

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.

Confusion, everywhere

We are confused because our national leaders are confused. Leaders are confused, may be, because of their selfish motives or because of their ignorance. More than 23 days passed since the grenade attack on opposition party's rally but unfortunately, nothing is known till to date. Not even any indication from the government about the motives of the attack and who might have been the attackers. As usual, the government is considering it as a conspiracy to destabilise the country.

Whatever may be the reason, all have to agree that it is a failure of the government. It is the constitutional responsibility of the government to protect the lives of the people and find out the culprits for any wrongdoing. Just pointing the fingers to someone with hypothetical assumptions cannot absolve the government of its responsibility.

Zabedin, Dharmundi, Dhaka

Our cricket

I was once very much hopeful about our national cricket team. Because we have got all the potential to become a strong cricketing nation. If our neighbouring countries can play at this level, then why can't we? Moreover, we have many promising cricketers at the grassroots level and we have got probably the best coach of the world. Yet our performance in international level is nothing to be desired. Every time our cricketers let us totally down and our hopes simply tatter. But is it their fault only? I think it's not their fault. Rather I think our selectors' decisions are affecting our cricket team. For example, in our opening match of the ICC Trophy, our Cricketers were bundled out for less than 100. And I think it happened because of poor selection of the team. Rajin Saleh is not suitable for playing one day cricket, yet the selectors made him captain, what a mockery!

In English conditions, Khaled Mahmud could have played better but selectors opted for the inexperienced, injured Mashfiqur Rahman. All in all, I think it was a very poor selection.

Nazmus Saquib, Notre Dame College, Dhaka

Looking East

This is in response to the article titled 'For friendship Bangladesh should look East' written by Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed (DS September 12, 2004).

I think Mr. Ahmed deserves appreciation for his straight talk, boldness and factual depictions.

Golam Ashraf

DOHS Bardhara, Dhaka

Death: A prayer for my brother

A part of me left a long time ago and passed away. My brother died a long time ago. He was a lot older than me. He died when he was a baby. I was born much later. I never had an elder brother and I never will. My ancestors have passed away. Human beings are spirits or souls. Thousands of souls. I think when people die, their souls and spirits live on. The Christians believe in an afterlife. The Sufis also believe that the soul lives and we have a spiritual

existence. According to Irish beliefs and folklore, Halloween is a holy evening or all souls day when we are supposed to pray for those who passed away. In Mexico, the people also have a tradition for the day of the dead.

I do not have an answer as to why my brother died. I still feel that he is a soul that roams and visits me, an angel spirit, a blessed baby. Blessed angels, blessed baby. The blossoms, the olive tree. I am sad because you did not see my happy days. I am glad because you did not see the horrible grief and violence in life. My brother is near the olive tree, on a borderland, beside a river. Like a rare gemstone. My brother died a long time ago.

Immunity to WB

I do not wish to delve into the contro-

versy on why Bangladesh should be the first country to grant such blanket immunity to the World Bank. I was interested to learn the background of such a move.

As I have worked in the field of human resources management in a United Nations agency for some 11 years, I am conscious of some of the immunities we enjoy. When we inform our staff that they have no right to take legal action through their national legal system, we inform them of the existence of the Mediator, the Joint Appeals Board, the Panel on Discrimination and other Grievances, the United Nations Administrative Tribunal and, if it pertains to the UN Secretariat, the recourse procedures which exist there in. The UN Staff Regulations 11.2 state in no uncertain terms that the United Nations Administrative Tribunal shall, under conditions prescribed in its statute, hear and pass judgement upon applications from staff members alleging non-observance of their terms of appointment, including all pertinent regulations and rules.

I believe the system of legal justice in the UN is fair and equitable. It would be interesting to learn from the representation of the World Bank in Dhaka if it has in place a similar internal justice mechanism in place as in the UN. I believe the civil society in Bangladesh and the parliamentarians before passing this bill must be satisfied that there isn't a legal vacuum in respect of the privileges and immunities of the World Bank.

