

To Far East Economic Review

Mr Editor (Far Eastern Economic Review Magazine), in your April issue you have written at length about Bangladesh, A Cocoon of Terror, using the words "revolution", "...trying to downplay the threat", "the cleric snarled", "nest for terror, and even call for a "counter-revolution". Are you trying to say something here that I am missing in my familiarity with that country?

As a regular visitor to Bangladesh- though it is a year since I last visited - to the contrary of what you are implying, that Bangladesh is a fertile ground for global violence, I would remind you that The Economist gave Bangladesh the plum of being the happiest nation in the world.

While that made me smile rather, if not grimace, that and much more positive reports in very decent journals such as The Herald Tribune would also paint a more positive picture of that country.

What you are saying in the article can be said today about any number of countries because everything is now coming to the surface, everywhere. Yes, in Indonesia as you significantly say. Of course there would be a sector within Bangladesh, which supports extremist Islam, it is a democracy.

On the street in Bangladesh Bin Laden is the hero and Bush the evil one. Well, the USA government has long been the enemy in the underdeveloped countries, partly through envy and desire to get what the USA seems to have got, and, rightly so given the demands of the IMF and World Bank, and we may as well throw in the UN, all of which are seen to be in the hands of the US government.

Bush is a right-winger with all of the links to the military-industrial complex that depends on control over resources and access to cheap labour and many countries are using the US dictates to execute local dissidents and have become unafraid of international criticism.

Opposition parties have a right to act against injustice. It is their role. Without the checks and balances of an effective opposition, whether voted into position or simply self-elected, a democracy



Bangladesh on the cover

"We are ashamed"

I was thrilled to read the letter "We are ashamed" by Mr Shopon Rahman. Here we have a person who has the courage and honesty to speak his mind and say what other BNP supporters cannot say. I hope this will encourage others to speak up. Many of us who had some soft corners for BNP do not subscribe to the following:

- 1. Continue to distort history. Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib is the undisputed leader of Bangladesh and therefore the Father of the

about Bangladesh and its leader Begum Zia... she is no less a culprit! Perhaps this is my last visit to Bangladesh.... No more in Bangladesh till Begum Zia decides to change!

David Swartz Hartmond, Victoria

Portrait politics

After repealing the existing law regarding hanging of Bangabandhu's portrait, the Prime Minister, may be out of her sheer

body and mind. There is something wrong with the entire Bengal belt. We have the Banerjees on one side and Begums on the other. For God's sake leave Sheikh Mujib alone!

We simply have too many leaders by default. In our country agitators mostly street agitators given a few years or so turn out to be politicians. Then to become a political leader you slowly and gradually proceed to collect a handful of the so-called social elite and pseudo intellectuals and a gang of terrorists.

While the whole nation is witnessing the worst tumults of its existence, we should teach our posterity to take cue from this proud chapter. I would, however, like to make a correction. Saiful Azam retired as a Group Captain and not a Squadron Leader, while he was the senior most officer of the BAF and should have taken over as the air force chief. But as it is, he was deprived and a very incompetent man who was much junior to him was elevated to the coveted post.

Group Captain (ret'd) Azam was a true hero and everything Mr ES wrote is absolutely true. Let us for a moment share the pride with this great son of the soil and emulate his examples and teach posterity to do the same.

Ahmad Kamal Abu Dhabi, UAE

The letter "A Bengali hero" has some errors and for the record I would like to correct them. The name of the hero is Sqd Ldr. Saiful Azam and not Islam. He was Chairman of Film Development Corp. and not Director. Before that he was the Chairman of Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh where he was sent back once again from FDC.

In 1991 he was elected MP from Kashinathpur with all time record of highest votes ever cast in anybody's favour.

Saiful Azam was educated in the Pakistan Air Force Public School at Sargodha and on joining Pakistan Air Force was sent to USA for training before being commissioned in PAF. During 1971 he was confined to Mauripur Base and was not allowed to fly.

I was his class friend at Sargodha.

Emran A. Beg Dhaka

cannot work. Likewise the need for proper dissemination of information - a free press.

On my visits to Bangladesh I have hidden in shops out of the way when police fought with demonstrators and yes, the protestors were of the fundamentalist breed, or at least they wore the all white attire. But in Bangladesh you can organise a big street demonstration for US\$1,000.

