

Opposition sponsoring crimes

I read your excellent commentary "The mystery of rising crimes is finally 'solved'?" (March 11). Since the Prime Minister is aware of the crimes sponsored by the opposition, it is now clear that in a few days time all sorts of crime will disappear from our society and we will live in peace.

In this connection I'd like to quote Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey's said, "There are not enough jails, not enough policemen, not enough courts to enforce a law not supported by the people".

J. Taher Banani, Dhaka * * *

Congratulations to Mr Mahfuz Anam for an excellent response to PM Khaleda Zia's claim that crimes are being committed by the opposition.

Nasreen Huq, on e-mail

Choose from the two options

As I see it, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia has only two options.

One, she can cling on to power like Benazir Bhutto of Pakistan until defeated and drummed out ignominiously by a nation fed up with her shenanigans. Or she can promise to step down and retire gracefully as did Corazon Aquino of Philiphine.

Which way will she jump?

MA Dhaka

"Pakistan owes to America"

This is in response to the letter "Pakistan owes to America" (March 8). Contrary to the viewpoint expressed therein, the main concern of the US policymakers when Russia invaded Afghanistan was not the security of Pakistan.

The invasion came at the height of the Cold War when both U.S. and Russia were grappling for global supremacy. The pro-American Shah regime had been toppled by the revolution in Iran and with it the U.S. had lost its foothold in one of the most strategically important regions of the world. Neighbouring India and Iraq already sat pretty in the Russian lap. Pakistan could be the only buffer and hence America's proxy against Soviet expansionist designs in the region.

True that the Americans provided finance, arms, intelligence etc. but it was due to Pakistan's, and allow me to say, naive and unnecessary frontline role that the Soviets were made to retreat from Afghanistan. For Zia's illegitimate regime in Pakistan this came as a blessing in disguise.

In fact Zia-ul-Haq's tyrannical and dictatorial military regime propped up and was conveniently hailed as a champion of the free world by the U.S. Consequently, the Afghan war gave Pakistan the *kalashnikov* culture, heroin and religious extremism under the burden of which it still finds itself reeling, Pakistani society has never been the same nor probably will be. Not that the onus purely and simply lies on the U.S. Part of, in fact most of it must squarely rest on the shoulders of Zia and his cronies. But then I am transgressing here.

Global politics and international relations are about strategic interests and shifting balances of power. And America in fact was only nurturing and promoting its own vital interests while supporting Pakistan. That Pakistan fell into their scheme of things doesn't mean they were doing it a favour.

The American presence now in Afghanistan and Pakistan has been instigated by the threat it finds itself under and what it conveniently terms as the "war against terror". The self-styled sole policeman of the world already controls the jugular to world energy resources as an aftermath of the Gulf war. Its presence across the continents and the oceans does not and cannot guarantee the safety or the independence of the world or the countries where it is presently entrenched. In fact it is the case of the parasite living off and devouring the host.

Uncle Sam is not the saviour as the writer Mr. Elahi thinks and terms it to be either for Pakistan or for that matter any other country. Rather it may well be the harbinger and catalyst of conflict amongst the peoples, polarisation of society, the usurping of independence and

interests and ultimately chaos and anarchy in that country. It is time we understood this and did something about it.

Abbas Raza, on e-mail

Stop this blame game

While exchanging views with the journalists the other day, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia said that if necessary new law would be enacted to curb violence. I would like to tell the Prime Minister that we do not want to see any more black law in the name of curbing violence. If the government takes the following steps then the violence will be curbed automatically.

1. Changes must be made in the existing laws so that the culprits do not get any bail whatever the circumstances may be.
2. Trail must be finished as quickly as possible. It should not be dragged on for months or years. If necessary set up special tribunals.
3. Death sentences should be given for the heinous crimes.
4. Our political leaders from top to bottom should not and must not support or take sides with the culprits.
5. Power should be given to the police to arrest the culprits without any fear. But if any policeman misuses the power then he should be given exemplary punishment.

We should always remember that nobody is above the law. We do not believe in the principle of "A king or queen can do no wrong". If anybody commits a crime then he/she should be punished no matter who that person is.

Iqbal Ahmed New Eskaton Rd, Dhaka

Bangladesh festival in Myanmar

The *Daily Star* report (March 9) makes nostalgic reading for Bengali Muslim families whose relations had settled in Rangoon and other places in the then Burma during the British period. I have fond memories of my cousin brother (a Bengali Muslim), who married a Muslim Bengali girl whose family had settled in the then Rangoon.

