

## "Letters to the Editor and the readers' right"

I fully agree with Jafar Chowdhury when he says "During these days of worst law and order situation this letter page is one place where any one and everyone is welcome to speak their mind... (August 24)."

Indeed *The Daily Star* Letters Page is an outstanding addition in print media. Even in any Bengali daily we would hardly find such a page where the readers express their opinion, ventilate their frustration, debate on sensitive issues like army and even say goodbye to a dear friend (goodbye to Angela Robinson).

Another excellent aspect of this Page is the full-page reaction on topic like ban on satellite channels, forced resignation of President Badruddoza, the recent dark episode in DU and so on.

But as Mr Chowdhury said, it is really frustrating when you end a debate even though we are taking interest in it. Isn't it better if those who started the debate ended it, i.e. the readers?

**Samia Rahman, Mohammadpur, Dhaka**

I also agree with Jafar Chowdhury and would like to request *The Daily Star* not to get involved with the letters and let it go as it is. I also suggest that the name of page be renamed as "People's Page".

I would love to know what does the readers have to say about this?

**Ansar Rahman**  
*Kalabagan, Dhaka*

Recently the Letters to the Editor page has become enlivened. It was getting quite dull with the usual stuff about corruption, dengue and what not.

Now we are breaking taboos and maybe, I believe, strengthening democracy.

My request, you killed the Bannya argument and rightly so. You also stopped the Afsan Chy/World Bank issue. Nothing ground breaking there.

But please do not kill this exciting debate on army

**Riki, Dhaka**



People's Page

## "Great Army"

Amazing! We have all gotten so caught up in the arguments and revelations of Army excesses and abuse that we all missed the point. Showrov in his letter (August 22) has kindly pointed out the obvious.

With full access through the cantonment from the Jahangir Gate, Old Airport, to the Staff Road, Heroes Live Forever gate, who needs a flyover? How did we not see this before? More importantly why did the World Bank support Dhaka Urban Transportation Project not see the obvious?

You can't be seriously suggesting that we are building a flyover only to prevent further civilian traffic through the cantonment?

The army is still forbidding entry from the airport road through their Heroes Live Forever gate. If that entrance were to be opened up then even with the, now redundant, flyover construction there wouldn't be any traffic jams.

**Azad**  
*Dhaka*

I am delighted to see that so many of the readers have shaken off their apathy and have challenged the Army. But amazingly one of the main

causes for this entire furore is still to be addressed. No entry from the Staff Road/Heroes Live Forever gate. WHY?

Everyday there is a huge traffic jam from the rail crossing opposite right past Dhaka Gate up to Kakoli.

Opening up the Staff Road entrance would be an easy way to address this problem. But who cares?

**Masood Rana**  
*Dhaka*

The letter of Mr. Joyonto (21 August) must have scared the citizens of Dhaka. "...tons of TNT, shells, missiles, plastic explosives... held next to Gulshan", "...army trucks in front of you driving towards Savar at 9 am are carrying tons of explosives that could take out an entire city block". Oh God!

But fortunately for the citizens, Mr. Joyonto was making stories out of his deep-rooted hatred towards our army. Here are the facts: Central Ordnance (not Ordinance) Depot located beside the Army Stadium does not store a single pound of explosive. The Central Ammunition Depot responsible for storing the bulk explosive is located at Rajendrapur, far away from habita-

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tion in the middle of a forest. The local units of Dhaka cantonment store their integral ammunition and explosives in safe storehouses called "magazines". These magazines are so built that in case of an accident, the explosion will be "localised" by the purpose-erected earth heaps surrounding them. Even the army buildings around them will not be affected by any accidental explosion, let alone any civilian life or property.

Now, about transportation of explosives. High Explosives (HE) are transported without their "means of ignition or detonation", meaning the detonators and fuses that are essential for the explosion of HE are detached from the HE filled ammunition and carried in separate vehicles. HE without their detonators and fuzes are as harmless as wood. On the other hand, explosive substance in detonators and fuses are so less in quantity that the vehicle carrying them poses far less hazard to public safety than a petroleum carrying vehicle.

