



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.

Undiplomatic!

Ahmedinejad dubbed Europe as a lion that lost its mane but still roars. He claimed that Iran is the most popular country in the world, while the US is the most abhorrent one. (Source: BBC)

Few months back, he commented that Israel should be wiped out from the world map. Recently, he threatened that Iran would withdraw itself from the Nuclear Proliferation Treaty (NPT) if the US raises the discussion in UN Security Council. These were direct threats from Iran to European states and the US. We should analyse the situation.

If the sources of his courage to threaten the US or Israel is the Islamic faith, he should be outspoken and make his position clear to the world. How will he face the attack of the US or Israel if they take military action? Will he be able to unify the whole Muslim world under his leadership so that everybody fights for him? Will he be able to minimise the Shiites-Sunni conflict and get the support of all Muslims?

Iran should take into account the situation prevailing across the globe, before committing itself to a particular course of action.

Taslim Hasan Sabu University of Dhaka

Against the tradition

"Ekushey amader aughosho swadhinota dibosh" is a collection of some interviews given by prominent writer Dr. Humayun Azad. He was one of the few writers who wrote against tradition and introduced a new trend against our traditional thinking on society and religion. When talking on a writer we only mention the positive aspects but Dr. Azad was not that type. He spoke about the star writers and even politicians in his own way.

The book is great because a reader can easily get familiar with Dr. Azad's thinking and philosophy. Was he a philosopher? That's a tough question to answer but his thinking was not like the general people. He thought about his past, present and future. The interviews are reflections of his thinking. In our society people are not familiar with criticism. Writers are same as the general people. They don't take criticism easily, that's why Dr. Azad was not a popular person among the writers. He was brave enough to say anything about the popular writers. But there were some exceptions too.

The collection includes 21 interviews and 2 essays. The interviews were published in different newspapers of Bangladesh. Politics, art, society, religion all are available in this book.

Fundamentalism is a popular topic nowadays. But Dr. Azad spoke against it from the very beginning. Some of the interviews are old but some of them are on recent issues like the attack on him, recent growth of terrorism etc. The book has been published by Osman Goni of Agami Prokashoni while Dr. Azad's wife Latifa Kohinor writes the introduction of the book. She writes, "Taking and giving interviews was Humayun Azad's favourite subject. He didn't like to say much about himself in interviews."

After reading the book twice I share Mrs. Kohinor's feelings. Dr. Humayun Azad was indeed a brave person. This book will help the upcoming generation to become brave and truthful.

Mostofa Saikh Chowdhury North South University, Dhaka

Murdered university teacher

It is difficult to comprehend that a teacher of the highest seat of learning kills his senior colleague in cold blood. We were witnessing rather with dismay the moral downfall of university teachers for quite sometime. We saw with condemnation the individual acts of perverted teachers in the shape of sexual harassment of their female students (Business Administration Dept./JU; Architect Dept./BUET; History Dept./DU and so on) and thought that perhaps these were the most heinous acts that were committed by a teacher but this murder has brought down their image to a new low - it is matter of shame for the whole nation.

This rot in the education system did not happen suddenly but is the result of continuous politicising of the noble profession of teachers. These days teachers (and the vice chancellors) are being appointed on political consideration based on muscle power and not merit (hundreds of partisan appointments were made in the BSMMU, RU and KU bypassing or manipulating rules).

They in turn don't care about moral values and indulge in non-academic immoral acts and mud slinging. Declining standards of education; declining quantity/quality of research writings/publications by the teachers; session jams; unauthorised absence from classes and corruption are but a few symptoms of the rot.

Unless sincere efforts are made to appoint/promote the teachers (and vice chancellors) on the basis transparent, well defined standards based on only academic merit and research/writing capability or output, the nation is going to face a disaster. Z Islam, Monipuripara, Dhaka

Voice of the valiant

The write up on Jinnah (DS-Feb 20) had some factual errors. He was never the prime minister of Pakistan. He was the Governor General of Pakistan, then a part of the British Commonwealth.

So much for history. Many "Student Action Committees" were formed in educational institutions all over Dhaka and probably all over the then East Pakistan during the historic Language Movement.

Here let me relate some interesting events of those days when I was a student of the then Ahsanullah Engineering College. Students of electrical department operated a small laboratory medium wave transmitter giving out extempore news, tidbits and slogans in Bangla. This had to stop as advised by our teachers, as it probably attracted the wireless monitoring units of Pakistan Army and wireless monitoring vans started moving around the vast Engineering College and Medical College campus at frequent intervals.

