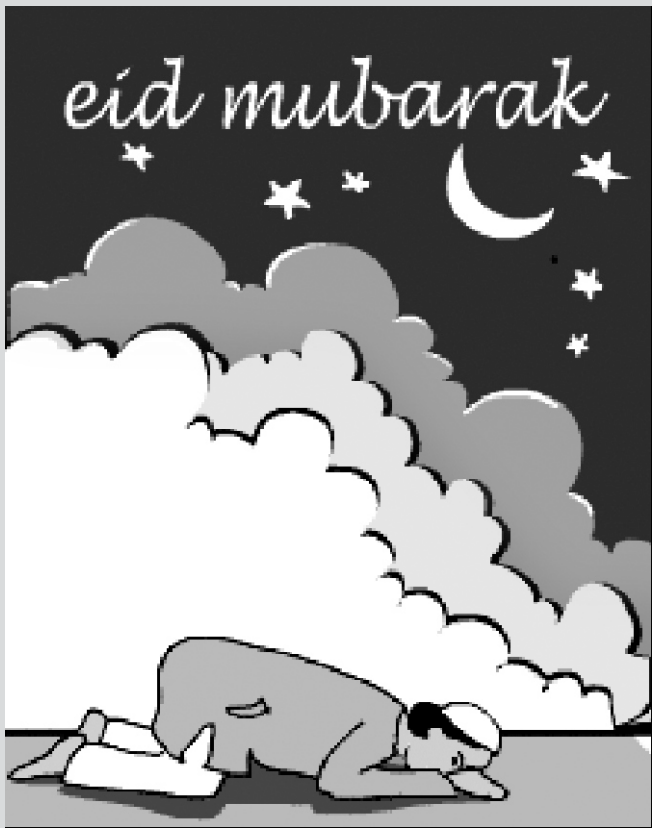


Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

HSC question and Eid-ul-Fitr



Mandatory celebration?

Living in Bangladesh always prepares you for news ranging from the bad to the worst to the absurd. Yet the fact that I wasn't prepared for the news of the absolutely bizarre question on Eid-ul-Fitr in the English first paper exam of the HSC examina-

tions is an understatement. This is absurdity at its best and to say that I am angry and appalled is to say the least.

First and the most obvious point is how can such an exclusionary question be selected in the first place and made mandatory for all the test takers? If this insidious attempt to side track the religious minority and even the women was not enough, the formulator(s) of the question even provided the so-called hints which to me was a reflection of their sheer bad taste. The selection of questions is a painstaking process involving hundreds of people. The fact that one of our teachers came up with this question for the English language exam and the question was selected at the final stage bodes ill for our education system. Are we to finally accept that our education system is staffed and run by incompetent and ignorant souls? Or is it a deliberate attempt either to exclude and alienate the religious minority (including the women, I must say, because how on earth would they know what happens at the *Eidgah* other than speculate?) from the mainstream or to coerce them into submitting to the dominant religious culture?

Second, judging from newspaper reports the question along with the add-ons (disregarding the controversy) only seems fit for a fifth-grader. A high school public exam that is supposed to test the aptitude of the English language should not be asking the test takers to discuss what their mothers/sisters did on a particular feast day or the 'feast' that was arranged on the day. Besides the controversial nature of the question I think it is equally important that we seriously and critically examine the standard of the education itself that every year churns out people with mere degrees and without any real education. It is not without reason that the current education system in the country is extremely poor by any standard.

Parsa S. Sajid
Cambridge, USA

This letter is in response to Ms Christina Gomez's letter on June 03. I totally agree with her on the issue of a compulsory question at HSC on Eid-ul-Fitr.

It made me out-aged when I learnt about this. I don't know what made the people (responsible for this) do such a silly and insensitive conduct. Is it complete apathy towards the sentiments of minorities? Or a planned miss-deed to tarnish Islamic values. No where in the Quran and the authentic Hadith sources of Prophet (sm) was said to ignore or curtail the rights of minorities, rather in many places, protection of the rights of minorities was stressed upon with utter importance. In many instances in the history, many Muslim rulers remarkably stood out among their contemporaries in regard to protecting the rights of minorities.

The government should investigate this matter quickly and take adequate measures against the persons responsible for this, so that no similar incident will occur in the future.

