

The face of Naipaul

Naipaul is untouchable by the reader. He also avoids touching the readers, except through permanence, which is a craft, not a philosophy. It appears, after re-reading some of his books, that Naipaul's philosophy of life underwent metamorphosis several times during his mature and sputtering lifetime.

He reminds me of Bertrand Russell; superb professionally (maths, philosophy, and a master writer of English prose). Yet there was something wrong with him. Later I found out he had troubled childhood, and had problems with his religion. On the same plane, Radhakrishnan was superb with the clarity of his philosophical dissertations.

Naipaul keeps his distance. Look at the photographs of his face that have flooded the newspapers since he won the Nobel prize the reluctant Nobelist of novels and travelogues. His photograph arrests my attention more than his paragraphs. But as a writer, he is top class;

always seeking the roots everywhere he went. He also loves to live in the branches and leaves, casting a shadow of pessimism over the firmament of his cathartic writing.

Naipaul also brings to mind another writer from this subcontinent, Nirad C Chaudhury. One is a stoic, the other an eccentric of rare qualities. Both writers on the shelf provide the reader with complimentary emotional outlets. One made it into the Academy, the other waited a century in his Oxford hamlet, but not muttering understandings.

Anyway, Naipaul is inimitable, with all his human weaknesses.

AZ
Dhaka

Age limit to apply for public/civil service

A few days ago, I heard on BBC News that the maximum age to apply for a government/civil service was going to be extended soon. I could not but appreciate the idea.

In Bangladesh, many and most

there is no age restriction; even though there is, it is flexible for highly qualified candidates. If you are 35, but you are quite fit and qualified for the job, why would you not get it? Many people are about to turn 30, and many have already crossed the line; but they definitely can serve the nation with the satisfaction of having a government service. I strongly emphasise on the necessity of extending the age limit for public service candidates for the welfare of the nation.

Md Shahadat Hossain
Clarksville, USA

Two-stroke step

In Dhaka city two-stroke baby taxis and tempos are mainly responsible for air and noise pollution. Noise created by these vehicles almost exceeds 100 decibels, which is much higher than the UN's specified limit of 45 decibels.

In New Delhi two-stroke three wheelers have been banned a time long ago. Then why won't our government be able to remove this

ment? This type of irresponsible horseplay is going on for 10 years. Have they taken the voters to be suckers? They are not immature primary school students to need advice how to behave politically, after so many years of experience in and out of the US.

The best place to grouse is from the opposition benches. That makes it official, duly recorded. Those who follow the debates from the outside can surely make up their minds who are right and who are crooked. Even the verdict of the election is not respected.

If parliamentary democracy cannot work in this country then let there be movement for alternative. The present political culture should not be treated as indispensable. This dog-in-the-manger policy is of no benefit to any one individual, group, society, nation or the country.

The opposition's present strength is too weak to mount sustained public movements. The opposition has been cornered after the October election, and it knows it. Marking

The Daily Star Business Award-- a commendable step indeed

Thanks to *The Daily Star* for its nice, encouraging and enthusiastic step of conducting an award ceremony for successful entrepreneurs and business personalities of the country. This can

considered a milestone in our business arena. It will not only encourage the big entrepreneurs but also the young generation for taking part in the country's economy effectively.

Azreen Karim
Dhaka

The Business Award is a great innovation and shows the maturity of the corporate sector. I think this year's award was also special because they recognized two creative personalities, Nitun Kundo and Rehana Kashem.

Business is measured not by turnover only but also creativity and innovation.

Nitun Kundo's award was long in coming. This person has taken designing to high art and functional products have become art objects through his imagination. His creations are really part of sophisticated living.

The award scheme should be continued.

Aziz Hosain
Malibagh, Dhaka

numerical but also manifested in the use of costly four-wheelers (an inevitable part of poverty alleviation!) and construction high-rise office buildings. Even a careless traveller in the countryside would not miss the sight of well-constructed NGO office buildings. If their social role is poverty alleviation then an inescapable 'parameter of performance' should be a comparison between their growth and fall in poverty (fall that is attributable to their activities).

