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.

ZIA and Arabic

Controversies mushroomed at recent times over the display of Arabic neon sign at Zia International Airport. This may be seemingly insignificant or rather a trifling matter but actually it's not. In the national context, it's too vital to be ignored. Every free nation is expected to have its own national language or the official language which is generally the mother language of most of the populace. It's a national pride to show up one's own language in all conspicuous establishments, let alone the international airports. It is very unfortunate that while the party in power declares itself as a nationalist one, its own people are playing havoc with our nationalist sentiments and trying to equate or sometimes even replace Bangla, our national language, with other languages and thus disgracing our nationhood.

It's a simple common sense that like any other language Arabic is just another one through which one can compose almost anything he likes and there is nothing holy about it. When the language is used to write Holy Scriptures, the latter gets sanctified, not the language itself. Well, it's always commendable and sometimes necessary to know other language(s), as this might open up the world of knowledge, science, literature, arts and culture and many other unknown phenomenon. In this context, miniature neon-signs in other prominent languages such as English, French, German, and also Arabic and other languages which might appear important in respect of business or any other national interest, might be shown up in the international airports just for the convenience of the international visitors. However, the national language should always reign supreme in our work-a day life, in our thoughts and aspirations, as it is the basis of our nationhood, our existence as a free

Therefore, our international airports should depict the significant signage only in Bangla. Any deviation from this smacks of a debasing mentality and leads to an unpleasant conclusion.

Hafeejul Alam, Dhaka

nation.

I wholly agree with the letter from Essam Sohail (April 26). It is senseless to equate things in Arabic with our religion. Essam is again right in asking those who speak so lovingly of our Arab brothers to have a taste of their hospitality. I have had the unfortunate privilege of visiting several Arab countries and I must admit I have found one place in the world where the natives are worse than the French.

Essam says three million Bengalis died to prove we are not Saudi Arabia. He's absolutely right. We are not an Islamic country. If we were we should have stayed a part of Pakistan.

We are a Bengali nation. A majority of us happen to be Muslim but thankfully our practices have a healthy dose of the culture of the subcontinent and not the undemocratic variety that our Arab brothers'

practice. **Masood Rana** *Dhaka*

This is in response to the letter of Mr. ZH (April 28). Though he did not mention anything about the neon sign but as the letter was published under the subjected heading I presumed he

was talking about that.

Why on earth does he think that if some one writes in favour or against Arabic neon sign installed in ZIA, he/she is conspiring against Islam! Arabic is the lingua franca of Arab people, he/she may be a Muslim, Christian or even a Jew. Just as Bangla is the lingua franca of the people of this region, in respect of Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist.

There were some more letters in favour of the Arabic sign. What makes them as well as Mr. ZH to think that by putting

Arabic neon sign they will be serving something good to Islam. Our government has taken this decision only to misuse our religious sentiment! And if people think that by installing Arabic neon sign, they would be installing an Islamic society, let them live on that hang over.

Enavet Ullah Forhad

Sukrabad, Dhaka

The overwhelming public reactions on the subject through the Letters Page are simply amazing also very well understood. This certainly goes to prove once again, how sensitive and uniform in thinking we are when it is a question of invasion of our culture/identity. There is definitely

nothing wrong to do so as some

(although a very small number)

seem to think otherwise.

This is vet another example of the authorities/people-inpower never taking lessons from the past. Otherwise an issue of this nature could not have assumed such 'a mountain out of molehill' magnitude, as evident from the flood of mails in this respect appearing in *The Daily Star* Letters Page till today. If majority viewpoints/democracy is the way to go by or of any serious consideration, then the CAB and the concerned ministry must have the wisdom by now to get the message right. And they must put an end to this futile attempt on their part by simply switching off the much debated 'Arabic neon sign' without any loss of time and any further wastage of energy in order not to aggravate or play with sentiments/critical issues of such

need to pay attention to.

However, as Muslims the learning of Arabic to better understand the Quran is, in my opinion, imperative.

Arabic is a language as old as Sanskrit, Latin, Hebrew and Aramaic. And it is as refined as all these languages are. But that is not all. It is also the only language which is in widespread use still, and this is primarily because of the Quran.

