

"Cigarette and our responsibility"

Regarding S Hussain's (March 22) charges made on cigarettes and their promotion, I feel there are certain things we should consider before making such drastic comments.

We all know that cigarettes are demerit goods and every government has its own policies of charging the producers and distributors of tobacco to compensate for the probable harmful effects. For example, there are special restrictions over advertisements of cigarettes and they are not aired frequently like commercials of other products.

But it is totally unfair when Ms Hussain is charging reputed dailies like *The Daily Star* and *Prothom Alo* for featuring such commercials. For a moment I would like her to treat cigarette as a simple product that has a right to be promoted and made aware of. Of course, there already exist different bans, restrictions, and how much more pressure can be exerted on the distributors of tobacco?

Ms Hossain claims that the young generation is greatly influenced by the models and actors and that many can pick up the bad habit of smoking from commercials. If she thought on a broader spectrum, then I could remind her of the famous Benson and Hedges Star Search sponsored by a tobacco company every year. This pageant is totally concentrated on the youths and is a form of promotional tool for cigarettes. Aren't youths at the risk of being influenced here? And where she is stating that "it was completely indiscreet and disgraceful on the part of Zahid Hasan to take part in such an advertisement" I would also like to remind her that every star/individual has his right to choose which product he is going to model for; and that is definitely not unethical to do so. If we put ourselves in the star's shoes, we might think that he probably wanted to change his image and hence went to promote such a product. Money, definitely is NOT the sole cause to divert a star to model for such products.

Yes, cigarettes are harmful for the public health, and every pack of cigarette and every commercial of cigarette accompanies the statement that smoking is injurious to health. But if the issue involves the risk of encouraging people to smoke more with a new commercial that was aired in television, Ms Hussain should not forget that the commercials put up on billboards, the various promotional tools taken up by the tobacco companies are equally influential to enhance smoking. A simple commercial would play little role in increasing the number of smokers.

With so many campaigns going around, people's awareness has increased over the years. Those who smoke, do so at their own responsibility. Is it not a bit unfair to

pers and our TV and film stars have responsibility to establish a healthy society which they are ignoring.

Moreover, it has been proved at molecular level that smoking causes cancer by inactivating p53 gene, which prevent cancer and more than 70 per cent lung cancer patients are found to be smokers. In this situation *Prothom Alo* which talk against acid throwing should not publish any cigarette advertisement and if it does it will be considered as an act as hypocrisy.

Dr. Mahboob Hossain
The University of Asia Pacific
Dhaka

The wind of change

The wind of change is always behind the civilisation. As nothing is permanent in life, the same is with civilisation. In the metaphysical sense all our pleasures are the children of our pain. A child is so dear to his mother because she delivers the child after much pain. In this age of science and technology when we are being bombarded by new idea everyday, our traditional values are being questioned by our younger generations, constantly. In the Western world where affluence and wealth has become the barometer of happiness, many values and traditions has become a matter of personal convenience. But the amazingly I have discovered a few new realities during my long stay in this society.

The ancient Indian philosophical magic, which was discovered by Romand Roland through the genius of Tagore, is taking its root in the western thinking mind. They are taking interest in moulding this into their fast paced lives.

But an opposite thing is happening in the poorer countries where there is tendency to shed all the traditional values and embrace whatever comes from the West. In the pessimistic human mind the lure for a noisy and shiny object is always irresistible. This tendency is a sign of desperation. The guardians of the society do have a very big responsibility to try to halt this degeneration. We can not replace sitar for a drum, the anchal of a saree can't be replaced with a skirt, rap can't be a replacement for *raag bageshri*, we can't say that a cousin is not a brother or sister and we can't send our old parents to the old home when we live in the house they built for us. Some of our traditional values must be preserved.

Akbar Hussain
Toronto, Canada

Duty drawback

The government runs an admirable program allowing exporters and certain thrust sectors to apply for VAT refund on electricity bills and clearing and forwarding charges.

Although a very useful program and a boon on these trouble times, since it is not well publicised it is underutilised by many eligible firms.

