

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.

EMPLOYING LOBBYISTS

I read with interest the news articles that appeared on page 1 of your April 10 issue relating to hiring of lobbyists by the government to push its agenda among centres of power in

the US capital. While this news may be received critically among some quarters in Bangladesh, let me assure you that such practices are not at all uncommon in the US.

In fact, thousands of entities from foreign governments to multinational companies employ lobbyists routinely to gain access and influence. Both

India and Pakistan have used lobbyists for years. In this country, professional organisations like the American Medical Association or even educational institutions like major universities do not shy away from using lobbyists.

The lobbyists, on the other hand, use former Senators, Congressmen or even former Presidents to gain access to the White House or current members of the Congress.

Bangladesh diplomats have little influence or connection in the US. Using lobbyists is perhaps a wise move.

There is, however, an important constituency that every successive Bangladesh government has ignored. This constituency consists of successful Bangladeshi Americans who hold positions of influence, stature and power in various professions. They do have access to powerful members of the Congress.

They can be used (willingly) to push the agenda of Bangladesh, but not that of any particular party.

Dr. Faisal M. Rahman
Saint Xavier University
Chicago, Illinois, USA



Politics of personality cult

I noticed on news Prime Minister Khaleda Zia being greeted on her return from Turkey at 1:30am at night by not only the senior members of her cabinet but also the three chiefs of the armed forces and diplomats from different embassies.

What type of culture is this? I am not aware of any democratic country that has this type of practice. I am sure those who went to the airport to receive her had to go because they were asked to do so by means of obsolete protocols. US president or prime minister of India or heads of state of any democratic countries don't drag their cabinet colleagues or diplomatic heads to the airport to receive them at dead of night or any other time. They leave inconspicuously and come back the same way.

Aside from the waste of money in providing security for the VIPs, this type of practice seems to me nothing but institutionalised promotion of personality cult. This should be abolished immediately. The prime minister should go abroad without any fanfare and also come back the same way.

Hasibul Haque
Lorton, Virginia, USA

Free medicine

Free sampling of medicine to the doctors is a common practice by the pharmaceutical companies. Companies perhaps ask the doctors to offer these medicines to the poor patients so that the doctors may judge the efficacy of a particular product and in turn may get convinced with that brand. Every day huge quantities of medicine are being dropped 'free of cost' at doctors' chamber and the competition among the pharmaceuticals to offer such service is on the rise.

I wonder where these huge amounts of medicine ultimately go. Do the poor patients really get the medicines free of cost? I came to know that a major portion of the stock is sold by (some of) the doctors to retail pharmacies,

which is definitely against the spirit of the medical profession.

I urge the physician community that if any doctor finds it difficult to ensure proper use of free medicine, he should not accept it when approached by the companies.

Bulu Ahmed, On e-mail

Public memory

There is a saying that public memory is short lived and surpassed by new events. The political scene of Bangladesh is fast changing with new events surpassing old events in public mind. Considering the concerns expressed by various quarters including print and electronic media, one would focus on three events like August 17 bombing, Kansat and the latest one being police action on journalists in Chittagong. These events have somehow surpassed other events like killing of ASM Kibria, August 21 bombing on an AL rally, fire in parliament etc.

A Bangladeshi abroad
On e-mail

Celebrating Pahela Baishakh

In a globalised world, where the dominant cultural practices are supplanting the local ones, the celebration of Pahela Baishakh is an act of self-assertion, courage and conviction on the part of the Bangladeshis. By celebrating the day amid fanfare and a colour galore, the people have highlighted the fact that the indigenous tradition, of which Pahela Baishakh is a part, is very much alive. Again we do not suggest that the mere observance of the rituals does mean that everyone is sincere in his or her commitment to the country. We cannot ignore the fact that the yawning gap between the rich and the poor is getting wider and wider. It could be argued that some people eat watery rice just out of curiosity or as a part of an occasion, whereas the majority toil from dawn to dusk to manage two square meals a day. Notwithstanding this social disparity, we can say that as a nation we have asserted our self-

identity by celebrating the first day of the Bengali New Year.

In the wake of the globalisation, we cannot afford to ignore our home-grown traditions and values, because these are an integral part of our culture. Unless we have a deep respect for our culture, we cannot stand up as a nation.

Md. Zayed Wali
Lecturer in English
Patya Government College,
Patya, Chittagong

Alternative energy resource

I totally agree with Mr. Syed Noor Hossain on the production and use of ethanol as a supplement to petroleum and CNG. Since the demand on our limited resource of natural gas is getting higher, it is a requirement for the energy management authorities to consider the bright possibility of producing ethanol as an automobile fuel from sugarcane in a fertile country like Bangladesh. You see we have a need, we have the resources and we have the means and the talent. The only thing remaining is to take action. I think considering such possibilities the agriculture authorities should give importance to encouraging farmers to grow sugarcane plentifully, as happened in the case of potato yield in the past five to ten years.

