

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.

Why hartal?

If the opposition parties are so serious about the safety, security and welfare of us, citizens, then why can't they pursue their concerns through legally and constitutionally approved ways - that is through parliament? A country's opposition parties are the only recognised critics and watchdog which are assigned the job of overseeing the government's policies and their implementation. Thus, it is normal for an opposition party in any country to oppose the government's proposed policies; though, it is very abnormal to oppose every policy. This is because the government of a country is elected and given the authority by the majority of the public to govern the country the way they want, not how the opposition wants.

In this case, the opposition parties of our country do not want to contradict the government policies in parliament because the government will not simply give in on every demand of the opposition. Likewise, if the opposition party supports every policy of the government, consequently, if tranquility, satisfaction and success prevail amongst the public, it will manifestly signify its trust and allegiance to the government. If this happens,

there will be virtually no chance for the opposition to persuade the public to vote for them in the next general election.

Ultimately, the opposition parties are left with only one option, which is to incite its supporters to bring about agitation programmes against the government. Hence, I can

guarantee that without public support, there is not a single opposition party in this world that can enforce hartal and bring the whole country to a halt.

In Bangladesh, there are multitudes of people who are fanatically obsessed with their political parties' interests. Even if their political parties

want to engage them in any activity, which will bring total destruction to the country, they will not hesitate to go by the party dictates. People of our country want to see their political party in power and don't like to be in the opposition.

It is proven from history that foreigners governed us better, regrettably though. I am

immensely saddened to learn that we cannot govern ourselves with stability.

If we consider the quote of MK Gandhi then surely, we will be able to reform ourselves swiftly. Gandhi said, "You will have to be the change you want to see in others."

Mohammed Ali
Manchester, UK



PHOTO: AFP

Kushtia operation

The more than 18-hour long biggest ever operation in Kushtia on Thursday ended without arrest of any JMB operatives.

Primarily, a 100-strong local force started the operation and three helicopters took commandos of Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) from Dhaka. About 1,000 men from police, Rab and Bangladesh Rifles searched every house in 10 villages in two upazilas (The Daily Star, 21 Jan, 2006). They were reinforced with another 700-strong force. Despite this huge number of personnel the operation ended in a fiasco. Actually this (ostensible) operation was not an endeavour to capture the top brass of the JMB but to show the countrymen and

foreigners that the four-party government is very keen and sincere to fight JMB. But like many people do not buy this argument as their previous and even present attitude towards JMB and other religious (so called Islamic) militants and tacit support to the rise of the JMB are well documented.

There was no need of such massive operation involving lots of resources. If government were really sincere (not really) they could do it with even a small number of law enforcers. Locals had to endure untold sufferings and agony. They were awakened up from the bed and were frightened to see the crack forces.

I think the four-party government knows the whereabouts of JMB top brass. They are waiting for

an opportune moment to catch them and reap big benefits in terms of publicity just before the next elections.

Mallik Akram Hossain
The University of Hong Kong

Stampede at Meena

It has been reported that at least 363 pilgrims died at Meena due to stampede when they were throwing stone on the effigy of Satan/Iblis as a compulsory ritual of hajj. This is the second incident of this year. Earlier 76 pilgrims died due to collapse of a residential hotel building at Mecca. This has become a normal phenomenon that some pilgrims would die every year under most unfortunate circumstances. This is very sad and

disgusting. Statistics revealed that 1426 pilgrims died in 1990 during crossing of a tunnel, 218 died at Meena in 1998, 35 died in 2001, 14 died in 2003 and 25 died in 2004.

Millions of pilgrims from different Muslim countries of the world are visiting KSA every year to perform the holy hajj and their number will increase in the years to come. The tragic death of pilgrims mostly occurred at Meena during throwing of stones and the effigy of Satan is situated at a small valley of Meena and its entrance route is very narrow which creates congestion during hajj. Besides, some pilgrims carry their luggage on their shoulders and their luggage fall on the ground when they kneel down. It does create an additional jam.

The following steps may be

taken for avoiding such tragedy in future:

1. The Saudi government's hajj management should be reorganised. They should ensure the total security of the pilgrims.
2. Discipline the pilgrims so that the order is never broken.
3. Some orientation course for the pilgrims is necessary before hajj and that should be organised by their countries.
4. Replacing of the Satan's effigy at a suitable place should be considered.
5. In course of time this congregation may turn unmanageable due to increasing number of pilgrims. So, our Islamic scholars should work out how it can be organised.

We hope that the Saudi government will come forward to revamp

their hajj administration considering the above points.
M.H. Bari
West Dhanmondi, Dhaka

Balance in education

In our country, there is no balance in education. Students are studying as per demand. So, when the demand of a certain area is filled up, students of that area get into a trap. We experienced that in the 1980-90s period, people were more interested to study humanities subjects, besides medical and engineering. So, we see most of the senior educated persons of our society have M.A. degree. (very few MBAs).

