

"Learning Arabic: An opinion"



This is in response to Mr Mojammal Hossain regarding Golam Sarwar's letter in support of English.

There is nothing wrong with crass materialism, aside from the fact that it is irrelevant from this argument. Crass materialism is what that fellow Adam Smith was writing about.

Another point Mr Hossain misses is that Japan is in terminal recession and becoming more and more irrelevant. The economies of China, Thailand and Malaysia are wholly dependent on the export market and they are rushing out graduates as fast as possible proficient in English.

In regards to his example of Europe, the French are putting up a desperate rearguard action trying to stem the onslaught of English. The Scandinavians and Germans use English as their second language already.

One of the reasons that India has us beat in the back office industry is you can hire a graduate fluent in English and with a little coaching able to fool an American over the phone, for as little as RS 4,000 a month. Try doing that here. Imagine one of our thousands of fine Madrassa graduates doing overnight Medical Transcriptions for the US.

Finally, anyone trying to promote Arabic in the school curriculum should be dealt with extreme prejudice.

I don't even accept that Arabic has any religious significance, certainly not anymore than say Latin for the Catholics. I am a Muslim, as good or bad as any other, in my own language thank you very much.

Dorji Dhaka

I would like to mention some points in reference to the ongoing debate on compulsory Arabic in our schools.

Firstly, it is not clear to me why some people are so eager to force our kids to learn Arabic in schools while a good number of translations of the Holy Quran are available in both Bangla and English. I hope no body is suggesting that each of our kids needs to be a Moulana before they graduate from high school in order to be a good Muslim. Being a good Muslim depends on being able to understand the Holy Quran and to practice it in our daily lives. Obviously translations in Bangla could help us with that in a much easier way.

Secondly, there is a capacity limit up to which we can push our

kids to take courses, given the poverty and lack of infrastructure of our schools. Introducing compulsory Arabic will definitely divert our kids further away from learning other courses, such as English, Maths and Science. There is no real comparison here with American-born Bangladeshi kids going to schools in USA in this regard.

Thirdly, introduction of compulsory Arabic will bring huge political benefits for the Islamic fundamentalist parties (i.e., Jamaat-e Islami) as it will be easier for them to recruit 'devoted' members and to create more confusion among the people regarding Bangla language and culture (i.e. Eid prayer by the Khatib of Baitul Muqarram).

Syed N Wadood, on e-mail

I would also like to see another change in our school curriculum. And that is to make the subject Islamiat compulsory for the Muslim students at the school level. In these classes, it should be taught how to recite the Holy Quran and also the verse by verse translation of the Holy Quran should be made available for the students along with the relevant "Hadith". And in order to make it easier for the students to understand the meaning of the Holy Quran, the subject Arabic should also be taught.

Every Muslim-based school should undertake this course, as a result of which the students would be able to understand the meaning of the Holy Quran. Also in these classes, students should practically be taught how to pray. I believe that if such a policy gets implemented, then *inshallah* the youngsters of our society would be able to practice their religion properly.

Md. Abdullah Dhanmondi, Dhaka

with death penalty.

Who will pay for the treatment and other costs for the victim in case of death penalty of the accused?

My suggestions are, (1) increase the amount of fine by 100 per cent and (2) fine should be equally imposed in case of death penalty also and in such case the amount of fine should be realised by selling the existing and inherited properties of

Zia Airport

I was just curious, by what logic the airport authorities at ZIA decided to allow cars to queue for passengers on a first come first serve basis? All you get is a mile long jam and lots of shouting and harassment.

Having travelled a bit, I would honestly say that ZIA Airport is an insult to the name and memory of

"They lay dead because they reported facts"



The gun and the pen

Thanks to Afsan Chowdhury for this excellent write-up "They lay dead because they reported facts".

I cannot agree more to the author's statement, 'To be killed for reporting facts is the murder of truth'. And those killers should be prosecuted as a traitor acting against the humanity.

It is evident that we are dealing with the 'fact' issue here and 'journalism' is defined by Webster's dictionary as 'writing characterised by a direct presentation of facts or description of events without an attempt at interpretation'.

But judgement and ideas of the reporter and/or the publisher rather than the direct presentation of facts today skew journalism. As a result, we see the readers prefer one media or newspaper to the other. A journalist cannot be neutral; as a sensible knowledgeable human being, he or she will always express his or her opinion. Sometimes we see the facts being distorted by media to make the report attractive to their typical audience.