Zafar Hadi, California, USA

The Marine Academy: Troubles and reforms

The recent revolt by the Marine Academy senior year cadets and their desertion of the campus at Jaldia, Chittagong is deplorable. Nevertheless this presents a unique window of opportunity to reform the unnecessarily bully-ridden military style system which is totally anachronistic in any modern merchant fleet. I was the first full time Bengali Marine Engineering Instructor there in 1965 and had come across first hand many evidences of bullying by the senior year cadets on the juniors. I myself being trained in England and qualifying by ship-board service and periodic professional examinations in UK found no

need for any military style training in my profession.

To my knowledge after the creation of Bangladesh the bullying got even worse as the West Pakistan cadets disappeared from the scene leaving only a singular polarisation of seniors versus the juniors.

Obviously fresh recruits need some training to smarten up and make them suitable for sea service, especially service hopefully on foreign ships, but a waste of two full years from a person's chosen career is unconscionable.

As the senior second year cadets have revolted and have already left the campus this is the ideal time to reform the system by cutting out one year. This will eliminate any conflict between senior versus junior and

the cadets will have a head start of about 15 months in joining early a meaningful career. Resources released by curtailing the training could be beneficially directed towards coaching for the subjects of professional qualifications. These could be split up into suitable educational modules by consultation with the Open University of Bangladesh. The cadets on shore study leave can complete these modules towards their professional competence and perhaps later those who want it, can pursue further module courses with the OU towards a degree in marine engineering or nautical science (as is the practice in UK).

Mr AH Shafiuddin Ahmed
London, UK

Deadline to disarm

The US occupation army gave Iraqi citizens two weeks to surrender the arms they hold. The goal is good. But given the Iraqi situation as it evolved before, during, and after the war on Iraq and ouster of the established order, what are the chances of this call for surrender of arms to be taken seriously or to succeed? The present ultimatum to give away arms without first providing minimum safety and security of life and property of citizens looks more like putting the cart before the horse.

It would have been more practical if the US occupation (a) learnt to keep a low profile and not move around with swagger and arrogant display of weaponry (there has been enough and there is no need for more "shock and awe"), (b) did show quickest possible restoration of all basic services including power, water, sanitation which have been denied for so long (c) started to massively inject (the much needed and long denied) cash and generate employment into the economy, and (d) hastened creation of credible local and central Iraqi administration to take charge.

And again, what is done may indeed be seen as done; but even in doing so there is no need to continue to undo what is not yet undone.

Dr. Zakir Husain
Dhaka

Unocal in Moulvibazar!

What happened to the \$685m compensation claim for the damages done by Occidental in Magurchhara? We all know that Unocal assumed the responsibilities of that fire accident when it bought the Occidental operations in the Moulvibazar block. Have we already received the 685 million dollars compensation or have the issue been settled in court? We have not heard anything about it in the media last one-year nor has the damaged environment been rehabilitated in Magurchhara.

I urge *The Daily Star* to immediately investigate the present status of the damage compensation claimed by Petrobangla.

Shafqat
USA

Subsidy for poultry feed

These days price of beef and mutton is very high and is practically beyond the reach of common man. Chicken is relatively cheaper but still not within easy reach of most people. Fish price is also quite high.

So to meet the protein requirement of the commoners, chicken should be made cheaper. It may be mentioned here that in India and Pakistan per KG chicken price varies from Tk. forty five to fifty. That has been made possible because of liberal subsidy given to poultry feed by the government.

While the government is providing huge subsidy to loss making state owned enterprises and willnily tolerating over Tk. twenty five thousand crores of classified loans, a few crores of subsidy to Poultry feed which will benefit all and sundry is worth considering. I therefore urge the Ministry of Finance to make some provision for it in the ensuing budget for which they will earn the gratitude of one and all.

Saleh Ahmed Chowdhury
Mohakhali, Dhaka

A maximum security prison in the Bay of Bengal

The underworld is maturing quickly in Bangladesh. Incidences of organized crimes are now common. Some recent killings give hints of involvement of highly trained pro-

fessional assassins. Smuggled Russian and Czech automatic weapons are abundant. The culprits are not even sparing on-duty members of the law enforcing agencies to collect firearms and ammunitions when needed.

In a situation, when the criminals are quickly specializing in their crime skills and the crime rates are rising sharply, it is very important that we isolate the criminals already convicted from the rest of their world. We need to establish a maximum security prison outside our mainland. This prison must be controlled centrally, not administered by a district official. We have been aware of incidents that some criminals are able to run their networks, maintain constant contacts outside, plan and organize crimes while serving terms in the prisons. Collaboration from the wardens and jail officials inside the prison is widely and reasonably alleged.

