

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 Star City quotes

I appreciate the laudable endeavours of *The Daily Star* supplement "Star City" in projecting different issues of interest for the Dhaka dwellers. I am a keen reader of the pages but feel that perhaps *The Daily Star* could be a bit more careful in quotes under "the City that was" at the top of the page. Though the information provided is intrinsically correct yet they convey a wrong impression.

For example, June 1 Star city give the impression that Ramna (a Persian word for lawn) was established in 1825, whereas the area as a recreational centre existed there long before Charles Doss's initiatives to recover the area from encroaching forests. Again June 8 Star city's "the City that was" quote implied that Dhaka was established in 1583, whereas evidences prove that Dhaka was a flourishing trading or urban centre long before that.

Being a student of Urban Design I feel that these minor details are very important to understand and assess the context under which the city evolved.

Dr. Qazi Azizul Mowla
Professor, Department of Architecture, BUET

Mayor brings light to our lives... not for long

Dhanmondi Road No.4 hasn't seen the streetlights working for more than three months now. All of the lights are out of order and after dark the whole street plunges into darkness. Only the lights coming from the nearby park and the gate light help the pedestrians to avoid open manholes and open dustbins on the pavement.

I was pleasantly surprised when all the streetlights started working a few days ago. Reason: The Mayor of Dhaka city has arrived in the area for the opening of a restaurant. Talk about a coincidence! I had never seen one of the lights (near my window) working. But suddenly they all looked so good.

Do we have to invite the Mayor every evening so that we can have the lights turned on?

Mohammad Isam
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

ADB assistance in gas sector

According to recent press reports quoting authoritative sources, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) has once again tagged assistance for gas transmission to the country's western region to substantial gas export through pipeline. Apparently this ADB condition that has been a bone of contention between the Government and ADB was reiterated by a visiting ADB mission to the State Minister for Energy and Mineral Resources recently. This is highly disturbing, coming immediately on the heel of the recent policy discussions conducted through the Centre for Policy Dialogue that concluded last week. Experts participating in the discussions expressed the view that gas export should not be the preferred government option when domestic demands for the foreseeable future could not be met from available gas reserves.

The primary justification given by the ADB Mission for including gas export in a project that involves gas transmission to the northern, western and southern parts of Bangladesh is that it would not be otherwise financially and economically viable. Apparently a larger pipeline has been considered to increase the throughput for export. We respectfully differ with the views of the ADB Mission. Indeed, the project viability is a contentious issue. It depends upon several factors, including market, capacity, technology, capital cost, and pricing. A smaller pipeline could be viable to meet only the domestic demand. The capacity could be expanded later through looping and compression if gas demand outgrows projections. The main issue that needs to be examined in this context is whether the proposed size is the economic minimum or is the optimal size taking into account economies of scale, and available technological options. The linkage between gas transportation to the west zone and gas export appears not clearly established beyond the viability issue.

Another important consideration is the changing geo-politic and economic context. Several new gas fields have been discovered in India over the past year or so, during which the west zone gas development project was being discussed with the ADB. In addition, India has been carrying out discussions with Iran to import gas. There are suggestions that the proposed Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) pipeline that is being promoted by ADB for transporting Central Asian gas to South Asia will meet the requirements that were to be imported to India from

Bangladesh. India also is discussing the possibility of importing gas from Myanmar through Bangladesh. All this raises the possibility that there may not be adequate demand for Bangladesh gas in India, and the proposed export-oriented gas pipeline would not utilise its full potential.

Imran Nazir
Motijheel, Dhaka

Iraq war far from over

President Bush declared the war finished on May 1. In the aftermath of this declaration, 44 Americans have died, averaging just over one death per day. Despite the administration's propaganda, this war is far from over, although the ground offensive is complete. The United States troops are exhausted. A substantial number of these forces are reservists. They want to come home to reunite with their loved ones. However, it appears this nation is on the cusp of a quagmire which will last ten years. Former Army secretary Thomas White recently corroborated this obvious fact. Rumsfeld fired White for his veracity. Since the Bush Administration has alienated our European allies, the United States will be forced to retain alone no fewer than 150,000 troops to deal with the civil anarchy which has already erupted throughout Iraq. This debacle will cost the United States \$300 Billion. It is inconceivable how this nation let itself get into this situation. Congress should have stopped this administration from its imperialistic venture. The United States has just stepped in an all-enveloping pit. If Vietnam was considered messy, this war will pale in comparison to what Bush has apparently gotten us into.

