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PHOTO: INTERNET

Bharati Mukherjee

I would like the readers to focus on the most interesting and important statements made by Bharati Mukherjee and also observe how she really is controversial or contradictory, and truly confusing. She has the creative and intellectual talent to write some interesting books. However, her ideas and her speech sometimes do not hold a balance.

We are writing about stereotypes and how certain men and women are talking a lot about ending stereotypes and bringing independence and freedom but at some point they fail to do so and again create their own stereotype. Khademul Islam has made some great observations about Bharati Mukherjee (July 3, 2004). But Nilofar Khan's observations (Star Magazine, July 2, 2004) are superficial.

Nilofar Khan says that Mukherjee tries to justify her Americanness. But at the same time she is not uncritical. What we want to say is that Mukherjee has made some important statements in her talk about Euro-centric white racism and Brahmin hierarchy. However, Mukherjee made some blatant statements to a broad minded journalist Bill Moyers, "Muslim bosses, hatred etc;" We do not expect Mukherjee, who is intelligent and talented, to make such one-sided statements (as Khademul Islam says that she kept talking about racism and yet her answer was short about fanatics and fundamentalists when she talks about Islam). From a person like Mukherjee, We expect a better understanding about the good and peaceful side of any race, people or religion whether they are Hindus, Buddhists, Christians, Muslims etc; there are peaceful Muslims such as Maulana Wahiduddin (India) and the wise and humorous Sufis. We are not fanatics. All we are pointing out is that certain people want to fight women's or people's stereotypes and they end up creating stereotypes.

Bharati Mukherjee failed to generate a "buzz" in Dhaka or a "ripple" and although she believed in cultural diplomacy to counteract stereotypes about America, "she proved to be futile" (Khademul Islam). She writes "I must find my way" (Sanskrit Sloka), but she loses her way. Miss Suchitra Sufian Aziza, Miss M. Shahi, Ms Chaud M Gulshan 2, Dhaka

Political intolerance

This refers to the post-editorial article on the subject by Prof. M. Ataur Rahman (DS: 19.7.04). Thanks are due to Mr. Rahman for this fine and timely piece of work, as well as to the Editor for opening up an issue of great public concern with its possible ramifications on our political culture as well as our fragile economy. Unfortunately, our nation has been plagued by political intolerance and vulgarisation as well as resultant violence that more often than not only affects the poor and the innocent. Thanks to our fire-spitting and venomous political elements, violence has been increasing in an incremental proportion in our society, particularly during the recent years.

While commending Mr. Rahman's article, I would have wished his article to be more specific so as to point his finger at the perpetrators of the repeated incidents of political intolerance and vulgarisation. I do understand the predicament of the author in directly pointing at the wrongdoers. I also understand that in these days of 'sophisticated' and not necessarily honest journalism, 'purported neutrality' is the best bet for both the author and the newspaper. However, such an approach does not necessarily serve the purpose of eradicating the incidences and menace of political intolerance, which was perhaps the prime but ultimate motive force behind publishing the article.

In view of the ever-increasing magnitude of obnoxious practice of political intolerance and use of foul and vulgar languages, it is perhaps high time for us to gather courage and moral turpitude to identify the political elements that are on the wrong side of the fence. Only then we would be able to understand the nature of the problem and possibly think of taking corrective measures to eradicate the ailments from our political culture. As a by-product of our political intolerance, we have only a one-way route of political respect and hero worship. Our children are growing up in such a politico-social environment where their 'confused' parents are in a real fix to suggest who are their national heroes and who are not. But a nation does need its heroes so that its posterity can take pride in them and follow their footsteps while building themselves as their country's proud citizens.

Will somebody stand up and bell the cat(s)?
Ahmed Ghani, Dhaka

Life in Lanka

I beg to differ with your correspondent AL Mussabir Sadi's comments about Sri Lankan cuisine in his

column Life in Lanka (Star Sport / DS: July 17). His remarks appear to be sweeping and rather uncomplicated.

