

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.

The worst kind of inspiration

There seems to be a fundamental lack of understanding about one very simple fact: our life here on earth is transient and we pass on to something we don't know and don't understand. Over the millennia, many schools of theological thought have sprung up to help us pass through this very important phase of acceptance and the courage of facing up to death and our passing on from this world. This has manifested itself into the various sects and sub-groups in the various religions. What I think that people would definitely not accept is the fact that someone else has the authority to teach him or her which religious following is valid or invalid. It is for each person to judge as influenced by factors that come very close to him or her. It is thus very amusing to hear that people want to divide the world according to religion.

They want to rule the world according to their own interpretation of religion. In the US, there is a resurgence of evangelical Christianity. In the Middle Eastern countries, and in many other countries with a significant Muslim population, there is an apparent resurgence of religious parties who advocate strict adherence to respective religious norms. In Israel the right-wing religious leaders hold considerable political influence. What all these people fail to understand is that religion was not meant for our welfare over others in this world, nor is it meant for some people and not for others. This makes the entire war on terror and the terrorism itself a very sick joke on ordinary people all over the world. The purpose of all religions is more or less the same: how to live your life as a better person and how to die in peace with yourself.

Is it too much to ask for all those religious leaders out there who are intolerant and religiously jingoistic to shut up? Their fiery speeches and calls to action against other fellow human beings is a one-way ticket to hell and the worst kind of inspiration to their flock.

Ahsan
Dhaka



Want to be a better person than you are now? In a world where the majority of people are not, there is an apparent resurgence of religious parties who advocate strict adherence to respective religious norms. In Israel the right-wing religious leaders hold considerable political influence. What all these people fail to understand is that religion was not meant for our welfare over others in this world, nor is it meant for some people and not for others. This makes the entire war on terror and the terrorism itself a very sick joke on ordinary people all over the world. The purpose of all religions is more or less the same: how to live your life as a better person and how to die in peace with yourself.

When warm hand shakes belies

The Secretary Generals of two major political parties shook their hands in public in a seminar jointly organised by *The Daily Star*, Prothom Alo and CPD the other day. They denounced the outlaws and pledged to get rid of the *mastaans* from their respective parties. A really reassuring news it could be, had it not been marred by the killing of an Awami League MP at Natore just two days later. Inter-party and intra-party rivalries have pushed our nation to an almost anarchic situation. Can't we go out of this quagmire? Of course, we can if there is just a will to do so.

First, mere shaking hands will lead us to nowhere, unless it is translated into a culture of political tolerance and a sincere concern for the socio-economic uplift of the common man.

Secondly, as we know, crimes and corruption are totally intertwined, as much as one cannot thrive without the other. Therefore, steps have to be taken to contain corruption, particularly those at the top level. It is in this direction that an independent anti-corruption body is a must to contain unbridled corruption and rampant "system loss" in every sectors of the establishment.

Third, the need of the hour is good governance. Again, good governance can only be established with a real democratic set-up that ensures structural checks and balance between the executive, the judiciary, and the parliament. The independence of judiciary has to be established in six months time, not in six years. Our parliament members have to be given constitutional rights to express freely the people's sentiments, their weal and woes, instead of mere party feelings.

Finally, in order to ensure justice and fair play and to guarantee individual rights against any authoritarianism and unlawful stance of the establishment, the constitutional provision of appointing an Ombudsman needs to be implemented without further delay. It is the will which matters, not the public speech or the public handshakes.

Hafeejul Alam
Dhaka

Anti-American double standards

My attention has been drawn to the letter "Anti-American double standards" (May 24). In the said letter the writer criticised that anti-American people are maintaining double standard regarding the Iraq policy. While levelling the charge of double standard, the writer conveniently forgot the double standard of his favourite Uncle Sam. The allegation of Bush against Iraq were:

- 1. It defies the UN resolution.
- 2. It possesses Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD).
- 3. Iraq is a threat to USA.

