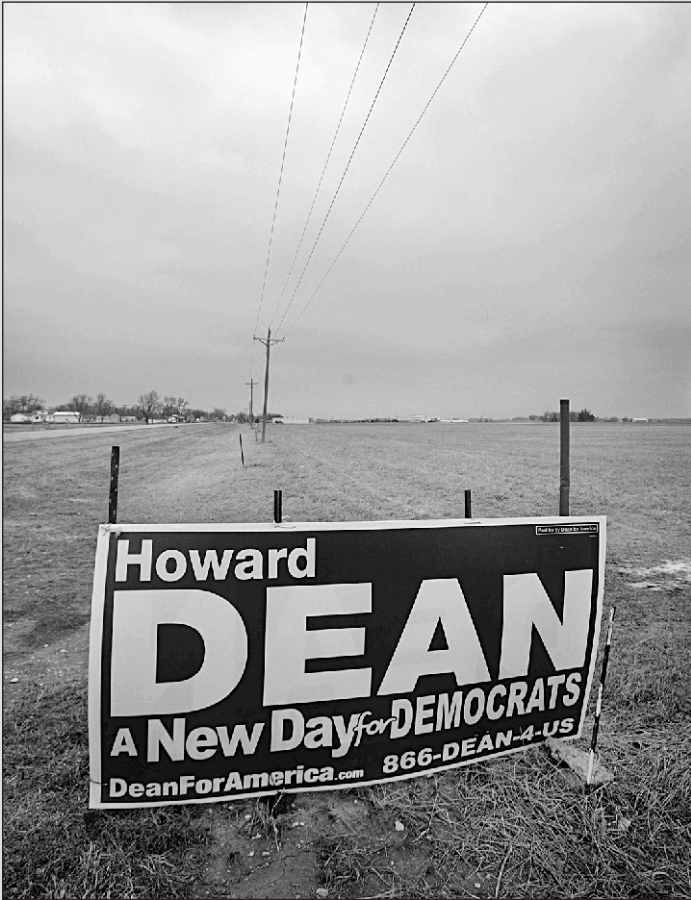


Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.



Future of democrat's stretching out in the emptiness?

Democrats in trouble!

As the campaign for the 2004 US presidential race is gearing up, the Democrats may be facing their worst defeat whosoever is nominated to lead the party. Former Vermont Governor Howard Dean, the Democratic frontrunner, says Democratic aspirations for 2004 are doomed if he doesn't get the nomination. Governor Dean's Democratic rivals such as Senator Kerry and Congressman Dick Gephardt say the Democrats are doomed if Mr. Dean gets the nomination. They are both right.

All Democratic presidential hopefuls are finding it difficult to attack President George W Bush, whether on the question of Iraq or on the economy. Mr. Dean has been able to fire up the anti-war Democrat base, but he seems to be contradicting himself on a regular basis. He recently said that the capture of Saddam Hussein is a good thing, but it will not make America safer. He said that the US should demand that Pakistan coughs up Bin Laden or America go in and get him. In the same breath, he said America should not prejudice bin Laden. And Mr. Dean has been inconsistent about the so-called missile defence

system (MDS). Sometimes he says he would abolish the programme and other times that he would only reduce funding for it. However, the worst news for Mr. Dean is that a recent Washington Post and ABC News poll showed that most of his own Democrat supporters know "hardly anything" or "nothing" about his policy positions.

Other Democrat candidates are not better. Former NATO supreme commander Gen. Wesley Clark, who led the US-led military intervention in 1999 to liberate Kosovo, says he opposes the military intervention in Iraq and wants UN participation. He forgets to mention that in Kosovo, the UN was not involved. Then President Bill Clinton avoided seeking Security Council resolution authorising military intervention in Kosovo when it became clear that Russia and China would veto such a resolution. Mr. Gephardt, who supports the Iraq war, wants the US to hand over Iraq's administration to the UN, ignoring the fact that the UN has no means to ensure peace and stability in Iraq. In fact, after the bombing of the UN headquarters in Baghdad by renegade Saddam-

loyalists, the UN has virtually fled Iraq.

