

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.



Helping good guys

At the end of his article, Mr. Asif Salehi says that the educated middle class needs to help the good guys and he seems to be very vehement about this. My question to Mr. Salehi is, what precisely do we need to do? Go out in the streets with the good guys, get beaten up by the police and end up in hospital spending a huge amount of money for treatment? Won't it be a better idea if Mr. Salehi comes back to settle in Bangladesh sacrificing his and his family's secure life in London for helping the good guys?

Fairuz Husain
On e-mail

Darfur massacres

The whole world is watching the incidents in Darfur, Sudan, and no one seems to have any headache about the issue. It seems we really do not care whether these innocent people live or die. The blame must go to the western world and the USA. These rich nations watch bloody conflicts and at the end they show mercy to the victims by giving them water & food. These types of inhuman activities must be stopped.

We have observed this type of attitude among the celebrities as well. They visit these places only to enhance their popularity.

So I would earnestly request all and sundry to come forward and help stop this genocide in Darfur. We also request our government to take the appropriate initiative to help stop the killings.

Minhaj Ahmed
Uttara, Dhaka

Month of Ramadan

It has become a common phenomenon in our country that with the arrival of the Ramadan, the prices of the essentials soar up alarmingly. Though the month is supposed to be one of self-restraint, as regards consumption of food, some of us indulge in an activity that suggests a kind of fetishism of victuals. In other words, whereas our religion enjoins us to eat less, we tend to do the opposite thing.

It is disturbing that some businessmen make the most of the occasion, cashing in on the religious sentiments of the common people. Some observers are of the view that it is the syndicates that—in collusion with the bigwigs of the government and the party in power—manipulate the market. As a result, the miseries of the masses multiply. The irony is that Ramadan is supposed to bring peace to their lives.

It is also surprising that the members of the BDR are selling beef at different points of the city. Certainly their duty is to keep vigil at the border. Interestingly, they are made to play the role of the officials of civil departments.

That shows that something must have gone awry with the civil administration.

Zabed Wali
Pahartoli, Chittagong

Distorting history

Some people create history, others write it. But those who try to distort it are thrown down its gutters. This is the cruel lesson of history. We are really shocked and dismayed that a democratic government could let some people to telecast a fabricated and concocted documentary on our glorious Liberation War to serve the petty party or group interests and make a heinous attempt to undermine the role of Bangabandhu in our movement for independence.

Bangabandhu and Bangladesh are inseparable. Anyone who denies Bangabandhu denies Bangladesh. It's like discussing the solar system without the sun itself. There may be various opinions and controversies regarding performance and contribution of every other person and party but as the undisputed leader of the Liberation War Bangabandhu's role was unparalleled. Many genuine freedom fighters are still alive. They can give their eyewitness accounts to clarify certain issues and opinions included in the documentary. Some people may even take legal action. It is frustrating and disgraceful.

We hope every sensible citizen will rise above petty political motivation and deplore the documentary. Bangabandhu is a treasure of the nation. The Awami League's greatest mistake is to treat him as their leader only. After 1971 he should have been placed above all party politics and retained as the symbol of national unity.

Everyone must realise that history can be distorted for a while, but it cannot be destroyed. For the sake of posterity, The Daily Star should start a series of reactions of prominent personalities to this particular issue.

A reader
On e-mail

Air India passengers' plight

I have recently come across a letter on the above subject written by Mr. Aly Zaker published in your daily. I was also a passenger (out of 40) on that ill-fated flight (AI 531/151 on 12

September) and had to undergo the same suffering as the writer described. I would not add anything here as Mr. Aly Zaker has already vividly described them all.

What I would like to add is that it seems Air India has a step motherly attitude towards this Dhaka-London flight as on my return journey on 26 September, I had to undergo the same ordeal of flight cancellation, lengthy alternative connections and mismanagement.

Mujibul Huque
Shantinagar Bazar, Dhaka-1217

Attack on Saber Chowdhury

The lion and the tiger kill the prey in one stroke, but a pack of hyenas kill by merciless biting that takes hours for the prey to die. What the victims underwent and the electronic media could capture in frame on 7 September during the Election Commission siege programme was hyenas swooping on the isolated and innocent prey. Mercifully, the victim survived sharp bites at a devastating cost to some of his vital organs. It is reassuring to see that Saber Hossain Chowdhury returned home after treatment in Singapore and London. But he would take much time again to be on his feet and to overcome the double vision problem. No wonder, his suffering from double vision is the consequence of double standard democracy in Bangladesh! It is his second dash with death. Between October 2002 and January 2003 he was subjected to imprisonment, which was subsequently held unlawful by the High Court. Amnesty International recognised him as a "Prisoner of Conscience" and campaigned for his release. Saber is a rare breed in Bangladesh politics. How many of his likes are in Bangladesh politics today?

