

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.

## Maglev Train

I can add to Mr. Delwar's observation (June 24) by pointing out that the interest on \$500 million will be over half a crore taka each day even at a low rate of interest. Moreover it is surprising to hear that the operating cost would not be very high. Will not huge electricity be needed to create a magnetic field to levitate the heavy rolling stock? Or is there some other form of energy to do the trick?

MAH, Dhaka

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This is in reference to Mr. Hasnat Khan's letter "Magnetic train from Chittagong to Dhaka" (June 27). Obviously the contents should be thought-provoking/useful for those who are currently engaged in exploring revolutionary changes to our old and dilapidated railway transport system.

The Communication Ministry surely deserves credit for enabling the old and the child population of Dhaka to breathe fresh air again. This was possible by taking positive actions against noxious pollutants from the city transport to save many lives of very old and young from the slow poisoning they were being subjected to by the foul exhaust emissions. With an example such as this, one should have no doubt about the good intention behind the proposed modernisation of the railway network to provide a fast as well as an affordable mode of transport for the benefit of our people.

However looking at the information and data given in Mr. Khan's letter, it is a matter of great concern for the sake of transparency in general and the public interest in particular to observe the glaring difference from those provided by the authorised spokesman for that news item mentioned by the writer (June 20). As suggested and in view of the alleged wrong information that may seriously confuse such an important issue of vital interest for the country's infrastructure development, may we expect an explanation/clarification of the concerned authority as soon as possible?

In the event the data provided by the spokesman of the authority for the subject news item (June 20) are found to be correct and the payload/fare per .km for the proposed Magnetic train in fact works out to be Tk. 1/- per. km, the authority should have no hesitation to get into signing a contract with whoever might have offered such a fantastically cheap proposal without any loss of time. But it must be ensured that it is not an 'octopus' trap like the case of some big fertiliser projects undertaken in the past and the authority should also make sure that the supplier/contractor cannot find an easy escape to get out of their commitment to achieve the bottom line result of Tk. 1/- per. km fare rate be it on a BOT or any other term as the case may be.

Z. Rahman, Gulshan, Dhaka



## An invitation

I hope our readers will forgive me for the proposal I am about to make. Comparing (you really need to compare before you start shooting!) with many big-name newspapers, The Daily Star is more than fair when it comes to putting up stories from both sides. But we still have some ungrateful people who are always complaining. So, in respect to their complaints, I propose that The Daily Star invite some columnists/journalists from UK and USA to put forward their part of the stories on a regular basis.

Indeed, The Daily Star already publishes a lot of articles from US, UK, India, Pakistan etc. However, the main difference in this proposal is that, we would like to hear specifically from those columnists who have made it their religion to vilify Muslims. Journalists who are always justifying the acts of terror-

ism committed by Israel in the name of "defence". Whenever US, UK or Israel commit crimes, some journalist would go to any length to come up with the most absurd excuses to justify those crimes. However, if those journalists want to put forward their views- however extreme they may be- with reason and logic, we will listen to them. Besides, if they are telling the truth, then they shouldn't be afraid to put forward their writings for fair scrutiny. Of course, I am not proposing that we should give the valuable space of Daily Star to fascists like Falwell.

Some readers may wonder why I am proposing this. Well, I believe it is far better to bring out those anti-Muslim writings and challenge them in a media that is fair and open, where it will get praise and criticism in equal proportion. If The Daily Star can publish writings from Arundhati Roy and Robert Fisk, why not from

certain anti-Muslim Mr X and Mr Y? So, I would request our readers to send in their opinion regarding this proposal. But please don't hit the panic button yet, nobody is taking over this paper!

Azad Miah  
Oldham, UK

## Who are these defaulters?

I refer to your last page news on June 25: "Father and daughter charged for laundering Tk. 82.50 lacs." In this case money was not looted from the bank but the transaction was illegal. Here you have specifically mentioned the names of both the father and his daughter.

