

**"Has BNP been elected to take revenge...?"**

This is in response to Shaheen Karim's letter (January 11). Mr. Karim seemed to argue that the Awami League's demonstration (in which several of its MPs were beaten up) was illegal and that the punishment they received was just. He then stated that the "Awami League should be thankful that they can at least be Members of Parliament and has a right to demonstrate". I wonder how you can demonstrate when the police are trying to drive you away with force...

Apart from the blatant contradiction, Mr. Karim went on to castigate the Awami League for taking "away every democratic right of the people of Bangladesh in 1975 by creating BAKSAL and closing down all newspapers and banning all political parties." I admit that the BAKSAL rule was draconian and illegal (to put it mildly), but how long do we need to keep berating the present Awami League leaders about it. Sheikh Hasina cannot be held responsible for her father's mistakes (she's made plenty on her own).

**Reshad Ahsan**  
Minnesota, USA

**Girish Chandra Sen's Quran translation**

Aren't we all forgetting Bhai Girish Chandra Sen who made the first courageous (!) move to translate the holy Quran into Bengali? We don't even think of reading his writings. Is there any shameful thing about him or is it because he belonged to the so-called minority? Seriously, this is a question.

**Tarun**  
Dhaka

**Will the polythene shopping bags really go?**

We hail the government's bold decision to ban the Polythene (High Density Polyethylene- HDPE) shopping bags gradually. In the first step it was banned in Dhaka city from the 1st January. We are very happy to see the support of the mass people of Dhaka city towards this resolve.

But recently I have developed a little scepticism regarding this matter. Just after a week of the banning I found another type of Polythene bags being sold at a very cheap price (even at Tk. 2). The sellers claimed that these bags are of 20 micron in thickness, which is the minimum allowable thickness. But a plastic manufacturer of my acquaintance has opined that it is not at all possible to produce 20-micron thick polythene bags at such cheap cost. I draw the attention of the concerned authority regarding this matter. By the way I think the thickness is not very important. But the price should be such high so as to encourage people reuse of the same Polythene bag for many times (as for the case of jute or paper bags) and thereby keep the total production (and disposal) of polythene bags to the minimum.

**Russell Chowdhury**  
West Rajabazar, Dhaka

**Wishful thinking**

As a Pakistani, I sometimes think, that if we had General Musharraf as the head of state of Pakistan, and leader like Khaleda Zia as the head of opposition in formerly East Pakistan, then probably Pakistan would have remained united.

**Saeed Ahmed**  
Houston, Texas, USA

**"Purdah and Islam"**

In the letter "Purdah and Islam" (January 2) the writer M Masud Isa says that "Allah has not set any detail of what to be seen or not to be seen of the men and women". But it

is not true and I must say that, to understand, to realise the meaning of the Quran one has to be quite acquainted with the Hadis. Hadis is the explanation of Quran.

Perhaps the writer never went through the Hadis. Therefore it is not possible for him to understand or to perceive the verses of the Quran. My request to the writer is to study Qura'n with the "Tafsir" as well as the Hadis to realise the actual meaning before writing about it.

**Taslim Hasan Sabu**  
Zia Hall, BBA, DU

**BJP-- playing with terrorism**

Terrorism seems to be the Vajpayee government and the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) new political mantra-- both for domestic politics and for international diplomacy. Prime Minister Vajpayee himself laid bare his game plan on the eve of his departure to Kathmandu for the South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (SAARC) summit.

Vajpayee played the Kargil War card in the last parliamentary elections and managed to bring his party back to power at the national level in 1999. He now hopes to revive his party's fortunes selling the terrorism card at the provincial-level elections.

Uttar Pradesh is the known bastion of anti-Pakistan feelings in India. Vajpayee's anti-terrorism rhetoric in Kathmandu is likely to work for the BJP back home.

**Salman Khan**  
Dhahran, Saudi Arabia

**Only the US can save Pakistan**

I am writing with reference to "War on terrorism: Pakistan's triumphs and travails," by Brig. (Rtd) Abdul Hafiz (January 7).

Brig. Abdul Hafiz has again written a highly contrived article

**But what about our excesses?**

This is in response to the letter of Ms S. Hossain (January 14). I get a feeling that we have a tendency to accept the partial truth only that pleases our mental orientation. And we often make blanket judgement based on our preconceived notion.

