

Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

Blasts of fear and fury

We should face the reality



Braving the rough weather

I do not think I am the only one who has watched the sequel to the tragedy of the Mymensingh bombs with my mouth open! The government has bent over backwards to make it look as though the Opposition is guilty long before the police were allowed to complete a proper investigation, of course - but the main object seems to have been to send out a clear message that it was nothing at all to do with Islamic extremists. But, when even the UK government, among many others, admits that there may be pockets of terrorism in its midst, despite its best efforts, what is stopping Bangladesh from admitting the same?

The answer, I fear is much deeper than politics. There is a sickness in the heart here which is one of the reasons for the despair felt by the friends of Bangladesh, at home and abroad. Before we can help with the development of any person or nation or even ourselves, personally we have to face reality. Bangladesh, like many poor nations who are as proud as hell, has a reality problem. Every time it is faced with uncomfortable realities about itself, there is the ducking and weaving, lies and denial, and the playing of games. But you cannot 'move on' from where you are until you accept where you are!

Yet this refusal is an insult to your friends! In the world of personal counselling, we come across those who say, "If people knew what I was really like, they would not like me!" The answer, to individuals, or nations, who feel like that is, "Rubbish! Friendship is stronger than that! True love can cope with the truth."

Throwing tantrums when faced with a reality one does not wish to accept gets individuals and nations nowhere. The truth is that, when relationships are good, forgiveness is possible, past mistakes are not 'made a meal' of and salvation can follow. If you do not think that God or man is capable of such forgiveness and salvation, then you cannot move forwards.

Angela MV Robinson (Rev Mrs), Dhaka

ased investigation free from any outside pressure. The real police works are painstaking, time consuming, often innovative and challenging but not impossible and does not require torture of the suspects.

Ahmed K. Rashid
Azimpur Road, Dhaka

Future costs of the carnage

It is a poignant reminder of our moral decadence when we have pieces of human bodies lying around and politicians playing the blame game. I find it positively obscene and revolting. Instead of looking for perpetrators of terrorist acts, the political establishment is looking for short-term political gain. Our inept law enforcers are playing conspiracy theory. The reactionaries are having a field day with their "Blame the Neighbour" rhetoric. The common people are the only ones not doing anything: they are petrified with fear.

Or is there something more sinister going on behind the scene? The obvious victim is our culture. Parents would not allow their children to participate in events like celebrating Bengali New Year in Ramna Batamul anymore. People would not want to be involved in progressive politics. Writers will refuse to act as social conscience in case their books get banned. The movie industry would go bankrupt because no one would want to go to the cinemas. I will not be accused of calling *desi* movies works of art but demented as they may be, they are a part of the expression of our national psyche. The world of art and culture - cradle of social dissent - will go mute as a result of these bombings.

So we would face a future where non-conformity will not be allowed - not that it is welcome now, but at least it is only frowned upon. Social dissent would be suppressed. The politicians will win: they will do away with that pesky little thing, accountability.

Even if you catch the people involved in these bombings, they have succeeded in their objective: creating a neutered civil society. Fear is our national pastime. And you're just another brick in the wall, just another statistic in the long list of victims.

Yahya
USA

When will we be able to know the truth?

Once again bomb explosion took place in Mymensingh, again some innocent people have died and perhaps like the previous incidents everything will soon be forgotten. We have been witnessing such pre-planned brutal killings of innocent people in public gatherings for the last three or four years. A group of people has targeted the innocent people of our country and they are attacking them for the last several years. People are not safe from them even in religious places. Each and every time these attacks have been carried out with the intention of causing the worst casualties. What seems to be most ridiculous to me is the fact that we still don't know who are behind these incidents?

After each explosion a number of people were arrested (most of them from the opposition party) and some interrogations were carried out which so far hasn't been able to give any conclusive results. The arrested are freed after some times and everybody seems to forget everything till the next attack takes place. I am sure the same would happen this time as well. Only those who have lost their dear ones and been victim of such incidents would never be able to forget these brutal episodes. This is the manifestation of

how helpless and vulnerable we are in the hands of these terrorists who are so coward that they don't even have the courage to disclose their identity.