Now I refer to the first page news on the same date: "Tk. 10,126 crore in pockets of 325 loan defaulters." That means that on an average, each defaulter has laundered 31.16 crore. But who are these "big"

defaulters?  
Nazmul Karim, Dhaka

## Hasina snubbed by the US

It was quite entertaining to read about how the US embassy and State Department officials kept the Leader of the Opposition party in limbo regarding whether or not she would be granted a session with Secretary Colin Powell. I believe embarrassment such as this one would finally help open the eyes of the opposition party and make them realise what an ill conceived idea it was to hold a hartal during the visit of a foreign dignitary as important as the US Secretary of State. It is even more of an eye opener if news reports are to be believed that the AL leadership was requested to drop the hartal as a sign of respect to Secretary Powell who would have then offered Sheikh Hasina a short yet politically significant meeting in return.

If such a powerful diplomat had indeed met with the opposition party leader, it would have been a huge coup for the AL, who could have flouted this meeting as proof as their importance as a viable and powerful opposition to the ruling party. But as usual, they managed to shoot themselves in the foot by refusing such an offer.

It played right in the hands of the ruling party who now have factual evidence of the disruptiveness of the opposition party and who can now take the moral high ground. Unfortunately, given the intelligence quotient and leadership calibre of the AL, I am afraid this is to be another wasted lesson.  
Mahmud, Detroit, MI, USA

## Free Iraqis are speaking at last

I am writing with reference to the letter "Iraq: Free or occupied," by Syeda Mushfiqa Munira (June 19). Awad Nasir, an eminent Iraqi poet, recently wrote: "The mullahs of Tehran and their Islamic Revolutionary Guards did not liberate the Iraqi Shites. Nor did the French President Jacques Chirac, or the European left liberate Iraq's communists, now free to resume their activities in Iraq. Iraq's liberation was brought about by young men and women who came from the other side of the world -- from California and Wyoming, from New York, Glasgow, London to risk their lives, and for some to die, so that my people can live in dignity." Nasir concluded: "In the meantime, Jacques Chirac, (Russian Prtesident) Vladimir Putin, (UN Secretary General) Kofi Annan and others have no authority to speak on behalf of my people."

Nasir could have added, neither does Syeda Mushfiqa Munira, nor others who are railing the United States for ousting a brutal dictator.  
Mahmood Elahi  
Ottawa, Canada

## Urge to withdraw unfair Anti Dumping Duty

This has reference to the BSS news under the caption "Rahimafrooz loses appeal in Indian court" published in The Daily Star (June 26).

Here we can clearly see how the Indian government and Indian Industry lobby continue building trade barrier against Bangladesh, whereas they are enjoying trade benefits from Bangladesh for years.

From the news item we can also realise that, the judgement given by CEGAT was blatantly one-sided

ignoring WTO stipulation by Indian court and it only reaffirms the business community concern of proactive implementation of trade barrier by the Indian Govt. and the Indian industry lobby. As such Government of Bangladesh (GOB) should be careful, alert and rigid enough in dealing trade matters with India.

India imposed and upheld anti-dumping decision against a globally reputed and foreign currency earner company like Rahimafrooz, therefore possibility is high that, similar export restrictions may be imposed on other industries of Bangladesh resulting in loss of huge amount of foreign currency.

Misbah  
Dhaka

## Perks but no additional commitment to productivity

A ten percent pay rise for the government staff members has been proposed in our 2003-4 budget. Additionally, the parliament would soon be considering an increase in the perks for the lawmakers, ministers and others. In the midst of the above development, two of my questions are:

1. Are these increases linked to say, a productivity improvement related commitment on the part of government functionaries, as well as others?

2. If so, how? If not, why? The questions are important for at least two reasons. Firstly, Bangladesh has been facing a formidable challenge of accelerating its economic growth through the limited means, opportunities (unless created otherwise) and resources, besides the global competition. Meeting the challenge would require the people of Bangladesh to be more result oriented and result generative, among others. In this respect, it is expected that the government and relevant political parties would convince Bangladeshis as to how the above increases could lead to a relatively better outcome (both quantitatively and qualitatively) in the areas like, economics, politics and governance. Interestingly, the people of Bangladesh are yet to come across a blue print or a strategy linking the additional compensation to an additional outcome (anticipated). An absence of such blue print or strategy would mean, among other things, that compensation and productivity improvement are perhaps loosely bonded in our national development dimensions at the time when motivation, efficiency and effectiveness are in great demand. Secondly, the matter involves the accountability of the government, political parties and others to the taxpayers (in or ex-country) and vice versa. Because it is the taxpayers' money that will fund the increases. Now, if the pre-facto justification for the increases is weak and the eventual outcome as such is poor, then the accountability in relevant transactions tends to be minimal. Presently, neither Bangladesh nor the taxpayers can afford it.  
Dr. M. S. Haq, New York, USA

