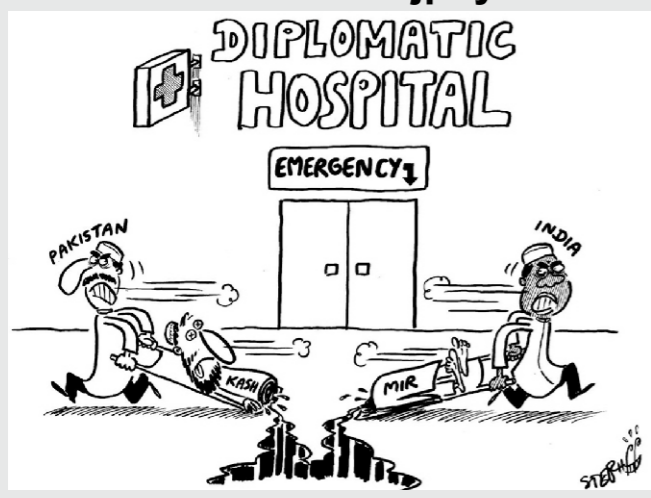
We were a little surprised to read that a human chain was made in protesting the arrest of Shahrar Kabir.

If someone is a freedom fighter, is he/she above the law and can do or undo whatever s/he likes or dislikes? In other words, and in the words of some AL leaders, if you are a freedom fighter/pro-liberation force, then they get the licence to kill, murder, rape and indulge in all sorts of corruption without any accountability.

Would you kindly tell me, where these so-called intellectuals were, when the past government and their henchmen killed, murdered so many people, arrested and implicated in false cases so many innocent people, raped so many women and committed unprecedented corruption, looted and plundered crores of public money. We have not seen a single protest from those so-called intellectuals.

Nasir, on e-mail

Musharraf meets Vajpayee



In a special gesture at the SAARC summit, Musharraf walked up to Vajpayee, offering his hand of sincere friendship and shook hands with him.

Musharraf's offer of friendship was part of Pakistan's desire to resolve all the outstanding differences with India through talks and urged India to pull back its troops and settle for a dialogue.

Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf gave a tough speech, saying that Pakistan, a victim of terrorism, is now part of a global alliance against terrorism and a distinction should be made between terrorist groups and resistance movements/freedom fighters.

He ended on a high note by saying that he was using the "exalted forum of the SAARC to extend a sincere hand of friendship to Prime Minister Vajpayee." And then he walked down, went up to Vajpayee.

Vajpayee, who seemed to be sitting with his eyes closed, rose and shook hands, and there was applause in the hall.

Musharraf had, it became clear, scored a moral point. He made India out to be a sullen and sulky neighbour.

It appeared that Vajpayee did not know what to do when Musharraf walked up to him. Vajpayee walked out for a moment, came back and inserted a note in his speech, which seemed to have been written in a hurry by a speechwriter.

And when it was his turn to speak Vajpayee looked disappointed and perplexed as he reeled off India's 'oft-repeated tale of woe'.

Mohsin Meer
Lahore, Pakistan

was a student of Dhaka University and a resident of S. M. Hall. During the crisis, in 1970, rooms of non-Bengali students were attacked by unruly mob. These students were dragged from their rooms and beaten to death. We even could not get my brother's dead body because it was badly mutilated and beyond the state of recognition. Still I do not have any negative feelings towards my Bengali brothers and sisters because after the period of thirty-two years hatred and condemnation will only give a chance to those vested interest who are ready to exploit the emotions of common man.

Khalid Mahmud
Georgia, USA ***

I fail to follow the logic of Mr. Zobair Anam's tirade against Ms. Nadia. Mr Anam, it is a fact of documented history that Pakistani soldiers perpetrated genocide in the then East Pakistan in 1971. It is also a proven fact that they killed innocent Bengali Muslim men, women and children. Mr. Anam, you can refer to the archives of any newsmagazine from that period (TIME, Newsweek, etc) to confirm this and you may also while looking, glance at the photographs of the many mosques the barbaric Pak Army destroyed during the nine months of horror they perpetrated on our soil.

What does the new generation of Pakistanis feel is beside the point. Bangladesh is still waiting for an official apology from Pakistan. History shows us that the Pakistanis at times of war and aggression do not spare Muslims or Muslim targets from devastation. India has every right to protect its national monument in whatever way it sees fit. Mr. Anam's idea of intellectualism seems to be to ignore the historical truth.

Shaila Hoque
USA

Highway deaths

One will be hard pressed these days to find a person who cannot

Life will go on, just as it always does. Some will avoid the Dhaka-Ctg or other major Highways, just as I do whenever I am home. But that has not solved anything. Ignoring a problem only tends to making it even bigger.