Now let us turn our attention to USA's favourite blue-eyed boy Israel.

Israel defied UN resolution many times. Israel possesses WMD and the USA has not done anything so far to rectify Israel. These facts clearly show that it is USA itself who is maintaining double standard.

Md Asadul Hannan
Mirpur, Dhaka

In defence of Israel

This is a response to Mr. Yahya's recent letters (June 5 & 6) regarding Arab-Israel conflict.

First, Mr. Yahya mistakenly equates the Arab opposition to Israel to that of anti-Semitism. Therefore, he implies that Arab resistance to Israel is an act of Anti-Semitism. True that Anti-Semitism was the de facto contributing factor that gave birth of the State of Israel, but the foundation of Israel lies on Zionism, a racist doctrine that explicitly makes Israel a Jewish State.

In this context, it is necessary to distinguish between Zionism and Anti-Semitism. For, the former is a political ideology of nationalism, while the latter embodies a hostility towards anything related to the Jews as a people, and until the turn of this century, Zionism was non-existent, as much as, more than half of the Jewish population on earth do not subscribe to Zionism; therefore, do not migrate to Israel.

Second, Mr. Yahya assumes that Arabs, or for that matter, any country would remain silent, when an external imperial power would grab their homeland and evict the natives, since the creation of Israel was born under the Balfour Administration and the British Mandate assumes a supremacy of its right over her colonies, for the Arabs, resistance to Israel became a nationalist struggle.

Third, regarding the state of misery of the Palestinian people as

refugee, the mistake that Mr. Yahya makes, is his intention to put the blame on the Arabs states. When Mr. Yahya points Arab States' decision not to grant citizenship to the Palestinian refugees, what he reiterates, is Israeli argument, as like the war hawks in Tel Aviv, he assumes that eviction of Palestinians was a natural right for Israel, and Arabs should bear the responsibility to settle down the refugees in their homeland!

Lastly, in his 6 June letter, as Mr. Yahya begins with the statement that blaming Israel is a characteristics of the Arabs, as the Arabs lack introspection. I would like to ask a counter question: similar to the Arabs, inversely, why he blames everything on the Arabs, while ignores any responsibility of Israel?

Shibly Azaad
Columbia University, USA

In his letter "Arabs and Israel" Mr. Yahya tried to blame the Arab leaders for the miseries of the Palestinian people.

No one deny that the leaders of most Arab countries are despots and don't represent their own people. But one cannot understand how these Arab leaders are responsible for the miseries of the Palestinians.

Problem of the Palestinians started with the illegal creation of Israel. Supporters of Israel cite the UN mandate to justify its creation. But the UN mandate was illegal and immoral in deciding the future of Palestine without consulting the Palestinians first. 1948 War, as claimed by Mr. Yahya, was not started by the Arabs. It was started by Israel which resulted in the Palestinian refugee problem. In 1953 Israel joined Anglo-French invasion of Suez Canal. 1967 War was

started by Israel using absurd logic of "pre-emptive strike". 1973 War was started by Egypt and Syria to recover their lands they lost to Israel in 1967 War.

Israel is the only country in the world that has not submitted the boundaries of its state to the United Nations. The two blue lines on the flag of Israel represent Nile and Euphrates rivers. What do we make out of this? No country broke or disregarded UN resolutions and Geneva Conventions as Israel has done.

Mr. Yahya's assertion that no Arab country has given legal status to Palestinians refugees holds no merit. The Palestinians are waiting to go home which is their basic birthright acknowledged by international law.

Solution of Palestinian problem is very simply outlined by Saudi Peace Plan. That is the return of occupied Palestinian territories by Israel in return for the recognition of Israel by Arab countries. It is simple as that. Only Israel holds the key for peace in Middle East.

