

Tagore: Another episode

If I have correctly read Mr. Nazmul Karim's letter (February 06), I have not found the contents of his letter to contain any personal attack against the singer or against any institution. Other than pointing out a wrong word in her song Mr. Karim commended Ms. Bannya as a great singer and acclaimed her contribution in popularising Rabindra Sangeet.

The discussions or debate, whatever you call this to be, as was set off by Mr. Nazmul Karim was quite appealing till Mr. Samir Khan from London (February 15) surprisingly questioned the reliability and authenticity of Shantiniketon. How can Mr. Khan portray Shanti Niketon as a 'gharana'?

I fully agree with Ms. Anjali Ghosh (Feb 18) that Shantiniketon may have some vices but its contribution in elevating world culture since more than 60 years (not half a century as claimed by Ms. Ghosh) is unparalleled.

Hale and hearty debates are always valued but not when someone goes out of track.

Q. R. Chowdhury
Dhanmondi R/A., Dhaka

Immediately after the letter of Mr. Nazmul Karim, readers from all over the world showed their interest and enthusiasm and started to exchange their views and arguments, both in favour and against the claim made by Mr. Karim.



The debate continues...

No one, not even Mr. Karim who pointed out the error, has questioned Bannya's competence and potentiality as a singer. Yes, many were surprised because according to them it was out of their imagination that Bannya can sing a wrong word but no one showed slightest disrespect for the singer.

But I was surprised with the contents of the letter of Ms. Sharmilee Banerjee (February 17). Why did she suggest that *The*

Responding to some military issues

I write in response to several issues that have been debated in this section of *The Daily Star* in recent days.

Mr Bastiat (February 16) put forward a well argued case for the military as a viable short-term alternative to democratically elected governments. I thank him for sharing his opinion but am unable to agree with him in the context of Bangladesh. I feel that resorting to military government will only take our country backwards. I agree with Mr Bastiat that elected governments in our country, I assume he had Bangladesh in mind, have proved to be highly corrupt, venal and largely ineffective so far. But I believe that we should give the democratic process time to mature. Resorting back to the military may be a short-term solution at best, but will have serious long-term consequences. When we will want to return to a democracy, we will find that all we have done is taken our country right back to 1990. And what is more, we will hand power back to the same politicians. It is better therefore, that we bear with our present system while our political parties realise that our electorate have very little tolerance for ineffective governments. This is the one thing that we have learnt from the last two general elections.

I would like to lend support to Mr Sumit (February 16) in saying that our armed forces should be appreciated for the good work that they have done and should continue to do. As a junior officer in the Bangladesh Army (February 15) pointed out, the army is the country's second largest foreign exchange earner. I have also heard that our army makes up the largest component of the UN Peacekeeping Force. The armed forces also did a commendable job in their unusual role as law enforcers in the last general elections. And I would like to make particular mention of the Roumari incident last year. The way our jawans responded in the face of a foreign intrusion on our sovereign territory was highly inspiring and although the government of the time failed to recognise these brave soldiers, I am sure the people of our country are grateful for their service and sacrifice.

Lastly, I thank Mr Sarwar (Compulsory Arabic in schools) for another *Bhasha Andolon*? (February 15) for articulating so well the many reasons why making Arabic compulsory in schools is such an absurd proposition. It is obvious that those who advocate it want nothing more

than to undermine our language and culture. The fundamentalist elements in our country have openly maintained their displeasure at the way we celebrate 'Pohela Boishakh.' I do believe, however, that such evil designs will never succeed. We Bangladeshis are proud of our language and culture and such misguided attempts to undermine them will be easily overwhelmed.

Shameran Abed
New York, USA

Sorting out sentences

I read your newspaper everyday, some days, I red-pencil some items that catch my editorial eye, more often, I let them go. And some days,

A journey by bus and with cigarette



The deadly smoke

On February 4, I was travelling by bus from Dhaka to Rajshahi. It was a six and a half-hour journey. I was in the middle of the bus. Several people in front and behind me kept smoking all the time. As it was cold outside, all the windows of the bus were closed. Within a short time I could feel my asthma getting worse; my eyes were burning. Several of us made repeated requests to the smokers not to smoke in the closed bus, but we failed to move them. Some of them even retorted angrily. Since that day I have been bed-ridden with bad asthma and infected eyes. My asthma has gone so far out of control that none of the available drugs seems to be working.

