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**Snubbing the French Foreign Minister: A diplomatic disaster**

A few days ago, Mr. Renaud Muselier, the French Minister of State for Foreign Affairs could not meet our Prime Minister despite a reported prior appointment. The reason was cited as "personal grounds" of the PM. Obviously, the French Minister took exception to the matter and recorded his observation in a press conference which got instant media attention and the people, within the country and without, learnt the news dumbfounded.

We do not know as to who quoted the reason as "personal grounds," but we know that such words are contrary to the common diplomatic nuance. The PM's Office as well as the Foreign Office, if those are not manned by the awfully mediocre bureaucrats, should know as to how to maintain a minimum courtesy with the distinguished foreign dignitaries. A Prime Minister might have innumerable schedules or s/he might have her personal preoccupation but there is an urbane and universally accepted style of saying sorry other than "personal grounds". After all, the French Minister is not some one who can be ignored, or is it!

We do not know either as to whether the entire scenario was cooked up to please the Bush Administration, who were visibly annoyed with the French government for their opposition to US-led invasion of Iraq. If so, this again puts our government vulnerable to very unpleasant conclusions. May we not

forget that France is our third largest trading partner and a very strong voice in the European Union, upon which we depend tremendously for trades as well as for aids. We can just ill afford to exclude our friendship with France on any ground whatsoever.

**Hafeezul Alam**  
Dhaka

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Our diplomacy touched its low when the French State Minister for Foreign Affairs Monsignor Renaud Muselier's appointment with PM Khaleda Zia was cancelled showing personal reasons. Journalists, politicians and other concerned people genuinely voiced their anxiety over this unfriendly overture to a friendly nation. France has a long-standing relationship with the people of this region. Please remember, a number of French soldiers fought by the side of Nawab Siraj-ud-Dowla in the battle of Plassey against the imperialist forces. Again the French soldiers trained and augmented the forces of valiant Tipu Sultan of Mysore in his onerous fight against the same imperialist forces. The role of French Govt and people during our War of Liberation is well known to everyone. Of late France has become a significant partner in our development programs. The present role of President Jacques Chirac to uphold the legitimacy and relevancy of UN in settling international disputes has also



It's all about diplomacy!

earned enormous support all over. The expressed opinion of our Govt is also basically similar with the French stand. Understandably there was pressure from the so-called 'Uni polar' administration. But should we succumb to it?

About France this is not the first mis-

handling by Khaleda Zia government. During her first term of office her official visit was cancelled at the last minute showing PM's pre occupation in the dubious Mirpur by-election. The election did not bring any laurel to her. But the closer relation which the then President

and Mme Mitterrand envisaged to usher got a serious setback.

Lastly I want to mention France is a very important country in the emerging geopolitics. The Franco-German unity is the guiding force of EU cohesion. Iraq war might have put a temporary cloud over the process. But in near future things will take proper shape. The earlier our 'Topkhana' people take a note is better.

**Sonia, Dhaka**

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Evidently we are to shun liberal democracies like the Republic of France and embrace those like the Junta of Myanmar.

I must say that the people in our Foreign Office deserve a pat in the back for devising such brilliant foreign policy directives.

Who do we slight next, Canada? Germany? Or heaven forbid, Switzerland? What next, ruse relationships with Mugabe of Zimbabwe?

**Yahya, USA**

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I do not believe that the Bangladesh bureaucracy and the PM's office is so inefficient and inept as to bungle up an important chance to cement the country's relations with France especially when our present PM had missed an opportunity to improve our relations with France in the past.

Could it be that it has something to do with a superpower?

**Javed Helali**  
On e-mail

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This is an irrefutable diplomatic blunder. An irresponsible and arrogant, unjustifiable fumble made by the Bangladesh government.

France is an economic strong house in Europe and also a formidable military power. They have and are developing some of the latest state of the art in high technology. It has significant influence in the EU. EU stands to become a very large market for goods and services. Bangladesh just cannot afford to interject detractors that will hurt its export to Europe. In this diplomatic fiasco created wholly by the government of Bangladesh, France will certainly NOT be the loser.

I'm afraid that whatever small amounts of sympathetic feelings towards Bangladesh France had, now has a big hole blown into it by this unbelievably errant and blind *savoir-faire-busting* bombshell.

