

## "English medium students in trouble"

For the past few days, I have closely followed the dispute over the issue of Bangla taught in the English medium schools. It gave me an opportunity to reminisce of my school days in Sunbeams when our Bangla teachers took all the efforts to read out Shorotchondro, Tagore in class, and give us some essence of our beautiful and enriched mother tongue. It is true, that the standard of Bangla taught is not at par with the other subjects that are taught in English, but the schools follow the secondary standard syllabus and books issued by the board.

Yes, we English medium students do not know the grammar in details, but we are taught well about constructing correct sentences with verb-noun agreements. Our courses are designed as such that they do not require deep knowledge of Bangla, but that does not undermine the language. Since the very essence of English medium education is to teach everything in English, Bangla is taught like a second language so that students can read and write it well enough. I was shocked to read one of the letters by a teacher who claims to be one from English medium school. He/she claimed that a student of class IV could not translate *pathshala* and divided the word into two parts to get to the meaning. This is hard to absorb.

Being a student of one the best English medium schools in Bangladesh, I am aware that most of the good English medium schools follow the books issued by the board. We study the same Bangla taught in Bengali medium schools, excepting for the detailed grammar part that is excluded in the O Level Bangla syllabus. Translations are a big part of the syllabus, and great care is taken by our teachers to ensure that students know the correct meaning of the words. And no matter how ignorant people can be they do have a minimum understanding of day to day words. *Pathshala* is no uncommon word that is not used everyday, and every child knows the meaning either from parents or teachers. Yes, he/she may not know 'bochon', 'shomash' and 'karok' but translations are taught well enough.

I protest at the rate of exaggeration and efforts by many to prove that English medium schools do not care about Bangla at



English medium schools: Tongue-tied?

all, and that English medium students cannot read or write Bangla properly. There might be one or two cases where English medium students fail to talk or write correct Bangla, but the fault does not lie with the schools. Other factors like environment at home, and family background also matter. On an average, we can write meaningful and grammatically correct sentences in Bangla and express ourselves well enough in our mother tongue. Instead of raising fingers at the schools, people should look at the environment background of those students who fail to express themselves in correct Bangla. Perhaps something is wrong with the 'singer' and not the 'song'.

**Arani Siddiqi, IBA, Dhaka University**

The English Medium students are in real trouble. The inefficient management of majority of these schools and their incompetent teaching staff, coupled with the poor study habit of most of these students, have made the situation worse.

For many of the English Medium students, it is not "cool" to

converse in Bangla, nor it is "practical" to speak English alone. So they end up speaking a language in which, out of five sentences three are in English, two are in Bengali. As a result, except for a few instances, most of the students can neither be a competent English user nor a good Bengali speaker.

Exactly, nearly all of the English Medium students will go to western countries to pursue higher studies. But what will be their scholastic performances there? At least the statistics suggests--Bangladeshi students with a Bengali Medium background perform far better than their English Medium counterparts in those western universities.

**Monirul Haque, Dhaka**

The debate on English Medium schools points to the endless debate on privilege and denial. But the difference can't be understood without the history of such schools. These schools didn't exist before the British period and were meant to give birth to colonial servants of various class and varieties. This is so well documented that it's surprising nobody mentioned this. So those who attend go to be part of the establishment. If you track the students one can see that during the Pakistan period the children mostly belonged to the ruling class as well and those who study in such schools are the same as well.

What is the debate all about anyway? That they don't know Bangla? Why should they? Learning the language is not necessary which is why those who study in those schools use them as stepping stones to go abroad. These are little bits of "foreign land" where people get ready to leave Bangladesh.

Why spend so much time talking about people to whom the destination from day one is the airport and instead of reading Bengali classics they are busy polishing their fake foreign 'uccharan'.

**Arifa Rahman, Lalmatia, Dhaka**

### Hartal

The public response to August 22, hartal was excellent. What if you call a hartal and no one listens? You become redundant or you change your ways.

If we can ignore this hartal then we can ignore others too.