Saddam's capture has clearly made other regimes nervous. That's why Bush must be savouring the aftermath of recent diplomatic movements in his direction: First, Iran negotiated a safeguards protocol with the International Atomic Energy Agency last month, and then Libyan leader Col. Moammar Gadhafi announced that he would renounce weapons of mass destruction. Gadhafi, especially, threw a monkey wrench in North Korean dictator Kim Il Jong's hard-line strategy by urging other nations to follow suit. For one thing, Kim's customer base has been drastically reduced. Iraq and Libya are no longer in the weapons market, while Syria and Iran are under such close monitoring that any sales Pyongyang might be contemplating would be too risky.

Not surprisingly, Mr. Bush is leading Mr. Dean by 53 per cent to 28 per cent. He seems to have won the race before it has even begun.

Mahmood Elahi
Ottawa, Canada

Position of Padma Bridge

We have three big rivers (the Padma, the Jamuna and the Meghna) in this country. The mighty Meghna has been partially conquered through building of a bridge in between Sonargaon and Gozaria and also in between Gozaria and Daudkandi. The Jamuna being mightier has taken more time and money to 'conquer'. However, we did that with foreign help.

The Padma is also under 'conquest' through an under-construction bridge near the Hardinge Railway Bridge. The question of building a Padma Bridge in the downstream has been under consideration for several years. The initial site was chosen near Aricha Ghat to join Aricha and Goalanda. But many want the bridge to be located at Maoa to join Bhanga of Faridpur (Shariatpur?). The Barisal-Madaripur people are awake and doing their bit to have the bridge in this position.

So there are two alternatives and two groups of people to fight for their own interests. But Nawabganj of Dhaka and the area of Faridpur opposite to this area have long been neglected. The road from Dhaka may go from the western side of the Gabtali-Ameen Bazaar Bridge connecting to the eastern bank of Padma at Nawabganj.

Therefore, the position of the bridge may be straighter in between Nawabganj of Dhaka and Faridpur proper. This will help develop the communication of the otherwise neglected area. This bridge will be easier to use for both the Barisal-Madaripur people and the people of Kushitia and Jessore regions. Besides, the parties of people will no more be quarrelling and calling strikes, hartals etc. for group benefits. Furthermore, the Gabtali Bus Terminal may be used for the purpose, while a new terminal would be needed if the bridge is built at Maoa-Bhanga point.

MAS Molla
BAAS, Dhaka

US Congressmen's remarks

US Congressmen Joseph Crowley and Gregory W Meeks, while calling on the prime minister, reiterated Washington's impression and perception of Bangladesh "as a democratic, liberal and moderate Muslim country". They also declared that "it could be a model for other Muslim countries". I am delighted that Crowley said that they would help maintain a positive image of Bangladesh in the US Congress. He has also observed, "Bangladesh is a democracy and a tolerant society."

Having said that, it is not clear why you covered another news item in your January 13 issue headlined "Intolerance has taken hold in Bangladesh", attributing it to Crowley. It certainly contradicted the earlier statement. You highlighted some minority leaders'

reported disclosure that they have been persecuted, oppressed and marginalised in society. If someone could ventilate such grievances to a foreign dignitary, I do not know what they expect in a society otherwise well known and well regarded for communal harmony and peaceful coexistence of different religions. No one should, I believe, search for casual and stray incidents, and jeopardise community interest or greater national interest for individual satisfaction.

AF Rahman, Dhaka

Foreign doctors

I am talking from my personal experiences as I have been working in different countries for the last fourteen years including Iran, the USA Brunei and now in New Zealand. Many countries in the world hire foreign specialist physicians

for rendering service to their community when there is a shortage of specialist physicians. Even in New Zealand, Australia and England, the governments are hiring doctors from South Africa, USA and Canada to get the services for their people and this service is free as governments pay the foreign doctors. These doctors are not allowed to do private practice. Even a hospital has to buy medical protection insurance for these doctors; without the insurance they are not allowed to work. The institutes that hire them must also appoint supervisors who are responsible for their activities. These doctors are not allowed to work in private hospitals. They are also involved in training the local doctors.