We recognise that the NGOs have brought about many changes in rural Bangladesh. Indeed, they have received more rewards than they deserve due to their 'close links with the donors' as well as with the press. The government has no reason to envy their reputation instead can easily subsume them in its record of achievements. But seemingly all the good words for NGOs have misled some NGO leaders to pose themselves as political oppositions to the government. While the editorial warranted caution against government's unrealistic steps, it should also have reminded the NGOs about their roles limits.

Mahfuz Beg
Uttara, Dhaka

"On Arabic language"
This is in response to Basmah Jasir's response (February 11) on my letter "On Arabic language". The writer totally missed my point. I never suggested to make Arabic as a compulsory language, what I tried to do was, to reiterate the importance of Arabic from Islamic Point of view. That doesn't mean that everybody should be a pundit in Arabic and forget about everything else. Even Prophet (sm) said to his sahabas to go to China for knowledge if necessary. We all know that nobody could get an Arabic text in China. The point was on the importance of Arabic for better understanding of the Quran as well as Islam.

The writer was also surprised to see that people like me still exist in these days. I am not surprised to hear that, as I know that the writer is the product of so-called modernity, which was incubated by the Western Enlightenment after the Industrial Revolution. So our modern values, which mainly originated from Western Enlightenment, are so much tied up with our lives and synonymous to our society, that anything not favouring them would be seen as taboo.

From that point of view, Islam is deemed to be out-dated and backward to many of us. However, we shouldn't forget that the birth of modern science and even democracy was based on those by the Muslims before the Industrial Revolution. All the buzzwords of modern democracy, which are, touted nowadays, like 'freedom of speech', 'human right especially of the minorities', 'equal opportunities' etc., were practised strongly by the Muslim rulers thousands of years ago. The view towards religion (especially towards the church) by the scholars of Western Enlightenment is not equally applicable to Islam or any other religion today. We know in what context and what situation, the bourgeois rebelled against the church system. However, many western scholars are giving the same attitude towards Islam and the religion in general. Islam gives us a very balanced social system, which is vividly outlined in the Quran and Sunnah of Prophet (sm). It is our fault that we haven't been able to rip the benefit out of that. That is why, when somebody stresses upon the understanding of the Quran, people like Basmah Jasir think him or her as outdated and backward.

Zafar Hadi
Los Angeles, California, USA

Arabic language
I fully agree with the views expressed by Basmah Jasir and Zafar Hadi. They have truly upheld the value of Islam and the need for educating our children. Without literacy we can never be good citizens. I congratulate the government for spending a lot in our education sector but this isn't enough.

Altaf Hussain
Jinjira, Dhaka

Bin Laden, Twin Tower and Muslims

With reference to Nasreen Mustafa's letter on January 29th and Shareen Hussain Tania's letter on 5th February, it appears that both are confirmed in their conviction regarding Osama bin Laden's involvement in the Twin Tower tragedy. Maybe they have been furnished with foolproof evidence from the right quarter. May we, therefore request them to kindly enlighten us through our esteemed column in this regard, so that we do not suffer from our inglorious impression that Twin Tower affair was the repetition of Hitlerite pretext of invading Poland, sparking off the Second World War. The Cuban crisis as planned by the 'right quarters' provokes such impression.

Allah's help and support for the Muslims are not forthcoming, may be, for two reasons namely, Muslims need to improve their lifestyle based on pure Quranic concept of life and as such, time has not come for help and support as yet.

