

Who is Ken Saro-Wiwa?

We have read the challenge and response on Nigeria between the High Commissioner and your Columnist. Who is this Ken Saro-Wiwa? Who executed him? What has that got to do with the Shell company? Is this the same company now working in Bangladesh? Could someone throw some light?

Harun Jabbar
Dhaka

"Wrong wording in a Rabindra Sangeet"

Responding to a series of letters that followed immediately after Mr. Nazmul Karim (February 6) pointed out a mistake of a word in a very famous Rabindra Sangeet sung by Rezwana Chowdhury Bannya, I do not want to make any more comments except on the one written by Mr. Chanchal Khan from Australia.

According to Mr. Khan Bisawa Bharti rejected one of his songs on the ground that the Board felt that his pronunciation of the song "shara Dao, shara dao" lacked the depth of "doo bindu ro".

If for a wrong pronunciation of a word, Mr. Khan's song was refused permission for recording by Bisawa Bharti then how was Bannya's song recorded, as pointed out by Mr. Nazmul Karim, not once but at least twice, with a wrong word?

According to Mr. Khan "Bannya need not pass through a litmus test any more to satisfy her commitment and love towards Rabindranath and his creation, and most importantly her great skills, knowledge and talents".

Did Mr. Karim question Bannya's capabilities as a singer? Rather he has praised Bannya in a very extraordinary manner except that he has just pointed out a mistake in one of her songs.

According to Mr. Khan "one must appreciate that even if she had pronounced 'dar' instead of 'dhar', this must have been an unintended error, which slipped her mind and ear, (and that of the music director and the recordist) while recording the song".

Did Mr. Karim say that it was her intentional mistake or that of the music director and the recordist?

According to Mr. Khan "I am sure the error (if at all this was an error, as I have not listened to the song) was so subtle that it had easily evaded the ears of the singer and others."

Why didn't this error (subtle?) evade Mr. Karim's ears?

I wonder how Mr. Khan calls a wrong word to be subtle error when his wrong pronunciation of a word could not evade the ears of the pundits of Bisawa Bharti?

According to Mr. Khan in a few songs sung by artistes like Konika Banerjee and Subinoy Roy often wrong words have crept in here and there. Were/are these wrong acceptable? Could Konika Banerjee and Subinoy Roy or whoever he or she may be, get away with those wrongs?

Mrs. Sayeeda Rahman
Uttara, Dhaka

As an ardent lover of Rabindra Sangeet and a great fan of Rezwana Chowdhury Bannya, I must say that this unnecessary debate should now stop for once and for all.

I appreciate the comments made by another Rabindra Sangeet artist

Chanchal Khan and feel that he has rightly said that Bannya need not pass a litmus test to satisfy us her talents and commitment to Rabindra Sangeet. I agree with him whole-heartedly and echo him that these unintentional errors are just yet another isolated incidents which go far beyond Bannya's mystic rendering at all times.

Thanks again to Chanchal Khan for such a comprehensive analysis.

Shopon Rahman
New York, USA

Bashing BDR bashing

The news item and subsequent follow-up stories regarding BDR crackdown on the dorms of DU have made me feel horrified and greatly shocked! As an ex-DU student as well as a dorm resident of Suryasen Hall during the period 1989-1996 I had happened to witness a great deal of nasty political dramas committed by the student wings of the major political parties which was always known to the concerned party leaders. I reckon this action does, not only suggest a heinous crime on the part of the democratically elected government of the country but also strongly indicates the following:

I) The action resembled the military crackdown on a civilian location and also reminded the military action of Pakistani occupant force in the early hours of March 25, 1971.

II) The action also strongly indicates that the university authority/administration has no control over the dealings with student affairs! The DU authority must come up with a satisfactory answer, if they really have any, to explain their failure over the security and welfare of common students and residents of the dorm! The VC should resign immediately. The department of justice should have an investigation on the issue!

III) By handing the matter over the BDR, the government has proved that the police department is no longer reliable at all. If this is the case how would the common people rely on the same department? Why would they be blamed when they take the law in their own hands?

IV) It's not a secret to the government party leaders as to who are the criminals residing in university dorms. Without having a broad political consensus, the government should never have attempted to resort to this sort of condemnable action!

V) The government has committed a serious crime by mishandling and insulting the young, educated and aspiring citizens of the country. They should come up with an apology and compensation pack.

I condemn both the government and the DU authority and demand an assurance from the authority concerned that such incident will not be repeated in the future. They should formulate a well-studied future plan to deal with the common students/dorm-residents and turn the campus terrorism free.

MD. Mashi Ul Azam Khan
Sydney, Australia

Some thoughts on the Letters column

Of late, I have observed that many non-issues seem to be hogging the precious space in your esteemed newspaper.

