

Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

"10 Geneva Camp refugees get voting rights"

The news about the verdict of the High Court regarding voting rights of the 10 Geneva Camp residents was published in your esteemed daily on May 6.

I understand that in Bangladesh only those people are refugees who have come from Myanmar and have been staying in Bangladesh with their "refugee status" As far as the residents of Geneva Camp are concerned, they have not come from any other country not even Pakistan. 8 of the 10 inmates of the Geneva Camp, who got the verdict of High Court, were born in Bangladesh and never migrated to any other country.

Geographically, if the Geneva Camp is within the constitutional territory of Bangladesh, then how come a person is treated as a "refugee" after being born in Bangladesh? What about all those Bengali people, who have been residing in this camp with their family members? It appears that like the government officials, some media people have also no knowledge and understanding about the status of refugee under the Geneva Convention of 1951 and they have not studied well the Tripartite Agreement that was signed between India, Pakistan and Bangladesh on 9 April 1974.

Ahmed Ilias  
Mohammedpur, Dhaka

"Insulin trouble for diabetic patients"

I am an insulin dependent diabetic patient. I have been on insulin for the past seven years. On May 12, I read with frustration the news-report "Insulin trouble for diabetic patients". But there is more to it than meets the eye.

BIRDEM in more ways than one is slowly and surely turning into just another "hospital" in town. Its services have seriously deteriorated over the years. Along with the current problem of marketing of insulin and deterioration of its related services, the management of BIRDEM itself is to blame more than any one else. It has unduly expanded without proper planning and without any careful assessment of its management capabilities. Its very basic services related to pathological tests have begun to be questioned just like services provided by the so-called diagnostic centres which have established themselves as sheer money-making enterprises.

The sale and import of insulin is no different. In the beginning Diabetic Association was the sole importer of insulin. The story goes that following the interference by a vested quarter within the hospital the import of the insulin has been allowed by other private parties. I request The Daily Star to do an investigative reporting on the issue and do a great service to millions of diabetic patients including the mass.

Shamsher Chowdhury  
Dhaka

DESA's misleading public notice

Secretary, DESA published a special notice in most of the daily newspapers recently requesting the general public to regularise their illegal electric lines and to refrain from meter bye-pass, tampering etc. He also notified that the DESA's power system (distribution lines/substations/cable lines etc) were constructed at Postogola, Shyampur, Fatullah, Shiddirganj, Narayanganj etc taking into account of approved/sanctioned load of the consumers. None can believe that a system is developed or constructed ever on the basis of sanctioned load. Once a system comes into existence and then only

Vision for a strong South Asian Union



It appears from the press reports that the olive branch held out by the Indian Prime Minister has been welcomed by the Pakistan administration. The world leaders also greeted the peace initiative as a significant development in the Indo-Pak relations. However, is it really possible to establish sustainable peace, security, and development in the South Asian region? In the greater interest of the people of this region, the answer has to be positive.

At the first place, Pakistan and India need to accept the stark fact that the Kashmir issue can't be solved through military force for the simple reason that both the contending parties are capable of destroying each other through their respective nuclear warheads. Innumerable talks had also failed in the past and there is no reason to believe that there would be a sudden thaw in the coming days, for neither Pakistan nor India are expected to convince each other about their specific stands. The only alternative is to maintain a status quo, be happy with the present line of control, and not to disturb each other's position by any means.

Secondly, the Indo-Pak rapprochement by itself cannot bring peace in the region. India, being the largest part of the Sub-continent and the biggest country in South Asia, has a great responsibility towards its smaller neighbours like Bangladesh or Nepal and should be reasonably considerate in dealing with them. If there is a sense of purpose, issues like border disputes, migration, trade matters and so on could easily be solved through normal dialogues.

Thirdly, inter-religious hatred has to be rooted out once and for all and all the countries of the Subcontinent have to play a positive and decisive role in this respect.

