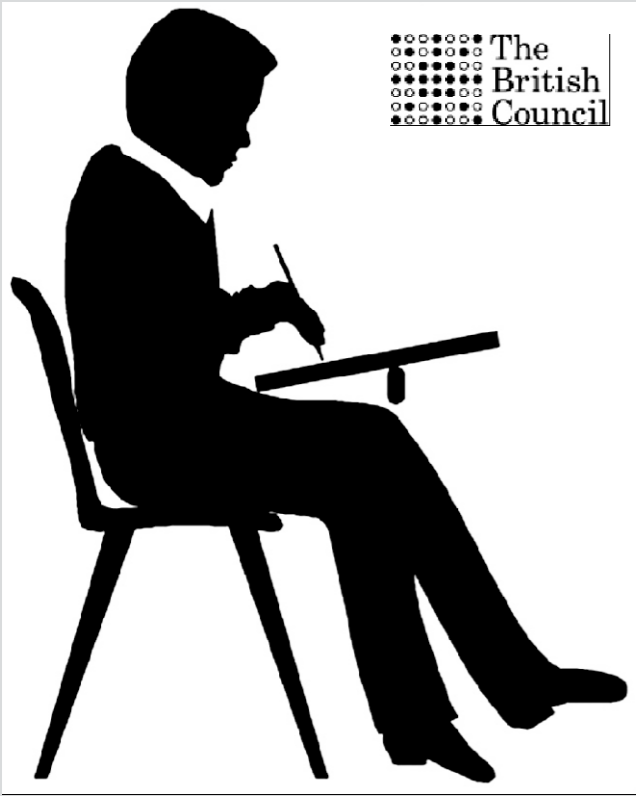


Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

"Exam hazards"



Exam query

I am writing with reference to the recent letters sent by your readers on the choice of venues for our examinations.

The reason why the British Council is not being used as a venue for the May and June GCE examination session is that we had to issue admit cards to candidates while our premises were still closed due to the conflict in Iraq. There was no way of foreseeing when our London headquarters would give us permission to open again, as nobody could predict how long the war would last. We will be using it in the next session.

There is, however, another issue. The British Council auditorium in Dhaka can only hold 200 candidates, whereas there are as many as 1,700 candidates sitting GCE exams in some subjects in Dhaka. We have tried to locate suitable premises by putting advertisements in your own newspaper and Prothom Alo, but most owners of suitable property in Dhaka do not wish to rent it out for only a few weeks a year. Understandably, they want permanent tenants. However, renting accommodation large enough to seat 1,700 GCE candidates all year round would mean ridiculous increases in GCE exam fees. Alternatively, other venues are unavailable for the six weeks we need them, as the owners tell us they might cancel at short notice because of a VIP requesting it. We hope that candidates and their parents will appreciate that choices of venue are further limited by the fact that many are not air-conditioned.

Arani Siddiqi (letters page 19 May) complains about the fact that we do not provide seating for parents, but this would mean that we would have to buy and store 3,400 chairs. While we are sorry for parents waiting for their children outside exam venues, it is impossible to provide seating for the ever-increasing numbers of them. Similarly, we have no control over traffic jams and pollution, although we wish it were otherwise.

Anami Kabir (letters page, 21 May) refers to the difficulties she faced because of a clash in her subjects. Unfortunately, although she wished to do her second exam a few minutes after the first one, this would be unfair to candidates who might feel they needed a break. Neither of the exam boards, Edexcel or Cambridge International Exams, would agree to Anami's suggestion. The British Council simply follows the boards' regulations. Clearly, students with clashes could discover the exam questions by using their mobiles to call their friends who had sat the exam earlier in the day. The security of the exam would be compromised if a candidate did so. With reference to the point she made about not being allowed to see her parents, I would like to add that parents were, in fact, allowed to bring these candidates their lunch.

The British Council is trying very hard to improve its services to exam candidates. Registration and collection of certificates will soon be much easier, for instance. But we hope that candidates and their parents will bear with us if we cannot overcome the logistical problems of operating in Dhaka!