I can't help but wonder if the present US government induced the Bangladesh government in their pursuit of 'punishing' France!

**K. Kabir**  
NY, USA

**Bangladeshi diplomacy in post Iraq war!**

With grave concern, I am writing you, as typical to our national character, although the War in Iraq has already come to an end, hardly have we noticed any foreign policy adjustment by the incumbent government. So that Bangladesh does not remain on the margin, while others benefit from the post war scenario; for us, it is time to make a damage assessment in order to avoid becoming an isolated and left over country in a fast changing world.

This shift in policy requires a smooth handling with maturity and pragmatism, which I believe, the incumbent government has repeatedly failed to exhibit in its recent manhandling of the French State minister of foreign affairs as well as in its inability to persuade the Bush administration to let Bangladesh have her pie in constructing the post war Iraq. In simple, because of foolishness, Bangladesh is about to lose both worlds.

As a third world country with a predominantly Muslim population, which is heavily dependent on foreign powers, Bangladesh cannot lay idle or suffer from diplomatic hangover. What is necessary in this changing scenario, is adjust to the reality as soon as possible, so that Bangladesh receives benefit both in short and long terms.

**Shibly Azad**  
NYC, USA

**Communication misguide**

Ministry of Science and Information and Communication Technology has recently published a telephone directory entitled "Information and Communication Guide" which is not their job at all.

The directory is full of mistakes. They could not even write the names of the cabinet ministers correctly. To your utter surprise about 50 per cent of the list of the officers of their own ministry is wrong. Yet you have more surprise. In page 182 of the directory they have published the name of their existing Secretary-in-charge as the Director General of Bangladesh Rural Development Board, the position which he held 3 years back!

We strongly demand that those who were involved with the publication of this nuisance should be taken to task seriously. Because nobody has the right to misguide people with wrong information.

**Hasan Shahria**  
East Tejknipara, Dhaka

**"ZIA and Arabic"**

This letter is in response to Mr. Enayet Ullah Forhad's letter on April 30th in response to my earlier letter on April 28th. Mr. Forhad is a paragon of reactionary people who (per my last letter) jump out of their skin whenever they sniff something about Islam. I don't know why *The Daily Star* put my earlier letter- that was about some comments on Islam- in the same section where the debate on Arabic sign is going on.

This in a way, drove Mr. Forhad to reach his conclusive presumption that I was in favour of Arabic sign at ZIA.

Personally, I think it's a stupid idea if the Govt. really tries to postulate its Islamic gesture through an Arabic sign at ZIA (yet Govt. hasn't came up with any explanation on why it was done in the first place though). In my last letter I was only trying to request people to learn more about Islam before giving a farfetched opinion in a public forum. It is not only true in case of "Islam", but in case of any branch of knowledge.

Though I have been noticing this phenomenon (in this Letters Page) for a long time, however felt the urge to write on this as I have recently noticed some irrelevant

civilians, are these the examples of bravery the White House is referring to?

Similarly the betrayal from the Iraqi Bath Party or its republican elite forces seems to be emerging through the "fog of war". If they did not have the courage or intention to fight the invaders, then why the charade? Why the defenceless civilians were allowed to face the most well equipped army in the world? Would it not have been better to simply let Saddam along with his Bath party to go into exile, which surely would have prevented the carnage!

It is the ordinary Iraqi civilians that have been the real brave souls in this war. Their courageous defiance to resist the occu-

restriction the communists, it pretended to be the friend of oppressed and spent money in the form of aid to buy the sympathy and confidence of poor nations. After the fall of USSR and the east Europe, its main opponents and competitors, the aid had dried up and the real face of the aggressor to intimidate the weak and poor nations came to surface.

Their greed to grab the wealth of others either by cunning methods or by cruel means is not unknown to anybody. History will repeat and the world will witness how the US grabs wealth of other nations for a long time to come and, of course, will be annihilated by the nature's forces only to give way, unfortunately, to another tyrant.

