

"English medium students in trouble"



English Medium schools: Good English, bad Bangla?

In response to the letters concerning the level of Bangla education in English medium schools, it may be pointed out that one or two isolated incidents of incompetent students should not reflect the general level of Bangla learning in English medium schools.

Having been a student of English Medium schools, I can highlight from my personal experience, the high standard that the senior level teachers impose to improve our knowledge in our mother tongue is well beyond the mere requirements of O level standards.

In no way can it be said that just because we don't come from a Bengali medium school that we lack in competency over Bangla. This kind of ridiculous stereotyping should stop.

Imran Khan, Canada

This is in reference to the letter, "English Medium students in trouble". I thank Mr Abdur Rab for pointing out such an important problem -- English Medium students lacking in Bangla, their mother tongue. I have come across a lot of students from the so-called famous English Medium schools who not only are unable to read and write in Bengali but also cannot even speak in Bengali. What hurts me most is they are not at all bothered about it. They consider it unsophisticated to speak in Bengali.

I'm not at all against English Medium education. My son studies in one of these schools but what is pathetic is that I have to take personal care that he doesn't forget his mother tongue.

Shamima Shohidullah, Dhanmondi, Dhaka

It is absolutely correct that English Medium students have very poor knowledge of their mother tongue. I am a teacher in one of the English Medium schools. I have just joined and was stunned to find out the students' poor knowledge in Bengali.

Last week I took a test in my class (standard IV) where the students were to write the word meaning of some Bengali words (in English). I was astonished when none of them got full marks (I have 35 students in my class) and one student wrote the English meaning of *pathshala* (school) as jute-brother-in-law [*pat* (jute) *shala* (brother-in-law)]

A teacher, Dhaka

The English Medium school students are only to complete their studies here and then go off to Western countries where they can get real education. All they learn here is *habi-jabi* about politics and *hartal*.

Of what use is a language like Bengali, which is spoken by the most illiterate, most impoverished and most iodine deficiency affected people in the entire world?

Mawsher Ibrahim, Kakrail, Dhaka

"Invisible" death

We are shocked hearing about the death of children like Bappi, Trisha etc. These are truly gruesome faces of our society. But it seems we are shocked only when they die in a violent manner. We seem to be totally oblivious of deaths of children caused by hunger, malnutrition, social violence and other 'invisible' deaths. It's media, which has shaped out the sense of shock. What is not good for TV is not worth crying about.

Fariha Ferdousi Bangsal, Dhaka

"Withdrawal of baby taxis: Where is the alternative transportation?"

This letter is in regards to banning auto-rickshaws with 2-stroke

engines (August 19).

A concerned citizen from Dhaka writes and I quote, "A month's official notice is not sufficient for saving up to buy a car which would cost at least Taka 3 lakh and on top of which would be the chauffeur's pay which would swallow up a large portion of one's salary."

I am sorry, but is this letter writer trying to be funny? Drive the car yourself! I understand not everyone is in a position to buy a car by the September deadline. May I suggest an early morning walk to your place of work? With all the toxic gas spewing auto-rickshaws gone, I hope it will be a very refreshing and healthy exercise.

The authorities should quickly address the Dhaka mass transit issue. There is no doubt shortage in the number of alternate transportation. However, until this shortage is resolved, let's work towards reducing that potbelly, shall we? Books on

self-improvement highly recommended!

AA California, USA

Our expectation on the Committee Report

We are all awaiting anxiously to see the one man Enquiry Committee Report on Shamsunnahar Hall incident which devastated citizens' peace of mind for the time being. The university authorities are the guardians of the residents who live in the halls because the parents live far away. The University authorities thus must apologise to all the parents who with full confidence and sincerity hand their daughters over to the authorities at the University.

The following questions need to be answered in Committee Report:

- Who called police in the women's residence hall?
- Who ordered the police to enter the Hall at night?
- Under the said order, what specific function police was asked to perform within the Hall?
- Why was male police needed inside women's hall at night when adequate women police exist in the police force?
- Are our women police not capable to handle a situation among women in women's hall especially at night?
- What was the proportion of female and male police, if any, who actually entered the Hall?
- Inside the Hall, what did the police really do and how much time did they spend there?
- Did any Magistrate beyond the University authorities, accompanied the police force at that late hours when police entered the Hall?
- Did the Magistrate and the Head of the police team who entered the Hall try to use loud speaker to console and disperse and explain the impact of non-adherence to the agitating groups of girls before the actual torture, arrest etc took place?
- What was actually the proportion of girls among the general residents who were involved in the situation? A little step backward implies some other concerns, which may be categorised as follows:
- When did the girls get permission to live in the Hall against whom the agitation started?
- Who actually gave them the written permission to stay in the Hall?
- Were those girls really students or outsiders?
- What was the time gap between the period when the outsiders started living and the agitation against the outsider girls started?
- What was the role of Hall authorities and the University administration in this matter? If there is any failure, that must be pointed out specifically.

