

# The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR  
LATE S. M. ALI

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## 'Gunfight' deaths

Bring down to zero

**Y**ET another person has lost his life in what is described as a 'gunfight' between the Rapid Action Battalion and the dead. The dead is an accused in the most gruesome murder of four young boys in Bahubal upazila of Habiganj district on February 12.

The circumstances of the death of the accused, in a so called gunfight, raise several questions in our mind, particularly because of the general impression created in the psyche of the people since the very inception of the special force regarding 'crossfire' and 'gunfights'.

We are constrained to suggest that crossfire and gunfight killings have put a blot on Rab's performance which is generally acknowledged as noteworthy, particularly in the matter of internal security. If Bangladesh has earned international acclaim for its successful efforts in combating the extremists and terrorists in the country, the greater part of the credit must duly go to Rab for its performance in anticipating and neutralising these groups.

Admittedly, incidents of crossfire has reduced considerably, but when the victim happens to be an important witness in a horrific and sensational murder case, it gives one the impression that such killings are a way of circumventing the due legal process.

It should not be lost upon the security agencies that cross fire incidents have drawn international attention and have become international issue. And one death is one too many, especially those that occur under questionable circumstances. It would be our expectation that Rab would devote all its efforts to bring down the number of 'cross fire' deaths to absolute zero.

## No place for people with disabilities?

Mahafuzar's story should be an eye-opener

**T**HE poignant story of Mahafuzar Rahman which appeared in this paper on Feb 25, ought to move the conscience of the state, and impel it to take concrete steps to make state institutions more inclusive of physically challenged persons. The 35-year-old from Lalmonirhat, who has no use of his right hand since birth, has returned all his academic certificates to the government, to express his frustration over not getting any government jobs despite consistent efforts to make himself a productive member of the country.

In spite of the challenges dealt to him by fate, Mahafuzar secured first division in both SSC and HSC exams, and graduated with a Master's degree from Rangpur Carmichael College with a second class. Even with these qualifications, he could not get a job as a primary school teacher.

Mahafuzar is one of countless talented and educated physically challenged persons in this country who are denied the right to a dignified and constructive life, discriminated against at every stage, by state and private institutions, and society at large. It is unfortunate that the 10 percent quota for people with disabilities continue to remain unfulfilled, while citizens like Mahafuzar struggle in vain to access government jobs. The situation is arguably worse in the private sector, with employers failing to take affirmative action to include more of them in the workforce and treating people with disabilities as burdens rather than as resources.

The call for a disabled-friendly workplace needs to be taken seriously by all concerned stakeholders, and a comprehensive national action plan must be put in place to address the institutional impediments that deny a considerable section of our populace the freedom to live and work as they please.

## COMMENTS

"Ravi Shastri forgets Mustafizur-mauling in 2015" (February 25, 2016)

Salah Chowdury

Mr. Ravi Shastri, Mustafiz is the name of the terror who terrorised Indian batsmen with his deadly cutters in last year's cricket series!

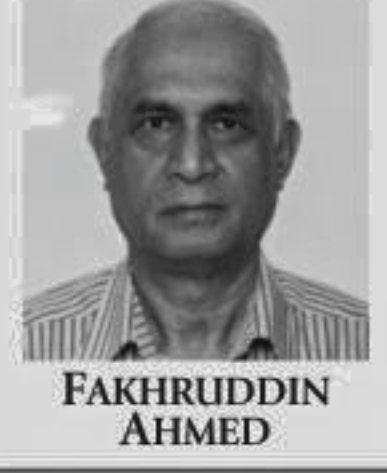
"A cautionary note" (February 24, 2016)

Mahedi Hasan

No statistics can define what is going to work out for a T20 match. Yes, we have a poor record in this version of cricket but I do believe that the recent BPL experience and the leadership of Mashrafe will be the key to seal something great. If our batting department do their job properly then we have the chance to win the matches, as I'm optimistic about our bowling skills.

# Punish the guilty, spare the innocent

LETTER FROM AMERICA



FAKHURUDDIN AHMED

**I** was shocked and horrified to learn of the indignities Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina suffered during her illegal imprisonment by the caretaker government of 2007/2008.

According to press reports, the Prime Minister's "house was searched twice," she was "arrested without any warrant," "her sick husband was pushed down," she was "dragged to jail where she had to live in a damp room, and sleep on a fragile, torn bed," and that "she was kept into solitary confinement for 11 months."

