

letters@thedailystar.net

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.

Eliminating child labour



Child labour has not decreased in Bangladesh and is prevalent in many other countries. It is a fact that we live with and without burdening ourselves with statistics, we know that in every second house, a child is doing ADULT jobs like scrubbing floors, washing dishes, grinding spices etc.

A great deal has been reported on child labour in your paper. Therefore one assumes some awareness has been raised and that this is sometimes apparent when employers refer to their child workers as "children they treat like their own". One proud

employer claimed that by keeping these children they are saving them from worse occupations. Others say they are dressed, clothed and sent to school. It's an attribute to the awareness raising programmes in the country, that many employers justify keeping child workers because they love kids and treat them as their own

Such practices, though rare, are indeed praiseworthy and should be well projected in the media.

What is the reason behind employing child workers, particularly as domestic helps? Reasons given by researchers

include poverty of the parents and greed of the employers. Poor parents have no option but to turn their kids into slaves at the mercy of the employers who save money by employing child labour. These reasons are not good enough when in a poor country like ours there are many adults willing to work as domestic helps. When a child worker was asked as to why he works instead of going to school, he said, "If my parents worked I could go to school!"

Considering the prevalence of child labour in the country and the reported incidents of brutality suffered by such kids,

it's time we looked into our hearts instead of delivering speeches on ratifying UN Conventions including the CRC. It's time we brought more human practices to our homes. It's time we stopped justifying child labour.

NGOs have always been the first to set up good models of development. Their people are also the first to attend international seminars and global meetings where their voices are heard clear and loud against child labour. It's time we in the NGO community set up a policy for protection of working children:

To ban hazardous work for children.

To survey the status of parents of working children who could be substitutes as domestic helps.

To set up a system of contracts for domestic workers and code of conduct for employers.

To set up ethical standards for NGO people who employ domestic help and to restrict recruitment of personnel who employ child servants.

Obviously, something has to be done for the hapless children.

Khursheed Erfan Ahmed
Member, Ain o Salish Kendro

between political Islam, cultural Islam, and revivalist Islam - and each of their subsets. Indeed by branding people 'Islamic fascists,' he is, as you say, driving the local population into the hands of militants and insurgent groups.

Moreover, to label Bangladesh as a new haven for "Islamic terror" is sorely off the mark. The 'War on Terror' is a farce - while the Bush administration mentions nothing of state sponsored terrorism and refuses to put pressure on any conflict outside of the Middle East - where, incidentally, the US refiner derives most of its crude petroleum is utter hypocrisy.

Labelling Bangladesh as a hub is simply a move engendered by political expediency, you're absolutely correct - President Bush would not lift a finger, or a pen. Moreover, this label drowns the actual Bangladeshi issues - as your aptly state: women's and civic rights - into a one-dimensional essentialisation of 'terrorism'. As you succinctly note, the US was a former staunch ally of 'terrorist' groups - from Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda to secularist Saddam Hussein.

The War on Terror is the US foreign policy searching for a new menace - unfortunately its target is too easily interpreted as the Islamic faith - and following, all Muslims in general. President Bush's new term 'Islamic fascist' only adds to this absurd state of affairs. American foreign policy has been in shambles since September 2001 - if not before, and is purely reactionary. I'm of the opinion that no one, neither in the Administration nor the general public, is asking the simple question: Why?

Perhaps it is because that they already know the answer - American foreign policy is simply too essentialist.

Lastly, its likely outcome. Iraq is in civil war. And every day bombs are dropped, persons are displaced, education, health care, and economy remain in tatters. One thing will surely be generated - the next generation of freedom-fighting, US-resisting, 'insurgents' and 'militants.' The War on Terror should be renamed The Terror Factory.

Robbie Siddell
On e-mail

Our poet, our pride



A twinkling, glowing, bright literary star of Bangla literature is now away from us. Shamsur Rahman, the premier poet of Bangladesh, passed away on 17 August, 2006, leaving us all lamenting for him. His service to literature and journalism is unquestionable and immeasurable. He fought for the country against Pakistani occupation with his mighty pen. The poet through his pen inspired all the freedom fighters.

Could we ever forget the poem "Swadheenata Tumi"? What a poem it is! I think it is one of the best patriotic poems of Bangla literature.

"Poet, you are not dead. You have just left your body, but your soul is with us. Bless us to preserve your soul within us to implement your thoughts and ideas for the betterment and welfare of mankind."

My condolence for the bereaved family of the poet.
Mrinal Sarkar
Lecturer in English
College of Development
Alternative, Dhaka

"April is the cruellest month breeding lilacs" was the feeling of T.S. Eliot, an American born British poet about the frustrating situation in the world after the First World War. The similar

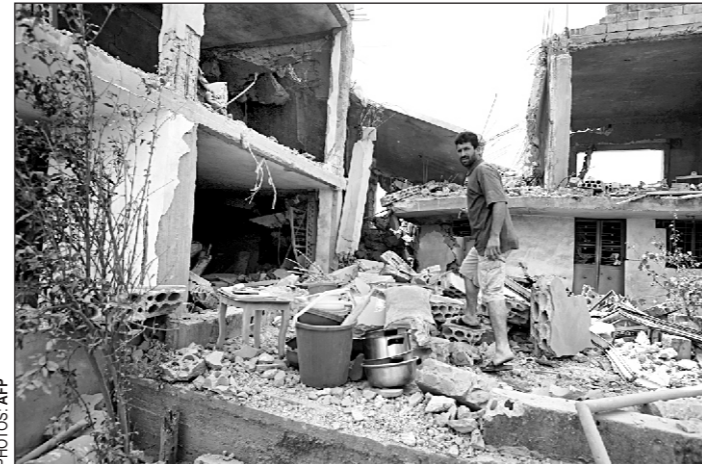
realisation has dawned upon the Bengalees in August this year, for a different reason though. To us August is the saddest month. This is the month when we lost the father of the nation; this is the month when our National Poet and a voice against tyranny and oppression passed away and last, but not the least, this cruel August has snatched away the leading Bangla poet of the 21st century- Shamsur Rahman.

Born and brought up in an urban atmosphere, he started his career as a journalist as if to shift into the vast domain of the world of literature where he took up poetry as his strongest weapon to fight for upholding the honour and status of our mother tongue, and to establish the democratic rights of the toiling masses.

This great poet has tremendously popularised Bangla poetry.
Md. Iqbal Hossain
Associate professor of English
Kushtia govt. Mohila College



Israel and terrorism



Israel has shown again that it is the sole source of terrorism. Its barbaric actions against Lebanon have proved the point beyond any doubt.

Now the US has to play an assertive role to stop Israel from massacring innocent civilians in neighbouring coun-

tries.
A reader, On e-mail

Israel has ignored past UN resolutions with impunity and has never been punished by anyone; thanks to its Big Brother's help and might! What guarantees are there that they

will honour this UN resolution? Israel could kidnap, arrest, kill, and maim hapless Palestinians and Lebanese whenever they wanted earlier without being questioned. If others do anything, it is reciprocated. They go for the over-kill in spite of appeals, requests or

resolutions till their thirst for blood is satiated. To Israel their past misdeeds are all lies, kidnapping of two of their soldiers is the only present truth.

They want to have absolute control over oil in the region.
A reader
On e-mail

Zafar Sobhan's article

As an Anglo-Bengali (whose mother immigrated from Dhaka to the UK and then to the US), I wish to applaud you for your write-up.

You hit every point with astounding accuracy - unfortunately the US administration, and the broader US public, simply don't get it. The problem with President Bush is that he simply refuses to differentiate