Irfan Ahmed
Dallas, Tx, USA

USA, Israel and international terrorism

Perhaps many Americans and Europeans know it well that Washington DC itself is the root cause of international terrorism. The abuse of power in a global level, mammoth military and economic aid to Israel is probably the reason why 9/11 incident took place.

In retaliation, USA attacked and occupied Afghanistan and Iraq, killed thousands of men, women and children. Today the Americans are being ostracised and hated by the people all over the world for their atrocities.

It is time that US opened it eyes, rectified itself herself, gave up its arrogance and war mongering attitude and worked for peace, freedom, human rights and democracy for which it has been preaching since end of the World War II.

OH Kabir
Wari, Dhaka

Yet another nose dive of Biman's Customer Service

I went to purchase a domestic air-ticket at the Head Office of Biman this afternoon and I came back as a very much disgusted and disappointed customer. I came to find out personally one of the many reasons why Biman is "crash-landing" in the aviation sector. Would you believe that I had to wait for almost an hour to make a payment for one ticket because the sales counter had run out of card payment slips? What kind of a sales service is the so-called national airline giving to its customers? Aren't they supposed to have all the necessary things by their side when they open their counter to sell tickets? On top of that I didn't hear a single word of apology for wasting my time. Is courtesy and politeness also "jettisoning" from the "fuselage"? Or does it require an extra charge?

My request to the administration of Biman: please wake up and try to give ('cause we all know how competent you people can be) the customers the worth of their money, if not what they really deserve.

Fuad Bin Rahman
On e-mail

The new-jungle order!

Today we are witnessing people who claim to be "good" (as opposed to evil) and "civilised" are in fact busy taking their opportunity to make whatever they can out of Iraq. France, Russia, Germany and many more have simply rolled-over and joined the crowd to make the best

they can. Iraq has been turned into a free gold mine; people can just walk in and take as much as they want.

On a completely different case, we observe that, wild animals in the jungle follow certain rules about who they attack, who they consider as friends and who they should stay well clear of. Fox or hyenas for example, will never dare to attack a tiger or lion. But if a tiger gets killed by something else, then fox, hyenas and many other weaker species will join to eat the unfortunate dead one; even if it used to be a lot stronger animal while it was alive. Big, small, strong and weak; all the animals get together and make the best use of the opportunity they have. Every time I see some reports about this bombed and injured Iraq, it reminds me of a dead animal that is lying on the ground and all the flies, worms, ants and everything else busy eating it from inside out.

It is shocking to see how these two completely different phenomenon- one happening in the jungle and the other in our so-called civilised society- appear to be the exact mirror image of each other!

Azad Miah
Oldham, UK

Lebensraum of USA

Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) were a mere pretext ("bureaucratic excuse") according to the Deputy Defence Secretary Paul Wolfowitz. Likewise Iraq would be handed over to the Iraqis after the removal of Saddam's regime, at the time they claimed "not even a day more", but Iraq remains under US control for the foreseeable future. She is currently shaping Iraq in her desired image including the formation of a new constitution. We were also told the war was not about oil, but guess who is in charge of it! Who is "awarding" the lucrative contracts to the US Multinationals (Bechtel, Halliburton etc whose board members are filled with the senior Republican party figures like Dick Cheney) in exchange for Iraqi oil? More importantly at what price and who determines that price? The "liberated" Iraqis or the liberators?

As the real ("Strategic") objectives of the US unfolds in front of our very eyes, many of think tanks are scolding Bush for not emphasising on the "strategic" objective as oppose to publicly stated objective. Which translates to, why did he continue to emphasise on the lie? So for the believers of US, they can now contemplate on the confessed "strategic" objective of this war, instead of generating the next spin about the status of WMD.

The US has Saudi, Kuwait, Qatar, UAE and now Iraq under its belt. That leaves Iran the other major oil producer in OPEC in the region to be brought under control and hence the sabre-rattling against her. What the Nazis used to call "Lebensraum", they call it "exporting" democracy and "free" market. The Nazis had concentration camp they have Guantanamo-bay. The Nazis had the SS they have the FBI, who can use the Patriotic act to execute arbitrary arrest and imprisonment without access to legal representatives. The Nazis persecuted the Jews they persecute anyone opposing the American dream.

