

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.

"Iron bumpers to be taken off cars"

On July 2 when I read the news about the killing of the doctor I was deeply shocked. This is just another example of the uneducated poor quality driver and most unhelpful, dummy like traffic police of our country.

On July 3 when I read that the honourable communication minister of our country ordered to remove all rail bumpers off from cars I felt that this is not a very good decision. Just the day before yesterday while I was passing through the Dhaka University campus I had to slow down and stop as the car in front of me was taking a turn, the moment I stopped my car jerked forward with a loud thump, I looked back on reflex just to find that a yellow cab hit me hard from the back. If I didn't have an iron rail my car could have been very badly damaged. It's not only rickshaws that the rail bumpers protect the cars from it's also other cars with reckless drivers who wouldn't have even got a license if our traffic system was a bit more honest and strict. So taking off the rail would only increase the number of car damages and accidents each day.

What we need is good and properly trained drivers with not just speed but full control over the car and more conscious traffic police who would be more active and not just stand with a vague expression on the face or be busy chatting with their female counterparts as I mostly see them doing when I cross the Panthapath and Russell Square intersection.

I would earnestly request our honourable communication minister to reconsider the decision of removing rail bumper from cars, and making sure that faulty cars are caught and taken off the street. And also it would greatly relieve drivers like us if the minister could humbly revise the traffic rules and make it more strict with the inclusion of even cancellation of license for accident prone drivers.

Saquifa Islam
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

Jumbo cabinet

After a landslide victory in October 2001 election BNP led alliance formed a jumbo cabinet which led to a lot of criticism both at home and abroad. Prime Minister Khaleda Zia might have some justification for this as many of her party colleagues contributed a lot

in the party fund before the election. So many of them had to be rewarded. By now they have served as ministers and state ministers for nearly two years. So their ambition has been fulfilled and most of them have also made enough money which more than offset the expenditure they incurred in electioneering and donation they made to the party fund.

So it is high time that the cabinet were reduced to a reasonable size. The recent dropping of three ministers touches the problem only on the fringe. It is suggested that there should be one cabinet minister from each greater district i.e. 17 cabinet ministers and at most 10 state ministers. This may lead to temporary dissatisfaction among the affected people but will enhance the Prime Minister's image in public eye in the long run. The Prime Minister should note that behind the last election victory her contribution was 90 percent and that of her party colleagues roughly 10 percent. So she has nothing to be afraid of. More ministers mean more corruption, more mismanagement and more public suffering.

Will the Prime Minister prove that she has necessary wits and will to assert herself in public interest?
Momtaz Jahan, Fulbari, Sylhet

Mag-lev train

We could not help but notice the article that appeared in your paper this month regarding the proposed train system and of course the letters that have been published recently.

Let me say now that there is very little actual truth in any of the article itself, albeit that may be some kind of "misunderstanding" between Wagner, The Minister and your Reporter.

The Germans have constructed a track in China at huge expense and there is absolutely no way that their system is going to be economically viable at the vast cost of circa US\$60M per km to construct it. Additionally in your article you have mentioned the names of other bidders, but have again missed out the other bidder for the Bangladesh project which is American Maglev Technology, otherwise referred to as "AMT".

AMT's maglev system is in fact the only economically viable maglev system in the world at this time and it works out at around less than one third of the cost of the German technology and addition-

The Achilles' heel of our polity

In order to ensure a sustainable democracy, there is no alternative of adhering to an honest political culture of free and fair inter-party as well as intra-party elections. There is no denying the fact that democratic traditions amongst our political parties are almost non-existent, which means the party hierarchies including the top-most are determined, more often than not, by selection instead of election. As a result, on the one hand the possibility of inducting any new leadership in the party becomes almost zero thereby giving rise to a situation where political leadership becomes still and stagnant and on the other the incidence of authoritarianism reign supreme in all policy decisions and national strategies. The state of affairs go even worse when the leadership of the major political parties are dependent almost totally not upon their own abilities, but upon the legacy of the kindred celebrities who are no more in this world. For Bangladesh, it has almost become a craze to support or not to support a political party on the basis of one's acceptability of the deceased leaders instead of the living ones. Here lies the Achilles' heel of our polity.