There are some small and less densely populated islands across our coasts. One of such an island in the Bay of Bengal can be chosen to build a prison, where dangerous, repetitive and top 'brand name' criminals will serve their times. Maximum security measures like isolated rooms, electrified fences, video surveillance, can be instituted. Centrally recruited, trained and well-paid wardens will guard and limit access to only selective family members to meet the prisoners. Trained dogs can also be employed.

Keeping the criminals separate from the outside world will surely help us break the chain of their networks.

Hasanat Alamgir
Vancouver, British Columbia

A man of vision!

Mahmood Elahi's letter "George W Bush is a man of vision" appeared to me as funny and as a travesty of truth. He seemed to be a pro-Bush fanatic and pro-American for some secret reasons. All his letters appeared in your esteemed daily eulogised the American way of life or the American President. I don't mind his personal views but when it assails the truth we are bound to protest.

Mr. Elahi has sarcastically made many statements about the Taliban for their defeat but he has forgotten that the Taliban fought against a military super-power backed up by Northern Alliance whose leaders were heavily bribed by CIA. There is no pride to fight against a militarily weak and poor country like Afghanistan which was unjustly involved in the war for giving refuge to Osama bin Laden. Up till now Bush could not give any authentic proof that Osama bin Laden was directly involved in destroying WTO building.

Again Bush along with his friend Blair got the scent of WMD and discovered Al-Qaeda connection in Iraq. UNO sent inspectors to Iraq to probe into it but Bush and Blair was not satisfied with the findings and the Iraqis were bombed cruelly and their hearth and homes were destroyed disregarding UN charter and trampling human rights. But up to now Bush has failed to discover WMD in Iraq to convince the world.

It is now crystal clear that the main purpose of Iraq invasion was oil and controlling the Middle East at the instigation of Israel and nothing else. Due to his arrogance and 'Might is Right's policy in invading Iraq without allowing sufficient time to the United Nations for probing WMD and for illegal occupation Bush will go down in history as the second Halaku Khan. If Bush is still considered a visionary person by Mahmood Elahi, may God help him.

AMujahid
Nandankanan, Chittagong

"Anti-Americanism"



The American beauty!

The Daily Star is being incriminated continuously for publishing "Anti-American" sentiments of the people of Bangladesh. A recent letter from the USA (May 30) "Anti-Americanism" reads as "I have been reading with much displeasure at the Anti-American comments of *The Daily Star* readers. All of these people would do anything to live or remain inside the US rather than live where they currently are."

First, let it be clear to all that "Americanism" relates only to the language, nothing else. According to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (1999), Americanism means "a word or phrase used in American English but not in standard English in Britain." Therefore, using "Americanism" or "Anti-Americanism" to symbolise political inclination or disinclination towards the USA is simply a misnomer.

Secondly, and most pertinently, before passing a sweeping remark against the readers of *The Daily Star*, one should understand the basic differences between criticising a government and criticising a people. No one can cite a single write-up or letter in *The Daily Star* where the people of the US were ever put to any kind of scratchy remarks. Like all the saner people of the world, including those of the US, UK, Canada, Italy, and many other countries, the morally conscious people of Bangladesh gave vent to their disapproval of the policy of President Bush whereby he engineered one of the most wanton aggressions the history had ever seen.

Finally, the people of Bangladesh has a great admiration for the people of the US and the US-Bangladesh relations is based upon time-tested mutual trust and friendship, not upon loyalty to President Bush. For our part, it is really heartening to note that hundreds of thousands of people of Bangladesh are now the citizens of that great country and many more including probably the "readers" of *The Daily Star* might try some day to follow the suit.

Hafejul Alam
Dhaka

In response to Shahjahan Ahmed - the US has not found the WMB's because they have been moved. There was been many times that mobile weapons labs were found to be scrubbed clean. What does that mean? There were weapons, but the military regime in Iraq wanted to hide them.

The criticism of the US is because it did not bow to world pressure, which I am so glad it did not. The Iraqi people are free and that is what matters. The capture of either Hussein or bin Laden, while the thought is very nice, is not the determining factor of whether the war is a success. The US has never said that they will capture these criminals. Come to think of it, the ease with which both wars came to a close shows the might and planning of the US military.

I have sympathy towards the innocent civilians about as much as you have for the terrorists. In every war, innocents always die. The US tried to minimise this, but when the Iraqis put military gear in proximity of civilian sites, what is going to happen?

Like I said, there is a lot of politics at work. The US helped Saddam and bin Laden when they needed them. This in no way gave those terrorists rights to wage war on innocent civilians.