Before I logged online to read *The Daily Star*, I was reading the March 11 issue of Time magazine, which just arrived in mail. I took special interest in this issue for two reasons. "The new healthcare blues" is an article related to my profession and more interestingly the lady from Chicago portrayed in the feature works for a paediatrician in the same building I work. The only thing I can say here that some obvious facts had been obscured to make the feature more eye-catching.

The first question is, can we make journalism 'direct presentation of facts without an attempt at interpretation'? The answer is "no". Otherwise we will not have the editorial in discussion to begin with. The next question, can we expect the people believing in 'a judgement, proposition, or idea' to be the truth, change overnight? Again the answer is "no". Otherwise we will be devoid of nation, religion and freedom of ideas.

Finally, we can only wish for the day when we, the best of the creation, will act like the best. Until then, those killers should be prosecuted as a traitor acting against the humanity.

Asad Zaman
Chicago, Illinois, USA

Mr. Afsan Chowdhury's column "Straight from the Heart: They Lay Dead because they Reported Facts" (March 5) was one of the most beautiful pieces of writing that I have ever read gracing the pages of a newspaper, Bangladeshi or otherwise. I wanted to commend Mr. Chowdhury for the clarity and decency of thought and vision that marked his amazing piece.

Thank you for your honesty which, even if at a level brutal, serves as at least as one guidepost away from the nonsensical platitudes that often mark discourse in our society.

Saif Shah Mohammed
Harvard University, USA

In the name of welfare tax

The newly elected students' union of Sir Salimullah Medical (SMC) College forcefully raised tolls of around Tk 1.50 lakh from the admission seekers (February 19, "Welfare extortion at Salimullah Medical College"). Each candidate had to pay Tk 50 for the so-called 'welfare'

States also withdrew. With the Soviets gone, the threat of Communist take over of Pakistan had also subsided. This decision was understandable. But war-torn Afghanistan could not rebuild on its own and fell victim of another brutal group - the extremist Taliban who imposed their own harsh tyrannical rule in the name of Islam and invited Al-Quada terrorists to export their extremism

the daughter of a well-known 'kabitraj' (herbal doctor) and from him she had learned the cures. I remember streams of women and children coming to her with their ailments. She would pick something from the garden for them: there was always some remedy in the free gifts of nature so close at hand. Most of those plants and herbs are gone now and there is very little left today.

There were even more wild plants and herbs in a nearby village, in the home of my mother's parents. There were always people picking things for either food or medicine. That place, too, is nearly bare today. The same tale must be true everywhere in Bangladesh. The geographical region we call Bangladesh was once rich in the gifts of nature. It is unfortunate that we did not appreciate their value and take good care of them. Even now we do not realise what we have lost or the need to save what is still left. Unless we take judicious measures immediately we will lose everything. That will be a loss beyond repair. Let us realise that there are certain things in nature that are vital to our well being and that are irreplaceable.

I urge our government, botanists, universities and all those concerned about the environment to design a massive public awareness campaign. I also propose that the government set up without any delay reserves in every Upazilla where all local plants will be painstakingly collected and lovingly tended. Let us save Bangladesh by saving its plants and herbs.

Prof. A. K. M. Mohiuddin
Rajshahi University

mosques on illegally occupied lands and declaring payers in such mosques are against the ethics of Islam?

Opinion from your enlightened readers would be appreciated.

Ziauddin Ahmed, on e-mail

Thank you

I would like to thank MRA K Faezul Huq for his brilliant piece "Is the Awami League heading towards another disaster?" (March 1).

It was refreshing to see that at least someone from that party is in touch with reality and is brave enough to point it out. I wish he had the ear of the former Prime Minister, but something tells me that he doesn't.

Shameran Abed
New York, USA

Extortion law

Presumably the government is planning to formulate some rigorous laws to restore law and order situa-

society.

Another point to mention, deployment of patrol police in New York and London reduced street crime by 20 per cent and 12 per cent respectively within a few months. There is no alternative of increasing the number of patrol police permanently to fight street crime.

Abul Hasnat
Manchester University, UK

Banning polybags

The Minister for Environment and Forest deserves appreciation for the bold step taken by him in banning polybags. Without his initiative and firm action this might have not been possible. A move as such was initiated during the past regime but it was nipped in the bud due to lack of firm determination and sincerity.