## Stalemate in Sangsad again?

It appears that the nation is again plunging into uncertainty over the stalemate in parliament. Though our parliamentary history is always marred by unnecessary inactivities, improper body language, disproportionate praising of leaders dead or alive and serious misuse of time and

money, little good is delivered to the taxpayers by whose vote and money this parliament is created.

Our elected leaders are least bothered at the hope and aspirations of the common people. This is evident from the chronic quorum problem of the Sangsad. Our MPs have ample time to spare to attend village shalish to secretariat tadbirs but find little time to occupy the coveted seats in the house for which they fought tooth and nail during the polls. Those who care to attend the session find no interest in discussing the relevant matters. Their discussion range from leader worshipping to vilification of opposition party, punctuated by personal bravado but never for the topic for which valuable time is allotted to him/her. We feel seriously disgusted when we see some of our hon'ble MPs throw open challenge to people of other profession including

indefinite boycotts but also cannot overlook the unbecoming demeanour of the Treasury Bench. We appeal to the good sense of leader of the house and opposition to make the sangsad a working place of our law makers to be respected by all. People of this country has suffered a lot over the clashes of political parties in the past. Please leave us alone in our struggle to earn our bread. We are not envious of your exalted position added perks or political prowess, just forgive us to concentrate in own our affairs. Let your differences be hammered out within the parliament and not in open road affecting our 'rooti rooti'.

Sonia, Uttara, Dhaka

## "NTV channel"

We, in Australia, fully endorse the suggestion of Pabitra Das and others from New Zealand about the new satellite TV channel, NTV.

A large number of enthusiastic Bangladeshis living in both Australia and New Zealand will be deprived of the programs of NTV if it transmits from Apstar 2R as its footprint does not cover the Pacific and its signal is very weak in parts of Eastern Australia. We used to watch Ekushey with ease as it was transmitted via Asiasat 3S. We therefore urge the NTV authorities to move NTV to Asiasat 3S.

Omar Khaiyyam  
Australia

## "Converting Muslims to Christianity"

I write in response to Angela Robinson's letter of June 27. Your readers may be interested to know that the June 30 US edition of TIME magazine has dedicated eight pages to its cover article titled, "Should Christians Convert Muslims?" Here are some excerpts: one of the featured missionaries describes Islam as a "weapon of mass destruction"; another claims to be praying so the Fajr Azaan would not "affect the souls" of the Muslims but rather help lift them from the "totally oppressive spiritual atmosphere" of Islam; yet a third urges his fellow Christians to "Put on the full armor of God and

sorry if I caused any offence.

As regards to the debate about muslim weaving, here's what a short internet search revealed: (a) "till 1813, Dhaka Muslin continued to sell in London with 75% profit and was cheaper than the local British make. Alarmed at this competition, the British imposed 80% duty on the imported product"; (b) "it is said that to protect the interests of the textile mills of Manchester, the Muslim weavers of Dhaka were persecuted and coerced to stop weaving"; and (c) "an unsavoury fact associated with this was that the thumbs and index fingers of many yarn makers were chopped off by the British in order to prevent them from twisting the finer yarns required for the Muslims". While the missionaries may not have carried out these brutalities themselves, by not speaking out were they not a silent partner to it? Interestingly, I don't see Mrs. Robinson protesting against Tony Blair's lies and fabrications to justify an illegal war.  
Shabbir A. Bashar, Ph.D  
Stanford University, California, USA

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This is in reference to the letters "The missing points" by Abu Hashem (June 24); and Mrs. Angela Robinson's "Converting Muslims to Christianity".

I do not think Bangladeshi Muslims spend lots of time "trying to find faults of people from other religions", rather they spend considerable time finding fault of their own religion or other Muslims. But both are meaningless pursuit. Instead they should study the Quran and the Bible along with world history to attain an insight and, to understand whatever is happening around us.

