

"Where do you want to lead us to, Mr. Editor?"

I hate to impute motives to the authors of learned articles, particularly those appearing in *The Daily Star*, which is generally looked upon as impartial. But some of the retired ambassadors writing in your paper seem to be doing so either because they want to be promoted from advisers in the party to ministers (and cease writing when they are not made one), or want to be re-appointed as ambassadors or to some such jobs, or out of grudge on not being given extension of service. I think many of your lay readers will agree that whether it is fundamentalism, corruption, law and order, or the state of the economy, during the last 30 years, our bureaucrats (notably CSP and PFS) have as much been responsible for the present state of affairs as our politicians.

I enjoy reading Hasnat Abdul Hye on economics and international affairs, Muslehuddin on West Asia, Arshad-uz Zaman on his love, France and Turkey, and Faruque Choudhury with humour even on a grim subject like Afghanistan, to name a few. Ambassador Rezaul Karim, Waliur Rahman and Mostafa Faruque defected from the prestigious Pakistan Foreign Service in favour of Bangladesh. They are freedom fighters. Hats off to them! But I do not pay Tk10 to read party propaganda in the guise of signed articles.

Juned A. Choudhury
Dhanmandi, Dhaka

I endorse the views of Mr Mostafa Faruque Mohammed. I believe that his arguments are based on facts.

There were press reports that Mr Saidi gave Fatwa in his public address in Sylhet district declaring "Secularism" as "Cufurism". The Jamaat leaders, now a major partner of the government, very often speaks about introduction of "Sharia Law" in the country.

You have blamed the Leader of the Opposition. Please remember Mr Editor, the western free world has a lot of sources of collecting information about our country. They are very much aware of the attitude of the so-called religious extremists in Bangladesh. During the Awami League period there were attacks on NGO organisations. You must not have forgotten the biggest rally that was held in Dhaka where millions of NGO workers attended. During that rally, a policeman was killed in a mosque at Mohammadpur by some religious extremists.

I also agree with the writer about training of madrasa students. The 62 thousand madrassas in the country are not only being used as factories of producing Talibani fanatics, it is depriving of our nation from the services of many talents who are attending those madrassas. A substantial portion of our young boys are being deprived of modern education, learning only religious lessons, becoming burden of the society.

Like Gen. Mosharaf Bangladesh government should also modernise the madrassas by introducing modern education system in the madrassas side by side religious education. These madrassas should be kept out of reach of religious fanatics. We should not allow some quarters in the name of religion to keep a vast number of our children alienated from modern education. And there should



Leading leaders

also not be two systems of education in the country. By keeping two systems, we are producing a substantial portion of our youths as imams, beggars and some intolerant fanatics towards other religious beliefs.

The progress of fundamentalists in the country is the main cause of Bangladesh's image crisis. The notice "Beware of Bangladesh" is not the result of anybody's propaganda or statement. It is the situation that is being created by some quarters in the name of Islam and Islamisation of administration, politics and our educa-

tion and so on.

Thanks to Mr Mostafa Faruque Mohammad for his opinion.

Shafiquil Islam
Fulbaria, Savar

In response to "Where do you want to lead us to, Mr. Editor?" by Mostafa Faruque Mohammed, all I have to say is that he is entitled to his own opinion. And thanks for sharing it with us.

But according to a Janakantha report (April 19) there are about 6000-7000 madrassa in Bangladesh. How did Mr. M. F. Mohammed come up with an absurd number like 62 thousand? I am afraid it is far from reality but it does have striking similarity with the number given in the Bertil Lintner article. Taking Lintner as the source one cannot judge the truthfulness of Lintner that would be circular reasoning.

Second point: Mr. Mohammed has squarely blamed the BNP government. If the alleged Talibanism is there in Bangladesh it did not mushroom overnight, isn't it? With all the military power to her disposal what did the AL government do about it?

As a career diplomat he must be aware whether Osama Bin Laden and his disciples were trained in madrasa or in Afghanistan by the CIA.

The US is sincerely trying to nab the terrorists, if we cannot help them, let us not mislead them.

Minhazul Abedin, on e-mail

"Taliban in Bangladesh"

Much as I abhor the cynical exploitation of secular ideals by Mr Kibria and his fellow travellers, I must admit he does have a point.

Without a doubt extremist organisations have a foothold in Bangladesh and I am equally certain that neither the AL nor BNP will do anything but exacerbate this cancer on our society.

