

Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

Aserious charge

I expected that some of your vigilant letter-writers from within the country and abroad, especially those belonging to the 'Well-done-Hasina' school of thought, would take notice of the letter written by Mr James P. Sheff, an Immigration Attorney from Pennsylvania, USA ("INS registra- tion may help Bangladesh in USA in the long run", January 17) and start a serious debate on the gravity of the charge brought against some of our Embassy staff in the USA. But it looks like they are so convinced about Shaikh Hasina's single handed contribution to the decision by INS that they ignore or decide to overlook the implication of the charge brought by the Attorney.

Unless a serious enquiry is instituted and the alleged corrupt practice is totally stopped, the danger of some real Al-Qaeda men (an Indian, a Pakistani or an Afghan) holding a Bangladeshi passport remain a possibility. So it is to the interest of the Bangladeshi diaspora to demand an immediate inquiry into the matter.

AZ M Abdul Ali, Uttara, Dhaka

"Whither"

In his letter (January 30) Dr. Maudood Elahi asserted that the word 'whither' is not at all obsolete. He seems to be concerned about the standard of English written by Bangladeshis.

I would suggest that importance should be given on correct construction of sentences. One should distinguish between assertive and interrogative sentences. The last sentence in his letter (I wonder why did Mr. Kim miss the main theme...?) does not seem to be an interrogative sentence, and it should have been properly constructed.

Shamim Rahman
North Fuller Road, Dhaka

"Well done Sheikh Hasina"

This is my response to the letter of Ms. Nabila Idris (January 31). I agree with Ms. Nabila that politics and the politicians have taken a dark side in our country's democracy but we cannot just blame the politicians as we choose them ourselves. It is our responsibility to elect people who can truly protect our identity and reputation, which seems to have failed this time. If Ms Nabila say Jamaat has democratically all the rights to form the government I agree with her, as it has been our decision. But I will say it has been our wrong decision. This puts a theocratic outlook to our secular democracy. I am not meaning that Jamaat has no right to be a part of the government but not as an Islamic party as Bangladesh consists of many religions and traditions.

As Ms Nabila show strong deplorableness towards the actions of Sheikh Hasina, I will ask her what does she think about the rallies, seminars, which were held by the Islamic groups and were on all possible international broadcasting channels. Even when the situation was too sensitive to handle a slogan was also very popular known as "Amra Hobo Taliban". Doesn't it put fire to the cracker?

Before we blame each other for the faults we should first come out of the dense fog, which gives us a hazy view towards the truth. I will say again that blaming each other is worthless and we should indulge ourselves to look forward to a better tomorrow.

Khalid Rahman, Dhaka

"A washed activist"

I was delighted to read Naem Mohaimen's "Opinion" of January 31. A washed activist like me concur with his views backed by reference to facts which writers like Satyajit should take note of and get better informed. Let me also suggest to Satyajit to read what Joseph Stieglitz had to say on globalisation of economy in his book "Globalisation and its Discont". This is what he had to say in the preface to the book. "I have written this book because while I was at the World Bank, I saw firsthand the devastating effect that globalisation can have on developing countries, and especially the poor within those

countries".

He came to believe that globalisation may have the potential to enrich everyone but the way it was managed, the way in which policies have been imposed upon developing countries without any regard whatsoever to the impact, particularly on the poor, leaves much to be desired. That is the fact and not a theory.

Satyajit should note how mercilessly the West has pushed the poor countries to eliminate trade barriers but managed to keep their own barriers against poor countries on one pretext or the other. Free market is not truly free; open market is also not so open. The so-called invisible hand that makes markets work perfectly are prone to nurture imperfect markets where the "giants" swallow up the "pygmies" in the name of globalisation; profligacy reigns over social responsibility, let alone moral rectitude. The litany of duality remains long and has been on for a long time.

If making profit is accepted as the supreme achievement of man then how can you expect the "unwashed, underprivileged, and the loony" will keep quiet and remain in blissful contentment with their lot. And mind you, the legacy of inequity, the perfidy of high rhetoric and low delivery as practised by the West, mainly the US, shall not fool all the people all the time, shall not prevail

become a neighbour if it is geo-graphically joined to another country. For instance, Dhaka to Singa-pore or Bangkok is of less distance and time than, for instance, New York to San Francisco is even though they are in the same country.