Later, due to political changes, the neighbours Bangladesh and Myanmar drifted apart. This cold social front looks artificial for two neighbouring countries, not thawing decade after decade.

Therefore the latest initiative of the GoB is welcome in arranging a Bangladeshi festival in Yangon (late by decades). Also welcome is the linking of Yangon through our national airlines BB. The greatest bug in international relations is the communication gap. Exploiting the five senses in a friendly way reduces the gap.

The two countries have aspects to share for better human goodwill. It is hoped this festival will set a new trend in friendly relations between the two neighbours. There is tremendous scope for bilateral trade, followed by more social understanding.

A Mawaz Dhaka

Export Promotion Bureau

Every export from Bangladesh requires, among others, a Country of Origin Certificate (CO) issued by the Export Promotion Bureau (EPB). The CO forms are completed by the exporters, the EPB simply checks, stamps and signs. The charge for this service is a pay order of Tk 100, in effect a tax on exporters plus Tk 100 as bribe.

On average there are at the very least about 1000 COs issued daily, ergo the daily take of this one section of the EPB is Tk 1 lakh.

A while ago, a metal grille was installed so outsiders could not get in. The naïve theory being, that staff would not be able to ask for bribes. That was ineffective and anyway the grille has since been removed.

As the leader in this weeks Economist points out, the World Bank in its most recent World Development Report has found evidence of higher levels of corruption associated with lower growth and lower levels of per capita income. The Economist suggests industries getting together to form a collective "no bribery" policy. This is similar to Transparency International's suggestions for reducing corruption as well.

Rezwana Chowdhury Bannya replies:

I would like to convey my heartfelt thanks to all those who wrote letters in your page and to those who would write later. By taking up this issue with such earnestness, they have once again convinced me about my old views about the eternal appeal of Rabindra Sangeet to music lovers. Whenever I was asked by listeners of Rabindra Sangeet, from both sides of the border, about the future of Rabindra Sangeet after the copy-right period was over, I had replied without slightest hesitation, that listeners all over the world would stand sentinel over the purity of Rabindra Sangeet, both of its words and its tunes. Listeners of Rabindra Sangeet do not only listen with their ears but perceive them with their heart. They would never accept any corruption or alteration in Rabindra Sangeet. All these letters written from all over the world have proved my point. I am also greatly flattered by the fact that so many listeners from abroad have listened to my humble renderings of Rabindra Sangeet, which brought for me the love and attention of so many people. I am grateful to each one of them.

From TV to cassette. I recorded the song, *Jakhon Porbe na mor payer chinha ei bate*, for a Bangladesh Television programme in a duet with late Aminur Rahman Nijhu on a mono-recording system in 1984. The recording was not of a good standard and the songs were not intended to be transferred to any cassette. A cassette of duets sung by me and Nijhu was however marketed by a company named Concord. I objected to the inclusion of that song, and a few other songs I sang for TV, in that cassette made for commercial purpose. In fact, I had some arguments about this matter with my friend Nijhu that came out in the weekly Bichitra in those days. The company that marketed the cassette closed down sometime later. I have no idea how that old cassette was again marketed by another company named Sangeeta giving it a new title Anandadhara. They never felt it necessary to seek my permission nor did they bother to find out whether the old spool was of a standard wherefrom a new cassette recording could be made. There was no scope for me to listen and approved the recording standard or correctness in anyway. I even did not know about the existence of this cassette until this controversy broke out. Then I got a copy of the cassette and found out that as a result of making multiple copies from a master copy the songs in the cassette have become over-used and the sound quality deteriorated to a sub-standard level. As a result Mr Najmul Karim and many others heard '*dhar gulay*' in place of '*daar gulay*'. I personally heard '*kanta lata girbe*' in place '*ghirbe*' and some other distortion in sound. Some defects in other two or three songs in that cassette can also be detected.

'Jakhon porbe na mor payer chinha' is one of the most popular and rather common Rabindra Sangeets that are sung in almost every school function or variety show in both sides of the border. Besides, changing '*daar*' to '*dhar*' makes everything meaningless. Thorny shrubs by the sides of the room (*dhar gulay*) do not close the entry into the room through the door (*daar*). I am sure any student of Rabindra Sangeet knows how this changes the central theme of that great song. I, always tell my students to read the songs repeatedly so that one remembers the words, understands the central theme before learning the tune. It is impossible to understand, enjoy and appreciate a Rabindra Sangeet without grasping the idea, expressed through the poet's own words. Moreover, the song was sung in a duet. It is impossible to think that neither of us could detect the fault and commit the same mistake or mis-pronunciation. Usually while singing duets it is the common practice for both singers to watch if the other partner is making any mistake in '*katha*', '*sur*' and '*taal*'. I am certain that the distortion is the result of making many copies out of an old over-used and worn out master spool which itself was of poor sound-recording standard.