No wonder, Frederick T. Temple, the former World Bank Representative in Bangladesh so aptly pin-pointed two basic weaknesses of our democratic system in a recently held seminar at Dhaka. He pointed out that our political parties do not follow the democratic system themselves and that only the very rich people can get elected in the parliament. It is a pity that our election commission could not yet devise any procedure by which honest professionals, intellectuals, and dedicated leaders could find their way in the parliament and speak for the people. If the parliament consists of only the rich entrepreneurs, it would better serve as a chamber of commerce and industry as opposed to a parliament. One may be amazed to find out that the successive national budgets reflects nothing but the hopes and aspirations of the chamber bodies in contrast to those of vast spectrum of professionals and people. It is high time that the political parties, government and the election commission came forward and took positive steps to ameliorate these grave shortcomings of our political culture before it's too late.

Hafejul Alam, Dhaka

ally has the backing of a large US Corporation.

Now with all said and done, the project between Dhaka and Chittagong is definitely feasible but not at anywhere near the costs that have been reported in your paper. I would estimate that using the American maglev system the one way fare from Dhaka to Chittagong would be around US\$12-US\$15 depending on a number of factors including how many cargo containers are carried on the trip. As you will be aware, apart from passengers the maglev system is ideal for carrying of cargo such as 20' and 40' containers and it will be a balance between that and number of passengers that will determine the price of course. One must also bear in mind that the risk of this project will, if it proceeds on a BOT basis, rest with the investors and not the taxpayer. Our company is prepared to invest the money required both for this and the Dhaka City to Zia Airport project

and we of course shall expect to make this a financially viable project.

John Pepin, One-mail

How to improve the working of the UN

Increasingly, the United Nations and its major apparatus, the Security Council, are becoming dysfunctional. The Security Council is little more than a forum, passing non-enforceable resolutions which can be vetoed by any of the five permanent members. Two of the permanent members are China and Russia -- ruled by most autocratic regimes who don't hesitate to violate the fundamental human rights of their own citizens. Yet, they both hold veto over all Security Council resolutions.

Similarly, the UN General Assembly, is not an independent body. It is a place where official delegates from various countries

can discuss and vote on issues as their governments direct. Most representatives to the General Assembly are officials from the Third World countries where governments are highly autocratic and hardly represent the views of ordinary citizens. In fact, the General Assembly is an assembly of elite, many of whom are career diplomats, from various countries. Only in the Western democracies, these elite are answerable to the elected governments and sovereign parliaments. This is not the case with most Third World countries.

The greatest flaw of the UN is that it makes no distinction between dictatorial regimes and democratic governments. What is needed is a 'World Organisation of Democracies,' devoted to promoting the original values of the UN, including democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights.

There should be a graduated plan for UN membership. Members, whose human rights credentials are in doubt, should be placed on probation for at least a year without voting rights. They must conform their laws to the UN standards by guaranteeing basic human rights of their citizens. If any members are found continuing to violate human rights of their own citizens, they must be suspended as members.

Mahmood Elahi, Ottawa, Canada

The Daily Horror-stories!

About 2/3 years ago, I stopped reading any Bengali/English newspaper related to Bangladesh. The reason for my decision - which was a very foolish decision - was that, every time I opened a paper, starting from the front-page right to the small prints of the last page, they were always filled with horror stories of Bangladesh. Every time the paper was filled with same disappointing sad news. The depth of those sad stories was so disturbing for me, that I just couldn't take it any more. And as a result, I somehow managed to convince myself that all those horrors will be over soon and everything will get better if I waited for few months. How foolish!

