

Positive image of Bangladesh

We only talk about the negative side of our characters, but would be much surprised what we have to offer.

Give you an example, the same environment that produces people who are the most corrupted, uncivilised, politically bankrupt, also blossoms beautiful people that we always forget to mention. I met two Bangladeshi brothers at Dubai airport, working as janitors. I overheard their conversation and joined in. After a while, I invited them to have coffee/snacks with me at a shop, and they obliged. Well, when I went to pay for the food, they just could not accept it...both started saying it was on them, and I was their guest, and forcefully paid the bill. Remember, we just met 15 minutes before, and the difference between our backgrounds (social/education... name it!) were immense. The only straw was all of us were Bangladeshis, and the love they showed me brought tears in my eyes.

My brother met a Bangladeshi in Seville, Spain selling ties at the Market Square. Those poor guys were illegally staying in Spain, and living an extremely harsh life, both financially and socially. Anyway, when my brother bought a tie from him, he would not take any money, saying, "You are my 'Deshi Bhai'" how can I take money from you, it is a gift from me!" I guess, a Bangladeshi can only show this generosity to a total stranger.

Nafees
TX, USA

Matir Moina and freedom of speech

Bangladesh government recently banned "Matir Moina" a film by Tareque Masud based on his boyhood as a madrassah student. The government found some contents of the film harmful to religious sentiments of general people in Bangladesh despite the claim by Tareque that his film actually projects the positive aspects of madrassahs in general and contradicts the western view about these religious institutions.

That the government decides to call the film harmful to religious sentiments is actually hilarious. I guess, under their judgement, films like "Khorob Achey", "Baba keno chakor", "Khaisi Torey", "Jabee Koi", etc are great moral builders for the nation and therefore can be viewed in virtually uncut versions.

Tareque Masud is no Oliver Stone and neither should he aspire to be in a country where Ministers

I want to be a gas-meter reader



and MPs can get away committing unlawful activities and later make outrageous comments on those crimes right under the very nose of the establishment. But he can certainly feel proud in another peculiar way and that is, if his movie had been passed by the establishment as a viewable one, we might as well consider him in the same bracket as the makers of "Khaisi Torey" and alike. An honour (!) Tareque can easily live without.

Freedom of Speech is a right in any democratic set-up. The fact that Oliver Stone can come out with a work like JFK questioning the very base of the US government and is recognised by being nominated for the Academy Awards is an ample testimony of how such right is practised.

That Tareque Masud finds himself protesting against the banning of his work is another testimony of how we look at such rights in Bangladesh.

Reaz Shaheed
Malibagh, Dhaka

Extortion idea

I doubt if in any other country an article like the one *The Daily Star* published on the Nasty Nine would

be greeted with this degree of apathy. Nothing has happened and those protected extortionists and gangsters are still out in the open.

I'd like to share another creative extortion idea that's floating around Agargaon and Shewrapara right now.

The Agrani Sangsad, dedicated to sports, culture and social welfare, is celebrating its sixth anniversary on 31st May. On that occasion they are having a discussion (*alochona shabha*), a cultural evening and a cricket match versus the Jagoron Krira Chokro, according to their General Secretary Mahub Alam Roton.

Among the invitees named are Prof. Mustafizur Rahman Pol. Sci., DU; Prof. S. Hasan Mahmud I.R., DU & Prof. AKM Shahin Akhter Dhaka College.

Apparently I am required to be a benefactor of this admirable effort! Oh well, c'est la vie.

Peter
Dhaka

Export target slashed

Transparency International's branding Bangladesh as the most corrupt countries, The FEER's report picturing Bangladesh as 'cocoon of ter-

I read the excellent coverage by Mr. Zayadul Ahsan about Titas Gas millionaires and I clenched my teeth and banged my head on my desk in the office in despair and envy caused by a sheer case of "sour grapes"! Why didn't I become a meter reader when I had the chance?"

Through my carefree and vagabonding adolescent life, I was always tormented by my parents, nosy relatives and elders "Son you must work hard and strive for the best, reach the highest pinnacle, go for your dreams, become a doctor, engineer, businessman, excel in what you do and enjoy the fruits of your hard work later!" Well I have news for you mom, dad, uncles and aunts! If you had let me decide my destiny I could have been a gas meter reader, Airport Loader or Telephone line repairman today which would have been a sure fire career choice, a choice that would have made me a millionaire by now.

