

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.

Sena Kalyan encroachment

I am usually the first to criticise *The Daily Star* for its lack of follow up stories. For instance our millionaire meter-reader, Jamuna Groups encroachment at Ashulia or Bashundhara's encroachment on Turag river.

But this time I am glad to see that *The Daily Star* is reporting on the incident of Sena Kalyan Sangstha (SKS) and their dispute about Buriganga land. I am constantly amazed that a conglomerate as rich as Sena Kalyan feels it necessary to encroach on public land.

In the case of SKS, it's difficult to even figure out how many businesses they own.

The role and scope of SKS should be examined. I am amazed that the IMF and other international organisations do not take askance to this military business dominating so much of our country's commerce.

Joyonto
Dhaka

Suggestion for NAM

NAM nations have taken a praiseworthy position on the issue of Iraq crisis. It expresses NAM's neutrality and necessity in this world dominated by one superpower. If NAM nations can work together in economical and political sectors, poor NAM nations will not have to depend on another rich dominant countries. NAM can be an alternative to US-UK led coalition, if NAM's leaders wish and work together.

NAM can become a shelter for the helpless people who have been frustrated by the US and its allies' howling for war. Mahathir and Fidel Castro must be better leaders than Bush and Blair in the case of assuring peace for world community. All the NAM leaders should be determined to build NAM into such an organisation which can be able to struck the unconscious mind of USA and its allies.

Shahrin Shahrin Naomi
Dhaka

The Non-aligned Movement's Kuala Lumpur declaration is something akin to the irrelevant mouthing off to the big boys. Contrary to popular perception, the movement did not become immaterial with the demise of the Cold War, although that was the death kneel of the NAM.

Ironically the next NAM conference will be held in Havana, which was also the site of the 1979 conference when these third world statesmen failed to condemn the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, one of the founding members of NAM. With that ended the fallacy of the NAM, something started at the height of the Cold War, by a pan-nationalist Arab, an Indonesian dictator and a naive Indian socialist.

What our papers failed to mention were some of the more odious members welcomed at the NAM summit. Leaders from Iraq, North Korea, Sudan and Zimbabwe had a merry old time criticising the US and the West in general. Iranian President Mohammed Khatami accused the United States of "fanatic fundamentalism" and "a new form of totalitarianism" that threatens overwhelming military firepower to decide the fate of countries such as Iraq.

According to the Globe, a Canadian newspaper, countries with poor human-rights records have continued to remain prominent in the movement. For example, Belarus, an isolated and repressive state in the former Soviet bloc, was chosen to speak for the European "regional group" at the summit Monday.

Mr. Mahathir felt obliged to defend the autocratic members of the movement. "A benevolent and caring autocrat can do wonders to develop a nation," he said on the weekend. "All the developed countries of today were built up by autocratic rulers."

The Non-Aligned Movement is not only irrelevant but downright insidious and subversive.