We are blessed with a country whose soil can grow multi-seasonal crops and we should never neglect the possibilities of farming and agriculture to meet our needs. Other countries like the Netherlands are also like us, it was even in more adverse conditions than us in the past. But when we look at them currently their farming products are being distributed all over the EU members and other non EU countries.

Bangladesh can also use its agriculture and fulfil its own needs, if not international demand. I am saying all these in the face of a, excuse me, "clientelistic" mentality long prevailing in our country. We should never underestimate the local possibilities in the way of development.

Abdullah Al Numan, On e-mail

Civil servants or masters?

The government should pay more attention towards making the civil servants publicly motivated.

The training institutes and courses are there, but motivation to serve the public interests has eroded.

Why retired civil servants are so much attached to a career of publicity? Let others analyse this motivation!

How to impose the public services—the human side? There is too much attention to booming statistics and data like the GDP rate of growth! And development projects are praised sky high ignoring the hidden systems losses.

The political leaders lack moral courage to face the truths.

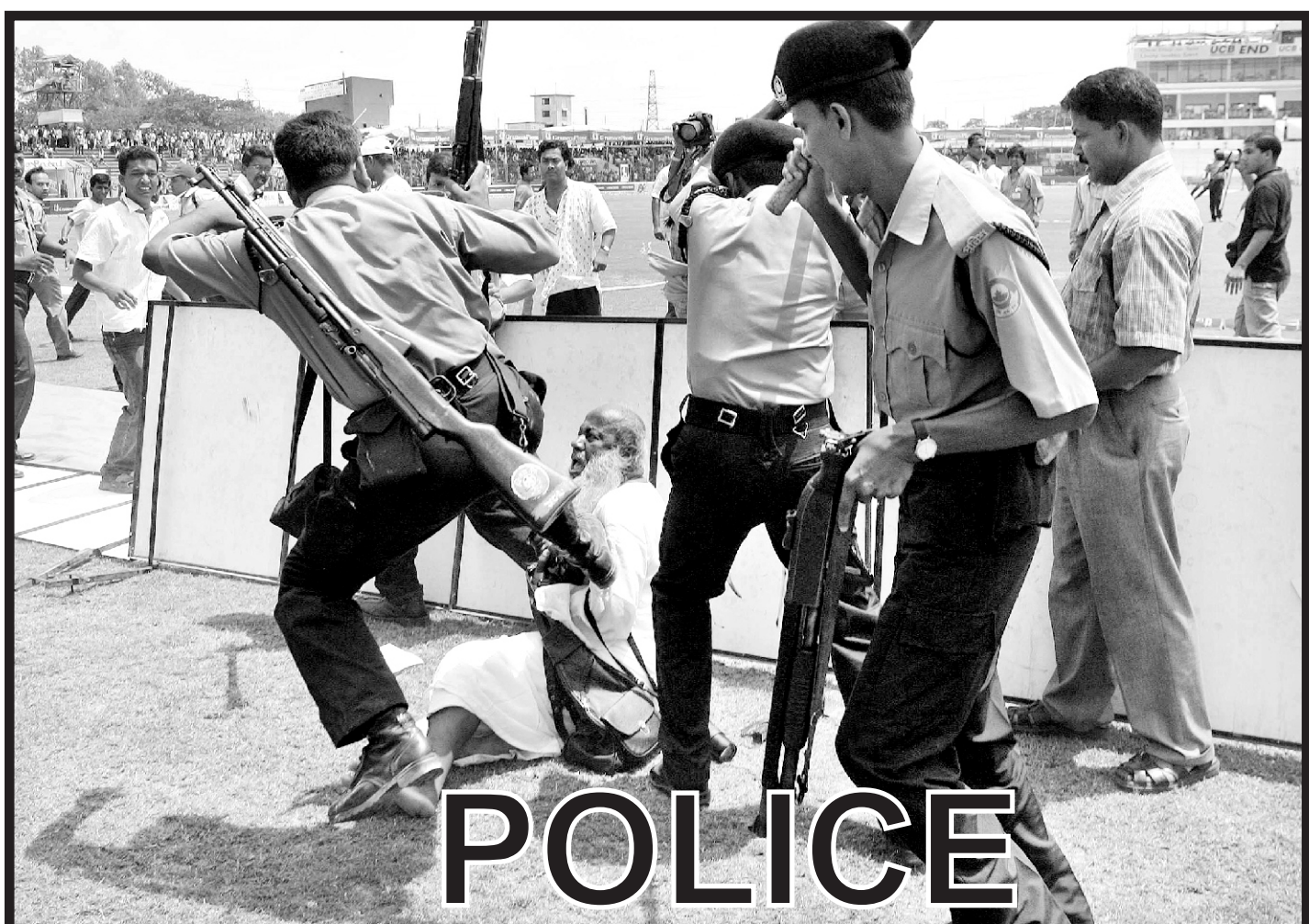
A Mawaz, Dhaka

Image of Bangladesh

When I go to web and search in Google or Yahoo with the keyword "Bangladesh", I most of the time get some links which just depict negative images of our country. I guess most of the readers will agree when they try. Is there not anything good in my country? Now that I am abroad I realise how I miss my motherland and how much love is there for me. But it's only that we don't realise it when we are in the lap of our mother, how precious and important she is. Imagine what other people will think when they will search with our country's name. We need to image ourselves the positive way.

I don't think we are so poor and doomed as it is shown in Internet and media. Isn't it a suicide? Let's find out how we can really improve our performance.

Parvez Monon Ashraf
Dallas, Texas, USA



friend or foe?

Police, who should perform the job of maintaining law and order of the country, have become a source of worry for us! Surely they are in the lead news of all the newspapers not for their routine activities but for violence! People are horrified to learn about their atrocities at Kansat.

Thanks to the media, we came to know how police committed all sorts of atrocities.

S. Reza Shosme
Dhaka University

I do not think the DS sports editor needed to say sorry for not covering the first day's (second Test) play. The barbaric treatment that the police have meted out to the journalists is nothing short of disgusting. This not only leaves a bad taste in the mouth but also makes us look like a failed nation in front of the whole world. When you have cameras covering the events for the whole world and this kind of incidents take place, it only brings out the truth about Bangladesh's problems in day-to-day life. From beating up of a housewife during hartal and now this, it is something that needs to be dealt with extremely stern hands. Police members involved in the atrocities should be punished twice as hard as regular citizens because they are violating the law, whereas they are supposed to protect it. I think the problem is self explanatory; when you have an extremist leader in the police then this kind of incidents are bound to happen as we all know the type of people who are in student politics these days. The only way out is to punish the culprits by throwing them off the police force and registering criminal cases against them. This should also be done against the police involved in beating the helpless housewife during hartal. This is despicable and my head bows down in shame when I hear of such incidents taking place back home.