Bangladesh is a secular country and a democracy and the majority of Bangladeshis are modern Muslims having nothing to do with extremism or violence. Emotional yes, that is the Bengali temperament. The country has perennial economic problems exacerbated by non-co-operation by neighbours over refugees.

Of course any stateless person is potential fodder for violence. What is Myanmar or the UN doing about the 59,000 stateless Rohingyas in the Chittagong Hill Tracts and around Cox's Bazaar? Or India? Also, the Shanti Bahini (Buddhist) manifesto awaits fulfillment and there are still smouldering problems in the CHT. But what country is without border problems, minority groups problems? That does not mean a country is going to the dogs.

Our humanist groups - we are part of the world-wide Humanist Movement - are happily mixed with Islamic, Hindu, Christian and Buddhist members and there is no dissension among us - surely there is boisterous dialogue. It is a point of pride among our members that there is that tolerance.

That such a small and damp area of the Indian sub-continent is able to sustain 120 million people is much more newsworthy than the likelihood that among those 120 million a band of violent dissenters are joining renegade armies, if that be true - because your article gave no specific information to substantiate its claims.

It could be simply that they are seeking a feeling of camaraderie and a way out of their present predicament of no income, no intact family, no country. In other words, they want a life, which they presume the rest of us with our television sets and the Internet have!

We do not see, in any way, Bangladesh as a likely source of such

exported violence as indicated by the article in your April issue.

Tony Henderson Chairman, Humanist Association of Hong Kong

I have read the Far Eastern Economic Review (FEER) article on Bangladesh and find no fault in it except for some omissions. To us in the urban areas the madness of Jamaat and that lot seem very distant. I have hardly ever even been to the South Eastern parts of Bangladesh.

But the FEER is certainly correct in pointing out that these semi-literate and utterly unemployable madrasa graduates are a threat to stability.

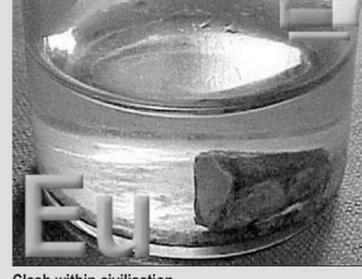
What the article omits is that both the BNP and AL publicly sponsor terrorism and intimidation. That AL would have gladly taken Jamaat as a partner if only it were not so complacent about its electoral victory. And for me the most important of all, the harassment of journalists, the contempt for free press and the use of sedition charges willy-nilly.

In Bangladesh, one cannot criticise the holy trinity of the Quran, Bangabandhu and President Zia. The first for fear of your life, the second formerly by law and now will just result in your name on a list for reckoning later on and the last will mean losing your job if you work for the government.

This government is well on its way to chalk up another episode as a total failure in another third world banana republic. Except Banana Republic will not place orders in such a country for much longer.

MA Dhaka

On trade war between USA and EU



Clash within civilisation

I am quite impressed at the European Commission's smart and clever move against America. It is considering imposing high tariff on a list of products (fruits, textiles) whose manufacturing and processing plants are located in Florida, a state now very dear to Mr. Bush. It should be. Mr. Bush owes his presidency to this state; it saved his day in the 2000 presidential election. If the retaliatory measures do take effect it could cost Mr. Bush his job. Because the tariffs could very well bring lay-offs in Florida. The Americans may not mind fighting a war against terrorism but they do mind losing their jobs.

There is absolutely no doubt that the current imposition of tariffs on global steel import has further confirmed the hypocrite that America is. It does not believe what it says. On more than one occasion I have heard the government speaking of fare competition, free trade. Yet when it comes to making the critical decision, one that requires rising above the grip of the lobbyists, one that could serve as a milestone to the entire world it miserably fails. It is even unforgiving towards its allies. I am quite stunned how it had the nerve to impose a tariff when it is seeking support of the world, especially of Europe in its war against terrorism. In a rare show of solidarity NATO even invoked article (V) of its constitution. And this is how America returned gratitude!

The American struggle for freedom, liberty and justice has inspired millions of people across the world. Yet it is the double standards the US government pursues at its whim that creates a handful of enemies who are hell-bent on its destruction. There are numerous instances in history where double dealers are met with a wretched and horrible fate. Should America wait to see history repeat itself?

