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Arabic signage in ZIA

The issue of ZIA International Airport flashing a sign in Arabic has raised quite an uproar. My question to the authorities concerned is that, does the Arabic sign serve any purpose? It consumes electricity in a country where load shedding is a common phenomenon, especially during the summer. The money that went into this sign could have been used for some charitable work.

A.B.M Zakaria (April 23) questions the reactions of some of the writers, asking them whether they respect their religious language. He wrongly asserts that Bangladesh is a Muslim country, whereas in reality it is a secular nation. This may not be stated in the Constitution, but this is the fact. He even states, and I quote, "Why should *The Daily Star* allow such uncalled for controversy and all just for nothing?" He seems to forget that other people will have opinions that differ from his own.

Shukla Mirza (also April 23) from Qatar displays a very patronising attitude, and has the gall to suggest that the people who protest the Arabic sign change their names because in her own words, to those who protest, "Arabic sounds too fundamentalist and not suitable for the 'New World Order'". I am no expert of international affairs, but to which 'New World Order' is she referring? Ours is a world in which the

mere difference in religion is used as a justification by some to instigate violence between fellow human beings, who otherwise could have lived in peace. Some people use religious differences to promote their own selfish goals.

People have the freedom to choose whether they will follow religion or not. Not following religion does not necessarily make someone bad, or decadent, but just different. As long as we, the people, are not ready to accept mutual differences of race, religion, caste, creed, etc there will be no peace.

I do not agree with anything that A.B.M. Zakaria, Shukla Mirza, and M.A. Bashar (April 23) have said. Mr. Bashar wrongly interprets the apparent absence of the mention of Bangladesh as a secular country as statement that Bangladesh is a Muslim country. He forgets that Article 2A of the Constitution states, "but other religions may be practised in peace and harmony in the Republic". Article 41 guarantees freedom of religion. I request him to get his facts straight. As for A.B.M Zakaria and Shukla Mirza, I suggest that they re-evaluate their attitudes. As long as a person is a good human being, does religion matter?

Rahat Bari Tooheen
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

This is in response to Mr. A. B. M Zakaria's letter (April 23).

Quoting from his letter, "Every Muslim is supposed to be able to read the Holy Qur'an as well as say his daily prayers in Arabic." I couldn't be more in agreement with him as long as he use the word 'suppose' in the sentence, because the number of Muslims who can actually do that are, well..., not the majority to put it mildly. He goes on to write, "They all learn it (Arabic) in their childhood. We revere the language from our heart." Again, I agree with him. The religion Islam has to have an integral position in our society because it is the faith that we believe in. But if that is really the case why there are dishonesty, deceit and crime in our society? If we all were proper Muslims, people of peace and love, would we be where we are now? Bangladesh is a Muslim country, fine, but are the people so?

And anyway, in the fast-paced world of these days, people don't have the time to look up and see what the airport's called and the languages its name is written in.

At a time when everyone's pointing their fingers at Muslim countries for harbouring extremism and fundamentalism, this is one neon sign we could have done without.

Syed Shareq Rashid
Greenherald International School,



Dhaka

I read with interest Khan Ahmad's letter on April 26th. He wrote, "I am a new generation kid, besides Bengali and English, I can also read Arabic."

I can also make a similar claim - but what does it really mean to "read" Arabic?

My parents employed a "huzur" to teach me to read Arabic. When we lived in Libya, it was a neighbour who did it for free. When we returned to Dhaka, it was the muezzin of Dhanmondi's Baitul Aman mosque. I sat under the muezzin's patient eye and finished reading the entire Quran, after which we had the "khatme milad" for the

whole family. In addition, he also taught me many *suras* for prayers.

For the SSC, I took Islamiyat, but most of my St. Joseph classmates took Book-keeping. Needing to compete with Book-keeping students (who often secured 100 marks), I had the famous "Kana" Korim of Laboratory College as my private tutor. Over laborious months, he taught me to memorise the "common" Arabic lines that would come in the SSC. Karim insisted that all his students "tarka mukhastho" (freshly memorise) the Arabic lines. It worked-- we all secured record high marks in SSC Islamiyat.

There was only one problem with all this, we read and wrote Arabic, but didn't understand a

word of it! Ironically, only after I went to America to study did I finally read the Quran in English translation. I did this inspired by my white friends who were curious about Islam's theological debates, and were themselves reading the translations.

Similarly, my mother understands the Quran because she read it in Bengali!