The Prime Minister's "relatives were not allowed to meet her on Eid day," and "she became sick and suffered from allergy and an eye infection, but no physician was permitted to visit her." The Prime Minister "was later shifted to the hospital from jail, but was again taken to the jail when the doctors said a blood test was needed for her." She "was transferred to the hospital again when she felt sick due to low pressure." The Prime Minister was quoted as saying, "I was not allowed to change my dress and I was taken to court."

I strongly condemn the way the Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina was mistreated during her illegal confinement by the caretaker government. This is no way to treat a human being, let alone the then former PM of the country. Those responsible must be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law and punished. Unfortunately, most Bangladeshis were unaware of the Prime Minister's ill-treatment and suffering during her imprisonment. Had I known about it, I would have certainly condemned it with the strongest language at my command.

Just as I had condemned the dastardly attack on Sheikh Hasina and her entourage in August 2004. In an opinion piece published on August 25, 2004 in

The Daily Star under the caption, "Attack on Sheikh Hasina is unacceptable," my opinion piece began: "This is serious, folks! When the leader of the opposition and the former Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina, is targeted for assassination five times this year alone, it is clear that the terrorists are determined to kill her. If the government's response is simply to "condemn" those responsible and not scour every inch of Bangladesh with the army's assistance to apprehend and punish the criminals, sooner or later, Allah forbid, the terrorists will succeed."

Some more excerpts: "Expatriate Bangladeshis are appalled at the carnage at the Awami League rally last Saturday in which the leader of the opposition and former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina was almost killed, and many of her top lieutenants maimed. Law and order is primarily the responsibility of the government. People elect governments so that they can live in peace and security as they pursue their livelihood. If the government cannot provide security, they fail in one fundamental responsibility they are entrusted with. To regain the people's trust, the government must ensure that anytime the leader of the opposition speaks at a location, the location is properly secured."

For the record, I have always been a huge fan of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. I consider him the greatest Bangladeshi ever. I also knew Sheikh Kamal. We used to chat at the Dhaka University sports ground during 1970 and 1971. Sheikh Kamal's wife, Sultana Ahmed Khuli was my teammate on Bangladesh's national track and field team for six years (1966-71). When I learned of what happened to them and the rest of Bangabandhu's family on August 15, 1975, I was devastated, and remained distraught for days afterwards. I mention these not to curry favours, but to proffer that what I have to say, I say as a great admirer and well-wisher of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her family.

Going after the press is never a

winning proposition. I have seen that movie before; it never ends well for the government that initiates the fight. First, there is a cacophony of criticism, which eventually rises to a crescendo. It is always portrayed as an unequal fight between David and Goliath – the helpless journalist vs. the mighty government.

A newspaper does not have the resources to verify allegations levelled by the nation's intelligence agencies. To what extent an editor can defy the coercion of such an agency during an emergency rule and still remain in business, I do not know. What I am pretty certain of is that The Daily Star did not cause the respected Prime Minister's imprisonment by publishing those allegations.

The caretaker government was determined to imprison premier Hasina and former premier Khaleda Zia regardless of whether The Daily Star and other newspapers published the allegations. The caretaker government should be held accountable here. Those not responsible like the editors of The Daily Star and Prothom Alo should not be prosecuted. Another question that begs to be answered: why are only the editors of The Daily Star and Prothom Alo being prosecuted? Why not the editors of other newspapers who also published the allegations?

A powerful premier can easily dispatch an editor to jail and shut down his newspaper. However, just because one can do it, does not make it right. It is unseemly for a premier to go after a newspaper editor. In America that would be derided as punching down, like President Obama going after Sarah Palin. A Prime Minister should pick fights with her political peers like a former prime minister. Newspapers only possess moral power. In the long run, moral power is powerful enough to win. Governor Monem Khan's banning of the popular Ittefaq in 1966 did not suffocate dissent; it only accelerated Bangladesh's liberation.

Freedom of press is sacrosanct in the

West. Two investigative journalists from The Washington Post, Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward, brought down the presidency of President Richard Nixon, and there was nothing the mighty Nixon could do to stop them. Westerners do not take kindly to the suppression of freedom of speech and the freedom of the press.