Mark Bartholomew
Examination Manager
British Council Bangladesh

Those of us involved in English-medium schooling have to work closely with the British Council (BC) and although we have our share of frustrations and complaints, we are in a position to appreciate the remarkable job the BC is doing in difficult circumstances.

Remember that there may be at least 1500 students taking any one examination, and that the Fuller Road venue has a capacity of only 300 -- where else can the exams be arranged? There are not too many places in Dhaka with halls large enough to be of any use, and of those, not all of them are available for rent for 6 weeks twice a year for. Not to mention all the other considerations -- the BC tries to choose venues that are more or less equal in facilities such as security, parking, air conditioning and generators. My eyes were opened one day when during an O-level exam I happened to sit down in the Exam Services office for a chat and watched the entire staff go into panic when they got the news that the electricity had gone off and the lift wasn't working in one of their rented centres, and the candidates were climbing nine flights of stairs. On that occasion, and on several subsequent occasions, the Exam Services Manager asked me whether I knew of any better alternative venues.

What most outsiders probably don't realise is that all of these things have to be paid for, and the more expenses the British Council incurs in arranging examinations in any particular country, the higher the exam fees for the students will go. They do work hard, I know, at keeping exam costs low, if for no other reason than that if the exams become prohibitively expensive, the British Council will be out of business!

I speak not only as a school principal, but also as a mother; my daughter gave her O-level exams in Fuller Road, University of Bengal, and the DU Institute of Education Research. Yes, Fuller Road was the nicest of the three, and there was no air-conditioning in the Institute of Education, and at the University of Bengal we had to park quite far away and walk. But considering all the other hardships I've endured in my 20 years residence in Bangladesh I don't feel that these minor inconveniences are very noteworthy.

There is always room for improvement, but I think on the whole the British Council is to be commended for the smooth running of the exams every year.

Mujahida Luceford
Principal, Manarat Dhaka

Separation of judiciary

Our Law Minister seemed very concerned about the fate of 600 administrative officers in responding questions in the donor meeting. He asserted that the separation of judiciary process is complicated and not very easy to resolve. And for the sake of the bureaucrats, separation of judiciary would be postponed for at least six years.

Even though he assured about the separation, would it ever really happen? For how long should people continue to wait?

Oli Md. Abdullah Chowdhury
Sylhet

The statement made by our venerable Law Minister in response to a question by a member of the BDF and published in your esteemed daily of the 19th May attracted my attention.

I found the statement to be most ridiculous and debilitating when he draws a parallel with India and goes on to say "The process took 15 years in India.... etc." One wonders as to when this trend of self-deception driven by extreme greed for power and position amongst our politicians and lawmakers will come to an end. Decade after decade our law makers continue to hoodwink the simple, naive and innocent millions of this country with empty promises raising peoples' hopes with such "slogans" like "we have initiated the process", "the matter is under review", "similar laws exist in many countries" so on and so forth. However, the message is simple "come what may, we will go on forever".

Shamsher Chowdhury, Dhaka

"Fat-tummied" OCs

This is in reference to the Finance Minister's comment that Officers in Charge (OC) at thana levels with 'fat-tummies' cannot maintain law and order as their movement with large potbelly are very slow which hampers the effective handling of their provided arms.

However, why isn't the FM telling anything about those backed-arms and logistics supplied to these police which could hardly be operated in most cases as have been reported in the newspapers several times.

Besides we can see lots of government employees in various departments who have also big tummies and are unable to 'run' their responsibilities smoothly!

There are also so many political leaders who grow 'too fat' after going to power and as a result cannot go and visit the people who elected them due to the ill conditions they possess.

Mr Minister, why aren't you trying to flash them out?

Ali Saikat
Sir AF Rahman Hall, DU

Politician-police-criminal nexus jitters the donors

The caption refers to the news item at *The Daily Star* on May 19. It is really remarkable that the development partners at last could identify the real problem of Bangladesh. However, they could not give any solution to the problem. They are not expected to do that either. The country is ours, the problem is ours, and the solution simply cannot come from anywhere else. Now, if the establishment has the will to eradicate criminal activities, there has to be concerted planning and honest efforts to that end. Just calling the armed forces for a few months and apprehending a few criminals or frequently reshuffling the police force would not change the crime scenario at all, as we have seen before that such cursory actions result in further mulling up of the problem, instead of unraveling the same.