1971: An honourable struggle

Having studied and later taught politics, history, and international affairs, a few things annoy me more than the brazen attempts by pseudo-intellectuals to categorise the Bangladeshi independence struggle as 'another' national liberation movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Personally I have never found gratuitous violence to be an acceptable means to achieve noble ends like liberty, justice, or equity. Hence, without taking away from the legitimate grievances of other oppressed people, I cannot but submit that the War of Independence of 1971 was hardly just 'another' such liberation struggle.

The War was not launched by a bunch of guerrillas sitting around a Beirut café who just decided to go for a putsch. Far from it, it was the last option after all others had failed. Even then, the decision to go to war was decided upon by an assembly of representatives chosen by the Bengalis in free and fair polls. This conclave of representatives also co-opted an all-party advisory committee to help with the prosecution of the war effort. Throughout the nine month long war, all the elements of the freedom movement in the field kept intact their allegiance to this elected assembly which became known as the Provisional Government of Bangladesh (Mujibnagar government). Few are such examples of discipline and democracy in the annals of national liberation movements.

The spearhead of the freedom fighters itself, the Bangladesh Army, was no rag-tag band of marauders either. A small force that had demonstrated its professionalism amply in the 1965 defence of Lahore, this force took upon itself to train and integrate the irregulars into its formations while keeping up the discipline and elan of a regular uniformed force.

In that struggle, some of these brave men gave their lives, many lost fortunes, but none gave up their sacred honour. Save the unfortunate stray incidents of misdirected reprisals during and immediately after the war, our War of Independence involved no planned assault on civilians, no targeting of foreign nationals, no hijacking of planes, and no blowing up of Pakistani embassies abroad. And when the War was over, our government and society rushed to protect from harm those who had sided with the enemy. Though many lives were lost in the immediate retaliatory attacks after December 16, 1971, history bears witness that there was no *en masse* 'settling of scores' with the erstwhile collaborationist element, unlike the brutal treatment visited on the Ukrainians by the Russians or the Sudetenlanders by the Czechs in 1945. In a perversely misplaced act of our national magnanimity we even pardoned the most outspoken anti-Bangladesh elements and let those accused of the most heinous war crimes go home.

Yes, it was a different kind of a national liberation movement. In an endeavour where ends are often supposed to justify the means, we did not take that low road. Our Independence was paid for by our blood, sweat, and tears. Our honour, however, was left unsullied and unspent.

On this 31st anniversary of the birth of Bangladesh, let us not

responsibilities

One of the fundamental duties of a state is to ensure the safety and security of its citizens. Unfortunately, under the present regime of BNP and Jamaat, the right to life, liberty and property—the fundamental rights of any citizen—are all at stake. This is evidenced by the number of rapes, murders, attack on minorities, unlawful arrests of Awami League leaders and supporters, and lifting the special security arrangements for the Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina. The recent incident at the Chittagong Court speaks for itself. Without an independent and impartial judicial system, there can be no democracy in any country.

The Prime Minister has gone to the extent of blaming all law and order violations on the Opposition, thus exonerating her own party cadres for their crimes. This will further encourage the BNP-Jamaat cadres to continue their atrocities because it is the Opposition who will always be to blame—what a convenient judicial system!

Based on the aforementioned reasons (there are actually many more but these should suffice), it would be prudent for the government to throw in the towel and just resign. If the government believes the October 2001 election was free and fair, and the Opposition is responsible for the deterioration of law and order, then there is nothing to fear but the fear of winning even more seats in Parliament.

Dr. Aref Chowdhury
Springfield, New Jersey, USA

Bannya's reply and Rabindra Sangeet

My God, for how long do we have to endure this silly topic? I thought you have some editorial staff. But I was mistaken obviously. No sane person can continue wasting so much time on such trivial matters. Looks like Bangladeshis (especially the ones residing abroad) have no other useful pursuit other than showing their deep knowledge of Tagore songs.

We have had enough of this rubbish. Please spare us this agony or just ask us to stop reading your newspaper.

Ahmad Kamal
Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates

I have nothing to add to this debate, but I am really pleased to see that there are Bangladeshis in Helsingborg (?), Sweden and Lisbon who listen to Bengali music and follow what's happening back home.

With Bengali New Year coming up, I hope more of us here would be lucky enough to participate in the cultural events.

MA
Dhaka

So at last we have the clarification from the singer. "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, the cassette have become over-used and the sound quality deteriorated to a sub-standard level. As a result Mr Nazmul Karim and many others heard 'dhar gulay' in place of 'daar gulay'."