Bangladesh needs specialists and the government may allow them to work in the country as long as these doctors, appointed by different institutes, serve a portion of the people free of charge. A foreigner is never given a permanent registration to work privately as it gives them unlimited authority to treat or maltreat the local people and there would not be anybody to shoulder the responsibility. But they can be utilised in the institutes as specialists under supervision of local doctors designated by the hospitals.

We should utilise foreign specialists like specialists or consultants in other areas. I admit that physicians from India and Sri Lanka are good but not all of them are equally good. The BMDC should keep an eye on them through the local specialists.

Dr. Mohammed Daud Haider
Dunedin Hospital, Dunedin, New Zealand

A 'creative living spirit'

The inhabitants of a particular time and situation are responsible for the sound or unsound environment of their world including its socio-economic condition from individual to national or international levels. The quality grade of the society and economy depends on how they (the ancestors) led their life. The grade of its quality can easily be judged and maintained by their successors when they acknowledge its receipt.

We have heard of many wise great people belonging to various communities and doctrines of thoughts, who pronounced from time to time regarding the newer generations' quality or non-quality living, if interpreted the average message stands thus: If you wish for a greater tomorrow, make your today a great day! Positive activities like 'Mutually Sharing Joy and Sorrow' around are evergreen means of 'give and take' system to 'live and let live' healthier, happier and lengthier life full of eternal contention.

If your today's attitude is free from invading, usurping, warring, killing or destroying, you are in the virtuous act of having today a great day. Consequently, every tomorrow shall be a greater day with heavenly joy. Opinions welcomed!

AR Shams
ACI Creative World, Naser Chambers, Hyder Chowk Gari Khata, Hyderabad Pakistan

No more cricket!

I write with a heavy heart but I firmly believe I am reflecting the feelings of this unfortunate nation. Yes, we all must have heard the heart-rending news of the Bangladesh A team being shot out by a club team of Pakistan for guess how many runs 30 to be exact, thereby losing a four-day match within two days and that too by an innings. Guess what was the opponents' score a paltry 189. Even the winners didn't dream of such an outcome. They were probably thinking of some how saving the match. But they should have known who their opponents were. Anything is possible if the oppos-

ing team is BD.

Isn't it time, dear countrymen, to say goodbye to such incessant insults from all strata of our cricket? Isn't it time that a country where the majority doesn't get two meals a day even, dies of cold in hundreds because we cannot, nay, we don't give them warm clothing, the daily necessities have gone beyond the reach of all except the fortunate few, we stopped squandering the poor men's resources in such shame bringing pursuits? How can such a poor country bring in a multitude of coaches (the number being almost the same as the players themselves) to multiply our shame? Time has come to put a stop to all this.

Let cricket along with all its paraphernalia be banished from Bangladesh for at least 10 years. We have much greater priorities to attend to. Will someone heed to this call?

Ahmad Kamal, Abu Dhabi

Minister's comments

While addressing the inaugural ceremony of the conference of the Islamic Chhatra Shibir (ICS), student front of the Jamaat-e-Islami (JI), Communications Minister Barrister Nazmul Huda said on 30/12/03 that the Jamaat did not commit any crime demanding non-separation of Pakistan in 1971.

If he thinks that what the Jamaat and its organisations did in 1971 was correct, then would he say that by proclaiming independence of Bangladesh on behalf of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib and also by participating in the Liberation War, the late president Ziaur Rahman made a great blunder? Ziaur Rahman was given the second highest award of the country, 'Bir Uttam' for his heroism in the war against Pakistan. Would Barrister Nazmul Huda now tell us to denounce him? Would he also say that by killing the intellectuals on December 14, 1971, the Al-Badr and Al-Shams did a good thing?