In the 1990-2000 period we saw a marked shift, as students switched to computer science and IT education.

And now we are experiencing that most of the students want to study BBA and MBA. But the demand and market of BBA degree holders are rapidly reducing. If the current rate of studying BBA & neglecting study of humanities continues, then we will see a serious crisis of job for the business administration graduates.

It is very important to remove this discrimination to maintain balance in the job market and to ensure proper educational environment. So, I think there must be a quota system in our education policy, which will decide how many students will study science, humanities and commerce in a certain year and the rest of the students should be transferred to technical and industrial fields to maintain the balance.

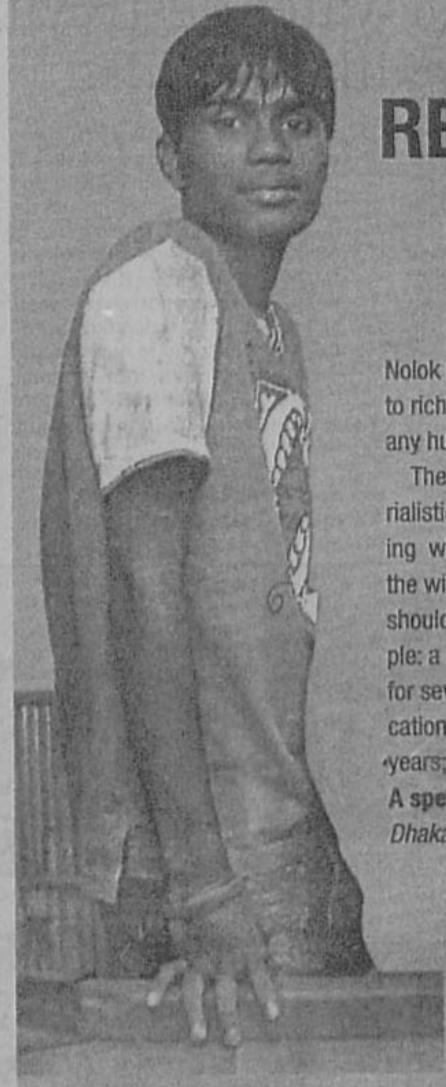
Tamim Ahmed
East West University

Save the bridge

The first Bangladesh-China friendship bridge, which is situated at Postogola region in Dhaka city, is now completely vulnerable. The bridge is a major attraction to the people of Dhaka & this is also a place to spend leisure time. The people of surrounding areas use it as a place of jogging & every day many people visit the bridge. In the evening the view of the sunset is quite beautiful from the bridge. And, overall, the bridge is the main entrance of Dhaka city from southern region. It will be more important when the Padma Bridge is built.

But the department concerned doesn't look after it properly. The bridge is going to be abandoned very soon. The environment of the bridge is quite bad. There is no light in the bridge, so hijackers take their chance. The railings are broken, there are some holes in the footpath of the bridge, and a temporary bus stoppage has been there on the

Achievement & REWARD



Nolo Babu's rise from rags to riches is an inspiration for any human endeavour.

The prizes offered (materialistic) should be in keeping with the background of the winner. At least there should be options: for example; a monthly remuneration for several years; free education facility for 10-20 years; a house or a flat.

A spectator
Dhaka

bridge for 15 years. These are creating serious problems for the pedestrians. During the Eid-ul-Azha a cattle market is organised on the footpath of the bridge.

Once I used to visit the bridge every evening but in the last five years I didn't go there more than thrice because of its environment.

So it's time to take proper steps to save the bridge from destruction.

Solaiman Palash
East Jurain, Dhaka

Modernism and believers

I strongly refute some claims made by non-Muslims that many Imams from around the world are brainwashing a large number of followers of Islam.

Today's lifestyle of so-called modern people and their freedom of will are greatly influencing and in fact diluting the faith of a large number of Muslims around the world. This is because the non-believers have set and perceived this world as an objective. And that objective is to extract as much enjoyment from this world as possible.

Those who are obsessed with the false beliefs of this worldly life should be reminded that whether they believe it or disbelieve it, accept it or reject it, willingly or unwillingly, every single thing between this Earth and Heaven, every Domain in the Dominion between this Earth and Heaven belongs to Allah, the Lord of all creation.
M.A.I., UK

BTRC decision...

It seems that the BTRC have asked the mobile phone operators to collect personal details of all their existing mobile phone subscribers. This seems a little like closing the stable door after the horse has bolted.

In the case of post-paid connections, there will obviously be no problem. However, the prepaid connections, which have proliferated into the millions, will be another matter. Although the initial prepaid subscriber was required to submit photos and other details, these connections have often changed hands; sometimes through sale and sometimes as outright gifts, and in many cases the connections have changed hands multiple times.