Shamima Islam Dhaka

Pakistan politics

M. B. Naqvi's column on Pakistani politics (August 14) needs a few additional comments. In 1958 when Field Marshal Ayub Khan promulgated Martial Law and finally became the President of Pakistan, his opportunistic politics had much similarity with Gen. Musharraf's present political gimmicks. It's surprising but true that from 1958 to 2002 many things have changed in the world but not the basic political character in Pakistan. The mental and political aspirations of the Pakistani people is also widely different. The Punjabi mentality of supporting military rules and the Sindh dream of a secular democratic Pakistan always kept the political antagonism an ongoing subject.

The long history of Pakistan's rabid anti-India policy was a very smart tactic of the military to keep the nation a hostage to fear. This policy of deception by the army

always kept the democratic aspirations in disarray. Politicians never had a chance to gain people's confidence due to the hanging sword of Martial Law over their head. The army deliberately flawed the authority of all the civilian governments by creating a fifth column. This fifth column created Taliban to rule Afghanistan, which has become a Frankenstein for Pakistan.

One final comment is that Pakistani politics will never be a truly democratic one unless the shadow of military rule is removed. But who will bell the cat?

Akbar Hussain Toronto, Canada

"Poverty, crime and affluence"

I have gone through Mohammad Badrul Ahsan's column (August 16) with a mixed feeling of pain and despair. I fully agree with him when he says, "the centre of crime has shifted in our mind. It has shifted from subsistence to comfort, from necessity to luxury, from sufficient to surfeit." It is really a grave concern for the nation that most of the crimes in our society is not because of abject poverty but because of unrestrained ambition.

But still questions that remain unresolved are that how much pleasure and luxurious amenities will be able to cause one's surfeit or what is the elasticity limit of one's ambition. When will criminals in our society be satiated with their own atrocious activities?

The peace-loving people of our society still sympathise as they come to know any atrocious incident. But repetition has an uncanny way of numbing one's senses. Two minor children were murdered only a week ago. Then there were the killings at Malibagh centering a mosque and so and so. Thus the news reports of crimes in our dailies are so frequent that nowadays reports on atrocities have become common to those who read newspapers regularly.

Probably we did not sacrifice as much blood as a nation needs to be independent. So we cannot appreciate the insights of fruits of our independence. Since our independence, we have been staining our motherland with our own bloods. As a consequence instead of fighting poverty and hunger, we are getting into hostility with relatives and neighbours, dissension among the political parties and as a whole into the deep mire of crime and corruption of the nation.

Islam Tangail

From Angela Robinson

I have been deeply touched by the kind remarks of some of your writers as they proffer their goodbyes to me. But I have to confess, somewhat sheepishly, that, as I have been headhunted for a second job, in the last fortnight, I shall be coming back!

I am still reeling from the shock--for I had resigned myself totally to a final leave-taking-- and my trunk and boxes are even now on the high seas-- and will have to return when I do, in November. However, I find myself extremely happy to think that, in the task ahead-- of being Principal of The British School in Dhaka-- I may be able to go on being of service to Bangladesh.

I am deeply grateful to St Andrew's Mission High School, Haluaghat for training me, as an ordinary assistant teacher, in some of the arts and sciences of surviving in the rough and tumble of a Bengali Medium School-- a very happy one with high standards. I feel, like the apprentice knights of old, that I have 'won my spurs'.

But, after coping, with various degrees of success and failure, with

classes of over 70, it will be a happy novelty to have only 25! I shall move among the ranks of the more privileged-- while always carrying the others in my heart-- and hope to speak much of the principle upon which I myself was reared-- "From those to whom much is given, much will be expected."

It is also nice to find people genuinely surprised and pleased that I speak some Bangla, rather than facing the merry games played by most school children round the world, when faced by someone floundering in their language. Many is the time I have had to growl, "You have been learning English for many years but I have been learning Bengali for only three --so your English should be MUCH better than my Bengali!" I also have to confess that it was your excellent paper that was the match-maker in what I hope will be a happy and fruitful relationship-- for I was 'discovered' on your letters' page and traced-- and interviewed. We are in your debt.

simple case of 'self over 'country'. No amount of government lip service to consumer rights, free markets, and Asian Tiger growth can obscure the fact that rampant trade unionism is choking our economic growth. These cartels of unscrupulous workers dedicated to self-serving hedonism need to be cracked down upon without delay and without mercy.

