

## Saifur Rahman's comment on AIDS and arsenic

Finance Minister Saifur Rahman's statement on AIDS/HIV and Arsenic vis-a-vis the involvement of NGOs/donor agencies is a mixture of facts and ignorance.

It is true that AIDS/HIV issue is grossly overplayed in this country. This is only to sell various NGOs and consumables like condoms. Hepatitis B whose mode of transmission and to a large extent the outcome, despite being the same and more prevalent in this country were hardly ever taken into account by the NGOs/donor agencies. Well, Hepatitis B was never a serious threat in the west compared to the developing countries.

As for Arsenic, the NGOs/donor agencies have gone years ahead with the "water" game, a major variable tipped to control the world economics as oil did in the last century. These players have been successful in planting the "tubewell" idea in the country bypassing the surface water usage. It is Saifur Rahman's ignorance (and our then policy makers) not to realise the fact that despite evidences of the lethal Arsenic in groundwater (and its effects), tubewells were merely sunk by the NGO/donor agencies until to reap benefits years later. Bangladesh is one of the guinea pigs of this ground water experiment. Billions of dollars will now pour in for its "mitigation", a fraction of which in the first place could have been used for surface water treatment and of which the NGOs/donor agencies were fully aware of.

### Adistressed citizen

Dhaka

For several days now Saifur Rahman has been attacking the NGOs for their exploitation of the AIDS and Arsenic issues. This is in typical Saifur style, just as he did with the garments factory owners before.

However we should not allow Saifur Rahman's ill thought comments to cloud the real issue. NGOs in various guises indulge in any number of business activities ISP's, banks, hatcheries, universities you name it. They are competing unfairly against private sector entrepreneurs who have to borrow at excessive rates of interests.

Rather than ranting at the NGOs, Saifur Rahman should address these issues.

### Azad

Dhaka

## Millionaire Meter Reader

AAhmed is quite right in asking *The Daily Star* to reveal the name of the BNP minister defending the millionaire meter reader. Ever since this paper exposed this scandal, this mysterious minister has been hovering over our meter reader protecting him from justice.

Either tell us who the minister and allow him to defend himself in the court of public opinion or stop making vague accusations.

### Riki

Dhaka

## Reintroduction of Upazila System: A new route for systems loss?

Bangladesh has again achieved a prestigious position in the list of the most corrupt nation and it is the politicians and bureaucrats who are responsible for this 'rare honour'.

It is a good news that the present government is so sincere about rural development and have decided to reintroduce Upazila system. But isn't it going to be another route to some more systems loss like that of DESA, WASA, Petrobangla where the authority itself is responsible for the loss but blames it to the system?

Under the present situation, the funds released from Dhaka reaches the Union Council Chairman through many departmental hands. It is an open secret that only 30% to 40% funds are being utilised for development works and the remaining are declared as the so-called systems loss.

To be elected as a chairman of Upazila, a candidate will spend a huge amount and if elected he'd try to retain ten times more than that spent during the election. The systems loss will also increase to transfer the fund up to the Union Council Chairman via existing system with new addition to Upazila Chairmen system. So where is the benefit for the mass people?

I fully agree with Barrister Nazmul Huda's concept of "a three-tier local government" system which will be fully accountable to the government. It is proved that the majority political leaders or politically elected persons are least accountable to the government. So this ruinous decision for reintroduction of UZ system should be reconsidered, since political gains are there but sustainable developments will never be there.

### Engr. A.M.F. Khan

Dhaka

## Murder of a doctor in Sylhet

I am a concerned citizen writing about the pathetic law and order situation in the country. The latest incident is the killing of a physician in Sylhet.

I wonder what excuse the government or its hibernating Home Minister has regarding this murder. The situation is getting worse day by day.

It makes us really sad and frustrated watching the downhill slide of the nation which was born in 1971 with immense potential.

### Javed Iqbal

New York, USA

## Of police and their duties

We have been observing with shock and dismay a total failure of the law enforcing agencies to maintain law and order in the country. Not a single day passes without the news of gruesome murder or rape. We cannot and must not blame it all on terrorists.

The number and nature of criminal activities have changed. Most families in the city have had brushes with hijackers or terrorists at some point in recent times. We are frustrated and angry to note that nothing has improved though we read of promises of safety, of good governance in newspapers. The policemen on duty on most roads are the most corrupt and incompetent force in uniform.

I am an elderly woman. I have been witnessing such sights all my

## Our zoo

I do not think the tone of the article on the tiger escaping from Chittagong zoo was appropriate. Our zoos are a national disgrace and nothing more than torture chambers for these helpless animals. To visit a zoo in this country is a horrible experience and a lesson in our inhumanity.