Muksitul Islam IBA, Dhaka University

While the whole nation is witnessing the worst tumults of its existence, we should teach our posterity to take cue from this proud chapter. I would, however, like to make a correction. Saiful Azam retired as a Group Captain and not a Squadron Leader, while he was the senior most officer of the BAF and should have taken over as the air force chief. But as it is, he was deprived and a very incompetent man who was much junior to him was elevated to the coveted post.

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spirit of freedom that inspired millions to sacrifice their lives was not driven in the right direction.

Still my humble request is not to call it a hangover. Why not watch the films on the liberation war to appreciate the sacrifice of the millions. Where our generation has failed, the younger generation may triumph over. But don't call it a "hangover" as that will besmear the sense of national pride.

M Taheruddin Dhaka

Distortion of history-- a bone of contention indeed!

During the last 30-years of independence two versions of the history of Liberation War have evolved in Bangladesh one is Awami League version and the other is BNP version. According to the AL version, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman is the Father of the Nation and Ziaur Rahman was merely the reader of the declaration of independence. On the other hand, according to the BNP version, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman is not the Father of the Nation, he is just a national leader, and Ziaur Rahman declared the independence.

There's a third version of the aforesaid history, which is partly acceptable and partly abominable by and to the supporters of both the parties. According to this version, Sheikh Mujib did not want the independence of the country in 1971; he wanted to be the Prime Minister of Pakistan and was engaged in a prolonged dialogue with Yahya Khan on that respect. On the other hand, Ziaur Rahman was not the declarer of independence. As he was the senior most army officer happened to be present at the Kalur Ghat radio station in Chittagong, he was given the opportunity by the Awami League leaders, who were present there, to read out the declaration of independence.

The debate on the distortion of history by the one or the other party will never help us reach a consensus. In spite of this fact, it is a succulent debate and a pastime for our media political leaders and their staunch supporters, who have little taste for our more important national issues on which the survival of our dying nation depend.

So let us go on harping, tireless, for ages on the deliberate distortion of the history of our independence and let the nation languish under the poverty, corruption, misrule, malnutrition, health hazards, illiteracy and what not. We are blessed enough that our newspapers relish this sort of debate profoundly.

Faruque Hasan Dhanmandi, Dhaka

Use of common sense

Many years ago a friend of mine requested his English boss if he would consider employing a young man who is an MA and is known to him. The English boss asked, "Does this boy have common sense? If he has common sense send him over."

Rightly so. Many intricate problems in life can be solved by common sense, be it family matters, business or running a government. If the leaders of our yesteryears had used common sense and said that Bengali and Urdu would both be the national language of Pakistan and English a common language, the course of history would have been different. Similarly if after the 1970 general election power were handed over to Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, today history would have been written differently. In both instances common sense did not prevail.

There are perhaps thousands of instances of national importance where common sense is never used. Common sense says that if political parties reach consensus on important economic matters then our country can make rapid progress. But this will never happen because our leaders believe in

confrontational politics. My letter may not get the attention of personalities who are destined to guide our nation but we do need a government run on common sense.

Ziauddin Ahmed Gulshan, Dhaka

Bipartisan irresponsibility

Not to be outdone by the ruling coalition's leaders or national khatibs, the Awami League too has joined the bandwagon of irresponsible and dangerous statements.

Taking a cue from Baitul Mukarram Khatib Obaidul Haque, and a certain sitting cabinet minister, Dhaka Mayor Mohammad Hanif in a public rally over the weekend called the United States the 'biggest sponsor of terrorism'. I certainly hope that the United States consular officials will remember it when the next time the mayor plans his annual visit to the USA.

Arafat's Palestine, Sharon's Israel



Present tense

Israel's claim that Arafat is masterminding the suicide bombings in the Tel Aviv and other Israeli cities would have held some ground up until the blast on Passover Day. Till then there was a shadow of doubt that Arafat may have had some control over his factions but being isolated in a room with virtually no command centre and the three suicide bombings inside Israel in two days just goes to show what an oppressed nation under illegal occupation can resort to in a state of desperation.