As regards the changes in laws to ban polybags permanently, I wholeheartedly agree, because we do need such tougher laws in this country in curbing this menace but I

of polybags in public places and for doing so one may be punished as above.

In a country like ours, laws should be framed after all due considerations leaving no scope for the law enforcers to extort money using the law as a pretext. The ever greedy and corrupt government servants at each and every step exploit us wherever and whenever we have to interact with them in our public life. I would request our honourable Minister to give a second thought to this particular portion of the law before it becomes effective. I suppose that by implementing the other clauses of the law firmly the menace of polybags will disappear.

A. B. M. Zakaria, on e-mail

New defence attaches

What possible justification does the government have to expand the number of Defence Attaché? What are the guidelines for taking such a decision? Presumably this post would be necessary in countries with which we have defence purchases, co-operation in training and peace keeping missions and border or maritime tensions or issues.

The government cannot just decide to have more defence attaches just because someone felt like it. I also don't see why we need an attaché in Washington DC and another one two hours away in NY. Why not have the attaché in DC commute to NY when necessary or vice versa?

Unless I am mistaken, there is no such need in Turkey, Islamabad and Malaysia. To the best of my knowledge the only one of these we have a defence related relationship with is Pakistan and that too for guns for the Police. South Korea, for sure, to return that damned boat.

The beauty of a Loyal Opposition is that the ruling party would be shredded in the Parliament for undertaking such wasteful extravagances. Sadly we don't have one.

MA Dhaka

the accused.

I appeal to the members of the parliament to please consider these suggestions and pass the bill as soon as possible.

Such bill should have been introduced long ago.

Sobhan Abdus
Atlanta, GA, USA

President Zia.
Bastiat
Dhaka

of who knows whom. These admission seekers had no choice as the student leaders threatened them that otherwise they would tear their admission form.

If such unhealthy practice continues to go unabated what would be the state of our educational institutions? What would the students learn from these institutions? I wonder what type of a doctor these student leaders would be when they start practising ?. Would they demand from their patients?

A frustrated admission seeker
Dhaka

Pakistan owes to America

When the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, the main concerns of the US policymakers had been the security of Pakistan. It was argued (I think correctly) that if the Soviet Union was successful in installing a Communist regime in Afghanistan, the pressure on Pakistan would grow.

Any Communist take over of Pakistan would have fulfilled the Soviet dream of having an access to the warm waters and possible Soviet enrichment of the Middle East. Anti-American Iranian revolution provided a unique opportunity for the Russians as the Americans had lost their major foothold in the region and was seen in retreat. A Communist victory in Afghanistan would pave the way for eventual Communist take over of Pakistan and both Afghanistan and Pakistan could be brought under the Soviet rule in the same way the Soviet Union ruled other Central Asian Muslim republics.

It is in this context, the United States decided to intervene in Afghanistan. The decision to help Afghan Mujahedins was prompted more by a desire to stem Soviet advance on Pakistan and not so much to help Afghanistan for its own sake. This was why once the Soviets were beaten back, the United

outside. The result was equally disastrous.

Considering this, the Americans have now rightly decided to stay in both Afghanistan and Pakistan. Without American presence, both countries would again collapse into religious extremism and war. America has saved Pakistan from inevitable Soviet domination. Only it can save Pakistan from war and devastation.

Mahmood Elahi
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada

Ekushey February

Adolf Hitler said that "If you want to destroy a country, then first of all burn all the libraries."

After the partition in 1947 the then Pakistani rulers tried to destroy the Bangalee nation by declaring that only Urdu should be the state language of Pakistan. But the valiant sons of the country foiled their evil design for once and for all.

On the Ekushey or the 21st of February 1952, Salam, Barkat, Rafique, Shafique and Jabbar embraced martyrdom to establish Bangla as one of the state languages of Pakistan. Had their been no Ekushey then there would be no Bangla language and culture, no Bangalee nation not to speak of sovereign and independent Bangladesh. So Amor Ekushey is not only a Shaheed and International Mother Language Day but it is also the heart of the Bangalee nation.

Iqbal Ahmed
New Eskaton Rd, Dhaka

Save our plants and herbs

Fifty years ago when I was a kid, the backyard of our house in a village about six miles from Bagerhat was full of wild plants, weeds, herbs and growth of various kind. The thick tangle of foliage was so dark that even in the daytime we hardly dared to go there. My grandmother was

"Wrong wording in a Rabindra Sangeet"

I wonder how much space and time you intend to spare on the above issue of great intellectual pursuit of Bangladeshi people. I do not believe it is an issue of national priority.