I ask our government to immediately ban smoking in public places, including all sorts of public transport, and to ensure that all violators are heavily penalised. We have a renowned practicing physician as our President and hope he would lend his weight to this salutary cause.

A. K. M. Mohiuddin
Professor of English, Rajshahi University

I actually try to bring issues to your attention. A few are listed below:
In the February 17 issue of *The Daily Star*:

1. Your lead editorial-- the lead sentence focused on the date the

convention was inaugurated and when it ended. (Hardly attention gripping)

2. On page 6, the heading for the article on "Harassment and hazards of working women" is confusing: 'Are working women a hazard?' I think the usage should be the "harassment of" and "hazards for".

In the same article, *The Daily Star*'s use of the verb (transitive and intransitive) 'avail' is regularly incorrect. If one means to make use of something, take advantage of (an opportunity), the proper term is 'avail of'. Any good old dictionary can offer the distinction between a noun and a verb.

3. "Secret organs" - On page 8, the article about the acid victim appealing for protection read:

4. And while I am at it:

a) Why do you refer to fire fatalities as: 'burned alive'? This usage is inappropriate, insensitive and disrespectful to the victims and also to their mourning families.

b) Why is a government official always "shocked" by news of some person's death, even if the death was of natural causes? The term, especially as a story headline, is tediously used.

c) What effort is required on the part of your news writers to use the definitive article "the" in your stories? If you start using the article, you might even start a national trend towards proper usage of this (subcontinentally) ignored item.

Suggestion: How about an intensive, focussed, specific campaign for one or two social issues? While you have taken up some issues, I recall them to be sporadic.

Good luck to your newspaper.

Melodia Santos, on e-mail

Leader of the opposition

Awami League and its president Sheikh Hasina categorically rejected the result of October 1 election and refrained from joining the JS since its very first session.

So would it be fair for us to use the title (as the newspapers always do) "Leader of the Opposition" before Sheikh Hasina's name?

Abdus Wahed
North Carolina State University, USA

Ruining the private sector

The increase of BTTB tariffs on phone calls is going to be perhaps the single worst decision of the BNP government. It was the BNP government in its previous incarnation that decided against linking Bangladesh to the Internet submarine cable in 1993.

Coupled with this decision, aimed primarily at world-wide web and computer users, they are going to destroy the nascent computer software industry in the country. And this at a time when world-wide phone rates are coming down dramatically. India just slashed its international phone tariffs up to 50 per cent and it is expected that the rates will come down over 80 per cent once the full telecom privatisation is in effect.

This decision is not only short-sighted and idiotic but it verges on being criminal. Bangladeshis need to make sure that the government has the most minimal regulatory influence over our lives or we will continue to live in abysmal poverty.

Daily Star should stop publishing any more letters regarding this subject? What is in these letters that disturbs her so much? Where on earth she will find a newspaper where the readers too have their right to write even accusing the newspaper itself?

Joyanta Dutta
Lalmatia, Dhaka

This refers to the letter of Mr. Nazmul Karim and also on the comment made by Ms. Farhana Zaman (February 18) of North South University. Thanks to Ms. Zaman for pointing out that in the same song both Bannya and Kaderi Kibria made the same mistake as pointed out by Mr. Nazmul Karim.

I fully agree with Ms. Zaman and want to know why are our intellectual 'gurus' still silent? Mr. Nazmul Karim has claimed that Bannya made the mistake a decade ago in an audiocassette and in again recently in a CD in duet with another male singer. Then what have all these 'gurus' of Rabindra Sangeet been for the last one decade?

I wonder how could this flaw evade the minds and the ears, for more than a decade, of the so-called 'experts' and 'gurus' of our cultural arena?

Mrs. Selina Haider
Berlin, Germany

Nafis, on e-mail Convention on human rights

It is appalling to read the news in *The Daily Star* of 14 February, that eight foreign participants were not granted visa alleged by the organisers. Amongst them were prominent human rights activists.

It may be mentioned that genuine and die-hard human rights activists

Human Rights Organisations and cause curiosity amongst the general public. Besides it gives the opportunity to the organiser for more miles to establish their cause.