Bad recording. My listeners can always write letters criticising me. That is their right. But I am very unfortunate for being criticised for a mechanical fault that crept into a cassette made without my permission and over which I had little control. That also from a song that I sang almost 20 years ago. Our laws do not provide any redress in such cases of unlawful and illegal cassette-production, which are made without any consideration for sound-quality or other technical matters. Once I had to stop halfway trying to take legal step against one such cassette maker.

Very few of our companies who market cassettes of Rabindra Sangeets have little care for correctness of word. This will be observed if the 'inlay cards' of any such local cassettes are scrutinised. They are full of either wrong words or spelling mistakes. Many of the cassettes are of poor recording quality due to distortion in pitch, vibration and unchecked metallic noise creeping in

Were the BGMEA to be actually representative of the interests of their members, now would be the time to have a frank and open discussion as to the bribes that have to be paid, even while obeying the law.

This government really does not care about promoting exports from Bangladesh nor does care about our economic growth. The disheartening fact is neither does the BGMEA. Both only care about appearances and the next elections.

Dorji Dhaka

Governing an LDC

It is tough governing a LDC. It is a have-not society, which cannot resist temptation; therefore corruption and non-transparency are rampant at all tiers. Then illiteracy and over-population impede infrastructure development. The playing fields are uneven almost everywhere. The top ten per cent of the society control 90 per cent of the

economy, money in circulation, and the other perks, visible and invisible. The vertical communication gap is huge. The politicians take advantage of the situation; hence politics become a profitable business, and public interest suffers. It is difficult to get out of this vicious cycle, as the succeeding regimes are not super-class, and come from the same society.

The first requirement is internal discipline. In Dhaka, the adverse effect is very much visible, since democracy was dragged back into action in the early 1990s. Rather, it is half action, as the opposition benches are empty for the last ten years. The political workers value highly the percentage system, another symptom of the have-not society. It makes petty corruption visible; and the human systems loss is very high. The latter adversely affect the budget, ADP and the donors' attitude. The potential energy and resources cannot be veered towards the take-off point in



while recordings are done. I do not know if anything at all can be done to control this.

Nobody is more aware than me about the limitation of my singing. I have many faults and defects and it is a never-ending effort on my part to get over them and reach perfection. Whatever I have learnt so far is very little compared to what I have been trying to achieve. To use Gurudev's own words, "*Hetha je gaan gaita asha/Amar hoyini se gaan gawa.*" But I claim that I am devoted and sincere. It will be quite unfair if I am accused of uttering '*dhar*' in place of '*daar*' because of my lack of sincerity or lack of devotion. Rabindra Sangeet is not a pastime for me, nor is it only a profession or hobby, it is my *raison d'etre*, my inspiration, my strength in sorrow and my ray of light in life's dark and despairing days.

Tagore notations. I would like to make one or two submissions regarding the notations, to which one of the letter writers, Mr Zahir Khan, claiming to be a musician has alluded. Rabindranath himself did not make the notations of his songs. Whenever he composed a new song he would see to it that some of his students around him learnt that song lest he should forget it later. Notation of the songs were done afterwards by those who learnt directly from him. People still living in Santiniketan since the early part of the last century (Rabindranath started residing most of time in Santiniketan since 1901) would testify to it. Dinendranath Thakur (the poet described him as the 'store-keeper' of his songs), Shailajaranjan Mazumder, Suren Kar, Anadikumar Dastidar, Santidev Ghosh, Indra Devi Choudhrai, Sarala Devi, Rama Kar and others were the main persons who prepared notations at the time. All of them had their own style of singing and they were different from each in their ability to translate Rabindranath's unique style and richness of voice in their own. Their notations also varied from each other. Shailaja Da's notations were perfect. The grains of *tappa*, the *meers* (glissandos) and the little *alangakars* of any song were all perfectly rendered in his notations. Dinu Da's notations were comparatively simpler. I heard all these from my mentor Mohar Di. Like some variant readings of his poems there are many modified versions of Rabindra Sangeets. The poet himself would change the same song while teaching it to one after having taught it in one way to someone else. He was always experimenting with the words and tunes of his songs. Shailaja Da tried his best to make notation of all variations. Mention can be made about the tunes of the two songs like "*Ogo tumi panchdashi*" and "*Aji jharo jharo mukhara badara deene*". Both the tunes are in the books of notations. But there are many songs where the notations of the second or alternative tune have not been made nor published, but Shailaja Da or Shantidev Da taught them to the students of Santiniketan. *Barisha dhara majhe, Aji kamala mukul dal, Bhor holo bibhabari, Badha dile badhe larai*, are a few of some songs. Some of these variants are available with Shailaja Da or