Sometimes I feel that the only remedy for Bangladesh is to have a dictator who is honest and patriotic. Only then we can get rid of all the evil elements from Bangladesh, including the corrupt politicians and government officials.

Shahriyar
Peterborough, Ontario, Canada

Thank you very much for the editorial on police atrocities on journalists covering the Australia-Bangladesh 2nd Test in Chittagong. I, as everyone who viewed TV footages or read about the incident, am outraged by the appalling police action against journalists. It is indeed expected and understandable that the newspapers would flood their pages in condemning

and criticising the police. Much has been already said while much is yet to be published.

In my view, there is another dimension of what happened on that day. Could the journalists avoid the incident through handling it differently?

Jamiul Walid
On e-mail

Recent police atrocities in Kansat and Chittagong stadium convinced me that free democratic Bangladesh does not need this force with such an attitude. How long can we bear the burden of this 'law enforcer' with tax payers' money? They need thorough counselling about their work.

Dr. Islam
On e-mail

The whole world observed the brutality of Bangladesh police in Chittagong on 16 April. "Police is the friend of public"—that's what is written in front of every police line of the country. But do we really need such kind of a friend? Even more fundamental question is "Are they really our friends?" The attitude of the police, Rab & other armed forces of this country has been under question for a long time when it comes to the issue of dealing with general people. Just a few weeks back, our so called friends killed 20 harmless poor citizens at Kansat. And this time they showed the kind of ruthlessness that is beyond the wildest imagination of any civilised person. Where shall we go then if we need the help of law enforcing agencies? Who will assure us of social security that has gone down to zero? Photojournalist Anurup Tito might not be able to come back to his normal life (God save him) and suspension & withdrawing officers to the line are the only actions that the authorities could take. Why should not they be tried under the existing law of the country? Why should not they be charged with attempt to murder? It has been a regular practice of our law enforcing agencies to break the law and use it against the innocent. They are the biggest accomplices of the criminals. Nobody wants to go to police unless and until it is unavoidable and if by mistake someone goes to police, he or she will have the lesson of the life time. The extent of their corruption is beyond any limit.

Let's all make them understand how detested they are in this country.

Dhrubo
Gulshan, Dhaka

BANGLADESH AND ITS IMAGE

The prime minister has repeatedly complained that her enemies have been tarnishing the image of Bangladesh by calling hartals; alleging corruption on the part of BNP men and by sharing their complaints with foreigners and the newspapers of their countries. Taking cue from her benign complaints, some of the Bangladeshi patriots, who live in foreign lands, caused great uproar on cyberspace and even abused those who posted some negative information on Bangladesh. Most of the abused people relied on Bangladesh newspapers for their information.