I will be brief here-- the atrocities committed by Pakistani army in 1971 were real and nobody disputes that. The only disagreement that sometimes is heard is about the extent of the brutality in terms of human life loss and the destruction of the country. On the other hand, the brutality committed by us, Bengalis against the non-Bengali population is totally denied or ignored in our history books although that was as real as the Pakistani army's atrocities.

The number of Bengalis killed by the Pakistani army until 25th of March in 1971 could be counted with the fingers of both hands, which changed drastically later. But the fact that there was a 'fore-lash' against the so-called Bihari people by the Bengalis is carefully omitted in any discussion. By eyewitness accounts, tens of thousands of Biharis were killed at different places in March of 1971. And then there were similar numbers killed in 'back-lash' after the independence.

And another information that is also not discussed is that 'Mukti-Joddhas' were formed not after 25th of March, but right after Yahya Khan postponed the National Assembly Session end of February or Beginning of March 1971. In addition, people claiming to be 'Mukti-Joddhas' in both March and December committed many of the atrocities against the Biharis.



The denied

We already have come 30 years after the nightmarish 1971, and we still try to shape the history in accordance with our personal viewpoint rather than being objective. It is said that people tend not to take any lesson from history. But if we do not have an honest and accurate history to begin with, I am afraid we even do not have any option. Everybody is entitled to emotions as human beings, but we should not neglect to uphold the truth for the sake of our posterity even if the truth is not palatable to our nurtured psyche.

**Shamim Ahmed**  
USA

I am writing in reply to S Hossain's letter. The writer appears to be saying that simply because the Pakistani forces acted like barbarians, the Mukti Bahini was justified in its retaliations.

Pakistani barbarity never excuses our own excesses of which there were many. Almost everyone has seen that famous photograph taken in the Race Course of collaborators being bayoneted. The irony is that the Father of the Nation forgave the greatest collaborators of all and himself welcomed Zulfikar Bhutto to Bangladesh, never asking for an apology or any comment on the war.

We should also remember that we lived next door to ordinary Pakistanis for many years. They were friends and neighbours.

Pakistan as a nation is not guilty of atrocities. Rather, their military and civilian supporters in Bangladesh were.

**MA, on e-mail**

Talibans. If Pakistan defied the Americans and continued to support the Talibans, the results would have been catastrophic.

In fact, the US, by routing the Talibans, has actually provided an escape route for Pakistan. With no Talibans in its midst, Pakistan can claim not harbouring terrorists. If Pakistan sided with the Talibans, India need not have to wait to thrash Pakistan for terrorist attacks on Indian Parliament. India would have got all the blessings of the U.S. to go after the terrorists in Pakistan. By not letting the Talibans to find shelter in Pakistan Pakistan's President

from basic safety aspects.

"... We had a horrible journey back to London, which lasted over 24 hours. We flew from Dhaka on time, surprisingly, and our first stop was Dubai, where we were allowed to get off the plane and go to duty free shopping for 30 minutes. Dubai airport is very nice, and we enjoyed our time there. We went back onto the plane, and were getting ready for take-off, when some people got ill, and so doctors had to be called onto the plane, and those who were too ill to travel were taken off the plane, and their luggage had to be removed from the hold. We were only supposed to stop in Dubai for one hour, but this delayed us by a further two hours. Then, we had a power failure on the plane, and all the lights and engine went out. This was quickly restored, and apparently was due to a fault in Dubai, not with the plane.

Finally, we took off from Dubai, and then after about two hours, the captain made an announcement that they would have to make an emergency landing in Ankara, Turkey, because there was some problem with the fuel tank, I think a possible leakage. So we stopped in Ankara, and were all told to get off the plane. The temperature in Ankara was 9 o C, and it was snowing heavily. There was no jet way, so we had to walk down some stairs outside, in the freezing cold, and get onto a bus, which took us to the terminal building. We were just left there, for about two hours, with no word from the crew as to what was going on, and the airport staff had no idea what was happening. There were lots of rumours spreading about what was going on, and eventually a few people asked to go and speak to the captain, seeing as he was unwilling to come to the terminal and speak to us.