**Orlando, Dhaka**

### Dhaka monorail feasibility

Mr William E Owen, P. E. President of Georgia Monorail along with ARMCO is seeking the support of the 'Dhakaites' for their monorail project. They have mentioned that the government (Treasury) would not have to pay anything except "the right to build and operate the system".

Whilst the proposal sounds good, it ought to be looked at in some details so that we the users could take an informed decision. May I request the GMC/ARMCO Consortium to provide us with a synopsis of the financial involvement and the method of recovery, which ultimately will boil down to the fares charged per kilometre/trip. Once we know this, we will be in a position to express our position for/against the proposal.

At the same time, the Ministry of Communication should take the initiative to collect/solicit similar proposals from other prospective investors, so that the best deal could be made through a 'transparent' system, which will benefit the country and the citizens.

Since the government is committed to encourage investments under the 'Build Operate Transfer' (B.O.T) system, there should be appropriate laws and guidelines for the investors to follow, otherwise, it would be a 'false' start for the investors.

Dhaka city's traffic congestion and pollution level has reached a level where options such as the one above, is a viable option, hence need to be pursued with all seriousness so that, we the citizens could sigh a breath of relief without taxing our pocket too much.

**Afzalur Rahman, Dhanmondi, Dhaka**

Let me clear up a few things about the proposed monorails for Dhaka. Of the several private groups invited to provide monorails to Dhaka, only two survived the government technical review. One company, Georgia Monorail Consortium, is American. This company uses "second-generation" technology, that is, two directions of vehicles operating on one beam. The other company is British. It uses "first-generation" technology, that is, each direction of vehicles operating on one of two beams.

The proposed fare for the British version is 50-60 TK. The American version has a proposed fare of 25 TK.

Both systems would operate at the same speed. British monorail stations would be as much as 100 meters long to serve very long trains of cars arriving at intervals of several minutes. American monorail stations would be only about 14 meters long to serve single cars arriving much more often and providing more frequent service.

Although more than 3,000,000 people can be served each day by the American system, only 400,000 persons a day are enough to pay for its construction and operation. As ridership increases, the fares can decrease. At the end of the contract period, the city-wide 52-km system will belong to the people of Bangladesh, and will be fully debt-free.

The system will provide high-paying jobs for many people in Dhaka, both during construction and while operating.

Because of its newer technology, the American system will cost approximately half of the billion dollars quoted for the British system. That keeps the American fare at less than half of the British fare. One thing the American providers

at GMC want to do is increase freedom of the people of Dhaka to move about the city for greater distances and much faster than is possible now with buses and taxis, and have access to better jobs by being able to go greater distances to reach them. Also, the people operating the taxis, baby-taxis, rickshaws, and minibuses will continue their jobs by transferring some of their services from cross-town to shorter distances (with more customers) by taking monorail passengers from stations to final destinations.

Another prospect is that the American monorail system will be able to connect to a future high-speed (400 kph) monorail under consideration by the government for connecting the major cities of Bangladesh.

Since there are other public works in Dhaka that the people desire, doesn't it make sense to bring in foreign money to build the better American system than to use scarce Bangladesh money to buy buses that will continue to pollute the air and clog the streets?

Dinesh has saved the residents of Tejgaon area and the people of this country from a criminal like Alauddin. It is he who had to pay the price of his colleagues and authorities of the country sheltering Alauddin during all the horror period with a prize of nomination as a commissioner during the recently held Dhaka City Corporation election.

The fight between good and evil, true and false is common in the society. However, in recent times evil and falsehood have overpowered in Bangladesh to such an extent that all human beliefs are about to die from the society. During these critical moments the honesty and sacrifice of late ASI Dinesh is something very worthy. He gave his life on duty without thinking of his family and children. We should honour him in such a way that the coming generations would be encouraged to follow his example.