Arnab Roy
On e-mail

August 21

The democratic politicians in Bangladesh are clearly right in deciding to keep their presence in the streets open despite the hardships and the recent threats posed by some terrorists. Their decision to reactivate and unite is prompted by a sincere desire to help Bangladesh emerge from the chaos and instability it finds itself in after the August 21. All the politicians now should altruistically serve the needs of the Bangladeshis who have become victims of terrorism waged on them by still unknown but easy-to-guess forces and of the cycle of violence and terrorism escalating day by day. When we have political stability, it is the people that benefit. Our people desperately need food, agricultural inputs and development services. They also need tools for reconstruction and development after the devastating floods, and the fast approaching 'monga'. The terrorists in action had better direct their attention to helping suffering compatriots stand on their feet in dignity and security and keep away from acts of terrorism.

A democratic polity cannot be cowed simply into closing their activity by terrorising. The democratic politicians too must continue to shoulder their responsibilities towards people.

Sirajul Islam
Social sciences researcher and consultant
Pisciculture Housing Society, Shyamoli, Dhaka

City of grenades!

Our dream city of Dhaka has become a store-house of "grenades". How long will it remain so?

Nasim Khan
On e-mail

III-fated democracy?

US Ambassador to Bangladesh, Harry K Thomas, has underscored the need for strengthening the local government for promoting democratic practices. I do not understand why Mr. Thomas is continually emphasising promotion of democracy. If we consider the incidents of the last 15 years of democracy, even a little baby can easily understand that democracy has turned Bangladesh into a jungle without security and tranquillity and it will continue pushing Bangladesh towards further turmoil and chaos if the people of Bangladesh still listen to the words of the people like the US Ambassador and some so-called intellectuals and journalists.

In Europe, democratically elected politicians such as Jorg Haider, Jean-Marie Le Pen, Berlusconi, Umberto Bossi,

