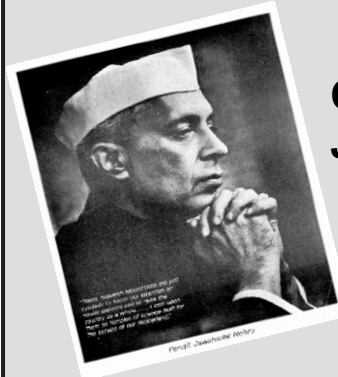


Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.



## On reading Jawaharlal Nehru

At the age of 17, when I was in the first year in college, I finished the huge volume of Nehru's autobiography in one sitting, forgetting about the surroundings and mother's calls at meal times. Such was the hypnotising effect of a good writer (regardless of the topic). Later, I finished his "Discovery of India" in the same manner. How did the writer click on a high-brow topic (politics, culture, imperialism the favourite field of another master, Edward said)?

I was in the formative period of my life, but why I got so engrossed in such a huge and complex topic as India (I was born and educated in Calcutta during the Raj period, and soon had to face the trauma of partition in 1947)? It was more than politics (you do not think of politics that seriously when you are younger). It is the mesmerising effect of a good writer. It is more sincerity than technique. Simple thinking creates simple writing, [the same with Mahatma Gandhi's writings]. Both these writers were acknowledged as top writers of English prose during the 20th century.

Writing is a human invention; it is an art of putting language in the black and white. Animals and birds cannot write or do not know more than one language. But, recently, I was amazed to see in Ripley's Believe it or not programme on the TV a dog writing his name in English on a sheet of paper with a pen. Dolphins and elephants are said to be more clever. But let us come back to writers, writing and readers.

Sincerity in writing is important to attract readers. Nehru wrote with disarming sincerity, hence the message went from heart to heart. That is the secret of good writing you forget you are reading, i.e. you forget the medium, as in intuition. Effects are not tried and spontaneity has its virtues.

Without clarity of thinking, the essential idea cannot be trimmed down to bare essential to be planted as a seed in the reader's mind. Then comes the sprouting, first through the flow of words, focussing into sentences and paragraphs, creating an after glow once the reading is completed. Writing for name and fame does not touch the heart [some Nobel laureates had no idea they were in the running for the prize].

Nehru was well-versed in English literature, and, like Edward Said, was deeply interested in culture and imperialism. But looked at them through the Eastern eyes. The German and French thinkers are different; one like hair-splitting, and the other abstract. The Americans are different from the English and the continental Europeans. Note the wide communication gap the narrow 21-mile English Channel can create! I like Bertrand Russell, but I can grasp Radhakrishnan better and faster. However, but have more empathy with Zen writing (is philosophy a tool or goal? it is a tricky question!).

**AAB, On mail**

the communications ministry to draft a project on the Dhaka city rail line bypass and submit it to the Planning Commission.

The meeting also identified the rail line running through the city as largely responsible for the traffic jams. There are 20 traffic signals between ZIA and Kamalapur rail station. Even the minister himself was late by half an hour to get to the meeting venue because of jam at level crossings. May be the minister's debacle has come as a blessing for us.

**M M Khairuzaman**  
Banani, Dhaka

## 'Ping-pong' over TI report

It was amusing to read Mr Shah Kibria's elaborations in the DS from October 17, 2003 on Transparency International's (TI) Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) 2003. I read the bold-print summary in the middle of the article first, before I saw who had written it. Instinctively, I was expecting some old-school retired bureaucrat, like Muhammad Zamir, to have written the pieces.

But when I saw who was actually behind it, I almost choked in disbelief. When people like Mr Kibria, an influential member of a former government (which was no less corrupt than the present one), writes an article like this, hypocrisy reaches its climax.

How a Bangladeshi is ever going to know who is serious about the desire to fight corruption and who is only talking about it to bash its adversary or to divert attention from their murky record? Maybe the intention behind it, apart from badmouthing the enemy, is to confuse people and make "corruption" another hollow word that needs no serious attempts to tackle. In this manner, people are led to lose hope that nothing much could be done to arrest corruption in our society.

Kibria calls for a "national consensus" on fighting this "menace". If he means this seriously, my question is: Why did he not start trying to find a consensus while he was one of the most powerful members of the former government? Why did he rant against the TI report of 2001 instead, alleging the then opposition BNP of crafting it? And, what this article really is about?

The focus of his piece was not to forge a consensus on fighting corruption, it was an attempt to

white-wash the misdeeds of his own party and to bash the opposition (and TI-bashing too). It is difficult to say how the majority of our people think about the childish 'ping-pong accusations' being traded between the two big parties and their leading figures.

My common sense tells me that every one, educated or not, can figure out after having spent 3 consecutive years as the most corrupt nation that none of our political administrations are pure, hence the sole responsibility for this blotted image lies with them alone.