ES Missouri, USA

The usual thanks to *The Daily Star* for exposing the undemocratic activities of the BNP backed JSD cadres.

Does the Energy Minister have any comments on this issue or is he still investigating it?

Orlando Dhaka

Why student politics? Have you ever given thought to the fact why we are studying? Well, whatever you say it all just links up to one little phrase-- to live a good life.

government comes, the leaders of student group of the party in power dominate the dormitories and make a 'torture cell' of their own and start their outstanding works. This is what's going on year after year.

Some have said that campus terrorism is not at all related to student politics! Then who is creating all these trouble? The general students? Well, go ahead and ask them whether they agree with the recommendation of the expert committee. And I can assure you that they WILL support this recommendation. Because they are also the sufferers of this phoney concept of student politics. Look at the private universities, the students are completing their studies in due time and getting into jobs early.

Yes, there's a question of sincerity and regularity of the teachers also. This I really don't know why. But if the teachers are co-operative and honest (at least 95%) with their work, I am sure they can work out all the problems.

The teachers are themselves

insincere what would the students learn from you? There are whole lot of other ways to serve the country except politics as it stands now. I am sure you can find one of them.

I praise the decision taken by the BUET authorities. With that I also demand punishment for all those culprits who are responsible for the death of Sony. No person should be above law. Along with the ban of student politics, teachers' politics should also be banned. So that nobody inspires anybody.

Iffat Hossain Dhaka

Telephone cost

In a recently published news it was mentioned that after the introduction of multi metering telephone billing system there is a proposal to increase telephone allowance for the MP's though some of them are defaulters.

So it has been proved that the telephone bill has become higher

"Monorail"

President of Georgia Monorail Consortium, Inc. has made a very strong and convincing case for the GMC/ARMCO monorail for Dhaka City (August 19). What he did not mention was, how much would it cost us to ride on the monorail?

If the fare is going to be close to the double-decker bus fare, the authorities should go for it without even batting an eyelid! Why are we even bothering to build flyovers with our scarce resources, which could be better spent elsewhere?

A citizen Dhaka

Five hundred buses for Dhaka City will cost USD 10 million. According to newspaper reports, the cost of the monorail project in Dhaka has been estimated at USD 1 billion. At that cost 5000

buses can be bought, which will carry 7,200,000 people per day for 12 hours a day, if we estimate at 120 people per bus. In fact these bus will carry more than 200 people per hour. 500 buses will cover the whole city. As far I know, again according to the newspaper reports, proposed monorail project will cover only the main routes of the city, such as Uttara-Motijheel, Gabtoli-Sadarghat, Mohammadpur-Motijheel/Gulistan and Mirpur-Motijheel/Gulistan (?). Will 3,110,000 people be available per day on those routes?

When there will be at least five hundred big size buses plying on the streets of Dhaka; rickshaws, baby taxis and even most of the so-called minibuses will go off the city streets. In rickshaw, baby taxi free streets the buses will run at more than 30 miles per hour (average).

A single ride in a bus costs TK 2-15. What will be the cost of a single ride in monorail? As per I heard, the cost will be TK 50-60. How many people in Dhaka City can afford that cost?

Construction money for monorail project will come from international sources. Well and good. Is that money coming as donation? If not as donation, how much money will the investors be sending out, for years, in dollar, from Bangladesh as profits on their investment amounting to the tune of as high as USD 1 billion?

We can have monorail from Uttara to Motijheel, or from Mirpur to Gulistan as a showpiece, not as a solution to the acute trans-

portation problem in Dhaka City.

Faruque Hasan Dhanmandi, Dhaka

This is in regards to that amusing letter by William E. Owen of the Georgia Monorail Consortium.

He reminds me of someone many of us would know. Any guesses?

In the Simpsons episode "Marge Vs. the Monorail," Springfield wins a huge settlement from Montgomery Burns and has a town meeting to decide how to spend the money.

Marge suggests that they use the cash to fill in some of the potholes on Main Street, one of which is so large that a popcorn truck falls in, bursts into flames, and creates a giant snack bowl in the centre of the avenue (Just like Dhaka's roads, if I may add).

That's about when the conman Lyle Lanley (in our case Billy Owen), makes his entrance with a dream for Springfield (Dhaka): their very own monorail.

After the conman's (Georgia Monorail Consortium) well-oiled schpiel, the citizenry is united in their lust for the device. Naturally, Homer gets a job as a monorail conductor, and when the Springfield monorail goes madly awry during its maiden voyage, it's up to Homer to halt its race around the town and



A rail to nowhere?

save the passengers.