The only personal experience I have with the Bangladeshi Taliban was quite recently. My chauffeur who is from Manikganj came and told me that all the young boys in their village have gone off with their madrasa friends to join the Ladin Bahini. Frankly I was amazed that the Taliban was recruiting young boys from Manikganj. A few weeks later all the boys were returned home after their madrasa friend took them as far as Arakan and dumped them there minus their money and belongings!

With Taliban like these the coming deluge Mr Kibria so vocally fears may just turn out to be a dribble.

Don Quixote
Dhaka

Protest against FEER report

The fact that the FEER report depicting Bangladesh as a cocoon of terror invited a long series of protests-- some very direct and some cautious and constructive-- in various forms from home and abroad testifies to the concern of the people of Bangladesh for their homeland.

Although it can be argued that the report was a one-sided story and was born out of a malicious conspiracy against the country, many people saw this as a moral support to their campaign against the rise of religious fundamentalism and extremism.

In my view, whatever the motive may be, the FEER report has simply diagnosed the presence of a very small number of malignant cells in the body as a caution that, if not treated now, these malignant cells will infect the benign cells eventually leading to fatal consequences. Naturally, it is a kind of self-deception and suicidal on the part of a benign cell to protest against the diagnosis of the presence of malignant cells. Questioning the motive of the doctor is not only irrelevant, but an act of foolishness also.

The blunt and emotional protests against the FEER report has caused two-fold damage to the nation-- a damage that may not be visible at this moment will be unfolding gradually in near future. First, it has been a cause of moral setback for the democratic, secular, and progressive forces in the country. Second, it has been a source of moral support for the heinous acts that the religious fundamentalists and extrem-

ists are currently engaged in. In other words, it has brought substantial amount of relief for them. They will use this as an open license to further their cause.

Subimal Chakrabarty
Arlington, Texas, USA

Build supermarkets on DU campus

There are ample open spaces in front of the Curzon Hall and the Arts Faculty of the Dhaka University. After the tremendous success with the Katabon Market and Green Supermarket, the DU may now

We hope and pray, soon the DU will excel DCC in building markets and supermarkets. Our National Mosque, Baitul Mokkarram, is the trendsetter in this drive. The DU is only following that trend. Are the other universities and educational institutions of the country in the offing to follow the footprints of the DU in this respect?

Faruque Hasan
Dhanmandi, Dhaka

Potka fish poisoning and 11 deaths

Life in Bangladesh has become so

loss of sensation around the mouth, severe headache, sweating, nausea, vomiting, in-coordination during walking, followed by muscle weakness and in some cases respiratory arrest.

The commonly held belief that bacteria or viruses are responsible for the poisoning is just not true, as no one in Bangladesh is likely to eat raw fish. A few Japanese succumb to the *Puffer* fish poisoning very year, who 'knowingly' eat the poisonous fish as a great delicacy, which are served in special eating houses, where the Chefs claim, that they can detect poisonous varieties from the non-poisonous ones, or can detoxify the fish!

Your esteemed daily can spread the information that all '*Potka*' or *Puffer* fish are poisonous, against which no antidotes are available. All fishermen and fish vendors, should therefore destroy these fish on sight, as poorer section of our community tends to buy these fish.

Dr M Mujibur Rahaman
Uttara, Dhaka

HC verdict on ETV

Your extensive editorial on ETV is a shame. How can you take side with some one who has been implicated by the High Court for all their wrong doings? An analogy to your support is like appreciating an army take-over doing all the best things knowing fully well that they were an usurper of power.

Mamunar Rashid
Dhaka

Government by SRO

Two days ago the National Board of Revenue (NBR) issued a Statutory Regulatory Order (SRO) to revoke the SRO issued a fortnight ago regarding taxing of telecommunications equipment. I am glad to hear that, however that does not take away from a vital fact.

For years, the NBR has been arbitrarily imposing, increasing, reducing, and changing the public levy (in forms of taxes, duties, and excise) on all kinds of goods and services. Nonetheless, article 83 of the Republic's Constitution is crystal clear about who can impose taxes: "No tax shall be levied or collected except by or under the authority of an Act of Parliament"

A SRO is a convenient back-door measure to bypass parliamentary scrutiny but it is not the equivalent of an Act of Parliament processed as a Money Bill. If, on the other hand (as probably will be argued), however, FY 2002 budget act gives the NBR the mandate to increase the levy on certain goods, then that board certainly does not have the power to waive that levy.

While certain stop gap emergency financial measures may be taken through Presidential Ordinances, the sensitive issue of raising and collecting taxes is not one of them. That power belongs

exclusively to Parliament sitting for the express purpose of legislating Money Bills.

Governing by SROs is apparently quite alien to the provisions of the Constitution of Bangladesh. It is also fiscally unsound and irresponsible as a tool of economic policy.