Such an old and refined language such as Arabic has nuances of words and expressions which cannot always be captured by such languages such as English and Bengali.

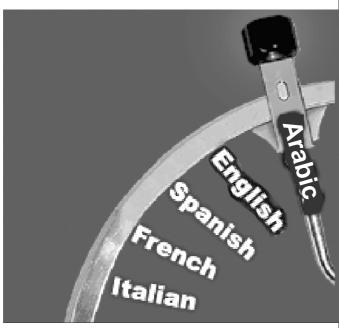
The most broad example which comes to mind is the use of the common noun 'He' to represent 'Allah'. He of course is masculine. And yet Allah is not Masculine. Nor is he Feminine. And such words are just inadequate as descriptions.

It is said that in translation, works like Homer's "Iliad" and Tolstoy's "War and Peace" lose a lot of their essential soul, depth and feeling, and to be able to read these great works of literature in their original language is to truly experience their true beauty.

Surely we can better understand the Quran in its original Arabic rather than in transla-

Mokaddes Hassan Khan *Birmingham, Alabama*

First of all we have to understand, most of the passengers travelling through ZIA are from middle eastern countries, vast Bangladeshis working there and most of the airlines travelling through ZIA are also middle eastern airlines, generating the



Surely, priority-wise, we have many more burning issues/subjects like; the fight against "mosquito menace" in Dhaka city, arsenic-free fresh water for our rural population, recurring IWT passenger launch disasters etc. To generate similar feelings urgently and express the views in the same manner will certainly be much better exercises to indulge than giving so much time for this issue only. Mention may also be made of the similar hue and cry repeatedly made in the past against the noxious air pollution in Dhaka city which it is felt had some positive influence to improve the situation.

Let us therefore set our priorities right and act accordingly trying our best to create the correct public awareness to focus on important national issues.

Z.Rahman Gulshan, Dhaka

Last night I was driving past ZIA and saw a neon sign lit up in English! I think we might be loosing our laws and customs to the English!

K Siddique, Dhaka

I write this letter in response to M. Hassan. His contention that those who can understand Arabic and read the Quran in Arabic do not have a better grasp of the Quran, in my opinion is not true.

Lately there has been a lot of debate on these pages on whether there need be an Arabic neon sign on top of ZIA. I do not wish to make any comment on that. I feel there are bigger problems that people major portion of revenue for the Civil Aviation Authority to maintain ZIA. Therefore, it is purely a business decision for the Customer Satisfaction to put a sign in Arabic, which is indeed the latest management technique, developed by Harvard Business School Professor Kaplan strategize business mission and vision, a major component of which is Customer Satisfaction.

Secondly, as per Aldous "Facts do not cease to exist because they are ignored". Because we do not want to know Arabic or we do not want to respect our religion or we do not want to identify ourselves as Muslim or we want to hide our religious identity does not mean we do not need to or we do not have to uplift our religious identity, values, heritage and legacy. Look what happened to Iraqis, Lebanese and Palestinians, none of them were identifying themselves as Islamic. Saddam was even killing thousands of Mullahs and so on. But that does not save them from the aggression

of an unwanted force.

So let us be real, be clear and straightforward in our actions. We do not have any hidden agenda. We do not want to say one thing and mean another. We do not want to manipulate people. We want to be genuine and sincere. We want to be true to ourselves. We want to be clear what we believe, what is our value and what we stand for. **Mohammad Anwar**

Power outage and Bashundhara

The residents of Bashundara have been without power for the last five days. But for those of us living there it is not an unusual phenomenon. Before moving to Bashundhara I lived in Uttara where we had load shedding at most maybe once a day for ten minutes. In Bashundhara the norm is six to eight times a day, plus low voltage every evening till 10 pm.

But the electricity problems are not the only rude awakenings for Bashundhara residents. The original plans, after seeing which, many of us chose to buy lands, showed ample parkland. All that has disappeared in the revisions.

The entry road is really a narrow lane thanks to the profusion of workshops and small general stores.

The entire area is susceptible to flooding thanks to inadequate drainage and rampant land filling. I am just surprised that *The Daily Star* never followed up on the illegal land filling activities in Bashundhara which were reported a while ago.