Most expatriate Bangladeshis are very patriotic. When devastating floods hit Bangladesh in 1988, in a fit of patriotic fervour, I published an opinion piece in The New York Times in November, 1988 entitled "Bangladeshi and Proud." Most of us are apolitical, but we are very protective of Bangladesh's interests and image. We speak out only when we feel that both are being endangered.

I have known Mahfuz Anam for 25 years, and can vouch that his heart belongs entirely to Bangladesh.

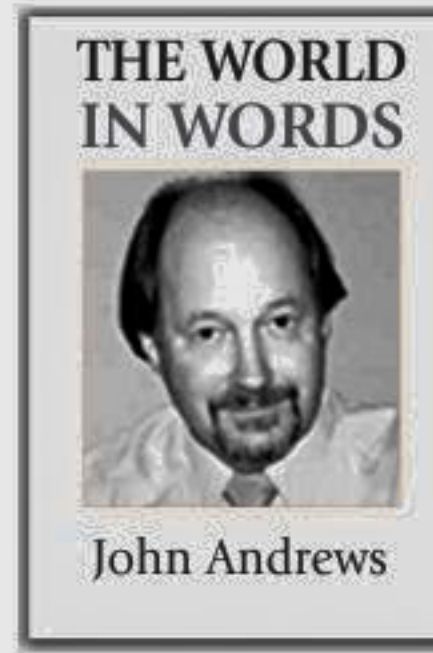
Here in America, Donald Trump has insulted Latinos, women, Muslims, blacks and even the Pope. Because of Trump's instigations, mosques have been torched and vandalised, Muslims have been shot, Muslim women wearing the hijab have been punched and their hijab snatched away. Yet, not a single legal suit has been lodged against Trump by any Latino, woman, African American, Catholic or Muslim. That is the price of freedom of speech and democracy in America.

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was well-known for his legendary generosity. He declared general amnesty to war criminals of 1971, except those who had been convicted. If I were so bold as to suggest something to the respected Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, I would pray that she rise above the fray, and through her magnanimity conquer everyone by stopping litigations against all newspapers, and move on to more pressing issues that confront Bangladesh. Such gestures will enhance Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's stature and reputation as one of the great statespersons of the world.

The writer is a Rhodes Scholar.

PROJECT ■ SYNDICATE

# More war than peace



John Andrews

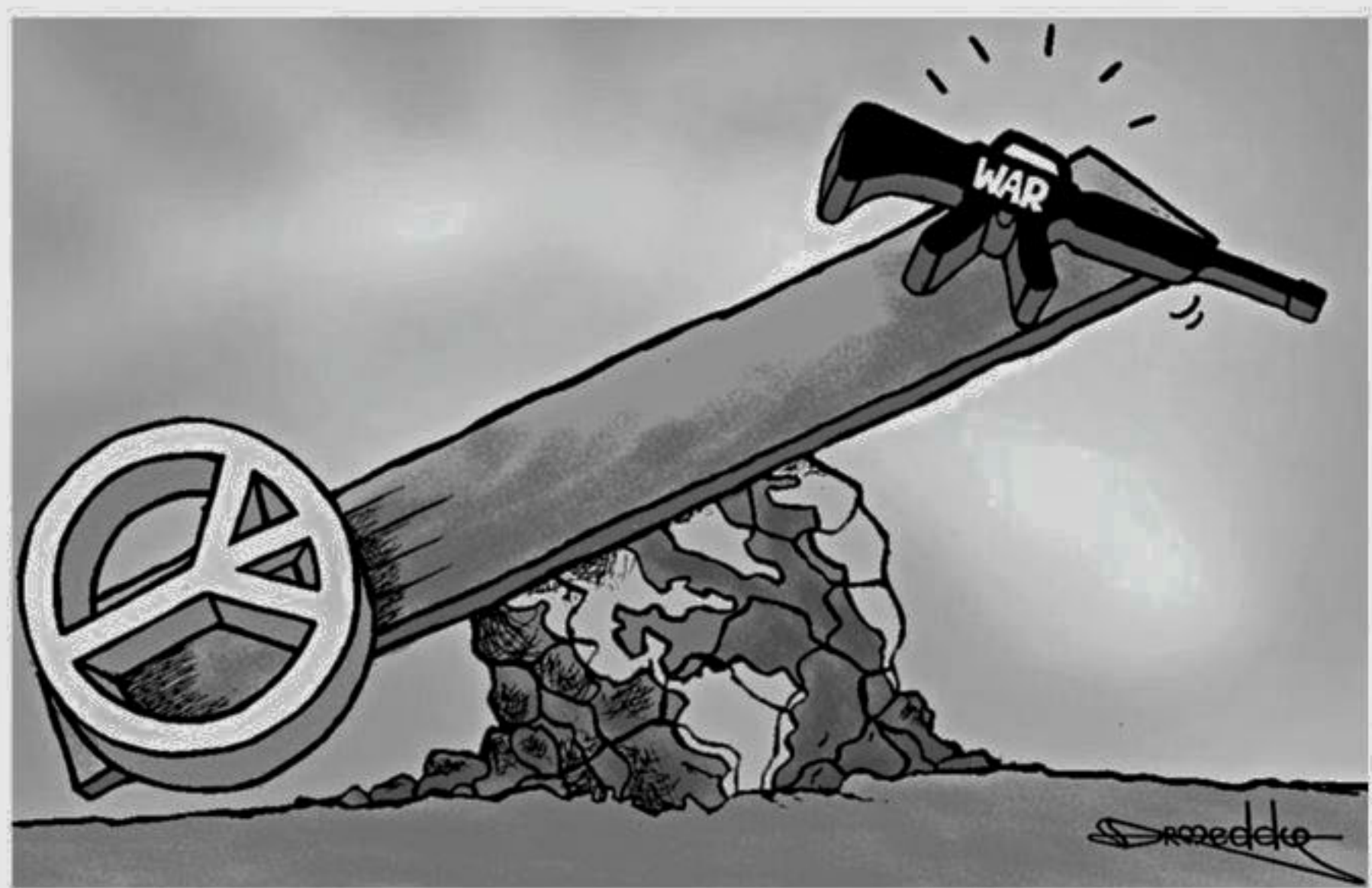
**O**NLY the dead have seen the end of war." George Santayana's dictum seems particularly appropriate nowadays, with the Arab world, from Syria and