Rezwana Chowdhury Bannya's mispronunciation error was an error

Learning Arabic, English and other languages?

A resolution to expand our great linguistic heritage by brushing up and broadening our linguistic skills will be an apt celebration of the Golden Jubilee of the Language Movement. 50 years since the Ekushey February 1952 and 30 years since transforming the ethos of our *Bhasha Shainiks* into nationhood, it is better late than never that we wake up to the realities of the day. We have turned into a nation that keeps feeding on the carcass of our rich history and heritage - basking in galore of symbolism and populist idealism. Yet, everyday, perennial poverty and misery keep eroding our national unity, image and identity. A paradigm shift is called for and language will be a good place to start with since a movement for language started our journey towards nationhood.

Government after government has zealously undertaken the Bangla-isation of civil service that has neither advanced the assimilation of Bangla among the citizenry nor contributed to the quality of the civil administration. Instead, we see an emergence of an awkward stream of Bangla that is remote or "Greek" compared to what we read, write and speak in our everyday life. A worse calamity has been the ability of our civil servants to communicate to the outside world. For a nation that produces so little and therefore must look beyond the borders to feed, clothe, shelter and educate the populace, our civil administration have become equally remote or "Greek" in interacting with foreign exporters, investors, lenders and donors. The worst is that politicians, bureaucrats, even intellectuals lack the courage to right this wrong fearing populist sensitivities.

I call upon the government to take a firm resolution to advance our great linguistic tradition in keeping with the necessity of the day for national development. First, Bangla is our pride and should continue to be the soul of our nation - through creative thinking and the dynamics of our everyday interaction. The government could introduce a creative thinking pool, ushering befitting benefits and incentives, and declare our leading creative proponents as national treasure, according them befitting status and benefits. Second, Bangla-isation of the internal civil service communication should cease to be enforced. Let the dynamics of communication dictate the language usage: for example, practicality dictates that communication with the citizenry will be mandatorily in Bangla. More importantly, immediate action must be taken to arrest the civil servants' lacking in English. Make it mandatory for all cadre civil servants to undergo training in applied English and incentivise excellence in communication since in a service industry effective communication to customers - citizenry and foreign exporters, investors, lenders and donors - is half the battle won.

Third, make learning English as a Second Language (ESL) mandatory in secondary education and make all secondary and tertiary educationists undergo training in ESL. Primary education should continue to sow the foundation of English just as learning English literature should continue through secondary education.

Fourth, introduce a third language in secondary education - the choices could be limited to about 5 languages. Arabic, besides being part and parcel of our distinct Bangladeshi identity i.e. mostly Bangali and 90 per cent Muslim, is the language of our target market for the bulk of our human resources export. French and Spanish are third languages at the United Nations system and most multilateral lending and donor agencies. Mandarin and Hindi are languages in two Asian economic powerhouses in the making. Arguably, Japanese being the language at the current Asian and global economic powerhouse can be added to the list as can be German being the dominant language in the European

allright and was rightly pointed out. However, what followed, in form of dozen odd in-favour/out-of-favour letters was unwarranted. The original writer had very well highlighted the discrepancy and the next step should have been bringing it to the notice of the esteemed singer, rather than banging the head in the letter-section. What are we getting at?

"Afghans are unlucky because they got bombed from US for no reason". Well, any kind of drastic change requires drastic action and many a times such actions do have costs. Talibans couldn't have been dismantled without the fear of pounding of bombs and daisy cutters. My heart and prayers goes to those who became the unsuspecting victims in this onslaught against the worst kind of theocratic regime, and the biggest tribute to

those martyrs is the smiling on face of every Afghan who breathes in freedom today.

Valentine's Day is un-Islamic. No. Valentine's day is Islamic. No it is not. Is it really worth all the debate? There is something called as personal freedom. Are you going to debate on why people should not be smiling, laughing, dancing, singing etc? Let people choose their own ways and destiny, as long as they are not hogging your personal space.

Gas should be exported or not? Yes it should be, because it will help gain revenues and help stabilise our failing economy. No it shouldn't be because we need reserves for our own domestic consumption and economic benefits. Well, it's all fine. Make a stand and come out with it. The gas reserves might help us after 25-30 years period, true. But, if its

export can help change the facade of our nation in the immediate future, let's go for its export. Our nation is in a dire need of an immediate transfusion. If US-India nexus seems evil or less attractive to do business with, let's export it to some other country. Let's invite international bidders who have better credibility or reputation than the US Company. But we do need something to boost our economy. We can't keep crawling forever, and we are not lucky enough to have borders with Afghanistan or get bombed by the US. We are not mischief-mongers, so I see no money coming our way.

