

Who is Ken Saro-Wiva?

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
Dhanmandi

"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 Visawa 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 '*doe 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 felt 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 happen 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 UI 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 cadred civil servants to undergo training in applied English and incentivate 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

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



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

I was greatly amused to go through the letter "Compulsory Arabic?" by Mr Reza ("Make Arabic compulsory in schools", February 3) in which he expressed his inability to control his 'hysterical laughter' while reading Mr Mustafizur Rahman's letter (January 28) on the above subject. Mr Reza found Mr Rahman in his letter 'to be living in a fool's paradise' --an expression rude enough for any gentleman. Mr Mustafizur Rahman's defence for compulsory study of Arabic for a Muslim "is to understand and follow Islam truly and to understand the Holy Quran properly. Simply reading our holy book without understanding the language does not create the desired impression and impact on our mind."

True, without knowing the language in which Quran is written

(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 Nazimuddin 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

The United States, with its extreme poverty and obscene income inequality, shows that corporate globalisation without proper safeguards to protect ordinary workers will only enrich the rich and impoverish the poor. This calls for progressive taxation, improving the minimum wages and working conditions, lowering working hours and increased unemployment benefits - all taboos in George W. Bush's America where tax cuts for the rich remain the top priority.

"At the peak of the longest economic boom in our history, over 30 million [Americans] live in households that experience hunger and

Mahmood Elahi
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada

Foreign policy

My recent endeavour to explore more about my country after a long pause prompted me to visit a few news web sites. I found your site pleasantly informative.

I think a "Health and Family section" may add information for the health conscious readers.

I was just reading Mr. Amjad Hossain's article on Foreign policy of Bangladesh. Mr. Hossain made the point clear that 'foreign policy is an extension of domestic policy'. But are we not failing repeatedly in making the point that we fail to elect the right 'policy-maker'?

I was in Dhaka just prior to the last general election. Later we have seen that the Shangshad was lacking in quorum to even have a session! And regretfully the sitting MPs and Ex- MPs of a major constituency in Dhaka ended up behind the bars.

The bottom line is, we as a nation have to look forward to the days when the think-tanks like the author will take the leadership to guide the country. Otherwise we will keep competing with Nigeria for the most corrupt country status and nothing else.

ShuptoRaag
Berkeley, California

food insecurity - about the same number as four years ago," said Larry Brown, director of the Center on Hunger and Poverty at Tufts University, Massachusetts, in a report published last year. Some 20 per cent to 30 per cent of workers earn so little that "they're making choices between rent and medical bill and adequate diet." Minimum wages have not kept up with inflation, Brown said and many jobs no longer include paid benefits.

Why are 30 million Americans going hungry in the world's richest country during its greatest boom? The answer is not far to seek. As Prof. Barry Schwartz, of Swarthmore College in Pennsylvania, points out: "The richest 1 per cent of Americans have almost 50 per cent of the nation's wealth. The next 9 per cent have about a third. And the remaining 90 per cent have about a sixth." Prof. Schwartz further points out: "What do we know about the great economic 'boom' we are living in the midst of? The income of the average wage-earning workers in 1997 was 3.1 per cent lower than it was in 1989. Median family income was \$1,000 less in 1997 than in 1989. The typical couple worked 270 more hours in 1997 than in 1989."

Schwartz concludes: "The United States has the highest poverty rate than any developed nation, and uses government income transfers less than any developed nation."

It becomes incumbent on the T&T Board to provide the service of telephone within 1/2 weeks or similar reasonable time. The authorities concerned should realise that by issuing more demand notes they have unjustly encashed their credibility and status by duping innumerable innocent applicants.

In all fairness, the government should wake up to this undesirable situation and move urgently to fulfil their obligations to the public.

Rumi Ahmed
Little Jewels School, Chittagong

IMF's King Kong image

I think the IMF should pack its bags and leave.

As sad as it may be, IMF has recently begun to think a bit too highly of themselves.

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