

**"You have a beautiful country"**



Golden smile turning into dust

It saddens me to read who did or did not declare the Independence of Bangladesh on the night of 25th March 1971. Surely, for the sake of those millions who gave their lives in that nine months of fighting, it should be said that it was they who declared the Independence of Bangladesh. It was they, who made the ultimate sacrifice in the hope that Bangladesh would be a free country and would prosper.

I have visited your beautiful country and I have served the poor of your land as a volunteer. I have many friends there now, some of who I consider my family but I feel sad as I read *The Daily Star*, via the Internet, to see that the country is regressing instead of progressing. It saddens me because I see no betterment for those poor people that I have served and loved. They are the innocent ones. It was from their families that the martyrs came but their lives have not improved.

I beg those who have some authority, to stop this petty fighting and join together to make Bangladesh the country that those millions died for. Do not let their sacrifice go in vain. Yours is a beautiful land, full of beautiful people. My greatest memory of Bangladesh is the smiles on the faces of the children in those villages I visited. In my diary I wrote in October 1999, 'If smiles were turned to gold, then surely Bangladesh would be the richest country in the world'.

I still see those smiles and I pray that my thoughts will one day come true.

**Kathleen, on e-mail**

**Is AL shy to join parliament?**

If the Awami League lawmakers could enter the parliament building and afterwards stage a demonstration in the building complex protesting the passage of the Law and Order Disruption Act 2002, why could not they enter the assembly hall to make the same protest? The parliament does not belong to the treasury bench alone, it belongs to all the lawmakers, irrespective of their being on the treasure side or on the opposition's; and above all to the people of this country.

During the tenure of the last AL government, the opposition BNP lawmakers abstained from joining parliamentary session for as long as two years. During that time they enjoyed all the facilities available to a member of the parliament. Are the AL lawmakers enjoying all those facilities, as like as their predecessors? If yes, is that morally right?

It is often said that the opposition is not joining the parliamentary session. This assertion is not right. The opposition members belonging to the Jatiya Party are attending the sessions.

**Faruque Hasan**  
Dhanmandi, Dhaka

**Is the new anti-crime bill worthwhile?**

A new bill "Law and Order Disruption Crimes (Summary Trial) Act 2002", seeking quick disposal of cases related to disruption of law and order was passed in the Jatiya Sangsad on April 9. The Opposition termed it as a black law. But according to the Home Minister, "It is not a black law. It will be used against criminals and not against any gentleman."

It has become a fashion in our country that a new government would always look for a tougher law to harass the opposition. It is a colonial mentality and no government either military or civil could come out of this. Therefore, doubt always remains whether the ruling party people would be tried under this law or the opposition people will suffer more.

**Oli Md. Abdullah Chowdhury**  
Sythel Law College, Sythel

**Indo-Bangladesh**

By arrogantly walking out of the trade talks, India has proved that it is not interested in fair trade. It would rather keep Bangladesh simply as a captive market for its goods. The

Indian negotiators' flat refusal to eliminate duties and taxes on Bangladeshi products, claiming that these "are in the hands of the state governments rather than the Indian federal government", is simply ridiculous. The state governments have to follow the law of the land, which is already supposed to ensure free trade under existing agreements.

As it is, our trade deficit with India is one billion US dollars a year. This is a staggering amount. Our largest export sector, readymade garments, has net exports about equal to this after one adjusts for raw materials imports. In effect, all of our garments earnings are being siphoned away to finance the trade gap with India. Small wonder that we are perpetually facing a foreign reserve shortage.

The blindness of the Indian trade negotiators is quite bewildering. Don't they see that with a trade imbalance of one billion US dollars in their favour, they have a huge amount to lose if Bangladesh imposes equivalent duties on their products? Obviously they think that we don't have the political will to take any such serious action against their unfair treatment.

It is now up to Bangladesh to show the Indians that they will be the losers if trade is not free. The only things we really need to import from India are food grain (to ensure domestic food supply) and fabrics and yarns for readymade garments exports. Aside from these categories, the Bangladesh government should immediately impose duties on all Indian products, and the duties should be high enough to bring the trade deficit down significantly.

**Zeesan Hasan**  
Dhanmandi R.A., Dhaka

**"Death of Residential Areas"**

Commercialisation of our planned residential areas has been a cause of concern and a topic of discussion as evident by the report by Mr. Shad Ali Khan, captioned "Death of Residential Areas" (April 7).