In response to Sami Afzal - I praise your intent to go back to Bangladesh. You must be living off your dad's money as you know that life in Bangladesh is better for you than having to toil in the US.

I used to feel for Bangladesh - but why help a country where the people are dishonest. This country will never be able to get out of the poverty it is in.

I am proud to live in the US where I can say and do anything I want. I can go out anytime I want to. Can you do these in Bangladesh NO! So, go back to your country, and don't waste the position of a good US student.

S. Khan
USA

I am writing in response to the letter by Mahmood Elahi (June 3). *The Daily Star* did no wrong in publishing all the anti-American letters, because any sensible person, irrespective of his/her geographical origin, would agree with the main theme of these letters. I strongly disagree with Mr. Elahi that most of those letters were "highly contrived and biased". Instead I find Mr. Elahi highly biased, but I cannot comprehend why a Bangladeshi origin like him would do so, especially when he is in Canada, not in America.

Any person with a little sense would know that America went into this war with several long-term goals, none of which were to do any good for Iraq or her people. The people who are "students or settled in the United States"

obviously know better what is going on inside this "greatest democracy" at least than those who are not residing in this country. Inferior are those people who are creating these problems, who are disregarding the UN and the world opinion and of course those who are supporting them blindly.

We, who live in this country, know the actual meaning of "greatest democracy" and the "freedom" that is enjoyed by the people here. It is that "great democracy" where NBC fires their veteran reporter for telling the truth, where each and every media are government-propaganda machines, where the Corporate people dictate the general public choices. Even in Bangladesh at least the print media are much more free than in that so-called "greatest democracy"- people have the chance to know about the negative-sides of the government and their decisions, which is quite impossible for Americans because of their biased media.

Mohammad Nazriar Rahman
University of Connecticut, USA

I must say I was angered by Mr. Elahi's letter on anti-Americanism. The gentleman, I must say, is a very poor student of logic and jumps to conclusion without basis. He is equating criticism of the USA for its current role in world politics as anti-Americanism.

Not only that, he extends this illogical conclusion to suggest that people who are doing this have a deep-rooted inferiority complex vis-à-vis the Americans. Well for Mr. Elahi's information, it is not only his poor countrymen in Bangladesh who are being critical of the USA; the French, the Germans, the Japanese, to name a few are criticizing the USA over its role in Iraq as we the Bangladeshis are doing. What is interesting is, those who criticised the USA over Iraq are now by hindsight correct for the USA and Great Britain who invaded Iraq for reasons for its development of the weapons of mass destruction failed to find any. I would suggest Mr. Elahi to go back and see some of the news on CNN and BBC and see how the likes of Mr. Bush, Mr. Rumsfeld and Mr. Blair lied day in and day out over Iraq. The issue was not, before the so-called coalition went to Iraq, that Saddam Hossain was a brute dictator that no one argued; it was that he had developed WMDs against US resolutions and was a threat to peace and therefore had to be disarmed.

Mr. Elahi should also know that there exist within the USA critics of the US actions in Iraq. Their views are more vocal and much more expressive than views expressed from Bangladesh in these columns against which Mr. Elahi has taken such great offense. Are they too anti-American and do they too also suffer from a sense of inferiority complex? Or is that Mr. Elahi is trying, and I hate to use the cliché, being holier than the pope?

Shahjahan Ahmed
Dhanmandi, Dhaka

This is in reference to Mahmood Elahi's letter (June 3).

People who opposed America's war against Iraq did so not because they hated everything about America rather because of facts like Saddam had close ties to the US government in the past when he tortured and killed his own people and the US failed to provide any tangible proof to substantiate the claim that Saddam had weapons of mass destruction. Please note that these facts do acknowledge the atrocities carried out by Saddam.

The US only intervenes in world affairs when it has direct or indirect interests in the matter. The US might appear selfish or arrogant because of such an inconsistent and unilateral foreign policy. Please note that it's the policy that is being criticised, not the outcome.

Pardon my ignorance but is there any law that prevents students and people in the US/Canada from criticising the US foreign policy?

I would like to refer to the United Nations annual report on human development published in July last year. In the report, experts from relevant fields evaluated developmental parameters like average income, projected life expectancy and the level of literacy in 173 countries. The top 5 countries according to the report were Norway, Sweden, Canada, Belgium and Austria. Perhaps Mahmood Elahi could elaborate on why people all over the world are not criticising any of these 5 countries like the US?

Omar Sharif
Simon Fraser University, Canada



Welcome back!