Earl Beal
Keane Lane, USA

Wake up to reality

Following K. Wasimuddin's comments ("South Asian alliance", June 16) and for those who think likewise, I would just say that they all live in fool's paradise. Mr Wasimuddin states that "China is already our trusted friend", well Chinese are friends of no one. Again in another place he states "This highway will allow us to import high quality Chinese goods," well Chinese goods are the worst of them

Dowry

A number of newspapers recently reported the story of Ms. Nisha Sharma, a 21 year old Indian Software engineering student, calling her the "toast of India" because she stopped her wedding minutes before the final ceremony and also is being considered a "role model" for rejecting dowry demands.

Dowry demands have always been one of the most dehumanising things for women in this part of the world and should be rejected by all self-respecting persons. And I believe that because of girls like Nisha it is never going to be eradicated.

Nisha had everything going for her-- good family, rich parents, good education and youth, living at the heart of Indian capital but still she did not object to marry a lesser qualified man in exchange of exorbitant amount of dowry. Since the marriage was settled in March, 2003, her family went into a shopping spree to meet the "double dowry demand"-- every item, such as, refrigerator, air conditioner, stereo player, and television had to be given in pairs. Nisha found nothing wrong in it.

On her engagement ceremony, the bridegroom's family wanted not another item on the dowry list but a "gift" of Pounds (sterling) 700.00 and a new saloon car and her father complied with those demands too but, obviously, Nisha yet did not find any reason to call off the marriage.

Only a day before the wedding the groom's mother called and demanded another Pounds (sterling) 17,000.00 to be paid on the day of the marriage. When Nisha's father failed to provide that and during the altercations groom's mother and her sister-in-law slapped and spat on Nisha's father's face. As he refused to meet their ever-multiplying-dowry demands the wedding finally fell apart.

Shouldn't Nisha have stopped her father much earlier or called the police at least on the day of the engagement? But she didn't. Things were okay for Nisha.

However, during the dowry altercations, the groom had also said that he was only marrying Nisha for the money. "He did not even like me, he would have thrown me off a balcony in three/four weeks", reported Nisha. Well, she called the police only when the whole thing has fallen apart and only when her enormous dowry failed to provide her a 'secure' marriage.

As long as there will be girls who happily surrender to the commercialisation of union

will also help Bangladesh's economy. As Sri Lankan high commissioner said his country benefited from free trade agreement with India. This will also help Bangladesh prepare for the post 2005 era.

Anirban Dutta Choudhury
Calcutta, India

"Mobile WMD lab" in Iraq!

We were told Saddam still had a lot of sick and dangerous weapons (even after 12 years of bombing and lots of inspections), so they sent in their inspectors to check it out. When nothing substantial was found, they came up with excuses saying Saddam keeps moving his WMDs from place to place and hence we can't find anything. They said Iraq has trucks/orries that are used as mobile WMD labs. It is not surprising that this sort of

technologically very advanced. And if Iraq was that good, how come it couldn't become a nuclear power? Apart from nuclear, if Iraq had other WMDs, why didn't they use any?

Azad Miah
Oldham, UK

"Converting Muslims to Christianity!"

I am writing this letter in response to Angela Robinson (Rev Mrs) that was posted on June 16, 2003.

After carefully reading your letter, with all due respect, in spite of your noble views towards conversion, it is a feeling that is not shared among the majority, Evangelical churches in the USA. I am speaking from first hand experience, as I myself have been a victim of such malicious propaganda. I do not know the background of your church, but I surely know through intense

the media, as well as psychological techniques to 'woo' a person, who is either confused or have been somewhere along the line, a victim of pathetic Islamic Fundamentalism. A church doctrine that is based on intolerant views, especially of Islam is highly objectionable.

Whenever, Islam seems to come to the mind of a regular Evangelical churchgoer, the world Evil, readily seems to be an analogy. These churches have discussions, as to from what angle a future prospective Muslim convert should be approached. They barely seem to have any true knowledge about the Islamic faith, other than the books they read, from a Christian's perspective of Islam. These churches are also highly involved in missionary activities.

So how am I supposed to believe that a missionary, who happens to hail from the churches mentioned above, would be able to provide genuine humanitarian help, without strings attached. I am not saying all missionaries have pre-conceived intentions, but then isn't it highly contradictory to what the missionary feels personally, as to what their 'HEADQUARTERS' back home in the USA preach. I have heard whatever they have had to say, but if I wanted to have a theological debate, they seem to have no interest in reasoning. After the fall of Communism, Islam seems to have been made the new 'enemy' of the progressive modern world.

