

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.



TASLIMA NASRIN



LAJJA  
SHAME



## Dear Ms Taslima

Your "Nirbachito Kolam" is one of my most favourite books (or maybe I should say "was", since someone stole it from my mom long ago). Although the book lacked any thorough analyses, it was full of questions and options for alternative thinking. It questioned many of our traditional values, customs and beliefs. It was wonderful to be able to see things differently. I was too young then to discern between good and bad sentences and was impressed mainly by the context, instead of the literary quality of that work. However, so far I remember, it was a good book.

Then I read "Lojja" -- out of curiosity and was appalled by its utterly poor standard -- not the Hindu-Muslim frame, but the novel as a whole was disappointing. I agree with the dilemma Hindus are facing, though.

Now about your recent "Ka". I did not have a chance to read it wholly, only the excerpts, intentionally distributed by some concerned "groups" online. True or false? I hardly care. What I care about is your stand and your standard as an author. If you are truly as egalitarian and liberal as you claim to be, then what is so special about your personal experiences with some other famous authors? Why is it worth publishing any way?

Extramarital affair is common in our society, however discreetly it happens. What is bothering me is your motive: Was it inspired by creative ingenuity or personal ambition for mere fame and publicity?

If it is creative ingenuity, then I must admit, "Ka" has very little to offer. But if it is just an effort to become controversial, you have succeeded.

I am shocked and disappointed at your selfishness, that you somehow chose to exploit liberalism. You published the book being fully aware that it would cause agitation, at the same time spared no opportunity to portray yourself to be a *muktomona* or free-thinker.

Are you really free, or just a prisoner of your own illusion of freedom? Once again, I admire your courage to question religious and traditional bigotry, gender discrimination, etc. I am myself somehow rebellious. But when I think that you described your personal memoir only to proclaim your status as a free thinker, that you are intellectually superior and more venturesome than others, it hurts. Is the book right about Mr. Haq? Maybe it is, it does not really matter. What matters is whether Ms Taslima is true to her cause, that she is truly dedicated to liberation of women and the oppressed, not her self-interests of being famous as a "controversial writer".

If your goal was to reveal the mask of Mr. Haq, then the effort appears to be too personal. Literary corners all over the globe are full of excesses: in sex, drugs, romantic relationships etc. Mr. Haq should not be an exception. Nor is any one else, even you.

The funny thing is, in those intimate scenes you appeared to be a participant (since you are an adult, avoiding your own responsibility in those moments would be a hypocritical behaviour). Then, you went on depicting Mr. Haq as the initiator and yourself as an innocent bystander -- who just observes and comments later on!

Had those chapters been written as a simple narrative, that would have been perfectly all right. But they weren't. Your sentences were written in a judgmental and accusatory tone, which is anything but a simple narrative style of a memoir. Therefore, the question about your motive becomes so irresistible.

The new generation always crave for something genuine, they look for role models. You could be one. But if "Ka" is any example, despite the integrity of the facts, it certainly raises questions about your integrity as an agent of benevolent social change. That is where my deepest disappointment lies.

You are now a fellow at Carr Institute of Harvard University, and we hope you will contribute to

global human rights issues. But I worry that many in the West fail to comprehend you from a critical viewpoint, since the linguistic and cultural gap between Bangladesh and the West is quite a big one. Nor is it possible for them to distinguish between a truly creative urge and a fetish for becoming a literary figure. They may also fail to understand that "controversy" does not mean "content."

However, you are a famous person now, deservedly or not. I request you, on behalf of all who are victims of religious and social oppression -- children, women, men, all -- that you utilise your position and pen for greater ends. It's much better than tickling public sensitivity or becoming famous by proclaiming about some sexual encounters with an elderly writer. The world has much more pressing issues than these. By the way, I do disagree with Mr. Haq's claim about banning your book; none should ban a book unless it threatens human security (like a terrorist manual, etc.). I think Mr. Haq's is as immature an initiative as your recent work "Ka".

