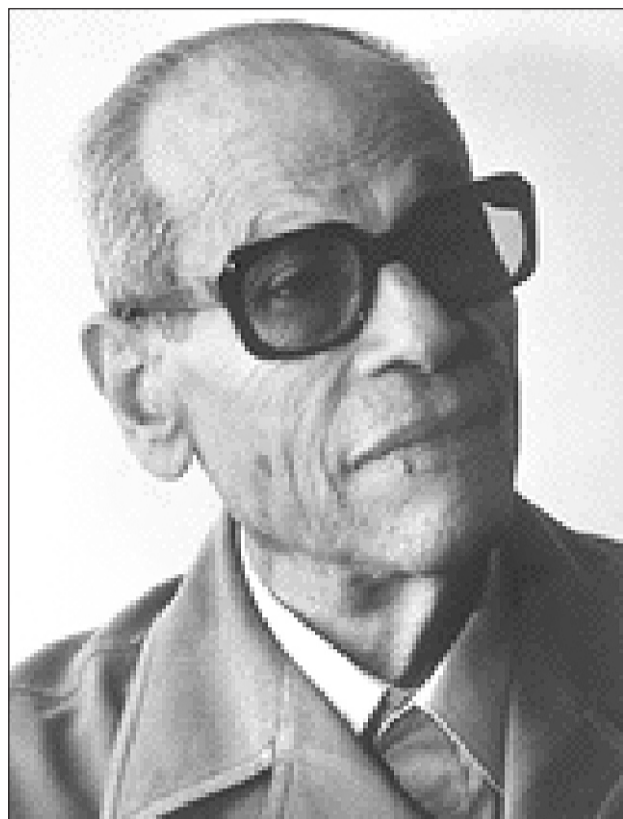


Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

Naguib Mahfouz



I would like to congratulate the Literature page staff for the publication of "Naguib Mahfouz: A beginning without end" by Asrar Chowdhury. It was highly informative and thought provoking. I agree with the author that writing about Naguib Mahfouz in such a short space is extremely difficult, but one thing is sure— through this publication interest in Naguib Mahfouz may grow in Bangladesh because the author has done a good job in describing main features of Naguib Mahfouz and his works within such a short space.

It would be nice if the literature section of your daily publishes works of other leading Arab authors in future since the page has developed a uniqueness that makes readers like yours truly look forward to opening the Internet on Saturdays!

Shalimar Mahmood
East Ham London E12
United Kingdom

Pope's comments

The Pope has unnecessarily hurt Muslim sentiments. It has done the cause of humanity not an iota of good rather irretrievable harm! While we believe that Hazrat Issah (Jesus) is a prophet of Allah, the Pope has shown religious bigotry with an unnecessary and uncalled for attack on Hazrat Muhammad (pbuh), the last prophet of Allah.

In the long run, he has harmed the Roman Catholics by his shallow and indecent remarks hurting Muslims all over the world.

S. A. Mansoor, on e-mail

I hereby quote verbatim, the opinion as expressed by the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB), which is deeply disturbed that the Pope Benedict XVI in his speech on Sept 12 to the University of Regensburg in Germany did not explicitly repudiate the passage he quoted from the 14th century Byzantine emperor Manuel II Paleologus. The Pope quoted from a text in which the Byzantine emperor referred to the teachings of the blessed Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) as being 'only evil and inhuman, such as his command to spread by the sword the faith he preached.'

"The Byzantine emperor's views about Islam were ill-informed and

bigoted. One would expect a religious leader such as the Pope to act and speak with responsibility and repudiate the Byzantine emperor's views in the interests of truth and harmonious relations between the followers of Islam and Catholicism. Regrettably, the Pope did not do so and this has understandably caused dismay throughout the Muslim world.

A F Rahman, On e-mail

It is indeed a matter of bafflement & shock that a personality of Pope Benedict's stature has made some comments / or a centuries old quote that links Islam with violence only to cause some turmoil in the minds of the Muslims across the globe.

It is doubly regrettable that such an act has been committed by none other than the distinguished Pope.

Rafiqul Islam Rime

Agrabad, Chittagong

The Pope is considered a very responsible person, more so when he is saying something on other religions. Nevertheless, the Pope's remarks against Islam & Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh) are highly regrettable.

He has failed to do justice to his position.