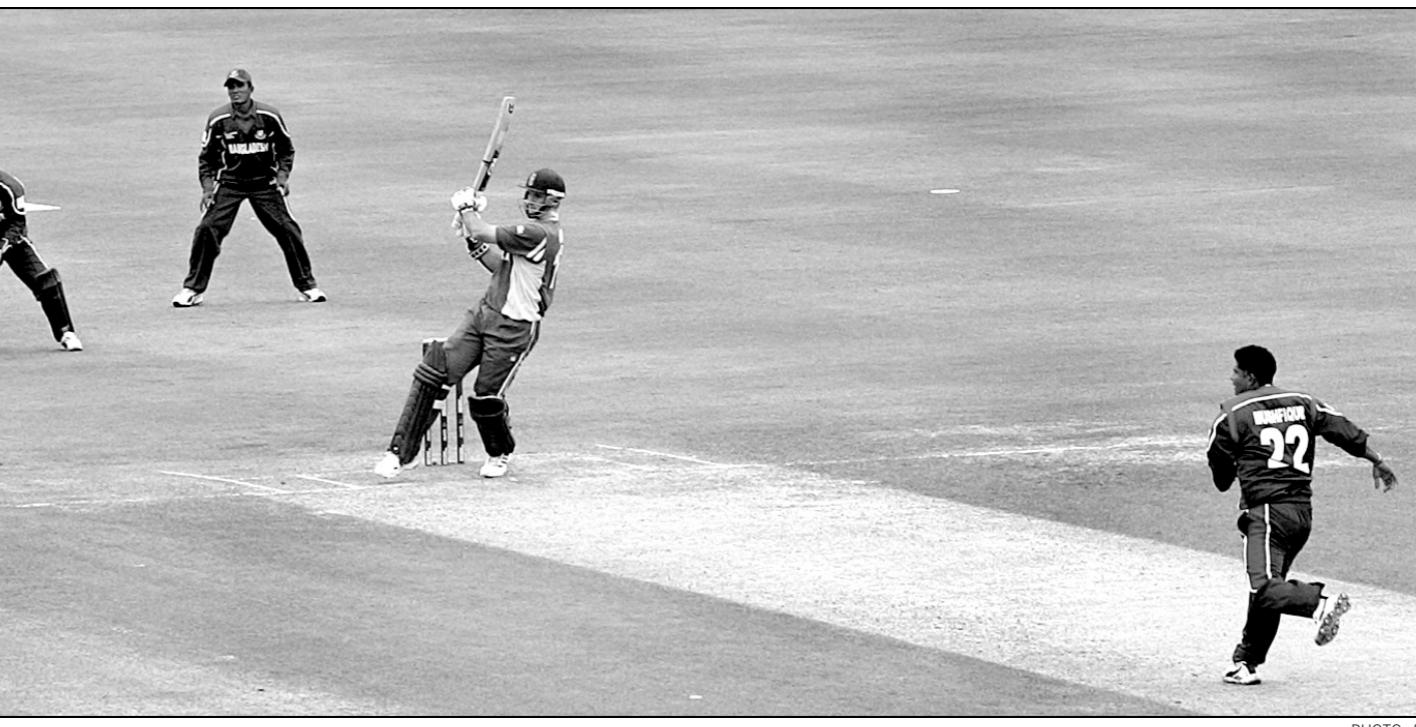


PHOTO: AFP

it, banning religious symbols from schools is simply a ruse to appease those who voted en-masse for the Front National and to encourage them back to mainstream politics. From my perspective, it's really a choice of which is the worst of two evils; (1) Ban the Hijab and other religious symbols and receive the wrath of a (pro-Hijab) percentage of 5 million French Muslims and followers of other religions or (2) Not ban the Hijab and have the Front National win the next election due to popular discontent, which would then work towards having all Muslims, Jews and Sikhs deported.

Abdul M Ismail, UK

FM's speech and the press release!

I am referring to the press release by the foreign ministry explaining the reasons for the FM's outbursts. (FM's India Remarks: DS September 12th). The release said that the FM "expected that the young journalists would understand the issues in their right perspective and look at them passionately and objectively."

Here is why no one except the foreign ministry would buy this explanation. Our relations with India did not dip to such low level to warrant this outburst. The FM just did not accuse India across a broad range of issues; his speech was also delivered in bad body language.

The timing for the outburst was awful with a series of meetings with India scheduled in the next few months ending with the next SAARC Summit. Then, if the FM thought that the Indians would believe that he was giving this speech to help young journalists understand our relations with India better then he must have made a serious mistake.

It looks like the FM is playing to a different gallery not interested in improvement of Bangladesh- India relations. Unfortunately, in this country there are many to go along with the FM, going by some of the letters that I have read in this column. Shahjahan Ahmed
Dharmundi RA, Dhaka

School siege in Beslan

The pictures of the children being carried out of the school in Beslan, their naked bodies splattered with blood, filled me with sorrow and anger. No excuse exists for the slaughtering of innocent civilians.

No excuse exists for taking children hostage, blowing up planes, or suicide bombings. Those responsible for such carnage have forfeited their right to be called human beings.

Whoever was involved in planning and executing this terrible massacre against innocent civilians, would be sharing the same evil intentions of Putin, the war-criminal who was the force murdering more than 250,000 Chechen civilians besides hundreds of thousands of injured, disabled and handicapped as a result of his genocide in

Hijab

I have read with interest the letter published in The Daily Star of 10 Sept.

Normal Hijab or "Purdah" is essentially covering the exposed parts of a woman in a decent way. Arab, Persian, East and West European, Pakistani, Indian, South Asian, African women belonging to Islam, Hinduism, Christianity and other faiths used to cover their heads with scarf as a custom/ tradition and also to save themselves from wind, heat, cold etc. The males would also wear turbans for reasons like tribe mark, caste mark, ornamental use, to protect against desert storm, heat etc.

