

## We love Sonar Bangla

Of all the bureaucrats turned columnist for your esteemed daily, Hasnat Abdul Hye is probably the most readable and I usually follow his column when time permits. Mr Hye is respected not only as a former administrator of integrity but more so as a prolific chronicler and essayist. Reading his travelogue is both informative and entertaining.

One must also respect him for resisting the temptation (so far) of jockeying for position in one of the political parties to continue to stay in the limelight of power. Some of my retired bureaucrat friends confided their feeling of impotence without the cover of official power!

However, his article "Who loves Sonar Bangla", which appeared on *The Daily Star* of 18<sup>th</sup> May left me a little disappointed. I think it was platitudinous at best and somewhat uncharitable at worst.

Let us examine why people in Bangladesh clamour to go to a first world country, whether for education, medical attention or for permanent residence. Are all these people unpatriotic because they have the ambition of living a decent, secure life, want to educate their children or simply want to survive disease? I think these people love 'Sonar Bangla' dearly and their dream always is to return to their beloved Bangladesh and invest in a house or apartment as soon as they can afford to do so.

And why do they need to go to another country for education, even be duped by apparently dubious institutions called 'Alpha Beta College' (to learn ABC?)? The answer is that our government has all but destroyed institutions of education, healthcare and law and order.

I remember in the 1960's, Dhaka University was considered a premiere seat of learning in this region, and Dhaka Medical College received foreign students from Malaysia and Singapore! Graduates of DMC used to proceed to the United Kingdom to pursue post-graduate studies in medicine and surgery.

Today, a graduate degree from a Bangladeshi medical college is not recognised in any country worth mentioning. If our medical students obtain their qualification with muscle power and by holding out physical threats to the faculty, what quality of medical attention can patients hope for?

Is it really fair to blame the middle-class patients for selling their assets to save their near and dear ones by seeking treatment in hospitals in Thailand, Singapore or India?

As for our boys and girls going abroad for higher education, most of them would like to come home to a self-respecting career rather than hang around as aliens in North America or Australia. But where do they fit in? After four or six years of study or internship in a civil society with personal rights and consideration for fellow citizens, is it possible for these young men and women to make a re-entry into a lawless, unjust and *mastaan*-ridden environment created by us in 'Sonar Bangla'?

Have our leaders (political, academic or official) done anything to create an enabling environment for young men and women to return to?

One wonders what Mr Hye thinks of his erstwhile colleagues who have made suburban Washington or New Jersey their home and commute to and from Bangladesh to cut multi-million dollar deals involving government or donor funded contracts? Do these people love their 'Sonar Bangla'? Or is it a pot of gold for the privileged few to help themselves from?

**Bibah Rattas**  
Dhaka

## Neutral BBC?

We used to rely on the BBC's neutral news and views, famous for projecting independent news casting. But to the shock of viewers, BBC has nowadays monopolised the news and views of certain countries.

Whenever we switch on to the BBC, we wonder if it is the British Broadcasting Corporation or the Bharat Broadcasting Corporation. Most of the programmes are India based, such as India Business programme, India quiz, interview programme of various Indian personalities and so on.

There are many countries in South Asia whose news, views, people and places are interesting to many. But these appear to be less or unimportant to BBC. Even when they do cover these countries, they only highlight the negative side. We have really become fed up with BBC's bias for India.

**AR Ripon**  
Banani, Dhaka

## Exempt taxation

In order to build a small house and rent it out to arrange for an income for survival after retirement, service holders with limited income usually take loans from the Bangladesh House Building Finance Corporation, (BHBFC) and supplement it with their life savings.

These borrowers, who have no other income except the rent money or maybe a small pension, find it extremely difficult to keep their body and soul together after paying the monthly loan repayment instalment. Taxation on this small rent income is really burdensome.

Under these circumstances, I appeal to the government to consider the borrowers' hardship and

exempt them from taxation till the end of their loan recovery period.

**MA Hashem**  
Mirpur Road, Dhaka

## Affordable train fare

The low income people of Sylhet are very unfortunate as they cannot afford to ride in the inter-city trains that run between Dhaka-Sylhet as there is no '*sulov*' (economy) class in them.

In the beginning when inter-city trains were introduced on this line both '*Joyontika*' and '*Parabot*' inter-city trains used to have economy class and the low income passengers could utilise this facility. But for the last few years, the Railway Authority have withdrawn this economy class for reasons best known to them.

Do the authorities consider all the passengers to be rich people? If they do so, they are wrong because almost 80 per cent people using this route are from the low income group.

The authorities are urged to look into the matter and introduce *sulov* class in all the inter-city trains running between Dhaka and Sylhet.