IncurSION of non-residential uses in a haphazard manner, in our planned residential areas is the result of poor foresight and total lack of forward planning practices by the relevant authorities. When permitting permission for construction of multi-storeyed apartments, accommodating 20 families and more-- in each plot, our planners have failed to take into due consideration the increased needs of the residents.

The number of persons in a given area is the yardstick for the provision of any urban facility. With a higher number of residents, the need for 'high performance stores', i.e., for items like-- bread butter, etc. ice-cream parlours, stationery shops etc. increased astronomically. The need for everyday services-- tailoring, laundry, salons etc. increased similarly. And of course the need for social facilities-- educational, health, and entertainment also increased. Evidently, our so-called planners in Rajuk or PWD did not keep provision for these spaces of any standards, within the areas.

Rezoning parts of plots on the fringes, abutting the main roads to commercial use does not serve the purpose. If anything else, this measure triggered the construction of shopping malls on the main traffic arteries, creating congestion on the roads of staggering proportions. More so, as a width of only twenty feet for commercial development, is insufficient for the spaces required for transition from the road to the malls and the allocation of shops on the road level. So on both accounts, the planners took a decision, which had poor logic, and did little to preserve the residential environment.

Another reason for the invasion of non-residential uses in these

planned areas is the non-availability of developed plots of a reasonable size for establishment of schools, clinics, etc., as an effective demand exists. IncurSION of non-residential uses, particularly those required in close proximity to residential development is thus the natural outcome of this effective demand.

The problem could have been overcome by some amount of forward planning. Some plots/areas within the existing planned residential areas could have been allocated for complimentary non-residential uses. Where a larger plot size is required for instance a school or a clinic two or three plots could have been allocated for the same. This was all the more possible, as most plot owners sold plots to developers-- many are non-residents immigrants. It mattered little to them how the plot would be used. It is unfortunate that we failed to take opportunity of this situation. It probably may not be very late to ponder on what little that can be done now.

**Zarina Hossain**  
Urban planner, Chittagong

**Yarn imports**

The BTMA emasculated the BGMEA when they managed to shoot down the SAARC Cumulation proposal of the EU, thereby putting another cross on the country's rapidly diminishing RMG industry.

They are doing it again and this time to the BKMEA as well. What I find very amusing is that in spite of being the largest foreign exchange earner and a far larger employer in Bangladesh, both the BKMEA and the BGMEA cannot stand up to the BTMA.

When will these captains of industry learn that protectionism in its various forms only hurts the industry that it is supposed to protect?

**MA**

deal between two seemingly mortal enemies. It provides for a set of steps that must be taken before both parties can start the negotiation. It is a much-needed departure from President Bill Clinton's efforts to reach a deal whether it is viable or not.

The plan calls for Israeli withdrawal in return for a Palestinian declaration that they will cease all suicide bombing of Israeli people. As a gesture of goodwill, Israel must start withdrawing its forces from Palestinian towns and the Palestinian Authority must do everything in its power to end terrorist attacks against Israeli targets. Palestinians must realise that terrorism is the product of self-defeating illusions. One of the illusions is that the terrorists are promoting their cause; in reality, they are discrediting their cause by their random acts of terrorism.

Mr. Bush has raised the hopes of all who like to see a political and diplomatic solution to the never-ending crisis in the Middle East. Onus is now on the Israelis and the Palestinians to fulfil their parts of the bargain.

**Mahmood Elahi**  
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News is meant for the people, not people are meant for the news; then why should not the news media give a lesson to the imprudent political leaders for the benefit of the poverty-stricken people of Bangladesh?

**Faruque Hasan**  
Dhanmandi, Dhaka

I would like to request the BBC

**"Taliban in Bangladesh"**



When leaders fail the dream

As a proud citizen of Bangladesh, I feel grateful to you for your thoughtful and enlightened commentary "Where are our leaders leading us to? Part3: Taliban in Bangladesh" (April 10).

Indeed, history bears testimony to our approximately a thousand year old record of religious tolerance and harmony; even in the face of grave provocation from the intermittent communal, and to be specific the anti-Muslim riots, across the borders.

If we recall our days under the Pakistani rulers who had a propensity to create communal disharmony on the soil of Bangladesh on the pretext of on-going disturbances in the neighbourhood to serve their ulterior purpose, the Bengali Muslim leaderships and the civil society always were up against such nefarious design and there were hardly any communal riots in our part of the world.

