

**Bangladesh: A Cocoon of Terror**

I have just finished going through the subject article and have the following comments to offer:

1. As you had mentioned earlier banning of the particular issue of the Far Eastern Economic Review is not the way to either counter or block flow of such information. In these days of IT people will have access to it whether the government wants it or not. Besides by banning the information the government if anything has succeeded in arousing is the curiosity of hitherto a much larger section of the uninterested population including those who are generally neither interested nor conversant with anything published in English. As I see it we should be concerned more about its readers outside the country.
2. The concerns expressed by the writer are not well founded. They appear to be superficial, biased and based on sheer observations and unfounded speculations.
3. The writer at one stage of the article has compared the corresponding state of affairs with that of Pakistan. I must point out that the "emerging situation" as he calls it, is simply reflective of his shortsightedness and absolute lack of understanding of the majority of Bangladeshis. Had his perspective been right the best of times for flourishing of the fundamentalism was during the Pakistan regime. If it did not flourish in the then East Pakistan in those ideal conditions, the writer's concern at this stage can therefore be best described as a figment of imagination. I believe the author with his crafty writing has succeeded in

mongering article. We have proved that Bertil was wrong. Then why should we worry?

Now let us move forward and pay attention to US Ambassador Mary Ann Peters who expressed her views to members of the Congressional Bangladesh Caucus on April 11 in Washington DC that "reports of human rights abuses and allegation and that Bangladesh serves as a haven for terrorists need to be fully investigated and put into proper context".

I think our "Spin Doctors" and others know what we have to do. So we have a very simple task ahead.

**Ahmed K. Rashid**  
Azimpur Road, Dhaka

**Prisoners of conscience?**

It's amusing that once you're in power, your sponsored terrorists are no longer criminals with colourful names like *murgi* something or *galkata* another, but prisoners of conscience.

I never tire of the imaginative ways that our politicians wiggle out of potentially embarrassing situations.

If BNP loses the next elections AL will be freeing their prisoners of conscience.

Here's a suggestion, let all these terrorists go free. Why waste the time of the police and clog up the court dockets with such time wasting folly?

**Don Quixote**  
Dhaka

**Peace made easy**

Now all Mr. Arafat has to do is issue a statement in Spanish asking

should be dismissed.

Why do I think so? The following is the procedure for the sanctioning of a loan to set up a RMG factory (keeping in mind that this is thrust sector):

Submit Proposal to the local Branch-- the Branch will forward it to the Regional Manager's Office (RMO)-- RMO marks it to the Head Office (HO).

At the HO the file goes from the DGM to the AGM to the SPO to the Dealing Officer. The Dealing Officer then sends this file to the Textile Engineer, then the Marketing Analyst, and finally the Financial Analyst. All this done, the Dealing Officer sends it back up the chain.

Now the DGM writes a Memo and forwards it to the Credit Committee, who after passing it sends it back to the DGM, who again writes a Memo and sends it to the GM, who sends it to the DMD who sends it to the MD. The MD sends the file to the Board Meeting (they sit once maybe twice a month). The Board, after passing the proposal, sends the file back to the MD--DMD--GMD--GM--AGM-- PO-- Dealing Officer and finally the Branch where you submitted your proposal.

And that is how we pass proposals in NCB's. Officially the time this takes is 90 days and no bribes to speed up the progress of your file which by now looks like the Gutenberg Bible. By the way, all this if your proposal has no faults and is clear to every one of these people.

So no wonder these poor guys are short of employees. Sarcasm aside, there are some people in the NCB's who try to fight this red tape and who aren't corrupt. But they are a tiny minority.

**Dorji**

**FEER editor protests**

I wish to draw your attention to remarks made by Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and carried in your newspaper, which suggested that the recent cover story on Bangladesh in the Far Eastern Economic Review was somehow "sponsored" by the opposition Awami League.

As editor of the Far Eastern Economic Review I reject without qualification any suggestion that anything that appears in the news pages of our magazine is influenced by any political quarter. In keeping with the highest standards of journalism practised by the Review and Dow Jones, I can assure you that politicians of any stripe in any country would find it impossible to sponsor our reporters to write anything one sided or biased in pursuit of a particular political cause.

**Michael Vatikiotis**  
Editor, Far Eastern Economic Review  
Wanchai, Hong Kong

well versed in defence matters and national defence strategy. As a layman on these matters, I would like to know from them (or any other informed reader) what is the raison d'etre for our Air Force, apart from contributing to our national pride (which, no doubt, is also important).