The solution lies in the good governance. Again, good governance cannot be established without a real democratic set-up that ensures structural checks and balance between the executive, the judiciary, and the parliament. It is a pity that the independence of judiciary could not be established even over the three decades of our

independent existence as a sovereign nation. Our parliament members are allowed to voice only party feelings and are constitutionally barred from expressing freely the people's sentiments, their weal and woes. These confirm that even by South Asian standard, we possess a very fragile democratic set up that may get crashed at any moment at its own authoritarian weight. A responsible minister told the press the other day that the executive branch needs six more years to ensure independence of the judiciary. We don't know as to whether an independent anti-corruption body would at all be set up in this country or whether the constitutional provision of appointing an Ombudsman would ever be carried out, but we know that the level of the will on the part of the successive establishments to get rid of crimes and corrupt practices has been rather pitiable.

Hafeezul Alam, Dhaka

"Double standard in US foreign policy"

The US government this week signed defence treaty with Philippines granting her unlimited access to US defence hardware, making it the first non-NATO, Asian country to have such a privilege. The action speaks for itself. While the American government accused Indonesia of violating human rights in East Timor and Aceh province, it deployed troops and supplied weapons of enormous proportion to help Filipino troops to crush Muslim population in southern Philippines yarning for independence for the last 30 years. The Aceh rebels of Indonesia and rebels of southern Sudan (they are Christians) were dubbed as freedom fighters, while the Muslims of southern Philippines and Chechnya are dubbed as terrorists. Washington hawks are now preparing the so-called road-maps (the civilised term used for achieving their uncivilised vision of peace) to break up Indonesia and Sudan.

White House dubbed the vice-president of Indonesia as a sympathiser of terrorists while gave unprecedented rep carpet reception to Gloria Arroyo, president of Philippines. Christian Science monitor compared her with Isabella queen of 15th century Spain who invoked the cruel "Inquisition" ending eight centuries of Muslim presence in Iberian Peninsula. In the name of Christianity the Spanish carried out the greatest massacre in medieval history, forcing every Muslim and Jew in Spain to convert and expelling or butchering those who refuse. Ironically, it is these fanatic hawks who still believe in inquisition type policy are increasingly dictating the affairs of the US government at home and abroad.

USA deployed troops in Georgia to flush out Chechen refugees only to be butchered by Russian thugs. President of Kosovo (Dr. Ibrahim Rugava) visiting Washington at the beginning of this year wishing to seek US support to make Kosovo an independent state was told flatly America will not support creation of a predominantly Muslim state in Europe as it will not be acceptable to European Union.

The sheer magnitude of hypocrisy and double standard indeed makes one wonder what could small non-Christian nations do to protect themselves from the wrath of these fanatic neo conservative Washington hawks. It is high time the intellectuals of our country started addressing the issue before it is too late.

K. Wasimuddin, Chicago, IL, USA

Re-building Iraq?

"Coalition warriors" won the war on Iraq. Can they keep the peace to rebuild Iraq? That is the question the world is asking. The way things are going, there is little cause for joy.

Soon after the fall of Baghdad, the US military, a military trained mainly to kill, found itself up against total breakdown of law and order; the vacuum it created swiftly engulfed Iraq and had the US army do nothing to fill. The US Defence Secretary even infamously said



Destroying our heritage?

Save the JS complex

Without any regards to the protest meetings, rallies and writings demanding cease to the unwarranted building activity in the heart of the Sangshad Bhaban complex, certain ill-informed members of the responsible departments have continued unabashed with the construction work. The recently declared High Court ruling validates all previous concerns regarding the unadulterated preservation of one of the grandest examples of architectural and urban design anywhere. The nation is already witnessing the

government's talent for unsympathetic building which, in the form of the monstrous and imported International Conference Centre and the unpleasant housing to the south of the complex, have contributed only negatively to the hitherto peaceful landscape in Sher-e-Bangla Nagar.