**Mohammed Gyasuddin**  
Sylhet

## Political standards

Creating planned incidents at the border, leading to military operations is an old political trick to divert attention. What is happening in Bangladesh today, could be suspected to be a pre-election stunt. I would not be surprised if the next incidents occur at the Chittagong and the Chittagong Hill Tracts borders.

The politicians cannot fool all the people, all the time. As long as the standard of politics does not improve, does it matter which party runs the country? The voters are fed up of the political in-fighting, and seek some change of political environment.

**AMawaz**  
Dhaka

## Garments sector

We are proud of the performance of our readymade garments industry, earning more than 70 per cent of the country's foreign exchange. From time to time, BGMEA has put forward different types of proposals and recommendations to the government for redressing grievances and problems of the industry. The administration has always been sympathetic, and extended its support and co-operation as far as its limited resources would allow.

But the human side of the huge garment industry has been suppressed. How are the human factors being monitored and improved; specially the lot of the lakhs of workers, mostly females? No public relations stories are being released to the press, nor AV documentaries released by the BGMEA for TV screening.

What are the recreation and holiday facilities? Do the workers have departmental stores for discount purchases and subsidised community centres for social and family activities? What are the extra-curricular and leisure activities of more than a million workers and

gers and pedestrians.

Due to erratic electric supply and constant loadsheddings, it is imperative that DCC and DMP compel and enforce rickshawpullers to use light/lamp on rickshaws for the safety and security of passengers as well as pedestrians.

**O H Kabir**  
Wari, Dhaka

## Toilet trouble

Due to lack of attention, mainte-

intimidated by a photograph showing Bangladeshi villagers carrying the dead body of a BSF soldier on a pole. But did they ever think the reason behind it was not to humiliate the body but something else?

One needs a stretcher to carry a partly decomposed body collected from the muddy and wet paddy field and carry it a long distance. Where in the world would the villagers get a stretcher? It is hardly available even in the cities, forget about a far off village, miles away from a hospital

Jamaat. They should not even be considered eligible to participate in the elections. Same is the case with Jatiya Party. Then whom does one recommend?

This has been the biggest crisis in our country for many years. We are in dire need of capable and charismatic leadership. We need a leader who will be concerned about the country, not power and self-interest.

At present, as we don't have any

run errands by her mother, because she knows she'll be attacked by miscreants. There is insecurity for a child to go out in the nearby field and play a game of football because the mother knows that there are lots of child traffickers around. There is insecurity for young men who know that if they are bold, they can be stabbed and this may cost them their life.

Despite being an independent nation, people suffer from insecurity,

minorities around the globe, we should organise a world body/world community to protect the life and wealth of minorities. Global awareness should be developed by the UNO's member countries.

I would request the Secretary General of the United Nations and all heads of state to initiate an International Minorities Day to uphold the human rights of minorities around the globe.

I have been trying to publish minority news from Bangladesh. But the authority concerned in the Bangladesh government has denied me permission to publish a weekly minority news from Bangladesh. I do not have the resources to start writ proceedings against the decision of the Bangladesh government.

I would remain grateful to any individual or organisation if they come forward to help me publish minority news from Bangladesh.

**Md. Hassanul Alam**  
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

## "Minister's son"

The letter "Minister's son" (May 20) disheartened me. Every conscious citizen knows that the minister's son indicated in the letter is minister Mofazzel Hossain Chowdhury Maya's son.

Mofazzel Hossain's contribution during our Liberation War is known to all. As a freedom fighter, he carried out some important operations, which was tremendously beneficial to the war. Like many people, I also salute him as a dedicated son of the soil.

But the recent notorious activities of his son have startled me. If the activities of the son of such a person is like this, then what can we expect from others?

**Pervez**  
Mirpur-02, Dhaka

\* \* \*

The letter "Minister's son" by "An Uttara resident" has a ring of sickening monotony about it. In the letter the anonymous writer illustrates the degree of terror struck by the said great son of the minister. Land grabbing, toll collection, extortion, rape and even murders are the sole preserve of these sons.

I may painfully assure the writer that nobody is going to give his letter two hoots. Great sons will continue to carry on their nefarious activities with greater zeal and amass more and more money.

The reign of terror echoes alarmingly familiar of bygone days but nobody learns the lesson of history. The writer, in his desperation, has appealed to MPs, the Home Minister, the President and the PM. Alas! the writer's memory is failing him. The PM has categorically declared to the countrymen more than once that no terrorist, whatsoever his party affiliation might be, shall escape the arm of law. To eliminate the black terror the PM has even piloted the Public Safety Act.