ES
Missouri, USA

A ray of hope

This refers to the report titled "Scientist sees 'small Bangladesh' in Bay of Bengal published (April 22).

In Bangladesh, it's not every day that we get to hear about scientists and their inventions. So when I read the article about the possibility of creating land through the mechanism of natural hydrodynamic forces, by all means I became very excited. My heartiest congratulations to Dr. Abdul Khaleque on his groundbreaking invention.

Let's face it. We need land. A mere 147,570 sq. kilometres of land cannot contain a hundred and 30 million people. Imagine, for every sq. kilometre of area that one travels he/she has the prospect of meeting nine hundred curious faces! People are screaming for space. They yearn for a decent place to live, a piece of land to work upon. But the present populace is not going to shrink soon.

Experts fear that by the end of 2025 our population will reach 170 million and after the year 2050...a whopping 205 million!

Dr. Khaleque's invention has given us a glimmer of light. There is absolutely no doubt that we need land, the promise of an additional landmass almost one-third the size of Bangladesh is too tempting to ignore. We can distribute the new lands to thousands of homeless for agricultural purposes. This will also open up additional spaces to set up new industries in the mainland.

Here is a chance for the present government to really get an edge over its political rivals. This issue could be their rallying point in any election. Promising people of new lands and wealth, protecting them from flood, erosion and drought are strong enough points to sway people to their side. Therefore I earnestly urge the government to consider the proposal. I also request The Daily Star to run a follow-up story on this report.

Muksitul Islam
IBA, Dhaka University

India and Palestine

This is a response to Meeta Sanyal's letter (April 26). So to speak, it's not clear to me what she wanted to say in her letter, which is full of jingoism. But it's quite clear that her anti-Muslim attitude is ingrained.

Ms Meeta, you have highlighted one similarity that lies between India and Israel. But there are several others also. You shouldn't ignore them. India and Israel are two countries that have friendly relation with none of their respective neighbours. Both India (in Kashmir) and Israel (in Palestine) oppress other peoples' land and oppress them.

Perhaps, Mr. Arafat's request for your help to resolve their crisis was a goodwill gesture from the people of Palestine to the Indians. He never asked you to sever ties with Israel or to fight for them or even to pay money. All he wanted, was your support on humanitarian ground. One thing you should know, the Palestinians will get whatever they want without your help, today or tomorrow.

Khaled Iqbal
Moulvibazar, Bangladesh

I agree with Ms Meeta Sanyal that India and Israel should have closer ties. After all, they share a common purpose: to eliminate Muslims from the neighbourhood.

Hasan, on e-mail

Terrorism takes on a new meaning

We are horrified with Ariel Sharon's "New Peace Plan" that is either to kill or isolate Yasser Arafat till he relents to the new Israeli kind of peace initiative.

While Israel is continuing their aggression on Palestine to ensure peace in the region, president Bush

made a statement in favour of Israel's occupation, condemning Arafat for not doing enough on his part. Apparently the American President is convinced with Sharon's explanation of Palestinian terrorism after the suicide bombings.

Now terrorism takes on a new meaning as America stands aside endorsing Israel's barbaric move. According to the latest definition if you are a suicide bomber or a sniper or a member of any organisation with Islamic affiliation -- you are a terrorist. And Israel took the full advantage of the September 11 crisis and is planning to treat the Palestine issue with the same objectives the Western Coalition had treated during the Afghanistan attack. Well I am afraid that the result this time is going to be quite opposite.

Farhan Quddus
Dhaka

Independence of Palestine

After becoming the President, George W Bush has met Ariel Sharon for four times; but he hasn't

CEC

I feel sorry for the CEC. I wonder how humiliating it must be for him to blame the opposition boycott for the low voter turnout. Rather than the real reason which he appears to realise as well, that people did not want to vote for murderers and rapists.

This leads me to wonder about our few good men, the handful of CSPs, the few decent ministers, how emasculated must they feel? Imagine having to spout mumbo jumbo at the behest of Hawa Bhaban or being at the beck and call of a jumped up state minister.

I wonder how bitter these men feel. They were the best of the best in the former East Pakistan. But since independence they've had to work with a succession of leaders unable or unwilling to govern. If a lot of them have become corrupt, I don't blame them. Wouldn't you be, if you were paid the miserable salary of a Secretary, while the local hoodlum is busy putting up high rises in Kemal Ataturk Avenue and selling Land Rovers to the Army?

Tintin
Dhaka

met once the Palestinian chief Yasser Arafat.

