

"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 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 Talibans who imposed their own harsh tyrannical rule in the name of Islam and invited Al-Qaeda terrorists to export their extremism

Do one good thing every day

Death's best friend

I am referring to the letters "A journey by bus and with cigarette" (March 1 & 4) by Mr. A.K.M. Mohiuddin, and Mr. Jamil Ahmed. Their traumatic experience with cigarette, reminded me once again of the evil residing in people's hearts which persuade them not to listen to someone else's very reasonable request just "not to smoke", let alone to help a person in a traumatic situation.

Why do we have to be for ban of smoking, why do we have to impose a rule to the people in order to stop them from the evil display of their unacceptable behaviour? Don't they have common sense?

I've come up with an idea to request you to open a "Do one good thing everyday" section in your esteemed daily where people can tell their own tiny, little good things that they do everyday and thus encouraging people to be respectful towards every tiny little thing that come in their way of life by giving them the proper exposure and space in your newspaper.

In this connection, I can't help telling you my one good thing that I try to do. Whenever I travel by any transport like rickshaw or taxi, if I see the drivers smoking in particular, I spend some time, talking to them about their harmful smoking habit and the consequences of this habit and also try to convince them to buy fruits like Banana to eat for their better health and therefore not to spend a lot of money for burning cigarettes.

The response that I get from the other side is pretty amazing and surprising. Until now whomever I've met, all of them accepted the fact that smoking is harmful for them and in future they will try their best to give up the habit.

Shahrin Hussain Tania
Old D.O.H.S. 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 concern 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

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

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

President Zia.

Bastiat
Dhaka

Ram-Rahim Nagar

According to a report published in the Times of India, the Ram-Rahim Nagar colony in Ahmedabad (a mixed population of 20,000 slum residents in Behrampura) has remained an oasis of peace when every thing burnt in communal frenzy.

We all hope that every community in the sub-continent becomes a Ram-Rahim Nagar colony even when we have differences of opinion on various issues.

M Smith
USA

In this aspect, I would suggest to formulate a separate law only for extortion related cases. If we look behind, in each locality, killings, coercion, terrorism even in education institutions are basically for money or in other words for 'extortion'. So if the government can prevent extortion I am optimistic that about 50 per cent of crime will be reduced drastically. A separate rigorous law like acid-throwing cases with maximum punishment of death penalty within a shortest possible time (maximum 1-year) can help reduce terrorism from the

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

Ziauddin Ahmed, on e-mail

Opinion from your enlightened readers would be appreciated.

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.

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

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

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

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.

MA
Dhaka

Bill seeking death to acid throwers

I congratulate the government for introducing the bill in the Parliament on the above-mentioned subject.

From newspaper reports, it appears that the provision of fine has been provided in case of conviction by imprisonment only and not



Tagore: Words, words and words

StarLetters 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. Bonny 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 Chowdhury 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