The writer would do well to pinpoint real terrorists and not beat about the bush by mentioning respectable persons like MPs of Dhaka Mirpur, Barisal, Chittagong, Feni, etc as all are doing their very best to turn this country into a 25 carat Sonar Bangla!

**A broken hearted man**  
Dhaka

## Privatise BTBT!

This is with regard to BTBT's proposed two lakh GSM cellular phones project for Dhaka city on supplier's credit. Only in greater Dhaka, about 22,000 paid demand notes are lying for a year or so. I wonder what would be the country-wide total. This is indeed the best 'achievement' of our BTBT with blessings from the bureaucrats.

I am an electrical engineer living in the USA. I used to work in Bangladesh for some years in the communication sector. In the USA, I can get

able and waiting for a telephone line for one year is unbelievable.

Since our Independence, there have been a lot of plans to privatise BTBT, but none of them succeeded due to unexplained reasons. The government should take bold steps like they did in gas and power generation sector to attract much needed investment in telecommunications. The time is ripe to privatise BTBT to lessen the misery of the common people.

**Aziz Rahman**  
Minnesota, USA, on e-mail

## Pension Money

I joined the then Pakistan Television Corporation Ltd on 01-11-1967 as an Administrative Officer and after emergence of Bangladesh, I was absorbed in Bangladesh Television as an OSD on 07-9-1972. Then I joined TCB on 01-11-1974 to the post of Junior Executive on deputation, but I was absorbed by the TCB till my going on LPR with effect from 30-6-1991.

My retirement from the service of TCB came into effect from 30-6-1992. But I was deprived from the actual benefit of my pension due to some administrative indecision of the TCB. On several occasions I requested the appropriate authority to pay me the balance amount of the actual pension benefit. None paid heed to my cries. I submitted a representation to the Chairman of the TCB on 02-12-1998, which is quoted below:

"a. That while I joined the TCB there was no pension scheme for its employees. After introduction of pension scheme in TCB, there was no direction for inclusion of absorbed personnel of the Corporation in the pension scheme.

b. That at time of awarding time scale, I was directed to deposit the amount received on account of Leave Salary, Gratuity and C P Fund from my last employer i.e. BTV. And it was directed that the aforementioned deposit would be made by adjustment from my time scale arrear payable to me.

c. That Tk 19,740/- on account of Leave Salary and Gratuity was adjusted as because the then Chief Officer, Accounts was not sure whether he would deduct the total amount contributed to the CP Fund by myself and employers, or only the Employer's Contribution to CP Fund. He withheld the deduction for comments of the Finance Ministry in this regard and accordingly left a note in my personal file. When the file was called for enquiry by the Establishment Division of TCB, it was informed by the Accounts Section that my personal file was missing. For this lapse of the Corporation, I was awarded pension benefit only for the tenure of my service in TCB depriving me from the benefit for the service in BTV and former Pakistan Television Corporation Ltd. To regularize this lapse, after my retirement I also applied to the TCB authority on 07-3-1993 to permit me for depositing unadjusted CP Fund including interest thereupon for facilitating calculation of actual pension payable to me. But the TCB Authority did not take any decision upon my application though it was within its knowledge that I was passing through financial crisis since my retirement. It may be mentioned here that if I am so permitted, TCB shall not be loser in any way, or its acts shall not be treated as unlawful".

The aforesaid representation remained ignored and unattended. So I was compelled to serve legal notice dated 02-6-2000 up on the TCB through my lawyer Mr Muhammad Muhiuddin, Advocate of Supreme Court, Muhiuddin & Colleagues, Ibrahim Mansion (2<sup>nd</sup> floor), 11, Purana Paltan, Dhaka-1000, demanding redress of my aforementioned grievance.

But till now I have not received a response from the TCB authority in spite of my repeated efforts. I fervently request a personal initiative from the Ministry to resolve the case since the TCB authority has utterly failed.

**Masihuddin Ahmad**  
New Circular Road, Dhaka

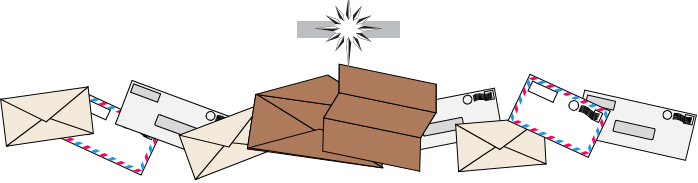
## Right to cheat?

Your columnist Almas Zakiuddin ended her column (May15) posing a question, "Are we prepared for a day when cheating becomes a fundamental right?" I am tempted to put a counter question, isn't it already the case in Bangladesh, albeit unofficially?

