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Naqvi to Lifschultz

(Below is the text of a letter written to American journalist Lawrence Lifschultz by Pakistani journalist and The Daily Star columnist MB Naqvi, following the recent publication of Mr Lifschultz's four-part article in The Daily Star on the events of August 1975. We have obtained Mr Naqvi's permission to reprint the letter for the benefit of our readers.)

Dear Lawrence, We have not met in ages now, though we used to meet more frequently earlier. I have been an interested reader and admirer of your writings largely because I share most of your conclusions. With regard to the assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, I carry a two penny worth of secret. I thought I will let you in on it. I was in Islamabad on August 15, 1975. I was in a meeting with the Director General of Radio Pakistan, who was a senior civil servant and a member of the Afghan Cell in the government of Pakistan. The meeting was attended by Ijlal Haider Zaidi, then Director General of Radio Pakistan, late Sardar Hussain Ansari, Director of News and MB Naqvi, who for a brief five year period was the Controller of Current Affairs in the Radio set up. The DG had called the meeting early in the morning. He instructed that there should be a hotline from the Central Newsroom to the Director General. He was expecting an important news and wanted to hear sentence by sentence as it came over the ticker. The meeting began with gossip and comment on various current politics and other small talk. No serious organisational or operational matter was discussed. The DG obviously had something on his mind. About three or four times he was forced to ask Ansari to ask his department whether any important news has come. The meeting went on interminably, doing nothing but talking whatever came to anyone's head. At long last around somewhere between 12:00 hours and 12:30 hours came the ring from Newsroom: Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had been assassinated by Bangladesh Army officers. That was the flash. One sensed that after that news bit, a sigh of relief escaped from Ijlal Haider; he certainly seemed relieved. Perhaps it was what he was expecting. He abruptly called the meeting off and left the office- I seem to remember straight to the Prime Minister House presumably to inform him of the news.

The conclusion I drew then and now is that whatever conspiracy there was in Dacca, Islamabad knew of it. Ijlal Haider Zaidi was no ordinary bureaucrat. He was a member of the Afghan Cell. The Cell was sort of clearing house for intelligence and policy making vis-à-vis Afghanistan. Several countries' intelligence agencies were active and were centred on Peshawar. To my knowledge they were British, American, and of course, Pakistani agencies. And that was the time when Pakistanis were thick in planning to assemble the Seven Sisters: the seven religious Islamic parties of Afghanistan that Pakistan recognised. First two of the top leadership of those parties, Gulbadin Hekmatyar and the first President of the post Najeeb Afghan government's President- Mujaddadi had come and began living in Peshawar by October 1975. I thought I should share with you this small bit of information also. I leave it to you to speculate how people connected with top echelons of intelligence could expect on the particular date a particular news. Obviously, there was some link and information was being shared.

MB Naqvi
On e-mail

horrified seeing several anomalies in technology and its implementation. I would strongly request you to propagate my concern to the people of this country. Firstly, people who do not understand technology at all head most of the government and non-governmental organisations and they pretend to be experts on the subject. Therefore those people cannot guide their technical people in the right direction. Secondly, most of the software firm/companies do not follow any development or engineering process in software development, which results in poor quality software development or no software at all, and that gives a poor impression to local and foreign buyers. I went around many companies at Dhaka in search of skilled manpower for working on a foreign software project, but I was shocked seeing malpractice almost at every level of software development and understanding. As a result, lots of software engineers from neighbouring countries have been employed in local companies. I can visualise that slowly and gradually the number of foreign technical hands will grow in our local companies and our local skilled people will be deprived of the jobs they deserve.

Delwar Hossain
Gulshan, Dhaka

London bombing

This is a response to the letter by Nur Jahan (London bombing) published on 31 August 2005.

First of all, why should any suicide bomber bother about CCTV camera in the first place? The identification paper left on the bus by the bomber simply substantiated the fact that he was one of the bombers and the DNA test later confirmed that he was indeed the bus bomber. On the other hand historical documents show that most of the suicide bombers' intention is to let the people know who carried out the bombing.

The third point seemed particularly naive, especially where technology is so developed and circumstances hardly differ in technologically developed and well-organised London underground system. Everybody knows that there is a train every minute especially during peak hours.

It is in fact a matter of great disappointment that a country which has been a safe heaven for all kinds of people regardless of their race and background is now being castigated by many.

Sady Mirza
London

Generic names of drugs

Thanks a lot to Dr. M. Karim Khan for expressing his views about generic names of drugs on Sunday August 28 in the health page. As a patient when I go for buying medicines, sometimes the drug dispenser tries to sell different brands of medicines, which the doctor had not prescribed. So at times I feel confused. Therefore, if all the companies name their products as generic names then it will be understandable to all and it will take out the additional burden (memorising brand names) for doctors, medical representatives, employees of the pharmaceutical companies, drug dispensers and occasionally the patients.