But for how long such situation will prevail? I wonder what our intelligence agencies are doing. They have failed to control these attacks and arrest those responsible ones. It seems that our intelligence network is either unable to find out the culprits or are unwilling to counter this sort of terrorism. What be the case, one thing I know for sure is we cannot wait for another attack. It is high time we did something. If needed we should take help from the foreign intelligence agencies or terrorist experts, just like what Indonesia did.

We cannot let our people die in such a brutal and helpless manner.
Tariq
Canada

On blasts in Bangladesh

I would like to make the following observations for your readers:

1. Any criminal act of this magnitude has to be borne out of extreme anger on the part of their perpetrators. People who are angry with the present social order and are afraid of being marginalised, people who are against seeing movies and holding of open air cultural shows etc. As I say this I also wish to reiterate that such people belong to the extreme minority.

2. Our political parties must also shoulder their share of responsibilities. Both of our major political parties through their highly dramatised charges and counter charges and campaigns of vilification have made way for "these people" to carry out such inhuman criminal acts.

3. Conversely it is evident that with the current state of our law-enforcing bodies it may simply be too much to expect any timely settlement of these criminal acts and bring the culprits to book. It is therefore may be wise to create a high-profile Investigative Committee involving members of various intelligence and law-enforcing agencies with a combination of members from some international agencies like the Interpol and Scotland Yard. This will not only create a check and balance but will also ensure transparency and credibility.

4. Finally once the process of investigations are complete and the culprits including their protectors are hauled up, the Government must be up front and lay bare open the charges in details for public consumption. It is extremely important to note here that uprooting the cause and effects of such criminal acts for once and for all, the administration must take the people in confidence. People's support is absolutely essential.

Shamsher Chowdhury
Dhaka

The Mymensingh bomb blast incident may eventually proved to be the Reichstag of Bangladesh. Lately, the Government seems to be using this incident to harass the opponents. The police and the prosecutors are getting "field days" for framing charges with flimsy or "make believe" evidences.

The oppressors grow on our fears: they win votes by reminding over-and-over again how dangerous the "others" are, and claim that only their leadership (with strong police and intelligence organisation, speedy trials, Special Power Acts, framing charges against innocents and the opponents, death penalty, etc) can save Bangladesh.

Keep in mind that oppression caused by these extremists hits everyone who dares to speak up or

think differently, including (and above all) those from the same party.

Perhaps the best known example of this in history is the Martin Niemoller, who supported Hitler prior to his taking power, changed his mind in 1933, and eventually ended up in concentration camp:

"First they came for the Communists, and I didn't speak up, because I wasn't a Communist. Then they came for the Jews, and I didn't speak up, because I wasn't a Jew. Then they came for the Catholics, and I didn't speak up, because I was a Protestant. Then they came for me, and by that time there was no one left to speak up for me...."

So, honest BNP cadres and supporters of BNP -speak up and resist before it is too late. Unless we know how to respect the opposition and differing opinions we are doomed.

Indeed, what we see today is that

speculation points at religious extremist groups while a number of East Javanese arrests could suggest political reasons.

Who was behind the bombings at the Udichi meet, at Ramna Batamul on Pahela Baishakh or at Mymensingh cinema halls? Bangladesh authorities (both the previous government and the present one) have been unable to identify the culprits, resorting instead to finger-pointing at respective political rivals -like what they did with the massive arsenic contamination. Is it lack of resources or lack of political will that prevents us from finding the motivation behind such mass violence? Does someone have an issue with our culture, our heritage, our politics or our religion? Is someone looking for attention?

Shrugging shoulders in the classic laid back Bangladeshi fashion will be a sure way to turn the country into the next Somalia and

intellectuals in this country who wont be biased towards any party but towards our motherland's interests.