... Because Biman has no agreement with Turkey to land there, the emergency landing and repairs were going to cost \$100 000, and the engineers refused to do any work until the money was wired over to them from their office in Dubai. This wasted a lot of time. There were rumours that there was a problem with the braking system on landing, but this was never confirmed. The majority of passengers refused to get on the plane, fearing for their safety, but the Captain said we had no other choice, as we would not be allowed to stay in Turkey without a visa, and they would not offload any luggage of people who did not want to get on the plane.

Finally, they gave us a small sandwich and a drink, and thinking we were now happy that we weren't hungry, told us to board the plane. We checked with the head steward that it was safe to get on, and he said that the captain would not fly if it wasn't safe, as he would be risking his own life, as well as ours. Finally we took off, after about one hour of waiting in the plane for clearance, and initially the journey was very turbulent, but it finally settled down. It took us just under four hours to get to London, and we arrived at 9.07 pm, 8 hours later than scheduled. We got through passport control and baggage reclaim very quickly and without problem. The three of us were completely exhausted, having travelled for over 24 hours. It's been a nightmare journey, but Alhamdulillah, we made it back home safely. Never again on Biman!"

**Dr. KMA Manzur FRCS**  
Consultant Surgeon, Islamia Eye Hospital, Dhaka

Musharraf saved his country from a total disaster.

The US is the only power to stop India and Pakistan from any suicidal conflict. The US has shown great diplomatic skill in remaining neutral in the conflict, though its own war against terrorism demands its should side with India.

Contrary to Mr. Hafiz's criticisms, Pakistan's decision to side with America may help it to come out of the present crisis relatively unscathed.

**Mahmood Elahi**  
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada

**Say 'no' to gas export**

I would like to voice my protest against the government's decision to export gas as soon as they came to power despite opposing it when they were not in the hot seat.

Although I have gas in my village in Bangladesh, millions of people are still deprived of this wonderful natural resource. So much can be done with the gas for the betterment of the lives of our fellow countrymen. I would also like to express my disgust towards the foreign fat cats who merely see dollars in their eyes. They need to be exposed to the world community.

I would like to express my support for Nuruddin Mahmud Kamal and S.K.M. Abdullah who have been involved in this war against global imperialism.

I would like to be part of any movement against the export of gas and would like to help in any way I can.

**Muyeeduz Zaman**  
United Kingdom

**The passenger's plight in Biman flight**

I would request you to consider publish the following email received from my daughter-in-law who along with two of my sons had the most unfortunate experience of travelling on the Biman's London flight which left Dhaka at 0345 hrs on 5.1.2002. The management of our national flag carrier certainly owes an explanation for such treatment to passengers on an international route apart

even a publicity secretary of a political party.

**A citizen**  
Dhaka

**Prize bond draw result**  
I am a regular reader of *The Daily Star*. I feel disheartened when I do not find the quarterly prize bond draw (TK 100) result in your paper. I have to look into another daily to collect the result.

**S Abedin**  
USA

The next draw will be held on January 31, 2002. Can I expect that you will publish the result this time and onwards?

**Tusher, on e-mail**

**Why is milk essential?**

This in reference to the letter by Nasreen Huq who stated that milk is not an essential for adults. As a nutritionist I don't agree with her statement. Milk has been a vital part of the human diet at all stages of life for a very long time. The earliest written records (6000 years old) show that milk was already an important food. Time has changed since the early days, and research and technology have made dairy products an essential part of a balanced diet, to maintain good health.

"Milk is essential only for infants and children" is not true because milk is an important part of a healthy diet for all ages, that is because it contains the essential nutrients required for health in a well-balanced form. The food and nutri-

**Shahriar Kabir and the Bangla Academy**

This refers to a news item published in *The Daily Star* of 29 December under the heading "Bangla Academy AGM rejects resolution on Shahriar's release."

This is neither an isolated issue nor one that can be ignored and brushed away. To my mind the entire episode taught some vital lessons to

both the ruling party and the civil society at large.

To me it appeared that three of our senior and respected intellectuals should not have raised the issue at all simply because this was not the forum or the platform. Shahriar Kabir is not an official of the Bangla Academy. Besides the matter is a human rights issue and surely Bangla Academy AGM cannot deal with the matter even if it felt sympathetic to the cause. As individuals, the Academy officials could have themselves raised and even supported (perhaps) the cause in other open forums and public meetings. Be that as it may in all fairness the AGM could have dealt with the matter without enactment of a pandemonium. The thumb rule therefore should be to raise the right questions at the right places and at appropriate times. Besides I do earnestly believe that statutory government/ semi-government institutions should be kept outside the purview of any and all political influence whatsoever. My appeal to our intellectual community is that they should not indulge or involve such institutions for advancing a political agenda no matter how lofty and morally justifiable it may appear.