There are several places in Colombo alone where authentic and very tasty Sri Lankan cuisine is served. All one has to do is choose the dishes of own liking from so many. I can recommend him to visit the Curry Leaf open air restaurant at Hilton Colombo that serves only Sri Lankan cuisine & believed to be the best in town. He will surely be surprised to find most of the guests there being foreigners really enjoying themselves. If he likes sea food cooked Lankan style, he should pay a visit to Beach Wadia on 2, Station Avenue in Colombo & ask for the visitors' book while ordering the food. He will find himself dining with some royalties & world celebrities - not to speak of the past & present Sri Lankan national cricket team members.

While in Dhaka, he may want to attend the buffet dinner called Sri Lankan Night at Royal Park Hotel in

Myth of reconstruction in Iraq

The whole Iraq affair has been littered with false intentions and lies on the part of the coalition, who were solely interested in the strategic and economic capability of Iraq. There was the pre-war intelligence deceit, the motives for war deceit, the link to terrorism deceit, the issue of sovereignty deceit and now there is the deceit surrounding the reconstruction of Iraq.

The American government has promised and allocated \$18.4 billion for reconstruction in Iraq, but the ugly reality is that the vast majority of it has yet to be spent. In addition to

these funds, there is the Development Fund for Iraq (DFI) - a fund established by the UN in May 2003 to collect Iraq's oil revenues. It has a total cash inflow of over \$20 billion, with almost \$9 billion available for spending.

The finance has clearly been available for reconstruction of Iraq's shattered basic infrastructure to begin in full earnest, yet the following statistics attest to the fact that reconstruction has been woefully neglected.

Tanveer Ashraf
One-mail



PHOTO: AFP

Worst floods

Floods this year are set to break the record of 1988. With the current rain fall trend and the passage of overseas rain water making way through our shallow rivers, it is almost certain that we are going to experience a flood of life time. But very surprisingly the peoples' government is yet to be touched by this impending havoc. As if everything is normal, smooth and fine.

Almost 80 to 90 percent of our total population is likely to be affected directly or indirectly. Sylhet International Airport is already out of operation. It is not sure how long ZIA will remain above water. Communication within the country is already seriously disrupted and communication with the outside world is under threat.

I was a schoolboy when the flood of 1988 inundated about 80 percent of our country. I thought it had been a good lesson for our policy-makers and rulers. I thought they would concentrate on fighting the flood more realistically and chalk out a long term plan to protect poor people from the havoc.

But nothing has been done 16 years after.

Romeo Ahmed
Central Road, Dhanmondi, Dhaka

Banani held every Friday. Perhaps he will want to have a second thought - thereafter.
Ashfaq Chowdhury
Banani, Dhaka

Examination systems need restructuring

I think the systems of SSC or HSC examinations are stereo-typed serving no useful purpose in progress of merit. In these systems of examinations, students are compelled to appear in examinations with tough syllabus of ten to twelve subjects at a stroke. And in order to carry on such big burdens of studies students have to depend on memorising and thoughtless preparation of answers to questions more than real understanding of the subjects. And as subjects are mostly theoretical in nature, for handling the series of examinations of different subjects consecutively, many students are under stress, passing through psychological trauma in many cases. In fact, these systems do not allow students to think creatively but confine them to the syllabuses that are taught for the examination. These processes are partly responsible for copying, violence during examinations too. Because of these, students resort to coaching centres very much and take subject wise tuition at home to get benefits of specific contents of different subjects. As a result, proper assimilation of knowledge is not achieved.

So, one suggestion is that like O' level or A' level, HSC or SSC examinations should be taken periodically in a year.

Rubab Abdullah
Dhaka Cantonment, Dhaka

Proshikha and the government

I read Zafar Sobhan's column "The case against Qazi Faruque Ahmed" with great interest (DS July 17th). His column has put the government on the spot and ashamed those of us who support this government that we helped elect with just not a sim-

ple victory, but with a massive mandate.

It is beyond even the slightest doubt that this government is acting most arbitrarily with Mr. Ahmed and using the law not as an instrument of justice but clearly as an instrument of oppression. In being oppressive, the government is also being utterly mean and most ridiculous. A quote in the column of a senior government official of the home ministry saying that Mr. Ahmed has to be taught a lesson says it all.

