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## Much ado about Rocca

On the surface, Christine Rocca's Dhaka visit, and her focus on the Ahmadiyya book ban, is good news for activists who are working on this issue. But in reality, it once again demonstrates how little our government listens to us, its own citizens.

For the last five weeks, we have been screening my documentary "Muslims or heretics?" (<http://www.pinholepictures.com/ahmadiya>) in Bangladesh to raise awareness of persecution of Ahmadiyyas. Although government-aligned people attended our various screenings at BRAC, Russian Cultural Center, Chittagong Press Club, etc., government officials never deigned to respond to the issues. Several sensible people within the BNP tried to arrange meetings with relevant ministers to protest the book ban, but these meetings also proved elusive. Yet, Rocca showed up in Dhaka for one day and immediately got a meeting with Jamaat leader Matiur Rahman Nizami.

Why did none of this happen when BANGLADESHI activists pursued the issue over the last six months? Why did the government never respond to the "Demand For Justice" notice filed by ASK and others, challenging the book ban?

I am reminded of my article "Who's Afraid of Bangladesh?", where I quoted Afsan Chowdhury as saying: "If anything is proven, it is that the authorities don't pay us enough attention but only care about foreign media. I don't know whether to be insulted or relieved."

External pressure may force the government to back down on the Ahmadiyya ban, but that will never be a permanent solution. The government (AL or BNP) needs to start listening to, and respecting the work of, Bangladeshi human rights activists.

**Naem Mohaiemen**  
Shobak, Org

## Criticising homeland

I failed to identify the wisdom behind publishing a private conversation between two expert architects and an editor in NY in a recent issue of DS. It is one of those clichés where these people spend part of their comfortable life in criticising their homeland and saying what should have been done.

In the past, I saw many such soliloquies of this duo and others occupying precious space of DS, advising us, those fighting to make an honest living. Instead, I just hope all the talents abroad, along with those who decided to fight corruption, mismanagement and plunder of public resources from home, would really come together to salvage the country.

**Manik Lala**  
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

## Extortionists at work

This is in response to the letter "Extortionists at work" by Truly Terrified of Dhaka (19.5.2004).

I have a friend whose family is also going through the same kind of telephonic threats from 'agents' of different "well-known" and listed criminals demanding "protection money". Her father is a famous academician and that's seems to be the problem for them. They have paid handsome amount of money to three different 'agent's claiming to have links with three different "Boro Bhai". They preferred to pay the money without authenticating their claim and of course never informed the police to avoid unnecessary hassle. Surprisingly, the call hasn't come to end. New "Boro Bhai-s" are surfacing almost every week.

I fully agree with the writer that Operation Clean Heart was a heav-

enly blessing for us. For the first time in our life we felt a rare sense of security.

I think there are a lot many who will agree with us. It is true there were some unfortunate incidents. But life was a lot better.

The self-styled civil society and the so called torch bearers of humanity were heart broken at the short respite. Now that the days of chopped up bodies are back, our 'civil' citizens (many of whom have murky backgrounds) seem to be quite happy to restore the 'normal' course of life.

There are many who will welcome another operation clean

through the annals and adjudge each one's contribution with a more dispassionate outlook.

Such judgement may lead to controversy. In that case those who feel dissatisfied may conduct a survey of their own or ask any of their more favourite media to do so on their behalf making sure that the results conform to their expectations.

**MM Asaduzzaman**  
Azimpur, Dhaka

## Who doesn't want to be an MP?

The Bangladeshi Members of Parliament (MP) are a lucky lot.

letter).

Is there any Bangladeshi who does not want to be an MP?

**Amerul Haq**  
On e-mail

## Extortionists at work!

I can very well imagine the mental state of the writer "Truly Terrified" (DS, 19.05.04). The dreadful reality is that the extortionists are operating here (in connivance with the administration and law enforcers, of course). The government will never realise the plight of the people receiving calls for 'chada'.

This is where all successive governments have failed miserably. For how long do we have to suffer at

private universities" by Hasna Hasan, Lecturer, Department of English, Leading University, Dhaka (18-5-2004). First, I want to say I did make a mistake in my letter (9-5-2004). There was no mismatch in "public" and "private" university in her earlier letter.

Let's start with her earlier letter where she mentioned there are "lots of" private universities all over the country. And the prosperity of "some" private universities is quite noticeable. Actually "some" can easily be replaced by "a few".