I wish you all the best.  
**Anonymous, One-mail**

## "ka"

I wonder what would be the next surprise from Syed Shamsul Haq in the name of protecting decency of the nation (!) and protecting 'freedom of pen' (banning a book!!).

What you did, Mr. Haq, aptly qualifies you to join the vice squad of the Talibans. In the eyes of the civilised world, your self-defence is simply outrageous and unacceptable. Your apology, in fact, proves you as an opportunist, as you were aware that being in exile, Ms Taslima would not be able to defend herself in the court. Should you have had the moral courage to face the truth and faith in your proclaimed freedom of pen, instead of going to the court, what you would have done is exactly what morals you attempted to preach: take advantage of your freedom of pen to refute Taslima's account.

Alas, as opposed to pen, you chose the chain of law whose pen now it appears to be in chain, Mr. Haq? This act also exposes another side of your character: hypocrisy, as the irony of the incident is that to suppress the truth by banning the book you went to a court of the government, which often you decry as being fundamentalist. What is more, when the same government had banned "Lojja", you had decied it with a loud voice. Therefore, I ask you a straight forward question: do you stand by your previous decision to decry censorship? Do you now believe that like this time, banning the "Lojja" was a correct decision?

Given your chameleon behaviour, people would like to have some answers from you:

- Would you withdraw your criticism of the government's decision of banning the novel "Lojja"?
- Instead of back-stabbing Taslima unfairly, would you provide the readers your version of the incidences that she claims to have taken place?
- Because of the graphic depiction of sexuality and dehumanisation of the fair sex as an object of molestation, as depicted in your numerous novels, if the honourable court decides to ban them on the ground of obscenity, would you agree to withdraw their circulation and pay punitive fine, as you claimed from the publisher of "Ka"?
- Should the scores of obscene screenplays that you wrote for the vulgar Bengali movies (and made mock protest in public) be banned also?
- Above all, for the sake of societal health, do you retain morality to enjoy your "freedom of pen"?
- Lastly, was this censorious attempt an act of your individual will, or was it a collective effort, as a member of the pack of wolves, who used to shed tears to protect Taslima's "freedom of pen" and now prefer a golden silence?

**Aneesa Batul**  
University of Denver Colorado, USA

## Monga and the 'super-expensive lehenga'

With the near-completion of the holy month of Ramadan, one that teaches the rich and the able to refrain from luxury, a group of people is struck by Eid fever and is engaged in buying lavish costumes like lehenga.

A second group is now facing starvation in the monga-hit areas.

Apart from all these, a relatively tiny third group feels very satisfied and happy to be able to throw grand and lavish Iftar parties in five-star hotels in honour of the handful of 'elite'. Such a 'high-profile' feasting congregation is sure to provide the hosts with social and political mileage and help dazzle with fake dignity.

In a country like Bangladesh, democracy cries for freedom at the cruel expense of natural and man-made disasters like monga, flood, cold-wave, arson, rape, murder, abduction and toll-collection, and also smiles, but in a mocking tone, before stage-shows of the blazing lehenga and Iftargalas.

**AA**  
Dhaka

## Dr. B and our political culture

So far we have come across many arguments and counter-arguments in favour of and against Dr. Badruddoza Choudhury's re-emergence in politics. Bangladesh's image has been badly tarnished in recent times; yet our political leaders do not have any worries about that.

I guess the incidents that have taken place surrounding Dr. B and his son Mahi B Choudhury, are totally unfair. In our country, politics means "rivalry". The political parties always fail to notice the good sides of the opposition. That is what our politics is.

Dr. B is the only outspoken politician in Bangladesh. For this reason, our political leaders are now after him. Whatever the doctor said, he said so considering the BNP as his own party. And I guess he has the right to do so. And about the reactions he got -- I can only say that people are not open to new ideas. They should appreciate his ideas.

Corruption, black marketing, political rivalry, murder, kidnapping and rape have become part of life. But who is supposed to take the necessary action against all these? It is none other than the political leaders. But it is our bad luck that the country does not have such leaders who care for the collective good and will do something to change the prevailing situation.