Aftab Alam, Advocate (High Court) Swat, Pakistan



We are living in a truly beautiful country crisscrossed by hills, lakes, rivers, canals & ponds. The natural greenery, which once adorned the country and served as a safe sanctuary to the birds & wildlife, is rapidly disappearing with the so-called development and urbanisation.

What we now see instead are mindless, unplanned, whimsical constructions of tall, ugly buildings, taking over the skyline of Dhaka city. The port city of Chittagong is following suit. The hills are now being bulldozed to create lucrative lands fetching high prices to some vested quarters, at the cost of our dear country.

The drastic encroachment of man over nature is now resulting in undue floods, landslides, earthquakes & the endless wraths of nature. To make it worse, we the unworthy citizens of the country are dumping wastes & litters into the beautiful lakes and ponds, ruining the water & destroying the precious aquatic resources. The indiscriminate use of polythene bags (despite the ban on its production) is aggravating the situation, throttling the natural & easy flow of rainwater in the drains & other outlets.

On the pretext of development, the trees are mercilessly cut down; the serene green-

ery is obliterated from the laps of Mother Nature. That creates a hostile environment unsuitable for a healthy living.

Dhaka, if not other cities of the country, can boast of wide roads, pavements, overhead bridges, underpass walks, etc. But, unfortunately, there's no way one can walk unhindered because of the litter, saliva spat on every visible spot, not to speak of beggars, hawkers, even rickshaws occupying the sidewalks! On top of it all, incessant honking of vehicles reminds one that we shouldn't claim patience as one of our virtues!

It is not the responsibility of the government alone to enforce laws & restrictions and monitoring actions of responsible adults. Why can't we individually or even as communities take initiatives in keeping our vicinity clean, planting saplings, promoting awareness, installing waste bins, popularising production & use of jute bags in shopping & workplaces?

Let us all work together to save our beautiful country before it is too late!

Kishwar K. Khan
Associate Professor, English
Jagannath University, Dhaka

Politics of discord

We need to look back to find out what has happened since the reform proposals were placed by the opposition leader in the parliament. The prime minister responded and suggested formation of a committee consisting of members from the ruling alliance and the 14-party combine. I need not explain the next episodes. The major point of disagreement was inclusion of the Jamaat in the ruling coalition delegation. Keeping the major issue undecided, statements and counter statements are being issued by the government and opposition leaders. This unimaginative game of politics has produced undesirable results, pushing back the chance of a negotiated settlement.

It is very difficult for us to predict where we are heading, governmental power and people's power are at loggerheads. The ordinary citizens are the victims of the current political impasse. We have already heard foreign observers/delegates (NDI and EU) advising the parties to go for a dialogue and settle the issue of electoral reforms. We have a feeling that both the contending groups are miscalculating their strength— especially the government when they have only about 5 weeks to remain in power. Then they will assume the role of a dubious opposition party, either opposing action by the caretaker government, or opposing the opposition to help the caretaker government if formed as per their choice. One can easily assume how difficult it will be for the caretaker government to hold a free and fair election as per schedule.

We have very little to do except sitting back and wishing the survival of democracy in Bangladesh.

By the way, one should watch President Ershad and his party. Time will tell where he stands.

Reader, On e-mail

Sad developments

As a concerned non-resident Bangladeshi, I am deeply saddened by the political develop-

ments of the country. I am distressed to see the politicians depriving the people of their rights. Corrupt politicians of both the parties have created a man-made disaster in this already underprivileged country. And in my opinion the blame goes to the political parties (AL and BNP) and their leadership.

The two top women politicians have been controlling everything within their respective parties and behaving like medieval queens, which makes me wonder if there is a dearth of able leaders and visionaries in the country. We need someone who can remove these politicians and their dynasties and create a clean socio-political environment. We need leaders like Dr. Mahathir, not self-serving leaders.

However, despite all odds the Bengalee nation kept its head high in the past in the midst of all darkness. Let us hope we can return to the once 'Golden Bengal' that our forefathers hoped to achieve but failed miserably.

Muhammed J Iqbal
New York City, NY, USA

Utter lawlessness

When a person damages any property that doesn't belong to him/her, he/she should be punished as per the law of the land.

Whenever political activists obstruct public daily life, they also need to be brought to justice.

What the Awami League is doing in the name of political movement is indeed an example of utter lawlessness.

Ashraful Islam
On e-mail

Where are the environmentalists?