As for propaganda, the Christian missionaries target non-Christians around the world, but the Imam's Khutba is aimed to Muslims only. Certainly prayer is far better than showering missiles and cluster bombs on the people of other religion.  
Similarly when Saudi Arabia gives money to build a mosque as pointed out by Rev Robinson (June 20), it is meant to serve the Muslims only. Whereas by adopting

## "Zoo tiger in the wild!"

The controversial statement by Mr. Mofizur Rahman, Curator, Dhaka Zoo to release surplus captive-bred zoo tigers and lions (DS, 28 May) in the Sunderbans for reasons that the Dhaka Zoo is not able to maintain these excess animals has opened up a debate. This is in response to the 'Opinion' by Dr. Reza Khan (DS, 11 June), my letter (DS, 13 June) and 'Opinion' by the Curator, Dhaka Zoo (DS, 18 June). The national daily in Bangla "Prothom Alo" (19 June) provided some clarification referring to that statement. The debate is very logical since it involves several issues:

- Primarily the release of captive bred tigers and lions in the wild,
- Releasing animals whose origins are not precisely known,
- Allegation by the Curator that the news published did not reflect the actual views of what he said, and

I agree with the Curator that captive breeding programs involving some rare and endangered species in several countries were a success and later those animals were reintroduced in the wild. That is where the role of the zoos all over the world was appreciated in the field of conservation. These were instances that took place a couple of decades ago and at that time scientific information on the implications of reintroducing captive-bred animals was still in infancy. However in those cases, either the origins of the animals were precisely known, or the released animals belonged to the same bloodline of the resident population, or the F1 generation animals were released or the habitat where the animals were released once supported them. These captive breeding and re-introduction programs were carried out under rigorous scru-

tiny and monitoring, which we do not have in the Dhaka Zoo. Moreover, the breeding and re-introduction programs were part of a management plan and as Dr. Khan rightly pointed out the Dhaka Zoo lacks it.

Historically, the lions never inhabited any part of Bangladesh, let alone the Sunderbans. So how can the Curator, holding a responsible position make such a statement? Moreover, the lions at the Dhaka Zoo are the African lions. So where did he find a similarity between the African savannah and the Sunderban mangroves!!

Let us for the sake of argument take that the press did not publish the news correctly. What has the Curator to say about the interview with the BBC? Hundreds of Bangla-speaking people probably heard it, if not thousands. The interview is on tape and can be procured from the BBC for verification.

Wildlife management is a science based on sound, logical theories and applied science, and is not easy as some people may think. Its implications carry far beyond, which the people without proper education and training in wildlife management science will not understand. It is disastrous when some whimsical decision is taken or an irresponsible statement is made. I do not think that our Ministry of Environment & Forest, which is responsible for wildlife, is ignorant of the facts on how to deal with the captive-bred animals. The statements made by Dr. Reza Khan, which the Curator referred to, as 'a utopian story' is grossly, a misstatement on the part of the Curator.