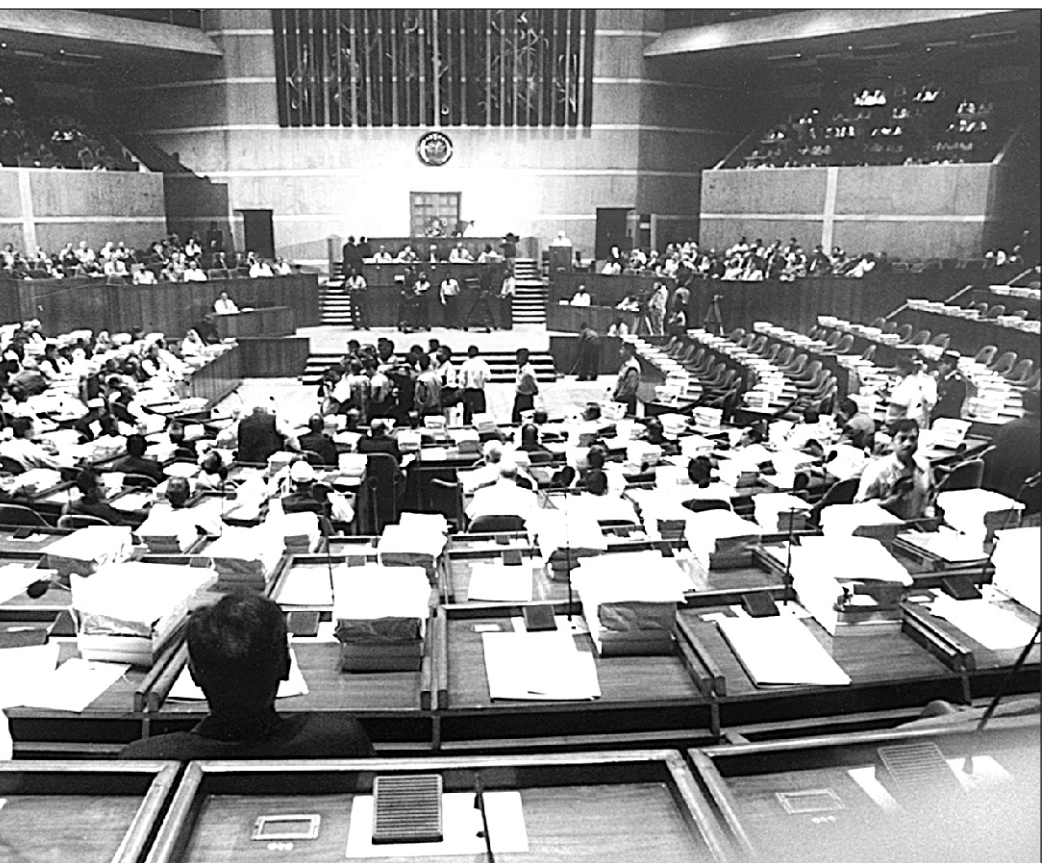
Today once again, I find myself facing the same horrors. Everyday we get news on The Daily Star, Ittefaq and other media about rape, extortion, gang-rubbery, assassination in broad daylight, road/launch accidents, border problems and so on. Every single day it is the same miserable news. After reading these sad news, the first thing that comes to my mind is our country's leadership. These people never have the time to do anything constructive for the country yet they always manage to get people's vote. How can our public be so irresponsible and naive? What is the main factor behind our people's decision to vote and even die for these politicians? What is even more unfortunate is that, nobody has a clue about how to improve our pathetic situation and how to get out of this vicious circle.

So, until you open the next copy of "The Daily Horror-stories" tomorrow, have a nice day (or the remaining part of the day)!
Azad Miah, Oldham, UK

"Converting Muslims to Christianity"

Much has been written recently on the Christian efforts of converting Muslims into Christianity in Bangladesh. I have something to share with the respected readers.

I came to Dhaka for a visit in June last year when I saw an "incomprehensible" or "confusing" programme on the ATN Bangla TV. It was in fact a Christian religious programme aimed at the non-Christian audience primarily to attract people to the religion. But I thought the programme was disturbing because the language used in it was so heavily burdened with Arabic theological expressions



Undemocratic politics in democratic Bangladesh?

taken from the vocabulary in Islam that it was almost impossible to tell which religion the programme actually represented. For the Church, the invention might seem good (because installation of alien ideas is easy even into an otherwise unwilling audience), but for the viewer, it is offensive for at least two reasons. Firstly, a disinterested Muslim audience would take it as a clever move to convert them into Christianity by deception, and, secondly, for a Hindu or Buddhist audience, it is virtually incomprehensible and discriminatory because the language and terminology - all were extensively borrowed from Islam only.

