

## Happy New Year

I am a Bangladeshi studying at the University of Portland. I live in University campus. I did not come across with any Bangladeshi yet. I think the number of Bangladeshis is very low in the West Coast of USA. I read the Bangladeshi newspapers in the Internet. And I always become frustrated know the pathetic situation of my country. Political environment is hopeless, economic situation is devastating, no security, no education.

Amidst of all these I wish you and all the readers a New Year full of possibilities and opportunities. May God bless Bangladesh. Peace.

**Leo**  
University of Portland, USA

## We need a Bengali calendar not a Mughal one

I want to raise some questions about the Bengali year. Who invented the Bengali year? Why was it invented and was it really necessary to invent a Bengali year? All of these answers died with the Mughal Empire. Mughals did this for their interest to rule Bengal and to collect taxes.

Does any of our activities relate to Pahela Baishakh? Does our financial year or academic session begin from Bengali New Year? Do the government employees get their salaries on the basis of the Bengali months? Do they get bonus in a Bengali New Year? Does our cultivation begin from the first month of a Bengali year? Rather all our crops viz, aman, aush, boro are grown according to the Roman Calendar.

It was Fatehullah, advisor to Mughal Empire arranged the Bengali months in such a way. The month of Baishakh comes first, then comes the month of Jaisthya and so on; and it was compiled such a way only for the sake of their tax collection.

What are the meanings of Baishakh, Jaisthya, Ashar etc.? What is the history behind these names? Honestly speaking, I know nothing about it and our teachers did not teach us anything about it.

The Bengali year is totally a Mughal imposition. It did not come from any Bengali culture or from Bengal. The Bengali year has nothing to do with Bengal. We need to devise by Bengal or from Bengal. It was really necessary to devise a new Bangladesh year after 1971, after the liberation. It's necessary to arrange the months according to our activities. The name of the months and days should be changed, too. Time has come to think and debate over the matter.

**Mesbahuddin Ahmed**  
Jigatola, Dhaka

## Crackdown on illegal drugs

Does Bangladesh have the resources to conduct a US style War on Drugs? Maybe it is now time to have a debate on legalising certain drugs. The best way to control drug related crime, monitor addiction levels and addicts and to raise revenue would be to legalise as many drugs as possible.

Holland has had marijuana legally available, with some restrictions, for quite some time now and has kept the matter under control. Switzerland has needle parks for heroin addicts and has not seen any surge in addiction either. Even the UK is freeing its police from prosecuting marijuana-related crimes, within certain limits.

On the other hand, where drugs are illegal we see a different scenario. The dismal record of the US in terms of prison overcrowding and judicial backlog is not encouraging.

**MA, on e-mail**

## Thank you

Thank you for publishing another heart-warming article by Mohammad Badrul Ahsan ("One Big Void"). I congratulate the writer

## A city named Dhaka

A news item dated November 28, has informed us that according to the United Nations Fund for Population Activities, the population of Dhaka City which now stands at 12.3 million, will reach the 21.1 million mark, as projected by the UNFPA. This would make Dhaka the fourth largest city in the world, in terms of population density.

The city's half the population live in slums without any access to clean water, sanitary facilities, sewerage, garbage cleaning etc. One fourth of people live in congested accommodations. Open-air toilets are spread throughout the city.

Dhaka is already the number one polluted city in the world, and as of now an unlivable one, where fishes die in the lakes and the citizens are slowly poisoned. What will be the scenario in the year 2015? This is anybody's guess.

Our road surface is one third of what we need. Our open spaces are vanishing leading

## The PM and Umrah expenses

It has been observed that after coming to power the top brass of the ruling party including the Head of the Government develop a desire to frequently visit Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (K.S.A.) to perform Umrah/Hajj. The nation was fed up with the numerous foreign visits by the Ex-Prime Minister, her cabinet members including the Speaker of the Parliament. We hoped for a change after the national election.

But to our dismay, our incumbent Prime Minister has already visited K.S.A. twice by now for the purpose of Umrah. I am not sure as to who pays for their religious trips. If it is on State exchequer then the question arises whether those would be legitimate or not from the Islamic point of view.