Are we setting a trend by mercilessly beating the highly educated to drive them away from politics and make way for the half-educated to determine the destiny of the nation?

M. Shafulah
Uttara Model Town, Dhaka

Rush for admission forms

Every year we face lot of difficulties in collecting admission forms from different educational institutions. Last year, I went to Udayan School at around 8:00am to collect admission form for my son. I was astonished to see the hundreds of guardians queuing for the admission forms. I heard that guardians started coming at around 3:00am in the night and the clock ticked 1:00pm when the last one got the form.

Now, imagine how many man-hours were lost and how the guardians faced the difficulties of being absent from their workplaces.

Today, when I am writing this letter, admission forms for MBBS courses in government medical colleges were given. One of my colleagues rushed to the DMC at 6:30am and spent almost 6 hours to get one form for his son. But had the authorities been a bit more sensible and updated, they would have hoisted a website having the electronic admission form. And just imagine how it would have made our life comfortable and easy.

I don't understand how these techno-illiterate people stay at the helm of administration—be it a school or a medical college.

Matters must improve in this area.

A reader
On e-mail

Reducing traffic congestion

To reduce traffic congestion in Dhaka, we need both sound planning and good performance at the implementation level. We definitely need major bypasses for the city that will connect several important points.

A citizen
On e-mail

Chief of next caretaker government

Some former advisers commented

on the above subject. The irony of fate is, if we ask the same question to senior members of the coalition, the answer would be just opposite, we apprehend. They see everything going well and no crisis anywhere. The Election Commission and the would-be chief of the caretaker government are not above controversy. They see them all right.

It is unfortunate to notice that some ministers and even the speaker are defending the would-be chief during house debate. We fail to understand why the intending incumbent is not responding to public scrutiny.

It is his or her moral responsibility to respond to public questioning. It transpired during the debate that the would-be chief adviser was a member of the ruling party in 1979. Has he resigned? Or was he involved in any party activities since retirement? We expect him to respond, and not any ruling party members.

Although it is not very appropriate to compare Bangladesh with the USA, it is pertinent to mention that in the USA there exists an institutional set-up to examine the strengths and weaknesses of the president's nominee for constitutional positions.

The would be chief of the caretaker government could be more acceptable to the people and the politicians if he was not involved in party politics.

Party politicians are unfortunately highly indoctrinated and find it difficult to rise above his or her political belief.

A reader
on e-mail

Whither democracy?

You could hardly find any political dictionary or encyclopaedia to define our political parochialism. Sometimes it seems to be a regular skirmish for a thrown bone among the street...

To listen to others is no longer any submissive compliance, rather a precondition for smooth functioning of democracy.

Murshed
Germany

The price of power

We are observing a very sorry state of affairs in the energy and power sector. Unfortunately, the biggest and the most visible failure of the present government has been power (electricity) and less visible—mineral resources extraction (energy)! Rationalizing power tariff is a reasonable step. I believe we should immediately introduce the two-tier power structure with high evening tariff rate (6 :00pm to 10:pm) for commercial establishments as the first priority step. Even an automatic sealed breaker set at, say, fifteen percent over connected load should be coupled to the incoming cable of all commercial load to ensure that excess power is not consumed. This will ensure self-control on power usage. The next step should be staggered closure of offices and shops; area-wise to conserve power. However, these need to be monitored and strictly enforced, otherwise these would be futile!

A daily has stated which I quote "A tariff hike, should be undertaken only after all other options for increasing power revenue have been exhausted. These options, there is much reason to believe, have not been explored to the fullest". This needs to be clarified and explained to the deprived power hungry readers which can also be of help during the ERC's first consultation meeting scheduled for 1st October and a service to the nation groaning under power starvation.

S.A. Mansoor
Gulshan, Dhaka

Coal mining debate

A very interesting debate has started among your readers regarding coal mining methods and Phulbari AEC contract.

The coal zone of Bangladesh is incidentally located in the high productivity Dinajpur-Rangpur region. The land formation and other features do not favour underground mining in an economic way. That is why several mining companies of repute from Australia, Belgium and other places did not proceed earlier, despite the presence of a significant reserve of coal in the area. The Chinese company was given permission to undertake mining in Barapukuria in a non-transparent manner and before that manipulations were made to show the project commercially viable. It's true that the project so far did not cause visible environmental damage, but Bangladesh has accounted for a huge amount of foreign exchange for this failed project and is continuing to bear the burden of the curse thrust upon the nation. Coal is the only other viable indigenous energy source that we have apart from natural gas. We must find out ways to explore and exploit it in the most economic way to ensure long-term energy security. We must make comparative pain/gain of open pit mining wherever possible.