We Bengalis do not understand Arabic, nor is it necessary to appreciate Islam's teachings. English and Bengali are sufficient for ZIA's signage.
Naem Mohalemen
New York, USA

Had Hindi or French additions to the neon signs over ZIA airport

been added, I doubt we would have had these outbursts of protest against the move. In a day and age where much of Western (read: American) sentiment has come to browbeat Muslims, some sectors of Muslims seem to be working hard to remove any sense of Islamic influence on their lives and immediate surroundings.

Unfortunately, many of us still feel the need to impress our former Western masters. In adopting the culture of materialism spread by our satellite media, in seeking to adapt ourselves to the 'modern' world we see, we seem to have also produced an aversion to things that once made up our culture- of which Islam was and is a significant part. I wonder if this may have created this great outcry against the use of the Arabic language in the sign over Zia airport.

Omar Siddique
New York, USA

This letter is about some of the writers who take reactionary stance on anything written about Islam.

Everybody has a right to express his or her true feelings in a democratic society, however what hurts me (as a humble Muslim) is their apparent ignorance and misapprehension about many aspects of Islam. Although these writers do possess admirable knowledge of many

other subjects, unfortunately they demonstrate their clear lack of either understanding or knowledge about Islam. Some of them seemingly associate almost everything related to Islam with "fundamentalism". I guess they meddle with the true spirit of Islam and equate it completely with the preaching of half educated - dogmatic mullahs.

There is nothing wrong in not knowing something; however being pretentious and putting far-fetched opinions based on ignorance, are not only fair but at the same time troublesome. The problem here is of two folds, either they might hurt religious feelings of millions of practising Muslims in this country or they may convey a wrong message to non-Muslims about Islam. Almost every aspect of Islam has its theological root and based on sound philosophy which needs thorough knowledge for apprehension. If it's not possible for one to acquire that knowledge, he or she can always consult a scholar on this subject like he/she does on many other issues. Therefore I will humbly request our writers to do their homeworks before putting a strong statement either against or in favour of Islam and its philosophy.
ZH, California, USA

Crimes of war

Although I fully agree with the trial of leaders of the former Iraqi regime, it is a matter of justice that British and American war-crimes must be punished also.

In the first place, by their air strikes the USA and Great-Britain used cluster bombs, which are internationally forbidden by the Treaty of Ottawa because of the big risk for the civilians on landmines and scattered missiles (by explosion many missiles are scattering in the wide environment). According to International Law the use of weapons with an enlarged risk for civilians is a war crime.

In the second place several times the Iraqi civilians were shot by American troops at check-

points.

The justification by military spokesmen, referring to a suicide attack by an Iraqi soldier in civilian clothes makes no sense, because shooting civilians is always a war-crime according to International Law. Of course the American troops have the right to take security measures, but not at the cost of the Iraqi civilians for whose safety they are responsible according to the 4th Geneva Convention being the occupying army.

For maintaining the principles of international justice, the trial of British and American war crimes is of the utmost importance.

Astrid Essed
The Netherlands



Threat to executive chairman of BOI

A news was published in all the dailies on April 25 that the Executive Chairman of Board of Investment Mr. Mahmudur Rahman has been threatened by a very influential businessman in Dhaka at his BOI office.

As far as we know, Mr. Mahmudur Rahman is a polite gentleman and a good executive working in our private sector. He has a great track record as a top executive where he served previously, and he is doing well at his present assignment as well. If a person like him could be threatened and the authorities concerned sit by and watch then it is really unfortunate and frustrating. If we can't improve the situation then in future the nation will be deprived of the services of many competent employees like Mr Rahman.

I am very much worried to read the news and protest vehemently the threat meted out to Mr. Mahmudur Rahman.
Md. Taufiqur Rahman
Mirpur, Dhaka

The Daily Star TV Guide

I would like to attract your attention on the fact that the TV Guide that is printed in your paper, is often printed

wrong. The days are mixed up and so are the programmes. Sometimes the programmes of Sundays are printed on Fridays. A series that is actually shown at 7:00 pm has a wrong time printed like 3:00 am.

For a person like me who depends on your TV guide, it's getting hard to keep track. You can verify this by looking at Star World's programme guide on April 24 issue in Page 16. You will find the timings of 'Roswell' and 'Dark Angel' along with others, completely wrong. Not to mention 'Nash Bridges' which is not supposed to be aired on Thursday but on Friday.

I would also like to request you to print the programmes of HBO, Star Movies, MGM, Star World and such channels instead of the Sports Channels. And I'm sure the Bengali channels need to be sacrificed because most people watching Bengali channels, look for the time schedule in a Bengali paper.