Yamin Zakaria
UK, London

Remittance flow

'Remittance flow clocks new record' by Monjur Mahmud narrated Bangladesh's reserve being 190 billion which I believe is a gross mistake. Wouldn't it be 1.8-2 billion or 1900 million? Can you clarify please?

Shah Zulfikar
Plano, Texas, USA

Under the banner of secularism

This is in reference to Ron Chepesiuk's article "As the axis of evil turns, Christian fundamentalists are at the gate" (DS, May 29) describing the overwhelming influ-

ence of fundamentalist Christians on the Bush administration. It is interesting to note how we 'secular' Bangladeshis feel so embarrassed to even talk about our religion while White House conducts regular Bible-study meetings. In fact I found the article very informative and useful for us because we often tend to forget that secularism does not and should not mean Islam-bashing.

It is amazing to know that in the US if someone wants to meet the President desperately but "can't hook up with Bush or member of his inner circle, a meeting with Pat

enlightening write-ups in *The Daily Star*.
Shukla Mirza
Doha, Qatar

Drug business

Of all criminal activities that take place in our country, drug business is one of the most serious of them all.

Recently, a Sub Inspector of Police of Mirpur Thana had been killed when he tried to nab the culprits engaged in this notorious run. It induces us to believe that the guild of these drug dealers is so strong

remember or have not noticed any initiative taken to nab the master-minds or keep an eye on them.

The rapid spreading of drug addiction in our society is a red signal to our government that if not checked in right time, it can ruin an entire generation.

Sulav Barua
Middlesex University, London, UK

"South Asian alliance"

In reference to Mr. K. Wasimuddin's letter (June 6) on "South Asian Alliance", I like to add few things. What Mr. Wasim felt today for a greater unity between the south Asian nations, he already mentioned President Zia thought of this long ago.

SAARC was born in 1986. But after almost 20 years of existence, SAARC could not even unite the nations on some common ground. As Mr. Wasim dreamt of SAARC currency, I cannot dream SAARC as ASEAN in the next 20 years. This is because, we have a big country like India which itself is trying for a permanent post in the UNSC. EEC, the former name of EU, could succeed only because they were all developed nations, and historically almost all the initial members had colonies overseas. Therefore, economic benefits, easy market access, and similar nature of socio-cultural situation made it easier for EEC to grow into the present day EU. The similar thing happened with the case of ASEAN.

In contrast regarding SAARC, India is not interested to think anything within the scope of SAARC. Though Bangladesh proposed a free trade agreement within SAARC, India is pressuring its neighbours for free trade with itself only. Already Sri Lanka, Maldives and Nepal signed free trade agreement with India, and after Mr. Saifur Rahman's latest visit to India, Bangladesh is going to put-up a similar agreement with India.

Moreover, it is better to indicate that SAARC as a whole shall not survive since except India all other nations are small and do not have chances to trade directly. All of their trades should pass through India a third country if the trading nations want to keep the cost low, and India meticulously obstruct all those trades between the nations if it is not made with "India only."

Most damaging or colossal thing occurred when India and Pakistan went on blasting their nuclear arsenals few years back. Therefore, despite all efforts, no meeting of SAARC head of states could held between 1996 2000.

Another shortcoming of the SAARC is that, its constitution mentioned that two countries could not raise bilateral issues to this platform. That is why, the contending states are less interested to participate in the SAARC meetings to discuss other matters keeping their burning issues in the cold basket. Typically, Indian leaders have long standing disliking of Pakistani leaders and vice versa. This contemplated with the divisions over religions, and long standing bilateral issues between the countries. Thus narrowing the chances for a successful SAARC.

