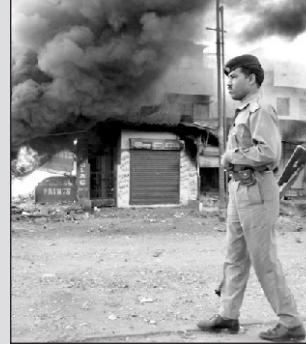


We are not a terrorist country



Happened in Gujarat, but not in Bangladesh

In its April 4th issue FEER identified Bangladesh as a terrorist and fundamentalist country. I want to tell its reporter Bertil Lintner that Bangladesh was never a terrorist and fundamentalist country, it is never so, nor will be. The people of Bangladesh irrespective of religion, race, colour and creed lives side by side with peace and harmony for ages and it's a moderate Muslim country.

Before making any derogatory comment against Bangladesh look at Israel and India. The Jews and the Hindus in the Middle East and India are massacring hundreds of Palestinians and Indian Muslims in a cold-blooded and systematic way. Israeli Premier Ariel Sharon is the butcher of the Muslim world and Israel is world's number one terrorist country. It is India, which is the most fanatic and fundamentalist country of the world.

Bertil Lintner, journalist like you make a mountain out of a molehill and also make hue and cry if you find anything in a Muslim country but shut your eyes and close your ears when heinous crimes, atrocities and genocide are committed by the non-Muslim countries on innocent Muslims. If you are a true and honest journalist and have the courage then write against Israel and India.

Iqbal Ahmed
New Eskaton Road, Dhaka

FEER's journalism

I am quite alarmed with the April 4 issue of FEER that carries a myth rather than a fact. If the reporter Bertil Lintner had taken a little more trouble of visiting some of the countryside where the majority live and did a little more investigative work, he could not have reached the conclusions that FEER has reported. Let me raise the following issues.

Bangladesh got its independence in 1971 after a bloody struggle that cost us 3 million people. We fought against the Pakistan Army who happen to be Muslim by faith.

Bangladesh is surrounded by India, Burma and Bay of Bengal--none of which is a facilitator for the spread of Islam nor any radicalism whether it be communism.

It is also an undeniable fact that the majority of the population is Muslim and to be a Muslim, one needs to know the basic teachings of Islam as in any other religion.

Alike any other branch of learning, students from Bangladesh go to other countries including India for higher studies in Islamic teachings and similarly it is reciprocated by other countries. So, where is the problem? FEER highlights Jamaat-e-Islami but this party would remain a factor in political horse-trading but will never become a dominant factor in Bangladesh politics. People in general are faithful and that far they will go but have no fascination for these elements.

The younger generation is more interested in developing their careers than indulging in politics of any kind. It does not exclude the students who are from madrassahs. So, the poor parents who cannot send their children to schools, the madrassahs not only offer an education but also food and accommodation. Well, one can always argue about the quality of education but madrassahs have at least done the minimum duty to humanity.

There are many who will raise the criteria that puts Awami League as a secular and left-leaning political party--a travesty of the truth. During the election in 1996, it was this very Awami League who took Jamaat-e-Islami under their wing as well as the deposed notorious military dictator HM Ershad.

I will agree with your report absolutely that there is a serious law and order situation in Bangladesh. For the first time ever, our development partners have tied it to their aid to Bangladesh. I for one laud this step of the international community. But at the same time, this law and order situation has absolutely nothing to do with madrassahs nor its students or Muslims.

Please be a little more objective and just not get carried away with a typical CNN attitude.

Khandaker R Zaman
Dhaka, Bangladesh

Are we fundamentalists?

What is tantalising about all the

lims of Gujarat only a month ago. This not has cost a great number of lives. In Sri Lanka the clash between government and Tamil Tigers is creating havoc in the country. And look at Nepal, the Mao activists have rocked the whole nation with terrorism. If Bangladesh is regarded as a "Cocoon of Terrorism", what would FEER call these states?

