

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.

"Peoples right to know"



Information denied!

I have carefully gone through your commentary and have the following remarks to make:

- Your point is well taken when you refer to various individual cases like those of the US President, the Thai Prime Minister and others. Most importantly when only two of the thirteen newspapers are selectively "picked" for the so-called defamation case. In this regard it is evident that he (Mr. Chowdhury) is the one on the path of a personal vendetta and vilification against the said newspapers.
- As for Mr. Chowdhury's accusation of *The Daily Star* having to advance the viewpoint and interests of a "particular" party, clearly he has not been able to provide any "primary or secondary evidences in support of his contention".
- The media in today's world despite all its claims of being independent do happen to advance the political interests of one party or the other in addition to dissemination of news as they are. Having a partisan "colour" for the media is universal including the Western media. I remember the recent conflicting reports made by the media during the US invasion of Iraq.
- In line with the declared spirit in your commentary I would call upon our media to let us "know" more about the clandestine and behind the curtain operations in corruption and other anti-people activities not just of our lawmakers and members of the opposition but also some of our high profiled members of the civil society. Help us to bring back an atmosphere of

accountability and transparency in the country at all levels.

4. Finally let me conclude by saying this, that if SQ Chowdhury for some reasons or the other is not elected to the post of the Secretary General of the OIC, he and the government will be held accountable to the "people" more than any one else.

**Shamsher Chowdhury, Dhaka**

Mahfuz Anam, has written a slightly boring commentary justifying the obvious. It's his paper and we can't begrudge him that right.

However it is without a doubt true that *The Daily Star* is negligent in reporting on the backgrounds of our political leadership. SQ Chowdhury is just one example where this paper reported anything at all about his background. Usually even the most prominent people's backgrounds and history are ignored.

But while we are discussing the shortcomings of *The Daily Star* something I read in the June 20 issue struck me. Under the article 'US to consider free access of goods' *The Daily Star* printed one of its typically vague reports bereft of any substantive information, familiar to all readers of this paper. Unless I am mistaken, that appears to be the end of the paper's reports on the all important issue of duty free access.

For those of you who want to read more about this issue, please visit <http://www.theorator.com/bills108/s1121.html> or go to any search engine and enter the phrase 'Middle East Trade

and Engagement Act of 2003'; I am just amazed *The Daily Star* didn't think this came under the motto of our right to know.

**Azad, Dhaka**

I enjoyed Mahfuz Anam's commentary. It was a good piece of journalism bold enough to speak out the truth with supporting facts and figures. Please keep up the motto which would help democracy and transparency take root in Bangladesh. Democracy teaches the magnanimity to accept the opponents views/criticism in right grace. Thank you.

**AZM Shamsul Alam**  
Randolph Ave, St Paul, MN

You are right about what you have said in your commentary, but like the so-called Muktijoddhya and AL people if you/your staff reporters continue repeating that old record then we don't need to hear it anymore. People know very well who is what and how much contribution one has made for the people and the country. I can guarantee you that you will not be able to find one single politician who does politics for the people. But SQ Chowdhury & family is doing politics with their own money! So what is the logic behind informing people about the incident which is 30 years old and in which people have no interest? People want to move forward, not held back. If you have any "Roadmap" for that, please let the people know about it.

**Rezaul Karim, On e-mail**

I must say that *The Daily Star* is at fault in the controversy over SQ Chowdhury ("People's right to know", June 21).

Mahfuz Anam does admit it but his apology is inadequate. He admits that *The Daily Star* hardly wrote anything about SQ Chowdhury and promises to try and correct that lapse. But when was the last time *The Daily Star* wrote anything about the background, business, social, family or otherwise of ANY political leader?

Tareque Rahman is one of the fastest rising and most powerful figures in BNP. He has really started coming to the fore in the last few years. With the exception of a few vague reports about Hawa Bhaban influence peddling and anonymous comments by 'high officials' *The Daily Star* has never reported anything about him.

Mahfuz Anam gives the example of Berlusconi being hounded by the

Italian media. That's an excellent example because only recently one of Berlusconi's associates was found guilty of various crimes. The Italian media diligently investigates the doings of Berlusconi's business partners and relatives. Bill Clinton was almost neutered thanks to the revelations of his sexual peccadilloes and allegations of financial impropriety by a vibrant and investigative press.

*The Daily Star* doesn't even report on the background of the future leader of the BNP and almost certainly a future Prime Minister. Nor does it doesn't report on his brother and his businesses even when his brother's ferries get involved in fatal accidents.

If *The Daily Star* is guilty of anything it is not living up to that motto on its masthead.