I really could not understand the point "issue of teachers" and related "complaint" in the second paragraph of her letter (18-5-2004).

It is very naive to say that "good teachers always teach well". A hectic schedule will work as a negative catalyst on their performance.

Now about the forged certificate issue. In fact a conman was acting as a teacher in two of the private universities. I did not elaborate to make the letter short. But I mentioned the source of information. It was not that tough to verify it. No one can awake someone who is pretending to sleep.

Now about the outrageous and outlandish cost of education. Yes, this is one thing (and the other is quality of education delivered) I will always make an objection to. We really need to redefine "the middle class and higher middle-class" of Bangladesh, which is one of the poorest countries in the world. Many of the students belonging to the so called middle class families wait for a year to get admitted into a public university if they fail the first time just because they cannot afford the fees charged by the private universities, and probably for a certificate which has better recognition without any "affiliation".

Now a point I wanted to avoid so far, the quality of intake in the private universities. All I want to say is that DS should run a report on that.

In my other letters, I mentioned the harrowing experience of students reading in a "college" without UGC recognition, the nexus between the private universities and the organisations offering jobs and other related issues. You can make the world a utopia by logic, but it's better to come down to reality and face the truth.

As for myself, I can say that I have got the guts to admit my mistakes and also to protest the "flourishing business" in the name of education where money overshadows the quality of education offered. I have said enough about it. I am not going to write any more letters regarding this issue.

**Saif**  
Dhaka

## One full year?

An American soldier has been sentenced to "one year" in prison for abusing Iraqi prisoners and committing crimes against humanity. This is pathetically, outrageously shocking! One year for abusing some Arabs and Muslims? That's not fair. Three months in an extra-light-security prison would have been okay, but one full year for abusing some Muslims? They are Muslims, what's the big deal? Come on, what happened to American justice?

On behalf of this unfortunate soldier, and on the ground of unfair trial, I protest and demand the sentence be reduced to three months immediately. This trial clearly wasn't fair since there wasn't any neutral/international third party. Bush and his warmongers are being so unfair with our hard-working, bunker-busting, perverting (sorry, that was a slip) lean, mean killing-machines. One full year? Gee, I am outraged.

**Azad Miah**

## Attack on UK High Commissioner



PHOTO: AFP

Another despicable and abhorrent act by a fanatic group took place at the Hazrat Shahjalal (R) shrine. The UK High Commissioner was the target of the barbaric attack.

We are peace loving and inclined to respect all religions. But some vicious circles, invigorated with the zeal of so called 'Jihad', are carrying out brutal experiments. It seems the government is hardly aware of the consequences of such acts. It must strongly resist the forces behind those heinous acts.

**Tahidur Rahman**  
Nazrul Islam Hall, BUET

It was an unpardonable, cowardly and barbaric attack on Sylhet people in particular and on all Bangladeshis in general. This has been a savage attempt to destabilise our beloved homeland.

We all in Bangladesh were so happy to know that a Sylhet born Bangladeshi, Mr Anwar Chowdhury, was going to head the British diplomatic mission in Bangladesh and were full of pride to see him speaking with journalists of Dhaka on TV channels, smiling and full of love and respect for the country where he was born and spent his early years. We take this dastardly act as an attack on our own selves. We have seen for some time that an orchestrated and planned conspiracy is being hatched to damage this country's image as a moderate Muslim nation. This is part of a dirty game being played by unpatriotic elements hidden in our society. Time will unmask the ugly faces of those cowards who are behind such attacks. We want the government to identify and punish the attackers.

For the HC and those who suffered, we pray to the Almighty Allah for their early recovery. We pray for their near and dear ones to have the strength to bear this pain. We hope H.E will be able to join his office very soon.

**GAhmed**  
Dhaka

A few weeks ago, I witnessed the extraordinary interview of H.E. Anwar Chowdhury, the British High Commissioner in Bangladesh, in BBC World. Mr. Chowdhury, basically a technician, rose to this coveted diplomatic Position, and that is not only an acknowledgement of the services of the ethnic minority community in Britain, but also a recognition of a Bangladeshi Muslim on foreign soil. Undoubtedly, it is a matter of pride for us and particularly for the people of his homeland in greater Sylhet. But then, no sooner he arrived in Bangladesh, he has been greeted with bombs! Do we have any say?