Masood Rana
Dhaka

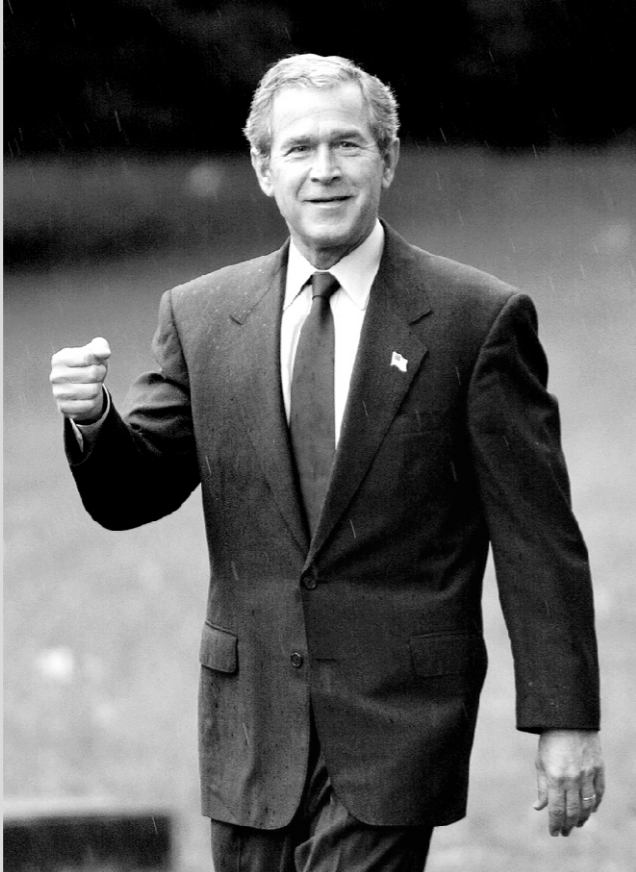
Independence Award

I would just like to point out an error in the letter of Mr. Raihan Rahman (February 26) where he claims that both Zia and Sheikh Mujib were the founders of the BNP and AL respectively.

With all due respect, Mr. Rahman, Sheikh Mujib did not "found" the Awami League. The Awami League is a political party that predates Bangladesh's independence by two decades and was founded by such great men as Moulana Bhashani and other Bengali Muslim nationalists in the 1950s. The AL and Jamaat are two political parties in this country that have been founded on ideology as opposed to one man i.e. BNP and Jatiya Party.

Scherezad Latif
Eskaton Garden Road, Dhaka

"War in Iraq"



Order, order!

This is in regards to Shomit Chowdhury's letter "War in Iraq" (February 24) accusing America of being probably the most Machiavellian regime since old Prince Machiavelli himself. Being constrained by the word limit, let me just reply to a couple of Shomit's arguments.

I hardly think that the US role in Bosnia was overblown. It was certainly a more honourable role than that played by the EU and UN which spectacularly failed. It was American pressure that brought about the Dayton Accords that has at least so far ensured peace, for Muslims from Christians, mind you. It was also US initiative that stopped Milosevic from trying the same trick in Kosovo. It was NATO, led by the US that stopped the Serbs from their ethnic cleansing. By the way, the Kosovars saved by the Americans were Muslim.

Again it was these greedy, baby killer Americans who tried to bring peace in Mogadishu. Again without much prospect for material benefit.

My question to all these *peaceniks* is this, where were you people when Americans were dying trying to save Muslims in Somalia? Now when the Americans and British are trying to remove a vicious dictatorship, we get the peace movement coming out of the woodwork.

It seems to me that this peace movement is not much more than knee-jerk anti-American relic, leftover from the Cold War.

MA, Dhaka

found equally noble.

Amina Alim has ventured to write "Ziaur Rahman was a Major of our army" (February 26), as if he cannot be put at par with Sheikh Mujib! In my opinion Mowlana Bhashani should also be considered at par for the award as he should be treated as the greatest contributor to our emancipation and freedom movement. And if you make the list of achievers names of Sher-e-Bangla A K Fazlul Haque and Hussain Shaheed Shurawardy also comes in.

Let us not give birth to controversies one after another—according to our personal liking or disliking or party affiliation. None should be lowered in the eyes of others due to our shortsightedness.

A F Rahman
Dhaka

What is this debate over giving Independence Award to Bangabandhu and Zia! Can't we take some time off from creating another controversy? We have millions of pressing problems which need immediate attention and all we are engaged in arguing over who was a better leader— Sheikh Mujib or Zia.

From my point of view, they both failed as a leader. The deteriorating state of our nation speaks for itself!

Raihan Chowdhury
Banani, Dhaka

BAF crash

On February 25, we had another

lucky save when a BAF trainer crashed in Kumitola airfield. Of course given the recently indemnified hauteur of our Air Force, there were few details and journalists were barred from the site and from taking pictures.

The Air Force is a dangerous life and accidents will happen, another trainer crashed in Dhaka last year and one in Chittagong. Air Force pilots know the risks and accept them as a part of their job.

But how long are we poor civilians going to stay lucky? Sooner or later one of these trainers will crash into a residential area. There are Air Force planes always buzzing about over Gulshan, Baridhara and Uttara. Are all these flights absolutely necessary? Maybe the trainer squadrons, logically the most likely to crash, should be moved to other bases in Comilla or Chittagong, which are situated in less densely populated areas.