Fourth, no-war pacts among the countries of the South Asia including, of course, nuclear powered India and Pakistan can go a long way in ensuring peace, stability, and confidence-building in the region. If India or Pakistan fails to play a positive role in this respect, there is every possibility that the smaller countries would try to find their security outside the region and that would not be a good omen for the regional peace and security.

Mr. Hafeejul Alam, Dhaka

the sanction of load can be considered for approval.

DESA may soul search to avoid their such numerous irregular future advertisements and may clarify the present one  
Emdad Ul Haq  
Baily Road, Dhaka

"Apartment Committee"

In response to Mary Gomes' letter (May 11), I would like to add that I am in charge of the committee which manages our building of 15 apartments, and out these 15 apartments, three are rented. And I would like to assure Ms Gomes that the tenants are treated with equal respect just as the owners are.

I would suggest that she requests her landlord to authorise her to act on his/her behalf in the Apartment Committee, which is only fair as she is living in the apartment and are aware of the situation and paying for the services too. I don't think any law is required to handle such minor issues, as the only solution is cooperation among with apartment residents. And another idea would be to take active part in the committee,

instead of just paying for the services and expecting things to be done automatically.

Joey  
Gulshan, Dhaka

Everything is Dhaka-centric!

Dhaka and its environs is a conglomeration of garments factories, numerous private universities, government universities, mushrooming English medium schools, mushrooming hospitals and clinics, not to speak of a massive (non-performing) government and bureaucracy and all the pressure on a poor infrastructure that all these entails. Dhaka has become unliveable from many points of view. That there is a country outside Dhaka seems to have escaped the attention of those who run the affairs of state. This nation is being suffocated by a Dhaka-centric mentality that has been nothing if not a failure.

The Asian University for Women is another case in point. It was to be established in Bogra but now we hear that it is to be moved to Gazipur (practically a suburb of Dhaka) because Bogra doesn't

have a good enough airport! Does Cambridge have an airport? Or Oxford? How have the universities there been functioning without airports? This university would have been a boost to North Bengal and could have had a real impact on life there. What has Dhaka/Gazipur got to offer it!

YK  
Dhaka

Cantonment restriction

I am seriously amazed to see the dearth of letters on restriction of civilian traffic through Cantonment. Letters on Iraq War still continue to occupy a significant portion of the Letters Page, but what about this very important local issue?

The army has recently introduced a new timing without bothering a bit whether the timing is convenient for the citizen or not. Dhaka traffic is already a mess and this restriction has deteriorated the situation much further.

Why can't we use the Cantonment Roads at all times? What are the armies' arguments against the general people using their thoroughfare? Wouldn't it have been more democratic if they made public why they have introduced this new timing? Couldn't we except a little courtesy from the army who are being paid by the general people's money?

Kajol  
Dhaka

"Kashmir crisis"

This is in response to Mr Jamil Ahmed (May 10). Pakistan may have an "official policy" regarding the self-determination of Kashmiris. East Germany also had an "official position" opposing the Apartheid Regime of South Africa. However, that does not make the Hoeneker administration any more likeable than the Afrikaner regime. Pakistani sponsored organisations comprising of Afghans and non-Kashmiri elements are responsible for terrorising the Kashmiri populace. They are responsible for murdering Kashmiri leaders who wanted peaceful solutions. They are also responsible for mass murders of Kashmiri Pundit populace. Last but not the least, these organisations are responsible for terrorist attacks on the Indian Parliament premises as well.

By sponsoring such organisations, Pakistan has proved itself to be an accomplice of terrorism. Such "allies" would do little to help the Kashmiri native populace who are trying their level best to achieve self-determination, being up against the oppression of the Indian paramilitary.

Yahya, USA

UN violation of UN resolution

I congratulate Mr. Esrajul Alam for his frank and bold 'Opinion' (May 5) that the "US has persistently violated the principles" of UN Charter. I do not need to go through the whole tragedy in Iraq to reaffirm the claim that the US with its accomplices have staged a gruesome murderous theatre of war in total violation of established norm and arrogant disregard of international law and UN resolution which is indeed a crime against humanity. The US has failed to keep up the values by not adhering to UN Charter-- which says, "a member country cannot attack any country except for self-defence".