**Ziaur Rahman**  
*Dhaka*

## What about the police?

Navana has just imported a large consignment of Land Cruisers for the Army. You can spot them on the roof of their new sales and service centre in Tejgaon.

Can't we please give or at least lend these jeeps to the police who really need them?

**Emile**  
*Dhaka*

Army officers on field training exercises have chemical toilets at their disposal. Police Officers on duty all day long in the streets have the backyard alleyway at their disposal. We have the money to buy unnecessary frigates but police officers working in Dhaka's noxious streets don't even have face masks.

Life really isn't fair is it?

**Kim**  
*Dhaka*

## Monorail for Dhaka

52-km long monorail system at half a billion dollars is not bad. Can the construction cost be brought down a little bit, say around 3/4 billion USD? It will minimise, to some extent, the burden of foreign debt on the people of this country.

We must keep in mind that the monorail will not directly help Bangladesh to earn foreign exchange, but the debt it will incur will have to be paid back in foreign exchange. Again, we must bear in mind that economic slump faced by most of the ASEAN countries a few years ago was caused by the foreign investments in those countries in unproductive sectors, such as in real estate business. May we know what margin of profit the American Company is expecting on its investment, and also the length of the contract period?

When the proposed fair is TK 25, we hope, it will settle at/around TK 15. Fare at TK. 25 is too much to bear for the middle-class people who would be the majority of commuters of monorail.

Thanks God that it is a BOT (Build, Operate and Transfer) contract, not BOO (Build, Operate and Own) contract. Our government should always be aware of entering BOO contract with any foreign company.

Lastly, I have a question to ask: the first urban monorail system was installed in Wuppertal, Germany in 1901, and till then few cities in the world have opted for this system, why?

In the United States, the first urban monorail system was installed at Disneyland, Anaheim, California in 1959. In 1962, Seattle installed an urban monorail system linking downtown Seattle with the World's Fair. I think that's all in the USA, or

are there a few more?

**Faruque Hasan**  
*Dhanmandi, Dhaka*

Whilst many of the issues put forth by William E. Owen (August 22) were very convincing, I note that pertinent information concerning details of the contract period was omitted.

Much is made of the benefits (logistical, environmental, health) and the fact that at the end of the contract period the monorail will belong to the people of Bangladesh.

In order to make a fair comparison of the two proposals, an outline of the British proposal is a necessity. However, in the absence of such a document in the press, the following question is based solely on Mr. Owen's comments: Is the Tk 25/- rate (US scheme) quoted fixed until the end of the contract period or would there be a price hike comparable to the level of the initial fare proposed by the British scheme at some point? Of course, as Mr. Owen states, "as ridership increases, the fares can decrease". However, if ridership decreases, one can assume that the fares will increase. Such a scenario would therefore lead to serious financial repercussions for the country.

I therefore ask not only when, - in exact terms - but at what cost would the monorail belong to the people of Bangladesh?

**Ms. Anita J. Brady,**  
*Oakland, California, USA*

The letter from Mr. Thor (August 21) regarding monorail was in bad taste.

This reminds me of certain people's objection and criticism when computer was introduced in Bangladesh. Their argument was many clerks would lose their jobs if computers were introduced in our country. I am sure today those critical people and also their children are using computer and encouraging others to become computer literate.

Such is the case with monorail. From an article in a Bangla daily, I have come to know that the cost of such a transport system for 50-55 km would be about USD 40 million. And if this amount is invested by a company, they should be provided all the facility and also be encouraged. We have to remember that not many investors are willing to invest in Bangladesh.

When Jamuna Multipurpose Bridge was planned similar criticism was voiced that this fund would be better utilised in education and other sectors and Bangladesh don't have the luxury to build a 5 km bridge over the mighty Jamuna River totally forgetting that the western zone is deprived of the facilities relating to communications and the economy as a whole in the western sector was suffering immensely.