Mohammad Ashraf
Dhaka

"Invasion, looting, and..."

Thanks to Mr. Mohammad Basirul Huq who wrote (April 25) very appropriately "Bush-Blair axis of evil invaded Iraq absolutely unilaterally, unlawfully and immorally". What

better way to express our indignation!

But my question is how long such dastardly act will continue unabated under the very nose of our brotherly countries-- the Muslim Ummah? Should they not wake up before it's too late? It has been a naked aggression with ulterior motives-- the motives being already well known. And with the invasion and looting of Iraq over threats of similar action looming bright over others!

Isn't it time for them (the Muslim Ummah) to think of their future and unite and fight against the Zionist America to thwart similar further invasion?
AF Rahman
Dhaka

Monkey business

In every nation, there are some over-enthusiastic and over zealous political businessmen. Sometimes they go against the will of their people by blackmailing them in the name of national security, patriotism and religion (Tony Blair etc). And sometimes they do it to befool the populace.

In our history of 32 years, we have seen many of the same type of monkey businesses. I will mention about two:

a. In late '80s one general wanted to be a number one Muslim in Bangladesh and he brought a bill in his pup-

pet parliament to declare Islam as a state religion! No body demanded it, there was no declared political agenda of any political party and overall in a country of 90% Muslims, it is unnecessary to declare a state religion. But he did it out of hypocrisy, to show the Bangladeshis what a devout Muslim he was!

b. The second one is the flashing neon sign in Arabic in ZIA. This is monkey-business no. 2. Again another devout Muslim wanted to be immortal in history of Islamisation or Arabisation of ZIA. This signifies how short-sighted and thoughtless our public servants and representatives are? How long our people would have to wait for enlightened, educated and true popular leadership? A true Muslim society does to need a signboard. By putting signboards one cannot show the actual spirit of Islam. It is a matter of practice and endurance.
M. Ayub Khan
Ottawa, Canada

Honour the national sentiment

At the dawn of the 21st century, when the entire world got shaken and shocked at the advent of the neo-colonialism perpetrated by the Bush-Blair regimes over Iraq, and when the sensible people of most of the countries including those of the United States and the United Kingdom came out in the street in vociferous protest, it was quite natural that the conscious people of Bangladesh would squarely respond to the global sentiment. Here, the role of the media emerged as a crucial factor in giving the peoples' sentiment a positive shape. When the most of the western media (except a respectable few who cared for the honest reporting), became a part of the lies, trickery, and deception, the media in general in Bangladesh came out with honest and upbeat coverage of one of the most gruesome carnage the world has ever seen. In particular, one must appreciate the role of *The Daily Star* for giving not only the extensive coverage of the US-led invasion of Iraq but also of publishing combat photographs, in-depth analysis and thought-provoking editorials and write-ups including those from the reputed international media-- all of which reflected not only our thoughts and feelings but also our moral views, our hopes and aspirations.

However, it is very unfortunate that when millions of people including the American and British and distinguished personalities like former US President and Nobel laureate Jimmy Carter and the Leader of the British House of Commons Robin Cook showed their open disapproval of an unjust war against Iraq, a few so-called Bangladesh elite and the recent migrants to the United States appears hell bent to humiliate our national sentiment. Well, if they relish to rally round the colonial administration of Bush as hangers-on, we may rather ignore them. But none should have the audacity to hurt our national sentiment.

Hafejul Alam
Dhaka

"Democracy, whiskey, sexy"

In response to the letter by KJS, 23rd April.

In your letter, you wrote "... democracies too can be flawed, after all a democracy elected Hitler to power in Germany in 1933". I just have one complain with your point, why do you have to go that far in history? I have something much closer. In the good old days of the year 2003, there was a democratic country located somewhere in Asia known as Bangladesh! Now I would request all our readers to find-out but more about that country, because that seems to be one of the most spectacular example of "flawed-democracy"!

How many times do you think the chairman, member or MP you voted for actually won the election? Despite having democratic process, it is always the people (or party) who have more money and muscle-power win the election (I have seen it myself). Police is supposed to protect people and make them feel safe, but in Bangladesh people get scared if they come anywhere near the police. People are more afraid of police than gangsters. In the last 30 years we had lots of elections, but why are we stuck with the same two leaders? Is there any shortage of people in our country, who are caring and educated enough to lead a party?
Azad Miah
Oldham, UK

Destruction of Iraq

This is in response to "Saddam's tyranny destroyed Iraq" by M. Elahi (April 22).