Instead I toil in the family business for 12 hours a day "dreaming" of the profit we will make, get nagged by the wife who says I spend more time in the office than with her, drive a reconditioned car, live on a rented flat and constantly worry about rising electric, gas, telephone bills and hoping that I pay them well in advance so as to avoid disconnection.

And whoever said that you have to work hard to be a prominent and distinguished member of the society obviously didn't know that the career of a meter reader or linesman comes with the highest political connections in the country.

The "Mahbubur Rahmans" in our society will continue to become wealthier and prosper while I while away my life running my miserable business and hoping to buy that flat someday and own a luxury car, take the family on foreign vacations.

Farhan Quddus
Old DOHS, Dhaka

ror, cut of foreign aid by Denmark alleging corrupt practices by the Ministry of Shipping and now export target of this fiscal year slashed by 8 per cent (first time in a decade) comparing with the last years achievement (May18) coupled with the ever deteriorating law and order situation in the country-- all indicating a very disappointing and gloomy picture about our coming days.

I am scared what's going to happen when trade barrier will go away from January 2005? How things will improve, where is the preparation of our ruling party and the opposition party? Will there be any significant improvements in the coming days ahead?

Jkobir
Mirpur, Dhaka

Law and order drive

Bravo to BNP. A toy pistol, Gillette and some drinks are all that our police and vaunted BDR managed to secure? This government is turning out to be a bigger joke than anyone could have imagined. I suppose Mrs. Hasina is so happy. With BNP floundering as it is there's no need for her to work or do any fundraising.

The most basic of all the roles of a

government is to provide security for its taxpayers. BNP has failed even in that. But they still find time to capture or liberate some drunks.

Pan
Dhaka

DESA bill

I was much elated to receive a computer printed DESA bill for the first time since I came to reside in this house 4 years ago. Previously I had to take reading of the meter and then visit DESA local office to have the bill made-out, every month. Every time we were told that our plight would end soon with the introduction of bill made in computer.

At last, the computer bill was received on 20/May/02. But my joy was short-lived. As, though the bill showed issue date as 24/Apr/02, at the same time the last date of payment was shown as 23/May/02 that is 3 days from the date of delivery. This is some thing ludicrous and not acceptable.

When the bill showed the date of issue as 24/Apr/02, why was not the bill delivered earlier? Not only it is the question of money being available within a short time, there is the question of making payments in a nominated bank, which may not be very near to where you stay. One has to the make time just to visit the bank.

Time and again DESA is found to come out with a statement of accumulated arrears. But have they tried to find out how and why bills remain unpaid?

C.M. Dahr
Mogh Bazar, Dhaka

English Medium Schools

This is in response to the letter from Yamen Hoque regarding the GCSE's.

I wish she hadn't written this because now I've had to look up my A-Level certificate, which I had tried to forget for the last ten years.

My A-Levels were under the Oxford and Cambridge Schools Examination Board and it says General Certificate of Examination Advanced Level. In Bangladesh we take our exams under the University of London Board but I doubt if it's very different. Then again this was ten years ago.

The GCSE's I am referring to are the General Certificate of Secondary Education, the equivalent of our O-levels. The O-Levels as we know them have been discontinued in England since 1988. In the case of GCSE's you take up to ten subjects and the course structure allows for a wider field of study i.e. easier.

Although I've never actually taken the GCSE's, from what I know the O-levels are now considered too constrictive. As for the A-Levels, well since you're now at UMASS you'll see for yourself that they were the most horrible exams of your life. Nothing, even including your masters' dissertation will tax you as much as the A-levels had done.

MA
Dhaka

"A murky millionaire"

This is in reply to K's e-mail (May 20) regarding corruption in the government.

I was touched by the imagery of the modest meals and broken TV.. I too had a few friends whose fathers were honest men and they too always had much less in the way to material possessions. Living in those yellow government flats in Eskaton Garden and always having to take lifts from friends.

But there is one thing K's father has that none of these crooked meter readers and bureaucrat turned politicians can boast of, self-respect.