Industrial revolution, emancipation of women changed the situations for most of the women. Hijab has been marked as a sign of domination of the males, traditional religious leaders.

We hardly noticed the kind of Hijab/ Purdah as we notice these days in pre- 1971 days. People were definitely not less religious in those days. The kind of abnormal 'Hijab' as many Muslim ladies are forced to use is quite baffling. It locks and subjugates their minds, visions and makes them subservient to the fundamentalist 'Wahabi' school of thoughts. They keep on sending wrong signals. They should realise that women always have the liberty to wear normal and decent clothes.

SN Mamoon, Dhaka

Sending troops to Iraq

This is in response to a letter to the editor Aug 16, 2004 by Ashirul Amin.

I would like to thank Mr. Ashirul Amin for his response. But he must have forgotten one crucial aspect on which my discussion was focused. If Iraq suffered for any other reason, for example civil war or internal conflicts, and the UN took the initiative to resolve such crises, then our troops could have gone there and that might have been welcomed by all and sundry. I support Mr. Amin's opinion. But the

point he is trying to make is totally different. It is not Sierra Leone, neither East Timor nor any other country; it is a battlefield where a war has been started with an ill motive.

Why should our soldiers die for such a cause?

If we take into account the country's overall interests, we can allow the US to set up a base in Bangladesh, but we are not doing that. Why?

Shafqat Rana Sayed
Dept of Economics and Social Science, BRAC University

fun with Whatmore and Whatless. What could be more ironic than this? Haven't we had enough of this circus? Who are these guys bent upon insulting this hapless nation ad infinitum?

Ahmad Kamal
Abu Dhabi, UAE

"Why I am not a migrant"

This is my response to Dr. Ohidul Amin.

"We cannot do great things, but try to do small things with great love".

Mother Teresa.

He knows very well the socio-economic spiral changes of Bangladesh for last 33 years and also that our country has been overwhelmed with a surplus of engineers and doctors graduating every year from public and private institutions. There is no shortage of doctors in Bangladesh unless someone comes up with a frivolous example of remote and isolated rural areas where our doctors are very reluctant to go for reasons personal in nature!!

Mohammad A Gani
US

Will peace return?

Nowadays people are being violent

mourn the deaths in Iraq, Afghanistan and Chechnya?

We are crying for the Russian tragedy but we are not crying for those innocent helpless people in Chechnya who are being liquidated. And after the hostage incident what will be their position in Russia? How will they be treated by the government? We call them bestial but we don't even bother to think what made them resort to terrorism.

Still I hope for peace and guess time will come when people all over the world will acknowledge the truths.

Cantara Wali Ruhi, Dhaka

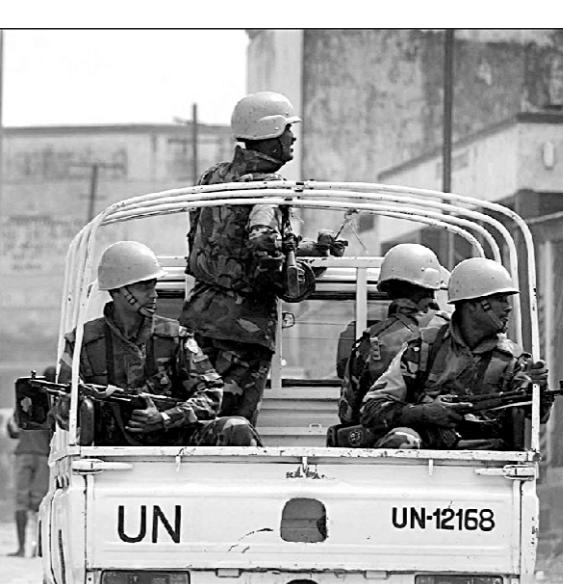


PHOTO: AFP

Beslan tragedy

The harrowing episode of hostage taking of hundreds of children in Beslan has drawn the attention of the international community to the often-neglected armed conflict in Chechnya. The hard line policy of President Vladimir Putin, a man who believes more in statistics than in human lives, is turning the conflict into the most serious human rights crisis in Europe's recent history.