I would confess that there are fundamentalist parties in Bangladesh that are also partners of the ruling party. However it does not mean Bangladesh is governed by the Talibans. The people of Bangladesh are mostly moderate Muslims, they are religious but not fanatical. There was not the slightest uproar seen in Bangladesh during Gujarat riot.

Surely we have protested against America, for attacking Afghanistan and for backing Israel. Don't you think we have the right to protest when we find humanity endangered?

However, the government shouldn't have reacted so unwisely like banning the 4th April issue of FEER. They have the right to say whatever they are saying and we also have the right to reply with our pen. We all have to stand up against this evil movement through our media. I sincerely hope that FEER will apologise to our nation for presenting such a negative image of Bangladesh.

Muhammad Ridwan Anam
Chittagong College, Chittagong

Kushtia daily Editor and journalists' responsibility

On one hand the government protests the FEER article accusing Bangladesh to be a cocoon of terrorism. On the other hand it goes ahead and charges another journalist for doing his duty.

The FEER may have been wrong about Bangladesh being a cocoon of Islamic terrorism. But as a police state we seem to be making great progress.

However, if the article were to be true by any means, and the baseless fact that Bangladesh is being

The Committee to Protect Journalists to know

comments is no evidence whatsoever has been provided to prove the Journal is wrong. Some brave individual said to be burnt some copies of the magazine in Hong Kong. A quite uncommon way to protest in any civilised world. Contrary burn, kill, remove, etc., are the common ways and language of the fundamentalists. We do not know if we are proving that the Journal's evaluation is correct. The term "Moderate Muslim" country is also unclear. In fact we should stand and clearly tell the world that we are a Muslim country or a democratic country where Majority of the people follow Islam as their religion.

People also want to know

A cocoon of terror: Bangladesh replies



Many faces of Bangla politics

For many of us living in secular democratic societies in the West and keeping a close watch on the events back at home, the FEER's report on rising fundamentalism and religious intolerance threatening secularism and moderate Islam in Bangladesh, has not come as an utter surprise. The reaction of the government was totally predictable but that of the press is somewhat baffling given that one does not need to look farther than *The Daily Star's* investigative reports of the recent past for corroboration to the FEER's report. As usual, the editor's commentary was very well written but to term the FEER report as loathsome was uncalled for.

Based on my observations on the treatment meted out by various quarters to last year's Transparency International (TI) report terming Bangladesh as the most corrupt nation, I would like to make the following comments:

whether there are any alleged fundamentalist training camp or presence in the country or not. The authorities concerned must speak up and clear our confusion.

Turja
Toronto, Canada

In the name of journalism

It is obvious that the Hong Kong based magazine "Far Eastern Economic Review" has started a hostile campaign against Bangladesh.

I would like to draw the attention of Bertil Lintner, the author, towards the situation of the other countries in our region. The Hindu fundamentalists and activists of VHP and Shivseva-lashed against the Mus-

nalists has filed another protest. Just visit their website (<http://www.cpi.org/attacks01/asia01/bangladesh.html>) and see the list of atrocities committed against journalists in Bangladesh.

Is it any wonder that we have such a terrible reputation abroad?

Beowulf
Dhaka

Why label Bangladesh?

I hate to make the general comparison but if the current situation in Bangladesh worries Bertil Lintner then how come he is not worried about India? Isn't India in a much worse shape with Hindu fundamentalists running amok?

Yes, there has been reason for some concern in Bangladesh on this

issue. But his over-sensationalising the news by putting it as cover story and the title of the story is very disturbing and unjustified. I don't think Mr Lintner ever understood the internal dynamics of Bangladeshi politics. There was hardly any source or any data or any revealing new information in that article which points to such a dramatic generalisation. He could not get affirmation of his premise from any of the sources he interviewed, yet he thought everybody was wrong.

But what was he basing such a dramatic conclusion on? Nothing much. A quote from a retired civil servant and his interview with a Rohingya refugee in Cox's Bazar. It was indeed unfair to the people of Bangladesh to be labelled like this but then again when did Dow Jones and Industries, the publisher of FEER and the republican icon of conservatism in the US, cared for countries like ours?

