

The face of Naipaul

Naipaul is untouchable by the reader. He also avoids touching the readers, except through penmanship, 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 Nobelst 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 understatements. 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 their 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 JS.

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

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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 Hossain  
Malibagh, Dhaka

and norms have been done away with. Organisations have been crippled by undisciplined unionism in most places. For example no zebra crossing signs in any of the cities/towns are seen now, Traffic Police have safely forgotten to guide traffic in their usual way by waving hands; these days they have some sort of sticks in hand! They do not have any red/green light signals in hand for night and such flags for daytime use! Over-bridges are there but people prefer to cross roads below and the police behaves like onlookers. I remember in similar cases in Karachi Police used to be tough and thus they succeeded in establishing discipline.

Buses stop to load and unload passengers anywhere they like blocking roads for other transports; employees attend office at their sweet will all over the year but we see pictures of empty offices in newspapers only after Eid holidays! Beggars are everywhere on roads be it they are genuinely needy ones or commercial beggars. Can't the state exchequer take care of genuine beggars to rehabilitate them and handle commercial beggars otherwise?

Hundreds of files are awaiting disposal in RAJUK and other utility service establishments. Why these are not disposed off in routine manner without waiting for bribes?

We are tired of politicians. If atrocities of past govt. are to be matched with another set of atrocities we will be nowhere. Party in power must forget all animosities and administer with no political bickering in mind. They must set their priorities right keeping in mind people's welfare. Development workers

Ministers and MPs must declare their assets now and also must declare their assets again on expiry of their term.

We felt better when we were under the CTG as they were impartial. Can we not expect impartial and transparent dealings from our democratically elected government?

Abaree  
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 and so forth.

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

OH 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,

which was delayed due to foggy weather. They handed over their luggage to the airport security after check-in. At 11 am they finally departed by Gulf Air. But after reaching Texas, they discovered that many of their belongings were missing from their suitcase and some of them were quite expensive.

Was it the loaders in ZIA who committed this mischief while the passengers were waiting for their flight? Is there anyway of finding the culprits? Would the authorities ever pay heed to the plight of the passengers in ZIA?

Nargis Iqbal  
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

NGO sector streamlining

Your editorial 'NGO sector regulation' (February 9) lacks clear reasoning. Any regulation to exercise administrative power is condemnable but that is not a strong ground to 'leave NGOs alone' and invite civil societies to debate on their role in partisan politics. If we suddenly see

by recent political ambitions of a few NGO leaders. But there is nothing wrong if that move leads to an institutional arrangement to make the NGOs more accountable. So far, the NGOs have enjoyed unlimited freedom, from setting up projects to the use of foreign funds. The whole process is apparently participatory but in practice dictated either by funding agencies or by one or two NGO leaders without being questioned. Frequently, this non-governmental freedom results in waste of scarce foreign funds via duplication of projects. In these days it is not difficult to find a village where at least five NGOs are not competing with each other with the same activities covering the same group of people.

This is not to argue that government projects do not waste or do not misuse development funds. However, misuses and malpractice by government agencies cannot be a rationale to allow non-governmental agencies to do the same. It was not a sensible notion in the editorial that since government lacks accountability therefore it should not be so

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 poise 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 value system as a result of 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 29<sup>th</sup> and Shareen Hussain Tania's letter on 5<sup>th</sup> 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 your 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

"Where was Brig. Hafiz then?"

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 today 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 different



Taliban: of war and peace and war...

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

hazardous vehicle from the city streets? I again request the government to stick to its decision and control pollution in Dhaka city.

Sabbir Ahmed 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. Shaha 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 (include 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 the guilty: the players or the referees?

Alif Zabr  
Dhaka

Don't coax the opposition

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

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

Abul Mahmod  
Dhaka

What is our democratically elected govt doing?

Have we not elected BNP and allies to ameliorate the sufferings through which the nation underwent during the past years? Did we elect them to squander poor people's money through hanging photographs, allowing system losses here and there, allowing losses in sector corporations, government owned mills etc. and compelling the law abiding citizens to pay through price hikes in electricity, gas, water etc.? Let us not spend money on photographs, sculptures, mausoleums, and other such unproductive things when other priority i.e. pressing priorities are hunting us. Let us spend on educational institutions in the names we adore, which will help people in the long run.

There is no discipline in the country. All established disciplines

"A question"

This refer to MA's "A Question" (February 10). While our political leaders try to pamper our armed forces, MA was courageous enough to point the drainage that it is causing to our economy and our national exchequer. Sure, it is a matter that has to be looked into by our parliament. But why IMF?

Isn't Mr MA inviting an international organisation to intrude into our very touchy domestic matter? Should we let IMF to dictate our defence policy? The national defence of our country should be governed by our own defence needs, even if the nation has to make economic sacrifices in other areas.

The nation's armed forces are not decoration pieces. The modernisation of our armed forces should be based on the strength of our potential enemy (if any) and a viable defence doctrine to combat that enemy, if needs arise.

However, considering the global geopolitical situation Bangladesh's defence against its "external enemies" will depend more on diplomacy and politics and less on our military strength.

Ahmed K. Rashid  
Azimpur Road, Dhaka

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The letter from MA (February 10) casts aspersions on the noblest sons of the land: the members of the Bangladesh Armed Forces. The writer, taking a leap of logic, goes ahead to compare the armed forces of the world's sixth biggest democracy to the rapacious military junta of a rogue state like Myanmar.

Our armed forces are asked to do everything for everybody. They guard a frontier against a world power; they are the first line of relief when nature strikes with cyclones and tidal waves; they keep the peace on four continents. If anything, we should be



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