Iraq to Yemen and Libya, a cauldron of violence; Afghanistan locked in combat with the Taliban; swaths of central Africa cursed by bloody competition – often along ethnic/religious lines – for mineral resources. Even Europe's tranquility is at risk – witness the separatist conflict in eastern Ukraine, which before the current ceasefire had claimed more than 6,000 lives.

What explains this resort to armed conflict to solve the world's problems? Not so long ago, the trend was toward peace, not war. In 1989, with the collapse of communism, Francis Fukuyama announced "the end of history," and two years later President George H. W. Bush celebrated a "new world order" of cooperation between the world's powers.

At the time, they were right. World War II, with a death toll of at least 55 million, had been the high point of mankind's collective savagery. But from 1950 to 1989 – the Korean War through the Vietnam War and on to the end of the Cold War – deaths from violent conflict averaged 180,000 a year. In the 1990s, the toll fell to 100,000 a year. And in the first decade of this century, it fell still more, to around 55,000 a year – the lowest rate in any decade in the previous 100 years and equivalent to just over 1,000 a year for the "average armed conflict."

Sadly, as I note in my new book *The World in Conflict*, the trend is now turning upward. Given that so many of Africa's wars, from the Democratic Republic of Congo to the conflict in Somalia, began decades ago, the explanation lies elsewhere: in the



Muslim world from northern Nigeria to Afghanistan and beyond.

Since Syria's civil war erupted in 2011, the death toll has reached more than 250,000, and half of the population has been displaced, causing a flood of refugees into surrounding countries and into the European Union. Indeed, the Syrian conflict alone has been enough to change the graph of conflict – and the upward trajectory becomes even steeper when the deaths in Iraq, Yemen, and Libya are included.

Those who hailed the Arab Spring five years ago must now recognize that its blooms died fast. Only Tunisia has reasonable democratic credentials, whereas Libya, Yemen, and Syria have joined Somalia as failed states, and Egypt, the most populous country in the Arab world, has reverted to an autocracy verging on dictatorship.

The question is when – or if – the trend will turn down again. Thanks largely to multilateral bodies such as the United Nations, states very rarely go to war with other states (Russia's brief war with Georgia in 2008 is an exception proving the rule). Likewise, thanks to the EU – awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2012 because it had "for over six decades contributed to the advancement of peace and reconciliation, democracy, and

human rights in Europe" – another Franco-German war is inconceivable.