Developers or the government can ensure proper rehabilitation and income regeneration of 50,000 people if the mining brings long-term benefit for the country. The AEC deal can be re-evaluated to critically analyse its implications.

Bangladesh does not have the capacity (technical or financial) to undertake mining, we must realise that truth. In developed countries and even in developing countries there are many examples of mining lease. We can examine those. Royalty limit can be ascertained. No investor will come to a corrupt or disorganised country to risk their money, we have to realise that also. Given all these and considering the situation of Barapukuria, Bangladeshi experts at home and overseas may explore the appropriate strategy to exploit the coal resources. Without doing an in-depth exercise it won't be prudent to say we won't allow open pit mining.

I wonder why Barapukuria botch-up is not getting any attention of our patriotic forces. The Daily Star is trying to expose the misdeeds, but nobody seems to bother about the money siphoning.

Saleque Sufi
On e-mail

POWER CRISIS



The entire electricity generation, transmission and distribution system is highly inefficient and ridden with corruption. Our administration has the uncanny knack for buying the most inefficient and useless power plants complying with the procurement regulations at above market price. If we wish to solve this perennial power shortage, then our intentions have to be honest and there should be minimum scope of corruption.

I have a few questions in my mind but have not been able to find answers to these from any source, including websites of the organisations involved with generation, transmission and distribution of electricity. The questions are:

How much does it cost PDB to produce one unit of electricity?

What is the percentage loss of electricity in the plant i.e. till electricity passes the first major step down the transformer. Transmission loss of electricity over a unit distance (one Km.) Distribution and pilferage losses of electricity in percentage after the electricity reaches the substation at the city gate.

The rate at which PDB sells electricity to DESA, DESCO and REB. The rate at which PDB purchases electricity from independent power producers, particularly from very large producers.

I am sure if all this information is gathered and then disseminated it may be found that it will be cheaper for us to purchase electricity from large independent power producers. These power producers are experienced and efficient. Moreover, they are able to install efficient and reliable power plants within a short time. Those who oppose this idea would like to argue that we have to pay for the electricity in foreign currency.

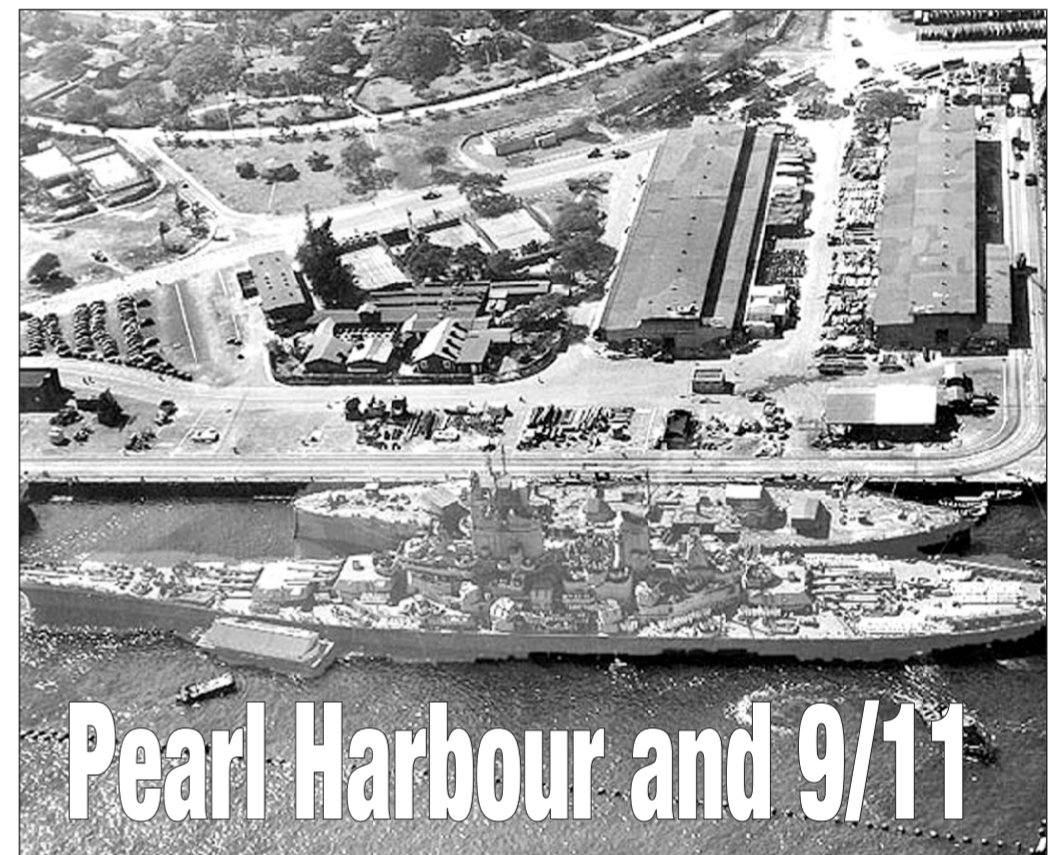
When we pay for the electricity from our own power plants we have to pay for the cost of the plant with interest. Then there is a glut of various conditions imposed by loan giving agencies, making the project not very attractive.