And perhaps the liaison with the US has energised Israel to carry on with their present atrocities. But Israel will not be able to suppress the indomitable spirit of the Palestinians and maybe a liberation war is not too far away.

People all over the world believe that the independence of Palestine that has long been denied is the only solution that can establish peace.

O H Kabir
Wari, Dhaka

Torture is disgraceful

I am expressing grave concern at reports provided by Amnesty International that the Government of Bangladesh has subjected a number of its political opponents to torture in custody. I urge the authorities to allow these prisoners to be examined by an independent and impartial medical body and given any medical care they may require. The Government has legal and moral obligation under the Constitution of Bangladesh and provisions of the Torture Convention, to which Bangladesh is a party, to ensure that the High Court is able to investigate whether the prisoners have been tortured.

Hence, I urge the government to ensure that all information regarding the allegation of torture is provided to the court without further delay and to ensure that alleged perpetrators of acts of torture are not afforded

immunity from prosecution. To torture one's political opponents is disgraceful.

It is one thing for the government to bring charges of corruption and abuse of power against its opponents, and quite another to torture one's political opponents. The first may be justified if there is sufficient evidence and the case is proved in the court of law, but the second is both shameful and illegal.

Tanweer Akram
Alexandria, USA

"Should our sons come back?"

It was really amazing to read Capt. Khaliqzaman's letter (April 24). I hope the majority of parents think like him.

Of course there will be cases of exceptions but who cares for them; always there will be some opportunists in a society/country.

Mohammed Ashraf Ali, on e-mail

What is our future?

Even after 30 years of Independence we have failed to bring economic development in our country.



The victor's rally

Mayor Khoka goes for Umrah

I just don't get it. Sadek Hossain Khoka got elected mayor in what was basically a beauty pageant with him as the only contestant. Granted it's not his fault that AL boycotted the elections but why is the first thing that he does as Mayor is go off to Umrah? Although I proudly didn't vote, I would still expect him to do his best to get the job done and keep his promise to kill all those mosquitoes.

Common sense tells me

Lost in a quagmire

Rules and laws govern a country. But, in Bangladesh what do we see today-- the names of Acts and Inquiry Commissions themselves are faulty and ambiguous. We have "Law and Order Disruption Crimes (Speedy Trial) Act"!

And then we have an Inquiry Commission to review cases which were filed "basically to politically harass" the opponents! So, what conclusion can we draw from these?

A Distressed Observer
Chittagong

Computer education in schools

Why aren't the school students provided with a yearly syllabus book? Is it too difficult? If so, then the students should get more time to learn their lessons.

Computer teaching has been made compulsory but most schools don't even have any computer. While those that have two or three computers never get the chance even to touch the machine.

Mujibul Haque

Le Pen's supporters and Hitler's admirers

Ambassador Arshad-uz-Zaman has written a very interesting commentary about the French election ("French presidential elections: Prospects for Chirac?", April 28). However, it is not President Jacques Chirac's prospects, which are in doubt. He would win any way. It is the prospect of the extreme right that is the main issue.

Adolf Hiter (whom Le Pen reportedly admires) built his support among the German masses to whom he promised "work, family and Fatherland," and by singling out the Jews for Germany's ills. Similarly, Le pen is building his support among the French working classes by blaming the immigrants, most of whom come from former French colonies of Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia.

Like Hitler, who blamed Jews for Germany's ills, Le Pen is blaming the immigrants for France's problems. Le Pen's diatribe against immigration is highly questionable. In fact, there is solid evidence that immigration has benefited many European countries that are facing steep population decline. With the rapidly falling birth rates and increasing participation in the workforce, population in most advanced countries has been rapidly ageing. While some countries - Italy, Germany, and Spain (and Japan) are becoming the oldest - the size of the working population in every European country is declining fast. Immigration provides these countries as a safety valve for the immediate and long-term future. In addition to the demographic need there is also skill need. In every European country there is serious skill shortage, particularly in hi-tech industries. Many immigrants are bringing such talents to their host countries. The United States has benefited from this pool of talent from the Indian sub-continent that has been the main supplier of skilled labour to Silicon Valley. Europe has not been able to attract these talents. Le Pen, with its paranoia about foreigners, will make things worse.

But the "Germanic herd" of Hitler was primarily responsible for the catastrophe that such xenophobic policies brought about. Without their whole-hearted support, Hitler could not have unleashed his blitz across Europe. The lesson: The world must not again follow what the extreme right-wingers say, even if it is wrapped up in populist terms. Le Pen's supporters should be countered not listened to.

Mahmood Elahi
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada



Pen's poison