Relations between Bangladesh and Britain are deep rooted, both historically and culturally. Nearly half a million Bangladeshi immigrants have settled in the UK and that reflects the bondage and recognition of dependable bilateral ties. The UK is the key development partner of Bangladesh contributing some 80 million pounds per annum to our development sector. At this point of time, British investment in Bangladesh is nearly one billion pounds or so. British investments in this country both in government and corporate sectors are manifold; namely oil and natural gas, poverty eradication, agriculture and seafood products, power generation, industrial infrastructure support and so on and so forth. The multinational corporate and banking establishments in Bangladesh with British patrons deserve all words of appreciation for creating global standard opportunities at home. Even the world famous chef, Tomy Miah, is a flag bearer of this country in the UK.

Having said that, the tragic incident leaves a few points to seriously ponder. The protocol matters, particularly the physical safety and security of foreign diplomats, warrant thoughtful review. The image of the country, once again at home and beyond would be making news; the initiatives of diplomatic missions, the donor/development agencies and the foreign corporate communities perhaps would focus on the issue of safer environment in the country once again. We deeply denounce the incident and sincerely plead to bring the culprits to justice without further delay.

Mr. Chowdhury is not only a respectable diplomat with a noble vision and commitment towards the development of this country; he is a son of this soil as well.

**Mahbub**  
Dhaka

There was a bomb blast at the Dargah of Hazrat Shahjalal (R) right after Juma prayers killing three people (so far) and injuring many others. The newly appointed British High Commissioner in Bangladesh and the Deputy Commissioner of Sylhet were among the injured.

This is the second time a bomb has been exploded at the Dargah, the first time being during the Urs of Hazrat Shahjalal (R).

If the government had taken steps to nab the criminals on that occasion, this mishap would not have happened.

What is our government really doing? Why can't it curb terrorism? Who are these terrorists? Till today the killers of Ahsanullah Master MP and the innocent schoolboy have not been arrested. Why?

Whenever we open the newspapers there is news of killing, rape, acid burns, abduction or extortion. Why is happening? Why can't the government control crime?

We, the ordinary citizens of Bangladesh, are frustrated.

Stop this senseless killing! Stop terrorism! Bangladesh did not become independent for its people to become hostage in the hands of goons and killers!

**Fahmeena Nahas**  
Altav Villa, Amberkhana, Sylhet

The new British High Commissioner in Dhaka, Anwar Chowdhury, the DC of Sylhet, Abul Hossain, and more than 50 people were injured in a powerful bomb blast at Hazrat Shahjalal mazar gate after Juma prayers on Friday. Three people died in the attack. Mr Chowdhury told the AFP news agency from hospital in Sylhet: "The bomb hit my stomach after it was hurled, but did not explode" (BBC online, 21 May, 2004). Mr. Chowdhury went to Sylhet on a three day visit.

In February this year, five people were killed when bombs exploded at a religious gathering at the same mazar premises. Over the years, bomb attacks in religious places, cultural functions and political gathering have killed more than one hundred and injured scores of people in Bangladesh. Killing people in our country is not a difficult task. Political parties give shelter to the killers. This senseless attack would send wrong signals! The attack on the British High Commissioner will have a negative impact on the image of Bangladesh. Lawlessness coupled with the emergence of the Muslim militants such as Jagrata Muslim Janata in the northern region must not be overlooked. The government's initiatives to halt these criminal activities have been futile. To regain our country's image, we must work together against the disruptive elements.

**Mallik Akram Hossain**  
Hong Kong

Back in January, there was an explosion at the shrine of Hazrat Shahjalal (R), which killed three people, but the government did not take any tough action, not a single person was arrested. If we look further back, in Khulna eight persons were killed in October 1999 in an attack on an Ahmadiyya mosque, but no one was arrested.

Now we see, as the government does not take any action against the extremists, they have gone to the extent of making an attempt on the life of a foreign dignitary.

**Jamaluddin Ahmed**  
Dhaka

We are deeply shocked and condemn the bomb blast in which the new British High Commissioner Anwar Chowdhury was injured. It is a miracle that he is now out of danger. We thank the Almighty Allah.

The incident happened at the mazar of Hazrat Shahjalal (R) in Sylhet in which three people died and almost one hundred people have been injured, many of them are in critical condition.