Monorail will probably play a greater role in our transport sector. It would offer - security of movement, less pollution, good health and most importantly would save a lot of time. Fare-wise, 4 years from now from Uttara to Motijheel each air-conditioned bus would cost at least 25-30 taka more. Therefore, I find it acceptable against the services assured by the Monorail Company (GMC/ARMCO) i.e. 30-35 taka for faster, pollution free and secured movement.

Let us all think positively, please.

**Abdul Matin Mirza,**  
*Dhaka*

## "The Man who Rediscovered Madhusudan"

Thank you for publishing an interesting interview "Ghulam Murshid: The Man who Rediscovered Madhusudan" (August 24). If I am not mistaken Prof. Murshid also taught Bengali at Bangladesh Agricultural University for some time.

I still remember his first class (1967) where he read out Tagore's famous short story "Aparichita".

**Abul Shams,**  
*Ontario, Canada*

## "English medium students in trouble"



No Bangla is good Bangla?

It is true that most, if not all, English medium students are a bit weak in Bangla. But this is not the students' fault but the teachers and the guardians should be held responsible.

Recently, in a fair I saw a mother speaking in English with her son. How is that boy supposed to learn Bangla if he is to speak in English both at school and at home?

Though being an English medium student, I was never allowed to neglect Bangla, thanks to my parents. And my teachers were also very cautious. So it is up to the individual, his/her parents and teachers who can make an English medium student fluent English and also his/her mother tongue with same skill and fluency.

**Zafar Alam Bhuiyan**  
*BRAC, Mohakhali, Dhaka*

There have been a number of letters in regarding the debate on the troubles of the students of English medium schools. The claim is that the performances of the students of English medium schools in Bengali are very poor.

Maybe all the nations in the world feel proud to speak and to be educated in their mother tongue. It is our misfortune that we are somewhat indifferent to our own language that has posed a question on the performances of the English medium students of our country in the mother tongue. This is because a good knowledge in Bengali cannot pave the way for the students to go abroad for higher studies what a good knowledge in English can.

There are two important things for the school level students in general: a solid concept on the basic subjects taught in school levels and the capability to express the themes in a clear and easy way. Lack of any of the two is found to be a great problem for the students who go for higher education. A solid knowledge in language does not mean that one good in understanding in the subject matters taught in schools and will fare well in his studies.

Basic concept on any subject grows well by the realisation of the themes through brain-mind exchange process when one's knowledge in mother tongue is sound. If his knowledge in mother tongue is poor, he is likely to face difficulties in expressing any thing in his own language because of frail reflectivity of the themes in his mind. That is why many students with English medium background are not faring well in higher education and both home and abroad the performances of Bengali medium students are far and away better than those of English medium students.

We should keep in mind that only proficiency in English could not bring success in one's academic life. Prime importance should be stressed on students' basic concept on the subject matters that will grow better if they try to catch the theme through their mother tongue. Then comes the ability to express the themes in their own language be it English or Bengali.

## Some thoughts on shrimp export

Frozen shrimp exports are considered as the second largest export-earning sector of the country and it has a bright prospect also. But the frozen food exports are facing a triple jeopardy. The food and drug agencies of shrimp importing countries like USA and Europe are excessively cautious about any form of contamination. On the slightest suspicion, the importing countries demand random inspections and suspensions of export orders.

Despite such sorry state Bangladesh is continuing to culture and export brackish water shrimp. But

jeopardy has developed at the ground level in the system of supply of cultured shrimp. Unscrupulous gher owners and their agents are reported to be faking weight by pushing foreign materials into the shrimp and into fresh water reservoirs to soak and gain in weight and volume.

The government offer for cash incentive to the frozen food exporter already disgruntled them that a few exporters of consumer packs will get the 10 per cent incentives. It would definitely create an uneven competition at home and ultimately affect the export of frozen foods. Seafood exports amounted to the highest ever 40,079 MT in 2001-2002, but earning was US\$ 276.11 million

**Islam, Tangail**

I can see that quite a bit of discussion is going on about the way Bengali is being handled in the English medium schools in our country.

