

Clarification, please

May I request a clarification from my friend Afsan Chowdhury, whose piece "Moving Poems, etc." (September 5, Culture Page) I have enjoyed very much (as indeed I enjoy everything from Afsan's computer)?

Afsan has described Sudeep Sen (another friend) as "India's best known English language poet residing in Dhaka." In these days of vanishing punctuation marks (the fewer the better seems to be everyone's policy) the reader could mentally insert a comma between "poet" and "residing" and construe the sentences thus: Sudeep Sen is India's best known English language poet, and he is residing in Dhaka. But this would be absurd since even Sudeep would admit that there are many Indo-Anglian poets who are better known.

Alternatively, one could take the statement exactly as it stands, in which case Sudeep becomes the best known of the Indian English-language poets who are now living in Dhaka. But that would be a pointless thing to say since, as far as I know, he is the only Indian English-language poet living in Dhaka (or are there others?).

Would Afsan please let us know what exactly he wanted to say?
Prof Kaiser Haq
 Department of English, DU

Afsan Chowdhury's reply:
 Vanishing punctuation marks, you got me there. Which is why we have sub-editors but somebody slipped.

In all fairness I did meet a couple of people who claimed to be Indian in origin and poets to boot. Being a consumer of Star's shillings introduces you to many kinds. I am not mentioning the Indian gentleman, slightly inebriated who recited poems loudly at midnight near the Nordic club 60 days from today - I am sure most were his own-but yes one or two very shy citizens of our next door neighbour do practice the art and craft privately in that language. None would want to be known as Sudeep's company who is eminent as well but I thought a mention would give everyone a sense of the widening diaspora of poets from many climes, some driven to poetry by Dhaka itself.

A pleasure to learn that you read the piece. Had my usual dividers as well in it to lend more sense to my piece but glad something got through even if that confused a lot.

A breath of fresh air

We were so pleasantly surprised to see a smiling Dr. B. Chowdhury at the presidential inauguration that it felt like a breath of fresh air just swept through our stifled and angry political atmosphere.

It is obvious that Dr. Chowdhury's respect for democratic tradition far outweighs any feelings of hurt or

Remembering September 11

On the morning of April 19, 1995 I woke up with a huge bang sound in my dormitory room in Oklahoma. That morning, America lost its innocence as it woke up to the cruel reality of domestic terrorism. The Alfred P. Murrah federal building at the heart of Oklahoma City was blown apart by a truck bomb planted by Timothy McVeigh. A few days later, when I visited the bombsite, there was unusual calm there, the silent questions in the faces of the people gathered there were asking "Why? Who could do such a thing!"

Six years later, on September 11th America faced the worst attack of global terrorism. It was not just an American tragedy but a global tragedy as well, as many foreign workers including Bangladeshis perished at the WTC. On the first anniversary of this tragic event, we remember the victims-so many of them whose lives were cut short, so many dreams were shattered and so many promises that were not fulfilled. I wonder how many of them knew anything about Al-Qaida and Afghanistan. But the truth is September 11th has brought the reality home for America, that it simply cannot isolate itself from global problems-be it terrorism, environment or the economy.

As the images of the planes hitting WTC will be played again and again across the globe on TV screens, let us remember the victims of WTC, the passenger and crew members of those 4 airliners and especially pray for the victims' families across the globe. Only they know how difficult a year this has been for them and they have to carry the scar of September 11th for the rest of their lives. Let us pray for the healing of the wounds of this monstrous attack on the monument of freedom and human spirit.

Parvez Murshed
 Mirpur, Dhaka



One year ago today the people everywhere were awed by what was happening in the US. As the world watched the crumbling down of the 'Twin Tower' in the New York people everywhere shared the pain and sorrow of not only the families of those who perished but the people of the US whose 'freedom' was being attacked.

In those few minutes the world scenario has changed. The 'terrorist' behind the attacks achieved only one thing and that is destroying our god given right to be decent human being.

One year later we the people of this universe have gained

nothing but lost many of the 'human rights' that we took for granted because we allow few people to act and propagate the ideology of hatred.