So it's my expectation that

appropriate authorities (like the Drug Administration, Drug Manufacturers) will soon take a decision on the matter.

K.M. Shamim Hayder
Dhaka

Bombs

So far we have witnessed three major bomb attacks in the western world: 9/11 attacks in the United States, railway bombing in Madrid, Spain and recent subway bombing in London. Just before the last US presidential election, Bin Laden himself claimed the responsibility of 9/11 attacks. After 9/11 attacks, many people were arrested in the US and almost all of them were Muslims and the majority of them were from ME countries. The al-Qaeda group claimed responsibility of Madrid bombing and the arrested individuals were Muslims from the ME. Similarly, after the London bombing, al-Qaeda claimed the responsibility and again the arrested people were Muslims.

In all of these bombing we cannot see involvement of any non-Muslim. From racial perspective, we see that no white person was arrested for these incidents. It is difficult to believe that all these countries intentionally avoid arresting non-Muslims or white people since the government of these countries must place security of their own people above anything else.

It seems Muslims are being held responsible for everything going wrong.

Wasim Haider
Toronto, Canada

SSC syllabus

Many of you already know that our education system is about to undergo a change. From the next year, the students of class IX will study a common syllabus. There will be no separate groups i.e. Science, Humanities, Commerce. If this change is done, the students, no doubt, will lag behind and will face problems in their higher education. If the education ministry wants to bring this change in order to match the international standard, then I think the attempt will be a failure and the students will become guinea pigs again.

If we consider O level (equivalent to S.S.C.) as the international education system then we need to know about the whole system to compare it with the change our education ministry is willing to go for. An O-level student has the option to choose from more than one hundred subjects taking English as compulsory subject. Then they sit for exams by registering with "University of London Board & Examination Council" with the assistance of "British Council" here. Bangladeshi students generally take 6-8 subjects and can sit for their exams twice a year (Jan & May). They don't have any optional subject. They can sit for exams more than twice as well but then it is not well evaluated in future education. Their syllabus is upgraded from that of S.S.C.

If a change is what the ministry wants then they can do one thing keeping a few subjects like Bengali, English and Religion compulsory. They can open all the subjects of Humanities, Commerce and Science for the students to choose from and make the grading system similar to that of O-level. The students will happily study subjects of their choice

keeping in mind what they want to study in the future.

Nusrat Rashida
BBA, Jahanginagar University

Why don't we listen?

Kausar Islam Ayon's article "Jatka ban effective on papers only" - covered all the aspects to paint a grim picture of destruction. Most importantly, he mentioned that the plan to increase the production of hilsha also includes awareness campaign on radio, television and newspapers, holding of rallies at district and upazila levels and providing alternative employment to affected fishermen in 18 jatka-rich districts. So why don't we listen?

I have also learned from a lot of people that Jatka is not exactly a culinary delight. And that it is also possible to find other fish rich diet within the price range of Jatka.

So it seems we are really indifferent to the future of fisheries in this country.

Sazzad Hossain
On e-mail

Another wake-up call

One after another, incidents like August 17 are happening, and we are letting them go without nabbing and bringing to justice the real perpetrators. The Ramna bomb blast on Bangla New Year should have been a wake-up call for us. Possible links to extremists were suspected, but no one was brought to justice. There were bombings at cinema halls throughout the country, the Bangladesh-born British High Commissioner was attacked in Sylhet, a well-planned grenade attack was carried out on the Leader of the Opposition - not a single incident was resolved with any degree of satisfaction.

Although it is not known for certain if all these and other incidents in recent past were linked or whether the same or like-minded groups perpetrated them. But clearly there is a pattern emerging. August 17 simultaneous bomb blasts throughout the country only proves that the people behind the bomb attacks are growing in sophistication and may have already gained capability to create destruction on a much wider scale. Perhaps it is only a matter of time that we will have our own national tragedy like that of 9/11, Bali bombings, Spain blasts or London bombing.

Establishing Muslim rule of law was alleged to have been the motive behind the August 17 bombings. Nothing could be more un-Islamic than killing innocent people or creating panic among ordinary people. I don't know how the so-called 'Islamists' could adhere to such un-Islamic acts and pretend as if they are serving Islam.

We simply ignored all the wake-up calls before. Maybe it is time now that we wake up and do something to get rid of this growing menace. Maybe it's already late, maybe a greater tragedy is already in the making. That would be so unfortunate for the ordinary Bangladeshis.

Zubair Sadeque
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA

Hasina's stand

Mr Shahabul Mujib writes (Wed Aug 31) that the leader of the opposition, among her many crimes, is out to tarnish "secular democratic values that we cherish since 1971". How, by speaking out against religious fanaticism and indiscriminate bombing is the leader of the opposition tarnishing the values of 1971? Perhaps his disgust would be better targeted at those who share the stage with those who worked against our independence in 1971.