The readers of the DS are penning in their letters to the editor that they are smarter than those who indulge in corruption while in power and writes obituary on it while in the opposition. People who write constitute a tiny minority and there is little resistance among people against the ongoing corruption by whoever it may be.

I however agree with Mr Kibria that the TI's CPI 'will not make even a small dent in this massive problem' as long as people like Kibria uses such studies and surveys only to slander political opponents, or the TI itself.

My hope is, once the politicians find out that they cannot score with "corruption" or the CPI any more, they might prefer to keep a low profile on the whole issue and leave the talk about it with people who do not live by corrupt means.

**Shahana Rahman**  
Eastern Tower, Dhaka

## Friday works can earn millions

I think Mr. Istiaque Uddin (Electrical Engineering) has failed to comprehend the importance of international transactions. It is not necessary to redefine what "Sunday" and "Friday" means to all of us spiritually, rather, we should look where the world is heading toward.

Our government and one of our electrical engineers seem to believe that earth goes around according to the wishes and whims of the Bangladeshis alone. That is why we scored a hat-trick in Transparency International's (TI) corruption index. Our two "ladies" are constantly at each others' throats and our per capita income is less than \$400.

Let's put the Friday debate into a perspective. Each Friday we do not Transact, we loose an average of \$10,000 on Friday trades alone. That amounts to \$520,000

## Are we endangered species too?

It would not be entirely inappropriate to term the Bangladeshis as yet another endangered species. Endangered species are so called either because their natural habitat is being irreplaceably destroyed or because they are being literally hunted down for various reasons. Whatever the reason is, the eventual effect is the extinction of the species in question. By stripping Bangladesh of moral values and the tenets of a good nation, the ordinary Bangladeshi citizens maybe portrayed as endangered species.

Following is just one example of the many excerpts from a recent Daily Star publication that demonstrates the plight of our citizen: "A hopeless country.

Somebody please give me a visa, so that I can go to another country and live".

Following is a humble attempt to elaborate the above:

Due to the zero tolerance level of major political parties in Bangladesh and their incessant rivalry, ordinary citizen are caught between the crossfire. Painful fallout from this animosity is borne by average citizen.

The catalogue of malice runs endlessly: endemic corruption, insecurity of life, strikes and so on. One who dares to cross the paths of formidable politicians or their associates is likely to encounter abuse, extortion, harassment and even sometimes the ultimate price.

Given the circumstances, the political scenario is rather apparent and quite predictable, albeit with a margin of error. Soon after a party comes to power, a sense of invincibility gets the better of them. All pre election promises are set aside and focus is shifted to perpetuate power at any cost.

Nothing would be a greater beginning than to see both leaders of the two major political parties sit together and bury differences in the greater interest of Bangladesh.

Would the above be too much to ask for by the endangered Bangladeshis?  
**Najmul Halim**  
Dhaka



PHOTO: AFP

## Bypass railway: Better late than never

I am delighted to learn that the government has decided to build a bypass railline between Zia International Airport and Kamalapur railway station to ease Dhaka city's traffic jam. A high-level meeting, held at the

NEC Conference centre, took the decision with the minister of finance in the chair. Better late than never.

The city dwellers in general had been waiting for this for a long time. We should go for this project as early as possible to solve the acute traffic problem of the city and save millions of dollar in fuel/oil. The meeting directed

## My take on war on terror

I have been reading readers' response for quite some time and cannot keep quiet any longer. The letters to the editor in relation to Iraq and war on terror are full of bias against the US and it's allies. Many of the arguments hinge on misinformation and jump to conclusions without checking facts. I am dismayed at the utter lack of thought that these people can display in a leading publication.

Those who oppose the war think it is being waged against Muslims, which the Muslim world believes too. No one ever hears when politicians repeatedly say that the war is not against a religion, but against the people who'd hijacked a religion. People also believe that the war against Iraq is unjustified.

Go and ask the Iraqis if they would like Saddam back. I feel majority will say no. We also see that they don't like the Americans either and are waging a guerrilla war against coalition forces. Who else had the resolve to start this war, certainly not the spineless Europeans. People also think that this war is to help only Israel. Of course Israel will benefit, so will the rest of the world.



PHOTO: AFP

There are many things that Israel does that I am not happy about, but you know what, how many innocent civilians die when a suicide bomber unleashes his destructive evil? People have to remember one thing - the state of Israel is never going to go away. Once they accept that, then peace becomes the only easy alternative. Israel also must remember that it can not keep the Palestinians under occupation for too long. The resistance is growing stronger and so is global opinion against Israeli excesses.

The US and it's allies are sacrificing a lot to help the world rid of terrorism. This is going to be a long fight, which may never end. There will always be people wanting to impose their beliefs upon others. The US is not alone. Almost daily, US soldiers are being killed, not by ordinary Iraqis, but by terrorists who are bent on disrupting peace.