My thanks are also due for your pointing a finger at the despicable role of our politicians who over the years have been trying to discover the 'Ghost of Talibanism' in the nook and corner of our otherwise tolerant and secular society.

My gut feeling is that in the face of ever-increasing hostilities

from some external quarters and their relentless efforts to malign our country and the people, it is time for us to call a spade a spade and precisely pinpoint the internal forces who are abetting the efforts of our outside enemies.

I hope, you do remember about the distribution of official publications during President Clinton's trip to Bangladesh that clearly painted a very damaging "Talibani" image of our beloved country. We as a nation are really unlucky to bear such a brand of leadership.

**Ahmed Ghani**  
Dhaka

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Your article "Where are our leaders leading us to" is a timely, most constructive and factual write-up. The article has portrayed the true feelings of the silent majority, "Within our turbulent history we have very firmly clung to both our heritages. Within the undivided India we took the side of partition with a view to protecting our religious heritage.

After 1947 when within the Pakistan state structure, we saw our Bengali heritage being threatened, we at once launched a struggle to protect it and continued throughout the Pakistani period...For them both are important and both must be preserved without any compromise."

How truly you have depicted the correct picture of our heritage and aspiration.

I wish I could obtain a copy of all the parts together in bolder print, easily readable by old people like me with poor eyesight. Some of your writings are worth preserving, I wonder if you have any plan of publishing your important pieces in a book form?

Thank you Mr Mahfuz Anam for your positive and objective approach to the problems of this unfortunate small abode of ours.

**MGP**  
Dhaka

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Irony has a way of playing its own tricks. Right below (in *The Daily Star* on-line edition) the signed commentary of Mr. Mahfuz Anam

**Rejoinder: "Intellectuals blast FEER's report"**



Enemies of moderate Islam?

This refers to the news item "Intellectuals blast FEER's report" published in your esteemed daily on April 9.

The BSS correspondent has quoted me not only selectively, but also out of context to the extent of making a travesty of my comments made on the telephone on his insistence. I told him that, judging from the excerpts of the FEER report published in the Dhaka press, I thought that there was some basis for this. First, there were the recent repressions on the religious minorities. Secondly, till the other day we used to hear and read on the walls the slogan, *Amra sabai Taliban, Bangla habe Afghan* (We are all Taliban and Bangladesh will turn into another Afghanistan). I added that if there were exaggerations in the report, a protest could be lodged, but proscribing an issue of a journal was certainly not the way to do it. Moreover, banning any printed material such as this was bound to be ineffective in these days of access to the Internet and this was not going to brighten the image of the country.

Leaving everything else the correspondent had chosen to quote me as saying: "If the writer has crossed the limits, he should be criticised." And the general tenor of his piece makes me a party to the wholesale charge of 'prejudiced, concocted, one-sided, far from truth and a slur on responsible journalism' brought against the report.

You can see, Mr Editor, the gulf of difference between what I had said and what was carried by the BSS. Do we have to put up with this kind of irresponsible journalism?

**Prof Anisuzzaman**  
Department of Bengali  
University of Dhaka

**About treatment facilities abroad**

I just read the comment made by the foreign minister on Bangladeshis going abroad for treatment. Well, it is true we are losing a huge amount of money due to people going to India, Thailand or Singapore, but what option do we have?

I have only one life and I don't wish to donate it to our hospital care. Doctors in my country are now quite capable of diagnosing the disease and sometimes the operation is also done successfully but the hospital service is very poor. There is no quality control and the clinics sprouting in anywhere any day. What about their waste disposal system? There

**Bush's approach on the Middle East is right**

U.S. President George W. Bush has rightly served notice to both the Palestinians and the Israelis for their counterproductive actions. He is absolutely right to denounce suicide bombing of Israeli civilians while taking into task Israel for its high-handed dealing with the Palestinians.

President Bush's plan is more than empty rhetoric. It provides a framework for an eventual



The sword of geography

can take treatment facilities at home with minimum worry for ending up in frustration.

**Monira Hossain**  
A patient at BH

**Say Aapni**

With the political situation of the country headed towards chaos and the economy going down the drain, the President wants me to say *Aapni* to strangers?

In the first place, this is a really easy target for him since most people do say *Aapni* to strangers already. That's probably one of the most basic facts of Bengali etiquette. Maybe he's trying to be cute like George Bush Sr. with his "I won't eat broccoli" and stuff?