**Launch disaster**

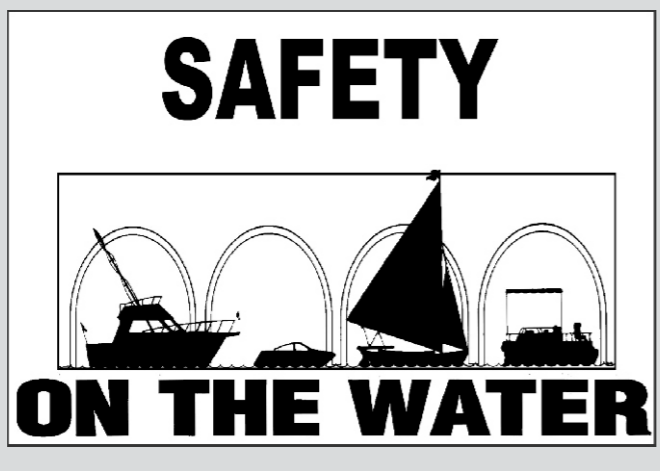
The stoppage of the launches during the Norwester hours for two months was a sound decision of the government. It is the responsibility of the government to give protection to the passengers from the very unsafe death traps called launches that ply on our rivers. These launches are inherently unstable and easily capsize with the first sign of a storm. Passenger accommodation are provided with very narrow door

that makes escape of most passengers from the compartment impossible, during emergency. Besides these launches have either very little or no life saving appliances like life buoys, life jacket or life raft i.e. total disregard to the safety of passenger. I have not heard any launch owner ever been punished for not keeping life saving appliance on board as required under relevant statute.

Without ensuring basic

stability of these launches, water tight engine room compartment, water tight cargo hold during transit and adequate life saving appliances on board no launch should be allowed to ply. If the launch owners wanted to continue their strike their route permits should have been cancelled. That way the government would not have pushed the passengers to the perils of the Norwesters and could not possibly be charged with negligence on the part of the government. Today there is no part in the country where people cannot go by road. With the strike on the passenger launches the passengers would only have been inconvenienced but now they have been pushed before almost certain death. This surely is the failure of the government in fulfilling its basic obligation to provide safe passage to passenger travelling in the river routes.

**Salahuddin Ahmad**  
Dhanmondi, Dhaka



comments on both in favour and against Islam (by some writers) which emanated from the on going debate on Arabic sign at ZIA. It seems that some people take it for granted that they can understand even the esoteric and metaphysical aspects of Islam (unlike any other philosophy/religion) just by their mere intuition and without studying it thoroughly.

**Zafar Hadi**  
California, USA

**Who are the cowards?**

The recent martyrdom operation led the White House condemning it as an act of "cowardice". A coward is the one who runs away from the battlefield in fear of his life, rather than sacrificing himself. Such sacrifice is the exact opposite of cowardice. Perhaps the White House assess "cowardice" by referring to the actions of its own chicken hawks that have avoided the various drafts for the past wars. Then calling for war against defenceless nations, demonstrating their bravado whilst insulated in their bunkers!

Donald Rumsfeld congratulating his armed forces to hide their disgrace, who are nothing but cowards. They resorted to flattening an area with high altitude bombings (B52), and Cruise Missiles, with total disregard for civilian casualties. Now that their soldiers are shooting unarmed

**The real face of the US**

I do not understand why people are so upset about the atrocities and brutalities of the US armed forces in Iraq. History is the witness that might has always been the right and the might has made the Romans, the Mongols, the Huns, the Turks, the British, the Germans under Hitler invade weaker nations some times in the guise of liberators and sometimes just as invaders. The invaders using the might established their right to atrocity and brutality and looted the helpless nations that had invaded or liberated. US is no exception. It has invaded Iraq to liberate it from the clutch of a dictator (as if there are no other dictators in this world) and after 'liberating' the Iraqi people went on a killing and looting spree to express their solidarity with them.

The US has always played a dubious role since the end of World War II. Competing against

We may like it or not, as our ancestors did, we have to live with the tyrant.

**Md. Akhtaruzzaman**  
East Rayzer Bazar, Dhaka

**"Complain against 36 army men"**

A news item published under the above caption attracted my attention. It is my impression that matters like these have roots elsewhere. Remember one or two more similar incidents involving the Army? It is my belief that incidents like these have their roots in the so-called Operation Clean Heart carried out some months ago which emboldened the Army. Besides the Indemnity Ordinance 2003 also created a kind of complacency in the minds of some Army personnel giving them a feeling of superiority over others and beyond reproach.