I still remember our then British Principal Col. Mathewmann who forcefully asked some of us including some Medical College students to be released from custody by the army when we were standing along the open fencing of Engineering College sports ground right opposite the Medical College hostel. We were accused of violating the curfew! Col. Mathewmann's military moustache and commanding English voice unnerved the Non-Commissioned officer whose group had arrested us. He not only released us all, but gave our Principal a correct military salute in return!

S. A. Mansoor, Gulshan, Dhaka

The article "A Witness to February

21, 1952" is not clear in stating that the Language Movement began "when Muhammad Ali Jinnah announced that the state language of Pakistan would be Urdu".

Although this is factually correct, it is important to mention that this announcement took place early in 1948, not in 1952. The article also mentioned that Mr. Jinnah was the prime minister of Pakistan, a post which he never held. He died on September 11, 1948, the same year in which he had made the pronouncement on the state language. On February 21, 1952, the Governor General of Pakistan was Mr. Ghulam Mohammad, and Khwaja Nazimuddin was the prime minister.

Syed Hamde Ali The Nawab Palace, Bogra

February is the month that symbolises the very soul of the Bangalis. We always wait for the very day 21 that manifests the essence of the Bangali nation. Ekushey Book Fair gained the momentum with the spontaneous participation of thousands of people from all walks of life.

Now that the people are buying books, enjoying their time at the fair with all spontaneity and the

festivity around them, it surely speaks of the richness and modernity that the collective spirit of this proud nation is embalmed with.

It is indeed good news that we've a greater number of readers in the society well & good, but the point that makes me worry is that only a few number of good / classic books are being published nowadays and as such only a few are being able to relish the essence of good writing that ultimately speaks of the intellectual vastness that Bangalis are endowed with. At this point, readers will agree that there is an alarming number of mediocre or even trash writings in the display of the grand fair that are, unfortunately, favoured by young readers these days. This phenomenon is not an unusual one - it's there in all societies; but what the thinking people and the authorities can surely, rather should be, doing is guide the youths to a mental landscape of enlightenment through a continuous process. Here, Bangla Academy has a lot to do.

Let us be bold, fair and honest



to make it a point to enhance and ensure the availability of good books and the urgency to read them. Because "A book is like a living friend" - as the British academic LAG Strong said. And John Milton is of the view that "Many a man lives a burden to the earth; but a good book is the precious life-blood of a master spirit, embalmed and treasured up on

purpose to a life beyond life." So let us, in this very solemn month try to uphold the spirit of Ekushey in our collective spirit through making it flow spontaneously. Any act of squeezing the spirit into a mere one-day celebration on 21 February will mar the very essence of the glorious day.

Rafiqul Islam Rime Agrabad, Chittagong

February 21 is celebrated over all the world as the International Mother Language Day for the 7th time after the declaration by the UNESCO. It is a matter of great honour for us.

M A H Nazim University of Dhaka



Freedom of expression and religion

A day or two after Ariel Sharon went into coma, a Muslim friend of mine who is also from my native country told me that he became quite happy hearing this news and then he inquired with me whether it was ethically right for him to react like that. He particularly asked me this question since he always regards me to be someone like a Muslim scholar because of my Islamic

esteemed person declared in a speech that Ariel Sharon's affliction was nothing but God's wrath since Sharon pulled out Jews settlement from Gaza and West Bank, which was in favour of the Palestinian Muslims. Later on, Robertson apologised to Sharon's family for his comments.

Quite surprising that how religious faith

the holy State of Israel by favouring the Palestinian Muslims?

Good for my friend that after living for years in an open and broad society like the one in the U.S., at least the doubt has come in his mind regarding whether or not such an implacable thought was rational. And pity for Robertson, who represents 40 to 60 million devout evangelical Christians that such an impure, inhuman and implacable thought came out of his religious heart.

Yes, even standing on the edge of today's civilised world, people still think like that, behave like that and act like that in the name of religion whereas all religions are meant for peace and peaceful co-existence of the believers of different faith and all religions guide towards the path of humanity.

Until very recently, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. fought for racism in the US, a country, which today, can take pride on its stand towards equality among all the races from black to white, Hispanic to Mongolian, and Asian to Pacific Islander. Has racism been completely rooted out from the people's heart? Hardly, anyone can claim - "Yes". But through education and following the steps of civilisation, with time, people have learned to suppress it, control it, polish it and then live with it by learning the "tolerance".

You cannot turn the entire world population into atheists, nor can you turn all religions into one. The world will live along with billions of believers in Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Hindu religion, Judaism, etc. till its existence no matter what ones' religion teach him/her about the believers of the other faiths. Nonetheless, through education and by learning the "tolerance", people of different faiths can live peacefully with mutual respect for one another's religion.

