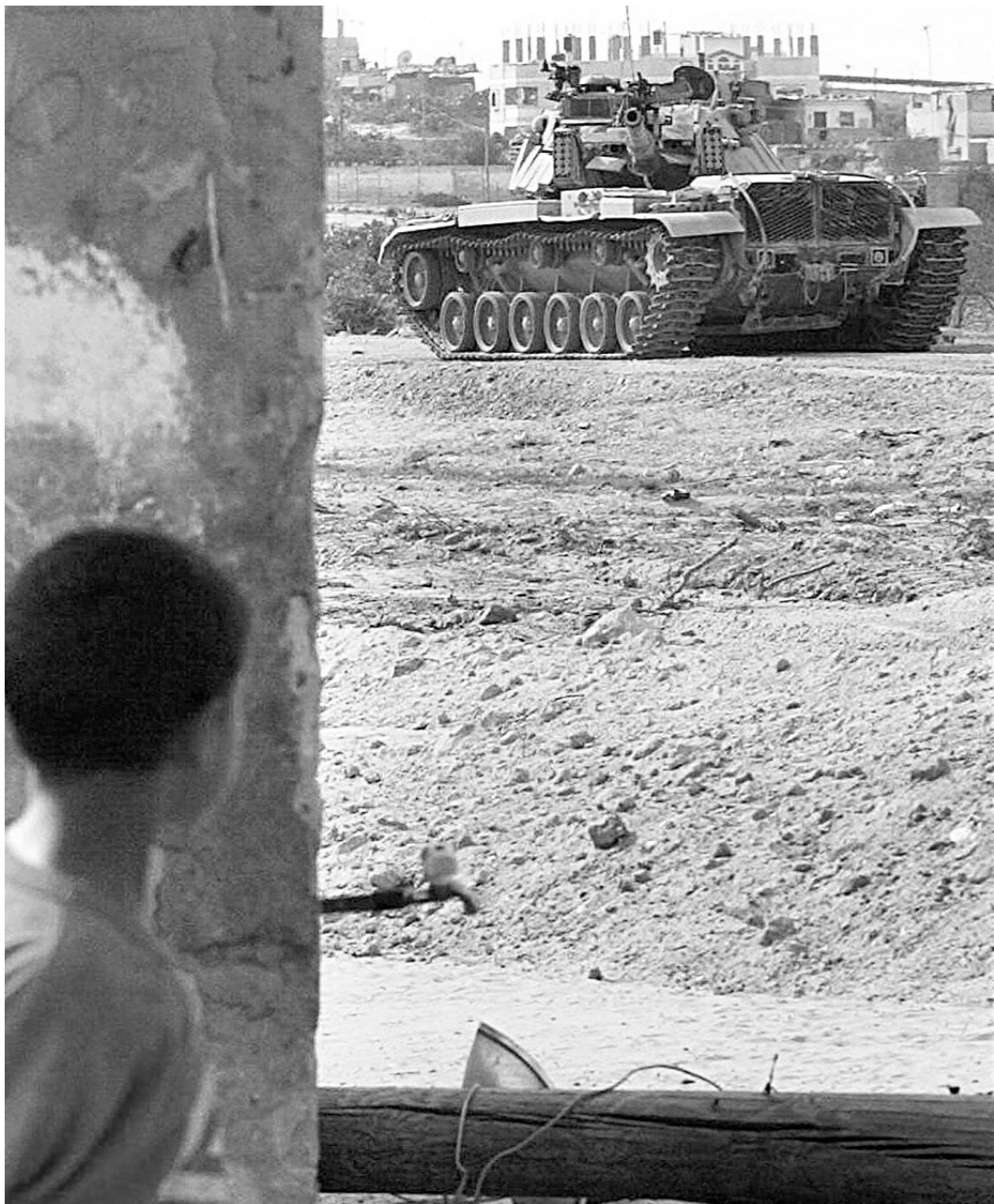


Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

# Global leadership



The opening decade of the new millennium (21<sup>st</sup> century) does not encourage hope, peace and happiness. Violence dominates the scene, encouraged by poor global political leadership. A major yellow signal was the 9/11 attack in New York, a symbol to destroy another evil symbol (to the majority of the six billion humans), i.e., stark materialism, which is touted as enriched democracy! The mighty United States went on a show of force, and there is no proof yet that might is right.

The expected solutions in Afghanistan and Iraq are not in sight. Now the US dollar is weakening as a global currency. It is the beginning of new problems for the US and the foreign users. The Euro is not working as expected; and the price of energy (oil) has almost doubled, and there is no solution in sight.