Billy I Ahmed
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

Regarding the vat of gas bill

While paying the Titas gas bill for the

Regarding acid



Barbarism and beauty

I run a small industry to produce zinc sulphate, used as soil nutrient generally called zinc fertilizer, which is a much-needed fertilizer for the farmers. My factory has five workers and is housed in a rented premise at Tongi. We produce around 200/250 MT of this fertilizer annually, contributing around Tk. 50,00,000/- to the GDP. Our only season is from January to March during the boro (paddy) cultivation.

Unfortunately we are unable to produce this zinc fertilizer this year because we do not have the license of "Precursor Chemicals User" from the Department of Narcotics and therefore cannot buy the main raw material-- sulfuric acid. The government has formulated stringent rules regarding buying and selling of any kind of acid. To buy this acid we need to fulfil some requirements and to fulfil this requirements it needs time. But I need to buy sulfuric acid in an urgent basis otherwise I might even have to shut down my factory.

1. I would like to focus on some issues in this regard 1. Defacing women/men by throwing acid is a social problem. It must be dealt socially and legally. The acid thrower and the supplier should be promptly prosecuted and exemplary punishment should be meted out to the culprit.

2. Precursor materials (acids) are used as industrial chemicals. Controlling its use must have negative impact on industries

like these personalities are the assets of the whole world. They use their own judgement and are not influenced by any quarter. They are obligated to be fair to the issues for the greater cause of humanity.

Therefore, their presence in the convention would have been beneficial to the government.

Denying their visa may draw the animadversion of the international

month of January I came to know from the teller of the bank that from now on the amount of gas bill and the vat needs to be shown separately. The amount of bill and vat are 157 and 193 taka respectively, for a double burner. As vat is a tax imposed on the utility service of gas, it is not clear to me how the amount of value added tax could exceed the actual utility service charge.

I draw the attention of the authorities concerned for clarification of this matter.

Mohammad Faizur Rahman
Dhaka

"Coco report"

This is in reference to Mr. MA's letter (February 18), suggesting Sheikh Hasina to stop harping on repression on minorities and refrain from recalling the Spirit of '71.

What Mr. MA has tend to forget is that the Spirit of '71 alone is what made Mr. MA a Mr. MA today, or was he against what happened in '71 and does he not enjoy the fruits of the Spirit of '71? About repression on minorities, why doesn't he speak for them, if anyone would care to listen to him and free Sheikh Hasina to engage herself in some other matters.

Kamal Ahmed
Dhaka

Canadian High Commission's injustice

I am a Canadian citizen and I applied for my parents' and my younger brother's Canadian immigration. Last week they had an interview in Canadian High Commission in Dhaka. Canadian High Commission refused my younger brother's visa on the basis of "not being a full-time student".

My brother has been always a full-time student. Due to the session jam his master's exam which in

have found out that Canadian High Commission has done similar things with other people.

My brother would not get immigrant visa and that is fine, but I would like to see that no other Bangladeshi is treated this way.

Montaz Chowdhury
Norstan Canada Ltd

Drowning Awami League?

The Awami League is sending out bubbles on the surface of the water; at the same time indulging in various forms of noble activities trying to catch some floating straw.

Nothing original, as many others would do the same, because acts of survival and self-preservation are a basic human right. The preceding regime forgot some of these tenets, and have now landed themselves into trouble, for which they are solely responsible.

One must shoulder the responsibility for one's own actions. This is also a universal truth. Of course the regulators have also been burdened with some duties and responsibilities, which they have to carry out, however unpleasant, in public interest.

Izzy
Dhaka

AL propaganda

As a voter I ask the Secretary General of Awami League to clarify (February 14) what AL would and

and its productivity.

3. Some industry uses it as a basic raw material and many industries use it as processing chemicals (leather, textile, dyeing, metallurgy industries like, corrugated tin industry, galvanized wire and pipe, nut bolt industries etc). Some uses it as catalyst like in ornament, paint, food processing, medicine and so on. Educational institutions use acid for practical science classes.

4. The volume of acid consumption is huge unlike phensydil or alcohol. More use of acid indicates industrial prosperity of the country reverse is the case of narcotics.