Shantidev Da's signature on them. My mentor Mohar Di had some of them with her. Rabindranath himself taught Mohar Di a song from Tasher Desh *keno nayan apni bheshe jaay*. When she (Mohar Di) taught me the same song it was without *taal*. She told me that it was different from the published notation. Mohar Di was only 13 when Rabindranath taught her this song. The poet probably taught her in a way so that it would be easy for a very young girl to learn. But that does not necessarily make the other tune wrong. Rabindranath himself had taught the same song in two different styles and tunes to two different persons. The famous 'Ananda dhara bahiche bhubane' sung by Mohar Di is different from its notation. The tune of this song is a variant from a Vishnupuri gharana kheyal in Trital of Sudh Malkosh. Mohar Di sang this song under the direction of a famous ustad of Vishnupur gharana, Ramesh Chandra Bandopadhy, and this was published with the approval of Santiniketan. Mention has been made of mixed Malkosh in the notation of this song written by Prafulla Kumar Das, but the song sung in Sudh Malkosh cannot be said to be wrong. V. Balsara, a famous musician is making the notation of the Sudh Malkosh form of this song. In fact, work is being done to make notations of many such variant tunes of the same song. When they come out in published form the present notation will not be declared wrong. One would be putting Rabindra Sangeet into a kind of straitjacket insisting that the currently published notations are the last word and all variations are either distortions or incorrect.

Santiniketan gharana ? Mention has been made of Santiniketan gharana. I personally do not know of any such gharana and do not understand what is meant by it. But of course Santiniketan is different in perception, in understanding the spirit of a song which are very much related to the nature surrounding Santiniketan, its prayer sessions (*Upashana*), its open sky and field. The students there sing from their heart by being one with the ambience of their *Ashram*. Songs like "*O amar chander alo*" sung by the students in the open fields of Santiniketan on a moonlit night when the moon shines over the Sal treetops bring about the natural best of the song that certainly disappear when the same song is sung in a closed room of a city. If this is considered the Santiniketan gharana then I have nothing to say about it. It has been mentioned that the song "*Apni ki dhani baje*" as song is different from its notation. But I have not either the song following the notation. You may listen to a recording of this song made by Geeta Ghatak. These songs of *Tappa* variety are generally neither sung nor taught following the notation. Their special style and tonal quality are handed over to the students by the Guru personally. If you look in detail in books of notation you will find that there are some clear instructions about some specific songs. The instructions say, "the singing style of this song should be specially learnt." In other words, only notations are not enough for those songs. It is impossible to translate the grain and pauses of *tappa* in notation. The notations of these do not show if the words are to be uttered fully or to be broken in syllables, or specify the length of the *meers*. The rhythm or the pauses are never spelt out. The notation show only a kind of format. Rest is left to the teacher who takes infinite pains to teach the student. The personal interaction between the teacher and student are always reflected in these songs. I can mention about 50 songs like, *Chira Sakha he, Aha amar sange, Amar sakal neey, Ae mohu abaran, Ae parabashe rabe ke, Peepasa hai no mitilo* etc. sung by great singers like Sahana Devi, Amita Sen, Kanak Das, Amala Das etc. and others where variations from notation can be traced. All these have appeared with the approval of the Biswabharti Board.

Rabindranath's songs are the reflection of his entire life, his philosophy, his aesthetics. One must understand Rabindranath in his entirety, be able to grasp the vastness of this myriad-minded genius before one can reach perfection in singing his songs. I can only quote a few lines of one of his letters written to Prashanta Mahalanabish. The poet writes, "Bula babu, I have an humble request. Please teach them to sing with a little love and *Rasa*. That is the only speciality of my songs.... Please try to ensure that there is some *Rasa*, some *taal*, some love, some *meer* left in my songs."

I once again thank my critics and admirers who took up pen on this issue. Their love and affection for me, and above all, their great concern for the purity of Rabindra Sangeet has overwhelmed me. I request them to pray for me so that I can be worthy of singing the songs of Rabindranath. My special thanks are due to *The Daily Star*, its Editor and staff who have taken great care to publish all letters (supporting or criticising me) in their paper.