Therefore notwithstanding the indefensible and ill-conceived plans for the present set of buildings in question and in witness of the recent indifference exhibited by the govern-

ment, it is seen as urgent to secure final and permanent solution to the recurring problems concerning the preservation and maintenance of the Sangshad Bhaban and its entire complex. Hence, in line with the ruling, declaration of the parliament complex by the concerned ministry as a National Heritage Site, directed towards protection from the whims of changing government and bureaucrats and from encroachments of all manner, can be seen as the minimum show of respect and consideration

which the government has so far failed to offer for this symbol of national pride. Sequel to this, it may be impressed upon those capable of so doing to materialise declaration by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site, thus augmenting the already acknowledged recognition of Sangshad Bhaban complex as one of the most elegant and monumental expressions of architecture representing democracy. **Architect Kashif Mahboob Chowdhury**
Dhaka

"freedom is untidy...., bad things happen, people use freedom to commit crimes etc." as if to condone the culpable dereliction of duty by the occupying army. As if ousting the Iraqi regime was the only end, and the occupiers had no obligation to keep security of life and property in the occupied land.

By allowing and abetting large-scale lawlessness, the US committed yet another crime; by failing to provide basic needs like food, electricity, water and first aid care, the crime was compounded. And now by refusing to transfer its authority to a "representative Iraqi administration", the occupation regime is about to add to its litany of crimes in Iraq.

What the occupation regime must realise is that its track record of peacekeeping is abysmal; its performance in "nation building" is untested. So the sooner that realisation translates into early and orderly transfer of Iraqi governance to Iraqi institutions, the better for all around. Concurrent to that, Iraqi resources must return to the Iraqi people and their chosen government freely and democratically chosen by the Iraqi people even if that includes a few ex-Baathist officials with non-incriminating record. If freedom is sometimes "untidy", so might good governance be less than evangelist.

Husain, Dhaka

Crimes and criminals

This is in reference to the letter by Mr. Khandker R Zaman's letter "Of crimes and criminals in uniform" with the background of recent court verdict on famous gruesome Sutrapur double murder case.

As members of the law-abiding and civilised society we must all

have due regard for our judicial system and its final outcome which should be taken as fair and right in all respects. Therefore any comment of the nature embarked in that letter on a matter of sub-judice may not be desirable.

However conducts of the two brothers, under sentence of death in that case and the display of their dress/attires in the press photographs as seen in national dailies implicating their political affiliation in a fashion without concern and the subsequent squabble and attempts on the part of leaderships of both major political parties to make an issue of it against each other, surely do not at all speak well. Such pictures as well as the subsequent debates of the nature still continuing, in the opinion of sane elements cannot be considered either objective or descent for the sake of law and order.

What we should ensure is to insist that no one is above law no matter whatever may be the circumstance and no special favour or indemnity is granted for any citizen engaged in any position of our state. In other words we have to respect human rights all the way in all respects and all our activities / behaviour should be with in strict compliance with the basic principles of our constitution without any exception.

Z Rahman, Gulshan, Dhaka

"History in tunnel vision"

It is indeed sad to note that the present alliance government is bent on apparently everything to suit their purpose. No wonder the selection of books for libraries of educational institutions should also be an instrument towards this

end. The advisors to the government tend to forget that their immature act is nothing but represent utter lack of farsightedness with respect to the future of the nation, and by which they themselves will end up as the garbage of history as has happened with many such governments in other countries. It is high time they studied a little bit of history.

Some of the leaders of the present government also advice the people to forget the past that means forget the role of AL in our struggle for national emancipation. And now they are also striving to banish Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman from the national scene. What the AL did not do, the BNP-alliance government is just doing that. For example, the AL did not change the name of the ZIA International Airport when they were in power. But while travelling through Tangail towards north Bengal, one can see that all the mileposts marked with Bangbandhu Setu (Bridge) and the signposts nearby the bridge have been defaced and destroyed in recent months. This is a diabolical hypocrisy when this government ceremoniously tried to honour Bangabandhu with an Independence award!

If the present government expect any respect for their leaders in future, it should learn to respect all national leaders irrespective of party affiliation. It is indeed sad to note that the BNP as one of the major political entity could uphold enormous political and nationalistic possibilities in the country but their acts are only benefiting the reactionary elements at the cost of their image.