We are very upset at this happening. Who are behind this and what could be their motive? The government must act fast and leave no stone unturned to catch the criminals and give them exemplary punishment.

The Awami League did not waste any time to blame the government. It blamed the government for patronising the extremist elements. During the AL regime, many bomb blasts took place. The AL used to blame the BNP for those attacks, now they are blaming the four-party alliance government for it. Doesn't it sound most unreasonable? We urge the opposition to shun this attitude. This bickering is helping the miscreants. They should come forward and join hands with the government to unravel the mystery.

**Nur Jahan**  
Chittagong

## Against the Calypso....

After a fruitful series in Zimbabwe, Bangladesh cricket team are now on their tour of the West Indies. After a long wait Bangladesh team got the much-coveted fifth ODI win against Zimbabwe, again they showed guts in the first two matches against West Indies. Under the guidance and coaching of Dav Whatmore, Bangladesh cricket team have shown remarkable improvement and rekindled some hope for the future of Bangladesh cricket, but their losing streak is still going on as they repeatedly failed to keep up the winning spirit. Well, I think if they toured Zimbabwe now they might've won their first ever Test and ODI series with ease. It's always uncertain when Bangladesh cricket is going to click in every department and snatch the match from the opponents, and they do have records of losing to minnows like Canada.

One must admit that some players have been doing very well so far, but the team's upper order failed to get the vital runs which could've changed the match results in our favour.

The bowlers bowled on a tight line and that gave the matches a close finish.

I immensely enjoyed the matches except the last one. I wish they'd do well in the upcoming Test series and hope they'd prevent King Lara from scoring five hundred runs in an innings. All the best wishes to them for the Test matches!

**Jinaan Khadeejah**  
On e-mail



PHOTO: AFP

heart. But our self-styled intellectuals will do their best to foil it.

**Joy**  
Dhaka

## BBC poll

In her letter of 6 May, Ms. Nurjahan of Chittagong came down heavily on BBC (Bangla) for polling the greatest Bengalee of all times. In her opinion, such kind of adjudication is not fair as all the polled greats are unique in their own fields for which none of them can be second to the other. They are not like students belonging to the same class that their positions can be determined in such a way. A very logical argument indeed. But where is the fault of BBC?

In all fairness, this should be addressed to the listeners-participants. Very often we hear of a Chancellor's gold medal being awarded to the best student selected from among a large number of fellows belonging to different disciplines and years. Graduation of historical figures by posterity is nothing new. Posterity can see

They enjoy some privileges that we poor citizens do not. Let's have a look at some of them: Most of the time the parliament is non-functional because of lack of quorum. The MPs do not do for what they have been elected to join parliament sessions and govern.

The MPs enjoy the privilege of buying a vehicle tax free (in a country where a car is a luxury). Dhaka has been witnessing a flurry of arrivals of cars like BMW, Mercedes, Lexus etc.

They get allowances telephone bills being one of them. But a good number of this privileged lot do not pay bills (recent newspaper reports carried the extent and names of our privileged group who failed to pay up their bills).

And even more interesting is now they want free phones. There is a Bengali saying, "Mamar Barir Abdar" meaning "as if you are at your uncle's house and all your sweet wishes are attended to".

Yes, they have to do a lot of hard work to get to this position (could be the topic of the next

the hands of our politicians who patronise these criminals? Why don't the police provide security to the citizens of this country? Our ministers at every given opportunity lament over an under-staffed police force and lack of safe funds. When victims (of rape and extortion) approach police, they seldom receive the cooperation which they rightly deserve -- rather the police harass the victims or are unwilling to accept cases even when the criminals are identified. Has this anything to do with funds or manpower limitations? The problem is not manpower or fund constraint but good governance.

The bottom line is, Bangladesh is turning into a criminals' den and lawlessness is becoming UNBEARABLE! We do not expect much from the government in terms of citizens' rights and benefits but we strongly demand that it MUST ensure the security of its citizens.

**S Islam**  
Dhaka

## Private universities: a final word

It refers to the letter "Attitude towards

## Are we thinking straight?

I am writing in response to Mr. Mahbub's letter titled "Are we insane?" published on May 21.