I see too many letters, often by masquerades, on the issue of Kashmir. All the time, it's about Indian atrocities in Kashmir, their failure to conduct plebiscite, "freedom fighters" etc. to an extent that most such letters have become predictable. However, it has an after-effect. Aggressive propaganda by the Pakistani readers has started to shape our views in a prejudiced manner.

While alienation of Kashmiri Muslims from the Indian government may be total, and state repression and HR records may be condemnable, the blood-soaked hands of terrorists from Pakistan and the dirty games played by ISI-military nexus cannot be ignored either. They are the most guilty of hijacking a peaceful democratic movement of the people of Kashmir from their legitimate demands, to an extent that it's no longer freedom movement but only a "terrorist movement" now. And those who have tried to go deep into the sub-continent history would agree with me that the issue of plebiscite was thwarted by the reluctance of Pakistan to withdraw its army from PoK (The first clause of the resolution was that Pakistan vacate its army from the occupied Kashmir, something that it never did). So when a demand for UN resolution comes from Pakistani, it seems more like a thief playing a cop. But then, a thief playing a cop doesn't surprise us anymore.

"We must be realistic, we must demand the impossible." - Che Guevara.

judicially.

No other human being is as revolting as Pinochet (except may be Sharon, Milosevic, Saddam and the Saudi regime). General Pinochet caused hundreds of thousands of political activists and intellectuals to disappear. He can be compared to the Al Badar in 1971. "Get rid of the intellectuals and we are home free to power" seems to be the rallying cry of the reactionaries.

I wonder at Mr. Bastiat's support for Musharraf. We must never forget that he deposited an elected government. Although it is not surprising in a feudal country like Pakistan, we have cause to be alarmed.

Mr. Bastiat, an obvious admirer of all things fascist,

militant as well as military and reactionary, may have similar minded friends in our society. If our fledgling democracy faces any threat, it is from people like him who would give unabashed support to military dictators. It is very hard for democracy to take root in a country like ours with a history of military dictatorships.

The job is made nearly impossible when we have admirers of Pinochet and Franco in our midst.

"We must be realistic, we must demand the impossible." - Che Guevara.

Yahya USA

"We must be realistic, we must demand the impossible." - Che Guevara.

TV size and Army Mess

I was amused reading the letters of Sumit from UK and a junior army officer from Dhaka in response to the letter of Mr MA ("A Question", February 10).

While I don't agree with a lot of what the first writer had said, it was interesting to see an officer responding. Since when has it been allowed to respond while still working in the army? As for Mr Sumit, he is not aware of anything, which really obviates the need for any response. I would only ask him to check up the facts before venturing into such exercises.

The junior officer appears too naive when he proclaims the army to be the second largest foreign exchange earner. Then he goes on to question a few things and even to the extent of venturing into blaming the senior officers while posing themselves as angels. He must remember theirs is the only non-productive organisation of one of the poorest countries of the world. Surely in a country whose millions live below poverty line, it isn't befitting of an army to display 52" TVs and such other things. There are many other things which the general public don't see (does he know about all such things?). But our gullible public almost accepts it graciously since the armed forces are an essential institution and will always remain so. But the taxpayers have a right to know what goes on there. No one should grudge that.

Ahmad Kamal Abu Dhabi, UAE

heartland - both accounting for over half of our current lenders and donors.

Learning the third language could follow the ESL structure to singularly focus on the applied and be graded for simple pass or fail in order not to cause undue workload. These last two steps should merit consideration on a strategic and broader context of medium to long-term growth and development. Our small economy is unlikely to absorb the human capital we produce; therefore exporting unskilled and skilled human resources will likely remain a significant source of financing economic development.

On this 50th anniversary of Ekushey February, let us make the sacrifices of our *Bhasha Shaheeds* and *Shainiks* worth their while not just by the regular year-in-year-out solemn festivities full of form yet of little substance, but by standing up for these steps that

(Arabic) it is simply meaningless repetitive exercise in imitation and therefore, it is essential that one should know the language of the Quran in order to comprehend fully the wealth of wisdom it contains.

Mr Reza's hostile accusation that the Arabs of Saudi Arabia are a miserable racist to non-Arab Muslims, treating them as 'miskins'; or employing little children from our land for jockeying their camel races." In his strangely worded tirade against the Arabs, he advised Mr Mustafizur Rahman to "stop looking at the bankrupt fodder American sycophant, autocratic Middle Eastern nations". These accusations seem to be based on tenuous ground, but even if it is true, those assertions have nothing to discredit a rich ancient language -- Arabic.

Mr Reza advocates that instead of learning Arabic 'we should make English, pure Mathematics and Computer as our most important subject in the curriculum. Nobody disputes it. Even the Quran enjoins that, for the acquisition of knowledge one should even go to as distant a land as China.