Killing Yasser Arafat or exiling him would turn every Palestinian into living bombs and what is even more worrying is that this war would now spill over into the entire region, the suicide bombings in the last two weeks would then be considered just the tip of the iceberg. When you have nothing more to lose, and you have nowhere else to go the only way out is to hit back and that is what the Palestinians will do.

The war on terrorism just died a sudden death this week. Israel lost whatever credibility or sympathy it had from the rest of the world and America lost the privilege of being the honest broker.

Farhan Quddus Old DOHS, Dhaka

- Nation. 2. Use political power to abuse and torture the Opposition. 3. Shelter criminals for political gains. 4. Indirectly support killing and raping the minorities.

For the first time in the history of Bangladesh, Khaleda Zia's government was refused foreign aid at the Paris Consortium meeting. She has no shame or rather she does not care except that she is satisfied that she is the PM.

Newspapers like The Daily Star should do more to make PM Khaleda Zia see sense!

Kaniz Fatema London, UK

"Should our sons come back"

Thanks to MA for his rather personal note (April 3). Now that he has 'exposed' me, I feel it is my duty to inform him that, yes, I do plan to return to my beloved Bangladesh-- he need not worry. I am also happy to have made him realise that it isn't our fellow Bangladeshis in Dingle Berry, NJ, but people like me who have the education, business contacts, and capital backing to make a difference, that he should have been thinking about when composing his initial note.

Cryptic Fate USA

Perhaps this is my last trip to Bangladesh!

I have visited Bangladesh at least ten times over the last 20 years in relation to my business activities. Never ever I felt so disgusted and felt so helpless than my last visit in March this year.

The country has now turned into a fascist regime marred by political vendetta, physical tortures of those who believe in different ideologies and a sense of insecurity all over. My friends in Bangladesh see no future-- human rights remaining a far cry! We talk about Mugabe, Saddam Hossain and others! What

sympathy for Bangabandhu suggested in the parliament for enactment of a new law on the issue for what she said; to remove the controversy for once and for all. She also invited the Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina to help formulate the law.

However, I don't think the new law would help end the controversy even if Awami League accepts the proposal. After all, the issue is not the concern of only the Awami League or BNP but the whole nation.

The new law stipulating the hanging of Sheikh Mujib, Ziaur Rahman and the Head of the State would not end controversy but would inflame it.

During the Liberation War, General MAG Osmany was the Commander in Chief of the Bangladesh Army. There were 10 more Sector Commanders excluding the then Major Ziaur Rahman who were fighting under the single command of General Osmany. The other Sector Commanders did not get an opportunity to become the President of the Republic and float political parties, so their sons or daughters could not claim to hang their fathers' portraits alongside the portraits of the Father of the Nation. If we plan to honour the war heroes, General MAG Osmany occupies the top position in the list. Even if we accept that Ziaur Rahman read out the Declaration of Liberation War, we should not belittle other valiant freedom fighters. We can't forget the national leaders like Maulana Bhashani, Syed Nazrul Islam, Tajuddin...

I would therefore request AL and BNP to consider this point before enacting new laws regarding the portrait issue. To solve or address one, we should not create new controversies. Shafiqul Islam Fulbaria, Savar, Dhaka

I have been carefully following all that has appeared in your esteemed daily on the portrait issue. I have a short comment. I had all along maintained that Bangladeshis are a poor people in

No terrorist is not the right word it should be hoodlums. Money, never mind it will keep coming.

The good thing of it all is that despite all this The Daily Star will continue to be the winner any time and every time.

Shamsher Chowdhury Dhaka

"A Bengali hero"

I write this as a supplementary information to what Mr ES wrote in the letter "A Bengali hero".

I would like to thank him for bringing to light such a proud and refreshing episode of our history.

Down with bad politics!



As a cynical voter, I find sadistic pleasure in the way BNP and AL are clawing at each other in a self-destructive manner. That is the law of nature - evil will destroy evil, because the minorities are in the right path.

I am sure the voters do not care for political parties, which waste 80 per cent of the time on each other. Our politicians have to trim themselves to size, and come begging to the voters for rendering voluntary service-- not command service.

We have seen enough of bilateral politics, and have been completely disillusioned. Let some new political parties develop, as we cannot live with these two abnormal parties forever. They have overused themselves, and have no reserve energy left for public service.