Amer Mustafa
Uttara, Dhaka



Ms/Mr. E S's letter (February 6) really surprised me, in which elusive ES criticised the DS columnist Brig Hafiz for voicing concern about inhuman treatment of prisoners in camp X-ray at US naval base of Guantanamo Bay in Cuba? Conscientious people all over the world are condemning the inhuman treatment of those prisoners of war. I was also shocked when I saw heads-and-beards-shaven prisoners in chains or locked in iron cages like ferocious wild animals.

Also, E S's description of Afghanistan before September 11 is outright hilarious. Does he/she really believe 'these very prisoners of war had enslaved an entire nation, imprisoned an entire gender, and demolished an entire culture?' Taliban and al-Qaeda beasts' were 'throwing acid on women, shooting young girls as sport in public stadiums'? (Aren't Taliban and al-Qaeda two differ-

ent entities?)

The Western media have unleashed a fierce propaganda offensive against Taliban right after September 11 and it is still going on. We know their desperation to distort the truth, and the irony is if you tell a lie 100 times it turns to truth.

November 28 issue of *Asiaweek* published a first-hand account of a Japanese doctor Tetsu Nakamura who worked in Afghanistan for quite a while. Let me quote from *Asiaweek*:

'...the Taliban are being wrongly portrayed internationally. "There's something wrong with the media reports," he (Nakamura) says. "This talk of the Taliban being vicious and disliked doesn't fit with reality." Nakamura says the fundamentalists have wide support from the population, particularly in rural areas. "Otherwise, how can they rule 95% of the country with only 15,000 soldiers?..."

So why are the people of the capital, Kabul, reportedly hoping to see the Taliban overthrown? "The Taliban may act differently there," he told me when we met recently in Tokyo. "They're obliged to fix the corrupt urban life. The people most vocal in criticising the Taliban are upper-class Afghans who have been deprived of their privileges..."

Let's check what is going on in Afghanistan as the Taliban is smoked out. According to Messrs. Bush and Blair "Afghanistan is now part of civilised world". According to British journalist Robert Fisk, a Taliban basher, "almost all Afghan women in Kabul continued to wear the burqa. ... If nothing else, the Taliban made the roads and villages of Afghanistan safe for Afghans and foreigners alike. Now, you can scarcely drive from Kabul to Jalalabad." [The Independent, December 22, 01]

By the way, I just read Brig. Hafiz's 'A civilisational aberration in defending civilization' (Feb 4) after seeing E S's letter and I found it well-written and praiseworthy, so I would like to take this opportunity to thank Brig. Hafiz and *The Daily Star*-- keep up the good job!

Shukla Mirza,
on e-mail

Ms/Mr. E S's letter on

meaning he can inject meanings on into non-meanings and non-issues. He is like the puritanical Brahmin writer writing in high class modern English. The hesitancy of the Swedish Academy is understandable in making him wait for the coveted honour near, yet so far away.

He is a first class rootless writer,

students start worrying about the age as soon as they pass H.S.C. Exam. A big portion of the students cannot make themselves in service before they reach 30. This is a cause of an absolutely unnecessary anxiety for them.

I would like to mention here that in many countries in the world today,

they will not pay the dividend. It is time to ignore the opposition outside the House, and go ahead.

Abul MAhmed Chowdhury
Dhaka City College

Medicine for all

Medicine is an essential commodity. I would like to draw the attention of the ministry of Health and Family Welfare Affairs. The poor people of our country do not get adequate Medicare facility from the government hospitals. And it is not possible for the government alone to develop Medicare facility for all the people. Often some unscrupulous medicine sellers sell these medicine at higher price to meet their selfish need. Except for a few medicine companies who have an adjustment between their quality and price, the rest do not follow proper rules and regulations. They fix up high price of medicine for the seller's interest. The medicine seller's are more benefited by their strong association. If you want to give Medicare facility to the grass-roots level, first you have to root out such illegal activities of associations.

Hope the government would take

necessary steps in this regard.

Md. Shah Alam Munshi
Comilla

The default syndrome

The condemned 2-stroke community and vehicles are on indefinite strike. The big bank-loan defaulters cannot be cornered or rounded up. The common factor is corrupt practices on both sides.