We should act now or we risk becoming insensitive to these horrific deaths, lest we have already become. Though the task of reducing accidents is too huge an undertaking for the government to manage on its own, but it still has to evaluate its recent efforts in curbing the problem. I don't want to speculate anything from so far away, but I highly doubt that the government has highway patrols monitoring traffic on the major highways of Bangladesh. If no such arrangement exists, I am pretty sure that lack of foresightedness will reign over lack of funds as a viable reason for non-action.

The sceptics would say, as they always do, that these patrols would only add to the problem by adding another layer to the bribe-hungry traffic control mechanism we have in our country. But a sceptic who has lost a family member will not be so subtle in jumping to such easy conclusions. With the naysayers out of the way, the present government has three avenues open in front of it:

1. Hide behind the failures of previous government and play the ever-popular blame game.
2. Ignore the problem, since most of the people who die are poor and insignificant to a government run by the elite.
- 3) Act as a true government would, should and ought to act.

It includes Nepal, a small country that sits on the southern flank of the Himalayas. Rapid population growth has forced the farmers onto steep mountain slopes, setting off a chain of environmental problems.

Dr Werner Fornos, who heads the Population Institute, a non-profit group in Washington D.C., says that Nepal's breathtaking landscape is dramatically changing as people cut trees for wood to heat homes and cook meals. The Himalayan high-

Simi's death: A shocking moment of truth



Even till yesterday, I believed that the future of women in Bangladesh was promising. I took pride that in my native country, the role of women was not only becoming more prominent but they were being respected as individuals by their male counterparts. Which other country in the world can boast of a female Prime Minister and an opposition leader? But today I have not only realised how wrong I was but also

have come to comprehend the depraved nature of the male dominated society of Bangladesh regardless of who is leading the nation. The very superficiality of the society has never been more apparent. Bangladesh, the country I was born in and the place I cherish most. The country every Bangladeshi calls his '*matribhumi*'; (motherland) and claims to love, that very '*matribhumi*' have been disgraced by the sons of the soil in the most heinous manner. And in this very country can an innocent woman die and the perpetrators live, only because they are men? Women can be raped of their individuality and that is accepted to be normal. After reading about Simi, I am ashamed of what my country stands for. Yes, it may be a rerun for many of the citizens and surely this story would

Board Director. Rather this will be a great joy for the fans of this Cricket-loving country. At the same time, the cricket players of the country will also be able to learn many things in practical. Our hearts were broken at the recent performances of the cricket-concerned people of our country.

Frequently, we remember the remarks made by the Indian coach Mr. Laia Amarnath and the sad departure of the great West Indian cricketer-coach Mr. Gordon Greenidge.

At least, give us some merry time to heal up the bad memories.

be pushed to the back pages in a matter of days, but to me it's the most humiliating moment of cognition as a Bangladeshi.

If we just leave it as 'a tragic, terrifying death', we will not only let Simi's death go in vain but also resolute to a similar fate to possibly thousands of women. What good are the laws of Bangladesh, if the culprits of such crimes can move around freely? In my eyes, it is crucial to bestow the harshest punishment to the sub-inspector Bashar, along with the other gang members because he, who was responsible to serve justice, committed the most appalling crime. The culprits should be punished in such a way that no one can dare think of doing anything similar to this again.

Sumaiya Islam
Indiana University, USA

"A tragic terrifying death"

Thank you, for printing the story of this young woman.

To say I am disgusted is an understatement. But more to the point I am disgusted by the leaders of our nation. Both of whom are women and both of whom do no more than pay lip service to protecting women.

Bangladesh should be held up as an example of a moderate Muslim country where women have equal rights and can choose whether or not to follow the strictures of Islam and how they wish to lead their lives.

Instead, day by day, we are becoming a more narrow minded society, dominated by men and led by two women who are too busy running back and forth from their incessant religious pilgrimages rather than do anything.

MA, on e-mail

ised religion and rather caring to protect the mother earth. Our main concern should be towards the well being of our fellow human beings and this beautiful planet where we live in.

Gone are the days of messiah and prophets to redeem ourselves because there is no one actually anywhere to save us. We are our only saviour, that is the wish of our creator otherwise S/he would not have waited for us to correct the wrongs around ourselves. We are blessed that we are the creation out of love and not to be judged by some harsh criteria, rather Almighty is merciful. So we should be forgiv-

God, you would never try to judge others.

I request them to think how we are recipients of God's mercy so without being judged by him/her at first place.

One who sees light, do not argue on the properties of light as only one experience can understand the other whereas religious debate (bahas) can offer a structural nothingness

Rezaur Rahim
Montreal, Canada

Purdah debate

Long debate is going on in *The Daily Star* whether *Purdah* is obligatory or

Hail to thee, Shahabuddin Ahmed

At last, the former President Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed has broken the silence. He has vehemently criticised some politicians and the so-called columnist.

Shahabuddin Ahmed commented, "I am an angel if everything is done according to their desire, otherwise I am a devil". This is the nature of a major political party, which even didn't hesitate to launch an agitation programme with the Razakars in 1995-96. Ironically, they proclaim that it is only them who uphold the spirit of independence.