However, I would like to remind the policy makers that each country has its sensitivities. Bangladesh should remember that countries like Thailand, which are predominantly Buddhist, will have an interest in human rights of Chakmas and other groups. Countries like China and Thailand seems to have only begun to take note of our country. And the time is ripe to solve our internal human rights issue.

Employing a Bangladeshi Bud-dhist ambassador to Thailand will be a great way to strengthen our relation with that country.

Prodipto Ghosh, Singapore

Cricket, politics and the ruling party

"An uncompetitive national team beset by political problems. The country's cricket chief was thrown in jail following a disagreement with the government", statement made in *The Australian* (30/01/03 p18) on our cricket and the world cup in South Africa. I don't know whether this observation made after any subtle visit of anti-government or anti-state elements, as always

government is using extra man-power to finish the work as soon as possible. I wonder why! We have never seen such commitment and speed from our government in any construction project before.

It is also reported that they are building a mausoleum on the grave of President Ziaur Rahman, a mosque and a conference hall inside the nearby Chandrima Udyan. The whole project is costing about Tk 3 crore. Who is paying for it?

If I am not mistaken, the only owner of the Sangsad Bhaban and all the land surrounding it, is the "people" of Bangladesh. Yet this valuable public property is being used as certain people's personal property. And on that note, despite so much protest against this project from everyone, why are both the Speaker and Deputy Speaker so silent about it? Surely they can refuse to live in a house that isn't approved by the people. Their silence tells a lot about who these people are and how much they care for Bangladesh and its people.

It is a tragedy that people who are willing to destroy a national heritage and waste a lot of money for their personal indulgence, are supposed to be our leaders and representa-tives!

Azad Miah
Oldham, U.K

I don't think Mr Junaid is a regular reader of *The Daily Star*, a few months back they had covered a very informative and interesting write-up on the budget allocation for the eradication of mosquitoes. The gist was, while the Mayor kept telling us he didn't have enough budget, the *Star* made an investigation which revealed that at least half the budget remained unutilised.

Supporting a certain political party or a person is of no use until we admit their flaws that way we can do both the party and the country a big favour.

Mrs. S Chowdhury, Dhaka

"No to war"

Mr. Satyajit, presented a very myopic opinion on the impending attack on Iraq by a vast, overwhelming military alliance of super powers on a country, that is already savagely ravaged and weakened by over ten years of sanctions. He must not be reading anything but the Bush and Blair media spin.

A leaked UN report on what they assess will be the human and material cost, was published by the Guardian on January 29. It says that half a million Iraqis would require medical treatment for direct or indirect injuries. 3.03 million people will require therapeutic feeding. About 900,000 refugees alone will go to Iran, another 2 million dis-

Khan Kabir, USA

"Dossier on America"

Mr. Billy I Ahmed's article "Dossier on America" (January 29) is quite revealing. The Dossier must be a very exhaustive one running into hundreds of pages. Mr. Ahmed has worked hard to make a good gist of it. He deserves credit.

I am a little confused at one figure of ODA. So far I remember, it was decided in the UN in early '80s that the 25 rich countries would give 0.8 percent of their GNP annually as ODA (Official Development Assistance) to the less developed countries. But Mr. Ahmed mentions, "US gives 0.2 percent of GNP for foreign aid, the lowest amongst all donor countries. Internationally agreed upon target is 0.7 percent." The world renowned economist, Dr. Jefferey Sachs told the other day, in his exclusive interview with *The Daily Star*, "Once the rich gave 0.8 percent of their GNP in assistance which totalled \$175 billion. Now, they give only \$15 billion."

Which figure is correct-- 0.7 or 0.8 percent?

A.F.G. Mohiuddin
Dhaka

The ruling party

- 1) Both Awami League and BNP used to torture the opposition when in power.
- 2) For any failure they used to blame the previous government.
- 4) Both of them failed to combat the terrorism and criminal activities.
- 5) Both of them failed to improve the image of our country at home and abroad.
- 6) Both of them failed to keep the price of daily commodities within the reach of the general people.
- 7) Both of the used to take important decision ignoring public opinion.
- 8) Both of them became unpopular while in power.
- 10) Both of them cannot tolerate freedom of speech.