All over the world zoos are changing their roles from being mere displays of captive animals to teaching centres. A great deal of effort is also made to mimic natural conditions in the enclosures. In Bangladesh we just throw them into a metal cage.

Since our government does not have the money or class to run zoos, they should all be shut down or handed over to private contractors. I am sure a private sector company would do a far better job than our pathetic efforts so far.

### Kim, Dhaka



Save animals, save earth

PHOTO: AFP

life. At one time I hoped and believed we would see better times, safer times for women in our country. But after having two women Prime Ministers we see that respect for women is nil even with the members of the law enforcing agencies. I do appreciate the role of those who toil extremely hard under extreme pressure yet carry on with their duties. But I am also afraid to acknowledge the fact that they are so few in number that they either perish or give in to the likes of the majority.

Can we not expect more accountability from all levels of the police force even after witnessing such brutalities in recent times? Is it impossible for us to expect to live in peace with less worries, about not facing the kind of dangers that we face every day? Why should our sons and daughters be beaten up for raising their voice over issues that does not concern the policemen?

### KMS, Dhaka

There are lots of complaints against our poor police force; some of those have been mentioned in the UNDP report on human security in Bangladesh (DS report, April 16). While criticising our police force, we must keep in mind that it acts under an extremely adverse condition. The freedom of the members of this force is curtailed by undue political pressure while in the course of discharging their duties. Moreover, our police force is extremely undermanned and ill equipped, even in comparison with that of our neighbouring countries.

There is at present 1350 people per police in Bangladesh. In the countries such as Saudi Arabia, the USA, Thailand, Singapore, Japan, Malaysia, India and Pakistan, people per police are 280, 345, 228, 295, 563, 249, 728 and 625 respectively. The statistics as to all the above-mentioned countries but Bangladesh is a few years old. The figure against Bangladesh is the latest one. From this statistics we can say that the easiest country in the world to escape the long arm of the law is Bangladesh.

Being so undermanned, how can we expect that our police force will be able to successfully cope with the responsibility vested on it? With a budget allocation of less than TK. 1000 crore for a year, how can we expect a better-equipped force? Till date most of the constables are burdened with the obsolete three-not-three rifles, which hinders their easy movement. Vis-a-vis with the well-organised criminal gangs in the country, who are possessing sophis-

ticated weapons, and thanks to mobile phone, country-wide wireless network, the ill-equipped police force of ours looks limp and helpless.

The police force of Bangladesh is ill trained as well. It seems that the members of this force do not know what their actual professional goal is. The training on human rights is most neglected in our police force. So in our everyday life we see the consequences of lack of this most essential training for a police force.

### Faruque Hasan

Dhanmadi, Dhaka

## Most corrupt country

It is really unfortunate that once again Bangladesh has been ranked as the most corrupt country in the world.

A few days ago the State Minister for Education was saying that the education sector is one of the most corrupt sectors. But can we find any single sector that is free from cor-

rupt?

As a teenager, I feel that by switching off ETV the government has not only violated people's right to be informed but also shattered the dreams of many youngsters.

### Moin-Ul-Alam

Dhaka

## Cable operator's charge

It was said that no cable operator would charge more than Tk. 300/- for a monthly payment, irrespective of the location i.e. whether the dish connection is given in Gulshan, Baridhara etc.

But in Uttara, Sector-4 a cable operator has collected Tk 350/- last month and has further notified to collect Tk. 400/- from this month.

May I request the authorities concerned to fix the monthly cable charge and redress the subscribers' misery?

### Mohammad Yuusuf

Uttara, Dhaka

## Wrong time wrong place

This is in regards to the letter by Concerned, USA.

Sheikh Hasina is not in power now. I am less concerned what the opposition leaders are doing/saying. AL is not in power because most people didn't want it to be and that is exactly why they are in the opposition now.

I am more concerned about what the ruling party leaders (BNP and Khaleda Zia) are doing and also what they are saying.

I'm concerned more about: --Lack of law and order --Ruling party's inability to control armed conflict between its own members.

-- When their MP complaints about corruption and smuggling about his own party ministers.

-- The ruling party not taking courageous and appropriate steps when it is clear that their own party cadres are responsible for defaming the integrity of their own party (for example incidents like BUET, DU women's Hall, Chabi Rani case, Indian wheat scam etc)

Right now shouldn't we be more concerned about what Khaleda Zia and her party is saying and doing? Isn't BNP in power because they promised better law and order situation and to reduce corruption? Concerned Too, USA

## Private TV channels

With the Ekushey TV saga finally behind us, it is very important that legitimate ventures in the broadcasting industry be given proper encouragement.

