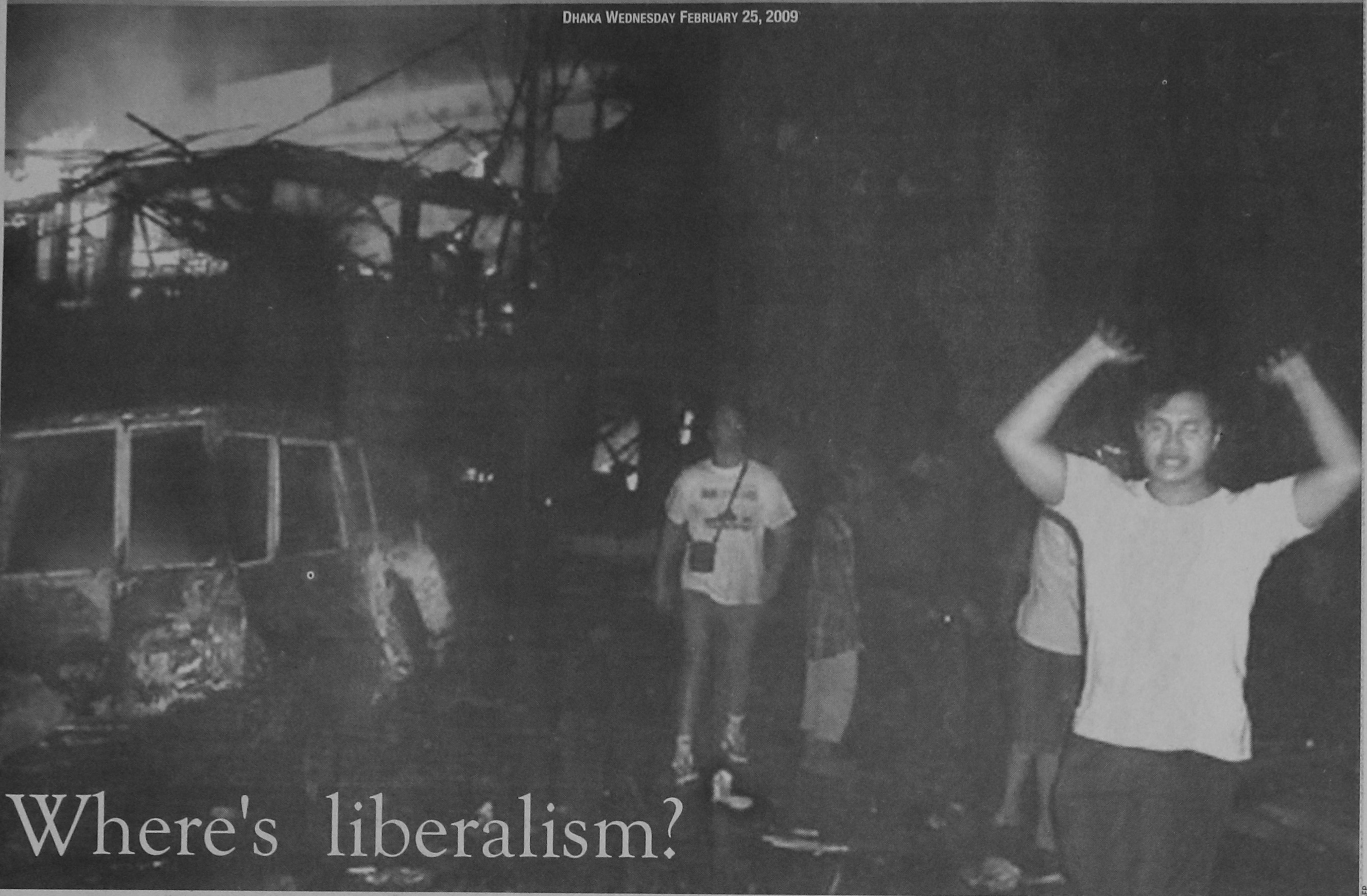


DHAKA WEDNESDAY FEBRUARY 25, 2009



Where's liberalism?

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moving to the extreme left where laissez faire often reigned the day, liberation of religion took centre stage. Liberal societies began to change their way of life in order to adjust to the renewed call to follow the scripture and return to, once again, the fundamentals of their religion. This however, did not daunt the spirit

to value their freedom to be educated and to participate in governance, while the women of Indonesia and Egypt continue to enjoy and assert their liberties from under the *hijab*.

In Indonesia, the *pesantrens*, guided carefully by moderate and liberal leadership, continue to be a force to reckon with. It was once famously said "pesantrens do not

than most secular countries around the world. It is a country where Muslims carry Hindu names and Christians carry Muslim names.

While men with caps and long alkhellas are sometimes visible in Indonesia it is a rare sight in Egypt. Egypt keeps a tight hold on religious freedoms and President

the defeat of radicals, extremists and the neocons at the ballots in Pakistan, the US and Bangladesh. A new wave of pluralistic liberalism, balancing liberties and personal freedoms in a democracy with duties and obligations towards the society and the world at large, has hopefully been ushered in. Respect for all ideologies and religions must become the cor-

nerstone of liberalism and democracy for the future. Liberalism in the extreme must be abandoned for liberalism on the middle path. It must, however, be kept under a watchful eye - the pendulum must continue to swing ever so gently, without getting stuck at either end for too long.

Nasim Firdaus is former Ambassador.

While liberalism for a period of time seemed overwhelmed by its own liberties and appeared to be on the wane, people's power reestablished it at the centre. This was amply demonstrated by the elections in Indonesia following the Bali bombings that the country witnessed with dismay. Change is now sweeping across different parts of the world as witnessed by the defeat of radicals, extremists and the neocons at the ballots in Pakistan, the US and Bangladesh. A new wave of pluralistic liberalism, balancing liberties and personal freedoms in a democracy with duties and obligations towards the society and the world at large, has hopefully been ushered in. Respect for all ideologies and religions must become the cornerstone of liberalism and democracy for the future. Liberalism in the extreme must be abandoned for liberalism on the middle path. It must, however, be kept under a watchful eye - the pendulum must continue to swing ever so gently, without getting stuck at either end for too long.

of true liberalism. Women being confined within the four walls in Afghanistan, or women wrapping themselves head-to-foot in black chadors in Iran or Baluchistan, or hijab-clad women becoming the norm in Indonesia and Egypt, have not really caused liberalism to collapse in any of these countries. If anything, many of these practices have actually strengthened the respect for personal freedoms. Women in Iran have demonstrated on the streets and in the polling booths to get back many of the freedoms that were curtailed by the revolutionary government of the late-seventies. Women of Afghanistan have learned

produce radicalism, much less terrorism, because they are the heart of religious study that teaches the way of life, morality and ethics". The *pesantrens* that dot the archipelago are indeed the backbone of religious tolerance and respect that Indonesians enjoy to this day. It is a country where religious pluralism - one of the pillars of liberalism - means something to every Indonesian. Indonesians carry on with a mixture of Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist traditions and practices in their everyday life without conflict and with respect for each of these religions. It is a country whose population is more secular

Hosni Mubarak continues to rule with an iron fist leaving no space for either religious freedom or extremism to raise its hydra head from under the sands of the desert. It also keeps a tight control over fatwas, with the Grand Mufti being the only one allowed to issue them.

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