Apparently, if only choppers are to be flown, then the Army Aviation Wing should be good enough to handle the situation.

However, someone once told me (and I have no means to verify the statement), that our defence strategy (with regard to India) hinges on the capability of carrying out a quick and decisive strike on the mega city of Calcutta, its adjoining industrial belt, harbours and port, should (God forbid), hostilities break out. If this be true even in the slightest degree, then it is quite justified for us to have

year, but having lived away for so long do not feel part of the political agenda that is chalked out by either AL or BNP because it doesn't affect my life directly.

However, like most people, I am disgusted by the deteriorating law and order situation in the country, particularly the crimes against girls sometimes as young as seven years old! The other issue that caught my attention is that after 31 years of independence, we are still debating on whose portrait to hang! Surely there are other issues that need prioritising!

But, I am not writing to highlight these issues. My letter is to raise concern about the treatment of Dr. Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir in particular (and others in similar predicament). If they are guilty of 'anti-state' activities, then they should not escape trial by law. But by torturing them, failing to produce them in court etc., what is the BNP government achieving! There are others who are routinely being harassed under this 'anti-state' umbrella. Physical torture, denying life saving drugs, harassing family members etc. reek of a 'police state' and this cannot be the way 'forward!' I can only hope that one day we can all truly feel that we have been part of a 'democratic process'.

**Nahid Rahman Huq**  
Oxford, UK

**Airforce**

This is a reply to Mr. Tintin's letter regarding Air Force where he accused the Air Force for having half of land of Bangladesh. Does he mean that Air Force and Army Aviation owns half of the land of Bangladesh, (which is about 74,000 Sq. Km)?

Well, Mr. Tintin if the military has 74,000 Sq. Km of lands where does our 130 million population live? There are more noise pollution by cars than aircraft in Dhaka city and Bangladesh do not have enough money to construct an airfield outside the city.

Mr. Tintin's remark is a conventional anti-air force remark.

**S.A.S Sumit**  
UK

**"The Horrifying Night of Mar 25"**

I read the letter of Mr. F. Majumder. He wrote that Sheikh Mujib did not declare our independence. It was other AL leaders and Major Ziaur Rahman who declared independence and called upon the people for an armed struggle

In 1971 Major Zia was not a public figure. He was an army officer like many others. Do you think that the countrymen took-up arms on the call of an unknown army person?

Sheikh Mujib was arrested on the night of March 25. He was taken to the then West Pakistan. But before being arrested he signed the declaration of Independence. Chittagong AL leader MA Hannan and Major Ziaur Rahman read the declaration from the Kalurghat Betar Kendro. They read it on behalf of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib. So Ziaur Rahman was the reader of the declaration signed by Sheikh Mujib. If Major Ziaur Rahman were not there at that time any other army man or civilian would surely read it. Zia was indeed lucky that he got the chance to declare independence on behalf of Sheikh Mujib. Moreover, Sheikh Mujib in his March 7th speech gave a clear indication of independence and armed struggle. Mr. Majumder, history goes on its own way. Never try to change it.

As far as SAMs go, I suppose these would also have their advantages and shortcomings. "Mobile SAM batteries", as suggested by one of the letter writers, may not be entirely feasible in a "primarily riverine country" as mentioned by another. I invite others (experts, pseudo-experts and interested readers) to shed some light on these matters.

**Ashraf Matin**  
Dhaka

**Concerned!**

I have recently returned from a trip to Dhaka. I visit my home town every



**Submarine Cable Project: lost opportunities**

During the question-answer period of the conference session on "Turning Your Call Centre into a Multi-Media Contact Centre" at the recently held Annual Call Centre & Customer Relationship Management Conference & Exposition in Metro Toronto Conference Centre in Toronto, Canada, an Indian attendee caught everyone's attention not because of the merit of the question he asked but because of the size of his company's call centre and its expansion plans. The company was managing a thousand seat call centre and was looking for the right technology to set up a multi-media contact centre of about the same capacity.

I work for a major Canadian company whose annual revenue is over a billion dollars and are attached with three geographically dispersed call centres with a combined capacity of about 500 seats. Our largest call centre is situated in the Atlantic province of New Brunswick, which had carved a niche in this market by providing excellent telecom infrastructure and a constant supply of highly skilled bilingual customer service representatives. Ireland and Florida have become call centre havens due to the advantages these locations possess but I did not have the slightest idea that India was also quietly vying for such a position.