He goes on to add, "Hindus, Christians, and Muslims are free to express their opinions, and choose their own religions, and way of lives." I would like to ask Mr Mujib, who lives in the comfort of Los Angeles many thousands of miles away, whether he has been to the villages of the extreme corners of Bangladesh where over one and a half crore Hindus and Christians live, where women are afraid to leave their homes on their own, where property owners live in constant fear of confiscation under the enemy property ACT and where voters are afraid to participate in elections.

We fight alongside our Muslim brothers against the common evils of poverty, unemployment and political violence and share the dream of glory for our beloved Bangladesh, but we don't need the patronising ignorance of the elite abroad.

Mr Mujib, if hearing unpleasant truths about our country embarrasses you, come and stand beside us and spend your energy on correcting those things, but do not attack the victims.

Sanjoy Kumar Nath, Chittagong

Challenge of religious militancy

Some observations on Gen. AMSA Amin's thoughtful article "Meeting the Challenge of Religious Militancy" (DS Friday 2 September) that performs the invaluable service of initiating a serious debate on how to deal with the aftermath of 17 August explosions.

First, Gen. Amin probably overstates the extent of the militants' threat. Organisational excellence as shown by their ability to coordinate geographically separated bomb explosions doesn't necessarily translate into or generate popular support.

Such support requires a coherent and relevant ideology. This is the militants' main weakness. Their doctrine gleaned from the leaflets scattered at the bomb sites is vague; lacks coherence; relies overly on religious zeal; dismisses valid non-religious political alternatives; and uses threats to compel compliance, always a sign of feebleness.

Another weakness is that the performance of Muslim states that were or are theocracies has not been particularly noteworthy e.g. Afghanistan, Iran and Saudi Arabia. So the powerful magnet of attraction by example is absent.

Gen. Amin may be right to characterise the bombs as "not just a threat to national security (but)... a declaration of war against the state."

But it's also possible to consider the explosions as a sign of the militants' strategic weakness. To get around this, the extremists are using muscle rather than brain power to get their message across and win public recognition. This rarely works though it can cause much mayhem before being contained.

Even where muscle power is used as the servant of ideology, as in the case of Naxalites in W. Bengal and focoists in Latin America, this didn't displace the state structure. The Maoists are attempting this in Nepal; its outcome still some time off.

Gen. Amin's proposal to deal with the militants' threat smacks of overkill. He suggests that BNP should drop its four party alliance, team up with the opposition to form a sort of united front of "democratic, progressive and secular forces", set up a war council or security council and not "worry about the next election".

Taken all together, the suggested measures would be a cure worse than the disease and amounts to throwing the baby out with the bath water.

There's no reason to suspend normal multiparty politics, or drop fundamental political practices such as elections. Throughout WWII, the US held presidential elections on time (1940 and 1944).

Also, Gen. Amin doesn't give the rationale for a war council. Couldn't the existing cabinet system set up a sub-committee if needed to deal with security issues?

Gen. Amin also doesn't mention the composition of this council. It's unthinkable constitutionally that serving or retired service chiefs or other defence personnel sit on this council. Surely, Gen. Amin, knowing the dangers of active or creeping military involvement in civilian jurisdictions, is not suggesting that!

Political grievances need political solutions. Military responses buy time but offer no panacea. Didn't our experience in 1971 and that of Latin America 1970-1990 demonstrate this point conclusively?

Gen. Amin's article seems to suggest that 17 August is an existential threat to us. This smacks of Bush's declaration of global war on terrorism (GWOT) following 9/11. This US policy, ill-conceived in theory and implemented injudiciously in practice e.g. Iraq and Guantanamo, is not something we should replicate easily or lightly.

Gen. Amin also raises the spectre that the country may lapse into "a state of insurgency, a state of guerrilla warfare, outcome of which is unpredictable." This depends a lot upon the capability of the Islamic militants.

While they may have access to a fairly large pool of manpower of questionable quality but undoubted devotion from madrassahs, and to some veterans of Afghanistan and Lebanon, the validity of Gen Amin's approach of using a conventional army's teeth-to-tail ratio of 1:9 to reach the figure of 15,750 'trained-fighters' is debatable.

I concur with Gen. Amin's assessment that "August 17 has sounded the warning bells loud and clear." But these bells have been sounding clearly for some time. They just sounded more loudly last month. The question is: for whom the bell tolls?

The responsibility for dealing with outrages like 17 August lies squarely with the elected government. The authorities have taken action to find out who were involved and why. But this and earlier governments' performance in tackling public safety issues doesn't give much ground for optimism. Will it be any different this time?