I am also glad to see that K, as a son or daughter of a senior government servant, still lives in Bangladesh. The number of sons or daughters of Secretaries and others of that stature who actually live here are only a handful.

Cervantes
Dhaka

Why institutions have to suffer?

The Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) examinations have been going on amid tight security. The Education Ministry has taken some new measures to prevent copying. For example: to set up summary trial courts, not to allow any political elements (except local MPs as chairman of the local law and order committee) to enter the centres, to make video recordings etc. There is no doubt that the steps are laudable.

The Education Ministry is supposed to take drastic action against the educational institutions and their employees if some one is found to have assisted in unfair means. And the development budget of those institutions will be halted and the employees excluded from the monthly pay order (MPO). Education Ministry must take any action against those employees directly involved in unfair means. But why would a whole institution with all its employees have to suffer for that?

Abdus Salam
Teacher, Mymensingh Central Jail

SIM card fraud

The letter (May 15) on mobile phone SIM card fraud needs clarification from the operators. There are other types of cyber cheating also which have to be publicised by the regulators for public awareness. Popularity of a new IT product does not mean that the loopholes have to be pushed under the carpet.

Mwz
Dhaka

Listed criminals as politicians

32 criminals have been elected (?) as ward commissioners in the recently held City Corporation

Disabled but not helpless

Usually I enjoy the writings of Md Badrul Ahsan but really shocked at his article on 'The Cripple'. In the developed world, he would be lynched by disabled women for suggesting that women in wheelchairs, paralysed from the waist down, are helpless cripples whose lives are over and are wishing themselves dead!

In particular to presume that no disabled woman could ever be attractive to a man because men are only interested in One Thing, is an insult to men also! Many disabled women are capable, with proper encouragement and facilities, to develop rich personalities, social life and friendships, jobs, hobbies and interests that give them a very full life. And marriage/partnership is indeed a possibility for some. Some also insist on 'having a go' at having children and, in some countries, their rights to do so are respected and a grant from the state gives them help to care for their child.

It will be a real measure of how far Bangladesh is developing as a disabled-person-friendly society to see what sort of postbag you get after that article. I hope you are inundated with letters from very cross people!

And the word 'cripple' is definitely not politically correct nowadays! No editor in the developed world would dare print it! It implies that anyone who cannot walk - or walk properly - is totally incapaci-

Election. And that means in near future we will have more MPs who are listed criminals.

Iftakhar Ahmed
Dhaka

Titas and its Sramik Dal

I see that the Sramik Dal has reconsidered its decision to suspend robbing the country for six months and instead decided on a three-month hiatus. They've probably figured that in three months everyone will forget about them and with the blessings of their masters at BNP, these unionists can go back to their usual thievery.

BNP threw around charges of sedition willy-nilly in its first few months to stifle free speech and to exact revenge. Well as far as I am concerned the real traitors are these Sramik Dal leaders and their BNP patrons.

Dorji
Dhaka

The Shipping Minister should resign

The recent Meghna launch disaster took nearly 400 lives. But our Shipping Minister visited the spot two days after the accident took place. There he spent less than an hour and did not even bother to go to Shaitnal, where MV Salariaudin-2 sank.

He completely failed to handle the post-capsize situation. Due to government's 'sheer negligence' hundred of bodies were washed away. No chemical was used to preserve the decomposed bodies. The government or the BIWTA sent no officers to hand over the bodies to their relatives. The committee formed to probe the Meghna disaster failed to submit its report in time.

Has it taught us any lessons so that such disaster may be averted in the future? Probably not. Because still we see the launches plying as they did before.

The Shipping Minister should have looked into the matter. And if he is not bothered to carry out his duties, he better resign from his post.

Abdus Salam
Mymensingh

In the name of band music

I assent to the judicious opinion of "A concerned citizen" who wrote "drugs in music" (17 May). S/he named just one artist-- Nagar Baul. But our society possibly possesses more artists like Nagar Baul and Hasan who have introduced a different kind of musical art in which drugs play a major role. Such a practice is extremely harmful especially the young generation. Boys and girls and young men and women who listen to their songs and like them tend to accept the 'significance' or the so-called 'positive side' of being an addict.