It became evident from subsequent discussions that the Indian Company was not providing service to local customers but catering to international business. This means that the customer requests coming over voice and other media are transferred to India for processing and at the back-end, the call centres are connected to servers and databases that are not necessarily in India but overseas, which are all linked over high capacity data networks. The operation is totally transparent and seamless to customers and many do not have the slightest idea that they are being served from India.

This is a perfect example of an extremely mutually beneficial scheme where Indians are finding employment and earning the much needed foreign currency while international businesses are taking advantage of the availability of a highly skilled English speaking technical workforce for a reasonably low cost.

For such an operation to be feasible, one requires access to high bandwidth global data network, which in India's case became possible due to joining and participating in the FLAG (Fibreoptic Link Around the Globe) project in the early '90s. The opportunity of participating in the FLAG project and thus connecting to the global information highway was also presented to Bangladesh but the powers that be, in their infinite wisdom, spurned the offer considering it a misperceived security threat.

It was however encouraging to know that the previous government, though belated, took up a submarine cable project to connect Bangladesh with the global network. But the recent white paper linking it with corruption as well as internal problems of the contracting company has come as an utter disappointment to many of us.

Our politicians, while lacking the necessary vision to lead the country in the new millennium, are not even capable of picking up the right ideas

when presented to them. Their total dependence on the bureaucrats who, by and large, have proved to be an incompetent and corrupt lot, give every reason to believe that we will remain unconnected with the global network and miss all the golden opportunities that this project had the potential to offer.

The T&T technocrats and the Ministry bureaucrats have delayed us by almost a decade. It is high time that the private sector is taken into confidence and the project entrusted to them. I am inclined to believe that our private sector has become mature enough to forge ties with international companies uniquely positioned to do such a job. It is also my firm belief that many non-resident Bangladeshis, possessing the right technical know-how and monetary clout, will also come forward to invest in such a project of national importance given the right environment is created.

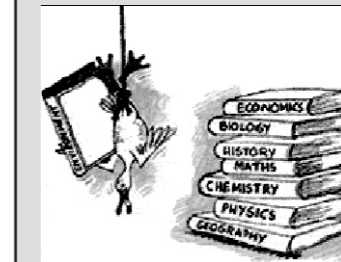
**Abul K. Shamsuddin**  
Mississauga, Ontario, Canada

**Neglected North Bengal**

The UNB report on the step motherly treatment of the rapid development of the northern districts (DS March 30) should have been front-page news. The Jamuna Bridge was not a windfall due to lack of gas pipe network.

The latter awaited the commission battles behind the scenes. The bypass highway in Tangail connecting the bridge made slow progress.

**Stop experimenting with the students**



Education or execution?

The National and Curriculum Text Book (NCTB) Board likes to experiment with the school and college students by introducing new system in the curriculum every few years. A change in the old system is of course welcome because it is high time we changed our old and outdated ideas to keep up with the changing world. But when they suddenly change the curriculum, they must first give it a thought as to how effective it would be in our schools and colleges. This year they have discarded English for Today (Board prescribed book for IX and X) introduced only three years ago for a new one to increase the communicative competency of the students. The objective is commendable no doubt. But to materialise this great idea neither a teacher's guide nor a sample question was given. The book has questions to increase the listening skill of the students. The teachers are supposed to read to the information, not given in the book, for the students to prepare the answer. But there is no teacher's guide with the necessary information. So the teachers are at a loss while preparing a lesson plan or a question paper.

The carelessness of the NCTB has caused concern among the teachers and guardians. The first term exam is going to start this month and still there is no guide to acquaint the students with the new system.

The Board must decide immediately what actually they want to achieve and stop playing with the future of the students.

**A concerned teacher**  
Dhaka

Even Bogra, Sirajgunj and Rajshahi have not got the gas network yet; while we are in hot debate about gas export. How to pay for the foreign exchange component of the gas pipe net within the country? Foreign investment has to enter the country in one form or another: why is it taking decades to decide on a sound policy?

The agro-processing sector is

not a political glamorous focussing area. The MPs have to reorient their views on how to be useful in national interest.