Ahmed Habib Manzur
Buraydah, Saudi Arabia

Price hike and...

I heard the news of fare hike of bus and eviction of the so-called bus counters in the city. While it is justified to increase bus fare (or is it 16% hike while fuel price hike is 14%?) if you narrow down the scope there is no justification of eviction of the bus counters.

Even the first one is unjustified on the basis of unjustified price hike of fuel. The affect of this fare hike would be certainly on the middle and lower income group. These groups are already feeling the heat of the price hike of daily commodities. And now the bus fare goes up. What's next?

Shakil Akther
Dept. of URP, BUET

One Government goes. Another one comes, each time a new government comes promising the voters the world. But as soon as they cling to power all they are interested in is serving self-interest. They come and go on increasing the image (a non-stop claim.) of the country abroad and also go on preaching the increase of GDP in paper from 5 to 8 percent every time. Increase of GDP is possible by increasing the price of most essential items for which livelihood of every people specially the poor who lives on hand to mouth become unbearable. Once the price of fuel could be increased by the government, the price of rice, pulse, fish, meat, vegetables and even water goes up by leaps and bounds.

On the one hand, the government propagates to keep the price of daily commodity stable. And on the other hand, it goes on increasing the price of oil, fuel, electricity and water.

Nur Hossain
Bangshal, Dhaka

The government goes on increasing the price of basic commodity, oil, gas, bus fare and it is the general people who suffer the most. The people's salary hasn't raised then how are they to cope up with this price hike?

Amanul
Dhaka

"Women's football"



The ball is on whose court?

By modernism, I mean a changed dimension the way people think, with more acceptance of the new and different. I have six years experience living in a developed country and know that everyone there does not treat women with respect. If someone in US, UK or any other developed country thinks that women should be confined to the house to cook and look after children, I would still regard him as backward. My concept of modernism includes showing tolerance towards those whose behaviour is not exactly in keeping with the mainstream population. Here I'm not just referring to the gender issue. People of different religion, ethnic status etc should be viewed with endurance. If they are different, leave them be, but why fight?

Coming back to the football discussion, no one was forcing the religious fundamentalists to watch the match. The women were not performing a social evil. A modern man, whether he liked the idea of women playing or not, would have avoided the match venue and let the game go on. But to coerce a match to being abandoned, just because the participants were 'different' from the type that the un-progressive people are used to, is a disgrace for the nation.

Munasir Kamal, Dhanmondi, Dhaka

First of all let's get one thing clear. Sports for women, whether football, cricket or gymnastics are permitted for women in Islam. It is also allowed for women to compete in their favourite sport, as long as they follow the wonderful guidelines.

Islam actually permitted women to participate in sports and gave them equal rights over 14 centuries ago. Which is not practised in Bangladesh at all, I am afraid. Those people who say that Bangladesh should be modernised are in fact unaware that if people practised Islam as how it should be, then they would not make these comments. Do most people know that Islam introduced child benefit?

Equal rights, voting and movements for women were introduced in the western world only half a century ago, whereas in Islam it was introduced over 14 centuries ago.

Mohammed N Islam, Gtr Manchester, UK

In reference to the letter of Mr Shabbir Khan (January 31) I must say I had to smile. It is always amusing when someone takes sarcasm literally.

I did send a response to Mr. Sakahwat Hossain (January 26) who had responded to my earlier letter regarding this issue (January 24).

I found Mr Hossain's response to be that of a knee jerk reactionary type. Hence I responded in a way which I thought would be funny and at the same time, necessary. The groups of people I reviled according to Mr Shabbir Khan are usually people I myself associate with.

Perhaps Mr Khan would be wise to read both of my letters (January 24, 27) and then reflect on the matter rather than leaping to an erroneous conclusion and branding me as a reactionary.

Yahya, USA

I was not shocked, but definitely frustrated reading the incident surrounding women's football. Before I had time to express my protest and concerns on what I thought was done by less educated fundamentalist people, I got shocked to read some of the letters written by the readers.