I wonder what did she hear? She did not explain. Frankly speaking I never expected such an immature

explanation from such a matured singer.

Looking forward to the observation of Mr. Nazmul Karim on Mrs. Rezwana Chowdhury Bannya's clarification.

Mrs. Nasreen Abbas
Sydney, Australia

I must thank the singer because she has acknowledged the song was sung by her and at least she did not

Should I ask my son to come back?

My only son left Bangladesh on the fourth of April 1989 for USA. My wife and I begged of him to stay back. Our concern amongst many others was that he was then a man of twenty years of age and had just crossed high school. He left without any fixed targets in that vast sea of foreign land.

As much as I can recall, not a single person followed up on it. Even the letter was not published right away, maybe the deaths of a few poor bus riders don't matter much to anybody anymore.

The last two letters I wrote followed two very gruesome accidents. This one follows, if anyone cares, the recent accident on Cox's Bazar highway.

I sincerely hope that people will show similar energy they showed over the last several weeks, debating over a silly mistake in an equally silly Rabindra Sangeet, and protest against the government's negligence in reducing the causes behind all these tragic accidents.

People please try to get your priorities right, debating over Rabindra Sangeet will never get anybody anywhere, so, my fellow letter writers, shape up and do something about all these accidents before one claims somebody who will not be just a statistic to one of you. I have seen how these accidents can destroy a dream in matter of seconds.

If you all want to experience what I did then you all are most welcome to write some more about the Rabindra Sangeet. If you don't want to explain to your wife how her 20 year old brother died

say that "some one else have sung this song and it is because of the 'bad recording' and 'because of a mechanical error that crept into the cassette' that the readers thought it was her voice."

Mrs. Sayeeda Rahman
Uttara, Dhaka

Today my son is thirty-two years old and working in a computer firm as a software engineer. Incidentally after a long and arduous struggle he did obtain a Bachelor's degree in Computer Soft Engineering. We had visited him last summer and intend to do so this summer also.

The social scenario in the States has undergone some changes since the infamous September 11 incident for the Muslim community there. My wife and I remain constantly worried and often argue as to whether or not to ask him to return home to Bangladesh.

The purpose of this letter is to share with you and your readers some of our concern and unanswered questions. Besides parents in similar situations may find some solace to find that there are others too who possibly share the dilemma.

The very thought of the possibility of asking my son to return to Bangladesh raised these questions which I place before you for your considerations. I have failed to provide a clean and honest response and hence I am at a dilemma whether or not to ask my son to return home.

1. Can I assure him of a suitable job opportunity in this ever-shrinking job market?

2. Will he have a safe and secure living?

3. Will he have the right to freedom of speech and action without the fear of being undue intimidation and persecution?

4. Will he be able to move about freely on the streets safely and without being subjected to the serious scourge of pollution?

5. Will he be able to have proper access to medical services without being subject to wrong diagnosis of an ailment or the peddlers of medi-

cal science trading on the human miseries?

6. Will he be able to rest and sleep in complete safety and security after a hard and stressful day?

7. Will he be spared of the ever deteriorating sights of law and order by way of murder, mugging, looting, arson, rapes etc?

8. Will he be able to withstand total inaction by the law enforcing agencies in bringing to book the perpetra-

Unfortunately the dawn of Bangladesh was not an easy feat. The horrifying atrocities and carnage can still be remembered vividly by many. After facing many years of degradation, death and loss of lives Bangladesh has emerged triumphant to secure a way of life. It is a country that can only claim its culture and heritage as its wealth and suffers indescribably poverty in every aspect of the word.

In Bangladesh for a majority of the people the simple act of survival requires an immense amount of will power and strength, survival against innumerable odds, acts test the strands of human strength to breaking point. Poverty has become the backbone of the nation instead of merely part of the vocabulary. It is with heart breaking poignancy that these people celebrate their very existence.