The other important point is that by undertaking such private visits they are violating statutory law of the land. One should be aware that late President Sheikh Mujibur Rahman enacted a law restricting the private visits by the public servants to once a year and once in two years on the religious grounds only. So before they undertake such travel they should deregulate the law which no doubt is a black law curtailing the fundamental rights of the freedom of movements of its citizens.

**A. B. M. Zakaria, on e-mail**



State paid pilgrimage?

for such a wonderfully written piece and hope he continues writing these stories-- his are not only interesting, but also thought provoking. They touch on delicate issues that are often ignored/overlooked by our society, but need to be addressed with understanding and empathy, like that of Mr. Ahsan's. Thanks again.

**Wafa Tawfeeq**  
Dallas, USA

## Land for Jews

We should understand that by growing population of Israel, they need more land. Shouldn't the European countries give some land in Europe for European Jewish so that they can form a separate state there and live in peace?

**Rabi**  
Washington, USA

## Biman Bangladesh Airlines



Flying low?

The Daily Star has published a letter on Biman on December 31. The writer's points are self-explanatory and demand the immediate attention. I had similar experience with Biman's Dubai office.

I bought six air tickets from Biman in April and flew to Dhaka in June. During my return I had a stopover in Dubai in September and could not get a seat in Biman for New York to complete rest of the Journey. I had to buy a new one-way ticket from Kuwait Air and complete my Journey.

In the Biman office (Dubai) my experience is not positive at all. I wrote to the Biman Management last month. Biman New York office web site or electronic connections never works. I am proud of the news of the Prime Minister that she bought air tickets for her family and made the Umrah Hajj. Why does a minister need a big tourage to visit foreign country? What dignity Bangladesh have now in the eyes of the world?

**Mir Dost Mohammad Khan**  
Denver, Colorado, USA

## Modern economics

Now a days the Business Pages of every newspaper are filled up with hopeless and discouraging news. Japan's trade surplus with Asia has decreased 80 per cent, and the Tokyo government is worried about their present growth rate.

One supermarket chain worth a couple of billion dollars has collapsed in Japan. The Japanese are suffering from the agony of a decade of recession. The plight of the industrialised countries all over the world is not at all inspiring, as consumerism declines to wipe out profits and expansion.

The curve must be rising all the

dering so meekly to the unruly elements. How have the muggers trained themselves?

Let the muggers be appointed as police so that they can catch the other muggers (without killing them first).

**AZ**  
Dhaka

## Plight of police

In response to the letter "Does the government know how" (December 20), I call the attention of the honourable Prime Minister to a certain aspect of the police officers of Bangladesh who are working in the field level. Everybody expects a police officer to do "everything" without rewarding him "anything."

In Bangladesh, police officers working in field levels are low-paid, ill treated and poorly organised. They have no promotion, no job-satisfaction, no status, no career, no social position and no motivation. They are unhappy. But they have been given the task of making people happy when they have no social security for themselves. They have been given the task of providing "security" for people. In order to make police a dynamic force, to deliver better service to the people the steps recommended underneath should be taken urgently:

- 1) The Police Act of 1861 which was designed to maintain a lord-subject relationship between higher authority and field level police officer during British period must be abolished to ensure the sense of dignity of field level police officers.
- 2) Sub-Inspector of police should be declared 2<sup>nd</sup> class gazetted officer and scope of promotion through competitive examination should be guaranteed.
- 3) The "give paise, take posting" policy should be replaced by placing the task of posting under the district magistrate.
- 4) The job of police is complex and risky. They should be given a special pay structure.

**Nazmur Rahman**  
DU

## Cadet College admission test

In our country cadet colleges are prestigious educational institutions. In this age of competition, seeking admission in a Cadet College is really a tough job. Only the brilliant and physically fit students are able to get admitted in these colleges.

The admission test usually held in the month of January. The test for the year 2002 is going to be held on January 18, 2002. After getting admitted the cadets are given different sorts of training along with their regular academic activities based on the syllabus of national curriculum and the TextBook Board.