**Riki, Dhaka**

Congratulations, Mr. Editor for your thought provoking commentary. People are yet to know many things about the politicians and their politics in this country. And the print media has the role to play in this direction.

However, I am not surprised at the nomination of SQ Chowdhury for the candidature of the OIC secretary-general, rather this is quite expected of the present situation prevailing in the country. Remember that the OIC did not support our causes for the war of liberation in 1971, Bangladesh was not admitted into the OIC till much later a time, OIC is still not a major development partner of Bangladesh, and Bangladesh claims to be a part of the Muslim Ummah!

Likewise, SQ and his family was opposed to the Liberation Movement of Bangladesh, his recent remarks on Bangla culture and women only echo the tune his father and other members made during the Pak regime. People like him probably preciously nurture their past and ideology that is inconsistent with the ideal of our independence. Armed with a distorted vision about our culture and tradition, what image of Bangladesh he will portray in the OIC and outside world for us!

People, particularly the new generation, now has the right to know, as mentioned in your commentary, his role in 1971 and his track record that has elevated him to the present stature at the patronage of the BNP and alliance government.

**ME, Dhaka**



The mass matters the most!

"Budget thought"

In order to express my profound shock, I am writing you, as for resource allocation, regarding which sector of economy should get priority, what remarks Mr. Atiqur Rahman has made, is completely unacceptable, therefore, deserves condemnation.

First, is it not the 'illiterate' masses, who by their laziness contributes the lion share of our national revenue; therefore, deserves attention? Without the general well being of the masses, as an economist, I wonder, does Mr. Rahman propose his path to economic development!

Second, by what standard does Mr. Rahman considers the masses as lazy? Doesn't he notice, just to feed their family, to what extent ordinary citizens bear inhuman sufferings?

Third, what Mr. Rahman forgets, is the fact that because our education system is subsidised by these illiterate masses, people like him could afford an education, and now he intends to payback advocating against their interest!

Fourth, being equipped with an advanced degree in economics, as Mr. Rahman did not bother to analyse the budget, rather made some causal stray remarks!

**Shibly Azad, Columbia University, USA**

I write in response to several letters about the recent budget and to express some alternate realities. In particular, I am amazed by the insensitive, irrational and inaccurate comments of Dr. Atiqur Rahman where he chastises the government for "wasting" our resources on "illiterate" and "lazy" masses. In any fair and just society, the gaps and disparities in education, health care and employment needs to be minimised to safeguard against its very degeneration and ultimate disintegration.

All Bangladeshi people are our assets regardless of what they do and where and how they live.

While I totally agree with him about the urgent need to expand our industrial base given that the existing agrarian economy is incapable of creating enough employment for the current 2% population growth rate, aren't some of the very reasons for its hitherto stunted growth the high illiteracy rates in addition to our lack of infrastructure, inadequate power and telecom facilities, shaky law and order situation and of course the adverse tax system? Currently, our tax system discriminates against home-made industrial finished products by imposing very high import taxes (anywhere from 30% to 80%) on the raw materials that are not available in Bangladesh.

This unfortunately means that despite having one of the cheapest labour forces in the world, the domestic industrial product is uncompetitive.

Bangladeshi industrialists are not incompetent the ready made garments industry is a testament to this. Contrary to the good professor's suggestion, our government does not need to pour any money into anyone's pocket, but rather realise that the industrialists are a valuable contributing partner in the development of our nation and in that spirit remove the hindering bureaucratic red-tapes and the adverse taxes. With air to breathe, our entrepreneurs and businessmen in other sectors such as engineering, technology, and service to name but a few, will be able to create new domestic markets and start tapping into the vast global markets thus broadening our foreign exchange earning sources.

**Shabbir A. Bashir, Ph.D**  
Stanford University, California, USA

Bangladesh troop in Iraq!

Saddam Hussein was toppled on April 8, 2003 but that was not the end of the war on Iraq. American troops in Iraq are now facing organised armed resistance, and there are real battle conditions in northern Balad and Fallujah and some pockets in West Baghdad. The Pentagon accepts that 49 US soldiers have been killed since May 1, 2003. If one like to include the casualties since April 9, 2003 one can reach the conclusion that almost as many Americans have died during the 'official war period' as died during the 'unofficial war period'. The official 'War on Iraq' has shifted into unofficial 'peacekeeping'. The body count is haunting the Bush Administration and they know it well that the Republican candidate cannot carry this burden into an election campaign, and has therefore come up with the bright idea of leasing out their war to countries like Bangladesh.