The neglect of North Bengal is a human issue in the policy maker's realm. We have to solve this problem. That means personal sacrifice to a very visible extent.

**A Mavaz**  
Dhaka

**Immigration to Canada**

As many Bangladeshi citizens are now trying for immigration in Canada, a couple of local companies against payment have been created to deal with the formalities required. Some applicants are even getting approval with their help within a short period of time. But many are waiting.

One of the reasons perhaps the applicants are not fully aware of the actual requirements. Or otherwise the companies that are dealing with the business, failing to deal properly. Many of the applicants, who are academically and technically qualified for immigration, have already given up as it is taking too long.

Each company has an appointed lawyer in Canada who handles the processing of immigration. If asked for the reason of delay, the usual answer from these companies is that the application is under process or reply is awaited from the lawyer. Any further inquiry is impossible, as the applicants are never provided with the contact address of the lawyers.

We wish there were certain guideline so that the prospective immigrants can apply directly.

**Abdul Hai**  
Dhaka

**Defining terrorism**

I am writing with reference to the comment by Mr Akbar Hussain on my earlier letter (April 14).

Apparently, Mr. Hussain has some difficulty in defining what is terrorism. Here is a simple definition. Anyone who deliberately, not accidentally, targets innocent civilians even during a war is a terrorist. The key word is "deliberate." While the U.S. Air Force pilots tried their best to avoid civilian targets in Afghanistan and most civilian casualties were accidental.

**Sad but true**

Mr. Omar Khasru's article (April 14) brings up a few unpalatable, sad and unemotional truths about our perception of Israel. Too often Bangladeshis, like others in many a Muslim country, end up equating Ariel Sharon or current Israeli policy with Jewish people and the Israeli State itself. While emotionally appealing, such wholesale extrapolation is intellectually dishonest. In addition to the facts mentioned by Mr. Khasru, I would like to offer a few other unpleasant notes.

Israel was the third country to recognise Bangladesh and amongst the first to deliver actual aid to Bengali refugees in camps in India. The then Israeli Consul in Bombay, who coordinated the effort, still considers it one of his most important services to humanity. This was while most 'brotherly' Arab countries were financing Yahya Khan's war machine and screaming for the 'territorial integrity' of Pakistan.



Friends of Palestine?

merely offending the people of this country at large.

4. I am curious to know as to the actual period of time the author has spent here in Bangladesh and what cross-section of people has he interacted before writing his story. As I view it the story seriously lacks credibility in terms of the neutrality of facts presented. The author seems to have heavily relied on information passed on to him by what he calls the "staunchly secular Awami League". He also refers to a renowned poet, and a local non-government organisation. May I remind the author that the 'cocoon' he refers to at one stage has also been nurtured and sheltered by Awami League itself. It was however magnanimous on the part of the of the author when he refers to a senior western diplomat and goes on to write, "There are some extremists here but they belong to fringe groups and are not part of the mainstream"

5. In conclusion I would like to state that this article is nothing but a classic example of Yellow Journalism at its best. It is my belief that this article will ultimately end up harming the image of the Far Eastern Economic Review more than that of Bangladesh, provided we are able to put our acts together in negating such malicious propaganda. In this connection our journalists have to play a major role.

**Shamsher Chowdhury**  
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

**"Banning is not the way to fight criticism"**

This refers to Mr. Ashfaque Chowdhury's reaction to my letter on the subject (April 14). Yes, I am impressed by Bertil Lintner's commitment to excellence, honesty and dedication for analytical reporting and adherence to scholastic standards.

But, that is besides the point. What I meant in my letter is that Bertil Lintner's FEER article can't simply be discarded as "Tabloid Journalism" as branded by our Foreign Office spokesperson. It has to be taken seriously.

Now, more than a week has passed since then, I have to admit that GOB has been successful at home in its effort to control the spin. It has successfully banned the infamous issue of FEER. All the newspapers have condemned Bertil Lintner for his hate-

the Shining Path of Peru to renounce violence for once and for all. Since the unequivocal statement is in Spanish, it will also work for the ETA as well as for the Columbian Narco-terrorists. A Tamil version should be recorded and played over and over again on CNN and Radio Ceylon so that Mr. Prabhakaran does not change his mind. Other versions in Urdu, Chechen and Tagalog will bring peace world around.