I couldn't resist joining in because I actually know about a few schools in Chittagong who even have a "system" of fines being imposed on students who are "caught" conversing in Bengali within the school perimeter! These schools are just trying to force-feed students with English while taking away their freedom of expression in mother tongue! They simply want to "impress" the parents and "justify" their exorbitant fees. One thing is for sure - we cannot expect a few Shakespeares on our soil in this manner!

The school that I went to never imposed such stringent rules and my English seems to be good enough to be qualified for, at least, *The Daily Star*.

**A Distressed Observer**  
*Chittagong*

I was shocked when I read the letters regarding English medium school students (August 23). It appals me that people are so ready to write us off in this bigoted fashion after what seems like meeting a handful of students from these schools. Well, I'm here to tell you, that you could not be more wrong.

Firstly there is the accusation that we flaunt our fake accents. We, English medium students pronounce English words the way we have been taught by our teachers or as specified in the pronunciation guides in the Oxford dictionary. This is where our "fake" accents come from.

As for the English medium schools being a ticket for us to go abroad - that is preposterous. Let me remind Ms. Rahman, with no intention to malice towards those who are referred to here, that the majority of people who queue up in front of visa offices and travel agencies looking for an exit, any exit out of this country are from a Bengali medium orientation. But spiteful remarks aside, the only difference between us is that we have a different perspective, we have heard of Harvard and Princeton and dream about going to study in those schools just like a student in a remote village in Madaripur dreams of going to Dhaka University. We all dream big, whether we are students of Green Herald or a public school in a remote village. It is only the magnitude of our dreams and aspirations, which are different. So, condemn us for it.

Mr. Haque has declared that statistics show that students from Bengali medium Schools are more successful at educational institutions abroad compared to their English medium counterparts. I would dearly like to know his source of this interesting bit of information.

To doubt our attachment to our homeland and claim that we do not think it necessary to learn Bengali is utterly ridiculous. I am sorry to disappoint her ideas but we do feel it is necessary to learn Bengali and learn about our culture and we have developed an appreciation for it like the next person.

I would request the two letter writers to rethink their perceptions and perhaps get to know a sizable number of students from English medium schools before passing judgements in this way. We know what it is to be a Bangladeshi and take pride in it and hold our homeland, language and culture dear. There is no reason to worry about what English medium schools teach us about our country and whether it is enough. We have a satisfactory knowledge of Bengali, the culture and an innate fondness for everything that is Bangladeshi and are more patriotic than you can imagine. When we are thousands of miles away from home we get excited and feel a warm glow when we get the chance to listen to a Tagore song or leaf through a Bengali book. We've just had a different orientation that does not make us better or worse or snobby or otherwise, only slightly different.

Instead of rushing in and decry us again with a rejoinder why don't we all do some mending for a change. Why not try and make this country more liveable and bring it more stability and security so that the young people have a reason to come home.

**Farzeen Saleh**  
*On e-mail*

down from US\$ 363 million in 2000-2001 due to severe price fluctuation in the international market. Seafood prices dropped 34 per cent over the previous year. And Bangladesh seafood already facing very stiff competition for the other Asian countries.

Bangladesh shrimp has a particular taste and as such is in demand amongst clientele in EU, USA and Japan. But shrimp, as an export commodity has to face hard competition these days in the global market. So eradication of malpractice, not only for processing and packaging but also at the level of shrimp cultures, catching and supplies ought to strictly and clinically pursue. BFFEA's (Bangladesh Frozen Foods Exporters Association) proposal for 7.50 per cent cash incentives for export of consumer packs and 6 per cent for traditional export may actively be considered.

**M.H. Bari**  
*General Manager,*  
*Bionic Seafood Exports Ltd., Khulna*

## Destiny in Islam and mistranslation of the Holy Quran

I was trying to search in the Holy Quran the basis of the common belief that Allah has given man the power to do all things except four- 'hyaal' (birth), 'maot' (death), 'rijk' (provision), and 'daulat' (wealth).