I fail to understand why Iraq ceased to exist as a nation. The reason as Mr Elahi cited was Saddam's gassing of Kurdish minority. We the anti-war campaigners agree that Saddam is not a good guy due to his brutality inflicted on his own nationals. But Mr. Elahi fails to give reasons why Saddam was singled out.

I would like to take the case of the US which under a well-designed plan eliminated the Red Indians from their legitimate paternal territory. Can Mr. Elahi tell me where the aborigines of Australia vanished? Look at India. The Kashmiris are being killed since more than half of a century back. The toll at present exceeds 40,000! In Palestine, the occupying Zionist regime has exceeded all records of torture under direct US protection. As has been always the case, where there is struggle for freedom, the US is and was with the oppressors, a fact known by Bangladeshis better than any other nation. Mr Elahi did never say that the US, Australia, India and so on due to their aforesaid brutality cease to exist as a nation?

Look at the liberators of Iraq. Can't Mr Elahi read the huge congregation in holy Karbala? One of the Shiite Imams already declared that Saddam was better than the 'Liberator US'.
M. U. Chowdhury
Dhaka

About our launch service

I was astonished by hearing the news that our government has decided to suspend the launch service. This will bring immense suffering for the people. Moreover it is not a solution. In the last couple of months some serious launch accidents has occurred, hundreds of people lost their lives in those accidents.

To get rid of such incidents we need proper implementation of the existing

laws. Nonetheless, after resuming launch service this type of accidents will occur again. Suspension of service will cause people's sufferings only.
Jabed Sufian, One-e-mail

Who are these loan defaulters?

If we know that 321 people have loan defaults of close to 10,000 crores Taka as our finance minister said, then we want to see the list. Who are these 321 people that are holding back more money than our entire foreign aid this year? We cannot just sit here and watch these people keep this country

in poverty because according to USAID, another 2-3 per cent of GDP can get us out of poverty.

Release that list or else we need to compile the list ourselves.
Rubel Ahsan
Fremont, California

Following Hitler's advice!

Iqbal Ahmed from Dhaka claims the USA was following Hitler's advice in destroying the Baghdad library and museum.

Human history can be really interesting. The Mongols under Halagu

Khan destroyed the biggest library of the world at that time, at Baghdad, and ransacked the city. The Mongols were the mightiest military force on the face of the earth and could strike terror in the hearts of any nationality, destroyed a lot, built very little. For generations, Mongols were invincible, they looted and plundered other civilisations. I would study a bit more to see what ultimately happened to their power.

Mustaque Ahmed
Connecticut, USA



Liberated look?

Top ten lessons from Iraq war

The world has something to learn from the Iraq war, an example of a modern warfare with advanced technology fought by people believed to be more humane in attitude and practice than those during the World War II. Consider the following points:

1. No matter how advanced we claim to be in the civilised world, force and greed are still the guiding principles of many of the top leaders in the world.
2. Some of the leaders people have voted to power utterly failed to carry out their assigned responsibilities. We put the leadership of the world on the hands of those who are not capable of carrying it.
3. The leaders of the United States and Britain have failed to realise that historically how much trust, respect and recognition were bestowed upon them as world leaders by the rest of the world. After the

war their images as "ideals" of freedom and justice have been destroyed beyond repair

4. If you have might, you can ignore the world and rule it. This was the principle in the primitive society but some of our leaders are bringing it to us again.

5. The sword and the gun have destroyed much more lives than the drug and vaccines have prevented. So we lost our ethics.

6. From the ruins of the devastated Iraq, democracy and justice will eventually rise, the process has already been started, it is only matter of time now. Someone needed to ring the bell in the Arab world, US and UK have played that role of bad guys in Iraq.

7. The fall of Saddam is a lesson for the 22 Arab nations. When they say Iraq's fate should be determined by the Iraqis, they indirectly endorse

the same for their own countries where democracy is not the rule now.

8. In the history of human civilisation, empires have emerged and collapsed and this will probably continue. There is nothing to be surprised. Even the world's greatest civilisation will collapse if not managed properly.

9. From time to time, destructive forces have demolished greatest accomplishment of human civilisation but have never been able to stop its onward progress.

10. It is difficult to define a moral and social value of punishment or persecution if one does not feel the impact of it. Judgement and penalty are meaningless for the insane.

Nazma Ahmed Kona
Mohammadpur, Dhaka