The US is keen to control the energy sources anywhere in the world; and the Muslim majority oil producing countries are under close watch. The rich CIS zone needs sea outlets via Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan; and, and, behold, Uncle Sam is waving his beard there!

About USD seven billions investment is involved in cross-country oil pipelines for the proposed pipe link between Iran and India in Pakistan and Afghanistan; and between Myanmar and India via Bangladesh. Iran is already on the Western hit list; and Dhaka cannot unshackle the US

interest to make Bangladesh a base for more than one reason (Pakistan and India are in the US camp already).

The adverse publicity on BD in the US has already been started in the NY Times. The timing is significant, when terrorist activities are being increased in Bangladesh by vested/hired groups. The violence rental business is booming!

The regime in Dhaka is cornering itself through non-transparencies in hot issues like the alleged activities of the so called Bangla Bhai and the underground activities of some of the religious fundamentalist groups. Today the Islamic world is facing a crisis of identity; and OIC is still born (too much disparity in prosperity levels amongst the members, plus huge communication gaps, regardless of the religious bond). The top Islamic leadership, if any, is a sad spectacle.

At the regional levels, the political leaders are sitting like lame ducks. The non-activity is enormous! Reason? Lack of internal discipline, major vision, and cooperative attitude. The exporters prefer dumping goods into exposed market exporting baskets, without diversification exercises, first on paper, then through pilot projects; ignoring regional markets and HR. Tradition and conservative attitude are still major weak points in leadership in the third world countries.

This is not encouraged by

the majority of people living at or around poverty levels. Politics has become a source of business, explaining the sharp rise in corrupt practices in the emerging nations. The major adverse repercussions are being denied by the regimes in power, but the local citizens are aware of the undercurrents playing havoc with cosmetic development projects, where a large percentage of the funds are diverted into unofficial and private channels. Politics has become inward-looking, in self-security exercises.

How religion has entered the political scene, confounding the secularists; after the collapse of communism in the vast USSR. It is not difficult to understand the swing to religious outlets, after the failure of democracy in the poor countries, and the concentration of wealth in the hands of the minority rich barons in the developed societies. The latter are now passing through sunset years of decline, and the trend is NOT going to reverse.

The wave of civilization shifts from the East to the West, and then from the West to the East. There are no options.

The political regimes have to be flexible in their policies, as rigidities create cracks in the system. The cracks are ignored at close range, but very much visible on telescopes. That is the political quiz: smug politics is out in Dhaka or in Washington.

A Mayaz, Dhaka

## An opportunity for us?



I took interest in reading the comments from S Arif Jamal, Ashfaq Kabir, Tahsin Hyder, Nur Jahan on your letter page. I fully agree that the way India backed out from this summit was a rather immature gesture, which undoubtedly has created unwanted diplomatic bitterness within this region. However, I believe Bangladesh can actually benefit from this issue.

The Indian press has already been very critical about their government's decision. All concerned quarters have the same voice. Surely, a bitter reaction from Bangladesh would be the natural instinct: as one Indian newspaper has framed it -- Bangladesh may use the gas-pipeline issue as a tit. But if we want to sound mature and diplomatic, I suppose Bangladesh will need to react cautiously. One of the best news items I found after this postponement was the one on State Minister for Energy: that the proposed gas-line project would be taken ahead, and that he expected the technical meeting to continue as scheduled this February. Such reactions would certainly add value, and reduce bitterness. Such reactions would also portray the image of a Bangladesh, which places right priority on issues. We know that this postponement has caused millions of taka loss, thousands of man-hours going down the drain, not to mention the disheartened efforts, but we also know that this should open up opportunities to take a composed position to benefit from other important issues, such as trade access to Nepal, ease of immigration process, mutual trade and energy links, joint efforts in curbing crime, etc. Bangladesh's loss this time should enable her to stand stronger in future negotiations and diplomatic dealings. "An eye for an eye will make the whole world blind" -- we certainly hope that this decision of the Indian leader would this time make Bangladesh smarter, more mature, compared to India itself!

Wishing the very best for Bangladesh from abroad.  
Zeeshan Kingshuk Huq  
Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

A recent news item on shifting of Kamalapur Railway Station to Joydebpur and a letter to you by Mr. M. Alauddin on 20 January, 2005 have drawn my attention. I fully agree with the news item as well as the letter of Mr. Alauddin. It is about time that the matter received due attention.

The government should also think in terms of shifting the international airport to a distant place, as the city has expanded right into the airport area.  
Mazhar Haq, Gulshan, Dhaka

### The man next door

I can't say I know much about the man next door. He was my neighbour for quite some time. In fact I should say it the other way round; I was his neighbour living in the same neighbourhood. I haven't had the opportunity to meet him personally, though. But I do recall a couple of events associated with him.