I teach in a university. As part of my lectures on some particular issues, I often discuss probable causes of drug addiction and drug abuse in our society. Curiously enough, I see most of the students, who are familiar with Nagar Baul and artists of that ilk, identify the growing popularity of the drug-induced musical culture as a major cause.

An analytical commentary on the FEER report in this column. I felt as a patriot and a responsible senior citizen of the country as though I owed it to myself to say a few words in right perspective. Little did I realise then that my enthusiasm and positive frame of mind and that special feeling for my country would stand brutally betrayed. Looks like the time has come for us to worry about our enemies within rather than those living abroad.

In recently published letters there are a large number which expressed in no unclear terms the image we are having abroad and why. Given the background I find the much-publicised white paper to be ironical, redundant and self-defeating. Having dealt with expatriates it is my impression that more than most of them are otherwise sympathetic and appreciative of our problems of Governance.

Now that *The Daily Star* has done this wonderful job of publishing the story of murky millionaire, a Titas gas meter reader let us dare ourselves to carry the stories of other millionaires who stand unaccountable and continue to thrive under our very eyes. Publish sample stories of police sergeants, of mid and high level bureaucrats, riches amassed through smuggling, wheeling and dealing, through cheating the Banks of millions, through grafts out of international contracts on purchases and services, gaining favours over tender documents using the influence and advantages of official positions and jurisdictions.

Let the people, those who care, for once join hands together without their partisan considerations and affiliations catch these Demons by the horn. We should be able to do it. In the meantime we would like to see a comprehensive report on the alleged corruption involving our Shipping Minister as raised by Danes only recently. Please be assured that the matter has not

job for the local Council, checking the access of public buildings for the disabled. And she would not thank you for calling her a 'cripple'!

Besides, we are all 'handicapped' in some way, because none of us always have the body, mind, abilities or circumstances that we would like. Poverty itself can be seen as 'crippling'... It is just the degree of frustration that we have to live with that is more, or less, significant. It is others who either help us, personally and practically, to cope and live well despite our situation - or make our lives intolerable by their rejection of us as 'basket cases' i.e. those who, in the *Bad Old Days* in lunatic asylums in Britain, were considered so hopelessly disabled, physically and/or mentally, that they were put in a big basket, in the foetal position, if necessary tied up, and left there all day because, actually, none knew what else to do with them. I am glad to say that, today, even such severe cases, through drug and other therapy, are usually provided with a standard of life which has some quality in it, enabled to make some choices of their own and treated with respect and care.

None, sir, should be dismissed as a cripple, or a 'basket-case' these days. We have grown up from those days, thank God!

Angela Robinson (Rev Mrs)
Haluaghat



They're just like us

cerebral palsy. Her parents were told, when she was born that she would neither walk nor talk but she does both - with great difficulty. She got a first-rate university degree and has just been chosen for a special honour, locally, for the Queen's Jubilee celebrations because she is an inspiration to so many in the town where she is very popular. She acts in a theatre group of other disabled people for whom a very good writer writes plays - and they perform to appreciative audiences. She also has a

ended.
S Chowdhury
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

Indian standard

This letter is in regards to the report, "Cracks at many points of Tamabil-Jafflong highway" (May 18).

Part of the contract for the construction of this highway was assigned to some Indian company. Cracks have appeared on the highway and a picture in your report showed erosion on one part. It has only been a month since completion of this project that cost taka 1.2 billion.

Has our government seen the state of most Indian highways? Who was the smart guy to have championed the idea of contracting an Indian firm for this project?

In the recent past, some Indian company was developing the railway link on the Jamuna bridge and apparently, used inferior materials that makes it hazardous for trains to play even before this link may be opened to service.

It is no secret that brand new Indian-made trucks and buses are inferior in quality than even similar reconditioned ones from Japan. Recently, the government was pondering on contracting yet another Indian firm to install several hundred thousand-telephone lines in the country. I sincerely hope, this contract has not gone through.

Disappointed
USA

Ban on channels

Isn't it at times like this that the minister in an act of contrition resigns? What will it take for a minister to resign in this obese cabinet?