Now the most interesting thing is that if he says that what both Ziaur Rahman and the forces opposed to liberation had done during the Liberation War in 1971 were absolutely correct, then we would be greatly confused. We know that 2 plus 2 is four and 2 minus 1 is 1. But 2 minus 1 can never be four.

So the bottom line is -- 'The cat is almost out of the bag'.

Iqbal Ahmed
136, New Eskaton Dhaka- 1000

Setting history right

My attention was drawn to an article [DS, 17 November, 2003], written by Dr. M Waheeduzzaman Manik, Professor and Chairman of the Department of Public Management at Austin Peay State University, Tennessee, USA on the occasion of the death anniversary of the great leader Moulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani. While I have nothing to say or add about what he has written about the great leader, I was rather surprised to find one information in his write-up, which is anything but true. Professor Manik wrote: "He (i.e. Moulana Bhashani) was dismayed when both Sher-e-Bangla AK Fazlul Huq and Shaheed Suhrawardy joined the central government of Pakistan as ministers in Mohammed Ali Bogra's cabinet without showing any regard for the pre-election pledges."

The above comments in the write up by Professor Manik escaped my notice in Dhaka, but when I arrived in the USA, some friends brought it to my notice, because Sher-e-Bangla also happens to be my father. Both as his son and a student of political science, especially contemporary politics of the then Pakistan, I can assert with all authority at my command that Sher-e-Bangla never, ever, was a member of Mohammed Ali's cabinet at any

time. Of course, he had joined the cabinet of Choudhury Mohammed Ali, and I would need at least 1500 words to explain that situation if anybody is interested. The question of any regard or disregard for the pre-election pledges therefore does not arise at all because there were no general elections on an all-Pakistan basis during the period which Professor Manik was talking about. Of course, the Jukto Front had pledged many things but when it was dissolved in late 1954 and after the senior leaders shifted to central politics, the pledges automatically became redundant. And as far as Mr. Suhrawardy is concerned, I am not quite sure whether he joined the cabinet of Mohammed Ali Bogra for a brief period. And that is it. Professor Manik or anyone interested in detailed history of that period may write to me at the following e-mail address: faezul@hotmail.com.

demonstrate that tolerance is the most important thing."

The Bangladeshis can boast that they are the most tolerant nation on the surface of the Earth. Our relationship with the Bangladeshi Hindus is remarkable. If the Americans carry out their venomous attacks on a general basis, who are they to comment on our 'specific occurrences'? We know such occurrences refer to some village fights - which in no way reflect the views of the Muslims in Bangladesh. These squabbles carried out by the unscrupulous opportunists in our society are nowhere near the scale of Gujarat massacre in India - what has Crowley to say about that?

The Parishad leaders are entitled to their views, however, one cannot but think they are stirring up problems for our country by charming the Congressman with



Humanity in distress

Stand by Iran

The colossal damage by earthquake in Iran has generated a sense of strong sympathy all over the world. We, in Bangladesh, must stand by our brothers in Iran in these days of distress with all possible assistance and resources. Iran, the ancient land of civilisation, is being visited by such horrible disasters repeatedly and the growth that the country achieved during the last few years is being neutralised unfortu-

nately.