I remember the time they moved in their home after a long stay abroad. I had heard from my mother that he was in different foreign countries for a very long time in various appointments and had decided to settle in Bangladesh for now.

I guess as they decided to come back to their house, renovations were being done. A big lush-green lawn was built, the path to the front door was redesigned even a new front gate replaced the old one. And then the family moved in.

From then on lot of new events took place in our neighbourhood. We saw security guards-dressed in police uniform taking their positions in the newly built wooden roofed shelters, a flag pole was placed in front of the lawn which bore the national flag and the number of cars and flow of people increased in our residential lane. Slowly with time, I got to know the identity of the man and his family. And it turned out that he was a personality in his own line of work. It was entertaining having a big name in the neighbourhood because

there was always something new to see, something new to talk about during the daily afternoon chats with neighbours. The enjoyable part was that I didn't have to go through a newspaper or a weekly to pick up the latest. Standing for a while in the front balcony of my home gave me plenty of tidbits for the day or when I left home early in the morning for school or while returning home.

On some days I could see a whole contingent of posh cars or flag bearing cars entering the gates, on other days there were people from different walks of life just going in or coming out through those gates. It was a guessing game trying to identify the cause of the influx of all the new foreign elements in our neighbourhood. On other days it was simply children playing in the lawn guessing these were his grand children and the man himself with his wife sitting on the balcony or walking in the lawn.

But one thing was sure that neither the man nor his family interacted within the neighborhood. They had their own community. That gave him and his family an evermore-distinct identity within our neighborhood and thus being the subject of most neighborhood discussions.

My point of interests changed while I was getting older. Moreover, my new residential address prevented me from knowing the noticeable changes and events in my neighbour's daily life. So here I was,

shocked to see the man next door in the Internet edition of a daily English newspaper in the most unexpected condition imaginable. For a very long and silent moment I felt very heartbroken and hurt knowing that security and protection of an individual's life still lacked so much in our country. Nevertheless for now, all I can express is my condolence to the family of the man next door- *May his soul rest in peace.*

Mahfuza  
On e-mail

### Good idea

I was impressed with the facts and the logic behind Mr. Golam F Akhter's views who maintained that close circuit cameras/long range hidden video cameras (with auto signalling capacity) are really and greatly required to blunt the force of terrorism. He pointed out that a distance of about 1,000 feet could be covered easily by the hidden cameras with 360 degrees angle covered around any venue or a large crowded place. The same cameras can auto tape and record the activities/movements with clear pictures. Those tapes can be used by the police and magistrates as direct evidence.

Thanks any way and best wishes to you, Mr. Akhter.  
Prof. Imtiaz Ahmed  
Dhaka

### Contractual appointments

An article on the above subject by Mr. Ahmed Mahmudur Raza Chowdhury on 30 January, 2005 makes interesting reading. Apparently, it seems to be an innocent piece of writing. But there are facts behind facts.

May I recollect here that in the mid nineties a mock interview was held for promotion to the post of Joint Secretary just to promote four officers of his batch. Mr. Raza was of course outside the country at that time and hence could not face the interview. But three of his other colleagues were promoted to the post of Joint Secretary by nakedly superseding hundreds of eligible officers. The incident is still vivid in the memory of government officials. The matter ultimately went to the Supreme Court and the result is known to all government officers.

Abdus Salam  
Dhaka

### Fox hunting in Britain

The Hunting Act 2004 received Royal Assent on 18 November, and will come into effect in Britain on 18 February, 2005. Although this legislation was contentious while it was being debated in Parliament, and it became law under the provisions of the Parliament acts because the House of Lords voted it down two years running, the British government is satisfied that the Act

complies fully with human rights requirements and that it is valid and enforceable.

While you may not be in favour of a ban (Ref: letter published in DS), I hope you will accept that the law has been arrived at after an enormous amount of debate and after numerous free votes in both Houses of Parliament. It is also worth remembering the lengths we went to in trying to reconcile opposing views and in listening to the views of people who hunt. This Act should be complied with like any other Act of Parliament. The British government fully supports the right of peaceful protest, and accepts the right of the Countryside Alliance and others to challenge it in the courts, but believes it is time to move on from the debate about the rights and wrongs of hunting to engage positively in the process of preparing for the implementation of the Act.

The government hopes that hunters who wish to will diversify into drag-hunting or other forms of riding, so that they can enjoy their activities while remaining within the letter and spirit of the law.