Mr. HR Khan Monno has been, unfairly, denied a portfolio for seven months now, yet he hangs on expectantly. Dr. Moyeen Khan gets shuffled off to launch satellites and he sulks but puts up with it. Col. Akbar gets into a full-scale duel with the loose-mouthed Danes, but hangs on when the cabinet rallies around him without explicitly clearing his name through a transparent enquiry. The Home Minister is sequestered from the media but seems to be desperately hanging on, at least until the PM gets home.

Now this Information Minister has gone and made a fool of himself. Doesn't being an embarrassment to your party count as sufficient grounds for resignation from this bloated cabinet?

Bewouf
Dhaka

I almost got an ulcer when I read the letters written by the two who actually supported the government's decision on banning all those satellite channels.

It was really heart warming to see that they were the only people who managed to make themselves look like pro-Taliban in your Letters to the Editor page.

Mr. Mohammad Rahman must have forgotten that we are a secular nation and Mr. Faruque Hasan must have forgotten that all those nature channels show naked natives doing weird stuff. "In the name of entertainment we cannot allow pornography?" Oh my goodness, The Simpsons are pornstars!

The government needs to do us all a real favour and get all those cigarette ads off ATN Bangla before they again decide to ban any channel or stuff like that.

Sharmeen Shehabuddin-Khan
American International School, Dhaka

The BNP government has been taking various decisions, which has generated huge criticism. But I never expected a decision as obnoxious as the banning of the satellite channels.

If watching women in western dresses affect our religious values-- are our religious values that weak? Just to remind the cabinet, the eight TV channels they planned to ban take care of not showing anything that has "adverse impact" on the society. Star Movies, in fact, give age limits for the viewers of every movie.

I would like to ask the government whether it is really taking any step to preserve our religious values? What about this: by constitution our country is Islamic and accordingly 'prostitution' is illegal here, but still it is rampant! Why are licenses issued to the prostitutes in an Islamic nation? Why do your values go for holidays in this case?

Nawab. Md. Farhan Ali
Oxford International School, Dhaka

Does anyone realise what's happening?

At first sight the crazed dictates of an out of touch ruling party ensconced in its Ivory Tower of Parliamentary majority has been defeated by the popular revulsion of the people.

But have we won against the vagaries of this proto-Taliban government? Not at all.

The government has backed down on most of the bans but has maintained it against MTV and Channel V to show us who's the boss. This government feels itself to be the final arbiter of what we can see or hear. Anything that it will find not to its liking will be banned. Today MTV and Channel V, tomorrow the BBC and CNN, it's only a short step to banning newspapers it doesn't like.



Fear of English channels?

AL got away with banning MCM and Fashion TV; BNP went ahead and banned the FEER issue, an act which unfortunately did not engender much public opposition and with that under its belt it banned Matir Moina and now it's telling us what we can and cannot watch on TV.

Our mistake was allowing the government to ban channels like MCM, opposition to which was not very vocal since not too many people watch euro-pop.

Bastiat
Dhaka

I would like to ask the readers to express their view on the ban on MTV and Channel V. Why is the government meddling in what people should and should not watch? If it hurts the so-called "culture" then I ask you this: which average sixteen-year-old listens to Lalon or Lokgiti? Rabindra sangeet and Nazrul giti?

Chances are that most of the young men/women (if not boys/girls) subscribe to music that is either from Bombay or from the West. We embrace new things as time goes by. I remember my room when I was in 11th grade: Tagore and Matallica face to face! That has become our culture. Yes we go to Remella on 1st of Baishakh and we also listen to Nirvana.

Let there be freedom of speech everywhere!

Yahya
USA

Al Gore claimed to have invented the Internet.

At this rate BNP is going to be claiming the privilege of banning it.

Remind me again why I voted for them?

T Ali
Dhaka

The news of the rape of a ten years old girl who subsequently died of excess bleeding highlights our moral bankruptcy (May 19). Moreover the alleged culprit is her close relative. Who is to blame? Is it because of poor parenting failure of parents to impart moral values to their children and teaching them importance of leading a virtuous life?

Or, is it the cable TV stations airing programs alien to Bengali culture proliferating vulgarism and immorality? In any case we need to mend our ways.

Shukla Mirza
On e-mail