The nation is facing unprecedented challenges with its teaming millions fighting for minimum human dignity, when rape, murder, looting and political dishonesty is the order of the day. You might serve the people better with your powerful tool of mass communication by focusing on issues closer to the heart of millions of unfortunate children of God.

Bangladesh has surpassed all countries in dishonesty, corruption and crime. You might consider publishing letters on such national issues.

Munim Chowdhury
Dhaka

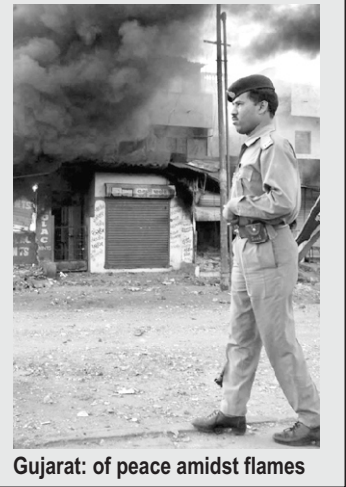
What are these uncalled for analysis enduring over for more than two weeks? Now is the time that the singer herself spell out her observation on the assessment made by Mr. Nazmul Karim (February 6) and thus bring an end to these unnecessary arguments to an end for once and for all.

Zereena Islam
Washington, D.C., U.S

In a country where as many as 50 per cent people live below the poverty line, where enormous number of children do not go to school in that country we debate for wrong or right wording in a Rabindra Sangeet for days after days! Shame on those people!

Shawkat Hossain
Mirpur 7, Dhaka

India is burning, we have a serious potential of related spillover effects and a government with an abysmal track record of protecting minority rights. Palestine continues to burn. Bangladeshi soldiers may find themselves in Afghanistan soon. Teenagers hang themselves after being gang raped while their attackers roam around freely. A Bangladeshi cricket team finally won an international first class match today in the West Indies. And of course there are a host of other things that people could write to *The Daily*



Gujarat: of peace amidst flames

disagree with the last portion of the law where one is liable to pay a fine of taka five hundred for carrying or being in possession of polybags. This will only pave the way for the law-enforcing agency to make grafts and harass the general public.

Except for Bangladesh, possibly no other country has banned polybags. So travellers returning home from abroad are likely to have polybags with them and what they may use casually. I think that instead of its use the law should strictly ban throwing and disposing



Tagore: Words, words and words

Star Letters page.

Yet today's (March 5) Letters to the Editor continues the saga of Rabindra Sangeet songs with incorrect wordings. Enough already! These readers could set up their own Internet message board on Yahoo! And take the conversation there. Or exchange personal emails. Yet they choose to bombard us with this monumental debate.

It would also help if the Editor could more freely exercise the paper's right not to publish every letter, especially when the subject is no longer of interest to the paper's general readership. One way you could gauge online reader sentiment is by putting in place online "polls" on your Internet site. If you do choose to publish this letter, please, please do not put it under the title "Wrong

wording in a".

Rafiq Ahmed
Chicago, USA

Oh! My God, so this is not the end. Mr. Editor, please do your readers a favour. Please immediately ask your cultural correspondent to interview Ms. Bonnya and let us know her views on the allegation made by Mr. Karim and wind-up the debate.

Khaled Rahman
New York, U.S.A

I am referring to the letter of Mr. Nazmul Karim (Feb. 06) and that of Ms. Millie (Mar. 4).

Though I have my reservations on the concluding remark of Ms. Millie, I fully agree with her that Mr. Nazmul Karim's letter, in all probability, is the first letter in *The Daily Star* that could activate so much enthusiasm and stimulate so much awareness among so many readers to participate and share their own personal thoughts with.

I wonder what the contents of Mr. Karim's letter were! What was it that drew so much attention?

Fateema Haque
Dhaka

On Tagore song wording

As a matter of principle we don't stop letters on any issue. In this case, it appears that the readers would like to hear from Rezwana Chowdhurt Bannya, the singer whose alleged mispronunciation led to this debate. We have tried to contact the singer but failed. We shall continue to search for her for another month. Meanwhile we would like to suspend letters on this topic for that period. If anyone has strong opposition to our decision, please let us know. This is not scissoring a debate but in view of the enormous letters backlog and space scrambling that we face, it seems a matter of equity towards others.

--Editor