Sajjad Waheed
Baridhara, Dhaka

Toss criminals out of politics

The General Secretaries of the two largest political parties, ruling BNP and opposition AL recently expressed their willingness to discard criminals in the closing session of the National Policy Review Forum. They got huge applause for this. We get a chance to become hopeful about our politics which is continuously creating dependence among common people.

To put an end in the process of criminalisation of politics these two parties need to take some bold steps-

- 1. They can make a list of criminals countrywide and then expel them.
- 2. A mutual understanding between them is a must, that none of the parties would give any room to criminals who was expelled from another.
- 3. Make it sure that none of the top leaders would patronage criminals.
- 4. Any minister or MP who have a link with criminals or a godfather image would also be subject to expel.
- 5. Retired bureaucrats and army officers would not be allowed to join a political party unless they spent five years of retirement.
- 6. After taking oath every govt. withdraw thousands of cases lodged by the previous govt. which are said to be politically motivated. But by misusing this chance many criminals come out of the bars. This practice should be stopped.

Jabed Sufian
On e-mail



Iraqis: Free but watched!

is playing the cat and who is playing the mouse?

Sadly yet surely, the much prized, much publicised transparency and accountability of western liberal democracies are coming under threat - strangely again under the banner of war on terror.

Dr. Zakir Husain
Dhaka

Robertson or the Reverends Jerry Falwell, Franklin Graham or Charles Stanley is the next best move."

It is true that in the wake of Gulf War II proselytizing activities have increased. And now in the Middle East we can see incessant Christian sermons by American preachers on TV (e.g. CNBC) on Sundays just like Canada and USA. Whereas before, even Christian Dior's advertisement of perfume used to consist of only the word "Dior" to respect cultural sensitivity of the Arabs.

Anyway, I want to take this opportunity to thank Professor Ron Chepesiuk for his well-written piece and would like to see more of his

and influential that even the law enforcing authorities couldn't dare to shackle them up. Our political history of last decade suggests that behind every criminal activity, political backing plays a huge role and therefore the godfathers always remains untouched.

A survey, as reported in newspapers, arrests our attention that more than 50% of illegal earnings by notorious mastans are the source of drug dealings. All big blacklisted names on terrorist chart of our country are overtly or covertly engaged in drug trade. Despite this being an open secret, I cannot



Controversial character!

SQ Chowdhury, OIC and us

The OIC was formed after the 1967 war. The purpose of this Saudi funded organisation is to get back Jerusalem from Israel and claim it as the Palestinian capital.

Noble aims, one would think. However, when the great grandfather of King Abdullah (Jordan) decided to annex the West Bank (part of the territory for the proposed Palestinian state) and Jerusalem, the Arabs did not utter any protests. Jerusalem was supposed to be a city run by the UN, so as to mollify all three faiths.

Where was this pious outrage then? When Palestinians live under occupation of brutal Arab regimes, we can afford to ignore them. It is only when Israel does it then it becomes a crime!

How fitting it is then, that we have nominated an alleged war criminal as chairman of this organisation!

Yahya
USA

It is the duty, responsibility and obligation of the government to choose an eminent and internationally reputed person for any high and prestigious post of any international or world organisation. But that is not the case with Bangladesh. I am very sorry to learn that the government has nominated a controversial figure like Salauddin Quader Chowdhury for the post of Secretary General of the Organization of Islamic Countries. For three reasons I oppose his nomination.

Firstly he opposed our War of Liberation and there are allegations that he committed war crimes in 1971. And recently he even made objectionable remarks regarding Bangla culture, Shaheed Dibash and Bangalee women.

It is easy to damage or destroy the image or reputation of a country, but is very difficult to regain it. So I earnestly request Prime Minister Khaleda Zia to nominate an eminent and internationally reputed person for this prestigious post in place of Salauddin Quader Chowdhury.

Iqbal Ahmed, Dhaka