The duration of such educational system takes six years which aims at making a Cadet capable of shouldering future responsibilities. The success stories of cadet Colleges are now a fact which allures many guardians to send their wards to a Cadet College, but the existing system of the admission test shatters many of the promising candidates dream. So, I would request the Adjutant General of Bangladesh Army and the Chairman of Bangladesh Cadet College to bring a little change in the system of admission test.

In the present system one can get admitted in a Cadet College on the basis of only one choice. Suppose, a candidate has given his choice for Comilla Cadet College, he will have to compete with the candidates of Comilla Cadet College only. It is usually seen that the candidates who give option for Comilla or Mirzapur Cadet College are usually the brighter ones. So, if a candidate for Comilla Cadet College fails to get an admission, he loses the chance of getting admitted in these colleges forever. Whereas, a candidate who is not so proficient gets himself admitted to the Rajshahi or Rangpur Cadet College because of his choice of college. The admission result is prepared on the basis of every particular college, which finally results in dropping out many brilliant candidates.

The results should be prepared centrally because when a candidate fails to get himself admitted according to his choice, he remains ready to enter into another Cadet College. But the current system leaves no scope for it.

So, the order of merit should be made centrally and the 450 candidates should be selected from the top of the list. Then they need to be distributed to nine colleges. Every candidate should have nine choices instead of one choice. The remuneration for examining the intake scripts should be increased for the faculty members, which is an important factor of admission test.

**Md. Masum Billah**  
Rajuk Uttara Model College

## Computer education compulsory?

Lunacy seems to have gripped the Ministry of Education and the Education Boards! In a country where even scientific calculators are not allowed at the SSC and HSC examinations centres, computer learning and operating has been made a compulsory subject!

It means that the young learners who cannot or do not even touch a computer in their educational institutions are supposed to have it in their homes. So, when they practice at home with their computers, at the examination centers, or may be at their own institutions, they will be able to fare well in their 'practical' exams.

Computer learning has been made a compulsory subject. Meanwhile most schools and colleges cannot even afford to hire or appoint teachers who are knowledgeable in this subject. Again, where there is no computer how is it possible to practice the handling of a computer?

**Mujibul Haque**  
Dhaka

## Stop tall talk

The Prime Minister and her Home Minister still continue to give direction. When will they start working?

People have lost faith in them within 60 days (100 days still far ahead). People's loss of faith is reflected in beating up the muggers on the spot and in many other incidents. Please stop these tall talk and do something constructive.

**Shawkat Hossain**  
Lalmatia, Dhaka

## To the DU VC

You have been appointed as a VC during the period when the varsity is facing a serious situation. The students are in the abyss of session jam and the situation is going downhill day by day.

In this connection I would like to mention that if the winter vacation is cancelled, the session jam may be minimised. And as a student, I think that cancellation of winter vacation is much needed for the sake of the students.

**Md Salah Uddin**  
Zahurul Haque Hall, DU

## Rise of Islam

Till the late eighties, the world was divided into capitalism and socialism or communism. Each was considered as the other's arch-enemy. With the fall of communism in Europe the threat of cold war had disappeared.

Everyone thought that from then on peace would prevail in the entire world. But now a new kind or fear has gripped the western countries. The rise of Islam in the western world has frightened them very much. So it would not be surprising if as an excuse for curbing terrorism more Muslim countries come under the attack from the powerful western countries in the near future.

**Iqbal Uddin Ahmed**  
New Eskaton Road, Dhaka

## The Khatib's sermon

Voices condemning the US attacks on Afghanistan have rung out throughout the world time and again, even sometimes in the heartland of America itself-- even by non-Muslims. The Khatib of course has the right to join in condemning attacks on fellow Muslim brothers and sisters.

Yet I have to ask, where was his sense of moral outrage, his condemnation of the systematic destruction that the Taliban rule visited upon the common Afghans? There are a number of issues (such as the enforcement of the hijab) that do give the scope for debate, but what about the Taliban edicts regarding women's education and their right to work? Where in the Quran does it say that Muslim women are not allowed to study or work?