Where is the relevance now of all those conventions (Geneva Convention, Genocide Convention etc.) they all talk about? The US' wanton aggression and massacre of lives and properties, constitute as war crimes. Since "the invading

forces have not only violated the charter of UN but also have committed crimes against humanity in Iraq in violation of all laws. The international community has the moral obligation that the persons responsible should be brought to justice. If the Nazis could face trial even after so many years, these criminals of modern century should not be left out.

AF Rahman  
Dhaka

War effect

When President George Bush attacked Iraq there were demonstrations and protests against it all round the world including the US as well. But President Bush is unperturbed by the protests from within the country and outside.

Now I see no hope. It is Iraq today. Tomorrow it could be us. I am troubled and distracted. As a teacher it is my duty to explain the children the meaning of democracy, liberty, justice. But does these words hold any meaning these words these days? We don't allow our children to fight in schools. But will it enter the minds of the young energetic children who are tomorrow's future when they see the horrible pictures of war in TV and newspapers everyday?

Geetha Nathan  
Dhaka

"Not insulted enough, we need more"

Thanks to Mr Yahya for his letter of 7th May.

Mr Yahya wrote "Israel was formed under the charter of the UN in 1948. Nothing illegal or imperial about that". But he makes no mention of any massacres that was carried out during the same period by Israeli extremist groups like Irgun Zvei Leumi, Lehi or the Haganah. Scores of Palestinian villagers were wiped out and Israel began occupying more land than was proposed by the UN. Still it's not enough for Israel.

Secondly, the case of British Nationalist Party (BNP) is very different from the oppressed Palestinians. BNP believes that because of the colour of their skin and their nationality, they are somehow superior to others. When do you think Palestinian people ever said something like that? As for BNP adopting suicide bombing, before you confirm it right or wrong, you need to understand the reason behind it. No immigrant is killing BNP's women or children, taking their land by force. Whatever the immigrants get, they get it with the permission of British government and if any illegal immigrants are found, they are deported immediately.

A Palestinian suicide bomber may not be the perfect example of a martyr, but fighting to save your homeland NEVER was and NEVER will be a crime; no matter how many Sharon and Bush get elected!

I certainly believe that Arabs and Muslims worldwide should do more than just beg for "peace plans".

Finally, in his letter, Mr Yahya made the Mid-East issue as my personal rather than keeping the case in its context. I forgive him. However, by comparing a racist organisation like BNP with the suffering of Palestinians -while attempting to defend Israel and USA- Mr Yahya has made a very serious error of judgement.

Old Miah  
Azadham, UK

India-Bangladesh friendship

I am an Indian, and in 1971 as a child of 10 years I had read the atrocities being committed in East Pakistan. We Indians were deeply pained at the sufferings of Banglades and hoped and prayed

old ancient treasures of "a land which is the very cradle of civilisation."

PM Blair's priority "our troops will stay in Iraq not a day longer than they have to is a pious wish. Mr. Blair subsequently must have unhappily discovered that his wish will have no impact in the decision-making machinery across the Atlantic.

No sane person will support Saddam's evil deeds. UK's actions are commendable. But again comparing one evil act with another will not be tenable to sane minds.

Now, some readers might not have found (and others might have) balance and objectivity in reporting by *The Daily Star*. This is one issue. But it is hardly consequential to the fate of the Iraqis.

Atiq R Afzal  
Dhaka

\*\*\*

To say that the UK's "military engagement" has been to promote "people's power" is really insulting to our intelligence. Most people are more than aware that the complex mix of factors behind the US-UK attack on Iraq includes the need to secure Iraqi oil resources for the energy hungry West and establish a strategic presence in the Middle East. Establishing democracy in Iraq, if it happens at all, will be, at best, a happy side effect of this process! The less positive ones, such as civilian deaths, unrestrained looting and the loss of priceless heritage items are not addressed in any great detail in Mr Carter's letter. And the facile comment that "what is done is done" is hardly much consolation for those who have been on the receiving end of what has been done by the great liberators!