I am really angry with the Government, which doesn't seem to know how to tackle situations like these. After the Mymensingh incident I expected our PM to issue a strong statement and take concrete steps to bring the culprits to justice. But all they could say was that it's an act of sabotage and conspiracy! How pathetic!

Syed M. Muttakillah
Mohammadpur, Dhaka

Why accuse us?

I would like to start with my condolences for the people who have died in the recent bomb blast and hope that unlike the similar incidents the investigation this time would go somewhere.

I find one thing very disturbing is that the accusation that these may

Then again how can I blame Mr. Yahya when the Secretary General of Reporters Sans Frontieres portray us as fundamentalist and a nation like North Korea. My only answer to that is, sir first you should look at the paper in which you have your letter printed on, I doubt you would find such a paper in North Korea.

But Mr. Secretary General how dare you bring up the aid equation into all this again? I know you people of the West think you do us a favour by opening up your pockets for us, it definitely gives you a pleasure of fulfillment and helps keeping your conscience clear. Yes I agree our economy would be devastated by the closing up of EU markets and aid, but ask yourself this question how much you and the countries you are from are to blame for the state we are in. How much in interest earnings does your governments benefit each year from us?

Whither investigative reporting?

Thank you for inviting readers' comments on the series of bomb blasts in Bangladesh starting from the Udichi cultural meet at Jessore, Ramna Batamul, Narayanganj, and to the most recent ones in Mymensingh, and other similar incidents across the country that killed a large number of people.

If we recall, those events stunned the whole nation and they stirred the imagination of civilised people everywhere. The whole nation was outraged and angered. As usual, accusations and counter-accusations by different quarters followed. The media carried the events at full length. Unfortunately, none of the mainstream media in Bangladesh went for the real story. This was a huge failure on their part.

Since *The Daily Star* has again raised this issue, I think this will provide a very good forum to discuss it from different perspectives. I would like to dwell on the media's role to investigate these events. The bomb blast incidents were possibly the best subjects for investigative reporting for our journalists. Unfortunately, they did not avail of those opportunities. To get the real stories, the reporters should have dug much deeper into the incidents they should have dug out facts beneath the surface. If investigative reporting is a process of opening closed doors and closed mouths, I'm afraid our reporters went nowhere near to the doors, not to speak of the mouths.

Please forgive me if I also hold our respected editors partly responsible in investigating events of grave national consequence. I remember at a dialogue session on investigative reporting at the Press Institute of Bangladesh sometime in 1995, Mr. Mahfuz Anam, the Editor of *The Daily Star*, aptly said that "Each editor must own up to his or her responsibility" in this regard. I would like to humbly remind Mr. Anam of his responsibility

ities when the series of bomb blasts took place in Bangladesh. Did he ever think of covering these events in depth? Did he or his news editor give the necessary story direction (which nobody does these days) to investigate those stories? Did he provide the reporters with necessary logistics and financial support to cover those incidents? After all, investigative reporting is a painstaking and expensive process. It cannot occur in a vacuum.

Again, my thanks for providing this interesting forum.

Quazi Abdul Mannan

Department of Mass Communication and Journalism
University of Dhaka



Investigation is the answer

Who to blame?

Just when we were rejoicing the holy festival of Eid-ul-Fitr, we had to be shaken with four bomb blasts in different cinema houses in Mymensingh. The number of casualties is rising and there is really no use in counting the number of injured survivors. Pictures taken right after the bomb blast give us some idea of the terrible incident that was totally unexpected.

Investigations are still going on and every day we are coming up with new clues to trace the people involved. Some claim AL has been responsible for such atrocities whilst others say that Al-Qaeda activists are involved with the incident. But does any one think about the people who died and why were they targeted?