Emile
Dhaka

Hansie Cronje-- a misled idol

World Cup cricket tournament is going on and we cannot but remember with sadness Hansie Cronje, the South African cricket captain. People used to look upon him with love and respect, a great captain who was dedicated to his team and the country, a perfect gentleman. But all his good name was destroyed by a disgraceful action on his part. The

entire world was shocked and hurt. His life also ended tragically, in a plane crash. But he would have remained a hero in peoples' mind had he not been deviated from his path.

Nur Jahan
Chittagong

While watching South Africa play in the World Cup I cannot but miss their former captain and indeed one of the best cricketers in the world--Hansie Cronje.

South Africa is one of my favourite teams and I really want them to make it to the Super Six. Had Hansie Cronje still been their captain, I am sure it wouldn't have all difficult for them to make it to the next step.

You cannot fulfil the need of a good captain by good players only. And the South African team is the best example of it.

Tanzin Rahman
Lalmatia, Dhaka

The World Cup tournament has indeed gotten very interesting. Everybody is holding their breath to see which teams make it to the Super Six.

I for one support South Africa and wholeheartedly want them to win the cup. They owe it to Hansie Cronje-- the best captain for the team so far.

Hugh Richard
Cape Town, South Africa

City of slums

Is there a 'Ministry of Bostee' (Slums) I can contact to rid our area (or the whole city for that matter) of the swelling slums? The vacant land on both sides of the Gulshan-Banani lake (especially facing Gulshan Roads 35, 41, 43 etc) is teeming with ever-growing slums bringing with it the accompanying problems of crime, drugs, prostitution and health hazards. Frequently there are disturbances in the slums at odd hours resulting in noisy commotion continuing for long time. The slum dwellers have a habit of turning on their radios at high volume at all hours of the day and night disturbing the residents of the area. Very often it is difficult to carry on a normal conversation inside our homes with the noise emanating from the slums.

I have read some letters in the recent past on this subject and it seems no one is caring. The Army is not keen to interfere, the Police are probably protecting the slums for personal benefit, the officials are too busy to pay attention (unless they are affected themselves) and the politicians patronise the slum dwellers for their political gains. Is there any one we can turn to? Should there be a 'Ministry of Bostee'? I would appreciate if someone can offer a guidance on how to tackle this nuisance.

Z.A. Khan
Gulshan, Dhaka

No one should be excused

Shane Warne, the greatest leg spinner ever, has been banned from international cricket for about a year for taking illegal drugs.

I am personally sorry because this player is really great to watch when in action. But, if anyone does anything illegal, then the person should be punished. Whoever it is, no one should be excused if the person is found guilty.

Minhaj Ahmed
Uttara, Dhaka

"Machine Readable Passport"

I agree with Rashid Chowdhury (February 25), that we should have Machine Readable Passports as well. Even India and Sri Lanka have already introduced these.

With added security measures they would be far more difficult to forge. Also it would save the trouble of looking for the photograph; all Machine Readable Passports have the photo on the back page and not on the front like ours.

Whenever we travel anywhere, you have to wait in front of the counter while the immigration officer tries to figure out that Bangladeshi passports are not standardised.

T AI
Dhaka

I would like to add to Mr. Chowdhury's trenchant letter (February 25) regarding Bangladesh's lax passport policy. One can make the argument that Bangladesh's placement on the INS special registration list was partly attributed to the fact that Bangladeshi passports are easily acquired through either corrupt passport officials, or easily forged.

Mr. Chowdhury has rightfully suggested that Bangladesh start issuing Machine Readable Passports (MRP). But this technology is old hat. Countries like the United States will soon require that all visitors have passports that contain some kind of biometric data-- fingerprints, retinal scans, etc-- to ensure that the passport holder's true identity.

Niraj Agarwalla
Boston, USA

The 'mastaan' named mosquito!

Can anyone save us from the number one 'mastaan' of Dhaka-- mosquito? The way they have been ruling over the city is terrible and terrifying. You can trace them anywhere and everywhere, be it day or night, but cannot fight them in anyway, at least not unless the government and our favourite Mayor gather all their force and make an honest effort.

But from their attitude it doesn't appear that they are too willing to free us from this menace. Spraying weird-smelling insecticide once in a while would not improve the situation in any way. Interestingly, I have noticed that after the City Corporation sprays this insecticide, thought I feel nauseated, it doesn't seem to create any effect on these 'flying machine'. Is it that I might be turning into mosquitoes and they into human beings!