At the end I humbly advise Mr Reza to mind his language, even when he is criticising someone's pious view.

Dr Nazmuddin Ahmed
Dhaka

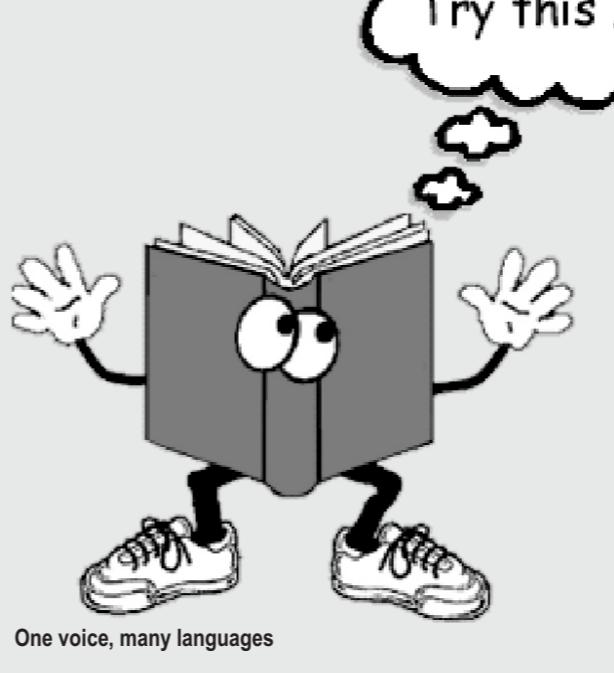
I am surprised to see that my letter on Arabic Language, which was in response to another letter by a reader, has sparked some confusion among some readers.

Though I clearly mentioned in my earlier letter that I never suggested making Arabic as a compulsory subject, however one of the readers had tried to associate this with Jamati conspiracy and even felt necessary for another language movement for conspiracy against our Bengali language. The writer also found no necessity for Arabic in order to understand the meaning of Quarn. According to him, finding some good Tafsirs by different scholars will suffice anybody in this regard. He also doesn't want to consider Arabic as a holy language for the Muslims. I really don't understand why it is defamatory to our mother tongue if somebody (as a Muslim) considers Arabic as holy language.

I don't blame people who somehow entangle Islam with fundamentalism especially for what the Islamic fundamentalists have done in the recent past. However, in this regard I will humbly request those people not to be in the reactionary mode against Islam (by considering fundamentalists as true Muslims), rather to educate themselves about the true meaning of Islam.

In my letter, I mentioned that if someone considers himself or herself as Muslim, he/she should abide by some rules set by God Himself. God has given every human being the free will to choose his/her own religion or not to choose any religion. However, if you accept one religion, you have to abide by rules and that is the discipline for every religion. God has made compulsory for every Muslim to recite the Quran in Arabic in every prayer. If you believe in Islam, you have to follow this rule and cannot indulge yourself in your own volition. Therefore it is necessary to learn Arabic in order to recite the Quran correctly. It is not a matter of finding some Tafsirs from here and there, rather it is a lifelong process for a true Muslim to explore the Quran and find his or her answers from it time to time.

Zafar Hadi
Los Angeles, California, USA



One voice, many languages

may not be populist but are likely to be in the right direction. Let us give them the Bangladesh they fought for and wanted us to inherit.

Syed Nazmul Ahsan
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

being pampered with 3-nutritional meals, shower with expensive shampoos, free shave and haircut, and soft foam to sleep on. Irony of ironies, isn't it?

Ahmad Jamali
CA, USA

Proshika's 'mealy-mouthed' report

The press release of Proshika's annual report (February 17) cleverly serves a purpose. It is a public knowledge that the government has accused Proshika of misusing poverty-reduction fund wrongfully using it for political activities.

Through the disclosure of the report and loan disbursement figures, Proshika attempts to reclaim its public image. But unfortunately, Proshika is not clever enough (or not efficient enough). Mere figures of how much it disbursed in a year is not a clear proof of whether it is spending properly. It does not say how much it would have disbursed had it spent right amount for poverty reduction. Over and above, the reporting about the disbursement is mealy-mouthed like conventional government reports.

Nargis Akhter
Indira Road, Dhaka

Commonwealth Summit

I see that the PM will be attending the Commonwealth Summit in Australia. I hope Robert Mugabe comes too. Then they can compare notes on his Zanu-PF and her Juba-Dal.

Mind you, take good notes. Remember Hasina sitting next to Castro at the UN a while back? One of them didn't burn the midnight oil.

Bastiat
Dhaka

Corporate globalisation is only enriching the rich

In the article, "Anti-global