ME, Dhaka

I, in my letter (April 23), on the

"Arabic sign at ZIA", hinted that now is the time for the alliance Government to think about putting a fourth signboard in Urdu. Immediately after my letter was published a reader's opinion where the writer termed me as a "fickle-minded" character. According to him, for Urdu even for an instance had no reference in the ongoing debate. I "exposed a gross lack taste".

Another reader from North South University, Dhaka, labeled my letter to be deceptive and that she was confused as to whether did I "really mean that ZIA should have a fourth neon sign in Urdu" or I "was trying to make a mockery of Urdu as a language?" According to another reader, a new generation kid from Dhanmondi, Dhaka, I "sarcastically argued to hang an Urdu sign beside the other three."

Now I am shocked as to how the Alliance Government has introduced the book "Birth of Bangladesh" by General Rao Forman Ali, only as a reference book for the students. Nevertheless the students need to know the true records of Bangladesh liberation war. The new generation needs to know the details of our glorious history of independence.

I wonder how, this time, some readers will react to my new suggestion. I recommend that the book "Birth of Bangladesh" by our beloved Pakistani General Rao Forman Ali must be made as the only compulsory textbook on Bangladesh History for the new young citizens of our nation.

Why our young citizens should waste their time on an irrelevant element of the past!

Nazmul Karim
Dhaka

A judge is not a detective

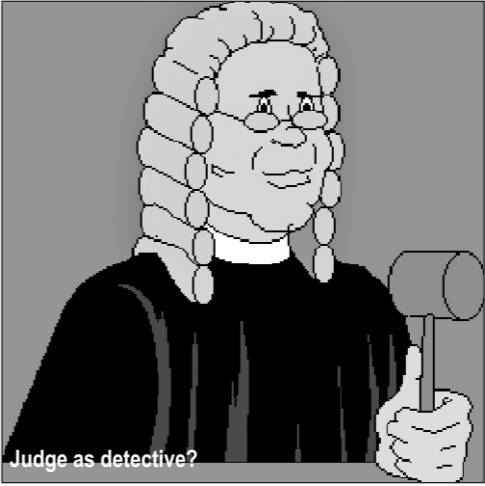


Forming a judicial inquiry commission is a common phenomenon in Bangladesh. The government when grows tired of facing a public uproar following an uncontrolled and disastrous incident of gross human rights violation, enters the shelter of a judicial commission which seem like entering a safe haven. In our experience, reports generated from such commissions have always been ignored, or cared the least; none of their recommendations have ever been implemented.

From the fates of three recent such commissions, we can safely conclude that forming such commissions is part of a government's political cooling game. Once the commission submits its reports, newspapers publish parts of it out of public enthusiasm and curiosity, and then, these reports are warehoused for dusting. Someday, somewhere, some other law and order situation develops and another such commission is formed and another bulk of paper is produced. In addition to ignoring the recommendations, there is something fishy about letting a judge work as a detective. A judge is someone who studies law, who is experienced in legal proceedings, and who specialises on evaluating witness and assessing evidence to declare a judgement. A deci-

sion to assign a judge in an investigative duty, in a fact-finding mission, may indeed bring in inefficacy and inefficiency.

A judge does not fit the profile of a detec-



tive. He neither has institutional training, nor the experience to perform as an investigator. His job description never includes a police

function. But the formed commissions; judges are expected to perform beyond their expertise.

The judge of the commission on Shamsunnahar Hall incident made strong comments on dirty teacher politics of Dhaka University and suggested ways to get rid of it. Neither the Vice Chancellor nor the Provost was punished, not even any disciplinary action was brought against any of them. Rather, one of them was later rewarded by a diplomatic assignment abroad. Nobody dared to touch the police officials involved in that midnight tragedy. Two other commissions formed on serial bomb blast incidents totally failed to dig out the facts. Those carefully planned serial blasts across the country were definitely works of extremely dangerous and clever organised groups, and for a serving or retired superior court judge, it was simply implausible to expect that he would single handedly identify the culprits and bring them to justice.

I wonder knowing these limitations why the government continues to assign judges time to time to work as detectives.

Hasanat Alamgir
Vancouver, British Columbia