I am very happy that someone has finally opened his mouth. Now let's wait and see whether any positive change takes place in the days ahead.

**Waarithah Ahsan**  
South Breeze School, Dhaka

## Hitler and the man from Ottawa

The October 29 letter comparing the former prime minister of Malaysia, Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, with Hitler, still bothers me. We expect the editors of the Letter to the Editor section of The Daily Star to be a little more vigilant. In the letter, Mr. Mahmood Elahi (if that is his real name) from Ottawa (if that is where he really lives) quite bizarrely compares Dr. Mahathir with Hitler!

Dr. Mahathir's October 16 speech at the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) has been criticised in America and in Israel for certain comments he made about the Jews. However, neither in the US nor in Israel has he been compared with Hitler. While Hitler exterminated the Jews, Mahathir advised the Muslims to

emulate them! Freedom of speech does not mean the freedom to insult and slander a distinguished statesman. Sure, the Ku Klux Klan also has the freedom of speech. They have the right to say, and they do say, the most awful things about the blacks in their own publications.

The Daily Star has tarnished its image by providing Mr. Elahi with a forum to bring ridiculous charges against Dr. Mahathir Mohamad.

In his letter, Mr. Elahi makes the ludicrous claim, "He (Mahathir) is trying to find a scapegoat for his own failures." Mahathir's failures? Here is a man who transformed Malaysia from a third world country into a first world country in the course of 22 years, and Mr. Elahi calls him a "failure!" What then is success? This is as absurd as ridiculing Albert Einstein for his scientific 'failures!'

**An irate Daily Star reader**  
New York, USA

## The minister is right

I am writing this letter after reading the Internet Edition of The Daily Star (20th Nov. 2003).

There were two articles "One Sixth of Children Work" and "Saifur Slams Survey".

I agree with the honorable minister's comment, "In my view, people aged 17 are not children".

Here in Australia everyone from the age of 15 is considered an adult, and an active member of the work force.

Secondly, anyone is considered a part of the work force, if they work for an hour per week.

I would suggest that the BBS decide on an International Standard and learn from one of the high profile economies (Australia) in the world. The BBS should not try to smear the image of our beloved motherland by providing information which will portray a negative image of Bangladesh.

This matter needs to be looked into as the BBS is a government organisation.

As an expatriate and a die-hard well-wisher of my motherland, I would appreciate if The Daily Star discourages such smear campaigns which undoubtedly further defame our country.

**Naved Islam**  
MEng (Fiber Optics), MIE Aust  
Melbourne, Australia

## Khoda Hafez or Allah Hafez?

I have gone through the article 'Khoda Hafez vs. Allah Hafez' written by Mr. Mahfuzur Rahman and published in the DS on 18.11.03. It was quite informative and timely and I thank Mr. Rahman for his contribution to the subject. But, I don't agree that it has anything to do with the AL or the BNP.

I have been using 'Khoda Hafez' since my childhood (I still do sometimes) but was convinced to switchover to 'Allah Hafez' after being informed by one of my relatives that the Persian word 'Khuda' could express both plural and singular (i.e. gods and God) while the Arabic word 'Allah' could express only the singular (i.e. God). So, I thought it would be more appropriate and proper to use 'Allah Hafez' than 'Khoda Hafez' as we believe in one God.

However, I didn't have the opportunity to verify this information and had to rely on my relative and his goodwill. Neither did I find this valuable information anywhere in the article of Mr. Rahman, although this was the core reason for switching to 'Allah Hafez' to many, like me.

May I, therefore, request Mr. Rahman to investigate the legitimacy of the said information. If the information is found to be incorrect, I might revert to my old expression 'Khoda Hafez'.

## Rickshaws in Dhaka city

Thanks to active, authoritative action, rickshaws have disappeared from many VIP roads in recent years. However, they are still causing traffic-jams in many places.

I think instead of completely withdrawing rickshaws from the streets of Dhaka, they should be allowed to ply on separate lanes in the main roads.