Asif Saleh
New York, USA

FEER and Bangladesh

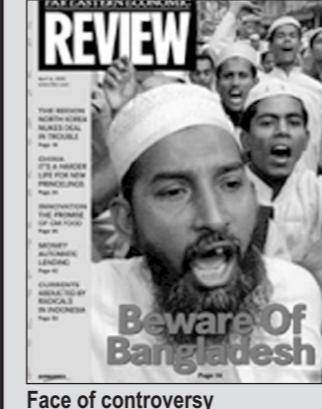
We would be in a state of untrut if we said "fanatism" does not exist in our societies, but being branded as a 'Cocoon of Terror' by the FEER is utterly obnoxious and baseless.

Bangladesh does go through its ups and downs now and again, thanks to our 'patriotic' politicians who are too engrossed in their own struggle for 'incessant' power, and being left in a cleft's tick, the citizens cannot help but cope with it. However, as far as my knowledge extends, religious disharmony has never been a major problem in our society.

And having worked in charitable organisations, I have had the pleasure of coming across a wide range of people of all classes, backgrounds and religions of Bangladesh, where disharmony between the people of different religions is a far cry.

However, if the article were to be true by any means, and the baseless fact that Bangladesh is being

The photograph on the cover of FEER



I draw your kind attention to the front page interview of Mr. Amir Ali Hawladar published in *The Daily Manabzamin* (April 7), whose photograph was on the cover of the 4th April issue of Far Eastern Economic Review under the heading "Beware of Bangladesh".

The interview published further proves how motivated the article was to malign Bangladesh at home and abroad. For leading a protest procession against the Gujarat carnage, Mr. Hawladar, son of a

martyred Freedom Fighter, has been identified with the Taliban and the likes by Bertil Lintner of FEER!

This interview in *Manabzamin* should provide further ammunition to our Foreign Ministry in regard to their earlier protest that they had lodged with FEER. And now through your esteemed daily, I would like to request the Foreign Ministry to demand of FEER an explanation citing Mr. Amir Ali Hawladar's interview.

I am not aware of what the

legal bindings are; but nevertheless, I would urge Mr. Amir Ali Hawladar to personally register, through proper channel, his strong protest to FEER for publishing his photograph for such evil attempts to create fear and apprehension amongst others about his own country.

Ashfaque Chowdhury
Banani, Dhaka

Though some stray incidents against the minorities did occur in Bangladesh, as the conscious citizens came forward such incidents almost stopped taking place.

But isn't it very common in Third World countries where miscreants try to take some opportunities of the situation after a general election.

We are really sorry that some of our countrymen had to suffer, but that doesn't make the entire nation fundamentalist.

The riots and communal massacres in our neighbouring country are not yet one month old. But did we encounter any incidents like Hindu-Muslim riot in Bangladesh after the Gujarat massacre?

No, we can boast of that, Bangladesh shall always be a peace loving and liberal, secular state.

Bangladesh is a major contributor in restoring peace of the world. You will see the Blue Berets giving up their lives for peace keeping in distant African countries like Sierra Leone, etc. Bangladesh is also committed to join the International Collision to Reconstruct of Afghanistan. Mass protests were lodged against the American invasion of Afghanistan including all the Western countries, even in USA and Britain.

It's natural, for a Muslim country to protest against bombing innocent people in a Muslim country. That doesn't pave the path for us becoming a fundamental nation.

Portraying a liberal and moderate country as fundamentalist will definitely increase the FEER circulation for a short while, but in the long run, truth will definitely come out.

both FEER and Wall Street Journal are not managed by fools where one can sneak a article (especially an cover page article) in their pages by the way of deception.

It could very well be an early warning signal to us. We should analyse ourselves and try to find out if anything is going wrong in our national agenda, which is very important in the current geopolitical situation.

Ahmed K. Rashid
Azimpur Road, Dhaka

I have read the article in the FEER. There are embellished truths with a twist. But banning just can't banish. The culture of banning makes the pariah look even better.