There are 3/4 private TV channels in the country serving the needs of the viewing population, but they are accessed through cables/satellites only. I would like to request the authorities concerned to allow the use of terrestrial transmission by the legitimate channels for the right fees so that the public can view the channel(s) without cable connection and the government can use the existing BTV infrastructures to earn money.

It is a real win-win situation. Also, the huge amount of money ETV defrauded the people by getting a free ride on the BTV terrestrial transmission system should be realised quickly.

### Zunaid Kabir

Canada

## Root cause of all our ills!

We find ourselves in a very familiar situation once again. The car of the leader of the opposition is attacked, all hell breaks loose and the inevitable happens; the opposition calls for demonstrations and finally an all too predictable hartal! It seems like the same old movie is played over and over again and we the non-partisan people of Bangladesh, a silent audience.

Does any one know or does sta-

## Bangladesh or Criminaldesh?



License to kill?

Your news item 'Alleged killer takes oath as DCC commissioner' was a good one especially the photograph of the alleged murderer taking oath beside the Mayor. How can a murderer get out of the jail and take oath? Isn't this ridiculous?

Where are we living? This actually shows what our country has become. With the deteriorating law and order and now seeing an alleged murderer taking oath as a DCC Commissioner, it very much appears the country has become the house of all criminals. The time is not far away when the international terrorist groups will come here to compete with the local ones!

PHOTO: STAR

Increase in criminals and corruption in almost all sectors may soon change our country's name from Bangladesh to *Criminaldesh*.

### Fuad Hussain, Dhanmadi, Dhaka

When I read the front page headline about the "alleged killer" Saidur Rahman Shahid being sworn in as commissioner of ward no. 83 of the DCC, I was reminded of Phoolan Devi, India's Bandit Queen. When she joined the Indian Parliament there was much uproar. How could someone who was responsible for scores of murders and more than 30 cases of kidnapping or banditry be allowed to hold such a conscientious official position in the government?

However, once she surrendered to the law she was accepted by the society as many came to see that her actions were in retaliation to the crimes of rape and abuse committed against her. So what is Saidur Rahman's justification for the heinous crimes he committed that we must accept him as the city's ward commissioner?

As an elected official and feminist spokeswoman, Phoolan Devi attempted to atone for her crimes by taking up the cause of the abused women in India. As the newly elected DCC ward commissioner, is Saidur Rahman Shahid going to be the voice of the bereft families of Dhaka city who have lost their dear ones at the murderous hands of the very same man? Or has the DCC just handed this criminal an official license to kill some more citizens?

### AA, Dhaka

statistics exist to tell us what percentage of our population is partisan (fanatical supporters or professional cadres of one political party or the other). It would be really worthwhile to know the percentage of the non-partisan population who takes everything that is thrown at them by lying down, on the chin, without ever protesting.

If I may recall, under the previous government (present opposition) was not the motorcade of the previous leader of the opposition (present Prime Minister) attacked and harassed by the so-called supporters of the party in power? So, what has changed so fundamentally?

We are already in a situation where no matter how hard you try, with every means at our disposal, the present malaise of our society can be reversed in the short term. Our problems are so very basic that without improving the fundamental 'basket of values' that form our character we would not be able to make a positive dent. We need to devise a strategy as a nation, which belongs to us all, to come out of this "catch 22" situation we are in. It is not a question of law and order any more, it is much more than that. We need to instil the basic value system of civilised behaviour to every citizen of our nation, partisan or otherwise, to survive and move forward as a proud nation.

**A Thinker**  
Dhaka

## BNP's eleven months in power

The law and order situation is getting worse day by day. Before the national election, the 4-party alliance led by BNP pointed out the improvement of law and order situation as their No. 1 priority in their election manifesto. The common people gave BNP the mandate but BNP failed miserably to uphold their election pledge.

In the last 11 months, the government instead of improving the law and order situation almost allowed the criminals to deteriorate it. These negative elements of our society do not even spare the educational institutions and made those their battlefields. We thought the law enforcing agencies would be able to control the situation but the police went after innocent students (Samsunahar Hall incident, BUET incident).

The PM keeps on giving hope to the people that her government will do whatever it needs to bring back law and order situation under control. But what they do instead is blame the main opposition party for incident. But it is the government who is responsible for the security of the people and their belongings, not

the opposition political parties. So why blame others?

I feel sorry for the people and wonder what will happen to them in the next four years. I hope that the government will think for the betterment of the people and not make every national crisis a political issue.