Some bright persons with some brighter idea try to convince the Bangladesh government that the world runs on arithmetic now, and that if Bangladesh sends its troops it is going to get some real perks. The idea may be suicidal. Iraqis, as well

as the whole world knows that this war is for control of oil and for the Israelis and for the benefits of the New American Century. Oil and nationalism runs synonymous in Iraq now. MJ Akbar was right when he said Iraqis fight against the enemy and a dream of independence will sustain the challenge through every frustration.

'Peacekeepers' on Iraqi soil will not be excused. We should not expect our brothers in the armed forces get caught in crossfire only because they would earn some economic or political benefits for the nation. Should we?

**Sirajul Islam, Shyamoli, Dhaka**

Declare Sangsad Bhaban a National Heritage site

News item in *The Daily Star* (June 19) called for Declaring Sangsad Bhaban a National Heritage site. Our experience regarding the listed buildings and sites is rather bitter. We know the plight of listed national historic or heritage sites in the country. Shait Gombuj Mosque, which got a place in the UNESCO's world heritage list, suffered most serious damages to its character and to its adjacent areas after

enlistment. The Sunderbans is yet another world heritage listed sites, being indiscriminately plundered.

In Bangladesh mere declarations are not enough to safeguard the character of an area or building. Coupled with declarations, there is a need to create greater awareness among the general public regarding preservation of landmarks or icons that provides the city or the country its image.

This will not be irrelevant to mention here that growth, change and adaptability are the core characteristics of a dynamic living building or urban area but these must happen in a controlled manner. Relevant experts may advise on the level and direction of growth, change and adaptability of an area by considering all the pertinent issues in a comprehensive way.

**Dr. Qazi Azizul Mowla**  
Professor, Department of Architecture, BUET

"Wake up to reality"

I am more than shocked to see the comments of A Dutta of Calcutta (June 18). Only an ignorant person could comment that Chinese product are the worst in the world. Western nations including the US would have never allowed Chinese prod-

ucts to enter their markets, had the quality of Chinese product were inferior as depicted by A Dutta from Calcutta. The more than 60 billion dollar trade deficit between America and China (in favour of China) speaks for itself!

Bangladesh Government should pursue more vigorously to improve its trade ties with ASEAN, United States and China. Bangladesh government should also take concrete steps to restore brotherly relation between Bangladesh, Maldives, Afghanistan and Pakistan. I would also urge the people not to be deceived by the evil design and deceit of these impostors and saboteurs from abroad.

**K. Wasimuddin**  
Chicago, USA

I am glad that I read both Mr. K. Wasim's comments ("South Asian alliance", June 16) and the writing of Mr. Anirban Dutta Choudhury, Calcutta, India under the caption "Wake Up To Reality". I am in no doubt as to who lives in fool's paradise. Otherwise why should a nationalist as well as a patriotic writing (in which one only dreams about a better future) evoke a rash response from someone in India. Is it because what Mr. Wasim pro-

posed goes against India, that Mr. Anirban is irked?

To what extent should we take his suggestion of not considering China as our friend? When in reality China is our friend, helping us in various field including defence! Mr Anirban talks about free trade while his Prime Minister put barbed wire on the border. Isn't it interesting?

According to him, Chinese goods are worst. Please Mr. Anirban, open your border if you truly have confidence in your quality. And then test your hypothesis.

Mr. Dutta is also disturbed about our "Look East" policy and the opening of eastern corridor. I am sure, years from now he will experience its practicality.

Reading Mr. Wasim's opinion I also was sceptical about the reality of an alignment where India and Pakistan can stay side by side. Mr. Dutt only confirms my opinion. We do remember 1971, but we also look at the reality now.

Never will you understand. Until you respect individual opinion and write respectfully whatever it may be, Mr. Dutt.

**Rimon Ibne Mahmud**  
Toronto, Canada  
**The Pied Piper of**

Hamelin: The Pied Piper of Dhaka

Nearly seven hundred years ago, in a fine morning, a mysterious man came to Hamelin, a small city in the north part of Germany. The stranger was wearing a multi-coloured bright jacket and thus was called the Pied Piper. He was a rodent catcher, and he pledged he would purge the city of all mice and rats for some reward. The citizens of Hamelin made a deal, promising him a certain price. The rodent catcher then took a small pipe from his jacket pocket and started to blow on it. Rats and mice right away came from every house and circled him. From there he walked into the water. The rodents all followed him, jumped in, and drowned.

After experiencing outstanding and superb performances of three successive mayors, the Dhakaites can now only hope that one fine morning, such a pipe will come to Nagar Bhaban, and for a handsome reward, will blow a pipe and take away all the mosquitoes, cockroaches, rats and mice from their flats and apartments, and then dump them into Buriganga river. For some extra money, he might be able

to clean the garbage and solve the traffic jam also by blowing his pipe.