Alun Michael MP  
UK

### Foreign university campus

It is observed that foreign university campuses are being established in Dhaka by different

student counselling firms. Students are also being admitted in those campuses for which a large amount of money is taken from the students as admission fees. It may be stated that permission of the University Grants Commission is required to open a foreign university campus. The terms and conditions of opening such campuses are the same as those of establishing a fully-fledged university in Bangladesh.

Generally, foreign colleges and universities appoint their agents in Dhaka and they can enroll students on the basis of a stipulated commission.

There is a specific quota in the colleges and universities for the foreign students. But some counselling firms are enrolling 400 to 500 students in each semester for their colleges and universities. On the other hand, the embassies of the countries concerned are expressing their inability to issue such a big number of visas.

My advice to the intending students as an experienced student counsellor is that they should not obtain any offer letter from the agents who are issuing an excessive number of offer letters, as this will create problem for the students in general to get visa from the embassies/high commissions.

Advocate Quazi Raquibul Islam  
Dhaka

Shifting of railway station

# The assassinated leader

Why mature, educated, and experienced persons enter politics in Bangladesh? As a citizen (double-retired pensioner), I am musing on the sudden assassination of SAMS Kibria, a citizen at the top of the society. He could have avoided not entering politics, judging from the low standard of prevailing political culture. There are many personalities, whether in politics and outside it as observers, who cannot adjust with the rest, cannot get out of the trap. The cleansing in politics has to come from outside the political playing field; but, it appears, the society is not yet ready for this vital operation. The dangerous political virus is causing epidemic in other sectors of the society. We are in the danger of going downhill, like an avalanche, destroying everything in the path. The two major parties are fighting a dual war, ignoring the negative implications to be faced by the young and future generations. Is this patriotism?

The politicians are unable to deliver public services (in Dhaka, and elsewhere in the world) due to the current polluted atmosphere, which has

now become murkier with the introduction of violence, terrorism, and religious extremism. The latter is ruled by the heart, and the politicians are supposed to be ruled by the head. There is no discipline in politics, and the ruling regimes are dominated by the political leaders, many of whom are suspected (by the public at large) as being hidden godfathers to ghastly crimes and unethical practices, operated through the backdoors. The political leadership is unclean, and non-transparent, hence the question of the development of the society (and the country or nation) becomes a moot point. When the footprint is small, the majority of the coverage area is excluded; and self-discipline disappears. How to measure the losses we are paying as compensation for more than three decades?

It would not be surprising if the politicians were not allowed (by circumstances) to come into power during the next change. This change could be sudden and unforeseen. It is an old, tried formula, which is triggered automatically, as history reveals.

Our political parties in power get smug and autocratic; while those in the opposition indulge in arm-chair political activity, putting the whole burden of the activities (like hartal) on the masses. It has become a proxy syndrome. What is the difference between kick-back and fall-out?

The oppressed people are not only losing faith in political leadership, but in politics itself. It is a dangerous symptom—losing faith in public institutions.

How to attract the right type of personalities to public service? Self-effacement is not the current style in showmanship. We are making our new elevated highways earthquake proof. How to contain evil political vibrations?  
A Mahasen, Dhaka  
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We are very much upset at some recent incidents in Bangladesh such as the killing of Ahsanullah Master, grenade attack on August 21 and the recent killing of SAMS Kibria. We heard so many interpretations of these events; some are blaming the fundamentalists, some are blaming the BNP and some are blaming the Awami



League. Police and other investigators looked for evidences. They are reported to have identified a local BNP

leader in Tongi as the main accused in the Ahsanullah murder case. As for the killing of Kibria, police claimed that

they found some clues after arresting some local BNP activists. Ahsan Ullah Master was perhaps killed because he

was a very popular leader in the area and his opponents thought that it would not be possible to defeat him in the coming

election. The same may be true about the killing of Mr. Kibria. But police could not find any clue of the August 21 carnage. It was obvious that Sheikh Hasina was the target.

Let's now talk about the grenade attacks on British High Commissioner, on cinema halls, rural festivals, Ramna and Udichi. Recently, police arrested 12 Bangla Bhai associates in Natore. These people have some ideology based on their interpretation of Islam. They describe cultural activities as un-Islamic and they are determined to resist such activities. They are also determined to resist NGOs which are the main force behind emancipation of women in the rural areas.

I am not a supporter of any particular party. My above analysis is based on reports published in newspapers, especially The Daily Star.

I hope that the culprits will be caught and punished.  
Nazmul Hasan  
677 Kings Road, Oshawa  
Ontario, Canada