We often hear about our top listed criminals taking shelter in our neighbouring country. My urge to them would be please give shelter to this irresistible 'mastaan'. We promise that we won't ask you to hand them over, ever!

Sabrina Chowdhury
Dhanmondi, Dhaka



So many freshman, so little time!

My experience of INS registration

February 24 dawned with much fear and uncertainty in the minds of numerous expatriate Bangladeshis in the US. This was the first day of INS special registration process for "call in-group 4" that includes our country. I was no exception to the mass apprehension regarding the process.

When I reached the Federal Building in downtown Chicago at 7:30 in the morning, I had to pass through security check like everyone else. After a pleasant greeting, an INS officer handed me a form and asked me to fill it up, which consisted of questions like my name, permanent address (outside USA), the name, address and telephone number of a co-worker etc. When I returned the form, the INS officer also asked for my passport and other INS papers. The officer asked me the approximate date of my first

arrival in the USA and jotted that down on my form.

I was then asked to wait till my name was called. Then an officer first asked me to take an oath. He then asked to see my driver's license or state ID and a major credit card for the purpose of identification.

He asked if I had any letter from my employer. I showed him the letter from our program administrator, which described my position and annual salary. The officer asked me my US address and telephone no, city of birth, the date of my last entry to US and the nationality and address of my parents. The officer also asked for three contact persons' name and address in USA. He then asked me to place my index fingers on the digital fingerprinting device on the table. After that the officer took my photo. He wrote a FIN number (Finger Print Identifica-

tion No) on the back of my I-94.

Finally, the officer returned my passport and other papers and gave me a few instruction papers that mentioned that I have to register again in a year if I do not leave USA within that period. I can exit USA through certain ports that have INS offices and I have to report to that INS office before departure. The entire interview process took about twenty minutes. Throughout the interview, the officer was very courteous, respectful and friendly. On my way out, I met few people from other countries who had similar pleasant experience.

Like many others, I was also disappointed and worried at the inclusion of Bangladesh in the terror-risk list. It was only after I went to the INS office, I figured out the whole registration process was simple and easy, well, at least it was in my case.



Land of the legal!

I hope sharing this firsthand information will help to alleviate the anxiety and fear that are stemming from rumours and hearsay.

Dr. A Nasser Khan
Louis A Weiss Memorial Hospital, USA

Bush and Iraq

The Bush administration gave in to international opinion and took the Iraq issue to the UN. Now France and Germany and to an extent Russia and China are trying to take advantage of this gesture.

The US and the Bush administration, along with its allies, England and Spain, had no reason to go to the UN asking for a resolution on an issue the UN has been toothless to solve for the last twelve years. Yet Bush, an instinctive unilateralist, gave in to foreign opinion, but to

bration of this new feast. So it seems that the custom of young men choosing maidens for valentines, or saints as patrons for the coming year, arose in this way.

K. Kabir
Rochester, New York, USA

Travel tax act

I am just a small person in the scheme of things. I started my schooling in the early 1950's. My Father was in the U.S. Air Force. He served at Molesworth Air Force Base. I lived in Thrapston and a small town called Woodford in Northamptonshire.

My memory of the English people are good memories. Even though the local folks considered Americans as somewhat posh.

I reserve my right to totally disagree with you sir. But I also respect your right to disagree with me.

As my Soldiers may go to war. It is in defense of both our rights.

This is the American way. The United States is not building an empire as the French, English, Spanish, Russians etc. did in the last century.

Image of Bangladesh as a maritime nation



Bye bye Bangladesh!

The tragic capsizing and subsequent sinking of a pleasure vessel owned by a family of industrialists on a river cruise turning in to a death trap for so many precious lives during last Eid-holidays cannot just go by expressions of sorrow and condolences.