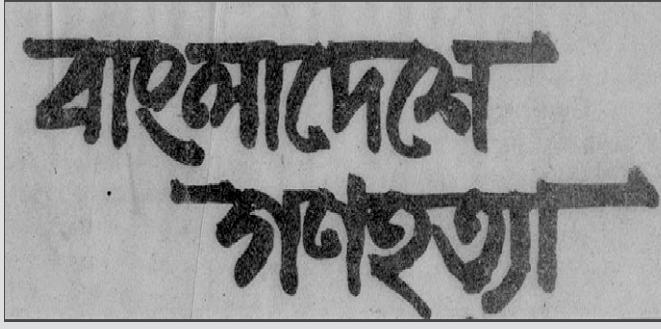
However it is a country that is wreathed with an immense amount of culture and history. In a vast history that stretches back thousands of years and claiming civilisation long before the west understood the prospect of the word. Bangladesh has had thousands of years of hardship equally matched with cultural wealth. It is this wealth that is often undermined and forgotten. It is important to understand that culture and identity comes with a price. It cannot be easily bought or attained. It is the glorious outcome of survival.

Many of our younger generation may often feel alienated from such notions but it is vital that we learn to overcome these obstacles. Unless we are ready to embrace our past, our hardships, trials and tribulations we cannot proceed into the future. It is up to this new generation to accept the best of our past and embrace the best of our present to create a future that represents our complete identity.

It is very real and tragic fear that in the future one of the most patriotic and time-honoured occasions in a nation identity should be seen as an excuse as a day off from work. It will truly be a day of lament if one day Independence Day approaches and the only emotions arising are of queries of culture and the meaning of cultural identity, and only a minority of the populace display a hunger for culture. It is distressing that while we are presiding in such a well advanced, first world, educated country that we should lose touch with perhaps what is one of the most human aspects of our existence; a pride in ourselves and the acceptance of our true identities.

Bangladesh's Independence should be a celebration in the truest sense of the word. It should be a celebration of a nation, a celebration of our unique heritage, multi-culturalism, and identity. And most of all a celebration of the achievements and triumphs over adversity.

Pushpa Jabin
Australia



A time to recall

jawans next to their latrines and these people were trying to get some water. I was quite pleased to see that our *jawans* were sharing their fresh water with our poor brethren.

That was like two seconds before they were all driven back to the lake. Oh well, you live and learn.

Bastiat
Dhaka

Bangladesh celebrates its 31st Independence Day this year and although many of us are a thousand miles away from home, it is important that we still take time to bear in mind what is perhaps the most poignant moments in our history.

In Australia the prosperous land of milk and honey, it is easy to get caught up in the excitement of the present and the anticipation of the future. Australia being the first nation to be lucky enough to win its birth and independence with a "vote and not a gun" it is a society that is rich with opportunity and the prospect of a thriving future.

Hospital in Gulshan. Authorities had allowed commercialisation of Dhanmondi in last 30 years and recently the same being done to Gulshan. The molestation had begun under President Ershad's regime and the rape has been committed over the last 10 years under patronage of RAJUK who was supposed to have protected the peaceful environment. RAJUK has commercialised Gulshan Avenue

which was gradually upgraded to college and now to an international university. Unlike Uttara Model School Manarat did not have playing ground mandatory for school and now whatever small space remained is being used for parking school buses.

With patronage from Manarat and Govt Fisheries department road no.106 was extended eastward over the lake as a barrage for fish culture mainly for the officials to look forward to get more students from Shazadpur on east of the lake.

There is long space along the road no. 104 along the Western Wall of Manarat school but neither the school nor the school itself made any effort to develop it as parking. There is chaos at the cross point of road no.104, 106 and 112 during the morning and mid day.

Recently the said Z. H. Sikdar Women College and Hospital, which was built in about six months and the neighbours had to endure noise not only during the day but also during the whole night so that six storied building could be completed within certain time.

The building was supposed to have basement parking but they have built nurses' quarter. The cars of the doctors and patients are parked at the front, washed and cleaned thus creating a chaotic situation during the whole day and also in the night.

As many as 30 cars and its drivers block the way to miseries to the residents around.

The chaotic behaviour of drivers, horn and noise have turned the entire area almost into aazaar.

Rajuk must pay compensation to the residents for having allowed the setting up of the hospital, which is purely a commercial enterprise.

You are requested to investigate, and report accordingly.

A.S.Ali
Gulshan



'Words' mean more than life?

on the DHK-CTG highway while on his way to attend his brothers wedding, then wake up for God's sake and write.

Anwar Babar
Dallas, Texas