Shahzeb Shahnawaz
New York City, USA

Irresponsible and callous

I have been amazed by many of the letters written to *The Daily Star* Letters Page from Bangladeshis all over the world. Mr. Yahya and Mr. Mahmood Elahi are examples of people who sometimes are blind to what does not fit into their process of thought. However what has shocked me even more is the ignorance of serious issues and the sheer callousness of many to those of other faiths.

In a letter a few days ago, I stated how religious extremism is affecting every government in the world. I think I forgot to mention how impossibly stubborn some Muslims can be when it comes to 'pet' issues like Palestine and Iraq. Let me make this clear: Saddam was a dictator and he deserved to go. Let me make it also clear that I do not support the right of return for Palestinian refugees as demanded by many around the world. If the Palestinians return to claim the land that is Israel, it is true that this will give rise to many serious problems that could threaten the sanctity of the state of Israel. I have read many books which make it very clear that there are strong anti-Semitic feelings all around the world which had once exploded in Nazi Germany to bring about the slaughter of countless number of Jews. Their memories must be honoured by giving their children a home and help in setting that home up. The best way to solve this issue is for all those high and mighty governments around the world to provide full citizenship and other facilities to these Palestinian refugees. Let the mistake that was done with the ancient Jews not be repeated with the Palestinians by driving them out of every place they seek shelter in.

Now this has of course an opposite point. While this is done in the case of Palestinians, the children of Israel must realise the injustice they are doing to the ordinary people in the Gaza Strip and other recognised Palestinian areas. They must



between two people, dowry demands will continue to stay. As far as I know, both taking and giving dowry are crimes. Nisha is also a party to this crime.

Salma Khan, Member, Women for Women, Dhaka

Heroes or villains!

Considering the recent developments in the Israeli-Palestinian situation one might start wondering whether the so-called militant groups such as Hamas, Al-Aqsa Martyrs, Islamic Jihad are actually involved in a conspiracy to delay the freedom of Palestine to fulfil their unrealistic demands. Wrong or right it is now quite obvious that Israel is there to stay.

The only option the Palestinians have now is to go for a peaceful resolution and try to achieve as much as possible through negotiation. The Palestinian authority has

clearly figured that out and their willingness to accept the current road map is a clear indication of that. Israel has also shown enough willingness to go forward with it. In such a positive situation why in the whole world would these militant groups keep doing violent stuff? How long would it take for the Palestinian people to realise that these heroes are actually now becoming villains for them? Hopefully not too long.

Shuja, Toronto, Canada

Oxford of the East and private universities

Gone are those days when Dhaka University had been the dream of millions. Student from every corner of the country even from the remotest nurtured the same dream in their heart, dream to be associated with the "Oxford of the East." The young novice with their curious eyes gazing around the university campus marvelled by the expanded beauty of *Krishnachura* have become quite an occasional event. The TSC premises, *Oporajeyoe Bangla* or the historical *Madhur Canteen* no longer attract the young generation. The place which has given birth to legends like Munir Chowdhury, the grounds which were once illumined with the footsteps of eminent figures, today is considered as places of reminiscences to many. The political instability along with the growing number of processions, strikes and session jams are chiefly responsible to curb the glorious reputation of the campus which it once held.

But in addition to that the mushroom growth of private universities goes a long way to put a veil upon its magnificent historical background. Even a few years back private universities were considered to be the places for "rich fathers' children" and the last resort of apathetic students. But recently the whole scenario has changed to a great extent. Nowadays even students who secure good academic results prefer private universities which assure them a session jam free undisturbed student life. Their lucrative publicity as well as air-conditioned class rooms and grand convocation ceremonies naturally attract a large number of students which DU with its limited resources fail to offer. Even their AC classrooms, cafeterias with burgers and *dosas* seem to be much more appealing than five-taka *singara*.

A pride to be associated with Dhaka University can hardly be seen whereas the student find themselves much more superior to be a student of other private university. Even the same prejudice can be seen among the parents. Parents nowadays prefer private universities than the government ones thought it involves an inordinate number of money. Semester system, make up classes, less holidays, constant pressure seem to be their first criterion not regarding whether their children are having their lectures on the *verandah* of a private house. Thus these private universities except a few with their vulnerable quality goes on with their rapid growth where Dhaka University strives hard to uphold and re-enlighten its glory amidst obstacles.

Antara Ahmed Chowdhury
Dhaka University