Rickshaws are an environment-friendly transport and a huge number of people are earning their livelihood by pulling them. Withdrawal of rickshaws has enlarged the already existing unemployment problem and has also increased the risk of road accidents as many of the rickshaw-pullers became CNG drivers overnight.

As for minibus drivers, I am afraid, most of them do not possess a valid and genuine driving licence!

**Prof. M Zahidul Haque**  
Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University, Dhaka



**Tanvir Rahman**  
Baridhara, Dhaka

## Good editorial

The editorial in your paper on November 19 titled "Indecent, personal attacks in Parliament" was very well written and appropriate. I have no doubt that all well-wishers of Bangladesh share your sentiments and comments. It is a pity that a member of parliament could use such unparliamentary language about a colleague who happens to be the Leader of the Opposition.

What is even more inexplicable is that the deputy speakers sat through the derogatory speech by the member,

Opposition herself on many occasions made speeches against Khaleda Zia similar to the one she has been subjected to on this occasion. Many such speeches were also made by her party colleagues while she was in the House.

Finally, on a related matter regarding parliament, why should the AL leaders be so concerned about this infamous speech? They seem to have written off parliament in any case and it is unlikely they will ever come back, unless they return to power. While I agree with you that this member's speech should be condemned loudly and unequivocally, I do not concur with you that this has made the return of the AL to parliament an even more

poverty, slowly but surely. I urge you to face the reality which is Bangladesh. This is our motherland and Bengalees are a nation with a glorious history.

If I have offended you in any way, take the words of Mahatma Gandhi as a message of peace: "You must be the change you wish to see in the world."

**Ashfaq Siddiqui**  
One-mail

## Taslima's latest 'victims'

Never believe or support a slanderer, because one day you will become his/her victim. It is a fact.

Novelist Syed Shamsul Haq and other intellectuals not only defended

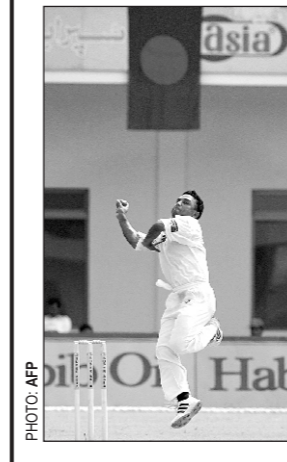
## This is our team

I write in reply to the letter posted by Mr. Ahmad Kamal, Abu Dhabi, UAE, dated Saturday 15/11/03.

Whilst I can understand Mr. Kamal's frustration and indeed many others, I would like to point out the road to success is never easy. In any field it requires hard work, discipline and above all, patience. And perhaps at times, even a bit of divine inspiration.

As such I find Mr. Kamal's views very unfortunate. It should not matter to us what anyone else outside Bangladesh says about our cricket. We are duty bound to support our national team. There is never a quick fix or short cut to success. There seems to be a real malaise in our nature to cut corners.

Therefore I make a call for all to support our teams both in times of good and bad. We, and the national team, do not need 'fair-weather' friends.  
**Asif Ahmed, Lendal Terrace, London, UK**



**PHOTO: AFP**

and senior ministers of the BNP did nothing to stop him from bringing shame to parliament. However, I have a couple of observations on this issue that I would like to share with other readers. While for any profession in Bangladesh, there is a set of requirements; there is none for becoming a honourable member of our parliament except that of age.

Then there is the issue of Newton's logic that every action has an equal and opposite reaction. While reading your editorial, some of us may have the wrong notion that this is the first time that an MP stood in parliament and went on a character assassination mission. When the AL was in power, there were many such instances in which the opposition leaders became the target of verbal abuse. Then prime minister and now the Leader of the

distant possibility. The AL has left no doubt in the minds of people that it would not return to parliament. The reasons that they have put forward thus far for not doing so are flimsy, to say the least.

**Shahjahan Ahmed**  
Dhanmandira, Dhaka

## Our image abroad

I want to respond to Samir Ahmed's concerns (A concerned Bangladeshi from Purdue University, USA, November 22) over the image of Bangladesh in the United States.