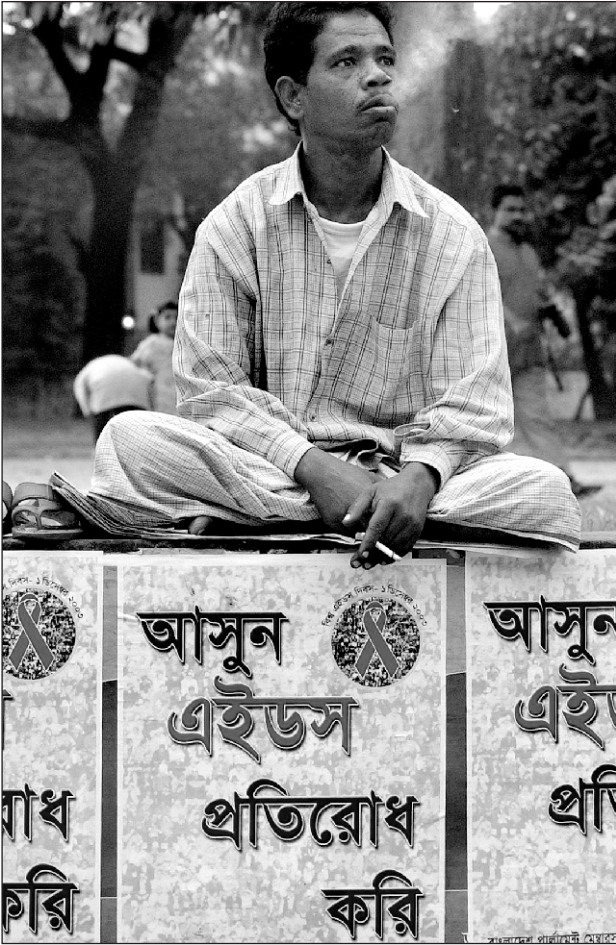
Our government may consider sending teams of doctors and nurses to serve the injured people in the devastated city of Bam. At the same time, the government may take the initiative to invite the resourceful people and philanthropic associations to come forward with their generous support in cash or kind for

the people in distress.

A team of engineers may also be sent to conduct rescue operations and help reconstruction of the city.

This is the time to express our fraternal feelings and serve the cause of humanity.

Kumar Prithwiraj Nath
Dhanmondi, Dhaka



Time to take a stand !

AK Faezul Huq, Atlanta, USA

Crowley's stand

The comments by US Congressman Joseph Crowley are somewhat offensive. One must stress that the Americans should put their own house in order before commenting on ours. Humiliating the visitors to their country through finger printing and taking a photograph and detaining people indefinitely on suspicion of terrorism are not activities that give a nation the right to teach a tolerant country like Bangladesh how it should treat its minorities. A country which gives Israel unconditional support for its actions against the Palestinians is in no position to preach about tolerance. They have proudly inscribed into the history books their massacres with the blood of innocent Red Indians, civilians of Hiroshima, Vietnam...Afghanistan, Iraq... the list being endless.

How could he say, "I am here to

their support for the US-led war and then sobbing to him about the constitution of Bangladesh. If the eighth amendment is offensive, then let the US force its daughter nation Israel to change its constitution which considers Israel to be a Jewish country. By the rules of democracy, we Muslims as the majority can consider Islam as the state religion of Bangladesh.

Sharif Hussain, Sylhet

Going back to '71

The crux of the problem was not the legitimacy of the then Pakistan government, but the historical perspective of the entire scenario that unfolded after the election under the aegis of Yahya Khan's legal framework order.

The Larkana conspiracy, hatched by the trio of General Akber Khan, ISI chief, Mr Awan, presidential security chief, and Mr ZA Bhutto, the chief architect of 'West Pakistan's supremacy' was at the root of the political crisis.

mandate from his party following the advice of his uncle Late AQM Shafiqul Islam, the then chief of Council Muslim League. Both of them met Tikka Khan and television and radio broadcasts followed.

We fail to understand how a minister of the present government could say that the then government was legitimate.

SM Khalid Chowdhury
Secretary General of the Society for Defence of Human Rights in Bangladesh, UK

Ban on Ahmadiyya books

I would like to express my views on the govt decision of banning all the publications of Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamat (Kadiani). I personally believe that the political/non-political groups who are protesting against the decision know very little about the ideologies of the Kadiani sect; they (protestors) do

Md. Arif Sadeq
Dept. of English, Dhaka University

Ahmadiyya books

This refers to the letter, "Ahmadiyya Books Banned", (January 14, 2004) by Masood Nasir. I strongly support the writer's view that banning the Ahmadiyya books were indeed a bad step by the government. This will definitely make the Ahmadiyyas angry. As we have seen in the past, terrorism originates from people who are suppressed.

I believe that if we want to live in peace, then we should not create chaos among people. Everyone has his or her choice when it comes to religion.

Minhaj Ahmed, Uttara, Dhaka 1230