My own knowledge about Proshikha and related developments are all gathered from the newspapers and articles like this one of Zafar Sobhan. It seems that a lot of wrath that has now come upon Mr. Ahmed has been due to his activities while he was leading Proshikha prior to his arrest nearly two months ago. We read of the controversies between the government and the donor agencies and the report of the audit and all the rest. It seems that Mr. Ahmed has brought upon himself a great deal of the government's anger because of his public statements where he even went to the extent of blaming the son of the prime minister for corruption.

We condemn the government's dealing with this case. Nevertheless, we need also to focus on the activities of Mr. Ahmed prior to his incarceration. He was leading an NGO and not a political party. What business did he have in making political statements?

Thus while the government is being utterly mean and arbitrary with this case, one should not get the feeling that the government is harassing a man who has done nothing to have the long arm of the law come down upon him. Our appeal to the government is to stop harassing Mr. Ahmed and deal with him in a civilised fashion.
Shahjahan Ahmed
Dhanmondi RA, Dhaka

Zafar Sobhan's article (The case of Qazi Faruque Ahmed - Making mockery of justice, July 17, 2004) on government's deliberate and calcu-

lated brutal repression of Kazi Faruque Ahmed makes me sick. I pray you, no I beseech you, please do something about it. Long ago, in the mid-nineteenth century, injustice done to a comparatively less known army officer Alfred Dreyfus, made a writer-editor like you take up his pen and write 'J'Accuse' which created history and proved once again that the pen was mightier than the sword.

I consider Qazi Faruque's case no less important. We are, it seems, in the midst of a new Ayyaam-e-Zaheliyat. I, therefore, beseech you to take up your pen and make other editors like you, take up their pens and write another 'J'Accuse and save our faith in justice saving Qazi Faruque from the blind wrath of the mighty.
AZM Abdul Ali, One-mail

Distorted history

On 10th April 1971, the formal proclamation of independence was made terming Bangladesh as a Sovereign People's Republic and it was resolved that the order would be deemed to have come into effect from 26th March 1971. There is a dispute over whose message of declaring independence was first broadcast and this is one of the issues for our political parties to be at loggerheads. What is important is whoever read out the message he just represented Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib as he was then imprisoned by the Pakistani army. Recently, the government reprinted the 'Bangladesher Swadhinota Juddho' - 'Dollipatro' and branded Ziaur Rahman as the declarer of independence as part of their well orchestrated plan to distort history. Our liberation war harks back on a series of turmoil and a sense of unity was implanted among the Bengali people who treasured a dream of political emancipation from Pakistan. The seed of our independence was sown in the Language Movement in 1952 and through various upheavals in the 60's, including the six points programme, the nation achieved freedom.

Ziaur Rahman was a valiant freedom fighter but branding him as the hero of our war is an outright shroud over the truth. The pathways to the real history can be camouflaged for the time being but history always takes its own course. The revolution cannot take place by a sudden mouthpiece from an army officer, but it is an aftermath of a great movement.

Imran Ahmed
Noboddy Housing
Mohammadpur, Dhaka

Declaration of independence

Once again the nation is held hostage to the whims and insanity of our political leaders.

The nation woke up last week to find that our history has been changed once again. We are now led to believe that President Ziaur Rahman was actually the person who proclaimed our independence. Whatever transpired during the initial period of the Liberation War is now null and void. In fact, if the information ministry and the ruling political pundits had their way unconditionally, the role of Bangabandhu would best be wiped out forever. What political benefits would be reaped from such a decision is best known to the insiders of the ruling party only.

My question to the "new writers" of history is a simple one. What about the millions of people who rose to the call of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman? What happened to the unanimous declaration of "Bangabandhu" as the founding father by the people of Bangladesh back then? How can a generation,

who witnessed the war, be led to believe that Bangabandhu had no role to play in our liberation?

This kind of distortion of our history is just another example of how sycophancy and political ignorance reigns above democracy. Can we not stand united and let Mrs. Khaleda Zia and Mrs. Hasina Wazed know that the nation is tired and frustrated with all these political shenanigans. When will these two leaders realise that Bangladesh does not belong to the families and cronies of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and General Ziaur Rahman, this land belongs to 130 million people and we too have a voice that needs to be heard.

