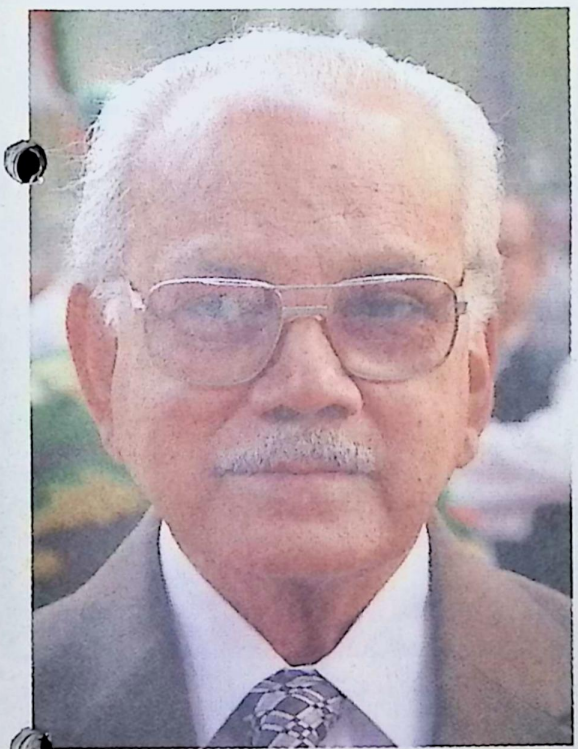
Air Vice Marshal AK Khandker, a very reputed freedom fighter, has just come forth with a book that has set people's nerves on edge.

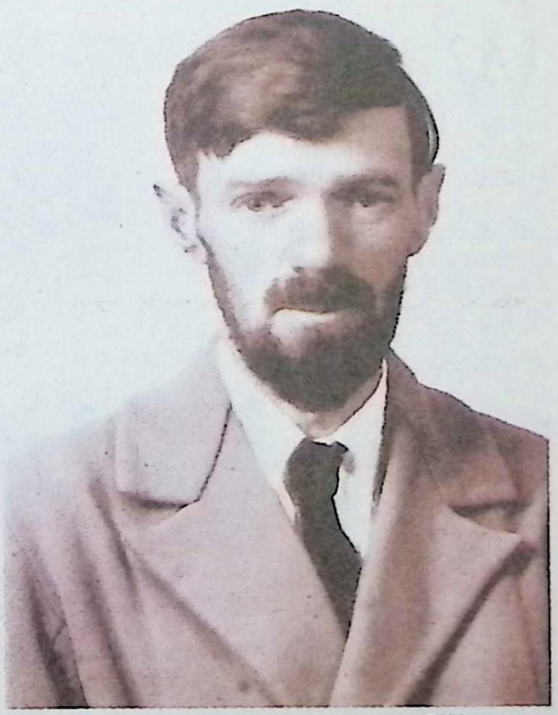


Air Vice Marshal AK Khandker

naively thought that clamping a ban on the Awami League would keep the two wings of the country together. That did not, indeed could not happen. The result was only too predictable. And it came to pass. Good old Ayub Khan, to whom must go the glory of an army occupying its own country – a tradition that was to leave democratic politics gravely wounded in both Pakistan and Bangladesh – decided one day, in the putative infinity of his wisdom, that politicians were behind the decline of the state. And, presto! He decreed an absurdity called the Elective Bodies' Disqualification Ordinance, or EBDO, through which some of the most significant of politicians of Pakistan were banned from engaging in politics. For the subsequent ten years, Ayub presided over Pakistan's fortunes, until a day came when those very EBDOed politicians put him out to pasture.

In the era of racial segregation, African-Americans were banned from getting into whites-only restaurants and buses. In apartheid South Africa, blacks, treated almost like vermin, were strangers in their own country. Not until Nelson Mandela arrived, through centuries of suffering –in that metaphorical sense of the meaning — did these unfortunate people graduate to respectability. A ban in the end shames the one who imposes it. And for that reason alone Nazi Germany will forever carry its burden of guilt over the inhumane treatment it meted out to its Jews as also Jews elsewhere in Europe.

Charles de Gaulle was once asked if his government intended to take action against the outspoken



DH Lawrence

Jean-Paul Sartre. The French leader's response remains a model of modern liberalism. 'You don't arrest Voltaire', he said. And left it at that. It was wisdom that did not touch, in early 1950s' America, Joe McCarthy and his fanatical band of anti-communists. McCarthy and his self-important vigilantes went looking for communists in the United States government. They left the reputations of perfectly good people wallowing in the mud. McCarthy, senator from Wisconsin, was to have his comeuppance. He died in misery, unmourned, condemned as the very personification of evil.

Ban newspapers. Ban journals. Ban movies. And you have a perfect recipe for a poisonous dish of medieval thought food.

The writer is Executive Editor, The Daily Star.