As a maritime nation the authorities concerned must explain who were responsible for approval of the vessel's design and the circumstances leading to the accident. Mere reference to a sudden storm within the sheltered IWT range at this time of the year as to the cause before the official finding is not also right. We have had so many commercial passenger launch disasters in our waterways normally attributed to overloading or gross negligence on the part of owners/operators but in this particular case it was a vessel owned and operated by a very wealthy safety conscious family without any such inference simply to enjoy a vacation with friends/family members. The people belonging to such enlightened society can never be indifferent to safety aspects in terms of construction or operating competence of the master/Engineer of the subject pleasure river-craft. How could such a unusual calamity of that magnitude happen with so many surveyors/inspectors of different organisations/authorities engaged today for protection and safety of lives and property in our waterways as it was never been before. River-crafts, still being the major mode of transport for our delta region the public has the right to know the real cause of this very sad episode and perhaps the H'ble Shipping Minister also may owe an appropriate statement in the 'Sangsd' on such an important matter.

The other news on maritime affair is the case of 'Banglar Robi' one of the national flag carriers, a ship of BSC flagged stranded in Portugal with 42 Bangladeshis on board which appeared in local as well as overseas press during the same time after the Eid festival as the aforesaid first incident. The mere loss of the charter-hire for everyday delay of this ocean-going ship flying the national flag is not all and sufficient for the public consumption. Bangladesh being a member of IMO (UN) has the means and every right to ascertain the nature of failures as well as hold those responsible for such acts that tarnished the image of our nation also caused heavy financial loss. As a Maritime nation we have a lot of obligations and rights under international conventions and we must be capable of taking care of all these to operate our ships in international waters without such hindrance in 21st century.

Z. Rahman
Gulshan, Dhaka

Valentine's Day and our rights

In response to Mr. Arafat from Yale (February 21), I'd like to say that by saying someone doesn't have a right to interfere with others' business one is not limiting freedom of "that" person.

Mr. Minhaj implied, "Keep your mouth shut on my business." In other words you do not have any right in my personal matters. And this is in no way limiting your rights, because you don't indeed have any rights on what I do, especially if it does not directly affect you. So I guess you fell in the trap of "misunderstanding" and taking the 'face value' of what was written, without getting the right meaning.

Shaddy
University of Toronto, Canada

For those of you who are clamouring to celebrate this day, here is some history that you should be aware of. You will see it has its roots in being a Christian religious celebration and even some elements of Roman Paganism.

Under the rule of Emperor Claudius II Rome was involved in many bloody and unpopular campaigns. Claudius the Cruel was having a difficult time getting soldiers to join his military leagues. He believed that the reason was that Roman men did not want to leave their loved ones or families. As a result, Claudius cancelled all marriages and engagements in Rome. The good Saint Valentine was a priest at Rome in the days of Claudius II. He and Saint Marius aided the Christian martyrs and secretly married couples, and for this kind deed Saint Valentine was apprehended and dragged before the Prefect of Rome, who condemned him to be beaten to death with clubs and to have his head cut off. He suffered martyrdom on the 14th day of February, about the year 270. At that time it was the custom in Rome, a very ancient custom, indeed, to celebrate in the month of February the Lupercalia, feasts in honour of a heathen god. On these occasions, amidst a variety of pagan ceremonies, the names of young women were placed in a box, from which they were drawn by the men as chance directed.

The pastors of the early Christian Church in Rome endeavoured to do away with the pagan element in these feasts by substituting the names of saints for those of maidens. And as the Lupercalia began about the middle of February, the pastors appear to have chosen Saint Valentine's Day for the cele-

What result?

Russia and China will eventually give in to US demands and stop their opposition. All that France and Germany have achieved is to tell the US that the UN Security Council, which during the Cold War was a battlefield between good and evil is now the stage for Old Europe's grandstanding and the last forum for these has been to punch over their weight.

Azad
Dhaka

It is a shame that Bush's administration is plotting an unlawful war against Iraq and the rest of the world is doing nothing but expressing their concerns. What will be the consequences if a war takes place? How many countries will put an embargo on US? The answer is none.

I hope USA makes a wise decision.

Mohammad Tareque

We do however subscribe to our own and the world's security.

Gary Lee Chandler
USA

We must see this all in the world perspective and not just in the Iraq perspective that the US wants us to see. Saddam Hussein has no weapons of mass destruction. If he had any he would not have had hesitated to use them by now. Because he knows that there will be a war no matter what he does as you do not station over 250,000 troops with the added cost of millions of dollars of maintenance of those troops in that region ready in battle mode for nothing.

There will be a war and there is no doubt about that, and not because of Saddam being a threat but because the US seeing their unipolar world and superpower status deteriorating wants a firm hold of the