No matter where the present day nasty world politics try to guide us, no matter how the same nasty world politics turn the media into the carrier and propagator of religious hatred and intolerance among the people of different faith, we, the common people, the believers in religion, should resort to the basic teaching of each of our religion 'peace and humanity' and should act accordingly.

We condemn the publication of Prophet Muhammad's (peace be upon him) caricatures in the European newspapers and magazines, which are a clear and deliberate insult to the religion Islam and its followers. No doubt that we respect, and we deserve as well, the freedom of speech, and no doubt that the 'Press' has the right to exercise its 'freedom of expression', but we, including the publishers of Prophet's

caricatures, know that the freedom of speech/expression comes with responsibility and no one should exercise any 'malign conduct' in the name of 'freedom of speech/expression' to deliberately hurt the emotion and feeling of billions of people believing in a particular faith. And at the same time, we urge the Muslim world to show 'Patience', which is one of the main teachings of our holy book and which was a key trait of our holy Prophet. By resorting to violence in response to this blasphemy, we will only add more fuel to anti-Islamic sentiment that already grew in the western world through a series of terrorist acts done in the name of Islam. Therefore, let's not allow the terrorists as well as the present day nasty world politics further take advantage of our religious belief, hijack our true religious teachings and dignity, and turn us into the enemies of the people of other faiths. Let's end this game, once and for all.

Abdur Rahman Abid On e-mail

I am a Bangladeshi citizen residing in Dhaka and am a subscriber to your newspaper. The recent cartoon incident regarding our Prophet (pbuh) has resulted in a mixed bag of reactions around the world. Many articles have been written reflecting different positions.

I personally would like to draw your attention towards one article written by an Islamic scholar of considerable fame in the Muslim world particularly in the Middle East and the West. I am pretty sure his view will be welcome to many readers here and abroad given the almost universal response to the cartoons. The final edition of the article is available at the following link:

http://www.bakkah.net/articles/defense-muhammad.htm

I request you to please take a look at the article. The scholar is a retired

lecturer of a renowned Islamic University abroad. Efforts are underway to get this article printed in Western newspapers and the like.

Murad Moqueet Dhanmondi, Dhaka

The exercise of freedom of speech almost by definition implies that someone is going to be offended. Freedom of speech is a virtue, but offending the sentiments of others becomes an abuse. I believe we have freedom of press and don't have to prove it by publishing inflammatory cartoons. Still, Canada and most American newspapers are not publishing the cartoons, viewing that they constitute offensive images.

Islam does not allow depiction of Prophet Muhammad [pbuh]. The holy Prophet did not ask Muslims to come to his defence. Most of the non-Muslims in the West say that the Holy Quran does not forbid images of the Prophet even though millions of Muslims do. The problem is that these cartoons portrayed Islam as a violent religion which it is not. This has hurt the sentiments of entire Muslims populations.

I have seen in Canada that many Christians are saddened and pained by satire of this type, aimed at the followers of another religion. We are all one human being and there shouldn't be any discrimination on the basis of colour, race or religion. Disrespect for others' beliefs and religions are a shame. There will never be peace and harmony in the world until we change our beastly nature and have respect for each other and have tolerance towards our own kind.

Demonstrations around the Muslim world and the political repercussions deepened when these cartoons were reprinted in papers in Norway, France, Germany and Jordan. Iran suspended all trade and economic ties with Denmark. But there is a fundamental difference between protest and violence. What some people in Syria, Iran, Afghanistan and Lebanon did was politically motivated violence in the name of protest.

Momtaz Ahmed Toronto, Canada

For long, some people in West Europe and America have been out to hurt the sentiments of the Muslims around the



practice and religious physical appearance, although, in fact, I'm no better than him in Islamic knowledge since I never went to any Islamic academic institution and do not have any formal education in Islamic studies.

His question right away reminded me about Pat Robertson of the US, who owns the CBN (Christian Broadcasting Network), which broadcasts his Christian evangelical messages to some 180 countries in 71 languages and his American evangelical devotees number anywhere between 40 and 60 million. Such an

and devotion of two very different persons, born in two different corners of the world, one in one of the poorest countries, and the other in the richest country, one with little formal education and the other with presumably high education, brought them on the same platform of thought and attitude although from two different angles! Is there at all any difference between the friend of mine, who thinks Sharon's affliction was God's wrath because of the suffering of his fellow Muslim brothers in Palestine and Robertson, who thinks Sharon's affliction was God's wrath because he disrespected