Saladin

BRAC University

Recently signs have come up next to the Tejgaon Aarong announcing the location for BRAC University.

BRAC is probably one of the richest institutions in our country. It is also probably one of the largest landown-

Why would a group with so much money and acres of land put a university right next to the Tejgaon Industrial area? The BRAC Centre in Moakhali, thanks to its insufficient parking has made that entire road a mess. Now BRAC University will effectively choke traffic coming to and from Gulshan.

Not exactly the kind of example I'd hope from BRAC. **Joyonto**

Dhaka

I must commend *The Daily Star* for being on the forefront of wetlands protection and reporting on their encroachment by developers. Not too long ago there was a front-page article about BRAC involvement protected watersheds in the city. Sadly, there was never a follow up story on that.

The other day I noticed signs sprouting next to the Tejgaon Aarong, announcing the site of BRAC University. At first sight, it looked like even more low lying wetlands are going to be filled up, just so we can have another private university inside the city.

I have several objections to this. Maybe the low lying land next to Aarong does not come under protection, but one may not be amiss in imagining that BRAC would have the civic responsibility not to fill up the land. Even if BRAC has bought the area, the gentlemanly thing to do would have been to leave it as it is.

BRAC, along with other NGOs, have thousands of acres of land outside of Dhaka. Rather than putting up another university without a proper campus, right smack in the middle of Tejgaon Industrial Area, would BRAC have set a better example by choosing a site outside the city?

Sabyasachi

Dhaka

The Venice of Dhaka

Thank you for publishing the photo of the stretch of Malibag Road in front of the rail crossing which we were lovingly calling as Venice of Dhaka since the last year but now we propose to change its name as instead of water, nowadays sewerage is flowing on this road 24 hours a day.

Even walking on footpath has become difficult and we have to use bamboo poles (Shako) to transfer from one stretch of the footpath to the other. And due to the stench, we have to use mask as if SARS patients have already reached Malibag. Every year we used to see, just before the start of monsoon, sewers being cleaned of sludge manually which has not been the case since the last two seasons.

Thank you Mr. Mayor for converting the Venice of Dhaka into open sewerage channel. Thank you again for all the free aroma in the environment. Thank you in the end for making us re-use the "Shako" (bamboo

bridges used in villages).

In the end we, the residents of ill-fated road of Malibag, ask your esteemed readers to propose a new befitting name for the above canal.

Munit Hassan

RMG

I must commend our government on our principled and vehement anti-American stand during the war. It is very brave talk coming from a country that depends on trade to survive.

While our Foreign Minister has been making such principled protests, Vietnam has just reached an agreement with the USA regarding its quotas.

The quota set on the most important category of all, cotton trousers, shorts and jeans, is 7 million dozens. That's 84 million trousers! At a bare minimum of \$6.50 per piece that's \$546,000,000 in foreign exchange earnings for Vietnam. And all that

from this one category alone!

In the meantime, Bangladesh last year over shipped in this category. That happened thanks to manipulation by senior BGMEA members and EPB staff. As a result, you will recall, thousands of dozens of our goods were stuck in US ports and many factories suffered huge losses. The American Commerce Department also fined us 25% of our quota allocation for having exported using falsified documents.

Thanks to our BGMEA, EPB and Commerce Ministry, Bangladesh in 2003 will be exporting roughly 2,900,000 dozens as opposed to the seven million to be exported by Vietnam

Not only are we losing the US market, the EU is also signing preferential trade deals with Vietnam.

Isn't it ironic that a country which was the sworn enemy of the Americans, one which is still a communist dictatorship where human rights and the rule or law are weaker than even Bangladesh, can still manage to negotiate a better trade deal than our esteemed leadership?

Dhaka

On CNG

This letter is in context to the news item appearing in all the major national dailies regarding breakdown of newly installed CNG refuelling stations and explosion of CNG gas

cylinder while refuelling.