**Shamsuzzoha Basunia, Austin, Texas, USA**

### An open letter to our

### Absentee patriots

I was wondering if anyone has noticed the marked increase of what I have decided to refer to as "absentee patriots" in *The Daily Star* Letters to the Editor section. It seems that our fortunate brothers and sisters who have had the good luck to be able to live and work abroad have taken a sudden interest in the motherland they left in search of greener pastures.

Every day, without fail, there is someone or another living in Canada or the UK who has decided to bang a drum for good ol' 'Bangla', but at the same time are happy with their place in the sun, thank you very much. If these people have such a heartfelt interest in their country's welfare, in things as remotely to do with their present lives such as the plight of the English Medium students, why did they leave in the first place? If they feel so fervently for their fellow Bangladeshis, why don't they come back home and fix the problem?

The truth should be told, these are people who are not really happy with their second-class existence in the developed world, but would die before admitting it. And if they were to stay here in Bangladesh, they would simply shrug at the daily problems appearing before them and simply look to the West for answers. This kind of hypocrisy should not be allowed to flourish in the pages of a newspaper as prestigious as *The Daily Star*.

**A Watcher, Dhanmondi, Dhaka**



Expatriate patriots?

**William E. Owen, P.E., President, Georgia Monorail Consortium, Inc., U.S.A.**

### Honouring late ASI Dinesh Kumar Biswas

While the stories and biography of top terror Alauddin were getting a good coverage after the triple murder and his demise by mob beating, I was searching for the stories of late ASI Dinesh Kumar Biswas. It may be speculated that if ASI Dinesh had not been killed, terrorist Alauddin would probably go unscathed even after his daring triple murder. So by sacrificing his life on duty, ASI

### Information Minister

You had held a press conference on 20 August, 2002 to advise the print and the electronics media to refrain from displaying in their respective publications and telecast the gruesome pictures of victims murdered by the pitiless, cold-blooded, scummy elements of our society. You said that viewing these visuals would be harmful for the soft-hearted children of the society. I do completely agree with your concern. There would be few people who would defer. But, will this help solve the problem that you and your party are facing in reality? Is it not like trying to cover the blown out head of Prof. Muhuri with a bed-sheet to hide from the public's eyes the

heinous acts perpetrated by some beasts?

Please control your cadres. That will help to a large extent in reducing panic in the society and thereby bring peace in the country.

**Wahid Shafi, Dhaka**

### Patients collecting centres

It is a common practice for the doctors of government hospitals to misuse their position in collecting patients for their private clinics. We, the people in Bangladesh had no choice but to accept this malpractice, as protest has so far yielded no result.

Now that the Finance Minister Saifur Rahman has raised the issue afresh, let us urge the population in general and the media and intelligentsia in particular to highlight this unethical practice of our doctors. Can we do something to bring back the honour that goes with the profession of physicians and doctors in Bangladesh, which they have lost to a large extent due to such dishonest practice?

**Khondker Habib Rabbani, Shantinagar, Dhaka**

### Pran's Nator plant closure

The incidents at the Pran factory are beyond belief. BNP cadres patronised by the aptly named Dulu and Patal are shutting down an entire factory.

This incident is scary on several levels. First, BNP seems to be having increasing difficulty in controlling its own people. This inability also led to AL's fall as it may for BNP too. Secondly the owner of Pran is a retired general. It is very frightening to think that one of the leading industrialists of our country and a retired army general can't do business uninterrupted.

**Kim, Dhaka**

Paying tolls, kickbacks etc have become almost a norm in our country. For a primary teacher's post one has to pay 50,000 taka. Then again for a posting in a desired place, for a place in the board, chairmanship of a corporation etc, people are paying thumping amount. To whom it goes, we all know.

All trade bodies have been complaining about extortion activities and deteriorating law and order situation for a long time. TIB's recent report reveals that a truck has to pay Taka 2,500 for a trip on the highway. Still the government appears almost nonchalant about it.

Pran Ltd has emerged as a synonym in our beverage and household names. One UP chairman has got so much power that he forces a pioneer industry to close down! This is absolutely outrageous. I'd love to see how the Commerce Minister reacts to it. Where is Pran's trade bodies?