In a world that is ridden with such impoverish problems needing immediate attention of all to solve them we are preoccupied with the need to arm ourselves to save our freedom from the clutches of those whose philosophy is 'destruction rather than creation'.

Akku Chowdhury
 Banani, Dhaka

A year after the horrific events of 9/11 I still find a lot of peoples' attitudes amazing. The most common complaint is 9/11 was terrible, a real tragedy, but the US is overreacting.

Well I disagree with that. The USA is the greatest power in the world and the events of 9/11 was an attack on their very symbol. It would be quite difficult to pronounce any reaction, as over reaction, such was the enormity of the attack. I hear otherwise liberal, educated people criticising the removal of the Taliban. One friend even says that Afghanistan is worse off. The lot of the Afghan people is now infinitely better than under the Taliban. Yet there are so many people in Bangladesh who criticise their overthrow.

The same goes for Iraq. It is only the intransigence of the Iraqi dictator that has led to the threat of war. How can anyone defend that Saddam I don't understand? In spite of its errors and frequent misconceptions the US is on the whole a force for good. The proof of that is in the fact that in spite of being hated by so many people there are very few indeed that wouldn't rather be in the US.

Gora Dhaka

resentment he may have felt. It is even more obvious how unsuitable it was for him to represent as President a government that beats up the students mercilessly, attacks the opposition leader's motorcade and is totally disinterested in improving the law and order situation.

It was his good fortune to be disassociated from BNP and the country's misfortune to be governed by it.

Dr. Krishna Dutta, DOHS, Dhaka

Looking for alternatives

We should seriously start considering the alternatives to our present leaders. Bangladesh has seen successive military rulers, Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia with their extended families. None worked.

I honestly believe democracy can and will work in Bangladesh, but only if it is true democracy. As long as we are ruled by the two competing dynasties there is no hope. The families of Zia and Bangabandhu are a cancer in our society and unless you remove a cancer it'll only spread.

Azad, Dhaka

Some thoughts on your Letters Page

I am an avid reader of your Letters to the Editor Page. There are some topics that seem to stir-up quite a debate and continue for a while.

There are "English medium school," "local employee of World Bank," "Kamal Ataturk," "Great Army," "Number one in Corruption" to name a few.

The collection of letters on the more popular topics could provide the material for a supplementary magazine... probably a yearly edition. This would allow the readers to reflect upon the subjects and views of the readers on the same. An interesting proposition to consider, isn't it?

Dr. Haroon Rasheed, Dhaka

"VN School: Acting principal alleges secret land transfer"

So, finally an admission of guilt from none other than the infallible (?) Hamida Ali-- the former crusader of VNCS and now a beneficiary of VU. To quote *The Daily Star*, "she said a lower price was shown in the deeds to keep the registration fees lower". It is not only the registration fees, she also evaded VAT and stamp fees. Hasn't she committed an act of fraud by (a) mis-declaring the value of property, and (b) by doing so, evaded the dues payable to the government?

I am sure the Tk 6 crore question that is coming to everyone's mind is how a principal can transfer the property of the institution she/he heads as an employee and not as the proprietor? Isn't there any regulatory body to oversee the trust/waqf properties in the country? I am not sure whether VNCS is a trust property but the relevant authorities must have a lot of explaining to do if it is so.

It was the benevolent Mrs Noon who established this institution to facilitate female education in the country in the '50s and what happens it now?

I would like to draw the attention of BAC in the matter for conducting an investigation to unearth the misappropriations and put all perpetrators on the dock regardless of their status or identity.

Khandaker R Zaman
 Dhaka

Drive to discipline rickshaws

While I was reading this news published on September 10, an image came to my mind. Too often I've seen traffic police beating up the rickshawpullers when they violated traffic rules. It is indeed a relief to hear that the traffic department of the DMP is seriously considering controlling the plying of rickshaws in Dhaka City. However, it is unfortunate the way police treats the poorer section of our society with no sign of respect. It is also very disempowering for the people who have to struggle every day just for mere survival. There is no need to exercise power with violence.