The transport sector is going through a very important stage with the installation of Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) refuelling stations to replace gradually the use of petroleum products thereby reducing the emission of toxic particles into the environment. We must thank the present Government for their timely decision to popularise the use of CNG as an alternate to petroleum products. Even though the concept of CNG refuelling stations in Bangladesh was initiated in the mid 90's no substantial

The benefits in using CNG as an alternate fuel is phenomenal. Use of CNG will reduce considerably the pollution factor, which has a direct impact on the healthcare. Again CNG being cheaper by 75% compared to petroleum products is financially beneficial to the user. As is evidenced in our neighbouring countries, the concept of CNG as an alternate to petroleum products will not go through a very long embryonic stage.

growth could be envisaged till now.

As is a very common phenomenon in this country we will see lot of new entrepreneurs trying very eagerly to set up CNG refuelling stations and conversion workshop facilities. One must however follow the international standards and also the national guidelines while setting up the CNG refuelling stations. By international standards we mean standards set by New Zealand, Europe or America among others, which we feel will surely be complied with by the manufacturer during supply.

As we are not aware of any national guidelines we feel that the following should be circulated amongst the potential entrepreneurs.

1. There should be a regulatory body to oversee the development of the CNG sector for both the refuelling stations as well as the conversion workshops.

2. Import of second hand or reconditioned machines/kits/cylinders

should be strictly prohibited.

3. CNG refuelling stations/kits/cylinders should preferably be imported from the manufacturers.

4. Sale of CNG refuelling stations by packagers, who will not be able to provide technical back up, should be discouraged.

5. The Government should ensure that the sellers provide the entrepreneurs with necessary technical back up.



Storm struck city

Dhaka needs an urgent face-lift

The storm was hardly strong enough to bite chunks of concrete off of buildings, though it did pull down big trees and some billboards across the city. Leaving a bigger mess than anticipated, wrecking havoc for the past few days in different parts of the city! The electricity and water supply were hard it in Gulshan and its surrounding areas. The authorities concerned are bewildered themselves (does not surprise me at all!) to take care of the situation. This shows how prepared they

6. The manufacturer/s should guaran-

next 10-15 years.

will stand cancelled.

America has won

thewarwithout

much casualties

Shaukat Ali

tee availability of spare parts for the

7. A time frame should be given to the

entrepreneurs i.e. the entrepreneur

should establish the L/C for importing

the machinery within 6 months of

receiving the permission for setting up

the station otherwise the permission

Pierre Berton, Canada's most popular

military historian, wrote in his World

War I account Vimy: "On a chilly Easter

Monday in 1917, with a blizzard

blowing over their face, the four

divisions of the Canadian Corps in

France did what neither the British nor

the French armies had been able to do

in more than two years of fighting.

defended German bastion on the

Western Front - a muddy scrap known

as the Vimy Ridge. The French, who

had lost 150,000 men trying to take the

ridge, didn't believe it could be done ...

even the British were sceptical. But the

Canadians triumphed. They went over

the top at dawn; by lunch time, most of

the ridge was in their hands - at a cost

of only ten thousand casualties"

Compared to only ten thousand

casualties by lunch time, American

casualties for three weeks of war in

Iraq must be unbelievably minuscule.

The U.S. forces suffered less than 150

killed in combat, some of which were

self-inflicted and about 400 were

wounded. Although Iraqi military

casualties were substantial, they were

nothing compared to the fatalities

Canadian forces suffered on a single

day. This explains the incredible

technological prowess of the U.S.

armed forces and the precision with

which the war was conducted from the

air and on the ground.

(emphasis added).

are to tackle such incidents, and it was only a mere gush of wind compared to real storms-which usually sweeps away anything in its path. I wonder what will happen then, how will they respond to chaos of a higher calibre! Neither do they have any clue about disaster management nor are they well equipped to respond to such events.

Even before the disaster, there were acute shortages of water and electricity. Why shouldn't there be? There are garments, banks, hotels, mini

Credits belong to the American

military and political leaders who

conceived such a plan and the ordi-

nary soldiers and pilots who executed

the plan. They have liberated an entire

country without suffering many

casualties while sparing the Iraqi

civilians. This shows how far a modern

army has travelled to make any war

America is well aware of the relation-

ships between Muslim countries and

Israel. It knows that every day some

Palestinian people are killed or injured

by Israel. And now -adding insult to

injury- America comes up with a plan

to build pipelines to take Iraqi oil to

Israel. This would of course solve

America's energy problem, but the

main reason for taking pipeline to

Israel, is to solve Israel's energy crisis.