I am almost positive that the enquiry and the so-called investigation in this instance will follow the usual pattern of ISPR issuing a press release giving out a "story" exonerating the Army. The government may or may not say anything except for the fact that a case has been registered etc. After a while this will be shelved forever and no one would talk about it or remember it.

**Shamsher Chowdhury**  
Dhaka  
**Cantonment**

**restriction**

This is in reply to the NM's letter "Cantonment restriction" (20 April). I believe you are a Bangladeshi and presently leaving in the USA. If so, your attitude towards our army is simply shocking.

First, you expressed your doubt whether Army is doing what they are supposed to do. For your information, the principle role of Army throughout the world during peacetime is to train themselves for war. The training of Army is a continuous and never ending process. You may take pride that in our Army a vigorous training goes on throughout the year. Our almost one hundred training institutions are of very good standard. Be proud to know that our Military Academy (BMA), School of Infantry and Tactics (Sylhet), Non Commissioned Officers' Academy (Bogra) and Staff College at Mirpur are world class institutions, (despite of our Technical lacking). We train hundreds of cadets and officers of friendly countries every year.

Secondly, you said that you find no justification of having an army. Try to locate the geographical location of our country in the world map. Be updated with the current political situation, know the history of our country and the subcontinent, try to visualise the future geo-political situation, know about the Hill Tracts problem, try to know about our neighbours, you're most likely to change your opinion then.

**M Kapua**  
Dhaka

**There is much work to be done**

Welcome or not, the US Defence Secretary is visiting Iraq dutifully congratulating the troops on the "amazing feat" they achieved. He added there is work to be done yet- perhaps much work that can be characterised (another twist of Rumsfeld speak) as probably the biggest understatement of this US led invasion of Iraq. Indeed, there is much to be done after the indiscriminate and overwhelming display of the most destructive fireworks rained relentlessly on Iraqi cities and citizens. To add to the "achievement", wholesale plunder and pillage of Iraq's national museum and archives followed; abetted if not engineered by the US marines in Baghdad and elsewhere. The scorecard is impressive indeed.

But even the redoubtable Mr. Rumsfeld may have great difficulty to congratulate the US army which is shooting civilian demonstrators including school children; his troops are becoming jittery and nervous.

When his troops feel so insecure how on earth will they bring security and keep order and provide emergency assistance and restore civic services - a very tall order for these inadequate men. Post-war Iraq's rehabilitation is too important and too complex a task to be left to rank amateurs and inept authorities. For over twelve years Iraq has been subjected to crippling sanctions imposed under the UN umbrella but stubbornly enforced by the US with UK. Now after this latest assault on its destroyed infrastructure, it is for the UN to lift the sanctions after concluding the inspection regime, deploy its peacekeepers to assume the task of returning security and implementing with the Iraqi authorities a massive reconstruction and rehabilitation programme. It is established fact the US has a poor track record of managing to clear the debris after

they have intervened and created the mess in the first place.

**Dr. Zakir Husain**  
Dhaka

**Iraq: what next?**

Prior to the US war in Iraq a few people harboured any illusions about the behaviour and intentions of the Iraqi government under Saddam Hussein. Nonetheless, President Bush's rushed initiative tragically undermines the theory of a just war and will lead to a proliferation of war and other acts of aggression.

Already this prediction is beginning to unfold. Buoyed by their apparent success in Iraq the US is now issuing subtle threats against Syria, Iran and other so-called regimes like Sudan and Libya.

While the Iraqi people have been freed from the oppression of Saddam Hussein they continue to suffer, now at the hands of US expropriation. It is, for example, no secret how America's formidable military machine was able to quickly seize control of all the Iraqi oil wells and the Ministry of Oil Building in Baghdad but were unable to protect - despite being forewarned - the irreplaceable heritage of a proud Iraqi people housed in the Iraq National Museum. It is now known that American troops were among those allowed to ransack museums, burn archives, and pillage libraries.

It is likely that the US will be in Iraq for many years - even decades. History shows that the development of democracy is a gradual, evolutionary process. Adding to the growing consensus of U.S. dominance in the region is the reluctance on the part of the U.S. to allow the United Nations to take the lead in rebuilding Iraq. To counteract such suspicions the U.S. will likely establish a legitimate government in the weeks ahead that will attempt to conceal in the world's eyes the reality of an American military presence.