If he wanted to see the "best creation" of Allah, he should have taken his rickshaw a bit further to see what torture the commuters have to go through everyday and the poverty that his party is bringing down upon the country. Maybe he could ride his rickshaw up to the PM's office to watch her million dollar motorcade flash past. Come to think about it, why does the Head of State of our country ride an old S Class Mercedes while the PM gets the new one?

I just hope the rickshawpuller got lunch out of the deal.

**Don Quixote**  
Dhaka

**Air Force**

Almost everyday Air Force and Army Aviation helicopters take off from the old airport to do a few rounds over the city. This goes on for several hours with a variety of helicopters from Huey's to Russian ones. It's obvious that some of these pilots are training.

Then if you're lucky you'll also have a C-130 Transport plane buzzing overhead.

There seems to be no regard for the safety of the people of Dhaka. There shouldn't even be a military aircraft field smack in the city. Since they own half the land in Bangladesh anyway, why not move out of the city? The old airport runway can continue to be the national parade ground and when not in use could be open to the public who don't have any open spaces as it is.

**Tintin**  
Dhaka

**FM's remarks**

The government's reactions to the FEER article are getting sillier by the day. First we went through denial, then anger and lawsuits and now the FM is offering helicopters to report-

ers wishing to seek out the dens of the Taliban!

Why do our ministers like to make silly statements?

**Biggles**  
Dhaka

**The name game**

How long will play this game of changing names? I came to know from your daily that the government has changed the name of Chittagong Airport as 'Shah Amanat', instead of, MA Hannan Int'l Airport.

Would the authorities concerned please explain what is the cause and benefit behind changing the name of this airport?

**Mamunur Rashid, on e-mail**

**Our judiciary**

The headline "Cabinet body finalizes a draft on appointment of judiciary officials" (April 8) on "Judicial Service Commission Regulation, 2002" has drawn my attention. The Judicial Service Committee is a seven-member body chaired by one of the judges of the Supreme Court Appellate Division. The members would include a Justice from the High Court Division, Law Secretary, a member from the judicial service cadre, a member from the Public Service Commission, and the Dean of the Law Faculty of Dhaka University. The specification of the Dean of Law Faculty of Dhaka University signifies that there is only one University Law Faculty in Bangladesh named as the Dean of Law Faculty of Dhaka University. But there are four Law Faculties in the Universities in Bangladesh including the leading Rajshahi University Law Faculty.

Certainly, the Judicial Service Commission is a national body and as such, it should represent the whole nation. If provision like "one Dean of the Faculty of Law of the Universities" is introduced, I think it would be more rational. This may also be considered as effective by principle of rotation/ seniority basis or by choice of the Government. With submission, I again draw your kind attention for consideration of my humble suggestion.

**Dr. M. Habibur Rahman**  
Dean, Faculty of Law  
University of Rajshahi, Rajshahi

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Professor Alatas, a pioneer in corruption studies, once told me that a whole generation has grown up without knowing what is bribe nor paying a cent in bribery. He was referring to Singapore. Does it mean Singapore is crime free or for that matter bribe free? No. One of Singapore's slogan is "Low crime is No crime".

Singapore would be the first to admit that Singapore has many problems. The patriotism of Singaporeans will not shroud their pragmatism. If problems are not identified, they will never be solved.

Does it mean Bangladesh should abandon democracy? No, all I am suggesting that we should face the reality squarely. "Right or wrong my country is my country" attitude will lead us to the quagmire of self-delusion.

The pre-condition of progress is critique. Bangladesh's democratic credentials must make us proud. Democracy is the jewel on Bangladesh's crown.

But at the same time, let us not ignore the deteriorating trends in our public safety situation, let us not keep our eyes closed to the dangerous trends in making a mockery of our history. Can a society be a proud member in the comity of civilised nations without serious commitment to the rule of just law? Please name democracies where political prisoners are tortured?

Civilised norms are to be cultivated with an open and self-critical mind.

If the *Dresden* or some similar magazine presents Bangladesh as the worst test cricket-playing nation in the world, how should we react? I would say, yes despite occasional sparks - our team is pretty weak at the moment but we are working on it. And in 10 years time, we will be as good as any other test playing team.

However, we could also accuse *Dresden* of international conspiracy fomented by our enemies overseas, etc. Or, we could blame Sheikh Hasina or Begum Zia for not doing enough for our cricket team.

**Habib Khondker**  
Singapore