So, as far as the viewers are concerned, this type of preaching method would be considered as either deceptive or discriminatory, and will attract criticism rather than ears. Such a method should better be abandoned by the Church in Bangladesh.

Armaan Ayub
Headington, Oxford, England

I am not surprised at the news, via Shabbir Bashir of California, that 'Time' magazine has highlighted the anti-Muslim sentiments of a minority of American Christians. The 'Western' media is largely secular and not averse to holding Christianity up to ridicule and such an extreme view sells newspapers. To respond to Azad Miah's invitation to publicise the opinions of such anti-Muslims would be to play right into the hands of an embarrassing minority as well as those determined to believe they are a majority!

The vast majority of 'mainline' churches, and indeed, mainline educational establishments in the so-called 'Christian' world, are working very hard to increase understanding and build up good relationships across all religious communities. For some years, I lived near the city of Bradford, Yorkshire, which had the first, but certainly not the last, Muslim mayor in the UK and the Church of England Diocese of Bradford, and other local churches there, have worked very hard for communal harmony. But the media are rarely interested in such good news. It is much more fun to keep prejudices alive and wind people up!

As Shukla Mirza said, it is good for religious people to study their religious writings and world history and pray - but I would wish also for more dialogue, including here in Bangladesh, but maybe it is happening but quietly among those who do not want it publicised and so spoilt by the intrusion of those who do not understand its motivation and might misinterpret it. I hope so.

As for those who think that Christians (missionaries or not) could take pleasure in fingers being chopped off, or in the tragedy of war - I give up!

Angela Robinson (Rev Mrs)
Lalmatia, Dhaka

The roadmap deceit

President Bush's recent statement that it is untenable for Palestinians to live in squalor and occupation and that Israeli settlement activity in the occupied territories must stop was hailed as a "significant step forward" to the emergence of a viable, credible Palestinian state. President Bush was clear that peace depends on Israel stopping its confiscation of Palestinian land to build illegal settlements. However, what is monumentally hypocritical of the United States is that it continues to provide the military, and economic, and diplomatic support for more settlements, although the official position has always been opposed to it.

The new initiative "road map", a framework leading to the creation of a Palestinian state by 2005, is a document stillborn in both its vagueness and structural flaws that repeats all the problems of prior proposals. It carefully adheres to the Israeli-American understanding of the cause of the current conflict-Palestinian resistance to

occupation, rather than the occupation itself. As far as violence is concerned, the spotlight is on the suicide bombings rather than the assassinations, the murder of civilians, the demolition of dwellings and the targeting of international activists and journalists. The Palestinians are required to pledge that they will instantly abandon all vestiges of resistance to Israel's onslaughts on their people, land, houses, roads and public buildings. There are, of course, some reciprocal demands made upon the Israelis. But not too many. Israel is not required to halt building the wall that will confiscate 40% of Palestinian land and 2/3 of all Palestinian water resources, cutting off a future Palestinian state from all its Arab neighbours.

The way the Palestinian state will look is largely dependent upon how much more land Israel decides to confiscate between now and 2005. Even though there is a clear final outcome in the Roadmap process-a Palestinian state by 2005 - it will be surrounded on all sides by Israel and there is a great likelihood that, without international intervention between now and 2005, it will be impossible for the Palestinian state to survive.

Monirul Haque, Banani, Dhaka

Anti-Bangladeshism?

This is a response to Mr. S. Khan's letter published on June 4, 2003. In one of last three paragraphs he questioned, "Why help a country where people are dishonest?" His question about Bangladesh people in general is on the one hand amusing and on the other hand the means of all excuses given by the Bangladeshis expatriates.