**Part-2**  
When the piper came back and claimed his reward, the citizens of Hamelin regretted having promised so much money, and they refused to pay him. The angry piper went away. He returned after a couple of days and sounded his pipe in the streets. But this time, instead of rodents, kids came out. The flock followed him, and he led them into a mountain, where he vanished with them.

It is highly likely that our City Corporation and government will also refuse to pay the piper of Dhaka. They will withdraw the money from the treasury, but will split and grasp it. They might also let the police run after him or file a false case against the piper. The deceived piper will return after a couple of days, dressed in a hunter's costume and wearing a strange crooked hat. He will sound his pipe in the streets, but this time it will not be rodents, but rather politicians: a large number of government and opposition politicians will come out. The crowd will follow him, and he will escort them into the Bay of Bengal, where he will drown with them.

**Hasanat Alamgir**  
Vancouver, British Columbia

"The Letters Page"

I do not know what newspaper Mr. Zakaria reads but it is obviously not *The Daily Star*. Its coverage of the war, in my opinion, was anything but fair and objective. From the stories it printed, to the editorials and opinion articles, was mostly anti-war. As for the Letters Page, which I have been reading religiously since the beginning of the war, has carried more letters opposing the war than those supporting it.

He then slurs the entire Bangladeshi community in the United States as "coolies", or waiting to receive their "Green Cards", or having a "colonial" mindset. For Mr. Zakaria's information the Bangladeshi community is not a monolith who blindly follow the United States on the war. There have been any number of letters of Bangladeshis-- non-immigrants, Green Card-holders, and American citizens-- who have vocally have unequivocally opposed the war. In addition, there have been letters who have supported war for reasons only they know.

**Karim Abdullah, New York, USA**

Loving one's country



It's my motherland!

With utmost respect for the wisdom behind Mr. Badrul Ahsan's column "Do you love your country?" (June 20), I must say that the real question should have been "Do you love fellow human being?" Anyone with some basic knowledge of world history, population dynamics (and economics) know that the title of a country is attached to billions without any strong voice from their part.

For example, my father was born in the British Empire, then he became a Pakistani, and then a Bangladeshi. Had Mr. Mountbatten, Nehru and Zinnah been bent to Mr. Gandhi's wishes, God knows what national anthem we would have been singing today. Is patriotism good or bad-- it's a subject of serious debate, which also should consider the grey line between patriotism and nationalism and other similar human phenomena. But there is no doubt that love and compassion towards fellow human being is the most benevolent

and all-encompassing human quality we all should strive to cultivate.

The other crude side of the issue is very simple. When the stomach is empty, and life is nothing but a constant struggle to make ends meet--day after day, month after month, the notion of patriotism seems to be a luxury reserved for the few. Still, Mr. Ahsan deserves sincere thanks from the readers for bringing up the issue, even during such a tough time for Bangladesh.

**Tirtho Mahmood**  
Albany, CA, USA

I read Mr. Badrul Ahsan's piece "Do You Love Your Country?" and I must admit that it has raised more questions in my mind, like the many questions that Mr. Ahsan has asked in his piece, without really answering any and confusing a concept that belies any definition but has always been used by good leaders and bad leaders alike for their good or selfish ends with equal jest and fervour.

My own way of thinking about patriotism is a very simple one. Ever since mankind learnt to live in communities, tribes and finally the nation states, they learnt to love and respect and pay back the benefits to their communities/tribes/nations as an expression of natural sentiments. A close analogy to this would be our love and respect for our parents. We love them because of what we receive from them. This has evolved in all of us as a natural phenomenon so much so that we love and respect our parents without ever being aware that we are.

There are dangers in making patriotism a national focus or a past time. Mr. Ahsan has alluded to some of them and I am sure your readers would be surprised to learn about Tolstoy's views on patriotism. We ourselves know of these dangers just too well. In 1971, when a totally unprepared nation was led to fight a War of Liberation that they fought just too well, there was a group who ran

away from this bloody war into sanctuaries in the neighbouring country. There were 10 million such people. They came back after the war was over and won and declared that those who did not run away were traitors and as they did and fought the war from Indian soil, they were patriots and then placed in our history a divisive force that is still destroying our development efforts. Those who actually fought our war of liberation or quietly faced death with full love of their motherland in their bosoms went back to their lives quietly after the war was won and never came back and declared themselves as patriots for patriotism or one's love for his/her country is like one's love for one's parents. There is nothing material to be gained from being a patriot. It is something that we do to ourselves to feel that we are simply being human beings.

**Shahjahan Ahmed**  
Dhanmandi, Dhaka