The police mentality has to be completely revamped. They are not only useless, but also standing in the way of clean public service. The politicians are responsible for all the ills in the present day society; because we have not yet paid the full price of freedom, and it cannot be done in mere nine months.

Acynical voter Dhaka

spit on them," our compatriot defenders of secularism, great followers of Udichi President Wahidul Haque's fatwa on Bengali culture, are disgracefully involved in flashing banners like "Taliban - New hideout is Bangladesh", "Islamic Fundamentalists are killing Hindus and Christians in Bangladesh", "Bangladesh is a new Taliban State", "Stop Islamisation", "Save US" etc. here in US and even in Australia.

The 4th April issue of Far Eastern Economic Review is a burning example.

The people, who do care for the interest of Bangladesh more than the Western concept of secularism or the nineteenth century Bengal dominated by Hindu Bhadrlok (gentlemen) such as Raja Ram Mohan Roy, should work out a way where we can bring Maulana Obaidul Haque and Wahidul Haque together at one round table and help them understand why we do need to be cautious regarding the international image of Bangladesh. We also do need to educate them about the very goal of our nation. Bangladesh aspires to be an Asian tiger, not either a Taliban state like Afghanistan nor a nineteenth century Bengal dominated by Hindu Bhadrloks.

At the same time, more importantly the people who proclaim to be the champions of human rights in Bangladesh and defenders of secularism, should keep their party based political activities out of the business of their actual job.

They do also need to learn how to show respect to the average people of Bangladesh, most of whom belong to a community of Islamic faith.

Lastly, the so-called pro-Liberation force in Bangladesh, as a whole, however, do need to be more cautious and behave with maturity; not to be just good and sensible, but also to improve our international image in the world.

This is horribly absent in the activities of our pro-Chetona friends (proclaiming themselves as "free-thinkers" but 'not' in reality) who exude a very closed, parochial mentality and categorically fail to help with our collective efforts to make our beloved Bangladesh a land of South Asian Economic Tiger.

Sohail Ahmad Dartmouth, Massachusetts, USA

On telecom

The article under caption "Freaky figures leave telecom graft case on fragile footing" by Abu Saeed Khan (April 2) was extremely enlightening. It seems there is a tussle between the two different wings in the Prime Minister's office.

We as common law abiding citizens and also as taxpayers are looking forward to bring the culprits to task. There is a saying that justice delayed is justice denied.

Khairul Masud Banani, Dhaka

Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir's arrest

If the charge of sedition could be brought against Dr. Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir for declaring his allegiance to a successful mass upsurge that toppled a farcically elected government, then what kind of charge should be lodged against Khaleda Zia, who as Leader of the Opposition, has, on numerous occasions, publicly and unsuccessfully incited the civil servants to revolt against a duly elected government?

Dr. Mozammel H. Khan School of Science and Technology

ing me up, cutting my nails and bringing hot tea to my room. One boy, before I settled for the night in my bed, regularly came into my room and kissed me on the forehead while asking for my prayers.

A convert to Islam for five years, I lost my family's affection because of that decision, and now live on my own. A retired Psychologist, I am involved in volunteer work with the Muslim community in Toronto, Canada; my hometown.

If ever I can be of any help to anyone from Bangladesh, I would consider it an honour. Feel free to contact me.

Jim Dorion (AKA M. Mustafa) amicable@sympatico.ca

Between two Haques?

As a non-resident Bangladeshi I intend to convey to my respected readers that there does not exist any fundamental difference between the Khatib of Baitul Muqarram Mosque Maulana Obaidul Haque and the President of Udichi Shilpi Gosthi Wahidul Haq. While Maulana Obaidul Haque is giving 'khubta' that "President Bush and America is the most heinous terrorist in the world. Both America and Bush must be destroyed. The Americans will be washed away if Bangladesh's 120 million Muslims

"Secularism: East vs West"

I read Mr. Shamsher Chowdhury's letter with interest. It seems to me that the Muslim clerics have one or two other problems. Most of them are not well educated in Theology. Some of them are not very knowledgeable in Islamic history. This is because there is no career structure for the clerics.

These are the reasons why they spread myths rather than present-