Instead, wars are between states and non-state actors – between, say, Nigeria and Boko Haram, or between India and its Naxalite insurgents. Or they are civil wars – for example, in South Sudan or Libya. Or they are proxy battles of the type that characterized the Cold War – witness Iran's deployment in Syria of Lebanon's Hezbollah fighters to defend Bashar al-Assad's regime.

Whatever the various, often overlapping, causes of conflict – ideology, religion, ethnicity, competition for resources – the Prussian general Carl von Clausewitz two centuries ago gave the pithiest answer to the question of why we resort to violence: "War is an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will."

But can force alone compel the submission of the Islamic State and the demise of jihadist extremism in the Muslim world? There are two reasons to doubt that it can. One is the reluctance of militarily strong outside powers, whether America and its NATO allies or Vladimir Putin's Russia, to "put boots on the ground" after their painful experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan (a disaster for the Soviet Union in the 1980s and in this century for the US and NATO).

The second reason is the underlying

appeal of the Islamist message to many of the world's 1.3 billion Muslims. The nation-states of the Arab world are colonial inventions, superseding the caliphates – Umayyad, Abbasid, Fatimid, and finally Ottoman – that once spread civilization from Mesopotamia to the Atlantic. When Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in June 2014 announced a new caliphate, with himself as "commander of the faithful," it struck a chord. Moreover, the brutality of his fundamentalist Islamic State seems to many not so very different from the behavior of Saudi Arabia, which has spent decades spreading its Wahhabi fundamentalism through mosques and madrassas around the world.

In other words, the message must change if peace is to return to the Muslim world. That will not happen soon. Sunni Saudi Arabia will first have to moderate its antipathy to Shia Muslims in general and Shia-majority Iran in particular. Meanwhile, the Islamic State has manpower, money, territory, and military expertise (much of it from former officers in the Iraqi army).

Saudi Arabia will eventually recognize that it needs Iran's help to defeat the Islamic State. And eventually the Islamic State will implode as its subjects demand the right to listen to music and behave as they want. Sadly, "eventually" is the key word. Saudi Arabia's instinct, born of the centuries-old antipathy between Arabs and Persians, is to see Iran as a threat to be confronted, rather than accommodated. As for the Islamic State, North Korea is proof that brutal regimes can be very durable. In the meantime, the graph of deaths from conflict will keep trending upwards, mocking the world's diplomats, peacemakers, and pretensions to humanity and civilization.

The writer is a former editor and foreign correspondent for The Economist. He is the author of *The World in Conflict: Understanding the world's troublespots*. Copyright: Project Syndicate, 2016. www.project-syndicate.org

(Exclusive to The Daily Star)

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### Support or oppose something when it suits your needs?

Recently, PM Sheikh Hasina, her son and other ruling party people accused The Daily Star editor for supporting and working for the last caretaker government led by Fakhruddin Ahmed. Our humble question to this government and the PM is, if the last CTG is unconstitutional, then why didn't AL agree to take part in the election under the Iajuddin Ahmed-led caretaker government? Their violent protest had made the path for Fakhruddin-Moin U Ahmed to ascend to power and keep hold of it unconstitutionally for nearly two-years.

The present government has also branded the caretaker government unconstitutional. However, in the 1996 election, AL had come to power through an election conducted under a caretaker government. If CTG is now considered so unfair, why didn't they practice what they preach now in the past? Is it fair to support or oppose something only when it suits your needs?

Md. Golam Azam  
Gurudaspur, Natore

### Islam never supports terrorism

Islam preaches peace. It never supports any kind of terrorist activity. The prophet (PBUH) spent all his life for the sake of establishing peace and humanity in an ignorant society where people were deprived of their basic rights. The recent killing of a Hindu priest is nothing but a terrorist act carried out by some

misguided fanatics in the name of religion. A real Muslim can neither be a fanatic nor an extremist. Those who are involved in such activities are not real Muslims; they are like cancer cells in the society, regardless of which religion they belong to.

MD. Abdur Rasbid  
Dhaka

### Thanks to Daily Star Books

Last week I had an opportunity to visit the Ekushey Book Fair. I was pleasantly surprised to find the Daily Star Books with its large collections of books in English. The Daily Star deserves our sincere thanks for that.

Anonymous  
On e-mail