That Saddam did not have the people on his side, as Mr Carter asserts is hardly news to any of us. For years, however, and in the process of building up his arsenal (including the much vaunted, and yet to be found "weapons of mass destruction"), he had the support of the very countries which have now launched this attack on him. Saddam was indeed a monster, but the role of Dr Frankenstein was taken by countries like the US and the UK. They can hardly claim to have the moral high ground now.

For whom the bell tolls?



Outbreak of cholera in Basra is no good news, but comes as no surprise. Before 1991, Iraqi water (drinking water) and sewage disposal (sanitation) systems were one of the best in that region using modern technology. But the systems were highly dependent on technology, thus vulnerable to lack of essential materials and supplies as well as good maintenance, both of which became extremely hard due to the strict embargo and denial of equipment and materials during the sanctions regime since 1990. It must be noted that during the Gulf War 1991, much of the civilian infrastructure was destroyed by bombing though these were not military targets as such. This war of 2003 destroyed even more of what was painfully reconstructed in spite of the prevailing sanctions.

Health status of the people of Iraq under the then regime had indeed been one of the best if not the best in the Middle East region. Communicable diseases were under control and cholera was eliminated. But the war and the long period of strict sanctions effectively destroyed and deferred the reconstruction and restoration of the Iraqi public health systems. And this war now has further damaged whatever was left and what repair was done.

Neither the "vacation of occupation of Kuwait" nor the so-called "disarming of Iraq and destroying the alleged weapons of mass destruction" justify deliberate destruction of vital and basic civilian infrastructure in military campaign. In fact, the targeting of civil facilities and installations causing massive damage and denial of basic civilian needs amounted to breach of Geneva Conventions.

Deaths by cholera and other war borne diseases now will be unacceptable; people of Iraq have been victims of denial and deprivation for far too long. The war itself has killed, maimed, and destituted many more. There need not be even more funerals due to denial of basic human needs; the "bells must not toll" forever more.

Dr. Zakir Husain  
Dhaka

that my motherland will invade and liberate their land. I am very proud of my nation not only for leading the war in glory but also for quick withdrawal from their land. We still consider the Bangladeshis as friends.

However there are large concentrations of Bangali speaking Muslims in all major cities of India who call themselves Bangladeshis. Most of them are there to make a decent living except that some bad elements among them have taken up *Gangsterism* and anti-national activities giving everyone a bad name. One can say that you cannot blame an entire population for the sins of a few. You are correct as long as the innocent majority is willing to throw and expose the bad elements out. If the majority keeps a silence everyone suffers.

Shyam Nediyanachath  
USA

Wastage of time in Parliament

Over Tk. 2.35 crore has been wasted owing to quorum crisis in the 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> session of the 8<sup>th</sup> Jatiya Sangsad. It has been revealed by the recent research of the Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB). None of the sittings of 38 working days of parliament had begun on time due to quorum crisis. It may be noted that Tk. 15,000.00 cost per minute to keep

the parliament building operative.

The parliament is the symbol of our national pride and dignity. It is very sad that the citadel of our democracy and freedom is seemingly abdicating its sacred responsibility to the hubris of a handful of lawmakers who have taken the parliament as hostage by their sweet whims. The people often finds that leadership of parties and members of the parliament and other elected bodies sometimes forget their pledges to the common mass. Members in the cabinet or the opposition party are found indulging in mud slinging against their opponents even when they were found participating in debates in the parliament.

But the parliament is not a place for wasting time! Every moment of the parliament session must be utilised carefully. Such wastage of time in the parliament is not desirable at all. We hope our political leaders will take special care in this matter in the coming sessions.

M.H. Bari  
Khulna

Plantation on road-islands

Tree plantation has been gaining momentum everywhere in the world since people have become more concerned about the deteriorating environment. Bangladesh is not an exception to that plantation

campaign.