When the country is stuck with investment and export potential, millions are out of job, this kind of destructive news should have got a prominence in the media, rather it appeared as a little news. Pathetic indeed.

**M M Haque, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia**

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

It is not funny at all to finish one's household chores and try to navigate oneself to the work place as AA suggests in his letter (August 21).

It is easy to pass comments from USA, where walking spaces on the boulevards are different and where the underground subways, buses and other means of transport as well as the atmosphere is totally different. When walking is a pleasure in Canada, UK, USA, Europe or even Bangkok it remains dangerous for long lengths in Dhaka. The mon-

soon rains and the overwhelming heat waves make matters worse.

So baby-taxis for the bourgeoisie is the only answer and if changes are to take place they should not be done suddenly, I repeat.

**A concerned citizen, Dhaka**

### Dhaka traffic

A writer in your column wishes to have a public park built on the under-utilised land of the old airport, so that the *Dhakaites* can enjoy some open space, which we so desperately long for. On August 19 it was reported in your newspaper that the Ministry of Defence handed over 17 acres out of the 33 acres of

the old airport land it intends to hand over to EPB for building a Permanent Trade Fair Complex. I hope we are talking about the same piece of land.

Whether we build a park or a Permanent Trade Fair Complex on the land in question, the need of the hour is an extension of the segment of the VIP road from Mohakhali Rail Line to Jahangir Gate (cantonnement) all the way to the Agargaon road near the Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre (BCFCC) in Agargaon. This extension will not only ease traffic on VIP road but would greatly help residents of Mohakhali and beyond to get to the centre and Mirpur as well as create an alternative route for reaching

### "Great army"

Our army can really become a great army if they only forget the old Pakistani ways. There is no reason to adhere to the old rules. At present the issue is simple. Public should not be deprived of the right of using the roads inside the cantonnement.

There are non-army residents inside the cantonnement and these houses are often rented out to civilians. Non-military personnel live there and civilians also go visiting them. There is no problem with this. Then what's wrong with letting us use the cantonnement roads? Then again if you enter the cantonnement in a public transport, you are free to enter. One can also enter cantonnement to attend Shenakunjo functions.

I have just given some discriminatory examples. The army authorities should immediately withdraw all restrictions and allow the civilians to use their road.

**Lina, Gulshan**

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The great letter from Vox Populi has really hit the nail on the head on the issue of the military. What is the logic of permitting pedestrians to freely enter the cantonnement but restrict harassment to private cars whose owner's face look suspicious to the MPs?

The problem with countries like ours is that the exercise of power is random and arbitrary. Since these MPs at the cantonnement gates are freely harassing civilian everyday we should know what their actual instructions are. What are their orders?

Vox also makes the excellent point that the army is buying up the best land for their own residential areas. There is a bypass road next to the BAT office in Moakhali that takes you straight to the Kakoli rail crossing through New DOHS and Old DOHS. Guess whose allowed using that road? Let's check the tally so far for civil positions taken by military officers:

1. Ambassadorships
  2. Board of Directors of Nationalised Banks
  3. Biman and Civil Aviation Authority
  4. Chittagong and Mongla Port Authorities
  5. WASA, DESA and PDB DMCH
  6. Home and Shipping Ministry
- Yet, many of these public institutions are run badly.

**Azad, Dhaka**

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Whoever wrote (14 august) about the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) incident about army soldiers in *khaki* uniform was lying. No army person served in *khaki* uniform in the CHT in last 25 years. Our Army parted with *khaki* uniform in 1996. Before that *khaki* uniform used to be worn only on Thursday in plain land. But for the CHT, the only authorised uniform have been green combat fatigue with full sleeves. Moreover, two soldiers moving in a civilian transport is not how the army fights an insurgency where ambush on armed army patrol is a common phenomenon. No soldier in his right mind will board on a civilian transport in CHT wearing uniform. It's not only a matter of discipline. It's about dear life.