Why should oil from a Muslim country

be used to solve Israel's problems

which is murdering Muslim people

daily? This pipeline isn't just about oil,

it is a message for those who can't

You may think this is nothing more

than just another innocent business

deal, but I believe it goes a lot deeper

than just business. America has now

created a 'wanted' list for 50 or so Iraqi

officials. It wants to prosecute these

people for war crimes. One would

have thought that reporting their

details on the news and launching an

investigation with the help of interna-

tional community would be the best

course of action. Instead America has

decided to print 'playing cards' and

make jokes about it. Where is the logic

behind that? Thousands of people

from all sides have died and many

more will die. But are all these death

just a game for America? Are we noth-

ing more than some pictures in Ameri-

quick and surgical.

Mahmood Elahi

Ottawa, Canada

Notinsulted

enough, we

need more

industries and every possible, commercial institutions mushrooming around the so-called
'residential area', which actually lost its real definition long, long ago! There are new apartment buildings being erected
practically every day! We are
already facing a disaster with
the two essentials; water and
electricity, and yet there's no
initiative from the authorities?
These are only the starters;
there's more sewage, traffic...it
just goes on!

Shaker, Dhaka

Azad Miah

"Free" Iraq under the shackles of neo-colonialism

It really incenses the mind of a rational human being when attempts are being made to demonstrate that corporate-US has waged this unprovoked war against Iraq for benevolent reasons. Does any sane person really expect the world to believe that leading Capitalist state driven by large multinationals have suddenly become benign? Why the US has selectively chosen to "liberate" the Iraqis rather than the Palestinians, or the Kashmiris?

If the welfare of the Iragis was an important factor for the US, why there has been so little effort directed towards restoring the vital public services, which were destroyed by the bombings? Yet the US managed to deploy adequate resources to securing the oil fields. Now that Iraqis have been "freed", why is it a problem for the Anglo-US forces to hand over the responsibility to the UN, since they have met their original well-intended objective? Did the "free" Iraqi's get a choice to say who will be awarded the contracts for reconstruction of their own country? Is it not being handed on

a plate to the US multinationals?

Perhaps the war of "liberation" will eventually become a war of "profit", just like the first Gulf war. Iraqis are now paying for the reconstruction of their own country destroyed by foreign forces with their own oil after they have already paid for it with their blood.

Yamin Zakaria

TheroleofUN

UN is supposed to be an independent body, not concerned with politics and should not have any affiliations with certain countries. But now, unfortunately, all those morals are turning upside down.

It is understood that UN authorised the attack on terrorism which was against Afghanistan but then they at least had the power to say "yes" or "no". This time, the superpowers ignored UN and its decisions totally. Has the UN grown so weak that the world does not need it anymore? Has it totally moved away form the very morals with which it was set up? These are some questions which are in everybody's mind but the truth of the matter is, the answer is not even needed because the superpowers have already made their decision.

It is about time that the UN took some responsibility and did what it has been set up to do. They should call meetings or a special General Assembly with leaders of both the US and UK. I hope the UN starts trying harder to be worthy of the responsibility bestowed on them.

Sunbeams School, Dhaka

Samera Chowdhury

What about the Statue of Liberty?

By now, almost everyone knows the Americans' hatred towards the French and Germans. There have been calls for boycotting French products too. The US Congress even went one step further by changing the name of menu items in their cafeteria, which had a French word in it, e.g., from French Fry to Freedom Fry, French Toast to Freedom Toast!

But what about the Statue of Liberty, the beacon of American Freedom and democracy? Nobody talks about bringing it down! Not a word! For the information of the readers, the Statue of Liberty WAS a gift from the French to the Americans. So, why keep that French Gift?

It is another example of American double standard and duplicity. They only do what suits them. And when I say "they" I basically mean the government and its foreign policy. Personally, I think the average Americans are very nice people, understanding, sometimes naive, and very straightforward. And many of them don't actually like their government's foreign policy. Nayeem Mano

Normal, Illinois, USA



Friendship under fire?