My request to the traffic authority is to consider an awareness and information drive for rickshawpullers about road rules and regulations. And also to ask the traffic controllers not to hit the rickshawpullers when they make mistakes. There are other ways, which are also more efficient to enforce the rule of law. Creating fear and alienating the poorer section of the society will not serve the purpose in the long run.

Bina D'Costa
 Canberra, Australia

Monorail/magnetic rail/fly-overs

Congratulations to Minister of Communications for making much awaited decisions needed for our country. I would like to remind all that fly-overs were planned in Dhaka in 1988 but was abandoned by the then BNP. Similarly, BNP lost an immense opportunity in the 1990s by not signing the Submarine Cable link free-of-cost because of very slow perceptions and mostly indecision. We would like now to see that decision with regard to Monorail/Dhaka-Chittagong Magnetic Rail and Fly-overs be implemented without any lapse of time.

Since Monorail is on B.O.T. basis, we need to implement it as soon as possible. The Monorail fare shall have to be decided based on comparison with other comparable means of transport and the fare itself should not be a deterrent to implementing the monorail.

Similarly, Dhaka-Chittagong fast rail link is a crying need of the hour for decades. We request Barrister Nazmul Huda to implement the same without listening to bureaucratic objections nor tolerating any lethargy in implementation. Fly-overs need to be built in all junctions not only in Dhaka, but also in Chittagong and other divisional districts for the overall infrastructure development of the country. 2-stroke auto-rickshaws should make an exit from the entire country within the next four years. Just as a thought, why bring 4-stroke taxis anyway. Isn't it better to have taxicabs instead? Three wheelers do not give a good look on the roads and is not available in any part of the developed world.

Qamruddin Chowdhury
 Dhaka

"Sri Lanka and Bangladesh: A comparison"

This is in reference to the letter by Sarjana Ameen (September 6) on the orderly nature of Colombo City, which impressed her and raised the question why Dhaka cannot be the same.

The answer is simple. We do not have the urban planning institutions that make a city worthy of mention. The municipalities and the development authorities are at loggerheads, when they should have been coordinating on a day to day basis. Their respective roles are ill defined. This is not the case with Sri Lanka, where they have very well defined process for urban development.

We do not have very many rules controlling construction of buildings, or other actions on land. The few that exists, we ignore with gleeful abandon! Profit making overshadows all concerns for a pleasant liveable environment. The more you build the larger the profit. Tress, greenery, and privacy are not on the agenda! Who cares how much garbage, noise or traffic a building may generate? Flashy facades and posh interiors satisfy all our demands.

When circumstances are such, impressive cities are a distant dream!
Zarina Hossain
 Architect Urban Planner, Chittagong

"Zakaat system"

This is a response for the letter by "A citizen" (September 9). The writer is trying to debate my previous letter (August 30) went ahead and said that the G8 or the donors to the developing countries when they make donations also put some unofficial conditions often unfair. Let's take again Bangladesh as an example.

Few months ago in Paris the donor countries for Bangladesh met and they had a condition in order to continue their donations. Their condition was that Bangladesh need to work out law and order within its borders. Is that an official and unfair condition? I don't think so.

I would like to enlighten the writer that there is a difference between giving the 2.5% of your annual income as a Zakaat and giving as an offering for a special cause. In his letter he mentioned the case of Amit who was infected with a rare disease. According to the writer 40-lakh taka was collected to provide treatment to Amit. That's great and worthy of respect. But think about it, 4 lakh (what is 4 lakh people in a nation with 130 million people) giving taka 10, you collect 40 lakh taka. Does taka 10 represent their 2.5% income? I hope you got my point.

And one last thing, in my previous letter I only said that if there was someone who gave his 2.5% of his

income I just haven't heard of him. I want to be clear that I didn't say that there is no one that is doing it. I am sure those who are doing it they don't talk about it, they just do it awaiting for their rewards in heaven. Often those who talk the most do the least. Are you a talker or a doer?
G. El Massri
 One-mail

"Biman's wrong decision"

In response to Mr Karim Abdullah (September 8), I fully agree that fleet modernisation comes far behind the other problems plaguing Biman. In my earlier mail ("Biman: Time to change", August 27), I mentioned steps like better management, improved customer service, reorganised route structure and an experienced CEO before the procurement of newer aircraft.