I wonder what motivates a citizen of an independent country to spread venom against his own army. Lack of self-respect? Of course we must criticise the army whenever it goes wrong. It's OUR ARMY and we have to mould it according to our own requirements. We have a democratically elected parliament that can enact new laws to regulate army affairs if necessary. But deliberately trying to tarnish the image of our very own army is not going to serve anyone's purpose. Please be rational.

**Ziaur Rahman, Dhaka**

This is a response to the letter by Nickey and Erithra regarding "Great Army".

1) The writer (concerned citizen) understands the security needs of all concerned. But those two soldiers, who themselves did not had a transport, wanted a forced ride with us, because they are wearing military uniform and carrying guns. No, they did not provide security; instead they kept us captive at their post for an hour or so. If you call this security, I shall rather trade it for an insecure liberty.

2) If a general is fit, definitely he can be an ambassador. Ambassadorial positions are mostly political. But let's think of a rather small position of a medical college hospital superintendent. When I was a student, they mostly were Colonels-on-Deputation. Well, running a hospital needs a lot of administrative skill. And in civilian life, you just do not command. You listen, explain and ask. I worked in many hospitals (not in Bangladesh) so far. The administrators almost always came from administra-

Mohammadpur, Asad Gate, Lalmatia, Dhanmondi, New market and beyond, if needed.

While on the subject of traffic on VIP road and the area nearby, I never understood how on earth the authorities could allow buildings to be built at the crossing of VIP road and Bijoy Sharoni (where the RANGS bhobon stands). It killed the possibility of Bijoy Sharoni going all the way up to the Tejgaon road and beyond. Can you just imagine for a moment what the traffic would have been like on VIP road if it was connected to Agargaon road from Jahangir gate on the one hand and Bijoy Saharani connecting to Tejgaon road cutting across VIP road, on the other hand?

I am no expert in Traffic planning, but I can tell you one thing; you are not going to help smooth movement of traffic when you have main roads dying a premature death at the foot of a multi-storied building!

On the subject of the extension road from Jahangir gate to Agargaon, as far as I can recall there was a plan for an under pass to be built which was approved under the last government. Does anyone know what happened to it?

**A Citizen, Dhaka**

I highly appreciate the decision taken by the government to ban two-stroke vehicles from the streets of Dhaka. From the early past since its introduction, these conveyances have been making massive contributions in environment pollution. As such the assessment to counter this problem by cancelling the two-stroke vehicles from the city has rightly been taken.

Moreover, to result the ban of two-stroke motorbikes in a better way, the four-stroke baby taxis are now being made available on roads which runs in CNG and the output is less pollution, contrary to the traditional method of burning petrol.

But the new four-stroke motorbikes are still inadequate for the huge population in the city, which still forces one to be dependent on either buses, cabs or the old baby taxis. Some of us, like aged women, are dependent more on motorbikes than any other vehicles because other transports are either unsafe or costly to ride. I would urge the man in power to put

teeth into the problem, so produce a solution, at least, before 1st September 2002.

**Samir, Dhaka**

### Of shame and the shameless!

Once upon a time, people in this country used to hide them from the public when any allegation of corruption used to be brought against them. Many even committed suicide for falsely implicated in corruption.

Now the corrupt rather take pride in their power and influence, even a cabinet member goes (or falls) to the extent to protect a meter reader - a savage display of the axis of corruption. Even the media seems to have been compromised or perhaps investigative journalism is completely absent in the country. Shame has gone in hiding witnessing the beastly power of the shameless.