These politicians have some hired writers who write according to their wishes. They didn't hesitate to make up stories and defend their party in crisis. Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed was their latest victim.

Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed will be remembered in Bangladesh for his role in establishing democracy. And Abdul Gaffar Chowdhury tried to destroy this man's reputation by fabricating stories! Abdul Gaffar Chowdhury resides in a safe place in London and enjoy the facilities provided by the British government. It is time the government investigated his controversial activities.

Thank you Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed for revealing the truth.

Oli Md. Abdullah Chowdhury
MC College, Sylhet

Unmask them

On behalf of the people of Bangladesh, I congratulate former President Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed for unmasking Sheikh Hasina, some AL leaders and their sycophants.

I humbly request the Awami supporters and sympathisers if they want to save AL from further humiliation and also to protect the image of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib then they should remove the party chief Sheikh Hasina from the post.

Iqbal Ahmed
Dhaka

Shahabuddin reacts

What has this country come to? The former President has been the target of countless, malicious innuendoes from the interested quarters. He has been slandered in the worst possible way. He has been called names and run down publicly in the vilest manner. He has been even called a traitor.

Apparently, his only crime was that he has served this country with integrity, honour, and distinction. His only crime was that he steered this nation courageously in its darkest hours and was instrumental in ensuring that the elections held in 1991 and 2001 were fair and free. Because of this, the most unfair and unfounded

criticism were heaped upon him by the opposition political party stalwarts, and worse yet, the most vicious aspersions were cast upon his character by a gang of so called "intellectuals," who are a disgrace to this nation. Is there no end to this?

Losing an election ignominiously can be painful and difficult to digest. But no matter how painful it is, that is no justification for calumniating an honourable man like former President, Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed. The leaders of the opposition party and the self-styled "pro-liberation intellectuals" should sense the heart beat of the people. The people have given an overwhelming victory to the

4-party alliance and they have given this for valid reasons.

The people are not enamoured with the 4-party alliance, but they were definitely fed up with the previous government for publicly and shamelessly supporting known terrorists. The people have no illusion about the 4-party alliance and its capability, but



The blame game

they were completely disappointed by the unprecedented level of corruption and nepotism of the previous government. Contrary to the dreams of the politicians and their subservient intellectual coterie, the people of this country are not a bunch of idiots to be duped by any vested quarters. They made a clear and unequivocal choice in the election.

There's no big conspiracy or grand design to defeat or make victorious a particular political party. The sooner the opposition leaders and the mighty intellectuals read the signs on the wall, the better. The sooner they wake up from their daydreams and feel the pulse of the people, the better.

Finally, before hurling further spiteful insinuations in the direction of Justice Shahabuddin, the politicians and their intellectuals should realize that this one man has more credibility in people's eyes than that of all the politicians and intellectuals combined.

And as for Mr. Abdul Gaffar Chowdhury, I can only pray for his sanity and guidance. Mr. Chowdhury, living in his self-created make believe world of illusion, is so far removed from the reality of Bangladesh, that nobody takes him seriously anymore. In the vast ocean of honor that is Justice Shahabuddin, Mr. Abdul Gaffar Chowdhury is not even a dot.

Dr. Rafat A. Quyyum Khan
Dhaka

Shaabuddin Ahmed and AL

I have gone through with keen interest the reactions of Justice Shahabuddin to some remarks made by Sheikh Hasina against the person of the Justice himself. This is really sad and unfortunate to say the least. Sheikh Hasina's remarks are not only false but also demeaning. With no reflections on anyone I is almost certain that given the existing state of affairs the nation as a whole is yet to repay its debts to a man like Shahabuddin Ahmed. To the nation at large by these remarks Sheikh Hasina has only succeeded in proving herself to be merely a frustrated and an angry loser. I am afraid vilification and character assassination has become a second nature to her. *The Daily Star* itself had pointed out this matter a number of times in the past.

Not only against individuals she has now let loose her tirade against the entire nation itself and its very image. It is one thing to politically fight your opponent and it is quite another to make derogatory remarks about an ongoing sensitive issue which may jeopardise the very image of the country and may even harm the country's socio-economic position in both long and short term perspectives. It is my earnest belief that sooner the government enacts a law through the parliament, which will put an end to such irresponsible remarks, which are likely to cause sectarian conflicts hurting the religious sentiments of the general masses of the country, the better.

It is my request to the intellectual community and the conscious civil society to come out strongly against such intimidating statements by none other than the Leader of the opposition. Sheikh Hasina would do well to remember that if she is the leader of the opposition today so was Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed the President of the country yesterday, a President who was lauded for his role by the entire nation including Sheikh Hasina. I am afraid given a matter of profile Justice Shahabuddin stands way above Sheikh Hasina.

To me it appears that all this, as far as, Sheikh Hasina is concerned is an extended expression of her party's defeat in the last national elections.

Shamsher, on e-mail