I agree the US does have lust for Iraqi oil, but it also has a stake in preserving global peace. I believe that the world will be better off if it depends less and less on Saudi Arabian oil and the Iraqi oil reduces pressure on the global oil market.  
**S Khan, USA**



## Multi-layered persecutions

Many stories are heard about wretched girls ending up in brothels against their will. We know that they make a living by selling their body and hide their pains. We should raise our voice against harassment of sex workers and vouch for their rights to lead a normal social life, free from mental and physical exploitations.

But what to do with other weak and poor individuals of our society. Like sex workers, these individuals too are exploited and turned victims of mental prostitution by the influential and the powerful. Are we aware of it?

For example, in an office, a man working in a junior post has to undergo lot of humiliation. It's not unusual to abuse low-graded staff members for bosses' mistakes. With patience, the junior has to accept the abuses of bosses, lest the boss decides to fire him/her given that thousands other are waiting to pick up the same low paid job in an economy where almost 40 percent able workers are rotting with curses of unemployment.

Similarly, when a child worker sees that in time of leisure he/she must toil hard when his/her master's son or daughter of his/her age enjoys a show on TV and plays games, he/she feels persecuted. The child labour must accept this persecution due to the burden of poverty. In a society like ours, persecution is multi-layered.  
**Rubab Abdullah**  
Dhaka Cantonment, Dhaka

## Grading system welcome

Finally our government and the teachers had successfully publish the HSC result of 2003 with universal grading system. It's really a wonderful achievement. I was a student of the last batch and passed with mark-based assessment system. We are all habituated with the

## A child's appeal to government



My name is Fahim and I am an eleven years old boy. I study in class five. I am writing about educational facilities of children.

In our country many children are illiterate. I do not think that we can blame their poor parents for their children's illiteracy. Some people are really poor and cannot afford much; even their children also work. They work as domestic servants and helpers in small motor garages, or as hawkers and so on. If we deeply think about these problems we will see that these problems have solutions. The government can help these poor children to overcome their problems.

It makes me sad that children of my age do not get the chance of being educated. I hope that the problem will be solved sooner.

**Mohammed Fahim Hara**  
Class 5, Roll no 2  
BIAM laboratory school  
Eskatan Road, Dhaka

dents always judged others by marks only.

Comparatively, there are lot of good things about the grading system. Students have to know all the subjects they have taken in their courses. And if a student secures 80 per cent marks in all the subjects, he/she can easily get an A+. Now nobody can show off his or her marks.

Though its already late to start the grading system in the higher secondary, its really good that from now on, like other developing countries, our students will also enjoy the grade system in their SSC and HSC results. In our

## to think

I am sure many of your readers, like me, were both pleased and moved to be able to read the unabridged text of the speech of Mahathir Mohamad delivered in the OIC. As the subsequent article by Zafar Sobhan indicated, the media of the Western world ignored its major points and focused myopically on the anti-Semitism. In a brilliant section, your Assistant Editor hammered home the point that we can be disapproving of some actions of the Israeli government and forces without being anti-Semitic - and

that the late, lamented Edward Said was a role-model for thinking.

But we can all be selective about the points we choose to focus on and be intellectually lazy about other points that are more demanding because they are critical of our situation. I am concerned about another part of that speech which those nearer home might not attend to -- namely the section on the importance of thinking.

Zafar Sobhan applied this to the Muslim world and to all of us. This is one thing that some Jews can teach us. I had some months on an Orthodox Jewish kibbutz, in the 1960s, on a World Council of Churches scholarship to study the concept of 'community' and came away wondering if the rest of the world were serious. Here was a community, some of whose members still had their concentration camp numbers tattooed on their arm, who set out to prove that Hitler was wrong when he sneered, "The Jews cannot be soldiers and cannot be farmers."

Within a generation, they were among the finest soldiers in the world (with a death rate among officers that indicated how many of them led from the front). They began sending agricultural advisers all over the world to poorer countries whose desert areas, like theirs, could be made to 'blossom like roses'. As too many in the Muslim world can sport anti-Semitism, so, too, many educational establishments can live without imparting any real education. This is the outcome of the works of those who don't bother to think and deliver only what the examiners want.

I now understand the starry-eyed admiration of a prestigious Bangladeshi that I met in the UK, who praised the kind of relationship that the teachers had with the students while she was doing her doctorate in Human Rights Law at my local university. The teachers encouraged true debate and actually listened to their students.

From my days at Oxford, I was aware that I was perfectly free to disagree with my tutor, even if s/he had just written a book on the subject. The importance of education is to teach students to think.

Bangladeshi are among the most brilliant students in the world when it comes to passing examinations, but, like students everywhere, the sad fact is that this does not necessarily go with their capacity to think. The education we offer encourages students to get good grades, but does not prepare them to face the challenges of the society, country and the world at large.

**Angela Robinson (Rev Mrs)**  
Principal of the British School in Dhaka, Lalmatia