While on the subject I would also like to point out that that this is high time for our intellectuals to draw a line and distinguish between their professional and moral obligations, visa-vis their commitment to politics. It is one thing to be politically conscious but it is quite another to indulge oneself in politics on a regular basis. Things have become too clouded these days. It has become difficult to distinguish between a scholar, a university teacher and a general secretary or

tion guidelines recommend that people need to eat many different foods to get the nutrients they need.

Calcium is essential to build and maintain strong bones and teeth.

**Justice delayed justice denied**



It has been almost four years that Shazneen was raped and murdered and a case was filed. The culprits were arrested. Even then why is it taking four years just to deliver the judgement? This is really surprising and pathetic justice system, not to mention a screwy one.

Are these people in the court suffering from all sorts of lethargic symptoms or what? In virtually every criminal case, the system lacks the momentum it needs to deliver the justice in time and before the case fades away from memories.

Can't we just introduce a separate court for the speedy trial of all these criminal homicide cases including rape and the incidence of acid throwing on women?

**AAhmed, on e-mail**

Research has shown that the incidence of hip fracture and osteoporosis rate is increasing due to calcium deficiency. By 2050, it is estimated that over half of all hip fractures will occur in Asia. Adequate intakes of key nutrients, including calcium, vitamin D, magnesium, and zinc are important for bone health. So it is important to get sufficient amount of calcium from the diet. Milk is the easiest way to get calcium.

As a nutritionist, I would like to say everybody must drink milk throughout life. As for children, when breast-feeding is stopped,

solution.

**Umme Fatema Chowdhury**  
Dhaka

**"Bangladeshis not fit to be Muslims?"**

Mr. Ashraf took issue on the fact that Bangladeshis "seem to be keener to wear the hijab". What is wrong with wearing hijab? Isn't it mandated by Allah (SWT) in the holy Qur'an? Obviously, This brother is turning against the wrong people.

Bangladeshis are not his enemy. He should spend his energy identifying the real enemy and not turning friends into enemy by criticising fellow Muslims in a not so constructive way. To avoid annihilation, I believe Muslims must strive for unity and not create *fitna*.

Introspection is good only if it derives positive results. I do not rule out that Mr Ashraf could be neither an Arab nor a Muslim but an adversary in camouflage intending to create animosity amongst ourselves.

**Nishat Khan**  
California, USA

I have read the letter by Mr. Ashraf, claiming to be of Middle Eastern origin. I have lived in Middle East for over 25 years and know the region and people very well.

After reading the letter over and over again, including the name, I can say with confidence that this gentleman is not from Middle East. The purpose of the letter was nothing but to create misunderstanding

friendship) between you and those whom you (now) hold as enemies. For GOD has power (over all things); and GOD is oft-forgiving. Most Merciful" (60:7).

So the obvious question is why are the Muslims all over the world constantly declaring Holy War against the infidels (i.e., the Jews, Hindus and Christians)? I don't know the answer. But I do know that, there is no concept of holy war (Arabic: al-Harb almuqaddas) in the Quran. In fact, the Crusaders invented the word "Holy War". The noun 'jihad' occurs four times in the Qur'an. The verb 'jaahada' (to struggle, strive) in various forms appears 29 times.

However, the Quran permits war in case of aggression, "but if the enemy inclines towards peace, you should also incline towards peace, and trust in GOD" (8:61).

Therefore, Mr. Sengupta the answer of your question, "Does Quran actually encourage its followers to destroy other countries if their beliefs are different than Quran's?" is No. Because, this is against the very essence of Islam "peace with GOD through submission. Islam

only encourages debate with wisdom and enlightenment. "You shall invite to the path of your Lord with wisdom and kind enlightenment, and debate with them in the best possible manner. Your Lord knows best who has strayed from His path, and He knows best who are the guided ones." (16:25)

**Mahmud Zaman**  
California, USA

**Towards disaster**

Our country is heading towards complete disaster and what I feel there is no possibility of change. The younger generations are little bothered of values and ethics and have no idea what they are up to. Have we ever considered the fact that these young people will rule the country in the near future and that is within a couple of decades? What will happen then?