So if we want uninterrupted and reliable power supply, I would recommend that

(I) We purchase our electricity from independent power producers instead of having our own power plant. (II) There should be a separate company responsible for transmission of electricity which will be paid on the basis of distance over which the electricity has to be transmitted. The loss permissible per unit distance (Km) has to be agreed upon beforehand. The loss beyond the permissible limit will be on the account of the transmission company. (III) Larger city and industrial areas are to be divided into several zones. These will be entrusted to different electricity distribution companies. PDB will collect charges from these companies on the basis of electricity supplied to them at their substation receiving the electricity.

I hope the above measures will help mitigate the power crisis.

Salahuddin Ayubi, On e-mail



The 9/11 attacks and air raids on Pearl Harbour by the Japanese in 1941 have many things in common. If anyone looks back at Pearl Harbour, the US government had enough intelligence reports regarding such an unexpected attack. But Washington officials held back the information from General Walter and the navy commanders. The Japanese attack on that day killed more than 2,400 Americans, destroyed 18 ships and 200 aircraft.

When the Second World War was spread-

ing from continent to continent, America was away from it. President Roosevelt had decided that America would join the war only if it was attacked.

The same thing was repeated after more than 60 years. So many people knew so many things (reports say!) but they didn't pass any information to the people who could have prevented the attack.

Abu Nahian
New York

Unbearable load-shedding



Nowadays, it's common that electricity goes 8 or 10 times in a day. It's not a problem of a particular area. It's a problem of whole Bangladesh.

For this reason, in the time of civilisation we're leading an uncivilised life. In modern life, the importance of electricity is undeniable.

The students can't concentrate on their studies for lack of electricity. It's a great obstacle for them. Factory, business shops are also facing serious problems. In the evening while electricity is a crying need, getting it becomes the golden deer of the forest. We know that production of electricity isn't sufficient. But we can make it sufficient by reducing excessive and unnecessary use of electricity.

The government should enact an effective law to stop misuse of electricity.

Alif Zabr
Dhaka

Iraq's hijacked future

Prof. Mansoor Moaddel, professor of sociology at Eastern Michigan University and an Iraqi-American, recently wrote: "While neither American nor Iraqi security officials have yet found a way to tame the militias, the Iraqi public is increasingly drawn toward a vision of a democratic, non-sectarian government for the country." But a significant minority with strong sectarian outlooks might have hijacked Iraq to

their agendas. When Saddam Hussein ruled Iraq with an iron fist, he didn't have the support of the majority. But a small well-armed Sunni minority provided all the support he needed to brutalise the Shiite majority and the Kurdish minority.

Although the Sunni minority lost their grip on power after the US-led invasion, they are literally slaughtering their fellow Shiites.

Now the Shiites are retaliating, killing Sunnis and destroying Sunni mosques. Almost daily, murdered and mutilated bodies of Sunni victims are being found. Most of them are victims of the Mahdi Army led by staunchly anti-American Shia cleric Moqtada Al-Sadr.

Such tit-for-tat killings by Sunni and Shia extremists show that they have successfully hijacked Iraq's future and the majority of moderate

Iraqis are powerless to stop the mayhem just as they were powerless to stop Saddam Hussein's systematic slaughter of the Shiites and the Kurds. Today, once dominant Sunni Arab minority are attacking the Shiite majority hoping to provoke a Shiite backlash which will bring other Sunni countries like Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Egypt to their rescue. Iran, for its part, is hoping that a Shia-dominated Iraq will join

hands with Shia Iran to end the Sunni domination of the Muslim world. Iraq is caught between these opposing forces and never-ending violence seems to have become the norm.

Unless Iranian Mullahs and Saudi Wahabis give up their rivalry and stop using Iraq as a proxy, the dream of moderate Iraqis may remain only a dream.

Mahmood Elahi
Ottawa, Canada