S. M. A. Rashid, PhD  
Mohammadpur, Dhaka

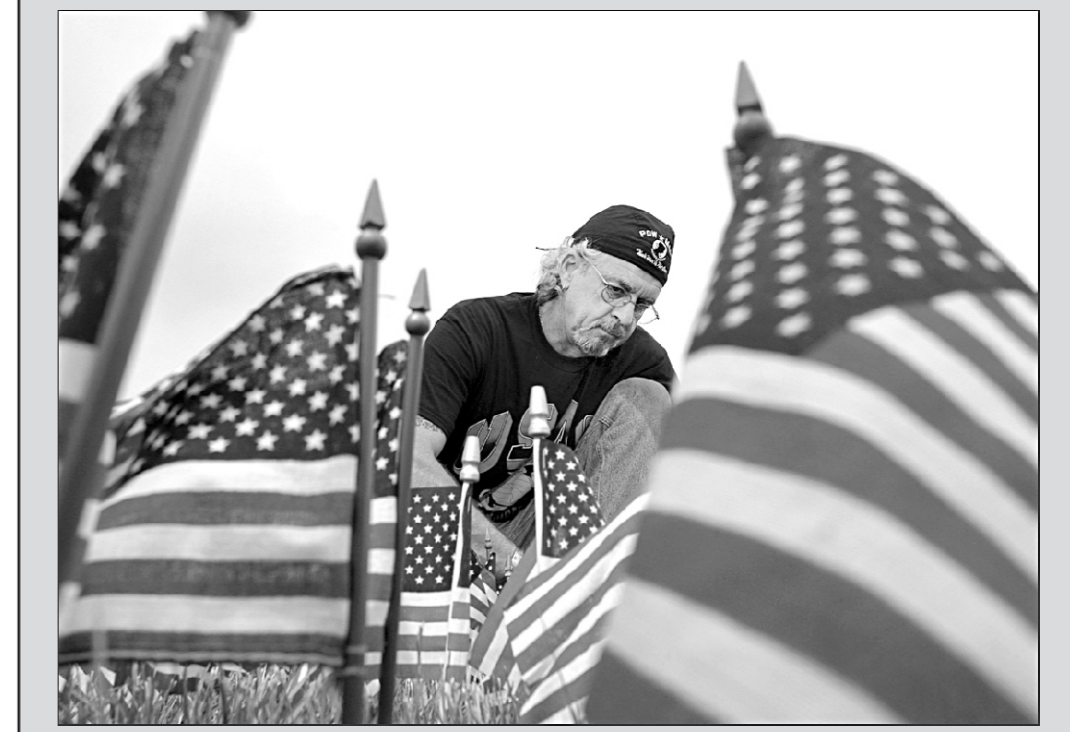


## Unprovoked attack?

BBC fumes it was unprovoked attack by Iraqis that killed six Royal marines south of Basra. US troops have also come under attack almost daily. These attacks are presumably by "remnants of Saddam loyalists"- the so-called miscreants who do not wish the Coalition liberators to succeed and re-build Iraq. It is beginning to sound more than a bit trite and of course outright naive; moreover amusing by this pretension of injured innocence coming from an occupation army. As if unprovoked invasion and ruthless occupation and indiscriminate destruction are not provocation enough.

Those who are well informed know the Iraqis are normally accommodating to the foreigners including the ordinary Americans if and when they come in peace, when they do not insult, provoke or intimidate with unnecessary show of force. All of the above have undeniably happened in post-war Iraq: house and body searches, prisoners tied and hooded, cold blooded use of disproportionate force against unarmed demonstrators, to name a few.

Clearly, the road ahead for the occupation army looks like anything other than rough; more blood will likely be spilt- Iraqi and Coalition. Perhaps, it is with this grim realisation the Americans and the British are hoping to rope in few more willing or reluctant partners to "share" the burden (read to contribute troops and ready to bear casualties). Even rewards are being offered, which might or might not be fully delivered, to hesitant partners.  
Dr. Zakir Husain  
Dhaka



journalism to get elected in parliament to say a word about a topic. This type of challenge only demeans our lawmakers in the eye of ordinary people.

We the less fortunate who could not enter the domed house by popular vote may kindly be regarded as a citizen of the state equally empowered by the constitution to speak freely may be outside the parliament.

Present crisis in the parliament has not arisen out any major political controversy rather out of some unparliamentary talks by one or two lawmakers. The Deputy Speaker belatedly expunged some of the comments which could not solace the major opposition party. They decided to boycott the Sangsad indefinitely. We are not in support of

fight with the spiritual warfare" against Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and ultimately Satan. However, it would be grossly unfair to put all missionaries/preachers into one basket especially when I recall people like Mother Teresa who dedicated their lives to the most needy and helpless or Bishop Tutu who helped eradicate evil like apartheid.

Mrs. Robinson may not have set out to portray Bangladesh as an oppressive society, and I certainly appreciate her subsequent clarification. I concede that I may have misinterpreted her usage of the words "considered deeply dangerous, needing to be carefully watched and under threat of eviction" in the same sentence as Bangladesh as an implicit attack. I am

Secularity, in other words by separating the Church and the State, the Christian majority in West assaults Muslims on two fronts. From the administrative level they pressure the Muslim Governments to chastise practising Muslims (for example Saudi Arabia suspended 1000 Imams recently, the US now dictates the content of the khutba and the textbooks of Gulf countries), while enthusiastic missionaries are busy converting Muslims around the world to Christianity. Definitely "it is not a level playing-field" as asserted by Rev. Robinson.  
Shukla Mirza, Doha, Qatar