Maybe we can sing along to our friend Billy, it goes something like this:

Lyle Lanley: I swear it's Springfield's only choice...

Throw up your hands and raise your voice!

All: Monorail!

Lyle Lanley: What's it called?

All: Monorail!

Lyle Lanley: Once again...

All: Monorail! Marge: But Main Street's still all cracked and broken...

Bart: Sorry, Mom, the mob has spoken!

All: Monorail!

Monorail!

Monorail!

Monorail!

Thor, Dhaka

Angela MV Robinson (Rev Mrs) Dhaka

Titans Union

If the unscrupulous activities of Titas Gas union prove anything, it is the fact the trade unionism has become a treacherous bottleneck holding back economic progress.

The incident at the Gas Company is but only one in a string of incidents that bespeak a trade union culture that is eroding customer service, business confidence and simple economic activity in an impoverished nation. What the trade unionists at Chittagong Port, Titas Gas, and the T&T Board are doing is a

To have a certain degree and then have a good job-- self-employment or otherwise, and live. Well, think about it...it's the only answer you will get. But some goes into the politics for I don't know why.

Talking about history-- the glorious history of course, I'd definitely agree with everyone out there. Because for their great contribution we are now speaking in our own mother tongue, we are living in an independent country. Yes, the students contributed and they had an issue. But what issue do they have now?

Killing, beating, torturing and chasing the opposition? Each

related to politics, and the so-called 'pati netas' are their pet. With the support of the teachers and party they get more fierce and desperate day by day. In each party there are two teams. They are both protected by certain groups (of teachers). Now the thing is that, both are always trying to kill one another and are always busy to save their own lives. Think about it-- everyone of them carrying guns creating violence, spending sleepless nights to guard. Is this a life of a student?

So, it's a request to the teachers also. You are supposed to be the guardians of a nation. If you are yourself corrupt, dishonest and

and the relevant costs also increased. Telephone installation charge in our country is the highest. In the neighbouring country the connection fee is TK.2, 500/- only, whereas in Bangladesh it is Tk.18,400/-, Tk.5000/- for name transfer fee and Tk.2,500/- for address change fee!

How are we to develop our IT sector, if the telephone cost is not reduced?

Runu, Dhaka

"Great Army"

For they are hailed as the defender of the sovereignty, less than laudatory discussion about military is a kind of taboo in the print media. Thus when *The Daily Star* decided to publish letters of patriotic criticism/appreciation from citizenry, it felt refreshingly healthy.

There are a few sovereign countries in this world that do not boast about a standing military. Costa Rica is a third world country with no military. Switzerland also does not have a standing military, although it can mobilise a huge fighting force in a period of 24 hours. So, the notion that a standing military is essential for preservation of sovereignty is rather lame.

In olden days military was the sole source of power. But not any more in these democratic days of voting rights. Power now resides with PEOPLE who toils, pays taxes, and makes thing happen. Thus military in these days needs to be tailored as to the need and desire of the PEOPLE. Military is not to be tailored as to the need of military alone!

Yes, we need a military that is lean, better equipped and highly mobile. We need the army not to fend off an attack from outside, but to help the nation in times of need (e.g., maintain law and order in times of need; participate in international peace keeping etc.).

We spend about 10% of our national budget on military while India (having definite external threat) spends only 5%. Estimated total strength police force in Bangladesh is less than a 100,000. How can we expect that a police force this meagre size can maintain law and order in the whole country, where communication is still less than optimal?

Smaller size of military can be compensated by having a reserve force as we see in the US and in many other countries like Israel. Reservist officers and soldiers shall spend few weeks (every few months) in active training, but shall work in the private sector or other government sector. They shall be called upon only in times of need. This shall minimise stress in national treasury while maintaining a large enough military base.

Mohammad Zaman, USA

This is in regard to Kishore Pasha and MA's letter (August 15)

about the Army. May be you wouldn't find anywhere in the world army officers being in charge of public institutions, like WASA etc but where would you find important water reserve tanks and all the key water points of the water supply department also guarded by the army? Why not make the army officers head of these public institutions? Have the regular officials of these departments shown efficiency in providing services?

As for having Army Generals as ambassadors, well none of them voluntarily take up the posts. They are assigned by the government. Kishore Pasha you are under the very wrong impression that the people in the Foreign Service are paid a low salary, they are the highest paid government officials and they get unimaginable salary when they are abroad. And for what purpose? So that they can drive Mercedes and spend hard earned foreign currency to represent our country at a huge cost, in countries which can't benefit us in any possible way.



A debate on a 'gate'?