Farhan Quddus
Old DOHS, Banani, Dhaka

claiming they were fighting foreign militants, terrorists and supporters of Saddam. Today they continue to bomb the Muslims of Falluja, killing entire families in the process and now with the blessing of the new Iraqi administration. In fact, so keen is Iyad Allawi to spill the innocent blood of the Muslims, he is personally supplying the locations of people that Americans then drop bombs upon. By such tyranny and intimidation, the Americans hope to quell the legitimate resistance to their continued occupation of Iraq.

And it is clear that it is the sincere Muslims of Iraq that are being targeted; the claim of foreign terrorists and Saddam loyalists is a mere justification and cover for unleashing catastrophe on those sincere people who have the bravery to

ing to the report the Deputy Minister for Disaster Management has asked the Water Development Board to withdraw their statement that the flooding was an act of sabotage. In contradiction the on site Sub-Div. Engineer of the Water Development Board says that there was no reason for the embankment to collapse at that particular location when other more vulnerable locations withstood the rush of flood waters. Both the WDB and the local UNO describe it as an act of sabotage. Local villagers blame the wrangle between pro BNP contractors as to who would repair the embankment, as the main reason for the flood waters rush.

With three very divergent viewpoints, one can only conclude that while the BNP contractors were

Shankhari Bazaar: Sustainability in the cultural context



PHOTO: AFP

rests on the unique way of life and living of the residents and not on the buildings. Original buildings were one or two storied and 80 to 90% of the buildings including extensions are of comparatively recent origin as can be seen from beam-column and reinforced slab system of construction. Even the building that collapsed recently was not very old and was unauthorised. What the author suggests (restoring the structural safety by underpinning method?) amounts to fossilising the illegal non-engineered structures in the pretext of sustainability. In Shankhari Bazaar, as in whole of old Dhaka, most of the buildings are new, even the old community has also very gradually been replaced by a new one, but the new residents have adapted the old ways in the process of integration.

The external socio-economic or cultural stimulants were never so sudden to be able to change the basic character of the community and the settlement. In old Dhaka including Shankhari bazaar, it is the way of life and living that is old -- the civic norms and their physical expressions (public spaces) gives the area its vibrancy. There are, however, some fine pieces of architecture (not in original use) and urban spaces in old Dhaka that needs restoration/conservation for the posterity.

ZIslam
Monipuripara, Dhaka

Mr. Ghafur's views in the above titled write-up (DS: Point-Counterpoint: 14/7/04) divulges on an issue that is haunting the policy planners for decades. Though relevant, the author has tried to unnecessarily complicate the matter by beating around the bushes, repeating jargons, gestures and

postures for simply stating that "sustaining Shakhari Bazaar" is needed, which he himself points out that the late Prof. N. Karim of DU had said long before. On the contrary, Mr. Choudhury's assertion (DS: 19/7/04: Tale of a City) on the same issue is more direct and down to earth. The dynamics of Shankhari bazaar

Iraq scene

The Americans would have the world believe Iraq is a changed place, that the tyrannical regime of Saddam has been replaced by a humane regime that cares for the people of Iraq. Yet, all the signs and events show that there is more similarity than difference in Iraq's new American appointed leadership and the regime of Saddam.

America has spent months attacking the Muslims of Falluja, trying to break their will to resist the colonialist invasion. They have shelled and bombed innocent civilians without any care or consideration for human life, all the time

resist. This was proved recently in the court appearance of Saddam Hussein, when a number of his supporters tried to hold a march in Falluja to show solidarity for any ousted dictator. However, over twenty cars full of well-armed Muslims arrived and prevented this small group of loyalists from holding their march. That shows what is going on in Iraq.

Omar
Tajmahal Road,
Mohammadpur, Dhaka

Who cut the dam?

This refers to your Bogra correspondent's report (DS: 17 July). Accord-

fighting over each other as to who would do the work, and the WDB officials awaiting the result of their fight as uninterested party, the water broke through and washed away any evidence of sabotage or any other cause of the incident.

Poor WDB officials are now left behind as the easy target. They unfortunately may have no choice between the frying pan and the fire. No wonder governance in Bangladesh is going away fast, like the flood waters; also flushing out all the contradiction between different agencies and leaving the unfortunate officials on the spot sucked into the mire caused by others' misdeeds.
SAMANSOOR, Gulshan, Dhaka