On January 31st, two letters caught my attention. One was from Mr. Shabbir Khan who criticised Yahya's letter. While I agree with Mr. Khan's views, I must point out that when I read Mr. Yahya's letter, I took it as a sarcastic one - it seemed to me that he was pointing out how ridiculous the incident and the letters supporting the incident were.

The second letter that I believe demands a response is the one came from Mr. Atif Alam. U.S.A. has its faults like all other countries and I certainly don't agree with the international politics of the current administration. However, Mr. Alam like many of my fellow Bangladeshis, made a mistake of calling the U.S. morally inferior to Bangladeshis due to "modernity". Morality to some extent may be subjective. However, being citizens of a country that is highly corrupt in all aspects, we hardly have the right to point fingers.

The kind of modernity that people like Mr Alam are afraid of can only make things better. Men have ruled our society for thousands of years and look what we have become. Like it or not, women are becoming more and more independent in every segment of our society, and as they become educated and self-reliant, as they achieve more in professional careers and gain more power over their own personal lives, things can only improve. The high divorce rate that you and many of my fellow countrymen like to quote as a "downside of modernity, i.e., women's empowerment" is merely a reflection of the fact that women are no longer forced to stay in abusive or otherwise love-less marriages. If you think that the so-called "family values" are what keep the divorce rate low in countries like ours, you are naïve.

Modernism is not a call for moral collapse, but it is a call for freedom of the individual that does not infringe upon others' rights. Feminism is not a fight for special rights, but a struggle for equal rights and equal protection to the half of the population who were born free, but kept in chains made of norms and customs by the male dominated societies.

WT, Dallas, USA

I am quite surprised by the letter written by Atif Alam, who has found all the negative aspects of US society but failed to show the positive side of it. I too, have been living in the US for the last 15 years and my experience is completely opposite to what he has observed.

The 67% divorce rate which he mentioned, seems high, I think it is more towards 45-50%. But, what he mentioned about the US society, as every moral aspect has collapsed, is far from the truth. The people of the US are overwhelmingly honest, hardworking and friendly. If we ignore our assumptions based on the Hollywood and talk shows, but on the basis of personal interactions and observations, majority of them are law abiding and polite. They are very often helpful and very seldom judgmental.

Here, one class is not given different salary based on their nationality. The reason for high divorce is not altogether immoral. If in our society, a woman could have the means to raise their children by herself, without social stigma, the divorce rate in our country would have been higher as well. The only reason for low divorce rate in our society is their dependence on the male and social stigma. We will be fooling ourselves if we feel that, the male in our society, treat our women with more respect than the people in this modern society do. Finally, in this modern society, which is an impending disaster to happen according to the writer, is surviving as one of the society, where there is justice, there is freedom of opinion and human values. I don't see it to collapse anytime soon.

M. Hassan, Plano TX, USA

Inclusion in INS registration



Listed but not blacklisted

Much has been said on the issue of INS registration and I thought I should let the readers know some of my own thoughts on the issue. I came to USA on student visa only a couple of days before the INS announced the inclusion of Bangladesh in the special registration procedure. Being a person directly affected by the procedure, I still feel that the issue has drawn unnecessary debates and political foul playing back home.

INS justifies the procedure in its website by saying "The INS is required, within three years, to track ALL of the estimated 35 million foreign visitors, students, business travellers, and tourists who enter and leave the United States

each year. It also requires that, by 2004, ALL official travel documents used to enter the United States contain biometrics identifiers (e.g. fingerprints) in addition to photo identification. This requirement is made necessary given the number of fraudulent documents presented to the INS....".

This means that the special registration will eventually cover all countries in the world whose citizens visit the US, although it is true that only the Muslim countries have been included till now. We cannot make the US exempt Bangladeshis from the registration system (no matter how many trips our Foreign Minister makes to US and how many

times he meets with Colin Powell, Senators and Congressmen). Blaming the other party as to what caused the inclusion will not help either. I personally don't feel US administration gives much weight to what our political leaders are saying.

What is needed now is to make sure that those who are here illegally are not harassed and deported. Our government should try to make the case for granting amnesty to those staying here illegally but do not otherwise have any criminal records. That is what thousands of Bangladeshi families need now.

Zubair Sadeque
Duquesne University, USA