The national highways of Bangladesh have turned into mini-forests as the Forest Department has been doing a good job there. But not the cities and towns mostly because of the lack of space in these densely populated areas. Thus the cities and towns are being turned to concrete jungles. If the Govt. and the people understood the importance of trees in their lives, they could not build only 'Houses' in the name of 'Homes'. Homes must contain trees.

However, there are some efforts of planting trees by the sides or on the middle (i.e., the road-islands) of the roads in the cities and towns. Dhaka does not have enough space on the roadside. The meagre space is occupied by electric posts and essential footpaths. So the only space for trees is the road-islands.

Road-island tree plantation is not new in Dhaka. But the islands are mostly narrower. However, there is a good sign that some road islands are being broadened in Moghbazar, Kakrail and Fakirerupal areas to contain the lean and thin *Debdaru* plants. This may be followed for the rest of the roads of the city so that no road-island is less than two feet wide and not devoid of soil. If this conversion is completed before the monsoon, more saplings may be planted this year.

MAS Molla  
Dhaka

\*\*\*

I wish to thank Mr. Harun-ur-Rashid and Mr. Muslehuddin Ahmad for a deserving and more comprehensive treatment of HE David Carter's letter. Yet I feel some points of Mr. Carter's letter went un-entertained.

Mr Carter supported the Western media during the aggression due to the coverage 'from all perspectives'. This is just a deviation from the truth. Within the third day of aggression, the BBC reported that 'Saddam was losing control'. In fact, BBC reporting was so untrue that the Britons protested in front of the BBC office in London and the BBC was forced to offer an open apology of their *malreporting*. It was more interesting that Saddam Hussein was killed in a number of occasions followed by corresponding resurrections by virtue of mainly the Western media.

Mr Carter also referred to 'international community' who waited for long 12 years for Saddam's disarming. Can I ask, why did he refer to the history last 12 years only? What happened just a decade before that? It is the period of extended and cozy honeymoon of Saddam Hussein with the West, who deliberately armed him and utilised him against a brotherly Muslim country Iran under the smoke of Shia and Sunni conflict.

Why the UK was so over enthusiastic and prompt about UNSCRs 678, 687 and 1441 (though these resolutions did not empower any country to unleash military assault on the Iraqis) and not others, for example, those regarding Palestine.

M.U. Chowdhury  
Dhaka

"A diplomat's letter"



This has reference to His Excellency David Carter's letter (May 7). Mr Carter categorically blamed *The Daily Star* for not maintaining the 'balance' and 'objectivity' while publishing headlines, editorials and commentaries 'over the past few weeks of the Iraq conflict'. As a reader of *The Daily Star*, I reject his acquisition and advice.

Mr Carter, you are representing a government of Tony Blair who did not give the slightest weight to or did not show the slightest respect for the votes he received, and was unmoved by the largest public demonstration taking place in England in the last 30 years. Mr Blair did not even mind going to the British Parliament with a fabricated dossier written by a student 10 years ago and present that as 'damning evidence collected by the British Secret Service'!

The US foreign policy that your government is promoting, provoked the British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw, into declaring that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, 'a war can have a moral justification', thus making him lose all credibility. You have made people around the globe united to fight for an idea even though that idea is opposed to the US and to the UK.

Sirajul Islam  
Shyamoli, Dhaka

\*\*\*

Is *The Daily Star* guilty of not maintaining balance and objectivity as HE David Carter alleges? The record does not justify such a comment.

UK did not initiate any conflict. It simply tagged behind the policy of those who tried to locate Bin Laden for the 9/11 tragedy, failed to find him; after attacking Afghanistan on October 7 2001 invented an imaginary enemy to pursue their secret objective; identified Saddam as "possessor of WMD, a friend of Al-Qaeda", and a potential threat in attacking the mainland; diverted the attention of Americans by ingenious coercion of the media; coined the word coalition; ignored the caution voiced by two former Presidents; set the scene to invade: kill, maim and destroy resulting in irreparable damages including plunder of centuries