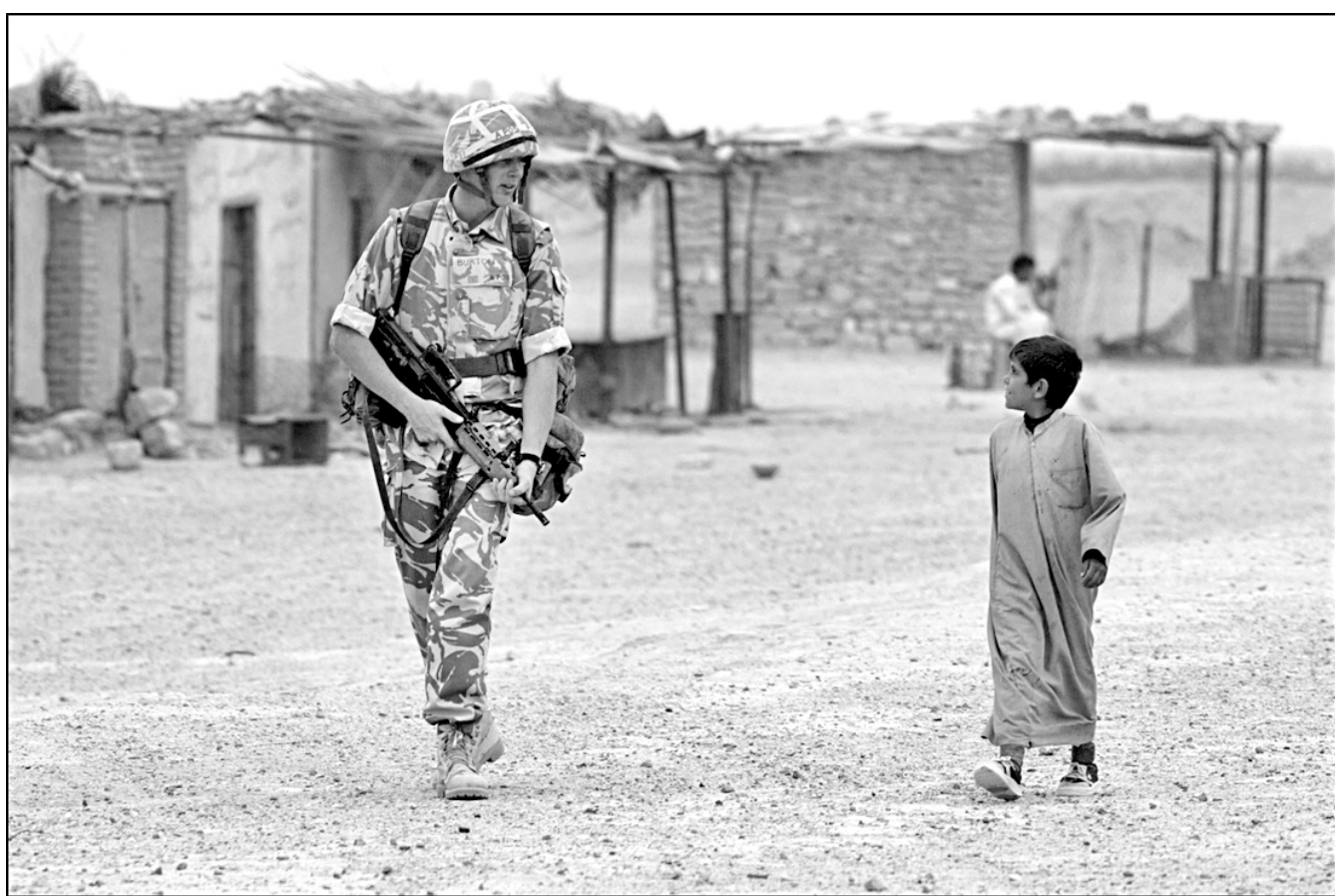
Amusing because following the structure of his question a teacher can question, "Why help the students who are so dumb? Or the government can question, "Why spend so much money on people who are mentally retarded? Point

is, what is more logical? Helping those who are already privileged or helping those who are underprivileged? If various institutions and organisations in our country start to question like Mr. Khan, the consequence will be catastrophic for our people!

Lack of security, corruption in government organisations are some common excuses given by the Bangladeshis expatriates who are willing to return to Bangladesh. I really feel for them but I have to say that the excuse given by Mr. Khan is the meanest of all. So some relevant questions like, "Why did Mr. Khan term all the Bangladeshis as dishonest?" and "How did Mr. Khan come to the conclusion that all Bangladeshis are dishonest?" can be asked. Actually Mr. Khan's remark reminds the infamous comment (Bangladesh a BOTTOMLESS BASKET) made by Henry Kissinger.