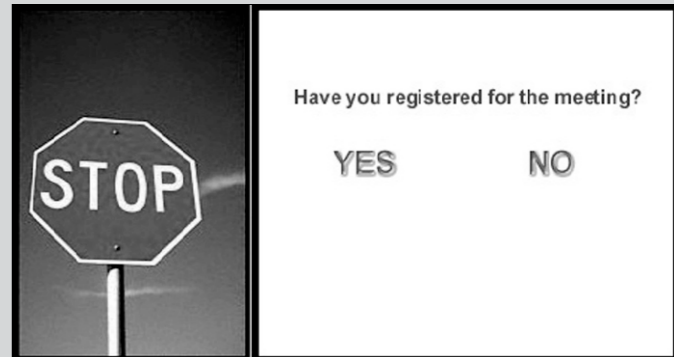
Reading *The Daily Star* of 20 August, I can only conclude that the shameless chorus of food officials in nine districts has given a new dimension to corruption. The paper reports denial of food officials of any stock of wheat "unfit for human consumption" (you do not need a chemist to make that declaration if the pictures of insect infested wheat are taken into cognisance) while the same front page also reports suspension of officials in the wheat scam. So, which one is correct?

Presuming that suspension orders were delivered only after detecting the corruption then more stringent action must be dispensed for the shameless district officials who denied the act of corruption attempting to divert the course of justice.

What the government do not recognise is we, the people, may not protest loudly enough but we have become smarter to reflect our protests when the elections are held.

The inedible wheat will find its way to the poor and the rich alike since we the urban population who have become so accustomed to packet flour, can hardly detect whether it was processed from edible or inedible wheat, many will fall sick and many will perish including the children of the 'shameless'!

**Khandaker R Zaman, Dhaka**



Army: Banging at the gate

tion, business or finance background depending on the need of the hospital. I have seen a few physicians in administrative position, but never an army doctor (not talking about military hospitals).

I have no trouble with an 11.00 PM time limit. My problem is why a military installation should sit in the city centre to begin with. It is the people's comfort that should matter.

And now comes the military budget. Do you know that our neighbouring country spends only 2.5% of its budget for its military? And do you know that we spend-- 10%?

It is not that I have malice against the military. But it just is another institution that needs to be tamed out their hubris.

**A Concerned Citizen, USA**

Rajib in his letter (August 19) about the great army makes a very interesting point. He questions where civil servants, politicians and retired military officers lie in our society. Military society, civil society or in between? I would say somewhere in between because solely by virtue of their being, they have greater rights than many of us.

Since we are discussing the military, the role of the PMO and the rest of the civil service is carrying out the pillar of our county's resources are not relevant here. Without the collusion of naval officers no civil servant or BNP recruit would have been able to fob off a frigate that can't float.

Would I be amiss in saying that most of us demand and have come to expect a greater degree of integrity from our military officers than our civil servants? I think not sir. Right or wrong the reputation and calibre of civil servants have plummeted since '71. It does speak volumes for our society when so many including I have come to expect higher morals from our men in uniform.

I have met so many government officials in the course of my work and I'd be hard pressed to imagine that any more than 10% could be said to be relatively honest. To clarify when I say 90% of government officials are very corrupt I am speaking from my perspective, that of a relatively well off, male, businessman.

My positive attitude on the integrity of military officers is compounded by the fact that I know quite a few apparently honest junior ones who share my resentment of military arrogance and corruption. I only know less than a handful of civil servants I could say the same of.

Rajib seems to have missed the fact that the whole argument over the Great Army started over the harassment of private cars entering the Cantonnement. The fact that BRTC buses and tempos are permitted free entry is relevant only in supporting the argument for full access to private cars.

To be honest I am not certain either on the procedure for army land appropriation. But we can reasonably make some assumptions. First, that a great deal of the expansion of cantonnements is at the cost of public land not private ones (*khas* land). If the army pays the government for this at all, it would be a pittance as *khas* land is always undervalued. Secondly some portion of the land must be appropriated from small holders who are paid at a rate determined by the government or the army. I am sure we can guess how fair that rate may be. In either case the landowner wouldn't have much of a choice but to sell.

But I don't think we should argue about the minutiae of army land purchase. Would *The Daily Star* editorial staff be so kind as to invite the army's Public Relations Officer to comment on this and the other issues that have come up?

**Riki, Dhaka**