With the standard of Bangladeshi films deteriorating rapidly in the last decades, it is mostly the lower middle-class and people below who go to these cinema houses for entertainment. Ordinary people, ranging from rickshawpullers to garments workers, etc resort to such level of entertainment. What good would it bring to anyone by killing them in mass, or creating a chaos amongst them? Previously, the bomb blast at Udichi meeting in Jessore created panic, and the one in Ramna Batamul was as shameful. These public meetings are usually not attended by political leaders or powerful incumbents so the motive of killing one particular person for a specific purpose can be ruled out. But does anyone know what initiated the masterminds of such mass killing? Perhaps no.

Bangladesh cannot be labeled as a country of fundamentalists. But such incidents would make anyone wonder if Bangladesh is really the new nest of Talibans as already hinted in foreign magazines. The process is like mud throwing, authorities trying to put the blame on specific people, without really getting to the root of the incidents. Almost like eliminating a headache instead of really discovering the cause of it.

The BNP government has a lot to do. It gained some confidence from people by the deployment of army to curb crime. The process must go on to find out the real criminals, put them behind the bars and discover the real motives of the blasts. Unfortunately, the government never made its statements clear on the incidents, and the Home Minister gave contradictory statements to authentic news agencies that confused us more. The government should quickly get out of that and tell the people right away where the investigation is going. We can mourn for the loss of the lives, and pray for their departed soul. But what would really give us sense of security and not stop us from attend-

ing other public meetings is a good solid investigation. We don't want Bangladesh to become the next Afghanistan, nor do we want international authorities pointing at us as fundamentalists.

Arani Siddiqi
IBA, University of Dhaka

"Judicial probe: Justice Khan in Mymensingh"

This refers to your front-page news item "Judicial probe: Justice Khan in Mymensingh." (December 13).

I don't quite understand how this judicial probe headed by a retired Justice can solve the puzzle and mystery surrounding the bomb blast incident. The recent bomb incidents in Bangladesh seem to be utterly complex and primary task at this stage is to gather evidences leading to the arrest and conviction of the real culprit(s) not just pointing fingers towards some scapegoats or scarecrows.

What was the objective of Justice Khan's mission to Mymensingh? Why this "one-member judicial probe body" has been formed in the first place? Based on the evidences presented, the judges can make their conclusions using their wisdom, experience and education. If the said probe is meant for independent investigation, the retired Justice Khan's one-man probe body definitely lacks the necessary tools and manpower.

We don't want to see another Bari commission report. We need unbi-

Bombing incidents in Bangladesh

If an objective analysis of the bombing incidents that took place during the last few years including the latest one at Mymensingh is made a pattern can be discerned. Firstly, the bombs used were quite powerful capable enough to kill any number of people within the vicinity of the blast. Secondly, all the blasts occurred in public places where there were large gatherings of cultural or religious or political in nature. Thirdly, either time bombs or bombs detonated by remote control devices were used. Fourthly, the theory that the criminals always leave some clues or traces of evidence proved incorrect in all these bombings. So far the investigators could not find clue in any of these bombings to proceed with their investigation. Fifth, unlike such incidents in other countries, nobody claimed any responsibility for causing the blasts to take place.

As laymen about these kinds of criminal activities we are unable to draw any conclusion. But the experts on crime and criminology should be able to see through this and find out clues for further investigation. But, an unfortunate nation as we are, the aftermath of these blasts was only political bickering among the various political parties and civil society groups overshadowing the necessity and urgency to cause proper investigation to unearth the persons or groups who were resorting to these horrendous activities of killing innocent people - activities which can be termed as crime against humanity. We do not know if any serious attempt was ever made by the Government to identify and nab the criminals for those bombings that took place during



When innocents die

the "weak can be terrible, because they try furiously to appear strong" - Tagore.
Tanvir Selim
Kendell Green, MA, USA

Recent spate of bomb explosions

The recent dastardly bombings in Bangladesh are a disturbing trend. But what I write from sunny California matters little to the victims or to their suffering loved ones.

As an ex-Londoner, I've been a lot closer to these tragic events: the massive car bomb in that city's financial district, an explosion at the busy Victoria train station where a friend nearly got killed and yet a third one literally yards from my college on the Strand -- all claimed by the IRA or its splinter groups. The series of "nail-bombings" in Brighton, Bricklane and Soho by a rightwing individual telling all non-whites and Jews to leave Britain were quickly condemned by all major politicians.