### Arafat A. Islam

Lalmatia, Dhaka

## "Great Army"

Mr. Joynto wanted to know what does army give us except for Senakunjo, Golf Courses etc? The army gives us the liberty, army provides us the protection from outside attack, the army let you to be the citizen of an independent country, and the army is the one that gives you the freedom to breathe in the free air of BANGLADESH.

As you're not responsible to protect the country you can't understand what the army is offering you. When Pakistan attacked our country in 1971, people could understand the necessity of army. But now that they're free, they've started to take the army for granted.

### Eritra

Dhaka Cantonment

How many cantonments or Army bases in the world has Mr. Joynto visited. I presume none. Baridhara, Gulshan are not Army base.

If Mr. Joynto visited Shenababhan Delhi, GHQ Rawalpindi or any US Army bases he will find out that there are more tight security than any Bangladeshi can ever imagine.

And for your information Mr Joynto, Chinese Army and Indonesian Army has their own business enterprise.

### Sumit

England

This is regarding the letter by Joynto (September 16). I am little hurt to learn about the judgement of Joynto about our Army. It is never impolite to criticise the Army-- at least the Army never spell out such self-deprecating words. Army is a part of the nation and what it does is for the interest of the nation. To say that our Army is a positively contributing sector would be an understatement. What our Army gives you besides well-manicured golf courses, Senakunjo and painted flowerpots? I would suggest you to do a little home work for yourself and open your eyes to look around.

Who disciplines the crowd when the police fail to control the street jams? Who are the first to in and last to out when a disaster strikes? Who are there to build low cost highly durable shelters for poor and needy in places where even devil fears to trade? Who is one of the top foreign

currency earning sources for our nation? Who has lifted the face and reputation of our country outside being the highest troops contributing country in the world for the UN?

I do not really like to signify the plethora of contributions that the Army has made for you, me and our country. While it is not impolite to criticise the actions you don't deem appropriate but it's disrespectful not to give due recognition to someone/something worthy of.

### A Man in Uniform, Dhaka

This is in reference to Sobhan Chowdhury's letter (August 13). He tried to justify the army harassment that the common people are always subjected to. He pointed out that people's entrance is fully restricted in every cantonment in the world.

But unlike other countries, Dhaka Cantonment is located amidst the city. So the inhabitants living at Kuchukhet, Ibrahimpur and other parts of the city need to use the Cantonment road. In other countries cantonments are situated outside the main city and they don't have to face such problems like others. So the example of other countries don't hold much water.

**Mohammad Murshad Shahriar**  
East Bashabo, Dhaka

The opponents to my views also argue that those English Medium students engaged in private sector at home are helping build our economy. I view their contribution to a very minute extent. Because, the public sector is in crying need of good employees. And if they serve there, the everyday sufferings of their fellow citizens would mitigate substantially. In the long run their service, better in all respects, can allow greater contribution to the economy.

Their abandoning the country or working in the private sector for better prospects at this stage does not signify much patriotism. Hence, I tried to clarify my earlier opinions.

### Ataf Hussain

Dhanmadi, Dhaka

## "Of Bangla and English"

I have gone through a number of letters regarding "English Medium students in trouble". Being a teacher of an English Medium school I would like to share a few words.

Yes, the performance of the students of English Medium School in Bengali is no doubt very poor. As a matter of fact, the responsibility goes to their teachers. But I confront about this blame. The English Medium students are not encouraged to learn Bangla in their own house. Their house tutors are asked to speak in English during tutoring, he/she is encouraged to watch only English TV programmes and so on. Over all they grow in an English environment. Though many of them learn to speak in Bengali in an English way it is an affection and it is considered to be a kind of modern style.

When they are sent to school they face another problem to cope up with the syllabus of Bangla because of their lack of fundamental knowledge in Bangla. Of course there are some exceptions. In school, they are to follow a standard syllabus, which is conducted by very efficient teachers. But the lacking in Bangla at their primary stage influences them not to do well in Bangla. I found them facing trouble in understanding, writing even reading

Bangla.

### Shams Faruque

English Medium School Teacher  
Dhanmadi, Dhaka

This refers to the response of my letter regarding "English Medium vs Bangla Medium" by Farhanaz Rabbani. She assumed that I view all the Bengali Medium students as "symbols of patriotism".

Perhaps she didn't understand the content of my letter. There I stated that if any English Medium students had joined the civil service, Bangladesh Army, all forms of irregularities there would automatically reduce. So, I recognise that irregularities are prevailing in the Civil Service. And corrupt Bengali Medium educated officials have great contributions in it. I do not view all Bengali Medium educated people as patriotic.