However, from his remark at first it can be assumed that Mr. Khan is a very honest and obviously a rare kind of honest man otherwise how could he term all the people of Bangladesh as dishonest? But in the very next paragraph he said, "In the US I can say and do anything I want." Yes this is the irony that is not expected. Doesn't this comment lack honesty a bit? Of course Mr. Khan can say and do anything up to a certain extent or limit. Mr. Khan can say anything as long as that doesn't go against the interest of the US. Can Mr. Khan deliver anti-Semitic speech in public? Even a US citizen by born never dares to even think that he/she can do anything he/she wants as this will ultimately hamper the rights of other people. The difference between an animal and human is: animal is motivated through its instinct but a human is motivated through his/her rationality and thoughts. That's why a human cannot do or say always what he/she wants.

Rajib, Uttara, Dhaka



Peacekeeping in Iraq?

Should we send our troops to Iraq?

Colin Powell, on his stopover in Dhaka, tacitly asked for help in Iraq, he made a very poignant statement, "Come down and get settled with us in Iraq". If not, troubles may brew in terms of trade and other issues. To be in the good book of the Big Brother is a big issue for the lesser brothers. Pakistan is mulling over and even the sub-continental giant, India has not ruled out the possibility outright. Arguments, both pros and cons, are in flux. But eventually it is the national interest that ought to be served.

Contrary arguments are largely philosophical. Iraq war is deemed as a unilateral and unnecessary perdition on an already de-fanged dictator, who happens to be at odds with the US Government. Lingering post-war uncertainty in finding a proof for WMD further undermines the US position. Sending troops to Iraq to shore up a mired US military shall only legitimise an illegitimate occupation. Thrust of this argument is immense

and finds easy reverberation even in my mind. There are practical reasons too. Firstly, both internal and external public sentiment is not in sync yet. There is a possibility that the other countries (especially Muslim countries) might view such move in a negative light. Secondly, the Iraqi people can view the Bangladeshi troops as extension of an occupation army and this may spoil our future relationship with a (hopefully) democratic nation of Iraq. Lastly, safety of our lesser-armed troops can be in real peril. The daily reports of emerging guerrilla warfare are not comfortable news to gut without certain queasiness. For a country like Bangladesh, it can be an internal as well as external disaster, if its troops get in situation similar to that of Nazaf where multiple civilians were killed by the US forces.

Arguments in favor are primarily practical. With loss of an important export-advantage to the United States, large sector of Bangladeshi economy is

hanging on a languid state. Morality and philosophy sounds great in oration, but eventually it is the "economy stupid!" Bangladesh should plot its course independent of its neighbours. They are in a comparatively better position. They can wait and bargain. Bangladesh should decide fast and I hope positively.

Getting on the wagon, however, when it is moving, by any means, is not the smarter choice.

Mohammad Zaman
McCleary Court, Raleigh

Bangladesh has excelled in UN peacekeeping duties around the world but involvement in both Iraq and Afghanistan is not a good idea. They were blatant acts of aggression in response to Bush's so-called War on Terror and have been based on insufficient evidence and 'alleged involvement' in 9/11.

The primary reason for Secretary of State Powell's visit was probably because

the US realises that the continual death toll of US troops will have a negative impact on the forthcoming US elections and they are in desperate need for non-US troops to act as bullet fodder to support its aims and objectives to rape Iraq dry of its black gold.

Of course, in the real world, improving an economic quota of export to the US is in Bangladesh's interest just as the Bulgarian Security Council vote on the pre-Iraq war UN resolution in favour of the US agenda was swayed based on the US support for Bulgarian entry to NATO. Unfortunately, poor countries will always take a selfish stance to better their own position even if it is at the expense of international peace and stability so I will not be surprised if Bangladesh troops do end up in Afghanistan, Iraq and other countries that the US plans to leave behind in a trail of destruction with its tactics of 'shock and awe'.

Abdul M. Ismail
Mossley Hill, Liverpool, UK