Meanwhile the renouncement statement in its original (Arabic) should be played in megaphones in the troubled regions in Morocco for the pacification of the separatists. Meanwhile an English version can be played for Mr. Bush and Mr Blair to dissuade or disarm (or charm?) them before they decide to shower Iraq with missiles.

Now that we have found the panacea for ending violence and establishing lasting peace, the world will soon turn into a heaven. Why didn't someone think of this magical path to peace earlier?

**Habib Khondker**  
Singapore

**NCB branch closures**

I wholly agree that NCBs are understaffed and in dire shortage of skilled bankers. None of these talented hardworking people

**Dhaka**

**The portrait issue**

We have already spent more than 40762800 seconds or 679380 hours or 11323 days debating on the subject as to who declared the independence of Bangladesh. Before this problem could be solved, we got involved in another issue regarding whose portrait should be hanged or not.

We do not know how many seconds, hours and days would be spent debating on this particular issue. All I want to know from our political leaders and the intellectuals are we going to spend and waste our valuable time and energy on these issues or are we going to try and build a prosperous and happy Bangladesh?

The bottom line is that, Moulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani is the dreamer of Bangladesh, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman the founder of Bangladesh and Shaheed Ziaur Rahman, who on behalf of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib proclaimed the independence, the builder of Bangladesh.

**Iqbal Ahmed**  
New Eskaton Rd, Dhaka

**MIGs and choppers**

From the letters of Biggles and Dorji, I gather that they are quite

a modern and credible Air Force with a reasonable strike capability -- and to ensure that, we DO need world class combat aircraft -- if not the Raptor, or the Eagle, or the Fighting Falcon -- then at least the MIG-29. This projected (and perceived) threat factor may provide the required deterrent effect and enable us to enjoy relative peace. Bear in mind that our primary air base, Jessore, is only minutes away from the targets. Then again, in the event of any hypothetical conflict, if the much stronger adversary decides to sacrifice the population and infrastructure of one of its major cities, then the entire plan would come to nought. In such a scenario, is there a "Plan B"?

As far as SAMs go, I suppose these would also have their advantages and shortcomings. "Mobile SAM batteries", as suggested by one of the letter writers, may not be entirely feasible in a "primarily riverine country" as mentioned by another. I invite others (experts, pseudo-experts and interested readers) to shed some light on these matters.

**Ashraf Matin**  
Dhaka

**Concerned!**

I have recently returned from a trip to Dhaka. I visit my home town every



In stormy seas?

Most of the times, the recipient has to buy products or services from the donor at an exorbitant price, as mentioned by the aggrieved minister in his counter allegation. How would the Danish government react if the Minister's assertions were proven correct? How about his accountant-

ity to the Bangladesh taxpayers?

We, the people of Bangladesh, are carrying the heavy burden of the interest payment on the loans or aids. What is wrong if our government tries to minimise the burden? Also, singing along with the chorus of "minority oppression" is becoming a fad nowa-days, and it was out of context while accusing the Shipping minister.

**N. Karim**  
Houston, TX, USA

**We should know the facts**

Bangladesh was once called "Bottomless Basket" by Henry Kissinger. Transparency International ranked Bangladesh as the number one corrupt country in the world a few months ago. This time Mr. Peter Lysholt Hansen, under secretary in Denmark's Foreign Ministry labelled graft charges against our Shipping Minister and has announced that Denmark has decided to terminate all sorts of cooperation with that Ministry.

The ruling party BNP promised to establish an independent anti-corruption commission and the office of Ombudsman. So far they have failed to establish none though they were very vocal against corruption during the tenure of Awami League. It is the fate of our people that whenever

politicians voted to power, they forget about their promises.

However, the accused Minister Akbar Hossain's statement was quite interesting. He said as he demanded open tender and 'transparent procedure' for awarding the repair job of ferries, the Danish authorities brought allegations against him.

We, the general people of Bangladesh, are very tired of corruption and violence. At the same time, we feel ashamed as the foreign diplomat pointed his finger directly at a minister. It is an unprecedented occurrence and people must know the truth.

Mr Hansen has said, "We have an obligation to the Danish taxpayers." The ministers of Bangladesh must remember that they also have an obligation to poor Bangladeshis. In order to resolve this problem and to save our image the Prime Minister should take immediate action. If the minister is found guilty, he must pay the price. We should also know the fact if it is found otherwise.

**Oli Md. Abdullah Chowdhury**  
Sylhet Law College, Sylhet