Bangladesh's sagging reputation got a boost when the Time Magazine recently carried a special report on it and on the leadership quality of its present rulers.

Its success story appeared in the pages of one of the most prestigious and well respected magazines of the world!

But while the Bangladesh leadership was basking in glory, something usually accepted by the great people

of Bangladesh but often deemed [unusual] by the so-called civilised people of other countries happened at one of the playgrounds of Chittagong. The day was Sunday, the 16th of April, 2006.

The Australian cricket team, already subjected to a [danthbhanga] performance by the Bangladeshi Tigers at Dhaka, was about to face them once again at Chittagong Stadium. They were nervous at the prospect of receiving another danthbhanga performance from the Tigers. But what we Bangladeshis are expert at doing most proficiently happened, and the shaky cricket team of Australia breathed a sigh of relief.

Earlier in the day, a photojournalist arrived at the outer gate of Chittagong Stadium and insisted on the on-duty police sergeant of Chittagong Metropolitan Police that he be allowed to ride to the entry gate of the playground in an auto rickshaw, with his heavy equipment,

cameras, lenses and a lap-top carefully stowed on it. The sergeant would not let him do that, for most ordinary souls of Bangladesh do not deserve such a comfort.

An altercation ensued, and the sergeant on duty performed his sacred duty by slapping the journalist, also known as [journalist] in the local English lingo of Bangladesh, on his face in the presence of a host of onlookers. The sergeant followed his slap by a kick on the body of the journo.

Bangladeshi journos are a different breed of human beings. Instead of congratulating the photojournalist for receiving a slap and a kick from the police sergeant, they took to their feet in a protest and began demonstrating in the field against the police sergeant with a demand that he apologise to the journo for treating him like that.

Tai ki hoi? Nonetheless, some high officials inter-

vened, and promised to the journos that their demand would be met the same day before the lunch break. Since most of the Bangladeshi journos knew well how honestly the high officials of their country fulfil their promises, they relented and the match began ten minutes behind its schedule.

During the lunch break the journos went to talk to the police after they came to know that no action had been taken against the sergeant. In the presence of high police officials, the imprudent journos became agitated.

Aar jai kothai? A deputy commissioner of police began hitting the journos with his fist. Soon, an entire contingent joined in, using their bare hands, batons and rifles (thank heaven!).

Mohammad Asghar
On e-mail

Indian TV channels

Through your daily let me propose a ban on Indian television channels in Bangladesh territory, to save our children from intrusion of foreign culture and ideas and to save our economy from the aggressive marketing of Indian products.

Banning Indian channels may not be the best solution, but it is undoubtedly true that we need to have control and monitoring over the cable TV operators. To ensure a healthy atmosphere for our new generation, we need to make sure that our children watch TV shows which educate them through fun and enjoyment.

The sickening dramas and serials in the Indian TV channels are definitely corrupting the thinking pattern of our young heads—in what ways is a question for the psychologists to answer, but whoever had the bad luck to watch those junks would agree that they are really not worth watching.

We are most of the time unaware of the conditions around us. "Banning Indian TV channels" is a shocking remark which may make us jerk a little bit, and we may start thinking actively about it. But we cannot evade the issue.

Fazle Rabbi
East Monipur, Mirpur

Iran's nuclear plan

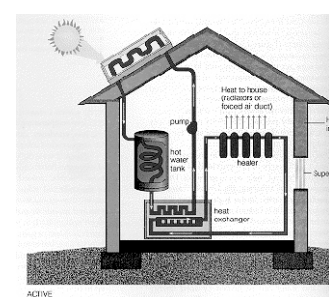
Iran has a nuclear plan that has made Mr. Bush angry. And the world's most powerful nation is planning to wipe off one more Muslim country from the world map like Iraq & Afghanistan. Bush & his allies are hell bent on preventing any Muslim country from becoming powerful. The Bush administration has been preparing for a combat to grab the control of the Middle East. Israel is making as much nuclear staff as they need but the Bush administration is dozing on that issue.

The US should halt Israel first, before acting on Iran.

Rajul Hasan, Sydney



Solar energy



In a country of large population scarcity of utility services is quite common. In every region of our country, we have load shedding. But in this high tech world we have several substitutes for electricity. Such as solar power panel in which electricity can be generated. In many countries, whether it is in Europe or Africa, they are using this technology, especially in rural areas. Moreover, it is very useful and cost effective. Developing countries like Bangladesh can promote this idea through advertising to increase consciousness among people.

These days we are using more and more electronic accessories that consume more electricity. If we use more of this technology, the price will come down and in future we may try to build a big solar power panel in our country. So we should be aware of this possibility of power generation.

Nadim Rahman
On e-mail