I came across a translation of the Holy Quran by Dr. Muhammad Taqi-U-Din Al-Hilali and Dr. Muhammad Muhsin Khan (published by Darussalam in Saudi Arabia in 1997, 16th edition). It translates parts of Ayat 3 and 4 of *Sura 44 (Dukhan)* as, "We sent it (this Quran) down on a blessed night. ... Therein (that night) is decreed every matter of ordainments". In a note to the word 'ordainments', the translators elaborated, "i.e. the matters of deaths, births, provisions, calamities, for the whole (coming) year as decreed by Allah".

"Eureka!" I have found it, I thought. I then looked for the translation of the same *ayats* by Abdullah Yusuf Ali. I was taken aback! His translation is entirely different. It stands as, "We sent it down during a blessed night. ... In that (night) is made distinct every affair of wisdom". Which one is correct?

Then I tried to look at the original Arabic *ayat* (please note the underlined words), "*teeha yufra ku kullu*

*amreen hakeem*". With my little knowledge of Arabic it appeared that the translation by Abdullah Yusuf Ali is the nearest to the original Arabic while that by Drs. Al-Hilali and Khan is nothing nearby. I then looked into the English translation by M M Pickthall and two Bangla translations, one by Md. Habibur Rahman (Former Chief Adviser of the Caretaker Govt. of Bangladesh), and another by Maolana Mobarak Karim Jaohar.

While that by Pickthall gives almost the same meaning as that by Abdullah Yusuf Ali, both the Bangla translations seem to echo Drs. Al-Hilali and Khan, which, to me, appears incorrect.

Putting one's own 'understanding' or 'interpretation' as the 'translation' of the holy Quran should never be done since no man can guarantee that he has understood completely what Allah has tried to convey. So every attempt should be made to present an unbiased literal translation. An interpretation may be given separately as a note, but that must not, in any way, be made to look like a translation which has been done in several of the above mentioned translations.

**KS Rabbani**  
*Physics Dept, Dhaka University*

## Another showdown of brutality

The unfortunate death of Papu once again brought in front a police department, which is so full of violence, brutality and savageness.

How far we have to wait till denouncing such a department, which I think is standing on a superficial structure of public eye wash? Or are we just have to understand the reality that this is what the country can produce at its best?

The corruption that goes in the police force is an open secret. A severe lack of courtesy and harassment is now being observed in the streets where the blue labelled hangs out creating mobile check posts.

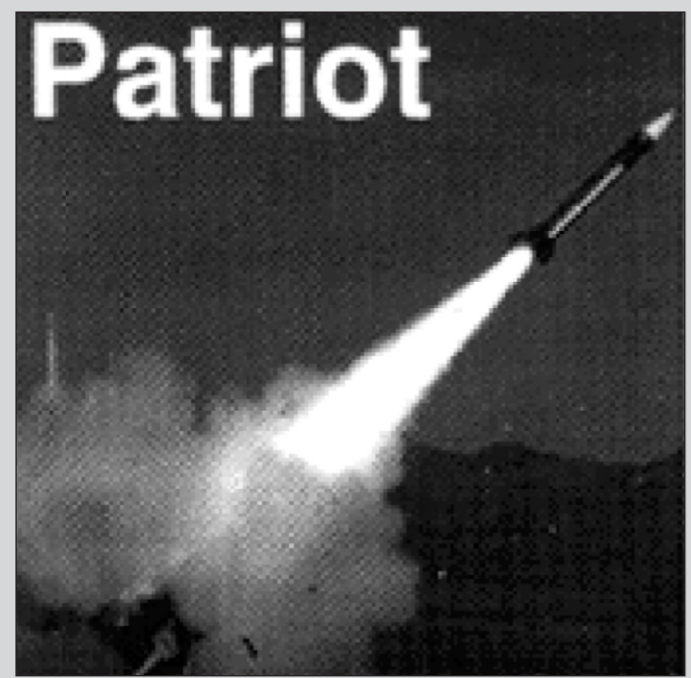
Do our politicians understand in what kind of hand they put the public onto? Or they are feeling safe, as any that relates to the party in power are not within the range of their claws!

