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USIS Library: Is It The Pentagon?

Sir,

After a long 20 years recently I went to the USIS to procure some information about Operation Restore Hope. The first shock I got was at the gate itself. Armed with batons and guns the security personnel fired a barrage of questions to me. After satisfying them and passing a well manicured lawn? I entered the building to encounter another hurdle. More security guard, metal detector et al. For a second, I thought where am I? What am I trying to do? Visit a library or the Pentagon?

Instantly my memories went back to the USIS of Chittagong (Jamal Khan Road). Spiral three storied building a landmark of a sort, the rendezvous of the youngsters of the late 70's and the early 80's. A place of cultural and social gatherings, of that time. A beautiful library well stocked with a cross section of books enough to rouse interest even in a reluctant reader. It had a lovely auditorium where with the Leo club we staged "Shama." The gentleman who was in charge always had a smile on his face and was ever helpful.

From 86-89 I was doing my Masters from Dhaka University so the British Council became a must for me. The British Council is still a library maintaining its colonial primeness and proper attitude. It also has its own security system in a very subtle way.

Correct me, if I am wrong. To me a library is a place where civilization and life is kept alive by the non-living matter — books and computers and disks cannot be any substitute for books.

The USIS library has become one such grey, grim place with an eerie atmosphere that hardly anyone would like to visit it a second time.

Maybe because of the deteriorating American image in most of the countries in the world, which has changed from a peace making democracy loving country to the policeman, that even the books are not easily available. I hope that USA will be able to restore its former image.

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