5. Volume of the acid used in the industry is variable unlike medicine, which has specific formulation. In the case of my industry consumption of acid use depends on the quality of zinc (the other raw material), which is very variable, galvanizing industries use more acid if the base metal is more rusty, it also varies in the case of leather or textile industries considering the processing materials. So the output and input will not match.

6. We use around 150 MT (150,000 kg) sulfuric acid per annum, when we return the acid jars to the supplier, 10 to 15 kg acid goes with the container. It is enough to burn 200 person with grave injury.

7. Industries are not retail seller of acid, our compound is fortified for pilferage and misuse. We make sure that only finished product goes in the market and nothing else. In my 10 years experience nobody came requesting for any quantity of acid, so no question of supplying arises to the acid thrower.

8. More regulation and controlling will only discourage the industrial use and it would increase the price of acid and subsequently the price of the acid related products. Narcotic department need 20 times more manpower to oversee the use, and certainly they will impose official/unofficial levy in case of any minor variation.

Our law enforcing agency is unable to control acid related crimes. But why do we have to pay for it? This sort of injunction ridiculous and impractical. It will in no way curb the acid related crime rather would create enormous problems for industries like ours and effect the country's economy in the long run.

S.M.Neamatullah
Dhaka

theory supposed to be held on 1997 was held in 2000. So in his certificate it shows something similar to "Master's in 1997 but held in 2000". The Canadian High Commission is saying he can't be considered a full-time student.

Either Bangladesh Govt. or Canadian High Commission needs to do something about it. Not only my case I talked to other people and

could do with the millions of Bangladeshi voters who voted the so-called anti-liberation forces into power in the last general elections.

Citing cheating in this case also is not enough. AL's attitude towards the independence of the voters' verdict is not clear.

A Voter
Dhaka

"Make Arabic compulsory in schools"

I have come across two letters, one by Mr. Mustafizur Rahman ("Make Arabic compulsory in Schools", January 28). The response to the letter was made by Mr. Nasir Siddiqui ("Arabic speaking CSWs" February 5)

I think Mr. Siddiqui has missed the whole point and the underlying message of the letter of Mr. Mustafizur Rahman. Mr Rahman never suggested that the Arabic Language would make any one "pure" or other languages are "impure" as Mr. Siddiqui consciously tried to suggest. All Mr. wanted to say that by learning Arabic (as any other language) from childhood would definitely help the children to understand the Holy Quran and Islam better. As I understand, Mr. Mustafizur Rahman only suggested minimising the language barrier to understand Islam better from the early age.

A language is a "vehicle of knowledge" a transport of ideas, a means of communication, the Arabic Language is no different. If Mr. Mustafizur Raman's idea or suggestion is applied, to teach Arabic as a "Quranic" language from the very childhood in the school along with other subjects, the young Muslims of Bangladesh would be given an opportunity to understand the Holy Book the "Quran" at its right context. They will understand Islam better than the so-called "Muslims" either having "ill knowledge" or "poor knowledge" of Islam who are worse than having "no knowledge" type of people.

I am not suggesting here that by learning the Arabic language from the playgroup would make every student a good Muslim instantly. But at least they would be given an opportunity to build their lives on Islamic values and morals.

As Mr. Mustafizur Rahman rightly suggested that learning of Arabic language would help many Bangladeshi to get better jobs in the Arabic speaking parts of the world thus inflating Bangladesh foreign currency reserves. It will also help them to become a balanced Muslim Bangladeshi citizen shunning the extremism either of nationalism or of religion, ill effect of which we are witnessing everyday in our country.

It is unfortunate that Mr. Siddiqui after living three decades in the Arab world could find only a sickening example of "CSWs" to criticise a noble suggestion. Did not he mix with those Arabs who speak softly and use the Arabic language to discuss Islam and other daily life affairs in the mosques and other social gatherings? As parents or guardian, it is our responsibility to offer our children the best opportunity to grow up as a true Muslim and as a true

Bangladeshi.