This situation has arisen because of a lapse on the part of both the BTRC as well as the mobile phone operators. Strict regulations should have been in place, and compliance enforced, on the transfer of connections after initial sale. The laxity of the operators was clear when I once complained to a service provider about obscene calls I was receiving, and when they learned that it was a prepaid connection they dismissed the matter saying that there was no way for them to verify who was carrying the connection. There was no interest in checking even the details of the initial subscriber.

Now that national security concerns have resulted in the monitoring of all telephone communications, it has proven impossible to identify who is making and receiving the calls being intercepted. Something obviously has to be done, but taking knee-jerk actions and snapping all unidentified connections will result in huge losses of revenue to the operators and inconvenience to the subscribers. Rather than summoning all mobile phone operators to BTRC offices and barking out orders, a well-thought-out mode of action should be developed by BTRC in consultation with the operators and any others who might have expertise in such matters, including the intelligence agencies, keeping subscribers interests in mind. A situation which has developed over the years, largely because of the indifference on the part of the regulatory body and the operators, cannot be resolved overnight.

Syed Hamde Ali
The Nawab Palace, Bogra

Bangladesh Telephone Regulatory Commission (BTRC) has taken a wise as well as much needed step through banning the free talk hours of mobile phone companies. It has become almost a curse in our daily life. Youngsters chatted for long hours without any good reason. Also pranks calls and eve teasing through mobile phones were increas-

ing at an alarming rate. We witnessed the effect of this offer when the network of phone companies started deteriorating. One could not make even his important calls. Night birds were chatting and general people suffered. Studies of teenaged students were going to dogs. Even if anyone wanted to avoid this huge network of free chatters, he/she was obviously teased by his mates and it was a sign of coolness that they could talk for a long time. Lovebirds took this chance, and used it as best as possible and also lost their valuable time.

I firmly believe if the mobile phone companies stop giving away this free hours and reduce their call rate during peak hours, it will be helpful for all kinds of people.

The step taken by BTRC should be welcomed by all and sundry.
Shoaib, Dhanmondi, Dhaka

I have recently come to know that BTRC has told all the mobile network providers to stop giving free talk time. I know many people might disagree with me, but personally I welcome what BTRC has done. It is true that the "Free Talk Time" has advantages and people appreciated it. But this is also true that many people are using those services for useless talks for hours and hours, they keep the network busy all night long. For this reason, common people like me do not get connection when it is really necessary as the network remains busy.

I hope the mobile network providers will think about it and they will use any other plan in order to get more customers instead of those free talk times at night.

Naba, Dhaka Cantonment, Dhaka

Some mobile phone companies were offering free talk time at night. However, the offer did not benefit the professionals, rather it encouraged students to spend their time chatting with friends. So the government decision to stop it is based on sound logic.

Md. Noman Siddique, On e-mail

The recent queer decision of BTRC regulatory committee has puzzled all the cell phone subscribers. While the mobile phone companies are keeping their subscribers under pressure through imposing very high call rate, it was a very great opportunity for us to have a chance of conversation on the cell phone.

But their argument and the lame excuse are surprising.
Saif
University of Dhaka



There are more than 400,000 children in the Dhaka city, all of whom must work from dawn till dusk each day, earning an average of 14 taka to help support their families. Education is not an option for these children, as their families cannot afford to purchase uniforms and pay for transport to school. The parents or guardians of these children live 'hand to mouth' and so they do not see the point of sending a child to school when the family will lose anything from a fifth to half of its daily income.

Besides the children who work in the markets and streets of Dhaka, there are many other children working in jobs ranging from begging, in workshops or factories, scavenging (or rag-picking), as drivers or money collectors on tempos and other forms of mini-transport, to domestic servants.

These children work in vulnerable conditions, and are exposed to hazards including street crime, violence, drugs, sexual abuse, toxic fumes and substances without adequate safety protection. They carry heavy loads, and handle machinery. The children often suffer from extremely poor health due to their working conditions, and this leads to serious health concern such as growth deficits.

In recent years there has been an influx of children from the villages to Dhaka, as their families put them on buses and trains bound for the city in the hope that a relative or friend living in Dhaka will find them some work and look after their daily needs. After commencing work, the child is obligated to send most if not their entire wage back to the village to support their families. Without education or formal vocational training, these children move into adulthood as unskilled labourers, highly vulnerable to changing social or economic conditions. The children of these labourers become in turn unable to get education and access to skilled employment opportunities; consequently the cycle of poverty and vulnerability continues.

This is the real picture of our society. Now the question is what is our duty towards them? Will we only talk about them? Many seminars take place where children's issues are discussed, new attempts to solve this problem are suggested, but what is the ultimate result? Can we progress towards a bright future for these poor children? The answer is not unknown. Nevertheless, society should play a role in changing their lots.
S Yasmin, Lalmatia, Dhaka



PHOTO: AFP