Suddenly the authorities feel the itch to clean up the mess (including the squatters and the riverbank encroachers). But the finger is pointed the other way "Cleanse yourself, before you throw the stone". This hide-and-seek game is going on through all the regimes, and the solutions are still not in sight (including the SOEs).

The prosecutors are not qualified or tainted. The shake-up is limited to political neutralisation after one-regime goes out. The foundation is scrapped, but the same rot sets in soon after. Who are guilty: the players or the referees?

Alif Zabir
Dhaka

Don't coax the opposition

Are we not spoiling the opposition by coaxing them to join the parlia-

ment?

A Baree

Dhaka

Freedom struggle

Why do the USA and Israel accuse Yasser Arafat for the freedom struggle of the Palestinian people and term it as terrorist activities? Why do Israel and the USA blame Yasser Arafat for not being able to stop the freedom struggle of the Palestinians?

No power on earth can control the earthquake nor stop the volcano eruption. Similarly no power on earth can control or stop the freedom struggle of the people of Palestine, Kashmir, Chechnya and so on so forth.

We would advise all concerned to realise the gravity of the situation and also request USA to desist from supporting Israel and India politically and militarily.

O H Kabir

Wari, Dhaka

Luggage dacoity!

Recently my niece came to Bangladesh, with her family and but departed with a terrible experience.

Their departure time was at 4 am,

that NGOs are unleashing hooliganism with regard to micro-credit (not unlikely as their fighting to capture poor beneficiaries is fierce), shall we advise the government to lay back until the civil societies have a conclusive debate on the hooliganism?

How wise it would be to conclude that the hooliganism occurred due to breakdown of law and order government should be more concerned about the police rather than the NGOs?

The government's move to regulate NGOs has been stimulated

serious about NGOs. I wonder what stand *The Daily Star* would take if the NGOs were receiving foreign funds via public banks or ADP allocation.

The editorial was not convincing that unlike the government it succeeded in locating 'social role' of the NGOs. Donors have trumpeted their role in poverty alleviation and reaching the poor unattended by government agencies. Their unrestrained growth over the last decade has been due to the support of the donors. The growth was not just



Military spending: worth it?

providing better pay, better equipment, and better facilities for these men who risk their lives today for our tomorrows.

Here is one patriot who thinks that the officers and men of the armed forces deserve more, not less.

ES
Missouri, USA

"Needed a coherent India policy"

India-Pakistan: masked friends, open enemies

M B Naqvi's article "Needed a Coherent India Policy" should give the politicians on both side of the border enough to think about. The basic responsibility of the government is to enact policies, which would better the lives of its citizens economically, followed by socially, culturally and spiritually. It is a shame that the two neighbours are obsessed with the so-called "dispute" or "issue" for 54-years when millions of their citizens are living under subhuman conditions.

Either country has any stature on the world stage because of its economic backwardness and heart wrenching poverty. One fifth of the human population barely makes evening news here in America. They get press coverage only when there is a natural disaster causing death and destruction or when they are ready to go to war or at war.

The self informed Americans, knowledgeable enough about the subcontinent wonder what these people living in the 18th century are doing under nuclear umbrella? This "dispute" or "issue" of Kashmir will simmer for long time as long as hatred between two people will continue to foster or their religious beliefs would continue to be exploited.

It is time to nurture what is common and right between these people than what is wrong on the account of history and faith. Co-operation, not confrontation, is the answer to the ills of this tragic and tense relationship. There needs to be exchange of ideas amongst the intellectuals of both the countries. If there exists such a forum, it needs to double up its efforts to bring some sense in to the heads of savvy politicians, selfish religious leaders and hawkish generals. Let there be normalisation of relations between two neighbours and let peace and prosperity prevail in the subcontinent.

Bharat Shah
Novi, Michigan, USA