One of the major dominant factors responsible for the disorder and anarchy is our debased political culture, which is obvious, and easier to imitate. This was encouraged by the vacillating leadership (the politicians govern the country) trying to build up or remain in power through false foundations, based on corrupt designs, violence and immoral practice. We have to choose between the politics of violence, and the politics of goodwill and public interest.

Such state of affairs has developed and accelerated during the last decade-- strangely, since the reintroduction of a democratic government after the long 15 years of autocracy. Why it did not mushroom in the intervening period? It was kept confined and invisible, and security of ones life was not involved. Now even a middle-class rickshaw passenger is not safe. No matter whether one is at home or out in the street, the risk remains. Even an inter-city bus journey has become too risky due to bad driving and unfit vehicles...The lukewarm attitude and general indifference of the intellectuals, politicians and the government is disturbing. Perhaps it is not safe to remain neutral anymore. The general elections have not yet brought any hope or betterment.

**A Mawaz**  
Dhaka

**Youth handicraft fair**

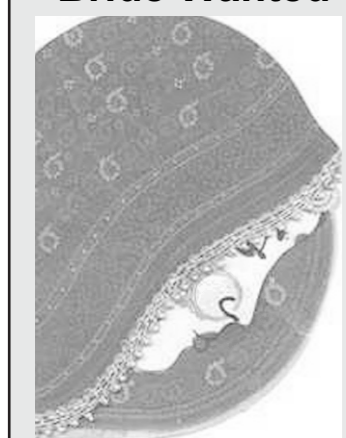
The recent handicraft mela (fair) held in Dhaka displaying the products of unemployed youth trained at the government institutes revealed a rich variety of indigenous flair and talent, which have flowered in presence of opportunity. This is the right step at the foundation level.

Such fairs may be held several times a year at major divisional towns for encouragement and appreciation by the public and exposure to the foreigners.

Also proper marketing arrangements may be planned by the relevant co-operatives, as marketing is always a weak point in the developing countries.

**Abd**  
Dhaka

**"Bride Wanted" mentality**



Marriage for sale?

I was very surprised to read a "Bride Wanted" ad in your daily on January 11, 2202. While such ads are very common in our country, the contents of this particular ad made me think about the mentality of the person who is putting the ad, and also the mentality of the paper that is publishing it.

The ad said that a man who is 55+, from upper class (whatever that is) and is extremely wealthy is looking for a bride from the age group of 18 to 25 years.

Of course the ad did not specify whether the man is a widower, divorced or never married, but was very specific about the attributes that the bride should have, along with the age group. That there is an age difference of at least 30 years did not seem to bother the person putting the ad, nor the newspaper publishing it.

Over the years *The Daily Star* has been able to establish itself as one of the leading English dailies of the country, and more importantly a family newspaper that all the members of the family enjoy. Such kind of ads certainly does not live up to the reputation that the newspapers have painstakingly gathered over the years.

**Salim Akbar**  
Dhaka

**Why was I denied US visa?**

Under compelling situations I seek help from the journalists in order to make up the loss for tarnishing my reputation as a bilingual poet and disgracing our country as well.

I was denied US visa on an invitation by the Vice Consul of the American Embassy, Dhaka, Bangladesh on July 19, 2001. I was suppose to be inducted as an International Poet of Merit on August 17-19, 2001 at the Hotel Hilton, Washington DC, for my poetic accomplishment (referring to the letter of Dr. Len Roberts, Convention Chairperson, International Society of Poets, I-Poetry Plaza, Owings Mills, MD 21117-62582, USA; Fax or Internet (410) 356-9931). You may go to the WWW. Poetry.com and verify my statement.

Death is preferable to the humiliation I had to go through. Therefore, I demand \$100 million dollars as compensation. Though a man in his late sixties, with the legal assistance of any advocate practising in Dhaka who can assist me, I would take up the matter with the American Court of Justice.

My passport number is 0 0623312, Bangladesh. I seek your moral help to overcome my agonies as a humble retired Principal of a Cadet College. I sent a letter to the President of the United States of America, Mr. George W. Bush and am waiting for his reply.

**Abul Ashraf Noor**  
Uttara, Dhaka



Halt! Who goes there?