As I recall, the Quran exhorts the faithful (and not necessarily only the men) to educate themselves and not only are there instances in

Islamic history of learned and professional women, but the Prophet's first wife herself was an established entrepreneur, a business woman in her own right. Therefore, were not the Taliban actions in shutting down schools and prohibiting women to work outside a direct contradiction of both the Quran and the example of the Prophet's life? Where was the Khatib's condemnation then? Why did he not condemn the Taliban's anti-Islamic actions from the same pulpit then? As a leader of the Muslim community, his condemnation should have been even stronger than-- for, unlike the US, the Taliban's atrocities were committed in the name of Islam. In

ber 31). I would like to inform your readers that as every body knows Taj was built by a Muslim ruler of India, Shah Jahan, in the memory of his beloved wife Mumtaz. It is a brilliant artwork of Muslim architecture and a heritage of one thousand years of Muslim rule over India.

Further, the walls of whole Taj are inscribed with the Muslim's holy book of Koran. It is ridiculous to even imagine that Pakistan will attack the Taj.

It is a mere a propaganda of Indian government to attract attention of the western world.

**Khalid Mahmud**  
Atlanta, GA, USA

## Solution for Kashmir

The current standoff between India and Pakistan over terrorist attacks on the Indian Parliament can trigger a war, which might end up in a nuclear exchange. By putting their forces on a war footing, both India and Pakistan have entered into a new phase in their old confrontation over Kashmir-- a territory that remains at the heart of their confrontation.

They fought two wars over it and skirmishes across the disputed border have been a regular feature. The problem remains intractable because the majority in Kashmir, the only Muslim majority region in a predominantly Hindu-majority India, are not satisfied with the Indian rule and either want to join Muslim Pakistan or have an independent country of their own while the Hindu minority remain steadfastly opposed to severing their links with India.

India, on the other hand, is not prepared to let Kashmir go on the basis of religion as it considers itself a secular state where all religious groups can stay together in harmony (though the election of Hindu nationalist BJP has put such an assertion in doubt).

Pakistan, for its part, considers itself obligated to Kashmiri Muslims and has provided political, diplomatic and military support for

Kashmiri militants. The result has been an endless confrontation and an ever-present prospect of war.

Negotiations to resolve the crisis have been a failure, mainly because the two parties have failed to find a proper format let alone a common



The violent hour

ground to end the conflict. In this context, the 1998 Easter Agreement to end the conflict in Northern Ireland can provide a practical blueprint for the resolution of the seemingly intractable conflict in Kashmir.

The confrontation between the two communities has made the crisis in Northern Ireland as intractable as the crisis in Kashmir. The Easter Agreement has tried to resolve this by addressing the concerns of both parties. The

pressed. Right now the few communist countries that are left have abandoned the policy of suppressing religious faith of their citizens.

In the USA the newly elected President takes oath putting his hand on the Bible though the country is secular. In the UK the Queen/King is the head of the Anglican Church though that country is also secular. In a secular country the faith of the majority always gets preference but that never crosses the limit or turns into religious extremism. Those who are in favour or against secularism should not misinterpret the term.

Nothing can evade Allah's attention.

concerns of the Protestant loyalists have been addressed through the Irish Republic's giving up its constitutional claim to Northern Ireland. The aspirations of the Catholic republicans have been addressed through cross-border institutions comprising Britain, Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic. These institutions will provide an advisory role in the day to day administration of the province. Under the scheme, Northern Ireland will become a self-governing body with links to Ireland while remaining a part of the United Kingdom.

The same formula could be applied to Kashmir. It could become self-governing within India while a joint India-Pakistan-Kashmir Commission could be created to provide an advisory role in the administration of Kashmir. Such cross-border institutions, on the line of the institutions stipulated in the Easter Agreement, can allow the Kashmiri Muslims some links with Pakistan while remaining a part of the Indian federation. This way both India and Pakistan could have a say in Kashmir, and Kashmir could be self-governing with links to Pakistan, while nominally governed by New Delhi.

**Mahmood Elahi**  
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada

## What is secularism?

Those people who think that secular sate means a state where people don't have any belief in religion and God, they are grossly mistaken. A secular state is where citizens are not discriminated on the basis of their religious faiths. It's in a communist country where religious faiths are discouraged and even sup-

Allah has not said anything in the Holy Quran about the form of a government or how a government should be elected and run.

It means He has kept politics or state affairs in the discretion of people and out of the domain of religion.