Evidence continues to mount, then, in the war's aftermath, that America's primary objective in Iraq was to gain control of the oil as well as the Middle East region.

Do other nations really want the US to be the world's lone enforcer? Is this not a time to revisit the concept of a 'Just War'?

**Paul Kokoski**  
Ontario, Canada

**Whom should we believe?**

In the recent past we heard that US troops killed Iraqi civilians by firing in peaceful demonstrations. But was it really peaceful as many of us like to believe?

Any objective reader will agree that soldiers are naturally jumpy in these kinds of stagnant situations, yet, the US troops get strict orders from the top brass about rules of engagement. In this world, however odd and untimely it may sound, US military is unique in contexts of showing humane treatment to enemies and the conquered. If one reviews any defence journals that deals with contemporary military issues, will agree as well. I highly doubt the firing took place without provocation. When one is in hostile territory and worried about guerrilla attacks, slightest gesture of animosity can cause havoc. Maybe we are forgetting that the US troops lost their people more so because their rules of engagement were strict about avoiding civilian casualty.

However, the question still remains. Was it really a peaceful

demonstration? It brings another question: what does America have to gain from this action? I think we can answer that question easily: nothing. From diplomatic standpoint, America won't be willing to loose any pluses nor to gain any minuses by senseless shooting. They need Iraqi people's support.

Then is it possible that someone deliberately created a hostile environment or flashed some gun muzzles to provoke the anxious and on-the-edge soldiers, so that they shot in fear of attacks? And thereby succeeded in a dirty trick to make America look bad? If that is so, then I feel sorry for the Iraqis again

So, will anyone tell us what really happened there? Will we ever know?

**Tirtho Mahmood**  
Albany, CA, USA

**Industrialisation**

Recently I came to know that our government is going to purchase hundreds of Swiss made Volvo bus worth hundred crores of taka.

It is a great step for solving acute transportation problem in our city. But our respected government should think everything related to the well being of our country. We can solve the bus problem more efficiently.

With a neediness of more than 4000 buses and more than 3500 buses still required we can easily set-up a motor car manufacturing plant when our ability is still limited only to the motor bike assembly. It will help us to save the foreign currency and also solve the problem of unemployment in a significant extent. It has been more than 30 years since we have been liberated but in the field of heavy industrialisation we have a speed of a snail. But look at our neighbours they became a nuclear power within 30 years.

**Asad Khan**  
Kalyanpur, Dhaka

I Important and Urgent	II Important & Not Urgent
III Not Important & Urgent	IV Not Important & Not Urgent

**We have more important problems to address**

It is wonderful that you publish a variety of letters from the people who reads your esteemed daily everyday. In contrast to other dailies, you have contributed a whole page for these mails. This is also a great sign that you try to capture a wide range of opinion from the readers, and try the best to focus all those on you pages.

Very recently, a news item published in your paper somehow attracted a huge attention from the readers both staying in the country and outside the country. It was all about a neon sign at the ZIA in Arabic. I do not say that there are no scope for argument on this matter, but what I really felt that this topic should not linger for a long time.

Those are writing to your newspaper are either residing in the posh areas of the capital or located at comfortable foreign environment with huge time to waste on the topic like Arabic neon signs at the ZIA. They should understand that this little, poor country of theirs has so many problems that the new Arabic neon sign is nothing compared to those.

I do differ from their opinion that the Arabic neon sign is a great problem. The writers can focus on or discuss about the basic needs for ordinary people, availability of jobs for the fresh graduates, gradual declination of education system and remedies for improvements, cleanliness of the city, reflection of values of life to our daily chores, corruption that takes place in various spheres of life, and such like.

One such problem I can point to-- the timing of garbage collection. The City Corporation can ask its garbage collection system to collect and clear all the garbage during the night. Since the corporation collects and dispose of bins at daytime, the people who gather those from individual houses are collecting the same at daytime. If the corporation informs us that they will manage the garbage after nightfall, so the collection teams can reschedule their timings for a night or after sunset collection.

This will help us in two ways. The city will rise every morning with a clean environment to breathe in. Secondly, while on the way to the work for the day, we would neither get stuck in a traffic jam behind a garbage carrying truck nor would face with the garbage dampers spoiling their ways and the environments, sometimes spoiling us as well!

**Sajjad Waheed, Dhaka**