The conflict, starting back at the end of 18th century with the Russian conquest of the North Caucasus, has two governing factors: one is the animosities rooted in a historical, ethnic, religious and territorial claims, the other is the struggle for geo-strategic space and vital resources like oil and oil pipeline routes.

The current conflict began at the end of the cold war, when Chechnya declared independence from the Russian Federation after a number of regions managed to gain independence from the collapsing Soviet Union in 1991. The result was a horrendous war in which Kremlin renewed the tragedy that has dragged on for centuries. The war led to death of almost 100,000 Chechens (from a total population of about 1.23 million) and has created another 100,000 refugees. In the last one decade while the Chechens saw their people imprisoned, tortured, yielding to the temptation of terrorism, the Russians found their soldiers killed in thousands, returned secretly to the cemeteries. Yet the international community remained silent. British Journalist Lindsey Hilsum notes: "... Chechnya is a shameful example of western leaders refusing to confront another government on human rights abuses and war crimes because, in the end, strategic and political issues matter more. Chechnya is complex and dangerous and miserable, and we just don't care enough to try to make a difference." The US stand on this conflict is still a mystery. It is being accused of giving green signal to the rebels to destabilise the region in order to ensure more control over the natural resources on one hand, giving tacit support to Russia to carry on the "war on terrorism" on the other.

In the mean time the conflict between Islamic democracy and Islamic militancy within Chechnya complicates the situation further. No matter how many times prominent Islamic scholars issue fatwa against terrorism or leading Muslim political experts suggest not to confront Russia for strategic reasons, Russia's heavy hand on Chechnya will intensify the resistance and continue to breed terrorism.

Syeda Sultana Razia, PhD
Former President, Canadian Society for Peace in Chechnya and Assistant Professor, BUET, Dhaka, Bangladesh



PHOTO: AFP

An Indian writes

It was heartening to learn, as I learned from Mr. Zafar Sobhan's insightful Op-ed article "co-operation not confrontation," that there are many India-friendly faces in Bangladesh and they have been consistently cautioning the Bangladeshi establishment that any overt anti-India stance or posturing by the government is not in the interests of the two democracies.

As an Indian, and as one who has been boastfully appreciative of the progress made by Bangladesh in her democracy, economy, education, population control, culture, pride in one's nation, and uplift of rural poor, I can only assure and reiterate that we, most of us if not all, are almost envious of Bangladesh and hold our country in real respect. And as such if there are outstanding disputes and differences in opinion and perception, as there are many, I believe they can be easily and eminently addressed with diplomatic grace and no-holds barred educated communication and exchange of feelings and ideas. Any resort to indignities is of no avail to both of us. And I believe the above-referred article has in one shot armed the decision-makers in these democratic neighbours with thoughts and directions to motivate and guide themselves towards more harmony in dialogue.

As we both strive to attain more economic independence and uplift of our institutions any gap in dialogue between us will be costly for both. We need to learn more from each other—especially the poverty alleviation programmes pioneered in Bangladesh, such as the one by Dr. Mohammed Yunus of Grameen Bank which has dramatically altered the life course of the otherwise neglected poor and is an eye-opener to India's elite policy makers, submerged in their plush corporate sector mentality.

Former prime minister of India, Atal Behari Vajpayee, an eminent statesman—who did not allow his diplomatic beliefs to be hijacked by the anti-Bangladesh hard-liners in his own party—launched this much needed change by travelling to Dhaka and the tumultuous response that he received there proved how eager Bangladesh was to reciprocate.

Let us not forget that the relished part of our history and waste the gains made in friendship by some temperate and thoughtful outbursts provoked only by imaginary political slights. Zafar Sobhan could not have said more.

Ganesh Shenoy

Bangalore, India