Mumtaz Iqbal, Montreal, Canada

Our security

What happened on 17/8 was an early warning to all of us. They tried to send us a message that they have become much more powerful than we think. Now, we must think how they have succeeded in building such a huge network and who are the people supporting them by giving aid and raising funds.

Certainly, there is much more to think about. Do our security forces have the ability to protect us from any great danger? Can we rely on them? And the most important question- can politicians solve such problems in their own way?

Tahsin Hyder
Maple Leaf International School
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

Dhaka Cantt.

Of late Dhaka Cantt has become a nightmare for the civilians. A lot of civilians are living in DOHS Banani and DOHS Mohakhali. But their movements are restricted even to such public places like Rajanigandha Market, Cantt. General Hospital, Cantt. Post Office etc. Military Police obstruct them in the name of security upon orders from the Army Headquarters. People who want to go to Rajanigandha Market from DOHS are asked to go there via Bijoy Sarani, Rokeya Sarani and Mirpur taking a detour of ten twelve miles. People willing to go to Cantt.

General Hospital from DOHS Mohakhali are asked to go via Shaheed Jahanqir Gate by taking a detour of a few miles.

Hence I request the authorities concerned to look into the matter and ensure the convenience of the 'civilians'.

Abul Hussain
DOHS, Dhaka

BNP's dilemma

It seems August is the cruelest month for Bangladesh. First, 15 August 1975, then 21 August 2004 and now 17 August 2005. Despite the overwhelming evidence indicating the active involvement of the Jamatul Mujahedin Bangladesh in the country-wide bomb blasts, the ruling party leaders are steadfastly stating that "a certain quarter" being jealous of its achievements have indulged in such heinous and dangerous activities. They are not blaming JMB directly for these blasts because they are afraid if they do so, it would amount to admitting the presence of Muslim militants in Bangladesh which they want to avoid at any cost as it might bring Bangladesh under closer international scrutiny. This is not the only instance when the BNP has blamed "this quarter" (obviously meaning Awami League) for violent activities in the country. They had done it when Ahsanullah Master, MP, was gunned down and again when ASMS Kibria was killed in a

similar manner. Even after the grenade attack in the Awami League rally on 21 August last year similar statements were made. As a result, the investigations, which were started at that time, got nowhere. In this way the militants felt they were immune under this government. Moreover, the presence of Jamaat ministers in the cabinet strengthened their hands further. But this attitude of the BNP has to change; otherwise, the country will face a grave danger in the future, even our democracy and independence may be at stake. As yet we do not know who are the masterminds behind JMB and other like-minded organisations who reportedly want to establish an Islamic state in Bangladesh. Unless the government remains very alert and refrains from focusing its attention only on the activities of the AL, one day it may find itself attacked by completely unexpected quarters. It may be too late then.

Abul Mohsin
Siddheswri, Dhaka

Intellectual sovereignty

Bangladesh is running a high risk of losing intellectual sovereignty in near future. I just came back from the US with a view to starting a technology movement in this country with the local skilled girls and boys. But I'm shocked and

places in the country, and nobody was killed.

Our country is moving towards an uncertain future.

Some people are doing politics on sensitive issues. They are creating havoc. It seems they won't have peace in mind until and unless Bangladesh gains a bad name for extremism, and foreign powers poke their nose in our internal matters.

Cantara Wali Ruhi
DU

DU campus

The situation on Dhaka University campus is deteriorating day by day. It was much better when I took admission here more than four years ago. But matters have worsened. Several factors are responsible for this degeneration. Many poor people are seen begging on the campus and they make the environment unhygienic. Many hawkers run their business here.

The university authorities should take corrective measures in this

respect.

Mohammad Mizanur Rahman
Department of English
University of Dhaka

I was there in TSC just half an hour before the bombs blasted.

My best friend was also with me. The students were very anxious and scared.

The situation was unclear until we knew it from TV news that not only in TSC, bombs were blasted in different



Indian TV shows

These days our youngsters & also adults are quite addicted to Indian TV shows. Watching Indian dramas, entertainment shows gives them immense pleasure. After the Indian Idol craze, now we are interested in the new reality drama of " Fame Gurukul". Youngsters of our country are crazy about one particular guy of that show, Qazil!

Even though the private TV channels of our country have already come up with such talent hunt shows, the response from the audience is really disappointing.

But the question is why people are more interested to watch Indian TV shows instead of our own entertainment shows?

Don't we have talented singers & performers like Abhijeet Sawant, Amit Sana or Qazi Tauqeer? Definitely there is no shortage of talent in our country but there is shortage of talented TV producers, presenters.

The way Indian TV producers & presenters design their shows with lots of attractive, thought provoking ideas is really pairwise worthy.

Nazmus Saquib, Notre Dame College, Dhaka