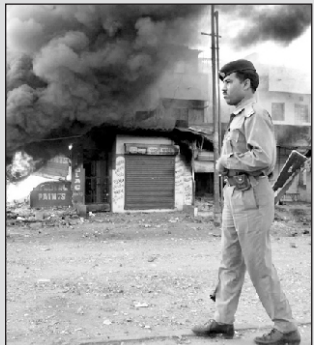


We are not a terrorist country



Happened in Gujarat, but not in Bangladesh
 Identified Bangladesh 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 tantilising about all the

lims of Gujarat only a month ago. This riot 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.

The Committee to Protect Jour-

issue. But his over-sensationalising the news by putting it in 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 untruth if we said 'fanaticism' 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 click, 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



Face of controversy

And such baseless and unfounded articles should never have had a place in international media, let alone a national one.

Mehtab Rahman
Queen Mary, University of London

Beware of conspiracy against Bangladesh

Despite being a Muslim majority, people of our country showed greatest patience when not broke in Gujarat. But, Bertil Lintner concocted a fairy tale to serve the purposes of a group who are active in conspiracy home and abroad against Bangladesh.

This same journalist wrote another vague report against our motherland in the World Street Journal. It is evident that he is playing according to the wish of a force that wants Bangladesh to be a target of western countries.

It is the duty of our government to file a case against FEER. Otherwise, anti-Bangladeshi force would be encouraged and distort our image more.

Oli Md. Abdullah Chowdhury
Khasdobir, Sylhet

Should I call it a co-incidence?

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.

Ashfaq Chowdhury
Banani, Dhaka

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 what end?

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?

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.

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 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 Shivsena-lashed against the Mus-

nalists has filed another protest. Just visit their website (<http://www.cpj.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

plagued by religious extremists has any validity at all, we should investigate and take immediate action, instead of whining and complaining over it.

Before we let the world know we are not a 'Cocoon of Terror,' the citizens of Bangladesh have to believe in that very fact themselves! I found the article very superficial, with not much detail and very little depth.

The media has every right to portray and project anything they want, provided they are neutral and completely fair.

However, publishing a totally unfounded, and supposedly motivated article aiming to diminish the image of the country to that of a religiously dysfunctional nation teeming with fundamentalists is a far contrast to the truth.

After that article of Bertil Lintner in Far Eastern Economic Review (April issue)- pernicious journalism as you rightly call it - about Bangladesh, a 'businessman' David Swartz from Hartmond, Victoria writes his one sided highly political piece castigating the present government ("Perhaps this is my last visit to Bangladesh", April 5). And, that too, after at least ten visits to Bangladesh over the last twenty years, as he claims. Now, he sentimentally declares, "Perhaps this is my last visit to Bangladesh....No more Bangladesh till Begum Zia decides to change!"

Now the question is: What is this leading to?

A Chowdhury
Dhaka

Why ban FEER?

The government decision to ban the April 4 FEER issue would rather create more awareness about the article "Beware of Bangladesh". At this age of IT, many people will get access to this article through the Internet. Then what is the logic behind banning it?

While I'm writing this letter the world is watching what the Israeli army is doing, how they are destroying the houses and killing the innocent Palestinians. Shouldn't we be concentrating on how to save these poor Palestinians?

In this connection, I recall Ayub/Yahya era. During their regime they frequently used the "banning" tactics to cover up their misdeed and keep the world at bay. Did they succeed? During our Liberation War the Pakistanis tried their best to hide what they were doing to us. Could they do that? No, they couldn't.

The banning of FEER issue by the BNP government only reminds me Ayub/Yahya era.

The FEER is an international journal. We should remember its contribution during our Liberation

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 well. The recent Gujrat riots did not have any repercussion in our country, that article is a far cry.

Faruque Hasan
Dhanmandi, Dhaka

Yellow journalism by FEER!

"Bangladesh: a Cocoon of Terror" was a splendid one-sided and malicious piece by Bertil Lintner. It is nothing new for us to get labelled such way by western-journalists who practice yellow journalism, and the author must be applauded for upholding that low standard of ethics.

The points made were subjective and were used to create sensation, but failed to depict a true picture of Bangladesh. It was mentioned that Awami League is a secular political party, which is totally wrong. Just having the word "secular" next to your name does not make you secular; in fact, Awami League is no different than Bangladesh National Party (BNP) who was termed as centrist/conservatives.

Also, the report forgot to mention that even though Jamaat-e-Islami got 17 seats in the parliament, they are in reality (percentage wise) is not much of a power. Jamaat-e-Islami cannot survive without tagging along with a major party, as they did with the so-called secular Awami League during 1996 election.

And Taslima Nasrin—the revered writer by Islam bashing western journalists is an over squeezed lemon. It is true that there were minority oppressions right after the November 2001 election, but it has subsided and the sterling proof is the absence of any riots whatsoever like in Gujarat, India.

How could a foreigner with such a biased outlook understood the national psyche of Bangladesh was no less than a miracle! Let



Tunnel vision of foreign media

it be known that Bangladesh, a predominantly Muslim country, is the only country in the world, where both the Leader of the Government and the Opposition are 'Muslim women'.

Nafees K
Texas, USA