Everyday, don't we glamourise cheating in our actions and deeds? The smartest person around is the one who can cheat others to attain his/her objectives, no qualms about it! The columnist has given a couple of examples before that concluding question. I could add some more. But what is the point? The rot has already set in.

Cheating was endemic in our society, gradually became pandemic and now it is epidemic in dimension and nature. It has, indeed, become an unwritten fundamental right.

**M. B. Zaman**  
Uttara, Dhaka, on e-mail



## LETTER OF THE WEEK

**We are pleased to announce that we have introduced a special attraction, 'Letter of the Week' and will award the writer a prize. Letters must be no more than 300 words and focus on a current topic in simple language. The Daily Star's selection of the "Letter of the Week" will be final.**

## Save our fragile bird population

Birds are an integral part of our eco-system. At present, the world population of birds stands at about 8,050 species.

The Indian sub-continent alone holds some 12,00 species out of which nearly half are found in Bangladesh. Another 150 or so "guest birds" find their temporary home in our country during winter. To escape from biting cold, these winged guests seek refuge in our land for five to six months before flying away to their original nesting grounds.

Unfortunately, an unscrupulous group of poachers carries out illegal trapping and hunting of these guest birds, specially around Mymensingh, Sylhet and other districts where the main wetland habitats are found. Besides, many individuals sell trapped ducks and other guest and resident birds at different places in Dhaka city illegally.

With an upward trend in the trade of winter birds, a sharp fall has been observed in the avis population in Bangladesh during the last few years. There is a law in the country against wildlife hunting and trade but due to various loopholes and lack of awareness, this law has become almost null and void and the exploitation of birds goes on unabated.

In order to earn quick money, another group is engaged in the trade of caged birds in Dhaka. Every month, the Katabon market sells hundreds and thousands of local birds. Our resident birds such as Roseringed parakeet, Munia (three to four types), Hill Mynah, Bank Mynah, Dove, etc. are sold together with various foreign species. Each year, millions of local birds perish in the process of rough cage handling and suffocation during transportation from their habitat to the capital's pet shops. According to some renowned bird watchers of



Bangladesh, each year, on average, 1000 Hill Mynahs die in captivity, only in Dhaka. A particular specie 'Sobuj Munia' or Green Munia is no more found in the country. The only habitat left for it in the Indian sub-continent are the plains of Uttar Pradesh. There, too, its population is dwindling. Let us come forward to start a united movement to save the bird community in Bangladesh. Firstly, hunting, buying and consumption of winter birds should be stopped. Secondly, children should be discouraged from having local birds in cages as 'pets'. Only specially bred cage-birds such as the Australian Budgerigar, the Love Bird, Cockatail should be kept as pets. By maintaining the above two disciplines, we can enrich and enliven the precious eco-system in Bangladesh. Co-operation and help from all quarters can easily bring a new lease of life to our fragile feathered friends, both guest and resident.

**Aziz Amirul,**  
*Bird lover and member Bird Club, Dhaka, on e-mail*

nance and repair work, almost all the toilets of Dhaka University campus have become unfit for use. All the basins are broken, or at least half-broken and the situation is the same with regard to the latrines and urinals. These are unhygienic, not washed regularly and give out an intolerable stench.

As many as 20,000 students have to spend long hours in the campus for various purposes. During this long period, they need to use the toilets. These students suffer a lot due to an unhealthy, damaged, or half-damaged sanitation system.

Will the authorities concerned

or a clinic.

The Indians are lucky that they have got the dead bodies back. Many a time, Bangladeshis have failed to receive the dead bodies of their dear ones killed by the BSF. If the villagers had not taken the trouble of bringing the BSF the bodies of their dead, they would have decomposed further. The Indians should realise that what was done was done with the best of intentions, given the limited resources available.

**Dr Rashid**  
Dhaka

## Election propaganda

such candidate in any political party. We should go for independent candidates. I have the firm belief that these candidates will be able to lead the country far better than the Awami League and BNP.

**Md. Habibullah Khan**  
North Carolina, USA, on e-mail

## Reject hartal

Bangladesh is a hartal prone country. Opposition parties of our country frequently call hartal to exhibit their democratic right. They never think about the fate of our poor people and those who live on their daily earnings. These unfortunate people are the real victims of hartal. But neither the government nor the opposition political parties care about these people and their rights.

The political parties routinely claim that they are struggling for the welfare of the poor. But in reality, they are only using them to cling to power.

The hartal culture is destroying our economy and increasing the distress of general people. It would be my request to all the political parties to consider the hardship of the poor and reject the destructive tool, hartal.

