

US AND THEM

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In recent times, Bangladesh has been given wide coverage in the international media as a turbulent country where a carnival of image-tarnishing events is going on. It has been endlessly debated whether the international media has been a little too harsh and sometimes even biased when portraying the country or whether it has been just stating facts.

Let's recapitulate some of the events that drew major attention from the international media lately. We had continued killings on the India-Bangladesh border and persecution of minorities, particularly in the south-eastern brink, the killing of the journalist couple Sagor-Runi, disappearance of BNP stalwart M Ilias Ali and death of labour leader Aminul Islam – all that called for investigation and transparency of state apparatuses, human rights and strategic interventions.

Events like the stock market crash, a minister's alleged involvement in vehicular movements where a huge sum was found stashed in broad daylight, the Padma bridge graft scandal and the infamous Hall-mark and Destiny scams and lately, the garments building-collapse tragedy has overshadowed our economic achievements.

Ripples of violence by political activists and the police, killings of innocents that usually go unnoticed, massive vandalism and bloodshed sweeping the country since the wake of the war crimes trial have only added to the persistent instability in politics. Prior to the slated election, the continued friction between the two major parties seems to have only increased the worries of the mass.

All cannot be addressed but a few certainly can be. Noted media analyst and author Muhammad Jahangir thinks we can of course accuse the international media of not publishing positive stories about our nation and politics. "But do we really have anything qualifying for that gen" he enquires. "The tale of 'the two Begums' has been published time and again. If the international media wants to avoid 'negative' stories on our politics, they have to totally stop publishing stories about us altogether."

Jahangir says the media cannot tone down news items having major international parties involved, such as the Padma bridge graft scandal. "The World Bank, the US and Canada are all involved here. It is a flagged item in the history of scandals and development aid," he says.

Then again, Jahangir thinks we can be critical of news treatment in the international media. He endorses an example that the war criminals, at the phase of allegation and after their conviction in the war crimes tribunal, have been termed as 'Islamists' in the international media instead of 'war criminals'. It sends a different message to the world as though 'Islamists' are being 'tried' for 'war crimes', whereas the meaning of 'Islamism' covers a wide area in terms of interpretation and context.