Our loss-making routes need to be closed down. We should open up new routes only after proper market study. Also most existing flights are very poorly timed. As an example, if Biman has 7 flights a week to Singa-

convenience. It has hundreds of advantages than disadvantages. Instead of banning polythene people should have been educated how to dispose off this item properly by massive campaign. If it is the only justification that it is bad for the environment then the government will have to ban so many things i.e. mobile phone is not good for health, TV is not good for eyes, plane journey is not good for health etc. But people are using these instead of these being risky. Almost no other countries including the neighbouring countries like India, Pakistan, Nepal, Burma, Thailand banned polythene bags. Isn't polythene harmful for those countries?
Mohammed Ashraf Ali
 Dhahran, Saudi Arabia

"Of English and Bangla"

This in response to Altaf Hossain's letter. He said that statistics show that almost no English medium educated personnel are in civil service and Bangladesh Army (BA), thus they are less patriotic. I request

Student politics-- BUET

On 9th September, I saw a photograph in one of the newspapers where a female student of BUET is seen crying helplessly amid tear gas, furore and police action. This one photograph clearly depicts the present state of common people of our country and the frustrating state of our educational institutions.

Indeed sometimes one picture can speak more than a thousand words!
Sohel Hara
 Dhaka

I just cannot help but conclude that the students of BUET are deviating from their first and foremost responsibility e.g. to study as hard as one can to accomplish their academic goals. Once they fulfil their responsibilities as students and move on in life and are able to place themselves in responsible positions of decision making, then only will they be in a position to influence change. Living on their guardian's hard-earned money, forgetting what their responsibilities are, it is very easy to raise slogans for one cause or the other. Who gave them this responsibility?

How on earth could you explain the nerve of the BUET students to give the authorities an "ONE HOUR ULTIMATUM" to meet their demands which has nothing to do with their studies. Today we see again a demand for the resignation of the BUET VC; couple of weeks ago it was the demand for the resignation of Dhaka University VC and the trend is very clear. Next target might be the Jahangirnagar University VC and then another one. The way things are going, I think we shall soon be running out of candidates for VCs.

Finally, we just want to have the "student news" coming off the front pages of our newspapers as I do believe we have more serious problems in the country to take care of. God bless our nation!

A Thinker
 Dhaka

Public opinion, the PM, the media all seem to be ganging up on

pore, they should be timed to depart daily at the same time. This will attract more business travellers and also increase customer confidence. Similarly, efforts should be spent to minimise the number of stops along every route. If Biman stops at Dubai and Rome on the way to London, most passengers will obviously choose British Airways or Emirates instead with zero or one stops, respectively.

Such management improvements can be expected only with the skills of an experienced CEO. However, in order to maintain such improved and efficient schedules, Biman needs to have a modern fleet too ... as its old DC-10s are becoming increasingly unreliable.

Shafiq
 USA

For a few weeks I have been observing with great surprise that some people are continuously trying to disgrace us, the Bengali medium ones without any apparent reason.

Me, belonging to a Bengali medium background believe that we do lack a bit in English but only when the question of spoken English is concerned. As for written or grammatical portions, we Bengali medium students are in no way lagging behind. For example, in the admission test in IBA where after passing a tough written test one has to face the viva board, where all the questions are asked in English and fluency in English is a must, the statistics is fifty percent Bengali medium and the other fifty percent English students. Thus in every educational sectors whether it's

stranger comes to visit your house, you must ask him who he is and whom he wants to meet before you let them enter the house. After 11 p.m. you don't even open the door but ask from inside about his identity. It's not a very grave fault on the side of the army.

Another person has written that Finland has no army at all. But let me remind you that this year Finland has been selected the most non-corrupt and Bangladesh, as the most corrupt country. Another weak comparison.

Various people have told that the Military Person from the Military Establishment has written a very impolite letter. Is it very polite to talk against the army?
Eritra
 Dhaka Cantonment

In a previous letter I had for the most part defended the military. However, I also mentioned that the military is not a perfect institution.