**Zaiami, Dhaka**

## "Absentee patriot"

People who come from Bangladesh to Western countries are mainly students except those on immigration status. These students are undoubtedly the most brilliant and capable section of our nation. After completion of their studies these people usually don't return to their motherland. But why? Is it that they don't love their country? Actually these people are eager to go back to homeland. But for that they need security and honour, which I'm sorry to say the government cannot provide.

But these people hold their motherland close to their heart. They observe all the festivals as people do back home. The expa-



Patriot from far?

triate have established Bengali Medium schools to teach their children as well as the foreigners our heritage and culture. Do these imply that these people have no patriotism? Also the expatriates send huge remittance back home which is one of the most important sources of foreign exchange in Bangladesh. We may also recollect the role of these expatriates during our Liberation War. They worked hard to glean foreign support and helped proceed towards achieving independence.

Nobody feels proud to be an expatriate. The expatriates here are willing to go back to Bangladesh and take part in its development activities given that there are rooms for them. So how could Mr. Watcher (August 23) think that the expatriates are hypocrites in expressing their love for our heritage and culture? To watch things is good but that should not be myopic.

**M. Abdur Rab**  
*University of Alberta, Canada*

This is in response to a myopic watcher's contradictory letter "Absentee patriots" (August 23). The writer says "our fortunate brothers and sisters who have had the good luck to be able to live and work abroad" in the first paragraph. However, in the last paragraph the writer says, "these are people who are not really happy with their second-class existence in the developed world". I see a clear contradiction here. If somebody is fortunate to live abroad how come he or she is not really happy? How can some unhappy person become fortunate? I also see a frustration of the writer who comments that people living abroad are fortunate meaning the writer is unfortunate to live in Bangladesh.

Bashing expatriates is not quite uncommon in Bangladesh, though I think this is myopic. The expatriates are sending the foreign exchange dearly needed by the country so that you and your friends can buy Thai shoes, Indian sarees, Gillette blades, American jeans, and Japanese cars. If all of them go back to Bangladesh there will be an "overcrowding" labour effect in the economy, which needs to get rid of more of its labours and add more capital. NRB's are sending dollars to add capital and at the same time reducing the burden of labour force, thereby helping the economy in both ways. That's why the government of Bangladesh

spends lot of time, money, and labour to export some people to get some more capital and foreign exchange.

Millions of Bangladeshis live their daily lives like third class citizens as well. They don't have the education, can't by enough food, can't afford necessary medications, and don't have blessings of the society. It's easy to imagine a disgusting 'second class' lifestyle of expatriates sitting in Bangladesh where people give weird look at foreigners, where beggars circle around foreigners, people pass comments, hijackers loots their money and so on. After all, leaving Bangladesh help change these myopic visions.

I think hypocrites are those who wear down the foreign reserve and are thirsty for foreign goods and at the same time question the patriotism of the NRB's who send enough dollars to refill the pitcher.

**Zakaria S Khondker**  
*North Carolina, USA*

The expatriates think that Bangladesh owes them a living, life and security. Why should they make a special arrangement for those who are already getting what almost no one gets in Bangladesh? I don't think that the NRBs are less or more patriotic. They only sound very superior all the time. As if by living abroad they have grown intelligent. Something most educated middle-class Bangladeshi would like to become.

I think one should face the facts. Those NRBs are selfish but lucky people who have managed to run away to safety while those here are mostly selfish unlucky people who haven't. What is there to choose between these two groups who care little except their paycheques and their distance from the dustbin at the end of the neighbourhood. In case of the expat, it's far, far way. That's all.

"And now for those expats, whether in Dhaka or abroad our sole ambition is whether we can buy a flat in Dhanmandi and our children can speak with a western accent so that we can claim that we are *bhadrolok*."

**Ahmed Rushdee**  
*Bel-Air, Washington, USA*