Newspapers reported that thousands of trees in the reserved areas of Kaptai hydro-electricity project have been cut down to arrange a Mezban (to entertain people with food on the occasion of a marriage ceremony). The chief engineer of the Kaptai hydro-electricity centre is reported to have ordered to cut down trees to provide space for

arranging the Mezban in which thousands of people were invited. If the report is true, a government official has performed his duty defying public interest.

Environmentalists in our country always raise a hue and cry whenever any damage to the environment is done. But why are they silent on this occasion?

Malik Akram Hossain
Hong Kong

Attention: education authorities

After retirement of non-government teachers their names are duly sent to the DG office for dropping from the MPO of the educational institution concerned and the Office of the DG (Higher Education) is supposed to drop the names and update the list of teachers by including those names that could not be enlisted earlier in the MPO due to limitations set by staffing patterns. With the retirement of teachers the scope is created for promotion of teachers from one scale to next higher scale (say, from scale 9 to scale 8, from scale 8 to scale 7 and from scale 7 to scale 6 and so on) and inclusion of those who are entitled to get promotion/salary subsidy but could not be accommodated for the embargo of staffing pattern. If any non-govt. college fails to send a statement of such retired teachers timely it may not be possible for the DG office to update the MPO by dropping retired teachers and enlisting those who are entitled to be included in the MPO. It is the responsibility of the college to send the list of the retired teachers immediately after they go on retirement. It is also a routine job of the college to send the updated list of teachers at the end of a financial year, that is on 30 June every year, so that the DG office can accommodate them in the budget of the next financial year. If any college fails to do this, it is likely that the names of teachers who have retired from service long ago would continue to be present in the MPOs issued by DG office. It is also not unlikely that a dead-man's name should also

appear in the MPO.

In this connection I would like to draw the attention of the relevant authorities (Ministry of Education, DG office and BANBEIS) to the MPO of Tejgaon College for the month of July 2006 which includes the names of some teachers who retired long ago.

M. Sadeq
Dept. of Management, Tejgaon College, Farmgate, Dhaka.

A suggestion for Iraq

During Saddam Hussein's Sunni minority rule, he had an opportunity to build his own country. Instead, Saddam and his Sunni minority clique monopolised the power and the Shiite majority and the Kurdish minority were rendered destitutes in their own country. Although the Sunni Arabs are only 18 per cent of the Iraqi population, they dominated the entire military and civil administrations. The Shiite majority, which constitutes more than 60 per cent of the population, were treated like worst enemies and non-Arab Kurdish minority, who are mostly Sunnis, were brutalised and systematically murdered. Human Rights Watch estimated that more than 100,000 Kurds were killed by the orders of Saddam.

As Prof. Salim Mansur, professor of political science at the University of Western Ontario, recently wrote: "The list of Saddam's crimes is immensely long. The shame of the Arab Muslim world has been its silence over the years of what took place in Saddam's Iraq, just as it presently remains silent over the rape and murder taking place in Darfur."

As such, a federal Iraq on the line of Switzerland, where political and economic powers are totally decentralised, is the only solution to end Sunni-Shiite-Kurdish conflict. Saddam's brutal Sunni minority rule and the present Sunni violence against the Shiites and the Shiite killing of Sunnis in retaliation have shown that the extremists on both sides will not allow any peaceful transition to majority rule in Iraq.

Sunnis, Shiites and Kurds can only live peacefully if they have their own autonomous regions like Switzerland. In Switzerland, the German-speaking majority live in harmony with French and Italian-speaking minorities as the cantons are completely autonomous and the federal government has only limited powers. This prevents any single group from dominating others. But before that can happen, the Sunnis and Shiites must stop killing each other.

Mahmood Elahi
Ottawa, Canada

Mobile service providers

A few months back, the finance minister said that the mobile service providers in Bangladesh seem to be minting money! So, instead of being just a spectator he would do well to impose something like a higher percentage of income-tax (say, 60%), same as he did in case of the banks (40%) which are also making huge profits in this country.

CNR, Chittagong

Hostile politicians

Recently, a team of foreigners visited our country to observe the situation before election and ascertain whether it is favourable or not. Mike Moor, the former prime minister of New Zealand, led the team and in the final report he expressed his deep concern about the hostility among our political leaders. For years, we have noticed that our politicians don't respect each other. Hostility, distrust and many other negative things prevail in the minds of our politicians which are an ominous sign for democracy.