Also, some readers suggested that patriotism is not at all impaired by those English Medium students serving abroad. True, they represent a good image of Bangladesh there. But will that help in building our economy ruined by corrupt quarters? Had most of them if not all stayed here, with their edge of ability, knowledge, honesty, efficiency, dedication, the economy could have reached much greater benefits.

The opponents to my views also argue that those English Medium students engaged in private sector at home are helping build our economy. I view their contribution to a very minute extent. Because, the public sector is in crying need of good employees. And if they serve there, the everyday sufferings of their fellow citizens would mitigate substantially. In the long run their service, better in all respects, can allow greater contribution to the economy.

Their abandoning the country or working in the private sector for better prospects at this stage does not signify much patriotism. Hence, I tried to clarify my earlier opinions.

### Ataf Hussain

Dhanmadi, Dhaka

## Notice

Due to lack of space and our commitment to include as many topics as possible we have reluctantly decided to end the two debates "Great Army" and "English Medium students in trouble" though both have drawn a lot of attention.

To accommodate the remaining letters, the final instalment of these two debates will be published on 20<sup>th</sup> September.

Thanks to the readers for making the debate so lively.

-- Editor

## Attack on Iraq and the American way of life

I am very much disturbed by some of your letters published on September 13. I would like to protest those through your column. Yamin Zakaria from UK pointed out that Bush and Blair are circulating blatant lies to justify the attack on Iraq and Farhan Qudus of Dhaka concluded that any one who supports USA is a victim of media overexposure!

Sir, Just spitting at the USA and its allies won't really change anything. Please open your eyes and look at the Muslim world, where's the peace? The simple fact of the matter is there are people in this world who are jealous of American freedom and power and this makes their heads go crazy and do heinous things. A very small percentage of people in Muslim world gave us all a bad name. They let the peaceful religion Islam down.

But the fact is when you start hating anyone/anything you only hurt yourself. Don't hate-- work together to make things better. You can't fix the world by hating America. Change comes from individual effort and accomplishment. No matter what god you worship or what is your religion, it's all the same in the end. There is only one way-out. That is love, respect, trust, and honour.

Don't jump on a conclusion on the basis of your wildest daydream. I have been in the United States for long 12 years. I have seen the American way of life. I can tell you from my experience, it doesn't matter whether you are white, black, red, or in between the Americans can live and let live, they share and get along, and most importantly they respect every individual. God bless America.

### An Immigrant

Portland, Oregon, USA

We feel outraged and condemn President Bush's plan to attack Iraq. Bush is also trying to persuade China, Russia and France that action against Iraq is urgently needed. This is absolutely ridiculous!

We feel sorry for Tony Blair who is on hands and knees to please the President of the USA. Once upon a time there was this saying, "The sun never sets in the British Empire". Now the British Empire has shrunk and it is pathetic to see that the PM of this once mighty empire has nothing else to do but to adhere to every action of the US President.

But everyone should remember that injustice never pays and everything is perishable and also that God is watching us and the wrongdoers will never get away with their misdeeds.

### Nur Jahan

Chittagong

Without caring about the UN mandate and world opinion, USA and UK are up against Iraq. We strongly criticise America's aggressive manner and condemn UK's 'yes man' attitude.

America in the name of eradicating world terrorism has already attacked Afghanistan and now its Iraq's turn. But it turns a blind eye to when Israel violates human rights, kill innocent people in Palestine.

Forgetting all the differences the Muslim world should unite and resist the aggression of the USA.

### Rashidul Ghani, Dhaka

Dhaka

I am writing with reference to Bottom Line: "US makes its case against Baghdad at the UN," by Harun ur Rashid (September 16).

With US President George W. Bush has made his case against Saddam Hussein's attempts to acquire weapons of mass destruction, the United Nations should take a look at what a top Iraqi scientist is saying about the threat the Iraqi regime poses to America.

Dr. Khidir Hamza, Iraq's top nuclear physicist and director of Iraqi nuclear weapons program before his defection in 1995, has made this point clear. In an article published in The Los Angeles Times after the September 11, he wrote: "Long before Osama bin Laden got to be No. 1 on the FBI's most wanted list, Saddam Hussein was employing top scientists and developing not only his much-talked-about nuclear program but biological and chemical weapons as well. I know because I spent two decades as a senior official in Iraq's Atomic Energy Commission...."

"Iraq has the capability to produce biological agents, including anthrax - not just raw anthrax, which almost anybody can prepare, but in a powder that is effective as a terrorist tool."

"Iraq's germ-warfare program was perfected during its war with Iran in the 1980s. Little known outside scientific circles is the fact that Hussein even experimented on humans, starting around 19