**Md Abdul Latif**  
Khulna University

## The lying culture

It is a matter of great concern that we, as a nation, are sliding into the lying culture. To our resentment, this has been vigorously pioneered by our political leaders. If politics is nothing but lying, we denounce it. If it is something for the betterment of the people, let the political leaders realise it first.

Telling lies is one of the six major sins. It appears that most of the people in our society are oblivious of the supreme doctrine of Islam. Lying has gradually pervaded our society so much that one can hardly rely on anybody's commitment.

The religious teachers also seem to have given up preaching the true values of life. It is the unpunished lying or for that matter the concealment of fact that underlies the perpetration of all misdeeds.

At this critical juncture, only practising truthfulness can save our nation and it has to start from our political leaders.

**Mohsin**  
Baily Road, Dhaka

## We feel insecure

We say that we are proud to be an independent nation and the people in our country are full of the spirit of freedom. But we do not possess the qualities and attributes that an independent nation should have.

There is insecurity everywhere. A woman cannot go out alone after nightfall or wear simple ornaments that a woman in our culture is supposed to wear, because she is scared that her ornaments can be snatched by offenders. There's insecurity for a teenage girl asked to

tension, unhealthy environment and a blind future. No lawful act is taken against the trouble-mongers. The facilities that the people of an independent nation should relish are missing within us.

We can talk and feel sorry about those unfortunate souls that were destroyed during the war, but we should not ignore the present status in the country. We look so much into our past that we overlook what is going on in the present.

Day after day sad incidents take place in individual homes. Members of families passes away due to political instability, law and order situation, unlawful activities, but sadly no lawful act ever takes place. Time and time again we come across grieved families, read about them in newspapers, see their pain on television and keep quiet about it. We lost so many people of our country during the Independence War.

After the war, people were relieved that there'll be peace, but peace never came. Looking at so many incidents, many of us have a vital question in our sub-conscious mind: *Are we really independent?*

**Arjuman Wohra**  
Mohammadpur, Dhaka, on e-mail

## Minority rights

Minority communities around the



party MP?

The government has declared that if during hartal vehicles are damaged and people suffer physical injuries, the government will compensate them. Why is the government ignoring the distress of journalists and not compensating the affected ones?

Isn't it the duty of the government to see to the welfare of all and not maintain double standards?

**Nur Jahan**

globe are facing different kinds of problems. Though almost all countries claim to uphold minority rights, this does not reflect reality. Behind the world-wide refugee problem lies peoples' outlook regarding minorities.

Ethnic riots have been victimising minorities around the globe. To stop the human sufferings and human rights violations and save

a telephone in one day. But how much does it cost in Bangladesh? Only US\$ 40.00 (Taka 2000.00) one time fee. There is no company like BTBT here.

All companies are private (AT & T, Sprint, Quest...).

In a country like Bangladesh where per capita income is US\$ 400.00 paying Tk 20,000 for a telephone line is simply not accept-

## The right to live



It was a surprise to learn ("Plight of the *hijra*" May 18) that the 'Bangladeshis' who are eunuchs (*hijra*) are not recognised by the state. Aren't they citizens of this country? Well, they must be if their births were registered.

The government has many programmes for looking after the handicapped citizens. It appears that the official attitude is not the same towards all.

The mass media do not carry any news about the *hijra*'s welfare activities. These unfortunate people are not responsible for the way they were born. Surely, the UN system is aware of their existence in different countries. One would like to know from either the UN or others what kind of attitude other communities have towards the *hijra*.

It is a taboo topic, but with government encouragement, there are enough NGOs in the country to initiate different programmes for the eunuchs. First, a database has to be prepared. But perhaps they are not in any official list. That means a field survey should be conducted first. A proper awareness campaign may tilt the response in the right direction.

**AH**  
Dhaka

take necessary steps to make all the toilets fit for use and keep them hygienic?

**Mohammad Shahadat Hossain**  
Department of English, DU

## "Milk products"

This is in reference to the letter written on the above subject (May 10). I fully agree with the views expressed by the writer about the problems faced by the consumers in purchasing milk products without necessary information.

It is the duty of the milk producers to mark the date of manufacture and the date of expiry on each product.

This will help the consumers to check each packet before buying.

I have seen in other countries that the Food & Drug Administration/Public Health Authority regularly runs checks on milk packets in stores. Products are also checked in the government food laboratories to ensure quality.

It is unfortunate that in our country the authorities have no time or inclination to check these matters in the public interest.

I would request the Health Ministry officials/City Corporation staff to wake up and do their job.

The milk manufacturers should also take appropriate steps to ensure safe products for the consumers.

**Jamil Rahman**  
Eskaton road, Dhaka

## BSF dead body

It seems that the Indians are mostly