We have seen the banning before but to whatend?

The only end results of such banning are- firstly most people at home (Bangladesh) cannot evaluate the information for themselves. But access to the foreigners and the net-surfers remain unhindered.

Secondly, it just looks stupid. Information in this cyber-crazy world is unbound.

MZ
Cary, North Carolina, USA

Information terrorism?

A baseless report has recently been published by the Far Eastern Economic Review. Is there a conspiracy going on to portray our country as a fundamental one?

Or is it an attempt to divert the world's views about Bangladesh, the most liberal country in this region?

What is so wrong with criticism? The cover story by the FEER titled "Bangladesh: A Cocoon of Terror", has brought out the old insecurities amongst our "leaders".

Human nature is very curious and when you, Madam Prime Minister, ban such a critical article you have inadvertently admitted that everything in the article is true.

Take for example the issue of US Vice President, Dick Cheney refusing to disclose who and what was discussed in his energy policy meetings. He has refused to even say whom he met with, all in the name of confidentiality. He has forgotten that he serves at the pleasure of the American people.

By being stubborn and arrogant, he has created the impression that he along with the Bush administration is guilty, of being in the oil companies' pocket.

Why do the politicians fail to see this simple point? If you engage in constructive dialogue then the country will be served.

By banning the April 4 issue of the FEER, the government has elevated the article to the level of truth. Why not let the people decide?

By the way, how many people in Bangladesh or even in Dhaka read the FEER?

Rahfat Hussain
Minnesota, USA

Banning is not the way to fight criticism

I wonder why our government is so nervous? Most of the dailies of April 8 published reports by UNB and BSS in which a statement by Ministry of Foreign Affairs was published expressing the government's irritation and describing the FEER's article as "motivated if not malicious".

I saw an undertone of personal attack on the writer Bertil Lintner. Be it known to all of your readers that Bertil Lintner is a highly respected and celebrated scholar and an authority on Southeast Asia especially on Myanmar and Indonesia. To the best of my knowledge, he has authored at least seven scholarly books on Southeast Asian Studies.

We may differ with his opinion and find erroneous conclusions in his writing but can no way call it a "Tabloid Journalism" as branded by our foreign ministry spokesman. In doing so, we ourselves may lose our credibility to the scholastic and academic world.

Obtaining character certificates from President Bush and Prime Minister Blair doesn't in any way enhance our credibility. Everyone knows that these certificates are given due to the diplomatic courtesy.

We should rather value the opinion and observations made by independent scholars like Bertil Lintner which will count in the long run.

Haven't we seen that in the cases of Philippine's Marcos and Indonesia's Suharto.

We should also bear in mind that

Banning FEER-- who's benefited?



Is ban the answer?

I've read the 4th April issue of FEER through the Internet. And so did most of my friends and relatives. Though we don't subscribe FEER, we went online and read the article partly because the magazine did a cover story on Bangladesh and mostly because the BNP government banned the issue. At this age of IT, why did the government go to the extent of banning it is a mystery to me. Is our reputation so fragile that it would be shattered by a weak, one-sided story by Bertil Lintner?

As Mr Afsan Chowdhury has said in his column "Who's afraid of FEER?" (April 9), "... of course there is a conspiracy. It is the conspiracy of the ISPs."

Brishti Islam
Purana Paltan, Dhaka

Banning of the 4th April issue of Far Eastern Economic Review by the government is not a well thought of decision. The damage done in the international arena to the image of Bangladesh cannot be undone by putting a ban on that issue. Furthermore, through the Internet many people will have access to that article, which cannot be stopped by any means.

It would be better, if the wider section of the people could know, by reading that article, what sort of propaganda has been going on against our country in the international arena. It would have also been wiser if people were given an opportunity to know which quarters in our country are involved in the international conspiracy to tarnish the image of Bangladesh as a moderate country. They do this to the detriment of the interest of the nation, but to the benefits of their personal and partisan interests.

The government's fear that the materials contained in the article may create hatred and division among the people of the country does not seem well thought as