Mrs. Nazneen Hussain
Doha, Qatar

This is a reflection on Ghulam Sarwar's letter "Compulsory Arabic in School: another Bhasha Andolon now?" (February 15). The caption itself is a result of premeditated malice to create confusions and harmful misunderstandings in public mind. Lately I been through several letters on this "Arabic Language" issue. A few writers opposed this concept (a letter on January 28 by Mustafizur Rahman) with their invalid, irrelevant and futile logic. They revealed their anger, irritation and severe indignation towards Arabic language, and in turn, against 'Islam' as well.

In nutshell, it was suggested: To make Arabic compulsory in Schools for Muslim boys and girls (alongwith other subjects like Bengali, English and Arithmetic) as it obviously would help them to perceive the actual meaning of 'The Quran' and 'Islam'. This clarifies further in a letter "Beating about the bush" by Azizul Huq (Feb. 8).

To Muslims after-life is more important than the life in this transitory World for distinct reasons.

In order to understand 'The Quran' truly- knowledge at depth in Arabic is essential. And the understanding of 'The Quran' is the sine-qua non for understanding and practising Islam in real sense and term.

There is no denying that Death is inevitable and life is temporary in this transitory World. There is a Life-Here after with accountability to our Creator. It is not that the Earth, the Solar system and The Nature were created upstart and spontaneously. Even the most stupid person (with little thinking) will believe that there is a Creator behind these. All the developments and movements in all respects (taken together) of our World till this moment, is the product of 'Human Brain'. This 'Human Brain' is the Most Merciful gift of our Creator: "The Allah, The Al-Mighty and The Most Merciful". Naturally, Human knowledge is limited to the extent of Human Brain-which is also short and limited so far so much gifted by our 'Creator'.

To: Mr. Sarwar and like others: Great "Shakespeare" rightly said long ago: "There are more things on Heaven and Earth- 'Horatio' than are dreamt of in your philosophy" (i.e. Knowledge).

So, please do not try to cite bad logic and malicious arguments with a view to hoodwink simple-minded Bangali Musolmans. Bengali Muslims are equally patriot and pious. They respect their religion: Islam, 'The Holy Quran' and so they respect Arabic- the Language of Holy Quran. Fundamentally languages are ever-green and rich. No matter: Ancient Arabic or English. With present learning of these, one can very well understand Shakespeare and 'The Quran' (as well and in same way).

At times, a section of our so-called malignant intellectuals try to castigate firstly Jamat's anti-liberation role and then cleverly (with Machiavellian shrewdness) try to discredit 'Islam' by putting it against "Muktijudho" contending that Jamat cultivates Islam. On the same breath, they go so far to discredit Arabic by putting it against our Mother Tongue: 'Bangla Bhasha'.

Bravo! What a fallacy, what a wicked logic for fulfilling their unpatriotic evil designs!

Remember, neither Islam has any dispute with 'Mukti Juddho' (Liberation Struggle) nor Arabic has any dispute with our mother tongue 'Bangla'. And Jamat's Condemnable role during liberation struggle is not Islam. 'ISLAM' is a religion of Love and Peace, Harmony and Justice.

So, true learning of Arabic is essential to understand 'The Holy Quran' and 'Islam' for peace and happiness in this World and in the World-Here-After as well.

Ahmed Golam Rahman
Dhaka

I think we readers are being involved in a quite unproductive debate regarding languages.

The time when we have to concentrate more on the quality of our primary education (especially quality of science and English teaching), we are unnecessarily bringing another language into the discussion. Bangla is our mother language and English is an international medium of exchange. But why do we need to introduce compulsory Arabic? Just because we are Muslims? Not necessarily. If somebody strongly feels like learning the Holy Quran in Arabic, he/she is welcome to do so. But for the whole majority of students, this is not necessary, as a good number of translations are available around. This is a time for specialisation: a small section of students can do that. But we should not force it to



Arabic: To learn or not to learn?

all the students; this will divert their attention from learning science, mathematics and English considerably. The outcome of this kind of policy will be disastrous.

I am a student in a US university. Our Bangladeshi students have a hard time competing with others because of their poor background especially in English and mathematics. I would urge people not to burden our kids even further with the introduction of compulsory Arabic. This will make them more at a disadvantage compared to others when a number of them will have to compete internationally. Dreaming of finding a job in Middle East? The future does not look that good there. Have a good moral life? I don't see how Arabic can help with that.

Syed N Wadood
North Carolina, USA