In Spain, the Basque separatist group, ETA, carries out regular bombings to demonstrate its capacity to cause massive human and financial carnage. In Asia, the blasts in Bali were clearly aimed at causing maximum damage to the mostly Western revellers and the Indonesian tourist industry. International

not a viable business partner of the industry abroad.
Shabbir A. Bashir, Ph.D.
San Jose, California, USA

Intellectuals on bomb blast

As a decent citizen of this country I am absolutely outraged by some recent disturbing events.

First of all, after losing the elections last year AL chief went on with her old habit of talking nonsense like the presence of Al-Qaeda element in Bangladesh. Even when she was the PM she went abroad and criticised her opponent. It seems that this Leader of a prominent party like AL doesn't know that it's an unwritten ethic not to criticise the past Presidents or PMs to foreigners for political gain.

Anyway, now it seems that India has joined her to malign Bangladesh for their interest. Then comes the bomb blasts in Mymensingh. All these looks like a greater conspiracy against Bangladesh.

Now on the main point, where are the so-called "intellectuals" (with due respect to the exceptional few) of this country who are supposed to be so patriotic? Except for a few, none of the big columnists are voicing their resentments to India. I hope there will be a new breed of

have been done by Muslim fanatics, but isn't the government being portrayed by the same quarters as giving shelter to these fanatics? So my own very limited deductive capability tells me, that if it was true then why would the same fanatics do something to harm the government's credibility to the nation? But I guess this deduction is left to the people who are much more capable than I am.

Like Mr. Yahya whose letter (December 5) was so eloquent in describing the first amendment, but did Mr. Yahya forget the Mc Arthur witch-hunt, the segregation of blacks from whites? Then again I guess that was in the past, don't the Americans have a wonderful thing about being so easily forgetful? But to be fair to Mr. Yahya, I think he is right we should be appalled by the detention of journalist in our country like we should be appalled by their travelling in Bangladesh under false pretences. I am an avid viewer of BBC and always try to keep in touch with their website, but I have never seen them complaining about being escorted by government officials when they go to report on any story. They have always done so when they reported stories about North Korea or places like that, so what could be the reasons for the journalist to travel under false pretences.

How many veiled trade restrictions in the form of GSP and others do your governments have in place against us? So please refrain from taking the moral high ground and be a gentleman and apologise for making a threat on a nation that is striving each day to survive with everything that is going against it.

Reazul Ahmed
Toronto, Canada

Destabilise Bangladesh?

The recent heinous bombing incident in Mymensingh seems to be a concerted evil acts of destabilising and embarrassing the Government and the people of Bangladesh.

Of late, our big neighbour India has been very vocal and very up front in their accusations that Bangladesh has become the refuge for Al-Qaeda terrorists. The Opposition Leader has also been claiming so. Is there any link between these incidents and such allegations?

Bangladesh is very vulnerable because of its extensive open border and rather weak intelligence to outsmart any outside terrorists. Only watchful and vigilant public could help the Government to catch those criminals planning to harm innocent people and distort the image of Bangladesh.

M Reza
USA

The politicians are on a drama!

I don't know how many bombs have been allotted to the fate of Bangladeshi people. I simply feel that we are on a fuse. At any moment any one of us may become victim of an explosion losing one's life or becoming crippled for the whole life. I don't know how the survivors of the previous bomb blasts are passing their days and what about the relatives of those who met death. So far we know the Govt. has neither taken any steps to rehabilitate the victims nor any such case has been closed after proper inquiry. We also don't have any clue regarding those behind these heinous incidents.

Unfortunately, we are forced to see a farcical drama of accusation and counter accusation staged by our politicians. They are doing politics with dead body. It's really a long days journey through the night.

Md. Zahurul Hoque Mozumder
Shahbagh, Dhaka