When Maitraie Devi and Mircéa Eliade fell in love in the late 1920's in then Calcutta, their love sadly did not consummate mostly because the society at that time was not open to interracial marriages. Interracial marriages were illegal in Canada and the United States in the past as well. But I wonder how many people nowadays would support the idea that two people in love should not be allowed to get married simply because they belong to two different races. Keep in mind that such attitude had certainly made sense in the past among the majority of people in societies across the world. Just as we used to believe that the earth was flat, the sun revolved around the earth and so on. If we are to accept things simply because they have been around for a significant period of time, why not go back to the time when women did not have the same rights as men? Let us also go back to the time when in order to be disposed of; dead bodies required a clean bill of character issued by a person with religious authority. We should also assert that the marriages of all straight couples without children should be declared null and void since "marriage also symbolises and protects the inherently reproductive human relationship."

Before we worry about "what lesson we intend to leave behind for our future generations," perhaps we should take a closer look at the history of mankind. One might safely pronounce that any society is bound to evolve and change through time and those who resist such change can only delay the pace of such evolution/change at best. What is inevitable is going to happen one day, sooner or later. We can be proactive and bring that day closer or we can blindly follow faith and traditions to make this already intolerant world a little more prejudiced to subject gay people and their families/friends to unnecessary and cruel anguish. Whatever decision you make, I just hope you don't make it based on misconceptions and misinformation. After all, evidence of human homosexuality dates back as far

as the Greeks and the Romans, homosexual lifestyle has been documented among more than 200 different animals so far and the American Psychiatric Association deleted homosexuality from its official nomenclature of mental disorders in 1973!

**Omar Sharif**  
Vancouver, BC, Canada

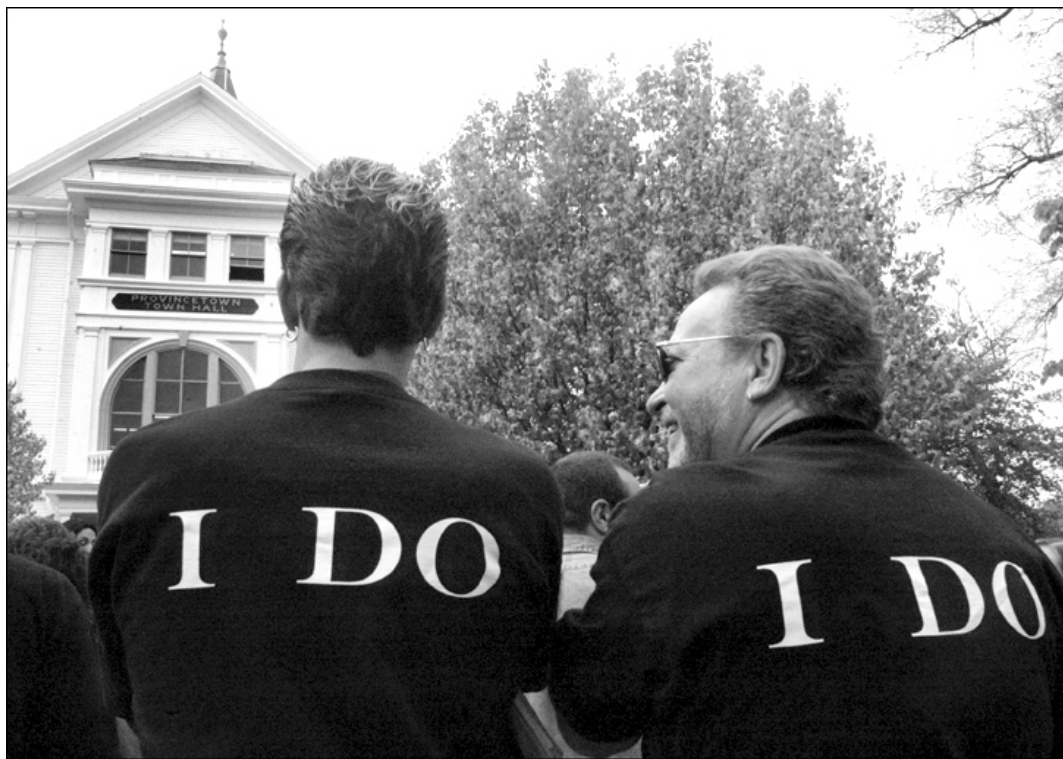


PHOTO: AFP