I think it would be useful for you to realise that people will think about what they wish to bother about, and it is not up to anyone else to force others to find interest in something that they don't like. If we make people from other countries think of Bangladesh as a paradise, it won't do anyone any good, my friend! I know that's not exactly the picture you are asking the media to portray, but we are still a staggeringly poor country.

Me, you -- the educated reading The Daily Star -- are a minority in our society. Those scantily clad children are a part of the nation and that's what our majority people look like. Those floods that we are infamous for are a reality which numerous struggling countrymen face every year. We face it, as we do not have the proper resources, ability and motivation, to deal with seasonal flood.

The image of us being stuck in the 1890's with bullocks and carts on the muddy pathways is obviously the one that foreigners have. We, the educated, must concern ourselves with much more important things than trying to force a fictitious idea into foreign minds to further the image of our country.

The fact that we have shopping malls and taxis in Dhaka, Chittagong, Sylhet, and some other places might indicate that we are coming out of

Taslima Nasreen by blasting her critics, but also supported her indecent, tasteless, vulgar writings. And now it's she who gave them the same medicine which she gave to others, or treated them in the same manner. So, why file a defamation suit?

The bottom line is: As you sow, so you reap.  
**Iqbal Ahmed**  
New Eskaton, Dhaka

## Mr. Haq's plea

The course that Syed Haq has followed to castrate the freedom of pen of Ms Taslima speaks for his male chauvinistic ego.

I can assure you that in a society, where news of female students being molested by their respected teachers are published frequently (Ref. the recent incident in Rajshahi University), such sexual harassment by our so-called progressive writers could not have been the figment of imagination.

Our senior students made us aware of these pervers, who in the guise of being progressive intellectuals, tend to exploit the innocent and young female students, especially those lacking a strong personality.

Such news should become public. Because of the social stigma that we would have to face, compounded with a sense of guilt, shame, and fear to lose public face, we could not always take legal action against such harassment. Had there been social justice, I can guarantee that a good number of our so-called vanguards of modernity, who claim to belong to schools of contemporary writing, would have ended up in prison.

I congratulate Ms Taslima for exposing the double faces of the hypocrites.  
**Sheema**  
One-mail

## Banshkhali tragedy, not an ordinary crime

I was deeply shocked after reading the news of the Banshkhali tragedy. I have lost my words to express my disgust at the massacre of the innocent people. I cannot imagine how a human being can commit such a crime.

Why even the innocent four-day-old baby had to die? Who can console the sole surviving member of the family who has lost all his nearest and dearest?

The culprits torched the house with the inmates locked in, and left the scene when they were sure that all was finished. Eleven men and women were burnt to death alive! After the massacre, many ministers, leaders and police officers rushed to the spot. Some of them have commented that it was the act of a gang of robbers, while others, including the local chairman, have termed it as a pre-planned car-

nage. If the motive was robbery, why haven't they broken the steal *almirah* and taken away the valuables? Whatever may be the motive of the killings, the culprits and their accomplices should be brought to justice as soon as possible and given exemplary punishment.

This is the third incident of killing of minority people by torching in that region. So, the authorities should not be in undue haste in making any comment. The minority community in Bangladesh is helpless and insecure, though the majority may not understand the feelings of the minority. I request the government of Bangladesh to ensure security of the minority community.

**Topon Kumar Paul**  
University of Tokyo, Japan

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It's very shocking for all of us that 11 members of a minority family, including a four-day-old baby, were burnt to death as robbers (?!?!). Set fire to a two storied earthen house in a village in Banshkhali upazila, only 30 miles off our major port city.

Ministers, high officials including the IGP and so many dignitaries visited the place by a special helicopter and gave 50 thousand taka and assured the victims of more help, including setting up of a temporary police camp there. Was it an acceptable solution? Where are our lawmakers, politicians and civil society members?

**Gopal Sengupta and Shyamali Sengupta**  
Montreal, Quebec, Canada



**PHOTO: STAR**