**Faruque Hasan**  
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

addition, hundreds of Muslims died in the September 11 attack on the WTC. Why did the Khatib not condemn the September 11 attack?

**Shabnam Nadiya, on e-mail**

## "Taj to take veil..."

I am writing this in response to the letter by Shabbir A. Basheer "Taj to take veil if war break out" (Decem-

## Purdah-- a personal choice or not

The concerned citizen has replied to my letter, which suggested that "purdah" is compulsory. Thank you very much for writing me back. I feel that you probably have misinterpreted my use of the phrase "personal choice". By this, I wanted to mean something that is "sunnat" or "nafl" i.e. optional. For example, for men, keeping of beards is sunnat which Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) did during his lifetime. And by meaning compulsory, I referred to those things, which are "Fazr".

There are a number of religions existing all over the world. For the ones who have accepted Islam as their religion, for them purdah is compulsory. Simply by name, one cannot become a Muslim, rather it has to be proven through one's deeds and purdah is a means of proving oneself as a Muslim.

In the Holy Quran, purdah has been made compulsory. The school of thought has arisen on the extent of purdah, not on the system itself. Some experts say that women can only show their face, their wrists and their feet up to the ankles while some say that women can only show their eyes, the wrists and the feet up to the ankles. But, otherwise, all experts have unanimously approved covering of the rest of the body. If a woman doesn't abide by the purdah, then she might be axing her own leg!

I know that there isn't any compulsion in religion but for ones betterment in the after life, one should strictly follow what Allah has ordered one to do. Although, the final decision of either being rewarded or punished depends upon Allah. We must remember that Allah has created humans and jinn only to worship Him and abiding by purdah is a means of worshipping Him.

In my previous letter, neither have I said that the Taliban were good and the Iranians were bad nor did I say that women cannot go to school or work. And as for your information I haven't proposed any self-made policy to make women's life uncomfortable. This is Allah's command. If one doesn't abide by purdah, then one may have to pay the price for the sins one has committed.

**Sameer Ahmed Khan Mojlish, on e-mail**

## Hijab for women

Whether a woman decides to wear hijab or not in a democracy like Bangladesh is her personal choice. Bangladesh is a People's Republic not an Islamic Emirate. No mullah and his fatwa should compel our women to forcibly don the purdah against their wishes.

Just ask the women in Afghanistan if they enjoyed being

behind the veil the last five years under the Taliban. The fanatics will use making Hijab-wearing compulsory in the first step of repression on women that will I'm sure soon be followed by no work outside the home for women, no education for girls and finally public executions in soccer stadiums.

Those in Bangladesh who believe that women should be forced to wear the hijab against their wishes should join their Taliban and Al-Qaeda brethren in the mountains of Tora Bora, where they can enjoy the hospitality of 15,000-pound American bombs.

**Sajjad Haque**  
New York, USA

## Purdah is compulsory?

I don't know why it is so hard to comprehend what I have been trying to say, must be my inability to express myself clearly. Let me try once more. There is no denying of the fact that Allah asked women to be in modest attire. There is no question about the praying, the fasting, the alms giving, and the pilgrimage being mandatory for Muslims. There is no doubt in my mind that those who follow the rules will be rewarded by Allah in the after-life.

But what I said and still maintain, is that it is ultimately a person's choice whether or not she/he is going to follow the rules or not. For example, can you force a person to fast? You can take away the food, and the drink, but if the person does not intend to fast, it would only result in starving, not fasting. (Perhaps this is why no one is asking fasting to be mandatory by society as well. But picking on women and imposing more restrictions on them is the easiest thing, isn't it?)

We can go in circles and argue all year about the level of purdah required by Islam, but that is not even the point of this discussion.

The question is whether the society needs to impose restrictions on women's attire or not.

I vote against such restrictions the same reason I would have voted against the French government's decision to ban wearing of hijab in schools. Wearing a hijab, or not, should be a woman's choice - like Farah Islam correctly pointed out, a woman should definitely wear it if she finds the calling herself and/or she fears Allah, but not because she is afraid of being prosecuted/persecuted by the society.

**A Concerned Citizen**  
Dallas, U.S.A.