The image of our country will further deteriorate to the whole world if these harmful matters in politics continue to prevail.

The politicians should be aware of all such developments.

Shoaib Siddiqui
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

Phulbari coal project



This refers to Dr. K. Maudood Elahi's letter (Sept. 14). Like him I also condole the loss of lives at Phulbari and praise the courage and unity of the people to protect their interest related to resources and the environment. But I do not agree to all that he writes pertinent to planning and development of Bangladesh coal which your readers should also know.

The 'win-win situation' regarding gas and coal extraction should be nothing less than the maximum that Bangladesh can benefit against FDI. We may not have the technology and the multibillion dollar finance for such a gigantic project but the best coal so far discovered in Asia lies under our soil and in large quantity. Hence, world renowned coal mining compa-

nies have shown keen interest lately to explore and extract our coal, risking billions of dollars before being able to extract the first ounce of it.

"Outsiders and unrepresentative bodies" involved in the Phulbari incident are the same powerful forces who were behind the sabotage of our flourishing garment industry which registered a phenomenal growth in all sectors during the last couple of years. Today it is doodling under extraordinary pressure and crying pathetically for survival. Coal could be a way out of our curse of being categorised as the least developed of countries. It is therefore one matter to condemn a company with nefarious activities involving coal extraction, but it is completely another matter to demand that no coal should be extracted from Bangladesh at all. No true Bangladeshi would like to ruin these two promising industries of Bangladesh. This leads one to believe that it could only come

from a source outside Bangladesh that does not want the prosperity and betterment of Bangladesh and its people.

It would be incorrect to declare that the shaft-mining procedure at the Barapukuria coal is being used without any significant damage to other resources, population and the environment. Unlike Open Pit mining where the large hole is gradually filled up by 'back fills', compacted and brought back into its cultivatable productivity in 3-4 years, the shaft-mining has every possibility of causing ground level subsidence in course of time. The likelihood is more in our case because unlike other areas where the coal seam is 10-15 ft thick and at far greater depths, subsidence in our case could be sooner and more aggressive for a number of reasons. Bangladesh has coal seams of 30 to 40 meters thick at fairly shallow depths which is not possible for shaft-mining without losing a dispro-

portionate percentage of our coal. The underground tunnel in our case could be 20-30 meters high (theoretically) compared to only 10-15 ft elsewhere, as a result the subsidence would be proportionate to the amount of coal extracted which would be very high in our case. Unlike Open Pit where the hole created by the amount of coal extracted is filled up with the 'back fills' we will not have any soil available to fill the deep subsidence in the case of shaft-mining. Villages, homesteads, marketplaces, etc could suddenly find themselves sinking as the tunnels underground gives way. With the shallowness of the coal seams and the sandy alluvial soil above it, subsidence is guaranteed as has already been noticed in the Barapukuria area which can turn catastrophic. Therefore similar method of mining should not be adopted in case of Phulbari.

Gas and coal mining are completely different technolo-

gies and therefore the accident at the Magurchhara gas field cannot be compared to the type of accidents that could take place in a shaft-mining procedure.

I agree entirely with Mr. Elahi that the findings of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) on the Phulbari coal project should be made public, particularly in the area concerned, so that the people can review, assess and express their opinions for better implementation of the project.

I also agree with him that the related matters were not adequately addressed and the whole project operation yielded nothing but a big mess and a great setback to the upcoming and very promising coal mining prospects of Bangladesh and its struggling economy.

Mahmoodul Haque
Gulshan, Dhaka

Voters' dilemma

People are having problems in deciding who they will vote for. Hopefully, the present political conflict between the parties will end soon and the election will take place in January 2007.

The BNP thinks that they will come to power again depending on the development work they did. The Awami League, on the other hand, believes that they will regain power campaigning against corruption of the BNP and the price hike of essentials. Only voters are in confusion as to which party they should let go to power and why. Most of the voters are poor. Price hike of essentials is the biggest problem to them. If rice could be purchased at Tk 10.00 per kg all other problems will be eased.

Sheikh Hasina introduced a new slogan in her meeting at Jamalpur on 16.09.2006—"Have rice for Tk 10.00 per kg. Cast your vote for the boat." It might really influence people.

Nur Hossain
151, Bangshal, Dhaka