Recently, I came across an interesting article on the web regarding Bangladeshi soldiers stationed in Bosnia as part of the UN Mission several years ago. The article stated that there was ONE rifle for FOUR soldiers. I am not a military expert but does this not mean that in a place as dangerous as Bosnia, only one-fourth of our



A rocky road to education?

the police for their brutal attacks on the BUET students. I cannot even begin to defend our police, who are probably responsible for more crime than all the regular criminals put together.

But criticism of the police should be within context. Our policemen are underpaid, over worked, abused by the politicians and deficient in every way from vehicles to arms. Here's a suggestion, cut the defence budget and pass on some of that money to the police, buy some new jeeps for the police rather than the army, helicopters for the police rather than the air force. See how much better they perform when we start treating them as humans and not mere political tools.

Why should the police be honest? Look at their morale. For any important job, we call on the army to come and help. We cuddle the army with more money, better food, uniforms, facilities, amenities, you name it.

Until we set our priorities right and start treating our true protectors as public servants deserving our respect and money, the police will continue to rampage.

Has the UN outlived its utility? Not yet as long as it can deliver what the US administration wishes it to. But has the UN lost its credibility too? I am afraid the answer is yes. How else would one explain why the UN failed to secure Israel's compliance with UN investigation (fact finding to be precise) of alleged massacre at Jenin refugee camp in Palestine territory?

So much then for international diplomacy, so much for the last fig leaf that has been shed with so little ceremony. Indeed, the whole world is expected to shiver and wait with trepidation as so many little school children to be lectured by no less than the US President on their abiding obligations. Will they listen with a resounding applause to endorse what in the absence of camouflage is nothing less than international banditry with self proclaimed righteousness? We shall wait and see. But one thing is for sure. The UN is at the crossroads of history. Either it will itself to recover its legitimacy given to it by its Charter or lends itself to crass manipulation by its stronger members and lapses to utter irrelevance. The latter is an ominous prospect. History and our progeny will not forgive if we have failed.

A disenchanting world citizen
 One-mail

Recently, I came across an interesting article on the web regarding Bangladeshi soldiers stationed in Bosnia as part of the UN Mission several years ago. The article stated that there was ONE rifle for FOUR soldiers. I am not a military expert but does this not mean that in a place as dangerous as Bosnia, only one-fourth of our

troops could defend themselves if attacked. I surely hope that while we spent millions of dollars on fighter jets and a naval frigate, we were also able to purchase rifles. Also, I would like to know the welfare of our troops abroad, and I do not mean the hefty UN paycheque.

Rashid Chowdhury, On e-mail

Exports

I see in your newspaper that exports are down as are prices. The RMG industry is still in a crisis and has not recovered from the events of last year. It should however be kept in context that 9/11 was not the only reason behind the woes of the industry.

The law and order situation, port congestion, extortion by mastaans and customs officials, all these factors have contributed to killing the goose that laid the golden egg.

I would guess that a large number of factories are closed right now for lack of orders. But while the Bangladeshi owned garments factories flounder, the foreign owned EPZ factories continue to prosper.

It seems that not only are we stupid enough to kill the only industry that really earns foreign exchange, but whatever's left is handed over to the Koreans, Indians and Sri Lankans.

Kishore Pasha, Dhaka

The final fig leaf

So the British Prime Minister has given "last chance" to the United Nations to prove itself. Indeed it's a dire warning to the world body coming from the chief executive of Britain - a member of the UN Security Council. What seems striking is the audacity and arrogance behind such a statement by the Head of the Government of a member state.

Yes, the UN credibility is being tested, rather challenged to be precise, this time by Blair as if the UN was created only to perform the dictates of its stronger members; other members are increasingly being made to count for nothing else assemble in ritual sessions and debates annually. UN is treated as relevant only when it is useful and pliant tool to further the US national interest. If the UN chooses to differ with US, so be it and the US will "go it alone" under no obligation to the world body. Indeed the last fig leaf of international law and legitimacy has been shed; it has been shed most unceremoniously without even the modicum of diplomatic cover.