The gun-toting culture

What is happening in Bangladesh today reminds us of the Western movies we saw during our student days, of cowboys settling account, dispute and enmity through the barrels of guns. Unlicensed guns provide a false sense of security. The loss of life cannot be compensated, specially of those who are innocent, and do not deserve such treatment.

The leaders and the government are not talking enough about and directly on this new type of negative mass psychology which has gripped the educated and the uneducated minds at different levels of the society.

It was not there before. It accelerated in the 1990s. It started with bad political culture, and the politicians know it, but evade the issue, and pass on the buck. Political accountability is the culprit. The gift of the gab should not be allowed to have the upper hand. The leaders are ruling not by the head, but by the heart. We are a doomed nation.

The time has come to question the integrity of the politicians in general, and whether the society should look for alternative leadership elsewhere away from the political domain. Politicisation on large scale has spread political corruption to great depth and breadth. Now money is also tainted, and the motivation to make a hard living is gone. Is this the foundation for the new generation?

It is amazing to note the utter irresponsibility of the political parties to come to a consensus on this and other national issues. They are fighting on marginal non-issues, and getting away with it. Fatten one's own calf and suck the society dry? How the public is being duped on both sides?

This is possible because politics has become a lucrative source of business, without working too hard. The corruption lists are being release in hundreds of pages. The

Korean naval frigate has been sent back for overhauling. Some of the MIGs are going back?

These are the symptoms. What about the diagnosis? Vested groups now control the society. The government cannot take fast and effective action as these interests are entrenched everywhere starting with the police. The bureaucracy is no longer neutral. Polarised administration is ruinatal.

Management and administration cannot solve these deep-rooted evils without solid public support. It calls for something like a tidal bore or earthquake before which noting can stand. It looks like we have to start with a new Bangladesh. Many nations in Asia, Africa, and S America are in the same predicament the leadership is not people-oriented. It cannot, initially, because a have-not society cannot rule itself. The eternal question looms up: how to get out of the vicious circle?

There is no point in repeating the old cliches by the commoners. This cleansing job is in the domain of the real leaders. Where are they hiding? The old leadership has been tested again and again, and found wanting.

The public support has to be cut from the old leadership and grafted on to the new leaders. This has already started in the daily lynching incidents. The people are taking law in their own hands and mete out justice. It is a sign of lack of confidence in the administration. The ball is in the court of the authorities. No mumbling, please, and no cosmetic pruning. Start at the foundation. Taste the bitterness of self-sacrifice. Action, no slogans.

lizzy Dhaka

"On Tagore Song Wording"

I am referring to your view "On Tagore Song Wording" (March 8) and I was surprised that you too call this to be a 'debate'. Mr. Nazmul Karim (February 6) specifically pointed out a mistake in a song sung by Rezwana Chowdhury Bannya and the readers automatically responded to Mr. Karim's claim.

An error is an error, a mistake is a mistake and a wrong is a wrong. I failed to understand why you call this to be a debate?

Tarique Adnan Khan Wallington, UK * * *

Reference to your "On Tagore song wording" (March 8) I must appreciate your tactic to stop publishing any more letters on the 'Wrong wording in a Rabindra Sangeet'.

I am surprised that Rezawana Chowdhury Bannya could not be traced. Did you call BTV or Radio Bangladesh for her address and telephone number?

Tobarak Hossain Lalmatia, Dhaka * * *

You have done a great favour to all the readers by winding up the debate but please don't want me to believe that you will need one month to search out the alleged singer.

In case you cannot contact her within one month and do not let the readers know of her views, the readers will assume that you willingly rescued her.



Yasmin Rahman Massachusetts, U.S.A * * *

In continuation of the letter of Mr. Shawkat Hossain (March 8), I'd like to insert that "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" and where more than 50 per cent people are illiterate and where more than 75 per cent of the people have not heard of Rabindranath Tagore and where 95 per cent people do not understand English and where more than ...

I "fully agree" with Mr. Shawkat Hossain -- what difference does it make whether a word in a song has been wrongly? What difference does it make if a spelling printed in the textbooks for the school children is right or wrong? Why does *The Daily Star* publish letters that are not related to poverty and illiteracy. I fail to understand why an English Daily like *The Daily Star* is 'wasting' more than half of its pages on 'absolutely unnecessary' subjects like sports, literature and culture which are not connected to poverty and illiteracy.

Shame on *The Daily Star*. In fact we 'don't need' an English daily in our country.

Raqibul Islam Dhaka

These letters arrived before Bannya's reply